



2015 Blog

18 December 2015 - Daffodils, Primroses And Bees In December Is Not What The Doctor Ordered For Our Butterflies

It may be mid-December but Hampshire has so far barely had a sniff of winter, as daytime temperatures hover in the mid-teens. The mild weather is confusing nature, with spring flowers in bloom already (I know of Daffodils and Primroses) and beekeepers reporting unusually high levels of hive activity for the time of year.

As for the consequences for next year's butterfly populations, only time will tell, but similar experiences in the past suggest that the impact on butterfly populations of a mild, wet winter, inevitably followed by an early spring will be negative for many species. It is also consistent with climate change, whilst benefitting a few species, being overall bad news for many of our native butterflies.

29 November 2015 - Pesticides Contributing To Butterfly Decline

In addition to my earlier blogs citing climate change and the effectiveness of land management in the decline of Hampshire's small fritillaries, there are now indications of another factor affecting some of our more widespread species. It has been considered for some time that the use of pesticides on arable farmland has been harming bees, birds and other wildlife. A recent study now indicates an association between the use of neonicotinoid pesticides and the decline of 15 of our more widespread species such as Small Tortoiseshell, Small Skipper and Wall. Whilst the EU banned neonicotinoids for use on flowering crops in 2013, the UK Government has exercised its right to allow them to be used on oilseed rape in parts of the country.

The study, which was carried out by the Universities of Stirling and Sussex in partnership with Butterfly Conservation and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, not only identifies a worrying link between the use of neonicotinoids and declines in butterflies, but also suggests that the strength of their impact on many species could be huge.

The researchers also indicate that another study found mobile dust with a high concentration of neonicotinoids on the surface of fields that had not recently been treated with this type of pesticide, suggesting that toxic dust is spread far and wide in the environment. This would explain why neonicotinoids are affecting the national populations of butterflies, despite most of them not living directly adjacent to arable fields.

We know that the decline in butterfly populations is a trend which is not confined to the UK, but is happening across Europe and in other parts of the world. Whereas climate change is affecting the whole globe, agricultural practices will vary quite widely within continents and from one continent to another. Whilst evidence as to the macro level causes is mounting, there is still much detail we don't understand about the actual mechanisms at play in the decline of our wildlife, and butterflies in particular.

There seems little doubt however, that the consequences of not effectively tackling these problems, which are fundamentally affecting the food chain (and insects are a very important part of it) and critical functions such as pollination, will be both serious and wide-ranging.



The Wall Is One Of The Species Which Has Suffered As A Result Of Pesticides

6 October 2015 - Concern For Hampshire's Small Fritillaries - Part 2

Having been observing the demise in the populations of small fritillaries for several years, my view there is are two main causes, which I discuss below.

The first main cause is climate change, which is a global issue and unfortunately an issue which can only be resolved over the very long term - if ever. The greater extremes and variability in our weather seems to be having two main effects. It is placing greater stress on butterfly populations, to survive frequent and severely adverse weather conditions, especially during critical periods in their life cycle, such as over-wintering or breeding during the flight period. Examples include high rainfall and storms during the flight period, or mild, wet winters, leading for instance, to greater threats from parasites and predation. In addition, it is in turbo-charging vegetation growth due to longer periods of mild weather and high rainfall. This is accelerating the demise of prime woodland clearings and also some downland habitats where grass lengths have become noticeably longer. As a result, the diverse ground flora is being crowded out to the detriment of butterflies like the small fritillaries.

The second main cause is the effectiveness of land management for wildlife, including butterflies. Whilst land management has many objectives, including commercial ones such as crop and timber production, commercial objectives can be combined with sympathetic management for wildlife. Examples include the creation wildlife areas in field margins and the cyclic creation of clearings in woodlands. However, there is also plenty of scope for improvement both in terms of preventing detrimental practices (e.g. timing of maintenance work such as clearance of ride margins during butterfly flight periods) and expanding good practices (e.g. appropriate grazing schemes and scrub clearance) to better maintain existing habitat or create new habitat. The need for effective habitat management is compounded due to the first main cause (i.e. climate change) and what may have been adequate a few years ago to maintain habitat is no longer the case. Instances of this are not difficult to find, even on some nature reserves, where grazing has been introduced, but is at a level insufficient to compensate for the effects of climate change driving growth.



Pearl-bordered Fritillary Is Also Declining In Hampshire

Several of the small fritillary sites are suffering from the consequences of one or both of the above causes, resulting in degraded fritillary habitat. These include Bentley Wood (Eastern Clearing), Wootton Coppice Northern Meadows and Martin Down NNR. Without going into specifics for each site, deterioration is resulting from ingress of invasive shrub species, excessive sward lengths or both in combination.

We know that key butterfly species will respond positively to appropriate habitat management with some recent successful examples, including the High Brown Fritillary, whose national population is at a ten year high. More locally, the Duke of Burgundy has responded well to habitat management efforts at several sites in both Hampshire and West Sussex. At Old Winchester Hill, improved grazing is having a positive effect on both Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper populations. Efforts now need to be reinvigorated in respect of our small fritillaries to preserve and enhance existing habitat and create new habitat suitable for natural re-colonisation or controlled reintroductions. To conclude on a positive note, I was pleased to learn recently that a controlled reintroduction of the Marsh Fritillary is being actively pursued in NE Hampshire.

2 October 2015 - Clouded Yellow Still About On Portsdown

I know I indicated previously that my outing on 11 September was 'almost certainly' my last one of the season, however the current spell of fine weather did spur me to take a late afternoon walk along the lower slopes of Portsdown Hill, below Paulsgrove Quarry. Third brood Large Whites were the most conspicuous species (8 seen) including a courting pair, followed closely by Small Whites. Amongst the scrub, a few Meadow Browns and Common Blues, all now seriously fading, were also enjoying the sunshine and nectar still on offer.

The highlight of my short walk however, was the sighting of a Clouded Yellow, which appeared to be in excellent condition, making its way along the slopes. A photo record would have been great, but sadly it was just passing through and never settled even for a moment.

Part 2 of my previous blog on our Small Fritillaries will be posted midweek.

20 September 2015 - Concern For Hampshire's Small Fritillaries - Part 1

Whilst Hampshire is still a UK stronghold for several priority species including Duke Of Burgundy, White Admiral and Silver-studded Blue, which are enjoying stable and fairly healthy populations in the county, the fortunes of the Small Fritillaries are becoming cause for alarm. I am referring here in particular to the Marsh Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

All seem to be undergoing significant decline, noticeable even during the decade I have been running this website. Whilst one could argue that Hampshire has very little indigenously suitable habitat for the Marsh and Small Pearl bordered Fritillaries, that is little consolation to know that their tenure in the county hangs by a thread. The Marsh Fritillary is only regularly recorded at one location (Martin Down NNR), however the population there is very small and the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary only retains one viable colony in the county in Bentley Wood (Eastern Clearing). Of the small colonies in the New Forest, the only recent records are from Royden Common

(despite searches of previously occupied sites) and the remaining population there may already be too small to be viable.

The Pearl-bordered Fritillary still retains viable populations in the New Forest, Bentley Wood and on one private site, but population sizes seem to be on a downward trend when viewed over a few years, despite conservation efforts such as the Tytherley Woods Project. This species could therefore be in a similar situation to the other two within a few years, if the current trend continues.



Populations Of Marsh And Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries In Hampshire Are Dangerously Low

It should be added that the situation within Hampshire is not inconsistent with the wider scale trends in other SE England counties, where these three species are either already extinct or are declining, with Sussex in particular launching its own initiative called 'Fritillaries for the future' to tackle the worrying situation.

To conclude the first instalment of this two-part blog, I also mention the Glanville Fritillary, which managed to retain a tenuous presence on the Hampshire coast until recently (initially at Hordle Cliffs, then at Hurst Castle), despite the absence of suitable long term habitat. Sadly there have been no Glanville records for a couple of years from the county, with the Hurst Castle colony never really recovering from the poor summer of 2012. Regrettably, it will now have to be removed from the list of Hampshire resident species on this website.

In the second instalment, I postulate reasons for these declines and what might be done about it.

11 September 2015 - Final Outing Of Season Fittingly Low Key

For what is almost certainly my final butterfly outing of the 2015 season, I returned to Old Winchester Hill, having had mixed success last week. Due to a diversion on the A32 because of an accident, my time was limited, so I concentrated on the south facing slope below the fort.

Despite the blanket of cloud moving in accompanied by noticeable fall in temperature, I did succeed in finding both Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skippers - four of each - on the lower slopes just above the scrub. The Adonis (all males) are fading now but still obviously brighter than the Common and Chalkhill Blues also present. However, two of the Silver-spotted Skippers were in very good condition, perhaps reinforcing the fact that is a very late site for them.

I must admit to having fears for both these species at this site, however the increased grazing now put in place with a small flock of Herdwick sheep on both the south facing slope of the fort and the car-park slope should give them a decent chance of securing their tenure for the time being.

It is perhaps quite fitting that my season of outings draws to a close in a low key way - a reflection of the season, despite the odd highlight. My attention will now turn to continuing my update of the website (sites features, galleries etc) interspersed with regular, but reduced frequency blog entries.

2 photos of Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



28 August 2014 - Summer Adonis Brightens Old Winchester Visit

The period around August Bank Holiday is becoming a regular time in my calendar to seek out summer brood Adonis Blue at its few Hampshire sites. So this afternoon I visited Old Winchester Hill, and with a little more time available than usual, I was able to check both the favoured locations for the species. The south slope of the fort had that decidedly end of season feel, and although butterflies overall were still numerous, many of the Chalkhills (both male and female) are now looking rather tired. It was slightly disappointing that neither Adonis nor Silver-spotted Skippers were noted here, however a Painted Lady basking on the path was a very welcome spectacle.

My attention then shifted to the car park slope, and here thankfully, several male Adonis in very good condition lifted the mood, accompanied by an increase in sunshine as the cloud began to disperse. Sharing notes with other observers suggested at least 6 males were on the wing in the area - a decent count for this site.

Whilst I was not fortunate to see any Silver-spotted Skippers, there had been some isolated sightings earlier. Indeed counts of this little skipper so far at Old Winchester Hill have been very disappointing and I fear their population is becoming dangerously low here, despite the grazing of sheep at both the locations visited, to try to control the sward length.

4 photos of Adonis Blue and Painted Lady posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



22 August 2105 - Clouded Yellow On Portsdown After Magdalen Visit

I visited the chalk pit at Magdalen Hill Down (on the crest of the north down part of the reserve) yesterday afternoon, which is the focus of the Small Blue colony there. Ideally I should have visited two or three weeks ago when the summer emergence was taking place, however around 7 Small Blue were still flitting around in the scrubby margins, along with a couple of Brown Argus, also well past their best.

The highlight of my short outing was to follow at Portsdown Hill, in the area to the south-west of Fort Southwick, where in the past I have seen Wall and Clouded Yellow in multiple years. Sadly no Wall today (as they are very scarce in SE Hants now) but I did see a Clouded Yellow. It stayed around for a few minutes on the flower rich

slope but never landed within easy range and never for more than a few seconds. So having given up on that one, I spent some time observing the other species close to the foot of the slope including Chalkhill and Common Blues (plentiful but fading) and Brown Argus (several in decent condition).

2 photos of Small Blue and Brown Argus posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



19 August 2015 - Season Starting To Fade But Still Some Highlights

This week I have made a couple of short lunchtime walks to local sites around Portsmouth, including the lower slopes of Portsdown Hill. There has been a shortage of sunshine which hasn't helped, but it is clear that butterfly numbers are declining as we enter the final stage of the season, with fewer fresh specimens to be seen.

Nevertheless a quick survey of branch websites for Hampshire and neighbouring counties shows that there is more than enough to interest the observer, with the chance of a surprise for those lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. Recent highlights include:

- A Long-tailed Blue seen feeding on heather at Browdown(S). This complements other recent sightings in southern England (and a mini-influx into East Sussex in 2013).
- A significant emergence of Brown Hairstreak at Shipton Bellinger. As usual, finding them low down, especially females, is a case of being in the right place at the right time.
- Occasional sightings of Clouded Yellow around the county.
- Good count of Silver-spotted Skipper on Oxenbourne Down.
- Summer brood Small Blue at Magdalen Hill Down and hopefully other sites (I did not see any on Portsdown Hill during my recent visit).

August is also probably the best month to view some of our most colourful Nymphalid species, including Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma and if you are lucky, Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady. Their colourful adornment will be complemented towards the end of the month by the shimmering blue of summer brood Adonis at a few downland sites, including Martin Down, Broughton Down and hopefully Old Winchester Hill. I can then settle down to do my blackberry picking!

12 August 2015 - Brown Hairstreak Flight Period Nears Its Peak

This afternoon I made the 'long haul' out to Shipton Bellinger for my final visit there this season to see Brown Hairstreak. Mornings are best for this species and it seems there had been a decent showing of both males and females during the morning and into the early afternoon, with several of each seen at low level by other observers. The earliest low level activity was just after 8am!

It was reported that some of the females seemed newly emerged, whereas the males are in various states of wear, as evidenced by my own sightings of 3 males at low level. One of these was in the parallel track leading from the village, the other two in the county boundary hedge, taking advantage of the wind-break provided at one section by a 'mountain' of hay bales!

This would suggest that the Brown Hairstreak flight period is now close to its peak, although egg-laying activity will go on well into September. 2 photos of different males posted to Recent Photos Gallery, the best of the bunch also being shown in the thumbnail below.



7 August 2015 - Summer Brood Wall Take Wing At Lymington-Keyhaven

This afternoon I made a circuit within the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve in the hope of finding summer brood Wall butterflies. The first section along the so-called Ancient Highway from the end of Lower Pennington Lane towards Keyhaven, was rather disappointing with just one brief sighting of a Wall butterfly crossing the track from north to south. Soon after reaching the coastal path, however, the outlook improved with a fresh male landing to feed on clover on the inland side.

Heading NE along the coastal path, then opting for the more sheltered path beside the lagoons, 3 further Wall butterflies were seen in the section beside the Pennington Lagoon, including a female. At one point she was facing a male, each on their own flower head, but neither seemed to have any amorous intentions in mind. The female flew off a few seconds later, but the male hung around making his way up the track then back again stopping briefly to grab nectar or bask, allowing me to snatch a few photos. One further male was seen after leaving the coastal path, making 6 sightings in all. Common species were also seen of course, but overall the reserve seemed rather quiet on the butterfly front.

5 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the not-so-amorous couple.



6 August 2015 - Silver-spotted Skippers Join The Action On Oxenbourne

A brief return visit to Oxenbourne Down as the clouds were beginning to disperse, succeeded in adding Silver-spotted Skipper to today's species count - about 5 were seen. Most were keen to warm themselves with open wings during the first sunshine of the day. It is the perfect time for a late summer visit to Oxenbourne, with Chalkhill Blue numbers now nearing their peak, including a few females complementing the numerous males, and all in generally very good condition.

2 photos of Silver-spotted Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



2 August 2015 - Last Main Month Of The Season But Still Plenty Of Butterfly Interest

As we enter August, the last of the main flight period months for our butterflies, all of Hampshire's resident species have been recorded, including Silver-spotted Skipper and Brown Hairstreak. The former has already been recorded at Broughton Down, Stockbridge Down and Oxenbourne Down and the latter at Shipton Bellinger and Noar Hill (including a pristine female).

A quick assessment of the flight period chart shows that there are more species on the wing in Hampshire during late July and early August than at any other time of the season, ranging from the abundant (e.g. Chalkhill Blue in their chosen habitat) to the scarce such as Brown Hairstreak and from the large aristocrats such as Peacock and Purple Emperor (still a few about) to the diminutive Small Blue. The wide variety of colours and patterning in our species is no more evident than now. and whether it's the variegated patterning of the Small Tortoiseshell to the relative uniformity of the Ringlet and Grayling, its all for a purpose.

This time of year is also the time to welcome back a few old friends as they emerge for their summer broods, such as Wall, Brown Argus and Holly Blue. It will hopefully provide an opportunity to observe some migrants such as Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and who knows what else....? I note that Painted Lady sightings are on the increase and I have seen a few myself in the last days. Perhaps no invasion is going to happen this year after all (as in 2009), however a decent late season for them will be most welcome. So August should be a time of plenty for the butterfly observer before another season begins to wane.

Finally, picking up again on Grayling, I post a single photo of a male taken during a late afternoon visit to Browndown North on Friday - one of 5 seen.



30 July 2015 - Brown Hairstreak On The Wing In Hampshire

Having noticed the very early sightings of Brown Hairstreak reported from Upper Thames area (and also from Somerset), I had been tempted to try my luck in Hampshire a few days ago. I am pleased I stayed with my instinct however, and waited until today. They are now on the wing at Shipton Bellinger but not easy to find yet, as it is still the first days of their season here.

Nevertheless I did manage sightings of 4 males, 3 in Ash trees including 2 in the master tree at the end of the main track, and a further male well above head height in blackthorn along the county boundary hedge. Luckily, with the aid of my monopod, a few passable photos were obtained. Once spotted, he remained motionless on his perch for the 10 minutes I waited, but had disappeared when I returned to the spot 30 minutes later.

There was a good variety of butterflies seen along or close to the boundary hedge, with 19 species recorded in all, including 3 Silver-washed Fritillary, a faded female Dark Green Fritillary, a Small Blue and perhaps most surprising, a Dingy Skipper. It was in good condition but suspect this individual is from the first brood.

4 photos of Brown Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper and Small Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



24 July 2015 - Full House Of UK First Sightings (Well Almost!)

The Butterfly Conservation table of 2015 first sightings is showing a full house (well not quite - Scotch Argus is not recorded so far). This means that all Hampshire species have been recorded, the latest additions being Silver-spotted Skipper (which has been seen in Hampshire anyway on 15 July at Broughton Down) and Brown Hairstreak, recorded already in Oxfordshire.

Yesterday, I made a short lunchtime excursion to my nearest Silver-spotted Skipper site - Oxenbourne Down. Despite there being many species in profusion (Chalkhill Blue, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Small Skipper, Meadow Brown), no skippers of the Silver-spotted variety were "spotted".

With the British summer currently living up to its stereotype characteristics with sun, rain and wind all thrown into the mix in equal measure, it's not the ideal environment to be a butterfly, nor to be trying to observe them. However, the season should still have plenty to offer.

For me, Brown Hairstreak always represents one of the highlights (even if I rarely see many) and second broods of Wall Brown and Adonis Blue are still to join the many species which are currently on the wing. There might even be a chance to see a late Purple Emperor, although their season, which has not been a great one in Hampshire, is now fading fast as their short but frantic adult lives come to an end.

18 July 2015 - Empress Down In The Whiteley Rough

Whilst it was male Purple Emperors which featured in last week's visit to Whiteley Pastures, a return visit this morning produced a single female, down in the vegetation just beyond the bridge (close to where I saw a fresh male a week ago). The Empress was already there when I arrived at about 9.30am and was being observed by two other visitors. She was taking moisture from the dew laden vegetation in an area where there is plenty of sallow.

It would have been nice to have got closer, but she took off after my first couple of evidence shots, initially flying back down the ride and landing once again amongst low foliage. She was seen again flying low soon after we reached the area, but then pulled the throttle back to soar high into the trees with a few flaps of her large wings. We watched her take off again soon after, only to glide effortlessly into the Whiteley hinterland and out of sight. Having seen several males last week each side of the bridge, it was surprising not to see any today.

Silver-washed Fritillaries seem to be doing very well again in Whiteley Pastures this year, after a dip last year and there were common species in profusion (Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Gatekeeper, Small Skipper) with a few fresh Peacocks, Commas, Brimstones, Large and Green-veined Whites to accompany them.

2 cropped photos of female Purple Emperor posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



15 July 2015 - Fresh Chalkhills Amongst Profusion Of Portsdown Flowers

A late afternoon visit to the lower slopes of Portsdown Hill confirmed Chalkhill Blue numbers are building. Six were seen in the small corner of the slope I chose - all fresh males. Conditions were overcast but warm and humid, with butterfly activity in that marginal state between being happy to fly but also happy to roost. The profusion of flowers adorning the slopes makes for a very summery vista, with stems being particularly long this year as an indication of vigorous growth unchecked by grazing.

There were other butterflies too of course - Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Skipper, Gatekeeper and the odd fresh Comma, although none in large numbers in the overcast conditions.

The changeable weather will mean a longer than normal flight period for the main summer species (with emergence anyway being a few days later than usual). So there is still a week or two remaining to see the likes of White-letter Hairstreak, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver-studded Blue, White Admiral and of course Purple Emperor, all in decent condition, with females now heading into the ascendancy in terms of condition.

It does not seem to have been a great season so far in Hampshire for Purple Emperor' and whilst sightings have been regular, counts have rarely exceeded 6, with groundings few and far between. With the delayed flight period, I am hoping that will improve.



10 July 2015 - Purple Seen Today But Could Have Been Better!

A warm morning was just the ticket to make a tour of Purple Emperor sites - I knew they might be active quite early. I was on station in Straits Inclosure by 9am. Silver-washed Fritillaries were the most conspicuous large woodland species, and seen regularly along the main track. A few White Admirals were also seen but there was no sign of the Emperor. Forestry 'traffic' suggested that this was not the best time to be in Straits so by 10am I was in Abbott's Wood, with one possible sighting of HIM flying over oaks. With nothing happening for 15 minutes, it was back in the car heading south to Whitley Pastures. At 11.30 I had my first definite sighting of a male Emperor - just before the bridge across the first stream, about 500m from the entrance, where there is plenty of sallow on the left.

I was aware of his shadow first as he went past above head height, then diving off into the trees, but immediately returning. This time he flew past at waist height so I could clearly see the blue sheen - and a fresh specimen too. It looked as though he might land on the track further down, but it's bone dry at the moment and no 'smelly stuff' in the vicinity. He did land with closed wings about 12 feet high in a conifer for a few seconds, so his perfect profile and underside colouring was evident. During the next 45 minutes, similar patrolling behaviour was witnessed twice more, first by another male further up the track (100 yards after the bridge) and then by probably the same male on my return. At no time did either land on the ground.

After that excitement, I made a recce to another site (I'll save that for a later date) and then changed the focus to a different purple - this time Purple Hairstreak. It was time to return to Browndown (S) and the stunted oaks and ground cover (scrub) oak. This time I was little further from the shore, in the hope it would be less windy. No trouble finding Purple Hairstreak either - select a low oak (up to 7ft), which is still nice and green, tap a few branches and hey presto - several Purple Hairstreaks start flitting around. Just follow where they land at eye level or below and take some pics! Two were on the same leaf on one occasion! I've probably made it sound a bit too easy and they are certainly not in every oak or scrub oak. I did not go as far as the Grayling colony but common species seen included Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Small Copper and many Small Skippers

Browndown (S) is open this weekend, but the level of closures for military training is a cause for concern, and my understanding from Longmoor, who control the site, is that access restrictions are likely to continue at a high level.

4 photos of Purple Hairstreak and Gatekeeper posted to Recent Photos gallery.



5 July 2015 - Beware Low Flying Hairstreaks At Browdown (And Grayling)!

Browdown South seems to have been open this weekend following a period of intermittent access due to military training. There is no notice at the entrance providing access restrictions next week, so hopefully this is good news going forward (but I intend to check with the Longmoor Camp Training HQ).

My visit this afternoon produced 6 male Grayling, all doing their usual master of camouflage trick, and only flying when disturbed. Today one could hardly take issue with that, when a gust of wind could sweep them 20 yards in the blink of an eye.

The highlight of the visit occurred during the long walk westwards back to the entrance. The stunted oaks are home to Purple Hairstreak and I was pleased to find them on the wing again. Previous encounters suggest, not surprisingly, that they prefer the taller trees (well 15 ft is tall for this location) and I was resigned to little or no chance of a photo with all Hairstreaks remaining well above head height.

With nothing to lose, I decided to take a look at some of the ground cover 'scrub' oak in the area. Lo and behold a female Purple Hairstreak was flitting around among it, barely a foot off the ground! She kept making short flights every few seconds trying to find a perch providing shelter from the wind. Unfortunately her presence there was quite short lived - after a brief stop on the surrounding pebbles, the wind carried her off.

4 photos of Grayling and Purple Hairstreak posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



3 July 2015 - Where Have All The Flowers Gone, Alice?

I'll get the bad news out of the way first. On arriving at the entrance to Straits Inclosure of Alice Holt Forest this afternoon, I was gobsmacked to find the all the flowery margins along the main track flailed to the ground, as far as the first tower. Prime habitat for Skippers, Ringlets, Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites temporarily gone! I know management is needed, but at the beginning of the flight and breeding period for many summer butterflies? The contemporary folk song included in the title of this blog aptly resonates - but I won't go into that here!

Once I had composed myself after the shock, Alice did her best to deliver. Behind the demolition zone, there are still shrubs such as brambles and honeysuckle and even a few thistles left standing. White Admiral and Silver-washed numbers are building, with the area around the first observation tower still being a hotspot. 8 White Admirals were seen during my visit and a similar number of Silver-washed Fritillaries, although all were very active in the warm, sultry conditions with good photo opportunities at a premium. The reduced butterfly activity along the main track encouraged a return via the back track from the tower, which presents one or two sunny spots with further sightings opportunities for most species, including those displaced from the main track.

I understand an Emperor has also been sighted in the Straits, but the best from HIM is yet to come, as we reach, what for many, is the pinnacle of the butterfly season during the next couple of weeks.

On my way home, I called in on Havant Thicket for my first visit. The flowery margins here were a joy, with all the expected common species including many Marbled Whites. Numbers of Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals were similar the Straits, these species tending to favour the more shady bridleways away from the main tracks. The Emperor is found here too and I noticed plenty of fallow along the main west - east track closest to the car park. This site will certainly be added to my butterfly sites page and is probably good enough for a site feature.

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



27 June 2015 - Silver Washed Start To Emerge In Alice But No Sign Yet Of The Admiral

A morning stroll in the Straits Inclosure (Alice Holt Forest) delivered decent numbers of butterflies (Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Large and Small Skippers, Speckled Wood, the odd Marbled White and a single Silver-washed Fritillary). Thankfully the butterflies still outnumbered the timber stacks which line the track (especially beyond the first tower) resulting from some serious timber extraction activities.

The sole Silver-washed Fritillary was fresh and flying in the open area close to the first tower but seemed only interested in investigating other flying insects and landing well above head height in foliage. Like its cousin seen earlier in the week at Kitt's Grave, it had sustained some early wing damage.

No White Admirals were seen during my visit, adding weight to the fact that this season is running somewhat late compared with most recent seasons (except 2013), the cooler days and some unseasonably chilly nights being the probable reason.

On the way home I called in at the Cosham White-letter Hairstreak site. There was activity at regular intervals in the elm canopy with several pairs of males seen engaged in short-lived aerial duels, rising many yards into the air before separating. There were at least a dozen White-letters present when viewing from the main observation point (a raised embankment) - most if not all were males with some showing wear.

2 photos of Silver-washed Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery (from Straits Incl) together with a further 2 photos of Dark Green Fritillary taken last Wednesday at Kitt's Grave/Pitt Down.



25 June 2015 - Silver Washed Shows Up Among The Dark Greens at Kitt's Grave

Yesterday afternoon I visited Martin Down NNR, but instead of making straight for the main part of the reserve, I headed north from the A354 car park for my first exploration of the area known as Kitt's Grave. This is an essentially wooded extension to the main reserve with the woodland broken by nectar-rich scrub areas (in effect scrub meadows) and some inviting open rides. The main target species for my visit was Dark Green Fritillary, which of course are also found on the main part of the reserve. Indeed it was the Dark Greens which were the highlight of the afternoon with a total of 8 fresh males seen. Several brief photo opportunities were afforded by the occasional thistle-stop as they zipped around the scrubby meadows.

A break from the Dark Green action took the form of a short walk along the adjoining track from one of the meadows into the woodland. A Dark Green Fritillary was sampling the creeping thistles here, but when another large fritillary appeared and settled, this time on wild privet, its true identity was revealed as Silver-washed (complete with bird-strike' notch in hind wing!). A second Silver-washed sighting was recorded later, this time in pristine condition but on a high flying mission.

Many other species provided a supporting cast during my visit including Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Skipper, Large Skipper and Small Tortoiseshell. The Kitt's Grave area proved an excellent location to visit and one which I intend to return to in future.

A brief stop was made at Pitt Down (Farley Mount) on the way home, where another Dark Green Fritillary was observed among the common species. The status of Hampshire's fritillaries and sites is likely to be the subject of a future blog entry during the next few weeks.

5 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery of Dark Green Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary (heavily cropped) and Marbled White.



19 June 2015 - Something Old, Something New....

Short visits this afternoon provided a mixture of both downland (Stockbridge Down) and New Forest heath/meadow (Roydon Common) habitats, as the spring period ends and the summer period begins. The outcome reminded me of that well known bridal rhyme - *something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue* (oh and something about a sixpence!).

There were several species in the *new* category, including a couple of Dark Green Fritillaries skimming around the eastern end of Stockbridge Down, but failing to provide any realistic photo opportunities, save for very brief pit-stops on musk thistle. The new also included several Marbled Whites and Meadow Browns. Stockbridge also provided the *old* - a faded Green Hairstreak - in fact the first I have seen at this site.

I had hoped to find Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the meadow on Roydon Common, but the highlight of the meadow was the memorable display of orchids (several species). Alas no Small Pearls and I fear for their future at this site, which may be becoming too dry for them. The category something *borrowed* may be apt here (i.e. on borrowed time, assuming they still there). As for something *blue*, well that's easy with several fresh Silver-studded Blues on the heath leading to the meadow - 5 males and 1 female seen.

When one visits the same site in most years, the evolution in habitat, even from one year to the next, can be very obvious and can have a huge impact on butterfly populations (e.g. availability of nectar sources such as thistles, to name just one variable). It's not surprising that some butterfly populations can vary so much from year to year, and with some alarming trends evident over just a few years.

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



17 June 2015 - Summer Butterfly Season Gathering Momentum

Whilst a short holiday and other commitments have curtailed my outings for a couple of weeks, a survey of local branch websites shows that several summer species are now beginning to emerge. These include common species such as Marbled White, Meadow Brown and Large Skipper, but also White-letter Hairstreak (e.g. Cosham site), Silver-studded Blue (East Hants sites and the New Forest heaths) and Dark Green Fritillary (probable sighting at Boughton Down, but confirmed sightings in neighbouring counties of Sussex and Wiltshire).

As if that wasn't enough, there have been a couple of separate **Monarch** sightings in Portchester and Portsmouth!

With other iconic species - White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary and of course Purple Emperor - now just waiting for their respective curtain calls, it looks like a busy month ahead for butterfly observers. Bring it on!

6 June 2015 - Too Early For New Forest Small Pearls?

I was probably pushing my luck in visiting a couple of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary sites in or close to the New Forest yesterday afternoon, bearing in mind that the first sighting at Bentley Wood was less than two weeks ago - emergence in the New Forest can be significantly later.

Indeed it proved to be the case, with no Small Pearls seen on either Roydon Common, nor in the clearings on the north side of Wootton Coppice Inclosure. Whilst I really hope the reason for these no-shows is that they have not started to emerge yet on these damper sites, I do have some concern for the future of these marginal colonies. Counts in recent seasons show populations being dangerously low (especially Wootton Coppice) and the habitat, in terms of quality or size or both, would in any case be unable to support significant populations. Suitable nectar sources in particular, are quite limited at both locations.

The first half of June is typically a quiet period in Hampshire's butterfly calendar (although I suspect Silver-studded Blues will be on the wing soon). so it's a good time for me to take a short break from butterflying. It is unlikely that there will be any further posts to this blog for about a week.

4 June 2015 - Mating Pair Of Small Blues Provides Bright Spot In Disappointing Portsdown Count

A lunchtime walk to the far western end of the slope from Paulsgrove Quarry produced just 5 Small Blues (mostly males), but included a mating pair. Some of the males were fading, so I suspect this is approaching the peak of their flight period here, which makes the total count quite disappointing. One male in very good condition was 'bothering' the mating pair, but eventually realised it was a lost cause.

I suspect the clearance work which has been undertaken towards the bottom of the slope has caused the emerging butterflies to disperse quite quickly, due to loss of shelter and scrub - hopefully a temporary disadvantage of the habitat management. A return was made via the scrub immediately below the quarry face, but no Small Blues were recorded there at all.

3 photos posted to recent photos gallery.



30 May 2015 - Adonis Seen On Old Winchester Hill But One Swallow Doesn't Make A Summer!

As I walked down the car park slope at Old Winchester Hill this morning, I was not very hopeful of finding any Adonis Blues on the wing. The temperature was just 13 degrees, it was still damp underfoot and there was a chill wind on the exposed slope.

However, I was pleased to see that the odd butterfly was already up and about as the environment became slightly more benign towards the bottom of the slope, with Common Blue and Small Heath showing. It was only when I ventured into the partially enclosed area at the very bottom that the unmistakable colour of a male Adonis

Alan Thornbury's Hampshire Butterflies

Blue could be seen a few yards in front of me, basking amongst the grass (see left thumbnail below taken as I approached),. Whilst in very good condition, I don't think this is a newly emerged specimen, so there should be others there - perhaps waiting for the temperature to rise.

Unfortunately, even the single Adonis seen did not stay around too long, taking off and fluttering (or rather being blown) over bushes and out of sight. One rather gruesome sighting, slightly further along the slope to the south, was the carcass of a young badger.

3 photos of the Adonis posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



28 May 2015 - Small Pearls Building At Bentley But Little Else To Cheer About

I visited the Eastern Clearing in Bentley Wood this afternoon. Whilst there was some sun, the cool wind became very noticeable as clouds frequently obscured it. My target species was Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, however a first exploration of the main clearing was disappointing, with few butterflies of any kind in evidence. That changed for the better as I moved just north of the main clearing, where there were 3 fresh Small Pearls sharing their time between feeding on bugle (during sunshine) or resting on foliage during the dull periods.

A return to the main clearing produced one further Small Pearl and several Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (now fading), together with a few common species (Brimstone, Speckled Wood).

So, relatively speaking, the clearing was very quiet on the butterfly front which may simply have been a consequence of the cool conditions. However, I suspect this is masking a rather poor season for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary in particular - a conclusion consistent with the sightings recorded in Bentley's visitor book.

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



25 May 2015 - Stuttering Emergence Not Good News For Marginal Colonies

The cool and rather cloudy May is resulting in the flight periods of some spring species being extended longer than normal, due to emergence occurring in fits and starts as the weather permits. For large stable colonies, this should not be a problem with still enough butterflies on the wing at any one time to ensure that each individual (and especially females) have a normal chance of mating. This applies to some colonies of Duke Of Burgundy, where there are still good numbers of males on the wing to 'service' the egg-laden females, despite the stuttering emergence.

For marginal colonies however, there may be only a few males on the wing at any one time, with reduced chance that all emerging females will be mated. In effect such colonies can fall below 'critical mass' in terms of butterflies on the wing, at a key moment for their survival.

That said, we may as well enjoy the extended spring flight period and look forward to the prospect of seeing Duke of Burgundy still on the wing when the Dark Greens are starting to appear!

Additional photo of Marsh Fritillary taken last Thursday in Wiltshire posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

23 May 2015 - Small Blue Takes Wing On Portsdown

A late afternoon detour, as the cloud was thickening, found me amongst the scrub below the western end of the Paulsgrove quarry on Portsdown Hill. I say 'scrub' since there has been significant clearance work near the bottom of the slope, leaving it temporarily rather exposed. However, I was pleased to find a single Small Blue on the wing there. Unfortunately it eluded the camera, but it appeared to be a very fresh male. Hopefully more will appear in the next days. Also seen were several Common Blue and a single Brown Argus (slightly the worse for wear).

21 May 15 - Marsh Frits In A Different Woodland Setting

At this time of year I often visit a colony of Marsh Fritillaries in the Wiltshire part of Bentley Wood. However, it's always nice to visit new sites to find the same species in a slightly different setting. This afternoon I did just that, travelling a little further into Wiltshire to Hound Wood, near Farley. I was aware of the site from sightings reports on the Wiltshire Branch of BC. It was also the perfect opportunity to take to two wheels and avoid the lengthy walk from Farley village.

Hound Wood, like Bentley Wood is a working woodland for timber and is sympathetically managed for wildlife. The wide verge along the main west-east track with abundant wild flowers is particularly distinctive, and of course a regenerating clearing of small conifers adjoining the track where there is a colony of Marsh Fritillaries. Whilst not abundant, they were easy to find (around 15 in total) with hotspots not unexpectedly located in areas where there is abundant foodplant (Devil's-bit Scabious), plentiful wild flowers, and small conifers to provide shelter from the wind. Most were males but there were at least three females, including one in courtship. It was pleasing also to see in the same area, several Duke Of Burgundy (primrose being the foodplant here), Grizzled Skippers and two Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.

On the return, I called in at the Eastern Clearing of Bentley Wood, whose surroundings seem to change every year as a result of clearance work along the northern flank. In late afternoon, there were still several Pearl-bordered Fritillaries on the wing and I don't doubt its smaller cousin is also on the wing here, with an unconfirmed sighting myself. Small Pearls I had noted previously are already recorded in the visitor's book. All in all, an enjoyable afternoon spent in Wiltshire's woodlands, and today bathed in sunshine.

4 photos of Marsh Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



16 May 2015 - Return To Rake Bottom Finds Profusion Of Butterflies

Now that the main crop of early spring butterfly species are typically in the middle of their flight periods, my attention will gradually turn to the next phase of the season and in particular to the small fritillaries. Nevertheless, I am aware that of the early spring species, I am yet to record Green Hairstreak. So in a bid to fill this gap and make a final dedicated visit to see the Duke and his entourage of other small butterflies, I made a return visit to Rake Bottom this afternoon.

On entering the gate to the valley floor, it was fitting that the first butterfly seen inside was indeed a male Duke, soon to be joined by Dingy and then Grizzled Skippers, as I made my way along the valley. It was pleasing to note that all three species were being seen in the margins of the path and even on the path itself. The main concentration of butterflies was, as usual, further along the valley after the track turns east.

There was one section of track margin where Dukes, 'Dingies' and Grizzled were being seen in flight or disturbed with almost every step. Whereas the Grizzled are now slightly faded, many of the Dingy Skippers and Dukes are still fresh, with the likelihood that emergence - particularly females - is not yet finished. In all, counts for these species were easily in double figures and in the case of Dingy Skippers, around 30 were seen. Small Heath, Common Blue, Brimstone and Peacock were also noted.

I did manage to see my first Green Hairstreaks of the season although this was the only species where numbers were slightly disappointing with just 4 seen. They are now well past their best, suggesting emergence occurred during a small number of days. The remaining adults, having mated, are now living out what remains of their short lives.

6 photos of Duke of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper and Common Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



8 May 2015 - Struggle For Pearls In the Forest Rescued By Unexpected Sunshine

Despite the forecast for a cloudy afternoon, I visited a couple of Pearl-bordered Fritillary sites in the New Forest. Not unexpectedly, all was quiet in Parkhill Inclosure with conditions remaining dull. In the main clearing, the young conifers are now 3-4 m tall, however the wide diagonal track and a few unplanted areas should enable the Pearl-bordered colony to survive here, despite today's no-show.

I moved on to New Copse and the story in the first clearing was initially the same - no Pearls to be seen in the cool, overcast conditions - and just to add further insult there was a light shower. I could see brighter skies heading my way in the distance however, so returned to the location some minutes later having explored one of the other rides. Patience had paid off as my first Pearl-bordered Fritillary of the season was flitting along the bank close to the track, as the first glimpse of sunshine appeared through a chink in the cloud. It was a fresh male.

Activity increased dramatically over the next minutes, as the sun temporarily got the better of the cloud. A few more pearls (all males) appeared as if from nowhere to investigate anything which resembled a female or to feed on bugle. At one point, a particularly favoured 1m patch of bugle had no less than 4 pearls feeding simultaneously.

It is clear that the flight period of Hampshire's Pearl-bordered Fritillaries is still in its early stages, despite the first sighting being more than two weeks ago. Their flight period development has been slowed by the weather. For me, watching newly emerged small fritillaries in a woodland clearing, flitting amongst the wild flowers and the lush green shoots of new vegetation is the perfect post-winter tonic! 5 photos of Pearl-bordered Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



4 May 2015 - Common Blue, Small Heath and Brown Argus Take Wing

Whilst the season is not exactly 'galloping' away, a mid-morning visit to Stephen's Castle Down followed by a walk along the lower slopes of Magdalen Hill Down produced three season firsts. The pun is intentional bearing in mind that the flat area below Stephen's Castle Down is used as gallops - and the down itself did not disappoint, producing singletons of Common Blue and Small Heath. Most of the expected cast were also present, including Duke Of Burgundy (a slightly faded male), Grizzled Skipper (2), Dingy Skipper (3), Orange Tips, Brimstones and Small Whites.

At Magdalen Hill Down, several fresh Brown Argus were flitting around at well-spaced intervals on the lower slopes of the main reserve. Not wanting to miss out on the other season firsts, a Common Blue was seen here too. Perhaps more surprising than the species seen were the ones which evaded me - no Grizzled Skippers nor Green Hairstreaks spotted during my short visit.

4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery. (PS: I started using a monopod for some shots today - perhaps you can tell which ones?)



1 May 2015 - Oxenbourne Experience Mirrors Season So Far

I made a circuit of Oxenbourne Down this afternoon - outward on the high level path, returning along the valley floor. The rain had not yet arrived and there was even the glimpse of weak sunshine, but generally conditions were cool and cloudy. I would not have been surprised to return a zero on the butterfly count, and in that event the exercise and bracing air would still have been worthwhile, as I return to fitness following a short hospital stay. In fact I saw 5 butterflies and, even more surprisingly, they were all different species - namely Duke Of Burgundy, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Small White and Red Admiral. The Duke - a fresh male, was in the scrub at the far end of the walk on the upper level and the only butterfly I photographed in my less than agile state.

In retrospect, the experience seems a fair reflection of the season so far. Species are generally appearing at about the time expected, but the cool, unsettled weather (again typical of today) is really holding back the development of the flight period of most species, with numbers still very low, two or three weeks on since emergence began. The weather outlook, at least for the bank holiday weekend, offers no respite either from the cool, unsettled conditions.

Two photos of Duke Of Burgundy posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



26 April 2015 - Season's Progress Set For Significant Go Slow

The cold and unsettled outlook for the coming week is likely to mean an even slower period in the season's progress, as we near the end of April. This will hardly be in contrast the week just gone, with the season already having the brakes applied as a result of some very chilly nights.

Nevertheless, progress has still been visible with the numbers of early spring species gradually building. Furthermore an eye cast to the neighbouring county, Sussex, observed that their first Pearl-bordered Fritillary was recorded mid-week, followed closely by a sighting in Hampshire (Bentley Wood). This bucks the trend of recent years when Sussex has recorded this species significantly earlier than Hampshire.

22 April 2015 - Return To Unsettled Weather Will Coincide With Some Armchair Butterflying For Me

Looking at the forecast for the next week or so, it looks as though tomorrow maybe the last settled day for a while to enjoy some butterflying. The early spring species (Dukes, Grizzled, Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper etc) will be starting to appear at other sites, following their first appearance some days ago at their very earliest locations.

For me the next week however, also necessitates a period of armchair butterflying as I recover from a medical procedure. Apart from tomorrow (when I would otherwise have been at work) and based on the unsettled outlook, perhaps it will not actually make much difference anyway!

17 April 2015 - Season Properly Underway With Duke And Grizzled

The weather presented a short window of opportunity for me today, despite cloud in some places and a very cool breeze. However hazy sunshine and just about tolerable temperatures did waken a few butterflies. My visit to Noar Hill did not start well with relatively few butterflies on the wing - initially only Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. It looked to be heading for the 'disappointing' category as I returned to one of the more northerly chalk pits before the exit. There a single male Duke Of Burgundy was flitting around, but thereafter spending almost all its time basking on low vegetation, adjusting its orientation for the best sun angle.

My second and final stop was Butser Hill and a walk along Rake Bottom. The hazy sun was just about holding out, so I was hopeful of finding Grizzled Skippers here having seen one last week at Magdalen Hill Down. The steep grass/chalk slope on the north side of the valley, as usual, was the most productive. Here at least 6 Grizzled Skippers were seen including a courting pair (which did not lead to mating). The return walk, keeping basically to the valley bottom, produced a further two. No Dukes (too early for this site) nor Green Hairstreak were seen.

4 Photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



11 April 2015 - Portsdown Tactic Learnt Last Year Works Again!

I recall that in 2014 I succeeded in obtaining a few photos of Orange Tips early in their season, by visiting one of their known haunts in late afternoon, when they are becoming less active and starting to look for places to roost. So it was a late afternoon return to Portsdown Hill today hoping to repeat that success.

There were much fewer butterflies on the wing at 4.30pm today compared to my lunchtime visit earlier in the week and no Brimstones in evidence - perhaps too cold or late in the day for them.

The Orange Tips however did oblige - only 3 males seen but I was pleased this time to manage a few photos as they were in the transition zone between foraging, sunbathing and seeking a place to roost - it had to be the one with the slightly wonky wing of course! A Speckled Wood also obliged as it basked on a leaf. 3 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



10 April 2015 - Season Firsts Of Orange Tip, Small White And Grizzled Skipper

A lunchtime walk on Portsdown Hill yesterday produced my first **Orange Tip** and **Small White** of the season, only to be eclipsed today during an afternoon walk on Magdalen Hill Down which disturbed a lone **Grizzled Skipper**.

In yesterday's bright sunshine on Portsdown, I was greeted early on by the male Orange Tip, and both Brimstones and Peacocks were plentiful, having awoken from their winter slumbers.

The sunshine this afternoon on Magdalen Hill Down was rather more hazy and was accompanied by a slightly chilly breeze. Whilst the display of Peacock butterflies was impressive, Brimstones were strangely absent, but compensated by a few Small Tortoiseshells including a courting couple. The Grizzled Skipper was disturbed from the path along the foot of the down but it darted off never to reappear - and nor did any others during my visit.

Despite 3 season firsts I did not manage any photos worth posting - something I will seek to redress soon!

7 April 2015 - More First Sightings Imminent As Spring Sunshine Arrives

The improvement in the weather to something more spring-like, with sunshine and higher temperatures, almost certainly means that the next week or so could herald several more first sightings in Hampshire. I have second-hand information that Orange Tip has already been seen in Hampshire and, outside the county, Green Hairstreak has also now been recorded.

Yesterday afternoon I took a bike ride along the old railway track-bed close to home and recorded 4 species (Brimstone (6), Peacock (10), Small Tortoiseshell (3) and Red Admiral (1). The vegetation and spring flowers seem to have come on significantly during the last couple of weeks, with an especially good show of primroses along the railway embankments.

6 April 2015 - High Brown Enjoys Best Season For 10 Years

Butterfly Conservation has reported that 2014 was the best season since 2004 for the High Brown Fritillary, with numbers up by 180% on 2013. The improvement in 2014 is attributed to the warm spring and conservation efforts. This is especially significant since the High Brown Fritillary is one of two UK butterfly species which are considered *critically endangered* by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (the other being the Large Blue), Whilst all species are important of course, improving the outlook for those which are in real danger of extinction within a few years is still a priority.

Whilst the BC article was indeed good news, it also served as a poignant reminder concerning the first High Brown Fritillary I saw since restarting my boyhood hobby. The date was 5 July 2004 and the location was Eastnor on the Malvern Hills. A thumbnail of this individual is shown below (with link to a larger image). Sadly, the High Brown Fritillary is now extinct from the Malvern area - the last sighting being in 2009. It is now confined to a few sites in SW England, the Morecambe Bay area and one location in Wales. Hopefully, its improved fortunes last year will pave the way for some expansion in its current limited range.



20 March 2015 - First Emerged Species Reported In Hampshire - But No Early Spring

The mid-March period has witnessed the first emerged species being reported in Hampshire - singletons of Small White and Green-veined White in the Portsmouth/Gosport areas. Elsewhere in Southern England, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood and even Orange Tip (in Dorset) have been reported. Hampshire sightings of newly emerged whites are complemented by increasing numbers of hibernators on the wing, including regular sightings in the last days of Brimstones.

Whilst March has been somewhat disappointing overall, it is fair to expect that the season will now, slowly but surely, start to gather momentum. That said, and looking at the maximum daytime temperatures expected during the next week (typically 10 degrees plus or minus), this is not going to be an early season.

This afternoon I made a detour to come home via an ancient woodland copse near Curbridge, where there is a show of wild daffodils. Whilst they would normally in full bloom by now, there are quite a number still in bud (with blooms generally down in number) suggesting the season is perhaps a week or so behind last year, at the moment.

6 March 2015 - Cold February Ensures No Repeat Of Last Year's Early Emergences

March has arrived and we still await the first reports in Hampshire of a newly emerged butterfly. A cold February with frequent frosts and daytime temperatures rarely reaching double figures, effectively put paid to a repeat of last year's early emerging specimens. However, I also note that Brimstone sightings are on the increase in Hampshire during the last few days (a good indicator that spring is on the way) and that Sussex has just recorded its first **Small White** of the season.

In my experience, spring seasons which make us wait a little for the action (excluding hibernators) usually turn out to be better anyway, avoiding the tendency to burn themselves out prematurely and dispelling the fear that a soggy summer will often follow.

Warmer weather is on the way, starting this weekend, so I suspect we will not be waiting much longer for the first emerged species to be reported in Hampshire.

8 February 2015 - Wall Hanging On Near Gosport

It was pleasing to read a recent report on the branch website that there were a few sightings of Wall butterflies at Fort Gilkicker in 2014. I paid an unsuccessful visit to the site on 22 August, but it seems most summer brood sightings (mainly male singletons) were earlier than this, complementing a handful of spring brood records. An egg-laying female was seen in early September (good news!) and a third brood male in early October. So hopefully the species will be seen again there this year.

Attention will soon be turning towards the new seen with the possibility of the first sightings of emerged butterflies in the next few weeks - perhaps Speckled Wood or a Small White. Last year both of these species had been recorded by mid-February in Hampshire. In preparation for this year, I have added two more pieces of kit which

could come in useful, depending on the site. Firstly a monopod to compensate for a less steady hand as my 60th birthday approaches, and secondly - a bike! Two-wheel transportation will enable me to explore some of the larger woodlands and forest tracks much more quickly than on two feet.

11 January 2015 - Another Year Begins - So What's In Store Weather-wise?

As another year begins, what are the weather forecasters saying about the prospects for the year ahead? I am cautious about reading too much into it, since it is such a difficult task predicting the weather beyond a week or so, never mind months ahead. However, the status of various large scale phenomena such as the Jet Stream, Gulf Stream, the size of arctic air masses and solar magnetic activity do provide some indicators. The predictions unfortunately do not make good reading for the butterfly observer!

I will not go into the rationale in detail, but there is some degree of consensus that the remainder of the winter will have cold and quite snowy periods interspersed by regular Atlantic storms. Spring and summer are both likely to be cooler than average with summer wetter than usual. Thus 2014, which was considered overall to be favourable weather-wise for butterflies and the warmest since records began, may be followed by a much more challenging year.