

## NATURE WATCH

We may be looking forward to warmer weather but beware this old nursery rhyme of frosty mornings during this month:

*Here we go gathering nuts in May,  
Nuts in May, nuts in May,  
Here we go gathering nuts in May,  
On a cold and frosty morning.*

In 2010 the May Day holiday was very cold, but the day kept dry for the Welton May Fair. The weather remained cold until the second half of the month. May can surprise as it did in 1698 when huge snowfalls and freezing weather caused great hardship throughout England and it was recorded that cattle and sheep were dying of the cold in northern parts of the country. In more recent times it snowed on the May bank holiday in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1997.

Once the recent April cold spell had gone the cuckoos started to arrive from their over-wintering in the Congo basin. They come by two routes; the westerly route takes them through Morocco and Spain and is the most perilous for them. They are in decline for a number of reasons but mainly due to a reduction in their food supply, especially large hairy moth caterpillars. There was a photograph recently in one of the national newspapers of a tiny reed warbler feeding an enormous cuckoo chick. The chick had already heaved the warbler's chicks and eggs out of the nest to ensure that it monopolised the nourishment it needed to survive.



*Oliver Castle*

Young robins are out and about in their speckled breasts; there are no signs of red as yet. The parents will continue to feed them for a few weeks and the chicks are not above begging for food from other adult robins but are unlikely to get any. The young blackbirds are not so bold and will remain hidden in the bushes and will call for their parents with a squeaky cry. The young blue tits are also out of their nests. They have grown in garden nest boxes but also in other cavities that their parents have discovered in discreet places. The chicks have yellow cheeks and green caps.



*Jim Blainey*

Most of our butterflies will be out in our gardens by the end of May. The male common blue is bright blue with a violet tinge while the female is brown with blue on its central parts. At night they will cluster together on grass stems. The small copper butterfly is light brown with black spots on its wings. The male is territorial and will sit on a flower waiting to attract a passing female or to chase away a rival male. Sunshine will bring out



*Oliver Castle*



*Jim Blainey*

all the butterflies but the cabbage whites will also venture out on cloudy days. They will lay their eggs on cabbages and Brussels sprouts and the larger species of whites will also lay their eggs on oilseed rape. The offspring of these eggs will become a second wave of butterflies in late summer that will then produce the eggs for next year's brood.



*Jim Blainey*

The cuckoo-pint plant has a strange method of pollination. It thrives in ditches where it unfurls a purple finger from its light-green hood. The finger will give off a rotten meat smell which attracts owl midges which then fall into an orifice and are trapped by a ring of bristly hairs. The insects are not food for the plant but will bring pollen for the female flower and will pick up pollen from the male flower. The bristles will wither away and the insects are released to fly off to pollinate other cuckoo-pint plants.



*Jim Blainey*

Buttercups are everywhere this month. In my young days (a very long time ago) it was a custom to hold the flower under a child's chin to determine if the child liked butter: if the chin reflected the yellow, it did (it always did). Cows avoid eating buttercups

(despite the common cartoon figure) as they taste bitter and so the buttercup grows tall in the fields and shines brightly in the May sunshine.



*Oliver Castle*

**Jack Falcon**