

**RINGWOOD**

**NATURAL**

**HISTORY**

**SOCIETY**



1983

Newsletter/Report

50p

To Non-Members

## The Garden of a Gardening Naturalist (Part 1)

It has to be admitted that the new garden of a little less than half acre seemed on removal to Ashley Heath to have but little promise either from a gardening or naturalist's standpoint. The choice had been made rather for the sake of the bungalow, seemingly about right for a recently retired couple, and for its position with quick access to areas of outstanding environmental attraction.

The Wiltshire valleys and downs, Purbeck, the New Forest, Poole and Christchurch harbours and an almost uniquely varied coastline, all being within easy driving distance.

The garden itself seemed singularly unpromising.

Some attempt at cultivation had been made years before but this had petered out leaving what had become no more than spoilt and ill-kempt heathland. Blocked ditches, coarse grasses and rushes, pines, birches, brambles and a few sorry-looking unpruned shrubs, mainly of the thorny kinds, were the garden's main features. It is true that in the first hour or two whilst awaiting the removal van's arrival, willow warblers were to be heard in the unoccupied scrubby land to the rear, some brimstone butterflies had passed through, that common Buzzards had been seen overhead and that there were chaffinches and Goldfinches about.

On the whole, however, it was a somewhat unenthusiastic gardening naturalist waiting at the front gate for the furniture to turn up and already convinced that all those prized possessions would never be seen again.

The mood underwent a dramatic change with the sudden appearance of two birds, one in hot pursuit of the other, when the pursuer gave up and came to rest, spent, on the telephone pole in the corner of the garden. That it should be a Red Kite was judged totally incredible, but the use of binoculars at short range made identification positive. Optimism and delight reigned at such an auspicious beginning to naturalist observations and suddenly anything was possible, even the successful development of an unpromising garden. No expectations were entertained of seeing this exciting bird once it recovered sufficiently to fly off, and so it proved. Nevertheless a memory to be treasured and an incentive to facing up to the task of planning a garden acceptable

to wildlife and acceptable to the needs of a keen amateur gardener. Aims which it was realised would not always be totally compatible and demanding no little degree of compromise and tolerance between one interest and the other.

It is not the intention of this short article to deal at length with the birds occurring in and seen from the garden but it is of interest that the telephone pole referred to has been found to be the favourite perch of the green woodpecker always present in the area. It would be an unusual day if one and sometimes two were not to be seen clinging to the pole, often quite still and in silhouette looking almost like wood carvings. Among the 78 different species seen and heard from and in the garden during the eight years or so of recording, apart from the red kite there has been considerable excitement over such species as the Hobby, Alpine Swift (consorting with a late party of common Swift), Whimbrel, Glaucous gull and, this year, a pair of Golden Oriole. Every Winter has seen the occurrence of Bramblings, Siskins and Redpolls as well as the Wintering Thrushes.

The intervening years have proved to be good ones both from the point of view of the naturalist and gardening interests. Inevitably there have been losses of wildlife from the gradual development of a garden as well as gains. The common lizards, whose hold must have already been somewhat tenuous, disappeared and the house building which took place at the rear spelt the end of the Willow Warblers. Adders and Grass snakes seen during the early years no longer appear, but the presence of a large compost heap led to the arrival and occupation by slow worms. No matter how enthusiastic the naturalist, the unsuspected colonies of ants below the bungalow and subsequent nuptial flights of ants in the kitchen and elsewhere were more than could be tolerated and war was waged against them. Nor was the incidence of a nest of the tree wasp deep in a particularly thorny berberis bush near to the rear door received with any great joy.

The principal gain to the naturalist is the realisation that the gardener is singularly well-placed by virtue of his persistent close examination and familiarity with his plants to observe the occupants of his garden at close hand.

For example, spiders of many kinds are constantly being discovered often purely and simply because a flower or plant is being more closely looked at than usual.

A new interest in butterflies has developed from the sighting of Brimstones on the first day and great pleasure has resulted from seeing and recognising such species as Painted Ladies, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Silver-washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Orange-tip, small Copper, Common Blue and Ringlet. The Gatekeeper actually fluttering around the farmlike front gate added a happy touch to its appearance. Large and small whites have also been seen, but it would be of no use pretending that the gardener felt any real joy on seeing them. Gardening, however is a tiring occupation and despite the naturalists willingness no great enthusiasm has yet revealed itself for staying up late enough to make a study of the many moths which have been seen nightflying around the garden. Nor have the promising sightings of Pipestrelle, Greater Horseshoe and noctule bats, all seen whilst watching the nightly visits of foxes, been followed up. Maybe all these and others will be investigated in time ... if the gardener is not to tired!

Arthur Wiltshire

### Dragonflies and Butterflies

The early emerging species, no doubt because of the cold and wet spring, were several weeks late in appearing and much reduced in numbers. The later species benefitting from the hot and sunny July weather were greatly up in numbers. Many of the Dragonflies have been mis-coloured, presumably as a result of the unusual weather conditions and those species breeding in the faster flowing streams have been few and far between as the weed harbouring the nymphs was washed away.

Imigrant butterflies have been very evident, particularly Clouded yellows for which 1983 must be a bumper year. Of the resident species, most people will have been impressed by the immense numbers of Peacocks visiting the gardens. Small Tortoiseshells which normally out number the Peacocks have so far been rather sparse - perhaps the later broods will make up for it!

Ray Brett

## Some 'Do's and 'Don'ts' on Rearing Caterpillars

Ideally caterpillars are best kept in fine net covered cages with food plants growing in pots, this saves a lot of time spent collecting food plants almost on a daily basis as the caterpillars grow.

Small caterpillars can be started off in a plastic container, but care must be taken to ensure that condensation does not occur as this can be harmful. (St. Ivel Gold are ideal in size and have a clear plastic lid).

If cut leaves are used as food, placing them in a small jar of water helps to keep them fresh, but don't forget to plug the mouth of the jar with cotton wool to stop the larvae crawling down the plant stems and drowning themselves.

As the old food withers, fresh food should be placed alongside and touching to allow the caterpillars to crawl across of their own accord.

Try to disturb the larvae as little as possible especially when nearing a skin change. This can be recognised by the fact that the larvae remain in one position without eating sometimes for as long as three days.

Remove frass daily, and as the caterpillars reach maturity it may be necessary to provide a small handful of soil/leaf mould for the larvae to pupate in. (Some caterpillars pupate underground - some spin their own cocoon above soil level).

Try to identify the caterpillars from local library text books, though this may not be easy, and do keep a record of any odd things which may happen, it may not have been noticed before. Slightly damp the soil of those larvae which pupate in that medium from time to time, then sit back to await the emergence of what will be a perfect insect - even a cabbage white butterfly has a beauty all it's own when freshly emerged from it's chrysalis, even though it might have it's beady eye on your cabbages for the next generation ....

Valerie Thurston

Well, we certainly have had a varied year, thanks to our outings organiser! From September onwards it seemed all "go"

Speaking as an absent-minded "ham" I have only gone forward being with expert company it has suddenly all "clicked" into place, I no longer say "oh what a pretty bird", I think and say "now is that a Reed Warbler?" and am delighted to find I'm right!!

Some of the highlights? Well, for the first time I braved the early morning and went "Deer watching" with Mike and Martin, "unforgettable experience", do it again? of course!

"The hawk conservancy", Weyhill? lovely day, different. We must remember even Falcons have to live?

Forest walk with Olive Blick and Margaret Weick, Oh the mud! The first time we "sussed it out"

I could go on for ever - but there - ! Nice to see some young people joining us, one outing we had a little handicapped girl here we were told, she wouldn't go all the way! But with the enjoyable company, plus "Blue" to keep in line (my dog) she made it! We nearly saw Hobbies again that day!

Well must not "hog" any more space, so will give a recipe to take on picnics (we get fed up with sandwiches so this makes a change).

Just a moment, what about the day at Kimmeridge? when we saw 4 baby Ravens on the ledge!! and the awful day at Pagham harbour, so windy we could hardly stand, and mud - !! oh but how we laughed, especially getting out of the cars, we were like balloons in our wet kit!! We saw a few nice waders that day anyway. All worthwhile. On the subject of food, how about when we went to Radipole and Chesil beach, my friends gave me a new lunch box, the old one I used for bacon in the fridge, yes, you've guessed it! in my hurry early morning I took the bacon, you should have seen the faces as I unwrapped the box! well what are friends for if not to hand out a sandwich or two to a starving companion?

Food, ah yes - recipe on next page.

Doris Williams

### Sponsored Bird Watch

A quick cup of tea was grabbed before there was a knock at the door announcing Martins arrival for the start of our sponsored bird watch. We loaded breakfast into the car, looked up at the starry sky and before our departure a Robin was heard singing, the first bird of the day at 4.0 a.m.

Our first major stop was to be Hengistbury Head but we made our way along back roads in the hope of locating some Owls. We stopped near a wet patch at Bagnum and Mallard were seen in the half light, a Skylark rose to greet the dawn and a Lapwing was disturbed in nearby fields. A ghostly white bird drifted by on silent wings and we realised that a Barn Owl was trying to help the R S P B all he could by being included in the list. A roding Woodcock and the call of the cock Pheasant was shortly followed by two more Owl species calling, Little and Tawny.

With the three hoped for Owls under our belt, we made a dash for Hengistbury Head. The dawn was beginning to break, birds could be found easily now. Blackbird, Heron, Reed Warbler, Reed Bunting, Song Thrush, Sedge Warbler, Dunnock, Coot and Wren. Those were located near double dykes and the M T C and a walk along towards Wick produced Cettis, Cormorant, Carrion Crow, Black headed Gull, Sand Martin, Sandwich Tern, Linnet, Shelduck, Whitethroat, Greater Black backed Gull, Yellow Wagtail, Magpie, Starling and Pied Wagtail.

Making our way towards the Nursery we saw Wood Pigeon and Mute Swan and as we entered the wooded area Blue Tits, Willow Warblers Great Tits and Chiff Chaff were all heard in song. The Green Woodpecker flew off calling noisily and Herring Gull was added as we arrived for a quick sea watch at 6.0 a.m. In poor sea watching conditions (e.g. bright calm conditions) we were pleased to add Eider, Whimbrel, Kittiwake, Fulmar, Shag, Dunlin, Common Tern, Gannet and Sanderling and just before we left a Rock Pippit became the 50th species on the list, and it was still only 6.30 a.m.

As we made our way back towards the car a Sparrowhawk was seen circling over Stanpit and feeding on the mud flats were Oystercatcher, Bar tailed Godwit and a Grey Plover in superb breeding plumage.

A chaffinch was seen just before we reached the car and as we made our way towards Stanpit Marshes, Rook, Jackdaw, Greenfinch and Collared Dove were added to the list. A parking ticket was obtained from the machine (honestly!) and we set off for a quick look at the Tip pools, Swallows were hawking for insects all around and there on the first pool, being closely photographed was Martins first ever Red necked Phalarope. Binoculars were only permitted to linger on this rarity for a short while before a Redshank decided to remind us in no uncertain terms of the way time was dashing on. The Mistle Thrush's song accompanied us back to the car and a Stock Dove flew from a nearby grassy area. We set off towards Sandbanks and a long awaited House Sparrow became No. 65 this was followed by a Kestrel hovering over the roadside.

We decided to make a brief stop at Branksome Chine and there right on cue (and thats an awkward place for any bird to sit) was a Great Northern Diver in summer plumage. A Guillemot was also seen before we moved on. A brief look at the Sandbanks ferry area revealed nothing new but in Poole Park Canada Goose, Moorhen, Goldfinch and Swift were all seen.

The weather began to worsen as we made our way to Keyhaven where more than 2 hours bird watching produced only 10 new species, Little Tern, Turnstone, Greenshank, Ringed Plover Stonechat, Curlew, Brent Goose, House Martin, Yellowhammer and Meadow Pippit, but this was due in part to the cold rain which had started.

On our way towards Ringwood for lunch we located Coal Tit, Long tailed Tit, Cuckoo, Goldcrest, Great spotted Woodpecker Snipe and Dartford Warbler in the New Forest.

Our flagging spirits were quickly put right with a cooked lunch and a cup of tea and we set off with renewed vigour for the Gravel Pits.

This area that we know so well had taken on a new light because of our days "twitching" but we still ended up with some unexpected birds, there was one late female Wigeon among the Tufted Ducks and the expected Little Ringed Plovers had

a Wood Sandpiper amongst them and Great crested and Little Grebe rounded off the species seen there. In nearby woodland, Blackcap, Nightingale, Marsh Tit and Wood Warbler brought the total to 99. What would be our 100th species of the day? Ears and eyes were strained and eventually there it was, number 100, Tree Creeper and still only 3.50 p.m. Redstart, Jay and Siskin were also added from this patch of woodland and not far away Woodlark and Wheatear were added. We made a dash to a certain pine area and after a short wait some Crossbills were seen and heard. A Nuthatch was added at Moyles Court with Grey Wagtail being seen at Bickton. New species were decidedly hard to find now and we decided to head up to the Downland areas (up to the Downlands?). Whinchat and Corn Bunting were located in one area and Grey Partridge and Bullfinch in another bringing the total to 112. As the Sun began to Set we hoped that we could add at least 1 more to our tally, tired eyes were put to binoculars and fields were scanned and eventually there it was, our final bird of the day - a Stone Curlew. Darkness was descending and we decided that Nightjars were in order and they were thoroughly enjoyed in the local. So a grand total of 113 and over £200 had been raised towards R S P B funds.

Our grateful thanks go to all who sponsored us and those who helped organise this event.

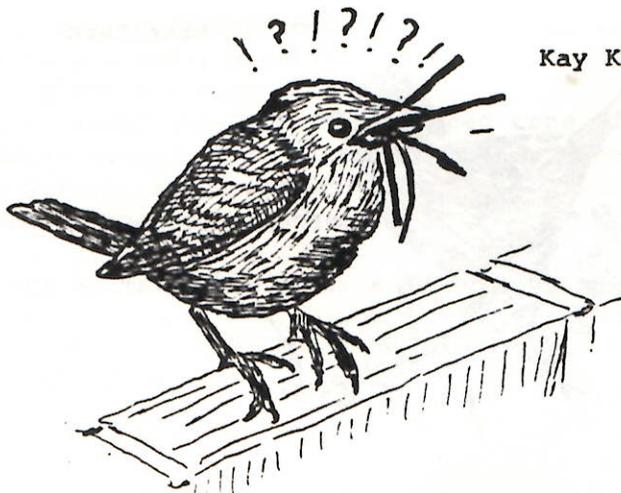
Mike Read



Kids Can Drive You Round The Bend

Bert was the sole survivor of the two broods produced by a pair of blackbirds nesting in a large bay tree, and as greedy and demanding as all young Blackbirds. He had grown enormous from the constant attention of both his parents. On Sunday morning he was sitting outside the back door totally immobile with his crop grossly distended and took no notice of the dog as she walked past. Eventually he managed to fly on to the fence and eject whatever it was that was making him so uncomfortable. Half an hour later I saw his mother rushing round feverishly snatching at dried grass and flying with large beakfuls to the hedge where she had obviously decided that her third nest should be.

I watched for a while and then Bert started to call for food again. To my amazement as she was working her way to the new nest site with a beakful of material she hesitated, and obviously confused, stuffed it all into Bert's open gape. He looked decidedly shaken and I wondered if he could possibly survive such treatment. It certainly stopped his plaintive calling and his mother was then able to get on with the nest building. I didn't see him for 24 hours and thought that a diet of paper, grass and string had put an end to him, but on the Tuesday there he was again, calling loud and clear! Father had taken over.



Kay Kenrick

Although there were only 3 actual bird group outings in the Winter programme, 10 of the general outings were mainly for the study of either Winter visitors or early migrants, we were fortunate to see a Kingfisher and a merlin as well as many Waders on our Keyhaven outing, and at Holmsley we saw the Great Grey Shrike very clearly - I think he posed especially for us!

Eight stalwarts turned up at 4.30 a.m. in May and were rewarded by seeing and hearing 47 species, including hawfinch, woodlark and woodcock. We even saw a tree pipit and a snipe displaying. What about a few more of you getting up early for once? It really is worth it if you are keen on birds.

During the Summer we have had 4 outings as well as 4 general ones with birds in mind. When we were timing the Denny Wood walk, (incidentally supported by only two members) we were thrilled to see a pair of Hobbies, unfortunately not seen on the actual walk. Otherwise apart from Nightingales at Vernditch, a very successful walk along the railway line and Nightjars in Ringwood Forest, we seem to have seen more flowers than birds on our walks.

Report of Outings Organiser 1982/83

During the year 23 general outings have been arranged plus 4 insect and flower group, 3 flower group and 5 bird group. On the whole they have been well attended, on one occasion we had 21 people and 7 dogs! The walk to Bucklers Hard seems to have been another popular one as was the trip to the Hawk Conservancy and the Fungus Foray always attracts a good number of people too.

The outing to Selborne was cancelled as only one person turned up and the day was so unbearably hot.

The Brownsea Island trip was most enjoyable and I hope whetted the appetite for nature study in the 5 new or prospective members who joined the 4 old stagers. We were nearly robbed of our lunches by Peacocks, Canada geese and Muscovy ducks, and despite diligent searching didn't see a Red Squirrel. However, we did see nests and young of the common and sandwich Tern and the Herring and Greater Black backed Gulls and watched as they mobbed a crow who dared to go near the colony.

Outing to Keyhaven - 16 January 1983

Leader + 5 Members

Weather : Cold, Dull, High tide.

Birds seen:

Brent geese - may groups of 5 - 10<sup>2</sup>

Kingfisher	Ringed plover
Hen Harrier female	Dunlin
Sparrowhawk	Red breasted merganser
Kestrel	Gulls - black headed
Female Goldeneye	black backed
Little Grebe	herring
Cormorant	Mallard
Redshank <sup>2</sup>	Shelduck
Greenshank	Bar-tailed Godwit
Curlew	Merlin
Lapwing	Grey Plover
	Mute Swans

Outing to Holmsley - 29 January 1983

Leader + 20 Member\_ (&amp; 7 dogs)

(Seen at Wildfowl Pens)

Geese - Greylag, Whitefront, Red breasted, Barnacle  
 Bar headed, Canada, Brent & Orinoco  
 Swans - Black and Mute  
 Shelduck, Ruddy shelduck, White faced tree duck, Pintail  
 Teal Green winged teal, Wigeon, Garganey, Shoveller  
 Eider, Tufted, Red breasted Merganser, Barrows Goldeneye  
 Bufflehead, hooded Merganser.

Seen over Holmsley bog towards Turf Hill - Great Grey  
 Shrike

Bird Groups

Outing to Poole Harbour - 6 February

Weather - Cold, northerly wind. Sunny.

Leader + 5 Members

Shell Bay

Cormorant, Red breasted merganser and Slavonian grebe

Little Sea

Tufted duck + pochard + Goldeneye- 1 female  
Great black backed gull, Teal, Long tailed tits  
Goldcrest (heard) Blue, Coal and Great tits.

Brands Bay

Shelduck, Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew, Black headed gull  
Merganser

Outing to Gravel Pits - Sunday 13 February

Leader Russell Todd

a.m. 12 Members + Leader      p.m. 5 Members + Leader

Weather - Cold, bright with snow showers from 12.30  
heavy at times.

Birds seen :

Tufted duck	Sparrowhawk	Blue tit
Teal	Pheasant	Blackbird
Wigeon	Mute Swan	Snipe
Gadwall	Bewick 140	
Coot	Jackdaw	
Goldeneye	Starlings	All seen :
Shoveller	Magpie ( 6 tog)	2 Foxes
Mallard	Lapwing	
Pochard	Black headed gull	
Canada Goose	Cormorant	
Kestrel	Mistle Thrush	

Outing to Stanpit and Hingistbury HeadSaturday 26 February 1983 10.00 a.m. - 4.20 p.m.

Weather - Sunny morning, milder very little wind.

Rain 3.30 p.m. Cloudy later.

a.m. at Stanpit Leader ± 9 Members

p.m. at Hingistbury Leader ± 7 from a.m. and 5 more

Stanpit

Sparrow	Grey plover
Blackbird	Dunlin
Coot	Greenshank
Mute Swan	Skylark
Shelduck	Meadow pipit
Crow	Oystercatcher
Black headed gulls	Kestrel
Gt.black backed gulls	Shoveller
Brent geese 20 ±	Teal
Cormorant	Moorhen
Redshank	Turnstone
Snipe	Long tailed tit
Curlew	Great tit
Lapwing	Goldcrest
Ringed Plover	Chaffinch

Hingistbury

Pied wagtail	Magpies
Oystercatcher	Green woodpecker
Eider duck	Wood pigeon
Gt. crested grebe	Black headed gulls
Redshank	

Outing to Winspit - 8th May 1983

Weather - fine but breezy - 6 Members ± Leader

Birds seen include:-

Fulmar	Guillemot	Swallow
cormorant	Razorbill	House Martin
Shag	Cuckoo	Stonechat
Montagues Harrier	Swift	Whitethroat
Buzzard	Green Woodpecker	Blackcap
Kittiwake	Sand Martin	Spotted flycatch.
Raven	Goldfinch	Yellowhammer

Nightjar Walk on 14 July

This walk was well supported by 19 Members. We saw 5 Nightjars and heard approximately 7. We also saw 1 large unidentified bat. 2 Members were very interested in the moths. The evening was enjoyable, but was not quite so spectacular as last year. I think next year we should start later.

Barbara Quick

Due to a lack of space all of the outings have not been recorded in this Newsletter.

Out thanks and apologies go to the recorders of these walks.

Editor.

Whilst watching the demise of the Large Blue butterfly and seeing the Essex Emerald moth put on the protected list, it came to me that for all our technological achievements we have a pitifully inadequate knowledge of the requirements of moths and butterflies - which can normally manage very well given the correct environment and minimal interference.

With this in mind, three years ago I decided to try and discover more about the life cycle of the Brown Hairstreak butterfly (*Thecla betulae*). Old records show that this butterfly has never been common in these parts, even though there is an abundance of the foodplant (Blackthorn) - much of which is not subject to the ravages of modern hedge cutters, which destroy any ova laid on roadside hedges. Many people have produced generations of imagos using sleeved larvae and/or artificial pairing methods, but this is still far removed from the natural life cycle of the butterfly. For the past three years I have attempted to simulate 'free flying' conditions in a converted 6' x 6' greenhouse, protected by fine mesh plastic netting and planted with Blackthorn.

In the first year half of my small larvae were taken by small spiders, and the only female imago by a larger spider so ova had to be brought in for the following year. In the second year imagos from this stock did produce around 100 ova. Unfortunately 60 - 70% of these were destroyed by Ichneumon flies, which may have been attracted by the above average temperature within the environment (the glass in the greenhouse roof having been left in), and the remaining ova proved to be infertile! The only positive thing learned so far is that larvae kept in simulated 'wild' conditions do not pupate on the food plant as many books suggest, but on the soil surface away from the foodplant.

Sunshine is an essential part of the life cycle of a butterfly and this may be one of the main factors affecting successful pairings. I read with interest the account by Robert Goodden in BBC's of how in 1979, with less than 20 Large Blue butterflies left, it proved impossible to obtain any pairings. Sophisticated artificial means were tried, plus a trip to France in an effort to get those notoriously amorous continental Large Blue males to oblige - and all to no avail. What was the missing ingredient? - and how often does this happen with other species. There is certainly much to be learned before we can justify injecting some 2000 insects to augment a declining species.

### Some 'Do's and 'Don'ts' on Rearing Caterpillars

Ideally caterpillars are best kept in fine net covered cages with food plants growing in pots, this saves a lot of time spent collecting food plants almost on a daily basis as the caterpillars grow.

Small caterpillars can be started off in a plastic container, but care must be taken to ensure that condensation does not occur as this can be harmful. (St. Ivel Gold are ideal in size and have a clear plastic lid).

If cut leaves are used as food, placing them in a small jar of water helps to keep them fresh, but don't forget to plug the mouth of the jar with cotton wool to stop the larvae crawling down the plant stems and drowning themselves.

As the old food withers, fresh food should be placed alongside and touching to allow the caterpillars to crawl across of their own accord.

Try to disturb the larvae as little as possible especially when nearing a skin change. This can be recognised by the fact that the larvae remain in one position without eating sometimes for as long as three days.

Remove frass daily, and as the caterpillars reach maturity it may be necessary to provide a small handful of soil/leaf mould for the larvae to pupate in. (Some caterpillars pupate underground - some spin their own cocoon above soil level).

Try to identify the caterpillars from local library text books, though this may not be easy, and do keep a record of any odd things which may happen, it may not have been noticed before. Slightly damp the soil of those larvae which pupate in that medium from time to time, then sit back to await the emergence of what will be a perfect insect - even a cabbage white butterfly has a beauty all it's own when freshly emerged from it's chrysalis, even though it might have it's beady eye on your cabbages for the next generation ....

Valerie Thurston



