

Country Notes for August 2018

What a turbulent year it has been so far! Heavy snowfall in late winter, then a very cold, wet start to spring, punctuated by days of really hot weather - and at the time of writing a heat wave that has been going on for weeks, with almost drought conditions in our gardens and fields.

One of the up sides of the recent hot weather has been an increase in the number of butterflies. Particularly noticeable have been the large numbers of Meadow Browns and, very excitingly, more Marbled White butterflies than I have seen for many years in several locations in our villages. I even had one in my garden a few days ago!

One aspect of nature which never varies, whatever the weather, is the fact that when we reach August most birds stop singing - or sing very little. This is because, having nested, they now moult to provide themselves with fresh plumage to keep them safe through the coming autumn and winter. This makes them very vulnerable to predators as their loss of plumage reduces their mobility. It is best therefore to keep very quiet!

There are however a few exceptions. Most noticeable is the Yellowhammer which can be heard throughout our villages where there are open fields. These wonderful bright yellow birds are used to being easy to spot all year round! They continue to make their call of 'a little bit of bread and no cheese' right the way through August. Visit the Hollingbourne Meadows Trust or the Hucking Estate and their call will be easy to hear through the heat of summer.

Another bird of the open fields which I had not heard in our villages for some years until recently is the Corn Bunting which also calls through August. It looks like a rather rotund sparrow, but with flecks all over it. The call sounds like someone jangling a bunch of keys and I have recently heard it again along the Pilgrims Way.

I wonder whether these birds will be singing in the rain or the heat as summer continues its journey through August!

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