

Thanks very much to those of you who got back in touch to let me know about your spring bird sightings. The record for the first swallows goes to Brian and Joyce at the Cults garage who had their first swallows back on 6th April, that really is early. On the whole, most people saw swallows around the 20th of April, which is much nearer their normal time. I am lucky enough to have 3 pairs in my stables and sheds, and I have heard of one family who have swallows in one stable and wood pigeons in the other, so we are all providing homes for wildlife! All the other summer migrants are also back, as today I heard my first sedge warbler (although that is very late for them). I've been hearing blackcaps regularly in all our woods, and on Thursday last week when we were walking down Balmalcolm Den to coffee and chat, we heard a lovely clear Garden Warbler singing from a broom bush. Garden Warblers are really hard to see, as they stay hidden in bushes. They are also plain brown colour all over, with no stripes, or patches of white, or mottles and speckles! They are called garden warblers as their preferred habitat is shrubs and bushes, as would be found in a garden. Their song is not dissimilar to a Blackcap, but Blackcaps are more often heard singing in woodlands and taller trees. A couple of people reported hearing a cuckoo in the area, again passing through as they don't nest in our area. If only all birds had a song as distinctive as the cuckoo, then life would be a lot easier!

Reporting back on the Lapwings, there are still at least 3 pairs at the bottom of Rameldry Brae, and today we heard and watched at least 6 birds calling and doing display flights near to Honeyhall. It really is lovely to hear and watch.

It is nice to be able to report that rabbit numbers are creeping up again, though I do apologise if you have them in your garden, as they can be a dreadful nuisance. There seem to be quite a few darker coloured ones and some black ones. I wonder if there is any correlation between coat colour and resistance to the rabbit haemorrhagic disease which has decimated rabbit numbers in recent years? Maybe darker ones survive better??!

There is no shortage of hares, which over this winter have been more common than rabbits. I watched a group of 3 hares boxing and chasing each other in the water tanks field a few days ago. This is likely to be a female with two male suitors, whom she chases off by boxing them, until she is ready to mate. She will very likely have had her first litter of the year and be ready to move on to her second. I have certainly seen young hares around quite a few weeks ago.

With all this fog and rain, there has been some lovely close up views of flowers and plants with sparkling dew drops. I'm particularly fond of the Ladies Mantle leaves with dew and attach a photo taken by Jill Ronaldson showing a really beautiful display. It pays to look down and enjoy the little things, especially when you can't see more than a few yards in front of you because of fog! There is always plenty to look at no matter what the weather!

I'll be leading a Spring wildlife walk on Thursday 11th May, leaving Burnturk Hall at 6.30pm, for a gentle amble to see what we can find. Hope to see some of you then.

Alison

