

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-Jan-12 04:11 AM GMT

HAPPY NEW YEAR! 😊

First up sorry no butterflies here – Hod Hill will follow in a couple of days...in the mean time here are a few juicy birds!

2012 started earlier than expected for me as my younger daughter woke up at 5:30. So once she was back in the land of nod I lay back and had a decision to make. Get up and drive there and then to Portland and wait for it to get light or catch a few extra hours kip, have breakfast and go birding closer to home...?

My eyelids did the deciding for me and then the next thing I knew it was 7 and I got cracking. I started off at Spinnaker Lake near Blashford. Usual ducks, and 5 Little Egrets with a Great White in amongst them, nice to see them together and in flight so I could get a size comparison and see how obvious the orange bill is. However the Ferruginous Duck 😞 wasn't around and Nick and Jackie gave me some useful information for Blue Winged Teal.

So next stop Longham Lakes where there were more of the usual ducks, gulls including Common, LBB and a nice dark headed Med Gull. The Teal has been hanging out with Shoveler and they weren't anywhere to be seen so could I be dipping for the second time? Luckily it became apparent that we were looking at the wrong side of the island so having worked around there it was, in amongst some Teal. It was sleeping for a while which meant that I could have a little scan around finding a female Goosander and Snipe. Then something upset it so it had a little shake and a little swim before settling down again further along the island. This allowed me to get a good view of the nondescript plummage with the white loreal spot showing up nicely. It certainly took a dislike to the Teal as each time one would walk past it would peck at them – some might say that this brash behaviour is what you'd expect from a Yank 😊😂

Again it was decision time – the end of Hengistbury Head for Snow Bunting or back to Blashford for another crack at the "Fudge duck? In the end time decided so it was back to Blashford. It wasn't on Spinnaker so I checked out Ivy Lake from the Rockford side. I looked through every Pochard, Tuftie and one of the ducks didn't look right. Its head was rounded with no tuft, it looked reddish in colour and every now and then when it turned or raised itself slightly higher out of the water it showed a white patch under the tail. I couldn't believe that I'd refound the bird so I ran (not a pleasant activity this side of Christmas!) to get a few more birders to check that I wasn't seeing things. It then decided to have a little stretch, showing clearly the white wing markings and white belly patch. Relieved that I hadn't made a prat of myself and chuffed that I'd made my own discovery I headed back to the car and drove round to Blashford reserve and headed to the Ivy South hide. I managed to relocate it and with a much closer few it was obvious, I could even see the white eye and now the diagnostic white undertail was much more apparent as was the reddish colour.

So 2012 begins with not one but two lifers! Hopefully this bodes well not just for the birds but also the butterflies! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

p.s. check out Two Owls Birding or Longham Lakes (birdworld) for photos of the Blue Winged Teal – I don't have a telescopic lens yet!

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 02-Jan-12 07:13 AM GMT

Hiya Wurzel, cracking start to the year!!!! Wish I could say the same for mine....highlight was a pair of Buzzards over Epsom Common.

Pity both the Fudge Duck and BW Teal are escapees though.

HAHA! Just kidding 😊 I'll be doing the same/similar circuit as you did in 2 days time, so I'm glad to have your insider info on the locations. Cheers! Then I'm on Portland until midday Friday and looking forward to locating hibernating Large Torts and suchlike 😊

Glad you had a goodun 😊

Gibster

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Jan-12 03:54 AM GMT

Hod Hill



Hod Hill is a large hill fort built by the Drurotriges. It is an area of calcareous grassland owned and managed by the National Trust and is a hotspot for Marsh Fritillary. This was the main reason for my visit in late April.

When I arrived it was cold and the wind was blowing so I ended walking around the rings twice. Luckily as the morning progressed the wind lessened, the sun came out and the butterflies came out. On my third wander round by the entrance to the site I finally came upon a Dingy Skipper low down between the inner and outer ring of the fort. It sat patiently waiting for me to take my shots and then fluttered away into the breeze.

I set off east back to the half way point along the bottom of the rings and decided to wait for them to come to me. I did a trick that often works and that is "give up and have a coffee". It worked again and all of a sudden there was a Grizzled Skipper, and another, followed closely by a Green Veined White and then a Small Copper, followed by a Common Blue, Brown Argus and another Dingy Skipper. My coffee was cold by now and I was clicking away like crazy. There was so much in this little hollow that I'd forgotten about the target species that I was there to see, that is until I spotted something larger and darker trying to nestle down in the longer grass on the side of the ring...





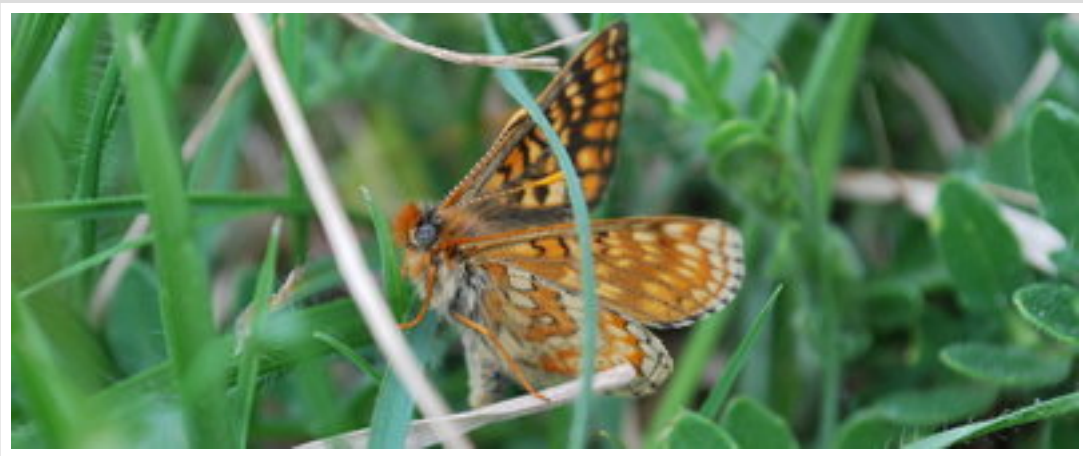
The darker and more unusually patterned butterfly turned out to be a Marsh Fritillary. Despite the somewhat gaudy appearance of the butterfly in these shots it was surprisingly well camouflaged in amongst the grass as the different blocks of colour helped to break up the overall outline. The darker colours helped it to blend into the shadows lower down in the grass. I also presume that they help it to gain body heat through basking as this is quite an early emerging species. When it did eventually decide to make a move it had quite a lazy flight and was surprisingly easy to follow. This meant that I managed to get not just shots of the open wings but also the under wing as well, with the orange and cream showing up against the white outer rim of spots. Once I'd got my eye in I managed to find four or five individuals along a small stretch of the rings.





This southern side of the ring seemed to be the most productive with pretty much all of the species encountered here. As well as those listed I managed to find another Brown Argus looking lovely and fresh, a Small Heath and also a second Common Blue.

However this site will now be my place to visit for Marsh Fritillary, although next time I'll wait until after 10am so they've had a chance to warm up. The final individual I found is shown above and seems much darker than all the others that I saw, with thicker, black markings, although I'm pretty sure that this isn't a recognised aberrant.



Have a goodun

Wurzel



Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Jan-12 04:05 AM GMT

Thanks for the wind up Gibster! 😊

Good luck down in Dorset – the Blue Wing is still at Longham Lakes as is the fudge duck and I've noticed that Lodmoor has 2 Long Billed Dowitcher, there's also a Richards Pipit and Hume's Warbler knocking around the Weymouth area so you should definitely see an improvement in your 2012 year list 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by NickMorgan, 06-Jan-12 04:50 AM GMT

Great pictures Wurzel. You have so many more species down there than we do in Scotland. I really enjoy reading the diaries of you Southerners!

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Jan-12 05:17 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comments Nick! I think you're experiencing a case of "grass is greener", as I am envious of your Chequered Skipper, Northern Brown Argus, Scotch Argus as well as the various forms and subspecies etc.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

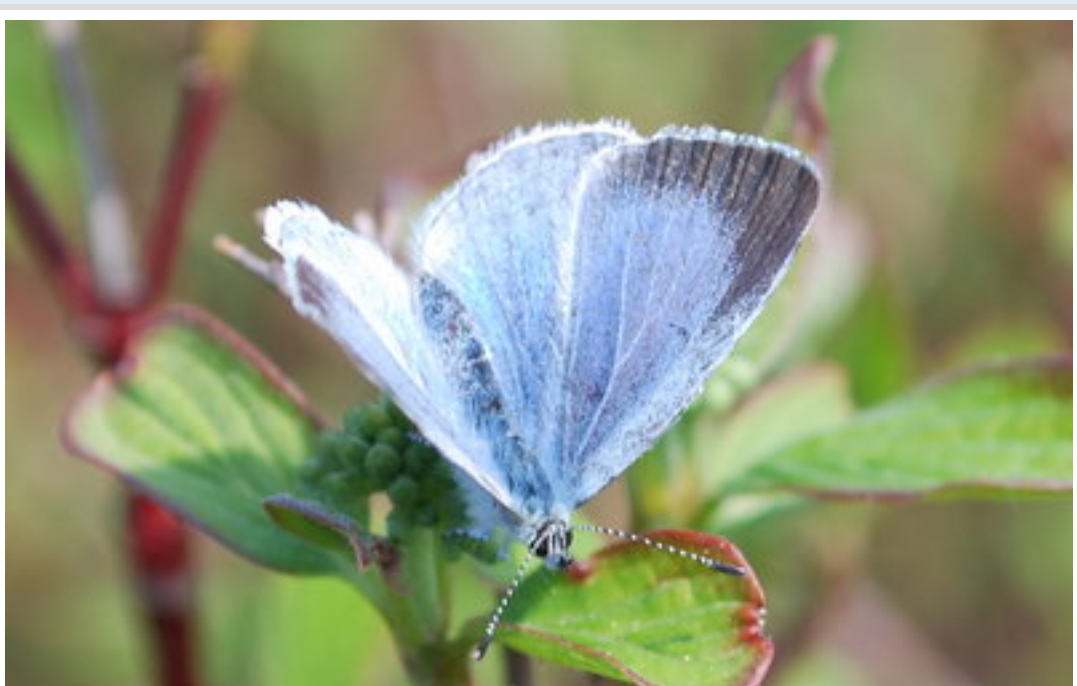
Martin Down – Part 1

by Wurzel, 09-Jan-12 03:00 AM GMT

Martin Down – Part 1



Martin Down is a NNR jointly owned and managed by Hampshire County Council and Natural England. As well as being one of the country's largest lowland chalk grasslands it also has a mosaic of habitats, including scrub, woodland and even a small patch of chalk heath land. These habitats were developed over thousands of years by man's activities and our existence here is evidenced by a large, prehistoric, linear earthwork called Bokerley Dyke. Over the last year I have probably made ten trips to this reserve as it is ideally situated lying half way between Salisbury and Sixpenny Handley and also because of the range of species found here. At the very start of the year when I was planning ahead I'd think about what species I'd like to try and find and then what time of year it flies before finally looking into where they could be found. A large number could be found at Martin Down; I could be there in early May for Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, back in late May for Green Hairstreak and Small Blue, make another visit in early July for Dark Green Fritillary, follow that in early August for Adonis Blues, later in August could provide Silver Spotted Skipper and Chalkhill Blue and finally September for vanessids and possibly migrants like Painted Lady. This site together with Bentley Wood over the last two years could have provided me with almost all of my species sightings!



I visited this site several times during the early part of the year, each time not knowing quite what I'd find. On one visit the highlight was my first female Holly Blue revealing her open wings which was followed by a nice picnic lunch with my daughter Kitty. On another visit there wasn't an awful lot about despite the weather being nice and warm. I did find my first Small Heath of the year but didn't manage to photograph it because as I was lining up my shot I almost trod on an Adder! It served as a timely reminder to wear a proper pair of shoes when out and about here – also good advice to avoid the Ticks!

One butterfly that I was expecting to find in May was the Green Hairstreak, but it was only on my third or fourth attempt that I managed to find one, and that was purely by chance. While getting a shot of a Brown Argus something slightly bigger flitted by and landed promptly in the grass. As I got closer I realised that it was a Green Hairstreak and the shock of seeing one on the ground and not hanging out at head height on a Hawthorn meant that I managed to get only one shot of it before it took off and disappeared up Bokerley Dyke. I don't know why I couldn't find them as easily as last year, but then that is the beauty of Nature watching – enjoying the unexpected and taking nothing for granted.





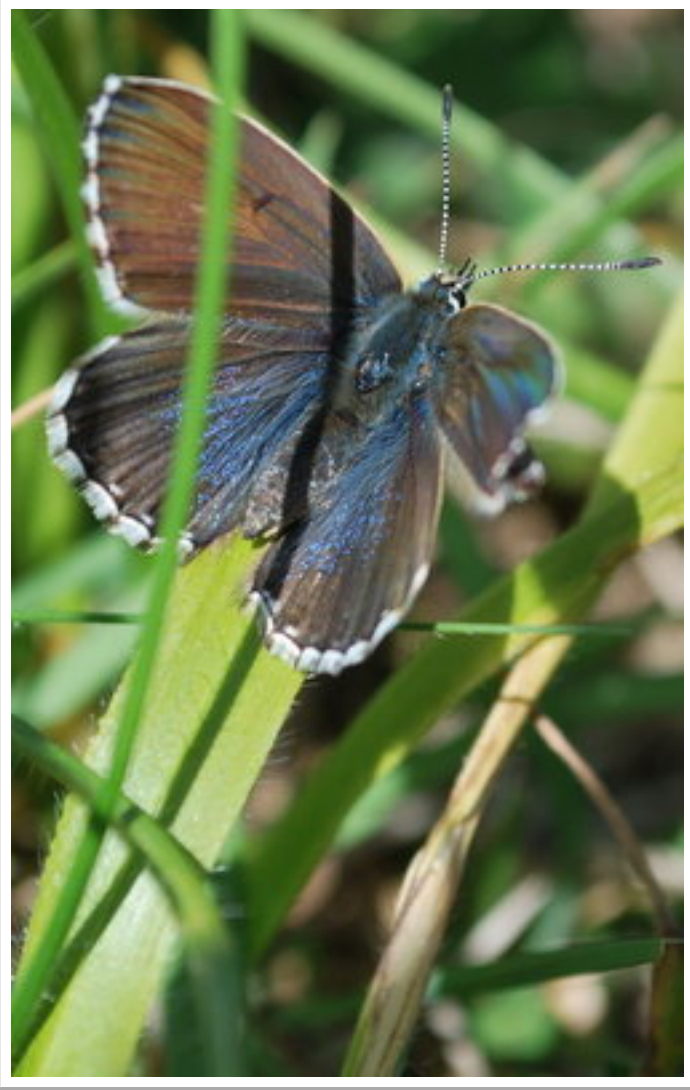
These shots were taken in mid May and were followed by early Adonis Blues. In all of the identification books I've read all refer to the blue scales used to distinguish between male and female Small Blues but this is the best example that I have seen and allowed easy identification from the female, who almost looks purple instead of blue. Of the many Small Blues that I saw on this visit one or two were actually basking on dog faeces – at least these chose nicer perches!

(Part 2 to follow after I've eaten my supper!)

Martin Down – Part 2

by Wurzel, 09-Jan-12 03:33 AM GMT

Martin Down – Part 2





One of my many reasons for visiting Martin Down are the summer time blues and one visit in early August saw me finding numerous individuals from four species.

The day itself wasn't particularly good for butterflies and their photography. It was pretty blustery with intermittent sunshine and was cooler than it should have been. Despite this I nestled down in Bokerley Dyke and waited. Every now and again the sun would come out and the wind would die down a little. Then the butterflies would appear as if from nowhere. Generally a Brown Argus would venture out first, followed by a Common Blue and then the Chalkhills and Adonis Blues. They wouldn't be around for too long as then the sun would go in, the wind would pick up and they would disappear back whence they came. Generally the Chalkhills were the last to go, grimly clinging to a taller flower as it was ripped and torn by the breeze.

For about an hour I followed this wait and see strategy and managed to photograph males of four species, but I was looking for the female blues in particular having not properly photographed them before. To this end I set off up the hill following Bokerley Dyke as the butterflies were taking advantage of the shelter it offered.



About half way up the Dyke something caught my eye and it turned out to be a female Chalkhill. While I watched it flitting around, nectaring and perching for moments I ticked off all the identification characteristics used to distinguish it from a female Adonis. First up compared to the female

Adonis on page 54, and photographed earlier in the year, it appeared brown rather than the slate blue colour that I'd seen in Adonis, it didn't have any scales and the markings on the hind wing near the margin were white not blue. Also it lacked the orange lunules present in Common Blue and Brown Argus. Excellent, target found, identified and photographed.

I then settled back to watch hoping to get an idea of its usual behaviour. It did seem at one point to be making courtship movements. It would flit past a couple of males, land in an open part and gently flutter its wings. The males would have a bit of a scrap, spiralling upwards locked in battle, and then the winner fluttered down ready to mate I thought. But instead of mating the female he started buzzing her, flying in low and battering her and repeating it from the other side again and again. In the end she flew off and hid under some leaves while the male landed and started basking. I'm still not sure why the male would do that?



I mainly access Martin Down from the Sillens Lane end car park, but in July I parked in the main car park off the Blandford Road. I was hoping to find Dark Green Fritillary so that I could photograph the underside of their wings. Having pulled up I was pleased to have already seen 4 individuals, and then after leaving the car park they were everywhere, almost one on every flower it seemed. The area was a flower meadow in hollow, bordered on one side by Bokerley and the other the main footpath and radio controlled plane landing strip, and is definitely worth a visit next year.

While I was trying for the underside wing shots I found a mating pair which gave me the perfect chance to photograph both the male (smaller and more scaly) and the female. I also witnessed some unusual behaviour with an interloper trying to push the female off of the male it was already copulating with so that he could muscle in. For a couple of minutes he tried head butting, ramming his whole body in the female but to in the end to no avail and they were left in peace to ensure some Dark Green Fritillaries for me next year!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Mottisfont

by Wurzel, 15-Jan-12 09:43 PM GMT

Mottisfont



Mottisfont a National Trust owned, 12th century Augustine priory along the River Test. It supports a range of habitats, from grazed meadows and their surrounding woodlands to formal walled gardens. It is the latter that we have explored most thoroughly on our previous visits as the girls love to run along the small paths bordered by flowers or dangle their feet in the fountain. While they're doing this I'm free to have a slow amble around and due to the formal construction and planting you can get close to the butterflies once they've settled. It also acts as a sun trap so is much warmer than the surrounding gardens which means that even if there is little to see elsewhere something should be here.

On my first visit I found a worn looking Holly Blue which wouldn't open its wings. Then later a male blue which turned out to be very confusing. The upper side, which I managed to photograph was like a Common Blue, yet the underside was only white with black spots and no orange ones, like a Holly Blue. Having previously seen Holly that was what I plumped for, rather than the more interesting possibility of an aberrant Common Blue which is probably what it was.



On subsequent visits, here and elsewhere, I was much more cautious because of this tricky little individual. Indeed on one visit I spent the entire time in the Walled garden following whites so that I could start rushing up on my identification skills of this group. I did manage to find males and females from the three main species of whites that are prone to confusion.

I have learnt that you start by looking for dark veins on the upper or underside of the wings to rule out Green Veined. Then you look at the darkness/boldness of the black markings to distinguish between Small and Large and then finally once you have identified the species look at the spotting to determine the gender.

Mottisfont has hosted a range of species; Holly and Common Blue, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral, Brimstone, the three whites and also a battered and tired looking Silver Washed Fritillary late in the season. Hopefully next year we can get into the woods proper at the right time as it has been suggested that Duke of Burgundy and White Admirals can be found there or maybe venture out onto the meadows and grazing land for Marbled Whites and skippers while the girls picnic?



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Jan-12 11:12 PM GMT

Shipton Bellinger



Shipton Bellinger is a small village on the edge of a plateau of chalk down land that is Salisbury Plain. Surrounding the village are large swaths of land which are owned by the Crown and the MOD. The hotspot itself is a drove way, the thick hedge rows making an avenue, at the top of which is an Ash tree.

This is the "Master Tree" around which the males will emerge, drink honeydew, have aerial battles for females and then, maybe, mate. Having previously visited this site I managed to find a female and they are slightly more amenable – often nectaring on brambles whilst seeking out Blackthorn on which to lay their eggs.

As I set off this time I walked slowly up the path, onto the avenue and I dutifully checked every butterfly and every bramble. Meadow Browns were about and Gatekeepers kept distracting me as they'd flash orange and brown as they fluttered by. Having reached the top of the avenue I went to look round the other side of the hedge.

While I was photographing a Brimstone I bumped into some other butterflyers who led me to a bush where they'd seen Brown Hairstreak earlier. As we got closer we could see that it had returned so I managed to fire off a load of shots. It was a pristine male, a very lucky find and it was very tame, perhaps suggesting that it was only recently emerged.



The male is slightly smaller than the female, as previously discussed shows behavioural differences. In appearance the male has the same style of patterning as the female, with the thick white "hairstreaks" but it has a more "honeyed" look, less bright and less orange than the females. We tried out some directions from a village local that did produce hairsteaks, but the hedgerows hemmed us in so photographing was almost impossible.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Slop Bog

by Wurzel, 30-Jan-12 02:52 AM GMT

Slop Bog



Slop Bog is a 22.6 hectare SSSI and Local Nature Reserve near Verwood. It has a mixture of habitats including wet woodland and conifer plantation although the reason for its designation as an SSSI is the "wet and humid heath land". Having visited for the first time this year it will be my first port of call for Silver Studded Blue in future.



When I first arrived at the site I could not believe how easy the Silver Studded Blues were to find. Having previously spent hours tracking two or three individuals at Arne to suddenly be confronted with males all over the place was really bewildering. I literally didn't know where to point the camera. As I walked first across the board walk and then the dusty paths between the heather, there were blue butterflies everywhere. Also as the weather wasn't exactly balmy the males were basking open winged which is why I managed to finally get a couple of the classic open wing shots, the wings showing the white edges and the black margins and spots on the hind wing.





Having got a classic open wing shot I then tried my hardest to find a female. There were one or two around but they were to prove much more elusive than the males, staying low in the undergrowth with brief flights before disappearing again.

As the sun came out one female did present herself to me and even spent some time sitting on my hand. This allowed me to get some shots of the closed wings to compare with the male.

First up the female has a much darker ground colour to the under wings, almost dark brown compared to the grey/blue of the male. Then there are the black spots which appear bigger and more clearly defined in the female and finally the silver studs which apparently are always present in the female and they are much larger and brighter too.

Once I had returned the female to the heather I set off back to the edge of the board walk and set to stalking again. It was a strange experience as across the heath land the Silver Studded Blues were the only butterflies to be seen. As I walked back to the car I did see a Speckled Wood – so there are other butterflies here then!



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 05-Feb-12 05:15 AM GMT

Stockbridge Down



Stockbridge Down is an SSSI and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty owned by the National Trust and comprises 65 hectares of chalk down land just outside Stockbridge in the Test Valley. There are ancient grazing rights that are still maintained by the trust as well as Iron Age workings. I kept meaning to make a visit to this site last year but Martin Down was familiar so took precedence. It took until this year for me to finally get here...



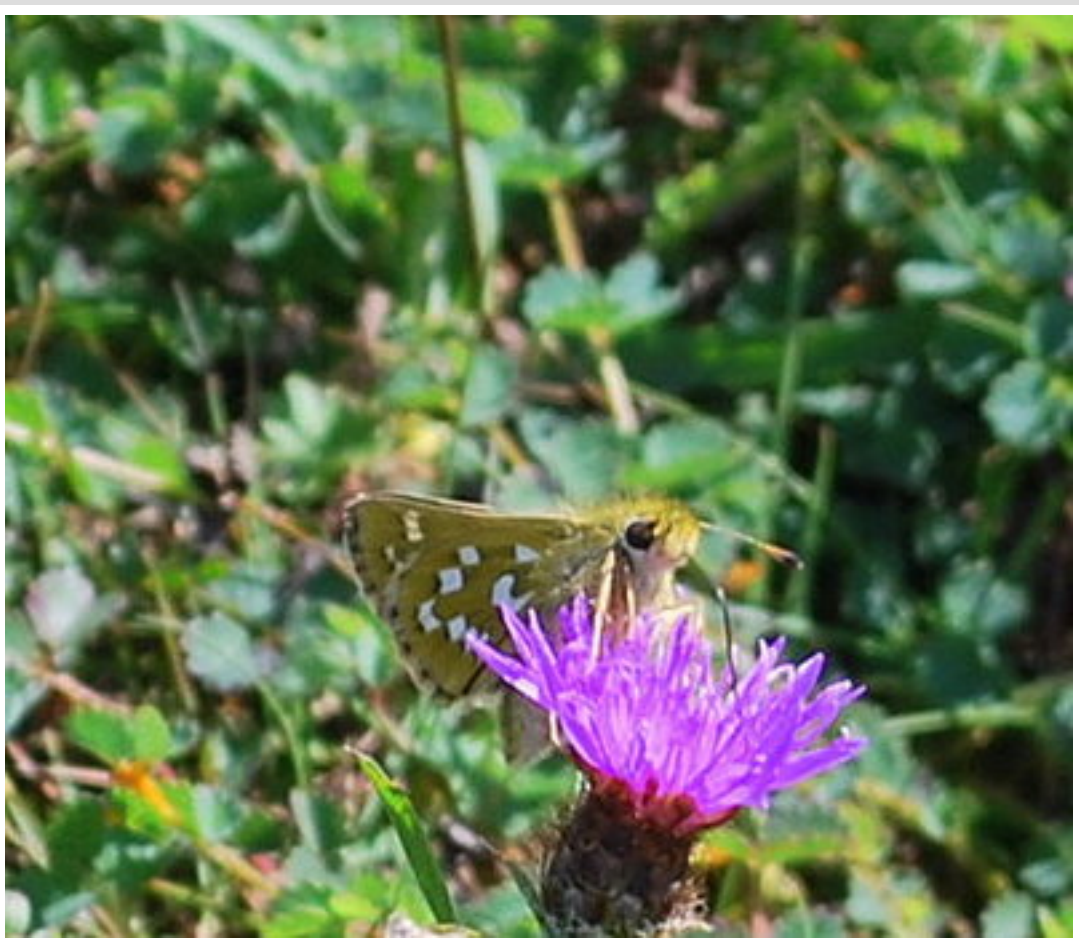
My first visit to Stockbridge came after a recommendation from a fellow butterflyer and I visited at just the right time for Chalkhill Blues. As I started off up the gentle sloping hill they were everywhere! It seemed that almost every butterfly that went up was a blue or brown (so female blue). The females had white crescents on their hind wings as opposed to blue but are very tricky to separate from Adonis Blue females. The wind was quite strong so they would keep quite low to the ground and the best place to find them was in the lee of the wind behind the scrub. With such a large number of individuals I was hoping to find some aberrants amongst them. So I worked through as many as I could find, checking their under wings and if they appeared normal moving onto the next one. After a while I'd found a female "arcuata", where the spots on the under wing join to form an arc, another unusual female with asymmetric antennae and a male "obseolata". This aberrant lacks some of the spots on the under wing, in this case most of them were missing almost giving it the appearance of a white when flying. While trying to get my shot I was steadying myself with one hand and he decided to crawl onto my hand allowing me to get an unobstructed view of this little cracker.





I also hoped to find Silver Spotted Skipper here having not had any luck at Martin Down on three attempts. The breezy conditions made finding them difficult, as did the cloudy weather as the temp would drop noticeably for 30–40 minutes. Despite the less than ideal conditions I did manage to find a male with its prominent sex brand.

On my second visit conditions were a lot better although there were far fewer Chalkhills by now, and those that remained appeared pretty worn. By the time I reached the short springy turf it was warming nicely and I managed to literally trip from one Silver Spot to another, encountering 5 that all stopped to allow me to photograph them by the time I reached the main gate.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

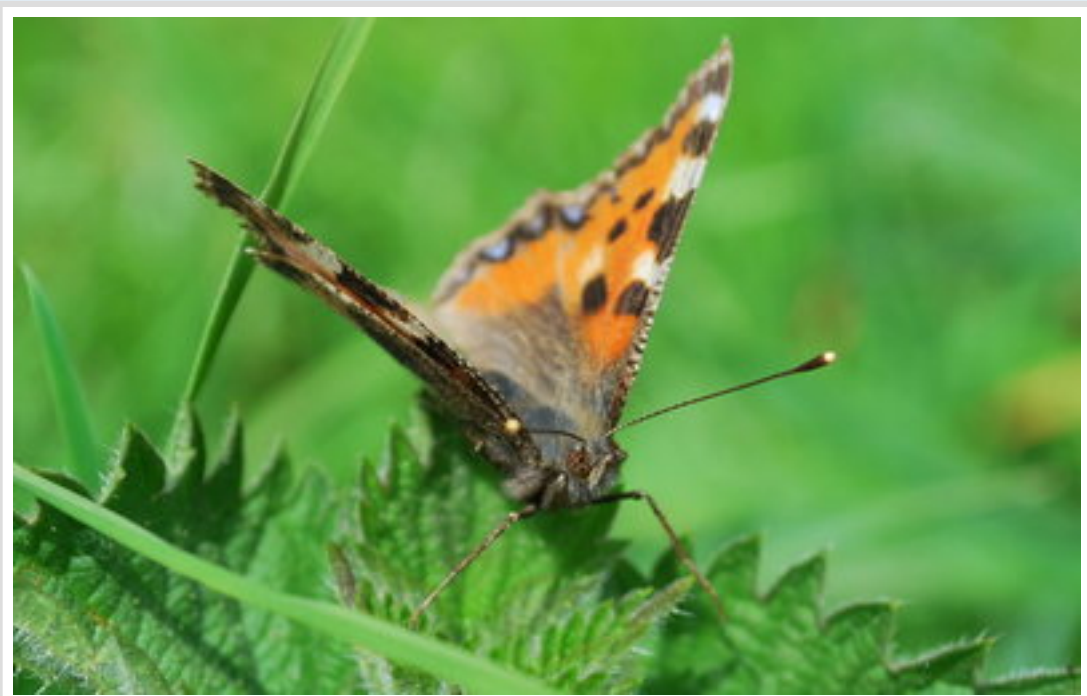
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 11-Feb-12 10:49 PM GMT

Stourhead



This is a fantastic National Trust site near Mere. The area was landscaped by Henry Hoare II to create areas of park land with a collection of exotic trees, Rhododendron, wooded hillsides with grottos, ponds and the huge lake created by damming one of the sources of the Stour. In terms of species there aren't any great rarities or surprises but the background is breathtaking. I like it because I can enjoy getting my photos while the rest of the family can enjoy it for lots of other reasons – from leaf catching in autumn to chucking coins in the grotto or climbing and hiding the tunnels leading up to Apollo's building.



One of my favourite walks at Stourhead I only discovered this year. Instead of the usual walk which takes you round the lake we decided to have a look around the house and once there I found the walk at the top of the garden. The back lawn area is covered with wild flowers in the spring and I saw four species of white as well as Common Blue here. To get photos can be tricky as you have to lean over into the flowers from the path, but if you miss one another will be along shortly. From here the path widens into a lush woodland ride with several paths leading down through the Rhododendrons and woods to the lake. This wide ride is also a cracking place as scattered amongst the tall trees that reach ever upwards are brambles for nectar and stumps for sunning and basking.

Eventually the ride ends at a Ha-Ha before opening out into pasture. The paths down through the wood leave the trees and after following a small hedge open out to the pasture area and small ponds. Here there are scattered bramble bushes and I've seen Small Copper, Speckled Wood and vanessids as well as photographing different species of dragon and damsel flies.



On a trip earlier in the year there were spring flowers in abundance everywhere but the butterflies were very flighty. I found the hill at the foot of the Apollo building to be a good place to try and photograph these nervous butterflies. While the girls could run around outside and then listen to echoes inside I was free to pursue some "flighty whiteys".

The steep slope which the building is perched on was a prime area. The butterflies would work their way up from the bottom of the hill so I could find a likely nectar source and wait by it. This didn't really pay off so after much waiting I had to revert to trying to stalk them. This worked much better as I could anticipate where they would land much more easily.

I managed to see five species of white on this hill with a single Brimstone and Large White, a few Small and Green Veined White. My favourite was my first female Orange-tip which landed with wings tightly shut showing the green and white markings it relies on for camouflage. A lot less showy than the male, a lot less bold in its markings but still beautiful and subtle. It seemed that this female once settled didn't want to move so she posed and fed and let me take my photos. Then I just simply sat back and drank in the sights before me, the yellows, greens and whites associated with spring.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 16-Feb-12 07:21 AM GMT

On Monday I took the family down to the sea, to Avon Beach near Mudeford to be exact. I like to go back to the coast during the winter so as to avoid the Grockles!

While the girls enjoyed making sandcastles, drawing in the sand, looking for sea glass and fishing with their net along the groynes without parental interference I was free for an hour. So I got out the scope and had a look out to sea, which was as still as a Mill Pond. There were a few Great Crested Grebes out amongst one or two Cormorants. Closer in a few Turnstones lived up to their name along the strand and were joined by Pied Wagtails and a large Crow. Further scans meant that I found the Long Tailed Duck (my fourth ever) as well as 2 Razorbill and a Great Northern Diver. After they had numbed their fingers in the sea and then warmed up again over lunch we started the journey home – with a brief stop at Fisherman's Bank overlooking Stanpit Marsh to unsuccessfully look for Spotted Sandpiper, although they were 8 Avocet there.

Today I dropped the girls off for a play date and so headed back to the Stanpit area as I felt that I had unfinished business. First stop was Fishermans Bank. I stared off at the same "hotspot" but as the tide was so low things didn't look good. As I was heading back along the boats to the road to return to my car another birder made me aware that it was about. And there it was, a slightly slimmer Common Sandpiper, with it's eyestripe and seemingly a longer bill. There were also one or two spots visible underneath the tail. 😊 Unfortunately I couldn't get too close but I swear to you that the grey blob under the "r" is the spotted Sandpiper.



After an hour enjoying the "Spot Sand" and the other waders/wildfowl feeding on the mudflats I headed over to Mudeford Quay and actually paid for car parking to go birding 😳, something I always try to avoid! Then I spent even more money – this time on the ferry over to the sandspit where I was hoping to catch up with one of my bogey birds – Snow Bunting. As I waited for the ferry I had a quick scan of the point and there was the Slavonian Grebe –today was turning into a real cracker!

Over on the sandspit I made my way through the beach huts and wandered along the path enjoying the salt smell and the weak winter sun when something white flashed by.



It couldn't be that simple could it? But yep, scope on it and it was another lifer. I followed it as it worked it's way along the sandspit wondering what it would do when it reached the end? It even let me get close enough a couple of times to try a few photos. At times it would stand out as it perched on the rocks and the fenceposts, but the minute it dropped to the ground amongst the pebbles, sand and detritus it would vanish, to reappear again as it opened it's white wings and took flight to the nearest fence post or rock.



After an hour of it's company I realised that I had to head back to pick the girls up, so I headed back, caught the ferry and hit the road (after a brief moment watching a group of Starlings having bath).



As I drove home I mused over the cracking birds that I'd seen over the last few days. If I had to put them in order of preference the Spotted Sandpiper came down quite low on the list – it was almost too easy; "where is it, there it is, time to move on". I had to actually force myself to stay and watch it so I didn't feel like too much of a twitcher. Whereas the Long Tailed Duck was great as it was not expected, I looked out thinking there's nowt about and there it was. However the favourite has to be the Snow Bunting. It felt right, it was in it's proper place, acting normally and I had to stalk it and in the end I had to force myself to stop watching it!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 16-Feb-12 07:28 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Have a goodun

Well, you keep telling us to...so I'm glad you had one too! 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 16-Feb-12 09:13 PM GMT

Cheers Gibster, it was indeed a "goodun", the karma aspect hadn't occurred to me so I'll have to keep up with my sign off phrase!

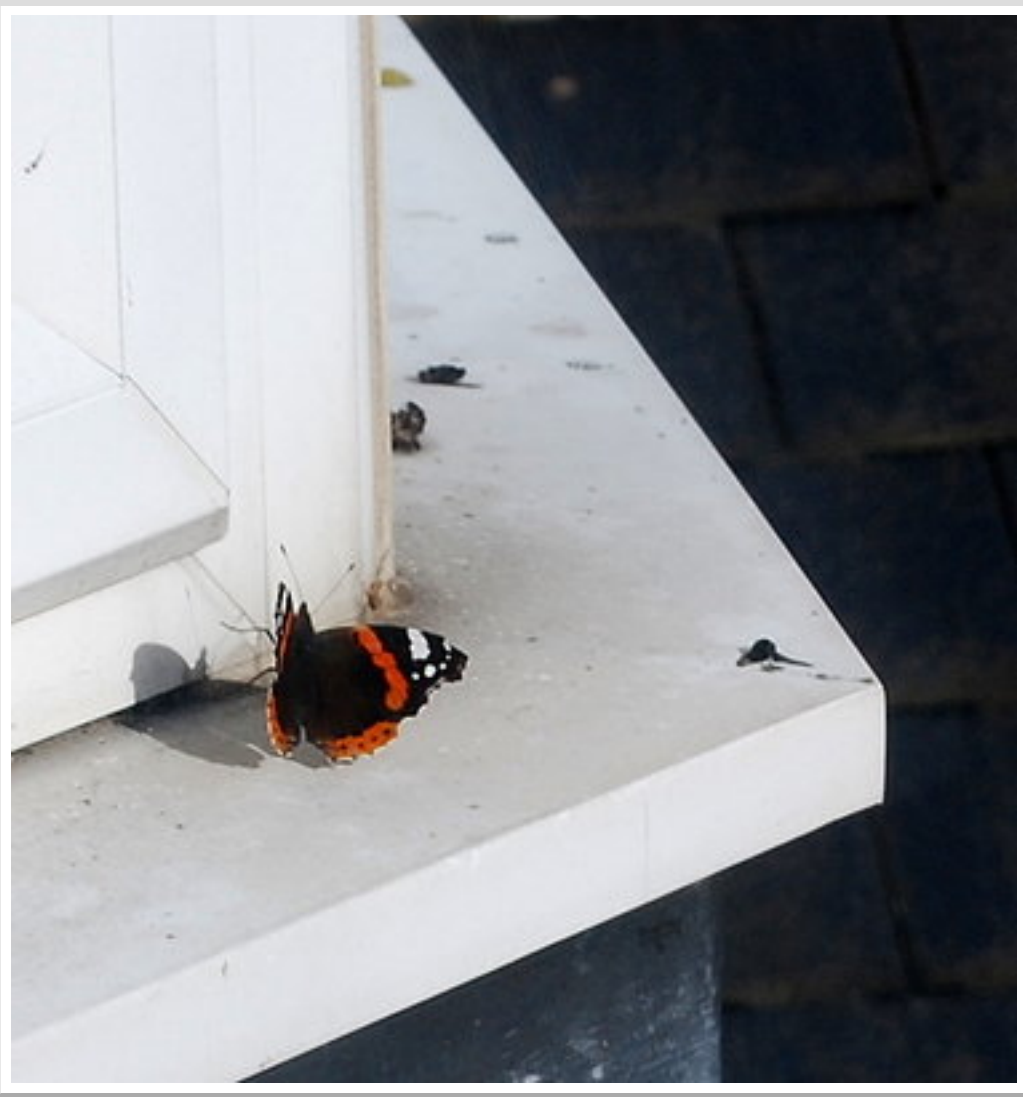
Have a goodun 😊

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Feb-12 06:31 AM GMT

While doing some tidying in my bedroom a fluttering shadow cast itself in the weak sun. I glanced out of the window and watched while a Red Admiral flitted past and landed on the window sill of my neighbours house. I grabbed my camera and managed to get a few shots through the window before it flew off. Ten minutes later it clouded over and the sun disappeared, I hope that my first butterfly of the year will be alright out there?



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Matsukaze, 17-Feb-12 07:32 AM GMT

That Red Admiral looks in good condition.

I've often wondered if the woodlands around Stourhead might support Purple Emperor. That big belt of woodlands running along the Wiltshire/Somerset border is the same belt of Oxford Clay on which the good butterfly sites north-east of Oxford rest.

White Sheet Hill and Long Knoll, just a few miles further north from Stourhead along the B-road to Frome, are good for downland butterflies. The former is National Trust land and has a very convenient car park. The second, a pretty spectacular piece of geology, is rather more inaccessible but is never visited by anyone.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 17-Feb-12 08:00 PM GMT

You lucky blighter, Wurzel.

I've still never seen a butterfly (in the UK) prior to 2 March. 😞

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 17-Feb-12 08:04 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

managed to get a few shots through the window

Take care, Wurzel. Pointing your camera at neighbours' bedroom windows can have all sorts of repercussions!!! 🤖

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Feb-12 11:52 PM GMT

Cheers for the info Matsukaze, I remember you mentioning those sites as good for Wall so I'll try and get there during the season as my meeting with that species was brief and rubbish this year 😞

Sorry if I upset you David, I think it was a pre Birthday treat 😊

Mike thank you for your concern I did think "this looks a bit dodgy" but then all the neighbours think I'm weird anyway – they're all into Landrovers and rose gardening or they're Plymouth Brethren so an amateur naturalist like myself isn't going to fit in anyway! Hanging out windows and taking photographs is just par for the course and something they've come to expect 😊

Have a goodun all

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-Feb-12 02:37 AM GMT

Thistle Down



At the very start of the summer holidays we all went camping in the Cotswolds. I was slightly disappointed not to be heading back to Downshay on the Isle of Purbeck as now would be the prime time to go looking for Lulworth Skipper.

As we arrived at the "site office" my disappointment evaporated as it looked stunning. Thistledown Farm is a family run organic farm squeezed into 70 acres of ancient meadow and woodlands, housing ponds, pigs and the largest Elder Flower orchard in Europe. The sun shone down as we made numerous trips from the car park down wooded hills bordered by dry stone walls to our plot. The site is car free so you can walk all 70 acres in peace and safety.

During the next few days we rarely left the campsite as the girls went wild in the woods with the friends they'd made, Rosie relaxed and I was free to disappear on forays to look at the selection of habitats available.

The site itself didn't offer anything rare but did give me the opportunity to enjoy and get close to the commoner species. The best bit of the whole trip was the proximity. Usually to get to see good numbers of butterflies I have to drive somewhere, at Thistledown they're just outside, one or two footsteps away. One Small Copper even tried to join us inside the tent – much more welcome than the wasps!





The majority of species were found just outside the tent as the owners had left large strips of the grass uncut and wild flowers grew amongst the tall grasses offering prime habitat.

Over the coming days the list included; Large, Green-veined and Small White, Brimstone, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Red Admiral, Ringlet, Marbled White, Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Small Heath, Small Copper, Common and Holly Blues, Brown Argus, Large Skipper as well as both Small and Essex Skippers (shown below – can you separate them?).





As part of the holiday we decided to take advantage of our National Trust membership and visited Woodchester Park. The site itself backed onto the woodlands of the campsite. The park comprised large swathes of Beech woods interspersed with five artificial lakes. We parked in the car park amongst rolling grassland and set off down the steps onto the road under a tunnel of Beech trees, a couple informed us that it was a "long way down". We decided to press on anyway as the map reliably informed us that it would only be a couple of miles all around. Once we finally got to the first lake we realised that the map was perhaps mistaken. While the girls were having a break I took myself off to a large patch of thistles in a clearing. While I was watching Peacocks a small, dark butterfly caught my attention. Something about its shape and size made me look at it more closely. With baited breath I edged closer and closer clicking away and when I saw the orange at the rear edge of the hind wing and a faint white stripe with a "W" I realised that I'd found an unlikely lifer, a White-letter Hairstreak. It was very worn and battered but still a very lucky and welcome find. All the way up the torturous return journey Rosie gave me suspicious looks, but I swear it was totally unplanned, honest!



Have a goodun

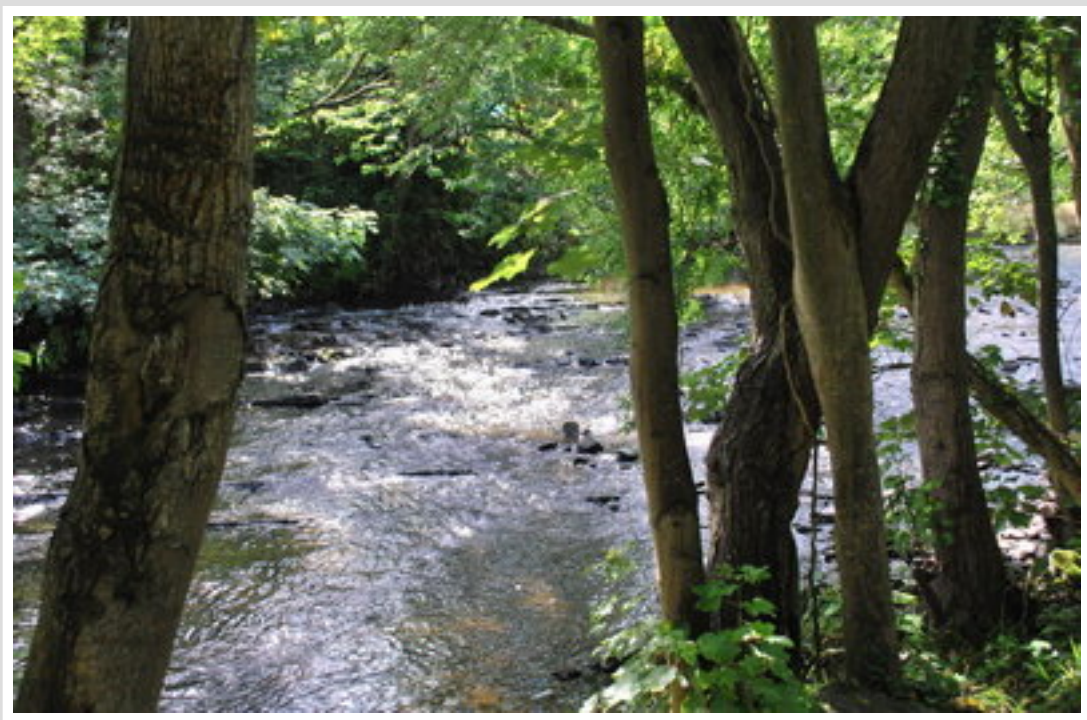
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

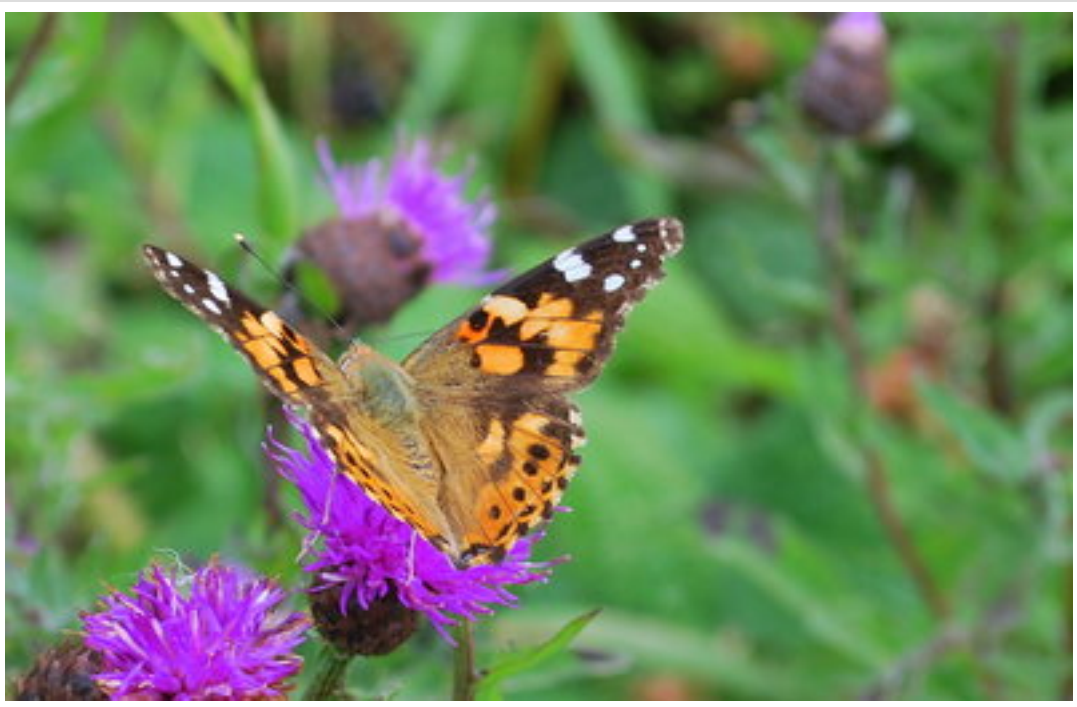
by Wurzel, 26-Feb-12 02:45 AM GMT



I have always enjoyed visits to my in-laws; they've allowed my visits to Llangranog for Chough, walks along the Aeron to find Common Sandpiper and Dipper, cross country drives to the amazing Dinas which is packed full of Redstarts, Wood Warblers and Pied Flycatchers or enjoying Red Kites from a garden chair with fresh ground coffee! And when I first started photographing butterflies I soon discovered that the area wasn't just good for birds. Generally the first place that we go to is the local play park and then we take a stroll down to the seafront. However it's the return journey that I look forward to as the girls are all swung out or full up on ice cream so I can afford to hang back a bit for a few shots and then easily catch them up again as they dawdle back to the car. The path takes us along the Aeron through lush, over hanging trees with a multitude of flowers on the banks and is a haven for various whites and Speckled Woods. After we've crossed the bridge that leads back towards the park the hedges can hold Holly Blue and vanessids. These aren't particularly rare species – but for all the places I visit whilst on holiday at the in-laws it's more how the butterflies are observed – just out for a stroll to the park or popping out for a brief walk or watching the girls play in the garden – I'm not even trying and the butterflies are there to photograph.



The path to Llanacheron is somewhere I always try to get to. The walk offers more of the tree lined riverscape that I associate with this part of Wales, but it opens up here and there and so the range of species increases. At one of the more open spots there is a large Buddleia and this is a great place to stop and get some shots; often of a multitude vanessids. Further along the path there are small fields which are bordered by wire fencing. There are butterflies here but to get shots I've learnt to wait until they come near enough to this fence so that I can lean over and click away. I seem to have luck here with Painted Lady – but they always make me work for my shots and I have to wait a long time for them to settle. Then just when I'm set, off they go again, flitting just out of reach!



The "Lane" is a road that runs past my in-law's house and is where we generally take our daily walks when visiting. It is a very narrow lane that winds upwards to the top of the hill, the main feature of which is the ancient hedge that grows on either side. I have seen four species of white here, Speckled Woods and Ringlets as well as Small Tortoiseshells and Red Admirals and once the walk is completed I can also spend some time in the garden and hopefully add Holly Blue to the list.

The main species that I'm looking for along the Lane is Hedge Brown or Gatekeeper as it is now known. The high sided hedge offers perfect habitat for this species it seems as they are by far the most common seen. In fact I enjoy photographing them as their large numbers means I am more likely to find some of the more common aberrations and variations. These are seen in the number, positioning or lack of spots on the wings. The individual shown here has one extra spot on the left fore wing, two spots on the right fore wing and three pairs of "eyes" on both the hind wings. It is so far the most unusual variation of this species that I have seen and when it comes to identifying the variation I am at a loss where to begin!





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 26-Feb-12 09:55 PM GMT

We took the girls out to Furzey Gardens yesterday so they could spend the afternoon finding fairy doors and running around like loons. While there I tried out my new lens, the Nikkor 105mm jobby, and it feels great, just what the Dr ordered 😊 and it only took me 6 months, a Christmas and Birthday to save for it! 🤪 Unfortunately the only butterfly about was a Red Admiral that insisted on staying on the otherside of the hedge so I had to settle with trying my lens out on the flowers (Crocci and Snowdrops). There were a few flies around as well as what I presume is a Tree Bee?





Today I had to drive over to Eastleigh to pick up some chairs that my wife bought on "FeeBAY", so I set off very early and got a bit lost on the way 😊 strangely ending up in Calshot 🤪 Imagine my surprise when I managed to spy a male Spanish Sparrow in the hedge 😊 Cheers Gibster and PJ for the "gen"! That makes 5 lifers in 2012 – making this so far my equal best year! I didn't have my camera with me so for photos check out the website of one of my fellow birders <http://www.bushbirds.co.uk/> It really was a cracking bird and I'm glad that I waited until now to see it as it's come into almost full breeding plumage now, with the white cheek showing up against the chestnut head and the dark streaking along the sides contrasting with the creamy beige belly. A cracker – maybe next week I can get lost near the Hawkhill Inclosure? 😊

And as if that wasn't enough I just saw (literally 4 minutes ago) my first Brimstone of 2012 fluttering across my garden 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 27-Feb-12 03:52 AM GMT

Hey, great news about getting lost!!! 😊

See you know 'Kojak' too? Small world. Good luck hopefully getting lost many more times this year 😊

Gibster.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-Feb-12 05:15 AM GMT

Cheers Gibster! I only met "Kojak" today at the Sparrow meet but he seemed like an affable chap. That has got to be one of the easiest twitches I've been too, just hanging around for 10 minutes and then there it was just over the road, ace! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 04-Mar-12 03:24 AM GMT

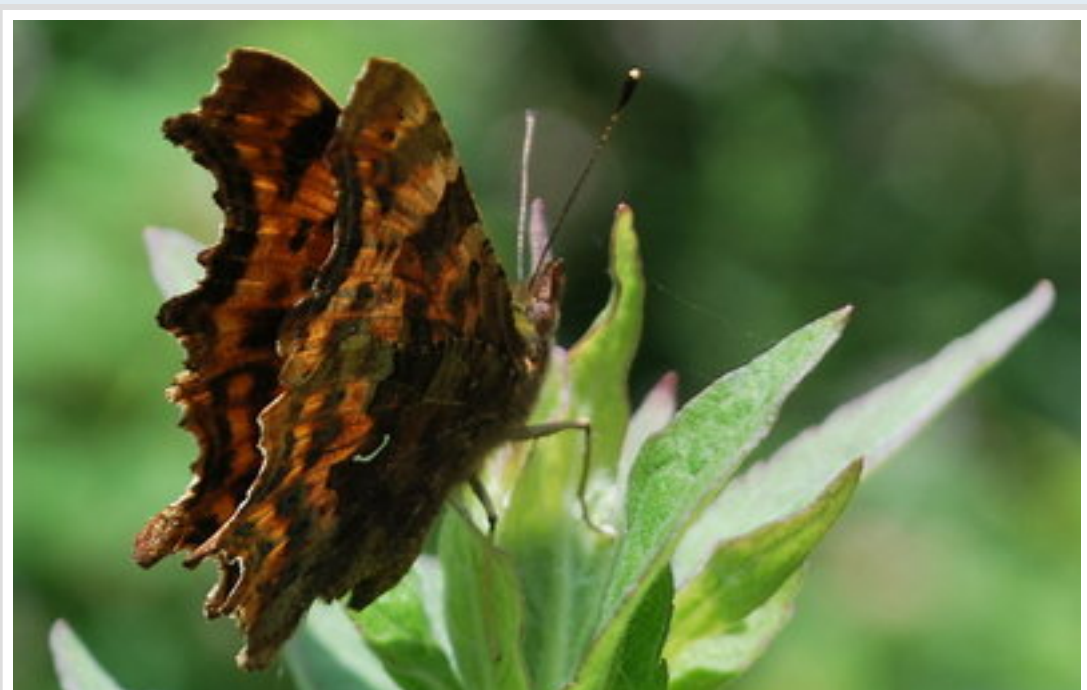
Way Home



One of the advantages of living in Salisbury and working in Pewsey is that to get home I have to cut across the Plain. There is the main route that I take that gets me from A to B essentially on auto pilot but sometimes during the spring and summer I take another route which means that I can choose to make a different stop each time depending on the time of year, the weather or what I fancy seeing.

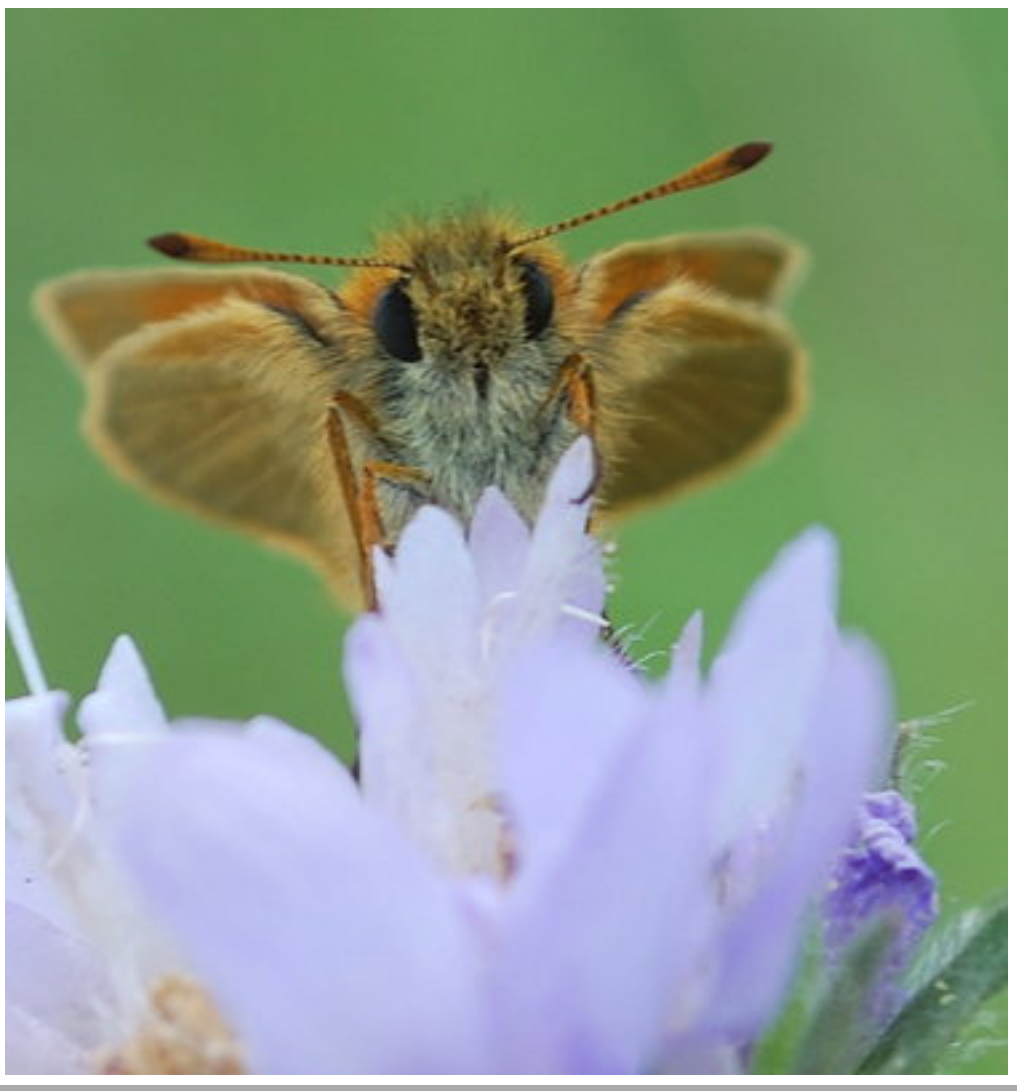
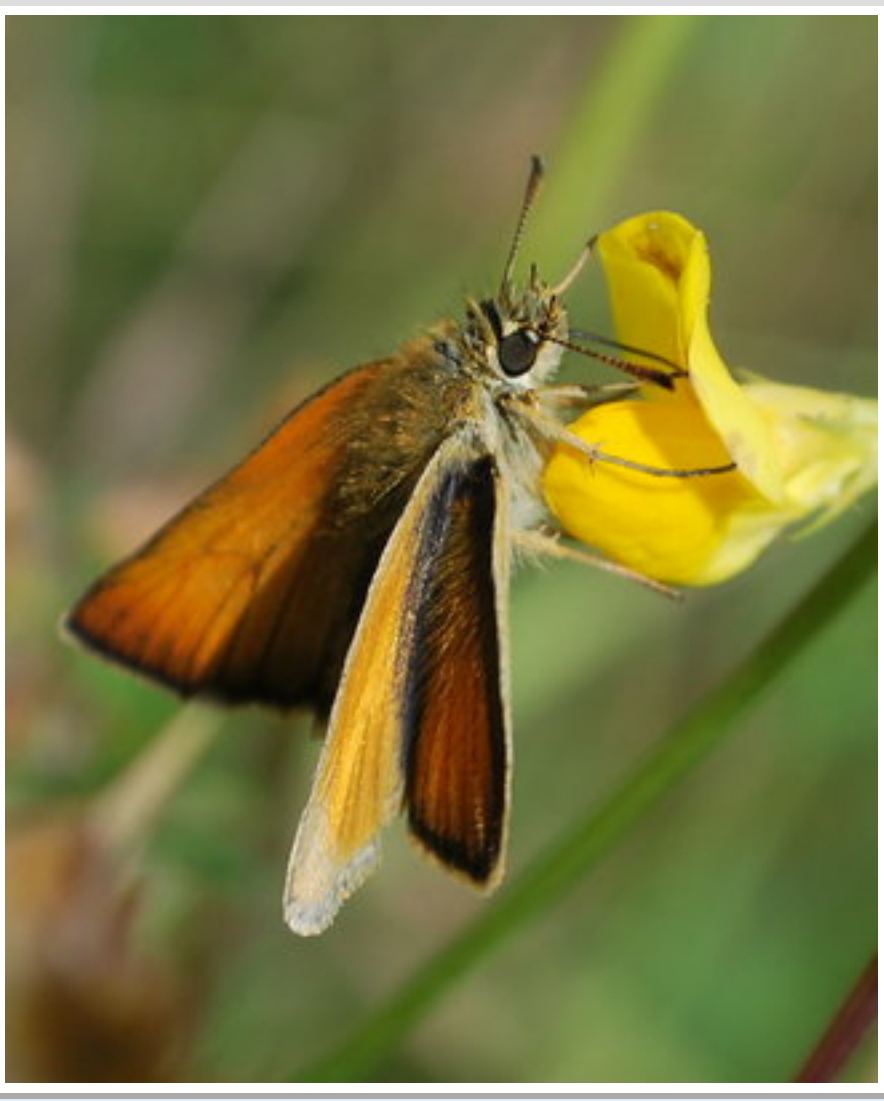
The closest stop is an unmown field across the rail track from the park, in Pewsey itself, where there are golden skippers, Meadow Browns and Common Blues. This leads down along the river with a tall railway embankment encrusted in brambles on one side and a small reed bed on the other. The more lush vegetation has whites and a Comma, Peacocks nectaring as well as Large Skippers battling it out. I generally make this stop if I have about 30 minutes to spare.

At the halfway mark is Woodhenge, about 20 minutes is all that is need here to hopefully get some great shots. I was very disappointed the first time I saw it, as it is constructed of concrete pillars and isn't a patch on the nearby stone version! However the site itself and the grass field by the car park is great for more golden skippers, Marbled Whites (probably mating) and Ringlets.



The final choice is for when I'm in a real hurry, with only 10 minutes to spare possibly. The title shot was taken here and it's found on the road from Amesbury through the Woodfords. There is an ungated field and I nip in and stroll around the edge of the flowers hopefully finding Essex or Small Skipper, various Whites, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Ringlet, Hedge Brown, Marbled White, Meadow Brown or one of the vanessids.

The great advantage of these sites is that I'm not going out of my way and still getting my "fix". I've eyed up a couple of other places on the journey home so I might be able to add Dingy or Grizzled Skippers to the "way home list" next year!





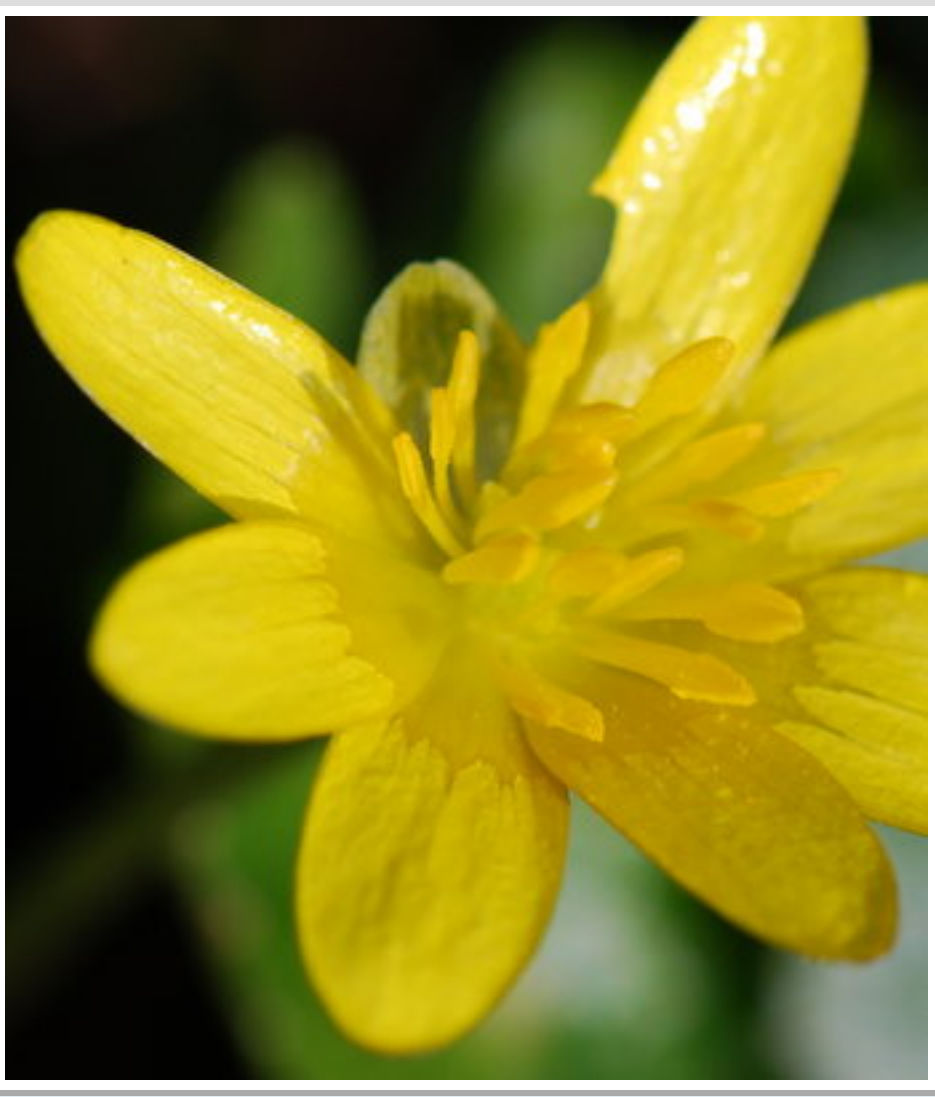
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 06-Mar-12 06:52 AM GMT

Having asked and then listened and taken advice onboard I recently purchased my new lens – a Nikkor 105mm, the only problem is that there are very few (if any) butterflies about now to try it out on, so I've resorted to a few walks around the garden taking flowers, bees and flies.



New species for me...



Having a scratch



This little fellow was on the ceiling in my bedroom so I couldn't get that close

It's a cracking lens and now I just need some butterflies!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 07-Mar-12 03:10 AM GMT

that's what i like to see, eight legs in a diary 😊 *Pseudeuophrys lanigera* would be my guess if you wanted to put a name to it.

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 07-Mar-12 06:21 AM GMT

Cheers for the ID Chris, or should I say Spiderman 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Paul Wetton, 07-Mar-12 04:43 PM GMT

The Hoverfly having a scratch looks like *Episyrphus balteatus* also known as the Marmalade Hoverfly.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Mar-12 04:44 AM GMT

Cheers for the ID Paul I have been meaning to get an identification book that Mark Clovin recommended so if I'd got it perhaps I could have made the ID too

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 11-Mar-12 05:56 AM GMT

This is the final chapter of my "book" but due to the file size restriction and my hopeless ICT skills I can't get the powerpoints which I was using to represent the final pages to upload. So just imagine and piece them together like a jigsaw to make the three pages which showed all the species that I managed to photograph during 2011... 😊

Parting Shots

Here are the species from this year. I managed to photograph most of my target species but the Purple Emperor still played hard to get, seen but not photographed! Next "His Nibbs" (Purple Emperor) is top of the list but also Wood White, Lulworth Skipper and hopefully one of the two remaining Fritillaries, maybe even Black Hairstreak - who knows?





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 12-Mar-12 07:40 AM GMT

With the lovely weather I was hoping to actually get my new lens onto some butterflies this weekend but work and household jobs took their toll... On Friday in between sorting exam results and updating policies etc I managed to get a few snaps of a hapless Robin that had got stuck in my lab. Once it had calmed a bit and posed a bit I opened the doors and 30 minutes later it was still there perched on the door step?



I did manage to get out into the garden a couple of times and due to a lack of butterflies focused mainly on bees because I reasoned that if I could get shots of them then butterflies should be easy as they're generally less active and settle for longer. I managed to find a couple of new species for me. One was very small...



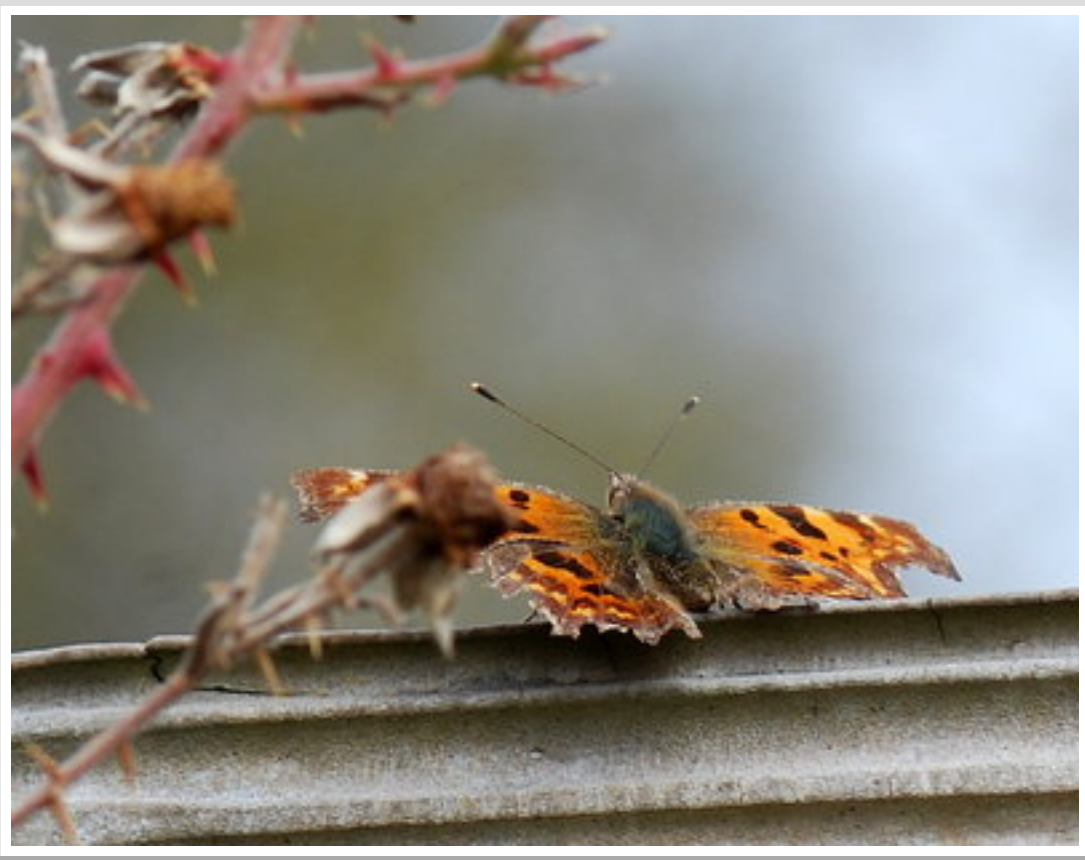
...and the other one some sort of solitary bee, guessing from the behaviour. One would be nectaring and another would fly in and buzz, a short dogfight later the "victor" would fly circuits around their "territory"?



I then thought I should put something in for Spider man as the area around the "old basin" was crawling in spiders



Happy with my haul I was then delighted by a fly by Brimstone and my second Comma of the year which decided to stop on top of the fence – yay I'd broken my butterfly duck with the new lens (hence from now on I can stop banging on about it being new 🤔)



Today there was a Brimstone and 2 Small Tortoiseshell but both were very flighty...lets hope that this is it and finally the season is upon us! 😊

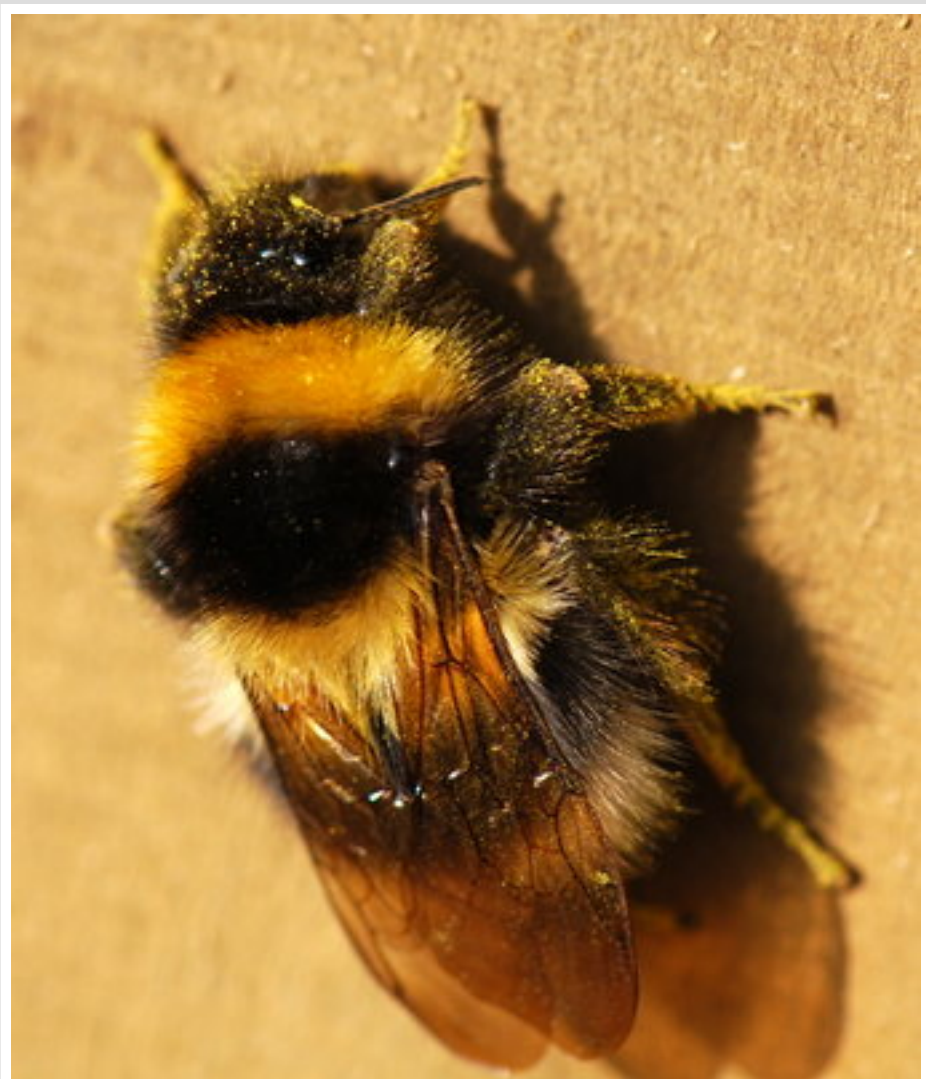
Have a goodun

Wurzel

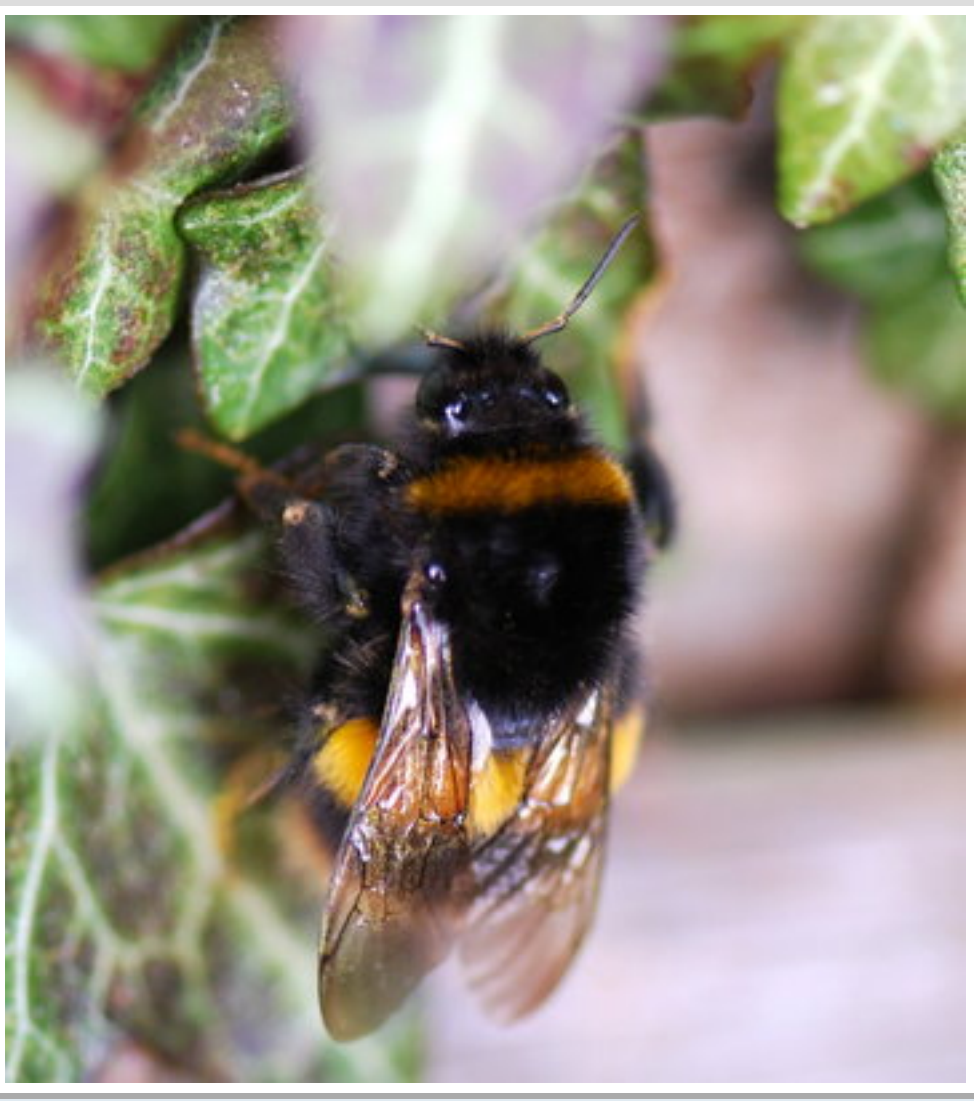
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 15-Mar-12 07:19 AM GMT

It seems to have cooled slightly over the last couple of days and butterfly sightings in my garden have dwindled – since Sunday I have only seen one butterfly – a darkish blur on the way home (presumably a Comma) so to keep my hand and eye in I've been looking out for Bees. The last couple of evenings have provided what I presume are two species of Bumble Bee. I've had a look on BWARS but to be honest I'm not really sure what the defining features are so purely by visual comparison I'm guessing that the first is *Bombus lucorum* and the later is *Bombus terrestris* – after my recent guess work I don't really trust my eyes so if I'm wrong be gentle 😊

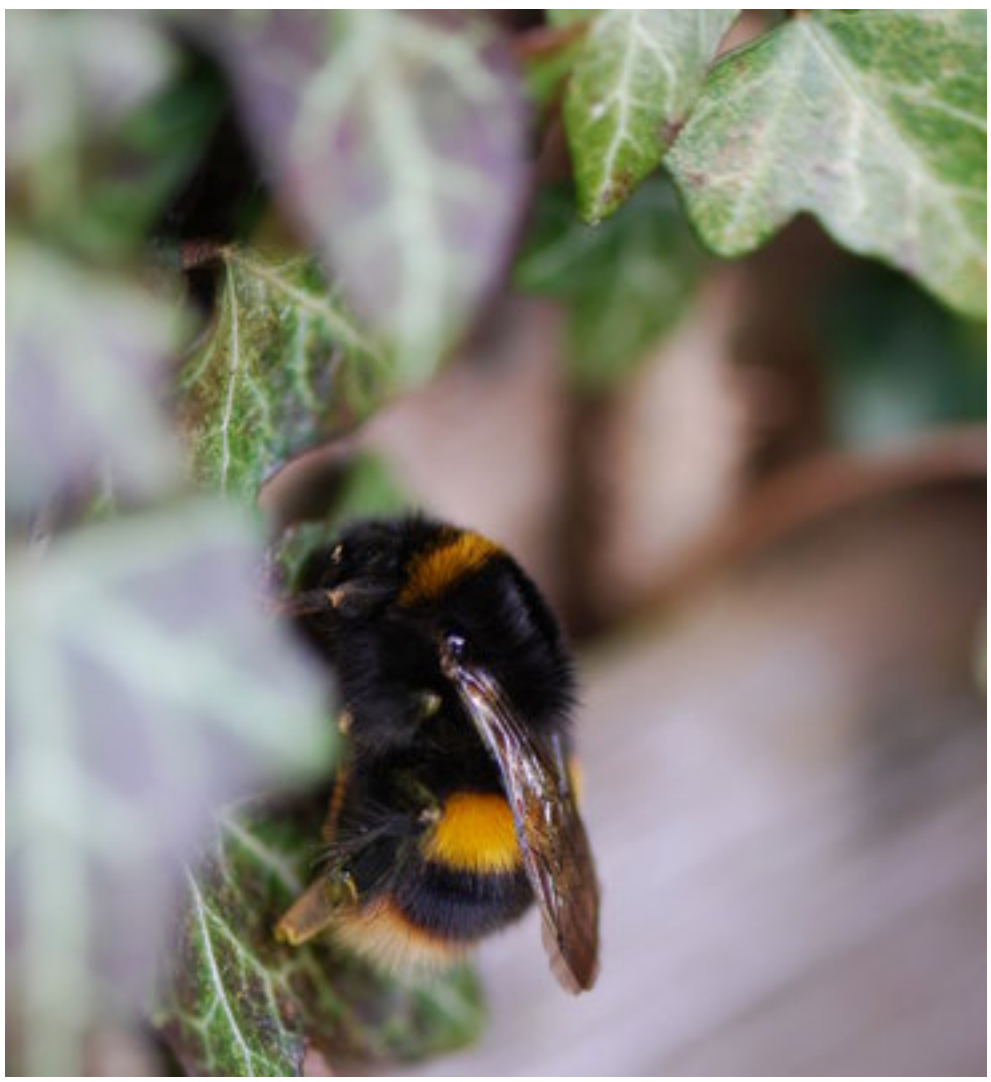


B lucorum?



B. terrestris?

I include another shot of the second bee just because I couldn't believe how "plush" it looked – like a very high quality Teddy...



And from the weekend a fairly typical view of Brimstone for me at the this time of year – they're either bombing up the garden and over the hedge or if they are nectaring I can't get close enough as they are very, very flighty. 😬 Will the season ever really start?



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 15-Mar-12 04:42 PM GMT

Hiya Wurzel,

regards the bees, your "plush teddy bear" is definitely *Bombus terrestris* and the one hovering at Lungwort is most likely *Anthophora plumipes*...but that's as far as I dare!!! 😊

Have you checked these sites yet?

http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk/bumblebees_id.htm

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/research/projects/bombus/bumblebeeid.html>

<http://www.brisc.org.uk/BByb.php>

Some make bumble/cuckoo bee ID seem really quite simple. Me? I'm not so sure!!!

Cheers mate,

Gibster.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 16-Mar-12 06:58 AM GMT

Cheers for the websites Gibster they're great and the downloadable I.D. chart is brill I've got it on my phone now. I was using BWARS but these are easier to use. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-Mar-12 05:13 AM GMT

Things have cooled down and got wet so even the bees aren't out and about for me to photograph 😞. Still it gives me the opportunity to sort through the specimens that I use at work and try to sort out their identification. It's a job that I've been meaning to do since I discovered and started using them a couple of years ago, before I got into photography and butterflies.

There have been debates about pinned specimens on UK Butterflies before so just to clear up one or two things before the pitchforks are sharpened... 😊

First up they are "historical" probably at least 20 years old (even more likely – much older as the building is over 50 years old now) which is why they look so battered and broken. Secondly they were collected by someone else who left my place of work many, many years before. Thirdly I have never "netted" butterflies ever and don't condone the habit for "pinning" of wild fauna. Finally I only use them for educational purposes (making keys, highlighting variation, speciation etc) and if I didn't use them then their deaths would have been even more pointless. I need to get them identified so that when my charges ask me what they are I can have an answer for them rather than just saying "the massive one" or the "funny looking one".

I also need to point out that all of my identifications are based on a Flickr site (African butterflies) and then cross checking on Wikipedia as don't know where else to look and the boxes have "Botswana and other African countries" written on them. So if I've made mistakes then all help is greatly appreciated.



Acraea sp - serena?



Eurema sp?



Catospilla florella - African Emigrant?



Belenois aurota - dry season

I think this is the "dry season form", a bit like the polymorphic forms of Map, or Comma and Hutchinson's Comma.



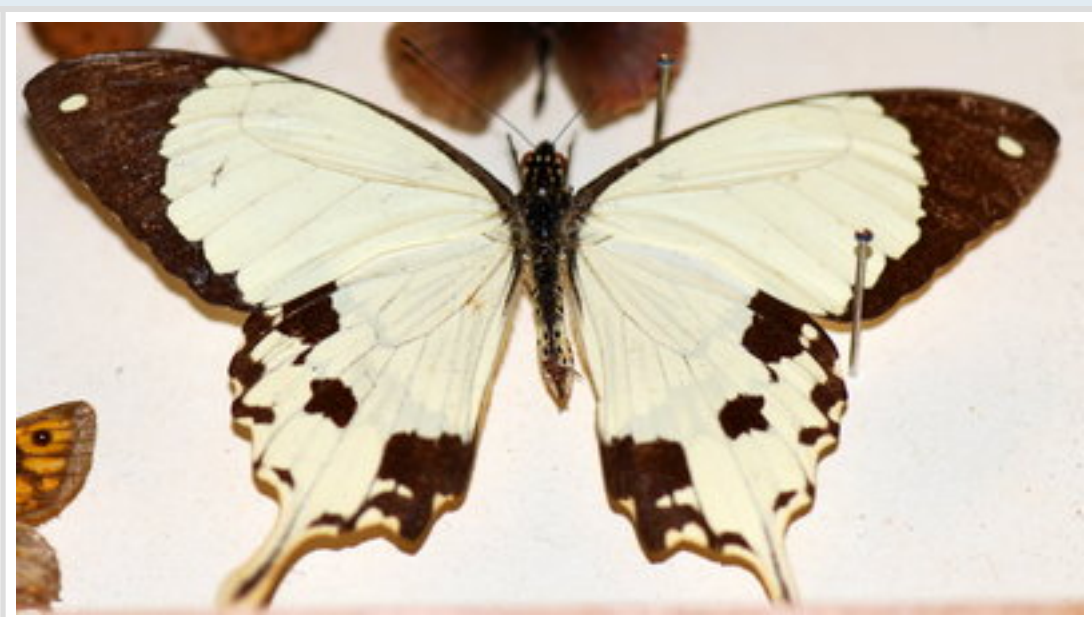
Belenois aurota - underwing



Junonia hierta possibly "cebre" - Yellow Pansy?



"cebre" underwing



Papilio dardanus



Papilio demodocus Citrus Swallowtail



Papilio nireus

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Padfield, 18-Mar-12 09:26 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I think all your IDs are almost certainly correct. If I feel brave, I might try to identify the *Eurema* more closely but this is a very common genus throughout the tropical regions, from Africa to Australia, and without closer knowledge of where it came from or a photograph of the underside (it would help if you provided this) I wouldn't feel at all confident. When I was in India I photographed two species of *Eurema* and needed to see the undersides to be sure of the ID.

I have various general books covering African species but my comprehensive volumes are Larson, *Butterflies of West Africa*, which deals wonderfully with every species in West Africa, Kielland, *Butterflies of Tanzania* for the East of the continent and Woodhall, *Butterflies of South Africa* for the South. That leaves a few gaps and it is a huge continent!

Guy

EDIT: I'm feeling brave. I think that is a female *Eurema brigitta*.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-Mar-12 09:55 PM GMT

Cheers Guy, I did start with the easy ones 😊 hence why my i.d's were on the ball! I'll try an get an underside shot of the Eurema but I thought it was a Brigitte as well but wasn't feeling that brave 😊

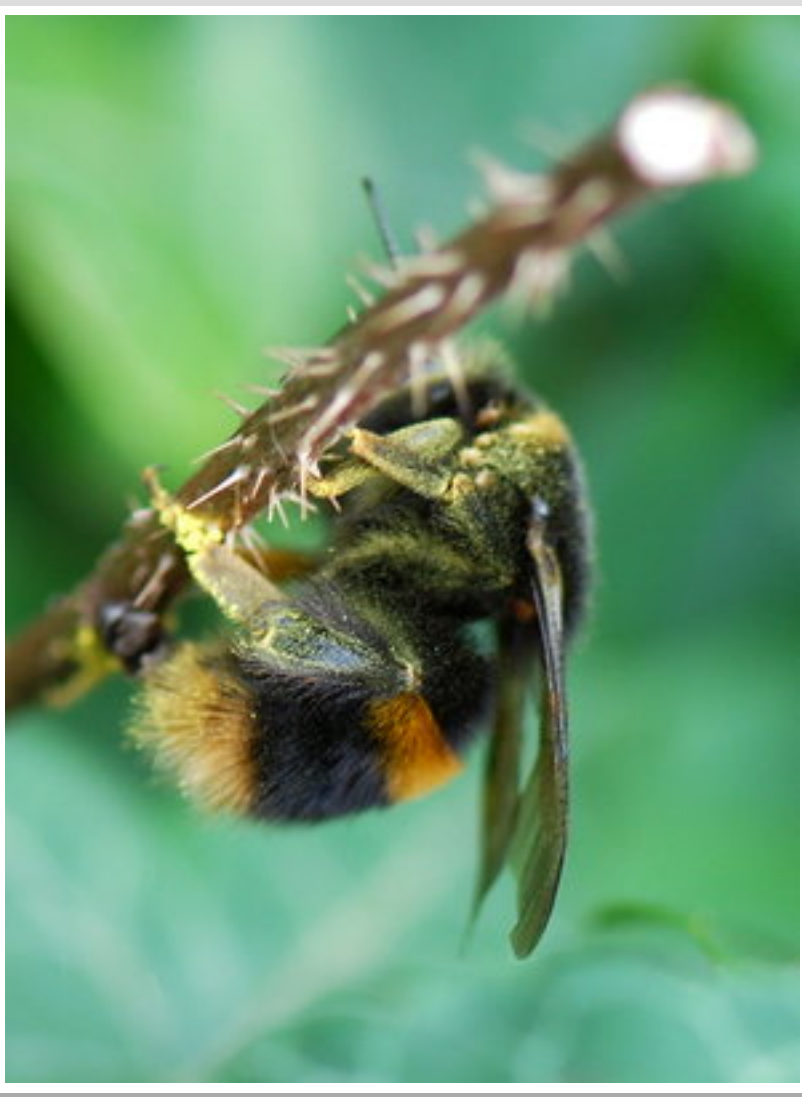
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Mar-12 06:05 AM GMT

Being stuck at work during the day is starting to wear a bit thin now, so I'm relying on weekends to get out and see what I can find.



This is B. Terrestris I think.



Not brill but just a record shot for this feisty little bugger.



I never realised how "hairy" they are...

As I drive to work in the mornings now I have the glorious tones of Skylarks and Corn Buntings instead of the radio or 70's rock music. There's one bush in particular that has had a male singing from it every morning for the past two weeks. Perhaps I might get there just after dawn and stand in the bush until I can get some shots of it? Due to it's proximity to Stonehenge it's probably seen a lot worse! 😊

As an aside – what is the name of the diamond shaped patch that appears on the thorax of some butterflies, is it caused when they nectar?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Lee Hurrell, 21-Mar-12 10:14 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

what is the name of the diamond shaped patch that appears on the thorax of some butterflies, is it caused when they nectar?

Most noticeable on the Red Admiral....I have no idea what it is though.

Cheers

Lee

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Mar-12 10:34 PM GMT

Cheers Lee for your honest response – I was expecting someone to reply with "tch, you don't know what that is?" 😏 " 😊 so it's good to know that I'm not the only one that hasn't got a clue what it is 😊

Cheers

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 22-Mar-12 02:47 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Cheers Lee for your honest response – I was expecting someone to reply with "tch, you don't know what that is?" 😏 " 😊 so it's good to know that I'm not the only one that hasn't got a clue what it is

Nor have I, Wurzel, and I have been aware of it ever since my interest in butterflies began when I was a kid.

Red Admirals **do** appear to possess a particularly noticeable diamond shape in the middle of the thorax. Perhaps someone can come along and tell us what purpose it serves?

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-Mar-12 03:31 AM GMT

Cheers David for helping me convince myself that I'm not seeing things. Philzoid pointed it out on one of my Peacock shots the other day and asked me if I knew what it was and I still don't 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-Mar-12 07:22 AM GMT

Somehow I actually managed to have a lunch break today for the first time in what feels like 4 months – so I made the most of it and headed out to the nearest wild patch and sure enough there were a few butterflies – a Peacock and 2 Small Tortoiseshells. Everything is very flighty still and I need to get back into the swing of stalking so the only shots I managed to get were pretty distant...



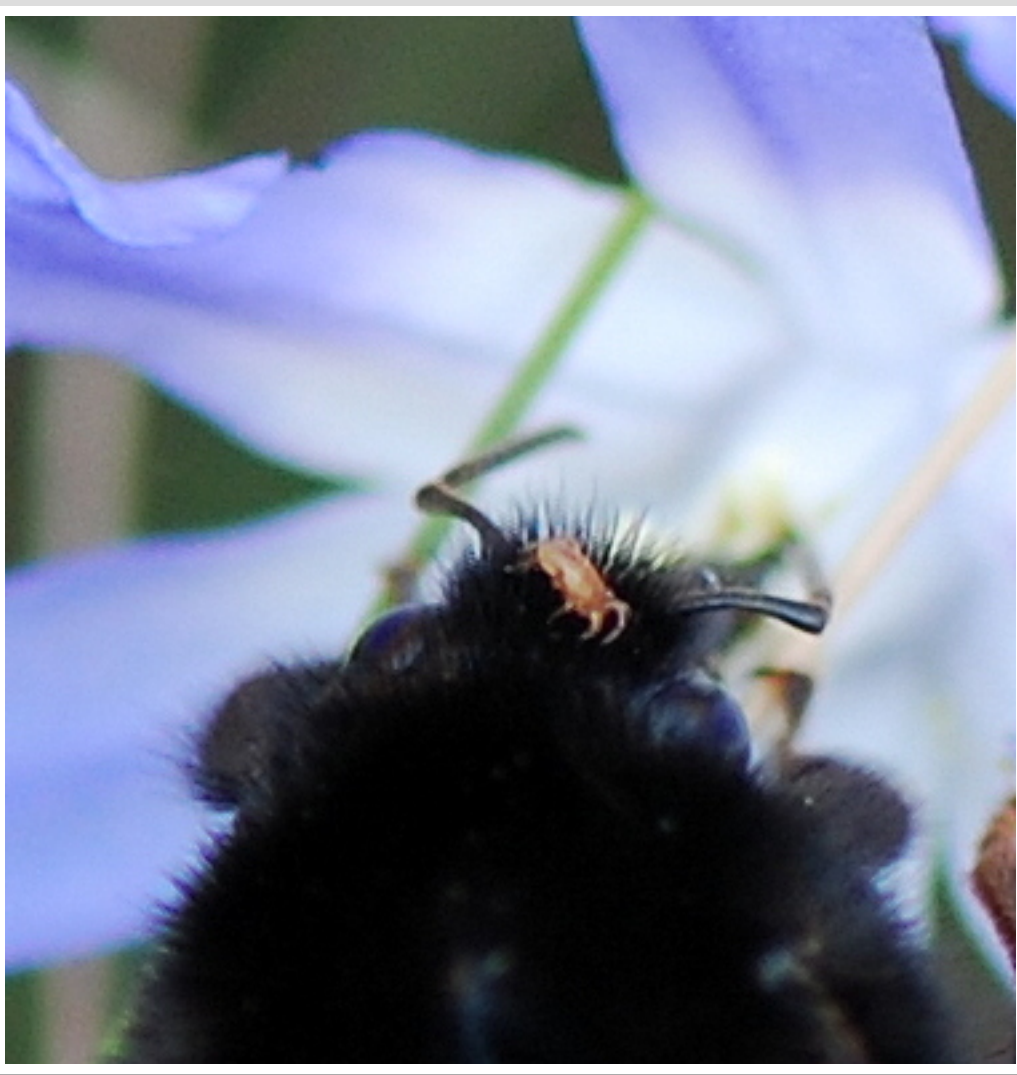
Once at home I headed out to the garden and as the girls were in full play mode I knew that there wouldn't be any butterflies around so I settled for some bees. The fiesty territorial ones from a few days ago seem to have chilled out slightly now and are much more approachable showing off their great white faces.



I also managed to get another first – *Bombus lapidarius*, with it's lovely red bum



When I was getting the photos ready for this post I noticed that it was carrying some sort of mite(?) – also a first...hopefully the nice weather will hold til the weekend and I might be able to get out properly.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-Mar-12 06:36 AM GMT

As the temperatures have been rising I have been finding myself increasingly frustrated with being stuck indoors and working so I have been taking my lunch break al fresco and checking out the small area by the ground keepers sheds. The other day the grounds offered a couple of butterflies but since then nowt so I have been getting into Bees. Over the last couple of days I suddenly noticed mining bees and they are brill!

These were excavating and tending a burrow in the dry earth around the roots of an upturned tree – I think they are yellow legged miners?



Yellow Legged Mining Bee – Andrena flavipes



Andrena flavipes

Also there were these slightly smaller and darker bees – they are also a lot less "hairy" around the leg regions and much narrower in the abdomen so I'm thinking they are a different species?



Not sure?



Not sure?

There have also been a couple of bees outside the window of my lab which I've had to watch and wait for the bell to go so I can nip out at change of lessons and reel off a few shots. Again there have been the puzzlers like this one...



Not sure?

And then there was this little beauty, a Tawny Mining Bee, which surprisingly really caught my eye 😊 . It looks like it's been submerged in Iron Bru...

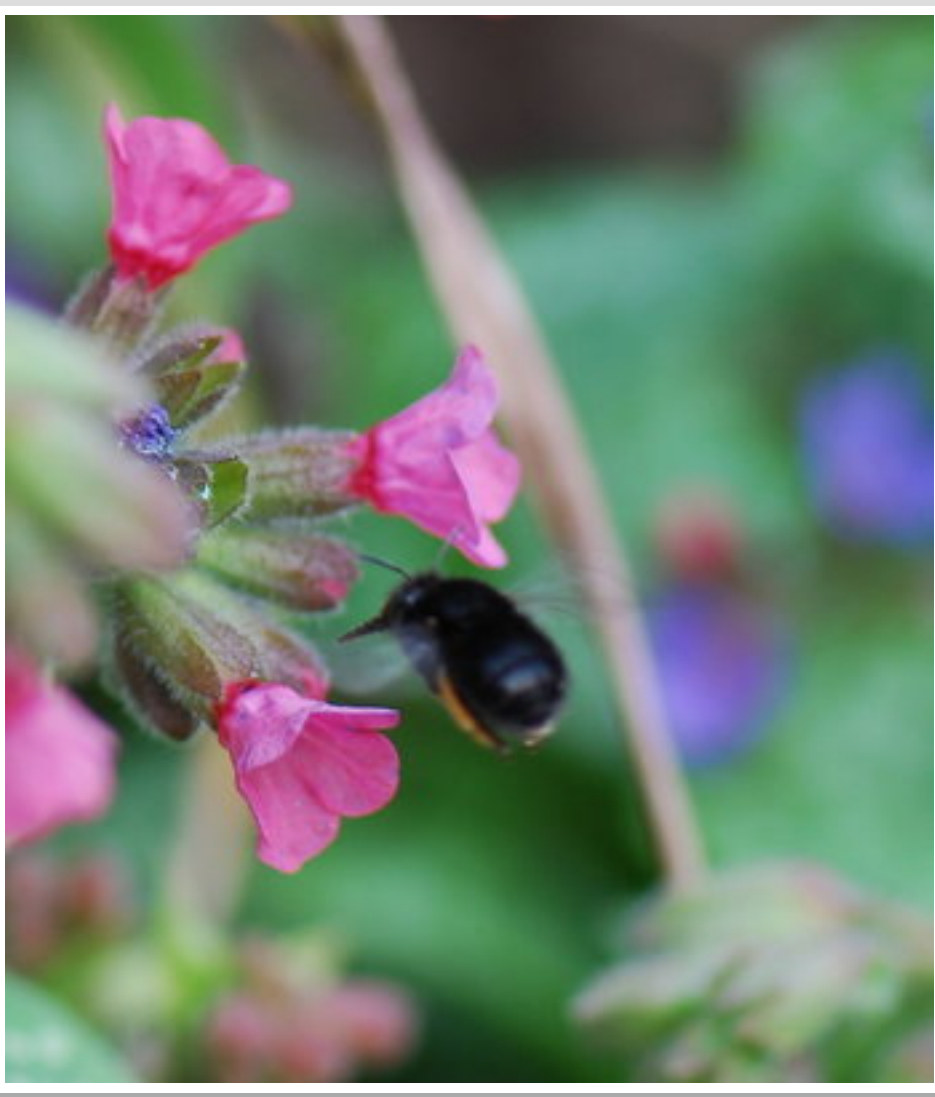


Tawny Mining Bee - Andrena fulva



Andrena fulva

Then when I get home I can head up the garden - no butterflies still but when they do come I'll be sharp and ready! I got a few more shots of the feisty, little black bee from the other day - I think that it is a female "Flower Bee"? Whatever it is it has a whacking gurt proboscis! 😲



Anthophora plumipes? - check out the "trunk"



Anthophora plumipes?

It's my little ones 4th Birthday this weekend so we're off to a Farm park - and with the lush weather perhaps there'll be an Orange-tip or a Holly Blue along the hedges, here's hoping...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 25-Mar-12 07:35 AM GMT

Tomorrow my younger daughter will be 4 (where does the time go? 🤔 - she'll soon be grown up and I'll have nothing to do at weekends and during the holidays but head out for some birds/butterflies 😊) so today we took both of them to Longdown Activity Farm. They had a whale of a time; collecting eggs, feeding goats, milking cows, pedalling tiny tractors and going completely loony in the ball pool and on the trampolines. They've got to the age now where we can let them go a bit more free range so I sloped off for the odd 5 or 10 minutes here and there to see what I could find. There were plenty of Sparrow around as to be expected and it gave me a chance to have a sort through and place them in seniority. From my brief 5 minute observations I think the chappy below was the fully pipped General, and very dashing he looked too!



The general

On taking the lunch back to the car park I dawdled my way back and spotted my first Bee Fly of the year. I think it was this species that first drew my attention to Macro photography as my best mate brought me an image of one to help him identify. I'd not seen one with the heavily marked wings like this before...



Bee Fly

There were also butterflies around – in fact the first of the day was a fly-by Comma while we were paying at the entrance and while queing at the animal handling, the goat feeding and walking past the shire horses to the pigs a male Brimstone bombed by like a wind tossed piece of Sulphur. Whether it was the same male doing circuits or three individuals I'm not really sure – probably the former. Later while my older daughter "chilled dad okay?" and my younger daughter wore herself out on the slide (we've nick-named her the "play machine") I checked out the only accessible bit of hedge in the whole place. I was rewarded with my first proper opportunity to get some really close shots of a Red Admiral.





Finally as the girls ate their ice creams to recharge their batteries before more goat feeding and small animal handling my first female Brimstone flitted by just out of reach. I didn't get the hoped for Orange-tip but something equally as nice, a peaceful car journey home with both girls crashed out and snoring quietly in the back 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 26-Mar-12 07:57 AM GMT

As we entered into day two of the Birthday weekend I didn't think that I would be able to get out so everynow and again between recycling the wrapping paper and cleaning through the house, or hanging garlands and decorating the table I'd pop outside . I did manage to see both male and female Brimstone but I didn't hope for much else. However just after lunch I did manage to pop over to Five Rivers for the first time this year. After leaving the car a male Brimstone fluttered by but when I reached the top of the bank there didn't seem to be much else about. While I watched a close Stock Dove another male Brimstone hove into view and alike so may that I've seen actually settled long enough for me to get close and take a few shots.



I then explored the woodland area which will be quite good in about a months time - when the Garden Warblers that seem to frequent this area will be back but it didn't hold any butterflies. Then I reached the long bank and suddenly along it's gentle slopes there were butterflies everywhere, or so it felt after the winter blues and snatches of views here and there. Two Small Tortoiseshells had a little battle and the victor settled down to defend it's patch, seeing off Small Whites and a Comma which settled further along the bank.





The Whites, 3 in all, were their usual flighty selves, and no matter how long I waited they didn't stop. Still there's always next time...and having seen more than 2 species in a day it's starting to feel like the season is upon us 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 26-Mar-12 07:22 PM GMT

You are certainly making good use of your new macro, Wurzel. That mite on *Bombus lapidarius* was a pretty stringent test! My wife sometimes complains that my photos show tiny whitefly etc on her plants, which she hadn't noticed.

"So nat'ralists observe, a flea
Hath smaller fleas that on him prey,
And these have smaller fleas that bite 'em,
And so proceed *ad infinitum*."
[Jonathan Swift]

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 27-Mar-12 04:19 AM GMT

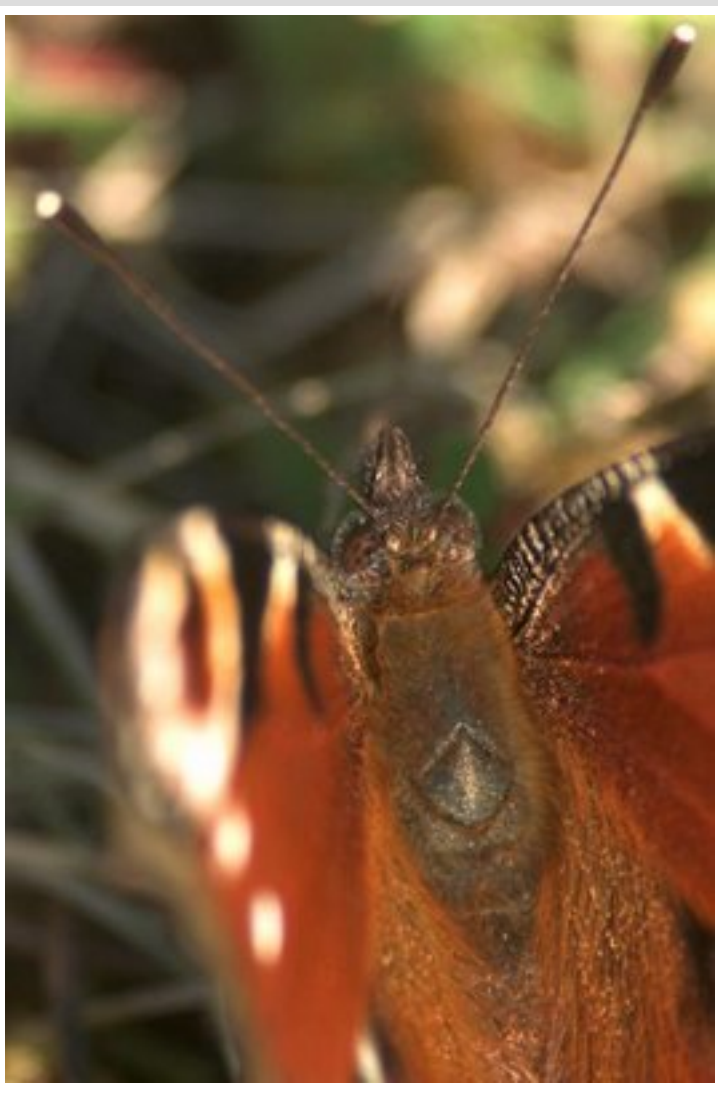
"Wurzel" wrote:

As an aside – what is the name of the diamond shaped patch that appears on the thorax of some butterflies

As far as I can see, you never got an answer to this question and, as it interested me too, I did a bit of reading!

Butterfly texts give loads of detail on wing venation, etc. but tend just to report "thorax black with brown hairs" or whatever.

I then went to one of my wife's entomology textbooks (*Gullan & Cranston*), where I learned that the thorax is composed of three segments (*prothorax*, *mesothorax*, and *metathorax*). In *lepidoptera*, the first and last are small, whereas the *mesothorax* is large and bears a *scutum* and *scutellum*. There are strengthening ridges, inside the thorax, to help support the flight muscles and the external structures arise from these. The *scutum* is well shown on this Peacock, which I photographed today at Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon.



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 26 March 2011 Nikon D300s with 300f4 lens + 1.4xTC - 1/350s@f/6.7 ISO400

Hope this helps.

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-12 08:25 AM GMT

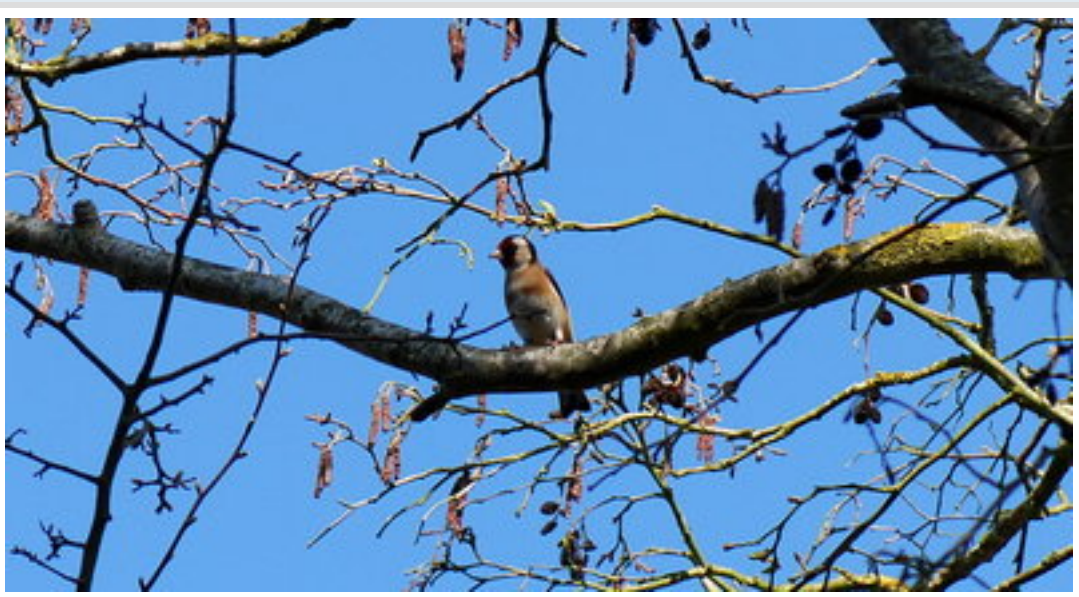
Cheers Mike I owe you two thank you's now. One for the advice on my lens which as you noted, I am absolutely loving! 😊 The second for helping out with the "funny diamond shaped thingy". I can now refer to it as the scutum, brill 😊
The poem was very apt as well as I was revising Particles with my year 9 class today and they were continuing ad infinitum about "what makes an atom?" and then "what makes a proton?" etc etc 😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 28-Mar-12 06:56 AM GMT

I popped out to the "wildlife" area at work again today but there wasn't a lot about - a few bees, including finding a *B.lapidarius* burrowing into a hole, and a charming "charm" of goldfinches - plinking away.



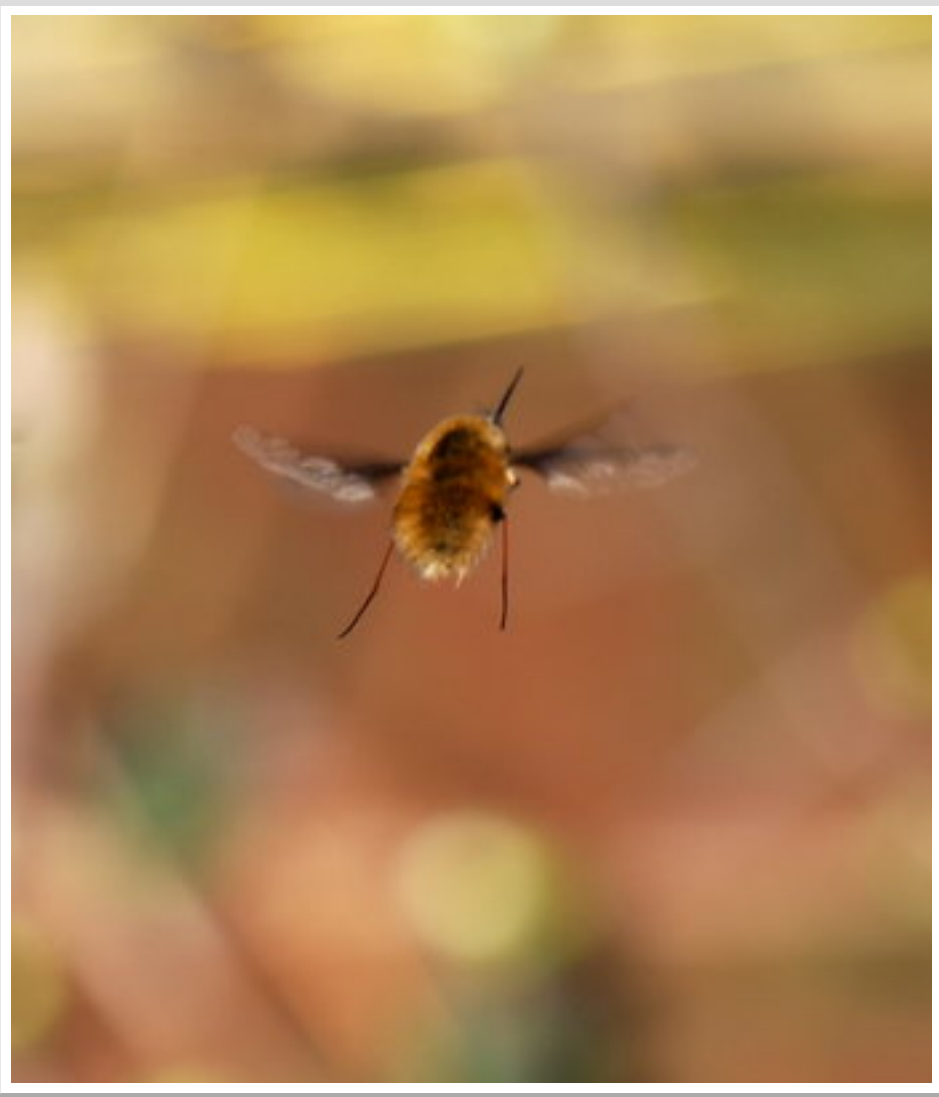
Once at home I had to do my first rush and grab of the year as a Small White settled on some Plum blossom. I managed to get a couple of shots before it was off like a rocket to neighbouring gardens. It looks like I'm out of shape and will have to get back into training for the 10m dash and grab!



While I was out in the garden I thought I'd have a little mooch around. The usual suspects were present; the white faced bees at the top of the garden along with a *B.lapidarius* and the Blackcap warbling with a more flutey tone than the local Blackbirds. More Bluebells are shooting through now joining those early bloomers from a fortnight ago.



As I moved further down I missed a Tawny Mining Bee as it went to ground but settled for trying to get some shots of a Bee Fly in action. I waited and edged into its airspace, focused and clicked away in "sport mode". I'm not sure about the end result but it's a technique in practice!



Finally tonight I was reminded that I now need to close the curtains before we sit down for our family tea. A Peacock flitted towards the open french windows, settled for a while on the wall, and all the time I was fighting the urge to grab the camera and get a few shots. With the curtains drawn I won't know what I'm missing! 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 29-Mar-12 07:50 AM GMT

Another lunchtime and another stolen 15 minutes in the "wildlife area". Today there were some butterflies 😊, but they were on the other side of the security fence (It supposed to be to keep people out but is it to really keep the kids in?) 😞 and to make matters worse they were joined, very briefly, by a Peacock. Settled for trying to get some "pinking" Chaffinch and watching the Bee Flies.



Once at home there was the usual rush to get my older daughter to Rainbows so I only glanced at a Peacock in the back garden. Still I managed to find one in a neighbours garden and it's got to that time of the year when I take my camera most places, just in case, so I managed to get a few shots of it. It seemed a bit washed out?



Still haven't seen an Orange-tip but there still plenty of time - I wonder if the cooler weather next week will slow things down a little?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 01-Apr-12 07:06 AM GMT

Due to packing ready for our journey to Wales today I didn't get a chance to write my diary post for yesterday...

Friday 30th March

Having pretty much exhausted the wildlife area I managed to get some time out and about in Pewsey as I needed to complete a reccie for my session for the school's Artsweek in a month or two's time. The idea is to let them loose with the school's digital cameras in the local area to get images of where urban and wildlife overlap. We can then jumble the images together in Photoshop and hopefully print off their work as large installations. This meant checking out the local nature reserve (Scotchell) and surrounding environs! 😊 It was pretty cold during the morning as the sun tried to burn its way through the haze so I wasn't hoping for much. However amongst the reccie shots (barb wire and brambles, fork in a tree etc) one or two creatures did happen to pass in front of my lens...

There were Chiff Chaff a plenty singing as well as a pair of Grey Wagtail for starters, quickly followed by my first Speckled Wood of the year and then 2 Small Tortoiseshell and to top the morning off a Red Kite being mobbed by a pair of gronking Raven (although I didn't get a shot as I was too enthralled by the dogfight)



Chiff Chaff



1st 1st of the day!

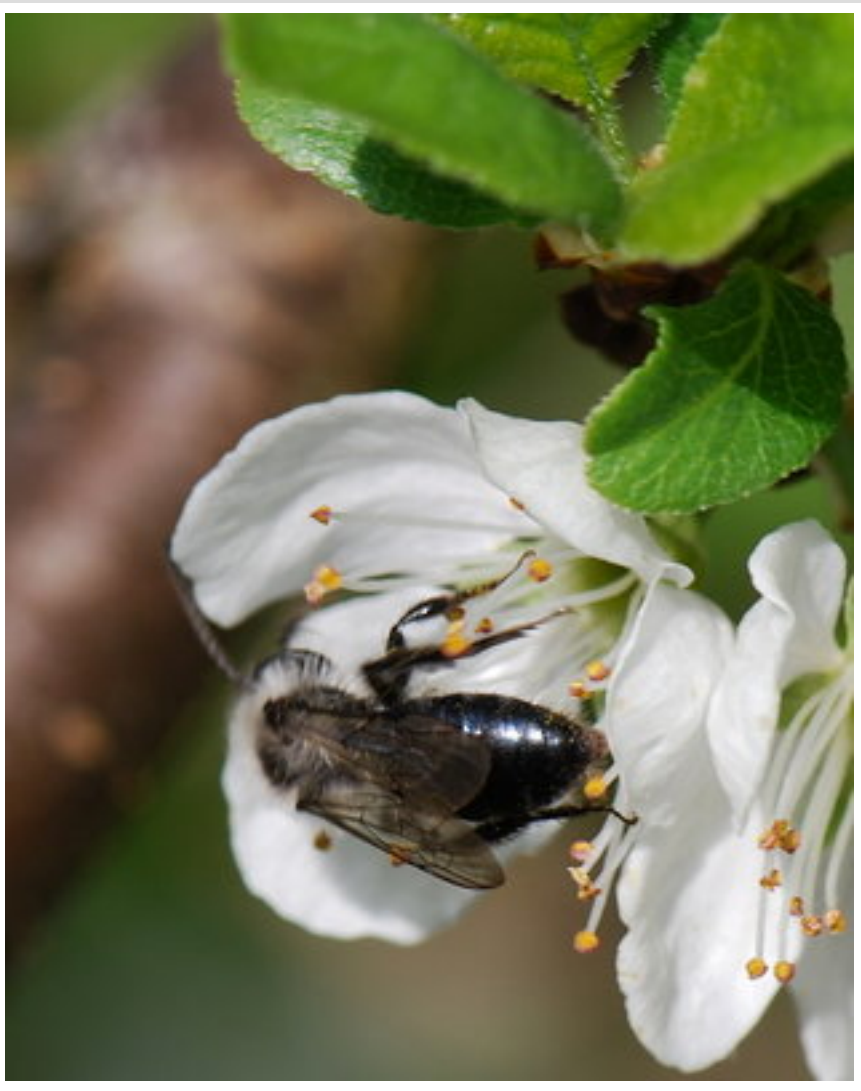
Job done, work over and away back home early...Once back I started doing the prep work for our trip to Aberaeron and in between sorting the recycling or ironing I took a few sorties up the garden. Once out there a male Orange-tip bombed up the garden, pausing just long enough for me to get a distant (and so cropped and "record") shot. The orange looked stunning as it caught the light. I later found out that my wife had seen a male and a female earlier in the day - typical! 😊



2nd 1st of the day!

Then, majority of the sorting done, I decided that I needed to make the most of the warm weather while it lasted, i.e. today. So I took a walk around the local estate and managed to find a few bees, including a lifer - what I think is an Ashy Mining Bee (?) as well as my first possible *B.humilis* and plenty of

hoverflies and bee flies.



Andrena cineraria – Ashy Mining Bee?



B humilis?

Then it was back home to more packing and getting the girls fed and to bed. While I was putting away their toys a small grey/blue blur silvered past me and landed on some ivy. Luckily I had my camera with me (it's that season when it's almost attached to me "just in case") so I clicked away at my first Holly Blue of the year, a female and looking absolutely resplendant. After I thought that I had enough shots I put my camera aside and feeling the warmth on my back, hearing the bees buzzing and my sight occupied by the Holly Blue I drifted away somewhere for a very tranquil 5 minutes.



Surely not my 3rd 1st of the day?



Then it was bathtime and my peace was shattered 😂

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 01-Apr-12 07:32 AM GMT

A liberal sprinkling of humour amongst the nitty gritty. Luvin yer style mate, keep it up (and the bee IDs of which I'm useless and need the tips!)

Av a goodun, 😊

Gibster.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 01-Apr-12 07:47 AM GMT

Cheers Gibster I'm glad you appreciate my style 😊 my wife hates it 😲😂 The sites you recommended along with BWARS that Chris C did are where I'm getting my bee ids from so I'm blagging it big time!

Better head to bed now as that post took an age to sort out and now my eyes are burning 😞

Have a goodun, and a lifer on me 😊

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

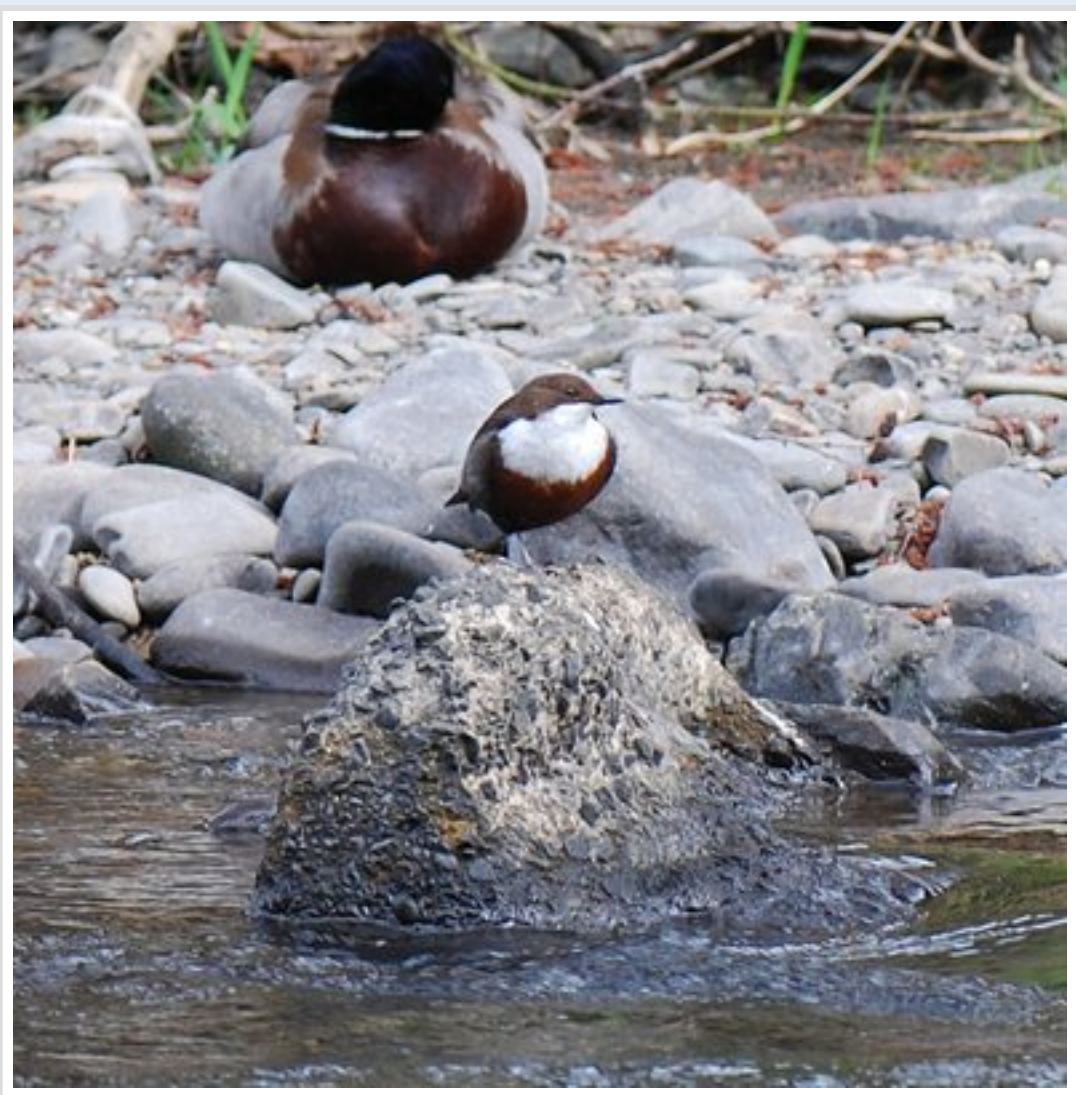
by Wurzel, 02-Apr-12 06:48 AM GMT

Didn't get a chance to post this yesterday so here is 31st March...

Luckily I made the most of the good weather while it lasted as when we left for Wales the sun was hidden from view, and as we made progress along the M4 there was even some rain. Once we'd settled in we took the usual tour – park, seafront, along the river and home. When the opportunities arose I checked out the Dandelions in the park and found a species of Bee that I don't recognise? Then during the walk back along the river there was what I think is a Caddis Fly or Stone Fly?



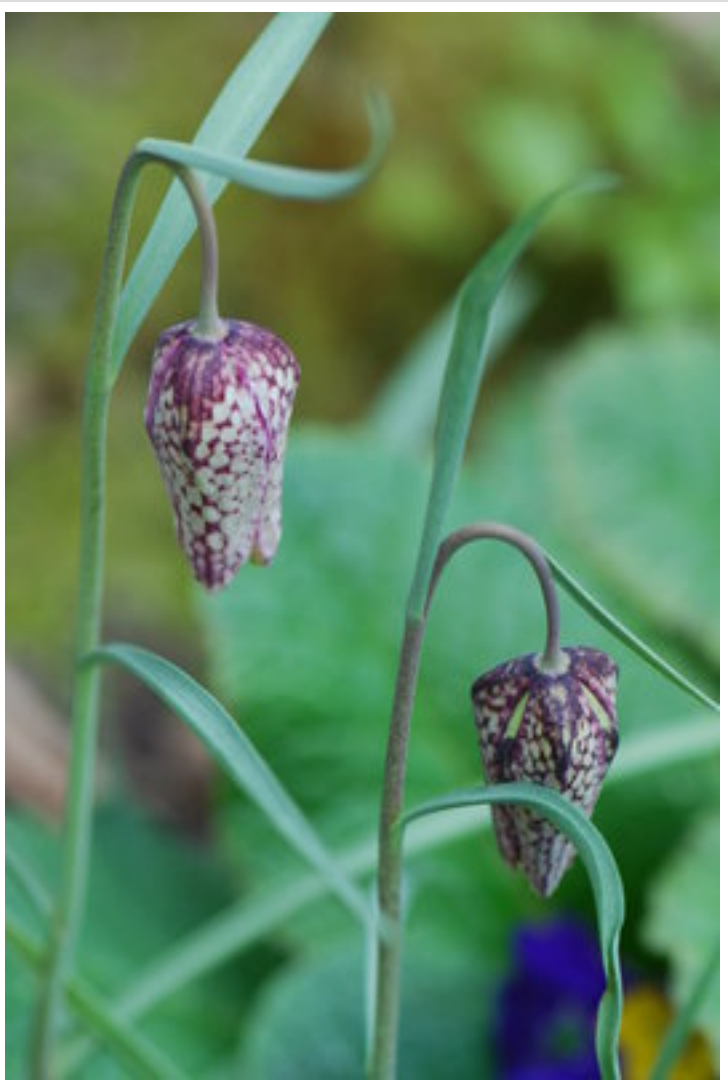
There were also a pair of Dipper that seemed to be using an outflow pipe as somewhere to take cover. When not down the bolt hole they demonstrated all kinds of identification features such as the white eyelids, the rusty breast of the British Subspecies, the bobbing behaviour and the scaly black back. What caught my eye in the first place was the bright white bib and the bombing flight, just above water with their wings a blur.





normal view...

Perhaps tomorrow will bring some butterflies? I mean today I did see my first fritillary...



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-Apr-12 06:58 AM GMT

April Fools day.

Another day when things weren't looking too good according to the Met Office, but we went out anyway, to Llanachaeron. The walled garden soon heated up but it was very hard work to try and get shots of butterflies as they seemed to favour the walls and vegetation around the edges, all of which were on the other side the small hedges, or the opposite side of the raised beds. This would mean that to get the shot you'd have to walk back and around, by which time the butterfly would be gone. I did see a few butterflies - Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Speckled Wood (down near the wood) and 2 Small Whites, along with a lot of bees (B.Terrestris, B.Humilis, A.fulva etc) but the photos I did get were pretty distant apart from one Peacock who decided not to bother flying away as I approached, it just turned its' back on me.



Punk Tit



Later on I found an unusual looking bee - *Nomada lathburiana* - amongst the leaf litter with hundreds of spiders.



Then the area of the car park came into its' own with 2 Comma, a male Orange-tip (which seemed smaller than I remembered them from last year?) and what I think is *Andrena angustior*?



Finally on the way down to get some honey ice-cream for the girls I found some *Osmia rufa* which had their nest burrows in a telegraph pole!



The Met Office are predicting cool cloudy weather again for tomorrow – lets hope they got it wrong again...

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 03-Apr-12 02:48 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Some nice photos there, particularly liking your Holly Blue shots 😊

That is one species that I totally failed to get a decent photo of last year despite seeing loads of them around. Every time I saw one settle it seemed to be twenty feet or so off the ground....oh well, maybe this year 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-12 06:15 AM GMT

Cheers Neil!

I too have experienced the Holly Blue blues! I seem to develop a crick in the neck or get blinded by the sun when trying to get shots of them. And when they do pose for you they always keep their wings shut – spoilsports! 😊 My shot was blind luck – though I had out the hours in over the few days previously...is that karma?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 03-Apr-12 06:16 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I've been having a look at your Hymenopterans this evening.

A few comments on IDs (From 30th March):

Andrena cineraria (male)

Bombus humilis is *Bombus pascuorum* (queen)

Probably *Andrena nitida* (male)

Nomada lathburiana could be *Nomada leucophthalma* due to its location in leaf litter under deciduous trees.

Andrena cineraria (male)

Osmia rufa.

Some great pictures.

Keep up the good work.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-12 06:29 AM GMT

Cheers Mark!

I was having doubts about *A.angustior* today when I found what I think is a female *A.cineraria* in the same place, it was the lack of hair that caused my initial doubt. I was also worried about the *B.humilis* as I remember photographing them back in August and I didn't think they were this early in the season – so the *B.pascuorum* is much better – and a "lifer" too! Thanks for the other pointers too, I didn't know where to begin with *A.nitida* as I'm at the stage where they all look the same still. 😊

Have a goodn

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 03-Apr-12 06:33 AM GMT

and regarding *Andrena cineraria* Wurzel, next time you visit Garston as you leave the car park if you turn immediately left (at least they were there last year) look out for burrows in the foot path.



taken 16th April 2011 Garston.

if you keep looking long enough you might even see other species (cuckoo bees) waiting to go in after they have left

CHris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-12 06:40 AM GMT

Cheers Chris , I remember you telling me about that last year and not knowing anything about Bees I went looking for these huge buggers (for some reason I thought they'd be the size of Hornets 😊) and so didn't see any. It's strange how your preceptions of scale change. Now I know what to look out for I'll be checking them out – and great tip about waiting for the Cuckoo wasps, I'll try that out. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-12 07:01 AM GMT

Unfortunately the weather men were correct and it was a lot cloudier and decidedly cooler than yesterday so with no butterflies in the offing we headed back to Llanerchaeron. This meant that the girls could have a look around the house and while we waited for it to open we hung around in the walled garden as it was much warmer there. A Red Kite passed overhead, a Little Grebe whinnied from the lake, a Blackcap fluted and a Woodpecker drummed away in the surrounding wood but it was too cold for the butterflies. I did find some dazzling beetles in flagrante 😊 and what I think was a "Conops" (although having spent hours looking at them last night it could have been my imagination) but then the doors opened and the girls whirled around looking for easter chicks and dressing up as welsh maids.



I did find a pristine Small Tortoiseshell on a window ledge in the cheese store but it was dead. Still it gave me a chance to check out the palps and get really close up.



Once the girls had finished dressing up and had eaten we took them down to the rivers edge where they had a paddle, threw sticks for Sophie the dog and made river sand castles. I had a little root around at the edge of the car park and a Comma flew by and was swiftly followed by a Peacock. This time it didn't turn its' back to me, instead it did the worst job of disguising itself that I'd ever seen! It must of realised how obvious it was and only settled for long enough for a single shot.



The sun then disappeared amongst the clouds and I settled down to try and find some mining bees – as luck would have it I found an Ashy Mining Bee – a very distinctive looking bee with much more hair then the mining bee that I found the other day!



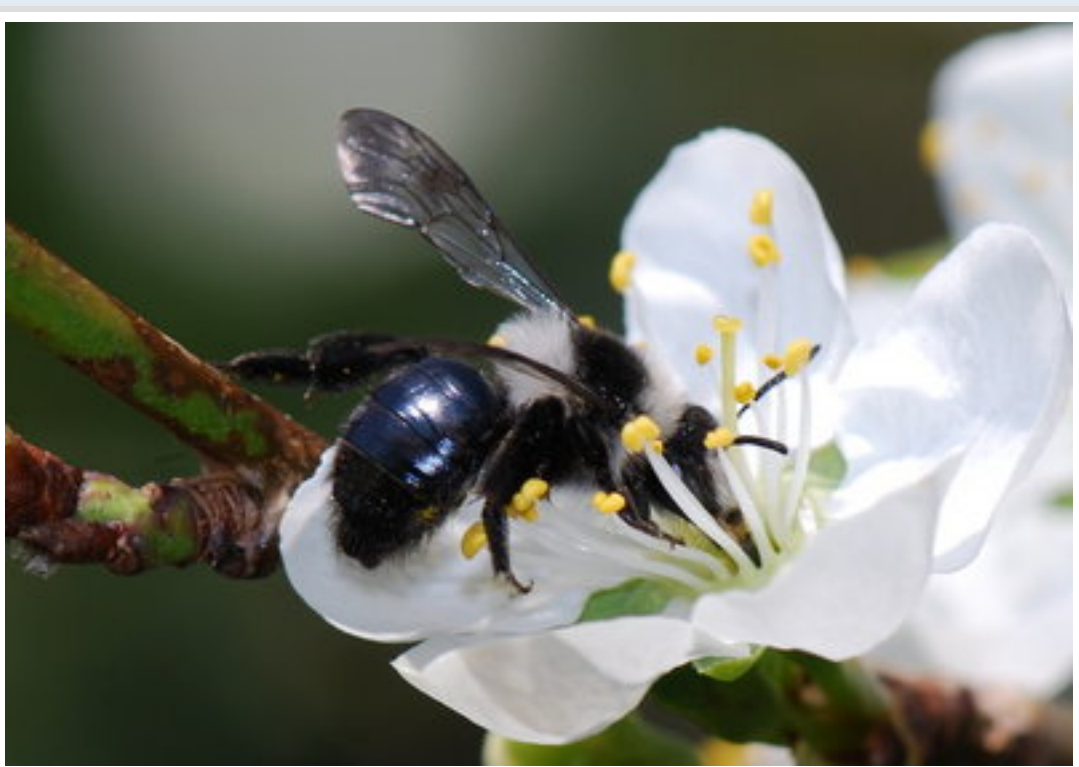
I know it's still early in the season but already I have a touch of Metis and I'm getting increasingly annoyed with weather people that insist on smiling while informing us that it's going to be wetter and colder over the next few days! Still you never know...
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 07-Apr-12 06:50 AM GMT

After a couple of days of really cold weather in Wales and then the journey home, when I opened the curtains this morning and saw blue skies and sun I was determined to get out with the camera. Once the sun had warmed a little and evaporated the dew I "supervised" the girls playing in the garden. At the top a plum tree is in blossom and there were bees galore - Honey, *B.lapidarius*, *B.terrestris*, *B.lucroum*, *B.lucroum B.cryptarum*, *B.hortorum* and *B.pascuorum*, *A.plumipes* as well as what could be 2 species of *Andrena* and probably my personal favourite *A.cineraria* - the Ashy Mining Bee. But no butterflies? I consoled myself that perhaps it was still a little cool for them and just carried on supervising 😊 and watching the bees overhead.



Ashy Mining Bee

After lunch with the temperatures rising slightly more I couldn't resist taking the family to Martin Down - hopefully to bag me a Green Hairstreak or Grizzled Skipper! Parking at the Sillen's Lane end we set off along the track towards Bokerley Ditch. There, patrolling the hedge was a white butterfly. It would settle very briefly and before I could even think about making an approach it would take flight. After several brief pit-stops it must have found some nectar that it appreciated as it stopped long enough for several shots and it was my first Green Veined White of the year, a male.

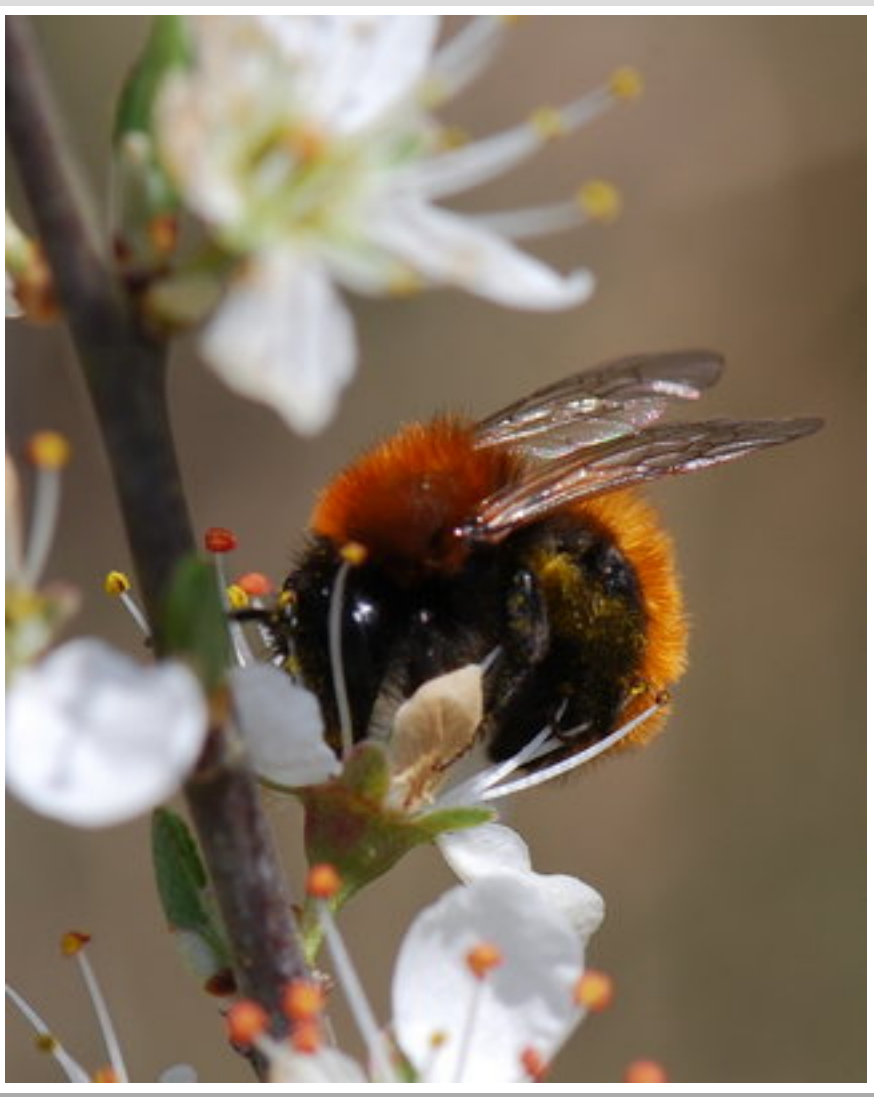


Ace - now for a few Grizzlies and Greenstreaks! But that was it for butterflies. There was a Speckled Wood and a Red Admiral later in the afternoon but I checked all the usual haunts for both species with no luck - perhaps the colder weather last week has slowed things down? I'll have to try again if there's a warm sunny day next week...if! 😊

So no butterflies I soon found some bees. The first one was a tiny thing and I haven't a clue what it is - I did think *Andrena labita* but the red markings are down the whole abdomen meant no, same reason *Lasioglossum calceatum* so I'm left thinking *Sphecodes*?



Then a Tawny mining bee feeding in a pose that reminded me of a Red Panda.



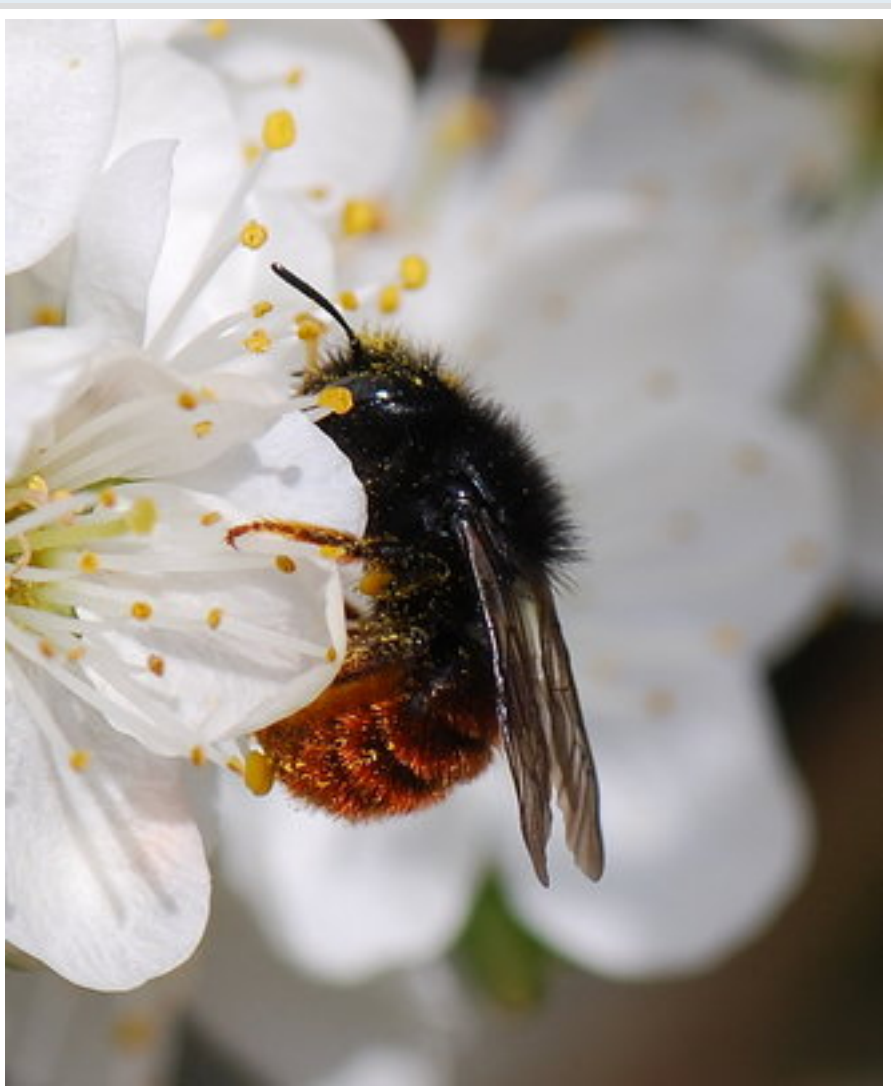
Tawny Mining Bee

Then another ?



?

Just before we headed home I picked up 2 lifers. First up *Osmia bicolor* and then *Bombus bohemicus*.



Osmia bicolor



Very distant shot...

So only three butterflies all day! What happened to those heady days of 2/3 weeks ago?
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Apr-12 06:08 AM GMT

I didn't think that I was going to have much chance to get out today, and the weather forecast wasn't hopeful either 😞. After taking my older daughter to her swimming lesson (she got her 10m badge 😊) and then doing the shopping I managed to nip out over lunch. After checking the garden and not finding any butterflies I settled for some bees. Only one or two species today but then I got distracted...a male Orange-tip was patrolling up the top of the garden. I got a few distant shots and wasn't hopeful of much more as it seemed very flighty. 😏



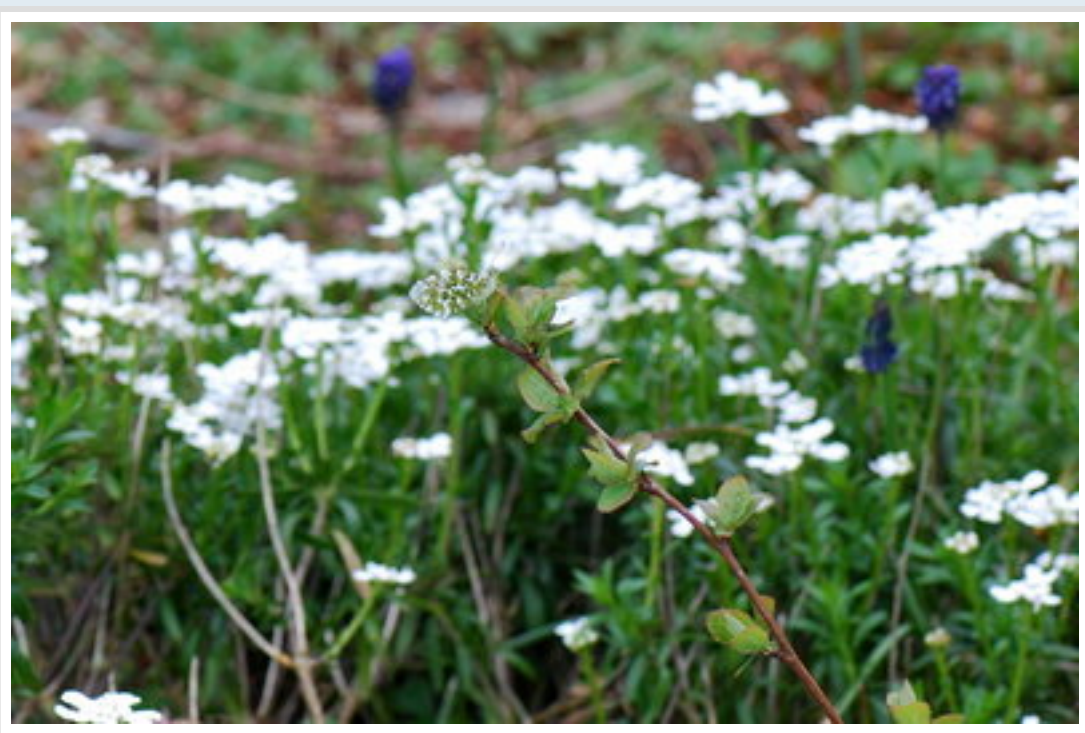
After watching it for a few more circuits round the garden it disappeared over the hedge at the back and I thought that would be it, so back to bees...Only it wasn't it did one more pass and then settled back on the same daffodil, allowing me to get really close. It kept its' wings closed at first...



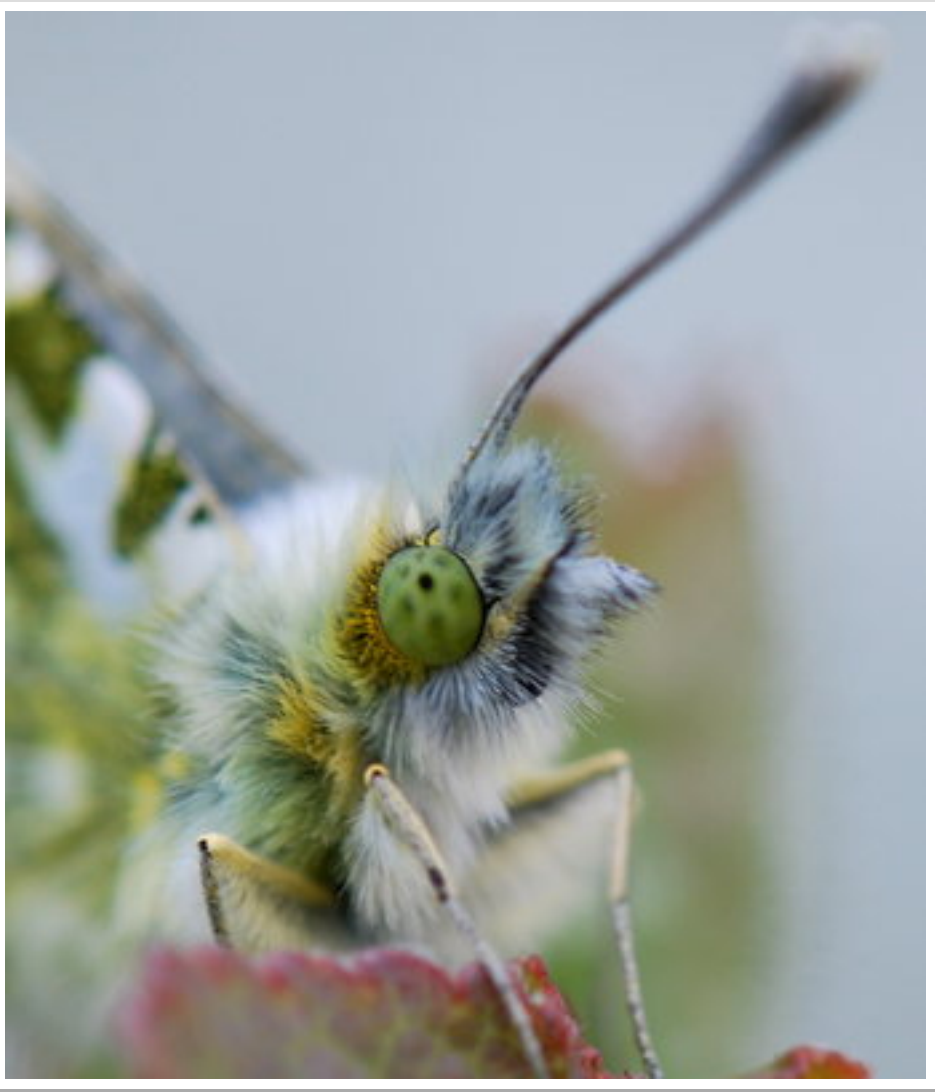
...before opening them up as the sun suddenly appeared from behind the cloud. Is it just me or are the black markings on the fore wing slightly darker and larger than usual? I'm not really sure if this is an aberrant. 😊



As the sun went in again it fluttered down to the bottom of the garden and landed. From the top of the garden I knew roughly where it was but the greenhouse blocked my view so I headed back down. Not wanting to disturb it I held back and scanned across the flower beds and it was then that I appreciated the wonderful camouflage the underwings offer (possibly because I've been reading *Dazzled and Deceived*).



Once I located it I spent 30 minutes in his company, just drinking in the details; the little tufts of hair on the edge of the wing, the yellow “eyelashes” and the grey hairs. My older daughter joined me and was almost as fascinated by it as me. She kept wandering to the middle of the lawn and then creeping back until it suddenly came into view/focus – a bit like the magic 3d pictures. We even tried tickling its’ wing edges so she could have a flash of the orange-tips. It just didn’t budge.



Having got back from some errands in town I did my late afternoon walk just to see what was about and it was still there then...I might even go and have a look in a minute - I'd better find my torch!

Have a goodun, hope you get visited by the lagomorph! 😊

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 08-Apr-12 09:02 PM GMT

That's definitely some type of aberrant OT, Wurzel. The black markings are quite smudgy and the forewing spot is more pronounced than usual.

A very striking specimen.

Re: Wurzel

by Lee Hurrell, 08-Apr-12 10:11 PM GMT

Agreed - it could almost be a foreign species!

I've never seen an Orange Tip look anything other than 'normal' and that's the second ab so far this year.

Lee

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 08-Apr-12 10:38 PM GMT

Hiya Wurzel,

I think your amorous beetles are Green Dock Beetles, *Gastrophysa viridula*. And that male Orange-tip is simply stunning! Very catching wingtips indeed.

I've just the one day off work this Easter break. Typically the weather is complete pants 🙄 but I'm enjoying your Diary. I'll definitely have to put in more effort with the bees, there's a whole world out there I'm missing.

Cheers mate,

Gibster.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 09-Apr-12 07:13 AM GMT

Cheers for your comments guys - I'm glad that I'm not seeing things! 😊 Cheers Gibster for the id of the beetles, and remember that "bees are the knees" 😊

I said yesterday that my Orange-tip didn't move all afternoon so I nipped out at 22.40 last night in total darkness, set my camera to "night" and pointed it at the daffodil where he'd been and clicked. This is what I got...



Just to make sure that I hadn't disturbed him I went out again this morning and he was still there. We had some rain in the night and I thought that butterflies would have gone under cover rather than just grimly sit tight? 😊



We took the girls to Downton Abbey...sorry I mean Highclere Castle today for the Easter egg hunt and Bonnet competition (they didn't win so it was a stitch up job! 😊). There was very little about - Chiff Chaff singing, a few bees, a Treecreeper and a beautifully marked spider.



As we left a raptor circled over head, the typical forked tail and finger-tips silhouette making this my second Red Kite of the day (the first almost got ran over by a mini van in front of me 😱)



Rain pretty much all week so I'll have to take what I can get in amongst the showers. Typical you're stuck in work when the weather is great and then when you're on holiday it's so pants it's a massive pair of brown and cream Y-fronts!(cheers Gibster for reminding me how useful the phrase "pants" is! 😊)

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 09-Apr-12 09:07 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Rain pretty much all week so I'll have to take what I can get in amongst the showers.

Normally I'd be equally frustrated but to be honest, we badly need a wet week (so long as April doesn't turn into a washout).

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 09-Apr-12 06:58 PM GMT

It's not the rain really it's the timing 😊 We definitely need it but why does it have to come when I'm holiday? 😞 That is the Law of Sod 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by NickMorgan, 09-Apr-12 07:53 PM GMT

I don't think we can complain. We had a lovely summer in March!

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 09-Apr-12 08:09 PM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

I don't think we can complain. We had a lovely summer in March!

Don't joke about these things, Nick. Look what happened last year. 😞

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-Apr-12 05:34 AM GMT

I think Nick's onto something here...last year we had an early spring with great warm weather, then what felt like a dampish summer followed by a

glorious autumn. So really we had 2 years worth of weather in one year. Here's looking forward to summer number two!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 11-Apr-12 06:51 AM GMT

As I was busy with errands and family duties pretty much all day I didn't manage to get out and make the most of the warm and sunny morning checking local sites like Martin Down for Grizzlies, which is what I wanted to be doing 😞. Still I did manage half an hour at lunchtime up the top of the garden and teh bees were quite active. I finally managed to get better shots of carder bee, *Bombus pascuorum*.



Then I was visited by a male Orange-tip which settled on a Bluebell after a few passes up and down the garden.

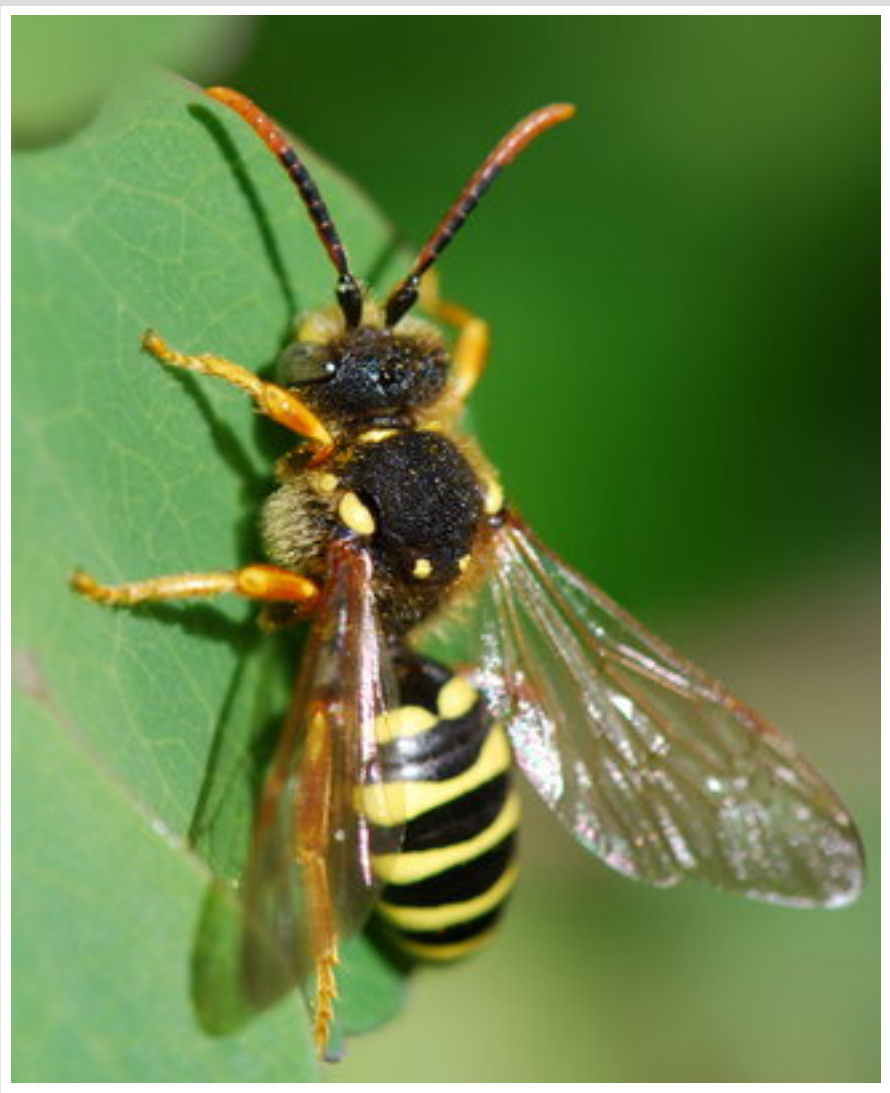


I thought at first that it might be a different male from the other day, but once he briefly opened his wings I realised it was the aberrant again. Still he was the only butterfly I've seen for the last couple of days and therefore I'm enjoying his company. After the initial photos he made another 3 stops in roughly the same area, so I'd stop looking at whatever I was looking at and enjoy the colours and the spectacle.



Having seen Ashy and Tawny Mining bees throughout the 30 minutes I was not so surprised when the little chappy below turned up. From the colouration and markings (greenish eyes, yellow spots, black at the base of the antennae and black to red to yellow on the legs) I believe it to be a male *Nomada goodeniana*, I like the "gooden" bit of the name in particular 😊





It's a true bee and is a cleptoparasite of mining bees, nipping in when the female is out collecting pollen to store in the burrow of her offspring. It then lays an egg and eventually the larvae will "dispose" of the mining bee larva. Apparently the females sniff at the entrance of a burrow to see if it's occupied or not!

Hopefully tomorrow I can wangle some time out – I think that the girls might need to have a walk at Martin Down or Garston 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 11-Apr-12 07:29 PM GMT

What great pictures of the bees and orange tip... 😊

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 11-Apr-12 09:57 PM GMT

Yes. Educational stuff. Thanks, Wurzel.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 12-Apr-12 05:06 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Cracking photos and interesting info about the bee.

In my ignorance I would have taken that as a wasp of some sort, just goes to show 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 12-Apr-12 07:17 AM GMT

Cheers for your comments DMS, Dave and Neil! 😊 I'm just trying to make the most of my holiday and my garden seems to have taken on the character of a safari park with all kinds of beasties that I never knew about turning up. 😊 Today was no exception...

As my older daughter had a friend round on a play date and so was occupied all morning I managed to pop up to the top of the garden for a little bit. What initially caught my eye was three whites having a bit of a set too. One came from over the back hedge, one from the left and one from the right and they just sort of met in a three-way spiral/crash under the boughs of the apple tree. By the time I'd grabbed the camera and made it up there only one was left but he was very chilled. This seems to be the way at the moment– after the initial skittish–ness they settle and I find I can get really close and spend some time getting to know them.



I thought that would be it for the garden, but then as I was heading in I looked back and a Peacock landed on the path to bask. I only managed a very rushed shot as the heavens opened at this point and the hail stung my face!



Later I very graciously offered to take the girls out for the afternoon so that my wife could have a break 😊 As I was packing the girls into the car a Speckled Wood landed on the stones and looked almost pristine, the underwings looked fantastic.



It was all going so well on the drive there with the shining and beautiful blue skies...unfortunately as we arrived at Martin Down the sun disappeared, the wind picked up and it was pretty cold. My hopes of Green Hairstreak or Grizzled Skipper were dashed, and although it did warm up once the cloud had passed after about 10 minutes we saw only one butterfly (a male Orange-tip) for the rest of the visit. Perhaps the Grizzlies emerge later at Martin Down, and looking around apart from Dandelions there doesn't seem much else for them to nectar on. Still I'll keep coming back and today Kitty was amazed by the fact that we were walking on Chalk and Lottie loved collecting snail shells and hated rabbit poo. Ahhh that's the stuff of special memories!

Once home I did my usual walk around the garden and there among the bluebells was a roosting Orange-tip. As I got closer I realised that this was a female, and the slightest flash of the open wings showed the black tip and confirmed it.



I left her to sleep in peace (if they do "sleep") but I'll head up there tomorrow morning and try to catch her stretching her wings. Bit of a strange one – four species in the garden and not really tried for, and when I visit a reserve only one sighting all afternoon? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 12-Apr-12 07:25 AM GMT

Hard to believe that three of those four butterflies are merely hours old, yet one is perhaps nine months or more... That Peacock seems hardly worn at all.

The Speckled Wood underside is splendid – I'm still to see one round here, so I'm envious!

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 12-Apr-12 05:47 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I like that Peacock photo, really shows how they can stand out from their surroundings. I agree with Dave, hard to believe it has overwintered and still looks like that .

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 12-Apr-12 07:35 PM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

hard to believe it has overwintered and still looks like that

I suppose that lying still, in a sheltered place, does not cause the damage that flying around amongst twigs, etc. does.

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Apr-12 07:08 AM GMT

Cheers for your comments guys! 😊 Lying around in a sheltered place is what I like to do during the winter too Mike 😊

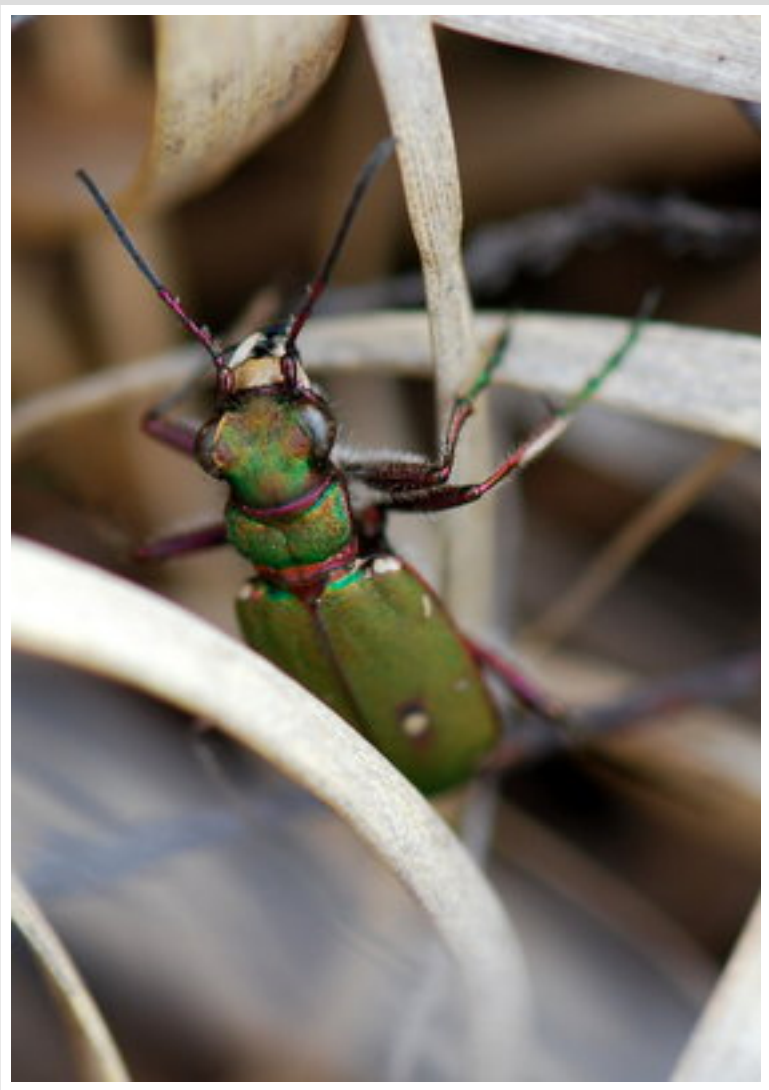
Today the girls were on a play date down near Christchurch and after my sterling work yesterday looking after the girls, today it was my turn for a break. So I dropped them off and headed over to Sopley Common for a bit of a reccie. The site guide on this website suggested Sliver Studded Blue and Grayling frequent the area and if the girls have another playdate at the right time in the future then I should be able to come back.



Once I'd arrived it was still feeling a bit cold and had yet to warm up, but I headed up onto the heathland anyway. At the top of the hill there were plenty of "gyp, gyp" calls and I found a party of 5 Crossbills and so tried to get a few shots. It was dangerous work as they would discard the pine cone once they'd finished with a flick of their bills and if I wasn't careful it would land on me bonce! 😲 I did put the camera down and pulled out my bins to watch them tweezering the pine cones apart with their mishapen beaks and then using their tongue to get at the seeds.



Once the Crossbills headed on their way they were replaced by a pair of Coal Tits and then a Stonechat singing from the top of the pine tree. On the other side of the side of hill a scratchy churring sound alerted me to a Dartford Warbler – looking stunning in it's summer wear. While on this hill a small dark butterfly flitted by (Green Hairstreak?) but I couldn't relocate it, consoling myself instead with a Sand Lizard and then (possibly) two new species of bees and a Green Tiger Beetle, with it's monstrous jaws 🤪



It was soon time to leave and back to collect the girls and as I left the heathland and entered the wood near the entrance I finally came across some more amenable butterflies – a Brimstone and a Peacock. The Brimstone didn't pose, but followed me all the way back to my car.



Once we got home I had to supervise the girls playing outside, shame 😊 So in amongst the showers I mooched around and had a look to see what I could see. I was visited by my first Large White of the year, a male, but he stayed up high or didn't stop at all.

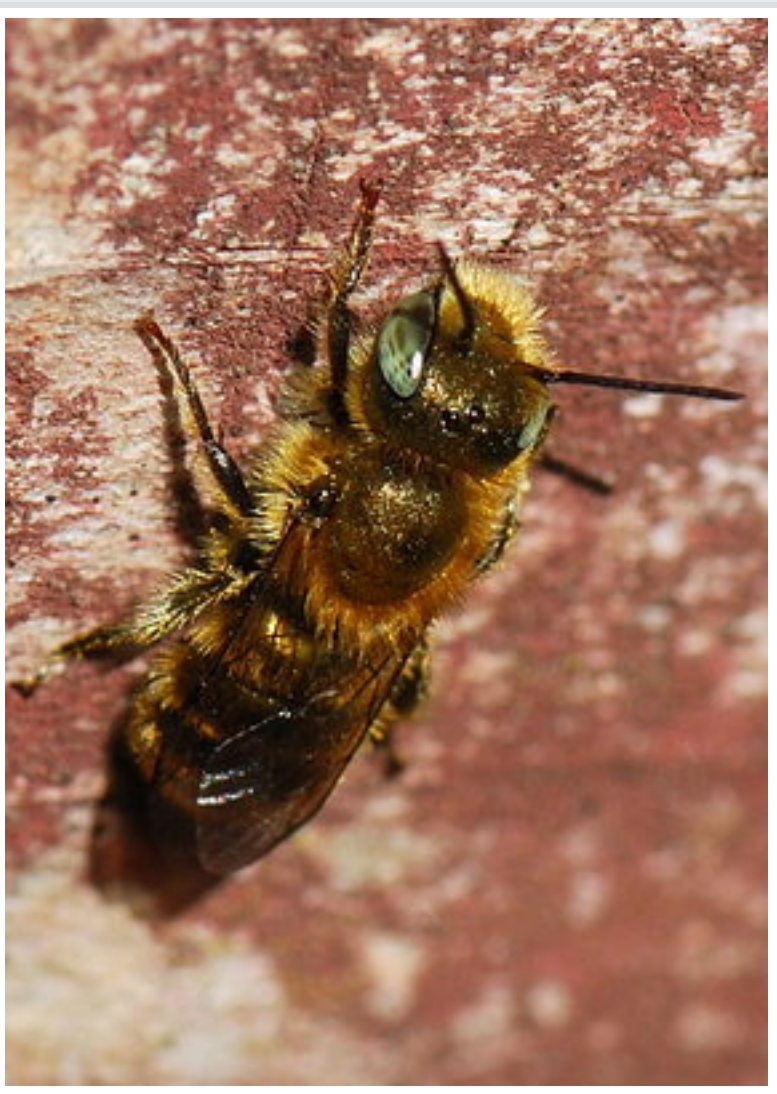


There was a Speckled Wood that bombed down the garden, a Brimstone that bombed up the garden and a Small White that literally dropped over the fence, and then gradually gained sufficient height to get over the fence on the other side of the garden. As everything was so flighty I settled down and mentally "zoomed in" to look for some bees. I managed to find the usual species of small bee and added *Osmia rufa* and *Andrena nitida* to the garden list.



Andrena nitida – fresh female

And then I found a tiny golden beauty of a bee – what I think is *Osmia caerulea* because of the green metallic eyes. It was only about 5mm long and keeping an eye on it was next to impossible so I'd slowly walk along the fence, turn and then walk back until I spotted one against the red panels.



Then finally just as I was heading in a male Orange-tip flew up the garden. I followed it and it settled a couple of times meaning that I could see that it was "normal" and so not my mate from a few days ago.



Finally the rain started, then the thunder, so I had to head in and call it a day. But what a day! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 13-Apr-12 07:21 AM GMT

You're certainly making great use of your macro lens, Wurzel. I notice you even used it for the Crossbill shots. I assume they are cropped but still look very sharp!

The second Bee pic intrigues me. At first glance it looks to be in flight but the wings are closed. Perhaps you super-glued it to a piece of glass? 😊

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Apr-12 07:26 AM GMT

Cheers Mike, I can assure you that no creatures were harmed in the production of that image! 😄 I just got in close so close at a funny angle that the depth of field is very narrow. It also helps that it was balancing right on the edge of the Ling 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 14-Apr-12 07:12 AM GMT

After the very busy last few days things in the Wurzel household slowed down a bit today – perhaps it's burn out or perhaps it's because the holiday is almost over, even the play machine that is my younger daughter only managed a paltry 2 hours of "shops" 😬 So to finally get some work done, and so I didn't have to keep doing the 15m sprint, I set up in the garden 😊 While I was out there a male and female Brimstone did a circuit, a male Small White and Large White also dropped in but didn't settle for long enough and after each lesson planned a brief 5 minute "break" yielded a few new bees. Two very small ones I have yet to identify, one I think is Girdled Bee and the other was *Andrena clarkella* – with its red back, bum and leggings.



I also couldn't resist finding *Osmia caerulescens* as it just looks so fake – like it's been sprayed gold...



Also just when I thought the day was over for butterflies a male Orange-tip did a couple of passes to keep me on my toes and when he settled he looked different from the last two males I've seen.



Back to work next week – and so finding things to photograph will take a back seat for a while 😞 , still it was fantastic while it lasted...and there is the long weekend ("Frit weekend")...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 15-Apr-12 07:03 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Back to work for me too on Monday 😞

That little gold bee is a cracker, I have never seen one around here, something else for me to look out for 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 16-Apr-12 07:17 AM GMT

Cheers Neil, I think it's now my favourite bee!

The last two days have been a bit mix and match. Yesterday was relativley warm but wet and then cloudy, and today was really cold but with lots of sunshine – put properly together and we could have had one pants day and one brill day! But as it was I still took the girls up to Garston Wood for a family walk with their grandparents. It was to cold for butterflies but you never know?

There were some great birds around; Treecreeper, Marsh Tits, Blackcap singing away and also Nuthatches a plenty.



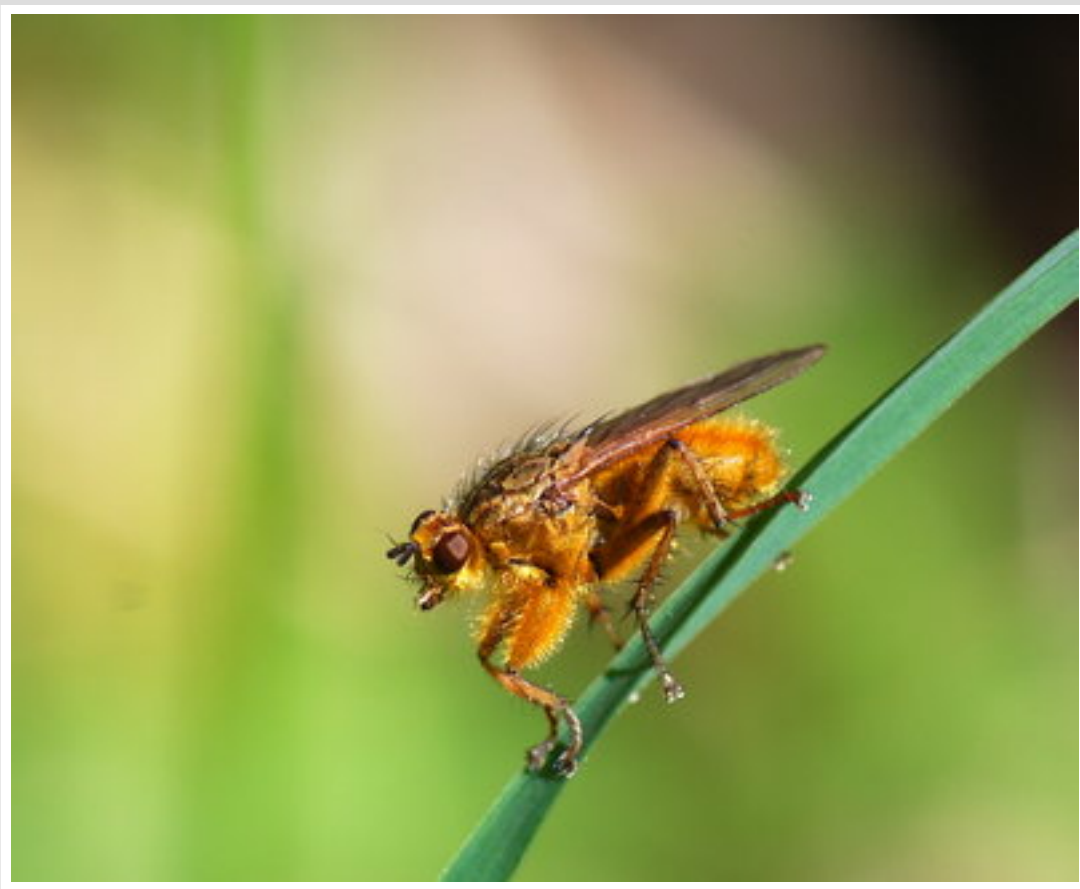
The girls would run ahead looking for fairy doors, or hang off the arms of their Dad Dad and try and pilfer his walking stick 😜 but they both went really quiet as the local deer slid through the shadows. Eventually I manged to stalk them close enough to get a photo and although the "white" played hard to get she is visible.



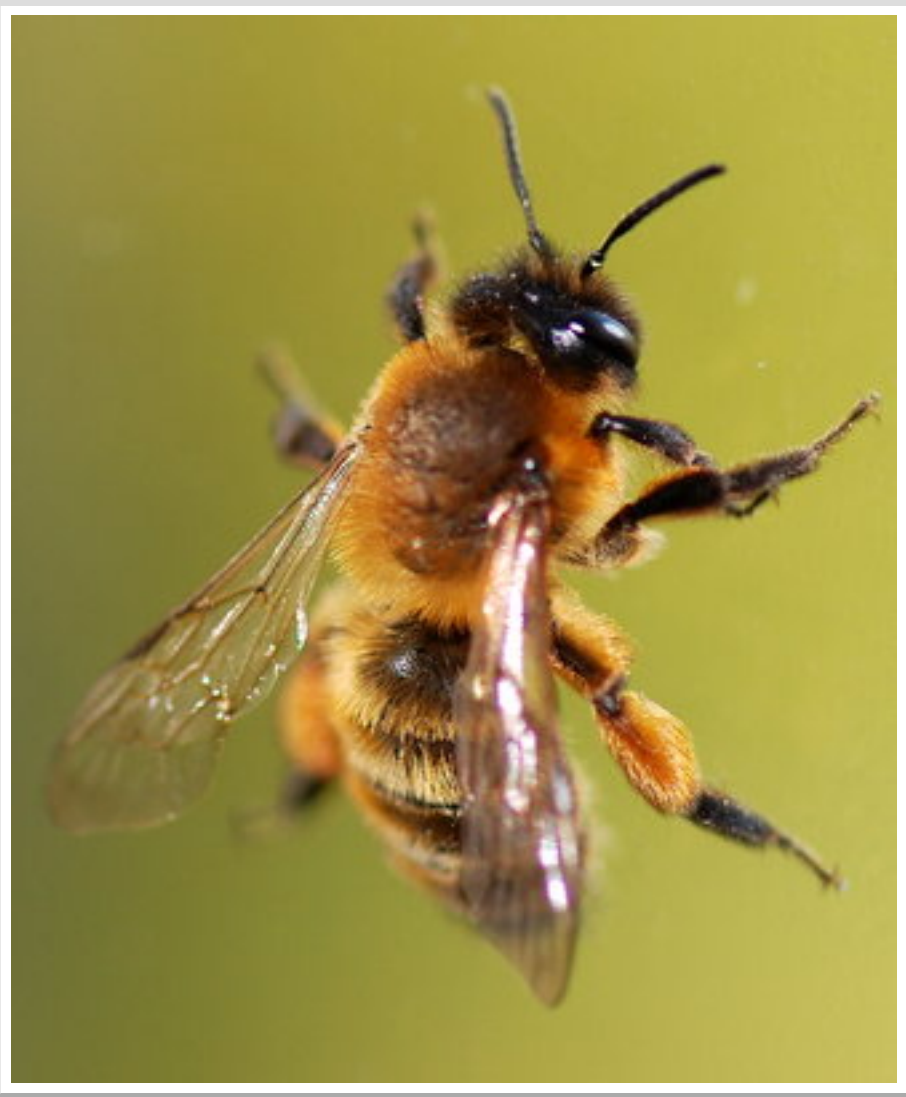
As we walked through the woods the Bluebells looked good but not as thick as last year, could the cold snap have knocked them back?



There were a few bees around, Buff Tailed Bumble Bee, Ashy Mining Bee and N. Goodenena but what really caught my eye was a golden fly (dung fly) that I seem to recall covering fresh cow pats?



Finally when we got back from the walk and the subsequent visit to the swings this little chappy was waiting for us in the porch. Not sure what species it is so I'll have to have a look on BEWARS, although it does seem familiar.



And so ended the weekend, and with it my holiday 😞 Still no Grizzlies or Greenstreaks 😞 But I guess that means I've still got them to look forward to 😊 and it was nice to visit Garston – perhaps next time it will a bit more busy butterfly wise 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 16-Apr-12 05:49 PM GMT

How wonderful to see your pictures 😊 when this weekend hubby & me could not find a single butterfly anywhere 😞 and we tried both sides of the county. Our bluebells are not out yet either 😞

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Apr-12 07:03 AM GMT

Cheers for your comments DMS! 😊

I managed to break the weekend duck today while at work. I was in a meeting with the Head, it was drawing to a close and I had a view across the quad when a white butterfly flitted along the hedge. It was then that I realised that I'd love to have eyes that could focus independently 😊 Luckily the bell went, so I loaded my 3 hours worth of work for tonight into the car and then grabbed the camera and headed back to the quad. I managed to relocate the butterfly and it wasn't just a white but a female Orange-tip. The sun went in initially so it shut up shop for a while.



But then when the sun came back out it opened it's wings for me. This was my first fully open wing shot and I've been trying to get this since I started butterfly photography 2 odd years ago. Looks like good things do come to those who wait.



Other people may be working their way through the species list (not that I'm envious of course 😊😄) but I'm still loving the Orange-tips!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 17-Apr-12 07:09 AM GMT

Nice work, Wurzel. Always good when you get to conquer a nemesis.

Female Orange Tips happy to pose open-winged are almost as elusive as Holly Blue females doing likewise.

Another one you can consign to the 'history' bin!

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 17-Apr-12 08:37 AM GMT

Lovely. It's the only time you ever really see that yellow blush on the hindwings.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Lee Hurrell, 17-Apr-12 09:15 PM GMT

Is it me, or is that *another* ab? I've never seen white streaks in the black wing tips like that before 🤔

Lee

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-Apr-12 06:27 AM GMT

Cheers for the kind comments guys 😊 In terms of the History bin I'm now looking for Duke closed wing shots and Wood White this year 😊 I know what you mean about the wing tips Lee, I had a look on Cockayne and thought that lineata looked possible, but it's more likely that it fits into the normal

range of variation. I don't think I'd be that lucky to get two abs in a row 🤔😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 20-Apr-12 07:27 AM GMT

Over the last few days the rain and cold temperatures have meant no butterflies. Plus I've been at work so today when I finally saw the clouds break and the sun come out I thanked the timetabler for giving me a free period! 😊 Marking pushed to one side (I'll finish that later tonight) I headed out to the wildlife area. There were a few bees about; Buff Tailed Bumble Bees, an Ashy Mining Bee and also a male *B.lapidarius*. But no butterflies 😊 I was briefly joined by a Song Thrush who seemed to stare quizzically at me for a while before deciding that I obviously wasn't a threat and so it went back to it's business.



Later at the end of the day we experienced another break in the clouds and this time there was a butterfly – a single female Orange-tip, from the looks of the wing tips the same individual from Monday. She posed again here and there before finally completing a goodbye circuit and heading up and over the building. Unfortunately blades of grass kept getting in the way of my shots (something I'll have to get used to in the summer) but I'd rather that than no butterflies.



Also around was a caterpillar which seemed to be stitching itself up in a leaf – not sure what species it is But it looks similar to Nick's (Hideandseek)?



And there was also a Bee – possibly a Colletes?



The forecast is for more of the same but hopefully I can find a break in the clouds and might get to Bentley Wood for an early reccie. Then they're predicting snow and the coldest May in 100 years 🤪 . Lets just hope they get it wrong, although I've noticed that when it comes to nice weather (barbeque summers etc) they often are inaccurate but the bad weather they're bang on with! (I'm sure I've said that before 😏) 😞 Still here's hoping...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-Apr-12 07:26 AM GMT

Having felt trapped almost at work all week I was itching for the chance to get out over the weekend and so jobs over and shopping done I headed over to Bentley Wood. I was thinking that there might be an early Pearl Bordered Fritillary but as I pulled up in the car park the sun disappeared from view, so not looking good. It didn't get any better when I checked the sightings book as it made pretty grim reading! Still I pressed on and spent some time walking around the eastern clearing just seeing waht I could find. There were plenty of Willow Warbler and Chiff Chaff calling and amongst them all I heard my first Tree Pipit of the year. Then I located it at the top of a large Silver Birch and it did it's parachuting song flight to another tree top. As it flew I noticed the leading white tail feathers that I hadn't really paid attention to before which reminded me that there is always something new to observe.



I then zoomed in to the smaller scale and there were one or two bees around as well as a few beetles...



Tiger Beetle



?

...But no butterflies, until in the only break in the clouds, when a Speckled Wood landed very briefly a couple of times. It was very difficult to approach and so I only managed to get a few distant shots 😞 but on days like this I'll take what I can get!



On the way home the clouds lifted, the temperature rose and the wind dropped – typical!
My garden yielded the usual bees but I also found a very small bee which appears sort of greeny metallic on the thorax? Better get onto BEWARS!



usual...



new...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 23-Apr-12 05:56 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Your larva looks just like mine, and if it is only about 10–12mm in length, [the one i found did `nt get any bigger]and that is a Nettle leaf, [all the ones i have found have been on Nettle] then like mine it will pupate, and attach itself to the leaf within the tent it is constructing. The pupa is only 7–8mm in length. Now i am just waiting for my one to emerge.[could be waiting a long time, but i hope not] 😊

By the way, that blue Beetle is lovely, i hope you get an id for it.

All the best,

Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 23-Apr-12 06:15 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Your mystery beetle appears to be the Oil Beetle, *Meloe proscarabaeus*.

A nice find.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-Apr-12 05:42 AM GMT

Cheers for the I'd Mark it was easy to spot being bright blue and huge 😲

I'll keep my eye on the "tent" Nick 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 26-Apr-12 06:41 AM GMT

Over the last couple of days the weather has been more like November than April, I've heard about little April showers but at the moment we're experiencing April Downpours! 😲

Yesterday I actually saw a butterfly...yep I almost couldn't beleive it myself. It was a white, which was the best i could do as it was on a traffic island on the A360 on my journey home. However there have been one or two bees around at work and in the garden including a couple of new ones.



The Carder Bee I've seen before but it's generally the first one to appear after a shower, almost an indicator species showing that it's warming up a little and hanging around and seeing what might turn up would be a good idea...

In the garden it meant finding a possible *Bombus rupestris*...much, much smaller than the huge *lapidarius*, with a lighter red bum.



At work it got me onto a very small bumble bee (smaller than the hairy footed ones in my garden, "*plumipes*") with a red bum and yellow thorax stripe. I thought it might be a male *lapidarius* at first but it seemed really small and the yellow from the "neck" should have continued over the top of the head and down the face. I did read on one website that despite a lot of images of *pratorum* having an additional yellow abdominal stripe some lack this, and so this is the identification I went for. The area where the abdominal stripe would be does appear worn.



Hopefully there may be some respite from the terrible weaather at the weekend and I can post some butterfly pics again...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-Apr-12 06:39 AM GMT

What with the weather still only mildly getting better and the fact that I haven't photographed a butterfly in 5 or 6 days now, I revisited some photos that I took of the Butterfly collection from work. It's taken a lot of trawling through the internet (the Flickr site "African Butterflies" was the most useful) but I think I've managed to identify a few more species. Again they are only tentative identifications so if something is wrong then please let me know...



Amuris albimaculata



Charaxes varanes



Colotis regina



Small Orange Tip?



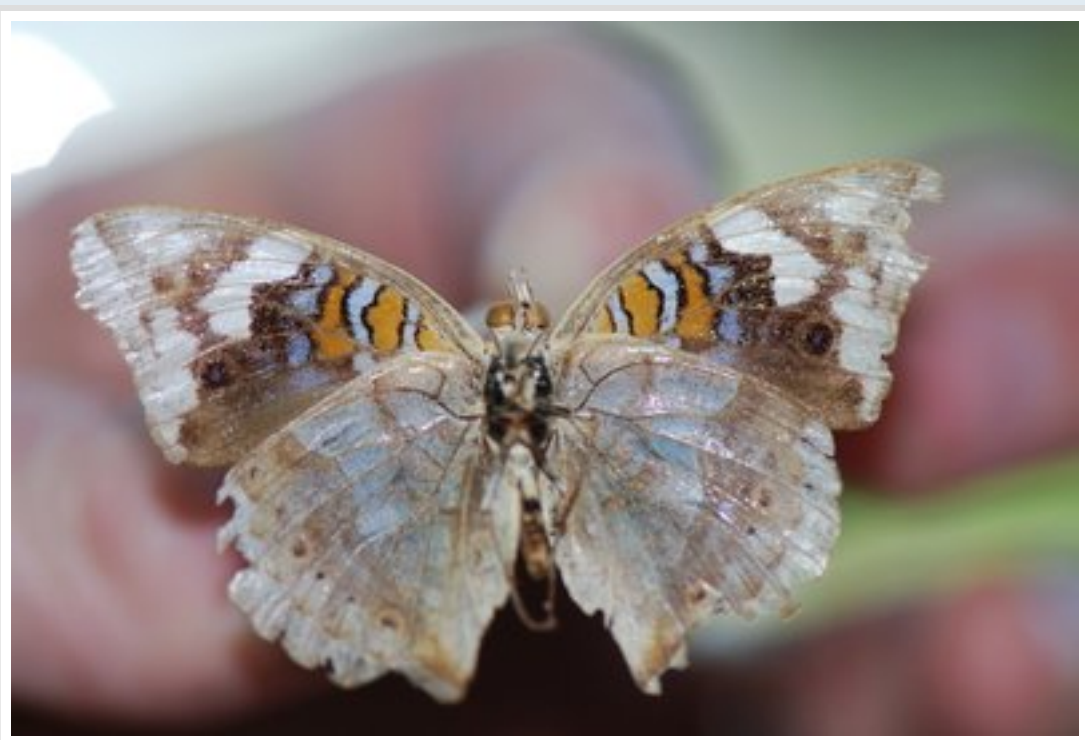
Mylothris sp. (could be *agathina*)



and the underside...



Junonia oene



underwing



Dark Blue Pansy

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 29-Apr-12 06:17 AM GMT

Over the last couple of days rain has stopped play for me. When it's been fine I've been working, and when I can get out and about it's been raining, drizzly and cold or blustery showers! All of which means that I haven't photographed a butterfly in almost a week now 🤔. I was hoping to get out today at some point and the previous couple of evenings were spent checking all the weather apps on my phone. Three of the four showed it being cloudy but with no rain up until 4pm and with temperatures no lower than 12 degrees, the least accurate was showing rain. So hopefully I lay my weary head on the pillow and dream planned the outing to Bentley Wood with my younger daughter...

This morning I awoke to the plinking of rain on the porch roof and all of the weather apps had changed. Now the 3 of the four showed light rain to heavy rain all day with temperatures no higher than 11degrees and the one which had previously got it correct showed sunny showers 😊. In the end I gave up even considering a trip out and so have pinned my hopes on next weekend.

While out doing an errand in the rain the drumming on my hood lulled me into contemplation...Recently I have been feeling very envious of other members of the forum who seem to be able to make the most of the sunny/dry periods, or those who have been enjoying more favourable weather whilst I seem to be trapped in by the weather or work...and then I realised that I need not worry. Eventually the sun will shine over a weekend and then there will be butterflies and I may be able to see them. On top of that so long as I can stay clear of accidents and ill health I reckon I've still got at least another 37 more springs in which to find and see butterflies...so long as this wash out doesn't put the populations into free fall. And so I spent the day catching up on work - so that when things do align I can get out with a clear conscience and spend even more time out in the field .

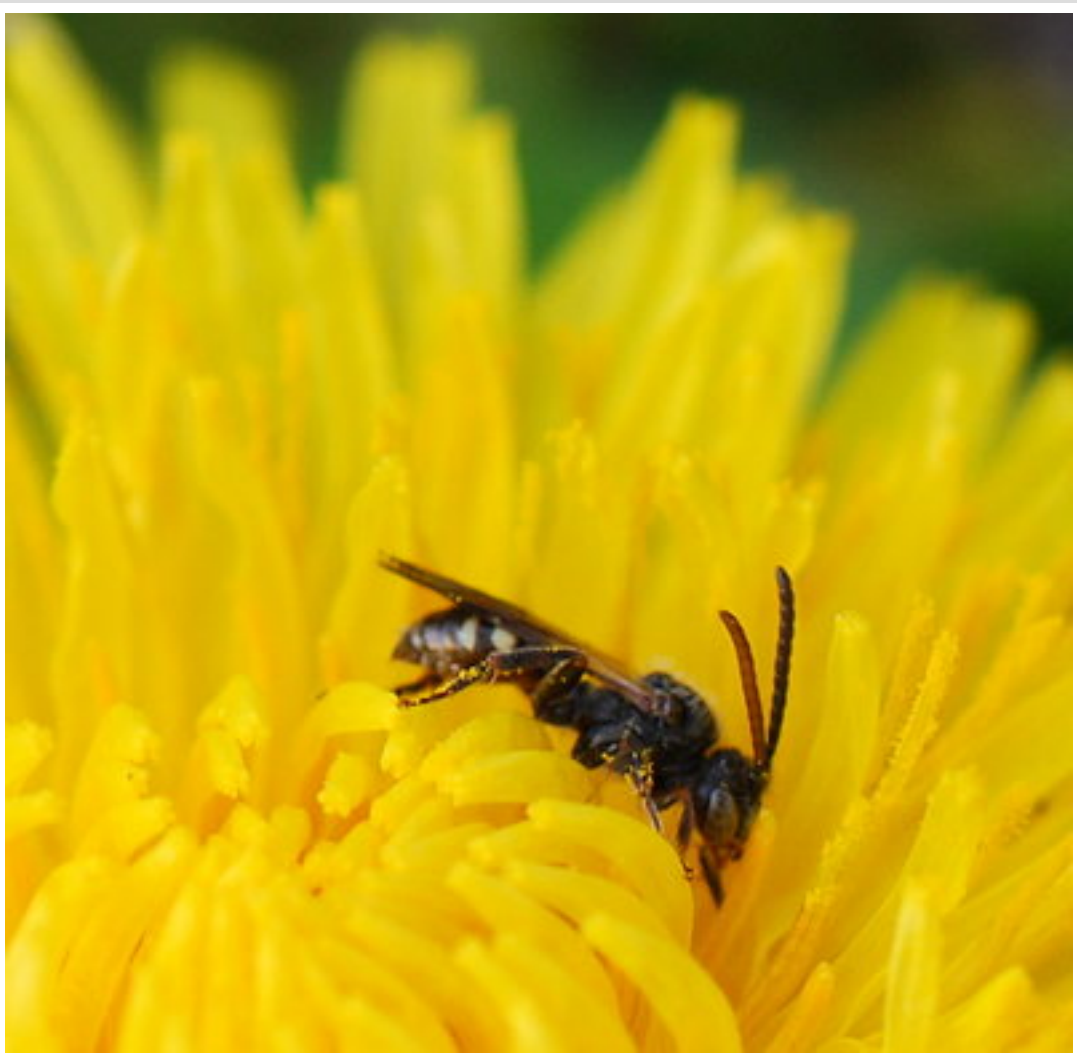
In the mean time here are some shots of things that I have been finding during my very limited free time which coincides with it not pissing it down!! 😡
Enjoy, and here's to a sunny weekend next week...

From work...





Nomada sp



Nomada sp. again

At home...



Mesembrina meridiana



Nom nom!

Actually the fly would have been a new species for me, so I moved in to get a shot but was even more chuffed when the Crab spider presented itself 😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 29-Apr-12 06:43 AM GMT

The camouflage on that spider is quite sublime. Excellent stuff. Thanks for sharing.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Apr-12 06:01 AM GMT

Cheers David 😊 I've been stuck in and working hard all weekend so imagine my annoyance when watching the weather on Countryfile and seeing a huge blue splurge settled just over Salisbury tomorrow which for pretty much everyone else is going to be the best day of the week 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 30-Apr-12 07:31 PM GMT

how nice to see everybodys photo's 😊 Great photos 😊 When hubby and I went out Saturday it was 6 degrees wet and windy and not even a wood ant could be found 😞

I hope that you do not mind me asking but as you also photograph lots of bees, bugs and things, do you use the www to id them or books (I am currently looking for a good book for identifying them)

Kind Regards,
DMS (Debbie)

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 01-May-12 03:48 AM GMT

Cheers Debbie 😊 I generally use a website called BWARS for the bees as it difficult to find a single book which covers as many species as the website. I also have the Readers Digest Field Guide to Butterflies & Other Insects of Britain and The Natural History of Britain and Northern Europe series in terms of books but they don't have much detail so they're just the starting point. I hope this helps!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

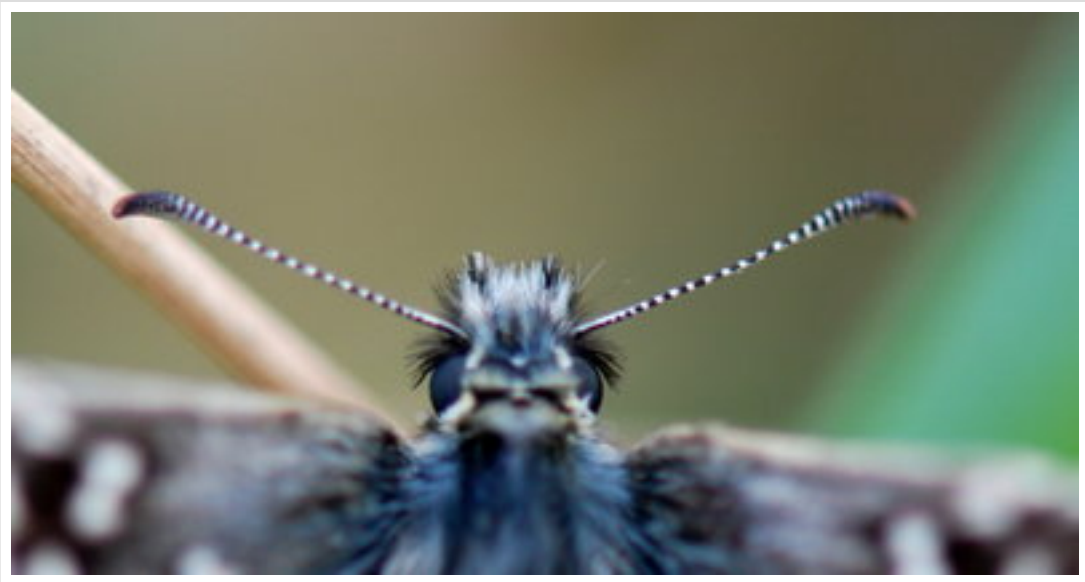
by Wurzel, 01-May-12 07:24 AM GMT

I made the mistake yesterday of watching Countryfile and caught the "5 day forecast" which suggested that today was going to be the best of the week.

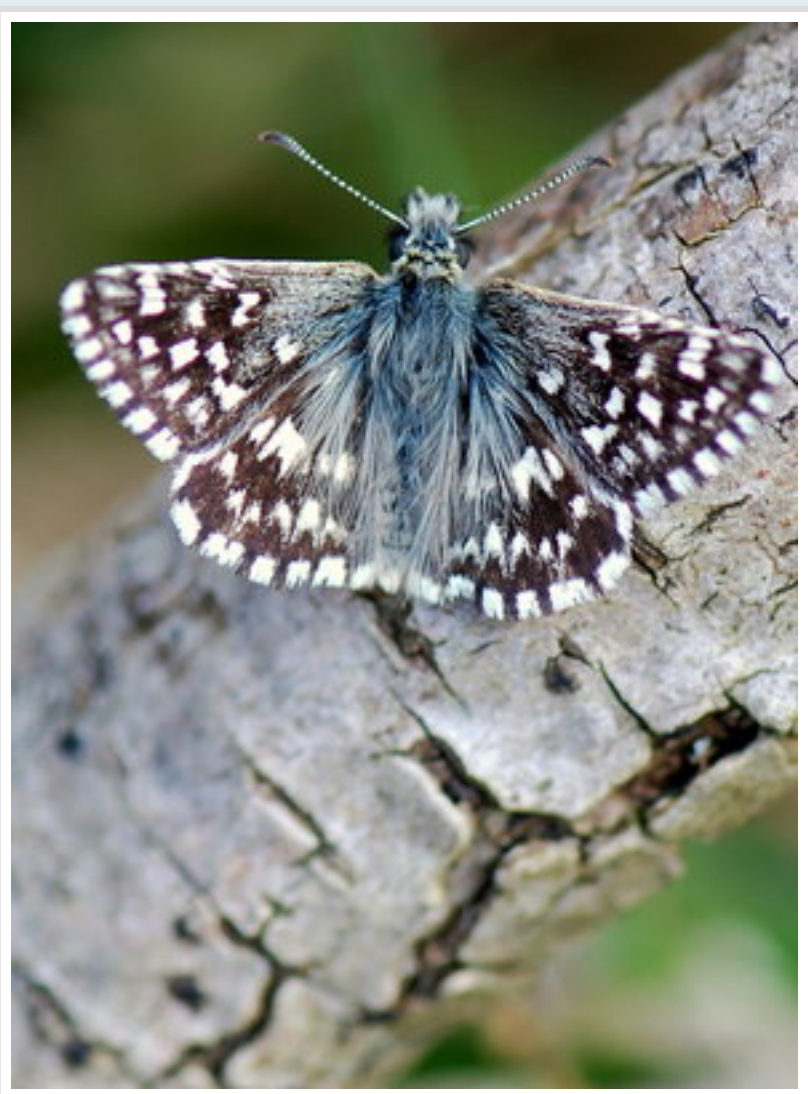
As I drove to work this morning through yet more rain I was convinced that they'd got it wrong again. But the day brightened, and then the sun came out and with it the butterflies. I was anxiously watching the clock all day, waiting for the bell to go and once it did I was off!

The journey from Pewsey to Martin Down produced 4 male Orange-tip, Large White and Red Admiral which cheered me no end 😊 . I hadn't seen Orange-tip so close to work this year and they must have been laying in wait for the sun or temperatures to rise as they all seemed very bright and fresh. Lets hope that they can last through the next bad spell...

Almost as soon as I pulled into the car park at Martin Down the sun dove behind the clouds – they say that the sun shines on the righteous – well I must be one evil b***ard then! 😡😏 Luckily it soon popped out again and by that time I'd found my first Grizzlie of the year – at last! I settled down to enjoy and get to know this cracking little butterfly better. It behaved impeccably well, opening it's wings to bask, walking up grass stems and closing it's wings so I could get the full complement of shots. There was one problem and that was the breeze that kept catching it's wings and so making photography difficult, but you can't have everything can you?



Lovely eyelashes!



I left the little fella and headed to round to see what else was about and the next butterflies were a pair of Peacock – one looking pretty battered. They both settled long enough for a careful stalk so I could get a few shots.



Photos taken I then had a bit more of a wander, the sun and songs of the birds ruined somewhat by the drone of a Helicopter practicing who knows what over the reserve. The sun seemed to heed this and so disappeared behind the clouds and stayed there. I then strolled along Bokerley and managed to find a roosting Grizzlie followed by another one. I seems an odd behaviour to cling to grass stems etc as the breeze whips you forward and back, I would have thought that they would have hunkered down in the grass. One of the Grizzlies looked pretty worn and knackered no doubt from grimly clinging to it's roosting perch during the last however many weeks of the deluge we've experienced!



The final act of the evening was the dulcet tones of my first Cuckoo drifting across the road from Kitts Wood. Hopefully there will be many more sunny

days to come in May so i might be able to squeeze in another visit for Grizzlies and Dingy's.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 01-May-12 08:38 AM GMT

Hey Wurzel,

have a look at <http://johnwalters.co.uk/research/oil-beetle-identification.php> for your oil beetle problems! 😊

Cheers matey,

Seth.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-May-12 07:04 AM GMT

Cheers for the site info Gibster I've now brushed up on my Oil Beetles 😊

All the best for the weekend!

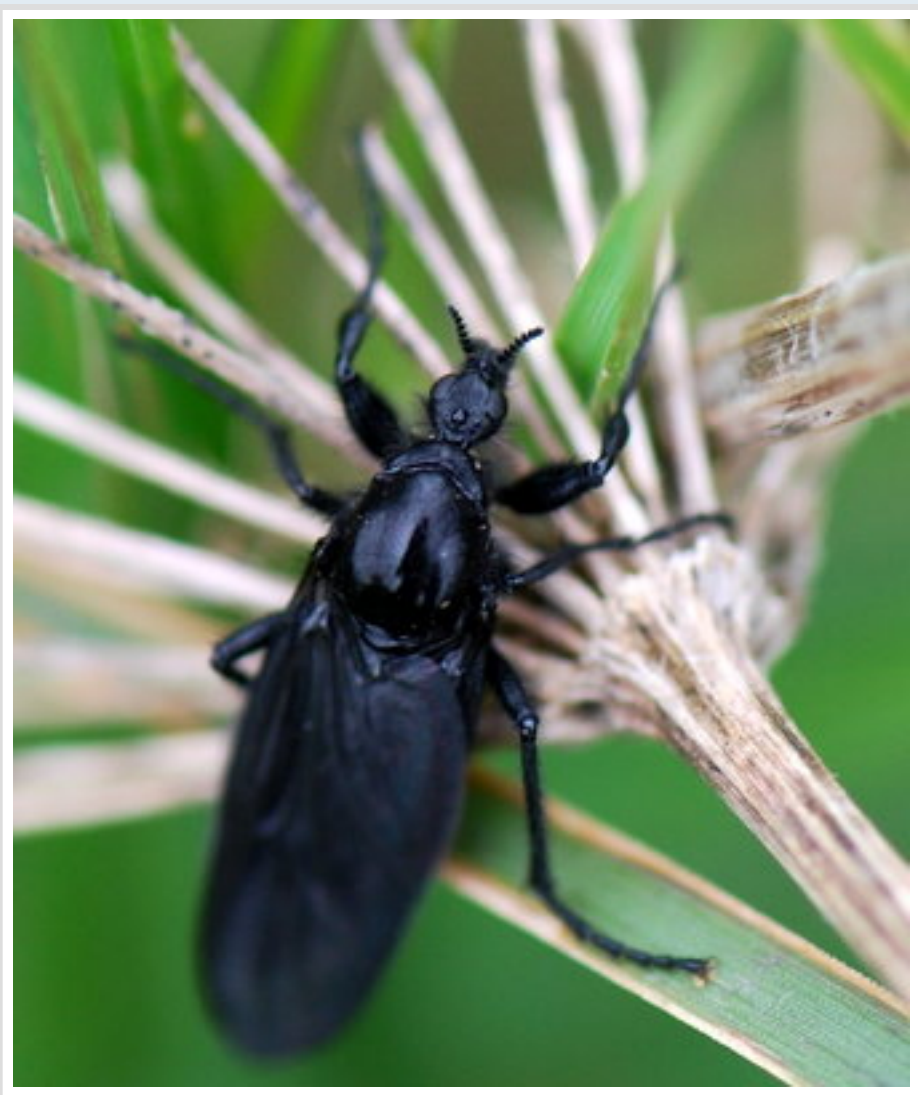
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 04-May-12 07:24 AM GMT

Just so I don't get beaten to the post by Mark... 😊



Female St Mark's fly – no head (as it doesn't have spy out a mate or rivals to fend off) and dark wings...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 04-May-12 07:35 AM GMT

Back to a proper post...

Two days ago (Tuesday) we experienced another sunny afternoon here in Salisbury so as soon as I got home and the kids were in bed I headed up the garden. No joy on the butterflies but it was just nice to mooch about, see what there was to see and enjoy the evening sun warming my back. If only we had a few more nights like that...

The first things I encountered were a pair of *Nomada goodeniana* and as I was watching them a crab spider appeared before me. Unlike the sublimely coloured yellow one that was hanging out on the Dandelions this one stood out like sore thumb, being all pink and on a white flower. As I watched it backed away over the edge of the flower and then lay in wait in the shade, clinging to the underside of the flower.



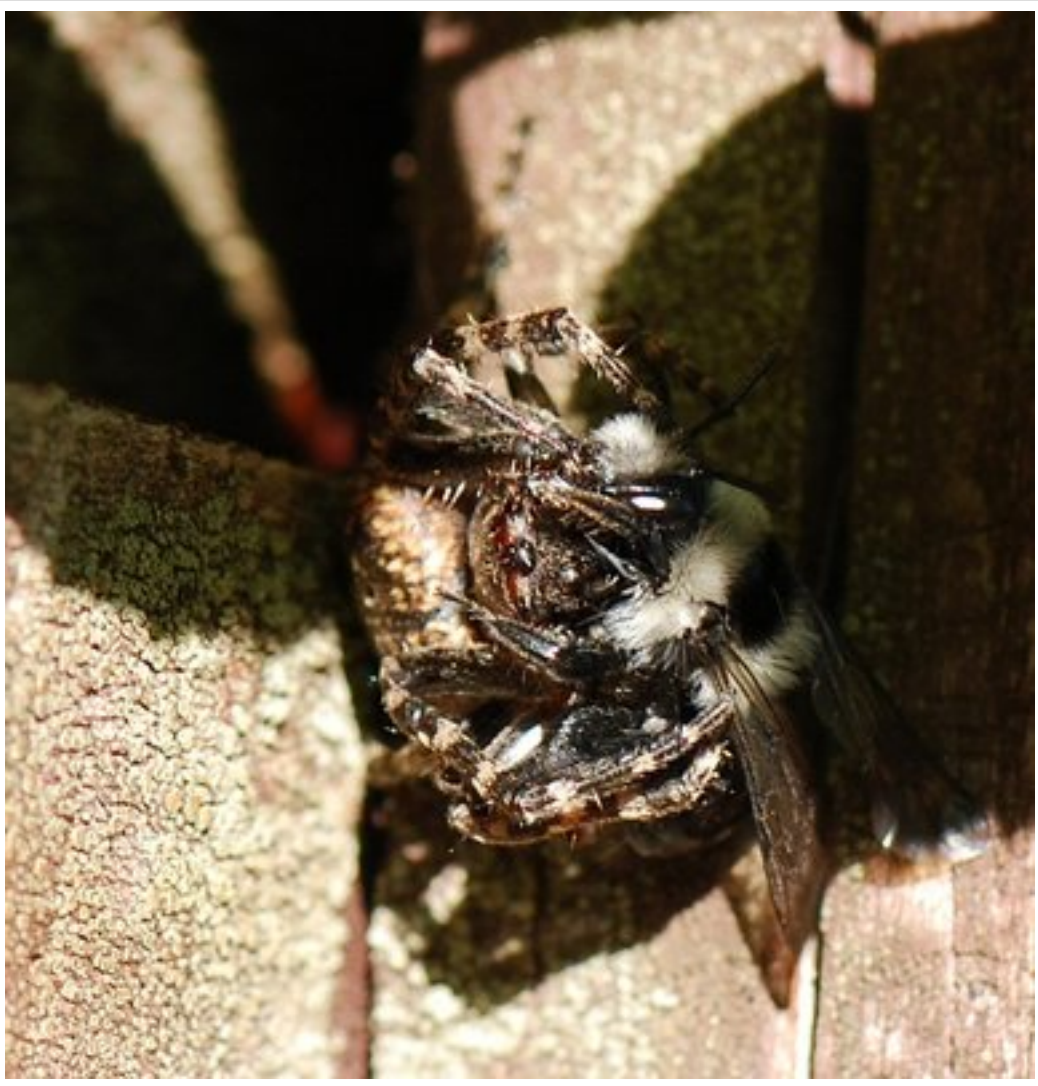
There were a few bees around including *Osmia rufa*. I think this individual is a male due to the much longer antennae.



There was also this fly around and about on the ivy.



Warmed by the final rays of the sun I headed back in but stopped half way down when there was a high pitched buzzing I checked the fence. A quick glance told me it was an Ashy Mining Bee but it didn't seem right, the posture was all wrong? When I looked closer it quickly became apparent why it looked wrong, as the legs of a garden spider curled slowly the black and white hairy body. It was one of those times when I felt bad about having to just impartially observe nature unfolding before me. But that is the way it has to be so I left the spider to it's meal and headed in doors to get mine.



Have a goodun

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 05-May-12 07:21 AM GMT

Two days ago (Wednesday) I stopped off on the way home to check out some parts of Salisbury Plain that I can easily access. Unfortunately while other areas were enjoying the sun we were “enjoying” much cooler temperatures and a thick covering off medium level cloud. Still you never know... So I set off walking across the grasslands and while there weren't any butterflies around there were huge numbers of St Mark's flies. Having managed to get up close to some I was staggered by how huge their eyes are, almost the whole head appears to be compound eyes! I later found what I initially thought was a different species of fly only later did I discover that this is actually the female. Not only are they slightly bigger and have smoky coloured wings they large the monstrous optics of the male. This sexual dimorphism it seems is caused due to their different approaches to sex. The male actively seeks out females to mate with and rival males to fight off hence the huge eyes to spot out targets for mating/fighting. Whereas the female is happy to wait for the attentions of males and so doesn't need such powerful vision.

*male**male**female (again)*

I then left the natural world behind and entered the domesticated world...Kids feed, bathed, stories read (they love “Where's my cow?” at the moment),

younger one tucked up and older one at Rainbows, I took a quick stroll around Five Rivers. It seemed strange to be walking around in the early evening, and even stranger to feel colder here in May than when I visited in March! Still it did feel warmer than it had been all day, and at 6:30pm the sun actually came out and there were, shock horror, blue skies!!! Unfortunately it was too little too late and I didn't see one butterfly. Still I made up for it by finding a bench overlooking the river and enjoying the sound-scape. It was one of those still evenings where sounds seemed to travel like smoke, drifting towards you. Amongst some chat and scuffling from the allotments, the odd dog bark and crunch of the joggers on gravel there were warblers aplenty. First up was the flutey tones of the Blackcap, then the more garbled Garden Warbler (I know it was because I managed a brief glance of this totally non-descript LBJ). There was an explosive "dink, dink-dink, dink-dink-dink-dink-dink-dinkkkkk" of a Cetti's Warbler along with churring and babbling from both Reed and Sedge Warbler. Despite straining my ears I couldn't find a Gropper instead settling for the scolding churrs of Whitethroats. One of which let me get almost within touching distance.



Blackcap



Whitethroat

So no butterflies but a well needed break...this popping in between Rainbows is something I'll have to do again when there might be some butterflies around...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 07-May-12 07:15 AM GMT

Today I took Kitty to Bentley Wood in desperation for Pearl Bordered Fritillary. We arrived just before lunch and it was not looking promising. For an hour we mooched around the Eastern Clearing but it was cold. Occasionally the sun would attempt to burn away the cloud and it would start to feel warmer, a few bees would come out, but then the sun would disappear and the wind would whip in to remind how cold it actually was. Despite several pairs of eyes, including those of Rob S and Jenks no Pearls were found...

As we ate lunch back in the car park the sun appeared again, there was some blue sky and we decided to give it another go...

Back at the clearing we suddenly found a lep, one of those long horn moths, then another an unknown moth



I'd just remarked that I actually cast a shadow and it seemed noticeably warmer when a cry of "WURZEL" rang out across the site. We hurried across the cleared area, sticking to the rabbit paths to avoid the boggy areas, to find Rob S staring at the ground and the little ginger jewel that we'd come to see. It looked very fresh, without a mark on it. 1-0 to Rob S.

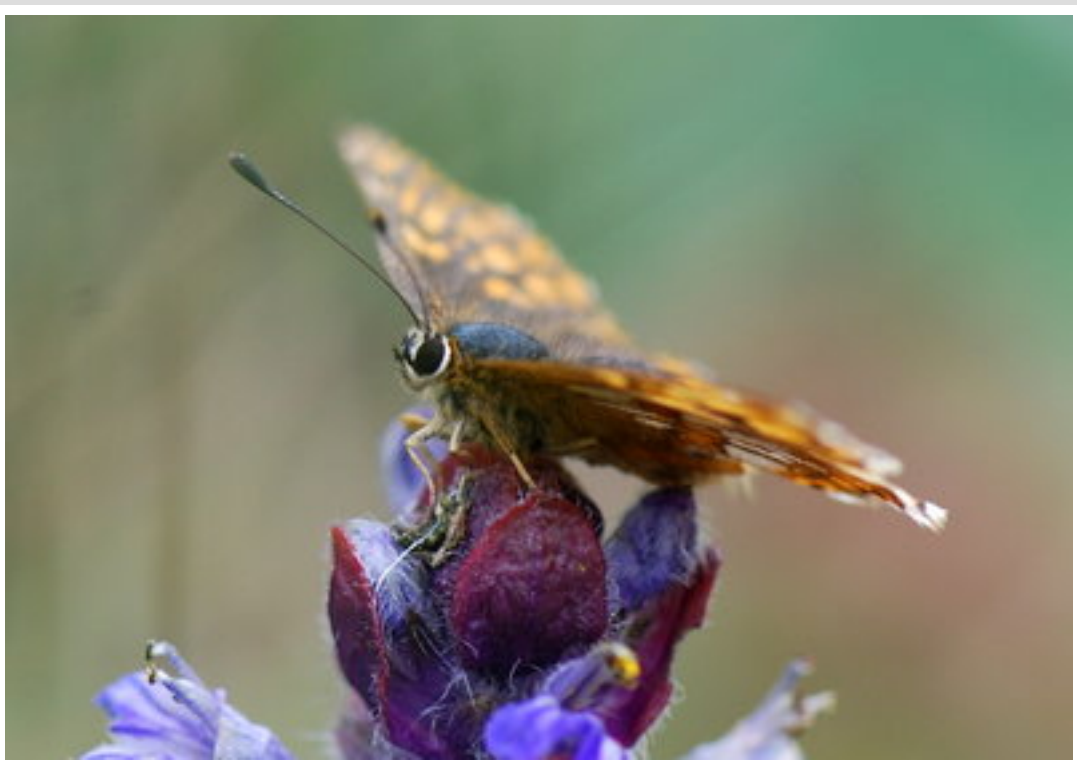


After getting a few shots it fluttered a short way before landing on a Bluebell. At first it was content to show us its' backside, then it's wings wide open before finally closing up shop so we could get that classic Pearl Bordered shot, pearls on display and the large single white "window".





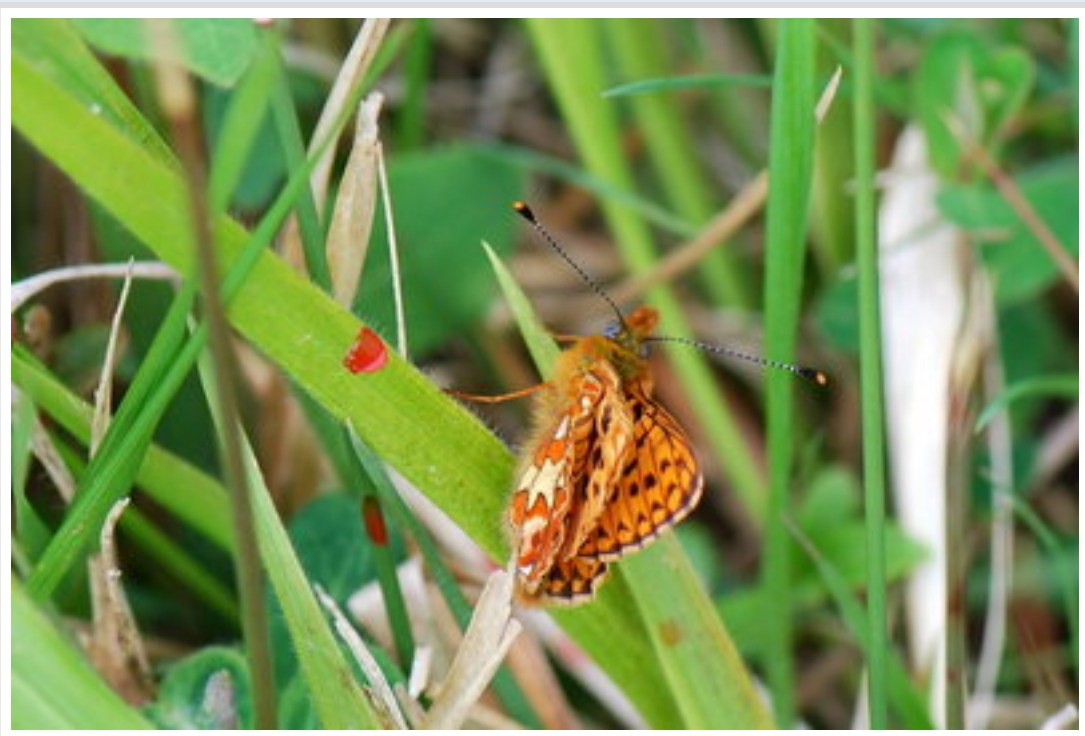
As always seems the way once you've found one, others seem to follow and this was no different, but on the other side of the path it was my second ever Duke of Burgundy! For an age it sat there wings open wide, sunning itself. It gave me a chance to try out the Butterflies App that Pete and Guy were involved in. In the end we settled for female.



As this was my second ever I stayed for a while and eventually it closed its wings revealing the 3 pairs of legs, confirming that it was a female.



After having my fill of the Duchess I took to strolling some more and found my very own Pearl, the equalizer 1-1. There was some red liquid on the surrounding stems which suggested that this was only just emerged. Closer inspection showed that its' wings weren't properly dry yet and were still slightly crumpled.



This told the story, we were witnessing an emergence event. And there just over the way was my second self found Pearl, 2-1 to Wurzel...



But Rob then drew...2-2, looks like it could go to penalties...



Rob S was in again, but this individual had previously been something's lunch, so we called it a draw in the end. Heading back the sun warming all the time I glanced what I thought was another Pearl out of the corner of my eye, but it was just a similar coloured leaf - I really have got to stop reading "Dazzled and Deceived" I'm seeing mimicry everywhere.



Once back in the car park I'd just started to write in the sightings book and was leaving directions for Jenks when he arrived back from Martin Down. I hope he found them. Tomorrow will bring family duties so little chance of butterflies but today will keep me going for at least a fortnight! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 07-May-12 08:32 AM GMT

my initial thought was Spruce carpet for your moth.

glad you had a good day, has sounded like you have needed one 😊

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 07-May-12 11:02 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Nice report and cracking photos 😊

I am glad you managed to have a good day, you have certainly done better than I have managed to do lately.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by jenks, 08-May-12 04:36 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

yes he did find the PBF and the Duke of B !! Thanks for the map and directions by the way. Rob S was still there to add extra guidance. I think I saw 5, possibly 6 PBF in the hour from 16.00 to 17.00, just the 1 D of B. Martin Down between 12.30 to 15.00 produced 4 possibly 5 Grizzled Skippers, all in the area of the old gun emplacements, on the leeward side of that and between Bokerley Ditch where it was warmer and sheltered, and 2 Peacocks. So, after a disappointing morning a good end to the day.

Always good to meet other UKB members, look forward to meeting you again.

Jenks.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-May-12 06:31 AM GMT

Cheers for the ID Chris, I definitely needed to get out, I've been like caged animal all week!

Cheers for got your kind comments Neil. We're currently getting half a decent day a week down here in Salisbury so you have to try and make the most of it when it comes. But it's got improve soon and then we'll all be out with butterflies everywhere wondering what all the worry was for (fingers crossed).

Alright Jenks? I'm glad the Pearls were still around and the Duke too. Likewise it was good meeting other UKButterflies members and looking forward to seeing you out and about again!

Have a goodun

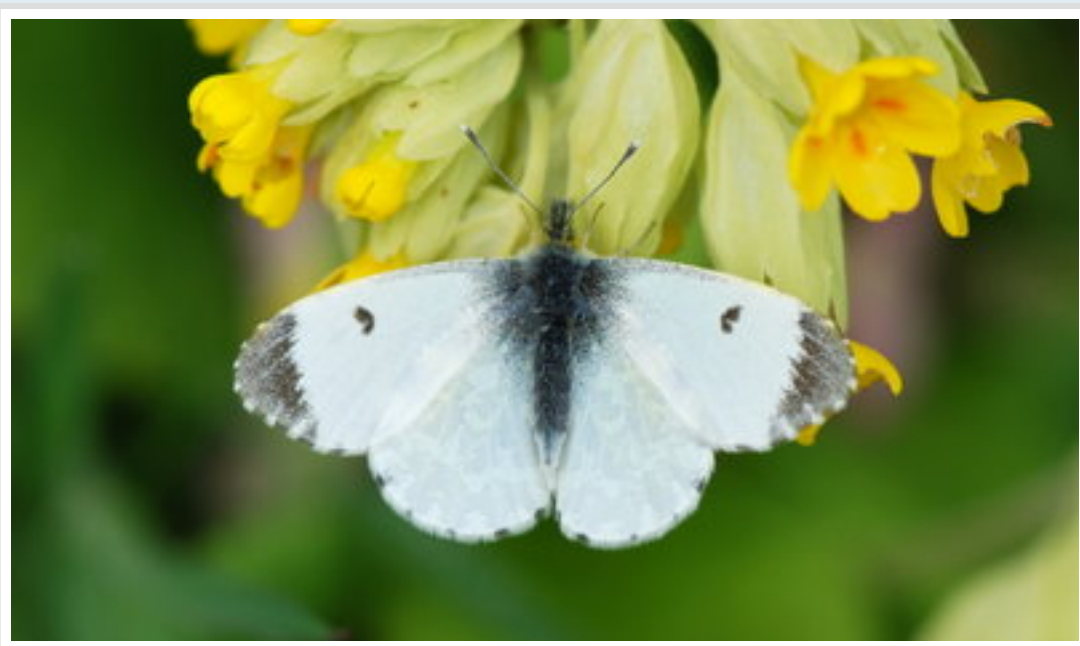
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-May-12 06:58 AM GMT

Yesterday couldn't have been more different than today...

Eventually the weather was warm and sunny for pretty much the whole day, but judging by what we've been having recently I wasn't about to take any chances and therefore got outside wherever possible, you have to make the most of it at the moment because you don't know how long it will last! During the lesson before lunch I clocked a white butterfly in the quad, watched and waited for the bell and then rushed out and managed to get a few snaps. It turned out to be a female Orange-tip. Getting butterfly photos is a bit like waiting for buses; for the last 2 and a bit years I've been trying to get the wide open wing shot of a female Orange-tip and after finally succeeding recently, now all female Orange-tips display themselves in this fashion!

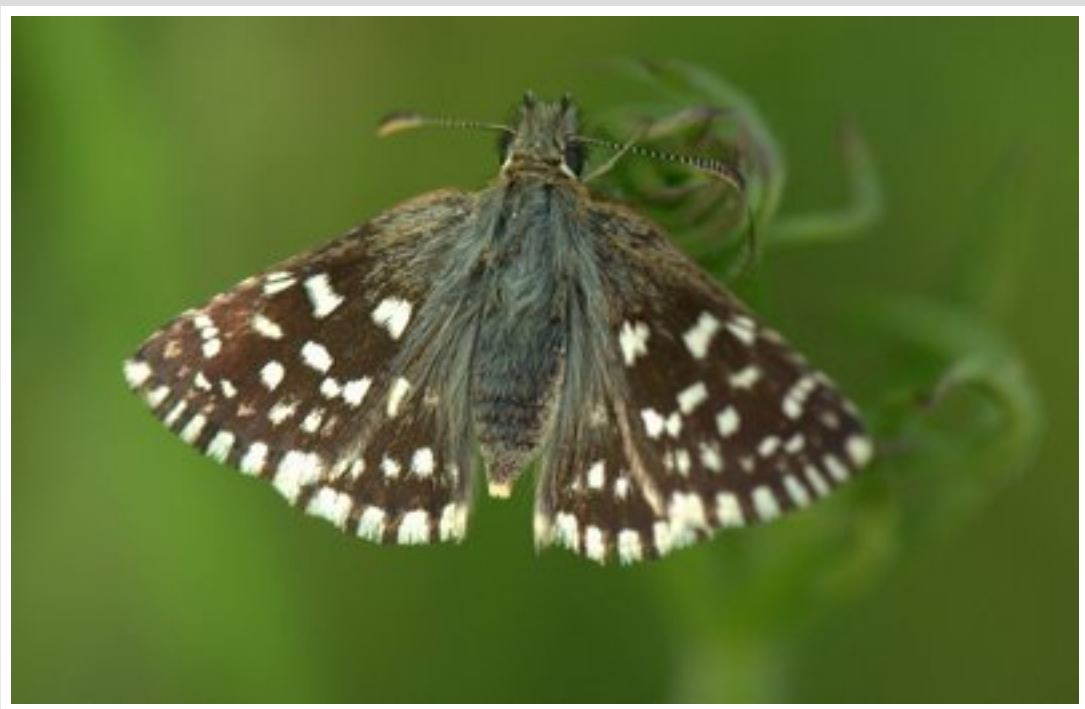


After waiting for the customary 25 minutes of lunch time which meant that no pupils wanted help with revision I nipped up the field. There a Peacock decided to give me a bit of a run around, much to the amusement of the neighbouring Primary School staff, and in the end I gave up the chase. The huge row of Hawthorns along the field yielded not one Green Hairstreak, not that I expected them too (although it would have been nice!), but there were what seemed like thousands of St Mark's flies, as well as a few bees lurking around the pile of dead vegetation. Later during free lesson I took 10 minutes out to look in on the "wildlife" area which yielded a bee mimicking Hoverfly, but no butterflies.

On the journey home I saw 2 male Orange-tips, Brimstone and a (Small?) White and once home I rushed up the garden as a White was flitting around the Apple blossom. Unfortunately no matter how much I stood on tip-toes or strained my neck it remained too high and obscured to get a positive id. No matter it would soon be time for tea so I headed back in when Blue took off from the ground. I thought that it might be a Common Blue, but when it landed in the Ivy I knew at once that it was Holly Blue.



Meal over and kids tucked up I took full advantage of the nice weather and headed for a brief visit to Five Rivers. I wasn't expecting anything - possibly a White - I went more for the warbler songs than anything else. They certainly didn't disappoint with 9 different species of Warbler all singing (still no Gropper though) with a Cuckoo joining in on the refrain! Background music taken care of I ambled along the sunlit banks scanning left and right when a moth caught my eyes. At first I thought Mother Shipton, but the pattern was more blocks than stripes and curves? I approached closer and it became immediately apparent that it was in fact a Grizzled Skipper, holding it's forewings back "moth" style.



I can't believe it, my own little Local Patch has it's own Grizzled Skipper. To my knowledge they haven't been recorded here before! Photos taken and feeling elated I carried on along the bank when I spotted another one! One Grizzled Skipper could have been a fluke - but does two make a colony? I hope so, my own self found Grizzlies -now I know how Lee felt.



More photos taken I mooched some more, checking dead stems but the cloud had covered the sun by now and it felt decidedly chillier so homeward I headed. If we get some good weather again then I'll be back to check on my charges, I feel strangely paternal towards them.

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Lee Hurrell, 10-May-12 09:30 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

my own self found Grizzlies – now I know how Lee felt

It feels good doesn't it?

Congratulations on finding them, Wurzel, I look forward to hearing about thier exploits.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 11-May-12 12:33 AM GMT

Excellent find, Wurzel. Hope you get chance to do a proper search when the weather improves.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 11-May-12 02:43 AM GMT

Excellent find Wurzel, and cracking photos too 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by NickMorgan, 11-May-12 03:52 AM GMT

Well done Wurzel. A good find. I bet that brought you a lot of joy. I would settle for any butterfly just now!!

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-May-12 04:02 AM GMT

Cheers Lee, Dave and Neil I had a brief check last night but I couldn't locate a single Butterfly but I'll check again in a day or two.

Sorry to rub it in Nick...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-May-12 07:55 AM GMT

With the weather finally improved, the girls with their grandparents and my wife shopping all day with her sister I made the most of it and headed out for the day. I was aiming to find Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak so I headed out towards Martin Down but somehow I ended up at Coombe Bisset Nature Reserve.



As I drove up the hill one or two Whites passed down the along the banks almost to greet me. So I parked and then headed back down the road. Over the next 30 minutes I walked up and down the road scanning the banks and enjoying seeing more than just one or two species. Here there was male and females of Orange-tip, Brimstone, Large, Small and Green Veined White as well a Peacock and Holly Blue. Not a bad haul before I'd even entered the reserve!

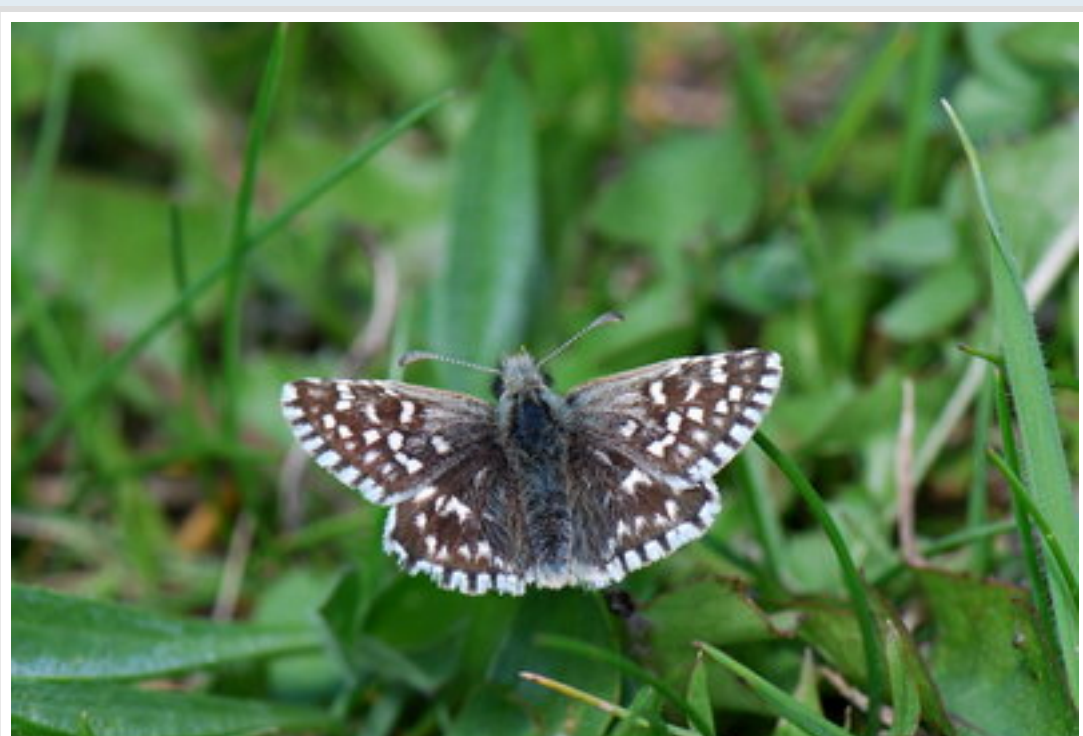




Once in I set off down the down with another Brimstone for company. It wasn't until I reached the bottom that the grass thinned out looked much closer cropped. I was just thinking this looks about right for Dingy when I spotted one feeding on a Dandelion. I managed to get closer and then it was off, hurtling and jinking left and right. For the next hour I patrolled this small little area and found what I think were 3 individuals at least.



There was also a Grizzled Skipper present and at one point it got into a bit of a scuffle with one of the Dingy Skippers – clash of the titans it wasn't more like “duel of the diminutives”.



One target down I wandered back up the Coombe with the odd Dingy and Grizzlie to add to the tally and once back at the car park a flash of blue caught my eye so I followed it along the hedge where it meet another blue and they spiralled together up and up eventually splitting apart – so two males? I followed what I thought was the original blue and it came across a different individual and repeated the spiralling but this time they both landed and the female quivered her wings. After a brief mating they split and landed on separate branches. Luckily for me the male landed low enough for me to get a few shots and he even obliged me by opening his wings slightly.



From there I headed on to Martin Down...but I haven't even looked at the 250+ photos I took there yet so I'll have to leave it there for now...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

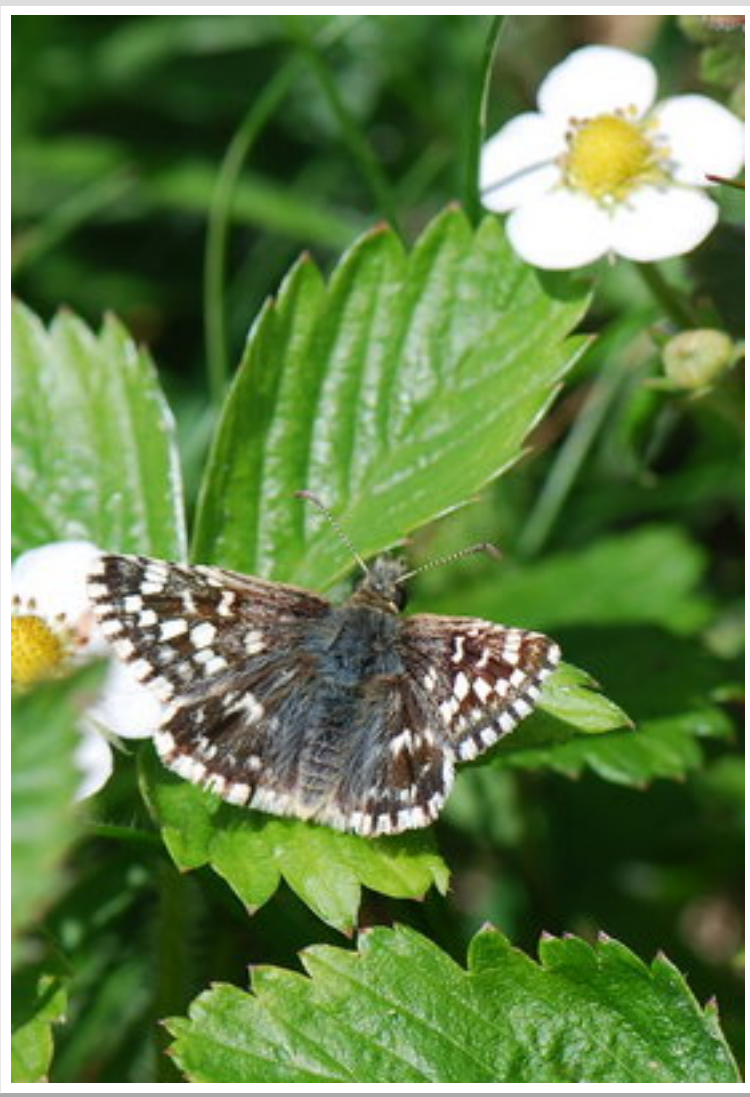
by Wurzel, 14-May-12 06:36 AM GMT

After the success at Coombe Bisset I headed over to Martin Down and made my way around the scrub near to the main car park. I'm pretty sure I saw a Green Hairstreak but it was gone in a flash so to be fair I can't count it. I started off back at the little alcove where I found my first Grizzlies this year. It proved to be a prime location again as there was a female Holly Blue down nice and low showing off her wings.

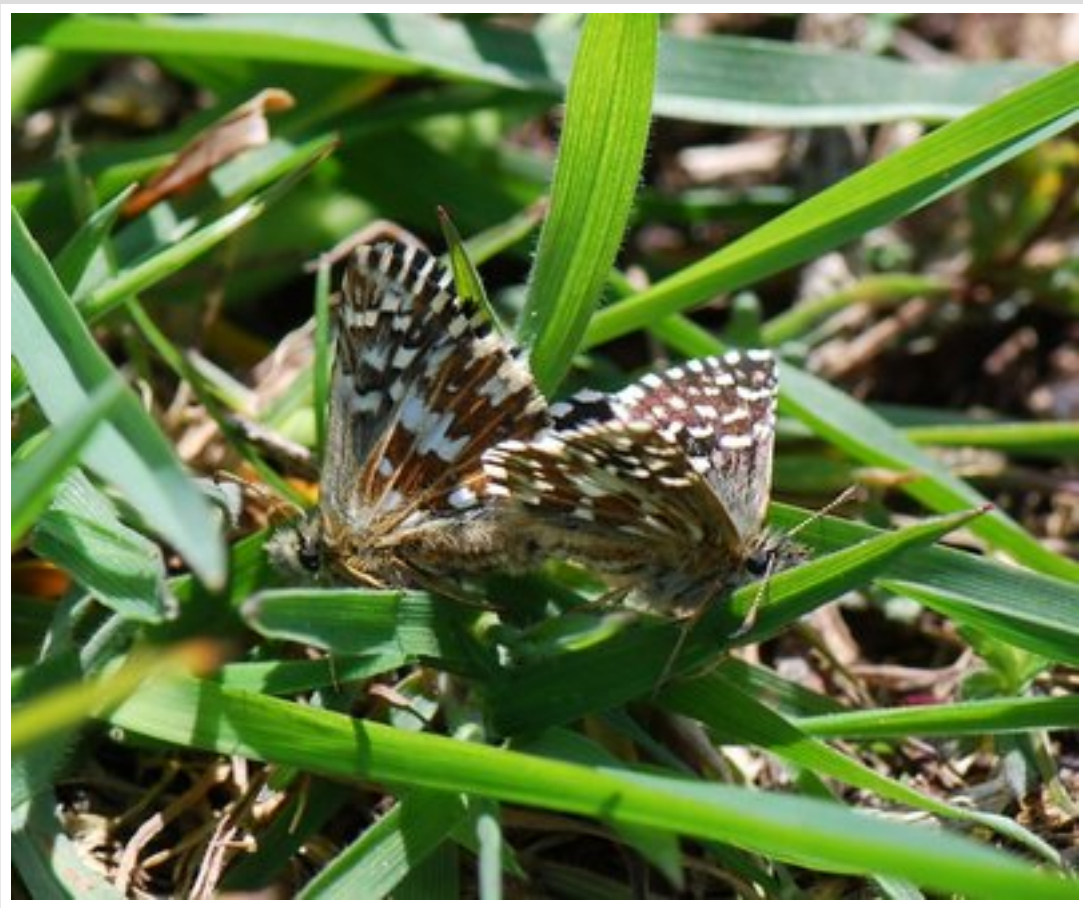


Also in this area were Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and after getting a few photos of one or two individuals I set off to check around some more. I couldn't believe the numbers - they were everywhere after 6 or 7 steps another little brown or grey job would whizz off jinking left and right never to be seen again.



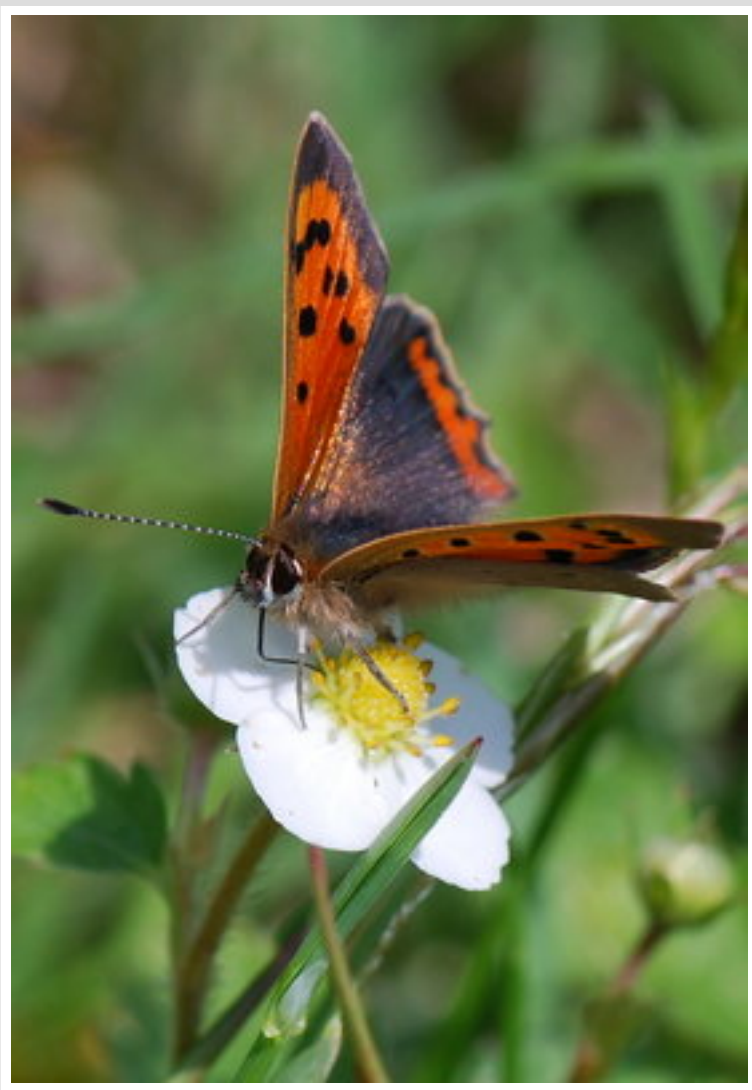


Occasionally they would stay still and then when I approached closer I could see why - they would be locked together mating. 🤔



In the end I put the camera down sat on the spongy ground, let the sun heat my back and just watched the spectacle in miniature. When I regained track of time I set off checking every Hawthorn that I came across. A little further round from my start point something orange caught my eye. I approached cautiously and found my first Small Copper of the year, then a second which let me get even closer. I don't think I've found them this fresh before?





Kitts Wood just over the other side of the road from Martin Down proper is a mixture of mature hedgerows and cleared wood land and feels a bit like a maze at times. I wandered round, checking every Hawthorn I could see but no Green Hairstreaks. On my meanderings I did find a Peacock, 2 male Orange-tips, singles of Grizzled and Dingy Skipper and a pair of Brimstone. However as I hadn't conclusively seen my target number two it was back to the car and onto the final place I could think of to try...

Still at Martin Down I tried the Sillens Lane end. This has produced Green Hairstreak a couple of times two years ago and also my only Green Hairstreak of 2011 so I was hoping for third time lucky! I set off along the track heading for where it bisects the ditch. Along the way a female Brimstone kept flitting just in front of me, landing for a fraction of a second and would then continue on her way. I presume she was laying eggs but she would always take off just as I'd focused on her. There was also the occasional Dingy basking on the track or mud puddling. Once at the site I walked around every checking every Hawthorn, scanning and hoping for an emerald glint as a male left to check his territory but to no avail. Eventually I decided that enough was enough and started to make my way back towards the car when I noticed that there was a female Brimstone (the same one from earlier?) flitting around small Hawthorn shrubs. She wasn't as flighty and seemed to be taking her time so I managed an approach and my earlier assessment of her behaviour was affirmed as she ovi-posed.



On the journey back to the car there were more Dingy Skippers, a Holly Blue and a Comma, just out of reach on some bramble in the hedge. The final butterflies of the day were a pair of Orange-tips along the lane. They seemed to be courting but then quickly went their separate ways. So no luck with the Green Hairstreaks again. I really need to find a more reliable Green Hairstreak site and time is running out this year...but despite this still a cracking day! 😊😎
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 14-May-12 07:35 AM GMT

Quite a day, Wurzel, by the sound of it. Like you, I'm still struggling to meet up with Green Hairstreaks. Sadly, the weather next week is turning cooler (12-14c) so it looks like the wait will continue. 😞

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 14-May-12 07:46 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Thats a lovely photo capturing the female Brimstone ovipositing, well done.

All the best,

Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 14-May-12 02:33 PM GMT

I second that Wurzel – and your earlier Brimstone photo was lovely too.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 15-May-12 06:18 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

I really need to find a more reliable Green Hairstreak site and time is running out this year...

Hi Wurzel,

I wouldn't worry just yet, they are only just starting to put in an appearance at some sites in the midlands, very late compared to last year. I saw my first ones at Prestbury Hill yesterday and apparently they have not been out long there either.

And some great photos you have got there 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

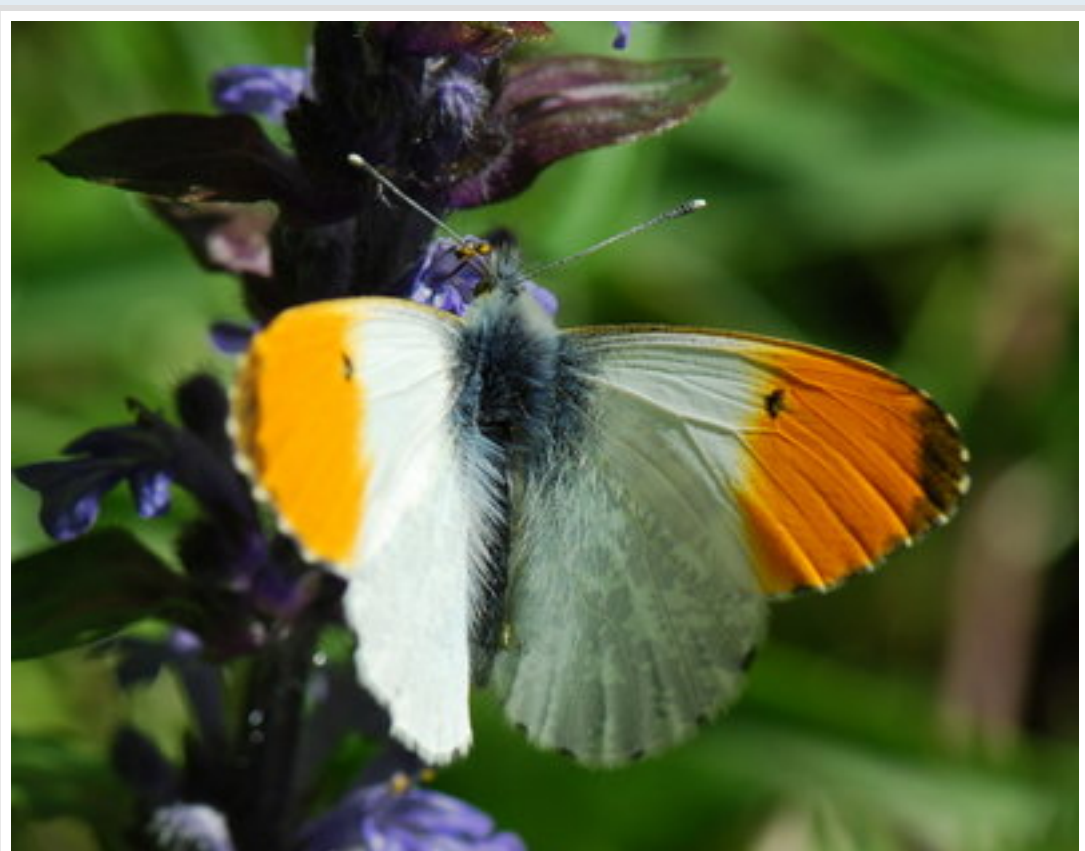
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 15-May-12 06:41 AM GMT

Cheers Neil I know I just need to be a little more patient but as David M is finding it feels like the world and his wife are seeing Green Harstreak! 🍷
Cheers Nick and Pauline your comments are much appreciated 😊

Having had my fill of butterflies on Saturday yesterday was time to spend with the family. We decided to make the most of the sunshine and spent the afternoon at Kingston Lacy a National Trust estate near Wimborne, Dorset. As always though I took my camera just in case...

After a brief walk across manicured lawns and heavily weeded flower beds we found ourselves walking along a Lime tree avenue with Wild Garlic and Bluebells lining the path. The dappled sunshine dripped through the leaves and played across the wings of one or two butterflies. A Brimstone stayed out of reach and a pair of Speckled Wood spiralled and fought. There was a small patch slightly more sun drenched than other areas and this turned into a real hotspot with 3 species of bee, a few different types of small wasp and a passing Large White, Brimstone, pair of Speckled Wood and a male Orange-tip which was seemed more interested in refuelling despite the great weather when I thought he'd be off patrolling.



We followed the woodland path round and while the girls investigated some bivvies I saw a Red Admiral and another Large White. The wood opened up into a grassed area with flowers along the banks – mainly Wild Garlic. Also here were a number of wire cages with trees and shrubs in. One or two of the trees had been cleared but the bases were still cleared of vegetation and served as perfect basking sites for 2 Peacocks and a Comma. Each had their own little private basking area but occasionally one of the Peacocks would try and force the Comma off of it's site. It would take to the air and a spiral dogfight would ensue the victor of which was always the tenacious Comma. At one point it took on both Peacocks and a male Orange-tip which had inadvertently strayed in range, and still came out on top, landing and taking a breather but always with one eye open!



The great thing about this little part of the grounds was that I could just sit back and enjoy the behaviour unfolding before me, while the girls were more than content to run around the long grass maze and play “Cafes” in the Pacific Island hut. As we headed on hopping along the log stepping stones a Holly Blue fluttered by and a pair of Green Veined Whites rested fitfully – just long enough for me to get a photo and notice that it only had one antennae – I wonder what inconvenience this would cause it?



In the Japanese Garden a Brimstone bombed past and while the girls ate their tea on the lawn a Peacock basked just out of reach in the flower beds. A relaxing end to a relaxing afternoon of butterflies, not bad for not even trying!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 15-May-12 06:54 AM GMT

LOL! I love watching Peacocks fight Commas. These two species simply do NOT get on.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-May-12 06:24 AM GMT

Having passed by various “entrances” to the Salisbury Plain Training Area on my way to and from work for the last 9 years just recently I’ve actually decided to check the area out. Hopefully I’ll be able to find one or two sites that can fall into my “way home” category. These are sites which I can call in at, spend 20–25 minutes photographing butterflies and be home before my wife is any the wiser!

This part was a road with banks on either-side and plenty of Hawthorn bushes. I saw these and immediately thought “Green Hairstreak” so I checked all prominent branches, stood back and looked for the flash of green and repeated this all the way up the hill! No luck and not even a single butterfly of any species. So I turned round and disheartened started to walk back to the car.

As I did a Small White hove into view on a patrol flight but what interested me more was that it spooked something orangey...on closer investigation it was my first Wall of the year. 😊



However it was very flighty and so I thought that this would be my only shot. Again I headed down the hill, invigorated and now checking the shrubs with much greater diligence for those pesky Green jobbies. When I was almost back at the car the Wall showed again and this time I managed to get close enough for a few closer shots before it was off and away. I’d forgotten how skittish this species is – you have to stalk it very carefully and if you want to get any photos start clicking early and while still approaching!



Once home and with the kids in bed I checked out Five Rivers as it still felt reasonably warm. However despite checking every shrub again still no Green Hairstreak. Where am I going wrong? Oh well here's hoping that the leg work I've done recently will be repaid at the weekend...if anyone knows any great sites for Greestreaks near Salisbury don't keep them to yourselves. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 17-May-12 07:40 AM GMT

Great photos of the Wall there Wurzel! Wished I could've got near enough for an open wing shot 🍷

Cannot understand why you haven't seen the Green Hairstreak yet 😊 ... you've visited everywhere and seen just about everything else that's on the go now 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-May-12 06:30 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid 😊

I reckon the Green Hairstreaks see me coming and hide! One more try this weekend at a place called Middleton Down (got my flask ready, lucky hat ready, I'll have a look and then "give up" etc etc all the usual techniques) so here's hoping?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 18-May-12 08:09 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel, I'm having trouble with Greenstreaks as well. Saw one at Mill Hill mid April—nothing since! Have they stopped emerging? It's been colder and duller than Christmas so far this May in East Anglia.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-May-12 04:22 AM GMT

Alright Essexbuzzard? I can't work out why I'm struggling to find them but I have had one or two ideas...

I could be going to places where they aren't found anyway...

Even though I'm looking at the right sites I'm looking in the wrong places

I've missed them – they all emerged in March/April and got on with it while the sun shone

They've given up on 2012 and have done an Orange-tip and will wait until 2013

Whilst I hate Anthropomorphizing I personally believe now that they see me coming and hide just to annoy me! Good luck with them where you are – I'm having one more try and then giving up (perhaps that's what they're waiting for and then they'll be everywhere that I go! 😊)

Have a goodun

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 19-May-12 04:42 AM GMT

Wurzel, don't despair. First find a site (use this forum's species distribution guide to help you) and once you're there, head for the most sheltered spot where there are scrubby bushes and trees growing. I personally carry a 'Hairstreak stick' with which I beat likely looking bushes to temporarily cause all resting insects to take flight. If you DO disturb a Green Hairstreak, just sit tight as they will come back to the same area as it represents their 'lek', and they will be determined to control it at all costs.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-May-12 05:57 AM GMT

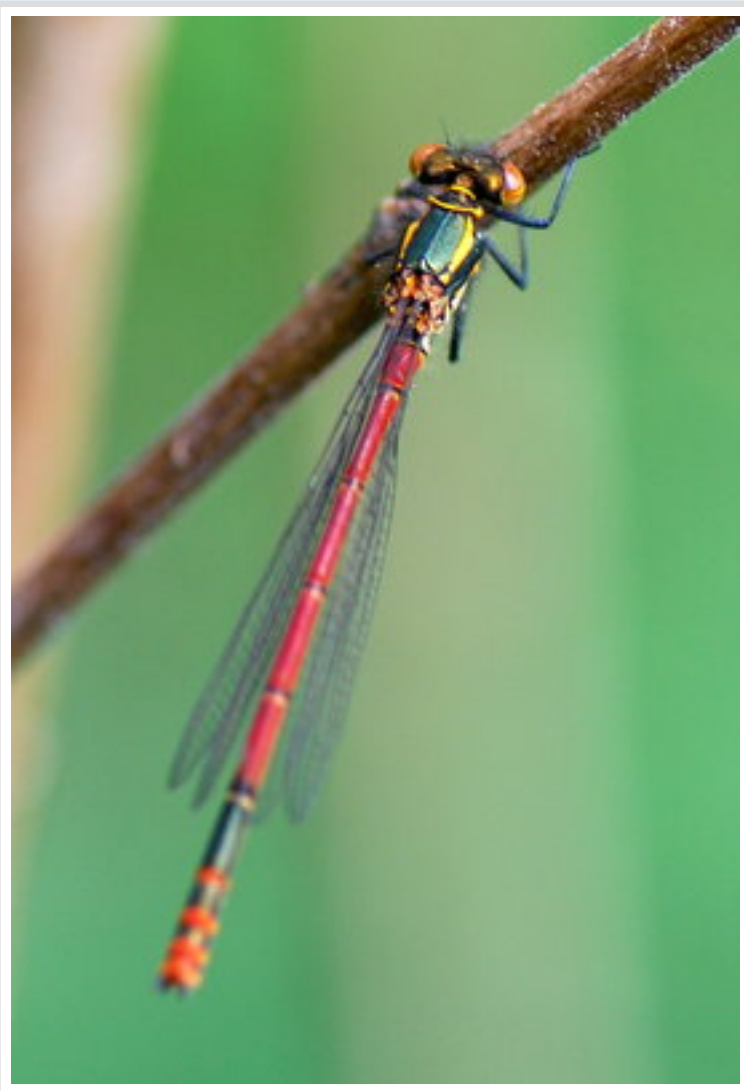
Cheers David I'm trying tomorrow at Middleton Down (the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust assure me that Greenstreaks are there!) and if I still don't have any luck then I'll try Martin Down again. I like the idea of a beating stick I'll give that a go! Let's just hope that I don't knock any trees down in frustration! 😊 It looks like the weather is improving over the next week so there may be a few more opportunities for me to find them.

While the weather hasn't been brill this week it's given me a chance to look through some of my other photos of non-butterflies.

First up is a *Bibio* species taken at Bentley Wood. Unlike *marci*, *pomanae* females have red legs. There is also another species that can be found in gardens in which the female has a red body but I've yet to see that.



Then there was this pair that were at the top of the garden, Large Red Damselfly. I didn't realise at first that I had both a male and a female visiting my garden. The male has much more red on the tail than the female.



Whereas the female has a greater number of dark bands from the tip of the tail up the abdomen.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Rosalyn, 19-May-12 07:37 AM GMT

Phil and I have found that Green Hairstreaks are a morning butterfly. Best to look around 10 am when they are likely to be flying. Good luck

Re: Wurzel

by Padfield, 19-May-12 04:39 PM GMT

Just for the record, and much as I respect many of David's ideas, I don't like the concept of a beating stick at all! It dislodges larvae as well as adults and breaks the first rule of the naturalist, that he should endeavour to observe without interfering. If the green hairstreaks aren't on show, too bad. No hard feelings David - but I don't like that one!

Guy

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 19-May-12 07:43 PM GMT

Fair play, Guy, but don't get the idea that I'm belting the living daylights out of the shrubs. Far from it, one moderate tap is sufficient.

If it's good enough for Jeremy Thomas, it's good enough for me.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 20-May-12 08:09 AM GMT

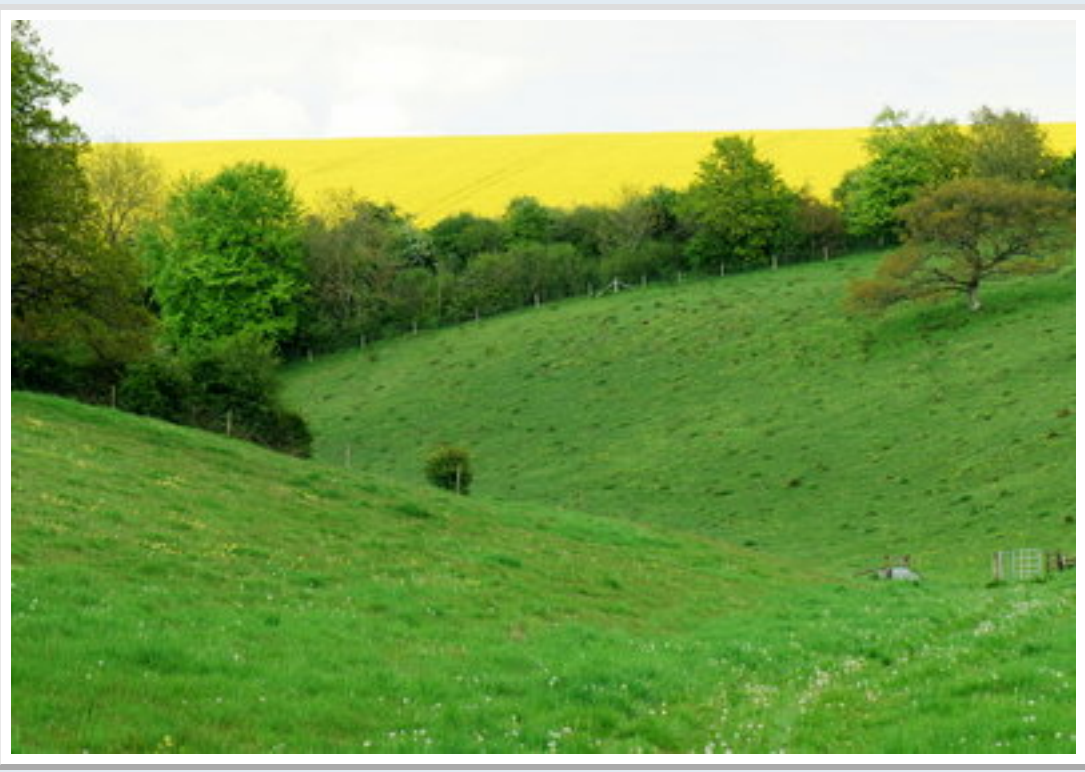
Today I visited a new reserve Middleton Down near Broadchalke. In fact I almost visited the site many years ago before it was a reserve as one of my Grandads had a rabbiting contract, so when I stayed in the village we'd visit a nearby coombe twice a day to collect bunnies and reset the snares. Today my target species was Green Hairstreak but I didn't take the advice of Jeremy Thomas and knock the shrubs - in fact the only thing that got

beaten was my car as I drove up the rutted track which was in fact a bridleway! 😞

As I wandered round this first part I saw only two butterflies - a Brimstone and a lone and battered Grizzlie which I thought was a poor return for all the hiking up and down down! 😞

Still I moved on to another part of the reserve - Rats Bottom I believe it is called and as I pulled up on the verge a Large White and male Orange-tip patrolled and the sun came out! Heartened by this I set off down the oath cheerily waving at the Aparist that was packing up his smoke cans. I should have paid more attention to that because as I entered the reserve I noticed 12 Hives. Then I heard the buzzing and a bee kept flying in closer and closer until I had to try swatting and then running before it finally stung me. I did feel sorry for it for a fraction of a second until the pain started and I remembered reading somewhere that the sting sends out a pheromone so other angry bees could be along soon. I quickly headed off down the hill!

As I did I was stunned by the beauty of the place. The rolling downs and wildflowers in profusion amongst the grasses and the best was yet to come - in three hours I was the only one there!



Having recovered from being stung by bees and beauty I carried further on down the down. A Brimstone went by and I saw at least 4 Dingy's, a couple of Grizzlies as well as my first Common Blue of 2012 looking pristine.

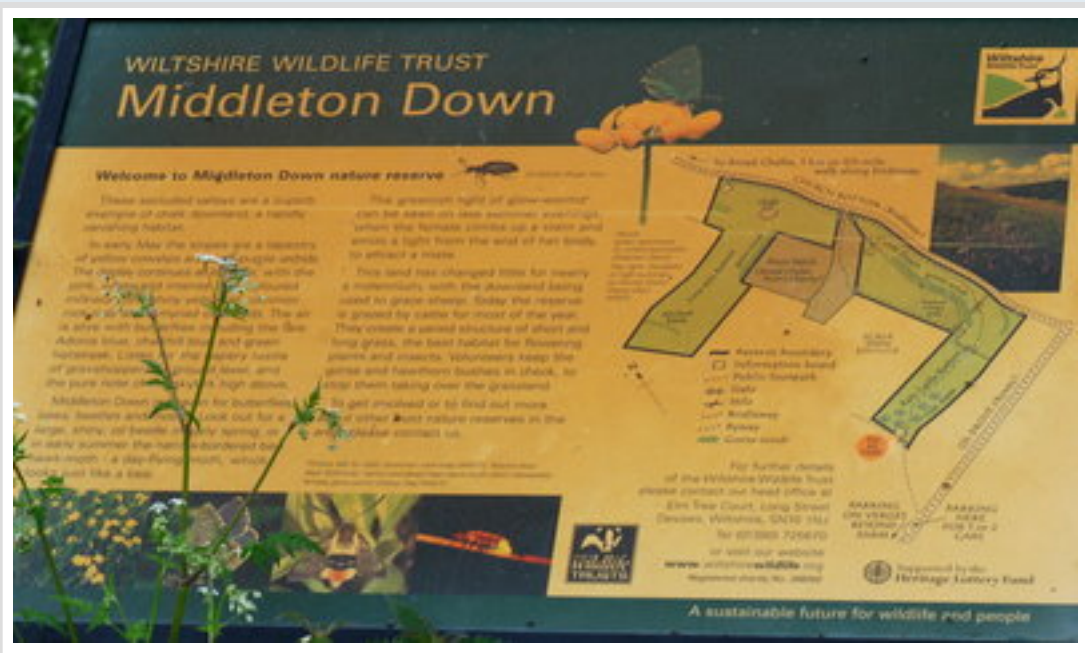




At the end of the field the reserve became fringed with Hawthorns and scrub instead of Oaks so I reverted to looking for Greenstreaks. I'm pretty sure that I saw one but it landed too far back in the scrub to relocate and my time was running out. I did however manage to get my second first of the day with a couple of Small Heath.



In the end I did get a photo of a Greenstreak...



...and probably because of that poor attempt at humour I got stung a second time as I ran the gauntlet past the hives on my return to the car! Still it's a cracking little reserve and with the good weather looking like it will make a comeback I'm sure I'll be back - and perhaps I'll even get a proper shot of a green streak! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 20-May-12 07:24 PM GMT

You are truly suffering in your pursuit of this butterfly, Wurzel. I think we'll all be delighted when you finally find one.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-May-12 06:35 AM GMT

I'm working on the basis of Karma and also what my PE teacher used to tell me "you only get out what you put in" now David - and after the leg work, new sites, disappointments and bee stings not only am I due one but it'll need to be mating and both partners will have their wings wide open to balance things out! 😊 I might give up and start looking for Small Pearls now, or Marsh Fritillary...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 21-May-12 06:48 AM GMT

If you choose Hod Hill for Marsh Fritillary, you'll surely find Green Hairstreaks there too... Unless the weather has messed everything up completely.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-May-12 06:51 AM GMT

I'll try that – any idea which side of the hill is best to look for them?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 21-May-12 07:51 AM GMT

As I recall, the western and southwestern side.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-May-12 06:10 AM GMT

Brill cheers for the info – I might give it go in the next week or two asit's getting time for the Marsh Frits!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 22-May-12 06:28 AM GMT

Indeed. I'm surprised no-one's reported Marsh Fritillaries yet. Give it two or three days and I'm sure the first sightings will be made.

In terms of habitat, I'd say GHs and MFs are practically bedfellows. Damp, scrubby areas and all that.

Wurzel, I've a feeling you're going to break your duck within a week! 😊

Re: Wurzel

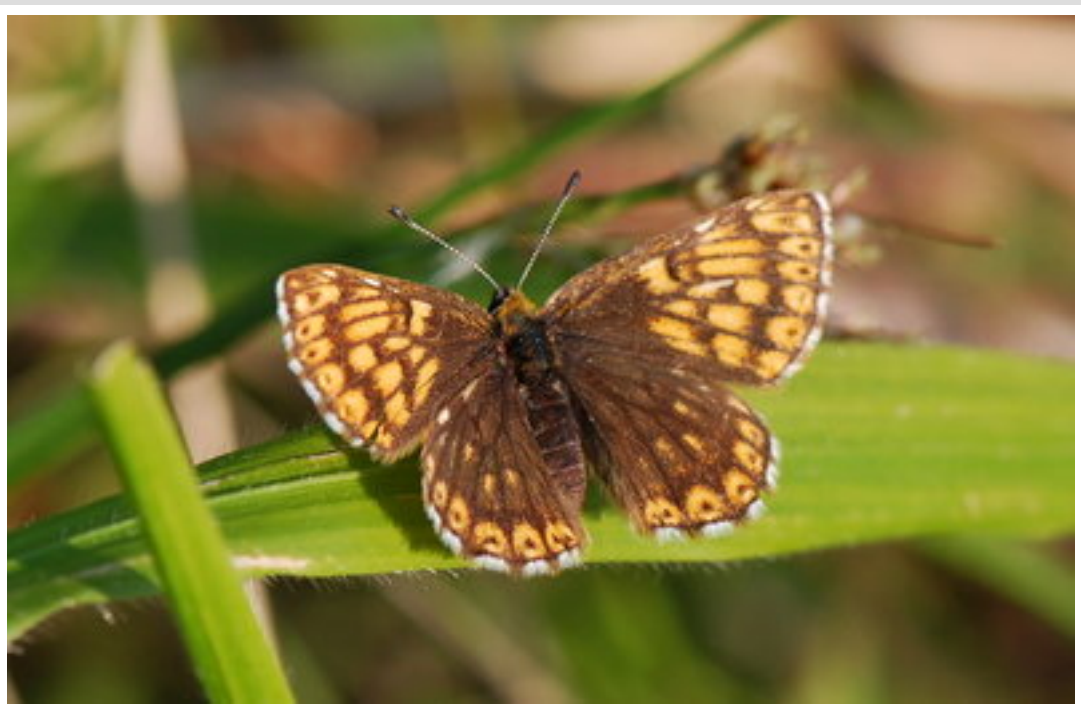
by Wurzel, 23-May-12 07:09 AM GMT

I'm crossing all my digits (toes too!) David! 😊

Today was glorious and is usually the way I was stuck at work. I managed to get out during a free and saw a pair of Orange-tip, a Large White and a Holly Blue in the "wildlife" area. I tried out the "sport mode" on my camera to try and capture some shots of Orange-tip in flight...but I'll leave them for another day.

On the way home there were a few whites and Brimstones fluttering along the hedgerows as I raced to get home. Kids fed, bathed, stories read and in bed, washing up done and wife ensconded on hte sofa I flew over to Bentley Wood. There were still a few hours of daylight to make hte most of! 😊

Once I arrived I headed straight to the Eastern Clearing and bumped into a couple of other butterflyers (Craig Bird and sorry I didn't get your name) who had obviously had the same idea. Pearls were flapping manically around in between the sunlit areas and shadows. As we were chatting about what might be about, and strangley just after I had referred to my lucky hat, a Duke flew into view and posed obligingly for us.





Then I had a bit more of a look around. The Pearls were very flighty – whizzing around rarely settling long enough to even approach them. Some did seem to like the stacks of straw while occasionally they would become engrossed in nectaring on Bugle so it was possible to get some shots.





As the evening progressed I looked around for roosting Small Pearls but with no luck. Instead I saw a Peacock, Comma, more Pearls and also this little chappy who must have been caught out by the setting sun. The Slow Worm was in the middle of the path and was very torpid and cold to the touch so it was probably basking in the evening sun when it dropped below the tree line plunging it into shade. I moved it slightly off the path and into some long grass...perhaps I shouldn't have but it felt like the right thing to do.



As the areas of shade increased the butterflies seemed to melt away and I put the camera down so I could revel in the eveningsong – Blackcap and Garden Warbler, a passing Greater Spotted Woodpecker and from the edge of the pines the unmistakable churring of the Nightjar. That sound took me back to when I was a kid living at Canford Heath, windows open on summer nights... 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 23-May-12 07:24 AM GMT

Sounds like a very nice evening,Wurzel-glad you managed to make the most of a rare spell of good weather. I havn't heard a churring Nightjar for years,they are now extinct in Essex,sadly.

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 23-May-12 07:29 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Glad to see you are getting out. Your Duke would appear to be a Duchess ...

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-May-12 06:53 AM GMT

I had to attend a course today in Southampton and as I set off I was sorely tempted to call in at Bentley Wood on the way...I didn't which was just as well as the traffic everywhere was pretty slow. I still arrived early so had a quick look around the grounds of the venue. A Holly Blue and Orange-tip

succeeded in frustrating me, the Holly Blue even appeared at the window while I was drinking the pre-course coffee!

By lunchtime I was raring to get out but the butterflies were solar supercharged by then so I didn't stand a chance!

This evening, jobs done and my older daughter dropped off at Rainbows I headed to Five Rivers. The sun was still beating down and the grass was heady and fragrant and also much longer than when I last visited. I was hoping for some Blues and maybe a Brown Argus.

First butterfly of the evening was a Small Heath - one of many over the next 50 minutes. I couldn't get any photos as they all behaved in the same fashion, exploding from the grass like an orange bullet and then jinking and circling until you lose sight of them. I checked the banks and found a mating pair of blues. At first they were flying and I thought it looked unusual and then as they dropped onto a blade of grass I noticed that it was only the male that was flapping! They stayed locked together for a good 20 minutes even having a bit of a "tug of love" along the grass blade.



Further along a large orangey butterfly became a battered Small Tortoiseshell when it landed. It was good to see and know that some of the early birds are still around.



Time almost up I found I'd worked my way round in a circle back to the initial bank. A male Common Blue (probably the same one slightly worn out?) did the usual "blue on a stick" pose. I watched it for a while and if the breeze upset it it would fly around and about finally landing within 3 feet from where it had started from. The minute it landed it would shuffle around on the perch until it was facing the ground, it would open its wings a fraction and then lock them shut almost. I tried taking the same butterfly from two different angles with the sun in front and behind and was surprised by the difference in the colouration it causes.



Now the Marsh Fritillary has been seen at Hod Hill I'm glad that I'd planned to head there this weekend - it's my older daughters 7th Birthday - what a treat it will be for her! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 24-May-12 06:59 PM GMT

Lovely pictures 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 25-May-12 05:34 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comment DMS 😊

I didn't realise that Goatsuckers were extinct in Essex, Essexbuzzard 😞 I haven't heard one for a few years now and the last one I saw was catching moths round a steet light in Kefalonia!

Cheers for the sexual discrimination Mark, that can get you into trouble can't it? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-May-12 07:26 AM GMT

At the start of the week I was planning to head to Hod Hill this weekend for Marsh Fritillary and those little green gits! But despite that I couldn't miss the opportunity to visit Bentley Wood today with Philzoid and his daughter Izzy. My daughter Kitty came along too and I'm not sure who had the best day - Phil and I surrounded by a plethora of butterflies or the girls who spent the day chatting about "secret stuff" and swapping sweets? Any way we started in the Eastern clearing and what a difference a couple of weeks can make. The last time Kitty and I were here we were struggling to find butterflies and yet today we were struggling to watch one as another would fly in and distract you! Throughout the next hour there were many Pearl Bordered Fritillaries which looked slightly paler and more faded than the recently emerged Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries. One individual was slightly less flighty than a lot of the others and when I managed to get close I could see why.



The Small Pearls were on a mission it seemed and very flighty. You'd watch one it would travel back and forth, gliding here and there and then just as it looked like it would land another Small or Pearl would appear, there'd be a tussle and a bit of a chase but then they'd be off again! But very occasionally they would take nectar, generally from Bugle and then you could get close enough for photos. They were a lot paler and more sandy coloured on the under wing than I remember as I always thought they had more red on the under wing? But when the light would shine through the red spotting would become apparent again.



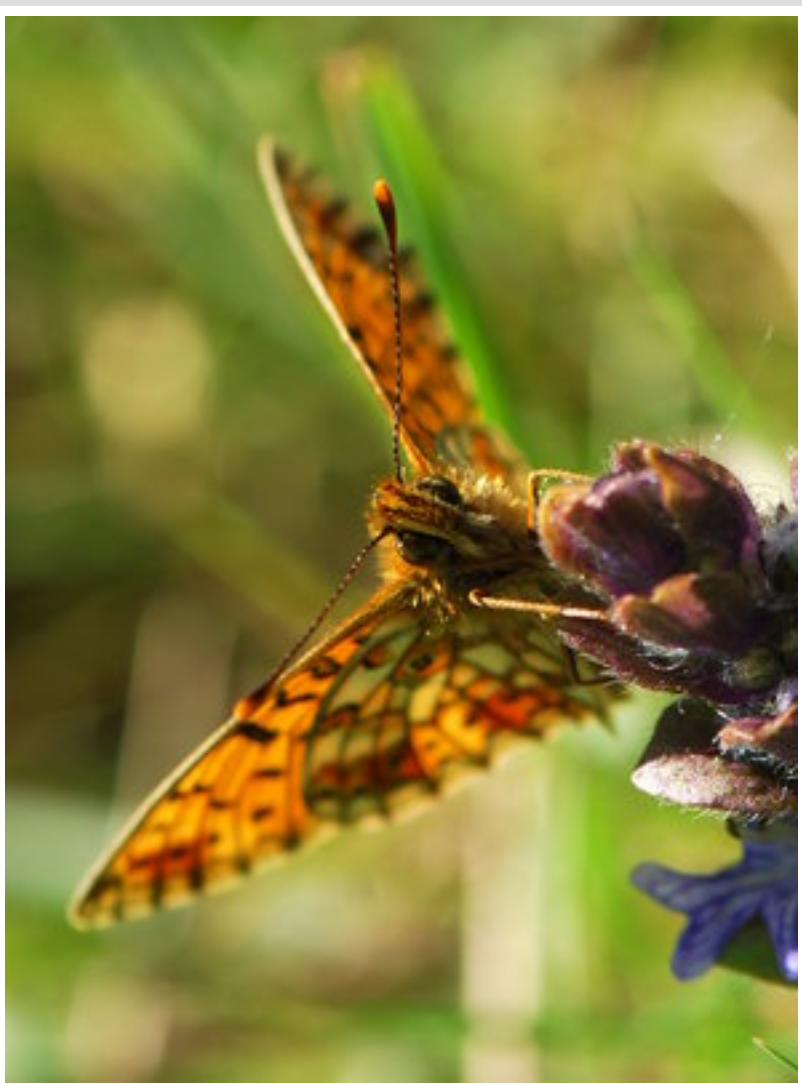
2 grounded!



closer



cherons not flying – difficult to get as they were so active!



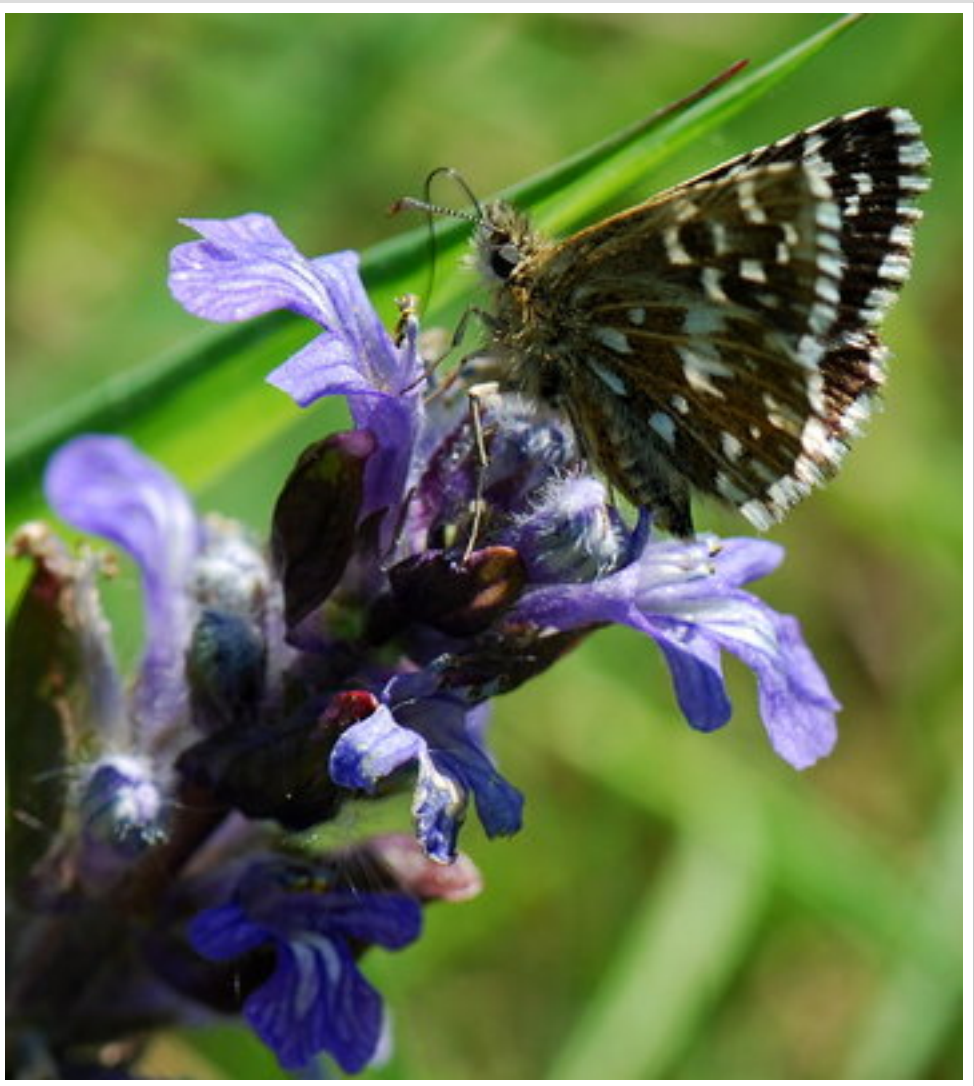
real close up



We moved up towards the cleared area and this too provided a good range of species with Grizzlies, Dukes and more Pearls. One of the Grizzlies seemed darker than the others and the markings much smaller than usual although it probably falls into the usual range of variation.



Can't get enough Dukes - is this a good year for them or what?





Between the main part of the clearing and the more extended, recently cleared area there were 2 Dukes, 2 male and a female Brimstone, a Peacock, Dingy Skipper, 3 Grizzlies, at least 5 Small Pearls and probably 20+ Pearls including an ovipositing female. The high temperatures whilst great for getting butterflies out and about worked against us slightly as they were almost solar turbo charged! Still it was a manic hour, hour and a half and we even found an Argent and Sable.



The girls were getting hungry so we set off back to the car park and from there onto an undisclosed site for lunch...more on that tomorrow!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 28-May-12 07:35 AM GMT

Sounds like a great day Wurzel—well done. It looks like i'm going to miss out on Pearls this year, having seen them in good numbers in Cornwall last time round. They are extinct in Essex 😞

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 29-May-12 07:08 AM GMT

Cheer up EssexBuzzard – at least you've got Heath Fritillaries to look forward to – if only... 😞

Today was my older daughters 7th Birthday so yesterday we spent the entire day doing what she wanted – visiting Coral Cove (a soft play centre not an aquarium as I'd first imagined) then watching her new Disney DVD (Frog Princess) and finishing up with a massive Roast for dinner. Once she was finally tucked up in bed I excused myself for a few hours and headed over to Martin Down to enjoy the evening sun.

A few years back I lived in Sixpenny Handley so I'd spend most of my spring and summer evenings strolling around the reserve or just lying back on the rifle butt and listening to the bird song. Now, whilst still enjoying the bird song, I was looking for butterflies and I headed straight to the Sillens Lane car park and started working my way along the hedgerow. At the first gate a small dark brownish butterfly flew up from the hedge and over it – a Green Hairstreak? No matter I carried on determined to not let my nemesis spoil my evening. At one point the hedge continues and is joined on the other side by another hedge so it feels like you're walking up a Hawthorn tunnel and as I entered this part butterflies seemed to suddenly abound. A Brimstone was joined in its patrolling by a male Orange-tip, a Common Blue fluttered about always looking like it would land and never actually getting round to it! I was still scanning the hedgerow so I forced my eyes downward and that was where the real spectacle was to be found. Small Blues seemed to be everywhere! At one point I found 5 roosting on one piece of vegetation – I could only just squeeze 3 into shot!

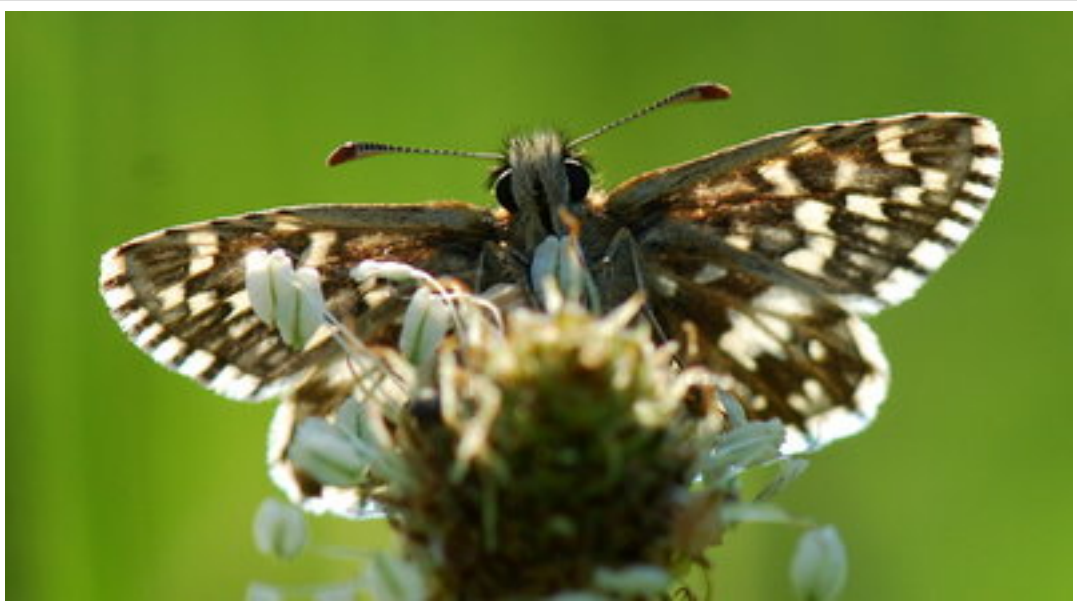
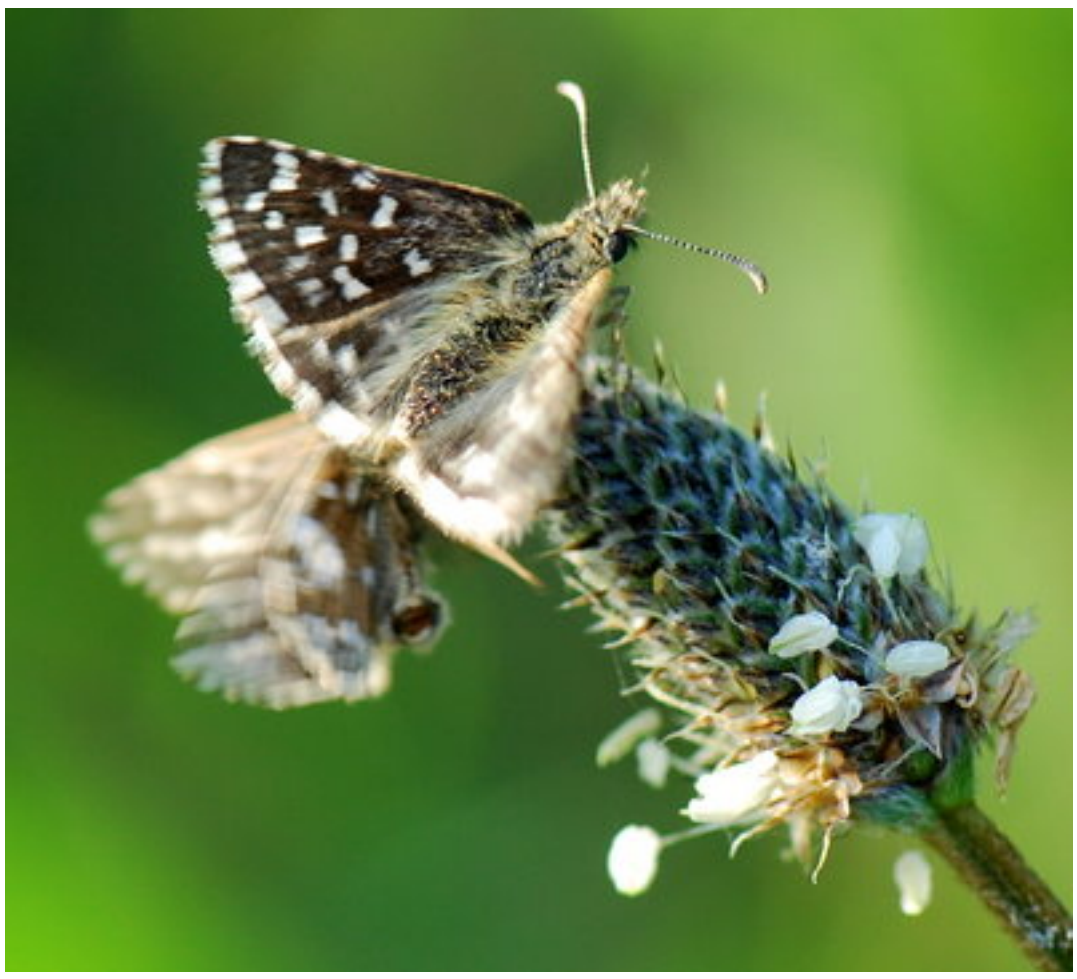


I'd turn round on the path and there would be miniscule blue butterflies taking off and resettling each direction I looked. Each time I see a species for the first time in a year I see something that I've forgotten and with Small Blue it's just how small they really are!

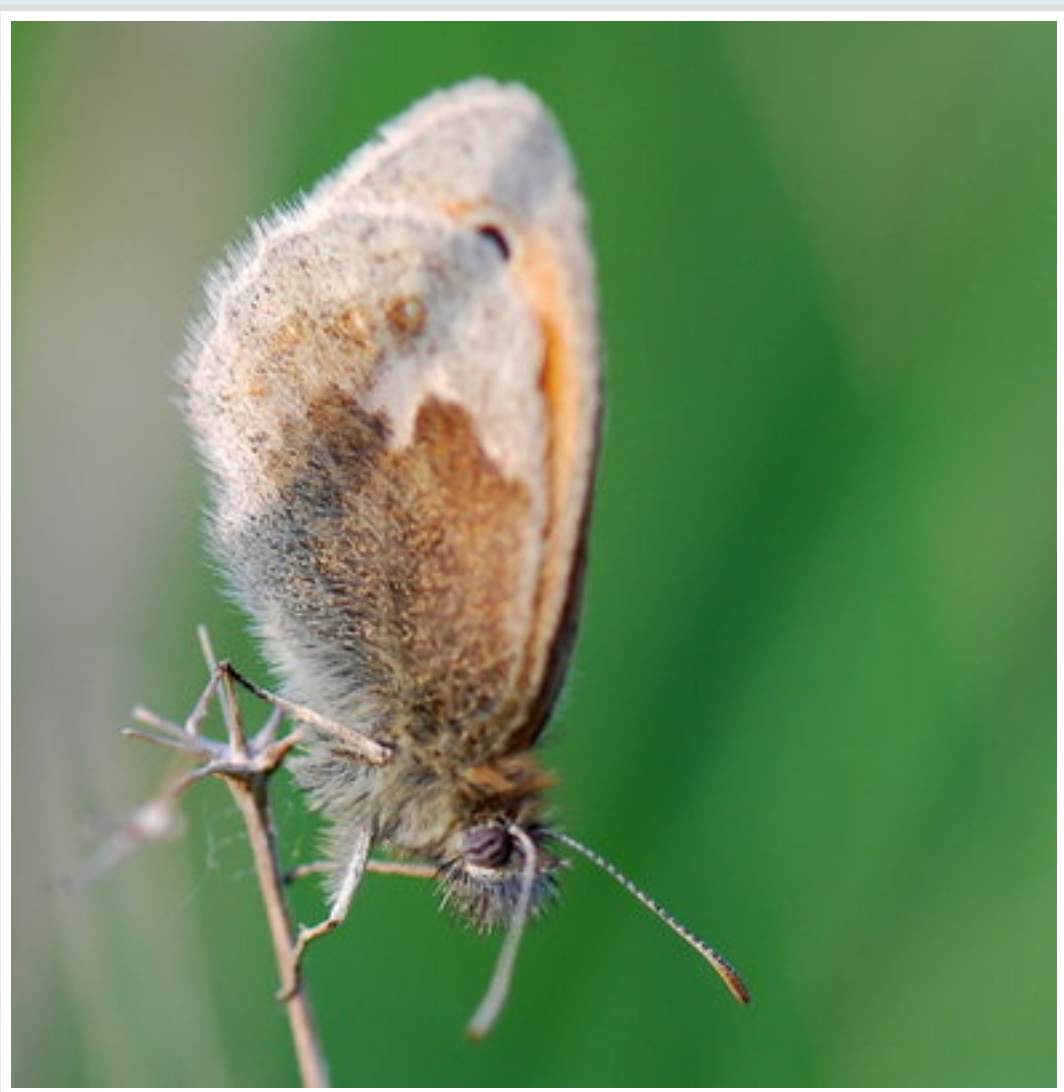
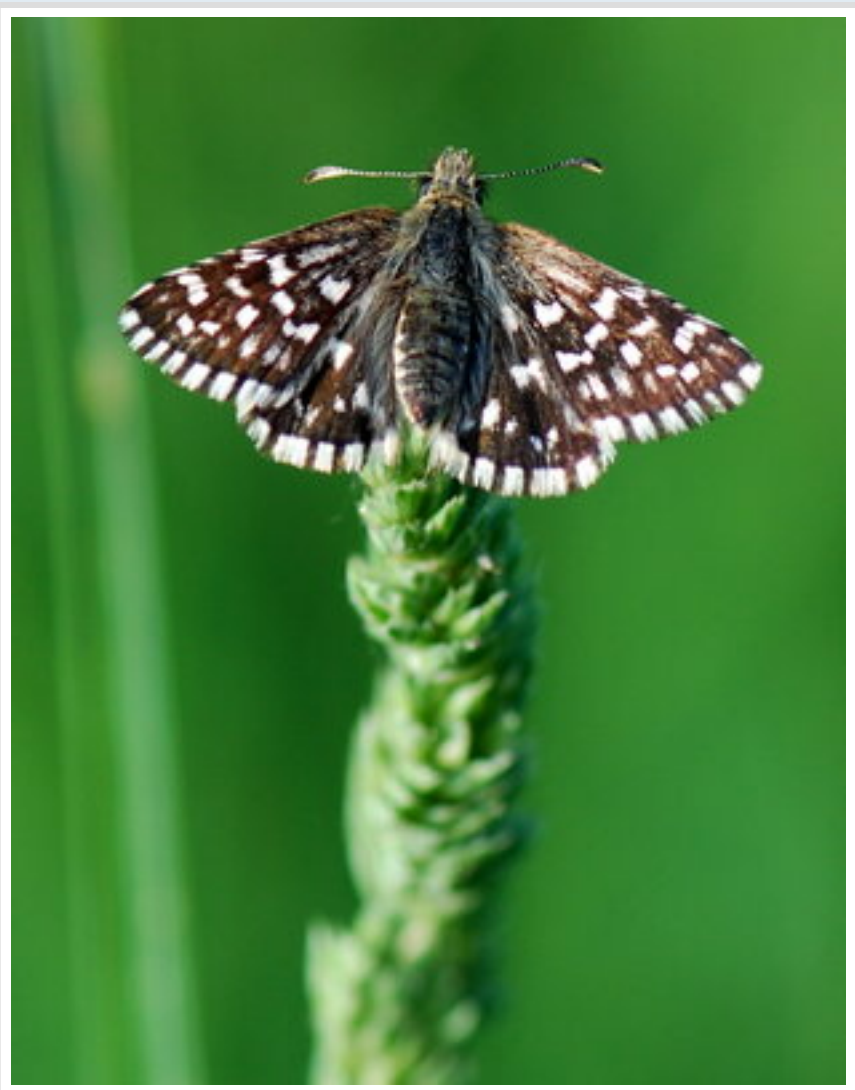




Having to tear myself away from the Small Blues I continued on down the "tunnel" and it seemed that the Blues were now replaced by Grizzlies and again cohabiting seemed to be all the rage with plenty of roosts hosting 2 or more Grizzlies. Although in some cases the reason soon became apparent!



By now my meanderings had brought me to the end and the tunnel opened out onto the down near the rings. Here there was a lone Peacock enjoying the last sun of the day and also more Grizzlies and the occasional Dingy. With time ticking by I thought that I needed to be heading back so once more into the tunnel I headed. This time a Speckled Wood greeted me and then a smaller, blue sized butterfly flitted around on the Hawthorn. A Green Hairstreak at last – now I just had to watch to see if it would land. It did...but too high and in such a position that I couldn't get the lens on it! So close!! Oh well perhaps that is the way it will be for me and Green Hairstreaks this year. As I headed back I was cheered up no end with more encounters with Grizzlies and Small Blues as well as a Small Heath and once almost back near the car a Yellowhammer.





So now I've definitely seen a Green Streak I might find one to actually photograph...
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 29-May-12 07:20 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

So now I've definitely seen a Green Streak I might find one to actually photograph...

Persistence pays off, Wurzel!

I knew you'd get there in the end. 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 30-May-12 07:12 AM GMT

Glad to see you got your Greenstreak Wurzel 😊

Loved the Small Blue photos with the contrasting dusting of blue scales against the brown background.

The yellowhammer shot is smashing 😊👏

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 31-May-12 07:09 AM GMT

Cheers David – now I just need to get a photo of one! 😊

Cheers for your comments Philzoid – all photos from luck rather than judgement!

Last night I took a flying visit to Bentley Wood in order to make the most of the nice weather while it lasts and also to get some more photos of Small Pearls that were slightly less turbo charged. I was also hoping that I might be able to get some shots of the Small Pearls with the sun shining through their wings to give the stained glass window effect...

The first butterfly of the evening was a solitary Speckled Wood who greets me along the path flitting between shadows and glaring evening sun. Even though it's past 6pm it's still really warm so perhaps the other butterflies will still be as active?

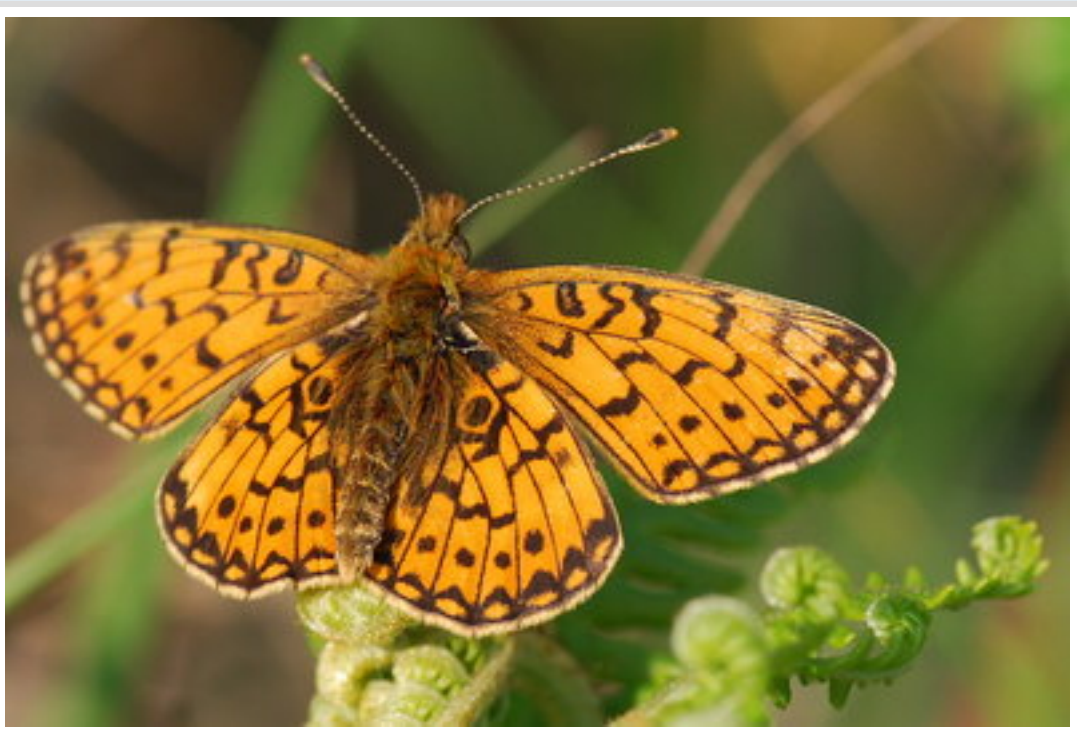
Once on site the second butterfly whizzes past, after a short while it lands just long enough for me to see that it's a Grizzlie. Then a slightly larger and more beige something blurs by – this time a Dingy Skipper.

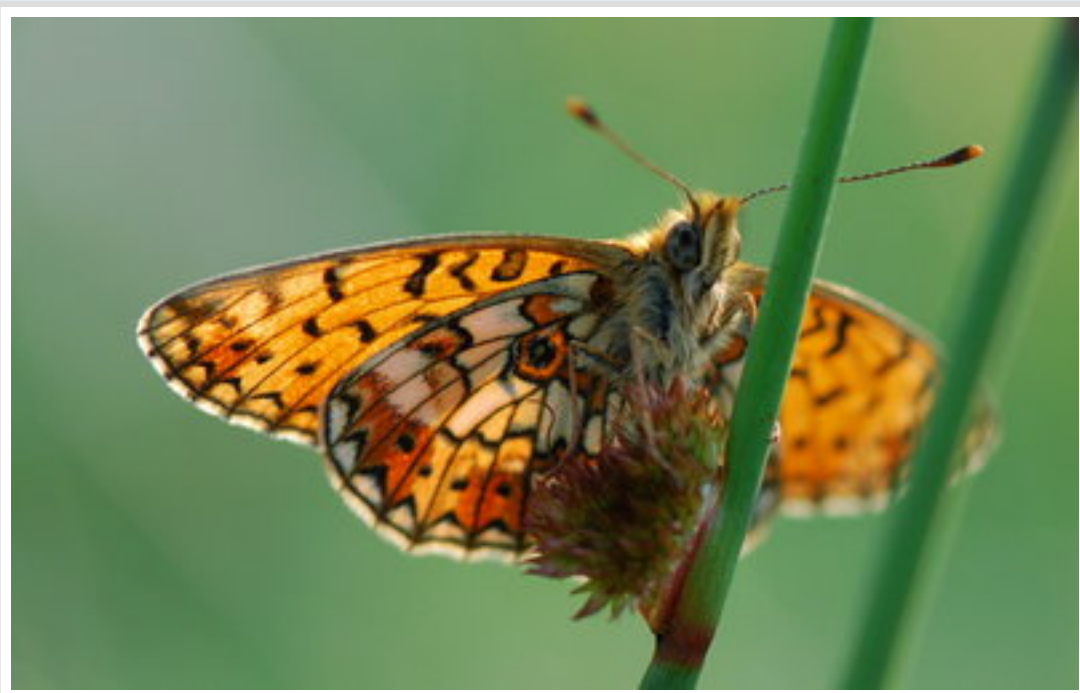


Next is a very battered and tired looking Pearl Bordered Fritillary and I knew it was this species before it had even landed by the much paler colouration. It's either had a lucky escape from a predator or a very busy fortnight of hard living!



Finally something ever so slightly smaller but much brighter caught my eye – a Small Pearl. Over the next 20 minutes it didn't leave my side and produced all manner of poses – up high, down low, wings open wide (showing the non-flying chevrons), the slightly down-folded wings, closed wings and finally the all important open wings with the sun behind shot that I came for.





Job done, time to head home with a bottle of “Proper job” waiting – very appropriate! Looks like I’ve worn out Bentley for the time being, only 5 butterflies, but 5 species tonight, so I probably won’t be back now for a good few weeks...I wonder what’s going on at Garston Wood?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 01-Jun-12 02:32 AM GMT

Beautiful photo of the Yellowhammer Wurzel.

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 01-Jun-12 03:09 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Yet again more great piccies, especially of the SPBF and PBF's.

I am yet to snap either on my mobile phone mission, nor even see one; 🙄

So even though I chuckle about your GHS scenario, I am longing to see these!

Flutter on!

CJB

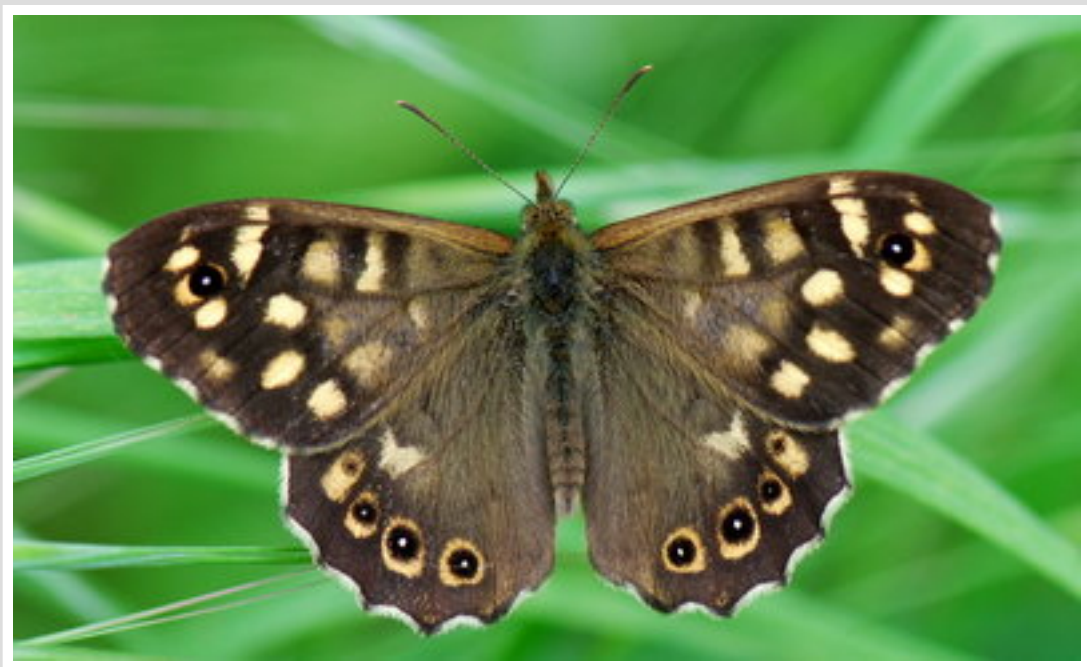
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Jun-12 07:53 AM GMT

Thanks for your comments CJB and Pauline! 😊

Having checked the rather depressing weather reports I decided to give my wife a break and take the kids out for the morning as this might be the last chance for the foreseeable future! Having done Bentley to death and with the problem of the local park at Five Rivers as a distraction we set off for Martin Down. "Who knows..." I thought "...perhaps I might find my first Brown Argus of the year, but I know what I won't find!" So muttering under my breath about green and streak and hair I unloaded the girls from the car. The car park was packed - it seems we'd arrived at the same time as a mothing party were packing up and a birding party were setting off. As usual I ploughed my own furrow, let the birders go, and then promptly headed off in the opposite direction! Luckily for me that was the route I'd intended.

So along the hedgerow we walked, me in the ruts, the girls on either side on the raised parts of the track. They were great - Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, Small Heath all pointed out and then the blues - Common and Small. Both girls took great delight in how small the Small Blues were. Then we reached the first gated area. A brief look found a pair of Speckled Wood but not a lot else so we continued along the track.



As we set off up the "tunnel" I was hoping for good things as it should have been more sheltered from the wind but it actually seemed like it was acting as a funnel forcing the air along it. With this small problem and what with my younger daughter being such a short arse and the grass/nettles/prickles being so high we had to turn back but not before noting a male Orange-tip patrolling along the hedge and another pair of Speckled Wood. So we set off back to the car and while I was watching a female Orange-tip something small and green caught my eye, almost like a flying emerald. Surely not! But yes it was! Finally! A Green hairstreak. 😲😲 This one kept close to the ground so I presume it was a female. During the five minutes it deemed to share with me I clicked away, the relief causing a little camera shake but I noticed it's brown socks -something I'd not seen before. I can't work out why I only saw them here today - I've looked in this area a couple of times over the last couple of weeks with no luck so why now? The only difference is the time of day. Every other time was in the afternoon or early evening whereas today it was first thing in the morning - so a belated thank you to Phil and Rosalyn for pointing that out! 😊



Battered, scarred (bird attack) and replete of scales – but who cares it's a hairstreak and it's green!



On the way back feeling jubilant (very appropriate for this weekend) we were joined by more butterflies. There were Small Heath, Common and Small Blues in the longer grass so you'd have to lean over to try and get some shots. Along the margins were battered and worn Grizzlies and on the path itself Dingy Skippers. My younger daughter found one of these to be most amusing as it skittered along the path in front of us, settling then moving forward, then settling, then flying forward etc etc. "Why doesn't he go over there?" she kept enquiring, so in the end we had to walk as close to the edge of the path as we could while she directed us away from the "poor little dingy"!

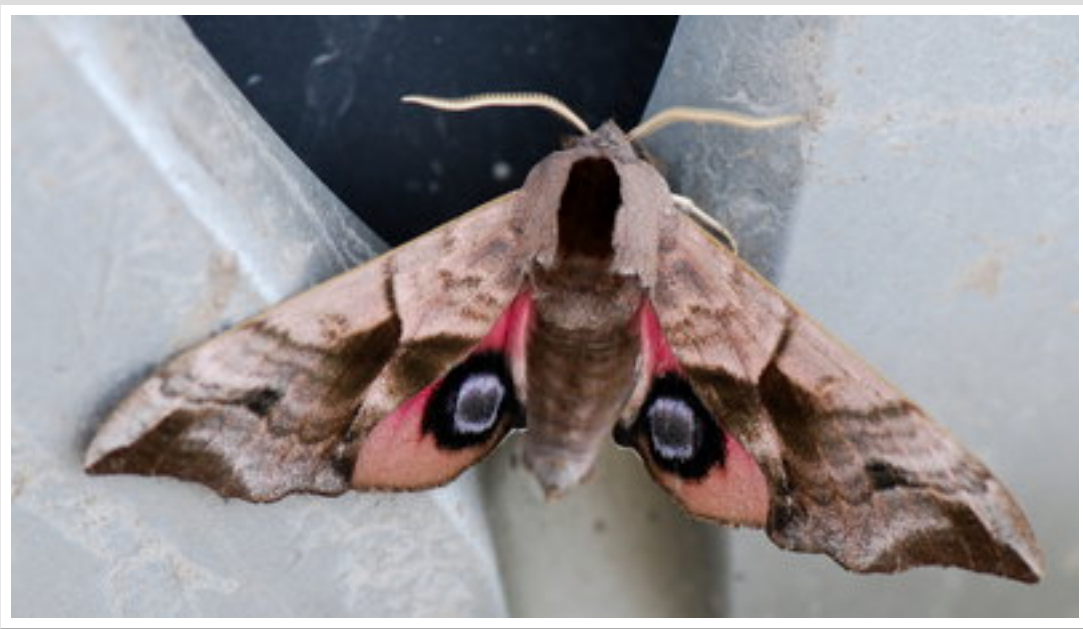
We were almost back at the car when everything seemed to appear. There were Small and Common Blues, another Dingy on the path and a golden blur that went by. I followed it and then made the approach and it was my first Golden Skipper this year – a Large Skipper!



Another Small Blue almost in my car was too tempting to resist despite the protestations from the girls who by now had drunk their drinks and eaten their bribe sweets.



Once back at the car we packed up and I went to open the door when I noticed something on the wheel - a huge moth. It seems the moth trappers had emptied their trap and this beauty was left behind, an Eyed Hawk Moth.



As I was carrying it over to the hedge because I didn't think it would be able to hang onto the wheel all the way home I noticed this one as well which I think is a Pale tussock?



With that we loaded up and headed home for lunch – finally a Greenstreak, but still no Brown Argus...and so it begins again... 😊 Still by the time the weather improves I should think there will be plenty more just itching to emerge:lol:
Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 03-Jun-12 08:06 AM GMT

Congratulations on the Green Hairstreak, Wurzel! 😊 My current nemesis is the Small Tortoiseshell...

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 03-Jun-12 06:31 PM GMT

Great Pictures and well done on photographing the GHS. 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 03-Jun-12 07:15 PM GMT

Great shots Wurzel and well done on your Green Hairstreak 😊

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 03-Jun-12 08:31 PM GMT

A splendid array of species there, Wurzel. The Hawk Moth must almost have eclipsed the 'Greenstreak'.

Nice to see Large Skippers out. They'll keep us company till August now.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 04-Jun-12 07:10 AM GMT

Cheers Dave (Millerd) I've only seen three Small Torts this year which is well down but there's still plenty of time to catch your nemesis! 😊

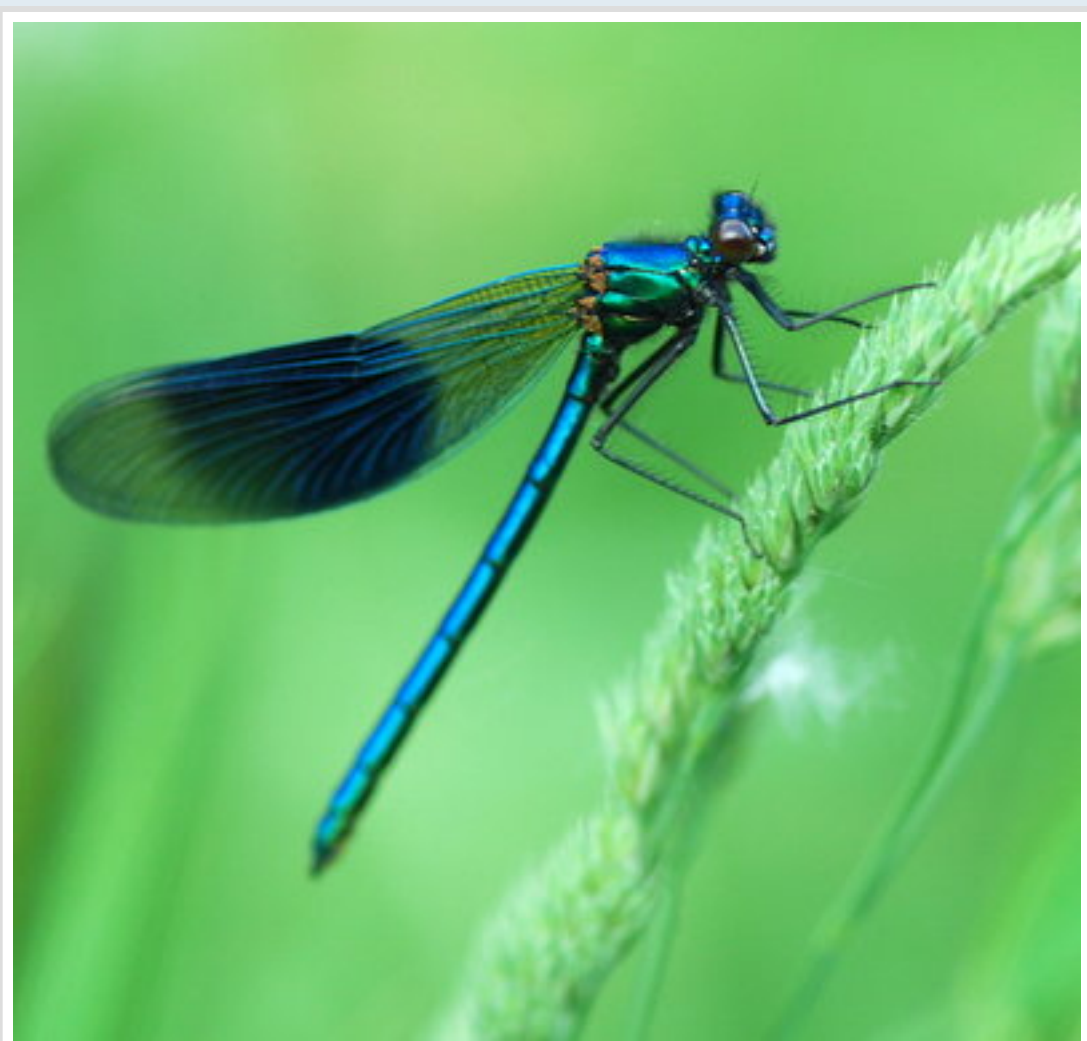
Thanks Debbie and Neil for your kind comments 😊

Cheers Dave M – nothing could of eclipsed the Green Streak for me...well maybe a Clouded Yellow? 😊

On Wednesday night I dropped my older daughter off at Rainbows and headed over to Five Rivers to check out my local patch. As I arrived it still felt warm and balmy I was hoping for some good sightings. But what I found was a series of mass emergences and a more general “massing”... I headed straight towards the banks which are good for Blues but there were none there this time. Instead as I skirted the longer grass at the edge of the bank huge numbers of black and white things would fly up then drop then fly up, then drop almost as if they were attached to a Yo-Yo. No matter where I looked there were huge numbers doing exactly the same thing. A mass emergence of Mayflies. I'm not certain how many species were part of the emergence, possibly just the one *Ephemera dancia* and I managed to photograph one individual.



On the other side of the Hawthorn hedge on the more sheltered side of the bank there were also plenty of the yo-yo like mayflies and they were joined by vast squadrons of Damselflies – all of which seemed to be Banded Demoiselles. These were even more skittish than the Mayflies, rising into the air when I was 3 metres away, and at one point because a solitary male Orange-tip patrolled by! The majority were the showy males with their metallic blue bodies and dark spots on their wings.





I did find a few females who looked to all intents and purposes like a different species. They were green instead of blue, lacked the large dark spots on their wings which instead had a small white spot near the tip and their abdomens end in red making them look a little like traffic lights. 😊



As I rounded the corner at the top of the reserve and passed breaks in the Hawthorn the air around it would become alive with small moths. When they landed they possessed some of the largest antennae I have ever seen! I thought they were more Longhorn moths but they weren't gold/green like I'd previously seen. The good old Collins Guide (which I have to return to the library again having used up my allowed "restamping") could only offer up one idea for the species – *Nemophora degeerella* – but the photo of that has blue bands on the wings and the overall colour seems more lime/green? Whereas my individuals were more straw and gold coloured? Any ideas greatly received. 😊



Further round at the Northern corner of the reserve I finally found a couple of Common Blues, one of which didn't lead me in the customary "merry dance" and sat as good as gold for me so I could get a photograph of a butterfly and so justify this post! 😊



As I headed back and with only a few moments to spare I had my eye caught by a brilliant scarlet from in the longer grass. A Cinnabar.



Still no Brown Argus - but I'll try again at the weekend. Perhaps it's still a little too early for them at this site?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 04-Jun-12 07:46 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Lovely composition of the Mayfly and you've really captured the colours in the Demoiselles.

Your moth is definitely a male *Nemophora degeerella*. I was watching them earlier today dancing in the sun.

Good hunting.

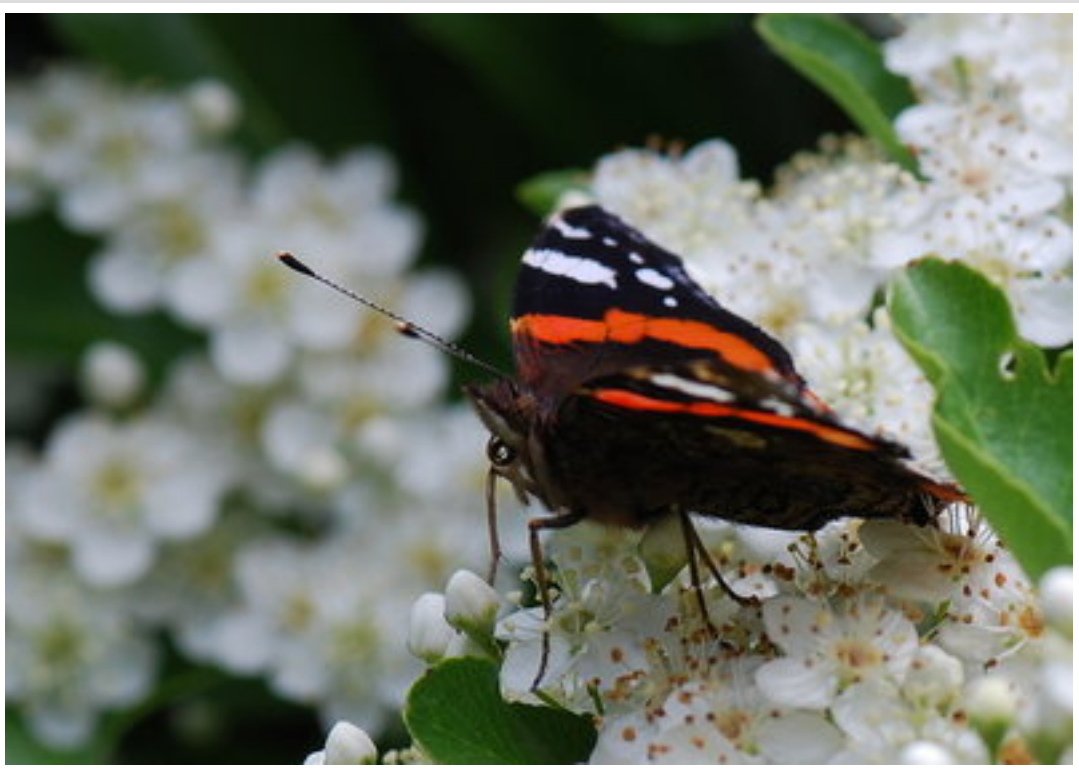
Kind regards. Mark

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 06-Jun-12 07:19 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comments Mark - I thought the Moth was one and the same but the Collins guide confused me slightly 😞 but that's been the only time it's let itself down in the 6 weeks I've had it out from the library. 😊

On Sunday I managed to sneak some time at Five Rivers (I said I'd get try to get back at the weekend) while my wife took the girls swimming. It was a bit breezy and at times it would cool rapidly when the sun disappeared behind a cloud but I knew it was going to be good when I found a Red Admiral in the front garden while I was packing the kids into the car.



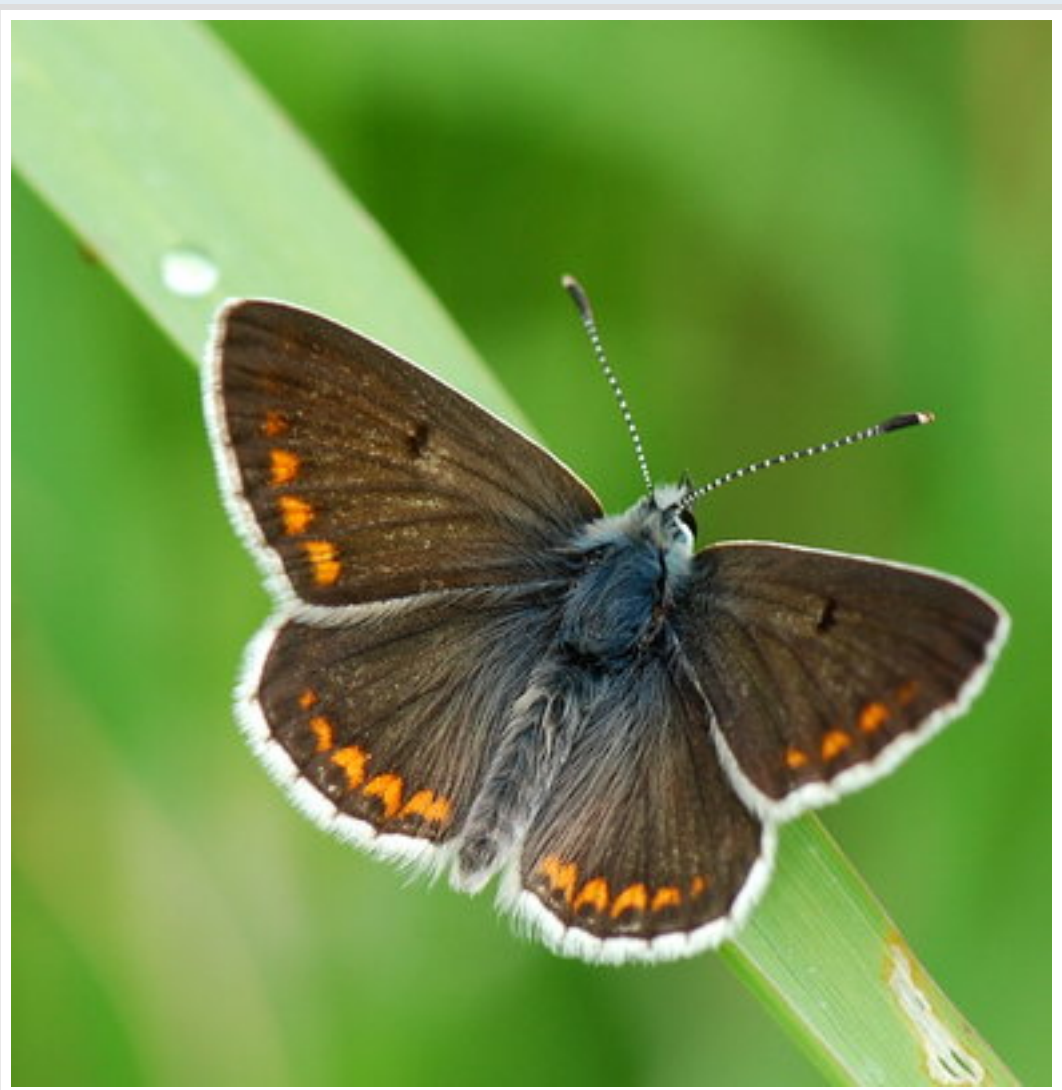
First up I checked the grasslands in the middle of the reserve and there were plenty of Mayflies still around, yo-yoing up from the grass as you'd walk by or the breeze would catch the seed heads. There wasn't an awful lot around here apart from a couple of Small Heaths.



I then moved onto the banks, the more sheltered side had more of the Mayflies but no butterflies so I worked round to the other side where the grass is up above my waist now on either side of the track. A couple of Speckies flitted along the edge of the hedge and male Common Blue also did a fly by. There were also the squadrons of Banded Demoiselles one of which seemed to be struggling as it was carrying its afternoon tea. You see these ethereal beings, waive like and flitting like little jewels in the sunlight and you forget that they're ferocious predators.



Something small and silvery caught my attention. Judging by the size and the silver flash of the wings I immediately thought Brown Argus. When I got a view of the settled butterfly I wasn't exactly sure as something about the underside seemed wrong plus it's also been a number of months since I've last had to try and differentiate female Common Blues and Brown Argus. What made it tricky was that the first two spots seemed more vertical than horizontal, but the silvery appearance when in flight and the lack of the cell spot on the under wing reinforced that it was a Brown Argus. It should be as simple as just determining the sex of the individual but I'm out of practice and can't remember how thin the abdomen has to be to make it a male and can't decide whether the abdomen extends lower than the wing tips far enough either? So for now my first Brown Argus...man I'm rusty!





I retraced my footsteps back and bumped into a definite Common Blue.



That was it for butterflies today but I did find a rather nice *Volucella bombylans* (hoverfly bee mimic) which was mimicking a *Bombus lucorum*.



On my last couple of trips I have been surprised to see small Small Heaths that would take off from the grass and then land in the shrubbery or small trees dotted across the reserve. I managed to follow one and found this small moth - which I believe is a Yellow Shell - *Camptogramma bilineata* so now I can use this behaviour to prevent futile attempts at getting Small Heath photos.



Not a bad hour and half and I'm glad that I managed to get out as now the weather has taken a real turn for the worse for the foreseeable future. Oh well there's always hope that the weathermen have got it wrong...
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 06-Jun-12 08:03 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel, some cracking photos there, I particularly like the shot of the Small Heath 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Jun-12 06:47 AM GMT

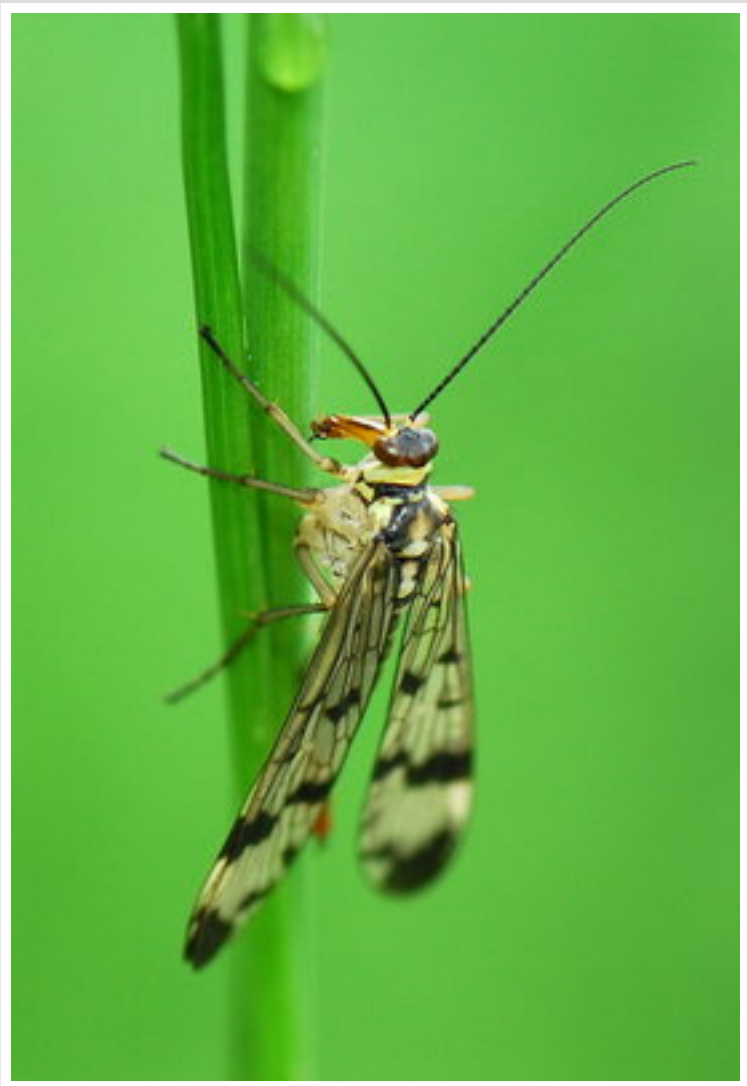
Cheers Neil that shot is one of the few that I've actually thought about getting/planned to get! 😊

Yesterday morning we visited the girls cousin in the Chalke Valley. It gave me an opportunity to check out Ebble Valley, a small field jam packed with wildflowers, privately owned but with public access allowed. As I hopped over the stile it was cool but warming as the sun had put in an appearance and within two strides along the path I was soaked from the waist down! Still as I couldn't get any wetter I pressed on hopefully.

There were bugs a plenty with some easier to identify than others. The bloated form of a female *Gastrophysa viridula* carrying it's eggs is very different to the shots I managed to get of the same species a few months back while copulating!



Then there was the Scorpion Fly, but a female with her abdomen “fading” away to nothing rather than the “poison tipped barb” of the male.



Then there were some new species a colourful marked Sawfly Rhogogaster, a large beetle which I tentatively named *Necrodes littoralis* and an unknown fly. The beetle looked very strange while I was photographing it and with its large orange eyes I thought it should have been easy to identify. When I looked at it at home and zoomed in I found that the eyes weren't eyes at all but actually a mite grimly hanging onto the carapace





I'd walked to the end of the path now and turned round to make my way back. It was warming nicely and a flash of green whizzed by and headed off and up the hill - another Greenstreak, but as always very camera shy of me! 😞 Tutting I carried on but soon had to shelter under a Hawthorn myself as the heavens opened and the sun disappeared. Now drenched from the waist down from last nights rain still sticking to the grasses and drenched from the waist up from the rain storms I called it a day and headed back to get the girls...

In the afternoon the rain passed and the sun came out but I was doing the proper family thing so didn't get to go out. Instead I headed out to Martin Down as soon as the girls were down for the night!
Once there I headed straight up and along the large hedge at Sillens Lane. Despite it feeling warm and there being sun the wind was pretty strong so finding butterflies was very difficult. I finally found some at Borkerley clinging to the grass stems and doing their best to roost. A single Small Blue and 3 Common Blues, they were a bugger to get shots of. Just as you'd focus the wind would start up and the grass would swing back and forth manically. The I'd wait for the wind to die down a little, refocus and just as I'd be about to click...the wind would start again! I finally gave up here and just went for an evening walk instead.

Whilst Butterflies were hard to find birds were everywhere and I almost trod on a Badger at one point!

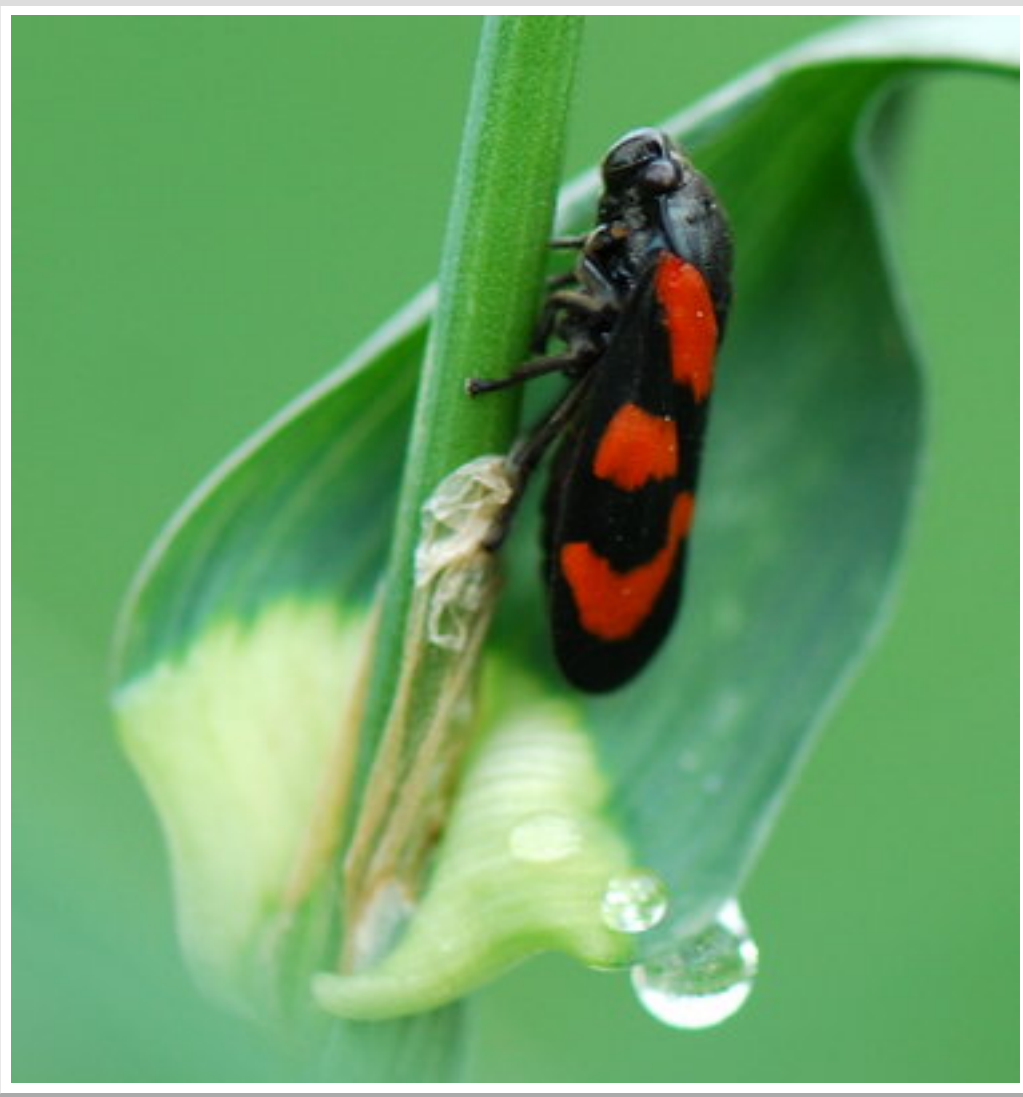


best shot I've got of a Badger - I'm always so surprised I forget to shoot

There were Skylarks, Whitethroats, Lesser Whitethroats, I also saw and heard Cuckoos and Turtle Doves (a couple of each) and a Grey Partridge. In the middle of the down is a large island of Shrubbery and in this sheltered area I Cuckoo did a fly by while I was getting shots of my second Small Blue of the evening and simultaneously being serenaded by a Turrriing Turtle Dove.



Realising that I was on a hiding to nothing I worked my way back to the car and while I was getting a shot of a leaf hopper, *Cercopis vulnerata*, I heard an unusual noise from low down in the vegetation. It was a kind of whistle/warble "wet yer lips". A Quail no less so I tried imitating it and for the next few minutes we had a bit of a conversation going but it wouldn't show itself so I headed home.



Hopefully I can get out on Saturday as that looks to be the only good day in the next few...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 08-Jun-12 08:40 PM GMT

What fabulous pictures 😊

Debbie

Re: Wurzel

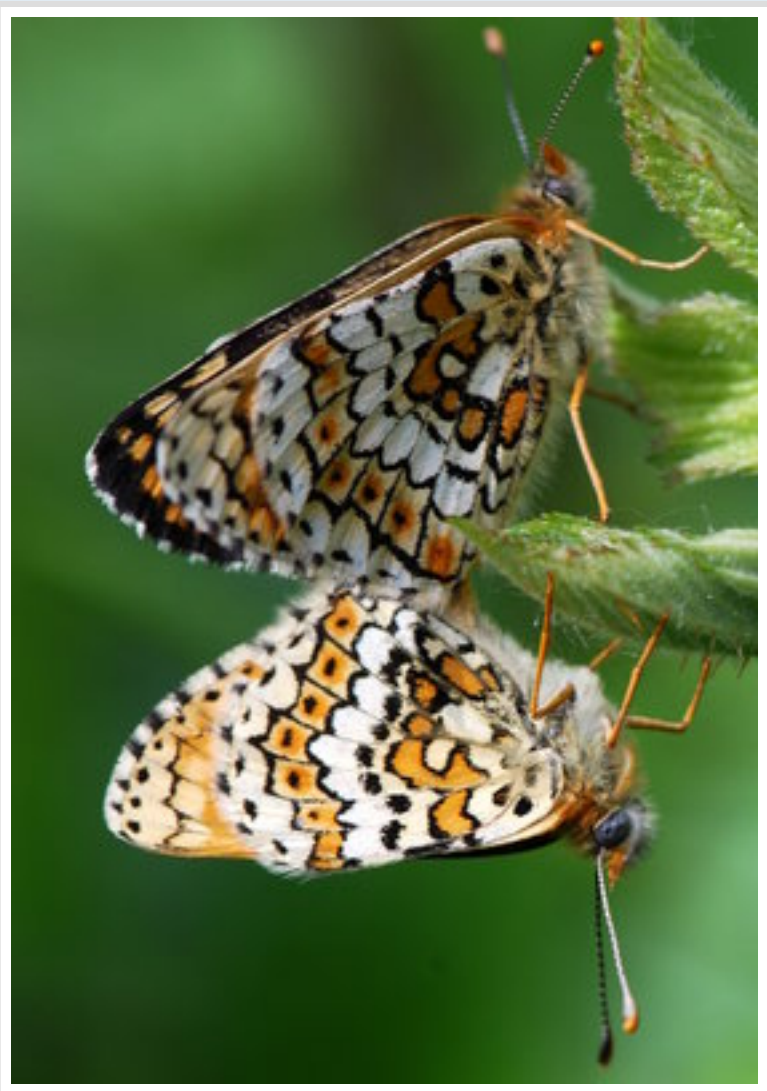
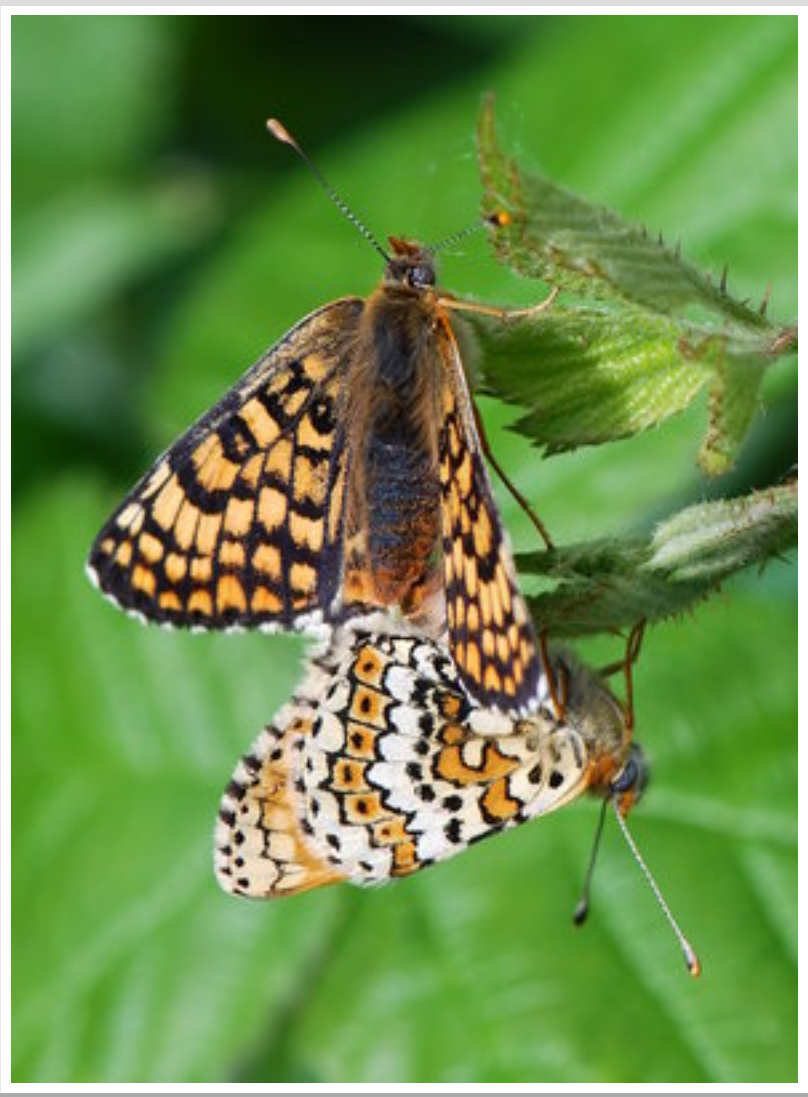
by Wurzel, 11-Jun-12 06:46 AM GMT

Thanks Debbie 😊🙏!

Kitty and I went on a bit of an expedition yesterday, journeying further than ever before for a butterfly. We arrived at Wrecclesham before lunch and headed straight across the cricket pitch to the site. From the gate it looked pretty intact, with a good coverage of Ox Eyes and other wildflowers. The ditch was a simple hop over and almost as soon as we were over the fence we came across a pair of Glanvilles, then a Common Blue and also a Green Hairstreak!



Walking along side the fence we headed down into the quarry and met up with Philzoid, Izzy and also Tuts. Over the next hour we walked about 200 metres and saw numerous, very fresh Glanvilles including a mating pair tucked away in some Brambles. They were there for a fair old while so I reeled off a load of shots relishing the views of the gorgeous undersides.



While we were stopping every three paces or so for another Glanville we noticed a slightly paler, less heavily marked individual. I managed to get both upper and under wing shots and it appears that the third line in is missing (is this the "post discal"? - a bit like the individual from Sand Point that David M found. Tuts has already suggested a couple of names for it as a possible named aberration.



There were other butterflies around - Common Blues (males and females), Small Heath and a bright Peacock but by far the most numerous were the Glanvilles - all of which appeared very fresh - I suspect that we saw at least 12 in this one little area of the site. An absolutely cracking butterfly! It was very pleasant to be in June and actually have some sun and more pleasant to enjoy some great butterflies with like minded people. It was all very orderly and polite, with people waiting for their turn at shots not like some twitches I've been on where people seem to be trampling over each other to set up their scopes!



Having had our fill we headed back to the edge of the site to visit the play park for lunch. As we left we noticed some great Bee Orchids and we were wished a fond farewell by Mr Osso Speckie (I think that's what he was called). He appeared to be winking me a goodbye?



This site has everything – similar habitat to the Isle of Wight without the expense of getting there, great butterflies, easy parking and most importantly a play park with which to bribe your young apprentices with! As the girls swung and we ate lunch we decided to head over to Chiddingfold, Botany Bay to see what was there...

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 11-Jun-12 04:15 PM GMT

Really pleased that you saw some Glanvilles Wurzel and it's great to know that there are more about than the paltry 4 I saw tho still less than the many hundreds of last year. I was hoping one of the group might spot a Heath but will just have to make do with an aberration 😊. It is a shame we missed you at Botany Bay but you definitely picked the right day!

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 11-Jun-12 06:40 PM GMT

Excellent images, Wurzel. Sounds like a great day (with even a Green Hairstreak thrown in!)

Yes, your weakly marked Glanville is similar to the one I saw at Sand Point, though if anything I think yours is even more bereft.

I'm pleased to see the site is still relatively undisturbed. When I read P.J. Underwood's post on here last month I feared the worst.

I wonder whether it's worth looking for Heaths there in a week or two?

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 12-Jun-12 06:33 AM GMT

Lovely Pictures wurzel a pleasure to the eye, Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 12-Jun-12 07:23 AM GMT

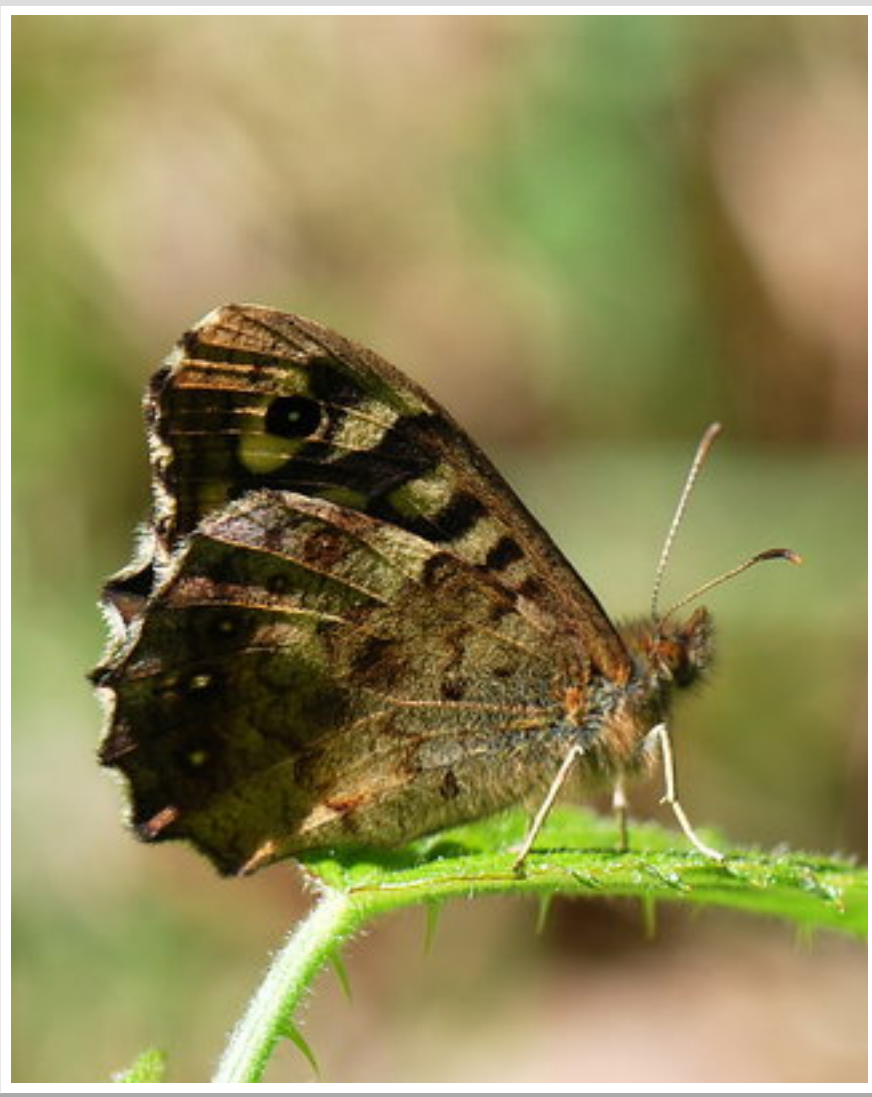
Cheers Pauline – if you hear about any Heaths make sure you let me know – SATNAV can get me there in an hour and 8 minutes 😊😊

Cheers David for your kind comments – the site looks in fine fettle – although saying that this is the first time I've ever been there!

Cheers Goldie for your kind comment – I'd swap all of them for one of your Small Pearls! 😊🍷

Botany Bay...

...so after a quick 30 minute drive through some lovely villages we found ourselves at Botany Bay. As we set off down the path the sun came out to greet us as did a very dark Speckie. Is it just me or is it always a slight relief when you've seen the first butterfly when visiting a site?



We wove our way along the path and over the bridge and just as Philzoid was saying “if they’re still out we’ll definitely see them along here” when something small and white caught my eye. My first Wood White. I leant over and took a few shots – probably my easiest ever new butterfly – no trawling of the internet trying to work out where to see them, no hiking up hills or down coombes, no frustration because after plenty of stalking it won’t settle and definitely no sitting and waiting for hours before heading home and seeing nowt! Just look over, focus and click!



Once one had appeared two or three joined it along the path as we continued up the hill towards the fork. As we were walking Kitty spotted an unusual bee and called me over. I’ve obviously been training her well as it was something I’ve been hoping to find for a while now – a long horned bee with antennae longer than it’s body – *Eucera longicornis*.



I got slightly distracted when a small brownish thrush with a noticeable red tail and rump flitted across the path – possibly a female Redstart but more likely a Nightingale? But just before we reached the clearing I stumbled on three Wood Whites on the same flower head. Two were in mid copulation and I don’t know what the interloper was doing, watching and waiting for its turn perhaps?



Once in the clearing the sun really came on strong and butterflies seemed to be putting on a show for us as species after species would suddenly appear, pose and then make way for the next act. First up we had more Wood Whites and I apologise now for the number of shots but this was my first encounter with this species and I was slightly enchanted by them. Their small stature and delicate almost hopeless flight as well as their ethereal and translucent appearance mesmerised me. Then a Brimstone showed up; not wanting to miss out on any attention. This was followed by the Skippers Dingy, Grizzled and finally a Large. Next on the billing were Blues with a small patch of longer tussocks offering us "Blue on a stick" shots of male and a very fresh and blue female. An Orange Moth turned up, must have got confused and the wrong date! Before the grand finale of more of those Wood Whites finally nearing properly, getting their whole head in sometimes and taking on the hue of the flower they were feeding on.





Looks like a horse head?





An absolutely fantastic day - with a species I didn't think I'd get to see this year, an aberrant, a lifer bee and a lifer Butterfly! 😊😊😊 Also I still have to remind myself that this was only two days ago - but with the weather we've just had it feels like another lifetime! As it's set to continue I'm glad I got out when I did!
Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 12-Jun-12 06:19 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,
I am chuffed for you that you finally snapped yourself a GHS!!! 😊
Good for you! I can only imagine how pleased you were/are.
Flutter on.
CJB

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 12-Jun-12 06:26 PM GMT

Oh, and also for the Wood Whites, which is another absentee on my mobile! 🇬🇧
Flutter on!
CJB

Re: Wurzel

by Rosalyn, 12-Jun-12 10:36 PM GMT

We arrived at Wrecclesham before lunch

Greens everywhere! You just needed to get up earlier 😊. I always think of Wood Whites as Woodland Faeries too. Nice pics

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 13-Jun-12 02:42 AM GMT

I bet you wouldn't swop them all now Wurzel 😊 Goldie

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 13-Jun-12 02:56 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,
Excellent reports and photos, I really enjoyed reading those 😊
Cheers,
Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 13-Jun-12 04:32 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,
Glad to see you made it to Chiddingfold Wood to see and photograph the Wood Whites. That Long-Horned Bee was an excellent find, i`ve only ever seen them there once before a couple of years ago. Your bird with the rustic tail was definitely a Nightingale, its not really the right habitat for the Redstart. Next time you are planning a visit let me know, and i will pop over.
All the best,
Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 15-Jun-12 07:17 AM GMT

CJB – Cheers for your continued support with my Greenstreak Quest 😊 WRT Wood Whites check out Chiddingfold for the second brood it was as easy as shooting fish in a barrel!

Rosalyn thank you for your kind comment. When I started butterflying I always arrived far too early and so by the time the butterflies were up and about I'd have drunk my coffee and was thinking about heading off. It seems that with Greenstreaks I need to revert to my less tardy ways 😊 – always difficult with small children 😊

Cheers for your kind comments Neil – I hope I didn't go overboard with the Wood Whites! 😊

Nick I can't take any credit for the E.longicornis as Kitty found it – Philzoid and I are training our daughters up to act like sniffer dogs but for butterflies/other mini beasts 😊 WRT the Redstart/Nightingale my ID was based on birding in the New Forest where a ruddy bummed bird would be a Redstart but I'm more than happy to count it as a Nightingale – that looks better on my year list 😊

Yesterday I had to go to Bath Uni to finish up this years PGCE business. I left just after break but having had a few cups of coffee prior to leaving felt an urgent need to "turn me bike round". So I found somewhere to pull in and did a bit of communing with nature during which I noticed a Common Blue. So I nipped back to the car grabbed my camera and reeled off a few shots. He looked pretty bated with the wing margins rubbed down almost to the

blue on the fore wing and I asked myself how much of his dishevelled appearance was down to the recent deluges we've received? Still back on the road...



Once home I completed my usual Wednesday night ritual – drop Kitty at Rainbows and fly over to Five Rivers for a mid week relax! 😊 The first butterfly I saw was a pristine Common Blue, absolutely flawless and a total contrast to my Blue earlier in the day.



I worked my way down the bank and round to the other side but had no luck finding any Brown Argus. So I worked my way along the narrow path, no Mayflies took off and only one or two Banded Demoiselles...but as I was brushing the longer grass away from my armpits something dark flitted by. I followed trying my best to lean over and not disturb the grasses until eventually it landed in an area that had either been blown over by the recent strong winds or had been crushed by dogs not on leads 😬 so I could get in a bit closer (so dogs do have a use then 😊). It was a very dark male Meadow Brown, my first of the year and the orange was really bright and very contrasting.





At the top of the site I couldn't find any more butterflies no matter how hard I peered at grass stems. I thought at one point that I'd found a white but it actually turned out to be a delicately marked White Ermine. This was followed by a Burnet Companion Moth revealing it's orangey, golden hind wings.



On the way back to the car another Meadow Brown (or possibly the same?) was about, this time posing in shorter grass for the closed wing shot. I also found a male Scorpion Fly - looking all deadly and threatening.



So in the usual 55 minutes I found 2, possibly 3 butterflies...this time last year at this site I couldn't move for butterflies. It seems that butterflies are still emerging – just in very small numbers. Is this something we should be worried about or will it be all right if we actually get some warm and dry weather soon? Have I turned in the stereotypical old man – "I remember when this was all butterflies..." My wife would probably say yes after listening to me moaning on about the weather for the last fortnight 😬😬
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 15-Jun-12 08:06 AM GMT

Your new Common Blue is beautiful, Wurzel. He seems unusually furry – just the job for keeping out the wind. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 15-Jun-12 07:43 PM GMT

Rain 😞😞😞

Your photos 😊😊😊

Re: Wurzel

by NickMorgan, 15-Jun-12 09:31 PM GMT

Fantastic collection of pictures on this page. I am very envious of many of the species you have seen.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 16-Jun-12 06:38 AM GMT

Cheers Dave, Debbie and Nick for your very kind comments 😊😬

After spending the morning at my younger daughter's pre-school I had to head back to work for two whole lessons! As I was travelling over my lunchtime and it was apparent that I wouldn't be back in time to join my team mates for 5-side against the year 10's I pulled into Woodhenge for 10 minutes.

This site at around this time last year had Meadow Browns, Marbled Whites and Small Skippers. Today I found a very small moth and four butterflies. I know it was pretty windy and the sun was a bit hit or miss, and I was there for a very short time, but I had kinda hoped for a few more than four. I am really starting to worry now because there just don't seem to be the numbers of butterflies.

The micro moth was a tiny yet intricately patterned moth...



Two of the butterflies were Small Heaths that whizzed by along the tops of the long grasses and would then dip down and disappear. Then I was visited a couple of times by an Adonis Blue, my first of the year, and looking pretty tidy/fresh. The path I was on must have been recently mown as the grass was very close cropped and I knelt down to get an eye level view of the longer grasses. The Adonis would skim across the top of the grass heads and then as it reached the path it would plummet to earth, dropping like a stone to land in a crumpled, yet attractive heap. Twice I was privy to this unusual behaviour, it was almost as if the tall grasses offered the flying insect some form of upthrust?





Finally with time ticking on and tutor time beckoning I had to head back onto the road but not before stopping to get a contrastingly worn Common Blue taking on some much needed fuel.



So tomorrow looks pants but I might be able to swing a few visits next week during the evenings weather permitting (Slop Bog hopefully and the usual Five Rivers) and of course Sunday is Father's Day - so I'll keep my fingers crossed for some nice weather and possibly I can get out before family commitments at lunchtime?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Jun-12 06:50 AM GMT

Back along at work, when we actually had some warm and dry weather (can you remember that far back?) I thought I better make the most of it so I was out every lunch time I was able to (revision sessions aside). There weren't many different species about, maybe the occasional Holly Blue or White and of course the Orange-tips which seemed to be everywhere and for a very long period this year.

I was almost getting blasé about the ubiquitous nature of the Orange-tips that I stopped trying to get more of the usual shots with Orange-tips perched on various different flowers with their wings in various states of closure. Instead I started trying out one or two new things. The most obvious thing was to try out a few flying shots, in fact this would be advantageous because as the temperatures rose the Orange-tips reverted to their more usual habit of patrolling back and forth. It was a pretty easy thing to do I merely clicked my options wheel round from "macro" to "sports", found a patrolling male Orange-tip and clicked away with autofocus whirling. I only tried it about 10 times and most were terrible as it was very hard to follow the moving butterfly as it flew towards or away from you through the viewfinder. But of the 10 tries I was pretty happy with two of them, so I'll have to try this technique out again. I missed my chance when looking with Wood Whites as I didn't set the camera up right, and also they were my first Wood Whites so I concentrated on the classic shots, but next time...



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 17-Jun-12 07:20 AM GMT

Interesting! I think my camera has some kind of sports setting too – never thought of using it. I suppose it would work best on a butterfly moving linearly as with your Orange Tip – I particularly like the second shot.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 17-Jun-12 05:19 PM GMT

"millerd" wrote:

Interesting! I think my camera has some kind of sports setting too – never thought of using it. I suppose it would work best on a butterfly moving linearly as with your Orange Tip – I particularly like the second shot.

Cheers,

Dave

Me too, though I haven't seen any Orange Tips for a couple of weeks so I may have to experiment with a different species!

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-Jun-12 07:21 AM GMT

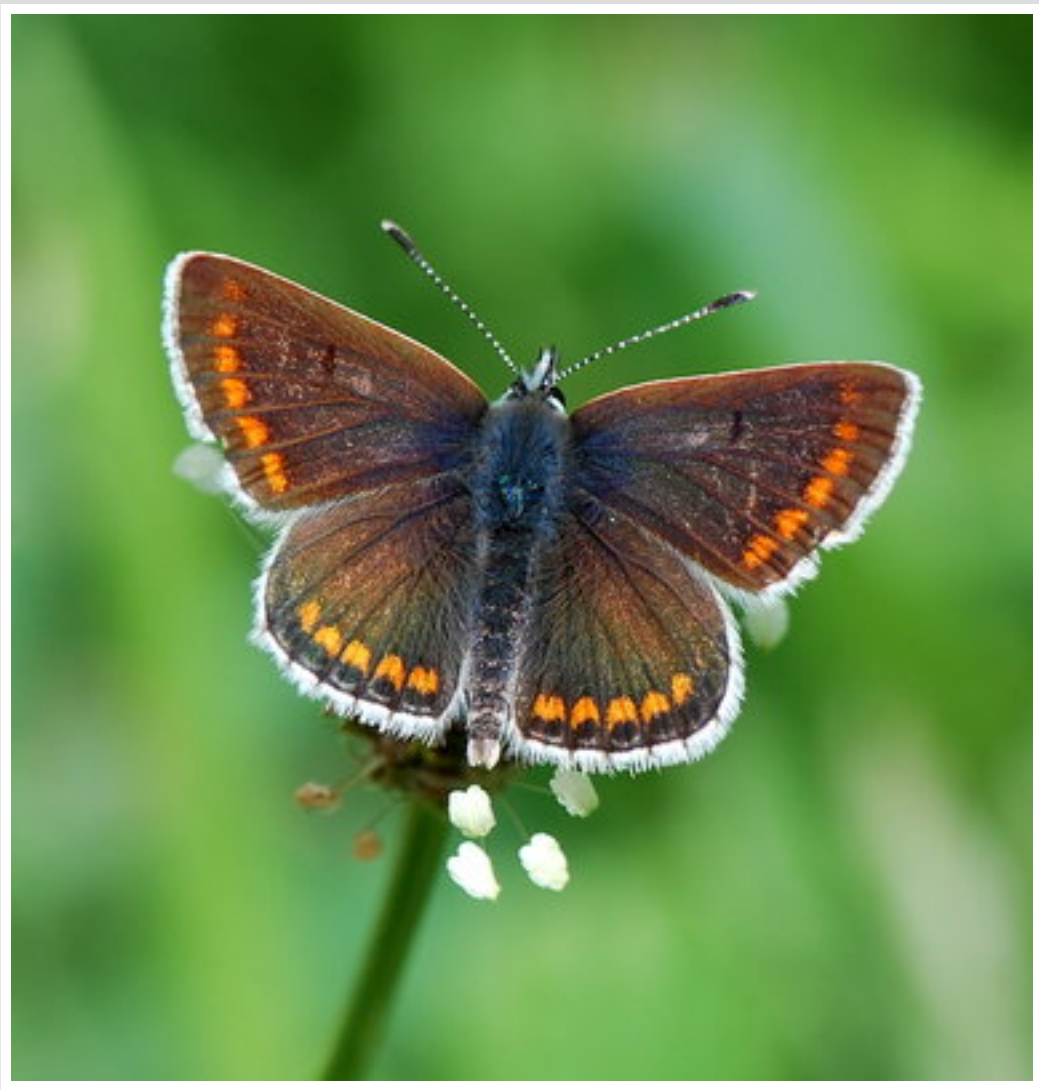
Cheers Dave and David – it is easier if they cross your path than if they fly towards or away from you. 😊

Father's Day at Martin Down was a mixed bag really. On arrival it felt warm and the sun was shining but the wind was still quite strong and it buffeted the long grass in great swathes. Along the path I found a pair of Brimstone and the female kept landing so I could get up close and personal. I've noticed the maroon hairs on their bodies before but never the bluish coloured hairs. Also I was surprised how the light was refracted from the female making it look so green.



The male was much more active and I tried out the sport mode again but the wind didn't help as I could just about follow the butterfly, just get autofocus to lock in and the wind would catch it and it was gone! Still the wind was actually beneficial in other ways as it gave the girls something to do and I left them flying their pocket kite so that I could get up to my hot spot. Once there the wind was actually whipping along the ditch instead of skimming across the tops, but the bottom area was quite productive with four Small Heaths, a good looking Common Blue and several Brown Argus (one of which looked nice and fresh) mobbing anything that came within a wing flap of them.





Also there was another blue butterfly which was much worn. I'm presuming it was a Common Blue but it had black spots along the hind wing margin - are these caused by wear and the under wing markings showing through from below? It was also posturing with its abdomen revealing what I take to be its genitalia. Once it had "flashed" it then tucked it away again back into the furry abdomen.



From there I wound my way back to my family who were still kite flying and we tried to get it all the way back to the car. On the way back I did take a slight detour with little L to visit the "secret area" as she called it. This is the island of Hawthorn in the middle of the down and as we walked up the tiny path to the centre there were three or four Small Blues - some looking more like Small Browns than Blues. Although worn some individuals still had traces of blue scaling which would normally suggest "male" although in this case they might have been the remnants of the blue background colour.



Once at the end of this small path it opens up into a large cleared circular area which is noticeably warmer than the surroundings as it is sheltered in all directions from the wind and acts like a suntrap. Whilst here a couple of Brown Argus and Small Blue flitted around along with a Meadow Brown. But time was almost up so we headed back to the car, lowered the kite and went for lunch.

Tomorrow I'm considering an after work dash to try for Silver Studded Blues at Slop Bog so hopefully the weather will play ball...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Jun-12 06:39 AM GMT

A couple of weeks back I managed to make a couple of visits to a Wiltshire Wood to find Marsh Fritillary. My first was during one of those rare warm and sunny days and the single individual that I managed to find was almost turbo charged. So much so that I only managed to fire off a couple of shots and then struggled to relocate it. It's flight was different from other Fritillaries in that it was more jinking, less direct and lacking any glides. Also it appeared more reddish than orange and much darker. Two bits of jizz to remember for future years. It would take off quite slowly and then rapidly accelerate as it flicked left then right a few times before suddenly dropping and disappearing from view.





A few days later I visited the same site and in the cooler temps it was much easier to locate and approach. I noticed that it had a tendency to feed on the small yellow flowers (Tormentil?) that poked up amongst the longer tor grasses. If this was the same individual then the few days had seriously taken their toll on it as it was obvious that some scales were lost and it was heading towards living up to it's old name of Greasy Fritillary.



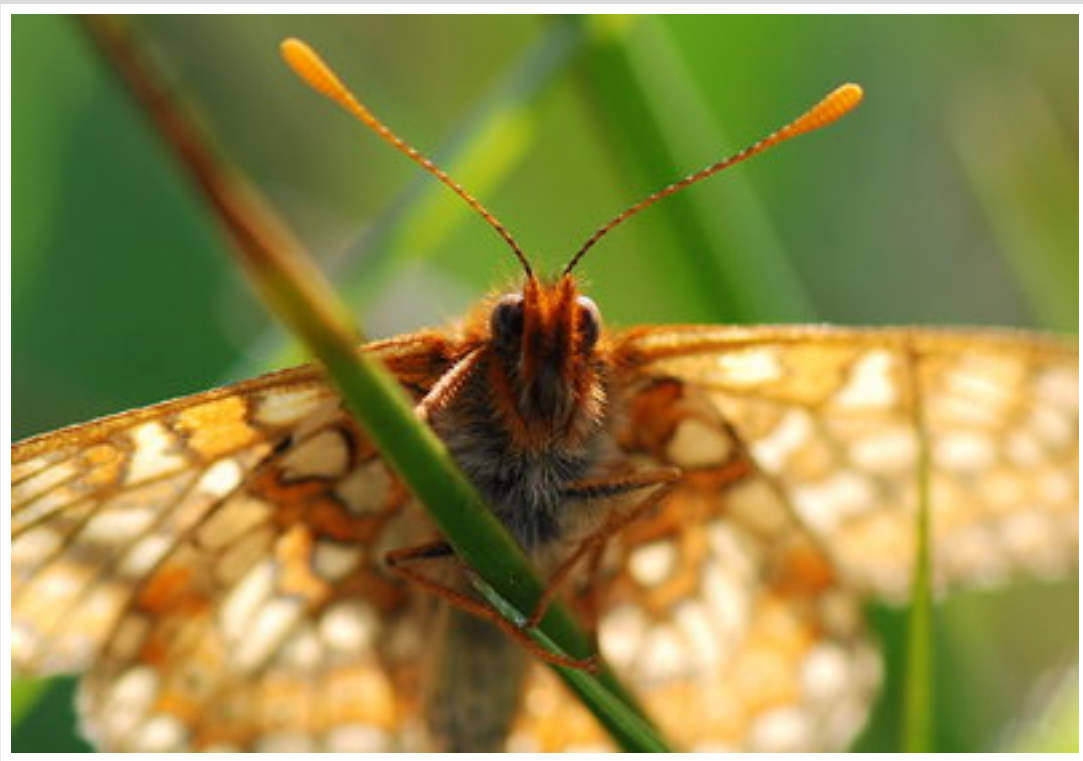
With the evening sun nipping in and out of the clouds I had an opportunity to photograph the same individual and note the affect that lighting has on it's appearance. I've experienced for myself the affect that lighting can have on birds - drastically distorting your interpretation of size, hue and sometimes even shape but I was quite surprised the difference that it made to this butterfly. First up when it was nice and sunny...



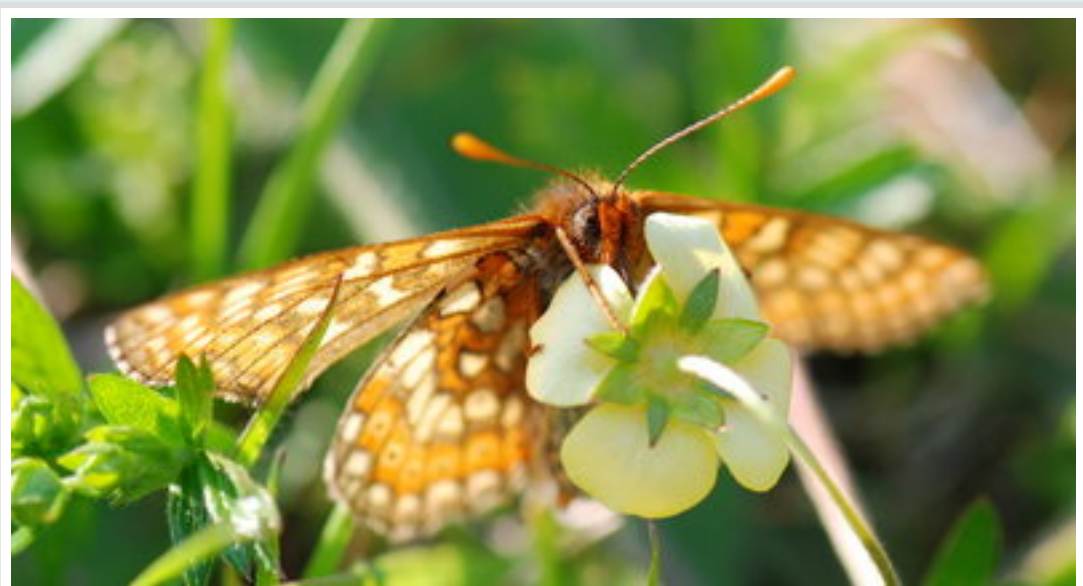
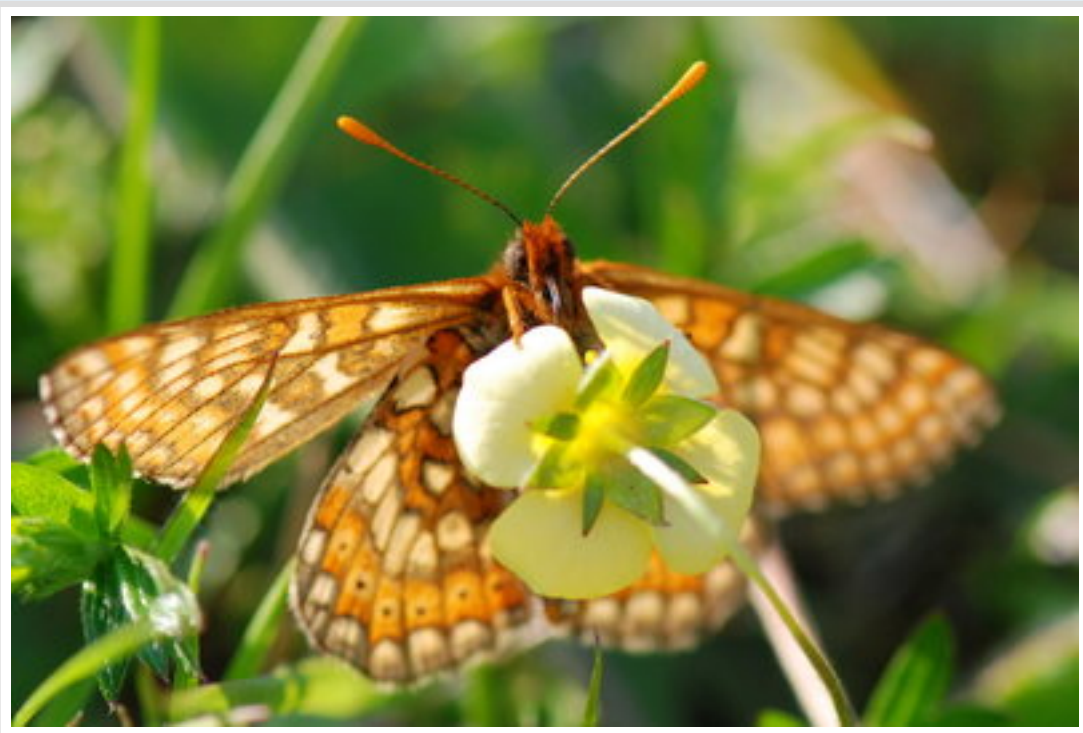
Very nice with the chocolate browns blending almost with the oranges and yellows. Now when the sun went in...



Quite a difference - what were warm browns become almost black and really contrasting with the other markings. Due to the cooler temps I also managed to get in a lot closer than on my previous visit and when I did I was rewarded with some shots of the "stained glass window variety" that I like to get with Fritillaries.



Also I managed to capture some nice nectaring behaviour. The butterfly would start nectaring and would cling to the flower head, legs gripping from underneath the petals. I appeared quite alert at this stage and then it would really go for, pulling the flower towards it at the same time as thrusting it's head in as far as it could. I always thought that when they fed butterflies were quite gentle, delicately probing with their proboscis, but that illusion is now shattered from watching this butterfly.



A stunning butterfly, if only it had a longer flight time so we could have more time to enjoy it...
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 21-Jun-12 06:54 AM GMT

Fascinating photos. The variation in colour produced by changes in lighting likely explains the wide variety of images of this butterfly you see in books. It looks like I'm not going to see Marsh Frits this year, sadly. This is where I envy you your west country base, Wurzel 🇬🇧

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-Jun-12 06:20 AM GMT

Sorry to rub it in Dave 😞 If it's any consolation you're much closer to Heath Frits than I am 🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 22-Jun-12 06:32 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel. Nice pictures and interesting points 😊 .

I took some pictures of Marshies at Hod Hill this year and noticed that some individuals don't have a distinct contrast between the yellow and orange cells making me think my photographs were not up to scratch. Perhaps it is as you say, to do with the light although it is also a variable species with respect to the layout and size of the cells.

After poring over your first two pictures taken days apart I'm fairly certain it is the same butterfly.

Also with this insect's 'table manners', I suppose if a butterfly is hungry/thirsty it'll just dive in, a bit like drinking your first pint on a hot day ...guzzle it down 😊😂

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 23-Jun-12 07:25 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid 😊

I too spent ages looking at the markings of the two butterflies but I couldn't work out whether they were the same individual though I had my suspicions that it was so it's nice to have an independant corroboration 😊

WRT to the nectaring on a hot day the beer doesn't even touch the sides! 🤪 With the Marshie it was like it was getting the very dregs from the glass, I could almost here that annoying nosie that you get from the last bit of a milkshake when using a straw! 😂

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-Jun-12 06:21 AM GMT

Woodford Valley



Recently I managed to pop out along the Woodford Valley but as I've been to other places with more butterflies recently I never got round to posting about it. It was a damp and cold day – aren't they the norm at the moment – so I wasn't hoping for much really just a chance to do a bit of a recce for future visits. I drove along the winding roads looking for interesting looking areas and took a left up a little road which soon ended into a grassed footpath. As I pulled in Yellow Hammer greeted me with their songs a Kestrel hovered over head and a Buzzard imitated this further off up the down. The road went from tarmac to stones to grass with low hedges on both sides and longer swards of grass overhanging the track. As I wandered I leaned in and snapped at what I found; first a delicately marked fly, then a small Tiger Beetle species and a Cockchafer bejewelling the grass heads.



As I rounded the corner a very pale butterfly flipped from one side of the track to the other and when I approached it I noticed how weather worn and faded it looked – almost a white rather than a blue!



So one lone butterfly but then that was actually one more than I had expected. This looks like a fantastic little area which may be worth some more exploring...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 24-Jun-12 07:16 AM GMT

possibly *Platystoma* sp. for the fly (don't know how many we get over here or anything else about them but thought it interesting so had a quick search) looks like Malachite beetle

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 25-Jun-12 07:27 AM GMT

Cheers for the ID Chris 😊

I finally managed to make it back to home turf for my first ever Lulworth Skippers. I grew up in Poole and so most summers were spent either wandering the heath lands or cycling the Purbecks and I visited Lulworth and Durdle Door hundreds of times with my parents. I always vaguely remember seeing strange orange Butterflies that looked like they had knackered wings and ever since I've gotten into Butterflies I've kicked myself for not paying them more attention as now I know what they were – Skippers and probably Lulworths ! 🙄

Still now I knew what to look out for they should be pretty easy to find. I strolled down the main street past lots of grockles, took a left and headed up the stairs with the sign post depicting the butterfly I'd come to find. I was a bit disorientated at first as the path seemed to be heading inland and into a wood but eventually it came out onto the coombe. I ambled along and there were certainly butterflies around; Small Heath, Dingy Skipper and Meadow Brown all put in single appearances and then I came to a stile, hopped over and was in Skipper heaven. The path wound on down and really close to the cliff edge so I hung back and settled myself down next to some tall blue/purple flowers and poured myself a coffee. Within minutes of settling there were Skippers everywhere. At least 4 or 5 Large Skippers and all around were smaller, darker Skippers. When I could crawl close enough the crescents or their tattered dark colouration allowed me to “tick” off a new species.





The females and tatty older males were easy enough to differentiate from other skippers but there were one or two males that were very orange and with only the very faintest if traces of the crescent. What's strange is that when viewed as a thumbnail the crescent is much more obvious than when looking at the larger image? Still I'll label them as male Lulworth Skipper until I'm told otherwise by people more knowledgeable than me



I then started watching more closely and they demonstrated some different behaviour for me. When the sun would go behind the clouds they would almost drop into the grass and then crawl lower in, disappearing from sight, only to return when the sun did. Large Skippers seemed to be the local bully boys forcing their smaller cousins off of their nectar source and the Lulworths seemed to get round this by group feeding with the same plant housing 4 or more individuals. I was also privy to some more intimate moments – excuse the blurred photos here but they’re kinda action shots.





I took a further walk and saw my first Marbled White of the year as well as some more Small Heaths and plenty of Dingy Skipper – some of which appeared very pale? But my favourite shot of the day is of one of the Lulworths nectaring for all it was worth, so much so that's it's legs were dangling over the side of the petals!



Over the next hour I took my fill of this delightful species – which for me is all the more special I suppose as it is a fellow Dorsetian and living where it does (on the edge of precipices) it certainly lives up to the Dorset motto “Who’s afeard?”.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 25-Jun-12 07:35 AM GMT

A splendid set of photos of another lovely little butterfly. I remember the first time I saw them: on a hot July day a few years back down at Durlston – there were dozens of them.

My turn to be envious 🙄

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Gothic_dreams, 25-Jun-12 07:36 AM GMT

Some lovely photos of the Skippers Wurzel 😊

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 25-Jun-12 07:46 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comments Dave and Chris! 😊 It was great getting back to the homeland, I did stop short of getting down and kissing the ground though 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 25-Jun-12 02:26 PM GMT

Those photos are really good Wurzel and nice compositions 🙄

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 25-Jun-12 07:02 PM GMT

Good morning Wurzel,

Yet more firsts; well done! 🙄

I haven't managed to venture out recently so have not chalked up any recent firsts. I did however stop off at Fovant, in your neck of the woods, to see what I could find and only found a battered common blue and a passing small white, but saw my first whitethroat, so not all bad. Can't help but echo people's concerns on butterfly numbers this year.

Very much enjoying your posts, even though I get more and more envious each time you tick off another species!

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 26-Jun-12 03:52 AM GMT

Nice report and photos Wurzel, a pleasure to read 😊

"Wurzel" wrote:

.....I strolled down the main street past lots of grockles....

Hee Hee, I have not heard that word since a mate moved to Dorset years ago and started using it 😂

Looks like we may be having a family break down there later in the year so there will be some more grockles heading your way 😊😂😂

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 28-Jun-12 06:31 AM GMT

Hi wurzel, just to let you know, I've heard Silver studded are out at slop bog.

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 28-Jun-12 07:01 AM GMT

Cheers Pauline for your kind comments – I think you might have inspired me to actually think a bit more about the shots that I'm taking rather than just clicking away. 😊

Cheers CJB – I'm sure you'll be able to get out soon – I sometimes take 10 minutes out on the way home – don't tell the wife... 😊

Cheers Neil you Grockle! 😊😂 It's a great word isn't it and it's nice to be part of a culture that can use it. PM us nearer the time and if I'm around I might be able to point you in the direction of some bits and bobs.

Cheers Chris for the info! On Monday I made another visit to Slop Bog. It was warmer and there was less wind than on my previous visit but there will still no butterflies. None, not even a Speckled Wood to greet me when I arrived! I checked and the Silver Studded Blues have just started emerging on Portland (Tout Quarry) and Adrian Riley suggests that the mainland population on the Dorset Heaths emerge a fortnight or so later so I'll try again in a week. I'll also try again during the morning in case they are early birds like Greenstreaks seem to be (cheers again for that tip Rosalyn).

So to console myself after striking a blank at Slop Bog I came back and looked through some photos from my visit to Lulworth – bathing in the glory of past victories as it were...

It seemed that in my excitement at finding Lulworth Skippers I'd totally ignored the photos that I'd taken west of the car park. As the path winds up the hill to Stair Hole, Dungy Head and the Durdle Door the white chalk is framed on either side by the long grasses as well as being dotted with wheezing bodies going up and accelerating bodies coming down. I thought that as I had another hour on the car parking it would be a shame to leave early so I'd have a little mooch around on the western side of the cove. Again I decided to steer clear of the grockles and followed a short path that hugged the lower edge of the hill. The grasses here rubbed against your knees as passed by and there was a good mix of wild flowers – and butterflies.

Before getting some photos I crouched down for 10 minutes to enjoy the spectacle. A Common Blue passed by all showy and then slunk away again as Adonis Blues took to the air and put him to shame! A pair of Brown Argus were locked in an amorous embrace and a Small Blue would occasionally put in an appearance looking tired and worn. A Peacock appeared as if by magic and then disappeared never to be seen again. Having taken all this in I then set about trying to capture on "film" what I'd just witnessed.

I couldn't find the Common Blue again but the Adonis were more than willing to pose (they are the posers of the blue family after all).





The Brown Argus were easy to find as they were still locked together slap bang in the middle of the path and I gingerly encouraged them to move a little to the left.



On my searches I also encountered Skippers –Dingy, more Lulworths and one male golden Skipper that I am unsure of still. It doesn't have a noticeably kink in the sex brand like a Small Skipper, but also doesn't appear to have the crescent of a Lulworth. Because of the sex brand I tentatively went with Lulworth...and probably because I was used to seeing them.





Small/Lulworth? Lulworth?

So that was Lulworth and it's still getting me through the week now 😊 ...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 28-Jun-12 07:28 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I would say it is a Lulworth Skipper, because the underneath of the antennae is dark rather than white with a orange tip to the antennae, which cancels out Small skipper. Really enjoy reading your posts, keep it up.

All the best, Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 28-Jun-12 03:06 PM GMT

Just having time to catch up with your diary and as always simply lovely pictures.

Debbie

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Jun-12 07:13 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comments Debbie 😊

Cheers Nick for the ID help 😊 - I couldn't find much info about using the antennae for differentiating between Lulworth and Small 😊 , but loads about Essex and Small. Could I ask which source you used? Cheers. 😊

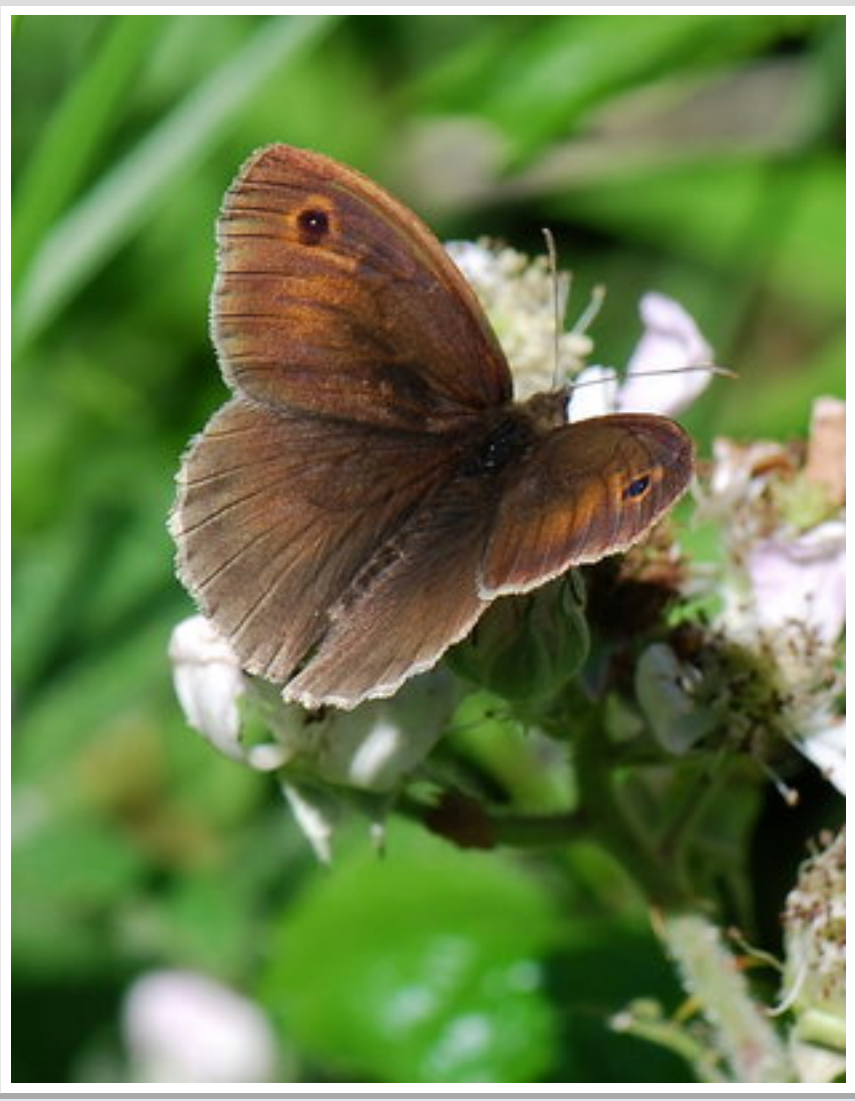
A sunny walk with three generations of the family Wurzel was a prime opportunity to check out Garston Wood for White Admirals and Silver Washed Fritillaries. They're showing elsewhere but as seems to be the way in this area of the country they aren't about where I go! Still there were butterflies around in the recently cleared area to the left of the car park. I say recently cleared and really I mean cleared last year, now it's full of wild flowers, brambles, Hawthorns and large thistles - absolutely brilliant for butterflies with the additional bonus of strategically placed picnic tables. There were one or two Meadow Brown near the start of the walk and then after climbing over a recently fallen tree along the "hedges" more and more butterflies appeared. A Speckled Wood flew up the path towards me, circled my head and then landed by my right hand, could they be any more welcoming! 😊

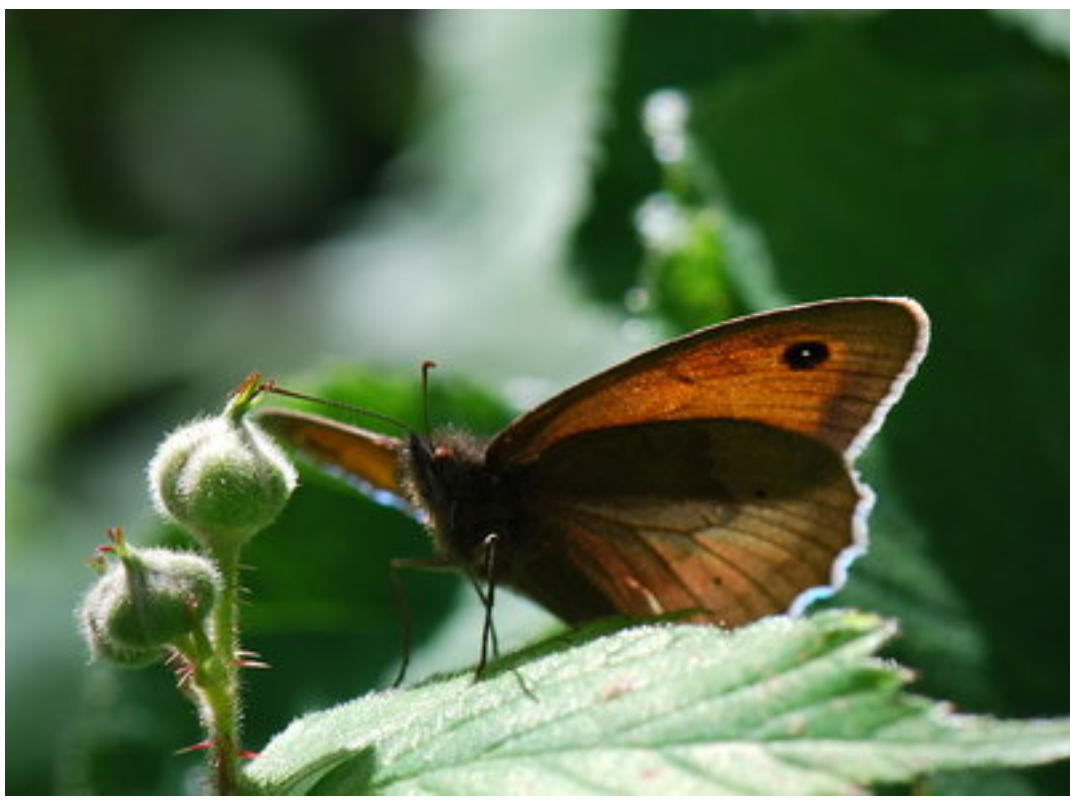


A few Small Heaths were about and then a white joined the mixture of browns and oranges only it wasn't a butterfly but a moth, what I believe is a Treble Bar.



But among the sunny breaks the real stars were the Meadow Browns. They were their usual flighty selves but were a joy to watch as the sun would catch their bodies and change their hue. I managed to get a range of underside shots showing part of the range in the spotting on the hind wings. I found 1 spot, 2 spots (which actually had orange centres so were almost eyes) and three spots – next I need a 4 or 5 spotter for the complete collection. I was also happy to get an underside view of my “stained glass” style. Bu the real gem was a classic open wing which clearly shows the sex brand but also the range of hues present on the wings when the light catches them right – greens and purples, almost an oil sheen and this from the “ordinary brown”.





Once through the gate into the more wooded area butterflies became harder to see. My hotspot from last year wasn't even tepid, but hopefully in a week or two it will be back up to temperature! Whilst there weren't many butterflies here there were these large flies around which gave a nasty bite – some species from the genus *Tabanus*, possibly *bovinus*.



Once the girls had found fairy doors and my younger daughter had “put on a show” while we sat on one of the benches and listened to her story and songs, we found ourselves back at the car park, where a Speckled Wood was there to send us on the way.



And so ended a day when the ordinary became just as splendid as any great rarity and outshone the spectacular species. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 30-Jun-12 09:56 PM GMT

I love your Pic's Worzal, no sign of Meadow Browns here yet, the weather has been awful. I'm off to Kent next so hope fot better weather. Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 01-Jul-12 04:16 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

A nice report and photos well up to your usual standard 😊

Meadow Browns only just getting started round my neck of the woods along with Ringlets and Large skippers.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Gothic_dreams, 01-Jul-12 04:28 AM GMT

Some more lovely photos Wurzel, love the colouring in the Meadow Brown 😊

Chris

Re: Wurzel

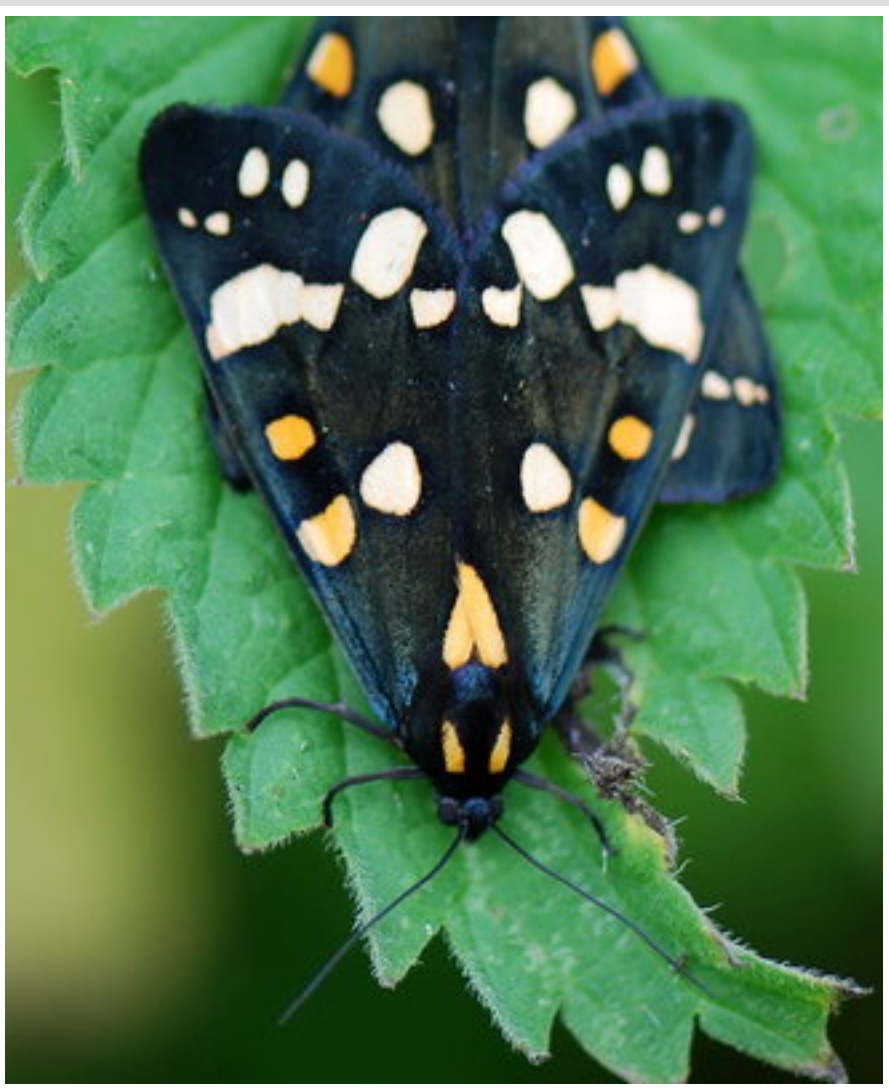
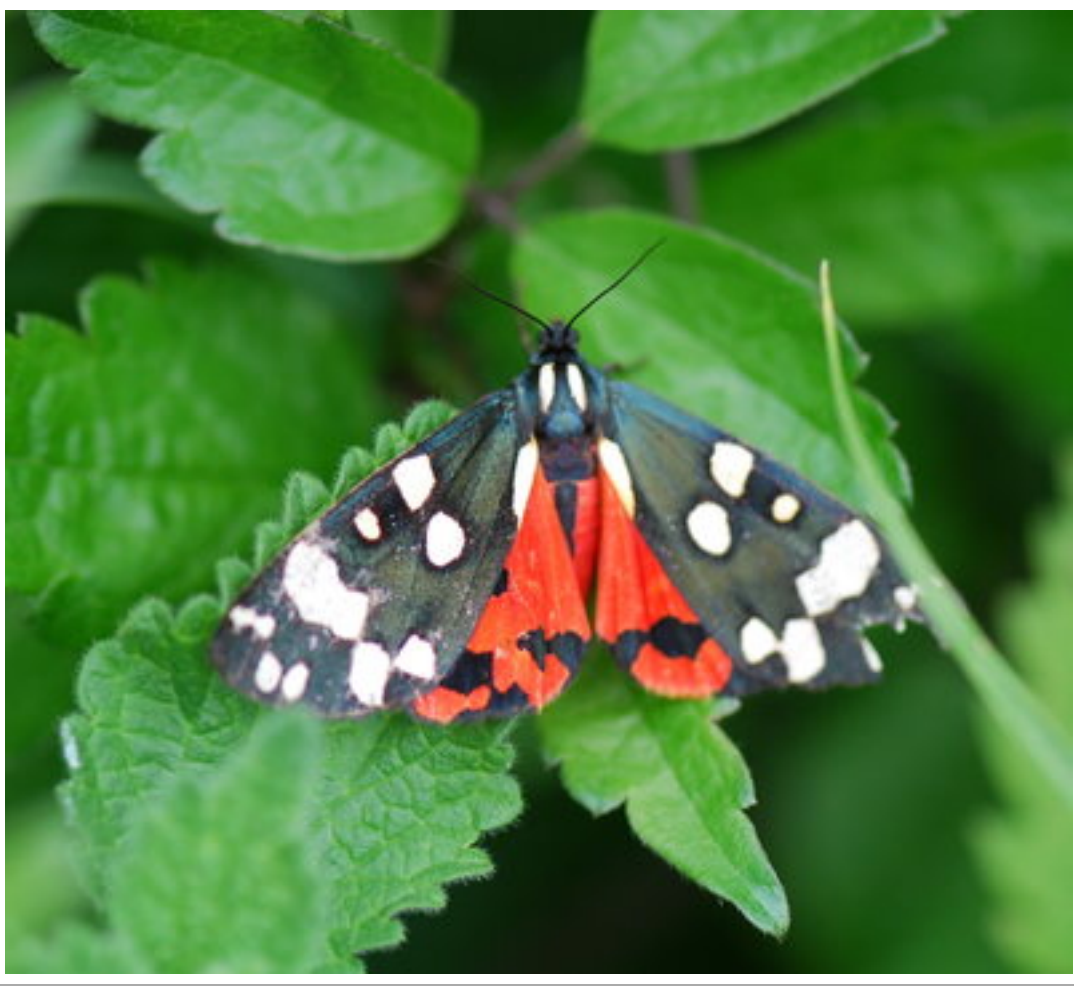
by Wurzel, 02-Jul-12 07:40 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comment Goldie – good luck in Kent 😊 Cheers Neil and Chris for your kind comments too – things are quite slow in this neck of the woods as well, we seem to be about 2 weeks behind the rest of the south so Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites etc are only just emerging... My usual Wednesday night butterfly foray had a change of venue. Normally I drop Kitty off at Rainbows and head over to Five Rives for 52 minutes before heading back to pick her up. This week however the Rainbows were at Old Sarum so having dropped Kitty off tonight I stayed and set off round the rings.

They reminded me of the rings at Hod Hill only much steeper and one advantage of this was that the wind in the bottom of the rings was non-existent. The downside was that the butterflies seemed to delight in perching half way up so you took your life into your hands every time you tried to get a shot and more than once I'd lean slightly too far and end up running/stumbling/falling back down the side of the hill. There were one or two of Meadow Browns and Large Skippers around but they didn't pose for long at the bottom.



A Yellow Shell followed me around for a bit and then lots of large reddy things kept erupting from the undergrowth as I passed. The first one I saw reminded me of a Red Admiral due to its strong, circuitous flight but I soon found some perched individuals so I was able to identify them as Scarlet Tigers and there were loads of them.



A little further round the sun came out and so I climbed out of the ditch and investigated the sunnier outer ring slopes. It proved to be a good call as there waiting for me were 5 Ringlets, flitting around and resting for just a fraction too short! In the end I sat down and watched as one would settle, ten another and so on. Then a Large Skipper would bomb in form who knows where and all 5 Ringlets would lift off as one.

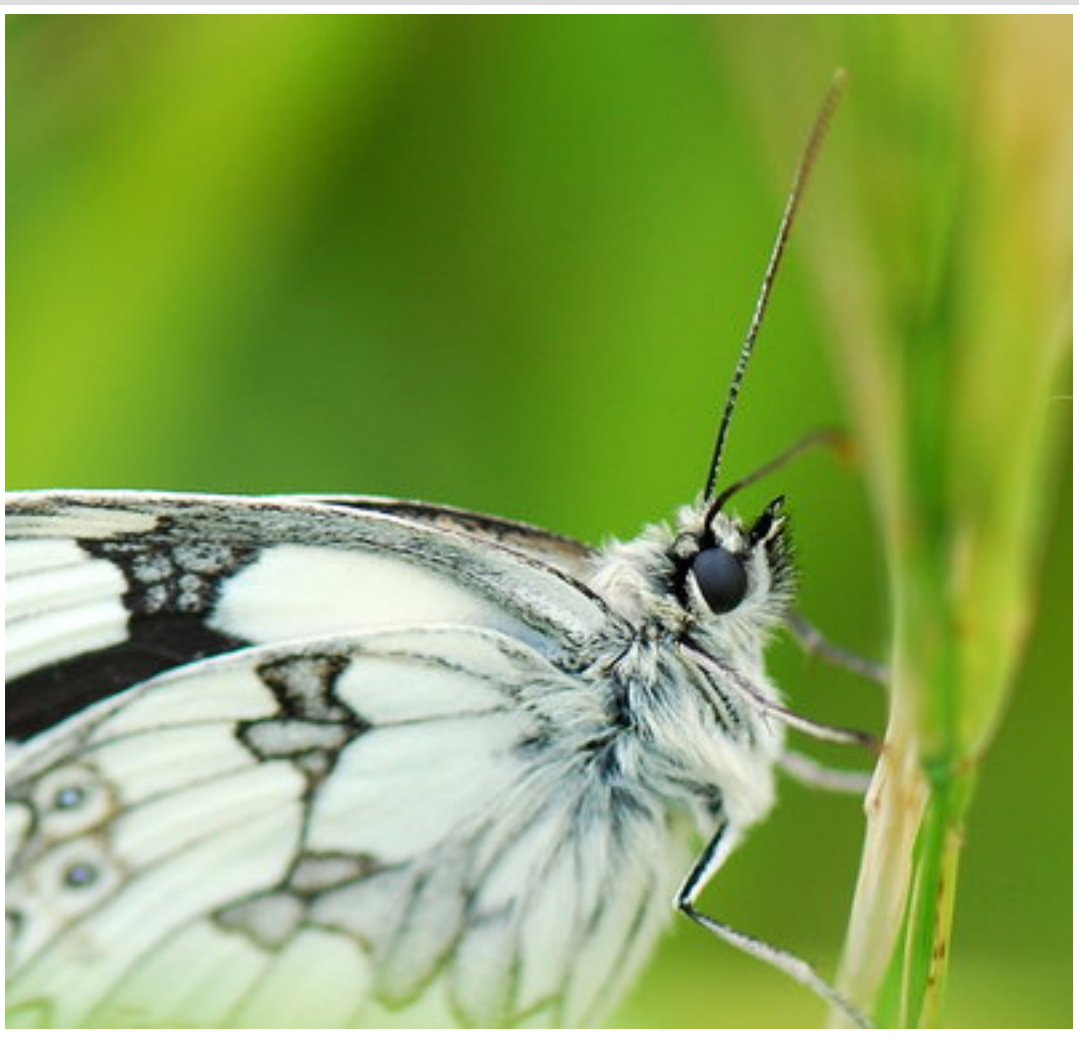


I am aware that Ringlets show some variation in size of spots but I haven't seen that much difference before. However I found an individual with only the one spot on each fore-wing and two on the hind wing, none of which were "eyed". So from now on I'll keep more of an "eye" out for variation in this species.





As the evening sun beat down I retreated from the Ringlets and continued around the ring back to pick my little girl up. I was almost back when a black and white blur passed along side almost surfing over the long grass. Eventually it landed but quite low down so getting a decent shot was tricky. I couldn't approach it side on because I didn't want to trample the vegetation around it, when the head was in focus the wings were green and fuzzy because of the grasses so in the end I settled for a record shot and close-up of the head.



Once back it seemed that I needn't have rushed as the Rainbows were still busy running around and playing so I wandered the edge of the battlements where I could see them coming but also find some butterflies including the darkest Meadow Brown I think I've ever seen...



Another great little site that will be worth another visit...if we get some decent weather soon.
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 02-Jul-12 02:31 PM GMT

You're doing something different Wurzel cos you're photos are improving in leaps and bounds – both focus and composition. I love the way you captured that oily sheen on those Meadow Browns as that is quite difficult to do. Your close up of the Marbled White is also well executed.

Re: Wurzel

by Rosalyn, 02-Jul-12 11:12 PM GMT

I agree Pauline, some very nice pictures Wurzel.

Phil and I looked for Silver-studded Blue yesterday. We spotted our first about 11 O'clock so still time for a lie in. You do need sun though. Yesterday was perfect sun and cloud (if a little breezy) too sunny and they don't stop – too cloudy and they disappear into the grass. Good luck

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-12 07:05 AM GMT

Cheers Pauline for your kind comments. I haven't done anything different really, just thought a bit more about where I'm positioning myself. I guess a lot of it comes down to the butterflies themselves being in the right place at the right time. 😊

Cheers Rosalyn for your kind comment. I'm holding off on the Silver Studs as the first was seen at Slop Bog last Wednesday and Chris C saw one on Saturday so I reckon a week or more and they'll be in larger numbers – that is if the weather plays ball 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

"Pauline" wrote:

photos are improving in leaps and bounds – both focus and composition.

High praise indeed. I think **Pauline** is raising the bar for all of us! I need to think about getting better glasses, as her criteria for focus seem sharper than my eyes can manage!

Your comments on Ringlets are interesting as I've never looked at the uppersides much – just regarding them as 'dull'.

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 04-Jul-12 02:11 AM GMT

approx 50 males seen on slop bog on Sunday Wurzel.

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 04-Jul-12 02:30 AM GMT

Aaahhhhhhhhh! I was planning to go there on Sunday but went to Bentley Wood instead because the weather apps all had showers, gusty winds and temps at "feels like 12"...only hope now is that they're still early in their tenure as males come out a week before females so there still might be one or two if we get a break in the weather. That is a huge "if" though 😞 Just like the Greenstreaks...here I go again. 😡

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 04-Jul-12 06:58 AM GMT

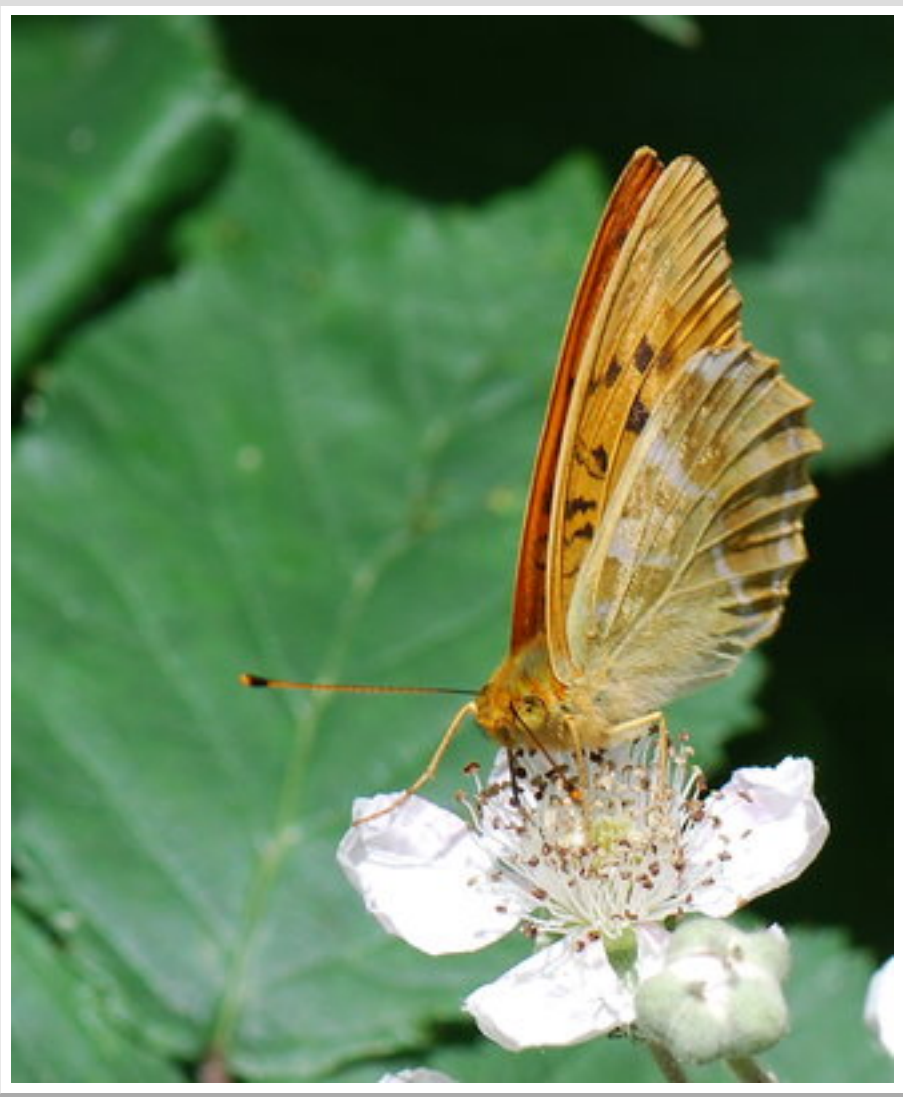
Cheers Mike – I guess that I'm getting attuned to looking for different numbers of spots after my Hedge Brown obsession last year 😳 ...

On Saturday afternoon I'd had enough of the weather ruling my life so I packed the girls into the car and headed over to Bentley Wood without even looking at a forecast. This also had the advantage of earning me Brownie points to save up for a fair weather day as my wife could have a nice quiet and relaxing afternoon. 😊

My older daughter was slightly disappointed that we weren't doing a meet up with Philzoid and my younger daughter hasn't been out butterflying for an age. So to cheer them up and encourage them I drew up a tick list of some of the species we would hopefully see. Please excuse the Marbled White as I was a bit rushed by time I got to the final species.



As we pulled up into the car park there to greet us right at the back door was a Silver Washed Fritillary. As I got my youngest out it stayed there nectaring along with a male Large Skipper and she took great delight in ticking off two of the species from her list.



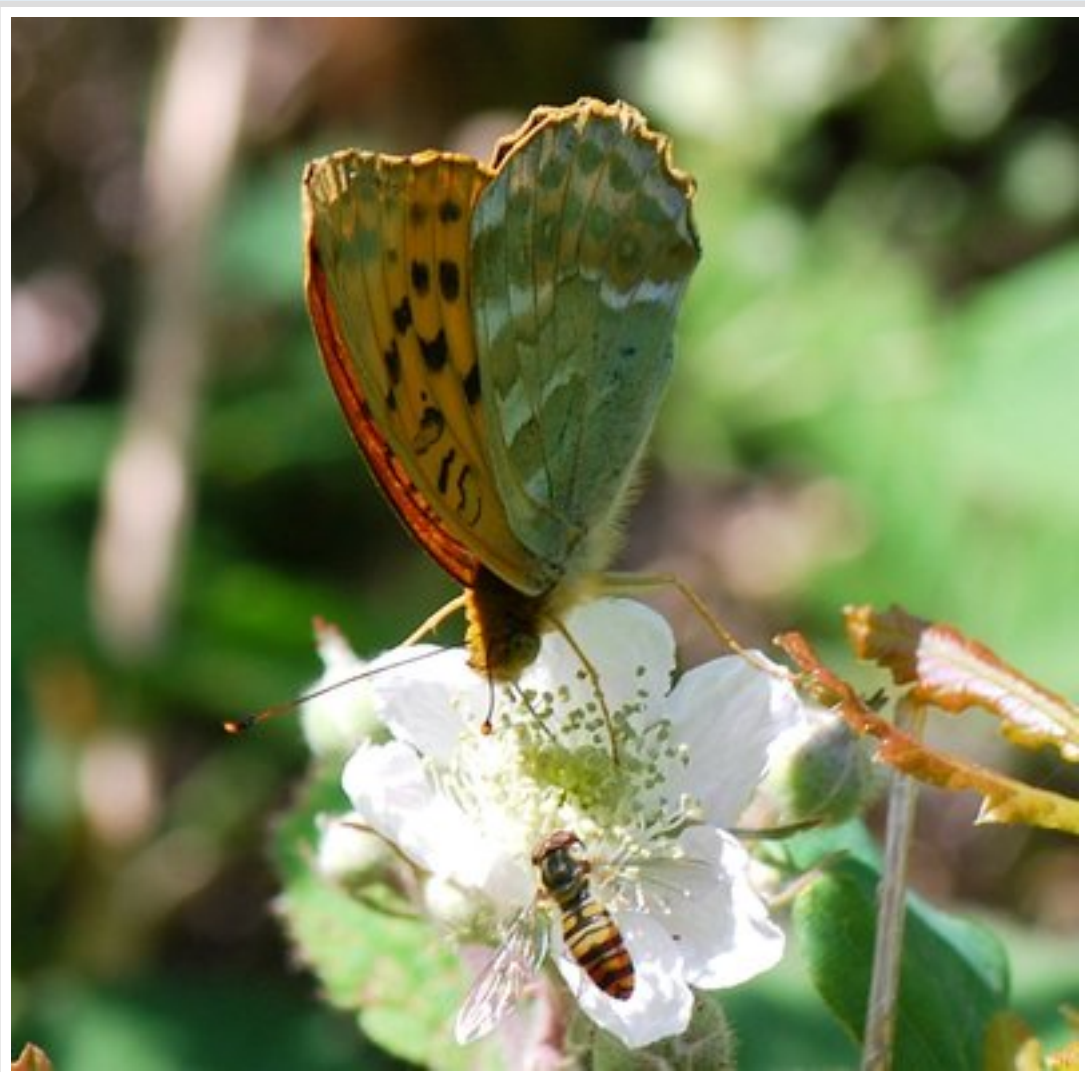
We then headed down the main track (the switchback?) scanning the bushes for ginger or black and white butterflies. There were Large Skippers at every turn as well as good numbers of Ringlets and also little Crickets too sitting on the Bracken in threes and fours. The occasional Silver Washed was also joined by a large dragonfly – I really need to get a book for these but I guess that's it's a Common Darter.





Dark Bush Cricket

About half way along the path there was a field of bracken and just up from this a large Oak tree overhung the path. This little area here proved to be most productive with an old and faded Comma on one side of the Oak; 2 Speckled Wood and a couple of smaller, greyer butterflies which I took to be Purple Hairstreak jostling high up and upsetting each other off leaf after leaf and 4 or 5 Silver Washed Frits all gliding around and then suddenly landing for a quick bask on the bracken.





We eventually reached the cross roads and had a quick mooch around before turning back as the bribe sweets were getting low and the girls hadn't ticked off any of the other species since the Hairstreaks. Once back at the car park we had a quick look in the Eastern Clearing and there were a couple of faded and well worn Small Pearls around as well as another Comma.



As we walked into the car park we meet Bill S who was just heading off into the woods and he pointed out another Hairstreak to finish up on.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-12 07:34 AM GMT

On Sunday I had a tricky choice to make - return to Bentley Wood to try and find the White Admirals which had eluded me the day before or head to

Slop Bog again for Silver Studded Blue. I knew that the Silver Studs were out as Chris C had seen one the day before but when I checked the weather Apps on the phone they showed; cloudy – okay, good light and less flighty targets, 16 feeling like 12 at around 4pm – not brill but could be worse and they might be torpid but I'd need to be back home by then, showers – getting worse and strong gusty winds – not good for Silver Studs. So I decided to try my luck at Bentley Wood. I won't say that I made the wrong choice but 50 male Silver Studs were seen at Slop Bog on Sunday and with the weather deteriorating over the last week I might of missed my chance for this species. I learnt a valuable lesson from this and that is sometimes it's better to just go somewhere and hope than try and use any form of knowledge to make a plan!

I arrived at Bentley just as the sun started to make more frequent appearances from behind the cloud. Unlike yesterday there were only a few Large Skippers to greet me in the car park and not the hoped for White Admiral, which meant that I could have taken my shots and then headed to Slop Bog... Still I set off down the main track retracing my steps from yesterday and covering the ground a lot quicker. Up to the crossroads there was much the same fare as yesterday but with the faded and worn Comma upgraded to a fresh Hutchinson's Comma. There were also one or two Red Admirals about and the first "field of Bracken had 4 males trying to bask in one view.

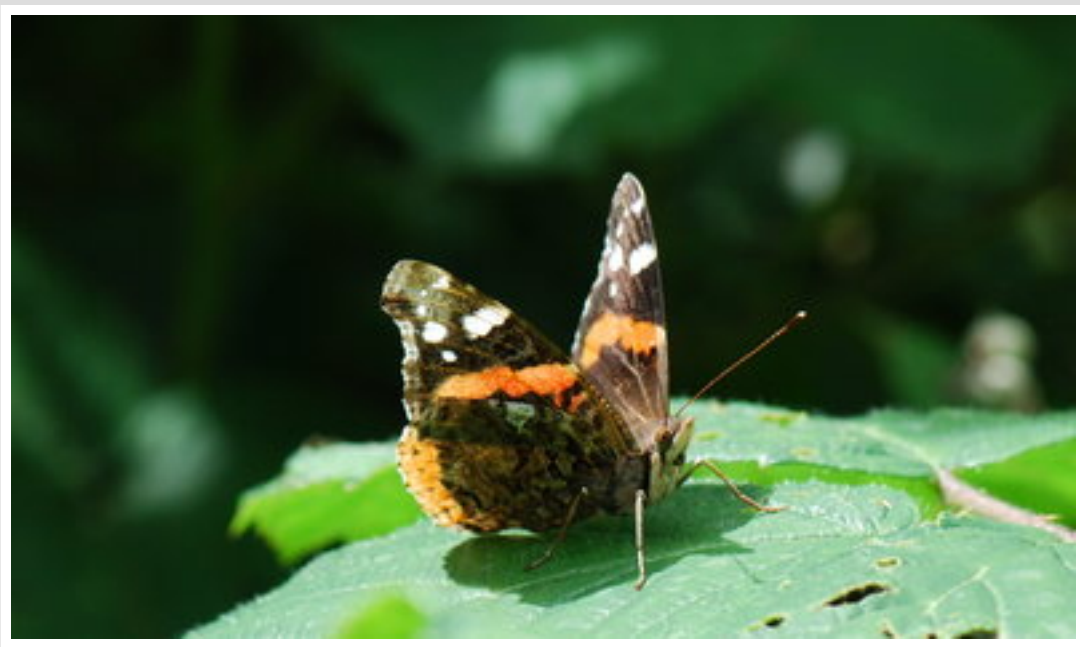


The large Oak that yesterday had Purple Hairstreak today had a pair of Speckled Wood and another Red Admiral. I soon approached the second Bracken field where immediately I saw another SWF. This one was demonstrating an unusual behaviour and I think it was deluding itself that it was a Common Blue. It was perched on a grass stem wings open wide, head down just like I've seen with various species of Blue. When the wind picked up rather than flying elsewhere it started walking down the stem again just like Blues do. Whatever the reason for this behaviour it allowed me to get an interesting shot using diagonals.



As I headed left at the crossroads the sun disappeared and there was a fine mist of drizzle following me along the path. I kept going though and ended up at an area called Donkey Copse which looked promising as there were large Bramble bushes and Honeysuckle in the same vicinity. Unfortunately there was no sun and it was surprisingly cool here so I followed the path on round to the right and ended up in an area of fields at Berryfields Copse (?). Back peddling slightly I took notice of the vegetation on either side of the track – a mixture of Bramble, longer grasses, the occasional Honeysuckle as

well as Bracken. In short a microcosm of the habitats I'd walked through to get there. As the sun came out so did the butterflies. Large Skippers took up residence on the Bracken and Bramble leaves, Ringlets and Meadow brown were in the grasses, a pair of Speckled Wood sparred/courted from one side of the path to the other and a Silver Washed basked briefly on Bracken. There were also Red Admirals and over the half an hour I spent in this tiny part of the wood I saw at least 4 different individuals. A couple seemed to prefer Bramble leaves, one liked the footpath and the other was very restless, constantly flying along the bushes and bothering the others.

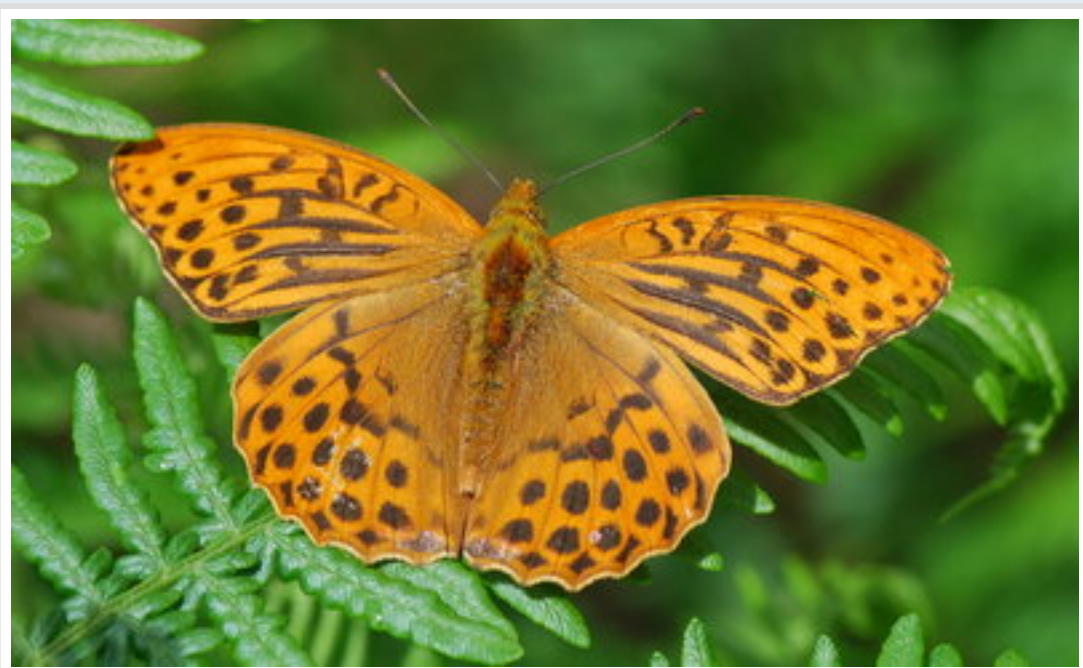


As the sun would go in the butterflies would disappear and then when it came out again they would reappear just as quickly. I'd plonk myself in front of a Bramble bush and wait for the sun to peek out. Once it went in again I'd move back up the track, find another bush and plonk myself there. This tactic certainly paid off on a day with intermittent sun as eventually an Admiral appeared that lacked the red...Odd as it may sound this black and white butterfly almost shone in the sun, with the white contrasting and shining out from the overall black background of the butterfly. I watched it for a good while until something else spooked it and it headed off only to reappear a few minutes later on the other side of the path nectaring low down. Stunning and certainly worth missing Silver Studs for and my only complaints were that I couldn't get the classic closed wing shot that I'm longing for and my time with it was too brief.





The breaks between the clouds were becoming less frequent and eventually the drizzle started up again so I wove my way back to the Switchback noting only a couple of Meadow Brown on the way. Once back at the larger Bracken field I spent another good half an hour in the company of more Silver Washed before finally checking out the Eastern Clearing.





This held a few worn Small Pearls but this section of the wood seems to have played its' part now until next year almost. Also I was still slightly mesmerised by the White Admiral and when I shut my eyes now I can still see the white wing tips glinting like jewels in the sun.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 05-Jul-12 07:42 AM GMT

Nice White Admirals and SWF, Wurzel! I need to seek them both out over the next few days – between the promised heavy showers...

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Jul-12 07:56 AM GMT

Cheers Dave – bit late in replying so you've found your own now 😊

On Wednesday I'd had enough of feeling trapped at work and so on the way home I decided to risk the wrath of my wife and call in somewhere. I pulled up in the Woodhenge car park and starting my stopwatch I headed towards the small area of uncut grass directly in front of the car park. Almost as soon as I reached it a Marbled White shot out and headed off towards the Henge site. Someone else had already been here before me and an entrance to the long grass had been trampled down and then into a set of concentric circles (was they out practicing here last night?) so I followed in their footsteps. As the air became misty and then turned to drizzle and due to the height of the grass, it felt like I was wading waist deep. A few Ringlet and Meadow Brown were about but the main reason I'd stopped was for Marbled Whites, and they were everywhere. I'd spy one within range of shot, edge towards it and two others would erupt in front of me. The wind didn't help either but after I felt I'd got a few shots I spent the remaining few minutes revelling in the sheer numbers around me and is it just me or do they seem darker this year?





Just before I left I tried out something. I'd found a small stick so I sent it skimming across the tops of the grasses and crouched down quickly so my eyes were level with the tops of the grass. Marbled Whites erupted from the grass in two rows as the stick passed overhead almost like rockets on a timed release or the little plumes of dirt you see when machine gun fire strafes the ground in old war movies.

The drizzle turned to rain and I'd been there a while so I got back in the car and stopped the stopwatch - 11 minutes exactly had passed. In that time my manner had totally changed, no longer was I like a caged beast, stressed and prowling but I was calm, relaxed and feeling mildly euphoric. Such a short time, and such a huge effect to one's mental well being...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

P.S. The remainder of the journey was very uncomfortable as I was sodden from the knees down and had to get my trousers dry so as not to raise suspicions. This meant cranking the heater to full blast and directing all vents to my knees and below. I think I got away with it although the car still has a slight aroma of singed flesh! 🤔

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-Jul-12 07:41 AM GMT

Once again the weather seemed to be putting butterfly watching on hold, and once again I ignored reports and just headed out. This time I was taking Kitty and meeting Philzoid and Izzy at Bentley Wood. We arrived much earlier and decided to do a quick recce as I was hoping to get some more shots of White Admiral, the closed under wing in particular. As we walked along the main track it was warm and sunny and Large Skippers and Ringlets were everywhere. We quickly reached the hotspot on the left of the main track with its' low but wide spreading bramble bush and here were a good collection of species. Kitty got really good at creeping right up close so she could see the proboscis of a Large Skipper or the sex brands on a male Silver Washed Fritillary. Also here was a White Admiral, not the most fresh with a small nick in its' hind wing but quite content to feed. No matter where I positioned myself or how long I waited it didn't close its' wings for longer than a second or two so that classic text book shot still eludes me. But I'm getting closer with one or two blurry shots of fully open wings and some views from underneath.



We headed back to the car so that we could meet Philzoid and Kitty took great delight in writing a message for Izzy in the report book!
Bentley Wood Part 2...

So once back in the car park of Bentley with good friends well met we headed back of down to the same hotspot. The White Admiral was still around but must have warmed slightly as it was now more flighty. There were a couple of SWFs around along with the ubiquitous Large Skipper and Ringlet. I took a back sit to let Philzoid catch up but further on down the path my first female SWF was too much not to miss.



We met a few other butterflies who were waiting with great patience at a stand of trees for His Nibbs but after the recent wind and rain it didn't look good so we carried on down towards Donkey Copse and the Drainage field (I think that's what they're called?). As we approached the sun went in and apart from a pristine White Admiral waiting for us at the top of the track the butterflies seemed to disappear.

We'd just walked out of the wood and started on our way down the hill when the sun suddenly appeared and with it came the butterflies. The thistles that lined the path had two or three Meadow Browns on all of them. There were Large and Small Skippers amongst the longer grasses and Marbled Whites all over the shop as well as an unidentified moth (some sort of Ermine?); it was a joy to behold. I tended to focus in on the Small Skipper as I haven't seen that many this year. One had a damaged wing, folded round, which seemed to give it a more swerving flight than normal whereas another couple were really fresh and practically glowed.

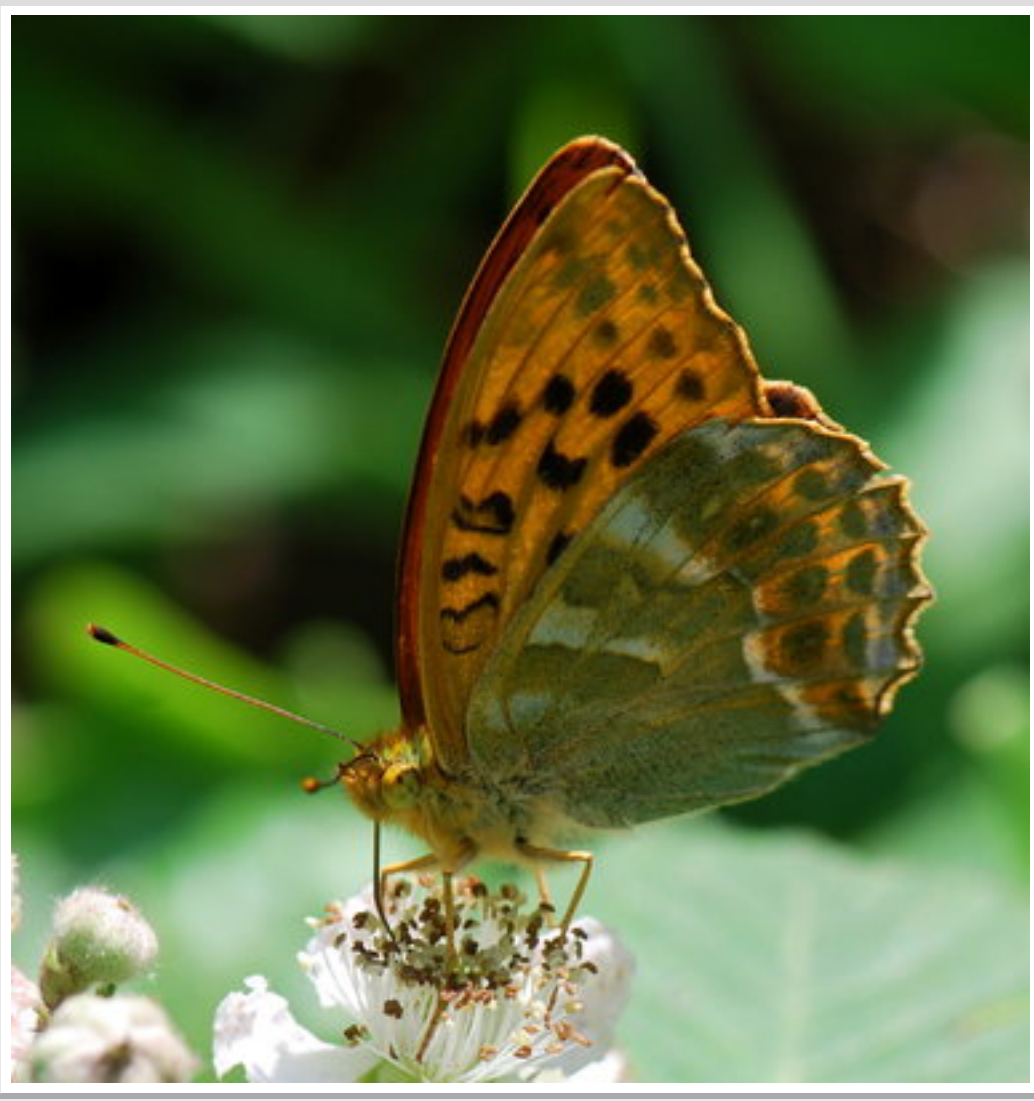




The sun then headed in and Philzoid discovered he had some camera difficulties so we headed back into the wood and back to the car park. There were one or two stops on the way. Once when we had to take cover under a tree as a heavy shower hit it lasted for five minutes and then we were back on our way while the rain evaporated and steamed from everything.

While the girls finished their lunch we checked out the car park as a couple of SWF flitted round.





From there we headed onto Martin Down hopefully for Dark Green Fritillary...
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 10-Jul-12 09:40 PM GMT

I didn't realise how well you were doing with your shots there Wurzel. Some of those Silver-washed Fritillaries are Beauts 🍷

Looking at the moth I think it might be a Wainscott (noctuid), though not sure which one.

Looking forward to the DGF's 😊

Phil

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 11-Jul-12 03:35 AM GMT

Some nice photos there Wurzel 😊

I have still to get out and see White Admiral, SWF, Marbled White and Small Skipper this year, this weekend and another day off work next Wednesday are currently lined up.

Weather be damned, I will be out 😊😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 11-Jul-12 07:05 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid 😞 I guess I had all the luck that day. You'd have noticed how I referred to the camera problems? And then you go and give the game away on your July posting!

Cheers Neil - that seems to be the only way to see anything at the moment - just get out there! When you do find the butterflies they're so much more satisfying! 😊

Martin Down...

As we headed to Martin Down the sun remained in the sky and we arrived to summer weather, which after what we've experienced recently was a bit of a shock! We headed off from the car park and worked our way across the meadow to the start of Bokerley Ditch. As we walked there were a few Small Heaths about and a small jewel like moth caught my eye a Forester.

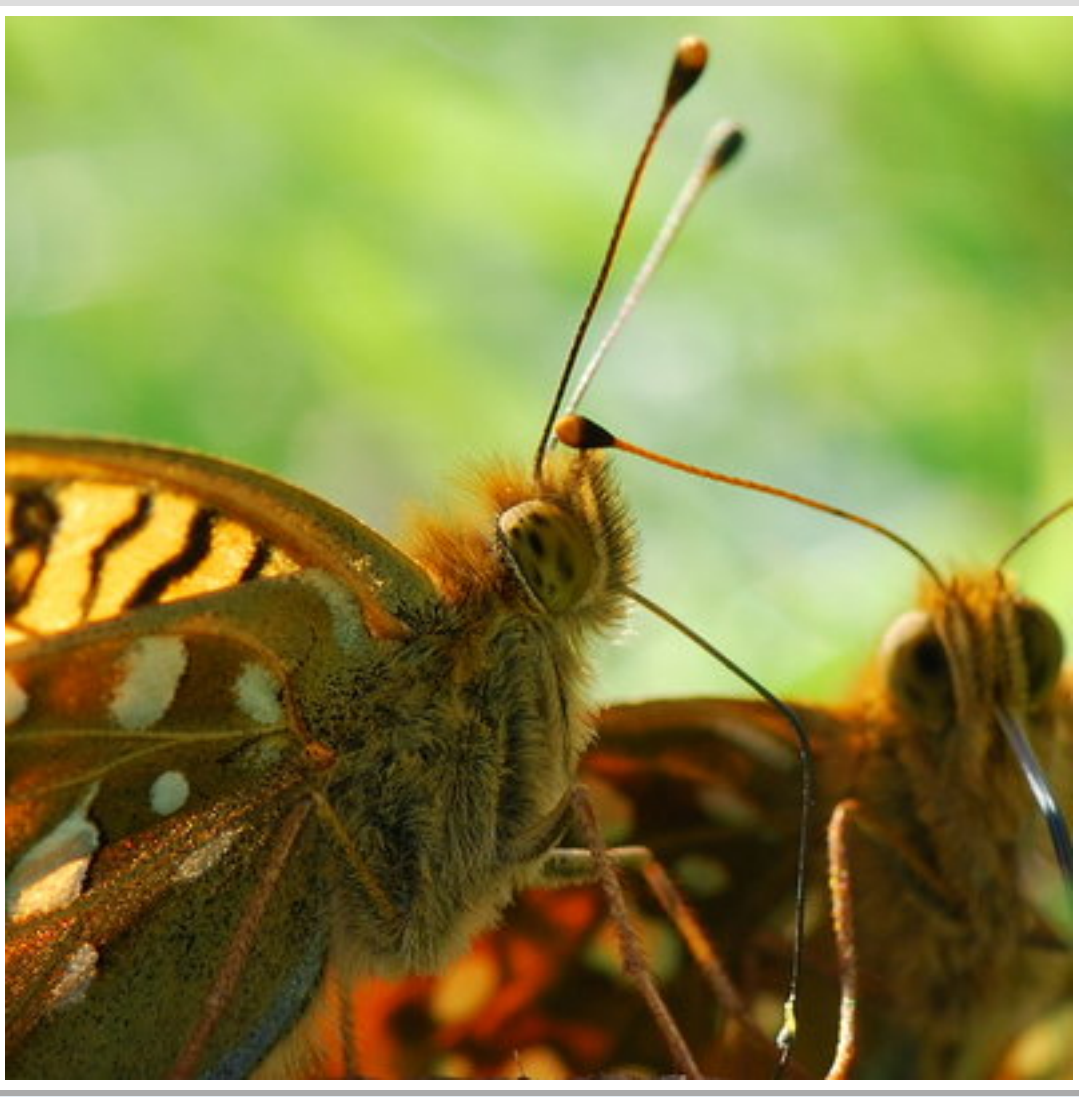


There were also some Meadow Browns but no big ginger jobs. Last year this area had huge numbers of Dark Green Fritillaries so many in fact that they seemed to spill into the car park! So far this year this wasn't the case but the Knapweed was out so we remained hopeful and started winding our way along the top of the ditch. Within a few yards we came across our first Dark Green, then another but the sun had charged them up fully so they were difficult to approach as they wouldn't settle for too long. Once spooked they were gone like little ginger missiles. With Skippers their jinking flight makes them difficult to follow in flight whereas Dark Greens are difficult to follow because of their great speed. Eventually we managed to creep up on enough different individuals to ensure that we had some photos at least, probably about 10 individuals in all.



Having got to the butts and walked up, along and then down Philzoid was just about to show me the hotspot that he'd found the year before when I checked my watch. Unfortunately it was time to head back so we said our goodbyes, relocated the main track back to the car park and hurriedly set off. While we rushed back Kitty told me all her favourite bits of the day and to get the full list I'd probably take another day. We were joined every now and again by a DGF nectaring on Knapweed or Thistles on the edge of the path. Just as the path started to wind into the scrub Kitty stopped talking and walking very abruptly and pulled on my arm. There at the edge of the path were two DGFs on the ground. As we watched they hopped, walked towards a large piece of dog faeces and then both climbed on and started "feeding". They became quite engrossed in their activity which allowed me to get in really close – very cautiously so I didn't get too close mind you!





Just as we were approaching the car two more DGFs did a farewell fly by and then it was our turn to fly - home as quickly as we could! An absolutely cracking day but if we'd believed the weather we'd have missed out on so much! Hopefully the weather will really improve by next weekend and the hunt for His Nibbs will be back on!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 11-Jul-12 07:11 AM GMT

Excellent shots, Wurzel. Very impressive.

This species is not one that normally allows close approaches!

Perhaps we should all carry a spare *crotte de chien* whenever we go out hunting. 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 12-Jul-12 06:07 AM GMT

Cheers David for the kind comments on my photos 😊 There has to be an easier/less smelly way to get a close up though if you do try out your idea make sure it's kept well away from your lunch! 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 12-Jul-12 06:43 AM GMT

The butterfly that time forgot...well I almost did anyway! Back during those few brief glimpses of the sun in Flaming June I managed a quick trip out to Martin Down. It was the shortest of stops just a quick recce to check on the progress of the Dark Green Fritillaries. From the car park I headed over to the hotspot from last year and straight away I knew I was not going to see much as instead of a sea of Knapweed Purple I was met by the usual beige of long grasses with the odd purple flower head peeping through. As I wound my way down the rabbit track into the hollow the odd Small Heath and Meadow Brown would explode from the turf along with a Silver Y at one point.

Something else caught my eye on a lone island of Bramble and as I approached it took off, flew round and round a few times before landing back on the Bramble Island. It was a pristine Small Tortoiseshell and a welcome sight after reading of all the doom and gloom this species is going through. As I watched it continued in cyclic pattern of behaviour; feeding, backing, flying a few loops and then settling elsewhere. It felt that while it was flying the circuit it was either reinforcing its' territory or trying to spy more Bramble islands in the ocean of grass. Whatever it's reason for this behaviour I managed to get in for a few shots and revelled in the blue powder triangles and strange lobes on the hind wings. Saying that I think that the underside is equally beautiful on fresh specimens and I love the way that the lighter areas change colour with the light from lemony to sometimes almost salmon in colour. I don't know enough about the reasons for the rapid decrease in this butterfly's population, but can only hope that it doesn't go the same way as its' larger relative...



I didn't find any showy Dark Greens but the Small Tort offered more than enough compensation.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Jul-12 07:03 AM GMT

Bustard Inn

I am getting slightly behind on my posts as despite the weather I seem to be managing to cram in as many "outings" as I can. This means stopping on the way to work, taking evening visits and taking the girls out at the weekend too! This "summer", and I use the term in the loosest sense, you have to be a bit smash and grab and the last two years with small children have got me all trained up for this eventuality!

So last week I stopped off for 10 minutes on the way to work. I generally follow the maxim "don't race to get to work, race to get home" so I had to leave slightly earlier but morning visits are less risky than stopping off on the way home and incurring the wrath should I get back later than anticipated! There was also the added bonus that the butterflies were slightly less active and more approachable.

The place I stopped off at was a lay-by off the Larkhill Road. There is a grass track parallel with the road with shrubs lining either side and shielding the grasses from the wind. I slowly worked my way up this track for 5 minutes or so and then worked my way back to the car again.

In that time I managed to find a good number of butterflies with 2 Large Skippers, 2 Small Heath, 15 or so Meadow Browns, 9 Ringlets and 8 Marbled Whites, all in this tiny section of scrub. The Ringlets were in various stages of wear from reasonably fresh to distinctly lacklustre.



I also managed to get a Multiple Species shot ready for later in the year.



The Marbled Whites all seemed to adopt moth like poses while roosting folding their fore wings back over the hind wings.



Ten minute sanity break over I headed off to work, once again with the heaters on full to try and dry out my trousers!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gothic_dreams, 13-Jul-12 07:11 AM GMT

Some lovely photos Wurzel, I love the marbled white shots as this is one of my favourite butterflies, especially the pic on the purple flower 😊

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Paul Harfield, 13-Jul-12 07:46 AM GMT

Hi

I think the full frontal close up shot of the Dark Green Fritillary feeding is stunning and very unusual 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Jul-12 05:40 PM GMT

Cheers Chris 😊 I too love Marbled Whites but they can be pains sometimes as they sometimes go down low so lots of greenery can get in the way of the shot!. They seem to be doing alright this year - I stopped at Woodhenge again this morning and they were all over the place - at least 35 in hte one small field!

Cheers Jack 😊 - luckily their mineral source wasn't that fresh so I could get close without the stench! 🤢

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 13-Jul-12 06:23 PM GMT

Your last account made me laugh Wurzel as it is very much my modus operandi at the minute – an hour here, half hour there. Grab the time while you can and s*d the weather! Haven't got it down to 10 mins yet tho' 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jul-12 02:40 AM GMT

You must have amazing willpower Wurzel, to manage to tear yourself away after 10 minutes :wink.

I have enough trouble leaving places when I have sometimes been there for hours.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 14-Jul-12 07:11 AM GMT

Cheers Pauline – sometimes I can stretch it to 15 but then I'll feel the water soaking through my work trousers so I know it's time to go 😊

Neil all I have to do to drag myself away is picture my boss tapping her watch and tutting at my tardiness 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 14-Jul-12 04:05 PM GMT

Slop Bog

Having made two trips already to Slop Bog with no luck I was determined to make my third visit count. Things were looking a lot more favourable than on my previous forays. There had been sightings of one or two Silver Studs and then reports from the weekend of 50 plus males at Slop Bog so I knew that they were about and now, like so many other times this year, I was relying on the weather. I watched the news, checked the web and 3 different Apps on my phone and then Thursday (05-07-2012) everything seemed perfect for an evening visit; warm, sunny, some scattered cloud with light winds!

I practically flew home from work, once the kids had taken their last mouthful of tea they were whisked up to the bath still chewing, stories were read, wife kissed goodbye and into the car. By 6:32 I was pulling up at Slop Bog.

As I practically sprinted along the board walk I scanned the heather on either side for blue waifs flitting around the heather tops with no luck. I slowed down a little realising that although everything looked good they might not be as easy to find compared to last year. However once on the appropriately named "Silver Studded Heath", they became much more obvious. What I found slightly ironic was that the first butterfly that I found was a female which are usually skulking around down low and so difficult to track down. This little beauty was more intent on sunning herself and strutting herself.



Once I'd had my fill of her I then moved further along the path and something huge and blue caught my eye, a monstrous dragonfly which I have yet to identify but will have a go at when I can get round to it!



It's difficult to remember exactly how the evening progressed and I was managing to capture moments and get shots of male and female in lots of different poses as well as becoming deeply engrossed in observing for fleeting minutes; so I found it useful when reflecting on the evening to group the shots into category rather than chronological order.

Last year I had limited success with female Silver Studs. I get the impression that the Slop Bog population are late emergers so when I turned up last year the females had only just started appearing. This year with the weather I think things have happened later but quicker hence there were many more females present than on my previous visit. I'd expected them to behave like the literature detailed, but the females I saw were all pretty much out in the open, clinging to exposed heather tops and basking, wings open wide. It allowed me to get some shots like Millerd has previously got, where the sunlight refracts one the wings to give them an iridescent oily sheen.

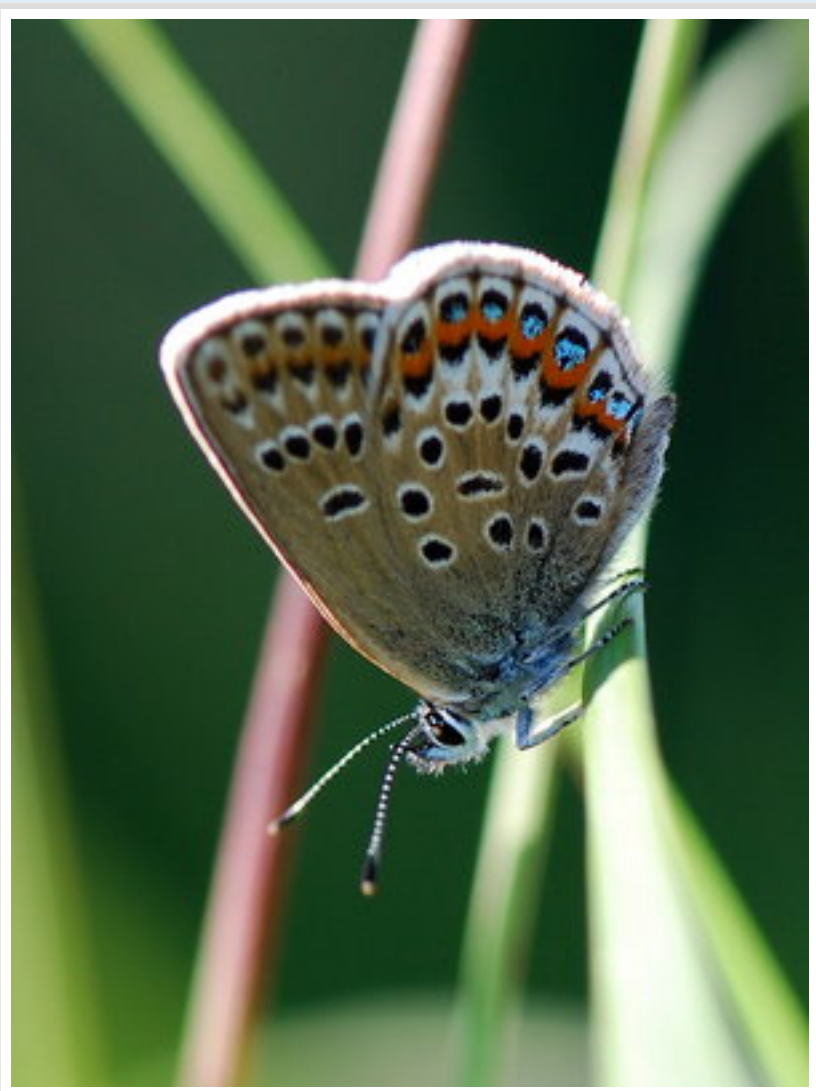


I was also able to get the more usual closed wings shots and noticed that just like the males they show a high variety in the size of the studs and are slightly less variable in the number of studs.

In one shot I managed to get an underside view of a females' wing which was in shadow and the studs are not noticeable at all. Does this mean that the blue of the studs is mechanical, a bit like the blue of the male?



where have the studs gone?

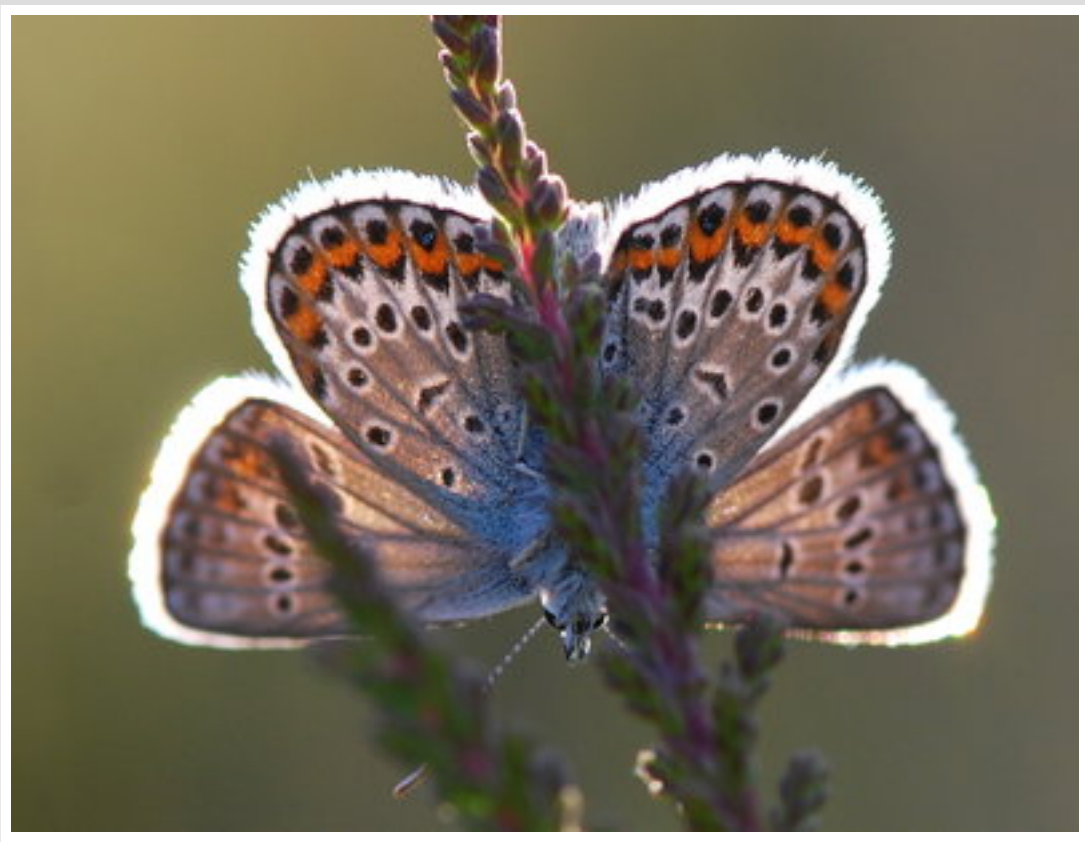


There were more males than females but whether that is due to timing, different behaviour or just the fact that the males are much more noticeable I'm not really sure. There were some slightly tatty looking individuals with tears in the edges of their wings and missing patches of scales, but on the whole most looked in very good nick. When I first arrived the majority were clinging to the heather, wings tightly closed. The way to find them was to crouch down low and scan across the heather tops with an eye for little white "flags". As the evening progressed the taller stands of heather appeared to be flying 4 or 5 white flags as the males in particular started to gather together for communal roosting. It was then that I noticed their behaviour changing slightly as now, just as I thought they were settling, they opened their wings and started basking. As the late evening sun caught their black wing margins they'd turn reddish, simply stunning.





The final set of shots allowed me to continue my stained glass window collection. One male was hanging upside down from a thin, tall heather stem and having got the obligatory frontal open wing shots I gently crept behind him, propped myself on my elbows and took my shots from slightly below and behind. Whilst I was happy with the end result I was less than happy to notice 3 minute Ticks crawling on my hand and trying to find purchase. Luckily they hadn't had a chance to lock on/bite so I could just brush them off!



Despite seeing only one species of butterfly the whole time I was out a thoroughly pleasant evening. Fantastic weather, scenery and most importantly company!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 14-Jul-12 08:47 PM GMT

What splendid results from an evening walk! I do like your 'stained glass window' collection. I believe that your dragonfly is the fairly scarce Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*).

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 15-Jul-12 06:07 AM GMT

Some lovely photos Wurzel, and as usual an excellent read. 😊

All the best, Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 15-Jul-12 06:16 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Some excellent SSB photos there, the evening light gives them a lovely quality 😊

A second the Dragonfly being a Keeled Skimmer, a male. Nice find.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 15-Jul-12 07:21 AM GMT

Glad you got to spend some time with the SSBs, Wurzel, and got those lovely shots of the females – and the backlit undersides. I don't think I could have managed shots like those without being upside-down in a gorse bush... 😊 I'd probably still be there now.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Jul-12 07:18 AM GMT

Cheers for the ID Mike and thanks for the kind comment!

Cheers Nick sometimes I don't know what I like best the sorting of the photos or the writing – of course the actual getting the photos beats both other aspects hands down!

Cheers for your kind comments Neil.

Cheers Dave – I didn't get stuck in a Gorse bush but did get soaked in bog juice and then eaten alive almost by some of the biggest Mosquitoes I've ever seen!

Woodhenge...

It's been a while and I'm getting so far behind with my diary that I've still get some posts from almost a fortnight back! Work keeps getting in the way of the important business of getting out and photographing/enjoying butterflies and then sorting the subsequent photos!

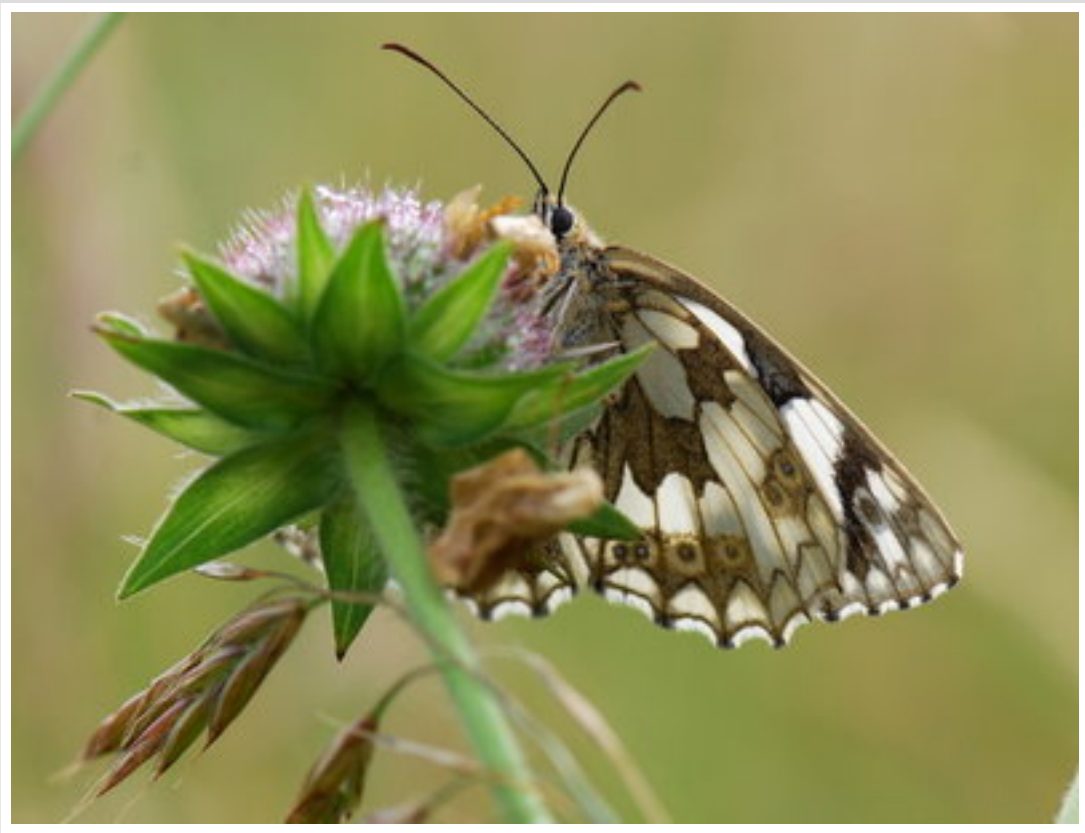
I've still got the weekends shots to sort through as I visited Straits Enclosure for the first time but to try and catch up here is a BOGOF, two posts in one from Woodhenge. The first was from 07-07 the second from 13-07. Both trips were made in the morning before work as it's safer that way and as I've previously mentioned the butterflies are more approachable.

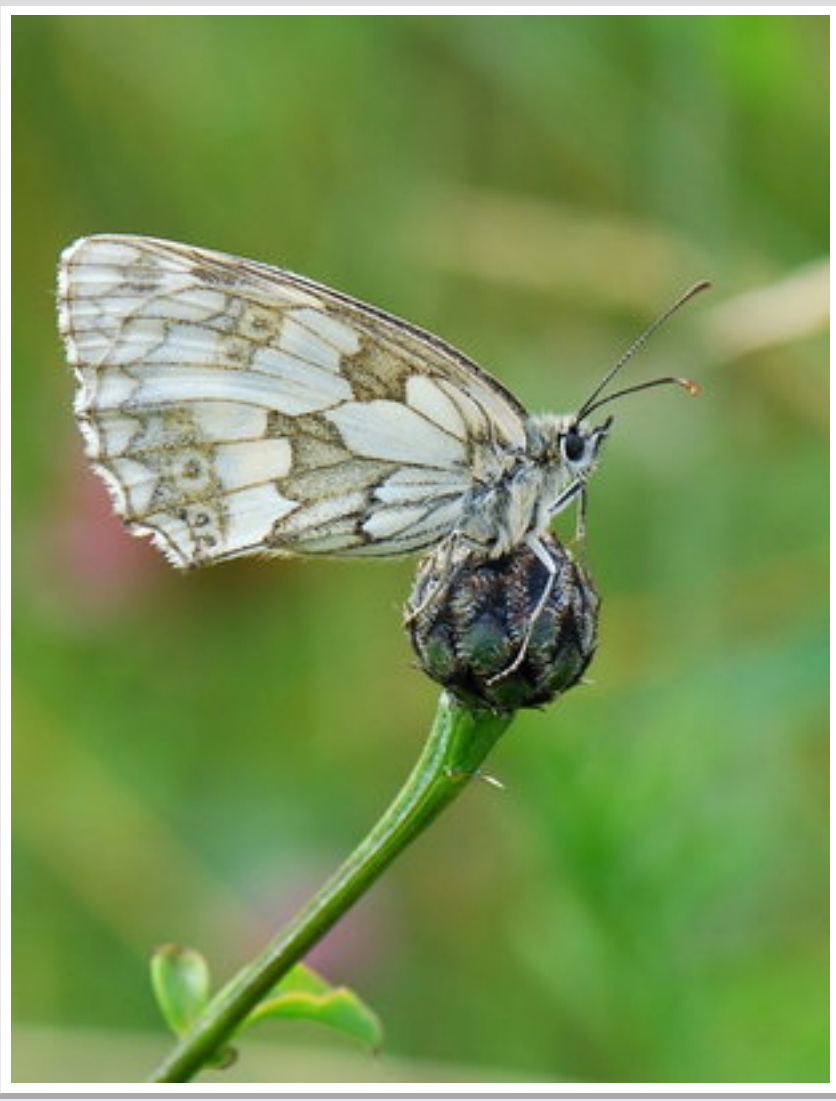
On the first visit the clouds came over and there was a lot of moisture in the air and on the grasses. I wandered around the rings and there were Ringlet and Meadow Brown in small numbers – Ringlets looking worn and Meadow Browns full of vim and vigour. But I was here for the Marbled Whites again as I wanted to get a shot of a female with her wings closed. I encountered a few males and lots of MW's with their wings held in the moth like manner. One of these had a white substance extruding from its' genitalia and I'm not sure whether this was a male or female and what the substance was?





I then found a few females to photograph including one with its wings firmly closed.



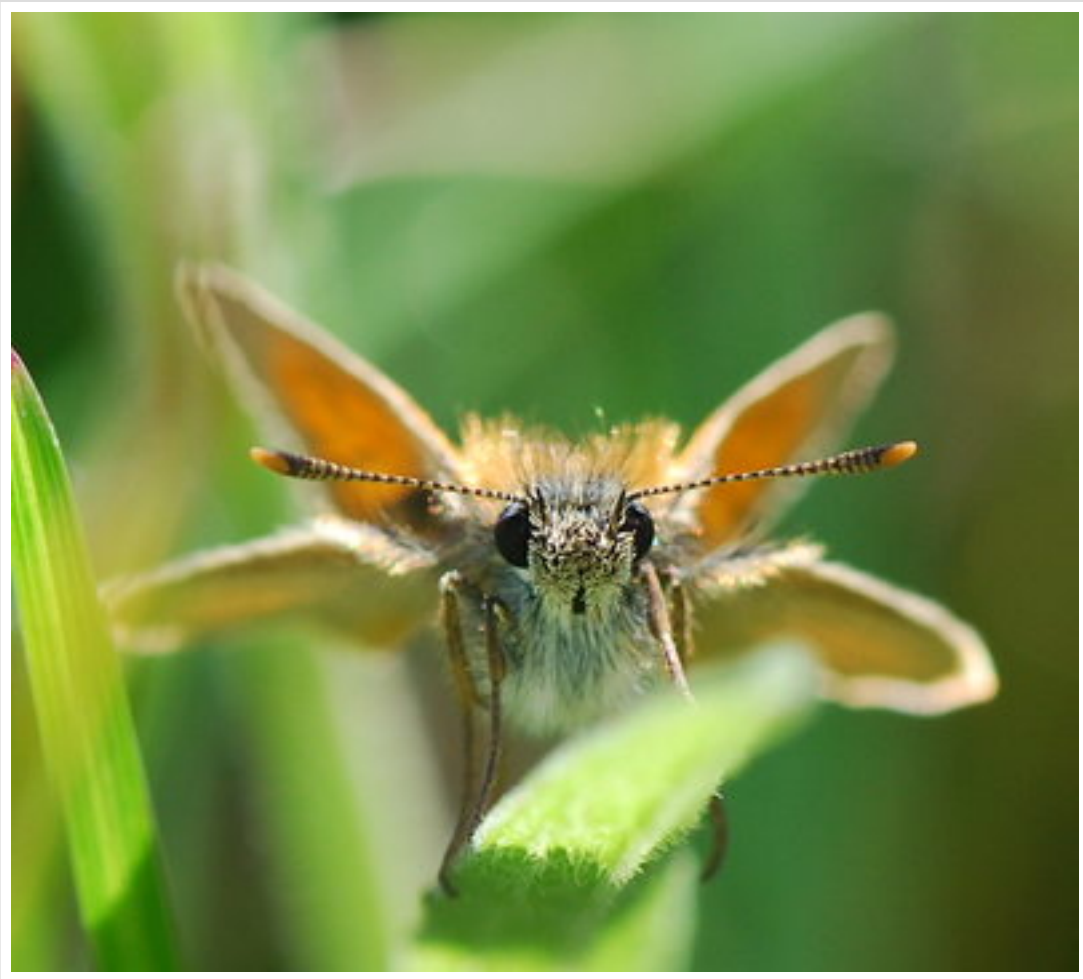


Shots in the bag I headed off to work with trousers soaked from the knee down but relaxed and ready for work...

My second visit was only a week later but what a difference. It was one of those rare blue sky mornings with a light wind and feeling decidedly warm for 8ish am. There were still good numbers of Marbled Whites but many more Meadow Browns now including one female that almost glimmered. In the early morning sun



Just behind the car park is a small triangle of grass shaped by the fence and hedge and the two roads. Here there were the same range of species but in much lower numbers - one MW and 2 MBs and I was just about to call it a day only 6 minutes in when a tiny orange blur buzzed by. I let it settle and then approached it cautiously as it settled in the grass. Straight away I could see that it was a Smessex and the lack of sex brands meant that I would have to get round the front and look at the antennae to be sure. Luckily enough she didn't seem to want to go anywhere so I worked my round getting shots from a range of angles.



The orange tips seen in close up left me in no doubt that this was a Small Skipper. I'll have to start looking at Five Rivers soon I think for my Essex!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 17-Jul-12 07:32 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

... I headed off to work with trousers from the knee down but relaxed and ready for work...

Wurzel

This conjures an interesting image, Wurzel. What exactly is it you do for a living? 😊

(Lovely Marbled Whites, incidentally)

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Jul-12 08:04 AM GMT

Thanks for pointing out the edit mistake, should be sorted now Dave, I hope the imagery didn't put you off your supper 😊

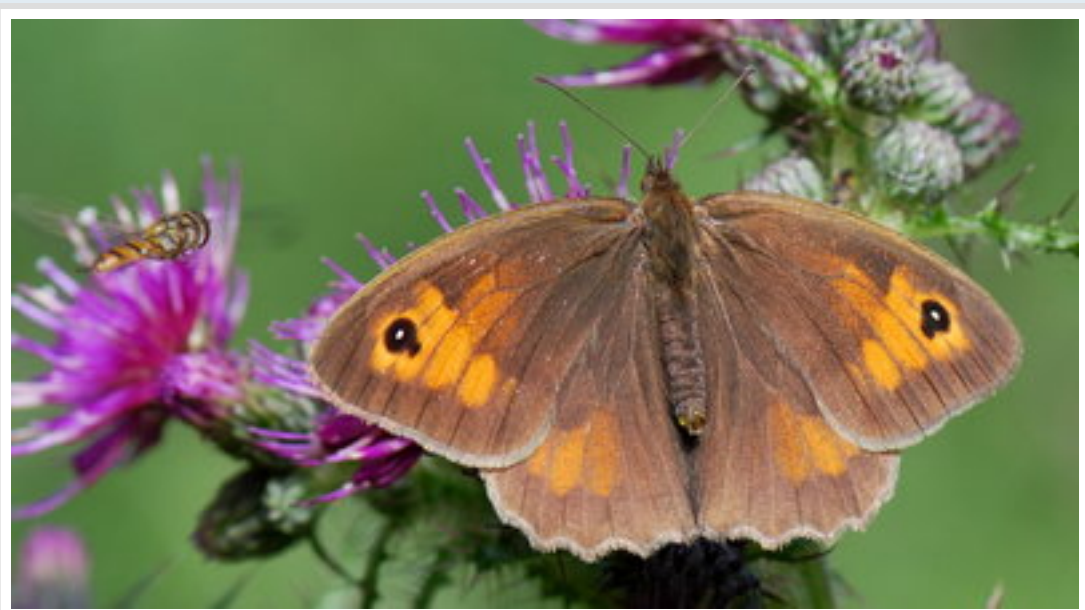
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

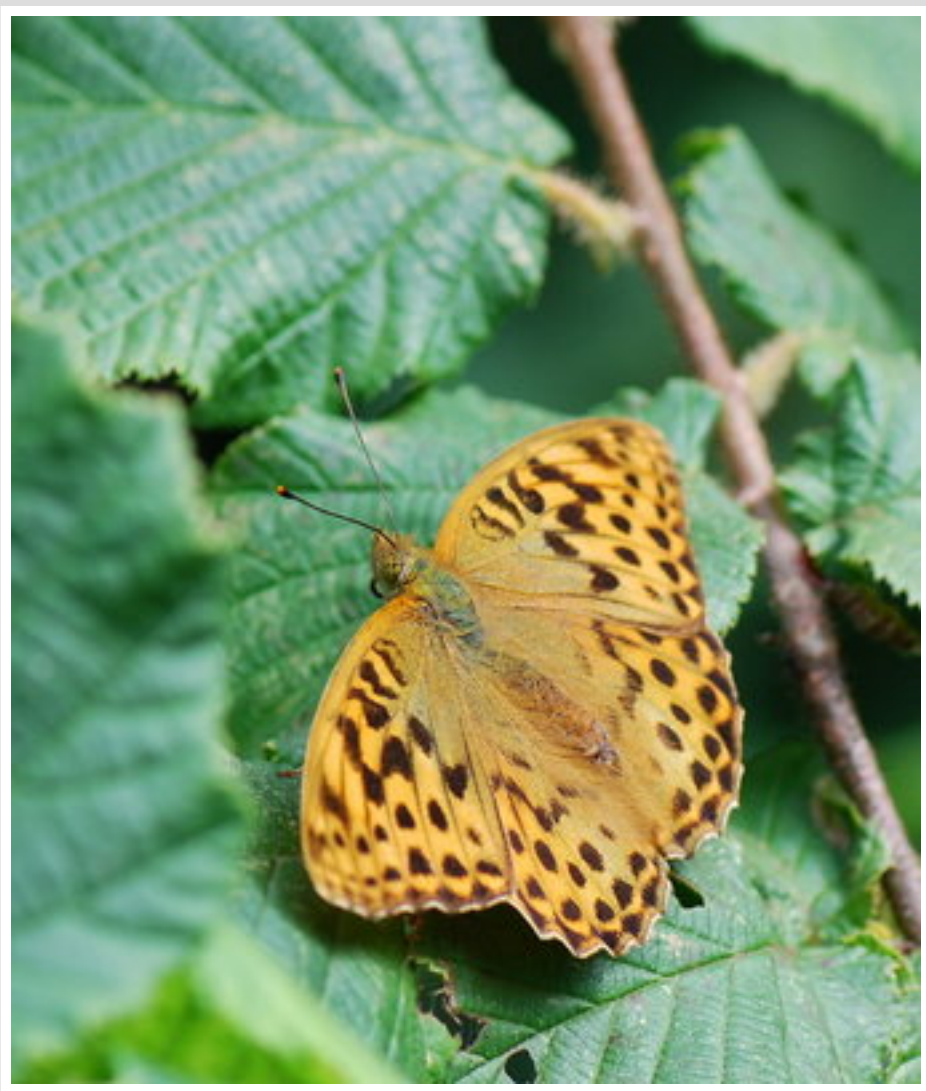
by Wurzel, 18-Jul-12 07:43 AM GMT

On Sunday with the weather looking like it was going to be the best the week would have to offer I loaded my older daughter into the car and headed over Farnham way for a meet up with Philzoid. We arrived early at Straits and set off with some trepidation along the track. Already there were people about as we enjoyed the Silver Washed Fritillaries and Meadow Browns along the edges even though they showed an infuriating knack of perching just out of reach. Despite this some individuals behaved much better perching on the large number of thistles including a possible aberrant female Meadow Brown with orange markings on the hind wings and also a SWF and Small Skipper allowed me to get a multi species shot.



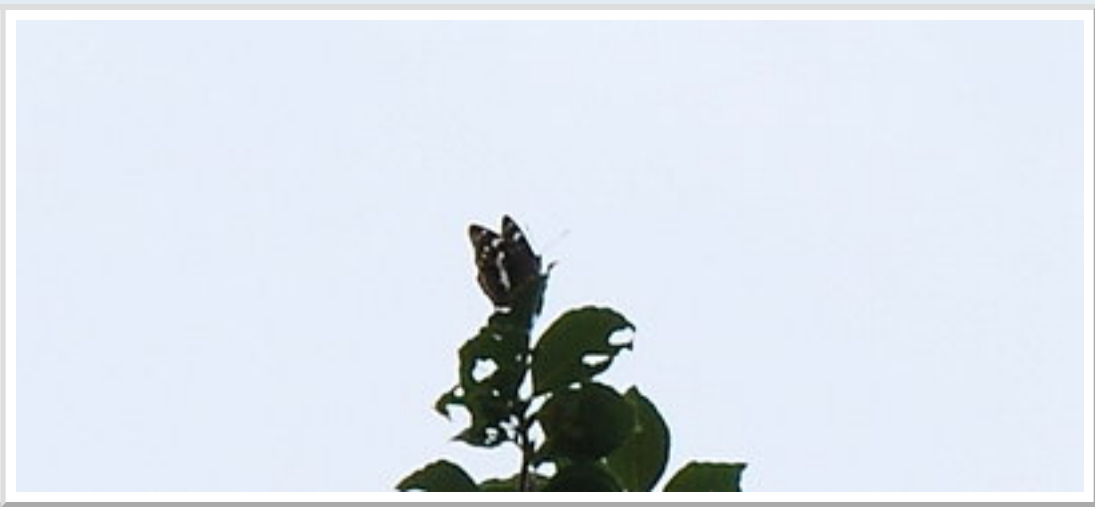


Other species seen were the occasional flighty White Admiral, Ringlets and Comma and we continued our way along the path towards the fire tower scanning the footpath for large dark blobs and stopping at thistles to snap away at the large number of SWFs a lot of them female. I met Pauline for the first time - good to finally meet up and also bumped into Tuts who was on his way to some other sites in the Alice Holt area. We continued on down and checked the hotspot that was by the fire tower. Here the bramble bushes attracted butterflies from all over and you just had to stand back as Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Large and Small Skippers, SWFs, White and Red Admirals, Commas and a Marbled White flitted in and out of the prickles, swooping in to nectar and then disappearing again to be replaced by a different species. It was enough to make you go dizzy as you'd try to watch one individual only for it to interact with another and another and then you'd get distracted and start watching something else!





Eventually we ended up at the end of the track which seemed quite over grown and had fewer of the same species. It seemed like the weather wasn't going to help us so we slowly worked our way back meeting up with Colin Baker on the way. From there we moved over to Goose Green hoping to at least see if not photograph his Nibbs. While we were having lunch Tuts arrived again and set off and when we joined him shortly he took great delight in informing us that he'd seen at least 6 individuals 😲! Still when the sun came out we were graced by His presence and enjoyed some of His monkey business! He'd fly really fast disappearing over the tree tops of the trees on the other side of the road and then appear Batman style back on his Perch. You'll have to excuse the poor photos but after three years these are the only photos I've ever managed to get! Still at least the pressure is off I have a photo and so now can look forward to the grounded more intimate shots to come. 😊



As the cloud came back over we left Him at his tree top palace and headed back to Straits. We strolled along the track with a Green Veined White on the way and soon found ourselves at the fire tower which was again alive with butterflies. To the species already seen we added Large White as well as a Golden Ringed Dragonfly which was a nice find. We were joined by Paul Richie and tried our luck at the far end of the track where Pauls cologne was too much for a mating pair of SWFs which continued copulating on his chest. Once finished the male unclasped the female and she flew off and landed on my daughters' hat. Once we'd got some shots Philzoid transferred the hat to his daughter, butterfly and all, so that she could have the red carpet treatment too! 😊





Back at the fire tower we were joined by Tuts and there was now a Small White and a very fresh Red Admiral and every time the sun would peep through the clouds the butterflies would throng around the brambles once again treating us to a fantastic spectacle.





All too soon the day was drawing to a close and I had to get home to complete the domestic duties prior to the start of the working week. Still here's hoping that with high pressure building we may get some proper Emperor weather and I can get those grounded shots!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 18-Jul-12 05:42 PM GMT

Aloha Wurzel!

As ever a feast of sharp images! I assume you mean Farnham in Wiltshire?

Well done on snapping 'His Purpleness'! I would have been in a world of trouble trying to capture that on the old mobile! 😊

Still can't quite believe I saw mine yesterday; genuinely made my year!

I hope you get closer to him next time and get some more hairstreaks.

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-Jul-12 08:52 PM GMT

Cheers CJB 😊 I too hope I get closer to Him next time as I'm still feeling pangs of jealousy at your shots!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 19-Jul-12 12:33 AM GMT

Some nice shots Wurzel – I particularly like the Meadow Brown and White Admiral. When I read your report it really made me question why I go further afield when I have so many really good sites, including this one, on my doorstep. I must try to remember that the grass isn't always greener 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-Jul-12 07:19 AM GMT

Cheers Pauline. 😊 I too am lucky enough to have some cracking sites near me but I travel to similar sites so I can meet up with other enthusiasts, although Straits was brill at the weekend, the Fire Tower area was simply stunning, just so many butterflies 😊

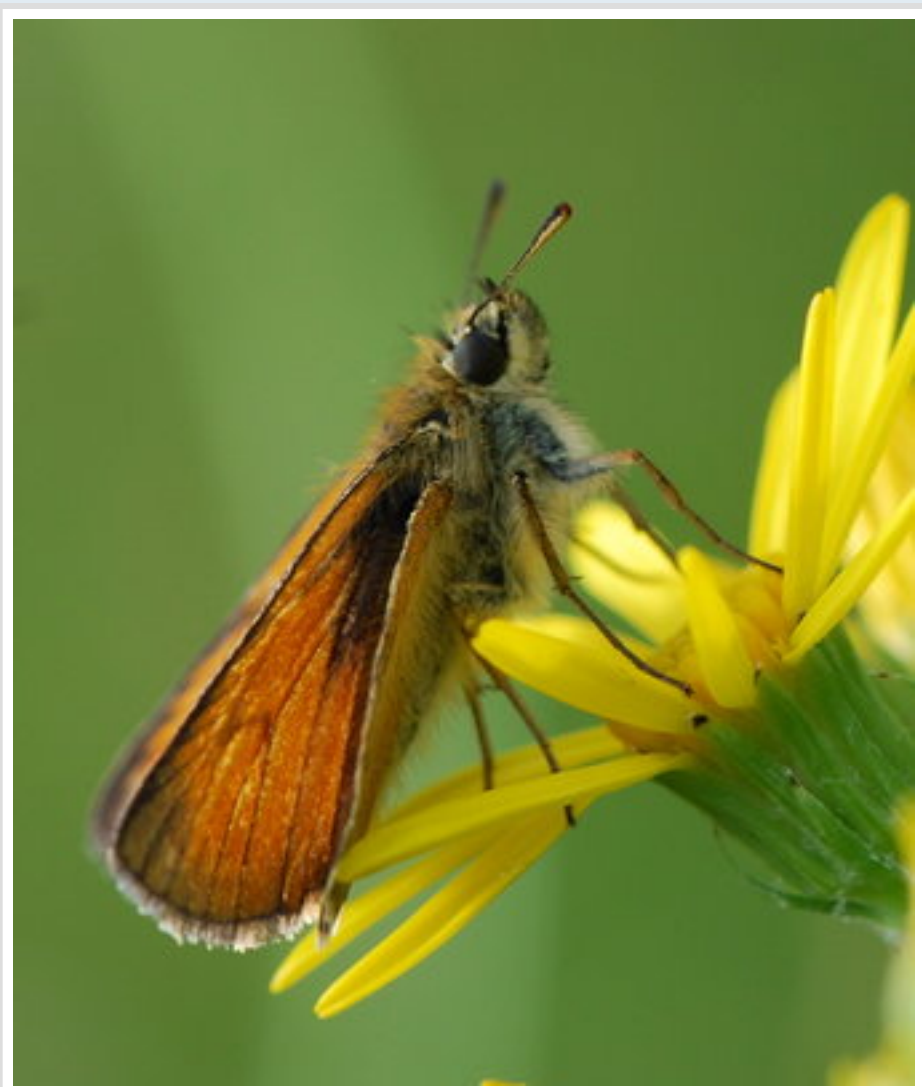
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-12 07:09 AM GMT

In order to keep up to date with my PD I really need to stop going out and trying to find butterflies! These were taken on a morning stop about a week ago. I called in at one of the pull in places on the edge of the Salisbury Plain Training Area. As I strolled up the path Meadow Browns exploded like exocet missiles from the grass in front of me and headed off at obtuse angles. I could glimpse the occasional Marbled White clinging to the grasses. At the top of the rise the path curves off and cuts through a small rectangular wood. Also here are larger thistles and almost every one of these had a Marbled White or Meadow Brown perched on the top. There were also Large Skippers about although they were starting to look a little past their best and when they'd chase others away they did so in an almost arthritic fashion. The vegetation present here formed a short cline with the succession starting with the short grasses in the centre of the path becoming more interspersed with shorter flowers, then taller flowers, grasses, thistles before the shorter trees and climaxing with the mature trees in the wood. This whole succession occurs in just a couple of metres. It was in the shorter flowering plants that I found a Smessex Skipper and having gotten a few shots from various different angles discovered that it was a female Small and it was soon joined by a much fresher looking male.





The Meadow Browns didn't seem to have any preference for any particular area but the Ringlets definitely favoured the longer grass and thistles. I noticed one individual with very large "eye" markings although I'm pretty sure that it falls in the normal range of variation for this species.



With the clock running down rapidly I started back and came across a Small Heath in the middle of the path. I knew that the moment I got within 2 metres of it, it would be off and I couldn't go round or edge past it without disturbing it so I thought that I would make the most of this opportunity. I set my camera to sport mode, focused in and very slowly, clicking all the time, shuffled my way along the path. The Small Heath acted as predicted and rocketed away and out of sight, but when I checked my photos there was an (bit blurry admittedly) open wing shot of Small Heath. I don't condone disturbing a butterfly to get a shot but I didn't have much choice in this case and perhaps next time I'm put in a similar position by a Small Heath I might get a sharper image.



That said the holidays are approaching and apparently we're going to be getting some warmer weather - who knows we might suddenly see loads of

butterflies –could this be a Clouded Yellow summer, when was the last one?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 20-Jul-12 07:33 AM GMT

2009, Wurzel, was probably the last summer with appreciable numbers of Clouded Yellows. The field down near Beachy Head at the end of September with an estimated 500+ was a sight to see.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 20-Jul-12 07:59 AM GMT

Seconded! I were there in early October, and they were everywhere –and all when i thought the butterfly season had finished! There were still some in early November! Unforgettable.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-12 08:20 AM GMT

Cheers Dave and Essex, so judging by what the books say the next big one will be around 2019 😞

Still at least our summer is here 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 20-Jul-12 06:12 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

More sharp shots 📷!

With you picture of the Ringlet, I wondered if you agreed that the Ringlet Ladies have 3 spots on the upper wing (when open) and the Lads only 2? In my PE posting (😊) I included a picture of a ringlet with 3 spots. Any thoughts?

Off for 2 weeks from tomorrow just in time for the weather and hoping to get my first DGF;; wish me luck!

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Jul-12 07:55 AM GMT

Cheers for the kind comments CJB 😊 All the books do indeed show male Ringlets with 2 abd females with 3 spots on the forewings but the size and how eyed the spots are seems to be quite variable. Good luck with the DGF this weekend –look for purple flowers and you should find them, also try early or later when they'll be calmer.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 23-Jul-12 07:45 AM GMT

While everyone else was out finding Chalkhills or Emperors I was enjoying a family day at Wisley. Hell of a long way to go for a day out but it was a request from my sister in-law, so we walked round the meadows and gardens as the sun beat down. It seems that summer is eventually here – how long it will last is anyone's guess as the Met are hedging their bets. Still amongst the shrubbery butterflies were about, mainly very flighty whites but they were joined by a male Brimstone and a Comma.



By lunch time we'd made it to the edge of the orchards so we stopped to eat a picnic in the longer grass as whites and Meadow Browns flitted by joined by blue Damselflies. As the day progressed there were many more Meadow Browns and whites and also another Comma and three species of Damselfly.



We were heading back to the car park when a blue butterfly flitted by – a male Holly Blue from the second brood. Unfortunately the tired legs of the children took precedent and so I tore myself away from watching it to return the family to the car and home. Whilst it was an enjoyable day from a family point of view, and it was nice to see some whites making flights, I couldn't help feeling somehow that I was missing out...remind me not to check the sightings thread!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 23-Jul-12 07:50 AM GMT

don't forget not check the sightings thread 😊 well you did ask 😊

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 23-Jul-12 07:54 AM GMT

Never mind, Wurzel. Wisley is amazing for botanical interest, but it seems a bit clinical for butterflies, somehow.

It's going to be a lovely week – you'll be out there somewhere, I'm sure.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-Jul-12 08:01 AM GMT

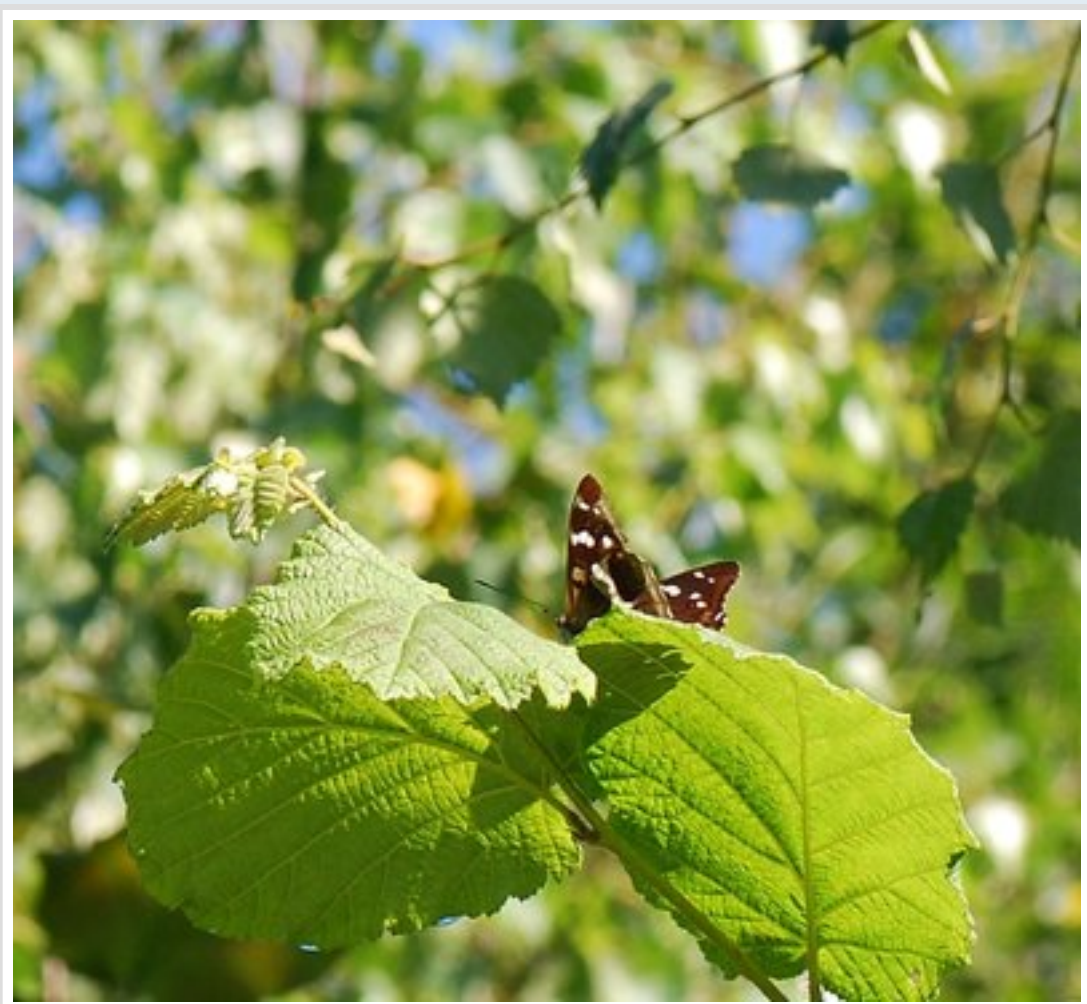
Cheers Chris but I succumbed – it wasn't too bad though... 😊

Cheers for the consoling Dave 😊 – and clinical was the word I was thinking of yeasterday but couldn't quite articulate.

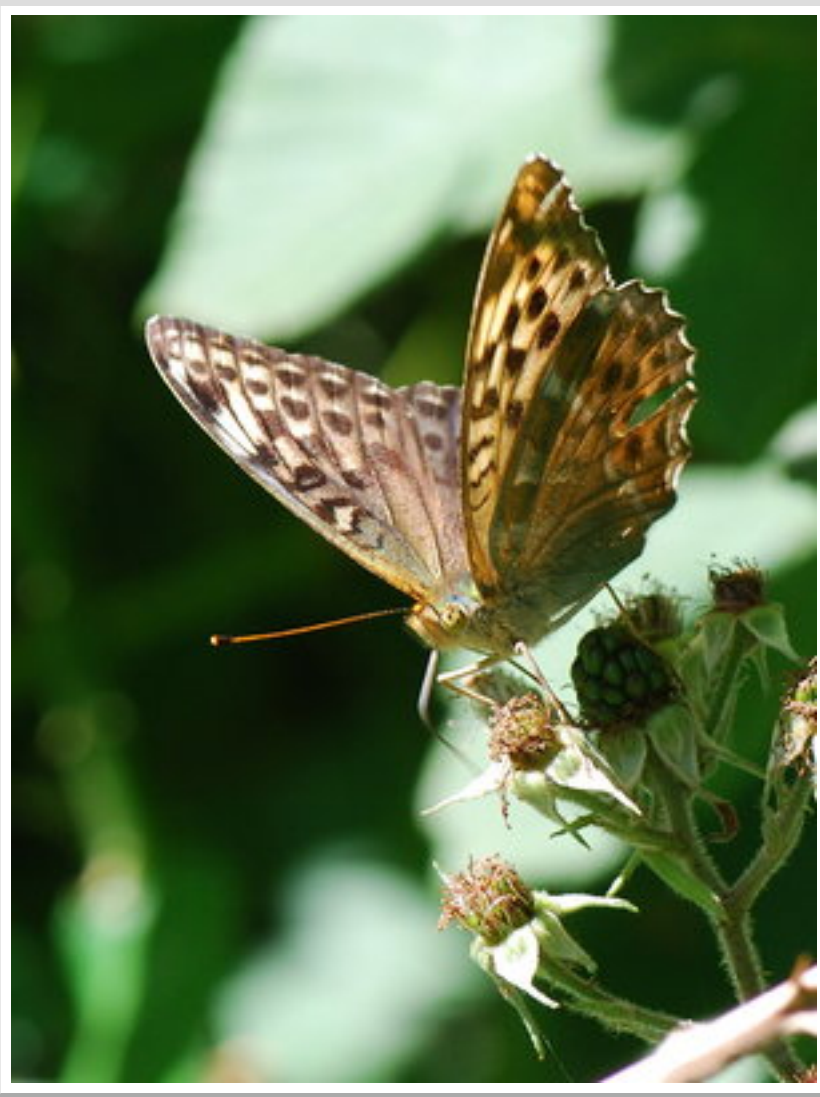
Bentley Wood delivers and then some...

With the weather wall to wall sunshine, high temperatures and very little wind it seemed perfect for Purple Emperors. Having driven all the way up to Wisley yesterday and with a camping trip back to my homeland in the offing I decided to stay local and try my luck for the third year at Bentley Wood. The last two years I have been getting closer and closer views of His Nibbs but the weather hasn't always been good so no grounded shots for me.

I arrived in the car park and there were a few people around. I apologise now if anyone I met today should read this because one of the things I really must do is actually ask people who they are! Anyway I set off slowly strolling down the switchback in trying to scan the tree tops and the ground at the same time. As it was a bit early there was very little flying apart from the occasional Ringlet. I was soon caught up by a couple of blokes from Falmouth and we arrived at the crossroads. The large Oaks on the corners had a single Purple Hairstreak flitting around and that was it. So they headed back along the switchback and I walked down the track on the left. Still there was very little about and the shade made things unfavourable so it was back along the switchback for me, with another single Purple Hairstreak. About half way along near the larger braken field I bumped into the two blokes from earlier and they'd seen a Purple Emperor in amongst one of the Oaks there. We got a bit distracted by the odd Silver Washed Fritillary and a White Admiral when something a fair bit bigger and more bat shaped flew down the path towards us and after a brief altercation with the White Admiral landed about 10ft up a Hazel tree that was at the side of the path, so it was just out of reach.



I thought this was going to be the best view I was going to get and so I wasn't surprised when it took off about 20 minutes later and became lost from view higher up an Oak tree. We three decided to head back to the car park for a drink and then do another patrol. Whilst there a fresh White Admiral and a Valesina gave us something to look at amid Large Skippers and Ringlets.



We were just heading back when another watcher told us that the individual that had been out of reach had landed on the path for a good 10 minutes so we all ran back to half way along the switchback. We were still some distance away when it took off. It did a couple of fly-bys almost landing a couple of times, landed for about 15 seconds and then was gone. Oh well I'd gotten some photos and the closest views I'd ever had so we carried on towards the crossroads. While watching a Silver Washed we realised that we weren't the only ones watching as perched just above it was a large Dragonfly - a Southern Hawker.



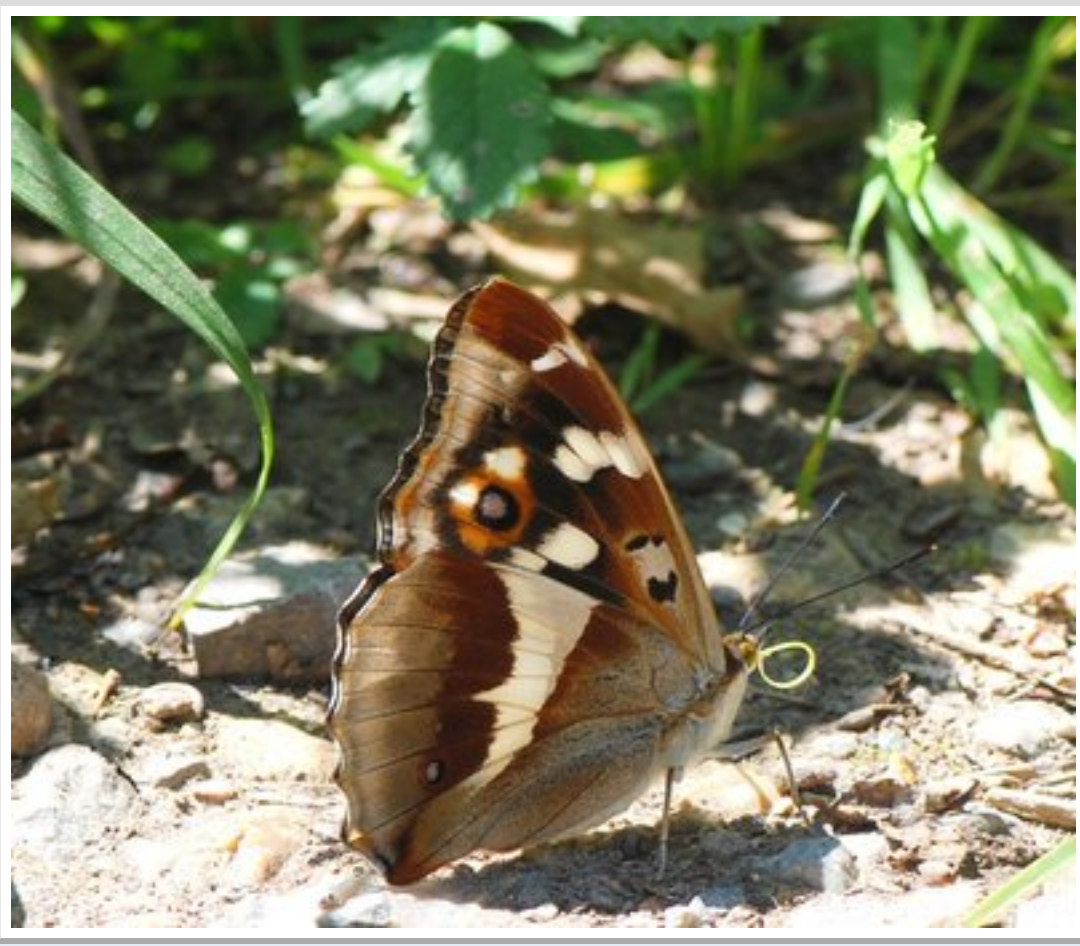
From there we headed left down the path from the crossroads with banter flowing about what we'd like and one gent reckoning that within 100yards there would be a PE on the deck. And within 98 there was as it had been baited by a couple of gents from Bournemouth. Also there was a dead rabbit and this proved to be successful in attracting another male down to the deck where it had a stroll around the logs, flew back up in to the tree again before finally settling down and feeding on decaying lagomorphs. Whilst I appreciated the bait for getting the PE down I did forget to breathe through my mouth at one point which was pretty rank - but that's what you have to endure for His Nibbs!



With the clock ticking I had to head back and left the group heading towards Donkey Copse and the baiters went back to their stools (something I'll give a go next year). By the time I'd almost reached the car park my cheeks were aching from grinning so much but it didn't end there! A small cluster of people had just seen a PE on the deck yards from the car park and as I was getting shots of a White Admiral another appeared and plopped down. This one could be a female as no matter from which angle the sun caught it it didn't show up blue. I say "could" because I'm not sure of the diagnostic features to differentiate between the sexes. 😊 I'd joined a group this time and all of the main bods present seemed adamant that it was a female - I'd be delighted if it was but I'm still not too sure...



As this one left it was replaced by another - a definite male this time which set about feeding on dog scat.



An absolutely cracking morning of madness – people bringing along their dogs scat in little baggies, 3 grown men sprinting along a gravel track, other people bringing road kill on a day out, others still peeing in the middle of the track while others look away realising it's all for the common good! True there were other butterflies around but they seem to pale into insignificance His Nibbs, I can't wait for next year!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 25-Jul-12 09:50 PM GMT

Congratulations on getting the Emperors Wurzel 🎉 😊 . Judging by the postings it seems like everyone has seen a grounded one this season except me 😞 😞 And it looks like the weather isn't going to hold for the coming weekend 😞 ⚠️

Looking at your pictures it is hard to tell whether the part open shot (4 from the end) is a female, but the next picture looks like one to me (not sure if your text saying its a male refers to that pic or the one below?) The wing shape is 'stockier', for want of a better description, and although females have the same patterns as the males they are generally bigger with slightly thicker-set wings (not 100% on this by any means though).

Phil

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Tutton, 26-Jul-12 01:24 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel – glad you got one in the end – reward for all your hard work. Looks good for a female PE to me – the most notable difference in the field is the size – the female appears noticeably bigger. However the white bands are also somewhat wider in the female and the wings have a general more rounded appearance than the male, which certainly looks to be the case with your one.

Just like buses eh? When ones shows up so do two more! Mark. 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 26-Jul-12 05:19 AM GMT

Congratulations on the Purple Emperors Wurzel 😊

A female on the ground as well 🎉

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Pete Eeles, 27-Jul-12 07:53 PM GMT

Congrats Wurzel – my experience was very similar and I even found the baited area (the gents must use this year after year since I saw PE there last year too on leftover bait!). Someone had added a banana skin to the mix, which absolutely stank from whatever concoctions it had soaked up. After 10 minutes of waiting there and seeing 2 male PEs fly by, a local dog walker came and chatted, and his dog promptly walked over to the rank banana skin and ate the thing whole. Whichever end that skin comes out of it is going to STINK! The dog breath must have been particularly potent that particular day 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Jul-12 06:04 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid and Tuts for the extra ID help 😊 , I was a little unsure as I didn't think that females were supposed to come down onto the deck, but then that's the beauty of nature watching – you have to expect the unexpected! And I much prefer these too buses!

Cheers for the congratulations Neil! 😊

Cheers Pete 😊 – I'm glad that Bentley yielded you good results too – it's been a bit off there it seems the last couple of years, for me anyway. I'll have to remember that spot and also scour my local Polish Deli for some shrimp paste that was recommended. Another idea I'll nick from the baiters was taking along a stool so you can have a sit down while you wait! 😊

I've only just got back from a 5 night camping trip to my old stomping grounds on the Isle of Purbeck and rather than sort through the photos I'm posting from a trip I made almost 3 weeks ago but never got round to sorting out...

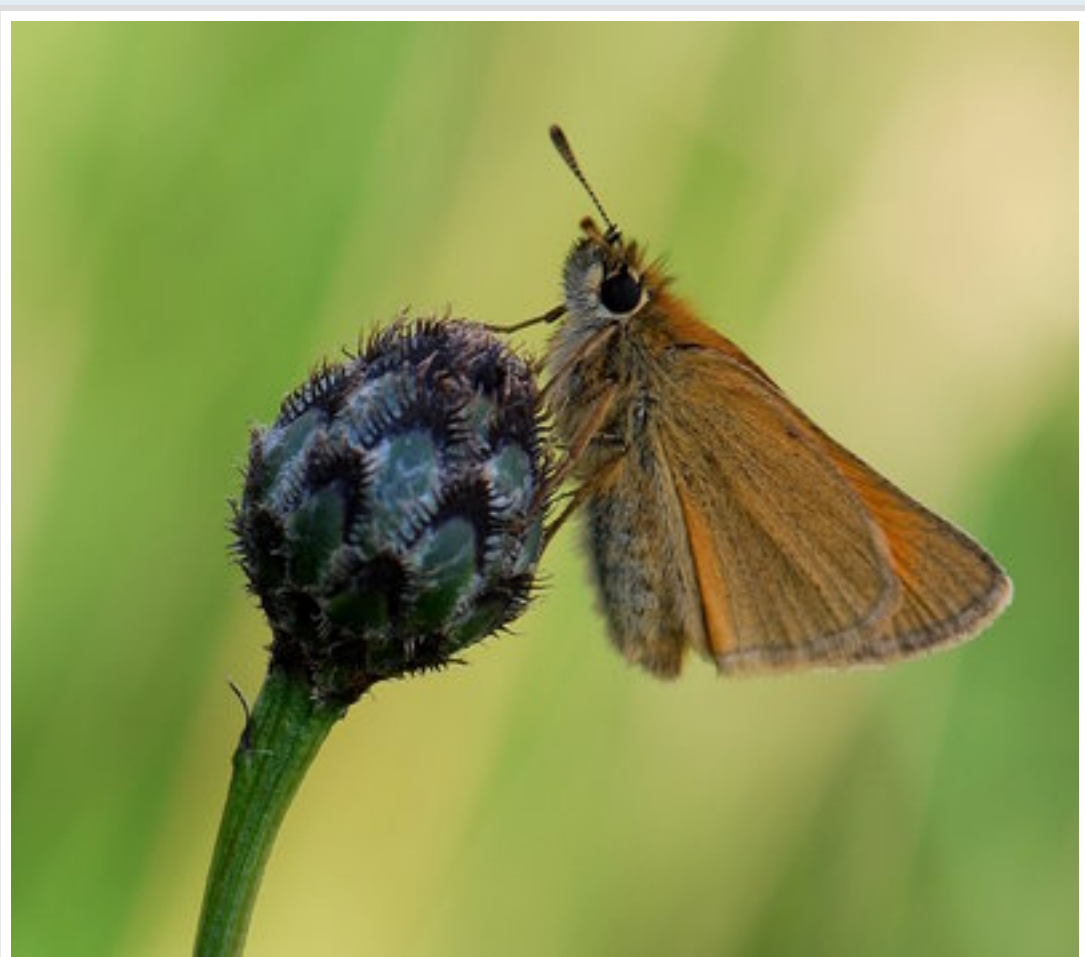
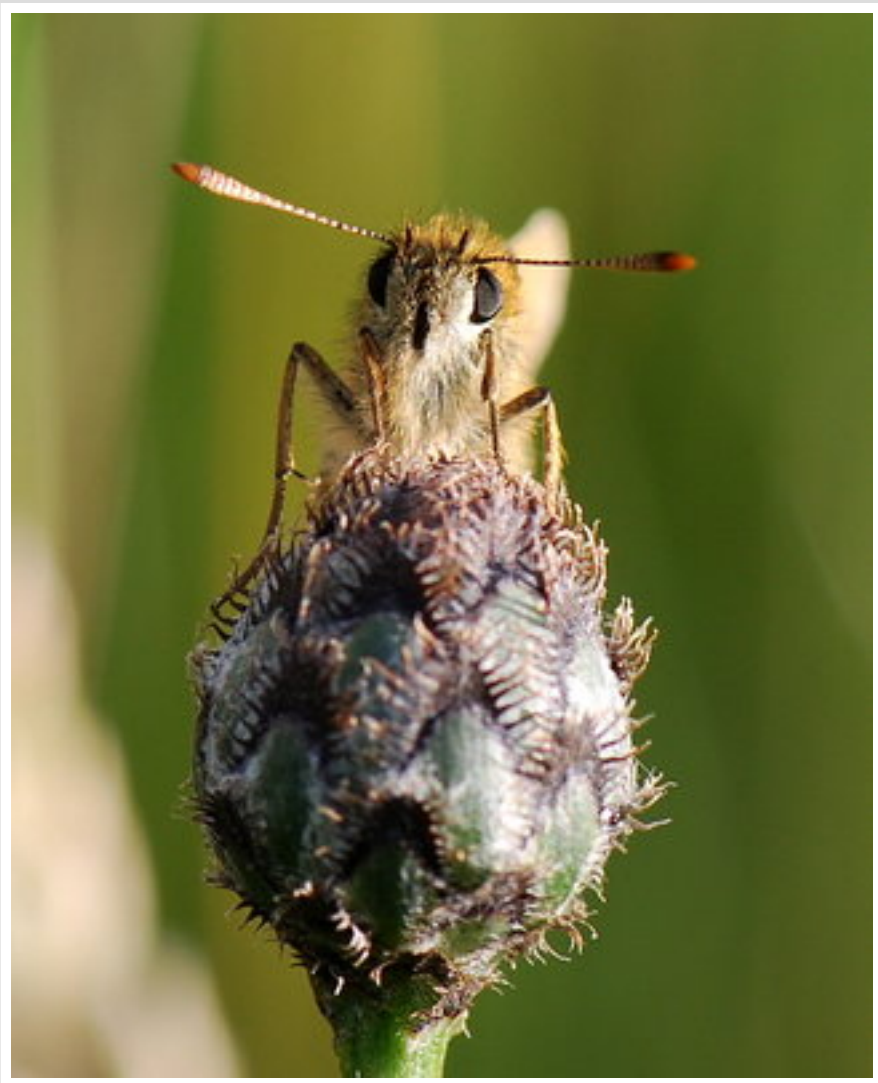
Martin Down back in mid July was experiencing totally different weather to what we have had over the last week or so. As I was feeling the need to get out as much as possible I decided to make an evening foray. However I didn't know what to try for – Bentley for more Silver Washed, Garston for a possible Valesina or Martin Down for some roosting DGFs?

In the end I headed into Hampshire and bombed along the well worn road to Martin Down. As I pulled up into the car park I was hopeful that the large threatening cloud might just skip by me and the sun would remain but as I headed for the butts I realised that my luck just wasn't going to be in and for the next 20 minutes amongst the showers I saw only the occasional Meadow Brown that was brave/stupid enough to fly, possibly in a vain attempt to find some shelter.

I got as far as the meadow at Grimm's Ditch (?) before deciding that I should call it a day and so I trudged back to the car park. The clouds would occasionally shift and the sun would break through only for rainbows to form for a few minutes before the next wave of rain hit.



I finally ended up at my DGF hotspot, the hollow to the right of the car park when the sun appeared, and with it butterflies! Where there had been none just 30 seconds before there were Foresters and spotted Burnets (okay they're moths but I really didn't care at this point - anything that flew was fair game), Small Heaths seemed to be having a competition with Meadow Browns to find which species could explode the quickest from the grass on the path and as well as Marbled Whites there was the occasional orange blur of a Smessex passing by. I did manage to track one of these down and I was actually quite grateful when a cloud covered the weak evening sun so I could manage an approach.



The Marbled Whites were easy to spot, just look for any purple flower head and there would be one, sometimes two. I came across two Marbled Whites on two separate Knapweed heads, both head down, the one on the right facing right, the one on the left facing left but despite 5 or 6 minutes of constantly shifting my position I just couldn't seem to get them both in focus. In the end I got as good as I could of both individuals and perhaps one day when I've got time/photoshop I'll splice the two photos together or layer them to get the effect I was seeing with my knackered old eyes.



Although the sun was weak when it did shine it would catch the Marbled Whites in particular and they would glow almost with the delicate blue spots showing well.



In the end I had to call it a night as the temperature noticeably dropped and the butterflies became scarcer and scarcer. I never did see a roosting DGF and it was only as I was driving home that I realised that I actually didn't know what I was looking for anyway!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 30-Jul-12 10:01 PM GMT

Wurzal I love your Butterfly Pic's, but I love your Rainbow even more ,it's vibrant, I bet it looked great as a back ground to the BFs and Moths.Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 31-Jul-12 06:44 AM GMT

Cheers Goldie, it's not too bad for a macro lens shot is it 😊

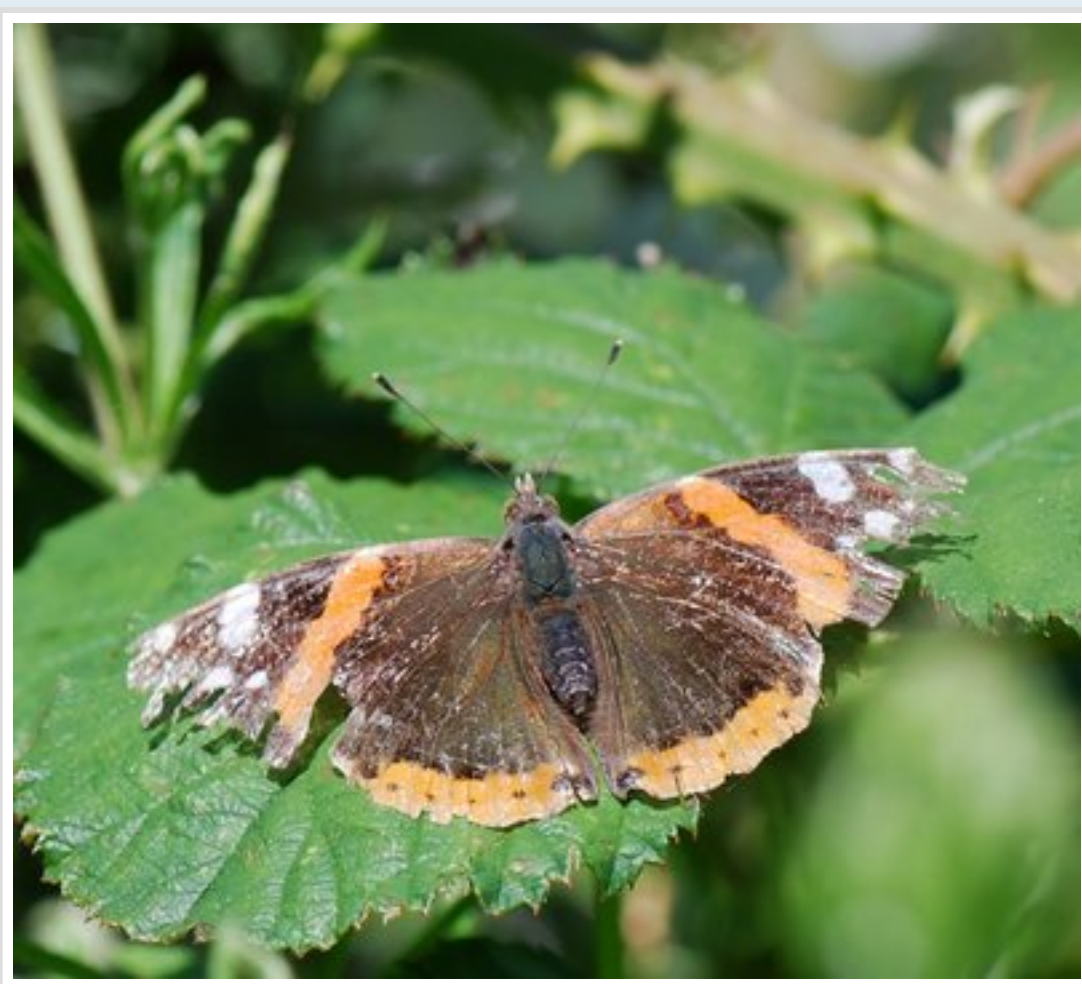
Camping at Downshay...23rd -29th July

I took the family back to my old stomping grounds on the Isle of Purbeck for a few days camping last week. We stayed at our favourite campsite - Downshay Farm with some stunning views of Ballard Down and Corfe Castle. Whilst it was great to be back in Dorset and actually enjoying the sun the butterfly habitat was pretty limited as there was only the hedge behind tent and some longer vegetation down to shower block. I was also limited by

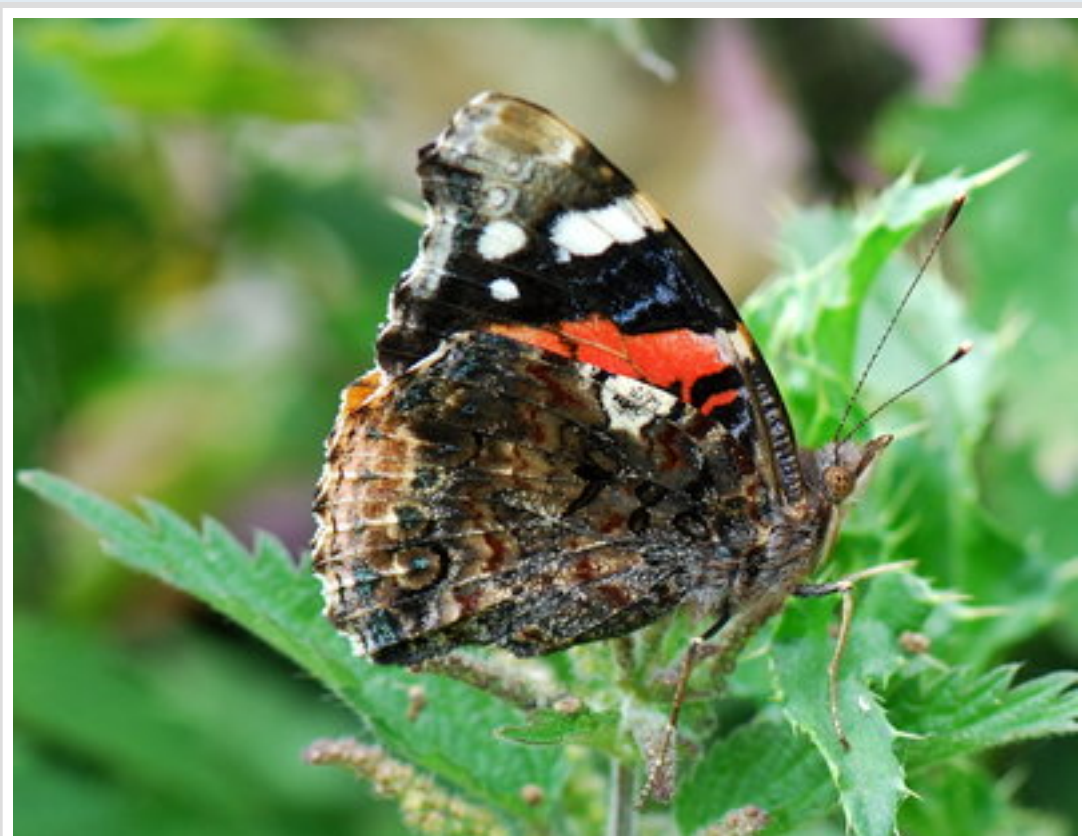
time in that I could only snatch 10 minutes here and there before I had to head back to kiddie patrol. That said I took as many opportunities as I could and there were a couple of outings to look forward too as well. The Hedge behind the tent was a nice mixture of bramble, ferns and small shrubs and it yielded butterflies from the minute we arrived with a nectaring Comma.



Later in the afternoon a very old Red Admiral turned up and I could enjoy a nice cup of tea while Meadow Browns played around my feet. There were also Hedge Browns in good numbers but I'll deal with them in another post as my variation obsession has returned!



Over the next couple of days the hedge housed a Smessex, Meadow Browns, Small Whites, Hedge Browns a single Marbled White and a much fresher Red Admiral but most species were turbo solar charged and so didn't stop for very long. Even the Meadow Browns had stopped playing around and now took to bombing it up the field!

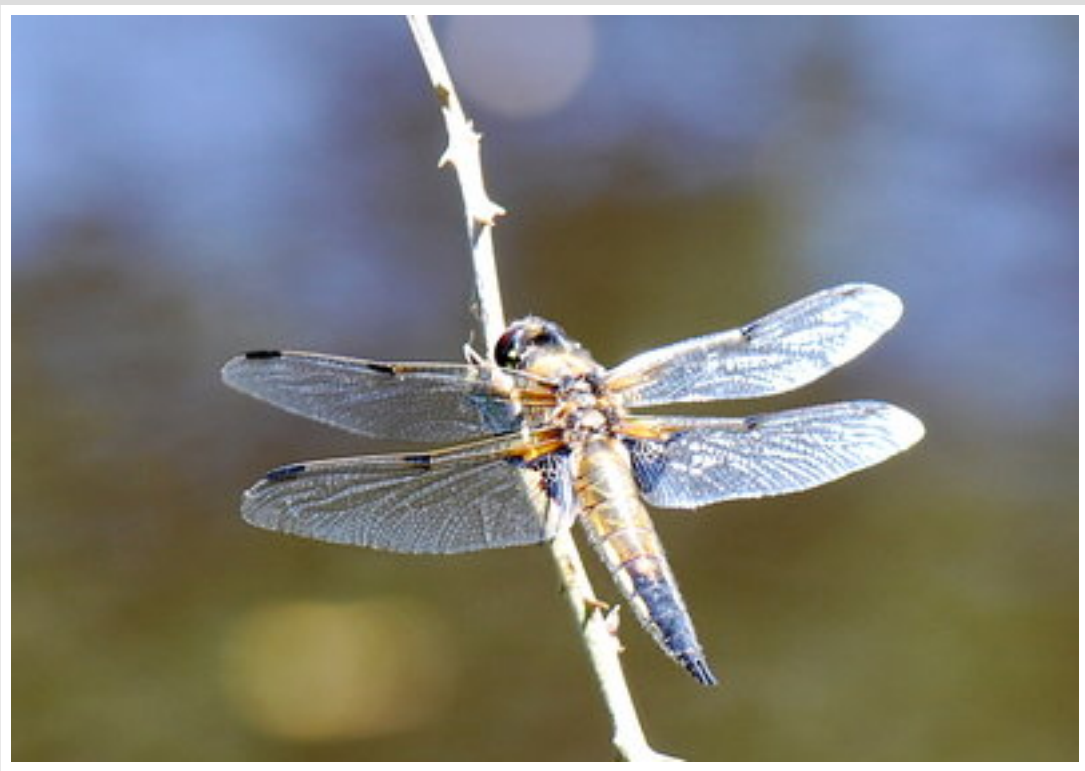




On site another good place I discovered was the new shower block – not for butterflies but for Moths. When I'd head down for my shower in the morning there would usually be one or two Moths settled down trying to look unobtrusive. I'm not too good on Moths but I know that one was a Buff Ermine and there was also a Small Emerald (I believe). However photo opportunities were pretty rare as it looked a bit dodgy taking your camera to the showers...



The first outing was to Hardy's Cottage and the garden there held a Hedge Brown, Red Admiral and a couple of tatty old Green Veined Whites but not much else despite the lush cottage garden planting. From there we took a walk up the hill to Rushy Pond but the heath land didn't hold any Graylings, although there were plenty of dragonflies and damselflies which were quite mesmerising. There were Large Red, Common Blue and Blue-Tailed Damselflies and a Common Darter, a few Four Spotted Chasers and a Keeled Skimmer. As the girls were enjoying watching the Dragonflies and a tiny frog slowly clambering it's way back to the pond we were joined by some Dartmoor Ponies that just waded in to cool down and feed on the lush pond vegetation. Back through the woods there was only a Speckie and that was it. Not quite the smorgasbord I'd been led to expect by the information board in the car park but still a nice family outing.



The second outing was to Arne with hopes of Grayling and possibly Silver Studded Blues. However it turned into more of a Dragonfly fest again with a few unusual Beetles. The guide assured me that there were Silver Studded Blues around still and so we set off, me looking out for blues and the girls with their spotters pack looking for Minotaur Beetles. Through the wood there was the odd Hedge Brown, a Rose Chafer a Meadow Browns.



Once on the Heath Proper it was baking and the sun was beating down. The only butterflies out and about were the odd Meadow Brown and that was it. So we settled down by the bog and watched the Dragonflies. A female Keeled Skimmer, Southern Hawker and mating pair of Small Red Damselflies were the only ones that posed for photos but we also saw male Keeled Skimmer, Broad Bodied Chaser and a couple of the blue Damselflies. Still no blue butterflies though.





The girls had a fantastic time even though I didn't see any Grayling and were dead chuffed to get their Bronze Spotters badges. They've even asked if we can go to Garston Wood so that we can get them their Silver one. All in all a great holiday break and not too bad for butterflies...and this still doesn't include the trip we made to Lulworth Cove...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 31-Jul-12 08:05 AM GMT

Don't tease us Wurzel, what happened at Lulworth?! I'm there in two weeks. 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 01-Aug-12 05:51 AM GMT

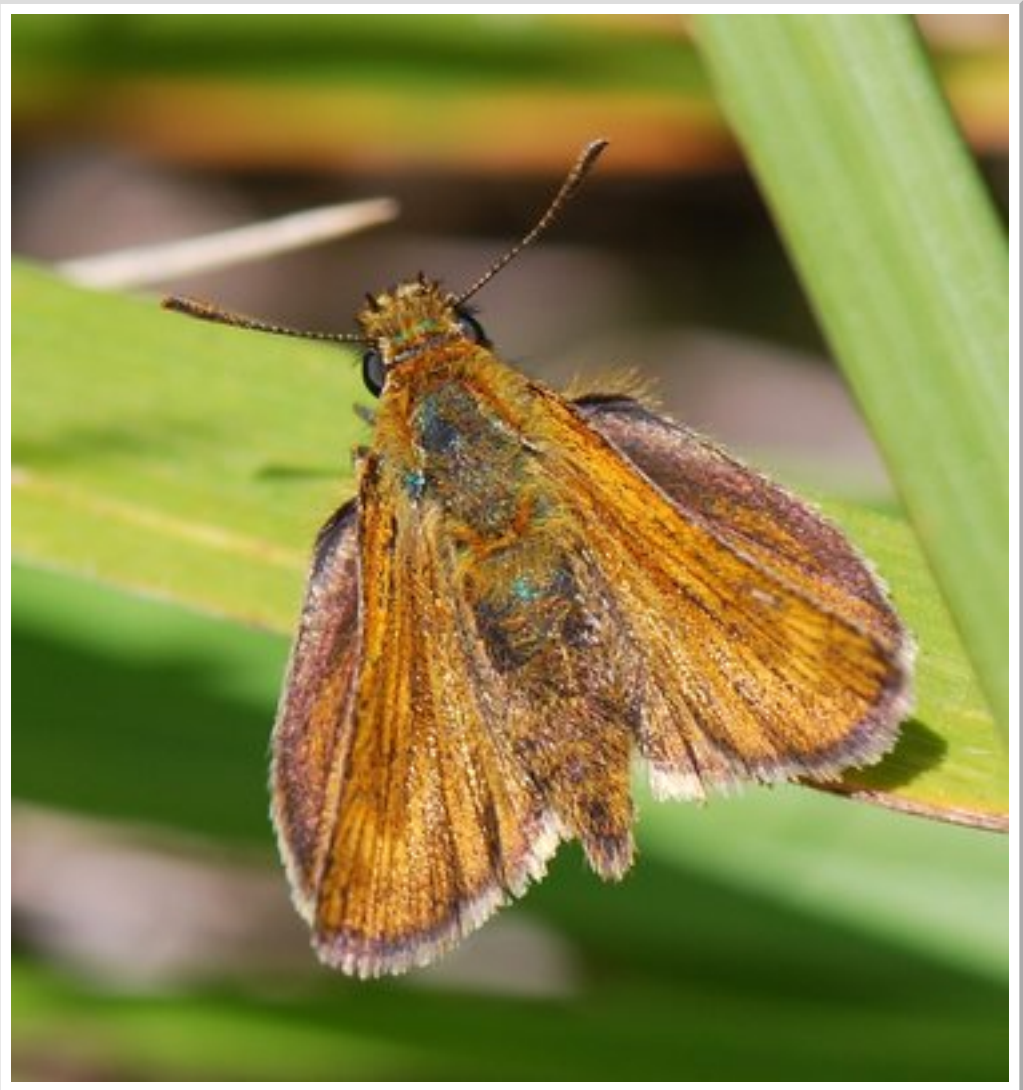
So as not to disappoint Essexbuzzard...

Lulworth Cove 28th July

By the weekend of our camping trip we'd been joined by my Sister In-laws' family and they desperately wanted to visit Lulworth Cove. So of course I insisted that we should oblige them and so on the Saturday we headed off after breakfast to Lulworth.

As we approached the beach we walked to the right and set up camp close to the right-hand wall of the cove. Here there were small patches of sand for castle building, there was easy access to the rock pools along the wall of the cove and behind us a cliff face shielding us from the wind. Once the family were ensconced amongst the Grockles on the beach I managed to sneak away for about 15 minutes. I headed up to steep path cutting its way through the cliff and about half way up it levelled slightly making a small plateau where there was a small reed bed. It seemed totally incongruous to be half way up a chalk cliff and there be a small marsh! Still this was a likely looking place for butterflies as the cliff was sloping more gently and as well as the reeded area there was also a good scattering of wildflowers and little paths terracing the cliff side.

I'd only just taken the lens cap off of my camera when I spied two skippers. Their more olive colouration meant that straight away I'd found a couple of Lulworths and they were both very obliging, sitting still while I snapped away.



Also in this little area was a very orange Small Skipper allowing a good comparison of the colouration differences between these two species. As I was moving in something else orange caught my eye and flitted around and about before settling on the path, a faded Small Copper. The wing markings were quite worn and the leading edge of the fore-wing had a distinctly greenish tinge, just like verdis gris in fact and quite appropriate for an aged Small Copper. I was also struck by how small the brown chequers on the fore-wing were.



Slightly higher up Meadow Browns, a Large White and a Dark Green Fritillary all appeared flitting around the wild flowers and all showing a penchant for the Knapweed in particular. The DGF as usual led me on a bit of a dance as I tried to keep up with it and approach it to get a shot. In actual fact looking back on it now it was quite a dangerous chase due to the narrow ledges that passed for paths along the cliff side!



Just as I was thinking that I'd been some time (in fact about 9 minutes since I'd taken my first shot) I found a female Skipper, most probably a Small, pole dancing. She was edging her way slowly down a blade of grass spiralling as she went, her abdomen curved right round. She reminded me of the little Woodpecker toys you used to get that would start at the top of your pencil and then peck their way down once you twanged the spring.





I then had to head back just as a Marbled White, more Meadow Browns and 2 more very fresh looking DGF's appeared. As I headed back down to the beach my final sighting was of a Hedge Brown but I couldn't quite reach him.

Once back on the beach I put my camera down and took my younger daughter off with her fishing net. The tide was very high so there weren't rock pools as such but we did see a few Blennies and Prawns much to her delight. From there it was back up to the car park because it seems that my sister in-law actually wanted to go to Durdle Door. On the way back to the car there were 2 Green Veined Whites mating in the middle of the path but I couldn't get any shots as I was carrying a very tired little girl, my younger daughter was all fished out.

As my sister and brother in-law set off up the hill to Durdle Door with their 2 year old daughter I wished them luck as I knew they were going to need it and briefly checked out of the small grassed area at the base of the path. This was quite productive last time but today the wind was very strong and only the occasional Meadow Brown and Marbled White were flying, well more like being blown away. I did catch a fleeting glimpse of a stunningly fresh Brown Argus, a couple of DGFs winged by and a ghostly pale Chalkhill Blue flew by but the wind was becoming far too strong and most butterflies were hunkering down in the long grass to get some shelter.



So I headed home (the tent) contented, some great butterflies in a very short space of time, very tired and happy little girls dozing in the back of the car and fish and chips on Swanage beach for tea to look forward too.
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 01-Aug-12 06:38 AM GMT

Sounds like you were in the same spot that I was! I found a marshy area in the lee of the cliff face by the arches. Sadly, the cool weather meant practically nothing was flying. Such a shame, as clearly Lulworth Skippers were there!!

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 01-Aug-12 07:19 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,
It sounds like you and your family had a great time, its nice to see your daughters are enjoying the wildlife. Its so rare with the younger generation these days, keep it up.

All the best, Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 01-Aug-12 06:24 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Just catching up on your last few reports, great stuff and smashing photos.

I love the way you combine your family breaks with 'sneaking off' occasionally with your camera 😊, sounds familiar that does 😊

All the best,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-Aug-12 06:32 AM GMT

Sorry David didn't mean to rub it in. 😊

Cheers Nick. 😊 The girls enjoying wildlife is a bit hit or miss but when they're into it they're really into it so hopefully there will be more hits than misses over the years to come. I try and hold back with the info I give them so they can discover stuff and observe it for themselves where possible when I remember to. My older daughter took great delight in informing her Nan about the baiting practices used for Purple Emperors – right in the middle of their lunch 😊😊

Cheers Neil 😊 That's the thing with being a dad, when they get to a certain age your time is never really your own and so if you're to ever get to see anything you've got to sneak off now and again. I'm getting pretty good at it now – it's surprising how bad my memory is, I'm always forgetting something and so having to return to the car to get it 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 02-Aug-12 07:09 AM GMT

Great stuff Wurzel! I'm looking forward to my annual trip to the best county in GB for butterflies. If you go back there, Wurzel, check Bindon Hill, to the left of Lulworth Cove. Lots of butterflies, incl. Lulworth Skippers, and some lovely wildflowers, too.

Lulworths seem to have quite a long flight period – Sussex Kipper saw them at the end of May, as did last year, and looks like they should still be there when I go.

Re: Wurzel

by Cotswold Cockney, 02-Aug-12 09:25 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:



Wurzel

Lots of good and interesting pictures Wurzel.

This one of a Red Admiral on a Thistle leaf bears closer inspection. The Nettle leaf below and behind the insect appears to have two ova on it. Whenever I've seen this butterfly ovipositing, the ova looked just like that on the upper surface of the younger leaves near the top of the plant. Maybe the clarity of the pictures on my laptop are misleading but it does appear to show two ova on that Nettle leaf.

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 03-Aug-12 05:44 AM GMT

I've just caught up on your last few reports Wurzel and I've really enjoyed reading them. Your photos are lovely too – some interesting shots – and you're definitely not playing 'catch-up'! I fully intend to get there next year and if my Lulworth Skipper shots are as good as yours then I shall be well pleased.

PS I love the rainbow too 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Aug-12 06:29 AM GMT

Cheers EssexBuzzard – as I'm Dorset born and bred I naturally think that Dorset is the best county not just for butterflies but full stop 😊 I checked Bindon Hill out earlier in the year and it was absolutely crawling with Lulworths, it was also very surreal to sit there and enjoy the stunning view, observing little Lulworths and feeling so close to nature while in the background there was machine gun fire from the ranges! 😲 There were a few Chalkhills and a fresh Brown Argus while I was there so you might be in time for a blues fest too. Good luck with it!

Cheers CC I hadn't noticed as I guess I was preoccupied with making sure the shot looked up to scratch. You've reminded me to pay a bit more attention so thank you 😊

Cheers Pauline 😊 I guess I want to be out there seeing Silver Spots and Graylings too but the weather this year has really (and is still) making things difficult. Still three more species for me to try and find this year – Grayling, Silver Spotted Skipper and Brown Hairstreak – hopefully I can get the odd day here and there when the weather breaks 😊

Hedge Browns...

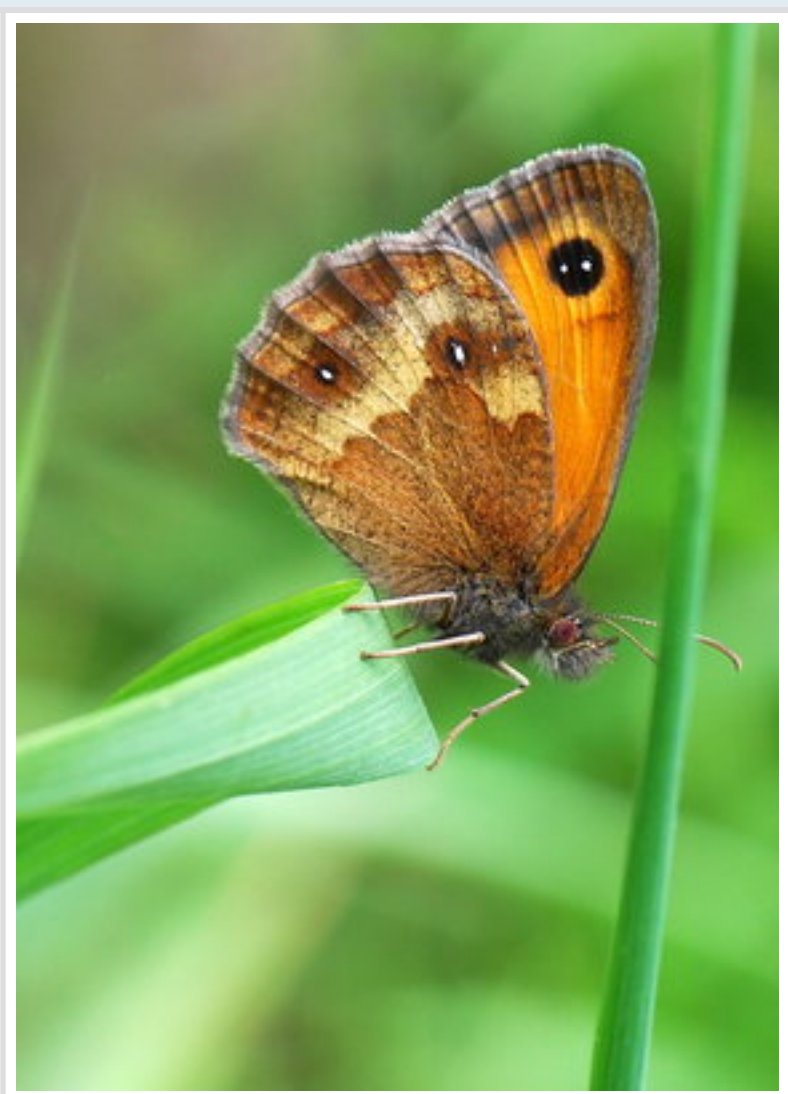
It's that time of year again when I start thinking about spots, eyes, how many, lack of them how many pupils etc. My Gatekeeper/Hedge Brown "obsession" started last year when I found an aberrant with an odd number of "eyes" on the hind wing and from there on I spent hours stalking Hedge Browns and observing the variation in the markings on their wings. I have come up with my own little system for recording the variations that I see. In order for anyone reading this to see what I'm seeing I'll briefly outline my system.

The "eye" often referred to as having two pupils is the large black spot on the fore-wing, the 2 pupils being the small white spots inside it.

Other eyes are dark edged spots with smaller white spots in them. Spots are just dark markings unless on the underside of the wings when they're the white markings.

The variation checking for 2012 started in earnest when I was away camping. The hedge on the campsite at Downshay housed good numbers of Hedge Browns and they showed a surprising amount of variation...

Underside three spots, quite elongate in appearance



Underside three spots, quite large



Underside six spots!



Male with faded sex brand - due to use during courtship?



Male angular shaped eye?



All of these are just variations on a theme with more or less spots (apart from the "sex brands" one) the last one is perhaps the most unusual in that the eye is hexagonal in shape rather than round.



I'll be keeping my eyes open for any more variations – any ideas about the latin names for any of these variations (if they exist) are gratefully recieved.

Have a goodun

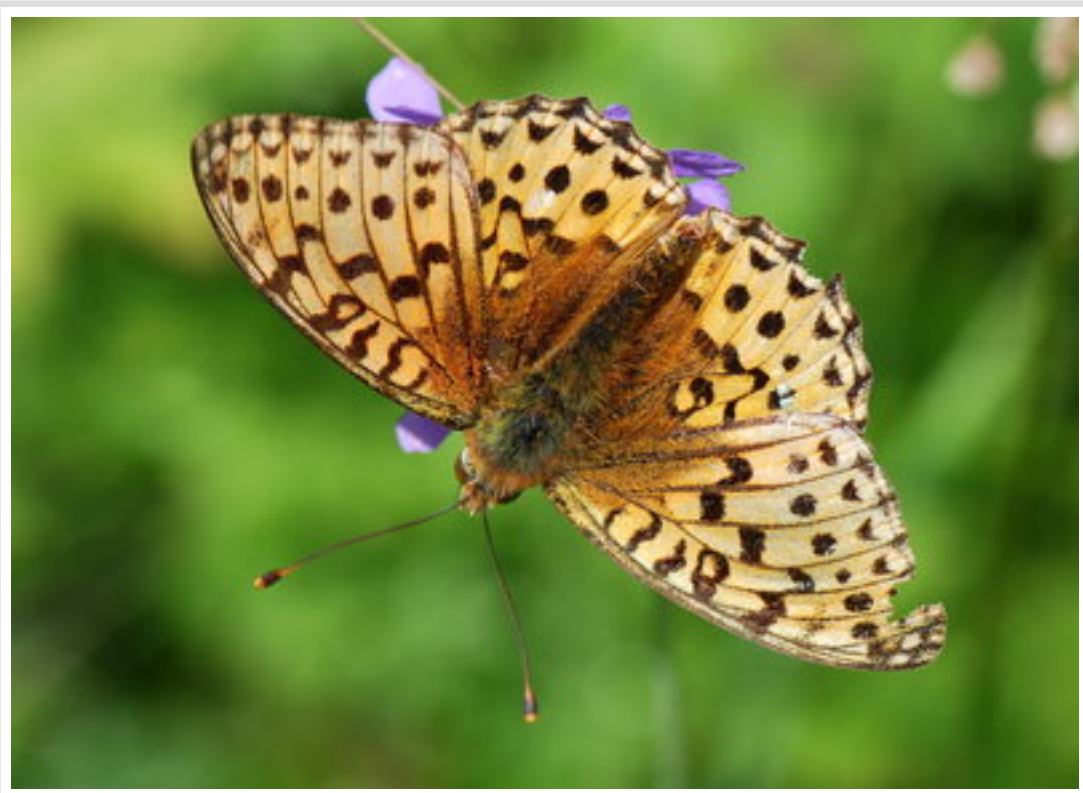
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

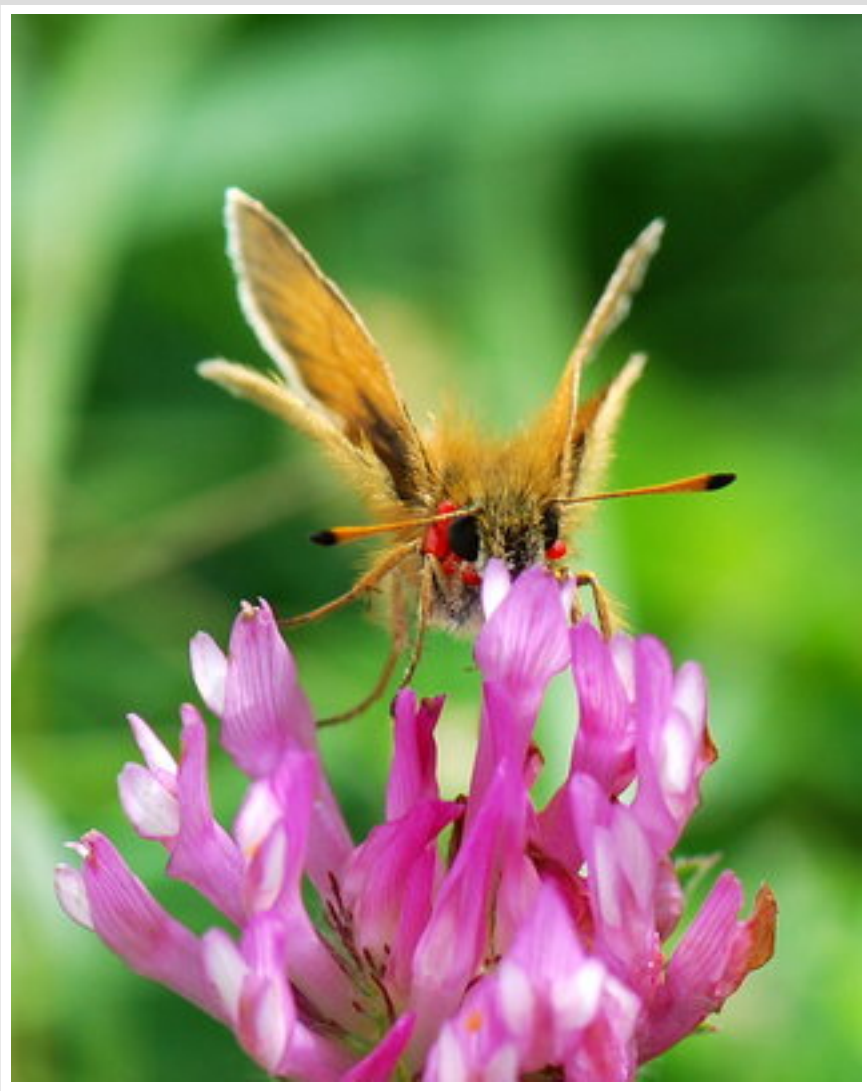
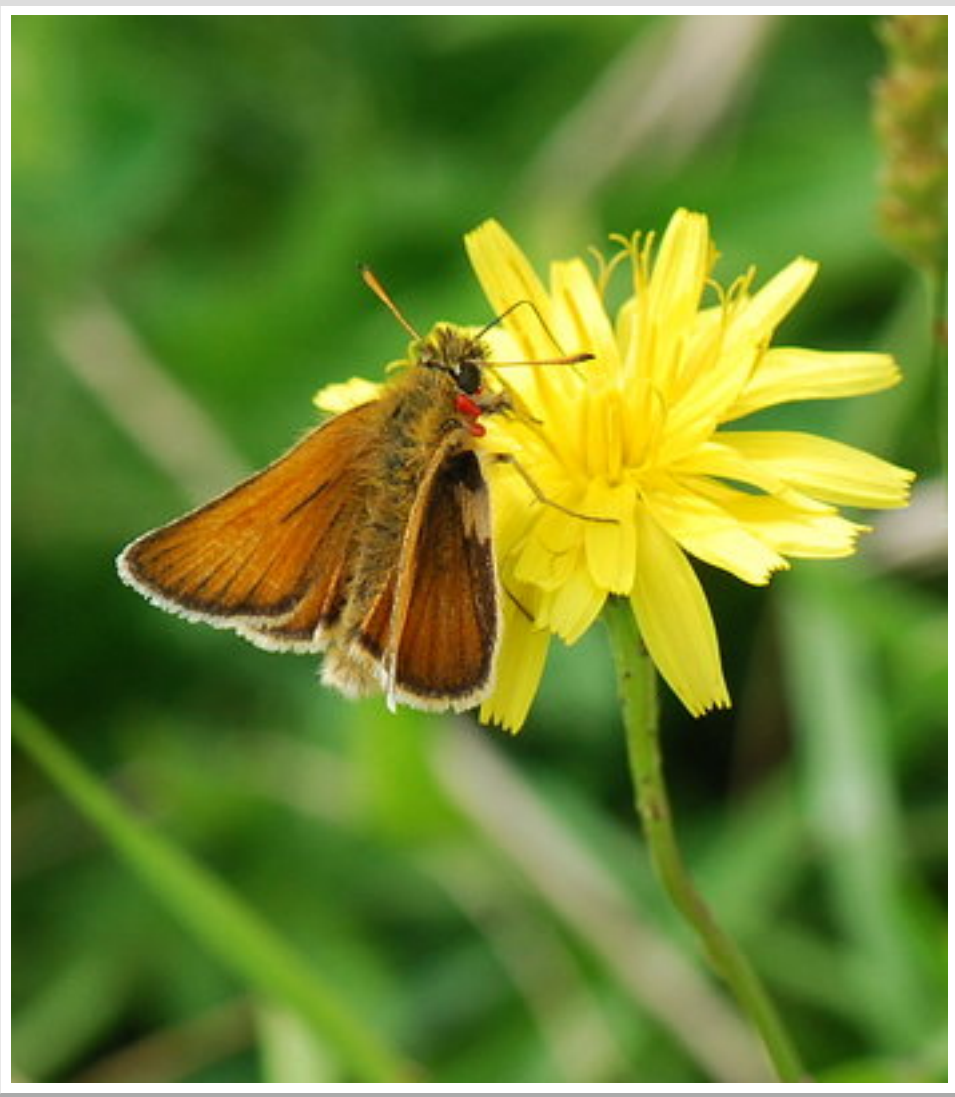
by Wurzel, 05-Aug-12 06:53 AM GMT

Martin Down 30th July

Having sorted out the camping gear so it was clean and repacked or airing before repacking I took off to make the most of the of the good weather while it lasted. As I drove up the recently resurfaced road at Sillens Lane it was looking a bit cool and cloudy but once parked and heading up the track to Hanham Hill things started to pick up a little with Ringlet and couple of Meadow Browns appearing and the odd Small Skipper which I had to diligently check if they were female as I was hoping to find an Essex or three. There were also Small Heath and as they insisted in remaining on the right where I was walking I switched the camera to Sports mode in the hope of getting a better open wing shot. It didn't work out but when I checked my shots later I noticed that one of the Small Heath showed some variation from the norm with a subsidiary pupil below the usual one as well as a dark spot below the eye. As the sun strengthened I also started to notice a few Dark Green Fritillaries that would be nectaring on vegetation along the side of the path. They would take to the wing, swoop low and the abruptly veer upwards before finally letting the wind catch them and then they would be gone from view. Then one DGF acted slightly differently. It was flying in circles around the path. It would land walk for a bit, then take off before flying in slightly a smaller circle, land and walk for a bit, proboscis out like it was tasting the air. It repeated this flying in ever-decreasing circles before finally settling down and taking minerals from dog scat. I took one or two shots but didn't want to get too close so as not to disturb it (but also because it stank) and finally it had had enough and decided it needed something a little sweeter.



Small skippers seemed to be everywhere along the side of the track and with each couple of paces there would be an orange blur as two Smessex battled it out or courted. I was starting to develop a crick in my neck from trying to look at under side of the antennae but eventually it paid off as I found an Essex. As I approached it to check it shifted position and I could make out the fine, short and straight sex brand so my neck got a rest. Unfortunately for the little chappy he was covered in red mite larvae.



As I was walking from the Essex across to Hanham hill I found another of my targets a male Chalkhill Blue. As I was getting shots of the under wings I noticed an unusual marking on underside of fore wing. The black spots had joined together to produce a vertical line.





Once at Hanham Hill I checked for Silver Spotted Skippers but it was a bit too cloudy and certainly a few degrees too cold for them so I mooched around and had a look about anyway. There were good numbers of Small Heath erupting from almost every foot fall as well as the odd Marbled White, a Large White a few Meadow Browns and DGFs and another male Chalkhill, this one with nice dark markings on the wings.



I continued my ascent right up to top with the wind picking up and whipping along Borkerley. This made finding butterflies tricky as they all seemed to want to stay low to the ground and all but a few disappeared to reappear periodically as the wind fell. That said I added a few more Chalkhills and DGFs along with the usual fare of Smessex, Browns and Heaths.

A new place that I checked out this year was a small meadow just behind the bench at the top of the path. It was pretty sheltered by the wood on one side and the top of Borkerly on the other and in here were plenty of DGFs, some looking very fresh with one or two quite resplendent ginger individuals. It will be worth checking this place next year a bit earlier in the season. As I carried on, downhill along Borkerley I found a female keeping low to the grass. She looked really dark compared to those that I saw last year and I wondered whether this could be adaptive for coping with cooler temperatures? As I worked my way down to the bottom to my "hotspot" there were a few more male Chalkhills, DGFs and a few more Marbled Whites but all seemed to favour the bottom of the ditch and I didn't want to go down and try for a few shots so as not to trample the habitat. Instead I watched and tried to pick up some behavioural observations.



Once at the usual hotspot I set about looking for my next target species Brown Argus and Small Copper. I found none but instead found a tiny Small Blue. The light blue dusting told me it was a male and the fact that the white margins were now grubby looking and gray suggested it was exactly fresh but I assume that it's a second brood.



As I was walking along the bottom path back to the car park I spied another Chalkhill on the path. It was showing the same behaviour as the DGF that was partaking minerals earlier in the morning. I scanned along the path, saw the turd and gingerly approached it, waiting for the Chalkhill to come to me. He did indeed find the scat and walking over it started to take up minerals.



I was almost back at the car park and was enjoying the Hedge Browns and Whites patrolling the hedge when something orange flashed in the grass. It wasn't the golden orange of a skipper so I approached hopefully. It was as I'd hoped - fresh small copper!



I gave myself an extra 5 mins to just check along the diagonal path from the car park - and there were loads of Smessex skippers. Even more than in the morning - most were Small but there were one or two Essex in there as well. I just couldn't believe the numbers. And so ended a fantastic morning with three out of four targets found. Now I need to start thinking about Grayling and Silver Spots before a trip to Alners Gorse...
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 05-Aug-12 07:00 AM GMT

nice report. i might try and get up there tomorrow.
Chris

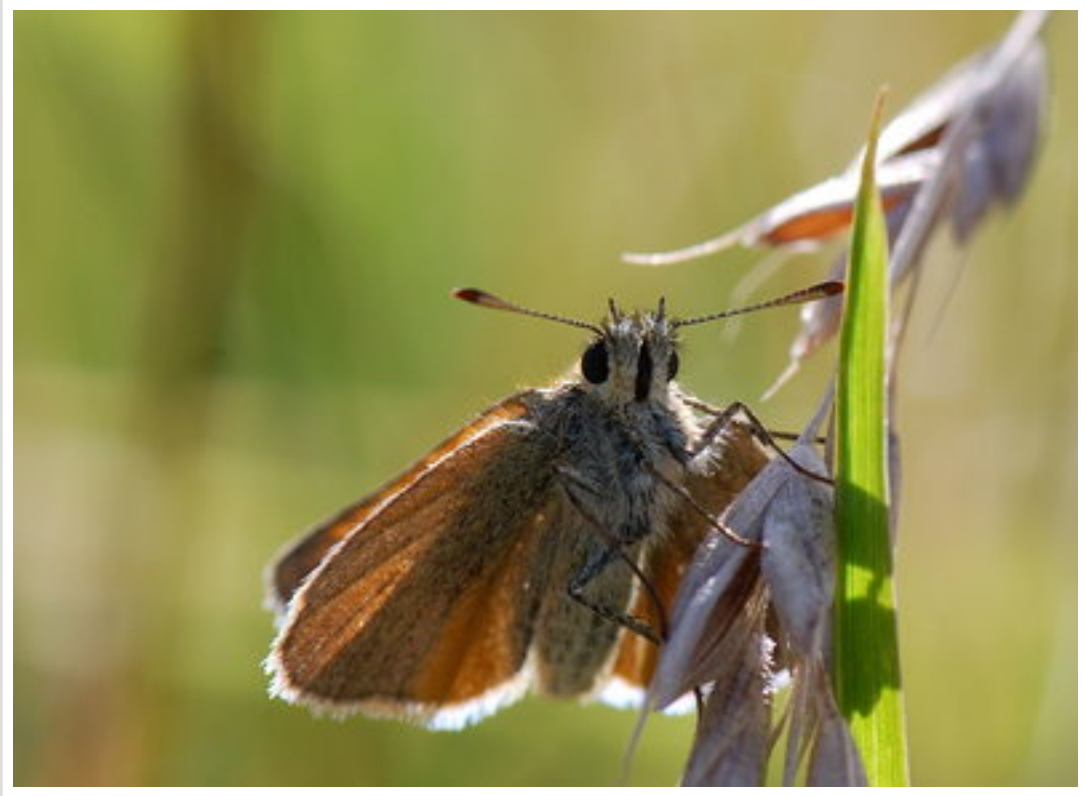
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 06-Aug-12 07:19 AM GMT

I saw that you didn't make it to Martin Down but I was glad that you got some great stuff anyway Chris.

Five Rivers

It's been a while since I've managed to get to Five Rivers what with the weather and camping so it was great to feel the grass of the old place under my Converse last Wednesday. As I strolled through the paths the wind whispered through the long grasses and the sun was hot still on my back. There were Meadow Browns and Essex Skippers and after practice earlier in the week I managed to differentiate the females without getting a neck crick or having to lie down in the grass. The first method I used was to look at the general state of repair of the individuals - the more worn were likely to be Small rather than Essex, it wasn't exactly perfect but most of the time when I was able to check other features my original guess was correct.

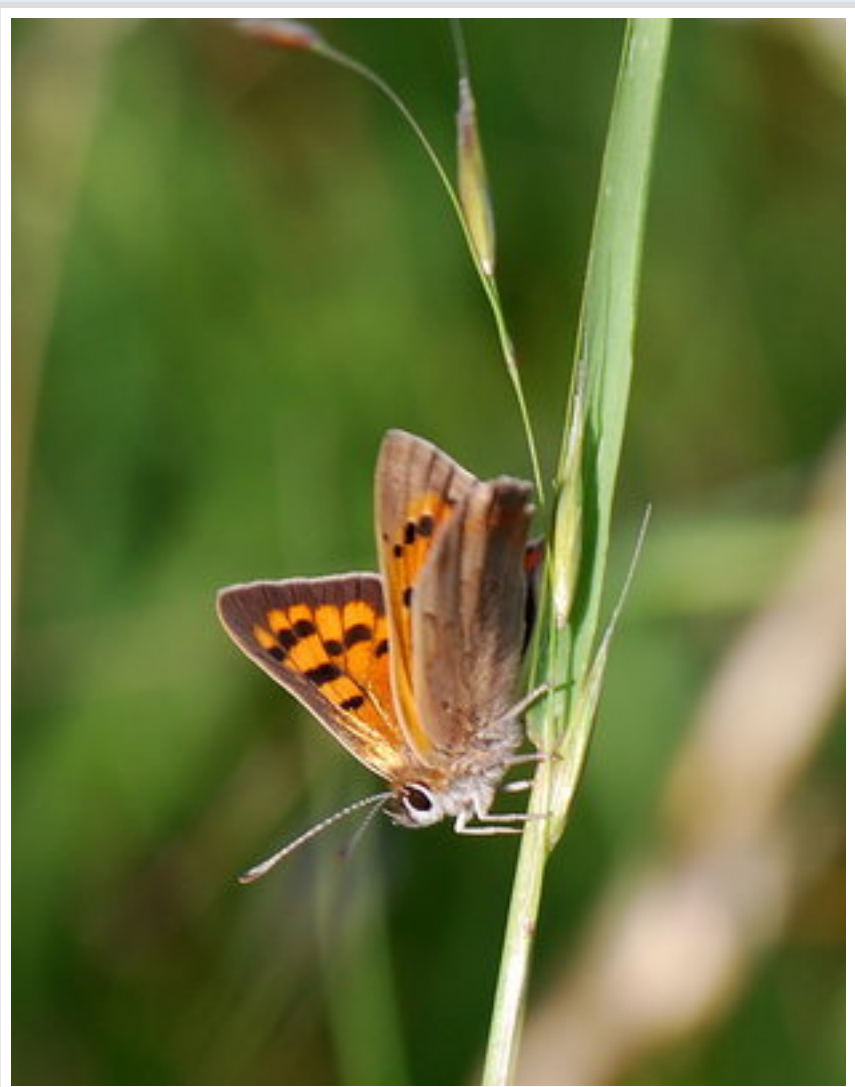


There were Essex Skippers around, but they didn't seem to be as numerous as Smalls, perhaps 1 Essex for every 3 Small? The first one that I found was easy to confirm as I was a male and I got a good look at the fine sex brand. Others involved peering down from above if I was able to get round. Some were looking slightly tired and luckily by perching on the blades of grass getting this view of them was relatively easy. I continued my way up to the top of the ridge and visited the three banks. Again there were plenty of Meadow Browns and the odd Marbled White which would periodically be joined by a Hedge Brown or two. There was also a pristine male Common Blue, but no sign of any Brown Argus. Again there were skippers everywhere.





On the way back I got waylaid by a Skipper bush. In the long grass there was a clump which was being occupied by a 8 Skippers. Try as I might I just couldn't get them all in so in the end I perched at the side of the track and just enjoyed watching them sway in the wind. While I was enjoying the skippers something glistened golden and I looked closer to see a stunning fresh Small Copper. The photo is a bit blurry but I like it anyway because it captured the golden glow of the fore wing. The view was fleeting as it was soon off but continuing with the golden theme was a golden Meadow Brown.





At this point my battery ran flat so I quickly retreated to the car park, walking some of the way with my eyes shut so as not to see any butterflies perfectly posed when I was incapable of getting any shots! The second brood Common Blue was a good sign and if I can get here next week there maybe some more blues and Brown Argus as well hopefully.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 06-Aug-12 09:11 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel

Like your Small Copper shots and the Small Blue in particular 🍷! . Also I'm glad I'm not the only one who runs out of battery from time to time 😊 .

The Graylings should be around for a couple more weeks yet. I went to Dawney's ridge today with my girls and got my best shots there so far under warm and sunny conditions. Nearly lost £200 in the process though when I bribed my daughters to offset a potential whining session, (due to their insistence on wearing shorts and sandals on gorse ridden land) with the offer to pay them £100 each if they were able to find me an open-wing Grayling that I could photo (so confident was I that this was an impossible task 😊) . Trouble was I hadn't foreseen that everytime I was down on the ground closing in on a photo it would be "dad there's an open-wing one over here" ... quick quick oh you've missed it" 😞 Ironically I did see an open-winged one (under similar circumstances to that posted by Pauline (courting pair)) and would've got it had I had a zoom lens on my camera 😞😞 . I think I need to be a bit more careful about my bribes in future.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 07-Aug-12 07:26 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid, I was pushing my luck with the camera as I hadn't charged it since before the camping holiday and it does the battery good to run totally flat now and again (you see the way I spun that, it was like it was intentional 😊) . If that's the level of bribe you're offering can I ask you not to mention it when Kitty is around as she might get ideas 😳

Full on Friday...

A pretty full on day really which started off in the garden. Over the lunchtime I spent about 20 minutes trying to follow Whites which was a very frustrating business. They would appear over the fence and then flit around for a while almost landing several times before rising up high into the air and then disappearing over the fence on the other side. The other way you'd see them would be while moving in to try and get a shot of one, another white would erupt Small Heath fashion right in front of you spooking your main quarry. Then you would be presented with the dilemma of which one do you watch and nine times out of ten the one you elected for would promptly disappear over the fence. Still my hiding and waiting in the shadows, approaching rapidly once it had landed eventually paid off and I managed to get a few shots of, what turned out to be, a male Small White.



As I was getting my older daughter ready to head out I spotted a something from out of the window landing on the stone path. I rushed down stairs, grabbed the camera from its' primed position and silently approached the butterfly. I could see that it was nervous as it kept flicking its' wings so I hung back a bit and let it settle. After about a minute I edged forward got a few shots and then moved back. Once back upstairs I checked out of the window and it decided at that moment that it had basked for long enough and so it flew off.



While we were camping we visited Arne and the girls loved ticking off their observations the RSPB Spotter books so we tried Garston Wood in the afternoon. My younger daughter intrepidly set off, pencil in one hand, spotter book in the other, rucksack on her back; "Right, come on Daddy!" I doubted whether the enthusiasm would remain as high so we pressed on to make the most of it while it lasted. The first butterfly was a surprisingly fresh female Silver Washed (tick) in the area which used to be for exotics. This is "overgrown" now with most of the flowers above waist height but it's great for butterflies with browns nectaring like crazy and the odd Comma standing guard of its' territory (or so it seems). We worked our way round to the bench and the girls sat and ate their sweets while Hedge and Meadow Browns flitted all around us and the brambles joined by the occasional Ringlet.



Further on in the wood proper we were followed by a Green Veined White for a bit and spent five minutes standing in the middle of the path watching a Gold Banded Dragonfly patrolling its' territory. It would fly towards us up the middle of the path and then veer off left, circle around us and then repeat the same circuit again.



We were almost back at the car park when a male Silver Washed put in an appearance, again looking surprisingly fresh. This seemed quite appropriate as when I checked the girls' list back at the car we'd managed to tick off Silver Washed, Whitebeam, Pignut, Collared Dove and Bat Box so when we next get to Arne or Radipole the girls can pick up their silver award.



Later that evening, once the girls were tucked up in bed, I risked a quick run out to Godshill. It was still quite warm when the sun poked out from the clouds but sadly it seems the butterflies were in bed as well with only 3 Meadow Brown and singles of Hedge Brown, Small Heath and a solitary Grayling which didn't pose long enough to get a decent shot. Lesson learned - make a visit here earlier in the day - I headed home happy that I had at least seen the single Grayling.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by philm63, 08-Aug-12 04:36 AM GMT

Wurzel

A fascinating and well illustrated diary.

I am lucky (?) enough to have had all my kids grow up so hopefully my spare time is my own (I kid myself that is the case frequently)

I tried it instill a sense of the fascination of nature to mine along the way, failed with the eldest and partially succeeded with the youngest Phil

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 09-Aug-12 06:19 AM GMT

Cheers Phil 😊 - I'm looking forward to the days when my times my own, but I have a sneaky suspicion that it's never going to work out that way 😊

As he faced the sun he cast no shadow...

Seeing all the fantastic shots from Denbies really made me envious. So when my wife suggested that I took advantage of a surprisingly warm and sunny Sunday I ummed and ahed for a bit (for effect) and then rather "begrudgingly" set off for an hour at Godshill 😊 . Hopefully my pangs of jealousy could be soothed by some Grayling action.

Having crossed the cricket pitch and strolled along the Gorse lined path I realised that it was going to be good. Already I had seen more butterflies than on Friday and I hadn't even entered the heath land proper. By the time I reached the brow of the hill and stood taking in the view which fell away before me I'd encountered a Peacock, Large White, 3 Small Heath and 5 a piece of Hedge and Meadow Brown.



I'd only juts started down the gravelly path when something just off to the side caught my eye. A Grayling already and one showing its' upper side! As I cautiously approached it became clear why I could see the brown upper fore-wing, tinged with purple and with pale yellow flashes - both sets of wings were severely damaged with huge chunks missing.



If only I'd had it on Sports mode!



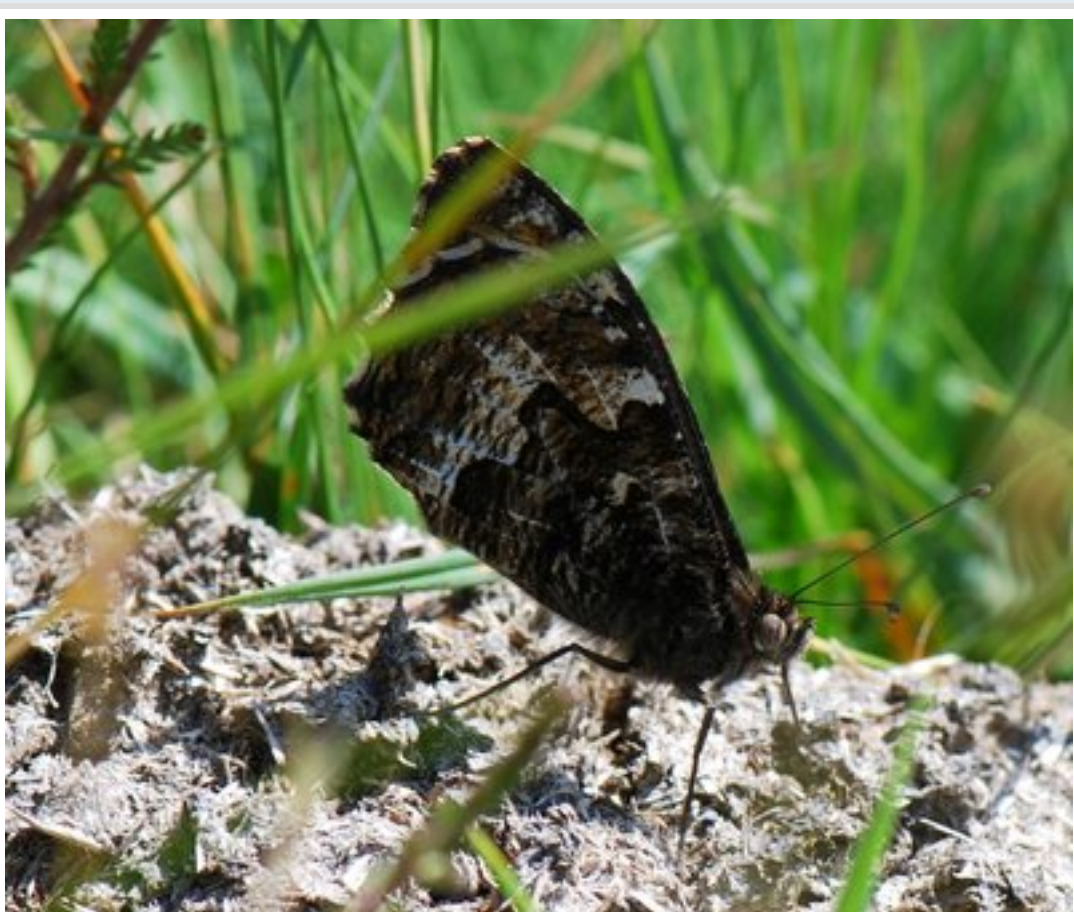
Showing purple sheen on wings

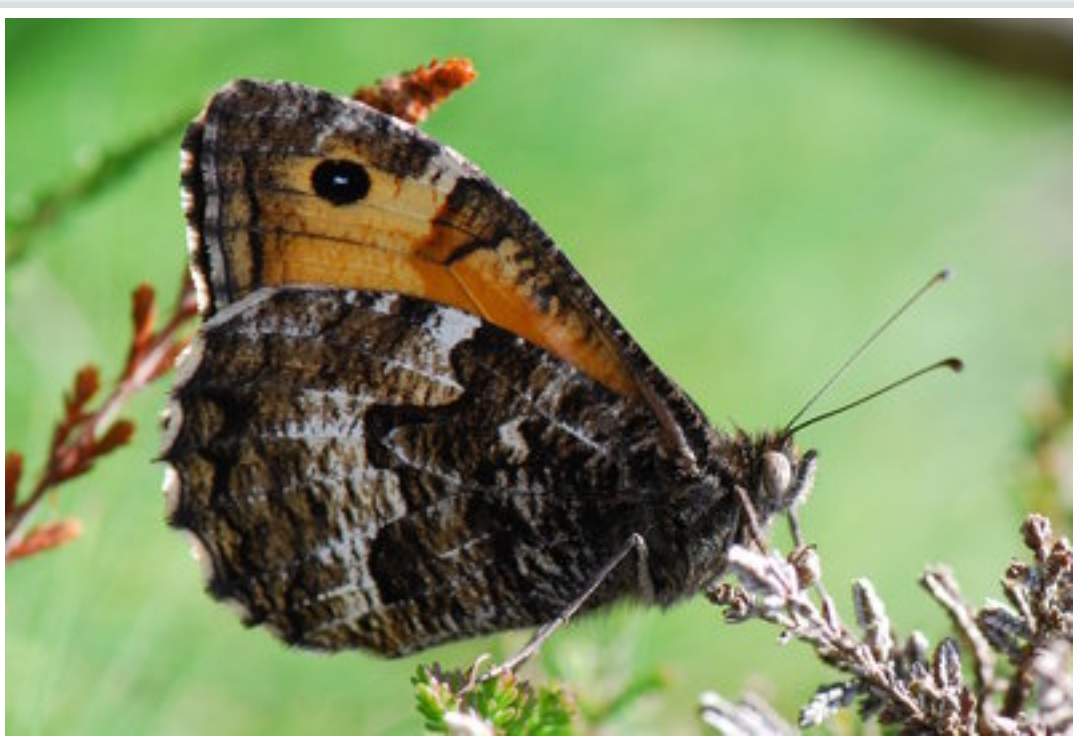
I was in a dilemma as to what I should do; leave it to fend for itself and let nature take its' course or try and move it as gently as possible to the side of the path where would at least pass over quietly? In the end I went for the later but I couldn't help thinking that the more humane thing would have been to just put it down?

I continued down the hill and there were Hedge Browns everywhere, with at least 2 on each fern I looked out it seemed. Within a couple of metres I was at the bottom of the hill and approaching the ford when another Grayling showed up, this one in much better nick. As I approached it raised its' fore wing, flashing its "eye" at me but when I pressed forward regardless of this threat it took to the wing, flew across the path and landed on a sun bleached stick - which seemed odd as now it was even more conspicuous than when it was at the edge of the path. Still it meant that I had another chance of trying to photograph it and I gave it a wide berth keeping my shadow well away so as not to spook it.



Once over the ford and on the tracks proper I worked my way to the triangle with a few Small Heath and Meadow Browns trying their best to distract me from my main quarry. A Brimstone also tried but soon disappeared again when I gave it short shrift. Once on the "triangle" of paths I wandered forward and back and there were good numbers of Grayling allowing me the full palette of colours and gambit of behaviours. Last year I noticed that this species is very variable in its' colouration and the paths in this area produced light through to almost black versions.





Some spent time feeding on Bell Heather and were quite approachable while taking nectar. Whilst they were drinking they would raise their fore wing showing off the orange. The orange is normally flashed as a bluff threat when they are spooked. Perhaps this offers some form of protection as they feed? Others preferred to bask often in the middle of the path and when anything came near, Hedge or Meadow Brown or another Grayling they would take off and a short chase with spirals and tumbles would ensue. After they'd investigated and reached their conclusions they'd return to basking on the path, often quite near to their original position. As they basked they'd tip their bodies over allowing a maximum heating affect and when warm enough would turn themselves to face the sun head on. Either way their orientation allows reference to the Oasis song. I find their flight difficult to describe but it seems more powerful and purposeful then Meadow Browns and also higher. When they do take to the wing they seem browner and there are flashes of black streaks almost. A butterfly that gets its' beauty from subtlety.

There were other butterflies around with plenty of other Browns and Heaths along with a pair of Large Skipper. There was also a large moth and haven gotten my shots I realised that it wasn't moving much as it was deceased! I think it's, sorry, was a female Oak Egger.



Finally time was up and I had to head off the Heath and back to town but I found time for just one more!



And it would have been rude not to have stopped for another Small Copper! I was pretty worried about this species, even starting a thread to that effect but now I've seen second brooders at four different sites so perhaps they'll be alright after all?



Silver Spots next and with high pressure building at the end of the week things might be actually looking promising for once!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 10-Aug-12 03:25 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

- I'm looking forward to the days when my times my own, but I have a sneaky suspicion that it's never going to work out that way 😊 ...Wurzel

My daughter is 22 years old, living in her own place with our little grandson.....and still I get that voice on the end of the phone, 'ohhhhhh Daddyyyyyy.....' 😊

Having destroyed your dreams for the quiet life to come 😊 ,

great reports and photos Wurzel, keep 'em coming, always a good read 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-Aug-12 07:55 AM GMT

Cheers Neil 😊 WRT to LAC I've got 2 daughters so something to look forward too 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 11-Aug-12 06:54 AM GMT

Five Rivers

In between my little sojourn to Godshill for Graylings I also managed to check out some butterfly activity in the garden and at my local patch, Five Rivers.

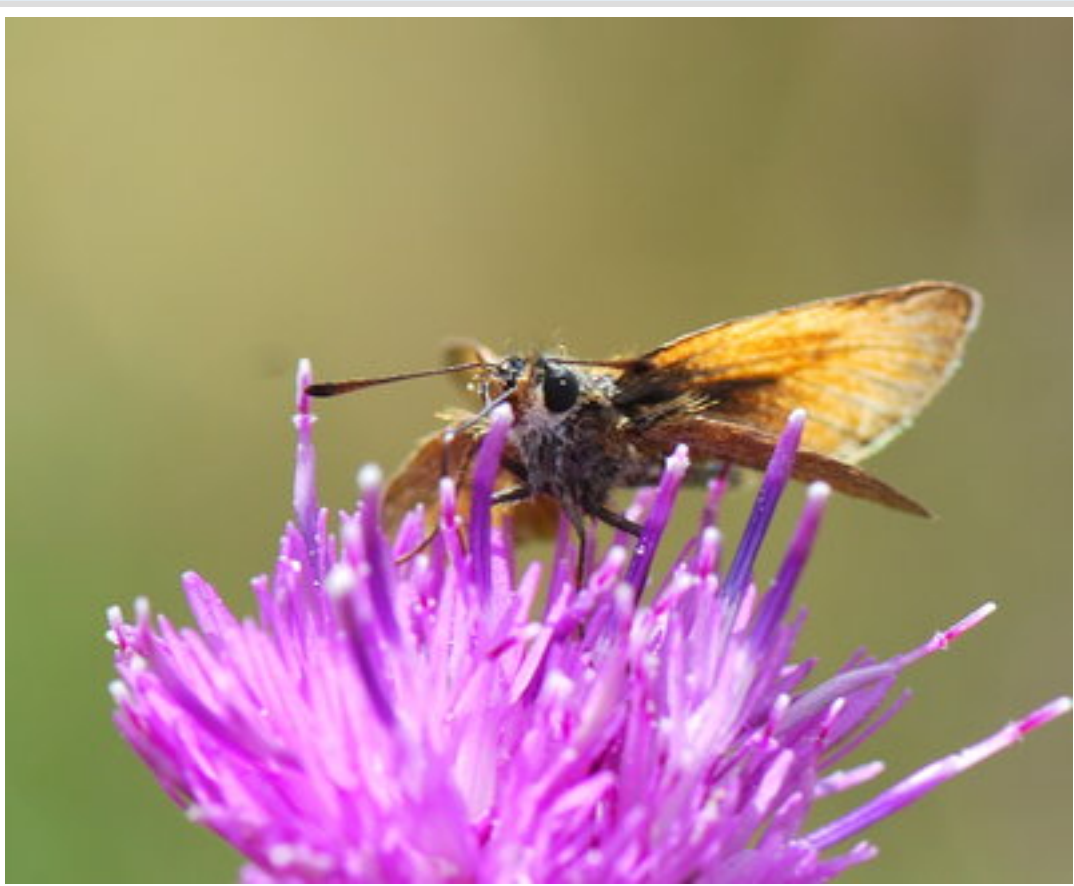
For about the last week the small bit of old concrete path running up the garden has attracted butterflies for basking. It's had a Red Admiral, Comma, a Small Tortoiseshell as well as a Peacock which I haven't been able to capture on "film". So when I was getting ready to head out to Godshill and I noticed a Peacock fluttering about I nipped out and got a few shots of it with its' back to me. It refused to open up so I gave up and headed off to Godshill...



Once back from Godshill I dropped my wife and daughters off at the local swimming baths and returned home to get the dinner ready. I finished earlier than expected so I thought that I might be able to squeeze in an extra half hour at Five Rivers before picking everyone up? Just as I was locking up the back door I noticed the Peacock return and land on the side of the fence. So again I grabbed my camera and headed out and this time it was a lot more accommodating.



So with a flourish I set off to Five Rivers noting a Holly Blue on the journey along with a couple of Whites. The first place I checked out was the small patch where I'd found the communal roost of Skippers on my last visit but this area was barren. As I made my way up to the banks there were Meadow Browns, the odd Marbled White still and Hedge Browns, surprisingly, along the hedges. There were also good numbers of Skippers though some are really looking worn. With one individual looking almost bald on top!



It was not only the Skippers that were looking tired as I found a worn Hedge Brown that was having difficulty in flying as it had lost the whole of its' hind and half of its' fore wing.



Some butterflies were still looking nice and tidy with the odd Smessex looking okay and the most pristine of the bunch was a fresh Common Blue male. However that said it kinda feels like it's "out with the old and in with the new" at the moment and I'm looking forward to some fresh second brood butterflies.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 11-Aug-12 07:03 AM GMT

"I'm looking forward to some fresh second brood butterflies." amen to that. 😊

CHris

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 12-Aug-12 03:00 AM GMT

Great to catch up with your diary Wurzel and some lovely pictures to. Debbie 😊😊😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Aug-12 06:09 AM GMT

Cheers Debbie 😊 I'm looking forward to your next installment.

It's surprising how behind you can get after just one night away so again (as so often this year) I'm playing catch up...

Martin Down

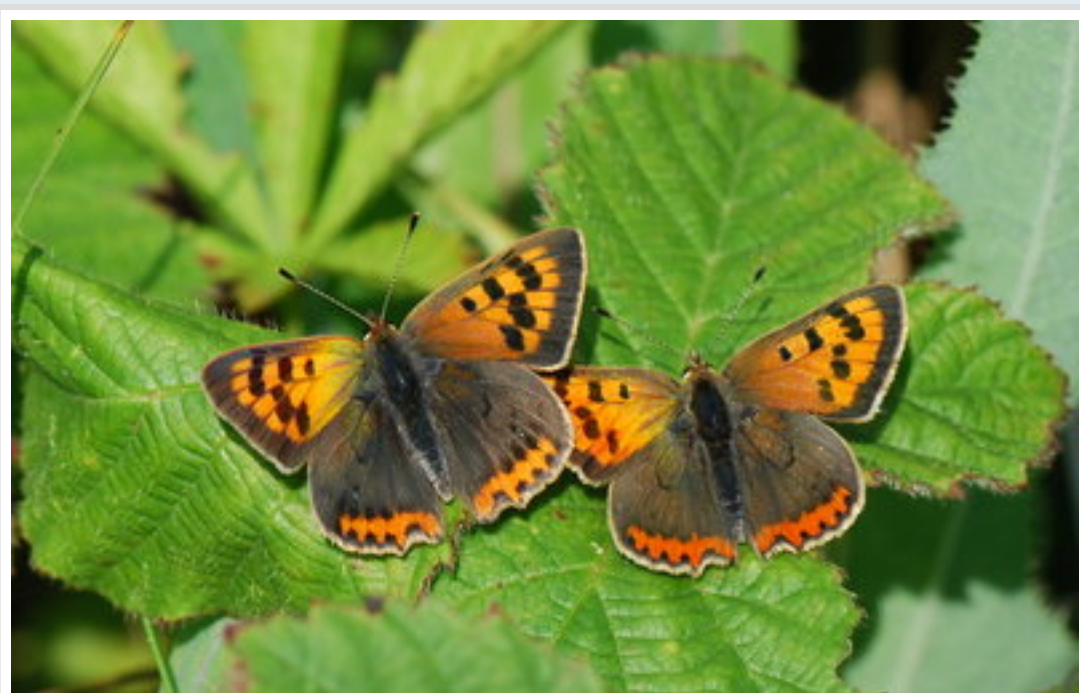
Earlier in the week my younger daughter asked to go to Martin Down so how could I refuse? When I suggested that we should go on Friday morning she was packed and ready and waiting by the front door before I'd even had a chance to have my first sip of coffee. In fact she was so keen that we arrived at Sillens Lane before 9am. We had a quick look around the car park area before setting off towards Hanham Hill.

On the way there was the odd Meadow Brown and Smessex, a few whites skipped by while Hedge Browns defended their territories from anything that moved. We stopped briefly at the top of the low rise to have a chat with another butterfly who was also out and about and then continued on. As we cut across the meadow to Hanham more and more butterflies were appearing almost as if they were awakening for another busy day.

Once at the foot of Hanham Hill we set up camp on the spongy turf. While I strolled about my little girl ate her sweets and chatted to the fairies that she'd met. Along the edge I checked for Silver Spotted Skippers just in case but I wasn't too concerned at not seeing this early as although it was warm I didn't think it was warm enough for them yet, also I was heading over to Stockbridge that afternoon so I should catch up with them there.

About half way along the foot of the hill there is a small area of scrub with taller vegetation; an oasis almost amongst the close cropped turf and bare chalk. This was the main hotspot and we visited it a couple of times whilst we remained here.

The first time there was a Hedge Brown, 3 Meadow Browns, a Smessex and 2 Small Copper all nectaring in an area that couldn't have taken up more than a metre and a half square. The Coppers were really fresh and their wings flashed golden in the sun. At one point they seemed to share a tender moment, perched on the same leaf with their wingtips touching before the male buggered off. Perhaps his intended wasn't a pure as he'd thought or perhaps he was just a cad! 😊

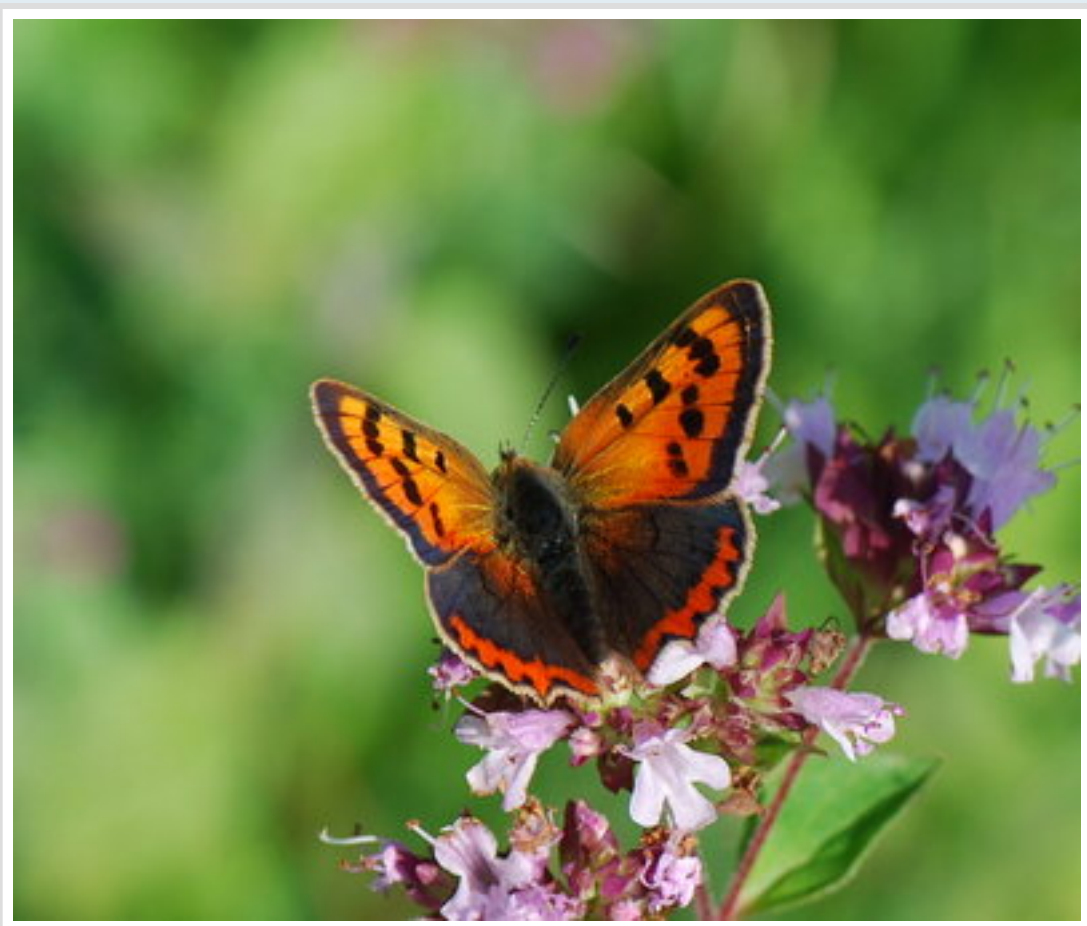




During a patrol along the base of the hill I also found a few Chalkhills (2 males and a female) which were being hassled by a male Common Blue. My daughter then moved camp to the scrub oasis and we sat and wait for the butterflies to visit us. As well as the usual browns, a Peacock, 2 DGFs (well worn), a couple of fly-by Chalkhills we also found 2 female Common Blues - neither of which could have been mistaken for Brown Argus, in fact one was almost as blue as a male.



But the real stars of the show were the pair of Small Coppers who were absolutely stunning. I was rather worried back along having only seen 2 (on the same day) over the whole spring but now I've encountered 7 or 8 in 4 different locations I'm a lot happier now about this species prospects. Just as we were setting off back a Brown Argus did a quick fly-by, stopping for a brief altercation with a Smessex.



So we headed homewards stopping every now and then so my little girl could have a breather. When we did we would be surrounded by Meadow Browns, Chalkhills and the odd Common Blue.



Slightly tired looking?

Almost back at the car the blues were replaced by whites and a stunning male Brimstone. So after a glorious morning we trundled out of the car park and I was most chuffed with what a little trooper my little girl had been.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 13-Aug-12 06:14 AM GMT

Splendid Copper pictures, Wurzel. The different sheen you see from different angles is amazing. I especially like the two together – had you considered they might both be chaps? 😊

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Aug-12 06:24 AM GMT

Cheers Dave 😊 I had thought that they were both chaps, but when I came home and checked out the Thomas/Lewington I came to the conclusion that the one on the left was a female as she was larger and more heavily marked...but then I could be wrong 😊 Either way they have cemented their place as my number one butterfly, until I see a few more Brown Argus or a Brown Hairstreak or something new, or something very aberrant...I'm almost as fickle as them it seems 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 14-Aug-12 06:54 AM GMT

Stockbridge Down

Straight after the trip to Martin Down I headed off to Stockbridge as we were going to be busy over the weekend and I wanted to make the most of the good weather while it lasted. As I approached the sun went in and I just couldn't believe my luck 😡. All year I seem to have been chasing the weather rather than butterflies, even now! Still just as I was brewing up some really good cursing the sun came out again and so I stepped onto the turf of Stockbridge 😊. Straight away there was a female Chalkhill to meet me and as it turned out she was the least shy of all the females that I would see over the few hours that I was on site.



I took a few more steps along the path which cuts diagonally across the reserve and then stopped in my tracks to take in the spectacle. There were pale blue butterflies (Chalkhills) everywhere I looked. Occasionally a pale grey/brown female would erupt from the turf only to be pursued by two or more of the pale blue males and I'd try and follow them only to be distracted by another, and then another and so on and so on. In the end I had to just stop and watch as I wouldn't have known which butterfly to focus on first. Just then a Skipper hove into view and it dropped to the ground almost as soon as the sun went behind a cloud. I approached it and second shot of the day was my target a Silver Spotted Skipper and a male not looking too shabby. After a few minutes of enjoying his company the sun reappeared and the temperature noticeably rose as did the Skipper. I tried to keep track of it but for my money this is the hardest skipper to follow.



A little further along were a mass of male Chalkhills frantically taking minerals from scat. As I watched them clamber all over it and jostle for position another one flew in to join the party. It seemed the way to get the best bits was to walk with your wings spread so as too barge any competitors out of the way. Some looked pretty worn while others were very pristine and one shot allowed me to compare old with the new.



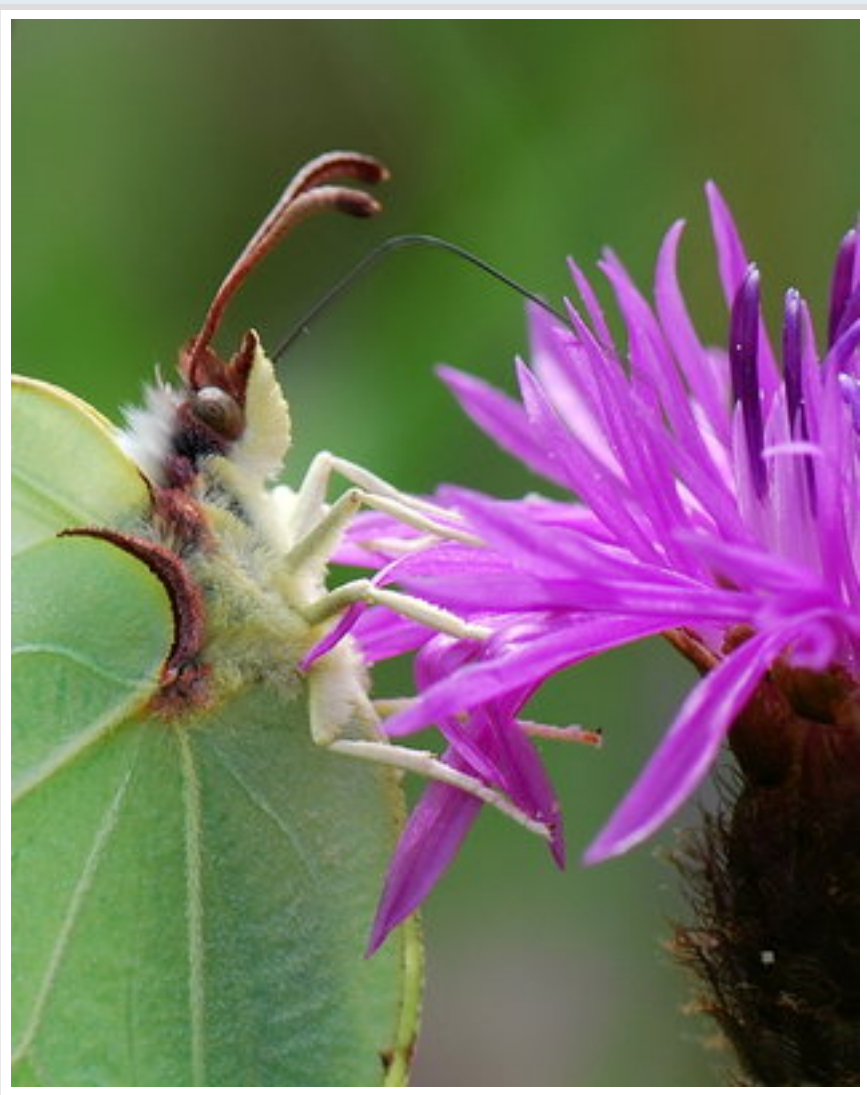
Leaving the Chalkhills to their feast I continued onwards and also ever so slightly upwards until another Skipper caught my attention. This time it was a female and she appeared to ovipositing. She would land on the short turf, brace herself with her legs and then dangle her abdomen below her at 90 degrees to the plane of her thorax almost as if she was on parallel bars. She'd then swing her abdomen until it came into contact with the larval food stuff and then deposit an egg. I didn't think that this was a particularly usual way of depositing ova?



The diagonal path continued to cut right across the down and almost at the top something along the edge of the longer grasses caught my eye. By now I was blasé about Chalkhills, there were so many of them I was almost blind to them but this was an orange colour...Another Small Copper my third or fourth for the day!



Eventually the path I was on reached the edge of the reserve and I started downhill following the boundary path. It went through a mixture of grassland and wooded habitats and the butterflies changed just as quickly as the habitat. On the more open grasslands there were Meadow Browns and Chalkhills with the odd Marbled White but the wooded area had Whites, Peacocks, Hedge Browns and Brimstone. Once I was almost at the car park I had a little purple patch with both male and female Brimstone so intent on feeding that I could get in really close as well as a female Small laying eggs and 5 Peacocks all in the one line of sight. The Small White would flit around for an age and then land and bend her abdomen around. Just as I'd have focused she'd take off and the same merry dance continued for a good 5 minutes. I don't think she was bothered by me as I was generally stood well back and also I observed the same behaviour once I'd given up. Perhaps she was spreading her eggs around so that they weren't all in the same basket? Also here were a few DGFs flitting around and at one point a small, greyish brown Hairstreak lifted from a thistle and flitted around the canopy for a while. I am pretty confident that it was a White Letter as I know there is a colony near to this locale and it seemed darker than a Purple.



I was now at the car park at the other end of the road and I was a little off track for Silver Spotted Skippers so I set off back to the other side of the down...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Hulme, 14-Aug-12 06:02 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Some great diary entries lately – and nice pics too. 😊

Dave is correct about those Coppers sharing an intimate moment at Martin Down – both are male. However, the one at Stockbridge is a WPC. BWs, Neil

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 15-Aug-12 02:38 AM GMT

WPC..... took me a while to get that one 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 15-Aug-12 03:55 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Some more great posts and photos 😊

You have really captured the 'coppery' sheen on the Small Coppers.

All the best,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 15-Aug-12 06:20 AM GMT

Cheers Neil – back to the drawing board on the gender identification for me then 😊, looking at the ones you positively identified I reckon the abdomen seems to be the key – thin and pointy for the males whereas the females are much broader and rounded. 😊

Cheers Neil F 😊 – I had to strike some funny shapes to get those sheens 😊 Good job the only person there was bribed with Tootie Fruties 😊

Stockbridge Down Part 2

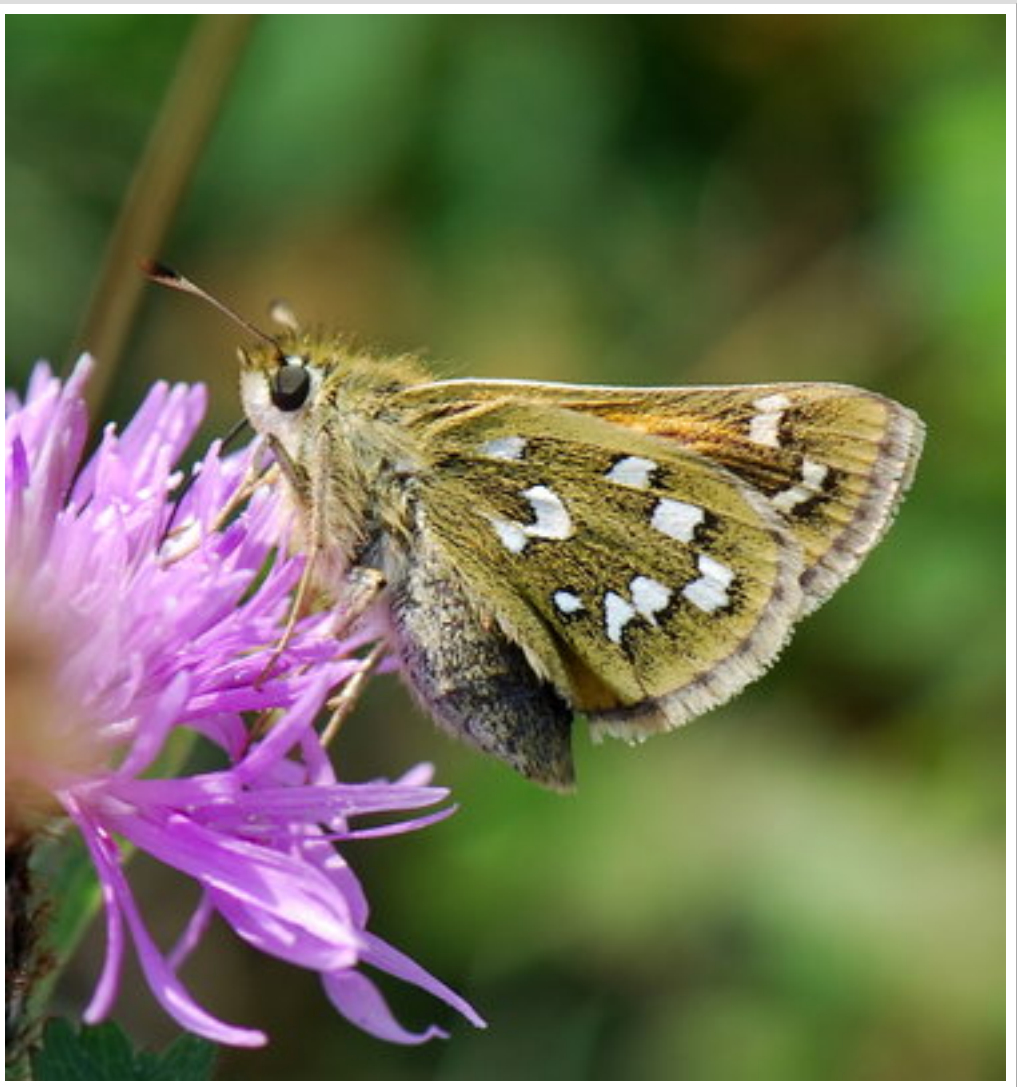
...Having spent some time at the other side of the reserve I thought I'd better head back to try and find some more Silver Spotted Skippers as they were the main reason for my visit after all. Up the hill I started putting up Chalkhills and Meadow Browns with every step. One chap seemed to be struggling and closer inspection revealed half a wing was missing, as well as the spots on the underside of the wing making it possibly ab. obseleta?



As I worked my way towards the central area which the Silver Spots seem to favour I again got confused by Chalkhills. I wanted to try and get some shots but again there were so many of them I didn't know where to start. In the end I settled for a Small Copper instead, and it was a caeruleo-punctata as well. Learning to sex Small Coppers is now on my "to do" list for the winter months (along with prep for Large Blues and Heath frits and getting to grips with manual) but having made errors using wing patterns I seem to have more success with looking at the shape of the abdomen. This individual however didn't play ball in that respect so I'm not sure of it's gender.



By now the sun was coming on strong and I was back at the Silver Spot spot where there was no shade. I patrolled the turf path for a bit and every now and again one would cross the path and with luck would perch long enough for an approach. I guess I found 5 or 6 individuals over an hour so I'm not sure how much of a "strong hold" this site will remain? Still those that I did find proved excellent value for the time put in. A very charismatic little butterfly with its' white face and its' changeable under wings - they ranged from line to gold to grey, all dependant on the position relative to the sun. Being a Dorsetian there is only one option for which species is my favourite skipper but this one does run a close second!





In the end I settled for shooting Chalkhills when they were massing on a poo. At one point I found 8 but this is in no way a record. The females were noticeable by their absence but who can blame them as every time they'd appear they'd be pounced on by males.



So after a full on day I was off home to rest and sort through the huge number of photos that I'd taken. This week maybe I can find a Browstreak at Shipton Bellinger or maybe even make the journey to Alners?

Have a goodun

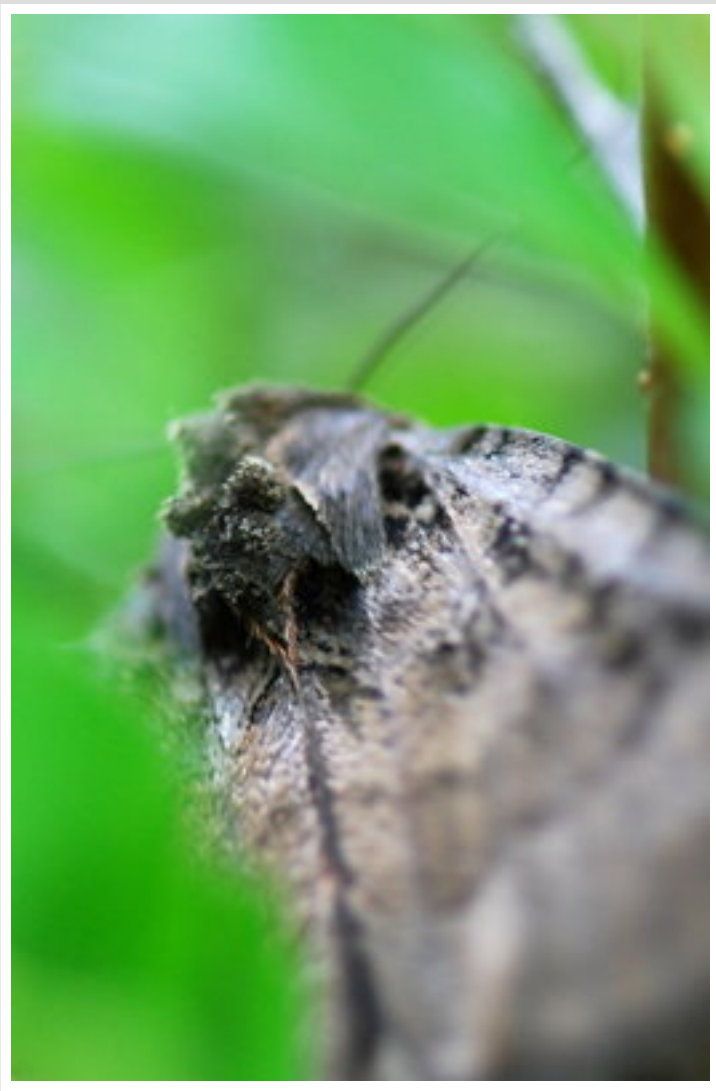
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Aug-12 06:20 AM GMT

Trips to town

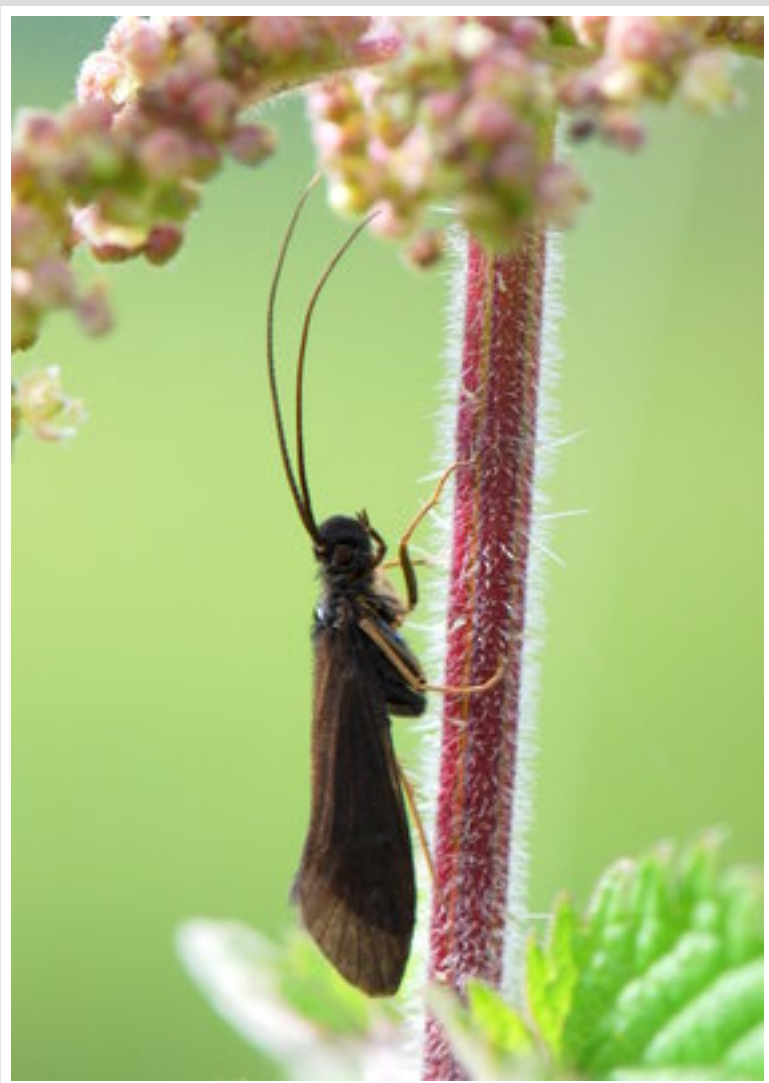
Over a couple of days last week I found myself walking round Salisbury town running errands or doing jobs at home. Whilst sorting out some of the more unruly bushes at the front I was startled by a large dark Moth. When it perched it showed scalloped fringes to its' wings and was a mosaic of dark and light browns. From a different angle it appeared to have a large protrusion over its' back and I am at a total loss as to what species it is, any id help gratefully received. There's also a moth coming up later that I need more help with.



My wife and I always work out “breaks” – times when we can do what we want while the other parent looks after the girls. My first trip into town was for one of these breaks. Normally I just take them to Bentley Wood or Martin Down so I can sneak in an extra butterflying visit. However recently they’ve actually requested to visit places specifically to look for butterflies so I didn’t want to push another visit and ruin their enthusiasm. Instead I walked and the girls scooted along the river path to Monpesson House in the Close. I took my camera just in case but didn’t hold much hope of using it. In the small garden at Monpesson there were two Small Whites but they were very flighty. We then took a walk around the Cathedral and the grounds held a Peacock. The girls then decided that they wanted to visit the park near Five Rivers so we set off back along the river path and there were a couple more whites flitting around but refusing to settle. I’d just put the lens cap on my camera when a Holly Blue flew towards me and then dropped down and settled in a small patch of Bramble and Ivy. It then started to walk over leaves until it reached to top of an Ivy flower and then it bent its’ abdomen around and it started laying eggs. I showed the girls and now they check out the spot each time we go to town.



After the girls had worn themselves out at the park sliding, swinging and “death sliding” we piled into the car and set off homewards. We took the longer and more scenic route and stopped for 5 minutes or so at the bridge near Old Sarum. In that time the girls had a drink and I watched a Red Admiral a couple of Banded Demoseilles a strange moth which I can’t indentify and a Hedge Brown.





A couple of days later both my wife and I had appointments at the Opticians. Luckily my wife's was an hour before mine so I dropped her off and went to park the car. I chose Five Rivers as it would be free and I'd manage to sneak in 20 minutes on my local patch. The sun was absolutely broiling by now. There were a few Skippers and Meadow Brown around as well as the odd Marbled White hanging on in there. On my way to the banks I stopped off to get a few shots of a mating pair of Meadow Browns.

eye appointment meant walking in again this time stopped at Five Rivers...sneaky.



Once at the banks there were a few more butterflies with Hedge Browns, a Peacock, a Comma and 2 Large Whites all feeding on the same Buddleia! The with the time ticking away and my walk to my appointment needing to become ever brisker I found what I was hoping for, a second brood Common Blue male. He posed for just long enough to get a few shots before flying off to hopefully allow his species to live up to its' name.



So now I take my camera everywhere because you never know what you could miss.

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Pete Eeles, 17-Aug-12 07:02 AM GMT

Great ovipositing Holly Blue Wurzel - I love the "more interesting" shots! Thx for posting!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 17-Aug-12 07:20 AM GMT

old lady for the big one but i have a sneaking suspicion your other maybe a caddis fly but i'm sure someone will be along to confirm/correct.

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Aug-12 07:48 AM GMT

Cheers for your kind comment Pete 😊

Cheers for the ID Chris, I had a bit of a google and it is a species of Caddis Fly, I thought they would have had clear wings hence thinking it was a moth 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 18-Aug-12 06:21 AM GMT

Knowle Church

Last weekend was spent at my parents' house so butterflying wasn't my main concern. On the Sunday before we headed home we spent the afternoon at Knowle Church. This is a ruined medieval church that was built inside a small Iron Age fort. It was surprisingly warm and sunny although a bit windy so we got the kite out, tied it to one of the chairs and the girls would come back and have a little fly in between playing hide and seek and disappearing before running round the base of rings to creep up behind you. While they were doing this I managed one or two walks round to see what this very small and unusual site had to offer.

The most numerous species were Meadow Browns followed by Hedge Browns. The Hedge Browns allowed close approaches but the Meadow Browns would lift up and then let the wind carry them out of sight. There were a few Small Whites flitting around the edges, a singleton Small Skipper as well as a few faded Marbled Whites. A trip back to the car meant that I caught up with a Comma and a Peacock as well as 2 Green Veined Whites, none of which stopped long enough for a photo. There's something about blustery weather that means that butterflies don't hang around? Some of my later wandering around the rings allowed me to get close enough to a Cricket and a small moth. I've seen loads of these in various different grassland habitats. They seem to be constantly taking off from just under your boot, flying and landing a short way away and then repeating this manoeuvre when a few steps later they're under your boot again. Today I managed to get close enough to actually appreciate their subtle markings rather than curse them as they spook my butterfly quarry!





Not an awful lot about but it was nice to get a few photos in a relaxed setting where playing with the girls was the main priority 😊 . I reckon at the right time there could be Common Blues, perhaps a couple of Skipper species and maybe a Brown Argus – perhaps I'll time a visit better next year to find out?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-Aug-12 07:41 AM GMT

Shipton Bellinger

With lots of people reporting Brown Hairstreak recently I thought that it was finally about time to head over to Shipton Bellinger and catch up. I took my younger daughter on this visit as she asked and so we started off up the hill. The sun was beating down and it was crazy hot. I was surprised by the number of Holly Blues around with at least 5 on the small section of path before the double hedge. We were almost there when we bumped into Colin so we had a bit of a chin wag. He'd had no luck and was sure that I would...Also around this area were a number of whites with at least pairs of Large, Small and Green Veined as well as Brimstones everywhere and a single Comma putting in an appearance.



We continued up the path with the hedges on either side dipping in and out of the shadows to keep cool with Meadow Browns doing their best impressions of a Brown Hairstreak to frustrate me. Once we reached the Master tree we had a little look around. Again there were lots of Brimstone this time joined by 2 male Common Blues and a female Hedge Brown with dark marks under its "eyes".



My little girl really enjoyed the "spongy grass" so we carried on until we found a good area of shade where she could sit and have a drink and her treat while I had a mooch around. Again there were Brimstones everywhere but more importantly 14 males Common Blues. But the real stars of the show were a couple of fresh second brood Brown Argus. They were right feisty little so-and-so's as I watched they took on Common Blues, Meadow Browns and even a male Brimstone on one occasion! There is something about the combination of the dark chocolate brown with the orange lunules, it's such an aesthetically pleasing arrangement.





As we worked our way back we had to check out all the little passages and holes in the hedges for fairies and during one such visit a Speckie posed nicely on a stick.



So, no Brown Hairstreaks, but some Brown Argus which were just as nice to my mind. As we reached the end of the path we were caught up by a couple who'd just completed a Transect and had seen 5 Brostreaks, three of which were low down on Thistles. Oh well at least I know that they are definitely about now.

The final sighting of the day was another Holly Blue in the play park while pushing my little girl on the swing. Well she'd worked really hard all afternoon so she deserved a break! Martin Down tomorrow as well as possibly revisiting Shipton Bellinger now I know the "hotspot"...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 19-Aug-12 08:10 AM GMT

Great stuff Wurzel! Good luck with the Brown Hairstreaks tomorrow,i will be looking for them too.

Re: Wurzel

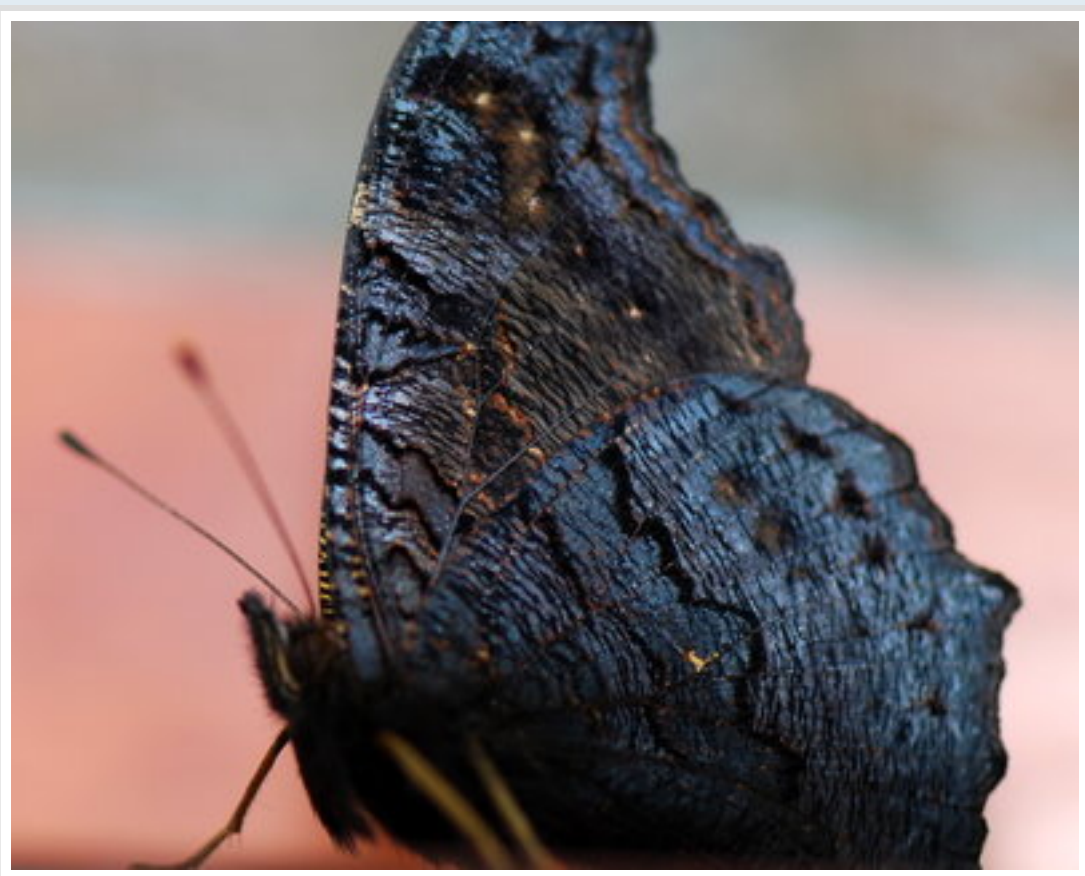
by Wurzel, 20-Aug-12 07:31 AM GMT

Cheers Essex, your luck helped and it seems you were lucked up too 😊

Gardens

The past week has been a bit like old times with the weather being a bit hit or miss. It's been warm but there has always been the risk of a shower or two or days when the sun hasn't been able to break through the clouds. Because of this and also because of errands and work to do I've found myself taking advantage of the garden whenever I can.

One morning last week the garden seemed to have joined us in the house. I'd left the backdoor open the previous afternoon right the way through until the evening, almost forgetting to close it before climbing the wooden ladder. As I was pouring y cereal the girls started calling out "Daddy there's a butterfly!" I thought it was a bit early but I checked out garden room and there was a Peacock that had obviously been there all night. It must have slipped in to bask as because of all of the glass it gets as warm as a greenhouse out there. While the curtains were closed it was perfectly placid but the minute they were open it started trying to flap its' way through the perspex! After a few shots I opened the door and guided it down towards freedom. I went for closed wing shots as I loved the blue glints against the black.



The next day I spent 20 minutes in the garden, standing in the shade waiting for butterflies to land and bask on the small strip of concrete path. This seemed to be the best bet as I'd already spooked a Peacock that somehow had blended in perfectly with the stones. Despite one or two likely looking landings by a Small and Large White I had to wait a whole 3 minutes for my first Butterfly. It was a slightly worn Comma which looked like it was going to land on the path but opted instead for a Ragwort that seemed to have invaded my lawn.



A few moments later a Small White actually landed long enough for me to approach and take a few shots. I was trying to get some close ups of the butterfly's head and I was lucky enough to get just what I was hoping for. Normally Whites flit over the fence on one side, fly all along the borders land for about a second here and there and then flit over the fence on the other side of the garden. So to find one actually perched was a rare occurrence.



Later in the afternoon we took a visit to my sister in laws so the girls could play with their cousin. They live in a cottage on a farm estate and the owners have left a small field to grow wild and mown a curved path through it. It acts as a fantastic butterfly trap, almost like a stop off point between the downs and the manicured and closely mown grass all around the estate. There were Meadow Browns everywhere and a male Common Blue. Unfortunately he was slightly too far in the grasses to reach but a very blue female was in perfect range.





Later while all the girls played ball and rolled around on the huge lawns I checked out the hedges along the side of the house. I found a Green Veined White posed on an golf ball flower head looking like it was perched on the moon. There was also some Buddleia and there were 3 Peacocks, a red Admiral and tired Meadow Brown all feeding on the bush, it was certainly living up to its' name of Butterfly Bush! Finally once home 2 female Hedge Browns appeared just outside the back door. So a fantastic array from just hanging around the home.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 21-Aug-12 05:56 AM GMT

Some nice photos there Wurzel.

What would we do without our gardens? mine has certainly kept me sane at times this year 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Aug-12 07:04 AM GMT

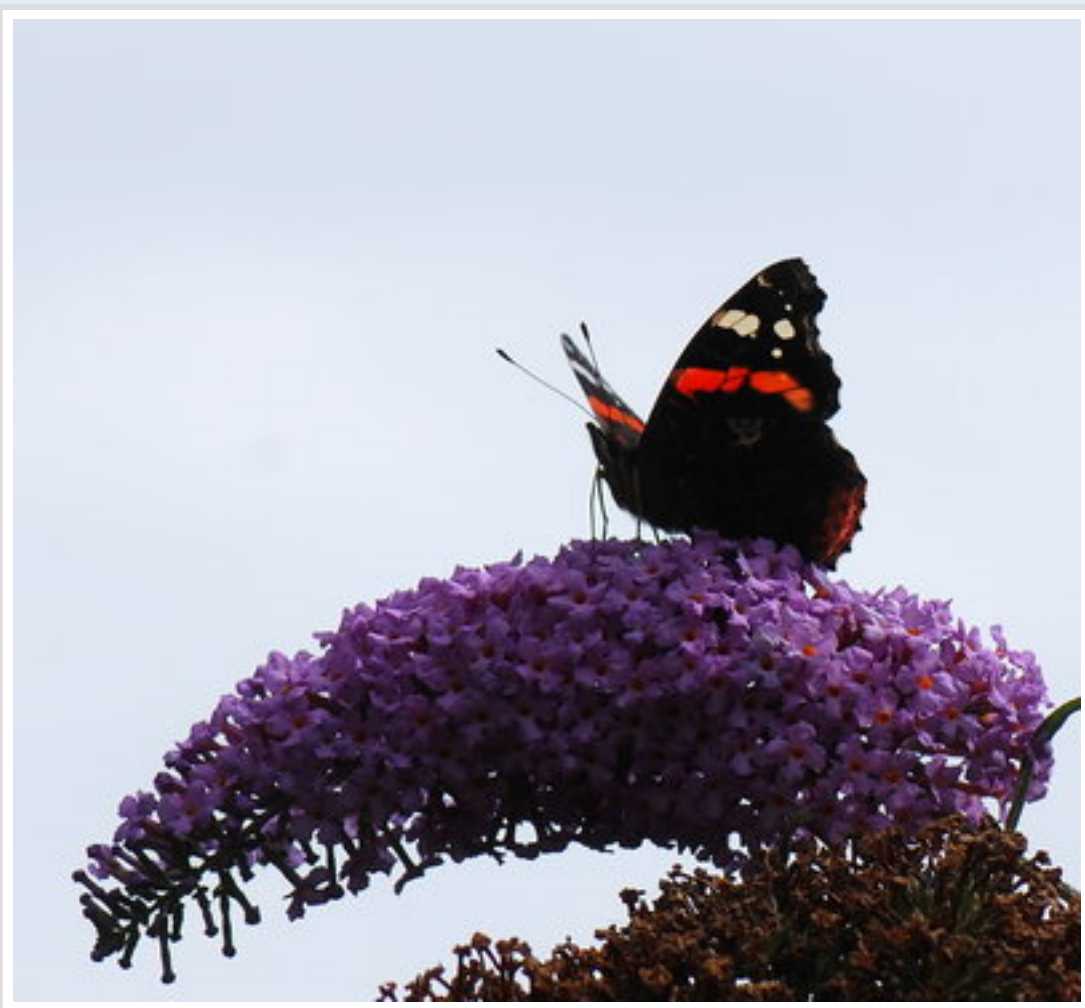
Cheers Neil 😊 I've got a few more shots from the garden but I'm hoping that Pauline finally gets her Small Tort before I post them. I might not have my garden next year as we're thinking of buying and can only afford properties with "courtyard" gardens 😞 so I'll just have to count the local park as my garden instead 😊

Weymouth and Lodmoor



On Friday I took both the girls down to the Weymouth area. We'd visited Arne and they had got their Bronze Spotters Badge, we'd also visited Garston Wood and so a visit to Radipole would mean that they could show their booklet and get their Silver and also their Gold Spotters Badges. Tall reed beds didn't seem the ideal habitat for butterflies so I settled down to just enjoy the day with the girls.

After getting a bit lost on the monstrosity of the new road (For the Lympicss) we arrived to find that the visitor centre was gutted. Flooding in July had washed pretty much everything away apart from the walls and thatch! Still the girls presented their booklet to one of the wardens and took great delight in pinning their Silver badges on. We then set off to have a look around the reserve so they could collect observations for their Gold Award. Unfortunately we couldn't get to the hide as the boardwalk was still under water so we kept to the stony paths and as the girls looked out for various things to tick in their Spotter Book I kept an eye out for things to photograph. There wasn't an awful lot of butterfly life around with singles of Hedge Brown and Red Admiral as well as moth that decided to land on the path in front of us. The Red Admiral kept his distance from us so the shot I got was a bit distant but I like the way the light shines through the wings bringing out the red to contrast with the shadows.



There were dragon flies around and the small picnic area cut into the reeds was the territory it seemed of an Emperor Dragonfly. He wouldn't land or even hover so there was no chance of a photo but a Darter was much more accommodating.



Once back at the Visitor Centre the girls went pond dipping to add to their “ticks” in the spotter book and by then the warden had managed to locate some Gold Certificates (I think they had to be printed especially) and a single Gold Badge. They hadn’t thought that anyone would have got to Gold and so possibly my girls were the first to receive them! 😊



On our arrival during the morning I’d noticed that the sightings board had details for Lodmoor where there was a Wood Sandpiper – not really a rarity but it would be nice to see so we packed up, said our goodbyes to the wardens who had been fantastic to the girls, and headed over to Lodmoor to check it out.

Once there we headed to the “Magic Roundabout” which offers a good view point of the reserve. The short walk to the viewing points and back produced a couple of Whites, 2 Peacocks, 2 hedge Browns, 3 Speckled Woods, 2 Holly Blue a Brimstone and a possible Painted Lady; it had a similar style of flight to a Red Admiral but was pale orange, not like a Comma, lighter? As I looked out from the Magic Roundabout there was a single Greenshank, single Lapwing, single Little Egret and 3 Common Sandpipers. We then walked a little further to the “hump” and looked back across the marsh at 90 degrees to where we first looked. There were a few more Common Sandpiper but in one of the small pools were two wades that looked slimmer and least grey. One was a clean looking Green Sandpiper and the other was noticeably browner and spottier, the Wood Sandpiper. This was great as both species were almost within one scope view so I could make comparisons easily.



Green Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper...honest



Gold and Wood Sand in the bag as well as possible butterfly first we headed back homewards happy with the days haul.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-Aug-12 06:32 AM GMT

Martin Down and Shipton Bellinger



I took my older daughter out with me on Sunday and we headed first to Martin Down to take part in the joint Wiltshire/Dorset outing. On arrival in the car park we loaded up and set off at quite a sedate pace noting Holly Blue, Green Veined White, Meadow Brown and Brimstones as we walked along the hedge at from Sillens Lane to where it transects Borkerley. A Comma and Peacock also put in brief appearances as well as the Dark Green Frit in the flower meadows on the left of the hedge. We were nearing the "hotspot" when the group stopped for a Small Tortoiseshell and I managed to spot first a Small Copper and then a Brown Argus amongst the grasses.

At the hotspot there were a couple of Small Skippers, 2 or three fresh male Common blues and two Brown Argus. The group had already started following Borkerley up the hill so we had to catch up with them, scanning the side the ditch for butterflies. Alost all the way up we were followed by Brimstone and Peacocks which always perched just out of reach on the other side of the ditch. Finally blues started appearing, a couple of male Chalkhills flitting along the sides of the ditch. As we progressed higher the numbers of Chalkhills increased until almost at the stopping point where there four or five fitting around our feet, including a single female. On our climb up the Down we'd also encountered a male Adonis Blue which refused to open its' wings and a large number of Frog Orchids.





After a brief snack while the others had their lunch we said our goodbyes and headed off down the diagonal path and back to the car park. On the way there was a other Peacock and a Small Copper and near the bottom of the hill 2 male Common Blues and a few more Smessex. All in all it was an interesting morning but I found it slightly tricky trying to get photos as I didn't want to disturb anything while there were so many people who might also like to see it. Still I think next time it would be good to go somewhere less familiar and that way I'll get a lot more from it.

It was absolutely baking hot now and even the shade of the car didn't offer any relief from the heat but we bravely set off to spend a couple of hours at Shipton and see if the gen I picked up yesterday would pay off. We were in such a hurry to get there and make every second count that we even ate our lunch on the journey...

w pulled into the car park at Shipton and eagerly made our way up the hill, stopping on the way to ask the occasional butterfly enthusiast that we'd see whether the Brostreaks were about. Again there were Brimstone and whites on the vegetation on either side of the path and again Meadow Brown were very frustrating as they kept jinking up high in a very suggestive hairstreak fashion. There seemed to be fewer butterflies today and as we rounded the Master tree we bumped into Pauline who very kindly showed us where the female was. She had to head off and so my older daughter and I stood watch of this beautiful butterfly. She was very absorbed in her feeding but every now and again she would fly higher up and further into the hedge, almost to stretch her wings, but then she would return to the original spot and start her way round the bramble blossom. She was up quite high so in order to get shots I had to hold the camera arms outstretched a peer through the viewfinder from about a foot away, clicking all the time. Still the technique seemed to work okay and I'd rather have gotten a few shots than none.



After about half an hour of watching and photographing we decided to leave her in peace and wandered further along the hedge. There were a couple of Holly Blues, Brimstones and a Peacock amongst the numerous Meadow Browns nectaring in the hedge but we didn't find any more Brostrokes. Having completed a circuit we'd ended up back at the place where the female had been but she must have realised that there were no more cameras around to pose for and headed off. After nectaring for so long I was surprised that she could actually lift her bulk!

I thought it would be good to head to the area that I'd visited the day before as my daughter could sit in the shade while I looked for Brown Argus. We were just passing a large bramble island before reaching the small bit of path and the springy turf where we were headed when something orange caught my eye. It was another female, quite far back in the bushes. Watching her all the time with one eye I scanned the bushes to see if there was a way to get any closer. As I edged closer, millimetre by millimetre so as not to disturb it (or even worse any Meadow Browns that go mental and then spook everything) I saw right in front of me a male.

He looked pretty worn, a sort of sandy brown colour rather than a honey glaze but he was good to see. The female then moved to a thistle head and he joined her on the same thistle. I moved round and managed to get a few shots before he shooed her away so that he could pig out on the nectar all by himself. He moved quite a bit but always staying around the front of the bush whereas the female preferred the bushes right in the middle of clump. Eventually she did come forward for a bit but she did seem more wary than the male. This same clump was also visited by a Comma, 2 Peacock, a couple of Brimstones and a male Hedge Brown, but my eyes were locked onto the Brostreaks.





Eventually it was time to go so we said our goodbyes and walked back to the car park, scattering Common Blues and Meadow Browns as we went. Again the vegetation on either side of the path had good numbers of whites and Holly Blue and again we had to stop in the play park on the way back. I have been posting my outings slightly out of order but some people might have noticed that there is a pattern in my visits. On the Friday I took both girls out all day (Radipole and Lodmoor), on Saturday it was a trip with my younger daughter (Shipton Bellinger) and on Sunday it was the whole day with my older daughter (Martin Down and another visit to Shipton). I'd planned all of these visits to allow first my wife a break from the girls, then for the girls to have a break from each other and finally as all of my plans were reaching their culmination in me having a whole day out butterflying to myself...the weather starts to deteriorate slightly. Still there may still be time to squeeze in a trip to Alners Gorse...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Nick Broomer, 22-Aug-12 06:44 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Your last photo really shows off the beautiful colouration of the undersides of this butterfly, what a beauty. You have got it just right, lovely photo, well done.

All the best, Nick.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 22-Aug-12 07:25 AM GMT

Lovely images, Wurzel. The Brown Hairstreak is surely one of Europe's most beautiful insects.

Re: Wurzel

by Gothic_dreams, 22-Aug-12 07:54 AM GMT

Some lovely photos Wurzel, love the Brown Hairstreak shots 😊

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 22-Aug-12 08:00 AM GMT

I love the shot with the contrast between the two sexes, Wurzel.

I must try to see BH this week somehow!

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Zonda, 23-Aug-12 02:03 AM GMT

Hya mate, great to meet you today at Alners gorse. I hope you have some great images from Dorset's top spots. I haven't got a decent BH this year yet, but i'm hopeful for the week ahead. Look after the wife and kids,,,, regards Zonda.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 23-Aug-12 02:44 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

More great reports and photos, especially envious of the Brown Hairstreaks 🍷 😊

Opportunities for a male and female together like that surely must be one of butterflyings rare moments.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Pauline, 23-Aug-12 02:55 AM GMT

Wurzel, your male and female BH together has to be one of the best photos I've seen this season. You should be delighted with it. Thought we'd done well with 2 males on the same thistle but that just takes the biscuit 🍷 🍷

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 23-Aug-12 07:37 AM GMT

Cheers Nick for your very kind comments 😊

Cheers David I reckon it's number 2 after Small Copper, but that's just my personal bias 😊

Cheers Gothic for your kind comments 😊

Cheers Dave 😊 Good luck with finding your Brostreaks, make sure you check those forecasts 😊

Cheers Neil the both sexes shot was a total blag 😊 I don't think I'll be able to replicate it.

Cheers Pauline 😊 It's normally me that's Mr Green about your shots!

Great to meet you today Zonda at Alners 😊 I only got three shots up close and the bushes got in the way 😞 Oh well I'll have to try and get back next week if the weather is good 😊 I'm looking into Flickr which would be fine if I could remember my Yahoo e-mail address 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 25-Aug-12 06:33 AM GMT

More from the Garden...

By the start of last week work was catching up with me and all the work I'd been putting off suddenly reared its' head from under the bed where I'd hidden it at the start of the summer. So over the course of the week I planned and prepared in amongst taking the girls out and trying to find time for butterflies. During one of the days Nanny took the girls out so I set up outside in the garden; fold up chair, work and clip board to write on, large cup of coffee and of course my camera placed in the camera bag ready and set up. However I hadn't even sat down when I saw my first butterflies of the day, two female Hedge Browns fluttering around the back door.



After that I set to work but I kept getting distracted by butterflies. A Red Admiral dropped down over the hedge near the back door it did a left turn and then flew the length of the garden before disappearing into the garden behind. Then there were the Whites, both Small and Large flitting forward and back but never landing long enough to get a shot. I tried to ignore them and settled back to work when a Small Tortoiseshell landed and proceeded to bask. I gently lowered the clip board, picked the camera up and slid off the chair. So as not to spook it I then elbow crawled commando style as close as I could so as to get some shots.



Happy with what I'd got I reverse crawled and sat back down for some more work. After a couple of minutes the Small Tort had obviously had a long enough break and so it took off to visit my neighbours. I then took this opportunity to get some fresh coffee taking my camera with me and snapping a Large White near the back door and a Meadow Brown that had got stuck in the garden room window. What was surprising about these shots was that I'd seen both species in the garden over the last few weeks but they were unapproachable once you'd gotten 6 feet from them. Yet today they were just chilling out by the back door or making themselves right at home.





I'd barely sat down when the Small Tortoiseshell reappeared on the path to bask. I saw "the" as I'm assuming that it was the same one. Again I gently let things drop to the grass, reached for the camera, slid off the chair and elbow crawled across the garden. If the neighbours had looked out of their windows they'd have thought I'd have lost it (but then you can't lose what you never had 😊). This time it was less skittish and opened its' wings for quite a while, only occasionally doing the nervous wing clap that they seem to do.



Shots taken I again reverse crawled back to the chair and feverishly started writing lesson plans lest I should be distracted any more. While seeking inspiration at one point I looked up at the Ivy arch and saw a Brimstone pass over from one garden to another and a Holly Blue disappear into the leaves but I doggedly pressed on with my work for a whole 20 minutes until a Peacock replaced the Small Tortoiseshell in the basking place. Same procedure as previous and I was lying prone on the ground so close to the Peacock that to get my shots I had to move back. When it first landed it held its' wings...

Sorry I had to stop typing as The Cure are playing Caterpillar and its' a cracking song...

...with the rear eyes slightly on show and then as it relaxed it brought its' fore wings back covering the hind eyes and looking almost all red. As I watch it sees a couple of ants and so the hind wings are revealed and it also moves its' head and the palps seem to separate giving it a belligerent look almost like its' berating them.





Not too shabby a tally for an afternoon in the garden with a total of 10 different species seen (I forgot to mention the Speckled Wood seen while venting the greenhouse), 12 lessons planned and probably about 4 peaceful hours. 😊

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 25-Aug-12 06:47 AM GMT

Sounds like you had a peaceful and enjoyable day Wurzel. Great stuff.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 25-Aug-12 06:32 PM GMT

That's a lovely Tortoiseshell, Wurzel. Very fresh looking, but also quite dark in colour, with the black extending to create almost a smudgy sex brand on the forewings.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-Aug-12 07:45 AM GMT

Cheers David – five in one day will take some beating though! 😊

Cheers Essex – great to see you enjoying the delights of Dorset 😊

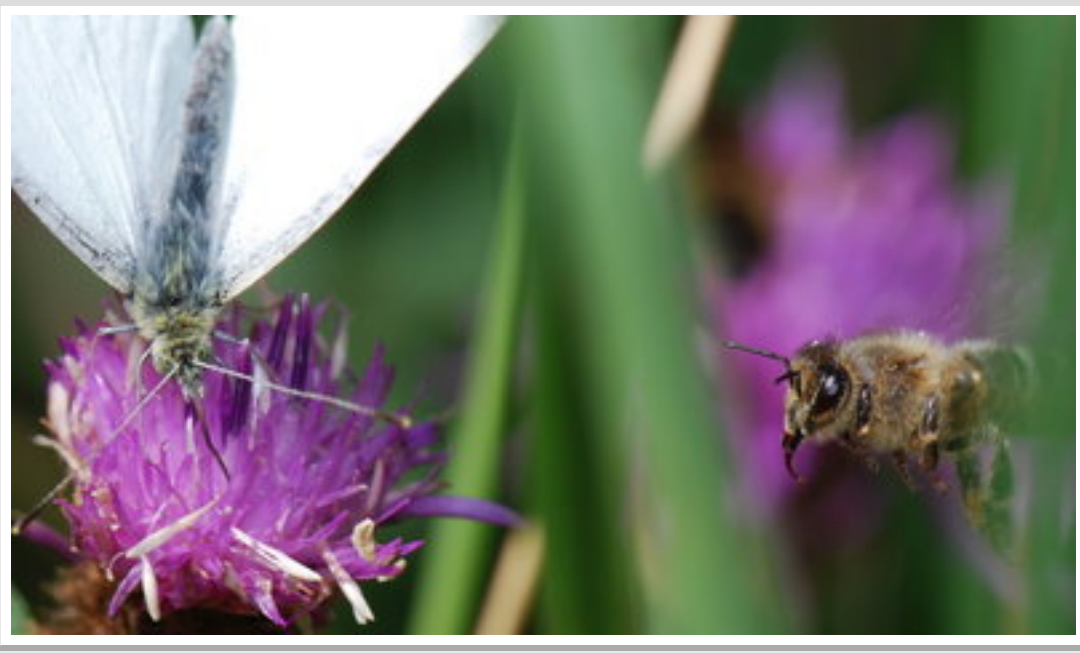
Alners Gorse



Last week I was in two minds about visiting Alners Gorse. I visited last year for the first time and it was brilliant with both male and female Brown Hairstreaks down low on thistle heads. But this year reports suggested that there weren't too many Brown Hairstreaks. In the end I went for it anyway so I nervously looked out at the clouds massing on the journey down. Having arrived I and walked down the hill checking all the brambles and thistles on the way down.

Once in the reserve proper I checked out the large bramble bush directly at the bottom of the hill but it only had a Hedge Brown and then started to check along the main hedge. There were a couple of other people around, Fritman whom I had met the previous week at Martin Down and another bloke whose name I forgot to ask. Three pairs of eyes scanned across different parts of the hedge but Meadow Browns masquerading as Brostreaks was as close as we got. I had a little bit more of a look around including the area through the gate. This seemed like a good little spot, the tall scrubs cut the breeze dead, there were thistles and large patches of brambles still with flowers and the height of the shrubbery almost funnelled the sunlight down like a little sun trap.

It was here that I got my first shots of the day of a Small White. It was throwing some unusual poses while feeding and in one a Honey Bee is also in shot, something that I didn't see at the time.

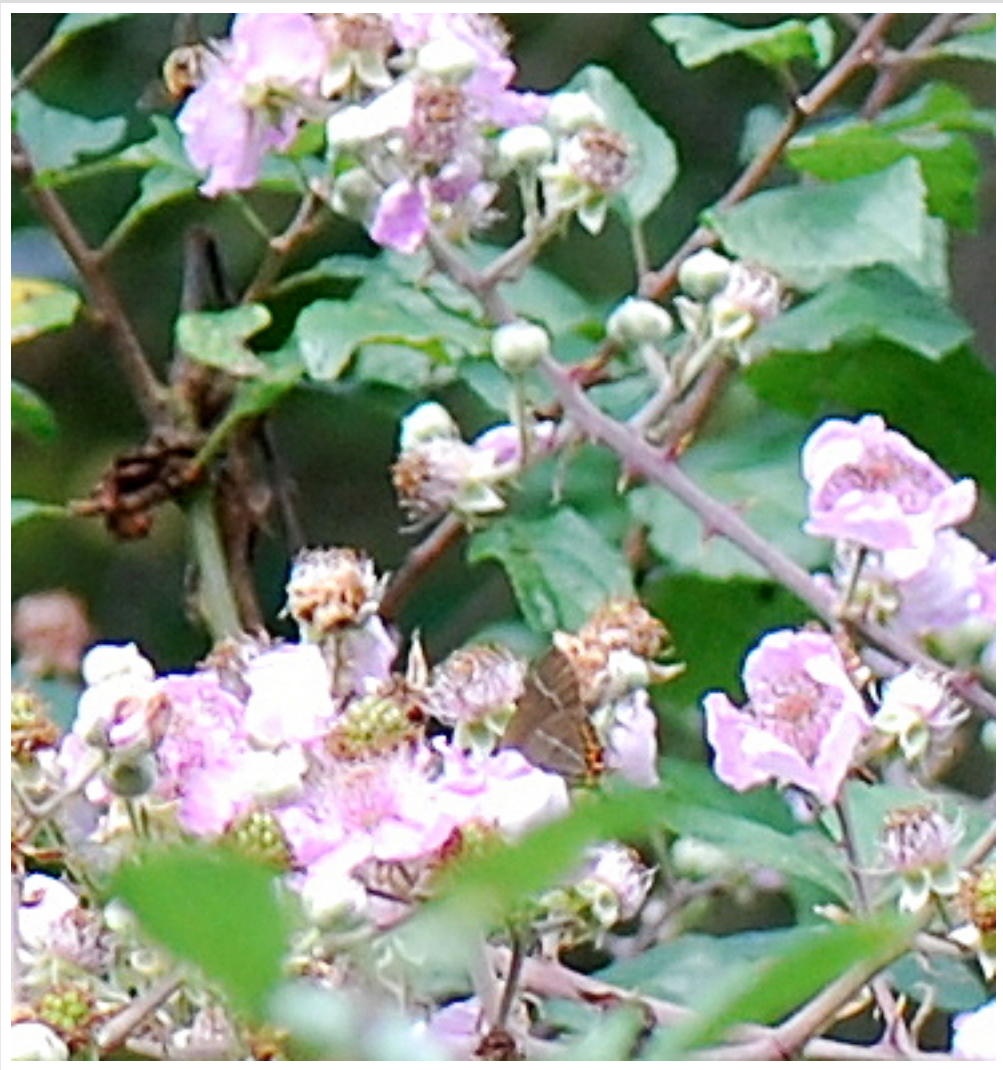


However nice as it was to see these butterflies it wasn't what I'd come for so I headed back towards the gate and as I was chatting to Fritman it all happened. From an Ash Tree (whether it was the Master I'm not really sure) a couple of butterflies took to the air and had a skirmish. One was smaller and lighter in profile than the other and I thought it could have been a Speckie and male Brostreak? Just after this another butterfly, a similar size to smaller one involved in the dogfight, left the same tree and flitted and jinked down and around our heads before flitting onto the bramble too high up and far back to get any shots. However we were in doubt that this was a Brostreak. It disappeared back further into the trees and then reappeared about half way in the bush where it settled to nectar.

While we were watching I noticed a smaller, greyer butterfly take off and land quite close to the feeding Brostreak. It was too grey to be a Holly Blue and had a similar jinking flight to the Brostreak. I was convinced that it was a White Letter and when Fritman got his bins on it my identification was confirmed. It was very far back but I took a shot and cropped it like hell because I didn't think people would believe that there was a Meadow Brown, Brown Hairstreak and White Letter Hairstreak all nectaring on the same flower heads. As we watched the White Letter stayed quite far back but the Brostreak worked its way closer and closer.

At this point we were joined by Zonda who regaled us with tales of White Letters and we also discussed the paucity of Purple Hairstreaks this year. All the time we were all willing the Brown Hairstreak closer still. Unfortunately once it was close enough for a decent shot it had positioned itself in such way that the vegetation kept getting in the way. Try as I might I couldn't get round it without spooking the butterfly so in the end I just pointed the camera through and took my shots. It actually came out in quite a "romantic" style. After a further wait of about an hour we decided that enough was enough and we all headed back up top for lunch.





It is in there (WLH)





As I was here now I thought that I'd have another look around to see what else the site had to offer. This time I followed the hedge to the right of the reserve and after a couple of hundred metres in something took off and jinked around me before disappearing into a blackthorn clump. Another Brostreak and possibly a different individual but I couldn't relocate it. Still there were plenty of other species to see including plenty of Meadow Browns, Hedge Browns and Speckies including one very ancient looking individual. I could almost hear him muttering; "I'm 4 weeks old I am, I remember when all this grassland was grassland, only shorter". There were also Small Skippers, four species of White, Peacocks, Small Heath, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, a Silver Washed Frit put in a brief appearance near the wood and also a pair of fresh male Common Blue.





And there was plenty of other stuff to keep you occupied too from Crickets to Dragonflies...





The afternoon was wearing on and I couldn't relocate the Brostreak or find any others, the main area of hedge was in shade so I decided that it was time to leave this cracking reserve. As I was making my way through the long grass I was recalling how Zonda was telling me that Essex Skippers were supposed to be on the reserve and how he'd never been able to find one when something small and faded orange blurred by. I knew it was a skipper and worked my round to the head-end face on to discover that it was an Essex.



And so ended a cracking day with good company, good butterflies and surprisingly good weather. Whilst there could have been more Brostreaks perhaps they are late and in a week or two's time they will come on strong? Here's hoping...as well as hoping that I can get back.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 27-Aug-12 07:01 PM GMT

Good report and photos Wurzel,

Alners Gorse looks interesting, looking on the map it is only 45 minute or so from where we are staying next week 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 27-Aug-12 08:22 PM GMT

Wow. I'm surprised White Letters are still about.It's practically September!!

Pleased you managed to spot a Brown Hairstreak though. It's one species that I'm happy to invest serious time searching for.

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 27-Aug-12 09:30 PM GMT

Great shots Wurzel 🍷 maybe I'll get some pics next yeat of a Brown HS, I'll have to come south though I think. Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 28-Aug-12 12:39 AM GMT

Wow. A three-species shot with both Brown *and* WL Hairstreak. Not easy to beat... 🍷

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 28-Aug-12 02:05 AM GMT

Have just read your PD after getting back from my hols. Some **fantastic** photos there Wurzel 😊🍷🍷. I can't really add any more on top of what has already been said (Peacock underside and Green-veined White (golf ball flower) deserve a mention).

Your grass moth; Knowle Church 17th is I think, a Crambus sp. probably perlella. The Old Lady was a nice find 😊👉

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 28-Aug-12 07:30 PM GMT

Cheers Neil 😊 Try and pay Alners a visit if you can and enjoy Dorset (it should be hard not too 😊)

Cheers David 😊 I saw two all day which isn't good for this site but perhaps they're running late, here's hoping...

Cheers Goldie 😊 If you do make it this way Shipton Bellinger is a cracking place for them too

Cheers Dave I didn't realise the Meadow Brown was there and the shot would already have been a massive fluke 🤩😊

Cheers Philzoid glad to see you had a good holiday and thanks for the ID too 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 28-Aug-12 07:59 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I have just read your report from Alner's Gorse..... 🍷🍷🍷

Having just mentioned the lack of hairstreaks in my snaps, you go and get two at the same time!?!?

Good work!

Flutter on!

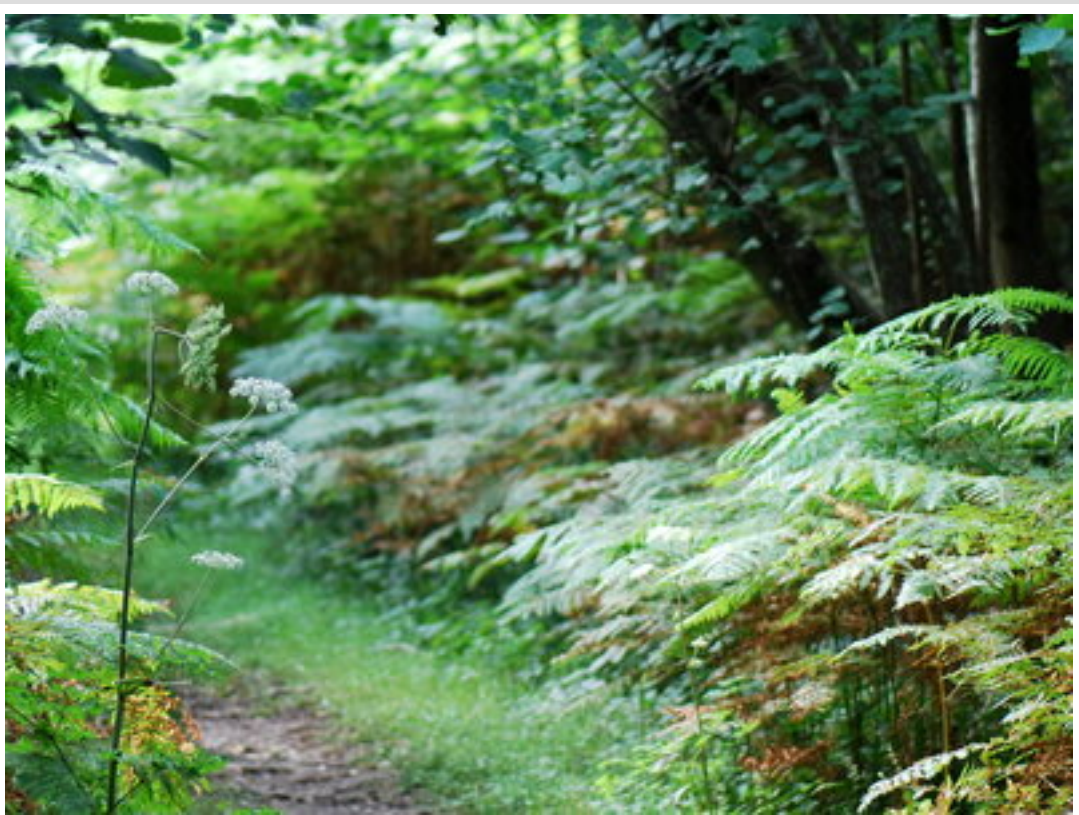
CJB

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 29-Aug-12 06:37 AM GMT

Cheers CJB I assure you it wasn't intentional and I didn't mean to rub it in

Garston Wood

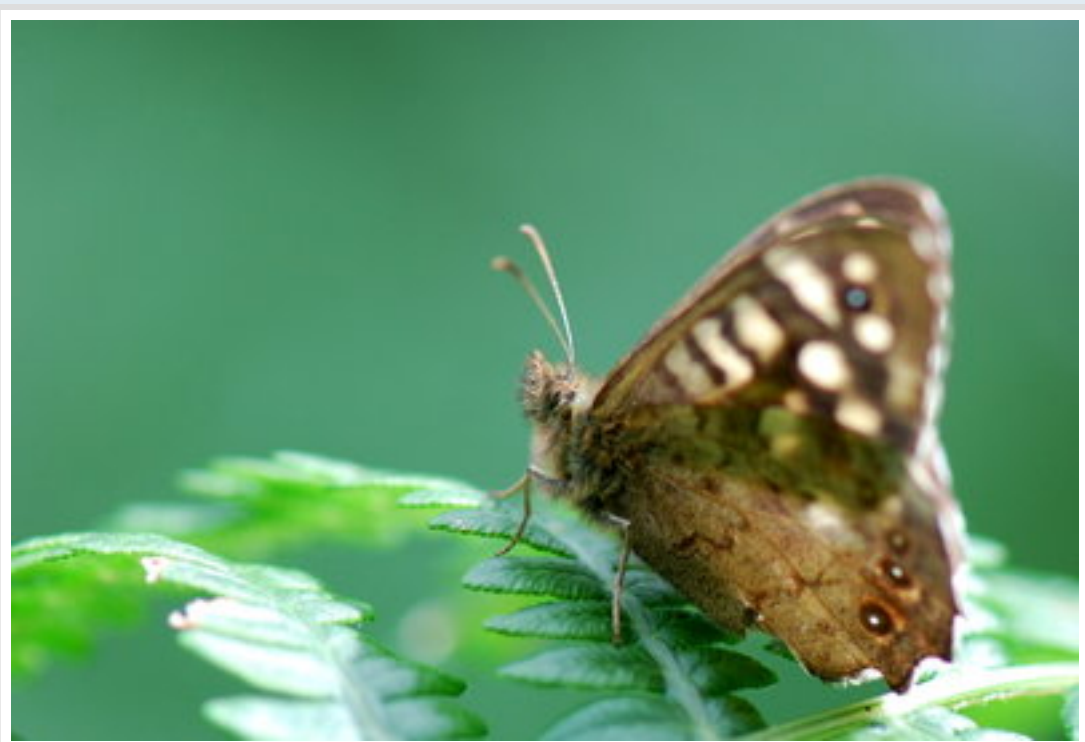
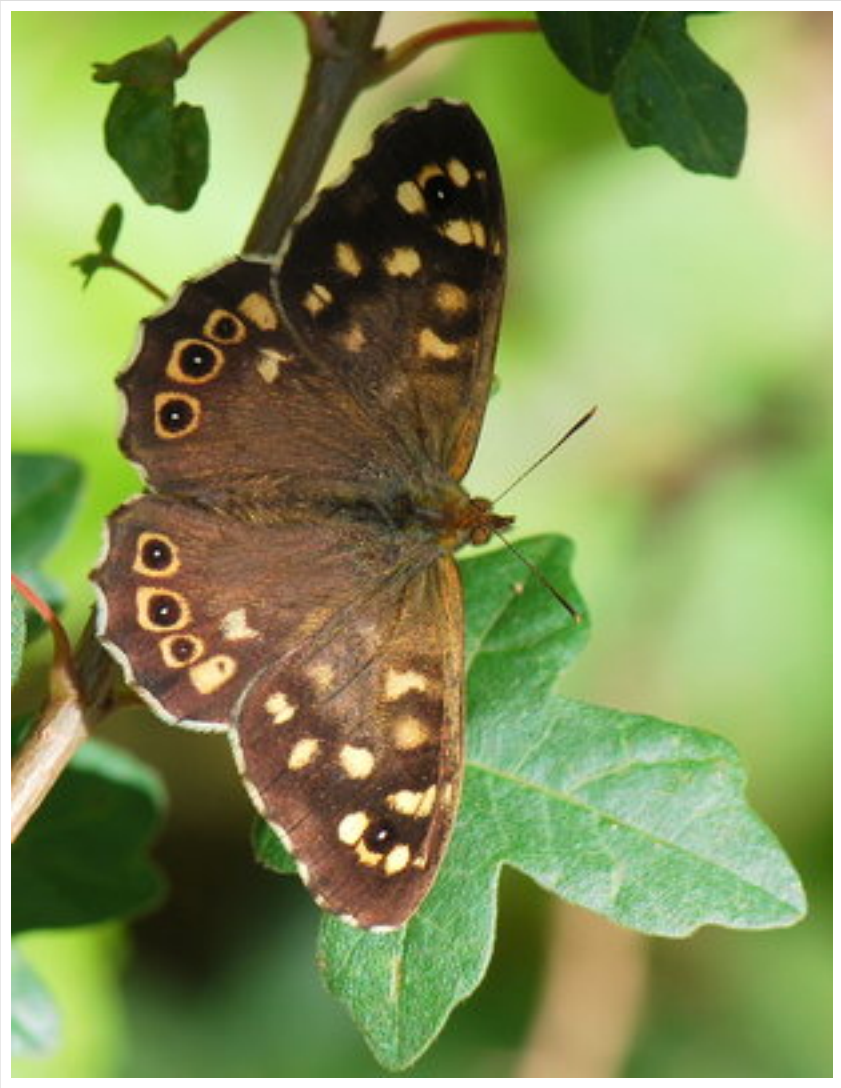


After staying over at my parents' house on Saturday the next morning we had a hearty breakfast and took a walk at nearby Garston Wood. There was a slight breeze but it was warm enough for butterflies which I knew as a fact having seen a Red Admiral and five Whites feeding on the Buddleia before we

left.

We started walking through the usual area of the wood but because of the wet weather the path was now overgrown and the fallen tree was an obstacle that my mums' dodgy knee couldn't cope with so we headed back to the car park and then set out on the wider and easier paths.

Despite the weather there weren't many butterflies around. I hadn't expected too much as woodlands seem to offer the greatest range of species during July but throughout the brief visit to the "old plantation" I'd seen a couple of Speckies and a single Meadow Brown. This continued to be the way throughout the whole visit - 2 species the entire morning. However saying that there were good numbers of Speckies and I counted at least 12 over the course of our walk. Some were nice and fresh looking while others appeared to be much more "vintage".



Once back at the car park we said our goodbyes and then headed home to get the girls their lunch. What with the slow start to the summer, the lack of a prolonged blaze of sun and an almost autumnal feel to the air I'm left wondering how much longer the season will continue?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 29-Aug-12 07:03 AM GMT

Chin up, Wurzel! The forecast is good for the weekend and into next week (after a couple of rather nippy nights this week). Maybe the winds will bring us some Clouded Yellows? there have been one or two spotted on the south coast recently. 😊

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 30-Aug-12 12:27 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel

I never doubted for a minute that it was unintentional! 😊

Fingers crossed for some BHS this weekend!

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 30-Aug-12 04:19 AM GMT

The 'season' is not yet over – the forecast for next week is pretty good and I would expect decent numbers of late summer butterflies.

Of course, most of the rare species have now checked out for the year, but I guess anyone looking for Brown Hairstreak will find a bonus window of opportunity given that it's expected to be in the seventies for much of next week with light winds.

How sad that we've rarely seen such conditions throughout the main summer flight periods of many species. 😞

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Aug-12 07:05 AM GMT

Here's hoping eh Dave? It would be great if September was all Yellow 😊

Good luck with the Brostreaks CJB, fingers crossed 😊

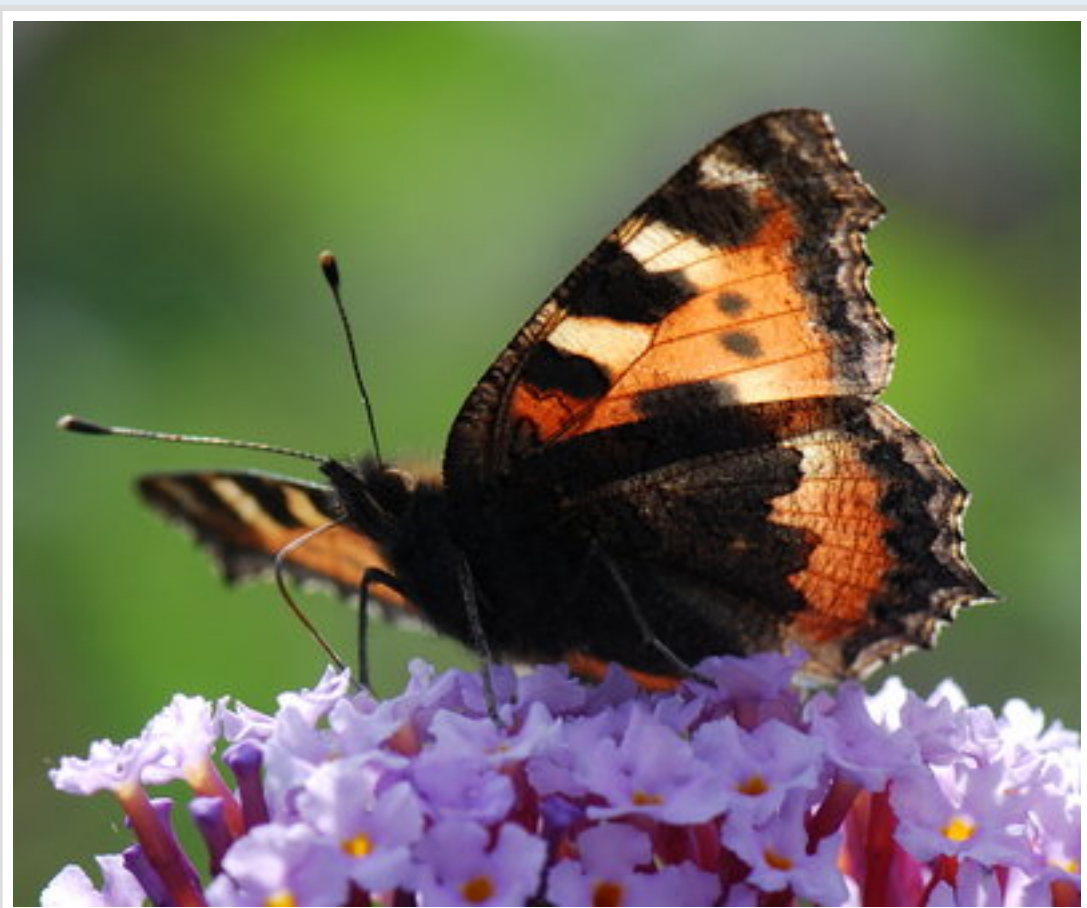
Totally agree David, this summer hasn't been one to remember fondly weatherwise 😞

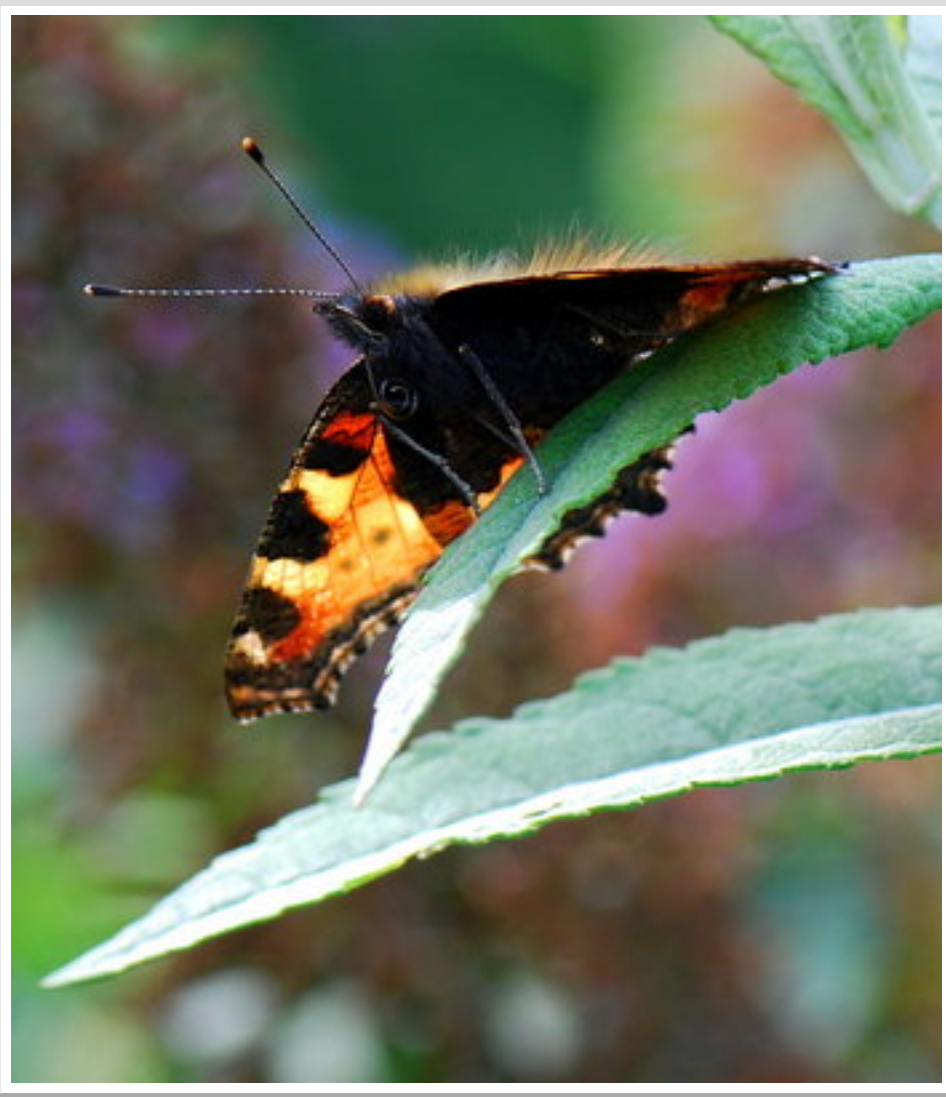
As to the season ending I think I may have been a little hasty...

Five Rivers

After a sombre visit to Garston Wood in the morning I was lucky enough to spend a couple of hours during the afternoon (Sunday) at Five Rivers. As I was leaving the car park a Holly Blue flew over the cars and then disappeared over the top of the leisure centre. I started off in the long grasses across the main part of the reserve hoping to find some second brood blues and possibly a Brown Argus or Small Copper, species which have been in very low numbers at this site this year. However it was also very quiet with only the occasional Meadow Brown or White making a pass over the tall grass heads. I think that the wet weather has encouraged the grass to grow really tall and this might have proved unsuitable habitat for the blues and the lush, green turf pathways aren't dry enough for the Small Copper?

Slightly worried I then checked the banks and it was pretty quiet again at the first bank with a few Meadow Browns. At the second bank it was a much more reassuring picture. There were a number of flowering thistles and a large Buddleia which was living up to its' name of "Butterfly Bush" with 6 Meadow Browns, a Red Admiral, Peacock, Small White and 2 Small Tortoiseshells all feeding from it at different points. One of the Small Tortoiseshells was very accommodating and allowed me to approach it allowing me to get my preferred underside shot but the other held back and adopted an unusual posture a bit further back in the bush.

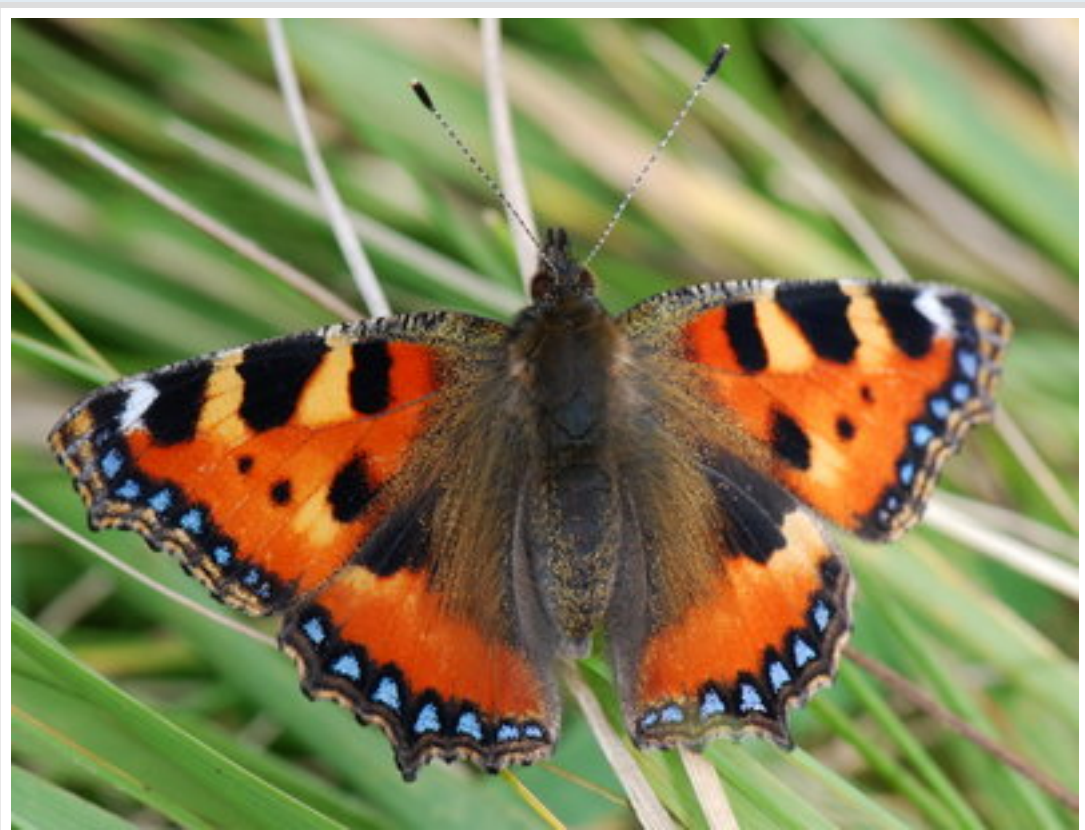




I carried on round couple but apart from a couple of whites and a Speckie or two venturing from one wood to another there wasn't much else around. One female Small White rested for long enough to get a few shots. I saw her land just up the hill side from me and tried to work my round to the other side of her clockwise but when I had I just couldn't see her which proved to me how effective a camo they have. The yellowish underside blends in quite well with the vegetation and I only managed to relocate her by working my way back to the point where I'd originally seen her.



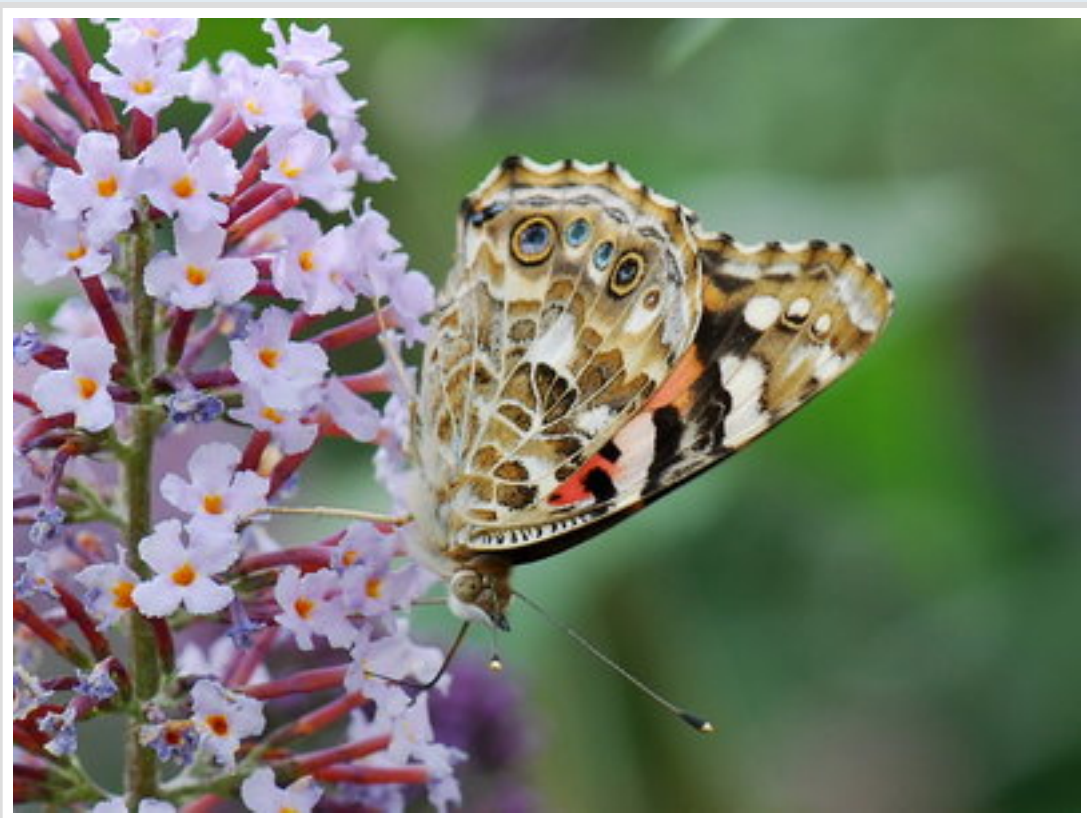
Back at the middle bank the buddleia was the best bet with a Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock still in residence and three of the Meadow Browns still in same place. The other Small Tort kept moving off from the Buddleia, completing a few circuits and then disappearing over the top of the hedge only to reappear again a few minutes later. It would then land for a few minutes in the grasses before moving back to the Buddleia. I also noticed the Peacock exhibiting similar behaviour but more infrequently.



Thinking that just waiting at the bush wouldn't find me any blues I checked out the closest bank again and this time I found one a single well worn male. It had lost all of his orange lunules as well as the white fringe to his wings. This could have been why I hadn't encountered any more I'd missed the main emergence.



I finally checked the bank and result, at this late stage of the season I got a definite first for the year - a Painted Lady. Over the past couple of years I have managed to find them in ones and twos but never managed to get the under wing view which gives them their names so I was particularly happy to catch this one feeding. It would start at the top of the Buddliea spear and then feed spirally down to the base before either climbing to the next spear or fluttering a few spears away. Unfortunately it worked its way further and further back and higher and higher up the bush until I was left just watching and enjoying the behaviour as it was out of range of a decent shot. PL





And there was me wondering if that was it this morning only to get a first for the season this afternoon! Hopefully it will continue until October!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by NickMorgan, 30-Aug-12 07:40 AM GMT

Nice collection of pictures there Wurzel. Sunshine - I remember that!

Re: Wurzel

by philm63, 31-Aug-12 04:08 AM GMT

Wurzel

Excellent shots of Painted Lady.
Now I am jealous haven't seen one since 2009!

Phil

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 31-Aug-12 09:23 PM GMT

"philm63" wrote:

Now I am jealous haven't seen one since 2009!

Phil

Yeah, and the only ones I've seen this year were in one of those butterfly kits a colleague brought into work 🎁 Hope we get some over our way soon.

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 31-Aug-12 11:41 PM GMT

Lovely shots Wurzel, have yet to see a Painted Lady this year 🎁 Lets hope the sun arriving brings at least one, also a Red Admiral Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-Sep-12 06:57 AM GMT

Cheers Nick – surely it hasn't been that bad 😊

Cheers Phil – they're one their way it seems so fingers crossed 🙏

Cheers Philzoid – I was only acking the other day about Painted Ladies...lets see if it works for Clouded Yellows..."Has anyone seen a clouded Yellow recently?" 😊😂

Cheers Goldie – it looks like Red Admirals should definitely be on the cards from what I've been reading tonight 😊

Shipton Bellinger

On Tuesday I made a run to Shipton Bellinger to take advantage of the last bit of sun for a day or two and also to make sure I got a break from house hunting. As I strolled up the hill feeling the sun coming on strong when it came out from behind the clouds there were still whites about but fewer in number than last time. Most were slightly tatty looking too with chunks gone from their wings or scales missing giving them a translucent appearance but there were one or two that still looked presentable.



As I continued up the track through the double hedges I was accompanied by Holly Blues and Meadow Browns – which were getting very adept at impersonating Brostreaks – even down to a jinky flight. They are very frustrating as you know for a fact that they are Meadow Browns but you feel like you better just check to make sure...As I came out of the onto the open field I could see that a few people were staring into the hedge along the back of the site so I headed over to see what all the fuss was about and got one of my easiest Brostreak sightings ever. "There's a male there"
"Cheers...CLICK...CLICK"



As we were properly meeting and greeting each other a female came down onto the Brambles just to the right of where the male was. She was still in quite an awkward position for photography but I took a few shots anyway before making room for others. After a short while she headed off and the male joined her I suppose as it went slightly quiet on the brostreak front. John V recognised me and so we joined forces is how you'd put it I suppose and so we trawled the hedge once or twice. There were plenty of Meadow Browns around as well as some obliging Holly Blues and on one patch there was Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma and Holly Blue all taking nectar. After a while things seemed to quieten down so we headed over to the large patch of Brambles where I'd been lucky the last time I was here.

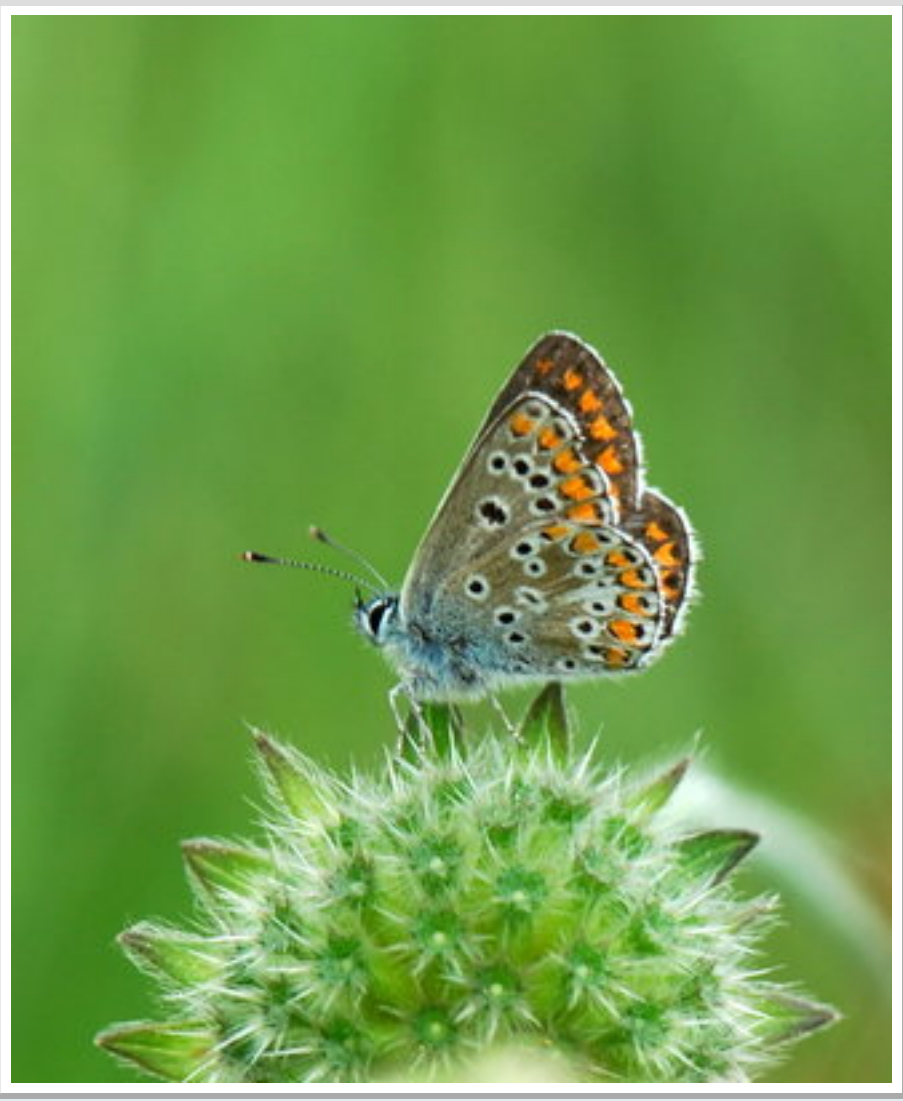


The thistle heads had gone to seed by now and there didn't seem to be many nectaring opportunities available at this patch so I wasn't surprised not to see any Brostreaks here, disappointed yes but not surprised. It served as a reminder of how transient the butterfly life is, here one day gone the next almost. The last time I was here (a week and half ago) this patch was crawling with butterflies; 2 Brostreaks, Brimstone, Peacocks, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers all possible in one view. And now a single solitary Holly Blue which did a brief fly by and seemed to get confused as instead of acting like a Hairstreak and staying up high actually landed on the ground deep in the vegetation. It appeared that it was getting mineral salts from discretely hidden dog turd (another one for the "butterflies on poo" book).



The springy grass turf also held a few butterflies with a Brown Argus or two and two male Common Blues, one of which looked pretty fresh I thought.





Having spent some time with the feisty little Brown Argus we tried the hedge again. By now we were the only people left on the site and the adage "good things come to those who wait" was only partially true as we soon found another male Brostreak (I'd have preferred a female but there we go). He posed very well for us for what felt like an age so we left him in peace and carried on checking the hedge. We found a few more male Common Blues, a Small Heath and loads more Meadow Browns, with 6 balancing on one flower head at one point. On the return journey the male Brostreak was still there so we took a few goodbye shots.





Along the double hedge there was more of the same with the addition of a Small Tortoiseshell which was very flighty and a Comma playing hide and seek in amongst some large leaves. And then all too shortly we were back at the car park. Overall a cracking afternoon with some great butterflies; It was pleasure to meet and photograph with John and I look forward to the next time we bump into each other.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

P.S. Once at home I had to return to domestic duties mode and as I was about to go and water the greenhouse I noticed a Small Tortoiseshell perched on the wall, so I took a few shots to try and get a close up of its' palps... So much easier than the Shipton one.



Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 05-Sep-12 05:48 AM GMT

Garden one more time...

Last Friday I took a quick trip around the garden but there were only a few whites flying including this tired and tatty looking individual who would fly for about 1 metre and then collapse seemingly exhausted into the borders.



Over the rest of the day I was busy, wrapped up in the madness that goes with house buying and so I wasn't really focused on butterflies. However offer accepted, prospective house off the market and quotes to consider for solicitors, I took a celebratory tour round the garden. I didn't get very far as on the path were two butterflies basking. As I slunk to the ground and slithered on my elbows towards them another Peacock took off from its' hiding place on the fence and I watched with baited breath as it passed over the two baskers. Fortunately they remained with only the odd wing twitch to suggest they'd even registered the other butterfly. I waited for a bit and then continued gradually edging forward until they were both in shot. There was a fine line between getting close enough for a sharp shot and getting both butterflies in the same shot. In the end it proved too difficult and so I tried to get individual shots of both butterflies.





I backed up and stood back to watch and from the other side of the garden both butterflies took off. The Peacock went up high and was lost from view over the Ivy arch but the Small Tort only went as high as my neighbours shed where it perched like a much smaller version of those house decorations.



I tried heading out to Old Sarum on Sunday with the girls the rain stopped play for the butterflies but the girls enjoyed being out and about. They loved walking the rings and then hearing tales of people storming the rings only to be repelled. They love loved the slippy chalk paths and hiding from the rain under the small trees. A great morning all in all.

And now I'm back at work watching butterflies flit by outside while I am trapped inside. Yesterday was particularly bad as we were working in the ICT room and so I could see the hedge, wildlife area and tangled bank just outside the window. Over the hour that we were in there I saw a Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Large White and a Brimstone. As I left work there wasn't a single butterfly around! Oh well hopefully the weekend will be more productive.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 05-Sep-12 06:01 AM GMT

I understand your work frustration completely wurzel.

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 05-Sep-12 06:51 AM GMT

Ditto!

Dave

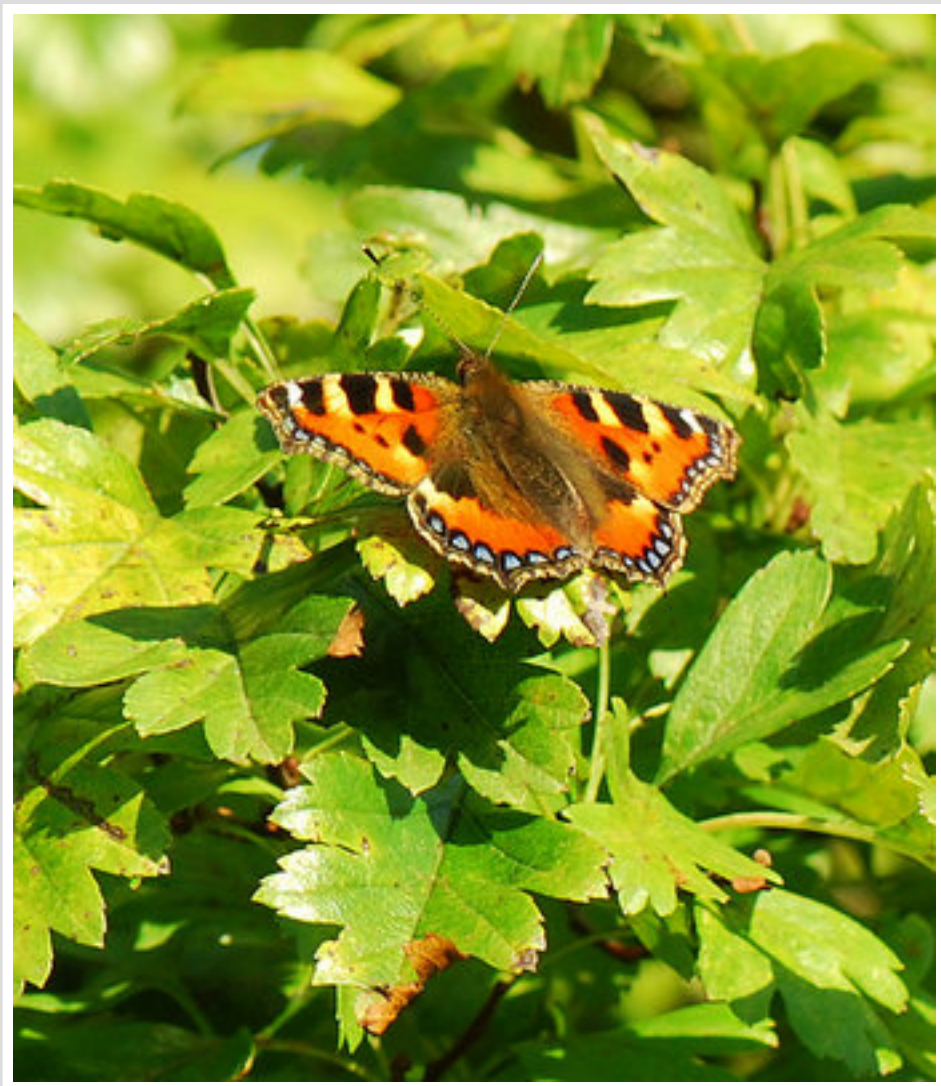
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 07-Sep-12 07:25 AM GMT

Thank you for the empathy Chris and Dave!

My frustration reached fever pitch yesterday when I left my at break and a Small Tortoiseshell flew down the corridor, took a wrong turning and tried to leave through the sky light before disappearing back down the corridor and out the door 😳. All the while my camera was in the boot of my car! 😞

So in remedy I headed to Five Rivers once the kiddi-winks were in bed. The grassy areas were very quiet with not even a Meadow Brown around so I headed to the Buddleia bush on the middle bank. It too was empty so starting to feel despondent I checked the hedge on the other side of the bank and there, finally was a butterfly. Up high in the bushes was a Small Tortoiseshell basking in the early evening sun, soaking up the rays.



After leaving it in peace a large butterfly passed high over head and judging by the almost black appearance it was probably a Peacock. Cheered by two butterflies in as many minutes I went back to the Buddleia and three Red Admirals had just appeared from out of the woodwork. They were quite far back but one came a bit nearer and played a game of hide and seek with me taking nectar from behind some leaves so I could only get glancing shots of it peering round at me.



As I checked the path and other banks it seemed to suddenly go quiet, the sun had lowered considerably and the shadows lengthened. It suddenly felt late; late in the day and late in the season, leaves starting to turn, migrants stocking up. The butterflies now were non-existent so instead I looked for birds that would allow me to get close enough for my 105mm to get sharp shots. I caught a female Kestrel almost unawares as I came down one bank but other species were slightly more relaxed like the pair of Woodpigeons settling down to roost. Others were still very active like the Willow Chiffs which had taken to acting like Flycatchers, flitting out from a perch to snatch a morsel to lay down as fat ready for the off.





There were still a few Whites along the verges on the way home and I'm hoping there should still be one or two butterflies out and about over the weekend, fingers crossed eh?



Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Debbie, 07-Sep-12 05:54 PM GMT

Lovely to catch up with your diary and great photos – wished I had got those shots of the painted lady 🍷

Debbie 😊😊😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 08-Sep-12 01:37 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Cheers Philzoid – I was only acking the other day about Painted Ladies...lets see if it works for Clouded Yellows..."Has anyone seen a clouded Yellow recently?" 😊😄

Just had a week in Dorset and as well as half a dozen Painted Ladies I saw 2 Clouded Yellows, 1 on Wednesday on Bindon Hill at Lulworth Cove and another yesterday(Thursday) on Ballard Down 😊😄

Cheers,
Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 08-Sep-12 01:42 AM GMT

A Monarch in Portland ...

I'm expecting BIG things from you Wurzel 😊

No pressure ... 😊😊😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-Sep-12 07:03 AM GMT

Cheers Debbie for your kind comments 😊

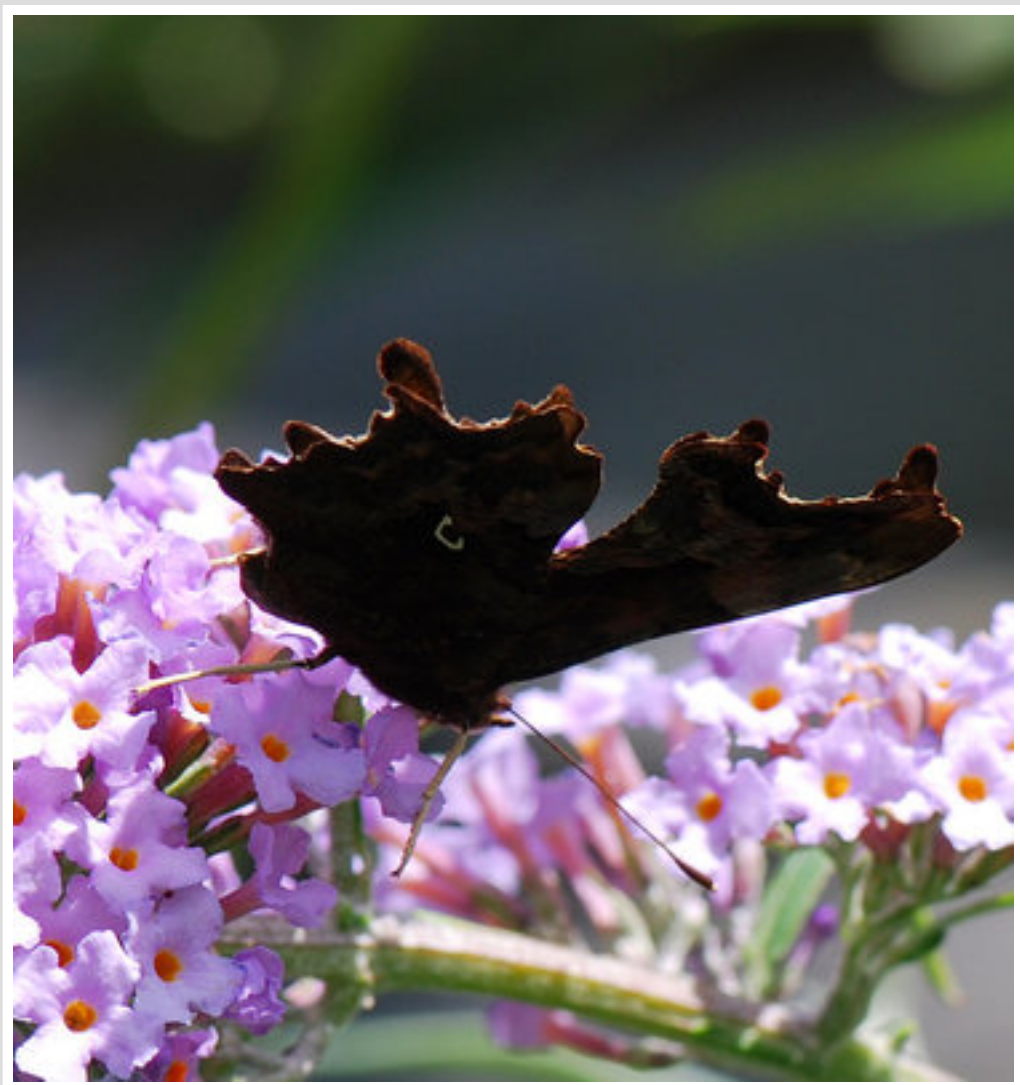
Cheers Neil – glad you had a blast in Dorset, looking in books is probably as close as I'll get to Clouded Yellow this year 🍷

Sorry Mark I just couldn't live up to the expectations as I hadn't earned enough Brownie points from the wife for a flying visit to Portland 😞 ...

Garden

As much as I'd have loved to have headed back to home soil to try for Monarch unfortunately the joys of being back at work mean that weekends are now for catching up on all those jobs that can't be done during the week days. However in between errands, bank runs and general domestic duties I did manage to get out into the garden every now and again.

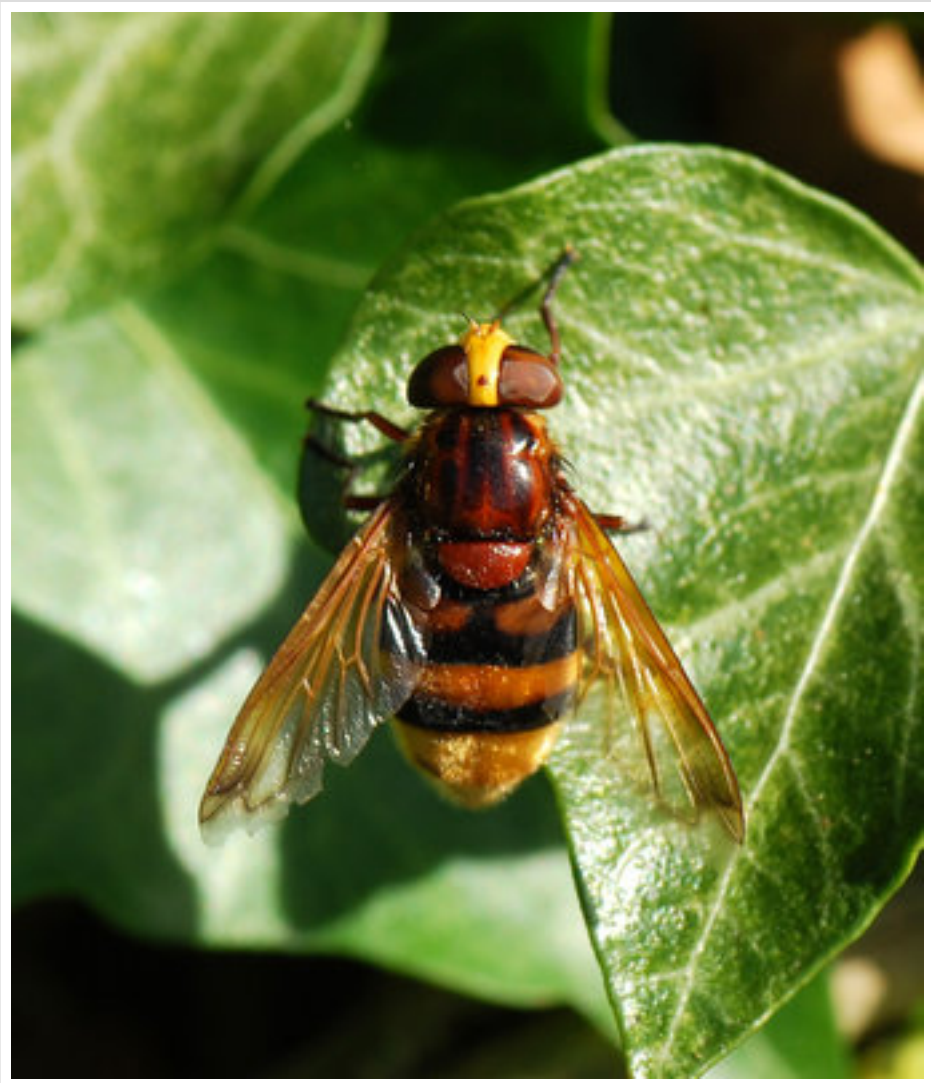
A Red Admiral was perched on the fence to greet me when I first stepped out there but the main site of activity was my neighbour's Buddleia. From what I could see whilst peering over the fence it held good numbers of butterflies. The biggest count I made at one time was 4 Small Tortoiseshells, a Red Admiral, male and female Brimstone, Large White and 2 Small Whites. And this was only the parts that I could see from my side of the fence. I stood back to see if that would open the vista when a Comma landed on one of the florets that was just hanging over my side of the garden. I was struck with how dark it was compared to the summer form that I've gotten used to, almost purple in colour.



I then took a stroll to try and find some Whites as they seem much more approachable at this time of year. I managed to see both Small and Large Whites but it was just a matter of waiting for them to land in a suitable place. I got lucky a couple of times and managed to get up close a couple of times.



As I was heading back in to start work again a large hoverfly caught my eye which I believe is the Hornet mimic?



This could be what it comes to in a short while, back to bees and hoverflies once the butterflies aren't flying...it's been a funny old year, productive but funny.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 11-Sep-12 03:36 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

.....I just couldn't live up to the expectations as I hadn't earned enough Brownie points from the wife for a flying visit to Portland 😞 ...

Wurzel

Tell me about it, I returned from Dorset on Friday to see the Monarch was being reported from less than an hour's drive from where we had been staying.

I mentioned this little fact to my wife and got the '*don't you even think about it!*' look 😳😂 I suppose she had a point, driving back down for a butterfly that might no longer be there was probably pushing it.....but I was tempted 😊

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 11-Sep-12 04:43 AM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

Tell me about it, I returned from Dorset on Friday to see the Monarch was being reported from less than an hour's drive from where we had been staying.

I mentioned this little fact to my wife and got the '*don't you even think about it!*' look 😳😂 I suppose she had a point, driving back down for a butterfly that might no longer be there was probably pushing it.....but I was tempted 😊

Neil F.

Sad thing is, had you have gone even your missus would have been knocked out by a butterfly approaching the size of a blackbird!!

She'd have understood your yearnings for sure.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Sep-12 07:19 AM GMT

I know that look Neil, there is no negotiating it's a done deal. No-one will mention "butterflies" "just pop down to..." and everything will be all right! 😳😊

She would have found it impressive I'm sure David but that doesn't get round the fact that my Brownie points are at an all time low... 😞

That said I did offer to take the girls out to Old Sarum the same afternoon. The girls however decided that they would rather play in the garden so my trip was a solo one in the end. I took the same route as last time which luckily meant that I was all alone walking the outer rings; the hoards of tourists that had accompanied me up the path having already entered the keep. The wind was light to non-existent and the sun was warm. A Red Admiral flew in between the rings and then a couple of whites flew by heading in the same direction it seemed that down in the bottom of the rings was where the butterflies were so I headed down there as soon as I found a path.

Almost as soon as I was down there butterflies appeared as if from nowhere. A male Common Blue and a pair of Brimstone, 3 Large Whites and 2 Small Whites plus countless Silver Y moths. The whites were tricky to get a shot of as they would land fleetingly before moving further up the side of the bank to again stop fleetingly before heading up again etc etc. Then once at the top they would head straight back down to the bottom and start the procedure a few metres from their previous ascent. The Brimstones were much more amenable and soon there were 3 males and two females all in one line of sight. I was pretty happy with some of the shots of Brimstone that I got earlier in the season so today I tried for the action shot hoping to catch their wings open.



From there I climbed back up to the outer ring and worked my way to the half way mark and as I scanned out across to the Devizes Road I saw 2 Red Admirals and 9 various whites all in one view on the lower slopes. They all seemed to be moving without stopping long as there didn't appear to be many nectar sources still available so I headed back between the rings to try out a "wait and see" approach. It did pay off with close views of Small White but the Red Admiral that fluttered down like a falling leaf didn't stay long.



Once back at the top of the ring I had to decide whether to cut back across the old ruins or to continue round the rings as both routes would end up back at the car. I plumped for continuing the rings and the western side seemed more gently sloping with more flowers and the base of the slopes and banks were wreathed in swathes of flowers. It was also more productive for butterflies. A Small Tort passed by as did a Painted Lady and then I saw what I was secretly hoping for – my second Painted Lady of the year. It took nectar briefly and then took off like a Skylark, climbing almost vertically to about 15f. Then it stopped flapping and for a fraction of a second it dropped before the wind caught its' wings and it glided over the bank, then over the flower meadow, then over the road only losing the slightest altitude. It kept on gliding until I lost sight of it. Its' behaviour reminded me of a Buzzard and was a clear demonstration of its skill as a migrant.



The rings on the final part of the journey held a 2 more Small Tortoiseshell, a female Common Blue and a few Meadow Browns looking a bit worse for wear. Then feeding at the bottom of the outer ring near the entrance were a further 4 Small Tortoiseshell.



It was only when I got back to the car that I realised that I hadn't taken a single shot of any of the Red Admirals that I'd seen. Still I thought I should find some tomorrow at Stourhead...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Unfortunately I didn't make it to Stourhead the next day as the garden needed sorting so I'm left hoping that this isn't the final trip of the season; I don't really want to be dusting off the telescope quite yet...

Re: Wurzel

by NickMorgan, 13-Sep-12 03:41 PM GMT

I love your picture of a Brimstone pulling the flower apart! Great action shot. Your Painted Lady is very boldly marked, too.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 14-Sep-12 12:15 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

I love your picture of a Brimstone pulling the flower apart! Great action shot. Your Painted Lady is very boldly marked, too.

Agreed. The Brimstone still has part of the flower attached to its proboscis!!

Is the Painted Lady an 'unimproved' image, Wurzel? Like Nick, I think it looks abnormally dark throughout.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 14-Sep-12 07:25 AM GMT

Cheers for the kind comments on the Brimstone it was all down to Sport Mode and luck 😊 WRT the Painted Lady...I thought at the time that it seemed a bit dark and when I cropped it and "improved" it in Picasa only added a smidgen of "saturate" which just highlighted the orange and didn't darken or thicken the black markings. I looked in Riley and Thomas and Lewington and the photos and images do look a lot lighter than this individual. It's the

margin on the base of the fore wing that is the most striking as it's black rather than brown and the markings do look larger and sort of blur into each other more. Still it will probably turn out to "fall in the normal range of variation" 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 14-Sep-12 10:22 PM GMT

Lovely Photo's Wurzal, I like them all Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 16-Sep-12 05:32 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Great reports and photos 😊

Earlier in the year, I cannot remember exactly where, I was talking to a fellow enthusiast I bumped into on one of my trips who mentioned that the Painted Ladies that are reared from these butterfly kits you can get are often darker than usual. He thought it was something to do with the food substance that they are supplied with.

I don't know if there is anything in this 🤔 but just thought I would mention it in light of your dark specimen. Mind you, it has showed up at the right time to be a genuine immigrant wit the others that have appeared with all the Red Admirals.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 16-Sep-12 05:47 AM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

I was talking to a fellow enthusiast I bumped into on one of my trips who mentioned that the Painted Ladies that are reared from these butterfly kits you can get are often darker than usual. He thought it was something to do with the food substance that they are supplied with.

That's an interesting suggestion.

What exactly are the home reared specimens fed on?

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Sep-12 06:38 AM GMT

Cheers Goldie for your kind comments 😊

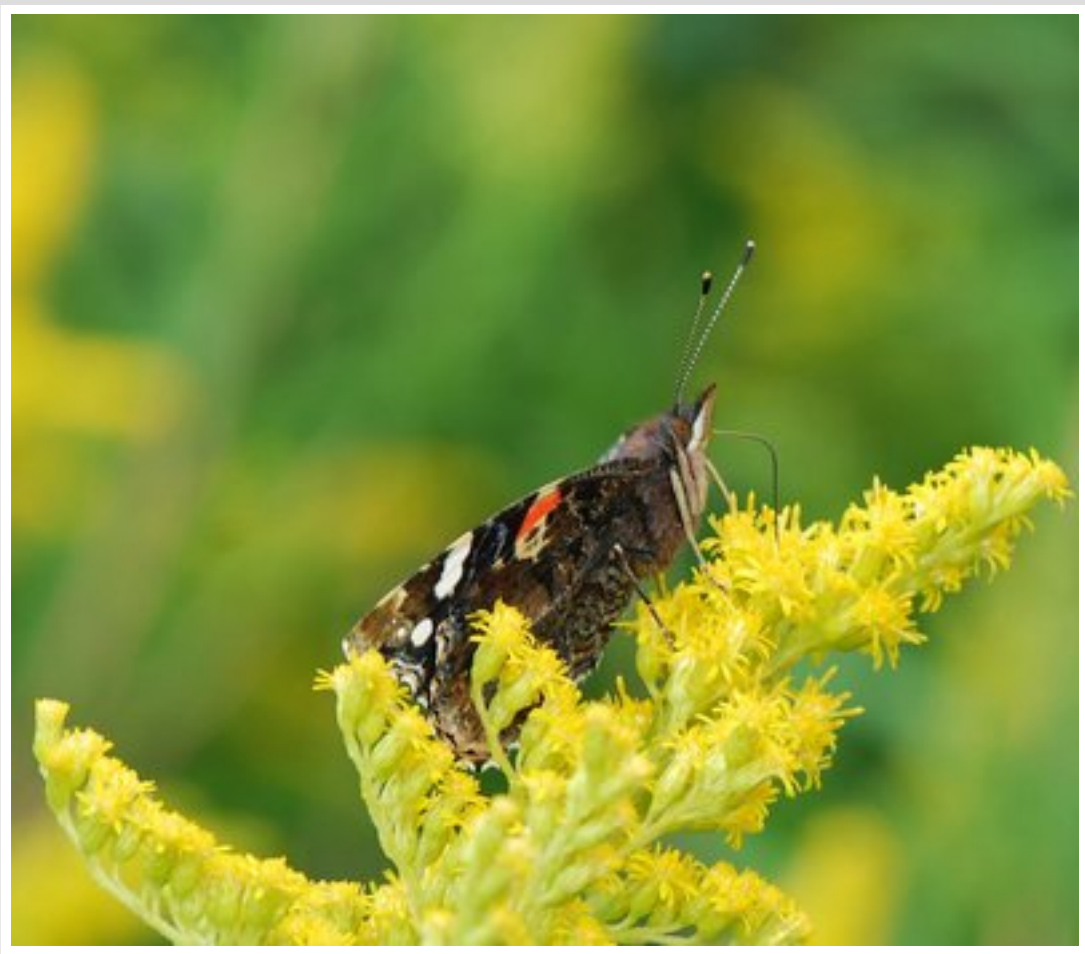
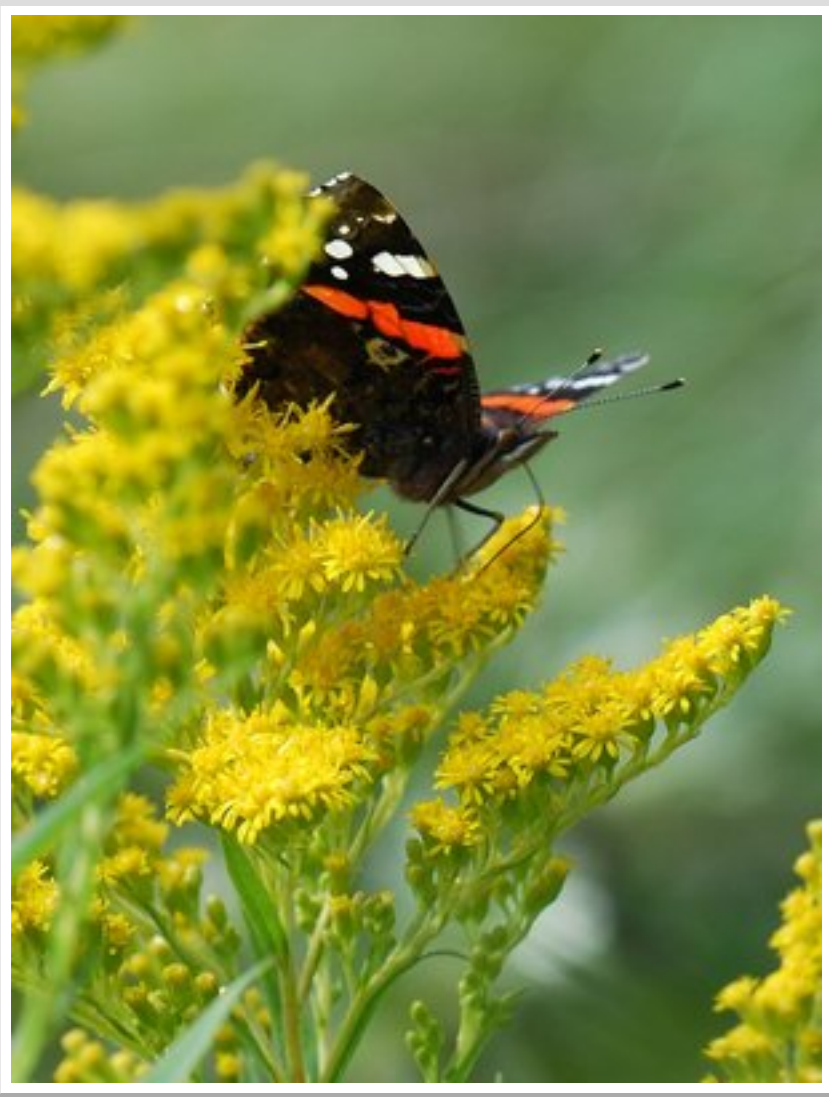
Cheers Neil for your kind comments and suggestions 😊

David if they're anything like Flamingies they must be fed on something really dark – perhaps 85% Chocolate? 😊

Shhh don't tell the wife!

On Wednesday I'd almost come to terms with being back at work but I couldn't do anything to stop the itchy feet. In the end I gave up fighting it and worked out that I might be able to squeeze in 15 minutes on the way home. If my wife finds out she is coming after me, so shhhhh!

As I pulled into the lay by the most obvious place to head was the patch of tall yellow flowers (Golden Rod?) right next to the dusty car park area. The tallest flowers seemed to be on the outside of the patch so it formed a natural bowl which meant that to see inside I had to stand on tip toes and peer over the flower tops. Inside was a hive of activity with at least 3 species of bee, 2 Hoverfly as well as a single Meadow Brown and a pair of Red Admiral. Once I'd found a subject to try and photograph the next problem was how to get close enough to get the shot. If I'd had more time I'd have waited for them to come to me but the clock was ticking on my stolen 15 minutes so I scanned around and noticed that something else had already trampled a low path from one side diagonal across the edge and here the flowers weren't growing as bunched together. I headed to this and edged my way in, wrapping my feet in amongst the tall stems so as not to knock them flat. I managed to get about a metre in and then the Red Admirals flew. Luckily one lifted right up, circled a couple of times up high and then plonked down right next to me.



As I extricated myself from the stem jungle I noticed a pair of Small White locked together intimately. So having taken all that effort to get some shots, here was a fantastic opportunity right in front of me, effort free! This close proximity allowed me to compare the sexes. It seemed that one was more yellow than the other and I'm not sure if this is a diagnostic difference that can be used to difference between the sexes or whether it's just that one was more worn than the other.





Having taken my shots I checked the time and saw that I had about 6 minutes left so I thought I'd just check the main track out. Earlier in the season when the Queen's Lace and Cow Parsley was in bloom this area was great for Marbled White and Ringlets but now that and they are long gone and I found only one solitary Common Blue. It's white margins were almost gone and the hind wings had worn through showing the dark spots from below.



Time was almost up but I thought I'd just check the mating pair and they were still at it!





So 16 minutes after arrival I was back in the car, feet no longer itchy and shots in the bag. I don't know what will happen now so it's a bit like the start of the season - waiting and seeing what the weather will bring, what will be about only now it's a case of what still about. Here's hoping for just a little more time with this seasons butterflies.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 17-Sep-12 06:56 AM GMT

I see that female is continuing to nectar throughout the proceedings. The ability of ladies to multitask... 😊

I hope any eggs laid have time left to get to the chrysalis stage before winter.

Dave

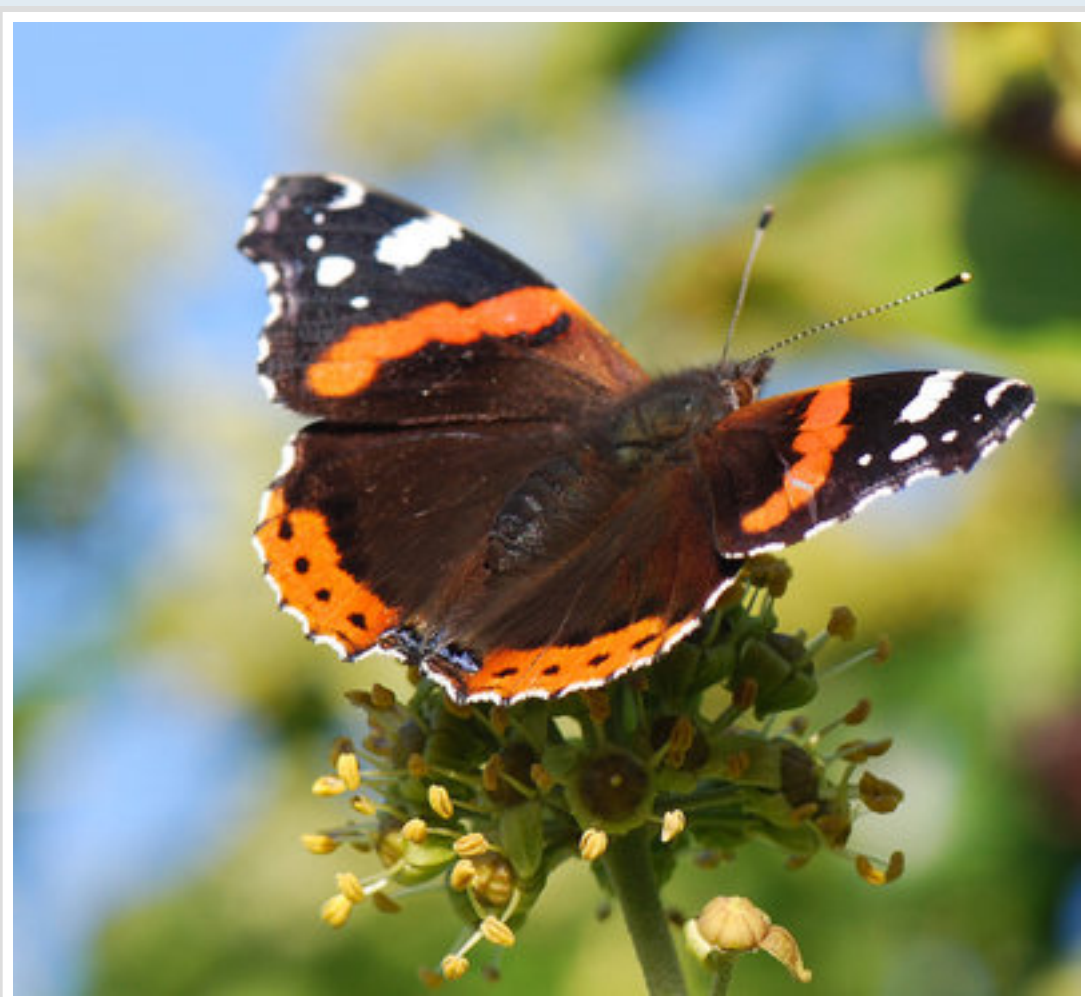
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-Sep-12 06:37 AM GMT

Food and sex on its' mind - are we sure it's the female Dave? 🤔 😊

Out in the garden

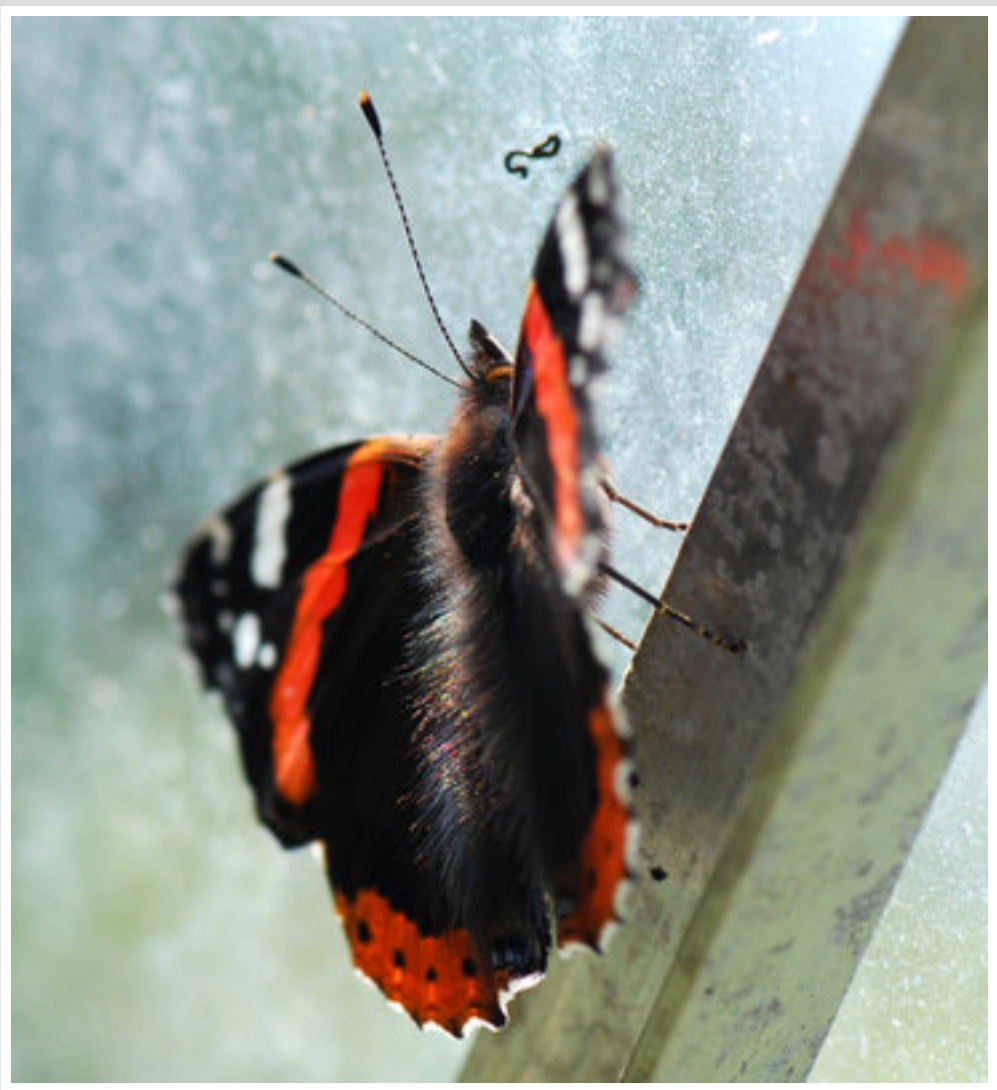
On Saturday I was again back on domestic duties so I had to take every available opportunity to check out the back garden. My first visit outside was to "open the greenhouse door for ventilation". There were already 2 Red Admirals feeding on the Ivy just outside the greenhouse but they were quite nervous and kept moving higher up the bush out of shot.

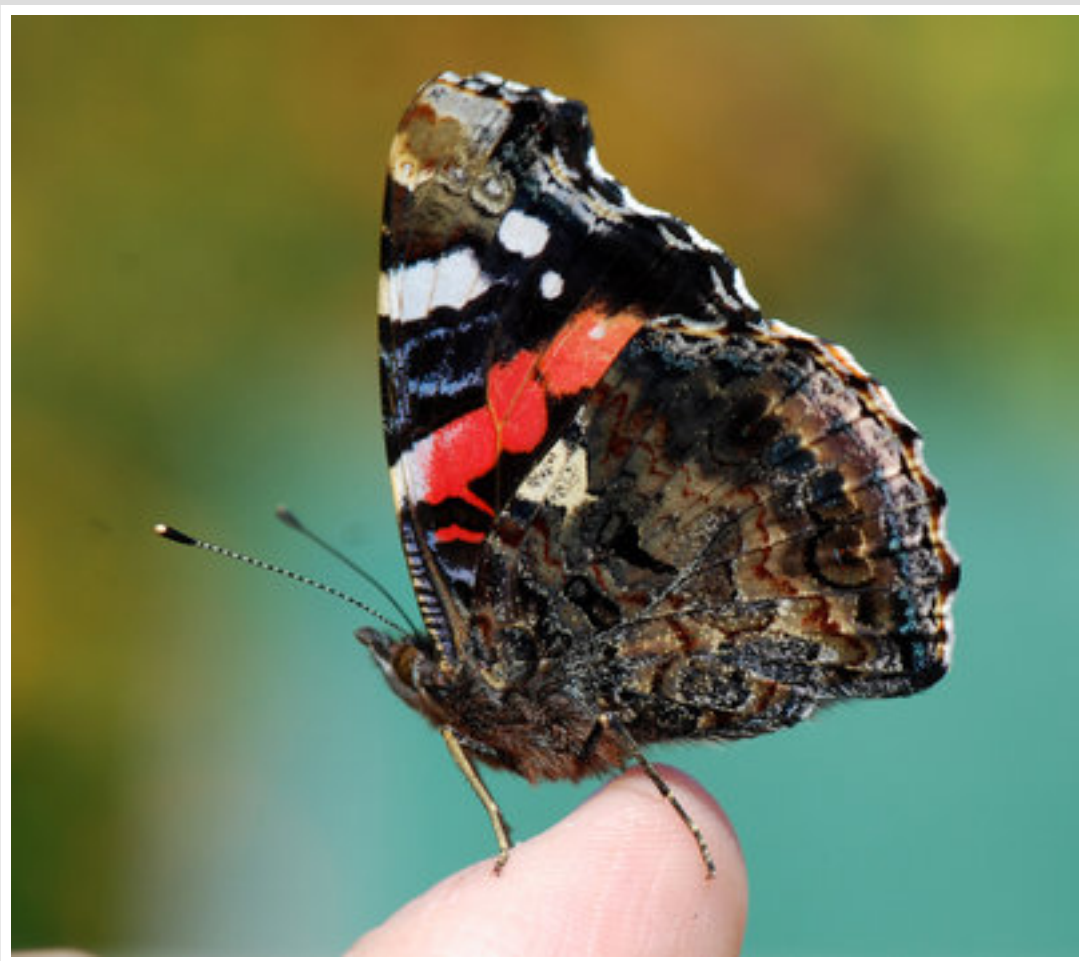


Later I popped out for 3 minutes in between putting the shopping away and helping out with the girls swimming lessons. Now there were four Red Admirals feeding on the Ivy, a Small Tortoiseshell on next doors Buddleia and a couple of Whites flitting around and looking like they would, but never actually landing. One of the Red Admirals got into the greenhouse but I managed to shoo it out.



Later over lunch I had to “sort the recycling and the bins” which included getting a load of the trimmings for the compost bin. Up at the ever dependable Ivy were 3 Red Admirals and again a few whites. As I walked past the greenhouse just about to pass under the Ivy arch a movement inside the greenhouse caught my eye. Inside was another Red Admiral (the fourth from earlier – the same one I shooed out before?). It was vainly trying to permeate through the pane but every time I approached to guide it towards the door it would hide behind the vines or fly up and slip between the frame slats. It was really heating up and we were heading into town soon so I had to get it out before it cooked. Suddenly after fighting me for an age it seemed to get the message and as I offered it my hand it walked onto my finger tips. It was a strange sensation as I could feel its’ needle like feet as it paced across my fingertips and hand. I took a few hasty shots to add to the “on my hand” collection before holding it outside. What even more odd was that once it was outside and could fly free it didn’t seem to want too. It lost all its’ urgency and took a few more circuits around my hand before opening its’ wings and starting to bask! In the end, my calling meant that I had to extricate myself from it so a gentle blow seemed to awaken it from its’ slumber, it looked at me for a few seconds and then it was off.





The stroll into town was very uneventful and I saw only two butterflies the whole time. A Small Tortoiseshell along the river path and a Red Admiral resting up on the Boots sign.



It really does feel like the end now and possibly the next posting I do will be reflective. Unless there is time for a final Hurrah this weekend? Who knows...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 19-Sep-12 07:11 AM GMT

Anything is possible – there were butterflies well into November last year... 😊

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Sep-12 07:16 AM GMT

Here's hoping Dave – it's looking good for Saturday, that is if the weather guys "don't get it wrong" 😊 Sunday is all upon the air at the moment 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by CJB, 21-Sep-12 08:38 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I look forward to hearing what you find this weekend.

The BHS has eluded me once again but as a year for firsts, 2012 was a good one with my species count on the mobile up to 40.

It is noticeably cooling in the evenings but you just never know!

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Wurzel

by Goldie M, 21-Sep-12 09:43 PM GMT

Once again Wurzal your photo's are tops 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-Sep-12 07:26 AM GMT

CJB Glad to see that you got your Brostreak! 😊 I hope "what I found" lives up to the 35 expectations.

Cheers Goldie for your very kind comment 😊 😊

Shhhhh again!

On Friday I'd had enough of work and so took out 10 minutes on the way home to find some butterflies in the lay-by near Larkhill (where I stopped about a week ago) but what a difference a week makes. As I pulled up in a cloud of dust and scanned across to the patch of tall yellow flowers I didn't see any butterflies immediately. As I approached a bit closer however it was apparent that there were a few about as 4 whites caught the breeze and wafted away over the thorn bushes. This left behind a rather desperate looking male Small White who seemed to be determined to have his wicked way with a female. She however was having none of it raising her abdomen at ninety degrees to her thorax and waving it at him violently.



Having watched his futile attempts at mating I decided not to embarrass him further and so checked out the grassland path. No Common Blues today but instead a nice Green Veined White at about 8ft up in a Blackthorn. Still I held my camera aloft and peered through the viewfinder from arms reach.



Once again the time was ticking away from me and rather than face the wrath of the wife I made my way back to the car. I was greeted by a cracking sight with about a 100 Lesser and Greater Black Backed Gulls all airborne having been disturbed by a John Deere. It reminded me that the season, whilst still limping on, is drawing to a close and soon I'll be paying even greater attention to these flocks of birds (hopefully I can get a Caspian or Glaucous this winter).



Have a goodun

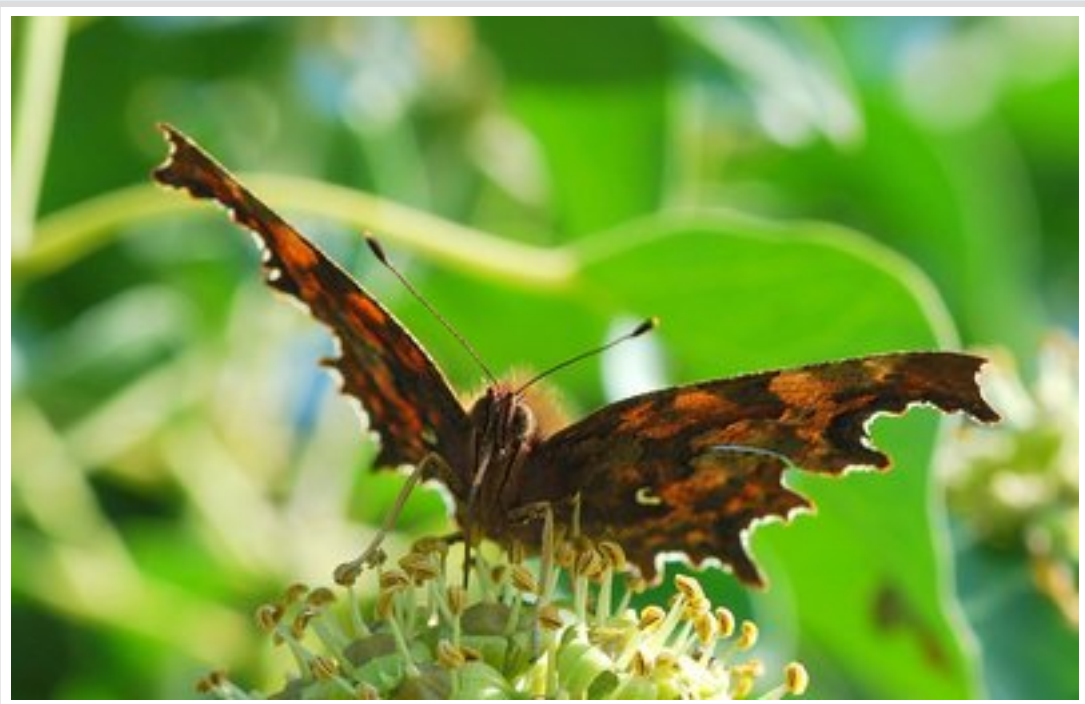
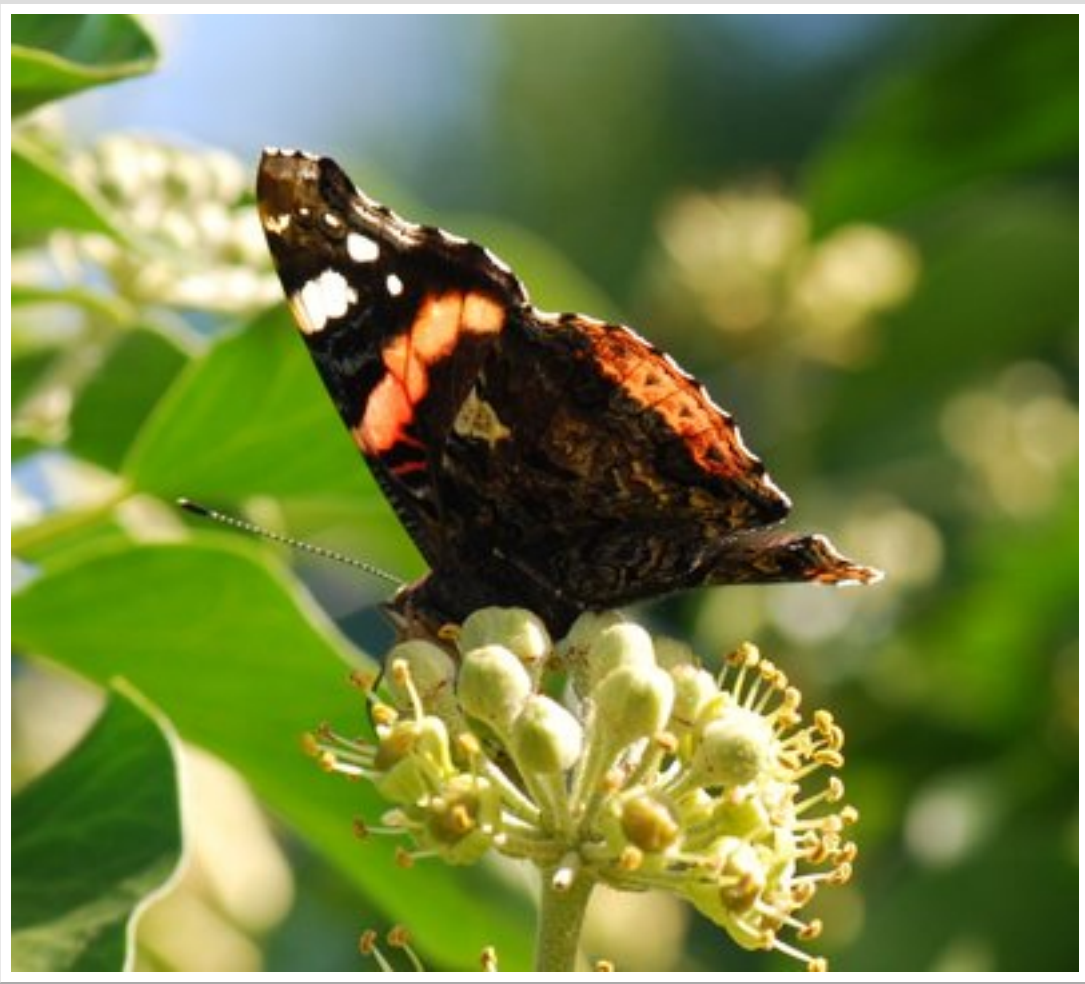
Wurzel

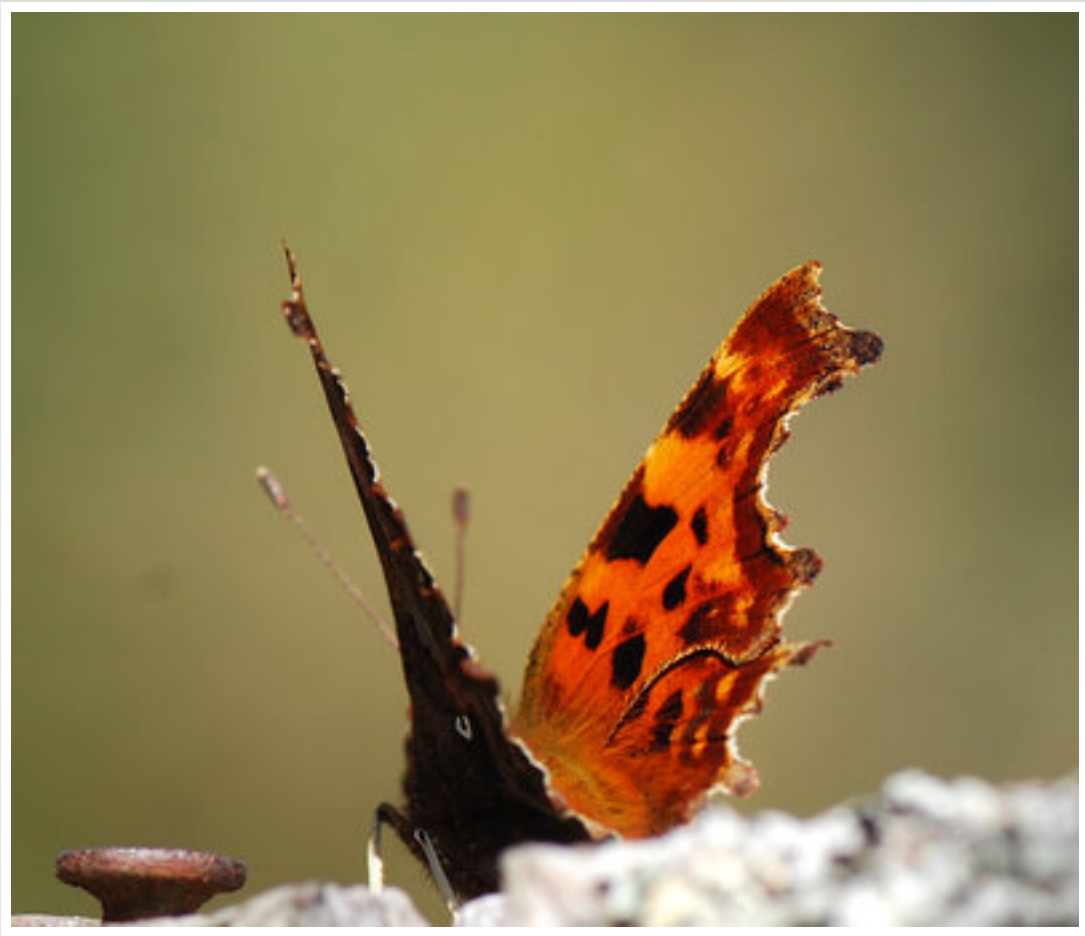
Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-Sep-12 07:53 AM GMT

After the brief foray on the way home from work on Friday I was in the mood to see more butterflies and so when I awoke the next morning to a beautiful sunny day I couldn't wait to grab my camera and have a look outside. Unfortunately I had to do a few domestic duties so checking out my garden had to be postponed but a few hours later, kids swam, showered and eating lunch I was outside.

The small Ivy "growth" up near the greenhouse was again the main hotspot with the butterflies crowding around it to feed now that the Buddleia next door has lost most of its' florets. Last week it was Red Admirals and they were present again but only two of them now. The main activity was coming from 4 Commas which flitted round and about on the Ivy, occasionally landing on the fence top or panes of glass on the greenhouse. They were briefly joined by a Small Tortoiseshell and a Small White but the Commas seemed to hold my attention the most, probably as they were so approachable. I'm not sure if there is an underlying reason for the apparent change in behaviour between spring and autumnal broods but the later always seem much more approachable - perhaps they have a greater sense of urgency as the time ticks away? Whatever the reasons it gifts us opportunities during the later stage of the season.





With the success in the garden and a family outing to Garston Wood the afternoon was awaiting full of possibilities...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 28-Sep-12 01:01 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

I'm not sure if there is an underlying reason for the apparent change in behaviour between spring and autumnal broods but the later always seem much more approachable – perhaps they have a greater sense of urgency as the time ticks away?

Urgency is probably the appropriate word, Wurzel.

At this time of year something instinctively tells them they need to feed up to get through a long sleep during winter meaning they behave rather differently than in spring when all they care about is setting up/defending territories and courting/mating.

These same butterflies that appear so approachable now will become, if they survive hibernation, the Commas that make you curse in the spring!

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 29-Sep-12 06:12 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

These same butterflies that appear so approachable now will become, if they survive hibernation, the Commas that make you curse in the spring!

It is a strange thought that in 6 months time we could quite possibly be watching the very same individuals that we are watching now. I find this a fascinating concept and in some ways quite humbling.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Sep-12 07:02 AM GMT

Cheers David and Neil – it is a weird thought and something I might look into in a bit more detail if I get round to it during the winter break – I mean how do they not freeze and if they do freeze how do they stop ice crystallisation from ripping their cells apart?

Any way I need to take a leaf out of thier book as urgency at the moment isn't my srong suit. What with seemingly ever increasing demands at work, being part way through buying a house and visits from family my posting are getting further and further behind. So without further a do...

Garston and Grandparents (22-09-12)

After the success when popping out to the garden during the morning I was hoping for more of the same at Garston Wood. As we took the low path from the car park it was looking hopeful with a two Speckled Wood in the car park and a Red Admiral flitting around the edge of the path. However as we got further in things went a lot quieter. When I did find butterflies they were always Speckled Woods and they showed an annoying tendancy for liking a loftier elevation and no matter how hard I tried to reach or how I strained I just couldn't get the camera close enough for any shots. In the end I took to just counting with a total of 8 Speckled Wood by the end of the walk.

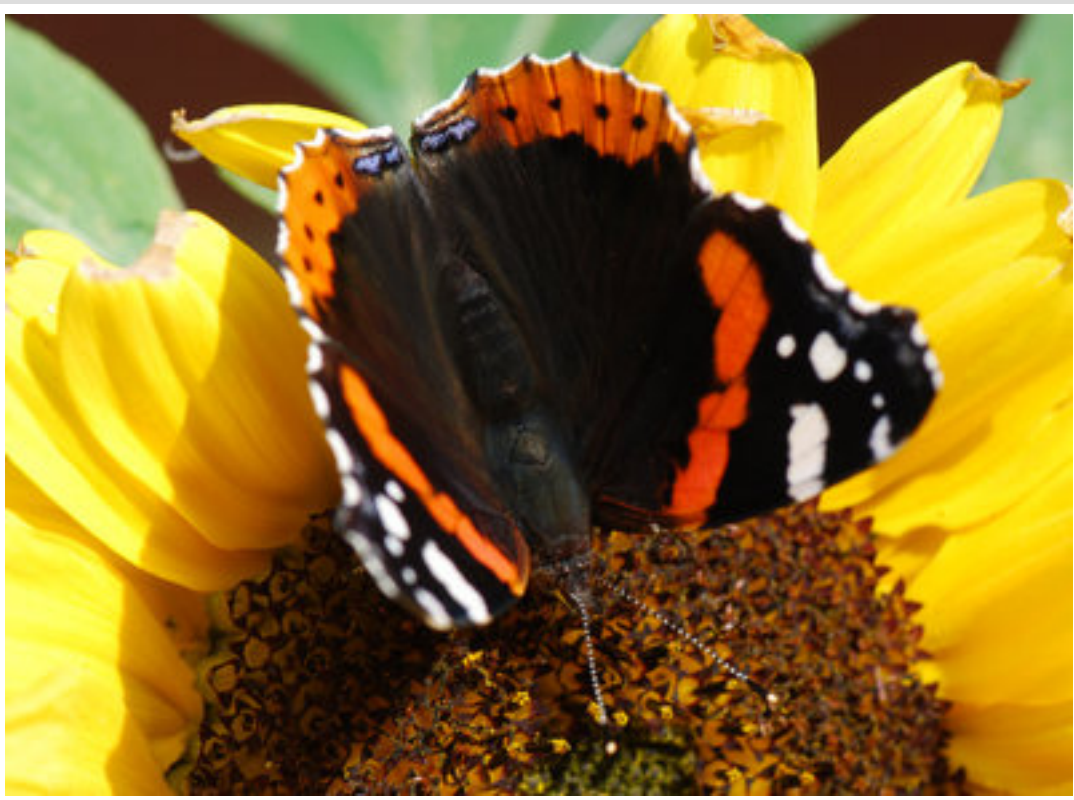


From here we headed over to my parents house where we were staying for the night. The girls get to have a sleepover at Nanny's and my old man and I can have a bit of an ale tasting session! As I was lugging the bags in I noticed a fluttering on the Buddleia and so took to a bit of a closer investigation. It was a Small White, just round the corner was a Green Veined White and scattered over the rest of the bush I counted 2 Small Tortoiseshells, a Comma and a couple of Red Admirals. The only problem as I recalled from last year is that the Buddleia is huge and florets are also out of camera range. 😞 However the Ivy clad fence running along side it was the perfect height and it was covered in Red Admirals – a grand total of 7 on an Ivy Bush that covered to a 3 metre length of fence. Up until now I'd read about some of the large groupings of Red Admirals with envy and here I was now enjoying my own small scale re-enactment 😊





Soon the tally increased with the additions of another Small Tort, another Comma, 2 more Small White and a Large White (female). As I headed in there were 3 Red Admiral basking on the side of the house and one on the Sunflower – giving a pleasing colour contrast.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 30-Sep-12 09:53 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

how do they not freeze and if they do freeze how do they stop ice crystallisation from ripping their cells apart?

There was a thread about this (started by **Gruditch**) last year. I did a bit of reading and came up with this: [viewtopic.php?f=1&t=5848&start=20#p53368](#)

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 01-Oct-12 04:28 PM GMT

Cheers Mike 😊 I'll follow the link to the link and have a proper read, all I could manage last night was a brief glance in between marking books, oh the joys of work 😊 Still soon be March 2013 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 03-Oct-12 07:09 AM GMT

Bath

Almost a week ago I was heading from Pewsey to Bath University for a mentor meeting. As I drove the weather was mild and sunny with the occasional cloud covering the sky and whilst it was warm there was a slight nip in the breeze. As I drove along the hedgerows towards Devizes I saw a few whites fluttering around various hedges when I was passing through the villages. However once I got to Devizes it was pretty clear driving and my opportunity to look out for butterflies disappeared as I had to keep my eyes firmly on the road.

Once at the campus and safely parked I realised that my flight across country had been pretty quick so I took 10 minutes to have a quick look around before setting off for WN1 or some such building.

My first port of call was the footpath right at the eastern edge of the campus. There were some tall Ivy bushes here so I was hoping to find some Nymphalids but as I crossed the car park to reach them the sun disappeared and the temperature noticeably dropped. The sun stayed there for the whole of my foray and towards the end I had to shelter from a very brief shower.

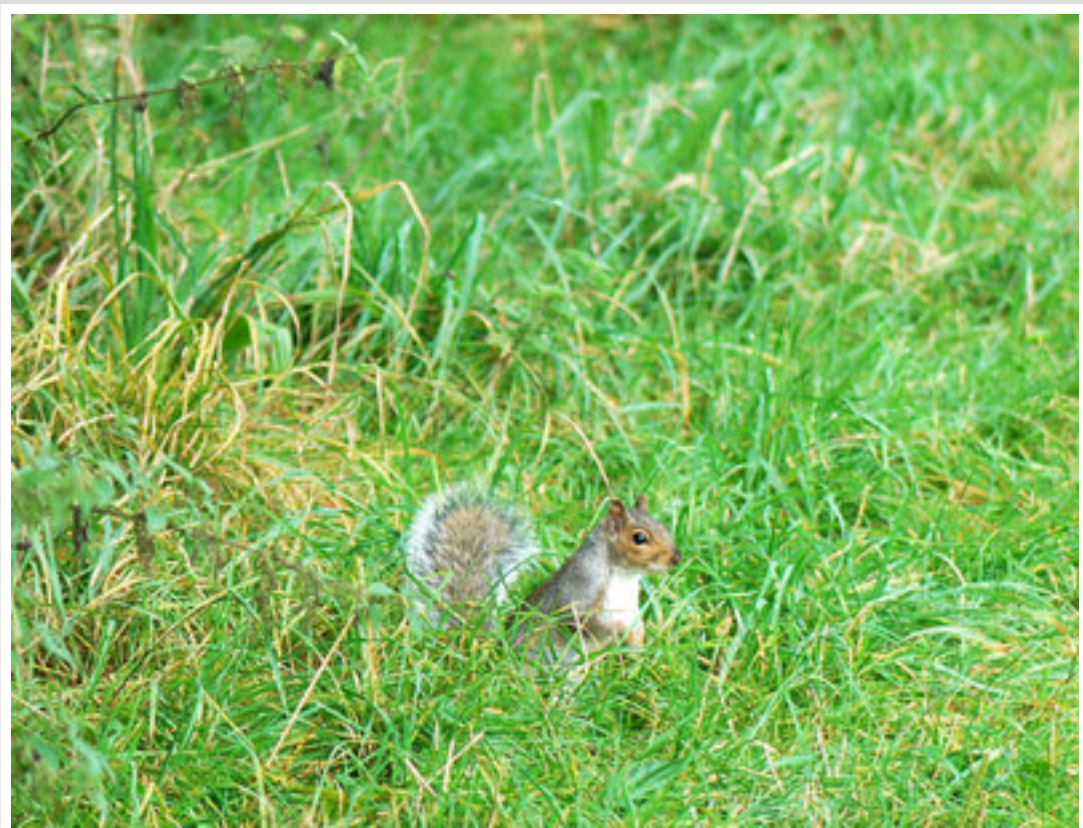
At the top of the path is a small woodland walk and beyond that the golf course. As I strolled through the woodland area thinking how it looked good for Speckled Wood one appeared as if by magic. It didn't hang around long and quickly hid among the foliage higher up a tree and out of camera range. I swear they can recognise camera lenses and so fly to a point just beyond their range, in fact I might test this out next year!

From there I found myself on the public footpath that hugs the edge of the golf course and so covering my head from errant balls I took a quick walk along a short length of it. The hedge looked like it could be good next spring for whites and Orange-tip so something to bear in mind. As I was about to head back something dark caught my eye fluttering for brief spells over the "rough". At first it looked so dark that I thought it could be a Peacock. Then it looked too small, there wasn't enough red for an Admiral and it wasn't orangey so no Comma or Tortoiseshell. Luckily it moved towards me and two steps off the path found me almost eyeball to eyeball with it. It was a Speckled Wood that had obviously decided to flout the Trades Description Act and was impersonating a Meadow Brown. As I watched it took a few short flights of no more than a metre or two before it would fall back to ground. Perhaps it was too cold for further flight? It didn't look worn at all but would land with its' wings hanging down which meant getting a focused picture was tricky.





I then remembered why I was here and so quickly made my way back to the car park stopping only briefly as I didn't want to bother this little chap unduly.





I will definitely have to check this area out next season as the habitat looks good and it made a nice to change to photograph something other than a Red Admiral or Comma 😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 05-Oct-12 07:38 AM GMT

The Town Path

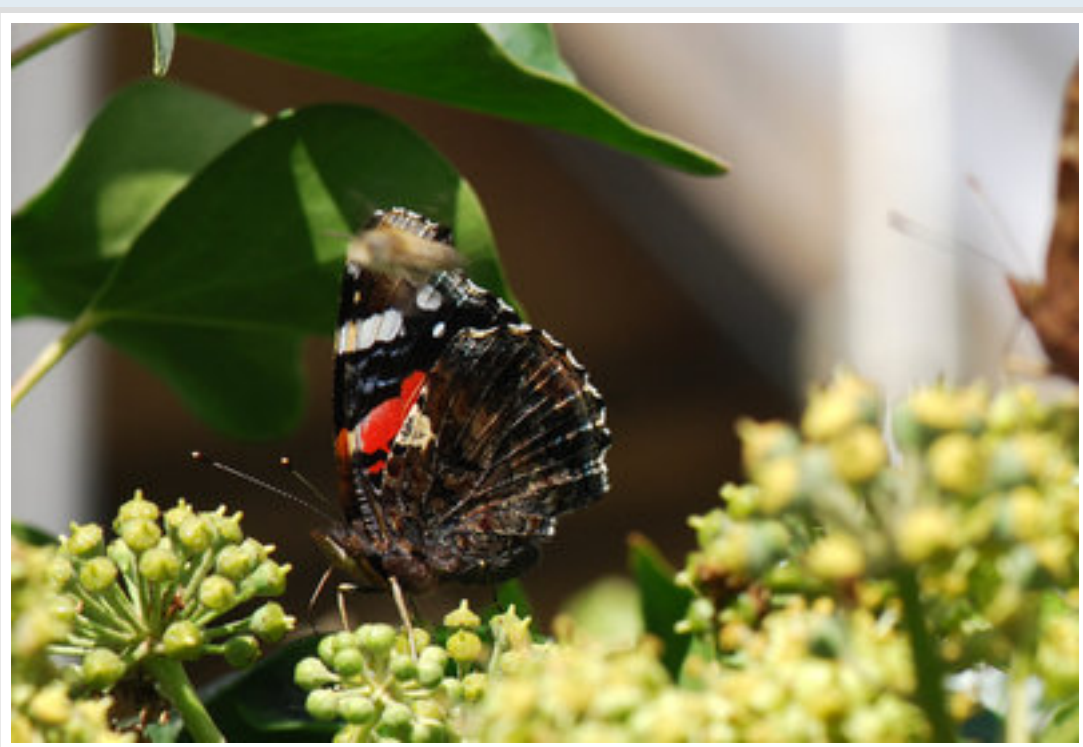
As my in-laws were visiting I realised that chances for butterflying would be few are far between. So when I saw the weather on Saturday morning – warm and sunny with very little wind – I groaned inwardly slightly. After they'd watched the girls swim we all strolled into town from Five Rivers along the Town path that hugs the river. I was hoping that visiting my regular hotspot would pay off. It's just after the Coach park where the path has a wall stretching along one side with wildflowers growing on the bank side. The flowers are a nectar source and the wall acts as a heat store trapped the sun and also shielding the bank side from the breeze. Also along the wall there are a few Ivy bushes which offer even more nectar. As I approached I could see that it was certainly going to deliver with 3 Red Admirals on one small bush. Unfortunately they were too spread out to get all three in one shot. The other slightly large bush held 8 Red Admirals with 2 Comma and a Small Tortoiseshell acting very coy on the other side of the wall. The Commas were a bit of a pain to get shots of as they insisted on feeding lower down on the other side of the Harris fencing on the other side of the wall. To get any shots I had to focus through the small square gaps in the metal fencing.



While we had lunch we were joined by a Robin that was obviously a teenager judging by its' unruly hair do!



The return journey with just the girls gave me another chance to have a quick look at the butterflies. By now the Small Tort had gone but had been replaced with another Comma and Red Admiral and all were intent on feeding on my side of the Ivy and within range.





Once home I was straight out into the garden to see what was there...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Oct-12 06:24 AM GMT

Back to the Garden...(30-09-2012)

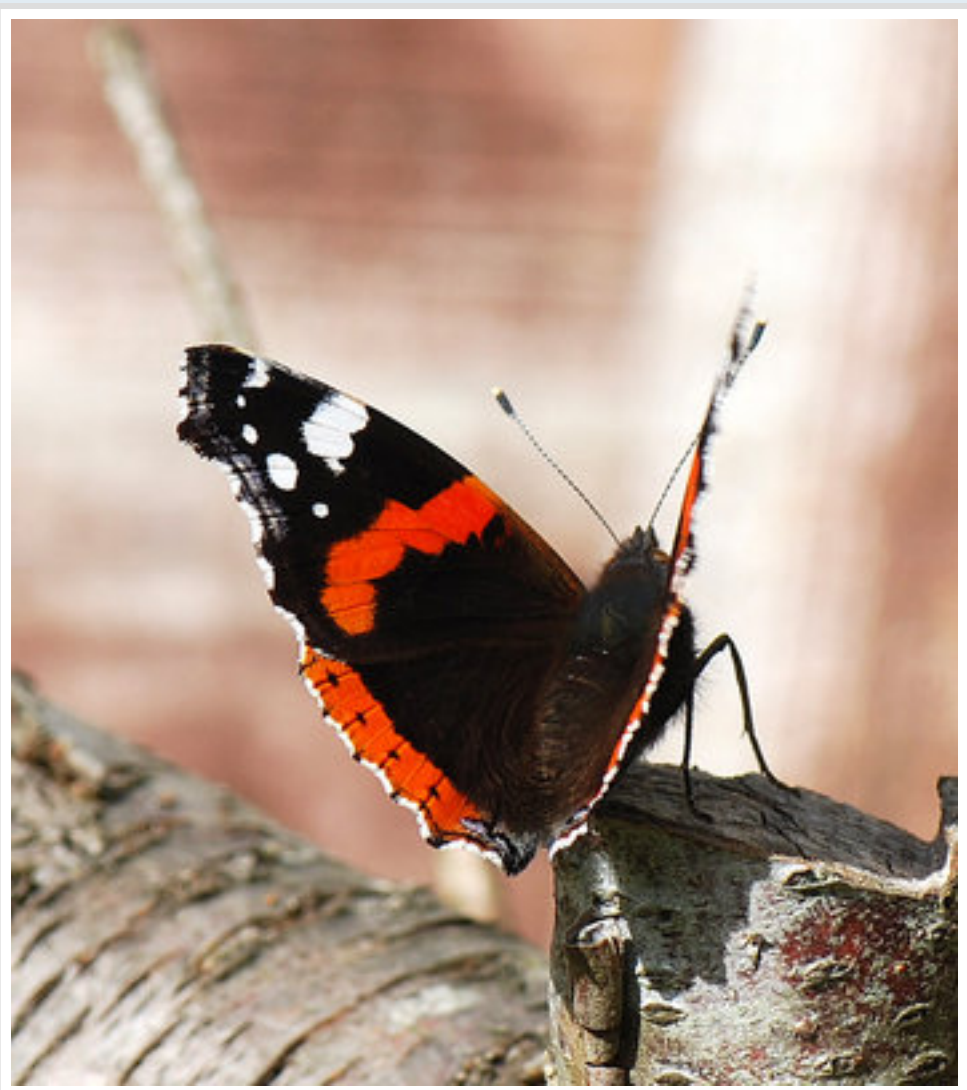
...And at first there wasn't an awful lot there! I checked the Ivy arch and it was bare of butterflies, as were the Brambles and fencing at the top of the garden. So slightly discontentedly I headed under the arch back towards the house. Something caught my eye on the old, bare wooden arch quite low to the ground, almost hidden amongst the grasses missed by the mower. As I carefully flattened the grasses it turned out to be a Silver Y.



This seemed to be the sign for other butterflies to appear and a small Ivy bush on the other side of the garden suddenly held a Red Admiral where before it had none. Unfortunately the afternoon sun was too strong and the shots I got were bleaching so again I thought about heading in. As I turned round back into the garden and extricated myself from the taller bushes that I'd pushed my way through to get to the left hand fence, I saw another Red Admiral on the Plum tree. I managed to skirt round spooking it only slightly so that it flew 30 cm to the fence where it rested with its' wings wide open.



After I'd taken my shots I stood back in the middle of the garden and it had moved back to the Plum tree. Only it hadn't as this was a different individual as Red Admiral 1 (RA1) was the aberrant with a white spot in the red wing band and Red Admiral 2 didn't have it. It seems that RA1 had moved and settled further along the fence and while I was trying to move back to the lawn so as not to disturb it RA2 had flown in from one of my neighbours gardens. Made a nice change them coming to me from over the fence rather than disappearing in that direction!



I thought I should try for a few more photos of RA1 when I noticed a third Red Admiral on the fence, like the flying Mallards on Vera Duckworth living room wall.



Happy that there were no more Red Admirals lurking around and with the sun disappearing for good behind the clouds I made my way indoors again. However I couldn't resist a few final shots of RA2 as it was holding its' wings in a pose I'm used to.



So this was a week ago and I've been seeing butterflies this weekend too – how much longer will it continue? Who cares lets enjoy it while it lasts... Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 08-Oct-12 06:32 AM GMT

Nice shots Wurzel, I particularly like the Silver Y Moth.

I must have seen thousands of these this year, especially when I was down in Dorset, but didn't manage to get any shots I was really happy with. They usually settle with their wings vibrating so unless you can find one properly settled they can be a s*d to photograph.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 08-Oct-12 06:48 AM GMT

I think you should be proud of that moth photo too – I've never found a Silver Y that would sit still for a minute either. 😊

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-Oct-12 07:21 AM GMT

Cheers Neil and Dave 😊 I too have experienced the frustration of the Silver Y! Previously whenever I've attempted to get shots of them they have either

been ridiculously difficult to approach or when you do get close enough they've buried themselves in the grass so you get shots of a blob behind some green stuff, or as you both mentioned they are busy vibrating their wings to such an extent that the hum is almost audible 😡 I was so shocked that this one was still (possibly torpid?) that I went and checked later that it had moved to make sure it wasn't dead 😊

Garden, my refuge

Another nice weekend has passed but it's like a switch was flicked on Saturday night as the temperatures dropped, the wind built and the rain that had been threatening for a while finally came. Still on Saturday I was blissfully ignorant of what was to come and with the girls back from swimming and a trip to town (sarcastic yay!) in the offing I nipped out for a short while to make the most of the back garden.

As usual it didn't disappoint with 5 Red Admirals all feeding on the smallest Ivy bush in all the surrounding gardens! At some points there was so little room that they were crawling over one another to find nectar. I decided that I'd taken more than my fair share of Red Admiral shots this year so had a poke around to see what else I could find. The top end of the garden was very quiet apart from a few Hover Flies and also an unusual looking fly. It looked like a mosquito with its' large spindly legs but the head didn't seem right?



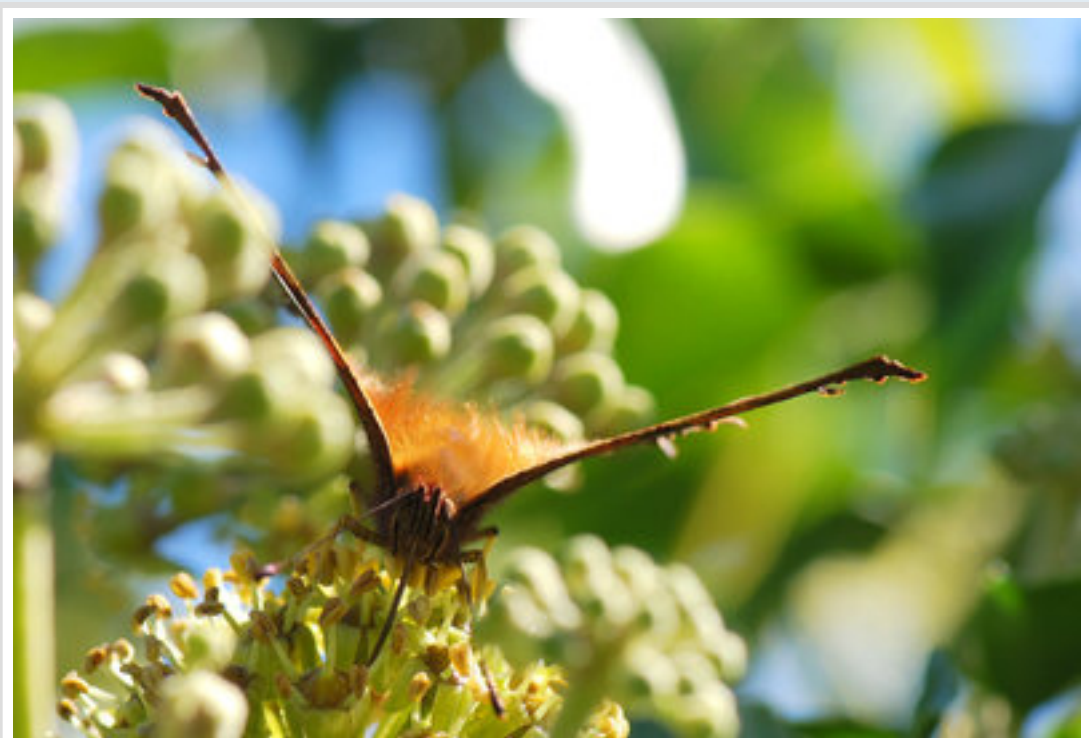
The Red Admirals were still feeding like crazy on the Ivy so I succumbed in the end but tried for some different shots. So rather than getting level side on views I started poking the lens between the bushes and deliberately tilting the camera a few degrees off level. However I was most happy with the shots that I took from below one Red Admiral, with the sun streaming through its' wings it took me back to those heady days during the early summer looking for Silver Studs at Slop Bog. In another shot the Admiral is almost playing peek-a-boo with me.



On the other side of the garden a Wasp was chewing the fence for paper. I managed to move in really close for a shot and then as I backed away was surprised to see a Comma fluttering up from an Ivy leaf right where I'd been standing. I was even more surprised when the dead leaf I brushed my hand against was a second Comma which stoically remained in disguise. I was about to get some shots of this when something really special caught my eye. I remember years ago when I was first getting into birding I'd flick through field guides and there was always the section with the birds I'd love to see - Hoopoe, Roller, Bee-eater. The really bright, gaudy ones that catch the eye and stand out from the rest of the LBJs. Well what I'd found was the Wasp equivalent, a type of Cuckoo Wasp probably *Chrysis ignita*. It was stunning with a bright purple abdomen and its' head and thorax bejewelled with Emeralds and Sapphires. I was only sad that the view was so fleeting.



I did get back to the butterflies once I tried and failed to relocate the little wasp and again tried for some different shots, this time of one of the two Commas that were hanging out in the garden. I never realised how hairy they are - insulation ready for the winter ahead.



Unfortunately the trip to town couldn't be postponed any longer so with a heavy sigh I headed back into the human world...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 10-Oct-12 06:40 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel, yet MORE cracking pics!

Dunno what your long-legged fly is, but check out *Trichocera*. Looks similar and is widespread across much of England, including in your neck of the woods. Cool pic of the Jewel Wasp too (and good luck IDing those!)

I've just bought myself a copy of Wasps of Surrey by David Baldock 2010. Am very much looking forward to putting it to use next year.

Cheers mate, catch you at the social?

Gibster.

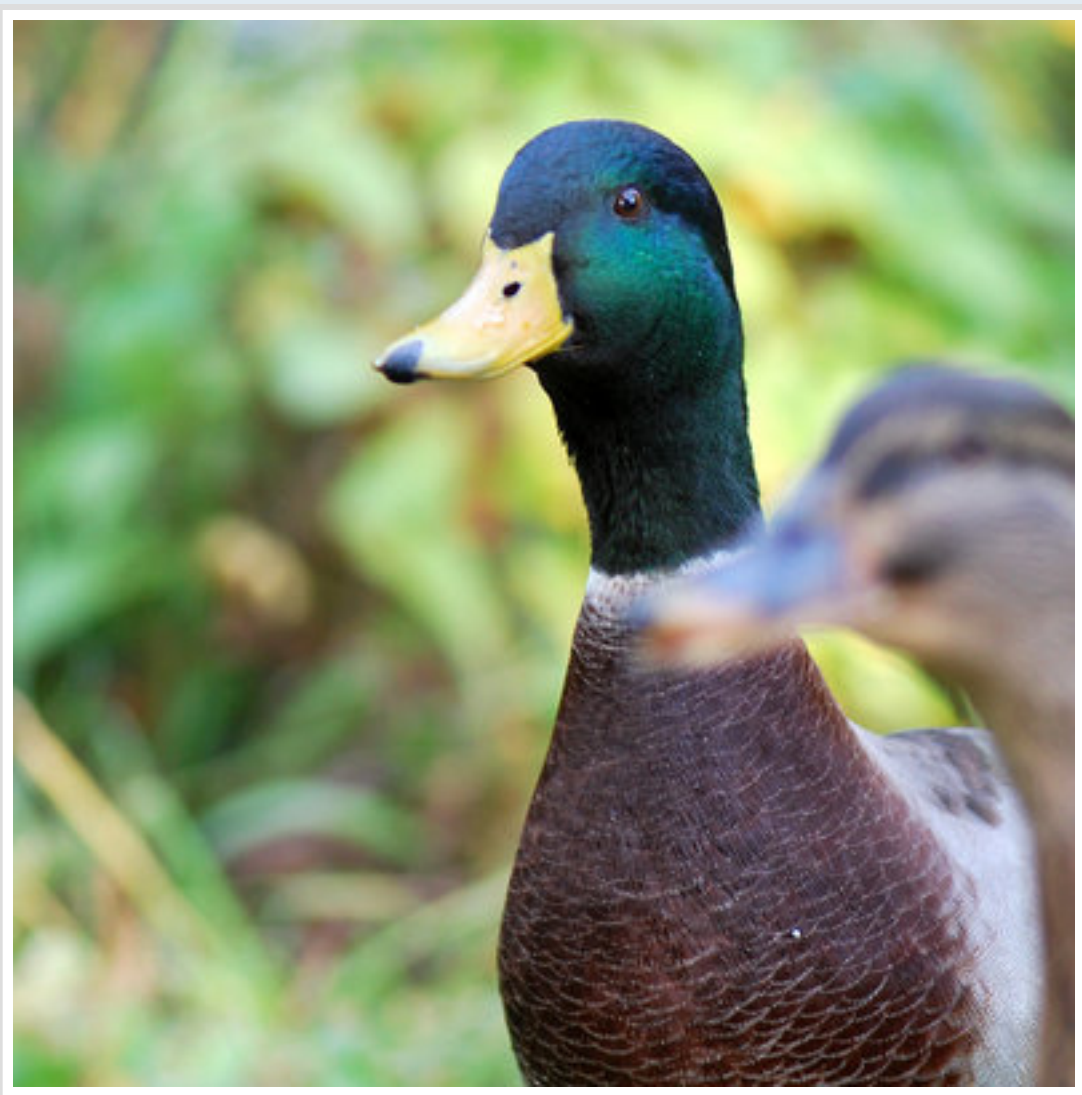
Re: Wurzel

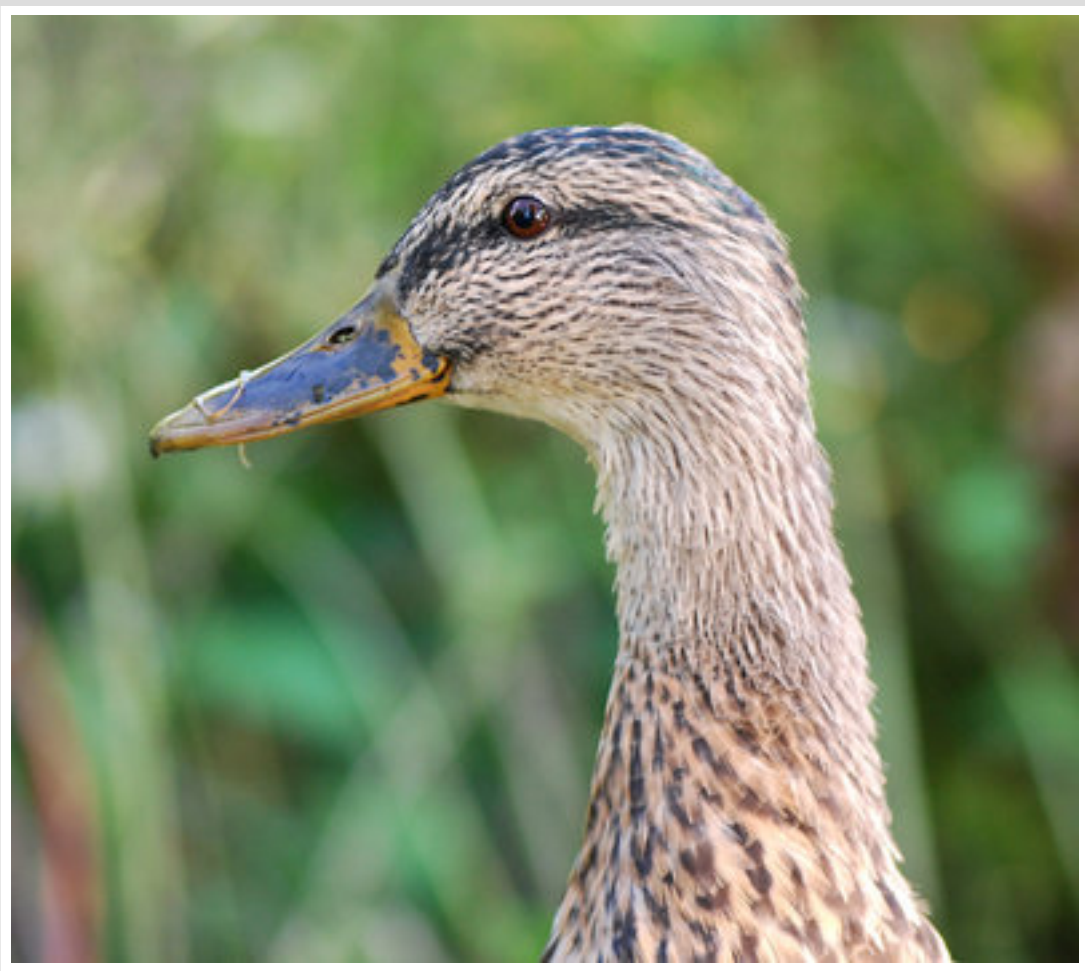
by Wurzel, 14-Oct-12 07:01 AM GMT

Cheers for the kind comments Gibster I'll check out your ID suggestion. I was dead chuffed with the Cuckoo wasp as I've wanted to find for ages and to have it in the garden made it extra special. 😊 See you at the social indeed (if I can find my cheque book 😞)!

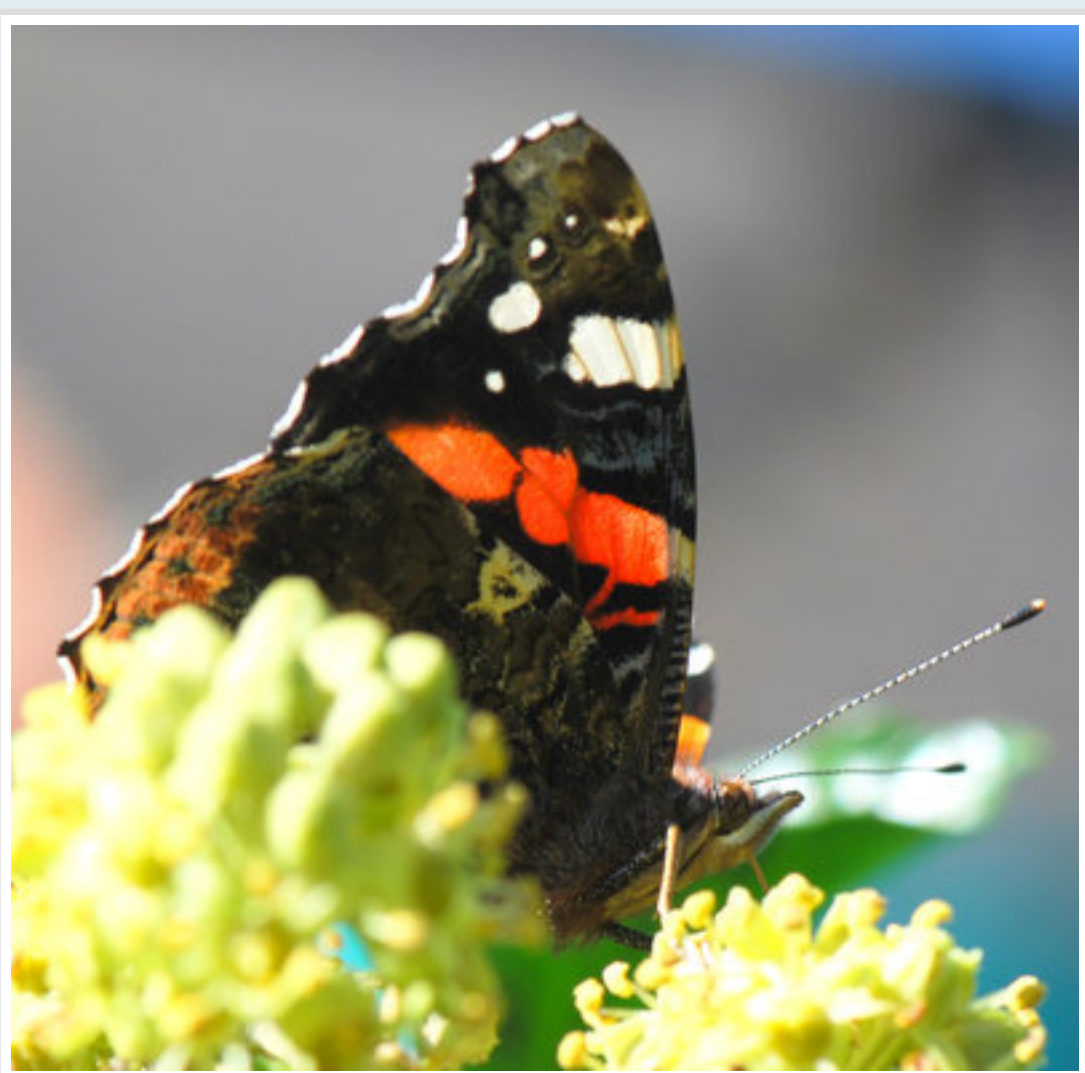
Town Path 06-10-2012

In the end the trip to town wasn't too bad as I took my camera just in case. As my nice and daughters fed the ducks I tried for a few close up shots of the ducks. They were hard to get, not because of any difficulty in approaching them, but because they were so active waddling here and there, ducking and diving to get to the eagerly thrown crumbs. My older daughter manages to make her slices last, ripping and throwing small pieces which she rolls into balls. My younger daughter on the other hand throws huge chunks which inevitably end up bashing the ducks on the head and they're lucky they don't get concussion the way she forcibly hurls it at them! My niece who is younger still just sort of drops the bread on the floor.





The usual suntrap area long the town path seemed quiet as I approached it today and when I got closer I couldn't see a single butterfly on the lager of the two bushes. The smaller one for some reason held 11 Red Admirals all jostling for feeding positions! I didn't know which one to try and photograph first so in the end I looked for the two closest.



Over the last two years I've noticed that I've taken my camera pretty much everywhere I go; to and from work, trips to town, visits out anywhere, even just down to the local corner shop and back! But now as the days get noticeably colder and wetter (another British summer?) and also shorter I'm tempted to start leaving it at home more and more. It no longer goes to work or the corner shop with me and this posting could well detail its' last trip to town until March 2013.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

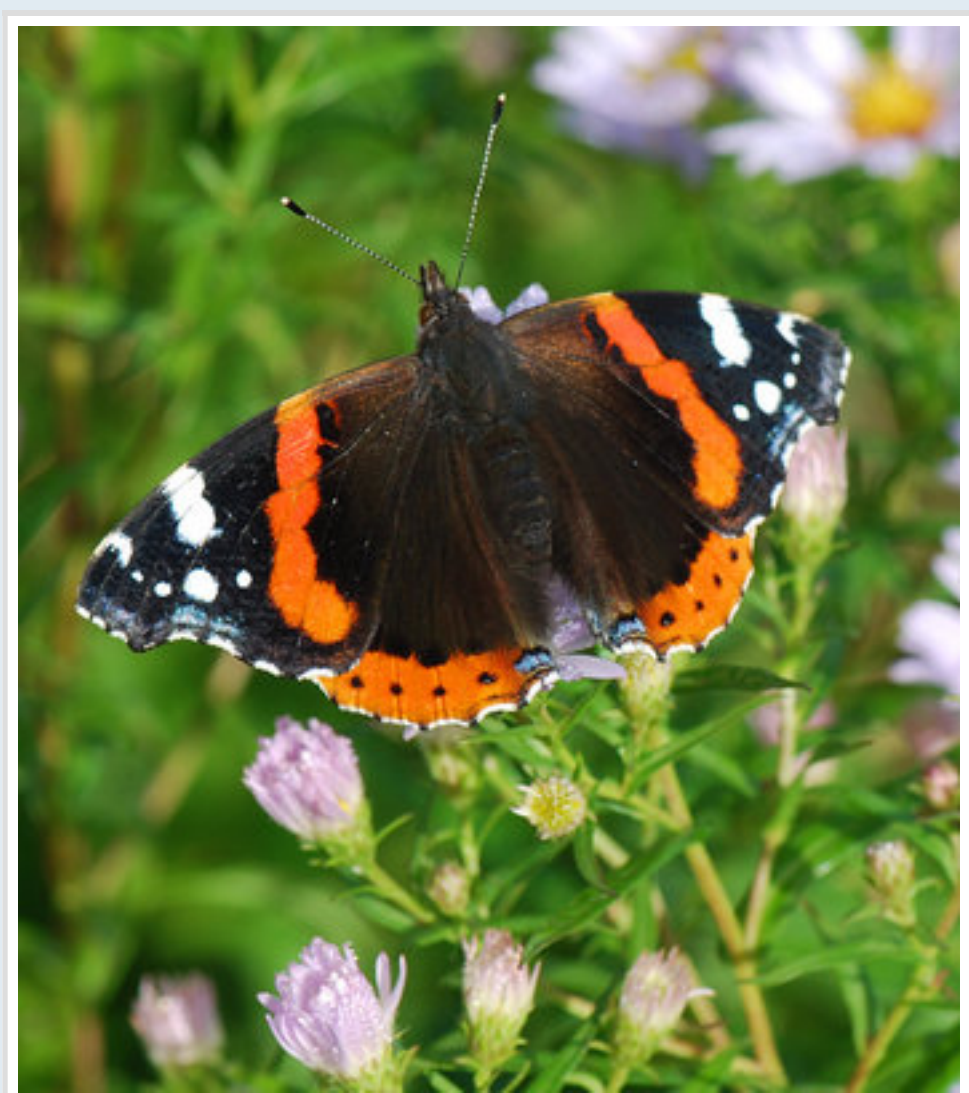
by Wurzel, 15-Oct-12 07:03 AM GMT

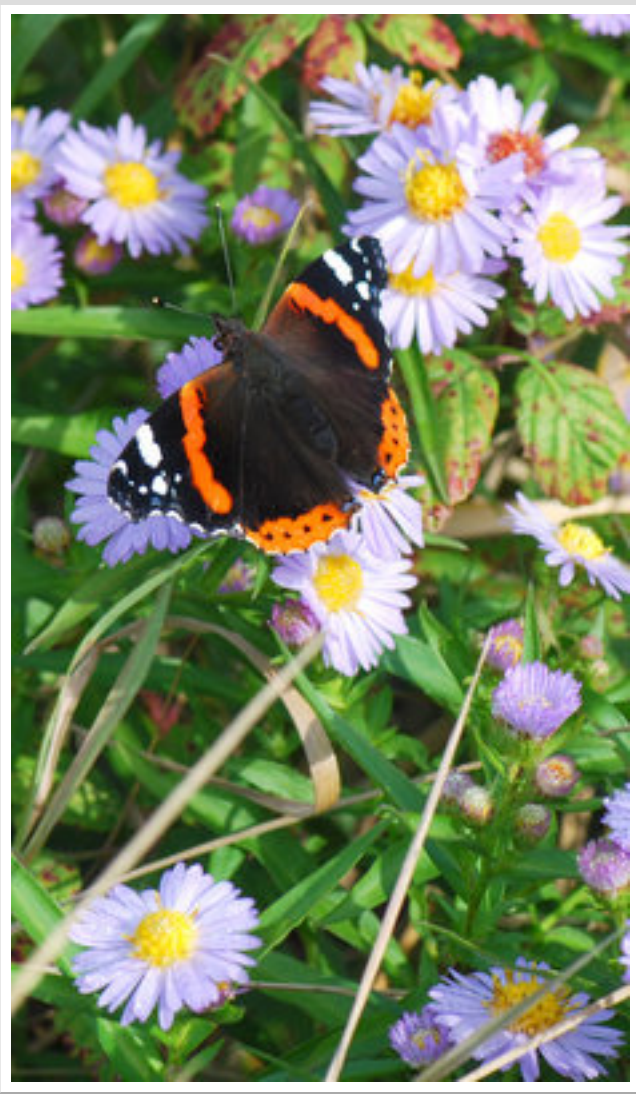
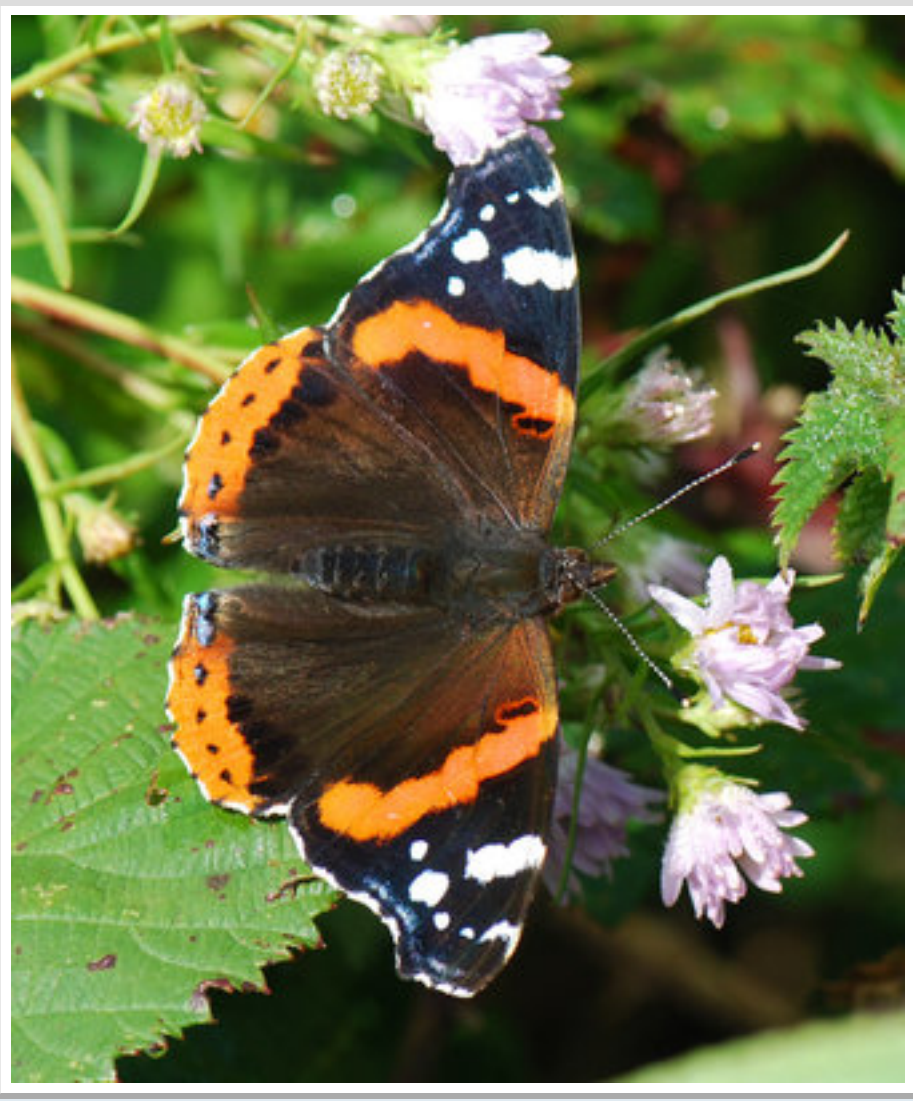
Lodmoor

This time last week I headed off early to Lodmoor to try my luck for the Short Billed Dowitcher that was seemingly settling in for the winter. As I arrived and set off down the Beechdown way which transects the reserve I saw a glum looking birder heading back to the car. I gave the usual greeting of expectant birders everywhere "any sign?" to which I received a negative. Oh well perhaps it was waiting for it to warm up a bit? I carried on until I got a view of the hump and had a quick burn with no joy. A couple of Snipe hiding in the edges, Gadwall, Teal and a Common Sandpiper but no yank. I moved round further to the Magic Roundabout and no joy there either only adding Little Egret and a stunning adult Med Gull. There seemed to be a growing number of birders on the western path so I thought it wise to try my luck a cast my scope around there. However again no joy and I spent a while watching a Heron feeding and patiently stalking its' prey before the strike, gulping it down and then I managed to capture the somewhat guilty expression as it furtively gazed around having finished its' meal.



Also around were a few Lapwings and a Buzzard sitting on the fence that demarks the marsh from the reedbeds. I listened in intently to all the other birders who seemed to have the inside track and all the gen "it likes to be with the Snipe - check those Snipe over there", "it likes to frequent this west path", "its' quite shy" etc etc. I smiled inwardly as I had a growing realisation that despite all this knowledge it wasn't there, don't ask me how but I knew I was going to dip, I'd left it too late and (this is the single worst phrase that any birder can hear) I should have been here yesterday. Resigned to not seeing the bird I wanted I headed back to the Magic Roundabout to enjoy the birds that were around and also the butterflies. While I'd been searching fruitlessly for the yank the sun had been warming the reserve and as I strolled along the path there seemed to be Red Admirals on every bush. A conservative estimate would amount to 30 individuals. Most were in a feeding frenzy on the small purple daisy like flowers.





Finally something else appeared – a Dunlin and no matter how hard I tried it wouldn't elongate its' bill, grow an eye-stripe or lengthen its' legs to resemble the yank. Still I slowly made my way back to the car stopping briefly to get the odd shot on the way and also espying a Comma along the Beechdown way.



Hopefully this won't set a precedent for the winter birding, but with 5 lifers last winter I mustn't grumble – I was probably due a dip! And thankfully it didn't appear after I'd gone which is something I guess. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 15-Oct-12 07:33 AM GMT

Looks like the RAs are feasting on Michaelmas Daisy, Wurzel.

Re: Wurzel

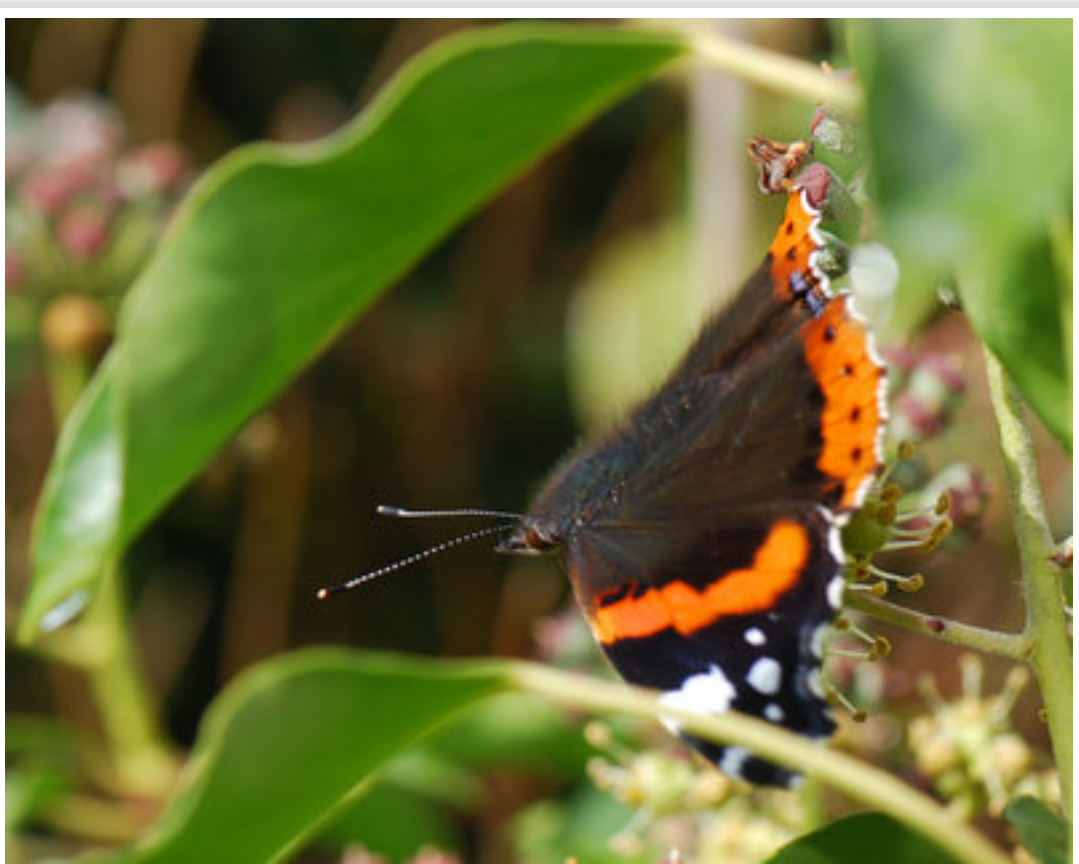
by Wurzel, 19-Oct-12 06:59 AM GMT

Cheers for the plant ID Dave I need to brush up on my Botany, another thing to add to the winter "to do" list!

Garden finally?

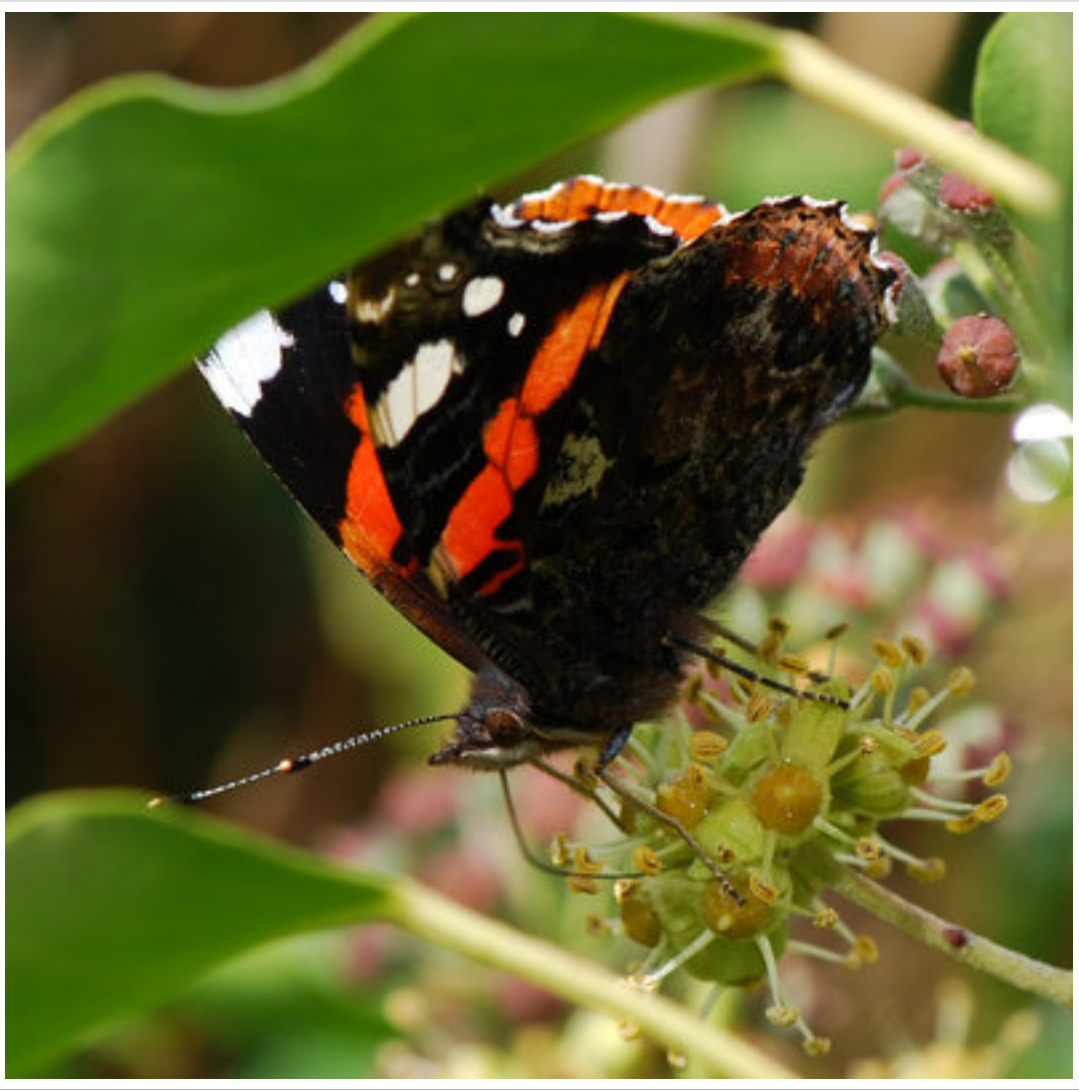
My time out in the garden on Saturday was limited to a few fleeting moments over the lunchtime. There were one or two butterflies around, but rather annoyingly they spent most of their time just out of reach in my neighbour's garden on the large Buddleia there. While I was tidying things away in my older girls' bedroom on Saturday I chanced a look out into the back garden. There didn't seem to be much going on in my side but an orange leaf looked out of place on my neighbour's Buddleia. As I watched the leaf definitely moved, and then it closed its' wings before flying a short way further into the bush to nectar revealing itself to be a Comma. Its' movement upset a feeding Red Admiral which in turn upset a Large White which had been hiding out of sight near the fence. The Large White fluttered around and about and then upset the Red Admiral again, so much so that it ended up on my side of the fence and within range. I was downstairs like a shot grabbing my camera and then out into the garden.

I could see it on the Ivy arch but as I got nearer the heavens opened and there was a five minute downpour. To hide from the rain I slipped into the greenhouse which also meant that I could keep an eye on my quarry. While bullet sized droplets plummeted all around, it carried on feeding regardless. As soon as the rain stopped I poked my lens out managed to get a few shots, one of an unusual perching position.



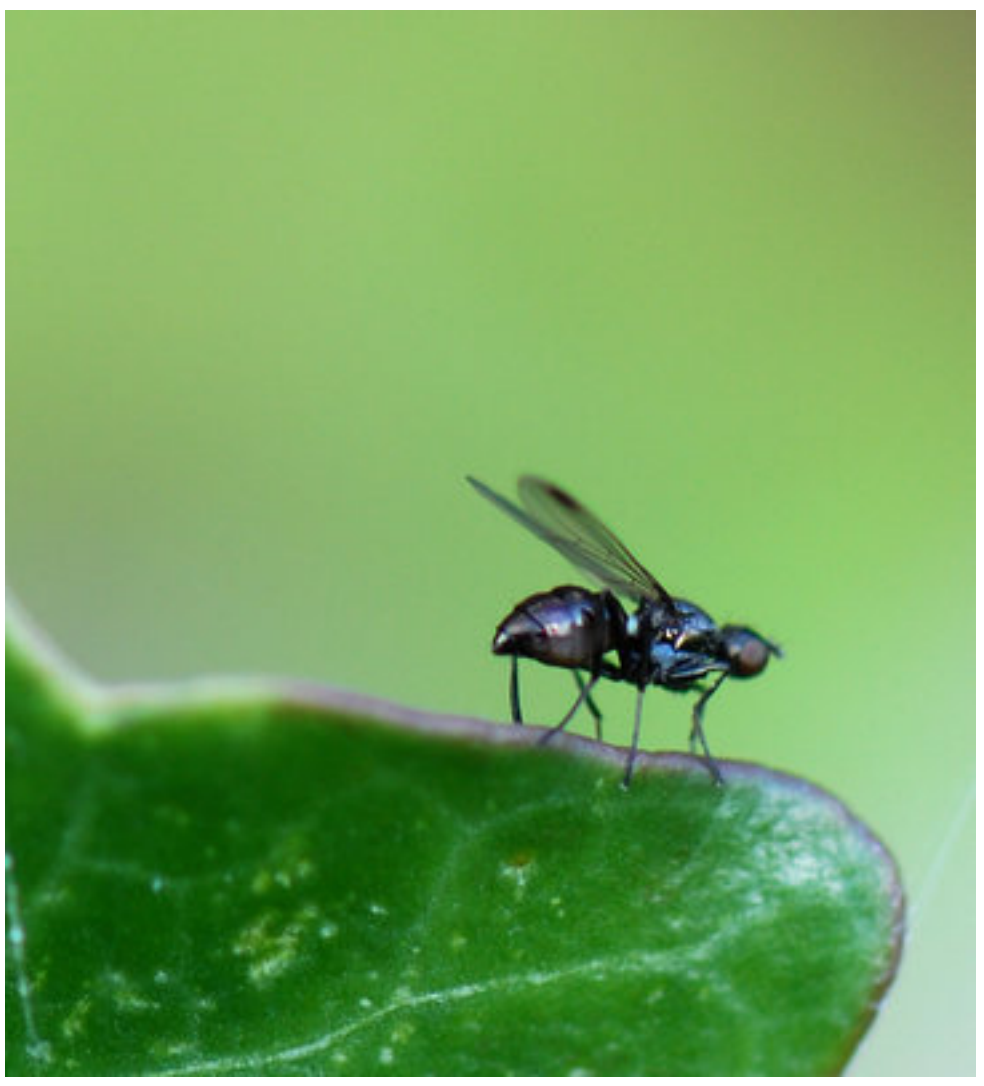
While it fed it would turn, eventually completing a full 360 degrees before moving onto the next flower head and repeating the process. The relative cover of the greenhouse and its' hide like capabilities meant I could get really close up to the butterfly and I was surprised by the length of its'

proboscis.



I thought I better head back in before more rain fell but I stopped by the small Ivy half way along the fence. There was a really small fly perched on the leaf but as I leant in to focus something heavily yellow striped hiding away under the leaves caught my eye. A bee and a species I'd not encountered before - possibly a species of *Colletes*? Having got a few shots I turned my attention back to the miniscule fly which I still can't identify.





Again I set off back to the house this time stop short by a few steps as on the fence were two Shield Bugs eyeballing each other. Both had a copper like patch at the rear but one was green the other rusty brown.





Photos taken I finally made it back into the house just before another huge storm was unleashed. So it's got to that time of year again when I'll point the camera at anything that moves!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Gibster, 19-Oct-12 08:32 AM GMT

Hey Wurzel,

shame you left it so long for the dowitcher (I saw it though, if that helps?) 😊

Your coupla shieldbugs are *Coreus marginatus* Dock Bug and *Palomena prasina* the Common Green Shieldbug. Check out <http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/gallery.html> and click on Shieldbugs and Squashbugs.

Sorry to be no use at all regards the fly and the bee – definitely not my strong area! 😞

Cheers mate,

Seth.

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 20-Oct-12 02:20 AM GMT

could it be *Colletes hederæ* the ivy bee?

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 20-Oct-12 05:09 AM GMT

Could bee... There's a separate thread about it on here somewhere.

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 21-Oct-12 06:07 AM GMT

Cheers for the Shieldbug ID Gibster 😊 But no thanks for the Dowitcher help 😡 😞

Cheers for the bee help Chris and Dave. That was the species I was thinking of but BWARS offered up a couple of alternatives and I wasn't sure because how many stripes it had and whether the stripes were continuous and uniform?

I couldn't find the thread about on the forums Dave, though I too recall seeing it recently. By the way I hope the pun was a typo 😊 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 22-Oct-12 06:44 AM GMT

Moth ID – 13th October

A couple of weeks back I saw this moth flitting around my longue. I was unsure what it was so I thought I'd get a shot of it. However it proved harder

than I'd imagined. First of all it liked hanging around right at the edge of the ceiling. Once I'd pulled up a chair it kept moving around and there was low light which meant that I had to correctly position the camera for the flash to catch it. I then thought that turning on the main light might work better as it should be attracted to it. The attraction side worked but rather too well as the moth flew round the light in ever decreasing circles before landing on moon like shade. The energy efficient light bulb produced an orangey light which put the whole moth in silhouette. Still I persevered and hopefully have managed to salvage a couple of shots which might help others to help me get an ID. Two things which aren't noticeable on the shots I've got were that in general appearance it was more black and white looking and the upper-side hind wings looked almost rosy in colour. 😊



Cheers for any ID help.

Have a goodun

Edit 29-10-2012 - I reckon now that it's *Cosmiotes freyerella*?

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 25-Oct-12 06:54 AM GMT

After the exploits the previous day with 3 species of butterfly, a new Bee and some interesting Shield Bugs I thought that the Sunday would be just as promising. So I headed out to do some tidying work on the garden taking my camera with me. While I dug over the veggie patch and prepared a fire a pair of Red Admirals teased me with rapid fly-bys but they were too high to get any proper shots. They then hung around at the very top of the garden, spiralling in combat over the Ivy covered Apple tree in my neighbours garden, again well out of range. Then while I was getting the green bin a male Brimstone hurtled towards me down the garden. I watched it for about 20 seconds as it covered the length of the garden, passed over my head and rose abruptly to fly over the house.

That was pretty much it for the afternoon so I got my head down and got the jobs done. Once finished I picked my camera up and slowly walked back to the house. It was decidedly cooler than yesterday and even the Ivy didn't have the flies and bees that were present yesterday. Two things that did catch my eye were another Shield Bug and a larva looking very out of place as it slowly wriggled across the fence post heading towards the safety of the Ivy. Any ID help greatly received.



Surely that's it for the garden this year...?
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 28-Oct-12 05:37 AM GMT

Not much to report recently - a single Red Admiral in the garden today so I've started doing those jobs that always get left until the late autumn/winter. I've just been sorting through my collection of moth photos and was hoping for some id Help. I really need to get a book on Moths, but with my wife's de-cluttering habit becoming ever more manic I fear that it wouldn't last long! 😬😞 I saw this Moth in my front garden back in September, but what with one thing or another I never got round to asking for help with its identification. Now that things have died down literally I thought it would be a good time to have a look on UK Moths and I think it is *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*? Confirmation or further help gratefully received. 😊



Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Oct-12 06:05 AM GMT

Lost day in the garden...

As we're almost at the end of the season I was starting the annual tidy up. Sorting through my folders, moving them to my hard drive and making room ready for next year I came across a folder or two with photos that I hadn't posted at the time.

Looking at the date it was during the very busy period when the weather was finally turning for the better so I had plenty of "trips" to sort out ready for posting; also at the same time I'd accrued enough brownie points with my wife to allow plenty more trips. So I was either out in the field or processing my shots and writing ready to post.

I remember this day as despite a recent run of very hot sunny weather things had turned damper and cooler so I took advantage of the poor butterfly weather and headed out back to sort the shed/summer house and do a few runs to either the Trussel Trust or the tip depending on the quality of the rubbish I was "de-cluttering". The shed was a haven for Spiders with webs everywhere and apart from the House, Garden and Harvestmen there were a couple of species that looked different. One was more stocky with huge fierce looking palps that seemed to take up most of its' head, a lot like the horror movie Tarantula. The other species was much smaller, less well built and much more delicate with an unusually marked abdomen. I'm still not sure about the first one and it's probably just a House Spider but the second looks like a Stedoda - possibly nobilis, the Biting Spider?



Once I'd cleared the shed I had the wonderful task of loading it all into the car. However a couple of times I was distracted as a few butterflies decided to brave the rain and cool temperatures and fed in the garden. The first was a Red Admiral basking on the path. It seemed a little nervous so I didn't want to get too close and disturb it so took the shot from a way back and cropped it like mad. While I was getting my shot I couldn't help wondering whether this was the last of the spring/early summer variety or the vanguard of the autumn invaders?



The second was a female Small White hanging out in the border shrubbery. Again I couldn't help wondering was it the first or last of the brood? Although the slightly darker appearance suggested first...



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by ChrisC, 31-Oct-12 02:17 AM GMT

the first is amourbious sp. and right genus for the steatoda but this is s. grossa rather than s. nobilis.

Chris

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-Nov-12 05:50 AM GMT

Cheers for the ID help Spiderman Chris! 😊

Stourhead 29-10-12

With the promised Indian Summer not arriving the focus for a trip to Stourhead switched from nature shots to trying to capture the colours of autumn, a tricky feat with a macro lens and a drizzly grey day! Still it was glorious to walk the paths surrounded by an ever changing palette of reds and oranges, yellows and greens of all hues and tones. The folly looked resplendent with all this autumn finery surrounding it and the colours of some of the trees were stunning.





Upon examining a leaf more closely I found a miniscule bug clinging to the underside and braving the cold and damp.



Further round one tree stood out from all the others as it glowed golden in the drear. All around were dark trees all crowded in and looking dark and ominous yet shining like a light among them this one tree stood apart.



I found my enthusiasm for photographing the trees was starting to dull after the initial awe of the colours and luckily an invertebrate appeared outside the gift shop to keep me amused for five minutes or so. I've looked through the Collins guide as well as flicked through UKMoths and the best I can come up with is *Acleris sparsana*, so any ID help would be gratefully received as usual.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

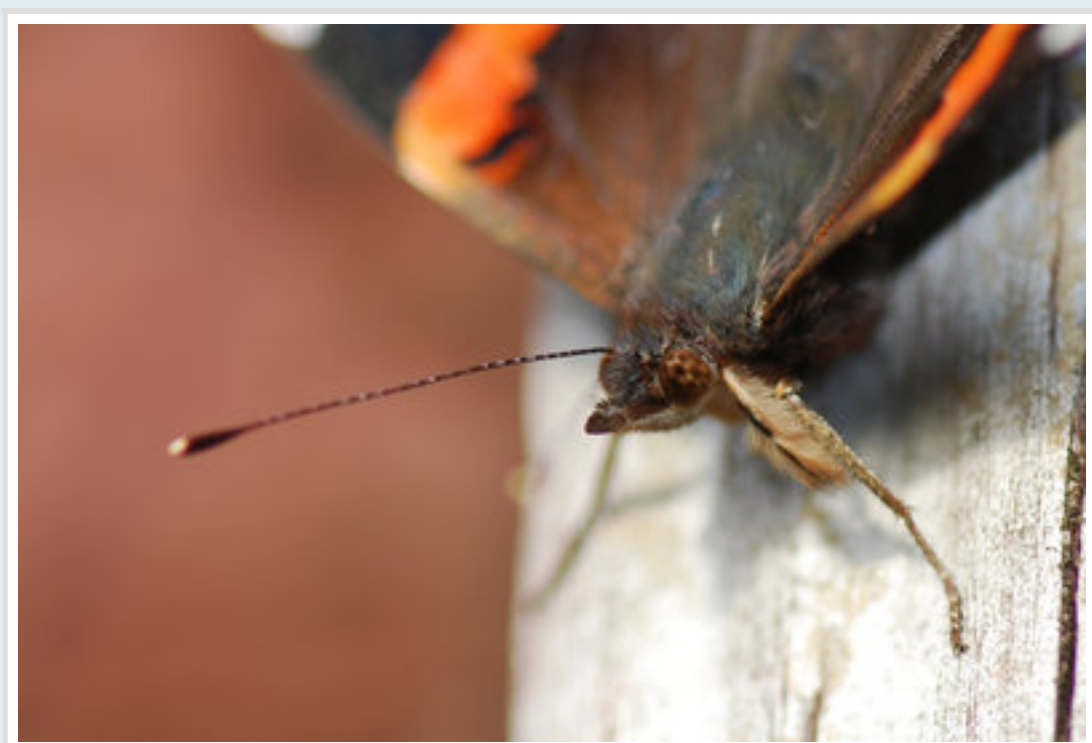
They think it's all over...

In one of my previous posts I ended by musing that it was surely the last of the butterflies from my garden. Yet today I chanced a glance out to the back garden and something small and dark crossed into the garden. I grabbed my camera and put on a coat and gloves (not usual garb for butterfly photography) and headed out the back. On one fence was a basking Red Admiral and on the other side of the garden another took off and disappeared towards the top of the garden. I took a chance and went after this one first as one basking on the fence seemed very settled. Despite a good 10 minutes of searching I couldn't relocate it so I slowly checked along the other fence, working my way back down to where I hoped the first Red Admiral was still basking.

Despite the chilly nip to the air which was biting at my finger tips there still seemed to be plenty about; a few Shield Bugs, a couple of Hoverflies and Droneflies, a few small bugs on the underside of leaves and some truly fast and bulbous Spiders. The Hoverfly was quite intricate and stunning to look at as it appeared to be made from burnished brass but the haltares appeared like little unpleasant balls of nasal mucus (snot very nice).



Getting back to the section of the fence where I'd seen the first Red Admiral I was pleased to see that it was still there, basking happily. I have been lucky enough this year to get so many opportunities to photograph Red Admirals I tried to get something different from this last one. As I approached it for a close up I noticed that its legs seemed really hairy. When I checked the shots back later I realised that the hairy leg was the non-functional front leg that is normally held close to the head, the "brush foot" that gives Nymphalids their other name.



Closer to the back door the small patch of Ivy was a haven for invertebrates with 4 easily distinguished flies, a couple of smaller Hoverflies and 3 Droneflies as well as a larva which I have yet to identify. Finally I couldn't resist a final parting shot of the basking Red Admiral in classic pose. I might have said this before but it seems almost poetic that my first butterfly of 2012 was a Red Admiral at the front of the year from my front garden. And here at the back end of the year is possibly my last butterfly, a Red Admiral in my back garden.



...it is now...probably!
Have a goodun

Wurzel

p.s...another Red Admiral on the 3rd...will it never end? 😊

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 08-Nov-12 07:05 AM GMT

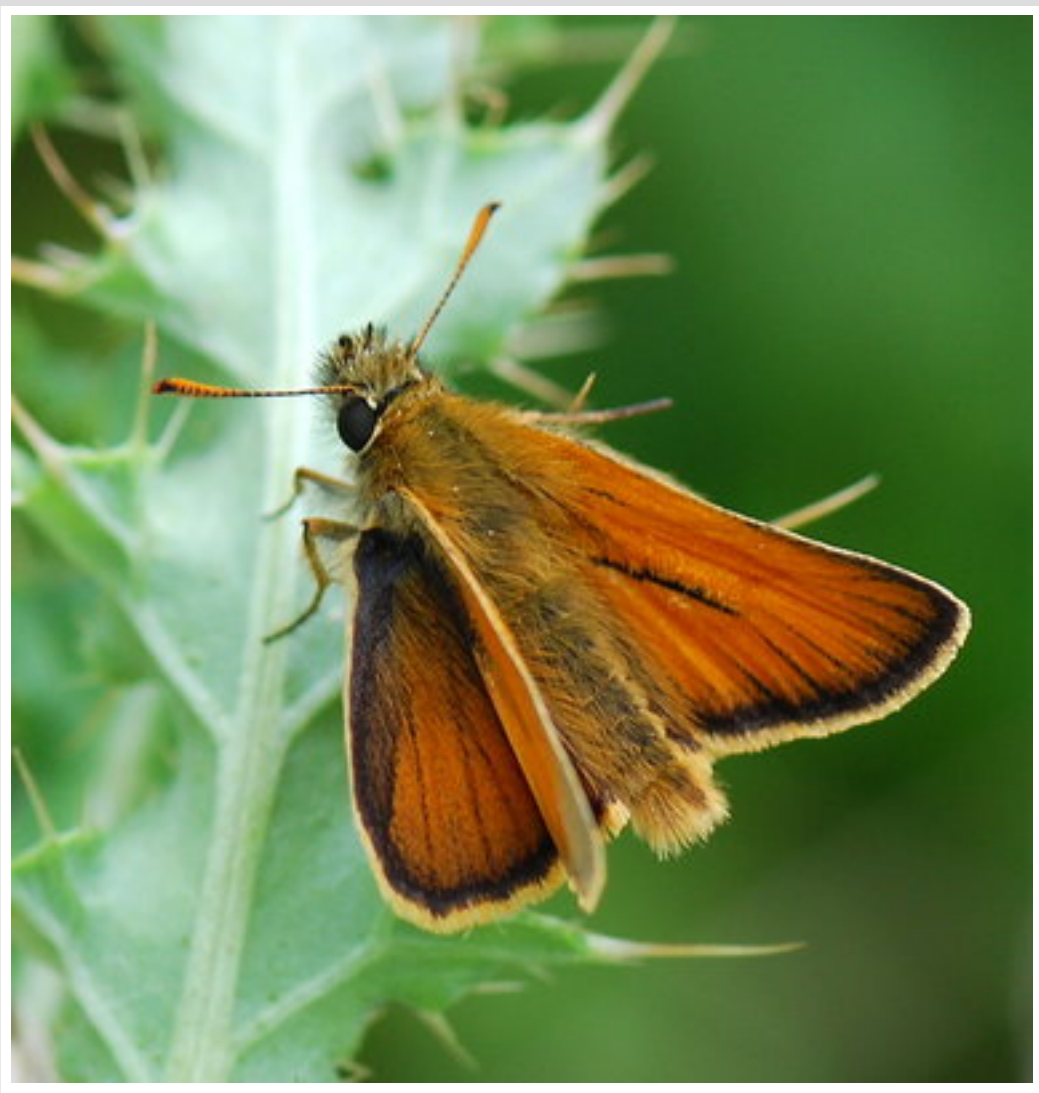
End of Year Tally

Over the last two years I've written books using Blurb in order to put all my favourite photos, trip reports and anecdotes together. This year with changes at work and trying to buy a house as well as still finding Butterflies into November I haven't had the time to put my book together. In fact I think that the next book will be my attempt at an ID guide but that may take more than a few years as well as a few thousand miles! With no book to rely on and still wanting to review the year I was a bit stuck on how to go about it. So I looked through the Forums for "inspiration" or in lay man's terms "ideas to nick" 😊! I liked the idea of the end of the year Tally (Neil) and the "Favourites" that has been running for two years now (Chris and Vince) and also the way that Mark divided it into the families. I also wished to feed my observations into the "Winners and Losers" data (Glostocat). Hopefully I'll be able to mash these ideas together for my all rounder review. So here goes...

The Skippers

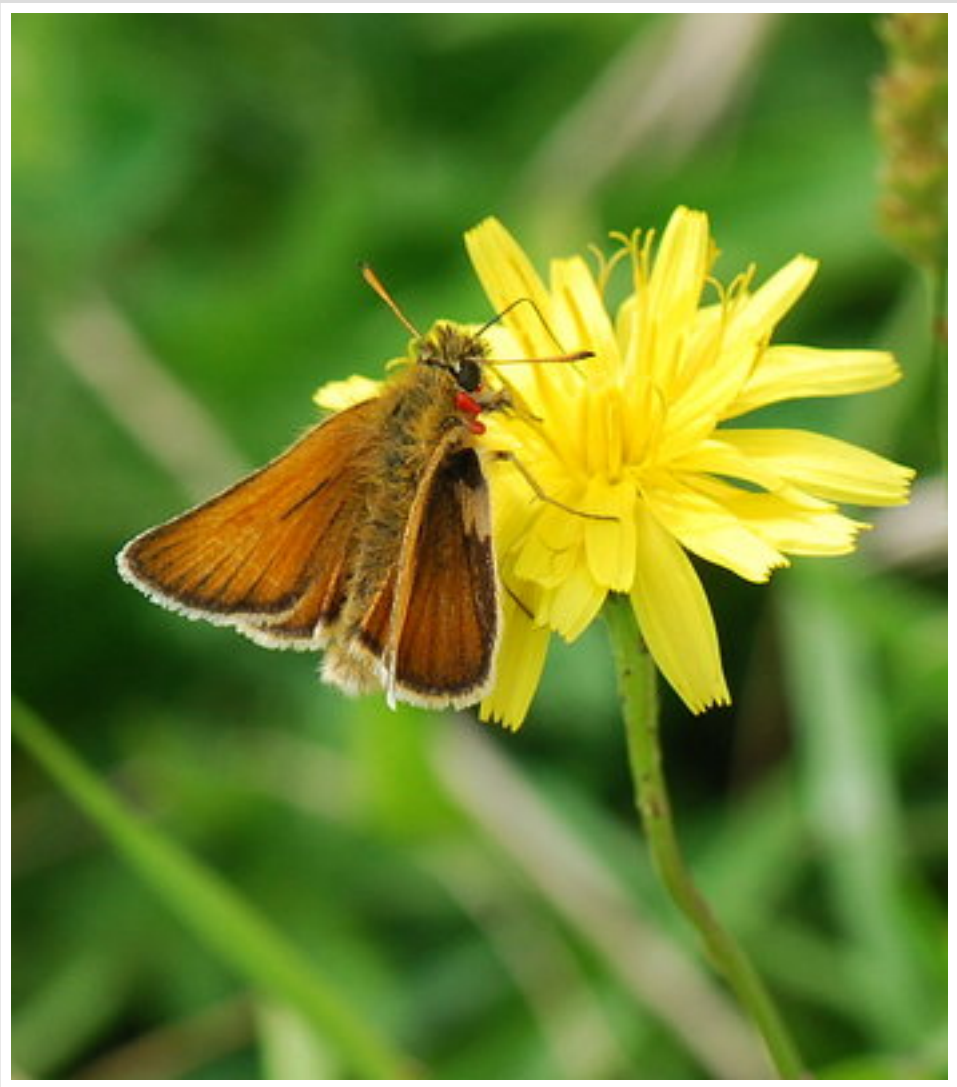
1 Small Skipper, 08-07 Bentley Wood.

It felt like this species emerged later this year than in previous years but once they started appearing then there were lots around. I managed to find them at most sites - including Downshay, Lulworth and Woodhenge. In fact on one visit to Martin Down they were everywhere! I walked about 100 yards along the path that cuts diagonally across from Sillen's Lane to the top of the hill and counted at least 20 all flitting around and bundling into each other.



2 Essex Skipper, 30-01 Martin Down.

Unlike Small this skipper was much harder to find and seemed to be scarcer this year. Despite getting a terrible crick in the neck from trying to look at Golden Skippers from the angle that allows you to see the "ink pads" over countless hours; I only saw it at two sites - Martin Down and Five Rivers. Whether this was because of poor weather meaning I didn't get out to the appropriate sites in time and so missed them I don't know but they were much harder to find. Hopefully they'll bounce back next year?



not in great nick but an Essex none the less!

3 Lulworth Skipper, 17-06 Bindon Hill.

This was one of my favourite butterflies of the year and as I remember saying early last year when laying out my plans this was my main target for the year due to my Durotrige heritage. I was slightly worried that I might miss them so I went almost as soon as they were reported on the Forums by Sussex Kipper back in early June. Sitting on the cliff edge, camera in one hand, coffee in the other enjoying the golden blurs in front of me while machine gun fire and RPGs went off in the distance was a truly surreal and enjoyable experience. I also managed a second visit to Lulworth itself (but not Bindon Hill) in mid August and they still seemed to be going strong then. This was my first experience of this species so I hesitate to say how well they did but I seem to recall noting on my first visit that they were outnumbering Small and Large Skippers by about 15 to 1? Hopefully I can increase my knowledge of them by a few more visits over the next couple of seasons.



4 Silver Spotted Skipper, 10-08 Stockbridge Down.

I took out three trips again this year to an area of Martin Down where I'd seen them before but none seen again. Saying that, a couple of Silver Spots were seen once I'd left the BC Wiltshire Branch butterfly walk in late August. I did find manage to find them quite easily at Stockbridge Down and to me there seemed to be slightly more than last year - though I did go earlier this year? My observations with little experience don't match reports from those with more comparative data who suggest that they are dwindling at this site, so who knows?



5 Large Skipper, 02-06 Martin Down.

I saw good numbers of them at Bentley and saw them at a large number of sites. However got I got surprisingly few shots of them as I was always focusing on something else. It was either Lulworths at Bindon Hill or Silver Washed Frits, Purple Emperors and White Admirals at Bentley so the Large Skipper didn't get a look in this year... still there should hopefully be plenty next year as they seemed to do well.



6 Dingy Skipper, 12-05 Coombe Bisset.

This seemed to have a good year, probably due to the great weather we had during the early spring, so much so that I finally saw my first Bentley Wood Dingy! I did go looking for them roosting at a couple of different sites but didn't have any luck - so something to aim for next year.



7 Grizzled Skipper, 30-04 Martin Down.

This species seemed to have an excellent year again probably because of the very warm early spring. Once I'd found my first one of the year at Martin Down (which was actually quite tricky) they seemed to be everywhere, even turning up at Fiver Rivers!!! 😊 I also found them at Bentley Wood and the ones there seemed slightly less hairy and much darker in colour than others elsewhere. I doubt whether this variation is significant but is something I'll look for next year.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 09-Nov-12 04:04 AM GMT

I like the way this idea of yours is developing, Wurzel.

Some good shots in there already and I look forward to seeing the rest.

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 09-Nov-12 04:08 AM GMT

Agreed,

A really good read with some cracking photos. I too am looking forward to the next installment

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 09-Nov-12 04:28 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Nice work. I like the format you are adopting and look forward to the next instalment 😊

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Wurzel

by Padfield, 09-Nov-12 05:39 AM GMT

Just to say I'm enjoying this too, Wurzel! You've caught some really good pictures this year.

Guy

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 12-Nov-12 07:56 AM GMT

Cheers guys for all your comments, no pressure now then eh?! 😊 Aside from sorting out the Whites I did manage to get out today for a family walk... Bolderwood

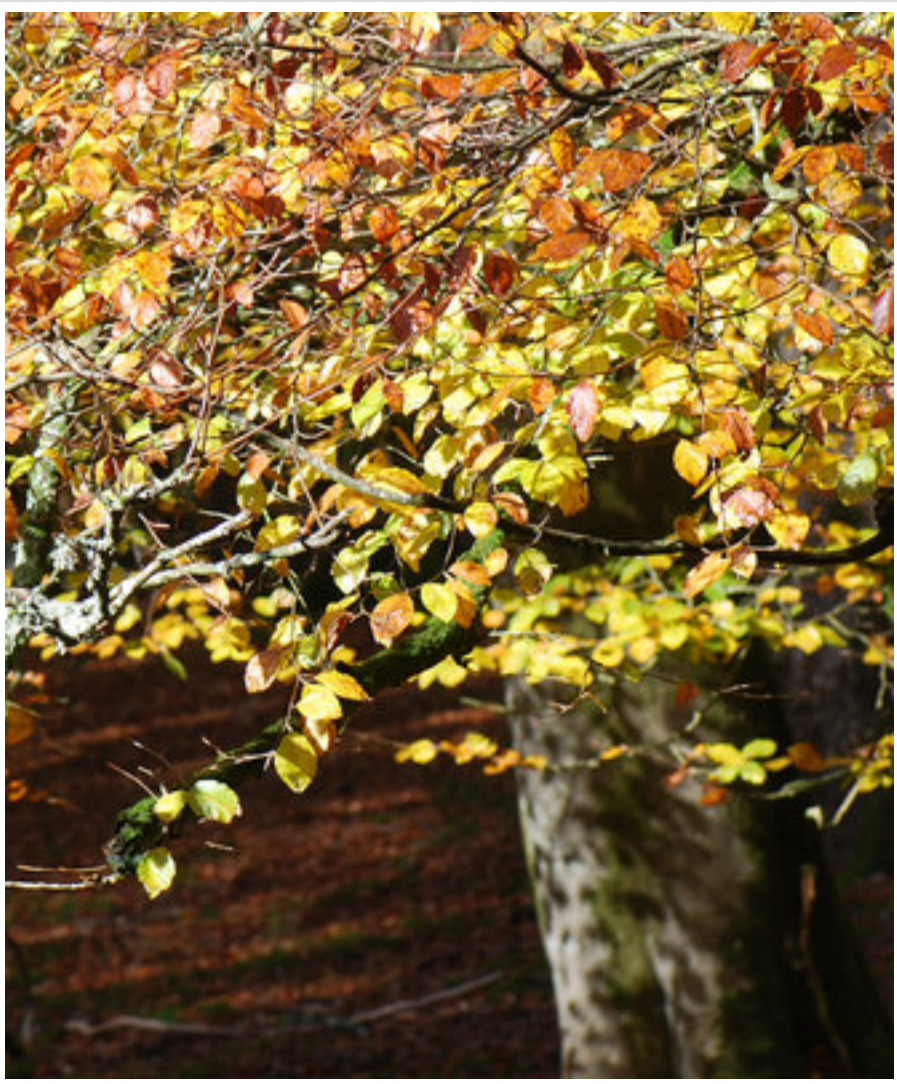
It's been over a week since I saw my last butterfly so when we went for an Autumnal walk in the New Forest I set my camera for landscapes. The low sun wasn't as weak as I thought it would be but it cast so stunning shadows and lit glades in spectacular fashion.



As we wandered along the track we were joined by various species of Tit, Nuthatch and a small party of Goldcrest high in the pine trees. Then something caught my eye high up a dead pine tree, basking for all it was worth – a Red Admiral. It was so far away that I had to crop and sharpen it like mad to make it even remotely recognisable but still a record shot, however poor, from November isn't to be sniffed at.



For the rest of the walk I kept my eyes peeled but didn't really expect to see anything else so got back to enjoying the trees and light as well as the birds calling. Almost back at the start of the walk I had another sighting of a Red Admiral but it was probably the same individual and it wasn't hanging round.



And there was me doing my "end of the year review", I should be safe to carry on now though surely?
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 15-Nov-12 07:46 AM GMT

The Whites

8 Wood White 09-06 Botany Bay

This was the first time that I'd ever seen Wood Whites and I drove back from Botany Bay deeply smitten by them. Their flight seemed so fragile it was almost ethereal. Guessing how well they've done this year with such limited experience seems pointless. All I can say is that despite us worrying that there wouldn't be any left on our June visit we saw a lowest estimate of 25 which didn't seem too bad for between broods? It was a cracking day with Glannies at Wrecclesham and at Botany Bay Nightingales, Orange Moth, Long-horned bee as well as some top notch butterflies, the cream of the crop being the Wood Whites. I loved the way that they would take the hue of the flowers that they were feeding on as they reflected it off their scales before idly flapping to the next one, effortless flight it is not.



9 Brimstone 25-03 Backgarden

I saw Brimstones over 8 months this year with my last sighting (at the time of writing) in October. I saw them at every site I went too. Some sites I visited many times and almost every time I went there would be a least a single Brimstone. Generally I'd see the odd male and/or female but at Stockbridge Down there were 3 males and 2 females all feeding at the same patch of Thistles and at Old Sarum down in the ditch there were Brimstones all over the place it felt like! I think I went a little Brimstone snap happy this year; getting both male and females in the classic pose, ovipositing and close ups, even managing to get an in flight shot using sports mode. As for how well they did it certainly felt like they had a good year.





10 Large White 12-04 Garden

I struggled to see Large Whites at the start of the year and it felt like they weren't having a good year but then by the late summer their numbers seemed to have picked up and there were reasonable numbers in my garden and at several local sites. Perhaps the cooler weather at the start of the year or the fact that if they were around I was generally after something else could explain why it feels like I didn't see very many this year? It could also be a case of identification problems as a flying Large White or Small White from a distance or as you're driving by inevitably becomes just a "white".



11 Small White 25-03 Five Rivers

Contrary to the Large White this species seemed to do well this year and I found a couple at most sites. Like the Large White they seemed to do well during the autumn period in particular when not only was it easier to get close to them but they were easier to find. I would like to think that I was safe in my identification of this species judged on size and the more subtle wing tips but again like the Large those that passed by without stopping so I could confirm were labelled as "whites". So this could mean that I'd seen more than I recorded. My gut feeling is that they perhaps of all the Whites species fared best this year, or at least ran Brimstones a close second.



12 Green-veined White 06-04 Martin Down

This was the species of White that I was most worried about. If I did see one then it was always outnumbered by Small Whites by around 3 to 1 and I have a gut reaction that this was the case overall but it could just be a local thing. What I did notice was that all bar one of the individuals I photographed were past their best, almost as if they'd been far too busy courting and mating to hang around to be photographed. One individual had lost most of its hind wing and another was lacking an entire antenna. Hopefully they've weren't plentiful because they were just keeping a low profile and just getting on with living and continuing the species through a terrible spring and summer, the proof of this will hopefully come next season...



13 Orange-tip 30-03 Garden

The early spring weather (temperatures in March reached 26°C... in Scotland!) seemed to bring out the Orange-tips in great numbers. Last year I had 3 males in the garden, and likewise this year too including a rather attractive aberrant. However when it all suddenly went cooler again I was concerned about them but they were still around in good numbers so I feel like they had a good year and I had sightings at home, work, Five Rivers as well as up in Wales. As usual they were a pleasure to follow as they patrolled along the hedgerows with the added bonus that because of the cooler weather they were much more approachable and spent more time roosting. This was great as sometimes getting shots of this species can a bit like a smash and grab attack whereas this year you could take your time. Because of this I was able to get some shots that I was really happy with, none more so than of a female with her wings open in the textbook pose.





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 19-Nov-12 07:48 AM GMT

Back to the Garden

I'm finding that work is piling up and the weekends are becoming the days in the week to catch up on all of the work you've not done because you're so busy. Add to that the dearth of butterflies now that autumn is dragging on with winter just round the corner and I'm not getting out and about as much. So today I was cheered enormously upon my return from the family shopping by a Red Admiral flapping weakly over my front garden. Having had lunch and in between the washing up and ironing I crept outside for 20 minutes.

There basking on the fence was a Red Admiral. It looked in very good nick as it tried desperately to absorb some energy from the weak November sun. I crept quite close to get some shots and then left it in peace so it would hopefully charge itself sufficiently.



I had a bit more of a mooch checking every blob and dot that was hanging to the fence on my way to the top of the garden. Most were the usual flies, with the occasional Drone thrown in for good measure as well as a couple of sparkly emerald-like Green Bottles.



On the other side of the Ivy Arch a tiny leaf hopper caught my eye as it contrasted so perfectly with its background. It should obviously be on some canary yellow plant and not the apple red of the old Bramble. When the light struck it seemed almost fluorescent.

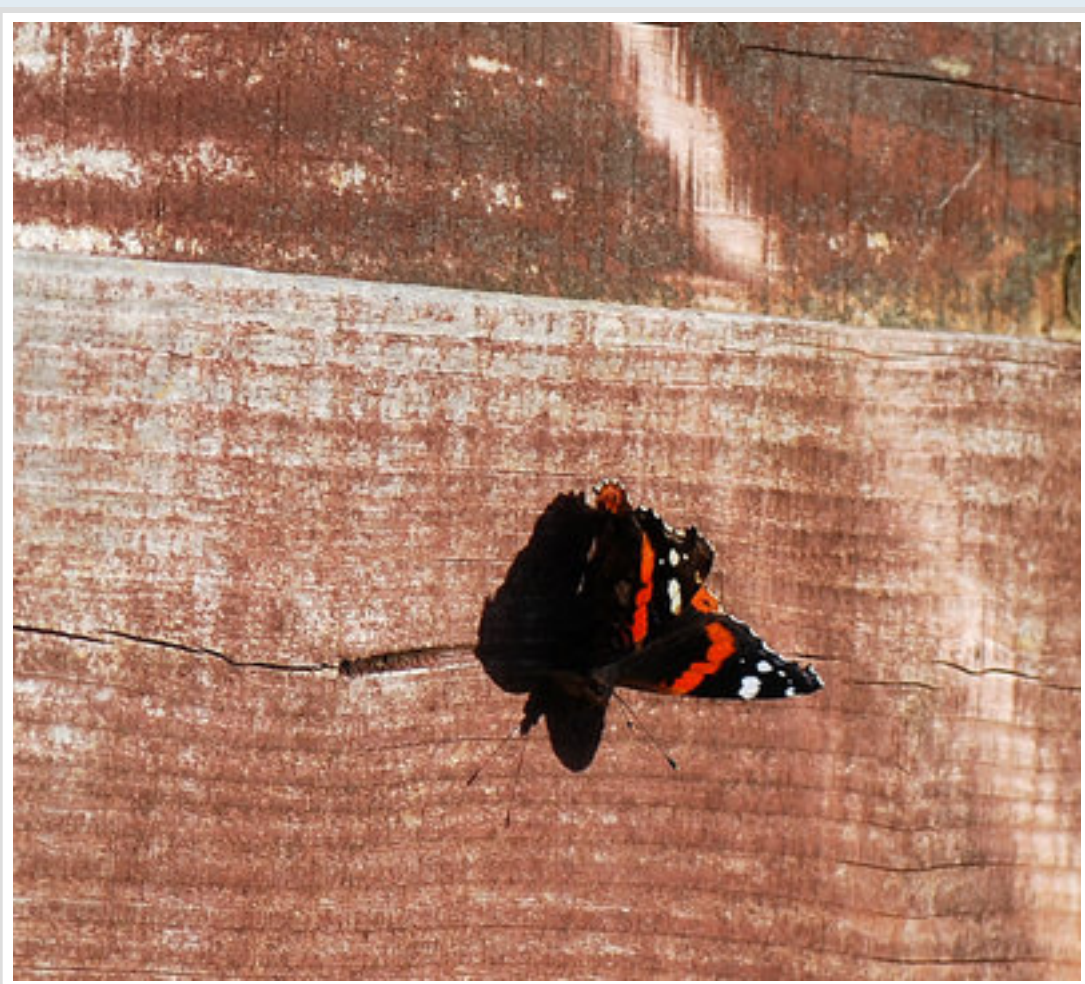


Right at the top where the fence ends and the hedge take over there was a small "smudge" that seemed to blend in with the lichen. I placed my finger

near to it and it moved slightly so I focused in and there was a beautiful subtle fly, some kind of picture wing I guess. What really struck me were its rainbow eyes they looked mad.



I headed back down to the garden and the Red Admiral was still there so I took a few shots from a distance so as to leave it in peace. I was hoping to give it a chance to carry on basking so I skirted it widely but it still took off.



However it wasn't me that spooked it but this little chappy who almost collided with my head as he dropped across the garden!



That seemed to be my lot and 13 minutes after I'd first headed out I was back in-doors looking thorough my shots and waiting for the kettle to boil! 😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 20-Nov-12 03:27 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Great photos and reports, keep 'em coming 😊

I know what you mean about work catching up on you, I am doing stuff now that I put off during the past few months whilst I was out and about 😞

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 20-Nov-12 03:59 AM GMT

Excellent stuff, Wurzel.

I particularly like your Brimstone shots.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 23-Nov-12 06:50 AM GMT

Cheers Neil – I'm just about catching up but then the next wave of work arrives! 😞

Cheers David for your kind comments – I did go a bit Brimstone happy this year 😊😊

The Hairstreaks

Before I go into details I just need to say that I was quite surprised that Black Hairstreak didn't feature more heavily this year on the Sightings page as last year for a period of 2–3 weeks it felt like the world and his wife had seen (and got some cracking shots too) of a butterfly I have yet to encounter so I take it this was a bad year for them? Well I too mirrored that...

14 Green Hairstreak 02–06 Martin Down

Do I have to begin with this species? Two years ago I found this species easily, last year it was much harder work with only one sighting at Martin Down so I assume that they had a bad year in 2011 yet I was hopeful that enough would have bred to make 2012 a good year for them. With the coming of summer in March and very early records from this period "it won't be long until I find my first of 2012" I said to myself. Oh how I came to rue those words! For me you see 2012 was terrible for Green Hairstreak. Everyone was seeing them; some people for the very first time, others would bemoan their lack of sightings one morning only to report that they'd seen one that afternoon, and then eventually even the wives of the world started seeing them. But not Wurzel, so the Quest began...I tried loads of different sites, different times of the day, I sought people that had seen them and got directions and grid references and I checked every single bush between Salisbury and Pewsey several times to not avail. I even considered religion so I could ask for help of a supernatural nature and all the while the sightings board was filling up with Greenstreaks! I thought I had a few run-ins with them but this was generally fleeting glimpses of something "small and darkish" so it could really have been anything but most possibly wishful thinking. In the end I gave it up as a bad job and decided to move on.

As so often happens the very next day I took the girls to Martin Down so they could have a run around and something caught my eye, low down to the ground. It was green! It was a butterfly that was green!! Finally...

The final twist to the Quest was that the almost the very next weekend at Wrecclesham what do you think was the first photographed butterfly of the day? Yep!

So to sum up...from other reports the early spring kick-started a good year for the Green One, but for me it was almost a complete disaster.

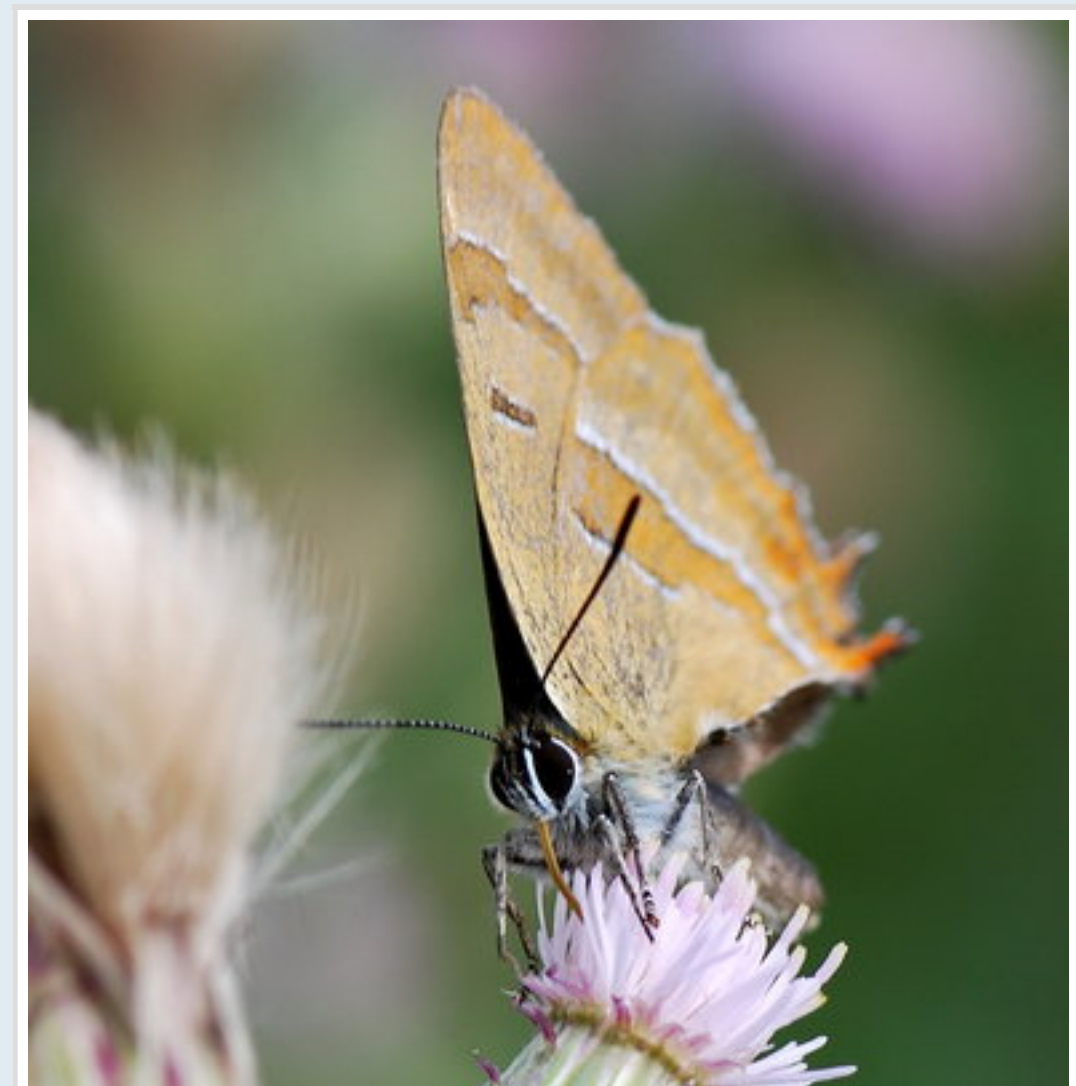




15 Brown Hairstreak 19-08 Shipton Bellinger

This almost feels like a game of two different halves. Alners Gorse was disappointing this year. I don't know whether that because they appeared early, in July no less (I seem to recall?), so by the time I visited they may have been past their best? All day the best I could manage was a maximum count of 3 females and they were hard work to find.

Shipton Bellinger on the other hand was absolutely cracking for them. On my first successful visit I found 2 females and a 3 males and the second visit saw a female and two males. Whilst it was good to see them here in higher numbers than last year it didn't seem many and with the Ash disease things aren't likely to improve...



16 Purple Hairstreak 08 07 Bentley seen, and again there on 23-07...

I guess over the last couple of years I've been spoilt for The Purps at Bentley with low resting individuals offering me open wing shots of a male and

female as well as the closed wing one. This year I saw them on two visits to Bentley Wood and heard of a report when at Alice Straits and that was it. From my own perspective as well as those people I've chatted with while out and about, they seem to have had a very tough time in 2012. The closest I got to a shot was pointing my camera half way up a tree and then cropping like mad. I have heard that Purple Emperors suffer when we get high winds during their flight period as they just try and sit the bad weather out at the top of the tree so I'm wondering if Purps do the same? If that was the case then the cooler and very wet weather we had during the late spring and summer could be responsible for their low turn-out?



17 White-letter Hairstreak poss.10-08 Stockbridge...definite 22-08 Alners Gorse

I possibly saw this species first at Stockbridge Down when I encountered a tiny dark grey/light brown butterfly jinking around at the top of the trees near the eastern car park - however I couldn't be sure so I'll have to rely on my only sighting of 2012 from Alners Gorse as my "first" of the year date. In fact it was a cracking find as on one bramble there was a female Brown Hairstreak, Meadow Brown and a White Letter all in one view. That being said I can't really comment on how well I thought they did having only a single record to judge it by!

White Letter Hairstreaks are an aloof lot, hanging around in the tops of the trees and only rarely deeming to come down to the "lower" levels. This is why they are such a pain to photograph and also such a pain to guesstimate their numbers. In fact when I've seen them it has always been through luck and never judgement if anyone has any tips (I've already thought about carrying a step ladder with me and building a tree house opposite a Master Tree) they'd be gratefully received...



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by millerd, 24-Nov-12 04:05 AM GMT

Two different Hairstreaks in one shot is an achievement by any standards, Wurzel!

Dave

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 24-Nov-12 04:26 AM GMT

"millerd" wrote:

Two different Hairstreaks in one shot is an achievement by any standards, Wurzel!

Dave

Indeed. In fact, to get a picture of a White Letter AND a Brown Hairstreak on practically the same bloom is almost as good as getting a shot of mating Red Admirals.

Re: Wurzel

by Jenks, 24-Nov-12 09:46 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote

" The Hairstreaks

I was quite surprised that Black Hairstreak didn't feature more heavily this year on the Sightings page as last year for a period of 2-3 weeks it felt like the world and his wife had seen (and got some cracking shots too) of a butterfly I have yet to encounter so I take it this was a bad year for them? "

I think I can confirm that 2012 was a bad year for BLH. Since 2008 I have made a trip to Glapthorn to see this species. On my first visit, 29 June 2008, I met the warden, Dick Smith, who kindly gave me his telephone number so I could ring for information before making future visits. As a result visits in 2009, -10, and -11 were all successful. I phoned him in late June this year as I had 4 days B&B booked in Suffolk and planned to make a diversion en-route for BLH. He told me that he had seen only 3 BLH at that point compared with 22 on comparable dates in 2011 and 19 in 2010. On my way up to Suffolk on 29 June it was pouring with rain (sounds familiar doesn't it ?) so I thought it pointless to stop. I did stop at Lakenheath (dipped on Golden Oriole) but saw my first Red Admiral, Ringlet and Small Skipper of the year, and Strumpshaw fen on 1 July produced 3 Swallowtail on the trail just before crossing over the railway line and before reaching the lane down to the Doctors house.

I'm really enjoying reading your reminiscences of 2012 Wurzel, and viewing your photos. Lets hope 2013 brings better butterfly weather than the summer of 2012.

Jenks.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 25-Nov-12 04:08 AM GMT

I don't recall any major posts this year relating to Black Hairstreaks. Of all British species, this one is the most adversely affected by a 2 week period of bad weather (if that period coincides with its flight season).

One of only two UK species I have yet to see, I am determined to set time aside next year to observe them.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 26-Nov-12 07:44 AM GMT

Garden

Cheers Dave it was definitely a case of luck rather than judgement and was also pretty distant. I found my first White Letter last year, again totally by chance but it was well worn and I'd really like to get some shots of fresh individuals next year. Still I might be able to pick up some inside information at the Social... 😊

Cheers David the Hairstreaks shot was a total fluke! 😊 Black Hairstreak is a target of mine too but probably for 2014, good luck next year with it! I'm after my first Large Blue and Heath Fritillary in 2013 as well as trying for close shots of fresh White Letters!

Cheers Jenks I too am hoping for a more bountiful 2013! It seems that you're the man to follow for Black Hairstreaks...in order to get my BLH I might have to start stalking you! 😊😊

On Friday I had a day off from work and the kids so as well as spending some time with my wife taking her shopping I made the most of the reasonable weather by spending my lunchtime out in the garden. It was actually quite warm in the sun but I didn't see a butterfly while out there although I was determined to make the most of this lull in the weather, the calm before the storm. So I decided to try out my lens to see "how low it could go", not limbo but macro!

In order to find some wee beasties I checked out the wild area at the top of the garden under the Apple tree as here there is a good layer of leaf litter to provide the micro habitats for the micro animals. I managed to find some interesting most of which I'm not too sure how to identify including a couple of bugs/beetles and a miniscule green wasp/hoverfly/fly.



The smallest thing I managed to find and photograph sensibly was a Springtail looking for all the world like a big headed cow grazing on the dead leaves.



Finding them wasn't the problem that was just a matter of turning over a few leaves and looking for the tiny little dots. No the real problem was focusing which wasn't the fault of the camera but me -I couldn't hold the camera still enough to get a crisp clear image. I might have to look into buying one of those small tripods - Gorilla grips, are they any good? Still I was chuffed with the performance of my lens at such close quarters and even when I zoomed back out to get shots of a Hoverfly I managed to just squeeze in another fluke shot of some tiny mite.



So this is what it's come to, scrabbling around in the dirt to find something to photograph 🤪 ...it must be winter 😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Nov-12 06:17 AM GMT

The Blues

Quite an emotive name for this group of butterflies as this is what I suffered from when I started reflecting on their fortunes over 2012...

18 Small Copper 12-05 Martin Down

After finding two individuals at Martin Down I didn't see any others for a few months despite checking all their usual haunts. I was so worried for this species I even started a thread so that hopefully others would be able to reassure me by all of their sightings. That didn't really happen for the first brood possibly because the weather was so bad 😞

Then came the second brood and I was heartened to see an upturn in their fortunes with sightings at a range of sights including grasslands and on the coast. They are always a joy to see with their stunning livery of contrasting colours and feisty behaviour. Of all the blues they are second in my affections only to the irresistible Brown Argus. However as glad as I was to see them I was still concerned that instead of three or four sightings on one visit there would be only ones and twos so overall I think that they didn't have a particularly good year.



19 Small Blue 27-05 Martin Down

It's difficult for me to judge how well this species did as I only encountered it at a few sites. Also with the cooler, wetter and windier weather arriving just as they were emerging I was almost at risk of missing them entirely. So I made one of my frenetic evening trips out to Martin Down and was lucky enough to find good numbers of these miniscule butterflies settling down for the night into their communal roost. One small area with 5 or 6 tall grasses had 9 individuals in it and I didn't know quite where to point the camera first. Then almost 2 months later and again at Martin Down I found a few individuals from the second brood. It felt like they had an okay year round my way and I can't remember any reports of particular problems for this species.

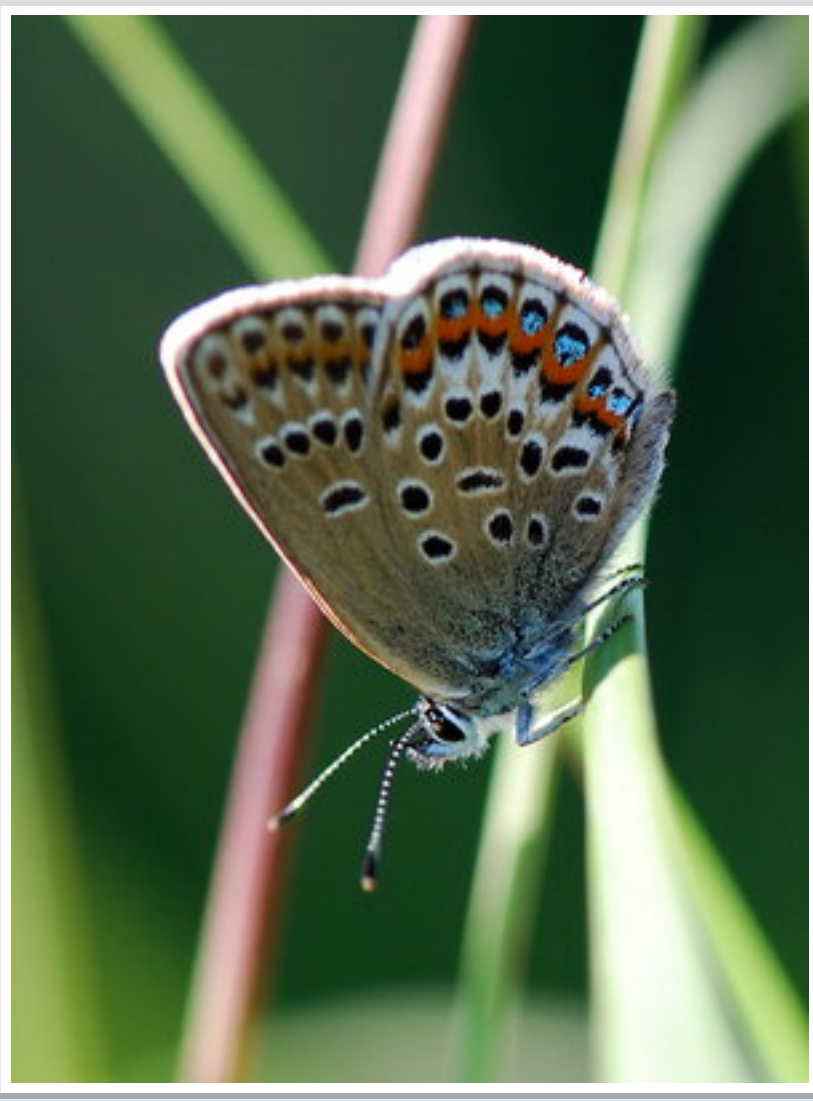




20 Silver-studded Blue 05-07 Slop Bog

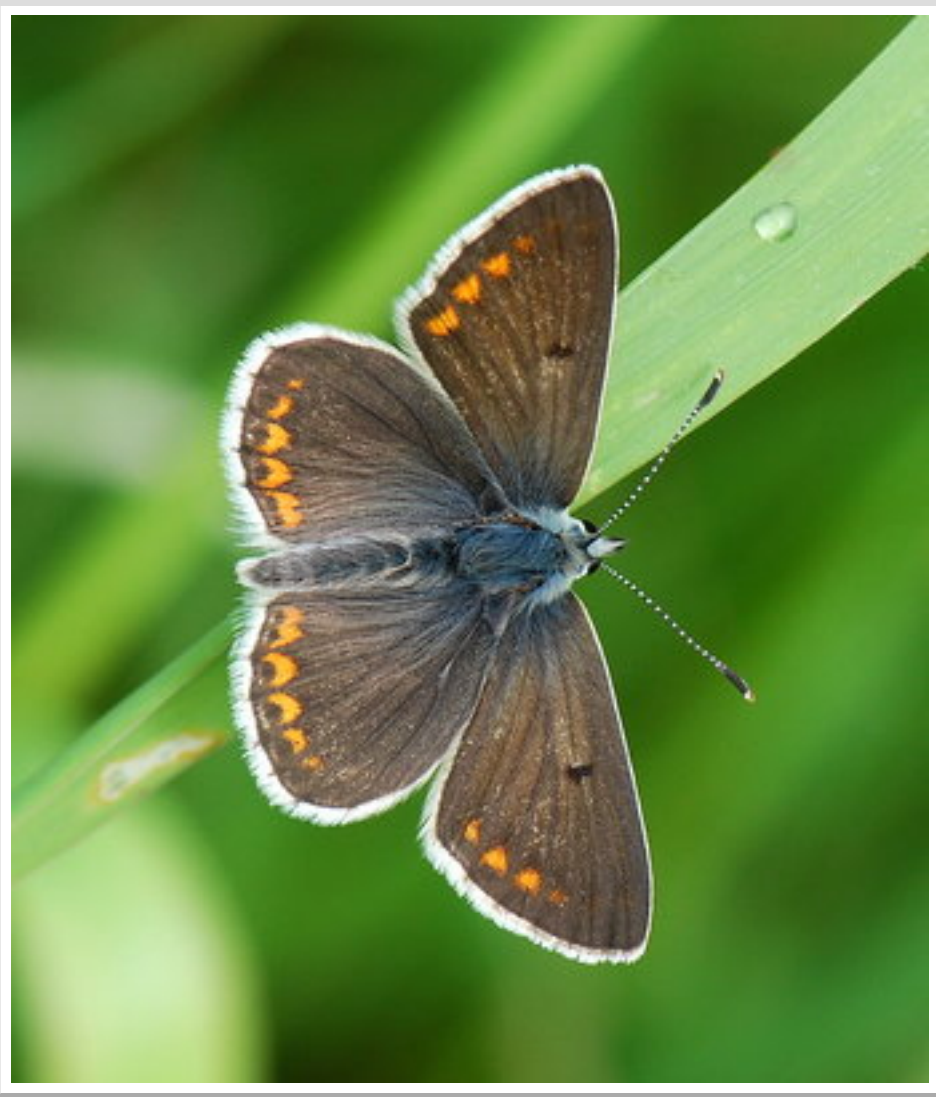
From my perspective this species seemed to hold its own this year. They seemed to emerge slightly later at Slop Bog than last year but in terms of numbers they were about the same. I'd had a few failed trips where I'd rushed over in the evening to no avail. However it was a case of third time lucky before I found some to photograph. It turned into a cracking evening warm and sunny with the light giving everything a fantastic glow. It caught their wings beautifully perfectly showcasing the oily sheen on the brown females and highlighting the wing margins on the males. I've only ever seen this species at two sites (Arne and Slop Bog) so my earlier statement of how well they've done needs to be taken at face value and I need to consider broadening my horizons next year.





21 Brown Argus 03-06 Five Rivers

These little beauties are my favourite Blue and possibly my favourite butterfly overall. There's something about the contrasting chocolate brown and bright orange twinned with their feisty attitude that endears them to me. I was concerned when I didn't find them straight away at Five Rivers but with a bit of patience they arrived, somewhat later it felt than previous years. They weren't in great numbers but I did see them at a couple of sites. Then they seemed to follow a similar pattern to the Small Copper as there was a large gap in my sightings until the second brood suddenly appeared and I saw them at a couple of sites yet again in small numbers. It seems that they have maintained their range but their numbers were well down. Hopefully they'll be able to bounce back next season.



22 Common Blue 19-05 Middleton Down

Like pretty much everyone I was seriously worried about Common Blues this year. In fact changing the name to "Uncommon" Blue seemed like a sensible suggestion. All the sites that I visited which are normally crawling with Common Blues were seriously lacking however I judged the paucity of this species from observations from my local patch. Last year on a good visit I could expect to see a couple of pairs on all of the 6 bank areas, whereas this year the same parts of the site had only one pair. The more open grasslands where normally I can find roving bands of common blues had only singles on several different occasions. I am hoping that this will just be a temporary dip and they will show an upwards swing next year. Hopefully enough eggs were laid and we get an end to the year which favours the survival of the larvae.

One thing I did notice is that this year I didn't find a single "brown" female blue. In previous years I've had some individuals that are quite tricky to correctly identify from their upper wings as they had no blue at all, not even scales close to the body. Yet this year I have seen nothing but "blue" females, and most of them are pretty much all blue. I'm not sure whether this is down to some selection pressure favouring the blue females this year or whether it's just a skew in my observations as "blue" females stand out more and so I'm more likely to see and photograph them?



23 Chalkhill Blue 28-07 Lulworth

After seeing my first ghostly blue bombing over the downs at Lulworth I thought that there would be plenty at Martin Down. However there seemed to be a dearth of them on my first visit there for this species a situation which didn't seem to change on subsequent visits either. They were about but in 10's rather than the 40 or more that I've grown used to. So I don't think they did well at this site. Could this be down to the turf level? Or was it because they emerged later and at a slower rate this year because of the cooler, damper weather?

However when I visited Stockbridge Down they were everywhere. Each dog turd had 7 or 8 males crawling over it. A female would flutter up from the grass and a mob of males would seem to emerge from the soil and submerge her under a mass of pale blues wings. I did vainly try to count them at one point but it just proved too hard so instead I sat in the sun on the springy turf and drank in the sight before me along with my coffee!



24 Adonis Blue 15-06 Woodhenge

Again another species of Blue which I felt had a hit and miss season this year. I struggled to find Adonis Blues at Martin Down as they didn't seem to be there in any great numbers for brood 1. Saying that however my first of the year was from Woodhenge, a tick for me at this site and there were more than a few at Lulworth. I also thought the males were particularly turquoise and metallic looking this year for first brood individuals. I remember last year that they were nowhere near as "bright" and in fact I seem to recall they were almost pastel blue? Perhaps this year with the cloudy, dull weather they needed to boost their brightness so as to get noticed more. The second brood were even harder to find with only one or two at Martin Down and none at Stockbridge. So overall not a vintage Adonis Blue year.



25 Holly Blue 24-03 Longdown Farm

Finally something positive! It felt to me that Holly Blues had a good year this year as I saw more in 2012 than in previous years, managing to get shots of my first definite male (open winged) and females from both early and late broods. Having seen my first at the end of March I then saw them at a range of sites including my garden, Martin Down and Shipton Bellinger. My favourite site however was along the river path into Salisbury. I was just strolling along with the girls and happened to look over the fence at a small, low growing Ivy bush and there was a summer brood female waving her wings at me in greeting. She then strolled around some of the bushes and once she had my attention started ovipositing. The whole thing happened about 6 inches away from me at eye level and was totally unexpected.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 01-Dec-12 12:15 AM GMT

Nice commentary again there, Wurzel, along with some excellent images.

I particularly like the very blue female Common Blue as well as the two cute looking Small Coppers.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 02-Dec-12 05:35 AM GMT

Cheers David 😊 It was quite depressing writing up my reflections for the "Blues" this year as it felt that so many of them had a badun 😞 It was moments like those two Small Coppers that stopped me sinking into a pit of depression 😊

I've been working with the "Enrichment" group at work and they've been messing around with digital cameras (which will be great next spring - I'll be being paid for getting butterfly shots 😊😎) with the hope of producing cards, posters and calendars so I had to have a go myself to "model" the process for them. With a month to go until 2013 and so I'm ready for releasing one a month here's the front cover...obviously not a patch on the official one which as many people as possible should order 😊



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 05-Dec-12 09:37 PM GMT

That's a great report you are doing there Wurzel and having just read the Blues section I have to say I largely agree with your findings. Small Coppers and Common Blues definitely down, on the previous year, whilst Chalkhills at Denbies ...an invasion of epic proportions would aptly describe their numbers 🤪. Sadly the same couldn't be said for Adonis, especially second generation, lower numbers than I can ever remember. I would also say that Brown Argus and Silver-studs were also slightly down over my neck of the woods (Surrey)

Great photos as ever I particularly like the bronze look of the female Silver-stud, something I've often seen but never been able to capture on camera anyway as good as that 🍷

Re: Wurzel

by essexbuzzard, 06-Dec-12 03:38 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I too have seen mostly blue Common Blue females this year, i wonder if this is a response to the cold weather this year? Blue females tend to dominate northern colonies, so could this explain their appearance in the south during poor springs and summers?

Just a thought.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 06-Dec-12 08:04 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid for your kind comments 😊 Looking forward to the session at the session at the weekend 😊

Cheers Essex 😊 You've got me wondering now about the reason for bluer females in cooler climates – something to look into... 😊

The “Aristocrats”

I know that this is an artificial grouping housing the Riodinidae and only some members of the Nymphalidae but due to their common names they seem to fit. Also this year review whilst enjoyable to do is very time consuming and if I included all of the Fritillaries and Browns in this as a single instalment I might not get any sleep for the next week or two.

26 Duke of Burgundy 06-05 Bentley Wood

I was slightly worried for this little butterfly when the gorgeous spring weather (those heady 2-3 weeks in March) gave way to the cold deluge but at the one site where I saw them they appeared in good numbers with sightings on 3 different occasions. On the first sighting there was one Duchess (is that the official term or is it just a female Duke?) and it posed a problem in sexing it. I've now learnt that the wings of the female are more rounded and lobed and it's taken a lot of looking through books and Apps but I can now start to see the difference in, typical though now I'll have to wait for 6 more months before I'm able to use this new knowledge, by which time I'll have forgotten it!

On my second visit there were two different individuals and then by the third there were at least 6 or 7. Doesn't sound particularly impressive but last year in the same area I saw a single Duke and I seem to recall sightings of singles only from the recording book the previous year. So to have a couple of these little beauties buzzing around your feet was a joy which I have difficulty in describing. What the Duke lacks in bright and lurid markings it makes up for with panache and charisma. Hopefully next year will be even better for them in my neck of the woods. I can't wait!



27 White Admiral 01-07 Bentley Wood

It's difficult for me to say how well I think White Admirals did this year. Personally I found more at Bentley Wood than I've ever seen with 5 or 6 on one visit so I'm inclined to feel that they had a good year because of this. On the other hand however I didn't see one at Garston Wood this year and when I visited Alice Straits the locals there were disappointed by their numbers. So overall I think they held their own but by virtue of doing well in some places but not as well in others. For me next year the main task in terms of White Admirals is to try and capture the classic closed wing shot. I tried this year with mixed results and whilst I got some shots I was happy with the classic field guide closed wing shot eluded me.





28 Purple Emperor 15-07 Straits Inclosure

For me this was a cracking year for Purple Emperor. After a couple of distant sightings and shots, observing some male posturing and bravado at Goose Green and not finding any at Alice Straits I tried my luck for the third year on the trot at Bentley Wood. I've written several times about the wondrous time I had on that day so to avoid reiterating here were a few highlights which may seem like an odd collection of memories...

Dog turd in a bag,
Cheering on urination,
Gathering round dead rabbits,
Bated breaths
The buzz of excited chatter
Stunning colours
Mesmerising.

I was washed away by the festival feel and only wished that I could have retired to a tent with a few beers ready for the same thing the next day! In all seriousness though they did seem to start later and last longer this year. On the one visit to Bentley we had at least three males come to the ground along with an Empress (again is that the correct term or is she a female Purple Emperor?) which is 4 times the number I've seen on previous years. What I feel was different this year was that we didn't have the strong winds that we've had the last couple of years. I remember someone telling me that they'll just grimly hang to the tree tops during really bad weather and the wind can rip them to shreds. Last year I remember some quite strong winds during just before or during their flight time but we didn't get those this year so could that account for, what seemed to me, improved numbers?





Incidentally my older daughter called me into the living room the other day while watching one of the Tinkerbell films to get me to tell her younger sister that she HAD seen the butterfly that was in the film and there was *Apatura iris*.

29 Red Admiral 16-02 Front Garden (last one so far 18-11- back garden)

It seemed to be a good year for Red Admirals with sightings spread over 10 months of the year! After the first in February things quietened down with only the odd sighting here and there. Then from mid July on their numbers started to pick up and I even managed unwittingly get a shot of one on my camping holiday with what could be eggs. But it was the tail end of the year that provided the wealth of Red Admirals. Local Ivy bushes and Buddleia were crawling with them. On the town walk the tiny Ivy there had seven on it along with a couple of whites and a Comma and even my garden homed 5 at one point! Interestingly they seemed to focus round one plant first before moving on mass to the next. So in my garden it was the Ivy arch by the greenhouse first, then the smaller bushes along the left hand fence, followed by the single plant on the right hand fence and then nectar all dried up they just basked. If there were other species they too would be on the same plant and it reminded me of the feeding behaviour of mixed Tit flocks during the winter. Finding food can be hard work so the last thing you want is to arrive to a tree that's been stripped bare of all edible materials. So if you join up with other birds/butterflies then you can keep an eye on where they're feeding and not waste effort trying the same patch which won't yield anything (it's a workable hypothesis at least 😊).

The milder and drier autumn certainly seemed to give the Red Admirals a bit more of a chance to feed up before their hibernation or return flight to the continent? I'm not really sure where they go so that's on my list of things to find out over the winter.





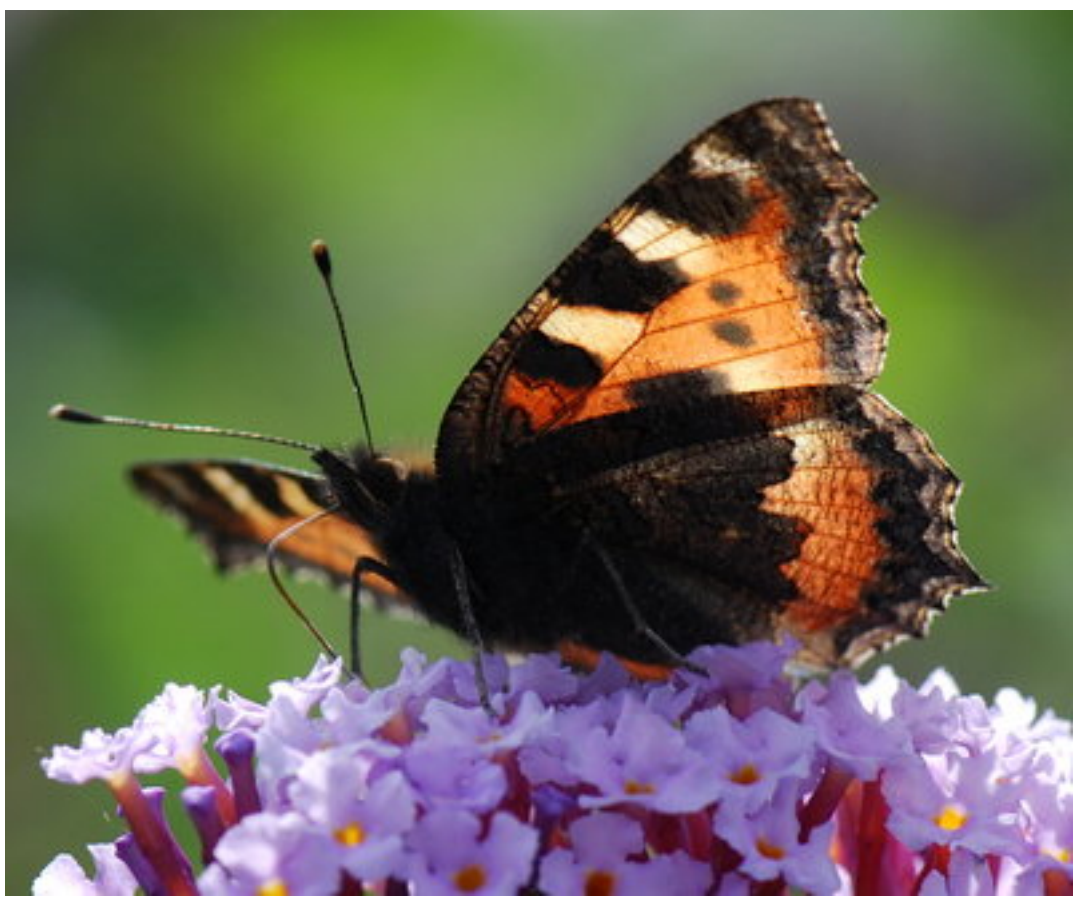
30 Painted Lady possible seen 17-08 Lodmoor - defo 26-08 Five Rivers

A couple of years back I remember seeing Painted Ladies all over the shop, then for the last couple of years including this year I've only managed to have a couple of sightings. However it seems pointless deliberating on how well they've done as the mass irruption years seem to be cyclic with a roughly 10 year period so we're only about a quarter of the way through. The odd thing is that on both occasions that I saw them this year I set out with a feeling that I'd see them. Usually on the journey I think ahead to which species I might see so as to prepare myself for what to look out for. My first sighting could have been from Lodmoor as something that was a bit like a reversed Red Admiral, orangey but too light to be a Comma, bombed up the path. Unfortunately it didn't stop and it was gone before I got a chance to confirm its identity. On the second occasion I planned to go straight to the large Buddleia bush at Five Rivers for Red Admirals, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and possibly a Painted Lady. Once at the site there indeed were a few Red Admirals, two Small Tortoiseshells, a Peacock and my first definite Painted Lady of the year. What was more pleasing was that I was able to get some shots of the closed wing which was a first for me. My second definite was from just up the road at Old Sarum and was slightly darker than the individuals that I'm used to. I also noticed this year that some have blue "eyes" in the circles along the margin of the hind wing; that's what 's great about observing wildlife, there's always something new.



31 Small Tortoiseshell 21-03 Pewsey

This is another of those once common species that seems to be on a decline. There were very low numbers first brood this year and happily those numbers picked up when the second brood arrived. I felt that this was probably because during the cooler, wetter spring they focused on getting by and breeding and so were less obvious to us butterflies. They had work to do and so got on with it under difficult circumstances and they did alright at that if the higher second brood numbers were anything to go by. Still even with an increase they didn't get to the numbers that I remember seeing as a kid. Even with the second brood they were outnumbered 2 or 3 to one by Red Admirals. It is often said about common butterflies that "if they were rarer then we'd appreciate their stunning colours/markings more". Hopefully that won't be true for Small Tortoiseshells, I don't need for them to become rarer to appreciate them, and I hope that they don't.



32 Peacock 28-03 Someone's garden!

My first of the year was photographed in one of my neighbours front gardens. I had to do a run to the shops and took my camera with me just in case and there it was. I do find it ironic that the first butterflies that we see in the season are actually the last from the previous and they look slightly under dressed and shabby compared to the new growth that they are feeding on. Peacocks always seem to me to be an ideal indicator species because they are large and striking and so therefore easy to identify and count. This year I saw them in the same places and in the same numbers as last year so I feel that they held their own.





33 Comma 25-03 Five Rivers

Commas seemed to do really well this year with sightings from pretty much everywhere that I went. My garden produced up to 3 at any one time and wherever there was a Buddleia a Comma would soon appear. Because of this I went through a time when I didn't pay them much attention, "oh look another Comma" and I think that in the end I almost stopped noticing them. I did notice that I rarely saw them in groups and the majority of my sightings were of singles so a bit of a loner the old Comma. Then during the autumn they were on hand to cheer me up once the majority of other species had disappeared and to offer a bit more variety from the ubiquitous Red Admirals. I sometimes feel sorry for the Comma as it's almost the poor relation of the group as it's not the largest, the brightest, the smallest or the rarest but what it lacks in these respects it makes up for in reliability - it won't let you.





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Mark Colvin, 06-Dec-12 04:13 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

Another great report.

"Wurzel" wrote:

On the first sighting there was one Duchess (is that the official term or is it just a female Duke?) and it posed a problem in sexing it. I've now learnt that the wings of the female are more rounded and lobed and it's taken a lot of looking through books and Apps but I can now start to see the difference in, typical though now I'll have to wait for 6 more months before I'm able to use this new knowledge, by which time I'll have forgotten it!

Duchess is good by me ...

As with many words in the English dictionary, if they are used frequently enough they become accepted.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 10-Dec-12 06:24 AM GMT

Cheers Mark 😊 From now on I'll use Duchess and Empress – if I can identify them that is 😊

About a week ago I took all of year 7 to Bristol Zoo so that they could consolidate work on Classification. It was freezing cold and threatening to rain so I spent most of my time in the Butterfly House. Wisley Gardens it is not but there is some variety there. However before I get to the butterflies I thought that I ought to at least get the shots that I took of some vertebrates out of the way. I know that I shouldn't be taken in by the "hype" and that others have differing views to myself on Zoos but I do think that Bristol is one of the better ones, at least its trying.



Inca Tern



Ring-tailed Lemur



Lowland Gorilla



Gibbon



Chameleon



Poison Arrow Frogs

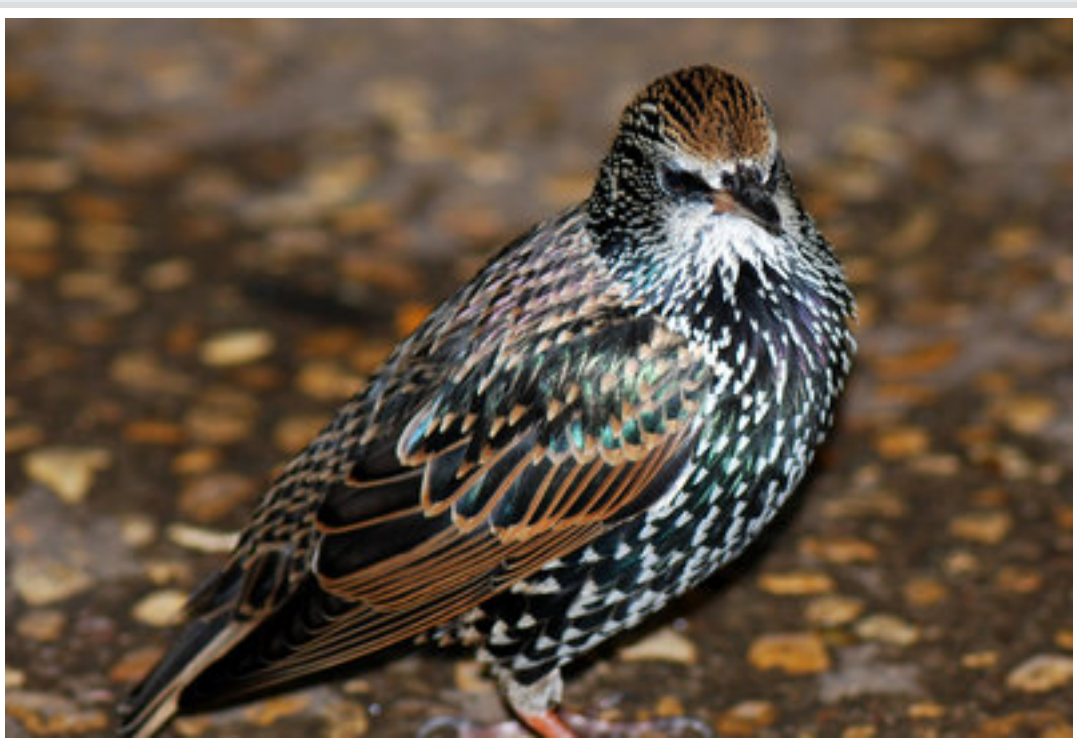


Dwarf Crocodile



Something for the birders...

The next couple of shots weren't of an exhibit but it's so attractive it might well have been. 😊



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by MikeOxon, 10-Dec-12 06:44 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

it's taken a lot of looking through books and Apps but I can now start to see the difference

The most obvious (and memorable) difference is that the females are leggier 🙄 'Duchesses' have 6 walking legs whereas Dukes have only four. Interestingly, in your first photo, she seems to have her front legs raised and is only standing on the back four.

Mike

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 13-Dec-12 07:09 AM GMT

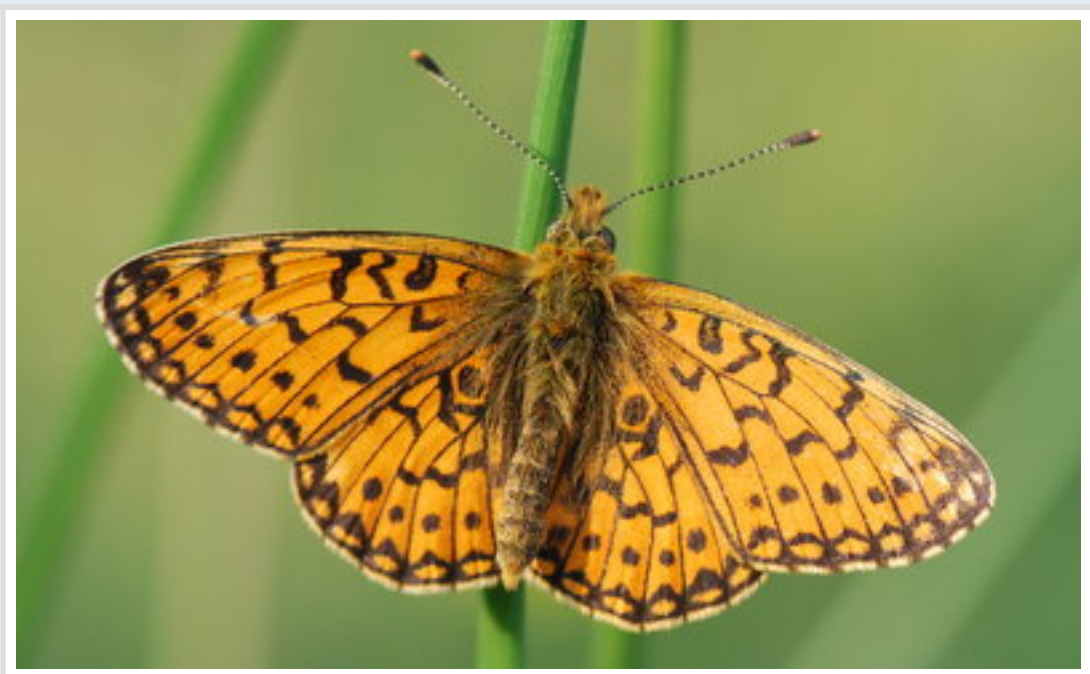
Cheers Mike 😊 I tried using the number of legs last time but she craftily hid the front 2 along the second pair so it looked like she had only two pairs which in book isn't playing fair! 😂

Fritillaries

34 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary 26-05 Bentley Wood

Having seen Pearls in the Eastern clearing at Bentley I waited a few weeks before checking there again for Small Pearls. So when I thought it would be about the right time to find them I took an evening visit to Bentley. The Eastern Clearing was bathed in the evening sun and despite hearing Nightjars and seeing a Slow Worm, Pearls, a Comma and a Duchess there were no Small Pearls like I was hoping for. A few days later in the same place and there were Small Pearls in abundance and that's one of the wonderful things about butterflies, the fact that just a few days wait can see huge differences in numbers and diversity of species! They were easier to differentiate from the Pearls this year than I remembered as they were much brighter and also much livelier, flitting forward and back across the clearing from one nectar source to another. The remaining Pearls, worn and faded, reminded me of old men sitting one on a park bench moaning about the "youth of today, always rushing here and there!"

When the Small Pearls occasionally did stop I tried to get some of the classic closed wing shots reminiscent of identification guides. I noticed that they appeared much more orange and brown this year. Over the two previous years they've seemed to have much more contrasting blocks of colour on the underside of their wings with some seeming almost red. Perhaps this was just down to the lighting as on previous years it's been slightly duller? Despite emerging later than last year I feel that they had a good year as they were certainly easier to find and photograph this year compared with the last. I think that they held off their emergence which then coincided with the second short spell of good weather and they were around in good numbers. So all in all a good year for the Small Pearls, though I suppose the proof of this will come next May...





35 Pearl-bordered Fritillary 06-05 Bentley Wood

They seemed to be a few weeks later this year than last in this neck of the woods and that was also a fair bit later than a lot of other sites. In fact I made a visit to Bentley at roughly the same time as last year and saw a single solitary Speckled Wood and that was it for butterflies!

Once they arrived though they seemed to do well at Bentley Wood and I saw them on the next few trips in reasonable numbers, if not more than in previous years as I restricted my search to the Eastern clearing and one other area. The best time was the first time I saw them this year as they were really fresh and in mint condition. Having wandered around the Eastern clearing in the cold and damp we hadn't seen anything and had resorted to trying to find moths to photograph! Luckily RobS had carried on looking and a shout brought us to a mini emergence event of our very own. We scanned around the area of brush and dead wood looking for the gorgeous orange beauties and keeping score like a football match. I think Rob won 3-2 in extra time in the end so I'm looking forward to a rematch next season.



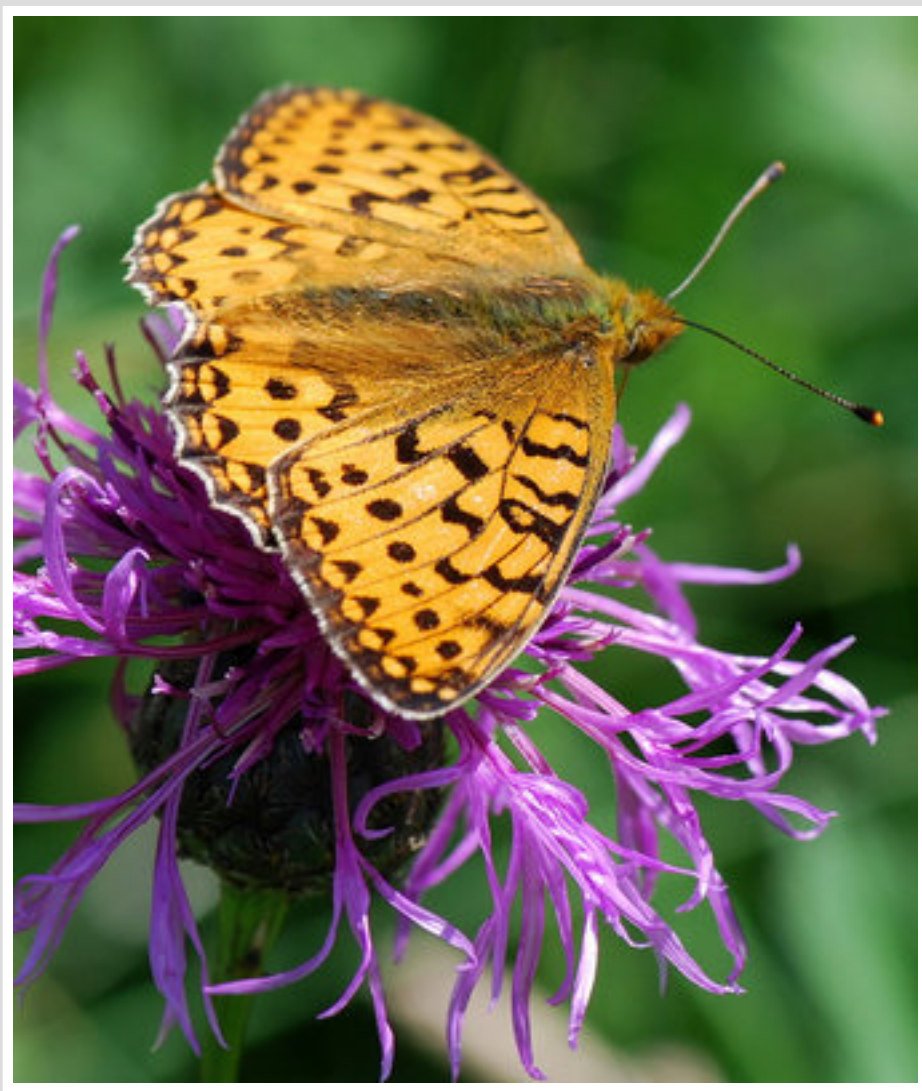
36 Dark Green Fritillary 08-07 Bentley Wood

It was difficult for me to say how well they did this year but I would hazard a guess that they probably did on a par with last year at the least and possibly slightly better. The difficulty in judging their numbers was that unlike last year they didn't seem to emerge all at once. Instead they emerged

much more gradually so when I visited Martin Down expecting them to be everywhere there were only 20 or more not the hundreds or so I was expecting. Whether this was due to the fact that the Knapweed didn't seem to be out in force I'm not sure? Also due to the indifferent weather I didn't get out as early looking for them as I did last year although I do recall reading in the sightings book at Bentley that two were seen at about the same time as last year.

On that my visit to Martin Down I was lucky enough to find three arguing over a dog turd. Eventually two of them bullied the third away and then they settled down to take minerals. This gave me an excellent opportunity to get up really close to them. When I looked back over the photos later I thought that one of them had been savaged and lost part of its abdomen but on closer examination it was holding it up between its closed wings so forming a v shape with its thorax. This is a posture I've not seen before and I'm used to see the side view of the abdomen below the wings.

Despite not seeing as many as I'd hoped for on my first visit to Martin Down I did chance upon them on the cliffs at Lulworth later in the month which was a new site for me. I also saw plenty five weeks after my first sighting back at Martin Down so it seemed that they emerged over a longer period of time hence my earlier estimation of how well they did.



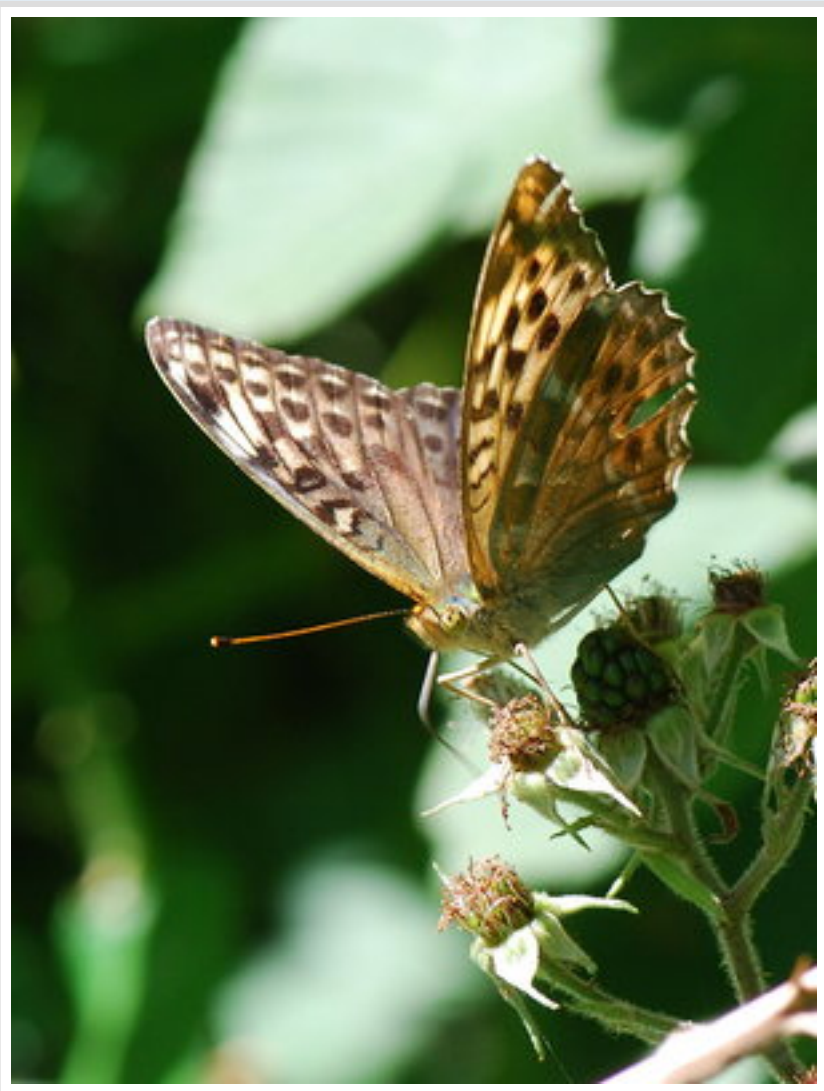


37 Silver-washed Fritillary 30-06 Bentley Wood

Again as with pretty much all the Fritillaries it seems this year “rain stopped play” and they emerged later than expected. Yet when they did they seemed to be bursting to get going. So much so that I made early morning visits to Bentley in the hope that they would be more sloth like while they were solar charging. It certainly paid off as I managed to find them basking on Bracken, their ginger colour not camouflaging them for an instant. When the females emerged a few weeks after the males I was able to see and photograph a Valezina for the third year running. These really are stunning butterflies sometimes appearing coppery with other times the purple blue showing more prominently.

In terms of numbers it felt like they held their own this year maintaining their numbers. One of my favourite times seeing them was at Alice Straits as they seemed to be everywhere. At one point we found a pair mating and they were clinging to someone’s chest! Once they separated the male shot through presumably to find another female leaving the recently impregnated female to her own devices. She took a tour around us before settling on my daughter’s hat. She was so settled we even managed to transfer the hat from the head of my daughter to the head of Philzoids daughter without disturbing her. Eventually the female seemed to recover and took off. Which got me wondering – how quickly after fertilization are females ready to lay eggs?





38 Marsh Fritillary 26-05 Wiltshire Wood

I tried a Wiltshire Wood for Marsh Fritillary this year instead of Hod Hill and from the two visits I made things looked dire for this species. My first was almost a whole month later than last year (and those from 2011 were a few weeks later than the firsts of the year), a single on a glorious sunny day (yep we actually had a few of those though it didn't feel like it). It was a striking sight with the red/orange squares really showing well as it landed after one

of its jinking flights.

On my second visit I again only saw one individual. This time I made an evening visit and the light was fantastic. When the sun was out it appeared brown and then when the sun dipped behind a cloud it turned black. Another advantage of visiting in the evening was that in the cooling air it was less active so I was able to get up to within a few inches of it while it was feeding from Tormentil (at least that's what I think it is?) and I wasn't too impressed by its table manners!

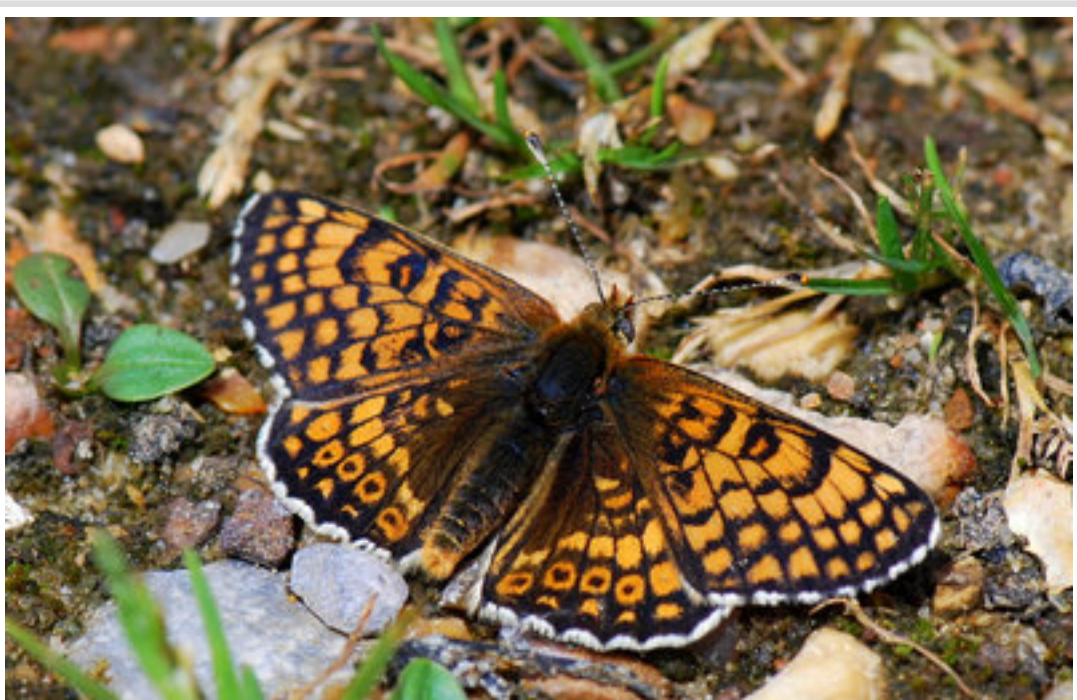
Whilst I only saw singles from my site I have to bear in mind that they have never been in great numbers here anyway. Also reports from other areas of the county were good. So overall things seemed okay for the species – just dire for the one particular site that I visited, with only singles perhaps that will be it for the Wiltshire Wood?

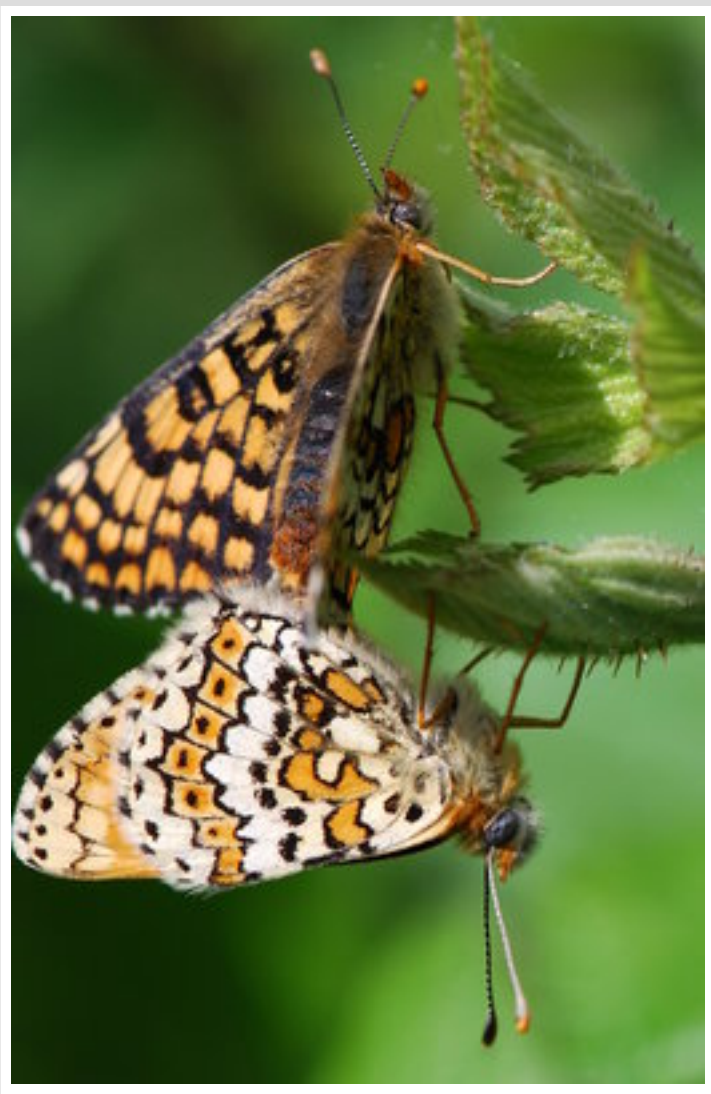


39 Glanville Fritillary 09-06 Wrecclesham

I didn't check out my mainland site this year in order to not put undue pressure on it in terms of trampling and also so I didn't let slip where it was. Instead I visited Wrecclesham for the first time which means that it's difficult for me to judge how well they've done this year in real terms as this is an "artificial" population which was first released 10 years ago. Speaking to people that had visited the site before all said that they felt the numbers were down here on last year. So if this is the case what could have caused the decline? It could be that perhaps not as many were released this year to "top" the numbers up, perhaps the bad weather kept the breeder indoors when he could have been planting Glanvilles instead? Perhaps the population is actually stabilizing and these are minor fluctuations while it reaches the correct sustainable level? Possibly the isolation has led to an accumulation of damaging genes in the gene pool or could it be that the population has lasted for as long as it could have lasted? I'm not sure which could be the correct reason(s) for their apparent drop in numbers at this site. Hopefully it was just a blip due to the weather and next year they will be back in full force as I really enjoyed them. I know that perhaps some view this as "cheating" but I am of the opinion that they are a boon to the natural populations on the Isle of Wight. Why go to all of the trouble, expense and why produce all that excess CO2 to travel to the Isle of Wight to try and find Glanvilles, then stomp around their delicate habitat and still not possibly see them when you can travel a shorter distance, walk around a waste land and photograph buckets of them?

My single trip this year produced mating pairs, top shots, under wing shots as well as an aberrant. Probably my favourite Fritillary, though I have yet to see Heaths?!





Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 17-Dec-12 06:51 AM GMT

(Taken at Bristol Zoo and researched using the first couple of websites that came up on google)

Half of what I say is meaningless
But I say it just to reach you
Julia

This is a member of the Nymphalidae family in the sub family Heliconiinae and is the only member of its genus with 15 subspecies. It was named in 1775 by Fabricus as *Dryas iulia* and has the common names of Julia or the Flame among many others. The female does appear slightly duller with more black on the wings and in this feature it can be highly variable.

Its normal range extends from Brazil north to Florida and Texas and in good years it may reach as far north as Nebraska. It was thought to be toxic to birds but as it doesn't feed on pollen but on nectar this isn't the case and so it has a relatively short life expectancy of several weeks in the wild. It can be found in deciduous woodlands but prefers the clearings and more open areas on the edges. When feeding it demonstrates behaviour called "trap-lining". This is where it flies along a set route of nectar sources each day. This might be useful if it displays the same behaviour in captivity as you could just sit and wait along the route for it to come to you. It is popular in captivity as without predation it is long lived as well as flying during the day and is spectacular in appearance.





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

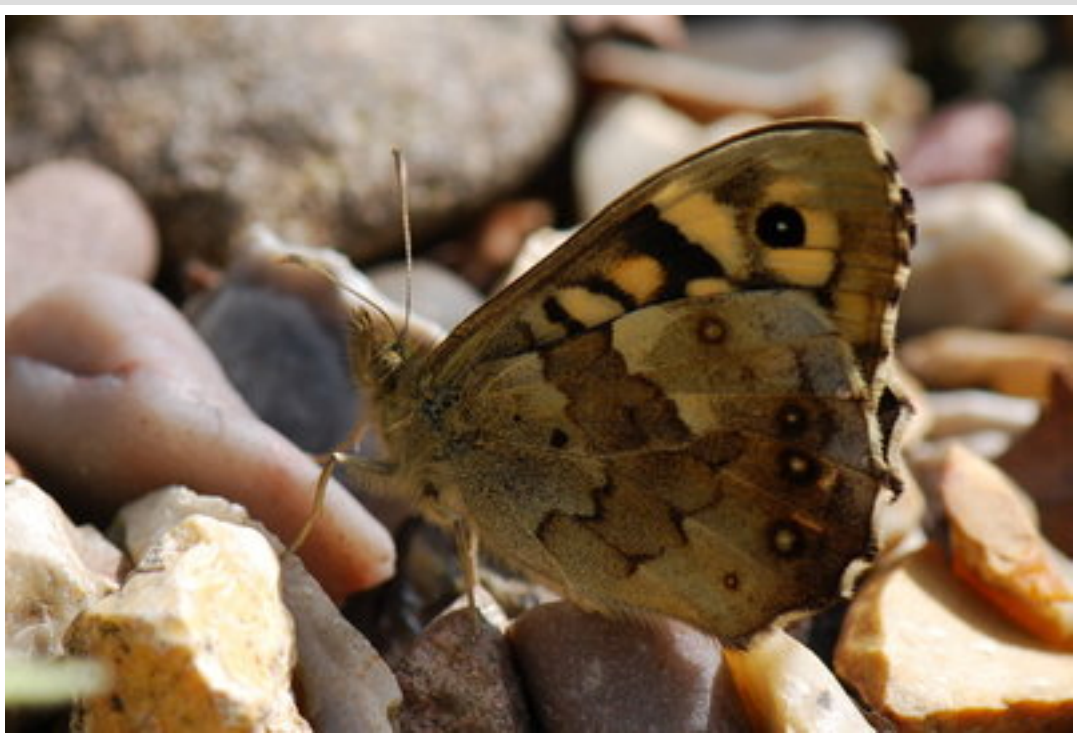
by Wurzel, 20-Dec-12 07:32 AM GMT

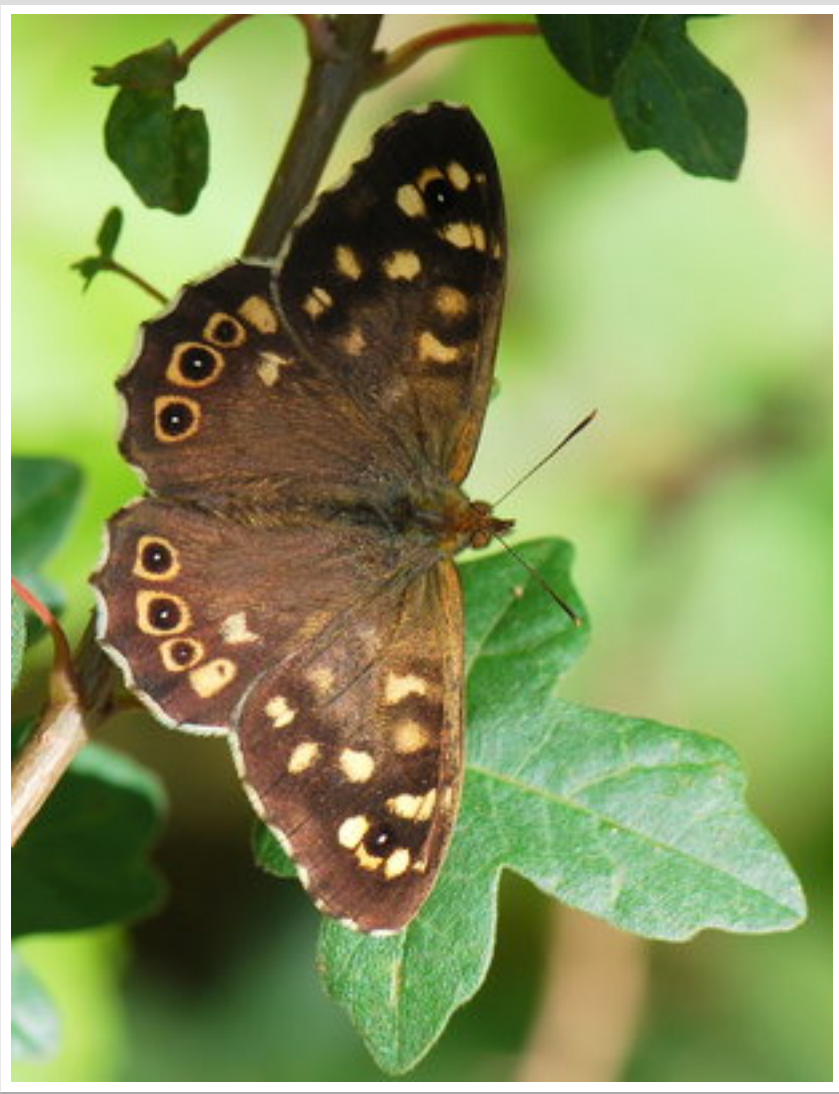
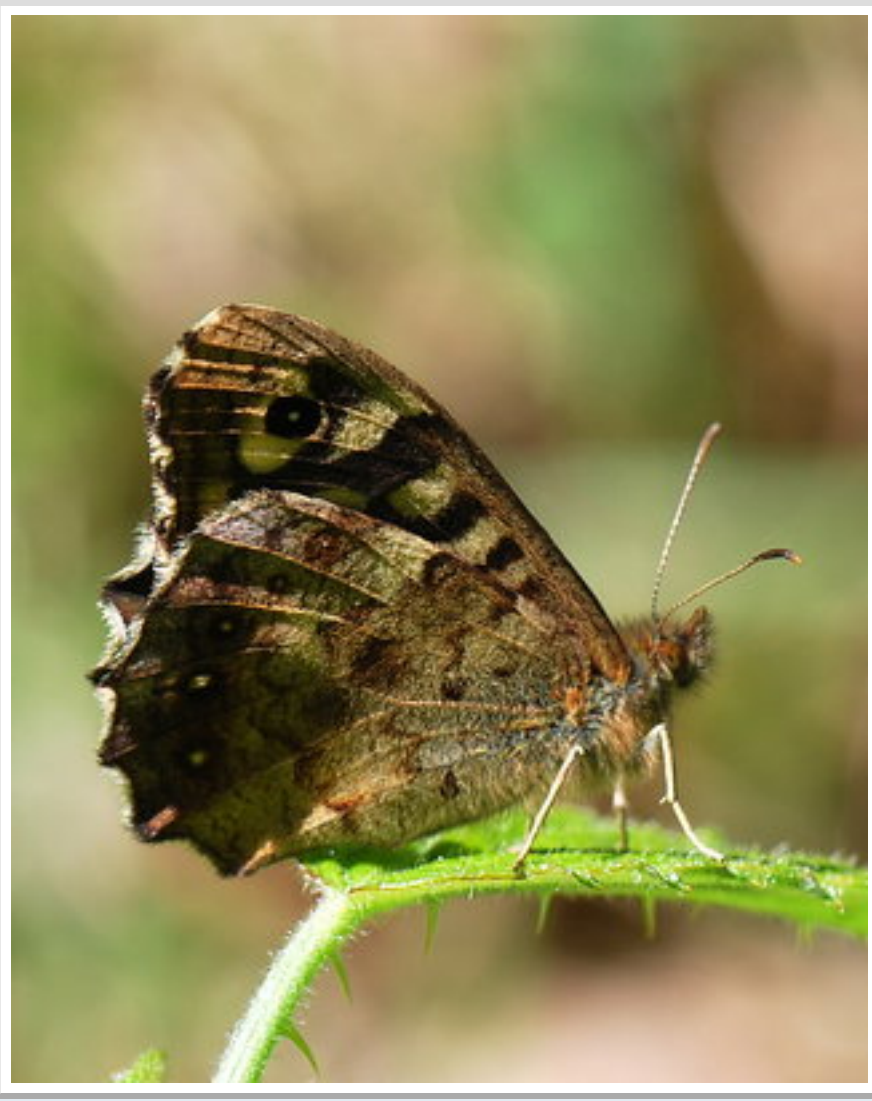
Browns

I often feel sorry for the Browns because, despite a few notable exceptions (Marbled Whites and the rarer species), I often seem to overlook them due to their ubiquity. Other reasons for my ignoring them is because I've gone somewhere expecting to see a particular species and so the fact that there are browns around merely serves as a distraction or as having taken an age to line up a cracking shot of something else a Brown will appear and spook it! This year was shaping up to be the same but by developing my Gatekeeper obsession and with my new lens allowing me to get closer than previously I developed a new respect and appreciation for these butterflies, as Confucius said "Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it".

40 Specked Wood 30-03 Pewsey

I remember reading on the forums that people were worried about the number of Speckies this year. However for me I think it may have been that the first brood weren't as noticeable as the subsequent broods. At first I only saw a few and they weren't in great numbers but once we started to get some of the slightly better weather towards the end of the summer they seemed to be around in very good numbers. Could it just have been that the first brood were under recorded as people didn't fancy venturing out in the appalling weather that we were having? I certainly wasn't sharing the concerns that others felt as I was seeing at least a couple of Speckies at every site I visited. On one visit to Garston Wood, just before the sudden influx of Red Admirals, it was the only butterfly that I saw all afternoon and I saw and counted 6 individuals so there were probably a lot more around. So in this neck of the woods at least they seem to have held their own.





41 Wall 16-05 SPTA

I remember when these were considered pretty common butterflies and I could easily see them flying around my Granny's back garden. Now I struggle to find them. A couple of years ago one just happened to land in my lap (not literally, just figuratively) while on a camping holiday and last year I hiked all around Pennington Marsh until I managed to track a solitary female. So in terms of numbers they've seem to have done the same this year as the last two years - with only a single sighting! What has caused this dearth of Wall Browns? I think I need to find a good site for them (Long Knoyle rings a bell?) before I attempt to make anything but an historical comparison of their numbers.

The single I found this year was another total fluke perhaps if I went looking for them they'd be everywhere? I was stopping off on my way home from work as I'd seen a likely looking haunt for Green Hairstreaks on the SPTA. While I was walking back down the dusty tank tracks something caught my eye, a totally unexpected Wall Brown, which then led me a merry dance back and forth across the path settling only long enough for the occasional grab shot.



42 Marbled White 27-06 Old Sarum

I feel that the Marbled Whites did pretty good this year. I saw them in good numbers at the usual sites and roughly at around the same time although there did seem to be slightly fewer of them at Five Rivers than I recall from last year. However at Woodhenge they were probably more numerous. I took to stopping off on the way to work instead of on the way home this year for three reasons. Number one (and most important) was because then I got less hassle from my wife, number two was because the butterflies were easier to approach having not warmed up sufficiently and reason number three was that it allowed me to stick to my motto of "don't race to work, race to get home". There were one or two draw backs like trying to explain why your trousers were saturated with dew from the knees down but on the whole I was happier with the shots from the morning than from the afternoon shots when the butterflies could be fully solar charged and so pretty active.





43 Grayling 03-08 Godshill

A good year for Grayling? It was difficult for me to tell as I've only seen them at one particular site so I guess this is another species which I need to try and locate at a few other sites. However I think that if they did as well at others sites as they did at Godshill then they had a great year. At first I thought I wasn't going to have any luck with them as I took an evening visit and saw only one Grayling the whole time I was there. Two days later I was back at the same place, this time in the morning and there were plenty. The first of the day was so battered that its upper wings were visible, then there was my favourite which seemed to sense how I wanted it to pose. Once I got to the "triangle" at the bottom of the hill they were everywhere it seemed and at every couple of steps there would be a Grayling. Again I was struck with how variable they can be with some almost white right through the greys and browns to others that appear almost black.





44 Hedge Brown/Gatekeeper 15-07 Straits Inclosure

At first I was worried as they weren't that easy to see but as soon as I'd seen my first at Straits Inclosure they seemed to be everywhere. What was strange was that having spent the day with patrolling Silver Washed Fritillaries, seen Purple Emperors holding their territory and finally got the closest I've got to the classic White Admiral under wing shot the final butterfly shot of the day was of a "lowly" Hedge Brown and it was the most exciting butterfly of the day for me!

My obsession with Gatekeepers returned refreshed and reinvigorated this year, most probably because of the timing of my camping trip back to Dorset. Whilst the girls were enjoying just being on the campsite I had a few lines of line grass and a single hedge to check for butterflies. However this small area produced Red Admiral (with eggs), Peacock, Large and Small Whites, Meadow Browns, a single Smessex Skipper, Comma and plenty of Hedge Browns. So I settled down to try and photo as many of the individuals as I could with special attention being paid to the Hedge Browns.

Once back home they were at almost all of the sites I visited from Martin Down to Godshill, Five Rivers to Shipton Bellinger. I even had three in my garden at one time, which is a bit of a record and three times the usual amount to see at any one time. So over all I feel that Hedge Browns had a good year despite the slow start.



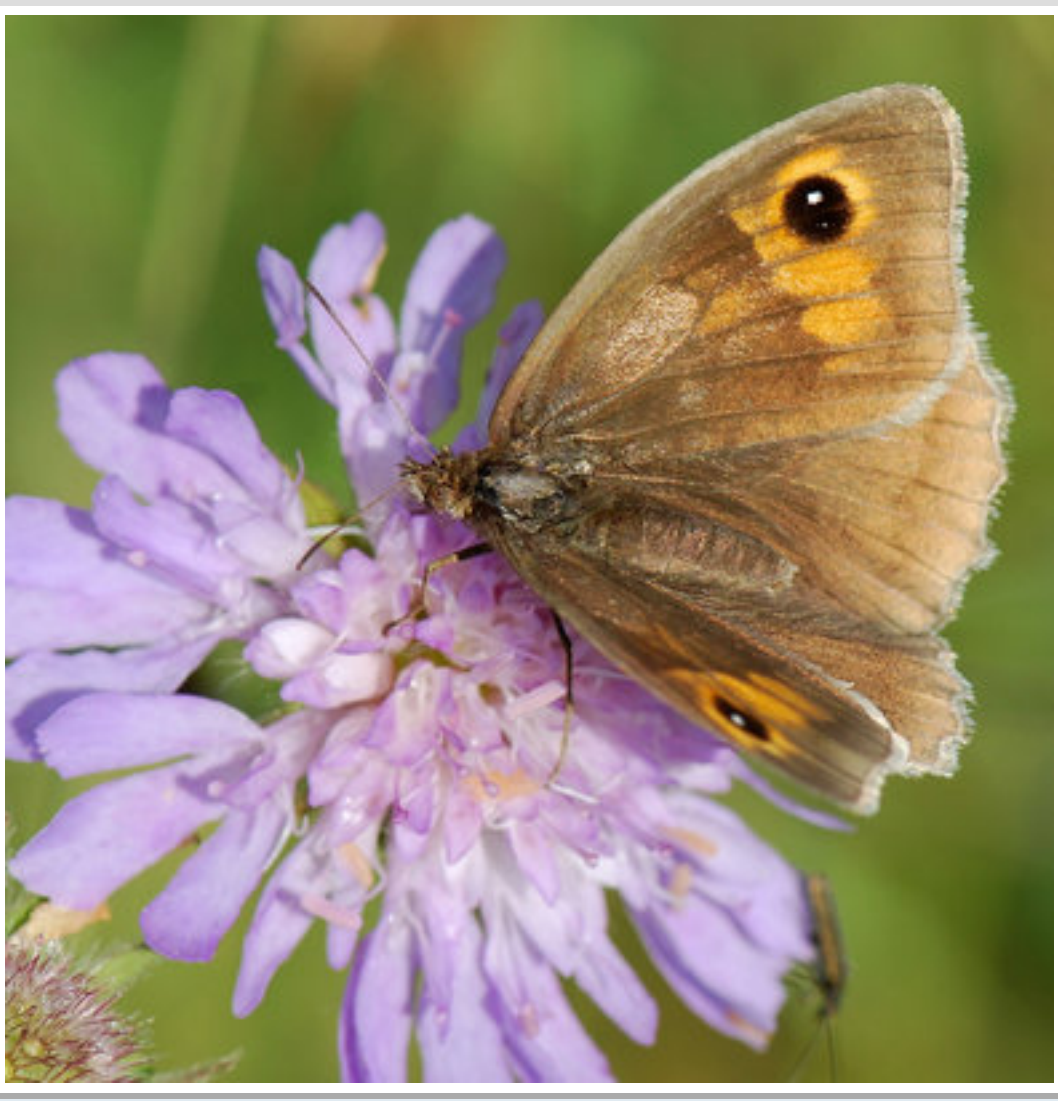


45 Meadow Brown 13-06 Five Rivers

These were a good fortnight later than last year and they certainly seemed to take a while to build up to their usual high numbers but they got there in the end. So not too bad a year really for Meadow Browns with them still in reasonable numbers but perhaps not as many as usual? Having really started to take a bit more notice of these "common" butterflies I noticed three things in particular about this species this year. First was the glorious petrol like sheen on their fore wings when the light strikes them just so. It's just a Brown butterfly one minute and the next instant it's a technicolour marvel and this really highlights the dark band of scent scales on the males. The second thing I noticed was how variable the females can be in terms of the orange on their hind wings. All the books have the females with drab, monotone brown hind wings whereas I found some with orange blocks that took almost all of the hind wings. Finally sticking with the females, I noticed the golden wing scales on their forewings that looked absolutely stunning when they caught the sun.

So a couple of things to look out for again next year, I wonder what else I'll notice?

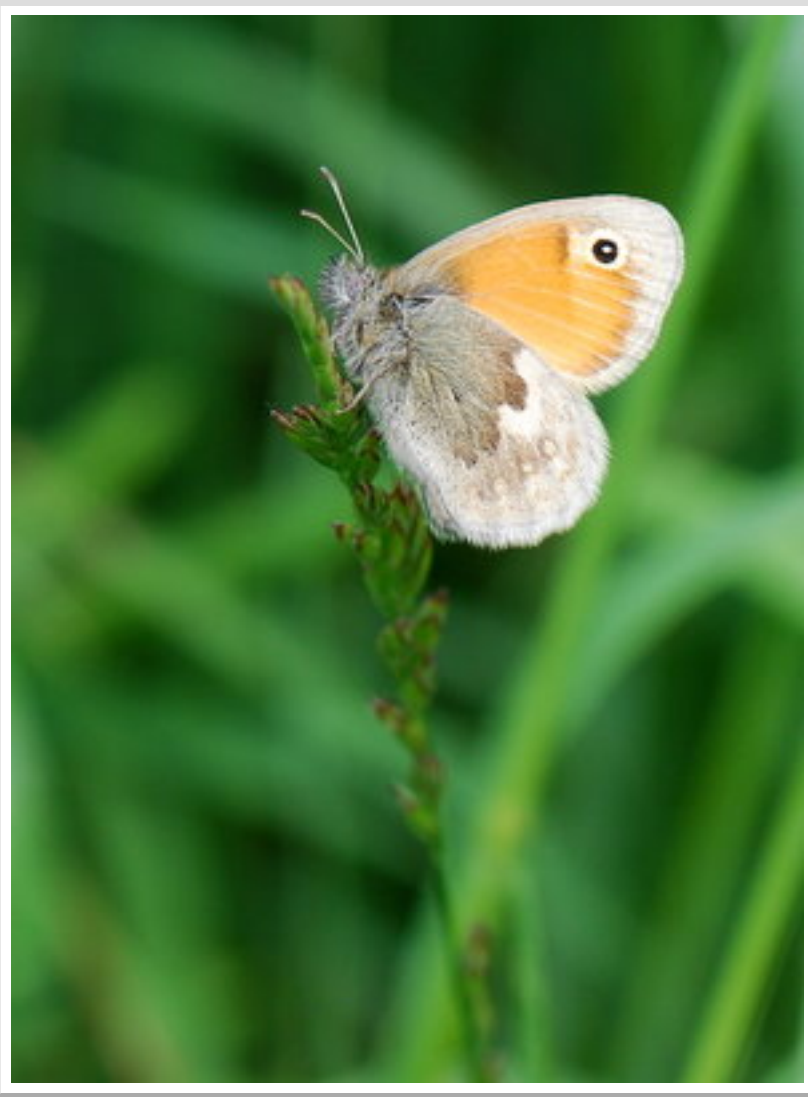




46 Small Heath 19-05 Middleton Down

I don't know why but despite them flying up whenever and wherever you put your feet down I have a gut feeling that they weren't quite as abundant as last year. I can recall seeing them everywhere I'm just not sure that I was seeing them in the same numbers? I certainly didn't see as many at Five Rivers this year as I usually do but on the other hand there were about the same at Martin Down as previous years. Nope I really can't call this one. The problem is that I got so used to them being around over the last couple of years that at times I've stopped noticing them. For other species like the Blues or Fritillaries which are more obvious or which you're used to seeing at particular sites and not expecting many of it's easier to go with a general feel. You're dealing with the difference between 20 and 30 say, but with species like the Small Heath it could be in the hundreds so a difference of 10 isn't going to be that apparent apart from a nagging feeling that something isn't quite right. I could and indeed hope my gut is wrong but the proof will become apparent next season.





47 Ringlet 27-06 Old Sarum

These seemed to emerge at around about the same time as last year and they seemed to be in very good numbers. In fact at times they seemed like the most common butterfly species and they almost replaced Meadow Brown as the “spookiest” butterfly. By this I mean that it spooked the other butterflies I was trying to get shots of the most times. I’d just be lining up for the shot and a Ringlet enters from stage left, and in a fraction of a second there is no shot *\$@#!

Was it a good year for Ringlet because they got their timing right? Were the few weeks of sun in March followed by the rain conducive for their larval food plants? They certainly seemed to have a cracking year with sightings across most sites throughout their flight period. One individual really stood out but was a right pain to capture on film as it were. The spots were very heavily “eyed” I’m just gutted that I didn’t get a better shot as unfortunately it was a warm afternoon and it was very active and intent on feeding.





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Philzoid, 21-Dec-12 04:00 AM GMT

Great review on the Browns Wurzel. 😊

Have to agree with your findings overall. Specklies:- no problem with numbers this year, but Gatekeepers were down in the sense you described for the Small Heath. I saw hardly any 'False Hairstreaks' during my quests for Brown Hairstreak at Bookham this August 😊. I missed their distracting presence, something to keep the interest up whilst waiting for a Brostreak to put in an appearance. Elsewhere too, they didn't seem to be as abundant as they were in 2011.

Meadow Browns were the opposite, can't ever remember seeing so many with best numbers in August and September

Re: Wurzel

by Neil Freeman, 21-Dec-12 05:17 AM GMT

Another cracking report Wurzel and some interesting observations 😊

I too had no problem with seeing Speckled Woods with 4 or 5 separate individuals in my garden at once on a few occasions plus reliably showing up at most local spots.

Gatekeepers were down a bit in numbers around by me but Meadow Browns were everywhere in massive numbers, as were Ringlets during their shorter flight period.

I agree that Small Heath seemed to be down, popping up in most places but nowhere near as many as last year.

I only saw Wall Brown and Grayling during my week in Dorset, Grayling especially seemed to be doing well.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 21-Dec-12 05:55 AM GMT

This has been a most enjoyable out of season commentary, Wurzel.

Now that you've 'nailed' Gatekeepers and Green Hairstreaks, I wonder which species are going to become your targets for 2013?

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 24-Dec-12 06:35 AM GMT

Cheers Philzoid for your kind comments 😊 – it's interesting to see how some do better in different areas than others.

Cheers Neil 😊 If my planned house buy goes ahead (never count your chickens before you've exchanged contracts) I'm going to have to do without a garden next year 😞😞 How will I find my Speckies so easily then?

Cheers David 😊 "Now that you've 'nailed' Gatekeepers and Green Hairstreaks, I wonder which species are going to become your targets for 2013?" It's like you've read my mind David – I'm intending to fill up on food and wine and then settle down to some reflection on 2012 and forward planning for 2013 with a bottle of Port or Jack! 😊 I'll keep you posted with what I come up with 😊

The Clipper, *Parthenos sylvia* (Cramer, 1776)

This is a Nymphalid with 2 other species in genus and the species itself has about 30 different subspecies which are all found in South and South East Asia. The different sub-species represent a "cline" which is a gradual change in a phenotypic character or feature across the range of a species or population. The phenotypic change is the colour of the wings and ranges from Green (India) to Blue (Malaysia) through to Brown (Philippines). Despite these changes it doesn't show sexual dimorphism with the female looking very similar to the male just being larger in size.

It is a tropical forest dwelling species which favours tree lined rivers. It beats its wings between the horizontal and just below which gives it a very fast flight which it also alternates with short glides. It regularly lands from its strong flights when it swoops to the ground to drink before returning to its original perch. If disturbed while drinking it has been observed to fly up to about 3 metres before resettling back on the deck – something worth remembering when trying to get photographs in a busy butterfly house!





Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 27-Dec-12 07:35 AM GMT

My 2012...

With the Christmas spirit almost completely drunk and my species review completed I thought that now would be as good a time as any to complete my review of 2012.

First up the lows... 😞

As for most butterfly enthusiasts 2012 will be remembered negatively for two things in particular. The first I've mentioned time and again in my review of the butterfly groups - and that was the low numbers of most species. It felt like few species did well in 2012, with some holding their own and a lot did badly, the Blues in particular along with Small Heath, some of the Whites and Purple Hairstreak (this last one is a personal feeling).

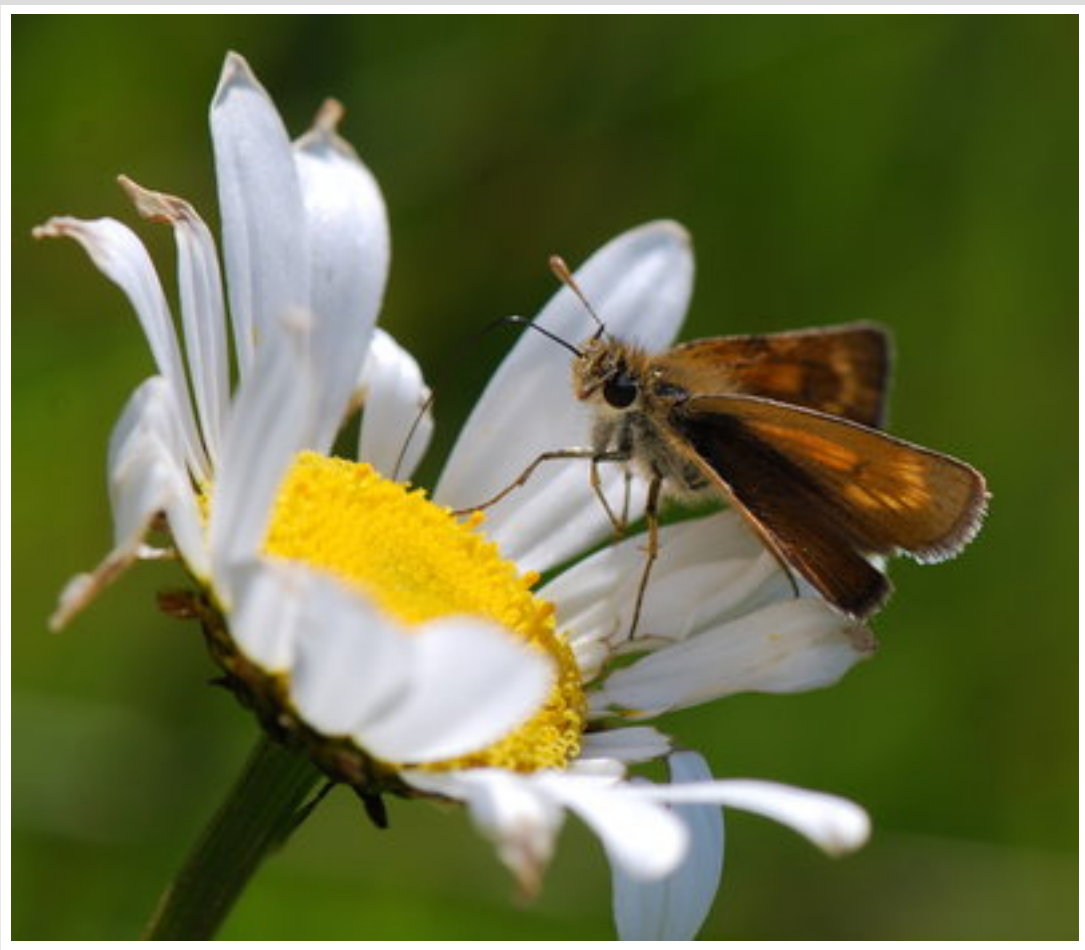
The second "thing in particular" was the weather. It was terrible and still is. We had a heat wave at the end of March which lulled us all into a sense of false optimism and raised our expectations to great heights from which the fall was severely bruising! There were one or two periods of reasonable weather and it felt like the butterflies knew something that we didn't as they seemed to cram all their activities into these brief respite windows.

From a personal perspective and apart from those already mentioned I had only a few "lows". I was disappointed to miss out on the Large Blues at Collard as I just didn't find a window of time what with work, family and making trips for other species to try for this species for the first time. I was gutted to have missed out on the Monarch but again I couldn't find an opportunity to get down to Portland plus I'd used all of my brownie points!

However the biggest low for me was the immense amount of time and effort that I vainly put into to trying to find Green Hairstreaks! 😡😞😞

Enough maudlin on with the Highs! 😊

And for such a poor year there were actually many, many highs! In terms of lifers my "high" was Lulworth Skipper. I still can't work out why I didn't try for this species before as with it lasting until into August there are plenty of opportunities to try and get photographs of it. Enjoying the natural spectacle of Lulworth Cove and its skippers with the machine gun fire and RPG's for accompaniment has got to be one of my abiding memories of 2012.



The best trip was to Wrecclesham and Botany Bay with Philzoid and our daughters where not only did we find plenty of Glannies, as well as enjoying excellent company but an afternoon jaunt to Botany saw me get my first ever Wood Whites. The small triangular clearing was an amazing place with Orange Moth, Longicornis bees, three species of Skipper and the ethereal Wood Whites loosely flapping in the breeze. A brilliant day and site!





Every year I look through the forums enviously at the one that got away – and for the previous two years that was the Purple Emperor – seen both years but not photographed! 😡 Well 2012 was an improvement high as finally His Nibbs graced me with his presence. He must have had word with Her Grace as well as not only did I manage to photograph three different males but also an Empress! 😲 😎



Perhaps my personal favourite moment was the evening when I discovered two Grizzlies on my local patch. I wasn't expecting much, if anything to be honest, so to suddenly find two roosting Grizzlies on my local patch where they haven't been recorded was just fantastic!



Targets...
All of the reminiscing and reflection on 2012 has left me itching to get out and get butterflying again but unfortunately the best I can do is start to think ahead and lay the groundwork for next year. So here are my targets for 2013 (any assistance gratefully received 😊)

- 1.) Finally visit Collard for Large Blues as its just down the road from me.
- 2.) Continue going "local" and try for a few more visits 5 Rivers next year as after a strong start they kinda petered out as the season finally got underway. I might possibly try to find new patch in the local area to check out?
- 3.) My main target for a Lifer is Heath Fritillary and I'll probably try to make an overnight drive to East Blean and get a bit of kip in the car park as its over 3 hours drive away. But it will be an adventure! 😊 I would also like to see High Brown Fritillary but I think I might have to leave that until 2014...

4). Species I feel I need to get improved shots of are definitely White-letter Hairstreak as I've been lucky enough to photograph them without really trying and the price I've paid is that they've been worn or distant. Some really close, fresh shots would be great. And after the strife and torment of 2012 I really need to find a local and reliable site Greenstreak!

Have a goodun, 2013 that is!

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 30-Dec-12 06:22 AM GMT

Prepona laertes

This is a member of the Nymphalidae of the Blue or King Shoemakers and originates from Central and South America. It was previously called *Potamis laertes* (Huber 1811). I'm not really sure which "subspecies" this is there is great variation and there are a huge number of forms and subspecies. However most of these subspecies are now considered to be "synonyms".

I'd not come across this word before in a Zoological context so I did a bit of Googling synonyms. As far as I can work out in informal terms a taxonomic synonym is where the same species is given two different names and one is superseded; so some of the many subspecies could actually be the same species. It comes around because of new insights into their ranking in a taxon or the discovery of an older name which will then have priority. These are subjective synonyms and are due to the wide range of variation seen in the species. A common example is *Apatasaurus* replacing *Brontosaurus*.

Back to the butterflies...they dwell in tropical forests and have a strong and rapid flight. They also have a habit of settling on projecting branches (good to know for photography) and are not easily alarmed (another useful fact to remember). They feed on animal dung and fermenting fruits and this later food source along with its attractive appearance and its habit of settling mean that it is very popular among collections.



Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Wurzel

by David M, 30-Dec-12 09:38 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

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Have a goodun, 2013 that is!

Wurzel

Wurzel, you could always try south Wales for HB Frit. I'd happily show you where they're to be found.

As for Heaths, aren't the Exmoor ones considerably nearer for you?

Personally, I'm determined to track down Black Hairstreaks, and if the weather's kind, maybe whizz up to Scotland for Chequered Skipper and the *artaxerxes* form of Northern Brown Argus.

Re: Wurzel

by Wurzel, 01-Jan-13 01:20 AM GMT

Cheers for the offer David- if I can earn enough Brownie points I might be able to take you up on it 😊

You're right the Devon HBFs are closer but East Blean sounds like more of a spectacle and also I wanted to see if I can still rough it like I used too 😊

Good luck with the NBA , Chequered and the Blackstreak they're all on my "hit list" but it will be a while until I go for them 😊

Have a goodun
(2013 that is)

Wurzel