Bees, butterflies and other insects

Introduction

Churchyards are a refuge for lots of insects. You are likely to see a range of butterflies, bees, moths, ladybirds and many other insects taking advantage of these relatively chemical free areas. Butterflies and moths lay their eggs on a variety of plants and trees which in turn provide food for growing caterpillars. Insects eat a range of foods, including, nectar, seeds, roots, leaves and wood. Well-known British species of bee (of which six are common in Norfolk) and butterfly that can be seen in churchyards include, buff-tailed bumblebee, common carder bee, meadow brown, orange tip, holly blue and peacock butterflies. Moths include the beautiful six-spot burnet, cinnabar and garden tiger.

How to help

Bees and other insects are crucial to pollinating the wildflowers and plants of our churchyards, but also our food, fruits and vegetables. Insects carry out a truly invalulable job. With declining numbers of these pollinators, especially bumblebees, it is something that should concern us all. Reductions in the number of bumblebees is the result of a number of factors, including a reduction in wildflower species. This is where churchyard managers can really make a difference in our rural and urban landscape for insects by:

- Maintaining hedgerows and ensuring a nectar-rich grass margin (at least a metre wide) is present on one side, if not both sides of hedges.
- Allowing tussocky grass to grow and piling twigs and branches in an area, provides cover for small mammals whos nests may later be used by bees.
- Leaving areas of the churchyard un-cut over the spring and summer to allow wildflower species to thrive.
- Ensuring trees are only planted around the edge of the churchyard to avoid depriving wildflowers and lichens of the sunlight they require. Limes are frequently planted in churchyards, as are oak, beech and hornbeam.
- Planting groups of mixed native shrubs in corners of the churchyard are great for a variety insects as well as birds. It is especially great when species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, goat sallow and dog rose are planted as the blossoms of these species supply abundant nectar for bees and other insects. In total they support over 600 insects, many of which are moths.

For further information please visit the NWT website or contact:

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Did you know?

Buff-tailed bumblebees like to build their nests underground.

Common carder bees nest in vacated bird's nests and redundant mouse runs.

It is believed that the eye spots on the peacock butterfly's wings are an evolutionary adaptation to scare off would-be predators.

Garden tiger moths are amongst the most vibrant of the UK's 2,500-plus moth species, but some members of this family have experienced dramatic fluctuations in distribution and population over the last 40 years.

Meadow browns are common British butterflies and are at home in many types of habitat, including meadows and other grassy places.

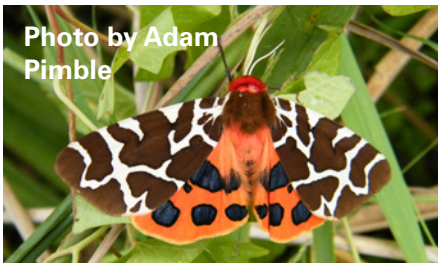
Garden tiger moths were a favourite with early collectors, who selectively bred them to create unusual colours and forms.

Bees, butterflies and moths to look out for

These species can be seen flitting about the tops of wildflowers, grasses and hedges on warm sunny days.

Buff tailed bumble bee
Has a yellow collar near its head and abdomen, and the queen has a buff-coloured tail.

Common carder bee
Brown and orange with darker bands around its abdomen.

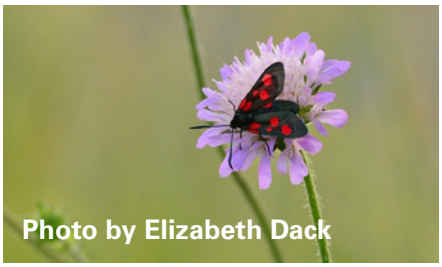


Garden tiger moth
Unmistakeable, with its dark brown spots. Flies July and August, and will regularly visit the light-trap.

Meadow brown
A more modest looking insect, with brownish coloured wings with patches of orange on the forewings and small white eyespots. It has a long flight period, June to August.

Peacock butterfly
Hard to miss, a well-known colourful insect, with bright red wings and large spots similar to the eye spots you see on the feathers of a peacock. Flies July or later.

Holly blue
Wings are pale sky blue. Females have black wing edges. Undersides pale blue with small black spots, differentiating them from common blue. Flies April/May and July/ August in two broods.



Six-spot burnet
The only British moth with six red spots on each forewing, although care must be taken with identification, as in some cases the outermost spots can be fused. Rarely the red colour is replaced by yellow. Day flying with slow buzzing flight during sunshine and is attracted to a range of flowers including thistles, knapweeds and scabious. Flies June to August.

Cinnabar moth
Its hindwings and the markings on the forewings are unmistakeable. There is little variation within the species although on rare occasions the pinkish markings are replaced with yellow, or the forewing is red with a black border, or the wings are completely black. Day-flying species, however adult cinnabar moths also fly very late at night, when they are attracted to light. Flies May to August.

Orange tip
Males are unmistakeable; mainly white with bright orange wing tips. Females are white with black wing tips. Both have mottled green underwings. Flies April or later in a single brood.