



Countryside Matters

by Harry Bott MBE DL

A monthly column sharing observations on farming, wildlife, gardening and rural life across Hertfordshire.

Through Rural Voice, CDA Herts provides a platform for the people, experiences and stories that help shape rural Hertfordshire.

June 2026

Wildlife Report

Butterflies have been on the wing early this year and so far I have seen Brimstone, Comma Large White and Small Blue. We saw Swallows when we were in Cornwall, but I haven't seen any locally here. I do hope that our resident Swallows visit us again, they were with us by this time last year.

Farming Report

I am writing this at the beginning of May and we have had virtually no rain for more than a month. Sarah and I came back from Cornwall recently and the crops on the chalky land of Salisbury plain were looking dreadful. They looked very weak and full of patches with no crop. I fear that the farmers will have a very poor harvest. In spite of the lack of rain, our crops don't look too bad. Winter sown Wheat is still looking green and has obviously got its roots well down into the moisture from the winter rains. Our winter Beans are coming into flower but they have made very little growth due to the dry conditions. The plants are so short that if they produce any beans, they will be so close to the ground that they will be very difficult if not impossible to harvest. Ian is a very skilled combine operator and I think that he will be very tested. Our spring sown crops look much better than the ones on Salisbury plain, I think that is due to Andrew and Ian getting them sown in good time. I also think that it is due to the system that we now have of never letting the ground be bare. We grow ground cover crops between the ones that we harvest and they are incorporated into the soil providing moisture retaining humus. Years ago when I was in charge of the farm and panicking about unfavourable weather, my old Father used to say, "Don't worry Harry, just realise that as each day goes past, it is one day closer to good weather"

After all that gloom we have one crop that is looking superb, our Oil Seed Rape (OSR). I have never seen it look better and this is the case wherever I have been travelling. Normally OSR is attacked by cabbage stem flea beetle at the two leaf stage of growth and then later on hordes of pigeons graze on the crop through the winter. I think that the flea beetle were beaten by early sowing into warm moist soil that gave it a very rapid start that enabled to quickly grow away from the beetle. The lack of pigeons is more mysterious, they must either have been struck by some disease or I have heard that the large flocks that come over from the Continent to feasts on our OSR throughout the Winter, have not appeared this year for whatever reason. A good crop of OSR will be a great help as the oil that is extracted from the seed is very much wanted and this is keeping the price up. It should show a good profit this year in contrast to the white straw crops of wheat, barley and oats that continue in the doldrums with wheat at around £170 per tonne, with barley and oats similar. At this price it is hardly worth growing and certainly not if the price of fertilizer and diesel tractor fuel remains at such very high levels.



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Garden Report

Due to my fall in the garden, I have been unable to do anything in the vegetable which has been very frustrating. Emma has been a wonderful help, she has planted the potatoes , now through the ground and looking very well. She will be sowing seeds for me, Carrots , Beetroot, Lettuces and this year we are sowing the sweet corn directly into the garden. It will be interesting to see how they do as in previous years I have always started them in the greenhouse.

Harry Bott MBE DL