



Phew - What a scorcher!

It may be wise for us to put on hats, or to cower indoors, but for the butterflies, and butterfly-watchers, it has been a marvellous summer - perhaps the best since 1976. The peak period in Turvey seemed to be around the end of July when over twenty species were on the wing. These included several species near the end of their tether - such as ringlet and the three species of skippers, and several appearing now in large numbers after a poor start - such as peacocks, small tortoiseshell, red admirals and common blues.

Mixed in with these regulars were a few red-letter specialities; including painted ladies, brown argus and holly blues. One or two painted ladies are seen in most years but their appearance is never certain because they come to us from as far away as North Africa. They breed here but the young migrate southward in the late summer as they cannot survive our winters. The brown argus, despite its name, is a member of the blue family which has been expanding its range northwards recently and the two so far this year are the first I've seen near Turvey. The holly blues made a welcome return after a two year absence. They were prolific in 1992 but whenever they increase a certain parasitic wasp increases also and so they go through a cycle of ups and downs. Hopefully the two seen this year will signal an upsurge in 1996, they are a delight to have in the garden being a pale sky-blue above and almost white below.

Surpassing even these red letter specialities, however, was the discovery of a colony of white-letter hairstreaks in late July. These derive their name from the thin white W on their underwing. This is a species which depends on elm trees for survival and, with the loss of so many elms through Dutch-elm disease, there were fears that it might become endangered. It seems to be doing well, however, on the many young elms which keep springing up in our hedgerows despite periodic dying back when the disease gets a hold once more.

As well as migrant butterflies, such as the red admiral and painted lady, we are also visited by several species of moth from abroad. Silver-Y moths were abundant in early August and a humming-bird hawk moth paid us a visit on the 6th. Both species originate from Southern Europe and fly in the daytime. The humming-bird hawk moth behaves just as its name suggests, hovering like a tiny bird before a flower while probing it with its lengthy tongue. This one had to be rescued from a spider's web, other comrades were less fortunate. One green-veined white was watched being nimbly wrapped up in "silk" by a small spider, while last year I witnessed a struggling moth having its wings bitten off and its "fur" removed by a wasp before being carried off as a pathetic pink "grub".

So much for the peace and quiet of a monastery garden!

Br. John

