

TREVOR BEER'S NATURE WATCH 2

Trevor Beer

Trevor Beer is in his 16th year of writing his 'NATURE WATCH' column six days a week for the Western Morning News, without missing a day. In Volume I a selection of some of the articles was published and now is the time for Volume II, a new selection of these very popular wildlife articles so loved by WMN readers.

NATURE WATCH is alive. It brings to the reader the wildlife and countryside as it really is and no doubt there will be a Volume III in time. It provides for readers of the *Western Morning News* a welcome daily break from the harsher news that so often appears. It is a quiet, peaceful and informative column, the very best in nature writing, written by a Westcountryman who knows and loves his subject.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trevor Beer, author and naturalist, is known to thousands through his regular Nature Watch column. From his home in Barnstaple Trevor has devoted much of his life exploring the natural history of the region, working tirelessly for the conservation and protection of flora and fauna. In 2002 he received the MBE for his contribution to wildlife conservation.

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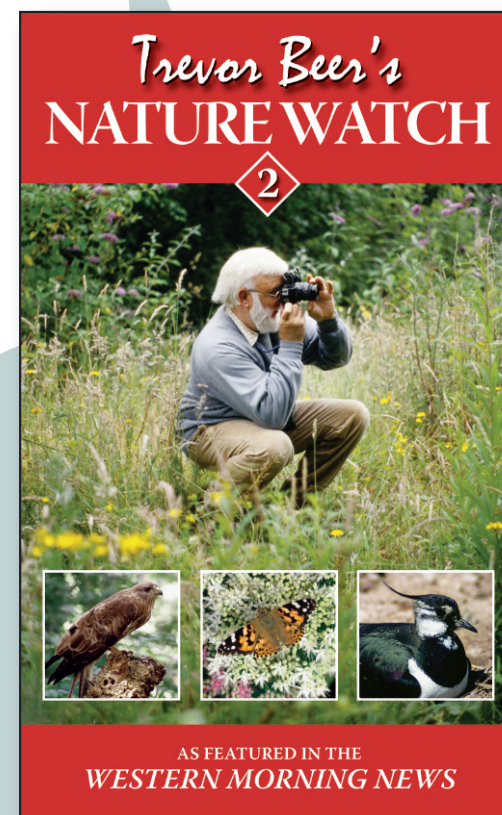
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By E. J. Anderson

think I prefer 'nocklers' to 'bins' which is a name commonly used. More rustic, somehow, and a good dialect word from a 10-year old.

Dinner smells good! I must set pen aside to wander off and feed the inner man. 'Andsome.

Try identifying any of 300 crane flies

The cuckoo seems to remain conspicuous by its absence, and I do miss their calling. A reader who farms in Devon, tells of one in his area and says that there are no swallows nesting with him this year. Sadly, it is the same hereabouts, with just a few seen on the wing at present. One lives in hope.

Another reader tells me he has been helping the robins feed their young by providing meal worms, and he notices three youngsters are fully feathered while the other two are still virtually pink and naked. A matter of the three almost fledged getting the lions share of the food, methinks.

Along the lane, coal tits are feeding young in the hedgebank in what looks like an old mammal hole. Lots of trees in the woods, too, but a quick squizz shows the hole to be deep and well chosen in many ways. Probably quite dry in wet weather, too.

In the porch today came a male, red-tailed bee of huge size. *Bonibus lapidarius* he is, a splendid fellow who nests in colonies down mouse holes. He buzzed about at the window until I guided him out on my hand, and off he went to join others, his black body and vermillion tail a fine sight.

A superb beetle, black and shining a beautiful green, crawled along an oak branch at Anchor Woods. It feeds on oak roller caterpillars beloved of the tit family and is called *Calosoma inquisitor*.

One feels like inventing English names for the creatures not so adored. Quite a predator, this beetle flies in May and June and takes other insects as food, including the larva of the winter moth.

Craneflies are getting about now. With almost 300 species in Britain, it can be fun trying to identify them.

Hearing the countryside in birdsong

There's a lot of chattering going on in the hedgerow between the wood edge and the gateway I have an evening lean on. The whitethroats are

nesting about 20 yards from where a pair nested last year. I have known them to nest here in the same area for over 25 years, always at what I call whitethroat corner. Yet they are not the original pair of a quarter of a century ago.

Fascinating, isn't it, how a species will choose this one spot over and over, adhering to it as 'just right', perhaps descendants of the first pair. All the way from tropical Africa at around 125 miles a day, they are here to breed, moult and return again to the tropics in five or six months; quite a task. The pair I had been watching had their nest built in five days and a clutch of five eggs within the week. Incubation is about 14 days, and is now on the go, and then there'll be about 10-12 days for the young to fledge, that is from hatching to leaving the nest.

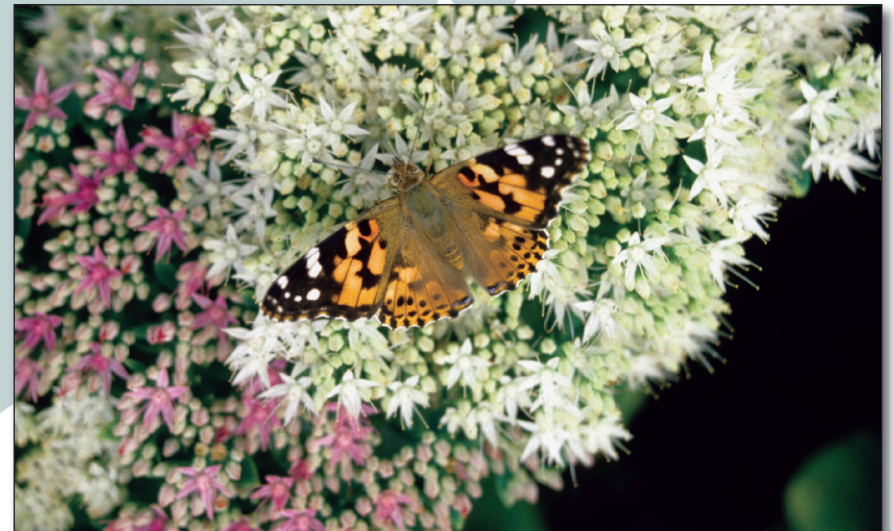


Found reed warblers in a site where I'd seen them before, too. The wet winter and spring has created new wetland habitat, with reeds and yellow flag springing up from nowhere and there the birds are, choosing the wetter area with sedge warblers nesting in the drier bramble patch adjoining it. The yellow flag looks splendid now, broad splashes of bright sunshine yellow amongst the green spikes of leaves.

From somewhere nearby, a blackcap is singing. There are no greater musicians than birds, for nature has given them freedom and wilderness in their singing.



What's this? Honey is my favourite!



Painted Lady. A beautiful migrant butterfly, sometimes common.