

dilettante

by dilettante, 16-May-11 01:33 AM GMT

Introducing myself

I thought I'd start one of these diary pages.

Inspired over the winter by Patrick Barkham's *"The Butterfly Isles"* and David Newland's *"Discover Butterflies in Britain"*, I told myself I'd make more of an effort to get to see different butterflies this year. The good weather has helped get that off to a great start, and I've already seen many species that I hadn't seen for a number of years.

I enjoy photography, so try to capture the butterflies I see on film (well, on sensor). I've not been sure which forum is best for posting pictures (is it Photography, or Sightings?), so having this diary page will allow me to post the pictures here.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 16-May-11 01:43 AM GMT

Sat 14th May 2011

Decided to look around my local patch of scrub, as I thought there would be common blues there, and hadn't seen many of them so far this year. Saw a female blue almost as soon as I arrived, then lots more that I weren't sure whether they were CBs or Brown Argus. A few posed cooperatively for the camera. Bright blue males confirmed the presence of CB at least, but I was not completely confident in declaring BAs too. A subsequent post in the Identification forum confirmed they were indeed Brown Argus. Not much else to be seen: one GVWhite, a couple of Speckled Woods, and a Red Admiral.

Brown Argus male



© dilettante

Common Blue female...



© dilettante

...and male



© dilettante

We (my kids and I) then took ourselves to a chalk pit in the next village, but it had turned grey and windy by then, so nothing to be seen except one Small Heath which flew briefly, then skulked in the grass:



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 16-May-11 01:55 AM GMT

Sunday 15th May 2011

The weather forecast promised sunny intervals, so I decided to drive to Totternhoe Knolls near Dunstable to look for Small Blues. I'd seen our largest butterfly (Swallowtail) last weekend, so now it was time for the smallest. When I arrived the weather was grey and windy, some spots of rain, so my chances of seeing anything flying looked remote. I soon encountered a large group of people, one of whom said they had seen two SBs roosting in the grass by the main path. I had a look where they'd been but failed to find anything, but felt encouraged to know the SBs were at least around somewhere. A couple of hours wandering around the reserve yielded no butterflies at all apart from a solitary Common Blue flying past. I decided to head back to the path where I knew the SBs had been seen to give it a longer look. I saw one more CB on the way back (roosting), and eventually found a Small Blue roosting in the grass by the path. I'd forgotten how tiny they are – no wonder I missed it first time, and it was easy to mistake for a petal at first glance.

At this point I regretted not bringing a tripod. There was not a lot of light around, and the SB wasn't going anywhere, so I would have had plenty of time to compose a shot. I did the best I could manage handheld, resting the camera on my camera bag. I used a flash, which never gives very natural looking shots, but it's better than shaky blurry ones.

I think this one's a female (?)



© dilettante

Heading back to the car, I spotted one more. A male this time, I think:



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by Pete Eeles, 16-May-11 04:03 AM GMT

There's nowt wrong with those shots! In terms of sex, one differentiation (depending on the species) is that the male abdomen is longer, whereas the female abdomen is shorter (since it is full of eggs and therefore shaped more like a rugby ball). In which case, I'd concur that the first shot is probably female and the second male.

However, you'd probably have seen other clues as to the sex while on site. Small Blue females are quite sedentary, while the males are certainly more active. And the upperside is a dead giveaway – with the male exhibiting a very dark blue, whereas the female is more brown.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 16-May-11 04:25 AM GMT

Thanks Pete

However, you'd probably have seen other clues as to the sex while on site. Small Blue females are quite sedentary, while the males are certainly more active. And the upperside is a dead giveaway

Neither of these was at all active nor showed any sign of wanting to show me their uppersides.

Re: dilettante

by alex mclennan, 18-May-11 04:01 AM GMT

Anyone visiting Totternhoe Knolls to see small blues should walk to the left of the main path underneath the white 'cliff face' where there is a new wire fence. This is the 'traditional' site and when I visited last week, small blues were plentiful along the fence line as were dingy skippers.

Alex

dilettante

by dilettante, 25-May-11 03:09 AM GMT

Tuesday 24th May 2011

Today I went to Hockley Woods in Essex in search of the Heath Fritillary. The Cambs & Essec BC site said that 10 had been seen on Saturday, so I figured I should be able to find them and it would be worth the 60 mile trip. When I arrived, I realised Hockley Woods is huge, and I didn't really know where to look. I shouldn't have worried though, because I saw a HF after about 10 mins, on one of the main paths alongside a sunny coppiced area with plenty of cow-wheat. That was soon followed by a second, so I spent the rest of my three hour stay in that patch. The HFs were plentiful. Not swarming (as Patrick Barkham (The Butterfly Isles) describes them in Blean Woods in 2009), but I didn't have to look hard to spot them.

This was my first encounter with HFs (in this country at least) and what a delight they are. Graceful flight, and frequent settlers to enable a close view and photographs. I found they tended to settle with open wings at first, then slowly closed them over about 5 seconds, so getting a 'full ups' shot with wings flat was seemingly impossible.

Here are some of my many photos from the day. None is perfect, but a good catch for me. Please correct me if my captions (sexes) are wrong. Other comments also welcome:

#1 Male



© dilettante

#2 Male [corrected since first posting]



© dilettante

#3 Mating pair #1



© dilettante

#4 Mating pair #2



© dilettante

#5 Switching from a 180mm to a 24mm lens. Man, you have to get close with this thing! I was almost touching the butterflies with the front of the lens



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by millerd, 25-May-11 03:37 AM GMT

I think the second one is male as well. In my experience the female has a shorter, plumper and more pointed abdomen (almost shaped like a wasp's) whereas the male has a straight cylinder. The difference is especially marked when the females are burdened with eggs. In addition (again in my limited experience) the males tend to be uniform in colour, whereas in females there may be several subtly different orange shades.

A couple of examples from 2nd June last year (same location), both female. The first shows the colour subtleties better, the second the shape of the abdomen.

Dave





Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 25-May-11 03:54 AM GMT

"millerd" wrote:

I think the second one is male as well.

Yes, I think you're right. I definitely saw some that were more obviously female. I'll have to see if I have a photo. Thanks for the correction.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 25-May-11 04:22 AM GMT

This one's a female:



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 26-May-11 12:54 AM GMT

Wednesday 25th May 2011

Made a brief stop at the local patch of scrub where there had been lots of CBs and brown argus on the 14th, and now there were none to be seen. I was

hoping for a Small Copper, which I still haven't seen this year, but to no avail. I did see my first Large Skipper for the year though - a very fresh looking one. I wished I had my camera. Also a Small Heath, which I didn't know could be found there, and a couple of Small Whites busy making more Small Whites.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 05-Jun-11 02:38 AM GMT

Friday 3rd June 2011

I spent the week in Wales, on the Pembrokeshire / Ceridigion border, for a family holiday. I made three trips to Rhos Pil Bach looking for Marsh Fritillaries, only finding a few on the last attempt when the weather was reasonably still, warm and sunny. These specimens looked pretty worn, so I guess I was a bit late in the season:

#1 Marsh Fritillary male



© dilettante

#2 Marsh Fritillary female



© dilettante

Also saw a ton of Small Heaths on the Preseli Hills, but nothing else particularly remarkable. Plenty of Speckled Woods, Small, Green-veined and Large

dilettante

by dilettante, 05-Jun-11 11:39 PM GMT

Sunday 5th June 2011

Encouraged by Jack Harrison's sightings of Black Hairstreaks, and some helpful and detailed info from him via PM (thanks, Jack!), I decided to head to Monk's Wood. It's only about 45mins from me, but for some reason I've never been before. The weather was windy and grey, but quite warm with some sun promised, so I thought it would be worth a try.

As we entered the woods, I was pleased to see so many Speckled Woods and Large Skippers. I don't think I've ever seen so many SWs in one place. Some were even forced to share a leaf 😊

#1 Speckled Wood pair



© dilettante

#2 Large Skipper



© dilettante

After photographing the SWs, I went to head off to the Black Hairstreak hot-spot that Jack had pointed me to, but then spotted this which had been

right next to me all along, at around knee height and not going anywhere:

#3 Black Hairstreak from the right...



© dilettante

#4 ...and the left



© dilettante

What luck! One of those heart-stopping moments, and my first ever confirmed BH.

Eventually I moved on, and saw several (8, I think) more at various blackthorn bushes along the paths, but none came close enough to be photographed. Seeing them fly around the tops of bushes makes it clear why they're called Black Hairstreaks – they do appear almost black, and quite hard to track with the eyes when they go in front of shadowy woodland. Apart from that, it was just one Red Admiral, and a load more SWs and Large Skippers, but an excellent trip overall.

dilettante

by dilettante, 12-Jun-11 02:16 AM GMT

Saturday 11th June 2011

Having seen my first Meadow Browns earlier in the week, I realised I didn't actually have any decent photos of these common, and let's face it rather

dull, butterflies. So I decided to pay a visit to Royston (Therfield) Heath to rectify that. I was also hoping, with little expectation, to see a Marbled White.

MBs were plentiful, but frustratingly hard to photograph. They seem very observant and easily spooked: when they flew they were carried by the wind, and when they landed it was usually deep in long grass. In the end the only place I could successfully photograph them was on a patch of cow parsley in a wooded area, and even here I didn't manage many good shots:

#1 Meadow Brown



© dilettante

In our 90 minutes there we (my son and I) saw a few Common Blues, a very small Brown Argus (it looked almost Small Blue size to me), some Speckled Woods and Large Skippers. Getting hungry for lunch we headed back to the car, about 50m from which we saw a lovely fresh Marbled White. So of course I then had to chase it around mercilessly to catch some photos:

#2 Marbled White



© dilettante

#3 Marbled White (up close with a 24mm lens)



© dilettante

#4 ...and the other side



© dilettante

On the non-butterfly side, I was also very pleased to see a Red Kite. This site is about 10 miles from my home, so nice to know they're in the area.

#5 Red Kite (~1:1 crop, so lots of sharpening artefacts)



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by Susie, 12-Jun-11 06:13 AM GMT

I do like your meadow brown photograph. They are tricky to get a shot of and you've done it very well. 😊

Re: dilettante

by Gruditch, 12-Jun-11 04:37 PM GMT

Agreed, tis an attractive image. 😊

Regards Gruditch

Re: dilettante

by Jack Harrison, 12-Jun-11 04:45 PM GMT

Meadow Browns need a lot really hard work to photograph in sunny weather. Cloudy bright days offer far easier opportunities.

I had heard a rumour that Red Kites are breeding at Therfield so you have been able to offer at least some degree of confirmation.

Jack

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 19-Jun-11 06:46 PM GMT

Saturday 18th June 2011

With the forecast predicting heavy showers and wind, i wasn't going to bother butterflying today. But when it had been bright all morning, I made a late decision to go to Broxbourne Wood to look for White Admirals. I drove through some heavy rain but by the time I got there the sun was shining, and the trees reduced the worst of the wind. Despite that, I didn't see any WAs, which was disappointing. The highlight was a couple of fresh-looking Commas, and a similarly perfect Small Tortoiseshell. Lots of MBs, but surprisingly no Ringlets that I noticed. Several Speckled Woods, one Common Blue, lots of Large Skippers, and a GVWhite complete the not very exciting tally.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 27-Jun-11 06:14 AM GMT

Saturday 25th June 2011

I was down in Hampshire for a family event, but had a couple of hours to spare on Saturday morning, so my brother, my son and I went to join the ever-affable Matthew Oates at Broxhead Common to see the the Silver-studded blues. Despite the weather there were a good many to be seen, some looking a bit tatty, and some fresh. The gloomy skies and windy conditions weren't ideal for photography, but I managed a few. As noted in the SSB topic thread, I didn't see many with obvious studs.

#1 (Not-)Silver-Studded Blue



© dilettante

#2 Head down on the heather



© dilettante

#3 Rather foolishly sitting on a big spider web



© dilettante

There were also a couple of fresh second gen small coppers:

#4 Small copper female



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by Lee Hurrell, 27-Jun-11 09:24 PM GMT

That shot of the SSB on the spider's web looks rather like he's sitting on a map of the cosmos where the lights have gone out.... Still splendid though.

Cheers

Lee

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 28-Jun-11 05:38 AM GMT

Sunday 26th June 2011

Went to Alice Holt (Straits Enclosure) with my family and brother to look for White Admirals, Silver Washed Fritillaries and hopefully Purple Emperors. We met up with Matthew again who was able to show us the best places (and times) to look. The morning heated up very quickly, so all the butterflies were very active and not settling for long for photographs. I took loads, but nothing very spectacular, but I'll post a few here later.

WA were everywhere. It's been a while since I've seen them, so that was a great delight. Similarly the SWFs – such stunning butterflies, beautiful gliders and such a bright orange. We had one glimpse of a PE on the main ride as it zipped past. Then around 1pm we moved half a mile up the road to a known 'master tree' site and witnessed three PEs duelling (or should that be trielling?) above our heads, but no close views. Still great to see, of course.

In addition to the three target species we saw several fresh Red Admirals and Commas, Marbled White, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Green-veined White, Purple Hairstreak and a very sorry-looking Speckled Wood. A great morning all in all.

Re: dilettante

by Wurzel, 28-Jun-11 06:53 AM GMT

Sounds like a great morning butterflying – I too noticed that they were extremely flighty on Sunday – fully charged 😊
Still I'm sure that there will be some great shots to look at later.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 30-Jun-11 06:52 AM GMT

Wednesday 29th June 2011

Following a tip received in the thread [url=http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=5297:206w9x59]"White-letter Hairstreak near Cambridge?"[/url:206w9x59] I went to my local Park and Ride car park after work. I wasn't entirely confident about recognising elm trees, but went along with my camera and a pair of binoculars. Being a P&R site, I was worried about being taken for a bus-spotter 😊

I saw Purple Hairstreaks on some of the old oaks there fairly quickly, but it took me a while to find an elm. I was scanning the trees through binoculars looking for elms, and was about to dismiss one as clearly not-an-elm when I saw a hairstreak duel going on. And then there were more – five or six all flitting around, before settling and becoming invisible. These were on some sort of poplar tree, which threw me, but I soon saw there was a shorter elm tree beneath.

A nice way to spend a sunny hour after work.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 30-Jun-11 07:03 AM GMT

A few underwhelming pics from Sunday at Alice Holt, Hants

#1 Silver-washed Fritillary



© dilettante

#2 Tatty White Admiral



© dilettante

#3 Oversharpened distant Purple Emperor!



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by Wurzel, 30-Jun-11 05:33 PM GMT

You sound a bit unhappy about the PE shot but I really, really like it! I've only ever seen 1 definite and 1 possible, never photographed them (yet) but have read loads about them and your picture matches up with how I imagine them and expect them to be. It seems to be acting in a haughty, aggressive manner – just right for His Nibbs

Cheers

Wurzel

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 30-Jun-11 07:39 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. I'm my own worst critic 😊

dilettante

by dilettante, 03-Jul-11 02:10 AM GMT

Saturday 2nd July, 2011

After a late night dining and drinking with friends, it was a struggle to get out of bed at 6am, but I was determined to get to Fermyn Woods early for the Purple Emperors. I had some useful tips in advance from NickB about where to go, so I had in my mind that I would be in the hot spot nice and early. We (my son and I) got there around 8am, and I soon realised (having parked in the wrong place) that I didn't quite know where I was going after all. Thinking peak PE time was running out, I got a bit stressed as we dithered about trying to get our bearings. In the end, I needn't have worried. As soon as I arrived at the place I'd been seeking (Lady Wood, just south of the main Fermyn Woods), I met someone who confirmed I was in the right place, and a minute or two later a PE landed on the path in front of me. That was the start of an amazing morning with plenty of PE sightings throughout the morning, and some sitting very patiently for photographs, even surrounded by four or five photographers. It was almost too easy!

14+ species in total seen:

- Ringlet (lots)
- Meadow Brown (lots)
- Speckled Wood (2)
- Small Skipper (several)
- Large Skipper (lots)
- Comma (5 or 6)
- Red Admiral (2)
- Small Tortoiseshell (1)
- White Admiral (5-10)
- Silver Washed Fritillary (1)
- Purple Emperor (5-8)
- Purple Hairstreak (several, all up high)
- White-letter Hairstreak (half! - only saw the tip of its wing on a high-up elm leaf)
- Small White, and probable GVWhite (many)

The pick of the many PE photos I took:

#1 Open wings, but no purple



© dilettante

#2 Mmm, horse poo!



© dilettante

#3 That's more like it!



© dilettante

Also saw my first Hummingbird Hawk-moth of the year, and heard a grasshopper warbler. What an amazing sound they make.

Re: dilettante

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-11 04:33 AM GMT

I hope you're happier with those PE shots cos they're great! 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: dilettante

by Neil Freeman, 04-Jul-11 02:12 AM GMT

I am planning to have a drive over to Fermyn tomorrow morning, will be my first time.
I notice you said that you parked in the wrong place. Do you have a tip as to where the right place would be.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: dilettante

by MikeOxon, 04-Jul-11 02:30 AM GMT

On previous visits, I've parked at the entrance to the bridleway, opposite the gliding club, around SP964859. It's a fair distance from the Country Park centre, where there is a cafe.

I have seen plenty of PE along the bridleway (well covered in dog-poo) but I'd be interested to know more about Lady Wood. Do you approach by the same route?

I'm hoping to visit later this week.

Mike

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 04-Jul-11 03:54 AM GMT

Here's a reply I just sent in PM to another member:

Have a look at [url=http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?msid=216000697753131255201.0004a6f4cfb335526ca19&msa=0&ll=52.451668,-0.575838&spn=0.043311,0.077162:1tp0nuud]this map[/url:1tp0nuud].

Park at the green pin, opposite the Gliding club. (I didn't, and wasted some time trying to find my bearings). From there, follow the track into Fermyn Wood, but if you just want PEs, keep going. You'll emerge from the wood and the track goes between two fields. Keep following it and eventually it enters the second wood (Lady Wood). PEs could be anywhere from here on, but I went right at the first fork, and saw my first one shortly afterwards. On the map, I've put purple pins to indicate approximately where I went and saw PEs. As you go along the path, keep your eyes open both for flying PEs and ones that might be already on the ground, especially if there's some fresh horse, dog or fox poo.

The red pin is approximately the location of an elm tree where I saw the White-letter Hairstreak.

Re: dilettante

by MikeOxon, 04-Jul-11 04:50 AM GMT

Many thanks, dilettante,

Last year, I found WLH at the spot you marked (including a very white aberrant) and also PE along the same bridleway. I never went further towards Lady Wood but it seems that is well worth doing!

Mike

Re: dilettante

by Neil Freeman, 04-Jul-11 05:08 AM GMT

Many thanks for that dilettante, very useful.

I am going to drive over early tomorrow morning whilst the weather looks like holding.

Neil.

dilettante

by dilettante, 06-Jul-11 05:08 AM GMT

Monday 4th July 2011

Having read that Chalkhill Blues were out at Devil's Dyke and elsewhere, I decided to check out Therfield Heath after work. After cycling home, I loaded up the car and headed straight out, arriving around 7:30pm, sun getting low in the sky but still quite warm and still. It was lovely being on the hill in the sunshine with very few people about, just a few late dog walkers and golfers. I headed straight for the hillside where I normally find CHBs and hunted for twenty minutes or so to no avail, so decided to head back towards the car and try to photograph some Marbled Whites. Then I spotted a pair of CHBs on a grass stem, looking like they were ready for bed: an opportunity for some underside shots:



© dilettante

Suddenly the male flew off and landed at the top of a nearby grass stem, turned upside down and opened his wings to the setting sun. Fantastic!



© dilettante



© dilettante

... and from the other side:



© dilettante

What a treat to see these beauties on such a beautiful calm evening. Normally I've only ever seen CHBs in the middle of the day when they zip around and never settle, and certainly not with open wings for any length of time.

After that I had a go at a roosting Marbled White:



© dilettante

... and with a 24mm lens. I always think of these wide angles as 'Padfield shots' 😊



© dilettante

A glorious evening. I went home very happy (but hungry).

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 10-Jul-11 01:36 AM GMT

Saturday 9th July 2011

Earlier in the week I went to Magog Down just outside Cambridge to look for Essex Skippers. I was fairly sure I'd seen some, but didn't have my camera so couldn't get independent confirmation. So today I went back to get some photographic evidence for the good people of ukbutterflies to judge.

The weather wasn't great: rather windy and occasional showers, but some sunshine in between. Walking along the side of the down (a large area of open grassland, formerly arable farmland) we saw a tremendous number of fresh Gatekeepers. Also Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Marble White, and many small (with a small s) skippers. Closer examinations showed most of the skippers to be Small (with a big S), but some looked like definite Essex candidates. They were hard to photograph: either they were being blown in the wind making them impossible to follow with the eye, or they were on top of grass stems swaying in the breeze and preventing steady focus, or they were deep in the grass making it hard to get a clear line of sight. Eventually I managed a few not very good shots, but good enough to post in the Identification forum for confirmation that they were Essex (thanks Guy!).

I've probably unwittingly seen Essex Skippers many times before, but this was my first confirmed sighting.

#1 Deep in the grass



© dilettante

#2 Distinctive antennae



© dilettante

#3 Feeding



© dilettante

Re: dilettante

by Gibster, 10-Jul-11 01:46 AM GMT

"dilettante" wrote:

Eventually I managed a few not very good shots

Yeah right! Absolutely cracking way to record a new species! Well done mate 😊

Gibster.

Re: dilettante

by Wurzel, 10-Jul-11 03:26 AM GMT

Some great shots that clearly show the ink pad effect!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: dilettante

by Neil Freeman, 10-Jul-11 03:36 AM GMT

Nice photos,

I know exactly what you mean about trying to get a good shot. I was doing a similar thing the other day, trying to identify Essex Skippers, at one of my local spots and the conditions were exactly as you descibe.

I managed to get one in the end but your shots are much better than mine.

Neil.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 11-Jul-11 01:45 AM GMT

Sunday 10th July 2011

I was going to go to Bedford Purlieus to try for a photo of White-letter Hairstreaks, but when I read NickB's report of Dark Green Fritillaries at Fleam Dyke, I decided I'd go looking for them instead, as Fleam Dyke is much closer to where I live, and I've yet to see DGF in recent years. With some helpful instructions from Nick on where to look, I decided to nevertheless park at the other end of the dyke to give me a good walk to get there.

Fleam Dyke is an ancient defensive bank built by the Angles to keep out the Saxons, or vice versa, I don't remember which. So it's a steep-sided bank

left largely untouched yet surrounded by typical Cambridgeshire arable farmland, a long and very narrow wildlife oasis in the desert.

First off, I stopped to photograph Essex Skippers. Now that I'm an expert at identifying them (since yesterday 😊, see my previous diary entry), I was surprised how many there were. I'd say about a third of the skippers I looked at were Essex.

#1 Essex skipper on a stick



© dilettante

Then I headed along the dyke, ticking off a very satisfying number of species along the way, including the usual browns, a lovely fresh Peacock, and this rather cooperative Comma. I think Commas are having a good year – I'm seeing loads of them:

#2 Comma



© dilettante

Eventually I crossed the A11 and reached the site that Nick had indicated to look for DGF, and it wasn't long before I spotted one on a knapweed flower. But it flew off before I could get near, and wow, they can shift! A little further on I saw another, and over the next hour or so, saw three or four (you can never be sure if you're seeing the same individuals). I didn't get very close with my camera as the terrain was not ideal! Typically I'd be on the path on the top of the dyke, and I'd see my target land on a flower some way below me. By the time I scrambled down the steep slope, trying to avoid tumbling down or breaking my ankle in a rabbit hole, I'd be just in time to see my quarry fly over my head. So I'd have to scramble up again, trying to keep one eye on a fast moving orange blur, and the other on the ground to avoid falling flat on my face. Anyway, I managed a few shots from a distance (These are cropped).

#3 Dark Green Fritillary, female



© dilettante

#4 (Not Very) Dark Green Fritillary underside



© dilettante

On my way back, I got this shot of a lovely fresh Brimstone – great to see them back again:

#5 Brimstone



© dilettante

and this Holly Blue, one of several dancing around a patch of ivy:

#6 Holly Blue



© dilettante

While I was photographing the HB, I met a couple of gentlemen who had come from Ely to see the DGF, so obviously news is getting about.

My species list for the day:

- Meadow Brown
- Ringlet
- Gatekeeper
- Speckled Wood
- Essex Skipper
- Small Skipper
- Large Skipper
- Red Admiral
- Peacock
- Comma
- Small Tortoiseshell
- Dark Green Fritillary

- Holly Blue
- Brown Argus
- Small White
- Large White
- Green-veined White
- Brimstone

18 species in all, not bad for half a day.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 11-Jul-11 03:44 PM GMT

"dilettante" wrote:

18 species in all, not bad for half a day.

I realised I missed one:

- Small Heath

So it was actually 19 species.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 22-Jul-11 06:13 AM GMT

Wednesday 20th July, 2011

Having been frustrated by the weather at the weekend and unable to go butterflying, I decided to take Wednesday afternoon off work when I saw the forecast was for dry, if not exactly warm or sunny, weather. I still wanted to visit Bedford Purlieus in search of White-letter Hairstreaks, which I'd only [url=http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=5167&p=48380#p47667:3m0ai5d4]seen at a distance[/url:3m0ai5d4] and not photographed. It's rather late in the season, but this was probably my last chance.

The skies were pretty heavy when I got there, but I started on the southern ride where there were plenty of valerian and marjoram flowers. I soon saw a few Meadow Browns and Ringlets, and a couple of rather elderly Silver-washed Fritillaries.

#1 Silver-washed Fritillary



© dilettante

#2 Ringlet



© dilettante

I walked up and down the ride, looking closely for WLH, but to no avail. So I decided to try to photograph the SWFs. I saw one land, lined up my camera, and then spotted a dark triangle hanging beneath a thistle head between my camera and the SWF. Yes, it was a WLH. An old and very tatty one, but I managed a couple of shots before losing it.

As the afternoon progressed, the weather brightened a little, and I soon found two more tatty WLH next to each other on some marjoram, and shortly after that a much fresher-looking one which made for much better photos.

#3 Reasonably fresh White-letter Hairstreak



© dilettante

Brown Argus were also quite plentiful, and good posers:

#4 Brown Argus underside...



© dilettante

#5 ... and upperside



© dilettante

I didn't realise they grew on trees though. Who knew? 😊

#6 The Brown Argus Tree



© dilettante

#7 Large White



© dilettante

#8 Holly blue



© dilettante

After several hours on this one patch of ride, and with the sun getting lower, I decided to try the main Bedford Purlieu ride in search of Purple Hairstreaks. I saw a few, but only at the top of the sunlit oaks, with none venturing within range of my camera.

As I went to head home, a rather lovely Red Admiral was waiting on the gatepost next to my car:

#9 Red Admiral



© dilettante

A good afternoon with 15 species in all:

Meadow Brown
Ringlet
Gatekeeper
Small White
Large White
Green-veined White
Large Skipper
Silver-washed Fritillary
Red Admiral
White Admiral
Comma
White-letter Hairstreak
Purple Hairstreak
Brown Argus
Holly Blue

Re: dilettante

by ChrisC, 22-Jul-11 06:26 AM GMT

brown argus tree..... I want one. one of my favourite butterflies. thanks for that. made me smile that did.

Chris

Re: dilettante

by millerd, 22-Jul-11 06:51 AM GMT

And me! I want one too...

Brilliant.

Dave

Re: dilettante

by Lee Hurrell, 22-Jul-11 04:22 PM GMT

Likewise 😊 Lovely image.

Cheers

Lee

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 24-Jul-11 06:32 PM GMT

Saturday 23rd July 2011

Searching the Sites pages here suggested I might find Walls at Over Cutting, so I decided to combine a trip there with some exercise for the family. I loaded four bikes onto the car, and we drove to Oakington, from where we would cycle the newly paved cycle track alongside the Cambridge Guided Bus route.

As I was unloading the bikes, an orange blur caught my eye. At first I thought it was a Large Skipper, but it settled nearby – a lovely Small Copper, only my second of the year.

We started cycling up the pristine and very smooth track, only hampered by a stiff and decidedly chilly headwind. A brief stop at a patch of flowering teasels brought us a couple of Red Admirals, a Peacock and Meadow Brown. Over Cutting, however, proved disappointing, with no sign of anything apart from Whites and Gatekeepers. So we cycled on to St Ives for tea and cake, before cycling the 8 miles back again in half the time with the wind behind us.

So not great on the butterfly front, but a fun day, and I did hear a Grasshopper Warbler and ate my first blackberries of the year (admittedly rather sour, but it is only July!)

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 01-Aug-11 02:21 AM GMT

Sunday 30th July, 2011

I arrived with my family at our holiday location yesterday, and was pleased to be able to see Arnside Knott from my bedroom window! So that's where we've been today.

I didn't see any Northern Brown Argus, and the three fritillaries I saw didn't settle at all for confirmation of High Brownness. But Scotch Argus were plentiful, a new species for me. Also plenty of Grayling, my first for a few years. And the first Painted Lady I've seen since Spring, looking in pretty good nick.

Photos will have to wait until I get home. The SAs were very frustrating to capture. I think they have very good eyesight or 'hearing', as they seemed to fly off at the slightest rustle of grass as I approached. And if they did sit still they were either behind a blade of grass, or facing away from me. Still I managed a few shots that look serviceable.

Does anyone know if Large Heath are still around? Is it worth me having a look? I don't really want to drag a slightly reluctant family across a bog for no pay-off!

The weather forecast's not looking too good for the week though, unfortunately.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 05-Aug-11 04:29 AM GMT

Wednesday 3rd August, 2011

While the kids were playing in the sand dunes at Haverigg on the Cumbrian coast, I had a wander through the scrubby dunes path along the coast. The sheltered hollows provided little heat traps that seemed ideal for butterflies and flowering plants.

My first find was a Small Copper, one of many that I saw during the day. Having only seen two singletons so far this year, it was great to find a strong colony of these little charmers. Similarly widespread were Common Blues, mostly males darting about and seeing off rivals.

Gatekeepers were everywhere, and Meadow Browns. Also in the sandier areas there were plenty of Graylings, with their distinctive gliding and flitting flight.

I also saw a handful of Dark Green Fritillaries, mostly old and very tatty, but one or two in better shape.

In the evening, we headed to Whitbarrow NNR, a hilltop area of limestone pavement, and bracken and birch scrub. Saw three Silver-Washed Fritillaries on a bunch of knapweed in the woods on the way up, all in not bad condition. I was hoping for High Brown Fritillaries, but it was 7pm and clouding over by the time we'd got up the steep slope to the top. There were many Small Heaths and Graylings, and a few Common Blues. I think I saw one Fritillary, but it flew past at speed so no identification was possible.

Thursday 4th August 2011

After a wet morning the sun broke through the clouds so I went back to Arnside Knott to try once more for HBF. Although I saw several fritillaries, the only ones that settled in view (and in front of my camera) were DGF. Oh well, looks like HBF will have to be for another year.

Apart from the DGF, I also saw Scotch Argus (still plentiful, still camera shy), Grayling, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Red Admiral, Painted Lady.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 10-Aug-11 07:15 PM GMT

Tuesday 9th August 2011

In surprisingly good weather, sunny but rather windy, we walked along the lovely rocky Berwickshire coast from Coldingham Bay to St Abb's head, where I hoped to find Northern Brown Argus.

Soon after entering the St Abb's nature reserve, I saw my first Wall of the year, one of a small number I'd see during the day. Shortly after that, a lovely fresh Small Copper which I took time to photograph, not realizing this was the first of probably a hundred or more I'd see. They were everywhere!

Unfortunately, I didn't see any NBAs. As we approached the fenced off area protecting the prime NBA slope, I saw something very Argus-like fly past, but that was my only glimpse. Also there were Common Blues nearby, so I have little confidence in calling this a sighting. The weather has now turned horrible for the rest of the week, so I think that was my last chance for this year at least.

Species list for the day:

Wall

Grayling
Meadow Brown
Small Copper
Common Blue
Red Admiral
Small Tortoiseshell
Peacock
Painted Lady
Small White

Re: dilettante

by Gibster, 11-Aug-11 03:49 AM GMT

Hi dilettante,

I've been constantly impressed by your pics in this Diary. Today I noticed that you've got a photo site. Some brilliant images in there, mate. But best of all (I thought) was the series of the female scorpion fly devouring the crane fly. Incredible. Nuff said! 😊

Cheers,

Gibster.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 11-Aug-11 04:03 AM GMT

Thanks Gibster. That scorpion fly sequence is pretty gruesome!

Re: dilettante

by IAC, 11-Aug-11 06:53 PM GMT

Hi dilettante,

I am sorry to read that you did not find a Northern Brown Argus at St Abbs. I have done a huge amount of recording in Berwickshire over the past few years, and I have to say that I have never really visited St Abbs for Northern Brown Argus...and I think that is down to just how popular the site is with tourists. You have however inspired me to make an effort next year in getting to know the NBA situation at St Abbs Head. Pity about this rotten weather while you have been up here...I cant apologise for that though, as that is just the way it is 😊

By the way, very impressed with your Brown Argus photos...especially the one on the grass head...Very nice...just a wee bit jealous.

Iain.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 12-Aug-11 05:37 AM GMT

Thanks Iain. In the unlikely event of better weather tomorrow, I might visit the Blaikie Heugh site you suggested. The frustrating thing about St Abb's is there's a sign telling you about the NBA, but the area is fenced off so you can't get in to see them. But David Newland's book says they're often seen in the long grass alongside the fence. I looked there, but obviously didn't see anything.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 12-Aug-11 11:25 PM GMT

With the recent bad weather, we had almost decided to curtail our holiday and head home today, but the forecast for today improved and there was some blue sky this morning, so I decided to have one last try for NBA at the Blaikie Heugh site that Iain pointed me at. He had said that unless there's an easterly I should see them, so guess which way the strong wind was blowing today? Needless to say, I didn't see any NBAs, but if I was one I wouldn't have shown myself in that weather either. I did poke around a bit in the grass and under leaves, but that only showed up one Small White and a Grayling. On the walk to and from the site, we also saw a Small Tortoiseshell, a Wall, a couple of Graylings and Meadow Browns, and a Small Copper. Not a great haul, but a pleasant walk. And we enjoyed watching the seals in Eyemouth harbour.

Re: dilettante

by Paul Wetton, 12-Aug-11 11:59 PM GMT

Hi

Just had a look at your photo gallery. Very impressed.

Did you write the script yourself or is it available on the web.

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 13-Aug-11 12:15 AM GMT

Thanks, Paul. I didn't do any scripting or web design. I just used the gallery-based system provided by the image hosting site pbase.com.

Re: dilettante

by Paul Wetton, 13-Aug-11 01:26 AM GMT

OK thanks for the info

Re: dilettante

by dilettante, 16-Aug-11 04:45 AM GMT

Some pictures from my holiday. See earlier entries in this diary for the words to go with them!

#1 Scotch Argus at Arnside Knott. A UK first for me.



© dilettante

#2 Grayling at Arnside Knott



© dilettante

#3 High Brown Fritillary at Arnside Knott (I reported at the time it was Dark Green but was delighted to have it confirmed as High Brown by Guy and DavidM yesterday! Another first for me.)



© dilettante

#4 Silver-washed Fritillary near Whitbarrow NNR, Cumbria



© dilettante

#5 Small Tortoiseshell at St. Abb's Head, Berwickshire



© dilettante

#6 Small Copper at St. Abb's Head, Berwickshire



© dilettante

dilettante

by dilettante, 30-Aug-11 05:53 AM GMT

Saturday 27th August 2011

En route to a weekend with my parents in Hampshire, my family and I met up with them at Denbies Hillside. Target species: Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper. The weather had been very wet all week, and now there were heavy grey clouds but also sunny spells, and rather breezy. Meadow Browns were the first to greet us, and Small Heaths and Gatekeepers. It wasn't long before we spotted our first blues, although I wasn't entirely sure whether they were Adonis or Common, not having seen Adonis before. These included this mating pair, whose identification I'm still not sure of:

#1 Common or Adonis?



© dilettante

There were also Brown Argus in this area. We then moved along the hillside, and soon saw the first of many Chalkhill Blues, then some indisputable Adonis males. When they catch the light, their stunning irridescence is indeed unmistakeable:

#2 Adonis Blue male showing the irridescence



© dilettante

#3 Adonis Blue male



© dilettante

After that we went down the slope and through a gate into an area of shorter grass, where forum member celery had directed me to look for Silver-spotted Skippers. It was quite cloudy when we arrived and not much was flying, but while sitting down with a picnic lunch, the sun returned, and I soon

saw my first skipper. They're hard to follow with the eye, especially in the strong wind, and when they did land, they were usually obscured by grass. This was the best photo I managed:

#4 Silver-spotted Skipper



© dilettante

And I watched this one apparently laying (you can just about see the curved abdomen)

#5 Silver-spotted Skipper laying



© dilettante

A successful day in all, especially as I was not confident of seeing anything after the weather of the previous week. I think that's probably the last two species I'll add to my list for this year, bringing my total to a respectable 47.

dilettante

by dilettante, 02-Oct-11 06:01 AM GMT

Saturday 1st October 2011

In the ridiculously hot October weather, I went to Hatfield Forest, Essex (near Stansted Airport). Of course butterflies were thin on the ground, but I did see a few Red Admirals, two or three Speckled Woods and a distant probable Small Tortoiseshell. Also a pair of Commas enjoying some refreshing

blackberry juice:



Comma. Sony A700, Sony 100/2.8 macro, f/4, 1/160s, iso200

A surprise bonus was this Small Copper, looking in good condition – a third brooder perhaps?



Small Copper. Sony A700, Sony 100/2.8 macro, f/8, 1/200s, iso200



© dilettante

Small Copper. Sony A700, Sony 100/2.8 macro, f/8, 1/200s, iso200