

VILLAGE DIARY

This warm spell has brightened the gardens with colour and at last the leaves are beginning to unfurl in the forest trees. The cherries, almonds and magnolias are a cheering sight. We are forecast to return to more seasonal temperatures soon but this is a happy respite from the chilly spring which is causing our farmers so many problems. Hopefully, the animals can be released from their winter quarters and the grass will grow well enough to nurture them and save the farmers from buying expensive supplements.

John Lea writes about those once in a lifetime sightings of nature which stay in the memory. The emergence of the bumblebees reminded him of an occasion when he watched a queen bumblebee emerge out of the soil in his lawn and crawl unsteadily about eight feet to a bed of crocuses, then move slowly from flower to flower three or four times in order to drink their nectar. Finally she gained enough strength to spread her wings and begin her busy search for a suitable nesting site.

Concern has been expressed about the drop in numbers of ground nesting birds and the danger to their eggs and young from predators like foxes. John tells us that May is the month when the fox cubs emerge and observing their lively frolics provides so much pleasure. The dog fox plays a part in the feeding the young. He never goes near the earth but drops the food, whether it be a rabbit or someone's free-range hen, some thirty or forty yards from the earth for the vixen to pick up. Sometimes one of last year's cubs nips in and tries to steal this easy bounty which ends up with quite a squabble when the dog fox chases the thief away. John has seen this dramatic even on two occasions, once when the dog fox was barely a yard behind the miscreant as they came flying out of the wood and dashed through his garden within yards of his kitchen window before leaping the ha-ha and disappearing across the field.

One of my vivid memories of nature in spring is watching a newly emerged queen wasp make chillingly short work of a fly that was sunning itself on our kitchen window. If any of our readers have vivid, rare memories of wildlife and are willing to share them, please send them to me for inclusion in the Village Diary.

Barbara Wilson