

Country Notes for August 2023

I love my food, but eating your own words can often be a rather unpleasant sensation. However this is one of those occasions when I am delighted to do so! Recently in Country Notes I expressed a worry that the heatwave of last summer would have had a disastrous effect on our summer butterfly population owing to the fact that so many of the food plants required by their caterpillars had dried up or died just when it was most needed. I am delighted to say that this has not been the case for many of our most loved species.

In the Meadows there has been an absolute explosion in the number of meadow brown butterflies, whose caterpillars feed on grass. Over the past few years their numbers seem to have dwindled but this year there have been impressive numbers. My two assistants, Bracken and Tilly the springer spaniels, have helped me no end by charging through the grass and sending up the meadow browns resting on the grass stems! This has enabled me to see exactly how many there are, even in quite a small area. There have also been very good numbers of marbled whites, one of my favourite butterflies and another which relies on grass as a food plant for its caterpillars. At the time of writing, gatekeepers, which look like small meadow browns, have just started to appear and I am feeling confident that they too will shortly be demonstrating good numbers.

In the last few days I have also seen good numbers of red admirals and painted ladies and welcomed the first hummingbird hawkmoth of the year into my garden, the latter feeding on my lavender. I have also seen a white admiral in one of its usual localities in our villages. On the minus side I have seen very few blues and skippers apart from the holly blues which appeared, as usual, much earlier in the year. However there is still time.

My buddleia has just started to flower and I am looking forward to seeing how many butterflies it attracts to my garden. This summer seems, recently at least, to be much more like our usual English summers with sunny days followed by showery ones. I am hopeful that this will result in even better numbers of butterflies next year.

Here's hoping!

Andrew G Snowdon