

## Country Notes for May

The **bluebells** that carpeted Croxley Hall Woods are almost gone until next year but the **hawthorn** is white with blossom. An interesting tree the **hawthorn**, holy to Christian and Pagan alike it is still considered, by some, to be unlucky to bring the blossom indoors. The young leaves are edible and are the bread of the "bread and cheese" of Grandma's day (the cheese being the unopened flower bud). **Cleavers** are in abundance this year (aka **goose grass, clivers, sticky-willy**) and is regarded as one of the earliest "spring tonics." This is a great plant and there is some justification in the belief that it will cure or assist a cure in anything from sunburn to throat cancer. Another tree of disaster and counter disaster is the **elder** of which there are some fine examples around. Look for the start of the frothy white flowers (used by amateur wine makers) that have all sorts of culinary use from fritters to ice lollies. Later in the year we can collect the tiny dark berries and turn them into syrup or use them to stuff apples BUT, they are mildly poisonous if eaten raw so cook them! By the way, did you know that you can use an oak twig as a natural toothbrush and that if you get stung or bitten when out in the fields a few chewed oak leaves put on the wound will bring some relief?

Our birdlife has been busy. A few weeks ago whilst out dog walking I thought (hoped) that I had suddenly been whisked off to a West Country Moor as I heard the unmistakable cry of a **buzzard**. A quick search of the sky did indeed reveal one of these wonderful birds riding the air currents. Unfortunately it seems it was only passing through but an enjoyable experience nonetheless. I am reliably informed that Croxley is currently host to **grasshopper warblers, whitethroats** and **lesser whitethroats** and at least three species of **owl** have been heard on the Moor. The **egret** is back in residence on the Chess and can be seen pottering about. There are at least two **thrushes** in Stones Orchard and they have been singing beautifully. I have been lucky enough to hear them on several occasions and it is a real joy.

**Fox cubs** will have emerged by now and I have seen two or three in the Dickinson Square area. Coming home the other night, I was surprised to see a **badger** ambling down a Croxley pavement and even more surprised to find it then walking sedately down the road in front of my car. A slow to a stop and lights off did nothing to deter its meandering until it finally disappeared into a nearby garden.

With the weather improving this is the time to get out and about and enjoy the wonderful countryside that surrounds us. You don't have to go far to find a lot to interest and enjoy. However, as is often the case the more you look the more you see and the more you listen the more you hear. Tune out the distant roar of the M25 and tune into the bird song. Really look into the hedge rows and be amazed at the many, many different plants and just stand for a while on the edge of the Green and wait and see what crosses your path. Your patience will be rewarded!

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Two topical points: If your route crosses a field with cows and calves please remember that Mum cow may be very protective towards baby so give them distance and please do remember to keep your dog on a lead if there is stock in the fields. I have had to help treat a sheep bitten, to the bone, by a dog and know of shepherds whose lambs have been killed. It is also worth remembering that a farmer can shoot a dog that is worrying stock so keep that lead on please!