

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-Jan-19 06:18 PM GMT

I hope that 2019 brings you loads too Wurzel 😊

Tuesday 1st January 2019

My first diary entry of the new year but not really had much chance to get out. My youngest son has been up from Bristol where he now lives with his girlfriend and stayed with us over the new year and when we have been out of the house it has been mainly to visit other family members.

Despite the forecast saying it was going to clear up here this afternoon it stayed resolutely grey and gloomy here all day, so that's the first forecast of the year wrong...I really must learn not to take too much notice of them.

Occasional glimpses into the garden have shown that the usual birds are all showing up and I managed to get a few photos over the past few days, all taken though the window from the back room, lazy birding again 😊



Male Bullfinch



Great Tit and Blue Tit.



A trio of Blue Tits



Coal Tit and Blue Tit



Robin

As well as those shown above I have also seen Long-tailed Tits, Dunnocks, House Sparrows, Blackbirds, Goldfinches, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a little Goldcrest that has occasionally been rapidly darting in and out to the fat block.

Now we are in 2019 I really must see about finishing my look back at 2018.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-Jan-19 08:40 PM GMT

A great set of birding shots Neil – what a great way to start the New Year with a Bullfinch 😊 I made my New Years Resolution to completely ignore

weather forecasts but I just know that come May I'll still be suffering from chronic Met-isis 😊😊 Have a brilliant 2019 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-Jan-19 07:30 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, the Bullfinches are regular visitors at the moment 😊

Looking back at 2018 part 3 – Late Summer into Autumn.

By the middle of August things were getting back to more normal conditions for the time of year around here, that is a mix of sunny spells and cloudier days with some longer periods of rain at last which helped to revive the parched vegetation hereabouts.

Second brood Common Blues, Small Copper and Small Heath continued to fly around my local spots but Gatekeepers had already disappeared as had Meadow Browns which usually hang on a little longer here, albeit nowhere near as long as they do down south. Holly Blues were still about but not that many and most were looking past their best now.



Small Heath – Sheldon Country Park 06.08.2018



Holly Blue – Coverdale 06.08.2018

Speckled Woods were continuing to grow in numbers and on one particular day (19th August) I managed to identify – by comparing photos – 7 different males and 2 females in my garden.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 13.08.2018

At the end of August and into the first week of September we went down to Dorset for one of our regular late summer visits, staying for a week at Durdle Door next to Lulworth Cove. I have said it before, and will say it again, that I believe this area to be amongst the best in the country for butterflies at that time of year. I must admit I was wondering what I would find following the hot, dry summer, and indeed the sites that I visited were all looking very brown and dry compared to visits in previous years. The weather during the week that we were there was a bit cooler and cloudier than it had been but still quite warm and we saw no rain until the last day.



The gully at Durlston CP looking very dry

As it turned out, there were plenty of most of the usual subjects to be seen, I say most because although I saw 19 species down there including good numbers of my main target for the week (Adonis Blues), there were some species that only showed up in low numbers, most notably the usual migrants. During the week I only saw 3 each of Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow plus by a co-incidence of numbers also 3 Hummingbird Hawk Moths. These, along with lower than usual numbers of Large Whites showed that there was not much coming in from across the channel at that particular time. Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks were also notable by their absence, a far cry from a few years ago down here when it seemed that every buddleia was covered with them.

Apart from the Adonis Blues already mentioned there were good numbers of Common Blues, Brown Argus, Small Copper and Small Heath to be found at most of the sites I visited. A few Chalk Hill Blues were still hanging on at Bindon Hill above Lulworth Cove, this being the only time I saw this species in 2018. Graylings were still flying at Durdle Door although Meadow Browns were definitely down in number from what I usually see in this area at this time of year.



Adonis Blue – Osmington 04.09.2018



Chalk Hill blue - Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Grayling - Durdle Door 03.09.2018



Brown Argus - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Small Copper – Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Common Blue – Portland 04.09.2018

A late second brood Small Blue surprised me at Durlston Country Park as I had never seen one of these down here at that time of year.



Small Blue – Durlston CP 05.09.2018

Less of a surprise was a late Marbled White seen at Durdle Door as I have seen occasional examples of these down here in the first few days of September before and they certainly seem to last longer on this stretch of coast than at most other locations.

Back home though the rest of September things were falling into that familiar pattern of decent warm and sunny days through the week when I was at work and then cloud or rain at the weekend. Looking back at my notes, the last two Saturdays in the month were particularly wet and both were followed by dull and gloomy Sundays.

Going into early October, Speckled Wood were still hanging on although most were now looking tired and faded. I saw reports of third brood Common Blues appearing at a few places around the midlands which is unusual for around here so I went out for a look around to see if I could find any. The conditions were far from ideal on the Saturday (Oct. 7th) that I went out with a cold wind blowing and I found just one butterfly which was indeed a single male third brood Common Blue.



Common Blue 07.10.2018

This actually turned out to be my last time out looking for butterflies in 2018 as things had just fizzled out locally plus I had used up all my floating holidays from work by now and also needed to catch up on some household jobs at the weekends. This was a shame really as I had seen reports of Clouded Yellows in unusually good numbers for the midlands (20+ including a number of helice) at Sywell Country Park in Northamptonshire which were believed to be the offspring of earlier migrants. Oh well, although I missed them myself, I did see some great photos of these posted by others on the usual social media. There had also been reports of Clouded Yellows sticking around a couple of sites in Warwickshire and Shropshire earlier in the summer so it appears that this species was seen a bit more often than usual in the midlands this year, unfortunately not by myself though... wrong place and time for me as usual.

My very last butterfly of 2018 was a tired Speckled Wood seen in my garden on October 20th.



My last butterfly of 2018

In the end it turned into a year which reminded me a bit of the weather that we used to have when I was a teenager growing up in the 1970s. That is, a proper winter followed by a changeable spring and then a hot dry summer. There was much talk of the summer being like that of 1976 but, at least around here, the really hot weather ended well before the drought became anywhere near as bad as in that year. That is not to say that it didn't become very dry and parched here which it certainly did and this seemed to adversely affected the summer grassland species in particular. As in most years there appeared to be losers (most Satyrids) as well as winners (Most Lycaenids) and it remains to be seen how the conditions this year have impacted on the numbers for 2019.

All in all I saw 38 species in 2018 which is the lowest final tally I have had for some years now. This was partially to do with decisions that I made before the season started on where and when to have our breaks/holidays around the country and also partially due to the fact that I have decided to try and cut down the miles that I clock up each year looking for butterflies. With this in mind I made a conscious decision to miss certain species this year, especially some of those that are a fair distance from me and I have seen many times before, and try and limit the longer distance journeys to those where we stayed for a few days and could make best use of our time in the area. This is all part of me trying to be a 'responsible butterfly enthusiast' and doing my bit to reduce my own carbon footprint.

With a couple of months of winter still to go I will be thinking of what I would like to see in 2019 and making plans for the forthcoming season, I already have some thoughts in my head so now need to check up on flight periods and look into possible locations and accommodation.

Here's hoping that everyone had a great New Year and is looking forward to a fantastic butterfly filled season ahead.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-Jan-19 05:58 PM GMT

A wonderfully illustrated (if that is the right word of photo?) and interesting account of 2018 Neil and I can certainly agree with a lot of your observations though I don't know if we'll have to wait and see how badly the dry summer affected the Meadow Browns they certainly seemed to be fewer in number 😊 Have a great 2019 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Jan-19 11:21 PM GMT

That's a thoughtful and interesting review of the latter part of summer, Neil. I agree, it has been a peculiar year, cold to begin with then spectacularly warm and dry followed by a descent into damp and dreary through August and into September.

Like you, I was alarmed by the relative lack of adult overwinterers and whilst much of the south and south east saw additional broods, the effect in my part of the UK was to bring a premature end to the season with little in the way of fresh emergences resulting from the warmer weather earlier in the summer.

Now that we're part way into January, I fear that we are also going to see a poor spring showing unless we get a cold snap before the end of February.

It just proves that a hot summer isn't necessarily beneficial long term to butterflies, although I hope I will be proved wrong over the forthcoming few months.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 09-Jan-19 03:41 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I feel afraid for the Meadow Brown's this year, because of the hot Summer and the fact we had the Moors burning around our way, lots of them were disrupted, I even had some in my Garden which as never happened before, it's certainly going to be a Summer this year of surprises. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 11-Jan-19 05:18 PM GMT

Very interesting year review Neil, and you took some fantastic shots. Love the double Tortoiseshell and of course the epic Swallowtail. 🐢🐢😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jan-19 07:29 PM GMT

Thanks David, looks like we could be in for some cold weather later this week. Around these parts at least, February can often be the coldest month of the year so plenty of time for some hard frosts.

Hi Goldie, yes, I too am a bit apprehensive about what the coming season will be like after last year.

Cheers Andrew, the Swallowtails were definitely my highlight of the year.

Sunday 13th January

A mostly grey and gloomy weekend again with the sun breaking through late on Sunday afternoon just before it set to leave a clear and cold night.

The Bullfinches are visiting the feeders every day and this weekend they have been joined by a male Blackcap. I think I remember last year mentioning that I usually start seeing the Blackcaps in the garden a week or two after Christmas and so I had been keeping a look out recently and was pleased to see him back. In reality I have no way to know if he is one who has been here before or a new one to the garden but it would be nice to think that the same ones keep returning.

As usual, all these photos were taken though the window from the comfort of my back room whilst having a coffee and watching the activity around the feeders.



Male Bullfinch – Coverdale 13.01.2018



Male Bullfinch – Coverdale 13.01.2018



Female Bullfinch and male House Sparrow – Coverdale 13.01.2018



Male Blackcap – Coverdale 13.01.2018



Male Blackcap – Coverdale 13.01.2018

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Jan-19 08:39 PM GMT

Great set of shots Neil 😊 I was intrigued as to whether your Blackcap is the same one so I googled how long they live and the typical life expectancy is two years so it could well be the same one (the oldest was 13 years old 🤪) – the only sure way though would be to ring it 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-Jan-19 09:09 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the Bull Finches and Black cap Neil, I've had a Black Cap in the Garden once I think, well, I've only seen one once 😊 We don't see the Bull Finches in the Garden , I've only seen them at Penn Flash, more's the pity because I love to see their bright red chests and the cheeky looks they give you 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-Jan-19 10:22 PM GMT

Loving those birds, Neil (especially the male Bullfinches). Is global warming responsible for Blackcaps remaining in the UK during winter?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-Jan-19 08:09 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel, I was wondering how long they lived, I guess much depends on weather conditions and food supplies.

Thanks Goldie, I am lucky in that I see the Bullfinches in the garden regularly, more often in fact than I see them when out and about.

Thanks David, It looks like it is. Some interesting info at <https://www.bto.org/about-birds/species-focus/blackcap>

And now for some moths,

Garden Moths - 2018.

As with the butterflies, 2018 was a year of mixed fortunes regarding the moths in my garden with some species having a good year and others less so. In very general terms it appeared that some of the species that pupate underground and emerge in the summer months suffered somewhat from the dry conditions which had led to the ground being baked rock hard.

An example of this is the well known Large Yellow Underwing - the Bobowler of my childhood - which often enter houses through open windows on warm summer nights and fly around the lights. In 2018 I had 207 of these to my moth trap, down from the 311 that I had in 2017 and well down on the 599 I had in 2016.

This trend seemed to hold true for other summer species as well lending credence to the theory I saw being discussed on some Facebook moth groups that they were having difficulties emerging from under the baked hard ground. It was certainly true that there was a noticeable rise in numbers from late July after we had the first proper rain for some weeks.

On the other hand some of the spring species had a good year. One of my favourite early spring moths, the Oak Beauty, was being reported in good numbers from all over the place and I had 6 to my trap from mid February through to mid March compared to just 2 in both 2017 and 2016.

All in all, I had a total of 225 species in 2018 made up of 142 macro and 83 micro species. These included 29 new for the garden (NFC) of which 19 were macros and 10 micros. This brings my total garden list up to a total of 291 species made up of 189 macros and 102 micros. It can be seen from this that I have seen quite a few species in the past couple of years since I started running the trap that didn't turn up in 2018. Many of these are ones that I have only seen in ones and twos but there were some that usually turn up in reasonable numbers including both White and Buff Ermine Moths that were missing this year.

Anyway, a few photos below of some of my favourites, posted in order that they appeared in the trap through the year.



Oak Beauty 15.03.2018. One of the most attractive of the early spring moths.



Early Thorn 19.04.2018. A nice spring brood female, there is also a second brood later in the summer so you can also have a 'not so early' Early Thorn.



Clouded Silver 15.05.2018. A beautiful late spring /early summer species.



Lime Hawk Moth 15.05.2018. The first adult to my trap although I did raise one in 2017 from a larva.



Ruby Tiger 28.05.2018. Quite a few of this lovely little member of the Tiger Moth family, up to half a dozen a night sometimes.



Peppered Moth 28.05.2018. NFG this year.



Small Elephant Hawk Moth 31.05.2018. NFG and a highlight of the year. I was surprised to see this in my suburban garden but apparently expanding its range in Warwickshire.



Poplar Hawk Moth 03.06.2018. The most common Hawk Moth, I had half a dozen of these in 2018.



Common White Wave 07.06.2018. Always get a few of this attractive species.



Blood-vein 17.06.2018. NFG in 2018, I usually see these when disturbed by day when out and about at my local sites.



Small Ranunculus 04.07.218. Extinct in the UK by 1914, reappeared in 1997 and has since recolonised and is spreading across the country and is now regularly seen in parts of Warwickshire.



Dusky Thorn 08.07.2018. A late summer/autumn species really, this one was a little early.



Elephant Hawk Moth. 08.07.2018. Always good to see this lovely Hawk Moth in the trap, I had half a dozen this year.



Pale Prominent 19.07.2018. Just one of these before, in 2016.



Gold Spot 02.08.2018. NFG and just the one of this lovely close relative of the Silver-Y.



Barred Sallow 03.10.2018. I usually get small numbers of this attractive autumn species.

It has either been too cold or too windy to put the trap out so far this year and it looks to be getting colder for the foreseeable future so I guess I won't be seeing any more moths for a while yet.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-Jan-19 06:23 PM GMT

A veritable smorgasbord of Moffs Neil – having learnt and then taught about it the Peppered Moth is probably my most wanted Moff 🍷🍷 Interesting to read of the decline in those summer emerging species which may have had trouble of getting out of the ground – I'm sure that I've read about butterflies having the same problems 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 21-Jan-19 08:37 AM GMT

Amazing colours in those Moths Neil, love the Clouded Silver Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Jan-19 12:12 PM GMT

Fabulous moth presentation, Neil. Your stats are pretty impressive too (225 species).

There is such a range of colours and shapes. It's easy to be drawn by the hawk moths, but the delectable Gold Spot is the one that most caught my eye.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 25-Jan-19 07:31 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I remember when the Peppered Moth was used as an example of evolution in action with the melanic form becoming more common in towns due to industrial pollution. In fact the normal form has become more common again over recent years due to there being less heavy industry in towns these days.

Thanks Goldie, yes, the Clouded Silver has a lovely silvery sheen to it when fresh.

Thanks David, I was well chuffed with that Gold Spot, definitely one of my highlights of the year.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-Feb-19 07:24 PM GMT

Friday 1st February.

Anyone watching the news earlier this evening might have got the impression that the whole of the country had been blanketed by snow. In fact it completely missed us here in my part of the midland with the heaviest snowfall appearing to have blown past us to the south. It has been cold though with temperatures down to -7 on Wednesday night with daytime temperatures barely rising above freezing, not helped by a biting cold wind.

Anyway, here's another look back to warmer times last year;

Day Flying Moths – 2018

I have mentioned a couple of times in my previous reports that I had a definite 'June Gap' early in the month around my immediate local area. This was mostly because my local sites are relatively species poor without any of the 'premium' species that can be enjoyed down south and where it appeared that everything was beginning to appear in quick succession.

Yes, there were a few spring butterflies hanging on and the first Large Skippers had appeared which always heralds the beginning of summer for me, but numbers of individual butterflies here were low and had not yet built up to the numbers that they would do later in June.

This was offset somewhat by the numbers of day flying moths that appeared from late May at a couple of local sites with some species such as Latticed Heath, Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton seeming to be having very good seasons.

Possibly due to a combination of the numbers that were around and also helped by the weather conditions which at this time tended to be quite warm but still cloudy, I managed to get some of my best photos of these moths which can often be very flighty and usually settle low down amongst vegetation making it difficult to get a decent shot.



Latticed Heath – Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Burnet Companion – Castle Hills 25.05.2018



Burnet Companion – Castle Hills 25.05.2018



Mother Shipton – Bickenhill 03.06.2018

It also seemed to be a good year for Small Yellow Underwings, a diminutive species that is classed as a macro but often overlooked due to its small size which is smaller than many micros. I saw more of these last year locally than I have ever seen before.



Small Yellow Underwing – Castle Hills 25.05.2018

Some of the species seen are not true day flyers but are so easily disturbed during the day that they will often be seen taking flight before settling again a short distance away, often low down in the vegetation or upside down underneath leaves.

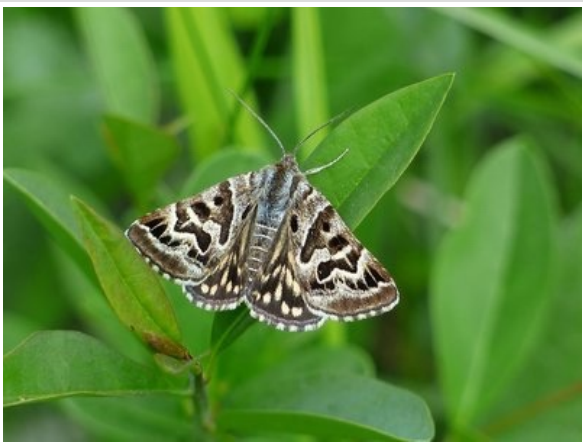


Silver-ground Carpet – Bickenhill 03.06.2018



Blood-vein – Bickenhill 03.06.2018

My first couple of trips a bit further afield continued this theme...



Mother Shipton – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Silver-ground Carpet – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

...and also included some species that I don't see locally.



Common Heath – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018.



Wood Tiger Moth – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Five-spot Burnet Moth ab. – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

I originally thought that the Burnet Moth ab. above was a Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet, loads of which I see locally. After posting the photo on a Facebook moth group it was confirmed to be the more scarce and local Five-spot Burnet which is known to occur at Prestbury Hill, a fact I was previously unaware of. Apparently this form of ab. with conjoined spots is also more common amongst Five-spots than it's more common relative.

As June progressed the numbers of these early summer day flying moths reduced and the numbers of summer butterflies increased but for a couple of short weeks they filled the gap nicely around here.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 02-Feb-19 03:31 PM GMT

Great photos Neil 😊 – especially the Mother Shipton – whenever I see them they're generally peering out from among the grasses 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-Feb-19 10:01 PM GMT

Beautiful selection of moths, Neil (as ever). Hopefully it's only a few short weeks before they (and butterflies) are visibly on the wing again.

Like you, we in Swansea missed the worst of the weather. A slight dusting is all that descended and today's wall to wall sunshine has seen almost all of it melt.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Feb-19 07:53 PM GMT

Indeed Wurzel, a common habit of many of these day flying moths and one which can be extremely frustrating at times.

Not even a slight dusting for us here David. Since then it has gone a lot milder but wet and very windy so no moth trapping until the winds die down a bit.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Feb-19 08:59 PM GMT

Sunday 10th February

A very windy couple of days with bursts of heavy rain but the sun came out for a bit this morning and before the next band of rain came across this afternoon it actually felt almost pleasant.

A lot of the garden birds have been keeping themselves tucked up in the worst of the weather but many reappeared this morning to make the most of the respite from the wind and rain.

Amongst the usual visitors to the feeders, a Great Spotted Woodpecker was tucking into the suet block,



Woody enjoying the suet block – Coverdale 10.02.219

Last year I noticed that some of the male Blackbirds that often pick up bits of food from under the feeders had taken to flying up and knocking bits off for themselves instead of waiting for other birds to do this. I noticed a couple of them doing this again today and was entertained with their antics as they did this and then tried to get down again to their rewards before a couple of big fat Wood Pigeons darted in and beat them to it.



Blackbird flying up to knock bits off the suet block.

I also noticed that I wasn't the only one watching them...



Fox watching from the long grass at the bottom of the garden.

...although it was far too wary (or lazy) to come out into the open.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 11-Feb-19 11:29 AM GMT

Love the Bird shots Neil, I put Suet Pellets out for the Birds and the Black Birds wait on my small Conifer for the Starlings to come and knock pieces off which they quickly pick up 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 11-Feb-19 06:34 PM GMT

Great shots of the garden birds Neil 😊 Do you shoot through the window because if you do how do you not get the sheen/misting? 🇩🇪 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Feb-19 07:48 AM GMT

Lovely bird images, Neil, particularly the Blackbird doing its impression of a hummingbird! Hopefully it won't be long before the first butterfly makes an appearance in your garden, though I suspect you might find a few moths should you put your trap out over the next few days.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Feb-19 07:28 PM GMT

Yes Wurzel, the bird shots were taken through the window. I just try and get an angle which minimises any reflection or sheen but with varying degrees of success.

I see what you mean about the blackbird's hummingbird impression David 😊. I was tempted into putting the moth trap out earlier in the week with limited success, see below.

Friday 15th February.

I see the warm spring-like weather has brought some butterflies out today with sightings from all over the country, mostly Brimstones from what I have seen but with a fair scattering of Red Admirals and also some Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks which is good to see after their poor showing last summer. I have not yet seen any myself but it is nevertheless good to see those reported as it shows that the dark days of winter are (hopefully) coming to an end.

On Wednesday night (13th Feb.) a bit more cloud built up which meant that the overnight temperature wouldn't drop too low and I was tempted to put the moth trap out in the garden for just the second time this year, the first time being in mid January which resulted in a blank. I didn't get much this time either but another blank was just avoided with a couple of micros, my first moths of 2019 – a nicely marked *Acleris cristana* and another *Acleris* species which I have yet to confirm it's ID.



Acleris cristana – Coverdale 13.02.2019

Acleris cristana overwinters as an adult and is a very variable species which comes in many colour forms, compare the one above with the one below trapped in April last year.



Acleris cristana – Coverdale 18.04.2018

It would be easy to mistake these for two entirely different species and is one of the things which I find makes moths – both macros and micros – so fascinating, but also challenging with so many species that vary so much within a single species but also with separate species that closely resemble each other.

I have seen lots of reports of spring moth species over the past few days and with some overnight cloud cover forecast for the weekend I may well put the trap out again soon.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Feb-19 10:47 PM GMT

They could be so easily (mis)identified as two species Neil – what are the defining features used to identify them as one 😊 For my money I reckon the first is the more attractive form – possibly because I've been reading a bit too much Tolkien/Harry Potter but I swear it looks like an Orc/Troll face 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Feb-19 08:46 PM GMT

Those are very contrasting features for closely related species, Neil. I enjoy your moth returns...hopefully there'll be good opportunities for you over the next few nights, with mild temperatures and decent cloud cover.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Feb-19 07:48 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel, narrow shoulders and concave leading edge to the forewing are indicators but the defining feature is a raised 'scale tuft' in the center of each forewing. This can just be made out in my photos above but is more obvious in the side view below. There is a better view of this feature in a photo at this link <https://ukmoths.org.uk/species/acleris-cristana>



Acleris cristana - Coverdale 13.02.2019

Thanks David, not just closely related but the exact same species. I had a couple more moths at the weekend...

Saturday 16th February

After a gloriously sunny day last Friday the weekend turned cloudier here but at least that meant that we had a reasonable night on Saturday with temps just dropping down to around 8c which tempted me to run the moth trap again and was rewarded with a couple of macros...'proper' moths to some 😊.

The **Dotted Border** is a species that overwinter as a pupa underground and is one of the first ones to emerge as opposed to overwintering as an adult. This is a common moth but only the second I have had in my garden, the first being in early March last year.



Dotted Border - Coverdale 16.02.2019

I also had my first **Common Quaker** of the year. This common and widespread species is another that overwinters as a pupa underground and this one on Saturday is a good couple of weeks earlier than my first last year...although just 1 day earlier than 2017.



Common Quaker – Coverdale 16.02.2019

Since the weekend it has been rather wet and windy here again and a bit colder albeit still fairly mild for the time of year but it looks like it may be warming up a bit again by the end of the week.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 20-Feb-19 09:36 PM GMT

Cheers for the ID I had a look at your photos and now you've pointed them out those 'scale tufts' are quite noticeable, especially from the side 😊 It's great when you can pick up the little ID tricks 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Feb-19 07:29 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, once you know what to look for that one is probably one of the easier micros to ID.

Friday 22nd February – Earliest ever.

I have said a few times before that February is never a butterfly month for me around my local patch...well that finally changed this afternoon.

Yesterday (Thursday 21st) was a cracking day with clear blue skies and 16c still showing on my car display on my way home from work at around 4.30pm. After a chilly night and foggy morning it cleared up by the time I finished work today at lunchtime and by the time we popped round to see my Mom this afternoon it was feeling very pleasant again.

Having seen plenty of butterflies reported over the past few days I decided to have a look around the park by my Mom's house to see if anything was about, although I thought it would be a bit of a long shot still as, like I said before, I don't see butterflies in February around here.

I had just finished checking the best sheltered sunny spots without success and had just started to head back when I spotted a dark shape flit past me and settle about twenty yards away between some clumps of grass. Sneaking up I found a Small Tortoiseshell 😊, my first butterfly of 2019 and the first one I have ever seen in February.



Small Tortoiseshell – Langley Hall 22.02.2019

In fact looking back at my records this is my earliest sighting by a couple of weeks, the previous being in 2014 (March 9th – Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock) and my usual first sightings falling between 22nd to 25th of March.

Back home a bit later in the afternoon I decided to make the most of the nice sunny afternoon and have a walk down to check out the rough ground by the local park where had seen my first butterflies last year (March 25th – Comma and Small Tortoiseshell).

There is a sheltered bank of brambles here which I headed for and on approach I spotted a bright orange shape standing out against the background vegetation, a Comma basking in the afternoon sun 😊.



Comma – Wagon Lane 22.02.2019

I then carried on along the hedge line here which separates the area of rough ground from some football pitches and was just circling back when I spotted a Small Tortoiseshell flitting slowly along the hedge and settling every few yards. I managed a couple of photos before it flew up and disappeared over the other side of the hedge.



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 22.02.2019

By now the sun was getting lower and you could feel the air temperature dropping so I headed home.

So then, not just one, but three February butterflies this afternoon and the weekend is looking promising too. Hard to believe that this time last year we were just about to get some heavy snow into the first week of March.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 22-Feb-19 08:36 PM GMT

Well done, Neil, what a fantastic February haul, especially the Small Tortoiseshells, which were something of a rarity around here last year. As for the weather, it's your turn for some sun, we've had days of grey gloom on the South coast.

Good news from the Midlands! 😊
Keep well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Feb-19 10:35 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Neil 😊 I was hoping for some Small Torts today but as I didn't get any I'll just enjoy yours from yesterday instead 😊👍 It's all kicking off now – brill 😊😁

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Feb-19 09:19 AM GMT

It's been great hasn't it, Neil? I've never known such a benign spell of weather in the UK so early in the year. I reckon these are the kind of conditions normally seen in the southern half of France in late February, although this year (according to Chris Jackson) plenty of places have seen temperatures in the low 20s!!

Lovely to see a couple of Torties round your way; it's the only species I've yet to see on the wing so far.....hopefully today! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 24-Feb-19 04:54 PM GMT

Stunning pics, Neil. You can kind of forget how colourful our springtime butterflies can be (or should that be our wintertime butterflies?)

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 24-Feb-19 06:08 PM GMT

That second Small Tortoiseshell in particular is a lovely insect, Neil – I'm glad you've broken your February Duck at last. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 25-Feb-19 08:06 PM GMT

Thanks all, it was certainly uplifting to see the butterflies but for me it does seem a bit strange to be seeing butterflies in February.

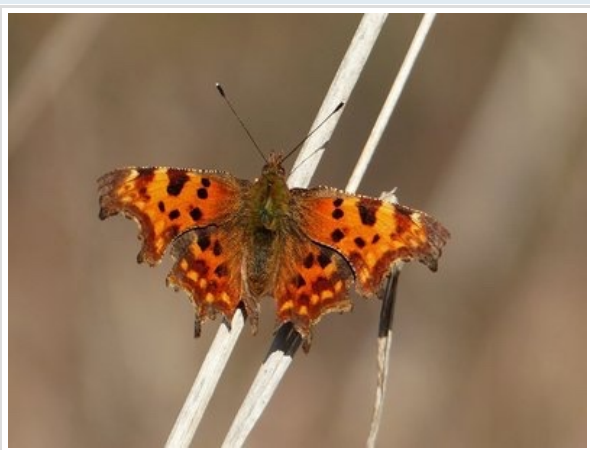
Sunday 24th February.

A glorious weekend with Saturday proved to be the best day around here but unfortunately by the time I had some spare time in the afternoon I had missed the best part of the day and didn't have enough time left to go anywhere. I had earlier spent some time in the garden but this early in the year the sun is not yet high enough to peep above the trees and shrubs for long enough to really warm it up.

On getting up and opening the curtains on Sunday morning I was greeted with thick fog which took until late morning to lift. Once this had dispersed it quickly turned into another lovely day and I was determined to get out for an hour in the afternoon to check out my local site at Bickenhill.

I arrived at about 1.30pm and proceeded to do my usual circuit of the site but it quickly became apparent that despite the warm sun some of my usual route was still in some shade and felt somewhat cooler. I had never been here this early in the year before, usually my first visits are about a month later and I was surprised how much different it felt with the sun still so much lower in the sky. I also noticed that the blackthorn that is usually in blossom here when I come in the spring only had the smallest buds and looked weeks away from flowering. In fact there was a distinct lack of nectar sources here with just one small dandelion found in flower across the site.

I had almost completed my circuit without seeing any butterflies when I put up a Comma from close to the path in front of me. It didn't go far and settled again on some grass stems where it seemed content to soak up the sun and didn't seem inclined to take to the air again, so after taking some photos I left it basking in peace.



Comma - Bickenhill 24.02.2019



Comma - Bickenhill 24.02.2019

Given the numbers of butterflies I have seen reported from elsewhere over the weekend, including other parts of the midlands, it was a bit disappointing not to find any other butterflies but I reckon that a cold previous night and the thick fog for most of the morning had cooled things down somewhat and not left enough time to warm things up enough in the afternoon to get anything flying. The single Comma that I did see did not seem interested in flying, rather preferring to just sit there basking. I also had to remind myself that we are still in February and in any other year I still would not have expected to see anything.

Back to work today (Monday) after another cold night and a frost this morning before it turned into another cracking day from what I saw of it. By the time next weekend arrives it looks as if things will have cooled down again and become a bit more unsettled (That's if I believe the forecasts).

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 25-Feb-19 10:22 PM GMT

[quote]Thanks all, it was certainly uplifting to see the butterflies but for me it does seem a bit strange to be seeing butterflies in February.

Even down my way it's a bit odd seeing butterflies this early in the year. Maybe the odd Brimstone on an odd warm day but around 20 individuals over the weekend whilst wandering around in a t-shirt in the middle of February, weird!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-Feb-19 10:50 PM GMT

Don't do it Neil...don't believe the forecast! 😊😬 Whilst it is great to be seeing butterflies after the winter I am a bit concerned that it could be too much of a good thing this early? I reckon the butterflies round your way are being much more sensible 😊😬

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 26-Feb-19 05:59 PM GMT

It's still very early, Neil, so I wouldn't be too disappointed at numbers right now. Brimstones and Commas appear to be the commonest encountered round my way, but the others are still thin on the ground.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Feb-19 08:49 PM GMT

Hi Bugboy, It wasn't quite warm enough to leave my jacket at home here on Sunday due to some lingering coolness in the air from the earlier thick fog but certainly much warmer than it should be at this time of year.

Cheers Wurzel, I know what you mean about being concerned about maybe, I too much of a good thing too soon. I seem to remember other early springs which have fizzled out and led to lacklustre summers.

I wasn't too disappointed David, after all I had never seen any Butterflies in February before. In hindsight I reckon I would have done better going out on Saturday but I just ran out of time.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 27-Feb-19 09:42 AM GMT

Lovely Comma shots Neill, the weather's been great, I hope to make the best of today before we're back to normal 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-Mar-19 07:31 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie 😊

No more butterflies for me this week as I have been stuck in work and the weather has now returned to more like normal for the time of year albeit still a bit on the mild side.

It looks like being a rather wet and windy weekend as well.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-Mar-19 08:07 PM GMT

Back to Normal

After the early taste of summer that we had last week, things have returned to normal with a bit of a vengeance. The last day of February (Last Thursday) was significantly cooler and cloudier and by the weekend we were looking at typical conditions for the time of year. Saturday was not too bad with a few short sunny spells in the morning before some rain blew in during the afternoon but Sunday was wet all day with mostly drizzle and light rain with some heavier bursts every now and then. The winds built up through the afternoon as storm Freya approached until by early evening it was blowing a right hoolie.

Needless to say with these conditions, I haven't seen any more butterflies but I did put the moth trap out a few times last week before the nights got too windy.

The best moth I have had so far was a **Pale Pinion** on the night of Tuesday 26th Feb. This nationally local species was first recorded in Warwickshire (at Oversley Wood) in 1984 following an extension in range from the south-west and is now fairly widespread around the county but still a good record for my garden.



Pale Pinion – Coverdale 26.02.2019

The previous Friday night I had trapped another **Dotted Border** following the one from the week before and this one was a darker colour form, again showing the variation found within many moth species.



Dotted Border – Coverdale 22.02.2019

To illustrate this I put together a composite shot showing the darker one from last week with the lighter form from the week before.



Dotted Border colour forms.

I also had more **Common Quakers** last week and did another composite of four different variations caught the same night.



Common Quakers showing variation.

The only other moths caught last week were first of the years of **Hebrew Character** and **Beautiful Plume Moth**.



Hebrew Character - Coverdale 27.02.2019



Beautiful Plume Moth - Coverdale 27.02.2019

Over this past weekend, especially on Sunday, it seemed that even the birds were mostly keeping hidden away from the wind and rain but on Saturday afternoon I was pleased to see a pair of **Greenfinches** on the feeders, this being only the second time I have seen these in the garden with the first time being a male last year.



Greenfinches - Coverdale 02.03.2019



Greenfinches - Coverdale 02.03.2019

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Mar-19 10:36 PM GMT

Great sequence of shots Neil 😊 The variation seen in those moths is really something – and to think they have the 'boring' tag applied to them so often...The Greenfinch shots are also great – something of a rarity nowadays – I can't even remember the last time I saw them 🤔🌱 Hopefully the weather will start to improve again soon – or have we already had our summer 😞?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Mar-19 05:33 PM GMT

Back to normal indeed, Neil. Nice that you've got your moths to keep you occupied as well as your garden birds. Those greenfinches look beautiful.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Mar-19 09:42 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, there is a fascinating variation within some moth species that can make even the 'boring brown jobs' worth a second look...at least when they are fresh that is.

Thanks David, unfortunately most nights this past week have been too windy for moths although I did put the trap out on Wednesday night when the wind dropped a bit and had my highest number of moths so far this year albeit not much variety...15 Common Quakers and a couple of Hebrew Characters

Sunday 10th March.

A proper wintry feel to today with a cold wind and showers of rain, sleet and hail on and off through the day.

The Greenfinches are still around but they spent most of the time further down the garden so I only managed a couple of shots of which the one below is a rather tight crop.



Greenfinch - Coverdale 10.03.2019

Other than that the usual suspects turned up at the feeders during the breaks in the weather, including the male Great Spotted Woodpecker that is around most days.



Great spotted Woodpecker - Coverdale 10.03.2019



Great spotted Woodpecker - Coverdale 10.03.2019

Looks like another week of cold weather ahead...that brief glimpse of spring the other week seems so long ago now.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Mar-19 08:28 PM GMT

Friday 15th March.

The past week has mostly been a windy one with some heavy rain showers but the conditions have settled down enough a couple of times to tempt me into running the moth trap in the garden.

On Monday (11th March) a cloudy night with some rain showers produced 29 moths of which 28 were Common Quakers along with a single Hebrew Character. Rain in itself does not stop moths from flying, in fact light rain or drizzle on a mild night can often produce the best catches, it is wind that the moths don't like.

Last night was a much milder night with a gentle breeze although when I got up this morning just turned 05.00 it was quite blustery. Nevertheless, I had my best count so far this year with 41 moths of 6 species – Common Quaker (32) Hebrew Character (5) Twin-spotted Quaker (1) Small Quaker (1) Clouded Drab (1) March Moth (1), the last 4 all being firsts for the year.



Twin-spotted Quaker – Coverdale 14.03.2019



Clouded Drab – Coverdale 14.03.2019



March Moth _ Coverdale 14.03.2019

One of the Hebrew Characters was a much paler example than the usual form, I have seen this form before but only one or two each year.



Hebrew Characters – usual form on the left.

I also had an example with reduced forewing markings, once again illustrating the variation within some species.



Hebrew Characters – normal (top), reduced markings (middle) pale form (bottom)

And just because I couldn't resist it I put together another combination of Common Quaker variations, all from last night.



Common Quaker variations – Coverdale 14.03.2019

The weekend, particularly Saturday, is not looking good but indications are that things could be settling down a bit next week...fingers crossed.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Mar-19 09:08 PM GMT

An interesting set of variations again Neil – the pale form really shows up the 'character' 😊 The March moth is quite unusual looking – not the roughly chunky triangular shape of the typical Moff – much more elongated – it reminds of a Rush Veneer? 😊😊 Does it always fold the right wing over the left? Looks like the jet stream is moving to a more favourable position this week so we could be back in the butterflies 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 19-Mar-19 05:57 PM GMT

Nice selection again, Neil. I'm assuming moonlight-free, cloudy, still and mild nights provide best returns? If so, there may be a few of those over the next few days.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Mar-19 11:48 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, the March Moth seems to be ambidextrous (if that is the right word in this case) regarding folding its wings, I have seen them settled with right over left and left over right now.

Thanks David, yes, cloudy mild and still nights are the best and there were indeed a couple of these this week.

Friday 22nd March

Exactly one month to the day since I saw my first butterflies this year during that brief spell of warm weather in February, I saw a Brimstone passing through my Mom's garden during our regular Friday afternoon visit. It was mostly cloudy and cool but the sun was trying to break through occasionally so I went for a quick look around the park just down the road from her house but without any further success.

More Moths

Tuesday was actually a quite decent day whilst I was stuck in work and the clouds built up later in the afternoon and evening leading to a quite mild night with not too much of a breeze which tempted me to put the moth trap out in the garden. The results weren't particularly outstanding with Common Quaker (7) Hebrew Character (6) Clouded Drab (2) but they did include my first Pug Moth of the year, a Double-striped Pug. This group of small moths can easily be mistaken for micros and include a number of species that can be difficult to ID but at least the DS Pug is usually easy enough when fresh.



Double-striped Pug – Coverdale 19.03.2019

Thursday was another promising looking night with plenty of cloud and overnight temperatures not dropping lower than 9 or 10 degrees so I ran the trap again and had better results, 37 moths of 9 species including 4 new for the years (NFY), Oak Beauty, Early Grey, Red-green Carpet and Diurnea fagella (a micro). The Oak Beauty was over a month later than the first last year when I had a couple on the night of February 17th, just before the 'beast from the east' hit and gave us a few days of snow at the beginning of March. Just goes to show how things can differ year on year. Other moths on the night were Common Quaker (22) Small Quaker (3) Hebrew Character (5) Clouded Drab (1) and Twenty-plume Moth (2)



Oak Beauty - Coverdale 21.03.2019



Red-green Carpet - Coverdale 21.03.2019



Early Grey - Coverdale 21.03.2019



Diurnea fagella – Coverdale 21.03.2019



Twenty-plume Moth – Coverdale 21.03.2019

The Hebrew Characters included another pale individual plus a nice reddish coloured example, once again showing interesting variation within a species.



Hebrew Characters showing variation – Coverdale 21.03.2019

Unfortunately it has gone cooler again for this weekend and as I write this there is a grey thick overcast outside and although some sun is forecast to break through later and tomorrow I am not sure if it will raise the temperature enough for any butterflies...fingers crossed.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Mar-19 05:28 PM GMT

They've missed a trick naming that moth then Neil – the Ambidextrous sounds much more interesting 😊 The Oak Beauty certainly lives up to it's name – much more so than the Red Green Carpet – to my eyes much more like a 'Green with a tiniest bit of red Carpet' or even 'Red in there somewhere I promise Green Carpet' 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Mar-19 06:22 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, The Ambidextrous does sound like a great name for a Moth 😊. In fact I have looked back through some of my photos of other species and it seems quite normal for wings to be crossed either way. The previous composite photos of Common Quakers and Hebrew characters show this nicely. I have never noticed this before and I reckon it is just the resting posture of the March Moth that makes it more obvious.

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Unfortunately it has gone cooler again for this weekend and as I write this there is a grey thick overcast outside and although some sun is forecast to break through later and tomorrow I am not sure if it will raise the temperature enough for any butterflies...

Well, happily it did 😊

Saturday 23rd March

The grey overcast of the morning gradually thinned until by mid afternoon the sun was trying to burn through although a thin layer of high haze

prevented any real warmth building up and kept temperatures down in low double figures at most. Nevertheless, I reckoned that it might be enough to be worth a walk down the road to the patch of rough ground to the side of the local park where I had seen a couple of butterflies last month during that brief taste of good weather that we had.

On arrival, the most obvious difference was that the blackthorn was now in full blossom...



Blackthorn in blossom – Wagon Lane 23.03.2019

...and a close look produced a Small Tortoiseshell making the most of it.



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 23.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 23.03.2019

After taking a few photos I left the ST in peace and carried on through a gap in the hedge to a sheltered spot where I often find a Small Tortoiseshell or Comma (or both) in residence at this time of year.



Sheltered south facing spot alongside hedgerow.

Sure enough there was one of each species in this spot,



Comma - Wagon Lane 23.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 23.03.2019

I then continued along the sheltered side of this hedge line and found another couple of Small Tortoiseshells and another Comma before turning round and heading back and retracing my steps before heading back home.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 23.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 23.03.2019



In total then I saw 4 Small Tortoiseshells and 2 Commas which, considering how cool and gloomy the morning had been were a nice bonus for the day. Still no Peacocks here but Sunday was looking like it may be worth a look.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 26-Mar-19 09:18 AM GMT

That blackthorn blossom looks absolutely ravishing, Neil....the Torties are pretty good too, especially that one just beneath the Comma, which is a notably dark example.

Hopefully your next offering will include Specklies from your garden? 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Mar-19 08:35 PM GMT

Thanks David. No Specklies here yet but I have seen a few reported so hopefully not too long.

Sunday 24th March.

A cold and frosty night here on Saturday gave way to a lovely bright sunny morning with not a cloud in sight although there was still a cold wind blowing. By the time I had some time spare in the afternoon a few clouds had bubbled up but not enough to spoil things so I decided to pop around to my local site at Bickenhill to see if I could do better than my last visit a during the early warm spell a month ago which had only produced one solitary Comma.

Well, it didn't take long to better that as within minutes I spotted a Small Tortoiseshell which was then joined by a second one and they spiraled high into the air and out of sight over some shrubs. Knowing that there was a good likelihood that one or other of them would return I stuck around for a bit but this time neither of them showed up again. I then carried on to circle around the site and soon saw another couple of Small Tortoiseshells along with a couple of Commas.



Small Tortoiseshell - Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Comma - Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Comma - Bickenhill 24.03.2019

One of my reasons for trying here was that it was often my best early site for Peacocks although they have been a bit thin on the ground the past couple of years with the summer broods being even more scarce. I was pleased therefore to see a couple of Peacocks along one section of path and carrying on to a sheltered corner which was a 'hotspot' until a couple of years ago I was even more chuffed to find some more, at least four in this one corner. I know there were four individuals as I watched a couple of times as all four spiraled around each other, it has been a while since I have seen four Peacocks at once like this around here.



Peacock - Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Peacock - Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Peacock - Bickenhill 24.03.2019

Despite the cool breezy, they were very flighty and the only time I saw any of them slow down a bit was when they occasionally stopped to feed on blackthorn or wild cherry blossom. One particular Peacock spent some time at head height and gave me the chance to get some of my favourite type of spring photos, butterflies on blossom.



Peacock – Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Peacock – Bickenhill 24.03.2019



Peacock – Bickenhill 24.03.2019

In the end I spent a couple of hours here and reckon I saw between 8–10 Peacocks, half a dozen or so Small Tortoiseshells and 5 Commas. There may well have been one or two more of each species but they were mostly very active despite the cool wind which was still blowing and I know I saw the same individuals of all three species in spots quite far apart so I only counted those I was fairly sure were different individuals.

I remember last year, there was some debate on social media about whether the Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells had gone into hibernation really early due to the warm and dry summer. It seems that there may have been something in this as I have already seen more of both species this year than I did of either's summer brood last year, In fact I saw more Peacocks this afternoon than I saw all season around my patch last year.

An enjoyable and encouraging couple of hours 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 27-Mar-19 01:06 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I love to see shots of Peacocks on blossom , they certainly herald Spring 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 28-Mar-19 12:16 AM GMT

That's a cracking haul of Peacocks Neil 😊🇧🇪 Round my way the Small Torts are the dominant species, speaking of which amongst your cracking shots of this species there was a real stunner that really stood out – it was from the previous post, the third Small Tort shot – it looks stunning with the yellow colour replaced with white and large white patches on the hind wing– an aberrant? 😊🇧🇪 Specklies have been seen in Hampshire now so it won't be long til your fave is back 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Mar-19 09:15 AM GMT

That blackthorn blossom provides wonderful photo opportunities, Neil. Such a shame it doesn't last very long.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Mar-19 08:55 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie, Peacocks on blossom are one of my favourite sights of spring too 😊

Cheers Wurzel, I think that Small Tort is within normal variation, for around here anyway. It is a nicely marked example though and I have seen a few similar ones over the years. They can be a surprisingly variable species.

Thanks David, yes, one of the quintessential sights of spring, there seems to be more than usual out around here this year.

Friday 29th March

The weather has gradually improved again this past week until yesterday (Thursday) was a fairly nice day. Today was even better and after a cold night and frosty start the sun shone from a cloudless blue sky until by the time I finished work for the day at midday the temperature was up around 17 degrees.

As usual we popped round to my Mom's for our regular Friday afternoon visit and as we pulled onto her drive I spotted a Peacock zipping back and forth along the front of her house. It landed on the drive in front of the car and I quickly grabbed my camera – which I usually bring with me in case I go for a look round the park just down the road – and got just one quick shot before it was off again.



Peacock – My Mom's front drive.

That put a smile on my face but even better was to quickly follow as before we had even got to the front door my first Orange-tip of the year came fluttering along and settled for a refueling stop on a small clump of aubretia growing on a low wall between my Mom's house and her neighbour. As I still had my camera in my hand I quickly took a few shots before it carried on its way. This was the first Orange-tip I have ever seen in March, my previous earliest record being April 2nd (2017) and more usually the second or third week of April.

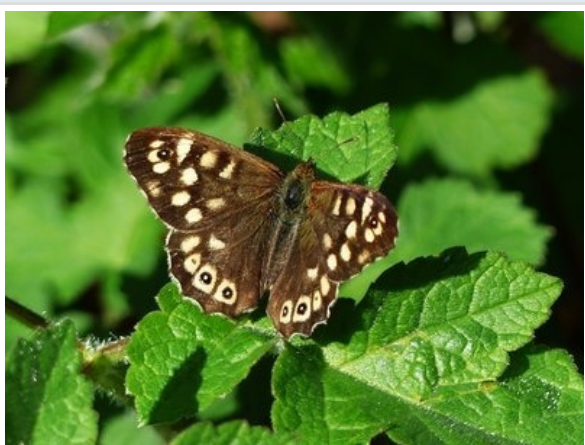


Orange-tip. My earliest ever.



Orange-tip tucking into aubretia.

A little later I left Jane and my Mom chatting and went for my wander down to the park and was greeted by a flypast of a male Brimstone as soon as I walked through the entrance gate. Having seen a few Speckled Wood sightings from around the midlands over the past few days I headed down to the sunny end of a small wooded area that often plays host to a few of these and sure enough I soon spotted a male dancing around a small sunny clearing. Even this early he looked like he had been out a few days going by the wear he was showing.



Speckled Wood - Langley Hall 29.03.2019

I then checked out some nearby cherry and blackthorn blossom and found a Peacock flitting between a number of these shrubs.



Peacock - Langley Hall 29.03.2019

Back home a bit later, I had planned on doing a bit of gardening but with it still being such a beautiful day I decided to walk down to the area of rough ground to the side of the local park not far from my house. As soon as I arrived a flicker of movement drew my eye to a Small Tortoiseshell on some dandelions,



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019

I then carried on to the same spots I had checked out last weekend and found an increased number of Small Tortoiseshells, maybe 8 or 9 and possibly just edging into double figure.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019

There were also at least three Commas flying here, as with the Small Torts they were very active and constantly taking off to intercept each other as they flew back and forth along the hedge lines.



Comma - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Comma - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019

I was also on the lookout for Peacocks here as I hadn't seen any at all at this spot last year, either in the spring or later in the summer, and was pleased to see at least three and maybe four mixing it up with the Small Tortoiseshells and Commas.



Peacock - Wagon Lane 29.03.2019



Peacock – Wagon Lane 29.03.2019

I also had a fleeting glimpse of a passing unidentified 'white'. My gut feeling was a Small White but I didn't see it clearly enough to be sure and it vanished over the hedges.

A cracking afternoon with six species of butterfly seen – seven if I count the unidentified white – before the end of March. That is quite something for around here.

Saturday is looking like it could be decent here as well before the colder weather descends on us again on Sunday.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 29-Mar-19 09:17 PM GMT

What a splendid set of spring butterflies, Neil, especially those on the tree blossom – the essence of the season. 😊 The variety in colouring between all those Tortoiseshells is amazing – one or two are very dark, and some have noticeable amounts of yellow in with the orange. The two Commas are also quite distinct.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-Mar-19 09:42 PM GMT

I concur with what Dave said 😊 I fantastic array, almost a plethora of butterflies. Just wondering though were you more excited by the flashy and early OT or the re-acquaintance with the Specklie 😊 Either way as I've yet to see either 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-Mar-19 10:21 AM GMT

millerd wrote:

...The variety in colouring between all those Tortoiseshells is amazing – one or two are very dark, and some have noticeable amounts of yellow in with the orange. The two Commas are also quite distinct....Dave

Thanks Dave. The more you look at some of our butterflies, you more you begin to appreciate just how variable they can be.

Wurzel wrote:

...Just wondering though were you more excited by the flashy and early OT or the re-acquaintance with the Specklie 😊 Either way as I've yet to see either 🍷...Wurzel

A tough call Wurzel, I reckon the OT just edged it as it was more unexpected.

However...

Saturday 30th March – Welcome back

After doing the usual Saturday morning household stuff, I was pottering around in the garden on what was turning into a pleasant late morning when I

saw a familiar shape flapping about – My first garden Speckled Wood of the season 😊



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 30.03.2019

With the occasional cloud covering the sun I also took the shot below which nicely illustrates how different things can look under different lighting.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 30.03.2019

Checking against my previous records show that this is only the second time I have seen a Speckled Wood in the garden before the end of March.

22.04.2018
07.04.2017
04.05.2016
09.04.2015
11.04.2014
07.05.2013
25.03.2012
06.04.2011

At one point I also saw a rather large and strange looking 'fly' buzzing about and wondered what it was. The mystery was resolved when 'it' settled and proved to be a pair of Bee flies in cop.



Bee Flies – Coverdale 30.03.2019

With the day turning out to be a reasonably warm one again with plenty of sun along with occasional clouds I reckoned it would be worth getting out for a couple of hours in the afternoon...

To be continued.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 31-Mar-19 10:13 PM GMT

Interesting observation about the difference lighting makes Neil – I was quite surprised at how much difference it made, from milk chocolate to 90% cocoa dark chocolate 😊 Good to see the Specklies returning to the fold 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 01-Apr-19 06:42 AM GMT

A veritable feast of colour there, Neil. Great to see a few Small Tortoiseshell images (I've still only seen three this year which is unusual round my way).

Your earliest sightings for Speckled Woods are interesting too. Glad to know that they've now arrived in your garden....if only they would do so in the Swansea area! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-Apr-19 08:06 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I have noticed before how different lighting conditions can really change the appearance of butterflies in digital photos, as can camera settings and even the screen it is being viewed on.

Thanks David, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells both appear to be doing well around my patch this spring with more coming out of hibernation than I have seen for the past few years.

Saturday 30th March part 2 – Afternoon.

By the early afternoon some more cloud was building up but it was mostly high level light stuff and in the sun it was feeling pleasantly warm so I decided to pop round to my local site at Castle Hills near Solihull. I chose this site as it is usually a reliable one for Orange-tips and with my first one seen on Friday and sightings being reported from all over I was hoping to catch up with a few more of this most iconic spring species.

The track that leads into this site has a hard stony surface to begin with which merges into more of a dirt track and on arrival I spotted a Peacock basking just a few yards along.



Peacock - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

This Peacock would occasionally take off and fly down the track for about a hundred yards or so, in the process putting up a Small Tortoiseshell and a Comma from their own basking spots a little further along. I stopped and watched for a while as all three of these would take it in turns to fly up and down the track and disturb the others for a brief dogfight before returning to their own spots.



Comma - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

I then carried on and hadn't gone far when I spotted a Brimstone that flew past me without stopping and then a male Orange-tip that settled down in the grass a short distance in front of me.



Orange-tip - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

The OT soon took off again but with some thin high level cloud covering the sun he didn't go far before settling again and he repeated this a couple of times before the cloud passed over and the sun warmed him up enough to carry on his patrolling.



Orange-tip - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

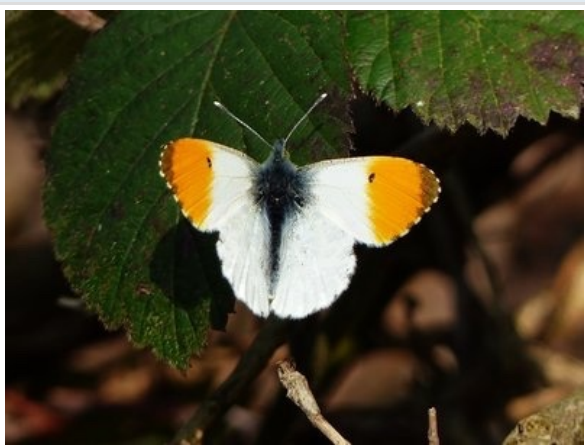


Orange-tip - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

Wandering around the various paths here during the next couple of hours I eventually saw four Orange-tips, all males.



Orange-tip - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Orange-tip - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

One in particular went down as I was watching him when a cloud covered the sun and I waited for the cloud to pass hoping to catch that short period when he would open his wings, but just to prove that there are exceptions to every rule, as soon as the sun came out he was off like shot without that brief period of warming up. At least he had given me the opportunity to take a couple of nice underside shots.



Orange-tip - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

As well as the Orange-tips another Brimstone was seen plus plenty of ex hibernating vanessids. Of these, Peacocks were the most numerous with approx 15 seen all around the site. Small Tortoiseshells were not far behind at about a dozen with Commas trailing behind with three seen.



Peacock - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Peacock - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Peacock - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 30.03.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 30.03.2019

With Sunday being Mothers Day and our youngest son up visiting from Bristol with his girlfriend, I didn't get the chance to pop out again over the weekend. The week ahead looks like being a return to colder weather so I guess the butterflies will be tucking themselves away again for a bit.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 02-Apr-19 07:26 AM GMT

Beautiful Spring selection, Neil.
Especially the Orange Tip, which has failed to appear locally yet.
Still, anytime now.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 02-Apr-19 01:09 PM GMT

Great stuff Neil, love the Small torts and OT's especially. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 02-Apr-19 06:42 PM GMT

A cracking report Neil 🤗🇮🇪 – good job you made the most of the weather; I don't know what it's like up with you but down here we've had sleet and hail today 🤔 I blame the Mail as they reported "3 months of heat" a week or so ago 😊 Lovely set of OTs – I've managed a fluke shot but yours are gorgeous 🤗🇮🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 03-Apr-19 06:23 AM GMT

What a feast of colour, Neil. You did splendidly with the Orange Tips, although my favourite image is the one with the Peacock showing its full, hindwing eye-spots.

Encouraging to read about decent numbers too on your patch.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Apr-19 08:15 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor, I am surprised to have seen Orange-tips before you and I guess that given the weather this week you are still waiting.

Thanks Andrew, glad you like them, it was great to see them.

Thanks Wurzel. It's been a fairly grotty week here, cold and wet mostly with some frosty mornings and Wednesday brought us hail and even some snow. In fact on my way home on Wednesday afternoon we had quite a flurry of snow and the temperature display on my car was reading just 2 degrees 😊

Thanks David, yes I was seeing good numbers last weekend, particularly for around here before April. Nothing since though with the weather we have had this week.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 06-Apr-19 04:33 PM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil, your way a head of us for the Orange Tips, I keep looking on Lanc's Butterflies but no one seems to have seen them yet although a Green Hair Streak has been spotted at Warton Craig. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Apr-19 05:35 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, I see a few Green Hairstreaks were reported last week from all over, as many from up north as further south which seems to be the norm most years for this species.

No more Orange-tips yet, it's been far too cool for them here this past week.

Saturday 6th April.

A thick grey blanket of cloud kept things feeling rather cold here on Saturday morning but by mid afternoon it had broken up and with some decent spells of sunshine had warmed up a bit to something like 13 degrees.

I reckoned it was just about warm enough to see if anything was flying down the road by my local park and so had a walk down for a look.

To be honest there was another reason that I was keen to go and have a look and that was to try out a camera that my daughter Sarah had passed on to me. I have mentioned in my diary before that Sarah is into photography although her tastes are more for 'arty' type stuff but she will take various wildlife photos when the opportunity presents itself.

Anyway, she had been using a Nikon D3400, an entry level DSLR, but has recently become the proud owner of a new mirrorless system camera and asked me if I was interested in having the D3400 off her. I am perfectly happy with my Panasonic FZ200 but thought I would give the D3400 a try to see how I got on with it.

There are two lens with the D3400, an 18-55 that originally came with it and a 70-300. After a bit of practising in the garden I reckoned that the 70-300 felt most similar to what I was used to with my FZ200 and so wandered off down the park with this set up to see how it felt.

Butterfly wise I think that the alternating cloud and sunny spells that had developed were borderline for activity and although I saw something like a dozen Small Tortoiseshells the only other butterfly I saw was a single Small White. The latter flew slowly past me and I was at first convinced that it was a Green-veined White but after it settled amongst some blackthorn blossom I got a close look to confirm it's identity.



Small White - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019

I mentioned above that I saw about a dozen Small Tortoiseshells and these were scattered about all over the site and spending most of their time alternating between contesting favoured basking spots when the sun was out and then settling and using those spots when the cloud covered the sun.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019

Curiously, I didn't see a single Peacock despite there being plenty about here last week. Perhaps just a bit too cool for them.

So then, what did I think of the D3400? First impressions were favourable given that it was the first time I have used a DSLR. The combined camera and 70-300 lens is a bit larger and heavier than my FZ200 but not that much. I need to spend some more time playing around with the settings but for a first go with it I was happy with the photos I took.

I also took a couple of bird photos whilst I was out and for these I found the D3400 but be quite a bit better with faster focusing than my FZ200.



Long-tailed Tit - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019



Robin - Wagon Lane 06.04.2019

I plan on taking both the D3400 and FZ200 out with me this season to carry on comparing them and will use whichever seems the best depending on circumstances.

Sunday 7th April.

Dull cloud all day so I didn't go anywhere. I did notice the Bullfinches coming to the feeders whilst I was in the back room and took the opportunity to take a few shots with the D3400 through the window.



Male Bullfinch - Coverdale 07.04.2019

Under these circumstances the D3400 with 70-300 lens definitely wins out.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 07-Apr-19 09:51 PM GMT

It definitely brings out the rosy underparts of that Bullfinch 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Apr-19 09:10 AM GMT

Great set of shots Neil as always (more down to the photographer I think 😊👍) Sound like you had the contrasting weather to me on Saturday, we had sunny intervals in the am followed by relentless cloud - guess when I managed to get out 😊 Oh well this is spring of sorts I suppose, I just wish the weather was a little less faltering...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-Apr-19 06:13 AM GMT

Well done with the Small White, Neil. There haven't been too many images of those on here so far this year.

Looks like our Welsh Tortoiseshells have moved north. I've still only seen five so your haul last weekend is enviable.

Nice shot of the Bullfinch BTW.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Apr-19 08:17 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments guys, much appreciated 😊

Friday 12th April

Nothing much to report this week, although Wednesday and Thursday looked pleasant enough though the windows at work, if you actually went out there was a cold wind which kept the temperatures well down. Clear skies overnight have also led to some frosty mornings with -3 on my car display yesterday (Thursday) morning.

The moth trap has only been out once this week, on Monday night when some cloud cover kept the temperature up a bit, but a cold breeze kept numbers down to just 8 moths of 4 species – Hebrew Character (5), Common Quaker (1), Small Quaker (1) and Light Brown Apple Moth (1). One of the Hebrew Characters was a particularly pale individual with reduced markings which threw me for a moment before I realised what it was.



Hebrew Character variant – Coverdale 08.04.2019

This afternoon was dull and cloudy again and just as I was thinking of having a bit of practice with the Nikon D3400 I noticed a pair of Greenfinches on the garden feeders, quite possibly the same pair I saw a few weeks back but this is the first time I have seen them since. Like I said before these have become a scarce bird round here over recent years so I was pleased to see them.

The photo below was taken though the window from my usual back room comfy spot.



Greenfinch pair – Coverdale 12.04.2019

I also took a few shots of the Bullfinches which are regular visitors here. The shot of the female below was taken from the back door from the garage into the garden. I have tried using this spot before to take photos of the birds but they usually spot me and fly off, I was luckier this time.



Bullfinch female – Coverdale 12.04.2019

It seems we have a dry but cold weekend ahead but indications are that it will be warming up a bit through next week...I hope so.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 12-Apr-19 09:04 PM GMT

I always get a pang of jealousy (and sadness) when I see your Bullfinches. I used to see them all the time but rarely get more than the occasional fleeting glimpse these days 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Apr-19 10:51 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil 😊 Like you say the weather has been a bit frustrating – a bit like the 3 bears porridge – either too windy, too dull or too cold but never just right 😊 Fingers crossed for next week 😊 We'll be alright so long as the Mail doesn't do a feature proclaiming how it's going an 'Egg-cellent Easter – so get the Barbie out!' 🙄🙄🙄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 13-Apr-19 02:31 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...One of the Hebrew Characters was a particularly pale individual with reduced markings which threw me for a moment before I realised what it was.

Threw me too, Neil. That's a really unusual specimen.

Nice to see the greenfinches again. We don't get too many of these round my way but there are, thankfully, plenty of bullfinches.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Apr-19 07:55 PM GMT

Hi Bugboy, it is strange to think that these days I see Bullfinches in my garden more often than Sparrows. How times change.

Cheers Wurzel, looks like crossing the fingers worked 😊

Thanks David, the Greenfinches seem to have set up home here, they have been around all week.

Friday 19th April.

After a cloudy and rather cold weekend, last week improved day by day until Good Friday arrived today with wall to wall sunshine and temperatures hitting the mid twenties here. I had already decided that, after a hectic week at work, I was going to have a lazy day and just potter around the garden rather than braving the bank holiday traffic.

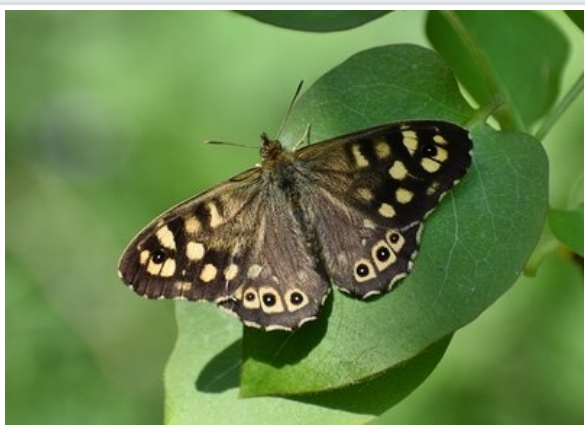
After a clear night there was a heavy dew on the lawn first thing this morning but it soon warmed up and by mid morning the Speckled Woods were up to their usual antics. Many times I watched a couple of males chasing each other in circles and occasionally there would be three individuals going around each other. During the day I managed to identify five different males by photographing them and comparing markings and damage to their wings.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 19.04.2019

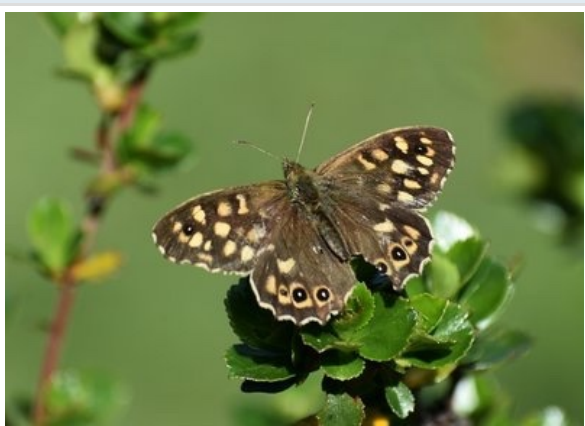


Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 19.04.2019



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 19.04.2019

Two of them had chunks missing from their hindwings proving the value of those eyespots in diverting attacks away from their heads and bodies.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 19.04.2019



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 19.04.2019

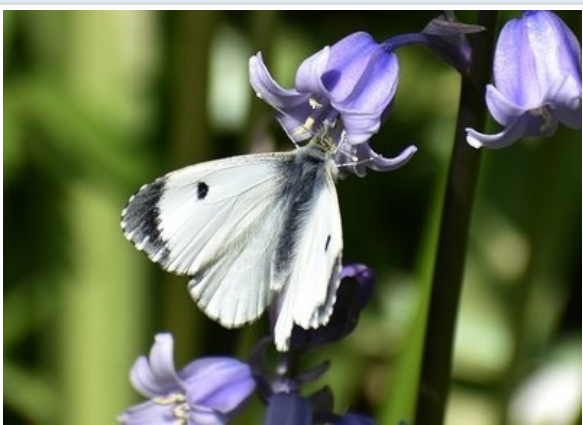
Later in the morning it had warmed up enough so that the Specklies were settling with their wings closed and this behaviour was maintained for the rest of the day until they disappeared to roost just after 5.00pm



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 19.04.2019

Orange-tips passed through regularly without stopping, no idea how many in total but I would see a male every 15–20 minutes but these could easily have been the same one or two individuals doing circuits, something that I know that these do as I have photographed the same individuals coming around time after time in previous years.

I also saw my first female which was a little less active and settled briefly on a bluebell.



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 19.04.2019

She was disturbed by a male who chased her about a bit before she settled and did the rejection pose and I just about managed to grab the camera (which was at the other end of the garden) and get a quick shot before they were off again into next door. This was the closest I got to photographing a male today with them being very active in the warm sun.



Orange-tips - Coverdale 19.04.2019

Other butterflies seen in the garden today were Small White and my first Green-veined White this year, neither of which were stopping in the afternoon heat. Also a male Brimstone which unusually for this species passed through later in the afternoon, way past the normal early afternoon retiring time. A little more obliging was my first Holly Blue of the year, a male which stopped briefly before carrying on his way.



Holly Blue male - Coverdale 19.04.2019

With the warming weather I put the moth trap out last night (Thursday) but after a cloudy start the skies cleared with the resulting drop in temperature plus a big bright moon didn't help. Although numbers were low with a total of 10 moths of 7 species, they did include a Lunar Marbled Brown which is a new one for the garden. Also a Pale Pinion which was only the second one of these I have had, the first being earlier this year. The supporting cast were Common Quaker(3), Early Grey(1) and Shuttle-shaped Dart(1) plus a couple of micros, Twenty-plume Moth(2) and Light Brown Apple Moth(1).



Lunar Marbled Brown - Coverdale 18.04.2019



Pale Pinion – Coverdale 18.04.2019



Early Grey – Coverdale 19.04.2019

The weekend ahead looks to be a cracker weatherwise and I have next week off work so fingers crossed it holds for a bit.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 20-Apr-19 07:32 AM GMT

Neil

I've just been going back through your past few weeks posts. I have to say although the pics you are taking with your new camera are wonderful they are just as good as the ones you have taken with the old one in my opinion. But to have a faster focus is a great thing when the subject is a butterfly!

The pic of the Speckled Wood against the dark uncluttered background is a winner in my opinion.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 20-Apr-19 06:46 PM GMT

It turned out nice after all – luckily the Mail didn't make a comment on the weather 😊 Lovely sequence of shots Neil 😊 Hve 😊 you been taking tips in Holly Blue whispering from millerd, I can never find them posing like that 🍷😄 Love the female OT – the way she's holding her antennae makes it look a little like she's been speared by a cotton bud 🤪🤪🤪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Apr-19 08:58 AM GMT

Thanks Ernie 😊 The faster shutter speed was certainly helpful yesterday (Saturday) afternoon with everything hyperactive in the warm sun.

Cheers Wurzel, I was lucky with that Holly Blue, still the only one I have seen so far. I love your imagination in seeing some strange things in photos 🤖

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Apr-19 04:19 PM GMT

That's a lot of butterfly traffic for a suburban garden, Neil (not to mention the moths).

Yes, you know it's hot when Specklies close their wings upon settling, but you've captured the underside really well in your image, something that is tricky to achieve.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Apr-19 05:57 PM GMT

Thanks David, I actually found out the other day that my area is classed as urban, not suburban. Not surprising really as although I am just over the border in Solihull I am just under 5 miles from Birmingham city center.

Saturday 20th April.

After a lovely warm day on Friday, Saturday was if anything even hotter and the garden Specklies were already settling with wings tightly closed from around 10.00am onward. By the time I was free to get out in the afternoon the temp was up to 23 degrees and I figured that any butterflies about would be very active in the heat.

I decided to pop around to my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull and on arrival at about 1.30pm immediately spotted a few Orange-tips patrolling the hedgerows. As I wandered about over the next couple of hours it was obvious that Orange-tips were by far the most numerous species with one or two in sight most of the time and half a dozen or more often visible scattered about around me.

As mentioned previously, they were very active in the warm sun and I figured that my best chance of getting a photo or two was to find some cuckoo flower and wait to see if any stopped for a brief refuel. With this in mind I made my way to a damp meadow that has proved productive in previous years and just stood around various cuckoo flower plants and waited.

My tactics soon paid off as the patrolling male Orange-tips made brief stops to refuel at the various cuckoo flowers that I was staking out, getting photos however was still challenging with their stops being brief with much fidgeting and fluttering around the flower heads. The bright afternoon sun also made things difficult for me as I was using the D3400 and playing about a bit with the settings. Nevertheless I managed to get some half decent shots which I was reasonably happy with given the challenging conditions.



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male - Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male - Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male - Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 20.04.2019

The males were most obvious and by far the most numerous but females were also seen with most flying 'whites' proving to be female Orange-tips when they came close enough.



Orange-tip female – Castle Hills 20.04.2019



Orange-tip female – Castle Hills 20.04.2019

I also witnessed many occasions of males chasing females and being subjected to the rejection pose although in the warm conditions these events happened very quickly and were over before I could get close enough to line up for a photo.

All afternoon, I only saw the Orange-tips stop to refuel on cuckoo flower apart from on one occasion when a male stopped briefly on garlic mustard.



Orange-tip male - Castle Hills 20.04.2019

In previous years I have seen loads of garlic mustard along the hedgerows here but there doesn't seem to be much about this spring. Possibly as a result of the dry summer last year and things are already looking very dry here this year.

As well as all the Orange-tips, I did manage to confirm at least one Green-veined White and a female Brimstone also came past me as I was standing around in the damp meadow.

A few Peacocks, maybe half a dozen or so, plus three or four Small Tortoiseshells and a single Comma were holding territories along the paths but these also were very active and flighty and difficult to approach, as were numerous male Speckled Woods scattered around the site.



Peacock - Castle Hills 20.04.2019

The Peacock below spent some time on a patch of dandelions in the shade cast by the trunk of a large oak tree, seeming to prefer it there to the full sun close by.



Peacock - Castle Hills 20.04.2019

Although I mentioned previously that the flighty butterflies and bright mid afternoon sunlight made taking photos difficult, I was pretty much expecting that, and for me the simple pleasure of just standing in the middle of a meadow and watching half a dozen or more Orange-tips fluttering around me was a most pleasurable way of spending a Saturday afternoon. The fact that I ended up with quite a few half decent shots was the icing on the cake.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Apr-19 10:10 PM GMT

Sounds idyllic Neil, it's good sometimes to peel your eyes away from the viewfinder and just watch 😊 A lovely collection of shots made even better by the frenetic feeding behaviour that ensues from bright sunshine 😊🌿

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 22-Apr-19 11:44 AM GMT

Lovely Orange Tips Neil, I'd love to stand in the middle of a meadow that had Butterflies in it 😊 At present we don't seem to have too many here in Kent 😞

We went to the White Cliffs via Lydden yesterday and stopped by the Grass verges of the Nature reserve, not a single flower or Butterfly, that was a disappointment , thank goodness for the Cliffs and the White I saw. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Apr-19 11:44 PM GMT

Persistence certainly paid off, Neil. That is a delightful sequence of Orange Tips, made extra special by getting them whilst on their larval host plant.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Apr-19 08:02 PM GMT

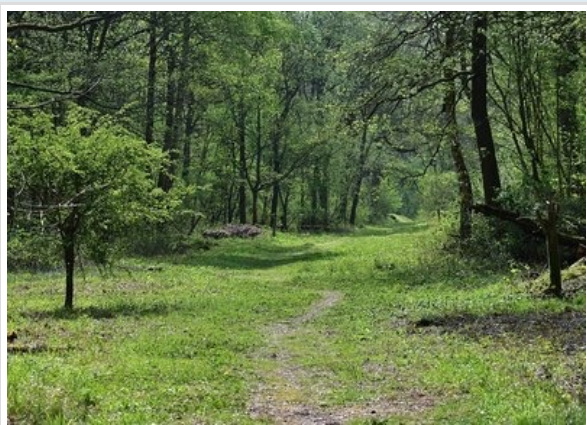
Cheers Wurzel. Yes, sometimes the enjoyment is simply in the watching and experiencing 😊

Hi Goldie, hopefully you will catch up with some nice butterflies down there soon.

Thanks David, one of those times when it is more rewarding to just stand and watch for what comes along.

Monday 22nd April – Easter Bank Holiday Monday

Having spent a lazy day at home on Easter Sunday, I had promised Jane that we could go out somewhere on Monday and so we settled on a run down to Snitterfield Bushes just north of Stratford-upon-Avon. I have mentioned in the past that Jane likes this Warwickshire Wildlife Trust SSSI as it has good level paths, a legacy from it's use as a WWII airfield, that she can manage with her limited mobility.



Snitterfield Bushes – view along one of the paths 22.04.2019

Jane also likes to come here at this time of year to see the primroses that grow alongside the paths and amongst the trees.



Primroses dotted along a path – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019



Primroses – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019

There are also plenty of bluebells to be seen here although the best views are often obscured by intervening trees (Well, it is a wood 😊)



Bluebells – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019

It was another very warm day and although there was some high level thin cloud about this had the effect of making it feel even warmer and quite muggy. This meant that the butterflies were once again very active and seldom settling for long. Orange-tips were again the most numerous species with maybe a dozen seen with Brimstones, Green-veined Whites, Peacocks and Speckled Woods all spotted in smaller numbers, about 4 or 5 of each, and a single Large White was my first definite example of the season.



Orange-tip male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019



Orange-tip male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019



Brimstone female on primrose – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019



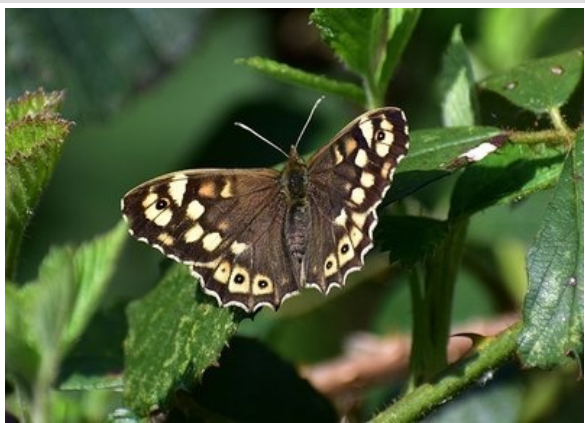
Peacock – Snitterfield Bushes 22.04.2019

Before we had set off for Snitterfield I had a coffee in the garden and was watching the male Speckled Woods doing their usual squabbling with each other between basking on their favourite perches.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 22.04.2019

Whilst the males were busily engaged with scrapping with each other I was amused to see a female flutter in and settle, she then carried on her merry way totally missed by all the males...there has to be some sort of moral there 😊



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 22.04.2019

Later in the afternoon, after our return from Snitterfield Bushes, I was once again pottering about in the garden and taking the occasional photo of the Specklies.

I rather like the shot below of a male that was in some shade with a bit of backlight,



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 22.04.2019

Just to show how the lighting conditions can make things look different, the shot below is of the same individual taken a couple of minutes later.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 22.04.2019

Well, it looks like the weather is on the change later this week, the only question is when and by how much. With the rest of the week off work I am hoping to get out again, although I do have some other stuff lined up to do as well.

Bye for now.

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Apr-19 10:28 PM GMT

Hopefully the weather will be not so great when we're trapped in work and conducive to butterflies at the weekend Neil 😊😄 Cracking shots as per usual, the contrast of the black and orange on the first OT shot is brilliant, I don't think I've seen it quite as stark as that before 😊👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 24-Apr-19 09:02 AM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, that Orange Tip jumps out at you, it's funny but since I've been here and although I've been in the Woods a couple of times I've yet to see a Speckie and they're the ones you usually see the most of, I did hear a Cuckoo though 😊

Like your Wife, I love the Woods at this time of year with all the early Spring flowers and that Cuckoo put the icing on the cake. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 24-Apr-19 11:38 AM GMT

Some very nice OT. shots in your recent posts, Neil.
Your camera does well to preserve the intense Orange on the male.

Is there a finer sight than an Orange Tip on Bluebell at this time of year?! 😊

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 24-Apr-19 01:20 PM GMT

Gorgeous Orange-tips Neil, and that female is my favourite of your Specklies. 😊
You are doing great work with that new camera. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Apr-19 09:52 PM GMT

That location looks positively idyllic, Neil. Once again you've captured those Orange Tips beautifully, especially the one on the bluebell.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Apr-19 10:29 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel, I think the contrast on that Orange-tip is probably down to being nice and fresh 😊.

Thanks Goldie, I heard my first Cuckoo of the year today 😊 ...just before some heavy rain, oh well!

Thanks Trevor, an Orange-tip on a Bluebell just epitomises spring 😊

Thanks Andrew, I always enjoy spotting the female Specklies in my garden 😊

Thanks David, it is indeed a lovely spot, one of Janes favourites 😊

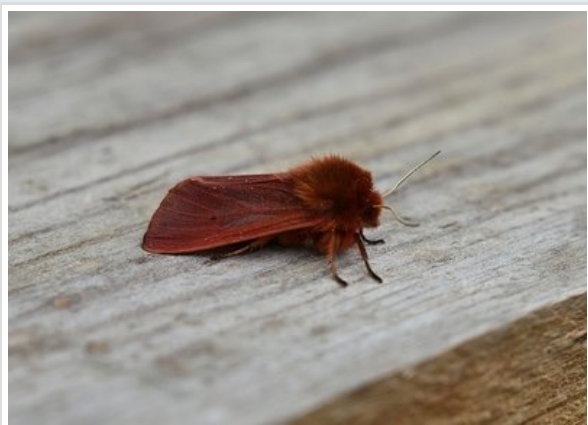
Tuesday 23rd April.

I mentioned previously that although I have got this week off work, I have a few other things lined up to do. One of these was to take our cat Benji to the vets yesterday (Tuesday) to have a couple of teeth taken out. We dropped him off at 09.00am with the vet going to phone us later in the afternoon to be picked up after recovering from his anaesthetic.

After returning home from the vets I checked out the moth trap which I had put out the previous night and covered and brought into the garage earlier in the morning. A cloudy and mild night had produced a good result of 47 moth of 19 species with no less than 10 firsts for the year.



Waved Umber - Coverdale 22.04.2019



Ruby Tiger Moth - Coverdale 22.04.2019



Least Black Arches, a macro that is smaller than many micros – Coverdale 22.04.2019



Oak-tree Pug. One of a number of similar small moths in this group that can be difficult to tell apart – Coverdale 22.04.2019



Shuttle-shaped Dart, female to the left and male on the right – Coverdale 22.04.2019

As it happened Tuesday had turned into a rather cloudy day and although there were some sunny spells in the afternoon it was noticeably cooler than of late. There was less butterfly activity in the garden and apart from the ever reliable Speckled Woods I only saw a couple of Orange-tips passing through.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 23.04.2019

It isn't often I catch a Speckled Wood on a bluebell (or whitebell in this case) and was pleased with this shot,



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 23.04.2019

After collecting Benji from the vets later in the afternoon I was in the garden again and noticed a female Orange-tip fluttering about around the (Spanish) bluebells where she settled for a while,



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 23.04.2019



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 23.04.2019



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 23.04.2019

After a much cloudier and cooler day it looks like the rest of the week is reverting to more typical spring weather. Oh well!, we could certainly do with some rain around here, I have been noticing how dry everywhere is already.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Apr-19 11:12 PM GMT

More cracking Moff's and those OT shots are absolutely cracking 😄 The break in the weather had to happen I just hope that we don't settle into the annoying pattern of dismal weather only at the weekends 😊😞 I hope Benji is mending well, my cat has had a few teeth out now and after a day or two he was like a totally different animal, much happier 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 25-Apr-19 09:28 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I hope your cat is better, I used to have two cats (this was years ago before I started having Dogs) they had the same trouble with their teeth, mind you they were getting on a bit 😊

I thought your first shot of a moth was a piece of Bark 😊 I've never seen a moth like that before so unusual 😊

Fantastic shots of the OT's on the Blue Bell's Neil, I always think they're the best shots of all 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 25-Apr-19 09:36 AM GMT

Nice moths Neil, but your butterflies on Bluebells are fantastic! 🍷😊 Well done. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Apr-19 08:53 PM GMT

Many thanks for all the comments. Benji was a bit subdued for a couple of days but is now back to his normal self again.

Wednesday 24th April.

It had to happen I suppose, a free day and the weather forecast was for thundery and heavy rain showers spreading in during the day.

I had seen that Green Hairstreaks were being reported from the usual midland hotspots, with particularly good numbers apparently at some sites, so had planned on going to Ryton Wood Meadows for a look. I am aware that Ryton is a comparatively later site for GH but had seen at least one reported there at the start of the week and as it is my closest site for these I figured it might be worth a look.

With the weather in the morning still dry, albeit cloudier and cooler than of late, I decided to go for it and arrived just after 11.00am under cloudy skies with the temperature showing 15c on my car display.

Walking through the wood to the meadows I saw a few Speckled Woods and a couple of Orange-tips but things seemed to be fairly quiet on the whole, no doubt due to the much cooler conditions compared to the beginning of the week. Arriving at the usual hotspot for Green Hairstreaks I wandered

along the hedgerow, some of which has been cut back as part of the site management here, but without any success in spotting my quarry. Over the next couple of hours I did a general circuit of the meadows during which a few spells of sunshine made it feel pleasant and almost warm, and during which I saw a number of butterflies, mostly Orange-tips but with a few Brimstones, Peacocks, and Speckled Wood scattered about.



Orange-tip – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019



Speckled Wood female – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019

At one point I watched a female Brimstone fluttering between a number of small newly planted buckthorn and managed to get a few shots of her laying.



Brimstone female – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019

Green-veined Whites have been a bit thin on the ground around my patch so far this year with just a handful seen and most 'whites' turning out to be female Orange-tips. I did manage to confirm a couple of GVWs here however and managed my first photo of one this year.



Green-veined White – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019

I eventually saw a single Green Hairstreak that stubbornly remained out of reach for a photo although I had a bit better luck with my first Small Copper this year which stayed still just long enough for a record shot before it disappeared out of sight.



Small Copper – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019

Whenever I visit here around this time of year there are always numerous swarms of Longhorn Moths (*adela reaumurella*) to be seen along some of the hedgerows. I have often tried to photograph some of these with very limited success but whether it was because of the cooler weather making them less active I was much happier with the results that I managed this time.



Adela reaumurella – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019



Adela reaumurella – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019



Adela reaumurella – Ryton Wood Meadows 24.04.2019

I didn't notice the small caterpillars on the second and third photo above until I looked at them later at home. They look like some type of geometer, possibly Mottled Umber but I am open to other suggestions.

Most of my time here today was also spent accompanied by the sound of a Cuckoo from somewhere deeper in the woods, the first I have heard this year.

I had been keeping my eye on some thick black cloud that was approaching and shortly before 1.00pm I felt the first drops of rain and with no further breaks in the cloud in sight I decided to head back to the car. No sooner had I left and was driving back towards the A45 to head home than the heavens opened and down it came.

With just the one Green Hairstreak seen it was obviously still a bit early for them at Ryton. Hopefully this unsettled and rather cool weather that has moved in won't last too long and another week or so sees them emerge there in numbers.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 26-Apr-19 09:11 PM GMT

I always enjoy reading your diary Neil – the content is interesting and the photos excellent – and I can only apologise that I don't comment as often as I should. However, that Brimstone egg-laying is outstanding. I know just how difficult it is and how quick you have to be to get a shot like that especially one so sharp and well composed. Excellent.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 26-Apr-19 10:13 PM GMT

Sometimes the cloudier weather is better Neil – it definitely helped with getting such a lush image of the Green-veined White 🌈🌈 It's difficult to judge when things have emerged as over the last couple of years things have been really early, there's been slow holding everything up or the season has been start-stop; I can't recall having a typical or field guide correct season for several years now 😊 Love the *Adela reaumurella* shots I find them really tricky as I can get bits of the antennae and not the body or the body and not the antennae in focus 🌈🌈🌈 Fingers crossed this is just a short blip in the weather...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 27-Apr-19 06:08 PM GMT

Lovely, clear images again, Neil. That's a fantastic shot of the ovipositing Brimstone. I've still yet to see this happening. 😊

Those longhorn moths always turn up when I'm looking for Green Hairstreaks so I daresay I'll see some very soon!

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 28-Apr-19 08:38 PM GMT

Good to read the report from Ryton, Neil – my visits there are likely to be few and far between now my boys have moved on. It was always a favourite spring site. There were two Hairstreak spots that I remember: one along the border between wood and meadow and the other within the wood where they perch on bluebells.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 29-Apr-19 11:07 AM GMT

That's a really great shot of the Brimstone Neil, well caught! 😊 Love the GVW also. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Apr-19 08:02 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments Pauline, that Brimstone was difficult to capture a shot of without intervening twigs in the way. Luckily she stuck around for a few minutes which gave me the chance.

Yes, the cloudier weather can certainly help Wurzel. The thing with emergence times is not only the way they vary from year to year but also between different sites, even within the same area.

Same here David with the Longhorn Moths, I nearly always see them when looking for Green Hairstreaks.

Hi Dave, I know the places you mean but Green Hairstreaks can crop up almost anywhere round the site these days although I believe the 'hotspot' is still the hedge on the side nearest the police college.

Thanks Andrew, that GVW is the only one I have managed to photograph so far this year.

Sunday 28th April.

Since last Wednesday the weather here deteriorated until Saturday which was a real shocker of a day with rain and high winds and even some hail at one point in the afternoon.

Sunday was a lot calmer and although the morning was dull and dreary, the sun eventually came through a bit later in the afternoon. This was enough to get the Specklies up and about and I eventually spotted four different males and a female plus a single Holly Blue that passed though during one sunny spell.

The photos posted in my last few reports have all being taken with the Nikon D3400 fitted with a Nikon 70-300 lens. With the D3400 being a crop sensor camera this effectively gives the equivalent of a 105-450 lens on a full frame camera and I am finding that I like this as a walk around setup as it gives me a good working distance for when butterflies are fairly active, which is most of the time when I can get out.

I had been thinking about treating myself to another lens, mostly for taking photos of moths from my trap, especially the smaller ones which my Lumix FZ200 struggles with, but also to use on other occasions when I could get closer to the subject.

After a bit of research I settled on a Sigma 105 macro lens which duly arrived on Saturday, just in time to give it a go in the garden with the better weather on Sunday.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 28.04.2019



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 28.04.2019

The cooler spells allowed me to get nice and close, I have seen photos of butterflies with hairy eyes before but this is the first time I have captured it myself.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 28.04.2019

With the grotty weather during the back end of last week I hadn't bothered running the moth trap but with the wind dropping I decided to give it a go on Sunday night. As it happened, the skies cleared overnight and turned cold which led to just 4 moths, singles of Shuttle-shaped Dart, Double-striped Pug, Light Brown Apple Moth and best of all a Chocolate-tip, just a bit too late for Easter 😊. This was only the 4th example of this species I have had to my garden trap since I started running it in 2016 (2 in 2016, 1 in 2017 and none last year)



Chocolate-tip - Coverdale 28.04.2019

With stunning inevitability it was a better day today whilst I was back at work and the rest of the week doesn't look too bad either, oh well!

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Apr-19 06:49 PM GMT

I feel the weather blues/Met-itis as well Neil 😞 - I was gutted that the weather was rubbish all weekend and so much better yesterday that I stopped off on the way home - only for a cloud to sit directly overhead for most of the time I was out 😞😞 Great Speckle shots 😊 Do they call that Moth the chocolate tip because of the wings, the thorax, the abdomen or all of them? 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-Apr-19 10:59 PM GMT

Love that first Speckled Wood, Neil...it's mint fresh.

Your chocolate tip moth is a stunner as well. I don't think I've ever seen that species before.

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 01-May-19 08:03 AM GMT

Neil - Great moths recently. I liked your Waved Umber and of course the Choc Tip. I've not seen either of these before. The Choc seems to be dark, milk and white choc all in one! Plus Adela's. I've had some success with pics of them like you did this year and never before. It must be the cooler weather over the past few days making them a little more lethargic than normal I guess.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 02-May-19 05:48 PM GMT

Looking forward to what else you get with your new lens. I've been using the Sigma 105 for a few years now, I'm more than happy with the results I get with it 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-May-19 08:00 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I have always assumed the Chocolate-tip was named for the tips of it's wings, much like a smaller version of the related Buff-tip.

Hi David, yes that Speckle was one of the most nicely marked I have seen so far this year.

Thanks Ernie, I think you are right in that the cooler weather helped in getting the photos of the Adela's. They have always been much more flighty when I have seen them before, often little more than hordes of small black blurs in the air.

Hi Bugboy, I noticed that the Sigma 105 seemed a popular lens and with my D3400 being a crop sensor camera it effectively gives me the equivalent of a 160mm lens (or thereabouts).

No butterflies seen this week as despite some reasonable sun on Tuesday and Wednesday, this was when I was stuck indoors at work and by the time I have got home it has clouded over.

I think conditions will be a bit borderline here over the weekend with the possibility of Sunday looking reasonable but it could go either way.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 04-May-19 09:15 AM GMT

Cracking shots Neil of the Speckled Wood, the bad weather's the only thing that's cheered me up 😊 shouldn't say that really but you know what I mean 😊 If you can't get out your not missing anything. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-May-19 07:53 AM GMT

Cheers for the tip-off about which tip the Chocolate Tip is named after 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-May-19 07:12 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie, I know what you mean about the weather being bad and not feeling like you are missing things 😊😊

Glad to be of service Wurzel, reckon that deserves a tip 😊

Saturday 4th May.

After a cold couple of days here on Thursday and Friday during which we also had a fair bit of rain, which if I am honest we needed, Saturday was at least dry although it remained quite cold with a nippy wind from the north keeping temperatures well down.

With just a couple of hours spare on Saturday afternoon and the weather not up to much I decided to just potter about in the garden where I ended up spotting four butterflies which were tempted out by the occasional bit of sun.

One of these was a male Orange-tip which appeared a few times. This was one of those times when I could easily have counted the same individual 3 or 4 times as he returned on his circuits but photos prove that it was the same individual every time.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip - Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip - Coverdale 04.05.2019

On one visit he remained settled for quite some time during one of the many dull and cloudy periods before the sun popped out again to warm him up just enough to continue on his way.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip - Coverdale 04.05.2019

There was also a female which, like the male returned a few times and on one occasion stayed settled for a while on a dandelion clock. She had a malformed tip to her left hand forewing which made identification easy each time she returned.



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 04.05.2019



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 04.05.2019

As usual, there was a male Speckled Wood flitting about. Just the one today though, most of the time it was too dull and cool even for these.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 04.05.2019

The fourth butterfly of the day was a Holly Blue which was spotted passing through just the once without stopping.

Sunday 5th May.

According to the weather forecasts, Sunday was supposed to be the better day of the weekend but despite the promise of a bit of sun early in the morning, a thick grey overcast built up so that from mid morning it was really dull and dreary for the rest of the day and ended up feeling even colder than Saturday.

Nevertheless, I managed to see a single butterfly making the most of that bit of early sun, a Large White that I spotted drift into the garden from next door and settle just long enough to grab a couple of photos.



Large White – Coverdale 05.05.2019

This was only the second Large White I have seen so far this year, in fact all three 'common' white species have been thin on the ground around here. I have mentioned previously that most 'whites' I have seen have been turning out to be female Orange-tips and this is still the case.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 06-May-19 07:39 PM GMT

Stunning Orange Tip images, Neil.

There are still butterflies to be found in this cool weather if a sheltered, sunny spot can be found.

Great stuff,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-May-19 08:26 PM GMT

WRT your last post – 3:15 Salisbury; Wurzels' Wonder Nag 🤔

Cracking Orange-tips 😊 I know what you mean about the other Whites they seem to have taken a while to get going – perhaps they're not used to the stop start type spring that we've had? 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by NickMorgan, 06-May-19 10:08 PM GMT

You have lovely dark Speckled Woods there. Your photographs really do them justice.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-May-19 07:33 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor. The problem here over the bank holiday weekend was that it was downright cold rather than just cool with not much in the way of sun. Saturday was the best day but I simply didn't have the time to go further afield to see anything special. Green Hairstreaks, Dingy & Grizzled Skippers, PBFs etc are all very localised around the midlands and usually entail a few hours or half a day at least to make the trip worthwhile.

Cheers Wurzel, not just stop-start to the spring but from one extreme to the other with temperatures swinging from well above average to well below and back again a few times.

Thanks Nick, I have seen them described as chocolate and cream which sums them up nicely 😊

Monday 6th May

Bank Holiday Monday and not having been out anywhere over the weekend I was determined to get out somewhere. The day started off pretty much as a re-run of Sunday, that is some early sunny spells soon disappearing as the clouds built up again. I decided to have a run down to Bishops Hill to see what I could find, hopefully Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and maybe Green Hairstreaks, all of which occur there although I realised it was probably a bit too early for Small Blues which I usually visit this site for sometime around mid May.

Jane came with me for the run out and as we headed down the M40 the clouds got thicker and darker until we arrived under quite gloomy skies. As we walked into the site it was obvious that nothing was flying and away from the shelter of the lower part of the site and up the hill a quite chilly breeze made itself felt.

Anyway, I had a slow wander around examining all the seed heads that I could find and managed to find a couple of Dingy Skippers settled up. The first one actually looked like it was alert with his antennae sticking up but I kept an eye on him for some time and he showed no sign of moving. The second

one (a female I think) had more of a droopy antennae sleepy look. Neither of them were in the classic wrap around pose that this species usually adapts to roost but rather seemed to be just plonked precariously on their perches.



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 06.05.2019



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 06.05.2019



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 06.05.2019

Bishops Hill is not really a proper hill, rather a pile of limestone waste from a nearby quarry and cement works which has now become mixed limestone grassland / scrub habitat. Nevertheless the top of the 'hill' commands views of the surrounding Warwickshire countryside and from there it could be seen that there was thick cloud from horizon to horizon, so with no breaks in sight and nothing else found we decided to call it a day and head home.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 07-May-19 07:54 PM GMT

Tough going, Neil. I was looking at the Met office site, and their headline was ' a cold, bright weekend' well it was cold, certainly, but bright? Hmm. But well done for making the effort, and some success at least.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-May-19 10:48 PM GMT

Despite the poor weather from the looks of those shots Neil is certainly worked out okay, cracking shots one and all though the last is the most cracking – it looks pretty despondent and down matching the weather 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 08-May-19 04:48 PM GMT

Some fabulous early efforts with your new 105! I particularly like the face-on Dinky on the tease. My own Sigma 105 has just passed its first birthday and I couldn't be happier with it.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-May-19 07:48 PM GMT

Thanks Mark, it was anything but bright here, in fact rather grim.

Cheers Wurzel, that Dinky looks like I have been feeling this week.

Thanks Callum, yes, I am really pleased with the 105 although I am still finding my feet with it.

Wednesday 8th May.

I know I said a couple of reports back that we could do with some rain around here but I reckon I should have kept my mouth shut 😊 It started coming down sometime in the early hours of Wednesday morning and carried on all day with some periods of that really heavy stuff that comes straight down...like stair rods as my dad used to say. It carried on all night through to Thursday when it eased off a bit later in the morning although it remained unremittingly gloomy until it started raining again in the afternoon. A couple of days when I really didn't mind being stuck indoors at work.

With the grotty weather we have had recently, I have only put the moth trap out in the garden once, on Tuesday night. I had seen that rain was due early in the morning but not supposed to arrive until around 06.00 and as I get up for work at at 05.00 I was hoping I could get the trap in before the rain arrived. In truth I was not that bothered if it started a bit before that as long as it was not too heavy as many moths will happily fly in light rain. Anyway, when I got up it was hammering down and looked like it had been doing so for some time. Nevertheless there were a few moths in the trap including my first Hawk Moth of the season, a Lime Hawk. It is always good to see the first Hawk Moth of the year 😊



Lime Hawk Moth – Coverdale 07.05.2019

The rest of the catch also included another couple of NFYs (New For Year), singles of Brimstone Moth and Garden Carpet, plus a couple of Shuttle-shaped Darts and a single Red-Green Carpet.

Friday 10th May.

A much better day with some sunny spells and temperatures actually feeling like they had climbed into double figures. I finished work at midday as usual and after popping round to see my mom was back home and pottering around in the garden when I spotted a female Green-veined White fluttering about. With the conditions now being a mix of sun and cloud she settled a couple of times so took the opportunity to take some shots.



Green-veined White female – Coverdale 10.05.2019



Green-veined White female – Coverdale 10.05.2019

Shortly after settling on the dandelion clock above, a big black cloud rolled in accompanied by a rumble of thunder which heralded a 10 minute burst of quite heavy rain. After this had finished I went back out to see if the GWV was still there and found that she had moved down a bit but otherwise weathered the downpour in the same spot.



Green-veined White female – Coverdale 10.05.2019

The sun soon came back out and with the sun high in the sky at this time of year soon warmed things up again so that she started fluttering around again albeit not very quickly and curiously enough regularly returning to the same dandelion clock to settle. I do not know what it was about this one particular dandelion that kept attracting her as there are a few similar ones close by but she always picked the same one to settle on . The photo below was taken over an hour later when she had again settled on this same dandelion.



Green-veined White female - Coverdale 10.05.2019

As I write this (7.45pm) she is still there settled in for the night.

As well as the GVW there were a couple of male Speckled Wood doing their thing, one of which was well faded but the other one looked like he had not been out for long.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 10.05.2019



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 10.05.2019

After a dismal week, things are looking up for the weekend and next week is looking like a return to better weather.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 10-May-19 08:06 PM GMT

I'm impressed by that Lime Hawk moth Neil and your image of it. I have never seen one before. I really should get the moth trap out but I never seem to get such a diverse selection as you do (and your shots of them are way better than mine 🍷🍷)

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-May-19 10:21 PM GMT

Great Dingy images, Neil. They're particularly attractive when fresh, with that beautiful dusting of silvery scales.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 11-May-19 06:43 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the CVW on the Dandelion Clock Neil – those types of shots are brilliant 😊👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-May-19 09:13 PM GMT

Lovely work with the Lime Hawk moth, Neil, and...well...that Green Veined White is to die for. It'll be hard to improve on that going forward.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 12-May-19 06:01 PM GMT

Love your shots of the Green Veined White Neil they look great, especially the ones on the dandelion 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 13-May-19 02:34 PM GMT

Some cracking stuff Neil. OT's, the Dingy, the Hawkmoth, the GVW, I can't pick a fave, they are all great! 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-May-19 07:16 PM GMT

Thanks for all the comments Pauline, David, Wurzel, Goldie and Andrew 😊

Saturday 11th May.

The Green-veined White from the previous report was still there next (Saturday) morning and with the spot where she was on the dandelion being in shade first thing she was still there when we returned from doing our Saturday morning shopping run at about 09.30. We had to pop out again shortly after and when we returned again an hour or so later the sun had reached her and she had woken up and moved on. She didn't go far though as I saw her again a few times during the rest of the day as she passed through the garden on her wanderings. With loads of cloud building up through the day she settled a few times, curiously enough returning to that same dandelion head on occasion although later in the afternoon it was looking a bit more bedraggled after a couple of heavy rain showers.



Green-veined White female – Coverdale 11.05.2019



What is it about that dandelion clock?

After a good sunny start, Saturday had turned into one of those days when clouds built up rapidly later through the morning until long periods of the afternoon were once again dull and gloomy with just a few spells of sun when it would feel quite pleasant. As mentioned above we also had a couple of heavy rain showers although these only lasted for ten minutes or so each time.

During the sunny spells there were regular sightings of Holly Blues passing through and I reckon I identified at least two different males and two females coming around on repeat circuits. With the cloudy periods slowing them down they settled frequently albeit usually high up or otherwise out of reach and on one occasion I watched a male attempting to court a female but she flew off and lost him around the top of the hawthorn they had been on.

The photos below were all taken from some distance and are cropped quite a bit.



Holly Blues failed courtship attempt – Coverdale 11.05.2019



Holly Blue female – Coverdale 11.05.2019



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 11.05.2019



Holly Blue male - Coverdale 11.05.2019



Holly Blue male - Coverdale 11.05.2019

The same male Speckled Wood from the past couple of days was still hanging around along with another more worn male.



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 11.05.2019

The only other butterfly seen was a single male Orange-tip that stopped just long enough for a quick record shot.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 11.05.2019

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-May-19 11:15 PM GMT

I don't know what it is about that Dandelion clock Neil but whatever it is you should bottle it - I still can't get a Green-veined White to behave for me this year 😊 Interesting to see the failed courtship - it does seem to take the males a long time to suss out that she's not interested - yet when she is it's almost immediate 🤔😬 Cracking sequence of shots, the female is gorgeously fresh looking 🤩🌿

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-May-19 10:14 AM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil of the Holly Blue, I just love to see them on blossoms, I've not seen a Green Veined White yet, hope when I do I get has good a shot as yours 😊 Goldie 🌿

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-May-19 07:37 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, that female Holly Blue was a beauty but like most good looking females she posed from a distance and wouldn't come down to my level 😊

Thanks Goldie, The cooler weather over the weekend certainly helped in slowing her down so I could get the shots.

Sunday 12th May.

With Sunday shaping up to be the better day of the weekend I figured a return visit to Bishops Hill would be in order after the disappointingly dull and cold visit on Bank Holiday Monday. After doing all the household stuff in the morning we headed off down the M40 just after 1.00pm under a mix of about 50/50 blue sky and cloud. As nearly always seems to be the case these days around here at weekends, cloud had built up again from mid morning but at least there was less of it today and it wasn't so thick and grey as that on Saturday. Even so, with very little wind, when a cloud did cover the sun it seemed to be there for ages before eventually moving out of the way to allow the warmth of the sun to be felt again.

Arriving at around 2.00pm we walked up the short lane to the entrance to the site accompanied by an Orange-tip and a male Brimstone and on entering through the gate saw another male Brimstone pursuing a female along the hedge immediately in front of us. There seemed to be quite a few Brimstones flying here today but I didn't do a count as I am sure we were seeing the same individuals on many occasions as we crossed paths through the afternoon. A couple of times I was watching a Brimstone flying along when a cloud covered the sun and the temperature dropped noticeably prompting the butterfly to drop down into the vegetation.



Brimstone female - Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Brimstone male - Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

Dingy Skippers were seen scattered around most of the site with an estimate of somewhere between 20-30 seen during the couple of hours we spent here.



Dingy Skipper - Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

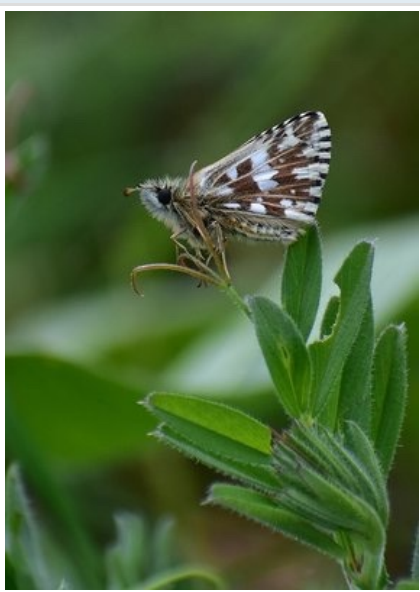


Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

Grizzled Skippers had a better year at this site last year than they had for a while although numbers are still not high so I was pleased to find three today.



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

Looking out for Green Hairstreaks along the areas where I have seen them before here, I spotted a couple flitting about high up and one individual, a female I think with a nice line of white dots, low down exploring the birds-foot trefoil which is the larval foodplant at most of their Warwickshire sites.



Green Hairstreak – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Green Hairstreak – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

I was also pleased to find a couple of Brown Argus, my first for this year. This is a species I have never found at this site before although I am aware that they are sometimes recorded here.



Brown Argus – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

Overall, it seemed that the season here has fallen back a bit in line with more normal timings after the recent poor weather, a fact supported by finding just one Common Blue here, which I failed to photograph. This is the site where I often see my first Common Blues as they appear on the limestone here a good week or so before they do at my immediate local sites around Solihull.

I also only found one Small Blue, which again I lost sight of before getting a photo. Checking my notes for the past couple of years, I saw Small Blues here in good numbers on 14th May 2017 and 18th May 2018, again supporting the fact that the season here has fallen broadly back in line with the past couple of years. I reckon the warm weather over the beginning of this week should see both Small and Common Blues emerge here in good numbers.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-May-19 11:23 PM GMT

Really nicely marked Greenstreak Neil, I think that one's called *inferopunctata* 😊 Lovely Skipper shots especially the closed wing Grizzlie, lush that is 😊
🇮🇪 Not looking too good this weekend weather wise 😊 hopefully the Beeb have got it wrong 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-May-19 12:22 PM GMT

David M wrote:

...that Green Veined White is to die for. It'll be hard to improve on that going forward.

Wish I hadn't said that, Neil, because you immediately went and did it!

That's a remarkably well marked Green Hairstreak too. I've certainly never seen one with such a bold 'streak'.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-May-19 06:50 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I must admit that it sometimes seems to me that someone has at sometime given a name to every slight variation out there. I blame the human condition of trying to fit everything into its own box when in reality nature is more fluid than that.

Thanks David, I usually see a good spread of variation in Green Hairstreaks, from no spots to almost full lines. That one was certainly one of the boldest marked but by no means the only one like it I have seen.

Wednesday 15th May – part 1.

Most of my time off work this year is already booked for various stays in B&Bs around the country as is our now normal habit, but with the good weather forecast for a few days this week I figured on trying to make the most of it and went in to work on Monday and managed to book one of my few remaining floating days holiday for Wednesday. The forecast was bang on for Monday and Tuesday and looked to hold for Wednesday so Tuesday night I weighed up various options to see how I could make the most of the day.

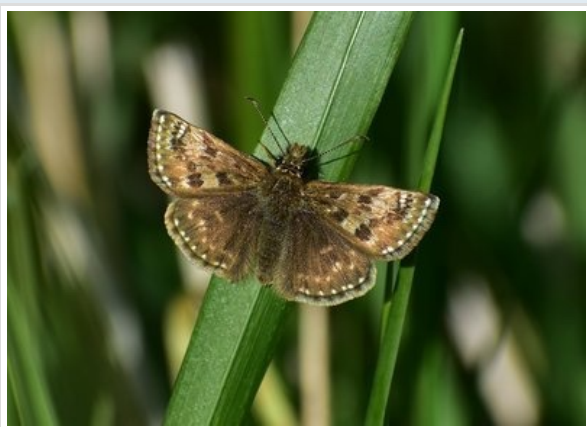
In the end I decided to head down to Gloucestershire and start off the day at Strawberry Banks, a site I had not visited before, and then planned on heading back up to Prestbury Hill. The main reason for heading to Strawberry Banks was for the colony of Marsh Fritillaries which I believe is the closest that this species occurs to home for me and seeing some sightings posted on social media over the previous few days I knew they were on the wing there.

I got up around the same time as I would have done for work which meant that I could make an early start to miss the build-up of traffic around Solihull and by 06.00 I was on my way. Arriving from the north-west, I headed for the village of Oakridge Lynch where a bit of research had showed that I could park up by the church and take a path to the reserve. By 08.00 I was parked up on what was a beautiful morning, even if it was still a bit chilly and after a short walk along a path across a field and through a short wooded stretch attractively bordered with wild garlic I came out onto the reserve itself which consists of two fields. The first area was mostly still in shade cast by trees further up the hill but looking to the second field, half of it was now in the sun and so I began my search there.

For the first hour or so it was still quiet and quite cool with a heavy dew on the long grass and I didn't spot any butterflies until around 09.00 when I began to see Dingy Skippers which increased in number and activity as it gradually warmed up and the sun spread across the whole site.



Dingy Skipper – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Dingy Skipper – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

These were soon followed by a single female Common Blue which looked fresh but with a malformed front wing and shortly after by a Small Copper.

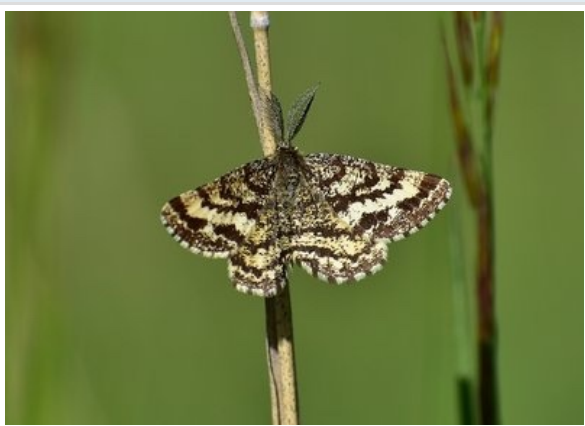


Small Copper – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

This cooler hour or so also enabled me to sneak up on some Burnet Companion and Common Heath moths which can be difficult to approach when the temperature gets warmer.



Burnet Companion – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Common Heath – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

It was 10.00 before I saw the first Marsh Fritillary and over the following hour or so I reckon I saw about half a dozen different individuals. As is often the case it seemed like a few more but photos prove that they were the same ones being seen repeatedly, sometimes a fair distance from a previous sighting and it appears that individuals will roam across the whole site here.



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

The individual below was a particularly attractive example which I saw quite often as it moved around the reserve.



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

Just after 11.00 I decided to make a move and was slowly working my way back across the fields when I spotted a Small Blue scrapping with a Dingy Skipper.



Small Blue – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

I am not really into Orchids but I couldn't help but notice a good variety of different ones dotted about across the site. One day I will have to make the effort to get to know these attractive plants so that I know what I am looking at.

A cracking morning spent at a beautiful little reserve and one which I really should have visited before now. I have seen that the Marsh Fritillary colony here is described as fragile and I am aware that a couple of years ago the population exploded although numbers have fallen again since then as is often the case with this species.

Anyway, by 11.30 I was back at my car and ready to head off up to Prestbury Hill...

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-May-19 07:12 PM GMT

Wednesday 15th May – part 1 addendum.

I forgot to mention in my previous report that I also saw my first Small Heaths of the year at Strawberry Banks, about half a dozen scattered across the site.



Small Heath – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

Wednesday 15th May – part 2.

About 45 minutes after leaving Strawberry Banks I arrived at Prestbury Hill and parked up in the lane at the top of the reserve. By now the temperature was up to 19–20 degrees so I expected the butterflies to be quite active and as I made my way down the path and along the lower slopes I spotted Dingy Skippers, Small Heaths and Small Blues, all flying in good numbers.



Small Blue – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Small Blue – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

I then started to work my way along the lower slope and found a nice fresh looking Brown Argus...



Brown Argus – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

...and a Green Hairstreak that had seen better days.



Green Hairstreak – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

There were also a few fresh male Common Blues but these were very active and the closest I got to one was the shot below.



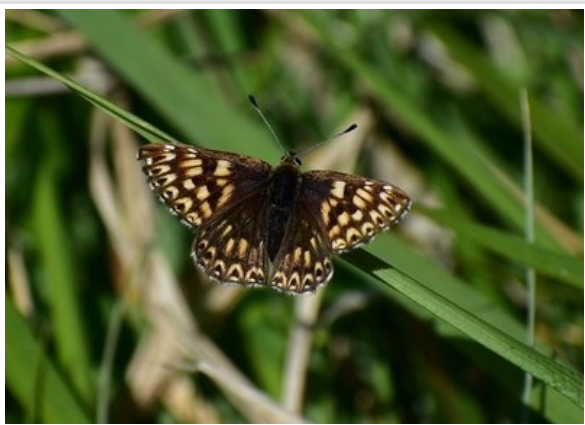
Common Blue – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

My main reason for coming here of course was to see Duke of Burgundy. After missing these for three years I had finally managed to get down to Prestbury Hill last year although not until late May when I found a few faded examples at the end of their season here. I am not sure how long they had been flying here this year but I had seen a number of posts on social media reporting anything between 10–15 being seen last weekend (11th/12th May) and this was one of the things that had prompted my day off work this week. I have also read that DoB is a lazy butterfly that doesn't often appear before late morning hence my decision to go to Strawberry Banks first and then here.

Anyway, after arriving at around 12.15 and spending nearly three hours here, I ended up seeing no more than six Dukes, only a couple of which were in half decent condition with the others looking well past their best. Four of these were at the Bottom of the Masts reserve with another one seen a bit further up the hill and only one in the Bill Smyllie reserve at the bottom of a path leading down towards the hedge line.



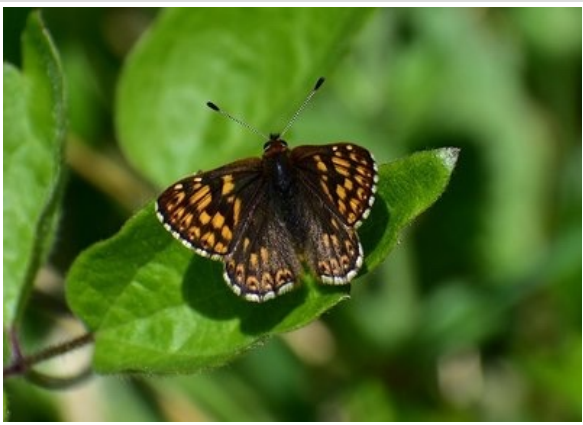
Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

I also had a good look along the area known as 'Happy Valley' but failed to find any along here. I spoke to a few other visitors looking along this section and none of them had seen any in this particular spot either.

I did have quite a few false alarms from rapid flying Burnet Companion moths which in flight can look similar to a DoB and had a conversation with another enthusiast about how often these might be misidentified as Dukes by the casual observer.

As mentioned above, Dingy Skippers, Small Blues and Small Heaths were all flying in good numbers along with smaller numbers of Common Blues and Brown Argus plus a few Green Hairstreaks along with plenty of Brimstones and a few Orange-tips, all of which were non-stop in the afternoon sun. A few whites were seen, at least one of which was a definite Green-veined, a species which seems to have been a bit thin on the ground so far this year.

Day flying moths included plenty of the aforementioned Burnet Companions plus loads of Common Heaths and a fair number of Small Purple-barred, an attractive little moth that is actually classed as a macro despite its small size. I have tried to photograph the latter before without success as they are very flighty and tend to settle low down in the grass so was pleased to get the record shot below even though it is not that good.



Small Purple-barred – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

Having made an early start and spending most of the morning at Strawberry Banks and then wandering around here for nearly three hours in the warm afternoon sun, my old legs were getting weary, so around 3.00pm I made my way back up the hill to my car and set off for the drive back home.

All in all a very enjoyable day for my first trip out of Warwickshire this year.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 17-May-19 10:40 PM GMT

That was an excellent day out, Neil, with some great shots of the Marsh Fritillaries in particular. 😊

I was also interested in your report from Bishop's Hill – I was wondering whether to include it on one of my excursions! Good to see the skippers are doing well still, and the hairstreaks too.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-May-19 11:12 PM GMT

What a cracking day Neil 😊🌿 I wonder if you can work out which is my fave Duke shot 😊 Mind you it was a difficult choice 😊🌿 Those Marshies are mighty fine – some really nice dark variants – the contrast of the black and orange is very pleasing to the eye 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-May-19 11:35 PM GMT

Lovely commentary, Neil. It's great when a plan comes off like that one. A bit of forethought, a degree of effort and the reward is all boxes ticked! Beautiful Marsh Fritillaries – they seem rather darker than my local race.

Re: Neil Freeman

by kevlng, 18-May-19 07:51 AM GMT

Neil,

Lovely photos of the Dukes and Marshies. I love the bold colours and markings on the dukes, they look mighty fine.

Regards

Kev

Re: Neil Freeman

by Glostocat, 18-May-19 07:00 PM GMT

It's a shame I missed you at Prestbury Hill on Wednesday Neil, I was there until about 3.15pm. I saw around 12–15 dukes on this occasion plus 4 wall browns along the path at the very top of the Bill Smyllie field, and also two females brimstones egg laying in the Happy Valley area.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 18-May-19 07:21 PM GMT

Some beautifully marked Marsh Fritillaries there, Neil. And captured to perfection.

Always an amazing sight!,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-May-19 09:37 AM GMT

Thanks Dave, very glad I made the trip as yesterday (Saturday) was back to cool and cloudy here and as I write this it is dull and cloudy again. Given the weather last week I reckon the Small Blues should also be out at Bishops Hill by now too.

Thanks Wurzel, I reckon your favourite has to be the back lit semi underside.

Thanks David, I seem to find both dark and lighter examples in the Marsh Fritillary populations I have seen although I have never yet seen this notably variable species in Wales, my previous experiences being in Cornwall or Devon.

Thanks Kev, I was happy to catch up with them as both species are a bit of a distance for me and I have limited time and opportunity to travel far.

Yes, Glostocat, it was a shame I missed you. You did better than me with the Dukes and I also missed the Wall Browns although I did photograph a female in the Masts reserve last year.

Thanks Trevor, it is always interesting to note the variation in Marsh Fritillaries, a beautiful species that I don't see often enough.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-May-19 07:14 PM GMT

Sunday 19th May.

After a cloudy and quite cold Saturday here, Sunday was pretty much the same and a bit of brightness in the morning soon faded as thicker clouds once again rolled.

The only butterfly that I saw was an elderly female Speckled Wood that I disturbed as I was pottering about in the garden during the afternoon. She flew a few feet before settling again and stayed in the same spot for the rest of the day, just opening her wings occasionally if it threatened to brighten up a bit.



Speckled Wood female - Coverdale 19.05.2019

Any fresh Specklies showing up here from now are likely to be the next brood offspring of those that started emerging here towards the end of March this year.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 21-May-19 07:42 PM GMT

Very nice shots of Marsh Fritillary Neil. I rarely see them so I hadn't realised there was such a variation in the markings. Is that because you have captured male and female or is it just a natural variation?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-May-19 07:46 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline, I don't see Marsh Fritillaries that often myself, that is the first time I have visited that site which is the closest one to me and that is a two hour drive with other locations being much further away. It is a very variable species, to the point that every time I have seen them every individual is different.

Friday 24th May

Friday arrives and although there was a lot of cloud around it was pleasantly warm so later this afternoon I decided to have a wander down to the area of waste ground to the side of my local park.

I had seen a few Common Blues and a Small Copper here last year so was on the look out for these but without success. In fact it was very quiet butterfly wise with only a single Green-veined White seen briefly and a worn Peacock still hanging in there.



Peacock - Wagon Lane 24.05.2019

Garden Moths.

A catch up on some of the moths that have come to my garden trap recently.

I haven't actually had the trap out that much over the past couple of weeks, just four times in total. Some chilly nights have kept total numbers low but there has been a steady trickle of species turning up.

A new species for the garden was a Sallow Kitten, a small relative of the Puss Moth, which turned up on 14th May.



Sallow Kitten - Coverdale 14.05.2019

I get a few Flame Carpets each year and these appear in two broods from May up until September.



Flame Carpet - Coverdale 14.05.2019

I think the one above is a male and the one below a female.



Flame Carpet – Coverdale 14.05.2019

I always get plenty of Brimstone Moths but never get tired of that bright yellow colour.



Brimstone Moth – Coverdale 14.05.2019

Common Swifts started appearing this week and are another species I get every year in good numbers.



Common Swift – Coverdale 22.05.2019

I was about to take a photo of the Seraphim below on one of my bits of wood when it made a break for it. It only went a few feet though and settled in a more photogenic position on a fading bluebell.



Seraphim – Coverdale 22.05.2019

And finally a nice Herald Moth was only the second one of this common and widespread species I have seen in my garden.



Herald Moth – Coverdale 22.05.2019

That brings my garden moth species count so far this year up to a total of 49 which is made up of 37 macro species and 12 micros. Looking at my past records this is about average for me by this time of year.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-May-19 04:54 PM GMT

You guessed right Neil 😊😄

Another great selection of Moths Neil – especially liking the Flame Carpet from this offering 😊 Good to hear that you reckon counts are about average – all the Moffers I know seem to reckon that it's not been too good down this way 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-May-19 08:29 PM GMT

You get some real stunners of the moth world *chez toi*, Neil. I'm familiar with the lovely Brimstone moth but that Flame Carpet is a new one for me.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-May-19 06:18 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, It has been a very stop-start season with the moths, much like with the butterflies, but overall it seems to be about where it should be. Having said that some species are doing better than others which is pretty much what you would expect.

Thanks David, I am sure I have posted photos of the Flame Carpet in previous years, I usually get a few each year.

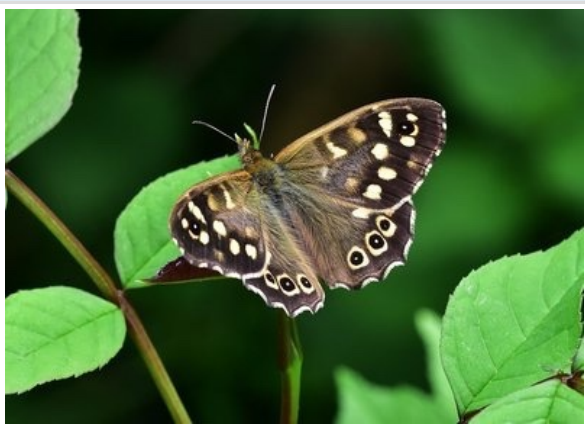
Saturday 25th May

The weekend arrives and on cue the clouds are set to roll in again but before that a pleasantly warm Saturday morning saw me pottering around a bit in the garden. A large pale butterfly fluttered into view and fooled me for a minute into thinking it was a Large White until a closer look confirmed it to be a female Brimstone which stopped briefly for a top-up on one of my small Bowles Mauve plants that were grown from cuttings taken last year.



Brimstone female - Coverdale 25.05.2019

A fresh male Speckled Wood was staking his territory down by the brambles. He is first of the second brood to appear here and would be a descendant of the first spring brood which emerged here at the end of March this year. This is actually quite early for me to see a second brood Speckle in my garden and means that I will not have a slight gap between these broods this year as often (but not always) happens.



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 25.05.2019

By early afternoon the clouds were building up but it was still feeling warm with temperatures nudging 20 degrees so I decided to pop round to my local spot at Castle Hills by Solihull to see what was about. As is usually the case at this time of year I was keen to see if Common Blues, Small Coppers and Small Heaths were flying there yet as these species tend to be later to get going around here than other spots around the midlands, including many further north than me.

Within a hundred yards of setting off down the first path I saw a Small Heath which promptly started chasing another one. This first small area produced about half a dozen and this proved to be the way of things today as I wandered around the site with various corners of fields having similar numbers flying.



Small Heath - Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Small Heath - Castle Hills 25.05.2019

I thought one individual looked a little different and just managed the one shot before it took off to chase another one. It wasn't until I looked at the photo afterwards I realised that it was missing the eye-spot on the underside of the forewing. I tried to relocate this one without success which was a pity as I would have liked to confirm whether it was the same on both sides.



Small Heath - Castle Hills 25.05.2019

Common Blues were flying with fresh males seen scattered about the site although no females were seen today which confirms that they are just starting here.



Common Blue - Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Common Blue – Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Common Blue – Castle Hills 25.05.2019

Small Coppers have been thin on the ground here in recent years with just one or two seen in 2018 and 2017, and those usually being second brood. I was pleased therefore to find four different males and a female here today which is the highest number of first brood individuals I have ever found at this site and seems to tally with reports I have seen from all around the country that they are doing well so far this year.



Small Copper – Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Small Copper – Castle Hills 25.05.2019

The female was an aberration with a golden sheen to her left forewing which I believe is caused by temperature fluctuations in the pupa – I could be wrong here so happy to be corrected.



Small Copper female – Castle Hills 25.05.2019

I was also pleased to find a couple of Brown Argus as I have only ever seen one (second brood) example here before. One of them (below) was quite faded but the other one looked pristine, but sods law meant that the better condition one wouldn't sit still for a photo.



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 25.05.2019

A couple of male Orange-tips were seen patrolling the hedgerows but despite the thickening cloud it was still warm enough to keep them mobile and they didn't stop. A search of various cuckoo flower and garlic mustard plants produced quite a few OT eggs and first instar caterpillars. I tried to take a few photos of these with my sigma 105 lens but the plants were bobbing about too much in the breeze to get any good results.

As is often the case at this time of year, various day flying moths were much in evidence with Mother Shipton, Burnet Companion, Latticed Heath and Small Yellow Underwing all seen around the site.



Mother Shipton - Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Burnet Companion - Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Small Yellow Underwing - Castle Hills 25.05.2019



Small Yellow Underwing – Castle Hills 25.05.2019

By around 3.30pm the cloud had become 100% grey overcast and the wind was picking up so I decided to head home.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 26-May-19 08:12 PM GMT

That's a really interesting and unusual Small Heath Neil – you've got to get out there and keep searching 😊 It must surely deserve a place as an Ab?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-May-19 09:23 AM GMT

Great shots as per always Neil 😊 That is a really interesting looking Small Heath as not only does it like the the most obvious 'eye' but there are no spots on the hind wing either so it's totally 'blind' 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 27-May-19 11:15 AM GMT

Great Small Heath Neil, at least you got the shot even if it's only the one 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 27-May-19 08:04 PM GMT

Some interesting subjects there as always, Neil. Like others, I am intrigued by that 'blind' Small Heath. I certainly don't remember ever seeing one like that myself.

The moths are fabulous, especially the Mother Shipton, which is a personal favourite of mine.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-May-19 09:32 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments Pauline, Wurzel, Goldie and David.

Unfortunately, with the deterioration in the weather here during last Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday, that was the only time I got out last weekend.

I had a look through my other photos from the Saturday and noticed this other Small Heath which seems half way between the 'blind' one and those with normal sized eye-spots.



Small Heath - Castle Hills 25.05.2019

More Moths.

With the overnight weather over the past week or so being either clear and cool or with a blustery wind, I have only had the trap out a couple of times. Saturday (25th May) night produced my highest count so far this year with 59 moths of 26 species (41 of 17 macro and 18 of 9 micro) including NFY of Light Emerald, Clouded Silver, Small Rivulet, Grey/Dark Dagger agg, Large Yellow Underwing and Turnip.



Light Emerald - Coverdale 25.05.2019



Mottled Pug - Coverdale 25.05.2019



Common Marbled Carpet - Coverdale 25.05.2019

A bit of a breeze last night (Thursday 30th May) kept the numbers down a bit despite the mild overnight temperature with a result of 36 moths of 17 species (29 of 14 macro and 7 of 3 micro) which included another NFY of Figure of Eighty...no prizes for guessing how this one got its name.



Figure of Eighty - Coverdale 30.05.2019



Setaceous Hebrew Character - Coverdale 30.05.2019



Clouded Silver - Coverdale 30.05.2019

Yesterday afternoon after work I found a little Mint Moth (*Pyrausta aurata*) living up to its name settled on some mint growing in a pot in the back garden.



Mint Moth – Coverdale 30.05.2019

It's looking to be quite warm here tomorrow, I won't have time to go far but hopefully will be able to get out for an hour or two before rain is forecast to arrive on Sunday...we'll see.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 31-May-19 10:16 PM GMT

Good luck getting out tomorrow Neil – I'm destined to take the family to the beach – Lulworth Cove it is then 😊😄 Another great set of Moffs – especially glad to see the first one as I found a dismembered wing matching this species in Bentley Wood this morning and now I can put a name to the (possible) Bat victim 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 01-Jun-19 08:17 PM GMT

Some cracking moths in the absence of butterflies, Neil. Thanks to you I'm ever keener in regard to the day flyers....saw several in the French Pyrenees last week which has made me, for the first time, consider buying myself a guide book.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 01-Jun-19 08:42 PM GMT

Another interesting Small Heath Neil which has got me flicking back and forth in your diary. Well spotted. A butterfly that I don't usually pay much attention to but perhaps I should!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Jun-19 08:47 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I hope you had a good time at Lulworth. I've not seen Lulworth Skippers for a few years no and won't get chance this year. One to look forward to next year maybe.

Thanks David, I bet there are some cracking moths flying on the continent, I've no idea how many specie are there but if the ratio is anything like that with butterflies there must be thousands.

Thanks Pauline, the more I look at our butterflies the more I am finding that they have a surprising degree of natural variation.

Saturday 1st June.

The first day of meteorological summer and the forecast was for it to be potentially the hottest day of the year, at least for the southern half of the country with the transition in conditions looking to be somewhere across the midlands. After the grey and gloomy bank holiday followed by a week stuck indoors at work I was itching to get out, although I knew I would not have the time to go far and would have to stick to my local patch.

During the morning, as I was keeping on top of the household chores, I kept an eye out in the garden as usual and spotted a male Speckled Wood in residence. As mentioned in my previous report, the spring brood of Specklies has merged into the follow on brood here in my garden this year which means I am not seeing the short gap between broods that I sometimes do.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 01.06.2019

By late morning I had done all that I was going to do around the house for the day and after grabbing a quick sandwich I went out. I wanted to check out a spot I had first visited in August last year and where I had found the highest numbers of Common Blues for any of my local sites. This is by a business park on the outskirts of Solihull where there is a lot of building development going on but where some pathways have been retained through woodland and meadows around the perimeter of the site. I believe these are going to form the basis of a 'country park' when the development is finished.

On arrival, I walked along a path across a first grassy meadow, seeing a couple of Common Blues and Burnet Companion Moths but didn't linger long as I wanted to carry on through a wooded section to another area that had been far more productive last year. Going through the wooded part of the path I spotted a couple of Speckled Wood dancing about in the dappled shade and coming to a long sunny stretch I noticed a rather worn Comma basking at the side of the path.



Comma – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

During the afternoon I also saw a couple of elderly Peacocks still hanging in there, although by then it had become rather warm and muggy under thin high level cloud and they were very active and kept their wings firmly closed when they did settle.



Peacock – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

I also saw a few Orange-tips, at least a couple of males patrolling the edges of the wooded areas plus two or three females, although these were all looking like they were getting on a bit now.



Orange-tip male - Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Orange-tip male - Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Orange-tip female - Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Orange-tip female – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

Anyway, I had come here to look for Common Blues and hopefully Small Coppers and Brown Argus, these being about as exotic as it gets around my local patch in what is actually a rather species poor area compared to the more favoured parts of the country. I was happy to find good numbers of Common Blues, approx 25-30 all told scattered around various parts of the site. These were mostly fresh looking males with just two females seen, one of which was part of a mating pair, the other one flying off across a pond before I could get a photo but she looked to be very fresh and a of the typical half brown/half blue type.



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Common Blue pair – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

A couple of Small Coppers were seen, both of which were a bit worn around the fringes. These were both males and although like everything else they were very active, once you spot their favoured perches they will keep returning to the same spots.



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Small Copper - Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

I was particularly pleased to find a Brown Argus, these being very hit and miss around Solihull with some years not showing up here at all. This is the second local site where I have found them already this year which is better than normal as I usually only find a few second brood around here, that is when I find them at all.



Brown Argus - Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Brown Argus - Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

A few passing whites were seen with some of them proving to be female Orange-tips but at least one was confirmed as a Green-veined White albeit a rather faded one..



Green-veined White – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

I have still only seen a few of these so far this year, maybe half a dozen at most with Large and Small Whites being even scarcer with only a couple of each seen.

Burnet Companion Moths were all over the place during the afternoon and very flighty in the warm conditions making them even more difficult to approach than usual. I didn't count them but they were the most common lepidoptera seen during the afternoon with loads flying in all the open grassy areas of the site.



Burnet Companion – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019



Burnet Companion – Blythe Valley 01.06.2019

There were also a few Mother Shipton Moths seen but nowhere near the numbers of the Burnet Companions.

After wandering about for a couple of hours, it had become very warm with the temperature in the low to mid twenties plus a fair amount of high level cloud was making it feel muggy and uncomfortable so I decided to call it a day and head home.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 02-Jun-19 09:37 PM GMT

More great shots from you Neil but it might surprise you that my favourite is that last shot of the female OT – just everything about it appeals to me. I think it is a lovely composition.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 02-Jun-19 10:54 PM GMT

I'm with Pauline Neil – that female OT is a cracking image, mind you the Coppers and Blues give it a close run 😊👍 Also what is that Comma doing still hanging around? The H Commas aren't that far away now 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-Jun-19 11:33 PM GMT

Interesting that you're still seeing Peacock, Comma & Orange Tip in June, Neil.

I've given up on these three in south Wales, though like you, we still have the likes of Small Copper, Common Blue and Brown Argus to compensate.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Jun-19 08:12 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline, I was pleased with that shot of female OT myself. I prefer a bit of out of focus vegetation like that in my photos when I can get it.

Cheers Wurzel, I often find one or two elderly Commas hanging on into June around here most years.

Hi David, its not unusual to still be seeing those species into June around here and this season has developed into a rather stop-start one which has prolonged the flight periods of some of the spring species somewhat.

Friday 7th June.

Well I hope we don't have many more days like today, its been 'orrible. The only difference has been in how heavy the rain has been.

Although there was some pleasant weather during the week when I was stuck in work there has also been plenty of cloud about and I haven't seen a single butterfly since last Saturday.

The moth trap has been out a couple of times with a few more new for year species turning up but mostly the usual common species with nothing particularly outstanding. Last Saturday night in particular turned cloudy and stayed mild after a warm day and produced my highest total so far this year, 72 moths of 26 species (51 of 18 macros and 21 of 8 micro).

The most common 'trap filler' at this time of the year is the Heart & Dart but these can still be worth a closer look with quite a bit of variation and some nicely marked examples to be seen.



Heart & Dart – Coverdale 01.06.2019

Another common species is the Marbled Minor, or rather one of three species (Marbled Minor, Tawny Marbled Minor, Rufous Minor) that cannot be reliably separated without expert examination and so are recorded as agg (aggregate).



Marbled Minor agg. - Coverdale 01.06.2019

I also had another Figure of Eighty on Saturday which was in slightly better condition and better marked than the one caught the previous week so I took a few photos of it from different angles.



Figure of Eighty - Coverdale 01.06.2019



Figure of Eighty - Coverdale 01.06.2019



Figure of Eighty - Coverdale 01.06.2019

The weather over the next few days looks to be rather changeable and on the cool side. A far cry from 'flaming June' so far, I can think of another word that describes it but better not say it...there may be children reading.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-Jun-19 10:29 PM GMT

A lovely set of Moths again Neil 😊 I can actually see where a couple of these get their names which isn't always the way 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Jun-19 06:35 PM GMT

You keep pulling rabbits from the hat with these moths, Neil.

That Figure of Eighty is particularly striking.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jun-19 09:49 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I know what you mean about some of the common names of moths, some make sense but others...well, sometimes I don't even know what the words mean 😊

Thanks David, I have been trying out a variety of backgrounds and poses instead of using the same old bits of wood.

Neil Freeman wrote:

Well I hope we don't have many more days like today, its been 'orrible. The only difference has been in how heavy the rain has been.

I shouldn't have said that...today (Saturday 8th) has not been any better with rain until about 4.00 this afternoon.

In the absence of any butterflies, here are a few more moths. These are from Wednesday night which was the only other night I ran the trap last week and when cooler temperatures produced a lower count of 42 moths of 20 species (35 of 14 macro and 7 of 6 micro).



Willow Beauty - Coverdale 05.06.2019



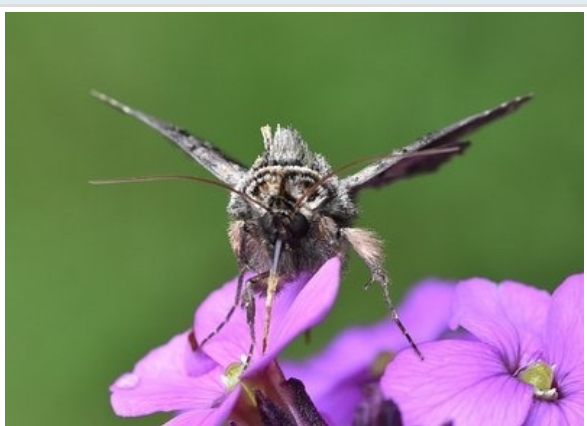
Scalloped Hazel – Coverdale 05.06.2019



Garden Carpet – Coverdale 05.06.2019



Spectacle – Coverdale 05.06.2019

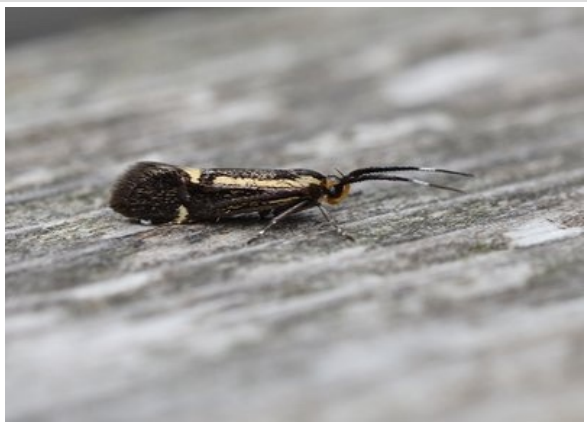


Spectacle – showing the 'spectacles' which give this species its name.

and a couple of attractive little micros, both usually day flyers but will come to light at dusk and early in the morning.



Nemaphora degeerella – Coverdale 05.06.2019



Esperia sulphurella – Coverdale 05.06.2019

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-19 03:23 PM GMT

A great set of moths Neil – I think I've seen all of those barring the *Esperia sulphurella* – although I'll have to check back through my folders to check that as it does seem familiar 😊😄 Mind you I haven't got shots anywhere near as decent as yours 🇮🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-Jun-19 09:22 PM GMT

I share your frustrations with the weather, Neil – south Wales is hardly the ideal place to be if you want benign conditions.

It's good that you've branched out into moths; they provide a different dimension.

Love the Spectacle, which, as you rightly say, gives away the reason for its name very readily.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 11-Jun-19 10:02 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I've not seen too many Moths so far this year so when on my five day break I saw a Tiger moth for the first time I was pleased, it really stood out on the leaves which were rather grim. I managed to find it's name in the British Moth's on line, that was a first for me 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Jun-19 09:26 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments Wurzel, David and Goldie, appreciated as always 😊

A few days up North – part 1.

We returned earlier today from our first trip of the season in which we usually spend a few days in a B&B to give us chance to explore an area. This first trip was a return to one of our favourite B&Bs which is in the Arnside & Silverdale AONB and is located just down the road from Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve, although ironically we didn't visit there this time due to making the most of the decent weather elsewhere before it turned. The weather was good on our arrival on Sunday (9th) afternoon and also good all day Monday but turned cloudy with a cold wind for Tuesday and Wednesday, although on the plus side we missed most of the heavy rain that they apparently had back home. It did rain heavily on both Tuesday and Wednesday nights but stayed dry during the day which meant that we could get out, although it was far too cold and windy for butterflies.

Anyway, on to the first report;

Warton Crag – June 9th.

Having seen the weather forecast for the next few days, which looked as if Sunday and Monday would be the best days for butterflying, Jane had said I could make the most of the time whilst the weather held and so after a reasonable run up the M6 on Sunday morning we headed straight for Warton Crag, arriving just after 1.30pm which gave a good couple of hours before we could check into our B&B. We often make a stop here when we come to this area although it has to be said the past couple of times the weather has not been too good with a cool blustery wind being felt on the higher slopes of the crag. Also, during our last visit to this area in early August last year, the vegetation on the shallow soils here was extremely parched after the hot dry summer last year. This time the conditions were quite reasonable with a mix of light cloud and warm sun so I was hopeful that I would catch up with two of my target species for this trip, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the salmacis race of Northern Brown Argus, both of which I had seen reported from here during the past week.

As Jane cannot manage the paths here due to her bad leg I left her reading her book and wandered off along the path through the trees and headed towards the higher slopes where I have previously seen SPBF here. As soon as I reached the more exposed slopes it was apparent that the vegetation had recovered somewhat since last summer with plenty of fresh green plant growth to be seen.



Warton Crag – looking north across the Kent Estuary to the Lake District



Warton Crag – looking back inland.

A fair breeze was blowing in off Morecambe Bay but along the more sheltered paths it felt pleasantly warm and it wasn't long before I spotted the first Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary flitting and gliding above the vegetation.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Warton Crag 09.06.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Warton Crag 09.06.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Warton Crag 09.06.2019

During the hour and a half or so that I spent wandering around the higher parts of the crag I reckon I saw between 8 to 10 Small Pearls scattered about along the various paths, it is difficult to be certain on numbers as on at least one occasion I saw the same individual along two different paths leading off one small clearing and if I hadn't looked closely could easily have counted it as two separate butterflies. From what I could tell, those that I saw were all males and don't think I saw a female, certainly not amongst those I managed to photograph.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Warton Crag 09.06.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Warton Crag 09.06.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Warton Crag 09.06.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Warton Crag 09.06.2019

I was also pleased to see a few Northern Brown Argus, although I only managed to photograph one individual with these being difficult to follow on the rocky slopes where I saw them.



Northern Brown Argus – Warton Crag 09.06.2019



Northern Brown Argus – Warton Crag 09.06.2019

A Small White was on one of the lower slopes which was worth noting as I have still only seen a few whites this year.



Small White - Warton Crag 09.06.2019

A few Brimstones were seen scattered about, both male and female, and a bedraggled looking Orange-tip was seen patrolling the area of grass by the car park.



Brimstone female - Warton Crag 06.09.2019



Orange-tip - Warton Crag 06.09.2019

Also on the grass by the car park was a male Common Blue that had that nice metallic look that fresh examples have when the light catches them right.



Common Blue - Warton Crag 06.09.2019

Also seen but not photographed were Small Heaths, Dingy Skippers and my first Large Skippers of the year.

Good numbers of Chimney Sweeper moths were also flying . This is a fairly localised species back home although where they are found they can be numerous and I believe they are more common in the north.

We then carried on to check in to our B&B with me feeling pleased that I had already seen two of my targets. The weather forecast was also looking promising for the following day although past experience has taught me that things can change rapidly, particularly in one area I was hoping to head for.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Jun-19 10:35 PM GMT

Great to see the NBA Neil 😊 - they do look noticeably different from the BA 😊🇮🇪 Looking forward tot eh next report, I'm intrigued as to what you're after...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-Jun-19 11:23 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I really envy your trip up North 🇮🇪🇮🇪 I can't wait to see what else you saw, could it be Large Heath!!!! I was up there last year on the 7th June and they were just coming out, lovely shots of the Pearls. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jun-19 07:26 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I always think that NBA has a warmer brown look than normal (southern) BA. The *salmacis* form anyway, I have never seen 'proper' *artaxerxes*.

Goldie M wrote:

... could it be Large Heath!!!!... Goldie 😊

Could be Goldie 😊

But first...

A few days up North – part 2.

Monday June 10th morning – Irton Fell.

After a good breakfast to set us up for the day we left our digs just before 09.00am and headed up into the Lake District, our destination being Irton Fell. We arrived at the small car park near Santon Bridge about 90 minutes later after going cross country for the last part of the journey via Ulpha and Eskdale Green so that we could enjoy some of the glorious scenery in this part of the world.

So far the weather had stayed true to the forecast, that is a mixture of sun and cloud with temperatures on my car display showing anything from 15 to 18 degrees depending on the altitude along the way and whether the sun was out or hidden behind a cloud. As I mentioned in my last report, Jane had said that I could make the most of today as the weather looked like it would go downhill for the next few days. As there was no way that she could manage the steep track up to the fell, this meant that I could go off for a couple of hours whilst she remained at the car where we kept a selection of reading and puzzle books for these occasions.

The reason for coming here was obviously to see Mountain Ringlet which, with this being the lowest altitude site they are found at, are often flying here from the end of May. I had seen that the first one this year had been reported on 30th May and keeping my eye on the Cumbria BC sightings page prior to our trip had seen numbers rising over the past week.

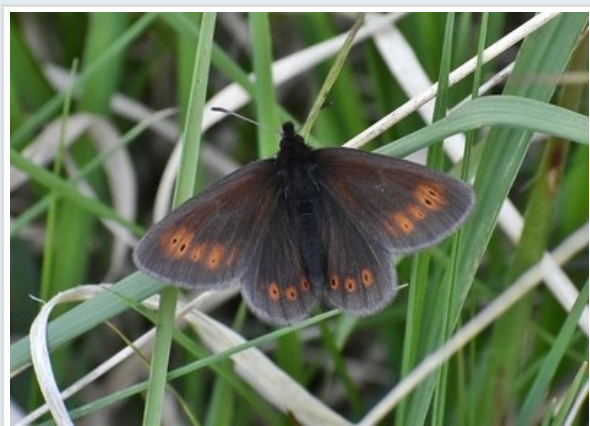
On my way up the track I met a chap on his way down who said that he had seen approximately 50 Mountain Ringlets whilst the sun was out earlier.

As it happened a big black cloud had settled over the fell as I arrived at the gate at the end of the track although there was plenty of blue sky to be seen in the distance, it just needed the cloud to shift. There were a few other people up on the fell and I chatted to some of these whilst we waited for the sun to come out. Most textbooks state that Mountain Ringlets will only fly in the sun and I have found this to be mostly true although I have seen them flying in cloudy conditions but this seems to require the air temperature to be above 18 degrees and it was only about 16 degrees up here under the cloud.

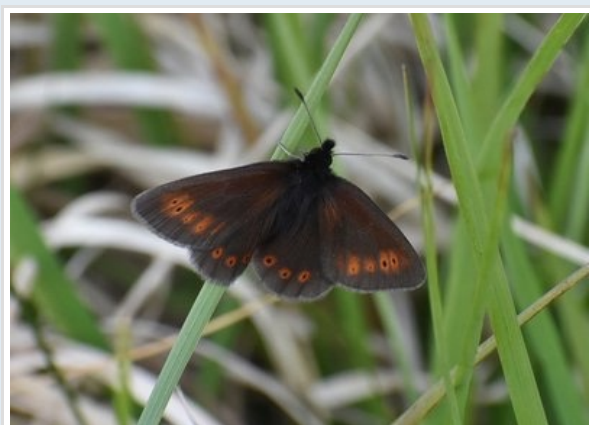
Anyway, after a wait of about 25 minutes the sun reappeared and almost immediately I spotted a Mountain Ringlet take to the air, followed by another, then another, as they responded to the sun in typical textbook fashion. During the next hour or so, as I got my eye in, I reckon I saw something like 40 to 50 Mountain Ringlets which ties in with what the chap I had spoken to earlier had said.

Seeing them was one thing, getting a photo was another. With this specie's habit of being very active when the sun is shining, combined with the way that when they do settle they just sort of crash land deep into the hummocks of grass, it is probably the most frustrating UK butterfly to get a clear photo of. One other thing that makes this species difficult to photograph is that they seem to be able to spot you from yards away so a fair bit of patience and luck is required in order to sneak up close before they take off again. Also, many of those that I saw were already looking tired and faded, not surprising I suppose given the exposed nature of the habitat up here where they must take a battering from the elements.

After many rubbishy shots consisting of more grass than butterfly, which I won't embarrass myself by posting here, I finally managed to latch onto a reasonable condition male which posed in a few positions as I carefully followed him around.



Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019



Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019



Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019

On one occasion I was watching this same individual when a cloud covered the sun and for once he landed a bit higher up on a small shrub where he shuffled about a bit but stayed down enabling me to get a couple of clear underside shots.

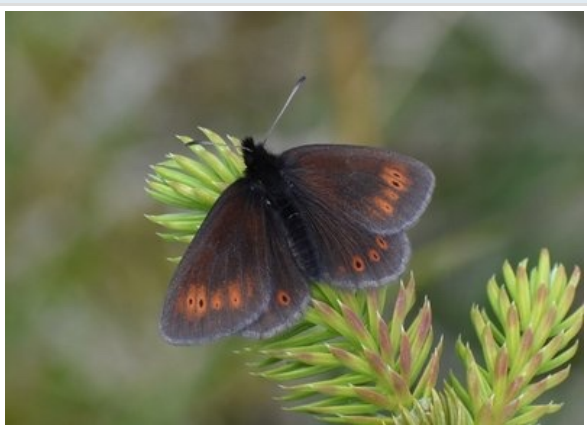


Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019



Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019

As the sun came out again I just had time for one topside shot before he was off again.



Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019

Most of those that I saw were males actively patrolling and looking for females. There were a few females about as well with these tending to look a lighter brown in flight compared with the darker males.



Mountain Ringlet female – Irton fell 10.06.2019



Mountain Ringlet female – Irton fell 10.06.2019



Mountain Ringlet male – Irton fell 10.06.2019

It seems that a few people had the same idea of making the most of the weather today with half a dozen fellow enthusiasts scattered about on the fell, the most people I have ever seen up here at the same time.



A fair crowd by Irton Fell standards.

As well as the Mountain Ringlets there were loads of Small Heath across the fell plus various small day flying moths, the only ones I managed to ID

being Common Heath (mostly because I was concentrating on the MR).

Of course, the scenery up here is worth seeing in itself;



Looking across Wasdale towards Wast Water from Irton Fell

By about 12.30 the sun was out more often and it was getting a fair bit warmer and consequently the Mountain Ringlets were becoming even more active so I decided to make my way back down to Jane. We then headed into Santon Bridge for a coffee before retracing our route back towards our B&B for the afternoon.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 14-Jun-19 07:49 PM GMT

Perseverance paid off with those Mountain Ringlets, Neil – terrific shots of a butterfly I have yet to meet! 😊👍

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 14-Jun-19 10:43 PM GMT

After 'running around' Cumbria and Scotland to get my last tick for the full set of British species last year, your pictures have whetted my appetite to do the mountain ringlet justice with a more sedate day during peak flight.... maybe next year 😊. Great shots though, particularly the underside shots, a deceptively and subtly attractive species.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Jun-19 10:45 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Neil – isn't that always the way though – you arrive and so does the cloud 😊 still your patience paid off 😊 This will be one of the last of the British species I get to 'tick off' I reckon 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Jun-19 06:23 PM GMT

Thanks for your Comments Dave, Bugboy and Wurzel 😊

That's the third time I have seen Mountain Ringlets now, each time I have combined a visit to Irton Fell with a stay in Arnside/Silverdale.

A few days up North – part 3.

Monday June 10th afternoon – Meathop Moss.

We left Santon Bridge about 1.00pm and retraced our route via Eskdale Green and Ulpa to pick up the main road and head back closer to our B&B. The plan was to call in at Meathop Moss where we arrived just over an hour later and parked up in the small space by the footpath onto the moss. A bit more cloud was building up by now but it was still feeling warm with the temperature around 18 or 19 degrees and even hitting 20 when the sun was out.

The first part of the path through the trees was quite soft and muddy and walking onto the boardwalk out into the moss it was apparent that it was a lot wetter than on my last visit here in 2016. I believe that there has been quite a bit of management work here to retain water levels to prevent the moss drying out and it also appears that this part of the country has had a fair bit of rain so far this year, unlike southern parts (up until recently that is). Last time I was here the moss had been dry enough in places to carefully venture off the boardwalk but this time I was not going to risk it, even wearing my wellies and with my five foot walking stick to test the ground.

Anyway, the reason for coming here was to see Large Heath and during the hour or so that I spent wandering backwards and forwards along the board walk I reckon I saw 25 to 30 bobbing about above the vegetation. I said in my last report that Mountain Ringlets are probably the most difficult UK butterfly to get a decent photo of but the Large Heaths that live in this habitat certainly run them a close second. Like the Mountain Ringlets, seeing them is easy but getting a photo is a challenge as they mostly stay out of reach on the moss with just the occasional one coming close enough to the board walk to grab a quick photo.

I eventually got a few shots, not the best I have ever managed of this species but given the circumstances I was reasonably happy, although some of them were at a fair distance and would require a bit of cropping.



Large Heath - Meathop Moss 10.06.2019



Large Heath - Meathop Moss 10.06.2019



Large Heath - Meathop Moss 10.06.2019



Large Heath – Meathop Moss 10.06.2019



Large Heath – Meathop Moss 10.06.2019

The only other butterflies seen here were a couple of Speckled Wood in the first section of path through the trees.

As is often the case in this type of habitat a large number of dragonflies and damselflies were about but the only ones I got close enough to ID were Four-spotted Chasers. Also lots of small day flying moths, most of which I got close enough to ID were Common Heaths.

Lots of Lizards were also basking on the board walk, most often seen scurrying away as they felt the vibration of my footsteps, but by moving slowly I managed to get quite close to a couple.



Common Lizard – Meathop Moss 10.06.2019

About 3.30pm I decided to make a move and make one more stop off...

Latterbarrow.

Leaving Meathop Moss and turning left out of the lane onto the dual carriageway meant that I had to drive down to the roundabout and come back up the opposite carriageway. This would take me past the turn off for Latterbarrow, a lovely little Cumbria Wildlife Trust reserve that I have often dropped into when in this area and I was keen to visit again today.

Just inside the gate into the reserve I saw a couple taking photos of something in the long grass and held back so as not to spook whatever it was. They

called me over and showed me a Northern Brown Argus basking on a grass stem and as they had already taken their photos invited me to help myself. As the sun went in and out behind the clouds, it opened and closed its wings and flitted about a bit but didn't go far.



Northern Brown Argus – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019



Northern Brown Argus – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019



Northern Brown Argus – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019

I then carried on around the paths and spotted a few Large Skippers and a couple of Meadow Browns, my first of the latter this year. These were all quite active and I didn't bother trying to take any photos of these as I get plenty of both back home.

I had just reached the far end of the reserve when a bright orange butterfly flew past and settled just in front of me, a nice fresh looking female Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

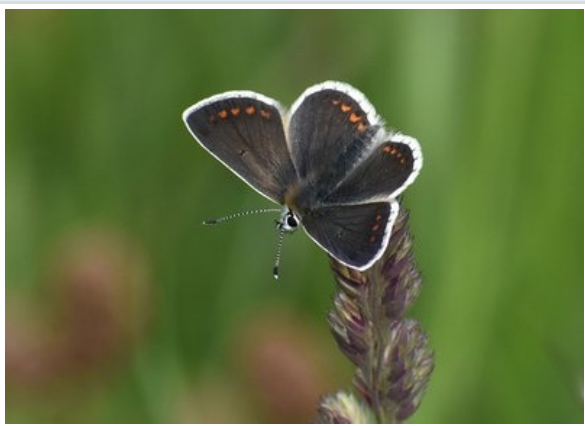


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Latterbarrow 10.06.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Latterbarrow 10.06.2019

The path here loops back to the entrance and on the way back I saw two or three more NBAs, one of which posed nicely for me.



Northern Brown Argus - Latterbarrow 10.06.2019



Northern Brown Argus – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019

Also seen here was a male Brimstone and a really tatty old Peacock still hanging in there.

I also saw a White-spotted Sable Moth *Anania funebris*, a micro that can be found locally scattered throughout the UK and which Latterbarrow is a known site for.



Anania funebris – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019

Latterbarrow is also known for its variety of wildflowers including orchids. I have mentioned before that I am not really into orchids and although I usually notice them I cannot really tell the difference between those that are various shades of pink or purple. There were some here however that are a bit more distinctive that I do recognise, Greater Butterfly Orchids.



Greater Butterfly Orchid – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019

By about 4.30pm the cloud had built up into a solid overcast and it looked like rain was on the way so we called it a day and headed back towards our

B&B in Silverdale.

During the course of the day I had seen Mountain Ringlets in the morning and Large Heaths earlier in the afternoon and now finished off with Northern Brown Argus and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary....A cracking day by any standards 😊.

I was glad that I had made the most of the day as the weather forecast for the next couple of days was not looking good, but even if the conditions were not good for butterflies, there is still plenty to see in this area...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 16-Jun-19 06:38 PM GMT

What a wonderful trip Neil and a fabulous array of butterflies. Those NBA certainly know how to pose for the camera 😊 Is there quite some variance in the markings of the Large Heath as that first one seems to have some teardrop shaped markings as opposed to the circular ones of the subsequent images? Can I come with you next time? 😊😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 16-Jun-19 09:06 PM GMT

I find it incredible that you found three species, all of which would have been ' lifers ' for me, in one day. You also managed some superb images of all of them. Certainly a break/holiday to remember.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 16-Jun-19 10:24 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I was right about the Heath! 😊 I didn't think you'd take a trip up there and miss seeing them 😊 Your shots of the Northern Brown are fantastic also the Pearl, I find the LH hard to get shots of they seem to disappear into the Moss 😊

I started going to the Moss just before Meathop it's called Foulshaw Moss , there's always a warden there and the board walk starts much nearer, also there's a toilet on the sight and if you've got sandwiches a couple of benches where you can sit and eat I think your wife would like it if you go again. 😊

Like you find the Mountain Ringlet hard to get shot's of I find the the Scotch Argus very much like them in flight, I've yet to get a shot that I'm really pleased with 😊

I will have to wait while next year now before I venture up there again, (all being well) so it was good to see your shots. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Jun-19 11:58 AM GMT

Cracking shots again Neil and worthy of plenty of 🍷🍷🍷 as the Large Heath is another one of those species that is missing from my list. That first one is a cracking looking individual with those lush tear drop eyes 😊🍷 I'll have to save this section of your PD and file it away ready for when I can finally get up to that neck of the woods 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Jun-19 10:50 PM GMT

Wow, Neil, your images from Irton Fell take me back briskly to the one and only time I visited the exact same spot, which is now a scarcely believable EIGHT years ago! 😊

One thing I didn't get that day (and have never seen on my European jaunts) is a female with upperside ocelli the size of those your wonderful specimen displays. A striking individual, for sure.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Jun-19 07:54 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline, Large Heath are quite variable in the size and shape of the spots. I've been wondering how to ask Jane about taking a lady I know from the internet 😊😊 probably best not to if I want to continue these trips 😊

Thanks Trevor, fortunately in that part of the country a bit of planning and some luck with the weather can get you all three on the same day fairly easily.

Hi Goldie, we did visit Foulshaw Moss on the Tuesday, your'e right, Jane liked it there...see below.

Cheers Wurzel, you really must make the trip sometime, beautiful scenery and it always feels as if I am stepping back in time when I visit that area.

Thanks David , that female did stand out a bit with those large hindwing spots.

A few day up north - part 4.

Over the past few years it seems that increasing numbers of birders are turning to butterflies and dragonflies during the summer months. My first interest is in butterflies and moths and I am not really a birder but when the weather is not conducive for butterflying I sometimes do the opposite and look at birds, especially on our trips when we are in areas where we may see something that we would not see at home.

Foulshaw Moss.

With the weather turning dull and cloudy on the Tuesday (11th June) we decided have a look at Foulshaw Moss, a Cumbria Wildlife Trust site which is well known for a pair of Ospreys that return each year to breed. Despite coming to this part of the world for some years now we had not actually visited here before although we had driven past a number of times and seen it signposted. We arrived just after 09.30am and after parking up had a chat with the ranger in his hut by the start of the path. We then went down a short way to the first hide which overlooks a row of feeders set up in a small clearing. These were being visited by lots of small birds including Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Siskins and Redpolls, the last one being a bird I never see back home.



Goldfinch, Chaffinch & Redpoll - Foulshaw Moss 11.06.2019



Redpoll - Foulshaw Moss 11.06.2019

There was also a Great-spotted Woodpecker that kept returning to these feeders.



Great Spotted Woodpecker - Foulshaw Moss 11.06.2019

We then carried on along the board walk to the Osprey hide from where the nest can be seen in the top of a tree in the distance. A couple of cameras have been set up in this tree which provide a live feed from the Osprey nest that can be viewed on the reserve's website. There was also a spotting scope in the hide for use by visitors to get a closer look of the nest.



Osprey nest in the distance, you can just make out the female hunkered down from the wind in the middle of the nest. The white objects to the sides of the nest are the cameras.

A few minutes after we arrived at the hide a volunteer arrived and set up another spotting scope and a tablet displaying the live feed from the cameras which showed the female hunkered down in the wind sheltering two chicks.



Osprey hide at Foulshaw Moss



Tablet screen showing live feed from the cameras.

After spending a little while in the hide and chatting to the volunteer about the Ospreys we then continued around the board walk which circles back around to the beginning of the path. Jane was keen to look in the first hide again and watch the birds on the feeders so we popped back there for a bit and then had another wander along the board walk noticing some Reed Buntings and lots of Common Heath Moths which seem to fly in any conditions. We spent a couple of hours at Foulshaw and although the weather was dull and cloudy with a cold wind blowing across the open moss, we both thought that it was a great reserve and well worth a return visit when we are next in the area. As well as the Ospreys and other birds, Large Heath can be seen on the moss and I believe that White-faced Darters can also be found here, although the cool and cloudy weather meant that neither of these were seen today.

RSPB Leighton Moss.

After leaving Foulshaw Moss we drove back around into Silverdale and went to RSPB Leighton Moss which is just a few minutes from our B&B. Anyone who has been reading my PD for some time will have seen that we often visit this reserve when we stay in this area as it has good paths between most

of the hides which Jane can manage with her limited mobility. We usually come to see the Marsh Harriers which breed here every year and this year we were told they are doing well with four nests scattered about the various reed beds. We certainly saw more Marsh Harrier activity than we have seen before with good views from all the hides we visited during the afternoon. Although we had good views through binoculars, these sightings were too far away for either my Panasonic FZ200 or Nikon D3400 (with 70-300mm lens) to get any good shots although I managed a few record shots with the D3400 which I have cropped quite a lot to post below.



Marsh Harrier - Leighton Moss 11.06.2019



Marsh Harrier - Leighton Moss 11.06.2019

We also drove around to the Allen and Eric Morecambe hides down by the shoreline where we saw various waders including nesting Avocets along with a large number of Black-headed Gulls which were making quite a racket.



No words needed.



Avocets – Leighton Moss 11.06.2019

By about 4.00pm Jane wanted to return to our B&B and have a shower and a rest before going out for a meal on the night so I dropped her off and returned to Leighton. There is one hide that we have never been to before (the Lower hide) as it involves a longer walk and Jane wasn't sure if she could manage it. With another dull day forecast for Wednesday we had decided that I would go back and do a recce to see if I thought that Jane could manage it with a view to perhaps giving it a go the next morning. On the walk to the hide a young Red Deer ran across the path in front of me and went down in the grass where I managed to sneak up and get a shot of him watching me from his hiding place.



Someones got their eye on me.

One of the star attractions currently at Leighton Moss is a female Bittern that is nesting not far from the Lower Hide and which had been seen most days taking flights across the reed beds. I had not long arrived at the hide when someone called out 'Bittern' and I turned in time to see it flying off across the reeds and just about got a couple of blurry record shots as it disappeared into the distance. Like the Marsh Harriers, the shot below is heavily cropped.



Bittern – Leighton Moss 11.06.2019

One of the other occupants of the hide mentioned to me that he had been there three hours and that was his first glimpse of the Bittern...and he nearly missed it, looking in the wrong direction at first when it was called out.

There were a number of Lapwings to be seen around the hide including a female on a nest amongst a pile of cut reeds right in front of the hide and who must be the most photographed Lapwing in the UK. Occasionally a couple of chicks would come out and have a little wander around before hiding back

in the nest.



Lapwing and chicks - Leighton Moss 11.06.2019



Lapwing and chicks - Leighton Moss 11.06.2019

After some heavy rain on Tuesday night, Wednesday morning started off very similar to the previous day i.e. cool and cloudy so we returned as planned to Leighton Moss and walked down to the Lower hide, Jane finding it not too bad as long as we took our time. We spent most of the morning in this hide and got more good views of the Marsh Harriers.



Marsh Harrier arriving at speed from stage left...



...and pulling up at the end of his run.

Unfortunately the Bittern didn't show whilst we were there this time but there was plenty of interest to see including the aforementioned Marsh Harriers and Lapwings plus Great-crested Grebe, Reed Warblers and a Kingfisher, most of which were too far away or too quick for photos.

Around mid-day we left the hide and wandered back towards the car, hearing a rather vocal Pheasant along the way which we shortly came across striking a pose in the middle of the path. He seemed quite tame and is probably used to seeing visitors here, in fact we have seen Pheasants around the other paths here on previous visits.



Pheasant making himself look all important.

We then went into Arnside where we had a cream tea before popping up the knott for a quick look around. It was very dull and gloomy by now under a thick grey overcast so I wasn't expecting to find much but I did a quick circle around some of the paths looking for roosting butterflies without success. I did find my only Lepidoptera of the day when I disturbed a Cinnabar Moth which flew a short distance and settled again.



Cinnabar Moth – Arnside Knott 12.06.2019

I also saw a young Red Deer which looked like it couldn't decide whether to run for it or not.



Shall I stay or shall I go.

We left Arnside and with the weather now beginning to turn drizzly we went back to Leighton Moss to finish off the day.



Chaffinch on feeder behind the visitor center – Leighton Moss 12.06.2019

The rain turned heavier again on Wednesday night and continued into Thursday morning when we checked out of our B&B. If the weather had been better I had considered taking a diversion on the way home to Prees Heath to see if Silver-studded Blues were out there yet but with dull skies and rain most the way back down the M6 I decided against it.

Still, it was a cracking few days in one of my favourite parts of the country 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Jun-19 09:52 PM GMT

Sunday 16th June.

After returning home from our few days up north on the Thursday (13th June), the next couple of days were cloudy and wet with some heavy rain showers, particularly on the Saturday.

Sunday was forecast to be much better and being Fathers Day, our daughter Sarah had invited us around for Sunday Lunch.

After lunch, Jane suggested that myself and Sarah could pop out for a bit whilst she looked after the grand kids so we drove around to my local spot at Bickenhill which is not far from where Sarah lives. I have mentioned before that Sarah is into photography but mostly arty type stuff although she will take photos of various insects and other small creatures as the fancy takes her.

We arrived just as a black cloud came over and a short, sharp shower came down whilst we waited in the car for it to finish. Ten minutes later the sun was back out again so we headed off to do a circuit of the paths here.



Sarah at Bickenhill - 16.06.2019



Not sure what she is photographing here...

To be honest, there were not that many butterflies about. Unlike some more productive areas, my local patch only has the common wider countryside species and I always see a bit of a 'June Gap' before the numbers of summer butterflies build up. This does not mean however that there is a total lack and the first Large Skippers and Meadow Browns were flying albeit no more than half a dozen of each so far.



Large Skipper - Bickenhill 16.06.2019



Large Skipper – Bickenhill 16.06.2019



Meadow Brown – Bickenhill 16.06.2019

It was also good to see three or maybe four fresh new Small Tortoiseshells, although getting close enough for photos was difficult as they were whisked away by a brisk breeze as soon as they ventured above the vegetation.



Small Tortoiseshell – Bickenhill 16.06.2019

A faded and slightly bedraggled looking female Brown Argus was a good sighting as these can be very hit and miss around my local sites and some years I don't find any at all.



Brown Argus – Bickenhill 16.06.2019



Brown Argus – Bickenhill 16.06.2019

The only other butterflies seen were a few fresh Speckled Wood that were flitting about in a couple of sections of path that go through some trees.

After an hour or so the clouds had built up again to a grey overcast so we headed back to the car. This site is not far from Birmingham airport and as we walked back we saw one of the Emirates A380s which now do a regular scheduled flight to Dubai from B'ham.



A380 heading into grey skies.

I am always fascinated by how these large double decker aircraft don't seem to be flying fast enough to stay in the air, although I know that this is an illusion due to the size of the aircraft and the reality is that they are flying faster than they appear.

Friday 21st June.

After finishing work at midday as I normally do on Fridays, we popped round for our usual visit to my mom. After having a chat and a coffee I left the women talking and took a quick walk down the road to the local park see if anything was about. Although it was quite cloudy, it was pleasantly warm and a few Meadow Browns and Large Skippers were flying in a couple of areas where the grass is allowed to grow long. It is pleasing to see that this year the areas of uncut grass here are larger than ever with some parts left which would previously have been cut short.

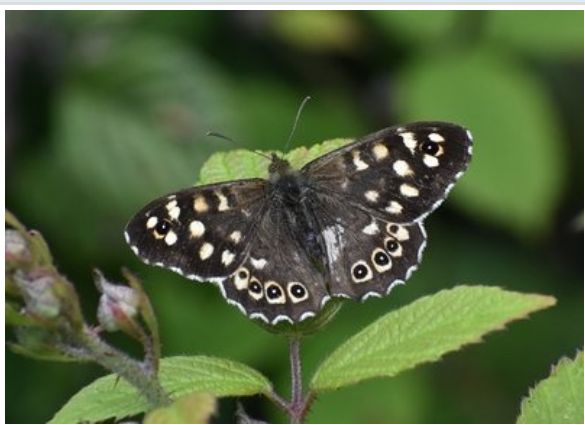


Large Skipper – Langley Hall 21.06.2019



Meadow Brown – Langley Hall 21.06.2019

A few Speckled Wood were again spotted around the edges of the wooded area.



Speckled Wood – Langley Hall 21.06.2019

I don't think I have ever been here between April and September and failed to see a Speckled Wood.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Jun-19 11:17 PM GMT

Lovely looking Large Skippers Neil 😊 That is a cracking looking Small Tort – the dark margins really show off the blue triangles to great effect 😊😎

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 23-Jun-19 11:04 PM GMT

That's a beautiful, fresh Small Tortoiseshell, Neil. Hopefully we'll all see plenty as the summer wears on.

Looks like we may finally see some proper hot weather later this week, so I hope things will get moving everywhere during what is the peak part of the season.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 25-Jun-19 09:08 PM GMT

Just catching up with the rest of your visit to the northwest, Neil – great Large Heaths, and NBA on the same day as well. June is such a busy month and I seem to concentrate my activity down south. I should do what you do for a change! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Jun-19 08:09 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, there are some lovely fresh Small Tortoiseshells appearing over the past week.

Thanks David. You were right about the hot weather, just returned earlier today from a few days in the south-west and we even missed the rain that a lot of the country had earlier in the week.

Thanks Dave, I always have a problem deciding what to see in June as so much appears at the same time and due to my local patch being so species poor I will often plan my trips away during this period after much pondering during the winter months.

June 23rd – Haddon Hill.

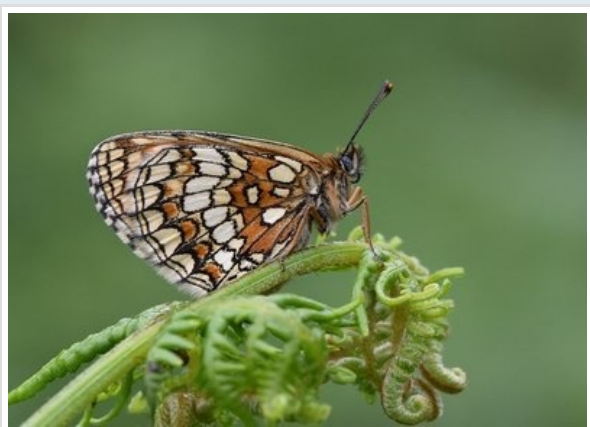
Last Sunday (23rd June) we set out for our second trip of the season, to spend a few days stopping at the Hunters Inn down in the Heddon Valley.

Our youngest son Daniel has been living and working in Bristol for a couple of years now and has recently bought a house down there with his girlfriend so we stopped off on the way down for a brief visit and to see their house. We then continued on our way, leaving Bristol in fine warm weather of approx 20 degrees, but further on down the M5 we started running into some rain.

The next stop was planned to be at Haddon Hill but by the time we turned off the motorway and was heading up into Exmoor the temperature reading on my car display was down to 16 degrees and the rain was becoming more persistent. Nevertheless we carried on to Haddon Hill and arrived at the car park just before 1.00pm. Although it wasn't actually raining when we arrived, the ground was wet and it looked like it would start again soon, but as we were there I took a brisk walk to the usual 'hotspot' to have a quick look around.

I wasn't expecting to see anything flying in the gloomy conditions but started examining the bracken fronds for settled butterflies and after about 5 minutes was well chuffed to find a Heath Fritillary settled in quite an open position...I don't usually find things that easily.

Given that he was not looking like he was going to move anytime soon I carefully trimmed away a couple of intervening grass stems and took a few photos.



Heath Fritillary – Haddon Hill 23.06.2019

It then started raining again so I left the Fritillary where he was and ducked under some nearby trees to shelter until it hopefully stopped again. I ended up waiting there for around twenty minutes, during which time the rain came down quite heavily, before it eased off a bit and I decided to make a break back to the car. Before I left however, I checked on the Fritillary again expecting it to have gone somewhere more sheltered but it was still there, the only difference being it had moved slightly and was now in an even better position for a photo. With some light rain still falling I took a few more photos and then made my escape before it came down heavier again.



Heath Fritillary – Haddon Hill 23.06.2019



Heath Fritillary – Haddon Hill 23.06.2019

I was a shame I didn't get any topside shots, particularly as it appeared to be a fairly fresh example, but there was no way it was going to open up in those conditions. Even so, I came away with some of my best Heath Fritillary underside shots to date so I can't really complain at that.

We then carried on to the Heddon Valley to check into the Hunters Inn.

No prizes for guessing what I was going there for...

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-19 07:58 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Neil, brilliant crystal sharp shots 📸👍 Cool and gloomy days often make for great butterflying ones especially when the butterflies allow you to do a bit of 'gardening' around them 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-Jun-19 01:11 PM GMT

Aah, Haddon Hill. Brings back happy memories, Neil, as it's a while since I headed out there.

Those specimens look to be in great condition too, and the cool conditions and darker light clearly helped you.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jun-19 06:22 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel and David, the cool and cloudy conditions certainly helped to keep the butterfly settled but I could have done without the rain.

June 23rd to 26th – Heddon Valley Part 1.

Over the past few years we have gone down to the Heddon Valley a few times in late June and purely by coincidence rather than by any conscious plan our visits have been in alternate years with our first visit in 2013 making this year our fourth time. We usually book into the Hunters Inn for three nights which gives a couple of full days to explore the area and hopefully have a decent window in the weather to look for butterflies. This also means that Jane has somewhere to just chill out for a bit whilst I wander around the paths that are too steep or rough for her to manage and she is happy to let me off the leash as long as I check back every so often and get the occasional drink or maybe an ice cream from the National Trust shop. Mind you, I don't

need much tempting back for an occasional pint of draught Exmoor Gold.

Anyway, as many people will know, the main reason for coming here is;

High Brown Fritillaries.

After departing from Haddon Hill last Sunday afternoon (23rd), the rain continued for the rest of our journey until by the time we reached the Hunters Inn at just after 3.30pm it had reduced to a slight drizzle. After checking in and getting settled into our room I noticed that the rain has stopped so I decided to go out for a little wander to stretch my legs, although I wasn't expecting to see many butterflies as it was still quite cloudy and cool feeling. As it happened, I saw a few Meadow Browns and a couple of Large Skippers, but that was it.

The next morning (Monday 24th) it was still grey and overcast to start with but the rain had stopped so Jane decided to have a slow walk down towards Heddons Mouth. We saw a few butterflies along the way, mostly Meadow Browns and a few Common Blues and Small Heath plus a tatty ancient looking Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary down by the wooden bridge but it was still a bit too cool and cloudy for much else to be flying. We then returned back to the Hunters Inn and as by this time it was getting on for midday and having walked off our breakfast we went and got an ice cream from the NT shop.

As we went in to the afternoon the cloud began to thin and with the sun breaking though occasionally the temperature rose a couple of degrees making it feel fairly pleasant so I decided to check out a couple of the lower meadows that had been productive in the past. I soon spotted some large orange Fritillaries all of which appeared to be males zooming about at high speed. Of course, the trick now was to get close enough to tell if they were High Browns or Dark Greens so I employed my usual method which is to stake out a spot with thistles or brambles and hope for one to come along. Most of the thistles in the meadows here this year have grown very tall with many of them being higher than the top of my head which actually made confirming some IDs fairly easy as it afforded good views of the undersides. The downside to this was that getting a decent angle for photos was tricky as they flew from plant to plant and fidgeted about above head height.



High Brown Fritillary - Heddons Valley 24.06.2019



High Brown Fritillary - Heddons Valley 24.06.2019

I also had a walk through Parsonage Wood, where a couple each of High Brown and Dark Green Fritillaries, and then carried on to the crossroads on the path at Ladies Mile where I saw a few more Fritillaries flying rapidly across the bracken on the slopes.

Later in the afternoon they started to slow down bit and would settle to bask on the bracken but with plenty of lush vegetation this year it was difficult to get a clear shot without intervening grass stems.



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

During the afternoon I reckon I identified half a dozen HBF with an equal number of DGF with a few more that didn't stay still long enough for me to be sure which they were.

During Monday night we had a bit more rain but luckily nothing like the amount that was forecast and the following morning (Tuesday 25th) again started off with a grey overcast but this soon started to break up and after breakfast I went out for a walk. This time I ventured up Trentishoe Combe and across the higher path, a route which is described in a butterfly walk pamphlet that is available from the NT shop and also on the bar in the Hunters Inn. This is a steep climb in places and my previous experience of this route is that Fritillaries can be seen fairly easily but not so easily photographed as they zoom around across the steep slopes at high speed. As the morning warmed up I saw about a dozen Fritillaries on this route but only managed to positively ID a couple of High Browns and one Dark Green with the others remaining to far away to be sure of their ID.

As I carried on around this walk some low cloud /sea mist rolled in and for about 10 minutes the visibility was down to a few yards ahead of me and everything went deathly silent which made for a rather spooky atmosphere. I could almost here a voice in my head saying 'don't go off the path' in a strong west country accent. It soon cleared again and having survived whatever may have lurked in the mist (in my overactive imagination) I made my way back down to meet Jane at the Hunters Inn.

A couple of hours later, after chilling out for a bit just sitting outside the pub enjoying a drink and watching the world go by, I went off for another walk, this time on a circuit of the lower meadows I had visited the day before. It had now turned into a lovely afternoon with plenty of warm sunny spells and I soon started to see Fritillaries bombing about. Once again I just stood around various thistle or bramble patches and managed a few photos as the butterflies made brief stops to refuel.



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

In previous years I had noticed some large buddleias growing wild in a couple of meadows off the path along the river but these had never been in flower at the time of our visits so I had not checked them out. In one meadow I noticed an obvious trail through the long grass where it looked like other people had walked through to these buddleias and as there were also a couple of large bramble patches I decided to have a look. As I got closer I saw that there were two more buddleias that were mostly hidden behind a tree which meant that they were not so obvious from the main path. These

were both in full flower with one in full sun through a gap in the trees behind it and I noticed a path of trampled down grass and brambles where other people had previously got through to it which allowed me to get closer. I had noticed a number of butterflies flitting about this buddleia as I had approached but from that distance they were just dark silhouettes against the sky. Now I was closer I saw that they were made up of at least half a dozen each of both Red Admirals and Painted Ladies and a single Small Tortoiseshell, but best of all I also counted five High Brown Fritillaries.



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



High Brown Fritillaries – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

It seemed strange to see the High Browns on a buddleia like this but I suppose there is no reason why they wouldn't take advantage when the opportunity arose. I spent some time around this one area just watching and taking photos when the butterflies came low enough and noticed that as the sun moved across the sky they also moved across to the other buddleia as that also came into more sun. There are also some large banks of brambles in this spot but they were mostly being ignored by the High Browns in favour of the buddleias.

After a while I tore myself away from this spot and carried on wandering. Up until now all the High Browns that I had seen had been males with most of them flying about at high speed. I had made a conservative count of 22 so far during the day with that number not including some that didn't stay still long enough for me to be positive about their ID.

I was slowly making my way back towards the Hunters Inn and decided to do a final check of another meadow before I called it a day. Scanning the brambles along the edge of this meadow an orange patch stood out against the green leaves and sneaking closer trying not to touch anything I finally found a female, and a beautiful fresh example at that. She really seemed to glow against the bramble leaves and I would not be surprised if she had just emerged earlier that day. I took a few photos and left her in peace, a cracking find to finish off a great day.



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

I have mentioned a few other species above, more details and photos of these and others to come as I sort through them.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 30-Jun-19 06:42 PM GMT

A beautiful selection of High Browns, Neil, all in excellent condition too. What a terrific spot that is down there. 😊🍷

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Jun-19 10:37 PM GMT

"I don't need much tempting back for an occasional pint of draught Exmoor Gold." -I'll bet that's a nice drop of juice that is 😊😄 I expect it would be even finer if supping whilst looking through all those cracking HBF shots 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 01-Jul-19 10:12 PM GMT

Stunning High Browns, Neil, and all very fresh. That female is a beauty. Your images do them full justice.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-Jul-19 05:36 PM GMT

As a High Brown aficionado myself all I can do is congratulate you, Neil. This is not an easy species to photograph but you've managed some enviable images. 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Jul-19 07:31 PM GMT

A terrific spot indeed Dave, hence why I like to stay a few nights to make the most of it 😊

Cheers Wurzel, there is a great selection of Exmoor Ales to try...but care has to be taken in choosing the right one for the occasion 😊😄

Thanks Trevor, I got the impression that the emergence was a bit later than usual.

Thanks David, a bit of luck was involved in being in the right place at the right time.

June 23rd to 26th – Heddon Valley Part 2.

Dark Green Fritillaries.

With Dark Green Fritillaries flying alongside the High Browns, most of what I wrote in the previous report is equally applicable to the DGFs that I saw i.e.

they were mostly males flying around rapidly and occasionally settling on the tall thistles.



Dark Green Fritillary - Heddon Valley 24.06.2019



Dark Green Fritillary - Heddon Valley 24.06.2019



Dark Green Fritillary - Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

One particular example that I saw on the Monday afternoon was a well marked example with additional heavy black markings which probably qualified it as a named ab.



Dark Green Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

I tried to get a better topside photo of this individual but with his restless flitting about on the tall thistles I just managed some underside shots.



Dark Green Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

I looked for him again on the Tuesday in the same spot but just found some more normal looking examples.

As with the High Browns, later in the day they slowed down a bit and could sometimes be found basking on the bracken.



Dark Green Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

Overall, I reckon that I only saw half as many Dark Green Fritillaries as High Browns and most of those were on the Monday. Curiously, when I saw the High Browns on the buddleias as described in the previous report, I did not see any Dark Greens in that spot at all.

Silver-washed Fritillaries.

During all my previous visits to the Heddon Valley I have also managed to spot a few Silver-washed Fritillaries, usually fresh looking males although on my last visit a couple of years ago there were also some females flying.

I was not surprised therefore to find a few SWFs this time as well, three different examples and all males, one on the Tuesday morning in Parsonage Wood and two chasing each other about in one of the meadows by the river later in the afternoon.



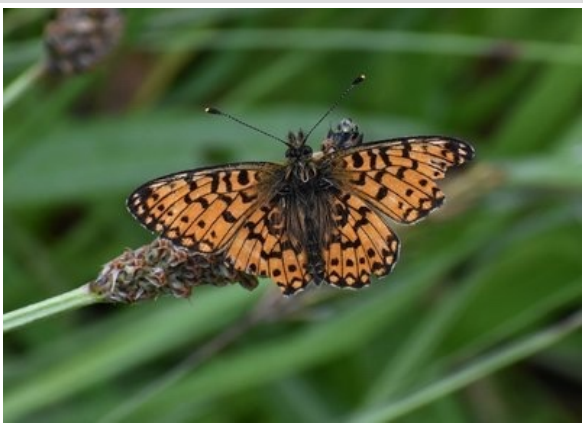
Silver-washed Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



Silver-washed Fritillary – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.

I have also sometimes found a few Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries still flying in past visits here, although they are usually well worn examples just about hanging on. This time I found four different faded and tatty examples scattered about in the meadows along the river.



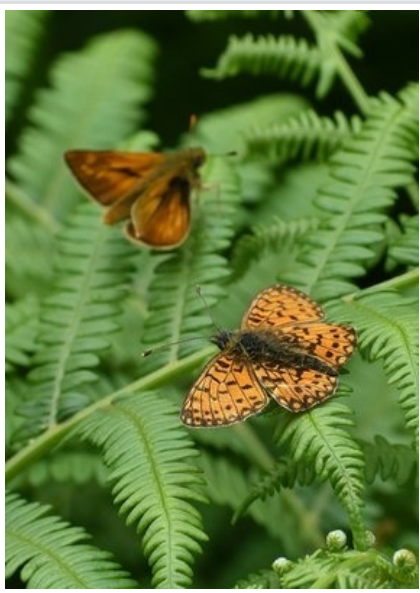
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

I watched on the Monday afternoon as one of them kept chasing male Large skippers...



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary & Large skipper - Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

...and found him up to the same antics when I visited this same meadow again on the Tuesday afternoon.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary & Large skipper - Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

It made a change from having the Large Skippers doing the chasing. In fact these few surviving Small Pearls were still quite feisty and I watched them chasing the larger DGFs and HBFs a few times.

Four species of Fritillary seen in one day and there were quite a few other nice butterflies around as well.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 02-Jul-19 07:56 PM GMT

Hi Neil

After all those fabulous shots of Fritillaries I have been scouring your diary for some tips. I tried the 'waiting beside the plant' trick but there were too many plants and too few butterflies and not enough time 😊 I smiled when you complained the thistle was too high as my knapweed was too low. We're never satisfied 😊 I have found a new respect for folk who can get close to these creatures 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-19 06:43 PM GMT

"but care has to be taken in choosing the right one for the occasion 😊😊" Indeed 'The Beast' is best kept for special occasions 😊 or if you're having trouble sleeping 😊

A fabulous Fritillary formed Fantastic Four Neil 😊😊🍀🍀

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 03-Jul-19 10:26 PM GMT

Great continuation, Neil. Reminds me of my 'patch' with all that bracken...and those Dark Green Fritillaries too!

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 04-Jul-19 07:18 AM GMT

Neil - I enjoyed your Frit Gallery from Heddon very much. I went there years ago before I got into butterflies. Even without that interest it is a very beautiful location and the Hunters Inn is great. I did not stay there but did have a couple of beers! By the way - do they still have the Peacocks? (birds that is).

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 04-Jul-19 05:09 PM GMT

Fantastic fritillary shots Neil, 🍷🍷 I'm feeling sorry for myself these days but your photos cheer me up 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Jul-19 07:53 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline. No, we are never satisfied...too cold, too hot, not enough cloud, too much cloud, plants too tall 😊

Cheers Wurzel. I do like a drop of 'The Beast' but experience has taught me to treat it with respect 😊😊😊

Thanks David, Bracken and Fritillaries...just made for each other 😊

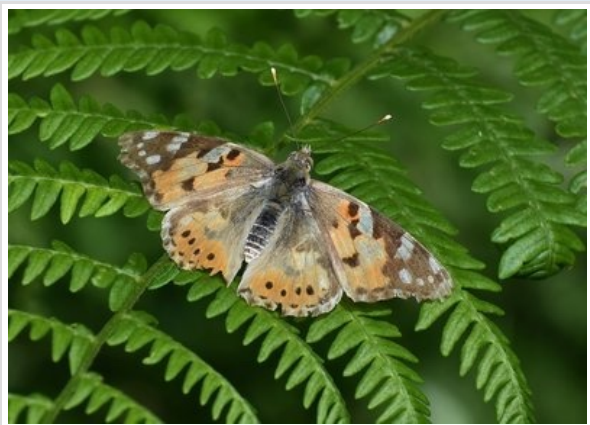
Thanks Ernie, the Peacocks are still strutting about, or at least their descendants are 😊

Hi Goldie. I am glad my photos cheered you up a bit 😊

June 23rd to 26th - Heddon Valley Part 3.

The High Brown Fritillaries were obviously my main focus but apart from those and the other Fritillaries that I have covered in my previous reports, there were plenty of other butterflies around.

Before coming down to the Heddon Valley I had seen reports of large numbers of Painted Ladies coming in along the east coast and watched as the reports followed their progress westwards across the country. On the Monday (24th June) I spotted a couple of pale and worn looking individuals which I assumed were from this influx.



Painted Lady - Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

The following day the numbers shot up to the point that I stopped counting them but during the course of my walks during the morning and again later in the afternoon I must have seen 50 plus. Every meadow and bramble patch seemed to have at least one or two and we saw a few fly past whilst we were just sitting having a drink at a table outside the Hunters Inn. Most of them seemed to be worn and faded but there were a few that looked to be in better condition.



Painted Lady – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019



Painted Lady – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

I also saw my first Red Admirals this year which is quite normal for me, I never see these in spring around my patch and usually see my first ones during one of our trips. There were nowhere near as numerous as the Painted Ladies but a good dozen or so were seen scattered about the various paths and meadows.



Red Admiral – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019



Red Admiral – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

It is a sign of the times I suppose that I was just as chuffed to see a single Small Tortoiseshell on one of the buddleias mentioned in the previous High Brown report.



Small Tortoiseshell – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

Not surprisingly, Meadow Browns were the most numerous species seen overall with loads of them in all the lower meadows.



Meadow Brown – Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

I was more surprised with the lack of Ringlets, I only saw a couple and reckon that the cool early June had delayed their emergence. In fact the season here seemed to be running a little later overall than I have seen in previous visits which have always been around the same time give or take a day or two.

Large Skippers were very much in evidence, especially the territorial males as they chased everything else about. I have found mating pairs quite a few a times before, usually down in long grass, but I found a pair here sitting in full view on a tall bracken frond.



Large Skipper pair - Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

Common Blues could be found in most of the meadows along the river along with a few Small Heaths and a couple of faded Small Coppers still hanging in there.



Common Blue - Heddon Valley 24.06.2019



Small Copper - Heddon Valley 25.06.2019

A single Green Hairstreak was seen by the crossroads at Ladies Mile which makes it every time I have been here I have seen at least one still hanging around.



Green Hairstreak – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

Whilst wandering around I came across three Adders sunning themselves in spots where the vegetation had been flattened, perhaps by a fox or deer. On two of these occasions I was too late to get a photo as the Adder became aware of my presence and shot off out of sight before I could bring my camera to bear. On the third occasion I spotted one from a bit further away and managed to sneak up a get a few photos.



Adder – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

Anyone who has visited the Hunters Inn before will be aware that there is a large garden to the rear. There is a path which leads from the garden out to the path along the side of the river. Since our last visit two year ago some of the woodland to the back of the garden has been opened up a bit, effectively extending the garden. There are some tables and benches along with some nice tree carvings which make for a lovely little spot to just chill out with a cold beer.



Hunters Inn garden.



Hunters Inn garden.



Hunters Inn garden.

And a final shot of the river,



Dappled sunlight along the river.

We checked out of our room on Wednesday morning and headed off around 09.30. My plan was to call in at Haddon Hill again and hopefully see some more Heath Fritillaries. The weather gods had other ideas however as a thick fog/low cloud built up as we went further into Exmoor. By the time we reached Haddon Hill the visibility was little more than a few yards and the temperature had dropped with it. Nevertheless I had a quick look but failed to find anything. Looking at the weather app on my phone it wasn't due to clear up for another three hours at least so we carried on.

But we weren't going home just yet as we had somewhere else to go...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-19 09:01 PM GMT

More cracking shots Neil 😊 That second Painted Lady is in much better nick than the last four that I've seen 😊 That beer garden looks great for

supping ale in 🍷🍷🍷 Somewhere else to go? I'm wondering if that's for something Big and Blue? 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 06-Jul-19 06:02 PM GMT

Good Painted Lady shots Neil, the only ones I've seen so far have been like your first shot well worn. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Jul-19 05:28 PM GMT

I'm thoroughly enjoying this report, Neil. Seems like a wonderful location.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-19 07:54 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

...Somewhere else to go? I'm wondering if that's for something Big and Blue? 😊😊 Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel...you were not far wrong, coming up next.

Goldie wrote:

...Good Painted Lady shots Neil, the only ones I've seen so far have been like your first shot well worn. 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, most of the ones I saw were like that first one too.

David M wrote:

I'm thoroughly enjoying this report, Neil. Seems like a wonderful location.

Thanks David, it is indeed a cracking location although it covers a lot of ground hence I like to spend a couple of days there.

June 26th and 27th – Daneway Banks.

Whilst planning this years trips we had already decided on the Heddon Valley and I remembered that a few years ago we had stopped off at Collard Hill to see Large Blues and this still remained the only time that I had seen this species. I started thinking about doing something similar this year but then started to look at Daneway Banks which is a site I had not yet visited. I then gave this a bit more thought which ended up with booking a couple of nights into a nearby Pub/Hotel just a couple of miles from Daneway Banks which looked to be ideally placed for visiting the reserve. Jane is always up for staying at a nice B&B, especially if it is somewhere where we can have a nice meal on the night as well.

After leaving Exmoor, we arrived just after 3.30pm and after checking in and getting settled into our room, Jane said she would chill out for a bit so I decided to go and have a look at Daneway Banks. I drove around to the reserve and thought I would try my luck with one of the parking spots by the main entrance that I had heard about and was quite surprised to find them empty, probably because it was now gone 4.00pm and it was quite overcast. Walking through the gate I immediately noticed a cool wind blowing across the grassy slopes but this didn't seem to be deterring the Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites that were there in good numbers. The first 'Blues' that I saw were Common Blues, both males and female in varying condition and with at least one very blue female that seem to becoming more frequent these past few years.



Common Blue female – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019



Marbled White – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019

I soon found a few Large Blues with a couple of females that looked to be doing a lot of egg laying, or possibly 'ovipositing' on flowering thyme plants.



Large Blue – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019

With the coolish conditions I managed to get a couple of open wing shots although they were still very flighty and not posing for long.



Large Blue – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019



Large Blue – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019



Large Blue – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019

By around 5.30pm the clouds had become even thicker and everything looked to be settling down for the night so I made a move back to our digs.

With a much better weather forecast for the following day (Thursday 27th) I arrived back on site at 08.30am to find it already quite warm although there was again a fair breeze blowing across the slopes.

As with the previous afternoon, I immediately began to see Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns and Common Blues. These were soon followed by a nice Dark Green Fritillary which flitted from flower to flower for a while before taking off across the upper slopes at high speed.



Dark Green Fritillary – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019

Large Blues were flying but were already fully warmed up and when they did settle it was with wings closed and often low down in the vegetation to get out of the breeze. With full sun in a clear blue sky, it was rapidly heating up and I figured I had missed my chance for any further open wing shots.

I headed towards the far end of the site, which I had noticed the previous afternoon was more sheltered from the breeze and half way across spotted a small silvery butterfly that proved to be a Small Blue.



Small Blue – Daneway Banks 26.07.2019

As I made my way along one of the paths I bumped into Dave Williams from West Midlands BC who I seem to meet at random sites most years now. Dave said he had been on site since 06.30am and commented on the fact that although he had seen numerous Large Blues they had been settling with closed wings from the start. As we were discussing this, a male Large Blue came past us and promptly landed with wings open, albeit only for a few seconds before he was off again.



Large Blue – Daneway Banks 27.07.2019

He had not gone far when he went down again but this time it was to try and intrude on a mating pair he had spotted. The pair rebuffed him with some wing fluttering and he carried on his way whilst they settled down again.



Large Blue pair – Daneway Banks 27.07.2019



Large Blue pair – Daneway Banks 27.07.2019

By about 11.00am we had seen plenty of Large Blues flying and having said to Jane I would meet her back at our digs I began to make a move.



This shot taken just before I left at around 11.00. The sky was like that all day.

Before I left however, Dave and I came across a chap we had been talking to earlier who was photographing another mating pair. After taking a few shots I left to meet Jane with the intention of coming back for another look later in the afternoon.



Large Blue pair – Daneway Banks 27.07.2019

As it happened, a little later after having a nice cold drink, I drove back around to show Jane the site. With her limited mobility, she could not cope with the steep lane up to the entrance so I thought I would be cheeky and park by the reserve gate for a brief stop so that she could see the wild flowers on the slopes and as we would just be standing by the gate I could always move if someone needed access to the gate. Whilst we were there a couple of Marbled Whites flew close by which pleased Jane as she particularly likes the contrast of their back and white markings. Even better, a Large Blue also flew past close enough for Jane to get a good view. Another car did arrive whilst we were there and squeeze in next to us and it transpired that the occupants were a couple of monitors who keep an eye on the site during the Large Blue flight period. We ended up having a nice chat with them and

they explained that, ever since the incident a few years back with the infamous collector that Neil Hulme reported, that they are regularly on site to keep an eye on things.

We then left and had a little drive around to explore the area before going back to sit outside our pub with another nice cold drink.

Later in the afternoon, around 4.00pm, I headed back to the reserve hoping to maybe find some basking Large Blues as the sun got lower. I saw a few more but it was still very warm and they were still as active as earlier and only settling with closed wings. I was watching one fairly worn looking male flying about when he found himself a female and with very little 'courtship' mated with her. This was the third mating pair I had seen during the day.



Large Blue pair – Daneway Banks 27.07.2019



Large Blue pair – Daneway Banks 27.07.2019



The same pair as above but taken from the other side.

I am not sure how long the Large Blues had been flying here but I believe that Daneway is a later site than Collard Hill which was one of my reasons for choosing to come here. Many of the males were looking quite worn and faded although there were some nice condition females still about although sod's law meant that I only got underside shots of the best looking ones.

The next morning, after breakfast, we checked out and headed home. I did wonder about paying a last visit to the reserve but it was another warm morning and forecast to get hotter so the butterflies were probably already zooming about again. Also, I wanted to get back before the Friday afternoon traffic built up around Solihull.

Although I didn't get many decent Large Blue photos, especially topsides, I was very impressed with Daneway Banks and thought it was a lovely reserve, although I have to say it was one of the busiest sites that I have ever visited. As I was leaving to meet Jane on the Thursday morning there was a steady stream of people walking up the lane from The Daneway pub. Given that it was a week day I can only wonder what it gets like at the weekend.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Jul-19 08:50 PM GMT

A great report from Daneways Neil 😊 I've been to both sites myself as well and prefer Daneways as it's a bit easier to work and I find that Collard I slip a fair bit on the slopes 😊 Another attraction of Daneways is the pub 😊 , although I'm always driving but they do a nice coke with ice and slice 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Jul-19 09:42 PM GMT

Another great report, Neil, and you've done ever so well to get so many open wing Large Blue shots, especially the mating pair.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 08-Jul-19 11:20 PM GMT

I was wondering if anyone had been to see the Large Blues this year? You've answered my question! I've only been there once, a few years ago, but it was excellent. I'm glad you managed to show Jane one as well.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 09-Jul-19 08:50 AM GMT

Love your Blues Neil, the Butterflies around here are few and far between at present, so it's great to see so many lovely shots
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jul-19 08:15 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

A great report from Daneways Neil 😊 I've been to both sites myself as well and prefer Daneways as it's a bit easier to work and I find that Collard I slip a fair bit on the slopes 😊 Another attraction of Daneways is the pub 😊 , although I'm always driving but they do a nice coke with ice and slice 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, yes I preferred Daneways myself. Although we didn't go in the Daneway Pub, as we were staying close by I did get the chance to sample some Stroud Brewery's OPA, very nice 😊😊

David M wrote:

Another great report, Neil, and you've done ever so well to get so many open wing Large Blue shots, especially the mating pair.

Thanks David, the open wing shots were hard to come by, especially on the Thursday with the breeze and hot sun.

essexbuzzard wrote:

I was wondering if anyone had been to see the Large Blues this year? You've answered my question! I've only been there once, a few years ago, but it was excellent. I'm glad you managed to show Jane one as well.

Thanks Mark, I am surprised I haven't seen more Large Blue photos posted, especially given how many people were on site. I suppose it just goes to show how many butterfly people are out there that don't post on UKB.

Goldie M wrote:

Love your Blues Neil, the Butterflies around here are few and far between at present, so it's great to see so many lovely shots
Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, things have been picking up around here lately so I hope they do up your way too

Sunday 7th July - Oversley Wood.

Since returning from our last trip the other week, with stuff to catch up with around the house and being back at work, I did not have chance to get out

again until last Sunday afternoon (7th July). I asked Jane if she fancied a run down to Oversley Wood which is a site that she likes and being just 40 minutes or so from our house is within easy reach for a couple of hours visit.

We arrived just after 2.00pm on what had turned into a pleasantly warm afternoon with some good sun and occasional clouds. Walking up the main path from the car park we soon saw loads of Ringlets bobbing about in the side verges and at the first junction where the path splits to circle around the wood there were three male Silver-washed Fritillaries chasing each other around a couple of bramble patches.

Continuing around the path to some more open areas, the number of Ringlets increased and were joined by Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites plus Large Skippers and a few Small Skippers, my first of the latter this year.



Ringlet pair - Oversley Wood 07.07.2019



Marbled White - Oversley Wood 07.07.2019



Small Skipper - Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

One particular Marbled White had one hind wing with darker markings, at first I thought that this wing was also undersized but looking again at the photos I think it is just the way the wings are held and the hind wings are actually the same size.



Marbled White – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

A couple of Cinnabar Moths were flying in the same area and a Scarlet Tiger Moth also flew past us and settled in the grass to the side of the path. Scarlet Tigers have undergone a huge increase in distribution and numbers around Warwickshire recently and have been turning up all over the county, although not yet in my garden.



Scarlet Tiger Moth – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019



Scarlet Tiger Moth – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

As we carried on around the wood we saw more Silver-washed Fritillaries, mostly very active males but we did see a couple of females including one incidence of the graceful courtship flight with the male spiralling around the female. A couple of spells of cloud slowed the males down a bit and enabled me to get a few photos.



Silver-washed Fritillary - Oversley Wood 07.07.2019



Silver-washed Fritillary - Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

Red Admirals were well scattered about with at least half a dozen nice fresh looking examples seen.



Red Admiral - Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

A few White Admirals were also seen flitting and gliding about, mostly out of reach of photos but we saw one individual making its way along the path and settling every few yards to take in minerals.



White Admiral – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

We saw quite a few Purple Hairstreaks around the wood fluttering around high up around various oak trees. At one point I saw something flutter down out of the corner of my eye and initially thought it was a falling leaf, but something about it made me go over for a closer look where I found a male Purple Hairstreak hanging upside down on a blade of grass.



Purple Hairstreak – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

I attempted to move the grass a bit to try and get a better angle for a photo but this disturbed him and he fluttered a few feet over to land on a leaf. After taking a few shots he crawled under the leaf where we left him in peace.



Purple Hairstreak – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

Having seen, and been a bit jealous of, other peoples photos over the past couple of years of open wing Purple Hairstreaks, I was well chuffed with this sighting and even though his one forewing was not quite properly developed it made my day.

A few Purple Emperors have been reported from Oversley so far this year. I have seen them here before but not usually after midday and although I kept my eyes open I was not surprised that we didn't see any this afternoon.

After slowly walking around the full circuit which took us an enjoyable couple of hours we headed back to the car.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 12-Jul-19 09:10 PM GMT

I'm not surprised you were chuffed at your PH sighting Neil. Great shots of it too – just love that wing colour and you have captured it well 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 12-Jul-19 09:26 PM GMT

Well done with your open winged Purple Hairstreak. I only ever see them like that freshly emerged. You did well getting the colour too, I find it much harder picking that up than on an Emperor!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Jul-19 10:37 PM GMT

That is a cracking Purple Hairstreak shot Neil – a really purple one 😊👍 No more envy on your part 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 13-Jul-19 06:16 AM GMT

I just love that image of the Purple Hairstreak crawling up the grass blade showing its undersides, Neil. This species seems to be having another good year which is encouraging.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Jul-19 08:16 PM GMT

Many thanks for your comments Pauline, Bugboy, Wurzel and David 😊

Friday 12th July.

A quick circuit of the park down the road from my moms' house on Friday afternoon produced reasonable numbers of Meadow Browns and Ringlets in the areas of grass that have been allowed to grow.

Large Skippers were zippping about with plenty of males chasing females, with all the instances that I saw ending with the female shaking off the male.



Large Skipper pair just before the female took off and lost the male – Langley Hall 12.07.2019

Small Skippers were also flying but no sign of any Essex yet.



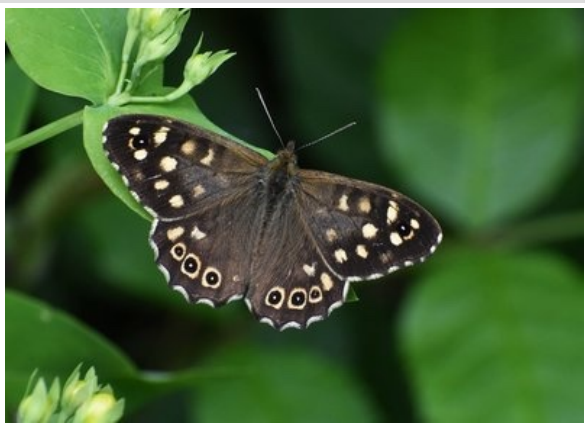
Small Skipper male – Langley Hall 12.07.2019



Small Skipper pair in cop. – Langley Hall 12.07.2019

Also seen were a couple of Speckled Wood and a Red Admiral flew past without stopping.

Back home later in the afternoon I watched three male Speckled Wood chasing each other around the garden with one of them returning to a favourite perch between bouts.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 12.07.2019

A male Green-veined White also stopped for a brief rest before carrying on his way.



Green-veined White – Coverdale 12.07.2019

The girl on the weather forecast on Friday night said that the weekend was going to be pleasant and settled. Well! she was half right, a blanket of cloud settled over us on Saturday and although it was quite warm it was really gloomy and we had a couple of spells of light rain. Sunday was much the same but with a steady light drizzle for most of the morning. It finally cleared up in the evening to leave a clear night which went quite chilly.

Needless to say, back to work today and the sun came back out to taunt me whilst I was stuck indoors.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 15-Jul-19 10:12 PM GMT

Great image of that male Purple Hairstreak, Neil.

An open wing shot of a male showing full purple is 'work in progress' for me.

Also you have some enviable shots of Large Blues, they never opened up when I visited Collard Hill.

Great stuff,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 16-Jul-19 06:16 AM GMT

Unusual shot of the PH underside Neil. I had thought perhaps he had just emerged until I read he had fluttered down. Splendid images of the Large Blue also. I continue to follow your diary with interest and apologise that I don't comment as often as I should!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Jul-19 10:29 PM GMT

Lovely set of images Neil 😊 the Green-veined White is especially well caught 🤩👍 I have experienced two weekends of incorrect weather forecasts now so I feel your pain 😞😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Jul-19 10:22 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

..The girl on the weather forecast on Friday night said that the weekend was going to be pleasant and settled. Well! she was half right, a blanket of cloud settled over us on Saturday and although it was quite warm it was really gloomy and we had a couple of spells of light rain. Sunday was much the same but with a steady light drizzle for most of the morning. It finally cleared up in the evening to leave a clear night which went quite chilly.

Needless to say, back to work today and the sun came back out to taunt me whilst I was stuck indoors.

That's one of the great frustrations of summer, Neil. 😞

My depression quotient reaches danger levels when I return to work on a glorious Monday having spent the weekend indoors!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 18-Jul-19 12:01 PM GMT

Catching up Neil, i just think that PHS shot is fantastic 🍷🍷 I've tried to find them here, no luck yet though 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Jul-19 08:36 PM GMT

trevor wrote:

Great image of that male Purple Hairstreak, Neil.

An open wing shot of a male showing full purple is 'work in progress' for me.

Also you have some enviable shots of Large Blues, they never opened up when I visited Collard Hill.

Great stuff,
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor, that is the one and only open wing shot of a male PH I have managed to get to date.

Pauline wrote:

Unusual shot of the PH underside Neil. I had thought perhaps he had just emerged until I read he had fluttered down. Splendid images of the Large Blue also. I continue to follow your diary with interest and apologise that I don't comment as often as I should!

No need to apologise Pauline, I struggle to keep up with other diaries and don't always comment even when I get time to read them.

Wurzel wrote:

Lovely set of images Neil 😊 the Green-veined White is especially well caught 😊🍷 I have experienced two weekends of incorrect weather forecasts now so I feel your pain 😞😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, given the forecast for tomorrow (Saturday) I am hoping it is wrong...but the bad ones are usually right 😊

David M wrote:

Neil Freeman wrote:

..The girl on the weather forecast on Friday night said that the weekend was going to be pleasant and settled. Well! she was half right, a blanket of cloud settled over us on Saturday and although it was quite warm it was really gloomy and we had a couple of spells of light rain. Sunday was much the same but with a steady light drizzle for most of the morning. It finally cleared up in the evening to leave a clear night which went quite chilly.

Needless to say, back to work today and the sun came back out to taunt me whilst I was stuck indoors.

That's one of the great frustrations of summer, Neil. 😞

My depression quotient reaches danger levels when I return to work on a glorious Monday having spent the weekend indoors!

Indeed David, often made worse when you see what others have been able to get out and see 🍷

Goldie M wrote:

Catching up Neil, i just think that PHS shot is fantastic 🍷🍷 I've tried to find them here, no luck yet though 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, I usually manage to see them easily enough, high up around the tops of oak trees but catching them low down is another story.

Friday 19th July

Not much to report this week apart from the fact I have started to see a few more assorted Whites along the roadsides whilst travelling back from work. There have also been a few more whites seen passing through the garden back home later in the afternoon, mostly Green-veined and Small but with at least one definite Large White on Wednesday afternoon. It has rained for most of the day today and with a forecast for more rain overnight and thunderstorms tomorrow it doesn't look like I will be getting out. Sunday is looking a bit better...maybe, we'll see.

With no butterfly photos to post from the week, here are a few recent moths from the garden trap.

Brimstone Moths are regular in the trap and I love their bright yellow colour but as they usually settle with their wings flat I don't often get the chance to photograph the underside.

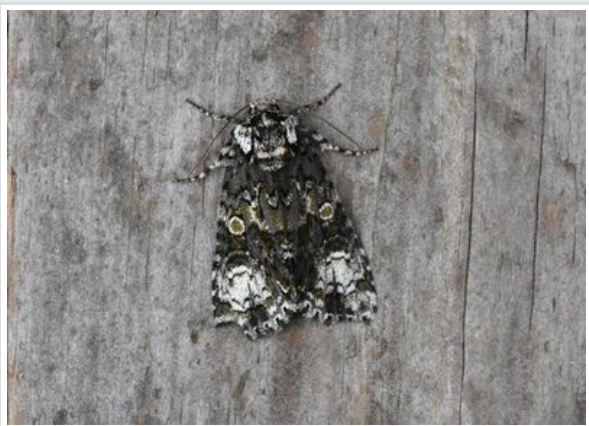


Brimstone Moth - Coverdale 04.07.2019

I have commented before on the variation found in some moths and I think I posted a couple of shots of Coronets last year as examples of this. I have recently had another couple of nice examples of this species.



Coronet - Coverdale 28.06.2019



Coronet - Coverdale 09.07.2019

The Scalloped Oak is another species I get a few of each year.



Scalloped Oak – Coverdale 16.07.2019

The Phoenix is a large 'carpet' moth that is usually described in the literature as widespread and common but this week I had only the second one ever to my trap.



Phoenix – Coverdale 16.07.2019

Anania coronata is an attractive micro that is closely related to the slightly larger Small Magpie Moth (*Anania hortulata*)



Anania coronata – Coverdale 07.07.2019

The curious little Honeysuckle Moth (*Ypsolopha dentella*) turns up in small numbers every year.



Honeysuckle Moth – Coverdale 04.07.2019

Lozotaeniodes formosana is an attractive micro that I have also had each year in small numbers.



Lozotaeniodes formosana – Coverdale 09.07.2019

That brings my garden tally so far this year up to a total of 124 species of moths made up of 79 macro and 45 micro species.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-19 08:01 PM GMT

Cracking Moff images Neil – especially like the Honeysuckle Moth 🤩👍 Really interesting to see the butterfly like pose of the Brimstone Moth, something I've not seen it doing – and begs the question "Why Brimstone?" as that underwing has a decidedly Clouded Yellow look to it 😊😊
On another note – they actually got the weather forecast correct today 🤩 – however forecasting 'sunny intervals' is a bit of a cop out as far as I'm concerned as it can mean one tiny cloud that covers the sun for 5 seconds or a 5 second break in wall to wall cloud cover 😞😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Jul-19 03:25 PM GMT

Some lovely moths there, Neil, particularly the *anania coronata*.

I too have started noticing more roadside butterflies, including Whites. Hopefully they'll increase in number after what was a disappointing first brood.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Jul-19 07:21 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

– and begs the question "Why Brimstone?" as that underwing has a decidedly Clouded Yellow look to it 😊😊...Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel 😊, as you probably know, Brimstone is the old name for Sulphur which is a yellow solid at room temperature so the moth is named after the element. Just to add to this there is also a relative of the Clouded Yellow in North America called the Clouded Sulphur, also named after the element.

David M wrote:

Some lovely moths there, Neil, particularly the *anania coronata*.

I too have started noticing more roadside butterflies, including Whites. Hopefully they'll increase in number after what was a disappointing first brood.

Thanks David, there were even more whites about over the weekend 😊

Saturday 20th July.

In the end we did not get the forecast thunderstorms on Saturday although it was a mostly wet day with some heavy showers in the afternoon. As it happened our youngest son Danny was up from Bristol to see one of his friends and stayed with us from Friday to Saturday (Mom & Dads B&B.) and then we popped round to our daughter Sarah's in the afternoon which meant that I would not have had chance to get out even if the weather had been better.

Despite this however, there were a few, mostly short, sunny spells and I managed to see a few butterflies in the garden at random times during the day. Most of these were various whites passing through and the plentiful cloud cover meant that they would settle fairly often although as often as not this would be in a sheltered position tucked away out of sight. All three common species were seen with most of them appearing to be Green-veined accompanied by a few Large and Small.



Green-veined White – Coverdale 20.07.2019

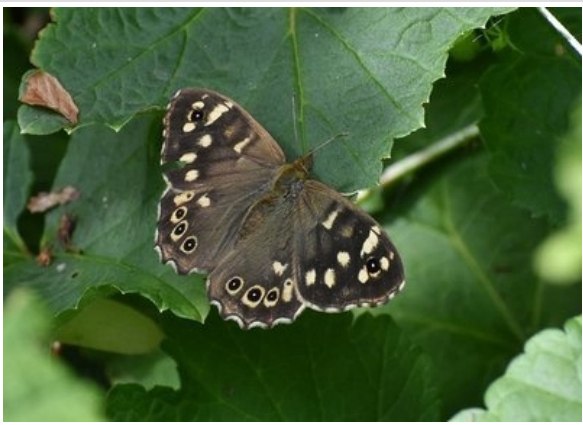


Large White sheltering from a shower of rain – Coverdale 20.07.2019

At least three different male Speckled Woods were squabbling over their usual spots and on one occasion I spotted a female that came wandering through and managed to avoid their attentions whilst they were chasing each other.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 20.07.2019



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 20.07.2019

A couple of male Gatekeepers showed up, my first of these in the garden this year plus a Ringlet was seen bobbing about above the areas of grass that I allow to grow long.



Gatekeeper – Coverdale 20.07.2019



Gatekeeper - Coverdale 20.07.2019

Sunday 21st July - Morning.

A much better morning and although there was still a lot of cloud about it was not so thick and the temperature was on the rise. I spent a bit of time doing household stuff and pottering about in the garden during which I saw all the same species as the previous day, probably the same individuals in most cases.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 21.07.2019



Ringlet - Coverdale 21.07.2019



Ringlet – Coverdale 21.07.2019

As the morning warmed up the whites increased in number and on a few occasions I had four or five in sight at the same time, mostly Green-veined and Small Whites chasing each other about but with a few Large Whites turning up occasionally as well.



Small White – Coverdale 21.07.2019



Green-veined White – Coverdale 21.07.2019

Given how scarce the first brood whites were around here (and elsewhere from what I saw reported), I am a little surprised by how many have appeared over the past few days. I can understand the numbers of Large and Small Whites being supplemented by migrants but as far as I am aware this would not account for the increase in numbers of Green-veined Whites.

Anyway, with the afternoon looking to stay reasonable, I was keen to pop out to check out one of my local spots.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 22-Jul-19 09:26 PM GMT

Just catching up, Neil – your trio of mating pairs of Large Blues is quite something! I've seen this species regularly over the years, but have yet to find a pairing. 🍷

Even more 🍷 are due for the beautiful open wing Purple Hairstreak shot, something else that persistently evades me, year after year. Beautiful to see.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Jul-19 11:19 PM GMT

Cracking White shots Neil – they're tricky blighters to capture on film at the moment as they're still pretty flighty 😞🇮🇪 There have been more round than earlier in the year which is a good sign, fingers crossed 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 23-Jul-19 06:37 PM GMT

Nice to see a selection of Whites for a change, Neil, particularly Large White, which has been incredibly scarce so far this year in my part of the country.

That's a lovely Ringlet too. Really nicely marked uppersides.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Jul-19 07:35 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

Just catching up, Neil – your trio of mating pairs of Large Blues is quite something! I've seen this species regularly over the years, but have yet to find a pairing. 🇮🇪

Even more 🇮🇪 are due for the beautiful open wing Purple Hairstreak shot, something else that persistently evades me, year after year. Beautiful to see.

Cheers,

Dave

Thanks Dave, I was well chuffed with the Large Blue pairs, they more than made up for the lack of open wing opportunities on the day.

Wurzel wrote:

Cracking White shots Neil – they're tricky blighters to capture on film at the moment as they're still pretty flighty 😞🇮🇪 There have been more round than earlier in the year which is a good sign, fingers crossed 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, your'e not kidding about them being flighty, I went out on the afternoon and didn't see a single one stop moving.

David M wrote:

Nice to see a selection of Whites for a change, Neil, particularly Large White, which has been incredibly scarce so far this year in my part of the country.

That's a lovely Ringlet too. Really nicely marked uppersides.

Thanks David. All the whites have been scarce here this year up until a few days ago. It is still mostly Small and Green-veined I am seeing but more Large are starting to turn up.

Sunday 21st July – Afternoon.

So far this year, due mostly to unfavourable weather at weekends when I have had available time, I have not managed to visit my local spots as often as I would have liked to. With the weather staying warm on Saturday afternoon and with a couple of hours spare I decided to pop round to Castle Hills near Solihull to see what was about.

There was still a lot of cloud about and a fair breeze could be felt in the more open areas but with the air temperature up in the low twenties it was immediately apparent that there were good numbers of the usual suspects flying. Within the first ten minutes or so I was into double figures of Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers with Ringlets and Small/Essex Skippers not far behind.

Gatekeepers in particular appear to be having a better season here so far with loads of fairly fresh males seen plus a few females.



Gatekeeper male – Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Gatekeeper male – Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Gatekeeper male – Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Gatekeeper female – Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Gatekeeper female – Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Gatekeeper pair – Castle Hills 21.07.2019

I spent some time trying to photograph the Skipper's antennae from below to confirm Small or Essex but the warm conditions and breeze made this difficult and I had limited success.



Small Skipper – Castle Hills 21.07.2019

I had a bit more success in getting shots that showed the short, straight sex brand of male Essex Skippers and from what I saw it appeared that there was a ratio of about 2/3 Small to 1/3 Essex.



Essex Skipper male - Castle Hills 21.07.2019

Lots of whites were flying but I didn't see one settle all afternoon so I cannot be sure of numbers but I did see examples of all three common species. Approximately 25-30 Marbled Whites were seen but these were all well past their best now.



Marbled White - Castle Hills 21.07.2019

A couple of Commas were holding territories around some patches of brambles and like everything else they were very active but at least these tend to return to their perches between bouts of chasing things about.



Comma - Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Comma - Castle Hills 21.07.2019

These brambles and some nearby thistles were also playing host to a couple of Small Tortoiseshells,



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 21.07.2019

I was pleased to see the Small Tortoiseshells given the vagaries of this species fortunes recently and even better, as I was heading back along one of the paths I found another three spaced out along a stretch of about a hundred yards.



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 21.07.2019



Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills 21.07.2019

As well as the previously mentioned Meadow Browns and Ringlets, a couple each of Small Heath and Speckled Wood were also seen.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Jul-19 05:11 PM GMT

Such a joy to see a few Small Tortoiseshells, Neil. It'll be interesting for me to see how numbers shape up after a bemusingly poor spring here in south Wales.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Jul-19 10:43 PM GMT

A cracking array of Hedgies Neil 😊😄🍷 I know what you mean about the Marbled Whites looking past their best although it feels like only yesterday that they were starting to emerge 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 25-Jul-19 09:28 PM GMT

Great to see good numbers of Small Torts, not something I see in my neck of the woods anymore 😊. The answer to your query about the increased numbers in Whites (particularly GVW) I think stems from last years drought which lead to far fewer than normal insects making to hibernation due to foodplant desiccation. This in turn lead to the parasitic population collapsing, and so by the time the next generation was growing up a higher proportion were able to make it through to what we are now seeing... that's my theory anyway 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Jul-19 12:02 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Such a joy to see a few Small Tortoiseshells, Neil. It'll be interesting for me to see how numbers shape up after a bemusingly poor spring here in south Wales.

Thanks David. It seems that Small Tortoiseshell behaviour is varying a lot around the country. I am seeing reports of groups already being found tucked away in sheds and outhouses etc, and am also seeing reports over the past week or so of large numbers flying, mostly from the midlands and further north. My son Chris had half a dozen, along with a couple of Peacocks, all at the same time on one of his garden buddleias last week.

Wurzel wrote:

A cracking array of Hedgies Neil 😊😄🍷 I know what you mean about the Marbled Whites looking past their best although it feels like only yesterday that they were starting to emerge 😊😄 ...Wurzel

Indeed Wurzel, I almost missed the Marbled Whites on my patch with those still around looking like they won't be there much longer.

bugboy wrote:

Great to see good numbers of Small Torts, not something I see in my neck of the woods anymore 😊. The answer to your query about the increased

numbers in Whites (particularly GVW) I think stems from last years drought which lead to far fewer than normal insects making to hibernation due to foodplant desiccation. This in turn lead to the parasitic population collapsing, and so by the time the next generation was growing up a higher proportion were able to make it through to what we are now seeing... that's my theory anyway 😊

Thanks Bugboy, your theory makes sense. It will be interesting to see how they fare for the rest of the season and next spring.

More Moths.

Last weeks hot weather during the days and warm humid nights led to an increase in moth activity although I chickened out of running my trap on Tuesday night due to the forecast for thunderstorms. Maybe I should have put it out as my son Chris ran his trap in his garden in Stratford-upon-Avon and had more than 500 moths despite the storms and heavy rain.

I did run my trap a few times last week however and even ran it on consecutive nights, something I don't usually do, on Wednesday and Thursday to take advantage of the conditions.

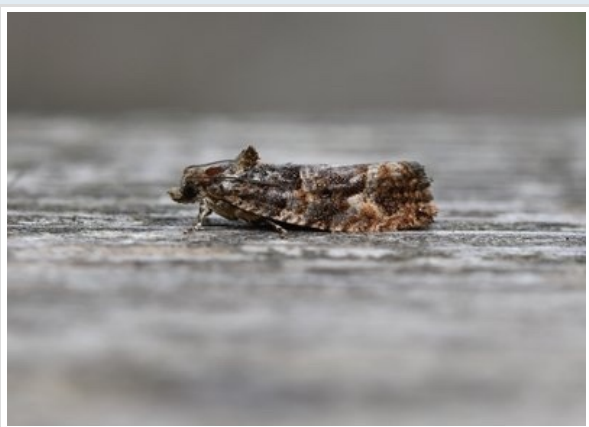
Wednesday night was a bit cooler with clear skies and produced a count of 187 moths of 45 species (91 of 22 macros and 96 of 23 micros). These included a new for the garden (NFG) of Lunar-spotted Pinion plus a couple of NFG micros of *Eudemis profundana* and *Cochylis atricapitana*.



Lunar-spotted Pinion - Coverdale 24.07.2019



Cochylis atricapitana - Coverdale 24.07.2019



Eudemis profundana - Coverdale 24.07.2019

I also had a nice Old Lady Moth in the trap. I often read that these seldom come to light and are more often attracted to 'sugaring' but I have a few to my trap each year. I suspect that they come more often to actinic traps (which I have) than to MV bulbs.



Old Lady – Coverdale 24.07.2019

After a real scorcher during the day, Thursday night had a bit more cloud cover and consequently stayed warmer and quite humid. We also had some rain in the night accompanied by some thunder which woke me up around 02.00. To prove the point that rain does not deter moths from flying I had my highest count ever for my urban garden with 307 moths of 45 species (115 of 15 macro and 192 of 30 micro). Most of these were the common 'usual suspect' and included 41 Large Yellow Underwings which can be a bit of a pain with their restlessness in the trap – hence they are often referred to as 'Blunderwings'.

Despite the high numbers there was just one NFG, a micro *Plutella porrectella*



Plutella porrectella – Coverdale 25.07.2019

I also had an interesting colour form of Marbled Beauty with brown toned markings instead of the greenish grey form I usually get.



Marbled Beauty – Coverdale 25.07.2019



Marbled beauty, usual form from the previous night.

After a wet and miserable weekend here and with the usual inevitability, tomorrow (Monday) looks to be a nice day again...but this time I have used one of my few remaining spare days holiday and am hoping to get out somewhere.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 28-Jul-19 10:39 PM GMT

More fantastic moths Neil 😊 The *Plutella porrectella* is a brilliant shot 📷👍👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jul-19 07:08 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I was chuffed with that one, especially as it is such a tiny little moth.

Monday July 29th – Aston Rowant part 1.

I mentioned at the end of my last report that I had managed to book one of my remaining odd holiday days off work for today (Monday 29th). It was a pure coincidence that it should follow one of the worst weekends we have had for a while but given that we had just suffered two days of almost non stop rain I was feeling in need of a pick-me-up trip so the timing was perfect.

A couple of weeks back I had realised that I had not seen Silver-spotted Skippers for a while and checking my notes I saw that it was back in 2014 that I had last ventured down the M40 to Aston Rowant. I cannot believe how quickly that five years has gone past.

This was the main reason for booking this day off and I also noticed that by a spooky coincidence the last time I had been to Aston Rowant was also on July 29th (2014), so five years to the day.

The forecast for the day looked promising, if anything looking like it might get a bit hot so I wanted to make an early start and hopefully arrive before the butterflies got too active. I left home at 06.45 with 14c showing on the car display and 90 minutes later pulled into the car park at Aston Rowant where it was already reading 19 degrees.

Walking through the trees and out onto the hillside it was obvious that things were already warmed up with Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers all over the place. My two main targets for the day were the Silver-spotted Skippers and also Chalk Hill Blues, this being one of my closest sites for both species. I soon saw Chalk Hill Blues in good numbers and it was not long before I also spotted the first Silver-spotted Skipper, a male, darting about.

During the morning I saw plenty of Chalk Hill Blues all across the hillside, so many that I didn't bother counting them but many hundreds were flying all across the hillside. They were mostly males but a fair few females were also about with both sexes being in all sorts of condition from well worn to fresh looking and I got the impression they had been on the wing here for a while.



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Chalk Hill Blue pair – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

The Silver-spotted Skippers were in lower numbers than the CHBs with something like 25–30 seen but I believe that it is still early in their flight period here with numbers usually building into August.



Silver-spotted Skipper male – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Silver-spotted Skipper male – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Silver-spotted Skipper female – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



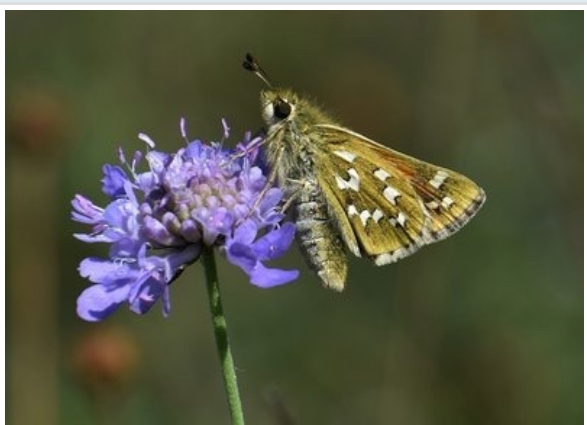
Silver-spotted Skipper female – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Silver-spotted Skipper female – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Silver-spotted Skipper female – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Silver-spotted Skipper female – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Silver-spotted Skipper pair (female left, male right) – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

On a couple of occasions I watched as a male tried his luck with a female but this usually ended with the female disappearing in a blur with the male in hot pursuit.



Silver-spotted Skipper pair (female top, male bottom) – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

For the first couple of hours I had the hillside to myself but by mid morning it was getting warmer and the butterflies were not only becoming far more active but when they were settling it was usually with closed wings. More people were now arriving on site and I couldn't help but think to myself that they had missed the best part of the morning, especially for taking photos. Nevertheless, it was still a beautiful morning and just seeing so many butterflies in the air at once is a pleasure in itself.

As it approached midday, I decided to wander back to the car park and make a move. I thought about going to Bald Hill on the south side of the reserve or maybe having a look at Watlington Hill which is not far away but in the end decided against doing either as I would just be seeing more of what I had already seen, only in hotter conditions.

I decided to head off back up the M40 and take a detour to Bernwood Meadows on the way back.

But before I get ahead of myself, there were plenty of other butterflies at Aston Rowant.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 31-Jul-19 09:27 AM GMT

Some super photos recently Neil, especially the Chalkhills!

Neil Freeman wrote:

More people were now arriving on site and I couldn't help but think to myself that they had missed the best part of the morning, especially for taking photos.

I agree, it's a great strategy to make an early start when the forecast is hot. This paid off twice for me on my southern holiday last month – both with the High Browns on Dartmoor and the Large Blues at Daneway. I was on site before 8am on both occasions and, while I had to wait a little while for the butterflies to appear, I was able to get great open-winged shots of both species, on days that went on to hit 30C before lunch.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 31-Jul-19 02:59 PM GMT

Love your Skipper shots Neil and also the Chalkhill's shot's, I'm so glad I got some shots of the CH's before I came home, missed out on the Skippers though 😊😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 31-Jul-19 04:51 PM GMT

Very nice SSS shots Neil. I appreciate them all the more having struggled to see a very small number today and get a few shots where they weren't huddled down in the grass!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Aug-19 07:04 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments Callum, Goldie and Pauline. Very much appreciated 😊

Monday 29th July - Aston Rowant part 2.

As well as the Silver-spotted Skippers and Chalk Hill Blues, there were loads of other butterflies fluttering about all across the hillside.

As soon as I came out of the path through the trees and onto the hillside, I was seeing Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers. With the clear sky and warm morning sun, both of these were already actively flying although both species could be found basking with their wings open.



Gatekeeper female - Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Meadow Brown female - Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

One nice female Meadow Brown was showing extra orange patches on her hindwings like a number of similar example I have been seeing over recent years.



Meadow Brown female – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A few nice fresh looking Brown Argus were found along the lower slopes along with some Common Blues, the males of the latter mostly looking well-worn but a couple of fresher looking females were also seen.



Brown Argus – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Brown Argus – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Common Blue female - Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A good number of Peacocks were seen, mostly on the clumps of marjoram along the path across the lower slopes, but also pretty well scattered about across the whole site.



Peacock - Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A couple of Red Admirals showed up later in the morning but these were very flighty by then and difficult to get close to for a photo.



Red Admiral - Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A single Painted Lady was flapping and gliding between patches of marjoram, just the one but given what I have seen reported over the past few days it will probably soon have plenty of company, in fact by the time I post this I reckon the latest emergence/influx will have spread across most of the country.



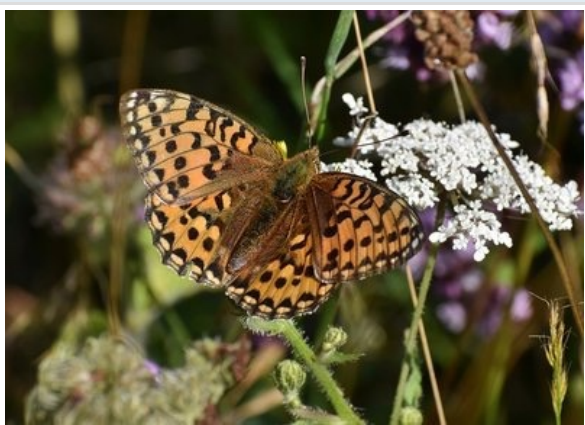
Painted Lady – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A single Comma was also spotted along the lower slope.



Comma – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

In all my previous visits here, I had never see a Dark Green Fritillary, these usually being over by the time I visited. This time I managed to see a good half a dozen still flying although they were mostly well past their best.



Dark Green Fritillary – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A few faded Marbled Whites were still hanging on but most of them looked like they were on their last legs.



Marbled White – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

A handful of Brimstones were seen along the lower slopes,



Brimstone – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Brimstone – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

Small and Essex Skippers were both seen and although I managed to get some photos of both species which confirmed their ID's they were poor, cluttered record shots with grass stems everywhere.

Also seen but not photographed, chiefly because they were seen later in the morning when they were more active, were Large and Small Whites, a few faded Large Skippers and a couple of Small Coppers, all of which were very flighty and seldom settled.

Before I left I spoke to a couple of fellow enthusiasts who told me that they had been here the previous week and seen a good number of Small Tortoiseshells but these had all disappeared today. When they said this I realised that I had not seen a ST all morning either and we discussed the fact that they had probably gone into hibernation already, something that I have seen discussed quite a bit on social media again this year after similar comments last year.

As is often the case here, Red Kites were seen above the hillside and as the morning warmed up they circled higher and higher against the blue sky.



Red Kite – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

All in all a fantastic morning at a great site, I really shouldn't leave it so long before visiting again.

As mentioned in my previous report I left around mid-day and headed back up the M40 towards Bernwood Meadows.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 03-Aug-19 02:01 PM GMT

That's a really dark female CB Neil. A timely reminder for me to pop back to Bramshott to see if the second brood are all as blues as the first was. Nice Kite too 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 03-Aug-19 05:53 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, I missed the fritillary this year hope fully I'll catch up next year. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Aug-19 06:24 PM GMT

Pauline wrote:

That's a really dark female CB Neil. A timely reminder for me to pop back to Bramshott to see if the second brood are all as blues as the first was. Nice Kite too 😊

Thanks Pauline. Yes, that female CB was a lovely individual. Unfortunately I lost her before I could get a better photo.

Goldie M wrote:

Lovely shots Neil, I missed the fritillary this year hope fully I'll catch up next year. 😊 Goldie 😊

I know how you feel Goldie, I have missed quite a few species again this year. Mind you it just gives us something to try and catch up with next year.

Monday 29th July – Bernwood Meadows.

Just under thirty minutes after leaving Aston Rowant I was pulling into the small car park at Bernwood Meadows. The grass had been cut in the larger meadows, which I believe is normal practice here in late July, but had not yet been cut in the furthest half of the narrow meadow alongside the road. I started off by slowly wandering down the narrow meadow, noticing plenty of Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers along with a few well faded Marbled Whites.



Gatekeeper female- Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019

Small Skippers were also buzzing about and although I checked a few carefully I failed to find any Essex Skippers here. There were also a few Large Skippers still flying with about half a dozen worn males being seen.

Peacocks were feeding up on the brambles in the hedges with at one or two on in sight almost constantly. From what I saw at Aston Rowant earlier and now here, plus reports I have seen on the internet over the past few days, it appears that Peacocks are making something of a comeback this summer.



Peacock - Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019

A couple of Silver-washed Fritillaries also flew past me but neither of them showed any sign of stopping.

Brimstones on the other hand were busy feeding up in readiness for hibernation and are always easier to approach at this time of year than in the spring when they awake and set off in search of mates.



Brimstone - Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019

My main reason for stopping off here however was that I wanted to check the 'Purple Hairstreak tree'. This straggly old hawthorn can be found at the end of the narrow meadow and was originally reported by Michael Field (Michaeljf) some years ago when he found a number of Purple Hairstreaks on it. I had visited it a few times since then and usually found anywhere between six and ten PHS on and around it. The last time I had been here was in 2014 when, like today, I had called in on my way back from Aston Rowant and I was curious to see if it was still being used by the Hairstreaks.

On approaching the tree I noticed that it was looking even more straggly than I remembered but I could see a couple of Purple Hairstreaks flitting about amongst the branches. I stood and watched for a while and reckon there were maybe six or seven individual PHS on the tree in all sorts of condition with some being well tatty but others not too bad although none were exactly fresh by now.



Purple Hairstreak - Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019



Purple Hairstreak - Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019



Purple Hairstreak - Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019



Purple Hairstreak – Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019

At one point I was watching one shuffle about on a twig when another landed close by...



...and then there was two.

...and shortly afterwards a third one landed so that I was watching all three individual shuffling about on the same bit of twig.



...and then three.



Purple Hairstreaks – Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019

I can only surmise that there was some particularly attractive sap or something similar on it.

I have seen a couple of Brown Hairstreaks on my previous visits here before so after watching the Purple Hairstreaks for a while I did a circuit of the blackthorn hedges but without success despite a couple of false alarms which turned out to be Gatekeepers.

I did find another Purple Hairstreak, this time down on some brambles about half way back to the car park. The antennae on this individual had been cut short by something but that didn't seem to be affecting its behaviour in any obvious way.



Purple Hairstreak – Bernwood Meadows 29.07.2019

By mid-afternoon the temperature was up around 27 degrees and although some summer cloud had built up, if anything this was just making it feel more humid and rather uncomfortable. I decided to make a move and head for home in order to get back before the build-up of traffic around Solihull later, particularly where the M40 joins the M42 which often grinds to a halt at peak times.

All in all a great day with lots of butterflies seen at both sites visited. A total of 19 species at Aston Rowant in the morning and I added Green-veined White, Silver-washed Fritillary and Purple Hairstreak at Bernwood to make 22 for the day.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Aug-19 10:01 PM GMT

Great work with the Purple Hairstreaks, Neil. That's not a bad selection of other species either, although it is a precursor to autumn whereby we will merely be left with what we started with in late February.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Aug-19 08:01 PM GMT

Thanks David, not quite Autumn yet though and I am hoping to squeeze a bit more out of the season yet. Speaking of which...

We returned earlier this evening from our latest trip, a fantastic five nights in Cornwall staying in a B&B right in Lizard Village which gave perfect access to the coast path where I saw plenty of butterflies.

As usual I have loads of photos to sort through and reports will follow in due course.

But before that, a quick catch up from my garden before we went.

Friday 2nd August.

I had been following with interest the various sightings of Painted Ladies from around the country and wondered whether I would see any in my garden this year, the last time being in 2009 during the now famous 'Painted Lady Invasion' of that year. Since then I had seen Painted Ladies locally but none had graced my garden so it was with great pleasure that I spotted not just one, but two on my front garden buddleia last Friday afternoon.



Painted Lady – Coverdale 02.08.2019



Painted Lady – Coverdale 02.08.2019



Painted Lady – Coverdale 02.08.2019

Saturday 3rd August

Despite it being a reasonable day weather wise, I didn't venture out on Saturday as I was getting stuff ready and giving the car a check over before the run down to Cornwall the following day (Sunday). I did however keep an eye on the garden and noted the same two Painted Ladies from the previous day were back again, this time moving between the buddleia in the front garden and some dwarf buddleias in the back. They were also joined by a third one with all three being identified by slight differences in pattern and wear.



Painted Lady – Coverdale 03.08.2019



Painted Lady – Coverdale 02.08.2019

I was also pleased to see a Peacock hanging around for most of the day.



Peacock – Coverdale 02.08.2019

Half a dozen Gatekeepers were in residence, the males looking a bit past it now but a couple of females still looked presentable.



Gatekeeper – Coverdale 02.08.2019

I was also a little surprised to see an aged Ringlet still hanging on,



Ringlet – Coverdale 02.08.2019

Anyway, as I mentioned above, I have loads of photos from Cornwall to sort through now and I really must try to catch up on other peoples diaries as well.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Aug-19 08:22 PM GMT

It's been a while since I've managed to read your PD Neil as I was pretty much without WiFi whilst in Portugal...so to business 😊 Cracking Silver-spots – still got to see some for myself this year, hopefully there will still be some about. Interesting behaviour you witnessed with the Purple Hairbreaks – I reckon you're surmise about a particularly good food source is bang on 😊 Cracking Painted Ladies from Coverdale 🍷🍷🍷 Looking forward to the Cornish shots 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Aug-19 11:46 AM GMT

I too am surprised to see that Ringlet, Neil, although your Peacocks and Painted Ladies are to be expected in that lovely part of the country in early August.

Like you say, still a bit of life to be squeezed from the season...

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Aug-19 06:02 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I know what you mean about the WiFi, even in this country it can be a bit flaky so I don't usually bother when we are on our trips. Those Silver-spots were early in their flight period at Aston Rowant and from reports that I have seen there are still plenty about.

Hi David, those photos were from my garden before we went to Cornwall so the Painted Ladies were not really expected in my garden. Having said that the numbers of those that we saw in Cornwall were unexpected too as described in the report below.

Some wet and wild weather here today has at least given me the chance to throw a report together.

Sunday 4th to Friday 9th August - Cornwall part 1.

Painted Ladies.

Last Sunday (4th August) we set out for Cornwall with five nights booked in a B&B in Lizard Village. On the way down the M5 we stopped off again at our youngest son's new house in Bristol where he mentioned to me that he had been seeing quite few Painted Ladies around and about and in fact during our brief time there we saw four (plus a Peacock and a Small Tortoiseshell) on a small Buddleia in his garden.

We carried on our way and duly arrived on the Lizard by about 3.00 in the afternoon, a little too early to check into our B&B so we headed for Kennack Sands for an ice cream. Whilst there I had a little wander behind the beach where I noted at least a dozen Painted Ladies. This was already more than the total I usually see in a 'normal' year (whatever one of those is).

We then went on and checked into our B&B which being to the south of Lizard Village was ideally placed to pop out for a walk along the coast path, something I did a number of times, both west towards Kynance Cove and east to Church Cove, over the next few days. After unpacking and settling in, I went for a little wander to stretch my legs and circled around a couple of paths down to Lizard Point and back. By now it was past 5.00pm and a bit of a stiff breeze was blowing in off the sea but I noticed something like 20-25 Painted Ladies around Lizard Point and a few more as I walked there and back.



Painted Lady - Lizard Point 04.08.2019

The next morning was a cracker with beautiful blue sky and so after breakfast I walked down to Lizard Point again and then along the coast path in the direction of Kynance Cove. Although I had seen a good number of Painted Ladies the previous afternoon, nothing prepared me for what I would find this morning. Painted Ladies were all over the place, basking on the paths and feeding up on the extensive patches of knapweed which can be found by the sections of dry stone wall along this stretch.



Painted Ladies - The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Ladies - The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Lady - The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Lady - The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Lady – The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Lady – The Lizard 05.08.2019

I soon gave up counting but some of the larger areas of knapweed must have played host to hundreds of individual butterflies and although I didn't go all the way to Kynace Cove on this occasion I reckon it is no exaggeration to say that total numbers along this stretch of coastline must have run into thousands.

I then returned to meet up with Jane and we walked up into the village where we had a coffee before carrying on down to the Lighthouse and the most southerly point in Britain, seeing many more Painted Ladies along the way.

Later in the afternoon I returned to the parts of the Coast path where I had been earlier in the morning to experience again the spectacle of so many Painted Ladies. If anything there appeared to be even more flying about and basking on the grassy paths away from the main path.



Painted Ladies – The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Lady – The Lizard 05.08.2019



Painted Lady – The Lizard 05.08.2019

On Tuesday afternoon I walked the coast path in the other direction past House Bay and towards Church Cove. Painted Ladies were again seen all along the paths although not the hordes I had seen the previous day to the north of Lizard Point.

On Wednesday morning (7th August) we had a drive over to Upton Towans and again saw plenty of Painted Ladies. By this time however I am almost ashamed to say that we had become a little blasé to them and whilst looking for other species it had become a case of 'Oh!, its just another Painted Lady'. Nevertheless I took a few shots as the opportunities presented themselves.



Painted Ladies – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



Painted Lady – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

Everywhere that we saw them, the condition of the Painted Ladies varied from pale and faded to very fresh looking. With this in mind and given the amazing numbers seen, particularly in the areas just to the north of Lizard Point, I am inclined to think that some of them were home grown individuals but that numbers were also reinforced by further immigrants, quite possibly descendants of the waves that came up across the continent earlier in the year, that had recently emerged just across the channel.

Although I had seen some reports over the past couple of weeks of large numbers of Painted Ladies in some areas, mostly in the north-east and Scotland, it appeared that sightings were a bit patchy elsewhere around the country. I never thought that they would be the most common species to be seen during our stay on the Lizard.

Anyway, one of my original targets for this trip was second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries so they will be the subject of the next report.

To be continued....

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 10-Aug-19 06:22 PM GMT

Fantastic sightings Neil – one of those individuals has to be an Ab surely? Fresh looking but very pale, lacking the salmon colour?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Aug-19 08:56 PM GMT

I was thinking just what Pauline was Neil 😊 Cracking sets of shots – as I was away I've yet to witness the 'invasion' for myself – I can't wait 😊🇬🇧
Looking forward to the Small Pearls 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Aug-19 09:17 PM GMT

Wow, those are serious numbers of Painted Ladies, Neil.

Do you think the fact that you were at a coastal site explains how common they were? How many have you been seeing near to your home?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Aug-19 07:55 PM GMT

Pauline wrote:

Fantastic sightings Neil – one of those individuals has to be an Ab surely? Fresh looking but very pale, lacking the salmon colour?

Wurzel wrote:

I was thinking just what Pauline was Neil 😊 Cracking sets of shots – as I was away I've yet to witness the 'invasion' for myself – I can't wait 😊🇬🇧
Looking forward to the Small Pearls 😊

Thanks Pauline and Wurzel. I assume you are referring to the lower one in the shot with the two individuals, one above the other. Unfortunately I didn't get a closer/better look at that one so cannot really say if it looked like an ab or just faded. I did notice that with so many flying together there was a noticeable variation on display, in colour, markings and even size.

David M wrote:

...Do you think the fact that you were at a coastal site explains how common they were? How many have you been seeing near to your home?

I think that you have hit the nail on the head there David. Although I have seen more than usual back home, I have not seen numbers anywhere else like I did along that one stretch of coastline.

Sunday 4th to Friday 9th August - Cornwall part 2.

Second Brood Small Pearls.

The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is known to have an occasional partial second brood in some parts of its range, particularly in favourable years, but this is a more regular occurrence in Cornwall where the species appears to have a full second brood in most years. I have seen these before during previous visits in August but have been a little late to see them at their best which is usually during the first couple of weeks of the month.

With the timing of our trip this year I was confident that, weather permitting, I would be able to catch up with these second brood Small Pearls and hopefully find some nice fresh examples.

It didn't take long for me to find the first one which I spotted during the short walk I took after settling in to our B&B later on the Sunday afternoon when I circled round to Lizard Point and back. This was a fresh looking, and very small, male that I saw on a grassy area on the cliff top just to the west of Pystyll Meadow. A quite stiff breeze was blowing in off the sea in this exposed location and the Small Pearl was taking short flights and settling low down in the grass so I only managed a couple of ropey record shots.

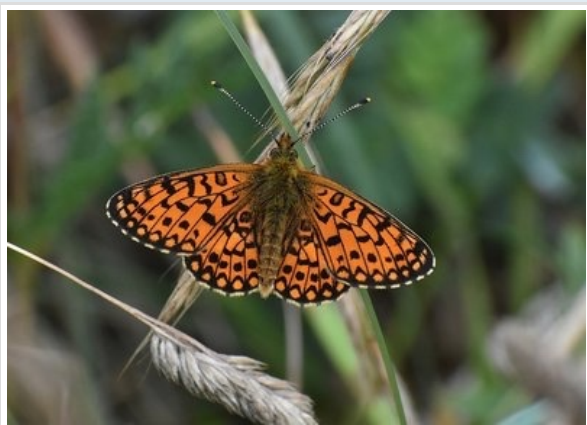
As described in my previous report on the Painted Ladies, the following morning I walked along the coast path in the direction of Kynance Cove. I wasn't actually planning to go as far as the Cove itself but was heading for an undercliff area that I had visited in previous years and which had produced SPBFs of both first and second broods in the past. As it happened I got a bit sidetracked along the way when I came across the spectacle of all the Painted Ladies previously described.

I also found a few Small Pearls when I checked a couple of spots along the path where I had seen them in past visits but as with the previous afternoon the breeze made it difficult to get a decent photo with them settling low down in the grass. So far all those seen were males and some tiny examples at that with wingspans little larger than the average Small Copper. I have read before that second brood SPBFs can be quite a bit smaller than first brood but I must admit that this was the first time that I had noticed such a difference.

Anyway, I made my way along to the undercliff area and was only half way down when I started spotting SPBFs flitting about above the vegetation with their distinctive flight. Reaching the bottom it was obvious that there were quite a few flying and I spent about 45 minutes or so at this spot during which I reckon I saw maybe 20-25 Small Pearls, both males and females. Many of them looked to be very fresh although there were also a few raggedy looking examples which indicated they had been emerging for at least a week or so here. It was also a bit more sheltered here so I finally managed to get some photos without bits of grass in the way.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - The Lizard 05.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - The Lizard 05.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 05.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 05.08.2019

I returned to this spot again later in the afternoon and if anything saw a few more flying including some fresh examples that I had not seen in the morning indicating that they were still emerging.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries male (top left) and female (bottom right) – Lizard 05.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 05.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 05.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 05.08.2019

At one point I watched what appeared to be two males indulging in what looked like some sort of communication involving touching antennae. I have no idea what was actually going on but they stayed like this for a couple of minutes before going their separate ways.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries – Lizard 05.08.2019

On another occasion I watched as two males chased a female to ground and after a brief scuffle she made her getaway with neither male being successful.

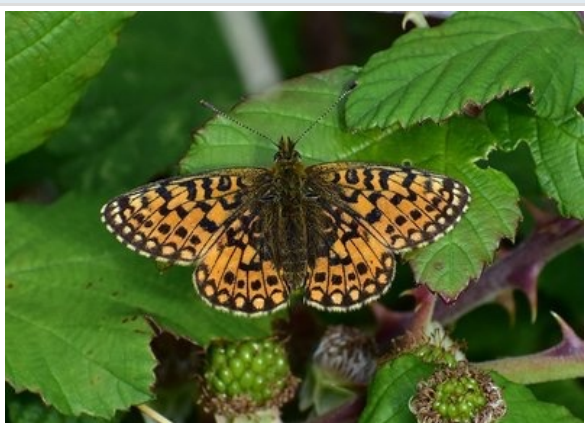


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries – Lizard 05.08.2019

On the Wednesday (7th August) morning we paid a visit to Upton Towans near Hayle on the north coast where I found a couple of dozen Small Pearls flying around in the sheltered areas behind the dunes. I have noticed before that they appear to emerge here a little earlier than those down on the Lizard and many of the males here were already looking worn and faded although the females were mostly in better condition. The butterflies seen in this population were nearer to normal size as opposed to the ones seen on the Lizard which were for the most part appreciably smaller than those I am more used to seeing.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

So far, apart from a bit of rain on Tuesday morning, we had enjoyed some decent warm weather with Monday and Wednesday in particular being warm and sunny all day. The weather was set to change later on Thursday but before the threatened high winds and rain arrived I had another walk along the coast path to the undercliff area I had visited on Monday.

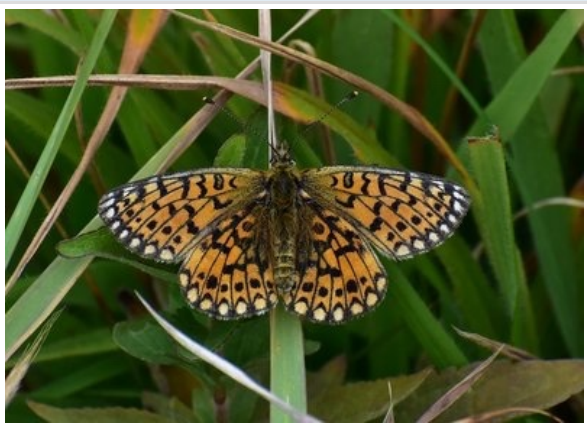


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 08.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 08.08.2019

One of those seen this time was a female that despite being a bit worn was still a nice looking butterfly and the largest example seen here as well.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 08.08.2019

By mid afternoon the weather was beginning to turn and some dark clouds were building up along with a freshening of the the wind. I watched as the Small Pearls disappeared into the vegetation and kept my eye on a couple as they went to roost which gave me the opportunity for some underside shots.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 08.08.2019



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Lizard 08.08.2019

As I was taking these photos the rain started to fall and so I beat a retreat back up the slope and hastened my way back to our B&B. As I paced it out back along the coast path the rain came down more heavily and with the increasing wind it was not so much coming straight down as blowing sideways. By the time I got back to the B&B I was soaked, a fact that Jane found quite amusing, especially as I reminded her of our conversation before I went out.

“Go out for another walk while you have the chance” she said.
“ You might as well make the most of it before the rain arrives” she said.

Oh Well!, I couldn't grumble. Apart from the bit of rain on Tuesday morning, we had been lucky with the weather up until now and we were heading home in the morning.

Plus, I had seen loads of butterflies and other wildlife.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Aug-19 08:51 PM GMT

Brilliant Small Pearls Neil – especially the final shot and shot number 4, that's a hell of a shot 🤩👍👍👍 I reckon I'd class the large but worn female as an aberrant – I've not seen them with such light/almost white markings like that before 😊😊 I'm trying to rack my brains to work out what you up your sleeve next, something a bit yellow possibly 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Aug-19 06:36 AM GMT

Fabulous, Neil. I really should take a look on the Common near where I live to see if my area gets a second brood. After all, there are good numbers of SPBFs here in the latter part of May/early June.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-Aug-19 06:23 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, lovely shots of the Pearl, I don't think we get second broods up here in the North mores the pity, 🍷🍷
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 14-Aug-19 07:20 PM GMT

A veritable feast of SPBF, Neil – some great shots there. 😊 Interesting to hear about the very small ones too – hard to tell from the photos of course, but Small Copper size is tiny in comparison to the regular version! A weather-related phenomenon in some way? The Painted Ladies earlier were excellent too – it's not just the North of England that has them in numbers obviously. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Aug-19 07:50 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

... I'm trying to rack my brains to work out what you up your sleeve next, something a bit yellow possibly 😊...Wurzel

Sorry to disappoint you Wurzel, nothing yellow this time unfortunately. In fact I have only seen a few yellow sightings reported so far this year.

David M wrote:

Fabulous, Neil. I really should take a look on the Common near where I live to see if my area gets a second brood. After all, there are good numbers of SPBFs here in the latter part of May/early June.

You never know David, second brood have reported very occasionally from the midland colonies so you could be in with a good chance.

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, lovely shots of the Pearl, I don't think we get second broods up here in the North mores the pity, 🍷🍷
Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie. No, I don't think you get second brood up there but you never know what might happen with climate change.

millerd wrote:

A veritable feast of SPBF, Neil – some great shots there. 😊 Interesting to hear about the very small ones too – hard to tell from the photos of course, but Small Copper size is tiny in comparison to the regular version! A weather-related phenomenon in some way? ...Dave

I am not sure what the cause is Dave, maybe the weather or maybe related to the shorter development cycle in the summer. I notice that Neil Hulme commented on the small size of the ones in Sussex too.

Sunday 4th to Friday 9th August – Cornwall part 3.

As well as the Painted Ladies and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, I saw another 18 species of butterfly down in Cornwall to make a total of 20. Most of these were seen on and around the coast paths, either going from Lizard Point towards Kynance Cove or in the other direction past Housel Bay and towards Church Cove. Others were seen in the dune system at Upton Towans on the Wednesday morning, or were spotted whilst we were generally out and about. Some were numerous (Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Common Blues) whilst a few were just single individuals or in low numbers (Small Skipper, Brown Argus, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell).

I thought I might see one or two old and faded Dark Green Fritillaries hanging on and indeed did see a couple of raggedy examples on the coast path to the west of Lizard Point. I was a bit surprised however to find good numbers still flying at Upton Towans on the Wednesday (August 7th). There are some wild buddleias dotted about amongst the dunes here and most of these played host to one or two DGFS as well as some Red Admirals and the ubiquitous Painted Ladies. Others were seen on patches of red valerian or flying at high speed across the dunes.

Most of the Dark Greens were looking well past their best with that almost transparent look that ageing butterflies have, but a few females were still looking quite reasonable and at least one male was still a definite orange.



Dark Green Fritillary – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



Dark Green Fritillary – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



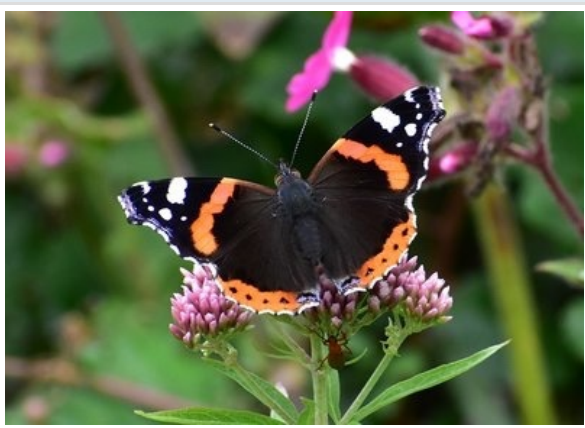
Dark Green Fritillary – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

One female in particular was still looking in good condition apart from a damaged forewing and must have been a particularly attractive butterfly when freshly emerged.



Dark Green Fritillary – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

I had reckoned that Red Admirals were likely to be around in fairly good numbers and this proved to be the case with these being one of the species that turned up everywhere we went.



Red Admiral – Kennack Sands 06.08.2019

One individual was hanging around the gateway to our B&B every day we were there and often flew around our heads to check us out as we passed by.



Red Admiral – Lizard Village 05.08.2019

A couple of Commas were seen on the walk up from our B&B to Lizard Village plus a couple more on the walk from the village to Housel Bay.



Comma – House Bay 07.08.2019

Single examples of Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell were also seen whilst walking up to Lizard Village plus another Peacock was seen amongst all the Painted Ladies on one of the large patches of knapweed along the coast path.



Small Tortoiseshell – Lizard Village 06.08.2019



Peacock – Lizard Point 05.08.2019

A species that I am always on the look out for on our trips is Wall Brown. I remember these being common around Solihull back in the 1970s although sadly they are no longer found in Warwickshire. They can still be found further afield around the midlands but inland sites are few and far between these days. I was pleased therefore to find a good scattering around the coast paths and saw a few every day.



Wall Brown – Kynance Cove 05.08.2019

One good spot to see these was along the coast path between the Lizard Lighthouse and Housel Bay, although I couldn't get close to them there as the path is quite narrow along that stretch and they kept flying off down the steep drop between the path and the sea. A few were also seen on the path from Lizard Village down to the most southerly point where they would be patrolling the pedestrian path which runs between the vegetation covered stone walls.



Wall Brown – Lizard Village 05.08.2019

I also found half a dozen Wall Browns at Upton Towans with a couple spotted feeding up on the previously mentioned buddleias and others scattered about behind the dunes.



Wall Brown – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



Wall Brown – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



Wall Brown – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

A few Graylings were seen on the coast path towards Kynance Cove and around the top of the undercliff area. These areas tended to be more exposed to the breeze coming in off the sea and consequently the Graylings usually settled low down amongst the vegetation or else flew off down the cliffs where they couldn't be followed.



Grayling – Kynance Cove 05.08.2019

I will save the rest for the next report before this one gets too long.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Aug-19 10:21 PM GMT

Really enjoying reading/seeing your Cornish reports Neil – that was a lovely dusky DGF, definitely living up to the 'dark' bit of the name but not perhaps the 'green' as there's a definite purpley tinge there 😊😄🇬🇧 You did really well with those Walls especially to get such a close view of the female – normally they're gone when you get to within a metre 😊😄 Looking forward to the next report. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 17-Aug-19 07:55 AM GMT

You've certainly filled your boots with some very desirable species, Neil. I thought for a moment that your SPBF shots were a retrospective look back to Spring, then I noticed the date!. What a second brood!. Lovely female Dark Green Frit then three female Wall Browns, obviously a great area for butterflies,

Well worth a good soaking,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-Aug-19 05:39 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

...You did really well with those Walls especially to get such a close view of the female – normally they're gone when you get to within a metre 😲
...Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, there were plenty that I didn't even get as close to as a metre (although I still think in terms of yards...it's an age thing 😊).

trevor wrote:

...I thought for a moment that your SPBF shots were a retrospective look back to Spring, then I noticed the date!. What a second brood!...Trevor

Thanks Trevor, I think that Cornwall is still the only area that currently has a reliable second brood although it appears that a partial brood at least is happening more often these days in other locations, particularly those in the south.

Sunday 4th to Friday 9th August – Cornwall part 4.

Common Blues were seen in good numbers with a few in nearly every sheltered grassy area along the coast paths in both directions from Lizard Point. They were also pretty well spread out behind the dunes at Upton Towans and half a dozen or so were seen to the back of the beach at Kennack Sands. They were in varying condition with some males in particular looking really old and faded but also a good number of fresher examples about too.



Common Blue – Kynance Cove 05.08.2019



Common Blue - Lizard Point 05.08.2019

The females that I saw were mostly of the brown colour forms but nonetheless included some very attractive examples.



Common Blue - Kynance Cove 05.08.2019



Common Blue - Kennack Sands 06.08.2019



Common Blue – Housel Bay 06.08.2019



Common Blue – Kynance Cove 08.08.2019

A single **Holly Blue** was also seen to the back of the beach at Kennack Sands.



Holly Blue – Kennack Sands 06.08.2019

Small Coppers were also about in fairly good numbers, not as many as I have seen between Lizard Point and Kynance Cove in previous visits later in August or early September, but appearing in ones and twos at most spots.



Small Copper - Kennack Sands 06.08.2019



Small Coppers - Kennack Sands 06.08.2019



Small Copper - Kennack Sands 06.08.2019



Small Copper - Kennack Sands 06.08.2019



Small Copper – Lizard Point 06.08.2019



Small Copper – Housel Bay 06.08.2019

I have only ever previously seen **Brown Argus** in Cornwall at Upton Towans and was on the lookout for them on our visit there on Wednesday morning (7th August). I ended up seeing four different individuals. Three of these were males that were all worn to some degree but also a nice fresh looking female but sods law meant that I only managed to get photos of a couple of the worn males.



Brown Argus – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

A number of species were seen but not photographed for various reasons, maybe they were too tatty or stayed out of reach, or I may have just got a ropey record shot to confirm the ID, or they may even have been a species that I see plenty of back home so I just didn't bother to photograph them. As it was I came back with well over a thousand photos to sort through.

Large, Small and Green-veined Whites were all seen but only in small numbers with a few examples of all three species appearing at random on most days.

Meadow Browns and **Gatekeepers** were both numerous with Meadow Browns being seen in the greatest numbers in the grassy meadow areas along the coast path between Lizard Point and Kynance Cove whereas Gatekeepers were more numerous along the stone wall and hedge lined paths that lead down to the coast path from various points around Lizard village..

Speckled Woods were also dotted about along the connecting paths, especially where they passed through trees or higher hedges.

A few **Small Heaths** were seen scattered about around Lizard Point and Kennack Sands and two elderly **Small Skippers** were seen behind the beach at Kennack Sands.

I said in my first report from our trip to Cornwall that I had seen twenty species but I had forgotten the single Holly Blue at Kennack Sands which actually makes it a total of twenty one species seen.

That covers all the butterflies seen on our trip to Cornwall but there was a variety of other stuff that I will probably put into a final round up.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 18-Aug-19 10:09 PM GMT

Another great read Neil with brilliant photos 😊 Love the really fresh Common Blues and some of those Small Coppers are sporting brilliant tails - they'd give a Long-tailed Blue a run for it's money! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 19-Aug-19 02:58 PM GMT

Brilliant stuff there, Neil.

Sadly, we haven't been able to get there in August this year.

The SPBF alone is worth the trip down at this time of year, as the second brood is more or less unique to West Cornwall. However, even more impressive, perhaps, are those Painted Lady numbers. They have been fairly common in East Anglia and the southeast, but nothing like you had on the Lizard. 🇬🇧

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 19-Aug-19 04:47 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, fantastic shots again, you've given me my holiday plan for next year 😊 (visit Cornwall in August !!!) 😊 I can't pick out which I like best they all look great 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 20-Aug-19 05:13 PM GMT

That's a cracking part of the UK, Neil. I really must get round to visiting some time.

Love your first Common Blue image. It is radiant!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Aug-19 07:25 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, Mark, Goldie and David 😊

Sunday 4th to Friday 9th August - Part 5.

Like most of us here on UKB, when I am out looking for butterflies I will often see other interesting wildlife and will attempt to take photos when the opportunities arise. This other 'stuff' usually includes various birds and as we were staying within spitting distance of Lizard Point, one bird that I was looking out for was the Cornish Chough. I have seen these occasionally in previous visits here but have never managed a photo as they would usually be flying around the cliffs or otherwise out of reach.

On the Monday afternoon, I had taken a path from the end of the lane outside our B&B to pick up the coast path at Pystyll Meadow which is just a short distance to the west of the old disused lifeboat station at Lizard Point. Just before joining the coast path I noticed a small group of four large black birds on the other side of a wire fence just ahead of me and as I moved slowly forward I saw the red beaks and legs which confirmed that they were Choughs. I carefully approached a bit closer and spent the next ten minutes or so watching them and taking photos. Although I didn't manage to get all four birds in the frame together I did manage a few shots with two or three of them in before they moved further up the field.



Choughs - Lizard 05.08.2019



Choughs - Lizard 05.08.2019



Choughs - Lizard 05.08.2019

I saw this group of Choughs flying around this spot a couple of times over the next few days but didn't manage to get so close again.

Other birds seen around the coast paths were Rock Pipits, Stonechats, Wheatears and Linnets. I think I have these IDs correct but as always would welcome correction if I have them wrong.



Rock Pipit (I think) – Lizard 05.08.2019



Another Rock Pipit (I think) – Lizard 05.08.2019



Linnet – Lizard 05.08.2019



Wheatear – Lizard 07.08.2019



Stonechat – Lizard 08.08.2019

Some boisterous gangs of Sparrows were noticeable around the hedgerows with these being more numerous than I usually see back home these days.



Sparrow chomping a grasshopper – Lizard 06.08.2019

Quite a few Swallows were swooping around the fields around the lighthouse and one afternoon I spotted some fledglings sitting on fence posts whilst the parents came back and forth to feed them.



Swallow fledglings – Lizard 06.08.2019



Feeding time – Lizard 06.08.2019

There were also plenty of Rooks and Jackdaws around and later in the afternoon on most days they would congregate on the farm fields opposite our B&B.



Mostly Rooks and Jackdaws – photo taken out of the bedroom window at our B&B.

When we walked down to the most southerly point on the Monday (August 5th) there was a National Trust chap with a spotting scope set up by the NT shed. This was aimed at some seals that were lazing around in the water by the rocks just out from the old lifeboat station and both Jane and I enjoyed some good views. At that time the seals were too distant to get a photo with my kit but I also saw them later in the week from the coast path by Pystyll Meadow where they were a little closer and I managed to get a few shots from there.



Atlantic Grey Seals – Lizard Point 08.08.2019

During my walks along the coast paths I would often see a few lizards although the view was usually just of a tail disappearing into the vegetation as they saw me before I saw them, or more likely felt the vibrations from my big feet.



A lizard on The Lizard - 05.08.2019

That's it from Cornwall, another great few days in a beautiful part of the country with plenty of butterflies and other stuff seen 😊 .

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 23-Aug-19 11:03 PM GMT

Excellent Neil. I have often found the Cornish Choughs quite approachable. Choughs are special birds anywhere, but especially in Cornwall, since they returned to their traditional home in 2001.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Aug-19 10:46 PM GMT

Cracking shots of the Choughs Neil - they definitely seem more approachable than the Welsh Chough 🤔👍 Spot on with the Rock Pipit ID 😊 It's a shame the report had to end 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 26-Aug-19 05:58 PM GMT

Wow! A fabulous area just got better!

The array of wildlife down there is quite something, Neil. We do pretty well on the Gower but I don't think it compares to the area around the Lizard.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Aug-19 08:51 PM GMT

Thanks Mark, the Choughs were certainly approachable on this occasion 😊

Cheers Wurzel, Thanks for the confirmation of the Rock Pipits. Sorry I have no more from Cornwall but will be down in Dorset for my last trip of the season next week 😊

Indeed David, I have been down there a number of times now and at various times of year and have really enjoyed every time.

Sunday 25th August.

For once, the weekend weather was true to the forecast and a Bank Holiday weekend at that. From Friday afternoon we enjoyed almost totally clear blue skies with just a bit of high altitude wispy cloud which did absolutely nothing to prevent the afternoon temperatures reaching the high teens on both Saturday and Sunday.

As it happened, we had arranged to look after our three year old granddaughter Chloe from Saturday to Sunday so my options for butterflying were limited. Most of the time was spent in the garden where Chloe would 'help' with some pottering about and tidying up during which I noted the usual male Specklies being their normal quarrelsome selves and a number of whites passing through, most of which appeared to be Small Whites.

Sunday was even warmer than Saturday and I spotted a female Speckled Wood sticking to the shade as she moved through the garden and thus avoiding the males who were chasing each other about like mad things in the heat.



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 25.08.2019

An elderly female Gatekeeper was also around most of the weekend,



Gatekeeper female – Coverdale 25.08.2019

A few Mint Moths were fluttering about above a patch of marjoram and I particularly like the way the sun is catching scales on the shot below.



Mint Moth – Coverdale 25.08.2019

With another hot day forecast for the next day, Bank Holiday Monday, I didn't fancy travelling far so was thinking about getting out to check out one of my local spots.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Aug-19 08:16 PM GMT

Monday 26th August.

Bank Holiday Monday and what a scorcher. As soon as the sun rose it beat down from a cloudless sky and right from the start the Specklies in the garden were in turbo mode. These were soon joined by passing whites, again most of them being 'Small'. I reckoned that whatever time I went out, any butterflies that I saw would be hyperactive, so I took my time and chilled out a bit during the morning and just potted about the house and garden.

Although my buddleias have mostly gone over now there are still a few flower spikes left to tempt another Painted Lady to drop in later in the morning.



Painted Lady – Coverdale 26.08.2019

I finally stirred myself into action and popped out early in the afternoon to my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull. In one field here there are a number of Buddleias of all shapes and sizes growing wild and I made my way to this spot. Given the numbers of Painted Ladies around this year I was not surprised to see quite a few around these buddleias and the more I looked, the more I saw. They were difficult to count with their constant movement around the buddleias but I reckon there were 20+ in this one spot. In the afternoon heat, most of the time they settled with their wings tightly closed but occasionally one of them would quickly flick their wings open a few times and I would try and anticipate the movement to grab a shot.



Painted Lady – Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Painted Lady – Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Painted Lady – Castle Hills 26.08.2019

There were also some Small Tortoiseshells and Red Admirals around these buddleias with 7 or 8 STs and 6 Red Admirals counted. With the afternoon temperature once again up in the high twenties, it was noticeable that the Small Tortoiseshells and Red Admirals spent quite a bit of time in the shadier depths of the buddleias to get some relief from the sun.



Painted Lady and Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills 26.08.2019



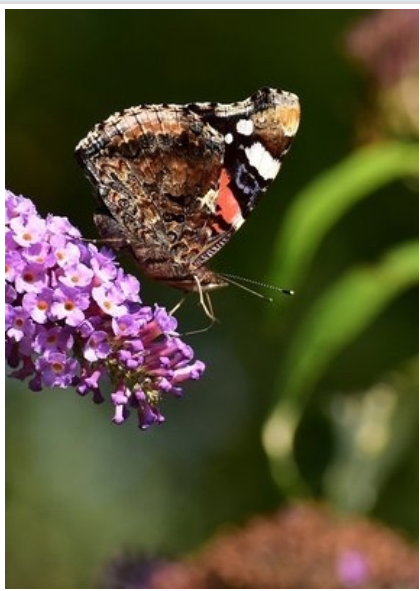
Small Tortoiseshells - Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Red Admiral - Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Red Admiral - Castle Hills 26.08.2019

A single Comma was also flying around this spot and also taking to the shade when it settled.



Red Admiral – Castle Hills 26.08.2019

I noted that the Painted Ladies didn't seem to be so bothered by the heat and happily stayed out in the hot sun, possibly due to the fact that this species endures much hotter temperatures in its breeding grounds in north Africa.

Away from the buddleias it was much quieter. A few Small Heaths and Common Blues were about along with some tired looking Meadow Browns and a single Brown Argus.



Small Heath – Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Common Blue – Castle Hills 26.08.2019



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 26.08.2019

A quick look along one of the shadier tree line paths produced half a dozen Speckled Wood and another Comma.

By mid afternoon the temperature was hitting 30 degrees, which to be perfectly honest is too hot for me, so I made a move back home to carry on chilling out in the garden.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 28-Aug-19 11:21 AM GMT

Hi! Neil lovely shots, I don't think I've seen very many Small Heath only when I was in Kent did I get a shot of one, I've not seen any here up to now. Like you I can't stand so much heat and when I've been out this week-end quickly retreated into Garden Centres and cafes for cooler air and drinks. 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 28-Aug-19 08:50 PM GMT

Great Painted Ladies Neil – one of them has even got the blue spots in the black spots on the hind wings 😊🇬🇧 Good luck down in Dorset 😊 – it was quite quiet at Lulworth/Durdle Door today but then the weather wasn't exactly great 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 29-Aug-19 08:24 PM GMT

Yes, Bank Holiday was glorious even here in south Wales, Neil. 😊

Good to see you've had your fair share of Painted Ladies...and a few Small Tortoiseshells thrown in too.

Red Admirals, by contrast, have been pretty scarce near me this month. Hopefully we'll see a few more before the season's over.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Aug-19 07:43 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

..Like you I can't stand so much heat and when I've been out this week-end quickly retreated into Garden Centres and cafes for cooler air and drinks. 😊 Goldie 😊

It didn't last long though Goldie, much cooler now and we had quite a bit of rain mid week.

Wurzel wrote:

...Good luck down in Dorset 😊 – it was quite quiet at Lulworth/Durdle Door today but then the weather wasn't exactly great...

Thanks Wurzel, Dorset has not let me down yet at this time of year – late August/early September – so fingers crossed.

David M wrote:

...Good to see you've had your fair share of Painted Ladies...and a few Small Tortoiseshells thrown in too.

Red Admirals, by contrast, have been pretty scarce near me this month. Hopefully we'll see a few more before the season's over...

Thanks David. I hadn't seen that many Red Admirals this year myself until the other week down in Cornwall and those the other day were the first local ones for a while.

Friday 30th August.

Our usual Friday afternoon visit to my mom's during which I nipped down the road to have a look around the local park. A quick circuit in mostly cloudy but warm conditions produced plenty of Speckled Woods around the usual wooded areas. Although numbers usually increase here at this time of year, a conservative count of 27 in under 30 minutes is probably the most I have seen at this spot, especially as most of them were concentrated around one large bank of brambles.

Some were pretty worn and faded but there were also a good number of fresher looking examples around and if the pattern of previous years is anything to go by, I suspect that numbers may increase even more into September.

Although they were indulging in a lot of basking, taking photos of the males was a bit challenging because more often than not, as soon as I lined up a shot they would be off to chase each other about. The females were easier, when they could escape the attentions of the males that is.



Speckled Wood male – Langley Hall 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood female – Langley Hall 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood female – Langley Hall 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood female – Langley Hall 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood male – Langley Hall 30.08.2019

Many of them were feeding on blackberries, a sure sign of the advancing season. This was the only time the males would stop chasing each other.



Speckled Wood female – Langley Hall 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood males – Langley Hall 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood males – Langley Hall 30.08.2019

I also spotted one feeding on Rowan berries, something I have not seen before.



Speckled Wood male – Langley Hall 30.08.2019

The only other butterflies seen here this afternoon were four or five Small Whites.

Back home later in the afternoon, the resident Specklies were also active with four different males seen and at least one female. I spotted one male settle in front of a female and they indulged in a bit of antennae 'tapping' before she decided to adopt the typical 'play dead' pose that these do when they are not interested.



Speckled Wood pair – Coverdale 30.08.2019



Speckled Wood pair – Coverdale 30.08.2019

Other butterflies in the garden this afternoon were a few Small Whites and singles of Green-veined white and Holly Blue.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 30-Aug-19 08:03 PM GMT

Excellent numbers of Speckled Wood, the three on the bramble is a most unusual image. We will be in Osmington next Friday afternoon, weather permitting. We will keep an eye open for you, just in case!

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 30-Aug-19 08:08 PM GMT

Some fascinating shots there, like Essex says the 3 in one shot is very unusual!

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 30-Aug-19 09:13 PM GMT

Some very fresh Speckled Woods there Neil.
All the ones I saw today were very worn, Except for one female in good condition.

Lovely shots, as always,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 31-Aug-19 04:01 PM GMT

That first 'threefer' shot in particular is a cracker Neil - I've not seen them sitting so nicely positioned as that ever! 🤪 :mrgreen: And the rest are mighty fine too! 🍷 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-Aug-19 06:57 PM GMT

essexbuzzard wrote:

Excellent numbers of Speckled Wood, the three on the bramble is a most unusual image. We will be in Osmington next Friday afternoon, weather permitting. We will keep an eye open for you, just in case!

Thanks Mark, we are heading down in the morning (Sunday) and coming back on Friday so will probably miss you unfortunately. Will no doubt pay a visit to Osmington at some point but when will depend on the weather down there.

bugboy wrote:

Some fascinating shots there, like Essex says the 3 in one shot is very unusual!

Thanks Bugboy, this is the only time of year that I see males put up with each other like that.

trevor wrote:

Some very fresh Speckled Woods there Neil.
All the ones I saw today were very worn, Except for one female in good condition. Lovely shots, as always, Trevor.

Thanks Trevor, we usually get a good emergence into September around here so hopefully there will be more fresh ones on the way.

Wurzel wrote:

That first 'threefer' shot in particular is a cracker Neil - I've not seen them sitting so nicely positioned as that ever! 🤪 :mrgreen: And the rest are mighty fine too! 🍷 😊 Have a goodun. Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel, I watched and waited for some time for that group to line up like that.

Recent Garden Moths.

With being away in Cornwall the other week plus some nippy nights this month, I haven't had the garden moth trap out that much during August, just five times in total. Nevertheless, I have had some nice moths with the nights of Sunday 25th and Tuesday 27th following the recent warm weather producing catches of 200+ moths, even if most of them were Large Yellow Underwings. Some early Autumn species are starting to show up now along with some second generation of early summer species.



Orange Swift – a nicely marked female.



Centre-barred Sallow – this one is a sign that Autumn is approaching.



Square-spot Rustic – A common 'trap filler' at this time of year. A very variable moth.



Rosy Rustic – Another late season species.



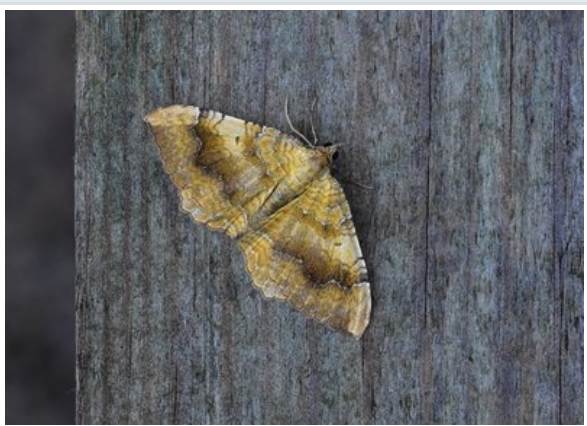
Flame Carpet – Second generation.



Old Lady – This large species seems to be doing well this year.



Dusky Thorn – I usually get a couple of these each year.



Yellow Shell – A particularly well marked example, compare with the one below.



Yellow shell – a more normal looking example.

Heading down to Dorset in the morning so off to do some packing for tomorrow and make sure my camera batteries are charged etc.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 05-Sep-19 04:08 PM GMT

Some nice moths again there, Neil, particularly the Dusky Thorn.

Good luck down in Dorset.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Sep-19 07:33 PM GMT

Thanks David. Another enjoyable trip to Dorset, details to come in due course as usual.

Dorset part 1 – Sunday September 1st.

Last Sunday, Jane and myself headed down to Dorset for our last trip of the year. In some previous years we have gone down to Dorset around this time with my mom and/or our daughter Sarah and the grandkids for a family holiday but this year due to various reasons it was just the two of us and so we had booked into a B&B on a farm not far from Corfe Castle.

With no need to rush, we took a leisurely drive down the A429 through the Cotswolds and then the A350 via Shaftsbury and by 1.30pm we were approaching Fontmell Magna. We planned to stop off for a bit at Fontmell Down, a site I had never visited before despite using this route a number of times.

Fontmell Down.

We turned off the A350 at Fontmell Magna and headed for the car park at the top of the down to find it absolutely rammed with cars so we carried on a little way and found a space a bit further long the road. I left Jane reading her Kindle and walked back to the entrance to the down and noticed a number of old aircraft taking off from the airfield across the other side of the road and many of the people at the car park appeared to be there to watch those. I am not sure if this a regular thing or if there was an event going on but it was nice to see these old planes flying around above the downs.



Above Fontmell Down – 01.09.2019

I went through the gate from the car park onto the down and as I often do when I am at a site new to me, I immediately went the 'wrong way'. It was very breezy at the top of the down and so I figured I would look for a sheltered spot and walked down the slope to my right and along the tree line at the bottom. I say I went the wrong way but I soon found Common Blues, Meadow Browns and Small Heaths plus some nice fresh looking male Adonis Blues and a Brimstone patrolling the tree line.



Adonis Blue - Fontmell Down 01.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Fontmell Down 01.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Fontmell Down 01.09.2019



Adonis Blue – Fontmell Down 01.09.2019

One female Meadow Brown stood out with a paler 'orange' patch on her left forewing.



Meadow Brown – Fontmell Down 01.09.2019

I was aware that Silver-spotted Skippers could be found here, the only site in Dorset where they can be found I believe, but thought it may be getting a bit late for them. I met a chap who was looking for them but had not seen any and was just leaving.

A little further along I met another chap who told me that there should be a few SSKs still flying but they were only found on the south facing slope on the other side of the ridge...which is where I would have ended up if I had gone the 'right way' from the car park.

I made my way up and over the ridge to the other side and then down and along towards the south facing slope and stopped for a few minutes to chat with a couple who asked me if I had seen any Clouded Yellows (not yet... but carry on reading), as apparently a few had been reported from there the previous weekend. I then carried on, seeing more Meadow Browns, Small Heath, Adonis and Common Blues plus a couple of Brown Argus but these were all very active in the warm afternoon sun and with the blustery breeze were difficult to photograph.



Adonis Blue male and female – Fontmell Down 01.09.2019

No more than five minutes or so after the couple asked me if I had seen any Clouded Yellows, what should fly right in front of me...a Clouded Yellow. I looked back to see if the couple were still around but they had disappeared from view around the curve in the down. I watched as it flew up the slope at high speed and I was just thinking 'there's no point in trying to follow that' when it did a 180 and flew back towards me and landed half way down the slope. I kept an eye on the position where it had gone down and walked up slowly and was about ten feet away when it took off again. Luckily, it just came a little closer and I managed to get a couple of record shots before it was off again, this time disappearing into the distance.



Clouded Yellow – Fontmell Down 01.09.2019

I was making my way back up the slope when I spotted a Silver-spotted Skipper, a worn female that darted from flower head to flower head for a while before I lost track of her.



Silver-spotted Skipper – Fontmell Down 01.09.2019



Fontmell Down 01.09.2019

By now, I had been here for an hour and not wanting to dig too deep into the store of brownie points too soon, I made my way back to Jane and we carried on our way.

My main target for our trips to Dorset at this time of year is always Adonis Blue, this being a species we do not get in the midlands and I usually miss the first brood. Also, I am always hopeful of a Clouded Yellow. We had not even arrived and I had seen both already which meant that the pressure was off for the next few days and I could just enjoy what turned up.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 06-Sep-19 10:01 PM GMT

Never heard of Fontmell Down, looks like a wonderful place 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 07-Sep-19 08:04 AM GMT

That's an excellent report, Neil, from what looks like a great piece of Dorset downland. 😊 I imagine it would be really good in the spring as well. It doesn't look far on the map from Martin Down, but the meandering roads between the two across Cranborne Chase make it seem a lot further! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-Sep-19 06:12 PM GMT

Great report Neil those Adonis are stunning – they really 'ping' and a cracking Cloudy 😊😎🌿 Like you say it's great when you get your targets early 😊 Looking forward to the next installment 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Sep-19 11:22 AM GMT

bugboy wrote:

Never heard of Fontmell Down, looks like a wonderful place 😊

I am sure I have seen a few reports from Fontmell on UKB in the past. If my memory serves me right (not guaranteed these days 😊) Essexbuzzard has reported from there.

millerd wrote:

That's an excellent report, Neil, from what looks like a great piece of Dorset downland. 😊 I imagine it would be really good in the spring as well. It doesn't look far on the map from Martin Down, but the meandering roads between the two across Cranborne Chase make it seem a lot further! 😊
Cheers, Dave

Thanks Dave, it would probably be good in the spring too. Martin Down is another site I have never visited...yet.

Wurzel wrote:

Great report Neil those Adonis are stunning – they really 'ping' and a cracking Cloudy 😊😊🌧️ Like you say it's great when you get your targets early 😊 Looking forward to the next installment 😊 Have a goodun. Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. Trying to sort some photos and get some words together for the next one but keep getting interrupted by apparently essential 'stuff to do' 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Sep-19 07:15 PM GMT

What could be more essential than writing up butterfly reports 🤔😞? Actually I know the feeling, hence my PD still being in June 😞😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Sep-19 09:12 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel... I managed to get it done in the end.

Dorset part 2 – Monday 2nd September.

For our first full day in Purbeck we decided to have a look around some local spots that we had not visited before. In previous visits we had usually passed straight through Corfe Castle on our way to Swanage and Durlston or maybe Ballard Down or Studland and not turned off the main drag apart from an occasional visit to RSPB Arne.

After breakfast we started off with a look at **Kimmeridge Bay** which was just five minutes down the road from our B&B. The bay is a designated marine wildlife reserve and known more for snorkelling than butterflies but is a nice scenic area with some good views, particularly from Clavell's Tower up on the cliffs to the east side of the bay. The South-West Coast Path passes along here although the section going west towards Lulworth through the MOD ranges is usually closed during the week when live firing is happening.

We had a look around here for about an hour during which I noted large numbers of Small Whites everywhere I looked.



Small White – Kimmeridge Bay 02.09.2019

Other butterflies seen here were a couple of faded Painted Ladies and singles of Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral which stayed defiantly out of reach of my camera.

We left Kimmeridge and drove up to a viewpoint car park just north of **Steeple** that I had spotted on the map and from where there are good views across towards Portland.



Looking across towards Portland from viewpoint near Steeple

I noticed a bridle path here leading down the hillside from the car park and explored a little way along it, again finding lots of Small Whites and a single Red Admiral. Other butterflies around this spot were Meadow Browns, Small Heaths and a Painted Lady.



Painted Lady - Steeple 02.09.2019

There was also a solitary female Adonis Blue. Being high up and exposed to the blustery wind, I wondered if she had blown over from some likely looking habitat which could be seen a little way to the west, just inside the MOD ranges which were closed at this time.



Adonis Blue female - Steeple 02.09.2019

From here we headed back through Corfe Castle and turned off towards **Kingston** and **Worth Matravers**. At Kingston I turned towards Swyre Head which is the highest point around here but our arrival at the car park coincided with a large cloud covering the sun which made the blustery wind feel quite nippy and so we chose to move on. We headed back through Kingston and on to Worth Matravers and by the time we pulled into the car park there the cloud had moved on and the sun was out again making it feel pleasantly warm. Also being lower down again there was more shelter from the wind. We had a little wander around the village and sat for while by the duck pond enjoying an ice cream from the tea rooms.

Once again Small Whites were everywhere along with a few Painted Ladies and at least one Red Admiral.



Painted Lady - Worth Matravers 02.09.2019

I also spotted a Hummingbird Hawk Moth on a clump of valerian growing out of a stone wall and spent some time trying to get some shots.



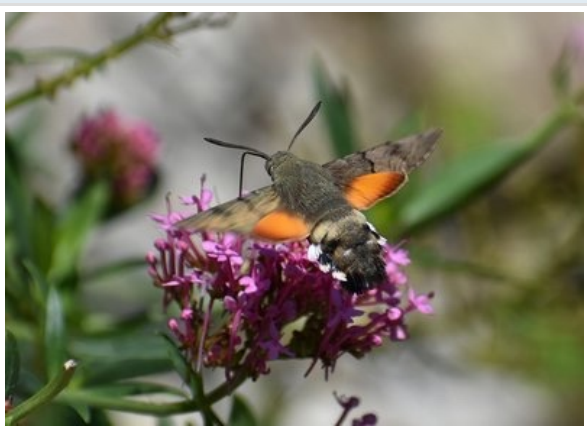
Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Worth Matravers 02.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Worth Matravers 02.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Worth Matravers 02.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Worth Matravers 02.09.2019

As I was doing this Jane pointed out a second one on another clump a few feet along the wall so for a while we were watching both at the same time although this second one was more lively and I didn't manage to get any photos of it (well, not any that weren't too blurred)

We then headed back towards Kingston and stopped briefly in a lay-by to take in the view down over Corfe Castle.



Looking down over Corfe Castle.

By this time we were into the afternoon and Jane was getting tired after doing what was for her a fair bit of walking. She did not want to overdo it on our first day so she suggested that we head back to the B&B and she would chill out for a bit whilst I popped back out for another hour or so (worth saving those brownie points).

Before heading down to Dorset I had looked on the map and noticed **Stonehill Down**, a Dorset Wildlife Trust nature reserve up on the Purbeck Ridge not far from our B&B. I reckoned this might be worth a look and so after dropping Jane off I headed up there.

I parked up in a lay-by by the gate into the reserve and headed off across the hillside, immediately feeling the wind which was blowing strongly from the east. This cool wind which was blowing for most of our stay was especially noticeable blowing across south facing hillsides and this site being high on the Purbeck Ridge was particularly exposed.

The first thing I noticed was a good number of Autumn Ladies Tresses growing along the hillside.



Autumn Ladies Tresses – Stonehill Down 02.09.2019

The road by the reserve does a sharp turn and I headed for a part of the slope that looked to be a little sheltered by the roadside hedge. I had already seen numerous Meadow Browns and Small Heaths battling against the wind and on this slightly more sheltered part of the slope I found both male and female Adonis Blues. The males in particular were mostly looking quite worn, not surprising really in this exposed habitat. There were a few fresher looking ones around but sods law meant that the best ones were quickly whisked away in the wind.



Adonis Blue – Stonehill Down 02.09.2019



Adonis Blue female – Stonehill Down 02.09.2019

A few faded Common Blues were also present in this area along with a couple of well worn Brown Argus. At least two Small Coppers were there as well and one of them found a sheltered spot on some brambles to bask for a while.



Small Copper – Stonehill Down 02.09.2019

Small Whites were again seen in good numbers and I had a flypast by a Clouded Yellow which vanished rapidly into the distance.

I also saw a nice big female Great Green Bush Cricket. I must admit that despite it's size I would probably have missed her if she hadn't moved and shuffled around on the brambles she was sitting on.



Great Green Bush Cricket – Stonehill Down 02.09.2019

After a while the intermittent clouds built up into a thicker overcast which made the wind feel quite nippy so I made a move back to the B&B.

A cracking day visiting some beautiful spots that were all new to me.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 08-Sep-19 09:52 PM GMT

Fantastic effort with that Hummer Hawk 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Sep-19 10:30 PM GMT

Brilliant HHM shots Neil 🍷😊, lovely scenic views as well – take me back they do 😊 and that is a really heavily marked Painted Lady, she's applied the mascara with a trowel! 😂😂

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 09-Sep-19 08:34 AM GMT

Successful images of one of the most difficult subjects. A feeding Humming Bird HM!
Also great shots of the male Adonis in your previous post, so hard to capture that electric blue sheen.
We skipped our day out on Purbeck for this year, no Sandbanks ferry.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Sep-19 08:01 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Bugboy, Wurzel and Trevor, very much appreciated 😊

trevor wrote:

...We skipped our day out on Purbeck for this year, no Sandbanks ferry....Trevor.

We saw a number of signs up around the area warning that the ferry was not running. Our host at the B&B told us that it was due to a broken driveshaft and as these are supposed to last for the life of the ferry there are no spares around. A replacement was apparently being made in Sweden.

Dorset part 3 – Tuesday 3rd September.

Jane was keen to pop into **Swanage** at some point and with a cloudy start to Tuesday morning we decided to drive there after breakfast. The local weather forecast had said that it should brighten up later in the morning and if this proved to be true we could pop up to **Durlston Country Park**. After spending an hour or so in Swanage the clouds did indeed start to thin and allow the sun to break through and with Jane having done her bit of shopping, we went on to Durlston. After parking the car, we wandered down to the 'castle' where we spotted some activity on the buddleia just outside the visitor centre. A closer look showed this to be playing host to over a dozen Small Whites, half a dozen Painted Ladies in varying condition and a rather tatty Red Admiral.



Painted Lady – Durlston 03.09.2019



Painted Lady basking on wall by the buddleia – Durlston 03.09.2019

We then took the path through the woodland where we saw a few Speckled Wood flitting about in sunny spots between the trees. Coming out onto the main path we then followed it down towards the lighthouse. Once out on the open areas we noticed the cool blustery wind which was once again blowing although with increasing sunny spells it was warming up nicely. It was noticeable how dry the meadows areas looked and whether it was due to this, or the wind, or indeed a combination of both, it was very quiet along this stretch with only a few Small Whites, Meadow Browns and Small Heaths to be seen.

Jane carried on slowly towards the lighthouse while I detoured down the gully for a look. In the more sheltered spots I found higher numbers of Meadow Browns and Small Heaths plus a few Common Blues. There were also Adonis Blues which varied in condition from well worn to quite fresh looking, but I reckon I saw no more than a dozen at most, well down on the numbers I have seen here in some previous years.



Adonis Blue female – Durlston 03.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Durlston 03.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Durlston 03.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Durlston 03.09.2019

I then went back up to Jane and we retraced our steps back to the visitor centre where we found a couple of Large Whites had joined their smaller cousins on the buddleia. These were the first Large Whites we had seen down in Dorset so far, all other whites being Smalls of which there were increasing numbers everywhere.



Large White - Durlston 03.09.2019

There was also a better Condition Red Admiral which had replaced the tatty one seen earlier.



Red Admiral - Durlston 03.09.2019

Overall numbers of Butterflies were down at Durlston compared to what I would have seen here a few years ago in early September, especially in the open meadow areas. I didn't find any late Lulworth Skippers but I haven't seen any of these still flying into September now for a few years (2015 was the last time) and looking at how dry it was I didn't expect any this time.

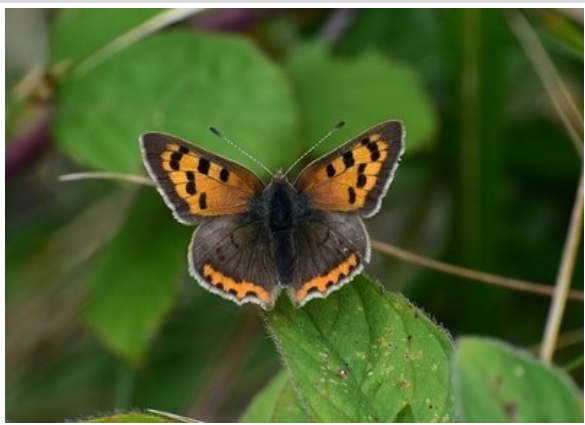
We left Durlston and drove around to the lay-by at Ulwell so that I could have a quick look up on **Ballard down**. I only wandered a short way along the path here and saw all the usual suspects for here, that is Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Speckled Wood, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Common Blue and Adonis Blue, but none of them in large numbers.



Adonis Blue - Ballard Down 03.09.2019



Common Blue female - Ballard Down 03.09.2019



Small Copper - Ballard Down 03.09.2019



Small Copper - Ballard Down 03.09.2019



Brown Argus - Ballard Down 03.09.2019



Brown Argus – Ballard Down 03.09.2019

Most of the Adonis here were looking quite worn and I believe that this is an earlier site for these than those around Lulworth and at Osmington.

I also saw a couple of large Wasp Spiders, one of which had caught itself a Small Heath. A gruesome image but one which shows the size of these impressive spiders.



Wasp Spider with Small Heath – Ballard Down 03.09.2019

Ballard Down appeared to have been heavily grazed in some recent years and I was interested to note that parts were roped off, apparently to prevent the ponies I saw there wandering about at will.

We then moved on again heading for **RSPB Arne** but stopped off first at the viewpoint lay-by on the B3351 with its views over Poole Harbour and where we were tempted by an ice cream from the van parked there.

Arriving at Arne, we stopped by the visitor centre as Jane has a Blue Badge which means that we can pick up a permit that allows us to drive further into the reserve to a disabled parking area. From this parking spot there is an easier access path through some nice woodland to a hide overlooking some reed beds and Pool Harbour.

Walking through the woods we spotted several Speckled Woods and some more Small Whites plus at least one Large White.



Large White female – Arne 03.09.2019

From the hide we could see a number of birds out in the pools between the reeds including Little Egrets, Oystercatchers, Redshanks and a couple of

Curlews.



Curlew - Arne 03.09.2019

After half an hour or so in the hide we circled back around the path to the car and made a move back to our B&B.

Another enjoyable day despite the fact that both Durlston and Ballard Down were not as good as they used to be for butterflies. I think that this has much to do with recent dry summers as Durlston in particular has been looking very parched when I have visited in early September over the past couple of years.

Still, there were some nice butterflies to be found with many of them still looking quite fresh.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by NickMorgan, 10-Sep-19 12:44 PM GMT

I love your Adonis Blue pictures and the fresh Painted Ladies. Strangely I am still only seeing very worn Painted Ladies, although I am receiving reports of fresh new ones.

The Wasp Spider is interesting. We used to find enormous spiders like that in the south of France. I wonder if they were the same species.

At least it allowed you an open-wing picture of the Small Heath!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-Sep-19 07:34 PM GMT

IHi! Neil, I see you got your Humming Bird Hawk shots 😊 They really are fantastic aren't they 😊 Your Adonis shots are super, I didn't realise the Female Adonis was so dark, she may not look like the Male but she seems to have her own beauty in your shots 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Sep-19 08:07 PM GMT

NickMorgan wrote:

I love your Adonis Blue pictures and the fresh Painted Ladies. Strangely I am still only seeing very worn Painted Ladies, although I am receiving reports of fresh new ones.

The Wasp Spider is interesting. We used to find enormous spiders like that in the south of France. I wonder if they were the same species.

At least it allowed you an open-wing picture of the Small Heath!

Thanks Nick. I saw plenty of worn Painted Ladies too.

I understand that Wasp Spiders are a recent arrival to the UK from the continent and can now be found across the southern counties. It may well be the same species you saw in France. Yes, I was thinking that about the Small Heath myself.

Goldie M wrote:

IHi! Neil, I see you got your Humming Bird Hawk shots 😊 They really are fantastic aren't they 😊 Your Adonis shots are super, I didn't realise the Female Adonis was so dark, she may not look like the Male but she seems to have her own beauty in your shots 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie. Yes, the female Adonis has a more subtle beauty of her own.

Dorset part 4 - Wednesday 4th September.

The weather forecast for Wednesday looked to be similar to the previous day, that is a cloudy start followed by some good sunny spells but with a continuing persistent wind. After breakfast we decided to head for **Weymouth** first so that Jane could have another wander around some shops (good for keeping the brownie points topped up).

By mid-morning it was warming up nicely again so we headed to **Osmington** where we turned off and parked up at the end of the lane by where the

bridleway continues up towards **White Horse Hill**.

I started off along the first part of the bridleway which is lined by trees seeing three or four Speckled Woods and a raggedy looking Comma. Coming out onto the open stretch, I spotted a number of Small Whites and a female Green-veined White, the first of only two GVWs I would see in Dorset, both here at Osmington.



Green-veined White - Osmington 04.09.2019

The ever-present wind was not too bad on the lower part of the path but as I went further along and higher up it became quite a blow whistling across the hillside. I spotted Meadow Browns, Small Heaths and Adonis Blues but they were either whisked away in the wind or settling low down in the grass. I decided therefore to concentrate on the lower area around where the path takes a left turn and goes diagonally up across the hillside and where there are some sheltered spots provided by trees and shrubs.

I spent a good hour and a half here and ended up seeing some nice fresh male Adonis Blues, maybe 25-30 all told, not as many as I have seen here in the past but that was in less windy conditions when they were spread all over the hillside. Also, I only saw a few females here this time which, along with the fresh males, makes me think that numbers were yet to peak here.



Adonis Blue - Osmington 04.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Osmington 04.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Osmington 04.09.2019

Osmington has consistently provided me with a Clouded Yellow or two at this time of year and I was pleased to see that it didn't let me down. One came flying past me and as I watched it fly back and forth across the hillside a cloud covered the sun and it went down. I approached carefully and managed a couple of shots before it was off again. Luckily, it went down again just a few yards away and I managed to creep up on it again before the sun came back out and it took to the air again.



Clouded Yellow - Osmington 04.09.2019



Clouded Yellow - Osmington 04.09.2019

All the usual other species were present with a few Common Blues and a couple each of Brown Argus and Small Coppers as well as loads of Small Whites and another Green-veined White.



Small Copper – Osmington 04.09.2019



Common Blue female – Osmington 04.09.2019

I have seen late Marbled Whites into early September at both Durdle Door and Bindon Hill in previous years but never this late at Osmington. It was a bit of a surprise therefore to find three examples here, two of which were definitely on their last legs but one which was still in fairly good condition.



Marbled White – Osmington 04.09.2019

A couple of Red Admirals were chasing each other around a patch of shrubs, one of which had particularly bold white spots in the red bands on its forewings – *ab. bialbata* I believe, although I tend to think of these as within normal variation given how many I see.



Red Admiral – Osmington 04.09.2019

As with the Clouded Yellow, the intermittent cloud worked in my favour when I spotted a Hummingbird Hawk Moth flitting about on the hillside. As I was watching it, a cloud came over and the HBHM dropped down and settled just a few feet in front of me. It didn't stay down for long though, as soon as the sun came back out it was off like a little rocket.



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Osmington 04.09.2019

Osmington is still one of my favourite sites in the area and even with the cool wind and clouds today it produced a nice selection of butterflies.

Before we left Osmington we called in at Craig's Dairy Farm for a Cream Tea...keeping those brownie points topped up again 😊.

We then carried on to **Durdle Door** where I was keen to see if there was anything on the grassy slopes above the famous rock arch. We pulled into the car park and Jane set up on the grass with a book and a garden chair that we always carry with us in the car, while I had a wander along one of the grassy paths down and across the slope.

I soon saw the usual Meadow Browns and Small Heaths being whisked about on the exposed hillside and coming down to the lower slopes I spotted a few Adonis Blues, Small Coppers and Brown Argus. The male Adonis here tended to be a bit more worn around the fringes than those at Osmington and there were also a few more females around.



Adonis Blue – Durdle Door 04.09.2019



Adonis Blue female - Durdle Door 04.09.2019



Small Copper - Durdle Door 04.09.2019



Small Copper - Durdle Door 04.09.2019

I also saw a few Graylings but they kept settling low down and I only managed some ropey record shots with grass stems in the way.



Grayling - Durdle Door 04.09.2019

Durdle Door is another site that has often provided a Clouded Yellow and once again it didn't let me down. I spotted one circling around the depression in the slope just above the archway and, as at Osmington, a passing cloud slowed it down and I spotted where it settled.



Clouded Yellow – Durdle Door 04.09.2019

We were going to pop around to Lulworth Cove whilst we were there but the cloud thickened up and it came over quite grey plus by now it was getting late in the afternoon so we decided to make a move back to the B&B.

Another cracking day with a good selection of butterflies despite the persistent wind.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Sep-19 08:12 PM GMT

I'm really enjoying your reports Neil, cracking photos and it's great reading about so many familiar places 😊 It seems that the Lulworth has shifted to an earlier start and finish over the last couple of years – a taste of things to come? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Sep-19 08:41 PM GMT

It seems that our posts crossed Neil 😊 Even better butterflies this time; those Adonis are electrifying and the Cloudies are brill – the Durdle Door Cloudy is a peach 🍑🍑

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 10-Sep-19 09:44 PM GMT

Interesting to read your report on Durlston as I was there about 2 weeks previously and came to much the same conclusion. I think you may actually have seen more butterflies than me in fact, and most of the Painted Ladies I saw were very much past their sell by date.

I also agree with your opinion about the Red Admiral ab. biolbata, I too don't bother counting it as an aberration for the same reason.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 11-Sep-19 09:44 AM GMT

I have very much enjoyed your Dorset coast adventures and photos, Neil – seeing Marbled Whites in September always seems bizarre to me, but they do hang on late in those parts. It must be a protracted emergence (as with their cousins the Meadow Brown) as they are certainly out in June too. It's probably my favourite part of the country. Durlston seemed very dry to me even back when I visited at the end of June: I don't think there has been all that much rain since to allow it to recover, and there's next to nothing in the current forecast. Let's hope the winter evens things out enough to help the vegetation (and butterflies) to recover.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Sep-19 09:51 PM GMT

Some lovely stuff in your last couple of posts, Neil, especially the Whites – the Large White is a stunner and the Green Veined is beautifully marked....but a September Marbled White? That's not something I expected to see.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 12-Sep-19 07:45 AM GMT

Hi! Neill, I've loved your Dorset adventures and envy your Clouded Yellow and those lovely Adonis Blue 🍷🍷🍷
I must try to get there next year. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Sep-19 07:59 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

It seems that out posts crossed Neil 😊 Even better butterflies this time; those Adonis are electrifying and the Cloudies are brill – the Durdle Door Cloudy is a peach ...Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, for both your comments. I wonder if all the Lulworth colony flight times are shifting or if the Durlston ones are falling more in line with the earlier (as at Lulworth Cove itself) colonies?

bugboy wrote:

...Interesting to read you report on Durlston as I was there about 2 weeks previously and came to much the same conclusion. I think you may actually have seen more butterflies than me in fact, and most of the Painted Ladies I saw were very much past their sell by date...

Thanks Bugboy. I have found in previous visits to this part of Dorset that the last few days of August into the first week of September can usually be productive which is why I time our visits for around then. Curiously, I have also found that the 'official' reserves like Durlston and Ballard Down have not been as good as areas such as Osmington which is essentially just a bridle path across farmland.

millerd wrote:

I have very much enjoyed your Dorset coast adventures and photos, Neil – seeing Marbled Whites in September always seems bizarre to me, but they do hang on late in those parts. It must be a protracted emergence (as with their cousins the Meadow Brown) as they are certainly out in June too...

Thanks Dave. I agree that it is more likely to be a protracted emergence of the Marbled Whites like the Meadow Browns as I have also seen plenty out in June before now. The Meadow Browns themselves were still flying in good numbers down there with plenty of fresh looking males still about.

David M wrote:

Some lovely stuff in your last couple of posts, Neil, especially the Whites – the Large White is a stunner and the Green Veined is beautifully marked....but a September Marbled White? That's not something I expected to see.

Thanks David. You may remember I have seen late Marbled whites down there before and posted photos in previous reports. There was a bit of discussion in this PD last year – page 130 <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=5424&start=2580> – scroll down to near the bottom of the page.

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neill, I've loved your Dorset adventures and envy your Clouded Yellow and those lovely Adonis Blue 🍷🍷🍷
I must try to get there next year. Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, it is one of my favourite parts of the country, particularly the Purbeck coast between Weymouth and Swanage.

Dorset part 5 – Thursday 5th September.

As we had not made it to **Lulworth Cove** the previous day, we decided to pay a visit on Thursday morning. The short cut over the ranges was closed with weekday live firing having resumed for the autumn period on September 1st so we went cross country via Steeple, West Holme and East Lulworth which is a slower but nicer route than going around the main drag.

We arrived at Lulworth cove just after 10.00am, parked in the main car park and wandered down to the beach. The blustery wind of the previous days had dropped a bit and it was a pleasant morning with plenty of blue sky and big fluffy white clouds slowly drifting across the sky.

The many clumps of red valerian growing out of the walls on the way down to the beach were playing host to loads of Small Whites, a few Large Whites and a couple of Painted Ladies.



Painted Lady – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019

At least two different Hummingbird Hawk Moths were seen on separate clumps of valerian. I was pleased with the HBHM shots I had taken at Worth Matravers on Monday but was even more chuffed with some of the shots I managed today.



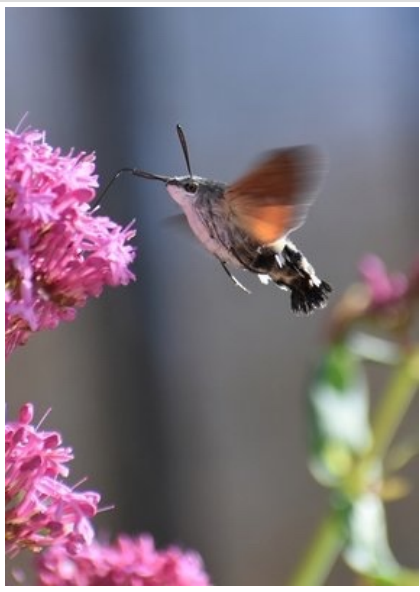
Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019

Of course, being at Lulworth Cove, I was keen to have a look up on **Bindon Hill** and so after we had a coffee, Jane set up on the beach with her chair and a book and I walked back up past the car park towards the entrance up to the hill. On the way I noticed there were quite a few dead leaves being blown about by the path and there seemed to be something a bit different about one leaf that blew across in front of me. It came to rest at the side of the path and a closer look revealed it was in fact a female Wall Brown.



Wall Brown – Lulworth Cove 05.09.2019

I then carried on up the road and turned onto the hill at the entrance by the B&Bs opposite the turn off for Durdle Door.

I figured that the breeze would be more in evidence up on the hill and that did indeed prove to be the case, but it was still not as blustery as the previous couple of days had been. I spent about an hour up there and saw the expected Meadow Browns and Small Heaths, Adonis and Common Blues, Brown Argus and Small Coppers.



Adonis Blue – Bindon Hill 05.09.2019



Adonis Blue – Bindon Hill 05.09.2019



Common Blue – Bindon Hill 05.09.2019



Small Copper – Bindon Hill 05.09.2019

One particular female Small Copper was a lovely pale golden orange colour and quite fresh too so it wasn't the result of fading.



Small Copper – Bindon Hill 05.09.2019

There were also a handful of Chalk Hill Blues still flying, a couple of really tatty males and a few worn and faded females.



Chalk Hill Blue female – Bindon Hill 05.09.2019

Also seen were plenty of Small Whites, a few Large Whites and one each of Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell.

I then went back to meet Jane and on the way saw another HBHM on some valerian by the cottages opposite the entrance to the car park.

We left Lulworth and headed back to **Corfe Castle**. In all the previous times we have come down to this part of Dorset we have passed through Corfe Castle on numerous occasions but never actually stopped there. We decided to put this right and instead of parking in the NT car park we turned off for the car park down West Street where we found far more room. Jane went to have a wander around the square and look at the gift shops whilst I went over a public footpath towards West Hill where I climbed the steep steps to look down on the castle

I then came back down the hill and turned along the lower slope to see what I could find. As usual Meadow Browns and Small Heaths were around in good numbers and this seemed to be a good spot for Small Coppers with at least half a dozen seen along a stretch of a couple of hundred yards.



Lower slope of West Hill at Corfe Castle 05.09.2019



Small Copper – Corfe Castle 05.09.2019



Small Copper – Corfe Castle 05.09.2019

There were a few Common Blues were along this stretch and I was keeping an eye out for the brighter colour of Adonis Blues when I spotted one a bit higher up the slopes. Before I could get close it flew further up where I lost it but almost immediately spotted another one a bit further along. In the end I saw four or five males, all looking a bit worse for wear, and a couple of fresher looking females. These were all a bit lively and I couldn't get close enough, not that I tried too hard as I had already taken a load of decent photos of Adonis Blues over the past few days.

I then went back across the footpath to the car park, seeing a few Speckled Wood and a single Comma along the hedgerows. There was also a deer that watched me carefully until it figured I had got too close and made a run for it.



That's as close as you're getting – Corfe Castle 05.09.2019



A final shot of the castle in the afternoon sun, taken from by West Street car park 05.09.019

That is the last report from our trip to Dorset.

We were leaving for home in the morning (Friday) and seeing the forecast for dull cloud and showers we decided to make a move straight home after breakfast.

In total, numbers of some butterfly species were not as high as I have seen in some previous years, but I reckon the recent dry summers can partly account for this. It was also quite breezy on most days and on the more exposed sites I would not be surprised if some were simply keeping their heads down out of the wind.

On the other hand, including the stop at Fontmell Down on the previous Sunday, a total of 20 species were seen which is not bad for early September. Also, there were plenty of Painted Ladies still hanging around and Small Whites were appearing everywhere in large numbers, plus the Hummingbird Hawk Moths of which I reckon I saw at least half a dozen.

All in all, another cracking few days spent in one of my favourite parts of the country 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Sep-19 08:15 PM GMT

Another cracking report Neil I'm just sorry that it's the last in the series – but a fitting finale with brilliantly captured HHM, blazing blues and Coppers including a less garish than usual individual 😄😄👍 Cracking! 😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 13-Sep-19 08:42 PM GMT

Excellent reportage, Neil–up there with your usual standard! I'm pleased you found your way to Fontmell Down for the first time, as it is a great site. Round the back, at the far end from the airfield, there are usually lots of autumn ladies tresses as well.

I'm particularly impressed with your Adonis pictures, and your ability to get all the wings in focus–something I struggle to do. You certainly seem to have had good weather overall, if not quite so good as other years. You are right about the Friday, we arrived to an overcast and damp day. Love your hummingbird hawk moth pictures, something were hoping to see, but failed to find.

Cheers.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Sep-19 10:22 PM GMT

Some lovely species in that last post, Neil, but that sequence of images of the Hummingbird Hawkmoth is almost peerless. How on earth did you manage that?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Sep-19 07:50 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Another cracking report Neil I'm just sorry that it's the last in the series – but a fitting finale with brilliantly captured HHM, blazing blues and Coppers including a less garish than usual individual 😄😄👍 Cracking! 😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. The days down there passed all too quickly.

essexbuzzard wrote:

Excellent reportage, Neil–up there with your usual standard! I'm pleased you found your way to Fontmell Down for the first time, as it is a great site. Round the back, at the far end from the airfield, there are usually lots of autumn ladies tresses as well.

I'm particularly impressed with your Adonis pictures, and your ability to get all the wings in focus–something I struggle to do. You certainly seem to have had good weather overall, if not quite so good as other years. You are right about the Friday, we arrived to an overcast and damp day. Love your hummingbird hawk moth pictures, something were hoping to see, but failed to find.

Cheers.

Thanks Mark. As we were leaving I wondered if you were still heading down there. Having just seen your PD, now I know, glad you saw some nice butterflies.

David M wrote:

Some lovely species in that last post, Neil, but that sequence of images of the Hummingbird Hawkmoth is almost peerless. How on earth did you manage that?

Thanks David, too be honest I think there was a lot of luck involved. I put the D3400 on sports mode and just clicked away.

After the comments from myself, Bugboy and Dave about how dry Durlston looked, I had a look back through my photos from previous years and found the two below, both taken looking up The Gully, which show quite a difference.

The first one was taken at the beginning of September 2015, which was also the last time I saw Lulworth Skippers into September st Durlston.



Looking up The Gully at Durlston – 01.09.2015

The second one was taken from a similar viewpoint in 2018. It was looking the same this year.



A much drier Gully – 05.09.2018

Saturday 14th September.

I was going to pop out to one of my local spots on Saturday afternoon but an improtu visit by our daughter and grand-daughter changed my plans. We walked down to the local park where I managed to have a quick look around the bit of rough ground to one side. Lots of Small Whites were flying about plus a couple of Speckled Wood and singles of Red Admiral and Painted Lady, none of which stayed still long enough for a photo.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Sep-19 10:34 PM GMT

Crikey that is a hell of a difference Neil 😬 Mind you if the habitat is drying up earlier in the year then the Lulworth Skipper could be better at dealing with it than some other species due to it's elongated and protracted flight period, fingers crossed 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Sep-19 11:00 PM GMT

I'm not surprised how arid Durlston was looking in 2018, but I wonder why it remains so this year? We haven't exactly had an absence of rainfall.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Sep-19 08:49 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Crikey that is a hell of a difference Neil 😬 Mind you if the habitat is drying up earlier in the year then the Lulworth Skipper could be better at dealing with it than some other species due to it's elongated and protracted flight period, fingers crossed 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

A hell of a difference indeed Wurzel. I must admit that, although I realised that it was looking dry last year and this, I didn't appreciate how much until I looked back at previous photos.

David M wrote:

I'm not surprised how arid Durlston was looking in 2018, but I wonder why it remains so this year? We haven't exactly had an absence of rainfall.

Not sure about that David. We have not had a drought like last year but there have been a few shorter periods of hot and dry weather. Conditions will obviously vary around the country but around my part of the midlands river levels are lower than usual for this time of year.

Friday 20th September

Being in work, I have not seen much this week, just a few Small Whites and a couple of Speckled Woods in the garden after work. I went round to my moms this afternoon and did a bit of work in her garden. Whilst there I was visited by a couple of Small Whites, a single Speckled Wood and also a Red Admiral, all of which just circled around a bit and then carried on their way.

September Moths.

Due to being away for the first week of the month and some recent clear and quite chilly nights, I have only put the moth trap out in the garden three times so far this month. Numbers have varied from 61 moths of 13 species on the night of Tuesday 10th up to 75 of 17 on Sunday 15th and then down to just 20 of 3 last night (Thursday 19th) which was clear and quite chilly.

Second generation of early summer species such as Light Emerald and Common Marbled Carpet are showing up. As with some butterflies these later broods can be quite a bit smaller than their earlier flying parents.



Light Emerald - Coverdale 10.09.2019



Common Marbled Carpet - Coverdale 15.09.2019

Autumn flying species such as Lunar Underwing are also now appearing. This is a very variable moth with a number of colour forms, four of which turned up last night.



Lunar Underwing - Coverdale 19.09.2019



Lunar Underwing - Coverdale 19.09.2019



Lunar Underwing - Coverdale 19.09.2019



Lunar Underwing, an attractive form I haven't seen before - Coverdale 19.09.2019

The good weather looks like it will last to tomorrow so hopefully I will be able to get out for a bit although this is now the time of year that it usually winds down around here.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 21-Sep-19 07:57 PM GMT

Those shots of the Humming-bird Hawk moth are the best I have ever seen, Neil. 🍷 Extraordinary. Taken with the excellent earlier shot you managed of one at rest, it's quite difficult to reconcile them as being the same species. There's enough material there to illustrate a monograph! 😊

And as for the dryness of the landscape – it hasn't rained significantly in my part of the world since way back in August sometime. I was speaking to someone the other day who said that 20% of all the rain here in 2019 so far fell on one single day in June. 😞😞 Lawns are brown, plants are withering and there is premature leaf fall from trees. I suspect that the Midlands may be similarly affected too, at least to some extent, and certainly the south coast seems to be.

All change from tonight, mind! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Sep-19 09:31 PM GMT

Wow! There's quite some dimorphism amongst those Lunar Underwings, Neil. I guess with temperatures dropping you will probably start paying more attention to moths over the next couple of weeks?

I look forward to seeing a few more.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Sep-19 10:28 PM GMT

Those different forms of the Lunar Underwing are really interesting Neil 😊. Normally dimorphism is a small 'add on' or a slight variation on a theme but some of those are almost totally different patterns 😞 Is there a single diagnostic feature that they all share or do you have to learn to recognise all the forms? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 22-Sep-19 10:44 PM GMT

That a fascinating (and a little worrying) comparison of the differences over there years at Durlston. This year is by far the latest I've visited there, don't think I'll be making that mistake again if I'm looking for Lulworths.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Sep-19 07:57 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

...Those shots of the Humming-bird Hawk moth are the best I have ever seen, Neil. 🍷 Extraordinary. Taken with the excellent earlier shot you managed of one at rest, it's quite difficult to reconcile them as being the same species. There's enough material there to illustrate a monograph! 😊
...

Thanks Dave, I was pleased with the HBHM photos I had taken earlier in the week but those ones really put the cherry on the cake for me 😊

millerd wrote:

...All change from tonight, mind!...

Indeed, we had a right soaking here all day Sunday and it is lashing down again as I write this.

David M wrote:

...There's quite some dimorphism amongst those Lunar Underwings, Neil...

Wurzel wrote:

...Those different forms of the Lunar Underwing are really interesting Neil 😊. Normally dimorphism is a small 'add on' or a slight variation on a theme but some of those are almost totally different patterns 🤔...!

Pedant alert 😊 Strictly speaking, the Lunar Underwings are exhibiting polymorphism as they come in a variety of forms, not dimorphism which refers to two distinct forms (di = two), for example, sexual dimorphism between males and female of a species or seasonal dimorphism between spring and summer broods.

Wurzel wrote:

...Is there a single diagnostic feature that they all share or do you have to learn to recognise all the forms? 😊...!

The photos do not show it but the hindwings have a 'crescent moon' shaped mark which is diagnostic. Other than that there are some cross lines and spots on the forewings which are fairly consistent in all colour forms.

bugboy wrote:

That a fascinating (and a little worrying) comparison of the differences over there years at Durlston. This year is by far the latest I've visited there, don't think I'll be making that mistake again if I'm looking for Lulworths.

Yes, I fear that the way things are going with our weather lately, then the days of Lulworth Skippers lasting into September at Durlston could quite possibly be a thing of the past.

Saturday 21st September.

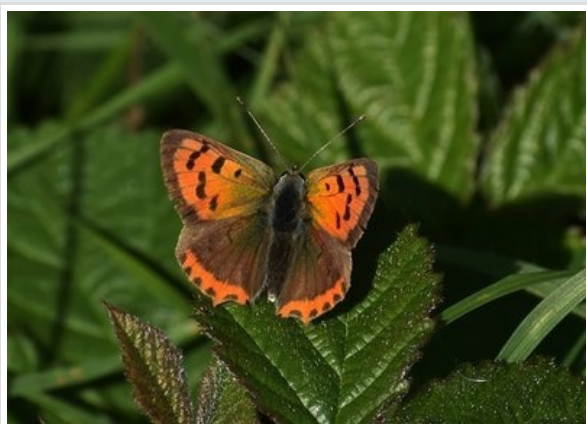
An hour around my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull on Saturday afternoon under clear blue skies and temperatures in the low twenties produced just a dozen butterflies and nearly half of those were Small Whites that didn't stop still.

The rest consisted of a couple of Speckled Wood and a single Comma along the hedges...



Comma - Castle Hills 21.09.2019

A Single Male Small Copper hanging on to his territory in a corner of one field...



Small Copper - Castle Hills 21.09.2019

and a Red Admiral and Large White on the few remaining flowers on the wild buddlieas here.



Red Admiral and incoming Large White – Castle Hills 21.09.2019



Large White – Castle Hills 21.09.2019



Red Admiral – Castle Hills 21.09.2019

Another Red Admiral was seen on the way back to the car but all in all a quiet afternoon that brought home the fact that the season is just about over here. Of course, there are always a few vannesids hanging on and Speckled Wood usually last into October, but with the change in the weather this week, I am not expecting much else here this year.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Sep-19 10:33 PM GMT

"Strictly speaking, the Lunar Underwings are exhibiting polymorphism " 🤔 Opps, mind you it's all Greek/Latin to me – being from Dorset even English is somewhat of a foreign tongue 😊😄
Cracking shots Neil especially the 'incoming' 😄 Was that a 'Sports Mode' special? 😄😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Sep-19 11:28 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

..all in all a quiet afternoon that brought home the fact that the season is just about over here.

Of course, there are always a few vannesids hanging on and Speckled Wood usually last into October, but with the change in the weather this week, I am not expecting much else here this year.

Tell me about it, Neil. Things were developing nicely until the non-stop storms arrived on Sunday. I dread to think what damage it's done to the butterfly populations and it's likely to be several days yet before I have chance to find out. 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Sep-19 08:46 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

...Cracking shots Neil especially the 'incoming' 😊 Was that a 'Sports Mode' special? 😊😊 ...

Not this time Wurzel, the dial was on 'A' (my usual setting with the D3400) and that was just a lucky shot.

David M wrote:

...Things were developing nicely until the non-stop storms arrived on Sunday. I dread to think what damage it's done to the butterfly populations and it's likely to be several days yet before I have chance to find out. 😞

Hopefully they will tuck themselves away to sit it out but having said that I reckon this week has pretty much seen the end of my season around here, which is pretty much on time for my patch.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-Oct-19 07:53 PM GMT

Some proper Autumn weather lately with lashings of rain last weekend and earlier in the week and when it eased off we had some clear and cold nights with temperatures dropping down to 4 or 5 degrees by the time I left for work in the mornings.

With the nights being either wet and windy or clear and cold I had not put the moth trap out for a while until last night when some cloud cover led to it staying a bit milder and the wind eased off a bit although we did have some overnight showers of rain.

I ended up with 30 moths of 10 species, all macros apart from a couple of Light Brown Apple Moths and a single *Tachystola acroxantha*. The most numerous are still Large Yellow Underwings (9) followed by Lunar Underwing (6) and Lesser Yellow Underwing (4) with the remainder consisting of Common Marbled Carpet (3), Red-green Carpet (1) and Setaceous Hebrew Character (1).



An attractive form of Common Marbled Carpet - Coverdale 03.10.2019



A nice fresh Red-green Carpet – Coverdale 03.10.2019

New for Year Autumn species were Black Rustic (2) and Blair's Shoulder-knot (1).



Blair's Shoulder-knot – Coverdale 03.10.219

For a 'black' moth the Black Rustic can be quite attractive when fresh with a mix of shades reminiscent of the underside of a Peacock.



Black Rustic – Coverdale 03.10.2019



Black Rustic – Coverdale 03.10.2019

It looks like we have more bands of rain heading our way over the next few days, oh well! I suppose it is Autumn. With the long dark nights rapidly approaching it will soon be time to start thinking about what I want to catch up with next year.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Oct-19 08:44 PM GMT

As much as I stare at the Blair's Shoulder-knot I still can't see it as being a Tony 😊 Cracking set of moths – that Black Rustic is, as you say, beautifully marked like a Peacock 😊 Stunning 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Oct-19 03:23 PM GMT

With ever more autumnal weather drawing in, it's nice to be able to visit your PD to see the beautiful moths that have no fear of the month of October!

The Red-Green Carpet is undoubtedly the pick of the bunch.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Oct-19 08:01 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I will not be able to see another Blair's Shoulder-knot again without picturing that Spitting Image puppet of Tony B with the insane grin 😊😊

Thanks David, there are some cracking autumn moths about including quite a few that I have yet to see in my garden, but you never know what might get blown in.

Sunday 6th October

"Of course, there are always a few Vanessa's hanging on and Speckled Wood usually last into October"

My words from a couple of posts back and they proved to be prophetic on Sunday.

Following on from a miserable grey Saturday and some heavy overnight rain, Sunday was the better day of the weekend with some pleasant sunny spells although it was still quite blustery.

Just after mid-day I was in our kitchen and happened to look out of the window and spotted a Red Admiral flitting about one of the buddleias that had a few flowers still on it. I grabbed the camera and managed a few shots before the sun went in and it flew off over the fence into next door.

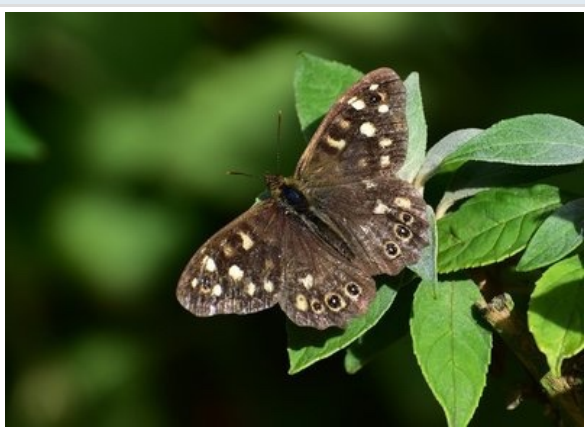


Red Admiral – Coverdale 06.10.2019



Red Admiral – Coverdale 06.10.2019

A bit later in the afternoon I was pottering about in the garden and keeping an eye out to see if the Red Admiral would return, which it didn't. At this time of year, with the sun now being much lower in the sky, most of the garden is now in the shade for most of the day and I was wondering if the RA would be the last butterfly I would see in the garden this year when I spotted a rather worn male Speckled Wood flitting about in one of the few sunny spots.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 06.10.2019

Just the two butterflies but an uplifting sight, especially after some of the weather we have had recently and quite possibly my last butterflies of this season.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Oct-19 10:33 PM GMT

"I will not be able to see another Blair's Shoulder-knot again without picturing that Spitting Image puppet of Tony B with the insane grin 😏😏"...glad to have been of service 😊😊

That is a lush looking Red Admiral Neil 🍷🍷 – the one's I've seen recently are all looking worse for wear – it's getting to that stage of the season 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Oct-19 09:00 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

..Just the two butterflies but an uplifting sight, especially after some of the weather we have had recently and quite possibly my last butterflies of this season.

Please don't say that, Neil. I'm already developing my annual SAD.

If the sun comes out and temperatures reach 13c, I'm sure there will be more about prior to the first November frosts taking their toll.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-Oct-19 08:55 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

...it's getting to that stage of the season 😞...

Indeed Wurzel, in fact it has well and truly got there now 😞

David M wrote:

...If the sun comes out and temperatures reach 13c, I'm sure there will be more about prior to the first November frosts taking their toll.

The sun has come out a couple of time this past week David...When I was at work. I haven't seen any more butterflies since.

Sunday 13th October.

The weekend was truly horrible one here with incessant rain on Saturday and Sunday being a bit better only in the sense that the rain was not so heavy and more of a drizzle under leaden grey skies.

With Autumn well and truly upon us, there have been increasing numbers of birds coming into the garden with the species that I don't see much of through the summer starting to show up again.

In previous years I have seen the occasional Nuthatch in the garden but they have been visiting regularly this Autumn.



A soggy looking Nuthatch – Coverdale 13.10.2019

I have mentioned before that Great Spotted Woodpeckers are regular visitors...



Great Spotted Woodpecker - Coverdale 13.10.2019

but they usually go for the peanuts or fat blocks and I have never seen one taking black sunflower seed before.



Great Spotted Woodpecker - Coverdale 13.10.2019

As usual, the photos above were taken through the window from the comfort of my back room.

Friday 18th October

The weather here this past week has been mostly wet and windy with some drier spells but the occasional sun has failed to make much impression against the chilly breeze.

This morning (Friday) the sun came out again whilst I was at work but with stunning inevitability as soon as I finished at midday, it started to rain.

A couple more photos of a few of the birds in the garden this afternoon.



Goldfinch and Coal Tit - Coverdale 18.10.2019



Goldfinch and Nuthatch – Coverdale 18.10.2019

Despite the mostly grotty weather recently, I have put the moth trap out a couple of times but numbers have now dropped considerably with nothing special turning up.

The best moth I have seen recently was a Herald Moth that I found on the kitchen door a couple of nights ago. This species hibernates as an adult and can sometimes be found in the company of Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks hibernating in groups in caves or tunnels and old bunkers. I reckon this one had come in from my garage which has a door into the kitchen.

I took a couple of photos and released it back outside to find somewhere a bit more appropriate to spend the winter.



Herald Moth – Coverdale 16.10.2019



Herald Moth – Coverdale 16.10.2019

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 18-Oct-19 11:37 PM GMT

The Herald is one of my favourite moths, it's been years though since I've seen one. Great shots in your garden too 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 19-Oct-19 12:03 PM GMT

Lovely Bird Shots Neill, especially the one's with the Nut Thatch and the Wood Pecker, I see the Gold Finch quite a lot, I've been told they're having a rough time with some kind of illness, my Gold Finch have been okay but some people have seen them with lumps on their head, it's good to see your GF are okay, let's hope it's not too serious an illness 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-Oct-19 06:03 PM GMT

Great birding shots Neil and I love the Herald – the only problem I have of this species is that it seems to herald the end of the season 😊 mind you only another 4 months til the new one begins 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Oct-19 07:52 PM GMT

It's almost part of my seasonal calendar these days to acknowledge that Autumn has arrived when you start posting more moths than butterflies, Neil. Equally, when you begin to concentrate on birds I can be confident that winter isn't too far away!!

That said, I enjoy your images. Love the Nuthatch and the Herald moth is a real beauty.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 25-Oct-19 08:26 PM GMT

Thanks Bugboy, the Herald is one of my favourites too, one of a number of species that bring back memories of finding them in my younger days. I don't see so many these days but usually get a couple to the trap each year.

Thanks Goldie, I don't usually get many Goldfinches in my garden, just the occasional one or two. I see far more of them when I am out and about around here.

Cheers Wurzel, ah yes! but as an adult hibernator the Herald can also herald the beginning of the next season 😊

Sounds like I am getting predictable David 😊 Glad you like the images though, the moths and birds certainly help when the butterflies have vanished.

Sunday 20th October.

Again, the Sunday was the better day of the weekend and dry enough to spend a bit more time pottering about in the garden during which I disturbed another old favourite moth, an Angle Shades.



Angle Shades – Coverdale 20.10.2019



Angle Shades - Coverdale 20.10.2019

This common and widespread species has two or sometimes three overlapping broods and can be recorded in every month of the year. It's distinctive markings and resting posture provide great camouflage amongst vegetation and I would probably have overlooked this one if it hadn't moved.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-Oct-19 08:31 PM GMT

"...but as an adult hibernator the Herald can also herald the beginning of the next season 😊 a great positive spin Neil and with it blowing a hooley outside and the rain pouring down much needed - I'll drink to that 😊😄 Lovely looking moff that Angle Shades 😊🍷"

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Oct-19 11:19 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...dry enough to spend a bit more time pottering about in the garden during which I disturbed another old favourite moth, an Angle Shades.

Quite rightly a favourite, Neil. It's a beautiful insect, very much the archetypal moth with its camouflage and angular appearance.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-Nov-19 09:14 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. A calmer but colder week but looks like the winds are picking up again for the weekend.

Thanks David. Both the Herald and Angle Shades are amongst a small number of moths that always bring back memories of finding them when I was a nipper.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 11-Nov-19 07:47 PM GMT

With the weather being either cold, wet or windy here and often all of these together, I have not seen any more butterflies, although there have been a few stragglers reported from around the midlands on brighter days when I have been stuck in work.

The weather has not been much good for running the garden moth trap either with the couple of times that I have lit up recently producing just a handful of moths. These included NFYs of Feathered Thorn and November Moth and a few Common Marbled Carpets, all of which are typical for this time of year.



Feathered Thorn – Coverdale 23.10.2019



November Moth – Coverdale 01.11.2019



A particularly dark form of Common Marbled Carpet – 01.11.2019

As usual, I spent some time over the weekend watching the birds from the comfort of the back room and took a few photos though the window,



Don't often see Nuthatches on the ground – Coverdale 09.11.2019



Great Spotted Woodpecker - Coverdale 09.11.2019



Half a dozen Blue Tits and a Great Tit - Coverdale 09.11.2019



Great, Coal and Blue Tits - Coverdale 09.11.2019

I must try and start doing a look back at my season soon.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 11-Nov-19 10:41 PM GMT

Beautiful Nut Hatch, Neil. I get regular visits from them.
As well as a daily invasion of Long Tailed its, which spend ages flitting around in my trees.
Gold Crests should visit soon.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 12-Nov-19 10:08 PM GMT

Nice nuthatch. They are common enough near me, but I have never had one in the garden.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Nov-19 10:24 PM GMT

That is a cracking shot of the Nuthatch Neil – the blue back really shows up well. I also really like the expression on the Woodpecker as well 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 13-Nov-19 11:59 AM GMT

~~[quote]~~.Don't often see Nuthatches on the ground

I've only ever seen them on the ground when they've been briefly under the bird feeder to pick up fallen titbits.

This is a bird I'm more used to seeing upside down so well done on getting that image, Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 13-Nov-19 04:19 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I saw a funny sight yesterday but too late to get my camera for it, I've had lots of Squirrels in my garden lately after the nuts, but I was amazed when this cat suddenly sprang up the tree and started to chase the Squirrel all along the fence even into a tree, of course the cat never caught the Squirrel but it's the first time I've seen that happen 😄 love your bird shots Neil, I'm keeping an eye out for that cat now in case it gets a bird. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Nov-19 08:29 PM GMT

trevor wrote:

Beautiful Nut Hatch, Neil. I get regular visits from them.
As well as a daily invasion of Long Tailed its, which spend ages flitting around in my trees.
Gold Crests should visit soon.

All the best,
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor, I get Nuthatches most years but only usually the odd one or two. This year they are regular visitors with often two or three around the feeders at the same time.

essexbuzzard wrote:

Nice nuthatch. They are common enough near me, but I have never had one in the garden.

Thanks Mark, I am actually seeing them more often in the garden than out and about this year.

Wurzel wrote:

That is a cracking shot of the Nuthatch Neil – the blue back really shows up well. I also really like the expression on the Woodpecker as well 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, I think that is the first time I have ever had a top down view of a Nuthatch like that.

David M wrote:

[quote]..Don't often see Nuthatches on the ground

I've only ever seen them on the ground when they've been briefly under the bird feeder to pick up fallen titbits.

This is a bird I'm more used to seeing upside down so well done on getting that image, Neil.

Likewise David, my usual sightings are of them at any angle but upright. In my garden they never go to the ground under the feeders. I watched that one exploring the cracks in the concrete path up by the house.

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, I saw a funny sight yesterday but too late to get my camera for it, I've had lots of Squirrels in my garden lately after the nuts, but I was amazed when this cat suddenly sprang up the tree and started to chase the Squirrel all along the fence even into a tree, of course the cat never caught the Squirrel but it's the first time I've seen that happen 😊 love your bird shots Neil, I'm keeping an eye out for that cat now in case it gets a bird. Goldie 😊

Probably a good job the cat never caught the Squirrel Goldie, they can be vicious when cornered. I saw a Squirrel turn on a cat a few years ago in a friend's garden and the cat's owner had to take it to the vets to get the bites treated.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Nov-19 11:07 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

....my usual sightings are of them at any angle but upright. In my garden they never go to the ground under the feeders. I watched that one exploring the cracks in the concrete path up by the house.

Been watching a few today, Neil, and they have almost all been edging down the trunk of a tree, beak downwards!

I'm determined to catch one on the ground like in your image...may have to exercise some patience though! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 19-Nov-19 03:59 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the Birds Neil, I don't get Nut Thatch in my garden, I've to go to Penn Flash to see them more's the pity 😊

That cat keeps coming back, I put some Cheese out for the Birds and it seems that's what it's after, I caught it picking the cheese up off the flags 😊 I keep watching now in the mornings and there's certainly less Bird life about, they do arrive in the afternoon though, it was minus 2 last night and this morning I thought it'd snowed it was so white every where, I think I've some very wise Birds round my Garden 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Nov-19 07:55 PM GMT

The Nuthatches have been visiting regularly recently David but that is still the only time I have ever seen one on the ground.

I find the birds in my garden keep regular timetables Goldie, loads early in the morning, then again around midday, and then loads again later in the afternoon with sometimes very few in between. It is just like they have their own breakfast, dinner, and tea times 😊

Looking back at 2019 Part 1 – Spring.

With the dark nights and recent cold, wet weather, it is time to look back at my 2019 season and begin with a reminder that the better days of spring will eventually return to cheer us up.

As always, my thoughts are based on my observations from my local spots around Solihull and various trips further afield around the country. Other people's experiences in other parts of the country may well differ quite a bit from mine.

We had a fairly average winter in my part of the midlands, not particularly cold but not particularly mild either. We didn't see much snow although at times it seemed that we were missing it when everyone else outside of a radius of twenty miles or so around us was getting some.

There was a distinct improvement in the weather in late February as late winter merged into what was appearing to be an early spring. Although the mornings were still cold, the last week of the month saw some warm sunny weather develop during the afternoons which tempted me out to see if any hibernating butterflies had yet woken up. This was still a full month earlier than I would normally expect to find anything flying around here but two of my local spots produced a couple each of **Small Tortoiseshells** and **Commas** which were the first ever February butterflies I have ever seen here.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane Solihull 22.02.2019



Comma - Wagon Lane Solihull 22.02.2019

After these early sightings the weather deteriorated again, and it was not until late March that I had the chance to get out again. This was much more in line with when I would normally expect to start seeing butterflies around here and visits to my usual local spots produced good numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and a few Commas. The number of Small Tortoiseshells was encouraging given the lack of sightings in the previous summer, although I had read some reports from as early as July of quite a few being found tucked up in sheds and outhouses. This had led to a lot of speculation that they had gone into hibernation earlier than usual due to the hot summer and the numbers now appearing seemed to back this up.

By the end of March, the Tortoiseshells and Commas had been joined by **Peacocks** and as with the Small Torts I was seeing more of these flying than I had seen the previous summer. Some sites produced more Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks in one visit than I had seen of either species all summer in 2018. Commas were not quite as numerous as previous years, but a couple were usually seen at most spots.



Peacock - Bickenhill 24.03.2019

My first **Speckled Wood** was spotted in a local park on 29th March and was followed by the first in my garden the following day, and then numbers increased steadily at most places through April.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 30.03.2019

Orange-tips also started appearing during the last week of March and these seemed to have a good year with plenty flying though April and into May.



Orange-tip – Castle Hills Solihull 30.03.2019



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 23.04.2019

By early April, **Holly Blues** were showing up although I saw these regularly over the next couple of months, they did not seem to be as numerous as the previous few springs.



Holly Blue - Coverdale 11.05.2019

I saw a couple of **Small Whites** in late March and these were joined in early April by a few **Green-veined Whites** and then in mid-April by the first **Large Whites** although all three of these would remain thin on the ground though the spring. In fact, although at some spots there often seemed to be quite a few whites flying, a closer look proved most of them to be female Orange-tips.



Small White - Coverdale 06.05.2019



Green-veined White - Coverdale 11.05.2019



Large White – Coverdale 05.05.2019

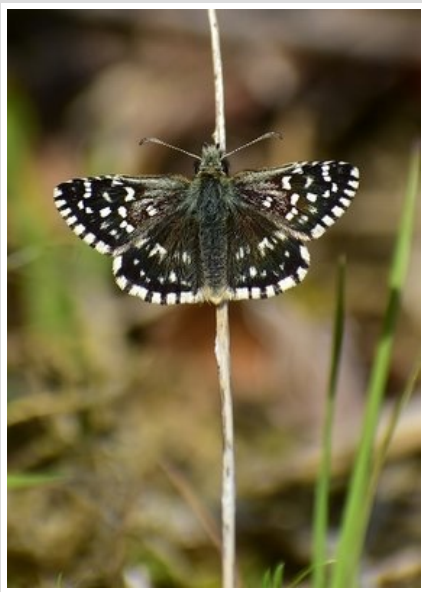
I had also spotted my first patrolling male **Brimstone** in late March and these were seen regularly through April and May along with the occasional female.

A visit to Ryton Wood Meadows on April 24th on what turned into a cool and cloudy afternoon was my first trip of the year outside of Solihull and amongst the few butterflies braving the conditions were my first **Small Copper** and **Green Hairstreak** of the year.

A trip down to Bishops Hill in South Warwickshire on May Day Bank Holiday Monday, on another day that turned cool and cloudy, produced my first **Dingy Skippers** of the year although nothing else was seen in the gloomy conditions that met our arrival. A return trip the following weekend in much better weather was far more successful with loads more Dingy Skippers seen along with a few **Grizzled Skippers** and a couple of Green Hairstreaks. Patrolling Brimstones and Orange-tips were also much in evidence here along with single examples of my first **Common Blue**, **Small Blue** and **Brown Argus** of the year.



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Green Hairstreak – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019



Brown Argus – Bishops Hill 12.05.2019

My first trip of the year out of Warwickshire was on May 15th when I went down to Gloucestershire to spend a morning at Strawberry Banks followed by the afternoon at Prestbury Hill. The visit to Strawberry Banks was to see Marsh Fritillary as this is my nearest site for these, although this was the first time I had actually visited this lovely little reserve. A few years ago, I had seen reports of an explosion of Marsh Fritillary numbers there but the population crashed the following year and has still not recovered to previous levels. I believe that this is a known phenomenon with this species and I read with interest similar reports from Chambers Farm Wood this year, where it seems that there had been a similar population explosion. Anyway, I saw half a dozen or so Marsh Fritillaries, most of them fresh looking and I believe it was still early in their flight period here.



Marsh Fritillary – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

There were also plenty of Dingy Skippers at Strawberry Banks along with a few Common Blues, Small Blues, Small Coppers and **Small Heaths**, all of which were also flying at Prestbury Hill in the afternoon.



Small Heath – Strawberry Banks 15.05.2019

My main reason for going to Prestbury Hill was, as always, to see Duke of Burgundy. I had seen reports of good numbers flying a few days previously but by the time I got there on what had turned into a hot afternoon, I only managed to find around half a dozen, mostly showing varying degrees of wear. I reckon I had left it a little late to see DoB (again) at this site and from some reports that I saw they seemed to have a rather short flight period there this year.



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 15.05.2019

By the end of May, Common Blues, Small Coppers and Small Heaths were all flying at my usual local spots which is pretty much in line with average timings around here.



Common Blue – Castle Hills Solihull 25.05.2019



Small Copper – Castle Hills Solihull 25.05.2019

To summarise, after a bit of unseasonably warm weather in February, March had failed to live up to the early promise and a couple of weeks of cool and cloudy weather held things back a bit. The weather perked up again later in March and early April with the rest of April and into May being a typical spring mixture of cloud/rain/sun, often all on the same day. Some butterfly species were flying in good numbers with Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks being the early stars of the show, joined by Orange-tips a bit later. On the other hand, the three common whites were well down in numbers around my patch, as were Holly Blues.

Having missed most of the fritillaries in 2018, I was hoping to catch up with some of these in 2019 but so far had only managed to see Marsh Fritillaries. Due to my usual constraints on available time I had already missed Pearl-bordered Fritillaries again (although I believe they had a good year in the Wyre Forest) but with a bit of luck I would get the chance to see some of the others as we went into summer.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Nov-19 10:22 PM GMT

A fantastic series of images Neil 😊 That Small Tort has some cracking blue triangles and the Marsh Frit absolutely lush that contrasting brown and pale yellow 🍷🍷🍷

"Due to my usual constraints on available time I had already missed Pearl-bordered Fritillaries again..." It is tricky trying to fit everything in 😊 still it's always good to leave something for the next year 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 22-Nov-19 10:35 PM GMT

Some great images to brighten up a dreary day 😊. I need to start my own retrospective review of 2019!

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 26-Nov-19 06:12 AM GMT

Lovely sequence, Neil, redolent of hope and anticipation for spring 2020.

That's a very striking Dingy Skipper and your Green Hairstreak has the chunkiest hindwing 'streak' I think I've ever seen. Lovely specimen.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 27-Nov-19 09:31 AM GMT

I agree, lovely sequence Neill, especially like the Grizzled Skipper 🍷🍷 maybe I'll one this next Spring 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Nov-19 07:34 PM GMT

Indeed Wurzel. In fact these days I set myself a few targets each year and don't even try for some others. I work on a sort of rotation around the species...if that makes sense 😊

Thanks Bugboy, looking back through my photos for these reviews is a great way to spend these dark nights.

Thanks David, looking back like this always cheers me up during these dark nights 😊.

I hope you get to see one Goldie. Cracking little butterfly but very quick and a sod to follow in flight.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 29-Nov-19 10:36 PM GMT

Enjoying your review of the season, Neil, and hearing about places I haven't been to lately (like Ryton). Good to hear both the spring skippers are doing okay at Bishops Hill as well. I also particularly like that creamy variation on a Marsh Fritillary – they are so variable and that one is more subtly coloured than some. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Dec-19 07:51 PM GMT

Thanks Dave 😊. I was particularly taken with that Marsh Fritillary myself. Like you say, a very variable species but I've not seen many with that yellowish tone before.

Looking back at 2019 Part 2 – Into Summer.

As we passed from late spring into early summer, the beginning of June continued the theme of mixed weather although the balance seemed to shift to more cloud and rain. Numbers of typical spring butterflies were now dwindling and as yet the common early summer species had yet to appear locally. Over the past few years I have read a few comments on UKB about a lack of a 'June Gap'. This may well be true in areas which are fortunate to have some premium species close by, but my local spots (by which I mean within the boundaries of Solihull) are relatively species poor with just the common and widespread species to be found. This means that I still see a definite gap between the spring species fading and the summer ones appearing. This does not mean that I don't see any butterflies at all as there are always a few late spring butterflies still hanging on and the first Large Skippers often start appearing around now.

Of course, this gap can be filled by travelling, and I often choose to have a few days away around this time to catch up with species from further afield. This year we went north again to stay for a few days in the Arnsdale & Silverdale area. We drove up on June 9th and as is often the case when travelling up there, we arrived with plenty of time to call in at Warton Crag where I soon managed to catch up with two of my targets for the trip. The first of these was Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, of which I saw half a dozen or so, all fresh males. A couple of fresh male Northern Brown Argus were also seen which ticked the second target.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Warton Crag 09.06.2019

The following day (June 10th) we took a drive up to Irton Fell where I saw approx. 40-50 Mountain Ringlets, some of which were already looking a bit faded and worn.



Mountain Ringlet – Irton Fell 10.06.2019

On the way back to our B&B we called in at Meathop Moss where I saw my fourth and last target for the trip, Large Heath. These seemed to be flying in good numbers when the sun came out, although the very wet moss meant that sticking to the board walk was essential and meant that only a small proportion of those flying could be observed.



Large Heath – Meathop Moss 10.06.2019

Latterbarrow LNR, across the road from Meathop Moss, produced a few more NBA, still all males and a female SPBF.



Norther Brown Argus (salmacis) – Latterbarrow 10.06.2019

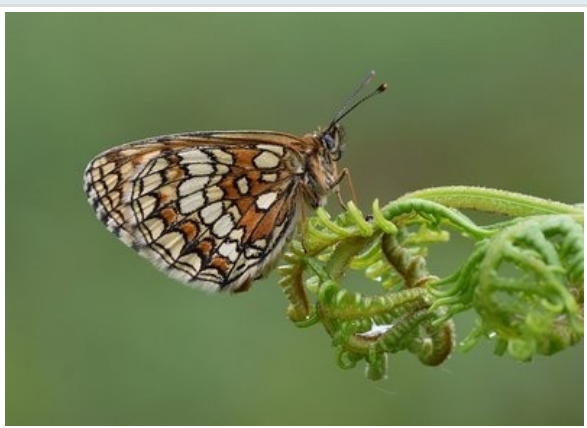
Latterbarrow also produced my first Large Skippers and Meadow Browns of the year. I nearly always see the first examples of both species during one of our trips away as they seem to appear nearly everywhere a few days before they do at home.

Back home, the Large Skippers and Meadow Browns were flying by the middle of the month and were then joined by the first Summer brood Small Tortoiseshells. Also, summer brood Speckled Woods usually start emerging around here sometime in June. This year I saw the first fresh summer male in my garden at the end of May although numbers didn't build until the second half of June.



Large Skipper – Bickenhill Solihull 16.06.2019

I mentioned in part 1 of my look back that I was keen to catch up with some fritillaries this year, having missed most of them in 2018, and so our second trip of the year saw us heading down to The Heddon Valley in late June. On the way down, we stopped off at Haddon Hill but our arrival there was met with low cloud and rain. Despite the unpromising conditions I managed to find a single roosting Heath Fritillary and took what are my best underside shots of this species to date.



Heath Fritillary – Haddon Hill 23.06.2019

We had seen a lot of dull and cloudy weather and a fair bit of rain so far in June, so it was a relief to get some dry weather for our stay in the Heddon Valley, although there was still a fair bit of cloud about and temperatures were not particularly high. I saw reasonably good numbers of both High Brown and Dark Green Fritillaries although neither were quite as numerous as I have seen here in previous visits. Having said that the examples of both species that I saw were mostly males in good condition, so they were possibly still to reach peak numbers.



Dark Green Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

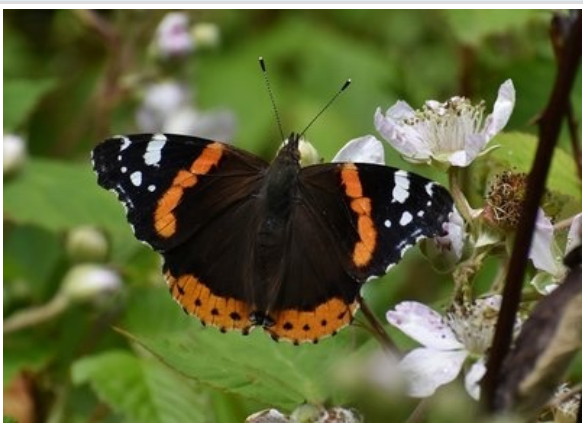


High Brown Fritillary – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

I also saw a few fresh male Silver-washed Fritillaries, my first of the year, but no females this time. A few Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were also still hanging on there meaning that, after missing most of the fritillaries in 2018, I was now seeing four species in one day. Meadow Browns were easily the most numerous species seen in the Heddon Valley but I only saw a couple of Ringlets, unlike previous visits when they would be lots of them everywhere. This lack of Ringlets, along with the fresh fritillaries, gave me the impression that that the season was now running a little later compared to the past few years.

Earlier in June, I had seen reports of large numbers of Painted Ladies coming in along the east coast and had seen further reports as they made their way across the country. My first encounters with this influx was in the Heddon Valley when I saw a few faded examples on our first day. Numbers increased dramatically the following day when they became the second most numerous butterfly seen (behind Meadow Brown) with many of these looking in better condition.

I also saw my first Red Admirals of the year down there with a good dozen or so seen. Unlike more favoured areas, I don't see these in the spring with my first ones usually turning up on one of my trips in May or June.



Red Admiral – Heddon Valley 24.06.2019

An overnight stop not far from Daneway Banks on the way back home gave me the chance to catch up with Large Blue.



Large Blue – Daneway Banks 26.06.2019

This was my first visit to Daneway and although I managed to get a few open wing shots in the late afternoon when we arrived, the following day was the hottest one of the year so far and most of the Large Blues soon disappeared into hiding, although I did manage to find three mating pairs during the day. Daneway Banks also produced my first Marbled Whites of the year along with a nice selection of other species.



Marbled White – Daneway Banks 26.06.2019

Back home again and going into early July, Ringlets and Marbled Whites had now appeared locally although neither of these appeared to be quite as numerous as in previous years.

A visit to Oversley Wood near Alcester on July 7th produced quite a few Silver-washed Fritillaries, lots of Ringlets and half a dozen or so Red Admirals. Also my first Small Skippers, Purple Hairstreaks and White Admiral for the year.



Silver-washed Fritillary – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019



My first ever open wing male Purple Hairstreak – Oversley Wood 07.07.2019

As July continued the weather threw plenty of cloudy days at us, especially at the weekends. Essex Skippers had now joined the Smalls although I got the impression that neither species had a particularly good year around here although from reports I have seen they did better elsewhere around Warwickshire.



Small Skipper – Langley Hall 12.07.2019

Gatekeepers were flying by mid July and these definitely had a better year around here this year than in 2018.



Gatekeeper – Castle Hills Solihull 21.07.2019

Despite having seen very few whites earlier in the year, the second half of July saw good numbers of Green-veined Whites appear with Large and Small joining them soon after. I suspect that, at least as far as the Small and Large Whites are concerned, the local emergence was boosted by immigrants. I don't believe that Green-veined Whites migrate like the other two species but given that they prefer damper habitats, perhaps the cool and wet weather in late spring and early summer had favoured this species.



Green-veined White – Coverdale 21.07.2019

It was also encouraging to see that the good numbers of Small Tortoiseshells seen in the spring had led to reasonable numbers of summer brood. Still not as many as years ago but certainly much better than the last couple of years.



Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills Solihull 21.07.2019

At the end of July, I took a long overdue run down the M40 to Aston Rowant. I had been surprised to see that my last visit there had been in 2014 which meant that it had been five years since I had last seen Silver-spotted Skippers. As mentioned earlier, I reckon that the season was now running a little later than the past couple of years and this was backed up by my visit here with the Silver-spotted Skippers appearing to be at the start of their flight period. I saw approx. 25-30 across the site which was far fewer than I have seen there before at this time of year but I saw reports of many more being seen during the following weeks.



Silver-spotted Skipper – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

There were also plenty of Chalk Hill Blues at Aston Rowant plus the usual supporting species, including many Peacocks which seemed to be taking over from the slightly earlier emerging Small Tortoiseshells.



Chalk Hill Blue – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019



Peacock – Aston Rowant 29.07.2019

I also saw half a dozen or so Dark Green Fritillaries still flying at Aston Rowant which surprised me a little as these have always been over when I visited there in the past. This also reinforced my thoughts about the season running a little later this year.

Having already mentioned the influx of Painted Ladies, these had been turning up in varying numbers at most places I visited through the summer. At the end of July and into August, I had the first of these in my garden since the invasion of 2009 with two or three on my buddleias on most days, often joined by a Red Admiral or two and the occasional Peacock.



Painted Lady – Coverdale 02.08.2019

I've waffled on a bit so I will stop there before continuing into late summer in part 3.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 02-Dec-19 08:34 PM GMT

You have a head start over me for those Northern species, Neil, by being at least 200 miles closer to them!. Great shots of the High Brown and Mountain Ringlet, and especially your wonderful open wing shot of that male Purple Hairstreak. 🍷 .

The Purple Hairstreak is one of my main targets for 2020.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

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Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 02-Dec-19 10:39 PM GMT

Fantastic stuff Neil – those Northern specialists are all worthy of a 🍷 for each and every one 🤪 cracking stuff and three gaps from my life list 🍷 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 04-Dec-19 03:54 PM GMT

What a joy to behold those summer species, Neil. 😊 Fabulous sequence, the pick of which for me is that impressive Large Heath. Never had one pose like that for me! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 04-Dec-19 04:47 PM GMT

Fantastic shots from Meathop and Latterbarrow Neil, have you tried Foulshaw Moss yet? it's right next door to Meathop and I find it's much easier to get shots of the Large Heath there as the board walk starts right near the car park and they've planted lots of shrubs etc which if your lucky the Large Heath some times land on 😊 I'm hoping to go back there next year, apart from any thing else I love going to Latterbarrow. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Dec-19 08:15 PM GMT

trevor wrote:

You have a head start over me for those Northern species, Neil, by being at least 200 miles closer to them!. Great shots of the High Brown and Mountain Ringlet, and especially your wonderful open wing shot of that male Purple Hairstreak. 🍷 .

The Purple Hairstreak is one of my main targets for 2020.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

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Thanks Trevor 😊

Yes, living where I do in the midlands gives me a head start for those northern species, however the down side to that is the southern ones that are that same distance away for me.

Wurzel wrote:

Fantastic stuff Neil – those Northern specialists are all worthy of a 🍷 for each and every one 🤪 cracking stuff and three gaps from my life list 🍷 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel 😊 If you ever get up that way it is possible to get three in one day like I did this year.

David M wrote:

What a joy to behold those summer species, Neil. 😊 Fabulous sequence, the pick of which for me is that impressive Large Heath. Never had one pose like that for me! 😊

Thanks David 😊. Those Large Heath do demand a bit of patience and luck in waiting for one to come close enough.

Goldie M wrote:

Fantastic shots from Meathop and Latterbarrow Neil, have you tried Foulshaw Moss yet? it's right next door to Meathop and I find it's much easier to get shots of the Large Heath there as the board walk starts right near the car park and they've planted lots of shrubs etc which if your lucky the Large Heath some times land on 😊 I'm hoping to go back there next year, apart from any thing else I love going to Latterbarrow. 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie 😊 We did visit Foulshaw Moss this year but it was dull and drizzly and the Large Heath were hiding. We saw the Ospreys though and we thought it was a great reserve and well worth going back to sometime in the future.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 08-Dec-19 07:34 PM GMT

A terrific selection of a huge variety of species, by and large all looking in great condition too. You seem to time your trips absolutely perfectly, Neil. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Dec-19 07:38 PM GMT

Thank Dave 😊 The timing of our trips is usually based on some winter research into the previous few years flight periods of my target species plus what time I can book off work in advance. There is also a fair amount of luck involved.

Looking back at 2019 Part 3 – Late Summer and into Autumn.

So far, the summer had produced some nice warm sunny weather but also some cooler periods with quite a lot of cloud. Rainfall, at least around my patch, had been below average but it was certainly not as dry as 2018 had been. Due to the best weather usually occurring during the week when I was stuck in work and with the weekends often turning cloudy and dull, I did not get out around my local patch as often as I would have liked to, but from what I did see most of the usual summer species were around in good numbers.

Early August saw us down in Cornwall where we stayed for five days right down on the southern tip of The Lizard. We enjoyed some decent weather with very little rain until the last afternoon when it got a bit wet and blustery ahead of a summer storm that was heading in, luckily for us it didn't fully arrive until we were heading home the next day.

I mentioned the Painted Lady influx in my last report and expected to see some down in Cornwall, but I must admit that I was not prepared for what I saw down there. They were easily the most numerous species seen, appearing everywhere in large numbers with one stretch of coast path from Lizard Point towards Kynance Cove producing hundreds. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there must have been thousands flying all over the Lizard. These Painted Ladies were all in varying condition, from fresh looking to very worn and faded and I suspect that they were made up of the offspring from the earlier influx plus more recent arrivals from across the channel. Interestingly, it seems from what I saw on social media that some other parts of the country were not seeing such high numbers, including some other parts of Cornwall.



Painted Ladies – Lizard Point 05.08.2019

One of my targets for the trip to Cornwall was to see second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries which I saw in good numbers along the Kynance Cove-Lizard Point coast path and also in the dune system at Upton Towns.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Kynance Cove 05.08.2019

I also found a good number of Dark Green Fritillaries still flying among the dunes at Upton Towans, some of which were in still in reasonable condition. As with the DGFs seen at Aston Rowant that I mentioned in the previous report, these reinforced my thoughts about the season running a little late...or perhaps it was just a case of not being a particularly early season like some recent ones have been.



Dark Green Fritillary male – Upton Towans 07.08.2019



Dark Green Fritillary female – Upton Towans 07.08.2019

Most of the other species that I expected to see in Cornwall were flying, some in very high numbers (Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper) and some in lower but still good or reasonable numbers (Common Blue, Small Copper, Red Admiral, Wall Brown).



Wall Brown – Kynance Cove 05.08.2019



Small Coppers – Kennack Sands 06.08.2019

One thing I noticed was that in contrast to all the blue forms of female Common Blue that have been cropping up lately, all those that I saw down there were of the mostly brown variety.



Common Blue female – Housel Bay 06.08.2019

One species that I didn't see down in Cornwall this time was Clouded Yellow and I remember that up until then, I hadn't seen that many reports of them this year.

Back home, the storm that was arriving in Cornwall when we left had followed us to the midlands to give us a weekend of wet and windy weather and then an unsettled spell limited my chances to get out. By the time the August Bank Holiday arrived things had improved and we had a cracking weekend.

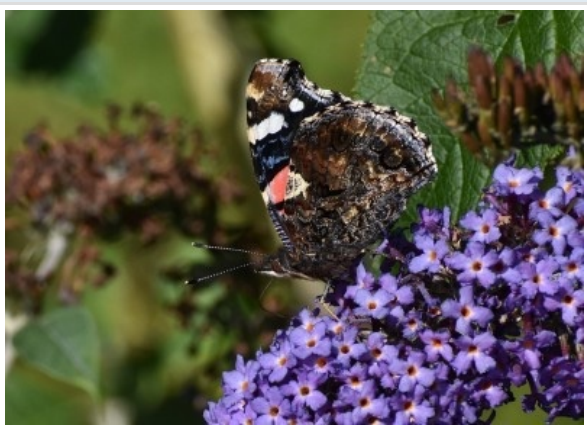
Painted Ladies were still very much in evidence with most garden buddleias around my local roads having one or two present and a rough count of 30+ on a group of wild buddleias on a visit to my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull. Small Tortoiseshells were still flying as were a few Peacocks and Red Admirals were turning up regularly, but Commas had seemed to be a bit thin on the ground this summer with just one or two seen at most spots.



Painted Lady – Castle Hills Solihull 26.08.2019



Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills Solihull 26.08.2019



Red Admiral – Castle Hills Solihull 26.08.2019

As we reached the end of August, things were winding down around my local grassland sites which is the usual state of affairs for around here. Meadow Browns, Common Blues and Small Heath were still flying but numbers were definitely dropping.

On the other hand, Speckled Woods were increasing in line with the usual late season flourish that they often have around here.



Speckled Woods - Langley Hall 30.08.2019

My last long-distance trip of the year was our usual stay down in Dorset in early September. It was quite breezy for most of the time we were there with that cool wind coming from the north west that seemed to be a feature for a lot of the time this summer. Some sites were also looking very dry, Durlston Country Park in particular struck me as looking very parched.

Although I saw all the species that I expected to, most of these were in lower numbers than I have seen down there during our previous visits at this time. Notable exceptions to this were Small Whites which were everywhere in large numbers and Painted Ladies were still turning up at most of the places that we went to albeit not as numerous as we had seen earlier in the year.



Small White - Kimmeridge Bay 02.09.2019



Adonis Blue - Osmington 04.09.2019



Small Copper – Osmington 04.09.2019

Marbled Whites last a lot longer on the Dorset chalk than in most other areas and I have often found one or two still flying during our early September trips here in the past. The sites where I find them at this time usually vary with Durdle Door, Bindon Hill and Durlston all producing examples in the past, albeit not usually at all of these in the same year. This year I found a couple on the path up to White Horse Hill at Osmington.



Marbled White – Osmington 04.09.2019

Having failed to catch up with Clouded Yellow in Cornwall I was pleased to find a couple in Dorset at sites where I have consistently seen them in the past.



Clouded Yellow – Durdle Door 04.09.2019

The weather for the rest of September was unsettled with again the best of it during the week when I was at work and it was the third weekend of the month before I managed to get out again to one of my local spots. A few Red Admirals, Speckled Woods, and Large Whites plus singles of Comma and Small Copper was all that was still around.

With some proper wet and windy autumn weather settling in for the next couple of weeks that was effectively the last time I got out to look for butterflies although I did still see the occasional Speckled Wood in the garden.

The last butterflies I saw this year were a Red Admiral and a well faded male Speckled Wood in the garden on the afternoon of Sunday October 6th.



Red Admiral – Coverdale 06.10.2019



My last butterfly of 2019. Speckled Wood – Coverdale 06.10.2019

In total, I saw 46 species of butterfly this year which is not bad for me these days. I managed to catch up with a few that I had not seen for a while but also missed some due to the choices I made on where to spend my available time.

Overall, I found it a bit of a strange year at times, a year of contradictions in some ways. We had some very warm early weather that was then followed by a spell of cool and cloudy conditions before settling down to a fairly typical spring. The summer followed on with more periods of cloudy weather, often with a cool wind, but we also had some very hot days. It was also a fairly dry summer although nowhere near as hot and dry as 2018 had been. Some species had a good year, it was encouraging to see the numbers of Small Tortoiseshells around my area and Peacocks did a lot better this year, although I suspect with both species this was due to them flying for longer this year before hibernating instead of disappearing early like they appeared to do in 2018. Gatekeepers definitely bounced back from a poor showing around here in 2018. The influx of Painted Ladies was particularly memorable, and I heard a lot of comparisons made with 2009 and whether this year was as good. I think the answer to that depends very much on where you were. If I remember correctly (which I might not), the main influx in 2009 came across the channel onto the south coast whereas this year the main bulk came across the north sea and hit the east coast first. Whatever the final counts show, some people (like myself) saw very high numbers, but I also saw some comments on social media from people saying that they had not actually seen that many this year.

The season had pretty much fizzled out here by the end of September, which is pretty normal for me, and apart from the Speckled Wood and Red Admiral that I saw in the first week of October that was it.

The time had arrived to get on with some of those jobs around the house that I had neglected during the summer...and to start thinking about plans and targets for next year.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Dec-19 08:47 PM GMT

An interesting read Neil with lovely accompanying photos 😊 Love the Small Pearls and Walls but the stand out for me is the late, late Marbled White – I keep forgetting to make a trip back to Dorset at that time of year for them 😊🇬🇧 Looking forward to hearing of your plans for next year Neil –if you're down my way give us a shout out 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-Dec-19 02:43 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, that Adonis really stands out for me, love it. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 15-Dec-19 07:37 PM GMT

Superb, quality images, Neil.
Like me, you seem to have had good 2019 season.
Great report from Cornwall, good to see the second brood Small Pearl.
The re-introduced population in my local area produced a second brood too.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 18-Dec-19 09:33 PM GMT

A most enjoyable round-up, Neil, to brighten these short winter days. It's been a long autumn, but it's the winter solstice on Sunday, after which we can start to look foreword to better times to come.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Dec-19 08:29 PM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel post_id=149802 time=1576270048 user_id=9821}` An interesting read Neil with lovely accompanying photos 😊 Love the Small Pearls and Walls but the stand out for me is the late, late Marbled White – I keep forgetting to make a trip back to Dorset at that time of year for them 😊🇬🇧 Looking forward to hearing of your plans for next year Neil –if you're down my way give us a shout out 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, will bear that in mind. No doubt we will be heading to Dorset again at some point next year but not sure where else yet. I have been told that we will be taking the daughter and grandkids away at some point so that will take some careful negotiation 😊

Goldie M wrote:

Lovely shots Neil, that Adonis really stands out for me, love it. 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, a fresh male Adonis Blue is hard to beat in the 'stand out' stakes.

`{quote=trevor post_id=149823 time=1576438667 user_id=13654}` Superb, quality images, Neil.
Like me, you seem to have had good 2019 season.
Great report from Cornwall, good to see the second brood Small Pearl.
The re-introduced population in my local area produced a second brood too.

Trevor.

Thanks Trevor, yes, overall I had a good season. Good to hear your local Small Pearls produced a second brood too.

`{quote=essexbuzzard post_id=149849 time=1576704818 user_id=11426}` A most enjoyable round-up, Neil, to brighten these short winter days. It's been a long autumn, but it's the winter solstice on Sunday, after which we can start to look foreword to better times to come.

Thanks Mark. Yes, the nights will soon begin to get a bit shorter. Just a few minutes each day but they all add up and we will be over the hump and heading in the right direction.

A busy few days ahead with the pre Christmas running around and visiting family etc, so just in case I don't get another chance I would like to wish everyone on UKB;

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

And here's to looking forward to the 2020 season.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Dec-19 08:38 PM GMT

Wonderful reflections, Neil. There's something about those three Speckled Woods fighting over a blackberry that brings a smile to my face.

Wishing you all the best for Christmas and the New Year. Hopefully you'll encounter more delightful moments such as those you've presented lately in 2020.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Dec-19 07:13 PM GMT

Thanks David 😊, Yes, lets hope we all get to see some good stuff in 2020.

Garden Moths - 2019.

From reports that I saw, 2019 seemed to be quite a good year overall for moths in Warwickshire, particularly for those who regularly trapped out in some of the larger woodland sites

On the other hand, numbers of many species in my garden were well down and some common species did not turn up at all this year.

I think there were a number of reasons for this. The weather was often not too good for moth trapping, particularly through the wet and windy autumn that we had. I have not checked on the exact number of times I ran the trap but there is no doubt that I lit up on fewer occasions this year, mostly due to the unsuitable weather. I also think that there was a knock on effect from the dry summer of 2018 in the same way that numbers of some butterfly species appear to have been effected this year.

Another factor that probably influenced my garden catch is that some new people moved in to a house a couple of doors down from me earlier in the year and then proceeded to have a tidying up blitz on their back garden which involved cutting down some nice mature trees and shrubs including sallow and hawthorns. There is also an increase in garden lighting around my way lately, either for security or ornamental reasons, which all adds to the local light pollution.

Anyway, my total for the year was 193 species made up of 118 macros and 75 micros. The comparison with the previous 2 years is ;

2018 - 225 Total (142 macro, 83 micro)

2017 - 245 Total (147 macro, 94 micro)

Despite the lower numbers this year I still had 15 species that were new for the garden (NFG), made up of 8 macro species and 7 micro. This compares with;

2018 - 29 (19 macro, 10 micro)

2017 - 78 (38 macro, 40 micro)

The higher numbers of NFG in 2017 is explained by the fact that I only started running the trap part way through 2016 and with 2017 being the first complete year it is only to be expected that there would be a good number of new species. As time goes on there is less chance of new species turning up but with some distributions being on the increase, you never know what might get blown in.

The new species this year were;

Macros;

Pale Pinion

Lunar Marbled Brown

Sallow Kitten

Marbled White Spot

Slender Brindle

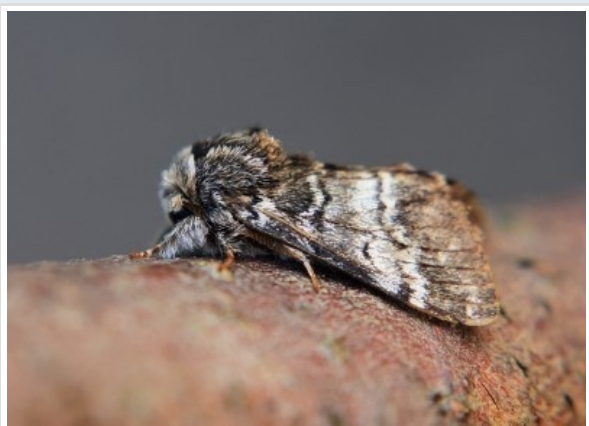
Lunar-spotted Pinion

Centre-barred Sallow

Deep-brown Dart



Pale Pinion - Coverdale 26.02.2019



Lunar Marbled Brown - Coverdale 18.04.2019



Sallow Kitten – Coverdale 14.05.2019



Slender Brindle – Coverdale 21.07.2019



Lunar-spotted Pinion – Coverdale 24.07.2019



Centre-barred Sallow – Coverdale 21.08.2019



Deep-brown Dart - Coverdale 26.09.2019

Micros;

Esperia sulphurella

Endotricha flammealis

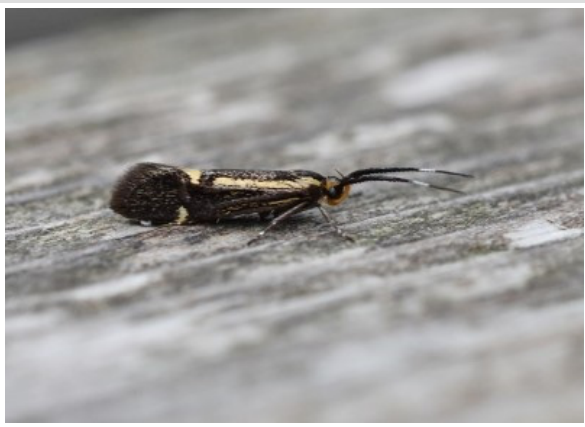
Yponomeuta padella/malinellus agg. Requires Gen Det for positive ID.

Plutella porrectella

Dichrorampha sp. Possibly *acuminatana* but requires Gen Det for positive ID.

Ypsolopha sylvella

Agonopterix nervosa



Esperia sulphurella - Coverdale 05.06.2019



Plutella porrectella - Coverdale 25.07.2019



Dichrorampha sp. – Coverdale 25.08.2019



Ypsolopha sylvella – Coverdale 10.09.2019

This years NFGs have increased my overall garden numbers to 197 species of macro moth and 109 micros which gives me a grand total of 306 species since I started running the trap in April 2016.

Here's hoping for a few more new ones in 2020.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Dec-19 04:55 PM GMT

A lovely collection of Moths Neil – the various posts on a few Facebook groups that I've read seem to come to the same conclusion as you Neil – with numbers seemingly down from last year – hopefully not an ongoing trend 😊
Hope you have a cracking 2020! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-Dec-19 10:10 PM GMT

As ever, an interesting assortment of moths there, Neil. Pity about your neighbours' desire to 'tidy up' their garden.....trees and shrubs are vital to so much wildlife that it's almost sacrilege to decimate them.

Here's wishing you an excellent New Year. All the best.