

BRIAN'S NATURE DIARY: May

This month is perhaps the busiest of the year for our nesting birds. Sit still anywhere in the open air, and it will not be long before you see them flying to and fro. Some will be carrying moss, dry grasses, feathers or small twigs with which to build their nests. Others will have beaks laden with caterpillars, greenfly, worms, and other delicious goodies to feed their young. The halves of eggshells on the ground indicate a brood of young not too far away. Pale blue ones are those of the starling, while white ones are likely to be wood pigeon, now officially our commonest bird.

Butterflies like the sulphur-coloured brimstone and the orange tip, white with a black smudge and broad orange tip to the forewings, will have been about for some while now. The brimstone will seek out the leaves of buckthorn shrubs on which to lay her eggs, while the orange tip prefers Jack-by-the-hedge with its apple-green leaves and small four-petalled white flowers. Incidentally the latter, also called sauce alone, is one of our best-tasting edible wild plants. Although a wild cabbage it has the flavour of garlic. A common hedgerow and road verge plant, I have used it for many years. Its young leaves, together with sliced tomatoes, make an excellent sandwich filler, and it can also be used in a mixed salad. Use it also in soups and stews. It is easy to grow and seed may be found in the wildflower section at garden centres, to avoid gathering the wild plant.

The outdoor show season is also well under way, and you may like to know that Jane, Dave and I will have a stand at the forthcoming Moulton (Northants) Village Show on May 20th, and also at the Northampton Town and Country Show, which will be at Overstone Park NN6 0AB, on June 10th and 11th. We shall have a selection of our pictures, our new Birds as Soloists CD, and a range of other ethically sourced and produced goods on sale. Please do visit us if you are able, when we assure you of a very warm welcome.

Birdsong is very much a feature of the month. At Short Wood near Oundle, where we went to see and photograph the bluebells, we were treated to just a few phrases of the magnificent nightingale's song. Obviously recently arrived from its winter quarters to the south, we felt privileged as this is a species in decline across the country, and only a handful of pairs find their home in Northamptonshire.

At home we are pleased to report that both badgers and the vixen continue to visit the garden for food, and we recently had a fleeting visit from a great spotted woodpecker to add to our garden list.