

## July 2011 Nature Notes

Well here we are in July with “new” Midsummer Day past and the days getting shorter (Old Midsummer day was July 5th).

July is, or should be, one of the hottest months of the year and we seem to have got off to a good start. This is the month that, since around 1970, circles and other patterns have begun to appear in various crop fields although it doesn't seem to be a particular Hertfordshire phenomenon but concentrated in the West Country. Whether this is due to the fact that the cider is better down there or that no respectable alien would come inside the M25 I am not sure! The crops in the fields are ripening and hay cutting is beginning with hay making and the near harvest providing food for man and beast through the dark months that lie ahead. May we have good hay and a good harvest!

The hedgerows are literally buzzing with a vast array of insects and I am delighted to say that there seems to be quite a number of bees around. There are nearly 250 different types of bees in Britain including 24 types of bumblebee. Most of the honeybees that we see will be on an excursion from a local hive but sometimes a wild swarm can be found in a hollow tree.

A few years ago we had a swarm settle in Dickinson Square and it was really quite a sight. I remember driving through a swarm on Exmoor a year or so ago and was more than a little concerned for the motorcyclist that I knew to be behind us. Most bees are in fact quite solitary creatures living in trees, sand, holes in soil and walls etc. A number of years ago we had a leaf cutter bee living in our garden and I spent many a happy hour watching it.

The Buddleia Walk is especially good at this time of year and as I write this on the 4th of July it is a feast of colour and I warmly recommend it to you at any time of day. There are many wildflowers so try and take a field guide or similar with you (I am sure that the Library must have some) and spend some time just looking and identifying but remember “Don't pick it!”

There are, I think, about 70 species of butterfly in the UK but I have not seen many this year whilst out on my frequent dog walks. Has anyone else noticed lower numbers this year or am I just missing them? I have not heard of anything special in the bird line recently although am glad to report that the egrets are still on the Chess.

There is an old saying that if the trees and bushes bear a large amount of berries then we are in for a hard winter. As I look on the holly, the blackberry, the elderberry and even the rowan I notice that there is going to be a lot of berries this year so regardless of the weather later in the year we do at least have pies, crumbles and jam to look forward to and plenty of holly for the Christmas Pudding!

This is a wonderful time of year to get out, sit, stand, lie and just listen and watch. Listening is a skill that few seem to really possess but it is not hard. Empty your mind of the distraction of car, 'plane, M25 and other distractions and tune your senses into the natural sounds going on around you. Try and distinguish the different noise of the many insects, the different bird calls and the various rustling and bustling going on around you. Watch carefully and you will be rewarded with sight of insects that you may not have noticed before, perhaps sight of a pheasant or partridge, a rabbit or even a hare.

On the latter when looking out across a field it is sometimes difficult to decide whether that brownish looking mound is a hare or simply a large stone. If it moves it's a stone!

If the first of July it be rainy weather,  
'twill rain, more or less, for four weeks together.  
St Swithin's Day, if thou dost rain,  
full forty days it will remain, St Swithin's day, if thou be fair,  
or forty days, 'twill rain no mair!

Well I seem to recall that the 1st was dry so fingers crossed for the 15th!

Dudley Edmunds