

The Yorkshire Dales Nature through the Year

Spring



As the days lengthen and the temperature rises, the first flowers begin to bloom in earnest. Insects aren't far behind and birds begin to build nests ready to raise the next generation.

Look out for the golden-yellow stars of lesser celandine dotting the short turf along field banks – one of the earliest spring flowers, humble but with the promise of sunny days to come. Wordsworth loved it and wrote three poems about it, including [‘To the Small Celandine’](#).

A little later on, woods in the Dales are full of primroses and bluebells. Visit [Grass Wood](#) near Grassington where there are also fine displays of lily-of-the-valley, or [Freeholders' Wood](#) near Aysgarth where there are also drifts of wood anemones in the spring.

Woods are also the best place to hear the dawn chorus and there's nothing more thrilling than standing in a cold dark wood watching the first rays of the sun peeping over the horizon and then hearing first one, then another then the whole wood-full of birds singing to welcome the day. Look for events around [International Dawn Chorus Day](#) in May.



The drowsy buzzing of the first bumble-bees can be heard in spring. The queens overwinter and the lucky ones who survive are the first to take advantage of the sunshine and spring flowers. Find out more at [Bumblebee Conservation](#)

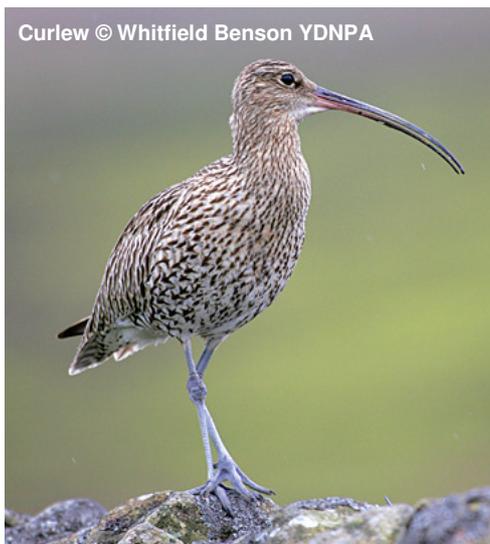


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Beware of the white frothy blossom of a blackthorn hedge — there's such a thing as a blackthorn winter — a sudden cold snap around the time that the blossom appears. The best hedges are in the north-west of the National Park but you'll find remnants of old hedges even where there are now dry stone walls. Hawthorns bloom later than blackthorns but are equally beautiful, "the risen cream of all the milkiness of May-time" as H E Bates wrote.



The dazzling green of newly unfolded tree leaves, such as Larch and hawthorn, are some of the most vivid at this time of year. Country children used to call young hawthorn leaves 'bread and butter', and ate them in the spring.

Farmers are always glad to see the green flush of new grass on limestone pasture because it means they no longer have to supplement their animals' feed, but for the visitor it's just part of what makes the Dales so beautiful. The limestone reef knolls at Cracoe are particularly striking, rising up against the brown moorland behind.

There's nothing that says spring has arrived more than the ecstatic bubbling trills of the returning [curlews](#), although some might say the lapwing's 'peewit' cry runs it a close second. The tumbling dance of the courting [lapwing](#) is a marvellous sight in fields across the National Park at this time of the year.

