

## Butterfly consolation

Over the last few weeks we have been spending much of our time in gardens and walking or cycling along roads. I don't think there can be a single reader of this article who has managed to get outside who has failed to see an Orange Tip butterfly. This is a medium sized butterfly whose ground colour is creamy white or white, and the male sports truly bright orange tips to the forewings. The female has blackish wing tips and can easily be mistaken for a Small White or a Green-veined White - however both sexes give away their identity when they perch – they both have marbled green and white underwings.



*Male Orange-tip on Cuckooflower*

We usually see a few of these butterflies each year but this year there seem to be exceptional numbers – whether there actually are more than usual, or the period of very settled weather during their flight period has made them more visible I am not sure – but we often have several in the garden at any one time. The males fly rapidly around looking for a female, while the female usually keeps quite a low profile while she looks for foodplants on which to lay her eggs. The favourite plants are Cuckooflower, which is found in damp meadows, and Garlic Mustard which is found along roadsides - it is often possible



*Female Orange-tip on Garlic Mustard*

find the single orange eggs on these plants. A range of other crucifers are also used including Honesty and Dames Violet in gardens. The larvae are cannibalistic – they start by eating their own egg-shell and will then eat any other unhatched eggs on the same plant.



Another butterfly which can be seen in gardens at this time of the year is the Holly Blue. It is very silvery-blue in colour, indeed in flight it often just looks silver, and it is a very hard butterfly to get a good look at! It is the only blue on the wing early in the year and it flies high in gardens, churchyards, open woods and shrubby areas. The upper wings are blue and the underwings are silver with black spots.

The Holly Blue has an unusual life cycle. The butterflies that we see flying now will lay their eggs on **holly flowers**, where the larva will feed, grow and then pupate. Adults will then emerge in the summer and lay their eggs on **ivy flowers**, where the next generation will feed and pupate. The Holly Blue therefore needs an environment where both Holly and Ivy grow – luckily there are quite a few places which fit the bill!



*Rosemary Royle*