

The View from Vaupillon OR Tacchi's Tittle-Tattle

Week 2

Monday April 20 to Sunday April 26

Monday April 20

A bright sunny morning and whilst undertaking my first walk I spotted a kite (the bird, not a toy) perching on the top of the burnt out farm house on the corner, normally, I am more likely to see it on a solitary tree in the field behind the farm. This field frequently is host to several white egrets who rest erect and stationary, presumably waiting for prey to pass by, though what that prey may be I am not sure.

Yesterday was peaceful and reasonably profitable in terms of research. I had the idea of using the camera to take some action shots of the garden pond as when the frogs are disturbed they leap from their sunny basking positions back into the water. I ascertained how to set the camera to take multiple shots with a very short exposure and positioned myself appropriately, everything went according to plan except the frogs. There were just insufficient of them to create the effect of a cascade of amphibians, I suspect that this was because it was late in the day and they were resting after a long day's hard croaking. Perhaps an earlier attempt might be made today.

Progress on the updating of this page took a positive step yesterday afternoon when I demonstrated a proof of concept. My cunning plan is that I will create a pdf of seven pages every week, i.e. a page per day. Thus this particular web page will have just the latest musings plus pointers to the weekly archives. This will probably take me a couple of days to actually put into production - so watch this space.

My second walk is normally late morning and I always take Mrs. T. for company as it gives us a chance to chat about life, the universe and everything. As we started yesterday's perambulation I mentioned a subject I might like to write about but she suggested that I should remember that this could be read by people of a nervous disposition and that I should probably desist. I agreed thinking that self discipline and good taste should be followed at all times.

However it did start me thinking about so-called Political Correctness. Spoiler alert, I am now starting one of my diatribes, there are

those who know me and will advise you to pass over this part at any cost. I am not a fan of PC- for me a fan of PC is something that prevents my computer from overheating. Firstly, PC normally means that someone believes their view of the world is more 'correct' than mine, in my humble opinion that ain't necessarily so, statistically speaking it would seem equally likely that my opinion was the superior one. My second reason is that one could summarise PC as not offending anyone, but PC offends me, thus PC is not PC, reductio ad absurdum. My third offering is that I want to discriminate: I want to discriminate against people who read The Daily Mail and believe it, if you buy it because it is cheaper than The Beano and you enjoy comics, then good luck to you, by the way you can go to Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Noticeboard/Archive_220#Daily_Mail_RfC) to get some idea as to the reliability of said Daily Mail; I want to discriminate against people who voted for Brexit because they do not like immigrants, if you voted to leave because you actually think Great Britain will be greater out of the union that is fine; I could, and frequently do, go on at much greater length about many other subjects upon which I wish to discriminate and some of them will probably crop up in a future article.

Whilst pondering as to how to finish this entry my PC produced a pop-up message which said that my machine was not suffering from a virus - nice to know at least one thing can be checked to see if it is has an infection. A question I ask myself is would this have happened if my PC was in the UK? The answer is of course - yes. However had I been a carehome worker rather than a PC then the response may well have been different. On Saturday the UK government achieved less than 22,000 tests for the COVID-19 virus, this gives them only a dozen days to ramp up to the 100,000 a day they have promised. My scepticism is further enhanced when on Sunday Michael Gove said 'He is confident', I wonder what odds he would give me if it involved his own money on the target being achieved. I am continuing to watch the local bird life being busy pairing up and enjoying the pleasures of the flesh and then constructing nests in which to raise their progeny. Dotted around the garden are several

bird boxes and in those I can see from my office window we definitely have bluetits in one of them and some sparrows in a second. The third that is visible to me is attracting attention from both sparrows and bluetits - it is yet to resolved to see who will take over this desirable residence.

Tuesday April 21

Another bright sunny morning and I hope that the weather remains so as yesterday it flattered to deceive and immediately upon finishing my efforts as a scribe it changed to overcast with an easterly wind. During my first sojourn this morning I discovered a wild Borage plant, upon close inspection of the surrounding area no Pimms, or any other fruit cup, was forthcoming. A disappointment.

The first of our four weeks of isolation is now over, just three to go. I must say it has actually passed less slowly than I feared. It may well be that we are adjusting to the new 'normal'.

In the afternoon, yesterday, I did what Sellar and Yeatman would have called 'A Good Thing'. In one of the nearby dwellings there is a Parisian family of four who managed to escape to the Perche before the lockdown. I have met them once or twice and have seen them taking their exercise in the neighbourhood. A couple of days ago a shouted conversation across the road junction near our houses managed to exchange Skype addresses which enabled me to engage with the children so they can practise their English during their enforced absence from school. Further meetings are planned. Hopefully the situation will be resolved before they become fluent.

At about four o'clock this morning during a bout of sleeplessness I realised that I was still not ruler of the world. A situation many of you will agree is well overdue. I then mused as to the actions I would take should by some strange circumstance I be granted the post. My first decree would be to set up a department of unintended consequences. A very minor example of what this means is with my Fitbit. One is tracked to ensure that 250 steps are taken every hour. So what do I do? I take 500 steps every two hours. Just before the hour I start out and walk and finish 500 steps later just

after the hour. According to my Fitbit I have done 250 steps in both hours - this is a correct fact but I may not have done for what the original idea was conceived. It almost certainly matters not one jot or tittle but I probably have not achieved what the manufacturers wanted me to do. My second action would be to have ban on knee-jerk reactions though the department of rapid response would come into being. What is the difference between the two? Knee-jerks are performed by politicians. Politicians are elected in a democratic manner and I suspect that the majority put themselves forward from the highest of ideals. However democracy appears to have one minor flaw in that as soon as a politician is elected the only thing that then concerns him/her is to be re-elected. In a knee-jerk situation, the politician says 'what must I do that makes me look re-electable' - the ruler of the world says 'what do we need to do to remedy this situation as soon as possible'. A slight difference of approach. Another pressing order I would give would be to ban scraptofts (Google scraptoft - Meaning of Liff)



A wild borage plant just outside the local gite.

Wednesday April 22

Yesterday was, meteorologically speaking, capricious as the early bright start failed to fulfil its promise. Let us hope that today will not be a repeat. Mentioning the weather made me wonder as to how one measures the success or failure. I have a vague recollection that the accuracy of rain prediction was a test. If that is the case then if the prediction is a 25% chance of rain then is success when exactly one out of the four days for which this is the forecast the recipient of rain. To return to my department of unintended consequences this would mean that if in a normal year there is rain on 91 days then a prediction of a 25% chance of rain for every day would be considered successful. What does this show? I think it shows that we do not have a simple way of measuring weather forecasting accuracy.

Today is a special day, Why? Because it is one of the few days when we know which day of the week it is. Today the dustbin men call. Thus we have a hook to hang the day on, since Only Connect finished (we then knew it was Monday) there is little to differentiate between the days. Last week was traumatic because the Monday was a Bank Holiday (Easter Monday), this meant the arrival of the waste disposal operatives could not be predicted with accuracy, they might appear late on the Wednesday or sometime on the Thursday, the uncertainty was very disconcerting.

I have suddenly realised that over these past days I have not mentioned cheese. As a well known turophile I have decided to remedy this. My initial action was to take an inventory of my cheeses - as an aside my thesaurus has no synonyms for cheese, so this paragraph will suffer from multiple mentions of the word. The first and most interesting cheese is an eight-year old Gouda, given to me by some dear friends on my visit to the UK just before this Brouhaha started. Once a week I cut off a small slice which I sit down to consume alone with a nice (very) large glass of port, unfortunately I think the cheese will run out before lockdown is eased. The other cheeses comprise of Cheddar (in industrial quantities and various brands), 24 month-old Parmesan, Feta, Mature Abondance, Halloumi, Harrogate Blue, Tallegio and an Extra Mature Gruyere. I

have not included the Philadelphia Cream Cheese as I would never include that in a Cheese Platter, though very useful for making a cheesecake. The upshot of this list is that in the near future I predict a soufflé and/or a fondue.

Discussing cheese has made me aware of the one thing I am finding difficult to deal with during the present situation. That is not cooking, eating and drinking with chums. As well as visiting cafés for drinks and gossip, in a normal week I will eat at local restaurants for lunch at least twice and will also prepare a meal for my 'footballers' every week. This originates back in the mists of time when a group of guys approaching middle-age played five-a-side football on a Monday night and for various reasons it fell to me to feed them after their exertions. Though they no longer play football (they are all too decrepit) the tradition of a boys evening of good food and drink continues and is one of my favourite happenings in the week.

Thursday April 23

Finally a day that fulfilled its promise, all day yesterday it was sunny and warm with the temperatures in the low twenties and only a light breeze in the afternoon. Today is supposed to be even better and it certainly appears that way from the evidence of my unremarkable early morning walk.

Yesterday somewhat less than 50% of a delivery of PPE from Turkey arrived in spite of the government promising its full arrival on Sunday, three days earlier. The quantity that actually arrived is less than the NHS's requirements for three days. Now obviously in these times there are going to be problems, mistakes and other snafus, but I cannot accept that it is always someone else's fault and never that of the government. This particular escapade was blamed on Turkey. It is possible that that is the case but I wouldn't bet the house on it. Surely a more 'interesting' question is why a country such as the UK is reliant on imports of essential supplies from Turkey and is not manufacturing them at home. Every morning on the Today program there is a stream of businesses trying to make equipment for the NHS but are getting no response from the powers that be. I

have a suggestion that might ease the problem. Why does the government not step in and run the breweries and let the breweries deal with the COVID-19 epidemic. There would be no negative effect from the breweries temporarily failing as there is a much reduced market for beer as all the pubs are shut (also there would be sobriety in government circles) and I suspect it is self-evident that the breweries would ameliorate the situation.

I must refrain from rants on this subject as it is a) too easy, b) unedifying and c) will result in me having an overproduction of bile. I put it down to a continuous feeling that today is Sunday, but Sunday when I was very young when on a Sunday you were not allowed to have fun or make noise or play or just be a child, and as I am still a child it is saddening.

Happy St Georges Day.
A red rose from the
garden of Mrs. T.



Friday April 24

Yesterday was a beautiful day, temperatures in the mid twenties, and virtually no breeze. However it did little to calm this uneasy feeling I have of being trapped inside a never ending Sunday - perhaps this lockdown will literally be a month of Sundays.

During the afternoon I stepped out of office for a few minutes to enjoy the sunshine and fill up on Vitamin D, when I returned I sensed that something was wrong. Some articles on one of the shelves were scattered on the floor. Had I been burgled? Was there an intruder

hiding behind my chair? No, a stupid female blackbird had flown into the room and was panicking, in fact she was so distressed that she left me a message on my seat. The more I tried to usher her towards the door the more flustered she became. So finally I opened the windows and left her to it. After about five minutes she managed to escape through the window, but not before she had left several other messages, including one on one of my computer screens, however in the name of decency, and to avoid humiliating the bird, I am not posting photos of her scatological behaviour, though the urge to name and shame was immense.

I spent a small part of yesterday's late morning sitting by the pond watching the life therein. The two main inhabitants, or at least those that you can easily see are the fish and the frogs. The fish are numerous, probably about one hundred, and vary in size from six inches down to a tenth of that. They are mainly goldfish and koi and originate from about a dozen with which we stocked the pond at the beginning of the century.

The frogs are more of a puzzle, mainly because they do not seem to breed in the pond. There are dozens of them and they also do not appear to mate and we can never find frog spawn, tadpoles or very small ones. However every year there plenty of them, they must arrive somehow but at the moment it is a complete mystery to us. In warm weather they enjoy climbing out of the pond onto the bank and sunbathing but at the slightest disturbance, in perfect unison, they leap back into the safety of the water.



In this picture there are four frogs; two in mid-air and two already having landed in the water after they were disturbed.

Saturday April 25

This morning follows the best day of the spring so far - weather-wise a glorious day, just like those days in the children's books we used to read in the fifties. Ah, Halcyon Days.

In an effort to ban the idea that everyday is a Sunday I have nominated Friday (or at least every other Friday) 'Take-Away Pizza Day' and so yesterday evening I combined the weekly shop at the supermarket with picking up a pizza from the café I pass on the way home. The pizza would not win gold medals but it was truly delicious, not just because it was well made but because it was food prepared by someone else and it broke the link to Sunday. I was expecting this morning that the scales on which I weigh myself everyday would give an unkind reading as not only did I eat all of my enormous pizza but a quarter of Mrs. T.'s as well and I accompanied this with large glass of vin rouge. Surprise, surprise, the reading showed a loss and that I am now at my lightest for this year. Obviously joy is a great user of calories. The trick now is to maintain this loss for a day or two and then push on again to lose some more. Though I am in no danger of becoming sylph-like I might get my number of chins into single figures.

Tomorrow, in theory, the black garlic I am trying to make should be ready. It will have passed two weeks in the rice cooker - if you don't believe me check on Google - and thus should be transformed into the soft sweet black substance that is black garlic. I am of the opinion it will probably need a few days more. One of the side effects of this activity is that the outbuilding in which the process is happening gives off the odour of raw garlic. There is no fear of vampires coming to stay chez Tacchi.



The Loch Ness Jaffa Cake.
Things we do when bored with too much time on our hands. (The best bit is you get to eat the middles.)

Sunday April 26

At last a real Sunday and in my spirit of differentiating the days from now on Sundays will be for relaxing and doing those things which I might consider frivolous if undertaken during the week. Gone is self-improvement and in is self-absorption.

I have just checked the black garlic and as I feared it is not yet ready. They have currently reached a shade of light brown and still taste slightly astringent. I suspect I did not allow enough moisture to be driven off so I have rearranged them in the rice cooker so they can dehydrate a little quicker.

The nesting box situation has changed little, the two occupied ones have a small amount of traffic as the eggs have not yet hatched, when they do I will be watching a flurry of activity as the birds strain to provide enough food to supply their clutch. The third box is still empty, it seems that duel between sparrow and bluetit has been declared an (un)amicable draw, a sort of demilitarised nest zone.

When I set out on my afternoon walk I am always surprised by the number of coleoptera I see upon the tar macadam. I initially thought that they just rested there to warm up but on closer inspection they are nearly always crossing the road. Why they should be doing so is a mystery to me, but the bigger mystery is how they know to cross orthogonally. Almost without fail they are taking the shortest route to reach the other side. It always amazes me.

If Samuel Johnson was alive and living around here at the moment he might well have said 'DIY is the last refuge of the lockdowned husband'. When I do my little tours of the neighbourhood I am constantly astounded by the sheer quantity of projects that have and still are being carried out. My favourite is the construction of a wooden hen house complete with the wooden ramp and is now the home to two chickens who are delivering about ten eggs a week between them.



House Sitter

This is my favourite photograph that I took some time ago of the third nesting box. How many of you have red squirrels in your garden?