

Blackcaps and Bluebells or “What’s in a name?”

I’ve always liked those short pithy adages that sum up a huge experience or offer profound advice in a few thought provoking words. Things like; “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. That particular one often comes to mind when I sit down to try and write something. The barriers to doing so many things in life can usually be brought down by making that first brave and daunting step. I thought

I would have a go at writing my own saying to sum up what I did last week. It's a bit rubbish and I doubt it's destined to feature in the top ten memes of the twenty first century but here it is anyway:

“If you can't sell your house and buy a boat, take a walk in a Bluebell wood.”

I have always taken a passing interest in birds and wildlife but working at [Brockholes Nature Reserve](#) here in Lancashire has fuelled that curiosity and given me a thirst for more knowledge. In

particular I was keen to get to know the reserve better first hand and with that in mind and a certainty that getting close to nature is a sure fire way of putting things in perspective Gill and I decided to spend a day there. What could be more fun than poking around in the woods and gazing out over the River Ribble and the numerous lakes in the hope of spotting some of the rarer delights of the reserve and trying to identify them.



Brockholes floating village

It wasn't long before we were staring hopelessly up into the now quite dense spring foliage of the trees desperately trying to pin down the source of a loud and stunningly beautiful bird song. It doesn't help that in my case being deaf in one ear means that I have

no sense of audio direction. Most of the time I wasn't even looking in the right tree. We did eventually spot a small bird with a black cap as the source of the warbling and identified it as the unimaginatively named Blackcap. This led me off on a train of thought about all the people that spot birds and other wildlife and claim to have no idea what they have seen. Like the small seagull with the black head for example. That will be the Black Headed Gull actually. Or the dainty little white butterfly that I was watching just the other day. When

I looked it up later on the internet it turned out to be called a Small White. I should have guessed. You see you probably know a lot more than you think.



Small bird with black cap. (Photo
Wikipedia)

That theme doesn't always run true though. The next bird we identified, the Garden Warbler wasn't in a garden at all. A much better name for it would have been

The Tall Trees by the River Warbler. Nice song though. After a couple of hours of exploration we made our way back to report our findings and add them to the sightings board in the visitor centre. There, one of the regular bird experts, Bill Aspin, undermined our growing confidence in song recognition by playing us a recording of a Willow Warbler (not always in Willow Trees I should point out) which was impersonating a Chiff Chaff. Oh well, still lots to learn I suppose. We paused to recuperate over a sandwich and a cuppa in the

floating restaurant on the lake.

Re-fuelled we made our way along the reed bed walk and peered deeply in the reeds in the hope of spotting a Reed Warbler (makes sense) or maybe a Reed Bunting. What we did see was both a Large Red Damselfly and a Blue-Tailed Damselfly both of which live up to their names admirably.



Large Red Damselfly. (Photo Gill Pearson)

This was all beginning to make sense now and a small brown bird with a white throat turned out, predictably, to be called a Whitethroat. Everything was falling into place until we spotted a Kestrel and a pair of

Linnets and and I realised the flaw in my new found theory of how to guess the name of everything. Then there was a pair of Great Crested Grebes building a nest on Ribble Pool. They break all the rules; Grebe meant absolutely nothing to me but the great crests on their heads made some sense. It's all very confusing. When I say they were nest building by the way that isn't quite accurate. One of them, gender not established, was busily swimming all over the lake gathering reeds and twigs and laboriously bringing them back to add the the structure while it's

partner slept peacefully nearby. Occasionally the sleepy one would raise it's head and open an eye as if to say, "you're doing fine, just another couple of hundred sticks should do it". I could sense a row brewing so we moved on and left them to it.



Grebes with great crests (Photo Gill Pearson)

Now we were in the Bluebell Woods.



Lots of bell shaped blue flowers. (Photo
Gill Pearson)

In every direction there were thousands of small, blue, bell-shaped flowers. Who would have imagined. As we were watching a delightful little Bank Vole (a vole that lives in a bank) amongst some fallen logs a couple of

visitors came by. Seeing our binoculars they jumped to the false conclusion that we knew a thing or two. They were wondering if we could throw any light on the identity of a small song bird they had seen. It was a pale brownish grey with a black cap they said. We tried not to sound too smug as we confirmed for them that what they had seen was almost certainly a Blackcap. They didn't look particularly impressed and I think they may have thought we had just made the name up.

So there we go. A fabulous day of

diversion therapy in a beautiful place. Oh, and if you were wondering; Brock is the old word for Badger. On the fringes of the reserve there are Badger sets and of course Badgers make holes don't they. Which brings me back to adages and the particular one; "What's in a name?" Quite a lot it seems.