

## Country diary: these trees have become part of the family

18 May 2020



I know these two well. There they stand, side by side, rain or shine – stoic through the seasons, resolutely inseparable. We share a garden and, as I would any elderly couple, I check on them, watch them for change – and trouble myself by imagining what life would be like if we lost them.

Trees do that when you have them close. They become a part of your family. Beneath the horse chestnut, mine have camped, collected conkers, made leaf piles tall enough to disappear into. We've hugged it, climbed it, studied it, sometimes worriedly. I breathe a sigh of relief when the horse chestnut bursts into leaf every March, afflicted as it is with a leaf-mining moth – nothing more serious, not yet – that turns its leaves brown earlier every year.

As I stand now on this windy evening, the grass for 20 metres around it is scattered with its blossom, intricately ornate up close, stood like perky pink arrows up in its canopy. Those, too, have come early.

The sycamore next to the chestnut is slighter. I pull a leaf down and examine it. Each one is a little world of its own. Red pimples on this one suggest gall mites. I turn it over and there are aphids, the shape of tiny translucent pumpkin seeds, a stilt-walking greenfly and a fine white fur, which is the tree's reaction to the mites. The flowers are clusters of spread hands, sticky and – with a close look – there's the embryonic "helicopter" seed, pea-green, the size of a rice grain and the shape of a wing nut. I look up and imagine all this, thousands of times over.

I'm out here, in the shadow of the new leaves, to feel the energy of the wind working the tree. Around me, the branches drape like a cloak. Above, the trees are so heavy over me, yet weightless. It's inexplicably heart-quickenning.

But it's the union of these trees I love most. During the winter they are a scrabble of hard branches, dark shapes with no identity. But when they are in leaf, their individuality emerges. Their character. I see it most in the line, that unique junction they share, where every spring, their canopies meet and interlock. In times of enforced distance, it's a beautiful thing.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/18/country-diary-these-trees-have-become-part-of-the-family>