

Confined to the Garden: April 2021

We are now firmly into the second year of the coronavirus pandemic and beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. The death rate is still falling. More than 34million people have now received their first dose of a vaccine, over 13million have had both doses. The government plans to inoculate the rest of the adult population, another 21 million people, by the end of July. Meanwhile, the 'unlocking' continues. On the 17<sup>th</sup> May: *"most legal restrictions on meeting others outdoors will be lifted"*. The next phase includes re-opening of indoor hospitality and entertainment, indoor exercise classes and all accommodation. Some sporting events and performances will be allowed and up to 30 people will be able to attend weddings and funerals. Other countries around the world are having varying levels of success in controlling the virus and there is a growing fear that a vaccine resistant variant will emerge and enter the UK, but for now we seem to be on track to enjoy at least part of the summer without Covid restrictions.

April has been very dry, with chilly nights and some frosty mornings. The sun is warm but unless you are out of the breeze, there is still a nip to the air. The lack of April showers and low temperatures have slowed the progress of spring, but it can't be halted. I've seen Brimstone, Peacock and Comma butterflies while out and about.

On a warm day in late April, bees to emerge from my bee hotels. The males come out first, then hang around waiting for the females to follow. I got two more of these for Christmas, so I'll put them up soon.



New insect hotels

The Primroses I planted last year are now flowering. They came out a bit later than in the wider countryside, but they are very welcome. I hope they will be enjoyed by the emerging bees and butterflies.



Primroses

It looks like a pair of House Sparrows have moved into the box on the back of the house, the one without a camera, of course. Still no sign of occupation in the new sparrow terrace on the front of the house. There's still time though. The hunt for nesting material is still on. I saw a Goldfinch collecting grass but sadly no photo. Sparrows, Starlings, Blackbirds and Collared Doves have all been busy gathering too. I have even seen a Blackbird carrying worms in its beak, a sure sign of hatched eggs. A typical nest takes around two weeks to build and the nesting season starts up to two weeks earlier in gardens than in woodland, so these urban birds have a headstart. Despite smaller clutch sizes, birds in towns fledge more chicks per nest than birds in the countryside.



Blackbird gathering nesting material

For information about the timing of bird breeding season, click the link:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/natures-home-magazine/birds-and-wildlife-articles/features/for-birds-spring-starts-here/>

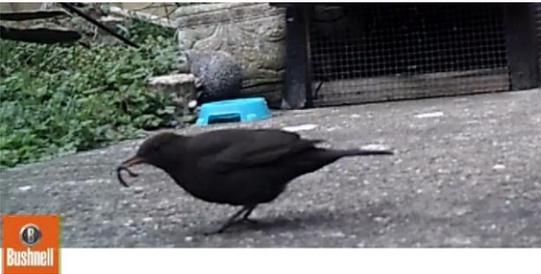
It's a busy time for birds, so here are some pictures of busy birds from the garden this month.



Starling



Coal Tit



Blackbird



Starling



Collared Doves



Starlings



Starling and House Sparrow

The Rats have not been seen on camera as much this month, although I did get an interesting video of one foraging for worms. It again ignored the Hedgehog food in preference for natural nutrition. Watching this rat gave me a strong suspicion that there was a nest of young being fed. Every time it found a worm, instead of eating it on the spot, it dashed back to the other end of the garden with it. The Rat then approached the dish left out for the fox. Just at that moment, the Fox with the injured back leg entered the garden and could clearly smell a rat. The Rat ran away and hid, but the Fox spent some time searching the garden before it gave up.



To see videos of this, click the links:

Rat foraging for worms: <https://youtu.be/5-U-SJb77Ns>

Rat hides from Fox: <https://youtu.be/Y5m20QordOU>

Full length version: <https://youtu.be/1vQIFxdVzTg>

My suspicions were confirmed a couple of weeks later, when I lifted the lid of the compost bin to find three extremely cute babies looking up at me. I didn't have a camera on me at the time but trust me, they were very cute. My new rodent-proof shed is on its way. I hope depriving them of this quiet hideaway will limit, or at least relocate some of their breeding.

The rats are not the only ones with new family members. I've spotted some very small mice visiting the feeding station this month. The first was accompanied by an adult, but baby mice grow up quick and they are now independent and pretty much indistinguishable from the adults already.



Baby Wood Mouse with parent



Baby Wood Mouse

There have been fewer squabbles between mice this month and even a few friendly encounters. I suppose family members are tolerated more than strangers. There has been another shift in the mice's behaviour too. Some individuals are now eating in rather than taking away. The feeding station is a safe place to nibble your prize and caching is less of a concern now that winter is over, so there is less dashing to and fro.



Eating in

In larger mammal news, The Fox with the broken rear leg still looks pretty strong and healthy. It's still limping, the leg has not healed in the right position, but it does sometimes put the leg down on the ground. I even saw it being used for scratching, so I think the Fox is learning to adapt to the new arrangement of its bones.



Fox with broken leg

There have been a few brief visits from 3Paws. She may have her own cubs or be helping to raise cubs for a related vixen.



3Paws

There has only been one other fox in the garden this month. I notice him when he turns up on camera because all his limbs are intact and working. He also has a thin tail with a kink at the end.



Fox

The same male Hedgehog is still visiting, slightly more frequently but still not quite every night. His ear still looks bad. I think it might be an infection and I'm starting to wonder if it will heal by itself. I am on the fence about whether to intervene, but he still seems strong and certainly has a good appetite.



Regular visitor

No female hedgehogs yet, still just the one male individual. Compared to this time last year it's very quiet. The breeding season should be in full swing by now with males rutting, females enduring lengthy courtship dances and babies starting to be born. I wonder if this is something to do with the weather, or if my local population has experienced a crash over winter. It's possible that a route has been blocked somewhere and some of the hogs can no longer access my garden. I hope to see more arriving as the weather warms up.



As I haven't found much time to edit videos this month, here's a selection of Hedgehog pictures from April for you to enjoy instead.



Hedgehog arriving



Hedgehog in the feeding station



Fox arrives to find Hedgehog got there first

May is going to be another busy month for me and for wildlife. I'll do my best to capture the most interesting action from the garden and share it with you here. Come back next month to get the garden gossip.