



HUMMINGBIRD HAWKMOTH

The hummingbird hawkmoth, *macroglossom stellatarum* migrates to UK every year from Southern Europe and North Africa. This is a day-flying, quick-winged moth with grey, furry body, black and white rump, and orange hind wings. The forewings are grey-brown, and difficult to see as the wings move so fast, at around 70-80 beats per second. When hovering, the wings rotate in a figure-of-eight motion, enabling the insect to remain almost motionless, as it dips its long proboscis into flowers. It shows a distinct preference for plants with deep nectar tubes like honeysuckle, red valerian and buddleia. Nectar is its sole source of energy. In level direct flight it can reach speeds up to 12 miles per hour.

Although it feeds and breeds here, most adults and offspring do not survive our winter temperatures. However, due to recent milder winters, more adults have managed to over winter successfully. Should this trend continue, this insect could become classified as resident in future. Females lay their eggs on bedstraw plants. The caterpillars emerge to feed on the bedstraw flowers.

Hummingbird hawkmoths are solitary individuals, that do not form pair bonds or defend territories. This iconic insect is a wandering nomad, not tied to any specific habitat or location. It is not unusual to see several hummingbird hawkmoths sipping nectar from the same flower patch. Recently, eight were observed on a single buddleia bush in Beaminster.

The hummingbird hawkmoth has been particularly abundant this year due to intense heat in Mediterranean breeding areas. Temperatures in the mid-forties scorched plant life and depleted nectar sources, forcing moths to migrate northwards. This movement was further aided by favourable warm, southerly winds, driving a massive migratory influx into the UK, with some individuals reaching as far north as Scotland.