



ALL CHANGE

Pinning down the exact moment when summer gives way to autumn seems to have been less difficult than usual this year. All of a sudden, there it was - a fresh clear morning after a couple of weeks of rain and doggedly-dull days, and no going back, the contrast all the more marked because of the terrifically hot spell at the end of July. In the past we've highlighted particular aspects of animal or bird behaviour to demarcate the change, but this year the weather seems to have said it all, and early too. In late July one could imagine that the heat would go on forever, this was high summer indeed, but now there is no doubt that summer has become mortal and, whether or not a hot spell returns, it has had its day.

W.H. Hudson wrote of the suddenness of this change one hundred years ago on the South Downs, but there he located the change as most obvious in September when the bleakness of the open downs made it already seem like December. The particular aspect of animal life which served to emphasise this change was the sudden drop in variety and number of insects,

"but a few days ago you marvel in a world teeming with millions of brilliant active beings, so numerous and small and swift in their motions as to be 'seen rather than distinguished,'

(Nature in Downland)

but now it is the solitary insect that catches the eye. Something of this still holds true for us, though one might substitute "hundreds" for "millions" and indeed "tens" of butterflies is good going today. But now, as for Hudson, it is that solitary Red Admiral or Dark Bush Cricket that rivets the attention, and gives an equal if a different sort of pleasure from seeing and hearing insects "by the million". Hudson captures this feeling very well when he writes that,

"Those who walk on the downs at this season, where they are highest and treeless, will sometimes feel that the loss of all that life and colour that made the summer so much to them is in some respects a gain. The vision that a little time ago roamed bee-like above the surface from bloom to bloom, ever finding and pausing to contemplate some fresh object of beauty or interest, is now free to take longer flights."

It was certainly a relief to me to find the moth-trap almost empty of moths the other day - a manageable thirty of some twenty different species as opposed to the five hundred plus of some fifty species a few weeks before. This gave me the chance to sort out some of the Rustics including Common, Square-spot and Six-striped. I love moths, but you can have too much of a good thing!

Br. John