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After a long winter, April is always uplifting. Where I walk the dogs, I counted more than 30 birds on the wires last autumn before their winter migration to Africa. A few days ago, only five had returned. The cuckoo is another sound of summer, but they were later this year and I haven't heard them as much as usual. Fewer migrants seem to make it back these days and I wonder whether their route takes them over Malta.

On 7 May, UK MPs debated the illegal shooting of spring migrating birds by Maltese hunters. This was a direct result of Chris Packham's "Malta Massacre on Migration" campaign (www.chrispackham.co.uk) against illegal bird hunting and trapping.

Packham's video diaries present a harrowing localised view, reflecting a much wider assault on our environment. Honeybee populations devastated by colony collapse disorder linked to neonicotinoid pesticides, development destroying ancient woodland and heritage trees succumbing to the axe.

When assessing historic buildings, English Heritage places great importance on the setting because the surroundings directly affect the quality of the asset. In planning, that translates to the setting of listed buildings being a material consideration.

This principle extends to the natural environment – the value of individual trees in ancient woodland is enhanced by the ecosystem that surrounds them. Putting those trees in a museum may look the same but the context has been stripped away.

Killing birds, poisoning bees, destroying ancient woodland and felling veteran trees all matter because these natural assets add depth to the setting in which people live.

Through the internet, at least we now know about the threat to our natural assets, but people still have to act to make a difference. Otherwise, the only way the next generation will ever experience them is stuffed in the Bee, Bird & Tree Museum.

