



2011 Blog

27 December 2011 - Butterfly Monitoring Provides Insight To Undiscovered Colonies

During the time I have been running this website, the way butterfly distributions evolve has always interested me. Butterfly monitoring and recording plays an important role in gathering data to firstly visualise this evolution and then explain it. Whilst in well-populated counties such as Hampshire, butterfly monitoring and recording is probably amongst the most comprehensive in the country, this is not the case everywhere. Many upland regions in South-West England, Wales, Northern England and Scotland are much less well monitored, due to large and often remote expanses of moorland, hill country, mountains or forest. It is in these areas that Butterfly recording also provides a powerful tool to help identify areas where, as yet undiscovered butterfly colonies, might exist.

An example of this potential being put into practice came to my attention recently, when reading some of the butterfly newsletters from around the country. In particular, an examination of the distribution of known colonies of Scotch Argus in the Scottish Borders highlighted some significant anomalies in their distribution. For example there seemed to be swathes of territory where the butterfly is known to be present (basically along parts of the Tweed, Ettrick and Yarrow valleys) yet other swathes with notionally similar habitats where the butterfly was not recorded or where there are only isolated historical records, including the whole of the upland county of Peebles.

Maybe then it's not surprising that targeted field trips by the local branch of Butterfly Conservation during 2010 and 2011 not only confirmed the presence of Scotch Argus in Peebles, but discovered several previously unknown and thriving colonies along the Tweed floodplain, south of Tweedsmuir and at the foot of the Fruid Reservoir dam.

I also noted in a different article that one known colony of Scotch Argus is just 3 miles from the border with Northumberland. Who knows – maybe there are undiscovered colonies of this handsome species on the English side of the border too (in addition to the two Cumbrian colonies), perhaps in a remote Northumbrian valley?

10 December 2011 - Head North For More Butterflies!

I have been watching a series on National Geographic recently called "Nordic Wild" and have been impressed by the variety of flora and fauna found in some of the most northerly countries in the world, including large carnivores such as wolves and bears. Although butterflies did not feature in the episodes I watched, I was interested to know if this variety was also reflected in the butterfly populations of these countries.

Perhaps it's no surprise to know that Greenland is completely devoid of butterflies (but this has not always been so) and Iceland can only muster 6 species, all of which are found in UK and include the Red Admiral, Large and Small Whites.

Move across to Scandinavia however, and the situation changes dramatically. Denmark has similar latitude to the UK but has just one sixth of the UK area, yet amazingly it has 94 butterfly species! The surprises get even bigger - Norway's land mass, apart from its very southern end, is north of the UK mainland, yet it boasts a staggering 121 butterfly species, closely followed by its neighbour, Sweden at 112 species. Just examining Norway as an example, it has most of the species found in UK - and many more of course to make up the full list. This includes a staggering 25 Fritillaries and 18 different species of Blue/Argus!

I am not even going to attempt to explain the reasons for these statistics (I'll leave that to the experts) suffice to say that climate (which is linked to latitude and geography), habitat diversity (which will correlate somewhat with

land area), and isolation (so islands like UK are disadvantaged) will all play their part in the status we find today. Fascinating!

(Note: Butterfly species data from Wikipedia)

26 November 2011 - Nine Species Still On The Wing In Hampshire

Based on the daytime temperatures in the mid-teens we've been experiencing recently, it's hard to believe that Christmas is less than a month away. According to the Met Office, the balmy November follows the 6th warmest September on record and the 8th warmest October. The warm autumn is causing some unusual phenomena in the natural world with plants having an unseasonal late flourish, including poppies in flower, apple trees blossoming and second crops of summer fruits such as raspberries and strawberries, suggesting perhaps that plants are being fooled into thinking spring is just around the corner.

There are an unseasonal number of insects around too, including sightings of dragonflies and of course many sightings of butterflies. It was only in my last blog that I was suggesting the season was well and truly over, yet in Hampshire 9 species have been reported in the last two weeks alone. The Red Admiral has been leading the way by a country mile in terms of November sightings with reports almost every day - I had one basking on the patio last weekend. However, Comma, Speckled Wood, Painted Lady, Brimstone, Small White, Clouded Yellow, Peacock and Holly Blue make up the reported sightings during the last fortnight.

Expert opinion suggests that the extension of the season should not cause any lasting damage to populations, however I think I would quite happily trade this year's warm spring and autumn for a decent summer!

4 November 2011 - Conservation Making A Real Difference

November has arrived and the butterfly season in many respects can be considered well and truly over until next spring. That may be more or less the case for the butterfly observer, however autumn and winter represent an important period of year for conservation work. Indeed I noticed that there was a work party today at Magdalen Hill Down for our local branch of butterfly conservation, and there are several more "meets" between now and the end of March.

I was delighted to read about some of the recent positive impacts of conservation projects around the country in Butterfly Conservation's annual review for 2010/11. There are major successes for Wood White in Chiddingfold Forest and Wyre Forest, Duke of Burgundy on Prestbury Hill and around Helmsley, Marsh Fritillary on Dartmoor and, nearer to home, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries have been expanding their range in Bentley Wood, thanks to the efforts of the South-East England Woodlands Project. It would be remiss of me if I omitted to mention an amazing four-fold increase in the population of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Shopshire's Wyre Forest - literally thousands of them were seen there during the marvellous spring we enjoyed. There is no doubt that well-conceived, carefully planned and effectively implemented conservation work really can make a difference.

Returning then for a moment to my first sentence, and despite the fact it's November, there are still a few butterflies about - Red Admiral, Small Copper, Brimstone and Speckled Wood have all been reported in Hampshire since the beginning of the month. The paucity of butterflies however, means I will keep updates to this website at a very low level during the next few months (perhaps one or two blog entries per month) which will give me plenty of time to plan for next season!

23 October 2011 - Wood White, Réal's Wood White Or Cryptic Wood White?

I was interested to read an article in this Autumn's edition of Butterfly Magazine of another twist in the Wood White saga. It was discovered around 10 years ago that some of the Wood Whites living in Ireland (and all of those in Northern Ireland) were not the same species as the Wood Whites found on the UK mainland, but a very similar species. The new species was named Réal's Wood White.

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Scientists based in Russia and Spain have recently analysed DNA and chromosome numbers from the Wood White genus *Leptidea* from across Europe and have now reached a different conclusion: Réal's Wood White is in fact two different species, resulting in another new species being added to the taxonomy - namely the Cryptic Wood White, *Leptidea Juvernica*.

So which one do we have in UK? - well the Irish specimens in the study were all shown to be the new Cryptic species, with the true Réal's Wood White probably confined to SW Europe. It seems the new species is aptly named - puzzling it certainly is!

30 September 2011 - Third Time Lucky, Third Brood Wall Brown, Three Seen At Keyhaven!

My last two visits to the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve for third brood Wall Brown (in 2008 and 2009) were unsuccessful. If the current early autumn heatwave couldn't change my fortunes, then I might be tempted to give it up as a lost cause! Fortunately, a circular walk this afternoon, heading west along the ancient highway, returning along the sea wall past Pennington Marsh produced three sightings of third brood Wall Browns, all males, and all of them along the sea wall section.

What was surprising (well apart from seeing Wall Browns at all!) was that these third brood specimens were already quite faded, although the only one I managed to photograph was probably the worst. So, if anyone is planning a visit, I'd make it soon, since the short third brood flight period might be over within a week.

If my Wall Brown experience came in three's today, other butterfly numbers weren't much better - a few Red Admirals, Common Blues, Small Coppers, Speckled Woods and Whites. I guess if the season is basically over, no amount of brilliant weather is going to change it!

The birds on the reserve, of which there are many, also know what time of year it is, despite the summery weather. Some, like house martins and starlings were gathering in preparation for migration. A large clump of shrubs seemed to have scores of starlings making quite a raucous din. This handsome Wheatear however, which was keeping one of the Wall Brown's company along the sea wall, was much better behaved and came within a few feet of me.

Two photos of Wall Brown posted to Recent Photos Gallery, showing his less than pristine condition.



24 September 2011 - Thoughts On The Butterfly Sites Pages Update

I have just completed an end of season update to the Butterfly Sites pages and as a result make some sobering reflections. In reviewing their content, whilst it's not evident that any species have completely disappeared from a particular site compared to a few years ago, I found myself often having to "tone down" the positive words on some of their butterfly populations, either generally or in respect of one or more specific species.

Sites which seem to be faring badly with decreasing butterfly populations are mainly the downland ones, such as Stockbridge Down and Old Winchester Hill, driven perhaps by the fortunes of some key summer species there,

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such as Silver-spotted Skipper and Dark Green Fritillary. Silver-spotted Skippers in particular, seem to have had a poor season generally. Factors which are contributing to reduced summer productivity of some downland sitse is probably related to grazing (or rather the lack of it) in combination with the often unsettled summer weather, driving grass growth to excess. Much more difficult to explain is the low numbers of migrants this year, such as Painted Lady or Clouded Yellow, but their fortunes in UK are always unpredictable.

It has not been all bad news however, since the early dry spring meant that many spring butterflies enjoyed a good season, including Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke Of Burgundy. Woodland species too have also fared reasonably well, including White Admiral and Purple Emperor, with the woodland environment not so affected by the mixed summer weather.

Perhaps, as in 2007, we ought not to welcome in future an early dry spring so unequivocally, when the consequence seems to be a poor summer and a heavy price to pay by our summer downland butterflies.

Finally, it has not all been website admin work for the last couple of weeks. A short walk on Portsdown Hill yesterday afternoon produced 6 species, albeit mostly in faded condition, except for a couple of Red Admirals and a Small White. Other species seen were Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Common Blue and the Small Copper below.



2 September 2011 - Summer Weather Arrives Just As We Prepare For Autumn

I had not planned an outing today, but the beautiful sunny afternoon was too tempting to miss. I guess it was more in the way of a coastal walk along the eastern shore of Thorney Island (in W Sussex) rather than a butterfly outing, but enjoyable nonetheless. Thorney Island is a peninsula which protrudes out into Chichester Harbour. Much of it is owned by the MoD, with an army barracks and disused airfield located there, as well as many reminders of its wartime history. However, there is a public footpath all the way round and much frequented (as today) by birders. The only minor impediment to a walk round the 'island' is a remotely operated MoD gate on each side (normally no problem - the gate is released on pressing a button) but there are strict instructions to keep to the footpaths.

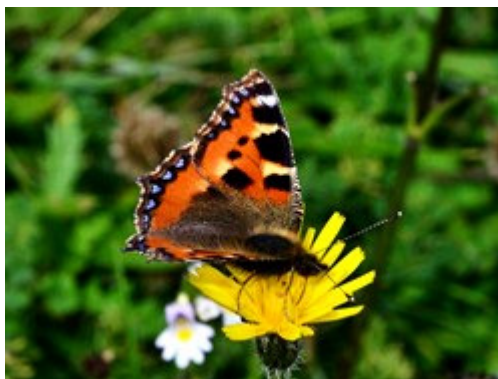
Clouded Yellows are quite often recorded on Thorney Island, bearing in mind its coastal location and a likely point of entry for them - and there is suitable habitat to cause them to stay. Unfortunately, I did not see Clouded Yellow today, but the butterfly count was not disappointing. Of note were several fresh Small Coppers - probably third brood in this advanced season - sharing with Common Blues several sections along the coastal path where the wild flowers were concentrated. I noted also some very fresh looking Red Admirals, contrasting with the now fading Meadow Browns and Small Heath. The most conspicuous species were undoubtedly the whites (mostly Green-veined) which were rarely out of sight along the whole walk down as far as Longmere Point. Having admired the delightful vistas across Chichester Harbour and beyond, it was time to retrace steps - well not quite as the incoming tide necessitated a minor inland detour at West Thorney through the sailing club and close to its lovely church.

Photos of Small Copper and a female Common Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

29 August 2011 - Where Have The Migrants Gone This Year?

A visit to Beacon Hill, Warnford this afternoon reminded me of the influx of Painted Ladies which occurred two years ago (it is the location I first became aware of the 'event'). 2011 however, is likely to be remembered as a very poor year for migrants - Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows in particular, where I note that sightings of these species in Hampshire during the summer period have been almost exclusively of singletons.

I saw neither of these species on Beacon Hill today, which was a pity considering the slope was full of wild flowers and would have drawn them like a magnet. Species were relatively few in fact - Meadow Browns and Small Heath were doing fine, but other species had to be searched for, including the few Chalkhill Blues and Common Blues on the wing. However I did not find any Silver-spotted Skippers. A single Brown Argus was seen at the bottom of the hill and a Small Tortoiseshell was nectaring on the many wild flowers adorning the slope. The latter also provided a photo opportunity, which is nowadays a significant event in itself. 2 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



28 August 2011 - Poor Season For Late Summer Species

The very mixed weather which has characterised July and August seems to have taken its toll on some of our late summer species, although I suspect this is not the whole story. In particular, Silver-spotted Skipper numbers seem to be well down at several sites (Stockbridge Down, Old Winchester Hill, Oxenbourne Down) with sightings typically a miserly one and two, rather than the double figures that would normally be expected. The only Hampshire site where the species seems to have done OK is Broughton Down. The higher than normal rainfall and perhaps reduced grazing (by rabbits in particular) means that the very short grass in which this warmth-loving species thrives has been replaced by swaying long grass at some locations.

That other late summer species, the Brown Hairstreak seems also to have fared poorly in the county, although the reasons for this are not obvious. There have been very few sightings at Noar Hill, and Shipton Bellinger also seems to have been "out-of-sorts" this season as a good site for Brown Hairstreak. We should bear in mind of course, that Brown Hairstreaks spend most of their time in the trees, so it's very difficult to say for sure that numbers are well down, just because not many have been seen.

So, despite the fact it is still August, the rather disappointing fade out in this year's butterfly season means that my focus will start to shift somewhat earlier than normal towards updating the site. Nevertheless I still expect to make the occasional field visit in the south Hants area during the next few weeks, before hanging up my walking boots until the Spring.

19 August 2011 - Adonis At Broughton Provides Sparkle To Fading Season

As the end of summer approaches (not that it has been a great one), my targets necessarily become less ambitious. Indeed my targets for today, based on two sites 20 minutes' drive apart, were to say 'farewell' to Brown Hairstreak for another season and to say 'hello' to summer brood Adonis Blue.

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So I decided to give Shipton Bellinger another go for Brown Hairstreak on what turned out to be a lovely sunny morning after yesterday's deluge. I succeeded too, although based on the rather sorry condition of the only one I saw (a male), this will certainly be my last outing this year to the far corner of the county and almost certainly my farewell to this species until next season. I had to look twice when I saw what appeared to be a plain brown butterfly nectaring in the hedgerow along the county boundary, bearing in mind there were also many faded Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, but sure enough this one was a Brown Hairstreak.

At Broughton Down Silver-spotted Skippers are still present in reasonable numbers and in decent condition. Indeed they have spread to the 'spike' of land at the far western end of the reserve since my last visit. Chalkhills are also present but no longer very numerous as their condition fades. The real target however, as indicated, was Adonis Blue and sure enough, on reaching what seems to be their favourite spot on the steeper slopes at the far western end of the reserve, a fresh male was sunning itself on bare chalk. Two others were soon spotted in the same area, although not quite in such pristine condition.

4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the two below, namely Adonis Blue (Mr Handsome), and Brown Hairstreak (who's a pretty boy then?) as well as a pair Silver-spotted Skippers, just being good friends!



12 August 2011 - Second Brood Dingy Provides Noar Hill Highlight

I have made a couple of short visits to Noar Hill this week and was looking forward to reporting my sightings of Brown Hairstreak or second brood Duke of Burgundy - well no such luck I'm afraid! The highlight was in fact the sighting of two second brood Dingy Skippers on Wednesday, both quite faded (i.e. at least a week old). There were many common species around of course, including some very fresh Red Admirals.

I am becoming somewhat concerned for the status of Brown Hairstreak at Noar Hill, since sightings seem to have been falling for several years. Indeed they seem to be having a poor season in the south generally, based on the number of reports to the various branch websites so far, but I guess we had better wait until the end of the season before jumping to conclusions.

The other experience at Noar Hill of note was the possible sighting of a Grayling in scrub on the west side of the reserve (70% certain). This is a species not normally associated with this site, but its existence here is credible. Initially I thought it was just another Meadow Brown until it landed and I immediately noticed its mottled underside. It then tangled with a definite Meadow Brown and when they diverged I was left following you guessed... the Meadow Brown! An extensive search of the area failed to relocate the possible Grayling.

I have posted 4 photos to the Recent Photos Gallery including second brood Dingy Skipper below and a female Common Blue taken during a lunchtime foray on Portsdown Hill last week.



7 August 2011 - Second Brood Duke Reported From Hampshire!

This week has seen its ups and downs at Noar Hill, thankfully the ups outweighing the downs. Last weekend more than twenty different species were reported from there including a Clouded Yellow and a second brood Dingy Skipper. Even this was surpassed on Wednesday when one lucky observer spotted a fresh, second brood Duke Of Burgundy in one of the chalk pits. The last record (as far as I am aware) of a second brood Duke in Hampshire was in 2007 - also a year characterised by a very dry and early spring. I hope that we can look forward to further records in the coming days - perhaps even a mating pair, as was the case in 2007.

It is appropriate to focus on this good news of course, but I'm also aware that no sightings of that other rarity - Brown Hairstreak - have been reported so far from Noar Hill, and indeed few sightings from anywhere in Hampshire. This situation in the first week in August would not normally be cause for concern, however this season being at least a week earlier than normal, means that females should by now be starting to engage in their egg-laying routine. Hopefully the next week will allay my concerns.

(Footnote: Whilst news of the second brood Duke at Noar Hill is great, it is likely to result in increased visitor pressure at the site. If you are visiting Noar Hill in the next days, please respect its fragile habitat by minimising trampling damage and keeping to footpaths wherever possible.)

5 August 2011 - Silver Spots Skipping Around At Broughton

A visit to Broughton Down this afternoon marked a change in my perspective of this site - firstly it was sunny and warm, whereas I have been somewhat unlucky with the sun on several previous visits - and I managed to avoid the rather gloomy (and for me slightly eerie) track which approaches the reserve from the south, by accessing it from Broughton village to the east.

So today it was a very cheery place - the newly emerged Silver-spotted Skippers thought so to, with a dozen or so seen and all very active. I couldn't match the very large numbers reported there on Monday, so guess there must be some hotspots, perhaps at the bottom of the down. Chalkhill Blues were even more conspicuous with a good mixture of males and females across the down.

Broughton Down is also a site where Adonis Blues are sometimes recorded, but it is perhaps too early for the very small Hampshire colonies and none were seen. In contrast, it is close to being too late for Dark Green Fritillaries, but not quite, as 6 of these handsome butterflies were present towards the western end of the reserve and in the "spike" at the far end. Handsome, however may be a slightly flattering description for them today, as all were well faded, particularly the males.

3 photos of Silver-spotted Skipper posted to Recent Photos gallery, including the one below.



2 August 2011 - Small Blue Summer Brood Takes Wing On Portsdown

I normally look for summer brood Small Blue in early August, but with this season now quite difficult to predict, I was not sure what to expect as I made a lunchtime visit to the scrub at the foot of Paulsgrove Quarry on Portsdown Hill. I almost left disappointed too, although there were decent numbers of other butterflies in the area including Chalkhill Blues and fresh Common Blues (and even a Small Tortoiseshell!).

Thankfully a single male Small Blue did show up - it looked to be in excellent condition although I didn't manage any photos. One has to bear in mind also that the summer brood is normally much weaker than the spring emergence. Kidney Vetch (larval foodplant) seems to be doing well on the hill this year, with the result I suspect that Small Blues may be present in various other small pockets.

30 July 2011 - Patience And Perseverance Is The Name Of The Game

This should be a boom time for our summer butterflies - and don't get me wrong, there are plenty of butterflies about, particularly of the commoner varieties. However, with this rather unusual and prolonged weather pattern where sunshine is not exactly plentiful, now is a time for patience and perseverance if you are in search of scarcer species.

Brown Hairstreak are already on the wing in Hampshire but not an easy species at the best of times. Other scarcer species should be on the wing already or about to take to the air. These include Silver-spotted Skipper, Wall Brown, Small Blue and Adonis Blue. Keep an eye open also for second brood Dingy Skipper (reported in Sussex) and perhaps even second brood Duke Of Burgundy (and that would be a find!).

I don't have any brand new photos of scarcer species to add to the gallery today, but instead give a chance to a couple of commoner species, Peacock and Gatekeeper, taken earlier in the week - and as a bonus I added another photo of the male Brown Hairstreak taken last weekend at Shipton Bellinger. 3 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.

24 July 2011 - Brown Hairstreak Season Kicks Off In Hampshire

The 2011 butterfly season, which started so early, has now become quite difficult to predict, following some lengthy spells of cool, unsettled weather. I had expected Brown Hairstreak to have been reported from Hampshire by now, but drew a blank myself at Noar Hill on Friday. So I decided to go for broke this afternoon and take the 1 hour journey to Shipton Bellinger in the far corner of the county.

The afternoon started badly with a traffic jam on the A303 close to Andover, but I'm glad I persevered to reach at my destination, albeit somewhat later than expected. Despite being mostly cloudy, it was warm with little wind - just about OK for the elusive Brown Hairstreak.

I spent around an hour and a half exploring the site, but focussing on the hedgerows along the border with Wiltshire to the west of the village. There was certainly plenty of butterfly activity, and fresh gatekeepers at first glance bear more than a passing resemblance to female "Brownies".

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Then, the quarry was sighted - this was no imposter but a female Brown Hairstreak nectaring on bramble! I could even see a nick in her left forewing, but as I positioned the camera - off she flew, right over my head in an attempt to foil me! I was not going to fall for that one however - oldest trick in the book - and my eyes stayed locked as she landed in Hawthorn about 10ft from the ground. Ah well, I'll just have to be satisfied with less than close-ups, since I didn't bring any step ladders!

Not long before leaving the site, an encounter with a male was much more civilised. He just sat on bramble engrossed in his meal, occasionally posing with open wings or fluttering to another nearby flower. Why couldn't that female behave like this! Guess I'll just have to return another day.

4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery including the male below.



23 July 2011 - Last Phase Of Summer Creeping Up

It may only be late July, however, in terms of butterfly flight periods, it's more like early August, as the final phase of the 2011 butterfly season creeps upon us. This was evident (with perhaps one notable exception) as I made a short visit to Noar Hill yesterday afternoon with the early/midsummer foliage looking less verdant and pre-autumn dieback starting to show.

As the skies gradually clouded over leading to a light shower, there were a decent number of butterfly species around, taking advantage of the plentiful supply of nectar, although only Meadow Browns were present in large numbers. Several fresh looking Peacocks and Red Admirals were adding their own splash of colour to complement the wild flowers and Silver-washed Fritillaries were equally conspicuous. In addition, there were Speckled Woods, Small Skippers, Ringlets, Marbled Whites, Large, Small and Green-veined Whites as well as singletons of Small Copper and Brown Argus. A mating pair of Holly Blues were in the lane leading to the reserve entrance, with several more individuals on the site itself.

I was also, of course, keeping my eyes peeled for an early Brown Hairstreak and whilst none were seen during my visit (the exception referred to above), I expect they have started to emerge here in low numbers.

3 photos posted to recent Photos Gallery including the Holly Blue below.



16 July 2011 - It's A Rainy Weekend For The Start Of The Big Butterfly Count

The big butterfly count is a nationwide survey aimed at helping to assess the health of our environment. It was launched in 2010 and an impressive 210,000 butterflies and day-flying moths were counted across the nation. This year's count runs from 16th-31st July. Anyone can take part and submit their sightings online by following the links from the Butterfly Conservation website ([here](#)). This year's count has added significance since the spring period has been one of the hottest on record and may have had a major impact on our native species.

On this rainy weekend, in addition to planning a contribution to the survey, why not consider what further practical measures you can do to help our garden butterflies? Many of our most colourful butterflies visit gardens such as Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Holly Blue, Brimstone and Orange Tip. In addition to ensuring our gardens provide nectar for the adult butterflies (e.g. Buddleia, Lavender), hibernating species can be encouraged by providing a small pile of logs in a dry position. Holly Blue butterflies will be encouraged by Holly or Ivy and Orange Tips by Lady's Smock, these being the larval foodplants. Maybe you could even leave a small patch of ground by the compost heap to "go wild" and perhaps be colonised by such "flora" as thistles, bird's foot trefoil, various grasses and even nettles, all important larval foodplants for certain butterflies. An alternative foodplant for Large and Small Whites, such as Nasturtiums, might encourage them to bypass your prize cabbages!

14 July 2011 - Portsdown Abounds With Midsummer Life

A lunchtime visit to the lower slopes of Portsdown Hill showed it to be teeming with life, particularly summer butterflies and wildflowers. On the central section, it would be difficult to choose the most conspicuous species, all enjoying the sunshine and abundant supply of nectar (Knapweed, Scabious, Ragwort, Kidney Vetch...). Chalkhill Blues are in the first week or so of their flight period and in generally excellent condition. Marbled Whites and Meadow Browns are also present in decent numbers, whilst Gatekeepers are just starting to show.

Perhaps the most notable sighting however, was a Dark Green Fritillary, a species not often seen on Portsdown, but one which seems to be colonising new locations this year, including some woodland sites (Whiteley Pastures and Bentley Wood for instance) and indicative of a very good year for this swashbuckling species.

Outside Hampshire, I note that a male Brown Hairstreak has also been spotted in the Upper Thames area. This is not a total surprise in this very early season and we can expect the first reports from Hampshire in the next days.

3 photos of Chalkhill Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



10 July 2011 - Emperor Flypast In The Pastures

I have been noting with interest the number of sightings of Purple Emperor in my local woodland complex of Whiteley Pastures/Botley Wood during the last couple of weeks. My previous encounters there have only been aerial views and the last of those was several years ago.

The big advantage of a local site is of course time and travel efficiency. As a result, I managed two visits there today between domestic engagements, doing a circular walk each time encompassing both locations, one mid-morning and one late afternoon.

The Emperor didn't disappoint in terms of sightings either, with a scoreline of 2-0 to Whiteley Pastures on this occasion! This morning I had a tantalising glimpse of a male (based on size) doing a couple of high level circuits around an oak. Then this afternoon, a male skimmed along the ground past me and I was praying it would land, but sadly, after deliberating the possibility, it flew up into the canopy and I lost sight. Both sightings were from the main track towards Ridge Copse.

Mornings are usually the best time to see Emperors low down, so the afternoon sighting was especially significant for me. I was also encouraged to see that this low level male seemed to be in very good condition. This afternoon there was a group of several people Emperor watching in Botley Wood, close to the substation access road, with several high level sightings reported.

Surprisingly, I only saw two White Admirals (so matched by Emperors!) suggesting their season is now on the wane, however Silver-washed Fritillaries are verging on abundant, and seemingly present in almost every sunny glade (even minor ones) throughout the complex. In Botley Wood, the rough glades where Grizzled Skippers were found earlier in the season are now buzzing with their summer skipper cousins, especially Small Skippers.

No photos on this occasion.

8 July 2011 - Grayling Season Building On Browndown

I find it useful sometimes to look back at my diary or rather my blogs, to see which sites I was visiting at a particular time of year and for which species. This provided the answer to my indecision this afternoon, bearing in mind it was hardly great butterfly weather and not worth going very far.

Taking into account that this is an early season, a previous blog reminded me that Grayling should now be up and about. Although there was a very early sighting in Hampshire in late May, from a site which does not normally see Grayling, none have been reported since to the branch website.

So it was off to Browndown (S) late this afternoon, and sure enough Grayling are on the wing there, in the area in front of the high walls of the firing range. I saw around 6 males, performing their usual trick of flying a few yards and then attempting to disappear, using their amazing underside camouflage to vanish from sight on the stony ground.

2 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery including the one below.



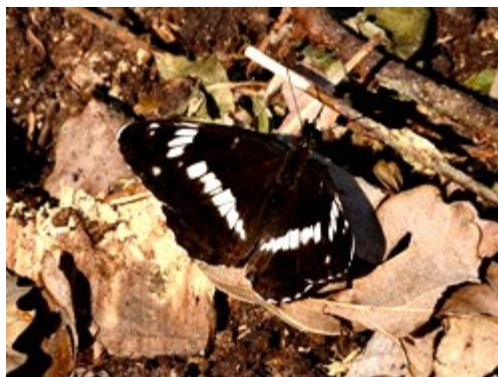
3 July 2011 - Local Sites Provide Perfect Start To Sunday

Having done a fair amount of travelling during the past week, the last thing I needed was another 100 mile round trip on a hot day. Then again, I didn't need to, since by 10.30am I was back home having had the perfect start to a Sunday morning, with photos of White Admiral and a female White-letter Hairstreak safe on the memory card, and never venturing more than 4 miles from home.

In Whiteley Pastures, butterfly activity was just beginning to stir before 9am, but late enough to see a White Admiral basking on the ground and several Silver-washed Fritillaries, vying for the few patches of bramble catching the morning sun. A fresh Red Admiral was also gracing the main track to sunbathe.

Then it was on to East Gosport, for probably my last visit this season to see White-letter Hairstreak, before they disperse or become too faded to photograph. This morning, a female had turned out to feed on creeping thistle - a special moment as it's the first time I have seen one low down - her long tails prominent.

4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the two below.



1 July 2011 - It's Purple Time Again (For Others!)

Many of you will know that for some, the pinnacle of the butterfly season has now been reached with the first sightings of Purple Emperors in Hampshire's woodlands. Having made dedicated visits every year since 2005 to either Bentley Wood or Alice Holt Forest, two of the best sites in the county for this species, I have decided to forego my dedicated Emperor visit this year. Instead, I will try to go to some sites in the county which I have not previously visited or not visited for a while.

So, this afternoon's destination was West Wood, part of the Farley Mount Country Park. There was rather too much cloud for the larger woodland species, but I did manage several Silver-washed Fritillaries and a White

Admiral, along with scores of Ringlets. There are a few open meadow areas within the wood which attract Marbled White and other grassland species.

Perhaps the most intriguing sighting for me was not a butterfly at all, but a brightly coloured moth. Several Scarlet Tiger Moths were performing their unusual looping flight along the glades.

Without photos (except for the Scarlet Tiger) I then made my way to Pitt Down, also part of the Farley Mount complex, which I visited last week. Dark Green Fritillary numbers on the eastern section of the down have increased to around 12, including at least 3 females. So it's a good time to visit there too if you can overcome the lure of His (or Her) Majesty - and by the way Purple Emperors are also seen occasionally at Farley Mount, such as around the Spindle Tree car park.

2 photos of Dark Green Fritillary (including female below) and one of Scarlet Tiger Moth posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



28 June 2011 - In The Land Of The Mountain Ringlet

I try to take the opportunity when visiting "my roots" in northern England to visit a butterfly site. On this occasion, when the date was set some days ago, a few options were needed. bearing in mind the present unpredictability of the weather. My last visit to Fleetwith in Cumbria for Mountain Ringlet three years ago, was not successful, due to cool, windy, conditions on the fells, although I have seen them previously on Kidsty Pike.

Low temperatures and wind were not likely to be a problem this time around, however I also know these little butterflies only fly in sunshine. On arrival at the Honister slate mine at 9.30am ready for the climb up to Fleetwith, the temperature was already a balmy 18 deg C, there was hardly any wind and pale blue sky filled in the gaps between the white cloud - the omens for seeing this notoriously difficult species were good!

The first part of the route to Fleetwith is a stiff climb up a rocky path, but once the terrain begins to level out on to the shoulder of Fleetwith, the going becomes much easier, following the route of an old tramway. The Mountain Ringlets were reasonably cooperative too - in the weak sunshine they seemed content to make plenty of brief landings to rest and take nectar, perhaps not being able to decide if it was sunny (when they fly incessantly!) or cloudy (when they vanish!). It's not that this species is fundamentally difficult, but rather the weather and the terrain where they are found which certainly can be!

I saw my first one just a hundred yards south of the drum house on Fleetwith, as I headed on the path towards Grey Knotts, but then no more until I found several flying in the sheltered gulleys running down from Grey Knotts itself. By the time I made the return across Fleetwith in late morning, a few more degrees had been added to the temperature and with it a few more Mountain Ringlets had taken to the air, flitting low across the high altitude grassland. I suspect their flight season is just about peaking there now, as most were showing some signs of fading, but nevertheless in decent condition. My total count was 16 Mountain Ringlets - a very satisfying outcome!

Alan Thornbury's Hampshire Butterflies

Even when Mountain Ringlets are reasonably numerous, photographing them is still a challenge, since they rarely settle for long and often nestle amongst the grass stems, making "a clean shot" difficult. Three photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the one below and [click here](#) for visit photo diary.



24 June 2011 - Dark Green Season On Pitt Down Gets Going After Rain Stops Play

It was somewhat of a race against the clock for this afternoon's visit to Pitt Down, with rain on the way and a diversion to East Gosport to re-acquaint with its White-letters. In fact all worked out well in the end, joining another butterfly observer in search of the same species and departing Pitt Down just before the rain arrived.

In East Gosport several White-letters were doing battle at the top of the elm. Two or three males had the need also to refill their tanks from creeping thistle, and happy to take their time in doing so, much to my delight. I'm still hoping a female will join them at some point!

At Pitt Down, summer is well underway, with plenty of Marbled Whites, sometimes several to a flower cluster, and also many Ringlets. The main target here, however, was Dark Green Fritillary, which initially played hard to find on the western section of the down (one seen) but eventually cooperated at its eastern end. The scrub is regenerating nicely in this area, and there is a reasonable supply of Knapweed and Thistles for nectar. Around 7 Dark Greens were seen here, mostly fresh males but interestingly one very faded one, which probably emerged a couple of weeks ago, in keeping with the very early season. Their emergence pattern however, may have been stalled since then by the recent spell of unsettled weather. On a personal note, I have now seen all the UK Fritillaries this season, which is something I don't manage very often (Heath and High Brown seen on a visit to Somerset/Devon three weeks ago).

5 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the Dark Green Fritillary below, as well as Marbled White and White-letter Hairstreak.



19 June 2011 - White-Letter Mini-Campaign Continues!

I have forsaken visits further afield in the last week or so to focus on the small White-letter Hairstreak colonies in East Gosport. I have now notched up several short visits there. It's handy too, being just a few miles from home. I am learning much more about the habits of the elusive little butterfly, which provides us with just a couple of weeks or so to see it in reasonable condition.

My latest visit was this morning and, in terms of numbers feeding down low, was the best so far. In fact it seems hard to believe now, but at one point there were 3 males feeding on a patch of creeping thistle at the same time!

During the hour or so I spent in the vicinity, 5 or 6 different males visited the creeping thistle, with one also feeding on bramble. Unfortunately none were in very good condition, with some quite well worn with nicks in their wings - and no females. They also seemed unwilling to descend from nearby elm whilst I was close-by, but once settled on a thistle-head to feed, they were largely oblivious to my presence.

I have now seen White-letters feeding there at different times of the day including mid-morning, lunchtime and late afternoon. One must recall also that we have just had two very unsettled days, which may have washed the aphid honeydew from the elm, leaving nectar as the only source of nourishment. Other butterflies seen included Comma and Large Skipper.

Three photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery (including the Comma below).



14 June 2011 - Impromptu Visit Takes White-Letter By Surprise!

A lunchtime visit to the area of East Gosport where there are several small colonies of White-letter Hairstreak was following the normal pattern - you know - a few hairstreaks flitting about high in their favoured elm trees, with seemingly no intention whatsoever of descending to feed!

However, one of the small colonies has the benefit of abundant bramble and some creeping thistle just below a group of elms. So having a few minutes to spare after my site circuit, I made an impromptu return visit to this spot before heading off.

It resulted in one of those moments you remember for a long time - a male White-letter had descended briefly to feed on creeping thistle. It only gave the opportunity for a couple of photos before flitting back into the elm, but I was grateful nevertheless.

You go over the 'what ifs' of course in your mind, and one of the photos has some strange light artefacts as the butterfly's closed wings were directly in line with the sun, but the rare experience certainly made my lunchtime worthwhile - well made my day really! Two photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the one below.



11 June 2011 - What's Going On In Whiteley Pastures?

Well the answer to that is plenty! This was a somewhat unexpected opportunity and contrary to my plan to wait a little longer before visiting Hampshire's woodlands. However, it was a lovely sunny morning, the shopping was finished early and my local woodland patch of Whiteley Pastures was too big a temptation for the hour or so that remained of the morning.

The forestry commission has been very busy in there with much timber extraction on the east side of the main ride and piles of logs stretching for hundreds of yards. The part over the brow of the hill, past what I assume is a forestry operations caravan was however, untouched by the loggers and was a mecca for both Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals. Both species were favouring a sunny patch of brambles for feeding and a patch of bracken just opposite for basking.

I saw around 8 White Admirals along the main ride, about half in this area, with one even taking a liking to the gravel path beside the log piles, There were slightly more Silver-washed Fritillaries (around 10), mostly males but including one mating pair (already!). Another intrusive male was making a nuisance of himself for a while (see thumbnail below) - or rather intent on "joining" the action would be more accurate!

An inquisitive young Roe deer buck, which stopped and stared just 20 yards from me on the track, completed a very eventful and memorable hour.

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



10 June 2011 - Making The Best Of The Sunshine Between The Showers

The current spell of less than summery weather meant it was a case of trying to dodge the showers this afternoon, in and around the New Forest. In view of the weather, I decided against being over ambitious by avoiding woodland sites for the more flamboyant species (like White Admiral) which are just emerging and instead take the more conservative option of heaths and meadows.

Alan Thornbury's Hampshire Butterflies

A walk around Beaulieu Heath produced a number of "pockets" of Silver-studded Blues, not in abundance by any means, but easy enough to find nevertheless. I have even seen this species fly in rain, but my time spent there was at least dry with some sunshine, unlike the journey to it, when the heavens opened!

It was then on to a site which I have not visited for a couple of years - Roydon Common which is just outside the New Forest boundary. It used to have a good colony of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - and they are still present, but numbers seem to be falling. I only saw 5 today, all near the top end, whereas they used to be much more widely distributed. It's not clear why they seem to be declining here (and my observation is consistent with BC records) - perhaps the site is becoming too dry.

For me, one good thing about the present spell of generally cool and unsettled weather, is that the butterfly season is no longer racing away, and the main summer flight season is building steadily, like it should!

4 photos of Silver-studded Blue and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (a slightly faded female) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



6 June 2011 - June Gap Over And Month Has Barely Begun!

In the last few days the first reports have been received of 6 summer species on the wing in Hampshire, including White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary and White-letter Hairstreak. These are species we would not normally expect to see until around the middle of the month (e.g. 2nd or 3rd week). Their early appearance indicates that the so called "June gap" between spring and summer butterflies is already over and we can look forward to a very early summer season. I note also on BC branch websites that a number of field trips are organised for late June/early July, oriented to some of these species. With perhaps the exception of Silver-washed Fritillary, which has a long flight season, some of these outings will find their target species well past their best and into the tail of their flight periods.

Whilst in the past, I was only too eager to "get out there" and perhaps contribute to the first sightings reports, I now adopt a more measured approach with the aim to visit one or two sites I have not visited before, and this best done further into the flight periods. I am still reminiscing about last week's excellent visit to Somerset, which also included a detour to the Heddon Valley, over the border in Devon, which I had not visited before. I had the pleasure there of seeing a small number of very fresh High Brown Fritillaries in a steep-sided coastal valley, leading to a vivid blue sea. The only disappointment was that none presented a photo opportunity, so the experience remains an enchanting memory.

4 June 2011 - A Polden Hill And An Exmoor Combe

After a period of relative inactivity with regard to my butterfly outings, yesterday I hit the road once again, destination Somerset, in search of Lepidoptera. The title should give you a clue about my target species for the day. The Polden Hill was Collard Hill for Large Blue and the Exmoor Combe was Bin Combe for Heath Fritillary.

Alan Thornbury's Hampshire Butterflies

I had seen from the National Trust blog pages that Large Blue were on the wing (although it's only a few days into their flight season) and I was also concerned that, this being a very early season, Heath Fritillaries might be getting past their best - I needn't have worried.

It being such a splendid day with virtually wall to wall sunshine and temperatures reaching the mid-twenties, I reckoned a call into Collard hill in the morning was a good strategy. It was a relatively short stop but I managed a couple of Large Blue sightings both on the approach to and on the main Large Blue slope. One paused long enough to feed on Wild Thyme for a photo - a male I believe as females are more heavily marked. There were many more Common Blues than Large Blues, but once you get your eye in it's not difficult to tell the difference in flight. As usual of course, with the warm sun, the Large Blues tend to land with closed wings. On my way back, from Exmoor, I called at Collard Hill again in the late afternoon (thinking it might have cooled down - it hadn't!) but I was lucky to witness a female Large Blue egg laying on thyme on the main down. It was reported that around 12 eggs had been laid on different plants over an extended period.

During the middle part of the day, I travelled on to Bin Combe on Exmoor, which is one of several heathery combes around Dunkery Beacon (the highest point on Exmoor), where Heath Fritillaries can be found. It's not an easy site, having quite steep slopes and few footpaths, but there were plenty of Heath Fritillaries, mainly fresh males. Nevertheless it's a beautiful spot with a gurgling stream in the bottom and on reflection was worth the effort. After walking several hundred yards along the combe, but well above the valley bottom, my estimate is that there must be several scores of Heath Fritillaries there, but having satisfied myself of that, I stayed towards the head of the combe, where it is more open and the slopes are less steep - and still plenty of Heath Fritillaries. The Heath Fritillary, which is noticeably darker than our other small fritillaries, tend not to fly far, although on a steep hillside, a few yards for them is a major exertion for the observer! They were very active in the sunshine, voraciously taking nectar, resting on bracken or chasing each other. I noticed a couple of patrolling Small pearl-bordered Fritillaries also in the combe, occasionally being chased by Heaths!

5 photos of Large Blue And Heath Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the female Large Blue below which had been egg-lying. [Click here](#) for Bin Combe visit photo diary.



31 May 2011 - 'Thriving' Glanville Colony Just Over The Hampshire Border

I do not normally comment on butterfly sightings where a species has been "unofficially introduced" to a site where it has not previously been recorded or has become extinct. On balance, the practice of such uncontrolled introductions has more disadvantages than advantages, and is to be discouraged. It may also be illegal.

Nevertheless, I confess to being intrigued by the existence of a Glanville colony at the Wrecclesham Sand Pit in Surrey, literally just over the border from Hampshire and reported on the Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch website in mid-May. This colony was introduced unofficially some 9 years ago, and what is even more intriguing, is that it appears to be thriving, with hundreds of Glanvilles on the wing.

The small colony of Glanville Fritillary at Hurst Castle in Hampshire is believed to be the result of natural colonisation.

28 May 2011 - Catching Up With What's Been Going On

I have returned from a short break and am now catching up with what's been going on locally and further afield. In Hampshire, despite the report of a Grayling being seen, it seems to have been a relatively quiet week, consistent with the period at the end of the flight season for many spring butterflies and the start of the main summer broods.

Scouring branch websites a little further afield, it's clear that the 2011 season continues at rapid pace and is still typically 1-2 weeks earlier than normal, although the current period of unsettled weather may tend to put the brake on slightly. As an example of continued early emergences, both Dark Green and High Brown Fritillaries are already on the wing in Devon, and I would not be surprised to see reports from Hampshire of summer butterflies such as White Admiral, Silver-washed and Dark Green Fritillaries within the next week or two.

I had hoped my time out would not be completely butterfly free, having spent a few days in Scotland. However, my hopes of seeing Chequered Skipper were completely thwarted by virtually continuous inclement weather. The closest I came was to visit the Allt Mhuic BC reserve in the Highlands, late one afternoon when spotting with rain and the air temperature registering just 10 degrees C. The reserve was very wet underfoot after all the rain in NW Scotland, but I am still pleased to have visited it, if only to experience its environment and habitat (and I will return another year!).

I often build an imaginary picture in my mind of what a new location will be like, and it usually turns out to be quite different from expectations, as was the case here. I imagined the reserve would be more wooded, rather than an essentially open hillside on both sides of a small ravine with a small wooded area on the lower slopes (see thumbnail below). Nevertheless, a stunning view over Loch Arkaig!



20 May 2011 - Quiet Time On Old Winchester Hill

The 2011 season so far has been phrenetic with many species already emerged by mid-May. Hence a gentle walk on Old Winchester Hill late this afternoon, covering both the bottom of the car park slope and the south facing field close to the fort, made a welcome change. Quiet would also be the adjective to describe butterfly activity there too, although it was cloudy most of the time.

I was of course keeping my eyes peeled for Adonis Blue, whose fortunes at this site probably hang by a thread, and today provided no good news on that front - none seen. The most numerous species were Common Blue (some fresh) and Small Heath. I also saw several Small Coppers, a single faded Green Hairstreak and a few whites, but curiously not a single Nymphalid.

Normally early June is the quiet time in Hampshire for butterflies, with no new species emerging and a time when I sometimes take a break from frequent updates to the website. However, the quiet period has come early this year (despite Silver-studded Blue having just been recorded in the New Forest!) so it is time to take a few days off and recharge my batteries. As a consequence, I may not be able to respond so quickly to messages sent via the contact form. My few days off will (I hope) not be entirely spent in butterfly wilderness, but we'll see.

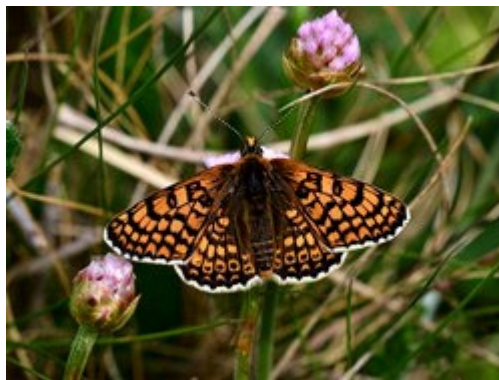
18 May 2011 - Hampshire Glanvilles Doing OK

On my way home almost two weeks ago (on 6 May), I visited Hurst Castle to see how the fledgling Glanville Fritillary colony is doing there. I managed to miss them last year, as I suspect that the flight period for this small colony is very short, and they disperse rather quickly.

As reward for the mile long trek along the shingle spit, I was delighted to see around 8 Glanvilles on the meadow by the ferryboat landing, including 2 females. Being a rather breezy day by the Solent, they tended to seek the cover of the grasses most of the time, occasionally taking nectar from thrift and even engaging in courtship.

Being such a small site, the longevity of this colony is by no means assured, especially as normally Glanvilles require areas where the earth is being continually disturbed (like the chines on the IoW). However, I'm confident that at least next year's generation at Hurst is assured.

I have delayed this posting in line with my fragile sites policy until after the peak flight period. 4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the one below.



13 May 2011 - Adonis Doing Well At Martin Down And More Duke Success In Bentley!

I made my first visit of the season to Martin Down NNR this afternoon. After travelling through a band of thickening cloud around Southampton, I was pleased to see decent amounts of milky blue sky as I reached Martin Down. Time was quite short, so only explored the central sections of the Bokerley Ditch (due west of Martin village). The shining electric blue beacons belonging to male Adonis Blues were encountered regularly during my walk beside the ditch, as well as a few females and a mating pair. In all around 15 males were seen and 3 females. There were also many small butterflies zipping about in and around the ditch, including Small Blue, Brown Argus, Grizzled Skipper, Small Heath and one very fresh Large Skipper. A few Dingy Skippers were encountered on the grassy tracks from Martin village and a single Green Hairstreak.

On the way back I made a detour to the north end of Bentley Wood, where Duke of Burgundy are regularly reported. On a north facing, primrose rich slope in the Richwellsted Copse, I only found one Duke, but at least managed a photo this time (unlike the one I saw in Eastern Clearing at the weekend). Dukes have been on the wing for around 4 weeks now, and whilst woodland sites are later, I was envisaging they might not be around for much longer. However, we should be OK for another couple of weeks, judging by the condition of the male seen today.

3 photos of Adonis Blue and one of Duke Of Burgundy posted to Recent Photos gallery.



11 May 2011 - Marsh Fritillaries Flying Very Early In Wiltshire Meadow

On Sunday, I also visited a Marsh Fritillary site over the border in Wiltshire - it is a site I visit most years but is fragile so I don't openly publish the location on the web (but you can contact me). The site is located in a damp meadow and excelled itself - as well as 8 Marsh Fritillaries, I also saw Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Brown Argus and even a Bee Hawk moth (not sure which variety) "buzzing" from flower to flower.

The Marsh Fritillaries all seemed to be males and quite variable in size, boldness of pattern and colouring. Whilst some were fresh, there were others clearly several days old - indeed it would not surprise me if emergence began the previous weekend in April! I will clearly need to review the flight period chart on my website, since this is the second very early season we have experienced in 5 years and hence 2007 can no longer be considered as a "one off".

3 photos of Marsh Fritillary and 1 of Brown Argus posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



8 May 2011 - Another Productive Visit To The Clearing After The Rain Clears

It was certainly somewhat damper and cooler conditions in Bentley Wood this afternoon compared to my previous visit of two weeks ago under a blazing sun. After the welcome rain overnight, the sun was in evidence again, albeit occasionally obscured by cloud, and the Eastern Clearing was looking very lush and inviting. Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, their colour now noticeably fading, were encountered regularly, skimming low over the vegetation.

However, my main target today was their smaller cousin, the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Their size and fresher, brighter appearance made them quite easy to distinguish as well as their clear preference for the damper areas towards the far end of the clearing. Around 6 Small Pearls were seen in this area, all quite fresh - and that's not all. For the first time in several years I connected with 3 other species in this area on the same visit - Duke Of Burgundy (1), Grizzled Skipper (3) and Dingy Skipper (1). 3 photos of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the one below.



6 May 2011 - Warm, Dry Spring Not Producing Bumper Crop Of Wall Brown?

The warm and sunny spring seems to be generally good news for our spring butterflies, with many emerging very early and doing well. The Wall butterfly is a heat and sun loving butterfly, so I was hoping the prolonged fine weather would also be good news for this species, which has declined dramatically in the south of England in recent years. Well it still might be, however a short visit to Keyhaven this afternoon and a walk along the ancient highway (SZ313921) did not produce the bumper crop I had been hoping for. Yes I did see Wall - 3 to be precise and all males, travelling in both directions along the track, stopping to bask briefly on the gravel before moving on or flying over the fence by the waterway.

Wall sightings from the Isle of Wight and Sussex are not yet conclusive on how well the species is faring this spring. It will therefore be interesting to see how reported sightings in Hampshire and neighbouring areas evolve over the next couple of weeks. 2 photos posted to recent Photos Gallery, including the one below.



1 May 2011 - Forest Pearls Enjoying a Great Season

After a busy couple of weeks, keeping up with the rapidly progressing butterfly season, I am taking a break from butterfly outings this bank holiday to await the next tranche of species to emerge (and besides I have plenty of other things to do!). I read with some surprise of a report of 300 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in 3 inclosures of the New Forest (what I call the East Inclosures, near Brockenhurst). I guess however, I am not completely surprised as this seems to be turning out to be a very good butterfly season so far.

So, on the way back home last Thursday (28th April), I made a late afternoon stop at the New Copse Inclosure. I could not compete with the report of hundreds of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, probably from inclosures north of the railway, but I did count about 16 Pearls, with most of the action centred close to the first clearing along the main east-west track. In the late afternoon, they were content to bask on last year's dead vegetation, or on the path or feed on bugle. I did come across a pair basking just one foot apart (thumbnail) in the clearing itself. Based on this visit to New Copse, forest operations seem to have disrupted the Pearls freedom to travel the wide track margins (piles of timber are good obstacles!), however of the 16 seen, two were further on into the inclosure.

3 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the pair below.



28 April 2011 - New Woodland Site For Me Produces Duke And Grizzled

I made the most of unscheduled travels to the north of the county to visit a Bradley Wood, just north of Whitchurch. After several years of visiting the best known sites in Hampshire, it's always nice to tread some new ground, and this wood is a little gem. The southern end of Bradley Wood has a very wide glade where scrub (e.g. brambles) is interspersed with a good variety of flora including primrose and bluebells (see thumbnail below).

I am aware Duke of Burgundy are regularly recorded here and was delighted to find a male just a few yards after entering the wood in the scrub on the right hand side (SU459516). It was darting around as Dukes do, stopping to bask on vegetation, including primrose leaves. I was hoping to see a few more, but assume it is very early in the season for woodland Dukes. To compensate, I also saw singletons of Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak during my short walk along the main ride, exploring the margins and scrub on either side, up to the point where the trees crowd in (about quarter mile!).

What is perhaps surprising is to only find one of each of these small butterflies. If anyone visits this lovely wood in the next couple of weeks, I'd be interested in feedback (via the contact form) on any further sightings of these species (please send all records also to the branch website). There were also several Orange Tips, Brimstones and Peacocks to be seen.

2 photos of Duke Of Burgundy (on primrose) and Grizzled Skipper posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



27 April 2011 - Spring 2011 Heading For The Record Books

A very dry second half of the winter, followed by a prolonged spell of very warm, sunny weather in April is causing something of a frenzy of early emergences and the premature peaking of flight periods. My estimate is that flight periods for spring butterflies are peaking close to two weeks earlier than usual for recent seasons, with the exception of 2007 which was also very early.

As a consequence, flight periods are also likely to burn themselves out prematurely if the good weather continues or, perhaps more likely, to be brought to an abrupt end if the weather becomes much cooler and unsettled. I still

expect (and hope!) that the law of averages will tend to prevail and that by late June, the season will be only a few days to a week earlier than usual.

One benefit of the early season is that the possibility of unusual later broods increases. This seems now quite likely for Duke Of Burgundy, where the flight period on some downland sites has already peaked before the end of April. Another less obvious example could be Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, where a single second brood individual was reported in late August last year from Roydon Common (and also one on the IoW). An earlier season suggests this could happen again, with more than the odd individual recorded.

Finally, on the subject of early seasons, a brief lunchtime visit today to the chalk scrub (SU635066) at the foot of the Paulsgrove Quarry face, produced 3 Small Blue and 1 Common Blue. This is the first time I have recorded either of these species in April!

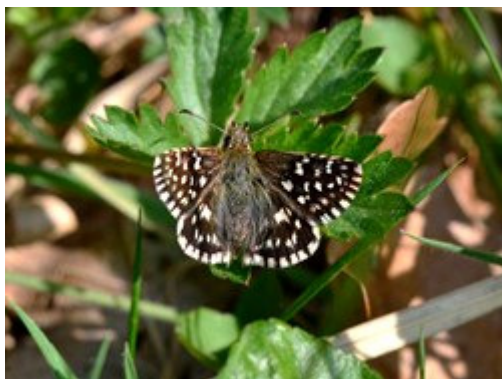
3 photos of Small Blue posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



25 April 2011 - Grizzled On the Up In Botley Wood

After a busy Easter weekend, it was nice to unwind for an hour or so during a late afternoon stroll in nearby Botley Wood. I wanted to check out the status of Grizzled Skippers there, bearing in mind a couple of years ago their numbers were dangerously low after a series of damp winters. I am pleased to say their fortunes are definitely on the up now, with a total of 9 seen today in two different locations either side of the electricity substation access road (east-west ride at SU546102 and open swathe at SU546098). Please note that the electricity substation access road is private, but is crossed by public rights of way.

The habitat in these two areas looks very Grizzled friendly, with plentiful bugle (nectar) and Tormential and/or Wild Strawberry (foodplants). Indeed Bugle and Tormential were often growing together, as in the thumbnail below. Two Grizzled Skipper photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



23 April 2011 - Bentley's Pearls Give Me The Run-around Before Newly Emerged Male Provides A Break!

I noted that Pearl-bordered Fritillary had been reported recently from the New Forest, so was expecting to see a few at Bentley Wood during a midday visit today. In truth, I saw around 16 during an exploration of centred on the Eastern Clearing. They all seemed to be males, characteristic of their season being just a few days old and were observed mainly around or adjoining the northern and eastern sections of the clearing. The very warm weather is causing something of a major emergence and for much of the time they were giving me the run-around, barely settling for more than a second or two, or chasing each other.

The highlight was finding (after an exhausting hour!) a male just emerged, initially hanging underneath a bramble leaf, antennae right back and in the final stages of expanding its wings (visibly), before flight. After a few low level and uncertain flutterings, it finally took off after about 15 minutes, and wasted little time in starting to chase other fritillaries! Soon afterwards, another perched male was seen hanging under a grass stem with wings closed - probably another of today's crop of newly emerged fritillaries.

Before leaving, I explored further north, where a further 2 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were seen around the edge of a different cleared area, and probably one that will be colonised in due course, as violets and nectar plants gain a foothold. 4 Photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the newly emerged male below. [Click here](#) for visit photo diary.



20 April 2011 - Making Hay Again To Find 3 Priority Species Living Together

I mentioned yesterday that it was good to "make hay" whilst the fair weather prevails, and a brief visit to Butser Hill (Rake Bottom) today produced 3 of Hampshire's priority species within a few square yards of the metal gate at SU708206. Within 20 yards of the gate on the downland side, I saw fresh Dingy Skipper (1), fresh Duke of Burgundy (1) and 5 Grizzled Skippers. I did not have time to explore further up the valley, but normally all three species will be found within yards of the valley floor in greater numbers than here (the main Duke colony being at the far end of the valley). 2 photos (Duke and Dingy) posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



19 April 2011 - Prolonged Warm Weather May Have Sting In The Tail

The period of warm, sunny weather we are enjoying at present (which is forecast to last into Easter weekend) will be accelerating the development of our butterflies, with early emergences becoming the pattern. I fully expect Pearl-bordered Fritillary to be reported from Hampshire within the next days and some other species, normally associated with early or even mid-May, to make an appearance before April is out.

Whilst this is great on the face of it, the down side will be that the flight period for many species will end prematurely as they burn themselves out in the fine weather. This could leave a long summer with few new species, or even worse, that the 2011 summer follows that of 2007 which also produced a warm, sunny spring, only to be followed from June onwards by dreadful weather.

Nevertheless, it's a case of making hay while the sun shines, and a short visit to Portsdown Hill today produced 8 Green Hairstreaks in one patch of bushes and scrub, most deciding to chase each other or settle above head height, rather than be considerate for the camera. There were also many Orange Tips (more than 20) including a few females, so it looks like a good season for them.

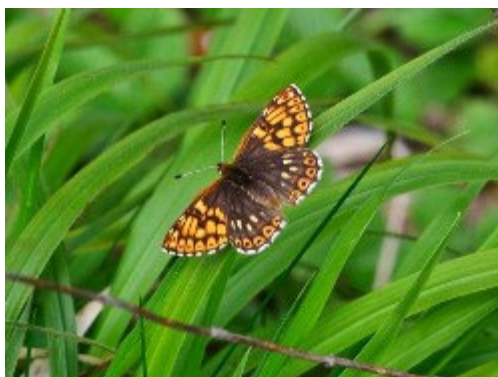
1 Green Hairstreak photo posted to recent photos gallery.



15 April 2011 - Duchess Of Noar Hill Is The Perfect Hostess

All good hosts should welcome their guests into their home - and in the case of one Duke, or rather Duchess of Burgundy, she had made the effort to come out of her normal dwelling place on the Noar Hill reserve to greet me. Indeed she had come a long way down the track leading to the road. So what a good start to my visit this afternoon, bearing in mind it was quite overcast when I had left the south coast to head north. On reaching Noar Hill, however, the white cloud was thinning in places and there was little wind - quite reasonable conditions for Dukes in fact, even if there were few other butterflies about. The reserve is looking in good condition, with abundant cowslips, grazing cattle and benefitting from some judicious clearance work during the winter.

In addition to the female on the track, I saw five further Dukes (all males) around the central chalk pits - two fresh males engaged briefly in a spiralling aerial duel. In the weak sunshine, the Dukes were happy just to bask on low vegetation with open wings, making occasional short flights and then manoeuvring on landing into the best aspect for the sun. 4 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery, including the hostess female below. [Click here](#) for visit photo diary.



8 April 2011 - Grizzled's On MHD Wasting No Time!

The spring butterfly emergence is really gathering pace now with a few days of super weather to give it a boost. The butterflies on Magdalen Hill Down were making the most of it this afternoon, or in the case of two Grizzled Skippers on the original reserve, making next year's generation! It's very unusual to see only a mating pair and no others, but that's what happened. Whilst the original reserve scored with the mating Grizzled's, I did not see any Green Hairstreak there - they were mainly along the western edge of the extension and also along its northern boundary track (6 and 2 seen respectively). At one point 3 hairstreaks were flitting amongst low vegetation at the SW corner of the extension. It's still very early in the season for both species so I guess a few quirky things can happen.

There were good numbers of Orange Tips too on the reserve (11 seen), but photos of them had to wait a little later, until I stopped off at Portsdown Hill on the way back. Temperatures were just beginning to cool by then and the normally very active fresh males were just beginning to take more prolonged breaks from flying and exploring places to roost.

6 photos posted to Recent Photos Gallery.



25 March 2011 - Grandfather's Bottom - An Enjoyable Location For A Spring Walk

With the fine weather continuing and the days becoming warmer (for the moment at least), a walk along Grandfather's Bottom at Butser Hill had all the ingredients I was looking for this afternoon. The track which approaches it from the north is usually quite muddy in early spring, but made for easy walking today with only the odd damp patch. The dry environment will mean that vegetation will warm up quicker and that means, far from a late spring, this might actually turn out to be a slightly early one for butterflies. In the last days for example, Holly Blue and Orange Tip have been recorded in the county, which makes my previous prediction that we could be in double figures in terms of first sightings by mid-April, look like a safe bet to say the least.

I did not have any joy with first sightings today (not that I expected to) as I have already seen all the hibernators, but I did get chance to get accustomed to a new DSLR, this time with a 150mm macro lens to provide a good

working distance - very useful for flighty Nymphalids. There were reasonable numbers of butterflies about and I had little difficulty in obtaining decent photos of Comma, Peacock and Brimstone.

There were plenty of other things to see and hear along the valley as well, including the frequent call of pheasants on nearby farmland and 3 roe deer grazing amongst the scrub, which scampered back up the hill into cover, displaying their very conspicuous white rump patches as they went. The valley, with Butser Hill towering at its head, also provides some of the most dramatic scenery in Hampshire.

3 photos to Recent Photos Gallery.

19 March 2011 - Spring Sunshine Brings Out The Butterflies

It is really starting to feel like spring has now arrived with many more flowers and blossom in evidence and plenty of sunshine. The decent spell of weather is also bringing out not only the hibernating butterflies (Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Brimstone, Peacock and Comma), but I note from the branch website that 3 emerged species have also been recorded recently in the county (Speckled Wood, Large White, Small White).

I have taken my first forays of the season on to Portsdown Hill, recording on different days all the hibernators, including the Small Tortoiseshell shown below photographed just this morning. It was flitting low along newly widened paths, stopping frequently to bask in the warm rays of the sun or feed on violets or dandelions. Larger resolution photo posted to the recent photos gallery.



4 March 2011 - A Colder Than Average Winter (Slightly!)

From a meteorological point of view, the winter is now over and spring began on 1st March. The change of season also allowed the seasonal statistics to be collated, which showed that the winter just gone was 1.3 degrees colder than average. However, it certainly does not feel as though the period since the beginning of the year has been unduly cold, so I guess this is a consequence of the bitter December.

On the local butterfly front, all the hibernators have now made an appearance in Hampshire (Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma and Brimstone), the last to show being a Comma on 24 February at Hill Head. Probably the first migrant - a Painted Lady - has also been recorded in the county. So now we have up to a month to wait for the first emerged species to show - and quite probably significantly less than that.

Based on the state of spring flowers, I do not expect this season to be a late one, and suspect by mid- April at least half a dozen emerged species will have been seen, including Grizzled Skipper, Holly Blue, Green Hairstreak and Duke of Burgundy and quite possibly into double figures.

I have not been completely idle during the quiet period in one sense, having just upgraded my camera gear - well some of it was five years old - so I'm looking forward to getting out there amongst the action instead of taking pics of spring flowers in the garden!

18 February 2011 - Evidence of Spring Already!

Despite the severe winter weather suffered in December, the relatively benign conditions since should mean that Spring 2011 is not going to be late, and could even be slightly earlier than usual. There are several reports of daffodils in bloom from Southern counties (including the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in Hampshire), with blooms as early as New Year's Day in Brixton, Devon.

Heading on further southwest, the first newly emerged butterfly of 2011 was recorded on the Isles of Scilly on 13 February, less than 1 week ago. Just the very name of those beautiful islands, which I have visited twice, will get me waxing lyrical - oh and by the way, it was a Speckled Wood!

28 January 2011 - A Peek Behind The Curtain Of The 2011 Season

From the title of this blog, you might think I could be tempted to do some crystal ball gazing on the coming butterfly season. Well I'm not going to be tempted on that one, for the moment at least. Instead I thought I would air my thoughts on a slightly different way of updating this blog when the season gets going, aimed at spreading the effort over a few days (which will help me) but also adding a slightly new dimension.

I will still continue to update the blog as often as practical, typically once but occasionally twice per week. Updates will normally follow my visits to butterfly sites in Hampshire, supplemented by a few forays outside the county. I will however tend to reduce the quantity of blog text compared to previous years but enhance the content on some occasions with a visit photo diary, in the form of a slide-show (flash content). This will include not only butterfly photos, but also landscape and local habitat photos taken during the visit, with captions. The butterfly photos will also be uploaded to the recent photos gallery as normal.

The other significant change is that updates may be spread over a few days (normally commencing on the day of the visit) and indicated in a single dated entry on the What's New page, which will be amended as content is added.

15 January 2011 - Undiscovered Brown Hairstreak Colonies In Hants?

I was interested to read on the Sussex Branch website about their Brown Hairstreak winter egg hunt, which is now about midway through its duration, and is proving quite successful in better understanding the range of the species there. Brown Hairstreak eggs (when you find them!) are quite conspicuous on the bare blackthorn bushes, being white in colour and usually laid at branch intersections a few feet above ground. See thumbnails below taken by myself at Noar Hill in January 2007, the egg being the white dot at the centre of the photo on the left, with close-up on the right.



Brown Hairstreak Eggs Can Be Quite Conspicuous On The Bare Blackthorn Branches

It has long been considered that in Hampshire too, Brown Hairstreak are more widely distributed than records indicate, and the next couple of months, before the blackthorn begins to shoot, is the time to find evidence in the form of their eggs.

Alan Thornbury's Hampshire Butterflies

The known population nuclei in Hampshire are in the Noar Hill/Selborne area in Easts Hants and in the Shipton Bellinger/Cholderton area in the NW of the county. These populations are actually metapopulations, thinly spread over several square miles, with the blackthorn rich hedgerows serving both as habitat and as thoroughfares between small colonies. Both the areas mentioned are on chalk dominated geology, with areas of regenerating blackthorn scrub interspersed with woodland, arable land, and unmanicured hedgerows.

The butterfly may be present in other chalk dominated areas of the county, such as within the South Downs National Park which stretches from the SE of the county, almost to Winchester. Open woodland areas outside the South Downs, where there is generous blackthorn, either within or perhaps around the margins could also be guarding a few little secrets in the form of Brown Hairstreak eggs. Walking along tracks and lanes where blackthorn is present in the hedgerows and where there are plenty of trees or woodland in the vicinity might also hold secrets.

So, if you are looking for something different to do one fine winter's day, why not go and explore, perhaps targeting somewhere you know that seems to basically fit the requirements. If you do find any Brown Hairstreak eggs, please take a note of the location (ideally the grid ref) and habitat. Any records should be reported as usual to the branch recorder or I can pass them on - just use my contact form. Happy egg hunting