

Fact:

Almost half the worlds bluebells are found in the UK

Spring Wildlife Newsletter

Spring Woodlands

One of the most noticeable signs of spring for all the parks wanderers, is the return of the leaves upon the trees. This natural phenomenon occurs due to the increased temperature, signalling the trees to produce leaves, moving from their winter dormant phase into the beginning of their growing season. However, before the woodland canopy emerges fully, wildflowers make the most of light reaching the ground, transforming many woodlands with carpets of colour. Bluebells flower early (mid April to late May) and Dog Wood provides spectacular viewing. Other woodland flowers to look out for include: wood anemone, marsh marigold and lesser celandine. In March, watch for buds bursting on ash, beech, oak and rowan trees and the first leaves emerging from alder, field maple and silver birch. These wildflowers, along with tree blossom, provide an early nectar source for bees, butterflies and insects. The vital work completed by Tatton’s volunteer team in thinning and coppicing this woodland to open up glades, has enhanced the wildflower growth. Please help us protect the bluebells by sticking to paths, these delicate wildflowers are often damaged by footfall.



Special points of interest:

- Smew spotted
- Bluebells soon to arrive
- Bird nesting season begins
- Antlers are shed
- Spring butterflies take to the skies

Birds

Spring is probably the most anticipated time by birdwatchers as summer migrants return. The first is usually the Sand Martin during the first week of March, which can be seen hawking freshly emerging insects over the meres. The Chiffchaff closely follows and their onomatopoeic call, heard in a fresh green woodland, is a sure sign of the arrival of spring. Now is the time that birds are at their most vocal as they sing to attract a mate or ward off a rival suitor. Early morning is the best time to listen and hone in your identification skills, with practice many species can easily be identified by call only.

The Great White Egret is still present and has been seen among the Heronry at Higmere which is now active. One of our regular visitors from the local Knutsford Ornithological Society persevered with a quest to see a rare finch called a Crossbill. He was rewarded when he discovered several individuals in Millenium Wood where he took the photograph seen above. We also had a brief visit from a male Smew, a very rare diving duck, which spread excitement through the local birding community. Finally, another wildlife highlight to keep an eye out for is the spectacular Great Crested Grebe courtship dance. This involves synchronised head-bobbing warming up to the main event, which is referred to as the ‘weed ceremony’, rising out of the water breast to breast with vegetation in their mouths. With a pair often spotted from the Allen Hide, just pack binoculars and patience.

Spring is an exciting time for our two flocks of rare breed sheep; Hebridean and Soay, as lambing season begins. Being wild breeds, they are naturally good lambers and mothers. This means that although closely monitored, intervention is rarely needed in the lambing process. Ewes recognise their own lambs within the flock through sound and smell, which is vital as lambs are up on their feet within an hour and often frolic in large groups. In the first few days of lambing, the mothers produce a nutrient dense milk called colostrum. This is highly important in the lambs' first moments as it provides the nutrients necessary to kick start their immune systems and support early growth.

Deer

As winter transitions to spring, a fascinating transformation occurs where the deer begin to cast their antlers. This happens from March onwards and usually the oldest of the male deer will cast first. An increase in daylight triggers a drop in testosterone levels which causes them to fall off and almost immediately, the antlers will start to grow back again. They begin to grow back at a rate of 1-2cm per day and each year they will grow back bigger and better than the previous year. The antlers are sold in the Gift Shop on a first come first serve basis. Towards the end of spring, the deer will start to moult their winter coat for a much thinner summer coat. Triggered by hormonal changes, the deer coats will change from a dark brown winter coat to a lighter brown colour that helps them blend into the lush vegetation. Quite often, crows can be seen perched on the back of unfazed deer. They gather soft deer hair to create nests that are strong, durable and incredibly warm. This is one example of how everything in nature is connected, and the more you observe, the more links you will find.



Butterflies and Moths



Throughout the colder months butterflies and moths enter a state of dormancy called diapause, this can occur in any stage of the butterfly/moths' life and involves halting their development until the conditions improve. During spring, once the weather starts to warm, they emerge from their dormant state, with different species emerging at different times. Some of the earliest emergers include Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral (pictured), Comma (pictured), and the striking Brimstone.

Day flying moths that can be spotted during spring include the Cinnabar Moth (with its bright red underwings, often found on ragwort) and Mother Shipton Moth (often found in grass verges from May). Often inaccurately associated with dreary colours, some moth species have colours that rival many butterfly species.

The Ranger team at Tatton Park complete a butterfly transect survey weekly, from early March. This allows us to identify what species are present and compare species numbers to previous years. Keep an eye out for the summer newsletter, where we will update you on what species have been spotted .