



2007 Blog

22 December 2007 - Mild Autumn Produces Late Butterfly Sightings

As we enter the Christmas period and 2008 beckons, I spent some time browsing the sightings pages of both the Hants & IoW branch of butterfly conservation and those of some neighbouring branches. Sightings of Red Admirals have continued with almost monotonous regularity through late autumn, relieved by occasional sightings of other hibernators such as Peacock and Brimstone. Whilst by recent year's standards this is not so unusual, it is also clear that the mild autumn produced some very late sightings of non-hibernating species well into November and even December. Some examples include:

- 10 December – Clouded Yellow at Southbourne, Dorset
- 25 November – Speckled Wood at Gosport, Hants
- 22 November – Holly Blue at Gosport, Hants
- 16 November – Small White at Gosport, Hants
- 7 November – Meadow Brown at Martin Down, Hants
- 3 November – Large White at Southbourne, Dorset
- 3 November – Small Copper at Lee-on-Solent, Hants
- 3 November – Brown Argus, Common Blue and Small Copper at Cissbury Ring, W Sussex
- 1 November – Wall at Lancing, W Sussex

Although there has been a “cold snap” during the last few days, we are already returning to higher temperatures and another mild winter looks likely. So we can again look forward to some early butterfly emergences before winter officially ends in late March. I just hope that, unlike last year, the weather doesn't collapse again during May not to recover for several months, causing further devastation to butterfly populations struggling to recover from the deluges of last year.

As far as 2007 is concerned, it just remains for me to wish all visitors to this site. **A Very Happy Christmas** 😊, but don't get too carried away since the 2008 butterfly season is likely to begin early!

11 November 2007 - News From Further Afield

At this quiet time of year in the butterfly calendar, I spent some time browsing the internet for recent news from other parts of the UK (and beyond). A couple of items in particular took my eye. The first item was prompted by an interview last Sunday on Radio 4 by Dr Martin Warren, the chief executive of Butterfly Conservation. He was highlighting the concern in Europe over the decline in butterflies which was discussed at a meeting of conservationists in Laufen, Germany, at the end of October. Dr Warren mentioned the Madeiran Large White, now formally considered extinct (globally) and the first European butterfly to suffer this fate since records began, with loss of habitat in its native Madeira blamed for the extinction. An article in the Telegraph paints a gloomy picture of the situation in Europe. The dire prognosis is not limited to agriculturally intensive western European countries but also applies to Eastern Europe, as a result of agricultural modernisation and loss of habitat due to tourism driven developments.

The second item is a Lepidoptera Conservation Update (No. 8) issued by Butterfly Conservation earlier this year. Its content mainly relates to 2006 of course, but nevertheless it provides interesting reading on some of the conservation initiatives in the various BC regions within UK. Some of the items which took my attention are mentioned below, albeit influenced by my personal affinities and knowledge of other regions:

- Pages 13 & 14. Heath Fritillary colony at Lydford BC Reserve (Devon) has expanded into a nearby coppiced woodland site. The butterfly has also been introduced into Greenscoombe Wood (Cornwall).
- Page 15 onwards. Many of our threatened species depend on metapopulations existing in a wide area (e.g. Marsh Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary). So called "landscape-scale" conservation projects are ongoing in Wales, S-W England and Herefordshire, focused on Mynydd Mawr, Culm Grasslands/Two Moors and Ancient Woodlands respectively.
- Page 20 & 22. On the subject of High Brown Fritillary, core areas are of course S-W England and the Morecambe Bay area, but there is positive news from the very few sites remaining elsewhere. In Wales, management work in the Alun Valley (Glamorgan) is showing good results with High Brown numbers having increased significantly since the project started. There is also some good news from the Malvern Hills where conservation efforts continue at pace and more High Browns were seen there in 2006 than during the previous few years. Incidentally the positive news continues there this year. The Malvern Hills Butterfly Group has an on-line forum accessed via the West Midlands Branch of BC. A posting on 20 July reports an incredible 54 High Brown sightings in Eastnor Deer Park on 19 July, albeit reflecting a somewhat lower number of individual butterflies!
- Page 26. In the South-East, a woodland management initiative (also aimed at landscape scale) aims to secure the future of some of the regions most threatened woodland species, such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and Wood White

However, on a less upbeat note, research at York University on some northern species (page 30) confirms that Northern Brown Argus, Large Heath, Scotch Argus and Mountain Ringlet are all being lost from some former sites. In the case of the Northern Brown Argus and Large Heath, this is mainly attributed to habitat loss whereas for the Scotch Argus and Mountain Ringlet, climate change is the main factor.

20 October 2007 - Reflections On The 2007 Butterfly Season

As late October beckons and the curtain comes down on another butterfly year, it's time for a few reflections on the 2007 season. It would be easy to reach an almost wholly negative verdict by focussing on the summer months, but there were a few good points if you look hard enough, as well as plenty of disappointments along the way. Let's first recall a few of the highs *and the lows*.

- Following a mild winter, Spring arrived very early, resulting in some exceptionally early emergences, including Duke Of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Green Hairstreak and Grizzled skipper, which did quite well at sites where good colonies are established.
- The warm April was probably a key factor in producing a small 2nd brood of Duke of Burgundy at Noar Hill during August.
- A sizeable Glanville Fritillary colony appeared at a new site at Hurst Castle (after sporadic sightings in 2006), however this must be balanced against the weakening (and possibly loss?) of its other Hampshire colony at Hordle Cliff
- 3 months of very unsettled weather began during May (remember the "monsoon rains" of June/July which brought flood chaos to other parts of the country?). The effects on butterfly populations whose flight periods occurred during this period were dramatic, with few species maintaining near normal numbers, and many suffering large declines.
- Those which seem to have fared much worse than normal include the Vanessaids (Peacock, Red Admiral, Painted Lady) and many chalk downland species including Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Common Blue, Small Heath and Silver-spotted Skipper. In contrast White Admiral had quite a good flight season, as did the ubiquitous Meadow Brown which again demonstrated why it is such a successful species.
- Whilst butterfly numbers have been much reduced during the summer months, the flight season has extended later than usual. As examples, Silver-spotted Skipper have been reported in mid-October from Hampshire and elsewhere Brown Hairstreak sightings also continued well into the month. Last sightings of these species are normally during September. This is perhaps explained by the lack of structure in the weather and temperature patterns during the summer period confusing butterflies "biological clocks" and resulting in emergence over a much longer period of time. The fine weather in September and early October has also played its part.

- There have been significant numbers of migrants reported in Hampshire including Large Tortoiseshell, Queen of Spain Fritillary and Long-tailed Blue. I have noticed myself Clouded Yellow sightings are frequent enough even this season not to cause too much excitement now.



New Colony - One of the season's highlights is a new colony of Glanville Fritillary at Hurst Castle

Identifying Trends

On the basis of one particular season (and let's hope a very unusual one at that) it's difficult to draw too many firm conclusions, however considering this season in the context of recent years, it is possible to see some trends.

Several species are expanding their range northwards in UK, probably as a result of climate change. These include the Silver-washed Fritillary, which has now colonised parts of South Cumbria and the Comma and Small Skipper have now reached Scotland. So it would be logical to expect a few continental migratory species will colonise (or in some cases re-colonise) the UK, with Hampshire featuring significantly in such developments. Thus, if further evidence comes to light that Clouded Yellow are regularly surviving the winter in this region, they may warrant being transferred from regular migrant to resident species status. Other species including the ones mentioned above could follow in the next decade or so.

Whilst climate change is benefiting some butterflies, it is notable that these tend to be species which are reasonably mobile, doing well in their core areas, and are not strongly dependant on fragmented specialist habitats. For other species which are either sedentary or depend strongly on special habitats, such as coppiced woodland or damp grassland, the situation is rather different. In many cases these are species which are already vulnerable and in decline as a result of habitat loss due to land usage development, lack of sympathetic management or simply neglect. In this case, climate change is more likely to be an enemy, accelerating their decline by upsetting the fine dynamic balance of the ecosystems on which they depend, with habitats for instance becoming too wet, too dry or too warm to sustain them.

There are examples in Hampshire – the Wall now seems to have finally lost its tenuous hold in SE Hampshire – I am not aware of any reports this season from Portsdown Hill or the nearby coastal areas. It is now possibly confined to just one breeding site in the county in the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve.

Two of the county's small fritillaries, the Small Pearl-bordered and Pearl-bordered are confined to a few sites mainly in the west of the county. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary colonies in Hampshire are very small and vulnerable and there is further indication that the colony at its only site in the North of the county (Pamber Forest) is declining, with two consecutive poor years. The Pearl-bordered Fritillary, as mentioned earlier, had a decent and very early flight season at its main sites in Bentley Wood and several New Forest Inclosures, but it continues to decline at marginal sites which lack appropriate woodland management regimes.

A mention of the Duke of Burgundy here is also appropriate. Whilst it enjoyed a reasonable season at key sites in the Meon Valley including Noar Hill, I am not aware of any reports this year from the few remaining woodland colonies, such as Bentley Wood, and it is possible that one or two of these small colonies are now lost.



A Tale Of Two Species - The White Admiral enjoyed a decent season in Hampshire whilst the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary may be losing ground in the county

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, whilst we might be welcoming additional migrants in the coming years to Hampshire and seeing some of our more vigorous species at least stable or even expanding their range, we should not be falsely lulled into complacency: many of our specialist species continue to decline, despite a tolerably decent season at core sites for some of them. If this trend continues, within a few years some species will have contracted completely to a few carefully managed nature reserves, and even then no amount of careful management can compensate for habitat loss due to climate change. The various regional and national conservation agencies can show the way, as Butterfly Conservation is doing with initiatives like the South East Woodlands Project, which aims to raise awareness of the decline of woodland habitats and make vigorous steps reverse it, to the benefit of species like the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy.

In nature conservation, there is only so much that conservation agencies can do as catalysts for change, and the real victory will be when the wide spectrum of landowners look after what they have in a conservation minded way, from farms and country estates down to us as individuals looking after our gardens.

As for the 2007 butterfly season, let it be a wake-up call to realise that the challenges posed by climate change and nature conservation are at least as big as ever.

14 October 2007 - 6 Species Still On The Wing On Portsdown

I had been planning to spend some time this afternoon working on new site features for the website, but the alternative scenario of a walk on Portsdown Hill, on what turned out to be a beautiful mid-October afternoon, was just too tempting. Butterflies are still on the wing there, but in very low densities, mainly confined to areas sheltered by shrubs or on the lower slopes. Six different species were seen: 2 Speckled Wood, 1 Meadow Brown, 3 Red Admiral, 5 Small White (3rd brood), 2 Large White (3rd brood) and 1 Common Blue (3rd brood). Photo of slightly ragged Speckled Wood posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

I am not planning any more butterfly outings this season (really!) but look out for updates to the site at about two week intervals, including 3 more site features.

5 October 2007 - Slow Start To Pennington Visit But Wall & Co Turn Up In The End

For possibly my last butterfly outing of this season, I chose to visit the Pennington Marsh area of the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve. This is the most reliable area in Hampshire for Wall Brown and 3rd brood sightings had

been reported last week (in quite decent numbers). Autumn visits for butterflies are often somewhat unpredictable – 3rd brood numbers can be very variable, the flight period can be very short, truncated by frost or bad weather, and with nectar in short supply, butterflies tend to disperse quickly.

The outward leg of my walk from the car park at the end of Lower Pennington Lane to the jetty, then west towards Keyhaven was disappointingly unproductive, with just a couple of Peacocks to show for it, but the sighting of a Clouded Yellow along the shoreline signified an upturn in fortunes. Next up was a 3rd brood Small Copper (and no ordinary one – it was a variant called *caeruleopunctata* with blue spots around the hindwing). This was soon to be followed by my first 3rd brood Wall of this season seen along the seawall in front of Pennington Marsh and then 3 more along the footpath leading inland from the jetty back to Lower Pennington Lane, including one rather tatty male which settled on a white plastic bag!. A Red Admiral, a Small White and another Small Copper completed what in the end was quite a productive outing for this time of year.

Whilst there may be no more blog entries on butterfly outings this year (but I won't guarantee it!), I will be preparing features on 3 more of Hampshire's best butterfly sites, as well as posting a few thoughts on this year's butterfly season. Look out for these additions during the next few weeks.

4 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

16 September 2007 - Pleasant Walk In Straits Inclosure, But Few Butterflies

I spent some time yesterday afternoon doing some "reconnaissance" in preparation for adding one or two more site features to this website during the quiet months. One of the places I visited was the Straits Inclosure of Alice Holt Forest, wishfully keeping an eye open for the appearance of a second brood White Admiral (the first record in Hampshire last year was on 7 September, albeit from Boarhunt area). None were seen, and in fact it was very quiet on the butterfly front with only a few Speckled Woods and a couple of Large Whites seen. The most conspicuous insects were Common Darters all along the main ride. Presently there are timber extraction operations in the Straits Inclosure, restricting access on weekdays. These will open up parts of the main track, providing more light and should benefit the butterflies next season.

In view of the limited opportunities for new photos at present (with few butterflies on the wing), I have opened a "2007 Bonus Gallery" (in Photo Archive) and will periodically upload a few additional photos taken during the 2007 season. These are photos which didn't make it first time round (e.g. because I just had too many!)

8 September 2007 - Settled Weather Arrives As Summer Butterfly Season Fade

Early September has at last brought a fine spell of weather, so at least we can enjoy that. The fine spell is likely to be too late however, to revive the very poor 2007 summer butterfly season. I did manage one outing this week (on Wednesday) to one of the North Hampshire heathlands, at Yateley Common. I saw several Graying amongst the heath to the north side of the A30. It's late in the Graying season now and they are looking rather worn and faded, but nevertheless quite active when disturbed.

Like the condition of the Graying, the 2007 summer butterfly season is now fading rapidly and the next week or two will also be the last opportunity this season to see other late summer species, like Brown Hairstreak, Silver-spotted Skipper and Adonis Blue at their various sites. If the weather does manage to remain reasonably settled, we can also look forward to a few third broods (Comma Wall Brown, Speckled Wood, Small Copper and Clouded Yellow) during September / early October, and perhaps a small second brood of White Admirals, hopefully complementing a good autumn showing of Red Admirals.

31 August 2007 - OWH: Skippers Stage Late Rally But Adonis Numbers Still Low.... And Matched By Clouded Yellow!

After the Indian summer of last weekend, it's been a disappointingly cloudy week. This afternoon I visited Old Winchester Hill (OWH), for what might be my last visit there this season. Despite the mainly overcast conditions, it was pleasing to see that Silver-spotted Skippers are reasonably numerous now – I saw about 50 in various locations including the south facing slope near the fort and at the bottom of the car park slope. Adonis Blue numbers compared to previous years (and spring) are, however, still disappointingly low with 4 males seen at the bottom of the car park slope and in the scrub at the very bottom beyond the “flattened” fence. I didn't see any Adonis at the original introduction site today (the south facing slope mentioned above) and no females at all. It will be interesting to see if they can bounce back next spring after such a poor summer season here, which may not be helped by the longer grass which is now a feature of their OWH breeding sites.

Probably the highlight of the visit was a count of 4 Clouded Yellows including two fresh specimens at the bottom of the car park slope - almost certainly offspring of spring migrants. For once I was thankful for the overcast conditions as a dark cloud passed and one settled to roost, making for an unusually leisurely Clouded Yellow photograph! I should also mention that Painted Ladies also seem to be having a late rally (10 seen), the Chalkhill Blue season is well on the wane with females now outnumbering males and the Gatekeeper season is still just hanging on (3 females seen).

3 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery (Adonis Blue and Clouded Yellow).



25 August 2007 - Adonis Doing OK At Martin Down - Even A Mating Pair!

There have been numerous occasions this season when butterfly sightings at a particular site have failed to meet expectations. However I cannot say that about my visit to Martin Down this afternoon – even the weather was glorious for a change. My main target species was Adonis Blue, which seem to be having a poor summer season at other Hampshire sites. I am pleased to say however, that they are doing tolerably well at Martin Down, particularly along the section of the Bokerley Ditch SW of Martin village. I saw about 16 Adonis Blue, (14M and 2F) which included a mating pair, as a highlight. The males are in less than pristine condition now with several quite faded, but at least the species is holding its own at this indigenous site, unlike some of the marginal sites in Hampshire.

There were several other species also in reasonable numbers, including Chalkhill Blue, Common Blue, Small Heath, Painted Lady, Brimstone and Small White. I even saw a Small Tortoiseshell (that's 2 in as many days!) and 2 Brown Argus. As usual Meadow Browns were present in scores. As I was returning to the car park, a Clouded Yellow flew past at speed, as if to remind me that this had definitely been a successful outing.

4 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery. In the sunshine it wasn't difficult to catch the iridescent effects in the wings of the males for the camera.

24 August 2007 - Warmth-loving Species Struggling But Some Better News For Others

Whilst western areas of Britain have enjoyed a taste of summer this week, sunshine has remained stubbornly elusive over much of Hampshire. So it was a case of heading to the western side of the county this afternoon to escape the cloud blanket. Stockbridge Down was enjoying very pleasant sunny spells, making what summer butterflies remain take wing. However, I soon discovered that for Silver-spotted Skipper, it's fast becoming the summer that wasn't. I found only 3 Silver-spotted Skippers on the down, none in particularly good condition, so it looks like a very short and poor season for this species. There was a small colony of Adonis Blue at Stockbridge Down last summer, but I saw none today. These two species are both lovers of dry, sunny, chalk downland slopes, so it's perhaps not surprising that the very wet summer has caused their numbers to plummet.

Several other species however, now seem to be doing a little better than feared. Painted Ladies were present in decent numbers in the flower rich scrub at the bottom of the down and in the area close to the eastern entrance: 8 seen altogether including 3 on a buddleia at the rear of the eastern car park. Feeding there also was also a worn Comma, a fresh Red Admiral, several Brimstones and wait for it – a brief visit by a Small Tortoiseshell! Back on the down itself Chalkhill Blue (~40), Small Heath (~12), Common Blue (~8), Brimstone (~6) and Meadow Browns (abundant) completed the score sheet, not forgetting a fresh Small Copper which added a little splash colour.

A new "2007 Recent Photos Gallery" has been started with 4 photos posted from today's visit.

17 August 2007 - What's Happened To Our Late Summer Butterflies?

I indicated in my blog entry of 3 August that summer butterfly numbers seemed generally low, which is hardly surprisingly after weeks of wet weather during June and July. However, for late summer species like Silver-spotted Skipper, summer brood Adonis Blue and even Brown Hairstreak, the phrase "conspicuous by their (relative) absence" would seem more appropriate. First sightings of these species in Hampshire were reported in either late July or early August, but the expected build up of numbers (and sightings) since then just doesn't seem to have happened.

This afternoon I visited the Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper site at the bottom of the car park slope on Old Winchester Hill. A few Chalkhills, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers were there, but I only found one Silver-spotted Skipper and no Adonis Blue. In largely overcast conditions the butterflies were not doing much flying and often had to be disturbed, but such a poor showing of these key species was very disappointing. The situation at Noar Hill was no better, in fact there were very few butterflies on the wing at all. Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, plus the odd Peacock, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and Common Blue were the highlights of more than an hour there (and not forgetting a Holly Blue in the lane!). In fact I would say the highlight was actually watching a grass snake slither into the undergrowth whilst attempting to swallow a large toad!

If the weather improves during the next days there is still a chance that numbers of the key species could rally, but one is left wondering if the consequences of this summer's abysmal weather will have long-lasting detrimental effects on many of our butterflies.

One photo of Silver-spotted Skipper posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery. No photo of grass snake with poor toad – would be considered in bad taste!

10 August 2007 - Successful Return Visit To Noar Hill For Brown Hairstreak!

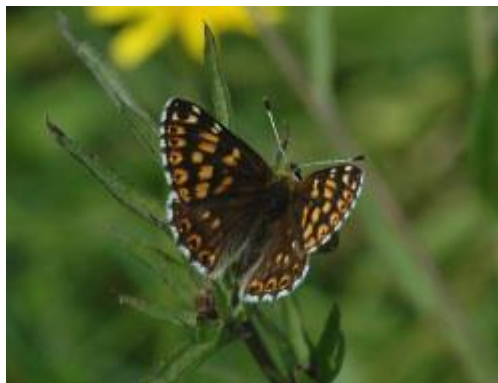
After concentrating yesterday on the Duke of Burgundy, it was the Brown Hairstreak which was to be the focus my return visit today. Judging from my own experiences so far this year and feedback from other observers, sightings of Brown Hairstreak, especially at low level, are generally proving to be hard work. On the reserve again today there were a number of branch members with similar objectives in mind as well some visitors from further afield. I had a possible sighting of a male in flight close to the entrance gate at ~11.00am and others had more solid successes with photos of a female, then a male (the latter in the triangle) during the following period of an hour or so.

As usual with Brown Hairstreak, the outcome of a visit can change from failure to success in a matter of moments. At 1 pm, whilst chatting to other branch members in the triangle, little did we know what was to follow, as a small bright brown butterfly dropped out of taller foliage into a low blackthorn bush – it was a female brown hairstreak. She stayed in the triangle for more than 20 minutes, never nectaring, but flitting from one shady or partially shady foliage perch to another, or crawling deep inside the blackthorn, at one point seeming to oviposit. Then after a quick zig-zag flight across the thick blackthorn on the right, she was gone. So for me, in respect of Noar Hill this year, with the Duke yesterday and Brown Hairstreak today, it's mission accomplished, but I might just manage one more visit there this summer! 4 photos of Brown Hairstreak posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery, including one of egg-laying behaviour deep in blackthorn.

9 August 2007 - Summer Duke Alive & Well At Noar Hill!

During August, Noar Hill is used to becoming somewhat of a "Mecca" for butterfly observers hoping to see a Brown Hairstreak or two, but this year interest is even greater with the Brown Hairstreak season coinciding with the remarkable appearance of a small summer generation of Duke Of Burgundy. I met several members of the Hants & IOW branch of Butterfly Conservation there this afternoon, including several I had not met before including the branch webmaster, Robin Turner and his wife Pat.

Having managed to see a Brown Hairstreak shortly after arrival - a male nectaring on the hemp agrimony in the triangle (but alas moving off before I captured a digital image), I decided to turn my attention to the aristocracy - or to be more precise, the Duke Of Burgundy. I soon learned a male had made several appearances in one of the chalk pits close to the visitor display board during the morning. After a short lunchtime siesta (when he went AWOL) he duly reappeared, seemingly content to sit for much of the time perched with wings closed or partly closed. The presence of red spider mite on his left side confirms beyond reasonable doubt that he was the same individual seen mating on Tuesday by Pauline Richards. Maybe that explains why he seemed so contented with himself! He made several more appearances in the same pit during the afternoon, watched by a number of observers, including myself. As I sat on the grass at Noar Hill on a warm August day with a fresh Duke Of Burgundy perched a couple of feet away, I couldn't help thinking how unreal the situation was! 3 photos posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.



5 August 2007 - Silver-spotted Skippers Take To The Air At Beacon Hill (Warnford)

This summer is at last delivering a few days of hot sunny weather in Southern England at least. Indeed it is perfect weather for the emergence of Silver-spotted Skippers on their downland sites in Hampshire, if a little too hot for me to be clambering up and down the steep slopes searching for them! The compromise was easy – a late afternoon visit to Beacon Hill (Warnford) as the heat of the day subsided. Towards the bottom of the steep escarpment on the flower rich downland, I only found 2 Silver-spotted Skippers, but enough to make the journey worthwhile. Numbers will increase over the next days as their emergence gathers pace. There were also good numbers of Chalkhill Blue (about 20) Common Blue (~12) with Brown Argus unusually competing with them in numbers. Meadow Browns were everywhere on the slope! 3 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

3 August 2007 - 23 Species Seen Today But Missed The Duke Of Burgundy!

This afternoon I visited two of the best butterfly sites in Hampshire – Noar Hill and Old Winchester Hill, clocking up between them 23 confirmed butterfly species on the wing. I was greeted at Noar Hill by the news that a second brood Duke of Burgundy had been seen in one of the chalk pits earlier in the afternoon (see posting to Hants & IoW branch website) – a rare event indeed and brought on probably by the very warm April we enjoyed. I didn't manage to find it myself, however I did spot a second brood **Dingy Skipper** in the chalkpits – not quite so unusual but a good find nonetheless. The other best find of the afternoon was at Old Winchester Hill where second brood **Adonis Blue** have started to emerge at their original introduction site on the slope south of the hillfort. Only one fresh male seen, amongst masses of Chalkhill Blues. I did check the other Adonis site (bottom of car park slope) but none seen there today. Other highlights at Old Winchester Hill were singletons of Small Tortoiseshell, Clouded Yellow and Dark Green Fritillary. Notable absentees however during today's visits were Brown Hairstreak and Silver-Spotted Skipper. I should add however, that I paid a short visit to Noar Hill on Wednesday and met Peter Eeles there. Whilst we were chatting, what looked like a female Brown Hairstreak made its jerky flight into trees by the main gate to the reserve.

So whilst in my estimation, butterfly numbers for many species are below average this summer, there is still plenty to see and be prepared for some surprises. The species seen today at Noar Hill were as follows: Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Peacock, Silver-washed Fritillary, Comma, Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White. Complementary additions at Old Winchester Hill were Chalkhill Blue (masses!), Small Heath (1), Clouded Yellow (1), Small Tortoiseshell (1) and Dark Green Fritillary (1) making 23 species in all. 5 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery, including Adonis Blue and Dingy Skipper.

30 July 2007 - Small Blue Flitting Once Again At Paulsgrove Quarry

This lunchtime I made a return visit to the scrub area at the bottom of the Paulsgrove quarry face, hoping to see summer brood Small Blue. There were about 6 Small Blue flitting among the scrub, consistent with the smaller emergence of the summer brood. I had thought that the 2 months of generally wet weather would have put this season more or less back on track (after the very early emergence of many Spring species), however most of the Small Blue today were well past their best, suggesting the season is still running a week or so ahead of normal. Also seen in the area were 3 Common Blue and a Chalkhill Blue (bearing in mind this is not the main area for Chalkhills on Portsdown Hill). One photo of Small Blue, showing typical rather faded condition, posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

27 July 2007 - Summer Brood Wall Brown On The Wing In Hampshire

Following recent news on the Hants & IoW Branch website that summer brood Wall Brown were on the wing at the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve, I paid a short visit there myself this afternoon, in blustery conditions as the skies were clouding over before light rain arrived. I could not match the numbers reported on the branch website on Tuesday but I was pleased to record 5 Wall Brown today, all males, along the lower level path in front of the lagoons (and mainly along the Pennington and Oxey lagoons which were as far as I got from Keyhaven). As usual, the Wall Brown proved a difficult species to photograph, but I did manage one passable picture, shown below and posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.



Also seen were many Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns, several Common Blues, Small Skippers and Small Heath. If anyone is planning a visit there, numbers of Wall Brown should be greater in a week or so with some females on the wing too – but try to choose calmer, sunnier day!

22 July 2007 - Poor Summer Weather Affecting Butterfly Numbers

I visited Botley Wood this afternoon - a wood which can be damp at the best of times, but I was not prepared for how wet it would be today, in "mid-summer". Areas of the path were so waterlogged that several detours through the woodland margin were necessary. My memories of the wood in high summer are very different - in late July the place should be positively humming with butterfly life, but today ticking over would be a more accurate description. That said, I did see most of the species I would have expected to see - Silver-washed Fritillary, Peacock, Brimstone, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small/Essex Skipper, Red Admiral and Comma, but in much lower numbers than usual for this time of year (half or less typically). A worn White Admiral also made a cameo appearance. Two absentees on today's visit were Marbled White (I have usually seen a few in this particular glade) and Purple Hairstreak. It's hardly surprising that weeks of unsettled weather are beginning to take their toll on our butterfly populations, with fewer on the wing than normal and those in marginal colonies being most at risk of local extinctions. 2 photos of a male and female Brimstone posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

18 July 2007 - Quiet Afternoon At Noar Hill

After returning from a family visit to the North of England, a somewhat shorter journey seemed to be appropriate, especially in view of the still unpredictable weather. I had not been to Noar Hill for several weeks, not since the Duke of Burgundy season in fact, so it seemed a good choice for a short visit this afternoon. I must have arrived after quite a downpour, since a rivulet of water was running down the main path from the reserve, but the sun was shining when I arrived. On the reserve itself, things were generally fairly quiet, although there were a decent number of species on the wing - Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Small/Essex Skipper were most numerous, but Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Silver-washed Fritillary, Comma, Red Admiral, Peacock and Small White all put in an appearance. As the clouds were building again in preparation for possibly another downpour, I made my retreat but look forward to visiting again in a couple of weeks in search of Brown Hairstreak. By the way, during my visit

up North, opportunities to visit sites for less common species (such as Large Heath) during clement weather didn't materialise, but I did manage a couple of decent photos of a Small Tortoiseshell near Hadrian's Wall. These plus two photos of a Gatekeeper taken today at Noar Hill have been posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

12 July 2007 - Successful Return To The New Forest

Something very rare for this summer occurred again yesterday - it was a fine day! I took advantage of it to return to two areas of the New Forest which I had visited briefly last week, but this time had much more success. Returning to Hawkhill, during early afternoon, I saw 12 Dark Green Fritillaries in the open areas along the Worts Gutter, including several in areas I had not visited before. They were mainly feeding on thistles. Several Silver-washed Fritillaries were also seen including a pair engaged in their ritual courtship where the male makes cartwheels around the flying female.

Then it was on to Beaulieu Heath, and a full circuit of the pentagonal track around the old airfield, walking where possible along the margin of the heath, avoiding waterlogged sections and making short forays into interesting looking areas (you won't see much if you keep to the track!). Silver-studded blue were widely distributed, but generally in low density, however a few pockets with higher concentrations (even scores) were found, mainly where the heather was in full flower with gorse bushes around to provide shelter from the wind. Unfortunately many Silver-studded Blues are now looking a little tired although a few were in good condition. About 10 Grayling were also seen, all quite fresh, again quite widely distributed but also a couple of hotspots - one just south of the Hatchet Moor car park where there are areas of damp bare ground between the stands of heather. Dark Green Fritillary were also encountered, mainly as singletons with more on the western section of the heath. The area sheltered by taller bushes and some trees just outside the western apex of the pentagon was quite good for all three key species. So, whilst my whistle stop tour last week was overall quite productive, it just shows how easy it is to get a wrong impression from a quick visit in the late afternoon to a site.

2 photos posted to the 2007 Early Summer Gallery from today's visit - Dark Green Fritillary and Grayling. Also a photo taken in late June of the underside of a Silver-washed Fritillary in Whiteley Pastures.

7 July 2007 - Quick Tour Of Several Key Sites

Now that we are enjoying a respite (albeit maybe a short one) from weeks of unsettled weather, we can expect a surge of summer butterfly emergences. The improvement in the weather also provides an opportunity to see a few of the species which have been around for a couple of weeks but have been hard to find because of the weather. This presented me with a dilemma - do I go and spend a few hours in Bentley Wood or Alice Holt hoping for a Purple Emperor on the ground, or perhaps make do with shorter visits there and go and check-out a few other sites? The latter should offer opportunities to see more key species, such as Chalkhill Blue or Dark Green Fritillary and was therefore my preference. Hence, during the past two days, I worked my way round 5 locations in fits and starts, focussing on the way several key species are fairing after the weeks of inclement weather. Here is the whistle-stop outcome of my findings.

- Martin Down (6th July) - Purpose was mainly to see the Dark Green Fritillaries at one of their best sites in Hampshire. Thankfully they are doing well here with 12 seen in about half an hour on the flower rich downland to the west of Martin village, mostly males but also two females. Many of the males are fading but one in good condition provided both open wing and underside poses for the camera. 2 photos posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery.
- Bentley Wood (6 July) - A lunchtime wait in the car park (lunch break!) produced a brief Purple Emperor sighting in a large oak. Emperor activity, according to other observers during the mainly overcast and breezy morning had been low, however one male in less than perfect condition had been down in the car park at 7.30am! A walk down the switchback and then to the Barn produced about 20 Silver-washed Fritillaries and 2 White Admirals.

- New Forest (6 July) - After all the rain, I was wondering how the Silver-studded Blue population would be holding up on the New Forest Heaths so I called in at two locations on Beaulieu Heath. Silver-studded Blues were found at both locations, but in much smaller numbers than I would have expected (a few, instead of scores). I also saw a fresh male Holly Blue on the heath near Crockford (photo posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery). Furthermore the heathland is, not unexpectedly, very waterlogged with large pools of standing water in many places. Although my visits were brief and included an excursion into the Hawkhill Inclosure, I did not see a single Dark Green Fritillary at any of the heathland locations or in Hawkhill. The heathland colonies tend to emerge a little later than the downland ones, and it is possible their emergence has been delayed due to the poor weather and waterlogged conditions.
- Straits Inclosure, Alice Holt Forest (7 July) - An early afternoon walk along the main ride in the Straits Inclosure could have provided another opportunity to see Purple Emperor activity high in the oaks, and even the chance of a low level encounter. However there was just too much else going on for this to preoccupy me. Silver-washed Fritillaries, making the most of the sunshine, were rarely out of sight along this lovely ride, one having the audacity to chase off a large patrolling dragon-fly! White Admirals skimming through the boughs with frequent diversions to feed on bramble, take minerals from the track or chase another White Admiral were also very prominent. The variety was enhanced by a few fresh Commas, Peacocks and Red Admirals. Incidentally, whilst White Admirals skim and glide as their normal flight pattern, they can also fly very fast as one Red Admiral found out as it was chased at high speed by a "White"! Photos of White Admiral and Peacock posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery. I also managed to record a video clip of White Admiral so will try to post this in the next few days.
- Magdalen Hill Down (7 July) - My final destination of the quick tour, was Magdalen Hill Down, with Chalkhill Blue being the main target. The walk through the extension, now ablaze with meadow flowers was pleasant enough, although butterflies there were mainly Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites. On the original reserve, Marbled Whites were again prominent but I didn't have to wait too long before spotting my first Chalkhill Blue of the season, and several more followed as I headed west along the lower slopes (7 males in all plus one female). I also saw 3 fresh Brown Argus among the rock rose at the bottom of the slope. 2 Photos of Chalkhill Blue posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery.

All in all, a very enjoyable quick tour with generally positive indications that our local butterflies have not been affected too badly by the prolonged poor weather. One cause for concern is the waterlogged conditions on the New Forest Heaths which may be presenting, in the short term at least, problems for the Silver-studded Blue and Dark Green Fritillary populations there.

1 July 2007 - Early Grayling Seen At Browndown

I heard one of the BBC weathermen reminding us today that it was a new month, but alas the same old weather - rain and more rain! I was determined however, not let it spoil another weekend at a time of year which is normally considered the peak of the butterfly season. So as the main rain belt cleared our area this afternoon, I made the short trip to the Browndown Coastal Heath (Browndown Ranges) near Gosport. It's normally an early site for Grayling in Hampshire and so it proved today - after a few minutes searching, I was delighted to disturb my first Grayling of the season - a male. It would have been easy to lose it the blustery wind but my determination to follow paid off with a couple of photos. Just as well, since a further methodical search produced no others. Small Skippers and Meadow Browns were numerous in the more sheltered areas along the path at the rear of the Browndown site, and a few Small Coppers, Small Heaths and Marbled Whites were also seen. As a bonus, I called in to Whiteley Pastures on the return, just staying close to the entrance, and found a pair of mating Ringlets. So not a bad outcome at all! 2 Grayling photos plus the mating Ringlets posted to the 2007 Early Summer Gallery.

28 June 2007 - No Weather For High Browns!

In planning my out-of-area visits for this season, a visit to Dunsford Woods, on the edge of Dartmoor, about 8 miles west of Exeter, was high on the list. It is one of the few remaining places in Southern England where the High Brown Fritillary can still be found. The flight period of the High Brown is similar to that of the Dark Green Fritillary and hence well underway by now. However, with no sign of the very unsettled weather coming to an end,

not to mention other constraints like work, my opportunities for a visit seemed to be fast running out. So yesterday, with a window of opportunity appearing on all fronts, I decided to go for it - albeit with misgivings about the weather, as the High Brown is a sun-loving species. The Dunsford site is reasonably accessible by public transport, thus avoiding a long round trip by car and facilitating an environmentally friendly visit. There is a good train service to Exeter Central from Hampshire and a bus every two hours from Exeter (Devon Bus service 359) which stops at Steps Bridge at the eastern end of the Dunsford Woods Nature Reserve. The logistics went like clockwork but my fears about the weather were growing by the minute as the bus departed Exeter, with cloud thickening and the sky becoming completely overcast. The situation deteriorated further after reaching the entrance to Dunsford Woods at Steps Bridge - showery rain began to fall during the mile and a half walk through the woods, following the path along the northern bank of the River Teign to the main High Brown Fritillary breeding site. The site, called Dunsford Meadow is located at the western end of the woods (photo below).



Dunsford Meadow - Breeding Site For High Brown Fritillary

Thank goodness however for a little bit of good fortune – 20 minutes after reaching this meadow, the skies brightened sufficiently for large fritillaries to start to appear – 2 High Brown in quick succession disturbed from the bracken, which landed to allow definite ID and one photo (the more faded of the two unfortunately) which has been posted to the 2007 Active Gallery. Two more large fritillaries were disturbed later, but as the skies once again darkened to dispense more showers, they immediately sought refuge in the trees. Based on size, one of these was probably a Silver-washed Fritillary. 5 species of Fritillary are found at the reserve (i.e. the UK list except for Heath, Glanville & Marsh) and I also had a definite sighting of a faded Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, content to roost at low level in the showers. As the showers turned gradually to more persistent light rain, my hopes of further large fritillary sightings had all but gone and I began the homeward journey.

The High Brown Fritillary is very closely related to the Dark Green of course and whilst the undersides of the two species are significantly different, the uppersides are very similar. They can normally be distinguished by examining the front 3 black spots in the main row of spots down the side edge of the forewing. In the High Brown, the small third spot (which is sometimes faint or almost absent) is slightly misaligned from the other two spots, whereas in the Dark Green Fritillary these 3 spots are in close alignment.

Overall the visit was a very positive experience, taking everything into account, including the beautiful reserve and its accessibility by public transport. Incidentally, the trip achieved another season milestone for me, since the photo of the High Brown Fritillary posted to the 2007 Active Gallery means I have now seen and photographed all 8 UK fritillary species this season. Pity I didn't manage a few more High Brown photos - I might just have to return next year!

20 June 2007 - White-letter Hairstreaks At Silchester Userped By Fritillaries & Admirals As Main Event

Last summer I had learned of a site for White-letter Hairstreak on the "walls" surrounding Silchester Roman Town - and this afternoon, refreshed from my few days time out from lepidoptera, I decided to visit it. You never quite know what to expect when visiting a new site, but be prepared for surprises, both good and bad! Walking anti-clockwise from the western access point around the perimeter of the Roman Town, I was pleased to locate a

mature elm in an area where the footpath is raised on the rampart and even more pleased after waiting for a couple of minutes when a small butterfly could be seen flitting at the very top - it could only be a White-letter Hairstreak. This was followed by a couple more sightings of either the same or different individuals. Whilst the raised rampart does provide some height advantage, it was clear that unless the hairstreaks ventured to the lower branches, there was no chance of any photographs - not today at least. Examining the elm more closely it looks as though it may be diseased, so the future of this small White-letter colony might be threatened - although there appeared to be a younger elm close by which looked healthy but as yet had no hairstreaks.

In view of the by then threatening skies, I decided to head back south towards the coast and called in at Whiteley Pastures. My change of location certainly paid off - with late afternoon sunshine in good supply. It looks like being a very good year for both Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals here with 8 White Admirals and 12 Silver-washed Fritillaries seen in less than one hour along the main track. The far end section beyond the ridge was especially good for the fritillaries with vigorous regrowth of bramble and thistles, following clearance work by forest enterprise last year. In the late afternoon sun, several fritillaries were just sunning themselves on the bracken fronds, before flying up into the trees to roost. On the return, one White Admiral was down on the main track seeking minerals, stopping for a few seconds at a time then flying a few yards further on, repeating the process several times.

4 photos posted to the 2007 Active Gallery including the one below of the aforementioned White Admiral.



16 June 2007 - Reflections On The June Gap

The middle of June is normally a fairly uneventful time in the Hampshire Butterfly calendar, with the spring show in its curtain call and the summer bonanza not quite under way. The so called "June Gap" has arrived somewhat sooner than normal this year and the early appearance of the large fritillaries (Dark Green and Silver-washed) and White Admiral means that it is already more or less over. There has even been a recent definite sighting of a Queen of Spain Fritillary on Old Winchester Hill - presumably a migrant! For those with excess energy to use, this is also a good time to make excursions to see some species not found in Hampshire, such as Heath Fritillary, Black Hairstreak, Large Blue and Swallowtail. For me however, having enjoyed seeing Heath Fritillary on Exmoor last weekend, this is also a good time to take a few days time out from the hectic pace of the season and instead plan my visits for the "high summer" period. These will include outings to sites, both locally and further afield, which I have not visited before (always exciting!) as well as some old favourites. Weather permitting, the summer butterfly season begins not later than next weekend for me, refreshed and raring to go!

12 June 2007 - Heath Fritillaries in Somerset

A long weekend in the West Country provided the opportunity (on Sunday 10th June) to observe a butterfly species not found in Hampshire - the Heath Fritillary, which is also one of the UK's rarest butterflies. I had only previously seen Heath Fritillary at a site in Essex where it has been introduced into coppiced woodland, so it was nice to see this lovely little fritillary in a completely different environment on the bracken/heather clad hillside of Haddon Hill within the Exmoor National Park. 8 Heath Fritillaries, both male and female, were seen close the path

descending the slope, feeding on bramble flowers or just flitting around, taking time out to sunbathe on vegetation or even on the path. A truly delightful and memorable scene! 3 photos posted to 2007 Active Gallery.

8 June 2007 - Dark Greens Zooming Around On Pitt Down

I spent a couple of hours this afternoon exploring sections of Pitt Down, from its various various car parks. My target species was Dark Green Fritillary. On the way there I had called in on Stockbridge Down where I had seen my first Dark Green of the season, together with 2 Marbled Whites and common species. This was easily surpassed at Pitt Down where in all I saw a further 10 Dark Greens, all very fresh males flying almost incessantly in the warm sunshine. Fortunately their activity reduced as the odd cloud took the edge off the heat to allow a couple of photos. Most Dark Greens were in the scrub area at the western end of the down. Common species seen were Small Heath, Common Blue, Large Skipper and Meadow Brown. 2 photos of Dark Green Fritillary and 1 of Marbled White posted to 2007 Active Gallery (new one opened).

6 June 2007 - Silver-studded Blues Begin Their Flight Season On Beaulieu Heath

A modest detour from my nominal itinerary this afternoon allowed me to call in at Beaulieu Heath in the New Forest - well actually the extension of it which is immediately in front of the Hawkhill Inclosure car park. After two or three minutes searching, I turned up my first Silver-studded Blue - a fresh male - and expanding the search area eventually produced another 10 males, all of them fresh. So Silver-studded Blues are just beginning their flight season on the New Forest heaths. Notably however, instead of the emergence being 2-3 weeks ahead of last year as was the case for many spring species, the difference is now in the region of 1-2 weeks, the partial correction probably resulting from the cool, unsettled weather we experienced during the latter part of May. 2 photos posted to 2007 Active Gallery.

1 June 2007 - Glanville Colony At Hurst Castle Provides Surreal Experience!

After being thwarted by the weather during the bank holiday weekend, I finally succeeded in visiting the "new" Glanville Fritillary colony close to Hurst Castle. Seeing Glanvilles apparently thriving in a small area of flower rich meadow, overlooked by the huge fortress of Hurst Castle, but isolated in every sense by either water or a mile long shingle spit, provided a very surreal experience for me. It just shows how resourceful nature can be, assuming that this Glanville colony has occurred naturally, either via dispersion from Hordle or "migration" from the Isle of White. The Glanville colony at Hurst has probably gone past its peak for this season, with no fresh ones seen. The remaining adults (mostly females) were busy feeding from flowers such as thrift or basking on stems or even on bare ground. At least 12 adults were seen, including a courting pair. I wonder what Henry VIII would have made of his attractive new guests as he looked down from the newly completed Hurst Castle in 1544! Three photos posted to the 2007 Active Gallery, including the one below.



27 May 2007 - News Of Glanville Colony At Hurst Brightens Dismal Weekend Weather

If you have been following the sightings pages on the Hants & loW branch website recently, you may have noticed some sightings being more conspicuous by their absence rather than their presence. Whilst numbers of Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary in Bentley Wood seem to be holding up, numbers in Pamber Forest have not so far reached double figures, following on from a poor season last year. From the Chiddingfold Woodland complex in neighbouring Surrey, numbers of Wood Whites and Pearl-bordered Fritillaries also seem low. Furthermore, there has not been a single Glanville Fritillary sighting reported to the branch website from Hordle Cliff in west Hants (although the species continues to do well on the loW). Balanced against these disappointing observations, where key species are at best having a poor season and at worst are in terminal decline, the discovery of a new mainland colony of Glanville Fritillary on Hurst Spit, close to the Castle, is especially welcome.

I say new colony, because there were one or two isolated sightings of Glanvilles at Hurst last year, but only in the last week has it become clear that a fledgling colony is establishing itself there. The development of this colony and the possible demise at Hordle, are not necessarily unrelated, bearing in mind they are separated by just 5km, 2km of which is the 'spit' at the end of which Hurst Castle is situated. Butterflies will tend to disperse naturally, especially towards the end of the flight season – it's how new colonies are formed when a fertilised female finds a new, suitable breeding area and lays eggs. If Hordle is becoming less suited to Glanvilles, based on the lack of sightings this year, this tendency for dispersal will be increased as the adults are forced to seek new habitat. From Hordle it would be a natural tendency for adult Glanvilles to fly along the coast, perhaps helped by the prevailing west or south-west wind in search of suitable habitat. An adult Glanville could easily cover a few km over two or three days to reach Hurst Spit, where a small area of suitable habitat is located with reasonable supply of ribwort plantain (larval foodplant) and flowers such as thrift for nectar. I suspect this is a more likely explanation for the appearance of Glanvilles at Hurst than a "migration" across the Solent from the loW, even though the distance from Hurst to the island is only about 1km.

It is hoped that this significant development will herald further expansion of the Glanville range along the Hampshire (and Dorset) coast, in the few pockets of Glanville friendly habitat. It is also hoped that visitors will act responsibly in respecting these fragile environments to give this handsome species every chance of gaining a stronger foothold on the mainland in the coming years. This news has certainly brightened the dismal Bank Holiday Weekend weather!

25 May 2007 - Productive Visit To Martin Down

Martin Down National Nature Reserve is a fine site to visit at any time during the butterfly season, but I think especially so at this time of year as the spring butterfly season begins to wane, with high summer just around the corner. For me Martin Down is quite a trek, being in the extreme west of the county, and all the species present there I can see at sites closer to hand. However it's the fact that it has so many species which makes it special - and most of them can be found following the line of the ancient earthwork called the Bokerley Ditch, which provides a sheltered habitat for butterflies, with adjoining areas of open grassland and downland. The section of it south-west of the village of Martin was the area I explored today. The most numerous species (and most conspicuous!) was Adonis Blue. At least 30 males seen and several females. It's probably about peak season now for the spring brood of Adonis at Martin Down, although the males are beginning to lose some of their vivid colour. Also doing well were Small Blue (19), Small Heath (15), Common Blue (12). Additional sightings included 2 Small Copper, 4 Brown Argus, 3 Grizzled Skipper, 5 faded Dingy Skipper, 2 fresh Large Skipper, 3 Brimstone and a late Orange Tip. It's certainly a great place to say goodbye to the spring butterflies, which will soon be old friends, as we look forward to high summer. 4 photos posted to 2007 Active Gallery.

19 May 2007 - Spring Adonis Season Having A Bumpy Ride

Taking into account the continuing rather unfavourable weather, thwarting plans for anything too adventurous, I decided to make two short visits to Adonis sites in Hampshire, firstly visiting Stockbridge Down and then returning to Old Winchester Hill which I had visited in very poor conditions about a week ago. At Stockbridge Down, I explored the area of "rough" at the bottom of the down close to the western entrance, where I had seen Adonis

Blue last August. Today however, it was home only to Common Blues (and Grizzled Skipper and Small Copper). Maybe if I had explored further along, I would have succeeded, but as thick cloud came in from the west, I decided to head east for Old Winchester Hill. There, at the bottom of the car park slope, Adonis Blues were indeed showing themselves, resting when cloudy but flying when disturbed or during bright or sunny intervals. I counted 8 males and a single female. It's clear that two weeks of unsettled weather has taken the shine of their condition, with the brightness of their blue fading and the white fringes to their wings becoming ragged. Hopefully a return to more settled conditions will result in further emergences. At the car park I was speaking to one of the wardens who said that the Adonis season began just over two weeks ago and had been building well when the weather broke. This season certainly seems to be giving them a bumpy ride, with a good spell of warm, sunny weather encouraging their very early emergence, now only to dash their season with two weeks of wind, rain and precious little sunshine. 1 photo posted to the 2007 Active Gallery.

17 May 2007 - Wall In Good Form At Keyhaven, But Still No Joy At Hordle

I visited two coastal sites in the SW of the county this afternoon, which started off overcast but soon brightened up. First up was the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve. This is the only reliable site for Wall Brown in the county - and it didn't disappoint either from the point of view of the bracing walk along the coastal footpath, or more importantly for sightings of Wall butterflies. In the very breezy, mainly overcast conditions, I saw 9 Wall, several of which I disturbed walking along the sheltered footpath beside the lagoons, east of Keyhaven. Most if not all were males, and generally past their best, but I saw at least one fresh one. It was interesting to watch their behaviour, making short stops for nectar, forays up onto the exposed seawall, but soon returning to the shelter of the lower level footpath. I even saw one cross (or maybe I should say blown across!) a water filled channel several meters wide to reach pastures new. A brief foray inland to the old tip where I had seen several "Walls" last summer produced none today. Two photos of Wall posted to the 2007Active Gallery including the nice one below.



Second up was Hordle Cliff, a few miles west along the coast. By now the cloud was breaking up to allow periods of warm sunshine and I had reasonable hopes of finding Glanville Fritillary. Sadly if there are any there, they were not showing themselves to me today along the half mile of so of undercliff running west from the beach huts. This is quite a concern, since it is my second barren Glanville trip to Hordle, and I will probably give it up for this year. I expect a few Glanvilles will be seen (all sightings last year were in June, but of course this season is much earlier) and the Glanville season on the IoW is probably past its peak now. So I will watch with interest the Hants & IoW branch website for any sightings of Glanvilles at Hordle and hope I have just been unlucky, as happens sometimes with marginal sites. The trudge back along the pebble beach, tough going at the best of times, seemed harder than ever today!

11 May 2007 - Male Adonis Defies Wind & Rain At OWH

So the dry sunny weather we have been enjoying for the last month has finally moved to pastures new, to be replaced by the more familiar mid-May offering of wind and rain (last year was the same!). So I don't really know why I decided to pay a late afternoon visit to Old Winchester Hill (OWH) - maybe a few glimpses of brightness before the promised heavy rain arrived tipped the balance. On the way down the car park slope at OWH, the

sky was heavy with cloud, and the strong, gusty wind was blowing sporadic water droplets in my face. I was almost resigned to a wasted journey. There was little sign of life - a fox made its way stealthily in the shelter of a hedge and there were a few small flying insects about, but alas not of the butterfly variety. I made my way to the flatter, more sheltered area at the very bottom of the slope on the other side of an almost non-existent fence. Careful footstep after footstep through the damp scrub produced nothing - then, there it was - that unmistakable flash of iridescent blue - I had disturbed a male **Adonis Blue**. It settled almost immediately on a stem and was certainly in no mood for voluntary flying or displaying its finery. The photo of its underside (posted to the 2007 Active Gallery) might not make the season highlights but certainly made my journey worthwhile and will remind me of this brave little chap who probably emerged a few days ago as the weather was about to break. I doubt I will ever again make a visit and honestly be able to say, that the only butterfly I saw was an Adonis Blue!

I can't say I'm too sorry about the interruption in the good weather (except for the little chap above of course) and as long as the unsettled spell does not last too long. It should help to restore some normality to this crazy season, where species are emerging much sooner than usual, and often out of sync with their environment (larval foodplants, nectar sources) with potential serious consequences for some of the more vulnerable butterfly colonies.

5 May 2007 - Relentless Pace Of The 2007 Season Continues!

It's not so unusual for the emergence of spring butterfly species to vary by the odd week or two, season to season, depending on how early or late spring arrives. Usually however, by the time mid-summer arrives, these anomalies tend to have levelled out, so species like Purple Emperor, White Admiral and the large fritillaries emerge pretty well on cue, with just a few days variation between seasons. Well this year now looks odds on to break that trend, and I will not be surprised to see even these species on the wing much sooner than normal - even up to a month early. My visit to Bentley Wood late this afternoon reinforces this prediction. When I arrived, I spent some minutes talking with another observer, who noted that there was a log book entry for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on 3 May. He thought the author must be mistaken and actually meant Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which normally emerge in early May, with its smaller cousin following at least two weeks later.

Since Pearl-bordered first appeared in mid April, the appearance of Small Pearl-bordered about now is not surprising, at least in relative terms. It was only when we went to the far end of the Eastern Clearing and found a very fresh male Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary that he was convinced - and another was spotted a short time later! In the clearing there were also about a dozen Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, in varying condition, and also a Brown Argus and a Dingy Skipper - two species new to me for this site.

In case you were wondering why I only made it to Bentley Wood late afternoon, I had visited Hordle Cliff earlier, in the hope of finding the odd Glanville Fritillary in the scrub areas at the bottom of the undercliffs. They are out in good numbers on the loW (e.g. 70+ in Wheelers Bay area last week) but I have to admit that Hordle is much less reliable - and today I was out of luck. I did however, spot a Green Hairstreak amongst the scrub which posed for the odd photo. 3 photos posted to 2007 Active Gallery (2 of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and 1 of Green Hairstreak).

2 May 2007 - Small Blues Doing Well At The Quarry

Tipped off by an entry on the Hants & loW branch website, I visited the large chalk quarry at Paulsgrove yesterday lunchtime. Flitting amongst the scrub at the foot of the huge chalk face just east of the "pool", I counted 10 Small Blue, some fresh, but some starting to fade, indicating that their season here is certainly a few days old. I normally visit this location for Wall Brown (none seen yesterday) but it looks very well suited to Small Blue, with adequate supply of kidney vetch on which the larvae feed and also nectar for the adults. Two photos posted to 2007 Active Gallery, including the one below.



30 April 2007 - A Note About Sensitive Sites & Species

As the butterfly season gathers pace and there should be plenty of butterfly activity to report over the next few weeks, I have decided to follow the line taken by the Hants & IoW branch website on sensitive sites and species. In particular, I will be restricting information on the fortunes of the Marsh Fritillary at Hampshire sites, which is considered sensitive and could compromise the long term future of this species in the county. Any Marsh Fritillary photos taken this season will be posted with unspecified date and location information, and posted after the main Marsh Fritillary flight period.

27 April 2007 - Pearl-bordered Delight In New Forest Clearing

This afternoon I visited the Pignal Inclosure in the New Forest. There were very few people about (I'm more accustomed to it on a Bank Holiday weekend!) but no matter - the Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were a delight! Its still relatively early in the Pearl-bordered season and they are still largely confined to the clearings, where they breed, although I did see an additional two along the rides in Pignal. In the very large clearing about 1km NE of Standing Hat car park, I counted at least 15 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (mostly males), having most success on its eastern side. They were flitting low amongst the new growth, sometimes intricately flying among the debris from recent timber extraction operations, stopping to feed on bugle or bask in the weak sunshine, and often displaying their characteristic wing opening and closing action which is a nightmare for still photography! I had an answer for that however today - as well as taking a few still photos, I also took some video clips capturing this behaviour. By 4pm, Pearl-bordered activity was beginning to wane, with remaining ones content to sit and soak up the warmth left in the rays of the late afternoon sun. Incidentally this clearing (or more correctly it's an area of regeneration) is the large one mentioned in my site feature "New Forest East" under the Pignal sub-heading, with directions to it from Standing Hat.

3 photos posted to 2007 Active Gallery - and look out in a few days for a **video clip** which will be notified via an entry in the "What's New" page.

24 April 2007 - Small Male Orange Tip Takes A Break From Flying

During the last couple of weeks I have seen quite a number of Orange Tips - mostly male and mostly flying more or less incessantly in the sunny weather. Today's cloudier conditions at least gave me the opportunity of a closer approach when I disturbed one by chance on the lower reaches of Portsdown Hill. After flying around for a few seconds it settled long enough for a couple of photos, which have been posted to the 2007 Active Gallery. It was a very small male with a wingspan of little more than an inch, as you can tell from one of the photos and the dandelion seed head on which it is perched. Orange Tips however can be quite variable in size, so I guess this is not that unusual.

21 April 2007 - What A Difference A Day Makes!

Having said just yesterday that I would wait another week or so for a visit to Bentley Wood for Pearl-bordered Fritillary, a rearrangement of weekend plans and the continuing settled weather caused a change of mind. It turned out to be a case of "What a difference a day makes!" After the modest successes yesterday in rather cloudy conditions at Levin Down and Butser, today turned out to be brilliant on the butterfly front!

Before Bentley however, I decided I had some unfinished business to do at Magdalen Hill Down, having not seen Green Hairstreak so far this season. I certainly put that right today - a walk along the scrub at the bottom of the slope on the original reserve produced 12 Green Hairstreak. They were mainly perched on the low vegetation or in the bushes along the bottom edge of the slope (so walking close to the bushes sometimes disturbs them). There were two sparring pairs, one of which flew to a great height and disappeared from sight. In the same area I also saw 10 Grizzled Skipper, 2 Small Copper and potentially another first sighting in Hampshire – a fresh **Brown Argus**. After that excitement it was on to Bentley Wood. As expected Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers are still quite low, but I managed to see 5 in all, two in Eastern clearing, one in the small clearing behind the car park (accessed via track between car park and Eastern clearing) and two in cleared areas along the main track (the switchback). All were very fresh and appeared to be males. Four photos (Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Green Hairstreak) posted to the 2007 Active Gallery.



20 April 2007 - Dukes Out On Butser And Levin Down

With reports coming in that Pearl-bordered Fritillary are starting to emerge at Bentley Wood, it was tempting to make an early visit to see them. However, Pearl-bordered can wait for another week or so whilst numbers build, and instead I decided to stay with my original plan and visit a downland site in W Sussex which I had not been to before, calling in at Butser Hill on the way back. The site in W Sussex is Levin Down managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust. In rather cloudy and coolish conditions Grizzled Skipper were numerous amongst the scrub on both east and west sides of the down - 14 in all of both sexes, with the bonus of seeing a single Duke of Burgundy as well. On the way back at Butser Hill (Rake Bottom) I added a further two Dukes on the steep slopes towards the head of the valley. Again conditions were not ideal being mostly cloudy and cool, but it looks as though the Duke season is just beginning there. Since I have posted two Duke photos previously, I post just one more to the 2007 Active Gallery showing an underwing view taken on Butser today.

17 April 2007 - Holly Blue Ovi-positing On.....Dogwood?!

Yesterday my lunchtime walk just below Fort Purbrook on Portsdown Hill produced 6 Holly Blues in just 20 minutes. It had previously puzzled me why they are reasonably common in an area where neither holly nor ivy are common (the main foodplants of the larva). I noticed one female however, fluttering among the heads of young dogwood - it soon became clear why when she started egg-laying (ovi-positing in technical parlance)! There is plenty of dogwood in this area which might explain why Holly Blue are doing well. A literature search afterwards showed that Holly Blue actually use a number of different foodplants in addition to holly and ivy, including dogwood and bramble. 2 photos, including a shot of the egg-laying have been posted to the 2007 active gallery.

13 April 2007 - The Duke Makes His Appearance On Cue At Noar!

I took advantage of the brightening skies during the early afternoon to visit Noar Hill. You may recall an earlier blog predicting we should be on the lookout for Duke of Burgundy during the second week in April - and right on cue "The Duke" has made his appearance. Only one male seen in the penultimate chalk pit, but he was very content flitting among the low vegetation, stopping to bask frequently in the weak sunshine, and that was plenty good enough for me! The odd bee fly attracted his attention, but no female Dukes around yet for him to get too excited. I also saw several male Orange Tips and my first Holly Blue. I think Noar Hill will be positively buzzing with Spring butterflies in a week or so - and quite a few people too! Two photos of the Duke below with higher resolution versions posted to the 2007 Active Gallery.



10 April 2007 - 3 More Species Today!

I returned to my favourite lunchtime butterfly rendezvous on Portsdown Hill for a short walk today - this time to the central section and added 3 season firsts for me. I thought my luck was really in when the very first butterfly I saw there was - a **Clouded Yellow** - foraging for nectar on the slopes. Only one clouded yellow sighting has been reported so far this year to the Hants & IoW branch website - and that was actually from Dorset!. Subsequently I added **Speckled Wood** and **Small Copper** to my season firsts (one of each), together with 1 Orange Tip, 3 Brimstones, 1 Small White and 2 Peacocks. Significant scrub clearance work has been undertaken during the Autumn/Winter on Portsdown, including the creation of wider tracks, which should help the butterflies. Photo of the Small Copper posted to the 2007 Active Gallery.

7 April 2007 - Grizzled Skipper At Magdalen Hill Down

I chose the coolest day of the Easter Bank Holiday weekend for a visit to Magdalen Hill Down. However, despite the cooler and partially cloudy conditions, the visit turned out to be quite productive - the most notable sighting being 2 **Grizzled Skippers** on the lower slopes of the original reserve (photo below). A male Orange Tip made its way over the down and a Small White was seen on the path leading west at the top of the reserve extension. Hibernators were also in evidence including several Peacocks, 2 Brimstones and - would you believe - a Small Tortoiseshell in very good condition. Having seen just 2 Small Tortoiseshells during the whole of last season, it was a pleasing sight and let's hope the sign of a revival for this species in the south. 3 photos posted to the 2007 Active Gallery



2 April 2007 - Gradual Build Up To The New Season

The weather forecasters promised this would be the best day of the week, so I took a lunchtime walk on Portsdown Hill to see how the butterfly season was building there. The most conspicuous butterflies by far were Brimstones - and nearly all males - 12 in all, seeking the attention of very few paler females - 2 females seen with a photo of one below. 2 Peacocks were also flying up and down the track stopping to bask briefly in the sunshine.



I did not see any newly emerged species during my short visit, bearing in mind the locality I visited has small populations of Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Small, Large and Green-veined Whites and even the odd Green Hairstreak. All these species have now been reported from different parts of UK, so it should not be long before we are starting to see them more regularly during outings to suitable habitats.

11 March 2007 - First Emerged Species!

It has been a beautiful spring day, so I took the opportunity for a stroll along the main track in my local woodland of Whiteley Pastures this afternoon. The higher temperatures and warming rays of sunshine are beginning to bring the hibernators out in greater numbers now, and my visit produced 8 male Brimstones (in flight only), 6 Commas and 1 Peacock, the latter two species flying up and down the main track, stopping at times to bask on the gravel. The biggest surprise, however, was towards the end of my visit as I approached the entrance gate - a **Small White** flew straight past me! It didn't stop but it passed within 2 feet of me and I'm confident of the ID. I note from the BC National Website that one was seen in late February in Suffolk, but a very nice surprise anyway to see my first newly emerged species so early in the season. The only photos I managed today were of the Commas - see example below.



25 February 2007 - Spring Has Definitely Arrived

This afternoon I made a short visit to a fragment of ancient woodland near Curbridge. The purpose of my visit was really to see if any of the wild daffodils which carpet the woodland floor in spring were in bloom - many are still in bud but one was in full bloom and a few others were just opening their dainty yellow trumpets. So what you might ask? Well, I visited the same spot on March 12 last year when not a single bloom was open! So by my calculation, if the Curbridge wild daffodils are a good metric for this purpose, this spring is 2-3 weeks earlier than last year (and nearer 3 weeks).

I also took the opportunity of visiting the Swanwick nature reserve (a Hampshire Wildlife Trust Reserve) close to the new air traffic control centre. Although much of the landscape is man-made (from the clay extraction), the site's industrial past is long gone and nature has taken over. Areas of scrub, meadow, woodland fragment and lakes now support a good variety of wildlife (including butterflies). So, having not visited this reserve previously, a return trip is already on the agenda later in the spring. As for spring flowers there - well the first primroses are already flowering on the so called New Hill - and yes it really is still February!

Talking of primroses, based on my outing this afternoon, my prediction is that we should be on the lookout for the first Duke of Burgundy in Hampshire around the second week in April - and Hampshire is often the first county to record this species nationally.

Photos taken today of wild daffodil and primrose are pasted below. It is definitely Spring!



17 February 2007 - Reports of Early Emergences

A quick trawl of a few UK butterfly web sites last evening confirmed that it's not just the hibernators (Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone) which are taking wing during the late winter period in greater numbers than usual, but there are also isolated reports from the Midlands and South of the emergence of spring butterflies. Those that I have seen reported are:

- A Large White seen at Seaview, Isle of White on 19 January

- A Speckled Wood seen near Lostwithiel, Cornwall on 16 January
- An unconfirmed report of a male Orange Tip (!) seen near Hinckley, Leicestershire at the end of January

It's not clear of course, whether these are simply rogue early emergences resulting from individual pupae acquiring very sheltered locations, conducive to early development (like a greenhouse or conservatory!) or the manifestation of the mild winter we are experiencing and almost certain early arrival of spring. Indeed if one considers in the butterfly world that the sight of Red Admirals pairing is a sign that spring is here, then its already arrived!

It will be interesting to see how the next few weeks unfold in terms of further reports of early spring butterflies from around the country, including hopefully from Hampshire.

27 January 2007 - Brown Hairstreak Egg Search

For my first butterfly outing of 2007, I visited Noar Hill, principally in the hope of finding Brown Hairstreak eggs (or rather 'ova'). The afternoon turned out rather overcast and cool, so the possibility of seeing any butterflies on the wing (like Red Admiral) seemed remote - and so it proved. On the egg search however, there was better news - after a good half hour of eyeballing young and medium sized blackthorn bushes in "the triangle", I located my first (and, as it was to prove, also my last) Brown Hairstreak egg, on a medium sized bush on the right hand side. In the thumbnail image on the left below, the white egg is quite conspicuous in the centre of the photo, with a close up view alongside.



Brown Hairstreak Egg on Blackthorn

A further half hour of searching, both in the triangle and on the way back to the entrance, did not produce any further egg finds - either a case of the needle in the proverbial haystack or I need a lot more practice finding them! Amazingly I noticed that a few blackthorn bushes in sheltered spots are already starting to leaf - in January!

25 January 2007 - Climate Change - A Few Thoughts

You have probably noticed that climate change is being given significant media attention at the moment, with articles in the press and programmes on TV and radio examining its causes and its consequences from many different perspectives. The messages on the need for urgent action at global level are also coming through loud and clear: action by governments, by industry and last but by no means least by us as individuals – for instance to reduce our fuel and energy consumption and minimise waste. I am not going to try to compete with the media and elaborate here on what's at stake if we do not tackle climate change – and in any case there are many who are far more knowledgeable than me to do that. However, I will postulate a few thoughts on the consequences for some of our local butterfly species – and its not all crystal ball gazing - since some of the effects are already there to see.

Over the last few years significant systematic changes have been occurring in the fortunes of some of our butterfly species in Hampshire, and perhaps more subtle changes are occurring for others, which are yet barely

detectable. Whilst there is likely to be a combination of factors at work (such as habitat loss, changes in land management, natural cyclic phenomena related to predation/parasites), these factors do not fully account for the scale of the changes, strongly pointing to climate change as the other major factor in the equation. Specific examples of these changes include;

- The decline of the Wall butterfly from inland habitats, now largely confined to one or two coastal sites in Hampshire
- The rapid decline of the Small Tortoiseshell (in S England at least) during the last few years
- The decline of Grizzled Skipper colonies from woodland sites, now possibly too wet for the survival of the pupal stage
- The variability in the fortunes of individual colonies of some species from year to year (e.g. Duke of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary)
- The expansion in range of the Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper
- The greater numbers of migrants being seen in UK
- The increased frequency of additional partial broods during late summer/autumn (e.g. White Admiral)
- The greater numbers of butterflies being reported on the wing during the late autumn and winter months

The still gathering pace of climate change is likely to make these effects even more pronounced. On the positive side, one or two new species which are currently occasional migrants could become established as UK residents, and partial or even full additional broods could become the norm rather than the exception. On the other hand, those species whose fortunes seem to fluctuate significantly or are in decline are more likely to suffer local extinctions and accelerated regional declines, with the possibility of UK extinction a real possibility for the most vulnerable. These effects are sadly only to be expected both as a consequence of the systematic changes in our climate, accentuated by the greater extremes in our weather.

Our butterfly colonies have evolved to survive the occasional winter storm (in their immature stages) – and the often inclement British summer weather affecting their flight period, however surviving, let alone flourishing, in a different climate which is being thrust on them over a very short period of time, in evolutionary terms, is something else. Frequent storms and gales in winter, prolonged heat waves and droughts in summer punctuated by torrential thundery downpours, and greater variability in our weather from year to year - that's what's in store for our butterflies, and it may prove too much for some species. We shall see over the coming years how well (or poorly) vulnerable species such as the Duke of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl bordered Fritillary, Wall and Small Tortoiseshell fare in this new era – the era of climate change. I suspect they will need all the help we can provide, both in tackling climate change and in managing and preserving their habitats as best we can.

14 January 2007 - First Butterflies of the New Year - Update!

I said in my first posting of 2007 that I hoped to make my first foray of the new year in the next 2-3 weeks, which is still true - but I didn't need to go anywhere to record my first butterfly sighting of 2007 - a Red Admiral fluttering around the outside of the conservatory at 3pm this afternoon, resting briefly to bask in the pleasant sunshine. Best make sure that camera battery is charged...!

12 January 2007 - First Butterflies of the New Year!

So 2007 has arrived and one wonders what it will have in store for the butterfly observer? There have already been several reports of Red Admirals on the wing in the first few days of the New Year, seemingly the species most tolerant of the cooler, but hardly wintry, temperatures. Indeed there were many Red Admiral reports from around the county during December, including one in flight when the temperature was just 4°C. This contrasts with the occasional sighting of other hibernators on the wing such as Brimstone, Comma and Peacock during December, tempted to take flight only on the warmer days. Perhaps the most remarkable sighting in December, however was a male Holly Blue recorded in Gosport on the 6th, believed to be the first ever December record of this species in Hampshire. And it's not just the butterflies which are confused by the changing climate – many shrubs such as honeysuckle have kept their blooms going through the so called “winter”- and no wonder with daytime temperatures more like early spring and even overnight temperatures not infrequently in double figures.

As for the coming butterfly season, well its maybe a little early to speculate too much, however if the generally mild temperatures continue, one can expect the hibernators to be out in numbers earlier than normal. We could also be looking forward to the early emergence of spring species such as Duke of Burgundy, perhaps a couple of weeks sooner than last spring, which actually followed a cold winter. I hope to make my first foray of 2007 in the next 2-3 weeks and will also have something to say about the probable consequences of the changing weather patterns on our local butterfly populations.