

Country Notes for October 2024

As we move into the first full month of autumn I find myself looking back on the year so far and reflecting on the good and the bad. The first half of the year was certainly very wet, although earlier on it had also been quite warm for the time of year. Even when we moved into summer I was still putting on wellingtons and rainproof clothes to take the dogs for a walk. Since then things improved however, with some very warm and sunny interludes. The wet first half of the year certainly impacted butterfly numbers which were well down on last year, which was so disappointing as I had hoped that they would build on the increase in the numbers we saw last summer. I am sure also that I am not the only one to notice the lack of smaller insects, presumably for the same reason. Whilst there have been far fewer insects to clear off windscreens, and windows left open after dark have left rooms virtually free of insects to annoy us at bedtime, one does worry about the effect that fewer pollinators will have on crops and the countryside in general.

Whatever the season and whatever the weather there is always the good and the bad and late summer this year has been excellent for foraging. The blackberries were wonderful, big and juicy, and although they are now virtually finished for the year my freezer is full of them ready to be made into blackberry and apple pie and jam. Delicious!

The return of wetter weather at the time of writing has certainly increased dramatically the number of slugs, some very large, and those of us who are gardeners will have noticed the effect on our plants. However, we must be certain to be careful about what we do to control them. There has been a marked increase lately in reports of hedgehog deaths in our villages with the victims seemingly in good shape. I wonder whether people have responded to the increase in slugs by putting down slug pellets. Slugs killed by this method can have a devastating effect on both hedgehogs and the wild bird population, as they find the poisoned slugs and eat them. I have taken to using pelleted wool which is both organic and safe for other creatures. They have proved to be very effective in controlling damage to my plants by slugs. Both hedgehogs and wild birds are the gardeners' friends and we must be mindful to look after them.

As the leaves begin to turn this month there is no better time to get out and about in the beautiful countryside that our villages have to offer. Let's hope that the weather is kind to us!

Andrew G Snowden