

Country Notes for June 2019

As I write this in the second week of May it is interesting to look at what the spring has brought us so far in our villages. Weather has been variable, with a very dry April, a very warm Easter weekend, but also some cold spells such as the one at the beginning of May. Just recently a very cold day brought us hail showers which looked suspiciously snowy!

It has been lovely to welcome two singing nightingales back to Hollingbourne, although the one that started singing on the Meadows Trust moved away for a while but has recently moved back, which is great news. Last year it probably bred on the Meadows, so here's hoping for this year! On the minus side there were several sites on the Hucking estate which had nightingales last year, which this year seem to be supporting none. With the national trend suggesting they are down by up to 90% this seems to be part of a worrying decline.

Swallows were back by the middle of April and there were a few house martins over Hollingbourne at the start of May. However numbers seem very low at the moment. Hollingbourne historically has always supported quite a lot of house martins and there were not that many last year either. At the time of writing I have not seen any swifts, but they are always very late to arrive and our villages have seldom supported many, even in a good year. Last year saw the welcome return of a number of willow warblers in both our villages. Sadly, to date, I have only heard one, in Hucking.

On the plus side there are a lot of whitethroats in our villages - and the Meadows Trust has as many singing as I can remember. There are also a lot of yellowhammers, linnets and goldfinches.

The first warm spell of the season in February brought out a number of butterflies and I certainly saw peacocks, small tortoiseshells and brimstones. When the warmer weather returned there were plenty of orange tips and the white butterflies were finally in evidence. To date I have only seen a few holly blues and one red admiral, although I have heard of others. Those butterflies such as orange tips, which breed early, certainly benefited from last year's weather before everything dried up and made fresh food plants rather scarce.

The trees all seemed to come into leaf early this year and daffodils and primroses were also in evidence fairly early on. At the time of writing there are some good displays of bluebells, although the may on the hawthorn bushes seems quite slow to appear, as does the cow parsley in our lanes.

I am certain that every year has its surprises, both good and bad, as no two years are the same. I wonder what the rest of spring will hold for us.

Andrew G Snowdon