

Confined to the garden – June 2021

The much anticipated 21st of June came and went, and Covid restrictions are still with us. The final stage of unlocking has been postponed to July 19th, to allow for more people to be vaccinated. Over 77million doses of vaccine have now been administered. This means over 60% of UK adults have had their first dose and almost half are fully vaccinated. Anyone over the age of 18 can now get their jabs and there is a big push to get as many people immunised as possible before the final restrictions are lifted. Infection rates are rising again rapidly, due to the latest variant, but this isn't being reflected in the death rates, so the vaccines seem to be doing their job. However, we must remember that worldwide only 10% of adults have been fully vaccinated.

Summer is upon us! After a record-breaking wet May, June began with some promising sunshine and a brief hot spell. Since then temperatures have mostly been average or below, with only slightly less rain. The weather has been disappointing for many, but for the wildlife this spring has been a hard one. Many species time their breeding to coincide with an abundance of food. If unusual weather causes this food to be early or late, there is what is known as a 'trophic mismatch', which can lead to breeding failure and population decline. Trophic mismatching will become much more of a problem as climate change progresses. The study of the timings of seasonal events is known as phenology. You can get involved in phenology by submitting records of things like the first buds bursting in spring or Swallows arriving in summer, through Nature's calendar.

To read about trophic mismatching, click the link below:

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/biodiversity/posts/trophic-mismatch>

To get involved in phenology, click the link below:

<https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

Summer has finally arrived in the garden. After 'no mow may' it was a bit of a jungle. When I cut the grass at the start of June, there was Ragged Robin in flower and Ox-Eye Daisies almost ready to bloom. I couldn't bear to cut them down, so I worked around them. The birds seem to prefer shorter grass, and spend more time feeding in the garden after I have cut it. This is probably partly because they can see predators approaching more easily, and partly because cutting the grass exposes invertebrates that they couldn't access when it was long.



May



June

During lockdown last spring, I added several new plants to the garden, to benefit pollinators. Most of them have survived and now I have a greater variety of wildflowers providing a longer flowering season. I have already seen Bumblebees visiting the Foxgloves and Hoverflies are attracted to the Ox-Eye Daisies. However, I have not seen many butterflies in the garden this year. I blame this on the wet weather.



My flowering 'lawn'



Foxgloves



Ragged Robin



Ox-Eye Daisy

Some species have been less affected by the weird weather this spring. The Blackbirds in my garden weren't short of food last month. The damp conditions are perfect for finding worms, slugs and other soft-bodied invertebrates to feed to their young.



Blackbird with worms

One of the Blackbird fledglings was hopping around the garden one evening in mid-June. I encouraged it into cover before nightfall as there was a cat nearby. Unfortunately for the Blackbirds, a young Fox discovered the fledgling in the early hours of the morning. It was difficult to watch because the Fox was inexperienced, and the kill was anything but efficient. It was heart-breaking to see the adults searching for their chick in the morning too, but I can console myself with the knowledge that it was eaten by a hungry Fox and not just killed by a bored cat.

The damp conditions this year suit amphibians. I have spotted a large frog jumping around the garden on a couple of rainy nights in June. Although frogs don't use my tiny pond for breeding, they

do make use of the terrestrial habitat and foraging opportunities here. Summer rain also makes snails easier to find, which may explain why I saw a Thrush in my garden for the first time. Thrushes eat a variety of invertebrates and fruits but are most famous for breaking open snail shells on anvil stones.



Song Thrush

Some of the Sparrows are still feeding their fledglings, but most of the Starlings seem to be independent now. They roam around noisily, like gangs of teenagers, feeding together, and sometimes bathing together in the pond. I set up a camera by the pond for a few days this month and all the birds seem to use it one way or another. Here are a few of them...



Collared Dove



Blackbird



Wood Pigeon



To see a video of some juvenile Starlings bathing together, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/tZHmjLtqt9M>

To see a young sparrow having a bath in the pond, click the link below:

<https://youtu.be/WuxVBOMQdZM>

This Squirrel is an occasional visitor to the garden. This month, it tried (and failed) to climb the pole to the bird feeders.



To see a video of this, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/0uSQ3zsQxuY>

The rats have come and gone again this month. They took over the space under the rockery by the pond for a while. They probably killed the Wood Mice that were living there and regularly visiting

the Hedgehog feeding station. The entrance to the secret space under the rockery is hidden in some Ivy by the pond, very close to the bird feeders. When I cut the long grass at the start of June, I noticed some tracks between the Ivy and the bird feeders, so I set up a camera. For a few days the rats were very active in this area, and then they disappeared again. I don't know where they are living now, they could still be in the garden, but if they keep to the borders and don't come out into the open, it's hard for my cameras to pick them up. I bet if I re-stock the bird feeders, they'll show up again.



Brown Rat

To see a short video of the rats making each other jump, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/dEtvUGMFSNk>

One lone Wood Mouse visited the feeding station this month, but found it empty. He had a bit of a wash and left without a meal. He hasn't been back since. I'm sure they're still in the area, maybe they'll start to come back if the rats have moved on.



To see a video of this mouse's visit, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/G-N4XAh4KEE>

The feeding station was empty because no Hedgehogs are visiting at the moment. The lonely male who has been my only visitor this year seems to have disappeared. He seemed fine when he came on the 22nd of May, he ate a bowlful of food and showed his gratitude in the usual way (by pooping on the floor on his way out). He hasn't come back since then, and no other hogs have shown up

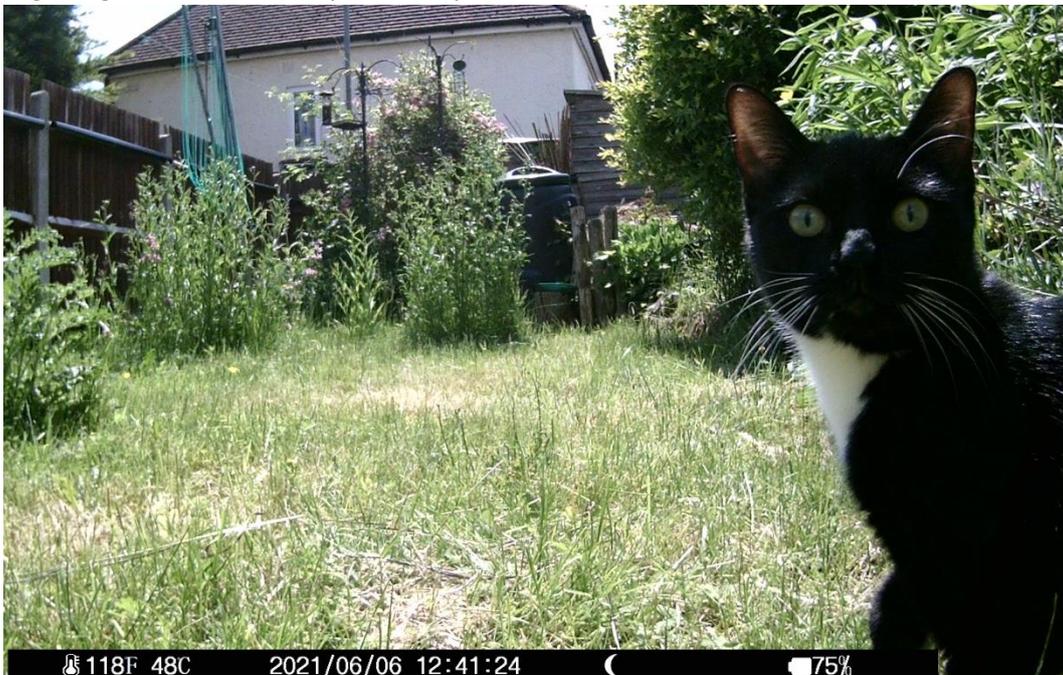
either. I kept putting the food out for a couple of weeks, but I don't want to leave food out that won't be eaten, so I stopped. The rats have ignored the Hedgehog food so far, but I don't want to push my luck. It makes me very sad not to have Hedgehogs visiting the garden and I really hope they will return. It's been such a dramatic decline, from more than eight individuals last year, to one this year, and now none. I suppose this reflects the state of the wider Hedgehog population and shouldn't really be surprising, but I still find it very sad.



To see a video of the lonely male leaving his goodbye gift, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/h5U3jKeaQ7M>

The patient cat that was stalking the mice was not seen at all for the first weeks of June, and has only visited briefly in late June. With no mice around, it seems to have lost interest. However, the next-door neighbours have recently started letting their young cat out, so she has been enjoying exploring our garden. She seems particularly interested in the foxes.



To see videos of this young cat meeting the local Foxes, click the links:

Coco meets two young foxes: <https://youtu.be/kk4zT4-Hkdc>

Coco meets 3Paws: https://youtu.be/1if9fv7_kjl

Coco meets a cub on a wet morning: <https://youtu.be/YvSK4ixy33c>

There have been plenty of Foxes around, as there were last summer. I thought the individual with the broken leg had gone for good after it had an unpleasant experience chewing through a live camera cable, but it showed up for one brief visit this month.



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

<https://youtu.be/SkkrxatwAqc>

3Paws has been around a few times, and some other adults are now becoming regulars.



To see a video of 3Paws visiting the garden, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/ZyYW93OcVZg>

This adult Fox, very conveniently, paused to pose for the camera upon entering the garden.



To see a video of this, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/EhcxxUsXYrM>

While on my way home one evening this month, I saw a cub on the other side of the road. About a week later a cub showed up in the garden. I cannot tell how many cubs there are, as they all look pretty much the same at the moment. None have any distinguishing marks, as yet, but I have now seen two in the garden at the same time, so I know that there are at least two of them around.



Fox cub

To see a video of two playful cubs in the garden, click the link:

https://youtu.be/N_D_DFbbIKk

They are quite grown up already and very independent, visiting by themselves most of the time. They sometimes come in the early morning and I get lovely colour images of them.



To see a video of this cub having a drink from the pond, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/rkoXGEQ-SQ0>

To see another early morning visit, click the link below:

<https://youtu.be/hbyN8i6-OHI>

All the Foxes seem very comfortable in the garden. This cub gave me a close-up demonstration of how to deal with an itchy leg.



To see the video, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/CJtJ4ar1IMI>

As summer goes on, the cubs will become harder to tell apart from adults, then they will start to disperse to find their own territories and I will see less foxes in the garden again. For now, I am enjoying having so many visitors to take my mind off the lack of Hedgehogs.

Whether the Hedgehogs come back, or if the rats and mice reappear remains to be seen, but whoever visits the garden this summer, my cameras will be keeping an eye out for them. I'll do my best to keep up with the news and bring you the most interesting highlights here. Come back next month to see what has been happening in the garden in July.