

St Matthew's Churchyard, Lightcliffe

May Wildlife Snapshot

Birdsong

I visited the churchyard just before dawn in late April to record the dawn chorus. It was a still, chilly morning with a hazy moon hanging in the sky above the Sun Inn. As it got lighter, blackbirds and robins were the first tentative songsters, followed by wren and the alarm rattle of the mistle thrush. The fullest sound came between 5am – 5.30am. On the recording, you will hear the chimes of St Matthew's Church at 5.15am along with great tit, blue tit, wren, blackbird, thrush and a faint wood pigeon, among others.



3m31 secs dawn chorus 5.15am with chimes.WMA

To support my point in my April snapshot about the wren having one of the loudest songs, I recorded a star soloist singing from a hawthorn tree, ably accompanied by great tit and wood pigeon (plus a faint blue tit).



Short burst of wren song.WMA

Unfortunately we can not link the webpage to the sound clips. If you would like to hear the clip, ask & we will send a Word copy of this & the links work. Well worth it!

Bird behaviour

The mistle thrush chicks have fledged and the parents are busy mobbing crows and magpies, chasing them across the churchyard whilst sounding their loud alarm rattle. Blue tits are using several of the nest boxes. Robins, blackbirds and thrushes have been seen with beaks full of tasty morsels to take back to their nests.

Butterflies

On sunny afternoons, there are plenty of speckled wood butterflies about, sometimes resting for a few moments on the warm ground (but never long enough for me to take a photo!). These butterflies have expanded their range northwards over recent years due to climate change.

Speckled woods are unique amongst British butterflies in that they can spend the winter as either a caterpillar or a chrysalis.



Females lay single white eggs on grasses along a sunny woodland edge and the caterpillars eat a variety of grasses including cocksfoot, Yorkshire fog, and couch – all of which we have in the churchyard. Adults eat aphid honeydew.



Cocksfoot grass

Cuckoo flower (*Cardemine pratensis*)

– also known as Lady's Smock or Milkmaids.

I also spotted some female orange tip butterflies to go with the male I saw in April. Their caterpillars feed on Cuckoo flowers, of which there are plenty in the churchyard. Apparently, the young leaves of cuckoo flower have a peppery taste and can be used as a substitute for cress in sandwiches! It flowers at roughly the same time of year as cuckoos begin to be heard – hence the name.

Deer

On Bank Holiday Monday (6th May), I called in at the churchyard at 8.15am and saw a Roe deer run across the lane into the churchyard. A dog walker confirmed that he sometimes sees one first thing in the morning and Tracey Langley has seen it in the afternoons. I was hoping the deer would move into the



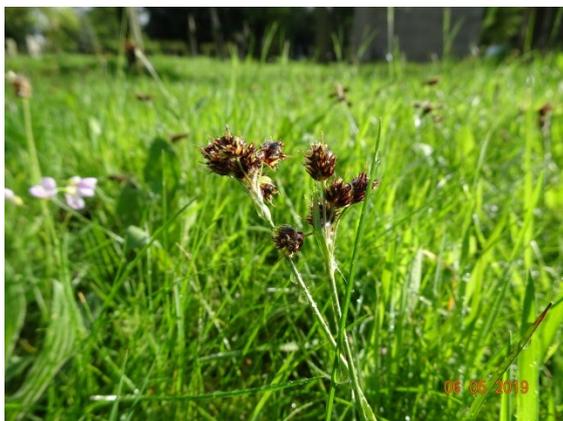
sunlight for my photo but it didn't oblige – Tracy's photos are much better. The deer is clearly a regular visitor!

Plants

Plants noticed so far amongst the grasses:

Cuckoo flower, ribwort plantain, ramsons (wild garlic), cow parsley, buttercup, daisy, dandelion, primrose, forget-me-not, daffodil, bluebell, dock, nettle, welsh poppy, bramble, hairy bittercress, cleavers, ivy, ragwort, fern, clover, common mouse ear, sorrel, sheep's sorrel, hedge mustard, red campion and field woodrush.

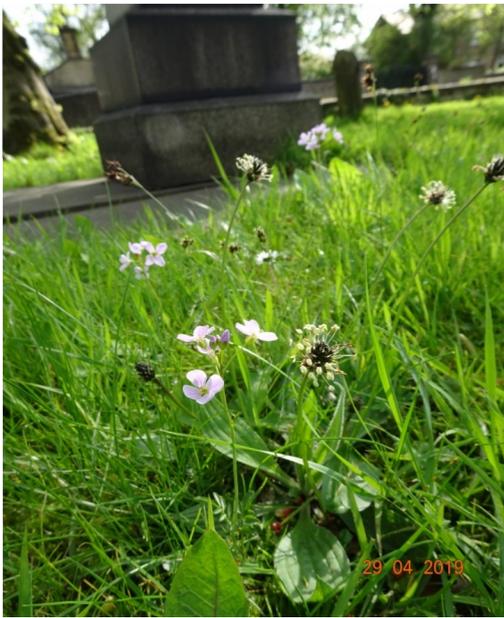
The Latin name for Field woodrush is *Luzula campestris*. *Luzula* is said to be derived from the Italian word for glow worm, *lucciola*, because when the woodrush is shining with raindrops, it is thought to look as if it is alight with glow worms! An alternative name for it is "Sweep's brush" because of the way the flowers are gathered at the top of the stem.



Field wood-rush
Luzula campestris



Wild garlic or Ramsons



The wild garlic is in full flower at the moment, lighting up the shadier part of the churchyard and adding its pungent aroma.

Ribwort plantain with cuckoo flower



Red campion

Meadow Foxtail grass

Grasses noted so far: Meadow Foxtail, Couch, Yorkshire Fog and Cocksfoot.

Bee Swarm



At 4.30pm on the 14th May, I noticed a large swarm of honeybees hanging from a young Sycamore tree halfway down the churchyard. The size was impressive – about two feet long and eighteen inches wide. I contacted someone I know who is a beekeeper and he agreed to come and collect the swarm at 8pm but unfortunately, when I arrived back at the churchyard at 7.30pm, the swarm had moved on. Trevor said that bees will congregate somewhere temporarily until they find a more permanent home – someone nearby may find an “interesting surprise” in their roof space!

Marjorie Middleton

May 2019