

THE DODO, AS IN "DEAD AS" - A STARK WARNING

CAST YOUR MINDS BACK if you are like me, of a maturer age, to days when the tunesmiths knocked out jolly, unpretentious little ditties that had the word 'moon' rhyming with 'June'. Corny to most ears possibly but generally the songs of those days were bouncy and cheerful and so different to much of the grey area repetitive old tosh that we have served up to us nowadays.

Some crooner of the day, perhaps the great Mr Crosby himself, informed us that Spring would be a little late this year. He could well have been singing about 1996 because the weather pattern as I write in early May is a good 2-3 weeks behind what it should be.

The blackthorn which produces the blue-black sloes in autumn is a wonderful guide because generally the cold wintry weather does not yield to balmy spring conditions until its snowy hedgerow blossom begins to wither. This of course has the odd exception, as experienced on Saturday April 27th, when the sun shone down on us and temperatures soared. Days later however we were shivering and putting the heating back on again.

The sickening thing about the wretched blackthorn is the time it takes to bud up. Those tight little buds which for weeks defy bursting, once in flower spend a similar age before a browning edge appears on the foamy blossom and it finally fades.

By that time butterflies, who only venture out when the sun shines, should be bounding among the verdant hedgerows once again and we will all be happy.

My interest in wildlife started at quite an early age listening to the "Out with Romany" programmes on the radio programme "Children's Hour". Romany, whose real name was G. Bramwell Evens, lived in the wilds of the north amongst the farmers, shepherds and gamekeepers. I used to be riveted listening as Romany and the country boy, Tim would come across a nest, or from a vantage point watch a fox cross a field. You never knew what would happen next and those half hours with the softly spoken Romany transported me far into the countryside; so vividly was the programme produced, I believed I was in their company too.

What a great shame that the planners of Radio and T.V. don't revert to more educational themes once more instead of the hyperactive, pop orientated stuff offered nowadays, with the inevitable saturation of American cartoons. Little wonder we have so many cases of alarmingly young children going off the rails, for sadly, we no longer recognise beautiful things that are still around us.

The other distractions, and the inability to communicate the message to the young, results in them growing up being completely unaware of these things.

I still have my original battered copy of "The Observers Book of British Birds" which according to inscriptions on the fly leaf was bought in 1940 when I was a nine year old boy and getting used to wartime Britain. I particularly remember the anti-aircraft, or barrage balloons dotted about the sky at that time and thinking that they resembled giant silver sheep's heads! The excellent pocket sized book can still be bought today but naturally it has been updated.

My 1940 version wrote of the endangered song thrush as follows: "This well known and well loved bird is one of our best songsters and is familiar to us everywhere, especially in gardens where it hops upon the lawn and pulls at a resisting worm". If you should be fortunate to witness this phenomenon today, enjoy the moment.

The collared dove which around here is nearly as common as the starling, hadn't even reached our shores until the mid 50's. Of the red-legged or French partridge there was scant or little mention but today

their numbers outweigh our own grey or common partridge.

However, at last concern by organisations like the R.S.P.B. (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and their members for the future welfare of our diminishing bird populations in particular, have now been highlighted in newspapers. I'm pleased to say our local Oxford Mail is well to the fore in this respect, continually bringing to our notice all reports of threats to wildlife in our area.

The fact remains that unless the politicians in Europe as well as in this country come to some legislative agreement to repair the damage inflicted over the last three decades, there will soon be serious doubts about the future of even the most well known animals, birds, butterflies and plants in the millennium.

To wake up to the dawn chorus on a fine May morning in this country is a joy that should never be denied us. The volume of that chorus has definitely decreased in recent years.

Tony Boardman.

Following the pleas on this subject from Milton and Shipton in the last issue, we received the following. It seems no-one is free of this problem.

Dawls Close,
Ascott-u-Wychwood.

Could I bring up the subject, to the people of Ascott or anybody walking their dog here, that it is an offence to let them foul the footpaths.

It's very difficult walking with a baby and a toddler, to have to dodge the dog mess and cars, because we spend most of the time having to walk on the road to avoid the dog mess. So please use a field or track which people don't use as footpaths.