



2014 Blog

15 November 2014 - Opportunists Making The Most Of The Mild Autumn

In this era of climate change, it is perhaps not so surprising that the butterfly season seems to be extending further and further towards winter. A few years ago, all you might expect to see at this time of year would be the odd Nymphalid hibernator making the most of the autumnal sunshine to forage and soak up the remaining warmth from the sun's rays. However, with mild autumns seemingly becoming typical rather than unusual, butterfly activity is expanding to encompass behaviour more characteristic of spring and summer, including mating and egg-laying.

No less than 11 species have been recorded on the Hants and IoW branch website since 30 October, six of them being non-hibernators or non-Nymphalid, namely Clouded Yellow, Large White, Small White, Brimstone, Holly Blue and Speckled Wood. Any remaining Clouded Yellows at this time of year are caught in two minds - either to attempt the return migration south or make the most of what's on offer here. Perhaps more and more are being tempted to stay and enjoy the sunshine, relatively mild days, nourishment from nectar and significantly, a decent population of like-minded adults with opportunities to mate and lay eggs.

Fresh Clouded Yellows on the wing, mating and egg-laying have all been witnessed in Hampshire during the period just mentioned. It will remain to be seen if survival of the species through our winter continues to be limited to a few sheltered spots in the south west of the county.

23 October 2014 - What's Going On Down At Glanville Manor?



Following a very good year in 2011 for the Glanville Fritillary, its demise since then has been rather dramatic. Whilst the fortunes of the small colonies on the mainland (Sand Point, Wrecclesham, Hutchinson's Bank and Hurst Castle) were always precarious due to lack of sustainable habitat, the last 3 years have also witnessed a significant decline in Glanville populations on the Isle of Wight.

In 2014, reports from the island seemed to start well enough, with decent early counts (up to 30) at the best sites, however numbers just never reached the levels usually expected, with some well-known sites reporting highs only in single figures. Perhaps the most poignant indicator was a count of just 13 larval webs found along the entire south coast of the island in 2013.

If that wasn't bad enough, the situation on the mainland is nothing short of dire, with only Hutchinson's Bank, of the sites mentioned above, having any Glanville sightings in 2014, the species having been virtually wiped off the mainland map in the space of 2 years. The loss from Hampshire is of course particularly disappointing from a personal point of view - in more than 10 years that I have been following Hampshire Butterflies, the species has always retained a small but continuous presence, initially at Hordle Cliffs and then more recently just along the coast at Hurst Castle. We should not forget however, that all the mainland colonies are very likely the result of introductions (mainly unofficial) or dispersal from introduced colonies.

Should we be alarmed by these developments? The loss of the species from its fragile mainland colonies was probably going to happen sooner or later, but the speed of the loss on the mainland and the decline on the island have taken me by surprise. Whilst Glanville numbers do tend to go through cycles, with parasites being a likely factor, any natural dip has been compounded by the weather patterns we now seem to be experiencing, characterised by greater extremes, more frequent and severe storms, higher temperatures and increased rainfall. Very wet summers (like 2012) and very wet winters (like 2014) have almost certainly taken their toll on both the mainland and the island. In addition, winter storms have increased coastal erosion on the Isle of Wight in the last few years, reducing the butterfly's available habitat. I would be delighted to see the IoW populations gradually recover over the coming seasons, but the situation is one of concern.

I have so far refrained from removing the Glanville Fritillary from my Hampshire species list (in the hope it might reappear soon). If extinction in Hampshire does turn out to be the case, it will be the first loss of a resident species from the county during this millennium, even if its presence was the direct or indirect result of an introduction.

1 October 2014 - Poor Year For Short Turf Species In Hampshire

Whilst 2014 has been a good year for many of Hampshire's butterflies, a few species seem to have fared quite poorly. In some cases the reasons for this are not so obvious (e.g. Purple Emperor), but there are couple of species where at least one of the factors is clear. These are the short turf, heat loving species, namely the Silver-spotted Skipper and Adonis Blue.

The Silver-spotted Skipper seems to be struggling at sites where it was formerly strong such as Old Winchester Hill and Beacon Hill (Warnford). One of the main reasons is that the downland slopes where it prospered have become largely unsuitable due to the length of the grass, and consequent cooling of the environment. Thankfully at both these sites, grazing programmes have been introduced by Natural England to help restore the habitat.

In the case of Adonis Blue, the true situation may have been temporarily masked by a decent showing at Old Winchester Hill, as a result of an injection of new stock by Natural England. In the medium and long term however, the survival of the species here will only be ensured by appropriate habitat management including effective grazing. The only other site in the county where the species has a significant presence is Martin Down, and although its future here is not in immediate danger, this colony is small compared to colonies in 3 neighbouring counties and the Isle of Wight. Indeed Hampshire seems to possess only fragments of the south facing, well grazed downland on which the species can thrive.

19 September 2014 - White Admirals And Walls On The Island

Following the warm summer and early autumn, it perhaps came as no surprise to note that 2014 has produced late broods of both White Admiral and Wall Brown. As far as I'm aware there are no sightings from Hampshire of either species so far, which makes Walter's Copse on the Isle of Wight look even greedier, with several sightings of both early this week!

I would be very confident that Wall will make an appearance at Lymington-Keyhaven during September and the odd White Admiral in Hampshire is certainly possible, but very difficult to predict which woodland(s) will be honoured.

Despite the fine spell, the season is winding down quickly in terms of butterfly numbers on the wing, so it's nice to have such events as a bonus to what has already been a very decent butterfly year.

31 August 2014 - Autumn Fruitfulness Arrives Early

Tomorrow is the first day of autumn (meteorologically speaking), yet in this advanced year it seems well underway already. Trees are showing their autumn colours and many flowers gave way before their time to dead heads and the seeding/fruitle stage. The early autumn butterflies have also arrived before their time to make the most of the fruitful bonanza. A late crop of buddleia flowers in my garden has been a bonus and means I don't even need to go outside to watch colourful Nymphalids! There were several Red Admirals visiting it this afternoon and I hope they will be joined by Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and even Painted Lady in the next days.

Most of Hampshire's best known butterfly sites, both downland and woodland, should be good to see these species - perhaps in combination with a spot of blackberrying for those winter pies and crumbles! Photo of Red Admiral posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



23 August 2014 - Summer Brood Adonis Appear At OWH

My visit to Broughton Down last week did not produce summer brood Adonis Blue, so this morning I made the relatively short journey to Old Winchester Hill, having noted that a couple of Adonis sightings had been reported earlier in the week.

Approaching the bottom of the car park slope, the search for my quarry was interrupted as a Clouded Yellow flew up and took me part way pack up the hill for a few photos, as it made short stops to rest and take nectar. The diversion was well worth it, but on returning to my main quest, the bright blue of a male Adonis was soon spotted several yards away as it basked on low vegetation. Despite this one being in rather faded condition, its colour made it easily distinguishable from the more prevalent Common Blues and Chalk Hill Blues. A further 3 males were seen as I scoured the bottom of the slope, the last one being in really good condition (thumbnail below). No females were seen. A single Silver-spotted Skipper was the other sighting of note in the area.

It is my understanding that no further Adonis re-introduction attempts will be made by English Nature at this site. There have been several attempts over the years, however the species has never really flourished here in recent times, I suspect because the sward is generally too long for its liking, despite sheep grazing, combined with several wet summers.

3 photos of Adonis Blue and Clouded Yellow posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



22 August 2014 - Law Of Diminishing Returns

I often think that this period of the butterfly season is analogous to the law of diminishing returns (often used in economics) with visits to butterfly sites tending to add progressively less value in terms of interesting sightings! Thankfully, there are exceptions of course, but yesterday afternoon was never going to be one to expend much effort for probably little in return.

So, I made the short trip to Fort Gilkicker near Gosport, following my chance encounter with a Wall butterfly last week at Broughton Down and having been reminded in the 2013 Hants and IoW Butterfly and Moth report of the 18 Wall sightings at Gilkicker last summer. My visit was not successful in finding any Wall's, however, with a network of paths on and around the mound of the fort, generous bare patches of earth, nectar sources for the adults and some sheltered areas, the site is certainly Wall friendly in many respects.

I suspect the problem is that the site is just too small to support a stable population. The Wall is a very active and mobile species, unlike Meadow Browns for instance, which are also present at Gilkicker, but in contrast are rather sedentary. The very active Walls will quickly disperse from the small site and will be unable to find their way back or locate suitable alternative habitat nearby. Once displaced from the immediate area close to the fort (for example by a gust of wind), the individual will be effectively 'condemned' to a nomadic lifestyle for the remainder of its days, as it searches for suitable habitat and a mate.

Perhaps this is how the Wall is sometimes encountered far from known colonies as singletons? On occasion, these nomads may chance upon each other as they wander miles from their birthplace with eggs then being laid on the variety of common grasses used as larval foodplant. A small but often temporary colony is then spawned at a new location or at a previous known location following several years of absence. Most of these locations (such as Gilkicker), will not be suited to meet all of the butterflies needs for a stable long term colony and so the cycle continues. Well that's my theory anyway!

15 August 2014 - Surprise At Broughton Down

I chose Broughton Down for an afternoon visit today, mainly to check if second brood Adonis were on the wing there. My judgement was somewhat off mark on this one however, with none of the target species seen and no Silver-spotted Skippers either. Indeed it could have turned into a rather disappointing visit, with the site turning quite autumnal as summer fades - rather like some of the butterflies still on the wing, including a very faded Dark Green Fritillary still patrolling the spur of land at the western end of the site. Nevertheless some of the Common Blues, Chalk Hill Blues and Brown Argus were still in decent condition, as were a few Speckled Woods at the edge of the site, content to rest on trackside vegetation in the mainly cloudy and cool conditions.

So enter the surprise visitor - a male Wall butterfly, first spotted at the extreme apex of the spur. It then proceeded to work its way along the well baked chalky path, setting down frequently for a few seconds at a time, flicking its wings before taking off again. After some tens of yards it took off over the site boundary. Wall butterflies do have a habit of turning up when not expected, but it's good to know they are breeding somewhere close, if not on Broughton Down itself.

4 photos of Brown Argus, Speckled Wood and Wall posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



13 August 2014 - Clouded Yellow Sightings Increasing In Hampshire

During this period of unsettled weather and with the season entering a phase normally associated with late August, I have not been venturing far. However, I did intend to return to the western end of Paulsgrove Quarry to confirm second brood Small Blue have at last made an appearance there. I am pleased to say they have (well one anyway!) but the focus of my short visit was abruptly diverted on disturbing a Clouded Yellow at rest on the chalky path. No sooner had I started to follow it when another one appeared. In heavier cloud than on my recent visits, I did manage a couple of hurried photos, taking benefit from their lower energy levels and need to set down for a few seconds at a time on the dry ground or low vegetation.

Since late July, Clouded Yellow sightings in Hampshire have been increasing and feature in many of the postings to the news page on the local BC branch website. They are most probably the offspring from the spring migration of Clouded Yellows to our shores. As a result of my encounters today, time in the Small Blue habitat further along the slope was very limited, but enough to confirm a single sighting.

Two photos of Clouded Yellow posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



9 August 2014 - Noar Out With A Bang - Unfortunately Not!

As the 2014 butterfly season starts to wane at a remarkably early time of year, I made a return visit to Noar Hill - probably my final visit there this season. With 2nd brood Dukes and a female Brown Hairstreak seen as recently as Thursday, I was hoping Noar would go out with bang, but a late morning visit did not produce sightings of either. All I can say is that anyone who sees these species there this season needs to heartily congratulate themselves, either on their brilliant tracking skills or unbelievable good luck!

The change in weather, from what seems like weeks of warm, clammy weather to much cooler and breezier conditions was quite refreshing, and there was certainly no shortage of butterflies overall. The summer crop of Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells continue to delight and especially the latter which has struggled in recent seasons.

Finally, returning to the subject of 2nd brood Duke of Burgundy, when butterflies emerge into what must be a rather alien environment for them (clover and thistles rather than a carpet of cowslips!), instinct will make them seek more familiar surroundings. Hence my suspicion is that they will disperse from their emergence site rather quickly. It also suggests that these individuals are unlikely to successfully reproduce (for many reasons) and their genes will be lost from the gene pool.

2 photos of Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



3 August 2014 - Second Brood Dingy At Noar Hill

Having indicated in my previous blog the Noar Hill was a good place to visit at this time of year, I managed to get an hour there myself this afternoon between other commitments. I did not find any Dukes nor Brown Hairstreaks (although two Dukes have been seen there today), however the day was not in vain.

On the return leg and heading towards the exit, I came across a second brood Dingy Skipper in one of the Dukes favoured hide-outs in the centre of the reserve. The photos suggest that it has been on the wing for a few days and has been unlucky in its short life to pick up an unwelcome passenger in form of a Red Spider Mite which had attached itself just under the left eye of its Dingy host. 2 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



2 August 2014 - Clouded Yellow On Portsdown Hill

I visited Portsdown Hill yesterday lunchtime with the aim of finding second brood Small Blue amongst the scrub at the western end of the Paulsgrove quarry. None were seen although they are reported elsewhere in Hants. The highlight then turned out to be on the way back, as a Clouded Yellow passed me flying rapidly along the foot of the slope and clearly on a mission, with no hope of any photos. This is the first one I have seen this season and hopefully will not be the last.

I note that a second brood Duke Of Burgundy was seen on Thursday at Noar Hill - not a surprise in view of the advanced season and warm weather. Noar Hill is quite a good place to visit in early August, with plenty of butterflies on the wing, the possibility also of second brood Dingy Skipper and, if you are really lucky, Brown Hairstreak.

31 July 2014 - Bellinger Brownie On Practice Egg Run

I visited Shipton Bellinger yesterday afternoon, now that the Brown Hairstreak season is underway. At the famous hedge bordering the county boundary, a group of observers were already gathered about one quarter the way down, where a male Brown Hairstreak was feeding on bramble in a fairly lofty and inaccessible position. He had already been there for many minutes, seemingly oblivious to his attentive audience.

The call then came from further down the hedge when a female Brown Hairstreak was spotted. She spent much of her time crawling the blackthorn stems searching for suitable egg-laying sites, occasionally dipping the tip of her abdomen onto the stem. We could not confirm that any eggs had actually been laid so suspect this was a dry-run in practice for the real thing. Thankfully she did emerge frequently from the shadows for a spot of sun-bathing or just to take a break from this demanding task. We followed her all the way down the thick blackthorn entanglement right to the end, from where she flew up into the trees.

For me it was now time to go solo and explore some of the other candidate Brown Hairstreak areas of the site. Whilst of course there were many other common species on the wing - Common Blue, Small Skipper, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Peacock and Brimstone - to name a few, my quick tour drew a blank on the Brown Hairstreak front. On my return to the boundary hedge, the male seen before was still in his favoured spot but flew off soon afterwards. For me it would have been slightly disappointing to leave Shipton Bellinger with the only two Brown Hairstreak sightings having been pointed out by others, so I was pleased to find another (or possibly the same?) male at a different location along the hedge, this time in a more accessible position for photos.

6 photos of Brown Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery including the female in egg-laying practice mode.



25 July 2014 - Noar Hill Awash With Butterflies

A visit to Noar Hill this afternoon before the threatening clouds moved in produced a good species count (17) and confirmed a very large emergence of Peacocks in the last days. They were voraciously feeding on the abundant Hemp Agrimony and other nectar sources, sometimes several within a few inches of each other. The butterflies were putting on a very colourful show, with the Peacocks complemented by smaller numbers of other Vanessids such as Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Red Admiral as well as other colourful species such as Brimstone and Silver-washed Fritillary. Smaller butterflies such as Common Blue, Small Skipper and Brown Argus provided a worthy supporting cast.

The icing on the cake would have been Brown Hairstreak but none were seen, either nectaring or as a result of numerous gazes skywards into the many ash trees. 3 photos of Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



22 July 2014 - Oxenbourne Silver-spotted Flight Period Underway

In sweltering heat, my lunchtime visit to the lower slope of Oxenbourne Down today was productive. Small Skippers and Chalk Hill Blues seemed to be everywhere (dozens) and included two mating pairs of Chalk Hills. Of the species in much smaller numbers, my sightings included a single, rather faded, Dark Green Fritillary and two fresh Silver-spotted Skippers, one of which provided a brief photo opportunity.

That means in Hampshire we are awaiting the emergence of just one species - the Brown Hairstreak, which is likely very soon.

Single photo of Silver-spotted Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



19 July 2014 - August Butterfly Broods Already Arriving

The prolonged period of generally fine weather and higher than average temperatures means that many summer broods of butterflies usually associated with August, such as Common Blue, Brown Argus, Peacock and Brimstone are already well underway. It also means species which can normally be seen into early August, such as Purple Emperor, White Admiral and Dark Green Fritillary are now almost over. However, they have enjoyed a virtually uninterrupted flight period which should bode well for next season.

Silver-spotted Skippers, one of our last species to emerge, have been reported from at least two Hampshire sites during the last few days and only one species, Brown Hairstreak, is yet to be reported. I will be very surprised if this remains the case next weekend.

My estimate is that the 2014 butterfly season is still at least one week ahead of normal, although the degree of 'earliness' does vary from one species to another. Apart from the status of species emerging, you can tell it is unusual just by looking at the countryside - bramble flowers are over in some locations, hemp agrimony is already in full flower and the leaves of some trees are starting to wither or even turn autumnal.

16 July 2014 - Evening Flyers On Browdown

I took advantage of the balmy summer evenings to make return visit to Browdown South yesterday between 7 and 8pm. Whilst the site is best known for its Grayling colony, my main target for an evening stroll were Purple Hairstreaks which can be found on some of the small Oak trees.

I had not specifically looked for Purple Hairstreak in this location before, nor had I been aware of how much oak there is here, some in the form of low growing "shrubby" amongst brambles and gorse etc. However, there are a few more mature trees which have reached the heady heights of 20ft, despite the poor nutrient quality of the coastal heath

Short periods gazing up at a few of these taller oaks in the pebbled areas, just east of the Grayling colony eventually paid off, when a Purple Hairstreak did take wing in an oak crown. There were at least 3 active hairstreaks in this particular tree, probably all males occasionally engaging in aerial squabbles. I did have the foresight to take along a set of kitchen steps (yes I did get some strange looks!) but their 2ft height advantage was valuable for the camera. Whilst in flight the hairstreaks looked in decent condition, it is clear from the photos that their season here is well advanced, with hardly any purple sheen remaining.

A short foray into the Grayling area disturbed two Grayling, proving that the Purple Hairstreak is not the only species here which is happy to take wing in the evening sun. 2 photos of a rather shabby Purple Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



12 July 2014 - Grayling Very Active In The Sweltering Sun

This morning I visited two of my local, but contrasting, butterfly sites, One delivering on expectations, the other slightly disappointing. Temperatures were already above 20 degrees by mid-morning and Browdown North does not benefit so much from the cooling sea breeze of its coastal cousin, Browdown South. It delivered the target species however, with several Grayling seen, mostly around the heathland margins. They were all very active in the warm sunshine and flighty when approached.

Next up was Whiteley Pastures, where temperatures were really soaring as midday approached. The sunshine was in marked contrast to a late afternoon visit yesterday in overcast conditions. Along the main track, there were plenty of common species in evidence - Small Skipper, Ringlet, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown. Several Brimstones, Red Admirals and fresh Peacocks were also seen. I noticed several examples of animal excrement along the way which I hoped would tempt an even larger butterfly from its treetop home, following my success here last year. However the only 'purple' I recorded today was in the form of a few Purple Hairstreaks in the oaks close to the entrance. The other statistics, and not good ones, were that no White Admirals (maybe season drawing to a close) and just two Silver-washed Fritillaries were seen.

I had noticed from visits to other woodlands, that this does not seem to be a good year for the large woodland species, with Whiteley Pastures perhaps suffering more than most due to the stage in the cycle of forest operations where a very large area close the main track has been felled in recent years.

4 photos of Grayling, Small Skipper and Ringlet (the latter two taken yesterday) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



9 July 2014 - Summer Marches On Rapidly As Chalk Hills Take Wing

I note that Chalk Hill Blues (using the new taxonomy for the species) are now emerging at various sites in Hampshire. A short lunchtime visit to the lower slopes of Oxenbourne Down added this site to the growing list, with several fresh males seen. Other species enjoying the sunshine and abundant nectar sources included Marbled White, Small Skipper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Gatekeeper.

For me it's always a slightly sobering thought when Chalk Hill Blues emerge, since they represent the start of the late summer period in my butterfly calendar and their very long flight period means they will be effectively still with us when the season draws to a close in late September. Two photos of Chalk Hill Blue and one of Gatekeeper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



4 July 2014 - Grounded Emperor Provides Stunning Start to Straits Visit

My return to butterfly business following a few days away could hardly have started better, with a visit to the Straits Inclosure yesterday morning in warm, sunny conditions. When I say it could hardly have started better, to arrive at a Purple Emperor site and find an almost pristine male on the ground within a couple of minutes of arrival has never happened to me before. Recalling an experience in Whiteley Pastures a couple of years ago when I inadvertently disturbed a grounded PE, never to see it again, I was more determined than ever to avoid a repeat. I could hardly believe my eyes when that unmistakable triangular profile hit the jackpot bell in my head, having barely walked 100 yards from the entrance! I was privileged to follow 'His Majesty' all the way to the first observation tower, as he probed the track for minerals and then moved on a few yards or tens of yards to the next refuelling point, before finally taking to the trees close to the tower.

Having arrived at the observation tower, courtesy of my purple escort, I was expecting to find plenty of Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals busily nectaring on the abundant brambles there, but numbers were far below expected (several Silver-washed, two White Admirals). We were perhaps spoilt last year when there was a pent up emergence of these species during just a few days, due to the very late season.

I decided to leave Alice Holt whilst I was winning and visit the multi-faceted Farley Mount Country Park, with forays into Crab Wood, West Wood and Pitt Down. Highlights were a mating pair of Silver-washed Fritillaries in West Wood and Dark Green Fritillaries on both Pitt Down and the florally rich meadow close to the monument. My day concluded with a visit to Browndown South, where I saw my first Grayling - unfortunately on this occasion I did not manage a photo of the possibly single individual to have emerged so far, but hope to put that right soon!

8 photos of Purple Emperor, Silver-washed Fritillary (mating pair) and Dark Green Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



24 June 2014 - Fine Spell Set To Leave Us For A While

We have enjoyed more than two weeks of essentially warm, dry weather which has driven forward the summer butterfly season. The flight periods of the large fritillaries (Dark Green and Silver-washed) are now well underway, as is the White Admiral, which already seems to be enjoying a very good season. Purple Emperor too, have been reported in East Hants (Alice Holt) in the last few days, and should appear at their other main sites within the county, including Bentley Wood before the week is out. Let's not forget other summer species, such as Marbled White, Large Skipper and White-letter Hairstreak, whose seasons are also progressing well. Speaking of the latter, a short visit to a site in Gosport on Sunday morning produced several WLH sightings in elm, but no close photo opportunities.

For those with time (and unfortunately over the coming days I don't!), you may have the opportunity to explore a site which you do not know that well. Perhaps Farley Mount for instance, where there are several locations for Dark Green Fritillary, such as in the scrub areas close to the monument. Just a mile or so away, Silver-washed Fritillary, White Admirals and even Purple Emperor are present in West Wood. During the next week, the weather is set to turn somewhat more changeable although still with dry interludes, so you may have to pick your days more carefully.

Although I am unlikely to make any blog posts for about a week, I will try to reply to messages. Heavily cropped photo of White-letter Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



20 June 2014 - Butterflies Have It All To Themselves In The Straits

I seemed to be the only visitor to The Straits Inclosure Of Alice Holt this morning - there were some workmen repairing the main track, but apart from that, the butterflies had it all to themselves. White Admirals are certainly in the ascendency here, with the area around the first observation tower rarely being free of them, flitting round the brambles making short stops for nectar and then gliding off. During my walk, I saw at least 15 White Admirals, including one taking minerals from the ground on a sunny minor track. This significantly exceeded the number of Silver-washed Fritillaries (about 6), all males and hyperactive in the warm sun. Red Admiral, Comma, Large Skipper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Marbled White and Speckled Wood completed a decent species list.

Purple Emperor will be on the wing here very soon - I did keep an eye on the skies of course for an early male defending his territory, but none seen. I doubt that over the coming two or three weeks, the blog headline above could still be applied!

On my way to Alice Holt, I called in on the White-letter Hairstreak colony at Cosham. The tops of the elms were almost "buzzing" with White-letters, with frequent aerial duels. They were generally staying out of reasonable photo range, but a rather worn male thought he could grab a quick snack high up on privet without me noticing!

It was a good morning for watching butterflies if not for obtaining photos. 5 photos of White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary and White-letter Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



15 June 2014 - Keep Eyes Peeled For Swallowtails In Hampshire!

I could not let the appearance of a second Swallowtail in Hampshire this year pass without a mention, bearing in mind the evidence from Sussex that a few Continental Swallowtails arrived during last year's hot summer and have successfully bred here to produce offspring this year.

The Continental Swallowtail (sub-species *gorganus*) is larger but less boldly marked than its UK cousin (sub-species *britannicus*). Furthermore the larvae of the continental variant will feed on a greater variety of foodplants belonging to the umbelifer family (such as cow parsley, hogweed, carrot and fennel), whereas the UK's indigenous subspecies feeds only on milk parsley and is not naturally found outside the fenlands of East Anglia.

The first Swallowtail sighting in Hampshire this year was at Magdalen Hill Down in mid-April with a further one last week near Four Marks. I don't know if there is evidence to indicate the origin of these individual butterflies (unlike in Sussex) or whether the possibility of released captive bred specimens can be ruled out. Nevertheless, the prospect of further Swallowtail sightings in Hampshire in the next couple of weeks, as we look forward to seeing other handsome species such as Purple Emperors and White Admirals, provides plenty of interest.

13 June 2014 - Dark Green Site Runaround

This afternoon I visited 3 downland sites in Hampshire, each with populations of Dark Green Fritillary - a dark green site runaround one might say, since an appointment back home later on certainly made it feel that way. First stop was Pitt Down (part of Farley Mount County Park) which can be a very good site for the species, once

they have emerged that is, which it appears is not the case yet! However, I did note my first Large Skippers of the season there - all very fresh.

A quick dash to Broughton Down was next and yes Dark Green Fritillaries were on view regularly towards the western end of the down and in the south pointing spur with about 7 seen. In the hot sun they were certainly giving me the runaround in a different sense to the blog title, showing no inclination to stop for nectar. Indeed two or three seemed to be just passing through, flying over the hedge at the site boundary and off into oblivion. I thought I spotted a female Adonis Blue in the spur, with its white fringes more or less worn away making ID trickier. However, an examination of the photos later showed it was actually a Common Blue. There were however, several Small Blues towards the extremity of the spur where there is a reasonable amount of kidney vetch (yes I had followed a Dark Green all the way down there!).

Last stop then, was Stockbridge Down. Dark Green Fritillaries have already been reported there on the branch website so I knew there should be no repeat of the Pitt Down experience. I only explored the eastern end of the down and the scrub area close to the eastern car park. Three Dark Greens in flight were seen in each of these areas, but it was a large scrub area thick with thistles which eventually provided a couple of brief photo opportunities. On a slightly more sedate note, Marbled Whites are starting to appear in the longer grass near the foot of the down.

5 photos of Dark Green Fritillary and Marbled White posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



12 June 2014 - Summer Butterfly Season Kicks Off In Hampshire

The last few days has seen the arrival of summer weather in Hampshire and with it the first sightings of several summer butterfly species. These include Dark Green Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary, Marbled White and White-letter Hairstreak. Whilst sightings are restricted to the earliest sites at present and numbers are still low, this will change quite quickly if the fine, warm weather continues for several more days. White Admiral are also reported elsewhere in SE England so it will only be a matter of days before they are reported from the county.

Yesterday lunchtime I visited the White-letter Hairstreak colony in Cosham. I could see one flitting high in the elm even as I approached the small site along the path, and several more were seen during the few minutes I stayed, although sadly (and unsurprisingly!) none offered the chance of a reasonable photo. Camera on a 15ft pole should do it next time!

6 June 2014 - Silver-studded Blue Makes Early Appearance In East Hants

Following feedback that Silver-studded Blues are emerging on East Hampshire's Heaths, I made a short visit to Broxhead Common near Bordon this afternoon.

Emergence is clearly at a very early stage here (possibly first day) but I did find two very fresh males flitting amongst heather close to a sandy track on the west side of the common - and none elsewhere. Bramshott Common, a few miles away, has witnessed an even earlier emergence starting a few days ago.

It would seem that the weather is set to be typical for the time of year, with short spells of both settled and unsettled weather during the foreseeable future. I see no reason why the early season should not continue and it is clear from my recent visits how summery sites now look and 'feel', ready to welcome the main summer flush of butterflies. These include Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral and yes, Purple Emperor, all of which I expect to be recorded in Hampshire during the next three weeks (and in that order).

Four photos of Silver-studded Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



5 June 2004 - Small Blues On Song In Quarry Corner

The improving weather saw me out again at lunchtime, revisiting the Paulsgrove Quarry for Small Blues. However, instead of heading for the scrub close to the quarry face and the pond, I took the lower level track and headed west to the far SW corner of the quarry. There were several Common Blues in the long grass and amongst the flowers on the lower slope, but increasing evidence of Kidney Vetch coincided with the first Small Blues appearing, with numbers soon overtaking Common Blue towards the SW corner of the quarry area.

Whilst Small Blues are now in the latter phase of their season, with no fresh ones seen, this is clearly a substantial colony, significantly bigger than the one close to the pond. Around 12 Small Blues were seen, mainly in this corner and heading up the slope. Although not seen today, I understand that Green Hairstreak are also found in this area, particularly on the Gorse.

Rather than post photos of less than pristine Small Blue, I post a large thumbnail of the area below.



1 June 2014 - Old Winchester's Adonis Battle On

Following the reappearance of Adonis Blue on Old Winchester Hill last year, yesterday's late afternoon visit to the bottom of the car park slope produced 4 males. One or two were showing signs of battle weariness, not only having been on the wing for some days but symbolic of their bigger challenge here, that of keeping Adonis Blue on Old Winchester's species list.

An electric fence was in place earlier this year protecting one of the areas of the down, presumably related to grazing management and it is hoped that the continued efforts of English Nature to secure the future of Adonis at this site will be rewarded in the long term.

Three photos of Adonis Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



30 May 2014 - Small Pearl And Ovipositing Marsh In Bentley Meadow

The days have passed by this week with hardly a glimpse of sun, but there was just enough warmth and brightness today to herald the restart of butterfly activity - at least there was in Bentley wood this afternoon. Following my unsuccessful search last weekend for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the New Forest, I returned to 'old faithful' Bentley Wood this afternoon in search of the species.

However I did manage to vary the particular location, bypassing the eastern clearing and returning to the meadow in the middle of the wood which is the home of Marsh Fritillary. Small Pearls (and Pearls) are also found here and although I only saw one Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, it was a fresh male, suggesting their season in this very damp meadow is just starting. Numbers here will never compete with the Eastern Clearing, however the change of surroundings was a welcome one.

My attention had earlier been drawn by another observer to a female Marsh Fritillary, completely focussed on completing its mission in life by ovipositing its full payload (of eggs) onto the underside of a devil's bit scabious leaf. Its task was still ongoing some half hour later, after I returned from my Small Pearls search, the mound of eggs by now noticeably larger.

There were several other Marsh Frits in the clearing but noticeably fewer than two weeks ago on my previous visit, with the males in particular rather faded.

6 photos of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and ovipositing Marsh Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



25 May 2014 - All Quiet In Wootton's Damp Meadows

Having visited Bentley Wood already a couple of times this month, my woodland destinations this afternoon were the New Copse and Wootton Coppice Inclosures in the New Forest. The former produced Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in modest numbers (around 6 seen) but only common species in the latter. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary have been reported from the New Forest already (and are on the wing in Bentley Wood - Eastern Clearing), but the meadows on the north side of the main track in Wootton Coppice failed to provide any sightings and I suspect it is still too early for them in this very damp/wet area.

Having said that, you will have noticed a number of day flying moths around at the moment, some of which resemble small butterflies at first glance - I suspect this is the explanation for a sighting resembling a Dingy Skipper in Wootton Coppice, Unfortunately I was not able to follow it to establish if my suspicion was correct.

Whilst it has been a decent day weather-wise today, the unsettled theme very much continues. However, there should be sufficient flight opportunities to allow the crucial egg-laying period of several spring species (such as Duke Of Burgundy) to be completed successfully. I note also that, based on the state of some larvae observed in the wild, that an early season is still predicted for summer species such as Purple Emperor, which it is forecast could appear as early as mid-June (although I am sceptical!).

Thumbnail of a slightly lopsided Pearl-bordered Fritillary taken in New Copse below (no full size image as several posted already).



19 May 2014 - Thumbs Up For Small Blue On Portsdown

Following my disappointing search for Small Blue at Paulsgrove Quarry last Wednesday (one seen), I returned today to find a much healthier turn-out in the warmer conditions. My short lunchtime visit today produced about 9 individuals, including two very fresh males as well as a few less pristine examples - and one which had 'escaped' over the protective rampart into the open grassland area. Thus emergence would appear to be still continuing, especially since I could not confirm any of the Small Blue seen were females.

It will be interesting to see if sightings of this diminutive species are reported from other areas of the hill in the coming days, which will be a better indicator of its fortunes this season.

As for my less than impressive tally last week, well I could put it down to the cooler conditions at that time, or simply accept that sometimes things happen which I can't explain! 3 photos of Small Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



17 May 2014 - Downland Species Enjoying Good Season

Reviewing the sightings page of the Hants & IoW branch website, it is becoming clear that a number of species, and especially downland species, are enjoying a good (or even very good) season. Special mention here goes to Duke Of Burgundy as well as Dingy and Grizzled Skippers. In the case of Duke Of Burgundy in particular, not only are counts generally good at core public access sites such as Noar Hill and the Butser Hill complex, but it also seems to be strengthening its presence at more marginal sites and colonising new ones, for instance in the Meon Valley area.

This afternoon I visited one of those - Stephen's Castle Down - located on access land near Bishop's Waltham. I was not even aware of this downland site until recently, nor is it mentioned in a list of known DoB sites in Hampshire which I obtained a few years ago. Not only are Dukes doing well there (9 seen during short visit), but also Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Slipper and Green Hairstreak.

Despite a blanket of cloud which conspired to cover the area for the duration of my visit, thankfully the butterflies remained active in the balmy temperatures. It was interesting to note which areas of this east facing down each species preferred - Dingy Skippers favouring areas of shorter vegetation with bare patches, whilst the Dukes were focused in more sheltered locations. Approaching the down using the path from the top, there was one particular area, as the path nears the bottom of the down at a slight valley like depression, where all four of these species were found, the Green Hairstreak favouring a group of bushes just before reaching the depression to the right of the path.

I think credit to the success of the Duke this season must also go to the significant conservation work in the Mean Valley area, both at core public sites and also sites on private land which is underpinning its current resurgence.

4 photos of Duke Of Burgundy and Green Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



16 May 2014 - Marsh Fritillary Recovering In Bentley Wood

I have been visiting the Marsh Fritillary site in Bentley Wood (Wiltshire side) for a number of years but have not openly disclosed its presence on this website. However, this year I note that sightings are being reported on the Wiltshire BC website. The small colony, located on a damp meadow in a central area of the wood, has endured a couple of difficult seasons, primarily the result of dreadful weather during the 2012 flight period.

This afternoon's visit thankfully shows the colony to be recovering slowly, with about 10 seen, mostly males and in decent to excellent condition. Activity levels ranged from lively to quite sedentary. The more sedentary ones (which tend to be egg-laden females) struggled to fly even short distances, one just managing to flutter a few inches on to my shoe as I stood staring down on it! Marsh Fritillary numbers in the meadow were almost matched by Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.

Whilst in Bentley Wood, I took the opportunity to visit the Eastern Clearing. Pearl-bordered Fritillaries are nearing the peak of their flight period here, with a good spectrum of conditions, including a few fresh ones. I was also treated to seeing two male Duke Of Burgundy in the centre of the clearing, bucking my usual trend of seeing singletons only (or none!).

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary are also reported in the visitors book (one yesterday) and I had one unconfirmed sighting just to the north of the main clearing.

6 photos of Marsh Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery including the one on my shoe!



14 May 2014 - Small Blue Struggling On Portsdown?

I had high expectations of a lunchtime visit to Paulsgrove Quarry on Portsdown Hill, expecting to find a number of Small Blues on the wing there by now. However, my early success of seeing a male within the first couple of minutes after arrival was sadly not followed by other sightings.

As can be seen from the photo below, its condition suggests emergence began at least a few days ago. I intend to pay another visit in the next days before drawing too many conclusions and hope that Small Blue are not having a difficult season here.

Two photos of Small Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



13 May 2014 - Big Surprise On Oxenbourne Down!

You may have noticed on my previous blog that I made reference to a further highlight during the visit to Oxenbourne Down last Friday. The 'highlight' was in fact Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (yes that's right!) of which I had multiple sightings, mainly at the top of the down, high above the valley floor. Now that an even earlier sighting of this species at Oxenbourne has been published on the Hants & loW branch website, I can share my experience, having been initially cautious due to the possible origin of these sightings (i.e. potential unofficial release) and the fragile nature of a PBF colony on a downland location.

Although I became aware last year of sightings of PBF on Oxenbourne Down (mainly in the valley bottom), it still came as quite a shock to encounter a small orange fritillary flying low and intricately over the vegetation at the top of the down, whilst I was searching for Dukes in the scrubby vegetation. A closer examination confirmed Pearl-bordered Fritillary!

Others followed with 7 sightings of PBF at the top of the down, 1 during the descent through scrub and a further 2 in the valley floor. All seemed to be males. Although a few of the sightings at the top are probably double counts, I suspect the total population in the area is in double figures - quite remarkable!

As to the origin - well the nearest known colonies are a serious distance away in west Hants or in Sussex, and whilst natural colonisation cannot be ruled out, a release (unofficial?) is more likely in my view. Nevertheless the area, especially at the top of the down where there is scrub, bushes for shelter, nectar including small amounts of bugle and a few violets, could support a temporary breeding population, perhaps for a few years.

3 photos of Oxenbourne's Pearls posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



10 May 2014 - Oxenbourne Down Delivers Several Season Firsts And The Duke

Late yesterday afternoon as the shower clouds began to disperse, I made an extensive exploration of Oxenbourne Down, encompassing the slope close to the A3, as well part of the valley bottom and the path along and high above the east side of the valley. The fact that I was able to devote more time than my usual quick visit really paid dividends.

Dingy and Grizzled Skippers were the dominant species - Grizzled are now starting to fade but there are still plenty of quite fresh Dingy Skippers and both species were encountered regularly in several areas.

The exploration also delivered 3 season firsts and all in mint condition - Small Copper (several), Small Heath (one) and Common Blue (two including a female) as well as common species (Brimstone, Peacock and Green-veined White). It also delivered my first Oxenbourne Duke Of Burgundy - a camera shy individual nestled among the grass in the scrub high above the far end of the valley, showing no interest in flying,

There was a further highlight of the visit which I have reported to the local branch but, on advice, consider it prudent not to elaborate here. Five photos, including the camera-shy Duke posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



4 May 2014 - Fresh Pearls And Dukes In Bentley's Clearings

Following my previous 'false start' some 10 days ago which resulted in an unsuccessful visit for Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Hampshire, yesterday's effort was rewarded with success. It is clear that, despite the season being early overall, the recent unsettled spell and cool conditions has delayed the emergence of this species in Hampshire.

In bright sunshine yesterday afternoon, I estimate that there were 6-8 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in the Eastern Clearing of Bentley Wood, with the flight period still in its early days. As usual when freshly emerged, the males were very active, investigating anything that might resemble a female (but too early!), resting on leaf litter or voraciously taking nectar, mainly from bugle flowers.

Having followed the few pearly targets around for a while, avoiding the really wet places and satisfied myself that the supporting cast were common species such as Peacock and Brimstone, I headed off (making use of 4 wheels!) to the extreme northern apex of the wood.

My destination this time was the primrose rich clearing in the Richwellsted Copse with Duke of Burgundy being the target species. I had visited this location a few years ago, with just one individual seen, so I was delighted to find two fresh males and a fresh female yesterday afternoon in the same favoured lower corner of the slope. Thus, hopefully next year's generation is already assured or soon will be! It often puzzles me why you very rarely see Dukes in significant numbers, despite seemingly excellent habitat - including abundant foodplant (primroses by the score in this case) on a gentle north facing slope.

5 photos of Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



1 May 2014 - Season Quietly Progressing Despite Damp Conditions

May has now arrived on the back of a generally difficult week for our butterflies, with significant amounts of rain keeping habitats in various degrees of saturation. Despite the conditions, the butterfly season has been quietly progressing.

Notable developments include the first report of Pearl-bordered Fritillary from the New Forest, Duke Of Burgundy emerging at other downland sites and the Grizzled and Dingy Skipper flight periods continuing to build. It is notable too that Wall and Glanville Fritillary have been reported before the end of April from the IoW, as confirmation that the season is still an early one.

There are indications that the weather should be gradually improving for the Bank Holiday, so more serious progress is expected soon along with pleasanter conditions to be out there witnessing it.

24 April 2014 - Unsettled Spell Curtails Hampshire's Fritillaries

Many of you may have noticed that Pearl-bordered Fritillaries have been on the wing for a few days in neighbouring Sussex - even mating pairs now recorded. Hampshire's damper sites in the New Forest and Bentley Wood (Eastern Clearing) are typically later, by anything from a few days to a couple of weeks. Nevertheless the short interlude of dry and bright weather this afternoon tempted me to head west, in search of the species in Hampshire. Short stops were made to visit Parkhill Inclosure in the New Forest and a couple of locations in Bentley Wood, including the Eastern Clearing.

All sites visited were very wet after the recent rainy days and the maturity of the flora (such as bugle flowers) is less advanced than I was expecting. Needless to say, no PBF's were seen at any of the sites. A check in Bentley Wood's visitor book also failed to show any PBF sightings so far, but does record a Duke of Burgundy - perversely this seems on the early side for a Duke colony in damp woodland.

Despite the lack of fritillaries, it was nice to reconnect with these iconic sites, note a few common species and look forward to a return visit when the fritillaries are flying!

21 April 2014 - Rewards Of The Long Trek Along Wascoombe Bottom

In case you are wondering where on earth I am on about, Wascoombe Bottom (marked on OS map) is the valley heading NW to the head of Oxenbourne Down in the Butser Hill complex. A walk along this remote valley will always provide reminders of history - there is a small, now overgrown Second World War bomb crater towards the head of it - and a climb up the steep slopes at its head provides a superb view down the whole length of the valley and beyond.

On the butterfly front, it is one of those places where you never quite know what will turn up - in spring Dingy and Grizzled Skippers with an occasional Duke, to Dark Green Fritillaries in the summer, as well as common species.

A walk along the length of the valley did not provide too many surprises this morning, but I was pleased to find that the Dingy Skipper colony at the head of the valley is surviving - just two fresh ones seen there today but it is very early in their season. Along the valley there were also isolated sightings of Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Small Copper, as well as more conspicuous species such as Brimstones, Orange Tips, Green Veined-Whites and Peacocks.

Two photos of Dingy Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

(Footnote: I was saddened to hear that, not too far from here, a car was broken into on Good Friday at the entrance to Ramsdean Lane (for Rake Bottom). There is alternative parking in Ramsdean, albeit adding a few minutes to the walk to Rake Bottom)



17 April 2014 - Dukes Going Strong At Noar Hill With Excellent Alternative Cast Elsewhere

A week of essentially dry weather with plenty of sunshine has really kicked the season into action, as evidenced by short visits to Noar Hill and Butser Hill yesterday afternoon. Noar Hill was quite busy, both in terms of visitors and Dukes, with numbers of both easily in double figures! Actually I recorded 11 Dukes on my short visit - all males, most in the central area but two seen in a chalkpit at the more exposed northern end of the reserve, which is unusual. I was also pleased to reconnect with Green Hairstreak after a few years of missing them at this site - only a singleton seen in low vegetation near the triangle.

Whilst I have no very recent visit to Noar Hill to act as a comparison, I do in the case of Butser Hill (Rake Bottom) where progress has been dramatic since my visit on 13th April. Grizzled Skippers are now very numerous on the lower slopes close to the valley bottom (18 seen), but the real stars were the Green Hairstreaks (7 seen). There was one particular area of scrub in the valley bottom where there were 4 or 5 of these territorial little butterflies which were sharing their time between absorbing the sun's rays on low vegetation, perching at slightly higher altitude in the nearby shrubs or engaging in aerial duels with each other. Some were fresh but others were showing some loss of scales, perhaps having emerged a few days ago.

As a further point of interest, I disturbed a small brown butterfly on the lower slopes which darted off at great speed, which was probably a Dingy Skipper. I expect Duke of Burgundy will start to emerge at this site in the next day or two.

6 photos of Duke Of Burgundy and Green Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



13 April 2014 - Sunshine And Warmer Days Propel The Season Forward

I had intended to delay any further visits to sites for a few days, to allow improved weather and temperatures to move the season forward. In fact, the last two days and especially today's almost wall to wall sunshine has had the desired effect. This was evident from a short outing this afternoon, and the opportunity to exchange recent experiences with other observers.

In particular, the Duke Of Burgundy season at Noar Hill is developing quickly now, so they should appear at other sites very soon. Grizzled Skippers are also appearing in the Butser area (and probably other sites), as evidenced by my own observations from the Rake Bottom area, where 5 were seen close to the valley bottom and along the path from the entrance gate.

I expect Green Hairstreak and Dingy Skipper will be reported very soon (and maybe already) from our county if the decent weather continues. 2 photos of Grizzled Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



13 April 2014 - Endangered Butterfly Confounds Expectations By Changing Habitat And Diet

I was intrigued to read a recent article about the Quino Checkerspot Butterfly (*Euphydryas editha quino*) which is a close relative of the Marsh Fritillary, living in Mexico and southern California.

It is also an endangered species, reduced to just a handful of colonies due to urban and agricultural development and global warming, causing previously suitable areas to become too hot and dry for the plantain on which the larvae feed. Indeed, the butterfly had been declining so rapidly in the last few years, that extinction was a real possibility.

Thankfully however, this species seems to have confounded expectations by recently recolonizing higher, cooler habitat to the east of Los Angeles and using a foodplant never before attributed to it (also of the plantain family). It is believed to be the first species to change both habitat and diet simultaneously in its bid for survival.

Many conservationists believe that climate change is happening far too quickly for species to adapt successfully. This example shows that some species at least, may be more resilient than we envisaged, and given the opportunity (e.g. different but suitable habitat/foodplant within dispersal range) can adapt quickly.

More information on the Quino Checkerspot can be found on its Wikipedia page [here](#).

11 April 2014 - Chilly Days Holding Back Spring Emergence

Although a number of early spring species are now reported from the south - with singletons of Duke Of Burgundy (Noar Hill) and Dingy Skipper (Mill Hill, Sussex) - being the latest additions, my own experiences indicate very slow progress, almost certainly due to the chilly days with limited sunshine. Short visits to Magdalen Hill Down and Stockbridge Down this afternoon produced hibernators, a few whites and Orange Tips - maybe I was expecting too much!

Hopefully activity will start to pick up during next week just in time for the Easter weekend.

8 April 2014 - Orange Tips Undeterred By Late Afternoon Chill On Portsdown

A late afternoon walk on Portsdown Hill produced my first encounter of the new season with the emerging crop of Orange Tips. By 5pm it was decidedly chilly (~11 deg C in the shade) but the sun shone at times and several males were patrolling one particular stretch of path bordered by trees and shrubs. One may have been lucky enough to encounter a lone female Orange Tip, which was also in the area at the same time.

Orange Tips, so iconic of spring, are adapted to the shorter and cooler days of April and will soon be joined by several other spring species. 4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



4 April 2014 - New Butterfly Season Starts To Awaken

It seems hard to believe that already 10 emerged butterfly species have been recorded this year in southern and south-western counties, with recent additions being Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Small Copper.

Those which have been around for a few days such as Orange Tip and the Whites are still only being seen in modest numbers, but their season is steadily gathering pace based on reported sightings to local branch websites.

At a personal level, I cannot say my season has really awakened yet, since a brief mid-afternoon visit to Magdalen Hill Down left me admiring the excellent management of the site, but not a single butterfly showed in the cool, cloudy conditions!

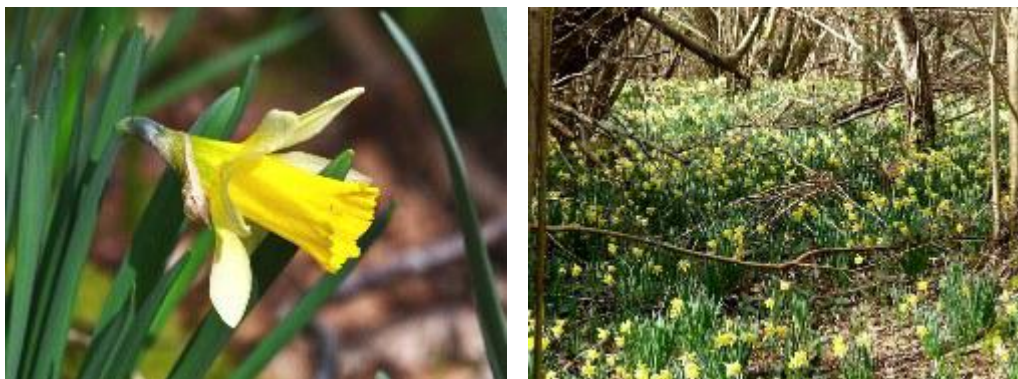
21 March 2014 - Wild Daffs Provide Super Spectacle And Suggest Early Butterfly Season

Despite the sunshine today, there was a decidedly chill wind this afternoon keeping temperatures low. So rather than attempting to check out what was flying (which was probably not much) I decided to visit a small area of ancient woodland which at this time of year is carpeted with a profusion of wild daffodils.

Apart from being a delightful spectacle, the condition of this woodland (Suttons Copse near Curbridge), is a good indicator for the forthcoming spring butterfly season. The daffodils here are just starting to go over their peak, a little earlier than usual by about a week. I was also pleased to find that the ground and tracks here are not seriously waterlogged after the wet winter - indeed their condition seemed rather typical for this time of year.

As for the butterfly season, well it also seems to be starting a little early with isolated sightings from Hampshire during that last week of Orange Tip and Holly Blue.

Two photos of the wild daffodils posted to Recent Photos Gallery. These will be replaced in due course by butterfly photos!



14 March 2014 - Mist Disperses At Noar Hill To Reveal Scale Of Scrub Clearance

Following the wettest winter for years, it was nice to get out and about again this afternoon. Noar Hill had not been my planned destination, however a check on the weather map indicated that the mist and low cloud had cleared much sooner inland than from Hampshire's coastal strip. The transition from mistiness to sunshine was also evidenced by a rise in temperature of several degrees (to a balmy 17 degrees!) during the short drive north.

Despite the wet winter, the recent fine weather had done a good job in restoring the reserve to a visitor friendly state, with only the odd muddy patch to navigate here and there. Visitor friendly it maybe, but I have to admit to being rather taken aback by the scale of the scrub clearance which has been undertaken during the winter - nothing short of savage in some areas, including the famous triangle. Some scrub clearance was certainly needed and I hope that any losses (e.g. to Brown Hairstreak eggs) will be more than compensated in a year or two as the cleared areas recover to an improved habitat.

On the butterfly front, it was relatively quiet with surprisingly no Brimstone's seen, despite their profusion at some other sites. However, Small Tortoiseshells and Commas were encountered regularly, flying and basking in favoured sheltered locations. Several of each were seen, along with two Peacocks.

2 photos of Small Tortoiseshell and Comma posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

(If you are planning to visit Noar Hill at present, note the traffic diversions on the A32 at Farringdon due to flooding).



23 February 2014 - Life Begins To Stir After The Storms

I was encouraged to note that some creatures of the natural world have been sending out a defiant message in the wake of winter storms. In fact last Sunday, little more than 24 hours after the worst of the storms, was a good day for hibernators on the wing in the south. Sussex and Dorset did particularly well with Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Brimstones all reported. In addition, Wall and Marsh Fritillary larvae are also reported to have stirred from their hibernation and are feeding, well on track for an earlier than normal emergence.

However, in this era of unpredictable and volatile weather, nothing can be taken for granted!

8 February 2014 - Wettest Winter Month For Nearly 250 Years Will Have Consequences For This Season

January has been the wettest winter month in southern and central England for almost 250 years (based on records from the world's longest running weather station in Oxford University) and the wettest since Met Office records began more than 100 years ago in 1910.

The consequences of the very wet, but also very mild winter on the forthcoming butterfly season will unfold during the next few months. One of the few predictions we can make with confidence however, is that there are likely to be both winners and losers, influenced in no small measure by how and where the different species over-winter.

Several spring species could act as early indicators. The Grizzled Skipper over-winters as a pupa, the pupa being formed close to the ground. The Duke of Burgundy and Green Hairstreak are unfortunately, 'in the same boat' so to speak, although the pupae of the latter are sometimes found deep in the nests of ants. Several of our blues, such as the Small and Adonis and all of Hampshire's fritillaries overwinter as larvae, with perhaps a better chance of avoiding being submerged.

There are many other factors at play of course, so we'll just have to wait and see.

18 January 2014 - New Year Opens With Pristine Speckled Wood

Trawling through the BC early sightings records, I had noticed that it will now be impossible to beat the early sighting record set last year for a non-hibernating species (Speckled Wood) which was reported in Cornwall on the first day of January.

It suggests that the first sighting this year of a fresh Speckled Wood in Hampshire on 11 January is not such a fluke, bearing in mind the very mild weather for the time of year and a sighting in Sussex of the same species one day earlier. The fact that this species can hibernate as either larvae or pupae means it could be seen on any day from early spring until autumn, even in a typical year - but not normally in January!

The untypical start to the year means that we will need to keep a close eye on how events develop, given the unusual weather, the late season last year and the initial very early sighting of a non-hibernator this year. Hopefully an interesting year ahead!