

Maria Himsworth's Chillenden Blog

June 2021

A Pollinating Buzz in my Rural Garden - A monthly look at how my rural garden is enjoyed by pollinating insects

A Pollinating Buzz in my Rural Garden - A monthly look at how my rural garden is enjoyed by pollinating Insects

Whilst writing my blog and doing my research it has made me realise more than ever how important our gardens are to pollinators and other wildlife. In the UK over 80% of households have a garden. This means that there are over 20 million private gardens covering an area bigger than all the country's nature reserves combined! Individually they may be small but together they are a lifeline as they connect wildlife from one place to another providing corridors of the vital necessities needed to survive that is water, food and a place to rest and breed. If you have taken part in 30 days wild this year I am sure you have included some activities that will improve your garden for wildlife.

www.wildlifetrusts.org/30-days-wild-2021-sign-your-pack

What was buzzing in June

As the meteorological summer commenced on the 1st of June, here in Kent it certainly felt like summer with warm hot days that seemed to hurry along the garden into a colourful array of summer blossom and within the first few days of June the garden was buzzing with insects enjoying the flowers offering of sweet nectar. Astronomically, summer begins on the longest day, the Summer Solstice, this year it was the 21st of June. Here in Chillenden it was cold and very wet all day. However, there has certainly been enough warm days this month to spend time in the garden and observe what's buzzing.

I have been inspecting nibbled leaves for caterpillars and other insects, an interesting activity. I even find myself excited, not disappointed when plants have been used as a food source as it is also a sign of increased biodiversity in the garden. A pest to a plant is a food source for another animal. Nature in balance in your garden usually means that you are never overwhelmed by any one particular pest or plant and everything is living in harmony. My spindle bush (*Euonymus europaeus*) that I planted at the bottom of my garden to attract aphids away from more delicate plants have been used this year by the caterpillar of the Spindle Ermine Moth, (*Yponomeuta cagnagella*). Ermine moths are known for the extensive webbing spun by the caterpillars and is often very noticeable as it can adorn hedges along roadside in vast quantities. The caterpillars use safety in numbers and by covering themselves in vast white halloween like webs to deter predators

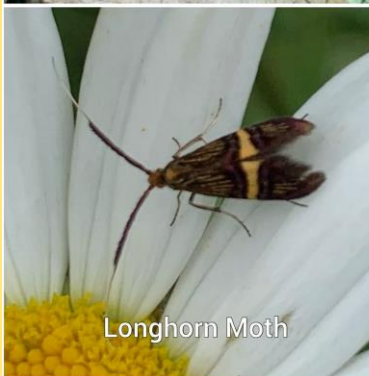


such as birds. Luckily mine are only a few and hopefully some of the many sparrows nesting in the garden at present will be able to hunt them out. I also have the caterpillar of the Mullien Moth (*Cucullia verbasci*), easy to spot bright black, yellow and white and will be happily munching away at the Mullien plants. Useful to have a few Greater Mullien (*Verbascum thapsus*) in the garden which you can transplant the caterpillars to if you find them on your Buddleja, which they also like, or your prized Verbascum hybrids.

Mullien Moth on Verbascum



Setaceous Hebrew Character Moth



Longhorn Moth

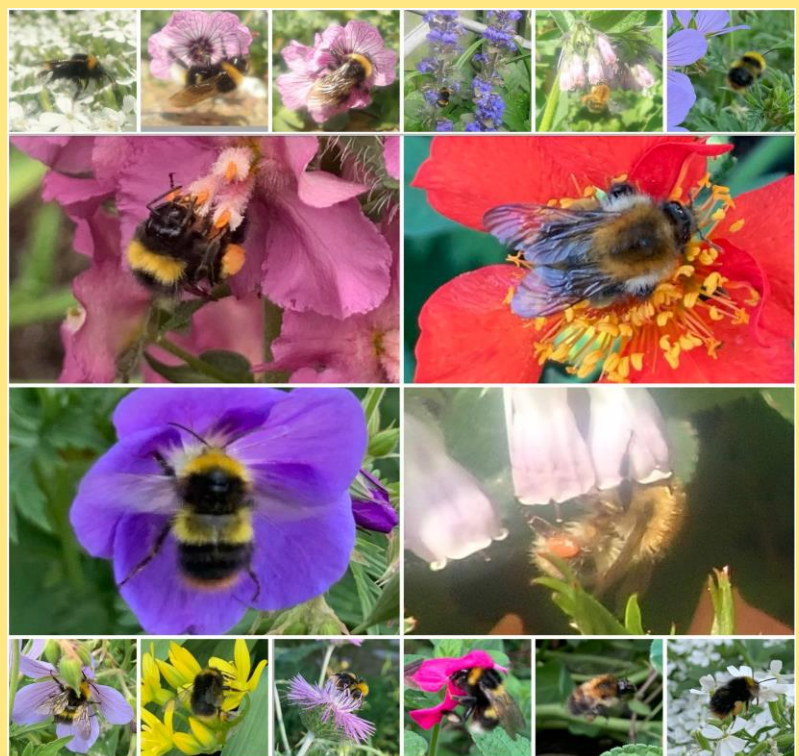


Silver Y Moth

A Hummingbird Hawkmoth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) turned up on the 10th of June. Unfortunately it was a brief moment and I didn't manage to catch it on camera. A day flying moth that has historically migrated here to breed in the summer months from warmer mediterranean climates. The caterpillars feed on the leaves of Bedstraw plants and the adult moths are frequent garden visitors seeking out nectar with their long proboscis they are fascinating to watch in the garden. In recent years with our climate warming it is believed they have started to overwinter in Southern parts of the UK. My first ever sighting of one many years ago was when I had a phone call from my mother to say she had seen a humming bird in her garden. When later that same week I visited and saw it myself I understood why she had thought it was a hummingbird! There have been plentiful night flying moths

that I have seen in my torchlight when I go out in the evening to put out supplement feed for the hedgehogs. One interesting day moth was the Longhorn Moth (*Nemophora degeerella*), a tiny moth with extremely long antennae the larvae of the moth will feed on leaf litter on the ground.

Bumblebees definitely featured as top pollinators this month although there were no new species this month the workers were out in big numbers. I also saw the first males this month, the Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*), is always the first of the males to appear. They were big in numbers this year spotting six altogether on one hot day. Male bumblebees lives are short lived, once leaving the nest they will not return. Their sole purpose in life is to try and mate with a new queen in between feeding on sugary nectar. At



night they will shelter sometimes inside flower heads where the temperature will be warmer and they can stay dry until morning. They will awake tired and hungry and can appear sluggish and unresponsive before feeding up and regaining their energy levels, after chasing females all day then staying up late they need time to recover. Another behaviour I observed this month was that of the bumblebee kicking out it's back leg. This is a defence warning used by bumblebees telling you to back off your too close for comfort! I had tried to get a little too close with my camera!



I have had plenty of Solitary bees on sunny days with some new species spotted, this included the Bryony Mining Bee (*Andrena florea*) found resting on a leaf of my White Bryony (*Bryonia alba*), this little bee is not common, probably because it is momolectic meaning it will only feed on White Bryony flowers. I used to remove this climber that climbs aggressively through my Beech hedge every year but since observing how popular it is with bees I have let it grow through the hedge, only cutting it back if it continues into the flower beds. Unfortunately I have still not set eyes on any Leafcutter bees or Wool carder bees in the garden yet which is disappointing.



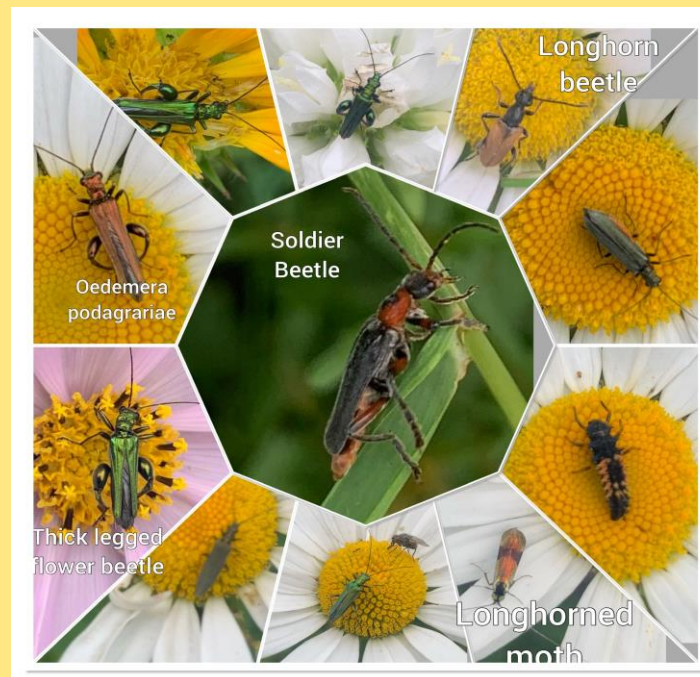
When days were warm I saw a few Butterflies fluttering through the garden mainly blues and whites but the star of the show this month was a beautiful Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*), I saw this migrant last month pass briefly through the garden, but this one stopped for a while enjoying the Orange brightly coloured flowers of the Ice Plant (*Delosperma*), which incidentally is also loved by the Red Tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*).

A few interesting Hoverflies have turned up in the garden. I particularly like the bumblebee mimics and have had a few of these in the garden this June. I also found out that a number of Hoverfly species have within their population different colour forms this is called polymorphism and the Hoverfly exhibits different colours depending on which bumblebee they mimic. Still no sign of any long tailed larvae or any other beasties in my Hoverfly Lagoon!

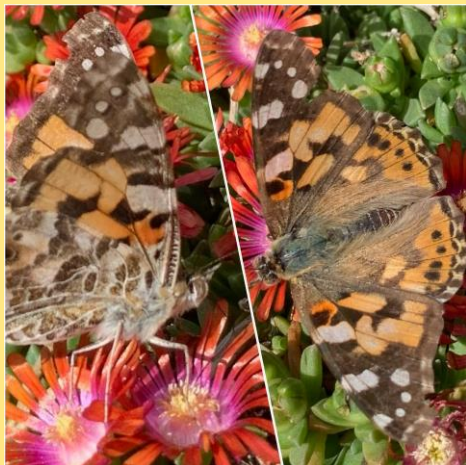


June is also the month that we start to see numerous Beetles in our gardens some may be seen as pests but most are innocuous and are also efficient pollinators. Beetles were the first pollinators of plants some 160 million years ago and today there are around 4000 different species in the UK. It is thought that this years cold April and wet May could well have had a detrimental effect on our pollinating beetle population including Ladybirds, Soldier Beetles and Long-horned Beetles. Flying

beetles like to use open flat flowers and I have spotted many on my Oxeye Daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) this June. These have included the Thick-legged flower beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*), named because the males have thick swollen thighs. The females lay their eggs on tree bark and the pupae live in the dry stems of plants. My first Soldier Beetle of the year was *Cantharis lateralis* on the 22nd of June, these beetles lay their eggs in moist soil or leaf litter in lawns when hatched the larvae will prey on slugs and snails. The adults feed on aphids and pollen so they are great pollinators. What a bug to have in your garden! Although beetle habitats are varied you can help them by making sure you have all of the basic necessities in your garden, leaf piles, compost heaps, log piles, long grass and plenty of flat open flower heads throughout the summer. As well as Oxeye daisies I also grow Achillia, so easy to grow and very pretty. Mexican Fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) is another easy to grow plant it will self seed and is happy growing in between pathing stones all summer long.



Before finishing I should mention that in many photos you will probably notice the small Pollen Beetles (*Meligethes aeneus*), they seem to be on almost every flower in my garden at the moment. They are particularly partial to Oilseed Rape which was in flower in the fields around where I live last month and have moved on to my garden now that the Oilseed Rape has finished. As their name suggests they are good pollinators if not a little annoying when they land on your yellow t-shirt in vast numbers!



Maria Himsworth - Follow my sightings on Twitter @HimsworthM