

Country Pie

By Tony Boardman

THERE ARE TIMES when the deadline for our articles draws nigh, that I can have sympathy with an artist faced with an empty canvas. He has his brushes and oils at the ready; all he needs is the inspiration!

I am fortunate that the shifting seasons provide me with a topic, as at present, as late summer moves relentlessly in to early autumn. There is now a cool edge to the mornings and evenings in spite of the possible provision of sunny days, and the golden stubble fields show evidence that they have yielded this year's supply of wheat or barley and the wagon-loads of straw have been collected.

Rosy-cheeked apples and golden pears will be carefully plucked from their branches and lowered with utmost care into baskets ready for storing. Fruit that drops to the ground when ripe attracts the colourful red admiral or peacock butterflies that delight in feeding on the rotting fruit.

Spring bulbs should now be planted in the gardens for a show in the spring.

Our beautiful swallows and martins have been gathering in groups, spreading themselves on telegraph lines like so many clothes pegs. They must feed to prepare themselves for their 6,000-mile flight to South Africa. With them will go the four youngsters that started their life in our garage with their dutiful and busy parents. Sue and I were overjoyed that they chose us and that they successfully produced their brood. God speed, safe journey and haste ye back.

I'm encouraged to believe that our swallow, martin and swift populations may have increased in our area this summer. Replacing them will be the northern thrushes, the fieldfares and redwings; shy birds who may be seen stripping the hedgerow berries. They can be enticed into our gardens when the weather becomes really cold, with regular provision of food, like the odd bruised store apple, raisins, etc.

This is the time of year when the spiders seem to go bananas. They rush about at night as if on some urgent business and in the morning we walk into their fine webs with muttered oaths.

A few years ago, Sue and I were joint leaders of the North Cotswolds "Watch" Group, which was the junior branch of the Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation. Our job was to attract local youngsters, and usually their parents, to appreciate the various aspects of wildlife by taking them out on walks, with indoor slide shows and quizzes, etc.

Occasionally we were expected to attend meetings with the experts.

One such meeting mentioned ballooning spiders, which Sue and I hadn't a clue about. Some species of spider which climb up plants or rocks and spin multiple strands of silk which are lifted into the air by the slightest breeze. As the spider spins more and more strands there is eventually enough lift to pull the spider up into the air above, thus "ballooning". These spiders have been found three miles above the earth's surface, which explains how they manage to 'ocean hop'.

Did you know that a spider's silk is the strongest natural fibre known? Even steel stretched to the same diameter is not as strong. The spider spins its web to catch its prey, either waiting in the web or spinning one thread away from the web to hide from its prey.

So, next time you walk into a web and go "Tchaah!", it could be a ballooning spider swinging about in the air spinning a web until he negotiates an attachment.

Northerners are known to use the expression "There's nowt as queer as folk". By jingo, they're right! The other day as I padded up the good old Swinbrook Road with my trusty hounds at my heels, I was aghast and not a little annoyed to find that some "charmer" who had obviously been to a local Garden Centre, had stashed several empty plastic trays and pots of different sizes, complete with soil I might add, along one of the two chunks of hedgerow on our upward journey.

The perpetrator of this irresponsible and anti-social act had finished with them and obviously had no use for them himself, but why in the world did he load his car up and dump them on one of my favourite walks? I have got used to finding the usual drink cans and paper litter hurled out of passing vehicles, but this was the last straw.

Had he, I wonder, considered loading his wheelie-bin with them for those jolly good refuse chaps to dispose of or, perhaps, as he had to get his car out to dump the blasted things anyway, why not take them to the tip at Dean?

For the record, I collected up as much as I could and immediately managed to find somebody who was only too pleased to receive them; they were new, after all. All the time I grovelled under the hedge to get them out I was hoping nobody had seen me in case they thought that I was putting the wretched things there! But, I ask you, how can we expect the young to learn to appreciate the do's and don'ts in this throw-away society we live in if adults behave like that. According to the Collins English Dictionary, a slob is a lazy and untidy person, befitting I think to those that like to **Scatter Litter Over Britain**.

My wife has an aversion to electric toasters which she finds annoying to the extreme. Because you are usually always doing other jobs in the kitchen when the toast making process is put into action, unless you post a sentry to watch over the thing, the results are frequently climaxed by a strong aroma of charred bread pervading the entire house. In theory the pop up toaster is a good idea. Those that work correctly are admirable, most are hell bent on cremation, whilst a few have a talent for flinging half cooked slices of bread all over the place, providing excellent catching practice for aspiring young cricketers who field close to the wicket.

I leave you with this amusing version of the Lord's Prayer heard in a kindergarten, which began "Our Father who art in heaven, Harold be thine name". Isn't that lovely?

If you have any similar stories to give us all a chuckle, please phone me on 01993-831332.