



## Notes of hope and persistent joys of nature

**T**hese are strange and unsettling times giving us all an uncomfortable sense of unease. Yet over much of this period, the Spring weather has been breathtakingly beautiful. It's almost as if the natural world is beautiful in indifference to us humans or even in mockery at our nervous plight.

Let's not allow melancholy reflections to spoil the small but persistent joys we can get by patiently observing the natural world and indulging ourselves in it. Have you noticed how much more prominent the sounds of that world are in the absence of normal traffic and concourse? Suddenly the birds are audible, they flit across our gardens almost possessively and over a day or so their routine appearance at selected spots reveals their daily habits and their habitat.

Sparrows chirp with a manic persistence and clearly show which bushes are theirs and which roofs are their look-out posts. A handsome male insists on scrabbling over our skylight with scratchy claws and yelps of alarm as he slides on the sloping glass. The wood pigeon coos like an unanswered telephone, the cooing then cut off in mid



It's wonderful to patiently observe the natural world

note as if the caller hung up in disgust. A lone dunnock scuttles around under the shrubbery and many locked down householders have learnt to recognise his melodious call. Some have said it's like a squeaky trolley wheel though to my ear that's an unfeeling judgement on a clearly tuneful call. Incidentally, if the call is more melodious and goes on longer then you

might be hearing a garden warbler.

While listening out for your feathered neighbours I'm sure you will have noticed what a wonderful season the rose bushes have had. Sprays of pink blooms tumble over numerous garden fences, deep red showers of rampant flowerheads surge over garden walls and many an early morning has been uplifting through their heady

scents. The birds are stirring into song as early as just gone four in the morning and are still at it by well gone nine at night, while the roses lure bees to endless burrowing in their colourful folds. This profusion of song and colour is free to all whether you have a garden or not – simply open the window for birdsong and peep over hedges for the roses. Now that we can move about a little more, we can take advantage of Horsham's great asset of the nearby countryside. Denne Hill is accessible to many as is Leechpool and Owlbeech woods. The trees are magnificent, the birds tuneful and even a kind thought can be spared for the predatory grey squirrels. The play of light through the massed leaves and the winding pathways have made a delightful distraction from the daily morbidity. A recent walk was stopped to let a slow worm wiggle across the dry path and small blue butterflies fled over the heathland. Wrens have surely exploded in song so raucous is their falling-down-stairs call and occasional deer have moved warily on our approach.

We're lucky to have such solace so close at hand and perhaps the salve of these small events will ease the memories of these oppressive hours.