

Tale of two Tigers

Malcolm Bridge

A BENEFIT of living in south London rather than Surrey has been the arrival of several sensational moths. **Toadflax Brocade**, **Tree-lichen Beauty** and **Small Ranunculus** are three 21st century arrivals that have spread rapidly through suburbia and beyond. But pride of place must go to two showy Tiger moths, **Jersey Tiger** and **Scarlet Tiger**, which, being largely diurnal, have captured the imagination of many.

On 20+ occasions this summer, mostly at my Shirley allotment where I am known as a butterfly/moth enthusiast, people have approached me, brandishing mobile phones and asking the name of an extraordinary butterfly they have photographed.

I have made a conscious effort not to be blasé, despite anticipating correctly that I was about to gaze at an image of a Jersey Tiger moth. My hapless victim has not escaped without hearing the story of this moth's remarkable spread throughout our area over the last 10 years and a bit about the Valley of the Butterflies on Rhodes, where this attractive moth is the star of the show.

From its discovery on the LWT nature reserves alongside the New Cross Gate to Forest Hill railway line in about 2003, it has spread since 2008 rapidly in all directions and has now been seen in the more rural settlements of north Surrey. At the same time a more predictable expansion has been taking place in Sussex and elsewhere of the Scarlet Tiger. This moth bemused me on first encounter. I thought I was watching a damaged Red Admiral fluttering weakly over a stand of ragwort.

Over the last three years I have received several reports supported by photos of Scarlet Tiger larvae and adults in gardens in the Coulsdon area, presumably working their way north from Sussex. I suspect that the area north of Crawley: Horley, Redhill/Reigate and Hooley – largely under-recorded – has been colonised by this splendid moth. Although Scarlet Tigers are largely over by the time Jersey Tigers appear in mid/late July, there is a possibility that both species could be seen at the same time – what a lovely thought.



Jersey Tiger



Scarlet Tiger