

Re: David M

by David M, 25-Feb-12 04:39 PM GMT

Dates of first UK sightings 2012:

1. **Small Tortoiseshell** – 25 February, Castle Meadows, Abergavenny
2. **Red Admiral** – 26 February, Linda Vista Gardens, Abergavenny
3. **Brimstone** – 11 March, Swansea Vale
4. **Comma** – 11 March, Swansea Vale
5. **Peacock** – 24 March, Cwm Clydach, Swansea
6. **Green Veined White** – 25 March, Castle Meadows, Abergavenny
7. **Small White** – 25 March, Linda Vista Gardens, Abergavenny
8. **Speckled Wood** – 25 March, Linda Vista Gardens, Abergavenny
9. **Orange Tip** – 1 April, Hirwaun, south Wales
10. **Grizzled Skipper** – 2 May, Merthyr Mawr, nr. Porthcawl
11. **Common Blue** – 2 May, Kenfig Dunes, nr. Port Talbot
12. **Pearl Bordered Fritillary** – 6 May, Ewyas Harold Common, nr. Pontrilas, Herefordshire
13. **Dingy Skipper** – 12 May, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
14. **Wall Brown** – 12 May, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
15. **Small Copper** – 12 May, Kenfig Dunes, nr. Port Talbot
16. **Small Heath** – 12 May, Kenfig Dunes, nr. Port Talbot
17. **Small Blue** – 12 May, Kenfig Dunes, nr. Port Talbot
18. **Green Hairstreak** – 16 May, Welsh Moor, nr. Gowerton, Swansea
19. **Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary** – 19 May, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
20. **Large White** – 19 May, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
21. **Brown Argus** – 19 May, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
22. **Holly Blue** – 20 May, Swansea Vale
23. **Adonis Blue** – 24 May, Swells Hill Bank, nr. Rodborough, Glos
24. **Duke of Burgundy** – 24 May, Swells Hill Bank, nr. Rodborough, Glos
25. **Marsh Fritillary** – 25 May, Welsh Moor, nr. Gowerton, Swansea
26. **Glanville Fritillary** – 26 May, Sand Point, nr. Weston Super Mare
27. **Painted Lady** – 28 May, Glais, nr. Swansea
28. **Wood White** – 4 June, Haugh Wood, Herefordshire
29. **Meadow Brown** – 9 June, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
30. **Large Skipper** – 9 June, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
31. **Dark Green Fritillary** – 9 June, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
32. **Large Heath** – 7 July, Cors Caron, nr. Tregaron, Ceredigion
33. **Ringlet** – 8 July, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
34. **High Brown Fritillary** – 8 July, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
35. **Silver Washed Fritillary** – 15 July, Bernwood Forest, nr. Oxford
36. **Purple Emperor** – 15 July, Bernwood Forest, nr. Oxford
37. **Marbled White** – 15 July, Bernwood Forest, nr. Oxford
38. **Small Skipper** – 15 July, Bernwood Forest, nr. Oxford
39. **White Admiral** – 15 July, Bernwood Forest, nr. Oxford
40. **Hedge Brown** – 21 July, Castlemartin, nr. Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
41. **Silver Studded Blue** – 21 July, Castlemartin, nr. Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
42. **Grayling** – 21 July, Castlemartin, nr. Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
43. **Chalkhill Blue** – 27 July, Lulworth Cove, Dorset
44. **Purple Hairstreak** – 27 July, Alner's Gorse, nr. Sturminster Newton, Dorset
45. **White Letter Hairstreak** – 27 July, Alner's Gorse, nr. Sturminster Newton, Dorset
46. **Essex Skipper** – 2 August, Oxford
47. **Scotch Argus** – 18 August, Arnside Knott, Morecambe Bay
48. **Brown Hairstreak** – 26 August, West Williamston Reserve, Pembrokeshire

Non-UK species recorded in the Pyrenees, France, between 22nd and 29th June 2012:

1. **Provençal Fritillary** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
2. **Spotted Fritillary** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
3. **Purple Shot Copper** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
4. **Black Veined White** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
5. **Pearly Heath** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
6. **Large Wall Brown** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
7. **Marbled Fritillary** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
8. **Long Tailed Blue** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
9. **Lang's Short Tailed Blue** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
10. **Queen of Spain Fritillary** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
11. **Ilex Hairstreak** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
12. **Turquoise Blue** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
13. **Great Banded Grayling** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
14. **Sloe Hairstreak** – 23 June, Ax-les-Thermes
15. **Weaver's Fritillary** – 24 June, Col du Chioula
16. **Oberthur's Skipper** – 24 June, Col du Chioula
17. **Olive Skipper** – 24 June, Col du Chioula
18. **Piedmont Ringlet** – 24 June, Col du Chioula
19. **Sooty Copper** – 24 June, Col du Chioula
20. **Lesser Marbled Fritillary** – 25 June, nr. Orlu
21. **Mazarine Blue** – 25 June, nr. Orlu
22. **Tufted Marbled Skipper** – 25 June, nr. Orlu
23. **Purple Edged Copper** – 26 June, Plateau du Saquet
24. **Bright Eyed Ringlet** – 26 June, Plateau du Saquet
25. **Mountain Clouded Yellow** – 26 June, Plateau du Saquet
26. **Map** – 26 June, Plateau du Saquet

- 27. **Marbled Skipper** – 26 June, Plateau du Saquet
- 28. **Scarce Copper** – 27 June, nr. Orgeix
- 29. **Large Tortoiseshell** – 27 June, nr. Orgeix
- 30. **Lesser Purple Emperor** – 28 June, nr. Savignac

UK species seen in the Pyrenees, France between 22 and 29 June 2012 (and NOT seen in 2012 in the UK):

- 1. **Heath Fritillary** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
- 2. **Clouded Yellow** – 22 June, Ax-les-Thermes
- 3. **Swallowtail** – 24 June, Col du Chioula
- 4. **Mountain Ringlet** – 26 June, Plateau du Saquet

Last butterfly seen:

Red Admiral – 3 November, Cwm Clydach, nr. Swansea

Total number of species in 2012: 82

Re: David M

by Padfield, 25-Feb-12 05:02 PM GMT

Glad you've broken the duck, David, and your previous record to boot! It's easy to forget, when you browse a forum where people typically post what they *have* seen, that most people *haven't* seen anything yet!

Guy

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Feb-12 05:09 PM GMT

Saturday 25th February

Swansea was shrouded in low cloud throughout the week which was frustrating given that some parts of the UK were threatening to break February records for warmth and sunshine. I arrived in Abergavenny on Friday 24th and was delighted to discover that the sun DID still actually exist!

Saturday was a lovely day and I ventured out to Castle Meadows, which is south facing and well sheltered, in order to see if there was any butterfly activity.

I walked down to a particularly sheltered spot by the tree line beyond this lake:



It wasn't long before I spotted a butterfly – a Small Tortoiseshell (the first I'd ever seen in the month of February in this country):



I watched this butterfly for a couple of minutes before it flew off, to be intercepted by a second butterfly. I lost sight of one but followed the other and it proved to be a different individual, and one that was unusually marked with the large black forewing spot much bigger than usual and merging into the colours at the top of the wing:



A third Small Tortoiseshell was seen a short distance away, then a fourth when I paid a visit to the nearby Linda Vista Gardens. Not a bad return for a February afternoon.

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Feb-12 09:43 PM GMT

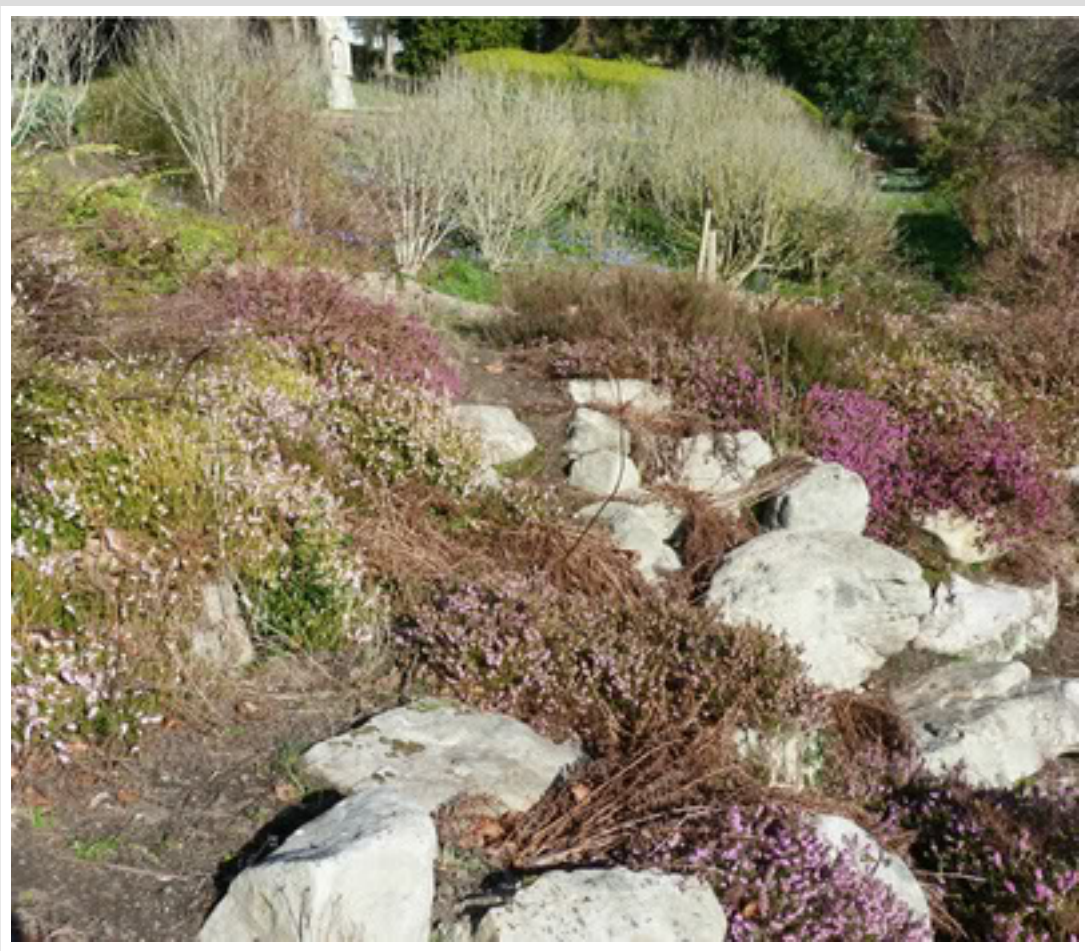
Sunday 26th February

The forecast was very inaccurate today – the suggestion was for cloud cover and strengthening winds. As I was feeding the chickens at 8am I was dressed in just a T-shirt and there wasn't a cloud to be seen.

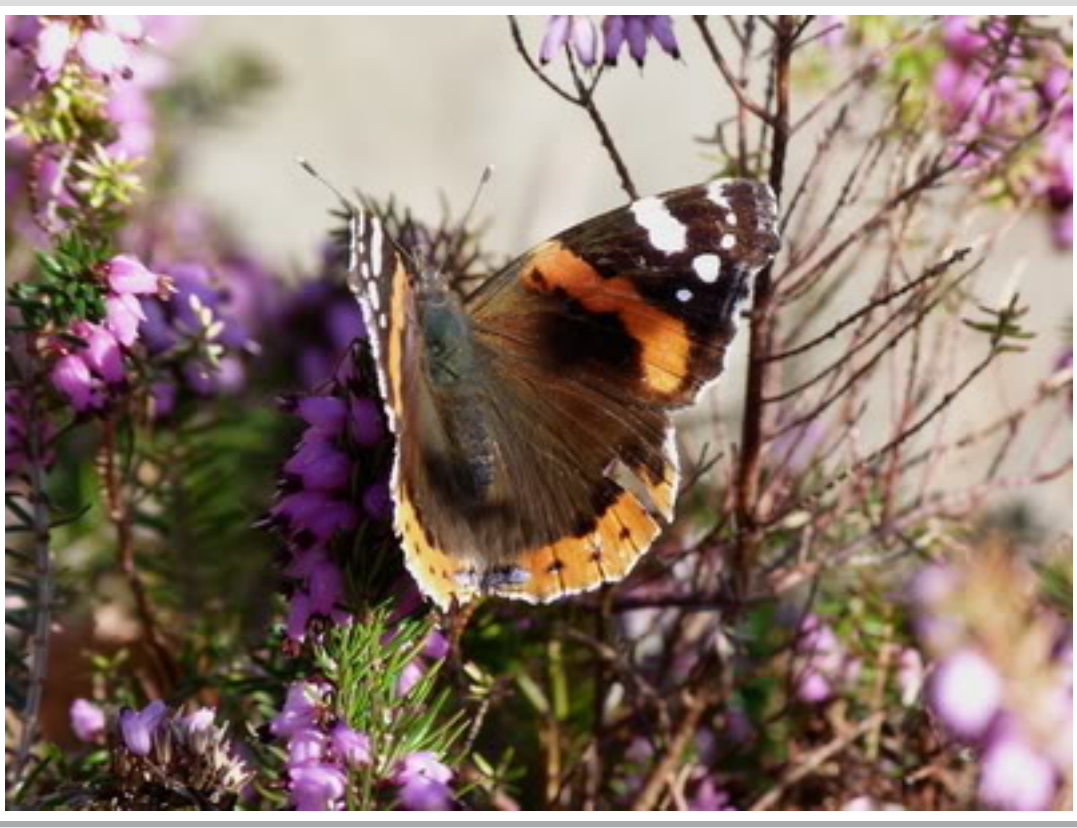
At about 1pm I decided to drive down to Linda Vista Gardens again to have a longer look round.

It's a beautiful spot quite close to Abergavenny town centre, with an array of seasonal plants and probably more available nectar sources than anywhere else within a few miles.

This patch of heather was a magnet for bees and was where I saw yesterday's Tortoiseshell:



I was delighted to find a visitor of a different species this time round:



Yesterday's Tortoiseshell had been on the same patch of heather:



There were two more Tortoiseshells today. Both were in romantic mood:



They were inseparable wherever they went:



They even chose to dine together:



They weren't the only ones in the mood:



Re: David M

by David M, 11-Mar-12 04:43 PM GMT

Spring most definitely here now in south Wales. The celandines and dandelions are everywhere, and when the sun shines the likelihood is that there'll be a butterfly or two to be seen.

Male Brimstones in spring are exceedingly hard to nail down. They never stop! This one led me all the way up the railway embankment at Swansea Vale and though I patiently watched it for over 10 minutes, never once did it come to rest:



The Commas I saw were much more obliging:



It's 11th March, and the only butterfly I'm missing for the 'early spring royal flush' is the Peacock! I wandered around the nature reserve on the marshes behind my work building as the wooden walkway seems to attract them at this time of year as it soaks up the sun's warmth and gives Peacocks somewhere pleasant to bask. None seen though, nor were there any Red Admirals about.

I suppose the next thing to look out for will be male Orange Tips – someone is definitely going to see these in the last week of March this year!

Re: David M

by David M, 24-Mar-12 04:07 PM GMT

Saturday 24th March

Had to take a reality check as I drove to Cwm Clydach with the car thermometer reading an astonishing 19.5c at 11.45 in the morning! Just like how it was bizarre baking in 24c heat last October whilst tramping through falling autumn leaves, so today it was similarly surreal basking in July-type temperatures with all the tree branches still bare!

Cwm Clydach is a wooded gorge with some interesting wildlife (particularly birds, where Dippers are regularly seen):



The wooded track looked beautiful with celandines and wood anemone in flower and much in the way of greenery starting to burst forth before

flowering in April:



Several male Brimstones were flying around the woodland, but as usual, none came to rest. However, my first female Brimstone of the year was just the opposite, plonking herself on a dandelion flower and nectaring for several minutes before wandering off:



Further down the valley, the woodland opens out into a large clearing which is something of a hotspot for butterflies. Here, I saw 3 Small Tortoiseshells, 2 Commas and my first Peacock of 2012. The Peacock kept alighting on the path but every time it flew into the air, a nearby, territorial Comma would intercept it and the pair would go spiralling into the air, forcing the Peacock to beat a retreat back down the track whereupon the whole charade would start again.



A week to go in March and I've seen all the adult overwinterers. I daresay over the next week the Pierids will be out along with Speckled Woods and Holly Blues.

Re: David M

by Mark Colvin, 24-Mar-12 11:29 PM GMT

Hi David,

That's a beautiful Peacock. 😊

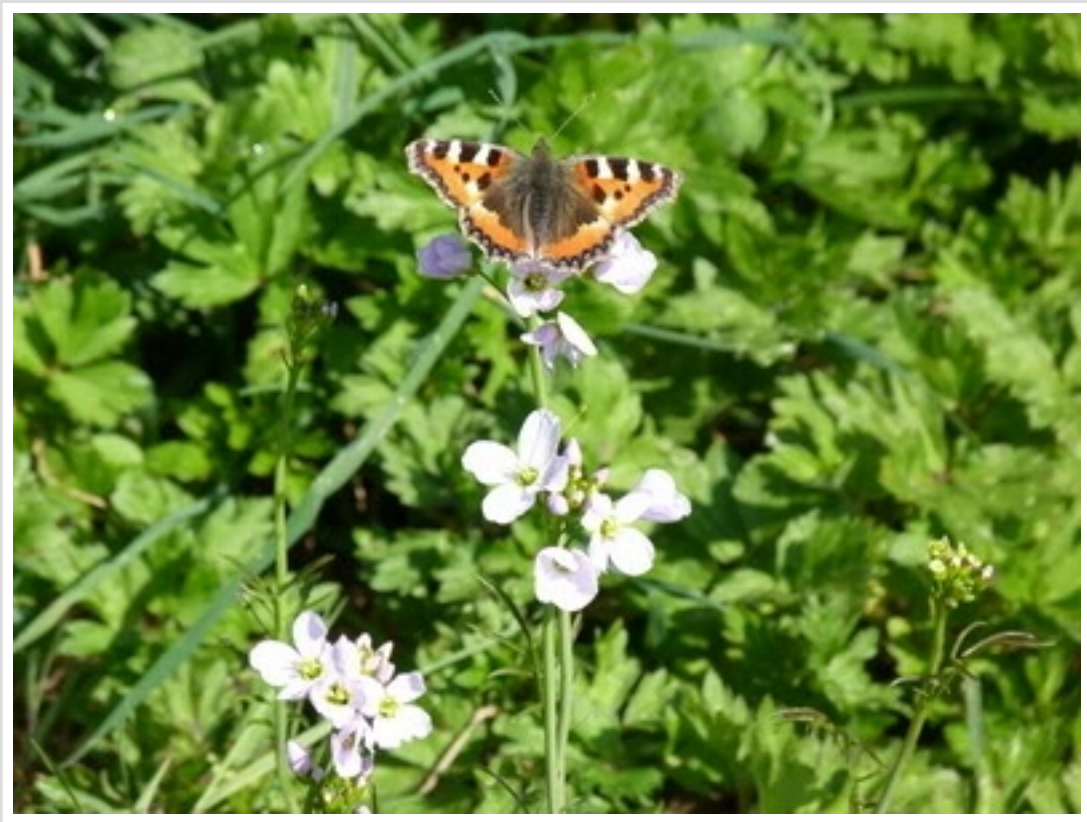
Kind regards. Mark

Re: David M

by David M, 01-Apr-12 05:17 PM GMT

Monday 26th March

Another visit to Castle Meadows in Abergavenny where again I failed to see any Orange Tips. I did see a Small Tortoiseshell nectaring on the cuckoo flower though, which is something I've never witnessed before.



Here's a photo of the Small White seen in Linda Vista Gardens the day before:



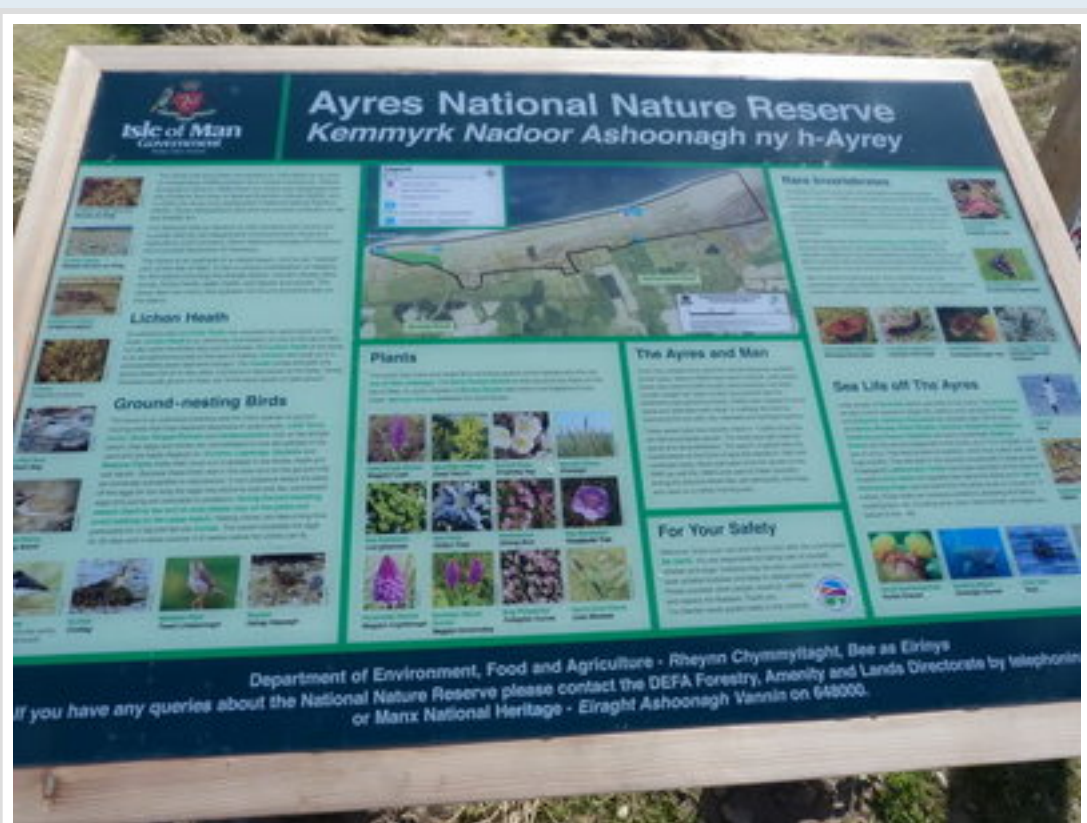
Re: David M

by David M, 01-Apr-12 05:30 PM GMT

Tuesday 27th March

Caught the overnight ferry from Heysham to the Isle of Man to visit my mother who lives on the island. It soon turned into a spectacularly lovely day with temperatures reaching 15C and clear blue skies throughout.

I thought I'd drive down to the nature reserve at the Point of Ayre, which is a rare example of lichen heath and plays host to some unusual flora and fauna (Common and Little Terns, Ringed Plovers, Skylarks, Curlews, Lapwings, Meadow Pipits and Oystercatchers are bird representatives, whilst Scarlet Crimson and Gold moths as well as Heath Bee-Flies are found practically nowhere else in the British Isles).



I then took a detour to Sulby Claddaghs where there was a fine display of Wood Anemone:



The scenery here is particularly picturesque (which compensated for the miserable butterfly return of just 3 Small Tortoiseshells):



Re: David M

by David M, 04-Apr-12 07:30 PM GMT

Wednesday 28th March

Bizarre to be writing this given that half the country has just seen snowfall, but just one week ago things could not have been more different. Peel is a fairly exposed town on the west coast of the Isle of Man, and temperatures in summer generally hover around the mid-teens, so to bask in 16C accompanied by cloudless skies was a real treat (it was hard to believe it was March).

The beach-front cafe probably had what will prove one of its best days of the year (kids on the beach building sandcastles as well):



The kids weren't the only ones active by the harbour – plenty of seals to be observed:



Re: David M

by David M, 15-Apr-12 04:51 PM GMT

Sunday 15th April

Not a butterflying day to be honest; temperatures of just 10C and more than 50% cloud cover. However, life is full of surprises and a 2 hour visit to my local patch produced the following butterflies:

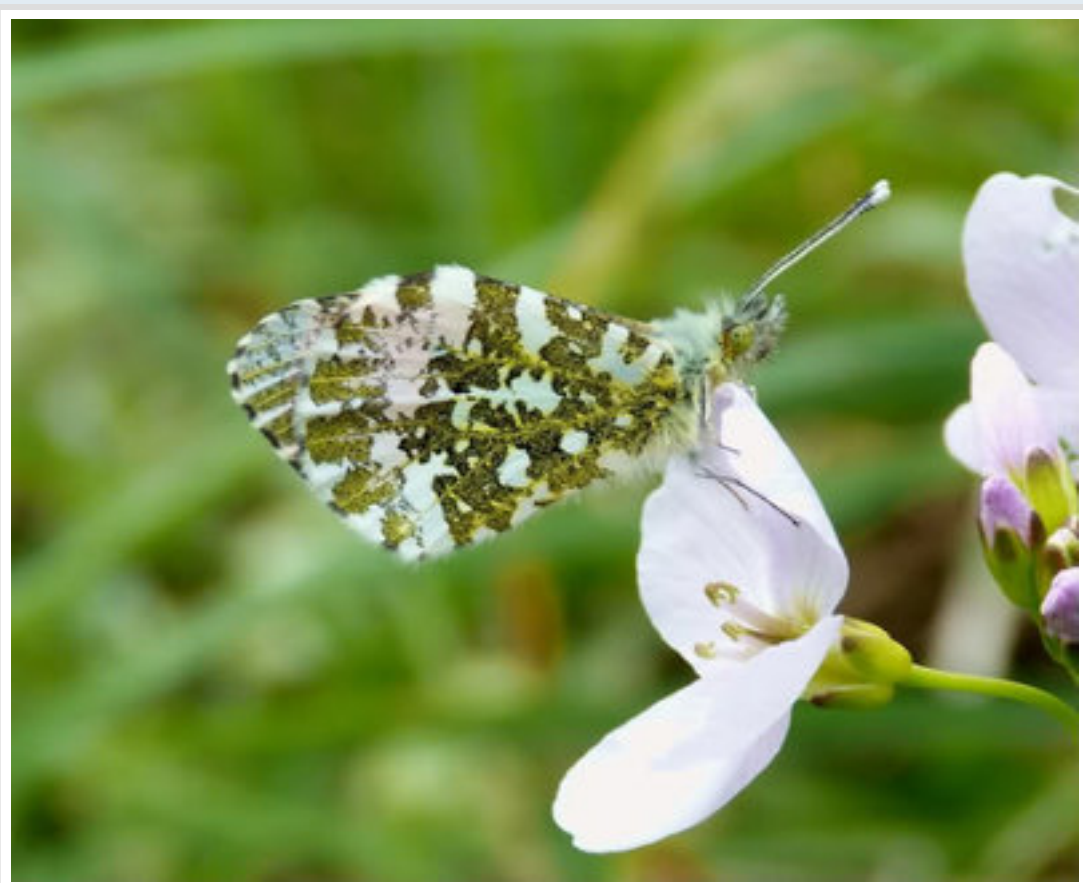
Speckled Wood 7

Orange Tip 5

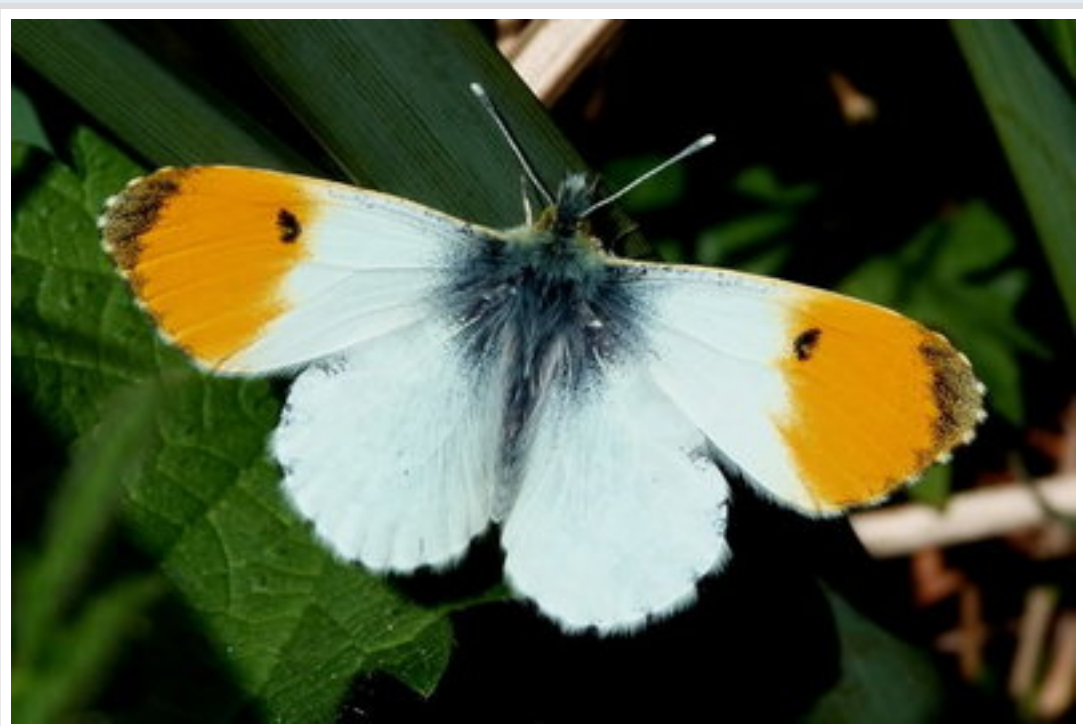
Peacock 1

Comma 1

As others have mentioned, cool conditions allow an easier approach towards normally restless Orange Tips. I found 3 resting on a single clump of cuckoo flower and was able to get in much closer than normal:



It makes a huge difference when the sun comes out, and the two male Orange Tips both took flight during one of these interludes, although one flew only about 10 yards before dropping into the foliage, whereupon it became an irresistible target:



One of the three on this clump was a female, and although she did briefly open her wings, she decided it was just too cold and stayed where she was:



As ever, Speckled Woods were undaunted by the unseasonal conditions:



Re: David M

by David M, 02-May-12 06:32 PM GMT

Less isn't always more

Wednesday 2nd May

When you're ill or busy and you don't get to take your dog out for a day or two, how does he/she react the next time you grab the lead? Well, that's how I've felt for over a week and given that this was the first decent forecast since March, I felt compelled to request the afternoon off from work so I could get some relief!!

It wasn't a warm day (16c was the maximum my car thermometer read, and that was on the way home) but it was largely sunny and I expected to see quite a bit of butterfly activity.

Merthyr Mawr is a vast dune system on the S. Wales coast (Porthcawl is in the distance):



I spent nearly two hours here, and although I managed to see 5 Grizzled Skippers, it took patient searching and a bit of local knowledge.



More worryingly, the only other butterflies I saw were 4 male Orange Tips and 2 Brimstones (one of each sex). I was staggered not to see a single Large, Small or Green Veined White and worry that they have been seriously affected by the recent conditions.

Re: David M

by David M, 07-May-12 05:14 PM GMT

Sunday 6th May

Plenty of people have been heaping gratitude on PBF-smeller pursuivant, Sussex Kipper lately. I ought now to add myself to that list.

Neil's recent posts regarding finding Pearl Bordered Fritillaries in cool conditions persuaded me to give Ewyas Harold Common a go, even though the temperature was no better than 10c!!

This site is just over the English border from Wales, situated in a pleasant spot near Pontrilas. I visited in early May last year and saw about a hundred of this species so I arrived there just before midday ready to do a little forensic searching.

The site itself is an interesting one, and stretches over a wide area. Grizzled Skippers are present too here (I've seen them) along with Green Hairstreak and Wood White (according to the notice board, although I've yet to come across either species).



With conditions being so poor, I headed straight for last year's 'hotspot', in a sharp dip just beyond the gorse:



I hit on one almost straight away, but it was clear it hadn't warmed up sufficiently for proper flight. It took a couple of attempted flutters, but came down to rest almost immediately. At one stage it was on the track, so I coaxed it onto my finger to transfer it somewhere a bit safer:



I couldn't resist placing it on a bluebell:



I saw 5 in total, one of which was racing around a field full of bugle seemingly oblivious to the conditions. Another one was content to bask on bare earth:



It clouded over after an hour and I realised I would be unlikely to see any more butterflies, but before I left I just wanted to see if the first PBF was still where I left it as it would be a good opportunity to get some underside shots. Sure enough, it was no more than 2 metres away from the bluebell, resting wings shut on a dead bracken stem:



Apart from the PBFs, I only encountered 4 other butterflies – 3 Peacocks and a male Orange Tip. Right now, butterflying is hard work for all of us but rewards can still be gained.

Re: David M

by David M, 12-May-12 08:40 PM GMT

Still frustrating, but getting better...

Saturday 12th May

With a guaranteed sunny forecast, I was out before 11am this morning to visit Old Castle Down, near Ewenny in Glamorgan. I saw nothing for the first half hour except for a Speckled Wood, but soon after I managed to spot my first Dingy Skipper of the year in the sheltered valley next to the quarry:



I walked back the way I came when I saw what I thought could be a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary (common on this site in season). The manner of flight gave this butterfly away though – it was a Wall Brown, and it frustrated me for 10 whole minutes by closing its wings within seconds of alighting. I thought I had got it at one point, but the bloody thing took off at the same time as I pressed the shutter:



I followed this male for a little while, and eventually he offered a very tempting closed-wing shot:



Of course, this site is notable for being the only High Brown Fritillary location in the whole of Wales. With vegetation having benefited from the wet spell lately, one hopes that by the end of June, these butterflies will once again be out in force here.



Re: David M

by David M, 19-May-12 04:57 PM GMT

Better times ahead.....

Saturday 19th May

A trip to the Alun Valley is always a pleasure, even when the weather is hardly ideal for butterfly hunting. The cloud and rain from the morning gradually gave way to light overcast skies with some sunshine so I headed out to check on the slopes cleared over the winter by conservation volunteers.

When I came in March to help clear the felled timber, not much that was green could be seen, but nature doesn't take long to recolonise, and already these freshly felled slopes are home to wild strawberry, bracken, bluebells and many other plants.

Whilst there weren't many Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries about (5 seen in total), the dull conditions allowed close approaches and the butterflies were easy to photograph:



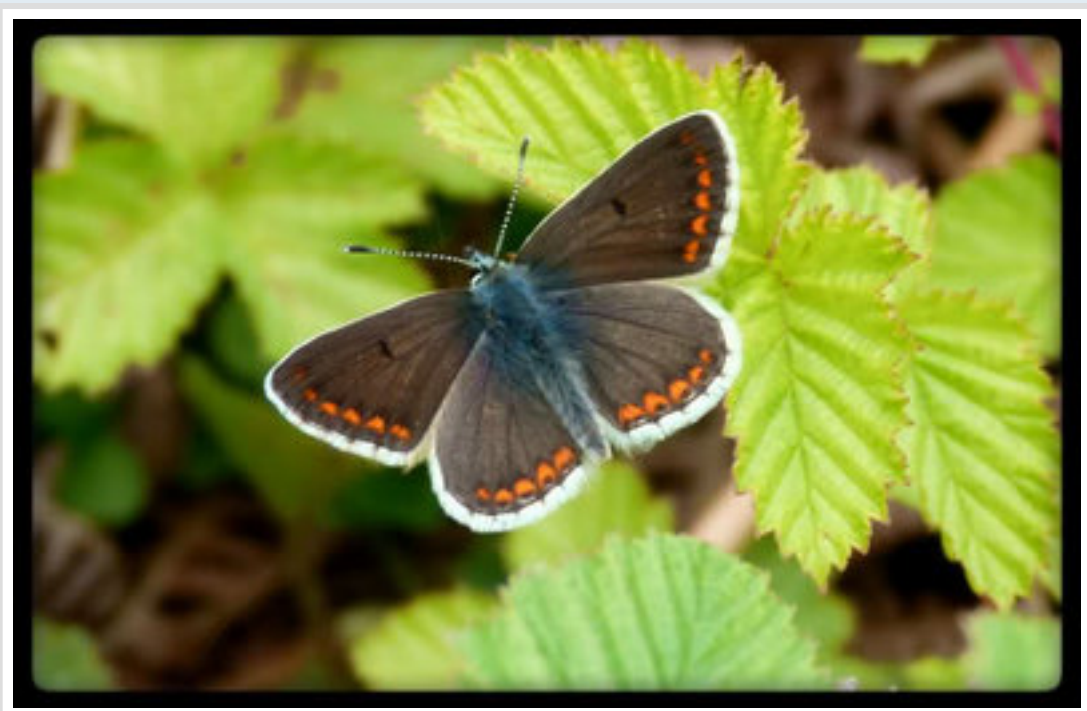
After two years trying, I managed to follow one until it snapped its wings shut in roosting mode:



A handful of Peacocks were seen, along with a Small Copper and a couple of Dingy Skippers, but I was particularly delighted to finally see a Large White, my first in 2012. It was a beautiful, fresh female but although she settled readily, she kept her wings firmly shut:



I also had the added pleasant surprise of a fresh Brown Argus:



Re: David M

by David M, 26-May-12 03:17 PM GMT

Friday 25th May - what a difference a week makes

A week last Wednesday, I visited Welsh Moor on the Gower Peninsula and it was a cool 13c with the moor waterlogged practically everywhere. Other than a handful of Orange Tips and Green Veined Whites not much was about butterfly-wise either.

This morning it couldn't have been more different. The Swansea area has been one of the warmest spots in the country for the last few days and not a cloud has been seen. When I arrived at 10.45 this morning it was already 24c and the moorland had dried out nicely. What's more, there were Green Hairstreaks and Marsh Fritillaries all over the place.



I counted 24 Marsh Fritillaries today, and I only really covered the smaller, northern section of the moor.



Hopefully, this species will do well this year as a result of an emergence coinciding with glorious weather conditions after heaps of rain previously.

I stopped at the supermarket on the way back, and by the time I was ready to drive home it was 1.30pm. The temperature was 27.5c and even rose to 28.5c in the dip on the motorway before the main Swansea junction – certainly the hottest day since I moved here in July 2010!

Re: David M

by David M, 27-May-12 01:15 PM GMT

Saturday 26th May – If at first you don't succeed....

I was determined to revisit Sand Point in Somerset before the weekend was out after my trip there on Thursday was ruined by persistent sea mist. With a healthy wind blowing first thing, I knew there would be no repeat, and thus it proved upon my arrival at 8.40am – the skies were clear and the temperature perfect.



The area by the stile is considered a hotspot and it was here I saw my first Glanville of the morning:



Plenty more followed, although the warmth of the air even at 9am was sufficient for them to be very active, meaning underside shots were very difficult to obtain:



Re: David M

by David M, 04-Jun-12 05:55 PM GMT

Monday 4th June - Overcast and downcast...

Hard to believe that anywhere in the Midlands could be 9.5c at midday on 4th June but that was the situation when I arrived at Haugh Wood today. It had been 12c and partly sunny in Abergavenny, but as I drove north the temperature seemed to drop by half a degree every 5 miles!

The cloud overhead was that stubborn stuff that never seems to move, and I wasn't surprised that no butterflies were active. Eventually though, I spotted a Speckled Wood in a sheltered spot and soon afterwards, when the sun briefly made an appearance, I found two Wood Whites along the southern ride.

The first one was roosting:



The second one was fairly active:



In spite of the low temperatures, those biting flies that took chunks out of my legs last year here were at it again (though thankfully, this time I was wearing jeans – shorts weather seems a long way off right now). 😞

Re: David M

by David M, 07-Jul-12 05:17 PM GMT

Saturday 7th July – Dodging the showers...

Although this unprecedented bad spell of weather shows no sign of ending, eventually one has to take a chance and just get out. The forecast offered little in the way of promise, but west Wales seemed to be the favoured spot, so I set off for Cors Caron, a raised peat bog near Tregaron in west Wales, which is notable because it is the furthest south that Large Heaths can be found on the British mainland.

I arrived at 10am, but the sun didn't come out till almost midday, although in the meantime I was treated to the spectacle of several Red Kites hovering around looking for a meal.

The butterfly return was meagre: 5 Large Skippers, 1 Peacock and 1 Small Tortoiseshell, but I did at least get to see 3 Large Heaths in addition to those species, 2 of which were found in this area:



This is the *polydama* form, less boldly marked and slightly paler in colour than the *davus* form, which is found in numbers at Whixhall Moss in Shropshire.

This was the only individual I was able to photograph; the bog was absolutely sodden with all the recent rainfall, and had it not been for the boardwalk that runs through the middle of this site then access would have been impossible.

I was hoping that the cloudy weather might make photographing this species rather easier than usual, but this was the best image I could get:



Re: David M

by David M, 08-Jul-12 05:32 PM GMT

Sunday 8th July – sunshine at last!

I'd forgotten what it's like to wake up to clear blue skies and sunshine, but this was the scenario at 7.30 this morning and less than 2 hours later I was at the Alun Valley site near Ewenny in Glamorgan to see whether there were any High Browns about.

The constant wet weather has made much of this site very difficult – I had to take a stick to help me keep my footing. Once down at the meadow, it seems that the reappearance of the stream has led to the vegetation changing somewhat. Large umbellifers have grown out of control in some areas, strangling the marsh thistles that Dark Greens and High Browns like so much. Even the bracken seems more robust than last year:



There were a fair few fritillaries on the wing, though Dark Greens seemed in the ascendancy. Still, I saw 8 High Browns, the first one being this fresh looking specimen:



Of the others I saw, this one was particularly interesting, as it was far more heavily suffused with black than is normal with this species:



Apart from Meadow Browns and Ringlets, the only other species about today were Small Tortoiseshell (5) and Large Skipper (2). It kind of breaks your heart when you see so few butterflies on such a lovely morning at a site that is as close to ideal for so many species. This really is a BAD year for our winged friends.

Re: David M

by David M, 16-Jul-12 04:41 PM GMT

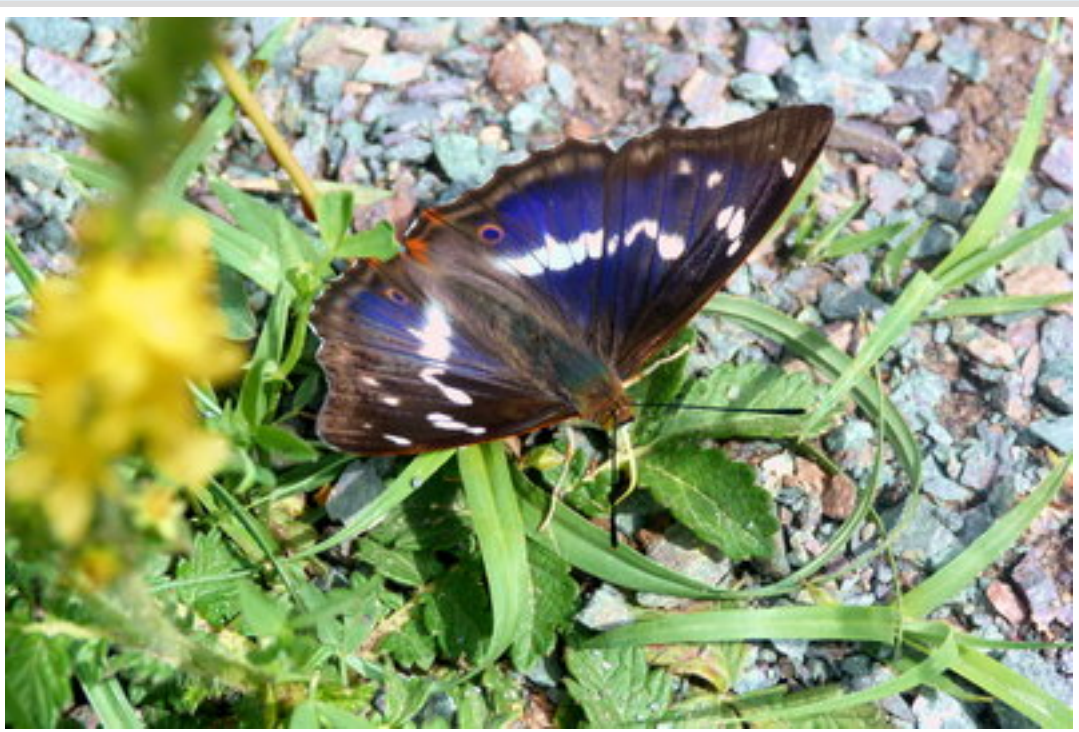
Sunday 15th July – Strange day, but rewarding nonetheless...

With this first reasonable forecast of the month coinciding with what ought to be the peak time for Purple Emperors, I drove to Bernwood Forest, near Oxford, arriving just before 10am.

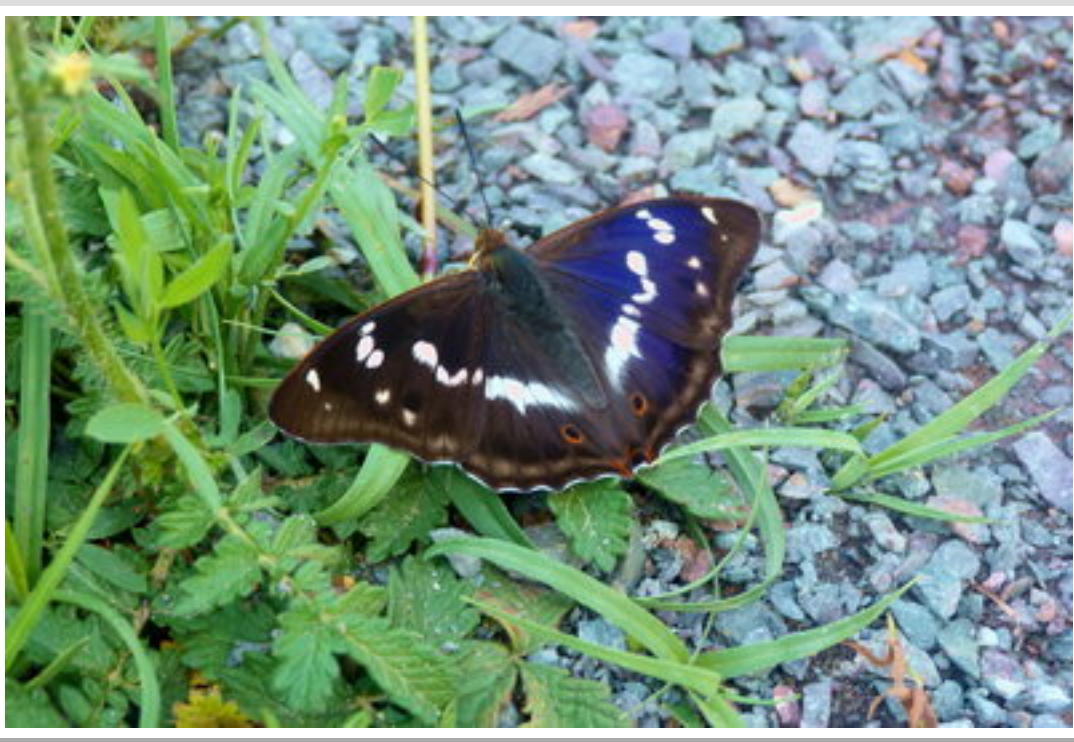
There were already several big game hunters assembled along the main ride, although none had been sighted thus far that morning. One local guy told me he'd seen three so far in the last week so I hung around admiring the Silver Washed Fritillaries that were flying along the rides:



Eventually, at 10.45am, near the first large clearing along the main ride, one decided to descend:



Once settled, He was remarkably approachable as he drank from some nasty looking fluid that was thankfully hidden under the vegetation, repeatedly opening and closing His wings depending on the presence/absence of the sun:



He seemed oblivious to the presence of we onlookers (numbering 6 at one point) and carried on nonchalantly for a full 20 minutes before disappearing back into the canopy.

I moved on to the large meadow at about 11.15, but getting there was a real trial – the ground was like a morass! Even large parts of the meadow itself were flooded.

I had hoped to check out the area where Willrow and Michaeljf had seen decent numbers of Purple Hairstreaks last year, but I gave up as much of the meadow was simply impassable. There were numerous Meadow Browns and Ringlets here though, along with Small Skippers and Marbled Whites.

I had hoped to see White Admirals and Purple Hairstreaks, but apart from one White Admiral seen flying into the canopy, my intentions were stymied, largely by the weather, which suddenly became very overcast and temperatures dropped markedly. Even Ringlets eventually went missing, and at that point I decided to call it a day as the ambient temperature was by now little more than 12c meaning that it was just too cool for flight.

So, frustrating in the main part, but compensated for somewhat by a single obliging Emperor.

Re: David M

by David M, 22-Jul-12 09:56 PM GMT

Saturday 21st July – mission finally accomplished...

When I first moved to Swansea two years ago, one of the first things I did was to check the UK Butterfly Monitoring site to get a handle on the species distribution in the wider area.

One of the most intriguing things was the presence of Silver Studded Blue colonies on the Pembrokeshire coast, near Bosherton. These are situated on the army firing ranges, which perhaps explains why they have survived unmolested.

The weather is unpredictable here, so getting a calm and sunny day is quite rare. In addition, the eastern firing ranges are only open to the public at weekends, so that narrows down the choice of days still further.

Anyway, we finally had a promising forecast coinciding with a weekend within the SSB flight period, so off I went to Pembrokeshire and what a delightful few hours I spent there.

This area is not a world heritage site for nothing. Some of the coastal views are breathtaking:



The view in the opposite direction was equally stunning:



Butterfly numbers were very encouraging given the atrocious summer we've had thus far, particularly in view of the fact that the exposed Pembrokeshire coast is hardly a hotspot. Meadow Browns positively abounded, whilst Dark Green Fritillaries were flying in sizeable numbers, certainly at least two dozen seen:



Wherever there were rocky outcrops you would find Graylings. This mating pair were particularly approachable (the female is even showing part of her upperwing):



Silver Studded Blues were hard work to find, but I eventually saw 4 males and 1 female:



There were quite a few other species seen in low numbers. Large, Small and Green Veined Whites seem to be reappearing, whilst I saw my first Common Blues for several weeks as well as a Red Admiral.

Perhaps most significantly, today was the first day this year that I have noticed reasonable numbers of butterflies flying around the roadside as I've been driving along. Obviously Whites re-emerging contributed to this as they are the most visible, but I also saw quite a few Meadow Browns/Ringlets, as well as a handful of Fritillaries.

Maybe things are starting to get better at last

Re: David M

by David M, 29-Jul-12 04:33 PM GMT

Friday 27th July - Part 1, Bad light stops play....almost!

Although this week's lovely weather has been most welcome (and long overdue), it was rather frustrating to see that temperatures were set to drop markedly just in time for the weekend. 😞

Knowing this could easily be the last proper hot spell of the 'summer', I bagged Friday off and thought I'd make an entire day of it. I decided to go first to Lulworth Cove which is a place I haven't visited since I was a teenager. I was hoping to see Chalkhill Blues as well as, maybe, a late Lulworth Skipper or two. Unfortunately, despite a promising weather forecast, by the time I arrived at 9am it was decidedly dull and quite windy too.

I climbed up Bindon Hill but saw no butterflies at all till 10am, whereupon the sun started to burn back the cloud a little to the point where a hazy glow started to develop. Marbled Whites began to show themselves along with a couple of Meadow Browns, but they weren't comfortable flying and I feared Chalkhill Blues would remain hunkered down in the long grass.

Thankfully, in the most sheltered part near the gate leading back down to the village, I disturbed five different individuals.



All were males, and every one flew for as short a time as it was able before dropping back to the ground in the cool, overcast conditions.



I got briefly excited on the way back to the car park when I spotted a Skipper, but it turned out to be a Small Skipper. I also saw a solitary Wall Brown, two Small Whites and about 20 Hedge Browns. I toyed with the idea of staying longer as by 11am conditions were starting to improve significantly, but I needed to move onto my main destination so I satisfied myself with a few photographs of this beautiful coastal site, which I will return to next year hopefully.



Re: David M

by David M, 29-Jul-12 07:34 PM GMT

Friday 27th July - Part 2, "Hairstreak Neck"...

After leaving Lulworth at 11am, I headed up to Alner's Gorse which is, if anyone needs to know, about a 45 minute drive away.

The further inland I got the bluer the sky became and well before I reached King's Stag conditions were almost perfect: 24c, only 20% cloud cover and light to moderate winds.

This is only the second time I've visited this site, but I genuinely think that the view down the tree-lined ride from the entrance is one of the most alluring sights in the UK from a butterfly enthusiast's perspective - it simply EXUDES anticipation laced with excitement.

Knowing that Brown Hairstreaks had already been recorded here this year, I had hoped on the off chance that I might do the almost unthinkable, i.e. see Brown, Purple and White Letter at the same site on the SAME DAY!!

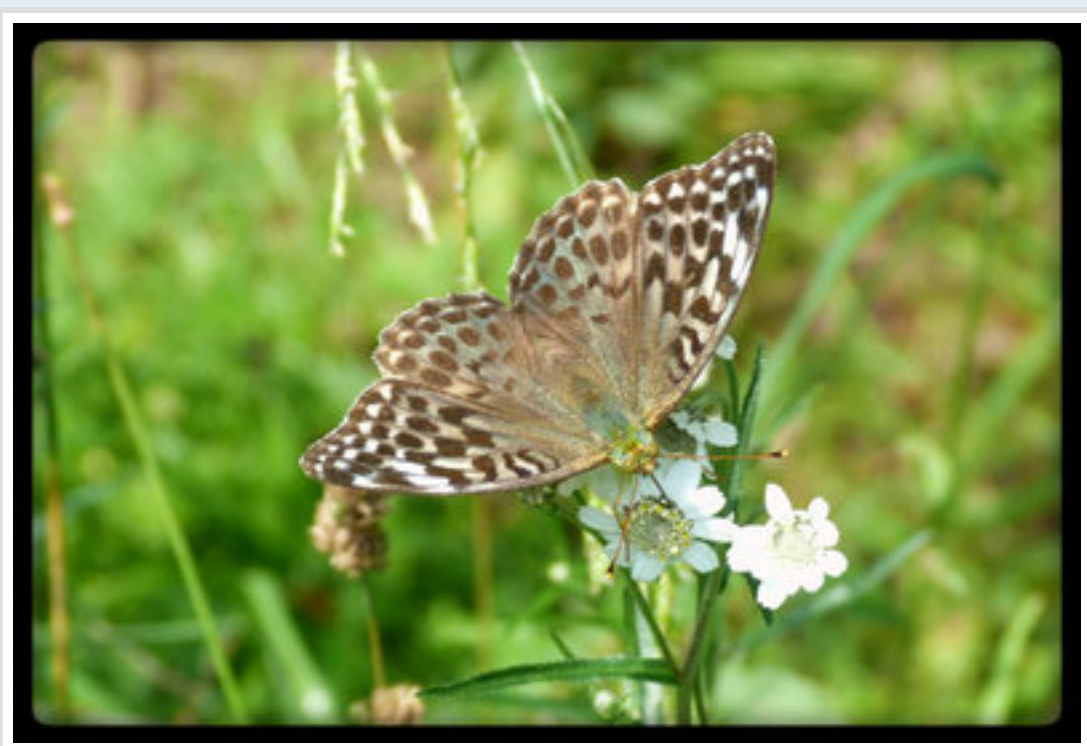
Once I'd arrived at the ride where the planted elms are, there were several people already there with SLRs that made my camera look amateurish in comparison. However, top quality equipment means that identification is more easily achieved, and one of the photographers there immediately pointed

to the elm canopy and informed me that there were plenty of White Letters up there. Almost straight away, there was a dogfight between two WLHs although they were so far away that the only reliable means of ID was the fact that they were engaging each other in the elm canopy, rather than the oak or ash.

Turning in the opposite direction to an isolated mature oak, a familiar silvery coloured insect fluttered around before settling about 8m up. My first Purple Hairstreak of the day:



I went through the gate to the densest part of the site and spotted a beautiful Valezina SWF:



Without doubt today saw the greatest number of butterflies I've seen in the UK in 2012. Meadow Browns/Ringlets/Hedge Browns/Marbled Whites/Small Skippers were at almost plague proportions. A time-out spent looking into the oak canopy at any stage would reveal a handful of Purple Hairstreaks, and a walk down one of the more open rides even turned up a White Admiral, which is, according to what I was told, a very infrequent sight here.

I returned to the elm ride at about 2pm and witnessed lots of activity amongst the treetops from White Letters, but none were nectaring or even settling at low altitude:



I saw several settle high up, but they were too far away to locate in my camera's viewfinder, so I simply took 'pot luck' and took a few shots of the canopy from afar. When loading the images onto my PC, I could see three WLHs, the best of which is the one below which, whilst taken from a distance and at full zoom, is of fairly poor quality but at least proves that the butterflies active here were White Letter Hairstreaks beyond doubt:



Sadly, I didn't see any Brown Hairstreaks here today, so I will have to invest all my energy in the West Williamston site in Pembrokeshire during the latter half of August (which, given a pleasant day, is one of the highlights of the entire year). Almost impossible to count the butterflies today, but here are the estimates:

1. Meadow Brown 250+
2. Hedge Brown 150+
3. Ringlet 150+
4. Small Skipper 100+
5. Marbled White 50-100
6. Purple Hairstreak 15-20
7. White Letter Hairstreak 10-15
8. Silver Washed Fritillary 10-15
9. Large Skipper 8-12
10. Large White 4
11. Small White 2
12. Green Veined White 2
13. Speckled Wood 2
14. Red Admiral 1
15. White Admiral 1

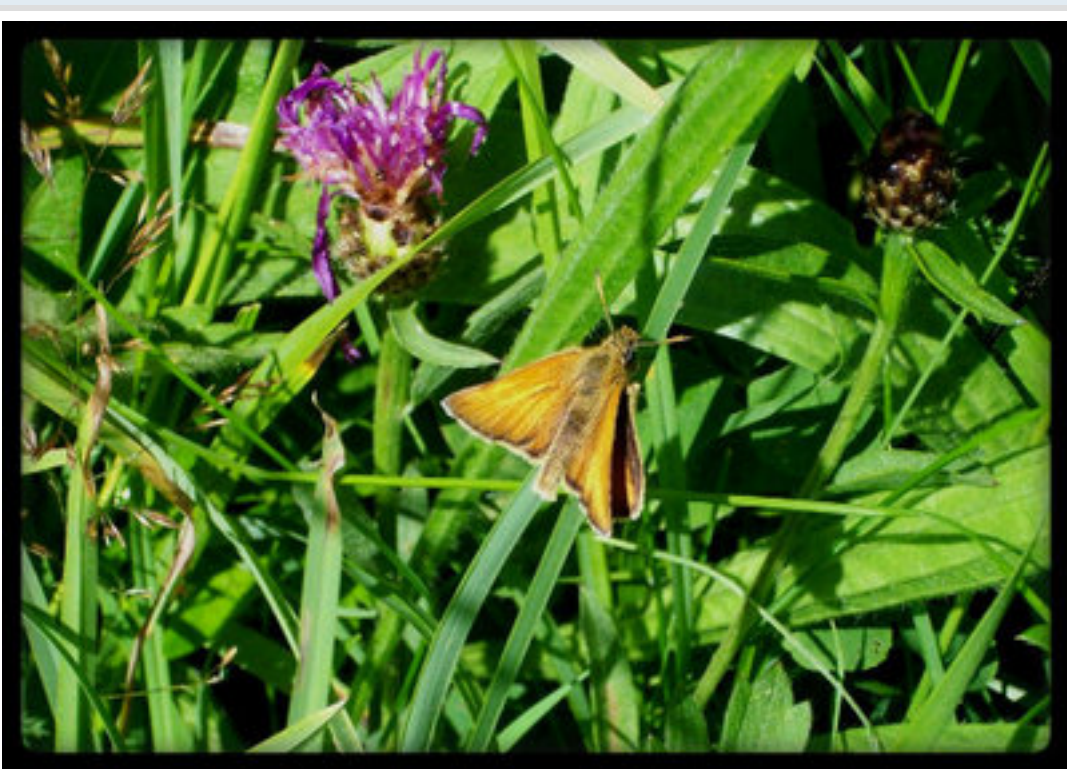
Re: David M

by David M, 03-Aug-12 01:03 PM GMT

Thursday 2nd August - always pays to check....

Had to attend a wedding in Oxford on 2nd August, but whilst sitting outside the Victoria pub I noticed an attractive meadow nearby. I must have looked a right idiot wading through knee high grass in my finery (God knows how many grass seeds ended up lodged in the rims of my shoes) but I was glad I did, for as well as seeing Meadow Browns, Hedge Browns, Marbled Whites, Small Skippers and a Dark Green Fritillary, I spotted a handful of Essex Skippers, a species I had effectively given up on this year.

Sadly, I only had my friend's cheap digital camera with me but it was sufficient for a record shot:



Re: David M

by David M, 20-Aug-12 08:53 PM GMT

Friday 10th August - cathartic butterflying experience...

On Saturday 4th August, I travelled to the Isle of Man to visit my mother to celebrate her 80th birthday which fell the following day. I'd booked us into the Sefton Hotel for the Sunday champagne carvery, but sadly we never made it as my mum had a heart attack on the morning of her birthday and passed away two days later.

As anyone who has been in this situation will know, the next few days see you taken completely out of your natural comfort zone as you have to set grief aside in order to concentrate on the logistical realities of the funeral arrangements et al.

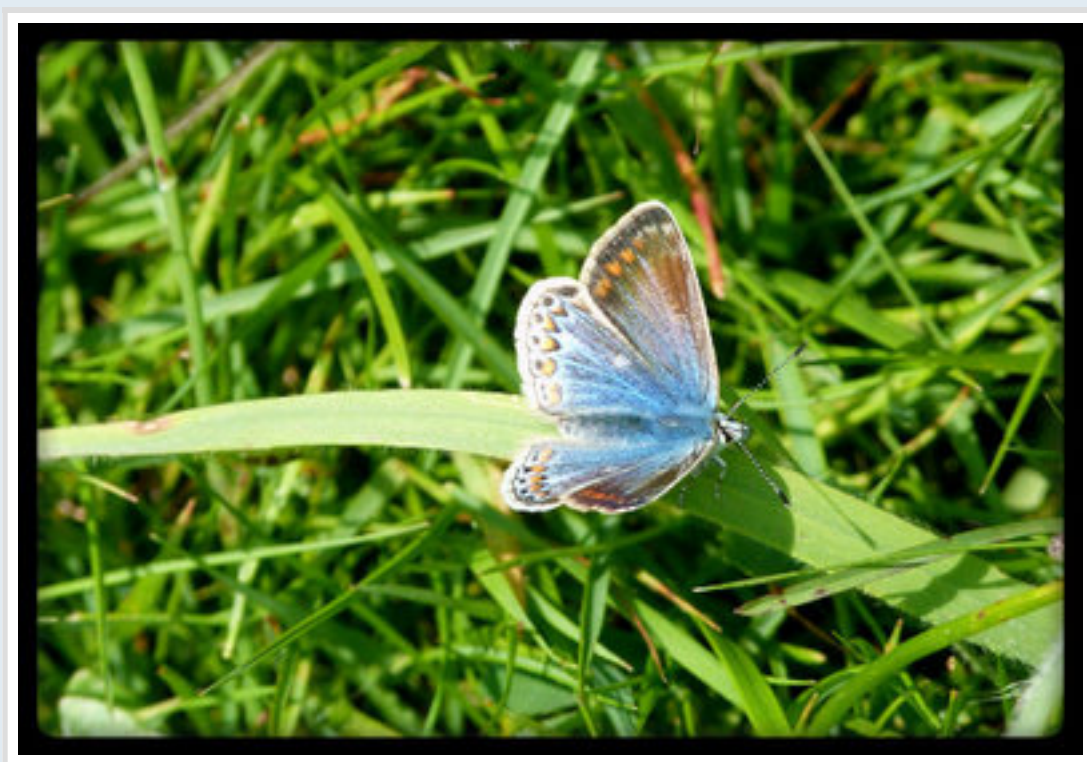
Wednesday and Thursday were simply awful, so when I awoke early on the Friday to find blue skies and warm temperatures, I felt obliged to take a little time out in an attempt to assuage the depression that had descended upon me.

I drove up to the Point of Ayre nature reserve, and with it being a weekday I pretty much had the whole place to myself. What's more, conditions were abnormally good, as not only was it unusually warm for the Isle of Man (20c at its peak), there was a virtual absence of wind even when standing on the exposed coast.

I believe it was a French naturalist who was once quoted as saying that "butterflies provide solace for the pain of living", and I suspect I will never again empathise quite so profoundly with those sentiments. For a glorious couple of hours, I simply cast aside the burdens accrued over the previous few days and was cheered up no end by the simple pleasure of being surrounded by butterflies in a wonderful setting on a particularly beautiful morning.

Now, the Isle of Man isn't renowned for its depth of species, yet in spite of that there were several notable things to report.

The main newsworthy point was the sheer numbers of Common Blues flying around this site. I wouldn't want to swear on oath but my gut instinct is that I have never seen so many of this species in a single place ever before in my life. I was on the heathland for about two hours and I walked a fair distance without retracing my steps, and I reckon I saw over 200. At any point, if you stopped and just looked around you would see them at all points of the compass. Of course, this kind of site is ideal for them, but given that there are many excellent habitats on the mainland that have suffered a paucity of numbers of this butterfly in 2012, it fair warmed my heart to see them in such glorious abundance on this often exposed island headland. The females were particularly interesting; most were predominantly brown but some were very blue indeed, and this one caught my eye not just because of its 'blueness', but also due to its strange brown pattern on the upperwings along with a curious white-ish spot on each upper hindwing:



This is an overview of the habitat that attracts them in such numbers, and at this time of year it is a joy to behold as the heather is a deep purple colour which contrasts beautifully with the green landscape and the copious yellow blooms that flower during August:

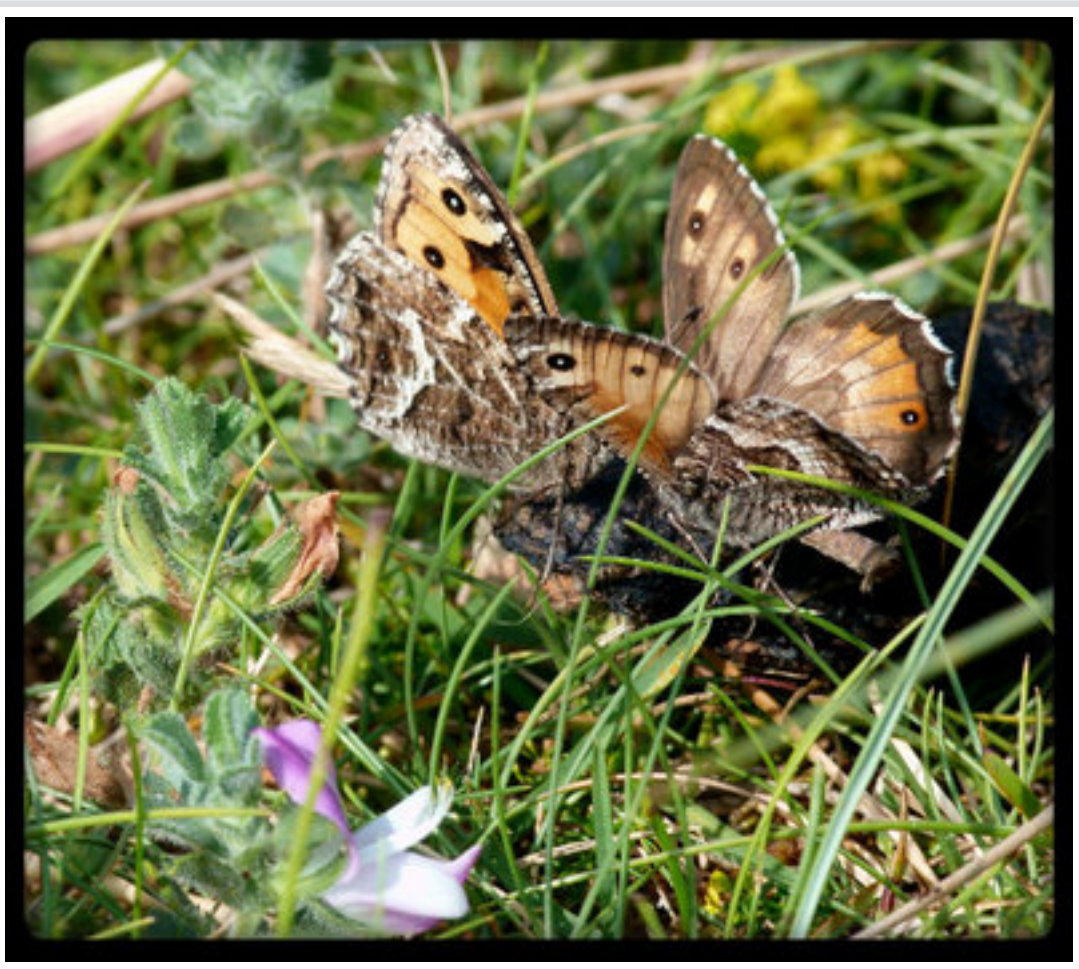


The Isle of Man is just 26 miles from Cumbria, and on a clear day you can see the mountains of the Lake District very clearly. Generally, this tends to happen in winter, but today the hills were distinctly visible in a summer environment, and they looked quite ethereal when seen from ground level, looking across the northern Manx plain beyond the Point of Ayre lighthouse:



Common Blues weren't the only species flying. There were a handful of Whites, 50–100 Meadow Browns, a Small Tortoiseshell, a single Wall Brown, a couple of dozen Small Heaths and even a Holly Blue in the scrubby area at the southern end of the site. However, there was one other butterfly seen in three figure numbers – Grayling.

I'd estimate I saw about 120, mainly in the dune area near to the shore. As ever with this species, the size and the markings were far from uniform. Manx Graylings seem to be bigger than mainland ones, and they have quite bold undersides. I photographed a few of them, but when I spotted a courting pair I followed them for a while as I knew that occasionally they can present open winged shots. I was delighted to capture the following image, not only because it gives a rarely seen look at the forewings, but also because it seems to show that the male (on the right, who is the one indulging in the 'wing-flicking') is intentionally coercing the female to come into contact with his androconial scales. This image shows quite clearly the female's antenna positioned directly above the male's sex brands, which one presumes is an intentional part of the pairing process:



Whilst butterflies don't make headlines here, birds certainly DO. The Ayres reserve is renowned for hosting breeding Arctic Terns, whilst many other infrequently seen species use the northern tip of this island as a staging post. I'm by no means an expert when it comes to ornithology, but even I could tell that the large seabirds flying low over the ocean weren't gulls. I took a few photos and my original suspicions were confirmed – gannets....and lots of them.



Re: David M

by Mark Colvin, 20-Aug-12 09:08 PM GMT

Hi David,

Wishing you much peace and happiness during this difficult time.

Kindest regards. Mark

Re: David M

by Padfield, 20-Aug-12 09:15 PM GMT

My deepest sympathies and condolences, David. My heart goes out to you.

Guy

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 20-Aug-12 09:23 PM GMT

My sincere condolences David.

It is times like this that put a lot of things into perspective

Best Wishes,

Neil F.

Re: David M

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-12 09:28 PM GMT

Hi David,

I'm so sorry to hear your sad news, but glad that you found some comfort amongst the butterflies.

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: David M

by Pete Eeles, 21-Aug-12 08:34 PM GMT

Very sorry to hear about your loss David. My thoughts are with you.

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: David M

by David M, 21-Aug-12 10:51 PM GMT

Thank you, Pete.

Saturday 18th August - window of opportunity....

I travelled on the ferry from Douglas at 8.30 this morning, arriving at Heysham at 12 noon.

Heysham port must be one of the ugliest places in the UK; filthy seawater surrounding you plus a monstrous carbuncle in the shape of the huge power station adjacent to the quay.

Still, every cloud has a silver lining and a look at the map shows that Arnside Knott is a mere 45 minute drive away, so that is where I went and I was at the car park just after 1pm.





It was fairly overcast when I arrived, though things improved markedly and by 2.30pm the clouds had all but dispersed.

Obviously, Scotch Argus was the target species, but the first butterflies I saw were Meadow and Hedge Browns, along with a Grayling or two and the odd Speckled Wood. Gradually, as conditions improved, I located my first Scotch Argus, though it was decidedly battered. Thankfully, a little while later I discovered two more, one of which was just about photograph standard:



Clearly, this species is at the end of its flight period up here, and despite much searching, I didn't find any remotely fresh-looking. This specimen was easily the most 'pristine':



I saw 14 in total, most of which were spotted in the sheltered dip just beyond the first peak you come to after walking up the hill from the car park.



The overall count was:

Hedge Brown 30-40
Meadow Brown 30-40
Scotch Argus 14
Speckled Wood 8
Grayling 5
Common Blue 5
Small White 2
Small Skipper 2
Large White 1
Dark Green/High Brown Fritillary 1 (didn't get near enough for a definitive ID)

Re: David M

by David M, 26-Aug-12 10:06 PM GMT

Sunday 26th August - Patience is a virtue....

A second visit in 4 days to the lovely coastal site at West Williamston in Pembrokeshire provided more than I had expected.

It's rare that the forecast for this exposed part of Wales is calm, sunny and mild so I simply couldn't resist, and sure enough upon my arrival at 10.30am it was as bright as it was tranquil.

I spotted several species on my way to the 'butterfly glade' (more of that later), but I finally managed to nail down a Brown Hairstreak here after patiently sitting in the prime egg-laying amphitheatre for an hour or so.

At first, I thought the movement in the undergrowth was due to a Hedge Brown, but when the insect didn't immediately surface I investigated more closely and discovered this little jewel:



As ever, the reward for perseverance is a very intimate audience with the butterfly, and I watched her go about her business for a good 20 minutes as she alternated between basking and looking for egg-laying spots:



At one point she seemed to get entangled in scrubby bramble undergrowth, so I offered her my finger and, unsurprisingly given how tame this species usually is, she accepted it and happily rested on my hand for a couple of minutes before wandering off towards the blackthorn:



Although she probed around the shrubs bending her abdomen, she didn't actually lay an egg, and once again I failed to find any in spite of a fairly thorough search of the young suckers growing in the glade.

There were plenty of other species on the wing. I saw 4 Silver Washed Fritillaries, including 2 females. There were several Large Whites pottering about, as well as a handful of Small and Green Veined. Speckled Woods kept popping up along with Hedge Browns, and I even spotted a Holly Blue. However, this was the first day in (I think) three years when I managed to see all 5 Vanessids at a single site on the same day. Small Tortoiseshells were particularly numerous, Peacocks were prominent too. Three Commas were seen and a couple of Red Admirals checked in.

A Painted Lady spent most (possibly all) of the day flying around the thistles near the entrance to the site:



No Meadow Browns today though, nor were there any Common Blues. Still, 13 species is a decent return at this time of year and hopefully Brown Hairstreak numbers will pick up over the next week or two as this site is a little behind those in England.

Re: David M

by David M, 22-Sep-12 06:32 PM GMT

Saturday 22nd September - Hairstreak Heaven.....

With storms forecast for the next couple of days, today presented a final opportunity to do a site visit with a reasonable expectation of seeing a fair selection of species. Sadly, with temperatures in south Wales forecast to peak at just 14c, I didn't expect very much though I was determined to locate my first Brown Hairstreak eggs of the year after drawing two blanks at the Pembrokeshire site last month.

Well, I'm delighted to say that not only did I find 25 eggs (which is the most I've ever seen), I also had the pleasure of seeing 4 adult female Brown Hairstreaks along with decent numbers of other species.

It was a mere 10.5c when I pulled into the small car park at West Williamston Reserve, but my spirits were raised by a Red Admiral fluttering over the ivy nearby along with two warring Speckled Wood males:



Before I'd reached the foreshore, I'd already racked up 7 Speckled Woods, and after 50 yards of walking along the tidal path that number was eclipsed by double figure numbers of Small Tortoiseshells nectaring on the hawksbeard-type plants.

This one was particularly attractive. Am I imagining things or does it have abnormally wide blue fringes?



I saw 3 Commas in total – this one was the best behaved:



I was surprised to see 2 Small Whites and 3 Green Veined Whites. I thought they'd have packed up for the year by now. This female GVW was irresistible:



I'd already found 9 Brown Hairstreak eggs, but this one little sucker had a staggering EIGHT on it, taking my total immediately to 17:



Then, just after midday, I spotted my first Hairstreak fluttering along the shrub line on the foreshore:



I followed her for over 20 minutes as she potted about, but most of the time she kept coming to rest on the grasses. This was in a very exposed area just by the water and I was quite surprised by her durability as though it was sunny the temperature was 13c at best.



It was whilst I was tracking her that I disturbed ANOTHER female BH amongst the grasses. I tried to follow her but she flew up over the shrub fringe. Luckily, the original one was still on the hawthorn where I'd last seen her:



She DID poke about in the blackthorn a little, but I only saw her lay one egg:



I then took a detour into the 'glade', and within a couple of minutes I spotted another female BH, though this one was in a far tattier state. She was resting quite high up on some dead bracken, and as I was taking photos of her another Brown Hairstreak fluttered past my face. Sadly, it didn't settle but I was delighted to track the other one down onto the blackthorn where she laid two eggs taking my total past 20. I found a handful more before bumping into two people I'd seen a couple of hours earlier who were on their way back to their car. They'd come specially to see this species for the first time and had also managed to spot 4 (though they'd trumped me as they'd also seen an osprey whereas the best I could counter with was my single curlew). 😞

So, I several lessons learned today:

Brown Hairstreaks will fly and lay eggs in temperatures between 12c and 14c. They will also spend time flying in open, exposed places settling on grasses in much the same way as Skippers do. There are also fair numbers of them about in late September.

Overall, a very worthwhile trip!

Re: David M

by Mark Colvin, 23-Sep-12 11:11 AM GMT

Hi David,

Glad to see you had success and interesting to note your comments.

"David M" wrote:

Brown Hairstreaks will fly and lay eggs in temperatures between 12c and 14c. They will also spend time flying in open, exposed places settling on grasses in much the same way as Skippers do. There are also fair numbers of them about in late September.

I've spent the last two days in the north of Wales; around Menai and Anglesey ... and the sun was shining! Although I was not butterflying I did see Red Admiral, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: David M

by David M, 21-Oct-12 04:25 PM GMT

Sunday 21st October – still enough warmth in the air.....

Cloudless and mild all day today. Temperatures peaked at 15.5c so it was inevitable that butterflies would still be on the wing.

I thought I'd check out Pembrey Country Park near Llanelli, as it is inhabited by Grizzled Skippers in spring and I wanted to have a poke about to get my bearings before visiting next year.

Before I'd arrived, I'd already seen a Small Tortoiseshell at a roundabout in Llanelli, and two Red Admirals also flew near enough to my car for a positive ID.

There were a fair few people on the beach which gives an indication of how pleasant it was. Here's a view of the Gower from across the bay to the north:



The surprise of the afternoon was seeing a male Green Veined White fluttering amongst the evening primrose-type plants (he was in remarkably good nick too). I've never seen a White this late in the year before.

I spotted three more Red Admirals and also got a decent look at a fox from one of the bird hides. It was 2.45pm when I arrived back near home, and the sun was still warm so I checked out my favourite little 'hotspot' down near the river at the end of Cwm Clydach. I saw three Speckled Woods in total but all were across the river and I needed full zoom and crop:



As I made my way back to the car, there on the ivy growth alongside the railings was a lone Small Tortoiseshell:



Seems like we're in for a mild week to take us up to November, so there's still a chance of spotting a few more individuals before the cold weather closes in.

Re: David M

by David M, 03-Nov-12 06:56 PM GMT

Saturday 3rd November - Last butterfly of 2012?.....

I needed to go to the Post Office this morning, but seeing as it was so sunny, I thought I'd also check out the flowering ivy in the sheltered nook at the bottom of Cwm Clydach nearby.

Although the air temperature was just 7 degrees, it felt quite pleasant in the dip by the river's edge, though I couldn't see any butterflies feeding on the ivy.

There were flies and wasps everywhere, and just as I reached the end of the stretch I disturbed a Red Admiral which promptly flew onto the bark of a tree on the other side of the river.

There it remained for a while soaking up what warmth there was in the sunshine, before decamping to the ivy flowers that belonged to the shrubs that had climbed up around the tree trunks.

Always a treat to find a butterfly in November, and I suspect that'll be the last one I'll see before March 2013. 😊



Re: David M

by David M, 28-Dec-12 05:00 PM GMT

Christmas in Abergavenny was fairly routine this year, if a little wet.

I managed to track down a haggis to cook for our 28 chickens - actually, 30 this year as we had two guests, Nosy and Shy, whose owners had housed them with us whilst they went on a cruise. Nosy and Shy are two Isa Browns who have stayed with us a few times. Their usual home is in a very small egloo so the pair of them must feel like they've been released on licence when they arrive in our huge back yard! They both got to indulge in the feast of haggis, 1kg of corn and 2 tins of chopped hot dog sausages. I have to say I ate a bit of it myself too before I put it out in the garden on Christmas Day morning:



As ever, they were like a pack of velociraptors and the usual riot ensued, with the senior hens getting to feast directly from the platter and the rest having to pick their moment to zoom in for scraps before withdrawing. Even when the seniors grow full, they still stubbornly remain by the main body of food, almost daring the subservient ones to come forward. Our three biggest beasts are Lucie (Light Sussex), Maggie (Magpie) and The Queen (Speckled). These three merely have to be there to deter those lower in the pecking order. In truth, most of the fights are between those in the middle third of the order, since the lowest ones accept their place without much complaint, and the top handful have all been around so long that they know each other's strengths and weaknesses inside out and the pecking order is therefore totally established and understood. Occasionally though, the top chickens will join in fights that have broken out amongst the unruly middle order. I think this has a positive disciplining effect, as things usually fizzle out pretty quickly as a result – I believe far more damage would be done if the unruly mob went unchecked. I suppose it's like teachers breaking up playground fights.



Thankfully, no chicken was seriously hurt as a result of this festive feast and all 30 of them had at least a little of what was on offer. For we house-dwellers, a prime fillet of beef was the selection for 2012, and it was exceedingly good!

