

Sambourne Village

Wildlife sightings in Sambourne

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Mid June 2021 to mid July 2021

The past four weeks have delivered rather variable weather, but the field and woodland footpaths have dried sufficiently for safe walks, and sunshine has brought out butterflies in good numbers.

18th June. Our evening walk through Coughton Park wood was enhanced by the fragrance of honeysuckle blossom and a view of a couple of Hares.

20th June. On an afternoon footpath walk to Coughton we found ourselves surrounded by low-flying House Martins. We had previously seen very few of this species this summer.

21st June. We had in the garden a pair of Carrion Crows feeding a juvenile with fallout from the seed feeders and whatever else they were able to find in the grass.

22nd June. Pristine Small Tortoiseshell butterflies appeared in our garden today.

24th June. I spotted my first Ringlet butterfly of the summer in the woodland.

25th June. Ringlets are now on the wing on the Monarch's Way, and we saw our first Silver-washed Fritillary butterfly from the woodland bridleway. Chiffchaff singing was heard quite frequently.

27th June. A Muntjac was on the bridleway and the songs of Whitethroats, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were audible.

2nd July. As we walked the footpath near Sambourne Hall Farm, a Barn Owl appeared and set off on a hunt across the fields.

3rd July. Our neighbour Paul mentioned having seen a Marbled White butterfly on the footpath to Coughton. We then walked the path and counted about a dozen of the species – the first we had seen this year. We went on to see a Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshells, Small Skippers, Small Heaths, Meadow Browns and Ringlets. One Six-spot Burnet Moth was also present. During the afternoon, a flock of Swifts were zooming around above our house. We were pleased to see them as they are now becoming quite a rare sight.

7th July. Our morning walk through the woodland was rewarded with our first sighting this year of a White Admiral butterfly. Silver-washed Fritillaries were also present, and I was pleased to be able to identify a female Broad-bodied Chaser (dragonfly).

9th July. In the woodland I had another sighting of a White Admiral.

13th July. By the footpath to Coughton up to twelve Marbled Whites were visible in one small area, and a Comma butterfly was nearby.

16th July. We stood with a couple of friends in our back garden watching a flock of Swallows hunting overhead when I noticed a couple of larger, dark birds, like giant Swifts, appear above them. I recognised these as Hobbys – a species of falcon that visits us in summer and feeds on large insects and birds such as Swallows and Martins. Quite a thrill and great for impressing our friends!

Mid May 2021 to mid June 2021

I would like to start these notes with a plea to dog-walkers. If you watched the recent "Springwatch" programmes you might have heard Chris Packham urging people to keep dogs on leads and not allow them to run through crops or across fields, particularly at this time of year, to prevent them from disturbing ground-nesting birds. Species such as Skylarks and Lapwings are very vulnerable to this.

17th May. Over a field beside Coughton Lane we noticed Lapwings chasing gulls, then spotted several Lapwings sitting on the ground, presumably on nests.

18th May. A Kestrel was hovering above a ditch in Wike Lane.

23rd May. Pete saw a Red Kite flying above Astwood Bank cricket club.

27th May. On an evening walk over the fields to Coughton we saw a fine Fox, a Hare, four Herons in flight, three Linnets, a Green Woodpecker, and a Roe Deer.

30th May. Peter, from Coughton, has seen a Great Crested Grebe with chicks near Coughton Court. We spotted three Hares near Coughton Park woods.

1st June. On an evening walk to Coughton we glimpsed a Fox, saw two Roe Deer, heard a Yellowhammer, and had fine views of two Whitethroats.

2nd June. A morning walk to Coughton delivered many damselflies, particularly Beautiful Demoiselles, and a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly. Butterflies, including Orange Tip and Small Heath were also active. We noticed a Roe Deer watching us suspiciously.

3rd June. While we sat in the garden of the Green Dragon having our first post-lockdown beers, the pleasure was enhanced by a Swift and a House Martin flying overhead. This was the first time we had seen either species this year.

6th June. Roy sent a photograph of a young Fox standing on top of a fence and sniffing at a nest box in a neighbour's garden. Chris reported having seen a Blackbird attacking a Jay that it presumably saw as a potential predator on its eggs or chicks. In the evening, as we stood by the woods watching and listening to a couple of aircraft from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, we noticed two Hares feeding in the field in front.

7th June. We had good, long views of a Red Kite soaring over the trees as we walked to Coughton. A Painted Lady butterfly visited aubretia flowers in our garden.

11th June. The Monarch's Way footpath passes through a flower meadow to the south of Astwood Bank. Several Common Spotted Orchids are in flower there.

13th June. Two adult and two juvenile Carrion Crows spent more than an hour and a half probing our lawn for food.

17th June. David described some encounters on his dog walks not far from the Village Green, which included a fine Fox, some Hares, and a Mallard with her family of ducklings.

During the period of fine, warm weather this month I have had the first runs of my moth trap with reasonable success. Top prize would have to go to the Elephant Hawk, being so large and colourful, but just as interesting have been the Buff Tip moths that so resemble twigs, and the subtly marked Pale Tussocks. I'm still trying to identify some of the species, but so far they have all be quite common. Naturally, all have been released the following day.

Mid April 2021 to mid May 2021

The weather for the period covered by these notes included the cold and very dry end to April and the wet and still quite cold first half of May. Fortunately, the joys of spring have still managed to arrive.

18th April. An Orange-tip butterfly visited the garden and Speckled Wood butterflies were now in good numbers in the woods. Coal Tits were feeding in the birch trees.

19th April. A Yellowhammer and three Linnets were in the hedgerow beside the field footpath to Astwood Bank.

22nd April. Two Lesser Redpolls visited our frosty garden to feed on the lawn then sunflower hearts. Two Whitethroats were on the hedge by the driveway to Sambourne Warren.

29th April. Cowslips were in flower in a field beside the Monarch's Way. Nearby a Lesser Whitethroat was singing. We had clear views of a couple of Whitethroats by Astwood Bank cricket ground.

30th April. The verges of the Evesham Bypass had its annual display of cowslips to brighten a journey.

1st May. A Garden warbler was singing in Coughton Park Woods. The "Seek" app on our phone identified Greater Stitchwort flowers for us – a common plant now flowering in the woodland and verges.

2nd May. Two Swallows flew over our garden – the first we have seen this spring. I spotted a Blackcap that was singing in the garden of Perrymill Farm.

5th May. We saw more Swallows over Coughton Lane and perched on wires over our garden.

7th May. I was surprised to see a Hummingbird Hawkmoth feeding on aubretia flowers in our garden. We have rarely seen one in our garden and I read that they don't normally appear on the wing until June.

9th May. I was amused by a male Chaffinch attacking its own reflection in a neighbour's car door mirror.

10th May. Nick reported that at 6am he watched a Muntjac trotting down Perrymill Lane and exploring each garden. He went on to say that at 7.30am, from his garden, he heard a Cuckoo calling – the first report this spring. A few minutes later we heard a Cuckoo call near Sambourne Hall Farm. Heather reported hearing (presumably) the same bird a short time after. Later in our walk we spotted a pair of Bullfinches in Oak Tree Lane.

11th May. From our back garden we heard a Cuckoo calling nearby.

14th May. A rare sight in our garden these days, a small flock of young Starlings sought a meal in our lawn.

Mid March 2021 to mid April 2021

Although the weather this month has been unseasonably chilly, there have been some beautiful calm spring days to coax out the butterflies and encourage the birdsong.

22nd March. From the footbridge across the River Arrow at Coughton we noticed a couple of ducks in the water some distance upstream. One was distinctly black and white. Before I could get binoculars on them they took off, but Sue was quicker and could see

the other bird had a distinctly brown head. The only conclusion then was that it was a pair of Goosanders – not a species we've ever seen before in the area. I contacted the county bird recorder who told me he was not surprised to hear this as birds have recently been seen between Bidford and Welford on the River Avon.

24th March. As we walked along Coughton Fields Lane beyond the ford we spotted an interesting plant growing in the verge. I used the "Seek" app on our phone and it informed me that the plant was Butterbur. I read that its name comes from the fact that in the past its large heart-shaped leaves were used to wrap butter in warm weather. The song of Chiffchaffs could be heard for most of our walk to and from Coughton. A Brimstone butterfly was present in our garden.

25th March. We noticed many white and purple violets in Dark Lane, Astwood Bank.

27th March. We spotted two male Yellowhammers in Coughton Lane, Coughton.

29th March. A Peacock butterfly was on the bridleway in Coughton Park wood.

30th March. Primroses seemed to be at their peak in the woodland. We were delighted to see a Hare in a field beside the wood. Peacock butterflies appeared in our garden today.

2nd April. On our walk along The Monarch's Way and through the woods we saw and stopped to listen to three Blackcaps singing in the bushes. Many Chiffchaffs were singing, and we watched one foraging amongst blackthorn blossom. We also had our first Orange Tip Butterfly sighting of the year. Many tadpoles were swimming in a large puddle in the woods.

3rd April. Two Siskins visited the sunflower hearts feeder in our garden. We spotted two Linnets in the hedgerow beside the footpath to Astwood Bank.

7th April. I noticed Cowslips in flower at the edge of the recreation ground. It would be interesting to know if these were self-seeded or part of recent plantings by parents and children.

13th April. We heard a Whitethroat singing near the ford at Coughton.

14th April. A Willow Warbler was singing in the woodland. Pete reported having seen House Martins over his Middletown Lane garden and Buzzards nesting in a tree nearby.

17th April. The early morning sunshine brought more butterflies out on the wing and we saw several Speckled Woods and a Green-veined White on our walk through the woods. A party of four Fallow Deer crossed the path ahead of us.

Mid February 2021 to mid March 2021

This has been the month when the transition from winter to spring has become apparent to bring us much cheer from the gloom of the pandemic.

21st Feb. Several Song Thrushes were singing and were audible from Perrymill Lane almost to Coughton along Wike Lane. A field off Wike Lane had 30+ Greylag and Canada Geese grazing. Adam mentioned having seen a Kingfisher by the brook below the end of Perrymill Lane – the first he's seen there since he was a boy (only yesterday!)

22nd Feb. In Coughton Lane, at the start of the drive to Coughton Lodge Farm, we spotted a flock of around six Yellowhammers, and a Cormorant was perched in a tree near the farmhouse.

23rd Feb. Justin mentioned having seen four Little Egrets in a field off Sambourne Lane. Frances later reported the same.

24th Feb. Celandines are adding some colour to the verges in Wike Lane.

25th Feb. A mixed flock of Siskins and Redpolls were feeding in birch trees in Wike Lane. A flock of Fieldfares and Redwings were feeding in a field off Coughton Lane, Coughton.

4th March. After a lengthy absence from our garden, Greenfinches and Goldfinches, three of each, have visited the sunflower seed feeders today.

7th March. As I potted in the garden my attention was attracted by the mewing call of a Buzzard. Five were circling overhead at a variety of altitudes – one quite low and the highest hardly visible.

8th March. A Kestrel was perched in a tree at the Alcester Heath end of Coughton Lane.

9th March. Pussy willow is now becoming apparent in the hedgerows.

13th March. More Greenfinches and Goldfinches were visiting the garden feeders and a Great Spotted Woodpecker visited the peanuts.

14th March. In Wike Lane Sue heard the first Chiffchaff of the spring, but unfortunately my inferior hearing couldn't pick it up. A Muntjac crossed the road in front of us. We watched a Skylark performing its song flight by Coughton Lane.

15th March. Blackthorn is now coming into blossom in the hedgerows.

16th March. Although still not audible to me, Sue could hear more Chiffchaff singing beyond the ford at Coughton.

17th March. Having presumably been temporarily woken from hibernation, a Peacock butterfly has now settled in a very vulnerable location by our utility room door.

18th March. Eight Lapwings were feeding in a field off Coughton Lane. These birds are no longer a common sight around us having suffered a significant decline in numbers. Pussy willow is now starting to develop its lovely yellow display of pollen. A brief spell of sunshine this afternoon raised the temperature a little and resulted in the welcome sight of a pristine Brimstone butterfly in our garden.

Mid January 2021 to mid February 2021

I have read recently how numbers of our common garden birds have been dwindling and this was really brought home to me when I carried out a count for the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. One benefit of keeping these jottings is that I can now look back over several years and I see that in the 2018 birdwatch I recorded 16 species in the garden. This year I managed just 10 and those were in much smaller numbers than 2018. It is a worry.

19th Jan. As we walked into Coughton along Sambourne Lane a Fox emerged from the hedgerow and trotted down the lane before disappearing by the cemetery.

20th Jan. A Sparrowhawk surveyed the garden from our fence before flying off in search of a meal elsewhere

27th Jan. A walk along Wike Lane often provides a variety of birdlife in the line of trees and bushes. Today in one spot we found Long-tailed Tits, Blue Tits, a Treecreeper, and a Nuthatch.

5th Feb. Peter reported having seen three Cormorants near Coughton Court and Matt mentioned having seen a Red Kite over his Coughton Lane home. A couple of other Coughton residents have mentioned seeing a Red Kite overhead recently. Catkins are becoming more obvious in the hedgerows and we spotted the first signs of wild garlic in the verges.

6th Feb. A fellow walker in Wike Lane mentioned having had her attention attracted by distinctive bird song farther down the lane. From her description I'm sure it was a Song Thrush, and it was in an area where we have often heard one singing. We spotted five Yellowhammers on a hedgerow in Coughton Lane. We arrived home from our walk to find a male Sparrowhawk perched comfortably on our garden fence. It stayed for at least half an hour before moving on.

9th Feb. A small flock of Siskins was active in the stand of larch trees by the entrance to Coughton Lodge Farm.

10th Feb. The cold weather brought a Redwing into our garden where it spent a few minutes feeding on the lawn.

14th Feb. We were pleased to see a Song Thrush in our back garden hedge, from where it moved into the flower border to search for food. Sadly, they are now quite rare visitors to our garden.

Mid December 2020 to mid January 2021

Our involvement with the natural world has inevitably continued to be limited to the lanes around Sambourne and Coughton, and our own garden. However, there is still great pleasure to be obtained from observing the more "everyday" species.

22nd Dec. Several Yellowhammers occupied trees by a barn in Coughton Lane.

31st Dec. A mixed flock of more than 100 corvids (Jackdaws, Crows and Rooks) were feeding in a field beside the footpath to Coughton. We stopped to watch a Dunnock in the hedgerow. Easily dismissed as "little brown jobs" they are most attractive birds when viewed in good light that shows off the contrasting grey and brown plumage.

2nd Jan. For the first time this winter I noticed two Siskins visiting our sunflower heart feeder. They soon departed and were replaced by a party of Long-tailed Tits.

5th Jan. We had another Yellowhammer sighting in Coughton Lane.

9th Jan. A Song Thrush flew from a tree in Sambourne Lane and a Great Tit was calling clearly in Wike Lane. Chris described the technique of a Blackbird in his Middletown Lane garden using a fatball as a pendulum, taking a peck each time the fatball swung towards it.

13th Jan. A flock of about 10 Starlings were feeding in the field behind our garden. To my mind this is worthy of comment because Starlings are no longer a common sight for us.

15th Jan. A sad occasion caused us to head south to Somerset on an essential journey. The journey was slightly brightened in both directions by the sight of a Red Kite flying overhead near Beckford.

17th Jan. A few Meadow Pipits and Yellowhammers were visible in the trees by the barn in Coughton Lane.

18th Jan. After a period of intermittent visits to the garden by a Great Spotted Woodpecker, today we had a male and a female feeding on the sunflower hearts and peanuts, and having a peck at the bark of our old apple tree.

19th Jan. We had a good view of a Mistle Thrush and a Song Thrush close together in a tree in Wike Lane. This gave a great opportunity to compare the size and the markings of the two species.

Although the time for the Big Garden Birdwatch will have passed by the time you read this, I hope anyone interested will have taken part. What better way to spend the enforced time at home than taking an hour to see what visits your garden?

Mid November 2020 to mid-December 2020

The wet weather over the past few weeks has meant that we've continued to keep to the surfaced lanes. Walks have now taken us beyond the ford at Coughton and along Coughton Lane as far as the B4090. This has reminded us just how pleasant is the view over the open countryside towards and beyond Alcester from the top of the rise out of Coughton.

15th Nov. Our garden received two visits from a Sparrowhawk, neither of which ended in a meal for the bird.

18th Nov. Our early Christmas present to ourselves arrived – a moth trap, which I hope will enable me report on a different set of visitors to our garden next year.

19th Nov. We spotted a Little Egret near a Heron in a field off Sambourne Lane near Sambourne Park. This is the first one we've seen near the centre of the village.

21st Nov. Graham and Elizabeth have been enjoying seeing this Little Egret together with at least three Herons for the past week.

22nd Nov. A cormorant flew overhead by the ford at Coughton. In Wike Lane a couple of Fieldfares were perfectly illuminated by the low winter sun reminding us of just what attractive birds they are.

25th Nov. Two Pied Wagtails visited our garden. They've now become quite regulars.

26th Nov. The well-berried holly tree in our neighbour's garden is proving to be a great attraction to the local population of Redwings.

5th Dec. Redwings are still feeding on the holly berries next door. I put out a niger seed feeder for the first time for many months. Last time it took some time for the birds to show any interest, but two Goldfinches arrived to feed within hours.

Embryonic catkins are now visible to remind us that spring comes after winter. Buds are also becoming more noticeable in some trees and bushes.

12th Nov. We noticed a small flock of Meadow Pipits near a barn in Coughton Lane. A yellowhammer was perched in a nearby tree. As we walked back along Wike Lane the pheasant shoot was beginning. A short distance ahead of us a startled Muntjac appeared from the woodland and ran across the road but found that there was no gap in the fence. In a panic it whirled around, shot back across the road and disappeared into the woods. On our return home we noticed snowdrops in flower in the garden two houses from us.

15th Dec. In a field beside Coughton Lane we noticed a flock of at least fifty Redwings and a few Fieldfares feeding.

18th Dec. A lady who lives in Coughton Lane mentioned having occasional visits to her garden from a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. These are now rare birds, so this is good news.

Mid October 2020 to Mid November 2020

This month began with reasonable weather keeping the field and woodland paths walkable. The recent rainfall has rendered footpaths very muddy, so walks have been confined to the lanes.

15th Oct. A stag fallow Deer with a splendid head of antlers seemed to study us on the bridleway in Coughton Park woods before sauntering off among the trees, followed by a younger stag.

Off the Monarch's Way footpath, we spotted two foxes, one of which gave us a protracted view as it seemed to be relaxing in a sunny spot in the undergrowth.

A Great Spotted Woodpecker visited the peanut feeder in our garden. This was the first time we've seen one here for many months.

18th Oct. From his Middletown Lane garden Chris heard Tawny Owl calls.

19th Oct. In the field to the Sambourne side of Coughton cemetery we counted five Herons, presumably hunting for invertebrates. I have found a variety of collective nouns for Herons, including a "sedge" and a "siege".

4th Nov. Walks have been curtailed due to an achilles tendon problem, so recent sightings have been limited to what visits the garden. The overnight frost has brought more birds into the garden including a Great Spotted Woodpecker to the peanuts and a couple of Blackbirds stripping berries from the pyracanthas.

7th Nov. A Heron spent a short time in our garden near to the kitchen window. It then moved on to the neighbour's garden before flying off. They really do look large when close. Peter was surprised to see a Hedgehog with a mouthful of leaves in his Coughton garden, presumably preparing sleeping quarters for hibernation. His neighbour has occasionally been presented with a gift of a Hedgehog by his sheepdog.

8th Nov. For the first time this autumn I saw visiting winter thrushes, mostly Redwings with a few Fieldfares, feeding in the field behind our garden.

10th Nov. At dusk on this mild afternoon I noticed a small bat, presumably a Pipistrelle, flying circuits over our garden.

To clearly show that Foxes visit the centre of the village, Roy has captured an image of one leaving his garden close to the Green Dragon around 7pm.

11th Nov. For the first time that we can recall we had the pleasure of a visit to the garden by a Grey Wagtail. It landed on the patio wall, briefly visited the bird bath then flew off. I have a soft spot for this species as it was one that stimulated our interest in birds many years ago when we lived in Harborne. A brook ran behind our garden and resulted in some less-common birds in the garden, including these wagtails with their sulphur yellow bellies.

Mid September 2020 to Mid October 2020

14th Sept. The onomatopoeic calls of Chiffchaffs were still being heard in Coughton Park woods and near Sambourne Park today. I

noticed an interesting looking fungus in the woods which the "Seek" app on the phone identified as *Amanita rubescens*. My field guide describes it as "indigestible when raw, but harmless and good when cooked". We were not tempted!

17th Sept. Today delivered our treat of the month. As we walked along the Monarch's Way footpath beyond Botany Bay nursery, we noticed a flock of 12+ birds which we recognised as Meadow Pipits. They landed on a fence and we realised that there was a different species amongst them. Looking through binoculars we could see that it was a Wheatear. Another different species was noticed close to this and we identified it as a Whinchat. These are both summer visitors to this country and we have normally seen them in mountain and moorland habitats, so I assume they were on their way from their summer haunts back to Africa for the winter. Both are very attractive birds.

20th Sept. The arrival of a Sparrowhawk in our garden instantly cleared the area of the small birds that had been busily feeding.

21st Sept. A doe Fallow Deer crossed our path in the woods.

22nd Sept. Chris spotted a Weasel in his Middletown Lane garden – not the first time.

27th Sept. During an early morning walk through the woods we had good views of a couple of Goldcrests and a mixed flock of tits. Several Chiffchaffs could be heard calling.

1st Oct. A Red Kite flew over us on our woodland walk.

6th Oct. A Heron was standing in a field off Sambourne Lane in Coughton.

11th Oct. A lady resident of Coughton Lane in Coughton told us of seeing three Stonechats in her garden, of a Muntjac that is regularly found in her garden shed, and of seeing nineteen Herons standing in a circle in a nearby field.

13th Oct. Overnight a couple of Lawyer's Wig fungi appeared in our gravel drive. These are good to eat but didn't suit our menu for the day!

14th Oct. Adam commented on seeing flocks of small brown birds in a clover field and around cattle. From his description these are almost certainly Meadow Pipits. Today we noticed numbers of Ladybirds on the house walls presumably seeking suitable hibernation sites.

Mid August 2020 to Mid September 2020

Anyone who read last month's jottings might be surprised to see this as I said it would be my last, but some kind words said to me prompted a rethink, so I'll keep going for a while!

16th Aug. We were very pleased to see a Hare in the field beside Coughton Park woods – we hadn't seen one for many months.

17th Aug. Chris reported having a party of 15 Long-tailed Tits in his Middletown Lane garden.

18th Aug. A Song Thrush was singing and visible in Wike Lane. I don't seem to have given them much of a mention in the past, but it is a pleasure to hear them when most birds have stopped singing.

20th Aug. Last month I mentioned the unexpected gift of Painted Lady caterpillars. Today we released the four successfully hatched adult butterflies onto buddleia and verbena flowers in the garden. One stayed in the garden for a couple of days before setting off on its migration to Africa (I presume!).

23rd Aug. I'm used to seeing Crows and Jackdaws mobbing Buzzards, but today I noticed Swallows harassing a Kestrel.

26th Aug. A Roe Deer was in the field adjacent to Coughton Park woods.

27th Aug. A Fox emerged from the woodland beside Wike Lane.

1st Sept. It was interesting to see a team of volunteers from Heart of England Forest carrying out some coppicing work and producing a "natural" fence at the entrance to woods. It's great to see the woods being actively managed for nature.

2nd Sept. We spent many minutes watching two Goldcrests feeding in conifers in the woodland. We used to see them frequently there but hadn't for a long time.

3rd Sept. A cool, wet day resulted in an explosion of the regular bird species visiting the garden feeders. Many Swallows were swirling over the garden and the field behind us.

4th Sept. As we walked along Sambourne Lane I noticed a long black beetle on the pavement. As I stopped to look closely it adopted a "threatening" pose, raising its rear rather like a scorpion. I thought I knew what it was and the "Seek" app on the phone confirmed it as a Devil's Coach Horse beetle. They are apparently capable of delivering a painful nip and can squirt an evil-smelling liquid. Apart from that they're lovely!

5th Sept. A Roe Deer buck was visible in the crop adjacent to the woodland.

8th Sept. A Small Copper butterfly was feeding on verbena flowers in our garden.

9th Sept. I spotted a juvenile Grass Snake in Wike Lane. Unfortunately it seemed to have suffered an injury to its body, but was still active, so I moved it onto the grass verge and hoped for the best.

12th Sept. Martin reported having seen a mother doe and fawn (species not specified) in the woodland.

13th Sept. We spotted a flat Slowworm in Wike Lane. We only ever seem to see them as roadkill, but I suppose it's a good sign that they are around.

Mid July 2020 to Mid August 2020

The spells of hot sunny weather have continued to keep butterflies active, but the birds have gone quiet as most breeding has come to an end.

16th July. A bramble patch in a sunny spot was attracting good numbers of butterflies including many Peacocks, Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns, with a couple of Silver-washed Fritillaries. We stopped to exchange a few words with volunteers from the Heart of England Forest. They were clearing birch scrub to make way for more brambles which should increase butterfly numbers in future. It is good to see this woodland being managed for the benefit of the flora and fauna.

My brother brought to my attention a phone "app" for identifying items in the natural world. It is called Seek by iNaturalist. Basically you point the phone's camera at the item and it tells you what the species is. I've tried it on a few wild flowers and a beetle and it seemed to work well.

17th July. I did the "Big Butterfly Count" in our garden and found Peacocks, Tortoiseshells, Small White, Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and a Comma.

21st July. Another Red Kite spotted flying over Middletown Lane – this time reported by Chris.

29th July. After dark I tried to spot Comet Neowise, supposedly visible near the Great Bear constellation, but was unsuccessful. However, using my birdwatching telescope, I did have an excellent view of Saturn and Jupiter close together with Jupiter's four moons clearly visible in a line.

31st July. An unexpected gift was delivered by Richard the postman. Friends of ours, knowing our interest in nature, had decided that we should have a kit for raising five Painted Lady butterflies. It consisted of a tub containing five tiny caterpillars with a complete food source and a mesh cylinder for the butterflies to emerge into. We now have four chrysalides (one of the caterpillars was DOA) and await the emergence of the butterflies in a couple of weeks. Very educational for children (young and old!)

7th Aug. A Red Kite was circling above our house.

9th Aug. A Common Blue butterfly was visiting flowers in our garden.

11th Aug. We were very pleased to spot a Marsh Tit in the hedgerow at the edge of the woodland in Wike Lane. This is a rare sighting for us.

12th Aug. A male Bullfinch brightened our garden when it briefly perched on a verbena stem.

Mid June 2020 to Mid July 2020

These past four weeks have been greatly enhanced by the emergence of several species of butterfly to attract our attention and go some way towards making up for the gradual reduction in bird song.

14th June. As we walked a section of the Monarch's Way footpath to the south of Botany Bay nursery a Fox crossed the meadow and headed for cover.

15th June. We noticed three Skylarks together as we walked the footpath to Astwood Bank. On the Monarch's Way we saw our first Small Skipper butterfly and later, in Coughton Park woods, spotted a White Admiral and a Silver-washed Fritillary.

16th June. Chris reported a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly on his Middletown Lane garden pond.

19th June. We spotted our first Ringlet butterfly in the woodland.

20th June. A Ringlet and a Red Admiral visited flowers in our garden.

21st June. Pete has had a Tawny Owl on his Middletown Lane garden fence each night for the past three weeks.

22nd June. Marbled White butterflies have appeared in the meadow beside the Monarch's Way and are particularly attracted to Knapweed flowers.

23rd Jun. The meadow now holds large numbers of Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites. The bramble flowers in the woodland were attracting Ringlets, Silver-washed Fritillaries, a Comma, a Red Admiral, and a Small Skipper. At least I think it was a Small Skipper, but the Biodiversity Manager from The Heart of England Forest informed me that she had seen an Essex Skipper and I don't think I can tell the difference! We also spotted a male Banded Demoiselle damselfly. As we walked back up Sambourne Lane away from the Green Dragon, we saw a Red Kite swoop into the paddock beside "Thatchbrook" then emerge to circle low overhead, gradually drifting across the village green and towards Coughton.

25th June. I stopped to photograph a couple of Burnet Moths feeding on Knapweed by the Monarch's Way. It was only when I viewed the photographs at home on the computer that I realised they were two different species – a Five-spot Burnet and a Six-spot Burnet.

26th June. We saw an Azure Damselfly on the Monarch's Way and a Holly Blue butterfly soon after. Fritillaries and Marbled Whites were in the woodland.

28th June. A couple of Linnets were perched on cables by the path to Astwood Bank.

30th June. I found the remains of a deceased Large Emerald moth in Wike Lane.

10th July. Phil noticed a Red Kite over Middletown Lane.

11th July. More butterfly species are now visiting our garden including Small Tortoiseshells, a Peacock, and a Gatekeeper. In a previous edition of "Nature Jottings" I mentioned that a pair of Great Tits had chosen a traffic cone in Janet's Wike Lane garden as a nest site. Access was through the small hole in the top. There having been a lot of people activity near the cone, Janet decided to check on their well-being. She gently raised the edge of the cone and five young birds shot out in a simultaneous fledging. Three weeks later young Great Tits are still around the garden so it would seem the story had a happy ending.

Mid May 2020 to Mid June 2020

Over the past few years, while we've been pottering in the garden, we've occasionally heard a strange call emanating from a number of different directions. We've always assumed it was a bird because of the changes of location but couldn't imagine what it was. The best way I could have described it was a slightly musical "bong" repeated up to five times with the sort of frequency of a crow calling. We recently heard it several times, but still couldn't see anything. I looked at all the field guides to see if any mentioned corvids making odd noises and came across one reference to Ravens making some curious sounds. I heard it again several times which drove me in to try Google. One of the results took me to a "Youtube" video of a Raven calling. The first calls this bird makes are amusing, but not what we've heard. Towards the end there's a very different call and "Bingo!" it's the call we've been hearing. Mystery solved! Interestingly this was filmed in Canada.

15th May. We had a lovely view of a fine-looking stag Roe Deer in Coughton Park wood. Blackbirds were gathering worms from some freshly spread compost in our garden, to take to their young.

16th May. On a morning walk through the wood we had good views of a Mistle Thrush then heard a Tawny Owl calling loudly. A Song Thrush visited our garden – sadly, a rare event these days.

17th May. On a morning walk along Wike Lane we heard a Cuckoo calling for about 15 minutes. We also had two good views of the bird. Janet showed us where Great Tits are raising a brood inside a traffic cone on the ground – accessing the nest through the small hole in the top. A Red Kite flew over our house. Chris spotted a Cinnabar Moth in his Middletown Lane garden. Our neighbour Ann saw a Hedgehog on her drive.

20th May. An unusual experience today was having a dead young rabbit fall to the ground beside us as we walked past Green Dragon Cottage. It was dropped by a Buzzard that had flown from the garden.

24th May. On our morning walk we spotted a Drinker Moth caterpillar on the woodland bridleway. The adult moth is a real beauty. About 20 Starlings were feeding on our lawn – rare visitors to our garden these days. Tawny Owl calls continued for some time off Perrymill Lane late in the evening.

25th May. A Muntjac Deer appeared to be watching us watching butterflies on the woodland bridleway.

27th May. The arrival of a Heron cleared Graham and Elizabeth's Sambourne Lane garden of Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves.

28th May. Young Goldfinches and Blue Tits were being fed by adults in our garden.

31st May. The woodland is changing with warblers becoming less vocal and foxgloves, honeysuckle and bramble flowers taking over from the bluebells.

2nd June. We had a brief view of a Redstart in the woods. We saw our first House Martins this year as they prospected for nest sites under the eaves of The Old Post Office.

4th June. In the woods we watched a Garden Warbler perched on a nearby branch as it spent several minutes preening.

8th June. Near Glebe Farm we stopped to watch a Skylark performing its song flight and noticed four Swifts high above.

9th June. A female Roe Deer grazed in a field beside the woods. There was mayhem in Graham and Elizabeth's garden where a Sparrowhawk was seeking a meal and a White Crab Spider caught a Peacock butterfly.

Mid April 2020 to Mid May 2020

I can think of nothing that is such an important symbol of springtime to everyone and acts as such a landmark in the year other than the call of a Cuckoo. On April 15th Heather was the first person to report having heard one. She was soon followed by Peter, Nick, Julie, Tracy and Paul. Today Sandra told me she heard one calling on April 16th and, soon after, she saw one on the telephone line in front of her Sambourne Lane house. We didn't manage to hear one until May 2nd, but have several times heard the call since then.

The recent spells of warm, calm weather have brought out more butterfly species and seems to have stimulated even more bird song.

16th April. We noticed a lot of bee-like insects with furry bodies and long proboscis feeding on flowers in our garden. These have subsequently been identified as Bee-flies.

17th April. Wild garlic in flower in Wike Lane and Bluebells in the wood are now a picture.

22nd April. We found small, dark droppings in the garden which we suspected of being from a Hedgehog. A few days later our neighbour Ann saw one in our drive around 9:30pm to confirm our suspicions.



Cuckoo



Tree creeper



Whitethroat

23rd April. Julie reported having heard a Cuckoo from the bottom of Perrymill Lane and suspects that a Tree creeper is nesting in our neighbour's oak tree.



Blackcap



Chiffchaff



Garden Warbler

30th April. In Wike Lane near the village green we heard the song then saw a Whitethroat. Since then we've heard and seen them almost daily along with Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and, less frequently, Garden Warblers.

3rd May. A Nuthatch was hunting for insects in the wall around our patio. Phil B. saw foxes and a Barn Owl off Middletown Lane.

4th May. I saw a Holly Blue butterfly in our garden. A couple of days later we noticed another settled on pyracantha flowers.

9th May. As we walked along the bridleway through the woods off Wike Lane a Red Kite soared overhead. A Willow Warbler added its voice to the chorus of bird song. Speckled Wood butterflies are now commonly seen on this walk.

12th May. A flock of Swallows was actively feeding over a field beside Wike Lane.

Mid March 2020 to Mid April 2020

While our lives have changed beyond all recognition during these extraordinary times, the rest of the natural world has continued as normal. Our horizons have been limited by restrictions in movement, but there has been much to see and hear locally with the move into springtime.

12th March. As we walked along Middletown Lane, we could hear a Skylark singing above an adjacent field.

14th March. Phil reported having seen 5 Roe Deer off Middletown Lane.

15th March. Our neighbour Ann saw a Barn Owl in flight and a Little Owl in the road at Hangings Well this evening.

17th March. On an afternoon walk along Wike Lane we stopped to listen to the song of our first Chiffchaff of the spring, then watched a Tree creeper working its way up a tree trunk. A Fox crossed the lane a little ahead of us and disappeared in the woods.

18th March. Phil noticed two Red-legged Partridges in his Middletown Lane garden.

19th March. As we returned home from Hillers Farm Shop we saw a Red Kite overhead at Cookhill. Several Greenfinches visited our garden feeders.

21st March. A Comma butterfly was visiting flowers in our garden. Many bees were visiting a patch of anemones.

22nd March. A Heron was looking for food in the field behind us.

23rd March. We spotted our first Brimstone butterfly in the centre of the village.

24th March. Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies were in the garden today.

25th March. A cock Pheasant was peering through the patio doors into the kitchen.

26th March. There was almost continuous singing of Chiffchaffs the length of Wike Lane to Coughton.

4th April. Matt and Lizzie saw a Little Egret in a meadow behind Coughton Court.

7th April. Several Goldfinches were ignoring the seed feeders and exploring the patio walling and the vegetable garden instead. Our neighbour Ann noticed "absolutely loads" of Peacock butterflies in the field behind us.

8th April. We heard a Whitethroat singing near the village green. The first Orange Tip butterfly was feeding on aubretia in our garden. Subsequently they have become regular visitors.

10th April. We heard our first Willow Warbler singing in Wike Lane/Sambourne Lane. Friends reported a Red Kite flying over Pebworth. Phil saw four Red-legged Partridges in his Middletown Lane field, and heard Skylarks singing.

11th April. We've noticed Blackbirds gathering food in our back lawn. We now know that they have young in a nest in our neighbour's hedge.

15th April. Heather from Middletown Lane heard a Cuckoo call this morning – the first report that I've received.

16th April. Our early morning walk to Astwood Bank and back across the fields paid dividends. We paused to listen to a Skylark singing and noticed a different bird on the ground. This proved to be a male Wheatear, which proceeded to give us great views. This is a summer visitor more generally associated with moorland and cliff-tops, so presumably it had stopped off to refuel on its way to its breeding territory. We then saw our first couple of Swallows this spring and watched a Skylark performing its song flight.

Mid February 2020 to early March 2020

The frequent and heavy rain this month have made the field footpaths so muddy that we've limited our walks to the lanes. However, wildlife continues to be active in the garden and hedgerows and the following sightings were recorded.

14th Feb. My attention was attracted by feathers floating down from an oak tree in our neighbours' garden. When viewed through binoculars the source seemed to be a Carrion Crow plucking and eating a Wood Pigeon in the tree.

21st Feb. We had a prolonged view of a Sparrowhawk sitting on our garden fence and were able to appreciate its lovely markings. Later, on a walk along Wike Lane, we saw a large mixed flock of Siskins and Lesser Redpolls feeding in the beech and larch trees.

26th Feb. A Little Owl could be heard calling across the field behind our house. Today I learned that the first Avocets of the year have arrived at Upton Warren.

29th Feb. As we drove just south of the Bidford Gliding Club we were please to see two kestrels hovering.

1st March. Phil was please to report sightings from his early morning run along Middletown Lane. These included long-tailed Tits, Buzzards and deer.

2nd March. We noticed a large flock of Fieldfares, Redwings and Starlings in Wike Lane. A Little Owl was again calling close to the house.

2nd March. Peter reported several sightings in and around his Middletown Lane garden including a Bullfinch, Muntjacs, Tawny Owls and a Fox.

3rd March. I was surprised to see a pair of Mallards waddling past the end of our rear garden – an indication of the amount of surface water around.

7th March. In a rare spell of pleasant weather, we took a 9:30am walk along Wike Lane and were entertained by bird song delivered by Song Thrushes, Chaffinches, Robins, Blackbirds and Great Tits. Wild garlic was growing well in the verges. On a drive to Hampshire we saw more Red Kites than we've ever seen before on this journey, the first ones noted soon after Stow on the Wold with more in Oxfordshire. I'm used to seeing large numbers where the M40 crosses the Chilterns, but they seem to be spreading their range.

9th March. A flock of 100+ Fieldfares, Redwings and Starlings was moving between the grass and the trees, performing a "mini murmuration" in the field behind us. Chris noticed a similar number of winter thrushes near his Middletown Lane home. It's around this time that these species that migrated here for the winter are leaving for their summer breeding grounds in continental Europe and Scandinavia. We now look forward to our summer visitors. We would expect to hear the first Chiffchaffs before the end of March. Who will be first to report a Cuckoo this year?

Early January 2020 to Mid February 2020

It's pleasing to report that at the start of the month a Barn Owl was spotted by Phil as it hunted along the hedgerow in Middletown Lane.

The Clarke family have continued to keep a watch on the wildlife in their Oak Tree Lane garden and have enjoyed very vocal Tawny Owls and a good number of species for the annual bird count. They've also been keeping their resident Hedgehog happy with a nightly feed and have seen a deer in the field behind.

For the first time for many years we missed doing the bird count as we were away in Ecuador. This also means that my only local sightings of note have been a Fox in Jill Lane late last Saturday and a Frog hopping across Middletown Lane early the next morning. Ecuador, however, provided something of a wildlife extravaganza. Our trip was organised by a company that we've travelled with many times before, specialising in birdwatching holidays for small groups. They are Bird Holidays, comprising a small team of highly experienced naturalists, based in Leeds. They take ethical travel responsibilities very seriously and back in 2006 they created a nature reserve in Ecuador. They funded the purchase and reforestation of 85 acres of cow pasture to extend an existing nature reserve. Using calculations established in the Kyoto Agreement the reforestation offsets the carbon emissions of the flights for the members of their trips, so we could enjoy our holiday with a clear conscience.

The trip began with a flight to the capital, Quito, which is at an altitude of 2850 metres. We spent two nights nearby and from there visited higher in Andes, up to around 4000 metres, to find some specific species. On one day we saw 25 Andean Condors while enjoying the mountain scenery including snow-capped volcanoes. We also had good views of three Spectacled Bears and saw 19

species of hummingbird. We then began to drop in altitude and spent three nights each in two different lodges in the “cloud forest” region, selected for their particular habitats. A Tapir visiting a salt lick below the restaurant veranda was an unexpected treat. We abandoned one morning forest visit due to persistent rain but were rewarded by an unexpected sight in the grounds of our lodge – an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock – a truly unusual and spectacular bird. Our final five days were spent in the Amazon Basin at Napo Wildlife Centre Lodge. Here the local community of the Anangu tribe has committed to conserving the environment and every local person is a stakeholder in the lodge and its environs. People who would otherwise have been clearing forest for crops and cattle are instead dedicated to preservation of the forest and wildlife. On our canoe trips along the Amazon tributaries we were treated to an abundance of wildlife including a 5 metre Cayman, an even larger Anaconda (sleeping!), Giant Otters, and several species of primate – not to mention the birds!

Mid December 2019 to Early January 2020

We saw the first signs that winter will be coming to an end before too long when we noticed quite prominent catkins in the hedgerow beside the Evesham Bypass a few days ago. Also, snowdrops and primroses are flowering in gardens around the village and shoots of spring bulbs are appearing.

The only report I received this month was of a Woodcock having been seen close to Coughton Woods – presumably flushed by shooters as they are normally crepuscular.

Our own observations have included:

13th Dec. On a walk along Wike Lane we noticed good numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings in the trees, but we were captivated by the antics of a Raven. We frequently see and hear one perched on a pylon, but this one was in the field and appeared to be jumping up and down in a sort of bouncing action. I can only imagine it was in some way trying to reveal something to eat, but it seemed a strange way to set about it.

21st & 22nd Dec. On both days it was a treat to see a Bullfinch – the first in Sambourne Lane and the second in Wike Lane.

22nd Dec. Two Muntjacs were at the top of Perrymill Lane and disappeared into the paddock opposite “Four Ways”.

19th & 26th Dec. A Red Kite was spotted flying overhead near Hillers Farm Shop and from the Evesham bypass near the town.

7th Jan. It's many years since we last visited the Slimbridge Wetlands Centre on the Severn estuary in Gloucestershire, so we decided to pay a visit. After a fortifying coffee and teacake in the on-site restaurant we set off through the grounds. We really wanted to walk out to the hides overlooking the pools and meadows where the wild birds congregate, but the walk through the pens of captive birds gives an excellent opportunity to see the ducks, geese and swans close up, some to be found in the UK and others from around the world. It's amusing to see how friendly many are, thinking that you're one of the kind visitors who has invested in a bag of seed (we weren't!). From the first hide we visited, a flock of Black-tailed Godwits with their impressively long bills were visible. From the next hide we viewed a very large flotilla of ducks, mostly Wigeon, but with a few Pintails and Teal mixed in. Some groups of wading birds, specifically Golden Plover and Dunlin were also present. From our last couple of stops, at the farthest hides, we could see a few Bewick's Swans, wintering here after breeding in Siberia, and 100+ Curlew. There were also several Redshanks and a couple of Ruff. I often struggle to identify waders, but I could manage these. There's something for everyone at Slimbridge and with the drive taking little more than an hour, there's every reason to give it a try. Binoculars (and ideally a telescope) are essential for the hides and are available for hire.



Black-tailed Godwit



Golden Plover



Dunlin