

A Way of Noticing

What do thorny hedgerows, a narrow concrete track that snakes through arable fields, over-sized satellite dishes, a solar farm, and crane-scattered skyline views of Cambridge have in common? They are all features of my regular walk. But here I observe the flux of nature too. In his poem, *Afterwards*, Thomas Hardy imagines himself described as someone who would “notice such things,” referring to his deep familiarity with his rural surroundings. My walk is an excellent way of noticing.

It's summer. Yellowhammers call from hedges and wires at regular intervals on my route. Babbling swallows, which nest in some nearby stables, pass overhead. I catch a glimpse of a young hare lolloping across the track ahead of me before merging into the long grasses of the verge. Either side there are the honey hues of sun-dried wheat and barley fields, combine-ready. I will miss the colour when the harvesters have been. But there's reassurance in the changes of the seasons.

The swallows leave but the redwings and fieldfares arrive to feed on the hedges' scarlet fruits. Parties of long-tailed tits entertain with acrobatic appearances. Winter can bring hoar frosted decoration, dew-defined spider webs or a shimmering flock of golden plovers rising from a bare field. Then there's the delight of spotting the first whitethroats and blackthorn blossom in spring and the yellowhammers returning to their singing spots. My walk is a way to appreciate the detail and the transformations. My walk is a way to notice such things.