



What to look out for in April

April is the month nature really wakes up after winter: bird migration is in full swing, trees and wild flowers are bursting forth, and insect numbers grow by the day. There is so much to see!

BIRDS

April is a very dynamic month for birds in South Notts, as the last of our winter visitors head off for the summer to be replaced by a myriad of summer visitors, passage migrants drop in and our resident species build nests and rear young.



Wigeon, Teal, Tufted Duck and Pochard, with us for the winter, will be reducing in number as they head off to their summer homes to breed. Taking their places on our lakes and ponds will be waders like Ringed and Little Ringed Plover, joining year-round residents Mallard, Gadwall, Great Crested Grebe, Coot and Moorhen (*left*). It's always worth scanning shallow edges, just in case passage migrants drop in.

Most of our summer warblers will be on territory by the end of April, so try and get out early in the morning to hear and see them. Willow, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Blackcap, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat should all be in full song virtually anywhere there is suitable habitat. Although species such as Redstart and Pied Flycatcher do not now breed in our area, April is the very best time to find one on your 'local patch', as they and - excitingly - other rare or scarce species drop in to replenish energy supplies.

Year-round resident species such as Nuthatch (*right*), Treecreeper, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers and common garden birds, such as Blackbird and Dunnock, will all be settling down to breed. Keep your eyes to the skies: literally millions of birds are streaming north. How many can you spot or hear as they fly overhead? You can do this in your garden - you don't have to go to a nature reserve! And talking of gardens, birds may be nesting anywhere, so please do not carry out garden projects where you are likely to disturb them. Remember: they are protected by law.





TREES AND FLOWERS

Trees and wildflowers really do start to do their thing in April, with yellow becoming a predominant colour as Cowslips, Dandelions and Buttercups all appear, literally anywhere.



Truly wild Cowslips (*left*) were once quite widespread in Rushcliffe and remnant populations can still be found in ditches, field edges, green lanes and a large colony on the West Leake Hills. However, Cowslip populations in road verges are largely planted. The large numbers at Rushcliffe Country Park are definitely in that category, although the grower who provided them from a surplus stock assures that they are of local native provenance. The significant population that appeared in Collington Common (West Bridgford) were imported as seed in green hay from Mansey Common (Central Notts).

Dandelions (*right*) can be found almost anywhere, and provide a very valuable source of pollen and nectar for pollinators early in the year. There are around 250 species of dandelion in the British Isles, so prepare to be confused! The Common Dandelion is the subject of many myths and games, one of which suggests that if you pick it, or even just touch it, you will wet the bed - an idea that forms many of the local common names, including 'Wet-the-bed' and 'Tiddle-beds'.



The third 'yellow flower' is the iconic Buttercup, of which there are three very similar species. If you look under the petal and it has turned down sepals it is Bulbous Buttercup otherwise it is most likely Meadow Buttercup, tall with deeply cut leaves. Unless, of course, it is Creeping Buttercup, which tends to grow in damp areas in noticeably dense groupings created by ground runners; its leaves, which have whitish markings have an overall 'triangular' shape.

Also appearing this month will be the small pale blue of the Field Forget Me Knot, but if you look carefully, particularly in woods, you may also find the bluer, slightly larger Wood Forget Me Knot - but just to make it hard, the Field will also grow in woodland.



Other widespread flowers to look out for are the first Red Campion (*below left*), including pinkish & whitish versions, not to be confused with White Campion, White Dead Nettle, Cuckoo Flower (*below right*), Ground Ivy and Garlic Mustard.



INSECTS



Garlic Mustard, or 'Jack by the hedge' prefers shady spots, and typically its white flowers, smelling faintly of garlic, are seen in hedge bottoms. It is the primary food plant of one of our brightest butterflies, the Orange Tip (*left*). Only the male has the orange-tipped wings, but both sexes have the most beautiful, delicate, filigree patterned underwings – do try to find one perched or feeding, and wonder at its beauty. In April, you will be most likely to see the brightly-coloured male flying by, in furious pursuit of a female.

Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies will be emerging from their winter hibernation. The Comma (*below left & right*) overwinters camouflaged as a dead leaf. Its mottled dark underside resembles a dead oak leaf with a white comma-shaped mark, from which it gets its name, which is said to look like a crack in a leaf, or even bird dropping. Its underside may be dull, like those of the Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell, but, like them, its upperwings are things of beauty.





Insect numbers will increase exponentially in April, with activity most visible on warmer and sunny days. Look out for Queen Wasps (*left*) as they emerge to begin a new generation; they can often be found in buildings, having just woken up from a winter's sleep. Please help them to get outside (using a glass and a piece of card works well) – they are generally quite docile.

Bees will be in growing evidence, both in terms of numbers and different species. We have around 270 species of bee in the UK, of which almost 250 are solitary bee species, so it is well worth taking a closer look – you never know what you may find. You may come across an Orange-tailed Mining Be, also known as Early Mining Bee (*right*).



Another insect appearing in April, often confused with wasps and bees, is the Hoverfly. There are around 285 species in the UK, many of which are bee, wasp or hornet mimics, but all of whom are harmless to humans. One of the most common is *Episyrphus Balteatus*, aka 'The Marmalade Hoverfly' (*left*).

28 March 2023

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