

May 2020

It's been a terrible spring for people but not bad at all for wildlife judging by the pictures and emails we've been receiving. Here's a round-up of some of the highlights for the latter part of April.

Frogs and newts. The tank of tadpoles in our front garden (9 Main St) has attracted a lot of attention. We've had a steady stream of visitors checking out their progress. Although not always easy to spot there's a common newt in there as well. He (it is a he) will be feeding on the tadpoles but given the sheer quantity of them he'll be unlikely to make much of a dent in the population. Things are different in our back garden pond where tadpoles are much less numerous as they are enjoyed especially by newts and dragonfly nymphs which we have in abundance. The taddies in the tank, however, should make it all the way – back legs will be next! Do take a look!



Trout in the becks. I was worried we'd lost our trout populations in the becks after the extreme weather we had in February. But we have now had two independent reports of very young fish (parr) in Church Field, three sightings of small trout in Town Beck at Burnside and two sizeable trout (15 cm), probably from last year's cohort, in Back Beck behind Burns Hill. We only have a small trout population in our becks compared to years gone by, so it's a relief we're hanging on to them!



Birds. Woodpeckers have been both heard and seen, one heard down Low Mill Lane and another seen (great spotted) near Winebeck. We've had sighting of **linnets** (see David Austin's great photo) and Chris Acomb alerted us to the presence of a **hen harrier** circling over Main St on 15th April. Given the persecution that hen harriers have received over recent decades on local moors we'd like to think this is a reflection of the ban imposed on shooting on Ilkley Moor last year by Bradford Council. It could on the other hand be a random, rare one-off event! We'll see...

Arnold Pacey has continued his recording of returning migrants listening for distinctive songs at his early morning observation station in Low Mill Lane. He reports a **chiffchaff** from 22nd March, about a week earlier than normal, **blackcap** on the 11th April, **willow warbler** on the 14th April and **sand martins** (in the banks across the river) on the 19th April. Anne Hodgson reports **house martins** busy nest building in Southfield Road. Please send your bird records to Chris at candj.acomb@blueyonder.co.uk.

Wildflowers: **Cowslips** are now in full bloom on the Skipton Road verge (see picture by Diane Morris) and in the Daniel Palmer Nature Reserve, and **cuckoo flower/milkmaid/lady's smock**, whatever you prefer to call it, is also in flower. It's an important food plant for **orange-tip butterflies** (see below). We have reasonable milkmaid populations in the village although sadly the ones that grow on our roadside verges are usually cut back in their prime by Bradford Council in spring. I was hoping this



year that our road verge wildflowers would be given a stay of execution but not to be! The example pictured here is from the Silsden Road verge near the entrance to Big Meadow Drive. It survived the blades because it was shielded by the daffodils...

Bees and butterflies: Despite the lockdown our bees and butterflies observers, co-ordinated by Malcolm Secrett, have been out and about walking along their transects as part of their daily exercise. This year we've added three more walking routes, one that takes in the Street beyond the bypass, one that takes in our Skipton Road wildflower bank and Bracken Ghyll Golf Course and one that covers the Garden Friends' pocket gardens along Main St. This is the season when bumblebee queens are active looking for nesting sites. Especially prominent so far have been **buff-tailed queens**, but we've also had red-tailed, white-tailed and tree bee queens along with many **solitary bees** (see picture of **mining bee**) reported. Maurice White (Skipton) provides expert advice on bees through our WhatsApp group. Thanks to him!



The warm sunny weather has also been good for butterflies. We had lots of **Peacocks** and **Small Tortoiseshells** early on and more recently **Orange Tips** have been especially common. It's the male that has the very distinctive orange tips. The female is mainly white and could be confused with the small-white butterfly, but at this time of year the small white is probably a female orange tip!

Diane Morris is our butterfly advisor. She not only provides guidance on identification but also collates our village records and passes them on to Butterfly Conservation UK so they can be added to the national database. Thanks to her! And please send your butterfly sightings to Diane at diane.barrie@yahoo.co.uk. Include date and location!

Hedgehogs: are now very active especially down at Low Mill and in Burns Hill where they are well-looked after! The males will be roaming quite widely now looking for a mate. Please continue to send in your sightings to Rick.

Roe Deer: have been seen near the Street independently by both Anne Clarke and Anne Hodgson. There seems to be a family group of three there.



Bats: are also now very active, foraging after dusk. We have some records, but no detailed understanding yet of distribution or species composition in the village. So **we're starting up a bat**

group. Once we've escaped the lockdown we'll organise things properly but in the meantime we'd like to hear from anyone who can provide us with sightings as well as anyone who would like to join the group. We have electronic bat echo meters we can use for identification.