

Country Notes for September 2019

At the time of writing in mid-September we are in the midst of a very typical, and glorious, English summer, with largely warm weather and days of at least partial sunshine. There has been lots to see in the fields, woods, lanes and gardens of our villages - and these have included some records of snakes being seen.

In our villages the most likely 'snake' to be seen is the slowworm, which is of course not a snake at all, but a legless lizard. I have certainly seen them recently on the Hollingbourne Meadows Trust land. At one time they used to frequent my garden - and what a pleasure they were to have around, as they enjoy eating all the pests that my plants don't like! These legless lizards are essentially mid brown all over but with a few darker markings. They seldom grow to more than a foot in length and are completely harmless.

In our fields and meadows by far the most likely real snake to be seen is the grass snake. These are not venomous at all and can grow to quite a length. They are truly beautiful in appearance - essentially green in colour, with a yellow and black collar and darker markings in small blotches over the body. They are reasonably common in meadowland, especially if there are damp spots nearby. They are good swimmers too! Not so long ago I saw a very large one crossing a path on the Meadows Trust - and I don't know who was more surprised, the snake or Bracken my spaniel, who decided the best course of action was to jump over it!

Britain's only venomous snake is the adder, although having said that, I am told that more people die in the UK each year from bee stings than adder bites. They will certainly do everything they can to get away from you and will only bite if they feel threatened. Even if they do bite a human, there is adequate time for most people to get to a hospital for treatment. Adders are essentially grey with a very conspicuous black V marking down the whole length of their body. The most likely place to see them is on our chalk downland where there is baked open land for them to sunbathe on.

As September draws to a close all three of these will start to think about hibernating in readiness for the colder weather to come.

In the meantime there is still lots for us to enjoy as summer slips into autumn in the latter part of this month.

Andrew G Snowdon