

Insects Galore 2

The first general account of insects in these columns was way back in November 1994, so here's an update on insects as a sign of spring and portent of summer – of the quickening of the year, formerly seen by many perhaps as a nuisance to be endured or eradicated but now seen to be a treasure and mark of a healthy countryside – needed by birds and flowers and us alike.

Winter is still largely marked by an absence of insects. They're there of course but in less visible forms: as eggs or larvae or nymphs or hidden adults hibernating. But even on New Years Day adult insects will be abroad. The first noticed here was typically a male Winter Moth drawn to one of the lights, and this soon followed by a series of moths, all with wingless or flightless females: the Mottled Umber, the Pale Brindled Beauty and the Dotted Border. The females climb trees instead while the males track them down by scent. Another moth, the



Herald, spent several weeks on our chapel wall, inside not out, hibernating in a full adult state. And soon afterwards the first of the hibernating butterflies began to appear: a Peacock on 15/2, followed by a male Brimstone on 20/2, a Comma on 9/3 and the first Small Tortiseshell and Small White on 13/3. Bees were also about in February

seeking early blossom such as Crocus and Oregon Grape. We have a resident hive in one of our chimneys which provided some excitement on 25th May when a swarm departed the hive and spent the night at the top of a Field Maple in our inner courtyard. We left it well alone and saw it depart in a swirling mass the following day at high noon. Another passed over on 2nd June, heard before seen, and sending me scurrying out of the way. The first White-tailed Bumblebee was active on 4/3, and soon joined by other queens prospecting for nest sites. Queen wasps and Hornets were also about, and the bee look-a-like, the Beefly, with its furry body and long dagger-like proboscis.

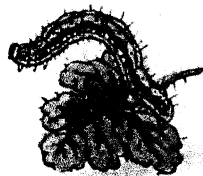
The fly is actually a parasite on bees and wasps, neatly dropping eggs into their nests which then hatch and live off the grubs of the bees and wasps. Moths continue apace with 114 species counted by 3rd June including several day-flying species such as the Silver-ground Carpet, the

Cinnabar, the Yellow Shell and the Mother Shipton. The last with a face said to resemble an old woman who lived in a cave in Yorkshire and was famously ugly.

Butterflies now number some 16 species and the first of the dragonflies have been on the wing since 14th

May. Typically, the Large Red Damselfly was the first followed by the diminutive Azure damselfly and the

vividly marked Banded Demoiselle. On 27th May the first of the larger dragonflies appeared, a female Broad-bodied Libellula, the same day as noted in 1994. It's expended larval case or exuvia was still attached ghost-like to a rising leaf in the Easter Garden pond.



And so the list goes on with each day producing something new: a brilliant orange Tawny Mining Bee in marked contrast to the green of the Box hedge; tiny China Mark Moths which have spent their larval stage underwater, the males now brilliant white with wings edged black patrolling the pond at dusk; an unusual

Longhorn beetle patterned red, white and black, *Anaglyptus mysticus* the book tells me; Cockchafers bumbling around in the moth-trap and, as the weather warms up and the wind shifts to the south, the first of the migrant moths and butterflies from Spain and France such as Silver-Y and Painted Lady, and perhaps Diamond-back moths after our cabbages. And after these, in both senses, the Swallows, and Martins and the Swifts and the bats. And after them, and the insects too, the Hobbies – glorious harbingers of hot summer days.

Br. John