

Visit April 17th 2020

A lovely sunny day with a cool light breeze. As I walked down through the village Jackdaws and Crows were flying around noisily and Swallows swept into Midtown Farm. A fortnight of good weather since my last (March) visit had dried out the approach path to the communal orchard and prompted the mowing of the playing field where a party of Rooks were taking advantage of easier access to worms and grubs in the ground.



A new 'flower bed' had been constructed alongside the car park and the orchard had been mown. A pile of 'prunings' from the orchard, if left, will provide a useful refuge area for small birds, mammals and insects.

I watched a Hairy footed Flower Bee (*Anthophora plumipes*) feeding on Red Dead nettle by the bridge before moving on through the orchard. Perhaps the most striking feature in this area was the show of Dandelions ! A common plant but nevertheless a striking patch of colour. Most of the fruit trees are showing blossom and the fine Elder saved when the orchard was developed was coming into flower. The branches of this bush are covered with the common lichen *Xanthoria parietina*.



Entering the 'Wildlife Area' it was plain that Spring had arrived. There was an absence of noise from building sites and less traffic on the road so birdsong was all around, some from the site itself, some from the gardens of nearby houses. I heard or saw - Blackbird, Song Thrush, Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Wren, Goldfinch, Chaffinch and House Sparrow. Willow Warblers seemed to be everywhere. I could see that Jackdaws and Crows had joined the Rooks back on the playing field.

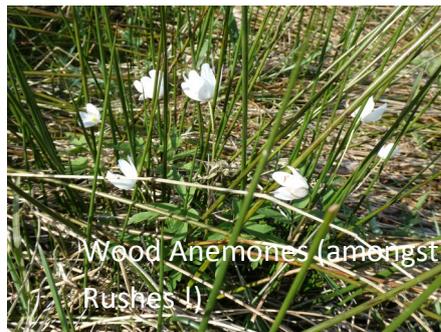
The path into and through the Wildlife area been mown as far as and around the pond, with a short loop through the 'dry grassland' and the reed bed . A good access route is important if people are to enjoy what this site, in the middle of the village, has to offer.



Spring plants included :-



Primrose



Wood Anemones (amongst
Rushes !)



Cowslips



Ribwort Plantain



Field Horsetail



Lesser Pond
Sedge ?



Timothy
grass

The surface of the pond is now covered with Duckweed (Lemna minor) and there is little open water at present. This year's growth of emergent water plants are beginning to appear. I searched briefly amongst pondweeds for Great Crested Newt eggs without success - maybe I was a little early.



Common Duckweed



A short moment of excitement was provided by the finding of footprints in the mud at the side of the pond. However, on checking with an expert at the Cumbria Biodiversity Record Centre they were identified as belonging to a cat, and not the otter that I'd hoped for ! .

I noticed that the reeds are beginning to send up shoots, these 'spikes grow very quickly and it won't be long before the reed bed is green again and hopefully attracting Sedge Warblers and possibly Reed Buntings to breed.

There were a few insects about, I saw Red-tailed and Buff-tailed bumblebees and a single male Orange Tip butterfly. Lady's Smock or Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) was just beginning to appear, this is the main food plant of the Orange Tip and a sure sign of spring. There were good numbers of Seven-spot Ladybirds and I photographed a pair mating. There were two or three species of Hoverflies visiting flowers for nectar and pollen, this one called *Eristalis pertinax* was probably the most abundant. There are over 250 species of hoverfly in the UK. Although some species mimic bees and wasps they are a harmless and attractive group of day-flying insects. Their larvae are predators on aphids and other garden 'pests'.



Plants in the 'Dry Grassland Area', to the north of the pond are only just beginning to show signs of growth, it will be June or July before these are at their best. I did find some Meadow Buttercup, with characteristic very finely cut leaves, just coming into bud. There were a few Spanish Bluebells (garden escapes) over against the walls of the gardens to the north of the pond. These are larger and paler than our native bluebell and unfortunately hybridise thereby posing a threat to our own bluebells



On my way back I saw signs (droppings) of Hedgehog, found a plant I was unsure of (another garden escape possibly 'Blue eyed Mary) and added one more lichen to my list for the site— *Parmelia glabratula*).

