

# Lovelorn nightingales



On 27th April 11 people, including two welcome visitors all the way from Brighton no less, met at the village shop at 9.30pm for the annual Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group nightingale walk. What we hadn't bargained for was competition from the evening event at Plumpton Racecourse. We understood the music was going to finish at 10 o'clock, and so it did, promptly – so thank you.

We had heard a few notes from birds in concert with the music but now they had the night to themselves. We heard some five or six nightingales in all, with one songster belting it out only 20 feet away – in the same spot we heard one last year, as it happens.

The male nightingales arrive first in the spring and, having found a suitable spot, start singing. They do this for two reasons: first, to 'pull' a female down from the sky as she migrates overhead, and second, to show her what a wonderful territory he has acquired for them to breed in.

Having procured a mate, the male then sings mainly at dusk and then again at dawn or the early hours of the morning to keep other males from encroaching on his patch.

Nightingales sometimes sing during the day too. The birds that tend to sing all night are thought to be unmated males still trying to entice a female to join them.

Tim Parmenter  
August 2012

## **Making hay at the Plough**

The meadow at the Plough is a wonderful example of a disappearing habitat – a meadow full of wild flowers and native grasses. Traditionally this kind of meadow was cut for hay and then grazed in the autumn. These hay meadows were not ploughed and reseeded with grasses; nor were artificial fertilisers used as they encourage the growth of rank grasses that smother the more delicate flowers.

The best months for wildflowers in these meadows are June and July. In June the common spotted orchids are in full flower and there are many colourful members of the pea family: meadow vetchling with its cluster of pale yellow flowers; tufted vetch with its long heads of purple-blue flowers; bird's-foot-trefoil, or eggs-and-bacon, with deep red buds that open as bright orange flowers; grass vetchling, which looks like a grass until its single bright crimson pea-flower appears; and red clover.

Other flowers that are easy to spot are the purple, thistle-like flowers of common knapweed, oxeye daisies, the starry-like tiny white lesser stitchwort and the numerous yellow, dandelion-like but more delicate, common cat's-ear. And on a sunny day there are many insects to delight us, bees and butterflies especially.

The most beautiful species of grass here is the quaking- or totter grass. It is not common away from the Downs but there are some extensive patches in this meadow and it is easy to spot with its shining, drooping flower spikelets that tremble in the breeze. This graceful grass is often dried for winter decoration and, indeed, a larger cultivated relative is often grown as a garden plant.

Do visit the meadow. The Plough has a hand-out with pictures of the flowers you may find there. It is a delight to see this rare and disappearing habitat revived and preserved in Plumpton.

Jacqui Hutson  
August 2012