

Wildlife Diary 33 for 8th April

Spring flowers open up



Wandering the local lanes carrying out a bird survey this morning, I saw my first sweet violets in flower on a hedge bank. Their strong smell is caused by ionine which, quite quickly, deadens the smell receptors in your nose and you cease to be able to smell it! Exactly what the biological function of this is I have no idea. Dog violets flower later and have no smell – hence ‘dog’ - which means ‘useless’!



Other plants in flower just now include golden saxifrage of which there are two species – opposite leaved and alternative leaved. The former, *Chrysosplenium oppositifolia*, is by far the commoner and more widespread.

To see a map of its distribution in the county go to the Derbyshire Flora online website [here](#).

C. oppositifolia cc N Brown

Hedgehogs



The distinctive droppings of hedgehogs have been appearing on my lawn in the last few days. Probably the hard winter did them some good – preventing them from coming out of hibernation too soon and burning up their fat reserves searching for non-existent food. The linocut is by David Hands who worked for the Trust as a graphics artist many moons ago.

Migrants flood in

As we move into mid-April, millions of migrants are pouring into the country. Every copse seems to hold a chiffchaff, always the first of many warbler species to arrive back. Their unmistakable song draws attention to their diminutive presence.

Now the first willow warblers and blackcaps are also back in the county, to be followed shortly by sedge and garden warblers and common and lesser whitethroats.

Swallows are now widespread enough for me to see over 30 at Wyver Lane Reserve on Wednesday, brought down by a shower of rain. They soon departed northwards.

Beatrice, a satellite-tagged osprey, flew over Chesterfield on April 1st and roosted near Strines Reservoir. She was soon back at her Highland nest. Another sat-tagged bird, [Morven](#), flew over the sea from North Spain to Cornwall in 12 hours a couple of days ago, a distance of 834 kilometres. This equates to 20 marathons non-stop, one after the other, a feat that even multi-marathon man Eddie Izzard would surely be amazed at!

Willington NR played host to a sandwich tern on 6th and no doubt common terns will appear there soon. Sandwich terns are exclusively coastal breeders (and therefore rare inland) whereas some common terns breed in the county – with luck on the specially designed rafts put out for them at DWT reserves such as Hilton and Spring Wood (the raft being on the adjacent Staunton Harold Reservoir).

The official coming of spring used to hang on the return of the cuckoo. Sadly, this bird is so depleted in numbers that many people now go through a whole summer without hearing even one.

