

## Country Notes for July 2017

At the time of writing this has been a dismal year for butterflies. There have been a few exceptions. There were quite a few orange tips earlier in the spring and there were some red admirals and peacocks which had overwintered. There were also a few brimstones, butterflies which are never to be seen in great numbers, even in good years. More recently I have only just seen my first holly blue and there have been relatively few 'white' butterflies – small whites, large whites and green veined whites.

The reason is not hard to discover. Last year the spring and early summer was cold and wet, only improving in the second week of July. As a result breeding was disrupted for many of our butterflies and even if eggs were laid or caterpillars hatched, they were washed away or perished in the cold. We are now reaping the result of this.

Happily in the last few days I have seen some meadow browns, speckled woods and tortoiseshells in the village so hopefully they bred late enough not to be affected by last years' weather. Speckled woods are one of my favourite butterflies, dark brown and covered on all wings with cream spots. Tortoiseshells are also good to see, as a few years ago their numbers plummeted to a critical level in the south east and their numbers have been increasing again in recent years. Their underwings are various shades of brown and their upper sides are orange with black and white markings. For me they have always been a real sign of summer.

Clearly the southerly airstream that we have experienced recently has started to bring in some of the migrant butterflies as I have already seen, in early June, my first painted lady, which is a long distance migrant from southern Europe and North Africa.

Let's hope that the weather continues to be good and that those butterflies we do have are able to breed successfully, so that in the coming months we see numbers rising again. It really wouldn't be an English summer without lots of butterflies flying around in our countryside!

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