

St Matthew's Churchyard Lightcliffe

Wildlife snapshot Late Spring 2022

Spring has been beautiful in the churchyard with birds, bees, butterflies and blossom all contributing to nature's celebration of new life.

Orange tip butterflies



Orange tip chrysalises. Photo by Vince Massimo

In mid-April, orange tip butterflies began to emerge and a stunning male alighted on some forget-me-not flowers, staying long enough for me to take its photo. These butterflies are on the wing between April and June but the larvae spend a whole ten months in their chrysalis. Females lay their yellow or orange TicTac-like eggs on the stalks of Cuckoo flower or Garlic Mustard plants. They lay their eggs singly because the caterpillars are cannibalistic, enjoying other orange tip eggs and caterpillars, if given the chance! When not eating each other, the caterpillars feast on the developing seed heads of the Garlic Mustard or Cuckoo flower. Once they are ready to pupate, they go off in search of woody stems that will remain over winter and form realistic thorn-shaped chrysalises which they attach to the stem with silk threads. At first, they are green, then later turn brown to camouflage with the stem.

April was a "yellow month" with cheerful daffodils, celandines, primroses and dandelions



Birds and a squirrel interloper



By April, the nuthatches were well underway with their mud plastering, although this year they seem to have been a little more restrained! I watched them for ages at the bottom end of the churchyard, searching for food amongst the bark crevices of a lime and an ash tree, coming down head first in characteristic fashion. They are the only UK bird to be able to do this, using their powerful feet and claws to grip onto tree trunks. The food they were finding may well have been insects and seeds that they had stowed away there in the autumn.



In May, I have been watching them making many journeys to the nest box, beaks stuffed with food for their young.



Other birds using our nest boxes this year include a pair of great tits on an ivy-covered beech tree and some blue tits in a box not far from Till Carr Cottage.



There are wrens nesting amongst ivy and earlier in April, a male perched obliging on a young hazel branch to sing whilst I photographed it. I also captured a squirrel having a nap on top of a nest box - he opened one eye as my camera clicked so he looks as if he's winking!

During May, I saw four of these brown-lipped banded snails on last year's old raspberry canes in one of the roped off wildlife sections of the churchyard. I was curious as to why they weren't on more succulent green stems and I read that they mostly prefer eating dead and decaying vegetation. They also consume aphids and thrips so a banded snail is a gardener's friend! Confusingly, banded snails also come in plain yellow or pink. The pattern of bands is unique to each snail - a bit like our finger prints.



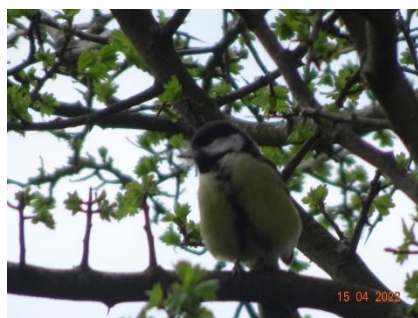
The new season's raspberry cane flowers are attracting a variety of bees: I've seen tree bumblebees with full pollen baskets and early bumblebees - the UK's smallest bumblebee. I also spotted a blotch-winged hoverfly (*Leucozona lucorum*) - a new record for the churchyard. Seen between May - August, adults like to sit in sunny spots in areas of dappled shade.



Blotch-winged hoverfly Photo by Dave Verrall



Three different colours of hawthorn blossom in the churchyard. The two above belong to the Midland hawthorn, I think, which has double flowers whereas the photo to the left shows the single flowers of the more common hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*.



Marjorie Middleton
May 2022