

YOU MAY NEED TO DOWNLOAD THIS FILE IN ORDER TO SEE IT CORRECTLY

NATURE RAMBLINGS (1)

Hi everyone,

First of all, it is most important to hope that you and your families are well and bearing up under the current circumstances.

Just for fun, Helen and I have put together some pictures and notes from our recent local walks. There is nothing special or unusual about them, the photos were taken on our mobiles. However, they show how varied the flora and fauna is in a relatively small area.

Para-phrasing the great novelist, it is the best of times and it is the worst of times. Worst, of course, because we are confined to quarters and cannot socialise. Best, because of the consolation of fantastic weather coinciding with spring. All the countryside is flourishing, and it is a great time for walking.

There is a myriad of wildflowers to be seen, a small example of which we have shown below. Also, large numbers of birds and their accompanying birdsong are present. We have seen a heron in Dibbensdale, pheasants in many fields, kestrels stalking their prey, hares racing away into the distance, and butterflies galore. We have heard many a woodpecker (mainly in Storeton woods) but haven't actually been able to spot one. Fields are full of crows feasting regally, geese have been flying overhead with their noisy calls, and there are lots of ducks occupying our local ponds. We even have a Mandarin duck residing on our local pond, which is quite unusual (however, Sue Martin also has one residing in a pond close to her).

Although they don't come under the heading of flora and fauna, we can't help but mention that we have also noticed an incredible rise in the numbers of joggers and cyclists. People are mainly much friendlier than usual whilst making exaggerated detours around each other! We have a vision that when this is all over (sooner rather than later please) there will be some fantastic gardens, some vastly improved homes and a much fitter nation!

By the way, you can click inside any of the photographs and 'drag' them to expand the picture.



The ubiquitous **dandelion**.
Magnificent in the fields right
now, Still don't want them on
lawns though!



Downy Rose. This was cascading
over a wall near Storeton. Big and
blousy!



Common Daisy. This may be common but always a welcome sight in our fields.



Scarlett Pimpernel: flowers open only when the sun shines, and closes even in overcast conditions. That is why it has the nickname "shepherd's weather glass". (It is also the alias of Sir Percy Blakeney in the novel of the same name by Baroness_Emma Orczy)



Country lanes. We have hundreds of course. This is Red Hill road in Storeton. It is great walking these lanes on sunny days and they are generally a little quieter than most places.



Gorse, although very prickly it is always a spectacular plant when in full bloom.



Forget Me Nots. What are these called?!



Lesser Celandine, is a member of the Ranunculus family, as is the buttercup. An early flowering wildflower.



Wonderful footpaths. Currently decorated with more wildflowers than you can count. This one is on Lever's land near to Brimstage.



Bulrushes. There are loads of them in Dibbendsdale nature park, but we spotted these (it wasn't hard) on the footpath from near Rest Hill road to Brimstage.



Hogweed. In days gone by, children used the hollow stems of hogweed as peashooters. Unlike the giant hogweed this one doesn't have to be reported (giant hogweed produces a sap which burns the skin).



Green Alkanet is a member of the forget-me-not family and is related to borage and comfrey. It is everywhere in abundance at the moment.



Common Buttercup. Do you like butter? You will have to hold one of these under your chin to find out. A wildflower to make you smile.



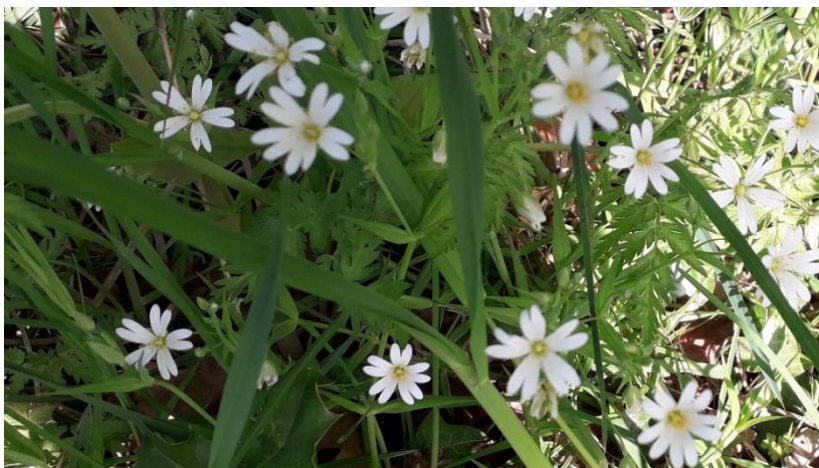
Yellow archangel, also known as weasel's snout. Related to the red and white dead nettles and does not sting. As the Bluebells fade, Yellow archangel takes its turn to flower.



Crab Apple Blossom, a precursor to the fruits that will follow. Crab apples have long been associated with love and marriage. It was said that if you throw the pips into the fire while saying the name of your love, the love is true if the pips explode.



Hedgerows. Miles and miles of them. They all seem to have been neatly cut this year. Well done to our farmers etc.



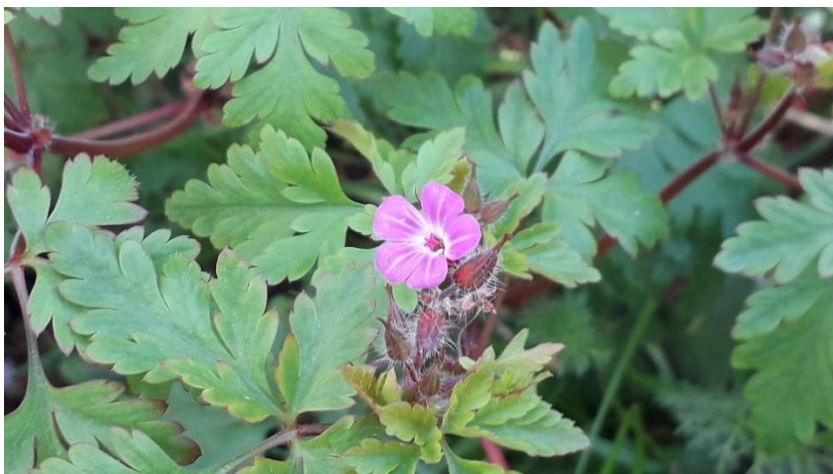
Greater Stitchwort. Star-of-Bethlehem' and 'wedding cakes' are just some of the other names for Greater stitchwort. You will find the pretty, star-shaped, white flowers in woodlands and along hedgerows and roadside verges.



Blossom. Everywhere is alive with great swathes of blossom. Really colourful and a joy to behold.



Bluebells. Apparently, it is against the law to intentionally pick, uproot or destroy bluebells (the bluebell is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981). Almost half the world's bluebells are found in the UK, they are relatively rare in the rest of the world.



Herb-robert. It is a member of the Geranium family. Traditionally, Herb-robert was used to treat nosebleeds and headaches, as a tonic for tummy upsets, as an antiseptic to help heal wounds, and even as a mosquito repellent. Why wasn't it just called Herbert?!!



Butterfly (Speckled Wood). There are loads of butterflies around at the moment. Unfortunately, most of them won't keep still long enough for you to photograph them. We were lucky with this one.



Roadsides and verges. This photograph was taken in Thornton Common Road and shows a roadside lined with **cow parsley**. More than 700 species of wild plants and almost half the natural flora of the British Isles is found on our road verges which also act like wildlife corridors for mammals and insects.



White Dead Nettle. This one doesn't have stinging leaves thank goodness. We can all remember the itchy stinging pain we had when accidentally walking through the real stinging nettles. With this one, the flowers and young leaves are edible, and can be used in salads or cooked as a vegetable.



A Sea Of Yellow. **Rapeseed** is a member of the family Brassica (mustard or cabbage family), it is the third-largest source of vegetable oil and second-largest source of protein meal in the world. See, this local walking exercise is educational as well!



Catseye (Speedwell). Considered a good luck charm for travellers, the bright blue flowers of Germander speedwell are meant to 'speed' you on your way.



Mandarin Duck. Although I think it is unusual to see these in this area both Sue (Martin) and ourselves have one resident in our local ponds. Digging deeper it appears that in the 20th century, a large, feral population was established in Great Britain.



So, there you are. Just a small sample of what there is to see in our fabulous countryside. I hope it serves as an incentive (if any should be needed) for you to keep on going for your own walks. We are so lucky in Wirral with the varied landscape we have. Helen and I haven't been to see our coastline yet which is a whole different experience as we all know. We might head out to Port Sunlight River Park soon.

You could also take advantage of these local walks to keep an eye on any public footpaths that are local to you. It is still possible to flag up any problems to our footpath officer and, indeed, to Robin Tuchings at Wirral Borough Council.

Bye for now from Helen and Gordon.