

## **Mike's Musings: Environment and Conservation**

### **High Summer 2016: June and July**

#### **Weather: June and July**

##### ***June***

The month opened with virtually a calm and dry six days, but in the following week it became cloudier with light to moderate North/North-east (N/NE) winds and temperatures between the low and high teens. Given the direction of the winds, it was not summery weather so it was rather chilly, especially in the mornings, even when in the beginning of the next week north-westerly (NW) breezes set in and the weather became unsettled, 5,25 mms. of rain falling on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month. In the second and third weeks, apart from the winds being from the south-east (SE)/south-west (SW) on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, the wind direction reverted to the NW, the weather remaining somewhat changeable and mostly cloudy and cool, interspersed by showers. On the 19<sup>th</sup> it was noticeably wet when 9 mms of rain fell.

Over the last 10 days of the month the unsettled conditions persisted. Accordingly, it was certainly not what had been traditionally described as 'Flaming June'. Indeed, there were 17 wet days, notwithstanding that each time it rained the amounts were quite modest. The total rainfall recorded for the month was 53.05 mms. (2.17 ins.) which was not appreciably higher than would be expected, but with so little sunshine it was considered to be a miserable month.

##### ***July***

July turned out to a better summer month than June in terms of it having many more dry days, particularly over the first 11 days, as there were only 2.0 mms. of rain recorded. Over this period the winds continued to be from W/NW, so the mornings remained as cool as they were in June. A pattern emerged of each day gradually becoming brighter towards the end of the afternoon. While it was pleasantly warm while the sun was out, as soon as it disappeared behind clouds it became chilly. The 12<sup>th</sup> of the month brought back the rain when 5.5 mms. fell; for five days, until the 17<sup>th</sup>, the weather was unsettled.

Suddenly it was summer! On the 18<sup>th</sup> a temperature of 22.0 C occurred and on the 19<sup>th</sup> the day was a scorcher, as the sky remained absolutely clear when the thermometer hit 32.0 C by midday. However, there was then a fresh wind from the SE, often a feature of summer high pressure weather conditions, so making it more comfortable to be out and about. The evenings during this anticyclonic period were delightful as it remained sunny and very warm to well after 8.0pm.

The late evenings were blessed over these few days of fine weather by the rise over the SE horizon of the waxing moon which became a full one on the 19<sup>th</sup> of the month. From the 20<sup>th</sup> the pattern of the weather reverted to one of mostly cloudy mornings and brighter afternoons. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> there were quite light falls of rain overnight, there being, respectively, just 1.0 mms., 1.5 mms. and 2.0 mms.. Daytime temperatures during the last 10 days or so of July hovered around the 20C level and overnight they did not fall below the mid teens. Overall, July was exceptionally dry, there being a total of 13.0 mms. (0.53ins.) of rain.

### **What happened to the 2016 summer?**

In the last Musings (April/May), the weather reports showed that in those two months the late spring was mainly cold and wet. Above, the weather has been described as not being much better for what should be summer. This does not seem to accord with the claims that the world's climate is changing and that the UK's will be characterised by mild wet winters and hot dry summers. Instead it seems that there are tending to be more extreme weather patterns with strong storms and heavier rainfall.

The spring was certainly late and it seems that summer will be the same. But it is not all misery and gloom as nature almost seems to adapt to adverse conditions and often the outcome is a welcome one. Two important factors come into play when the weather is cooler and wetter. The first is that the progress of the seasons can be slowed down and consequently, be enjoyed for a longer period. The second is that nature appears to be more more responsive and produces what can only be described as a superb 'show'.

Indeed the consolation of the poor experience of the spring and, currently, the summer this year, is that there has been, until the last 10 days or so, superbly green and luxurious growths of grass, foliage in hedgerows, and on shrubs and trees. This has been accompanied by a magnificent array of blooms in gardens, fields, roadside verges, copses and woods. Of particular note locally has been comments by keen gardeners on how magnificent their roses have been and, also, those who have them, their buddleias, cherries, and hydrangeas. Equally, in the countryside, in the hedgerows, wild honeysuckles, crab apples, rhododendrons and wild roses have almost excelled themselves in the quality of their blooms. Equally, the fauna, including the avian, have flourished.

It was, however, rather saddening that midsummer's day heralded what is the inevitable decline in the light evenings. By the end of July it was readily apparent that dusk was creeping insidiously earlier at the end of the day, an indication of the coming autumn and winter.

The cessation of birdsong, particularly that of the resident blackbirds, song and missel thrushes and the summer visitors, especially the blackcaps, garden and willow warblers and, until early June, the nightingales of course, which sadly are becoming fewer as the years pass, added to the wistfulness of the loss of the excitement of spring and the onset of what should be the warmth and sunshine of summer. In a sense these feelings are amplified by the 'mini' summer weather that occurred in mid July for only a few days.

The lack of any appreciable falls of rain in July is underlined by Inkpen's and Kintbury's location and somewhat drier micro-climate than the Thames valley. In fact there were no torrential thunder storms which afflicted other areas in southern England. As a result, in the last week of the month, there were signs of stress in the vegetation, especially lawns which were still turning brown through the lack of rain at the time this Musings is being composed. Gardeners have consequently had to resort to quite extensive watering of summer bedding plants and even shrubs.

### **Profile of one of the countryside's lovable mammals**

It is both seasonally appropriate to choose an animal and one that should quite abundant in West Berks for inclusion in this Musings. This is the Harvest mouse, an illustration of which was published on the cover of the Inkpen Village Bulletin last year. Moreover, given the prominence of arable agriculture in the area, with an emphasis on the cultivation of cereals, its preferred habitat, the selection of this particular creature is apposite.

The scientific name of the Harvest mouse, '*Micromys minutis*', is clear, as indeed it is one of the *Globe's* smallest rodents, weighing in at 7grams, less than the weight of a 2p coin. When fully grown its head and body are around 60 to 65 mms. (2.5 ins.). with a tail of the same length.

This mouse builds a spherical nest, with a diameter of about 65mms, in which to breed, erected around 60cms. above the ground using grasses, or reeds, if there is water nearby. The breeding season is usually at its peak in August and September but it often starts earlier and carries on later if weather conditions allow. Harvest mice normally have three litters a year, the gestation period of a litter lasting from 17 to 20 days. Up to eight young are born in each litter, a new nest being built in which to rear them every time. The young leave the nest when they are about 20 days old. The diet of the mice consists mostly of grains, grass shoots, soft fruit and insects. They only live for a few months and can die out entirely in less hospitable habitats in hard winters.

### Snippets

- Question: which of the two most common raptors one might look at be correctly identified, if observed from some distance away? Answer: if it was seen it would be a kestrel, if it was hovering it would be a kestrel and if it was perching on a tree branch it would be a kestrel, whereas if it was racing through a wood it would be a sparrowhawk, if it was soaring at some height it would be a sparrowhawk and if it was being mobbed by crows it would be a sparrowhawk!  
*Acknowledgements to Bill Oddie; 'At Home on the Heath', p.83, BBC Wildlife, Vol.34, No.7, June 2016*
- With regard to the UK's Brexit result in the recent referendum as to whether to remain in the European Union (EU) or leave it, readers' attention is drawn to the note in the spring Musings in April/May this year, indicating the value of the UK being in the EU because of the environmental benefits granted. The writer is of the opinion that the decision to leave will have a detrimental effect on the UK 's environmental policies and actions. The EU has given a much higher priority to such issues than the UK did before becoming a member of the EU. There is no certainty that the country will continue to consider environmental matters as being of great importance now it is solely responsible for them. Not to put too fine a point on it, the government appears to have put the environment well below other priorities on its agenda for legislation and implementation of its policies.
- West Berks, and Inkpen in particular, is very fortunate to have two people, namely Nicola Chester and Jamie Sadler, who have dedicated much time and effort to promoting an interest, and indeed involvement, in wildlife locally. The recent wildlife 'ramble' in Combe, initiated and conducted by them was a worthy demonstration of their commitment to encouraging West Berks residents to appreciate and care for wildlife locally.

Mike welcomes comments on his Musings: email: [mike.j.stabler@btinternet.com](mailto:mike.j.stabler@btinternet.com)