



This week's blog was going to be a report from the island of Corfu, which was home to one of the founders of modern species conservation, Gerald Durrell. It is also home to the Durrell School, which hosts regular seminars and residencies that have been led in the past by such distinguished environmental campaigners as David Bellamy. Climate change has been noticeable over the past decade or so in the changes to the ferocity of the mosquitoes on the island. My wife has twice had to call on medical treatment because of bites that have become infected. I'm not usually targeted because of my complexion; this year was different. In vain do I search the environment directory for a solution.

However, news hinted at during my two-week vacation on the island, a favourite haunt, and revealed on the journey home has overtaken other environment news stories. It's the weather, again. I prefer to be incommunicado while I'm away, having other issues to distract me, so the only news I heard was from two Geordie fellow sun-worshippers, who had word of flooding in Newcastle due to the 'localised' remnant of a tropical storm. There was a picture of the Tyne Bridge being struck by lightning.

When we remarked to the taxi driver on the way home that we had heard that story, he stunned us by pointing out that our little Pennine town had also been under three feet of water (about a metre to the non-middle aged). Neighbouring towns had suffered similar fates, as had Hebden Bridge, which is today being visited by Prince Charles.

On arriving home we were informed the flooding had been going on 'all week' and was set to continue. The following day the rain stopped for a full two hours, during which half of my neighbours mowed their lawns!

Last month was, needless to state, the wettest June since records began in 1910. The BBC, as

ever in these situations, reported that a month's rain is expected in 24 hours. It never says which month. We are once more indebted to Rhod Gilbert for summing up the whole picture: "...in The Bible God made it rain for forty days and forty nights – that's still the best summer I remember!"

The wet weather experienced over the past couple of months (for once, April was relatively dry and warm here in the North West, even though it wasn't elsewhere) is irksome for us humans, but catastrophic for birds, for it has, literally, put a damper on the breeding season. Writing in *The Independent*, Michael McCarthy says it's "rain stopped play", with the breeding season being rained off, "like a cricket match is rained off".

He quotes Dr Dave Leech of the British Trust for Ornithology as saying: "This has been the worst breeding season I have ever experienced in my life."

The same story is true for flying insects, on which many birds feed and which are also having a "calamitous year".

He does blot his copy book, however, when he points out that, while the breeding season last for 90 days, a cricket match only lasts for one. Oh dear!

Chris Stokes