

LOCKDOWN SPRING THOUGHTS

Spring is to me an exciting time. Lengthening days and warmer sunshine entice me out to enjoy nature, often at one of my local reserves, such as Messingham Sand Quarry, Alkborough Flats or Far Ings. This spring is different because we aren't supposed to visit these places. Bird, insect and nature watching generally don't seem to count as "exercise", though we are frequently told that these activities are good for the head, morale and spirit. Of course they do constitute gentle exercise as well. Though I don't recommend trying to jog with binoculars and/or a camera round your neck!

I've really missed some aspects of spring this year, but have perhaps gained in others. First, one of the losses, usually sometime in mid to late March I will head to Messingham, because I am pretty certain to see Sand Martins, related to Swallows which arrive earlier than their cousins, lovely migrants who arrive to nest in burrows in sand cliffs. It lifts the heart to see them flying over the water seeking food. And that sort of place is where you're likely to see your first Swallows of the year, as they too head for water after their long flight here, before getting down to the serious business of building and repairing their nests. But when I think rationally about it, though I'm not seeing them, they are still here, doing what they are hard wired to do regardless of whether I get to see them, regardless of our very human predicament of Covid-19. I find that helpful to remember.

But what of the gain? We have been fortunate in that after the vilest February I can remember, recent weather has been kinder and those of us who are fortunate to have some outside space at home have an opportunity, if you're so inclined to embark on hunting out and seeing newly emerged butterflies, beetles, ladybirds, damsel flies all in your garden, or at least nearby. Sometimes we are simply too busy to enjoy and note the wildlife that is right outside your door, or just down the road. Birdsong is more noticeable, even to me, as traffic noise is so much less, and because some councils have reduced verge trimming, wild flowers are said to be doing well in some places, and if they do well so do the butterflies, moths and other minibeasts. We can have a chance to watch, really watch, our local birds, maybe hedgehogs, bats, foxes or whatever we have near us.

Many people I am speaking to say the pace of life has slowed down for them and with this, simply being and looking can become more important. There are also challenges about our relationship and treatment of the natural world to be considered, and maybe this enforced Sabbath will focus our minds on this important subject.

For me, the generosity of nature, the spring and changing seasons is a source of hope and consolation to me. Despite what we do to it nature has resilience, but this is not unlimited as we are all too well aware.

Let us not lose touch with the wonder and variety of the nature that is all around us, and praise our Creator.

I shall conclude with a short poem written by Gerard Manley Hopkins (the Jesuit poet) written in 1877, it is called God's Grandeur, try reading it out aloud, it's a great way to hear poetry :-

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil*

*Is bare now, nor can the foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs-
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.*

With my thoughts and prayers for you all

Alice