

Country Notes for August 2026

As I write this in the midst of a prolonged heatwave, with temperatures that have sometimes been quite challenging, it is good to report that it has, so far, been quite a good year for butterflies. There are good numbers of meadow browns, gatekeepers and marbled whites, to name just a few. There have also been plenty of sightings of day flying moths, including burnets and cinnabars.

The most exciting of the day flying moths however is the hummingbird hawk moth. I have already had several visits in my garden where they seem to favour the lavender, and there have been plenty of other reports in the area. These moths are extraordinary and it is no surprise that some people really do think that they have spotted a hummingbird when they see them.

They hover in front of the flower on which they are feeding with wing beats between 70 and 85 times a second, which is quite extraordinary! Whilst doing so their long proboscis feels inside each flower to collect the nectar. They move amazingly fast and quite suddenly and when they fly off they are gone in a flash.

I always get very excited when I see one in my garden, especially if it is the first one of the year. They come from southern Europe and are particularly noticeable in warm summers when the air flow is from the south. However, with climate change there is some evidence that they are breeding here and overwintering. The numbers being seen certainly seem to back this up.

They are essentially various shades of brown but with a distinctive black and white abdomen. Their hind wings also provide a flash of orange.

If you see something whizz into your garden and then hover in front of nectar rich flowers it will undoubtedly be a hummingbird hawk moth!

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