

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jan-19 06:40 PM GMT

Hi Philip. Fortunately, if Common Dog-violet is present on a site (it isn't universally present, as it doesn't like some soils/underlying geology) it usually flushes after any woodland, scrub or bracken clearance. The seeds can lie dormant for quite a while, so once the shade is removed they'll usually germinate soon after. Violet abundance can increase rapidly, as the numerous seeds are catapulted away from the host plant by a three-chambered pod. The seeds are often distributed further by ants.

The key to success in keeping a population of e.g. Pearl-bordered Fritillary going is to keep up the steady provision of newly cleared habitat, and hence a regular supply of pioneering violet growths, together with bare ground and leaf/bracken/woody litter.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jan-19 06:42 PM GMT

Thanks, David. I have high hopes for PBF and SPBF in Sussex this year. I'm hoping there'll be good news to report by late April.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jan-19 06:43 PM GMT

Off The Mark

My 2019 butterfly season got off to a flying start today, with a Red Admiral seen in my central Worthing back garden. It was still there when I returned from my local, after a couple of mulled wines and a Mummings Play. Happy New Year to all.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 01-Jan-19 08:42 PM GMT

Happy New Year to you too Neil 😊 You had a much better start than me from the sounds of it as all I got were some (probable) Winter Moths in the headlights on the way home 😊😊 Have a great 2019! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jan-19 10:02 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. Nowt wrong with Winter Moths; we'll take anything at this time of year. I always associate them with the torch-lit trudge back to the car, after finishing 'fire watch' at mid winter work parties.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jan-19 10:04 AM GMT

Arundel Butterfly Talk

All welcome.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 03-Jan-19 11:34 AM GMT

..... and maybe make some comments about the route(s) of the proposed bypass.

The very best for 2019. 😊

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Jan-19 08:30 PM GMT

{quote}My 2019 butterfly season got off to a flying start today, with a Red Admiral seen in my central Worthing back garden...

That's set an unbeatable yardstick, Neil! Well done. Hopefully it is a positive sign for the year ahead.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all the best with your conservation work this winter, which I trust will provide optimum conditions for the target species in 2019.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Feb-19 09:46 AM GMT

Thanks, David. I haven't had time to post much news this year, but there's been plenty going on behind the scenes.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Feb-19 09:58 AM GMT

Rejuvenation Of The BC Park Corner Heath Reserve

Many thanks to all who attended the penultimate BC volunteer work party of the winter at Park Corner Heath on Sunday (10 February). We had a great turn-out and made further progress in clearing the lower levels of the reserve behind 'Peter's Seat', which had become over-run with scrub and small trees.

Over the winter we have reclaimed a large area of lowland heath, greatly extending the rejuvenated habitat created over the plateau above. We also cut a few 'windows' through the scrub/tree-line separating these two areas, increasing the connectivity between them.

A good turn-out for our last event on Sunday 10 March should see this work completed and it will be an opportunity to celebrate all we've achieved over the winter. The butterflies clearly showed their appreciation of our efforts last summer, but I suspect this was just a taste of things to come.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Feb-19 11:39 AM GMT

Fritillaries For The Future Continues

Yesterday (15 February) I had an entire day free, so headed out to look at progress on a couple of projects. I started off in a private part of the woods at Small Dole, where a joint project involving the owners (Pete and Sally), BC (Fritillaries for the Future), South Downs National Park Authority (supported by the Volunteer Ranger Service) and Petra Billings (Consultant), is now under full steam.

Our contractor, Graham West (Weald Woodsman) and associate are bringing 1.5 hectares of overstood (unmanaged/overgrown) hazel coppice back into cycle, by cutting one third over each of the next three years, after which it will be managed by volunteers as six coupes (compartments) to produce hedge-laying materials for use in the National Park.

As each one third of the coppice is initially cut to ground level, the standards (large individual trees) are being thinned out, to allow more light to reach the woodland floor. This will improve the growth rate and quality of the regenerating hazel, improve the ground flora, and greatly improve the habitat for woodland butterflies and other wildlife.

Most of the trees being removed are Ash (which will inevitably succumb to 'die-back'), while the majority of oaks are being retained, particularly those which have been identified as having potential for bats, during an ongoing survey.

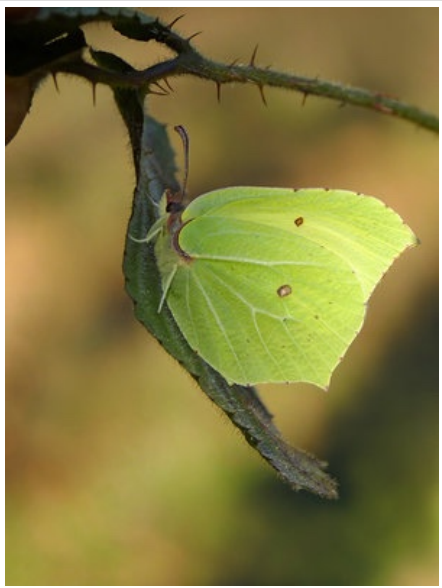
When I visited, the felling of standards had almost been completed, and the once-closed canopy was allowing the sunshine to flood through to the previously dark and floristically barren woodland floor. By reinstating traditional management practices (both hazel coppice and standards would traditionally have been harvested, on short and longer cycles respectively), this exciting project will bring sustainable benefits for a wealth of wildlife

long into the future.

Graham reported seeing a Holly Blue the previous day (14 February), which although not a national first, is a 2019 first for Sussex.

I later moved on to Rewell Wood, seeing a Brimstone en route (Amberley Station), and Brimstone, Peacock and Red Admiral at my destination. Having walked over areas managed by the Norfolk Estate, SDNPA/BC, Plumpton College, the resident woodsman and commercial contractor, I suspect we'll be seeing very good numbers of Pearl-bordered Fritillary this year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 16-Feb-19 10:54 PM GMT

Looking really good there Neil 😊 Good to see another person of the mark 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 17-Feb-19 08:54 AM GMT

[quote]Good to see another person of the mark 😊 Is that the Left Hind Mark? (Guess what book I have just been reading – again!)

To be a little more serious: spell checkers are all very well but they don't pick up context. *OF* was clearly a typo for *OFF*.

Is there such a thing as a good SENSE checker?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Feb-19 08:00 PM GMT

Red Admirals And Hedgelaying

I saw two Red Admirals in warm sunshine at Lee Farm (near Patching, West Sussex) today (17 February), but the real interest for me was the annual South of England hedgelaying contest. It's great to see this traditional craft being practised, particularly with some of the best on show.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Feb-19 08:54 PM GMT

I guessed given your absence that you had been abnormally busy, Neil, and I wasn't disappointed!

Some lovely out-of-season habitat shots, and that hedge-cutting art is something to be in awe of. Glad to see some folk still know how to perfect it!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Feb-19 08:24 AM GMT

Angmering Park Coppicing

Many thanks to Chris Letchford (Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group), Paul Day (BC Sussex) and Simon Mockford (National Park Ranger) for all their hard work in cutting the third coupe of hazel coppice (in a new eight coupe cycle) on the Angmering Park Estate (near Arundel). This project, which will

continue the legacy of *Fritillaries for the Future*, will create top quality habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and many other woodland species.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 23-Feb-19 06:59 PM GMT

That's beautiful looking habitat, Neil.

Is Angmering Park a public access site?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Feb-19 09:58 AM GMT

Hi David

There are some PRow's across the area, but at this stage I'm keeping the exact location quiet (no PBF yet, but I hope that they'll colonise naturally), to allow quiet enjoyment of the site by those who are doing all the hard graft. It's early days in terms of building a relationship with the estate, so it's a case of 'softly, softly' for now.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Feb-19 10:04 AM GMT

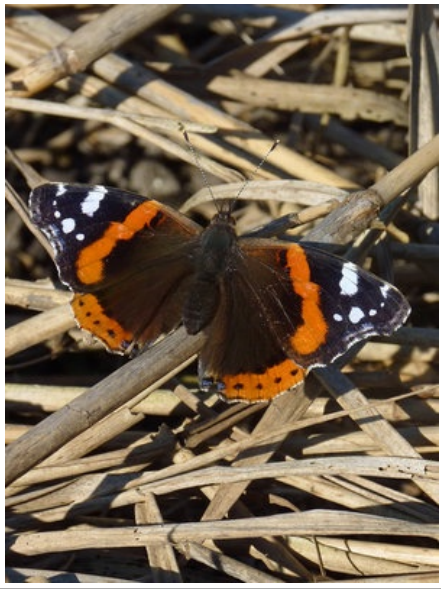
First Tort And Speckly

Yesterday (24 February) I had hoped to join the Graffham Down Trust for a work party, but other commitments did at least give me a two hour window to get out later in the day. A brief visit to Ferring Rife produced my first Small Tortoiseshell of the year (they are only just waking up here), a Brimstone, three Peacock and a couple of female Red Admiral, both of which were egg-laying.

I bumped into Vince Massimo, who was on a similar mission and making his first visit to this great early season venue. Vince will be rearing a few of the Red Admiral eggs in captivity. I have seen Red Admirals egg-laying as early as 22 February this year and I suspect that at least some of these individuals are over-wintered females (rather than recent immigrants).

As we walked, Vince flushed a weakly-flying butterfly from the grass – our first Speckled Wood of the year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-Feb-19 01:45 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

First Tort And Speckly...As we walked, Vince flushed a weakly-flying butterfly from the grass – our first Speckled Wood of the year.

Amazing to see a February Specklie, Neil. Can you now conjure us a Large Tortoiseshell? 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Feb-19 07:05 PM GMT

Hi David, I'll see what I can do, but I might cheat a little. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Feb-19 08:33 PM GMT

Tout Tortoiseshell

I had already arranged to meet Pete for a long overdue catch-up on Wednesday (27 February), with the original idea being to show him some of the *Fritillaries for the Future* habitat work performed over the last few years in Sussex. However, Pete had just noticed that the published images of the Large Tortoiseshell at Tout Quarry (Portland) clearly showed the presence of two individuals. A quick change of venue was inevitable.

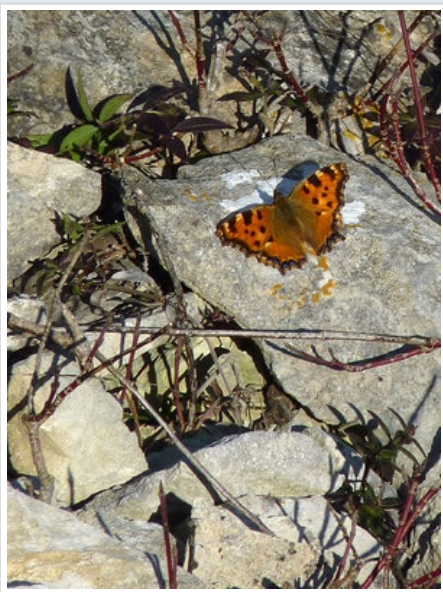
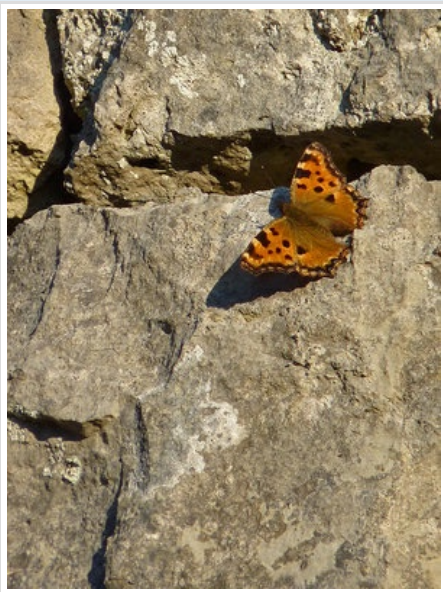
We searched without luck throughout the morning, with only Peacocks, Humming-bird Hawk-moths and the odd Small Tortoiseshell to show for our efforts. In retrospect, our mistake was to focus our search on the areas where previous sightings had been made – at least those reported on social media. It was only after midday that I managed a brief sighting, when I wandered across the central part of the quarry; all of a sudden a Large Tortoiseshell was gliding close to my shoulder, before being attacked and driven off over a ridge of boulders by a Peacock (this inter-species violence was to become a common theme). By the time Pete had joined me the tortoiseshell had disappeared, and as we climbed over the ridge we came across a small group of enthusiasts asking for an ID confirmation based on the images they had taken only a minute or two before (it was).

There then followed a frustrating period of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, while hearing regular reports of others being in the right place at the right time. The number of visitors was now swelling and it was great to see that everyone was doing their best to help others connect with the butterfly, with several locals going the extra mile.

Unfortunately, Pete had to take an extended 'phone call at 2 pm, just as the Large Tortoiseshell (the better of the two specimens seen the previous day) started to perform really well. I felt really frustrated for Pete, who I could see attending to business on the horizon, just as the butterfly floated around my knee.

Things then just got better and better, before the butterfly finally headed off to roost shortly after 4.30 pm. By now there was a network of observers tracking its every movement as it glided around the mini-ravines of the quarry. This wasn't the right scenario to risk any close approaches, so all of the images I took were at extreme zoom range for an antique bridge camera (those with DSLRs and 400 mm lenses made hay), but I was more than happy with a few nice context shots. The real pleasure was, of course, just observing this magnificent creature; a richly coloured example in superb condition.

Congratulations to the finder(s), to Mike Gibbons for his image (I nearly fell off my perch when I first saw it), and thanks to the 'spotters' who did their best to ensure everyone got a piece of the action. What a start to the season!





Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 28-Feb-19 10:36 PM GMT

Great stuff Neil, any thoughts as to whether this is likely to be a recent arrival from the near continent or whether it overwintered on our shores?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 28-Feb-19 10:51 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Neil 😊👍 Bugboy asked the question that sprung to my mind – what is the likelihood of it being homegrown?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 01-Mar-19 08:16 AM GMT

Well done Neil – wish I could have been there! 🍷👍

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 01-Mar-19 09:08 AM GMT

Several points to be made. These are pure speculation

While “home grown” Large Tortoiseshells cannot be ruled out, the run of exceptionally warm southerly winds must strongly point to immigrants from mainland Europe (no doubt keen to get here before Brexit day!)

A large number of observers including you Neil (surely the expert) didn’t find making contact easy, so it must raise the question as to how many LTs – perhaps a huge number – remain undetected?

Your observations of Peacocks giving the LTs a hard time might point to inter-species habitat competition. Peacocks seem to have become much more abundant in the past 70 years (coinciding with the poor times for LT). Of course the two species don’t directly compete (for foodplant) but maybe Peacocks just don’t allow LTs enough “free space” for them to be able to get on with breeding.

The definitive proof of breeding LT’s in Britain will come from finding early stages. North Stoke Neil?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 01-Mar-19 03:50 PM GMT

I have been following the Portland Large Tort. saga on another platform.

There was speculation on there about the possibility of two specimens present, which you have confirmed.

The Portland find seems to have played out in a similar fashion to the Queen of Spain Fritillary

event at Piddinghoe ie. obliging Butterflies remaining in one location for some days, to be enjoyed by those who have risked a long journey, and had success.

And your 'old camera' did just fine! 📷 .

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 01-Mar-19 07:39 PM GMT

Excellent report from Portland Neil 📷 😊

I have been following the sightings of the Large Tortoiseshells on social media and have seen photos of two different individuals. I assumed they were migrants given that they appeared at the same time as a lot of other migrant activity I have seen on various moth group social media. The only thing that made me consider that they may have been home bred was the fact that there were two in a comparatively small area but then again I am familiar with Tout Quarry and it does not seem to be the kind of habitat I would think of as ideal for this species.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by False Apollo, 01-Mar-19 10:49 PM GMT

Glad you caught up with the Large Tortoiseshell Neil. I can imagine there were a lot of enthusiasts in Tout Quarry on Wednesday searching. When I first saw this butterfly sunning itself on the rocks late on Tuesday it really did hit me how beautiful it was, it was literally glowing colour, and boy was it big! Everybody was well behaved and some people were called on the phone and given directions to go past the Gormley sculpture to see it. It really behaved itself and they managed to see it, one observer arriving on crutches. Apparently it had been seen earlier and had flown off. When I arrived around 14.15 everyone was looking with no success. Eventually I was told it was put up by a fly. Interestingly there were no Peacocks (that I know of) seen that afternoon. It did land for a short time but then flew off and really settled down on the rock face for a good 30 minutes.

There were indeed 2 individuals seen, this was obvious later when photos from two separate observers were studied. Portland Bill observatory did email me wondering why I had said 2 on my twitter feed, later they realised there definitely were. Originally found and photographed on 24th February, the butterfly(s) remained in the relative shelter of the quarry.

Interestingly Portland and the surrounding area has become a hot spot for this species. Large Tortoiseshells were seen on Portland on 1st July last year and another just outside Weymouth at West Knighton on 26th April. I do think the 2 over the last week were likely migrants. Habitat does not look that suitable on this part of Portland either compared to the Isle of Wight for example, but I will be watching with interest to see if they are seen here again.

Regards
Mike Gibbons

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 02-Mar-19 07:01 AM GMT

Thanks Neil,
Nice to read up about your winter work.
Fritillaries for the Future

I have a question regarding "best practice" with hazel and lime coppice. As the common dog violet was the **primary food source** for so many of our United Kingdom Fritillary species which the caterpillars depended on, it was assumed that one needed to encourage the native plants our Fritillaries evolved with, rather than garden hybrid viola that might be more fragrant or produce a profusion of blooms, rather than leaves (a bit like garden primulas, instead of our Brimstone coloured, native Primroses).

In Lincolnshire, I thought that Butterfly Conservation was contracted to the Forestry Commission in Southrey Wood to coppice areas on a 12 year cycle rotation. I know that one result was an amazing display of wood anemone in late March.

Might you recommend (or have you recommended) a best practice of both short and long term coppice rotation for the benefit of Fritillaries? We now have the Silver washed Fritillary in several of our Lincolnshire Woods (including a resident population at Chambers Farm Wood).

Kind Regards

Re: Neil Hulme

by Benjamin, 02-Mar-19 11:33 AM GMT

Nice updates Neil, and glad you had a good day with the Large Tortoiseshell.

I was very close to making the trip myself, but ended up overwhelmed by the urge to 'find my own', and instead spent the sunny warm spell wandering about the Arun and the Cuckmere river valleys. Many miles covered and some good potential habitat (to an amateur's eye) but no luck unfortunately - i will return to a few spots later in the spring for sure.....

cheers -

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Mar-19 09:01 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Amazing to see a February Speckle, Neil. Can you now conjure us a Large Tortoiseshell? 😊

Well done, Neil.

As ever, you **delivered**.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Mar-19 10:36 AM GMT

Hi all.

I would take a lot of convincing that these Large Tortoiseshells (LTs) are anything other than individuals appearing from their hibernation hidey-holes in the quarry, having dispersed from their continental birthplace during the late June – July period last year.

This species is not an obligate migrant (unlike Painted Lady or Clouded Yellow) which annually migrates to a broadly consistent plan (north in spring, south in autumn) in order to track favourable environmental conditions for breeding. Larger scale movements appear to be driven by population irruptions and influenced strongly by prevailing weather conditions (winds), in a manner similar to Camberwell Beauty and Scarce Tortoiseshell.

These influxes occur soon after the butterflies emerge from the pupa, with mixed sex groups travelling together and then hibernating at a suitable location on arrival. The last major event for LT occurred in the summer of 2007 (of course more recently for Scarce Tortoiseshell).

I don't think there's any evidence for long-range dispersive movements immediately post-hibernation (I think the recent immigration of e.g. Painted Lady is coincidental). Such behaviour would probably render the chances of finding a mate closer to none than slim. It's already difficult enough for these species to colonise terra nova given their MO of 'disperse, hibernate, locate a mate'.

The dispersive movements of LT in the summer are usually less 'visible' than the spring survivors (unless involving an influx of the 2007 magnitude) as the butterflies will rapidly feed-up and hibernate. The highly territorial males are much easier to spot the following spring, when they can be 'twitched'.

Tout Quarry doesn't look anything like suitable breeding habitat for LT, but it does look like an ideal overwintering site. Any adults crossing The Channel in late June – July would find plenty of nectar to fuel-up on, and plenty of nooks and crannies to disappear into.

I suspect there are more LTs around on Portland, possibly including the female which was spotted on 1 July 2018. Once mated, any females which survived the winter would probably head off in search of elms or willows.

I wrote at some length about the possibility of transient colonies in the UK in *The Butterflies of Sussex*.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Mar-19 10:53 AM GMT

Hi Philip.

There aren't really any 'secrets' to making coppice work for early successional species such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF). If the local soil chemistry allows Common Dog-violet to grow (it doesn't always) it will soon appear.

The important factors are that each coppice coupe must be of sufficient size, be easily located by dispersing females, and be cut *every year*; continuation of the rotational management is essential.

There's an extensive section on woodland management, including coppicing, in the PBF chapter of *The Butterflies of Sussex*.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Mar-19 11:47 AM GMT

25 February & 26 February Catch-up

Last Monday, in beautiful, warm sunshine, I visited North Stoke, in the hope of finding a Large Tortoiseshell; I didn't, but I did see a lot of butterflies. My tally of 22 male Brimstone was much lower than the counts of 76 (23 Feb) and 40+ (24 Feb) made by David Cook and Jonathan Crawford, but this is very typical for the species; Brimstones tend to congregate in favoured overwintering locations, but rapidly disperse into the wider countryside. I also saw a further 8 on the road verges between Worthing and North Stoke. Other species included Peacock (6) and single Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Red Admiral (egg-laying).

I then moved on to Houghton Forest where the Forestry Commission has widened and regraded the main track, but has sympathetically retained the large sallow trees which are used by the Purple Emperor (great job!). Here I saw Brimstone (6), Comma (3) and Peacock (2), before making a final visit to Ferring Rife. It's still early days, but the single sighting of Small Tortoiseshell does suggest that the species may have crashed, following last summer's drought.

On Tuesday I was joined by Chris Letchford, Simon Mockford (SDNPA) and Paul Day, to continue coppicing Hazel on the Angmering Park Estate. We saw Brimstone, Comma and Peacock, and two Orange Underwing moths – this is the earliest I have ever seen this species.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Mar-19 12:20 PM GMT

More Work For PBF

Many thanks to Simon Mockford (South Downs National Park Authority) for helping me to complete the clearance of a newly cut section of Sweet Chestnut coppice at the western end of the main W-E ride in the southern part of Rewell Wood last Friday (1 March). A full 1km length of this ride has now been widened to produce top quality breeding habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Do keep a look-out for deer ticks – I've already removed my first of the year!





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 05-Mar-19 11:53 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

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I wrote at some length about the possibility of transient colonies in the UK in *The Butterflies of Sussex*.

Very interesting, Neil. One can only hope that any males find females who then go on to locate the foodplant and lay their batches of eggs.

It would be wonderful if early stages could be discovered at some point, proving that this species is at least breeding again in this country.

However, as you say, these colonies may merely be transient, although the fact that the Large Tortoiseshell was once spread over a decent portion of southern Britain gives cause for hope.

I would have thought that, for this species at least, global warming would assist it in recolonising its former UK haunts.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Mar-19 08:35 AM GMT

Hi David. I do think Large Tortoiseshell is making an attempt to come back home ... and I'm sure we all wish it the best of luck. Irrespective of its rarity, I think this is one of our most beautiful and impressive species. However, I suspect that the challenge of finding early stages will mean that it's breeding long before we find concrete evidence.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Mar-19 11:22 AM GMT

Coppicing Completed

Yesterday (7 March) Chris Letchford and I finished the now annual cut of Hazel coppice on the Angmering Park Estate, creating top quality habitat for woodland butterflies, which will hopefully include species such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Grizzled Skipper in the future. This work is physically demanding and takes considerable time, so I'd like to say a huge "thank you" to Chris, and to Paul Day and Simon Mockford (National Park Ranger) who

have helped here on numerous occasions over the last month.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Mar-19 09:40 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi David. I do think Large Tortoiseshell is making an attempt to come back home ... and I'm sure we all wish it the best of luck. Irrespective of its rarity, I think this is one of our most beautiful and impressive species. However, I suspect that the challenge of finding early stages will mean that it's breeding long before we find concrete evidence.

Thanks, Neil. Yes, this butterfly is a great draw wherever it is found. I think large nymphalids are always highly sought after; they're bold, powerful, colourful and exhibit interesting behaviour.

I'd say on my trips to France it is always in the top half dozen or so in terms of people's reactions....probably only slightly behind Camberwell Beauty.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Mar-19 03:11 PM GMT

Toad Balls

Yesterday (9 March) I visited a small pond hidden away in the upper reaches of Rewell Wood. Just a month from now I'll be here looking for Orange-tips, but on this occasion I was looking for amphibians, following a tip-off from the Norfolk Estate's Head Forester.

I was not disappointed, as an estimated 500 toads were crammed into the pond, or taking a rest from their exertions, sitting quietly around the margins. The water was thick with strings of toad spawn, mixed with huge mounds of frog spawn. Adult frogs were much less visible than the toads, but very vocal. I also glimpsed a Great Crested Newt, but the toads provided the main act.

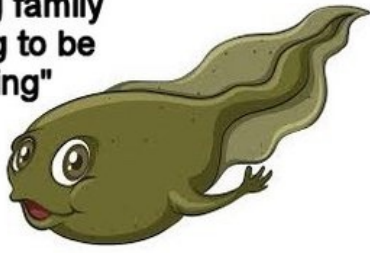
I took dozens of images, but was particularly keen on photographing the clusters of amorous toads. It was quite tricky getting all the animals in focus, particularly as the 'balls' were constantly moving as more male toads tried to join in the fun. Some of the facial expressions were priceless; 'toad erotica' at its best!



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 10-Mar-19 03:59 PM GMT

"researching family tree is going to be challenging"



Jack 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Mar-19 04:16 PM GMT

Hi Jack

Looks like a job for the Jeremy Kyle Show.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 10-Mar-19 07:08 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi Jack

Looks like a job for the Jeremy Kyle Show.

BWs, Neil

Hope you don't watch that crap, Neil.
Great Toad orgy.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 11-Mar-19 07:45 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

I visited a small pond.....an estimated 500 toads were crammed into the pond...



I've often wondered where they all come from and where they disperse to afterwards!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Mar-19 08:47 AM GMT

More Toads

A few more pics for any amphibiphiles out there.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Mar-19 04:52 PM GMT

Springhead Hill Management

Many thanks to South Downs National Park Ranger Simon Mockford and new Assistant Ranger Sophie Trice for finishing this winter's management tasks at Springhead (a.k.a. Kithurst) Hill on Tuesday (12 March). We performed some light scrub work in the meadow, around the main Duke of Burgundy lekking area, and trimmed off the coarse vegetation over the large scallop created by felling some tall conifers and Ash a few years ago. Thanks also to West Sussex County Council for strimming and raking the plateau situated above the access road, and for performing badly needed repairs to the road, which had become seriously potholed.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Mar-19 09:07 PM GMT

Nature Day

A wildlife hunt with my kids today (17 March) started at Mill Hill, where there's an impressive display of violets on the lower slopes. I was very impressed with the extensive scrub control performed by the South Downs National Park Authority over the winter; the site is looking in great shape. We failed to see the Adders I'd hoped for, but we did see a single Peacock and two very early *Pyrausta despicata* moths.

We then moved on to Rewell Wood, to watch the toads spawning in a small pond. There were far fewer than the 400 – 500 I saw here on 9 March, but still well in excess of 100.

After nine years my Panasonic Lumix FZ38 finally started to behave erratically, so I've upgraded to the nearly-new FZ38 I bought a few years back. I've been so happy with this model that I see little point in getting to know something else.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 18-Mar-19 11:16 AM GMT

It's served you well,Neil! The view finder on mine packed up years ago so, following your example, I purchased a backup last year.

ATB for the season.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Mar-19 06:29 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark; a good move. I've even invested £17 in a new camera case!
I'll hopefully catch up with you somewhere this season.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Mar-19 08:00 PM GMT

Winter Work Completed

Many thanks to the 15 members of the Brighton Conservation Volunteers who completed the 2018/2019 management work on Park Corner Heath yesterday (19 March). Regular conservation work parties by BCV and our own volunteers have cleared a significant area (shown in green on the map) of numerous small trees and scrub, which have been invading this remnant of a once much larger area of rare lowland heath habitat, thereby extending the currently open area outlined in white.

I realise that this sort of work isn't universally popular, so it's important to point out that we have a duty to retain the characteristic features of this Site of Special Scientific Interest, which cannot be allowed to succumb to the development of 'secondary woodland'. We also have a legal duty to achieve the targets set out by our grant-funded Countryside Stewardship Agreement. Most importantly, the work will benefit the woodland ground flora, several

species of regionally threatened butterfly and our important reptile fauna. Thank you to everyone who has been involved in this vital work over the winter.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Mar-19 08:30 PM GMT

Surprised no-one else has said it, but yet again you and your teams of volunteers have moved mountains to protect and to help extend butterfly habitats during the winter period.

If every county/region in the UK could aspire to do the same thing then perhaps the losses of the last few decades might be reversed somewhat.

Well done, Neil, and I hope this year's flight periods see your efforts rewarded.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Mar-19 09:29 AM GMT

Thanks, David. We certainly have some great volunteers in Sussex, but I'm sure there's plenty of similar work going on elsewhere which doesn't get reported on UKB.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Mar-19 09:33 AM GMT

Butterflies Reappear

Following a quiet three weeks, butterflies reappeared in good numbers yesterday (24 March). While driving from Worthing to Heyshott I spotted 19 male Brimstone flying along the road verges, and a further 17 during a walk up Heyshott Escarpment, along the edges of Charlton Forest and in a full circuit of the Graffham Down Trust reserves. While on foot I also saw 28 Peacock, 2 Small Tortoiseshell and an Orange Underwing moth.

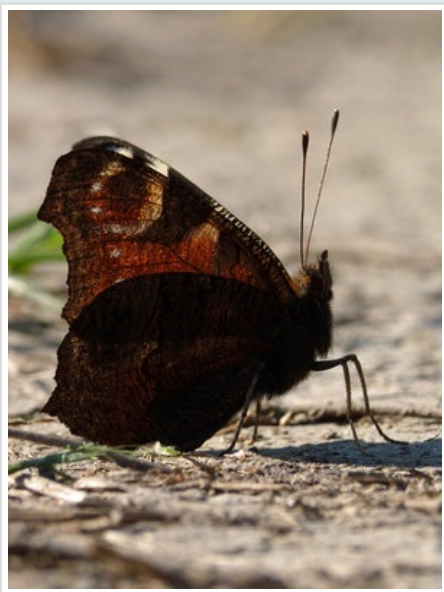


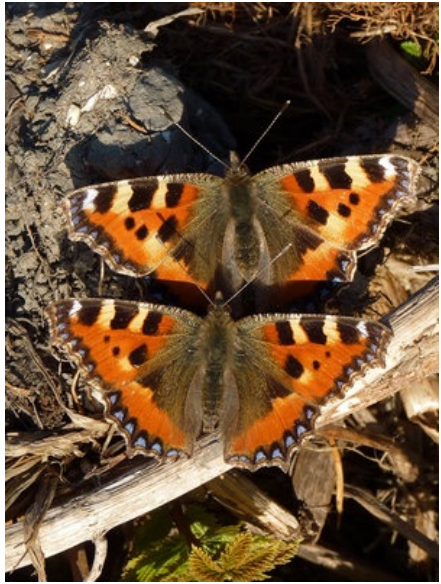
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Mar-19 10:49 PM GMT

Ferring Rife

An afternoon walk up Ferring Rife (east bank) today (25 March) produced 14 Small Tortoiseshell (a low number for this site) and 3 Peacock.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 25-Mar-19 11:54 PM GMT

It's great to see things building nicely - 28 Peacocks 🤪😄 - hopefully the warm spell will hold for a while and things can really get into the groove 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Mar-19 09:34 AM GMT

Those are impressive returns on the Brimstone & Peacock front, Neil. Things are looking encouraging at the moment.

At this rate it mightn't be long till the first Dukes are on the wing!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-19 05:22 PM GMT

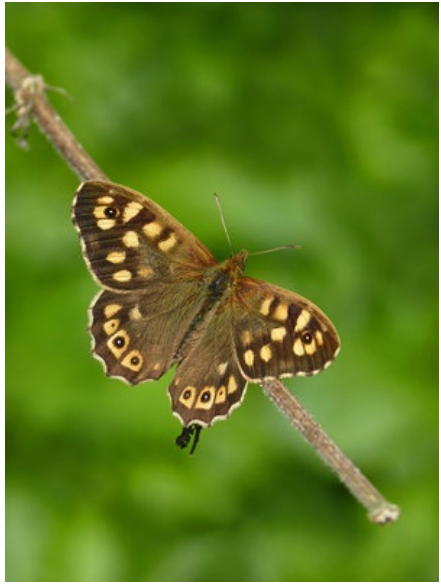
Thanks, Wurzel and David. Wishing you both (and all UKBers) a bountiful season; we're off!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-19 05:23 PM GMT

Spring 2019

A couple of hours in a damp meadow near Billingshurst marked the official start of my personal spring, with a beautiful male Orange-tip. Unfortunately he was too active for anything resembling a good photograph. However, a very smart Speckled Wood was much more obliging. A few Brimstone, Peacock and a Comma were also seen.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 26-Mar-19 07:48 PM GMT

As I read that Neil I looked left at one of my favourite framed photos: a lovely damp meadow near Billingshurst with masses of Cuckoo Flowers.

Today I was half expected a post reporting an Orange Tip sighting. I wonder what is the earliest ever date for the British Isles?

Meanwhile, my own Orange Tip chrysalises are being kept in the fridge for another four weeks or so to avoid early emergence. My Dame's Violet (aka Sweet Rocket) plants are coming along nicely and should be at just the right stage for the Orange Tip season (in May here). Orange Tips absolutely love Dame's Violet for egg laying.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 26-Mar-19 10:11 PM GMT

I need to make a date with my diary and make it to Billingshurst this year, after failing last time round. I'm guessing second week of April would be good...

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Mar-19 09:09 AM GMT

Hi Jack and Mark. The spring flowers and Orange-tips should be at their best here in about 10-14 days time.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Mar-19 09:14 AM GMT

Monitoring Barred Tooth-striped

Last night (26 March) a small group of us searched for the rare Barred Tooth-striped moth on the slopes of Mill Hill at Shoreham. We monitor numbers here by torchlight, which is the best way to find this species as it sits along the edge of mature clumps of Wild Privet, appearing just after full darkness. We only found three, but all were in mint condition, suggesting that they are only just starting to emerge.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Mar-19 08:29 PM GMT

Hole-In-One

Today (27 March) I was driving along the road between Steyning and Washington, so briefly diverted to Wiston to look at the meadow which annually supports good numbers of Orange-tip. This was more in hope than expectation, bearing in mind that the flight season has barely started and it was cool and cloudy. However, the first stem of Cuckooflower I looked at had a male Orange-tip snoozing on it! After that my luck ran out and a search of all the other plants in the meadow failed to turn up any others.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 27-Mar-19 10:30 PM GMT

Great sighting, Neil—they all count! Another site for me to visit when I come down. Can I order some sunshine in early April, please?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 28-Mar-19 12:32 AM GMT

Woah it doesn't normally work that way round, the narrative should be "I checked every single Cuckoo Flower and was about give up and pour myself a coffee when..." 😊 After getting a shot like that I'd have probably not noticed any other OTs anyway 😊🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 28-Mar-19 09:24 AM GMT

Well done, Neil. There may only have been one but in the last week of March that's still highly notable!

Give it a week or so and there will doubtless be hundreds! This is a wonderful time of year and for once we have benign weather coinciding with it.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Mar-19 06:06 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark, Wurzel and David. I must confess to feeling a little jammy yesterday, especially this early in their flight period. But the first ones of the year always feel doubly special, so I'm not complaining! At least I earned the shots I got today. 😊
BWs, Neil

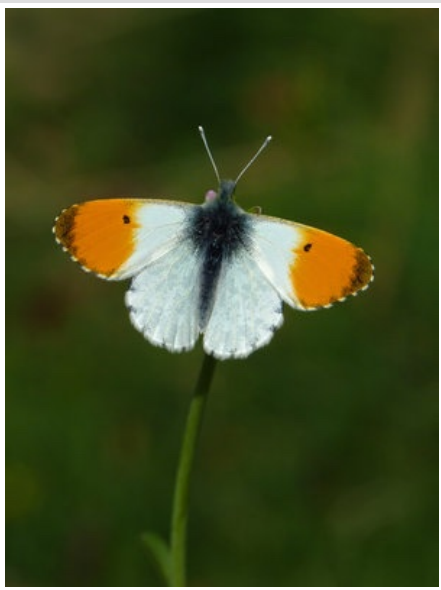
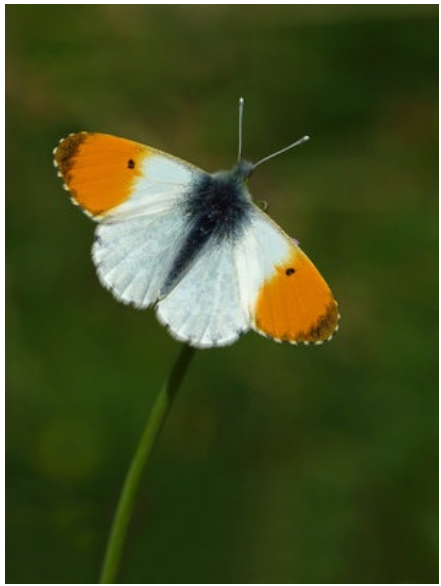
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Mar-19 06:09 PM GMT

Sitting Pretty

The mix of cooler cloudy periods and warm sunshine provided the perfect opportunity for getting some open-wing shots of male Orange-tips today (28 March). By patiently waiting for cloud cover and watching where they settle, it's relatively simple to predict when they'll reopen their wings, with the best chances being when the returning sunshine is filtered through thin cloud.

I first returned to the meadow at Wiston where the butterfly I found yesterday was still the only one present. A favoured meadow near Billingshurst also produced just a single male, so it will be a few days yet before this species really gets going, at least on my patch.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 28-Mar-19 08:22 PM GMT

Aren't they gorgeous though, Neil? Definitely quality over quantity. Fantastic pictures.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Mar-19 09:20 PM GMT

A cracking set of shots 😊😊 – there seem t be reports coming in from all over of this species today so hopefully (if the weather stays fair) they'll be around in good numbers next week 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 29-Mar-19 10:35 PM GMT

Picture postcard images, Neil, particularly the first one.

It's surprised me how quickly they've emerged this year, which means they may be 'spent' by early May, so let's get out and revel in their presence while we can....this is a species we only get ONE audience with annually. 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Apr-19 01:22 PM GMT

Thanks, all.

David: yes, it's vital to enjoy them to the full before their all-too-brief season is over. I feel the same way about Bluebells; their season is just too short. 😞

BWs, Neil

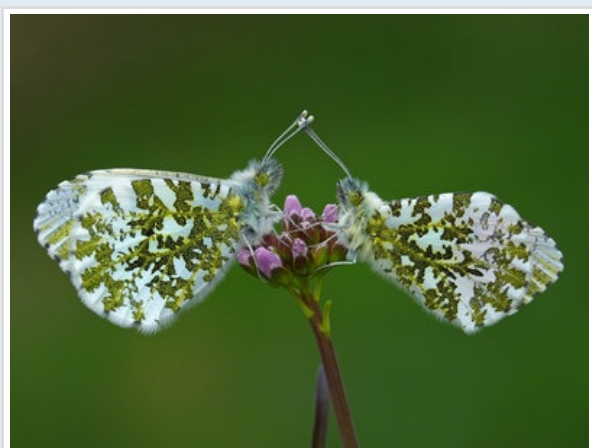
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Apr-19 01:25 PM GMT

Orange-tips

A thorough search of the Cuckooflowers and Bluebells in the meadows and lanes near Billingshurst yesterday (6 April) under cool and cloudy conditions (with none of the promised sunny spells) produced a surprising blank.

However, a move to the meadow at Wiston was much more rewarding, where three snoozing Orange-tips were found with relative ease. The best find was a pair (female to left in image), which I'm sure would have mated during the previous spell of decent weather.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 07-Apr-19 03:15 PM GMT

Hi Neil, I am hoping to get down there this week, weather permitting!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Apr-19 07:50 PM GMT

Hi Mark. Good luck, but I doubt you'll need it if the weather plays ball. Monday and Thursday look ideal if the forecast holds true. Both Billingshurst and Wiston should produce.
BWs, Neil

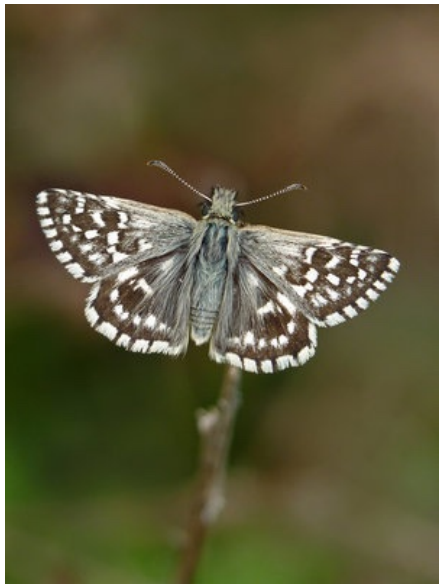
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Apr-19 07:52 PM GMT

Grizzles

This afternoon (7 April) I took my kids to Mill Hill for a butterfly hunt and some mountaineering. Despite the late hour and overcast conditions we managed to find 5 Grizzled Skippers at roost. A couple of them start to fidget and one briefly opened its wings for a couple of minutes when some weak sunshine forced its way through the cloud, but they soon returned to their slumber.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 07-Apr-19 09:47 PM GMT

Thanks Neil, hopefully tomorrow. I will consult google maps first. What lovely Grizzled Skippers, too!

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 07-Apr-19 10:03 PM GMT

That is a lovely powdery Grizzly 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 08-Apr-19 09:13 AM GMT

Beautiful set of shots Neil – especially like the first Grizzlie which seems to be reaching out to steady itself a bit like a grizzled old man leaning on the bar 🤔😄 I hope the mountain ascent was safely completed 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 08-Apr-19 11:04 AM GMT

Wurzel^[quote]a bit like a grizzled old man leaning on the bar 😄 Watch it youngster 😡😄
Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 08-Apr-19 06:33 PM GMT

Sorry Jack no offense meant 😊 As I am now have plenty of white hairs in my beard and also as according to my pupils I'm "well old, practically ancient" 😄 I did have myself in mind when thinking about propping up the bar 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 08-Apr-19 06:47 PM GMT

I think you missed the "smiley" Wurzel. No offence whatsoever. I laugh at myself. But I don't prop up bars these days (very often). I can't even remember when I last had any alcohol at home.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Apr-19 06:38 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...Despite the late hour and overcast conditions we managed to find 5 Grizzled Skippers at roost.

Very nice, Neil. I wondered when the first of these would emerge. Surely, it can't be long before the first Pearl Bordered Fritillaries are on the wing?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Apr-19 06:35 PM GMT

Thanks, all. More Grizzles coming shortly.
David: I reckon about 19/20 April for PBF in Sussex.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSp0ck, 13-Apr-19 06:46 PM GMT

Agree with the PBF dates, expect the other early Fritillaries around then too, i looked up the dates for 2011 and things seem to be ahead of those,

2011 First Sightings, [the SPBFs were probably West Country.]

Green Hairstreak 29th March

Duke of Burgundy 3rd April

Grizzled Skipper 2nd April

Dingy Skipper 7th April

Wood White 18th April

PBF 9th April

SPBF 22nd April

Marsh Frit 22nd April

Glanville 22nd April

Common Blue 18th April

Adonis Blue 26th April

so it looks like the April Fritillary will be with us again, and the May Fritillary a little later. so when things warm up i would expect most on the above list to appear.

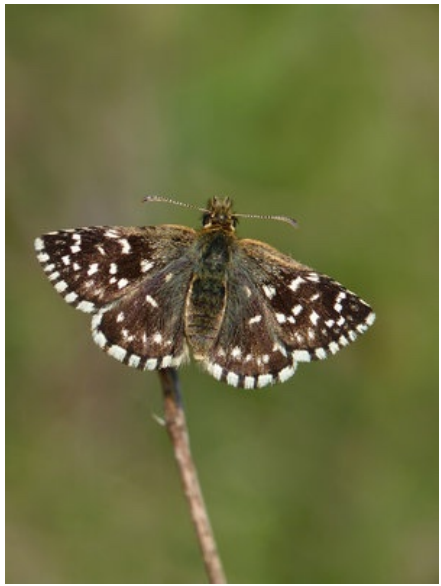
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Apr-19 06:47 PM GMT

Grizzles And A Greenie

Dodging the showers and with only the briefest spells of sunshine, a short visit to the lower slope of Mill Hill today (13 April) produced about 5 Grizzled Skipper and a fly-by Green Hairstreak (my first of the year).





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 14-Apr-19 08:44 AM GMT

Lovely images, Neil. Should be a lively Easter weekend with Grizzlies, Green Hairstreaks, Small Coppers and PBFs about. Let's hope the forecast is accurate and these 17-20c temperatures materialise.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 14-Apr-19 08:47 AM GMT

If 19-20 is the prediction for PBF in Sussex then I reckon 27th in Wiltshire - that's if there are any left 😊 On a brighter note those are cracking Grizzlie shots; the last one is brilliant and quite an unusual pose 😊🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-19 07:47 PM GMT

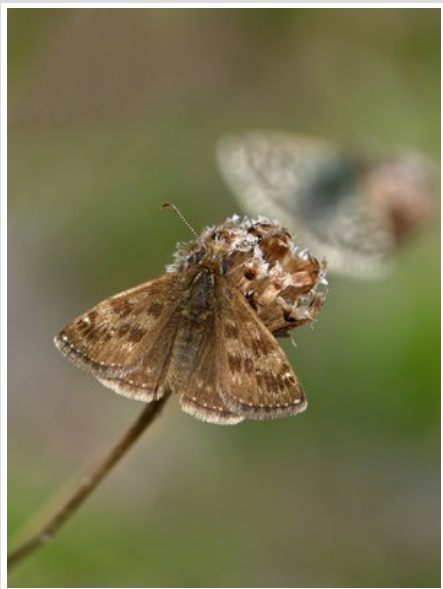
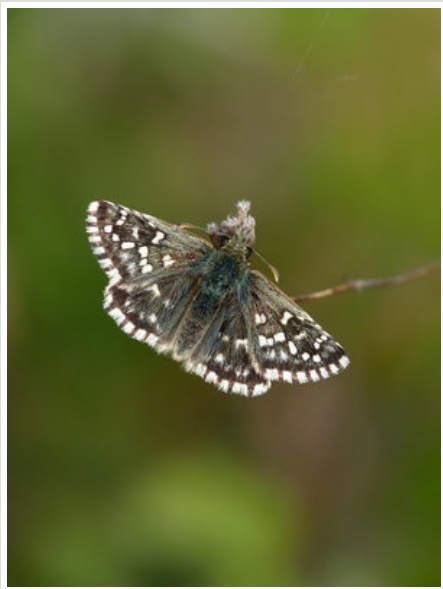
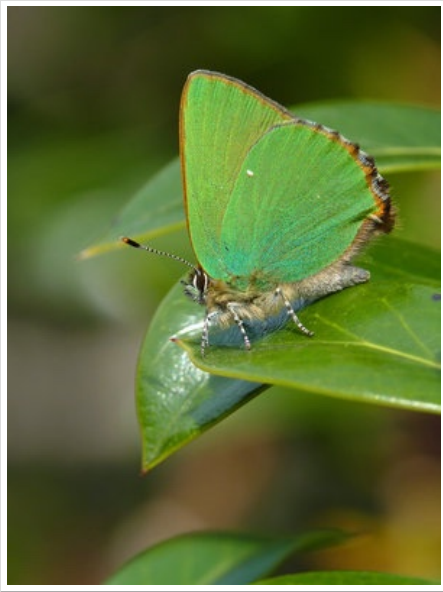
Thanks, David and Wurzel. Hold on tight - this weekend should produce fireworks!
BWs, Neil

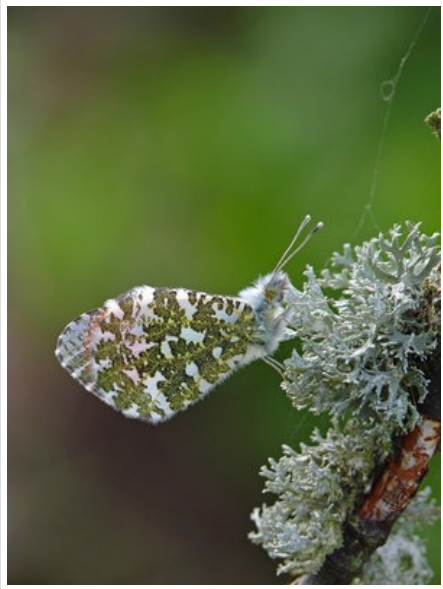
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-19 07:50 PM GMT

Mixed Bag

A late afternoon visit (18 April) to Chantry Hill provided a nice mix of Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Green Hairstreaks and male Emperor moths. Moving on to the stream-side meadow at Wiston, the roosting Orange-tips were initially difficult to track down, with none at rest on the Cuckooflowers. I eventually found four secreted in the adjacent copse, with two of them using lichen as camouflage; something I've never seen before.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 18-Apr-19 10:44 PM GMT

Great shots Neil especially the Dingy – it looks like it's rubbed out the Grizzlie in the background 🤪😁 Have there been any records of Small Heath over your way yet?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Apr-19 11:55 PM GMT

Delightful, Neil, especially the Dingy Skipper which is immaculate.

Pearl Bordered Frits are on the wing at Cwm Soden in Wales so they must surely be emerging round your way.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 19-Apr-19 09:12 AM GMT

I had never thought of OTs using lichen but now you have photographed it really ought to have been obvious. How could we all have missed it? Maybe we are less smart than Orange Tips 😁

Thanks for the "discovery" Neil.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 19-Apr-19 09:18 AM GMT

Love your Green Hairstreak shot, Neil. How that green can vary according to light, camera angle etc. Always a thrill to see.

Keep up the good work,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Apr-19 06:09 PM GMT

Thanks, all.

Wurzel: Small Heath started on 17 April in Sussex – unsurprisingly on the ultra-warm slopes of Mill Hill.

David: PBF started at Abbot's Wood on 19 April and on 20 April at Rewell Wood, where numbers have built rapidly.

Jack: One of the joys of butterflying is that no matter how much time we put in, there's always something new to learn.

Trevor: Not much can trump a fresh Green Hairstreak. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

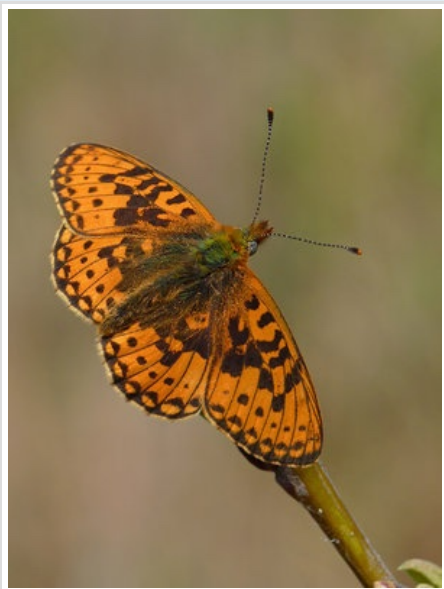
by Neil Hulme, 27-Apr-19 06:39 PM GMT

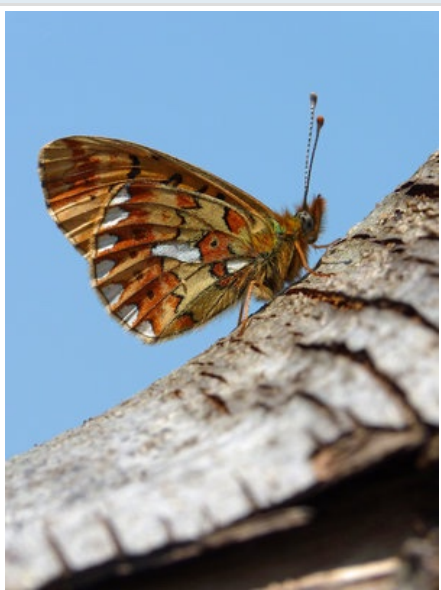
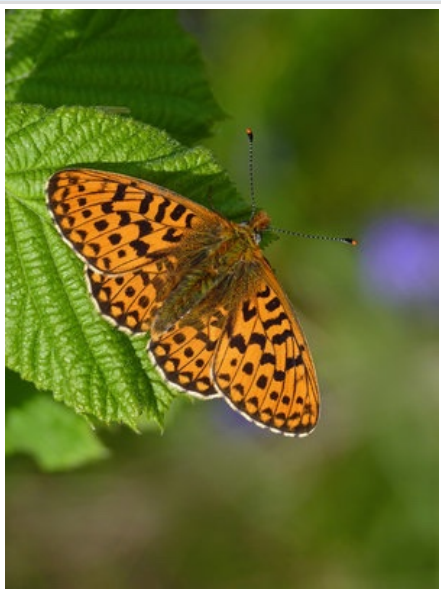
Pearls Aplenty

I'm pleased to see that Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) numbers have reacted very well to the huge amount of habitat creation work performed at Rewell Wood over recent winters, thanks to generous financial support from the Norfolk Estate, and the labours of South Downs National Park staff and Volunteer Rangers, BC Sussex, Plumpton College and Kenny the resident woodsman.

On just Day 5 of the flight season here (25 April) I made a count of 65 PBF, of which only 3 were females. This total was recorded over six monitoring compartments, some of which are away from publicly accessible areas. However, there are plenty to see on the main W-E track running across the southern part of Rewell Wood.

When visiting, please try to avoid excessive footfall over the areas of regenerating vegetation, particularly in cool periods when the butterflies may be sitting on the ground. Freshly emerged adults, mating pairs and pupae are also at risk during the early part of the flight season (the same applies to other PBF sites).





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 28-Apr-19 03:11 PM GMT

Thanks for the info on the Small Heath Neil - the 17th was the same day I got my first ones of the year too 😊

Lovely to see the Pearls especially the slightly melanistic one 😊 Looks like I might need to take a slightly different route home tomorrow after work 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 28-Apr-19 04:59 PM GMT

Wonderful to see them out, Neil, and an early ab. to boot!

After last year's near perfect flight period weatherwise, let's hope this cool, cloudy, stormy stuff disappears to give this species an opportunity to further consolidate in 2019.

Re: Neil Hulme

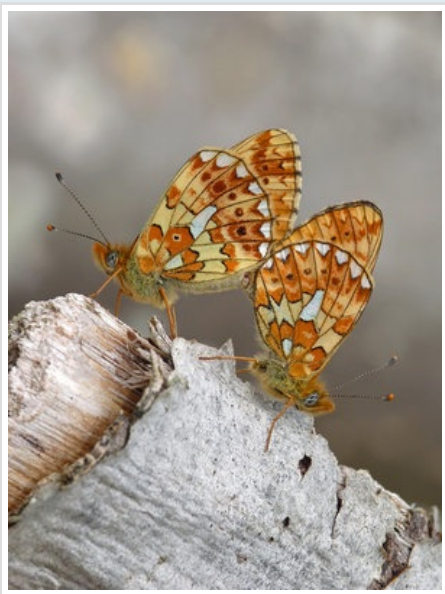
by Neil Hulme, 30-Apr-19 07:32 AM GMT

Rewell PBFs Go Large

The warm, sunny weather yesterday (29 April) triggered a huge emergence of Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) at Rewell Wood, with the previous best 2019 count of 114 being easily surpassed, as the number of female butterflies rose dramatically after midday.

I bumped into Patrick Moore, who had already seen 23 PBF on the main W-E ride, and invited him to join me in a standardised count of a large commercially harvested area of chestnut coppice (please keep to the public rights of way, from which large numbers of PBF can be seen). Within this one recording compartment we counted 151 PBF (in just 30 minutes), and my final tally for six compartments reached 243.

This is the most PBF I've seen in a day for a very long time and is testament to years of cooperative work here by the Norfolk Estate, South Downs National Park Authority, Butterfly Conservation and others. I have a feeling that other projects guided by BC's *Fritillaries for the Future* will be providing some more good news over the coming weeks.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Andrew555, 30-Apr-19 08:53 AM GMT

Absolutely fantastic Neil! 🍷🍷🍷🍷😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-Apr-19 05:12 PM GMT

Even by your standards that's a fabulous sequence, Neil. We're really spoiled for choice, especially with that mating pair.

I particularly like the one with the 'bluebell hue'. It's always irresistible when a butterfly settles on these blooms.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 30-Apr-19 07:13 PM GMT

A fantastic sequence of shots Neil and fantastic new of the success, those numbers are incredible – and I thought that I was doing well finding 5 easily at Bentley Wood 😊😊😊😊🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 30-Apr-19 09:38 PM GMT

Stunning shots, Neil.

I popped into Rewell Wood this afternoon and was staggered by how many were flying. I just had to stand still and they would appear from all directions. We owe a huge debt of thanks to all those involved in making this happen – including your good self of course! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 30-Apr-19 09:50 PM GMT

Hear hear!

Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 01-May-19 08:17 AM GMT

Neil – Its a 1 hour drive for me to see Pearls and because of circumstances I don't do this every year so I have seen none so far. It seems all I need to do is visit your PD. Its a lot closer and I get to see them mating and also the odd ab as well!!! Also, amongst all your wonderful pics of them is that one on a Bluebell. Magnificent. And going back in your PD slightly, a great shot of a Grizzly from underneath. You must have been standing on your head to get that one!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-May-19 08:54 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

....my final tally for six compartments reached 243.

Absolutely marvellous, Neil. Clearly, the work that has gone in here has been perfect for the species and quite rightly you are now reaping the rewards.

This will hopefully not only sustain this butterfly in that area but also allow it to expand, thus reversing what was hitherto a depressing decline.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 02-May-19 06:05 PM GMT

That's a phenomenal result and just goes to show what can be done with a some knowledge and the will to make it happen! Lets hope other counties take note.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 02-May-19 06:20 PM GMT

Great to read of the fantastic numbers of PBF at Rewell Wood.
Will Abbots be able to match that?.
Lovely images of a very photogenic species.

Keep up the great work,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-May-19 09:02 AM GMT

Thanks to all for your comments. I managed a subsequent count of 306 🤩 over the entire site; probably the highest number ever recorded at Rewell Wood. However, I think they've now peaked here for this year (a high proportion of females in my last count), so my focus will now move to monitoring other, later sites.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 06-May-19 09:44 AM GMT

[quote]I managed a subsequent count of 306 🤩 over the entire site; probably the highest number ever recorded at Rewell Wood! I've lost my data but in 1974 I had a count of something like 100. The records might be hiding somewhere in Sussex Wildlife archives as I had certainly submitted them.

Of course 45 years ago (!) PBF wasn't noteworthy in Sussex. The way present conservation efforts are going, PBF might again **not** be noteworthy in another 45 years time. Hope you last that long Neil. You should by then have already received your ton-up congratulatory **text message** from King William V.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-May-19 08:56 PM GMT

Hi Jack. If PBFs are doing that well by then, I'll be a very happy 103 year old. Texts will probably be obsolete.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

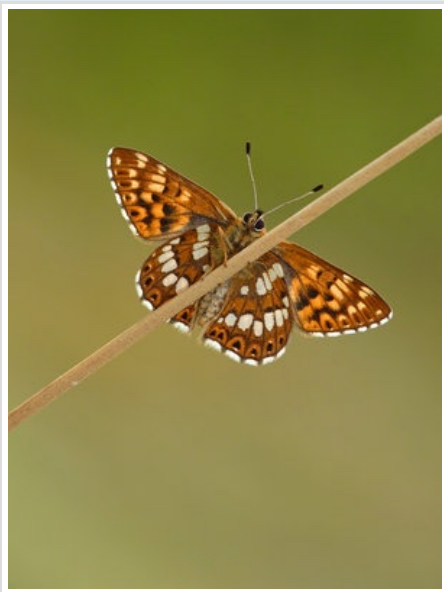
by Neil Hulme, 06-May-19 09:00 PM GMT

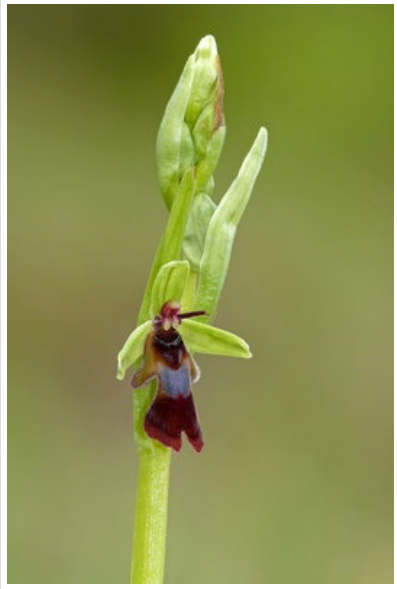
Dukes

On Sunday (5 May) I visited the Heyshott Escarpment and Graffham Down Trust reserves, hoping to find Duke of Burgundy at both locations. The weather was only periodically good enough to tempt them into action (and it's still early in the season), but my tally of 11 at Heyshott was still a little disappointing.

I found 2 male Dukes at the Scott's Corner (GDT) reserve, which gives hope that the recent colonisation may become firmly established. I also saw Dingy and Grizzled Skippers at both sites, and my first Fly Orchids of the year at Heyshott.

I'll be leading a walk for GDT next Saturday (11 May), leaving Graffham Church at 10.30 am.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 06-May-19 09:22 PM GMT

Great work Neil ! Sadly don,t think I ,m going to be down that way till the third week in Juneguttled !
I love to see the Pearls ,and it was a treat to see them at Rewell last season ,still perhaps I may get lucky with the Small Pearls ,at Park Gate
heres hoping ! Regards Allan.W.
Just been flicking through my copy of Edward Newmans "British Butterflies " it always tickles me to read ,just how common they once were .
" One of the very commonest of wood butterflies in England " and "It swarms (!) in the London district " (!!)
and " it is found in every county list received ,with the exception of Derbyshire " .

Re: Neil Hulme

by NickMorgan, 06-May-19 09:45 PM GMT

Ah, all these exotic species! Dukes, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers – three butterflies I have never seen. It is amazing how different things are down south. We are still experiencing frosts after to false starts to the season! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 06-May-19 10:38 PM GMT

306 is an incredible count, Neil. Well done to you and your team!

If temperatures round your way were anything like as suppressed as those near me on Sunday & Monday, then I'm not surprised you didn't see many butterflies. 11c might be alright for the adult overwinterers, but it's a bit of a shock to Dukes, Dingies, Brown Argus et al.

Hopefully we'll return to more clement conditions very soon.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-May-19 08:56 PM GMT

Hi Allan. If you're coming south in the third week of June I think SPBF (first brood) will be all but over on the Sussex reserves. I'd go for Purple Emperor at Knepp.

Hi Nick. You could always treat yourself to a holiday in Sussex next mid June. I'd make sure you saw Dukes, Grizzles, Dingy and others, such as Adonis Blue.

Hi David. With temperatures set to rise at the weekend, I think next week should be a big one for many of our rarities.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-May-19 09:15 PM GMT

Pearls And Pipits

With Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers having peaked at Rewell Wood, my focus has turned to monitoring a couple of PBF reintroduction sites, including Stansted Forest and Charlton Forest (part of the BC *Fritillaries for the Future* project). Things are looking good at both locations.

While at the latter site on Tuesday, I flushed a bird from right at my feet. A careful step backwards revealed a well hidden Tree Pipit nest. I took no more than 30 seconds to take a couple of shots and quickly retreated to a safe distance, from where I watched the female quickly return to her brood of six

beautifully marked eggs.

During my tour of the site I heard at least three singing males. This is one of the many unplanned benefits of the conservation work done for butterflies; the greatly widened margins of the forest road and rides have increased the foraging and nesting opportunities for Tree Pipits and many other species.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 08-May-19 09:23 PM GMT

Thanks for that Neil ,I,Il definitely look into KneppPurple Emps are a bit thin on the ground ,here in Kent !
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-May-19 09:37 PM GMT

Hi Allan
I should have said "west" - I forgot you're equally south!
Do consider visiting Knepp; it's a fabulous place, and there's so much more on offer than the hundreds of Purple Emperors.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-May-19 09:38 AM GMT

[quote]...my focus has turned to monitoring a couple of PBF reintroduction sites, including Stansted Forest and Charlton Forest (part of the BC Fritillaries for the Future project). Things are looking good at both locations.

Are the above locations in the 'pipeline' or have the reintroductions already started, Neil?

Re: Neil Hulme

by keving, 11-May-19 05:36 PM GMT

Neil, I love the photo of the perched Duke of Burgundy. Such magnificent markings.

I hope you don't object to me asking a question. I have been reading your diary with some interest and will be holidaying in Sussex at the end of May. I think I will be too late for PBF but would very much like to see SPBF. I will be staying near Lewes and would be grateful for any tips on where to get best results. I think the nearest to me may be Park Corner Heath.

Any help would be appreciated.

Kind Regards
Kev

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-19 09:07 AM GMT

Hi David. These reintroductions, performed in accordance with the 'BC Code on Introductions and Re-introductions 2010', took place in 2016 and 2018 respectively. There is another underway as I write, but we don't publicise the programmes until the job is finished, in order to allow the butterflies to get on with their initial business unhindered.

Thanks, Kev. End May should be spot-on for SPBF at the BC Park Corner Heath and adjacent Rowland Wood reserves. I'm hoping the first will emerge in

about a week from now.

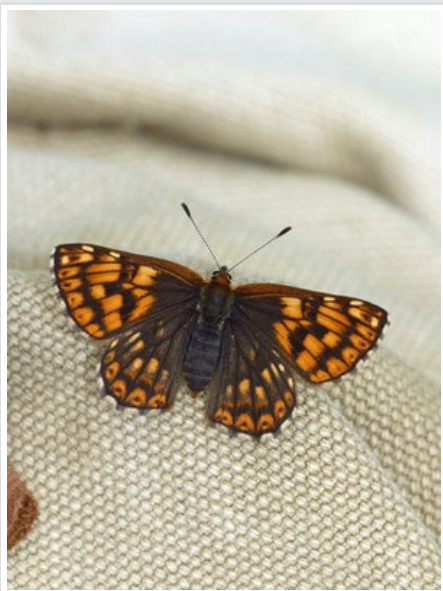
BWs, Neil

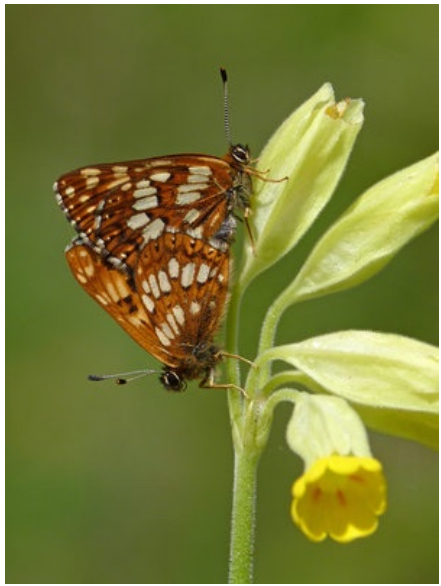
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-19 09:23 AM GMT

Dukes Spreading

Over the last few days I've spent some time looking at some of the smaller Duke of Burgundy colonies in the Arundel area, where natural colonisations are at the stage of (hopefully) becoming firmly established – one of these is at the Fairmile Bottom LNR. Things are looking promising. At one site I had a Duchess land on my rucksack; she must have emerged that morning, as ten minutes later she took to the air and was chased by three males, the fastest of which grabbed his prize. 😊



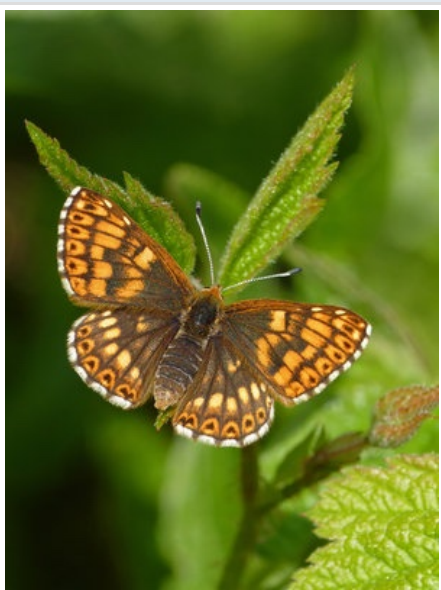


Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-19 09:43 PM GMT

Albomaculata

I spent a very enjoyable day (12 May) monitoring Duke of Burgundy numbers at Kithurst Hill and on private land in the area, seeing a total of 75 individuals in all. The pick of the bunch was an aberrant female (ab. albomaculata) at Kithurst, where numbers have increased significantly since yesterday. I even found Dukes in the hollows of the chalk grassland restoration area, before entering the meadow (the Cowslips here are better than they've ever been).



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-May-19 08:20 PM GMT

Thanks for the update, Neil. With all the excitement regarding the PBFs, the poor Dukes are in danger of being sidelined somewhat.

Encouraging to hear those numbers, and that last female is indeed a striking specimen, although I actually prefer the one on your rucksack; makes a change from your trousers!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-19 10:03 PM GMT

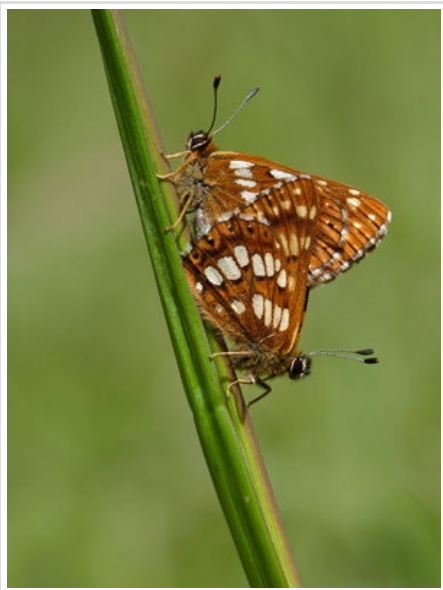
Hi David

Fortunately, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy flight seasons have been eased apart by the cool period of spring weather this year, at least in Sussex. PBF is on the wane at all but one site in the county, with Dukes only having really got going over the last few days. This is a huge relief to me, with so much monitoring to do.

I'm pleased to say that the numbers of both are excellent this year; records (for this century) will undoubtedly be broken. The only Sussex site bucking the trend is Heyshott Escarpment, which is rapidly dropping down the league table for Dukes.

Recent highlights include a lovely dark PBF ab. *transversa* and numerous mating pairs of Duke of Burgundy.

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 16-May-19 09:18 AM GMT

That is a cracking aberrant Neil 😊🍷 Any predictions for the start of the Small Pearls over your way (we're a few days behind – that's if there any this year 😊) ?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by kevlings, 16-May-19 08:36 PM GMT

Neil,

The ab. *transversa* is a stunner, what a find. That is by far my favourite photo of the season so far.

Regards Kev

Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 16-May-19 08:43 PM GMT

Hi Neil,
have you any idea why the Dukes are struggling at Heyshott, compared to other Sussex sites?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-May-19 12:42 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and Kev. SPBF started yesterday on the Sussex BC reserves.

Hi Mike. The scrub-cutting regime at Heyshott is currently far too aggressive in my opinion, being annually too extensive and of an insufficiently rotational nature. A very large area of the reserve now lacks Dogwood regeneration in the 1 and 2 year class, which renders the Cowslips too exposed to UV and prone to drought – they are reverting to the undesirable growth-form (small, flat rosettes). This also reduces the suitable habitat for other species, such as Tree Pipit, which has failed to breed on the slope for the first time in many years.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-May-19 01:09 PM GMT

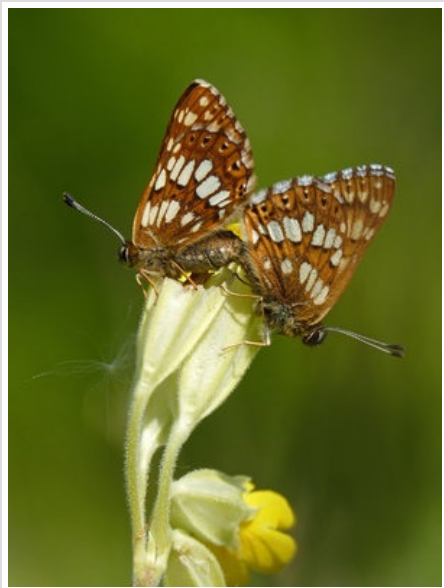
Dukes Aplenty

Yesterday (16 May) I covered many (but not all) of the scattered Duke of Burgundy colonies on the Downs near Storrington, some of which are on private land. My final tally of 104 individuals sounds very good, but the cold wind blowing directly onto the escarpment (Dukes hate northerly and easterly winds) undoubtedly kept the numbers down, particularly under increasing cloud cover. However, I saw enough to know that there is much better to come, and that this species is having a very good year in Sussex. Even under these adverse conditions I found half-a-dozen mating pairs.

During a previous visit, on a much warmer day, I had my highest ever count of Dukes at Kithurst Hill, where they are far more widespread than in previous years. My thanks go to all those who are doing their best to keep to the existing pathways across the meadow, as this helps reduce the trampling of foodplants.

As always, I'm struggling to monitor all Sussex Duke sites, so any records from Harting Down, Washington chalk pits and Fairmile Bottom (searches required along the scrub-line at the base of the slope) would be most welcome.

In the evening I visited my local site for Field Cricket, where the air was filled with the exotic sound of their chirruping.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 17-May-19 07:54 PM GMT

Hi Neil .

What do you reckon the chances of the field Crickets singing and showing their selves ,3rd week in June ??
Great pictures by the way ! Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-May-19 11:38 AM GMT

Great news, Neil....and that's a beautiful aberrant PBF in your previous post. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-19 06:47 PM GMT

Thanks, both.

Allan: The be honest I never search for Field Crickets that late in the year – I always visit in mid May. Finding them in the open (usually on their 'arena' – the bare patch of ground outside their burrow) takes a great deal of patient searching and stealth. They come out of their burrows to sing (attract mates), clear vegetation to keep the arena clear, and to forage, and the necessity to perform certain tasks may change with the season, once the majority of mating is done with. I don't know sufficient about them to rate your chances, but it must be worth a go. But be aware – one heavy footfall and they're gone in a flash.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-19 06:49 PM GMT

More Dukes

Another good (but not huge) count of Duke of Burgundy (82) on the Downs near Storrington today, but I didn't have time to visit all of the known colonies, and never made it to Kithurst Hill. A larger count was precluded by long periods of cool cloudy weather, so I'm still yet to fully assess the emergence this year. Male butterflies are still hatching, so I think we're still a day or two before peak season.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 18-May-19 07:25 PM GMT

That's great news, Neil. When you think of the dire situation with Sussex Dukes ten years ago. Storrington was yet to get going when I was there a couple of weeks ago, but things change so quickly this time of year, given a bit of sunshine.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 18-May-19 08:39 PM GMT

Thanks for that Neil ,I,m down that way anyway in June (for Club-tailed Dragonfly) so may well still have a look ,we,re hopefully going to try Knepp and maybe have a look for Black Hairstreak at Ditchling as well ,thanks for the information Neil !
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by NickMorgan, 18-May-19 09:42 PM GMT

Great to hear that the Dukes are doing so well with you. You have taken some stunning photos.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-May-19 10:02 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...Male butterflies are still hatching, so I think we're still a day or two before peak season.

That's quite something given that the first ones emerged in early April. I guess that cool spell between Easter and the second week in May has retarded them somewhat?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-May-19 08:16 AM GMT

Hi Mark and Nick. The recovery of the Duke of Burgundy in Sussex is a real conservation success story – these days I occasionally count more adults sitting in a metre square than were seen in the entire county during 2003. The great news is that the species is now spreading and its future looks secure in Sussex.

Hi Allan. Good luck with the Clubtails. I sometimes see one or two on the Downs in May, before they return to the rivers; there were three in Kithurst meadow last year! Here's one I found in the upper reaches of Rewell Wood a few years back.



Hi David. Although the Duke of Burgundy season appears very long on a national basis, there is a strong local effect involved. Noar Hill has a southwesterly aspect and is far inland, which means that the very warm microclimate (and strong population) triggers the very early appearance of 'early bird' individuals. Aside from a handful of males, the species didn't really get going in Sussex until May, so we can expect the last adults to be flying in early/mid June.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 20-May-19 04:45 PM GMT

Thanks Neil ,i'll settle just to see one or two on the wing! that'll do me ! a picture would be a real bonus !! and that's an excellent one ! Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-May-19 08:58 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...Although the Duke of Burgundy season appears very long on a national basis, there is a strong local effect involved. Noar Hill has a southwesterly aspect and is far inland, which means that the very warm microclimate (and strong population) triggers the very early appearance of 'early bird' individuals. Aside from a handful of males, the species didn't really get going in Sussex until May, so we can expect the last adults to be flying in early/mid June.

Thanks for the explanation, Neil. Good to know they'll be around for a couple of weeks yet.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-May-19 07:53 AM GMT

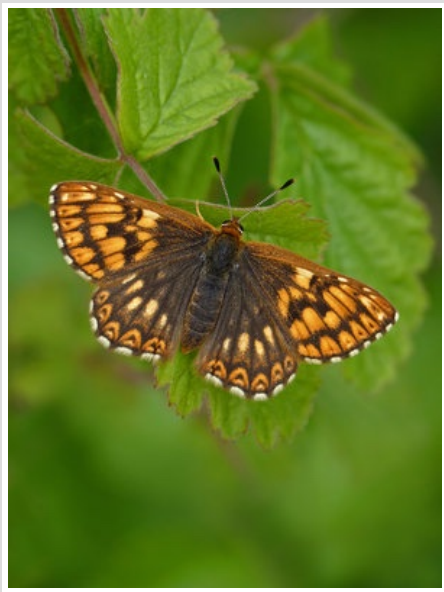
Albomaculata Again!

Yesterday (20 May) I arrived at Kithurst Hill with a view to starting a landscape scale count of Duke of Burgundy, but the changeable weather soon convinced me that it would be difficult to make progress under the stop-start conditions. I decided to stay put for the day, in the hope that I might be able to find another of the beautiful aberrant forms which have cropped up here in recent years; this is the only site at which I've ever seen ab. *albomaculata*.

Throughout my long stay I saw a total of 17 individual Duke of Burgundy, some of which are now looking tired, although several recently emerged females were seen. Soon after meeting Andrew Burns in the meadow, I located a Duchess and was following her when another caught my eye. Fortunately, I picked the right one to pursue and was delighted to find she was a perfect specimen of ab. *albomaculata* – my second for the site this year. We spent more than an hour waiting for her to reopen her wings after a cool, cloudy spell, but the wait was worthwhile.

Throughout the day many other species were seen, including Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Green Hairstreak, Brown Argus and Small Blue. However, the most important sighting was made by Beryl Greenaway and her party, who spotted a female Pearl-bordered Fritillary, about 10km away from its Rewell Wood birthplace. Unsurprisingly, given the explosion of PBF numbers there this year, the species has clearly dispersed into the wider countryside, giving hope of colonisations.

The day also provided the chance to catch up with or meet some very nice butterfly people, so in retrospect I was pleased that I never moved on from this wonderful location.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 21-May-19 04:45 PM GMT

Your patience is why your rewards are so great, Neil. Again, that is a beautiful specimen.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-May-19 01:07 AM GMT

BC Fritillaries For The Future Update

I'm pleased to report that a reintroduction of the Pearl-bordered Fritillary to the Rowland Wood reserve, conducted in compliance with the 'BC Code on Introductions and Re-introductions 2010' (involving the necessary research, thorough preparations and implementation of a sustainable management plan, as part of a landscape scale programme), has now been completed.

We haven't posted any of the reports sent in by those who have noticed the appearance of PBF on the Sussex reserves (some have already found their way into Park Corner Heath), in order to let the butterflies get on with the job of establishing a new population, unhindered by too much attention – thank you for your patience. We will welcome any reports from next year onward.

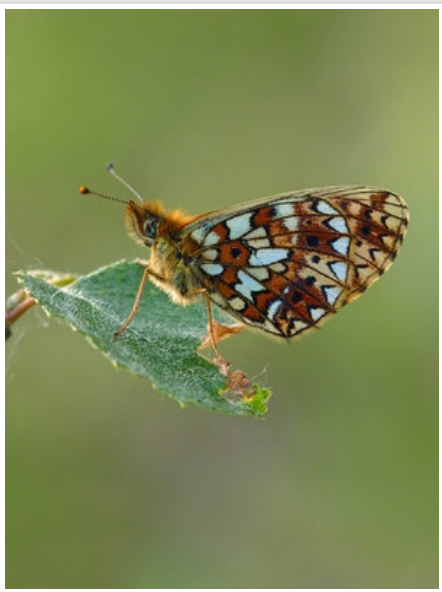
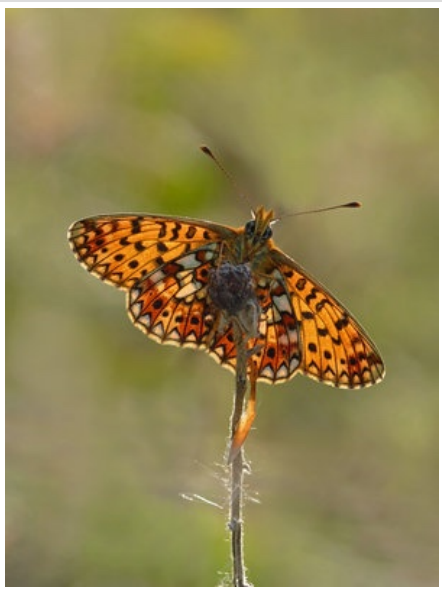
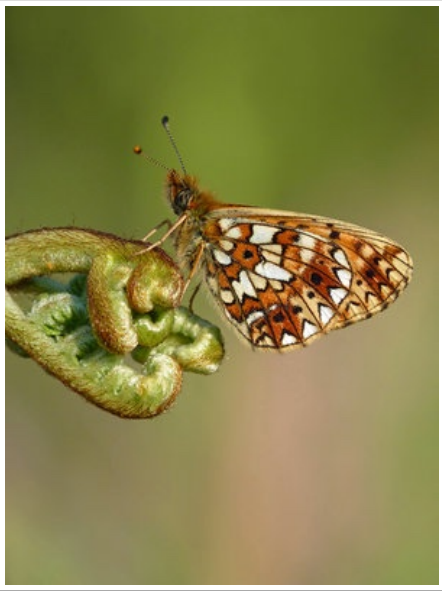
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries are now emerging on the reserves, so you now have the happy problem of differentiating between these species (a good book on The Butterflies of Sussex will help). I would like to thank the project's captive-breeding team of Theresa Turner, Gary Norman and Mike Mullis for all their hard work, and everyone else who has supported the project in any way.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-May-19 01:31 AM GMT

SPBF And PBF Flying Together Again

This afternoon (21 May) I performed a thorough search of both the BC Rowland Wood and Park Corner Heath reserves for the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which started to emerge a few days ago. My tally of four and eight individuals respectively, at such an early stage in the flight season, suggests we may see good numbers this year. The highlights were a chase of four SPBF males over the area in front of the PCH hut, and the sight of SPBF and PBF nectaring together; it was like stepping back in time.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 22-May-19 01:47 PM GMT

It was nice to bump into you at Park Corner Heath yesterday afternoon and thanks for showing me where most of the SPBF were flying. I eventually got some nice shots when the sun went in later in the afternoon.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

It is certainly a delight to see PBF and SPBF flying together, and thanks for all your efforts to make it happen.



Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Re: Neil Hulme

by False Apollo, 23-May-19 01:16 PM GMT

Hi Neil, there was a Duke of Burgundy ab. *gracilans* photographed at Cerne Abbas in Dorset recently. Photograph on the Dorset BC website.

Regards
Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by kevling, 23-May-19 05:22 PM GMT

Neil,

Lovely photos of the Frits. I'm getting very excited about my holiday in Sussex next week and will be staying close to Park Corner Heath. Is there a particular place I should be looking, or will a thorough sweep of the area be sufficient?

Regards
Kev

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-19 09:00 AM GMT

A pleasure, Andy. Plenty more now emerging!

Thanks, Mike. We see a few ab. *gracilens* in Sussex most years, but I don't recall seeing a good one in 2019.

Hi Kev. Don't worry – you won't be able to miss SPBF on either Park Corner Heath or Rowland Wood by next week.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-May-19 03:48 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

BC *Fritillaries For The Future* Update

I'm pleased to report that a reintroduction of the Pearl-bordered Fritillary to the Rowland Wood reserve, conducted in compliance with the 'BC Code on Introductions and Re-introductions 2010' (involving the necessary research, thorough preparations and implementation of a sustainable management plan, as part of a landscape scale programme), has now been completed.

That first paragraph gave me so much pleasure that I read it twice more! 😊

The sustainable management plan should ensure that both Pearl and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries gain a permanent foothold in the area. What a delight for all butterfly lovers. You and your team deserve medals.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-May-19 08:27 AM GMT

Thanks, David. We are now really beginning to see the rewards of the huge team effort over recent years, with the fortunes of both PBF and SPBF looking much better in Sussex. It's very satisfying to see both species flying together on the BC reserves.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

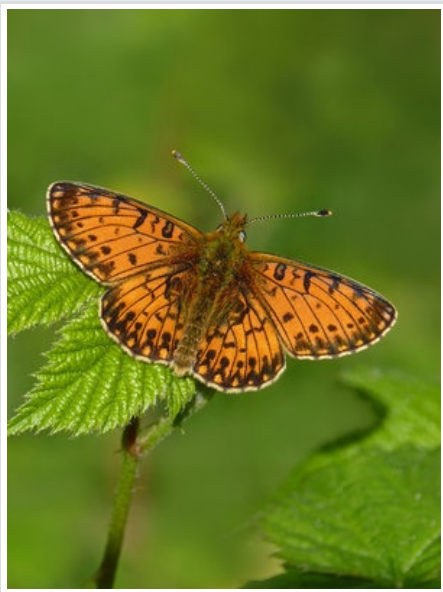
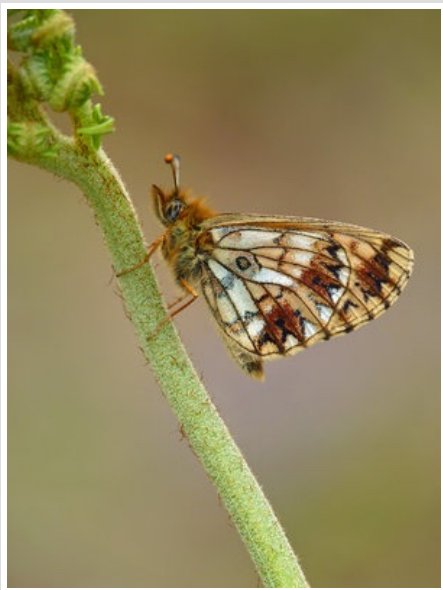
by Neil Hulme, 25-May-19 08:33 AM GMT

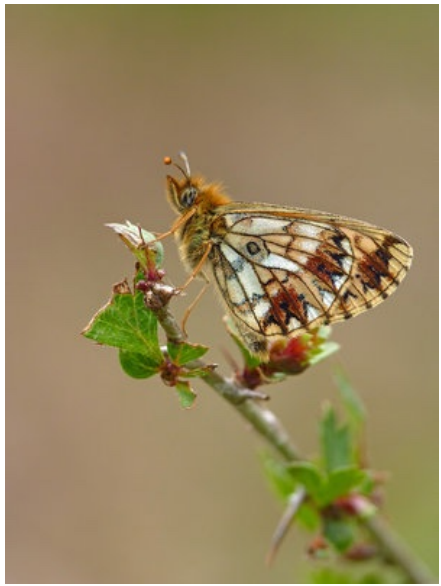
Small Pearls Going Large

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) numbers are now building rapidly on the BC Park Corner Heath (PCH) and Rowland Wood reserves, with the best count to date being 19 over the entire area. The highest numbers are currently being seen on PCH, where they emerge slightly earlier than in the cooler rides of Rowland Wood. We are always keen to hear of any SPBF sightings (numbers and locations helpful), both here and at Abbot's Wood, so please post any reports to the BC Sussex Sightings Page.

A small but beautifully marked aberrant male SPBF (ab. *infraclara* + trans. ab. *vanescens*: silvery-white cells over the basal and central hindwing underside; heavy, streaked upperside borders and reduced central spotting) has been causing much excitement over recent days.

Those wishing to photograph the SPBF will get better opportunities after 6pm on warm sunny days, or on partially cloudy days. Please note that chasing them around in the heat of the day will only cause unnecessary trampling of their breeding habitat – and you'll never catch up with them!





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 25-May-19 05:15 PM GMT

No wonder it's caused much excitement Neil – it's a cracking looking butterfly 🤩🌱🌱

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 25-May-19 08:58 PM GMT

Glad you got the shots you were waiting for, Neil (terrific photographs too!) – it really was a delightful little thing and never strayed very far. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-May-19 08:59 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and Dave. When Gary returned early the next day, the aberrant SPBF was lying dead below his perch, minus legs and antennae. Cause of death unknown, but probably dismembered by ants. Blink, and these beautiful things are gone!
BWs, Neil

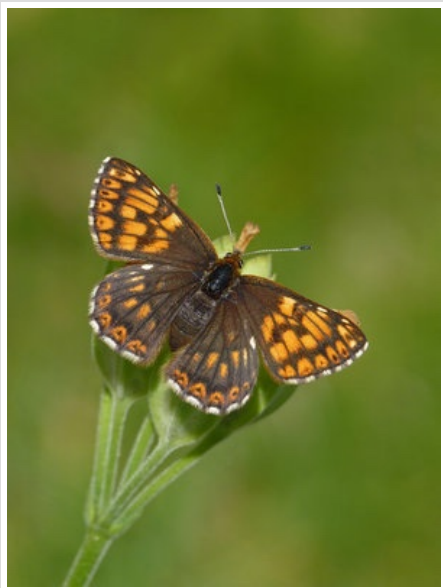
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-May-19 09:09 AM GMT

Spring Bonk Holiday

Yesterday (25 May) the weather finally held out for me to complete an extensive survey of the Downs near Storrington, primarily to count Duke of Burgundy numbers. My final tally of 163 individuals, over six colonies, included 3 mating pairs and many females in fresh condition; this species is having a very good year in Sussex and should fly until mid June on late sites.

During my travels it became clear that many other species were making hay; I found mating pairs of Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Small Copper and Small Blue. With so much bonking going on, it's clear that many spring butterflies are still emerging – there won't be much of a 'June gap' this year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-May-19 05:18 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

When Gary returned early the next day, the aberrant SPBF was lying dead below his perch, minus legs and antennae. Cause of death unknown, but probably dismembered by ants. Blink, and these beautiful things are gone!

Profound but true, Neil. Still, you got to see it alive and we were all able to take a look at what is quite some aberration.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-May-19 07:03 PM GMT

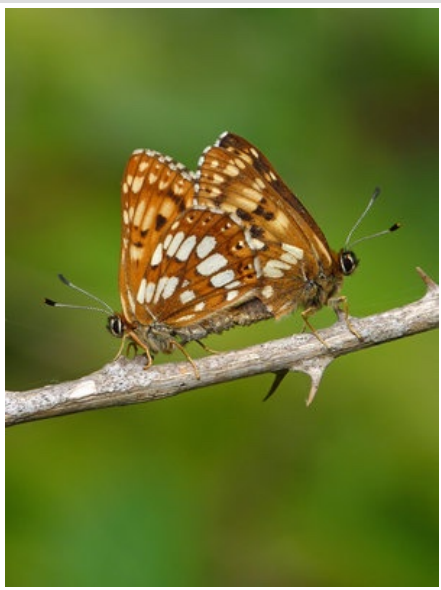
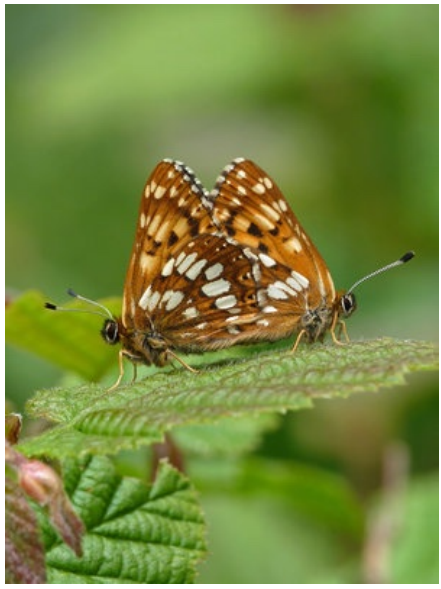
Record Duke Count

Today (26 May) I was joined by Mathilda Whittle, who is gaining some experience of conservation work for butterflies, by assisting with the monitoring of Duke of Burgundy numbers. I also invited Theresa Turner and Gary Norman along, to show them some of the more remote locations where the species now flies in good numbers. This was a suitable way of showing my appreciation of all they have done for the Fritillaries for the Future project.

With the sunshine gone before we set off, I suspected that we might struggle, but I'm pleased to report that we were in for a nice surprise. For most of the day the weather remained warm enough to keep the Dukes on the field of play, but largely inactive, making counting them very easy, especially with the extra eyes to help.

By the time Mathilda departed we were on the impressive total of 185 individuals. Theresa and Gary came along to Kithurst Hill, where another 13 Dukes were added. I then left them to photograph the Small Blues and headed to my final destination on private land.

The final tally of 216 Duke of Burgundy, including 6 mating pairs, is a record for this landscape, in which it is still spreading. It is very rewarding to see a species which was once on the point of extinction in Sussex, as the most common butterfly on the slopes today.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-May-19 05:29 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

The final tally of 216 Duke of Burgundy, including 6 mating pairs, is a record for this landscape, in which it is still spreading. It is very rewarding to see a species which was once on the point of extinction in Sussex, as the most common butterfly on the slopes today.

That's a fabulous tally, Neil. As you say, this was quite recently a species many feared might be lost.

Wonderful to see it about in such numbers, and equally good to know it's future seems in safe hands.

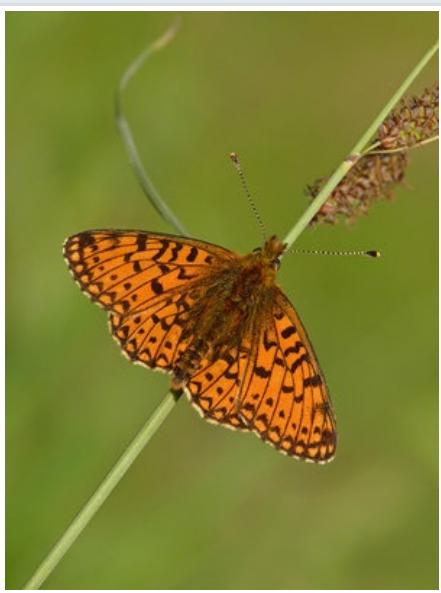
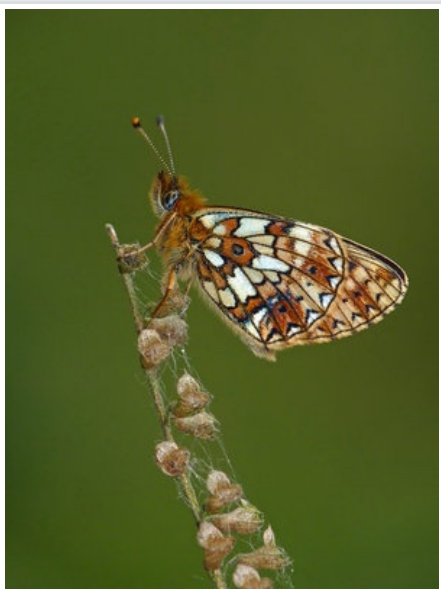
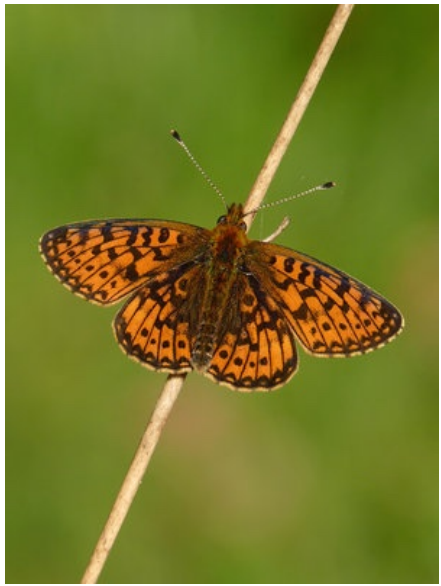
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-May-19 12:02 PM GMT

Small Pearls Still Emerging Strongly

The emergence of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the Sussex reserves is still gathering pace, with the numbers in Rowland Wood now overhauling those on Park Corner Heath (where they appeared earlier). Yesterday (28 May), good numbers showed in Wide Ride (TQ51441487) and Christmas Tree Glade/east end Beech Ride (TQ515150) for the first time this year. Numbers are also good at the top of Rushy Meadow and Birch Meadow (TQ51591496).

The best count for the entire reserves now stands at 54, but I suspect we are still a few days short of peak emergence. Cream-spot Tiger moths are now flying and Adder was seen on both reserves, including a pair coiled on a tree stump. Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak made up the best of the rest.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 29-May-19 05:19 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

..The best count for the entire reserves now stands at 54, but I suspect we are still a few days short of peak emergence.

Very encouraging, Neil. I'll keep my fingers crossed that you can hit three figures at some point! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-May-19 09:46 AM GMT

Hi David. I'm hoping we can reach that sort of figure next year, but the good news is that we now know they're already spreading. BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

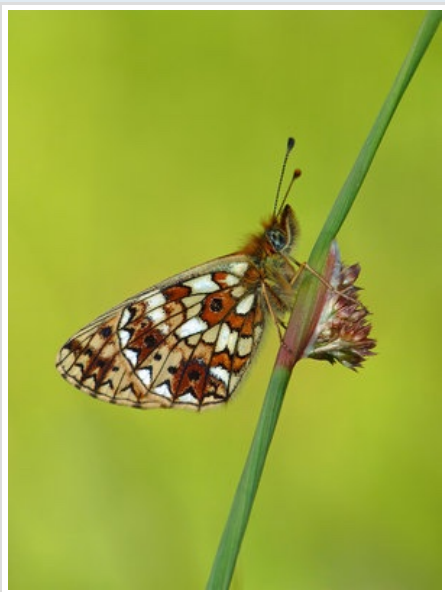
by Neil Hulme, 31-May-19 09:49 AM GMT

Small Pearls On The March

Close monitoring of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary reintroduction (following the 'BC Code on Introductions and Re-introductions 2010'), conducted as part of the BC *Fritillaries for the Future* project in 2017, continues to produce very encouraging news. Yesterday (30 May) I teamed up with Patrick Moore to count SPBF on the reserves, with our total of 58 individuals comprising 43 in Rowland Wood and 15 on Park Corner Heath.

Just as we finished the count, we bumped into Peter Farrant, the bearer of more good news. Peter had found three male SPBF at widely separated locations within other parts of the Vert Wood complex. These indications that the butterfly is attempting colonisation of the wider landscape at such an early stage, exceeds expectations.

We then sat back to enjoy the spectacle of SPBF collecting to roost in small groups. It wasn't long before we met other enthusiasts with the same idea; now an almost daily ritual on sunny evenings, as more people discover the joys of watching these stunning butterflies head for bed in such peaceful and beautiful surroundings.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 31-May-19 10:08 PM GMT

Great shot Neil and a great success 🙌👍 – if only the same was happening at Bentley Wood 😊 mind you four definite individuals there today whilst nowhere near the figures you quote at least means that there is a chance that they'll cling on 😊 I discovered this morning that it's also nice to be there when they wake up, if anything even more tranquil 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Jun-19 12:31 PM GMT

The good news keeps on coming, Neil....

....meanwhile, that's the best Fritillary image I've yet seen. The light is perfect and that little tuft on the other side of the grass blade just tops it off.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Buchan Boy, 01-Jun-19 12:36 PM GMT

Beautiful image of a Sussex SPBF there Neil, best get meself down there to admire all the good work being done. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jun-19 01:30 PM GMT

Thanks, all. Things are looking very good down on the reserves - I can't keep away from the place at the moment!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jun-19 01:35 PM GMT

Start Of Summer

Yesterday (1 June) I attended a BC event along with our Branch Chair, Jess Price, and several trustees and members of staff, to show some of our supporters how the Rowland Wood & Park Corner Heath reserves have been developed and much improved over recent years. The success of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary reintroduction was high on the agenda and the butterfly performed well, with sightings widely spread over both reserves.

However, the numbers seen were relatively modest compared to recent days, as the weather was just too good! As is often the case when it gets very hot, many butterflies were seeking out shade and sitting deep within the undergrowth, particularly during the middle part of the day.

Other species seen included Grizzled, Dingy and Large Skippers, Green Hairstreak, Common Blue, Small Heath and Brimstone (egg-laying on buckthorn). We also saw Meadow Brown, which I always use to mark the official start of summer.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Jun-19 07:00 PM GMT

Wow! Meadow Brown.

Is it **that** time already?

Re: Neil Hulme

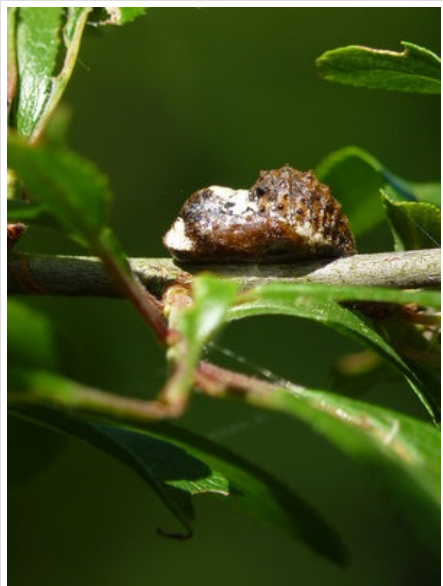
by Neil Hulme, 04-Jun-19 07:49 AM GMT

BC Reserves And Beyond

It appears that the first brood of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the BC reserves in Sussex is now past its best; yesterday (3 June) I had to work hard to find 15 individuals flying, although some of those seen were in mint condition. However, they will still be around for a couple of weeks yet and there is the possibility of a further surge in numbers, mirroring the emergence pattern we saw in 2018.

There was more good news from further afield within the wider Vert Wood complex. With the managing agent's permission I searched a neighbouring property and found three SPBF, including a mating pair, more than 0.5 km from our reserves – they're spreading!

I then moved on to Ditchling Common, where I photographed the fabulous Black Hairstreak pupa found by David Cook. No adults were seen despite favourable conditions. The Bee Orchids at Ditchling are looking particularly good this year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jun-19 09:56 PM GMT

Dance Of The Longhorns

Today (4 June) I visited the Vert Woods Community Woodland (just over the road from our reserves) for the first time in two years and was given an extensive tour by their forester, Tom Ottaway. The progress made far exceeded my expectations and much of the habitat now looks highly suitable for the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, although many other species are set to benefit.

There's a new forest road to facilitate harvesting, wider and better connected rides, and new glades. The ground flora is fast improving and heather is regenerating in many places, as the old Vert Wood is gradually uncovered. I came away very excited about the prospects for the wider woodland complex here, and was further enthused following a later meeting with the manager of Sandpit Wood, which lies to the south of Park Corner Heath.

Although the weather wasn't good enough to shift more than the occasional Speckled Wood, warmer spells were sufficient to send dancing clouds of the longhorn moth *Nemophora degeerella* into the air.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jun-19 08:27 PM GMT

Fritillaries And Adders

By the time I had reached the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves this afternoon (5 June) the weather had turned cool and cloudy. However, this didn't stop me finding Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at roost, and with the help of others, who had already marked the positions of several butterflies, I finally ended up with a tally of 11. A sunnier day would be required to achieve a more representative count. Although now past peak, SPBFs are still emerging, with fresh male and female examples seen. I get the impression that their lifespan is quite short and the turnover rate high.

I also spent some time stalking a couple of beautiful Adders in Rowland Wood, having previously discovered their favourite spot to bask in dull but warm weather.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 06-Jun-19 04:10 PM GMT

Those adders are stunning, Neil. The only time I've ever got close to one is when I nearly stepped on one basking by the entrance gate at Whixhall Moss.

Inevitable that the Small Pearls are starting to wane, but they've had a decent season and who knows, there may be a second brood!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jun-19 10:27 PM GMT

Thanks, David. I think a second brood is inevitable. 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

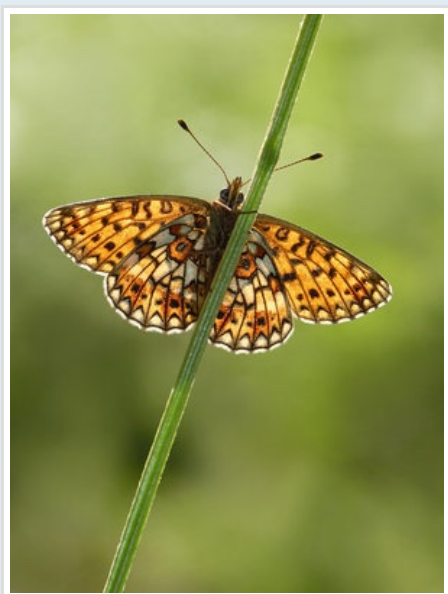
by Neil Hulme, 06-Jun-19 10:32 PM GMT

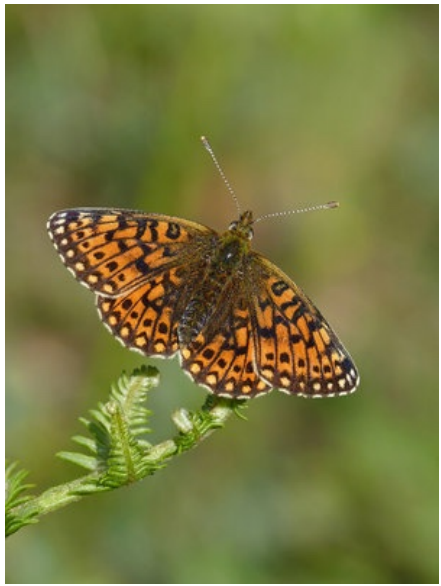
Another Day With Small Pearls

This afternoon (6 June) I managed to find a total of 13 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the BC Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood reserves. Nine of these were females, which are much harder to locate than the males, as they flutter slowly amongst the increasingly tall vegetation, periodically taking rests between bouts of egg-laying.

I also watched a drunken brawl between five or six Red Admiral, which were regularly returning to a fermenting sap run on an oak in Rowland Wood.

The highlight for me today was the place itself; I think we've created something stunningly beautiful here.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Jun-19 11:56 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...The highlight for me today was the place itself; I think we've created something stunningly beautiful here.

That must be hugely satisfying, Neil. That's one of the great things about butterflies – they take you to the most wonderful, yet not particularly well trodden, places.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jun-19 08:03 PM GMT

Hi David

I'll take some scenic shots of the reserves next spring, when the Bluebells are out. By then, all of the scars from the recent major forestry operations will have healed, and the place will be looking its very best.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jun-19 08:06 PM GMT

Pruni Party

The Ditchling Black Hairstreak Festival has started slowly this year, with only about half-a-dozen males flying so far (at 8 June), but that should change rapidly from tomorrow onwards. As always, they are posing beautifully on the Bracken here. Ben Greenaway kindly showed me a couple of the pupae he's been following.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 08-Jun-19 09:02 PM GMT

Brilliant Neil ! I,m keeping my fingers crossed for the week after next ,hope they,re still about

Absolutely bucketed down when we went up to Oxford area ,a year or two back ! keeping my fingers crossed that the weathers kinder this time.
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by John W, 08-Jun-19 11:00 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Good to see you again today. Lovely shot of the Black Hairstreak pupa!

Cheers
John W

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 09-Jun-19 07:15 AM GMT

Something went seriously wrong yesterday!.
You, and others, were enjoying Black Hairstreaks,
and I was washing the kitchen floor/gardening.

Great images,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Jun-19 08:14 PM GMT

Such a delight to have found this species in your neck of the woods, Neil. It fills a nice gap too – after the Dukes and Frits but just before Emperor season! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-19 09:04 PM GMT

Thanks, all.

Allan: Your timing should be fine to see the Sussex Black Hairstreak.

Trevor: A man's work is never done. 😊

David: June Gap? What June Gap? There's no such thing in Sussex now! 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

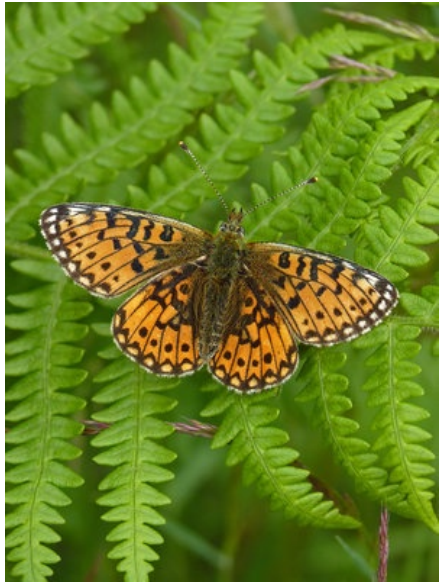
by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-19 09:08 PM GMT

Last Of The Small Pearls, For Now

The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary first brood flight season on the BC reserves in Sussex is now winding down, with just three females seen in Rowland Wood today (9 June). The good news is that they will fly again this year, with a second brood emerging in the last days of July or first few days of August. They've had a brilliant season here and the reintroduction appears to have been a great success.

In warm but overcast conditions an elderly female Brimstone was still laying plenty of eggs on the short regrowths of coppiced buckthorn, while caterpillars were easy to find. Large Skipper was present on both reserves, together with Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Common Blue.

Much to the delight of my kids, we found several Adders and Grass Snakes.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Jun-19 11:14 PM GMT

Sad to see SPBFs declining, Neil, but it's encouraging to know a few will grace those parts later in the summer.

Much as I love these Frits, hats off to the humble Brimstone which is a true survivor! I've seen a handful myself this month, meaning I'm in the company of butterflies almost a year old!

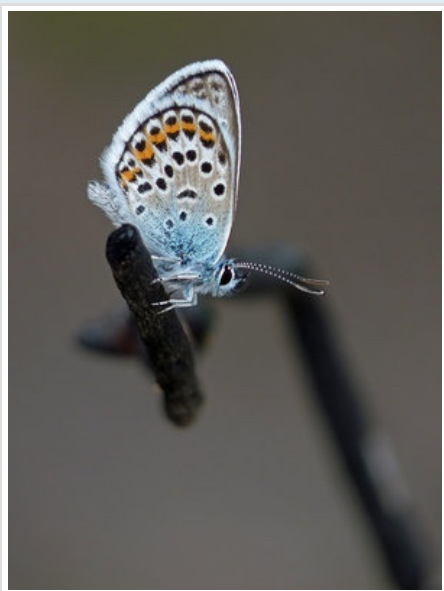
Fair play to that female who's still hard at it! 😊😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jun-19 04:33 PM GMT

Silver-studded Rainy Day

On a drizzly day in early June (12th) there was only one (fairly) sensible option open to me – Silver-studded Blue at Iping Common. It didn't take me long to find half-a-dozen males, but the increasingly persistent and heavy rain prevented a wider search.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 12-Jun-19 06:45 PM GMT

Great stuff Neil ! ,love the Silver Studs and hopefully another species to look out for next week !
I suppose you wouldn,t happen to know if Frog Orchid grows at Fairmile Bottom would you ?? Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jun-19 07:21 PM GMT

Thanks, Allan.

Yes it (Frog) does, although I haven't checked this year. Let me know if you're visiting Fairmile.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 12-Jun-19 07:44 PM GMT

Thanks for that Neil ,I did wonder if they may be there ,and we will be looking in at Fairmile ,as its not too far from where we,re staying ,so I might try an early morning visit or two . Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Mark Tutton, 13-Jun-19 06:51 AM GMT

Had a look for the Frog and Bee Orchids at Fairmile last weekend and couldn't find either – but that doesn't mean much where Frog Orchids are concerned as they can hide in plain sight!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jun-19 08:53 PM GMT

Black Magic

Despite the dodgy weather this morning (13 June) I suspected that a few Black Hairstreak might be down on the Bracken at Ditchling Common, so phoned Dave Cook for a local weather report. He told me that he was going to head out and would let me know if anything was moving. It wasn't long before he called to say that he'd found one waiting for him. Another call, just a few minutes later, telling me that he'd seen a pairing, and I was in the car. At times I must have been right on the speed limit. 😊

Fortunately, they were still there, remaining in cop for 1 hour 15 minutes. The female was down for more than 2 hours, sufficient for Trevor to catch up with her. Unfortunately he arrived just too late to see the happy couple.

There was plenty of other action and together we saw 11 individuals on the Bracken, including 7 females, all in good condition. Despite the unpromising weather, it was a day to remember. Thanks, Dave!







Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 13-Jun-19 09:35 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Another call, just a few minutes later, telling me that he'd seen a pairing, and I was in the car. At times I must have been right on the speed limit. 😊

Seems to have paid off – superb images as ever! 🍷

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 13-Jun-19 09:38 PM GMT

(Through gritted teeth!) Great images of the mating pair Neil.
Almost as sickening as Dave's video !.

Seriously, a great afternoon.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 14-Jun-19 03:30 AM GMT

Neil[quote]At times I must have been right on the speed limit. 😊"Sorry Officer, I was just on my way to witness a mating."

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jun-19 07:43 AM GMT

Thanks, Pete and Trevor. I was pleased with the shots given the very challenging conditions of low light and high wind. I took more than 100 images, but only 5 or 6 were passable. I overlooked the one below during my first sift through the mountain of blurred and grainy efforts.

Hi Jack. I don't think that excuse would hold water; I believe that dogging is also illegal.

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 14-Jun-19 08:18 AM GMT

It is *reasonably* obvious (but nothing in the butterfly world is ever certain) that the Ditchling colony is the result of an introduction "N" years ago. It might be true that given the right habitat, Black Hairstreak quite readily colonises if it gets the chance. I have heard it suggested that the distribution of Midlands Black Hairstreaks coincides rather well with the estates of one of the earlier members of the Rothschild clan. If I understand correctly, the Continental range of Black Hairstreak extends nowhere near to the Channel or North Sea coasts. So...???

The Ditchling colony remained undetected for a long while. Wasn't there also a Cranleigh introduction that anecdotally might *not* have died out, merely moved slightly? So are introduced colonies lurking in plain sight in southern England? It's not as if it's a big showy butterfly. Compare with how a genuine big showy butterfly for long had remained undetected in many of its localities.

There's a challenge for you Neil and your *Band of Merry Men of the Wealden Forests*.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jun-19 10:03 PM GMT

Hi Jack

Are there likely to be other colonies existing undetected in Sussex or Surrey? I would say probably yes, but a full explanation would require a mini-essay, which is a job for the winter.

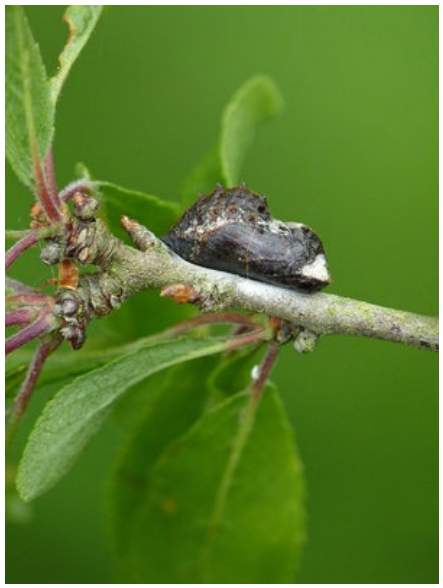
BWs Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jun-19 10:08 PM GMT

Ditchling Again

Another good day (14 June) at Ditchling Common, where numerous visitors from various parts of the South of England, including a posse from Surrey, enjoyed plenty of Black Hairstreak action. No mating pairs today (apart from Large Skipper), but a good selection of male and female butterflies were seen and all looks very promising for the weekend guided walks.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Matsukaze, 14-Jun-19 10:13 PM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:

It is *reasonably* obvious (but nothing in the butterfly world is ever certain) that the Ditchling colony is the result of an introduction "N" years ago. It might be true that given the right habitat, Black Hairstreak quite readily colonises if it gets the chance. I have heard it suggested that the distribution of Midlands Black Hairstreaks coincides rather well with the estates of one of the earlier members of the Rothschild clan. If I understand correctly, the Continental range of Black Hairstreak extends nowhere near to the Channel or North Sea coasts. So...???

The Ditchling colony remained undetected for a long while. Wasn't there also a Cranleigh introduction that anecdotally might *not* have died out, merely moved slightly? So are introduced colonies lurking in plain sight in southern England? It's not as if it's a big showy butterfly. Compare with how a genuine big showy butterfly for long had remained undetected in many of its localities.

There's a challenge for you Neil and your *Band of Merry Men of the Wealden Forests*.

Jack

The Oxford Clay belt continues south-west from Oxford through Wiltshire and Somerset, and the butterfly has been found not too far from the Wiltshire border. There must be a reasonable chance it occurs in the woods around Swindon.

Re Continental distribution – it is resident around Rouen (Seine-Maritime, which is effectively south Sussex).

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Jun-19 07:33 AM GMT

Fabulous images of the Hairstreaks, Neil, especially the mating pairs. When the flight season is over please let us know how it compared with last year's glorious one.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jun-19 08:24 AM GMT

BC Sussex Ditchling Common Walks

Congratulations to Jamie Burston and David Cook for their excellent guided walks to see the Black Hairstreaks of Ditchling Common yesterday (15 June), despite challenging weather conditions in the afternoon. The morning event was a 'walk in the park' and the large crowd (25+) was treated to numerous close-up views of the target species. Everyone managed to get photographs of a male hairstreak in perfect condition, within just minutes of arriving in Hairstreak Alley. Other highlights included an early Ringlet and a fabulous display of Common Spotted Orchids.

The weather collapsed for the afternoon event, but fortunately we had marked the position of a male Black Hairstreak sheltering from the drizzle, so everyone managed to see the butterfly at point blank range.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 16-Jun-19 08:37 AM GMT

Hairstreak Alley looks exactly the same type of habitat that I have seen Black Hairstreak before, eg Monks Wood, Glapthorn so it is reasonable to predict that if it does occur in other so-far undetected places in England, then the search can be confined to that type of habitat only. Might a winter egg search be profitable? Or is the habitat requirement so similar to that of the Brown Hairstreak that searches - with 'null' results - might already have been made? But no doubt Black Hairstreak eggs would not be quite so easy to find as the white ones of the Brown.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jun-19 08:00 PM GMT

Hi Jack. I think it would be true to say that effective surveying for all habitat specialists involves the searching of only their optimum habitat type. The

pioneering stuff is hard enough going as it is, so searching sub-optimal habitat would soon demoralise the keenest of surveyors.

Egg hunts for this species are not recommended as a way of assessing presence. Black Hairstreak eggs are 1–2 orders of magnitude more difficult to find than Brown Hairstreak.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jun-19 08:03 PM GMT

Super Pupa

Today (16 June) saw another two highly successful guided walks at Ditchling Common, despite poor weather in the morning. Over the four sessions this weekend, Jamie Burston and David Cook managed to show more than 60 attendees the Black Hairstreak, with everyone holding a camera going away with photographs. A total of 15 hairstreaks were seen low down on the Bracken today, with much more activity above the Blackthorn thickets.

A chrysalis discovered by Ben Greenaway finally hatched, allowing a few people the rare opportunity to photograph a (female) Black Hairstreak next to its vacated pupal case. A great weekend was had by all.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Jun-19 06:41 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Today (16 June) saw another two highly successful guided walks at Ditchling Common...

Who'd have imagined this a couple of years ago? What a great opportunity for people to see this rare and elusive species.

They are clearly still emerging so there's plenty of life in their flight season yet!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Jun-19 07:38 AM GMT

More From Ditchling

The Black Hairstreaks of Ditchling Common were again entertaining large numbers of visitors yesterday (17 July). I was particularly impressed that one chap had risen at 5.30 am to travel up by train from Devon!

Unsurprisingly, numbers have been lower than last year, but very few enthusiasts have gone home disappointed. One thing we have learned this season is that this species will sometimes be active in the most unpromising conditions, with good numbers being seen down low on overcast, windy and even drizzly days. Activity levels start to subside in prolonged heat.

It is still possible to find butterflies in good condition, but from now onward it will be necessary to sift through an increasing number of individuals which are now beginning to lose their original shine.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Jun-19 05:11 PM GMT

Two 2019 Firsts

A brief visit to Fairmile Bottom LNR this afternoon (18 June) provided me with my first 2019 sightings of Dark Green Fritillary and Marbled White, although I have yet to see either species with their wings open! I found one of the former and two of the latter at roost under threatening clouds, but only managed to photograph the DGF before the heavens opened. I was very pleased to find Duke of Burgundy larval feeding damage on Cowslips in several locations.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Jun-19 04:33 PM GMT

Beautiful DGF, Neil. It's taken them a while to get going this year. In 2018 I saw several on 10th June.

Hopefully High Browns won't be too far behind.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Jun-19 06:03 PM GMT

Thanks, David. Here's another from this morning. There are now more than a dozen Dark Greens flying at Fairmile Bottom and Marbled White numbers are increasing rapidly.

The orchid flora here, which was superb until a couple of years ago, will hopefully improve again, as I've managed to broker a deal to get the cattle grazing reinstated, after a run of years without. However, I did manage to see half-a-dozen small Frog Orchids.

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 20-Jun-19 06:59 PM GMT

One of the oddest localities for Bee Orchids was/is on and around the crumbling runways of a WW2 airfield in East Anglia- I presume the concrete as it broke down reached alkalis of some sort. But the most bizarre aspect was that the colony of Bee Orchids extended into the soggy ground beside the old runways. The density of Bee Orchids and the total size of the colonies was quite the most impressive I have ever come across.

The owners / users of the airfield (including a - now deceased - knowledgeable botanist) were / are well aware of significance of their Bee Orchids but don't want to advertise things for fear of the meddling by "do-gooders" from the conservation bodies. Things are just fine as they are.

I came across another airfield in the north of England, this time a damp grass field without runways, that had huge colonies of orchids (embarrassingly, I can't recall the species but I think Bee Orchids).

My point is that Bee Orchids are not confined to calcareous grassland.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by kevling, 20-Jun-19 08:08 PM GMT

Neil,

Lovely photographs of the Black Hairstreaks. They seem to be flourishing over the past couple of years making them a much sought after species for us all. Nice to see the DGF on the wing too. Things are hotting up and not just next weeks weather.

Regards
Kev

Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 21-Jun-19 02:04 PM GMT

Hi Neil ,

I reckon just missed you at Fairmile ,I had 3 bites of the Cherry (so to speak) all early morning visits (6.30 – 8.30 am) ,what a fantastic site !! Like yourself I found 8 Frog Orchids ,but after visiting them once I was loathe to return ,as I was frightened of treading on them ,so left them be. Very pleased to find them !! I also managed 3 Bee Orcs (inc ,1 weather beaten White one) , also found several Fly Orcs ,and of course Pyramidal Orcs (just coming into flower) and hundreds of Common Spots ,including a type that I,ve never seen before ,it had the standard top flower clump and then halfway down the stem ,another part flower headvery unusual .

On Tuesday morning we stopped in at Ditchling , for Black Hairstreak ,and was lucky enough to find a pair (in-cop) ,which I showed to 3 other butterfly folk that were there ,I reckon we saw about 6 , a lifer for me so well pleased !

Back at Fairmile ,I saw 1 Dark Green male ,numerous Meadow Browns ,Small Heath ,Large Skippers ,half a dozen Marbles , (my first for year) Single Male Common Blue ,single Grizzled Skipper ,Ringlet (1st) Painted Lady,also a very unusual 5 spot Burnet .

Had 3 "goes" for Silver –Studs(At Stedham) ,the first 2 attempts were aborted in the car-park (Rain) but finally cracked it yesterday and found high numbers on the wing including a pair in-cop .

On the way back to Kent this morning we again stopped in at Ditchling and were treated to some nice views ,but they were reluctant to come down low, also met Dave Cook there and had a natter ,good to meet him . No luck with the Club-tails thoughgood excuse to go back !!

Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-19 07:19 PM GMT

Hi Jack. Although Bee Orchid is usually associated with calcareous grasslands, it does sometimes grow on neutral soils. However, as I live on the South Downs I see 99% of mine on the chalk.

Thanks, Kev. The Black Hairstreaks of Ditchling have quickly gained superstar status! We've had hundreds of visitors from all over the UK this year.

Hi Allan. I'm glad your visit went well. If you thought that Fairmile was impressive, I reckon you should revisit in future years. The site is currently at a bit of a low ebb, but once the cattle grazing reconditions it, the orchid flora should increase by an order of magnitude! A few years back it was exceptional, and I'm sure it will be again.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-19 07:21 PM GMT

Rarity At Knepp

Yesterday (21 June) I saw a real rarity at the Knepp Wildland – a Small Tortoiseshell laying eggs on young nettle shoots. Following the modest number of post-hibernation butterflies at Ferring Rife, this was only my third sighting of first brood individuals this year. I believe that this species has a grim future in the South of England, courtesy of climate change. No sign of the eagerly awaited Purple Emperor yet.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 22-Jun-19 08:45 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the Small Tort Neil 😊 I don't share your pessimism as in my area they're pretty numerous still with similar numbers at my work for the last couple of years now – it may be a West/East divide as I know that Philzoid reckons that they're difficult to find in Surrey for example 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 22-Jun-19 10:08 PM GMT

I hate to rain on your parade, Neil but, where I live at least, Small Tortoiseshells seem to have few problems getting to this stage. There are plenty around where I live at the moment, for example. But there seems to be a problem getting this generation through the immature stages, to produce adults the same year. Certainly since 2013, I have had plenty in late June early July, then almost nothing after.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 23-Jun-19 10:04 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Yesterday (21 June) I saw a real rarity at the Knepp Wildland – a Small Tortoiseshell...

I live in inland East Sussex, between the South Downs and the Ashdown Forest. Small Tortoiseshells have been a rarity here for several years. I've seen none in and around my village this year, and last year I saw only 2.

Oddly though, the only Small Tortoiseshell I have seen in Sussex this year was at the end of April, at Knepp!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jun-19 09:15 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel and Mark. I'm afraid we'll have to agree to differ on this one!

The vast UKBMS database (from 1976 onward), based on the national transect record, shows a 78% decline over the 43-year series, a 22% decline over the last 10 years, with 2018 ranked 41st. Bearing in mind that this is the nationwide record, which smooths out latitudinal differences, it masks just how serious the situation is in the South of England. Regional data shows the decline of the Small Tortoiseshell is generally less serious as one moves north. A quick and dirty analysis of some Sussex data suggests the decline here over that period is >90%.

I also pulled out the single species transect (max) counts of post-hibernation adults at Ferring Rife – the best site in West Sussex:

2013 – 194
2014 – 77
2015 – 64
2016 – 18
2017 – 33
2018 – 47
2019 – 14

The way we perceive the fortunes of a species depends on many things, including how far back individual memories extend. Malcolm Farrow, who is of similar vintage to me, posted this in response to one of my BC Sussex tweets: "*I grew up in Sussex and, when I first began to take an interest in butterflies in the early 1970s would regularly count 20-30+ small tortoiseshells at a time on the buddleia in our garden. Now I'm grateful just to see one, as I did today.*"

This fits with my experiences of a time when the Small Tortoiseshell was common – more than 5 on a single *Sedum spectabile*; more than 30 on a single *Buddleia*; more than 100 on a walk in mid-late July (which was the peak of the first brood in the period 1990–1994 – an event which had shifted forward to late June by 2010–2014); at least half-a-dozen dead in spider's webs in the garden shed; and large aggregates hibernating in any outhouse.

I think we have to be wary of 'shifting baselines' – which even includes the 1976 date against which most scientific studies are measured. We have become used to Small Tortoiseshell being relatively rare, so I'd be interested to hear what "pretty numerous" or "plenty" means to others. These days I see far, far more Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy, Wood White and Purple Emperor than I do Small Tortoiseshell, and they are considered rarities (to a greater or lesser extent). This would have been considered unthinkable when I was a kid.

I believe, as does Jeremy Thomas (pers. comm.), that climate change is behind the problems faced by Small Tortoiseshell. I've previously posted on this subject <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?p=140248#p140248> With the extraordinary forward shift of this species' phenology I believe there is an increased tendency within the population towards bivoltinism, with a consequent decrease in its risk spreading strategy (early hibernators). Here, I agree with Mark – the increasing risk comes with the next breeding cycle, and the increasing chance of desiccation of the nettle-beds, courtesy of climate warming. We saw this last year – the 'common' nettle-feeders suffered a stinker.

It's important to separate out climate change from shorter term weather effects. Only a few years back the species rallied strongly for a couple of years, only to fall back again. Small Tortoiseshell is likely to fight rearguard actions in cooler, damper summers, but this has to be set against the longer term backdrop of decline. Sadly, the data only points one way.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jun-19 10:05 PM GMT

Fritillaries And Clearwings

Yesterday (22 June) I met up with Gary Norman for a very pleasant few hours at Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood. Highlights included a very late Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, a couple of Silver-washed Fritillary and a Dark Green Fritillary, but despite our best efforts we couldn't locate a White Admiral. Small Skippers are just starting and, bearing in mind the way the vegetation is now developing over the new rides, could become very numerous here.

We also bumped into Derek Barber and his partner, who were waiting patiently beside clearwing lures. I was delighted to see my first Yellow-legged Clearwings – very exciting!



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jun-19 10:17 PM GMT

The Ladies Are Coming!

This morning (23 June) I visited Littlehampton Golf Course to look for White-letter Hairstreak. They're only just starting here, with just five males seen in the canopy. Later visits to Eartham Wood and Fairmile Bottom were met with variable success, with neither White Admiral nor Silver-washed Fritillary at the former, but plenty of Dark Green Fritillary and Marbled White at the latter. However, Painted Lady was seen at both sites, with about ten at each. As many others have reported on the BC Sussex website, we're enjoying a significant influx.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 23-Jun-19 10:46 PM GMT

Without considering the data I still have to agree Neil with regard to the Small Tortoiseshell. I remember seeing plenty of Small Tortoiseshell on the Buddleia at the bottom of my garden in the late 70's/early 80's. Living all my life in London has probably magnified the situation, with naturally far lower numbers naturally anyway but I went for many years without seeing a single Small Tortoiseshell. It was only when I moved to north east London that I started seeing them again. What I now consider a hotspot, Tottenham Marshes, can produce 5 or 10 post hibernators, (I'm not often there during the summer so I can't comment on first gen numbers), which looking back to my childhood years is pretty pathetic.

Obviously there will be isolated pockets which will produce the 'perfect storm' of conditions more often than surrounding areas which may mask the true, wider situation and us butterflies do tend to gravitate to these places so perhaps some of us are guilty assuming things are better than reality. Perhaps Wurzel's situation, being further west and therefore having a higher average rainfall is also masking the overall situation?

A couple of weeks ago I was in Farnham in Surrey and came across a damp meadow/cattle pasture with a patch of nettle. Instinct told me it looked good for Small Tort and low and behold I found three larval webs plus a few fresh emergents so at least four batches of eggs were laid here. If I grew up here and didn't travel further afield and this is a normal occurrence I would probably assume things were ok for the Small Tort. The fact that I spent half an hour here chasing the adults and searching for more larval webs tells me quite the opposite sadly.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-Jun-19 06:24 AM GMT

I don't think there can be any doubt that Small Tortoiseshell numbers in the south of England (particularly the south east) are declining. Their scarcity has been reported many times on here over the years although this year numbers seem to have picked up, whereas where I live in south Wales they have been relatively scarce this spring.

Of course, in Wales there is a range of altitudes and generally wetter weather conditions, meaning that nettles are rarely desiccated. Even in hot summers like last year, the adults can still find suitable, healthy LHP by flying to greater altitude, which is something this species does as a matter of routine. That's not the case in the SE,

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 24-Jun-19 08:03 AM GMT

With desiccation of the Small Tort larval foodplant in hotter summers become more likely, I wonder why Comma which also uses nettle, is thriving?

Incidentally Neil your underside shot of that Small Tort is stunning. The detail is amazing and everything in sharp focus. Taken a Lumix bridge camera?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jun-19 10:10 AM GMT

Thanks, Jack. The ST shots were taken with the trusty Lumix.

With regards to Comma, again, it is important to look at the hard data and consider latitudinal effects. The 43-year UKBMS series does indeed show how well this species has been doing in recent decades, demonstrating a 130% increase since 1976. However, this increase will be largely attributable to the spectacular spread in geographical range of the species, as it continues its rapid march northwards, in response to climate warming (maps showing this spread are nothing short of amazing – see *The State of the UK's Butterflies 2015* p.12).

However, the shorter term (weather-related/2018 drought) picture is less favourable, with a 2018 nationwide decrease of 33% on the 2017 figures. How did it fare last year in sun-drenched Sussex? In my diary (late 2018) I commented: "*It also explains why I observed a much greater reliance (than normal) upon elm as a larval foodplant in the Comma, which also had a poor year in Sussex; the supply of succulent nettles had simply dried up.*"

The use of an alternative foodplant does give some advantages over the Small Tortoiseshell, but despite this the Comma did suffer a significant dip, from which the 'hangover' was clear to see this spring, at least down here. My own data (which these days is collated in excel rather than notebooks) suggest that I've seen fewer in the early part of this year than at any time since I've been a recorder. Postings by others to the BC Sussex website show a similar pattern – reports of Comma have been notably few and far between. Fewer than 150 individuals have been reported (including 4 *hutchinsoni* which is yet to get going). That's poor, but nowhere near as bad as Small Tortoiseshell.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 24-Jun-19 10:38 AM GMT

Neil commented:
[quote]commented: "It also explains why I observed a much greater reliance (than normal) upon elm as a larval foodplant in the Comma, which also had a poor year in Sussex; the supply of succulent nettles had simply dried up." I have to wonder – if push came to shove – whether Small Tort might accept alternative foodplants. Captive breeding experiments perhaps?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 24-Jun-19 10:46 PM GMT

Alright Neil? I read the data with much displeasure – those numbers don't look good and I understand your concerns 😞. I've read in various places of a decrease in numbers of the Small tort of between 70 and 78% which is shocking. I can also remember seeing loads when I was a kid crawling over any

Buddleia I found and I'm not denying that the Small Tort has drastically decreased. 😞

That being said my optimism/hope comes from the fact that for the last couple of years the numbers of Small Torts that I've seen during the spring have stayed to pretty much the same level - building to highs of 15 or so in a 10-15 minute walk at my workplace which is a pretty good density. Also each spring I don't struggle to see them, they're often the most common butterfly on my early spring visits outnumbering Peacocks by about 3 to 1 on average. There is also the observation that people that I know that live in the South East have often told me how they may only see a handful of Small Torts over the year whereas in the spring I can see a handful most days.

I also based my optimism/hope on the fact that in Wiltshire since 2008 the Small Tort has made something of a comeback moving from a classification as a Scarcity to Widespread, with the expected fluctuations the graph overall shows a positive correlation (from the County report). Again I pose the idea that perhaps there is a West/East divide although this can only be conjecture on my part as I don't know the data from other Western counties and I can only base it on anecdotal evidence - with a massive dollop of hopefulness thrown in too 😊 Fingers crossed...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 24-Jun-19 11:06 PM GMT

I must reiterate, I'm in no way disagreeing with anything Neil has said. I'm delighted Small Tortoiseshell is still doing ok here, it's just the second generation thing, which seems to suffer much lower success rate, either from predators, poor condition of the nettles, or probably both. I will enjoy this flight for the next few weeks, as I don't expect to see much after mid-July. I hope I'm wrong...

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Jun-19 10:51 PM GMT

When I was a kid, the guidebooks all stated that Comma larvae preferred hops and nettle was a secondary source of LHP.

To my knowledge, Small Tortoiseshell is a species that relies almost totally on nettle.

Has anyone seen them lay (or larvae) on anything else?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jun-19 10:28 AM GMT

Hi all

Thanks for your comments. However, I don't see or hear anything which allays my fears. The total of Small Tortoiseshell first brood (late May - present) individuals which have so far been reported to the BC Sussex (19) and BC Hants & IOW (18) websites are easily beaten by single day counts of species such as Black Hairstreak and Marsh Fritillary. I appreciate that these are colonial species, but the comparison is nevertheless quite shocking.

Wurzel: I suspect that the post-2008 improved status rating for the species in Wiltshire is based on the spectacular but sadly short-term recovery (nationwide and headline-making) seen in 2013 and 2014, before the species again slumped. As an aside, the terms 'Scarcity' and 'Widespread' are a little confusing, as one refers to abundance and the other to distribution; the distribution of Small Tortoiseshell has remained unchanged.

There will always be peaks and troughs, based on weather patterns and parasitoid load, but the long-term data is what gives cause for concern - or in the case of Comma, celebration.

It will be interesting to see the national figures for 2019, but until then I'll have to turn my attentions to other matters ... the Purple Emperor is now out!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jun-19 10:41 AM GMT

Emperor Out - At Last!

Yesterday (25 June) I made visits to Littlehampton Golf Course and the Knepp Wildland, with the common denominator being about a dozen Painted Lady. A similar number of White-letter Hairstreak was seen at the former site, including the first female. Plenty of Marbled White and 'golden skippers' at the latter, where Matthew Oates had a fleeting glimpse of a male Purple Emperor.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-Jun-19 03:46 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...until then I'll have to turn my attentions to other matters ... the Purple Emperor is now out!

Your work never stops does it, Neil? 😊

Nice Marbled White by the way.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jun-19 10:15 PM GMT

Hi David. Too many butterflies, too little time!
BWs, Neil

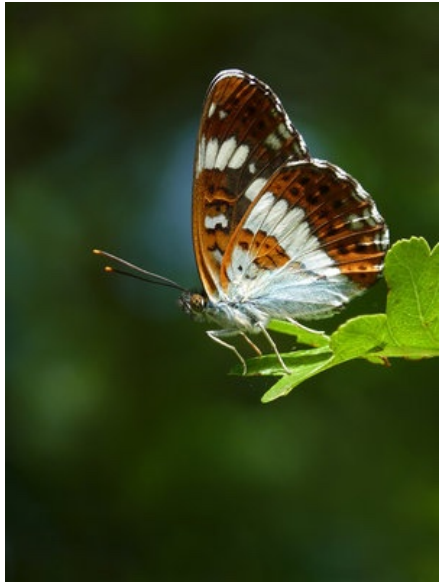
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jun-19 10:18 PM GMT

Purple Emperor Appearing At Last!

Yesterday (27 June) saw the first Knepp Wildland Purple Emperor safari of the year and we were fortunate to see a pair of males doing battle just before the end of the event; the species has started late this year, as the cool June weather has slowed things down significantly. However, we enjoyed plenty of action from White-letter and Purple Hairstreaks, White Admiral (pictured), Marbled White, Comma and 'golden skippers'. By the close of play in the evening, the emperor tally had risen to seven.

Purple Emperor numbers increased today and 12 were seen on a private safari, with a further four on territory by late afternoon. The best is yet to come. A similar supporting cast was flying, together with a few White Stork.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-19 11:44 PM GMT

More From Knepp

Another great day (29 June) at the Knepp Wildland started with a Purple Emperor safari on which nine individual males were seen, along with the usual supporting cast at this time of year. Finding emperors was quite hard going, as they (and other species) were clearly seeking respite from the 30+ deg. heat.

A mid-late afternoon survey along the Green Lane transect produced 14 Purple Emperor, two of which were probably re-counts from the morning walk. However, one territory had become occupied by an additional male by the evening, bringing the day's total to 22.

Today was more about quality than quantity. One angry male chased Long-tailed Tit, Chaffinch, Marbled White, Painted Lady and dragonfly from its territory. Another repeatedly chased lumps of earth thrown into the air, ensuring that a number of visitors were provided with their first ever sightings of this species.

White Admirals are also performing well for the crowds; although numbers are modest (5/6) they can reliably be seen in several areas.



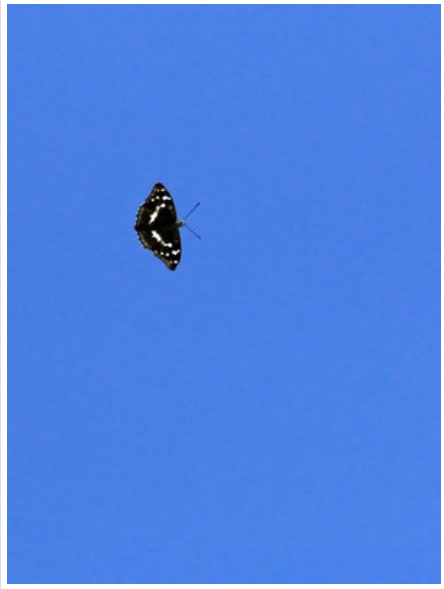


Image by Mark Hulme

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 30-Jun-19 06:01 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

One in the sky will do for now, until the groundings start.
Nothing at Chiddingfold Friday or Saturday (back there next week).

How's the neck ache!
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-Jun-19 04:03 PM GMT

Great airborne shot by Mark, Neil. I'm sure they'll be on the ground very soon.

Good to see numbers steadily rising.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jul-19 10:50 PM GMT

Hi Trevor. They've now started coming down. 😊

Hi David. The numbers have finally started to build, so it's time for the annual turkey shoot at Knepp. 😊😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jul-19 10:53 PM GMT

Emperors Kick Off In Style

The Purple Emperors of the Knepp Wildland finally kicked off in style today (1 July). While I searched the Green Lane and main hard tracks (26) Matthew Oates worked the fallow fields (56), giving a total of 82, which included just a single female. I photographed one on the ground in the late afternoon and heard reports of a further three on the deck between 10 am and 11 am.

White Admiral numbers reached double figures (the most I've ever seen in the Southern Block) and Purple Hairstreak was swarming in the oak canopy by 6.30 pm.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 01-Jul-19 10:57 PM GMT

Cracking shots Neil 🤩👍👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 01-Jul-19 11:15 PM GMT

White Admiral has always been one of my favourite species ever since caught a tatty one in east Norfolk in the early 1950s - they weren't supposed to occur there in those days. Much as I love Purple Emperors, White Admirals seem to be more graceful as they flit among the brambles (and sometimes come down to the floor). I had in fact planned a trip down south this week for these charismatic species but circumstances required a change in plan. I went to the Outer Hebrides instead (work that one out if you can!)

Your WA photo Neil does it great justice.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 02-Jul-19 05:49 AM GMT

That one must score a 10 on the Hulmometer!.
Beautiful specimen.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-Jul-19 07:30 AM GMT

Fabulous, Neil. I never tire of these 'full purple' images. 🍷

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jul-19 08:27 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel, Jack, Trevor and David. The emperors at Knepp are still emerging in numbers, so the next few days will be busy! BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jul-19 08:27 AM GMT

100 Emperors

Plenty of Purple Emperor action at Knepp again yesterday (3 July) with the single species Green Lane transect producing its season best tally of 31 males on territory. Matthew Oates counted 66 in the willow jungles away from the Green Lane (from his total of 76) and I counted 23 in other areas (from my total of 54), giving a minimum combined total of 97. However, it is likely that we together saw well in excess of 100 individual butterflies. Matthew's score sheet included three females. Males are still emerging and females are still hard to find (I've seen just one so far), so I suspect the flight will peak this weekend or early next week.

Re: Neil Hulme

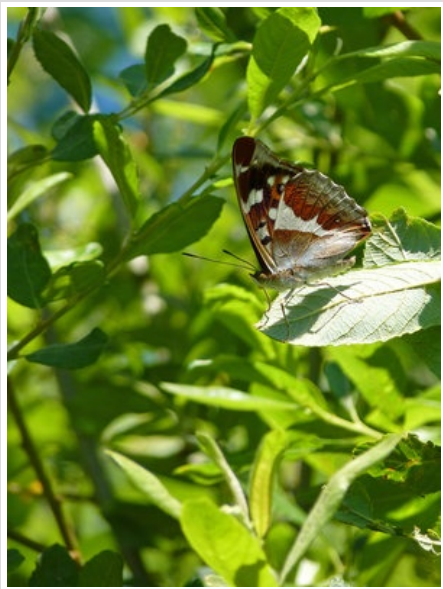
by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-19 12:05 AM GMT

Knepp Again

More fun at Knepp today (4 July) starting with another Wildland safari, during the course of which I counted 45 Purple Emperor. The highlight was when a female rejected the advances of an amorous male, with the pair spiraling down to within a metre of where I was standing.

I later walked the Green Lane transect, with a further increase in numbers to 42; males are still emerging and we are yet to see the peak of this year's flight. I counted a further 26 individuals in the willow fields away from the safari route, bringing the day's total to 113 emperors.

Afternoon highlights included an empress leading a trail of four males, resulting in a high level pairing at Bentons Gorse at 14.40 hrs, and attacks on Great Spotted Woodpecker and Bullfinch.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-19 12:18 PM GMT

Looks like they're getting down lower and lower Neil 😊😄 Interesting to see the shots of the one on the tree – is it taking sap?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Jul-19 08:08 AM GMT

All's looking positive with those numbers, Neil. I guess at some point next week they will hit their peak?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-19 09:11 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel. Yes, that emperor is at the sap bar.

Hi David. It's difficult to call 'peak' this year, as the emergence has been drawn out by the poor June weather. Females are still low in number. BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

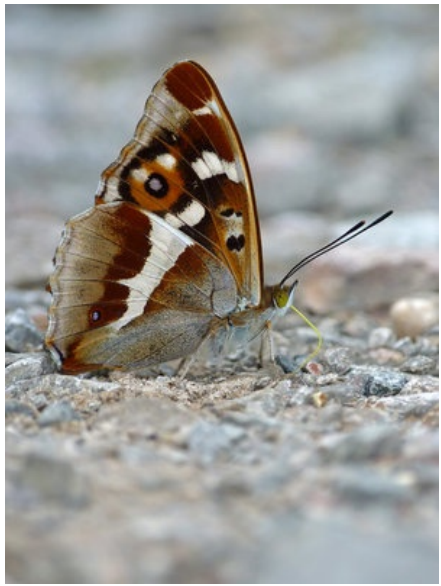
by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-19 09:16 AM GMT

Safari Re-run & Botany Bay

The Sunday (7 July) morning Knepp Wildland Purple Emperor Safari was conducted under cool, damp and grey conditions and it looked likely that Matthew Oates and I were about to lose our 100% record of showing the target species to visitors. However, we managed to glimpse three just before heading back to base, and there is always plenty more to see at Knepp.

I offered to take the group out again during the afternoon and about half were able to join me for a re-run under increasingly warm and sunny conditions. This time we were much more successful, clocking up 43 Purple Emperors. We also discovered the now famous sap run on the Green Lane, which has hosted up to five emperors at a time, and may do more.

After taking a group from Steyning out to Knepp on Monday morning (8 July) I decided to travel to Botany Bay for a change of scenery. Two emperors came to ground and the rides were littered with male Silver-washed Fritillary.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Old Wolf, 09-Jul-19 03:25 PM GMT

Hello Neil,

I am catching up on diaries and cannot believe the amount of Purple Emperors you have been seeing, is this usual or more than usual? It sounds like a dream come true 🍷

Can I just ask a question about your photography because all of your images are crystal clear with loads of detail? I know you mentioned using a Lumix but do you have it on macro setting to get such a large amount of detail? I can see all the hairs and scales on the wings in pretty much all of your shots. 🍷

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Jul-19 06:57 AM GMT

Sounds like things are picking up after a slow start, Neil.

Is there any evidence of aberrations such as those that have been seen in White Admiral and Silver Washed Fritillary?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jul-19 08:11 AM GMT

Thanks, Old Wolf. I use the Panasonic Lumix FZ38 with the Panasonic close-up lens for the vast majority of my images, only removing the lens for longer range shots, such as landscapes. I use the 'P' setting on the dial (sometimes referred to as 'idiot mode' by serious photographers) and only ever tinker with the exposure setting. I just let the excellent Leica lens do all the work, although very good lighting is essential to get the best results from small-sensor bridge cameras.

Hi David. No dark aberrations on my patch ... sadly. I saw some discussion about these in another thread, so here are a few thoughts on the subject, taken from *The Butterflies of Sussex*:

"The 'Black Admiral'

Collectors of the past, and photographers in the modern era, have always enthused over the aberrant, dark forms of the White Admiral. Those specimens in which the white bands have been greatly reduced, to leave mere smudges of grey, are termed ab. *obliterae*, while fully black individuals, which are genuinely rare, are referred to ab. *nigrina*. Aberrant individuals, which err significantly from the standard pattern of a species (which is itself often subject to some lesser degree of natural variation), may be produced by either genetic or environmental mechanisms. The 'Black Admiral' falls into the latter category.

Colin Pratt's definitive 2011 work on the history of Sussex Lepidoptera records that "Analysis of the history of these melanic forms shows that they have often occurred together in the county, both in distinct episodes and in the same places ...". These "same places", at least during the current atlas period (2010 - 2014), have notably included the Southwater Woods complex, and a scattering of woods in the Ashington/Wiston/Ashurst area. 2010 was the last year during which significant numbers of these prized aberrant forms were recorded.

Although 'Black Admirals' can potentially turn up anywhere that a population of this species exists, there is no doubt that some locations demonstrate a consistent, albeit periodic tendency to produce specimens of ab. *obliterae* and ab. *nigrina*. This suggests that the environmental conditions which influence their creation are in some way exacerbated by the physical attributes of these sites. The existence of such a link is supported by the ability of these same locations to produce dark, aberrant forms of other species, including the Silver-washed Fritillary, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell, at the same time of year.

Butterfly breeders have long been aware that it is possible to produce these unusual colour forms in captivity, by artificially chilling the insect while the chrysalis is being formed. It therefore seems likely that atypically large diurnal temperature variations, during the late May to early June period, may be the trigger for this phenomenon. When night-time temperatures drop, the topography and microclimate of some sites may increase the likelihood of this outcome, through the development of 'frost pockets'.

The Southwater and Ashington/Wiston/Ashurst sites do have some features in common, including deeply incised stream ghylls running close to localised high-points. Chill, damp air will sink into and collect over lower lying areas in the landscape, which will almost certainly include some of this species' breeding areas. Whatever the mechanism, when the White Admiral population builds once more, these are the locations which are again most likely to produce these unusual and much celebrated specimens."

Temperatures were notably low during the period 10 - 13 June 2019, which probably triggered the happy events at e.g. Alice Holt.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Old Wolf, 11-Jul-19 03:53 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Thanks, Old Wolf. I use the Panasonic Lumix FZ38 with the Panasonic close-up lens for the vast majority of my images, only removing the lens for longer range shots, such as landscapes. I use the 'P' setting on the dial (sometimes referred to as 'idiot mode' by serious photographers) and only ever tinker with the exposure setting. I just let the excellent Leica lens do all the work, although very good lighting is essential to get the best results from small-sensor bridge cameras.

Thanks for the insight and regardless of setting, the results are astounding 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jul-19 09:05 PM GMT

Botany Bay & Knepp 9.7.19

On Tuesday I spent the morning at Botany Bay (allegedly just in Surrey) with Ben Greenaway. Despite this being a late Purple Emperor season, which started slowly, I was nevertheless surprised at how many of the males are clearly still emerging, based on this and subsequent visits; we saw two on the ground which can have been no more than 24 hours old.

I then moved on to Knepp, where Matthew Oates and I led another Purple Emperor safari, during which we witnessed a courtship flight and pairing, high in an oak. We later went back out and confirmed that the happy couple were joined for three hours and fifteen minutes. By this time our combined tally for the day had reached 62 emperors.

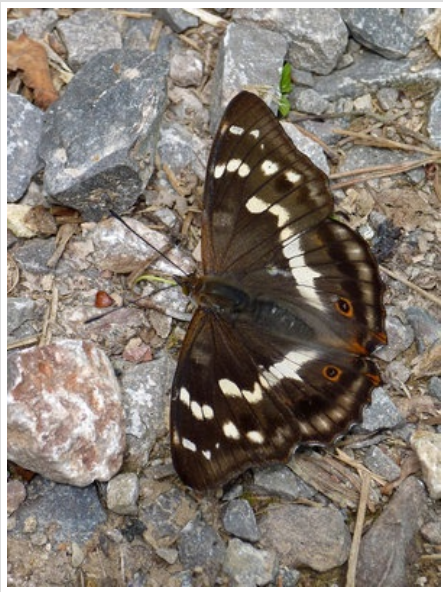


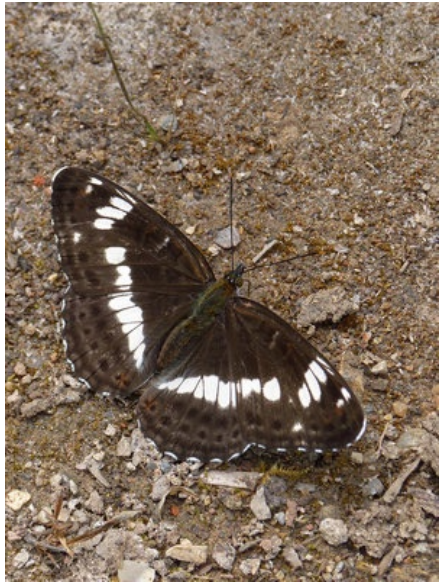
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jul-19 09:30 PM GMT

Botany Bay 10.7.19

On Wednesday I returned to Botany Bay, which some say is in Surrey. I again teamed up with Ben Greenaway and we enjoyed another day searching for emperors, with surprisingly few other enthusiasts around. More pristine males were seen on the ground, but they were outdone by a very large empress searching for moisture. White Admiral numbers are good here this year, with many visiting the forest road surface. I also found two mating pairs of Ringlet and was pleasantly surprised by the presence of three Dark Green Fritillary (2m, 1f).





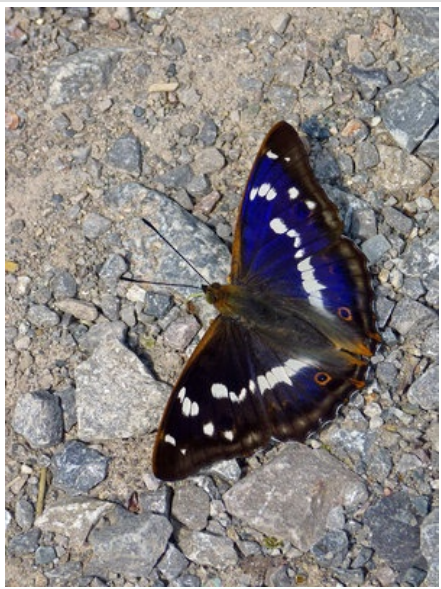
Re: Neil Hulme

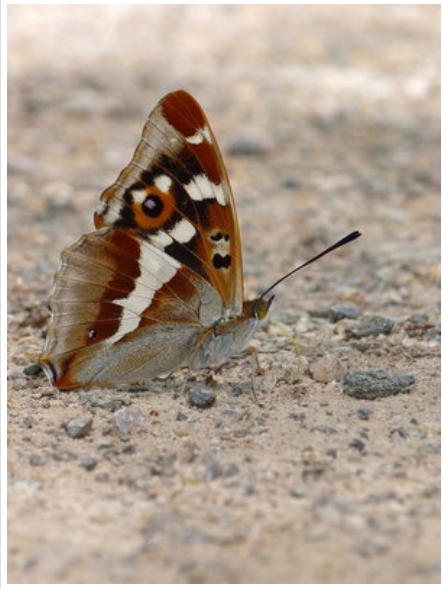
by Neil Hulme, 12-Jul-19 10:56 PM GMT

Botany Bay & Knepp 11.7.19

On Thursday (11 July) I spent the morning at Botany Bay and the first butterfly I saw was a Purple Emperor on the forest road, but its posture immediately appeared unnatural. Closer examination revealed that it was an empress in the last moments of her short life, as she was being killed and dismembered by a posse of hungry wood ants; macabre but fascinating to watch – I didn't intervene. She was 'recycled' within a couple of hours. The other Purple Emperors (4) I saw on the ground were all either 'day 1' or 'day 2' males, indicating that the protracted emergence continues.

I then moved to Knepp, where Matthew Oates and I led the last of the 2019 Purple Emperor safaris, during which more than 30 were seen. The safaris may be over for another year (our thanks to all the wonderful people who joined us), but the emperor season still has much to give.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 12-Jul-19 11:48 PM GMT

That's a sad end for the empress, Neil, any thoughts as to why it happened to such a large and highly mobile butterfly?

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-Jul-19 06:51 AM GMT

Yes, I agree with Mike, a powerful butterfly such as this could surely have got airborne to escape these attackers? Do the ants transmit some kind of poison in their bites?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 13-Jul-19 07:20 AM GMT

It is probably wrong to assume that the ants *killed* the butterfly. It may already have died from some other cause and the ants were merely the equivalent of re-cyclers.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jul-19 08:14 AM GMT

Thanks, all. No assumptions made, Jack – trust me, I'm a scientist 😊. The ants certainly killed her; the butterfly was struggling and still very much alive when I found her. Without going into too much detail, I can rule out the possibility of her being squashed by a vehicle – and if it was possible for a

human to tread on her (early morning dog-walker?), then she must have already been sufficiently immobile to be attacked. Also, there was no sign of compaction to her body parts.

The most likely explanation is that she was already close to the end of her life, whether just through old age or some other factor, and was sitting on the track when ambushed by several ants. It was still quite early in the morning (9.30 am) and cool with 100% cloud cover. No insects were flying and whatever else may have been ailing her, a rapid escape would have been hampered by her low body temperature. Huge numbers of butterflies are killed by predators (spiders, ants etc.) before they're warm enough for flight, which is why roosting is such a dangerous business.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 13-Jul-19 09:14 AM GMT

Not all that much difference from the scientist's view and my own. I had been unhappy with the implication in David's comments that an army of ants had "attacked" a lively healthy Purple Emperor. You observed that the ants finished off a sick (or immobile) insect: I suggested that they dealt with an already dead one.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jul-19 09:33 AM GMT

Botany Bay & Knepp 12.7.19

On Friday morning (12 July) I visited Botany Bay, primarily to enjoy the male Purple Emperors which are still coming to ground. While there, I saw the first (2) male Wood Whites of the second brood.

I later joined a cameraman working for Big Wave Productions, to film some of the more extreme aerial antics of Purple Emperors at Knepp. They put on a spectacular show for us. The footage will be included in a short film for the South Downs National Park Authority.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 13-Jul-19 10:47 AM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:

Not all that much difference from the scientist's view and my own. I had been unhappy with the implication in David's comments that an army of ants had "attacked" a lively healthy Purple Emperor. You observed that the ants finished off a sick (or immobile) insect: I suggested that they dealt with an already dead one.

Jack

Does it matter? Neither ants nor Purple Emperors have the luxury of human morals. It is, as Darwin said better than anyone, "the struggle for life."

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Jul-19 11:04 PM GMT

26 Species In A Hectare

This afternoon (15 July) I set out to record as many species of butterfly as I could on a single site; something I haven't attempted for quite a few years

now. As I only had a couple of hours to spare, it had to be a local venue, so the obvious choice was Springhead (Kithurst) Hill. This site might only be a hectare in size, but it supports an impressive list of species.

I managed a total of 26, which included Essex Skipper, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Purple Emperor, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Copper, Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue and Chalk Hill Blue. I think that would be hard to beat in July, but it's certainly possible at locations such as Newtimber Hill, Friston Gallops and Cissbury Ring.

Springhead Hill is currently well worth a visit just to see the wildflowers; the meadow and banks are a riot of colour. There is a very good crop of our county flower, Round-headed Rampion ('Pride of Sussex'), which is particularly common along the road bank.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Jul-19 08:03 AM GMT

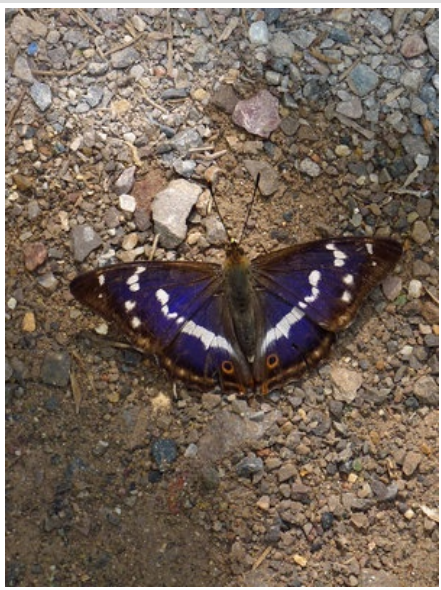
Last Emperor Down?

Yesterday (16 July) I made what will probably be my last visit to Botany Bay this summer, primarily to look at the second brood of Wood White. The emergence is still in its early days, so they proved quite difficult to track down. However, by late afternoon I'd seen four individuals, including a female which I watched rejecting the advances of a male and occasionally laying eggs.

The appearance of second brood Wood White usually coincides with the end of the period during which the male Purple Emperor regularly comes to ground, and when their fast and furious morning flights subside (thereafter it becomes an 'afternoon butterfly'). This season is no different and the single opportunity to enjoy a male emperor on the forest road may prove to be my last for 2019. Fortunately, this individual spent more than an hour on one of my baits and entertained a large number of happy visitors.

My thanks to Dawn & Jim for showing me the spectacular Broad-leaved Helleborines on site.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Jul-19 10:34 AM GMT

Sad that the Emperor 'grounding' season looks to be over, Neil, but second brood Wood Whites are good compensation...not to mention those helleborines!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Jul-19 09:53 PM GMT

Big Butterfly Count

Today (21 July) I performed my first Big Butterfly Count of 2019, with one of the deep coombes at Chantry Hill living up to my expectations. I decided to wait until I'd bagged something of note, such as a confirmed Essex Skipper, before starting the 15 minute count. What I didn't expect was a huge Purple Empress gliding majestically over the flowery slope! Within a few minutes a male Clouded Yellow (my first of the year) came zooming past.

My final tally, comprising 132 individuals of 21 species, included: Purple Emperor (1), Clouded Yellow (1), Dark Green Fritillary (17), Silver-washed Fritillary (1), Marbled White (8), Chalk Hill Blue (5), Common Blue (1), Brown Argus (2), Small Copper (2), Small Heath (1), Small Tortoiseshell (1), Red Admiral (1), Peacock (3), Meadow Brown (33), Gatekeeper (26), Essex Skipper (1), Small Skipper (12), Large Skipper (1), Large White (5), Small White (9) and Brimstone (1).

Chantry Hill is currently awash with colourful flowers, including one of my favourites, Field Scabious.



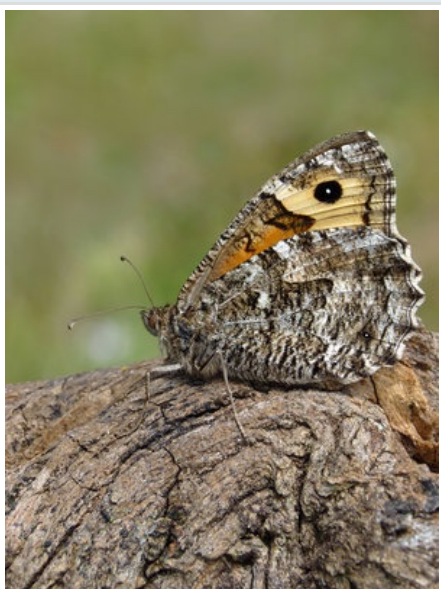


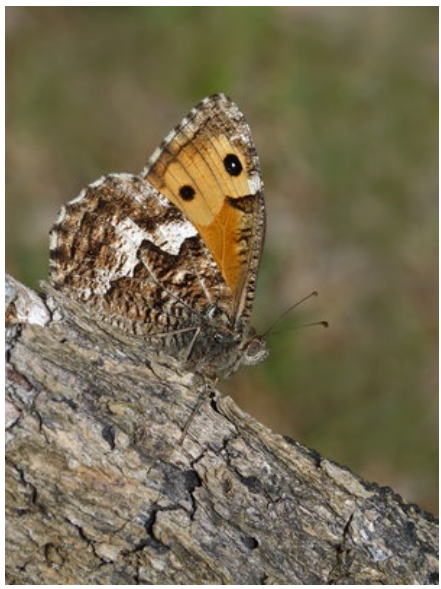
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jul-19 11:21 PM GMT

Chalk Grayling

I spent much of today (22 July) in Deep Dean (Wilmington), counting and observing Grayling; my total of 17 individuals included four females, which I followed to determine egg-laying site preferences. It was very satisfying to find the males repeatedly thermoregulating in the artificial rabbit scrapes we made last winter. The scrub work along the top of the slope also appears to be beneficial, with quite a few males holding territory amongst the woody litter and bare ground here. The pony grazing has certainly knocked the Tor-grass back, but more work is needed next spring, early in the growing season.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 22-Jul-19 11:24 PM GMT

Great set of shots Neil 😊 How are they doing number wise there? I went to my local site (Godshill nr Fordingbridge) on Saturday and they were putting on a very good showing there 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 23-Jul-19 09:00 AM GMT

This is excellent news about the last remaining chalk Grayling site in Sussex. I hope to get down there soon.

Thank you for all the management work that is being done and we live in hope that the colony will expand and disperse more widely in the South Downs.

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 23-Jul-19 11:42 PM GMT

At least they have emerged, Neil. After such low numbers the last couple of seasons, Neil, I had doubts whether the site would be rescued in time. More work required for sure, but the management already carried out buys a bit of time. Congratulations to you all, long May this success continue.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 24-Jul-19 07:28 AM GMT

I was going to say 'great news' but I think 'better news' is more apt. The woody litter between the edge of the Gorse and the path that runs along the hill, is where I found most Graylings last year. 10 were seen if I remember.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Jul-19 06:57 AM GMT

Good to see the Graylings return again, Neil. Hopefully these populations will thrive given the measures put in place to assist them.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jul-19 07:24 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel, Andy, Mark, Trevor and David. I'm hoping that we might see numbers rise significantly above this early season count, as I feel that the species is in dire trouble in Sussex. I'm confident that we're doing everything we can, but only time will tell if we can do enough. Getting them back into Ewe Dean (the bowl by the reservoir, on the way up) and onto Lullington Heath ASAP will be critical.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jul-19 07:27 PM GMT

Cissbury Silver-spots

Yesterday (24 July) evening I found 17 Silver-spotted Skippers in the most southerly compartment of Cissbury Ring, although I'm sure that the hot weather will have triggered the emergence of many more by now. I suspect that the species may have spread to other parts of the site due to ongoing improvements in the habitat, so would appreciate hearing from anyone who finds them beyond the squares TQ137076, TQ137077, TQ136077 or TQ135076.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Jul-19 10:36 PM GMT

Lovely image in the weak light, Neil. Let's hope they have a good season.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jul-19 10:12 PM GMT

More Grayling

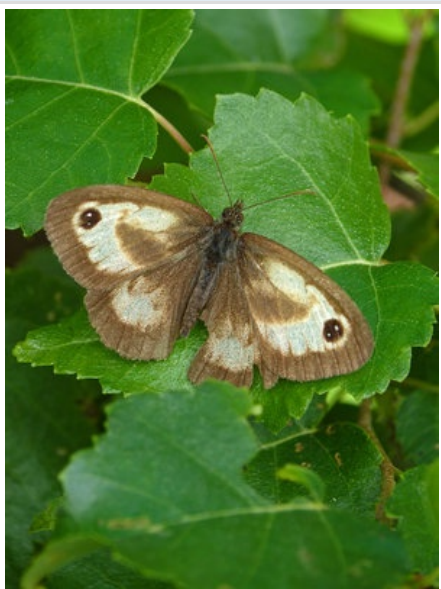
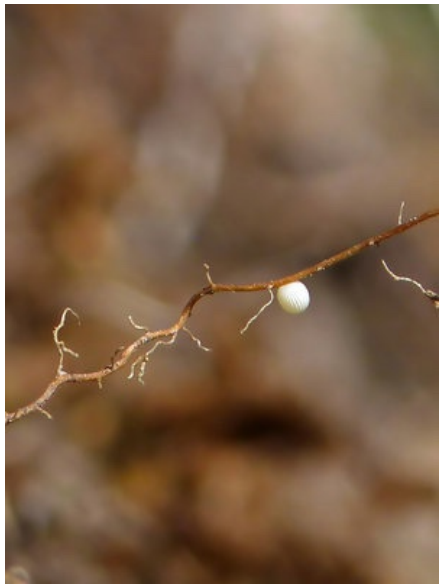
Another hot and sweaty session at Deep Dean today (29 July) provided more important information on the resident Grayling population and particularly the butterfly's egg-laying preferences. With valuable input from Malcolm, Tom and Bob's party, a total of 22 individuals were recorded, suggesting that the population has stabilised, at an albeit perilously low level.

On the ascent, Malcolm photographed a female below the reservoir, highlighting the importance of getting Ewe Dean back under heavy grazing. A couple more Grayling (males) were seen on the chalk track up to Windover Hill, so the species is now dispersing. Lullington Heath is well worth searching by those with a pioneering spirit.

Aside from those females I've watching laying on Sheep's-fescue, I've also seen quite a few eggs laid on wiry rootlets, matching Patrick Moore's observations. Today I saw three eggs being laid on rootlets protruding from the overturned turfs cut when we made the artificial rabbit excavations. Many Grayling are using these man-made features to thermoregulate or rest in. The cuts into the upper scrub line are also proving their value, with many individuals seen here. I'm becoming increasingly confident that our management plan is a good one.

I later moved on to the BC reserves, where I found a rare aberrant Gatekeeper, ab. *albidus*. No sign of second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary yet, although the poor June weather may have scuppered their prospects this year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Jul-19 08:52 PM GMT

Cissbury Ring & Knepp Wildland

I found 41 Silver-spotted Skippers on the southern flank of Cissbury Ring today (31 July), under cloudy and cool conditions; I suspect there are plenty more around. Many were trying to warm up on dried cowpats. The poor conditions precluded a wider search of the site.

I later moved on to the Knepp Wildland, to say goodbye to the Purple Emperor; just one of each sex seen. There were a few very smart Red Admirals on parade.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Aug-19 11:19 PM GMT

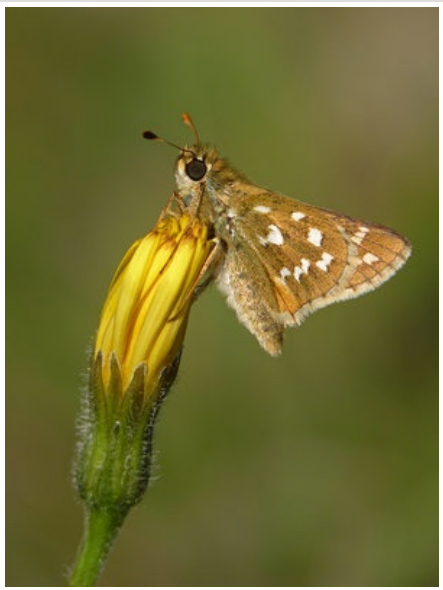
Strange Day

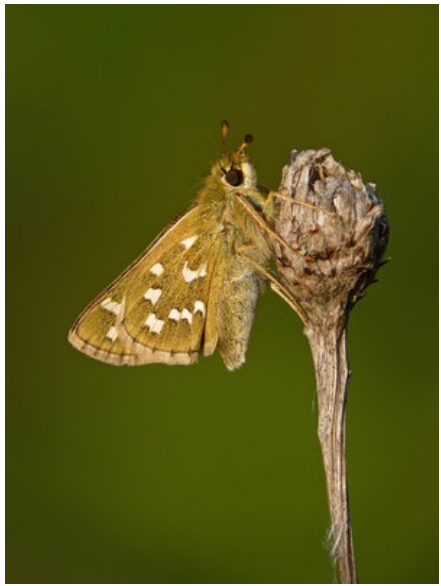
What a strange day! On the way back home from a job interview, I picked up a voicemail from Martin Kalaher – "would the image of an aberrant Brown Hairstreak I've sent you be of any interest?". I reserved judgement until I got to my computer – "yes, it would!" (see BC Sussex website). After picking myself off the floor, I arranged with Martin that he would call me if it reappeared, as I headed out to count Silver-spotted Skippers on Cissbury Ring.

I was approaching the ramparts and heading for a chat with a chap from Essex, who was enjoying his first sightings of this species (we met later, giving me the opportunity to explain my odd behaviour), when my 'phone went off. I immediately ran back down the hill, in the style of Forrest Gump.

Unfortunately I was too late to see Martin's extreme and extremely beautiful aberrant, but I did very much enjoy my first (and long overdue) visit to his stunning wildlife garden in Storrington – it was heaving with butterflies. Despite the wide range of species on show, I was particularly taken with a beautiful female Meadow Brown. I hope to receive another call from Martin tomorrow.

Once back on Cissbury Ring, it didn't take me too long to count 150 Silver-spotted Skippers.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Aug-19 02:47 PM GMT

Thanks for the update on the Grayling situation, Neil. Hopefully this colony can be assisted to prevent it disappearing.

I also hope you get to see that extraordinary Brown Hairstreak aberrant. It is amazing. 🤩

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Aug-19 10:34 PM GMT

Hi David. Unfortunately the Brown Hairstreak aberrant (ultra rare and unnamed) never showed again, despite Martin Kalaher spending many hours waiting at the top of the stepladder he used to photograph it from.

Yesterday morning (2 August) I spent a few hours enjoying the wealth of butterflies and wildflowers at Kithurst Meadow, including this Holly Blue. Rather bizarrely, I was then to spend the rest of that day up a stepladder in someone else's garden, again waiting for a rarity. This time I got lucky!

I've promised not to advertise the presence of this butterfly until it has disappeared, to protect the privacy of the homeowner and neighbours.

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 04-Aug-19 07:15 AM GMT

Nail biting suspense, Neil!.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 04-Aug-19 07:51 AM GMT

Monarch / Scarce Swallowtail / American Painted Lady / Cardinal (strike out as appropriate).
Or is it something more "mundane" like a Camberwell Beauty?

Bird watchers (and egg collectors) have been known to fall out of trees or off cliffs with some rather serious consequences. Take care Neil.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Aug-19 09:29 PM GMT

Hi Jack

Fifth time lucky!

A risk assessment was done – then burned.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Aug-19 10:35 PM GMT

What A Beauty!

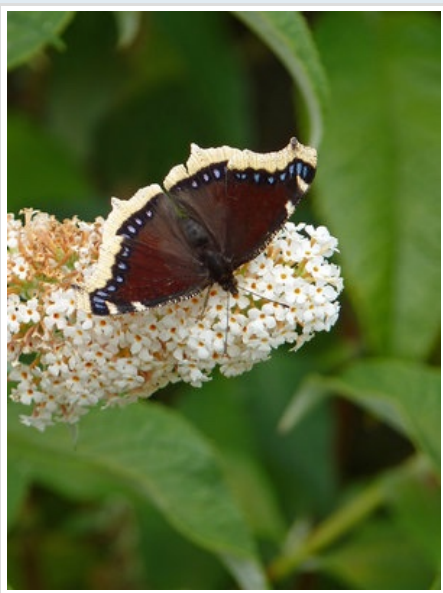
I'm greatly indebted to Peter (BC Sussex committee stalwart) and Terry Atkinson for the 'phone call on Friday (2 August), which resulted in me being up a stepladder in someone's garden for the second day in a row! Peter had spotted a Camberwell Beauty on his neighbours' Buddleia from the kitchen window and suggested that I might like to visit; I ran half a mile back to the car. I am equally grateful for the hospitality of their neighbours, who must remain anonymous.

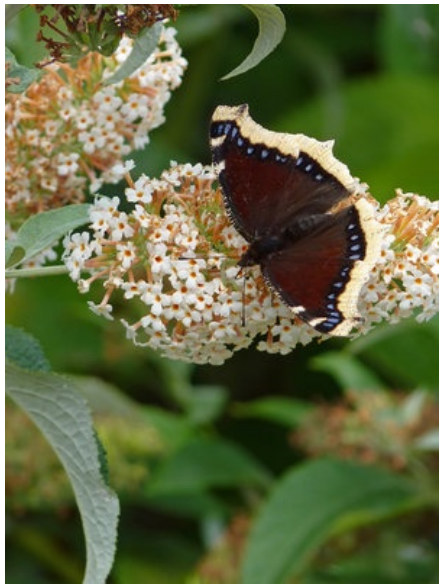
The neighbours, who are not butterfly people, revealed that it had been in and out of both their front and back gardens since at least 31 July, at one point coming into the house through an open door (probably searching out a suitable hibernation spot). Although they had noted its exceptional beauty, they were unaware of its identity or rarity.

I was given very generous access to their High Salvington (Worthing) garden on the understanding that I wouldn't trigger a stampede of 'twitchers' to this very quiet residential area, which happened to be the road I lived in during the 1970s. As it turned out, this was the last couple of hours during which the butterfly was seen.

It was a surreal and immensely enjoyable couple of hours; a very large female Camberwell Beauty served with coffee and biscuits (thanks, Terry). This was only the second I've seen in 50 years of butterfly watching, the last being at RSPB Pulborough in 2006.

As with all such sightings these days, provenance is an issue. However, the timing is spot-on for the natural movement of this species, as has been the weather, bringing many migrants to our shores, including notable influxes of Bedstraw Hawk-moth and Dark Crimson Underwing, and the odd Queen of Spain Fritillary (Kent) and Swallowtail. I've just heard news of another Camberwell Beauty in Lancing last week, the details of which I'll be pursuing. This is a good time to be out looking along the coast.







Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSpOck, 05-Aug-19 08:13 AM GMT

Its always good to have good contacts. I remember years ago the Bird Pagers going off with Camberwells at Mill Hill.

The 2nd First Sighting this year in Sussex [23rd February] one of these years they will get to breed in the UK.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-19 08:50 AM GMT

You're right MrSpOck, I can claim no credit – but I do feel very fortunate. However, I don't think this will be the last exotic to be seen this summer. BWs, Neil

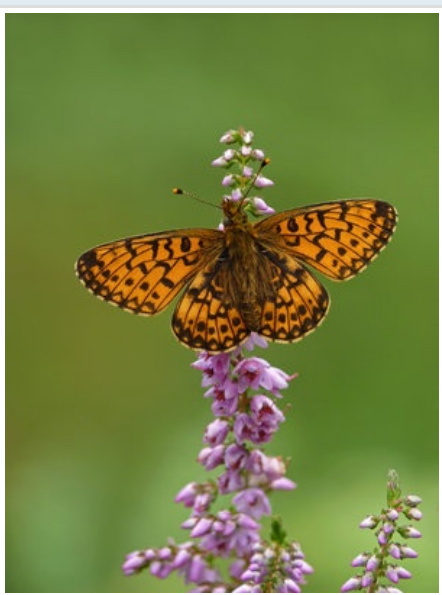
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-19 08:58 AM GMT

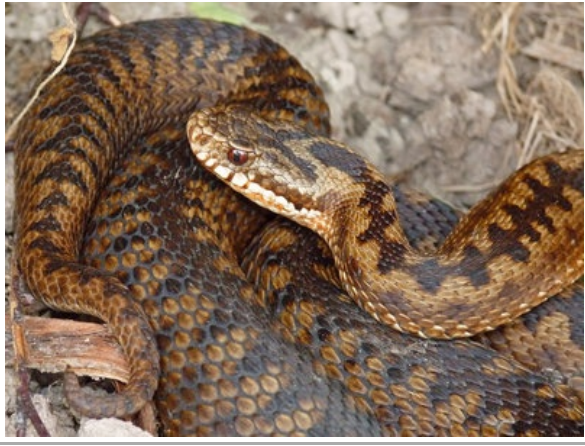
Second Brood SPBF

On Sunday (4 August) I took my kids to one of their favourite places; the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves. I searched for second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (seeing a male and female in front of the PCH hut) while they expanded their collection of deer bones. As always, the reserve's rich reptile fauna kept them happy, with multiple sightings of Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard and Slow-worm.

The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were surprisingly difficult to spot. As is sometimes the case with second brood butterflies, the two we saw were minute (not much larger than a Small Heath), but very fast in flight. Other butterfly highlights included a male Chalk Hill Blue, a female Wall laying eggs, two female Dark Green Fritillaries and several freshly emerged Painted Ladies, showing that intense colour seen only in just-hatched individuals.







Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSpOck, 05-Aug-19 09:15 AM GMT

I wonder what else will have 2nd Broods this year, 3rd August was when the first 2nd Brood Glanville was also seen, hope the violet conditions are still reasonable so any SPBF offspring can get to hibernation size before the autumn. We should be looking out for Dingy, Grizzled, Dukes and Orange Tips also on our travels. I also think we will have some interesting butterflies to spot this August and September.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-19 09:49 AM GMT

Hi MrSpOck. We do a late July bracken cut on the reserves, specifically to open up areas of the closed canopy. This triggers a late flush of violets (particularly after a little rain 😊) and allows some areas to become grassier and herb-rich, which suits SPBF oviposition preferences.

Other areas are left to perform shade-out duties, generating bare ground more suitable for PBF breeding. The reserves are, in effect, zoned, to cater for the different needs of each fritillary.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Trev Sawyer, 05-Aug-19 10:39 AM GMT

I'll certainly be looking out for a Camberwell Beauty this month – I was lucky enough to have one visit my garden during one of the last decent influxes at the end of August a few years ago. They might be difficult to spot amongst the clouds of fresh Painted Ladies/Peacocks/Red Admirals though 😊
What chance another Long-Tailed Blue "Indian Summer" by the way Neil?

Trev

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-19 07:42 PM GMT

Hi Trev

A Long-tailed Blue came in at Saltdean today! I'm hoping there'll be more to come.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSpOck, 05-Aug-19 09:37 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi Trev

A Long-tailed Blue came in at Saltdean today! I'm hoping there'll be more to come.

BWs, Neil

There was one way inland at Caterham Surrey on Aug 4th a female probably egg laying.



Picture from Surrey BC Sightings page

I know we should have checked the pea on Denbies more on Saturday.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 06-Aug-19 05:58 PM GMT

Camberwell Beauty – an inspired guess on my part.

As for twitchers, for more than two weeks in July, I had a Quail doing its “wet-my-lips” call in the cornfield at the back of my garden. I reported it almost daily on the local bird group and to my knowledge, only one twitcher turned up (but did confirm Quail). It's a scarce but regular species in this part of Scotland. I hear one most years (I live in a predominantly arable area) but of course, have yet to see a Quail (except on a dinner plate – where its minute size provided about two mouthfuls 🤤)

Your photos Neil are always superb. I am aware of the arguments DSLR versus Bridge. For purely web use, I know which one wins hands down – and for a fraction of the cost.

Jack

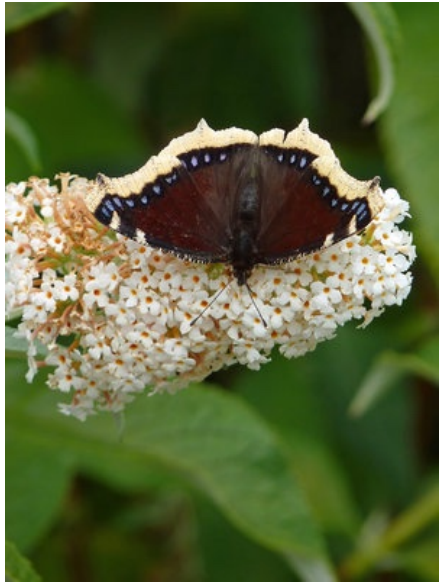
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Aug-19 07:04 PM GMT

Thanks, Jack. Much appreciated. I was quite pleased with the Camberwell images (but thrilled with the sighting), bearing in mind that they were taken at long range with zoom (bar the underside close-up).

Must rush, I have a Quail in the oven, but I can't resist posting one last shot of my 'butterfly of the year' ... so far.

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 08-Aug-19 08:13 PM GMT

Those shots are just sublime Neil and the Camberwell is certainly living up to it's name – it's so pristine 😊🌿🌿🌿

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Aug-19 10:08 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

I'm greatly indebted to Peter (BC Sussex committee stalwart) and Terry Atkinson for the 'phone call on Friday (2 August), which resulted in me being up a stepladder in someone's garden for the second day in a row! Peter had spotted a Camberwell Beauty on his neighbours' Buddleia from the kitchen window and suggested that I might like to visit...

I certainly wasn't expecting that, Neil!

No wonder you ran like a greyhound.

It's a lovely specimen as well – when I see CBs on the continent they're usually faded and battle-weary.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Aug-19 09:02 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and David. She had just one minor tear in her hind-wing margin and some light scale loss, so I doubt she could have been more than a week old. But let's face it ... *any* Camberwell Beauty is a sight for sore eyes.

Apparently one seen in Bucks yesterday.

BWs Neil

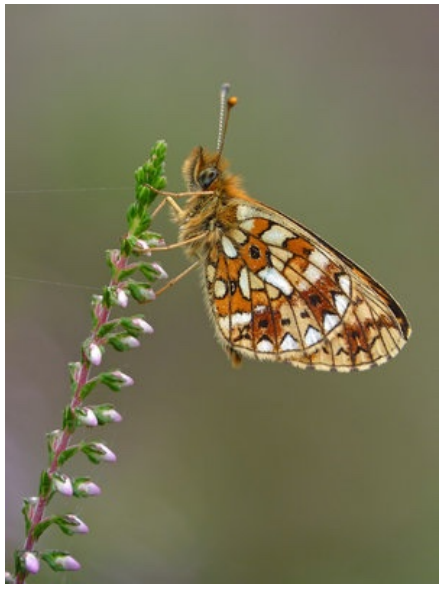
Re: Neil Hulme

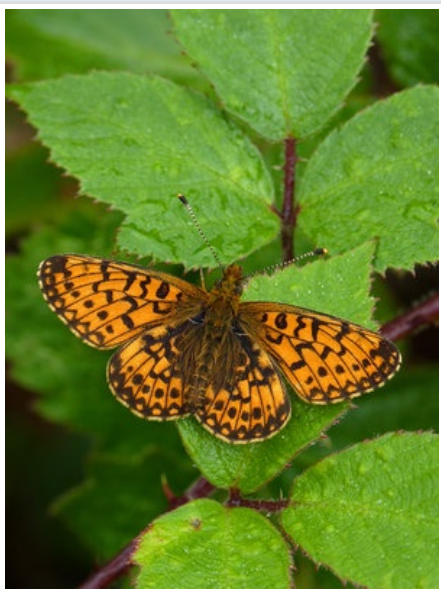
by Neil Hulme, 09-Aug-19 09:33 AM GMT

More Second Brood SPBF

On Thursday (8 August) I spent most of the day at the Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, waiting for the grey cloud to lift. However, there was periodically sufficient sunshine to get things moving, particularly later in the afternoon. Highlights of the day were two Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (one on each reserve), a male Wall Brown (a rare sight in woodland) and the currently ubiquitous Painted Lady.

An earlier visit on 5 August produced four SPBF and a very nice Adder.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Aug-19 09:32 PM GMT

Great to see 2nd brood SPBFs, Neil, and a nice bonus to have Painted Ladies, Wall Browns and adders.

Impressive stuff!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Aug-19 09:58 PM GMT

Thanks, David. The BC reserves in Sussex have plenty more to give yet. Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood are going to get seriously good in the next year or two, thanks to our wonderful volunteers!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Aug-19 10:02 PM GMT

Migrant Alert!

Fortuitous circumstances on Tuesday (13 August) led to the discovery of three Long-tailed Blue (LTB) eggs on one of the Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea (BLEP) plants in my Worthing garden. Having noted an impressive BLEP plant tumbling over a garden wall on the way to my son's pre-school, about 600 metres from my house, I set off for a discreet look, and could see two LTB ova from the pavement. We are undoubtedly enjoying a significant influx of this species and all of the Sussex sites which have produced this species in 2013 and 2015 are worth searching, NOW!

Today (15 August) I visited the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves. Highlights included two second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, a photogenic Holly Blue (seen laying eggs on heather), some very blue female Common Blue, a Painted Lady caterpillar, and the stunning scenery we've created here!

A later visit to Cissbury Ring produced 20 – 25 Silver-spotted Skipper (now on the wane), 2 male Adonis Blue and a female Brown Hairstreak.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 15-Aug-19 10:27 PM GMT

That's excellent news ,concerning the Long tailed Blues Neil ! I had about an hour looking at the Pea plants at Dungeness yesterday(late afternoon) but no joy (as yet) ,but there were several eggs on the Bladder Senna (as you mentioned) . A questiondoes the pea plant ,need to be in flower for the females to lay ,or will they still lay on plants with just the seed pods ?
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Aug-19 10:42 PM GMT

Hi Allan, that's a really good question, but one that I can't answer with certainty. However, all of the LTB eggs I've ever found (which is several hundred) have been laid on either buds, flowers, or stalks in their vicinity. The caterpillars will happily move on to/into the pods once they've demolished the flowers, but I'm not sure whether a female would lay eggs on a pod.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 15-Aug-19 10:45 PM GMT

Great news regarding the LTB eggs, Neil. Allowing a six week turnaround, there is every chance of an emergence in early October, given reasonable weather. Please keep us updated!

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 15-Aug-19 11:19 PM GMT

Sounds like a busy Autumn ahead. Bring it on!.

Last time (2015) it was LTB 😊 and garden centres full of festive cheer, all at the same time! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 15-Aug-19 11:40 PM GMT

I still have 10 days leave to book from work, looks like it'll be sometime in October. Southern rail will be reaping the benefits from me if we get a good Indian summer!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 15-Aug-19 11:56 PM GMT

Looks like we may have a repeat of the Autumn of 2013, as far as LTB,s are concerned, Neil, lets hope so 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 16-Aug-19 09:06 AM GMT

Goodness Neil - LT Blues in your garden. And I thought I had done well when I lived in northwest Norfolk eight years ago: White Admirals on bramble and Purple Hairstreaks on the overhanging oaks. As a child in east Norfolk, I once had a SW Fritillary in the garden.

Neil. How big is your Worthing garden?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Aug-19 02:54 PM GMT

Thanks, all.

Mark – if we get hot weather I reckon we could see UK-born LTBs in late September, as we did in 2013. The 2015 UK brood was later, as the influx was held up by poor August weather. I reckon the return to better conditions next week will see more crossing over from France. I'm not sure how long the eggs have been on my plant, but I suspect it was only a matter of a few days before I discovered them.

Trevor – without checking, I recall seeing the last of 2015 on Armistice Day. This year, they'll hopefully all get South before then, as I suspect many didn't make it back in 2015.

Bugboy – I reckon the first two weeks of October should be ideal for some holiday.

Maximus – a re-run of 2013 would be better than the last big event in 2015, when they left it rather late!

Jack – I only have a small garden, but size doesn't matter ... it's what you grow in it! The other garden I've found the eggs in is even smaller, but the butterflies seem to be able to detect pea plants with impressive efficiency!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 16-Aug-19 07:15 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Just catching up on your diary.

What can I say, Camberwell Beauty and now Long-tailed Blue eggs in your garden. I am going to have to think about moving down south.

Neil Hulme wrote:

...The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were surprisingly difficult to spot. As is sometimes the case with second brood butterflies, the two we saw were minute (not much larger than a Small Heath), but very fast in flight...

I was interested to read your comment above. I saw second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries last week in Cornwall and some of the males by Kynance Cove were really tiny, the smallest I have ever seen. Much smaller than second brood I have seen here before. Interestingly, I also saw them at Upton Towans where they were much closer to normal size, not much smaller than the average first brood.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Aug-19 12:33 PM GMT

Great find with the LTB ova, Neil. Hopefully we'll get a decent emergence in a few weeks time.

Nice female Holly Blue too, an image that has eluded me thus far in 2019. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Aug-19 10:58 AM GMT

Hi Neil F. I suspect that many of the second brood SPBF are small simply because they have to rush through the instars if going down the bivoltine route. Feeding activity and food availability may be dependent upon microclimate. Great report on your Cornwall visit; always a great time to be down that way!

Thanks, David. I'm hoping that many more LTB (and other migrants) will make it across the water this week.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

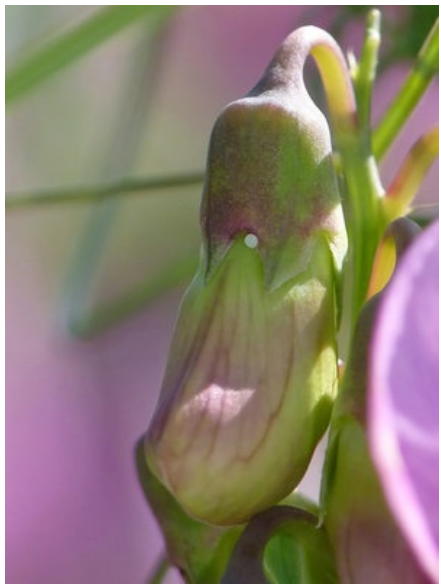
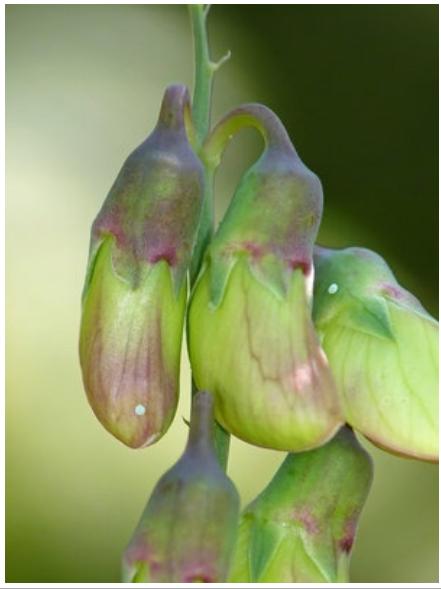
by Neil Hulme, 19-Aug-19 11:01 AM GMT

Long-tailed Blue Egg Hunt

A search for Long-tailed Blue (LTB) eggs yesterday (18 August) produced mixed results. Newhaven Tidemills was hard going, but I eventually found three ova on the abundant Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea (BLEP), much of which is in perfect condition for egg-laying. I suspect that the recent very windy weather and exposed nature of the site has discouraged any incoming LTBs from hanging around for too long here. However, that may change this week, with a return to more suitable weather conditions; I'm hoping that more butterflies will make the crossing.

A sheltered site within the town was more productive, with nine eggs found (thanks, Dave, Sue and Pete) and probably many more present. I also found several boreholes which looked like good candidates for where hatched larvae have entered the flowers to feed.

A visit to Whitehawk Hill (potentially the best LTB site in Sussex) was disappointing. Unfortunately the key compartment had been grazed from mid June to late July, removing the BLEP (and more 'appropriate' chalk grassland wildflowers) at a critical time. I also visited Beeding Cement Works, where two more eggs were found.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 19-Aug-19 03:07 PM GMT

Thanks for the report, Neil. Many of us might be considering a trip to Sussex this autumn, so any updates are welcome. It's amazing the females find the same plants and sites as in previous years. I'm sure BLEP plants grow on many other south coast sites, so many LTB no doubt go unseen.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 19-Aug-19 03:39 PM GMT

Superb stuff, Neil, and very encouraging. Those LTB already here have been widely scattered, judging by the distance between egg finds.

At Steyning on Saturday, there was speculation as to whether you would turn up or not. My guess that you were performing the role of 'Pea inspector' was right!

Here's to LTB and Clouded Yellow taking us well into Autumn.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-Aug-19 06:57 PM GMT

Good effort with the LTB ova, Neil, although the grazing at Whitehawk Hill is disappointing.

Like you say, with benign weather conditions for the next week or so ought to see a few more tempted to cross the Channel. Here's hoping.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 19-Aug-19 09:50 PM GMT

Excellent stuff Neil. I've booked the first two weeks of October off (before I read your reply, great minds 😊) and Newhaven was very high on the agenda for a foray this week before I head off to Dorset for a few days. It's now on the top of my list!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Aug-19 12:05 AM GMT

Hi Mark. I'm finding LTB eggs just about everywhere I look (as in 2015), so they're probably there to be found along the entire South Coast.

Hi Trevor. Although I was there for a different reason today, I won't be spending much time at the Rifle Range this year. Unfortunately, the cattle ate most of the Brown Hairstreak caterpillars 😞.

Hi David. LTBs are still arriving with more due this week 😊.

Hi bugboy. I'd save your money and stay in Sussex 😊.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Aug-19 12:12 AM GMT

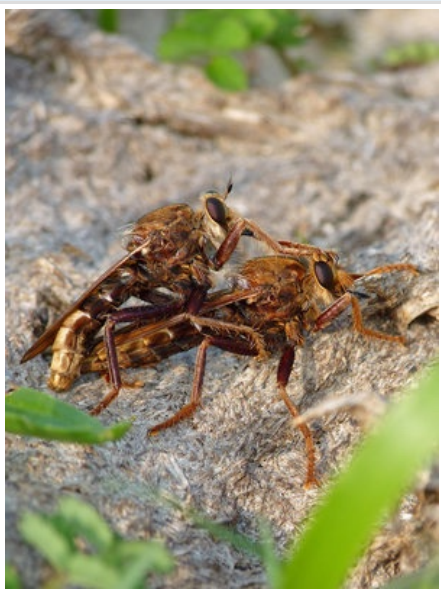
A Day With Will

I spent today (20 August) with UKBer Will Langdon from Somerset, who is visiting Sussex for a few days. We didn't see everything on our wish list, but we did see some good stuff which wasn't on it.

Our first stop was a private area on the Wiston Estate, which didn't yield the rare moths we were after, but did produce four Brown Hairstreak. Just before heading up to Steyning Rifle Range, I recalled seeing a Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea plant in a private garden nearby. A quick check from the pavement revealed three Long-tailed Blue eggs.

We finished the day at Anchor Bottom, where Autumn Lady's-tresses are now flowering in abundance. Adonis Blue numbers were modest, but I suspect that the second brood is still far from peak here, with just one female seen. Will then spotted what for me was the highlight of the day – a mating pair of Hornet Robberfly.





Re: Neil Hulme

by John W, 21-Aug-19 08:36 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi Trevor. Although I was there for a different reason today, I won't be spending much time at the Rifle Range this year. Unfortunately, the cattle ate most of the Brown Hairstreak caterpillars 😞.

Hi Neil,

Is anything been done to remove the cattle from the site? I was there on Sunday and the cattle were munching on this year's eggs as well. I've spent 11 hours at the Rifle Range this year and only seen one Brown Hairstreak 😞 I fear that if the cattle are not removed soon then next year it will be none 😞



Cheers
John W

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Aug-19 09:52 AM GMT

Hi John

I've already had the conversation with the Steyning Dowland Scheme manager, but they can't be moved in time to rescue this season. The same thing happened in 2016. Unfortunately, the Dexters seem to prefer browsing *Prunus* to grazing the ranker grasses, which is what they were told to do! The site will recover quickly once the issue is resolved, but from my wider observations recently, it's probably time to revisit the management plan.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Aug-19 11:29 PM GMT

Trainspotting

Another great day (21 August) spent in the company of UKBer Will Langdon. We started by looking at some nice Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea (BLEP) plants in a communal garden in Lancing, where I found Long-tailed Blue (LTB) ova in 2015. A far-from-thorough search produced 15 LTB eggs.

We then moved to Lancing Station to observe the vast stands of BLEP through the security fence around a supermarket car park, using binoculars. We agreed to masquerade as trainspotters, to avoid being labelled as social outcasts/anoraks/weirdos, and I think we got away with it. Despite being frustratingly remote from our quarry, we got rather excited, as we could clearly see three female LTBs frenetically laying eggs; I suspect there are hundreds of ova present here, or there soon will be. A male LTB was also briefly present, as were several Holly Blues. PLEASE NOTE: the accompanying image was taken through a gap in the security fence and there is absolutely no access to the BLEP plants on this site.

Searches for adults and eggs at Southwick Basin and Brighton Royal Pavilion were unsuccessful, but the species may well turn up at these locations in the next week or two.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 22-Aug-19 07:01 AM GMT

A very successful train spotting trip, Neil, as you managed to capture the oldest 313 unit left in service. It was painted in the old BR blue and grey to commemorate that fact.

Back to butterflies, with the amount of LTB eggs located so far, and the widely scattered sightings of adults, how do you think this Autumn is going to compare with 2013/15 ?.

Trevor.

PS. I have never owned an anorak!! 😊 .

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Aug-19 09:30 AM GMT

Thanks for the info, Trevor. I got my camera settings all wrong, as this was the background composition I was hoping for:



A4 Pacific 60019 'Bittern' crossing the Arun Valley in 2008

Too early to say just yet, but this is already on a comparable scale.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Aug-19 10:28 PM GMT

Talk about being caught in the act....those cattle are eating the very thing we wish to protect!!

The railtrack site looks very promising, Neil. Looks like there should be quite a few LTBs in a few weeks so long as the weather remains benign.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Aug-19 11:38 PM GMT

More Long-tails

My final day out with UKBer Will Langdon, before he returned to Somerset, turned out to be an epic. We started off at a site in Brighton where there is no public access, after being invited along by our generous host. We immediately made contact with male Long-tailed Blues (LTBs) as they clashed and performed their characteristic vertical jousts, reminiscent of the Duke of Burgundy. It wasn't long before we were treated to a chase of three.

We then performed an egg count over three areas where Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea (BLEP) was growing, finishing with a total of 54 ova. Just before leaving, I decided to check a different part of the site, where we again saw three male LTBs in combat.

Our next port of call was the meadow near the TV mast at Whitehawk Hill, although I didn't hold out much hope of success, as the BLEP has been heavily grazed. However, we found a further three male LTBs here, bringing the day's tally to nine.





Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 23-Aug-19 07:10 AM GMT

Your taste in blue butterflies is equalled by your taste in locomotives !.

Seriously, your last report is amazing, as are the images.

I'm tempted to visit Southwick today,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 23-Aug-19 09:10 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi John

I've already had the conversation with the Steyning Dowland Scheme manager, but they can't be moved in time to rescue this season. The same thing happened in 2016. Unfortunately, the Dexters seem to prefer browsing *Prunus* to grazing the ranker grasses, which is what they were told to do! The site will recover quickly once the issue is resolved, but from my wider observations recently, it's probably time to revisit the management plan.

BWs, Neil

I can only speak as a casual observer on this but Belted Galloways, which I see on several sites i visit through the season, seem to avoid browsing altogether and stick to grazing. They are allowed to roam the Brown Hairstreak habitat at bookham throughout most the year and as far as I can tell the Blackthorn, along with the other shrubbery seems to remain untouched. Also they are extremely docile.

Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSp0ck, 23-Aug-19 09:34 AM GMT

But at Denbies the Belted Galloways have eaten most of the Horseshoe Vetch on the hillside and there are very few 2nd Brood Adonis flying there now, it seems the Chalkhills were pupae, when they started Grazing the hillside, but being later the Adonis larvae were Galloway Breakfast, we shall see if the numbers havnt increased in the next 2 weeks, the Adonis will be in trouble again. Ponies grazed the hillside a few years back, causing similar damage to the Adonis population.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 23-Aug-19 07:00 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...We agreed to masquerade as trainspotters, to avoid being labelled as social outcasts/anoraks/weirdos, and I think we got away with it...



Seriously though, it is great to see all the LTB reports coming in. I will be in Dorset in a couple of weeks and will have to keep my eye out for BLEP down there.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-19 06:42 PM GMT

More Long-tailed Blue Eggs

I discovered another 22 Long-tailed Blue eggs in private gardens on the outskirts of Bognor Regis this afternoon. Meanwhile, others are finding them at numerous locations in the Ouse Valley, upstream of Newhaven.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Aug-19 11:12 AM GMT

Great to read all this, Neil, and also to see so many images of this attractive little migrant.

How many years have we had an influx recently? Is it three out of the last six?

Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSp0ck, 25-Aug-19 08:29 PM GMT

They seem to like odd years at the moment, 2013,2015, &2019 dont know why they missed out on 2017, there were a few in 2014 and other years, but only in ones and twos.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-Aug-19 10:08 PM GMT

MrSp0ck wrote:

They seem to like odd years at the moment, 2013,2015, &2019 dont know why they missed out on 2017, there were a few in 2014 and other years, but only in ones and twos.

That's an illuminating set of statistics, MrSp0ck. Seems like they've got over here every year since 2013, even in years when conditions have been unfavourable.

This would have been unthinkable 15 years ago. Proof positive that climatic conditions are becoming more benign in the UK for this species.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Aug-19 11:17 PM GMT

Even More Long-tailed Blues

We are yet to see the UK brood of Long-tailed Blue get going (although I believe the first are now emerging in Devon), but I suspect that 2019 will trump both 2013 and 2015, based on primary immigrant and egg numbers so far.

Today (27 August) I enjoyed another good day with the Long-tailed Blue in Sussex; I managed to see eight individual adults (5m, 3f) at four locations. First up was the Lancing Ring male (TQ17960661) discovered by Lindsay Morris. I then moved on to Whitehawk Hill TV mast, where three males are still present.

I took lunch in an undisclosed public house (never let your family know where you drink), which had at least 30 eggs on a couple of pea plants in the beer garden (scampi & chips with a Long-tailed Blue side salad in late September). Next on my hit list was Rowland Wood, where a male was located close to the Big Beech. I finished the day at Lancing Station, where three females are still pumping out eggs.





Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 28-Aug-19 10:55 AM GMT

It's all very encouraging news, Neil. We could be in for a real treat. I admire the hardships you undergo to acquire the data as well... 😊 😊

Neil Hulme wrote:

which had at least 30 eggs on a couple of pea plants in the beer garden

Do you think that LTB should now be accepted as a fully British species in the same way that other regular immigrant species (that also breed here) are? Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow spring to mind, and I can't see how you can really draw any kind of line to differentiate between these two and the Long-tailed Blue. What criteria actually qualify a species for the British list?

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 28-Aug-19 01:45 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

What criteria actually qualify a species for the British list?

I don't think there are any "official" criteria. This web site itself is a resource that many people use, but the species listed in dark blue on the home page include such things as Mazarine Blue, Large Copper and Black-veined White, all of which have been extinct in the UK for many years. However, if you adopt the criteria "species that regularly breed in the UK", then I agree that in the 21st Century, the Long-tailed Blue should be considered as "fully British".

Jolly good show too, I say!

Andy

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 28-Aug-19 04:07 PM GMT

Andy:~~quote~~Jolly good show too, I say!They have made it just in time. After 31st October, they won't be allowed in.

Does anyone know if Guy Fawkes has any descendents? They could be useful now 😬

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 28-Aug-19 08:55 PM GMT

I was thinking almost the same thing Jack 😊 Any ideas on what sort of time frame we're looking at Neil for the next set of pristine adults? Also what happens if we get some terrible weather - will they get knocked on the head? 😬

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 28-Aug-19 09:34 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

Do you think that LTB should now be accepted as a fully British species in the same way that other regular immigrant species (that also breed here) are? Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow spring to mind, and I can't see how you can really draw any kind of line to differentiate between these two and the Long-tailed Blue. What criteria actually qualify a species for the British list?

There is no hard-and-fast criterion that can be applied - just vague adjectives such as 'regular', 'rare', 'occasional' being used, and I took a stab here: <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/distributions.php>

I guess that one boundary is 'resident', which would apply when a species has been proven to successfully overwinter over a number of consecutive years. On this basis, both Red Admiral and Clouded Yellow would qualify, but not Painted Lady or Long-tailed Blue.

My 2p worth!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Aug-19 10:41 PM GMT

Hi all

An interesting point, and one which I've given some thought to already. My own perception of 'British butterflies' includes residents and regular migrants, so I've always included Painted Lady. 'Regular' is difficult to define, but I don't think it will be too many years before most people would agree that Long-tailed Blue has qualified for inclusion in that club.

Part of me doesn't want to accept that change in status just yet, with some justification beyond wishing to retain its reputation as a genuine rarity. I've probably seen more than most in the UK (now a minimum of 70 individuals), but that remains a long way short of the number of Painted Ladies I've seen in the last 50 years!

Wurzel: I think we'll start to see a significant number of UK-born LTBs by mid September, although I suspect the first has already hatched in Devon. This species is as hard as nails, so it won't get 'knocked on the head' unless night-time temperatures drop below 4 degrees for a day or two (larval tolerance was tested in 2015); that's unlikely to happen for a while yet.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Aug-19 10:46 PM GMT

Filming The LTB

This morning I was interviewed by BBC South East's Yvette Austin, together with BC Sussex Branch members Kirsty Gibbs and Dave Cook, for a news article on the Long-tailed Blue (available for a short while at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00080y8/south-east-today-evening-news-28082019> starting 20:04). Unfortunately a few facts (including Dave's surname) got scrambled, but I was pleased with the amount of airtime we were given. In a few weeks time these old warriors will be replaced by shiny new Sussex-born LTBs.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 29-Aug-19 12:10 AM GMT

Great stuff, Neill! I feel a bit disloyal to Sussex having travelled to Kent yesterday to see them, but they seem to be turning up all along the south coast at the moment. I'm looking forward to the next generation in a few weeks time, touch wood!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 29-Aug-19 08:32 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...This morning I was interviewed by BBC South East's Yvette Austin, together with BC Sussex Branch members Kirsty Gibbs and Dave Cook, for a news article on the Long-tailed Blue (available for a short while at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00080y8/south-east-today-evening-news-28082019> starting 20:04).

Grr. That's showing as 'no longer available' when I click the link. 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Aug-19 10:26 AM GMT

Hi Andy. Far from feeling guilty about leaving the motherland, it's great to get data from further afield, where there is sometimes less observation or reporting. I would have covered Kent myself if there wasn't so much going on in Sussex.

Hi David. Unfortunately the daily news items only stay up for 24 hours. Blink and they're gone.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Aug-19 10:30 AM GMT

Losing Steam

Although the male Long-tailed Blues at the Whitehawk Hill TV mast were still performing well yesterday (29 August), I suspect that the majority of the primary migrants we are likely to see have now arrived, and the majority of eggs have now been laid. On several occasions yesterday, three males were in sight at the same time, but subsequent examination of my images proved that four were present (not all shown). It is certainly worth visiting them this weekend, but by next weekend I suspect that numbers will have dropped off, and they'll all be looking as ragged as some of the old boys already are.





Re: Neil Hulme

by CallumMac, 30-Aug-19 02:11 PM GMT

Great to see that the LTBs are still going reasonably strong, and some are even not totally ragged yet! I am travelling down from Yorkshire this evening for the weekend to see whether I can find one for myself. If you (or anybody else in the know) happens to see this in time, I wonder whether you'd mind giving me a grid reference for the Whitehawk Hill males, please? It looks like a big site, and not one I'm familiar with...

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Aug-19 05:46 PM GMT

Hi Callum
Stand at TQ33000452 and you should be fine this weekend.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by CallumMac, 31-Aug-19 08:09 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi Callum
Stand at TQ33000452 and you should be fine this weekend.
BWs, Neil

Many thanks Neil! I was indeed fine, photos to come on my PD once I'm back home... 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Sep-19 11:31 AM GMT

Ragged or not, they're a joy to see, Neil. I'll certainly be keeping my eyes peeled in south Wales later this month just in case any have made their way as far as here.

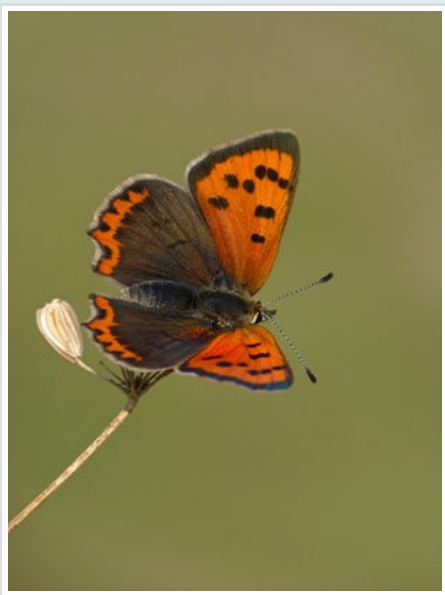
Re: Neil Hulme

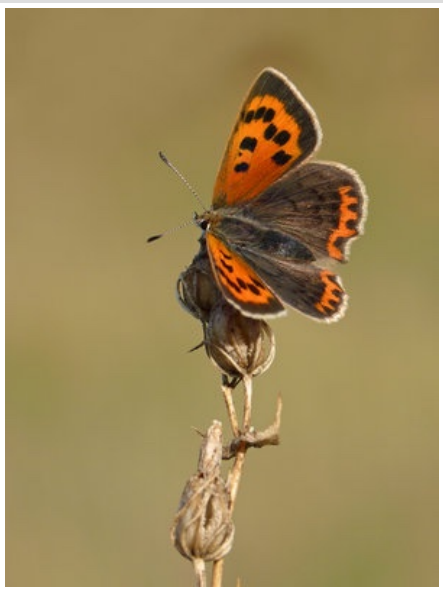
by Neil Hulme, 09-Sep-19 10:13 AM GMT

Bag Of Coppers

I didn't make any accurate counts during my visit to Cissbury Ring on Sunday (8 September), but I saw about 30 Small Copper and at least 20 male Adonis Blue, some of the latter in areas where I haven't seen the species for many years. Other highlights included a female Brown Hairstreak and a steady stream of Red Admirals heading south.

This site is rapidly attaining some of its former glory (I spent many hours here in my youth) thanks to the excellent management in recent years by the National Trust. The combination of pony grazing, cattle grazing (eastern compartment) and scrub control is likely to bring even greater rewards over the next few years.





Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSp0ck, 09-Sep-19 07:03 PM GMT

We also noted Red Admirals flying south, along the cutting at Hutchinsons Bank, where Red Admirals are not usually seen in numbers.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Sep-19 09:39 PM GMT

Beautiful Coppers, Neil. Not seen too many lately on the forum but this time of year usually sees them come into their own.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Sep-19 04:43 PM GMT

Thanks, David. I never spend much time chasing this species in the spring and summer, but the third brood always provides one of the highlights of autumn. These won't be the last images I post!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Sep-19 04:51 PM GMT

Wonderful Knepp

With every passing year I find that I'm spending more and more time on the Knepp Wildland in West Sussex, which fortunately is on my doorstep. Here's a link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP3-TsRRSys> to a video which gives a flavour of what has been achieved in relatively few years. It gives me huge hope when so much of our landscape and wildlife has been degraded. Well worth a visit at any time of year, but the next six weeks will see some real fireworks as the Red and then Fallow Deer ruts get underway.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 12-Sep-19 05:44 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...Here's a link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP3-TsRRSys> to a video which gives a flavour of what has been achieved in relatively few years.

Thanks for posting this, Neil. It was a delight to watch. What's interesting is the statement later in the clip explaining how the financial returns are actually better than when the estate was being intensively farmed.

Was good to see a few Emperors and nightingales too! 😊 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Sep-19 06:48 PM GMT

British *boeticus*

Despite suffering increasingly painful tonsillitis (no pain, no gain) I went up to Whitehawk Hill yesterday (17 September), mainly on the basis of Katrina Watson's image taken on 16 September, which shows a pristine male Long-tailed Blue, with fringe hairs completely intact. I believe that the condition of the fringe hairs is critical in differentiating Sussex/British born individuals, particularly during this period when some primary immigrants are overlapping with the first born on Sussex/British soil.

Based on my 2013 and 2015 observations of this species, it starts to lose fringe hairs almost immediately on emergence, rather like the Chequered Skipper. The fringe hairs appear to be so loosely attached that I doubt any butterflies could cross the Channel with them completely intact, so whereas Painted Lady, Clouded Yellow and other species can cross in perfect condition, I suspect that *boeticus* can't. As an aside, I think Mike Galtry's female at Lancing Ring on 30 August was probably the first Sussex born example seen this year (which would mean the egg was laid in late July).

As I walked through the male lek below the TV mast, I flushed what at first appeared to be a moth, but when I saw the 'moth' land delicately on a grass stem I got rather excited. I had the company of this mating pair between 12.22 and 13.18 hrs, when she finally kicked him off. I believe that the male was a Sussex born individual, only a day or two old (probably Katrina's butterfly), but the female had much of her fringe missing, some minor chips and a heavily scarred upperside; I estimate she was about a week old, and most likely a new arrival from France.

I also saw two other males, which were of some age and almost certainly primary immigrants. However, they were in much better condition than those seen regularly up until end August. Those seen yesterday match the condition of males seen since 10 September by David Phillips and others. I believe that we have seen at least two (discernible) waves of immigrants, the beginnings of which started approximately one life cycle apart (some supporting evidence from Lancing Station today).

This makes differentiating late wave immigrants from Sussex/British born individuals potentially tricky. I think the burden of proof, at least for the next week or two, must be quite high in confidently determining the latter, which undoubtedly *are* now beginning to emerge.

Eyes to the pea; things are going to get very exciting over the next month or two.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Pauline, 17-Sep-19 07:06 PM GMT

That's a pretty good shot of the mating pair Neil 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 17-Sep-19 07:16 PM GMT

Very exciting times indeed – and an excellent analysis! Thanks Neil – and that shot of the mating pair is incredible!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Sep-19 07:17 PM GMT

Thanks, Pauline. Sometimes you need luck and I got it in spades that day. If I hadn't walked within a metre of them, I would probably have gone home empty handed. And they were so cool that they didn't budge for an hour. When it warmed up slightly they split and I saw two more males briefly before the cloud thickened and the temperature dropped.

Today, under clear blue skies and heat, I got three or four high speed fly pasts in three hours. The camera never came out of the bag.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 17-Sep-19 07:18 PM GMT

Beautiful study of the Mating pair, Neil. One of your best images IMO. Still waiting for the proper kick off.

Get better soon,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 17-Sep-19 07:27 PM GMT

Great shot of the pair, Neil! 🍷😊 The next few days are forecast for wall-to-wall sunshine, which I suppose means a few may well emerge, but from what you say will be nigh on impossible to photograph... Early starts or late finishes required perhaps?

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Sep-19 07:53 PM GMT

Thanks, Pete, Trevor and Dave. I've photographed mating LTBs in the UK before, but this pair was the most photogenic by far. When the female opened up, after they parted, she revealed an upperside which was in surprisingly poor shape. I definitely caught her best side.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 17-Sep-19 08:09 PM GMT

Hmmmm I'm free this coming weekend, whatever shall I do with myself... ?

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Sep-19 11:10 PM GMT

You **always** deliver, Neil, I'll give you that.

Interesting to read your commentary too. I sincerely hope that this does indeed signal the start of an exciting and rare event.

The next couple of weeks should support that sentiment, I hope.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Sep-19 08:44 AM GMT

Late LTBs

Yesterday (17 September) I watched a female Long-tailed Blue through the security fence at Lancing Station. From her quite good (but chipped) condition, determined through binoculars, I suspect she represents one of the late wave primary immigrants seen in Sussex since 10 September. She appeared to be laying many eggs, very quickly, so there's a chance that some LTBs will still be emerging at the start of November, assuming the weather is kind.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Sep-19 08:40 PM GMT

New Site For Long-tails

Today (19 September) I visited Thundersbarrow Hill, where Patrick Moore found a Sussex-born male Long-tailed Blue yesterday. I later found out that, after a long walk, I had stopped just 200 metres short of where I needed to be! However, compensation came on my return journey, when I found a late wave immigrant LTB (male) in the scrubby compartment at Southwick Hill, nearly a kilometre away (TQ236078). I suspect that the species has been breeding on Common Gorse up here, and further searches may prove fruitful over the coming weeks.

Also seen were Wall Brown (14), Small Copper (4), Brown Argus (3), Clouded Yellow (1), numerous Speckled Wood (many in pristine condition) and a few Small Heath, Painted Lady and Red Admiral.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-Sep-19 11:44 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...Today (19 September) I visited Thundersbarrow Hill, where Patrick Moore found a Sussex-born male Long-tailed Blue yesterday.

Did he use his telescope! 😊

Seriously, this Long Tailed Blue migration is looking to be quite a phenomenon right now. We still have adults from the first wave and with any luck they will be joined by a home-grown influx very soon.

Exciting times!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Sep-19 09:17 AM GMT

Hi David

No, that's silly, but he did spot them at night!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

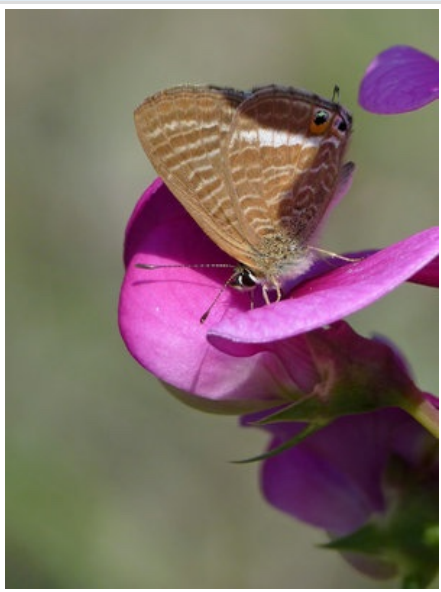
by Neil Hulme, 23-Sep-19 09:20 AM GMT

Long-tailed Explosion!

Saturday (21 September) saw the start of the largest ever hatch of Long-tailed Blue on British soil. Some sites cannot be reported as they are on inaccessible private land, while there is some sensitivity over others, as this species has a habit of breeding in private gardens and allotments; we must be respectful when congregating in urban areas.

However, there can be little doubt that everyone who wishes to see this species will have the opportunity to do so over the next few weeks. LTBs should appear at all the sites where it was seen in 2013 and 2015, and many others – just look for the pea! I'm aware of at least 50 individuals flying in Sussex on Saturday and that number is likely to increase. We are currently seeing a mix of Sussex-born butterflies and late arrival primary immigrants, some of which are still laying eggs.





Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 23-Sep-19 04:13 PM GMT

Beautiful Neil, and on a Pea flower too!
Good to see you today, hope the gathering cloud didn't spoil the party.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 23-Sep-19 06:42 PM GMT

Excellent, Neil.
My own searches in Essex today failed to turn up any signs, so I will be keeping an eye on sightings, with a view to heading down in early October.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 23-Sep-19 06:58 PM GMT

That was a very enjoyable day Neil. I have a sneaky suspicion I might bump into you again in the coming weeks, along with several other familiar faces 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Sep-19 07:08 PM GMT

Thanks, Trevor. Unfortunately the weather collapsed completely, so I was just in time to see that butterfly you were photographing. Fortunately I had a

nice male with open wings earlier in the day.

Hi Mark. I don't think there's much sunshine planned until w/c 30 September, so later that week might be good.

It certainly was, Paul. I'm sure there will be even better to come.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Sep-19 07:16 PM GMT

Knepp Monsters

A break from Long-tailed Blue hunting, enforced by poor weather, saw me heading to the Knepp Wildland on Sunday (22 September). It will be a while yet before the Fallow start rutting, but the huge Red stags are already rounding up their harems.

If visiting Knepp in the rutting season, please do keep to public and permissive rights of way.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Sep-19 11:46 AM GMT

Long-tailed Blue Delay

On Monday (23 September) I visited a site on the outskirts of Newhaven, to search for Long-tailed Blue. The strong breeze seemed to be suppressing activity, with the five individuals seen falling below expectations. However, I did photograph a smart Sussex-born male. A dash to Whitehawk Hill TV mast, to beat the rapidly collapsing weather, was a little too late, but I did briefly see one of the five reported (late wave immigrant) males, before the dark clouds rolled in.

It looks as if any further action will now be delayed by poor weather. However, this will be a suspension, rather than a cancellation of normal services. The adults and pupae will sit it out, and temperatures are easily sufficient to ensure that larval development will continue.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Sep-19 08:25 PM GMT

Weather Window Blues

An unexpected but welcome break from the foul weather this afternoon (24 September) prompted both Lindsay Morris and me to visit Lancing Ring. We decided to spread our efforts, with him heading for the far side of the wooded summit and me staying to search the chalk pit to the east of the car park.

Fortunately, Lindsay had made a short detour to pick up his mobile, as it wasn't more than about 20 minutes before I found a Sussex-born female Long-tailed Blue. I was delighted that he got back in time to see it, as it was his sighting of a male LTB yesterday which had led me here – thanks, Lindsay! While photographing her, another LTB whizzed past me, but I never relocated it and couldn't determine its sex.

There were plenty of other butterflies on show, including at least half-a-dozen Wall, mostly in pristine condition. We watched a brief but successful courtship and pairing. I went home satisfied that we had made the most of this short weather window.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 24-Sep-19 11:23 PM GMT

What a beauty! 🦋

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-Sep-19 06:41 AM GMT

Perfection, Neil. Good to also know that they can sit out this awful, wet spell and respond when conditions improve. Let's hope that's soon!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Old Wolf, 27-Sep-19 08:17 PM GMT

Hello Neil,

I realise it is late and you may not see this before but I am toying with the idea of heading down to Brighton on the train tomorrow and see you mentioned grid reference TQ33000452 earlier. Is this still a good place to look?

Any info will be greatly appreciated.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Sep-19 09:30 AM GMT

Hi Old Wolf,

I've only just logged on to see your request. I hope you were successful. I was at Knepp, where the weather was 'sunny enough', so fingers crossed you got lucky.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Sep-19 09:38 AM GMT

More Reds

On Saturday (28 September) I had a difficult choice; chase Long-tailed Blues or Red Deer. In the end, a trip to watch the rut at Knepp won, as the LTBs will be going for a while yet and better weather is promised later this week. With patience, the Knepp stags rarely disappoint.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Sep-19 08:28 PM GMT

The Long Search

Today (30 September) a thinning of the cloud cover was sufficient to persuade me to try Whitehawk Hill for Long-tailed Blues (LTBs). Five others had the same idea, travelling from as far afield as Essex and Scotland! The sun eventually broke through, but none of the late wave primary immigrants, which have been seen here regularly since 10 September, made an appearance; they may have run out of steam during the recent spell of poor weather.

After a prolonged search for roosting butterflies on the flower-heads and scrub in both the lekking areas (either side of the TV mast), I changed tactics and started to methodically search the pea plants. When I eventually found a pristine male, I was relieved that Trevor Rapley was still on site, but felt rather bad that all the long distance travellers had departed! I have high hopes for Wednesday onward.



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 30-Sep-19 09:58 PM GMT

Ooooooh he's a corker! 🍷

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-Sep-19 11:01 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

..On Saturday (28 September) I had a difficult choice; chase Long-tailed Blues or Red Deer. In the end, a trip to watch the rut at Knepp won...

I didn't realise you liked them **this** much, Neil?! As you say, the Long Tailed Blues will (hopefully) wait until this dreadful spell of weather clears up.

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 30-Sep-19 11:58 PM GMT

I'm hoping to head down on Wednesday, perhaps there will be a few familiar faces on site!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Old Wolf, 01-Oct-19 08:34 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi Old Wolf,

I've only just logged on to see your request. I hope you were successful. I was at Knepp, where the weather was 'sunny enough', so fingers crossed you got lucky.

BWs, Neil

Hello Neil,

No worries, I knew I had probably left it a bit late for a reply and in the end I had to go into work so couldn't go anyway. I am keeping a close eye on the weather for this Saturday though 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Oct-19 09:29 AM GMT

Long-tailed Blues Continued

On Tuesday (1 October) I visited Paghams Beach, where Chris Janman recently discovered a couple of Long-tailed Blue (LTB) on Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea growing in front of the seafront bungalows. There's a lot of pea and some Broom (alternative foodplant), so I suspect there have been far more LTBs here than those reported. I found a mint condition female resting on Bramble, but failed to get a photograph before she was whisked away in the wind. I also saw a male in flight on several occasions. Other species seen at Paghams included four Clouded Yellow (all in good condition), Small Copper, Common Blue, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Comma and Small White.

Yesterday (2 October) I started quite early at Whitehawk Hill TV mast and was soon joined by Mark Wagstaff from Hampshire. While we were chatting a male LTB suddenly appeared from its roosting spot beneath a Bramble leaf, but it remained inactive until the temperature reached about 14 degrees after midday. By this time a large crowd of admirers were on-site. After losing track of it for a while (when they shift they really do move!), more people arrived and it was relocated by Mark Bunch from Essex (essexbuzzard). Colin Whitehead and his wife (visiting from Edinburgh) reported seeing five LTB at Lancing Station the previous day, so I headed there.

I spotted my quarry immediately upon arrival, seeing three in all. One, a Sussex-born male, cleared the fence and spent about ten minutes on the rough ground to the north of the track. However, when the sunshine returned it flew off before giving me the open-wing shot I was hoping for. Another great day with hopefully more to follow.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Oct-19 08:57 PM GMT

That LTB is an enviable specimen, Neil. Must be thrilling to see them as fresh as that in the UK.

Fingers crossed that we get some settled conditions over the next week or so to give as many people as possible a chance to see this beautiful little lycaenid.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Oct-19 08:26 PM GMT

Thanks, David. There are actually two individuals there, from different sites. It appears that even the late wave primary immigrants have now all perished, so we're just left with gleaming UK-born specimens. I nearly wrote 'Sussex-born', but I'm convinced there are plenty to be found in other coastal counties.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Oct-19 08:30 PM GMT

The Party Continues

My pleas to spare some rampant Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea (liberally peppered with Long-tailed Blue eggs) from being cut back in a Lancing retirement home garden paid dividends today (6 October). I saw two Sussex-born females here, with possibly a third in flight. I then moved on to Lancing Station, where the action came thick and fast behind the security fencing. I eventually worked out that there were four females and two males present, although I suspect that might be on the conservative side.

On a private East Sussex site (Site X, which I don't know the location of), Mr Y saw 17 LTB today, which just goes to show how many are still out there,

just waiting to be found.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 06-Oct-19 09:27 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Some superb shots there Neil ! Good to see the LTB's doing so well in your neck of the woods . For me in mid-Kent not much to report . I visited Kingsdown Leas back in mid- August ,and although I didn,t see any ,I did find several spent egg cases and I believe one or two others on UKB have seen some of the early migrant individuals at Kingsdown ,i'm guessing that the new LTB's should now be on the wing there ,I was hoping to re-visit today but the weather (and a few jobs !) were against me ! At Dungeness the eggs laid on the Bladder Senna ,have all but gone , I did see some sign of Larval damage ,but as yet none have been reported ,the BLEP (and the NLEP !) finished flowering along the entrance road ,a long time back. At Rye harbour ,not far from the car park ,a few BLEP plants grow and I reckon there was some feeding damage on a couple of flower heads . Further along the sea wall ,where the new visitor centre is being built ,theres a mass of Pea growing along the raised platform growing around the site ,had a quick look ,a while back but couldn't see any likely LTB signs ,but it is a bit awkwardso many people back and forth ! Had a bit of a look along the bungalows at Winchelsea beach as wellbut no luck . Hoping for some better weather next weekend . Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 06-Oct-19 10:05 PM GMT

That would finish off my year in style, a nice fresh female LTB.
Glad to here the party is still in full swing. Your perseverance was rewarded!.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Oct-19 10:03 AM GMT

Hi Allan

There hasn't been too much news coming out of Kent, but I do know someone who visited Kingsdown some while back and saw 6 or more LTB in a short period of time, and found 'plenty' of eggs.

I wouldn't worry about whether or not any BLEP, NLEP or other foodplant is still flowering, or even green, as most LTB will now be pupae, ready to emerge over the next few weeks. The length of the life cycle will now be stretching out in response to lower temperature, so it's likely to be a protracted emergence. Sadly, many of the eggs laid by late wave primary immigrants, up until that recent spell of foul weather, will never make it through; November frosts are likely to do for them. All the research I've done on the species since 2013 suggests they'll fly south, with the females departing once mated.

Thanks, Trevor. Slightly better weather this week should see a few more coming out to play.

BWs, Neil

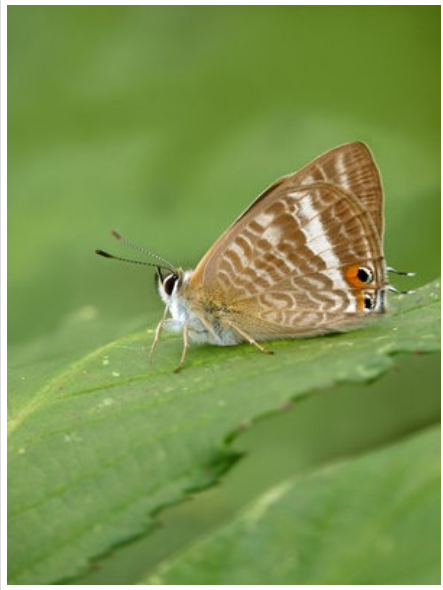
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Oct-19 09:53 PM GMT

Lancing Station

My thanks to Network Rail for allowing me access to the track-side at Lancing Station today (8 October). Before the company ecologist arrived, a small group of us enjoyed plenty of action through the security wire, with both males and females visible, and chases involving up to three adults. At least six were observed from the car park, with a further three further down the line to the west. As I expected, no freshly laid eggs could be found. However, the

very first flower I picked, to demonstrate where the ova are usually placed, held an old eggshell. This was my first ever butterfly outing while dressed in day-glo orange and a hardhat.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Oct-19 03:01 PM GMT

Elephant In The Room

Over the last few years I've helped my children breed through a common species of moth (previously Emperor and Vapourer), to teach them the wonders of metamorphosis. In September, a mother from their youth group described the large caterpillars she'd seen wandering around her garden, which could only be Elephant Hawk-moth larvae looking for a pupation site. I managed to find one of them that evening, so the kids will be in for a nice surprise early next summer.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Oct-19 11:37 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

My thanks to Network Rail for allowing me access to the track-side at Lancing Station today (8 October). Before the company ecologist arrived, a small group of us enjoyed plenty of action through the security wire, with both males and females visible, and chases involving up to three adults. At least six were observed from the car park, with a further three further down the line to the west. As I expected, no freshly laid eggs could be found. However, the very first flower I picked, to demonstrate where the ova are usually placed, held an old eggshell. This was my first ever butterfly outing while dressed in day-glo orange and a hardhat.

That's a commendable achievement, Neil, in being allowed access to such a site. Even better that you found a fair number of Long Tailed Blues there.

Was the company ecologist also there because of this species?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-19 08:26 AM GMT

Hi David

Yes. We were there to look at the opportunities for LTB on the Network Rail estate (Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea is quite common along track-sides and in unused sidings), and for wildlife in general.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Oct-19 12:27 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

We were there to look at the opportunities for LTB on the Network Rail estate (Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea is quite common along track-sides and in unused sidings), and for wildlife in general.

Thanks for that, Neil. Good to see industry taking an interest.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-19 10:15 PM GMT

Back To Knepp

I'm spending a lot of time on the Knepp Wildland at the moment and I'm likely to be back many more times over the next few weeks. Yesterday (9 October) I photographed some more of the large Red Deer stags which are particularly active in the early and late parts of the day.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Oct-19 09:55 AM GMT

Last Of The Many?

The Long-tailed Blues I saw yesterday (10 October), with my brother who's visiting from Antwerp, might be the last I see this year, bearing in mind the weather forecast for the foreseeable future and the likelihood of rapidly diminishing returns. I'm sure that more will emerge, but they won't hang around for long, assuming they can get airborne. With a couple of exceptions (Lancing Station and an undisclosed site in East Sussex), where there remains evidence of colonial behaviour in local populations of significant size (as seen in 2013), most sites seem to be emptying out rapidly (as seen in 2015); I suspect they're flying south. Many of the eggs laid by the late wave of primary immigrants (during late September) are unlikely to produce adults, unless an Indian Summer materialises unexpectedly.

There is no doubt in my mind that we have been cheated of something really spectacular, by the collapse in the weather just as the UK brood started to emerge. That said, I've collated more than 200 records for Sussex in 2019, including primary immigrants (two distinct waves) and locally hatched adults. This surpassed the 2013 and 2015 events.

Yesterday, we started at Lancing Station, where a small group (including Mark Tutton) was treated to plenty of action through the security wire. Mark had seen a definite female, but the four males we viewed ourselves were all Sussex-born males, all now showing signs of their age. I suspect they will hang on here, hoping to ambush virgin females.

We then moved on to the Newhaven area, but drew blanks at Buckle Bypass (where earlier counts had reached 11) and Tidemills. However, we finished on a high, with a very smart male in a sheltered glade below Newhaven Fort.

It may nearly be time to say goodbye to the Long-tailed Blue in 2019, but I'm certain of one thing; they'll be back!



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 11-Oct-19 10:35 AM GMT

That law of sod strikes again, I'm just glad I got the encounters I did rather than put all my Blues in one basket (I booked next week of work specifically to find them 😊). Realistically I guess we have to admit that butterflying in October in the UK will always be rather hit and miss, at least for the foreseeable future.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Oct-19 10:38 AM GMT

Small Tortoiseshells, Long-tailed Blues And Climate Change

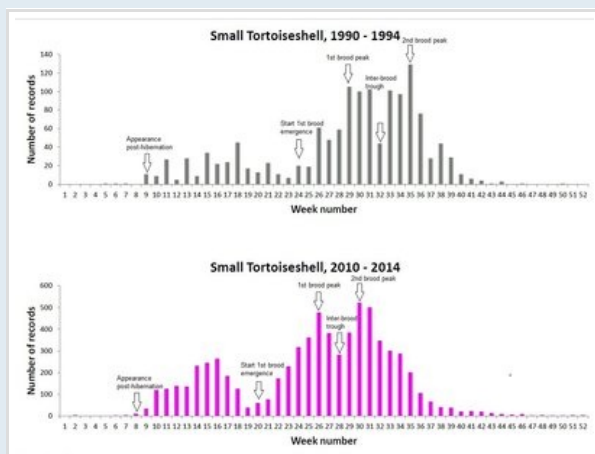
If anyone (other than Trump) should doubt the effects of climate change, it's worth looking at some basic statistics, which suggest that the excitement of seeing exotic species such as the Long-tailed Blue in the UK should be viewed as the silver-lining to a very dark cloud.

Looking first at the Small Tortoiseshell, the phenology of this species has hurtled forward by an unprecedented three-and-a-half weeks (minimum) over twenty years (at least in Sussex), which I suspect has led to an increasingly high proportion of the first brood (the progeny of over-wintering adults) going on to produce a second brood, with correspondingly fewer going into early hibernation (historically a risk spreading strategy). This second brood appears to be falling foul of desiccated nettle-beds in our warmer summers, such as 2018.

I believe that a string of hot summers will prove disastrous for the species in my region. However, rearguard actions are likely to be fought following cooler, damper summers, so it's the longer term trend which is most worrying. This year, I have seen **18** Small Tortoiseshells, **14** of which were post-hibernation butterflies, on the best site I know of in Sussex.

Following last year's drought, I have seen far more Long-tailed Blues in 2019 than I have Small Tortoiseshells; I have made **93** sightings of a minimum of **48** individuals. Since 2013 I have seen a minimum of **102** individual Long-tailed Blues in Sussex and Kent; I had never seen this species in the UK prior to 2013.

In the 1970s this would have been considered unimaginable. Exciting as Long-tailed Blues are, we should be very worried for the sake of our children and grandchildren.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 11-Oct-19 01:29 PM GMT

I don't have your expertise Neil, but I certainly have my suspicion that Small Tortoiseshell is routinely double brooded here in north Scotland (historically *usually* single brooded). Some enter hibernation (well, come indoors /go into the shed) by early July. Then after a lull a few fresh individuals are seen right through August and September; I speculate that these are second brood.

One aspect of warmer summers in southern Britain puzzles me. The climate is still cooler than say southern France where there are far more species. No doubt we would have more species if it were not for that stretch of water. A bigger puzzle is why the highly mobile Continental Swallowtail hasn't become established along and near the south coast. Unlike LT Blue, Swallowtail has no problem surviving winter.

On a plus note, global warming might benefit the north. Small Torts and Peacocks are abundant up here. I have yet to see a Comma but they have been reported as near as the Aviemore and Aberdeen areas. It can't be long.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 11-Oct-19 02:53 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

I too have concerns about the Small Tortoiseshell. At a farm in Halnaker, West Sussex, they overwinter in the farm outbuildings and usually emerge from hibernation around late March. Several years ago about 40 were seen in an unmanaged meadow, nectaring, courting and basking. This Spring there were far fewer to be seen.

My East Sussex count for this year amounts to 5, including two together at Ditchling Common.

In Wiltshire, where I spend a few days most months, they are still seen and my best encounter for 2019 was 5 in a Lacock garden centre.

In contrast, when I was a boy, Small Torts were an every day sight, and in some numbers in our Godalming garden, favouring the French Marigolds.

It says something when sightings of Purple Emperors outnumber those of the Small Tortoiseshell, which has been my experience for the last two Summers.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSp0ck, 11-Oct-19 04:03 PM GMT

Small Tortoiseshells in Surrey are just as bad, in 1997 we had over 100 on the Hutchisons Bank transect this year just 8. We had a web of larvae, but nothing came of these. with 1420 Small Blues and 8 Small Tortoiseshells, most other species had higher counts, we even had 4 purple emperors. At the moment we have Clouded Yellows still flying around, a few Red Admirals, and no Small Tortoiseshells.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-Oct-19 06:34 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

It may nearly be time to say goodbye to the Long-tailed Blue in 2019, but I'm certain of one thing; they'll be back!

It's probably not going to be long before it's an annual event, Neil.

Shame about how the weather took a turn at a critical moment. I'm sure had conditions remained benign we'd have seen plenty more of this lovely lycaenid.

Isn't that just the problem with many UK species though? Whilst temperatures generally are rising, causing butterflies to manufacture new ways to respond, we are still at a fairly northerly latitude and such cool, stormy conditions in September and October cannot be ruled out. I suppose if they **did** become rare occurrences, species such as Wall Brown might break out of their 'developmental trap'?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Oct-19 10:14 AM GMT

Thanks for your comments, all.

Jack: I suspect it's only a matter of time before the 'Continental Swallowtail' becomes established here (it has certainly tried and succeeded in the very short-term), but it has probably never arrived in the sort of numbers required to form a self-sustaining population. As a species which wanders through the countryside in lower numbers than, for instance, Long-tailed Blue, and periodically crosses the Channel in much lower numbers, it is less likely to establish a firm bridgehead.

Whereas the LTB finds it easy to set up late summer/autumn breeding colonies, it cannot survive our winter. However, I suspect this is a true migrant and returns south – or at least that part of the brood which completes its life cycle in a timely manner.

David: I think it is entirely plausible that the Wall will break free from the 'developmental trap', given added climate warming.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Oct-19 10:16 AM GMT

Blues And Reds

Yesterday (15 October), while on the way to Knepp to enjoy the deer rut, I made a detour to Lancing Station, to see if the Long-tailed Blue is still flying here. Three very active males were present on the north side of the track, clearly visible through binoculars.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Oct-19 11:33 PM GMT

Just in case you didn't know (and I guess you do), there has been another Long Tailed Blue sighting in Wales, Neil, although this one met a

disappointingly sticky end:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ButterflyConservationSouthWalesBranch/permalink/2473027946252047/>

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 17-Oct-19 05:31 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

In the 1970s this would have been considered unimaginable. Exciting as Long-tailed Blues are, we should be very worried for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

I read this and the comments of other people with great interest. I would just add a few points:

Climate change is a fact. It is happening and has already happened. The scientists and politicians can argue about whether it is anthropogenic or not 😊

Populations of butterfly species in Britain have fluctuated considerably over the years, not only because of climate change but also due to other factors. Take the example of the Comma, which declined in the 1800's to a low point in the early 1900's, but has now recovered and is continuing to expand northwards into Scotland, well beyond its original range. Another case is the Black-veined White, which became extinct in Britain in the early 20th century for reasons that seem unclear. The same is true of the Large Tortoiseshell, but it may be coming back now (together with its cousin, the Scarce Tortoiseshell). The Mazarine Blue was apparently once quite common and widespread in Southern England, but became extinct (probably) because of changes in haymaking practices. Maybe the Swallowtail was once widespread in England, but for some reason shrank to a remnant population that evolved into the separate sub-species *britannicus*. Who know what species of butterflies lived in Britain before the early naturalists first wrote about them?

Butterflies in general are in long-term decline, but (IMHO) that is more to do with intensive farming practices and insecticide use. I am not belittling the gravity of climate change, nor am I suggesting we do nothing. It also goes without saying that I am a great admirer of the conservation and reintroduction work that Neil and others have done. However, in our little corner of the world, we will see numbers of butterfly species go up as well as down. The Small Tortoiseshell is a great rarity now where I live in East Sussex. As a teenager in the 1960's, I paid them no attention, so common they were. The same could be said for the Wall Brown -- there were loads where I grew up in Surrey. Their decline is a great pity, but on the other hand I have delighted in seeing several Long-tailed Blues this year and one in 2013. In 2017 I was lucky enough to see one of the Queen of Spain Fritillaries at Peacehaven. I also look forward to Continental Swallowtails establishing themselves in Sussex, and perhaps Southern Small White!

Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSpOck, 17-Oct-19 08:02 PM GMT

Yes things are on the Move, the Wall is believed to have died out in the 1980s practically overnight on some Surrey Sites, trying to fit in a 3rd brood, but couldn't at the time. It probably has been able to for a decade but there are none left to try. Our Glanville Fritillaries have produced a 2nd Brood this summer and the resulting larvae are about to get to hibernation size in the next week, so can fit a 2nd brood in with success in Surrey. The the Brilliant Butterfly Banks project research is being carried out, on some species, some re-introduced and habitat created on nearby sites. The continental Swallowtail was established here until the cold winter of 1947. It tried to come into the Dover area in 1999 and survived a few years, and again into Sussex in 2014. The Dover site is full of Fennel.



2nd Brood Glanville Larvae

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Oct-19 07:43 PM GMT

Hi David. I don't do facebook, so am keen to know the fate of the Welsh Long-tailed Blue. I know that a Swallow swallowed one elsewhere!

Thanks for your comments, MrSpOck and Andy.

Andy, you are of course right in pointing out some of the other factors which have caused problems for many of our butterfly species, particularly since the mid C20th. We've lost c.80% of our chalk grassland (which now covers just 4% of the South Downs National Park) to the plough since WWII; this can never be reclaimed to any significant extent. Following WWII, and again after the 1987 blow-down, we created huge swathes of uniform, dark conifer plantation. However, the public forest estate is managed in a far more sympathetic manner these days, and we will hopefully see further improvements in the future. On the other hand, we are unlikely to see the return of Hazel coppicing on anything other than a hobbyist or nature reserve scale, although biomass plants give a glimmer of hope for even this lightweight material. Then there's the spread of concrete and agricultural intensification, involving the loss of hedgerows and copses (some now being replanted) and the use of herbicides and pesticides. Add the draining of wetlands, water

and air pollution and increased Nitrogen deposition and it's not difficult to see why so many (but far from all) of our species have declined, since the inception of UKBMS (1976) and long before.

However, my piece above was specifically about the effects of climate change on the Small Tortoiseshell and Long-tailed Blue; the changing fortunes of these species are largely independent of those factors listed above. LTB is here entirely as a migrant and prefers urban and semi-urban habitats, such as allotments, gardens and wasteland. Small Tortoiseshell is a non-specialist of the wider countryside, requiring nothing more than nettle-beds – or at least those which are not subject to summer drought.

The problem for some species (particularly habitat specialists) is that climate change is exacerbating those problems listed above. Species will generally move northward in response to climate change, as some non-specialists have done with ease, such as Comma. However, the patches of high quality habitat required by specialists have become so fragmented and isolated, and the intervening areas so hostile, that many species will find it difficult to make the great leaps required in response to our warming climate.

When all these factors act together, we see that climate change causes problems both directly and indirectly. As always, there will be winners as well as losers, at least in the shorter term. However, if we continue to make such a mess of our planet, the future of our butterflies may become the least of our worries.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Oct-19 07:58 PM GMT

Giants

My brother, Mark, spent a few days at Knepp while on a recent visit from his home in Antwerp. He did far more justice to the giant Red Deer of the Wildland with his more sophisticated camera, especially in the dingy weather conditions we've experienced lately.

The first shot shows a clonking great stag, which lost an eye in last year's rut. It hasn't put the ladies off.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Oct-19 10:30 AM GMT

Red Admiral Eggs

Yesterday (20 October) I paid another visit to the Knepp Wildland, primarily to enjoy the deer rut. The Reds have now finished their business for the year and are no longer charging around or bellowing, but the Fallow are still going strong. There is plenty to see for those interested in fungi, including rarities associated with the ancient oaks in the Middle Block. Although common, I found a particularly nice example of Beefsteak Fungus. Butterfly interest was restricted to a single Red Admiral, which was busy laying eggs on nettles growing along the base of a south-facing hedgerow. I've also seen a few Peacock and Comma here in recent days.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Oct-19 09:51 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi David. I don't do facebook, so am keen to know the fate of the Welsh Long-tailed Blue. I know that a Swallow swallowed one elsewhere!

Yes, this is the fate that befell the Skokholm Island LTB:

...Having caused a mini twitch, she headed back out towards the pup only to find a Long-tailed Blue on pretty much the same patch of Goldenrod! This stunning first for Skokholm was only briefly twitchable as when it looped up towards its next patch of Goldenrod it was snapped up by an east bound Swallow. We're awaiting details of how many Pembrokeshire records there have been, but it can't be many...

https://skokholm.blogspot.com/2019/09/on-day-of-really-quite-exciting-birding.html?fbclid=IwAR3aeFkJ20LA3fsLI1UN1Hzd8RnuHb_mzTvfVbVFxK4PfsYyKST6nXjMPw

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Oct-19 11:16 AM GMT

Thanks for the clarification, David. Long-tailed Blues are still flying in Sussex, with a couple seen at Lancing station yesterday.
BWs, Neil

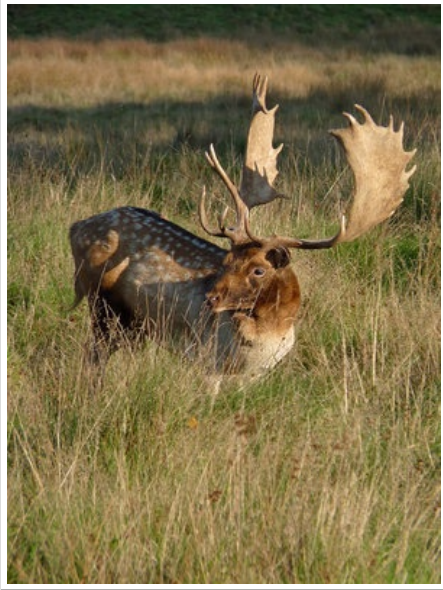
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Oct-19 11:29 AM GMT

Turn Of The Fallow

With the Red Deer rut at Knepp now over, yesterday (22 October) I turned my attention to the Fallow. This species is now in full flow, with plenty of belching and clashing of antlers. I started at Knepp, but photography of the Fallow here is difficult, as most of the action occurs deep within the stands of sallow (in areas which are out-of-bounds).

A change of venue to Petworth Park, in beautiful autumn sunshine, provided plenty of opportunities for the camera. A wonderful day was marred by the second attack on deer by unleashed dogs that I've witnessed in just the last three days. Sadly, the standard of dog ownership in the UK appears to be at an all-time low.





Re: Neil Hulme

by NickMorgan, 23-Oct-19 02:02 PM GMT

Neil,

Jumping back to your Long-tailed Blues and climate change.

It is all very worrying, although I am also finding it currently very interesting.

In East Lothian (South-east Scotland) we have also seen a dramatic decline in Small Tortoiseshell numbers. I am not convinced that this is to do with climate change rather than parasitism yet. Something that could be looked into relatively easily.

What we do have by way of an enormous silver lining is a big increase in species. Looking back at 1970s records there were only 12 species regularly recorded here. We now have double that.

It seems odd to think that Orange Tips first appeared here in 1978, Ringlets in 1984 and Peacocks in 1985. Imagine life without three of our most abundant species!

A bit of a jump but our first Comma was found here in 2001, Holly Blues in 2007, Speckled Woods in 2009 and Wall Brown in 2010. We also had our first Small Skipper in 2011. The last three species are now also amongst our most common. A couple of colonies of Holly Blues were suddenly discovered here this year after 11 years of just the odd one or two being seen each year.

The first record I can find for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is 2013 and Green Hairstreaks is 2014, but I suspect both of those species had been flying under the radar for some time.

And our most recent arrival is the Large Skipper which we have seen randomly over the last few years since 2014. Many of these species have worked their way up the east coast around the Lammermuir Hills, which form a southern barrier. So, all very exciting. I then managed to get my hands of a book by Thomson of Scottish Butterflies. This contains information on historical records and I discovered that many of these species were found here in the late 1700s, but had disappeared by the mid 1800s. This corresponds nicely with a dip in average temperatures, sometimes referred to as the little ice age. Maybe that gives us a little hope that things are returning to what they once were, but I share the general concern about the impacts that we are having on the climate and the planet in general.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Oct-19 06:22 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments, Nick.

Unfortunately I don't have time to respond in too much detail, as I'm currently setting up a new wildlife consultancy business, so need to focus on building websites etc.

In brief, there has been much research done on parasitoids of the Small Tortoiseshell by Dr Owen Lewis and others, which failed to prove a causal relationship. However, I suspect that parasitoid loading will have been influential, at least to some extent, both temporally and spatially.

Although it is indeed exciting that many species are marching northwards, it is often at the expense of others. This is seen in other groups too, so it's not good news for e.g. Red-backed Shrike, Willow Tit or Ptarmigan (although habitat degradation and other factors also play their part). Shorter term local benefits are likely to be dwarfed by threats on a global scale, as climate (and ultimately habitat) becomes increasingly homogenised over a wider latitudinal range. It is difficult to see any other outcome than an overall reduction in global biodiversity in the longer term.

Rather than things returning to what they once were, this link https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2000_Year_Temperature_Comparison.png shows where we currently are in relation to pre-Little Ice Age times. I always find these graphs terrifying!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by NickMorgan, 25-Oct-19 01:37 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Thanks for your comments, Nick.

Rather than things returning to what they once were, this link https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2000_Year_Temperature_Comparison.png shows where we currently are in relation to pre-Little Ice Age times. I always find these graphs terrifying!

BWs, Neil

Even more scary is that shows a difference of about one degree between 1800 and now, yet that was enough to freeze over the Thames back then.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 28-Oct-19 11:24 PM GMT

Impressive sequence of images of the deer, Neil. That site must be incredibly fulfilling all year round? I wish there were a few more like it in the UK.

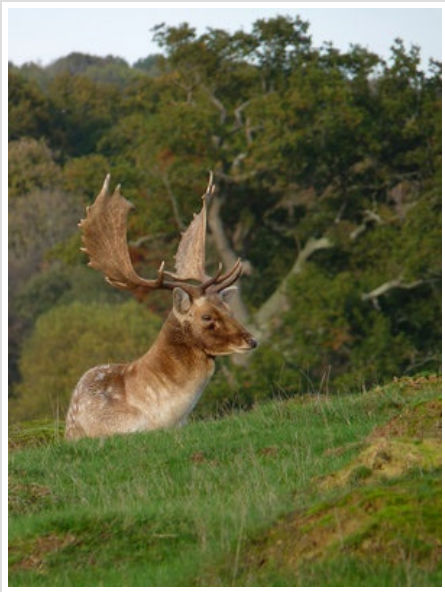
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Oct-19 09:54 AM GMT

Last From The Rut

On Sunday (27 October) I made my last visit of the year to the Fallow rut at Petworth Park, where I watched four prolonged clashes between large bucks, many of which are now limping and exhausted. The rut will continue for a little while yet, but we've undoubtedly seen the best of it.

A friend managed to see five freshly emerged Long-tailed Blues over the weekend, all in the Newhaven area, but sadly out-of-bounds.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Oct-19 11:11 AM GMT

Park Corner Heath Work Party

Many thanks to Mike Fearn and the Brighton Conservation Volunteers, and BC's Richard Farran and Richard Bickers, for their magnificent efforts on our Park Corner Heath reserve yesterday (29 October). We continued coppicing small trees and clearing Bracken and scrub along the northern edge of Parris Plateau. Gorse was cut back to the south of the old hut site and several more invasive Turkey Oaks were felled. These pose a threat to both the open nature of the rare lowland heath habitat here, and our own native oaks.

I was pleased to see that heather is now clearly spreading away from the main patch and some new growth was spotted in the NW corner of the reserve. There is no doubt that the ground flora is now improving in response to the more intensive management over recent years. Among the numerous species of fungi seen were Fly Agaric, Shaggy Parasol and Hedgehog Fungus.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Oct-19 10:45 AM GMT

Happy Halloween!



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-Nov-19 05:53 PM GMT

Wow! Winter work party time came round quickly. Nice to see them all getting stuck in again, Neil. I wish you all the best with it over these dreary next few months.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Nov-19 06:09 PM GMT

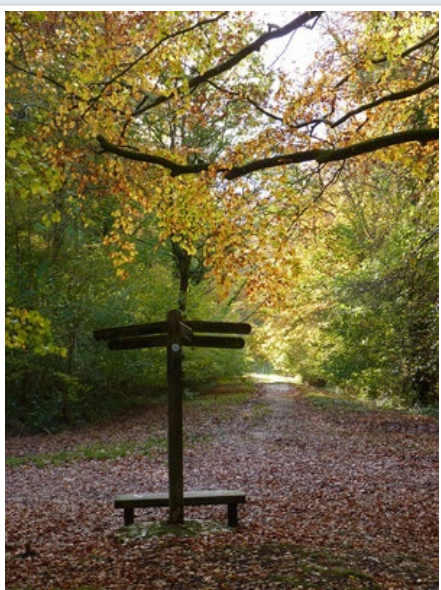
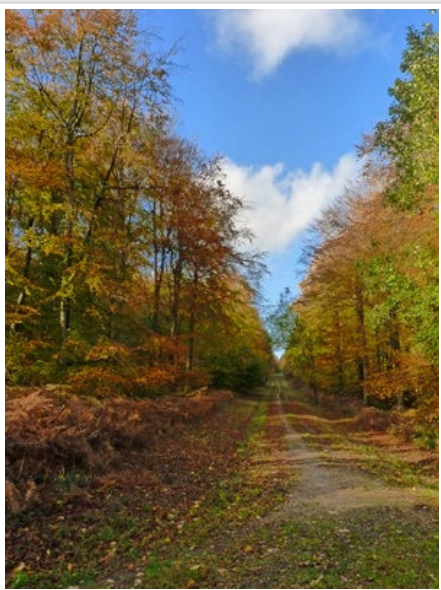
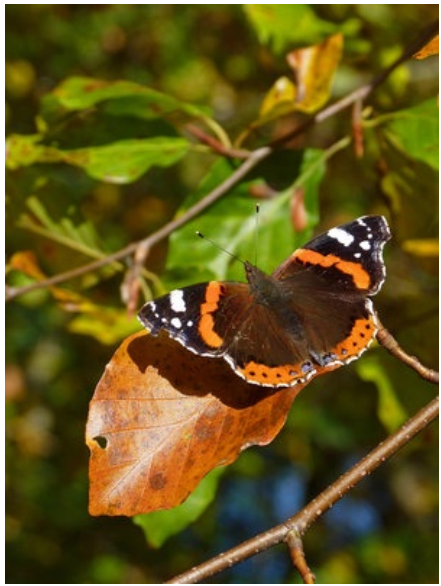
Thanks, David. As always, there is much to do!
BWs, Neil

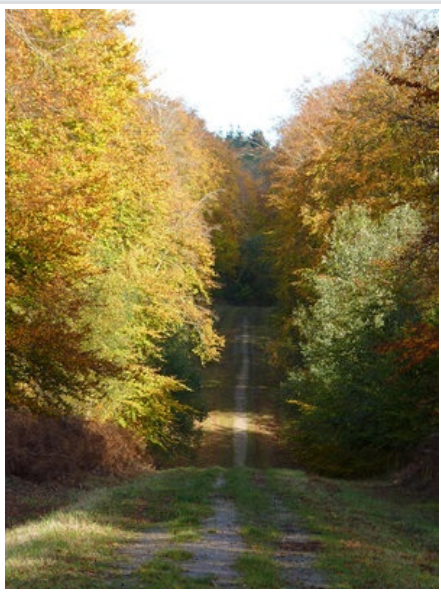
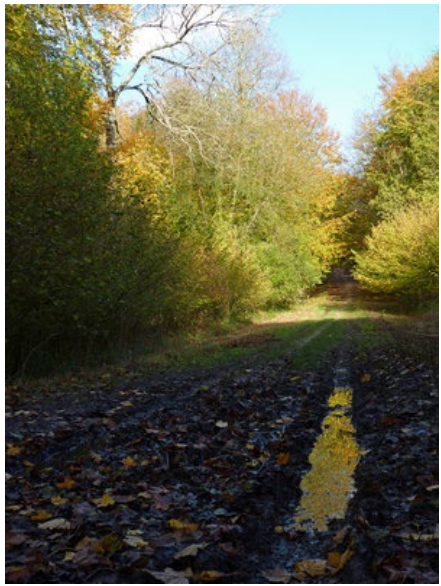
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Nov-19 06:12 PM GMT

Eartham Autumn

Three Red Admiral seen in beautiful sunshine at Eartham Wood today (7 November). Butterflies may have been in short supply, but autumnal colours were not.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Nov-19 06:59 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Three Red Admiral seen in beautiful sunshine at Eartham Wood today (7 November). Butterflies may have been in short supply, but autumnal colours were not.

Very evocative, Neil. The very essence of autumn. Nice that you managed to get an image of a Red Admiral – I'm still seeing them here in south Wales but they're all airborne! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-19 07:07 PM GMT

Thanks, David. I managed a Brimstone and a Red Admiral today. Incredibly, elsewhere, a friend saw 3 Long-tailed Blues! BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-19 07:11 PM GMT

Remembrance Sunday Work Party

Many thanks to all 17 who turned out for the Remembrance Sunday conservation work party at Park Corner Heath, with our two-minutes period of reflection marked by a distant cannon. The team continued coppicing and clearing scrub along the northern edge of Parris Plateau, and we said farewell to a few more unwanted Turkey Oaks. Along with the 'regulars', it was great to see some new faces today. The impressive progress made can at least

partly be attributed to the excellent cakes provided by Andrea and Carola – thank you.

Wildlife included Brimstone, Red Admiral, Common Toad and a Goshawk (size suggested female), which is the first I've ever seen in East Sussex.

Group image by Theresa Turner.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 14-Nov-19 11:35 AM GMT

[quote]Thanks, David. I managed a Brimstone and a Red Admiral today. Incredibly, elsewhere, a friend saw 3 Long-tailed Blues!!

That Brimstone is a gift, Neill! Amazing too that Long Tailed Blues are still being recorded. You were right about them being indestructible. Surely even they can't last much longer though? 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Nov-19 08:31 PM GMT

Vert Wood Regaining Its Former Glory

Our contractor, Ian Hampshire, has been hard at work in Rowland Wood over the last week, conducting the annual programme of ride and glade maintenance. This autumn, most of the rides and open areas have received a lighter touch, following the period of major restructuring in late 2017 and more intensive management over the winter of 2018/2019. However, several rides have been given a more thorough working over with the mulcher, as the log piles and trunks still lying around from much earlier operations have imposed an unrealistic burden of management by hand. Recent history has shown how rapidly these rides will recover. The ability to now manage all rides with a tractor will free vital volunteer time for fine tuning of the habitat.

The mulcher has also been used to open up the track down to Park Corner Heath, which has become increasingly shady and wet. It wasn't that many years ago that it was possible to drive a Morris Minor down to the old hut, but you'd need a rugged 4x4 to make the journey today. It will take a while to settle down, but the greatly increased penetration of sunlight will make the track (and new glades along its southern edge) highly suitable for White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary, as these areas once were.

Even more exciting is the work we have performed in Sandpit Wood, to the immediate south of the reserves, by kind permission of Fountain Forestry and the owner. Please remember that this area is private property, and out-of-bounds to our members and visitors. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary has already penetrated the wider Vert Wood complex and numbers are set to grow, following the reconditioning of >0.75 km of rides.

I would like to thank Ian Hampshire, the manager and owner of Sandpit Wood, and all volunteers (BC and Brighton Conservation Volunteers) for their work and cooperation so far this winter. However, there is still much to do, so please come along to the next BC conservation work party on the reserves (8 December).







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Nov-19 08:34 PM GMT

I love these images of prime butterfly habitat firmly out of season, Neil. They always seem a little austere like the 'gloaming' paintings of Farquharson, only with a promise of better things to come the following year.

I wish everybody all the best in their efforts to further improve Rowland Wood and Park Corner Heath.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Nov-19 09:42 AM GMT

Thanks, David. Plenty more of the same to follow this winter.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Nov-19 09:46 AM GMT

Beavering Away

Many thanks to the 13 hardy volunteers, including Mike Fearn & the Brighton Conservation Volunteers and our own Richard Farran, for braving the heavy rain to attend a work party on Park Corner Heath on Tuesday 26 November.

We split into two groups, with one continuing the coppicing and scrub control along the northern edge of Parris Plateau. The other group mimicked the work of Beavers, by building a series of dams and lodges along the stream ghyll using pre-cut timber and brash, following the felling of some dangerous, wind-blown trees. These water retention structures will improve the habitat for mosses, liverworts, fungi and ferns. A little further 'thinning' of this woodland block is planned, to create new habitat for semi-shade-loving species such as White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary. The work will also increase the 'permeability' of this compartment, allowing the easier dispersal of butterflies, including the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, into the adjacent (private) woodland, where much habitat improvement work has recently taken place.

With the assistance of Vert Wood Community Woodland, Fountain Forestry and some private owners, I believe that we can restore the fauna and flora of more than 100 hectares of the Vert complex to levels not seen for three or four decades.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Dec-19 11:22 AM GMT

Rewell Wood Progress Report

Yesterday (30 November) I visited Rewell Wood, to see how this winter's commercial and conservation activities are coming along. On the Norfolk Estate it's sometimes difficult to separate 'commercial' from 'conservation', as all commercial forestry operations are conducted with conservation in mind. I know of no better example of this in the UK.

With my five-year-old in tow (he did well to walk more than two miles in boggy conditions, but loves it in the woods) we first looked at the rolling programme of scalloping and ride-side mowing along the main W-E ride in the southern part of the wood. Many thanks to Simon Mockford and colleagues from the South Downs National Park Authority (and Volunteer Ranger Service) for the former. This bridleway is the best place for visitors to view the Pearl-bordered Fritillary each spring, negating the need to wander onto private land.

We then caught up with the current Sweet Chestnut coppice cuts (please keep well clear of ongoing forestry operations). The brash is now being harvested for biomass, which reduces waste and significantly increases the area of fritillary breeding habitat per hectare. The sequence of commercial cuts is designed, as best as possible, to facilitate the movement of butterflies from year to year, further assisted by the programme of ride widening throughout the wood.

I'm now getting very excited about the prospects for a very large area (c.9 hectares) which has been open for many years, but recently replanted with conifer species and mixed broad-leaves (tubed). Working in close co-operation with the estate (many thanks to Peter Knight, Mark Aldridge and Tony Hart), we have incorporated a pattern of unplanted areas, which will form wide woodland rides in the future. As the new plantation develops it will, for some years, provide additional breeding habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and many other species, including Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Green Hairstreak and Small Copper (and birds such as Nightjar and Woodcock). Control of competing plants, while the trees become established, is already providing the perfect conditions for violets to flourish.

Elsewhere, ride widening continues, conducted by both contractors and the resident woodsman, Kenny, who is as much a part of the fabric of Rewell Wood as some of the mighty Beech.

I know of some of the estate's future plans, which will guarantee even further improvements for butterflies and other wildlife here, so last year's peak count of more than 300 Pearl-bordered Fritillary may be far from the best we'll see. I suspect that a well-hidden and small colony of Duke of Burgundy is likely to expand, having already spawned a new colony at the adjacent Fairmile Bottom, where excellent management by WSCC, assisted by the cattle of local farmer James Seller, is creating a real gem for butterflies, moths and orchids.

Working with so many enthusiastic partners sometimes makes the job of a conservationist rather easy, and always a pleasure. My thanks to everyone involved, past and present.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Dec-19 05:23 PM GMT

BC Sussex Reserves Progress Report

My thanks to Theresa, Helen, Andrea, Rosie, Colin, James, Richard, Richard, Gary, John, Ian, Ian, Mark, Keith and Bob for attending another highly productive conservation work party at Park Corner Heath on Sunday (8 December).

We initially split into two groups, with one completing this winter's coppicing and scrub/Bracken control on Parris Plateau, while the other worked in Mitchell's Ghyll, where additional flow retarding features and an access bridge were constructed. We all ended the day working in the copse which runs along the ghyll, where we completed thinning operations to allow more light through the canopy. It will now be much easier for butterflies to move through this lightly wooded area into surrounding parts of the Vert Wood complex. We have now completed all work on Park Corner Heath for this winter and will move to Rowland Wood in January.

All of the main rides, glades and other features on the reserves have now been given names; these can now be seen on the very smart reserves map which Bob Foreman designed and has now mounted on the main reserves noticeboard.

Although no butterflies were seen on the day, I was delighted to see a Kingfisher perched on Reedmace in the PCH pond; this was the first I've ever seen on our reserves.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 11-Dec-19 05:51 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...Although no butterflies were seen on the day, I was delighted to see a Kingfisher perched on Reedmace in the PCH pond; this was the first I've ever seen on our reserves.

What a fabulous surprise, Neil. You must have been thrilled to see that electric orange and blue delight perched in one of your reserves.

Some impressive machinery (not to mention volunteers) in your reports – no wonder your success level is so good. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Dec-19 07:41 PM GMT

Thanks, David. With such great volunteers (BC and Brighton Conservation Volunteers) it's no wonder that things are progressing so well here. But I'm convinced that far better is to come.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Dec-19 07:45 PM GMT

Another Great Day At The Office

Many thanks to Mike Fearn & The Brighton Conservation Volunteers (BCV) and Richard Farran of the Sussex Branch for another highly productive day (17 December) on the BC reserves at East Hoathly.

We cleared 'The Christmas Tree Glade' (see map) in Rowland Wood to provide more breeding habitat for the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other species. Finishing well ahead of time, we then cut some south-facing scallops into the woodland edge at the eastern end of 'Big Beech Ride', where Pearl-bordered Fritillary females showed a liking for the area following their spring 2019 reintroduction.

This was the last visit by BCV for the current management season and I'd like to thank them on behalf of all at BC Sussex for their invaluable assistance over the last few months. Happy Christmas to them all.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Dec-19 12:46 PM GMT

Merry Christmas



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Dec-19 02:47 PM GMT

Thanks for the pictorial overview of Rowland Wood & Park Corner Heath, Neil. I can 'see' it better in my mind's eye now.

Wishing you all the best for an enjoyable festive season and good luck with the continuation of your work in 2020. 🍀

PS – is that lovely winter scene in your Christmas images from one of your reserves?