



What to look out for in March

March is the start of meteorological Spring, a time of reawakening for nature, but sometimes with the risk of cold weather and even snow, if the Polar Vortex misbehaves. As the days grow longer and, hopefully, the temperature rises, our flora and fauna change with the season.

BIRDS



March can be a strange month for birds. Migration is in action, though it can be almost imperceptible. Winter visitors such as Redwing and Fieldfare (*left*) may be moving out if conditions are right and/or the supply of berries is running out. If conditions become harsh, they may even move further south before heading north to breed later in spring.

As the days lengthen, some species start breeding: Robins have been known to nest early in the season, so keep an eye out for newly-fledged youngsters! (*right*)



On fine mornings, listen for the first Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps singing; these species may have overwintered here undiscovered but are teased into song by the longer daylight hours. March is an excellent time to hear drumming woodpeckers, and Tawny Owls should be very vocal in suitable woodland.

Look up for skeins of Pink-footed Geese as over-wintering flocks from Norfolk head north, to their summer breeding grounds via Lancashire and Scotland, sometimes passing over our area in good numbers. The glorious song of the Skylark will be heard over many of our fields – look up and watch Shelley's 'Blithe Spirit' soar up into the sky, and reflect that Spring really is coming!

Favourable southerly winds could bring our first summer migrants, albeit in very small numbers, including Sand Martin, Little Ringed Plover, Northern Wheatear, and Garganey. March is a good time to scour your local rivers, lakes and ponds for rare wildfowl such as American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal.

TREES AND FLOWERS

Spring is probably most apparent in trees and flowers. 'Sticky buds' will form on Horse Chestnut trees, ready to burst into leaf and flower, and hedgerows may turn white with the blossom of the Blackthorn.



Newly-emerged wild flowers will appear. Sweet Violets (left) are amongst the first to flower; found in woodland, they are usually white (there is a blue variant), with a mild scent. The flower is noticeably larger than its Dog Violet relative and, as the flowers die off, the plant generates a fresh growth of larger leaves, larger than Dog Violet leaves.

Dandelions will abound, along with the less common but, at first glance similar, Coltsfoot (*right*). Coltsfoot flowers are yellow and dandelion-like in appearance, often found in ditch banks and bare areas. Notably there will be no leaves, but the flower stalk has leaflets running up it. The large easily-identifiable horseshoe-shaped leaves only appear as the flower dies off in mid-Spring.



Look out also for Lesser Celandine (*left*) with its distinctive buttercup yellow flower and ubiquitous habits. Another plant to look for is Danish Scurvy Grass, which can be seen almost anywhere in Rushcliffe, along the edge of roads that have been gritted over winter. Actually a coastal plant, it has moved inland and thrives in areas where salt has cleared other vegetation, thanks to its chemistry that allows it to deal with salt.

INSECTS

March should also bring insects. Hoverflies will appear. Flies will appear in increasing numbers. Over-wintering butterflies will emerge on warmer days (generally, they need a temperature of 12^oC and above to be active). Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock (*right*) and Red Admiral are all likely to be seen but very little can match the sight of the year's first Brimstone in flight, particularly if it's the wonderful yellow male!





Increasing warmth will wake hibernating queen Bumblebees from their underground winter quarters; they will take nectar from flowers to build up their energy and look for suitable nest sites to lay eggs and raise the first worker bees who then help build and grow the colony through into summer.



Finally, keep a sharp eye out for one of our more unlikely-looking insects, the Dark-edged Bee-fly (*left*), with its incredible spear-like appendage (actually a rigid proboscis which it inserts into flowers to suck nectar). Appearing towards the end of March, it really is a harbinger of Spring!