

Staying in One Place

Staying in one place has its advantages. The temptation, at first, is to regret all those other places where the wildlife must be better;- the coast - anywhere; the heathlands of Surrey and Hampshire; the mountains and hills of Scotland and the Lake District; even Hertfordshire, and so on. But, little by little, Bedfordshire has begun to reveal its secrets and some of them right under my very nose.

We have a stream at the bottom of the garden which was diverted during the garden's creation in the early nineteenth century to run a little further south than it had done. Just very occasionally, after heavy rain, it returns to its original course and gives the garden a thorough soaking. Most of this garden is now a mix of ornamental trees and an extensive lawn, but one patch is mown less often and, given the chance, begins to take on a quite 'natural' appearance. And so it should, for hidden within it are such gems as Adder's-tongue Fern, Devil's bit Scabious and Great Burnet, as well as the more widespread Meadowsweet, Common Birdsfoot Trefoil and Lady's Bedstraw. All of which makes me wonder whether we haven't got a tiny relict of the wet meadow which would once have had the stream running permanently through its centre. Which then makes me wonder whether the seventy or so snake's-head Fritillaries which also occur here, but just across the path, are not also relicts from the garden's original wild state!

And on a similar theme, but this time with birds in mind, there is a wonderful area close by which looks uninviting on the map, and on first acquaintance, but so far this year has produced Tree Sparrow, English Partridge, Corn Bunting and lots of breeding Yellow Wagtail, as well as the usual Buzzard and Hobby. So, don't give up on Bedfordshire just yet - and take a closer look at those rough patches in the garden, they may be rougher than you think.

Br. John

