

Lockdown Life

People's experiences of the past months of this most peculiar year will have varied greatly. What follows is (literally) some snapshots of my 'lockdown life'. It's felt like a time to batten down the hatches, slow down and try to appreciate the small things. I guess most of us in FoDNW are fortunate to have gardens, providing welcome breathing space, enjoyment, and keeping us occupied. Those living in crowded flats are less fortunate. I have found that in some sense time seems to have slowed down, and with the less frantic pace of life I've been able to appreciate the small things a bit more. Here is a brief record in pictures of the last few months:



Blackthorn blossom is always a welcome indication of Spring's arrival.



In March there were wood anemones and celandine beautifying the floor of Newstead Wood.

The Spring was glorious and (as many have remarked) made all the more so by the reduction in traffic and air pollution enabling wildlife to thrive.



One day a fox strolled nonchalantly onto our back lawn, made himself comfortable and curled up for an afternoon nap!



The blossom on trees in our road was glorious.



In the garden I enjoyed the colour amidst the unruly corners, and experimented with taking photo's from different angles.



Sometimes it was a delight to find a hidden treasure, like this shy primrose, concealing itself among anemones and discovered by a bee.



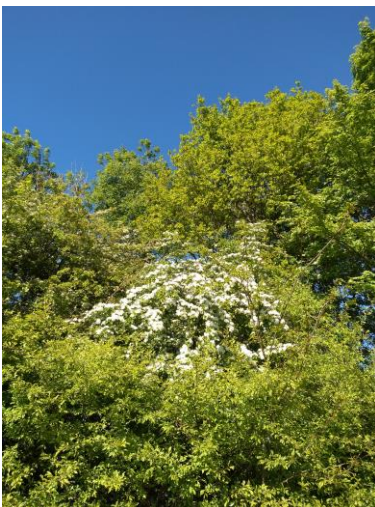
It was good to be able to try a variety of local walks. One day in April we passed this familiar corner before deciding to cross the A21 and do part of the Farnborough Circular Walk.



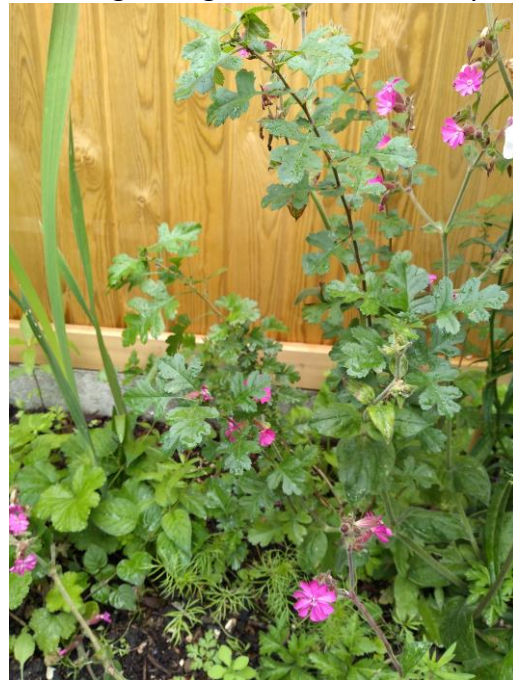


April gave way to the sunniest ever May, and glorious blue skies crowned the woods and meadows. The May blossom appeared on the hawthorn and beautiful wild roses bloomed nearby.

Around Tubbenden Meadow.



Last Autumn, after a tree popping session in Tubbenden Meadow, I decided to take a 'popped' hawthorn sapling home. The bark had been partially stripped from its main stem, and Judy advised me to cut that stem off in order to increase its chance of survival. We used to have a goat willow in our back garden, but had to have it felled as it had grown too large and was practically coming in through the bedroom windows. I rather foolishly replaced it with a non-native tree, a forest pansy (Cercis). Although attractive it spread horizontally, causing annoyance when it came to lawn mowing, so that had to go too! In went the rather unpromising Tubbenden Meadow hawthorn, and I'm pleased to say that it has survived and is growing, albeit rather slowly.



My hawthorn in March and in June.

The Cercis is fighting back, putting out some new shoots around its stump. I took a few cuttings. It is an interesting and attractive tree. It has heart shaped leaves, small pink flowers in the Spring and lovely autumn colours. It just needs to be in suitable place!



The Cercis in Autumn.

I don't know whether the cuttings will survive, but if you think you might like one just let me know!

One day in early May we walked in High Elms. Talking of non-native trees, I spent a moment gazing up into this redwood dreaming I was back on a trip we made a few years ago to the redwood groves of northern California!



Further on, strolling along one of the main paths in the edge of the wood near the golf course, I became aware of loud chirrups above my head. It was a great tits' nest, in a hole in a tree right above the path. The parent birds were constantly coming and going with food for their hungry brood. The photo isn't too clear, but one of the parents is in the middle of the thin branch above the hole.

The last local walk I'll mention was around Green Street Green. I'd often noticed, when passing by car, the footpath sign from the A21 near the roundabout, but had never previously explored it. It actually has a name, Snag Lane. I love these ancient shady lanes!



At the top, the path does a right-angled turn, and you can cross Cudham Lane North and take another path leading across to High Elms. We found that this stretch of the walk had its own delights: pyramidal orchids right next to the path, a lark ascending into the blue in the adjacent field and, in a sheltered stretch with brambles, great clouds of meadow brown butterflies. I only managed to photograph one, but I've never seen so many butterflies together – at least not since the bumper migration year of (I think) 2009, when I saw huge numbers of painted ladies on a cliff top in Cornwall.



The lark is here, but you'll have to take my word for it!



One meadow brown among hundreds!

After the sunny stretch with the butterflies, came the shady woodland of High Elms. Then the final stretch is across a field to return to Green Street Green.



It was a lovely afternoon, exploring a route that was new to us.

In the last couple of weeks we've been grateful to the National Trust for opening some of its properties for pre-booked visits. You book a ticket online for a designated arrival time. Numbers of visitors are restricted. You follow a one-way route, maintaining social distancing.



We've been to Emmett's Garden many times in springtime in the past, but the rose garden in June was stunning!



Ightham Mote was enchanting too. We enjoyed a circuit of the garden and then the 'red walk' through fields and Scathes Wood.



Scathes Wood looked like a coppicing challenge!

What a strange few months it's been! Although there have been many things I've missed, especially visiting family members, I have much to be grateful for. Unlike many people we had not booked a holiday for 2020. My husband had to undergo eight weeks of daily radiotherapy. It had

begun about ten days before lockdown, and so it continued through to the end. We have heard of others having treatment postponed. Anyway, as we hadn't planned anything beyond that time, we had no cancelled holidays to regret. However, we hope now that some sort of getaway might be possible, perhaps in the autumn. We have just been offered a brief window of opportunity for one short visit to my mother in her nursing home in Cornwall, while the situation there is considered stable and before the predicted large hoards of tourists begin to arrive.

I hope that other members of FoDNW have stayed safe and well, and that it won't be too long before it's possible to resume the work mornings.

Here are a final couple of pictures of our garden to finish with.



I'd like to thank Christine for giving me some red campion last year.

It's settled in very nicely and contrasts rather well with this white campanula.

My late father loved the red campion in the Cornish hedgerows.



I was quite pleased with this 'snap' of a small tortoiseshell butterfly on our buddleia.

All the pictures in this piece were taken on my smartphone. I do possess a camera, but only tend to have it with me on holidays!

Wishing you all the best, everyone!

Vanessa Dixon

