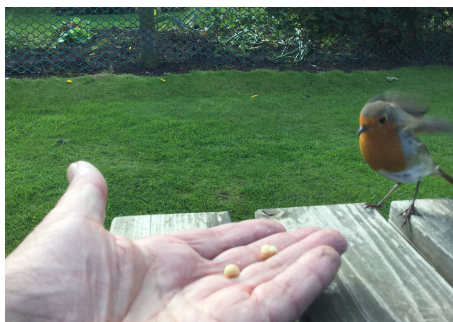


VILLAGE DIARY

A touch of autumn came with the heavy rain and rough winds this week and the first leaves are beginning to fall. My lovely dahlias are battered and their delicate petals bruised. This year 'the eye of heaven' has certainly shone 'too hot' and 'summer's lease hath (had) all too short a lease'. I wonder if Shakespeare had experienced a summer like ours this year, starting out with such vigour and energy and running out of steam before the end of August.

Peter Hulme writes that he has observed some surprises in nature. For the first time he and his wife have seen hornets and watched their daily aerial battles as they tried to enter the wasp traps.

On a happier note, the robin that first appeared as a fledgling last spring and flew into the house, perched on a chair and accepted food from their hands, returned this spring and came into the house to the same chair to be fed by hand. They are confident that it raised a brood of chicks and is still here.



Peter also tell us that a local farmer has caught two mink (a nasty, introduced species that pose a threat to native wild life) and two or three foxes have been seen, one possibly an albino. Apparently they are extremely rare and John Lea, who has watched wild life for many years, has never seen or heard of one; a completely white black bird he has seen and it mated with a normal blackbird.

John writes that many rabbits have moved into the shelter of a tall crop of fodder beet, hiding beneath the large, broad leaves. A hunting buzzard, relying on the ambush technique by perching on a tree branch that leans over the fence, was ready to just drop on to an unwary rabbit. Young buzzards, yet to perfect their hunting skills, settle for large worms that come to the surface after a shower of rain. One had done just that and returned to the oak tree branch when a rabbit dashed out of the beet and across a strip of grass toward the wood. The buzzard swooped but missed by inches as the rabbit dived under the wire netting. The bird flipped its wings and lit on the adjacent fence post. Immediately a fox leapt up and snapped at the buzzard. The fox had also been lying in ambush behind the fence and was just showing his frustration that one very lucky rabbit had gone to earth. John comments that the fox would not have been trying to catch the buzzard; it would have had more sense than to put its nose too near those dangerous claws.

John has recently seen the fox that came by his garden some evenings in August to visit. Perhaps the shorter days have affected its pattern of hunting or, possibly, it just got bored with their 'conversations'.

Barbara Wilson