

## Confined to the Garden: May 2021

It would appear that, in the UK at least, life is slowly returning to 'normal'. At the time of writing, more than 38 million people have now received their first dose of a covid vaccine (including me). 35% of the adult population has received both doses and is considered to be fully immunised. There is concern over a new variant which originated in India, and uncertainty about international travel, but the government maintain that we are on track to complete the 'unlocking' process on June 21<sup>st</sup>, ending all restrictions on social interaction.

After a record-breaking cold and dry April, we have been treated to a record-breaking wet May. April 2021 was the coldest since 1922, and the driest since 1938. May has been very wet, but not much warmer than April was and windy too. The unseasonable weather had been slowing the progress of spring, but May's rain has kicked off a delayed growth spurt and vegetation everywhere is finally getting going.

In the garden, I'm joining in with 'No Mow May' and thanks to the rain, the grass is very long indeed. Some of the little plug plants I added to my flowering lawn last year are beginning to show themselves now, and on 27th May I counted 21 different plants flowering in the garden.



No Mow May



Red Clover



Common Daisy



Ox-Eye Daisies, almost ready to flower



Ragged Robin



Pond area

For more information about No Mow May, click the link:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/no-mow-may>

The extra pollen and nectar from my flowering lawn will be welcomed by all kinds of pollinators, including the solitary bees using my bee hotels. These hotels are really busy when the sun shines on them. I've put up two new ones that I was given for Christmas.



Bee hotels

A Great Spotted Woodpecker has visited the feeders a few times, but I haven't been able to get a photo. Woodpeckers have never been regular visitors to my garden, but they do like a peanut feeder. I've been putting more peanuts out recently because they make less mess on the floor than seed and fat balls. There are lots of foods I could put out to attract woodpeckers, such as sunflower hearts, mealworms and suet, but peanuts will have to suffice for now. The birds are on a restricted diet, at least until my new rodent-proof shed arrives, because I'm trying not to encourage the rats to get too comfy here.

For help identifying woodpeckers, click the link:

[https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u23/downloads/pdfs/bt63\\_18-19.pdf](https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u23/downloads/pdfs/bt63_18-19.pdf)

The presence of Great Spotted Woodpeckers in the area is not good news for the House Sparrows. The eggs in the nest box at the back of the house have hatched. Woodpeckers will take young chicks when they get a chance, so they had better watch out. The parents are feeding non-stop and it won't be long before the chicks fledge. The new Sparrow terrace at the front of the house remains empty, maybe next year. Some young birds have already made it out of the nest. I've seen fledgling Starlings and Sparrows in the garden, pestering to be fed by their parents.



Fledgling Starlings



Fledgling Sparrow

To see a video of the fledgling Starlings, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/NgNnUTIDPQs>

While many of my garden visitors come to find food, one quirky character is bringing food. Every now and then, a squirrel appears on my cameras. Sometimes it tries to steal peanuts from the bird feeder, but this one brought it's own. The peanuts in my garden don't have shells, so this one must be from someone else's garden. Squirrels don't only cache food in the autumn, if there is a surplus

of food, they will hide some away for later. It must have found a good hiding place, because it eventually left the garden without the nut.



To see a short video of this squirrel, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/3z5Nwey662E>

Rodents generally seem to be giving the garden a wide berth at the moment. My cameras may be missing some activity due to the long grass hiding smaller mammals from view, but there is a definite reduction in numbers. This could have a lot to do with a very patient cat spending long hours outside the feeding station, ready to pounce. This particular cat is a new and very regular visitor. It has caught at least one mouse, possibly several. Another cat managed to catch a baby rat and that was the only rat I saw this month. The patient cat also pounced on a Blackbird early one morning. The Blackbird got away, but lost a few feathers which were quickly gathered up by sparrows for lining their nests. Domestic cats kill significant numbers of birds and small mammals and some are more determined than others. Thankfully, my own cats very rarely catch anything these days. One is just not much of a hunter but the other one would kill everything, given a chance. They have 24hr access to an enclosed outdoor space where they can watch the birds, but not reach them. When they are let out into the garden, the hunter has to wear a bib. He looks a bit silly, but he can still run, jump, climb, eat, wash etc., and it's the only thing I've found that actually stops him from catching birds, and believe me, I've tried everything.



For information about the CatBib, click the link:

<https://catgoods.com/>

In early May, there were some more tiny mice caught on camera inside the feeding station. These babies grow up very quickly, but are easy to spot at first. They're so small!



Baby Mouse



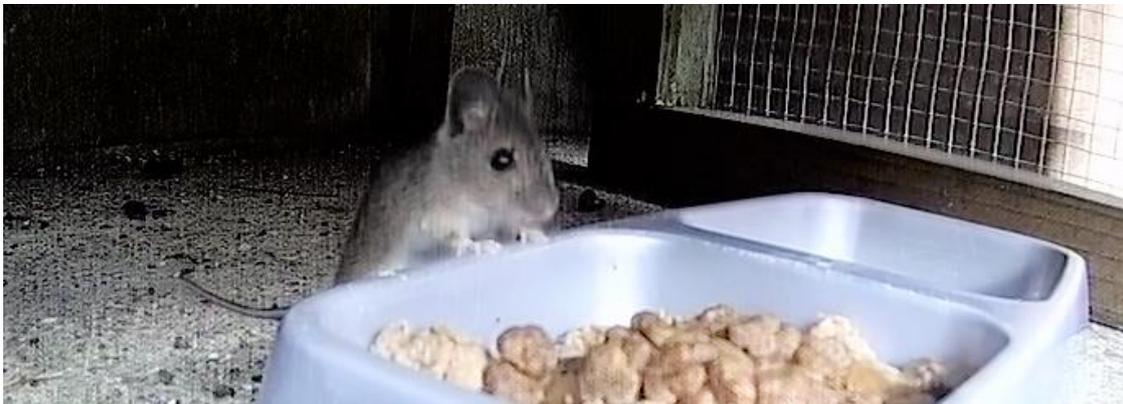
Adult Mouse

To see videos of the baby mice, click the links below:

<https://youtu.be/FgaKUmKW0kw>

<https://youtu.be/pDa4kY3QvJI>

Long daylight hours leave less time for the nocturnal creatures to go about their business under cover of dark. This mouse was caught on camera in the feeding station during daylight, and it wasn't the only one this month.



Daylight mouse

To see videos of mice caught out in daylight, click the links:

Baby mouse: [https://youtu.be/0n4\\_PUnHDil](https://youtu.be/0n4_PUnHDil)

Baby Mouse: <https://youtu.be/eLPYZvGaZC4>

Adult Mouse: <https://youtu.be/5HiprmVuXAg>

This camera was out of action for a couple of weeks this month, while I got around to fixing it, after the fox with the broken hind leg chewed through the cable. The Fox wasn't hurt, but I don't think it enjoyed the experience because it hasn't been back since. When the camera came back on, there was far less mouse activity inside the feeding station.

As well as the fox with the broken hind leg and 3Paws, this healthy-looking individual has been visiting quite a bit this month.



Healthy-looking Fox

The last time any other foxes visited the garden was at the end of April. A dominant dog fox was followed into the garden by a subordinate fox, possibly a vixen or a juvenile male from the same family. I didn't recognise either of them, but they clearly knew each other.



To see a video of these strangers in the night, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/3tABR9YlpPc>

It's still just the one Hedgehog, he visits most nights, but is always on his own. He often disappears into the long grass for a while after visiting the feeding station, then reappears for a second helping. He's easily recognisable because he has some kind of injury/infection/skin condition around his right ear. It doesn't appear to bother him and he certainly has a good appetite. If he starts to decline I might have to intervene, but only if absolutely necessary.



To see a video of this Hedgehog, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/lvkOuYRVQZA>

I'm starting to feel a bit sad for this lonely male. Last year, there were at least eight individuals courting in my garden from March to June. I can't help but wonder where they have all gone, and whether they will ever come back.

To read about courtship in Hedgehogs and other small mammals, click the link:

[https://ptes.org/snorting-snuffling-and-singing-a-small-mammals-guide-to-courtship/?fbclid=IwAR0ZsqMaen\\_e40ScYRc3BUsvOYptkyCdT6yrNNgFq4CA2FBPFasVdapqiE](https://ptes.org/snorting-snuffling-and-singing-a-small-mammals-guide-to-courtship/?fbclid=IwAR0ZsqMaen_e40ScYRc3BUsvOYptkyCdT6yrNNgFq4CA2FBPFasVdapqiE)

Next month, we will reach the summer solstice. It seems fitting that this turning point in the natural calendar will coincide with perhaps the most anticipated date since this pandemic began over a year ago. If all goes to plan, the longest day of 2021 will be the day all restrictions are lifted and that feels like a reason to celebrate.

For tips on how to make the most of the summer solstice, click the link:

<https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/summer-solstice-2018-when-it-happens-and-the-best-places-to-celebrate-the-longest-day-of-the-year/>

Whether the government's plan works out or not, the wildlife will carry on regardless. The bees will keep buzzing, nestlings will fledge, babies will grow up and predators will hunt. And all this will be happening right outside my back door. As always, my cameras will be watching as summer kicks off, and I'll do my best to keep you updated. Come back at the end of June to get the highlights of another month in the garden.