



2018 Butterfly Blog

2 December 2018 - Declines In Butterfly Populations Reflect Much Wider Biodiversity Crisis

It should come as no surprise that the decline in our butterflies reflects a much larger and wider scale problem - namely the dramatic and global scale loss in the biodiversity of Planet Earth. The latest Living Planet report by WWF indicates that, since 1970, humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles. This follows a report earlier this year that one in eight bird species is threatened with global extinction. Recent studies have also tracked massive declines of pollinating insects in the USA, Costa Rica and Germany. The WWF report is accompanied by a dire warning that the loss of wildlife is now an emergency that is threatening human civilisation.

Biodiversity describes the rich diversity of life on Earth, from individual species to entire ecosystems, the term being a contraction of "biological diversity". The global biodiversity losses now becoming apparent represent a crisis equalling, and quite possibly surpassing, climate change. Deforestation, poaching, industrial farming and pollution are some of the ways in which the planet's natural ecosystems are being disrupted – with devastating results.

Why is biodiversity so important? Well, the reality is that the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat all ultimately rely on biodiversity. Some examples are obvious: without plants there would be no oxygen and without bees, and other flying insects like butterflies to pollinate, there would be no fruit or nuts. Indeed, insects play a really crucial role, not just as pollinators of flowers, predators of pests and decomposers of waste, but as the engine at the lower end of the food chain that supports complex, but ultimately fragile, ecosystems.

According to the UN, we have just two years to draw up and then implement ambitious global targets to protect the insects, birds, plants and mammals that are vital for global food production, clean water and carbon sequestration. In other words, we have very little time to prevent a biodiversity Armageddon. Food for thought indeed!

7 November 2018 - Decent Number Of Species Make It Into November

A quick look at the branch websites of both Hampshire and neighbouring Sussex shows that 10 butterfly species have made it into November on the wing, excluding hibernators. For the record, these species are: Small Copper, Common Blue, Speckled Wood, Large White, Small White, Meadow Brown, Brown Argus, Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and Wall. Most of these sightings were reported from Sussex, but in principle they could apply to Hampshire.

Sussex also publish the average latest sighting dates for their species. In the case of Brown Argus and Meadow Brown, the November sightings are almost a WHOLE MONTH later than typical. It is not clear whether this is due to the rather unusual season or the serendipitous nature of late season sightings, when there are much fewer butterflies around - and even fewer observers to see them!

22 October 2018 - Patchy Turnout Of Partial Late Broods Despite Hot Summer

Back in July, when the 2018 summer heatwave was at its most intense, I commented that this could be a good year for those partial late broods which tend to occur only in the hottest years. These include Duke Of Burgundy, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and even White Admiral.



This year Hampshire seems to have missed out in this respect, at least based on reported observations. Some other counties fared slightly better, with second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary appearing in Sussex - and also in Cornwall and County Durham, to my knowledge. On the other hand, I am not aware of any second brood Dukes or White Admirals being recorded anywhere in UK.

Nevertheless, the late brood phenomenon usually provides at least one surprise because of its very nature, and this year it was the appearance of second brood Heath Fritillary at one of its Essex sites (Belfairs Wood) - and by all accounts quite a decent emergence. Second brood Heath Fritillary are very unusual in UK.

I am not going to try and explain why 2018 overall fell slightly short of expectations in this respect, despite the summer being classified as the joint hottest on record by the Met Office. However, I suspect the easing off in daytime temperatures during August, following the hot June and July was a factor in keeping the partial late broods at bay.

25 September 2018 - Third Brood Walls Provide Fitting Season Finale During Sussex Visit

Yesterday I made my final outing of the 2018 butterfly season, to Lancing Ring Local Nature Reserve in West Sussex. Joined by another butterfly enthusiast, we explored different areas of the reserve with third brood Wall Brown being the main target. The coolish (but sunny) conditions did not seem to bother the late September butterflies, although it was clear that more sheltered spots were favoured.

An early distraction from our main target was the sight of a small butterfly which settled about 20ft up in a tree, just yards from the car park - we both commented that its flight was very much hairstreak-like. The main, and probably only butterfly candidate at this time of year, is Brown Hairstreak. They are recorded on the reserve and blackthorn is plentiful, but no definite ID could be made on this occasion.

Back to the main business of seeking out the Walls, we explored several areas which were generally close to the margins of the triangular reserve. Particular Wall hot-spots were on the west side and around the pond at the northern end. In total around 12 third brood Walls were seen, all those identified after settling being males, in various conditions from fresh to somewhat faded. They were generally very active and quite skittish, but most did spend some time basking on sheltered paths or on bramble leaves, as well as taking part in aerial skirmishes with each other.

As a supporting act, a few other species were also recorded, including Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Small Copper and a mating pair of Common Blue. Four photos of Wall and one Comma posted to Latest Photos.



12 September 2018 - Site Features Update Includes Pearls In West Wood And Dukes At Stockbridge

During the past couple of weeks, I have made some editorial changes to the site features on this website, with the aim of reflecting the continuous evolution in their butterfly populations. Whilst many of the changes are minor, there are several which are quite important, and generally represent good news, as a few species manage to colonise new sites. I highlight these below:

- Farley Mount Country Park: West Wood is added as a specific area within the country park worthy of a butterfly visit. Pearl-bordered Fritillary are colonising a clearing there and the wood is becoming a very noteworthy location for Purple Emperor, with sightings in several of the rides, as well as a few groundings.
- Stockbridge Down: Duke Of Burgundy have been appearing there during the past couple of years, and seem to be establishing a small colony in one of the earthwork ditches close to the hill-fort.
- Shipton Bellinger: Following what is believed to be the loss of the Wall colony from the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve, the few Wall sightings each year at Shipton Bellinger take on greater significance. These sightings suggest the species is breeding in the area, albeit in very low numbers. Indeed, the three individuals seen during a recent BC field trip to Perham Ranges, just to the east of Shipton Bellinger, serves to reinforce this theory.

4 September 2018 - Hampshire Butterfly Sites - Five Out But Four New Ones In

Keeping pace with Hampshire's evolving butterfly populations is a bit like painting the Forth Bridge, when you think it's finished, it's time to start again! Over the last year or so, it has become increasingly clear that several of the butterfly sites I have included on the website, can no longer be justified as among the best butterfly places. This is usually because a specific key species has disappeared or its butterfly population/diversity has noticeably decreased.

Sadly, these include the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve. Whilst it is a place I have enjoyed visiting for 15 years and continues to be a haven for birds, the loss of its breeding colony of Wall Brown means I can no longer justify it on the list of butterfly sites. Roydon Common has also been removed, having suffered the loss of its Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary colony, a species whose existence in Hampshire is seriously threatened, and is now lost from all of its former New Forest sites.

Two heathland sites have been replaced by others in the same area, which I believe are richer in key species and offer greater habitat diversity. Godshill is replaced by Hampton Ridge (both in the New Forest) and Castle Bottom is replaced by Hazeley Heath (both in NE Hampshire). Grayling and Silver-studded Blue are present on both the new sites.



One downland site in central Hampshire has been replaced by another. Beacon Hill (Warnford) is a challenging site with very steep slopes, and no longer records Silver-spotted Skipper on a regular basis. It has been replaced by St Catherine's Hill near Winchester, which is one of few places in the county where both the Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper can be found.

Finally, Portland Coppice near Purbrook has been added, which is part of the Southwick Estate in SE Hampshire. It is a delightful small wood, and a very good site for both White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary. So, if my arithmetic is correct, that makes five sites removed from the Butterfly Sites summary page, but four new ones added. None of the new sites have a site feature as yet, but that may be considered in the future.

31 August 2018 - Grayling Still Flying In The New Forest

During 2018 I have not managed to visit very many new locations, so as the season now draws to a close, I took the opportunity today to visit the Hampton Ridge area in the north-west of the New Forest. In addition to wanting to explore this area of wide vistas for the first time, my target species was Grayling, in the hope that one or two are still on the wing.

I made a circular route, setting off from Frogham car park, walking along the first part of Hampton Ridge (exploring some of the sandy tracks and heathland on the right) then downhill into the Alderhill Inclosure and back along the Latchmore Brook. I must say what a lovely part of the New Forest this is, with beautiful views, undulating heathery heath and grassland, woodland, a tranquil brook and butterflies!

Well, I didn't see too many butterflies, but I did manage two female Grayling (disturbed from the margins of minor sandy tracks in the heathland) as well as Small Heath, Pecked Wood (in the Alderhill Inclosure) and even a Common Blue. Other blogs indicate that the area is also good for Silver-studded Blue, and although my visit was too late for them, I certainly would not doubt it. One photo of Grayling posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



23 August 2018 - Brown Argus Success Story On Portsdown Hill

It was not many years ago that one butterfly species conspicuous by its absence on Portsdown Hill, was the Brown Argus. Whilst this might seem surprising, considering that there seems to be sufficient suitable habitat, there is certainly no absence any longer. From the occasional record of Brown Argus on the hill, there now seems to be a thriving colony at the bottom of the down below the Paulsgrove Quarry, especially the far western end, with around 15 seen this afternoon.

I made the short visit to this area primarily in the hope of seeing Clouded Yellow, which I have seen



there in previous years, as well as, of course, Small Blue. Well, I did not see any Clouded Yellows today. However, I suspect at least one of the little butterflies providing fleeting glimpses alongside the Brown Argus, was a Small Blue, without being able to confirm.

The strong showing of summer brood Brown Argus is not confined to Portsdown - the butterfly seems to have done well at several other downland sites, including Old Winchester Hill and St Catherine's Hill. 2 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



17 August 2018 - Noar Hill At Last Comes Up Trumps With Brown Hairstreak, Including Ovipositing Female

My recent visits to Noar Hill for Brown Hairstreak (not all of which have been the subject of a blog entry) have fallen somewhat short with respect to sightings. However, with a sunny morning in prospect, I brought forward to today, my final planned visit this season to the reserve.

The decision paid dividends too, since my visit around midday produced no less than 3 female Brown Hairstreaks. They were all in the same area during a period of about 20 minutes, close to the stone circle on the SW side of the reserve - and at least one of them was ovipositing on young blackthorn. All were quite restless, never staying in one location for long, whether that be perched in the light scrub by the path, basking with open wings, diving off into nearby shrubs or, as indicated, ovipositing. Two of the females were showing some wear and tear, but one seemed almost immaculate.

Another observer, who had visited the site regularly, seemed to know a few other secluded nooks and crannies elsewhere on the reserve to search for them, adding one more female 'brownie' feeding on Hemp Agrimony to the list, but alas it had gone by the time I climbed the steep bank to take a look. A detour on the way out, to the area where the 3 females had been seen, produced no further sightings - indeed all was quiet there on the hairstreak front. 5 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery, including the best I could do to photograph one of the eggs.



14 August 2018 - Return Visit For Silver-spots and Adonis, with Clouded Yellow Bonus

A major motivation for this afternoon's return visit to St Catherine's Hill (followed later by a stop at Old Winchester Hill) was my previous failure to find Silver-spotted Skippers, only to subsequently learn that 21 of the little critters had been seen there just a few days earlier! I actually managed to locate the spot where one of the photos (on the local BC branch website) had been taken, by comparing the background landscape, and think I now have a viable explanation for the apparent disparity.

A good area for the species (at least this year) is the lower south facing slope, just a little further east than I had ventured during my previous visit, where there is an area of short turf, nectar and undulating landscape. I only saw 3 Silver-spotted Skippers there today and suspect that the sighting of 21 coincided with their main emergence. As is usual at a site which has limited ideal habitat for them, most of the butterflies soon disperse, hopefully after mating, to other areas of the overall site, and are more likely to be encountered as singletons. Populations of Adonis Blue on the southern slopes, and other species, seemed similar to my previous visit almost a week ago, with Adonis continuing to emerge in small numbers.

So, hopefully having solved the conundrum, I moved on to Old Winchester Hill, focusing on the car park slope. The weather had now evolved from partly cloudy to almost completely overcast, but thankfully it was quite warm with butterflies still flying. In a shorter turf area, reached after turning left along the gravel path at the bottom of the slope, I disturbed two Silver-spotted Skippers. These were noticeably fresher than the ones at St Catherine's Hill, illustrating that this (as always) is a late site for them. As a sun loving species, the only one I was able to follow wanted to hunker down amongst the grass stems, under the cloudy skies.

Now, heading back towards the meadow area at the very bottom of the slope, I encountered (amongst other blues) a male Adonis Blue and a second one in the meadow itself. Then, soon after the sun made a brief re-appearance, a Clouded Yellow entered the fray. Sadly it did not land at all, before flying over a hedge and out of sight. It was to be the only one I would see during my visit. 4 photos of Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



8 August 2018 - Fresh Adonis On the Wing Provides Much Needed Boost, As Season Wanes

We have not even reached mid-August, but already it feels like the 2018 butterfly season is on the wane, with all species now emerged, an ever-decreasing number of fresh specimens, a parched landscape and nectar at a premium. So my visit to St Catherine's Hill this afternoon, in search of Adonis Blue, provided a welcome boost. The first two Adonis Blue seen were not fresh and I began to wonder that my visit should have been a few days earlier. Thankfully this turned out to be just down to chance, since further searching of the lower south facing slopes did provide two fresh males - 5 male Adonis seen in all.

Whilst there were still plenty of Common and Chalkhill Blues, I was also pleased to find a decent population of Brown Argus on the slopes - 8 somewhat faded specimens seen. I did not come across any of that other scarce species found on St Catherine's Hill, namely the Silver-spotted Skipper, although one was seen last week. I think the population here must be very small, despite the species being recorded every year.

I now plan to start reducing my outings to about one per week, as the season enters its final phase. Hopefully, I still have unfinished business to conclude with a Clouded Yellow or two - a species which has eluded me so far this season. 3 photos of Adonis Blue posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



6 Aug 2018 - End Of An Era For Keyhaven's (And Hampshire's) Walls?

The dramatic decline of the Wall butterfly in the UK is well known, with the species lost from large swathes of the country, especially from inland areas in southern Britain. It is a great shame therefore,



although not completely surprising, that the only remaining and long-standing colony in Hampshire, at the Lymington to Keyhaven Nature Reserve, has now probably gone.

The last sightings there which I am aware of (reported in the Hampshire and IoW Butterfly Report 2017), were in the spring of that year. I visited the reserve this morning, complementing a visit by another observer yesterday morning, both visits being conducted in hot, sunny, conditions. In combination, the visits covered the whole length of the sea wall between Keyhaven in the west to Normandy Marsh in the east, as well as the '*Ancient Highway*' and the paths around the old salt-working buildings. Sadly, not a single Wall butterfly was seen.

As a butterfly of the wider countryside, and with colonies still existing in neighbouring counties and the Isle of Wight, Hampshire does still witness occasional, more or less random sightings. Thankfully this should continue and perhaps may allow the butterfly to recolonise at some point in the future. Indeed, having visited Wall colonies on chalk downland in both Sussex and Wiltshire, it is somewhat surprising that, given the amount of downland in Hampshire, the butterfly has been so scarce here for years, with sightings in the near future likely to be limited to occasional wandering adults from elsewhere.

From my visit this morning, it is clear that this hot summer has resulted in early burn-out of nectaring flowers for all species, with few butterflies of any description seen. Only Meadow Brown, Common Blue, Small Heath, Whites, Peacock and Red Admiral were recorded sporadically in low numbers. I will have more to say on the demise of the Wall in Hampshire in a later blog. In the meantime we can always hope that other visitors have better success, but I somehow doubt it!

3 August 2018 - Noar's Brownies Playing Hard To Find Again!

It was 52 weeks ago today (actually the 4th August) that a visit to Noar Hill produced a lovely female Brown Hairstreak feeding on Hemp Agrimony, during late morning. As a slightly superstitious person, I was hoping I could be lucky again today, so chanced my arm with another late morning visit, this time in cloudless skies and sweltering heat. I am aware from other observers, that there have been occasional sightings at Noar Hill during the last couple of weeks. However, until very recently, the Brown Hairstreaks have been reluctant to come down from the shade of the trees at this site, and have usually been very skittish and restless, even when they do.

However, I probably should have listened to my head, and whilst the site is alive with butterflies (including fresh Common Blues), the one I was looking for was keeping out of view, as best it could. So although I had no low level Brown Hairstreak sightings, I can't say the visit drew a complete blank for the species, since a male was in the first Ash tree on the left side of the triangle, making occasional short flights around the boughs, but always landing out of full view.

It is not clear why Brown Hairstreaks are being especially elusive at Noar Hill this year, but it is likely that the prolonged hot weather is modifying their behaviour, with the need to seek shade almost all the time. This behaviour seems to be accentuated here, compared to their other main location in Hampshire at Shipton Bellinger. It may also be that the population at Shipton Bellinger is significantly larger with low level sightings more frequent as a consequence, but still less often than usual. This is just speculation of course!

31 July 2018 - Shipton's Brown Hairstreaks Not So Camera Shy As Their Season Marches On

I returned to Shipton Bellinger this morning after the weekend downpours, to see if its Brown Hairstreaks were being little more cooperative than last week. I met up with some familiar faces too, all with the same target species in mind. I am pleased to say that, after the sweltering heat of last



week, the Brown Hairstreaks are now more willing to come out from their hidey-holes in the trees and thick hedgerows to feed or just do what Brown Hairstreaks do - sit motionless on foliage passing the time of day!

Whilst there was male activity in Ash trees along the track from the village, all my low level sightings were in the county boundary hedge. Six males and one female were recorded there during late morning. The condition of the males ranged from good (but not excellent) to quite faded. The only female I saw had slight tears in her hind wings - perhaps from brambles - however, another observer had seen a female in close to pristine condition. Brown Hairstreaks have been on the wing at Shipton for at least two weeks, which is consistent with their flight period approaching peak now, with few if any males still to emerge. I suspect this season is proving quite challenging for them, and for us finding them! 5 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



26 July 2018 - Oxenbourne Finally Delivers Silver Spots!

It was with an ironic smile that I read Monday's posting on the branch website indicating that 6 Silver-spotted Skippers had been seen that morning on Oxenbourne Down, following my failed visit two days previously. So having indicated I would probably not return this year, I decided to eat humble pie and set off for Oxenbourne this afternoon. I only managed 4 Silver-spotted Skippers, but at least did manage a few decent photos of some lovely fresh skippers. As I focused on one which had just settled on Sheep's Fescue, it dipped its abdomen, then flew off. It was more important to try to follow it rather to check if an egg had been laid. As it happened, I succeeded in neither!

So having succeeded with Silver-spotted Skipper at Oxenbourne, that really will be my final visit there this season (barring miracles like a Swallowtail being seen!) however, I hope it will not my last acquaintance with the species this year. 3 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.





25 July 2018 - Good Year For Partial Second Broods?

This summer may be turning out to be unprecedented in terms of the relentless, hot, dry weather (we shouldn't complain, I know!) however, it will increase the likelihood of partial second broods for several species which are normally single brooded. These range from *very likely* (as in the case of Dingy Skipper) to *quite possible* in the case of Duke Of Burgundy to *surprising, but not astonishing*, in the case of the Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. Partial second broods tend to occur after a strong first brood showing at sites with good populations, so I am not sure whether Hampshire qualifies on that count in the case of the Small Pearl!

Partial second broods can be a double-edged sword for species with weak populations, and probably do more harm than good, by reducing next year's breeding population. Partial brood individuals are likely to have reduced chances of mating, and any larvae emerging into the unseasonal environment may have a limited food supply, made worse this year by the prolonged hot weather, causing premature wilting.

Nevertheless, whilst you are out enjoying the weather and our usual summer butterflies, look out for these species in a more unusual environment for them.

23 July 2018 - Soaring Temperatures Spell Frustration For Brown Hairstreak Observers!

I visited Shipton Bellinger this morning for Brown Hairstreak, timing my arrival for around mid-morning, which is normally a good time to find odd ones descending to feed. It seems however, that most of the activity today (such as it was) had been even earlier, one observer reporting some low level male sightings soon after arriving at the site, but sightings quickly plummeted as temperatures soared into the upper twenties.

I did not see any Brown Hairstreaks at the usually reliable boundary hedge, despite several passes. However, whilst walking down the minor track towards the village, a male 'Brownie' was spotted, flitting well above head height in the shrubbery. He made a few short, jerky flights, always landing in shady foliage and often partially obstructed from view, enabling only a record shot as evidence.

Other observers reported sightings of two or three more males in the vicinity, all adopting similar, somewhat frustrating behaviour, at least for the observer! Whilst other species (Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns, Whites, common Nymphalids) seemed to be actively enjoying the heat, in the case of Brown Hairstreak, it just seems to send them for an earlier and longer 'siesta' than usual! One photo posted to Latest Photos Gallery.





21 July 18 - Last Chance Saloon For Oxenbourne's Silver-spots

I made a return visit to Oxenbourne Down this morning, to see if I could succeed with Silver-spotted Skipper at the second (and probably final) attempt this season. No luck for me again today, although a couple of individuals have been recorded there on different days.

During the last few years, a number of observers have been expressing concern for the Silver-spotted Skipper at this small site, which has very little of the short turf/flower rich/low scrub habitat they need. I really do fear that the writing is now on the wall for this species at Oxenbourne. In Hampshire the Silver-spotted Skipper can be found at Broughton Down (strongest site), Old Winchester Hill (late site), St Catherine's Hill and occasionally at Martin Down.

On a more general point, the long, hot, dry spell may well prove challenging for some summer species, not only to ensure availability of moisture, but also for newly hatched larvae on foodplants which are rapidly drying out and withering before their time. We shall see!

I did take the opportunity of photographing a pair of mating Gatekeepers whilst at Oxenbourne (posted to Latest Photos Gallery).

18 July 2018 - Oxenbourne's Silver-spots Playing Hard To Find

On my way back from a visit to Aldershot (nothing to do with butterflies!), I made an early afternoon call at Oxenbourne Down to check on the Silver-spotted Skipper status. Whilst one was reported there at the weekend, I had no such luck, despite a thorough search of their usual haunts. On the upside, the cloudier conditions meant that the Chalkhill Blues were calming down and happy to bask with open wings. They were very numerous, along with Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and Small Skippers. I even saw a couple of Dark Green Fritillaries, albeit faded females.

So I will need to return another day for the Silver-spots, hoping that they will have a better year on Oxenbourne than of late. Interestingly, when I visited St Catherine's Hill earlier in the year, another observer indicated that Silver-spotted Skippers are seen on the southern slopes there every year, so that might be another late summer destination for my list. Two photos of Chalkhill blue and Large Skipper (yes, Large Skippers seen too) posted to Latest Photos gallery.

14 July 2018 - West Wood Gap Filler Delivers A Couple of Emperors!

There are just two summer species yet to show themselves in Hampshire (Silver-spotted Skipper and Brown Hairstreak), in addition to second brood appearances of a several other species. Bearing in mind first sightings of the last skipper and last hairstreak species to emerge have been reported elsewhere, it will only be a matter of days before they are seen in Hampshire.

I took the opportunity of the little gap in 'goings on' to revisit West Wood this afternoon, which is part of Farley Mount Country Park. It seems to have done pretty well for Purple Emperor sightings this year (along with some other sites), so I explored a few of the rides around the centre star point, where 5 rides intersect, and towards the western end, which I don't know very well. The most conspicuous large species was Silver-washed Fritillary (around 20 seen) but my main purpose was to take note of the abundance of willow (for Purple Emperor) in the different rides.

This is of course a large working wood, and time was limited, but my tentative conclusions are that the main track north from the entrance at SU424293 (at least the first few hundred yards), the ride branching off to the left leading to the star point and the ride heading SW from the star point to the boundary with Pitt Down, all have reasonable amounts of willow and should be good Emperor territory. The Emperor (or rather Empress in one case) graced me with a couple of appearances



during my walk, the first close the entrance to the main track, landing briefly in fallow for a quick distance photo, and the second gliding among the tree-tops as I approached the Pitt Down exit.

It was probably best that I didn't get too close as their flight period is, rather prematurely, nearing its end now, and their condition is deteriorating. One photo posted to Latest Photos Gallery. I can't be sure this is a female, but the white band on underside seems slightly broader, which is one of the differences.



11 July 2018 - First Visit To Hazeley Heath Produces Silver-Studs And Grayling

I made my first visit to the HCC/RSPB reserve at Hazeley Heath near Hook around lunchtime today, hoping to find Grayling joining a few Silver-studded Blue still on the wing there. The reserve consists of lowland heath, with areas of scrub, gorse and woodland - and a maze of paths! Silver-studded Blue in low numbers are indeed still around, despite being into the 5th week of their flight season. The remaining ones were all in areas where the heather (which by no means dominates on the reserve) is more sparse. I recorded a total of 8 Silver-studded Blue in 3 different areas. Most were well faded, but surprisingly I found one fresh male just out of the box!

I did not have time to explore many parts of the reserve, but concentrated on the HCC section and the eastern part of the RSPB managed area. In the latter area, whilst walking up the tarmac track leading to Crabtree Lodge, I was thinking to myself that the habitat to the left, with areas of sparse heather and dry, bare ground where scrub had been cleared, would be just the sort of place to find Grayling.

My thoughts were confirmed seconds later, as a largish brown butterfly flew powerfully up from the edge of the track and then down the slope into it - yes it was a Grayling. Further on, where access to the area could more easily be gained, a few more were seen - 9 in total. They were mostly fresh but some could have been around for a few days.

I did say that the reserve also has areas of woodland. Two Silver-washed Fritillaries were a welcome bonus, in addition to common species. 6 photos in total posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



8 July 2018 - Chalkhills Take Wing At Broughton Whilst Dark Greens Fade

In the sweltering afternoon heat (mad dogs and Englishmen come to mind!), I visited Broughton Down, vowing it would be my third and final specific attempt this year to obtain Dark Green Fritillary photos. The good news is that there were reasonable numbers of these spectacular fritillaries on the wing at Broughton, and I did manage a few photos, concentrating on females, which tended to be slightly less active and in better condition than the males. In all I saw about 12 Dark Greens, mostly at the western end of the reserve of which 5 were females. Several of the males were very washed out with some wing damage, probably having been flying for several hours per day since their emergence, perhaps up to two weeks ago.

I am aware that Chalkhill Blues are starting to emerge on other sites, but Broughton Down is essentially north facing and maybe slightly later than some sites. However, Chalkhills are starting to emerge there too, with just 3 males seen.

This year, Broughton Down is taking on a different complexion, the long grass now being predominantly brown and the ground parched and dusty, having been largely starved of water for a month or so. Already this is becoming a crazy season, the slightly late start long forgotten, and the season now ranking amongst the earliest for summer species, with flight periods also being shortened as a result of the continuous fine weather. 5 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



7 July 2018 - 20 New White-letter Sites Located In Hampshire And Probably Scores More Under The Radar

Twenty new White-letter Hairstreak sites in Hampshire have been listed by a keen observer on the local BC branch website, compiled during the last few years. As we know, the White-letter Hairstreak



larvae fed only on various species of elm and although the butterfly suffered badly as a result of Dutch elm disease, it is recovering in some areas, helped by surviving pockets of elm, disease free sucker growth and the introduction of more resistant types of elm.

Thankfully, the White-letter Hairstreak does not seem too fussy about where its foodplant is located, provided there is enough food in the form of aphid honeydew (on the host trees or other tree species nearby) preferably supplemented by flowers, such as bramble, in close proximity.

Not only are there populations of White-letters on elms in hedgerows, in woodland and in parkland, but also on elms growing beside busy trunk roads and railways, on waste-ground, on industrial sites, business parks, around car-parks and even on individual elms in the gardens of private dwellings. The butterfly's domain encompasses towns and cities as well as the wider countryside.

Given that the county of Hampshire has an area of almost 1500 sq miles, even with the 20 recently added sites, I suspect many more small colonies remain undiscovered - scores and possibly hundreds! The new sites add further weight to the widely held view that the White-letter Hairstreak is under recorded, and is significantly more common and widespread than the formal records suggest. An additional photo of a female White-letter Hairstreak, taken in late June, posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



4 July 2018 - No Emperors Seen Today But Valezina Silver-washed Provides Compensation

I had intended to travel a little further than my local patch this morning, but encroaching cloud and the likelihood of showers suggested a local walk in Whiteley Pastures might be more suitable. I stated in my last blog that I had seen at least one Emperor on almost every visit to suitable locations this season - well the statement has come back to haunt me - none seen during my mid-morning visit today. This seems quite normal for Whiteley Pastures with quite a lot of activity during the first days of their season, then decreasing rapidly.

However, a largish dark butterfly did capture my attention and turned out to be a Valezina form of the female Silver-washed Fritillary. Although I have seen odd ones before, I did manage to capture a few photos this time as it nectared on bramble. Other notable sightings were around 8 Silver-washed Fritillary (normal form) and 5 White Admirals, their stunning black and white colour scheme, so characteristic of their early days, now starting to fade. 2 Photos of Valezina posted to Latest Photos Gallery.

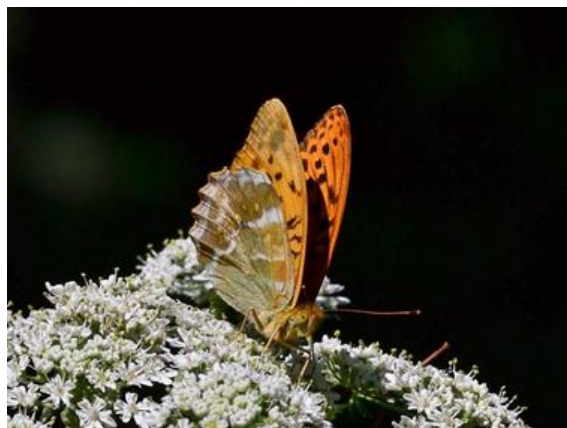


2 July 2018 - Farley Mount Delivering On Most Fronts, But Dark Green Count Still Poor

Based on feedback that Dark Green Fritillary numbers are increasing on Pitt Down (and doing rather well at Martin Down), I made a return visit this morning. I visited both middle and eastern sections of Pitt Down. Following a count of zero there last week, I managed 6 today - still a very poor count compared to expectations. Most were males, with one confirmed female. A combination of their hyperactivity in the heat and my reduced mobility (sprained ankle improving!) again meant no Dark Green photos worth posting. Other species including Marbled White, Small Skipper, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood (the latter along the shady margins) were numerous. The down is starting to look very dry and parched, which is probably no surprise, with less nectar on offer than in more moist years.

My attention then turned to West Wood, exploring a couple of the tracks heading north. Once again a Purple Emperor put in an appearance low down, gliding at head height along the track in front of me, but failing to touch down. Whilst my sightings have been usually just singletons this season, it is notable that I have recorded PE on almost every visit to one of their known haunts, despite most visits being short in duration. It would appear that whilst Dark Green Fritillaries are well down at Farley Mount this year, Purple Emperors are having a good season there - and indeed elsewhere.

Thankfully one of the Dark Green's cousins - the Silver-washed Fritillary, does seem to be doing much better and two of around 10 seen in West Wood were happy to pose whilst feeding. 4 photos of Marbled White and Silver-washed Fritillary posted to Latest Photos Gallery.





28 June 2018 - Dark Greens Thin On The Ground In Central Hants?

I made a return visit to Farley Mount this morning hoping that Dark Green Fritillaries have by now appeared there, but again no joy. I only visited the meadow close to the monument and one of the downland areas - on the latter I did see one large Fritillary flying close to trees and then over them, but that was a Silver-washed. Common species (and especially Marbled White) seem to be maintaining populations, and it is not clear to me at present why the Dark Green Fritillary seems to be having a bad year there.

Before leaving the Farley Mount area, I took a short walk in West Wood. Multiple sightings of Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral were on offer and yes, even a male Purple Emperor patrolling the main track for a few minutes, then swooping up to the trees, only to reappear a minute or two later further on. Sadly he never landed at low level.

I then headed off to Stockbridge Down for another attempt at Dark Green Fritillary. Well I did at least break my duck this time, seeing just one male in the eastern section of the down during a 30 minute visit. He also did not offer any photo opportunities, although did stop briefly on a thistle head. So it would seem Dark Green Fritillary may be having a difficult season there too. It will be interesting to find out how the species is doing at other sites in Hampshire. Hopefully my experiences in central Hants this morning are not typical.

(Footnote: Sorry for the occasional lack of photos, as I am having to be very careful where I walk at present, having turned my ankle over twice in the last two weeks and sprained it. I really ought to rest it for a while!)

26 June 2018 - New Silver-Studded Resident On Browndown?

I have returned from a few days away to catch up on sightings in Hampshire, and beyond. It's now Purple Emperor season, and although there have not been a large number of sightings reported from Hampshire so far (well not compared to Sussex and Knepp in particular!), I am encouraged that there are reports from several locations around the county. These include Alice Holt Forest, Whiteley Pastures/Botley Wood, Lord's Wood, Micheldever Wood and Bentley Wood, where two males were photographed simultaneously on dog poo! Some observers comment that Emperors are behaving somewhat differently this year, choosing to settle on low vegetation rather than gravel tracks - maybe the search for moisture has something to do with it. For those still hoping to see Emperors, it is probably worth noting that their season is likely to be shortened as a result of this prolonged hot, dry, spell.

Away from the Emperor's antics, purplish-blue of a different kind has been recorded for the first time (at least for a long time) on the heathland of Browndown North. There have been multiple sightings of Silver-studded Blue in the last days, including a female. According to BMS records, low numbers of the species are recorded each year from Hamble Common, about 6 miles away as the crow flies, so natural colonisation from there would be a tall order for a little butterfly, but not inconceivable.

Unfortunately, bad news often balances good, and my final point concerns sightings of the Wall butterfly in Hampshire, or more accurately, the lack of them. Whilst the species seems to be holding its own in some neighbouring counties and on the Isle of Wight, I am not aware of any spring brood sightings from the Lymington-Keyhaven area this year. This follows a zero showing of the summer brood there last year, although sporadic sightings from the far NW of the county continue. I really hope that the Wall will not soon become the second butterfly I have to remove from my list of Hampshire resident species.



23 June 2018 - White-letter Site Revisited - Fresh Female Feeding!

Yesterday morning, prior to my visit to Whiteley Pastures, I checked on progress at the White-letter Hairstreak site in South Hants I visited on Monday. There were a few males making periodic flights in the trees at the back of this very small site, with the odd confrontation in evidence as they chased each other around the treetops. Amongst all the other flying insects flying around and feeding on the bank of brambles below the trees, I thought I had seen a small butterfly out of the corner of my eye, flitting briefly near the rear of the bramble mass - probably a male White-letter.

As my gaze began systematically combing the mass of brambles for feeding hairstreaks, another one was spotted - not a male, but a beautiful fresh female with long, delicate tails! She was almost motionless on a bramble flower just a couple of metres to my right and fed for several minutes, making short flights between flowers, sometimes settling in positions obscured from full view. Having gathered a few photos, I decided to quit whilst winning, leaving the possible male to finish his feed in peace. 4 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



22 June 2018 - Brief Encounter With Emperor In Whiteley Pastures

A late morning walk in Whiteley Pastures produced my first Emperor of the season. Oddly there weren't actually that many butterflies to be seen, which made the Emperor encounter even more significant. Having walked as far as the bridge, I had only seen common species, however two other observers confirmed there was Emperor activity in the oaks (2-3 seen) and another had been grounded earlier in the morning closer to the entrance gate.

Just a couple of minutes after setting off again as I continued up the track, the unmistakable profile of an Emperor was ahead of me flying close to the track. It landed briefly on the gravel before flying past me at eye level to land on low level vegetation. I managed to obtain a couple of quick photos before it took off again into the trees. The whole episode was over in a few seconds.

During my walk as far as the cross tracks in Ridge Copse, I also saw 3 White Admirals and 5 Silver-washed Fritillaries - not great but it is early days in their season - and also one very low-flying national grid helicopter! Perhaps the crew were hoping to get a better view of the tree-top Emperors, but hadn't reckoned on the noise and downdraft! 3 photos of the Emperor and Silver-washed Fritillary posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



21 June 2018 - Farley Mount Quiet, Browndown No-go

This morning I made a quick tour of several different areas of Farley Mount Country Park, with target species comprising Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary, making a detour via Portland Coppice on the way back. All the Farley Mount sites were relatively quiet in terms of the key species listed above, with no Dark Green Fritillaries yet in evidence on Pitt Down, nor in the meadow on the west side of the monument. Just two White Admirals were seen in West Wood but no Silver-washed Fritillary (and just for the record no Purple Emperors either!). Back on Pitt Down, the most conspicuous species was Marbled White (around 12 seen) in company with other common grassland species.

In conclusion, it would appear that the main emergence of key summer species at Farley Mount has not quite begun yet, with this season running just a few days behind last year. Interestingly, it is a year to the day that I had a male Purple Emperor on the ground in West Wood.

Fortunes were a little better in Portland Coppice near Purbrook, where the main emergence of White Admiral is well underway (6 seen within a few minutes) with Silver-washed Fritillary not far behind (4 fresh males seen today).

Finally, in case anyone is planning to visit Browndown South tomorrow (e.g. to see the Purple Hairstreaks at low level), please be aware that it will be closed and was closed on Wednesday too, contrary to the opening times published for guidance on the Lee residents association website. I have sent a message to the residents association concerning the matter, since I know people can travel significant distances to this unique site, and have to rely on the online published information provided by the MoD. No photos posted today.

18 June 2018 - White Admiral, Silver-washed And White-letter All Ticked Today!

Having visited Portland Coppice and adjoining areas of the Southwick Estate last year, I was already aware that this is a really good place for White Admirals, providing a good mix of shade and sun for this elegant species. A lunchtime visit today did not disappoint with a total of 7 seen. Only two provided brief photo opportunities, which is not unusual when they are very active in the first days after emergence, and in excellent condition (which sadly does not last long for this species). Whilst there, I was also pleased to record my first Silver-washed Fritillary of the season - a very fresh and lively male - and a reminder, if one was needed, that summer is here!

If that wasn't enough, I also revisited the small colony of White-letter Hairstreak I was made area of last year in south Hants (precise location not public). I am pleased to say it is also doing well,



occupying both elm and other trees in the vicinity. One male was even obliging enough to pop down for a feed on bramble! 4 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



13 June 2018 - Astonishing Discovery Of Black Hairstreak Colony In Sussex!

It's not often that I make an entry to my blog on the fortunes of species outside Hampshire, but the recent news from neighbouring Sussex probably represents the most astonishing discovery of its kind this century!

A thriving colony of BLACK Hairstreak has been discovered on Ditchling Common - a country park east of Burgess Hill in West Sussex. This is one of our rarest and most elusive species, previously thought to be confined in UK to the swathe of land between Oxford and Peterborough, characterised by its Oxford Clay geology. It is thought that this dependency is related to the mineral content of the soil, bearing in mind the general habitat needs of the species, such as abundant blackthorn, are not especially demanding.

It is clear from the fact that dozens of Black Hairstreaks are being seen on Ditchling Common, that this is not a case of a few captive bred specimens (adult or immature stage) being released into the wild. One theory is that the colony has managed to elude detection for decades (perhaps in much lower numbers) and is descended from a release way back in the 60s or 70s by the late Peter Cribb. Whilst this discovery is terrific news of course, it does pose several very searching questions for the butterfly fraternity (and beyond), such as:

- If a colony of Black Hairstreak can exist for decades outside and isolated from their normal UK range on Oxford Clay soils, could they survive or even be already present, elsewhere? Interestingly Ditchling Common is, geologically speaking, also on clay soil, in this case Wealden Clay.
- The above questions could also apply to other species (not even confined to butterflies), especially where their distribution constraints, whether that be habitat, climatic or geological, are not well understood.
- Is there scope for more to be done with regards to rare species, where appropriate giving them a 'helping hand' through properly managed and controlled releases? Of course, this would only be acceptable if done with the full approval and involvement of official conservation organisations. In the case of Black Hairstreak, it is known that their ability to expand their range through natural dispersal and colonisation is very limited, despite what appears to be suitable habitat being reasonably widespread.
- Is it really plausible that a butterfly colony (being the most studied and conspicuous of all insect groups) has gone undiscovered for decades in a well visited country park? Let's face it, we are not talking about a remote valley in Northumberland here! Perhaps other theories will come forward in due course.



12 June 2018 - No Joy With Silver Studs At Broxhead But Plenty At Bramshott

My return from Gloucestershire yesterday was via East Hampshire, making mid-afternoon calls at both Broxhead and Bramshott Commons for Silver-studded Blues. Whilst they are reported already from Bramshott and several sites in Sussex, I was surprised not to see any on the wing at Broxhead Common, during my short stop there, visiting two areas where I have seen them in previous years.

Rather than risk wasting time on a wider search and concluding that they are not emerging yet in the areas checked, I set off for Bramshott. Here, the colony is unusually based in a flower-rich meadow, with no heather in immediate sight, although there is plenty elsewhere on the common.

No such problems at Bramshott - about 20 Silver-studded Blues in the usual small area, mostly males in good to excellent condition with a few females. The males were generally content to bask on vegetation in the hazy sunshine. At this small site, I was becoming very aware of the damage which can be caused by footfall, so having gathered a few photos, I departed. 5 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



11 June 2018 - Large Blues Giving Me The Runaround On Daneway Banks!

This morning I took advantage of family connections in Gloucestershire to visit Daneway Banks near Cirencester, a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve where the Large Blue was reintroduced some years ago. I very much like this reserve, which is based on flower-rich limestone grassland and tucked away in a secluded Cotswold Valley. Whilst much of the reserve is fairly easy walking on gentle slopes, naturally the Large Blues have a penchant for the steeper slopes, but thankfully not exclusively. Most of the activity was in north-east of the reserve, where there is a reasonable amount of wild thyme.

Well, now let's cut to the chase - I saw around 10 Large Blue sightings (possibly including a few double counts) and mostly fresh males during a period of an hour and a half. Once the sun became really warm in late morning, it was pretty much goodbye to Large Blue photo opportunities as they became hyper-active, with any settling limited to a few seconds. Fortunately, I had already obtained a few closed wing shots in slightly cooler temperatures.

One individual obligingly opened its wings briefly whilst I was manoeuvring - nevertheless a first for me, despite the lack of photo evidence, and another was sporting a slightly crumpled forewing, hopefully as a consequence of its very recent emergence. Not all Blues on the site are of the Large variety of course - they were outnumbered many times by Common Blues. 3 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



9 June 2018 - Summer Species About To Burst Forth In Hampshire

Three weeks of warm, mainly dry weather means that key summer species are starting to emerge early, broadly on a par with last year. Indeed Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral and White-letter Hairstreak have all been recorded in south-east England and I expect that the first reports from Hampshire will occur in the next days. Indeed, my suspicion is that these species are on the wing in small numbers at their earliest sites within the county, joining Silver-studded Blue which are already reported.

So this is not only a time of great anticipation in Hampshire, as we head towards the pinnacle of the butterfly season, but it is also a good time for a visit further afield for species not found locally. Species such as Large Blue, Black Hairstreak, Lulworth Skipper, Heath Fritillary, Swallowtail, Large Heath and Mountain Ringlet are all on the wing in their respective locations further afield, whereas Glanville Fritillary and Wood White require only modest journeys.

5 June 2018 - Glanvilles by The Score On The Island, Including Mating Pair

Taking advantage of what is normally a quiet time of year for new species emerging in Hampshire, I made the voyage over to the Isle of Wight yesterday, for Glanvilles. My previous visits have focused on the eastern side around Wheelers Bay and Horseshoe Bay. However this time, using the Lymington-Yarmouth route, I explored the western colonies, walking from Freshwater Bay along the clifftop paths as far as Shippards Chine, taking in Compton Chine on the way. The weather forecast turned out to be seriously optimistic regarding the amount of sunshine on offer, but thankfully the air was warm and skies were often bright, even if sunshine was at a premium, which seemed to be OK for the butterflies.

I saw my first Glanville soon after setting out from Freshwater Bay, with odd ones flitting around the path, albeit in somewhat faded condition. I suspect these individuals had emerged much earlier in the flight season and dispersed from the main colonies. The cliff-tops are awash with flowers at present - a butterfly paradise, with more unusual vegetation on the crumbling landslips (to my mind more characteristic of Mediterranean shores). Close to Freshwater Bay there are sections with abundant Rock Rose and Kidney Vetch, so it was a little surprising that there were only a few Brown Argus and Small Blue around.

There is no doubting however, that this coastline is Glanville territory with several colonies encountered during the walk, the largest colony being immediately south of the gulley which is Compton Chine (30-50 seen) and again approaching Shippards Chine, where a mating pair had settled on Thrift. At one point another male was annoying them, trying to get in on the act! Most of the Glanvilles seen showed some fading, however there were a few fresher specimens, which suggests their season has now peaked.



Glanvilles were encountered sporadically almost during all sections of the walk, and I did make the descent down the new steps into Compton Bay - there were a few Glanvilles behind shore area too. Species seen during my walk included the following: Glanville Fritillary (many), Common Blue (many), Small Blue (few), Brown Argus (few), Dingy Skipper (few), Large Skipper (few), Meadow Brown (few), Green Hairstreak (one). 6 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



2 June 2018 - St Catherine's Hill Visit Gradually Builds To Success

A made a short visit to St Catherine's Hill this afternoon in warm, sunny conditions. The trip did not start out particularly well, landing myself an additional 10 minute walk due to the main car park being full. My principal target was Adonis Blue - never very numerous here and the spring brood in particular, can be elusive. The best areas to look seem to be the flower strewn south-west and western lower slopes where there is a reasonable supply of horseshoe vetch.

These areas can conveniently be accessed via a gate from the Itchen Way footpath at the SW 'corner' of the fort. Whilst butterfly numbers were not huge, there were a good number of Small Heath and Common Blue (in various conditions from very bright to fading), but other notable sightings included a faded Green Hairstreak (in shrubs at the bottom of the south-west slope) a fresh Large Skipper, a fresh Meadow Brown, several Dingy Skippers and finally, a single confirmed very fresh male Adonis Blue.

I was told by another observer that Silver-spotted Skipper are still found at the site south of the fort, so a return visit in August for them and summer brood Adonis could be on my list. The main downside of the visit was my limited time and a lack of decent photos to post! Hopefully on my next outing the butterflies won't be so active!

31 May 2018 - Warm May Sees Season Recovering From Late Start

I have recently been following first sighting dates for spring and early summer species on Butterfly Conservation. My conclusion, that this season has now recovered almost completely from its late start, has been reinforced this week by a report that Hampshire's first Silver-studded Blues have been recorded at Bramshott Common. This is traditionally a very early site for the species, which typically appears there in the last week of May. Whilst the weather has now turned unsettled, (but not cold) this follows a full month of mostly warm, dry and often sunny conditions, which are the reason for the recovery.

So looking forward, there is every reason to expect the start of emergence of iconic summer species such as White Admiral, the large Fritillaries and even Purple Emperor at their usual times in the butterfly calendar, during the second half of June.



Before closing this short post, I just want to mention some other topical good news - namely that Chequered Skippers are once again flying in England. Following a 40 year absence, 42 Chequered Skippers (from Belgium) were released last week to a secret location in Rockingham Forest, Northamptonshire, by Butterfly Conservation, under the Heritage Lottery Fund 'Back from the Brink' project. This will be the start of a long road to fully re-establish and secure the future of this little butterfly in a former stronghold area - let's hope the project is as successful as the Large Blue reintroduction programme.

28 May 2018 - Small Pearl Emerges In Eastern Clearing With Pearls And Marsh Frits For Company

A lunchtime visit to the Eastern Clearing in Bentley Wood confirmed that Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries have begun to emerge there. I only had one confirmed sighting (with photos) which surprisingly was a female, bearing in mind males normally emerge first. After leaving hot sunshine on the south coast, this part of the Hampshire/Wiltshire border was bathed in well, cloud, which was unexpected and no doubt subdued the butterfly activity.

I was aware from other blogs that Marsh Fritillaries have made somewhat of a comeback in the clearing this season, with 4 seen by myself today, along with 6 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in and around the clearing. A fresh Grizzled Skipper also deserves a mention. I may be jumping the gun, but my visit today does not allay fears that the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is in a precarious situation in Hampshire, with no sign of recovery at its only remaining location in the county. Let's hope there will be a reasonable emergence in the coming days.

A quick look at the visitors book indicated that the first Small Pearl record this year was only yesterday when again only one was seen. Duke of Burgundy have been seen in the clearing this year also, but none have been recorded in the book since early May. 6 photos of the Small Pearl and Marsh Frits posted to Latest Photos.



24 May 18 - Detour For Stockbridge's Dukes

I am pleased to note that the Duke of Burgundy is being recorded in some new locations in Hampshire, albeit in small numbers. In some cases the range expansion may be simply to a different area on the same site (e.g. on Oxenbourne Down for example). In other cases there are indications the Duke is actually colonising a new site. The species has now been recorded on Stockbridge Down for a few years, so I took the opportunity to call there on my way back from Battlesbury Hill yesterday. There is a colony of Duke of Burgundy on private land within dispersal distance of Stockbridge Down and it is likely that this is the source of the new arrivals.



Armed with some approximate information on the location, I made my way from the eastern car park up the down towards the hill fort. The first surprise was the sighting of a small fritillary in the scrub close to the foot of the down - a Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which is another species now making regular appearances on the down in small numbers. It was the only one I would see.

Several Dingy Skippers were flitting close to the path as I climbed, resting to sunbathe at times - Common Blues and Small Heath were also quite conspicuous on the ascent. Just before reaching the fort, there is a sheltered ditch on the right, rich in vegetation and flowers. It produced more Dingy Skippers, a Grizzled Skipper and yes, several Dukes, now somewhat past their best, but nonetheless very active in the sunshine. Target achieved, I made my way back, just stopping for a lovely fresh Small Copper on the path as I descended. 2 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



23 May 2018 - Marsh Frits And Walls At Battlesbury

Since Hampshire is not exactly the strongest county in southern England for Marsh Fritillary (but they are on the wing at Martin Down), I decided to have a change this year and visit a site in neighbouring Wiltshire, namely Battlesbury Hill near Warminster. This is also a new site for me. The hill is crowned by an Iron Age fort with splendid ramparts which provide magnificent views, as well as a rich, sheltered habitat for butterflies - and don't they love it! On the journey there I passed Cotley Hill, which is another good site for butterflies including Marsh Fritillaries. The journey, having taken longer than expected, did cause me to have second thoughts about changing plan, but I am pleased I didn't.

In the interest of keeping the post short, a circumnavigation of Battlesbury Hill Fort (starting from the NW corner) produced about 20 Marsh Fritillaries, the best area being the eastern ramparts and the meadow just below, although I did encounter singletons in other places. Most were males in very good condition (some fresh). Dingy Skippers were also quite numerous. Just to the south of the fort, there is a wooded area, the fringes of which look interesting from a habitat point of view. However, I returned to my starting point using a diagonal and chalky track on the southern slope of the hill, starting from the bottom of the wood. Here (as well as the odd Marsh Fritillary), I encountered several Wall Browns as I walked up the track, including a lovely female which did pose for some photos.

Whilst Battlesbury Hill may not have quite the species list of near neighbour Cotley Hill, I understand there is a small Duke Of Burgundy colony and Grizzled Skippers, neither of which I saw on my short visit. 6 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



19 May 2018 - Small Blues Continue Revival On Portsdown

Having visited the Small Blue colony below the Paulsgrove quarry face for a number of years now (and having witnessed a few very difficult years for them), I am pleased to say they are doing very well this year - one might even say thriving! Amongst the meadow/scrub below the western end of the quarry, I counted no fewer than 19 Small Blues during a visit of just half an hour this morning.

It is possible that the late emergence has now resulted in a mass emergence, with the whole of the colony emerging in the space of a few days. It was notable that nearly all were males, many in good to freshly emerged condition, so most of the females are still to emerge. Common Blues seem to be doing well there too with 8 males seen. I did not have time to visit other locations on the hill, but it is likely that Small Blues can be found in decent numbers in many of the scrubbiest areas.

I then made a detour home to call at Stephen's Castle Down, following my failure to find Duke of Burgundy there last year. That was the case again today and I suspect the paucity of foodplant (at least in the areas I looked) is the main reason. It is possible they are no longer present - but if anyone knows differently, please let me know! In partial compensation, I was pleased to find several Green Hairstreaks in the bushy area dominated by Hawthorn at the bottom of the slope, and opposite the farm, although most were slightly camera shy, preferring Hawthorn branches above head height. On the down itself Dingy Skippers are doing quite well with 9 seen, in company with 4 Grizzled Skippers. 7 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



17 May 18 - New Copse Pearls Don't Disappoint

Following the delayed start to this year's butterfly season, we are now enjoying a prolonged spell of almost continuous fine weather, which is set to last well into next week. This morning I visited New Copse Inclosure in the New Forest to check on the Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.



This year the pearls are mostly flitting low to the ground (as pearls do) around the northern verge beside the main track, occasionally stopping briefly to feed or bask, rather than occupying the clearing opposite. Nevertheless around 10 were recorded during my short visit, all those I was able to get close to being males. I understand that Pearl-bordered Fritillaries are also on the wing in reasonable numbers in Parkhill/Pignal Inclosures in the New Forest (which I must say is looking splendid at the moment) and in Bentley Wood.

On my way home, I called in at a small woodland clearing in the Test valley, which I had visited last year. I did manage to record a single Pearl-bordered Fritillary there today (unlike several last year), however it was noticeable that the vegetation is now more dense and probably less suitable for them. 5 photos posted to Latest Photos Gallery.



14 May 2018 - First Pearls During Morning Outing And Good Variety of Spring Species

This morning I returned to Stansted Forest in West Sussex, now with better guidance on the location of its Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. I won't dwell too long since, in terms of photos, I didn't manage any, but two very active males were seen between 10.00-10.30 in the bright morning sunshine. They were travelling along paths surrounding a clearing in the southern part of the forest, but showed no sign of stopping. It seems the species is still building here following its reintroduction two years ago.

Returning to Hampshire, I paid probably my final visit of this spring to Rake Bottom, with Dingy Skipper as my main target species. The vista here at this time of year is stunning, with Hawthorn and other shrubs in full bloom against the dramatic backdrop of the South Downs around Butser. The target species of Dingy Skipper was not hard to find, and indeed it was the most numerous species in the scrub close to the central section of the valley floor, where 12 were seen. Dukes were doing quite well here too, with 8 seen in this location (mostly quite fresh males) and a similar number of Grizzled Skippers (now starting to fade). A single Green Hairstreak was also disturbed from thick bramble scrub.

For the return walk westwards to the Rake Bottom entrance gate, rather than using the track along the valley floor, I walked parallel to it on the north side through low scrub. Although I expected to find the odd Duke here, since they are occasionally seen on the track verges near the entrance, I was not expecting to find another 7, making a total of 15 Dukes in all. There was also a fresh Small Heath and two more Grizzled Skippers.



I hope to add to my sightings of Pearl-bordered Fritillary (this time with photos) during a visit to the New Forest later in the week. 5 photos posted to Latest Photos (Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Duke).



10 May 2018 - Duke And Grizzled Numbers Building On West Butser

West Butser was the destination for an early afternoon visit, in noticeably cooler conditions than my outing earlier in the week. From the car park near Butser summit, go through the gate at the far end and bear left to follow the hedge down the slope towards Rake Bottom. I was pleased to find a couple of male Dukes almost from the word go, on reaching the hedge, and very fresh too. Despite this part of Butser being quite high and generally open, sections close to the hedge are sheltered. Not only were the Dukes benefiting (10 seen up to point where the slope starts a really steep descent) but there were several Grizzled Skippers too. All the Dukes were male and mostly fresh which suggests they will not peak here for at least a week or so.

You may be interested to know that, in conjunction with Sussex Branch of BC, Pearl bordered Fritillary have been reintroduced into Stansted Forest, which is close to the Hampshire border near Rowlands Castle. I made a short stop there after my Butser visit. I was not successful in finding any Pearls, although they may not have emerged there yet, despite being recorded already from other Sussex sites. It would seem that they have not yet emerged at Bentley Wood either although I would expect their appearance there and at New Forest sites to be imminent. 5 photos of Dukes and Grizzled Skippers posted to Latest Photos.



8 May 2018 - Grizzled And Green On Magdalen Hill Down

The spell of fine, warm weather, as expected, is allowing this unusual season to make up some lost time. A mid-morning walk along the lower slopes on Magdalen Hill Down confirmed that both Grizzled



Skipper and Green Hairstreak are now on the wing there. Four Grizzled Skippers, including one fresh female were flying on the original reserve, but extremely active in the heat (with no photo opportunities). Based on numbers and condition, this is still the beginning of their season. It seems hard to believe that back in 2007 (admittedly a very early season) I saw multiple Grizzled Skippers a full month earlier, in the same location.

Green Hairstreaks were staying above eye level in the SW corner of the extension, often settling in Hawthorn, but occasionally venturing down to lower branches or softer vegetation. It is clear that, despite this species being on the wing for only a week or so, some are already quite worn - the result of continuous activity during several fine days. A total of five Green Hairstreaks were seen.

Elsewhere on the down, butterfly numbers were modest - others seen included two Orange Tips, several Brimstones and a Holly Blue flitting around the southern boundary hedge. 2 photos of Green Hairstreak posted to Latest Photos.



5 May 2018 - Orange Tips At The Moors

The Moors, near Bishop's Waltham, is a local nature reserve comprising semi-natural woodland, fen, grassland and open water close to the source of the river Hamble. My visit this morning was aimed at Orange Tip butterflies, which lay their eggs on Cuckoo Flower (Lady's Smock). Having already seen a couple of wandering Orange Tips there a couple of weeks ago, I was expecting my visit today, in glorious sunshine, to be a gentle stroll interrupted by plenty of photo opportunities. Well it didn't quite work out like that, but it was successful in the end!

First of all many of the paths are quite muddy (no surprise there I guess) and initially Cuckoo Flowers seemed present only sporadically, but at least I did reach a meadow on the eastern side of the reserve where there are many of them. Green-veined Whites (which have similar foodplant preferences to Orange Tips) were plentiful and settling frequently to feed. At first, no Orange Tips at all were showing and I was starting to puzzle why that was the case. Then, as if from nowhere, a male appeared, followed soon by two more. Had it not been for the Cuckoo Flowers, photos would no doubt have been challenging, but all were happy to feed, albeit briefly, before continuing their wanderings elsewhere. 3 photos of Orange Tip posted to Latest Photos.



3 May 2018 - Noar's Dukes Flitting (And Mating) At Last!

Following my aborted visit to Noar Hill on Tuesday, the weather was kinder today with some sunshine and higher temperatures for a return visit, and the reserve is in very good condition. There were several other observers on site by mid-morning and I don't think any would be disappointed by the building Duke of Burgundy numbers, although overall the butterfly species count was poor.

In the central area of the reserve, I recorded 6 Duke of Burgundy in several of the chalk pits and gullies, including a mating pair (for which I have to thank others). Although the pair were already coupled when I arrived at the location, the whole procedure lasted just over half an hour, after which time the pair uncoupled, the male opened his wings flat for a few seconds and then flew off (job done so to speak!).

During the hour and a half I was on site, the only other species recorded were Orange Tip (3 males and one female), several whites and one Peacock. It may not have been the start to a new season we were hoping for, but at least we can belatedly look forward to better times ahead. 7 photos of Duke Of Burgundy posted to Latest Photos.



1 May 2018 - Season Still Struggling To Get Going, But The Duke Is Out

It might be the first day of May, but spring is still being held back by unsettled weather and below normal temperatures. Today did offer bright sunshine, at least for a while, albeit accompanied by a chill wind. I had planned to make a call at Noar Hill after lunch, but managed to mistime my visit to coincide with the arrival of showers, so headed back south to explore byways and woodlands around the Southwick Estate, where the wet was at least limited to underfoot. My count of butterflies was



restricted to a few whites, a male Orange Tip (a target for the visit) and hibernators, mainly Brimstones.

However, I note that at least a couple of people have been successful in seeing Duke Of Burgundy at Noar Hill, which have just started to make sporadic appearances there - thank goodness for that! Surely we are due a more prolonged improvement in the weather soon, to kick start the season, which is now about two weeks behind normal.

26 April 2018 - The Wait For Hampshire's Spring Butterflies Goes On!

This morning, being aware that showers were forecast by lunchtime and the weather will continue unsettled for a few days, I made a visit to Rake Bottom in the Butser complex, hoping to find the odd newly emerged Grizzled Skipper. By 10am the temperature had 'soared' to a measly 11.5 deg C in the rather chilly wind - maybe 12 deg during the few sunny intervals. The path along the valley floor seems to have been much more churned up this year as a result of horse riding. Another main observation was that not a single butterfly was seen during the 45 minutes spent there!

So the wait for many of Hampshire's spring butterflies goes on, during what has now become a late spring. I did see two 'whites' on the journey home, one of which was more likely to be a female Orange Tip, based on its size. It would seem the wintry March weather has really set the season behind, not at all compensated by the couple of beautiful warm days last week. It does mean we are probably in for a very busy May indeed!

19 April 2018 - Record April Temperatures But Hampshire's Species Not Yet Buying It!

Just because we are enjoying some rather overdue warm weather, I know from previous experience that spring species may still need a few more days to complete their development, before emerging into the sunshine. Magdalen Hill Down was the destination, during late morning, for my first outing of the new season, followed by a call at the Moors LNR, near Bishops Waltham.

Despite the fantastic weather, the butterfly count at Magdalen Hill Down was slightly disappointing, although not completely surprising (for the reasons indicated above). Whilst Brimstones, Peacocks, Commas and a few 'whites' were enjoying the sunshine, the only emerged species I saw (apart from the whites) was a single Speckled Wood. I expect Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak will show during the next few days. Last year, there was a significant patch of Cuckoo Flowers, favoured by Orange Tip, along the boundary between the original reserve and the extension, however scrub clearance efforts during the winter may be the reason for its absence this year.

I had heard that the Moors LNR near Bishops Waltham is a decent site for Orange Tips, and indeed I did see two males doing their usual early spring thing (i.e. not stopping at all!), although I did not find any good clumps of Cuckoo Flower (or Garlic Mustard) where they might congregate.

So I will take this opportunity to ask a favour - I would be delighted to hear of locations in the county, with plenty of Cuckoo Flowers, where Orange Tips are likely to congregate. Needless to say, my camera had a day off today!

15 April 2018 - Spring Has Been A Long Time Coming This Year!

Spring has been a long time in the making this year, testing the patience of many butterfly observers (albeit minor compared with the very significant concerns of farmers) but spring is now finally arriving.



In fact, in the neighbouring county of Sussex, spring seemed to begin (in butterfly speak) on 14th April when the first sightings of Orange Tip, Grizzled Skipper and Holly Blue were all observed. I shall be surprised if Hampshire does not follow closely this week, perhaps with other species too (e.g. Duke Of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak), especially if the forecast for a significant and long overdue improvement in the weather proves correct.

8 April 2018 - Southern England May Soon Be Suitable For A Return Of The Black-veined White

The Black-veined White, which became extinct in the UK after a series of disastrously wet autumns in the early part of the 20th century, is still found across much of Europe. Now, with average temperatures rising, experts believe it could prosper here once again in southern England.

Studies focussing on northern France, which has a similar climate to southern England, have found that it would be easy to provide for the black-veined white's needs by creating flowery field margins and allowing the growth of young scrub such as hawthorn and blackthorn. Fabrizia Ratto, from the University of Southampton, who conducted one of the studies for Butterfly Conservation, said: "Our study found that the butterfly has a strong preference for small isolated bushes of blackthorn and hawthorn as egg-laying sites with abundant nectar sources such as red clover nearby.

While average temperatures look good for the Black-veined White, more research may be needed to determine whether the butterfly could survive the increasing frequency of extreme weather events that are a feature of our changing climate.

5 April 2018 - My First 'White' Of The New Season Seen Today!

Just a very short post to mention that, whilst driving in Fareham this morning, I saw my first emerged butterfly of the new season - a Small White foraging in a suburban garden. The cold, miserable weather has endured longer than I had expected, so it will be interesting to see if the arrival of more spring-like temperatures succeed in bringing out 'whites' and other emerging spring species, during the next few days.

22 March 2018 - Two Cold Snaps Thwart Early Start To Season

My previous prediction for an early start to the 2018 butterfly season seems now to be wide of the mark, with two late winter cold snaps to be factored into the equation. The general state of development of spring flowers and shrubs certainly seems to have slowed during the last month. It now would be reasonable to expect that a slightly later start to the butterfly season is on the cards, with the first species to emerge such as Orange Tip, Grizzled Skipper and Duke Of Burgundy starting to appear (other than the odd isolated specimen) from mid rather than early April.

On a different topic, I note from the local branch website (Butterfly Conservation - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch) that additional transect data, including 25 year trends for each species, has been recently added, which will provide some interesting material to read as a prelude to the start of the season.

17 February 2018 - Spring Is On The Way!

As much as I love my hobby, I have also enjoyed taking a break from it during the last few weeks - which was especially welcome after the work to migrate the site last autumn to a different web-builder product.



As the days grow longer and, dare I say, warmer, signs of spring are all around, from the new growth of flowering plants and shrubs, trees in bud and birds in song. It's a bit too early yet for many insects, including butterflies (excepting a few hibernators venturing out on warmer days), but we are only a few short weeks away from the appearance of newly emerged species. Indeed, strictly speaking the first non-hibernator has already been seen at UK level - a Speckled Wood in London recorded in late January.

Initial indications are that spring will once again be somewhat early, since the winter has not been cold overall with very little snow in the south, despite a few cold snaps. There is still time for a prolonged cold spell to slow progress (but unlikely I feel), and I will continue to monitor with a view to suggesting when the season is likely to start in earnest.