

Wild Norley

Think Global But Act Local

March

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THAW by Edward Thomas

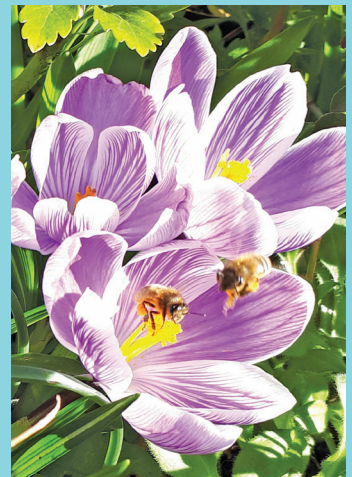
*Over the land freckled with snow half-thawed
The speculating rooks at their nests cawed
And saw from elm-tops, delicate as flower of grass,
What we below could not see, Winter pass.*

Just as in 2021 I'm writing this in mid February, its bitter winds still remind us that life is often a struggle to survive. The nightmare of earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria and nearer home with many having the awful dilemma of heat or eat shows humanity is just as vulnerable as other species. Springtime seems to beckon on the horizon then suddenly retreats into icy darkness. But the speculating rooks are back in force and I'm sure from their high vantage points in the Wild Wood Rookery (corner of Town Farm Lane) they'll see, "Winter pass". Their very noisy "parliament" will no doubt inform us on a daily basis! Despite the current chilly conditions, temperatures in January were above average, even Norley reaching 15°C, so some early-nesting birds reacted gaining a competitive advantage on rivals ahead of the breeding season, making a start on gathering nest materials, securing a patch and finding a mate".

Robins were in daily dispute and our house sparrows made an awful mess on the balcony, to these busy spadgers (old Cheshire name), gathering nest materials means chucking it about. The dawn chorus is always a good sign too that spring is well on its way, about an hour before dawn, starting with the blackbird, shortly followed by the robin, wren and then many others. The dawn chorus builds fast during February, with more places coming alive with the sound of bird song. With the lengthening days as the months go on, by mid April they'll start singing about 5am and by midsummer as early as 3:30am, around an hour or so before dawn.

The warm January weather has also acted as a

catalyst for other wildlife. Throughout southern England there have been a number of reports of frogs starting to spawn and newts heading towards the nearest pond as they emerge from their winter hibernation. Frogs, toads and newts will soon be busy up here once there are warm, (10C and above) humid nights. Under the Neighbourhood Pride scheme our three ward councillors granted NWG the money for toad crossing signs at Cow/Moss lane. We will not be able to have them in place until next year, but fear not Mr.& Mrs.Toad, our, albeit increasingly tatty, homemade ones will still give you some protection.



February is strictly still winter, but the mild January has meant that nature's calendar may have advanced by a week or more, making it a month full of great promise, so by the time you read this everything will be much more advanced.

The sight and smell of early-flowering woodland plants such as snowdrops, primrose crocuses, hellebores, wood anemones and daffodils will have also started to greet people in their gardens or while enjoying the lovely walks around Norley. These plants, not all native, have evolved over many years to flower before the woodland canopy closes overhead into perpetual shade. Some 6 years ago 10,000 snowdrops were planted around the village. They seem to be universally loved and what better way to mark the end of winter than to see more of these little flowers braving the "sleety dribble and cranreuch (hoar frost) cauld" (To a Mouse: R. Burns). These beautiful, delicately

SNOWDROP & BEE



scented flowers are wonderful harbingers of spring, but they are also a very important early source of both pollen and nectar. Honey bees and queen bumblebees just awakening from their hibernation will visit them on warm days and if they do the flowers will produce viable seed. Crocuses are the same and the wonderful banks of purple flowers on Bratt's Bank on Moss Lane are literally lifesavers for many queen bumblebees. The crocuses will set seed too, thus helping them spread even further. Hellebores in the Memorial Garden look wonderful, and they too provide both pollen and nectar and I can just see the Anemone Blanda beginning to show themselves there. Cowslips and wild English daffodils will soon be flowering here and around the Norley sign.

On the RSPB website there is a 'Signs of spring challenge', which look like fun, as well as a useful way to learn about our precious wildlife. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/signs-of-spring/> NWG has just delivered a large map of Norley, plus a bag of 'wildlife' pins to our Norley Primary School. The children can now record what they and their families see at home. NWG will record the information which will eventually go onto our website.

An international Wildlife Recording event is the City Nature Challenge 2023: Chester Region (actually all of CWAC including Norley) Our 'Region' is joining hundreds of other areas worldwide in an effort to explore and document as much local wildlife as possible over 4 days from 28th April – 1st May. Our observations are vital to protecting nature as they enable scientists, conservationists and decision makers to understand more about how species and habitats are doing. The more we understand, the easier it is to protect wildlife for

generations to come.

See <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2023-chester-region?tab=about>

At the moment our annual "Beating the Bounds", Norley Commons Health Assessment is pencilled in for 2pm on Sunday 30th May, starting from the Village Hall, so we can also take part in the challenge. I will confirm this on our Facebook page and the village notice boards.

IN BRIEF

There is an exciting development with sowing well over 500 m2 of wildflower seeds. Some on 4 plots (which have now been roughly marked out) between the gates to Norley Hall and Norley Lane and a further two plots on the verges into the village, either side of Finger Post Farm, some distance from the entrance and taking account of the planted daffodils. The CWAC wildflower team is planning to start the ground works (depending on the weather conditions) around the beginning of March or so.

No decision has been made on our workday, Sunday 26th March. See our Facebook page for further details.

