

MAY TIME, A CHARMING MONTH - by Tony Boardman

GAZING ACROSS the allotment, as we frequently do, we enjoy the changing scene of seasons. All too soon the merry month of May has come, and sadly, gone. To me it is the loveliest month of the year. For only in May does the new growth that decks the trees and plants and grasses that spring up in the pastures have those varying shades of green. The soft lime through to bronze of the young leaves contrasting with the emerald hue of the fresh growth of grass.

As we move in to the summer months the sun, when it obliges, tends to bleach the lush verdant growth and the Maytime magic has gone. Wouldn't it be "the cat's whiskers" to be able to seal the splendour of the month in a bottle and uncork it during the drearier winter months!

The dandelions which have spanned the allotment's uncultivated part with their golden flowers have attracted flocks of goldfinches to feed on the dandelion clocks now that they have gone to seed. How many times must we have infuriated our gardening elders, as kids, blowing on these clocks to see what time it was!

A small finch, the handsome goldfinch with his red mask and yellow and black wings are easily identified when they descend as a flock or "charm", as a collection of them are called, to feed. They have a beautiful tinkling call which is not unlike the sound of Japanese wind-bells. Years ago they were kept in this country as a cage bird because of their pleasant little song but fortunately legislation has stopped all that nonsense and we all can enjoy watching and hearing a charm of these colourful little birds wherever there is wasteground and plenty of thistles, dandelions, groundsel and teasel in particular.

For some reason the wasteground on the allotment attracted flocks of jackdaws in early June, presumably in pursuit of some choice grubs and insects. Perhaps it's my imagination, but I don't think there have been as many butterflies this year. For instance I cannot recall seeing any holly blues in the garden as yet. The pretty little beauty usually visits the garden in pursuit of its favourite food plants for the young caterpillar, the holly or dogwood (cornus). The eggs are laid in the Spring but a second brood usually feeds on Ivy, of which we have plenty, sprawling over an elderly plum tree and along the low stone wall bordering the afore mentioned allotment. Hopefully we will be rewarded with a sighting of this delightful little creature later in the Summer.

Normally at this time of year, particularly in fine sunny weather, there are cabbage whites flapping about wherever you look but even they are few and far between this Summer, news which will I'm sure be of great comfort to the brassica brigade! However one must pose the question why the dearth of butterflies this year? We didn't have an Arctic Winter, maybe the extreme wet weeks we experienced had some effect on the pupated insect. There must be a reason but I can't put my finger on it. It's all rather disturbing.

One sad note to end with and that's the news of the death of "Dandy" our favourite little bantam cockerel. He of the feathered feet and comical capers. He is much missed by the family, dogs and particularly neighbour Reg who used to spoil him and his girls with tit bits when they penetrated the thick Beech hedge in his garden. The surviving hens still call though, they're not daft!