

Halling View Summer 2021
Feeding the Wildlife

I was going to write just about feeding the birds in our gardens, but we also feed a lot of other animals too – some of them inadvertently. On Thursday mornings, there's usually a good scattering of rubbish where the foxes have helped themselves from the recycling. I do try to avoid myself putting any food items in with the rubbish, but then I've got a healthy appetite, a dog and a compost heap in a big garden. So I don't really have any food waste.

Quite a lot of people make a point of feeding the foxes deliberately. Most of us enjoy seeing foxes about and nobody likes to think of any of God's creatures going hungry. On the other hand, there is case to be made that foxes are vermin and ought not to be encouraged. If you keep chicken, you might well feel like that. Maybe they take lambs too. Some people are slightly afraid of foxes, not entirely without reason. I once knew an old lady who fell asleep in her deckchair in the garden and a fox came up and bit her for no obvious reason at all.

Rats are intelligent creatures and keep themselves clean if they are allowed to. I'm told that they make good pets. I have no objection to rats in principle, but I would object to them indoors. So such food as I put out for the birds I put out in the morning so that it is eaten up before the rodents come out at night.

The birds in my garden have to put up with breadcrumbs. A family of blackbirds are ready for their breakfast watching my kitchen door most mornings. If you put out food regularly, they get used to the time they need to be there. There is a danger that the number of birds in your garden will increase if you put out food very generously and then go hungry if for any reason you stop. It's a responsibility!

When I had goldfish in a pond, they were always waiting for their tea around 5.00. It is not true that goldfish have only three second memories.

One person I know, who is much more generous than I am with feeding the birds, has a regular visitor, a blackbird with a broken leg. Maybe the food she puts out has enabled to survive. It seems bright enough and in no pain from the leg.

I also put out any fat I don't want (out of reach of the dog) which I suppose the birds or other animals take. We're warned not to pour fat or oil down the drains for fear of causing those fatbergs which block up the sewers.

A huge number of people buy seed and other food to put out for the birds. If you do, you get a much greater of variety of birds and larger numbers than if you don't. Years and years ago, *Amateur Gardening* carried out an investigation into whether putting out bird seed protected your plants because the birds were too full up to eat anything you were growing for yourself or whether you just attracted more birds which would eat your crops as well as the food you had specially bought for them. The conclusion was the latter, but it was worth it because birds in the garden are such a delight.

There have been a couple of warnings. You need to keep the bird feeding area clean and move the bird table occasionally. Otherwise, rotting food and disease organisms build up and the birds start to die. Greenfinches especially have suffered from an infection (trichomonosis) they've picked up around bird tables, feeders and bird baths.

Also, if you put out one kind of food, such as nuts, the kinds of birds which eat nuts will grow in numbers but the sorts of birds which don't like nuts may be pushed out of the area altogether by the increased competition. Greater spotted woodpeckers like nuts. Green woodpeckers don't.

In the winter, when the ponds and puddles are frozen, I like to put out water for the wildlife. When I was a child, my father told me that it was useless to put out hot water because it freezes faster than cold. As I grew up, I wasn't at all sure that he was right, but it turns out that he was right (as in so many things). Scientists have been puzzling over why this is the case for decades and now they think they know. Anyway, winter or summer, we need to make sure that the water we put out for the wild creatures is clean and in a clean container.

Looking after the world, especially the living world, is a nice thing to do and it's good that so many of us want to do it.

It's hard to say where we shall be vis a vis COVID. We're holding Communion services at S John's on Sundays at 11.00 & Thursdays at 9.30 and at S Michael's Cuxton at 9.30 on Sundays & Wednesdays. We can do socially distanced weddings and christenings with a maximum of thirty people. We can have as many people at funerals in the church as can keep 2m apart. We're hoping to hold a barbecue at Cuxton Rectory on 10th July and XKids for children and their parents and carers at S John's on 24th July. You can find the latest information I have as it comes out on my webpage. If there is anything I can do for you, please contact me.



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