



### Insects Galore

Part of being a monk is learning to live fully in one place without the opportunity or the desire to wander about all over the country. This can, at first, be quite frustrating, particularly when one reads, or hears, about rare birds turning up in one's old haunts. But staying in one place does have its advantages, especially when that place is Turvey.

The first highlight of the year with regard to insects was watching the dragonflies emerging from one of our ponds. The earliest to appear this year has the grand title "the Broad-bodied Libellula". The first of these were noted on the 27th May still clinging to the sweet-grass rising from the pond and with their freshly-cast skins nearby. They were still there on the 29th when the sun at last appeared and they were able to complete their transformation. As the sun struck each insect it began to move its head, climb a little higher and to give its eyes a quick rub - for all the world like waking from a deep sleep. The first to fly did so within twenty minutes and was off across the garden almost immediately, the next took a little longer and needed a few rests on the way, the last waited yet another day and finally flew on the 30th May. Another was later found with its wings crumpled in a half-open position and unfortunately remained like this until eventually dying, perhaps it had been let down by the sun whilst in the process of extending its wings and drying them.

There were still dragonflies to be seen in late October, these being mainly the red-bodied Common Sympetrum, pairs of which were attempting to lay eggs on the black plastic sheeting in the nuns' vegetable garden on the 10th October!

The mild weather in late autumn was also responsible for several late insect sightings: there was a Hornet on the 16th October and a Comma butterfly on the 28th, whilst November produced a queen wasp looking for a wintering site on the 12th and Dark Bush Crickets still chirping away on the 17th. Hornets have been unusually frequent this summer, up to three being seen at one time feeding on rotting apples and pears. This may be part of a general extension of their range northwards.

Most insects will perish in the first frosts of winter but some, of course have to survive, whether as eggs, pupae or adults, until



the following spring. The ladybirds pass the winter as adults and it was interesting to discover in September that 2-spot ladybirds favoured the tops of the apple trees while the 7-spot ladybirds were to be found lower down. Many of the latter were later found clustered together on the tops of stinging nettles - they were still there in mid-November and it will be interesting to see whether they will make it through the winter.

Other insect highlights included watching a small species of bee robbing the comfrey of its nectar by entering the flower through a hole at the base of the petals rather than through the 'front-door', and watching aphids being milked of their honeydew by ants.

Br. John

