

jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 02-Mar-12 07:12 AM GMT

This will be my first year of proper Butterfly watching since my mid teens (I have outlined my early childhood butterfly experiences in another thread). I thought it would be good to record the year in the form of a diary, so this is the first post. I will try and keep posts regular and as interesting as I can.

This year I will hopefully have the help of my 11 year old son. He shows plenty of interest and enthusiasm but perhaps needs to be reined in a little, 'bull' and 'china shop' come to mind!

I will do my best to record my findings with photos, but I do not as yet have a decent camera. I am managing at present with a compact. This is fine but it takes about a week to focus properly 😞, so please do not be too critical!

I saw my first and only butterfly of the year so far last Thursday near Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley. Southampton a female Brimstone. The temperature was up around 18 degrees at one point that day. The temperature was again up to 18 degrees today at Hayling Island but no butterflies seen today. However, I have not been out actively looking so far.

My interest is currently being satisfied by the captive rearing of some Speckled Wood larvae. Some of these are the offspring of a previous generation which emerged as adults in December! I could not really entertain releasing these adults in midwinter so kept them going on overripe fruit and sugar solution and managed to get at least one pairing. The resulting larvae are feeding on Couch Grass which I have the misfortune to have growing in my garden. My own supply of this foodplant has been gradually running out over the last few weeks as it does not grow much in winter. Thankfully (from the caterpillars point of view) over the last week or so the mild weather has prompted it to sprout with more vigour. However, the larvae are rapidly approaching pupation so foodplant will not be a problem anyway. The resulting adults will be released back where the original eggs were collected last September. I will post the finer details of this captive rearing in a separate post.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 05-Mar-12 06:33 AM GMT

After experiencing 18 degrees on Thursday whilst at work in Hayling Island, today early afternoon we were subjected to snow briefly in Hedge end. My parents also reported snow at a similar time a few miles down the road in Fareham. Later this afternoon the sun came out and my parents reported a Red Admiral on their windowsill, sadly I was not there to witness it.

Still have had no time to get out and about yet this year. My focus in this my first proper year Butterfly watching will be to thoroughly explore my own local area. This is Hedge End, Botley and the closely surrounding area. I have already noted a good few areas to explore. I know I will also not be able to resist the temptation to go a little further afield and find some of those rarer species that eluded me as a child. I am very surprised to find that good sites exist very close by such as Botley Wood and Whiteley Pastures. I also find that I drive past or work very near many of the well known sites in Hampshire quite regularly and never knew of their existence until recently. I probably drive past Alice Holt, Noar Hill, Magdalen Hill, Yew Hill and others at least once a week. Sometimes it is like torture as I spend my working today driving past these prime sites. Bring on the spring and warmer weather....

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 12-Mar-12 07:52 AM GMT

It has been gorgeous here in Hedge End this weekend, lots of sunshine but not enough hours. The kids football seems to take up half the weekend and what with other chores there is not much opportunity left to get out and about. My eldest son was on walk with the scouts today from Ashurst to Beaulieu, I did consider joining him but really had too many other less enjoyable thing to do. May be next time. He did report seeing a male Brimstone though whilst eating his lunch at about mid point on his journey.

Dropping my son off at Ashurst meant popping in to the inlaws who live nearby. As we left a butterfly flitted across the front of the car. It was too brief to id positively but certainly looked Speckled Wood ish. I know its too early but not sure what else it could have been. Too small and the wrong sort of flight for Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell and the wrong colour for a Brimstone.

I finally managed to venture out today at about 1pm for the sole purpose of butterfly watching. Only for an hour or so but it was well worth it. A walk along the footpath that runs east west along the edge of the railway line from Hedge End to Botley. As soon as I turned the corner from my house on to the footpath I was greeted by a gliding Comma. This part of the path is near housing and is quite busy, further on the popular route curves away from the railway line but through the trees the path continues along the railway to Botley and is much less used and more wild. However this part of the path yielded no sightings and it was only when I reached the end of the path that I spotted two butterflies spiralling up into the air too distant to id. I doubled back along a parallel path through the fields and then made a second pass along the railway path. Where I had seen the two butterflies duelling earlier I was rewarded with another Comma sunning itself on a fence post. I think with hindsight it is quite likely that the two duelling individuals were also Commas, perhaps even the same one. This particular Comma allowed me to approach and photograph it several times which were all out of focus. It even flew off and came back to exactly the same spot to give me a second chance. Still my results are very poor. The camera I am using is an old point and shoot. Not really the right tool for the job I know. I really must get myself a decent camera as soon as finances allow. I was not going to post this photo but here it is anyway if you want a laugh



A Very Poor Comma Photo

Do not be too harsh with your criticisms please!

Re: jackz432r

by hilary, 14-Mar-12 09:03 PM GMT

Can't criticise your photos – mine are much the same! I wondered how your speckled woods are coming along?

Re: jackz432r

by MikeOxon, 14-Mar-12 09:33 PM GMT

Don't knock 'point and shoots' as they can be very good for close-up work and provide good depth of field, which makes focus less critical. Yours has done a remarkable job of exposing correctly for the very dark underside – it's rare to see the detail so well. If anything, you've got a bit too close and cut off the legs and antenna – no need to try so hard!

Mike

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 16-Mar-12 07:12 AM GMT

"hilary" wrote:

Can't criticise your photos – mine are much the same! I wondered how your speckled woods are coming along?

Hi Hilary

The Speckled Wood larvae are coming along well. None have reached pupation yet, but I think for the largest it will not be long. I have eight larvae at various stages the largest are about 24mm long and will not get much larger than that. Yet I have others that are quite a way off entering their final instar. A couple were accidental captures from my own garden, found on foodplant back in January. I have a half written post on the finer points of development from eggs laid in September to now, I will try and finish that and post it soon. As I said previously these larvae are the offspring of adults which hatched in December. Faced with a large number of eggs out of season I tried several different ways of dealing with them, most perished. The larvae that I have left are from the very last ones laid that I kept in a warmer environment. Once hatched I weened them into a colder environment and they have been outside in a sheltered spot ever since. Interestingly the two that were accidental captures have been very noticeably less active than the others and much slower growing. I will try and get some photos up at the weekend.

Are you also using a point and shoot camera? I think it is just about possible to get reasonable results it just requires a bit more persistence, patience and subject matter that is not easily spooked. Here are a couple of photos taken with the same camera last September which I do not think are too bad.



Speckled Wood September 2011 Hedge End



Speckled Wood September 2011 Hedge End

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 16-Mar-12 07:32 AM GMT

"MikeOxon" wrote:

Don't knock 'point and shoots' as they can be very good for close-up work and provide good depth of field, which makes focus less critical. Yours has done a remarkable job of exposing correctly for the very dark underside – it's rare to see the detail so well. If anything, you've got a bit too close and cut off the legs and antenna – no need to try so hard!

Mike

Hi Mike

Thanks for your encouragement. I will try and find some photos from previous years to show that reasonable results can be achieved. I will persist with what I have at present, but I will need to get something more appropriate for the job in hand. At the moment I am likely to miss many photo opportunities because of the cameras reaction time. I do not think I will be challenging for butterfly photo of the year just yet! 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 17-Mar-12 07:07 AM GMT

A couple more photos from previous years. I am quite into dragonflies/damselflies as well.



Agrion virgo Mill Lawn New Forest



Orthetrum coerulescens Mill Lawn New Forest

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 21-Mar-12 07:43 AM GMT

Saturday 17/3/2012

The first of my captive Speckled Wood larvae has suspended itself ready for pupation after having become slightly translucent, reducing its feeding and wandering somewhat.



Ready to pupate

When I checked tonight it was still a larva but I imagine within the next 24hrs it will shed its larval skin.

The next two photos were also taken on 17/3/2012. The first is a larva that has undergone a skin change within the last 24hrs and has yet to resume feeding, it is about 12mm long. The second is a larva that is almost fully grown, about 23mm long and still actively feeding.



Recent skin change



Nearly fully grown

Tonight it looks like 2 more larvae have stopped feeding, become translucent and are looking for a position to pupate.

Re: jackz432r

by hilary, 21-Mar-12 06:56 PM GMT

I liked the pictures of the speckled wood caterpillars. It must be quite a burden of responsibility trying to keep the out of season ones going! I have never seen one in 'the wild' and wondered if they are more likely to feed at night? My camera is I think what is termed a 'shoot and point' (panasonic lumix) and does seem to focus on anything but the insect in the centre of the frame.

Re: jackz432r

by MikeOxon, 21-Mar-12 07:18 PM GMT

"jackz432r" wrote:

At the moment I am likely to miss many photo opportunities because of the camera's reaction time.

You put your finger on the main drawback with compacts! I use a Lumix TZ5 as a travel camera and miss loads of 'grab shots'.

If I may reply to Hilary on your thread: I don't know which Lumix you have but search in the menu since mine has an 'AF Spot Mode', which helps a lot. It is only available in 'Normal Picture' mode and not in 'iA' mode.

Mike

Re: jackz432r

by NickMorgan, 22-Mar-12 02:07 AM GMT

Fantastic pictures of the speckled wood caterpillars. I can't wait to see pictures of the chrysalis.

Speckled woods have only just moved into East Lothian. Last year was the first year when we saw more than just the odd example here. Now I can go and look for their caterpillars too!

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 23-Mar-12 08:12 AM GMT

"hilary" wrote:

It must be quite a burden of responsibility trying to keep the out of season ones going! I have never seen one in 'the wild' and wondered if they are more likely to feed at night?

Hi Hilary

Yes the biggest problem in keeping these larvae through the winter months has been foodplant. I am certainly not a grass expert but trying to identify different types of grass in autumn/winter when they have no flower heads is very difficult. I established early on that they would eat Couch Grass and learned to identify it. I did not have this foodplant potted up ready, my feeding regime is to cut enough food from growing plant in the garden and change it daily (most days). During the week I do not get in from work until 6.30, when it is dark in winter. My neighbours will have been slightly bemused/amused to see me in the garden with a torch and a pair of scissors 😊

As to feeding at night, I am not entirely sure. They definitely do feed during the day and probably at night as well. These larvae are very sensitive to disturbance. The slightest knock or movement and they stop feeding and remain motionless for quite some time. They are very well camouflaged particularly even when quite large. It has highlighted the fact that my eyesight may not be what it was, I have had to use a magnifying glass to see them a lot of the time. I have been back to the location where I found eggs last September a couple of times now just to see if I could find larvae/pupae. I managed to find one larva at one visit but that is it. I think knowing that they are to be found in a particular location is a big help and once you get your eye in it becomes easier.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 23-Mar-12 08:25 AM GMT

Wednesday 21/3/2012

After having seen my first Brimstone (female) a couple of weeks ago, I saw my first male Brimstone of the year in Bitterne, Southampton. From my van as I was driving, but unmistakable. I would imagine it is quite unusual to see female first, I think males are normally on the wing much earlier.

Thursday 22/3/2012

Still no sign of my suspended Speckled Wood larvae shedding its final larval skin, maybe tomorrow. With the prospect of good weather into the weekend I look forward to making another trip out into the wilderness.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 27-Mar-12 08:14 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

I can't wait to see pictures of the chrysalis.

Hi Nick

You need wait no longer.

Friday 23/3/2012

The first of my captive Speckled Wood larvae has now shed its larval skin exposing the bright green chrysalis. This occurred sometime during the day today. It's taken a little longer to shed its skin than I expected, nearly a week! I expect development to be fairly rapid now in the unusually warm weather we are experiencing.



Captive Speckled Wood Pupa



Captive Speckled Wood Pupa

Saturday 24/3/2012

I have been itching to get out and explore all week. Today got out for an hour and a half round local footpaths, of which I am finding new ones all the time. Again I was rewarded almost immediately with a Peacock, my first of the year. This individual was stubborn though and would not reveal his splendour. I then proceeded on a hitherto untried route and was gifted with my first 'White' of the year flying quite high and not settling. I lost sight of it without positive identification. Back on one of my tried and tested routes and a more obliging Peacock and a Brimstone. Later one more Peacock to finish the day. I think I was a little late to catch the best part of the day today.

I noticed that another of my captive Speckled Wood larvae has suspended itself ready for pupation.



Stubborn Peacock



Friendly Peacock

Sunday 25/3/2012

I managed to get out a bit earlier today, the changing clocks helped. I was joined by my son who was keen to show me some tadpoles he had found. We walked around Dowds Farm park in Hedge End and through Moorgreen Meadows. Moorgreen Meadows is a new area I have not been to before within walking distance of home. Sadly this area produced no butterflies today. Dowds Farm however came up trumps with the first Speckled Woods of the year, three in total. Also three male Brimstone and a Peacock all in a very small area near where the tadpoles had been found. Tried in vain to get a Speckled Wood photo. Spent the late afternoon in the garden doing some much needed garden tidying. A Peacock and another 'White' flew through without stopping. It looked like a Small White but I could not be sure. Also found several Larvae in the Garden including this one.



Unknown Moth Larva

Now that I have seen Speckled Wood on the wing locally it will be interesting to visit the site where my captives originate from. Last September they were plentiful there. I visited yesterday but saw none, albeit a bit late in the day. I will look again as soon as the opportunity arises.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 02-Apr-12 07:41 AM GMT

Tuesday 27/3/2012

I have borrowed a Sony DSLR A-230 camera for a few days to try out. It only has a standard lens but will be interesting to try. The last time I used an SLR camera was about 10yrs ago when they had film in!

Managed to get out for half an hour this afternoon after finishing work earlier than normal at about 4pm. Though it was probably too late to see much. I went to check on the spot where my captive Speckled Woods came from and found none. However did find one solitary Speckled Wood on the way there, which was still flitting around in the same spot 20 minutes later when I came back. Also saw one Peacock soaking up the last rays of sun. Although I did not find many butterflies today I did find four deer less than half a mile from home, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a curious insect that I have now identified as a Bee Fly. I can not recall seeing one before, It was buzzing around just off the ground a cross between a fly, a bee and a mosquito. I did try to get a photo but I had my first encounter with the nature photographers best friend, a curious and over excited dog! Once the owner had made her apologies my subject had long since disappeared, so no photos today 😞



Four Deer Close To Home

Thursday 29/3/2012

The second of my captive Speckled Wood Larvae has shed its larval skin during the night. Yesterday I lost one of the smallest of the Speckled Wood Larvae.

Saturday 31/3/2012

The third of my Larvae has suspended itself ready for pupation during the night. It is much cooler and cloudy today than it has been so no chance to do any butterfly watching. Tomorrow looks like it will be sunny so maybe a chance to get out.

Sunday 1/4/2012

Although it was much cooler today than of late, it was almost unbroken sunshine today in Hedge End. I managed to get out for an hour and a half today round my favourite local footpath along the railway line. Today seemed to be the day for Speckled Wood, as I saw at least 8 in different locations, including the spot where my captives originate from. I managed to have a bit of a play with 'my' borrowed camera and got a few Speckled Wood shots.



Speckled Wood. First try with borrowed camera



Speckled Wood Hedge End, Hants

Not great but its a start, its a bit more cumbersome than the compact.

After having seen several 'whites' out and about at work this week all too far away or too fleetingly to id, I was pleased to see two male Orange Tips today 😊 However, my first Orange Tips of the year were unwilling to settle, so no photos sadly. I also saw one Peacock and one Comma. The weather looks set to deteriorate slightly now as Easter approaches, so I am not sure what opportunity if any there will be for butterfly watching as I take a few days off work over the holiday.

I am beaming very envious of those that are now into double figures with speies already. I have still yet to see Red Admiral or Small Tortoiseshell 😞

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 06-Apr-12 07:47 AM GMT

Thursday 5/4/2012

I took a trip down to Barton On Sea today with the family to run an errand. Butterfly watching was not the aim of the day as it was cold, windy, cloudy and visibility was poor. I took the opportunity for an hour or so to walk along the beach below the cliffs to show my boys where I used to collect fossils when I was much younger.

Once we had parked in the clifftop car park my eldest son ran off down the path to the beach to explore, as he does. He immediately came running back saying 'Dad, Dad, Dad there are hundreds of black caterpillars down here!'

I know that some years Glanville Fritillaries are reported along this stretch of coastline, if not from this spot. Narrow Leaved/Ribwort Plantain grows in abundance and the ground is constantly being disturbed at the cliff edge and below. So obviously my first thought was that my son had found an abundance of Glanville Larvae, I rushed to see what he had found 😊 . Sadly it was not Glanville Fritillary larvae but something entirely different 😞 .

There were literally thousands of larvae huddled in groups along the wooden railing at the edge of the path that leads down the cliff to the beachwalk. A spectacular site that I have not witnessed before and not on any foodplant, just on the wooden railing and signs. I would say the larvae were young and not fully grown and were mostly 10-15mm long. Also seen Bluebells and lots of Thrift in flower on the cliff face and undercliff area.

Does anybody know what they are?



Unknown Larvae Barton On Sea



Unknown Larvae Barton On Sea



Barton On Sea Cliff Area

Re: jackz432r

by Pawpawsaurus, 06-Apr-12 08:10 AM GMT

"jackz432r" wrote:

Does anybody know what they are?

I'm pretty sure these are Brown-tail moth larvae. They're (in)famous for occurring in large numbers and are considered a pest by local authorities.

Paul

EDIT: Here's confirmation: <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2747>

Re: jackz432r

by Lee Hurrell, 06-Apr-12 06:25 PM GMT

Don't touch them if you go back, their hairs are a nasty irritant!

Best wishes,

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 09-Apr-12 07:05 AM GMT

"Lee Hurrell" wrote:

Don't touch them if you go back, their hairs are a nasty irritant!

Thanks for the warning chaps. Looking at the Uk moths site, that is certainly what they are.

Any ideas why they would be huddled in clumps along a wooden barrier and local signage? They were neither newly hatched or fully grown and not near any foodplant of note.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 09-Apr-12 07:50 AM GMT

Friday 6/4/2012

After a miserable day weatherwise yesterday, today looked to be mostly sunny albeit a little cool. I took the opportunity to make my first visit of the year to a site known for butterflies. This site is called Botley Wood and is about a 15 minute drive away so still part of my local patch. It apparently boasts 35 different species recorded there but it is the first time I have visited. I only found out about the site at the end of last year when my interest in butterflies was reawakened.

I entered the site from Titchfield lane and made my way down towards the board that marks the boundary with Whiteley Walks, another adjoining site known locally for butterflies. I did not have time to 'do' both sites today but spent a pleasant hour and a half after lunch exploring the site. My first species was Speckled Wood of which I saw a total of three and then one comma. I took the same route back to the car and saw two male Orange Tips together feeding mainly on Violet which seems abundant there. These Orange Tips were less flighty than the ones I saw last week and I was able to get a photo, they also seemed smaller than the ones I had seen close to home last week.



Comma Botley Wood 6/4/2012



Orange Tip Botley Wood 6/4/2012

I was hoping I might have seen Grizzled Skipper, a species that I have never seen before. I know that they exist at this site and in some places I note they are already on the wing. Alas, I was dissappointed on that score. I could only guess on the areas that they might inhabit. They may have been there but I did not see them today 😞

I cant wait to go back and explore further, especially later in the season when other species are on the wing.

Re: jackz432r

Sunday 14/4/2012

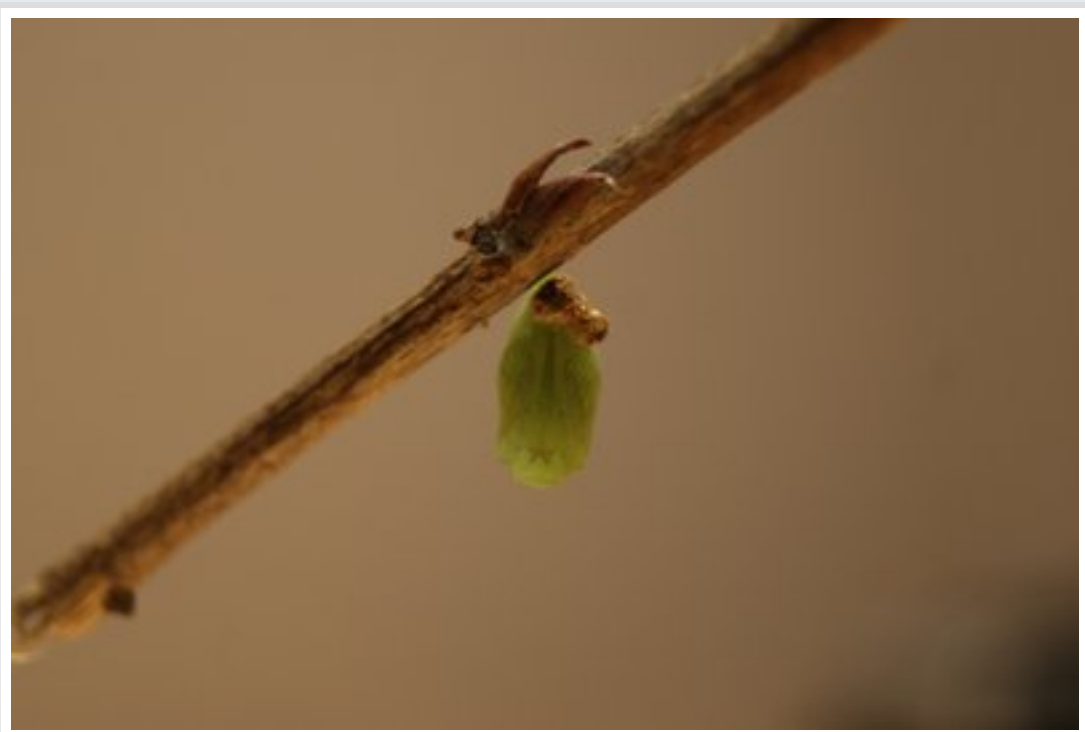
The weather has been pretty erratic this week. Most days the actual weather has not matched the forecast. Today was no exception. The forecast looked promising, sunshine but cool all day. I had the opportunity to go out and about locally so off I went in an optimistic frame of mind, just after lunch. Unfortunately the sunny moments were brief and few, it was cold and very windy 😞 It was actually colder, windier and cloudier than the previous day. It was soon apparent that I would struggle to see any butterflies today. However I did see 3x Speckled Wood braving the conditions, one of which was very ragged indeed. I returned home dissappointed 😞😞

Wednesday 18/4/2012

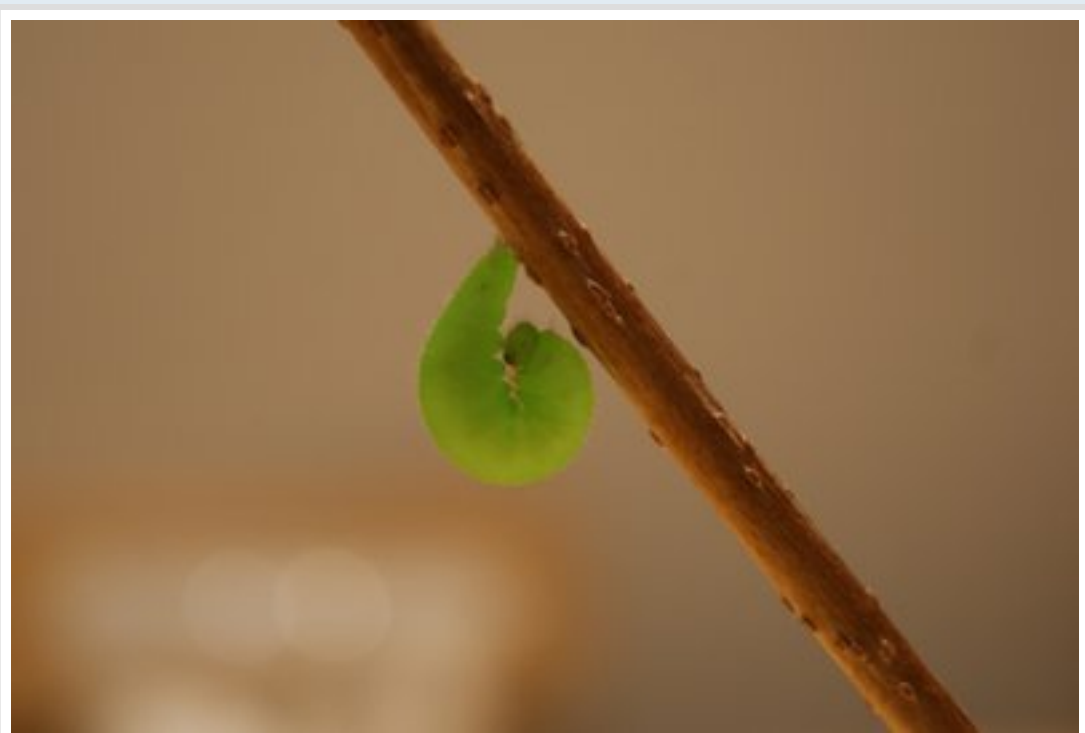
My borrowed Camera has to go back so last night I took the opportunity to get a couple more shots of my captive Speckled Wood larvae/pupae. All but one has now pupated. The earliest pupated nearly amonth ago and still shows no sign of colour change to indicate imminent hatching. I have got them in a very sheltered area which does not recieve full sun, so maybe this is why they are a little behind the local wild population.



Speckled Wood Pupa



Speckled Wood Pupa



Speckled Wood Pupating Larva

Rain and miserable weather looks set to be staying put into at least the middle of next week here, so not likely to be much butterflying going on for a while at least 😞

Re: jackz432r

by Matsukaze, 20-Apr-12 07:43 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

Grizzled Skippers seek out hot-spots with nectar – sheltered, sunny places with bare ground. At night and in poor weather they will often roost on

ribwort plantain flower heads, on which they are exceptionally well camouflaged. The species is an absolute nuisance to track down because it habitually flies fast and low before jinking at the last moment and vanishing into thin air.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 23-Apr-12 06:22 AM GMT

"Matsukaze" wrote:

Hi Jack,

Grizzled Skippers seek out hot-spots with nectar – sheltered, sunny places with bare ground. At night and in poor weather they will often roost on ribwort plantain flower heads, on which they are exceptionally well camouflaged. The species is an absolute nuisance to track down because it habitually flies fast and low before jinking at the last moment and vanishing into thin air.

Thanks for that information. It will be a great help when I return to Botley Wood. There were certainly areas which match your description. Hopefully I will have better luck next time.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 27-Apr-12 07:36 AM GMT

Saturday 21/4/2012

Two more Orange Tips seen at Rodaway Park Hedge End whilst watching my eldest son football training. One was quite ragged. There is a wide footpath/bridleway which runs from this park to Manor Farm Country Park which I have yet to explore, hopefully I will fit that in soon.

This afternoon after lunch I spotted my first Holly Blue fluttering through the garden 😊 It did not stop and by the time I had got my camera it had gone. I did however spot a newly emerged though slightly disfigured Ruby Tiger moth on the fence in the garden.



Ruby Tiger 21/4/2012

Sunday 22/4/2012

Went out around my local footpaths near where I live today.



My Local Footpath Near Home

The sun stayed out for long periods between the clouds today but did not see much out and about. Two Speckled Wood and a solitary Comma was all I saw in an hour and a half. The Speckled Woods were quite fresh and I managed to photograph both but not the Comma. I am now back to using my old compact camera, I do not think today's results are too bad. I seem to be accumulating lots of Speckled Wood shots and not much else.



Speckled Wood 22/4/2012 Hedge End



Speckled Wood 22/4/2012 Hedge End

Thursday 26/4/2012

Still no sign of any of my captive Speckled Wood pupae emerging. I have in the last couple of days brought them indoors mainly to get them out of the strong winds and torrential rain. I still have one larva which has yet to reach its final instar. This larva I feel may have been parasitised it seems to move very little and does not eat much. It also looks slightly different to all the others I have reared through. It seems very dark internally near the head and tail and very light in its middle section internally though the skin colour externally is normal. This particular larva was an accidental capture found when collecting foodplant. I will continue to rear it through until its destiny becomes apparent.

Hopefull we will soon get some better weather.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 30-Apr-12 06:40 AM GMT

Friday 27/4/2012

I noticed today that one of my Speckled Wood pupae has turned noticeably darker during the day today. A sign that we are getting closer to emergence time hopefully 😊

Re: jackz432r

by hilary, 03-May-12 11:49 PM GMT

Given the forecast I hope it can hang on for a few more days! Barton on Sea cliff area looks enticing. In my garden and local area I've also yet to see a Red Admiral and, excepting Brimstones(earlier) and Orange Tips, most of the others I have seen only one or two individuals so far this year. Dismal!

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 07-May-12 07:07 AM GMT

Not much change with my 'captive' Speckled Woods this week. I still have one larva which is very slow growing and I fear has been parasitised or is struggling to fully come out of hibernation. Also the one pupa that has darkened is, I fear, poorly 😞 as it is not developing as I would have expected.



Darkened Speckled Wood Pupa 27/4/12

The remaining pupae are all still green and have not changed. I also have a few assorted moth pupae, some of which should emerge soon hopefully. These comprise Cinnabar, Lime Hawk and a couple of unknowns.

No butterflies seen this week at all 🙄

As I have mentioned my work involves a fair bit of driving around all over, regularly close to good butterfly sites. This week has been no exception and as usual no time to stop and explore 😞

Wednesday- The best day of the week, the sun did appear for a while. Working in Sway in the New Forest. I really hoped that today I may have finished early enough to take some time out, but alas no. Sway is apparently very close to a known site for Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, a butterfly I have never seen. I took a route home via the Brockenhurst to Beaulieu road which cuts through some more good sites. I could only dream as I drove on through.

Thursday - My route took me through the village of Selbourne, very close to Noar Hill. Then down the A3 close to Butser Hill. The weather was so miserable I could barely see the tops of trees for mist.

This is all becoming very frustrating. Tantalising glimpses of butterfly sites but no time or poor weather. Still only 6 species so far this year 🙄

The weather looks set to be disappointing for some time now. Tomorrow looks to be the best day of the week, I shall be in the New Forest at the laws so with a bit of luck I might see some butterflies.

On a positive note I managed to find some Cuckoo Flower in my parents garden in Fareham. I have retrieved one plant to put in my own garden at the moment but will bring more back when I get the opportunity. I can only find it growing locally to me in one small boggy area where it is actually fenced off and only a few odd plants grow.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 18-May-12 08:04 AM GMT

Tuesday 8/5/2012

Despite the poor forecast for today it actually turned out nice in the afternoon, sunny and warm. Working close to home in Hedge End at Freeground school. At lunch time I spotted my first Large Whites of the year at least one of which was a male. The other was too far away to sex. Also spotted a yellow butterfly rapidly flying through probably a Brimstone but too far away for positive id. Now up to seven species this year.

Friday 11/5/2012

Much better weather than of late today. Whilst driving through Gosport this afternoon I stopped at traffic lights near a wide sheltered verge and counted 11 various whites/yellows in a very small area, at least 3 were male Orange Tips.

Saturday 12/5/2012

My youngest son was football training at a different club today in Bishopstoke. I noticed that the Itchen Way runs right next to the sports ground, so I took the opportunity to walk for an hour south along the the Itchen Navigation from Bishopstoke. Bright unbroken sunshine but with a stiff cold breeze meant I did not actually see any butterflies. However, I saw my first Damselflies of the year a fresh looking male *Agrion virgo* fluttering briefly in a sheltered area too far the wrong side of a wire mesh fence to get a decent photo.



Agrion virgo Itchen Navigation 12/5/2012

I managed to persuade it onto the end of a stick and transfer it to the right side of the fence. I only had my phone so the picture is not great but I was pleased. After all that trouble another came fluttering toward me and settled close. A bit further on I passed a clump of garlic mustard and I took a cursory glance at the flower heads not expecting to find anything. I was amazed to see nearly every flower head had a single egg on it 😊 I am not sure if they were Orange Tip or Green Veined White though, is it easy to tell the difference? All in all a productive morning inspite of seeing no butterflies at all.

This afternoon the wind had dropped and it was lovely and warm. I was determined to make the most of the conditions so I headed for Botley Wood.



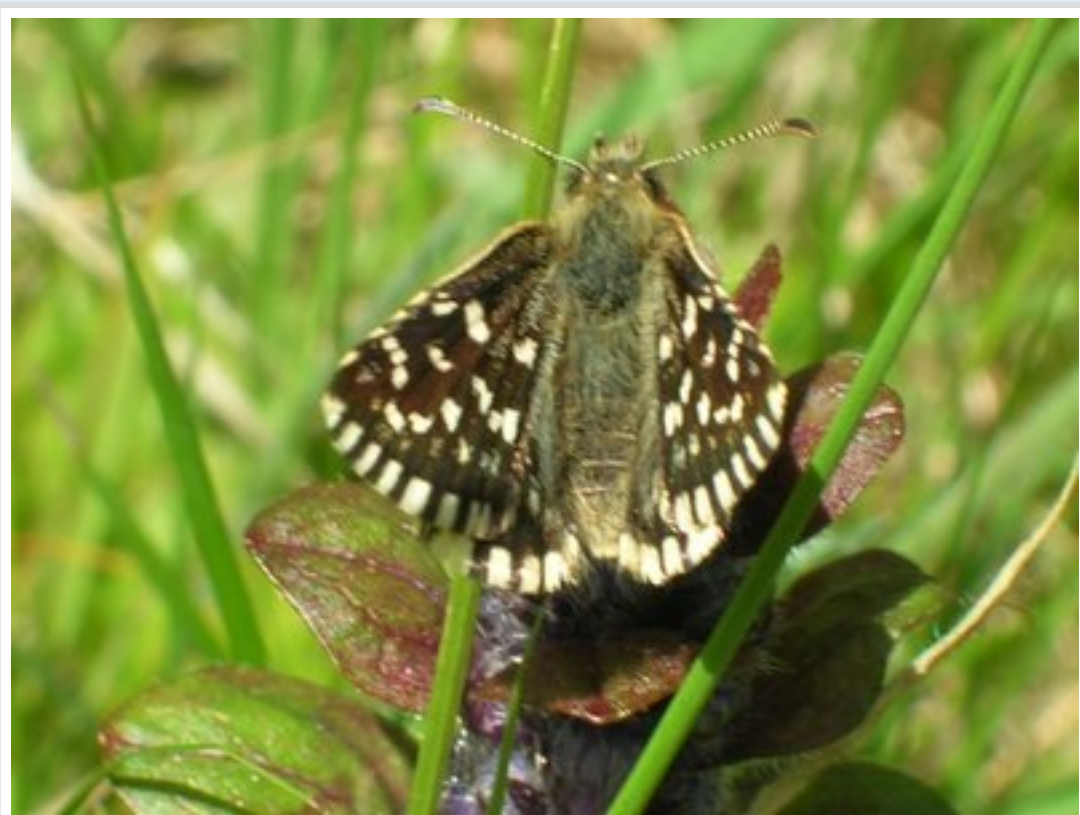
Botley Wood

Truth be told I was a little disappointed with my first visit to this site a few weeks ago when I had hoped in vain to see Grizzled Skipper. Today the results were much better despite the ground being very wet and almost impassable in places. I walked the same route that I did last visit so I still have not seen the whole site yet.

Today was the day for Brimstone up to 9 male seen and 3 female. One of the females looked to be egg laying just away from the main track on what looked like no more than a stick! Once she had moved on I squeezed myself through to examine the chosen shrub but could find no eggs. The shrub had virtually no greenery on it just a few buds beginning to open. I also saw up to 6 orange tips all male. What made me really happy was finding one solitary Grizzled Skipper, my first ever sighting 😊😊



Grizzled Skipper Botley Wood 12/5/2012



Grizzled Skipper Botley Wood 12/5/2012

I spent some time photographing this individual but my results are not great. Although I looked I saw no others but just the one made my day very worthwhile. I was surprised not to see any Speckled Wood at all. Overall my best day butterflying of the year so far 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 21-May-12 07:09 AM GMT

Monday 14/5/2012

I have removed my 'captive' Speckled Wood pupae from their individual containers and attached them to plants in various positions around the garden out in the open. They have as yet shown no change in colour except for one which I suspected was sick and had started to smell so I disposed of that one.

Wednesday 16/5/2012

I noticed today one of the remaining pupae beginning to change colour. This one I can just about see from the kitchen window so I will be able to check its progress quite closely hopefully.

Thursday 17/5/2012

The one pupae is now showing distinct wing patterning through the pupal case. Though the abdominal area is still green, about 5-7 days till emergence I guess 🤔🤔🤔

Today at work I was coming down the A3 near Butser at lunch time so I pulled into a layby for 10 mins. Whilst stopped I spotted at least 2 male Orange Tip (very small) and a Brimstone on the steep bank beside the layby whilst the sun was trying to shine through the cloud cover.

Saturday 19/5/2012

Today it was much warmer, less windy and more sunny than of late so I could not miss the opportunity to do some butterfly watching close to home today. Along my closest footpath along the railway line unfortunately the council had been round in the last couple of days and cut the grass and verges 😞 Tons of nettles, Garlic Mustard and unknown wildlife gone forever 😞 I do not understand why they need to hack so much down particularly in an area where they proudly label small areas of Dandelions as 'Wild Flower Area'. In reality there is more wild flowers outside of these small set aside areas.

It was a day of ones today. Large White, Brimstone, Peacock, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue all singular in number. The Brimstone was quite a worn specimen and it promptly tried to hide under a Bramble leaf right in front of me, giving my first Brimstone photo of the year albeit a slightly unusual pose.



Brimstone Hiding Hedge End 19/5/2012

Also seen were a pair of what I think are leafhoppers they are about 15mm long.



Leaf Hopper ? Hedge End

I am slightly perplexed by the lack of Speckled Wood around here currently 😞 They were so plentiful last September. I saw a few early in the season but more recently I have seen very few locally. In saying that my own 'captive' Speckled Wood pupae have yet to emerge (more from them later) so may be they are just adapting to the weather and in a week or so we will be hopefully back to the numbers seen at the end of last year.

Sunday 20/5/2012

One of my captive Speckled Wood pupae is now very close to emergence. Between yesterday and today the abdominal segments have become distended a sure sign of imminent stirrings.



Speckled Wood Pupa 19/5/2012



Speckled Wood Pupa 20/5/2012

I have been monitoring it all day and was hoping I might see an adult by this evening but as of 9pm it is still not emerged. I would not be surprised if there is a freshly emerged Speckled Wood waiting for me in the morning 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 22-May-12 07:28 AM GMT

Monday 21/5/2012

At 7.30 this morning there had still been no activity.



7.30 this morning

I was unexpectedly late home from work this evening. By the time I got in the show was over 😞 It chose a good day to return to the wild, I wish it luck 😊



7.30 this evening

I now have three remaining 'captive' pupae, all still green. I hope I get to see at least one emerge.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 01-Jun-12 07:15 AM GMT

Friday 25/5/2012

I managed to fit in a very late visit to Botley Wood today, my third visit there. It was gone 6pm when I arrived so I was not very hopeful. To be honest I was more intent on unwinding for an hour after a hard day at work. I seemed to be alone there and it was very relaxing, dappled sunlight in leafy glades, pools of sunshine in secluded clearings very relaxing and absolutely beautiful. The only noise was the birds and the occasional rustling of deer in the trees 😊

Parking along Titchfield lane is poor for this site and I only know of 2 entrances to the wood. The road is a fast, narrow, windy country lane with no pavement or verge. Where I normally park is a layby near the electricity sub station access road but this entails a dicey walk along the lane to the entrance. Today I parked at the safer entrance, only enough space for 3 cars but nobody else there today. I found the wood again quite wet in places. I fairly soon came across an open area catching the late sun where there were several damselflies and Dragon flies flying which I observed for a while before descending deeper into the wood. I only saw two butterflies, a solitary Orange Tip and then a while later my first Small Heath of the year. Neither stopped and no doubt they were on the look out for somewhere to spend the night. I also saw 3 or 4 Speckled Yellow moths flying around in a late pool of sunshine. It was good to see a different part of the wood and find a large pond which will be good for Dragonflies/Damselflies if I can manage to get back at a better time of day. An enjoyable hour.

Saturday 26/5/2012

Today I noticed a second of my Speckled Wood pupae beginning to change colour. I spent some at my parents house today in Fareham. I was amazed to see at least 8 Blues flitting through the garden. Some stopped briefly to investigate the Holly tree but none stopped, Holly or Common Blue I imagine. I also saw a couple of Speckled Wood. This afternoon quite late I managed to get out for an hour along my local footpath in Hedge End I saw 2 Small White my first of the year and I am pleased to say at least 8 Speckled Wood and a Comma larva on Nettle in the same spot as I had seen adult Comma earlier in the year.



Comma Larva

This path is now nearly completely overgrown in week or so I will struggle to get through in places.

Sunday 27/5/2012

I was surprised by the emergence of a captive Cinnabar moth today.



Freshly Emerged Cinnabar Moth

This was reared from larvae collected along my local footpath last year. This was now released into the garden. I spent some time in various parks locally today Football with the kids, scooter rides etc and was pleased to see 20+ Speckled Wood during the day and a couple of Holly Blue as well as several different types of Damselfly.

Monday 28/5/2012

Today the second of my Speckled Wood pupae has emerged and gone, again not seen by me. This one developed much quicker than the last. 3 days from colour change to emergence whereas the previous one was 5 days from colour change to emergence. No doubt the weather has played a part in speeding this process up it has been consistently warm day and night for the last 10days.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 10-Jun-12 07:44 AM GMT

Wednesday 6/6/2012

I went for a quick walk late this afternoon with my son along my local footpath, during a gap in the weather. I spotted a large 'tent' of Nettle leaves and telltale droppings on the leaves beneath which looked quite promising 😊 I teased apart the leaves just enough to confirm that it contained a Red Admiral larva, nearly fully grown I would say. The first evidence I have seen this year of Red Admirals having not seen any adults at all. I will return and check on it over the next few days.

Saturday 9/6/2012

I walked south from Bishopstoke to Itchen Valley Country Park along the Itchen Way whilst my youngest son was at football training this morning. The weather was warm and sunny but with a stiff breeze blowing. I thought I would check up on the eggs I had found on Garlic Mustard a few weeks ago. The large clump of Garlic Mustard where I had found eggs on nearly every flower head seemed to have been cleared away since my last visit 😞, bar one plant which did have an Orange Tip larva on it. I walked a liitle further on today and found another clump of Garlic Mustard on which I counted at least 6 Orange Tip larvae all about half grown. The only butterflies seen were 7 Speckled Wood. Also seen several damselflies, Beautiful Demoiselle, Large Red and several smaller blue damselflies.



Orange Tip Larva 9/6/2012 Bishopstoke



Large Red Damselfly 9/6/2012 Bishopstoke

This afternoon along my local footpath in less than ideal conditions I went to check on the Red Admiral larva I had found on Wednesday. Unfortunately I was unable to find it. A brief appearance of the sun brought with it a flash of orange. Trying its hardest not to get blown away in the wind, my first Large Skipper of the year. The sun promptly disappeared again and the little chap settled on a fern and stayed put despite me pulling the leaf around in all directions to get a photo 😊



Large Skipper 9/6/2012 Hedge End

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 02-Jul-12 07:50 AM GMT

Wednesday 20/6/2012

A lull in the bad weather and a day off work meant a good opportunity for some butterfly watching. I spent a couple of hours at Botley Wood, my local patch, exploring some different areas of the site. I also managed to get out somewhat earlier than I have been able to manage so far this year, I was there by 10am. My visit started slowly with a Speckled Wood and then in an area I had not been to before I found several Large Skippers. I then came upon the pond and spent some time watching the abundant Dragonflies. Downy Emerald, Azure Hawker and many chasers (not sure which species) and damselflies. I then walked up through an area of long grass and found numerous Small Heath and Meadow Brown. Of all the butterflies I have seen so far this year Meadow Brown has been the most difficult to approach and photograph. Later I came across one solitary Grizzled Skipper which was tiny.



Large Skipper Botley Wood 20.6.2012

When I returned home I was shocked to see that I had managed to acquire a dozen or so ticks, it took a good hour to remove them all! 😱

Saturday 23/6/2012

A short visit to Stoke Park Wood, Bishopstoke whilst my son was football training at around 10am this morning. The weather was less than perfect, very

breezy and only small gaps in the cloud. The first time I have visited this site. Looks like it is worth another visit although I saw no butterflies at all until 5 minutes before I left when the sun came out. As the sun appeared so did three Speckled Wood one of which was very large, perhaps a third bigger than most I have seen this year. I assumed it was a male until it demonstrated typical egg laying behaviour and produced an egg on a blade of grass in front of me. Unfortunately photographing butterfly eggs on a blade of grass in the wind is beyond the capabilities of my camera. Just before I got in the car a Red Admiral descended onto the path to sun itself.



Red Admiral Stoke Park Wood 23.6.2012

Thursday 28/6/2012

I managed another hour at Botley Wood today mid afternoon. The conditions were hot and sunny with a light breeze. The ground was very soggy and waterlogged in places after all the rain recently. Wary of the ticks after my previous visit I wore long trousers this time. I was hoping for White Admiral and SilverWashed Fritillary this visit. My first encounter was with a couple of Meadow Brown close to the entrance and then several Speckled Wood. I decided to search a new area after seeing some likely looking places in the distance I was soon rewarded with the unmistakable sight of a couple of large Fritillaries feeding on the abundant Thistles in this area. I am a bit of a novice when it comes to Fritillaries and these did not look like Silverwashed Fritillaries and were not strong flyers. I could not get close enough to photograph them. Could they be Dark Green Fritillaries? A bit further on in a different clearing I found one solitary fritillary cruising up and down, definitely a Silver Washed male but again no photograph. After studying pictures at home I think the first two were female Silver Washed Frits but not sure. I now know what to look for. Also seen today 25+ Meadow Brown and 7 or 8 Large Skipper. No White Admiral though. On my return home I found I had reduced my tick count to 3. Slightly worrying, I am not sure if there is any way of deterring ticks. Maybe this site has an infestation of them, there are lots of Deer here.



Large Skipper Botley Wood 28.6.2012

Saturday 30/6/2012

Along my local footpath today for an hour around 4pm. The conditions were sunny spells and cloud and a blustery wind. This little used footpath is completely grown over in places during summer and is hard going. 3 Red Admirals seen including at least 1 egg laying female, at least 15 Meadow Brown and 10 or so Large Skipper including at least 1 egg laying female.



Large Skipper Ovum Hedge End 30.6.2012

My camera struggles with butterfly eggs 😊

Sunday 1/7/2012

A trip to the inlaws today at Woodlands near Ashurst on the edge of the New Forest. Not much chance for butterfly watching. But three Red Admirals were fighting for control of the small park area whilst playing football with the kids. I managed to convince the boys to stand motionless 😊 near the favourite spot of the winning Red Admiral and as expected he came and landed on my arm and then on each of my boys shoulders and then on my eldest boys back. Probing his shirt with his tongue. No camera with me at this point though. I returned later with camera and he was still patrolling the same spot.



Red Admiral Woodlands 1.7.2012

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 13-Jul-12 08:02 AM GMT

Looking back at the first half of my first butterflying year, it has been fantastic reacquainting myself with species that I have not been close to for 30 years or so. They are like old friends really 😊 I have made two new friends so far, Grizzled Skipper earlier in the year and Ringlet yesterday. Hopefully in the next couple of months I will meet a couple more new ones. I have seen 16 species to date this year 😊

I suppose I am a little dissappointed but not surprised that I have not been able to get out more often for longer and further afield. There always seems to be other more pressing things to do. I am very envious of those on here that seem to have butterflying as thier primary occupation and work as a secondary passtime to be fitted in as and when 😊

For anybody that has read my diary and wondered about my captive Speckled Wood, I never did get to see any emerge 😊 Of the last two one failed to emerge and one disappeared completely, a tasty meal for something I should think. I am now tending one Large Skipper egg. This was retrieved from a local footpath and should be due to hatch any day, watch this space.

Thankfully I do not seem to have had any longlasting ill effects from my recent encounter with ticks 😊 I shall prepare better in future.

Now all I need is for this incessant rain to stop falling 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 19-Jul-12 07:35 AM GMT

Tuesday 17/7/2012

My Large Skipper egg, laid on the 30/6/2012, has changed colour in the last 24 hours. I think it will hatch in the next day or so 😊 I have food plant potted up for this though it is quite small at present



Large Skipper egg 17.7.2012

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 21-Jul-12 07:49 AM GMT

Friday 20/7/2012

When I got in from work tonight I was pleased to find that my Large Skipper egg had hatched 😊



Newly hatched Large Skipper larva 20/7/2012

The larva is tiny, very pale, almost white with a shiny black head. I have transferred it to potted growing foodplant (Cocksfoot) out in the open in a similar aspect to that which it was found. The photo is the best I could do in a hurry, I will try and get a better one tomorrow.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 22-Jul-12 07:49 AM GMT

Saturday 21/7/2012

This morning my Large Skipper larva had started to draw the edges of his grass blade together. The first photo was taken at around 9am and the second was taken at around 12am, by which time his construction is completed. You can just make out the larva inside.



Large Skipper larva 21/7/2012 9am



Large Skipper larva 21/7/2012 12am

Whilst all this was going on I managed a quick productive walk down at Manor Farm Country Park. This was probably my best day for total species seen so far this year. Lots of fresh Gatekeepers seen, my first of the year also seen Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Comma, Small

Heath, whites 😊

Tomorrow I hope to see a few more maybe, Purple Emperor if I am lucky 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 25-Jul-12 07:21 AM GMT

Sunday 22/7/2012

Today I was determined to get in some decent butterfly time. I set off as early as possible for Botley Wood and arrived before 9am. Bright warm sunshine (for a change) as per forecast, meant conditions were ideal 😊. The site was found extremely muddy and wet as expected. I was hoping luck was on my side and that I might catch a glimpse of the Purple Emperor but I did not really have a clue where to look 😊. I thought there might be more chance of seeing White Admiral or maybe Purple Hairstreak. The day started well more or less as soon as I got out of the car with a couple of Silver Washed Fritillaries warming in the sunshine together with a mixture of 7 or 8 Ringlets and Meadow Browns some sunning themselves on the sign that marks the entrance to the wood. As I descended further and further into the wood Silver Washed Fritillaries were everywhere I looked, together with lots of Meadow Brown and Ringlets. When I came into a wide grassy ride there were lots of Small Skippers. I later found out that Essex Skippers are present on this site as well so what I saw is likely to have been a mixture. I also saw more whites today than I have on any other day this year with Small, Large and Green Veined seen in small numbers. I also found several areas where Marbled Whites were prolific and lots of fresh Gatekeepers. To round off the days tally I also spotted a couple of Red Admirals, a couple of Large Skippers and a solitary Speckled Wood. I was quite pleased at this point after being there for maybe a couple of hours, but no White Admirals seen or Purple Emperor.

As yet I have not bumped into anyone else butterfly watching at any visit to this site. I then walked down a so far unexplored track and heard voices in the distance as I came out into the open area where the access road is I spotted three chaps with binoculars and cameras etc. I asked what they were looking for, although I had a good idea 😊. They confirmed that they were looking for Purple Emperor and that one had been spotted earlier on that day. Hello to Phil, Allan and Ivor if you are on this site at all. Thanks for the friendly advice and chat and yes my name is Paul (despite my username) After a chat I left them to it I then went back to the area I had come from. There I met with another chap called Russ who was watching half a dozen butterflies on a bramble bush. Whilst we were chatting a lady came past doing her transect. She was later introduced to me as Tracy together with Richard who is the Warden/Ranger/Manager of the site for HCC who own it, hello to you both. Introductions by Anne a very knowledgeable and friendly BC member who also showed me a short cut back to where I was parked, thanks for that, as I was 2 hours overdue to get home! 😊

Although I was initially quite pleased with my sightings for the day it became clear, after talking to all these butterfly folk who are far more knowledgeable and experienced than myself, that butterfly numbers are considerably down at this site compared to previous years 😊. I had a thoroughly enjoyable day and returned home at 2.45pm after originally saying I would be back by 12!!! It was lovely meeting the other butterfly folk, all very friendly and knowledgeable. I am sure we will bump into each other again at some point.

I never did get to see White Admiral although a couple had been spotted that day. I was told that normally this time of year they are very abundant. And as for Purple Emperor, well I did not expect to be very successful on that one, maybe next week. Highlight of the day having Silver Washed Fritillary and Small Skipper settle on me. Low point of the day was finding that all my butterfly pictures were out of focus for some reason 😊, maybe wrong setting on the camera. So I will include a couple of general pictures of the site.



Marbled White, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Large White, Green Veined White, Red Admiral and Silver Washed Fritillary seen in this area at Botley Wood



Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Silver Washed Fritillary seen in this area at Botley Wood

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 08-Aug-12 08:01 AM GMT

Thursday 26/7/2012

I could not resist a quick trip to my local site, Botley Wood, this evening at about 6.30 pm. I was pleased to see my first 2 White Admirals of the year catching the last of the days sun and a few Whites. I also think I may have seen my first ever Purple Hairstreaks high up in the sunny top of an Oak tree by the pond. Unfortunately my binoculars will not get me close enough to positively id, but there were certainly 3 or 4 small butterflies flitting around at the top of this Oak. I will certainly return at the weekend with some stronger magnification.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 08-Aug-12 08:24 AM GMT

Sunday 29/7/2012

I managed to convince my eldest son to accompany me to my local site, Botley Wood. We started early although the weather was not great, cool with little sun. After last Sunday I was hoping to show my son a few species he has not seen before. I had hoped at the beginning of the year that he would come more often but he has had more pressing things to do 😊 Needless to say we did not see much. We started early and were there by 8.30 in a hope to catch the butterflies before they became too active. My son, who is eleven going on sixteen, amazed me by spotting a roosting Gatekeeper in long grass as soon as we arrived 😲



Roosting Gatekeeper Botley Wood 29/7/2012



Ragged White Admiral Botley Wood 29/7/2012

All in all quite a disappointing day we saw a couple of well worn White Admirals, plenty of Silver washed Fritillaries, Small Skipper, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Marbled White. I also again saw what I believe to be Purple Hairstreak in Oaks near to the pond, I still could not get close enough for positive id. I think we were very lucky to avoid a drenching and I had probably been there too long for my son to maintain his interest. Alas, I think I may have put him off 😞

Re: jackz432r

by MikeOxon, 08-Aug-12 07:42 PM GMT

You can led a horse to water but.....

Alas, this has not been a Summer to enthuse anyone with butterflying 😞

Mike

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 10-Aug-12 06:55 AM GMT

"MikeOxon" wrote:

You can led a horse to water but.....

Alas, this has not been a Summer to enthuse anyone with butterflying 😊

Mike

Hopefully it is not a total lost cause. He is at an age where his interests seem to change from one day to the next. I will make sure the weather is more reliable before I take him again, though I might have a long wait 😊

An Update on my Large Skipper larvae which has not been very photogenic tucked up in its little grass tube. I had noticed that the 'nibbled' area of grass had not changed over the last week and I had wondered if the larvae was still in residence. Tonight I carefully opened the tube to find it EMPTY. No sign of the larvae on any of the potted foodplant so I assume it has become a meal for some predator, maybe a spider. Unless it is hidden somewhere that I can not see it. The potted Cocksfoot will stay where it is and may come in useful later in the season or next year. If I do Large Skipper again I think more than one larvae would be better.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 12-Aug-12 08:35 AM GMT

Sunday 5/8/2012 Beacon Hill, Warnford

Yesterday I had made the decision to go out butterflying irrespective of the prevailing weather conditions 😊 Reading others diaries I had seen many of late, ignoring the weather and even getting productive results in the rain. I had also decided to go somewhere other than Botley Wood. A downland site was very appealing as I had so far seen no 'Blues' other than Holly Blues this year. I have several downland sites within half an hour from home (none of which I have visited), Beacon Hill is the closest and also offers the possibility of Silver Spotted Skipper 😊 as well as other species that I have never seen. I had also made the decision to start early ish and try and catch the butterflies waking up.

I awoke to blue sky 😊 but that rapidly gave way to grey skies. By the time I left home at 8.30 the sky was pretty black 😊 I wondered if I had made a bad decision but I pressed on any way. I am glad I did because as I drove a blue pathway opened up in the sky and I arrived on site at 9 just as the dark clouds moved away into the distance and only 2 cars in the carpark.



Beacon Hill as the clouds clear

A short walk along the track to the top of the hill and the sun appeared as if by magic, surely my timing could not be this good.



View from Beacon Hill over Meon Valley

Having not been to this site before or indeed any downland site for the specific purpose of butterflying. I was wary of trampling habitat as there were no real paths onto the hillside. But there were several previously trodden tracks through the area, which I tried to stick to. I did not know the best spot but headed roughly for the arrow on Alan Thornburys map.

The first species that greeted me even before the sun came out were meadow browns bobbing around at the top of the hill as well as some burnet moths, these two certainly being the most numerous of the day. As I found a route down the hillside the numbers seen started to increase.



Brown Argus Beacon Hill 5/8/2012



Common Blue Beacon Hill 5/8/2012

I started to see Common Blues, Chalkhill Blues, Small Skippers and Gatekeepers. The numbers increased as the sun warmed the hillside but there were still occasional dark clouds dulling the sunshine for a few minutes. At these times I was able to watch most of the flying butterflies except the Meadow Browns settle until the sun shone through again. One short rain shower still did not quell the Meadow Browns which carried on regardless. I spotted what looked like a fritillary half way down the hill but it did not stop for id. It was not until I was half way down the hill that I could see the base of the hill this looked like a promising place with large clumps of flowers. I made my way down there and was amazed at the number of butterflies 😊😊 Groups of 4 or five would rise up in a tumbling ball of frenzied activity. By now more species were on the wing Small Heath, Large Skipper, Red Admiral, Peacock, Marbled White and Brown Argus. A large clump of Pink Flowers? had several well worn Dark Green Fritillaries patrolling around it, very actively. This is what I must have seen earlier. Also seen lots of fresh Brimstone (male and female), Small White and Green Veined White. Also seen lots of mating pairs of Common Blue and Chalkhill Blue.



Mating Pair



Mating Pair



Proboscis Out



Chalkhill Blue Beacon Hill 5/8/2012

This was by far my best butterfly day so far this year, 15 species (2 for the first time 😊😊) and numbers far above anything I have seen so far this year. Alan Thornburys map was spot on for the best spot. I did not see another soul in 4 hours until I was leaving even though the car park was full up when I left. This all made up for the fact that I saw no Silver Spotted Skippers 😞 I will certainly return to this wonderful place if not this year then next. Maybe in the spring, the board says Duke Of Burgundy are resident. 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Neil Freeman, 12-Aug-12 05:17 PM GMT

Nice report and Photos 😊

Good to see the Common Blues, I am struggling to find any second brood at my local spots in the midlands.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: jackz432r

by ChrisC, 12-Aug-12 05:23 PM GMT

some lovely pics. prior to my camera days i used to holiday in East Meon. it's a lovely part of the world. we used to get barn owl quartering over the fields and even had a woodcock from the pub garden in West Meon.

Chris

Re: jackz432r

by Vince Massimo, 12-Aug-12 07:46 PM GMT

Hi Paul,

I've just noticed that your first Common Blue photo is actually a Brown Argus 😊

Vince

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 14-Aug-12 06:52 AM GMT

Thanks for the comments Chris and Neil F.

Thanks for the correction Vince 😊 I was actually looking at a copy of Thomas and Lewingtons book last night and could not make up my mind if I had got it wrong 😞 I take it the lack of spots near to the body on the underside of the forewing, is the giveaway 🤔

Re: jackz432r

by MikeOxon, 14-Aug-12 07:32 AM GMT

the two spots on the underside of the hindwing, like a colon ':' are the Brown Argus 'signature'



Brown Argus signature

Nice photo.

Mike

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 16-Aug-12 07:17 AM GMT

Hi Mike

Many thanks for that clear explanation.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 17-Aug-12 06:58 AM GMT

Saturday 11/8/2012 Butser Hill (Oxenbourne Down)

Sorry About The Poor Photos In This Report

After my unsuccessful but very enjoyable visit to Beacon Hill at Warnford last weekend, looking for Silver Spotted Skipper, I thought I would try again this weekend. My only window of opportunity this weekend was a couple of hours on Saturday afternoon, not the time I would choose, but at least the weather was ok. I had decided to try Oxenbourne Down, a site close to Butser Hill, on the advice and reports of 'Pauline' and Alan Thornburys excellent website. After lunch I quickly checked Alan Thornburys website and I thought I need not print off a map as I could remember directions pretty well, or

so I thought 😊 So I set off, without map or satnav, on the pleasant drive through Bishops Waltham, Corhampton and West Meon. I parked up in the Queen Elizabeth Country Park main car park, which was pretty much full up, and headed off, on foot, under the A3 towards the Butser direction. I spotted a few Chalkhill Blues on the banks of the road immediately outside the carpark. As I approached the foot of the hill I checked my mental map and remembered that Oxenbourne was one, or was it two valleys south of Butser Hill. I was now not so sure exactly where I should be going 😞 so I headed off up the main hill to have a look anyway. The main mown path up Butser hill was busy with foot traffic. Although it was hot with bright if hazy sunshine, there was quite a stiff breeze blowing.

As I walked up the steep lower slopes of Butser There were lots of Meadow Browns and Burnet Moths in the longish grass. Through the gate about two thirds the way up, the areas either side of the main path became more flowery with less long grass Common Blues seen here. This area seemed more suitable for Silver Spotted Skipper (from what I have read) than that at Beacon Hill where the growth is much longer. It was gradually dawning on me that Oxenbourne Down was not what I could see to my left, so Oxenbourne would have to wait for another day 😞 Further up towards the summit of Butser the wild flower areas were much wider. A very worn Dark Green Fritillary flew past me together with a couple of what could possibly have been Painted Lady.



Lots of Small Heath seen here

I found a very sheltered area where there were good numbers of Small Heath. With only limited time I decided that enough was enough and that I should start to head back. I had missed Oxenbourne completely 😞 and probably my chance to see Silver Spotted Skipper as well 😞 In fact I had seen no skippers at all up until that point. As I descended the hill I spotted a couple of guys with proper cameras and lenses photographing something low in the grass. I thought they looked like they knew what they were doing, perhaps they can point me in the direction of Silver Spotted Skipper. I went and spoke to them but they admitted to me that the cameras were brand new and they did not really know what they were doing 😞 Then something caught my eye. What looked like a skipper flying low over the turf, doing its best not to get blown away, paler in appearance than a Small or Large skipper, could it be 😊 Then to my amazement it settled right at the edge of the mown path, almost at my feet 😊 I think I may have let out an audible expression of my excitement, no doubt amusing to passers by of which there were many 😞 Yes, I had found my first Silver Spotted Skipper 😊😊 It stayed long enough for me to get close enough for two photos.



There is a Silver Spotted Skipper there somewhere

It then flew off in the wind and I lost sight. I searched the area thoroughly but did not see another.



Out of focus Small Copper Butser 11/8/2012

However, I did find numerous Small Copper (my first of the year) and some Small Skippers in the same area which I had missed on the way up. Unfortunately all my photos were out of focus again, maybe this was my over excitement 😊 All in all I was pretty chuffed when I had all but given up. I continued on my way down at the bottom of the hill in the car park/camping/barbecue area I found a quite few Chalkhill Blues but none were seen on the hill itself. Hopefully I will have time to return next weekend, WITH A MAP. 😊

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 19-Aug-12 07:32 AM GMT

Friday 17/8/2012 Botley Wood

My wife has taken the kids away for a long weekend with friends, unfortunately I have to work, so could not go 😞 The upside is that the world is my oyster, so to speak, until Tuesday 😊

I finished work slightly early so decided to pop into Botley Wood on the way home for a late visit. I arrived at 5.30pm and found the site extremely muddy as usual with a few areas still bathed in sunshine. However, I saw very few butterflies 😞 Just a few Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, a couple of each. I did see lots of dragonflies though including one area where there were 10 or so patrolling a small area skimming just along the top of long grass. How they managed to avoid each other I do not know. I went and stood right in the middle of their path and observed for sometime. I noticed that the long grass was full of flying ants. I imagine the dragonflies were feeding on them. They patrolled continuously without settling at all, so no photos. I can not even tell you what species, a hawk with lots of blue. I only managed a couple of photos of some hoverflies/dragonflies, not sure on species though 🤔

Looking forward to a bumper butterfly weekend 😊 'While the cats away the mice will play'



? Hoverfly Botley Wood 17.8.2012



? Hoverfly Botley Wood 17.8.2012



Darter Dragonfly Botley Wood 17.7.2012

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 21-Aug-12 07:11 AM GMT

Saturday 18/8/2012 Oxenbourne Down

This weekend I was determined to get properly acquainted with Silver Spotted Skipper. I was heading for Oxenbourne Down, again, this time with a map and directions 😊 Having the weekend to myself unexpectedly, meant that I could please myself and there were no time limits 😊 The weather looked to be pretty perfect, hot and sunny with some hazy cloud. I arrived on site at about 8.30 and found the place without any problems thanks to excellent directions provided by 'Pauline' (thanks again Pauline) 😊 Greeting me on the steps that lead onto the site from the road, was a handsome Slow Worm 😊



Slow Worm On Guard Duty



Closely Grazed Turf at Oxenbourne Down

As I entered the site I could see that the butterflies were already pretty active with Meadow Browns and Chalkhill Blues avidly nectaring in the morning sun. The main part of this site, from a butterfly point of view, is a south facing sloping area of closely grazed turf with wild flowers surrounded by scrub. There is a track of sorts through the middle of this part of the site, it was not long before I spotted my first Silver Spotted Skipper 😊 (male) here, one minute it was in sight and the next it was off at high speed. I saw several male Silver Spotted Skippers in and around this track within 20 minutes of my arrival. Also seen Several fresh Brimstones (male and female) and Some Common Blues early on. As the temperature increased throughout the morning I explored the whole extent of this area. There are some very sheltered spots here that are not immediately apparent when you first enter. I ventured away from the main track and found several areas where there were good numbers of Small Heath and also Small Copper together with a couple of Green Veined White. I came across another Silver Spotted Skipper which seemed less flighty than the others I had seen. When she opened her wings and was then bothered for a few minutes by an enthusiastic male, I realised this was a female (she gave him the brush off by the way). After that encounter it became fairly easy to tell the sexes apart, as the females were a lot less inclined to fly away when I approached them. One female in particular I spent quite a while with. She would spend a short while feeding on a few flowers and then appeared to rest rather than bask with wings shut whilst coiling and uncoiling her proboscis. I waited patiently in case she may start egg laying but I did not witness that. By mid morning the numbers of butterflies had increased significantly particularly the Chalkhill Blues, which ranged from very fresh to very ragged. There was one particular area where there were so many egg laying females, mating pairs and courting pairs, that I had to retreat for fear of trampling them 😱 I saw lots of examples of females that had half a dozen males pestering them, looking like a writhing mass of silvery blue in the grass.



Male Silver Spotted Skipper



Female Silver Spotted Skipper



Silver Spotted Skipper Underside



Small Copper Oxenbourne Down 18.8.2012



Small Heath Oxenbourne Down 18.8.2012



Silver Spotted Skipper feeding

I had been given directions to a flower filled valley below the site. The route to this was along a ridge with narrow strip of different habitat with longer grass. The only skippers I found here were good numbers of very worn Small Skippers together with Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Brimstone. At the point where you need to break through a narrow strip of trees to get you into the valley below, there is a couple of Buddleia Bushes. Whether they have been planted there deliberately I do not know, but they were covered in butterflies. On the largest bush I counted 2 Brimstone, 3 Red Admiral, 8 Peacock and a couple of Small Skipper. It is a long time since I have seen that many butterflies on a Buddleia bush, most I see these days have none on them.



Fully Occupied Buddleia



Male Brimstone Feeding

The valley below was a site to behold, full of wild flowers as far as the eye could see. It did not look like this place gets many visitors because the growth was lush and there were no discernable tracks at all. Butterfly wise it was not as productive, Meadow Browns and Chalkhill Blues mainly with a couple of Brimstone and 1 possibly 2 female Silver Spotted Skipper.



Female Chalkhill Blue Oxenbourne Down 18.8.2012



Meadow Brown Female Oxenbourne Down 18.8.2012

It had been suggested that I should take a circular route which terminated at the end of the valley. When I reached that point I decided rather than end my visit I should retrace my route and take a second look at everything. I had looked closely at several Small Skippers during the morning just in case they might actually be Essex Skippers, up until that point they had not. Later, in the area of well grazed grass, I spotted what I thought was a Small Skipper. When I looked closely I could see it was an Essex Skipper. As I knelt down to take a photo a Silver Spotted Skipper flew into view. I have to say I was a little blase and tried to ignore the Silver Spotted Skipper 😊 as I had seen plenty of those already, this was my first confirmed Essex Skipper 😊 Needless to say when I turned my attention back to the Essex Skipper, it had gone. I spent sometime looking for it, but to no avail 😞

All in all I spent 6 hours at this wonderful place. By the time I left I was happy but sunburnt, tired and thirsty. I am reluctant to say that this was my best butterfly day so far because I seem to be saying that quite often now. I am certainly glad I persisted in finding the place and will return again next year.

Re: jackz432r

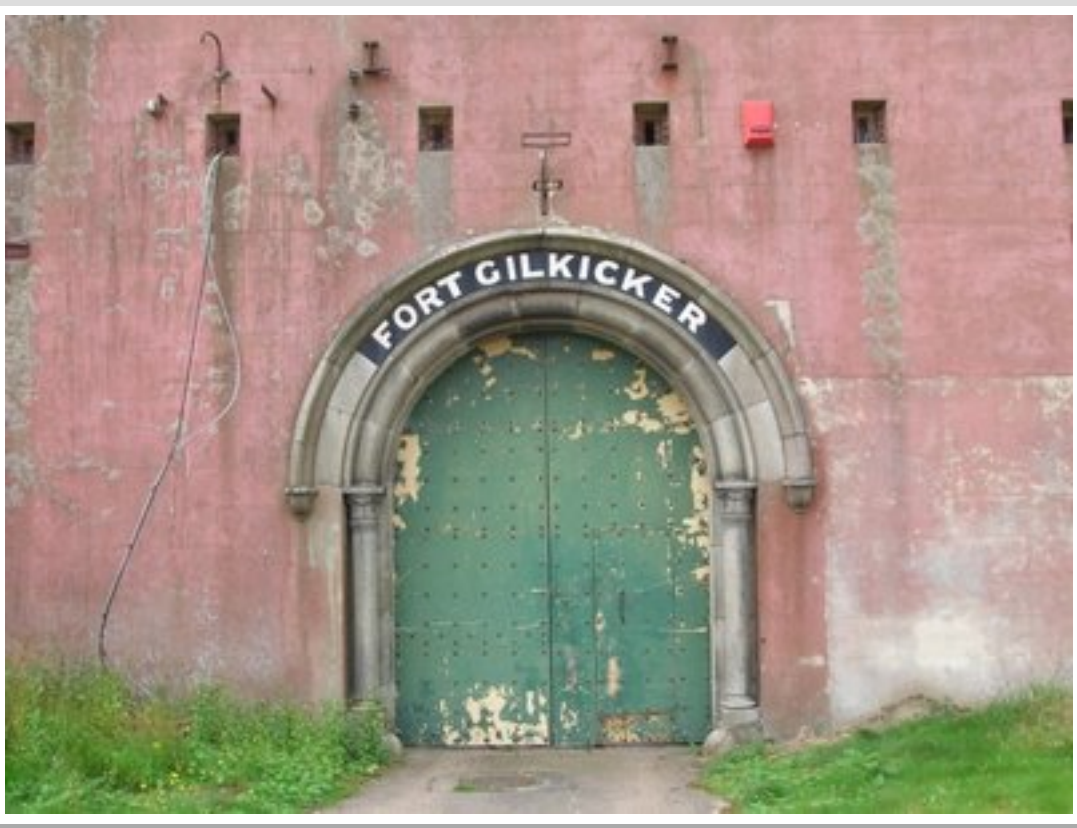
by Paul Harfield, 28-Aug-12 07:26 AM GMT

Sunday 19/8/2012 Gilkicker Fort, Gosport (the weekend before last)

With the weekend to myself and after an excellent few hours spent at Oxenbourne yesterday, where should I go today ? I could try for Brown Hairstreak at Noar Hill, Adonis Blue at Martin Down maybe or Wall Brown, could I fit in two sites and make the most of the time ? To be honest spending 6 hours out in the blazing heat at Oxenbourne yesterday had taken its toll on me, so a short journey was appealing. Some one had told me that Wall Brown are sometimes to be seen at Gilkicker Fort in Gosport. I have not seen Wall Brown since the first and only time I have seen them when I was about 11 yrs old at Bembridge on the Isle Of Wight. So I decided to head for Gilkicker Fort, this would tie in with a quick cup of tea at my parents in Fareham later on. I headed off in the early morning sunshine and managed to find the Fort after asking a couple of guys fishing in the area.



Gilkicker Visitor Board



Fort Gilkicker



View to the east

The Fort was built in the 1860's as part of a ring of defensive forts that surround Portsmouth. It is now bounded on three sides by a golf course and is adjacent to the beach. The fort has steep earth banks which are covered in dense wild flower growth and a small area of sheltered scrub to the east, west and north. Access to the area is via a footpath through the golfcourse or along the coastal/beach walk. The site is a designated SSSI due to the two salt water lagoons behind the Fort which contain unusual marine life and the Gilkicker Weevil which lives on the banks of the Fort itself. This is quite unusual for a butterfly site and is exposed and sheltered at the same time, if that is possible.

I arrived at 8.30 ish in bright sunshine and slight sea breeze at which time not many butterflies were on the wing save a few Meadow Browns.



Female Common Blue Gilkicker 19/8/2012



Female Common Blue Gilkicker 19/8/2012

My first proper encounter was with a couple of Common Blues, one male and a beautiful Blue female 😊 the bluest I have ever seen, in the sheltered grassy area immediately behind the fort. I then headed off around the fort and found that you can climb the banks and do an almost complete tour around the top of the banks. More Meadow Browns a few Gatekeepers and some Small and Large Whites up on the banks. I started my second tour of the Fort by climbing a steep track up the bank. As I climbed I disturbed a Small Tortoiseshell which must have been basking on the bare ground 😊 It flew a short way and settled on some flowers beyond the reach of my camera. However, I did manage a very long range shot just for the record. This sighting alone made my visit worthwhile as I have not seen Small Tortoiseshell for several years 😊😊 I then took a wander westwards away from the fort where there is some sheltered scrub and pools (not sure if the pools are salt or fresh water) In this area I found more Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers a few Common Blues, one Small Copper, a couple of Speckled Wood and some very worn Small Skipper. I also saw several Emperor Dragonflies and some others. I tried to get close to an Emperor dragonfly patrolling up and down a small pool. I watched where it occasionally settled and waited near that spot very still. Unfortunately I was subjected to the attack of the inquisitive and over excited dog on his Sunday morning walk which made a close encounter impossible 😞 Back at the fort itself I met up with a local butterfly enthusiast, David T, doing his regular count at this site. We spent the next hour discussing the local species. He mentioned that Wall Brown are rarities here and only a few are recorded each year, normally very late. He also confirmed that there was a Small Tortoiseshell here yesterday so probably the same one. We caught up with the S.Tortoiseshell again feeding on Hemp Agrimony on the other side of the fort and also added Small Heath and Red Admiral to the days tally.

An enjoyable morning with a good species count. And good to get some local knowledge. If the opportunity presents I will return in a week or two to check again for Wall Brown

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 14-Sep-12 08:05 AM GMT

This report is for a visit a while ago. Late due to some computer problems 😞

Sunday 26/8/2012 Noar Hill

It is beginning to dawn on me that the butterfly season is drawing to a close. With the additional prospect that my boys football season is due to recommence, opportunities for butterflying are likely to be few and far between 😞 So with the forecast of good weather on Sunday morning I thought I had better grab the opportunity as it might be my last chance. I had read many reports from Noar Hill during the year and heard it described as a special place. I had always intended to visit earlier in the season but did not find the time. So with the outside possibility of a first Brown Hairstreak sighting I set off for Noar Hill for the first time. I regularly drive through the village of Selborne so I knew roughly where to go. I printed off a map from Alan Thornburys site and set off up the A32. I found this place quite difficult to find even with a map and parking also is not great. Luckily, when I arrived at 8.45, I appeared to be there on my own. What a difference a couple of weeks makes, there was certainly the first signs of autumn looming, heavy dew and a very slight chill despite the sun.



Noar Hill typical terrain

This site is criss crossed with a myriad of small tracks and paths and I found it quite difficult to keep my bearings on the open areas whilst I was there. Initially there were hardly any butterflies evident, just a few meadow browns. Once I made it to the treelined track further into the site I came across a couple of Speckled Wood and then, busy nectaring on flowers in one of the many deep hollows, a solitary Small Tortoiseshell, my second of the year.



Speckled Wood Noar Hill 26.8.2012



Small Tortoiseshell Noar Hill 26.8.2012

As the warmth of the sunshine started to be felt, a few more Meadow browns and the odd gatekeeper appeared. Every now and again I got out the binoculars in search of flutterings in the treetops. I found a secluded tree lined hollow on the far side of the site where, scouring the tree tops through the binoculars, a butterfly flew into my field of view briefly a couple of times 😊 Although I stayed put for quite a while studying the top of the Ash trees I did not see it again. When I turned around a Red Admiral was busy feeding on Hemp Agrimony in the same area. I made another tour of the site just seeing a few more Meadow Browns and the odd Gatekeeper by which time the temperature was getting up despite the increasing cloud. I returned to the spot where I had previously seen treetop flutterings to find another chap on a similar mission, he had seen nothing. We stood for a fair while and chatted but Nothing further developed on the Brown Hairstreak front, only a Hawker dragonfly, possibly a Migrant Hawker was patrolling the area. Something then caught my eye on nearby bramble blossom, on closer inspection it was a Holly Blue. Despite the dragonfly settling very close on the same bush, the Holly Blue did not take to the air the whole time we looked on. My fellow watcher moved on whilst I stayed for a few minutes more in the hope of a Brown Hairstreak. My allotted time was now drawing to a close and I had promised to get home by lunch time. On my return to the car I again bumped into my colleague as a first world war Fokker triplane flew overhead, surely rarer than a Brown Hairstreak 😊 He had met another watcher who had seen and photographed a female Brown Hairstreak on the other side of the site 15 minutes earlier 😊😡 Wrong place at the wrong time but never mind, I might try again in a week or so if the opportunity presents itself.

This brought my total species count for the day to 5 with all but the Meadow Browns in very low numbers. I was quite disappointed with this tally for a site which promises so much. I certainly need to visit earlier in the year.

On my return home I thought some garden tidying was in order. My neighbours Wisteria seems to have doubled in size this year and has been gradually invading my garden and blotting out the sun from my kitchen window 😊 Some severe pruning was necessary. Whilst doing this a beautiful exotic looking caterpillar appeared 😊 I believe this is a Vapourer moth larva. It is a shame the adult moth is distinctly unexotic by comparison. I returned it to the living part of the Wisteria.



Vapourer Moth larva in the garden



Vapourer Moth larva in the garden

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 01-Oct-12 06:37 AM GMT

Friday 21.9.2012 My Local Patch

I have been guilty of neglecting my local patch recently 😞, so a day off work today meant I had the opportunity to visit my favourite local footpath. The weather was not ideal, very cool with the sun only barely visible through the cloud



Struggling Sun

. Only one butterfly seen 😞, in an hour and a half, a Red Admiral that I disturbed from its roosting place. So I had to satisfy my interest with other things. I found a number of these Nettle Tap moths, something I have not noticed in the past. Up to eight seen on a single flower head.



Nettle Tap Moths Hedge End 21.9.2012

Saturday 22.9.2012 My Local Patch

I had one of my best days out along the same local favourite footpath today 😊 When I opened the front door I could see 3 whites and a Red Admiral before I stepped outside, not bad for an area which is mainly tarmac and block paving. This was a good omen and plenty of warm unbroken sunshine in the middle of the day.

As I approached the large, multi trunked Ash tree along the path I disturbed 3 or 4 Red Admirals. I waited, as one does in these situations, as they circled round and came to rest on the sundrenched trunk of the tree 😊. I observed for a while and then noticed that there was some fluttering activity in the shade behind the tree. As I took a closer look I could see there were several Red Admirals fluttering in this shaded area..



First view of my special Ash tree



Behind my special Ash tree



My special Ash tree



Red Admiral feeding at Ash sap

I have been passed this tree many times in the past and not noticed this activity before.

This Ash tree has several trunks, as you can see in the photo. In fact it could be several trees all growing in the same place that have become fused together, it would make a good Master Tree if Brown Hairstreaks ever fancied popping in here 😊. The way the trunks meet at the base forms a kind of 'atrium' in the centre and the ground at the back of the tree is about a metre lower than the front as it stands on the edge of a railway cutting. As I peered into the 'atrium' I could see several Red Admirals feeding on what I assume to be a sap run, hidden and out of site in the shade. I must admit to being quite excited at this point 😊. I had seen the great video footage posted, only a few days prior, by 'chocky' recently of Red Admirals feeding at a sap run. Unfortunately it was difficult to manoeuvre myself easily into a position of good view without disturbing the assembled diners, so my photos do not really convey the whole event. I observed the spectacle for a while before moving on. Further on the footpath is dominated by Hawthorn and Bramble, both heavily laden with over ripe fruit, and then ends with a large clump of Buddleia. Today this stretch of footpath was alive with Red Admirals and Comma all feeding on the overripe blackberries. The butterflies were very tame and docile. The Commas particularly were difficult to spot initially being so still and well camouflaged even in wings open pose. However, once I got my eye in they appeared to be everywhere, often several in view at once. At one point I had a Comma on my nose when a Red Admiral alighted on my arm 😊.



Small Copper Hedge End 22.9.2012



Small Tortoiseshell Hedge End 22.9.2012



Red Admiral Hedge End 22.9.2012



Small White Hedge End 22.9.2012

I soon reached the large clump of Buddleia which is now well passed its best but with still enough flower to attract a crowd. Today it played host to several Red Admirals and a couple of Small Whites. I was also surprised to see a female Brimstone, I have not seen one for a few weeks. I also spotted a solitary Small Tortoiseshell, the first I have seen in my local patch for several years 😊😊😊. I then spotted a Small Copper, the first I have seen locally this year 😊😊. After a while of observing I returned homeward along the same stretch of footpath to have a final glimpse at my 'special' Ash tree. By now it was gone 4pm and the temperature had started to drop 😞, when I got to the tree there was only one Red Admiral but also a Speckled Wood fluttering around at the back of the tree, though I did not see it stop on the sap run.

Overall quite a good count for the day and I shall certainly be back to check out this Ash tree regularly. I am still a little concerned about the Speckled Wood population along this stretch of footpath 😞. Last year at this time the area was alive with them well into October.

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 08-Oct-12 06:42 AM GMT

Saturday 29.9.2012 My Local Patch

As the season draws to a close, reasonable weather today might be the last chance to see some butterfly activity. The foreseeable forecast does not look good with rain all week 😞 So I headed off down my local footpath again to check on my special Ash tree and see what else was about. A bit cooler than last week with more cloud but still some good sunny spells. I optimistically approached my 'special' Ash tree, but was disappointed to see no activity at all other than a walker using the tree as a seat to rest. This was a surprise as I rarely see anybody on this section of path. I felt slight selfish dissatisfaction that somebody else had found my special spot and made it their own 😞



Part of my favourite local footpath

No butterflies seen at all until I reached the farthest point on the path where there is plenty of overripe blackberries. 9 Red Admirals, 5 Commas, 2 Speckled Wood and a Small White was the total count 😊 a little down on last week.



Red Admiral Hedge End 29.9.2012



Red Admiral Hedge End 29.9.2012



Comma Hedge End 29.9.2012

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 08-Oct-12 07:30 AM GMT

Saturday 6.10.2012 My Local Patch

After rain all week the sun shone today 😊, as it has the last few weekends. I set off down my local footpath again for the third weekend in a row. It is interesting to see how things change week on week. Today there was pretty much unbroken sunshine from mid morning onwards and pretty warm at 1pm when I set off. Again no butterflies seen on my Ash tree 😞 or until I reached the very end of the footpath where the majority of the blackberries are together with the large clump of Buddleia. The Buddleia has now all but finished, just a few small flower spikes in the shade with no butterflies 😞 When I reached this point I had only seen 2 Commas and 1 Red Admiral. I was on the point of returning home disappointed and then realised that I was actually a bit earlier than I had been previously, so I hung around for a while. I am glad I did because within 15 minutes there were at least 7 Commas all feeding on the blackberries 😊



Tame Comma Hedge End 6.10.2012



Comma Hedge End 6.10.2012

Then 4 Red Admirals appeared chasing each other around above a large Hawthorn. I then spotted that the Hawthorn was topped by a large clump of densely flowering Ivy. From the restricted view I had I could see that this is where the Red Admirals were congregating together with a few Commas. Also seen 1 White which did not stop, possibly a Large White and 1 possible Small Copper which did not stop. Something I witnessed today for the first time was Commas fighting over the same bunch of blackberries. I witnessed this several times. A pair would rear up face to face and appeared to prod each other with their proboscis until one party departed to another location. Sadly my camera struggles to capture these moments but I have done my best.



Commas fighting over blackberries

Several of the Red Admirals and Commas seen today were pretty tattered compared those seen last week, some with great chunks of wing missing. If any of these Red Admirals are thinking of returning south I think they will struggle 😞 Less butterflies seen this week compared to last and no Speckled Woods seen today 😞

Re: jackz432r

by Paul Harfield, 15-Oct-12 07:04 AM GMT

Saturday 13.10.2012 My Local Patch

4 Red Admirals seen in Unbroken sunshine at Bishopstoke Recreation Ground this morning between 9.30 and 10 am, whilst my son was at football training. This afternoon a trip up my local footpath yielded numbers well down on the last couple of weeks with just 1 Comma seen 😞 With no butterflies on the wing I spent some time with my youngest son looking for Speckled Wood larvae. They were so easy to find this time last year in this

area, the count for today was zero 😞 Then later 1 Red Admiral in the garden. I also counted 4 Knot Grass larvae in the garden, all feeding on different foodplants.

Sunday 14.10.2012 My Local Patch Again

5 Red Admirals and 1 Large White at Fleming Park around lunch time today whilst my youngest son was playing football 😊 This afternoon around 4pm 1 Red Admiral feeding on Hebe in the garden. Whilst I took a photo a Humming Bird Hawkmoth visited briefly 😊😊 The first one I have ever seen, what a magnificent creature, no photo sadly.



Red Admiral in the garden