

Country Notes for June 2016

Nearly every year I am joined in my garden by at least one fabulous looking Hummingbird. They fly from flower to flower collecting nectar; favouring valerian, tobacco plants, verbena and buddleia. Sometimes they move so fast that it is almost impossible to see where they have flown to until there are seen again in another part of the garden. Their wings are a blur as they move so fast - and I for one get very excited when I see one! Their presence reminds one of hotter places and indeed that is where they come from.

However these are not birds - even though at first glance that is what they appear to be. These are moths - Hummingbird Hawk Moths to be precise. They migrate from the Mediterranean to join us in small numbers each year. The earliest I have ever seen one in my garden is 7th June 2012 and they can be seen right through the summer and sometimes into the autumn, although the latest I have seen one in my garden was 13th September 2009.

The Hummingbird Hawk Moth has greyish brown wings and the lower part of the body is chequered black and white. Although considered to be a migrant they do hibernate, but it is not clear whether they do so regularly in this country. The caterpillars feed on Lady's Bedstraw among others.

There only two other moths which can be confused with the Hummingbird Hawk - the Broad Bordered Bee Hawk and the Narrow Bordered Bee Hawk, but identification is fairly conclusive as both have clear wings like a bee.

Do keep an eye out for these beautiful creatures - especially if this summer turns out to be a warm one. I would be interested to hear how many people see one!

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