

A Comma butterfly *Polygonia c-album* and a crab spider *Misumena vatia*.

Roger Plant

I regularly see Comma butterflies *Polygonia c-album* in my garden during the summer months. This species of butterfly with its bright orange upper parts and mottled brown under wings (01) is found across England and Wales, and is spreading rapidly in Scotland (Butterfly Conservation). Its larvae feed on a variety of plants including Hop *Humulus lupulus*, and elms *Ulmus* spp., but its favoured foodplant is Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*. Its pupae hang from the foodplant and resemble a rolled, withered leaf.



01. Comma butterfly ambushed by a crab spider *Misumena vatia*, 25.07.23. Roger Plant.

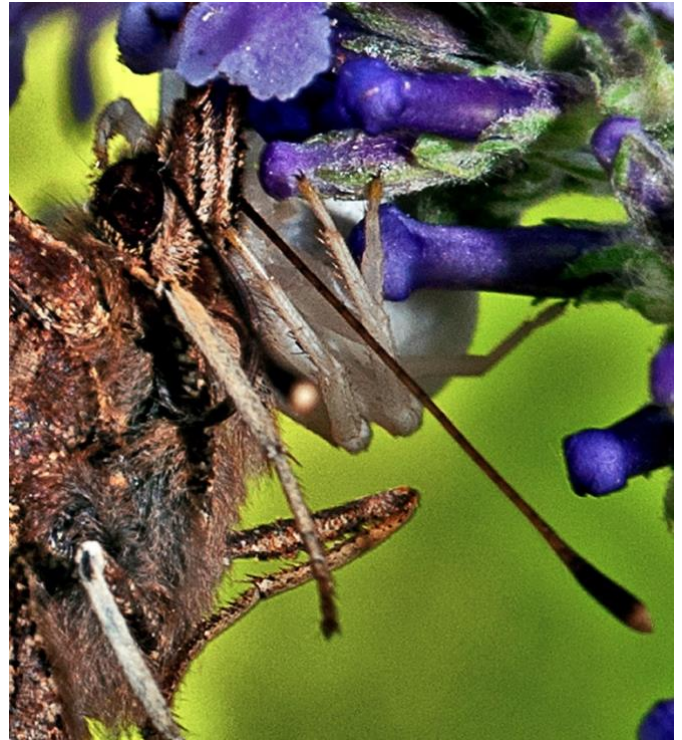
The crab spider *Misumena vatia* is a species of southern England and the Welsh Coast and can be found between April and September. Crab spiders are named after their ability to scuttle sideways, and long, pincer-like forelimbs which they use to restrain prey. Female *Misumena vatia* especially are well known for being ambush specialists, taking a wide range of insect prey (e.g. Farmer 2013).



02. Out of hiding, crab spider *Misumena vatia*. Roger Plant.

On 25th August 2023 I noticed a Comma in my garden. It had settled on a flower and remained there motionless. I approached the butterfly, camera in hand and captured a couple of images. One of which I filed away among many other Raw images of butterflies in my garden.

I joined the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation (WMBC) earlier this year, 2024 and began posting images of my garden butterflies to the WMBC social media platform, including this Comma. A sharp-eyed member spotted that it was actually in the jaws of a crab spider which was completely hidden within the flower spike and had ambushed the butterfly, seized it (01 & 03) and dispatched it in an instant.



03. Close up of Comma butterfly in the jaws of *Misumena vatia*, 25.07.23. Roger Plant.

References

Farmer, G. 2013. Flowers that bite. *Worcestershire Record* 35:34-35. Butterfly Conservation. Available at: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/comma> [Accessed 14.12.24]. Spider and Harvestman Recording Scheme. Available at: <https://srs.britishspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/Summary/s/Misumena+vatia> [Accessed 14.12.24].

Images

- 01. Comma butterfly ambushed by a crab spider *Misumena vatia*, 25.07.23. Roger Plant.
- 02. Out of hiding, crab spider *Misumena vatia*. Roger Plant.
- 03. Close up of Comma butterfly in the jaws of *Misumena vatia*, 25.07.23. Roger Plant.