



Penallta Yafflings

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Summer 2020

A seasonal newsletter about the wildlife at Parc Penallta

Our lives may have been turned upside down by the Covid-19 pandemic but for our wildlife, it's business as usual. During lockdown, the natural world has burst into life and many of us have had more time to observe the world around us. I have been amazed at the wealth of wildlife found in our own gardens and have taken great pleasure in having the opportunity to get to know it better.

As lockdown began, the bumblebee queens were in the process of getting their colonies started. They would have found a suitable nest site several weeks earlier and begun egg laying and collecting pollen to feed to the developing larvae that would soon become the first batch of workers. Before long, those workers could be seen buzzing around the garden from flower to flower. It was noticeable how each species preferred different plants. The garden bees, with their long tongues favoured the nodding flowers of Columbine while the short tongued early bumblebee loved the tiny cotoneaster flowers. In all, I counted six species of bumblebee as well as honey bees and numerous solitary bees all visiting my garden. By each having different feeding and nesting preferences, they can live side by side in relative harmony and not outcompete with each other.



*Garden bumblebee feeding
on columbine*



Palmate newts

Sitting by the pond with a cup of tea gave me the opportunity to get to know a few other garden residents. The frog spawn, laid a month before, had hatched and now tiny little tadpoles were beginning to explore their watery world. However, each time I looked there seemed to be fewer and fewer. A quick dip with the net soon revealed

the culprits, palmate newts, and lots of them. Newts are voracious predators, eating anything they can catch and tadpoles made an easy meal. But the frog's loss was the newt's gain, and all that protein rich food was giving them the energy boost they needed to lay their own eggs. Watching quietly you could see the females attaching their eggs to the leaves of pond weed and then carefully folding the leaf over to hide it and protect it from predators.

Despite having to run the gauntlet of predatory newts, I am certain a few of the tadpoles will make it to adulthood, joining the dozen or so frogs lurking in the shallows ready to gobble up all the emerging damselflies!



Common frog

As the weeks rolled by, the list of birds that could be seen (or heard) around the garden continued to grow. The resident robin and song thrush were joined by travellers from afar as one by one the swallows, house martins, willow warblers and swifts returned from spending the winter in Africa. Even the cuckoo could be heard calling from further up the valley, a sound usually drowned out by the background rumbling of car engines! But by far the most entertaining avian visitors were the pair of blackbirds who had built a nest in my wood store. After a couple of weeks of sitting on eggs, the chicks hatched and both parents busily set about collecting food for them. The adults would perch on a low branch with a beak full of worms, checking that the coast was clear and that there were no predators about before swooping low across the garden and into the nest. As soon as the two chicks fledged, the parents began work building a second nest and now, at the start of June, they are sitting on a second clutch of eggs.

Finally, as we work our way out of lockdown, it's back to Parc Penallta full time. The trees are all in leaf, the meadows are flowering and the many bugs and beasties that call the park home are frantically going about their business. No matter what goes on in our lives, the natural world keeps on turning. Blink and you miss it!