

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-Jan-14 12:31 PM GMT

I notice that I haven't posted anything since August, which is a shame as 2013 was such a great year for butterflies.

I try to co-ordinate the butterfly transects undertaken by East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service and pass the information on to Butterfly Conservation. There are eleven rangers, but sadly, other work often gets in the way and they often don't manage to do their weekly transects. However, I feel it is still worth noting what they record. We are now starting to enlist some volunteers to help with the transects, so hopefully we should improve on the records we take.

As well as the transects I ask for any other interesting butterfly sightings, which builds up a good record of what is out and about. I now have a number of volunteers who also send in their records, giving a much more complete record of how the butterflies are doing in East Lothian.

The year started off very slowly with winter dragging on until the second week in April. Prior to that I only received records of two Peacocks and two Small Tortoiseshells in March.

Spring butterfly numbers were not particularly remarkable, but it was a relief that the numbers weren't very low after the two previous wet summers. My transect follows the River Tyne, which had flooded twice the previous year, and this had an obvious effect on the number of Orange Tips and later Ringlets and Meadow Browns. Luckily the number of butterflies in other areas more than made up for this, though.



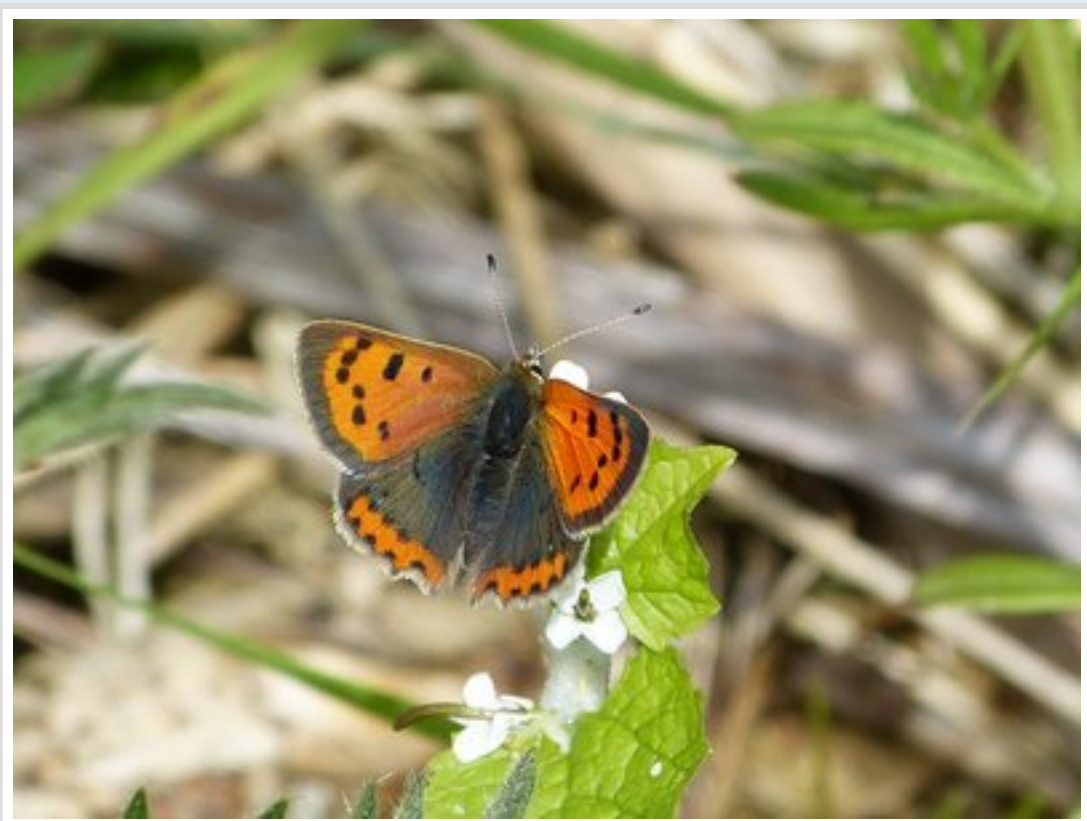
It wasn't until mid-July that butterfly numbers literally took off. The summer broods of Green-veined, Small and Large Whites were fantastic, with numbers that we have never seen before. Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells did really well too.



It was interesting that the Comma, which first arrived here seven years ago, didn't seem to thrive as the other species did.



Similarly the first generation of Small Coppers was quite sparse, but later in the summer they were more numerous than ever.



Common Blue and Dark Green Fritillary were at about their normal numbers.



Thinking about it, it was the species that produce a second generation in the year that did so well. Those that over-wintered as caterpillars and only produce one generation didn't benefit so much from the good weather. Hopefully, if we have a good spring we may see the benefit next year, though. The one real loser this year was the Holly Blue. We have an isolated population on the western fringes of East Lothian, and two years ago it appeared to have spread with a second colony found and a few isolated sightings. This year I only heard of a single sighting and that was at the original colony. I am keeping my fingers crossed that next year we will see more.

There were a number of highlights this year, though. I received a report of a Clouded Yellow from one of our volunteers in North Berwick on 31st July. The following day one of our Rangers saw presumably the same individual in Musselburgh, about 20 miles further along the coast.

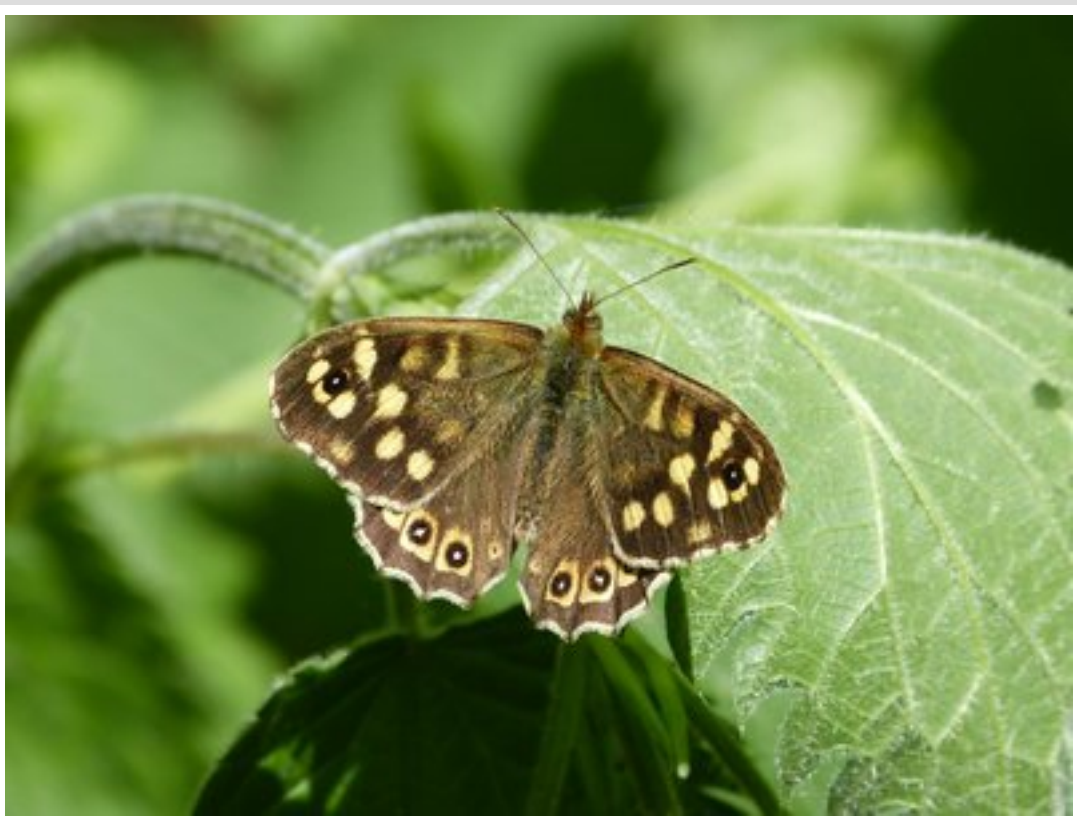
While I was searching for Northern Brown Argus, I discovered Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries at a site right on the edge of East Lothian. These are the first confirmed sightings of this species in East Lothian.



After receiving reports of individual sightings of Small Skippers in 2011 and 2012, I received an excited phone call from one of our volunteers to say that she had found a small colony of them in Aberlady. I rushed out to meet her and managed to spot 5, but she saw many more later that day. Later I received records of Small Skippers from two other sites within a couple of miles of Aberlady, so they seem to be doing well in the area now.



Speckled Woods have only been recorded in East Lothian in the last four years. Initially there were one or two sightings on the east coast and since then they have spread further along the coast. This year I received records from various areas and they are now found in wooded areas about two-thirds of the length of East Lothian. This is a remarkable rate of colonisation and if we have another good year in 2014 I wouldn't be surprised to hear that they have been found all over the county.



Similarly the Wall Brown was a new species for East Lothian four years ago. They have continued to spread along the coast from the east, but at about half the rate of the Speckled Woods.



Despite the good weather Red Admirals and Painted Ladies were conspicuously low in numbers. I heard from someone in France that Painted Lady numbers were low there, too, so possibly they had a bad start to the year and weren't able to recover from that. After the bonanza of butterflies in July and August we were hoping for an influx of migrants from the south, but unfortunately September and October were disappointingly cold, so this was not to be. This probably explains my lack of posts since August! However, I received records of 23 species in East Lothian this year, which I am sure is a record. I am delighted with the new species that are being recorded here in the last few years. It does seem amazing given the constant loss of habitat here. I can't imagine what the next new species will be, but there are a few possibilities!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 04-Jan-14 09:58 PM GMT

Excellent report with stunning photos Nick 😊 I found that I read it in two minds – chuffed at the successful spread of butterflies which is a bonus 😊 but at the same time concerned that this is a shift northwards due to climate change 😞😞 . Still if it continues like this maybe down here in Salisbury Long-Tailed Blues etc will become a regular feature 😊😊 By the way what are your suspected additions to the list?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 04-Jan-14 10:14 PM GMT

Nick, I must accidentally have unsigned myself from this thread, because I missed all of those August posts – I didn't even see the fantastic pictures from Tenerife. They are really brilliant – you did much better than I did on my trip, many years ago, to the Canaries. I'm sorry not to have commented before! I hope this reply will ensure I get notice of your future updates!

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Jan-14 10:54 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Excellent report with stunning photos Nick 😊 I found that I read it in two minds – chuffed at the successful spread of butterflies which is a bonus 😊 but at the same time concerned that this is a shift northwards due to climate change 😞😞 . Still if it continues like this maybe down here in Salisbury Long-Tailed Blues etc will become a regular feature 😊😊 By the way what are your suspected additions to the list?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel. I have to admit that I share your concerns. I am delighted to find new species here, but I do wonder why they are spreading northwards. Certainly it isn't because of habitat improvement! I find the climate change argument difficult to concur with, too given two really hard winters with two really rainy summers and then a horribly long winter last year. I note that historically Commas and Speckled Woods were in this area, but their ranges drifted south, so those species are returning.

However, looking at distribution maps from 1970 <http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/8104/> we only had 11 species in East Lothian. That must have been rather miserable!! Although I am delighted with 23 species, I am still envious of people on the south coast where 43 species is possible!

Potential new species in East Lothian: Green Hairstreaks are not far away in the Borders: Purple Hairstreaks have been found over the Firth of Forth in Fife; Large Skippers are also not far away in the Borders. I would love to find Small Blues – again not far away, but we really don't have much in the way of good habitat for them. My greatest ambition is to find a hidden colony of Scotch Argus in the Lammermuir Hills, but I think that may be a little too much to hope for!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Jan-14 11:01 PM GMT

"padfield" wrote:

Nick, I must accidentally have unsigned myself from this thread, because I missed all of those August posts – I didn't even see the fantastic pictures from Tenerife. They are really brilliant – you did much better than I did on my trip, many years ago, to the Canaries. I'm sorry not to have commented before! I hope this reply will ensure I get notice of your future updates!

Guy

Guy,

I was very pleasantly surprised by Tenerife. The north coast, particularly the north east corner offered lots of walking opportunities and the wild flowers and butterflies were out in force there. It would be interesting to return at a different time of year, when I am told there are more butterflies in the south.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Feb-14 09:38 PM GMT

We woke up to a frosty morning with a lovely blue sky. The first day like this all year! At lunch time I walked along the River Tyne in Haddington with a slight hope that I could see a butterfly. It was only 7 degrees and when I arrived at a sheltered spot that has provided me with my first butterfly sightings most years there was nothing. I told myself that I was just being stupid and that it was far too cold for butterflies to be flying. Back in Haddington, I turned up a shady path and saw a small brown triangle on the ground. I took a closer look and saw a Small Tortoiseshell. I picked it up and carried it to a sunny, sheltered spot where wild flowers have been sewn outside the Council offices. I put it on a Marigold and it opened its wings to absorb some heat. I hope that it managed to feed to build up its strength to see if through the last few days of winter!



Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 28-Feb-14 11:55 PM GMT

Good save Nick 😊 One down 19 to go then 😊

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 01-Mar-14 08:20 PM GMT

Wurzel,

I managed 21 species in East Lothian last year and I don't think there is any way I can beat that. I added a couple more UK species, so I could aim for 24 UK species this year.

Nick

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Apr-14 08:42 PM GMT

Wow, at last I have seen a white! Only the fourth species I have seen this year – a Green-veined White, just as I was thinking it was far too cold, cloudy and windy for any butterflies to be mad enough to emerge!



I also saw my first Swallow and Sand Martins so maybe signs that good weather is on its way! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-May-14 11:11 PM GMT

Things are ticking along quite nicely up here this year. We seem to be in between the warm weather the south had last month and the warm weather that the north of Scotland had last week, so hopefully we will get our turn soon. At least it hasn't been exceptionally cold or wet this year, so a reasonable number of butterflies around.

On last week's transect I had 63 butterflies and today I managed 50 despite a strong westerly wind. Most of these were Green-veined Whites and Orange Tips.



I have been surprised that Commas have almost been out-numbering Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells so far this year. They are a relatively new arrival to East Lothian and over the last 8 years I have rarely seen more than one or two at a time. This year I have seen three or four of them dog-fighting a couple of times and regularly see one or two on my transect.



Another recent arrival, the Speckled Wood has spread remarkably quickly across East Lothian since it was first seen in 2009. Last week I had records sent in from three areas in East Lothian and saw a fleeting glimpse of one when I was on a site visit at work. On Friday I decided to check out the place where I had first found Speckled Woods in 2011. Remarkably there were four males in an area about ten feet in diameter, exactly the same spot as I have seen them for the last four years. Strangely there are many other very similar-looking places in the rest of the wood where they don't exist!



So, that is eight species for me so far this year.

1. Small Tortoiseshell
2. Comma
3. Peacock
4. Green-veined White
5. Orange Tip
6. Large White
7. Small White
8. Speckled Wood

I also received a report of a Small Copper today, so hopefully I will add another species to this year's list soon.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 07-May-14 09:34 AM GMT

Good to see things are moving on up there Nick 😊 You may only have seen 8 species but you've probably seen the same number of Specklies as I have this year - they seem to be a bit hit or miss down our way - I'm not sure whether they've had a good start to the year.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 27-May-14 09:52 PM GMT

I have been having quite a bit of success searching for butterflies despite us not having any prolonged warm weather here yet. On my transect two weeks ago I had 83 butterflies, mostly Green-veined Whites, but also Orange Tips, Small Whites, Large Whites, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas. Most excitingly was a Speckled Wood. The first one that has reached Haddington as far as we know. Having first been recorded in East Lothian in 2009, they have made their way around the entire length of the coast, started to move along the River Tyne and have been moving inland. At the rate they had been moving, I thought they may arrive in Haddington this year, but I hadn't expected them to arrive quite so early in the year!

Last week's transect produced 91 butterflies, mostly the same species as the previous year, but no sign of the Speckled Wood. As a consolation, though, on my walk back to the office I saw a Wall Brown. This butterfly was first recorded in East Lothian in 2010 and has spread along the coast for about half the length of East Lothian. To reach Haddington is quite a jump, so I wonder if they are now established in other areas nearby?

I was annoyed that I didn't have my camera with me, and I have been back twice to see if it was still there, without success. Yesterday I did see my first Red Admiral of the year while I was looking for it though.

Today, I had a few site meetings giving me the opportunity to look for butterflies in between. There were plenty of Whites flying along the River Tyne, despite a chill wind. At John Muir Country Park I saw my first Small Heath of the year and a Wall Brown. At five o'clock this afternoon I found eight Wall Browns at the first site they were spotted in East Lothian. It is amazing how they well they are doing.

So, that is me up to 12 species this year.

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

Re: Nick Morgan

by Paul Harfield, 27-May-14 11:28 PM GMT

Hi Nick

Just catching up with your diary.

It has just struck me that it must be quite exciting to live in an area which is at the edge of colonisation spread of various species. Whereas down here on the South Coast we take many species for granted, I imagine that for you each year brings much anticipation. To see species gradually moving in to your area must be immensely satisfying and exciting.

I hope you continue to get new arrivals in your area and that their numbers continue to increase 😊 You never know maybe you will wake up to find Glanville Fritillaries and Lulworth Skippers fluttering around outside your window 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-May-14 10:59 PM GMT

"jackz432r" wrote:

Hi Nick

Just catching up with your diary.

It has just struck me that it must be quite exciting to live in an area which is at the edge of colonisation spread of various species. Whereas down here on the South Coast we take many species for granted, I imagine that for you each year brings much anticipation. To see species gradually moving in to your area must be immensely satisfying and exciting.

I hope you continue to get new arrivals in your area and that their numbers continue to increase 😊 You never know maybe you will wake up to find Glanville Fritillaries and Lulworth Skippers fluttering around outside your window 😊

Hi Jack,

Yes it is certainly interesting times up here for butterflies. For the last few years there have been a number of new species occurring here 2004, I saw my first Comma, and they are now as common as Small Tortoiseshells. 2009 the first Speckled Wood, which are now pretty widespread, 2010 I found the first Wall Browns and they have made their way along the coast half way along East Lothian. We had a new colony of Holly Blues here two years ago, but sadly they seem to have died out. Three years ago we received a couple of reports of Small Skippers and last year three or four good colonies were found.

Talking to an ex-countryside ranger, I hear that in the '70s we didn't even have Ringlets, Orange Tips or Peacocks up here!

It is great to find more and more species here, despite reducing habitat, but I do wonder what it happening. I hope that it isn't at the cost of the southern range of these butterflies.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Jack Harrison, 31-May-14 01:29 PM GMT

In the 1980s, I lived in the Aberdeen area for five years. I saw just one Peacock in that time. I have no idea of the situation today in that part of Scotland, but here in the west, they are certainly not scarce.

Jack

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Jun-14 09:10 AM GMT

I have had a good few days recently. On Friday I was sitting in my mother-in-law's garden enjoying a glass of wine to celebrate my wife's birthday, when a Painted Lady landed on some Honesty right next to me. It sunned itself and fed for about ten minutes, giving me great views.

On Saturday, I decided to go and look for some Green Hairstreaks that had been seen just outside East Lothian in the Scottish Borders. I had been given the grid references of where a consultant working for a wind farm company had found Green Hairstreaks, and when I plotted them on a map they formed a line along the boundary of the local authority. I felt sure that they must also be on the East Lothian side of the boundary, but after a long walk across wind farm tracks and Sphagnum bog, I saw that the fence line that marks the boundary of the local authorities is also the boundary between two

different farms. In East Lothian we had "improved" grassland.

I soon discovered some Green Hairstreaks in various locations, all of which were in boggy ground with tussocks of Blaeberry and within about 10 metres of Spruce plantations.



I climbed over the fence and searched all around the fields on the East Lothian side, but found no suitable habitat and no Green Hairstreaks. So, I decided to walk across to a local nature reserve, which is a fantastic area for butterflies, hoping that there may be some suitable habitat there. I followed a stream and was suddenly stopped in my tracks when I saw a Green Hairstreak on a Meadowsweet leaf in front of me. It didn't seem to be at all the right kind of habitat, but I climbed up the bank and discovered Blaeberry growing and another Green Hairstreak. I was delighted, thinking that I had found the first Green Hairstreak in East Lothian, but then realised that I had jumped over the stream to get past some rocks and I was actually now in Midlothian!



The Green Hairstreak was just below centre in the picture above and East Lothian is to the right of the stream! You can see that it was probably about three feet outside East Lothian!

I told a friend who records butterflies in the Scottish Borders about these sightings and he informed me that a previous sighting and my single sighting were in fact inside East Lothian. This puzzled me, but he told me something that I didn't previously know. Biological records use the boundaries of the Vice County maps and for East Lothian there is a spur sticking down into this area!

So, we have another new species for East Lothian. Well, not really new, as Green Hairstreaks were recorded in a couple of locations up until about 20 years ago, but they were thought to have died out.

My personal East Lothian list is growing well this year:

1. Small Tortoiseshell
2. Comma
3. Peacock
4. Green-veined White
5. Orange Tip
6. Large White
7. Small White
8. Speckled Wood
9. Wall Brown
10. Small Copper
11. Red Admiral
12. Small Heath
13. Painted Lady
14. Green Hairstreak

Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Freeman, 03-Jun-14 08:25 PM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

... This puzzled me, but he told me something that I didn't previously know. Biological records use the boundaries of the Vice County maps...

Yep, this is why my postal address is West Midlands but I am in the Vice County of Warwickshire.

Nice report and photos Nick, a great read 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 03-Jun-14 11:44 PM GMT

Interesting report Nick 😊 I'll have to check out the old Vice County boundaries as that could explain why some records are kept by what seems to be the wrong county. The first Green streak is the aberrant with the streak running across the fore wing but I can't remember the name 😊😊.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 04-Jun-14 01:08 AM GMT

I think you can take the presence of GH in East Lothian as a 'given', as the idea that this tiny stream presents an unconquerable boundary is preposterous.

I guess if you sat down for an hour you'd see frequent incursions over the border!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-Jun-14 09:44 AM GMT

I have been sent a very useful link to the Vice County areas: <http://www.cucaera.co.uk/grp/?refs=SJ311134&sticky=false&autocenter=false&map=road&graticule=true&nsgrids=false&zoom=5&lat=56.01066647040695&lon=-2.900390625>
Wurzel, I hadn't even thought about aberrations! I noticed that they seemed to have varying amounts of white on them. I will have to do a little research now that it is a local species!

David, I was tempted to chase it over to the other side of the stream!! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 18-Jun-14 09:56 PM GMT

I have had an interesting couple of days. I was told by an enthusiast in the Borders, Iain Cowe, that he had seen Large Skippers just outside the eastern East Lothian border. This is a species that I haven't seen, so the following lunchtime I went across with another enthusiast to have a look. I had a map reference, but it didn't seem to match up with the description of wasteland I had been told about. We searched some road verges and a field that had recently had sheep put in it. At one point we saw a little orange butterfly, but it wouldn't stop flying.

We then searched a builder's yard, but thought it unlikely this would be the right spot.

We kept seeing Speckled Woods, but we have become quite complacent about them now! Five years ago we would have been amazed to see one!



There was a railway running behind the sheep field, and I wondered if the wasteland was on the other side of that, so we went under a bridge and saw an area of short vegetation where the old road had been. It is an area where the spoil from the newer dual carriageway had been dumped, and it never looked as though much grew on it. However, we could see that it was covered in Orchids, which could have been why Iain had been there in the first place. Sure enough, as soon as we arrived there we saw a Large Skipper! I only had about 15 minutes left before I had to return to work, but we managed to see four of them in that time.



Today, we had sun for the second day in a row!! I did my transect this morning and it was interesting that the number of butterflies has continued to drop. Only three Orange Tips, and eight Green-veined Whites, along with a few other faded butterflies. The most exciting were my first two Ringlets on the transect for this year. I saw another four on the way back to the car!



I then went to an old slagheap which has been landscaped into a pyramid with a view point on the top. It is only about 100 metres across the base, but it houses our biggest, and one of only three known, colonies of Grayling. Unfortunately, I was a little early, but I did see one, which flew off never to be seen again. What was impressive, though was that I counted 24 Common Blue as I walked around the pyramid.





This has brought me up to 18 species this year. 😊

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

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 18-Jun-14 10:12 PM GMT

Good news about the Large Skipper Nick, you're building the tally up nicely 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 18-Jun-14 10:16 PM GMT

A Grayling prior to midsummer's day is highly notable, Nick.

Excellent spot.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 18-Jun-14 10:18 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

They were literally a stone's throw away from East Lothian. Just the other side of a bridge. The grass verges on our side look quite similar, so I am hopeful they may spread in our direction, as have so many other species in the last few years.

Hi David,

Yes, I have only known of them being here for the last three years, but it has been early July when I have seen them before. We seem to be a couple of weeks ahead so far this year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 18-Jun-14 10:50 PM GMT

I'm surprised at that, Nick.

I accept that in SE England things are 2 weeks ahead of last year (one only need to compare the first sightings' page of BC to confirm that), but in S. Wales it's more like 7-9 days. I'd have thought SE Scotland was no more than a week in advance of last year but clearly that is not the case.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 19-Jun-14 07:54 PM GMT

Actually, David, you are probably right! Ringlets and Meadow Browns are about a week early. Grayling and Northern Brown Argus are about two weeks early. Common Blues are about their normal time. All in all we are probably about a week ahead on average! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 19-Jun-14 10:26 PM GMT

Maybe the Graylings benefit from their proximity to the coast?

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Jun-14 09:58 AM GMT

Another good day yesterday – sun for three days in a row! Although there was quite a cool northern breeze and plenty of grey cloud in between the sunshine.

I went down to a small nature reserve in the Lammermuir Hills to look for Northern Brown Argus.

I was surprised how few butterflies there were there, although there were plenty of Small Heaths. Unfortunately it is in a valley that runs north to south, so there was very little shelter from the wind. I made my way along the burn (stream!) to a south-facing banking where I have seen Northern Brown Argus before. As the sun came out I noticed my first NBA of the year, and over a half hour period I saw nine of them.





As well as over 40 Small Heaths, I also saw 9 Small Coppers, 7 Green-veined Whites and 2 Large Whites.

I also heard yesterday that a Large Skipper has been seen just inside East Lothian. That is the 25th species over the last two years. This is a remarkable increase in species recorded here. Since 2009 we have added Grayling, Speckled Woods, Wall Brown, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Large Skipper. The Grayling and Green Hairstreak may have been here, undetected, for some time, but they have all increased significantly in numbers and range. 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by Lee Hurrell, 20-Jun-14 01:38 PM GMT

That's amazing, Nick. With your reports we are watching range expansion almost in real time from your neck of the woods.

Lovely NBA photos too!

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 22-Jun-14 11:02 AM GMT

Thanks Lee.

It really is amazing how so many species are moving into East Lothian. We now have double the number of species than there were here in the 1970s. I think that we had some species such as Speckled Woods many years earlier, but it is difficult to decide why we are getting these new species now. The habitat is reducing considerably and really the weather doesn't seem to be any better for butterflies than it was in the 70s. Certainly the movement seems to be from the south, with most species first being noticed in the south-east of East Lothian.

After last year's bumper number of species I didn't expect to see any new species for a while. I have always been very envious of the number of species in the south of England, but we are starting to catch up quickly.

I would be very interested to know if the southern extent of the range of these butterfly species is reducing and if they are truly moving north in response to climate change.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Hoggers, 22-Jun-14 03:06 PM GMT

Those Northern Brown Argus are stunning, Nick! Thanks for sharing them with us Southerners!

Best Wishes,

Hoggers.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 23-Jun-14 10:17 PM GMT

Thanks Hoggers, they are really nice wee butterflies with their white spot on each forewing.

Last year I planted a Garlic Mustard seedling in a pot in the hope of an Orange Tip laying an egg on it. A few weeks ago I was surprised to find some Large White caterpillars crawling over the leaves. They soon completely denuded the plant and so each day I picked Garlic Mustard stems and put them in a jar of water. The caterpillars continued to grow, but by this weekend I could only find three. They were quite big, so I am hoping the others crawled off to form a chrysalis.



Yesterday I noticed that one of the butterflies was a little smaller than the other two, but it seemed healthy enough. However, when I had a look at them this evening this is what I found:



Quite a gruesome sight and very disappointing after all of the effort to keep him fed. I will have to have a good look around the garden and see if I can find any chrysalises.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Pauline, 26-Jun-14 06:50 AM GMT

I'm enjoying catching up with your diary Nick – a Grayling that early is remarkable and those NBA are beautiful; your images have certainly done them justice.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jun-14 08:43 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline. It has certainly been an amazing year so far with another two new species for East Lothian. We haven't even had particularly good weather so far this year either!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Willow, 26-Jun-14 10:13 PM GMT

Some great reporting from north of the border Nick, and your **Grayling** record is highly notable (at least to this south Welshman 😊)

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Jun-14 11:08 PM GMT

Thanks Willow. There had been other Graylings seen before I saw mine. Maybe we have a hardy northern race up here that doesn't mind cloud and rain!! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by Chris Jackson, 29-Jun-14 09:12 AM GMT

Hi Nick, I would love to see a photo of your northern Grayling to see how it compares with ours down in the Med. While actively searching, I saw my first *semele* down here on June 9th, which is the same date as in 2013.

There is little chance of one of your NBAs wandering as far South as me 😊

Cheers, Chris

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Jul-14 02:42 PM GMT

Sorry Chris, I have been away for a couple of weeks. Here is a picture of a Grayling I took last year. Is it any different from those you see? Certainly it seems to be perfectly camouflaged against the Scottish soil when it lands and closes its wings!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Jul-14 04:13 PM GMT

Just back from two weeks family holiday in Southern Spain. We returned to the villa that we rented in 2012 near Alora, about 40 kilometres north west of Malaga. When we were there two years ago Spain had been experiencing a particularly dry spring and hot summer and everything was really parched. This year the weather patterns had been more normal and it was a little greener, but strangely, fewer butterflies seemed to be in the air. Not surprisingly most of the species I saw were the same as last time!



The first morning I took a walk up the hills behind the villa and came across some Wall Browns in the same location I had seen them before.



On the way back down I saw a few Dusky Heaths. These were a lot smaller than I had remembered and I thought they were a different species until I checked in the book!



What was strange was that these were really common two years ago, but I only saw about six or seven of them that morning and no more on my other saunters around the countryside near the village.

Back down to my usual butterfly patch and I saw a blue butterfly which I expected to be a Common Blue. However, it turned out to be a lovely fresh Lang's Short-tailed Blue.



Over the holiday I would regularly visit the area where I had seen so many butterflies exactly two years earlier, but I was always a little disappointed by how few there were there. I suspect that this area with a lot of thyme, rosemary and lavender on it was like an oasis to butterflies two years ago, but this year there was more choice for them to feed in other areas.

I think I only saw two Common Blues this year, whereas last year there were tens of them each day in this area.



I saw a few more Southern Brown Argus, which are really beautiful little things.



The butterfly that was the most common two years ago was the Southern Gatekeeper. These seem to like any slightly shaded ravine and I remember walking along a dried-up stream bed last time and hundreds of them flying up in front of me. This year I probably only saw about ten in total.



This little Sage Skipper (please correct me if I am wrong with my identification!) patrolled a short section of the track leading to our villa. Without fail it would be there any time I walked past flying up and down a section about 20 metres long, seeing off any other butterflies that should dare to enter his area.



The other skipper that I saw was new to me. I think this is a Mediterranean Skipper.



One morning I had a brief view of a Clouded Yellow and managed one quick photo before it continued on its way.



Most of the other butterflies I saw were ones that flew through the garden of the villa. Many of them didn't give me a chance to grab my camera, including a Holly Blue, a Brimstone and some Large Whites (which never seem to stop in Spain!). We regularly had a Small White visit a Lantana plant near the swimming pool. I not sure if it was the same individual that came back day after day, but it only seemed to be attracted to this one plant.



This Meadow Brown was seen in the garden and I saw a couple more in the hills close-by.



Geranium Bronze were the one butterfly that I saw more of this time than on my previous visit. Normally, I have only seen them in parks or gardens, but this year I came across them out in the countryside quite regularly. I imagine this must be because there were more flowers available for them to feed on this year. This Geranium Bronze was enjoying the fruits of a Lantana and it stayed in this position for over half an hour one evening.



Last visit I saw one Bath White very briefly along a track. This year I also saw one, but it stayed around a Lantana plant for a while allowing me to take a few pictures.



This Long-tailed Blue flew manically around the garden all day without stopping. Eventually, one evening it decided to refuel, allowing me to positively identify it and get a picture. A shame it didn't stop in brighter weather to allow me to get a better picture!



I went for a walk down to the river in the village, where last time I had seen quite a few butterflies. Unfortunately for me, there was a lot more water in the river, so I wasn't able to cross over to the better side. However, the next morning I drove down to another shingle area by the river where I saw some Speckled Woods and my target species, African Grass Blues. No trip to southern Spain is complete without me seeing these!!



Having checked through my butterfly book before we left I thought that there were about 90 species of butterflies occurring in this part of Spain at this time of year. By the end of the holiday I had only seen 19 species! I know that many species will have quite specific habitats and thinking of the butterflies that occur back home, you really have to know exactly where to look to find some small colonies of butterflies. When I had climbed to the top of the hill behind the villa I had looked down on the valley the other side and wondered if there would be different butterflies on the northern slopes of these hills. So, on the last day of our holiday I drove round to the other side of the hills for a short walk. As soon as I stopped the car I saw a large, dark butterfly land at the side of the road. It flew off before I could spot it, but within a few metres I saw another and it turned out to be a Striped Grayling. I walked up into the Pine and Eucalyptus forest and saw a Striped Grayling about every 20 metres. They seemed much bigger than the illustration in the book, but I was thrilled to see a new species before we left Spain.



It was great seeing all of these butterflies. Although there weren't as many as I saw during my previous visit, at least I saw almost as many species. What more than made up for the lack of butterflies around the villa in Alora was all of the butterflies I saw on a trip to the Sierra Nevada. More to follow!

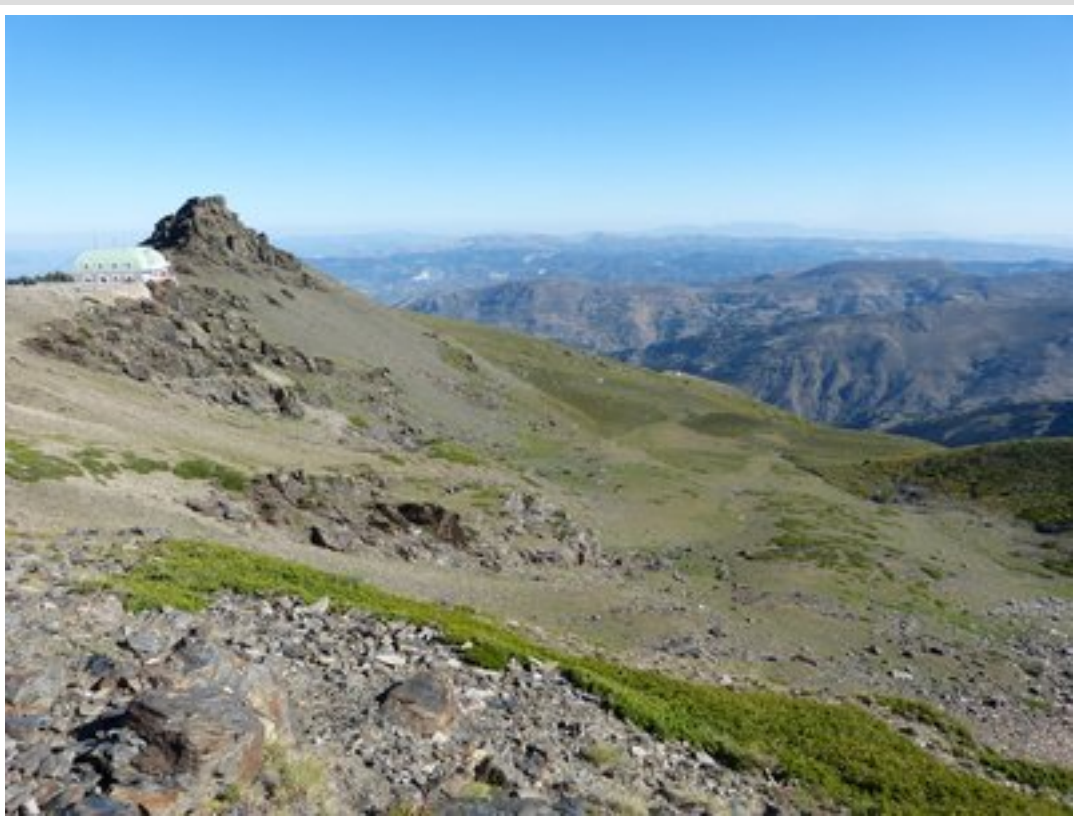
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 24-Jul-14 11:59 PM GMT

When looking through my butterfly books before we went on holiday to Spain, I kept noticing a little blob on the distribution maps to the east of Malaga. After further investigation I discovered this was the Sierra Nevada, a relatively isolated area of mountains and apparently the second highest range in Europe after the Alps. The highest peak is 3482 metres and due to its isolation many butterflies occur there that are not found in much of the rest of Spain.

120 species of butterflies have been recorded there and I am really grateful to Merche from <http://waste.ideal.es/primeramariposas.htm> who told me that July was a great time to look for butterflies there and she suggested a walk I should go on.

So on 4th July I got up early and drove for three hours from Alora to Hoya de la Mora. In winter this is a ski resort 2,550 metres up in the mountains. The road is blocked there, but if you want you can continue further up the mountains in a mini bus to over 3,100 metres.



The walk that had been suggested to me left the road at the barrier at Albergue Universitario and ran across the eastern slopes of the mountain to a stream called Borreguil de San Juan. The walk was only a couple of miles, but it took me three hours there and back because I spent most of my time watching butterflies!

Much of the landscape was very rocky with scree slopes and occasional green, damp areas. It was almost like walking through a giant rockery with the Alpine plants such as Sempervivum, Dianthus, Saxifrage and Gentian carpeting the ground.

Almost as soon as I set off an Apollo, *Parnassius apollo nevadensis*, landed on the slope above me. The subspecies occurring in the Sierra Nevada has orange markings within the ocelli, rather than the usual red. As the day warmed up I saw several of these gliding up and down the hillsides, constantly on the move, and hardly ever landing.



I wasn't able to identify most of the blues that I saw, until I looked at my pictures afterwards. Even then, I find it very difficult to differentiate between some species. I bought a great book about the butterflies of the Sierra Nevada "*Las Mariposas diurnas de Sierra Nevada*", which has detailed information about each species that lives there and a section on differentiating similar species. Unfortunately some of the characteristics mentioned in the book are not very apparent and the advice conflicts with information from other sources.

Both the Idas Blue, *Plebejus idas*, and the Silver-studded Blue, *Plebejus argus*, occur in the Sierra Nevada. The book says that light veins are apparent on the underside of the wings for the Idas Blue. Guy et al's fantastic Butterflies of Europe app says that the blue scales are more extensive on the hind wing of the Silver-studded Blue. I have come to the conclusion, therefore, that those that I saw were all Silver-studded Blues, but I would be happy to hear from anyone who thinks otherwise!





It was interesting that I could walk for 50 metres and see no butterflies and then come to an area where there were several flying around. It seemed that a subtle difference in habitat made a big difference in the number of butterflies.

I am pretty sure that the following pictures are all Escher's Blue, *Agrodiaetus escheri*. These were the most common butterflies I saw high up in the mountains and they were mostly in areas around the prostrate Juniper scrub. They seem to have quite bold markings on the underside of the wings.





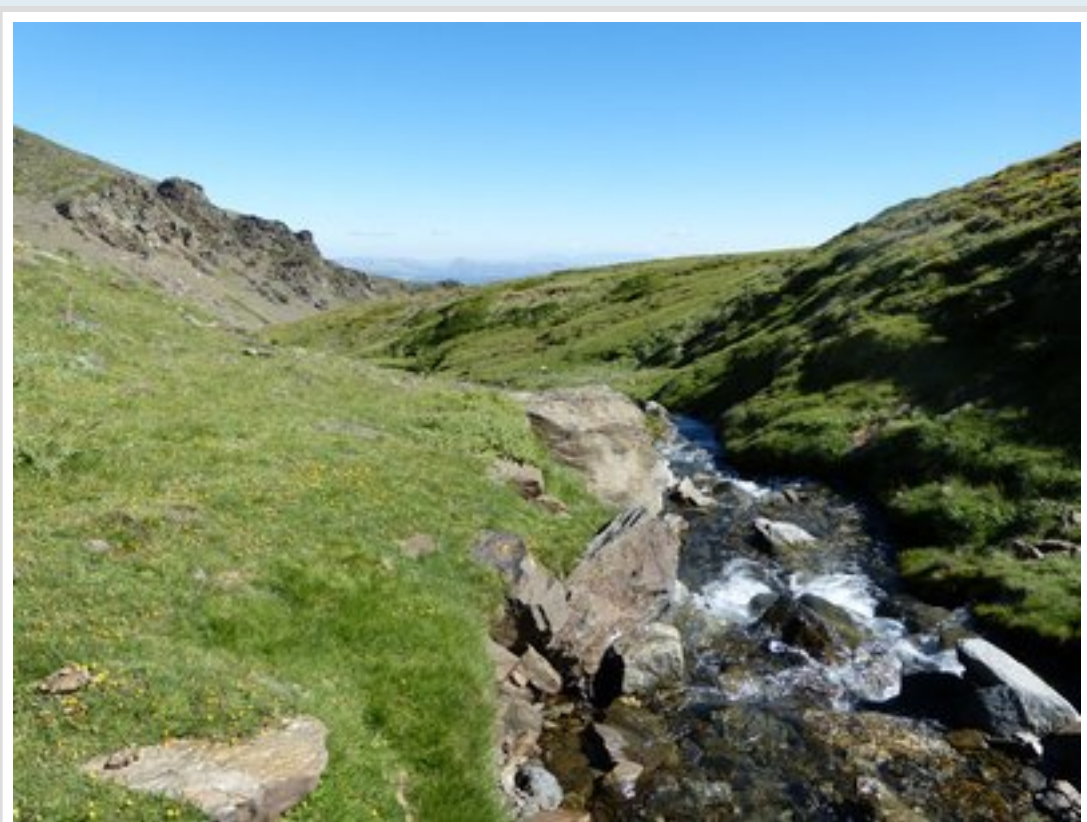
This Large Wall Brown, *Lasiommata maera*, flew across the path in front of me and kindly stopped for a picture. The form found in Sierra Nevada and much of the Iberian Peninsula is *adrasta*, which is lighter in colour with more extensive orange markings.



I descended a small path to a damp area with water running through it. Here I noticed the blues seemed a little smaller and lighter in colour. They turned out to be Nevada Blues, *Plebicula golgus*.



There were also quite a number of Common Blues, *Polyommatus celina*, in this area, but they were markedly darker.



As I continued down to the Rio de San Juan I was excited to see some orange butterflies. They were very flighty and difficult to approach and they turned out to be Small Tortoiseshells, *Aglais urticae*. They seemed more orange than those in Scotland.



It was here that I briefly saw my first Purple-shot Copper, *Lycaena alciphron*. Later I was to see more of them near the Albergue Universitario where I got into trouble for taking pictures close to their military building. After I showed the soldier the pictures of butterflies I had been taking we parted on good terms!





On my return to the car I saw some Clouded Yellows. Most of them didn't stop, but I managed a distant picture of this one. I had thought that it may be a Berger's Clouded Yellow, but Guy kindly identified it as a Clouded Yellow, *Coleas crocea*.



After that, there was a bit of a Fritillary-fest. First a Heath Fritillary, *Mellicta athalia*.



Then what I think is a Niobe Fritillary, *Argynnis niobe*.



A Queen of Spain Fritillary, *Issoria lathonia*.



And finally a Cardinal Fritillary, *Argynnis pandora*, just as I was getting into the car.



Frustrating moment of the morning was having a Spanish Brassy Ringlet, *Erebia Hispania*, in the view finder only for it to be chased away by a blue just before I managed to take a picture!

Other butterflies seen that morning were Small Copper, Bath White and Wall Brown.

After that I drove down the mountain and stopped a couple of times to check what was flying in different areas. I'll put those butterflies on a separate post.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 25-Jul-14 12:03 AM GMT

Excellent resumé, Nick. Sounds like you found a really interesting and isolated hotspot.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Jul-14 12:50 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Excellent resumé, Nick. Sounds like you found a really interesting and isolated hotspot.

Thanks David. The Sierra Nevada was the best place I have ever been for butterflies! It would be amazing to spend a week or so there. It was interesting that on my 3 hour walk I didn't see one other person. When I returned to the car park there were hundreds of people there. I think they all drive up the mountain pass and stop to take in the view and buy a drink in one of the challets and then head back down again!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 26-Jul-14 04:44 PM GMT

Fantastic reportage Nick and that Striped Grayling shot is stunning 😊🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jul-14 07:25 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Fantastic reportage Nick and that Striped Grayling shot is stunning 😊🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

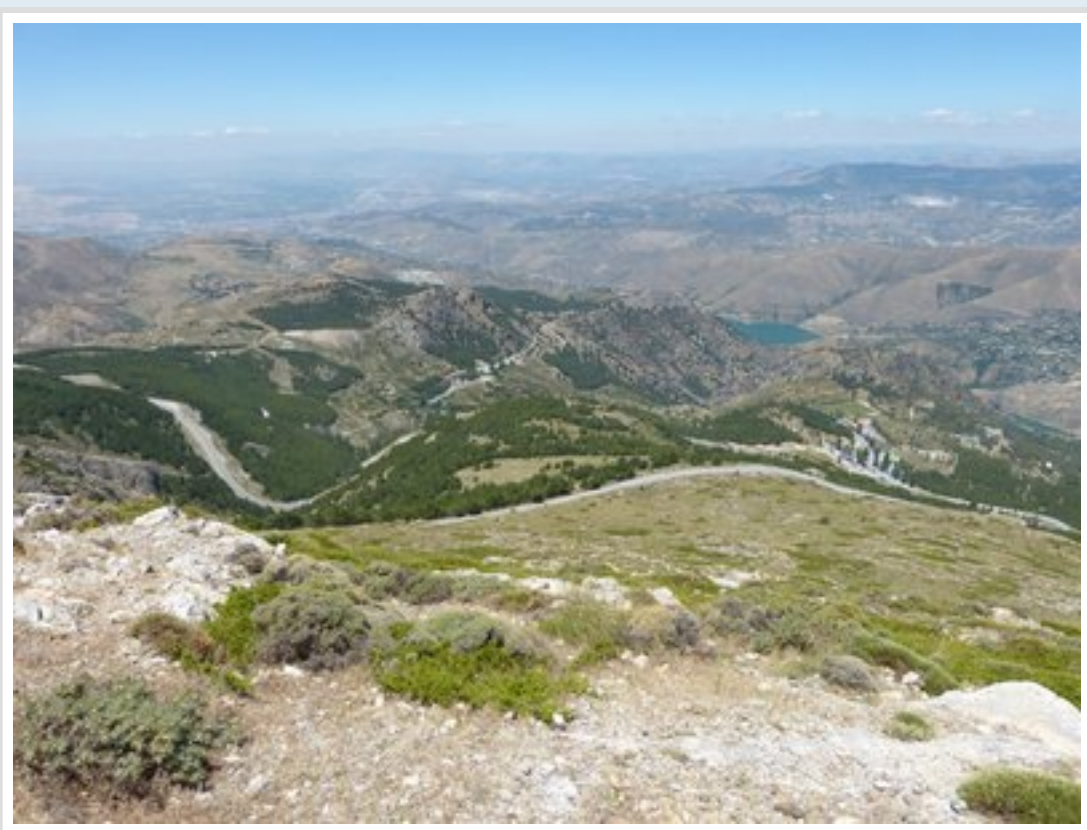
Thanks Wurzel,

It was a great holiday and the Striped Grayling was a last day treat for me! I haven't added them all up (actually I am not definite about all of my IDs), but I must have seen more than 50 species and about 15 of them were lifers for me!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jul-14 07:45 PM GMT

On my way back down the mountain road I noticed a viewpoint, but it was impossible to drive the car into the parking area as there was a foot drop off the tarmac! I managed to find somewhere to park the car a little further down the road and walked back towards the viewpoint.



Initially, I was surprised not to see any butterflies, but as I walked up to the viewpoint I was amazed to see five Swallowtails, *Papilio machaon*, flying backwards and forwards. I presume this is the "hill topping" activity that I have heard so much about.



The Swallowtails were being bombarded by Wall Browns, *Lasiommata megera*, every time they flew anywhere near them. It was a great sight to see!



I was delighted to see this Blue-spot Hairstreak, *Satyrium spini*. I had read about them before I went and I was disappointed to see that they occur in May and June in the Sierra Nevada. However, this one looked quite fresh. Later I saw some much more faded individuals.



As I crouched down to take a picture of the Blue-spot Hairstreak I noticed another butterfly out of the corner of my eye landing on the same plant. It was a Southern Scarce Swallowtail, *Iphiclides feisthamelii*. What a dilemma – which to take a picture of?! I ended up alternating between the two!



The Dusky Heaths, *Coenonympha dorus*, here were a lot fresher-looking than those back in Alora. There were quite a number here at about 2,100 metres, yet I had seen none 500 metres further up the mountains.



There were also plenty of Purple-shot Coppers, *Lycaena alciphron*, in this area.



The Common Blues here were all rather faded, but this Idas Blue, *Plebejus idas*, was particularly nice.



I was amazed by how many butterflies there were in this small area. If you look carefully at the picture below you can see a dot about the left-hand interpretation board. It is one of the Swallowtails!



Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 26-Jul-14 08:36 PM GMT

Glad you got to see Dusky Heath, Nick. It's such a beautiful insect.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jul-14 09:56 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Glad you got to see Dusky Heath, Nick. It's such a beautiful insect.

Yes, they are lovely, and I had forgotten how small they are!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Chris Jackson, 27-Jul-14 07:34 AM GMT

A great report Nick, including Mediteranean species I know, and several I don't. I can imagine the thrill of seeing your first Striped Grayling, and they are relatively large compared to *semele*.

On a previous subject concerning your Scotland *semele*, it looks no different finally from its cousins down here in Marseilles.
Cheers, Chris

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 27-Jul-14 09:47 AM GMT

"cjackson" wrote:

A great report Nick, including Mediterranean species I know, and several I don't. I can imagine the thrill of seeing your first Striped Grayling, and they are relatively large compared to *semele*.

On a previous subject concerning your Scotland *semele*, it looks no different finally from its cousins down here in Marseilles.
Cheers, Chris

Hi Chris. Interesting about there being no difference in our Graylings! Yes, the Striped Graylings seemed like very large butterflies, but they don't look that big in Tolman!

I saw what I think was *semele* on my last stop in Sierra Nevada, and it certainly looked different from those I have seen here. There were two or three species I saw there that I am not that confident about, so I will be calling on the expertise here for a bit of help! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 31-Jul-14 10:59 PM GMT

Further down the mountains at about 1,800 metres above sea level, the road entered an area of Cedar and Pine trees. I pulled over and walked into an area of scrub and meadow. There were plenty of different butterflies everywhere I looked here and I am very grateful to Mikhail for helping with some of their identifications!



This Iberian Marbled White, *Melanargia galathea*, was flying at the side of the road. There were several other Marbled Whites flying amongst the scrub, but I can't be sure they were the same species. The Spanish Marbled White and the Western Marbled White both also occur in the Sierra Nevada.



I spent some time watching this butterfly until it gave me a chance to photograph it. It turned out to be a Grayling, *Hipparchia semele*, although it is a little different from those I see in Scotland.



I think this is a Safflower Skipper, *Pyrgus carthami*. There were a lot of similar skippers in that area, but they were mostly whizzing about and they rarely settled.



I have come to the conclusion that this is an Oriental Meadow Brown, *Hyponephele lupinnus*, thanks to Mikail's help! The undulations on the rear wings being the deciding feature.



When I saw this little skipper I thought it was a Small Skipper, but closer examination of the pictures showed it to be an Essex Skipper, *Thymelicus lineola hemmingi*. There were quite a number of them flying around in this little area.



There were a lot of these little blues flying there. I assumed they were Silver-studded Blues, but again thanks to Mikhail, we now think they are Idas Blues, *Plebejus idas nevadensis*. In the Sierra Nevada the Silver-studded Blues tend to have lighter undersides to their wings (as per my earlier post). The Idas Blues have a grey background to the underside of their wings with a lighter postdiscal area. (Thanks also to "Las Mariposas de Sierra Nevada" and Google Translate!).



Given that all the males in this area were Idas Blues, I am assuming that this female is also an Idas Blue.



The other blue flying there were Common Blues, *Polyommatus celina*.



This Marsh Fritillary, *Euphydryas aurinia beckeri*, was the only fritillary there that I was able to photograph. Several others, large and small, flew past me!



After taking pictures of so many female blues, assuming that some of them were going to be an argus, it turns out that the last butterfly I photographed was the only argus I saw all day. It is a Mountain Argus, *Aricia montensis* (Thank you Guy for the identification!).



Up on the top of the mountains the temperature was 10 degrees, but down here it was 18 degrees, and I think that is why the butterflies were so much more active. However, this was a lot cooler than Granada a few miles further down the road where it was 36 degrees when I drove past! There were so many butterflies in this area that I wouldn't be surprised if there were twice the number of species that I managed to identify there. I also saw my first ever Black-veined White, *Aporia crataegi*. It was much bigger than I expected! There were also Cleopatras, *Gonepteryx cleopatra mauretanica*, Large Whites, *Pieris brassicae vazquezi* and Small Whites, *Pieris rapae*, flying there along with a lot more butterflies that I couldn't identify. I was only there for about 15 minutes, but I would have loved to have pitched a tent and spent several days there! Sadly I couldn't spend more time there as I had a three-hour drive ahead of me to get back to the villa. All the driving was well worth it, though. In the five hours I had spent in the Sierra Nevada I had seen 33 different species, with 18 of them being species I had never seen before. Definitely my best ever day looking for butterflies!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Mikhail, 01-Aug-14 07:09 AM GMT

Just a note, Nick, that the Spanish Argus is *Aricia morronensis*, not *montensis*.

M.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 01-Aug-14 12:57 PM GMT

Oop! Thanks Mikhail (duly edited) and thanks very much again for all of your help identifying the butterflies. It is much appreciated.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 01-Aug-14 04:04 PM GMT

Hi Nick. I seem to have got way out of synch with your diary. I never get to the south of Spain in the summer nowadays and you have convinced me I should!

They're excellent species you've seen. My only corrections, on a brief perusal, would be the clouded yellow (which is a clouded yellow, not Berger's, unless there's some strange trick of the light going on) and that last argus, which does look to me like *montensis*, not *morronensis*. From Misha's comment about the names I presume you originally had it down as *montensis* – or maybe I've missed a trick. Everything's been a rush recently.

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 01-Aug-14 06:38 PM GMT

Hi Guy,

Thank you very much for your comments. I really appreciate your expert view.

The reason I went for Berger's was because the hind wings appear not to have a black margin. However, I have never been sure how people can tell the difference!

For the Argus, I originally thought *montensis*, then changed my mind to *morronensis*, but only remembered to change the Common Name! The underside markings seem closer to *montensis*, but I was swayed towards *morronensis* by the much reduced orange markings on the upper side of the wings.

I will apply Google Translate to my Sierra Nevada book and see if I can do better!

I would appreciate you letting me know how you can tell the difference with both of the above butterflies.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 01-Aug-14 08:34 PM GMT

Hi Nick. For the clouded yellow, the colour looks quite wrong for Berger's, which has no hint of orange in it. The outer dark border of the forewing also seems to run parallel towards the trailing edge, enclosing the pale spot, though the black spot on the underside somewhat obscures this. The difficulty I have with photos of these species is that in the field I always know whether it is *crocea* or *hyalensis* (my word for *hyale/alfacariensis*) before I photograph it, from the flight appearance. For the argus, I agree the upperside is very weakly marked if it is *montensis* but the orange lunules are well developed on the underside, the ground colour is far too pale for *morronensis* and the wing shape is wrong. My general impression is that it belongs in the *artaxerxes* group – and therefore must be *montensis*. But I could be wrong ... 😊

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 01-Aug-14 08:41 PM GMT

"Padfield" wrote:

Hi Nick. For the clouded yellow, the colour looks quite wrong for Berger's, which has no hint of orange in it. The outer dark border of the forewing also seems to run parallel towards the trailing edge, enclosing the pale spot, though the black spot on the underside somewhat obscures this. The difficulty I have with photos of these species is that in the field I always know whether it is *crocea* or *hyalensis* (my word for *hyale/alfacariensis*) before I photograph it, from the flight appearance. For the argus, I agree the upperside is very weakly marked if it is *montensis* but the orange lunules are well developed on the underside, the ground colour is far too pale for *morronensis* and the wing shape is wrong. My general impression is that it belongs in the *artaxerxes* group – and therefore must be *montensis*. But I could be wrong ... 😊

Guy

You are far more likely to be right than me!! I will bow to your superior knowledge and change the identifications accordingly.

It seems that many of the butterflies occurring in the Sierra Nevada have slight differences to those occurring elsewhere. I can't recommend the Sierra Nevada highly enough and I would have loved to spend several days there.

Thank you for your help.

Edit: Here is another picture of the Clouded Yellow if it helps!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 10-Aug-14 09:30 PM GMT

During our recent holiday to southern Spain, we paid a quick visit to Gibraltar. While my wife and kids went up to the top of the rock in the cable car, I spent a couple of hours in Alameda Botanical Gardens, as I remembered that it was a good spot for butterflies when we visited a couple of years earlier.

This time it was the same!



One of the first flower beds I came across had several Holly Blues enjoying the flowers.



There were Small Whites everywhere and they were certainly the most numerous butterflies there.

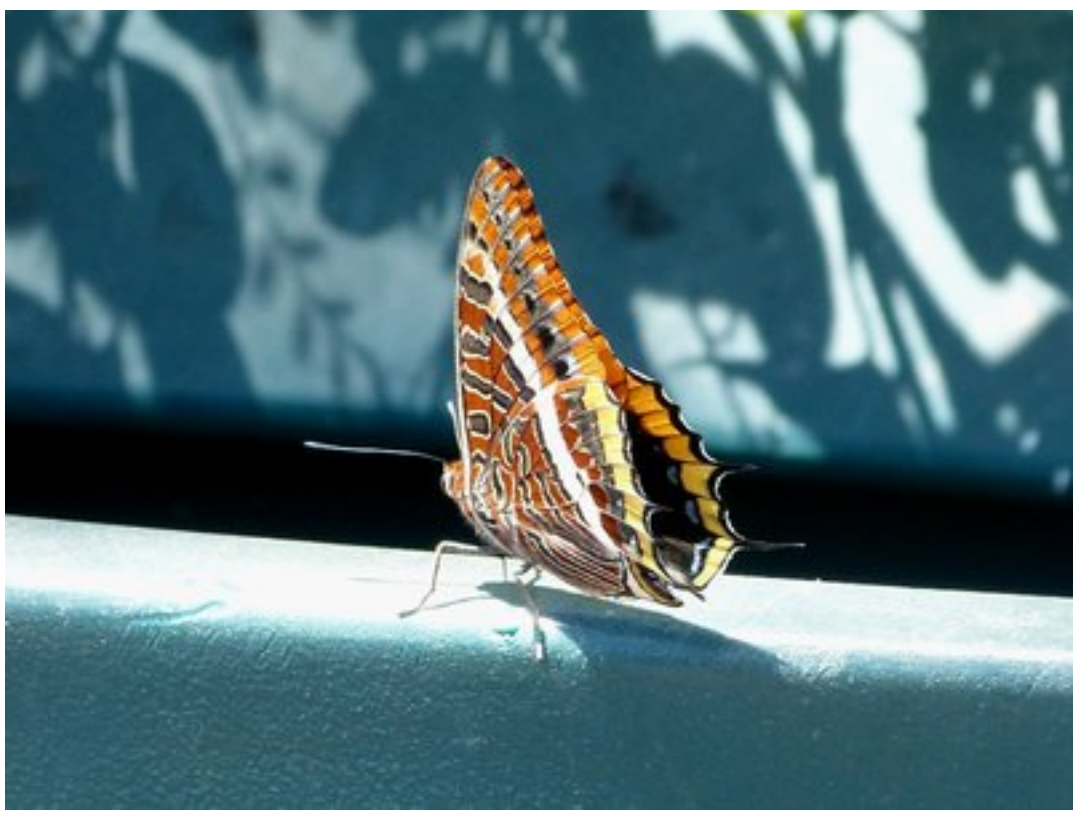


I returned to an area where two years ago I had seen a lot of Southern Brown Argus, Geranium Bronze, Common Blues and Small Coppers feeding on the flowers. Unfortunately this year the flowers were not doing as well and there were a lot fewer butterflies at this spot. I did see this nice Common Blue, though.

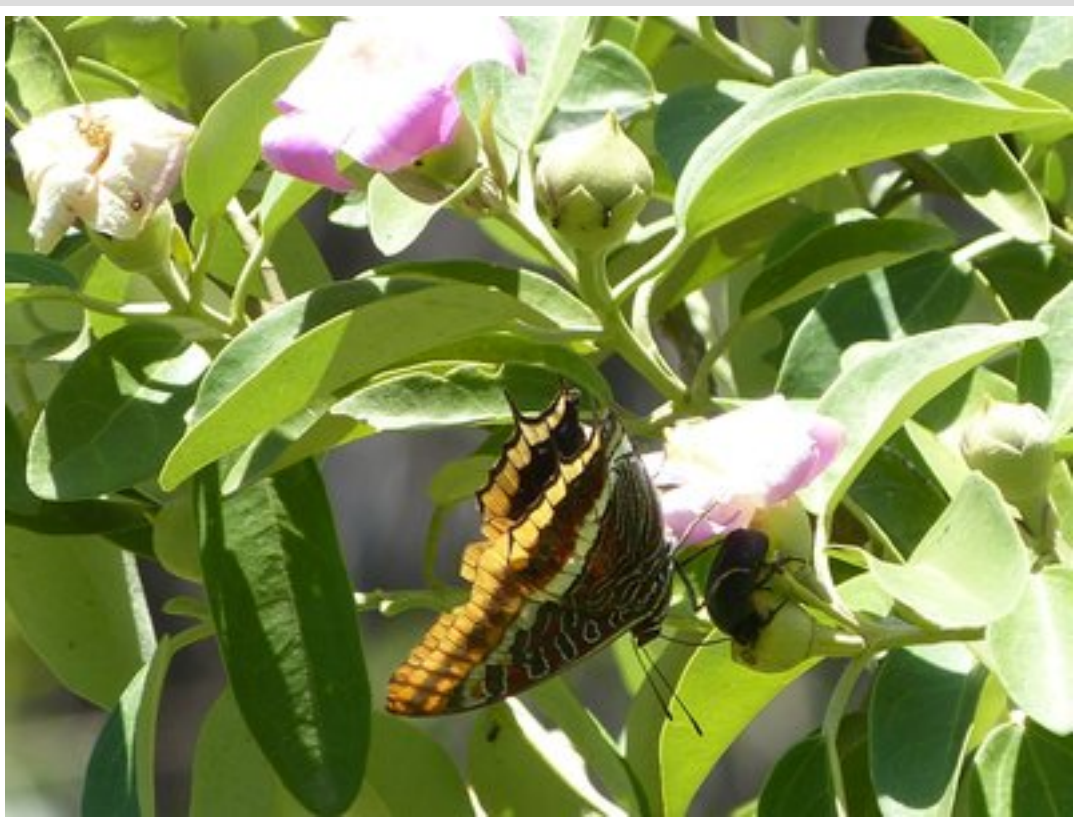


While I was watching it, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a large butterfly drifting past. Eventually I tracked it down in the high branches of a pine tree. It turned out to be a Two-tailed Pasha. According to the books this flies in May/June and mid August to October, so I was surprised to see it the second week in July.

Nearer the entrance I spotted another enjoying something sticky on the lid of a bin.



I then noticed some more in a tree. As I watched it was apparent that there were seven or eight of them, some quite fresh-looking and others very ragged. I don't know what kind of tree this is, but it was obviously very attractive to the Pashas and other insects.



They would keep chasing each other from the choice fruit and fly across the path to the trees on the other side of the path. I spent quite a bit of time tracking them trying to get a picture, but they would always land high in the trees. At one point I completely lost sight of one of them as it flew past me. I couldn't figure out where it had gone, but then noticed something out of the corner of my eye. I had a Two Tailed Pasha sitting parrot-fashion on my shoulder! Unfortunately my camera strap was too short for me to get a selfie with it!

Close to where the Two Tailed Pashas were flying was a patch of milkweed and right on cue a Monarch landed on one of the plants. They have their own little breeding colony of Monarchs at the botanical gardens and I saw quite a few during my visit.



Also enjoying the Milkweed was this Wall Brown.



There were a few Speckled Woods enjoying the dappled light.



This was the only Lang's Short-tailed Blue I saw that day.



And I only saw one Small Copper.



There were plenty of Southern Brown Argus there, though.



Also flying in the botanical gardens were Large Whites, Geranium Bronzes and Cleopatras. And on our walk from the border to the bus station we saw a Brimstone and a Clouded Yellow. Our trip to Gibraltar added two new species to my holiday list bringing it up to 48 species, 20 of which were lifers for me!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Sep-14 06:18 PM GMT

I had an amazing day on Thursday. A friend and I went to a woodland to look for signs of Purple Hairstreak, after being told of a possible sighting there five or six years ago. Sadly, we didn't see any Hairstreaks, but we were almost overwhelmed by Speckled Woods.



Up until 2009 we had no records of Speckled Woods in East Lothian. That year we had two sightings reported to us and each year since the number has gone up and they have spread westwards right across East Lothian.



In an area of woodland about 200 metres by 400 metres we saw hundreds of Speckled Woods. Probably about 400, or more. Everywhere we looked they were dropping out of the trees, basking on the path or sunning themselves on a leaf.



There were quite a number of darker individuals amongst them, which I hadn't seen before.



I particularly liked these Sycamore and Ash trees in a loving embrace!



We are so lucky to have Speckled Woods up here now. I have never seen so many butterflies in one place. Apart from them I only saw two Peacocks and two Red Admirals.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 13-Sep-14 09:19 PM GMT

Nick, when did you see your first Speckled Wood in your locality?

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Sep-14 11:03 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Nick, when did you see your first Speckled Wood in your locality?

David,
The first Speckled Woods I saw here were in 2011, but I received one record in 2010 and two records in 2009. They seemed to arrive here along the east coast, with the Lammermuir Hills to the south an apparent barrier. It has been interesting tracking their progress along the coast and now inland.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 14-Sep-14 05:25 PM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

The first Speckled Woods I saw here were in 2011, but I received one record in 2010 and two records in 2009. They seemed to arrive here along the east coast, with the Lammermuir Hills to the south an apparent barrier. It has been interesting tracking their progress along the coast and now inland.

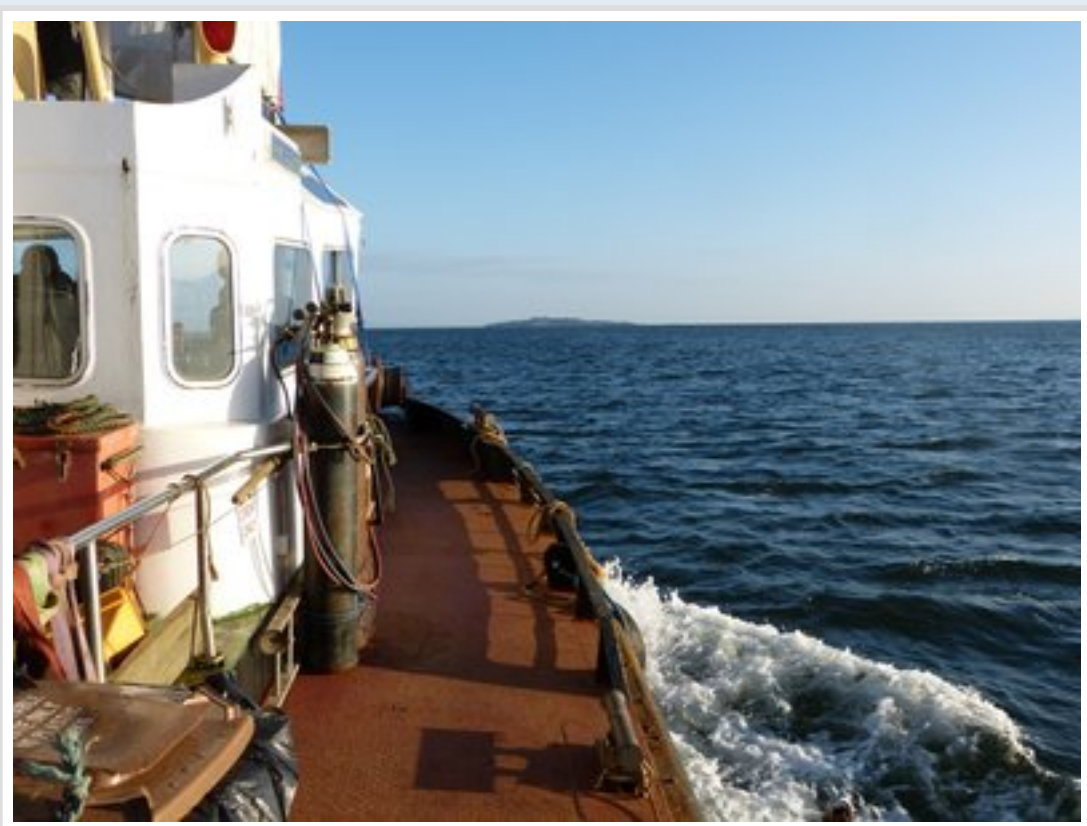
Interesting that, for it was about that time when they started appearing in the Isle of Man where they are now fairly well established.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Nov-14 08:16 PM GMT

I had an interesting day on Saturday, when I was invited to join a group counting Grey Seal pups on the islands of Inchkeith and Inchmickery in the Firth of Forth. The reason I was there was to identify butterflies that they had seen hibernating in old underground military buildings in previous years. I hadn't realised that both islands are almost entirely covered in old military buildings of various ages.

Last year they had noticed large "clumps" of butterflies on the walls and ceilings of some of the rooms. This year they were very disappointed to only see one or two butterflies at a time. I found it all very interesting. I wondered how the butterflies had found these locations. They seemed to only be in the underground buildings. There were none in the tunnels or rooms with direct access to the outdoors. They were all in rooms that had just the slightest hint of daylight and no perceivable movement of air. When we searched rooms that were further underground we found nothing. We found a total of 77 Small Tortoiseshells and 7 Peacocks on Inchkeith. The buildings on Inchmickery were all above ground and didn't appear to have any butterflies at all. We also saw two Small Tortoiseshells flying outside on Inchkeith. The seal pups were pretty sweet, too!!







Today I was walking along the coast at Gullane and saw a Peacock flying past. It was only 8 degrees, but lovely and sunny. I have never seen so many butterflies in November! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 03-Nov-14 09:20 PM GMT

Nice reportage, Nick. Must admit, I 'googled' Inchkeith after reading your earlier post and it seems it has quite a history!

I can't explain why the butterflies are attracted to underground locations, but am confident that 'they know best' and there must be some kind of reason for them behaving this way.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Nov-14 01:27 PM GMT

David,

Yes, Inchkeith certainly has had quite a history. There is hardly a square inch without some sort of building, concrete or tarmac. Nice to see it all reverting back to nature, though.

I imagine that the butterflies choose the underground chambers on the island as the temperature should remain just above freezing and the lack of wind will help them through the winter without desicating. I am now thinking about similar buildings inland that may be suitable for butterflies. They have to be hibernating somewhere around here too!

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 06-Nov-14 08:40 PM GMT

You may be right there, Nick. Perhaps butterflies instinctively know that a coastal location is a prime spot due to there being less risk of extreme low temperatures and a greater degree of moisture in the air.

If only **we** were as clever as **they** are!