The merry month of May

Spring is long awaited, long hoped for, looked forward to, looked out for in all the tiniest details leading up to it, but when it finally arrives the wait is over and it is to be relished, tasted, drunk in and submersed in. The month of May is like Christmas morning - nature's decorations are overflowing, the green stockings bursting full, excitement and avian laughter in the air and tantalizing floral scents drifting on the breeze. May is to be enjoyed for it is the peak of spring, nature at its best with risen sap, bursting bud and blossom scent. If there was ever just one season to get out in this would be it. And where to go? Well the choice is endless.

Find a bluebell wood, maybe Heartwood Forest, and catch your breath at the dark furniture of the forest set upon a carpet of blue trimmed with green.

Find open water, maybe one of the many old gravel workings around St Albans, where the pulse of life is doubled as birds and insects find food water as they travel through or settle to build a home.

Walk through farmland and field, maybe around Redbournbury Mill, and listen to skylarks up above and see if you can spot any of the newly arriving yellow wagtails like mobile dandelions in the water meadows by the Ver.

One of my favourite places, just a short walk from the city centre is the Watercress Wildlife Association nature reserve. Tucked away at the end of Riverside Road and bordered by the Alban Way and allotments the reserve is a miniature oasis on the banks of the Ver. As you walk through the gate and leave the relative urbanity of Cornwall Road and Riverside Road behind you will be greeted by a chorus of birdsong and a hustle and bustle of activity around the bird feeder.

There is an intensity about the presence of wildlife in this small reserve that is immediately noticeable and is largely thanks to the excellent efforts of volunteers over the years who have carefully carved out, planted and created a haven for wildlife. The sheer number of songbirds along with the activity of water birds gives the sense that this place also meets the mother-bird’s commitment to it and the occasional squeaking of delighted youngsters.

Don’t forget to look up either as the plethora of wildlife does not go unnoticed by the occasional passing air-borne mouse, scurrying to and fro. If you watch a while you may be rewarded by discovering the purpose of all the hopping, flitting and scurrying – a nest of fledgling young tucked away in an old dead stump, given away only by the occasional squeaking of delighted youngsters.

A number of well-placed benches provide the perfect place to soak up spring with vistas over reed-bordered pools and drooping willows. This is one of the best places in St Albans to watch kingfishers as they fish from overhanging branches. It is not unusual either to encounter them arrowing through the wooded areas unafraid to leave the river to take a short-cut between the trees. Some birds – like the noisy green ring-necked parakeets – make themselves immediately obvious as they squabble in the trees or at the feeder. Others, however, only appear with careful observation – the dunock hopping silently along the ground or the wren, like an air-borne mouse, scurrying to and fro. If you watch a while you may be rewarded by discovering the purpose of all the hopping, flitting and scurrying – a nest of fledgling young tucked away in an old dead stump, given away only by the mother-bird’s commitment to it and the occasional squeaking of delighted youngsters.

Don’t forget to look up either as the plethora of wildlife does not go unnoticed by the occasional passing sparrowhawk or buzzard who are apt to circle over watching for potential meals below.

In the last few days too the swifts have arrived back over the town centre, their screaming calls arcing over the trees and rooftops below, a certain declaration that spring is indeed now complete and the doorway to summer open.

So make sure you venture out to be reinvigorated and refreshed by nature’s enthusiastic display of new life and energy! If you are stuck for where to go why not visit the Watercress Wildlife Association reserve and discover a real hidden treasure and a great place to encounter spring.

For more information visit their website at www.watercresslnr.org.uk