

## Forty years, did you say!

Tuesday ten sharp come rain pandemic Christmas Day  
or the leader no-shows, we walk Hampstead's Heath,  
oasis of solace and amusement,  
of long-tail titterings in the foliage,  
trees crept and kestrels 'binned',  
chiffs-chaffed, kings-fished, crowed 'n ducked 'n smewed,  
waxed-wings wryed-necks waggy-tails,  
and at the viaduct where's that blimmin water rail?

It's not the wild west, though a tortoise  
has been seen taking its ease at sunset,  
but it is blest with all manner of exotic pest  
other than the robin red breast.  
We follow the rhythm of the seasons, says chairman Steve,  
and the comforts of unconditional companionship,  
while the birds govern our discourse.

Early March ushers in the good times,  
willows greening, brimstones busying, blackbirds auditioning,  
but oh, those dogs and their moans,  
and the north London gentlefolk, loudly into their phones.

And when the birds play stay-at-home  
it's time to ponder, straighten out our woes;  
and there are the trees...at least they sit still,  
eclipse before our very eyes,  
not bothered by the expert's wheeze  
peering into the Jodrell telescope,  
says...Andy or was it Gay?  
...'a little ringed plover!'  
WHERE? 'Oh...it's taken cover'.

But now comes the hour of greatest need;  
enter the villain of the piece.  
Tuesdays are cancelled. Masked,  
in fear of our neighbour, we tramp the paths alone.  
A menacing drizzle hangs on the pond  
where men no longer swim;  
the mother grebe, one chick on her back,  
two more paddling at her wings;  
stately, thus was the flotilla at Trafalgar.

Above the stock pond too high to hear, screaming  
swifts flip their wings and are gone.  
It's official; summer has come.

The watchers meet again at the water fountain,  
recount their woes and are placated;  
serious folk, not twitching for instant pleasure  
but eager to see lives lived in other worlds  
- '...is that a redwing in the holly?' -  
and will linger over the most banal and pinch  
themselves when the kingfisher makes their day  
on the pond where our founding mother Kate  
ordained a bank for them to burrow in.  
And lo, a turquoused missile launches o'er the water  
to clamp a mid-morning snack for her ravenous brood.

David into pocket recorder... 'one blackbird, chiffchaff heard,  
three pigeons, cormorant, wings extended...'  
Barbara leaves for her keep-fit class, and soon  
Marion will make her apologies;  
we must manage without the stalwarts  
as we enter the jungle of this unroofed aviary,  
its ups and downs and yet more ups  
but then a rarity even for us,  
as without shame nor fear of detection  
the sparrowhawk feeds her squawking foursome.

Perhaps one day the very sparrows will return  
to the city they once owned.  
Was it we who chased them away?  
Will we keep the planet cool  
so that forty years hence we walk  
this avian jewel, this Hampstead Heath?  
And if we do not change our ways,  
will they miss us when we're gone?

At last, the poet makes 'a spot'. Authoritatively,  
through unclean glass and eye unwiped...  
'kestrel, third oak right, near top two o'clock.'  
A dozen bins train into the canopy.  
'...it's...it's a pigeon.'  
Not a sneer, but an unspoken 'keep on trying'.

Here's the last lap to the coffee garden,  
to share wisdom and amusement,  
and gripes too, why not? a contented band,  
and much needed in this troubled England?

As with the birds that give us joy,  
we too fall back from the flock,  
a walking-stick appears, the rucksack empties,  
soon even Kenwood is too far.  
But other, more sprightly species come to sing  
and the murmuration buzzes busily on  
through the winter wilderness and into the spring.

Happy birthday, Tuesday friend

**PS** Where's Teresa, haven't seen her for months?  
*denis herbstein december 2021*