

Wildlife in St Matthew's churchyard, Lightcliffe

April 2019 snapshot.



I visited the churchyard on three beautiful sunny April afternoons when Spring was bursting from every corner. Daffodils, primroses, bluebells and wild garlic were all in flower and insects were making the most of the warm gravestones, basking in the sun or, in the case of these two ladybirds, mating!



Hoverflies danced in shafts of sunlight, hovering for a few seconds then zooming suddenly to another spot and a male orange tip butterfly flitted rapidly between the stones. This butterfly will have spent the Winter as a chrysalis, with warmer weather and longer daylight triggering the final changes before the insect emerged. No doubt he was on the lookout for a female but none were spotted.



Male orange tip butterfly *Photo by Chris Lythall*

A large red tailed bumble bee was seen flying low over the grass at the bottom end of the churchyard. This will be one of last year's new queens that hibernated over Winter after mating and she will now be looking for a suitable nest site to start a new colony.

The churchyard was alive with birdsong. I recorded 13 species over three visits and no doubt there will be more. The species I saw/heard were:

Woodpigeon, collared dove, blackbird, mistle thrush, wren, robin, blue tit, great tit, willow warbler, chaffinch, goldfinch, magpie and jackdaw.

There seems to be a good population of goldfinches in the churchyard, their musical twittering coming from amongst the fresh green leaves of the hawthorn trees. The collective noun for a flock of goldfinches is “a charm” which seems particularly apt for this pretty bird.



Goldfinch Photo by David Chapman

Wren song is also very noticeable. Although wrens are tiny and weigh less than a £1 coin, they have one of the loudest and most joyful of songs of all birds.



Wren photo RSPB

A pair of thrushes - mistle, I think - has made a nest in a large holly tree and through binoculars, I could see that they have four well grown chicks. Both parents are busy feeding them, foraging mainly in the park across the lane.



As for evidence of mammals, several grey squirrels were seen scampering up the tree trunks and a series of holes under old gravestones may be a rabbit warren.



Marjorie Middleton
20th April 2019