

## Country Notes for July 2019

July - and high summer. How wonderful! Hopefully, there are days to come of sunshine and warmth, so that we can all venture outside and enjoy the countryside. One of the truly great joys of summer is witnessing clouds of butterflies rising into the air as we make our way through a meadow full of flowers and tall grass.

Two of the real butterflies of high summer are the meadow brown and the gatekeeper. Last summer there were lots to be seen, but it is possible that their breeding cycle was interrupted by the very hot weather. The caterpillars of both feed on grass and, by the time they needed it, a lot of the grass was very dry indeed.

Both of these butterflies appear to be brown in flight and they have a languid and rather floppy flight pattern as they dance over the tops of the meadow grass. When they land and open their wings, however, there is a difference to be seen. Firstly, the gatekeepers are smaller. Secondly, although they are essentially brown, they display orange markings on each of their four wings. The meadow browns are larger and only have orange markings on their forewings, although some females do display a very small patch of orange on their back wings.

As I write this article in mid-June on a rainy and rather miserable day, it is sobering to reflect that this year has been very varied for our butterflies so far. Let's hope that July will find our lanes and meadows alive with not just meadow browns and gatekeepers, but lots of other butterflies as well.

Andrew G Snowdon