

## **14th March 2003**

***Paul Westley 2004***

What a glorious day the 14th of March was, as spring dawned in all its glory under an azure sky. The cultivated plum in the garden at the rear of Marsh Cottage was heavy with blossom and early morning dew. A distant drone which had first attracted my attention to it was, on closer inspection, caused by visiting honey bees, hundreds of them. I stood beneath the lower branches of the tree with bees busily visiting the blossom. The air was thick with almond scent, noticeable from some distance. Without exaggeration, I spent a good hour at and around the tree, taking a few photographs and watching the bees - they were more interested in an early source of nourishment than my closeness.

Numerous signs of spring were flowering for the first time. The purple bud-scales (hence the common name) of the purple willow, alongside Wheatfen Broad, had split open and dropped away to reveal fresh new growth. On the banks of Home Dyke, Lesser Celandine were gently opening their high gloss yellow petals adding further joy for the bees. At Alder Carr Pond the tips of hawthorn buds were pushing through. More yellow rays, in the form of Colt's-foot on four acres, were turning their heads to track the sun on its daily journey.

Great Tits, always vocal at any intrusion into their territory, were making no mistake in showing their annoyance. Great Tits are always very territorial, even in the depths of winter. At last, to some relief, the heronry was active with birds calling from the nest and the greeting ritual of the returning partner. A young Cetti's Warbler was doing its best to provide a song and establish a territory alongside Thatch Pond. I say young, as the song was quite weak and generally muddled both signs of a young bird in my opinion. In the following weeks it disappeared, presumably established birds nearby decided it was time for the newcomer to leave. Chiffchaffs were calling from the tops of oaks in Surlingham Wood. Possibly having arrived the day before, they are a sure sign that spring is gearing itself up. Reed Buntings were singing their jangling song from the reed beds of Thack and Blake's. They are a strong, early spring singer, but tend to fade into apparent obscurity as the season advances.

The diatom and other microscopic life that lives in and near the bottom of the dykes during the winter months had lifted and was floating on the surface of the water. I know little of this subject matter, but I do know that many people refer to it as the 'floating brown scum'. Under a microscope you would travel through a microscopic world of diverse complexity.

On returning to Marsh Cottage after an exceptional couple of hours walking the paths of Wheatfen, another emblem of early spring the Brimstone butterfly spread its yellow wings and danced around the garden. Like the arrival of swifts signalling the approaching warm fronts of summer, there can be no stronger indication of things to come than the spring Brimstone.