

Country Notes for June 2021

What a cold and damp spring we have endured this year. This has been such a change from the weather we experienced last spring, and in fact for several springs recently. At the beginning of May very few trees had any leaves and the colder weather has meant that many plants have kept their flowers for much longer than has recently been the case. Some daffodils in my garden were only starting to open up in mid May and the bluebells were very slow to reach full flower. Hawthorn flowers, often known as 'may' flowers, did not really open fully until the beginning of June and the same can also be said of cow parsley.

Despite a promising start in late March, butterflies have been slow to appear, although there did seem to be a lot of orange tips and brimstones when the sun did appear. I have also already seen two painted ladies which migrate from Africa and southern Europe, plus an exceptionally early Hummingbird Hawk moth. These do not usually appear until much later, and in some years, hardly at all.

One butterfly in particular, however, has taken full advantage of the sunnier and warmer weather of recent days. This is the, often overlooked, small heath. These small butterflies have suddenly appeared in good numbers in the meadows of the Hollingbourne Meadows Trust – and in particular in the meadow known as Hasteds Meadow. They stay close to the ground and flutter amongst the grasses which will later provide food for their caterpillars. In flight they appear to be chestnut orange. However, when they settle, they rarely do so with their wings open and their lower outer wings show as brown. Their outer forewings, which are mainly orange, show a small black spot at the top.

Do have a look for them as you walk the meadows of our villages over the next few weeks. They are small but very beautiful!

Andrew G Snowdon