Dear recorder

Welcome to your first newsletter of 2012. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you a happy new year and thank you for your 2011 observations. Since our last newsletter many of our offline citizen scientists like you have started submitting observations via the internet at ***naturescalendar.org.uk*** *which has helped to greatly reduce our running costs. We would encourage you to submit your observations online if at all possible. Not only is the Nature's Calendar website easy to use, it also gives you access to all of our new fact packs, recipes, wildlife calendars and a more frequent email newsletter.*

I look forward to receiving your upcoming observations and hopefully welcoming you as an online recorder in the near future.

Until next time,

Beverley

Beverley Gormley

A record-breaking spring – analysis of spring 2011

Preliminary results from analysis of your spring observations show some record-breaking events. After the cold winter a particularly warm spring led to many events occurring earlier than usual, and some occurring earlier than at any time this century. For a few species, such as the orange tip butterfly, last spring's sightings were the earliest ever recorded.

Despite January's chilly start to the year following a long cold snap stretching back to the end of November, February's above average temperatures surprised us all. This resulted in the mildest February since 2002 with very low numbers of air frosts. The spring months of March, April and May continued this trend, with a UK mean temperature of 9.1 ^{0}C, which is 1.8 ^{0}C above the 1971-2000 average. April was particularly warm, with mean temperatures across the UK 3.7 ^{0}C above average, making it not just the warmest April since 1910 but also the sunniest since 1929.

Along with the warm temperatures, many regions experienced a drought, with spring rainfall below normal everywhere except in western Scotland. The eastern half of England had particularly dry conditions, in fact across much of East Anglia only about 20 per cent of average rainfall was recorded.

Many thanks to you all who contributed to the 63,488 spring records added to our database. These indicated the degree to which species responded to the conditions. Almost all events were earlier than our baseline year of 2001 (the year spring temperatures were very close to the 1961–1990 30-year average), with many considerably earlier.

Trees came into leaf early with almost all species we record, the exceptions being elder and hawthorn. The following also came into leaf on average earlier than at any time this century:

Pedunculate oak 16 April.
20 days earlier than normal

Rowan 5 April.
18 days earlier than normal

Beech 14 April.
18 days earlier than normal

Ash 24 April.
16 days earlier than normal

Flowering was also earlier with records for seven species the earliest this century:

Cuckoo flower 10 April.
17 days earlier than normal

Garlic mustard 11 April.
18 days earlier than normal

Lilac 16 April.
25 days earlier than normal and the earliest on the database

Horse chestnut 19 April.
21 days earlier than normal and the earliest on the database

Butterflies were recorded as emerging substantially earlier than normal:

Dog rose 12 May.
24 days earlier than normal and the earliest on the database

Orange tip 13 April.
26 days earlier than normal. The earliest record we have for this species

Holly blue 15 April.
26 days earlier than normal and the earliest this century

Green veined white 19 April.
23 days earlier than normal.

Spring migrant birds arrived earlier than usual, with records for six species the earliest this century, including:

Turtle dove 9 April.
21 days earlier than usual

Blackcap 23 March.
16 days earlier than usual

House martin 24 April.
7 days earlier than usual

Swallow 16 April.
9 days earlier than usual

Willow warbler 12 April.
8 days earlier than usual

Whitethroat 23 April.
10 days earlier than usual

Blue tits first seen feeding their young 12 April.
8 days earlier than usual.

It's crucial we continue to get your records as every season brings richness to this growing data bank that uniquely records the impact of the climate on our natural world. If you have access to the internet why not combine your recording activity with exploration of some new places? VisitWoods (visitwoods.org.uk) offers the best directory of accessible woods to visit across the whole of the UK.