



Sussex
Wildlife Trust

Awakenings



Awakenings



Lucy Townsend

Lucy is a writer, journalist and wildlife lover based in Sussex. She has worked for the BBC and Sky and is currently working on an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Brighton.

She approached Sussex Wildlife Trust with the idea of creating an anthology for the Trust's 60th anniversary and to this end has delivered a series of blogs encouraging both poetry and flash fiction submissions celebrating the arrival of spring.

Lucy said, 'There is perspective to be found in nature and wildlife. Perspective to be found in the ancient ground below our boots and in the constancy of the tides. During 2020, a year of recurrent lockdowns, we have watched our gardens, our neighbourhoods and the land around us through all four seasons, and when the buds began to form this spring they seemed to carry extra significance.'

'Works submitted for this anthology came from people nursing family through Covid. We had writing from home-schooled children, and we had poems from people celebrating the joys of the garden bird table. Mostly they have been works by people who have been looking for the beauty in our natural world, and finding hope in it.'

'So thank you for your submissions. We could have filled this anthology several times over, which was joyful reading.'



Tor Lawrence

CEO Sussex Wildlife Trust

A bouquet of fiction and flowers, a treasure box of sunlight and brimstones. A host of writers weaving 26 letters and commas into a tapestry of illuminated Sussex for the emerging queens. Words of delight for the exquisite detail flourishing in the warmth of the sun. Odes to the orange tips, blackthorn blossom, the nightingale and the buzz of Bombus bumble bees. Eulogies and elegies. The bread and cheese of hawthorn leaves. Poems for creatures on the move and the cold-blooded basking in the sunbeams. Lyrics for our migrants and heralds in the sky – first the swallows and last the swifts. On the land the smiles and hope of embrace long missed.

Front cover: Oak seedling © Colin Varndell



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Joseph Lee

Getting the Giss

Welcoming grassy knolls stoop like grandma
placing blackberries one by one into parcels of
golden pastry.

Branches brace with the incoming scurry of
squirrels playful streaks marking Formica
worktops.

Seeds fight frost to create yellow trumpets but
some seeds blew away and couldn't bloom.

Hedgerow eyes widen as foxes take the stage
practising their dance for an evening city
commute.

A grand marble umbrella protects ascended
visitors a focal point for remembrance, a place
for growth.

Green fronds fan and wave in congenial
breeze more precious than Blaschka glass.

On my walk, nature informs my senses
colouring in the shape of my memories.



Wild Daffodils © Roger Wilmshurst



Skylark © Barry Yates

Ruth Lawrence

Arrival

I hitch a sky ride
on lark's feather,
rise up on flight-song
into the blue.

He soars me,
note on note,
mind-eye compassed on home,
past cloud, past mountain,
pulled higher than kestrel
or flying machine,
past rocket, past moon.

His song still lingers,
joy-flown and love-sung
to this Spring sky.

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Lottie Angell

Eve's tear

the first snowdrop bows
her bell shaped head, sheds
a tear on the skin of snow
underneath clasped leaves,
watches
as it softens and thins –
reveals ground



Snowdrop © Darin Smith



Crocus © Dave Kilbey

Rona McGeer

Welcome home

See me, spring.

Take me along with you,
show me the way to hope.

I'm sorry to have to ask
but I can't do it on my own.

Can I come along with you?

Can you show me the unknown?

Take me to see the daffodils, a thousand suns
across the fields.

Lift me up over the gate, through the coppice
where the crocuses play.

Smile at me from the cold, cold sea,

Her flash of light will set me free

See me spring.

Take us along with you,

You are truly welcome home

Dawn Farley

Beneath the cold and frozen ground

Beneath the cold and frozen ground
A million things are stirring
The bluebells, snowdrops, primrose too
Push up towards appearing.
And great oaks roots begin to whir
As sustenance they gather
To grow the buds and build the leaves
And commune one with another.
While up above the songbirds call
To tell the world it's spring
They know the season's moving on
For 'ere a hint of green
Begins upon the trees to show
The awakening only nature knows.



Pearl-bordered Fritillary © Bob Eade



Robin © Lisa Geoghegan

Mike Clemens

The Robin's Song

We've watched them emerge, blinking from
their winter of enforced hibernation.

They are the Survivors, rediscovering a way of
life half forgotten.

We too have had our trials;

Avoiding the bird flu and the offer of a quick
vaccination from a passing Sparrowhawk.

Spring is here and the Survivors give us worms
from their digging, crumbs from their table,
and seed dropped from their feeders.

We give them our melancholy song of social
distancing.

It lifts their spirits, and seems like a good
exchange.

Awakenings



Common Seal © Barry Yates

Catherine Emmitt

The Seal

I am floating lazily in the summer sea, the sun shining down on me from a bright blue sky. On the glistening surface I spot a glossy black head. Two round eyes appear, drawing my silent gaze. You swim towards me, confident in your own element and curious at my intrusion. I keep as still as I can in the rippling waves, but you are uncertain and dive deep below the surface. You and I shared a moment of connection in this water world, both delighting in the gentle swell and warm air. I swim slowly towards your last gaze. You do not share my need of contact and go invisibly about your business, leaving me cradled in wonder and awe. Finally I slowly return to my own natural element, refreshed and content to have been allowed to be part of yours.

Camilla Barnard

She Returns

A long sleep is done,
Is that a bumble I hear,
Flying in spring sun?

Harmony Kinnear

Winter froths and bubbles

Winter froths and bubbles
as the sun rubs her eyes
You are golden, but cannot I trust you
We say to the spring.
That first hit of sunlight and we are reeling
In the morning.
From the window
You've watched the day become dim.

Spring's abundance of her new things
Are leading us back into the forests
Where a flurry of the senses
Strike

'We did not build all this beauty'

In fact, she built herself when no one was
looking

While we were all inside.

Claire Booker

On Telscombe Tye

Once more, the scent of wild thyme adorns
 these wind-blown hills. Sky tacked to scarp,
 sheep
 buttoned on grass or flopped against thorn;
 lambs, stained prophetic red, butt at the teat.
 Air turns skittish blue with butterflies.
 They mate on ox-eye daisies, flit the thin
 sinew
 of life for flung bounty on either side.
 Two buzzards slow spiral. Their mew, mew
 spills flocks of finches from invisible wire.
 White triangles are inching along a swatch
 of sea.
 Cliff-top boys stop. Squint up. Higher and
 higher,
 a lark unravels its song, seamlessly.



Spring lambs © Sam Roberts



Hedgehog © Peter Brooks

Alister Scott

My Wilding lawn

Springs to life
 Peace returned
 Mower retired
 A natural order
 Chaotic, joyful
 Re-enchanting

Primrose, bluebell
 Speed well back
 Wanting to thrive
 Ready to live
 With us, if we can
 Only step back...
 Step forward.

Awakenings



Primrose © Derek Middleton

Maggie Weir-Wilson

Spring on the Plot

I rest from digging, stretch and listen to
a woodpecker drilling the distant oak,
still cold air vibrating with sudden sound.

I smile, nature is beginning to move,
daffodils bunched and bent from recent winds,
pale primroses peeping from grassy banks.

A solitary bee, up too early,
unstable on stiff winter wings, zig-zags
across the plot, befuddled and buzzing.

I bend to plant plugs of broad bean seedlings,
their long white roots bursting with energy,
tops unfurling tight hooks of new green leaves.

I think of April and my spirits rise,
warmer days, longer light, lockdown loosening.

Kerry Ingham

Window Pain

The owl knows nothing of a hurried pace,
Nor the speckled wren, of grief;
So entangled are we in this human race,
In our prisons without relief.
No hedgehog feels the sting of guilt,
Or an anxious fear of age;
The Coot will ensure her nest is built,
And corvid jousts will wage.
Sleek Eider Ducks are never down,
Nature carries no selfish plight;
Wild Chalk Down blooms will still unfold,
As Grizzled Skippers take flight.
Fling wide your doors, hear the Skylark sing,
To the pollen-filled saviour called Spring.



Tawny Owl © Richard Sharman



Malling Down © Nigel Symington

Liz Hunter

The Fog South Downs

Climbing steadily towards the barn, each step eased the pain of the last few months. Metaphorically speaking she was attaining peace with each stride; mindfully walking, losing the deep rooted dis-ease and fog which had haunted her every waking hour over the last few months.

Battling against the steep incline of the road, head down and fighting her demons, she could feel a change deep within her. As the mist lifted, she felt able to raise her head, to open her eyes and her being to the beauty in the surroundings. Within her heart, the sun began to warm her, spreading through her veins and revitalising her brain.

She stopped.

The stillness was all encompassing, the air crisp and clear, the view uplifting and remarkable. Birdsong and lambs bleating broke the silence; her heart pounded, her breathing increased, she felt liberated and free at last.

Her healing journey had begun.

Digby Wheeler

Spring poem

Do not resist

The monotony of days

The Talbot dog who turns the roaster's wheel

Has long since retired

Do go gentle into that miserable light

For fabric muffles

And quietness abounds

But all is not silent

The clattering of beeches

Sings louder than any death rattle

And through all the greyness

Come revolutions, illumination

The peaceful sirens of the ice cream truck

A rockpool's silver mirror



Queen White-tailed Bumblebee © Nick Upton

Awakenings

Mandy Faulkner

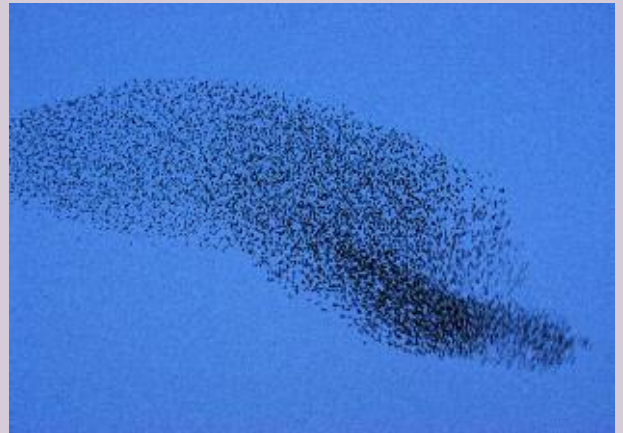
Oh! You beautiful Sun

“Oh! You beautiful Sun
Let your delicate rays
Caress this sodden terrain
To herald the Spring in its awakening”

Hazel Rogers

Flowers

Flowers are floundering in the wind.
Great swathes of blossom cling tightly to their boughs
Knots of delicate ivory, rose, marine, flaxen
- Shy, modest florets, no strength in their hold
Flutter, and scatter in flurries of tend'rest snow.
Eddies of endless sorrow, plucked and thrown;
Silent billows that charm the breeze as they tumble
Unseen currents awash with colour.
A most wonderful sight, of
Petals whistling through the sky
As though the heavens themselves were in bloom.



Murmuration © Mike Read

J.E. Seuk

Persist

In the beginning
One... two... three red foxes to salty shore
Skittish new night time neighbours of spring,
venturing distanced
Hungry
Emboldened rats nest 'neath railings
Cantankerous craving gulls give way
To the murmuration of starlings haunting
Brighton Pier
In plague, in peace.
We hear tales of rampaging boars and goats
and
Root for trees, weeds, bees to rampage too.
Now humans swarm
Year's caution obeyed, ignored
Our foxes gone
But murmurations persist.

Andrew Bugden

Finches

These times: it's out there
 At the back of my throat, back of my mind.
 The sense of its jagged threat
 Nagging as a toothache I can't leave behind,
 Added to that lumbar wrenching pack upon
 my back.
 Am I broken now?
 This day:
 A lark sharp sunrise
 In the enfolding sun;
 Golden pollen on the velcro hide of a bee.
 Soft bottomed bee
 On the gaudy blossomed sweet pea I planted.
 I lean back below a passing shimmer of
 goldfinches,
 And I am whole.



Goldfinch © Alan Price



Strawberry Anemone © Sarah Ward

Caroline Gross

Nature bomb in lockdown

My last wild swim was a burning cold sea swim
 on new years day.
 With Lockdown favourite swim spots are out
 of bounds.
 I thought and confirmed that I could river swim
 between Lewes and Offam.
 Tide app checked, wet suit stuffed in bike bag I
 rode up river.
 Wind roaring, beautiful river reflecting blue
 sky and spring green grass.
 In with the incoming tide, avoid nesting swans
 on left, turn swim against the flow. All smiles in
 the wide slack water where the river divides.
 Tide turns I float back towards the Picnic spot.
 Drying off by the river I hear a 'flop splash'.
 I peer over the bank, a large fish? no a small
 seal! he surfaces, we stare at each other.
 He disappears. Searching the rivers surface I
 notice three swans flying up river squabbling,
 wind behind them flying fast, closer, close
 straight at me – I dive.

Awakenings

Ethan Blake aged 12 years

Spring is coming

Flowers are blooming, leaping lambs are out,
Spring is coming, so let's go out,
To see the blossoming trees, to hear the life,
Let's prepare for spring and welcome new life,
Banners are hung, eggs are laid,
Let's prepare for Easter and let the long nights
fade,
Let out the cold, feel the sun,
Let's prepared for Easter now spring has
begun,
Smell the grass, taste the air,
Nature is growing everywhere,
Flowers are blooming, leaping lambs are out,
Spring is coming, so let it shine out



Blackthorn flowers © Mike Read



Blackbird © Mike Read

Annette Mary Radford

The Blackbird's Song

A nimbus-eyed blackbird waits to bless
New Dawn, to sing in sole prowess....
His clear and haunting note, floats on air
Like a muezzin's call to prayer,
Or the bell of matin's canticle.
Chased by joyful bursts of versicles.
The Black Bard chants his song of grace,
Of Springtime, green Albion and blind Faith.
From golden flute, rare strains of gold
Weave sacred melodies of old.
Sweet roundelays, in refrain unite
A song, to make, night's darkness light.
Whistled and chirped in purest hues,
The Aria, risen, falls like morning dew.

Jennifer Rowe

Seeing

My excitement at seeing the lizards spilled out across the street, as I searched for another soul to share the joy. No one. Three beautiful secrets, and mine alone: pink, green, tan against the pale rock.

“Come closer”, they whispered. “See how our tiny bodies flutter with breath, how our pinhead eyes watch all and everywhere.”

On sunny afternoons thereafter, I’d haunt the low stone wall mobbed by foliage escaping the old school grounds. When I could, of course. When I wasn’t caged by trains or meetings or screens.

Each sunny season the lizards seemed fewer.

I blamed climate change, encroaching ivy, the magpies ka-kack-ing in their tree-top nests.

But then the world stopped and a walking hour became a precious thing and, suddenly there on the low stone wall, were the lizards.

“Here we are,” they lisped. “Always here. But just for a while, you forgot how to see.”



Common Lizard © Mark Monk-Terry



Fern © David Plummer

Jessica Taylor aged 11 years

Fiddlehead

A coiled head of a violin,
 Curling and unfurling,
 Amongst the dark damp forest,
 Tender shoots of new growth,
 Flashes of verdant green,
 Spiralled like an ammonite fossil,
 Miniature neat cork screws of emerald,
 Waiting to become tangled immense giants.
 Now the minute fiddleheads,
 Are transforming into feathery ferns,
 Ready to spread their spores once more.

Awakenings



FOX © Lisa Geoghegan

Alice Johnson

There's a chilly breeze

There's a chilly breeze over the fields this morning, I wish you could feel it. You know the place, it's where the ancient oak tree guards the meadow, the one we climbed when you scraped your knee. I close my eyes to breathe in the soft moist air, as the gentle scent of blackthorn blossom wafts around a tender aroma of spring, of hope, comforting me while a mistle thrush sings its glorious melody. My hands are cold, I wish you were here to hold them. I open my eyes and through the blurry screen of not quite fallen tears another's stare meets my own. His gaze is focused yet disregarding; his fur holds the colourful glory of autumn, red, brown and orange, despite the spring season; and his cubs will be born soon in their mother's den. Then the fox is gone, but I no longer feel so alone.

Robert Winter

A Dormouse Locks Down

Where cold moon stares on honeysuckle nest
And tattered webs weigh low with pale hill
dew –
It's here I lie by bramble barbs to rest
A while. The world slows down, but not for
you
Whose sickly lights despoil my sleepy view,
Till stiff with frost, I wake with night-pool eyes
And beat neglected Hunger's drum to size
By chasing billowed, airborne willow fuzz
In woodland swathed with white anemone,
Those starry mimics shining bright because
You've dimmed. Though more environmentally
Friendly, your silence breeds perplexity:
Our normal roles reversed with I awake
While you still sleep and scorn each new day's
break.



Dormouse © Derek Middleton



Cowslip © Mike Read

Ellie Evans

A springtime run on the South Downs

I pause, my pulse thudding, my breathing hard. Stop to look up at the skylark high above, just a spot against the periwinkle sky. Radiant with song, trilling fit to burst... There's so much to love on the South Downs in springtime, so many beautiful plants studding the ground, joyous birdsong abounding.

I continue my run and a flash of terracotta wing catches my eye: it's a kestrel, dashing from post to post just a few steps ahead. Further on, goldfinches flush out of the hedge, scooping and carving the air with their bobbing flight.

Custardy cowslips speckle the hills, along with spotted orchids. The sun warms my face, my breath the only human sound in the valley. I pad on, catch the coconut cream waft of gorse, glimpse gnarled thorn trees made verdant by lichen and moss. A buzzard lifts off in the distance and smoothes across the currents, gliding in sunlight.

Caroline Travis

Pond life

A squillion miniscule creatures, frolic in the pond.

Trapped by unhatched cousins and blind to the world beyond.

Their bodies wiggle and jiggle and shine,

Fare for adults of a different kind.

Newts are the first to investigate,

Coming up from beneath the dinner plate.

And arthropods gaining wings in May

Gorge themselves on the easy prey.

The oil-slick shimmers in the sun

And youngsters escape, one-by-one

To masticate the natural algae

And hide from jaws, forever hungry.

To fight for life, they have been freed,

How many will return to breed?



Snakelocks Anemone © Sam Roberts

Awakenings



Barn Owl © Jon Hawkins Surrey Hills Photography

David Paynter

Barney

The beat of wings is felt, not heard,
the barn owl's on patrol –
a wraith that haunts the tussock fields
to stalk the timid vole.
But less and less this spirit's seen
for food is hard to find.
The barn owl's struggling to survive
in sterile fields and minds.
Unless we measure more than cost
we'll make our children poor:
the beating wings of ghostly owls
will fade and be no more.

Karolyn Mnich

Spring Sketchbook

Gathering goldfinches in the lilac, glints of yellow and red in the morning sun.

Iridescent starlings shoving sharp beaks in a coconut, creating craters like the moon.

Great spotted woodpecker, out of hiding, flashes red patches pecking at peanuts.

Long tailed tits, fluffy pink, take turns with tails curled inside fat-ball feeder.

Upside-down on elder, blue-tits, flit back and forth, beaks full to the nest box.

Little brown wren takes a soft white feather along thorny rose to its ivy portal.

Blackbirds vigorously pull up pink worms and pick out moss in shady spots.

Woodpigeon wallows in the water bath, splashing grey feathers.

Robin, red-breasted, tail up, hopping from flowerpot to chair back, peeps in.

Above the ash tree a denim blue sky, no clouds or contrails.

Silhouetted shapes of circling crows, reflections criss-cross the table top below.

A red fox running, acrobatic grey squirrels, a peacock sunning fresh wings.

Each day something surprises. Nuances of nature seen more clearly this spring,

Colouring my garden in Shoreham-by-Sea.