

## AROUND AND ABOUT

Group member Richard Candeland is managing to keep active and here he tells us what he's been seeing, and thinking about, on his permitted daily exercise.

"Yesterday my daily exercise took me to Cleatop Woods and there was a great spotted woodpecker, calling - not drumming. The French word for woodpecker is 'pic' and I've always been perplexed as to whether this is onomatopoeic, named for the call of the great-spotted, because to my ear, this is exactly what it says, especially if you say 'pic' with a French accent. More likely, is it derived from one or other of the verbs, picorer (to peck) or even piquer (which has many meanings including to prick and to stab as well as to sting, as in a wasp), which is not half as exciting. Perhaps our U3A French group could be tasked with researching the etymology of this name! Obviously, green woodpeckers, our other Settle native pecker, have a completely different call. Around Settle I have heard them yaffling in the area of the golf course and round the shoulder towards Stackhouse.

Also on yesterday's stroll, coming out the top of the wood over the wall stile, some airborne gulls were making quite a commotion. Looking up, a buzzard was circling, beautifully lit up by the afternoon sunshine, and a gang of gulls were 'minding' it, mostly lesser black-backed, but I also heard a call I associate with herring gulls, and black-headed gulls were calling from somewhere out of sight behind me. One particular lesser-black backed gull had obviously taken great exception to the buzzard and was harrying it more vigorously than the rest, flying at it repeatedly and passing to within two metres or so (exercising social distancing, in line with government guidelines, obviously) and causing the buzzard to flinch. The buzzard eventually drifted off, bored with the game, and the lesser black-backed headed off towards Ryeloaf Hill [presumably heading to the roost at Malham Tarn]. Look out for skeins of them late in the afternoon right through the autumn and winter – if you can have a skein of gulls as well as geese - passing over Settle town centre, late in the afternoon. I'm never up early enough in the morning to see them go the other way, but I guess they do?

The starlings around town are having a good chatter at the moment. They are superb mimics and often confuse me: the big tree in the close next to Settle police station is home to both wigeon and curlew. It seems to be the same starling doing both. It is there most mornings and it was there last spring. I suppose it must spend another time of year somewhere near the coast – every morning I will it to try eider or long-tailed duck, but it hasn't done yet. If you don't know what eider or long-tailed duck sound like, I find their calls evocative, and in the case of eider, highly amusing, think Frankie Howard or Kenneth Williams. Check them out online or, once this is all over, take a trip to the Scottish East coast in February – I recommend Musselburgh, on a gentle Northerly wind, when the tide is in. Another starling favourite is sparrowhawk – why would they do that? One that lives at North Ribblesdale RUFC seems to specialise in sparrowhawks. He frequently has me scanning the skies for a circling hawk until I remember where I am. Song thrushes and blackbirds are also good imitators, but to me they seem to prefer human sounds. The blackbird in Booth's car park is good at burglar alarms. Where we used to live in Utley, near Airedale Hospital there was a song thrush that was fond of ambulances.