



This meadow near Macaulay Buildings is covered in a swathe of cowslips in spring. Alongside is one of the oldest woodlands in Bath, Smallcombe Wood



Special facilities are provided for mini-beasts at the Lyncombe Hill Meadows

cities having invaded from surrounding forests. In contrast, the gulls that nest on rooftops in our city centre seemed nonplussed by the absence of people. Small groups flew around in disarray, frantically searching for scraps of food, all to no avail. Very few pairs raised young in 2020, partly because of lockdown but probably also as a result of the extremely hot weather in spring and early summer.

During lockdown I made a recording of the dawn chorus in Bath. The performance was unusually long, well over an hour instead of the usual 20–30 minutes. I recorded 24 different species that morning. Sometimes it was a cacophony of blackbirds, robins and wrens; at other times song-thrushes and blackcaps dominated the chorus. Intermittently I heard the fluty notes of a nuthatch, and at times the deep croak of a raven from its nest nearby. There were even the soft tinkling voices of goldcrests, our smallest British bird. The recording was broadcast on our local Bath radio Imperial Voice which prompted many people to get in touch asking for a commentary to identify the species, which I was happy to provide. You can hear it on the Bath Natural History Society website.

One of the most profound effects of lockdown has been the realisation by many people that nature is all around us. Certainly people have appreciated all the parks and green spaces available in Bath, from the formality of Parade Gardens, or the green expanses of Victoria Park and Bathwick Meadows, to the wildness of the Skyline walk. We are not alone. The Office for National Statistics reports a huge increase in use of greenspace during the pandemic. Nearly 40% of people said nature was more important than ever to their wellbeing. National media have also recognised that links with nature have been crucial for both physical and mental health. For some, lockdown meant getting to know your local patch, gaining an intimate knowledge of all that nature offers. The spring of 2020 was exceptional. In *The Consolation of Nature: Spring in the Time of Coronavirus* (Hodder Studio) one of the authors claims that it was the loveliest spring in living memory. This book brings together the experiences of three well-known nature writers as they explored their particular local patches in southern England. It is a glorious account of spring, in which exhilaration abounds. Another book that captures the spirit of our time is *A Song of Gladness* (Two Hoots) by Michael Morpurgo and Emily Gravett. Subtitled ‘A story of hope for us and our planet’ this is a children’s story that shows us the beauty of nature and what is at stake.



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In Bath some local communities have been going further to encourage nature and make it more accessible. A local group has leased Lyncombe Hill Fields from the city council to do precisely that. Paths have been laid, trees planted, benches constructed, bird boxes erected and this nature area is taking on a new life. Local communities can make changes happen.

If you are stimulated to learn more about nature in Bath I would encourage you to join the Bath Natural History Society. We should be delighted to welcome new members. ■

David Goode is president of Bath Natural History Society, past president of the Institute of Ecology, and before coming to live in Bath was head of environment for the Greater London Authority. He is the author of the highly acclaimed *Nature in Towns and Cities* (Harper Collins).

- Bath Natural History Society: bathnats.org.uk
- Listen to the dawn chorus: bathnats.org.uk/international-dawn-chorus-day-3-may-2020



A nuthatch bringing food to its nest