

Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 12-Mar-12 01:33 AM GMT

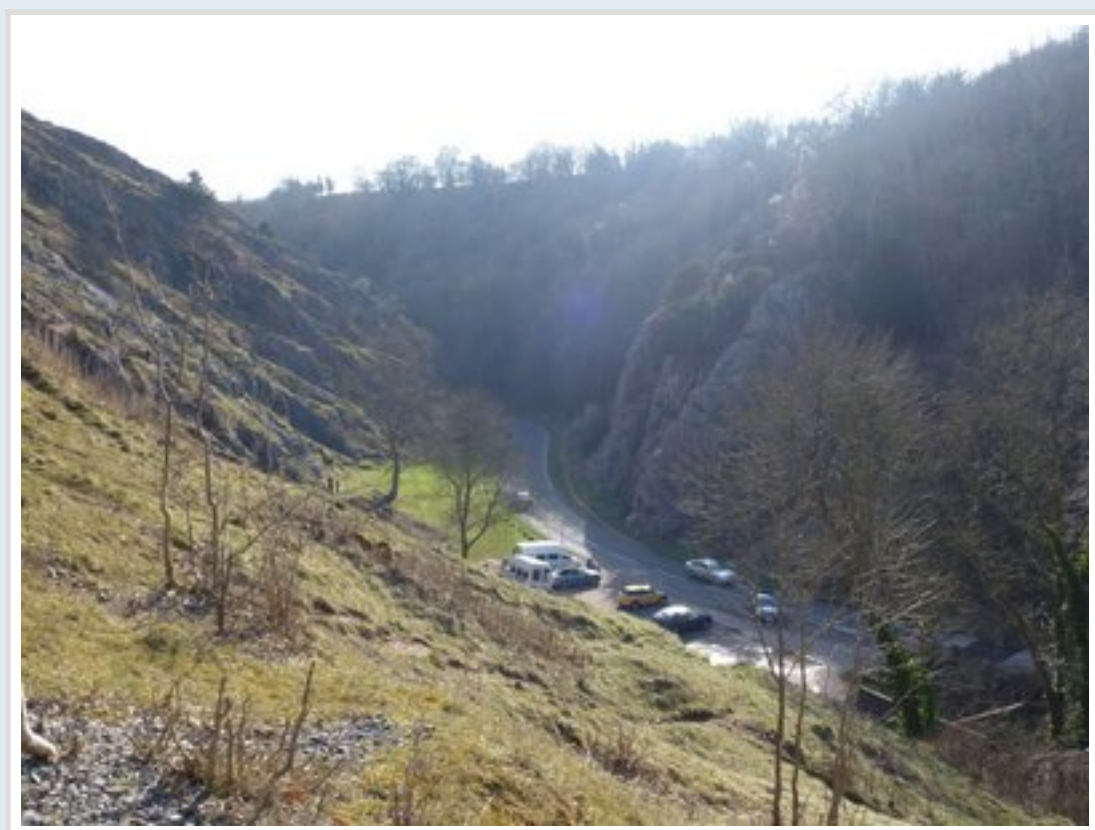
The sun this weekend has tempted me out of hibernation and to look for early butterflies.

On Saturday I visited my usual early March butterfly hot-spot, Haydon batch near Radstock. This is the old spoil tip for the long-closed Kilmersdon colliery, now covered by fine grasses and bird's foot trefoil, that later in the year support colonies of Common Blue and Small Heath. Parts of the edges are fringed with plantations of birch and sallow, along with gorse and broom scrub, and one point in particular forms a sheltered, south-facing bowl that attracts vanessids and Brimstones. However, Saturday was a bit too early for the butterflies – I caught a brief glimpse of what may have been a Comma or a Peacock, around the base of one of the sallows, but no more. On only a few of the sallows were the kittens fully emerged; mostly they were a week or more from being open.



Today a visit to Sand Point, which unlike the surrounding countryside was swathed in sea-mist and unsuitable for looking for wildlife. I had a very brief look on the slopes for Glanville Fritillary larvae, though didn't find any (I have only the sketchiest idea of the conditions they might like, and it may have been too cool for them to be active). On the way back, inland, several male Brimstones were active. The lanes leading to Sand Point are lined with flowering elms and ought to support populations of White-letter Hairstreak.

We stopped off at Burrington Combe, Cheddar Gorge's baby brother:



This ought to support some good butterflies later in the spring. Today there was a Peacock enjoying the conditions, exploring the slopes with its bold bat-like flight, and periodically stopping to bask on the outcrops:



Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 09-Apr-12 08:00 AM GMT

This place may be familiar to some...



No blues to be found at Collard Hill today. I looked amongst the gorse hoping to find Green Hairstreak, but none were to be seen. A Small Tortoiseshell and my first Speckled Wood of 2012 were in the area, however. Also present were numbers of little moths – *Cydia ulicetana* I believe:



A couple of Orange-tip males patrolling the nearby countryside, but as yet numbers have not really built up around here.

Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 17-Apr-12 06:08 AM GMT

Northern France, 12–15 April

A weekend away visiting friends in Northern France. We were not really looking for butterflies, but my wife loves the coast and fine weather on arrival near Calais allowed us to explore the coast around Cap Gris Nez. We were surprised to find this *chenille* on the coast path – a Glanville Fritillary – not the sort of thing I come across every day at home.



The coastline looked very much like their haunts on the Isle of Wight.



Further south, Orange-tip, Small White and Green-veined White were on the wing. As would be expected, the season is a little further advanced in northern France than it is here.

Worth noting for any future visitors to Rouen is that there is an impressive line of steep south-facing chalk slopes running through the fringes of the city, that might well reward exploration.

Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 24-May-12 05:28 AM GMT

No posts for a while as we have been moving house! We have a very much bigger garden to look after, quite daunting in size especially as it is neatly laid out and well-maintained, with a lot of unusual shrubs (at least to me). A male Orange-tip visited after a few days, and Peacock and Large White have found their way in since; hopefully the first of many.

We have a substantial rockery and with a strong colony of Small Blue a mile down the road are thinking about planting a lot of kidney vetch...

There are numbers of huge bats flying around at night, a remarkable and fascinating sight I have never witnessed on this scale before, even if as a moth-trapper I have slightly mixed feelings about it.

Not seen many butterflies because of being busy and the poor weather. Orange-tips were just coming out here when the sustained spell of bad weather hit, and have been quite scarce since. I have still seen a couple, seemingly in good shape, fluttering along the hedgerows. Peacocks are still around, though quite worn, but the other overwinterers are few and far between. Small Copper and Common Blue are only just coming out, but Holly Blue appears to be very scarce again this year.

I carried out my annual local Grizzled Skipper hunt this year; as is often the case an exercise in futility. This year involved me floundering around on a 30-degree slope of loose coal shale chasing after what generally proved to be moths – if they could be identified at all; even the most ineptly fluttering microlepidoptera generally had the beating of me on that surface.

Late May 2012

by Matsukaze, 11-Oct-12 06:20 AM GMT

There was a sunny spell in late May; a few of our spring butterflies had hung on and could be found enjoying the bright spells. **White Sheet Hill** on the Wiltshire/Somerset border is a good place for downland rarities and is my nearest area of chalk. A visit on 20 May in warm but not sunny conditions allowed me to see Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, and Small Heath, although not Green Hairstreak and Adonis Blue, two species a little more scarce in this part of the world that I have found here before.

Small Blue is said to occur at White Sheet Hill, but the 20th may have been too early. However, on the 25th I found a freshly emerged male at a new site near Combe Hay, south of Bath, at which Dingy Skipper was also present. The site looked to be artificial – a topsoil scrape seeded with various

limestone plants, such as the horseshoe vetch on which the Small Blue was feeding. Sadly the horseshoe vetch is probably beyond the reach of Chalkhill or Adonis Blue here.



France, May–June 2012

by Matsukaze, 11-Oct-12 06:30 AM GMT

We had a two-week holiday in southern France, at the Lac de St Croix on the Var/Alpes de Haute-Provence border, an area we have visited a couple of times before and which has proved excellent for butterflies. A remarkable feature is the way species that are rare here are extremely common, even within built-up areas. This grassland area is pretty suburban, surrounded by houses on three sides, but I have found here Black-veined White, Common, Chalkhill, Provence Chalkhill and Adonis Blues, Brown Argus, Geranium Bronze, Clouded Yellow, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Spotted Fritillary and more.



This was the first Black-veined White I had ever seen, but they proved quite common this year. My previous visits had been slightly earlier in the year, perhaps too early for this species. This is a lovely butterfly with a characteristic way about it, quite different from other whites.



Spotted Fritillary on the other hand appears to be a constant presence here and I have found it to be the commonest fritillary in May/June. The males are spectacularly orange and one of the few fritillaries that are straightforward to identify.



In another fairly anonymous field, in this case bordering the lake, I have in the past found Glanville Fritillary, Silver-spotted Skipper and Swallowtail, species that do not occur in the same county in Britain. This time I found this bumblebee – I believe the dark form of *Bombus ruderatus*, extremely rare in Britain.



part 2

by Matsukaze, 11-Oct-12 06:57 AM GMT

Southern White Admirals were widespread too. These are extremely beautiful butterflies and were quite approachable.



Small Coppers are always fun to watch. They also have the useful habit of moving along grassy banks fighting with all the other small butterflies along its length, many of which are a little more reluctant to display themselves. Following Small Coppers around can be quite valuable!



The circus had come to Digne-les-Bains the day we visited. Driving down the road to the Eaux Chaudes we nearly collided with a horse, which had absconded from the circus. Being slightly worried that their lions might be loose as well, we went further up the valley than perhaps would have been ideal. Although a number of blues were present the star of the show was this strangely comical burnet moth. Can anyone identify the species?



The butterfly gardens had a good range of species including lolas and Osiris Blue. A large patch of thyme proved a particular attraction to the butterflies, including this female purple-shot copper and worn pearl-bordered fritillary.





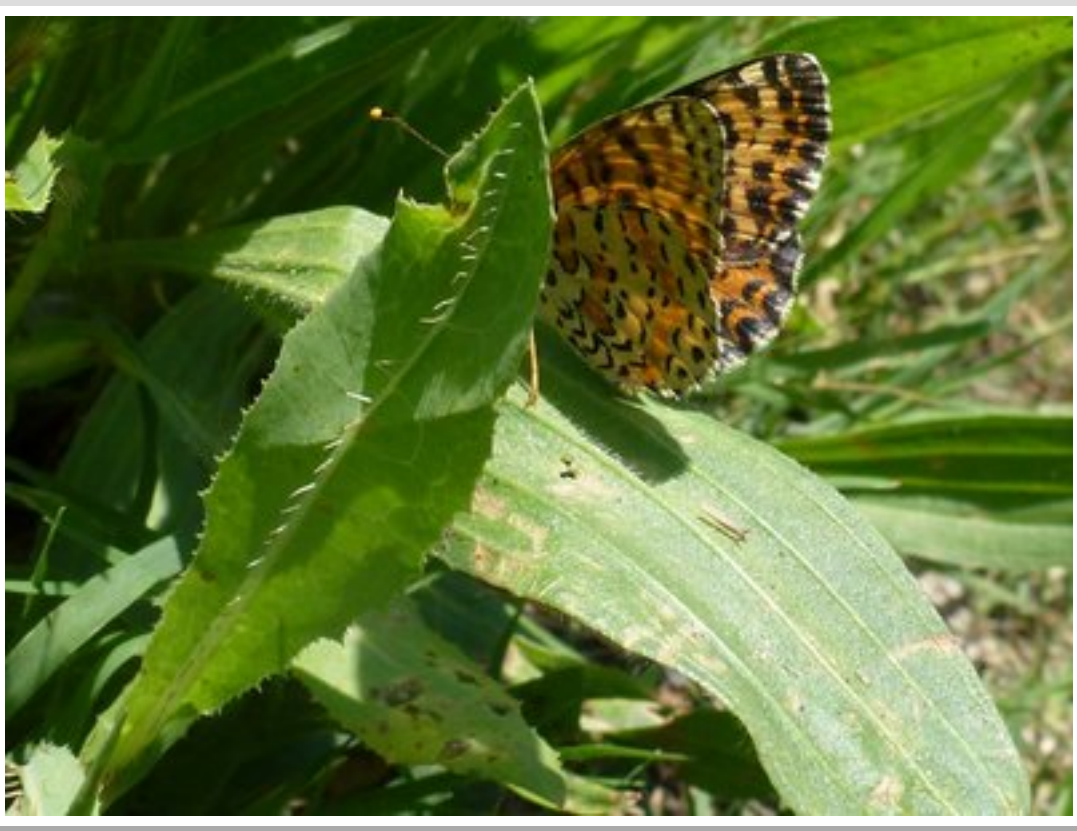
part 3

by Matsukaze, 15-Nov-12 04:08 AM GMT

I like hairstreaks but they do not often descend to ground level in Britain. To see these two freshly emerged ones in easily photographable positions was a nice surprise (blue-spot and ilex).



This female spotted fritillary was camera-shy:



This is a particularly beautiful butterfly – *alciphron* (purple-shot copper? I can never remember which English name relates to which species):



I do not often twitch butterflies but our long and winding way home took us past this site where bog fritillary occurs, absolutely carpeted in foodplant. It was early in the year for them and there were just two on the wing.





Mid-Somerset, June 2012

by Matsukaze, 15-Nov-12 04:42 AM GMT

I only managed a brief visit to Collard Hill this year but Large Blues were fairly easy to find – several on the wing and I saw more in 15 minutes than I managed of all the hairstreaks combined all year. I understand they have survived the poor weather tolerably well.



Dragonflies were the real target of the day. On the Levels, the Red-eyed Damselfly will make use of ditches and slow-running rivers, whereas in many parts of the country it is a species of well-vegetated lakes. This is the female.



Here are a couple of *Myrmica* ants I found foraging on the flowerheads of hogweed. I don't think they are *M.sabuleti* though...



Some of the high summer butterflies were just starting to come out. The freshly-emerged Ringlet with its velvety brown texture is always a joy to see.



Large Skippers were also just coming out. This one was playing peek-a-boo.



Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 15-Nov-12 04:53 AM GMT

Vanessids seem to do well on the Levels; the fertile soil and moisture encourage the nettles. I found a fair few larval nests over the course of the summer. These Peacocks were on the banks of the Tone downstream of Taunton; I estimated around 1000 larvae were there.



I also found Small Tortoiseshell nests a fair few times. Later in the summer there were good numbers of adults, about 50 Small Tortoiseshells on a buddleia bush on one occasion, something I do not see very often.

Re: Matsukaze

by Padfield, 15-Nov-12 04:54 AM GMT

I'm enjoying your retrospective. In particular, those lovely shots of bog fritillary have inspired me to try and find this species myself next year. It's something I've yet to see.

Guy

Re: Matsukaze

by David M, 15-Nov-12 05:33 AM GMT

"padfield" wrote:

I'm enjoying your retrospective. In particular, those lovely shots of bog fritillary have inspired me to try and find this species myself next year. It's something I've yet to see.

Agreed. And you slipped it in so casually as well. 😊

I'd love to see this species along with another wetland lover – Violet Copper.

Re: Matsukaze

by Wurzel, 15-Nov-12 06:48 AM GMT

Some delectable butterflies there, though having not seen a Large Blue I think that's the one I'd like to see most.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Matsukaze

by Gibster, 15-Nov-12 04:00 PM GMT

Hi Matsukaze,

regards your mystery burnet pic, have a look at http://www.insecta-web.org/cgi-bin/MWM/vk/display_virt_koll.pl?land=en

I can't get the damn page to load properly on my cronky old laptop, maybe you'll have more luck? Hope it helps (looks like it should, if it does what I think it does!!)

Cheers,

Gibster.

Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 22-Nov-12 02:28 AM GMT

Thanks folks. It's always puzzled me that so few of the European wetland species occur here, as we have no shortage of habitat.

Wurzel – come to the Poldens next summer! It is only just down the road from you after all...

Gibster – thanks for the link – I can't quite make head nor tail of it yet but there are more burnets there than I have seen in my life.

Re: Matsukaze

by Mikhail, 22-Nov-12 04:08 PM GMT

I've only just seen your mystery burnet. I think it's *Zygaena rhadamanthus*. Try <http://www.leps.it>.

M.

Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 24-Nov-12 10:54 PM GMT

Thanks Mikhail.

Brean Down, 30 July 2012

by Matsukaze, 26-Nov-12 04:09 AM GMT

The peninsula at Brean Down is one of the few places in Somerset the Chalkhill Blue can still be seen, and one of the most westerly places in the UK it can be found. The butterflies seem to survive the stiff breeze that was pinning them to the grassland just above the cliffs, although they did not fly far and were being continuously buffeted by the wind even when at rest. The burnet moths with which they share their habitat had dispensed with flying for the day and settled for walking everywhere instead. Grayling also occur here in numbers, one of the few places in north Somerset where they do.



Re: Matsukaze

by David M, 26-Nov-12 05:49 AM GMT

Wall Browns are also present on Brean Down and, of course, a few miles to the north you have the long standing Glanville Fritillary colony at Sand Point.

Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 26-Nov-12 06:35 AM GMT

The Peacocks were late to appear this year, only coming out in numbers from mid-August onwards.



At Burcott Mill on the Levels the buddleia had eight species of butterfly on it, including my only UK Painted Lady of 2012 and at least 50 Small Tortoiseshells, a welcome sight.



Silver-washed Fritillaries, however, had quite a long flight season this year, even though there were not many of them to be seen.



Exmoor August 2012

by Matsukaze, 26-Nov-12 07:45 AM GMT

The higher and wetter parts of Exmoor do not offer much scope for butterflies, being very damp and exposed, however a few species of butterfly do survive up here – Green-veined White and Small Heath most commonly, and here and there Wall Brown.



(the fence marks the county boundary – Devon to the left, Somerset to the right).

I was mainly looking for dragonflies – there are very strong populations of Black Darter on some of the mires, which are being helped by restoration of the habitat. These populations tend to go unnoticed owing to the remoteness of the area and the way one tends to get immersed in the habitat whilst looking for them; it is a species that can be found with a good deal less effort elsewhere.



It is surprising what can turn up in these places though. Red Admiral and Peacock will wander into these areas, despite there being no trace whatsoever of foodplant.



Fortunately there are some drier bits – the coastal heath was glorious.



Perhaps Exmoor's best known residents.



Re: Matsukaze

by Matsukaze, 03-Dec-12 05:10 AM GMT



(April 2008)