

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Jan-13 01:20 PM GMT

Just back from an amazing two weeks on St Lucia in the Caribbean.

Although this was a family holiday to a resort I still managed to see a number of butterflies. My ageing father took me, my wife and kids there, which was very generous of him. His need for constant attention limited our exploration of the island, but I can't really complain!!!

Before heading off I did my usual research into what butterflies I might see on my holiday, but I was amazed at how difficult it was to find much information. I managed to buy a used copy of Norman Riley's Field Guide to Butterflies of the West Indies, but this was published in 1975, so much could have changed since then. Further internet research revealed that Butterflies of the Caribbean was written by David Spencer Smith in 1994, but the only copy I could find for sale was almost £2,000!! My local library eventually managed to get a loan of a copy from Cambridge University Library, which I was able to read at the library, with strict instructions not to take it out of the building!! I spent several lunch hours writing copious notes from this book during the two weeks it was available to me.

The best web site I could find about butterflies in the area was Focus on Nature Tours' web site

<http://www.focusonnature.com/CaribbeanButterfliesList.htm>. This lists all of the butterflies that occur in the Caribbean and beside each has a code for which islands they occur on.

I also spent a long time e-mailing various individuals and organisations in St Lucia, but amazingly no one was able to give me any information about butterflies there. The only person who was able to help me was a professor in Canada who had studied beetles in St Lucia and he sent me a list of the butterflies he had seen.

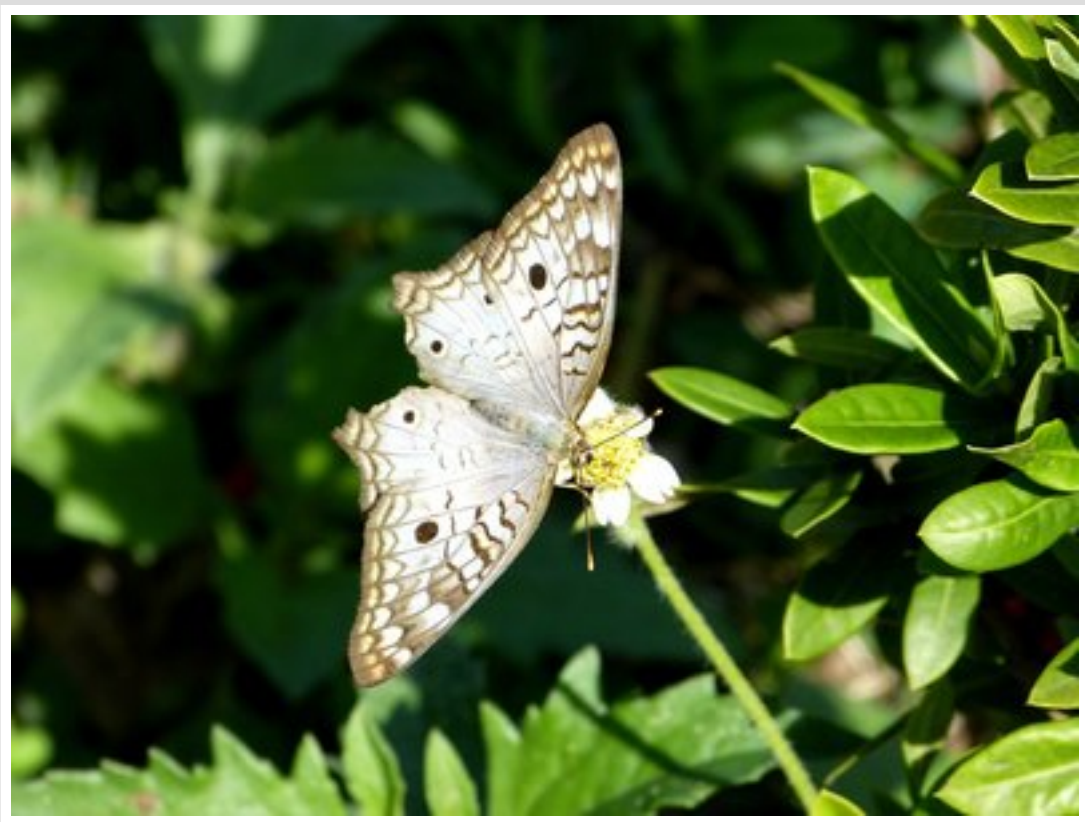
Using the above sources, and also searching Flickr and other web site for pictures of butterflies taken in St Lucia, I put together a list of butterflies that could occur in St Lucia. There were a total of 67 species on the list, but further research showed that one of them was a single record from 1913 and various others were rare vagrants. I think that there are probably about 50 species of butterflies regularly occurring on the island, which is amazing given that it is only 27 miles long by 14 miles wide!

Of course, I had no idea if December/January was a good time of year for butterflies, or how localised any populations may be.

The temperature varied between 25 and 30 degrees Celsius while we were there and it was very humid. There was a constant breeze making it very pleasant. There were regular heavy downpours, usually in the early hours of the morning or in the late afternoon. None of the showers lasted very long and the ground quickly dried up again. Most of the time it was sunny, with the occasional cloud.

I was delighted that when the sun shone there was usually at least one butterfly to be seen flying past. The problem was that they did tend to just fly past and rarely settled! It seemed that the larger the butterfly the less likely it was to land and many butterflies seemed to hop from flower to flower only settling for a second at a time, which was not long enough to try to take a picture!

The first butterfly I was able to photograph was a White Peacock, *Anartia jatrophae jatrophae*. I was surprised how small this was (about the size of a Green-veined White) as I had expected it to be about the same size as our own Peacock.



White Peacock

It is missing a bit of its rear wings, but it turned out to be the only one I saw during our holiday.

The White Peacock was being harassed by a Great Southern White, *Ascia monuste eubotea*. These turned out to be the most common butterfly that I saw. They had amazing bright turquoise clubs on their antennae.



Great Southern White



Great Southern White

The Great Southern White was easily confused with the Tropical White, *Appias drusilla comstocki*. To make matters worse, the Tropical White occurs as a wet season or dry season form and the males and females differ. So the upper side of the wings can be anything from completely white, to yellowish, with either a very narrow grey margin or a lot of grey! They also have some turquoise on the antennae, but not as pronounced.



Tropical White

There are also five larger Sulphurs occurring on St Lucia. They vary from orange/yellow to pale greenish/white. For me it was impossible to identify anything until it landed, which didn't happen often. Even when they did land, I found it difficult to know what they were without taking a picture and then studying it with my old book.

The most common yellow butterfly seemed to be the Apricot Sulphur, *Phoebis argante argante*. Along with the Great Southern White, there would rarely be a sunny moment when there wasn't one flying in view.



Apricot Sulphur



Apricot Sulphur

I learned that the only way to get a picture of these was to watch them when the sun was about to go behind a cloud and wait for them to settle. They usually disappeared into the vegetation, but occasionally they remained in view.

The Large Orange Sulphur, *Phoebis agarithe antillia*, was incredibly similar to the Apricot Sulphur. They are very slightly larger, but the main difference is the extent of the kink in the brown line of markings leading from the apex of the fore wing. The Large Orange Sulphur was also inclined to settle high in the trees, rather than in lower vegetation.



Large Orange Sulphur

The Cloudless Sulphur, *Phoebis sennae sennae*, was a lot easier to identify. It was quite large and bright yellow. It would flit from flower to flower, rarely settling for longer than a second, managing to frustrate anyone trying to take a picture!! I did manage the odd shot, but it never settled at a good angle!



Cloudless Sulphur

It seems that there are six different species of *Eurema* occurring on St Lucia. *Eurema* are amongst my favourite butterflies. They are mostly bright yellow with black markings on the upper side of their wings and I find their diminutive size very endearing. The Pale Yellow, *Eurema venusta emanona*, seemed to be the most common one I saw.

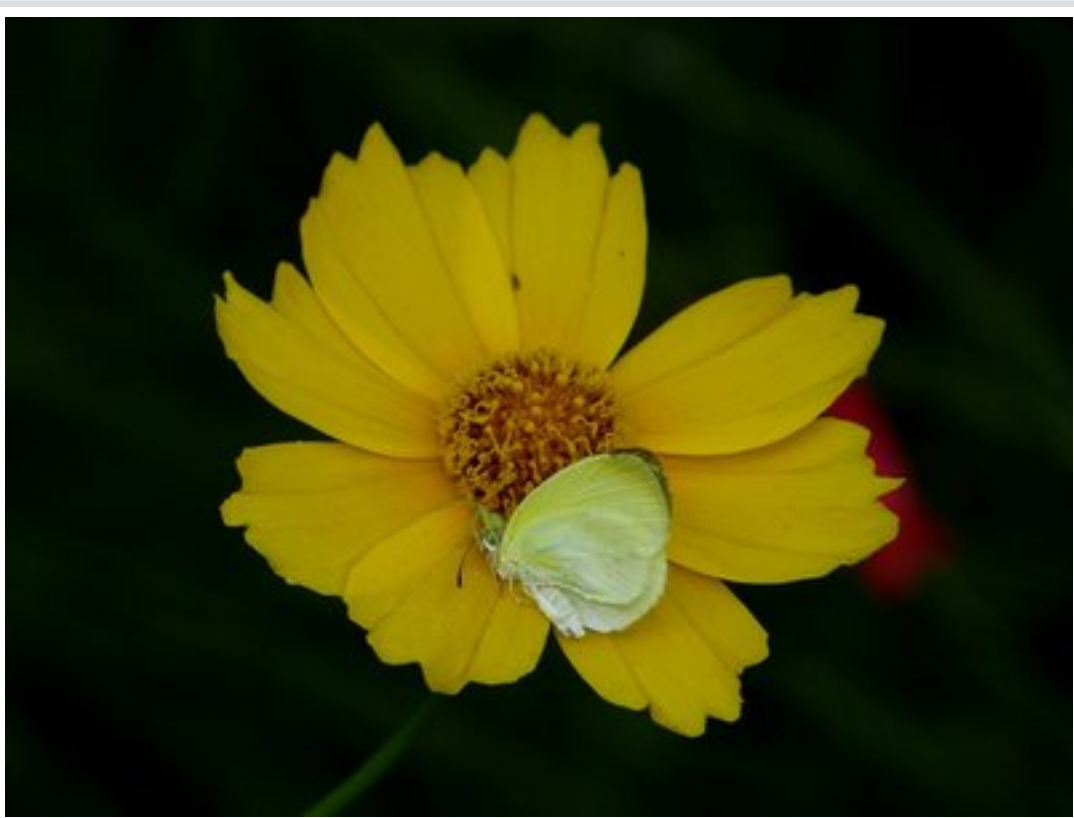


Pale Yellow



Pale Yellow

I really love these! The Pale Yellow must be a little smaller than our Common Blue butterfly. I was surprised to see this one behaving a bit strangely on a flower one evening, but then noticed that it had become the victim of a little Orb Spider. Later I found its discarded body on the ground below the flower.



Pale Yellow and Orb Spider

This poor picture is of a False Barred Sulphur, *Eurema elathea*. I had expected these to be more common, but this is the only one I am aware of seeing.



False Barred Sulphur

I also saw some Little Yellows, *Eurema lisa euterpe*, but didn't manage to photograph one.

The picture below intrigues me! I think that the black mark at the top of the wing is because a bit of wing is missing, showing a mark from the upper side of the other wing. Even so, there appear to be no markings at all on the under side of the wings, so I can't be sure what it is. Unfortunately, I couldn't get close so this is the best picture I could manage. I will have to do a little more research to see if I can identify it.



Unidentified Eurema

There are 13 different species of whites and yellows and very often I saw one flying past that looked as though it was a slightly different shade of yellow or cream. I think that to seriously try to identify them it would be necessary to take a net and catch them, although there are very few places where this could be done without permission.

There seem to be two different blues and six different hairstreaks occurring on St Lucia. I didn't manage to spot any hairstreaks, but there were a few Hanno's Blues, *Hemiargus hanno watsoni*, flying around the resort we were staying on. These were really small and difficult to spot, but at least they allowed you to approach them fairly easily.



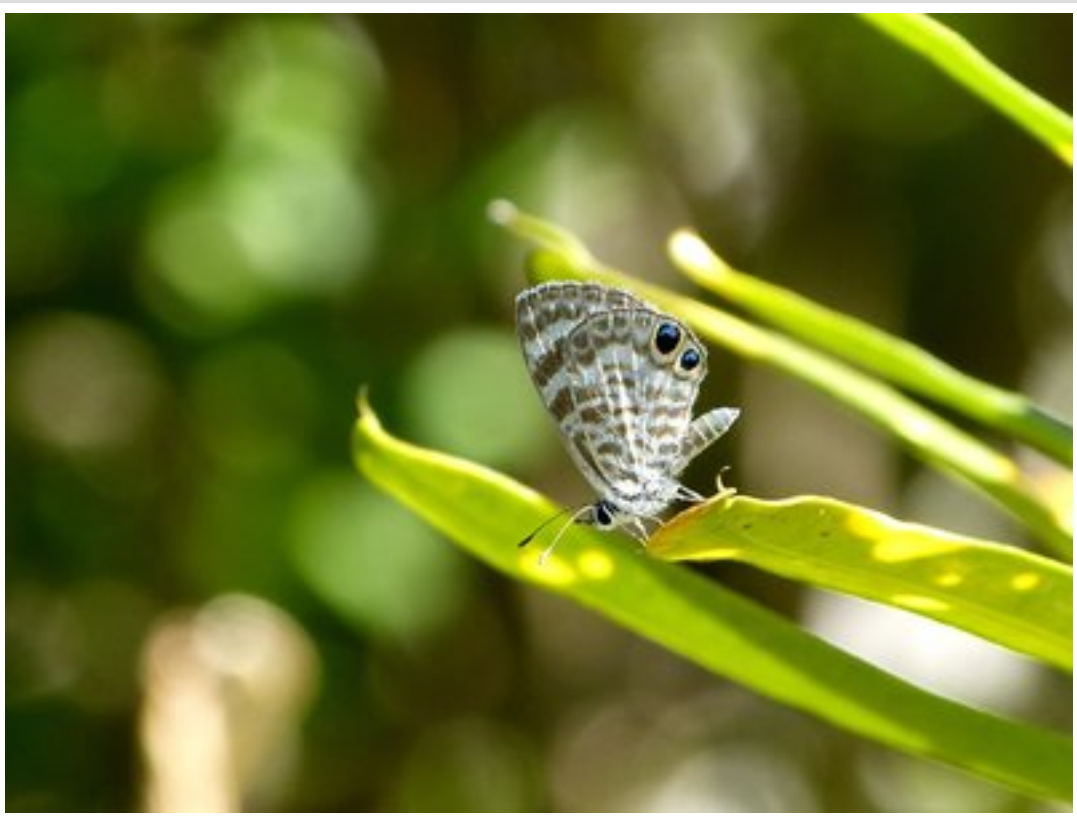
Hanno's Blue



Hanno's Blue

These are so small – about the size of our own Small Blue.

The other blue I was was the Cassius Blue, *Leptotes cassius chadwicki*. When they were flying they actually looked like a white butterfly as much of the upper wing is white. I had expected these to be really common from what I had read on the internet, but I only saw two individuals. There was a lot of Plumbago growing at the resort and in the towns, which I thought would have been covered in Cassius Blue, but that wasn't the case. Maybe it would be different at a different time of the year.



Cassius Blue

On a few occasions I saw a Buckeye. Both the Caribbean Buckeye, *Junonia evarete michaelesi* and the Mangrove Buckeye, *Junonia Genoveva* occur on St Lucia. I think it was the Mangrove Buckeye that I saw each time, but I find it very difficult to tell the difference between the two species. It seems that until recently they were thought to be sub-species of *Junonia evarete*. It was interesting that the one I saw at our resort didn't settle for long at all, but later during our holiday we did a Segway trip near Rodney Bay, where I saw several of them just sitting in the grass drying themselves. It makes me wonder if the plants in the resort were treated with insecticide or something to make them less attractive to insects.



Mangrove Buckeye



Mangrove Buckeye

There could be up to 21 different Skippers occurring on St Lucia. I only managed to identify three, although I saw a lot more that just didn't stop to let me see them!

This one is a Southern Broken Dash, *Wallengrenia otho ophites* and it seemed to be the most common Skipper I saw. Again, they rarely settled at our resort, but this one was happily sitting on a flower on our Rodney Bay trip. The guide was starting to get a little tired of my jumping off the Segway to photograph butterflies by this stage, so this one was quickly snapped!!



Southern Broken Dash

The other Skipper I managed to photograph was the Canna Skipper, *Calpodus ethlius*. This was on some *bougainvillea* at the resort in an area they say was planted to attract butterflies.



Canna Skipper

The other Skipper I identified was the Common Long-tailed Skipper. Sadly I didn't manage to photograph it.

It seemed that the more spectacular butterflies were less inclined to stop for a picture. Amongst those I saw were the Gold Rim, *Battus polydamas lucianus*, a dark, tailless swallowtail, the Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui* (it gets everywhere!!), the Julia Heliconian, *Dryas iulia lucia*. This is a beautiful bright orange long wing (I think Wurzel has a picture on his Personal Diary). They would fly around tantalizingly close to me, one time circling my feet, but just never seemed to stop! Another common orange butterfly was the Gulf Fritillary, *Agraulis vanillae vanillae*. Again, these are really beautiful, but I didn't see one land at all. I also saw a Monarch, *Danaus plexippus megalippe*. This is a sedentary sub species that occurs in much of the West Indies. It is slightly different in appearance from the migratory Monarch, but of course, I didn't see it for long enough to notice!!

During a trip into the rain forest I only saw two butterflies – a Cloudless Sulphur and a Great Southern White. Not surprising really, I suppose, as there were not as many flowering plants as there were in the more inhabited and coastal areas of the island. However, I had thought that I may have seen a Leaf Wing or Menstra in the shade of the trees. Certainly the best area I explored were the tracks above Rodney Bay. It would have been good to have had more time to explore such areas.

St Lucia comes highly recommended. I have never been to such a lush vegetated place. There are plenty of areas to explore, although you have to have permission before entering any of the trails in the rain forests. Looking at the excursions that were offered from our resort, it is possible to visit the botanical gardens, a few large estates where cocoa beans are grown or where you can explore the native flora and try out native fruits and plants. I am sure if I had been to any of those places I would have seen more butterflies.

I'm certainly not complaining, though. It was lovely being there. Such a beautiful island, but much of it completely unspoilt. The people there are so friendly, too. Don't expect anything to be done in a hurry, but it will be done with a smile!

Another time I would love to hire a car (which would be an adventure in itself!) and explore more of the island. The Segways were great fun, but my 14 year old son demonstrated how it is possible to run yourself over with one! I am sure the scars will eventually fade!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 06-Jan-13 03:02 PM GMT

I really enjoyed looking at these, Nick. Yes, *Eurema* are lovely little butterflies, found throughout the tropics from the Americas to Australia, via Africa and India. In India they flutter ineffectually around most bushes in grassy areas, hiding in the shade in the heat of the day. But your pictures of the blues are what excite me the most! What a great trip.

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Jan-13 09:31 PM GMT

Thanks Guy. I was surprised that there are only two species of blues found on St Lucia, but I was pleased to find them both. It is interesting that *Leptotes* seem to have carved themselves a niche in most continents. I remember you seeing a species of *Leptotes* in India and I have seen *pirithous* in Mauritius, the Canary Isles and Europe.

Blues are what usually does it for me, too, but for me they are just pipped by *Eurema*. I am sure that is mostly novelty value, though. There is certainly a lot more variety amongst blues.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 06-Jan-13 10:43 PM GMT

Some absolutely cracking butterflies Nick! The Buckeye is cracking but I was most impressed by the White with the turquoise antennal club. You start looking at it and it doesn't appear to be much and then all of a sudden the blue catches your eye almost out of nowhere, ace! 😎

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 07-Jan-13 06:41 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. Yes, it was amazing seeing so many new butterflies. It would have been nice if some of the more colourful ones had stopped for a picture, but I can't complain! It's funny that the two butterflies I expected to photograph were the Julia Heliconian and the Gulf Fritillary, as I had seen so many pictures of them on the internet. It was great seeing them fly past, though!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Jan-13 05:16 PM GMT

Sitting here with a cold and a sore back, watching the snow come down outside, I thought I would put some on pictures of birds that I saw in St Lucia. It seems amazing that I was there only 9 days ago!! I am not an expert birder, so some of my identifications could be wrong.

This is a female Carrib Grackle. I took loads of pictures of males, but deleted them from my camera, thinking I would get a better one later on our holiday. Now I find I don't have any. The male is completely black with bright yellow eyes. They seemed to be the St Lucian equivalent to starlings and a large flock of them constantly checked out the dining area at the resort, taking the opportunity to steal a bit of dropped food or sachet of sugar! They were the most common bird on the resort and made quite a bit of noise.



Carib Grackle

The other black bird was the Shiny Cowbird. This was a little smaller than the Grackle and had an amazing iridescence to its feathers varying from blue to purple.



Shiny Cowbird

I was very surprised to see that Cattle Egrets wandered around the grounds of the resort, quite unconcerned about the people there. They were to be seen all over the island on any open ground.



Cattle Egret

I was surprised to see a Black-crowned Night Heron at the resort when I crossed a bridge. At first I was concerned as I thought it had a bit of plastic around its neck, but later discovered that it was its long feathery crest!



Black-crowned Night Heron

I was surprised when this flew across the path in front of me and landed in a tree. I had never seen a bird with a badger's head before! Turns out to be a Yellow-crowned Night Heron.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

It was fantastic to see Humming Birds all around the island. There are three species occurring on St Lucia, the Purple-throated Carib, the Green-throated Carib and the Antillian Crested Hummingbird. They were very tame, very rapid and often had me fooled while I was searching for butterflies. I didn't notice any Purple-throated Caribs, but I saw plenty of the other two. I took hundreds of pictures and most of them turned out to just be green blurs!



Antillian Crested Hummingbird

Another of my favourites was the Lesser Antillian Bullfinch. The male is black with a red chin, while the female is various shades of brown and grey. They seemed to occur all over the island, but not in great numbers. They would make quick assaults on the dining area searching for crumbs. These two were photographed at a feeding area in a rain forest visitor centre.



Lesser Antillian Bullfinch male



Lesser Antillean Bullfinch female

There are several species of doves and pigeons on St Lucia, although I only noticed three. The most common at the resort was the Zenaida Dove. They had a lovely patches of purple iridescence on the sides of their necks.



Zenaida Dove

There were a number of Collared Doves at the resort. They don't appear in the book I have, and I guess that they are the same species as we have here and they have been introduced.



Collared Dove

My favourite dove was the Common Ground Dove. This was only a little larger than a sparrow and they tended to go around in pairs!



Common Ground Dove

The Bananaquit was a noisy little bird. It seemed to compete with the Grackles to see who could make the most noise and it was just as inquisitive.



Bananaquit

Another bird that I saw regularly out to see was the Magnificent Frigatebird. Unfortunately I didn't think to try and take a picture of one! Surprisingly, for an island, I didn't see any gulls and only one wader which I was told was a Yellowlegs! There were a lot more birds that I saw, but I have no idea what they were!

It was amazing how tame the birds seemed to be there and considering that I didn't specifically look for them I was surprised how many I saw.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Jan-13 07:07 PM GMT

A few other bits and pieces of wildlife from St Lucia. Everywhere I went I saw lizards sunbathing or scurrying off into the undergrowth. I thought that I recognised two distinct species, but now I think they were both the St Lucian Anole. Apparently this is very variable, and it occurs as a brown lizard in dryer areas and green in wetter areas. This is one I saw at the resort.



St Lucian Anole

And this is one I saw on a building in the rain forest.



St Lucian Anole

This is a little gecko that lived in our bathroom. It was only three or four centimetres long!



Gecko

There are a few other species of lizards including whiptails and an iguana, which lives in the dryer north west of the island. Apparently the iguana can grow up to six feet in length. It would have been interesting to have encountered one of those! Frogs were also abundant and were the noisiest thing about after dark making regular peeping noises. There are also introduced giant Cane Toads there, which grow up to about six inches long. Cane Toads seem to be regular victims on the roads. The only wild mammal I saw was also sadly squashed. It was an opossum that we found at the side of the road during an early morning walk.

Just about everywhere you looked there were holes and piles of soil. These were created by land crabs. I think they are the St Lucian equivalent of moles!



Land Crab

They seemed quite variable in colour.



Land Crab

I spotted the caterpillars on the first day of our holiday at the resort. I was amazed at their size – about 9 centimetres long. Each day they grew bigger until they were about 20 centimetres long and then they disappeared. I don't know if they had gone off to pupate or if a gardener had decided that they had eaten enough of the plant and had dispatched them. Checking the internet since we returned home it appears that they are Frangipani Hawkmoth caterpillars. The moth is disappointingly dull compared to the caterpillar!



Frangipani Hawkmoth

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 13-Jan-13 07:36 PM GMT

Really lovely pictures, Nick. I have a sneaking suspicion you will go back there one day ...

I hope the cold clears.

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 13-Jan-13 08:33 PM GMT

Thanks for posting these, Nick. I've really enjoyed looking at them (especially the humming bird).

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 14-Jan-13 06:49 PM GMT

The humming birds were amazing little things. Here is one having an early morning shower under a spray from a leaking pipe. There was also a large brown butterfly at the same spot, but it flew off before I could see it properly!



I would certainly love to go back some time. It is the sort of place that I could explore for weeks, enjoying the diversity of plants and animals, the lovely landscape and friendly people!

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 14-Jan-13 08:59 PM GMT

Lovely shot, Nick. I'm not sure if I've ever seen a humming bird actually perching before.

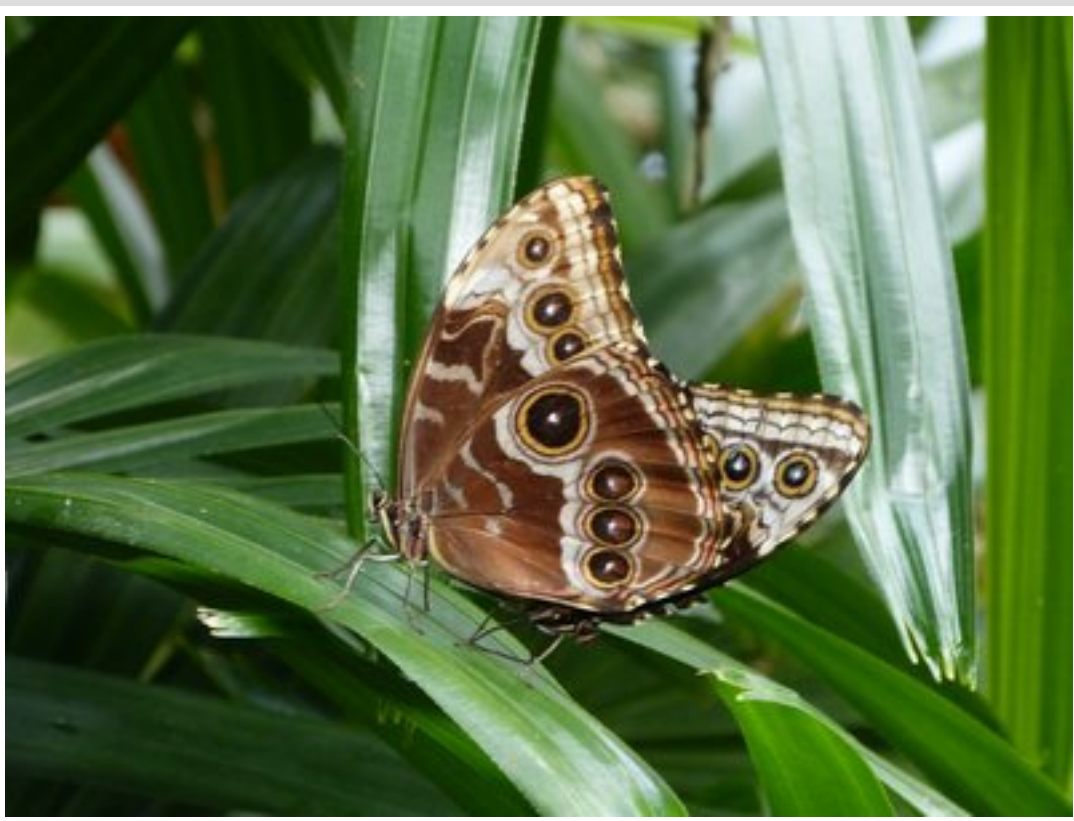
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Feb-13 10:58 PM GMT

Last Saturday my son and I visited Butterfly and Insect World, just outside Edinburgh. It is the perfect antidote to a cold February day after several months of butterfly-less-ness!!

The place isn't enormous, but there is plenty to see for the enthusiast or casual observer. As well as a large greenhouse, full of plants and ponds where the butterflies fly, there is also an area with reptiles, tarantulas and other insects.

You can buy a small Guide to Tropical Butterflies, but it doesn't cover all of the butterflies that can be seen there. I suppose the species that can be seen depend on the chrysalis available. I think I have managed to identify them all correctly, but I would be happy to be corrected if I have any of them wrong.



A pair of Blue Morpho butterflies, *Morpho menelaus*. The upper side of their wings are an amazing blue colour, but of course you can only see that when they fly. One of these was roosting high in a palm tree and another was flying around it. I switched my camera to take a video and almost immediately the male landed and they started to mate.



This is a Banded Purplewing, *Myscelia cyaniris*, from Central America. Its wings had an amazing purple sheen, depending on how the light hit them. It would land, flick its wings open a couple of times and then close them to roost. The underside of the wings are a dull brown pattern. I didn't manage to capture the colour very well and because it was never still the picture is a little blurred.



This is a Cattleheart, *Parides lysander*, which is found in much of South America.



A Clipper, *Parthenos sylvia*, from South-east Asia.



I think this is a Doris Longwing, *Laparus doris*, from Central America.



And this is the upper side of the Doris Longwing.



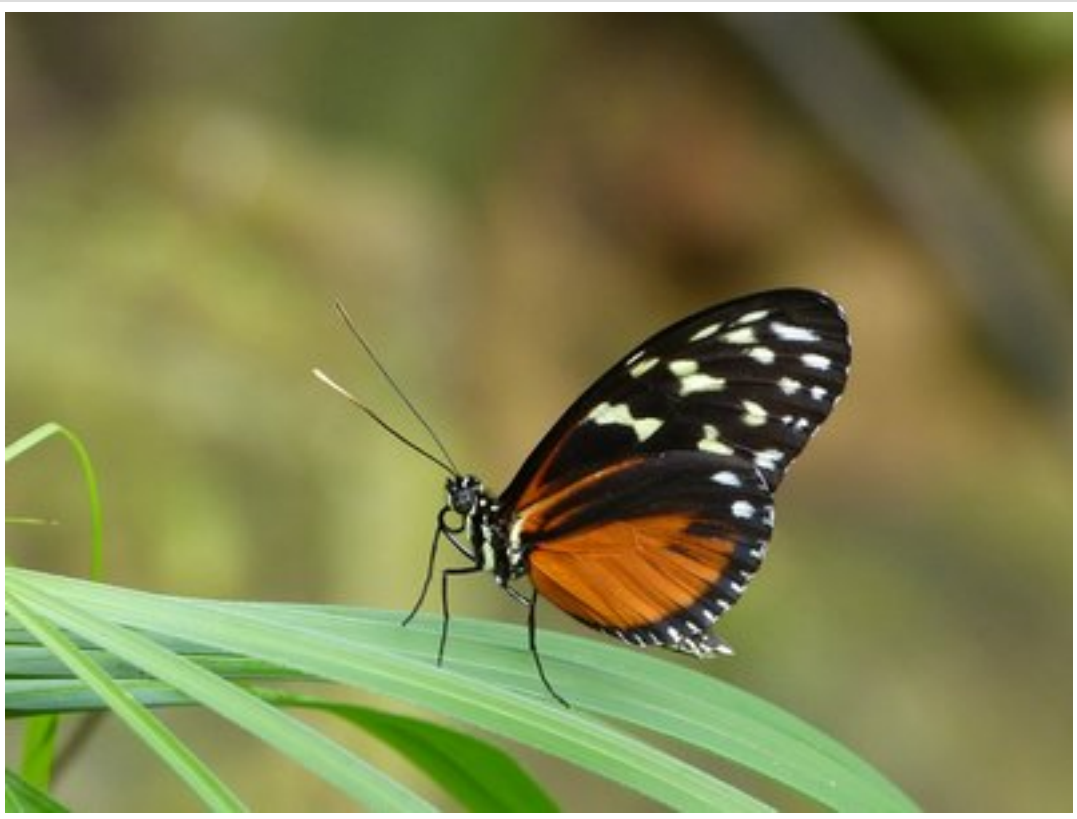
One of my favourite butterflies there was the Glasswing, *Greta oto*, which occurs from Mexico to Panama. There were quite a lot of them flying around the display.



This is a Goldrim, *Battus polydamus*, one of the butterflies I saw in St Lucia.



I am pretty sure this is *Hypolimnas bolina*, the Mimic. The markings on the upperside of the wings is very different from those on the underside.



This is Hecale's Longwing, *Heliconius hecale*, from Central America.



This, I have discovered is a Jazzy Leafwing, *Hypna clytemnestra*. The upper side of the wings is mostly black, with a white band.



This is a female Low's Swallowtail, *Papilio lowi*, from the Philippines...



... and this is a male Low's Swallowtail.



One of my favourite of all butterflies is the Malachite, *Siproeta stelenes*, which occurs in Central and northern South America. I only saw one of these at the display and it seemed to like perching high in the vegetation.



A Postman, *Heliconius erato*, from northern South America.



A Purple Mort Bleu, *Erpanis polyxena*, from South America. These had lovely purple upper wings.



A Tiger Leafwing, *Consul fabius*, from South America.



The Tree Nymph, *Idea leuconoe*, from South East Asia. There were plenty of these drifting around Butterfly World.



This is the Variable Cracker, *Hamadryas feronia*, which occurs in the southern USA and northern South America. This one came down to feed on some bananas, but it normally rests flat against tree trunks.



Just before we left we saw a Monarch, *Danaus plexippus*. Whenever I have seen these in the wild I have always thought they were large butterflies, but in the company of the other butterflies here it seemed quite small!

I struggled to get sharp pictures of some of these exotic butterflies in the Scottish gloom! I was impressed with the number of different species on display. Initially when we arrived, I thought there were only ten or so species flying around, but the longer we stayed the more we spotted. There were other species that I didn't manage to photograph. I only saw one example of many species, but I am not sure if there were more hiding amongst the vegetation.

There were also a number of chrysalis on display waiting for future butterflies to emerge. I'll put some pictures in a separate post.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 02-Mar-13 09:06 PM GMT

I saw my first East Lothian butterfly of the year today. A Small Tortoiseshell enjoying the sun against a wall a short walk from the village. Not much sign of any flowers nearby, so I hope it finds plenty to eat. 😊 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 01-Apr-13 11:20 AM GMT

It's the first of April and I can't believe that I am meant to be starting my Butterfly Transect this week! I think it will be a long time before we are having temperatures of 13 degrees and above. It is now almost a month since I saw my only UK butterfly of the year and the weather has been hovering around freezing since. Yesterday was the first day in 16 days when we haven't had snow here!

So, to keep myself going I thought I would add a few pictures of chrysalises I saw on our recent visit to Butterfly and Insect World. There is an area where they had rows of chrysalises on canes waiting to eclose or emerge. Unfortunately, there were no names on the canes, but there were a couple of freshly eclosed butterflies and there were a couple that I managed to identify afterwards from the internet. However, there are still a few I can't identify.



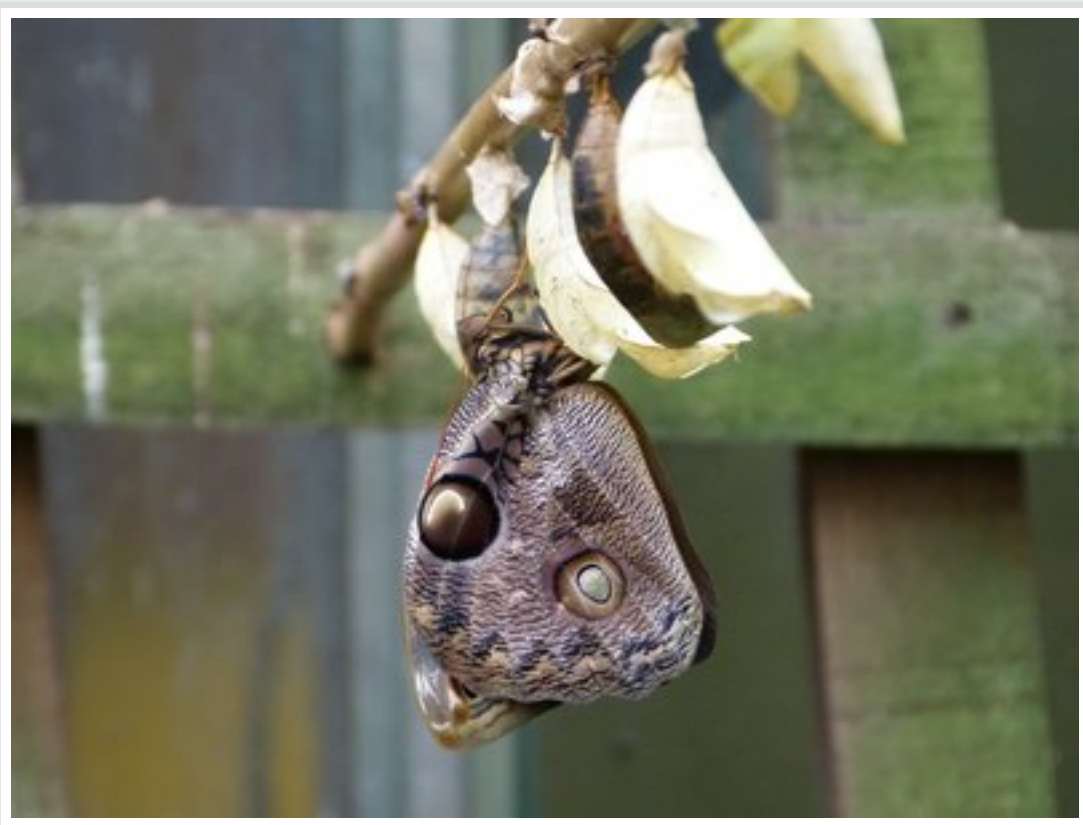
There was such an amazing array of shapes and colours.



These are the chrysalises of the Tree Nymph, *Idea leuconoe*.



I had thought that these were the chrysalises of the Monarch, *Danaus plexippus*, but I am grateful to Kirsten from the Museum of Science and Industry in Tampa, Florida, who identified them on my blog. (If you haven't seen their blog, I would highly recommend that you take a look - <http://lepcurious.blogspot.co.uk/>) Kirsten informs me that these are in fact the chrysalises of Queens, *Danaus gilippus*. These were about 20mm long. I love the row of golden dots around the top, just like a golden zipper! I had been concerned that out of 20, or so, chrysalises only two were green, with the others being a buff colour, but Kirsten assures me that this is normal for Queen chrysalises.



This Owl butterfly, *Caligo memnon*, had kindly just emerged, allowing me to identify the chrysalis!



Similarly this Cattleheart, *Parides lysander*, was still pumping up it wings.



Judging by the chrysalises above I thought that this was also a Cattleheart. Kirsten has suggested that this looks more like a Polydamas Swallowtail, but it is very difficult to be more specific than that as the chrysalises of that group of Swallowtails are so similar. I am sure that she is right, as this chrysalis was on a different stick from the Cattlehearts and looking again, I can see that it isn't the same.



And now for some chrysalises I can't identify. I have no idea what these are!



Or these! Kirsten has suggested the Giant Swallowtail, *Papilio cresphontes*.



This is a fantastic chrysalis, looking like a variegated leaf. I would love to know what butterfly it will turn into.



Here is a Blue Morpho, *Morpho menelaus*, eclosing, being closely watched by a Glasswing, *Greta oto*.



Here is a Goldrim, *Battus polydamus*, illustrating a bit of a concern that I have. The bamboo canes that the chrysalises are attached to are very smooth and difficult for any butterflies to grip onto. My son and I were looking at a Blue Morpho that had dropped to the ground while its wings were still soft. Luckily it found a rock to climb up to allow its wings to harden. While we watched it climb the rock this Goldrim dropped to the ground and its wings flopped over as it walked along the ground. I bent this fern leaf over and it immediately climbed up it, allowing its wings to straighten and dry out. I think that it would be better if they were to roughen up the canes with some sand paper before they stick the chrysalises on to give the butterflies something to grip onto.

I was also slightly concerned that the chrysalises were within easy reach and it would be easy for kids to poke them or any newly eclosed butterflies. I suppose this can't be a problem, or they would have changed how they display the chrysalises. Actually, the last time we visited Butterfly World the chrysalises were all behind glass, so it is a big improvement to be able to get a close look at them.

I find the whole process of caterpillars turning into chrysalises, then turning into butterflies really fascinating. For me, the range of chrysalises at Butterfly World was just as interesting as the butterflies themselves.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 15-Apr-13 01:58 PM GMT

At last it has warmed up a bit. On Saturday the frogs that first appeared in our pond over a month ago regrouped and were calling for reinforcements. My wife was sitting in the sun and she spotted a frog appear from under the fence and hop across the garden to join in the fun. We ended up with thirteen frogs in the pond and our first clump of frogspawn. That is over five weeks behind Susie's frogs!

There are now eight big lumps of spawn in there.

Still no more butterflies and the weather forecast doesn't look as though there will be any chance of seeing any until next weekend at the earliest.





Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-Apr-13 07:37 PM GMT

Not a lot happening up here butterfly-wise yet. Two Commas today, a Green-veined White last Friday, a few Small Tortoiseshells and even fewer Peacocks. The weather warmed up on Monday, so hopefully butterflies will start to show in greater numbers soon.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 08-May-13 12:19 PM GMT

At long last I have seen my first Orange Tips of the year. About three weeks later than normal, I had five of them on my transect yesterday. For me they symbolise the start of the butterfly season, so I hope that the year will now be a little more fruitful. It was great to see the Orange Tips, as the area where they normally lay their eggs was completely flooded last year and I feared that there would be very few of them flying this year. It will be interesting to see how many there are over the next few weeks.





Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-May-13 08:55 PM GMT

I was down at my Dad's today in the Scottish Borders. No chance of any butterflies, but I had another look at the Orange Tip chrysalis that I found last year, expecting just to find an empty shell. When I was there three weeks ago, I noticed that it had changed from green to darker shades. I imagined that a butterfly would emerge in the next few days. However, today it looked just the same. It doesn't look particularly unhealthy, but I am a bit worried about it being this colour for so long. Maybe it is something to do with the weather we are experiencing at the moment.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 14-May-13 06:43 PM GMT

It's only a week since I saw my first Orange Tips of the season, but I haven't seen a butterfly since, so it seems like ages! Today I was in Dunbar talking to some German visitors to the Council and showing them part of our coastal path. There was a very strong westerly wind, but the sun was shining on and off. They then went off to have a networking lunch with some Councillors and I took the opportunity to visit John Muir Country Park to look for Speckled Woods. I walked down to the sheltered spot where I have seen Speckled Woods for the last three years. And there, in exactly the same spot as always was a beautiful fresh Speckled Wood. I managed one picture on my work phone and then it clouded over and the butterfly flew up into the trees. I continued my walk and returned about ten minutes later after the sun had come out again, but there was no sign of the butterfly. I thought to myself how lucky I had been to have arrived when I did. If I had been only a couple of minutes later I wouldn't have seen it.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 18-May-13 11:00 PM GMT

I don't know what is going on with the weather just now, and neither it seems do the forecasters. Thursday was supposed to be a great day, but it turned out to be overcast, with just the occasional sunny spell. I was out of the office all day on site visits and I expected to see a lot of butterflies, but all I saw were three Green-veined Whites.

Friday was meant to be cloudy all day, but turned out to be beautiful. I dashed out at lunchtime to do my transect and I saw a reasonable number of Orange Tips, some Green-veined Whites, Small Tortoiseshells, a Peacock and a Comma. I also saw my first Large White of the year and on my way back to the office I saw my first Small White of the year.

To make the most of the weather I then drove to Aberlady to look for the new colony of Speckled Woods. Eventually, I found one, but it didn't seem particularly happy. There was the smell of herbicide in the air and I noticed that the neighbouring golf course were spraying blue liquid on the grass. Hopefully the Speckled Woods will return once the smell has gone!

I have so far seen 8 species this year, and I saw them all again yesterday!





Today we have had strong easterly winds, 8 degrees and heavy rain all day. I hope the butterflies have found somewhere good to shelter!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 23-May-13 10:30 PM GMT

Despite the wind yesterday I had quite a good butterfly day. I managed six species on my transect – Green-veined White (8), Orange Tip (6), Small White (2), and one Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma. On my way back to the office I also saw a Large White and quite a few more Orange Tips and Green-veins.



Green-veined White



Small White



Orange Tip



Large White

Earlier in the day I popped in to Tynninghame and saw two Speckled Woods at the usual few square feet where they always are! A female was sunning herself on a nettle leaf, while a male was about ten feet above her on a sycamore leaf. After a few minutes he flew down and the two of them spiralled up in the air before she returned to a close-by nettle leaf and he landed a few feet away from her. It is so funny that this is the third year that I have found Speckled Woods in exactly the same spot. Assuming that there are two or three generations a year, that is six to nine generations in that place and apparently non only a few feet away. It does seem like a very sheltered spot that gets the sun, but there seem to be so many similar places nearby that they choose not to inhabit.





So that was another day of 8 species. Hopefully it won't be long before I see species no 9 for the year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Nick Broomer, 23-May-13 10:41 PM GMT

Hi Nick,

lovely photos, especially the male Orange-tip with it`s wings open, and the Large White, excellent.

All the best, Nick.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 31-May-13 10:48 PM GMT

Thank you Nick.

At last we have had a warm, sunny day.

I had various site visits to do this morning for my work, which gave me a good excuse to look for butterflies while I was out. Numbers are certainly down on what I would expect at this time of year, but with a bit of searching I managed to see a few. A kilometre section of the River Tyne Path yielded only six Orange Tips, four Green-veined Whites and a Small White.



Further along the path I watched a Peacock for a while, which was inspecting a patch of nettles. I hoped I would see it laying some eggs, but sadly I didn't have time to stay long, as I was meant to be working!





Later I was able to go down to the John Muir Way at Bilsdean where I was pleased to see that the Wall Browns had appeared.



At lunchtime I walked my transect, which just turned up a few Orange Tips and Green-veined Whites.



Other than that I saw a Large White and a Small Tortoiseshell while I was out on my travels. So, that brings me up to nine species so far this year. The forecast looks quite promising for next week, so I hope I will be able to add a couple more species then.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 31-May-13 11:27 PM GMT

Cracking shots of Wall Nick - one I have to chance across to see in a year 🍷 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Jun-13 10:05 PM GMT

Thank you Wurzel.

On Saturday I visited my father in the Borders and I hoped to find that the chrysalis I had been keeping an eye on all winter would be an empty shell. Sadly someone who had been helping him in the garden had decided to clear the old dried up Garlic Mustard plant where the chrysalis had been. As I searched through the debris a male Orange Tip flew into the vegetation I was looking through and then landed on a Forget-me-not a few feet away. It was almost as though it was the butterfly from the chrysalis that was popping by to say hello! Sadly, I will never know.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-Jun-13 11:06 PM GMT

I went down to Burnmouth, on the coast in the Scottish Borders, this afternoon to look for Small Blues. There was a small colony rediscovered here a few years ago and it appears to be doing well and expanding. Today I think I saw about 60 Small Blues, but it was difficult to be sure as I kept stopping to take pictures. I think it was likely that there were many more than that on the site.





There were very few other butterflies around. I did see my first Small Heaths of the season – probably about ten in total. But other than that I only saw a Wall Brown, a Small White and a couple of Green-veined Whites. I think we are in that lull between the spring generations and summer generations of butterflies just now.

It was great to see a couple of new species for the year, bringing me up to eleven now.

Re: Nick Morgan

by millerd, 04-Jun-13 11:37 PM GMT

The iridescence on that lovely new female is amazing. Makes a nonsense of the "dull brown" descriptions you see in books.

Dave

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 05-Jun-13 09:43 AM GMT

Nice to see it's not just in Wales where Small Blues are thriving. They're certainly having an excellent year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 05-Jun-13 09:29 PM GMT

Yes, I would say that Small Blues are anything but dull. Well worth travelling down to the Borders to see.

Today I saw my first Small Copper of the year. Actually, I saw three. I am always surprised at how bright they are when I see them for the first time each year.



So that is 12 UK species so far this year:

1. Small Tortoiseshell
2. Green-veined White
3. Peacock
4. Comma
5. Orange Tip
6. Speckled Wood
7. Large White
8. Small White
9. Wall Brown
10. Small Blue
11. Small Heath
12. Small Copper

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Jun-13 09:05 PM GMT

Hurrah, number 14! A nice fresh Common Blue.



1. Small Tortoiseshell
2. Green-veined White
3. Peacock
4. Comma
5. Orange Tip
6. Speckled Wood
7. Large White
8. Small White
9. Wall Brown
10. Small Blue
11. Small Heath
12. Small Copper

13. Red Admiral
14. Common Blue



Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 20-Jun-13 09:14 PM GMT

Curses, Nick!! It's almost July and I'm yet to see a Red Admiral. 😡

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Jun-13 09:21 PM GMT

It was only a fleeting glance, but long enough to ID it.

I'm determined to hit 20 UK species this year. I should manage another three in East Lothian, but I will have to travel down to the Borders to be sure of another three. 21 species next year will be more of a challenge!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 24-Jun-13 02:37 PM GMT

Thank goodness for some rain this weekend. When I was looking for Common Blues last week, I felt as though I was walking through coastal grassland in Spain rather than Scotland. The vegetation was so dry and crispy! Hopefully there will be a chance for it to bulk up a bit and produce some flowers. A lunchtime today we went for a walk with the dogs up a local track and my wife pointed out a little dark butterfly. It turned out to be my first Ringlet of the year. The ocelli were much reduced. Unfortunately, it didn't pose for a picture of the underside on this rather overcast day.



Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 24-Jun-13 05:51 PM GMT

Wow! Ringlets aren't out yet down here on the S. Wales coast!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jun-13 09:01 PM GMT

I am off work this week using up leave, so yesterday I drove down to the Borders to have a look for butterflies. Firstly I went to Linn Dean, a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve in the Lammermuir Hills. Here I was hoping to see Northern Brown Argus, but unfortunately I didn't see any. It was a little cloudy at the time, but there were plenty of Small Heaths around.



There were also some quite fresh looking Green-veined Whites.



I watched these two Small Coppers getting up close and personal, but after a few minutes the male flew off as if the female had said something to offend him. Just prior to that she had climbed down a grass stem with her wings vibrating.





After an hour or so it became more cloudy and I gave up on the idea of seeing any Northern Brown Argus. So I headed down to Gordon Moss, another Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve. This is a peatland covered in birch scrub, with some open grassy areas. Iain Cowe had been there a few days before and had reported a lot of Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, a butterfly that I have only seen once before as it flew past me.

Iain advised me that SPBF will fly even in overcast conditions, so I was hopeful I would be able to see one. After a short walk into the reserve I saw the first one just in the gateway to the field that Iain suggested I look in. Over an hour or so I saw about 40 of them, along with a Small Copper, some Green-veined Whites and plenty of Small Heaths.

I was surprised at how variable their markings were.





This aberrant seemed to have trouble flying and its wings looked a little malformed along with its wonky antenna.



I was hoping to get some pictures of the underside of the wings which are truly beautiful. I think, because of the overcast conditions, the butterflies were trying to take any opportunity to make the most of any solar radiation. As soon as they landed they would open their wings up, almost flat, angled towards the sun.

This I assume is a freshly emerged female, who was attracting the interest of a couple of males. I presume she was still trying to dry her wings as she kept climbing up stems. At least she kindly revealed her under side.



It was a very enjoyable morning. Seeing Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries more than made up for not seeing any Northern Brown Argus.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 26-Jun-13 09:35 PM GMT

Great shot of the aberrant, Nick. I'd willingly trade yesterday's High Brown for that!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jun-13 10:02 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Great shot of the aberrant, Nick. I'd willingly trade yesterday's High Brown for that!

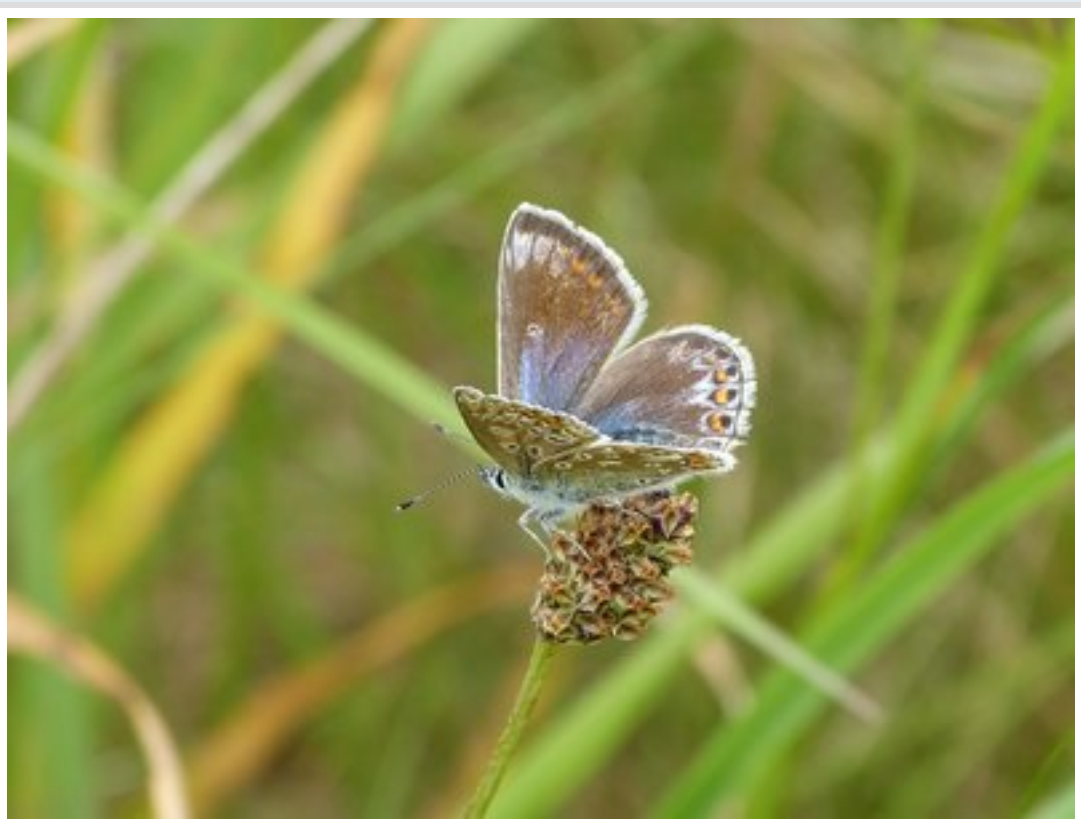
I'm sure we could come to some sort of arrangement!! 😊

It was a thrill to see it, but I was also very thrilled just to see the other SPBFs! I have to admit that I also felt a bit sorry for it, rather like the Dark Green Fritillary you came across.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Jul-13 09:50 PM GMT

I managed to catch the sunshine this morning while I was checking a right of way near Muirfield where the Open will be held later this month. The coastal grassland was filled with Ringlets and I saw my first Meadow Browns of the year. Also a few Common Blues and my first Dark Green Fritillary.





1. Small Tortoiseshell
2. Green-veined White
3. Peacock
4. Comma
5. Orange Tip
6. Speckled Wood
7. Large White
8. Small White
9. Wall Brown
10. Small Blue
11. Small Heath
12. Small Copper
13. Red Admiral
14. Common Blue
15. Ringlet
16. Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary
17. Meadow Brown
18. Dark Green Fritillary

At lunchtime I went to Meadowmill to look for the Graylings, but I think it was too overcast by then for them to appear.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 03-Jul-13 10:08 PM GMT

That's one hell of a haul, Nick. Amazed you're still seeing Orange Tips in July!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Jul-13 10:52 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

That's one hell of a haul, Nick. Amazed you're still seeing Orange Tips in July!!

That's the year's haul, not today's!! Although there are still a few Orange Tips about just now.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 03-Jul-13 11:10 PM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

"David M" wrote:

That's one hell of a haul, Nick. Amazed you're still seeing Orange Tips in July!!

That's the year's haul, not today's!! Although there are still a few Orange Tips about just now.

Sorry, Nick. Must learn to concentrate properly when reading! 😊

Still surprised about the Orange Tips though.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-Jul-13 11:17 PM GMT

I've been spending a bit of time photographing Ringlets to see the variation in their markings. This was sparked off by the first Ringlet I saw this year having very reduced ocelli on the underside of the wings and virtually no markings on the upper sides.



This next one has just two small dots on the upper hind wings.



The next one has one dot on the forewing and two on the hind wing.



I was also keen to see the differences on the underside of the wings.



This nice fat female has three ocelli on the forewing and two on the hind wing.



And this is the underside of the same butterfly.



And another one with slightly differently sized ocelli.



Yesterday, when I was at Gullane, I saw this one that seemed to have no markings at all on its upper wings.



And this one seems to have slightly elongated ocelli.



This one has lovely markings on the underside of the wings. It is a shame that Ringlets always land in amongst the grass where it is difficult to get a clear view!!



This one has very reduced ocelli on the underside of the wings and only four on the hind wing rather than the usual five.



This one has almost no white in the ocelli of the forewings.



And this last one that I saw at Meadowmill has only small beige dots on the hind wing, but five this time!



I used to think that Ringlets all looked more or less the same, but now I am beginning to realise that they seem to be infinitely variable.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 09-Jul-13 10:13 PM GMT

At long last the good weather has reached Scotland! It hasn't made a lot of difference to my transect, though and we seem to be in the lull between the spring butterflies and summer butterflies. Today only yielded 11 Ringlets, a Small Tortoiseshell and a Meadow Brown.

Yesterday lunchtime I made a quick visit to a site where I thought I should find Northern Brown Argus. Initially I didn't see many butterflies, but I then found an area where I counted 16 Northern Brown Argus. I also saw a small Fritillary, that looked just like the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries I had seen down in the Borders two weeks ago. It continued on its way without stopping leaving me intrigued. Later I saw 5 Dark Green Fritillaries and while I was photographing one a smaller Fritillary flew around my feet and I was delighted to see it was a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, a butterfly that hasn't been confirmed in East Lothian before. While I was there I also saw 60 Ringlets, 35 Small Heaths, four Green-veined Whites, a Large White, a Small White, five Common Blues and four Meadow Browns. A pretty amazing haul for 40 minutes in East Lothian.





This brings my UK total to 19 for 2013, 18 of them from East Lothian, so not far off my target of 20 species for East Lothian.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 09-Jul-13 11:23 PM GMT

Love the NBA shots Nick and that sounds like a very respectable haul for a visit 😊 Good luck with getting those last 2 species 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Jul-13 10:41 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. I managed to pop back to that site yesterday afternoon. After a cloudy morning the sun came out, the breeze stopped and the temperature went up. This happened just after I arrived, so initially it appeared as though there were no butterflies, but they soon came out and opened up their wings to absorb some rays.

After about ten minutes the air was full of butterflies. Hundreds of Ringlets, with a few Dark Green Fritillaries flying past, Meadow Browns and Small Heaths squabbling and the occasional Common Blue and Northern Brown Argus. I just stood there and watched the whole scene. After I managed a few more pictures I headed for home just as a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary came into view, landed on a thistle and then flew off again in a wide ark. I thought it may return to the thistle, so I sat down a few feet away from it and didn't have to wait long before it returned. It was very active, and flew off after a few seconds. I did manage a couple of distance shots though.



As I was walking away from the site I spied this Ringlet with unusual markings. I have never seen one like it before.



Re: Nick Morgan

by millerd, 11-Jul-13 10:52 PM GMT

You do have some varieties up there, Nick, but that particular Ringlet is spectacular! 🤩

Dave

Re: Nick Morgan

by Pete Eeles, 12-Jul-13 12:02 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

As I was walking away from the site I spied this Ringlet with unusual markings. I have never seen one like it before.

Me neither – a very nice find indeed – most unusual! Looks like *ab. chrysophalarus* – for which I need to find a description.

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/...scientific>

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Jul-13 08:18 PM GMT

Thanks Dave, and thanks Pete for the identification. I was thrilled to find it and it shows that it is worth paying attention to each individual butterfly. I have been looking at the variations in Ringlets this year, otherwise I may have just walked past it!

Today I had another thrill when I received an excited phone call from a local enthusiast, Abbie Marland, who had just found some Small Skippers at Aberlady Local Nature Reserve. There had been a couple of sightings there two years ago, but nothing in 2012. Abbie had found five on a patch of thistles.

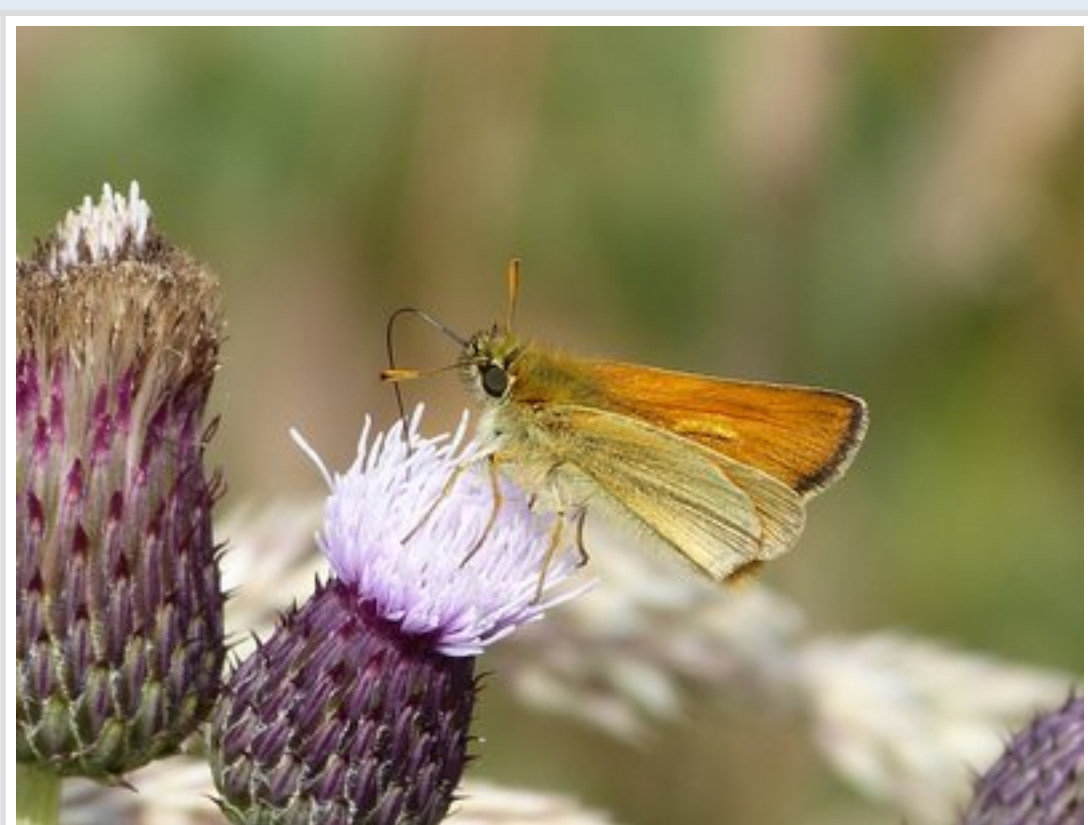
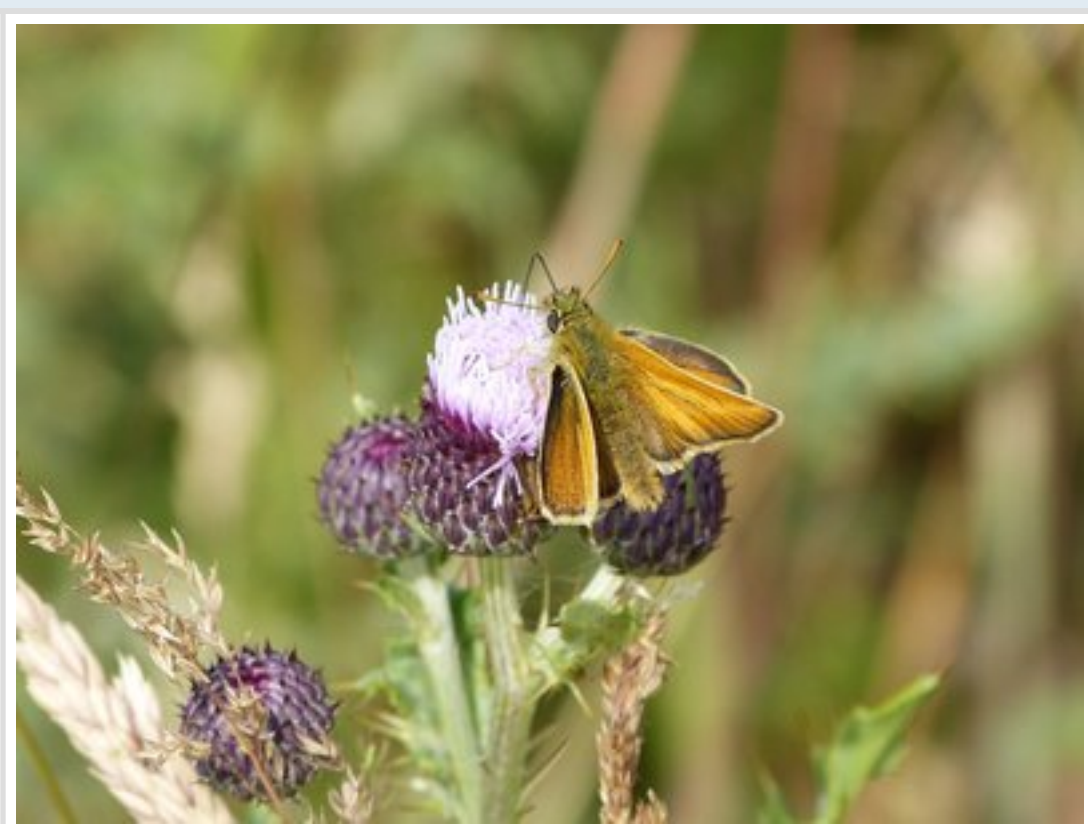
At lunchtime I went to have a look for myself and met Abbie on her way out of the reserve. She pointed me in the right direction and I found the

thistles, but it took me some time to find a Small Skipper. They were not bothered by my presence at all, but they were difficult to follow as they darted about in the strong wind. It was difficult to know how many I saw, but there were at least three.

When I arrived back at the car park, Abbie was still there and she told me that she had seen another five on the path leading out of the reserve. I have to admit that she did really well to find them. I would never have seen them if I hadn't been told exactly where to look.

It was a shame that the wind was so strong, but nevertheless there were still hundreds of Ringlets and Meadow Browns, good numbers of Small Heaths, about thirty Common Blues and more than twenty Dark Green Fritillaries.

It is so nice being in areas such as this with good numbers of butterflies. It makes a lovely change from the baron fields of wheat and barley that cover much of East Lothian.





Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jul-13 08:37 PM GMT

Hi Nick,

Great reports and interesting reading about your Small Skippers, just shows that what is exciting all depends on where you are. I have never seen a Northern Brown Argus and Dark Green Fritillaries are not common in Warwickshire.

Great find with the Ringlet ab. good point about looking at each individual, it makes you wonder how many unusual examples of common species get overlooked when the rarer species are out.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Nick Broomer, 12-Jul-13 09:23 PM GMT

Lovely photos and report Nick, especially about the Small Skippers, and your Ringlet ab. but, have you noticed your picture of the fresh male Common Blue, i believe its a male, i don` t want to make another boo boo, but the undersides look remarkably like a females, could be wrong. But i took a similar photo, of what i thought was a female Common Blue with it`s ` wings closed, and with the same colouration, then it flew off, and it turned out to be a male. What do you think?

All the best, Nick.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 12-Jul-13 10:18 PM GMT

"millerd" wrote:

You do have some varieties up there, Nick, but that particular Ringlet is spectacular! 🤩

Dave

Only just seen this and it's a belter! I didn't know Ringlets could throw up aberrations like that.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 13-Jul-13 11:52 PM GMT

Great report of the Small Skipper escapade 😊 The Ringlet abs are brill – I thought my eyes were pretty open but now I'll have to really open them 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 15-Jul-13 09:24 PM GMT

Neil, I suppose that one advantage of not having that many species up here is that I can spend more time checking out what we do have in more detail.

Nick, I am pretty sure that was a male Common Blue. It was certainly very blue and it chased after a Dark Green Fritillary that dared to fly too close!

David, yes that Ringlet was thrilling to find!

Wurzel, it was only because I had been looking for aberrations that I bothered to give that Ringlet a second look! From a distance it didn't look any different for all of the others.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 15-Jul-13 10:46 PM GMT

Wow 20! I have managed to hit my target for the year! Initially, I was hoping to reach 20 UK species, but having seen Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries and Small Skippers in East Lothian I realised that 20 species for East Lothian was now possible!

Today I visited Meadowmill (an old slag heap!) where I saw over 80 Grayling. It is amazing to think that they were only discovered there two years ago. There were also about 40 Meadow Browns and four Common Blues. Not bad for 15 minutes on a windy lunch break!



Re: Nick Morgan

by IAC, 16-Jul-13 04:19 PM GMT

Congrats Nick!! You are not far behind Berwickshire now. 😊 Large Skipper still worth looking for in your neck of the woods. Do you have Painted Lady yet on your year list? There are more than likely Large Heath somewhere on the East Lothian side of the Lammermuirs...dont ask me where. What about Purple Hairstreak ...possibilities. I have failed to see anymore Clouded Yellow...sadly. Scotch Argus are the last of the species I expect to see this year...a week or even two away in the Borders.

Iain.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 16-Jul-13 06:40 PM GMT

Iain,

I haven't seen a Painted Lady yet here. That's the last one I may see this year. This shouldn't be a bad year for them.

It's funny as I thought that I may be lucky enough to come across a Small Pearl Bordered Frit or a Small Skipper this year, but really wasn't expecting to see them.

Only one record of a Holly Blue this year unfortunately, but I am sure there is a hidden colony somewhere around North Berwick.

Large Heaths – that would be amazing. I have been wanting to check out the Lammermuirs around Crystal Rigg. There could be hidden colonies of something there. Apparently there were once Green Hairstreaks near there.

And Large Skippers – that would be too much to cope with!

I would love to see your Clouded Yellow make it over the hills to East Lothian.

I will definitely come down to look for the Scotch Argus when I am back from holiday. I would love to see them.

This is my East Lothian list:

1. Small Tortoiseshell
2. Green-veined White
3. Peacock
4. Comma
5. Orange Tip
6. Speckled Wood
7. Large White
8. Small White
9. Wall Brown
10. Small Heath
11. Small Copper
12. Red Admiral
13. Common Blue
14. Ringlet
15. Meadow Brown
16. Dark Green Fritillary
17. Northern Brown Argus
18. Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary
19. Small Skipper
20. Grayling

It's funny to think that five years ago five of those species were thought not to occur here.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 08-Aug-13 10:08 PM GMT

Just back from a lovely two week family holiday to Tenerife. I managed to sneak in a few walks while my wife and kids were enjoying the beaches and swimming pool. We were at a resort in Callao Salvaje in the south-west which wasn't a good area for butterflies, however with the island only being about 50 miles long, nowhere was more than around an hour and a half away.

Most of the southern side of the island is semi-desert with various succulents and drought-tolerant plants growing. In the spring it must be quite colourful when the plants are in flower, but at this time of year there was nothing much flowering.

On the first morning I was delighted to see African Grass Blues on the grass outside our villa. They seem to occur on almost every irrigated grassy area in the towns and resorts. I didn't see them in any natural areas, so I guess that they will be one of the few species to have benefitted from developments there.



African Grass Blue

Most days we would see one or two Small Whites flying through the resort and later on our holiday my daughter spotted about thirty Small White chrysalises on an abandoned building across the road from our resort. They were probably the most widespread butterfly we saw while we were in Tenerife.

Each evening, at about 7 o'clock, a Monarch would cruise amongst the trees opposite our villa. It occasionally landed on a leaf, stayed for a few minutes and then flew around again. There was one tree that it appeared to feed on, but I couldn't figure out why it landed on the other trees, or why it always seemed to arrive at that time in the evening! I never managed to keep track of it, so possibly it came to those trees to roost for the night.



Monarch

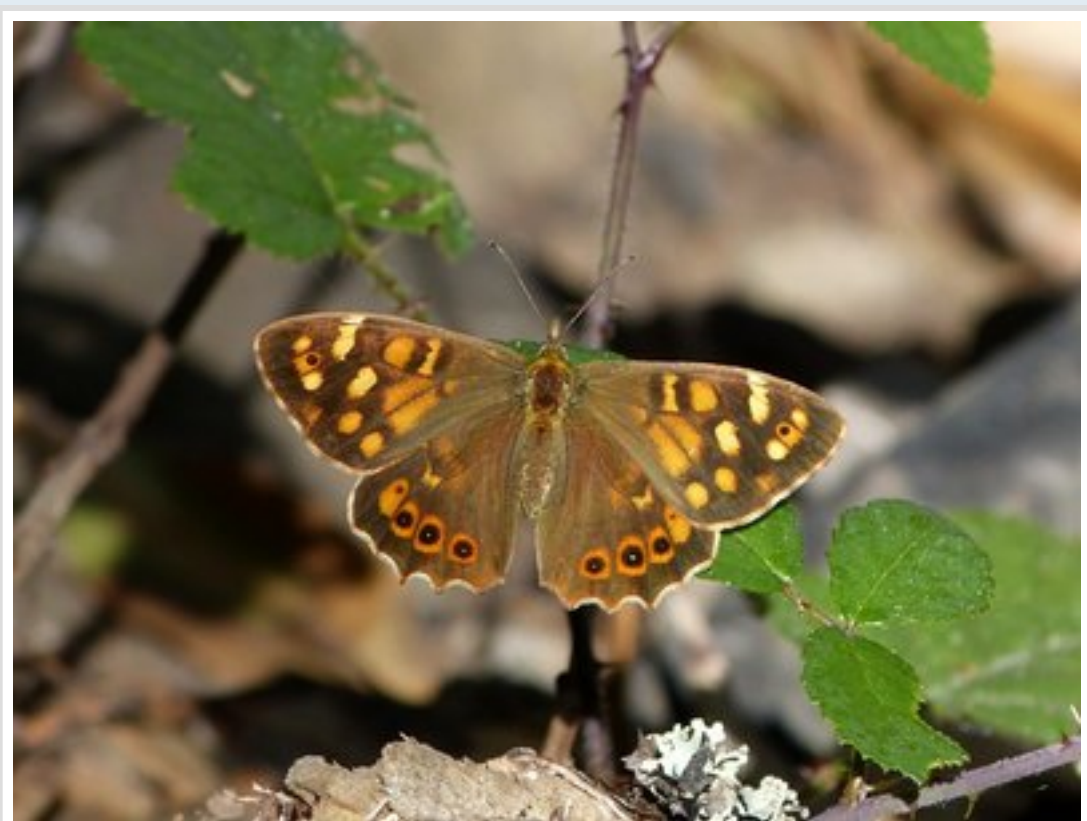
A few days into the holiday, I drove up to the north east corner of the island for a walk in the Laurel forest near a small village called Erjos. Having only seen three species of butterflies in the first three days, this proved to be a good move! I saw ten species of butterfly that day. Sadly, the first one was a road casualty, a Canary Red Admiral, making its last few flutters at the side of the road. It was a very striking butterfly, noticeably more of a deep red than our Red Admiral, with fewer white markings. Unfortunately, this was to be the only one I saw on our trip.

Once in Erjos, I walked out of the village and through some small fields where there were several Small Whites. I guess that the local cabbage production is severely impacted, as one small field had over 100 Small Whites amongst the Brassicas!



Small White

Just outside the village, on a shady path, I saw my first Canary Speckled Wood. I excitedly took several pictures, all of which I later deleted, as I saw so many more of them that day. Further into the Laurel forest they were quite numerous and I saw more than 50.



Canary Speckled Wood



Canary Speckled Wood

A little further up the path, in a sunny spot, there were several Clouded Yellows chasing each other without stopping for a picture! This spot also proved attractive for Small Coppers and Southern Brown Argus.



Southern Brown Argus



Small Copper

Once into the cooler Laurel Forest, amongst the Canary Speckled Woods, I saw my one and only Canary Grayling. I disturbed it as I walked past, and I watched it fly down the steep slope below the path, landing briefly, before flying up and landing in a tree several metres away. I have a picture and I know that the small dot in the tree is a Canary Grayling, but it is only just distinguishable as a butterfly!

Further down the track I saw a Canary Large White on a thistle growing in a gorge below the path. There was too much vegetation between it and me for a picture, but further down the track I saw another. After scrambling and sliding down the side of the gorge I did manage to get a few pictures, but not very good ones. They were worth all of the cuts and grazes, though! The Canary Large White is noticeably larger than our Large White and much more strongly marked. When it flies it appears to be yellow, black and white, but when it lands the yellow isn't so clearly noticeable.



Canary Large White



Canary Large White

As I started my return walk to Erjos I saw a Canary Brimstone flying towards me. It was rather ragged, but quite a bright yellow. Unfortunately it appeared to be on a mission and didn't stop for a picture. I did managed to point my camera vaguely in its direction, so I have a picture of a yellow smudge that only I know is a Canary Brimstone!

The other butterfly I saw that day was a Meadow Brown that was at the side of the path back into Erjos.

Two days later we drove up to the Parque Nacional Del Teide. I was very surprised to see quite a number of flowering plants and shrubs in this high, dry landscape. At the visitor centre, close to 12,000 feet above sea level, there were plenty of Canary Blues flying amongst the Shrubby Scabious and White Broom.



Parque Nacional Del Teide



Canary Blue

I saw what I assume were Bath Whites flying by. The Tenerife Green-striped White also occurs up there, but I think it was a little too late in the season for it to have been them. There were also a few Clouded Yellows flying amongst the sparse vegetation.

The following day I dropped my wife and kids off at a water park at Puerto de la Cruz on the north of the island while I visited the botanical gardens. Unfortunately, it was a rather overcast day and the gardens are very leafy and shaded, so I only saw a couple of Small Whites there. So I went for a walk in the Pine forest instead!

Back in Puerto de la Cruz to pick up the family I saw a couple of African Migrants amongst the Small Whites. The flower beds outside the water park were teeming with Geranium Bronze and African Grass Blue.



Geranium Bronze



African Grass Blue

A couple of days later I decided to go for a walk near a village called Masca where I had been told there were good walks. The village is reached down a death-defying road, consisting of nothing but hairpin bends on a steep mountain side. I couldn't find much in the way of paths to walk, but enjoyed walking along the road and amongst the terraces of vegetables. Amongst the numerous Small Whites there were quite a lot of Clouded Yellows laying eggs. Also Long-tailed Blues, Bath Whites, Southern Brown Argus and Small Coppers. It was lovely watching Monarchs floating on the thermals at the side of the road.



Masca



Clouded Yellow

One day we visited Siam Park, which claims to be the biggest water park in Europe. I had plenty of time to look for butterflies while queuing up for the water slides. Strangely, I only saw three butterflies, despite the lush vegetation and flowering plants. Later that week, back at our resort, we received a note through the door to say that they would be fumigating the gardens the following day. This consisted of one person with a knapsack sprayer spraying insecticide and another with what looked like a leaf blower puffing out smoke. This was to keep the cockroaches down, but I am sure this sort of treatment must also repel butterflies. And I think this probably explains the lack of butterflies at Siam Park, too.

On my second last day I drove up to the north east of the island – Anagar. Much of this area is a national park and covered in Laurel forest. I thought that probably the best area to look for butterflies would be around the edge of the forest, and I found an amazing road going down to a collection of houses called Bejia. Many of the houses were built into the rock faces and much of the area was terraced with various fruit and vegetables growing.



Los Batanes

I walked down the road and then over a path to the neighbouring village of Los Batanes. This area proved to be very good for butterflies. It was much cooler than the south of the island (21 degrees as opposed to 28 degrees) and very green and productive. The first butterfly I saw was a Canary Blue and it was strange seeing it in a completely different habitat to Mount Teide. During my walk I came across and another six or seven.



Canary Blue



Canary Blue

It was interesting that at the top of the road there were a lot of Canary Speckled Woods, but as I descended they became less common and further down the road the area was also alive with Small Whites and Bath Whites.



Canary Speckled Wood



Bath White



Bath White



Southern Brown Argus

I saw one more Canary Large White, several Southern Brown Argus and a number of Clouded Yellows. Sadly, I didn't see any Canary Red Admirals, which was what I was hoping to find. I was told that they were quite common on the south of the island over the winter, but that they are rare during the summer due to the lack of flowers. They should still be around on the north of the island during the summer, though.

However, I did manage to see 17 species during our holiday. I was surprised not to see a Painted Lady and I did spend a lot of time checking out areas of grassland for Canary Skippers without success. The only other butterfly that I potentially could have seen would have been a Cardinal.

I would love to return to Tenerife, maybe in the spring time, as it is a fantastic destination for walking, once you get away from the developed areas.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 08-Aug-13 11:05 PM GMT

Cracking report Nick with lovely shots- the Large White and Brown Argus are really striking 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Freeman, 09-Aug-13 08:42 PM GMT

Great report and photos Nick.

I particularly like the Monarch against the blue sky and the Southern Brown Argus is a little gem 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Aug-13 04:24 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel and Neil. It was a real thrill to see the butterflies there. So many new species or species that I hadn't seen close up before.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Aug-13 10:14 PM GMT

What an amazing butterfly week this has been. There seems to have been an explosion in butterfly numbers.

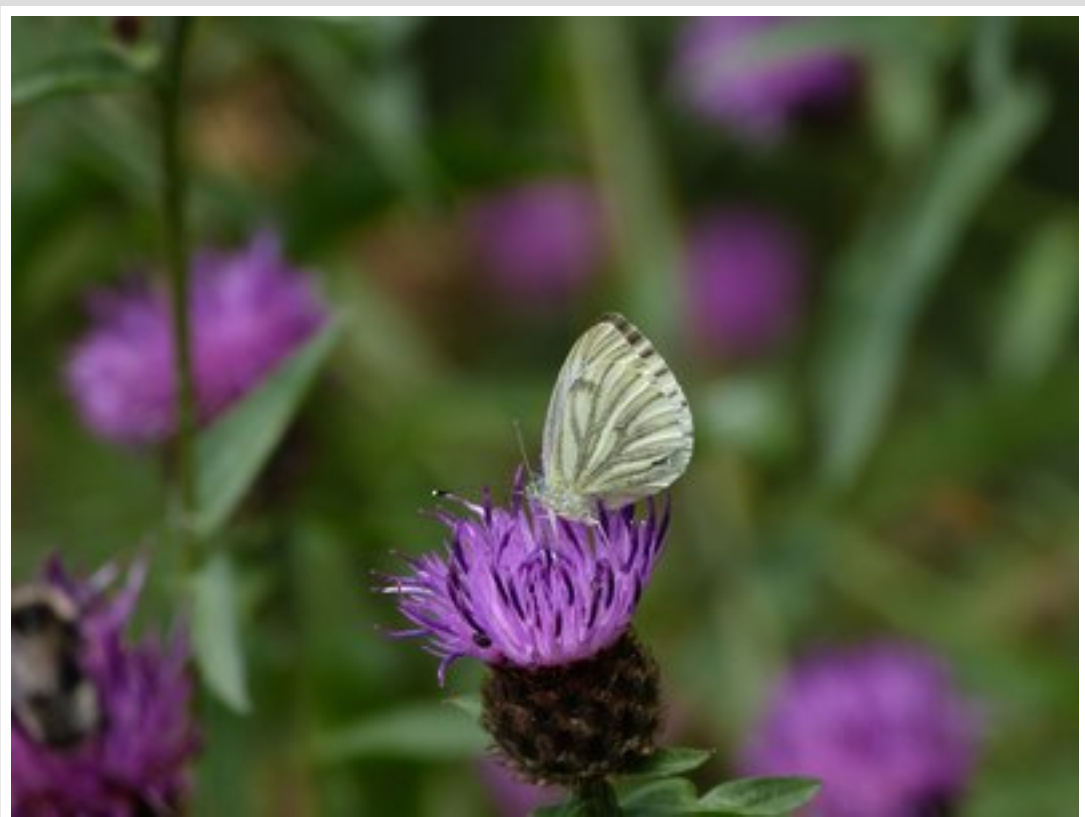
On Wednesday I walked my transect, and for the first time ever I had butterflies in each section of the transect. I saw eight different species, another record for my transect. I was quite relieved to finish it having counted 72 Green-veined Whites and 50 Small Whites amongst the butterflies I saw. Probably not numbers that will impress many, but about ten times the number of butterflies that I have seen on my transect over the last three years.

On Thursday I had a couple of site visits to make for my work. Between the two sites I saw over 100 each of Small, Large and Green-veined Whites. I have never seen Large Whites in such numbers.



Large White

It was interesting to see the variation in size of the Large Whites. Some were only the size of Small Whites, or a little smaller. I also came across some very small Green-veined Whites. This one had a wingspan of only about 30mm.



Mini Green-veined White

I waited for ages to see if another butterfly would land next to it to show how small it was, but unfortunately they didn't oblige, but the normal-sized one below gives an idea of its size against the Knapweed flower.



Green-veined White

There were also quite a few faded Meadow Browns still around and my first summer Comma.



Comma

While I was walking along the farm track I kept noticing Peacock butterflies flying past, east to west. They certainly showed no inclination to stop, and I don't know where they were coming from or where they were going.

Next I visited a track up to a disused quarry. In a sheltered spot there were a few buddleia bushes and I was delighted to see them covered in Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. I estimated there were more than 40 of each.



Peacock



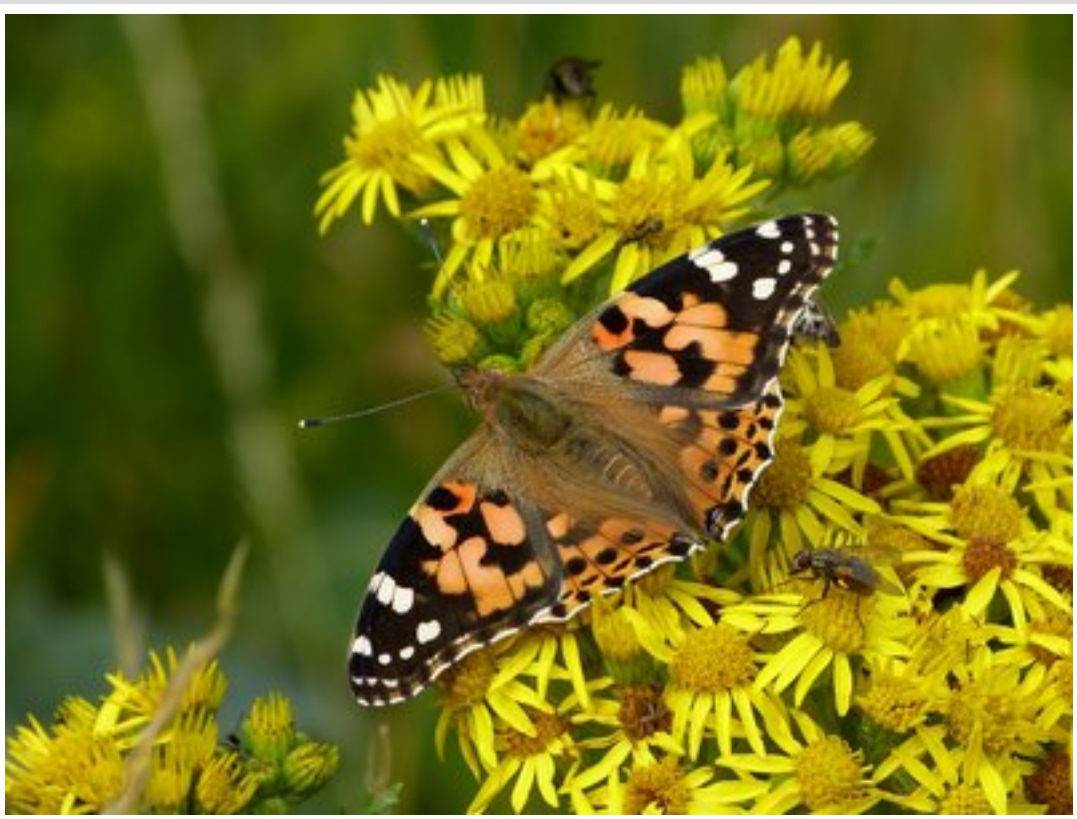
Small Tortoiseshell

There was a lot of Ragwort growing along the track and almost every plant had a Small Copper on it. I noticed last year that almost every Small Copper at this site had blues scales on their wings to a greater or lesser extent. This year, I saw over 20 and only one of them had blues scales. I wonder if this is related to the weather conditions and availability of the food plants when they are caterpillars?



Small Copper

Inside the quarry butterfly there were plenty more Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Large and Small Whites and Small Coppers. Also one Common Blue and my first Painted Lady of the year. That is species number 21 for me in East Lothian – another record!!



Painted Lady



Small White

Yesterday my son and I visited my father in the Scottish Borders and helped him in his garden. It was a cool overcast day and it rained heavily around lunch time. The cloud remained for the afternoon, which was a shame as I was hoping to visit a colony of Scotch Argus near Melrose on my way home. As I was passing less than a mile from the colony I thought I should still take a look. By now it was 5:30 and only 14 degrees. I walked into the site and didn't really know where to look for them. After about 15 minutes, I decided that I was wasting my time as it was getting darker by the minute. On my way back to the car a dark butterfly rose up in front of me and landed in the grass a few feet away. I walked over to it and recognised it as a Scotch Argus before it flew off again. I saw another two flying and then one landed in the grass. I picked up my camera only for it to switch off with a flat battery!! My spare battery was in the car, so I ran back and got it.

The Scotch Argus seems to be a very wary butterfly and it was difficult to get close to them. The only time that I could approach them was when they were deep in the grass. I did manage some pictures, but none of them are good. At least they are a record that I saw them. Overall I saw more than 30 Scotch Argus and no other butterflies, so it must be true that they fly in overcast conditions!



Scotch Argus



Scotch Argus



Scotch Argus

I am really taken with them. The orange band contrasting with their dark brown wings and the white pupils in the centre of the ocelli really stand out.

I left after about 15 minutes and my poor son was waiting for me in the car. I have been told that they start to appear at this site in the middle of July and next year I will definitely make a pilgrimage down to Melrose to spend some time there. I think they are one of the most beautiful butterflies I have seen.