

## July: Butter and dragon flies – and ladybirds

When the sun comes out, there are still plenty of butterflies to be seen in the churchyard, although late July is often a bit quiet. On Sunday there were speckled woods, large whites and commas, and earlier in the week peacocks, small tortoiseshells and red admirals. Earlier in the summer there were orange tips, green veined whites, small whites and the occasional common blue – all of which should soon return as the second generation of the year.



Clock wise from top left: speckled wood, comma, gatekeeper, peacock, 14-spot ladybird, 7-spot ladybird, harlequin ladybird, peacock

Darting around the 'new' churchyard, doubtless enjoying the view across the Welland valley, was a large dragonfly – although I couldn't make out what species as it didn't stay still for long



enough (this is a southern darter from a local pond – and what we see routinely in the garden). Last week, those in our garden pond had a mass emergence- maybe those in the churchyard are from the cart wash, below the escarpment, or maybe the old fish ponds further down.

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The larvae spend 2-3 years underwater, going through several moults. They are fearsome predators eating tadpoles and even small fish. Finally they climb up a stem or leaf (they don't have pupae) and the

adults emerge, fully formed but soft and pale (the blurry pictures here are because it was raining!). It may take several hours, during which they are easy prey for birds, before their wings and body fully unfurl and harden – then they fly off leaving behind the larval 'exuvia'. The adults eat other flying insects, and tend to live only a few weeks, during which they have to find a territory and a mate.

Also at the weekend were loads of 7-spot and harlequin ladybirds, and a few weeks ago a very small, yellow 14-spot ladybird. Seven- and 14-spots are common British ladybirds. Harlequins originally came from Asia, and were introduced for use in green-houses to control aphids – then they escaped. There were worries they could outcompete – and even eat – our local ladybirds, but they seem not to have done that so far. It's harlequins we get forming huge clusters in the vestry in autumn (although other ladybirds can do the same). Harlequins are very variable in colour, but can be identified from often having a distinctive black (if sometimes broken) 'W' on their white heads, and usually having orange legs.



By the way – did you see the photo of a vapourer moth caterpillar that Phil found in the churchyard recently? And, thinking about night-flying things, his video of the bats in the church porch?