

Country pie

Tony Boardman

AN IRREGULAR VISITOR to our neck of the woods said to my wife the other day that she didn't realise that we had so many pools in the Wychwoods. Sue was somewhat dumfounded by this observation racking her brains as to where these pools were.

Later she realised that what the lady believed were pools were in fact fields of blue flax which produce a crop of linseed, unlike the garish oil seed rape with its equally overpowering cloying aroma. Flax when in flower is pleasantly easy on the eye with its pale French or powder blue coloration (I didn't dare say Cambridge blue!) From a distance they can give the impression of an expanse of water, particularly when the sun goes behind a cloud and the flower petals close, you then get a silvery-blue effect. This year in particular it seems to be the favoured crop for our local farmers.

In yesteryear our fields were all wheat, barley, oats, possibly some rye, or potatoes so perhaps a little colour is coming into our lives. Flecked as many are at this time of the year with the scarlet field poppies they make a dazzling contrast to the summer panorama of our countryside.

A few years ago sunflowers were tried by farmers but as they are not seen in the fields these days it must be assumed that the brief flirtation was not deemed successful, which is a pity as a field of sunflowers is a joyous sight to behold.

Have you noticed that there has been a marked lack of butterflies this summer? Disturbing as it is to sight only a few of our favourite regulars but what has happened to the butterflies that gardeners love to hate, the cabbage white? For years we have looked from our house, overlooking the allotments, to see the field full of dancing white butterflies but there are very few this year. The large white – *pieris brassicae* – to give it its proper name, and the small white are the menacing insects that lay their eggs on our cultivated greens producing the caterpillars that chew great unsightly holes in the foliage. When you take into consideration that many migrate to these shores you can only pose the question, what has happened to them?

We learn that many of our native species are moving further north as global warming continues to take effect but as with our British birds and animals, pesticides and the continual threat to their environment will also take their toll, that is why it is so vitally important that we support organisations such as the R.S.P.B. and the Woodland Trust, or BBONT locally, who can physically obtain and sustain important areas of land. If we really care about our countryside we must stand up now and be counted before it's too late for many of our native species. If you are concerned and are not yet a valued member of one of these organisations I urge you to do so and find out not only what is going on, but how you can support them.

Sue was watering the beans growing up their bamboo canes recently when she found a young swallow on the soil. The perfect little bird looked so forlorn and vulnerable as it sadly looked up at her. She carefully collected it and released it from an upstairs window on to the flat garage roof. A few twitters and communication was again restored with its parents and not long after the young fledgling, from its higher perch, took off somewhat erratically to the house across the road where hopefully parents took over. Flying time is important as in a month or two it will be Africa bound. A delightful little bird, we hope it makes the journey safely.

I know that I'm always going on about my favourite dog walk up the Swinbrook road, but I must mention that a new 30 mile calming sign had been painted on the road between the existing 30 mile signposts. Very commendable you may think but there's a snag. Unfortunately because it is on the bend you can't see it as you drive down from the top, in actual fact all you can see is just the outstanding signpost, which of course is hardly noticed if you happen to be coming at a rate of knots towards Shipton. We hardened dog walkers listen out for speeding cars and swiftly scoop our pooches and ourselves on to the verge.

The real concern however is that the signs and the bend are virtually directly on the junction with Fiddlers Hill and any form of traffic turning right albeit a cyclist (it is on the Oxfordshire cycle route), or even a tractor, literally can be very vulnerable to oncoming traffic, particularly when you can't hear them.

I pointed all this out to the powers that be, to no avail. Apparently they can't do anything beyond the last lamp post, whatever that has to do with the price of fish. I simply asked for a slow sign further up the hill where it can be seen, pointing out the obvious hazard. It seemed to me a sensible and reasonable suggestion. I got in return verbiage about why they couldn't proceed further than the lamp post and then quoted prices plus VAT, if you please, on the cost of road signs! Bureaucracy gone mad; it seems that public safety doesn't come into the equation. I'm afraid I didn't reply.

On the domestic front we have to report that the old gentleman "Rastus" our senior border terrier is now on garlic tablets as he now suffers with acute halitosis. Trying to administer the equally evil smelling tablet past his set teeth is as difficult as wriggling between the double portcullis at Warwick Castle.

"Justin", son of "Percy" has moved on to a farm in Cassington. The younger cockerel was re-housed following a real barney with his dad. Why "Justin" did you ask? He was always last into the pen at night so whenever we closed up we would say "Oh he's just in". Simple really.

Summing up, here is the latest treasure from the 'out of the mouths of department. Again we have to thank our friend Jeanette from Badsey for this, from her young daughter Paula. Jeanette - "Would you like to go for a cycle ride Paula?" Paula (tearfully) - "I can't". Jeanette - "Why not?" Paula - "Because my tyres are blunt". Please keep them coming in, phone me (evenings) on 01993 - 831332.