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NATURE RAMBLINGS (2)

Hi everyone, once again.

Firstly, Helen and I would like to thank all of you that wrote to thank us for our first effort with these notes. They helped with the impetus to continue (I know, I know, we won't be getting any more after this one!).

April 2020 was the sunniest on record and the fifth warmest. May has continued in the same vein so far.

We have been for a walk every day except for one since the previous notes and have walked just short of 150 kilometres (93 miles) and we can honestly say that we have enjoyed every step. We are becoming remarkably familiar with our surroundings.

As a bonus on some of walks we have met fellow members of Wirral Ramblers and, at a distance, we have bemoaned our current plight. We want to get back to some sort of normality. I am sure that it is the same for us all.

So, here is our latest effort for you to peruse at your 'lockdown' leisure, we hope you enjoy it as much as we did putting it together.

If you have any photographs of any local flora or fauna that you have come across on your daily government sponsored walk and would like us to include them in any future notes, please forward them to us or Sue with an accompanying line or two to describe them. Similarly, any unusual items you may see.

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



Fleabane.

Seen growing on a wall in Rest Hill Road. Did you know its curious scent, with hints of carbolic soap and chrysanthemum, is an insect repellent? In the past it was kept in houses specifically for the purpose of driving away fleas. Bunches were dried and burned as a fumigant or hung in rooms.



Navelwort.

Navelwort is so named because the flower spike grows from the centre of the leaf, leaving a dimple, just like a navel! Also known as Pennywort. This was, again, seen in Rest Hill Road against a damp shady wall.



Pink Clover.

Loads of clover out at the moment. Clover is very common, but the four leaved clover is fairly rare and is considered lucky.

Clover is good at 'fixing' nitrogen in the soil and also makes a good compost so is of importance to farmers and gardeners alike.



Holly in bloom.

Holly provides dense cover and good nesting opportunities for birds. The flowers provide nectar and pollen for bees and other pollinating insects.

The Mistle thrush is known for vigorously guarding the berries of holly in winter to prevent other birds from eating them.



Herb Bennet.

Herb Bennet or wood avens has yellow, strawberry-like flowers followed distinctive fruits with burrs. It is a common weed of shady borders. This example seen in Dibbensdale woods'

In the 15th century, Herb Bennet was hung over doors to stop the Devil crossing the threshold as it was considered to be one of the most powerful charms against evil spirits.



There are fields full of buttercups at the moment. Irresistible to photographers. At least this one!

Folklore has it that, because of the yellow of the buttercups, cows grazing in buttercup-rich meadows provided the finest butter.



Spot the difference!!

Answers on a postcard please.



Ivy Seed Head.

Shelter, foodstuff, pollen source ... ivy is so valuable to wildlife, even though it is maligned by many a gardener

In ancient Rome ivy was a symbol of intellectual achievement and ivy wreaths were used to crown winners of poetry and athletics contests.



Hawthorn.

Also known as the May tree. Hawthorn is a pagan symbol of fertility and has ancient associations with May Day. It was the ancestor of the Maypole and its leaves and flowers the source of May Day garlands

Its blossoming marks the point at which spring turns into summer, and the old saying 'Cast ne'er a clout ere May is out' almost certainly refers to the opening of hawthorn flowers rather than the end of the month.



Me and my shadow!

Loads of butterflies out in the sunshine. This Red Admiral was resting on one of the paths on Levers' land near Thornton Hough.



Teasel.

We visited Port Sunlight River Park on another bright sunny day. The views to and over the Mersey were great. Liverpool is still there!

On the walk up to the view top the banks were covered in teasels. Some a few feet tall. Florists and craft hobbyists use teasels for ornamental purposes.

There are many vivid and descriptive folk names for this plant – 'Brush and Comb' and 'Johnny-prick the finger'.



Bluebell.

Bluebells flower in colours ranging from white (quite common), through to grey, pale blue, lilac to dark cobalt.

Its root sap was used to glue feathers onto arrows in the Middle Ages and to stiffen ruffs in Tudor times.



Wood Sorrel.

A member of the oxalis family, also known as Fairy Bells, Wood Sour and Cuckoo's Meat.

It is sometimes confused with clover which is a plant of grassland and the mature leaves don't have a heart shape.

Wood Sorrel acts as a weathervane: the leaves fold up before and during rain and when it gets dark.



The face cream doesn't seem to be working!



Lilac.

Another plant flourishing at the moment cascading over many walls and fences. This one was seen on Clatterbridge road opposite Claire House.

White lilacs symbolize purity and innocence. Violet lilacs symbolize spirituality. Blue lilacs symbolize happiness and tranquility. Magenta lilacs symbolize love and passion.



Young Sycamore leaves.

In Wales, sycamore trees were used in the traditional craft of making 'love spoons', decoratively carved wooden spoons given as a romantic gesture. In some parts of the UK, the winged seeds are known as 'helicopters' and used in flying competitions and model-making by children.



Rhododendrons.

What I want to know is why these plants seem to grow in profusion in lots of places that we walk with no care or attention given to them. Yet, when I want to buy one from my garden centre they are £12.99 each!



Cow Parsley.

This is a fast-growing plant and is all over the place at the moment. It is important for a variety of insects, including bees and hoverflies, as it is an early source of pollen. It is also a nectar source for orange-tip butterflies.

This photo was taken on one of Levers' lanes near Brimstage village.



Campion.

The flowers of red campion are important for various pollinating insects, including bees, butterflies and hoverflies.

Red campion's genus name, *Silene*, from *Silenus*, the drunken merry god of the woodlands in Greek mythology.



Young Hedgerow Crane's Bill (similar to Dove's Foot Crane's Bill).

Although most often found along hedgerows and banks it does also occur in open grassy areas which can throw you a bit when you come across it in such a location. It has pinkish or purple flowers visible from May until September.

Crane's Bill are so named because their fruits (seed heads) resemble the beak of a crane.



Flowering Horse Chestnut.

The flowers provide a rich source of nectar and pollen for insects, particularly bees. Caterpillars of the triangle moth feed on its leaves, as does the horse chestnut leaf-miner moth whose caterpillars provide food for blue tits

Once pollinated by insects, each flower develops into a glossy red-brown conker inside a spiky green husk, which falls in autumn.



We think this is a female **Large White** butterfly which has black spots on the forewing. We were lucky to get this photo as the butterflies that day were numerous but very busy!

If anyone knows it to be different, please let us know.



Honesty.

Honesty has heart-shaped, green leaves with toothed edges, and pink, purple or white flowers with four petals. The flowers are followed by the recognisable oval, papery seed pods.

The dried seed pods are often used in flower arranging due to their silver, coin like appearance. The beautiful seed pods used to be used by Victorians to paint intricate scenes on.

There are many other colorful names for this plant, such as two-pennies-in-a-purse and money-in-both-pockets.



Still one of our favourites when flourishing in the countryside. We spotted this 'before and after' opportunity to take a photo, so we did!

We have noticed that they are starting to die off slowly now leaving just their stalks for the time being.



Wild Garlic (Ramsons).

Wild garlic is one of a number of plant species whose presence indicates that a wood is ancient. It has traditionally been used in medicine, the bulb being one of the key ingredients in tonics for rheumatic problems and high cholesterol. Its leaves can be eaten raw in salads, or blanched and used in place of spinach, or made into a delicious soup and pesto. They have a mild garlic flavour and are at their best before the flowers appear. The flowers are also edible and can be added raw to salads.



Pink Clover again but this time with (we think) a **Common Carder Bee**.



The countryside is for all.

Please think of a caption for this photograph and **send it** to me or Sue by June 4th. We will email out the best entries.



So, that's it for now. If things continue as they are for us all, Helen and I will endeavour to produce another 'notes' bulletin, maybe with your help? Until then, take care, see you soon hopefully, even if it is only one at a time!

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.