

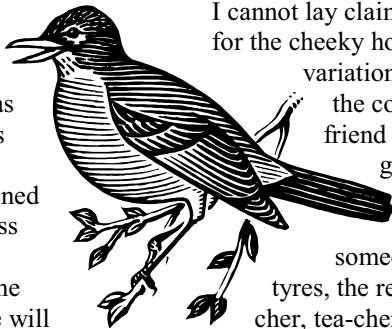
“Tea Leaves” and “Creaking Gates”

From the author of “Country Pie”

It is nice to be back although, to be perfectly honest I haven't been away! We are still waiting to sell our house in Fiddler's Hill and move to Devon, so in the meantime.....!

Gateway to Summer

This is a marvellous time of year to pick up the country story; the finest of all with its richness of vibrant new colour as trees and hedgerows burst in to leaf. Great writers from saucy Geoffrey Chaucer to Stratford's Will Shakespeare were inspired by this change in the season. As the days become warmer, all around nature is hard at work. Look up and be cheered by the sight of the pathfinder swallows as they jink their way across the English skies once again; similarly be heartened by the cuckoo's call across the meadows in the early morning. Truly April is the gateway to what we hope will be a golden summer.



Odd Names For Local Birds

Sue and I call some of our local birds by odd names that identify them to us but would defeat a stranger. What would you make of the following: - “Tea Leaves”, “Walters”, “Creaking Gates”, “Crocus Beaks”, “Winged Spivs”, “Chack-Chack” Birds, “Spadgers” and “Bicycle Pumps”? Rooks circling round treetops remind me of tea-leaves swirling in a pot of freshly made tea. Wood pigeons are referred to as “Walters” in memory of 1930's heart-throb Walter Pidgeon. Corn

buntings are the “creaking gates”; their singing is reminiscent of a garden gate in need of an oilcan. The male blackbird in his prime claims the “crocus beak”- his bill is crocus yellow. Those of you old enough to remember ‘Dad’s Army’ will recall Private Walker – the perfect ‘spiv’; the starling is the epitome of a spiv, brash and into everything. The “chack-chack” birds are the Scandinavian winter-visiting thrushes, as they fly over in groups calling “chack chack chack” to each other; they are fieldfares.

Spadgers and Yaffles

I cannot lay claim the name of “spadger”, for the cheeky house- sparrow, there are variations of this up and down the country! However our friend in Begbroke named the great tit the “bicycle pump”; its call really does sound like someone putting air in their tyres, the repeated: “tea-cher, tea-cher, tea-cher” – listen out for it in your garden.

In Somerset and the West Country the green woodpecker, is known as the “yaffle” because of its laughing call. That unusual summer visitor to our heathland, the nightjar is referred to by country folk as “goatsucker” because in time past it was thought that their wide gape, used for hunting moths and flying beetles at dusk, was used to steal their milk. It is also known as the “churn owl” because of the weird churning noise that it makes at night time.

Tony Boardman