

# St Matthew's Churchyard Lightcliffe

## Wildlife snapshot March 2021

March has seen the churchyard burst into colour with crocus, daffodils, and primroses as the main stars. Towards the end of the month, the startling fresh green of newly-unfurled hawthorn leaves are brightening the bare branches.



The intricate, understated beauty of Wych Elm flowers can now be seen on gracefully spreading branches near the east wall.

## Birdlife

The most exciting news is that the nuthatch heard in February, has remained in the churchyard. I put down some peanuts and seeds on the 7<sup>th</sup> March and managed to photograph the nuthatch feeding.



A neighbour has kindly repaired the nest box that had fallen off the large beech tree and on the 29<sup>th</sup> March I watched the box for half an hour to see if anyone was at home. First, a robin flew in and out and then a nuthatch made several visits. It will be interesting to see who wins the box! I hope it's the nuthatch – it would be amazing to be able to see a pair raise a brood, and the robin has a more suitable open-fronted box elsewhere in the churchyard!



Nuthatches will often attempt to stop larger birds from entering their nest by reducing the size of the hole with mud. They lay between 6 – 8 eggs in April or May and in a good year, may produce two broods. Fingers crossed!



The moss carpeting the east wall is providing nesting material for a variety of species. On the 16<sup>th</sup> March, I observed a mistle thrush taking huge beakfuls of moss for its nest high in a tree in the park on the other side of the lane. Every time it flew back to the tree, its beautiful rich song rang out across the churchyard.





Blue tits and magpies have also been using the moss for their nests.

According to some research by York University, the intensity of the blue of a female blue tit's crown shows interested males how good a mother she will make! Apparently, females with paler blue heads will find it more stressful to rear their chicks.



At the beginning of the month, during a chilly spell, the birdsong was much more noticeable than in February. A flock of goldfinches, hidden in a holly tree, provided a constant musical twittering, a male chaffinch was singing from a lichen-covered twig above my head and a two rival male wrens were having a singing duel from across the churchyard – one perched on a gravestone, not far from me – on the photo, you can just see its tongue! A robin sang its sweet song from a nearby holly, the green leaves making a nice contrast with his red breast. A few redwings were sitting in another holly, making the most of some sunshine. The 7<sup>th</sup> March was the last occasion that I saw the redwings so they must have started their migration back to their northern breeding grounds.



On the 16<sup>th</sup> March, on a warm sunny afternoon, I watched a wren busily looking for insects around an old tree stump about 2 metres from me.



The warm brown of its feathers glowed in the sunshine and from this angle, its fine bill, typical of insectivores, can be seen clearly, as well as the characteristically cocked tail.

Then it spotted me!

Its body shape elongated into a tall, alert posture, unlike its more characteristic rounded outline. The long white supercilium is clear on this photo.

### Bees

Towards the end of the month, during a spell of beautifully warm days, large queen bumblebees were out of hibernation, searching for nest sites. I spotted a queen red tailed bee and a queen buff tail.



Photo by Kate Moore



Photo by Graham Calow

**Marjorie Middleton**

**March 2021**