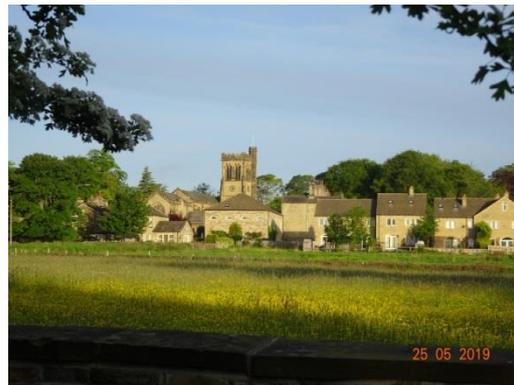


## St Matthew's Churchyard, Lightcliffe

### June wildlife snapshot

This month's snapshot covers the period between mid-May and mid-June.



Early morning sun streams through the trees, lighting up a dandelion seed head and shining through fresh green oak leaves.



green oak leaves.

### Trees

We are lucky to have a wide variety of tree species in the churchyard. Species recorded so far are:

**Hawthorn, Rowan, Sycamore, Wych elm, Oak, Holly, Goat Willow, Lime, Ash, Beech, Laburnum and Elderberry. Recently planted saplings include Yew, Hazel, Field Maple and more Rowan and Willow.**

*"If the oak is out before the ash, then we'll only have a splash*

*If the ash is out before the oak, we shall surely have a soak!"*

If the old folklore is correct, we are in for a splash rather than a soak this summer. This photo, taken on the 21st May in the churchyard, shows an ash tree on the left just coming into leaf, and an oak on the right with its full canopy of leaves.



In fact, these days, we don't often see ash trees coming into leaf before oaks. On the Nature's Calendar website, there is data to show that since the year 2000, there have only been two years when ash trees beat the oaks: 2010 and 2013. There was one year when it was a dead heat: 2008. It's all down to climate change. The springs of 2010 and 2013 were cold and wet and the timing of bud burst in oaks is strongly linked to temperature: for every extra degree of warmth, they come into leaf about 6 days earlier. Warmth has less effect on ash trees so as our springs get warmer and warmer, oaks get earlier and earlier and ash trees get left behind!



There are several very large **holly** trees in the churchyard which lack the characteristic prickly leaves of smaller trees. Hollies have developed prickles to deter browsing deer, cattle and sheep but as the trees grow taller, the leaves which are out of reach of hungry animals lose some or all of their prickles. If you look closely, you can often see trees with prickly leaves on their lower branches and smoother ones higher up. Our mature hollies were full of flower in May and on still days you could stand underneath a tree and listen to the hum of many foraging bees.

During May and June, hollies shed some of their old leaves to make room for new ones which are bright green and soft to the touch. The photo shows some fresh leaves growing on one of our pricklier hollies, with a few old yellow leaves about to drop off, forming a crunchy carpet on the earth below.



Amongst the leaves and flowers of our wonderful, large **oak** trees, I found this odd-shaped, pinkish-green gall. These are common on oaks – people sometimes call them “oak apples” - and you can often find different types of galls on the same tree, on leaves, buds and acorns. Gall wasp larvae secrete chemicals that prompt the tree to form these abnormal growths which

then enclose the growing larvae. The galls don't damage the trees, but they can look a bit weird, especially when they distort acorns.

Our **Hawthorns** were full of beautiful white flowers in May, providing a good source of nectar for foraging insects. On our bat watch night, Pipistrelle bats were seen darting around these trees, catching moths attracted to the nectar. When insects have pollinated the flowers, they change colour from white to pink – the close-up photo shows a mixture of pollinated and non-pollinated flowers. In June, the abundant flowers are already turning into berries so there should be a good crop to feed hungry birds this winter.



## Tree bumblebees



The first half of June has been a bit soggy for surveying bumblebees, however tree bumblebees have been out in force despite the rain. I photographed this one feeding on the large stand of geraniums near Till Carr Cottage. These striking bees only arrived in Britain relatively recently, first seen in the South of England in 2001. Since then, they have spread rapidly and are now one of England's most common species – a rare success story! Unlike other bumblebees, they nest above ground in tree holes, unused bird nest boxes or buildings and therefore are not in competition for nest sites. Apparently, they are often the

cause of panicky phone calls to beekeepers along the lines of, "Help, I've got a bee swarm in my eaves!"



They are also (thankfully!) relatively easy to identify with a ginger brown thorax, black abdomen and white tail. This species of bee has a short tongue and therefore feeds on wide open flowers such as the geranium, red campion and rhododendron that we have in the churchyard. Look out for them in your gardens!

## Birds

Another species to add to the list is the long tailed tit. I heard them calling to each other from the cover of the large trees the other day – they make a high pitched "see see see" contact call – and then two or three flew across an open space overhead. They are beautiful, agile little birds, often hanging upside down to reach food.



I also spotted two newly fledged great tits sitting on the west wall being fed by their parents. Blue tits and chaffinches were also seen collecting insects and caterpillars from hawthorn and oak leaves and from amongst the cracks in the stone wall.

## Plants

Plants to add to the list this month include **ox eye daisy, white clover, herb bennet, foxglove, vetch, hogweed, horsetail, laurel, pyracantha, rosebay willow herb and wild strawberry.**



The stately spires of the foxglove are a familiar sight in June.



Wild strawberry plants in the lower part of the churchyard.

The wet weather in the first half of June has encouraged some attractive fungi to sprout under the wych elms.



## Butterflies

During the churchyard working party afternoon on the 16<sup>th</sup> June, we spotted two beautiful red admiral butterflies spiralling upwards around each other. One landed on a gravestone long enough for me to take its photograph. Red admirals lay their eggs on nettles, so it's important that we keep some nettle patches in sunny areas of the churchyard.



Marjorie Middleton

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