

A Time for Going and a Time for Arriving

THE END OF AUGUST and already the martins and swallows are gathering in their groups busily searching the airways for small flying insects which will get them in the right condition and sustain them ready for their long and arduous journey to their winter quarters in Africa. They need to gorge themselves at this stage because very shortly, like their many ancestors before them, nature will intimate that it is time to move off south and the perilous journey will start again.

For the young born in this country of course it will be their first experience. There will be the hazards of crossing the Alps, then they will encounter the firearms of the so called "sportsmen" of the Mediterranean countries, before crossing the Mediterranean itself. Reaching the coastal resorts of North Africa they might enjoy the luxury of a brief respite and take on more sustenance from the local insect population. Girding up their metaphorical loins they then go for the big one confronting the shimmering sands of the Sahara Desert. Sadly older and weaker birds succumb to this ordeal but the survivors reach the different oases in the area known as the Sahel where again insects are in abundance. Replenished, the freshened birds cruise down to the virtual comfort of normality in South Africa where they will remain until their little time clock tells them to return to Europe next March and they attempt the great adventure once more.

Speaking personally, nothing delights me more than to see the first swallow in our district, normally in early April and it is sad to see them now perched on the telephone wires because we realise that these graceful and skilful birds of summer are bidding us adieu for another year. With them goes our summer and russet autumn beckons.

Already the thin song of the robin calls out in our gardens. He makes himself scarce during the summer months preferring the deeper woodland haunts but he likes to lay claim to his piece of garden territory and woe betide any other robin who has the temerity to trespass on his "manor".

I must confess that I always enjoy autumn with its morning dew and evening mists. The countryside goes through a breathtaking transformation, the trees now clad in a rather dry and uniform green are about to become a riot of rich browns, gold, scarlet and purples. We who are fortunate to live in this beautiful area to witness the colourful change will no doubt have also noticed the tractors turning the fresh brown furrows of the stubble fields, attracting hoards of seagulls, rooks and jackdaws following the plough making short work of the freshly cast grubs. Methods may have changed over the years but the seasonal scenes do not alter and it makes up the rich pattern of our heritage. I'm even getting used to those straw swiss rolls we see in the fields instead of the old fashioned "stooks".

Very soon we may be aware of skeins of wild geese mournfully calling to one another and at the same time, almost unnoticed those northern thrushes, the redwings and fieldfares will have slipped across the North Sea from Scandinavia.

The last time I put pen to paper you may recall my concern for the dearth of butterflies in spring and early summer. I am indebted therefore to an article appearing in the Sunday Mercury, an excellent newspaper of my original West Midland native heath, which explains all. Apparently a combination of poor weather plus a surge of wasps was the cause of the alarming decline. For some reason the wasps found the conditions to their liking and they fed on the larvae and caterpillars of all our favourite butterflies, even the cabbage white! Happily, as I had hoped the second brood fared much better.

I happened to be approaching Fifield in the van the other day with my son and his friend when we saw a

large black mink furtively go up a drive into a smallholding. Mink are vicious killers and are responsible for causing havoc, particularly to fish hatcheries but are quite capable of taking on virtually anything, including humans, if cornered. Misguided people "liberated" them from the fur farms years ago and now we are reaping the harvest and native wildlife is suffering in consequence.

Congratulations from this contributor to the Cricket Club for their very successful season, and how close they became to becoming champions of their league. If only they could have got Buckingham's last man out. Finally to the tailpiece! Can anybody explain to me how it is that our labrador and three border terriers are completely deaf to any strenuous appeals on our part to recall them from exercising in a field, and yet you only have to quietly lift the lid of the biscuit tin and they appear at your side like a genie from a lamp! Quite uncanny....

Tony Boardman.

CHIROPODY AT THE BREAKESPEARE CLINIC MILTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

We now have a regular Chiropodist at the Breakspeare Clinic in Milton, tucked away behind the Breakspeare House Shop (next to Groves the builder).

For the last 6 years, Mrs Rachel Vetch MSSCh. MBChA., has been running a busy visiting practice and a surgery at the Spendlove Centre in Chalbury.

She is at her happiest when confronted with tricky corns, callouses, ingrowing and long toe nails and general foot problems.

The Clinic will be held every Wednesday morning.
Mrs Vetch can be contacted for advice or an appointment on
Filkins (0367) 860339