



2013 Blog

13 December 2013 - Hampshire December Butterfly List Probably Complete

As we are soon to enter the final week of 2013 and with the country being battered by Atlantic storms, it is unlikely that the 5 species reported on the wing in Hampshire so far in December will increase. Small Tortoiseshell was the latest to be added to the list since my previous blog. Looking around the local branch websites, Wiltshire seems to have fared quite well for late butterflies this year with Small Copper and Large White making it to mid and late November respectively.

If the current weather characteristics set the theme for early 2014 (i.e. wet but not especially cold), maybe we can expect an early spring, but not a great butterfly season, if previous examples can be relied on (e.g. 2007). Thankfully it's just not that simple! Indeed, the legacy of 2013, being a late season for most species, may already have cancelled the prospect of an early butterfly spring in 2014.

8 December 2013 - December Butterfly Count Up and Running

The final month of 2013 has arrived, and whilst the month which formally heralds the start of winter is never going to excel in terms of butterflies on the wing, it sometimes throws up some surprises.

Butterflies on the wing in Hampshire reported to the branch website during the first week of December include a Clouded Yellow (at Southbourne) along with less surprising records of hibernators - Peacock, Brimstone and Red Admiral. 2013 was a late season for butterflies - this and the benign year-end conditions so far may mean that Speckled Wood and even a lingering Holly Blue are also possibilities. We'll see what develops over the weeks taking us to the start of a new year.

10 October 2013 - Warm Summer Drives Continental Migrations

If you have been following sightings reports on local butterfly branch websites, you will have noticed a plethora of sightings of Long-tailed Blue in Sussex since early September. There have also been sightings in Kent, Wiltshire and a singleton on 24 September on Southampton Common in Hampshire. The wide distribution of sightings strongly favours natural migration from the continent of this rare migrant, driven by the warm summer.

Furthermore, the sightings are sometimes of multiple butterflies in good condition, often where the foodplant is growing (everlasting pea), which suggests these are the offspring of butterflies which arrived on our shores earlier in the season. If the forthcoming winter is a mild one, there is a real possibility that these butterflies could mate and successfully produce adult offspring next year.

The mini-influx of Long-tailed Blue complements the continued strong showing of another essentially migrant species, the Clouded Yellow. Sightings of this species continue to be reported regularly from Hampshire.

So this season seems to be drawing to a close on a high note, echoing the generally very productive summer for many species. This encouraging news however, does need to be tempered by a more sobering note, in that the successful season has not been enjoyed by all resident species, nor indeed by all migrants.

14 September 2013 - Summer Broods Likely To Fizzle Out With Change In Weather

After what has turned out to be a good summer for many species, the onset of changeable and cooler Autumnal weather is likely to lead to the rapid fading away of the remaining summer brood butterflies.

Having said that, late September can be a reasonable period (if decent weather makes an Indian Summer return) with some fresh specimens to see, including Vanessids such as Comma, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell, all taking advantage of the Autumn fruitfulness. A late brood of Small Copper should be almost certain and I would not rule out a few Wall Browns emerging for a third brood.

The end of the main summer period, with much less to report, will mean that postings to this blog reduce, as I reflect on what has been a very unusual, but in the end, a quite enjoyable season.

7 September 2013 - Mystery Adonis Resurgence At OWH Now Unravelling

Following my midweek posting about the good numbers of Adonis Blue at Old Winchester Hill, I visited the site myself yesterday afternoon. Whilst not matching counts reported earlier in the week, the population on the south facing slope from the fort were certainly improved from normal, with around 10 males seen and at least one female. None were in pristine condition, but their season should last at least another week. On the car park slope I counted 3 males, making a total count of around 14.

The mystery resurgence is also explained (although not quite fully) since I understand that Natural England made a limited reintroduction of pupae last year, matched hopefully, to the improving habitat. Clearly all adults managed to evade observers in the spring who might have reported them to the webmaster, yet still managed to breed and produce a more visible summer generation.

Other notable sightings included 5 Silver-spotted Skipper, 3 Brown Argus and 2 Clouded Yellow, with Chalkhills still by far the most numerous species on the downland slopes, although many are now quite faded.

4 photos of Adonis Blue (including the female below), Clouded Yellow and Brown Argus posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



4 September 2013 - Summer Brood Adonis Appear At OWH After Barren Spring?

In a year which has had more than its fair share of excellent summer weather, it is not surprising that butterflies are enjoying strong second broods compared to normal.

In the case of Adonis Blues at Old Winchester Hill (OWH), the phrase 'compared to normal' very much applies, since they have been struggling there in recent times (following an official reintroduction some years ago). I note however, a count of 29 male Adonis on the hill fort slope earlier this week - possibly the highest individual count in recent years. It's even more surprising bearing in mind that visits by several observers during the spring brood flight period (in late May/June) reported not a single Adonis sighting!

It will be great if this is a springboard for the Adonis Blue to sustain a robust population at this site, but with no other Adonis sites within reasonable dispersion distance, a more mundane explanation than a miracle has to be considered!

30 August 2013 - Grayling Doing Well At Castle Bottom

I have been doing some 'research' on North Hampshire heathland sites of late, principally to locate a good site for Grayling in the north of the county. There are some good sites within a few miles of Hampshire's northern borders in both Surrey and Berkshire, so it was rewarding to confirm a location within the county boundary by personal visit this afternoon.

Castle Bottom NNR near Eversley is a lowland heath/valley mire based reserve, managed by Hampshire County Council. It is a very pleasant place to visit with a number of paths to explore and boardwalks provided as one descends to the damper areas near the stream. My time was limited so I was only able to explore the western side of the reserve.

Castle Bottom has a very good population of Grayling (~25 seen today), the first one encountered within a few yards of the approach along a gravel track from Cooper's Hill (not actually in the reserve) and then frequently encountered in the areas where the heather is more thinly spread or along the permissive paths. The males were mostly quite faded by now but there were several females still in very decent condition.

Whilst I will not elaborate here, Castle Bottom is also a rich site for other invertebrates (with some rarities) and birds such as Nightjar and Dartford Warbler. On the butterfly front, although too late for this year, I will believe the literature that a healthy population of Silver-studded Blue thrive in the heathery areas.

2 photos of female Grayling posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



27 August 2013 - Season Ending On A High For Some Species

We seem to have been blessed with more than our fair share of warm, sunny weather during the last few weeks and the mid/late summer butterflies have been 'making hay', so to speak. For many of these species, 2013 should turn out to be a very good year.

Having some unexpected time to spare this afternoon, I also decided to make hay, and headed off for the Selborne area, to make short explorations of both Selborne Common and Noar Hill. Naturally I was keeping in mind the possibility of seeing Brown Hairstreak, but it was enjoyable just to take in the abundant nature of these sites, in the mellowing light and lengthening shadows of late summer,

Despite no Brown Hairstreak sightings, there were butterflies aplenty at both sites, but especially Noar Hill where a Clouded Yellow was the most notable sighting amongst the many common species, perhaps followed by a couple of late Silver-washed Fritillaries. There was just a hint of autumn butterfly fare too, with a few fresh Commas feeding on the ripening blackberries.

Selborne Common provided a serene alternative to Noar Hill, being more tranquil and shadier, as well as offering lovely vistas across the Hampshire countryside and the hum from the combines gathering the harvest from the nearby farmland. As for butterflies, the brilliant season for both Large and Small Whites was again evident complemented by a sprinkling of Nymphalid colour in the form of Comma, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell.

Just the one photo (Brimstone from Noar Hill) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



23 August 2013 - Adonis Flying At Broughton As Season Starts To Wind Down

A short visit to Broughton Down this afternoon ended in success as the Adonis Blues take wing at their best central Hants location. Well it's all relative of course, with a total of just 3 males seen today. Nevertheless, I was grateful for that, with none seen in the vicinity of the tumulus or in the gulley at the west end of the reserve. Thankfully, as I entered the meadow forming the south pointing spur of land beyond the gulley, the first male Adonis was eye-catching to say the least against the plentiful, but rather faded Chalkhill and Common Blues. This first one was very fresh indeed, but a search of the spur produced two more males which had perhaps, been around for at least a day or two.

Whilst there were still plenty of butterflies on the reserve (including a few Silver-spotted Skippers), the condition of many butterflies is now fading. This is in tune with an unmistakable air of late summer going into early autumn which is pervading the downland, as the vegetation turns yellow or brown and the flowers go over to become dead-heads.

3 photos of Adonis Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



21 August 2013 - Walls Thin On The Ground At Keyhaven

Following my visit to Shipton Bellinger yesterday, I then headed south to the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve on the south coast, to check out the fortunes of Hampshire's only significant colony of Wall butterflies. A circuit along the so called "ancient highway" at the end of Lower Pennington Lane to Keyhaven, then returning along the sea wall past the Keyhaven and Pennington Marshes, was quite a slog in the breezy conditions.

Finding the target species was at best a hit and miss affair, with the total count eventually struggling up to 7 individuals. These ranged from a very worn male to five other males in varying condition through to a fresh female in beautiful condition. Most of the 'hits' were along the sea wall, with the butterflies preferring the sheltered landward side and being encountered sporadically along the Keyhaven and Pennington Marsh sections of the

route. Needless to say, with so few Walls to see, obtaining decent photos was also a challenge and, in the circumstances, turned out OK. The female in particular was extremely restless, leaving her wings open for just a second or so after landing, before flicking them closed in characteristic Wall fashion.

Whilst Walls are hardly thriving here, they are well worth seeing and this weekend may be the last opportunity this season to see them in reasonable condition (I would certainly not rely on a partial third brood in late September!).

3 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



20 August 2013 - Ladies Day At Shipton Bellinger

Shipton Bellinger is about as far away from me as it's possible to go, whilst remaining in Hampshire, so today was definitely going to be my final visit there this season. Thankfully the ladies did not disappoint and put on a decent show (Brown Hairstreaks that is!).

The return on the investment had to be earned however, with around 2 hours spent searching the usual spots (including of course the hedgerow along the county boundary) and about 15 minutes spent in the company of 2 female Brown Hairstreaks in the aforementioned hedgerow (and in the company of other observers of course). They were both real beauties too, the second one being particularly camera friendly, just sitting motionless on the dead flower head of a bramble for several minutes.

I did manage to see 3 males as well, but they were high in Ash trees along the main track from the village. The hedgerows generally were thronging with common butterflies, including whites, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Holly Blue and Peacock in particular.

5 photos of Brown Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



18 August 2013 - Clouded Yellows Enjoying The Portsdown Nectar

The risk of heavy showers this afternoon meant my plans for an outing further afield were shelved in favour of Portsdown Hill, which has served me well in the past during good Clouded Yellow years. I was fairly confident that the nectar rich scrub areas below Fort Southwick would be on their radar, with so many Clouded Yellow sightings across the county at present, as offspring of the spring migrants.

Quite astonishingly, the first Clouded Yellow I saw today was of the pale *Helice* form, which only occurs in the female. Unfortunately it flew over bushes and out of sight, but I could clearly see the dark wing borders in flight to distinguish it from any of the other whites, which were numerous. Had I not been on the look-out for the species, I could have easily over-looked it.

After a great start, it was not long before the deep yellow colouring of a normal form Clouded Yellow was seen flying across the thick scrub, but it was easily outpacing me and settled just once, briefly, before it was so far ahead I had to concede defeat. It looked in beautiful condition - perhaps newly emerged.

Ironically, heavy cloud came to my rescue, as my third Clouded Yellow (again normal form) was disturbed. Thankfully, in the duller conditions, this one was much happier to settle again quickly to feed or rest on vegetation - indeed almost Grayling-like in its ability to merge into its background as one of the photos shows.

During my escapade, I was also very pleased to come across a single summer brood Small Blue and many Small Tortoiseshells feeding, particularly on the buddleia bushes bordering the scrub.

4 photos of Clouded Yellow posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



16 August 2013 - Plenty Still Going On Including Frequent Clouded Yellow Sightings

It will soon be late August but last week's mixed bag of weather will have curtailed the tendency for those butterflies on the wing at present to burn themselves out prematurely. Hence there is plenty still going on out there.

Of the less common species, the next week should provide opportunities to see Brown Hairstreak and Wall Brown, still in good condition.

I note too that it is turning into a decent summer for Clouded Yellow with sightings in Hampshire on most days, including several sightings of the paler *Helice* form. Summer brood Adonis Blue have just been reported in Sussex so can be expected in the next few days at their few Hampshire sites such as Martin Down and Broughton Down.

A combination of other commitments and the weather have prevented me venturing far recently, but I hope to end the main part of the season with further outings during the next days.

13 August 2013 - Small Whites Hold Impromptu Meeting On Portsdown

I made a short lunchtime visit to the foot of the Paulsgrove quarry to check out if second brood Small Blue had emerged there. On the blue front however, dominance was held by Common Blues with only a fleeting glimpse of a possible Small Blue which I disturbed and lost. ID has to stay as unconfirmed bearing in mind several female Common Blues on the site.

Perhaps the most unusual finding was a gathering of Small Whites on the mossy, dried out margins of the pool at the foot of the quarry face. It started with just 2 or 3 individuals taking moisture/minerals but others were drawn in like a magnet, fluttering around then landing. A few minutes later, with the meeting over and meeting minutes duly recorded, they dispersed again!

Photo of Small White Gathering posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



10 August 2013 - Goings On At Noar And Oxenbourne

I made a round trip yesterday afternoon taking in Noar Hill and Oxenbourne Down with target species Brown Hairstreak and Silver-spotted Skipper. At Noar Hill the Hemp Agrimony was in perfect condition for butterflies - the Peacocks in particular were on a feeding frenzy with a dozen or more on some of the larger clumps, with a few Small Tortoiseshells and even Silver-washed Fritillaries adding some colour variations.

I was not lucky enough to see any Brown Hairstreak although there was at least one sighting reported earlier in the day, along with a visiting Clouded Yellow. Whilst the agrimony was terrific across the site, I was somewhat disappointed in the state of the Triangle - once a good location for Brown Hairstreak but now in need of some management before it becomes overrun by large bushes.

Previous visits to Oxenbourne Down had been tinged with disappointment, as I did not find Duke Of Burgundy there in the spring and did not connected with Silver-spotted Skipper there last summer. Well no Dukes of course today but I counted at least 10 Silver-spotted Skippers, which is reasonable for a small site - the well grazed habitat with decent supply of nectar clearly suiting them. Chalkhill Blues are doing well there too, with several fresh males complementing the more faded individuals of both sexes. I even managed to see two Dark Green Fritillaries, albeit in a rather sad condition by now.

4 photos of Silver-spotted Skipper, Chalkhill Blue, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell posted to Recent Photos gallery.



8 August 2012 - Single Brown Hairstreak Is Saviour At County Boundary

I made my first visit of the season to Shipton Bellinger this afternoon, having noted that Brown Hairstreak are just starting to emerge there. There were several other observers walking the thick hedgerow along the county boundary which has been a hotspot for the species for some years. I arrived to learn of several males and the odd female being seen there earlier in the day and as recently as a few minutes prior to my arrival. There had also been a few sightings in the Ash trees along the lane from the village and also along the parallel backtrack.

"Shouldn't have too much difficulty then", were my initial thoughts - but how wrong I was!! Firstly, by now it was largely overcast and secondly there is the unpredictability of this little butterfly which spends most of its time roosting in the trees or feeding on honeydew or sap.

Along the hedgerow, despite the bramble flowers being almost over as main nectar source, there was much butterfly activity - Meadow Browns (some males not much bigger than hairstreaks) and Gatekeepers were abundant. Whites, Peacocks and Brimstones were plentiful with Holly Blues and Commas not difficult to find. Along the field margin Small Heath and Small Copper were also noted.

After 2 hours of searching, all I had in respect of Brown Hairstreak was a sighting of a male high up in Ash along the track from the village. Thankfully a further diligent search of the famous boundary hedge at last produced the goods, albeit quite briefly, as a male Brown Hairstreak descended to feed on bramble and a I gratefully grabbed a couple of photos before he returned to the trees.

2 photos of Brown Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



2 August 2013 - Broughton Down Alive With Summer Butterflies

As the rain and heavy cloud moved north to leave a warm if breezy afternoon, I visited Broughton Down to see what it had to offer the butterfly observer. Time was limited, so it was more of a quick survey than a photo opportunity, but it certainly did not disappoint. The species count was 15 which included Silver-spotted Skipper, Dark Green Fritillary, Chalkhill, Common and Holly Blue, and Brown Argus.

The Silver-spotted Skippers (mainly fresh) were encountered quite regularly at the western section of the reserve, but were very active in the warm sunshine and difficult to follow. In contrast the Dark Green Fritillaries are now quite faded having enjoyed about one month of almost continuous flying weather. Several were seen on the down. Chalkhill Blues were numerous if not abundant, and Meadow Browns and the Whites as usual are doing well, seeming not to mind what kind of summer we have.

The recent long spell of good weather seems to have revitalised this year's butterfly season, with the verdict for several species (including Purple Emperor) likely to be that it has been a good one. The only species yet to be reported in Hampshire is the Brown Hairstreak, although there is a report of a sighting in Dorset from about a week ago. Let's hope they have a decent season in Hampshire too!

4 photos of Silver-spotted Skipper, Holly Blue and a faded Dark Green Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



26 July 2013 - Summer Butterfly Pick And Mix

I had intended to make my first visit to Bentley Wood today during Purple Emperor season, but the forecast of fog for west Hants caused a change in my itinerary. First stop was on the other side of the county in the Straits Inclosure of Alice Holt Forest. Emperors have been paying ground visits there most days this week - today too one was disturbed by a forest research worker close to the first cabin around mid-morning. I had to be satisfied however, with one confirmed and one possible aerial sighting. There were many more female Silver-washed Fritillaries evident today compared to my previous visits, joining the many amorous males, but White Admiral numbers now seem to be declining fast (just 3 seen). The fresh crop of Peacocks too was very eye-catching, many in pristine condition.

As it clouded over in late morning, I took the opportunity whilst in NE Hants, to visit the heathland of Yateley Common (Country Park), hoping to connect with Silver-studded Blue and Grayling. I had not visited this site for some years and it now seems much more gorse dominated than I recall, with some thick areas of heather. I did not have too much difficulty finding Silver-studded Blue, including a tiny female (size of a Small Blue) which I photographed. It kept lowering its abdomen on to the bark on which it was resting in egg-laying mode, although it was not evident any eggs were being laid (eggs are sometimes laid on debris close to black ants on which the species depends).

I have seen Grayling at this site before, but none seen today and the area I visited was largely bereft of bare ground (apart from sandy tracks) which is a characteristic of Grayling habitat. In partial compensation, there were many Gatekeepers feeding on the abundant bramble flowers.

Not to be disappointed, I returned to a more familiar Grayling site on the south coast - Browndown North, near Gosport. Here the Grayling favour an area adjoining the main heathland, where the heather is more thinly spread, leaving patches of bare ground and stones. There were around a dozen fresh Grayling here, some flitting between one stony resting place and another, others occasionally feeding. There were also a few Small Copper and Common Blue in this area.

7 photos of various species posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



20 July 2013 - Season Reaches Pinnacle In The Pastures!

You are probably aware that I do not manage photos of Purple Emperor on the ground every year, so it is a high point when I do achieve it and even more so when it's in my local woodland.

A walk in Whiteley Pastures this morning in fact delivered two male Purple Emperors along the main track, one making only a brief ground stop close to the entrance gate after several passes close to the ground - not even looking to take nutrients.

The other was already well and truly engrossed in feeding from excrement as I approached, close to where the main track crosses a brook. It would have been so easy to overlook him from a few yards away amongst the various debris and sharp shadows at the edge of the track, and then kick myself as I disturbed him. The very same thing happened last year in nearly the same spot - but I had now learned my lesson and was much more streetwise on this occasion!

This Emperor stayed for around ten minutes before flying off into oaks but only offered the occasional open wing flash of blue, as if to say: *that's close enough!* I was probably lucky to have his attention for this long, since the main track is popular with both cyclists and dog walkers which are not the perfect soul mates for feeding Emperors! I think fortune was definitely on my side today.

5 photos of both Emperors posted to Recent Photos Gallery (one of each below).



19 July 2013 - Chalkhill Arrival Heralds Start Of Late Summer

I always consider that the appearance of Chalkhill Blues on our chalk downland is a timely reminder that the butterfly season is entering its late summer period, with most species now emerged, although still a few to look forward to and plenty of second broods. The sight of downland alive with hundreds and sometimes thousands of Chalkhill Blues is mainly a reminder of bygone times, yet could happen again this year if the fine weather continues.

We are not there yet of course - Chalkhill Blues on Portsdown Hill, which I visited this afternoon, are still in the first days of their flight period, with just a dozen or so males seen in one local area. The high temperatures coupled with an increasing breeze meant that no open wing feeding was on offer today, so that will have to wait.

Elsewhere, I note that the Purple Emperor season in Hampshire seems generally to be a bit slow, given the glut of sightings and ground visits elsewhere (Sussex, Bucks, Oxon). Females should be starting to emerge by now, adding a new dimension for the patient Emperor follower to pursue.

Two photos of Chalkhill Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



14 July 2013 - Follow The Emperor's Antics

A brief stop at the Straits and Abbots Wood Inclosures in Alice Holt Forest yesterday morning, did not suggest that the observers there were about to be treated to a display of aerial or ground-based Emperor antics (but I could be wrong!). In fact the woods seemed generally quieter yesterday morning than Friday afternoon, on the butterfly front at least - maybe it is getting too hot!

It is worth noting too that Dark Green Fritillaries continue to enjoy a bumper emergence at some sites, with a count of more than 100 recently reported on the downland beside the Monument at Farley Mount, matching the earlier count at Broughton Down.

12 July 2013 - A Week Is A Long Time In Alice's Butterfly Diary!

Last Friday I was in the Straits Inclosure of Alice Holt Forest and reported that the wait goes on for our woodland icons, with not a single White Admiral nor Silver-washed Fritillary to be seen. This afternoon, exactly one week later in almost identical conditions (hot and sunny!) the place was alive with them!

Silver-washed Fritillaries were almost never out of sight (several score of them seen but just one female) and White Admirals were also plentiful, intricately skimming the boughs but also stopping to feed for long periods on bramble. As for Ringlets - well let's just say there were many scores of them!

Whilst I was in the Inclosure, there was even the report of a grounded Purple Emperor, but alas not grounded for long and missed by me. I did have partial success even with His Majesty - a short detour to one of the vantage points in Abbots Wood Inclosure produced a male PE briefly circling tall oaks as reward.

At present, all the large iconic woodland species are generally in excellent condition, being just a few days into their flight period. However, if the warm, sunny weather continues for many days, the flight periods will peak quickly and the condition of the butterflies will deteriorate quite fast as they fly for extended periods every day (especially so for the White Admirals).

6 photos of White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



10 July 2013 - Summer Butterflies Start To Burst Forth - At Last!

I have been reading with interest the sightings blogs covering Hampshire and am relieved to see that the emergence of summer woodland species, such as Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral is now underway, with the first report of Purple Emperor from the county expected imminently. Male Emperors have already been reported from some other counties (such as Surrey) with sightings including individuals imbibing from their usual ground-borne 'delicacies'.

Away from woodlands, there have been some remarkable counts of Dark Green Fritillary earlier this week including 150 at Broughton Down (by far the commonest species!) and more than 30 at Stockbridge Down. Beware, however, such events indicate a mass emergence brought on by the prolonged warm weather and numbers are likely to plummet quickly as the butterflies disperse. To some extent I have witnessed this sort of thing myself with the White-letter colony in Cosham where, in the space of a week of almost unbroken sunshine, the count has gone from double figures to a singleton today.

Since the forecast is for the fine weather to continue well into next week, the flight period of species such as White Admiral is likely to reach a peak quickly (with consequently good numbers) but also be shortened compared to normal.

5 July 2013 - The Wait Goes On For Woodland Icons Despite Fine Weather

I made my first visit of the season to Alice Holt Forest (Straits Inclosure) this afternoon, in the belief that surely the warmer and sunnier spell of weather will at last be triggering an emergence of White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries? It's hard to believe that we are near the end of the first week in July and sightings both in Hampshire and nationally of these species are barely off the ground. Purple Emperor sightings too, are also off the ground, with a singleton seen in the South Midlands earlier in the week.

It's true that in Hampshire's woodlands, if this afternoon's experience is typical, numbers of some woodland dwelling species such as Ringlet and Large Skipper are building, but I drew a blank on any of our woodland icons. As if to emphasise the lateness of the season, I did see a male Orange Tip in the Straits Inclosure, in quite decent condition!

Being just a few miles from Surrey's Glanville Fritillary site near Farnham, a change of tactic was needed. On my last visit there, I did not see Glanvilles but did see Grizzled Skippers. Well this time the Small Skippers were in the ascendency, along with Marbled Whites, but I was also pleased to find Large Skippers as well.

I was not expecting to find Glanville Fritillary in early July - and cannot even confirm there have been any recent sightings of this introduced colony. However, whilst I was climbing a grassy bank, concentrating on where I was putting my feet, a brown butterfly with the characteristics of a small fritillary in colour and flight pattern flew past at head height, at which point I lost it. Glanville maybe?

2 photos of Marbled White and Large Skipper posted to recent Photos Gallery.



2 July 2013 - White-letter Crown For Cosham Elms

Yesterday lunchtime I deviated from the public site in Gosport which I usually visit for White-letter Hairstreak, following a disappointing outcome last year, and instead visited their Cosham residence. In strong sunshine, there was a good turn-out of White-letters too - perhaps up to ten males in residence. Between their jerky flights around the sunnier branches, they would occasionally spar with each other before landing to peer out over the top of a leaf from a strategic observation position.

It will be interesting to watch the development of their flight period over the next couple of weeks, including the emergence of females and, once their initial reserves of energy dwindle, their partiality to taking nectar. Neck ache or not, it has to be better than spending lunchtime at the office, just a mile or so away!



30 June 2013 - Farley Mount Dark Greens Come To The Rescue

Following a largely unsuccessful exploration of my local woodland (Whiteley Pastures) this afternoon, a change in tactics was needed. Although Whiteley Pastures had produced a few Large Skippers, Meadow Browns and Specked Woods, there was no sign of the species I had hoped for - White Admiral nor Silver-washed Fritillary (after all it is the end of June!).

So I headed north-west to Farley Mount Country Park, not to search for those particular species but to check if any Dark Green Fritillaries had yet emerged, to begin their adult life 'bombing' around Pitt Down. Nothing will surprise me now about this season, so I was prepared for disappointment (again!).

Thankfully Mother Nature did oblige on this occasion, and after a few minutes eye-balling the many thistles at the east end of the down, an orangey-brown thunderbolt in the form of a Dark Green Fritillary whizzed past me to continue its acrobatics around the down. Where it came from I don't know - but the challenge now was to try to get some photos, since it may be the only one!

I lost it several times in the breezy conditions but it always returned some minutes later to the same area - and yikes - there was another one! Thankfully I did manage a few hurried photos during their refuelling stops on

thistles, the blustery breeze sometimes causing their wings to close to allow some underside shots. I departed relieved and satisfied - a relatively rare occurrence this season!

4 photos of Dark Green Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



28 June 2013 - This Most Difficult Season To Predict

The very unusual (and generally poor) butterfly season so far, is not only turning out to be one of the latest on record, but also one of the most difficult to predict. I note with some relief that two of our iconic woodland species, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary have now been reported from central southern counties (Hampshire or Sussex), but I suspect the build-up of their flight periods may be very erratic and variable across different locations. It also seems hard to believe that Dark Green Fritillary has not so far been reported in either of these two counties, yet has been recorded in large numbers (82!) in one south Devon location as far back as 10th June. Is Hampshire really that far behind or are there other underlying reasons?

I will refrain from speculating on the likely fortunes of some of our larger summer species, but let's just say I am concerned. As for my travels, a short exploration of Portsdown Hill this afternoon produced a fresh Small Tortoiseshell, complementing the one I saw three days ago on Martin Down - a refreshing sight indeed. Photo posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



26 June 2013 - Full Set Of Blues Seen As Butterfly Season Battles On

I made a short visit to Martin Down yesterday afternoon, returning via the New Forest, as the butterfly season labours slowly forward against adversity. Nevertheless, I saw most of the species I would have expected, albeit in generally low numbers. Along the Bokerley ditch at Martin Down, Adonis Blue were the most conspicuous species. Many of the males are faded now but a few were in decent condition - surprisingly no females were seen. Even more surprising was the presence of several Grizzled Skippers - it's very late for them!

Other species seen were Small Heath, Dingy Skipper, Small Blue, Small Copper, Common Blue and a fresh Small Tortoiseshell. Despite ~ 70% cloud cover, the sun failed to make an appearance until I was almost ready to leave the site which may have been a factor.

In the New Forest, lack of sunshine was not the problem - just lack of butterflies! In Hawkhill Inclosure there was little on the wing except a faded Holly Blue, and more worrying was the almost complete lack of common nectar sources, such as thistles, which are usually in reasonable supply. We wait to see the impact on the turn-out of the large fritillaries here (Silver-washed and Dark Green) which in normal years would be on the wing by now.

On the heathland, there was slightly better success with 3 Silver-studded Blues seen on Beaulieu Heath - all fresh males. Whilst these are already being seen in decent numbers on sites in the east of the county, my conclusion is that they are just starting to emerge at their main New Forest sites.

5 photos of Adonis Blue, Small Blue and Silver-studded Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



21 June 2013 - June Gap Lives Up (Or Rather Down) To Expectations

When the weather started to brighten up after a dismally cloudy morning, I made a short tour of several of the butterfly locations around Farley Mount this afternoon (2 areas of Pitt Down and Crab Wood), followed by a detour to Stockbridge Down. It was my first visits of the year to these locations and - teeming with butterflies they were definitely not! The lateness of the season, in terms of the state of vegetation, was all too obvious, with the favoured nectar sources such as thistles and bramble flowers mostly in bud (a few in flower).

On Pitt Down, scrub clearance has been undertaken out of season, and 'sward management' duties continue to be performed by the long horned cattle. The highlight here was a fresh Large Skipper, with Brimstone, Large White, Small Heath, Common Blue and Peacock also seen. Stockbridge Down added Small Copper - if you look in the reference books they should not even be on the wing in late June, but the first brood is still flying. I have to say that I was disappointed by the state of the vegetation at the bottom of the down - it's now mostly grass with much fewer wild flowers. Finally Crab Wood added Speckled Wood and, surprisingly a Meadow Brown.

Elsewhere in the county, I note first sightings of Silver-studded Blue and White Admiral have been reported, so gradually we are getting there. However, don't expect our butterfly sites to be teeming with summer butterflies for a week or two yet - and the progress of the season is still very much dependent on the weather.

Photo of Small Copper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



19 June 2013 - When Will Summer Arrive?

The on-going theme of generally cloudy and unsettled weather in central southern England continues to delay the 2013 butterfly season, and the consequences of last year's poor performance in suppressing butterfly numbers this year, is all too evident. From a personal perspective, I have also reduced the number of out of area visits I have made - it's one thing to have disappointing visits in your own patch without being compounded by travelling many miles to sites that are much less familiar - only to have a similar (or worse) outcome!

In mitigation, Hampshire is now in the middle of its June Gap between the flight periods of the early spring species, which are now drawing to a close and the emergence of the main summer crop of butterflies, including large species such as Dark Green and Silver-washed Fritillaries, White Admiral and Purple Emperor, but not forgetting some of their smaller brethren such as Silver-studded Blue, White-letter and Purple Hairstreaks.

A Dark Green Fritillary has already been reported from the New Forest - earlier than I had expected when the season is so late - and hopefully most of the other species above, perhaps with the exception of the purple varieties, will start to emerge within the next two weeks. The term calm before the storm would normally come to mind now, but I fear, looking at the weather forecast for the second half of this week, that might literally be true!

14 June 2012 - Fears for Surrey's Glanville Colony

You may recall in my 2012 Blog, that I visited a site in Surrey (near Farnham) where a Glanville Fritillary colony has been surviving (indeed thriving) for more than 10 years, following an unofficial introduction. Wishing to avoid the longer journey and windswept walk along the shingle spit to the Hurst Castle Glanville site (with absolutely no guarantee of success), I opted for a return visit to Surrey this afternoon.

Needless to say, I had no success there either, at least not for Glanvilles. I know this is a very late and slow season for many species, but with Glanvilles seen on the IoW almost 3 weeks ago, there must be concern that the Surrey colony is now in serious trouble. Introduced colonies are especially prone to sudden collapse, and it should not really be a surprise in this case, given two consecutive years of challenging weather and perhaps unseen factors such as the effects of predation or parasites.

Having said that, I was doubly surprised during my visit - not only to find Grizzled Skippers (2) on this site, but to find them in quite reasonable condition for mid-June! So maybe we ought to give the Surrey Glanvilles a few more days to appear and hopefully any thoughts of an obituary will turn out to be premature.

Other species seen were Common Blue, Small Heath, Large Skipper, Peacock and various whites. No full size photos posted on this occasion. Grizzled Skipper thumbnail is shown below.



7 June 2013 - Unexpected Rain Clouds Have Pearl Lining In The Clearing

This morning's thundery rain in south Hants was an unwelcome surprise, but it turned out have some blessings for a mid-afternoon visit to the Eastern Clearing in Bentley Wood. There was little flying on arrival, except for a lone Duke Of Burgundy flitting around at the western end of the clearing, as the sun's rays began to dry things out. Next up a couple of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries took wing, perhaps for their first laboured flights of the day across the sodden vegetation.

In the circumstances, a good start, and it got even better as I explored the rush areas just to the north of the main clearing. A fresh Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was climbing a rush stem, before opening its wings wide to warm up ready for flight. A few easy photos were captured as it gathered its resources. There were several others too, including a female, gliding around the same vicinity, taking short breaks to indulge in open wing basking amongst the rushes.

Back in the main clearing, activity was also warming up, but mostly of the Pearl-bordered variety. Of 8 Pearls seen in total, two were fresh males - an unusual sight for early June and an indication of the very late season. In all numbers of Pearls and Small Pearls were comparable (although focussed in different areas) with the Small Pearls in the ascendancy and soon to over-take their larger cousins.

6 photos (Small Pearl, Pearl, Duke Of Burgundy) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



5 June 2013 - Dukes And Dingies Finding New Homes!

During the last couple of days, I have made short visits to 3 local sites: Oxenbourne Down, Old Winchester Hill and Portsdown Hill. Let's get the bad news out of the way first - firstly, butterfly numbers are generally lower than normal and compared to a few years ago, significantly lower. Secondly I failed to connect with Duke Of Burgundy at Oxenbourne Down.

Despite our butterflies having another difficult season (after the coldest spring for 50 years) it's not all doom and gloom. I had noticed over the last two years records of Duke Of Burgundy at Old Winchester Hill, which until

recently has been 'Dukeless' despite some passable Duke habitat. Well, it's not Dukeless anymore! A recent report produced a count of 13 and although I was in no way able to match that I did see two male Dukes on downland bordering woodland, along with several Dingy Skippers. It is probable that the sizeable Duke colony on private land nearby is the original source of the Old Winchester colony.

It was then on to the Paulsgrove Quarry on Portsdown Hill. This time a known colony of Small Blue was the target. Having struggled to find the first two Small Blues there, they eventually showed themselves in small pockets, with 8 males counted in about half an hour. The surprise here however was a fairly faded Dingy Skipper - a species not normally found on Portsdown Hill, despite some reasonable habitat. I noted that Common Blue numbers are starting to build, albeit belatedly, with two females also seen.

4 photos of Duke Of Burgundy (OWH specimen with curved antenna tip), Dingy Skipper (OWH specimen) and Small Blue (Portsdown Hill) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



An Old Winchester Hill Duke

31 May 2013 - Marsh Frits & Much More On Cotley Hill

Cotley Hill, near Warminster was the destination of my first out-of-county butterfly visit of this season. I have never visited this site previously, but it certainly delivered today, producing season firsts for me of Marsh Fritillary, Wall Brown and Small Blue - and in some style.

I had barely ascended 100m along the path heading north from the Cotley Hill roundabout when I came across the first Marsh Fritillary - a fresh male - and it was the first of more than a score of Marsh Frits seen, as I explored the lower slopes of the western side of the hill.

At one point, a larger, fast flying brown butterfly crossed my path - that turned out to be a pristine female Wall Brown - flighty as ever and definitely camera shy. I saw a male after that in an area where there are bare scrapes of earth and managed to snatch an underside photo.

As if that wasn't enough, there were also Small Blues (some actually looking slightly tired) including a mating pair, as well as Dingy Skippers and many Small Heath. On the return to the previously mentioned path, a single Green Hairstreak was also spotted.

On my way home, I called into Bentley Wood, Eastern Clearing to check if the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries have started emerging there. They have, as reported by a couple of observers with confirmed sightings today, although I myself was not successful during my short visit. However I did manage a male Duke Of Burgundy at the far end, as well as several Pearl-bordered Fritillaries around the clearing - some fresh.

5 photos of Marsh Fritillary, Wall Brown and Small Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

Visit Photo Diary created and accessible from Video and Photo Diaries page.



27 May 2013 - Brown Hairstreak To Peak In September!

The generally below average temperatures, prolonged periods of unsettled weather and late arrival of spring has played havoc with the early season plans of many butterfly groups and individual observers (including me!).

Often a late start to a season due to the weather will tend to be compensated later, with the butterfly season making up most of the lost time. The fine bank holiday weekend will help with this process, however, with a further spell of cool, unsettled weather now forecast, 3 fine days will have little impact on a season which is estimated as 2-3 weeks late.

Unless we really do have a 'flaming June', it's difficult to see how the season will now recover the delay, and it is probable that flight periods of the remainder of this season's species and second broods will be significantly later than normal - perhaps catching up a week or so before high summer.

I cannot imagine that the cumulative effect of multiple stressful seasons (including last year) will not result in reduced populations for many of our species. There might even be the prospect of our late summer species, such as Brown Hairstreak and Silver-spotted Skipper, not seeing the peak of their flight seasons before September!

One additional photo of Pearl-bordered Fritillary (taken 25 May in the New Forest) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

25 May 2013 - Missing Dukes Explained As Pearls Glide The Forest Tracks

This afternoon I returned to a site near Chilcomb in my quest to reconnect with Duke Of Burgundy, having failed last week. Not only did I succeed today with 7 seen close to the bottom of the escarpment, but I also have a pretty good idea why they were AWOL last week.

The weather was much better today, but the fact that all the Dukes seen were males, many of them fresh, would indicate that their season on this North facing site is still in its early days. If Dukes are only just emerging on some downland sites, it would suggest that the few woodland colonies (using primrose as foodplant) in Hampshire may not even have begun their flight periods yet. I shall have more to say on this very late season in the next few days.

Satisfied that this mystery had been solved, it was off down the M3 to the New Forest to check out how the Pearl-bordered Fritillary season is developing there. I think we can accurately say 'slowly' as the answer to that!

In New Copse Inclosure, 4 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (all males) were seen, in the margins of the gravel track at the eastern end of the inclosure, feeding and investigating anything which could resemble a female. The picture was similar, although slightly better in Parkhill, where 7 were seen in and around the large clearing. I say 'clearing' but it is more like a young forest now and less suitable for the species than it used to be. However the diagonal grassy track though it, with decent margins should allow a population to be sustained.

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



18 May 2013 - Duke And Grizzled Prove Elusive At Small Site

The weather did not seem to know what to do with itself today - as the low cloud lifted this morning, the hope of good butterflying weather failed to materialise, as thicker cloud moved in to render a mainly overcast day.

Around mid-afternoon, I decided to head out anyway in the Winchester direction to visit a downland site near Chilcomb, which I had not visited for at least a couple of years, but one where I have never failed to connect with both Duke Of Burgundy and Grizzled Skipper. It's not a great site for Grizzled, but can be quite decent for Dukes, sometimes reaching double figure counts.

There was one other observer with the same idea and we both failed to connect with either species, despite some weak sunshine. The explanation for the lack of Dukes is unclear (too early in the season at this site, too late in the day (Dukes go to bed early!), not enough sun or even population collapse?). Perhaps a return visit in better weather and earlier in the day will help solve the mystery.

Species seen were Brimstone, Peacock, Holly Blue and, on the way back to the car, a very faded Small Tortoiseshell. No photos posted on this occasion.

16 May 2013 - Dispersing Clouds See Bentley Pearls Take Wing

A late afternoon visit to Bentley Wood was close to leaving me with just one sighting of a Pearl-bordered Fritillary and no photos, but the sun finally got going as the heavy cloud moved north to allow a brief, but welcome window of activity.

An initial search of the rather wet, Eastern Clearing produced only Brimstone, Orange Tip and Peacock, under rather cool and mainly cloudy conditions. However, I noted from the visitor's book that Pearl-bordered Fritillary were first reported there on 7 May, with sporadic subsequent reports.

At the other end of the wood (in Howe Copse West), half an hour of searching had produced just one sighting during a brief bright interlude. However, as I watched the cloud eventually give way to more in the way of blue sky, the sunny intervals became sunny spells and soon Pearls started appearing, as if from nowhere (but in reality from their tree roosts). 5 fresh males were seen in total. After a few minutes of sunshine (and now close to 4.30pm) all went quiet again.

It is clear that the very late and cool spring is still in no mood to yield as summer approaches, and is not only causing mayhem with the normal butterfly calendar but also with the build-up of flight periods.

Two photos of Pearl-bordered Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



10 May 2013 - From Late Start To Stop-Start!

Following the short spell of good weather at the beginning of this week, it's back to normal business once again, meaning cool and unsettled. Hence, not a day to venture far, which meant that any thoughts of an early attempt for Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the west of the county were soon dispelled in view of the dubious weather (although I have since heard they are starting to emerge in Hampshire).

Instead, short walks along the Lythe (steep slopes of birch and ash on NT land near Selborne) and on Oxenbourne down were the limit of my travels this afternoon. The rough meadows along the Lythe are indeed colourfully filled with flowers. Green-veined Whites (including mating pair) were the most common species, however a few Orange Tips, both male and female, were also enjoying the nectar forage and seeking mates, attracted by the decent showing of cuckoo flower on the lower slopes.

One of my mini-goals this year is to see Duke Of Burgundy on Oxenbourne Down. I had to be satisfied with a couple of Grizzled Skippers today, in far from ideal conditions (little sun, cool and breezy) but I'm not giving up yet! Sightings of this species at Oxenbourne I will regard as a bonus but they are recorded most years in very low numbers.

Photo of Female Orange Tip posted to Recent Photos Gallery (this one was actually taken at Butser Hill on Monday but better than today's!).



6 May 2013 - Dukes And Dingies Emerging In Rake Bottom

I recall making the comment previously that it should be possible to record Duke Of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled and Dingy Skipper on a single visit to the Rake Bottom area of Butser Hill, but had never actually succeeded myself - until today that is!

Joining up with another butterfly enthusiast for the search proved an advantage, in the case of Duke Of Burgundy and Dingy Skipper in particular, which are just starting to emerge here. 4 fresh male Dukes were seen on both sides of the track at the western end of Rake Bottom (including an earlier fleeting glimpse when I was searching

on my own) but just the one Dingy Skipper further along the valley. One of the Dukes looks as though its wings are still to fully fill out after emergence.

2 Green Hairstreaks and 12 Grizzled Skippers were also seen on the lower slopes close to the valley bottom, with 5 Peacocks, 6 Brimstones, 2 Commas, 1 Red Admiral and 4 Orange Tips (including 2 females) completing my afternoon's count. A few more days like today (both weather-wise and butterfly-wise) will be most welcome!

3 photos of Duke Of Burgundy and 1 of Dingy Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



3 May 2013 - Sunshine Eventually Brings Its Rewards At Magdalen And Butser

Spring species are, as expected, emerging quite quickly now - with even Duke Of Burgundy on the wing at Noar Hill. I resisted that temptation however, and instead headed this afternoon for Magdalen Hill Down and Butser Hill, with the main targets being Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper. The weather was almost perfect with plenty of sunshine and just the occasional cool breeze to remind one that this is still early spring.

At Magdalen, the hibernators were showing quite well (Brimstone and Peacock in particular) and Orange Tip numbers are building nicely, with one female seen as well as several males. A walk along the lower slope did eventually produce the targets - I disturbed a Green Hairstreak from the scrub. Luckily this first one settled back down in the low vegetation for some photos, unlike its two peers who decided it was safer high in the hawthorn.

I had almost given up on seeing Grizzled Skipper at Magdalen, but a good look around a patch where there was plenty of Bugle coming into flower produced one individual. I need not have worried too much, since a stop on the way back at Butser Hill (Rake Bottom), produced 4 more Grizzled Skippers on the slope behind the shrubs along the valley floor.

5 Photos of Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



30 April 2013 - Fine Weather Will Help Season Catch Up

The spell of fine weather we are at last enjoying should help this belated season to catch up - and there is certainly plenty of that to do! Estimates that this season is about 3 weeks later than normal are completely believable.

I had not been out and about on the butterfly front for a few days, but a short visit to Oxenbourne Down today was notable, not so much for the butterflies seen (a few Brimstones) but for making me realise just how dry our downland is at present. This will enable the ground to warm up faster and accelerate the development of the adult spring butterflies, presently undergoing metamorphosis as pupae. Hopefully the still isolated sightings in Hampshire of species such as Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak will turn quickly into decent numbers.

It could be a busy May!

23 April 2013 - Orange Tip Sees My Season Up And Running - At Last!

It may be late April but a male Orange Tip, seen today on Portsdown Hill, heralds the true start of this year's butterfly season for me - a case of better late than never!

Despite the beautiful sunshine and pleasant temperatures, there were actually fewer butterflies on the wing during my short lunchtime walk today, compared to my visit last week. In addition to the Orange Tip, just two Commas and two Brimstones were seen.

As usual with fresh Orange Tips, there is a huge imbalance between flying time and rest time, but luckily this one did oblige for a few quick photos.

Weather permitting, the season should now build quite quickly, as the first emerging individuals are soon joined by their peers of the same species and other species. Two photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



19 April 2013 - First Outing Of The Season (What Season?)

It's almost late April and by now the spring crop of butterflies would normally be making their presence known - Orange Tips, Whites as well as the hibernators. A search of more specialist habitats would produce Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks.

I am sure it does not need me to tell you that this season is very late, and whilst singletons of Orange Tip and Green Hairstreak (as well as a few whites and hibernators) have been reported in Hampshire, we are hardly up and running yet.

My first foray of the season took me to two chalk downland sites this afternoon, Portsdown Hill and Butser Hill (Rake Bottom) in cool conditions with rather limited sunshine. The only non-hibernator I saw was a Speckled Wood. On Portsdown there were also several male Brimstones, Peacocks and Commas going about their business (searching for females in the case of Brimstones, flying and basking for the Nymphalids).

There was even less activity in Rake Bottom and it was clear that the season here is very far behind, with most of the cowslips still in tight bud - just a few beginning to open. When it's like this, I have found in the past that it pays to wait at least a few days before making another venture.

Photos of Peacock (with missing wing corner) and Comma are shown below and posted to recent photos gallery.



31 March 2013 - Late Spring Means A Compressed Season

As temperatures continue to struggle to reach anything resembling normal for early spring, I begin to ponder the consequences of the late start to this year's butterfly season.

Just two non-hibernating species have been recorded in Hampshire so far (Speckled Wood and Small White) - a rather measly turn-out compared to last year at this time, when Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Large and Green-veined Whites could be added to the list. The early start last year of course, was the precursor to one of the worst seasons in recent times, which became all too evident soon after its blockbusting entrance.

So what is likely to happen this spring? The late start will mean that the emergence period for spring species will be shortened, with newly emerged species appearing in quick succession, almost one after another, over a period of a month or so. Once emergence starts, the flight periods should build more quickly than usual (weather permitting of course), with more adults on the wing at the same time, albeit for a shorter period. I say that with tongue in cheek of course, since the consequences of last year's poor season on the health of this year's butterfly populations, remains uncertain.

22 March 2013 - Nature Is Best At Biomechanical Engineering!

It might be late March, but continuing cold and wintry weather indicates a late spring this year, with significant action on the butterfly front still a few weeks away.

So I take the opportunity to reflect on an article I read recently. It relates to a recent study conducted at the Ohio State University on the techniques which nature has evolved to keep surfaces (including butterfly wings) clean. The researchers believe that incorporating some of these features into man-made products might help solve the bio-fouling problem which plagues many industries. Bio-fouling may be considered as the gradual build-up of natural debris and contaminants over time, such as barnacles on a ship.

Researchers found that butterfly wings make use of some unique surface characteristics that promote self-cleaning. They are characterized by shingle-like scales, which keep water from pooling, and microgrooves which repel water and reduce surface adhesion. These features help keep the surface free of debris and contaminants.

With 3.5 billion years of research and development under her belt, it's not surprising that Mother Nature is the best biomechanical engineer!

3 March 2013 - New Month Should Herald First Sightings Of Newly Emerged Spring Butterflies

The first two months of 2013 have been unremarkable in terms of weather in Hampshire, with cold and cloudy conditions generally prevailing. However, March heralds the beginning of spring, not only in a formal sense but also in the sense of witnessing the first sightings of newly emerged spring species in the county. The most likely are Speckled Wood, (already recorded in neighbouring Sussex), Holly Blue, Small Copper, Orange Tip and other common Whites. Late in the month there is also the possibility of Grizzled Skipper and perhaps one or two other species more usually associated with first emergence in April, depending on how spring-like March turns out to be.

So it's time to make sure the camera battery is fully charged and ready for action!

9 February 2013 - No-one Told The Glanville That 'A Life In The Fast Lane Is Usually A Short One'!



In the animal kingdom, there is often a reverse correlation between the energy an individual burns in living its life (its 'metabolic rate' in science jargon) and lifespan. In other words, those who 'live life in the fast lane' tend to die young. This is not just a coincidence - scientific justification indicates that burning more energy results in greater production of free radicals and other cell damaging molecules, which tend to shorten life.

It seems however, that one butterfly species has not yet got the message. Researchers reported last month in the Journal of Experimental Biology that in the case of the Glanville Fritillary, the butterflies which had the highest metabolic rates also lived the longest. There may be a number of reasons for this, such as access to more nutritious food sources or maybe they have evolved other ways to protect themselves from the harmful effects of their own high speed metabolisms.

So next time you see a Glanville Fritillary taking things a little too easy, tell it to get a move on and it might just live longer!

13 January 2013 - 2012 Ends With A Record And 2013 Starts With One!

2012 ended as the wettest year on record in England - hardly a record to be proud of - but 2013 has already started with a more agreeable one! During the last decade (or to be precise, since 2002 for which data is published online), the earliest 'first sighting' reported on the BC website for a non-hibernating species was 13th January and occurred last year. The species concerned was a Speckled Wood recorded in Cornwall.

Well the same species has really hit the jackpot this year for a non-hibernator, by being seen in the same county on **New Year's Day**! So our butterflies have wasted no time welcoming the New Year, with five other hibernating species also reported in UK on the same day.

In isolation of course, the early sighting on an individual butterfly is not necessarily of great significance, since it's what happens on the wider scale of butterfly populations which is important. Nevertheless let us hope that 2013 has a few more pleasant surprises in store!