



Kate's Chat

CONNECTING THROUGH THE COCOON



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The birds are singing louder than ever because we are finally listening

'Have you been listening to the birds?' Mam asked me this week. 'Listening?' I said 'sure you can't help it these days – the racket they are making!' The youngest, Tom, couldn't do his lessons this week because of the noise and I had to close the windows in my office for him.

They say that nature has come to life now that we are all in isolation, that there are more birds about than there have been for decades – or perhaps it's just the same birds but they are making more noise. Singing louder. My hubby reckons they have always been there but this is the first time we have stopped long enough to sit and listen.

He could be right. The radio and TV are full of rotten news these days so it's a pleasure to just open the windows and listen to nature doing it's thing.

Generations past knew how to appreciate and enjoy nature because you lived it. As a woman in my mid-fifties, I remember that outdoors was our playground. Nothing fun happened in the house – TV didn't start until late afternoon – if you had one! Nature was our playground, racing woodlice and digging for worms with the same enthusiasm kids have for computer games these days.

Maybe the loud birdsong is nature's way of calling to the young – of connecting our generations to the same call of nature. Reminding us we are all still under the same sky and maybe – just maybe – that wee robin outside your window was peeking in at someone you love earlier. I like to think so....

Kate x

P.S. If you have the radio on this Sunday Morning I might be reading on Sunday Miscellany, RTE Radio1 at 9am. Listen in – and you can download some of my past readings on their page on the RTE website.



Bird friends

We can all discover new friends in nature and bring the birds to our windowsill with food (works for me too!) Birds require high protein foods and should only be fed selected foods at this time of year.

Pinhead oatmeal, soaked sultanas, raisins and currants work (for human's too!) but avoid using peanuts, fat and bread at this time, since these can be harmful if adult birds feed them to their nestlings.

Getting some lovely feedback from you all and I love hearing from you all – staff and residents alike. You can write to me the old-fashioned way at Kate Kerrigan, Quay, Killala, Co. Mayo, Ireland or email me at

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The Starlings

The starlings finally flew their nest this week.

When we got up on Sunday morning they were gone. I miss them. They were with us last year and returned to set up their nest in the roof gable of a neighbour's outbuilding that overlooks our patio. First we noticed the parents going in and out with bits of twigs. They work cleanly and quickly. Then, once the eggs hatched all hell broke loose. The three young sat up on the wall facing our kitchen table, their mouths open as their parents supplied them with worms and insects with a far more impressive efficiency and speed than I provide my young with nuggets and chips. They would join us for every meal. As the weeks passed, the chicks grew, and began to fluff up and flutter their wings. 'Look - he's ready to fly!' I would shout across to the boys. Just in time for the bird to turn and cheekily cock his bottom in the air and squirt his business out onto the patio onto the newly built shelf wall where I arrange my pots.

'They have the patio destroyed,' my husband complained.

I think it's sort of hilarious. I love the fact that our two families can live in such close proximity to one another. We provide them with peace and quiet to feed their young. The parents gave me a couple of weeks warning to move my pots before their children began defecating with gusto. They won't come out when they can hear us out on the patio, and if we go anywhere near the nest, for instance to hang wire to train clematis up the wall, or clear out the guttering - there is a chance that the adults will take fright and abandon their young. And so we accommodate them. Recently, our local tame ducks, who I adore, were pottering hilariously in our garden last week. I ran them off because I sensed they were there to bully the starlings.

They are welcome back now, because the starlings have flown. I was disappointed that they left without saying goodbye.

As I drove to get the Sunday papers from the garage I passed a group of birdwatchers lined up along the wall of the holiday cottages car park at the end of Quay Road, Killala. I knew they were birdwatchers because they had binoculars and one or two of them wore decorative woolly hats and they were taking

photographs. I kind of wanted to get out of the car and take a picture of them, they looked so cheery and - well - so very like bird-watchers that I felt a bit like watching them - watching the birds or doing whatever it is that birdwatchers do. It is so very soothing, I think, to have an outdoor pursuit that largely involves 'observing' as opposing to running about and getting all worked up. This group were down for a weekend staying in the Old Deanery Cottages and I thought to myself, what a fantastic way to spend a weekend. The Old Deanery does a great line in hobby holidays. Apart from the chirpy self-caterers that potter up and down outside our house, they have groups of bikers, and yoga enthusiasts and even creative writers - and as I stopped the car on the corner and watched the watchers watching I realised that I need a hobby. Firstly because my job - 'creative writing' used to be my hobby but now it's my job. Before I got published, I went on creative-writing holidays and found them gloriously relaxing. Now that I write all day every day - I need to find some other way to relax.

When I got home I went to the games cupboard and puled out the binoculars and sat on my doorstep or a few minutes and watched the sea birds, cormorants and seagulls, out on the bay. I had a look at the birdwatchers too.

All my life, I have been afraid to simply sit and watch. Afraid that if I got off the merry-go-round and just sat and 'observed' I would be unable to get up again. I might find myself still sitting on a wall, five years later - looking out to sea in a woolly bobble hat.

In recent times I've come to feel that none of us spend nearly enough time just sitting about doing 'nothing'. If I have an ambition, now, for my middle age, it is to do more of that. To let the dishes pile up, and let go of foolish responsibilities, like keeping the kitchen counter wiped and the cutlery drawer tidy, so that I can sit at my kitchen table and watch starlings poo all over my patio.

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