Outside Medicine

Butterflies

STEPHEN TAYLOR

It is a pity that the lepidopterists have not yet followed the good example of the ornithologists and given up collecting. Our island is not the best of places for butterflies and moths. It is at the extreme north-west of the range of many European species, and outside the ranges of the beautiful scarce swallowtail, the apollo, the map butterfly, and many more. I suspect that, despite their protests, collectors do nearly as much harm as the agricultural sprayers. But butterfly watching and butterfly photography are harmless pastimes that add to the interest of every summer's day. Of course, you must keep a butterfly diary.

Hawkmoths and painted ladies

I knew by early May that 1982 was going to be a special summer for butterflies and moths. The combination of rain, sun, and then more rain was just what they needed. Then on Wednesday, 7 July, I saw it. Pink and white valerian grows like a weed in our part of North Wales. On a sheltered clump near our side gate, I spotted first one, then two, then three, then four small tortoiseshells. I was trying to estimate which had overwintered and which were this year's crop, when I noticed hanging in front of a head of blossom a stubby little body with yellowy-white flashes near the tail and wings vibrating so fast as to be almost invisible. As its long proboscis exhausted one floret, it darted on to another. It was that best of all day-flying hawkmoths, the hummingbird hawk. Sixty years ago, I often saw them at Lyme Regis, but this was only my second sighting in the eight and a half years that we have been in North Wales. The hummingbird hawk was so intent on its meal of nectar that I could approach within a foot of it. But by the time I had got my camera, the sun had gone in and the tortoiseshells and the hummingbird hawk had vanished.

The first painted lady of the year arrived on 27 June, also feeding on valerian nectar. Four days later, my neighbour saw three of them sunning themselves on the corrugated iron roof of his garden shed. I always get a special kick out of the painted ladies. When they come at all, they stay with us for the summer, then move down to Southern Europe and North Africa for the winter. Their movements seem to be to some extent heat determined. Exceptional warmth may tempt some of them north in late February or early March. But these early arrivals do not survive the late stages of our winter. The main influx reaches us in May or June. An observer on the beach near Algiers on 3 June 1948 describes their take off. "Between 9 00 and 10 30 am thousands of painted ladies emerged from their chrysalides, which were hanging from dried thistles. Within an hour they were ready to fly. 'As though on a word of command' they all set off together, and headed out across the Mediterranean towards

Sardinia." It is thought that they strike our coasts at river mouths, and then work their way inland along the watercourses. This would explain their distribution in the east and south of England. But when it comes to our painted ladies in the Ceiriog Valley the mystery deepens. For the Ceiriog is a tributary of the Dee, which emerges into the Irish Sea between the Wirral and North Wales. Perhaps the Grand Union and Shropshire Union and Llangollen canals provide the guidelines.

Once here, our painted ladies soon start breeding. Their offspring mature in two to three months. Then in the late summer they start on their southward migration. Unlike their close relative, the small tortoiseshell, they never hibernate here. Certain years are specially good for painted ladies. In 1976, the year of the great drought, there were none. But 1930, 1945, 1947, 1952, and 1980 were definitely "painted lady years." Why these population explosions occur is not known. Changes in breeding cycles may reflect recurring food shortages. But this only puts the explanation further back.

The painted lady's first cousin, the red admiral, is another migrant. But hibernation here does occur. The small tortoiseshell tends to hibernate in sheds and stables and attics. The red admiral, on the other hand, chooses natural sites, where its camouflage works well; its folded wings mimic a dead leaf, which scarcely shows on rough tree bark or on a stony bank, so it is easy to underestimate the numbers that stay out the winter.

Books, pubs, and journals

In America seaside promenades are usually made of wood. On 12 October 1980 I was walking along the board walk on the edge of the beach at Ocean City, New Jersey, when I noticed what seemed to be huge autumn leaves blowing about in the wind. A further glance showed that they were butterflies. I was watching the annual southward migration of the monarch or milkweed from Canada to the Sierra Madre in Mexico, a 20-acre area known as the Mountain of Butterflies. The monarch has a four-inch wingspan, but a head no bigger than a seed pearl. Yet within is presumably all the information needed to make these amazing migrations both ways. Monarchs are by no means rare visitors to our southern shores, mainly in Devon and Cornwall. It seems to be proved that they are genuine transatlantic fliers, helped by favourable winds, and not just accidental passengers on ships.

I had often thought that I would like to write a book about butterflies and their ways as a supplement to the many excellent descriptive handbooks. Dr E B Ford's splendid volume in the *New Naturalist* series is rather hard going for the simple amateur. Then, two years ago, I discovered that the job had been done, and done so well that it did not need repeating. Strangely enough, the author is an actress, and a writer of detective stories and children's books; but she is also a vice-president of the Butterfly Conservation Society. Miss Dulcie Gray (Mrs Michael Denison) has called her book *Butterflies on my Mind*, and she has had the

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good fortune to have Mr Brian Hargreaves as illustrator. I cannot recommend it too highly. But she does make one mistake. She is describing the many remarkable entomological achievements of the Rothschild family. Among these she names the Checked Skipper Inn at Ashton Wold, built by the Hon N C Rothschild, as "the only pub in England named after a butterfly." She should visit the new town of Harlow where she will discover no fewer than 18 pubs named after butterflies and moths. The butterflies are the white admiral, the Essex skipper, the painted lady, the small copper, and the purple emperor. The moths include the garden tiger, the drinker, the heart and club, and my old friend the hummingbird hawk. Anyone seriously infected with the entomological bug will need a journal. The two I have found most useful, and incidentally recommended to me by Sir Cyril

Clarke, are the *Bulletin of the Amateur Entomologists' Society*, and the *Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation*.

But the best guide of all is the book of nature itself in the shape of a garden, half of which is devoted to the shrubs and plants that attract butterflies. Among the shrubs are buddleia, spiraea, blackthorn, hawthorn, honeysuckle, the tree lupin, and the ordinary bramble or blackberry. Among the plants are valerian, nettles, hops, the various kinds of vetch, dog violets, heartsease and the other wild pansies, primroses, cowslips, clover, rape, lucerne charlock, jack-by-the-hedge, the everlasting pea, and wild thyme. You cannot have a butterfly garden without a good crop of weeds. What better excuse could there be for not weeding.

PS. 16 July. Today the first comma for eight years arrived in our garden. I knew it was going to be a good year for butterflies.

The game of cricket

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The practice of medicine is much older than the game of cricket. It took man some time to discover that it might be fun to defend a couple (initially) of sticks with a third across the top by wielding a fourth against a piece of rock thrown along the ground. This discovery may have been made in the Weald of Kent, and the first probable reference to cricket comes from the wardrobe accounts of Edward I in 1300 in that county. At the beginning of the sixteenth century Gargantua indulged in 217 games listed by Rabelais, including cricket; since he was provided with a carpet this seems to be the first use of matting—used to this day, for the equivalent of Lord's in South Africa is the Wanderers' ground in Johannesburg, the pitch being matting laid on ant-heaps.

Boys protecting a target with a weapon against a missile graduated to the most enjoyable form of the game—carefree village cricket and its elder brother club cricket, reaching its zenith in Butterflies, I Zingari, Free Foresters, Incogniti, and others. An obvious evolution was for counties to play one another, starting with Kent's challenge to the Londoners in 1707. And since boys must be dragooned by pedagogues, school cricket teams evolved, Eton and Harrow first playing at Lord's in 1808 with Byron despite lameness in the latter's team. A game taken too seriously is ruined, and "the flannelled fools at the wicket" became heroes not just in the wide eyes of small boys but even in the side glances of their masters, so that Kipling could write of these:

How is this reason (which is their reason) to judge a scholar's worth
By casting a ball at three straight sticks and defending the same
with a fourth?

How different from village cricket! Here the blacksmith (alias garage mechanic) will be clouting the slow bowling of the doctor, while the publican and the vicar are carrying a barrel into the pavilion. I recall a glorious day at Stow-on-the-Wold when the village policeman beat a ball into the long grass, and while it was sought among the cow-pats the

wicket-keeper told him the bowler was H G O Owen-Smith, who had just been playing in the Test Match for South Africa against England. The PC got out next ball. Dr "Tuppy" Owen-Smith is one of the best players the medical profession has produced. Indeed, he has a remarkable record to his name since, although primarily a bowler, he made 129 for South Africa against England at Leeds in 1929, sharing with A J Bell a 10th wicket partnership of 103, which still stands as a record against any country. He also played for Middlesex. Australia has produced Dr George R Thomas (former surgical registrar at St George's), who opened against the West Indies in 1951.

W G Grace

Our profession must take pride in having produced the greatest cricketer of all time. W G Grace (1848-1915) was the fourth of five sons of a doctor near Bristol, to the medical school of which he went before qualifying from Bart's and the Westminster. He practised as a surgeon in Bristol from 1879. He was chosen to play for the Gentlemen v Players when only 16, and at Lord's helped his side to their first victory for 13 years. He played in the first Test Match in this country against Australia in 1880, making 152. He last played for England in 1899 when 50 years and 320 days old, gave up surgical practice the same year, and retired to be manager of cricket at the Crystal Palace. In his later cricketing days massive, rugged, and unwashed, he has many records still standing, and his eminence may be shown by comparison with achievements of Frank Woolley.

	Years in 1st-class cricket	Runs	Av	Wickets	Av	1000 runs 100 wickets	2000 runs 100 wickets
W G Grace	44	54 896	39.55	2876	17.99	8	2
F E Woolley	33	58 969	40.75	2068	19.85	8	4

Grace, apart from a longer spell in first-class cricket (until 1908 when aged 60) had a bowling advantage over Woolley, who gave up long before he ceased to bat complaining of stiffness (never apparent to me when I was coached by him); Grace,