



## *South Yorkshire Branch Lockdown Newsletter*

Editor Pauline Rutherford M.B.N.A.



Song Thrush by S. Rutherford

If it wasn't for lockdown, we would probably have missed this visitor to our garden!

**A Special Issue Newsletter featuring sightings and photos taken by members during the Covid-19 crisis. We were all allowed to take a daily exercise and many of us have made more use of our gardens. here are some articles and records of what we have seen.**

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## An Hour in the Garden – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020

By Di Farrar MBNA

After spending a couple of weeks on “lockdown” and self-isolating, it was so nice to see the sun shining and I was able to get out in the garden. Looking out of the window is ok, especially when the weather is bad, but it doesn’t compare to being in the fresh air! I had been watching Dunnocks (*Prunella molinaris*), robin sized birds, streaky brown and grey in appearance with orange legs, and known for scurrying around under bird feeders looking for seeds or beneath hedges foraging for insects or earthworms. Just recently, I have noticed seeing these birds actually on the feeders and fat balls, which I thought was unusual, and wondered if their usual food was in short supply?

The sun had brought out butterflies, a Peacock butterfly fluttered around the plants but I was thrilled to see one of my favourite flying creatures, the Bee-fly. This one was the Dark-edged species (*Bombylius major*) so called as the wings have lovely dark markings along the leading edges. Looking a little like a bee, it has a yellowish-brown hairy body, long spindly legs and a long proboscis which it probes into the flowers to get at the nectar.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) were looking beautiful, House Sparrows (*Passer Domesticus*) are now returning in groups after being absent for quite a while and Drone-flies were hovering around protecting their territory, so it looks like life in the garden is just as it should be.



Bee-fly by D. Farrar



Dunnock on the feeder by D. Farrar



Peacock Butterfly by D. Farrar

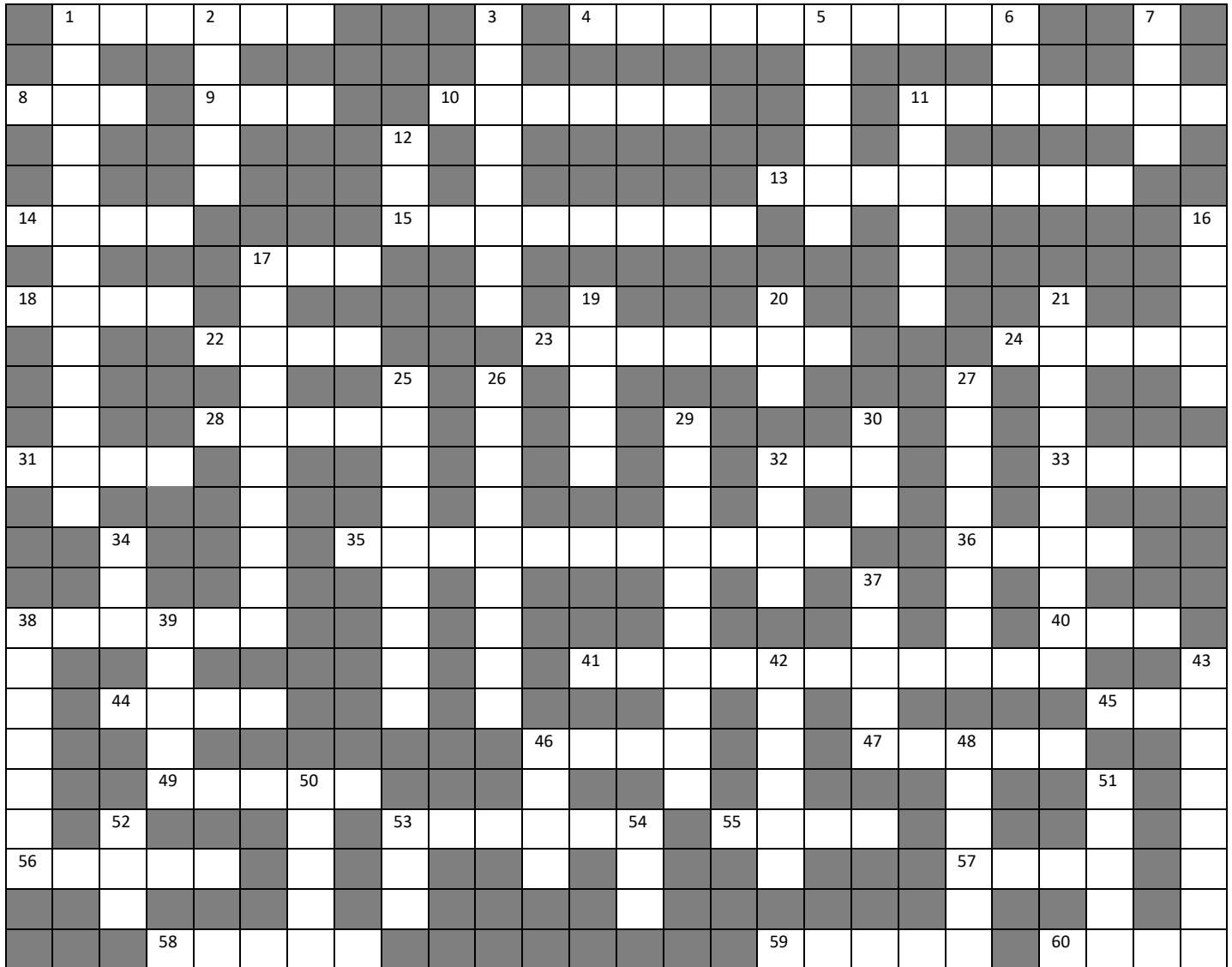
# LOCKDOWN CROSSWORD

Have Fun!

## BIRDS, BUGS AND BOTANY

Devised by David & Gill Shearing

Some of you know Dave and Gill and some of you have heard us mentioning them as the friends we house-sit and chicken-sit for over winter!



The answers are at the end of the newsletter!

## Clues

### ACROSS

1. Small Mustelid. (6)
4. Resting field with antlers. (6,4)
8. This tree is affected by Netherlands blight. (3)
9. Fire residue. (3)
10. Sister relative. (6)
11. Boom, Boom! (7)
13. Trees with male appendage. (8)
14. In a ballet, on water. (4)
15. Luminous wriggler. (8)
17. Busy letter of the alphabet. (3)
18. White Anglo Saxon Protestant initially. (4)
22. you can coif this. (4)
23. A cockney bird. (7)
24. Bird often seen on a Christmas card. (5)
28. Something that counts up. (5)
31. Unwanted plant. (4)
32. Extinct NZ grass cutter. (3)
33. Little Jack Horner found one on his thumb. (4)
35. Bee food and nurse (verb). (11)
36. Manoeuvre to save your head. (4)
38. Talk incessantly. (6)
40. Juvenile Newt. (3)
41. Bird that crawls up trunks. (11)
44. Female sailor. (4)
45. Green vegetable. (3)
46. Partridge tree. (4)
47. Pastime. (5)
49. A nut in Watership Down. (5)
53. Swiss clock. (6)
55. Fly as high as a .... (4)
56. Largest UK Corvid. (5)
57. He likes cars. Toot Toot! (4)
58. Difficult to tame? (5)
59. As quiet as a ..... (5)
60. Used with wax as a sign of authenticity. (4)

### DOWN

1. Salix singer. (6,7)
2. Has a mobile home. (5)
3. Prudish English flower. (8)
5. Aspirin tree. (6)
6. As fast as a ... up a drainpipe. (3)
7. Advice to Dick Whittington. (4)
11. Harass. (6)
12. High on the ... (3)
16. Period of work. (5)
17. Bosom with hirsute chin. (7,3)
19. Adam and Eve's favourite fruit. (5)
20. Container. (3)
21. Bird with built in shock absorbers for hammering. (10)
25. Mythical fiery beast takes to the air. (9)
26. Spread for bread and a drinking vessel. (9)
27. Deep and crisp and even. Oops! (8)
29. Dark Frenchman's hat. (10)
30. Used by cricketers. (3)
32. Skin blemish. (4)
34. Mister Swan. (3)
37. A sandy shore. (5)
38. Fish egg Bambi. (3,4)
39. Tree (for Corporal use). (5)
42. Familial furry pet. (6)
43. The Welsh flower. (8)
46. Old fashioned sharp weapon. (4)
48. Volkswagen favourite. (6)
50. Sharp eyed bird. (5)
51. Plant with three sided stems. (5)
52. Climbing plant without the 'crown'. (3)
53. Penny bun. (3)
54. Hogwarts postie. (3)

## A Walk in Wharncliffe Woods

By Roy Stewart MBNA

Autumn is often considered the best months for fungi but they can often be found all year round in smaller numbers but there is also a significant increase in spring. Whilst out on a walk during 'lockdown' in Wharncliffe Woods I noticed a clump of brown on a raised bank under a large group of pines and thinking it was dead vegetation I walked past but curiosity pulled me back as there was no other area like this along the bank. It was very fortunate as the brown clump turned out to be a group of about 10 very unusual spring fungi called the false morels. Someone once described them as a brain on a stick which is a very apt description. The name false morel can be applied to a group of very similar fungi worldwide but generally in Britain it specifically refers to *Gyromitra esculenta*.



False Morel Fungi by R. Stewart

There is a lot of controversy surrounding this fungus as unlike its gastronomic cousins the true morels it's considered deadly poisonous but is still eaten in certain parts of the world as par boiling or drying is considered enough to render it relatively harmless. It's actually banned from sale in Spain and comes with specific instructions in Finland where it can still be bought at markets; unfortunately, *esculenta* is derived from latin *esculentus*, meaning "edible". The compound isolated from the fungus is called gyromitrin and is hydrolyzed in the liver into Mono-methylhydrazine (MMH), a chemical often used as a rocket propellant. The poisoning caused by MMH has a wide range of gastrointestinal and neurological symptoms with serious cases leading to liver and kidney damage as well as seizures and coma, sometimes resulting in death. MMH is also thought to be carcinogenic as shown in animal models. After checking for distribution and recording on I Record and NBN atlas, they showed that the fungus was quite rare (or under recorded) and found mainly in Scotland and the South. There were no records for this area at all so it looks like this is a first record for this area (and a first record for me) and I have entered the data into the I Record database.

## View from a Comfy Chair by The Chairman

From the view of the Comfy Chair in this issue, the amount, diversity and quality of the articles within it is quite obvious that most, if not all of us, are getting out within the limits of the lockdown restrictions and finding the natural world is there still to surprise and impress. To look locally and to think on a smaller scale is not a bad thing, chance to reconnect with your garden, to look at the wood down the road, or just enjoying the fact that when out walking the birds sound louder and there seems to be more flowers; it is incredible how much we can find. Again, it is not just the exotic, unusual and rare that is always important; Moira's description of her garden is delightful, as are the photos shared by Jean of the bluebells in Wath Wood; Kevin's owl in the tree, I feel as though I was there with them all; but the finding of something special, something easily overlooked by others, to find it, recognise it for what it is worth and then to share that information with everyone is special; another great find from Roy.

## Daily Exercise During Covid-19 Shutdown

By Jean Panniker

As Covid-19 spread through the UK and the whole country went into lockdown, Richard and I have picked up our binoculars and set off for our daily walk from home.

Here are the notes I've made of the highlights of the birds we've seen over the first two weeks of Lockdown:

- Just up the road we saw a flock of golden plover, looking like clumps of soil to the casual observer. Suddenly they flew off, en masse, in a tight knit flock of some 150-200 birds.
- We've seen lots of lapwings, sometimes in pairs, sometimes in a group of about 20-30, swooping and calling their characteristic 'pee wit' call.
- We've heard the unmissable call of the curlew, then seeing them coming down to land, their long, curved beaks clearly visible. We have seen and heard more than usual this year.
- We've loved hearing the loud, ceaseless skylark song and eventually seeing the bird - a tiny dot high up in the sky. Or seeing them taking off or coming in to land - nearly vertical when doing so.
- One walk we came across a large group of field fare flitting and chattering between the trees of a small wood and then landing in a grassy field usually grazed by sheep.
- Walking in woodland around Broomhead reservoir we've seen blue tits, great tits, robin and blackbird, followed soon afterwards by a pair of tree creepers. One seemed to follow the other and both flew from one tree trunk to another, running up the trunk or large branches, busily using their beaks to investigate the bark.
- Walking through another woodland we saw and watched a pair of nuthatches.
- We've often heard the chiffchaff, usually when walking through heathland, knowing they're around but not managing to locate them anywhere!
- We've thoroughly enjoyed taking time to notice the birds in the garden. We have blue tits, great tits, long tailed tits, robin, dunnock and goldfinch coming to the bird feeders and see blackbirds, crow, magpie, pheasants and wood pigeon most days. We also saw a greater spotted woodpecker once on the nuts, having not seen one visiting our bird feeders for a couple of years. I've subsequently heard it drumming nearby.
- Walking through open moorland, we've seen several pairs of pheasants and seen pairs of buzzards flying overhead.



Nuthatch and Chiffchaff by D. Farrar

- On a walk through a grassy field we saw a flock of meadow pipit settling on the grass and then flying off a short distance before landing again. In the past we've usually only seen them in ones or twos or threes so this was new for us.
- We have heard two owls in the garden over the past couple of months. On 26<sup>th</sup> March we were lucky enough to have a really good view of one, perched on a small branch near the trunk of a conifer, just as dusk was falling. Looking through the binoculars we could see it was a tawny owl and watched it for several minutes before it flew off.
- We haven't been very methodical at keeping dates of our sightings and sadly, didn't have a camera at hand for any photos, but I think I will associate the first couple of weeks of lockdown with Spring bursting out around us!

## Rutherford Ramblings During Lockdown

Pauline Rutherford MBNA

Since the Lockdown began, we have all been limited to certain activities. Gone are the normal routines of branch meetings or get together's with family and friends. Gone are the visits to restaurants, cafes, cinemas, and pubs. And gone are the holidays and last-minute journeys we all need to re charge our batteries. Some of us have been told we must isolate and therefore can't even visit the shops (who would have thought buying a pint of milk would be so exciting!), the rest of us are allowed out for essential shopping and one short walk a day. For naturalists and outdoor people this has been quite restrictive to say the least, but most of us have our gardens and we have been blessed with sunny weather so we CAN make the most of them.

Steve and I have been taking our walks over the fields around Thorpe Hesley, either towards Scholes or towards Wentworth. Walking the footpaths and old coach road regularly has meant we have seen the best of the wild flowers as they have come into flower – forget-me-not, speedwell, dead nettles, yellow archangel, bittercress, groundsel, pineapple weed (often overlooked), green alkanet, dog's mercury, garlic mustard, wild garlic, and carpets of bluebells.



Red Dead-nettle, Groundsel by P. Rutherford



Field Speedwell, Green Alkanet and Garlic Mustard by P. Rutherford

It's been wonderful hearing the birds as they arrive too, first swallow – 6<sup>th</sup> April, first house martin – 7<sup>th</sup> April, first blackcap – 9<sup>th</sup> April, first willow warbler and whitethroat – 12<sup>th</sup> April, first garden warbler – 19<sup>th</sup> April, and first lesser whitethroat – 26<sup>th</sup> April.

Of course, I mustn't forget the never-ending skylarks and their continuous singing, or the buzzards as they 'mew' on the thermals. But the best sightings were a hobby and ravens flying over!



Swallow by S. Rutherford



Whitethroat and Hobby by D. Farrar



Southern Cuckoo Bee by P. Rutherford

Our garden has been very productive with bees, butterflies, hoverflies and our resident birds. Like many of you we have noticed more because we have the time to look. It has been a delight spotting the butterflies as they emerge, the first view of a brimstone was on the 24<sup>th</sup> march just as lockdown started. Others followed – comma, peacock, small tortoiseshell and the orange-tips and holly blue first showed on 10<sup>th</sup> April. We have had many bumble bees visiting our garden and a southern cuckoo bee as well as so many hairy footed flower bees!



Male and Female Hairy Footed Flower bees by S. Rutherford

Many of the insects would have been missed, all the drone flies hovering around the flowering dog roses, the solitary wasps and ladybirds, but two we probably wouldn't have seen if we weren't spending every day in the garden were Gwynnes mining bee on the 6<sup>th</sup> April and an ichneumon – *Ichneumon stramentor* on 10<sup>th</sup> April.



Gwynnes Mining Bee and Ichneumon Wasp by S. Rutherford

We have of course, missed seeing our friends every week and have had to cancel a few short breaks, our holiday in June looks uncertain. However, the lockdown has given us all the chance to slow down and notice what is going on in the natural world around us. Nature will be the biggest benefactor of lockdown, with less disturbance from humans, less traffic and less pollution the wildlife has taken advantage and is thriving and that can only be a good thing.

### **Solitude in the Chaos of Isolation**

**26 March 2020**

By Kevin Hinchcliffe MBNA

The working day was over, dinner was made and eaten, pots were washed and dried. The kitchen blind was drawn, shutting out the chaos of the day.

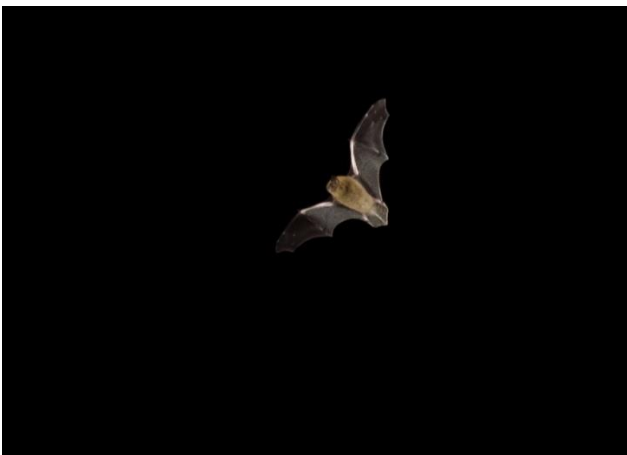
At last, time to relax.... Bam!! "Oh no, the bin needs bringing in, bugger!" Mr. Grumpy, with head hung low wanders out, clunk! The door is unlocked and opened. Whoosh! suddenly the fresh cool air of the evening rushes around me, senses roused, followed by the cackling chatter of a blackbird's alarm call. Now my head is up, a long deep breath of air lifts me further. I pause a little, noting that the day is settling down, I find myself listening to the birdsong echoing around the area.

But this seems to be slowly calming too. The moon and stars are starting to show, with Venus shining next to the thin slice of the moon, all presented upon a backdrop of fading blue and orange sky. I turn the corner of the house to wander down to collect the bin and I see for the first time this year the familiar flutter of a pipistrelle bat, over towards the trees down the road.

Quickly, I finish my task and head inside for the bat detector, to help me narrow my identification down, is it a Common pip or Soprano pip? But I decide to take a moment on the bench beside the back door. Melting into the bench listening to a calming Mistle Thrush song, my head is turned by a flutter from the top of a near-by birch tree, as something grabbed my attention flying a short distance to the towering conifer tree in a neighbours garden. My tiredness and stresses are now becoming distant in my mind, my thoughts now focused on what I believe is an owl.



Tawny Owl by S. Rutherford



Common Pipistrelle by K. Hinchcliffe

Excited I pulled out my phone to try and take a video, but wait, what's this? My phone's actually ringing, a phone call from Rachel, inside Sheldon had snuggled in tucked up asleep on Rachels legs. Excitedly I said "I'm watching what I think is a Tawny Owl now making its way up the big conifer tree". I quickly ran inside and popped the little man in his table to settle in for the night so Rachel could join me watching the owl. Up it flew and across to the Birch tree, binoculars grabbed and raised "it is a Tawny Owl" I passed Rach the binoculars "I bet it's the one we usually hear" Rach said, I was scrambling to take a picture but argh the things not focusing through the glass. "I'm off outside" I muttered, completely forgetting the security light... click... The owl was disturbed and seemed to float calmly back to the safety of the conifer tree. Quick glimpses were had of the Owl as it made its way up the tree. Rachel still inside peering out of the window, as I got back on the bench... I'm waiting... Still waiting.... "whoa!" It just made a majestic but brief flight to the top of the tree... Waiting again, eyes fixed and focused in the now failing light. A quick glance away to see what noise I heard just to my right and the owl must be teasing me, as it's now disappearing flying away quickly up into the park.

I take a few moments on the bench absorbing what I've seen, happy to have knowledge of what I was appreciating, getting sights and sounds of. All of which was from our home. Taken during a few brief moments of relaxation switching off from the day's chaos. Now reflecting on the fact that nature can be appreciated at anytime and anyplace no matter how isolated from humans we may feel at this time, nature is there for us all to enjoy and be a part of.

## Snippets of Sightings from Members

### Catherine & Mark 24<sup>th</sup> March

Six different bee species including hairy footed flower bees on the pulmonaria! My favourite bees. There were two males and then a female arrived. One of the males tried to mate with her but she wasn't having it. All three flew off! The males patrolled all afternoon and had the odd scrap and the female reappeared late in the day.... so wonderful to watch and a blessing of the situation - time to really watch and observe.

### David Swales 24<sup>th</sup> March

Working from home as I am at the moment, has allowed me to spend tea breaks and lunch times wondering in the garden and taking note of the various insects I have seen on the spring flowers. Only problem is it's very distracting and I have trouble getting back to work!

## **Tony Browne**

25.3.20 – First frogspawn in the garden pond – 4 clumps of it which means – lots of tadpoles!

25.3.20 – A Green Woodpecker drumming and two Jays in Scholes Wood great to see and hear them.

30.3.20 – We saw exposed swan mussels on a walk to upper Wentworth lake.

## **Jean Hayter 13<sup>th</sup> April**

My daughter Jennifer and I been out walking. I love walking around the lake in Wath but not the walk back up the hill. I did attempt to take a picture of a pair of great crested grebes but quickly deleted my pathetic attempt! Lots of bright yellow gorse around and bees that appear to be on steroids.... enormous!

Must confess, not really seen very much activity in our garden. Probably, my fault because I stopped feeding the birds because I was getting inundated with feral pigeons and Jennifer didn't appreciate her car getting dive bombed with bird droppings, every day! Not seen any butterflies other than a beautiful peacock butterfly in a neighbour's garden.

We did see a carpet of bluebells in Wath Woods, with plenty of birds singing and blossom in full bloom on the trees.



Tree Blossom by J. Hayter



Bluebells in Wath Woods by J. Hayter

## **David Jenner**

Some photos of a visitor flying around in the sun this afternoon and taking a moment to relax on the walls of Musgrave House at Bamford Mill.



Photos by Chris Wright

## My Lockdown

By Moira Beaumont ABNA

### 24<sup>th</sup> March

I am enjoying walking in Notton and Woolley in this beautiful weather. Seen lots of colt's foot, celandine, wood anemone, ground ivy, violets, to name but a few. I love seeing all the trees starting to burst into life.

My frogs have laid four huge clumps of spawn and I noticed movement. Lots of back swimmers bobbing up to the surface. My hedgehog is being spoilt with biscuits and leaving his thanks in the only way he knows! I have both male and female pheasants every day coming for their raisins. My birds come every day, my favourites being the coal tits and the flocks of long tailed tits.

My wildlife planting is really shooting up. All the lavender planted a couple of years ago is looking very healthy and I have masses of honesty. the green alkanet has doubled in size and already flowering. I have noticed loads of bees around my muscari, but unfortunately can't identify them. So lovely to see a healthy butterfly population often in small groups, mainly tortoise shell and red admiral but I did see this lovely comma too.

In other words, nature is just so wonderful and very therapeutic in these difficult times. If anything can come out of this it may be that more people become aware of our natural environment and want to look after it as we all do.



Lesser Celandine by M. Beaumont



Wood Anemone by M. Beaumont



Comma Butterfly by M. Beaumont



Ground Ivy by M. Beaumont

## 13<sup>th</sup> April

Talking of gardens, it has been my lifeline. It is looking amazing as I have been putting a lot of hard work in. I have the female pheasant asleep in my border under the kitchen window. I have some blackbirds that come down every day for their bath and breakfast. I have so many sparrows now along with lots of other resident birds who I know are feeding little ones at the moment. My tadpoles are still very tiny and I love watching them. Although I haven't seen my hedgehog for a few weeks he is still there leaving his deposits. And I have seen so many butterflies including the orange tip.

I am very fortunate to live here and I have managed a walk nearly every day. New Miller Dam is just so eerie but the wildlife love it. Yesterday on the way there I stood and watched five buzzards and then on the water a mallard with 7 ducklings that were so tiny and looked like they were having their first outing. The coots are nesting so close to the banking and yesterday I saw one stand up and showed me her 4 eggs. The swans are nesting in their usual place away from the public. I have seen goosanders and great crested grebes, but no dancing yet. The woods are awash with blue bells, a most beautiful sight which always brings a smile to my face, more so this year. I really miss going to Bretton and seeing the grebes with their little humbugs. I go every year to see the herons, but not this year.

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## Answers to Crossword

### ACROSS

1. Weasel, 4. Fallow Deer, 8. Elm, 9. Ash, 10. Siskin, 11. Bittern, 13. Woodcock, 14. Swan  
15. Glow Worm, 17. Bee, 18. WASP, 22. Hare, 23. Sparrow, 24. Robin, 28. Adder, 31. Weed  
32. Moa, 33. Plum, 35. Honeysuckle, 36. Duck, 38. Rabbit, 40. Eft, 41. Treecreeper, 44. Wren  
45. Pea, 46. Pear, 47. Hobby, 49. Hazel, 53. Cuckoo, 55. Kite, 56. Raven, 57. Toad, 58. Shrew  
59. Mouse, 60. Seal

### DOWN

1. Willow Warbler, 2. Snail, 3. Primrose, 5. Willow, 6. Rat, 7. Tern, 11. Badger, 12. Hog  
16. Stint, 17. Bearded Tit, 19. Apple, 20. Box, 21. Woodpecker, 25. Dragonfly, 26. Buttercup  
27. Snowdrop, 29. Blackberry, 30. Bat, 32. Mole, 34. Cob, 37. Beech, 38. Roe Deer, 39. Birch  
42. Catkin, 43. Daffodil, 46. Pike, 48. Beetle, 50. Eagle, 51. Sedge, 52. Ivy, 53. Cep, 54. Owl