

# Wildlife during Lockdown



I am sure that many of us lucky enough to live in this beautiful part of the world are currently finding great solace from the nature around us. In these extraordinary times, we thought we would temporarily change the format of this article to record some personal reflections from some Wildlife Group 'activists.'

At this time of year I am usually actively involved in surveys - of plants for the Sussex Botanical Recording Society, of mosses and liverworts for the mapping Sussex Bryophytes project and for meadows and gills in the River Ouse catchment. Also my regular Monday morning volunteering at Markstakes Common. With all these cancelled what else could I do to satisfy my longing for immersing myself in nature? First I decided to do a survey of the mosses and liverworts in my garden - and found a total of 26 species, including one I had never seen before. It is only 2 mm high so is probably under-recorded. In the process I also found a tiny 2-mm diameter, bright orange eyelash fungus, whose exact identity has yet to be confirmed. A blog about that exercise aroused interest among the bryologists of the county and further afield and now others have conducted their own garden moss surveys. And then I found about the Garden Wildflower Hunt launched this spring by the Botanical Society of the British Isles so I had a much closer look at the garden than usual. The project wants to find out how good our gardens are for native plants - wild flowers, trees and ferns - and the online recording system allows you to enter the species you have, plus other details. I have listed 54 species so far. These include the native trees and shrubs, the 'weeds' and the species we have sown or planted to enhance the garden for wildlife. So this lockdown time has meant I have taken a much closer look at my own very local environment, appreciating what we have and how important it is to ensure that the garden is as biodiverse as possible.

*Jacqui Hutson*

I am an active participant in many of the knowledge-based 'citizen science' initiatives that are encouraging us to record wildlife whilst we're at home under the Covid-19 restrictions, but I am also interested in the idea that fostering an emotional connection with nature can help us stay positive in these strange and sometimes anxious times. Thus, going for a daily walk in nature and reflecting on how it makes me feel, rather than just what I saw, is good for my mental well-being. Writing things down later helps to reinforce the benefits. I try to jot down three nature/wildlife experiences every day. The feeling of joy watching lambs in the sunshine stays with me even as the TV news gets more worrying. The bluebell woods are as lovely as ever. A pair of buzzards are calling above my garden. Nature is doing its thing, the same as every other year and my over-riding feeling is one of hope.

*Kate Gold*

The Covid-19 restrictions have coincided with a very rapid change in the weather and ground conditions from cold and waterlogged to warm and dry plus a truly extraordinary period of general peace and quiet in town and countryside. Wildlife, for a change, has a chance to wander about foraging for food without the usual hustle and bustle of human disturbance. Spare a thought though, for those creatures that actually thrive off the food we regularly throw away: foxes and seagulls for example...also rats. An effect of lockdown has been the closure of high street food takeaway and restaurant outlets, leading to little or no food for the resident scavenging rodent population. Bird lovers have also reduced the amount of sunflower hearts, peanuts and fat balls they are putting out due to the warmer weather or difficulty in buying supplies. On top of this there was unprecedented stashing of an additional £1billion-worth of food in our larders, under stair cupboards and garages. Where has all the pasta gone! Rats also require water and as everywhere has dried out so quickly they are attracted to garden ponds and flower pot saucers. They particularly like eating snails and will also eat such diverse creatures as worms and frogs. As we are quite likely to be staring out of our windows more than usual at the moment it is perhaps unsurprising that rodent sightings are on the increase. And as for a welcome sign of approaching summer - and hope - I saw a swallow up on Plumpton Plain on the morning of 6th April.

*James Otway*