

VILLAGE DIARY

Autumn has really set in. Hurricane Ophelia brought down the first fall of leaves. Our tree of heaven, always the first to feel the winter coming, has lost all its leaves and the colours are gradually fading in the flower beds. I did see one painted lady butterfly, looking a bit tattered, but still able to flutter to investigate a begonia in our garden.

John Lea comments that the unusually cool summer has created some lasting effects on wild life. Although bumblebees can work in much cooler weather than honeybees, he has been aware of the sharply reduced number of them in his garden and among the wild flowers in the meadow. There are several species of bumblebee but John is concerned that he is seeing fewer of the varieties that were once common. He is able to observe the wild flowers in his meadow and to visit, on wheels, a large area of woodland every day. In doing so he has become aware of the damage done by badgers to the wild bee population. After a couple of days the evidence that a bees' nest has been taken simply vanishes. John hopes that the badger cull will help the bees to recover next year and reverse the damage done to their nests which has increased in recent years.

He notes that there is a plentiful harvest of a variety of wild berries and, as a result, apart from the tit family, few birds are coming to his feeders. A large flock of goldfinches visited one day in early October but have not been back. He has not seen any chaffinches or greenfinches this autumn. He hopes that this is because there is plenty of food for them in the wild and not that the cool season and infectious disease has reduced their numbers. Only time will tell.

Barbara Wilson