

ALAS POOR WANDA AND THE BEMUSED GUESTS Tony Boardman

WHETHER we like it or not the march is now irrevocably on towards the second part of the year, for midsummer has come and gone.

What spring we had was really compressed in to the first few weeks of June when to all intents and purposes we had lovely weather normally reserved for May with all the beauty of the new growth, the blossom and the horse chestnut "candles" at their best.

Along the lanes now the familiar umbellifer, the cow parsley or kek, as us midlanders call it, has lost its sweet scented creamy white flowers and has gone over and we see tall parsley that has gone to seed. You see it is aptly named. Posh folk prefer to call it Queen Annes lace. Prolific it certainly is and a menace if established in your garden but in our country lanes the cow parsley personifies the beauty of unspoilt village life..

The single pink or white dog rose now sprawls over the hedgerow and already the rosebay willow herb is beginning to show on spare ground with its rosy magenta flowers. This tall striking weed is frequently called the fireweed because of its liking for growing on recently burnt ground.

Back in the days of heavy bombing in the blitz it established rapidly on bomb sites and of course in the days of steam similarly where there had been line side blazes caused by flying cinders, again up popped the rosebay.

Speeding trains also helped to scatter the feathery seed further along the railway and thus it is now a common sight but easy on the eye.

Also easy on the eye is the scarlet tissue-paper petalled field poppy and whilst the farmer isn't too keen to see them growing in his cornfields, to the nature lover to look down on a cornfield in a valley with a haze of brick red poppies predominant is an extreme pleasure.

As we live on the Oxfordshire Cycle Way we are naturally used to cyclists of all shapes and sizes struggling up Fiddlers Hill on their way, presumably, to the city of learning. They appear to fall into two separate types.

There are the affable out-for-a-ride in the country set who wobble about keeping up a continuous chatter whilst awaiting the more rotund stragglers of their group to catch up. The latter, I hasten to add, with an expression that proclaims, why oh why did I agree to spend my days off doing this! They are extremely friendly however and often pass the time of day with me whenever I meet them when taking "The Old Gentleman" along the Swinbrook Road.

The other category however are completely different, they move at speed, are well honed, aerodynamic lycra clad athletes, usually attired in garish colours, vivid greens, shocking pinks, aggressive orange contrasting with black.

Complete with mandatory crash helmets they have all the appearance of a swarm of hostile insects bearing down on you.

A few weeks ago Wanda the sandy coloured bantam pullet was put out of her misery. We had taken her to the vets and had some special eye drops for an infection but in spite of all this, and keeping her warm in plastic plant crates in our conservatory, she seemed disorientated and clearly wasn't making progress. Neighbour Reg called one Saturday morning and suggested that he would dispose of her humanely, for which we were very grateful.

That evening Sue and I left for Stratford for a dinner party with some friends. Another friend of ours, Gary, who had been staying with us for some time and is gradually coming to terms with our bizarre habits concerning animals, had also decided to entertain guests for dinner.

As darkness fell he dutifully went out to lock the chickens up for us noticing as he did so that Wanda was no longer in her conservatory crate. On going into the garage he discovered a sandy coloured hen in a crate. Peering inside he was amazed to find not only had a miraculous recovery to the stricken hen had occurred but the bird had actually

flown away to join the others in the pen. Surely it could only have been divine intervention!

The realization that there was one chicken short however was disconcerting and he called upon his dinner guests to beat the gloomy undergrowth in search of the missing fowl, a task they hadn't bargained for.

Fortunately Reg Ray reappeared and when acquainted with the situation cheerfully advised the search party that Wanda was no more and the correct quantity was penned up. Unfortunately we had failed to mention Wanda's sad demise and also that Mrs Fluffybottom (Fluffybum to her friends) had gone broody, a state that we were anxious not to encourage, hence the incarceration in the garage.

The following morning at breakfast Gary wryly posed the question "Was there something you omitted to tell me last night?" – Sorry Gary.

Finally can anyone tell me how it is that tiny portions of grit can flip up off the ground and lodge under your stockinged feet? Amazing how they manage to wriggle down that slight gap in your instep isn't it? Not quite like walking on a pebbly beach in bare feet but extremely irritating nevertheless, particularly if you are wearing lace ups.

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the people who showed concern at my mislaid scrap books of the Oxford Times cuttings. I am pleased to say that they have come back home!

Olive Tucker.