

Consider the butterflies of the field

Roy Chambers

AND THE MOTHS, too! When I see newspaper photographs of conservation projects with well-meaning people hacking away at hawthorn, brambles and stinging nettles, shudders go down my spine. Perhaps they know what they are doing, but such plants are hosts to some of our most attractive insects and a worrying feature about conservation is that many of the participants seem to become engrossed in a specialist area, to the detriment of the whole.

Tree lovers worship trees in any shape or form and when it comes to replacement, rarely stop to consider whether the tree or trees were right in that position originally. Flower people only have eyes for flowers and, normally, bird enthusiasts trample around in the anxiety of their "twitching". A great pity!

Out of this, the least cared for are the insects which have already suffered more than most through "developments", intensive farming and chemicals. Some insects may hold little attraction for the average person but this cannot be said of butterflies and moths; they are the fluttering jewels of the countryside. Yes, many moths are

brightly coloured too, and day-flying, not drab, nocturnal beasts who give your fur coat a short- back-and-sides whilst it is hanging in your wardrobe, as some people seem to think.

We are fortunate because our part of England, in spite of set-backs, is still home to a good variety of butterflies and moths. Out of the seventy different species of butterfly, including rare visitors, recognised in

the British Isles, about forty-three can be seen around East Kent. I'm not sure about the moth numbers; there are over 2,000 varieties in the country, including micro-lepidoptera (butterflies and moths), and Kent has a good population. Whilst some butterflies have become rarer a number have increased their range in the last



1 Painted Lady 2 Red Admiral

few years, aided by the reduced use of some insecticides, the mild winters and hot summers. Two members of the Brown family, the Satyridæ, whose caterpillars feed on grass, are now to be found commonly in the Dover area when previously their limits were the Weald and Canterbury. The two are the Speckled Wood, the butterfly of dappled sunlight with its blotched brown and yellow wings and the Gatekeeper, a brown and clear orange coloured insect which idly flutters along hedgerows, usually staying within 100 metres of where it was born.

The Speckled Wood is almost continuously brooded from the beginning of April and can be seen until mid-September, whereas the Gatekeeper, which is also known as the Hedge Brown or Small Meadow Brown, is only on the wing in July and the first half of August.

A butterfly which has made a staggering recovery is the Comma which was almost extinct in the mid-1920's, however it is now widespread and can commonly be seen around Dover. A strong, fast-flying insect, it is called the Comma because of the white mark on the dark undersides of its wings. Whilst I find the common names of most butterflies and moths to be romantically descriptive I feel that a better one for the Comma, with its uniquely indented, rich orange and brown wings, would be the Beautiful Brocade. It certainly deserves a less pragmatic title than it has.

The caterpillars usually feed on stinging nettles but in my garden they feed on their alternative food, elm. My elms form part of a hedge and are cut back at the end of each year as I have discovered that this prevents them from getting Dutch elm disease. This butterfly is long lived, surviving for about nine months, hibernating during the winter in dense vegetation.



1 Green-veined White 2 Small Tortoiseshell 3 Peacock 4 Common Blue 5 Large White 6 Small Copper



had had to miss his performance: the kindness and good company of P. D. James who showed such interest in the festival and in the future of Dover itself: the moving and funny performance by 'Words' Alive!' at Astor High School's parents evening: Sarah Lear, the children's librarian at Deal, dressed as a furry pink elephant on the hottest day of the year(!), alternately delighting and terrifying her young observers in the Charlton Shopping Centre: Donna's much derided Teddy Bear Rally on a glorious Whit Monday when all the world seemed to have come to Kearsney Abbey with teddies big and small, flat and fat, ancient and modern, to have a good time in the sunshine with Judy and Punch Puppet Company and the splendid staff from the GPO who gave their free time to bring Postman Pat to an entranced young audience. Most of all, I think, I appreciated the good humour and mutual support of the committee when things weren't going too well or when we realised the enormity of the project that we had undertaken so lightly, and also the hard work of Donna Sowerby whose enthusiasm kept us all going.

We have made some mistakes but we have learnt a lot and we will learn more when the District Council's survey results are analysed; this will stand us all in good stead whatever happens in the future. We would have been delighted if some people had taken it upon themselves to write to the Press expressing pleasure with events they had attended, but, alongside some criticism over the siting of the box office, we have all received encouraging verbal appreciation from many people and at least no one can say that we didn't have a go! We remain bloody, but unbowed.



Deadline for CONTRIBUTORS

An important change has been made in the *Newsletter* publication dates.

As from the next issue publication will be one month earlier than has been our custom, ie in April, August and December. A number of advantages, both to the membership as well as to the Editor and producer will result from the change and will, we hope, soon become apparent.

The Editor welcomes contributions and illustrations, particularly line drawings, or other appropriate visual materials.

The deadline for issue No. 15, for publication on 1st December, is 24th October. The producer would prefer "copy" to be typed, and in any case asks that it be double-spaced. Single spacing, especially in manuscript, is a frequent source of typesetting error.

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