

An uneasy Springtime

As I poke my head out from the long hibernation of winter I just don't know what to expect. None of us do. Will the vaccine win the race against the virus?

When will life get back to normal ? Will there be a new normal?

We've just been allowed to return to work in my local nature reserve in the shadow of Arthur's Seat. Just four volunteers at a time, socially distanced of course. But even here among the trees, ponds and reed beds, the spring seems hesitant. Herons sit cautiously on their nests high in the trees. Smaller birds twitter uneasily, carrying twigs to their nests. The geese and swans on the loch argue loudly among themselves. Buds and flowers are only slowly unfurling.

It's been a windy and wet March and in February we had a visit from another Beast from the East when Scotland recorded its lowest temperature for a decade (-23 C). So although we've been urged to take lots of outside physical exercise, it's often been icy, cold and miserable.

Then, being confined to our local district, popular places for walking have been crowded. Try finding a parking place at Bonaly, or Cramond, or Hillend, or Flotterstone. Try walking along the promenade at Portobello or cycling or running along the canal path or the Water of Leith. Try booking a slot at the Botanic Gardens.

We've all learnt to queue respectfully outside coffee take-

always, go to the supermarket when it's not too crowded, never to leave home without a mask in your pocket. And, the hardest of all, to live and work at a social distance.

There's a growing sense of weariness after this dreadful winter. Some are just plain tired, like NHS staff, and some are worn down by seeing their jobs and businesses disappearing down the Covid black hole. School pupils and students have felt abandoned. And in January and February we watched with horror as the case numbers, hospital admissions and death figures soared for a second time (50- 70 a day at times).

We expected a rise after the Christmas "amnesty" and the return of primary school pupils but nothing like this. We then hoped the vaccination programme would tame the virus but alas it mutated into a yet more virulent form. Now, at last, we are hoping to come out of Lockdown over the next few weeks.

But we emerge into a still uncertain world. Covid may yet have surprises in store. The economy may not spring back as quickly as we imagine and it may be in a different form – more on-line, more working from home, more unequal. We don't quite know what form our summer holidays will take. And there's the small matter of an election campaign when, between now and May 6th, we will be thinking about what kind of country we want to live in.

It's all so unsettling. It might be better to be living in less interesting times.

