

Nature Notes June 2011

Gaskins, geans, mazzards, merrys or, to you and me, wild cherries! With Croxley's connection to cherries, we have to give them an honourable mention as they start to appear on the trees; there seems to be a very good crop this year. Good for making into cherry brandy or cherry bark and elderberry cough syrup, this is a useful tree and a useful fruit. We also have the old game of cherry-pit (stone) spitting. If you fancy you are good at it you may be interested to know that the world record stands at 29.12 metres!

Having mentioned elderberry, the elderflower is now starting to show well and we have plenty of them around Croxley. A very useful tree, the elder, as flowers, berries, leaves and bark can all be used for various applications from flower fritters through to sparkling wine and one of the tastiest stuffing for baked apples. It has been wisely said that there is no hedgerow glory finer than the elderflower and as an added extra, the elder is reputed never to be struck by lightning although I would be reluctant to put this to the test!

If you passing through Croxley Woods via All Saint's lane, then take the turn to the right just before the track "T" junction and a little way into the wood enjoy the wonderful view of a glade of foxgloves.

I have not heard much on the birding side of Croxley although there does seem to be some interest as to where the swallows or swifts are nesting. I can't remember which one it is that is causing the mystery, so, if you happen to know where either of these are setting up home, please let us know. A while back, whilst walking up Loudwater Lane towards the Green, a rustling and a bustling in the hedgerow attracted my attention and out hopped a golden pheasant. It hopped on to the road, ignoring both dog and me, did a sort of little dance before hopping back up into the hedge. Is this Croxley's first exotic dancer? Magpies: there seem to be quite a lot around this year and I must admit I rather like to see them. They get a very bad press from certain sections of the "conservation" lobby, a lobby that ignores the estimated 50 million songbirds killed by sparrow hawks and the (estimated) 55 million birds killed by the domestic cat! (It is estimated that the domestic moggy is responsible for killing some 275 million prey items per year: why on earth buy cat food?).

There has been quite a lot of press coverage recently about the increased number of ticks in the countryside (is this an 'uptick'?). Apart from the fact that they will happily gorge themselves on your blood, your dog's blood and probably cat's as well, they can carry the infection that leads to Lyme disease so please keep a good look out for tick bites and do a little bit of reading up on "the net." Long sleeves and trousers a good idea in known infestation areas!

Remember that if a cuckoo is heard on the 21st of June then it will be a wet summer and take heed that Midsummer Eve is one of the most uncanny and dangerous days of the year. It is recommended to protect your house with St John's wort, mugwort, plantain, corn marigold, dwarf elder, yarrow, ivy, vervain and orpins. Make them into a garland and hang it on the door.

Good luck!! D Edmunds.