

Country Notes for September 2016

At the time of writing we seem to be having a proper summer at last - and for me one of the glories of summer is seeing clouds of butterflies in our gardens and fields. Unfortunately the very cold spring and early part of summer seems to have knocked the number of butterflies and I have seen neither the quantity or the variety that one might normally hope for.

Hopefully however, as August drifts into September and the last few weeks of summer, we might see more of the migratory butterflies such as Red Admirals and Painted Ladies. These butterflies come to us from Africa and the southern Mediterranean and there is generally an earlier invasion, leading to them breeding, with the second wave being bred in this country. Red Admirals arrived as usual, although perhaps not in quite the usual numbers but Painted Ladies have been a rare sight indeed. They are certainly near by, as a few days ago I noticed lots of Red Admirals and some Painted Ladies on Guernsey where the buddlejas were smothered - in particular with Red Admirals. Hopefully they will continue north over the coming days.

Red Admirals are quite large and essentially black and dark brown but with significant areas of red on their wings, with some white on the tips of their fore wings. Painted Ladies are a similar size with black and white markings, although they are mainly an orange brown colour.

Some years they both invade in huge numbers and in 2009 11 million Painted Ladies were estimated to have visited our shores, and I remember seeing several flying around the cairn at the top of one of Scotland's higher mountains as early as late May. This was such a remarkable sight that my record made it into the Butterfly Conservation Society's magazine *Atropos*!

Let's hope that the burst of summer that we are experiencing at the time of writing will lead to a good period for breeding and that next year butterfly numbers will be higher again.

Andrew Snowdon