

Wildlife Notes, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2026.

Well, it's official! Spring is here! The sun has been out for two days, and the wildlife seems to have burst into life.

Most unexpectedly, this morning I heard my first Chiffchaff in the sawmill woods. That is at least 2 weeks earlier than usual. Apparently, there have been a few sightings (or most likely, hearings), of the little birds, which will have flown from Africa. They can't have had much time to spend in Africa, as they are amongst the latest to leave in the Autumn. They can only have just arrived there, had a few weeks to recuperate and then turned about to come back again! They have a most distinctive "chiff chaff, chiff chaff" call which they repeat very frequently while they are feeding up in the trees on any small insects they can find.

I was walking in the Drummy woods on Tuesday, and was attracted to several small pools beside the track, by a veritable boiling of the water, as several dozen frogs all splashed to get down to the bottom of the pond as I approached. Already there were at least 20 clumps of frog spawn. I love hearing frogs calling at night, which sounds to me like the muted noise of a motorbike, roaring in the distance!

Last Thursday evening, which was a bit damp and mild, I noticed several toads out on the road, making their way down to the pond, and sadly 3 squashed toads on the road in the morning. It is such a shame to see them killed this way, when their numbers are in decline in our area and across the country. There are various factors thought to be causing this, including loss of good habitat to support them in the summer months (nice over grown gardens, long grassy areas, and woodland with good undergrowth are ideal), and use of chemicals in farming and gardens. But no-one is completely sure why their numbers have dropped so much. I remember when I was little, the numbers of baby toadlets coming from the pond up the road was in the 100s of thousands. They formed a solid line at the edge of the road about 6" wide. We children used to put up little obstacle courses, chicanes and even tiny jumps in their path to watch them negotiate them! Poor little toadlets! Now, I barely see any toadlets on the move in July and early August.

I have also come across Coltsfoot and Butterbur in full flower. These two plants are interesting as they both send up flower spikes before their leaves. Once they have finished flowering, then the leaves follow, and both have really big leaves which completely cover the ground where they are growing. Butterbur gets its name because the large leaves could be used to wrap butter in the good old days!



Coltsfoot in flower

I have a couple of wildlife cameras up in various places near here and have had video clips of hares mating, and pheasants fighting, so clearly everything in nature is getting ready to spring into action.

As I write this, I can hear the rain battering against my window – I knew it would be too good to last! But hopefully, we can all look forward to the longer, warmer, and, fingers crossed, drier days to come.

Alison