

THE COUNTRYSIDE AROUND US

19th September 2003.

I wonder how many of you miss what I am lucky enough to see while out walking in the lanes and fields around Puddington. Yesterday I was walking along the lane, and because it was so still I could hear every little sound around for what seemed like miles. One sound in particular caught my attention, and as I looked up into the honeysuckle where it came from, I saw the most beautiful moth feeding from the flowers. It was a humming-bird hawk moth. I have never been lucky enough to see one before and so stood watching while it went about the business of collecting nectar from each flower in turn, as it's name implies, it looked and sounded just like a humming-bird with it's long tongue and darting hovering movements, but is only the size of a ten pence piece. It was beautifully coloured and unlike other moths, humming-bird hawk moths are active during the day. They feed on honeysuckle and the larva feed mainly on bedstraws.

Another spectacular insect to see through the lanes and even in your gardens are the large green dragonflies. They zoom up and down patrolling an area looking for smaller flying insect that they see with their huge eyes, and are able to turn and catch them in an instant. They don't in fact live near to ponds all the time, and can mostly be seen quite some way from water hunting.

As I said last week, the swallows and martins would soon be gone, and overnight they have. I for one will miss them until their return next spring, but we have lots to look forward to in the mean time.

As I sat in my lounge the other evening, a skein of geese flew by and down across the field. I went outside to watch them as they flew away into the valley and as it was such a beautiful evening stayed out to watch the bats begin to appear from their roosts for the nights foraging for moths. There seemed to be more than normal that night, but it was impossible to see which species they were, I should love to know, but it was clear to see from the sizes that there was more than one kind. I could hear about three tawny owls in a tree by my gate all calling to each other, and so waited to see if they would show themselves. I couldn't believe my luck when two of them landed on a branch above my head, as it was not yet completely dark I had a very clear view of them and an even better one when one of them flew up onto my roof. I could see then that it was only a newly fledged youngster because of the downy feathers still on in, who was out with it's siblings having a great time practicing flying. Just like children the world over, they were up far too early! The next night, quite late, they were in another tree close by calling across the field through the mist to mum and dad letting them know where they were and where to bring the supper to once they had caught it. I expect anyone who had been kept awake by all the noise didn't find it very endearing, but I loved it!

The key to finding all of these things is to look and listen all the time, it's all there for you to see and hear. So many people look but don't see. Walk slowly and look beyond the first leaf or twig and look for the smallest movement, perhaps you will get lucky, and it's so worth it when you do. Just to walk down the lane in the early morning when the air is still and warm, and smell the scent of the honey-suckle all around you is something that to me you simply couldn't put into a bottle, you have to be there.

Here's to next time, I hope you enjoyed my little 'Snippet'. *Joan Lakeland*