

Country Notes for August 2020

August is the holiday month and I am sure that for many at this time of year memories of childhood come flooding back. These memories are frequently of sun drenched days, with less clement days carefully filed away at the back of our minds and largely forgotten.

Certainly for many of us they will be of exploring meadows and hedgerows looking for anything and everything! One very clear memory for me, as I am sure it is for many, is of walking through meadows with grasshoppers calling cheerfully and jumping onto arms and legs as we waded through the long grass. Sadly that seems to be something that is largely missing these days. There are grasshoppers – but they are few and far between. Certainly the chirps and ticks that seemed such a familiar part of the meadow landscape are seldom heard nowadays.

There are three types of grasshopper that are most likely to be seen in southern meadows. They are the Common Green Grasshopper, Meadow Grasshopper and the Field Grasshopper. To the expert eye they can be identified apart – but I have to say that for me I find identification quite difficult as the differences are really quite subtle.

There are also crickets, which make much more noise, and can be confused with grasshoppers. These are fairly easy to tell from grasshoppers however, as they have long, and sometimes very long, antennae. Most likely to be seen are the Dark Bush Cricket, Roesel's Bush Cricket and the Speckled Bush Cricket. Just like the grasshoppers, identification is quite hard as the differences are slight.

The other insect of the meadows which sticks in my memory from childhood explorations is the bloodsucker. They provoked a feeling of excitement to a child as they seemed rather mysterious and scary. It was a shame to discover later on however that the bloodsucker is actually the Common Red Soldier Beetle and is only dangerous if you are an aphid! At the time of writing in the second week of July there do seem to be some of these around already, which is encouraging to see.

Throughout the month of August I shall continue to keep a sharp eye out for these insects in the hope that they do better than has seemed to be the case in recent years.

Here's hoping!

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