

Country Notes for April 2018

One of the great delights of the arrival of spring and the wonderful month of April is that we begin to see butterflies in our gardens and countryside again. Some years they may be seen as early as February, but this year the cold and wet weather means that very few will have been seen much before the turn on the month.

I always enjoy the speculation over which will be first. Often it is the Peacock butterfly with its tell tale 'eyes' on each of its four wings. Completely unmistakable and an absolute joy to see! The first ones will have overwintered somewhere dry and secluded and they always seem to be searching for a warm spot where they can get the cold of winter out of their systems. Competing for first place are Red Admirals and Small Tortoiseshells, both of which also overwinter. Red Admirals are roughly the same size as Peacocks but half of their open wings are a rich chocolate brown with red and white striping. Small Tortoiseshells have a significant amount of orange on their wings and a beautiful border of small blue spots to each of their four wings. They are a little smaller than the other two.

The other possible contender for first butterfly is the Brimstone. They are fairly large and the males are unmistakable, as they are a wonderful deep powdery yellow all over. The females are slightly more difficult to identify as they are cream in colour and therefore frequently mistaken for members of the 'white' family of butterflies.

Other early arrivals likely to be seen in April are Orange Tips and Holly Blues. The Holly Blues are a much more powdery blue in appearance than the other members of the 'blue' family and are also much more likely to be seen in our gardens, perhaps searching for holly bushes on which to lay their eggs. Female Orange Tips are easily mistaken for members of the 'white' family, although the males display the orange tips on each of their forewings which give them their name.

Whichever butterfly you see first, they guaranteed to gladden the heart as we move further into the glories of spring.

Andrew Snowdon