

Village Diary for July

The Village Diary is a bit late this month for which I apologise. I have had a nasty infection. These last two weeks of unseasonably cool weather have been a burden to gardeners and isolators but, hopefully, we are in for improved, more July-like temperatures.

John Lea has written this month with a fascinating account of the life cycle of the Great Oak Tortrix Moth. Noticing a Carrion Crow feeding under an oak tree, he wondered what the bird could be finding. Then he recalled from his days of fishing that trout could often be observed to be active under an overhanging oak tree. They, like the Carrion Crow, were feeding on the caterpillars of the Great Oak Tortrix Moth.

The females lay their eggs in emerging oak leaves. As the little green caterpillars develop they curl the leaves together with silk and so hidden eat from within. They are the favourite food of Bluetits and are also taken by ants which are active climbers. To protect itself and its snug nest the caterpillar attaches itself to the tree by a gossamer thread and hangs beneath the twig. If an ant starts to nibble it can bail out but in the panic of the moment getting the right length of thread may not be easy and the ones that get it wrong can end up in a river feeding trout or on the ground beneath the tree. The caterpillars dangle down over a nearby lane and their cheeky cock Carrion Crow misjudged the speed of an approaching car. John wonders if its mate will stay on the nest without him.

Two pleas have reached me from contributors. Please, if you are planning to cut back your hedges and bushes, remember that the nesting season goes on well into August as many small birds raise three broods a year.

John Lea also asks readers to protect bumblebee nests. It seems that some people call in a pest control company if they find a bumblebee nest. There is no danger from them unless you catch one in your hand. They are valuable pollinators in gardens and farms and should be protected. A rare White-tailed Bumblee has nested near his front door and his wife, Celia, is happy to enjoy sitting in this sunny spot while the bumblebees bus in and out within a couple of feet of her legs. John is pleased to observe that there are quite a few bumblebees feeding on patches of London Pride in his garden. Their numbers have improved now that the badger population has reduced.

Barbara Wilson