

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Jan-20 08:42 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel 😊 I have already had my first moth of 2020, a Chestnut, which is a species I missed last year so fingers crossed.

Thanks David 😊 Unfortunately, the obsessive desire to 'tidy things up' is far too prevalent in current society and needs a shift in perspective for many people.

Hope you both had a good festive break and here's wishing you and everyone else on here a *[color=#BF0000]Happy New Year.*

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Jan-20 08:01 PM GMT

I see that there have been a few sightings this week of hibernators brought out by the mild weather. No butterflies for me yet but I have had my first moth of 2020, a Chestnut, that came to the garden trap on the first night of the year (and decade). I have put the trap out just once since then, on the night of the 5th Jan, which resulted in a blank. All other nights have been either too cold or too windy.



Chestnut - Coverdale 01.01.2020

Other than that, I have been keeping an eye on the birds coming to the garden feeders during the weekends and over the festive break and taking a few photos, as usual through the kitchen or back room windows.

A selection of birds in the garden from the last couple of weeks of 2019;



Two males and a female Bullfinch - Coverdale 16.12.2019



Bullfinch male - Coverdale 19.12.2019



Bullfinch pair and Coal Tit - Coverdale 23.12.2019



Bullfinch male - Coverdale 28.12.2019



Greenfinch and Blue Tit - Coverdale 22.12.2019



Nuthatch - Coverdale 23.12.2019



Nuthatch - Coverdale 29.12.2019



Robin - Coverdale 28.12.2019



Blue Tit and Coal Tit - Coverdale 29.12.2019



Blackcap male - Coverdale 29.12.2019



Blackcap and Blue Tit - Coverdale 29.12.2019



Great Spotted Woodpecker female – Coverdale 29.12.2019

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-Jan-20 08:54 PM GMT

Love the Bird shots Neil, I'm thinking of popping to Penn Flash one day weather permitting , I love the shots of the Bull Finch, they certainly earn their name 😊 Bossy!! Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Jan-20 10:24 PM GMT

Great bird images and Moffs Neil – those Bullfinches are lush looking 😊 When I was birding as a nipper many moons ago a winter Blackcap was really unusual but now they seem to have almost become 'resident' 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Jan-20 06:49 PM GMT

The nuthatch is lovely, Neil. Well done for capturing one perched like that. However, those bullfinches are to die for. Great that you managed to photograph male and female together at the feeder.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jan-20 07:14 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

Love the Bird shots Neil, I'm thinking of popping to Penn Flash one day weather permitting , I love the shots of the Bull Finch, they certainly earn their name 😊 Bossy!! Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, not sure if you would have managed to get to Penn Flash yet with the weather we have had lately but it has been wet and wild here.

{quote=Wurzel post_id=150207 time=1578695088 user_id=9821} Great bird images and Moffs Neil – those Bullfinches are lush looking 😊 When I was birding as a nipper many moons ago a winter Blackcap was really unusual but now they seem to have almost become 'resident' 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. I regularly see Blackcaps in my garden during the winter these days but don't get them during the summer. Apparently more and more are being attracted into gardens over the winter due to an increase in people having feeders.

David M wrote:

The nuthatch is lovely, Neil. Well done for capturing one perched like that. However, those bullfinches are to die for. Great that you managed to

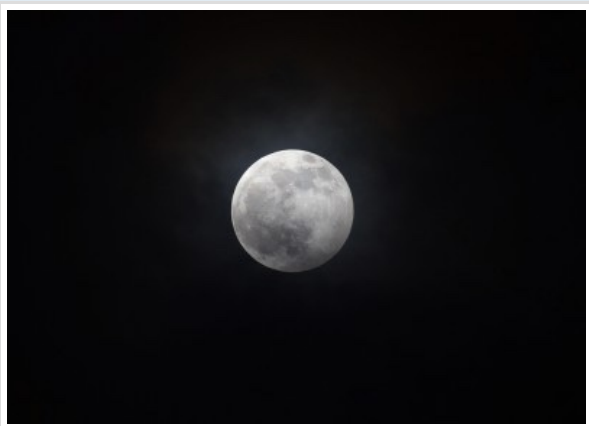
photograph male and female together at the feeder.

Thanks David. There are currently two pairs of Bullfinches hanging around the garden and they often arrive at the feeders together.

Friday 10th January

Having seen that the first full moon of January – The Wolf Moon – was also going to be a penumbral lunar eclipse, and never having tried to take a photo of the moon before, I thought that I would have a go.

I have seen some lovely photos that were taken when the moon was just rising giving it a nice yellowish colour but in my case I had to wait for it to rise higher in the sky to clear the roofs of the houses opposite us. By the time I had a clear view, some thin high level cloud was beginning to drift over and partially obscure the moon at times but there were still a few clear patches until about 7.30pm when some thicker cloud rolled in and stayed there for the rest of the night.



Not as good as some images I have seen but given they were my first attempts at photographing the moon, I was quite pleased with them.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Jan-20 10:42 PM GMT

Really good detail Neil 😊 I don;t think my lens would be much cop for those sort of shots 🤔👁️ Now you've got the bug there are a few more interesting 'moons' due in the coming months 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 15-Jan-20 07:38 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, best day we've had so far was today and guess what , I'd some Mussels and they must have been off, I'm still on Soup, eggs etc, the week-end is supposed to be better so fingers crossed I may make Penn Flash yet 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jan-20 08:06 PM GMT

{quote=Wurzel post_id=150284 time=1579041746 user_id=9821} Really good detail Neil 😊 I don;t think my lens would be much cop for those sort of shots 🤔👁️ Now you've got the bug there are a few more interesting 'moons' due in the coming months 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, those shots were taken with my Nikkor 70-300 lens on a Nikon D5300 camera that my oldest son Chris has given me to try out as he has recently upgraded to a Nikon D7500. The D5300 is very similar to the D3400 that I used for most of last year but with a variable angle screen. I keep meaning to put a few words together on how I found the D3400 compared to the Panasonic FZ200 I had been using, but just haven't got around to it yet.

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, best day we've had so far was today and guess what , I'd some Mussels and they must have been off, I'm still on Soup, eggs etc, the week-end is supposed to be better so fingers crossed I may make Penn Flash yet 😊 Goldie 😊

Hi Goldie, Hope you are feeling better. It look like it is going to be a much drier weekend albeit a colder one. I much prefer it to be cold and dry to the wet and windy stuff we have been having recently, the past couple of days have been awful here.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Jan-20 08:46 PM GMT

"The D5300 is very similar to the D3400 " crickey I'm using a D60 – does that mean it's about 50 times worse 🤔😬 Seriously though how do you find using the 70-300 lens? I tried a zoom lens before I got my 105 but because it didn't have VR so I'm guessing that as your shots are always so crisp that your lens does?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Jan-20 07:36 PM GMT

Great lunar shots, Neil. I'm itching for an opportunity to take some myself but Swansea, unfortunately, is a cloudy place and I will probably have to bide my time. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jan-20 07:57 PM GMT

{quote=Wurzel post_id=150365 time=1579639608 user_id=9821} "The D5300 is very similar to the D3400 " crickey I'm using a D60 – does that mean it's about 50 times worse 🤔😬 Seriously though how do you find using the 70-300 lens? I tried a zoom lens before I got my 105 but because it didn't have VR so I'm guessing that as your shots are always so crisp that your lens does?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, the 70-300 does indeed have VR although it does not have a switch on the lens and need to be turned on in the camera's menu.

David M wrote:

Great lunar shots, Neil. I'm itching for an opportunity to take some myself but Swansea, unfortunately, is a cloudy place and I will probably have to

bide my time. 😞

Thanks David. Lots of cloud here lately as well and plenty more in the forecast ahead.

Changing Cameras.

Last year I changed cameras and I thought that I would set down some of my thoughts on how I found using a DSLR for the first time compared to the bridge camera that I had been using. I will say upfront that I am in no way an expert in cameras or photography and have little interest in the technical aspects in themselves so some of what I say may not sound 'right' to the experts.

Up until early last year I had been using a Panasonic Lumix FZ200 bridge camera which had served me well for a few years. This had replaced a FZ150 which had taken a few knocks and on which the zoom mechanism had become a bit rough and erratic although I was still using this camera with a close-up lens attached to take photos of the moths from my garden trap.

My daughter Sarah had been using a Nikon D3400, mostly for landscape and general photography, but in April upgraded to a mirror-less system camera and asked me if I wanted to have the D3400 to try out.

My intention was to use the D3400 alongside my FZ200 for the rest of the season and to see which I preferred, particularly as I had never used a DSLR before. The kit lens that came with the D3400 was an 18-55mm which is not much use for butterflies so, given that the camera was a freebie, and after a bit of research, I splashed out on a Nikkor 70-300 lens.

https://www.amazon.co.uk/JAA829DA-AF-P-70-300-4-5-6-3G-Lens/dp/B07STZSZCN/ref=sr_1_4?crid=14IC7WRR9SNP6&keywords=70-300+nikon&qid=1579878941&srefix=70-300%2Caps%2C141&sr=8-4

This turned out to be a good workaround lens for most of my outings which tend to take place at times when butterflies are most active, and the 200 to 300mm focal length of this lens gives me a good working distance. A couple of months later I also treated myself to a Sigma 105 macro lens for when circumstances allowed me to get closer to the subject, for example butterflies on cooler days or moths from the garden trap.

I will also mention that the D3400 is an APS-C format camera. This means that the sensor gives a crop factor (on Nikon cameras) of 1.5x. On the 70-300 lens this gives an equivalent focal length of 105-450mm and on the Sigma 105 an equivalent of just under 160mm. In comparison the FZ200 has a 24x zoom range equivalent to 25-600mm.

After using the D3400 for the rest of the season, most of which involved some trial and error with the settings, this is what I found;

There is not much difference in size and weight between the D3400 body and the FZ200 but adding the 70-300 lens to the D3400 makes it a bit bigger and heavier but still light enough to be a good walk around combo.

The D3400 has a fixed screen and I found there were a few occasions when I missed the variable angle screen on the FZ200 such as stretching up to take photos above my head or from low down without kneeling or lying down.

Being a DSLR, the Nikon has an optical viewfinder which is superior to the electronic viewfinder on the FZ200. I found myself using the viewfinder most of the time on the D3400 as opposed to lining the shot up on the screen which I did most of the time with the Lumix.

The FZ200 has a slightly longer reach at maximum zoom but in practice there was little in it.

Due to the larger sensor compared with the FZ200, the D3400 is much better at handling contrast between light and dark areas. I found this particularly noticeable when photographing both light and dark butterflies (for example Orange-tip and Peacock) on the same day when I would need to change the exposure compensation on the FZ200 but far less so with the D3400.

The D3400 can take a larger photo which means that I can crop further if required and still retain a reasonable image. Useful on those hot days when it is difficult to get close to butterflies.

The D3400 is faster in both focusing and taking the photo which meant that I got some shots which I may have missed with the FZ200. Also, focusing in general seemed to be better and I managed a larger proportion of 'keepers' with the D3400.

Overall, I think that the quality of my photos with the D3400 was very similar to what I was achieving with the FZ200 but the Nikon gave me more options and enabled me to get some photos that I may have missed or struggled to get with the FZ200.

All things considered, I found that I used the D3400 exclusively for the rest of the season and although I usually carried the FZ200 as well, I didn't find myself taking it out of the bag.

The shot below shows the FZ200 (left) and the D3400 with the 70-300 lens attached, in both cases with the lens hoods attached which is how I always carry them around, and shows the difference in size.



A lot of things with cameras and photography can be down to personal tastes and other people may well have different thoughts to me. In my own case I have now become converted to using the Nikon, although I will keep the FZ200 as a backup.

I mentioned in my reply to Wurzel above, that my son Chris has now also given me his old D5300 since he upgraded to a D7500. The D5300 is pretty much a D3400 with a variable angle screen and a few other minor differences.

This also means that I have 'inherited' both Nikon cameras from my grown-up kids which has obviously saved me a few bob and without which I probably wouldn't have bothered changing at all...at least not yet.

Anyway, a new season is creeping closer so let's hope that we all get plenty of chance to get out and photograph some nice butterflies with whatever cameras we use.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Jan-20 10:22 PM GMT

Interesting reading about the various kit Neil – I'm definitely considering the Nikkor 70–300 lens – I liked the Sigma version but it didn't have the VR – better start looking under the sofa cushions 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Jan-20 01:06 PM GMT

Thanks for providing that comparison, Neil. Which camera have you been using for the images of the garden birds?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-Jan-20 08:08 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. It is a cracking lens and fairly light in weight.

Thanks David. All the garden bird shots this winter have been with the Nikon and 70–300 lens, usually taken through the kitchen or back room windows.

More Garden Birds

All the usual suspects have been visiting although the recent weekends have seen some really gloomy weather making for bad light for photos.



Female Blackcap – Coverdale 12.01.2019



Long-tailed Tits and Blue Tit - Coverdale 17.01.2019

Last Sunday morning I sat down to do the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and for once most of the usual species turned up within the hour, the only absentees were the Bullfinches. I even had both male and female Great spotted Woodpeckers show up this time.



Great Spotted Woodpecker female - Coverdale 26.01.2019



Great Spotted Woodpecker male - Coverdale 26.01.2019

I entered the results online and shortly afterwards saw that the Bullfinches were back, once again proving that sod's law will always take effect in some way. Two pairs were in the garden at once with one pair on the feeders and the other pair lurking around the plants closer to the house and taking various seeds off them.



Bullfinch male – Coverdale 26.01.2019



Bullfinch female – Coverdale 26.01.2019

A cheeky little Robin kept coming up close to the window and seemed to be watching me watching them.



Robin – Coverdale 26.01.2019

Even though the conditions have not been too good, either cold or windy, I have had the moth trap out a couple of times with a single *Acleris ferrugana/notana* on the night of the 23rd and another Chestnut last night (the first one was on the 1st).

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-Feb-20 11:08 AM GMT

Great birding shots Neil 😊 I was just saying how great Long-tail Tits are on Bugboys PD and you've got a lovely gaggle on the feeder 😊 Also another one of favourites with the Bullfinch shots, not seen one yet this year but I'm working on it 😊🐦

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 01-Feb-20 11:28 PM GMT

The bullfinches are good but, like last year, I am jealous of your redcap. Despite living much further south than you, I've never seen one in a feeder like that.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 03-Feb-20 08:17 PM GMT

Very nice, Neil, especially the Long Tailed Tits. With fine weather forecast for the next few days I must keep an eye out for bullfinches in the light woodland by my workplace – don't think I've seen one yet this year.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Feb-20 08:22 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, Mark and David.

I have seen quite a few reports of hibernators appearing on some of the better days recently although nothing for me yet.

A couple more bird shots from the garden feeders last weekend to be going on with.



GS Woodpecker, Blackcap and Blue Tit – Coverdale 02.02.2020



Greenfinch pair – Coverdale 02.02.2020

We had a nice sunset here last Monday,



Silhouettes against the sunset – Coverdale 03.02.2020

Looks like a bit of windy weather due on Sunday.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Feb-20 08:27 PM GMT

Great shots again Neil 😊 Good to see those Greenfinches – how are they doing round your way? Round here they're still seem to be lower in number 😊 Not long now 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Feb-20 07:10 PM GMT

Always a delight to see your avian garden visitors, Neil. Your last shot of the sunset has a real warmth to it; very impressive.

Let's hope once this stormy spell burns itself out that we'll all have a few butterflies to entertain us.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Feb-20 08:25 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I still don't see that many Greenfinches, just one or two at a time usually, but compared to recent years there does seem to be a few more about.

Thanks David, another stormy weekend to come and it looks like it will last into early next week so I'm not expecting anything yet. Having said that, a normal start for me would be toward the end of March, even the warm spell last February which produced my first ever February butterflies was followed by a couple of cool and wet weeks which brought things back to more like normal.

The last time I had the moth trap out was on the night of Sunday Feb 2nd which produced just a single Hebrew Character. Since then it has been too cold or too windy for me to bother and looking ahead I certainly won't be putting it out for the next few nights.

In the absence of any lepidoptera, here's a few more birds...

The female Blackcap is still visiting and actually seems more confident than the male.



Female Blackcap and Great Tit – Coverdale 07.02.2020

Sparrows are actually one of the less frequent visitors to my garden, never thought I would be saying that a few years ago, but they are appearing a bit more recently.



Female Sparrow – Coverdale 07.02.2020

Goldcrests visit the garden fairly frequently and often dart to and from the feeders but are so small and fast that they have usually gone before I can grab the camera so I am always pleased to get a shot, even if it is usually a bit blurred.



Goldcrest – Coverdale 08.02.2020

We actually saw a bit of light snow around here earlier in the week and it even looked like winter for a short while. With a bit of luck, things will start looking up again after this weekends storm has passed.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freman

by Wurzel, 16-Feb-20 06:47 PM GMT

Good news about the Greenfinches 😊 Cracking shot of the Goldcrest, they are a right pain as they're so mobile and tiny – the crest really stands out on that one 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 19-Feb-20 08:45 PM GMT

Your birds are lovely, Neil, but I sense you are eager to get cracking with butterflies now?

Me too. However, I see no respite from these storms in the next week or so, meaning that we may have to wait for March before we can indulge ourselves.

Coming to something when Blackcaps and Goldcrests are replacing Sparrows at the feeding table!! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 22-Feb-20 03:06 PM GMT

Wow, a goldcrest on your fat feeder. That's amazing!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Feb-20 07:54 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, the Goldcrests are the most difficult birds in my garden to get a decent shot of.

Thanks David. This winter seems to be dragging on forever, not helped by the way that autumn came early with similar wind and rain.

Hi Mark, I get the Goldcrests coming to the feeders most years but only ever to the fat blocks. As Wurzel says they are very quick and often in and out before I can grab the camera.

Another weekend and another load of wind and rain. It has not stopped raining here again all day (Friday 28th Feb.) and as I write this it is still lashing down.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Mar-20 09:38 PM GMT

Great to see some butterflies being posted lately. Still nothing for me though but being stuck inside at work during the week obviously doesn't help.

Last Sunday afternoon (8th March) was sunny enough to tempt me to take a walk down the road to the patch of rough ground by my local park which often produces my first sightings but it was stubbornly cold and windy and with no butterflies seen.

Having said that my usual first sightings here often occur during the second half of March and it is looking likely that this year will be similar.

With no butterflies yet, here are a few garden birds from the past couple of weeks.



Bullfinch male – Coverdale 01.03.2020



Blackcap male - Coverdale 22.02.2020



Blackcap female - Coverdale 08.03.2020



Greenfinch male - Coverdale 07.03.2020



Greenfinch pair - Coverdale 08.03.2020

Over the past few days there has been a couple of cases of coronavirus in the company I work for, although none yet at the site I am based at. Restrictions on inter-site travel were introduced today and wherever possible we have to conduct meetings over microsoft 'teams'.

I reckon next week could be 'interesting' but at least if I have to self isolate at home I have plenty of reading material to occupy me.



My bookshelf.

Looks like the weather is going to settle down a bit next week too...at last.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 15-Mar-20 08:43 PM GMT

I feel the same way Neil – we're stuck in that annoying pattern of the best weather day being mid-week 😊 I'm hoping that a period of self isolation could be used to actually catch-up on my PD 🤔😓

Cracking set of images as per usual – a particularly find looking male Greenfinch 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-Mar-20 10:52 PM GMT

Love the male bullfinch shot, Neil. Superb.

Your library looks much the same as mine. We may all have time to catch up on a bit of reading if all these Coronavirus rumours are true. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 16-Mar-20 08:52 AM GMT

I agree, that male Bullfinch shot is beautiful, wonderful colours. They are very rare visitors to my garden, but I did once see a pair spend a considerable time giving my trees and shrubs the once over.

Hopefully some butterflies this week.

Keep well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Mar-20 09:11 PM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel-post_id=151003-time=1584301433-user_id=9821}` I feel the same way Neil – we're stuck in that annoying pattern of the best weather day being mid-week 😊 I'm hoping that a period of self isolation could be used to actually catch-up on my PD 🤔😓

Cracking set of images as per usual – a particularly find looking male Greenfinch 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel. Yes, a cracking bit of sun again yesterday (Monday) when I was back in work. Fingers crossed for next weekend.

David M wrote:

Love the male bullfinch shot, Neil. Superb.

Your library looks much the same as mine. We may all have time to catch up on a bit of reading if all these Coronavirus rumours are true. 😊

Thanks David. I reckon most of us on here must have a similar selection of books.

`{quote=trevor-post_id=151016-time=1584345124-user_id=13654}` I agree, that male Bullfinch shot is beautiful, wonderful colours. They are very rare visitors to my garden, but I did once see a pair spend a considerable time giving my trees and shrubs the once over.

Hopefully some butterflies this week.

Keep well,
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor. it seems weird to me that these days Bullfinches are one of my more regular visitors to the garden.

Saturday 14th March.

I wasn't going to post any more photos of birds, hoping instead that my next photos would be of my first butterfly(s) but unfortunately Saturday was dull and cloudy around here.

I did however get a visit to the garden from a small group of three Redwings which lifted my spirits a bit, these being very irregular visitors to the garden and I am lucky if I see one or two each year. These stayed down the far end of the garden so the shots below are heavily cropped as well as being taken through the back room window.



Redwing – Coverdale 14.03.2020



Redwings – Coverdale 14.03.2020



Redwing – Coverdale 14.03.2020

On Sunday we had a drive down to Bristol to visit our youngest son Danny and his girlfriend and drove through some horrendously heavy rain on the

way down the M5 in the morning and again on the way back later in the afternoon.

Garden Moths

So far in March, the mostly windy nights have meant that I have only had the moth trap out a couple of times, on the night of Sunday 10th and again on Saturday (14th), both of which resulted in 5 moths.

Monday 10th produced 2 Hebrew Characters, 2 Common Quaker and 1 Twin-spotted Quaker.

Saturday 14th produced 2 Hebrew Characters, 2 Twin-spotted Quakers and 1 Common Quaker. By comparing markings, all of these were different individuals to those from the 10th.



Twin-spotted Quaker - Coverdale 14.03.2020



Common Quaker - Coverdale 14.03.2020



Hebrew Character - Coverdale 14.03.2020

With current events now escalating quickly, I have been informed that I will be working from home after tomorrow. Not sure what that is going to entail though as there is not much that I can actually do from home with my job. Still, I am going in tomorrow to find out as apparently they have a 'plan'. Depending how long this all goes on for, I am hoping that I might be able to take advantage of some better weather.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Mar-20 09:43 PM GMT

That first Redwing is really well marked Neil – I haven't seen one with as much red as that for a while now 😊
Good luck with the working from home – hopefully we'll get some good weather and you can nip out somewhere during your lunch break or work in the garden camera at the ready 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 17-Mar-20 10:12 PM GMT

You never know, Neil – working from home may allow you to clock a nice new early Speckled Wood at the moment it appears in the garden. 😊
Interesting – I always associate redwings with evil winter weather. Let's hope they dont know something we don't!

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 17-Mar-20 10:54 PM GMT

Working from home sounds good, Neil.
One eye on the computer, the other on the garden, camera at the ready!.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 17-Mar-20 11:36 PM GMT

Your redwings are probably on migration, Neil, as they are currently leaving our shores in numbers. They have had an easy winter this year, but are still a good garden visitor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Mar-20 09:27 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Depending how long this all goes on for, I am hoping that I might be able to take advantage of some better weather.

I think it will go on for several weeks, Neil. My company serves the Department for Transport and we worked from home yesterday to test how robust the 'remote' operation was. I reckon it could be a directive from next week. We'll see.

If it helps you take time out to boost your morale by seeing a few butterflies then some good will come from it.

Lovely Redwings by the way. Never had the pleasure of seeing one myself. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 18-Mar-20 10:51 AM GMT

Great bird shots Neil, love the female Blackcap. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Mar-20 09:22 PM GMT

{quote=Wurzel post_id=151065 time=1584477798 user_id=9821} ...Good luck with the working from home – hopefully we'll get some good weather and you can nip out somewhere during your lunch break or work in the garden camera at the ready 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, things are looking up next week so fingers crossed 😊.

{quote=millerd post_id=151072 time=1584479542 user_id=9839} You never know, Neil – working from home may allow you to clock a nice new early Speckled Wood at the moment it appears in the garden. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Indeed Dave. I have set up on the table in the back room with a good view, maybe next week with a bit of luck 😊.

[quote=trevor-post_id=151077-time=1584482061-user_id=13654] Working from home sounds good, Neil. One eye on the computer, the other on the garden, camera at the ready!

Trevor.

That's the plan Trevor 😊

[quote=essexbuzzard-post_id=151085-time=1584484584-user_id=11426] Your redwings are probably on migration, Neil, as they are currently leaving our shores in numbers. They have had an easy winter this year, but are still a good garden visitor.

Thanks Mark. If I see them in the garden it is usually earlier in the year so your comment about them being on migration makes sense.

David M wrote:

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Depending how long this all goes on for, I am hoping that I might be able to take advantage of some better weather.

I think it will go on for several weeks, Neil. My company serves the Department for Transport and we worked from home yesterday to test how robust the 'remote' operation was. I reckon it could be a directive from next week. We'll see.

If it helps you take time out to boost your morale by seeing a few butterflies then some good will come from it.

Lovely Redwings by the way. Never had the pleasure of seeing one myself. 😊

Thanks David. Officially working from home as of Wednesday, just in time for the rest of this week to be cloudy and damp. things are looking up for next week though 😊

[quote=Andrew555-post_id=151095-time=1584525119-user_id=16056] Great bird shots Neil, love the female Blackcap. 😊

Thanks Andrew. I get at least one pair hanging around the garden every winter for the past few years now 😊

Friday 20th March.

Well, I went in to work on Tuesday during which our team was given a plan for working at home and as of Wednesday I am officially working from home until further notice. I had already missed the best day of weather on Monday and since then it has been dull and cloudy here with spells of rain and drizzle.

Tuesday night (17th March) was quite blustery but heavy cloud kept the overnight temperatures just into double figures so I put the moth trap out and was rewarded with my first tally this year into double figures, albeit just 2 species. A total of 15 moths consisted of 12 Common Quakers and 3 Hebrew Characters.

I put the trap out again last night (Thursday 19th) but temperatures down to about 4 degrees resulted in a reduction in numbers to 5 moths, again Common Quakers (3) and Hebrew Characters (2).

The weekend is looking to be dry and bright albeit a bit on the cold side but I reckon it will still be worth checking out some sheltered local spots. Next week is looking like spring will finally be arriving around here so I reckon a lunchtime walk or two will be in order.

Bye for now.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 21-Mar-20 02:00 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I've not had much luck here either, although we've had the Sun nothing in my Garden has yet.

I've been told to stay put as well but if it gets milder I'm venturing out, I think if I steer clear of too many people that should be okay, love the bird shots Neil I actually saw a Male Bull Finch in my Garden last Monday, that's the first I've ever seen in the garden unfortunately it didn't stay too long so I didn't get a shot 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Mar-20 07:34 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, I've not had much luck here either, although we've had the Sun nothing in my Garden has yet.

I've been told to stay put as well but if it gets milder I'm venturing out, I think if I steer clear of too many people that should be okay, love the bird shots Neil I actually saw a Male Bull Finch in my Garden last Monday, that's the first I've ever seen in the garden unfortunately it didn't stay too long so I didn't get a shot 😊 Goldie 😊

Nothing in my garden yet either Goldie but I did venture out locally this afternoon and struck lucky...details below.

Saturday 21st March - Off the Mark

Most years, apart from 2019 with it's unseasonably warm spell in late February, my first butterfly sightings occur sometime from the third week of March. Looking at the forecast for next week I was feeling pretty confident that I would see something soon, I wasn't too sure about this weekend

though, as although plenty of sun was forecast, there was still going to be a cold wind keeping the temperature down. Nevertheless, I felt that it would be worth a walk down to the patch of rough ground alongside my local park this afternoon (Saturday) to check out some of the sheltered spots that often produce my first sightings around here. Out of the wind it felt almost warm but as soon as you moved into a more exposed spot the effect of the cold wind made it feel quite nippy. I noticed that some of the blackthorn was in full flower and scrutinised it for butterflies but without spotting any.



Blackthorn blossom - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

I then carried on along a more sheltered part of the path and was pleased when I spotted the bright colours of a Small Tortoiseshell basking on the ground, my first butterfly of 2020.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

A little further along I spotted a second one and shortly after another, then another. During the hour or so I spent here I saw at least eight different individuals spread out along the sheltered side of the hedge line. Most of these were staying low down out of the wind and basking which made them fairly easy to spot with their bright colours standing out against the vegetation.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

At one point I saw a male chasing after a female in attempted courtship and managed to get a couple of shots before they took off over a large patch of brambles.



Small Tortoiseshell pair - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

I also saw at least four and possibly five Commas which would often engage with each other and the Small Tortoiseshells in spiralling around up into the air before splitting off and returning to their favoured basking position. I did notice that these 'dogfights' didn't go as high as usual and they tended to separate as soon as they came out of the shelter of the hedge.



Comma - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

A single faded Peacock was also seen in this area.



Comma - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

I walked the length of the hedge line and then retraced my steps, seeing the same butterflies on my return leg.



Sheltered side of the hedge.

After all the doom and gloom of this past week, it was great just to get out for a bit and seeing my first butterflies of the season really lifted my spirits.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 21-Mar-20 08:15 PM GMT

What a fabulous haul for first sightings. Those Small Tortoiseshells look so fresh and vibrant. 🍷
With luck, once they have warmed up and nectared, they will go on to provide the next generation.

I hope to find some Small Torts in West Sussex tomorrow.

Good luck for the new season,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Mar-20 09:05 PM GMT

Brilliant stuff Neil – what a way to get off the mark 😊🍷 Those Small Torts look to be in mint condish most of em 😊🍷 They certainly were a sight for sore eyes – long may they continue. 😊 Stay safe.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 22-Mar-20 07:35 PM GMT

Some lovely tortoiseshells there 🍷 The way things are going down here in London I'm not sure how many of them I'll be seeing this season and that's nothing to do with their scarcity down here 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Mar-20 08:24 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Trevor, Wurzel and Bugboy 😊
It is good to see the numbers of Small Tortoiseshells around here again albeit I have only looked at the one spot so far.

It appears that I wasn't paying attention properly with my previous report. I noticed that I posted a duplicate photo which I have now deleted. The shot below is the one I intended to post.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

And here is another one from Saturday which I was going to post but missed out 😊 .



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

Sunday 22nd March.

A pleasant looking day but that cold wind was still in evidence and some high level cloud took some of the warmth from the sun so I didn't go anywhere.

Still no butterflies in the garden but whilst pottering about in the afternoon I did disturb a nice colour form of the micro *Acleris cristana*. This was only the second micro I have seen here so far this year.



Acleris cristana - Coverdale 22.03.2020



Acleris cristana – Coverdale 22.03.2020

Monday 23rd March.

Now that I am working from home, I am trying to set myself a bit of a daily routine to include a lunchtime walk to get some fresh air and a bit of exercise...at least for as long as we are allowed to that is.

After a cold night, this morning began with a frosty start but by lunchtime it had warmed up nicely. The cold wind of the past couple of days was much lighter and it felt quite pleasant in the sun, although it was still a bit nippy in the shade.

Not having the time to go too far, I just went for a walk down to the patch of rough ground by my local park where I had gone on Saturday and seen the butterflies posted in my previous report.

I soon spotted a couple each of Small Tortoiseshells and Commas, probably some of the same ones that I had seen on Saturday, but also a Peacock that was definitely a different one, this individual being in better condition.



Peacock – Wagon Lane 23.03.2020

I wandered over to the stand of blackthorn that was in full flower and on the way spotted my first male Brimstone of the year patrolling in the distance. At this time of year I am always keen to get photos of butterflies on spring blossom and was hoping for this today. On Saturday the cold wind had kept the butterflies low down but with the much lighter breeze today I hoped that I might be lucky. Sure enough I soon spotted the bright orange shape of a Comma standing out against the blossom.



Comma – Wagon Lane 23.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 23.03.2020

There were also a couple of Small Tortoiseshells flying around close by and occasionally settling on the blackthorn.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 21.03.2020

There was also another Brimstone, or quite possibly the same one I had seen earlier coming around again on his circuits.

As this was just a lunchtime walk I couldn't stay long and soon headed back home but this short session certainly brightened the day up somewhat. During the 40 minutes or so that I was out I only saw a few people, none of whom came anywhere close to me so social distancing was easily observed.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Mar-20 09:49 PM GMT

Sublime photos Neil 🤩👍 The *Acleris cristana* looks like it flew under a paint brush 😄 I will envy your garden even more than usual over the next three weeks 🤩👍 Stay safe.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 23-Mar-20 10:28 PM GMT

Classic Springtime images, Neil, butterflies on Blackthorn blossom.

A mrgreen is reserved for the Small Tortoiseshell shots. 🤩 .

Wurzel used the word 'sublime', and that is about right!.

Stay safe,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Mar-20 08:25 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel and Trevor, much appreciated 😊

Tuesday 24th March.

Another frosty start to the day but with clear skies again it didn't take long to start warming up. In fact there was very little breeze today and what there was had shifted to come more from the south so without that wind chill factor of the past couple of days it turned into the warmest day so far this week.

There were a few connection issues this morning with not only myself but also other members of our team dropping out of the company systems we are using. I guess that there is a large amount of online traffic with large numbers of people now working from home and putting extra strain on the systems. During these breaks, I would pop into the garden and later in the morning was pleased to see my first garden butterfly of the year, a Peacock.



Peacock - Coverdale 24.03.2020

With the latest government directions still allowing for a walk outside for exercise, as long as the required distance from other people is maintained, around 11.30 I went for an early lunchtime walk down to the area by my local park. Once again, only a few people were seen on the way and it seems to have become the social norm now to cross the road to avoid each other while still nodding a greeting.

I was hoping to get some more photos of butterflies on blossom as it makes a change for me to be able to do this during the week instead of being stuck inside at work (trying to look on the bright side during these trying times).

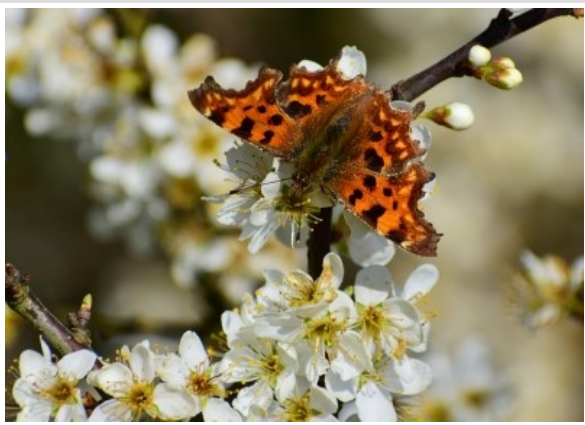
Anyway, there was plenty of opportunity with four or five each of Commas and Small Tortoiseshells posing nicely on the blackthorn blossom.



Comma - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020

There were also three Peacocks in this spot today, only one of which went anywhere near the blossom and then only briefly.



Peacock - Wagon Lane 24.03.2020

The rest of the time they seemed to be more content with patrolling up and down the hedge and settling to bask lower down on the vegetation.

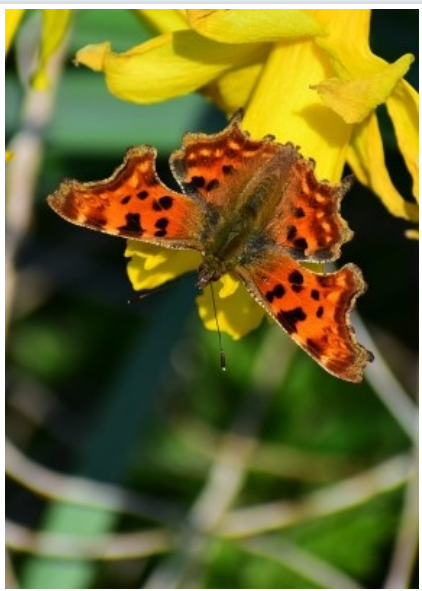


Peacock – Wagon Lane 24.03.2020



Peacock – Wagon Lane 24.03.2020

There are a few small clumps of garden daffodils growing here, no doubt escapees from nearby gardens, and at one point I spotted a Comma settled on one. I don't think he was feeding from it, just using it as a basking spot.



Comma – Wagon Lane 24.03.2020

After another brief but enjoyable session here I started walking back home and on the way spotted another Small Tortoiseshell in a front garden. I took a couple of sneaky shots before (hopefully) anyone saw me and wondered what I was up to.



Small Tortoiseshell around the corner to my house.

Later in the afternoon, my second garden butterfly, a Comma, passed through without stopping.

It looks like a similar day is forecast again tomorrow so I may well end up doing the same again, after all there is only a short window before the blossom starts to go over.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Chris L, 24-Mar-20 08:41 PM GMT

Lovely photos Neil. So vivid with the colours. The butterflies all look absolutely pristine.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Mar-20 11:03 PM GMT

Fabulous array of spring colour, Neil.

How come your blackthorn is so much more advanced than mine? We have a few sprigs in blossom here and there, but nothing like what you've captured in those images above.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 25-Mar-20 09:56 PM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil, I love to see the Butterflies on the Blossom Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Mar-20 07:48 PM GMT

`{quote=Otep post_id=151324 time=1585078901 user_id=19316}` Lovely photos Neil. So vivid with the colours. The butterflies all look absolutely pristine.

Thanks Otep, although these adult hibernators can vary greatly in condition, it always amazes me how many of them can emerge looking so good after the winter weather.

David M wrote:

Fabulous array of spring colour, Neil.

How come your blackthorn is so much more advanced than mine? We have a few sprigs in blossom here and there, but nothing like what you've captured in those images above.

Thanks David, not all the blackthorn here is as advanced as that, that stand is in a sheltered south facing spot.

Goldie M wrote:

Fantastic shots Neil, I love to see the Butterflies on the Blossom Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, one of my favourite sights of spring and one I always look forward to.

Tuesday 24th March – Garden Moths

It was a little less cold on Tuesday night with temperatures forecast to just drop down to about 3c instead of the -1 or -2c we had been getting for the

past couple of nights. The skies were still clear but with no moon I decided to put the moth trap out...after all, as my son Chris says, it won't catch anything in the garage.

I was pleased with the result, which was 12 moth of 5 species including new for years of Clouded Drab (5) and probably my favourite spring moth, an Oak Beauty.

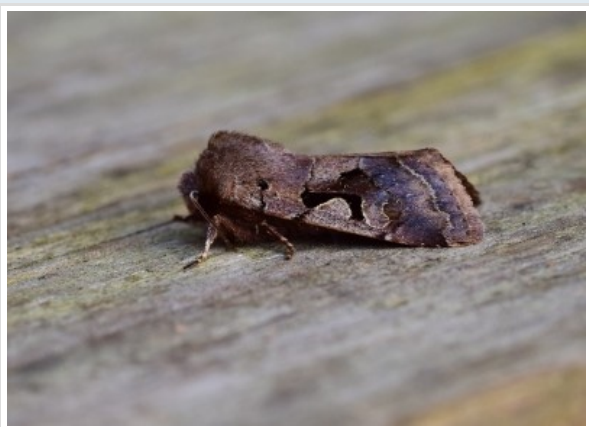


Oak Beauty – Coverdale 24.03.2020

The rest of the catch consisted of Common Quaker (2), Hebrew Character (3) and a single Common Plume Moth.



Common Quaker – Coverdale 24.03.2020



Hebrew Character – Coverdale 24.03.2020

I remember last year posting a couple of Combined images of the variation in Common Quakers and Hebrew Characters, and with Clouded Drab being another variable species I have done a similar combo showing four of these from the trap on Tuesday night.



Clouded Drabs showing variation – Coverdale 24.03.2020

The moths are a bit slow to get going in my garden this year with 9 macro species and just 3 micros to the trap so far. No doubt the run of windy weather hasn't helped, especially through February when we had that run of storms coming in.

Wednesday 25th March.

In the end I didn't make it to my local park today, my lunchtime walk was taken up by a visit to my local shop to get some fresh food.

I did have a couple of afternoon breaks in the garden and had fly pasts from a Peacock and a Comma that were both flitting about but neither of them settled.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Old Wolf, 26-Mar-20 08:10 PM GMT

Hello Neil, lovely images you have posted. The Commas and Small Tortoiseshells really pop on the Blackthorn. Makes me excited for what's to come, if only we can get out to it.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 26-Mar-20 11:49 PM GMT

Another cracking array Neil 😊 Although it's not great I'm coming round to this 'daily exercise' lark 😊 Mind you it would be good to think that in a few weeks it won't be necessary 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 27-Mar-20 10:18 AM GMT

Neil, thanks for sharing your moth pics. I have for some years now been considering getting a moth trap and never did due to cost. But your pics are making me think about it again more seriously. If I cannot get my usual Butterfly fixes by venturing out – I can perhaps better turn my attention to encouraging moths in! Thank you for reminding me about this possibility.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Mar-20 08:09 PM GMT

Old Wolf wrote:

Hello Neil, lovely images you have posted. The Commas and Small Tortoiseshells really pop on the Blackthorn. Makes me excited for what's to come, if only we can get out to it.

Thanks Old Wolf, I have a feeling that things will be a bit limited for many of us soon. In my case I would need to drive to see some of the later spring species which is not on the cards at the moment. It remains to be seen how long this will be the case.

[quote=Wurzel:post_id=151437:time=1585262990:user_id=9821] Another cracking array Neil 😊 Although it's not great I'm coming round to this 'daily exercise' lark 😊 Mind you it would be good to think that in a few weeks it won't be necessary 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, here's hoping that in a few weeks things will look a bit better.

ernie f wrote:

Neil, thanks for sharing your moth pics. I have for some years now been considering getting a moth trap and never did due to cost. But your pics

are making me think about it again more seriously. If I cannot get my usual Butterfly fixes by venturing out – I can perhaps better turn my attention to encouraging moths in! Thank you for reminding me about this possibility.

Thanks Ernie, glad to have given you some food for thought. The moths certainly add an extra level of interest to the garden. I am not sure if you use Facebook at all, I use it for a few groups and don't bother much with the drivel that makes up the main feed. The link to the group below may be of interest as it is mainly for home made traps.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/mothtraps.uk/>

I myself have a twin actinic tube Robinson trap that was a birthday present a few years back but I appreciate that these are relatively expensive. I know some people who use Skinner or Heath traps to good effect. The local habitat is more important than the type of trap used.

Thursday 26th March.

We woke up to the frostiest morning so far this week but with clear blue skies and a gentle breeze it did not take long for the sun to start warming things up although it still felt quite cold in the shade up until mid morning.

With the forecast for the weekend looking like the weather is going to turn cloudy and colder again, I decided to make the most of my lunchtime exercise walk today and return once again to the spot by my local park. Although a few dog walkers can usually be found in the park itself, the area of rough ground to the side is usually quiet and it is easy to keep well away from the odd one or two people passing through.

I checked out the usual favoured spots, including the large stand of blackthorn, some of which is beginning to go over now. There were a few more butterflies about today than there had been on my last visit on Tuesday and I reckon on a conservative count of approximately a dozen Small Tortoiseshells and half a dozen or so each of Commas and Peacocks. As well as visiting the blackthorn blossom, some males of all three species had established territories along the hedgerow and I recognised some of the same individuals that I had seen here previously, as well as new examples of Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock in particular.



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Peacock - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Peacock - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Peacock - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Peacock - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Peacock - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020

Numerous instances of two or three of these three species mixing it up together were observed spiralling high up into the blue skies before separating and returning to their favourite spots.

A couple of times I watched males chasing after females but only once managed to see a pair of Small Tortoiseshells land close enough so that I could sneak up and grab a photo, although not without annoying blades of grass in the way.



Small Tortoiseshell pair – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020

I also watched a Small Tortoiseshell chase a Peacock into the blackthorn and attempt what looked like courtship behaviour which the Peacock seemed to just ignore.



Small Tortoiseshell & Peacock – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020

Having seen other spring species being reported from around the Midlands over the past few days, I was keeping a look out and was pleased to spot a white butterfly come fluttering along the hedge line. It settled and proved itself to be a female Small White, my first of the year. It was soon off again but returned a litter later and settled for a bit longer this time.



Small White – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020

Even better, a little further along, a male Orange-tip flew past, just a couple feet away. I watched it fly on, figuring that it would keep going in the warm sun but then saw it drop down into the grass. I carefully approached and just managed to get a couple of shots before it was off again. Not the best photos in the world but who cares, the first Orange-tip of the year is always a bit special.



Orange-tip – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020

Another fairly short but cracking session at this spot which has proved to be a godsend over this past week with it being just five minutes walk from my house.

Still no Speckled Woods or Holly Blues here yet and with the weather turning cloudy and much colder over the weekend I guess I may have to wait a bit longer for these.

Bye for now.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-20 09:23 PM GMT

Another lovely set of Exercise shots Neil 😊 I'm especially jealous of the OT – try as I might I couldn't turn any of the feathers or Dead Nettles into one during my hour of exercise today 😞🍀 Fingers crossed that the majority hold off in emerging until the next spell of cooler weather is over and done with 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 27-Mar-20 11:43 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

I'm surprised you have seen Small White and Orange Tip already, though the weather has been warmer further north and west this week than in east Anglia. Your right though–your first Orange Tip of the year is always special!

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Mar-20 09:34 PM GMT

Helluva post, Neil.

I'm a little envious as I never see Small Tortoiseshells nectaring on blackthorn like that round me. Normally, I see them in fairly open spaces away from woodland.

Great to see you nailed a male Orange Tip. It'll be tricky for us to follow them this year given the circumstances but with any luck in a week or so they'll be fairly commonplace.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 28-Mar-20 10:31 PM GMT

A great selection of shots on the blackthorn, Neil. On my visits to Ryton Country Park in previous springs, I always noticed this behaviour – maybe its a Midlands thing! I also envy you your numbers of Small Tortoiseshells as once again they are few and far between so far round here, more so even than in the last couple of years.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Mar-20 10:18 AM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel post_id=151484 time=1585340634 user_id=9821}` Another lovely set of Exercise shots Neil 😊 I'm especially jealous of the OT – try as I

might I couldn't turn any of the feathers or Dead Nettle into one during my hour of exercise today 🙄🍀 Fingers crossed that the majority hold off in emerging until the next spell of cooler weather is over and done with 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, things are looking to turn a bit warmer again later next week, fingers crossed.

[quote=essexbuzzard-post_id=151494-time=1585348989-user_id=11426] Hi Neil,

I'm surprised you have seen Small White and Orange Tip already, though the weather has been warmer further north and west this week than in east Anglia. Your right though—your first Orange Tip of the year is always special!

Hi Mark, Wednesday into Thursday was quite pleasant here, the wind dropped and temps got up to around 16c and possibly even higher in sheltered spots.

David M wrote:

Helluva post, Neil.

I'm a little envious as I never see Small Tortoiseshells nectaring on blackthorn like that round me. Normally, I see them in fairly open spaces away from woodland.

Great to see you nailed a male Orange Tip. It'll be tricky for us to follow them this year given the circumstances but with any luck in a week or so they'll be fairly commonplace.

Thanks David. Hopefully, in a weeks time the weather will have warmed up a bit again and I may get one or two in the garden.

[quote=millerd-post_id=151530-time=1585431075-user_id=9839] A great selection of shots on the blackthorn, Neil. On my visits to Ryton Country Park in previous springs, I always noticed this behaviour – maybe its a Midlands thing! I also envy you your numbers of Small Tortoiseshells as once again they are few and far between so far round here, more so even than in the last couple of years.

Cheers,

Dave

Interesting observation about the blossom Dave. I have seen others post photos of butterflies on blossom from other areas so I don't think it is just a midlands thing. Possibly just down to the timing of the blossom coming into flower at different sites depending on local microclimate.

Friday 27th March

No more butterflies here, despite a few sunny spells it has gone much colder with a stiff wind from the north.

Before the wind became too blowy over the weekend, I put the moth trap out on Friday night despite it still being a bit blustery and with temperatures forecast to drop down to around 3 degrees.

Numbers were down again but I still had 7 moths of 3 species, these being Hebrew Character (5), Common Quaker (1) and another Oak Beauty. The latter was a bit more worn than the one from the other day but could be identified as a different individual by slight differences in markings.



Oak Beauty – Coverdale 27.03.2020

The first few days of next week look to be staying colder but there are signs of the temperatures creeping up through the second half of the week so lets hope we all get to see a few more butterflies soon, whether in our gardens or on local exercise walks.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 30-Mar-20 04:02 PM GMT

fantastic shots Neil, a Small White and an Orange tip 🍀🍀 I'm really envious now 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Old Wolf, 30-Mar-20 08:04 PM GMT

Hello Neil, more fabulous shots, I am really quite envious of all the 'action' in your area 😊

The Oak Beauty really lives up to its name and I said it before but the butterfly on Blackthorn combo really is spectacular 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-Mar-20 06:58 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

fantastic shots Neil, a Small White and an Orange tip 🍷🍷 I'm really envious now 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, hopefully you will be seeing some yourself by the end of the week.

Old Wolf wrote:

Hello Neil, more fabulous shots, I am really quite envious of all the 'action' in your area 😊

The Oak Beauty really lives up to its name and I said it before but the butterfly on Blackthorn combo really is spectacular 🍷

Thanks Old Wolf. I am fortunate in that little spot is just five minutes walk from my house so qualifies for my daily exercise walk.

Tuesday 31st March.

After a cold and rather blustery weekend, Monday brought more of the same but with some added rain showers. Today (Tuesday) was a bit better in as much as the wind had dropped again and some sunny spells helped the temperature just about creep up to around 12 degrees. Having said that, when the sun was hidden behind one of the large grey clouds that kept coming over, the temperature dropped back into single figures.

Apart from a few short forays into the garden, I had spent most of the past couple of days inside and so felt in need of a walk to stretch my legs so once again I headed to the spot by my local park

I figured the conditions were a bit borderline for seeing butterflies but checked out the sheltered corners and was pleased to find couple of Small Tortoiseshells. The grass was still quite wet from yesterdays rain and the large stand of blackthorn was looking a bit bedraggled now.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 31.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 31.03.2020

I did my usual circuit and reckon I ended up seeing 5 or 6 Small Tortoiseshells and singles of Comma and Peacock, more than I expected given the cool conditions. The Comma and Peacock didn't hang around but I managed to grab a few shots of the Tortoiseshells although they tended to settle low down in the vegetation today.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 31.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 31.03.2020

Not a bad little session in the end and one that I wasn't really expecting to have given the weather forecast for today.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 31-Mar-20 09:20 PM GMT

More lovely Small Torts, Neil. Despite the sunshine today, the air was very cold. I exercised at my usual spot and saw absolutely nothing, even in more sheltered areas.

The weekend is looking warmer!.

Stay well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 31-Mar-20 09:49 PM GMT

Those Tortoiseshells certainly are robust up your way, Neil. 😊👍 Like with Trevor, nothing braved the chilly breeze and intermittent sunshine round my way. However, the coming weekend looks promising... 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-Apr-20 08:11 PM GMT

Cracking Small Torts Neil 😊 I too ignored the weather forecast and risked it on the 31st and like you I was glad that I did as out of the icy wind and when the sun came out from the clouds it got nice and warm and the butterflies came out – sometimes you just have to go for it 😊 . Fingers crossed that the weekend lives up to the expectations – I wonder if I can transfer my exercise allowance from today, tomorrow and Friday to the weekend? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 02-Apr-20 09:47 AM GMT

Well done with the Butterflies Neil, nothing ventured into my Garden for the last few days, roll on Week-End, let's hope the forecast is right Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-Apr-20 07:19 PM GMT

I'm loving your Tortoiseshells right now, Neil. In fact, I've never been so eager to see your first garden Speckled Woods.

Surely this is now only a matter of time. Covid-19 is life-threatening to we humans but of no consequence to nature. My hope is that 2020 will see a resurgence within the natural world that we will all be able to better appreciate in the months/years ahead.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Chris L, 02-Apr-20 07:31 PM GMT

Lovely pristine looking Tortoiseshells Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Apr-20 07:23 PM GMT

Thanks for all the comments Trevor, Dave, Wurzel, Goldie, David and Otep.

Still no Specklies here yet, fingers crossed for this weekend.

In the meantime...more Small Tortoiseshells;

Friday 3rd April.

Since Monday, it has been a cold and dreary week here with a thick grey blanket of cloud most days along with a cold wind from the north. Yesterday, the wind started to shift to come more from the west which meant that it didn't feel so cold. This morning started off with some nice sunny spells which started to cheer things up a bit and by late morning was feeling fairly pleasant. Since I have been working at home, I have been sticking to roughly the same hours that I would normally do and this meant that I finished at midday today for the week.

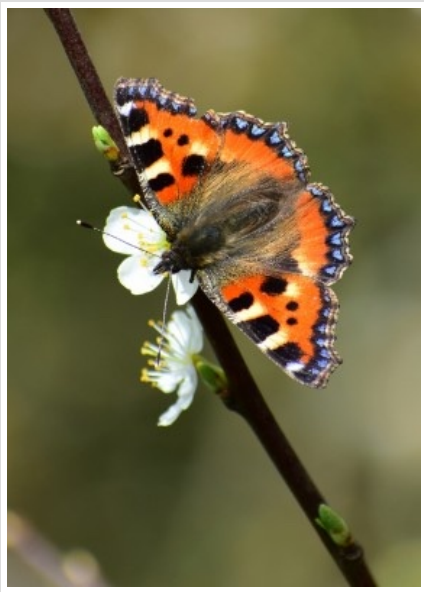
After grabbing a bit of lunch I decided to have another walk down to my local spot by the park as I have yet to find anywhere else within close walking distance. Having said that, my usual local spots, all of which are a little further way and usually entail a 10 minute drive, would only produce the same species at this time of year anyway.

With a bit more time in hand this afternoon, I spent a little longer there today, covering the same areas but wandering around more slowly and I reckon I saw at least a dozen Small Tortoiseshells. The stand of blackthorn that many were frequenting last week is now well past it's best but a couple could

still be found on some of the remaining blossom.

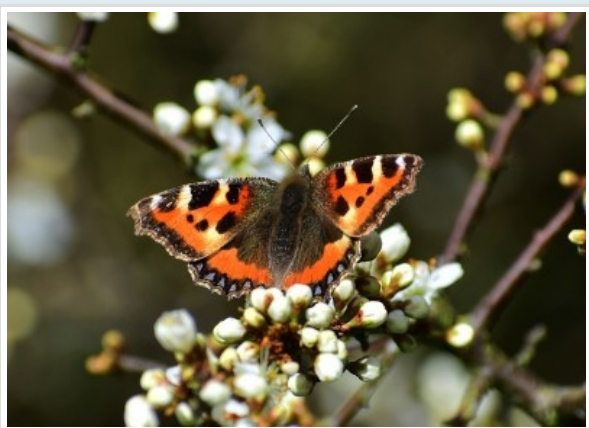


Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 03.04.2020



The same one as above from a different angle.

There is another large stand of blackthorn a bit further along that is in a more exposed position and which is only just starting to flower. Wandering over to this, I spotted three Small Tortoiseshells on the new blossom, only one of which was low enough to get a shot.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 03.04.2020

Other Small Tortoiseshells were basking around various bramble patches and nettle beds, where I would usually put them up on my approach. Some of these only glided a few yards before settling again which enabled me to sneak up to grab some photos.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 03.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 03.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 03.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 03.04.2020

Curiously, I did not see any Commas or Peacocks today and during the hour or so that I wandered around I only saw the Small Tortoiseshells.

Amongst the assorted bird song to be heard, I also heard my first Chiffchaff of the year.

Back home later in the afternoon, I was pottering about in the garden when a couple of Commas flew in together and after a bit of an airborne scuffle one settled on the lawn for a bit before taking to the air again and disappearing next door.



Comma - Coverdale 03.04.2020

A bit later still, the shadows were lengthening across the garden when a Peacock dropped in to take advantage of one of the few remaining sunny spots.



Peacock - Coverdale 03.04.2020

I found it interesting, that after only seeing Small Tortoiseshells earlier today on my walk, that the two species that I didn't see then would be the two that turned up later in the garden.

Also, although I have seen plenty of Small Tortoiseshells at my local spot, I have not yet had one in the garden this year despite being only a few minutes walk away.

Anyway, it looks like a nice weekend ahead, I must spend some time on google earth to see if I can find any other local spots within reasonable walking distance.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-20 08:32 PM GMT

A lovely collection Neil 😊 I was at work today and so didn't get out, I feel quite unfit now 😊 Interesting observation of the species distribution Neil – could it be something to do with the type of vegetation at the different sites? Or could it be that Small Torts I quite/more territorial, I've noticed that Peacocks do seem to wander more? 😊 Either way you've highlighted a couple of positives of this Lockdown – appreciating the local and finding even more local spots 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 03-Apr-20 08:36 PM GMT

Beautiful Small Torts, all look so fresh.
Your count today, is more than I saw locally last year.

Great stuff, keep well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 04-Apr-20 08:26 AM GMT

Those Tortoiseshells are positively radiant, Neil, especially the first two.

Good to know there are decent numbers around your patch right now. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 05-Apr-20 10:10 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, we'd a rubbish weather week-end here, the clouds you described in your post never really left us, this morning just one hour of Sun. I think when we do have better weather it will be mostly Small Torts and Peacocks venturing into the garden, the Small Tort's seem to be having a good year a round here. It's always a pleasure to see them 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Apr-20 07:08 PM GMT

Thanks again for all the comments Wurzel, Trevor, David and Goldie 😊

Sunday 5th April.

Morning.

Saturday had been a cloudy day here and the skies didn't clear until late afternoon and then remained clear resulting in a cold night. Sunday dawned with a fresh crisp morning but despite the forecast for clear sunny skies all day, a layer of cloud soon moved in. From mid morning onwards, the only sun we saw was occasional glimpses of hazy sunshine when the cloud thinned a bit. At least the wind was warmer, if a bit blustery.

During the morning I spent some time pottering around in the garden and saw a Peacock coming back and forth. Looking more closely, I noticed that what I had originally taken for a single butterfly was in fact two different examples flying in at different times, with the one looking distinctly more worn than the other.



Peacock #1 - Coverdale 05.04.2020



Peacock #2 – Coverdale 05.04.2020

Taking a few photos and looking more closely at the better condition one also proved that one to be two different individuals, identified as such by comparing the 'faces' in the blue eye-spots on the hindwings.



Peacock #3 – Coverdale 05.04.2020

This gave me three different Peacocks taking turns to fly in and out of the garden.

Later in the morning I also saw a male Brimstone come round a few times on his circuit without stopping.

Afternoon.

I had hoped that the cloud would dissipate for the afternoon but if anything it thickened up even more, although there were still times when it thinned a bit and it felt reasonably warm, if not the clear sunny day that the forecast had promised.

I decided to venture a bit further for my exercise walk today and set off for Sheldon Country Park. I can reach the start of here in a brisk 15 minute walk from my house but it consists of a long thin area that extends between housing estates for some way and loops past the end of the runway at Birmingham Airport and to walk the length of it would take a fair bit longer.

I have visited this area in the past, but not for a couple of years now as it is usually too busy for my liking with numerous dog walkers and occasional gangs of teenagers lurking about. As it turned out, although there were indeed a fair few people about, most were staying on the main paths whereas I skirted around the outer edges where there are assorted areas of brambles, nettle beds and longer grass.

Small Tortoiseshells were the most numerous butterfly seen and during the hour or so that it took me to walk as far as the end of the airport runway I counted 36. Along some sections they would fly up every few yards and a couple of nettle beds produced particular concentrations with one notable spot having a dozen or so flitting about in one small area.



Small Tortoiseshell – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020

Despite the persistent cloud, it had become fairly warm and the Tortoiseshells were quite active with lots of territorial sparring and chasing taking place along with attempted courtship activity.



Small Tortoiseshells – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshells – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshells – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020

Peacocks were almost as numerous with a minimum count of 25, with these being spread out more evenly with no particular 'hotspots'.



Peacock – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Peacock – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Peacock – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020

Coming in at third place were Commas with just 5 seen.



Comma – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Comma – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020



Comma – Sheldon Country Park 05.04.2020

On any other day this would have been a decent count but they just couldn't match the numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks today. In fact it has been some years since I have seen the kind of numbers of these two species that I saw today, particularly the Small Tortoiseshells.

I did keep a good look out for Orange-tips, Holly Blues or Speckled Wood but none of these put in an appearance today. Never mind, they won't be long now and the numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks made it a memorable walk.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-Apr-20 07:56 PM GMT

Thirty six Small Torts is a cracking tally Neil – I thought I was doing well getting into the 20's during their peak last year! 🤩🤩🤩 Your Peacock number three is a diopthalmica ab isn't it? 😊👍

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Apr-20 08:49 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Small Tortoiseshells were the most numerous butterfly seen and during the hour or so that it took me to walk as far as the end of the airport runway I counted 36. Along some sections they would fly up every few yards and a couple of nettle beds produced particular concentrations with one notable spot having a dozen or so flitting about in one small area...

...Peacocks were almost as numerous with a minimum count of 25, with these being spread out more evenly with no particular 'hotspots'.

Those are very encouraging numbers, Neil. Even though my area is usually good for Small Tortoiseshells I doubt if I could find concentrations like that.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 08-Apr-20 06:10 PM GMT

WoW! Neil, some lovely shots there, the Peacocks colours really stand out 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Apr-20 07:23 PM GMT

{quote=Wurzel_post_id=151830_time=1586199415_user_id=9821} Thirty six Small Torts is a cracking tally Neil – I thought I was doing well getting into the 20's during their peak last year! 🤩🤩🤩 :mrgreen
Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, that was the most I have seen on one day for a good few years now.

{quote=Wurzel_post_id=151830_time=1586199415_user_id=9821} ... Your Peacock number three is a diopthalmica ab isn't it? 😊👍
Wurzel

Possibly Wurzel, although I must admit that this is one of those 'abs' that I see often enough to consider as within normal variation.

David M wrote:

Those are very encouraging numbers, Neil. Even though my area is usually good for Small Tortoiseshells I doubt if I could find concentrations like that.

From the reports I am seeing it seems to be a very good spring for Small Tortoiseshells around the midlands in general. Very encouraging indeed.

Goldie M wrote:

WoW! Neil, some lovely shots there, the Peacocks colours really stand out 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie, yes ,there are some lovely Peacocks around.

Tuesday 7th April.

We had some rain here during the night on Sunday and a further couple of showers on Monday morning so I didn't bother with my lunchtime walk and although the afternoon cleared up a bit there was still a cool feel to the breeze.

A clear night led to a bit of a frost this morning (Tuesday) but once the sun gained some height in the clear blue skies it turned into a pleasantly warm day.

I am still working from home and took my lunchtime exercise walk once again to my local park where I saw more of the same as last week, the only difference being that Peacocks and Commas were back after being mysteriously absent on my last visit here.

Numbers today were Small Tortoiseshell (11), Peacock (8) and Comma (3).



Peacock - Wagon Lane 07.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 07.04.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 07.04.2020

No Orange-tips, Holly Blues or Speckled Wood seen today but I did spot a single female Small White.



Small White – Wagon Lane 07.04.2020

Later in the afternoon, I was having coffee break in the garden and was joined by a Peacock and Comma.



Peacock – Coverdale 07.04.2020



Comma – Coverdale 07.04.2020

Whilst working in the back room I also spotted an unidentified white and my first Holly Blue of the year passing through.

A was also pleased with this photo I took of a Dunnock with the pick background provided by a large Magnolia that is in full flower in a neighbours garden.



Duncock - Coverdale 07.04.2020

Wednesday 8th April.

More of the same today on my exercise walk to the same spot with Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks in similar numbers, in fact probably most of the same butterflies as yesterday.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 08.04.2020

The Peacock below is another of those possible ab. *diophthalmica*



Peacock - Wagon Lane 08.04.2020

I didn't see any Commas today but did see a patrolling male Orange-tip and an unidentified white that likewise didn't stop.

A number of Chiffchaffs were making themselves heard amongst the rest of the birdsong and I managed to get close enough for a couple of shots of one.



Chiffchaff – Wagon Lane 08.04.2020

The warmest afternoon of the week so far saw me popping into the garden a few times (to rest my eyes from the computer screen of course) during which I saw a couple of Peacocks and a single Comma. A passing male Orange-tip was the first seen in the garden this year and although I saw him come round a couple of times he was in constant motion so no chances for a photo.

I have been keeping a close eye on the garden lately, looking out for my first garden Speckled Wood this year and was finally rewarded with a fresh male this afternoon. He fluttered about a bit and settled a couple of times, albeit amongst some dead bramble stems where it was tricky to get a photo. Despite looking nice and fresh I noticed that he had already lost the tip of one antenna.

Edit; Not the best angle (that's my excuse) but looking again, that is a female.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 08.04.2020

At one point I was sitting quietly just chilling for a few minutes when I got the feeling that I was being watched...



Someone's watching me.

I have now been informed that as of Tomorrow (Thursday 9th) our team is going on furlough from work with this being reviewed on April 29th. Looking at the positive side of this, it will give me more flexibility for my daily exercise walk instead of being restricted to between 12.00 – 1.00pm as was the arrangement while working from home.

Hope everyone is well and keeping safe.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Apr-20 08:11 PM GMT

Great stuff Neil although I am now exceedingly envious of your garden (or anyone with a garden) 🍷🍷 Good to see the Small Torts still holding their own and in your most recent post a touch of normality – a Specklie in a Neil Freeman PD post 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 08-Apr-20 08:34 PM GMT

Great shot of the fox Neil and the birds, I had two or three Gold Finch enjoying themselves in the garden today, it's great watching them and two Robins were having a territory dispute 😊 lovely shots of the Butterflies as well. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-Apr-20 02:05 PM GMT

Always good to see Speckled Woods return to your garden, Neil. Spring isn't the same without them. 😊

Things look to be moving now round your way with Holly Blues, Orange Tips and Whites on the wing.

I'm sorry to hear you're being furloughed. Hopefully it won't be for long and, as you say, you have a little more flexibility regarding when you can get out on your daily exercise walk.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 09-Apr-20 05:58 PM GMT

Desperately trying to catch up Neil but a fox shot can usually be relied upon to get a comment from me 😊 Great shot! Lovely Dunnock and Chiffchaff too but 36 ST????? Wow!! 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Apr-20 07:56 PM GMT

[quote=Wurzel post_id=151920 time=1586373110 user_id=9821] Great stuff Neil although I am now exceedingly envious of your garden (or anyone with a garden) 🍷🍷 Good to see the Small Torts still holding their own and in your most recent post a touch of normality – a Specklie in a Neil Freeman PD post 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, the garden has indeed been a godsend in these times and it is good to see the return of the Specklies 😊

Goldie M wrote:

Great shot of the fox Neil and the birds, I had two or three Gold Finch enjoying themselves in the garden today, it's great watching them and two Robins were having a territory dispute 😊 lovely shots of the Butterflies as well. Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie. I too have a couple of Robins that keep trying to chase each other off from around the feeders.

David M wrote:

Always good to see Speckled Woods return to your garden, Neil. Spring isn't the same without them. 😊

Things look to be moving now round your way with Holly Blues, Orange Tips and Whites on the wing.

I'm sorry to hear you're being furloughed. Hopefully it won't be for long and, as you say, you have a little more flexibility regarding when you can get out on your daily exercise walk.

Thanks David. Fortunately I am still being paid full pay for now, at least until the end of April when the situation is being reviewed.

[quote=Pauline post_id=151966 time=1586451525 user_id=1095] Desperately trying to catch up Neil but a fox shot can usually be relied upon to get a comment from me 😊 Great shot! Lovely Dunnock and Chiffchaff too but 36 ST????? Wow!! 🍷

Thanks Pauline. I wondered if you would spot the fox shot. It seems Small Tortoiseshells are having a very good spring around the midlands from other reports I have seen.

Thursday 9th April.

With me not working from home now I went out for my daily walk a bit earlier this morning. Instead of just sticking to the area of rough ground to the

side of the park, this morning I also did a full circuit of the outer boundary hedges of the park itself where there are a number of hedges, bramble patches and small areas of scrub.

This was around mid morning and after another clear night and chilly start it was rapidly warming up. Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks were once again seen in good numbers but today I didn't take that much notice of them as I was on the look out for Orange-tips which so far had only appeared here in small numbers.

My luck was in as I soon spotted a male Orange-tip which settled a few yards in front of me and stayed down long enough for me to creep up and get a couple of shots.



Orange-tip - Wagon Lane 09.04.2020

A couple of unidentified whites were also seen and one went down and enabled me to identify it as a male Small White.



Small White - Wagon Lane 09.04.2020

Commas have been a bit thin on the ground around here this spring, especially in comparison with the Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks. I have only seen a few each time I have been out with the highest count being 5 at Sheldon Country Park last weekend.

Again, I only saw a couple today but one of them was a nice large and plump female that I spotted fluttering around a large nettle bed and occasionally stopping to bask.



Comma - Wagon Lane 09.04.2020

By this time it was approaching midday and although I saw a couple more male Orange-tips they were now in full on patrolling mode and showing no sign of stopping.

Friday 10th April.

My exercise walk today was to our local shop to get some essentials so I didn't make it to the park although I did see a couple of Peacocks chasing each other up above a front garden on the way to the shop.

Butterflies passing through the garden during the afternoon consisted of Brimstone, Orange-tip, Peacock, Comma, and unidentified white(s). In all cases I saw these more than once, but whether they were different individuals or the same ones returning I couldn't say. They were all highly mobile in the warm afternoon sun.

Stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Apr-20 08:08 PM GMT

That's a cracking Small White shot Neil 😊 I too have been doing a spot of Supermarket Butterflying – on Thursday I saw a Small Tort, Peacock, Brimstone and a Holly Blue whilst shuffling around the car park of Waitrose. 'm glad I didn't tkae my camera though else I could have lost my place in the queue and so another 1hr 30 wait would have been endured 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Apr-20 12:06 AM GMT

Beautiful image of the Orange Tip, Neil. You don't get presented with many oppourtunities like that each spring so you have to react when they arise.

You are also one of the few to capture a settled Small White in a good pose. They're driving me mad this spring! 😡

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Apr-20 09:33 AM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel post_id=152025 time=1586545737 user_id=9821}` That's a cracking Small White shot Neil 😊 I too have been doing a spot of Supermarket Butterflying – on Thursday I saw a Small Tort, Peacock, Brimstone and a Holly Blue whilst shuffling around the car park of Waitrose. 'm glad I didn't tkae my camera though else I could have lost my place in the queue and so another 1hr 30 wait would have been endured 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. I did a bit of supermarket car park queuing myself yesterday morning, only about 15 minutes though but it was too early for butterflies to be about.

David M wrote:

Beautiful image of the Orange Tip, Neil. You don't get presented with many oppourtunities like that each spring so you have to react when they arise.

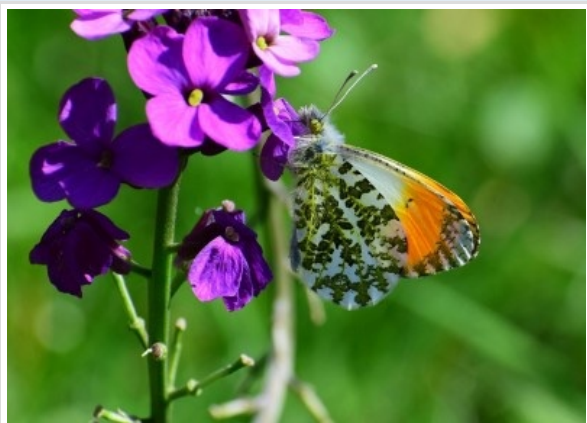
You are also one of the few to capture a settled Small White in a good pose. They're driving me mad this spring! 😡

Thanks David. Not just the Small Whites, everything has been highly mobile in the constant warm sun we have had this past week.

Saturday 11th April.

A day spent keeping myself busy doing stuff around the house and garden.

During the course of the day I had Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Brimstone, Small White, Orange-tip and Holly Blue passing through the garden. The only ones that settled long enough to grab a quick shot or two were a Small White and Orange-tip that paused briefly to refuel...



Orange-tip – Coverdale 11.04.2020



Small White – Coverdale 11.04.2020

...and a male Brimstone that settled briefly when a bit of cloud appeared in the afternoon and covered the sun for a couple of minutes. This enabled me to get a quick shot before the sun returned and he was off again. This was the only time I have seen a Brimstone actually stop moving so far this year.



Brimstone – Coverdale 11.04.2020

Looks like a couple of cooler days ahead before becoming a bit warmer again later in the week. Still not much rain in the forecasts though, it is getting a bit dry around here.

Bye for now and keep well.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Apr-20 01:01 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil especially the lemony Small White 🍋🍋 – we could do with a little drop of rain down here, ideally during the evening 😊 cooler would be good too as everything is going full throttle in the warmth 😊 Only a 15 minute queue 😊 I'm shopping in the wrong place 😊 bet they even had toilet roll in stock:wink: 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Apr-20 09:33 AM GMT

{quote=Wurzel_post_id=152098_time=1586692867_user_id=9821} ... we could do with a little drop of rain down here, ideally during the evening 😊 cooler would be good too as everything is going full throttle in the warmth 😊
Wurzel

And just on cue, we had quite a bit of rain last night and it is going to be cooler for the next few days, maybe a touch too cool today but tomorrow onward looks better.

{quote=Wurzel_post_id=152098_time=1586692867_user_id=9821} ... Only a 15 minute queue 😊 I'm shopping in the wrong place 😊 bet they even had toilet roll in stock:wink: 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

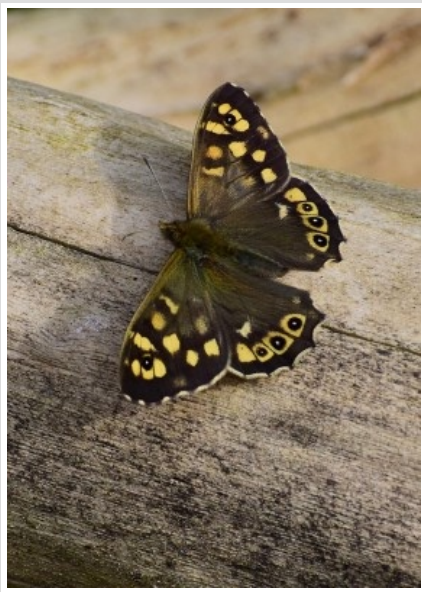
Wurzel

They did indeed have loo roll Wurzel, and this was my local Tesco not Waitrose 😊😊

Sunday 12th April

Another crisp and clear morning with quite a heavy dew on the lawn first thing but the sun soon warmed things up again once it had gained a bit of height in the sky.

The stormy winds earlier in the year had blown down an old elder tree in the corner of my garden and over the past few days I had been tidying this corner up a bit although a section of the blown down trunk is still lying there. This morning I noticed a male Speckled wood was using this as a basking spot so I will probably leave it there for a while yet.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 12.04.2020

Later on a Peacock also tried to move in to this spot but was chased off by the Specklie so then went over the fence into next doors garden and settled on the back of a wooden bench. I surreptitiously leant over the fence and took a couple of sneaky shots, although the neighbours wouldn't have minded being well aware of my usual garden antics with the camera.



Peacock – Coverdale 12.04.2020

As the morning went on a layer of cloud moved in although for now this was high level stuff that gave that milky sort of light and left it feeling warm. A Comma passed through and settled for a while on the elder trunk whilst the Specklie's attention was elsewhere.



Comma – Coverdale 12.04.2020

Later in the afternoon I went on my exercise walk down to the local park. The cloud was still building up but every now and then it thinned enough to

let some sun through and it felt quite warm and muggy.

The Small Tortoiseshells are still around and this afternoon produced my highest number yet at this spot with a count of 16.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 12.04.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 12.04.2020

There were not quite as many Peacocks here today but at least half a dozen were actively mixing it up with the Tortoiseshells.



Peacock - Wagon Lane 12.04.2020

A couple of male speckled Woods have now emerged here.



Speckled Wood – Wagon Lane 12.04.2020

Two or three each of Orange-tips and Brimstones were patrolling the hedges, all males, none of which I saw settle. A few whites were doing likewise and the only ones I got close enough to ID were Small Whites. I still haven't confirmed a Green-veined White yet this year.

Back home in the garden later in the afternoon I spotted a Peacock, a different one to the one that was hanging around in the morning, on a flowering (wild?) cherry that sprung up a couple of years ago in one of the side borders.



Peacock – Coverdale 12.04.2020

By now the cloud was thickening up and around 4.00pm we had a few spots of rain but that didn't come to much.

There is a bit of rain in the forecast for tonight but apart from that it is looking like another dry week ahead albeit going a bit cooler for the next couple of days.

Stay safe and keep Well,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 13-Apr-20 09:46 AM GMT

Love the image of the Small Tortoiseshell on the bramble leaf, Neil.
As for the weather it's cold and blowy down here today, and with no rain since the Winter deluge, the garden is parched and the water butt is empty.
I sometimes envy the weather you get in the midlands, it seems a little more balanced.

Take care,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Apr-20 10:19 AM GMT

It is that certain law Neil that means when we butterflyers 'ask' for cooler wetter weather that's what we get, but when we ask for clam, sunny weather it isn't forthcoming 😞😞

I'm not brave enough to visit Tesco's – the one in town is tiny and the aisles are barely a 5 foot in width 😞

Lovely set of Specklies and other cast members – they certainly seem darker in the spring season. Loving the Small Torts 😊 and I've still to see a Green-veined White too – where are they 😞? Saying that in =your next post you'll probably be featuring one 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 13-Apr-20 10:57 PM GMT

Your butterflies have been posing well for you, Neil. 😊 The Torties and the Specklies in particular – as I've said before I really envy you the numbers of the former that still can be found a scant 100 miles northwest of me. Very thin on the ground they are round here this year.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Apr-20 06:59 PM GMT

{quote=trevor-post_id=152127-time=1586767572-user_id=13654} Love the image of the Small Tortoiseshell on the bramble leaf, Neil. As for the weather it's cold and blowy down here today, and with no rain since the Winter deluge, the garden is parched and the water butt is empty. I sometimes envy the weather you get in the midlands, it seems a little more balanced.

Take care,
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor. We did get some rain in the end on Sunday night but not as much as we needed. The weather may be a bit more balanced here but our season is a good couple of weeks shorter than down south. I envy your late season stuff such as the Clouded Yellows.

{quote=Wurzel-post_id=152131-time=1586769577-user_id=9821} ... and I've still to see a Green-veined White too – where are they 😊? Saying that in =your next post you'll probably be featuring one 😊😁...

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Not in this next post Wurzel but there could be one coming up soon 😊

{quote=millerd-post_id=152169-time=1586815079-user_id=9839} Your butterflies have been posing well for you, Neil. 😊 The Torties and the Specklies in particular – as I've said before I really envy you the numbers of the former that still can be found a scant 100 miles northwest of me. Very thin on the ground they are round here this year.

Cheers,

Dave

Thanks Dave. Looking at what others have been posting on here, and elsewhere on social media, it is interesting how different species are faring in different parts of the country.

Garden Moths.

For the second half of March and into early April, things remained slow to get going, with a run of clear and cold nights only producing small numbers of the usual suspects (Common Quaker, Hebrew Character, Clouded Drab) on the few occasions that I ran the trap.

A much milder night on 10th April (minimum of 10 degrees and a light breeze) produced a better result of 24 moths of 11 species with Small Quaker, Early Grey, Red-green Carpet, Double-striped Pug and Brindled Beauty all new for the year (NFY). I was particularly pleased to see the Brindled Beauty as I have only had a couple of this large attractive moth before with the last one being in 2017.



Brindled Beauty – Coverdale 10.04.2020



A different view of the one above.



Early Grey - Coverdale 10.04.2020



Another shot of the one above.



Small Quaker - Coverdale 10.04.2020

There was also a diminutive little Diamondback Moth (NFY), a micro that can occasionally migrate here in large numbers and become a pest on some vegetable crops.



Diamondback Moth - Coverdale 10.04.2020

I don't usually run the trap on consecutive nights but another reasonable forecast for the next night (April 11th) tempted me to go for it again. As it turned out, the temperature dropped a bit lower and there was a bit more of a breeze which reduced the numbers to 13 moths of 8 species but these included a couple more NFYs of Pine Beauty and Spectacle.

The Pine Beauty is only the third of this attractive little species I have had with the others being in 2016 and 2018, so that is every other year that one has turned up.



Pine Beauty - Coverdale 11.04.2020



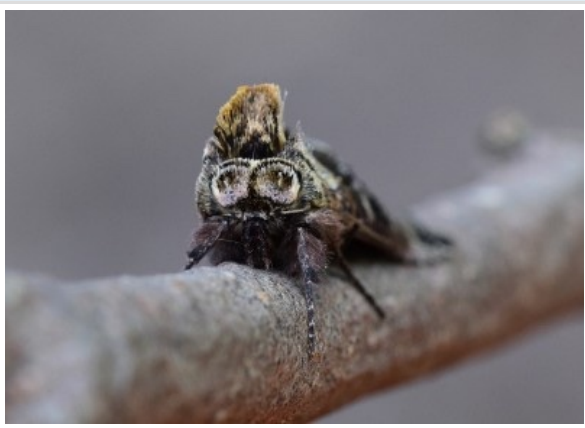
The same moth as above.

The Spectacle usually flies in two overlapping generations (just one in the north) from April through to early October although with climate change it's flight period is beginning to start earlier, as is the case with many species these days. It has previously not shown up in my garden until May and this is my earliest by over three weeks.



Spectacle – Coverdale 11.04.2020

No prizes for guessing how it got its name.



Spectacle – Coverdale 11.04.2020

A return to colder (and windier) nights for a couple of days means I have not had the trap out again since then but the conditions are looking better again for the second half of this week.

Bye for now and stay safe.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Apr-20 07:51 PM GMT

Thank you for sparing me the Green-veined White Neil 😊 it's okay I saw my first today so now you can publish your images 😊😊 Cracking set of Moths – I can see why the Brindled Beauty is so named – one of those juxtapositions of subtlety and stunning-ness 😊 Loving the Punk-dweeb feel of the Spectacle 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-Apr-20 08:26 PM GMT

Love that Spectacle Moth Neil, it made me laugh 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Apr-20 09:25 PM GMT

Looks like Wagon Lane is producing them by the wagonload, Neil! The Midlands seems to be doing fine for spring butterflies right now!

Love the moths too, especially the Spectacle (although the Pine Beauty runs it close).

Re: Neil Freeman

by Matsukaze, 14-Apr-20 09:46 PM GMT

Nice moths – I also had Brindled Beauty on about the same date, and it is also a rare visitor to our garden. I've never had Early Grey here (though it was

regular in my previous garden 3 miles away) and have only ever seen one Pine Beauty. It's strange how local some moths can be.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Apr-20 08:41 AM GMT

[quote=Wurzel post_id=152208 time=1586890291 user_id=9821] Thank you for sparing me the Green-veined White Neil 😊 it's okay I saw my first today so now you can publish your images 😊😊 Cracking set of Moffs – I can see why the Brindled Beauty is so named – one of those juxtapositions of subtlety and stunning-ness 😊 Loving the Punk-dweeb feel of the Spectacle 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Thanks for the permission to show the Green-veined White Wurzel 😊 ...coming up.
Stunning-ness...is that word? If not, it should be.

Goldie M wrote:

Love that Spectacle Moth Neil, it made me laugh 😊 Goldie 😊

Glad you enjoyed it Goldie 😊 There are some great moth names.

David M wrote:

Looks like Wagon Lane is producing them by the wagonload, Neil! The Midlands seems to be doing fine for spring butterflies right now!

Love the moths too, especially the Spectacle (although the Pine Beauty runs it close).

Thanks David. Yes, I am lucky with that local spot, it is only small but usually produces a good number of the commoner species.

[quote=Matsukaze post_id=152232 time=1586897213 user_id=23] Nice moths – I also had Brindled Beauty on about the same date, and it is also a rare visitor to our garden. I've never had Early Grey here (though it was regular in my previous garden 3 miles away) and have only ever seen one Pine Beauty. It's strange how local some moths can be.

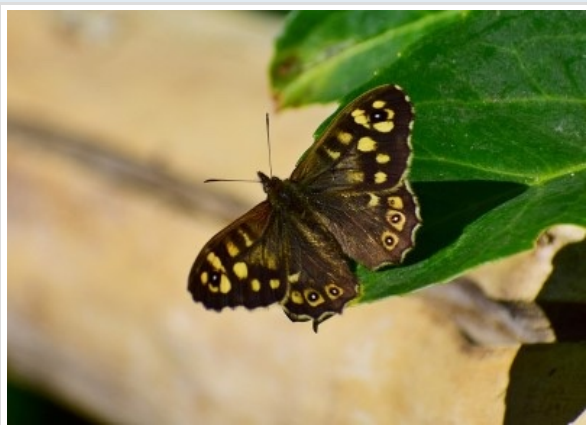
Thanks Matsukaze. Yes, there are plenty of supposedly 'common and widespread' moths that I have never seen here. Then again, I have had a couple of rarities in previous years, that is one of the things with moth trapping, you never know what might show up.

Tuesday 14th April.

After a cold and quite blustery Bank Holiday Monday, we woke up on Tuesday morning to a frosty start under clear blue skies. The cold wind from the previous day had dropped but an underlying chilliness persisted all morning despite the constantly shining sun. It was not until early afternoon that the air temperature rose into the mid teens and it began to feel reasonably pleasant.

I had already popped out earlier in the morning for a walk to my local shop for some milk and fresh bread and so I decided to sit out in the garden in the afternoon to see what turned up.

The first butterfly I noticed was a Speckled Wood in the corner with the blown down elder tree. I took a couple of photos and compared them to those taken on Sunday which proved that this was a different individual that had moved in to this spot.

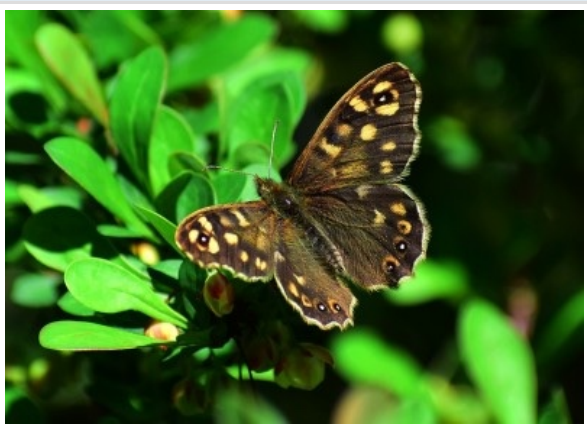


Speckled Wood – Coverdale 14.04.2020



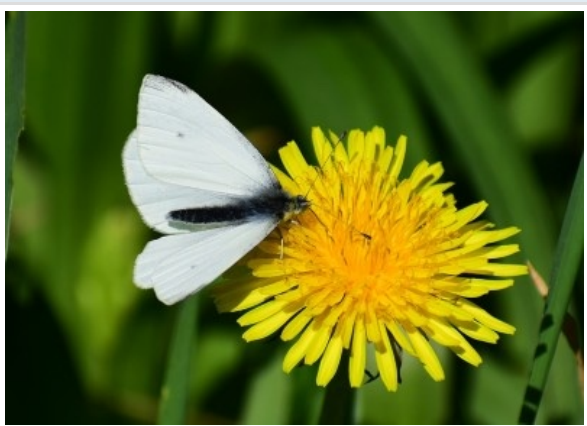
Speckled Wood - Coverdale 14.04.2020

Another male Speckle was flitting up and down one of the side borders and photos proved this was also a new one in the garden.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 14.04.2020

Both male and female Small Whites kept passing through and occasionally stopping on the dandelions that I leave growing wherever they pop up.



Small White male - Coverdale 14.04.2020



Small White female - Coverdale 14.04.2020

I had also been watching another white that looked a bit different in flight and was wondering if this may be a Green-veined White when it settled giving me the chance to creep up and get some photos. It was indeed a GVW, my first confirmed one this year and a nicely marked female at that.



Green-veined White female - Coverdale 14.04.2020

But of course, what I was really hoping for was a visit from an Orange-tip or two and hoping that one would actually stop long enough for photos. Despite the cooler conditions, the first couple of times a male appeared they seemed to be nearly as active as before....nearly, but not quite, as today they did stop occasionally albeit they were still very flighty.

As the sun began to get a bit lower later in the afternoon the Orange-tips began to settle more often and would stay down a bit longer giving me a more opportunities to get some shots. By comparing photos, I identified at least two different males that kept coming around on their circuits.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 14.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 14.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 14.04.2020

One of them also began to stop for an occasional refuel at one of my 'Bowles Mauve' plants. I grew these from cuttings taken three years ago and they are beginning to look a bit straggly now, I must take some more cuttings this year before they peg it.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 14.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 14.04.2020

A day that turned out much better than I had expected given the original forecast and one that proved the value of just sitting in the garden to see what turns up.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Stevieb, 15-Apr-20 06:58 PM GMT

Cracking photos of female Green-veined White and Orange-tips Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 15-Apr-20 07:54 PM GMT

No mistaking that Green-veined White Neil - what a cracker 😊🇬🇧 Lovely Orange-tips too - the first male has got the smallest fore wings I've ever seen - at first glance I thought that he was 'blind' 😏😏

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-Apr-20 08:42 PM GMT

What a fabulous array of images, Neil. Probably the best I've seen this spring.

That first Orange Tip is most unusual, with the forewing spots almost completely diminished.

The female Green Veined White is a stunner too. How I'm praying to see one of those right now! 🇬🇧

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Apr-20 08:51 AM GMT

`{quote=Stevieb_post_id=152254 time=1586973504 user_id=19003}` Cracking photos of female Green-veined White and Orange-tips Neil

Thanks Stevie, glad you like them.

`{quote=Wurzel_post_id=152260 time=1586976882 user_id=9821}` No mistaking that Green-veined White Neil - what a cracker 😊🇬🇧 Lovely Orange-tips too - the first male has got the smallest fore wings I've ever seen - at first glance I thought that he was 'blind' 😏😏

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. There is nearly always some variable feature on a butterfly that I use to identify different individuals, with Orange-tips it is the size and shape of the forewing spots. That is one of the faintest examples I have yet seen, like you, I thought he was 'blind' at first.

David M wrote:

What a fabulous array of images, Neil. Probably the best I've seen this spring.

That first Orange Tip is most unusual, with the forewing spots almost completely diminished.

The female Green Veined White is a stunner too. How I'm praying to see one of those right now! 🍀

The GVWs have only really appeared here over the past couple of days David, I saw a few more today, mostly males.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 16-Apr-20 01:58 PM GMT

Lots of variety within those Orange Tips, Neil – knowing how tricky it can be to get even one decent shot of this very mobile species, getting a contrasting array of them takes a bit of doing. 😊 The two Specklies both look darker than my local ones – much more like the later broods.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Apr-20 06:39 PM GMT

Thanks Dave. It cooled down a bit later on Tuesday which certainly helped with those Orange-tips.

I have noticed over the past few years that I get a good variety of Speckled Wood here with some spring ones, like you say, looking like later brood examples.

Wednesday 15h April.

I had to pop out in the morning to pick up some tablets for my mom from her local pharmacy and then drop them round for her. This was done with all the social distancing measures that have now become normal practice, that is, queuing up on lines outside the pharmacy and only one at a time allowed inside. Then going onto my mom's, I dropped the bag inside her front door as she stood back a bit inside her entrance hall before we had a bit of a chat whilst I stood half way up her driveway. Strange times indeed.

Back home later, it was turning out similar to the previous day albeit a few degrees warmer. Once again I potted about in the garden and kept an eye out for whatever passed through. With the return to warmer temperatures, the butterflies today were back in highly mobile mode and the only ones settling regularly were a couple of Speckled Wood and even then they would quickly close their wings.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 15.04.2020

At one point during the early afternoon I was watching a male Brimstone that had already been around a couple of times, when he dropped down. I quickly grabbed my camera and just had time for one shot before he was off again. Looking at the photo afterwards, it appears that a blossom petal had attracted his attention.



Brimstone male – Coverdale 15.04.2020

A little later a male Green-veined White stopped for a brief refuel on a dandelion...



Green-veined White male - Coverdale 15.04.2020

...and a male Orange-tip did likewise at a violet growing in the lawn.



Orange-tip male - Coverdale 15.04.2020

A female Holly Blue also stopped briefly, this being only the third one I have seen so far this year, all in the garden with none yet on my exercise walks.



Holly Blue female- Coverdale 15.04.2020

Later in the afternoon, I was just thinking that I had yet to see a female Orange-tip when one flew up the garden 🤩 - I'll have to try that again, hmmm!, (thinks hard) I haven't seen a Large Tortoiseshell in the garden yet 😊 - nope, hasn't worked yet.

Not only did the female Orange-tip apparently appear out of my mind, but she dropped down and posed nicely.



Orange-tip female- Coverdale 15.04.2020

Also seen in the garden today were a number of Small Whites and singles of Comma and Peacock.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 16-Apr-20 07:09 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, your Garden is fantastic like your shots, I'd love to see a Holly Blue in my Garden but they don't usually put in an early appearance and when they do it's a real effort to get a shot although last year they enjoyed the Marjoram in the Garden and I managed a few. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Apr-20 10:41 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil especially the Green-veined White and the female OT 😊👍 Good luck getting the Large Tort, I hope you get some great shots 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Apr-20 05:52 PM GMT

Lovely underside shot of the Speckled Wood, Neil. I like the Holly Blue as well, probably due to the unusual angle which sort of makes it look like a painting.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Apr-20 07:21 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, your Garden is fantastic like your shots, I'd love to see a Holly Blue in my Garden but they don't usually put in an early appearance and when they do it's a real effort to get a shot although last year they enjoyed the Marjoram in the Garden and I managed a few. Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie 😊 I have only seen three Holly Blues so far, all in the garden, and that was the first one that stopped and then only briefly.

{quote=Wurzel post_id=152333 time=1587073313 user_id=9821} Lovely shots Neil especially the Green-veined White and the female OT 😊👍 Good luck getting the Large Tort, I hope you get some great shots 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. Unfortunately I reckon the Large Tort will have to remain in dreamland 😊

David M wrote:

Lovely underside shot of the Speckled Wood, Neil. I like the Holly Blue as well, probably due to the unusual angle which sort of makes it look like a painting.

Thanks David 😊 That was the only shot of the Holly Blue that I had time for before she was off again.

Thursday 16th April.

I went out for my exercise walk today (Thursday) around mid morning, once again heading for the rough ground by my local park. It was another beautiful morning with the sun shining from clear blue skies and the first butterflies that I saw, a couple of patrolling unidentified whites, looked to be already fully warmed up.

I spent around 45 minutes here during which I saw slightly fewer numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks as on previous occasions, with most of these now looking well past their best with just one or two looking not too bad. Not surprising really, as with the weather we have had recently they will have been fully active on most days since emerging from hibernation.



Peacock - Wagon Lane 16.04.2020

A couple of male Speckled Woods were holding territories and as usual chasing off anything else that came into their field of view. One of them had what looks like a bird strike at one of the hind wing eye-spots showing their value as a defensive measure.



Speckled Wood - Wagon Lane 16.04.2020

Numbers of whites have increased here with one or two almost constantly in view, mostly too far away for definite ID but a few settled briefly and enabled me to positively ID a couple each of Small and Green-veined. I've still not yet seen a Large White this year.

I reckon I saw at least three different male Orange-tips on patrol and one of them stopped on a patch of garlic mustard just long enough for me to grab a photo.



Orange-tip Wagon Lane 16.04.2020

I searched the garlic mustard for eggs without success but then again I have not yet seen a female Orange-tip here. I'll have to come back next week for another look.

Back home again later, I did the now usual session in the garden with occasional bouts of pottering about interspersed with periods of just sitting there and watching what came along.

Today, I identified three different male Speckled Woods along with two females that came wandering through.



Speckled Wood male #1 - Coverdale 16.04.2020



A different shot of same male as above.



Speckled Wood female #1 - Coverdale 16.04.2020



Speckled Wood female #2 - Coverdale 16.04.2020

One of the males took a liking to the bright orange plastic of a toy play table that is there for when we have the grand kids round, although at the moment it is anybody's guess when they may be able to come round again.



Speckled Wood male #2 - Coverdale 16.04.2020

Another of the males had suffered a bird strike which again showed the value of those hind wing eye spots.



Speckled Wood male #3 - Coverdale 16.04.2020

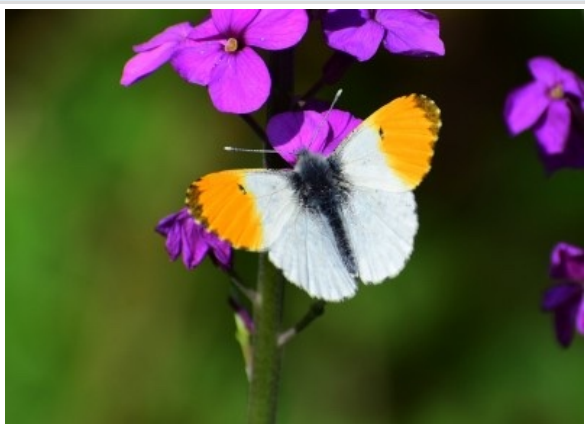
From mid afternoon onwards some high level cloud moved in which slowed the Orange-tips down a bit with at least two different males once again showing the value of the bowles mauve plants.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 16.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 16.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 16.04.2020

A few Small Whites and at least one Green-veined White also passed though but no other species today.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Apr-20 07:46 PM GMT

More lovely shots Neil – especially like the Specklie on the orange background/toy 😊 I guess we'll know more in three weeks time Neil though I'm not sure whether we'll be any closer to the 'exit' then – I saw someone liken it today to: "right we've opened the parachute and slowed down a lot so now we can do without the parachute" 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Apr-20 10:13 PM GMT

Orange Tips reaching their apogee now, Neil, and you have caught that one superbly on the bowles mauve. Beautiful contrast in colour.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Apr-20 10:28 AM GMT

[quote=Wurzel post_id=152392 time=1587149184 user_id=9821] More lovely shots Neil – especially like the Specklie on the orange background/toy 😊 I guess we'll know more in three weeks time Neil though I'm not sure whether we'll be any closer to the 'exit' then – I saw someone liken it today to: "right we've opened the parachute and slowed down a lot so now we can do without the parachute" 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, I saw that comment somewhere as well. That's the problem, we all want to return to normal but doing so too quickly could undo all the sacrifices people have made.

David M wrote:

Orange Tips reaching their apogee now, Neil, and you have caught that one superbly on the bowles mauve. Beautiful contrast in colour.

Thanks David, I rather like that colour combo myself. A few more coming up.

Friday 17th April.

The forecast wasn't looking good for today with lots of cloud heading our way along with rain later in the afternoon, although in truth the rain would be welcome as we hadn't had much for a couple of weeks now and things were beginning to look very dry.

As it happened, after a cool and blustery start, during which we had a bit of drizzle, things brightened up for about an hour or so around mid morning and the sun made a few feeble attempts to break through.

This was just enough for me to see a male Orange-tip fluttering around the bowles mauve plants and occasionally flying around the garden, but not looking like he had any inclination to wander far.

The next few shots are all of this one individual, after all, it is often said that you cannot have too many photos of Orange-tips 😊



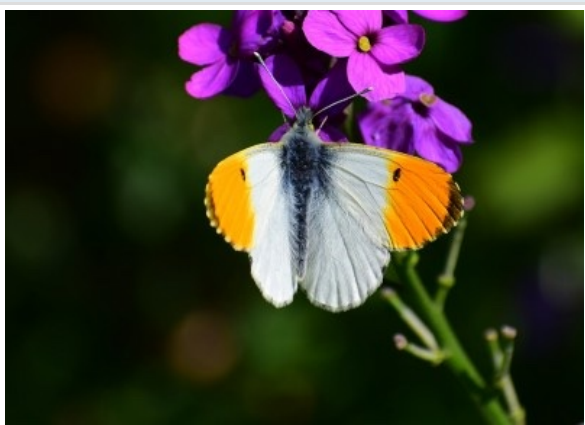
Orange-tip – Coverdale 17.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 17.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 17.04.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 17.04.2020

At one point a second male Orange-tip, looking a bit more weather beaten, flew in but was chased away from the bowles mauve by the first one. This second one settled further down the garden for a bit until the clouds thickened up again and they both disappeared over the neighbours gardens.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 17.04.2020

These were the only two butterflies seen today as, true to the forecast, the clouds grew thicker and it turned quite cold for the rest of the day. The rain arrived later and came down quite heavily during the night and then continued on and off until mid morning on Saturday.

The rest of Saturday saw us sitting under a thick blanket of grey cloud and it remained quite chilly all day.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 19-Apr-20 11:33 AM GMT

Wonderful Orange-tips, I feel like I need to put my sunglasses on to cope with that colour combo with the Bowles Mauve!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-Apr-20 05:44 PM GMT

"it is often said that you cannot have too many photos of Orange-tips" definitely when they're in fine fettle like the first one 😊👍, mind you the second? Yeah he'll still do 😊😂

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Apr-20 10:03 AM GMT

`{quote=bugboy_post_id=152442 time=1587292392 user_id=13753}` Wonderful Orange-tips, I feel like I need to put my sunglasses on to cope with that colour combo with the Bowles Mauve!

Thanks Buggy. I wear prescription specs with a 'reactolite' type coating, probably a good job with these colours 😊

`{quote=Wurzel_post_id=152459 time=1587314672 user_id=9821}` "it is often said that you cannot have too many photos of Orange-tips" definitely when they're in fine fettle like the first one 😊👍, mind you the second? Yeah he'll still do 😊😂

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Indeed Wurzel, it is difficult to beat a fresh male Orange-tip 😊

Sunday 19th April

A much better day than yesterday. The weather returned to mostly clear blue skies and constant sun, I say mostly because later in the morning some high level cloud built up which hid the sun occasionally but this had dissipated again by early afternoon. There was also a bit of a cool breeze which knocked the temperature down a bit but for the most part it was a reasonably warm day.

I spent most of the day doing the now usual mixture of pottering about around the house and garden and keeping an eye out for whatever turned up.

Today's butterflies included a couple of male Orange-tips, one of which was a lovely crisp fresh example.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 19.04.2020

A single female Orange-tip was only the second female I have seen so far.



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 19.04.2020

A few whites came wandering through but the only ones that settled and were definitely identified were a couple of Small Whites.



Small White male - Coverdale 19.04.2020



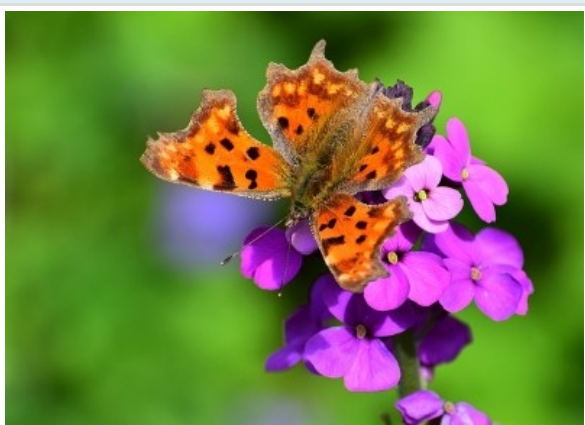
Small White male - Coverdale 19.04.2020

Two male Speckled Woods were set up at opposite ends of the garden and one of them took to settling regularly on the flower spikes of a lilac bush. I don't think he was nectaring on these, just using them as a perching spot.



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 19.04.2020

A Comma flew in at one point and spent some time around the bowles mauve plants, providing a more subdued (just) colour combo than the Orange-tips.



Comma - Coverdale 19.04.2020



Comma - Coverdale 19.04.2020

A single Holly Blue also came fluttering in and did a circuit of the garden shrubs but stayed at high level and didn't settle before departing.

A bit of a lazy day really, I did think about having a walk to my local park but was quite enjoying myself in the garden and never went out in the end. In truth, I see the same species in my garden as I would see there although the Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks have been in much larger numbers down by the park. Also, the only Holly Blues I have seen so far, just 4 with today's, have all been in my garden.

I have been stuck on nine species for a bit now, no Large White yet and no Red Admiral although it would be unusual for me to see the latter around here before June.

Up until now I have been seeing all the usual spring butterflies that I would see in any normal year. Small Copper, Common Blue and Small Heath will be flying soon and should all be possible within walking distance for me. Brown Argus is also possible but is very hit and miss locally.

Green Hairstreak, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper and Small Blue are all species that I need to travel further afield around Warwickshire to see, so it looks like these will be the first ones I will be missing this year.

DoB, PBF and SPBF also require longer trips but these are species that I don't usually catch up with every year anyway.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 20-Apr-20 07:47 PM GMT

Beautiful shots Neil - that Comma and the Specklie practically fly out of the screen 🤩🤩🤩 All too soon we're going to get to the time when we start missing out on certain species but with your garden as productive as it is should go some way to compensate 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 21-Apr-20 08:48 AM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil, those Orange Tip shots really stand out, I'm eager to see what your Garden will produce next. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Apr-20 07:05 PM GMT

Beautiful colour contrasts once again, Neil.

What are you doing to make normally restless Orange Tips so content to sit so well in your garden?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Apr-20 09:22 PM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel post_id=152515 time=1587408459 user_id=9821}` Beautiful shots Neil - that Comma and the Specklie practically fly out of the screen 🤩🤩🤩 All too soon we're going to get to the time when we start missing out on certain species but with your garden as productive as it is should go some way to compensate 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. From what I have seen recently, it looks like I will be missing some pretty soon but you are right, the garden certainly helps.

Goldie M wrote:

Fantastic shots Neil, those Orange Tip shots really stand out, I'm eager to see what your Garden will produce next. 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie. I reckon the garden will be producing more of the same for a little while.

David M wrote:

Beautiful colour contrasts once again, Neil.

What are you doing to make normally restless Orange Tips so content to sit so well in your garden?

Thanks David. All I am doing most of the time is just watching and waiting. The cool breeze over the past few days has helped.

Monday 20th April.

After the clear and cold nights we are having, it takes a while for the sun to take the chilliness out of the air but by 10.00ish it was feeling pleasant enough for a walk down to my local park although a cold and blustery wind from the east was blowing

The first butterfly that I saw was a male Speckled Wood in the usual spot in a gap between two hedges, a different individual to the previous times I have checked this spot. In fact the past three times I have looked here, there has been a different male each time.



Speckled Wood male – Wagon Lane 20.04.2020

The last time I had been here was last Thursday and I was struck by the difference that a few days and a good bit of rain over the weekend had made with everything looking much 'greener'.

The nettle beds had put on a spurt of growth and were still playing host to at least a dozen Small Tortoiseshells. As the morning warmed up these were becoming more active but the blustery wind would have them diving into the nettles and nearby bramble patches for shelter. As mentioned in a previous post, most of these are looking worn and faded now but a few are still in good condition and one particular individual was looking particularly vibrant.



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 20.04.2020

Due to the way that Orange-tip males patrol over large circuits, I always find it difficult to accurately count them. In the past, I have taken photos of what I have thought were different butterflies in different parts of a site, which the photos have later shown to actually be the same individual. Nevertheless, I reckon that by watching differences in their circuits and the timing of when they came around, that there were at least four males flying here this morning. They were already in full mobile mode but every now and then a cool gust of wind would catch one and it would go down into the vegetation.



Orange-tip – Wagon Lane 20.04.2020

One individual was particularly well marked with dark scales extending along the leading edge of his forewings.



Orange-tip – Wagon Lane 20.04.2020

Around a dozen or so other whites were seen, amongst which I managed to confirm a couple of Smalls and at least one Green-veined. Still no Large Whites here yet.

Just one male Brimstone was seen and he seemed to be flying more weakly and more 'fluttery' than usual. A gust of wind sent him down into a bramble patch where I managed to get a couple of photos of him. This showed that he had some damage to the leading edge of his forewings which no doubt accounted for his weaker looking flight. Nevertheless, he was soon off again and seemed to be coping well enough.



Brimstone – Wagon Lane 20.04.2020

Back home in the afternoon, the conditions remained much the same with the sun shining strongly but with the cold wind knocking the temperature down a bit. As in the morning the gusts of wind would cause any passing butterfly to go to ground with a Green-veined White being the first one of the afternoon that I saw this happen with.



Green-veined White – Coverdale 20.04.2020



Green-veined White – Coverdale 20.04.2020

A Small White was also cooled down by the wind and spread his wings wide to warm up again.



Small White – Coverdale 20.04.2020

A male Orange-tip proved a classic case of using photos to identify individuals. During the afternoon, the impression had been that two or three males had been passing through, but I managed to get record shots practically every time and checking these afterwards proved that today it was just the one individual coming round on repeated circuits.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 20.04.2020

He also managed to find the only Herb Robert flower that has opened so far. These are a favourite of Orange-tips and I let them self seed over most of the garden specifically for this reason, although the straggly plants can spread everywhere and become a bit of a nuisance if left unchecked.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 20.04.2020

The male Specklies were nowhere to be seen today, perhaps a bit too blustery in their favourite spots for them. Later in the afternoon however, a female did come wandering though, keeping low down out of the worst of the breeze.



Speckled Wood female - Coverdale 20.04.2020

So then, a Speckled Wood was the first butterfly of the day (at Wagon Lane) and a Speckled Wood was also the last (in the garden).

It looks like the rest of the week is going to remain dry with the wind dropping and temperatures rising up until Thursday. I suppose that one good thing about this 'lock down' and being on furlough is that I am not moaning about being stuck in work and missing the best of the weather. If truth be told I am having my best start to the season for many a year.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 21-Apr-20 09:40 PM GMT

Lovely selection of springtime butterflies. That male Orange-tip is a very striking individual, an ab. *costaenigrata* if I'm not mistaken 🍴 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Apr-20 05:56 PM GMT

That aberrant is a real gem Neil – even more stunning than a normal male OT if that was possible 🤩🤩🤩

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Apr-20 11:08 PM GMT

Another desirable line-up there, Neil. It's unusual to see Brimstones with chunks missing from their wings – I wonder how that one suffered such damage?

The Orange Tip with the dark costa is a standout; I don't think I've ever seen one like that.

As you say, the recent rain has refreshed the landscape and your Small Tortoiseshell image oozes that verdant return which comes from a bit of precipitation. Much as I complain about conditions in south Wales, I'd much rather have fresh looking foliage than arid, parched landscapes.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Apr-20 09:04 AM GMT

`{quote=bugboy_post_id=152588_time=1587501604_user_id=13753}` Lovely selection of springtime butterflies. That male Orange-tip is a very striking individual, an ab. *costaenigrata* if I'm not mistaken 🤩🤩

Thanks Bugboy, and for the ID of the Orange-tip ab. He certainly stood out a bit 😊

`{quote=Wurzel_post_id=152603_time=1587574592_user_id=9821}` That aberrant is a real gem Neil – even more stunning than a normal male OT if that was possible 🤩🤩🤩

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. Even in flight he looked bit different, slightly darker, which was what attracted my attention to him as he flew past.

David M wrote:

Another desirable line-up there, Neil. It's unusual to see Brimstones with chunks missing from their wings – I wonder how that one suffered such damage?

The Orange Tip with the dark costa is a standout; I don't think I've ever seen one like that.

As you say, the recent rain has refreshed the landscape and your Small Tortoiseshell image oozes that verdant return which comes from a bit of precipitation. Much as I complain about conditions in south Wales, I'd much rather have fresh looking foliage than arid, parched landscapes.

Thanks David. I have seen Brimstones with damage to the trailing edges of their hindwings but that is the first time I have seen it like that. A bird strike perhaps?

That was the first time I have seen an Orange-tip like that too.

I ended up being a bit busy mid-week so must get my next report (from Tuesday) done while I can still remember what I did on what day, they are all tending to blur together at the moment.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Apr-20 07:07 PM GMT

Tuesday 21st April

My original plan for today was to catch up on a couple of little jobs in the house and I did indeed make a start on this. However, my willpower is not strong and by mid morning I could see a few butterflies fluttering about in the garden and went outside for a coffee break, taking the camera with me of course.

This break turned out to last a lot longer than initially intended and I actually ended up spending most of the day in the garden again, with the occasional 'work break' just to keep things ticking over 😊.

After yet another cold and clear night the day was very similar to Monday albeit with a bit less wind and eventually becoming a couple of degrees warmer.

All the usual suspects were passing through again and I was pleased to see my first Large White of the year. This makes 10 species so far and completes all those that I would normally expect to see here at this time of year.



Large White female – Coverdale 21.04.2020



Large White female – Coverdale 21.04.2020

I seem to have been waiting a while for a Large White this year but I have checked my records and it is actually my second earliest sighting, only beaten by 2017 (15th April). Just goes to show how being on furlough in all this sunny weather is throwing out my perception of time.

Both Small Whites and Green-veined Whites were seen, with one male GVW with a slightly deformed hind wing making him easily identified as one that has been hanging around for a couple of days now.



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 21.04.2020

Two male Speckled Woods were back in their usual spots and two different females came passing through with both of them managing to avoid the males by staying low down whilst the males performed higher up.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 21.04.2020



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 21.04.2020

Today I managed to identify three different male Orange-tips along with three separate females, all in varying condition with one particular male looking a bit ragged now.



Orange-tip male – Coverdale 21.04.2020



Orange-tip male - Coverdale 21.04.2020



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 21.04.2020



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 21.04.2020

I was watching one female when a male came along to try his luck but the female adopted the classic rejection pose and flew off giving me just enough time to get a couple of blurry shots.



Orange-tip pair - Coverdale 21.04.2020

Later in the afternoon I saw another example of this behaviour, this time involving the raggedy male and another female. This episode lasted a bit longer giving me time to put the camera on 'sports' mode and fire off a sequence of shots. Just a bit of a shame the male wasn't in better nick, although maybe that was why he was rejected 😊 .



Orange-tip pair - Coverdale 21.04.2020



Orange-tip pair - Coverdale 21.04.2020



Orange-tip pair – Coverdale 21.04.2020

Although I didn't end up going out, it was another enjoyable day in the end, making the most of the garden.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Apr-20 07:45 PM GMT

Brilliant sports mode shots Neil 😊 and what a cracking Large White – still not got any shots of this species though I've seen one finally 🙄🇬🇧 I like your way of working too 😊 definitely a style I need to adopt:D

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 24-Apr-20 07:50 PM GMT

That male OT is being told to get lost, every female I've seen this year has given this signal to would be suitors. Good to see your female Speckled Wood, I've only found one so far this season, but males by the hundred.

Your garden is certainly productive, a great Spring selection in your posts.

Stay well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Apr-20 10:22 AM GMT

It's comical watching those Orange Tips. I've observed similar scenes lately and each time the female has sent the males on their merry way.

Great underside shot of the Speckled Wood, by the way. I always find it tricky to capture them posing like that.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Apr-20 10:28 AM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel post_id=152684 time=1587753948 user_id=9821}` Brilliant sports mode shots Neil 😊 and what a cracking Large White – still not got any shots of this species though I've seen one finally 🙄🇬🇧 I like your way of working too 😊 definitely a style I need to adopt:D

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. I have seen a few more Large Whites now but they are still thin on the grond compared with the Small and Green-veined Whites.

`{quote=trevor post_id=152685 time=1587754241 user_id=13654}` That male OT is being told to get lost, every female I've seen this year has given this signal to would be suitors. Good to see your female Speckled Wood, I've only found one so far this season, but males by the hundred.

Your garden is certainly productive, a great Spring selection in your posts.

Stay well,
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor. I have a few females passing through the garden now, they tend to sneak through lower down amongst the vegetation as opposed to the more boisterously obvious males.

David M wrote:

It's comical watching those Orange Tips. I've observed similar scenes lately and each time the female has sent the males on their merry way.

Great underside shot of the Speckled Wood, by the way. I always find it tricky to capture them posing like that.

Thanks David. The Speckled Woods tend to perch with their wings edge on to the sun but they often fidget about a bit and I wait until the sun lights up the side. I have also tried using fill in flash to light up the shaded side with various results.

Wednesday 22nd April.

A busier day with the morning spent dropping some stuff around to both my Mom and Jane's Mom and checking that they are both OK, making sure we maintained all the social distancing protocols of course.

The afternoon was then spent getting on with the little jobs I had put off from the day before. Mind you, with the continuing sunny weather, it would have been remiss of me not to have the odd tea break out in the garden. I saw all the usual suspects passing through but conscious of needing to make some progress today I forced myself to crack on and only pointed the camera at a single Orange-tip and a couple of Specklies.



Orange-tip – Coverdale 22.04.2020



The same OT as above.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 22.04.2020



This is a very popular perching spot.

The garden moth trap has only been on a few times recently with the clear, cold and windy nights giving poor results. The only moth of interest recently being another Brindled Beauty on the night of Tuesday 21st April. That was the second of these this year after not having one since 2017.



Brindled Beauty – Coverdale 21.04.2020

It seems that Holly Blues are having a good spring in some parts of the country, not here though. So far I have only seen one female and three or four males, all passing through my garden. I have seen none yet whatsoever on any of my local walks.

The last time I took a longer walk to Sheldon Country Park was nearly three weeks ago now (on 5th April), I reckon I will have another walk there tomorrow (Thursday 23rd), mainly to see if I can find any Holly Blues.

Bye for now and Stay Safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 27-Apr-20 12:31 PM GMT

Your Orange Tips have posed beautifully for you this spring, Neil. They look great on that bowles mauve. Your Speckled Wood perching post is a handy thing to have too – I really struggle getting underside shots of this species but they are very dutiful towards you in that spot.

The brindled beauty certainly is a beauty – another fantastic example of the camouflage many moths exhibit.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Apr-20 07:38 PM GMT

Thanks David. One of the upsides of being on furlough from work is that it has coincided with some very nice weather and I have been able to spend more time than usual in the garden which has given me plenty of opportunity – both with the Orange-tips and the Speckled Woods.

Thursday 23rd April

As mentioned in my last report, I decided to go on a longer walk this morning, to Sheldon Country Park which only takes about 15 minutes to reach on foot from my house but then extends for some way and includes various habitats including meadow areas, hedgerows and mixed woodland.

I set out at 09.30 so that I could be there before it got too warm as, after another chilly start, it was forecast to turn into the hottest day this week.

The first butterflies seen were male Speckled Wood basking in the morning sun before taking up their territories for the day.

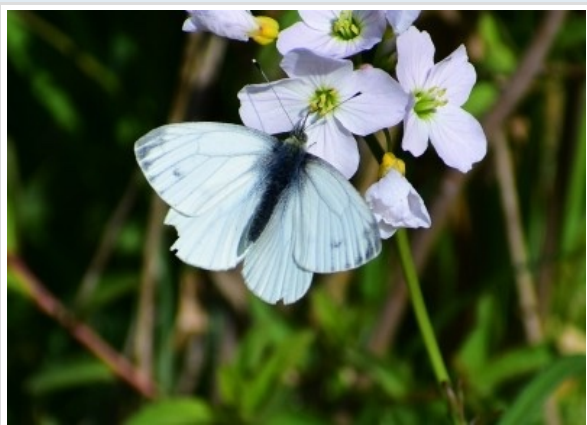


Speckled Wood – Sheldon Country Park

These were soon followed by various whites of which I managed to confirm Small, Green-veined and female Orange-tips before they got too warmed up and flighty.



Orange-tip female – Sheldon Country Park



Green-veined White – Sheldon Country Park

Male Orange-tips seemed to take a little longer to get flying but when they appeared they were already in full patrolling mode.

The last time I was here, on April 5th, I had counted 36 Small Tortoiseshells and 25 Peacocks. Today, nearly three weeks later, I only managed to find 6 Small Tortoiseshells and 2 Peacocks. I guess that most of them have done their bit towards propagating the species for another year and faded away.



Small Tortoiseshell - Sheldon Country Park



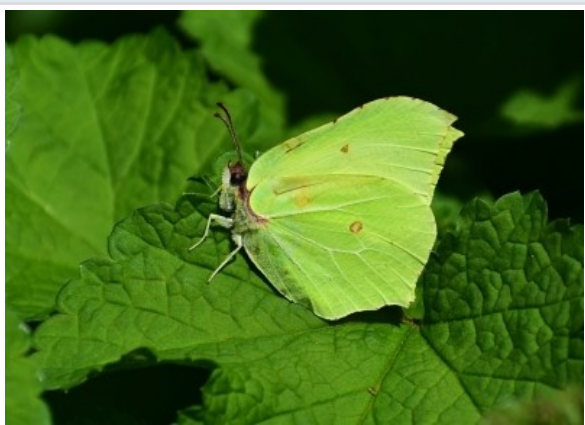
Peacock - Sheldon Country Park

On of the main reasons for coming here this morning was to look for Holly Blues which seem to be having a very poor year around here this year. Well, on this count I was unsuccessful with none seen here today. This means that the only ones I have seen so far are still the single female and three or four males passing through my garden.

I didn't see any Brimstones here either and this is another species that seems to be having a rather poor spring around here, I have still not seen a female.

By around 11.00 it had become very warm and I retraced my route back towards home.

Back home in the garden later, I found a male Brimstone settled quite happily where he stayed for some time before being hassled by a Green-veined White which stirred him into action and he flew off. I have noticed previously that, although seldom settling through the morning and later in the afternoon, that they seem to dislike the midday sun on very warm days and will often take an extended rest...a bit like a siesta I suppose and for a similar reason.



Brimstone - Coverdale 23.04.2020

All the usual species were seen passing though the garden again, most of them supercharged in the warm sun but later in the afternoon some would occasionally stop for a brief refuel or to bask for a bit.



Green-veined White – Coverdale 23.04.2020



Orange-tip – Coverdale 23.04.2020



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 23.04.2020



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 23.04.2020



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 23.04.2020

A single Holly Blue also passed through rapidly later in the afternoon, the only one seen all day.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Apr-20 08:59 PM GMT

Really great shots again Neil my fave has to be the Small Tort – they're practically 'over' round my way and that one has very little orange on the hind wing – it gives it an almost Red Admiral appearance, though only a rear Admiral 😊 as the fore wings are definite 'Small Tort' 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Apr-20 09:51 PM GMT

Still looks to be plenty about round your way to keep you interested, Neil. Will it remain that way as we go through May?

Round my area, after the Marsh/Small Pearl Bordered Frits have withered away there's a bit of a gap until midsummer when not much is happening.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Apr-20 09:52 AM GMT

{quote=Wurzel post_id=152799 time=1588017559 user_id=9821} Really great shots again Neil my fave has to be the Small Tort – they're practically 'over' round my way and that one has very little orange on the hind wing – it gives it an almost Red Admiral appearance, though only a rear Admiral 😊 as the fore wings are definite 'Small Tort' 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. The Small Torts are definitely winding down here as well, as are the Peacocks. I guess the really warm April has burnt them out somewhat.

David M wrote:

Still looks to be plenty about round your way to keep you interested, Neil. Will it remain that way as we go through May?

Round my area, after the Marsh/Small Pearl Bordered Frits have withered away there's a bit of a gap until midsummer when not much is happening.

Thanks David. I should be ok into May – weather permitting, it has collapsed the past couple of days. No Fritillaries locally for me, or indeed Green Hairstreaks or spring skippers, but I should be able to find Small Copper, Common Blue and Small Heath. Then I have my 'June gap' until the summer species build up.

Friday 24th April.

It was forecast to be a cloudier day today with a drop in temperature before more unsettled conditions blew in, but after some early cloud had burnt off we ended up with yet another day of blues skies and sun.

After popping down the road to get some fresh bread and milk, I went out into the garden and spotted a male Brimstone flitting about. He returned to the Lilac bush a couple of times where I got a few shots and identified him as the same individual I had photographed the previous day. I'm still not seeing many Brimstones and still no females yet this year.

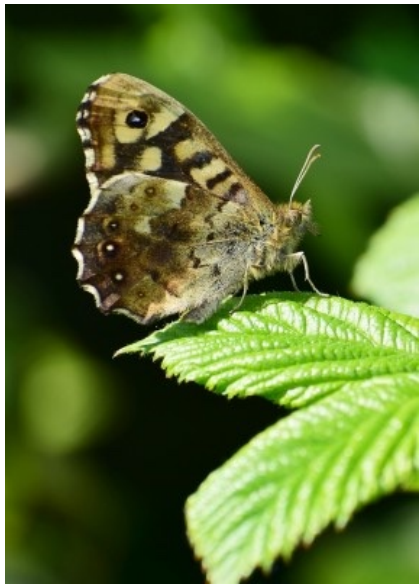


Brimstone – Coverdale 24.04.2020

The Speckled Woods were about;

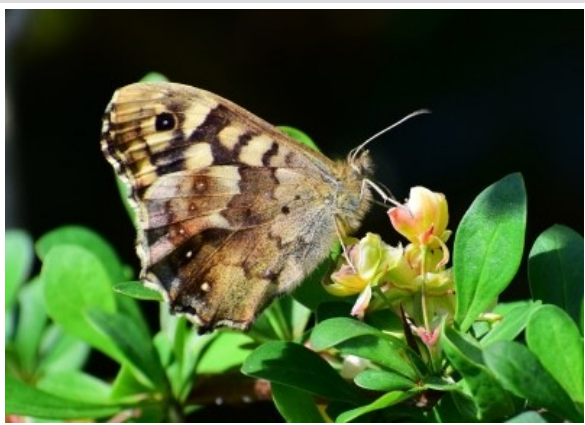


Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 24.04.2020



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 24.04.2020

This spring I have seen Speckled Woods nectaring from flowers more often than usual, especially females. I suspect that the recent dry weather has led to a lack of the honeydew that they would normally be using. I have a Japanese Barberry (*berberis thunbergii*) and the small yellow flowers on this shrub have been a particular favourite, but I have also seen them feeding on Lilac, Forget-me-nots and (Sweet?)Violets in my garden.



Speckled Wood female feeding on Berberis – Coverdale 24.04.2020



Speckled Wood female feeding on violet – Coverdale 24.04.2020

At least two different males were in the usual spots again and two females were hanging about. One of the females was spotted by a male and he tried his chances but was met by the 'play dead' pose that the females will usually adopt if not interested.



Speckled Wood pair, female 'playing dead' - Coverdale 24.04.2020

After a short while he backed off but took up station a couple of feet away and watched her.



Male Speckle watching the female - Coverdale 24.04.2020

After a minute or so he lost interest and flew off, upon which she 'came back to life' and flew up onto a Lilac flower.



Speckled Wood female on Lilac - Coverdale 24.04.2020

I have posted photos before showing how different light conditions can make the same individual butterfly look different and the shot below, of this same female, again illustrates this.



Speckled Wood female, the same one as the photo above.

My first trip away was due to be late in May, a few days in a B&B down on the Lizard in Cornwall. Given the current situation, I was expecting that this would be cancelled and had an email yesterday confirming this to be the case. It remains to be seen if any of my other planned trips later in the year will be effected.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-Apr-20 10:47 PM GMT

Cracking set of Specklie action Neil 😊 Sorry to hear about the cancelled trip – hopefully things will improve so you might be able to make some of the later ones, fingers crossed 🙏

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-Apr-20 10:10 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

..This spring I have seen Speckled Woods nectaring from flowers more often than usual, especially females. I suspect that the recent dry weather has led to a lack of the honeydew that they would normally be using.

I'm sure you're right, Neil. It's strange how you rarely see the spring brood nectaring yet the summer one can't keep of the bramble flowers!

Sorry to hear about your cancelled trip. It's impossible to predict when we'll be allowed to travel in our own countries right now, let alone abroad!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-May-20 07:24 PM GMT

Thanks for you comments Wurzel and David 😊.

I was expecting the Cornwall trip to be cancelled and was just awaiting the confirmation. Fingers crossed for some others I had planned but I suspect that the next one in late June will also be canned.

My attitude to this year now is that anything that I get to see outside of Solihull will be a bonus. There is always next year.

Sunday 26th April.

We finally started to see some clouds on Saturday (25th April) and by Sunday we were back to normal weekend weather with a mostly grey overcast and just a few short sunny periods. Butterfly activity had reduced in line with these conditions with just the occasional Speckled wood or white seen in the garden during the brighter spells.

Later in the afternoon, I was watching a male Orange-tip that had just flown in from next door during one of these brighter spells when the clouds covered the sun again and it went down on to a (Spanish) Bluebell. It would have been nicer if it had been a native Bluebell but I don't have those, these Spanish types have been there since we moved into the house and spring up all over the place.



Orange-tip male – Coverdale 26.04.2020

He then stayed there for well over an hour and I was beginning to wonder if he would roost there for the night when the sun reappeared for a couple of minutes and he was off straight away, with none of the brief opening of wings that they usually do. Perhaps he was in a rush to find a roosting spot where his camouflage worked better.

That was the the last butterfly of the day and the only butterfly I actually pointed my camera at over the weekend.

Monday 27th April.

A better day with more sun and a warmer feel than the weekend and although the wind was getting up again it didn't feel so cold.

As usual, Speckled Woods, Orange-tips and Green-veined and Small Whites were spotted during the day but once again no Holly Blues were seen. I have still only seen one Large White around here too.



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 27.04.2020



Small White – Coverdale 27.04.2020

I was watching a female Orange-tip at one point and was just about to take a photo when a male pounced on her. Having already seen a number of interactions this past week or so, with the female adopting the rejection pose, I was expecting the same this time. On this occasion however, the male was successful and with no apparent courtship they immediately coupled.



Orange-tip pair - Coverdale 27.04.2020



Orange-tip pair - Coverdale 27.04.2020



Orange-tip pair - Coverdale 27.04.2020

They stayed in this position for about 45 minutes, during which time the sun was mostly hidden behind clouds, separating only when the sun came out properly again for a bit. I did wonder if they would have stayed coupled for longer if the sun had stayed hidden.



Orange-tip pair – Coverdale 27.04.2020

They then went their separate ways, the female over the fence into the neighbours garden and the male just fluttering around a bit until another cloud came over and he settled to bask for a bit.



Orange-tip male – Coverdale 27.04.2020

We had been forecast a few showers for today but in the end it stayed dry all day and reasonably warm. Just as well really as there was plenty of rain in the forecast for the next few days...and they were not wrong about that.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-May-20 07:56 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Neil 🤔🍷 I too was lucky enough to witness my first OT copulation and they certainly don't hang about 🤔🙄 It does make me wonder why the males don't seem to understand the rejection posturing? 🙄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-May-20 07:23 PM GMT

That's quite something to observe a mating pair 4 weeks into their flight period, Neil.

You've really done superbly with this species this spring, probably better than anyone else on here.

Any more surprises? 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-May-20 10:11 AM GMT

[quote=Wurzel_post_id=152986_time=1588359375_user_id=9821] Cracking stuff Neil 🤔🍷 I too was lucky enough to witness my first OT copulation and they certainly don't hang about 🤔🙄 It does make me wonder why the males don't seem to understand the rejection posturing? 🙄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

They may well understand it Wurzel, it may just be persistence in the hope of wearing down her defenses...after all you can see similar behaviour in some humans 😊

David M wrote:

That's quite something to observe a mating pair 4 weeks into their flight period, Neil.

You've really done superbly with this species this spring, probably better than anyone else on here.

Any more surprises? 😊

Thanks David, I have been fortunate this year in having so much time available to watch them. Not much of anything else yet, I have only seen a few Specklies and Whites since the weather collapsed last week and it is still mostly cloudy and cool around here.

Garden Moths update.

The end of April saw my tally of garden moths standing at a total of 34 species made up of 23 macros and 11 micros. It has seemed a slow start to the year but checking my records for the past few years gives the following by the same time of year;

2019 – Macros 22, micros 11, Total 33

2018 – Macros 18, micros 12 Total 30

2017 – Macros 23, micros 15 Total 38

This shows that despite a run of poor trapping conditions through April, my results are fairly normal for me for this time of year. I reckon that spending the longer time at home under the current circumstances has led to a distorted impression. We are after all only now at the beginning of May which is when moth numbers in the garden usually start to increase.

April is usually the time when the first Pug Moths appear, many of this family of small moths being difficult to tell apart. I have had 5 species of these so far, Double-striped, Brindled, Oak-tree, Ochreous and Foxglove. Luckily I have had fresh examples of all of these making them easier to ID with the Foxglove Pug being one of the easier and more attractive members of this family.



Foxglove Pug – coverdale 26.04.2020

Another typical moth that usually appears in my garden around now is the Flame Shoulder, a common and widespread species and one that it is easy to see how it got its common name.



Flame Shoulder – Coverdale 26.04.2020



Flame Shoulder – Coverdale 26.04.2020

The Pale Prominent is one that only occasionally shows up here so I was pleased to get one on the night of 26th April. This moth has an interesting resting posture with its 'prominent' tufts and extra long palps helping to break up it's outline and make it look like a bit of twig.



Pale Prominent – Coverdale 26.04.2020

Whilst I was taking photos, it decided to start warming up by vibrating it's wings, as many moths do before take off. I quickly put the camera on sports mode and clicked away, hoping to catch a shot or two in focus, and was quite chuffed with the result.



Pale Prominent – Coverdale 26.04.2020

This past week, the weather has collapsed and like most areas we had a lot of rain, in fact two days constant Tuesday through Wednesday. Thursday and Friday were cloudy and cold with some heavy showers and the weekend has been mostly cloudy and cool here. Next week is looking more promising, both during the day and at night, with temperatures looking to rise by the end of the week.

Fingers crossed I may be able to get out and start looking for some more local butterflies.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-May-20 08:25 PM GMT

That Pale Prominent Neil reminds me of a line from 'Roxanne' (the movie not the Police hit) – to misquote "when the Lord gave out Palps, when he came to you, well he just keep on giving!" 🤪🤪 I love the kinks in the fore wings as well 😊 The Foxglove Pug is a bit of a beauty 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 05-May-20 09:23 AM GMT

Lovely shots of the Speckie Neil, my garden full of flowers and my Speckie lands on an hose pipe 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 05-May-20 11:17 PM GMT

Just catching up with what you've been seeing, Neil. The Orange Tip sequence is particularly interesting – you get so used to the typical rejection behaviour that when they actually do pair, for a moment you wonder what's happening! Difficult to get a shot too, of as it rarely happens right in front of you.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-May-20 08:55 AM GMT

[quote=Wurzel-post_id=153154-time=1588620310-user_id=9821] That Pale Prominent Neil reminds me of a line from 'Roxanne' (the movie not the Police hit) – to misquote "when the Lord gave out Palps,when he came to you, well he just keep on giving!" 😊😊 I love the kinks in the fore wings as well 😊 The Foxglove Pug is a bit of a beauty 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel, I love the way you can often think of an appropriate line from a song 😊

Goldie M wrote:

Lovely shots of the Speckie Neil, my garden full of flowers and my Speckie lands on an hose pipe 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie 😊 I know what you mean, all the plants in my garden and the Specklies squabble over a bit of dead tree.

[quote=millerd-post_id=153219-time=1588717027-user_id=9839] Just catching up with what you've been seeing, Neil. The Orange Tip sequence is particularly interesting – you get so used to the typical rejection behaviour that when they actually do pair, for a moment you wonder what's happening! Difficult to get a shot too, of as it rarely happens right in front of you.

Cheers,

Dave

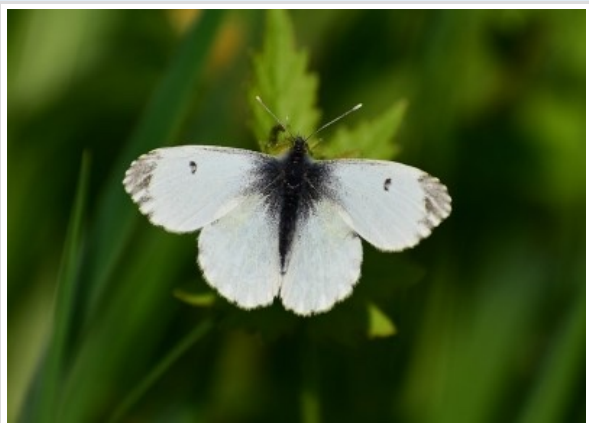
Thanks Dave. That was exactly what I was expecting to happen too and, like you say, it caught me a bit by surprise.

Monday 4th May

After the heavy rain last week, it remained cool, cloudy and showery for the rest of the week and over the weekend. The only butterflies I saw were a couple of whites that were being whisked along in the wind.

The thick cloud continued for the first half of Monday but then began to break up in the afternoon to let some sun break though, although the chill wind still made it feel a bit nippy.

Nevertheless, when the sun did come out it had enough strength to bring out a few butterflies in the garden with Orange-tips, Green-veined Whites, Small whites and Speckled Wood all showing up during the second half of the afternoon.



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 04.05.2020



Green-veined White – Coverdale 04.05.2020

One female Small White was interestingly marked with the lower set of black spots on her forewings almost split in two, similar to one that I saw that Goldie had in her garden the other day, although not so well defined in my case.



Small White female – Coverdale 04.05.2020

With Small Coppers, Common Blues and Brown Argus all now being reported from the midlands and the weather looking to improve later in the week, I am hoping to get out for a look for some of these locally myself.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-May-20 07:07 PM GMT

"I love the way you can often think of an appropriate line from a song 😊" I doooo like a bit of pop culture 😊😊
Cracking set of images Neil especially the final Small White – interesting that the wing tips are so pale yet the black spots are really dark and contrasting 😊😊 Good luck with the Lycaenids 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-May-20 09:41 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Those black spots almost look as if they have been dabbed on after with a black marker pen. No luck yet with the Lycaenids but it is still early for them around here.

Tuesday 5th May

A much sunnier day from the start but the cold wind from the east was still very much in evidence and quite blustery at times.

By mid morning it had warmed up enough to get some butterflies active in the garden with a couple of male Speckled Wood being the first to occupy their usual spots. Green-veined Whites soon joined them with one particular male that has been hanging around for a couple of days once again providing some photo opportunities.



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 05.05.2020



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 05.05.2020

With the turn in the weather last week and over the weekend, I had not been to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park for a while now so decided to have a walk down there early in the afternoon. The chilly wind could still be felt but the sky was almost clear of clouds and most of what I saw was quite active in the afternoon sun, particularly the whites which had greatly increased in number. These consisted of mostly Green-veined but with some Small Whites plus a few Orange-tips.



Small White male – Wagon Lane 05.05.2020

Just one Brimstone (male) was seen and no Large Whites again today.

Small Tortoiseshells are still hanging on with more seen today than on my last visit which was well over a week ago now. I reckon I saw at least a dozen with most of these looking the worst for wear now including some really tatty and almost transparent examples which were nevertheless still actively fluttering about. The one below was probably the best condition example I saw today.



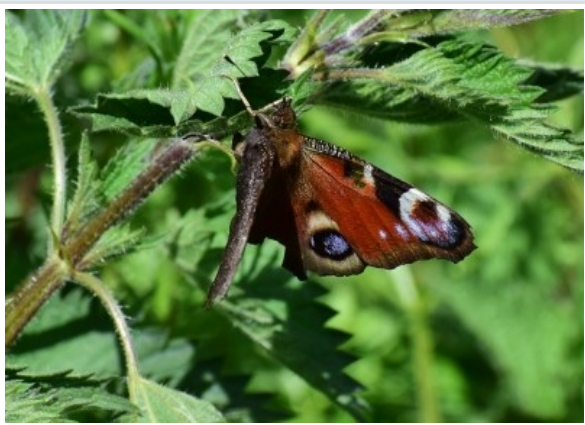
Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 05.05.2020

A couple of Peacocks were also seen, again past their best but no less active for that.



Peacock – Wagon Lane 05.05.2020

I watched one female fluttering around a large nettle bed and occasionally touching down to test the leaves. She finally found a suitable leaf and had just settled down to start laying when she was accosted by a raggedy Small Tortoiseshell and she flew off with the ST in pursuit.



Peacock, just before being accosted by a Small Tortoiseshell.

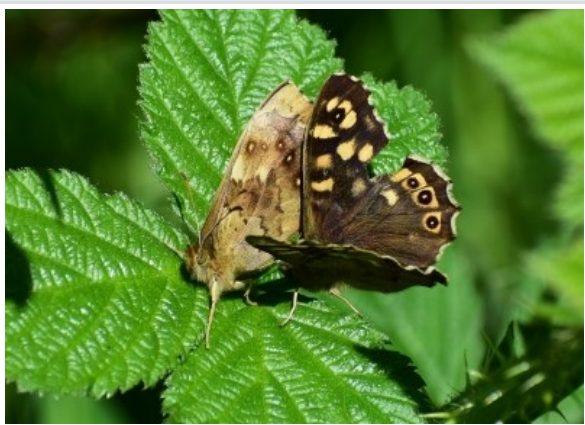
A nice surprise here today was my first Red Admiral of the year, a bit ragged with a large chunk of hind wing missing but my earliest ever for around here.



Red Admiral – Wagon Lane 05.05.2020

In the past I have recorded both Common Blue and Small Copper from here, albeit only in small numbers, but despite a good look around the likely areas I didn't find any today. Mind you, it is still early days for those two species around here, especially the Common Blues which tend to start later in May at my local spots.

Back home in the garden later in the afternoon I was just sitting there with a cuppa and watching the male Specklies chasing everything about when a female made the mistake of entering the line of sight of one of them. He chased after her, whereupon she dropped down and immediately played dead. It was quite amusing to watch him circle around and prod her with his antennae trying to get a reaction but he soon gave up and flew off.



Speckled Wood pair – Coverdale 05.05.2020



Speckled Wood pair – Coverdale 05.05.2020

As usual, once the male had departed, she then came back to life and flew off in the opposite direction.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-May-20 05:59 PM GMT

That Small Tort is in a very good state of repair Neil 😊😊 Lovely whites 😊 I've seen the playing dead routine a few times now and it always makes me chuckle one I saw was being hassled as she flew and she just dropped like a stone 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-May-20 08:19 AM GMT

Those Speckled Woods are comical, Neil. It's interesting how different females adopt different strategies for shaking the males off. 😊

Nice Small Tortoiseshell too; not seen one round my way for about 10 days now. The Small White is lovely too, rather more darkly marked than I would expect at this time of year.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-May-20 07:27 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel and David 😊

There are still quite a few Small Tortoiseshells around here but they are mostly looking a raggedy bunch now.

The Specklies can be quite entertaining and I am fortunate to have them in my garden for most of the season.

Wednesday 6th May.

Clear skies and a bright sun from the start and the breeze was much lighter today meaning that it soon warmed up.

After doing some little jobs around the house in the morning, I took another walk down the road to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park. I saw pretty much the same butterflies as yesterday, minus the Red Admiral, all of which were fully warmed up and charging around so I didn't bother trying to take any photos.

Back home again, I made myself a cuppa and went into the garden, this being my usual habit on nice days like this when I get back in. Whenever I go into the garden, I have got into the habit of automatically casting my eyes over a number of 'favourite spots' where butterflies will often settle. This time my eyes immediately fell upon a nice fresh looking male Orange-tip and, despite the warm mid afternoon, he stayed there long enough for me to grab my camera.



Orange-tip – Coverdale 06.05.2020

He then took a short fluttery flight down the garden before settling again and over the next fifteen minutes or so I watched as he flew up and down the garden taking short flights before settling to bask for a bit. His flight looked to be quite weak for a while and I suspect he may have just emerged, but whatever the reason, Orange-tips are not usually such co-operative subjects in the full afternoon sun like this.



Orange-tip - Coverdale 06.05.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 06.05.2020



Orange-tip - Coverdale 06.05.2020

My apologies for yet more Orange-tip photos but...well, you know 😊

After this period of fluttering up and down the garden, his flight became more normal and he took off over the neighbour's gardens in the usual manner.

Later, as I carried on pottering about, I noticed what at first I took to be a Large White fly in over the fence but when it proceeded to flutter around my Alder Buckthorns I realised it was a female Brimstone. This was the first female I have seen so far this year and I have only seen a handful of males, but having said that, Brimstones are never that numerous around here.

Anyway, I watched as she proceeded to lay on a number of leaves dotted around the two shrubs in this spot.



Brimstone female – Coverdale 06.05.2020



Brimstone female – Coverdale 06.05.2020

I planted these bushes about eight or nine years ago and they are now well over ten feet tall and getting a bit leggy so in need a bit of pruning back. She didn't seem to mind though and spent as much time around the tops of the bushes as lower down.

Between bouts of egg laying she would drop down and refuel on the dandelions that are dotted about the garden.



Brimstone female – Coverdale 06.05.2020

Other butterflies seen in the garden today included the usual Speckled Woods, Green-veined and Small Whites and a single Holly Blue.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 08-May-20 07:57 PM GMT

Hi Neil – that sequence with the Speckled Wood is really well captured and the Brimstone egg-laying is great. Seeing these behavioural shots is just so much more interesting than the usual poses wouldn't you say?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-May-20 08:27 PM GMT

Great report Neil really interesting to see the sequence of the Brimstone laying 😊 My fave shot tough has to be the OT on the Dandelion clock – I'm trying for my own 'Collection' of these shots but it's hard going 😞😞 Your OT would very nice in my collection 🍷🍷

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-May-20 02:52 PM GMT

Good to see your efforts to help your garden butterflies pay dividends, Neil. You should now have a chance to follow the larvae when they hatch.

Your Orange Tips are still looking in mint condition. Hard to believe they'll be gone in a couple of weeks.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-May-20 10:00 AM GMT

[quote=Pauline post_id=153329 time=1588964263 user_id=1095] Hi Neil – that sequence with the Speckled Wood is really well captured and the Brimstone egg-laying is great. Seeing these behavioural shots is just so much more interesting than the usual poses wouldn't you say?

Thanks Pauline. Indeed I would, sometimes I just enjoy sitting and watching the various behaviour of the different species.

[quote=Wurzel post_id=153334 time=1588966064 user_id=9821] Great report Neil really interesting to see the sequence of the Brimstone laying 😊 My fave shot tough has to be the OT on the Dandelion clock – I'm trying for my own 'Collection' of these shots but it's hard going 😞😞 Your OT would very nice in my collection 🍷🍷

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. I rather like shots on dandelion clocks myself. Green-veined Whites and Orange-tips in particular seem to be partial to settling on them.

David M wrote:

Good to see your efforts to help your garden butterflies pay dividends, Neil. You should now have a chance to follow the larvae when they hatch.

Your Orange Tips are still looking in mint condition. Hard to believe they'll be gone in a couple of weeks.

Thanks David. I have started following Brimstone larvae on these buckthorns a few times over the past few years but have never yet managed to keep track to final instar. I suspect they suffer from predation by the Great Tits that are always around the garden.

Thursday 7th May.

I decided to stretch the 'rules' a bit and drive round to my local spot at Castle Hills this afternoon which took under 10 minutes from my house. In truth, it would be possible to walk to here but that would take about an hour through residential roads and another hour for the walk back so I reckoned that time would be better spent actually on site.

I am getting a bit concerned about parts of this site as JLR are building a large new logistics hub very close by and I have a nasty feeling that further development will be expanding in this direction.

In fact, there is far too much development going on all around Solihull these days and it is no longer the pleasant town it used to be. The local council are obsessed with 'growth' and there are housing and business developments going up every where. And that is without the shambles of HS2 and it's associated development which has laid waste to a large area around the N.E.C. and continues to carve it's way through the countryside on it's way here.

Anyway, I digress. I was here to look for butterflies with my particular targets for today being Small Copper, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Small Heath. Out of these, Common Blue and Small Heath are usually the most numerous here but it is still a bit early for them. The timing should be better for Small Copper and Brown Argus but these two can both be a bit hit and miss here with only small numbers usually seen and some years none at all.

I soon saw plenty of other butterflies including Orange-tips, Green-veined and Small Whites and a few Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and Speckled Woods, all of which were very active in the warm afternoon sun. I didn't bother trying to take any photos of these as I was concentrating on looking for my targets and had chosen this time on purpose hoping that they would be more active and therefore easier to spot, although I realised that taking photos would be a challenge. The afternoon sun also seems brighter and 'harsher' than usual this year, probably due to less atmospheric pollution due to the 'lockdown'.

I made my way around the likely areas where I have seen my target species before and my first success appeared in the shape of a nice fresh female Small Copper.



Small Copper female – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020

About a hundred yards further on I spotted a male darting about and soon picked out his favourite perches which he kept returning to.



Small Copper male – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020



Small Copper male – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020



Small Copper male – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020

A carried on around my circuit and disturbed a small orangey brown butterfly which proved to be a Small Heath. I managed to track it to where it landed down amongst the grass and managed a couple of record shots before it was off again and I lost sight of it.



Small Heath – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020

Things were looking good, two of my targets seen and I had only been here about 30 minutes so far. I then followed the footpath into a second meadow area and was greeted by a flash of bright blue rapidly flying back and forth above the grass. This could only be a male Common Blue and I watched until it finally settled long enough for me to sneak up and get a couple of shots...on a dandelion clock no less (Wurzel).



Common Blue – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020



Common Blue – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020

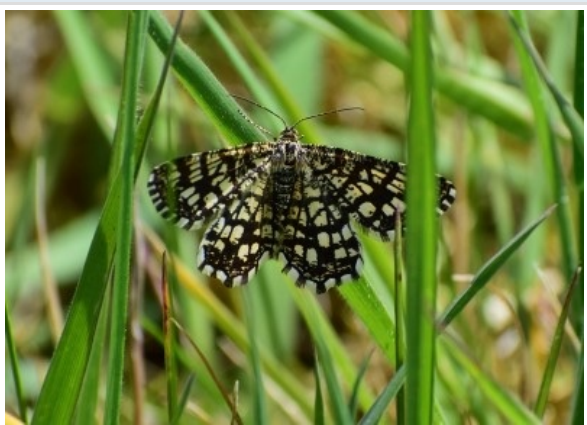
A second male Common Blue turned up and for a while they chased each other about until they both disappeared over the boundary hedge.

I then began to circle back and checking in the last corner of the meadow spotted a small silvery shape flying about. This was my fourth and final target, a Brown Argus, a male that looked like he had been around for a few days.



Brown Argus – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020

As well as the butterflies, there were quite a few day flying moths about including Latticed Heath, Cinnabar, Small Yellow Underwing and a couple of Mother Shipton. As with the butterflies these were very flighty and difficult to get close to plus when they did settle it was usually low down in the grass.



Latticed Heath – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020



Cinnabar Moth – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020



Small Yellow Underwing – Castle Hills Solihull 07.05.2020

A cracking afternoon in the end with all my targets seen. The final tally was two each of Small Copper and Common Blue and singles of Small Heath and Brown Argus. Only small numbers but it is still early for these here and Small Heath is the only one ever seen in any numbers here anyway.

I didn't count the supporting cast but Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites appeared numerous, with Small Whites, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and Speckled Wood in fewer numbers. Singles of Comma and Brimstone were also seen.

No Holly Blues again...I am seriously beginning to think that Dave Miller has hijacked them all, like a latter day Pied Piper calling them down the M40.

Hopefully I will be able to return here for another look, although it will probably be in about a week or so after the forecast cold snap early next week.

I am now on 15 species and don't expect to add any more now until the summer skippers and browns start to emerge.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-May-20 04:37 PM GMT

It's great when you get all of your targets 😊 Lovely shots of the Coppers and Argus but I think you can guess which was my fave shot 🤩👍👍 I managed to get one for my collection the other day 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-May-20 08:40 PM GMT

Your images prove that we are now moving to a new stage of the season, Neil, with grassland species such as Brown Argus, Common Blue and Small Copper filling in for the likes of Comma, Small Tortoiseshell & Brimstone.

This will continue for much of the rest of the month until the next batch of arrivals appear – Large Skipper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, etc.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 10-May-20 09:10 PM GMT

Good to see those Common Blues, Neil. 😊 Curiously enough your area seems to be a bit ahead of mine in that respect, as I've only seen a couple, and

at a distance at that. They are glorious when new like that.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-May-20 11:31 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, love your shots of the Common Blue, Coppers, we may be able to travel now so that should help reap some more Butterflies in. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-May-20 10:04 AM GMT

`[quote=Wurzel post_id=153401 time=1589125056 user_id=9821]` It's great when you get all of your targets 😊 Lovely shots of the Coppers and Argus but I think you can guess which was my fave shot 😊🍷🍷 I managed to get one for my collection the other day 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. Yep, I reckon I know 😊

David M wrote:

Your images prove that we are now moving to a new stage of the season, Neil, with grassland species such as Brown Argus, Common Blue and Small Copper filling in for the likes of Comma, Small Tortoiseshell & Brimstone.

This will continue for much of the rest of the month until the next batch of arrivals appear – Large Skipper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, etc.

Thanks David. Those four species in that last report, along with the day flying moths, will see me through the next few weeks. Small Copper and Brown Argus in particular can be very hit and miss at my local spots so always worth looking for

`[quote=millerd post_id=153415 time=1589141446 user_id=9839]` Good to see those Common Blues, Neil. 😊 Curiously enough your area seems to be a bit ahead of mine in that respect, as I've only seen a couple, and at a distance at that. They are glorious when new like that.

Cheers,

Dave

Cheers Dave. Yes, they are a bit early, I would normally expect them in a week or so but I guess all that warm spring weather has brought them on a bit.

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, love your shots of the Common Blue, Coppers, we may be able to travel now so that should help reap some more Butterflies in. 😊 Goldie 😊

Thanks Goldie. Yes, it looks like we can travel a bit more now, just as the weather turns much colder.

Well, we all know how cold it has gone over the past couple of days but at least it has given me a chance to catch up on my;

Garden Moths.

Since my last update, I have added another 20 species for the year, consisting of 16 macros and 4 micros. Things remained slow up until the end of last week when the forecasts actually tempted me to run the trap for three consecutive nights. This is something that I wouldn't normally do but after so many frustratingly clear and cold nights I couldn't resist it.

As it happened, the forecast partial cloud failed to materialise on the the night of Thursday 8th resulting in yet another clear and cold one. This produced just 4 of 4 macros but these did include a new for garden (NFG) Golden-rod Pug and two new for year (NFY) of Waved Umber and May Highflyer. The 4th macro was a Brimstone Moth which I have already had a couple of this year. A few micros – 5 Light Brown Apple Moths and 3 Tachystola acroantha plus singles of Bee Moth and Small Magpie – also came to the trap giving a total of 14 moth of 8 species.



Waved Umber – Coverdale 07.05.2020

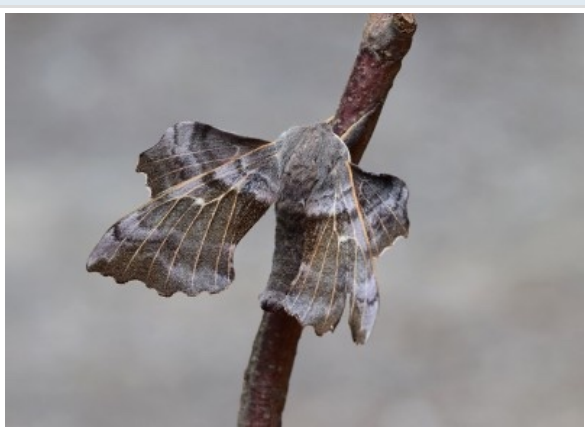
Friday night (9th May) was again looking promising with a build up of cloud from late afternoon so I set the trap up again only for the heavens to open about half an hour later and deliver a deluge of biblical proportions for about an hour. As the trap was already turned on I left it (the electrics are sealed and there is a rain guard over the light tubes) and was glad I did as although the resulting catch was again small with just 5 of 4 macros, they included NFYs of Flame Carpet and Mottled Pug and best of all, a Lime Hawk Moth. A couple of Shuttle-shaped Darts completed the macros. Again a few LBAMs (4) and *T. acroxantha* (6), along with singles of Bee Moth and *Sydemis musculana*, made up a total of 17 moths of 9 species.



Lime Hawk Moth – Coverdale 08.05.2020

Saturday night came and again I watched a nice layer of cloud build up and temperatures looked to be staying mild overnight so I was tempted to run the trap for the third night on the run. This time the conditions remained good all night and produced my best catch so far this year with 70 moths of 26 species made up of 37 of 20 macros and 33 of 6 micros. Highlights were a NFG of Chinese Character and 9 NFYs of Poplar Hawk Moth, Heart & Dart, Knot Grass, Garden Carpet, Common Marbled Carpet, Spruce Carpet, Yellow-barred Brindle, Least Black Arches and Lime-speck Pug.

Strangely enough, I didn't get a Poplar Hawk last year despite getting a few to the trap in previous years, so I was chuffed to get this one.



Poplar Hawk Moth – Coverdale 09.05.2020

The Chinese Character has markings and a resting posture that mimic a bird dropping, a camouflage that is apparently very effective as I have read of instances where birds have picked moths off from the outside of traps but left Chinese Characters alone.



Chinese Character – Coverdale 09.05.2020

The Lime-speck Pug has a similar colour scheme for similar reasons and is one of the few Pug Moths that can be instantly identified.



Lime-speck Pug – Coverdale 09.05.2020

The Least Black Arches is an attractive little moth that is classed as a macro despite being no larger than many micros. This is just one of many examples that shows that the difference is a purely arbitrary one and is based on families rather than size.



Least Black Arches – Coverdale 09.05.2020

Another Pale Prominent, the second for the year, made a liar of me when I said the other week that I only get one of these every other year.



Pale Prominent – Coverdale 09.05.2020

The Brimstone Moth is an abundant species which I always get a load of but its bright yellow colour is always welcome at this time of year. I had 3 in the trap on Saturday.



Brimstone Moth – Coverdale 09.05.2020

And, a few of the rest, all species that I get every year in varying numbers.



Knot Grass – Coverdale 09.05.2020



Mottled Pug – Coverdale 09.05.2020



Yellow-barred Brindle – Coverdale 09.05.2020



Spruce Carpet – Coverdale 09.05.2020



Common Marbled Carpet – Coverdale 09.05.2020

With the return to colder weather, we had a light frost here this morning, I have not run the trap again since Saturday but it is looking better again later in the week.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 12-May-20 03:07 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I've just found a large Moth in the kitchen and posted it , Any Idea what it's called 🤔 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-May-20 08:00 PM GMT

Lovely set of Moffs Neil 😊😁 – especially the Knot Grass I feel like little eyes are following me round the room 🤪🤪

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-May-20 09:21 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, I've just found a large Moth in the kitchen and posted it , Any Idea what it's called 🤔 Goldie 😊

Hi Goldie. I have just posted on your PD. I think it is a Cabbage Moth but not 100% sure.

[quote=Wurzel-post_id=153499-time=1589310048-user_id=9821] Lovely set of Moffs Neil 😊😊 – especially the Knot Grass I feel like little eyes are following me round the room 🤪🤪

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. It is amazing how many moths (and some butterflies) have evolved to have a sort of face or eyes on their wings, even if they are not always obvious to us.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 13-May-20 10:27 PM GMT

You really do present us with some fascinating moths, Neil.

The obvious eye-catchers are the hawk moths but some of the others have a real understated beauty, such as the yellow-barred brindle and the common marbled carpet.

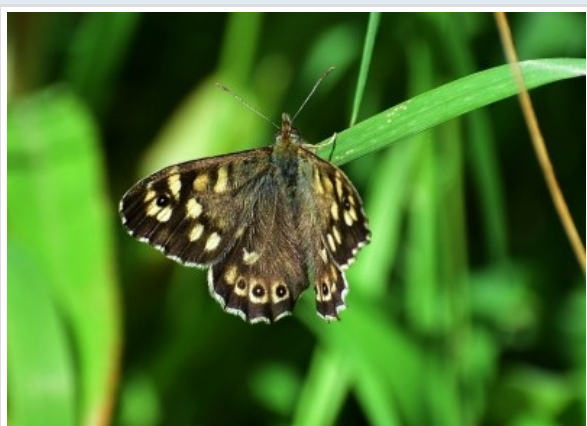
Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-May-20 09:32 PM GMT

Thanks David. As you say the Hawk Moths are the eye-catchers but out of that lot it was the Chinese Character that I was most chuffed with as it was a first for the garden.

Wednesday 13th May

After a couple of days of cloudy and cold weather, it improved a bit here on Wednesday...just a bit. It was still mostly cloudy with a bitterly cold wind blowing from the north but at least the sun was making a bit more of an effort and later in the afternoon it almost felt pleasant. This was enough to bring out a few butterflies in the garden with a couple of Small Whites and a single Speckled Wood making an appearance.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 13.05.2020



Small White - Coverdale 13.05.2020

A male Holly Blue also fluttered in but took shelter from the breeze in the brambles which enabled me to take only my second Holly Blue shot so far this year.



Holly Blue - Coverdale 13.05.2020

He stayed put for the remaining time I was out there, which wasn't that long as the chill wind was starting to make my fingers and nose feel cold so I went back inside.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-May-20 11:04 AM GMT

More lovely shots Neil - especially like the Small White lush 🥰🍃 Hopefully things should pick up in the coming days and get back to where they should be - that blast from the North was a bit of a shocker - all the pupils (keyworkers children and vulnerables) were moaning when I was in as the heating was turned off in March 😞😞

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-May-20 09:11 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. We had our heating on in the house during the day again for a couple of days last week, very unusual for us in May 🤪

Thursday 14th May.

A cold night and another frosty morning but the wind had dropped a bit and as the sun gained some height it began to turn into a nice morning although there was still an underlying chill in the air.

The same male Speckled Wood from yesterday was soon up and laying claim to his corner...



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 14.05.2020

...and a Green-veined White was soaking up the morning sun.



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 14.05.2020

Most of the morning was taken up with household stuff and a walk to my local shop but by early afternoon I was done and decided to walk down to my local spot by the park at Wagon Lane.

By now it was quite pleasant with a mixture of long sunny spells and some white clouds slowly moving across the blue sky. The breeze, although not as strong as on previous days still felt cold in the more exposed areas but it felt a few degrees warmer in the more sheltered spots.

A few Small and Green-veined Whites were seen along with a single Speckled Wood and a couple of raggedy Small Tortoiseshells were still hanging on. A single Orange-tip was spotted making his way along the hedge line and stopping occasionally for a top up.



Orange-tip – Wagon Lane 14.05.2020

With most of the adult hibernators now finished here, it was much quieter today with no more than a dozen butterflies seen, mostly patrolling whites.

Back home later in the afternoon, I spent some time pottering about in the garden again and watched a Small and Green-veined White (probably the same GVW from the morning) flutter up and down and chase each other every time they met. After each of these little incidents they would separate and both settle for a refuel.



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 14.05.2020



Small White male – Coverdale 14.05.2020

I also watched a female Holly Blue, only the second female I have seen so far this year, as she fluttered about a pyracantha and repeatedly settled on the flower buds and appeared to lay eggs. I have seen this behaviour in previous years but have yet to actually find any eggs or larvae on this plant. Mind you this is a fairly large shrub and pyracantha is not the easiest to search with its dense growth and sharp thorns keeping many clusters of flower buds out of reach.



Holly Blue female on Pyracantha – Coverdale 14.05.2020

Despite the bright sunlight, the slight but still chilly breeze must have cooled her down enough for her to stop a few times and pose nicely for some photos. A little worn and faded perhaps but the highlight of the day for me.



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 14.05.2020



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 14.05.2020



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 14.05.2020

That brought my total number of Holly Blues seen this year up to eight, six males and two females, all of them in my garden. Despite looking, I have not seen any at all at my local sites. In contrast to what I am seeing reported from many other areas, Holly Blues are having a very poor year around here. I am wondering if we are at a low point in the parasite/host cycle here and am also wondering if this cycle progresses at different rates in different areas. For example one location could be at a high point in abundance with another part of the country being at a low point, with other areas somewhere in between. It would certainly help to explain the large differences in abundance I am seeing reported this year.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 17-May-20 09:34 AM GMT

Great shots, Neil. I'm glad a female Holly Blue finally performed for you, and it's a shame you haven't had a few more. 😊 When they are laying (rather

like Brown Hairstreaks) they tend to stop and bask between bouts apparently to recover some energy. With the right amount of incoming sunshine (not too bright, not too shady) they will open up nicely. I'm inclined to agree with your theory around the parasite cycle being unsynchronised across the country – there's no reason why it should be, and it would boost depleted colonies if their neighbours had a spillover of surplus – thus helping maintain the overall population. Holly Blues do seem to range quite widely from their home hedgerows.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-May-20 08:18 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the Holly Blue Neil – especially like the way that the light catches her and gives her an almost Adonis/electric blue sheen 😊🌿 Also that Small White is a corker with the beautiful lemon tips – lush 😊🌿

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-May-20 08:57 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...That brought my total number of Holly Blues seen this year up to eight, six males and two females, all of them in my garden. Despite looking, I have not seen any at all at my local sites. In contrast to what I am seeing reported from many other areas, Holly Blues are having a very poor year around here.

I am wondering if we are at a low point in the parasite/host cycle here and am also wondering if this cycle progresses at different rates in different areas. For example one location could be at a high point in abundance with another part of the country being at a low point, with other areas somewhere in between. It would certainly help to explain the large differences in abundance I am seeing reported this year.

Great to see a female Holly Blue posing like that in your garden, Neil. You may indeed have a valid point regarding local abundance/scarcity of this species.

The last three have proved pretty spectacular for HB round my neck of the woods, but I'm aware there are other areas where few have been noted.

I guess if in a couple of years you are seeing many dozens and I'm struggling to hit double figures then the theory will have been proved!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-May-20 07:03 PM GMT

`{quote=millerd_post_id=153716 time=1589704450 user_id=9839}` Great shots, Neil. I'm glad a female Holly Blue finally performed for you, and it's a shame you haven't had a few more. 😊 When they are laying (rather like Brown Hairstreaks) they tend to stop and bask between bouts apparently to recover some energy. With the right amount of incoming sunshine (not too bright, not too shady) they will open up nicely. I'm inclined to agree with your theory around the parasite cycle being unsynchronised across the country – there's no reason why it should be, and it would boost depleted colonies if their neighbours had a spillover of surplus – thus helping maintain the overall population. Holly Blues do seem to range quite widely from their home hedgerows.

Cheers,

Dave

Thanks Dave. It will be interesting to see what the summer brood is like here this year.

`{quote=Wurzel_post_id=153752 time=1589743125 user_id=9821}` Lovely shots of the Holly Blue Neil – especially like the way that the light catches her and gives her an almost Adonis/electric blue sheen 😊🌿 Also that Small White is a corker with the beautiful lemon tips – lush 😊🌿

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. I notice that with most of the blues, the colour can change by a surprising degree depending on the angle that the light catches them.

David M wrote:

Great to see a female Holly Blue posing like that in your garden, Neil. You may indeed have a valid point regarding local abundance/scarcity of this species.

The last three have proved pretty spectacular for HB round my neck of the woods, but I'm aware there are other areas where few have been noted.

I guess if in a couple of years you are seeing many dozens and I'm struggling to hit double figures then the theory will have been proved!

Thanks David. Yes, it will be interesting to keep an eye on things over the next few years.

Sunday 17th May.

Friday and Saturday were both quite dull days here with a thick cloud cover and the few short times that the sun broke through did nothing to raise the temperatures so it still felt quite cool.

Sunday was better with a bit less cloud but the main difference was that the wind shifted from the northerly blow we had been having to a much more pleasant breeze from the west.

Early afternoon I decided to pay a return visit to my local spot at Castle Hills at Solihull. I came here the other week and said I would return in a few days but the cold snap last week has meant that it is now 10 days before I have come back.

I spent about two hours wandering around the various paths along the hedgerows and through the meadows here and reckon I saw something like 35 to 40 butterflies all told. Not great numbers but given the conditions which remained mostly cloudy with a few sunny spells, I thought was pretty reasonable for around here.

Most numerous species was now Small Heath with at least 15 seen scattered about all over site.



Small Heath - Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Small Heath - Castle Hills 17.05.2020

And one for Wurzel 😊



Small Heath - Castle Hills 17.05.2020

Second place surprisingly went to Peacocks with at least 8 counted and possibly a couple more. Most of these were showing their now considerable age but a couple were in remarkable condition still given how long they have now been around.



Peacock - Castle Hills 17.05.2020

Also looking his age was a single Small Tortoiseshell.



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 17.05.2020

Half a dozen or so unidentified whites were seen, mostly too distant to be sure of their ID but one Green-veined White did settle just long enough to confirm.

A single Orange-tip was also seen fluttering around a small patch of cuckoo flower. I did not notice until I looked at the photo below afterwards, but there appears to be a (blurred) first instar OT larva in the top left of the shot.



Orange-tip - Castle Hills 17.05.2020

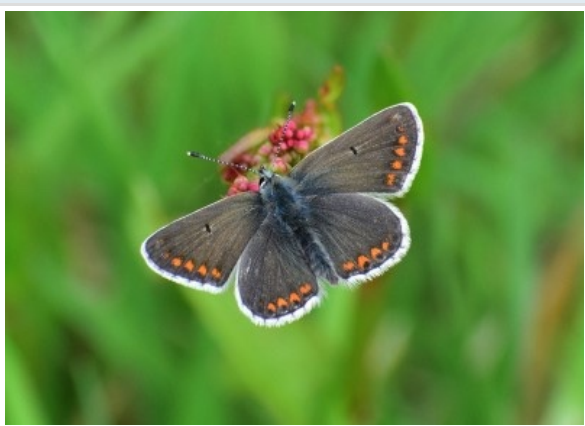
As with my last visit I was on the lookout for Small Copper, Common Blue and Brown Argus and was pleased to find all three again albeit in small numbers (2, 2 and 1 respectively). Truth is, Small Copper and Brown Argus are never found at this site in large numbers and some years I have not found any here at all so I was chuffed with these.



Small Copper male - Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Small Copper female - Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 17.05.2020

The Common Blue were both fresh males so there is plenty of time for more to emerge here.



Common Blue male – Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Common Blue male – Castle Hills 17.05.2020

A few day flying moths were also seen including a couple of Cinnabars and Latticed Heath and a few Mother Shiptons to complete a pretty decent afternoon given the borderline conditions.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 20-May-20 05:22 PM GMT

A real mix of the old and the new in that last sequence, Neil. That Tortoiseshell is a real survivor. I don't think I've seen one at all during May and don't expect to. Similarly, your Orange Tip will be one of the last; there are still a few stragglers round my way but give it another week and I reckon they'll be gone till next spring. 😊

On the other hand, your Common Blues look beautifully fresh, and your images of Small Heath are evidence of the weather conditions – in warm, sunny weather they are on the go all the time – cloudy and cool and they will pose.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-May-20 09:49 PM GMT

Thanks David. We often Get Small Tortoiseshell lasting through May and into early June here but with all the warm weather we have had this spring, I can't see them lasting much longer. Same goes for the Orange-tips although I am still seeing a couple on most days although they are non stop in the heat this week.

Monday 18th May – Bishops Hill

Most years we pay a visit to Bishops Hill in Warwickshire as this is a reliable site for Small Blue and Dingy Skippers with the added bonus of a few Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks, none of which can be found on my local patch. Jane also likes it here as she can see plenty of butterflies from the paths that she needs to stay on because of her limited mobility.

This site is a 40 minute drive down the M42 and M40 which is further than I was comfortable going under the 'lockdown' but with the recent relaxation of the rules this was now possible.

So it was that we set off on Monday (18th) morning and arrived about 10.30 under a nice mix of cloud and sun and the temperature already up in the high teens. The traffic getting out of Solihull had been almost back to pre lockdown density but the motorways were still much quieter than I am used to.

As is often the case here, my first target, Small Blue, was seen immediately on entering through the gate with a few individuals in the patch of grass before the first hedge.

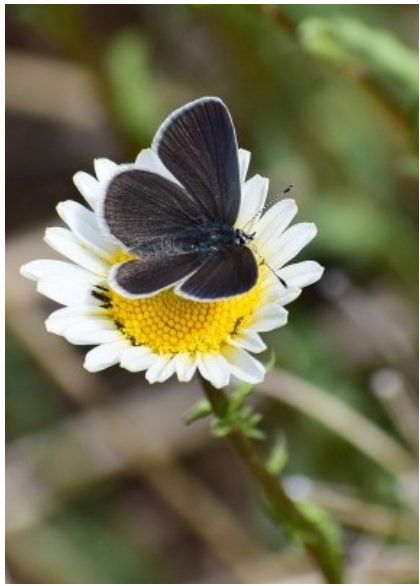


Small Blue – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

It was soon obvious that Small Blues were out in good numbers and during the couple of hours that we spent here I reckon there was easily 50 plus spread around the usual spots.



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Small Blue - Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Small Blue - Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Small Blue - Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

Three pairs in cop were seen, two of which were hidden down in the vegetation but given away by other males trying to get in on the act. Conversely, the pair below was sitting out in full view but being left alone.

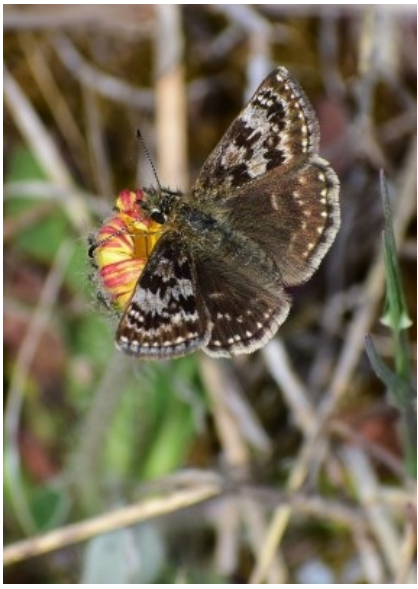


Small Blue pair – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

Dingy Skippers were almost as numerous with many of them now faded and living up to their common name but there were also some looking to be quite fresh.



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

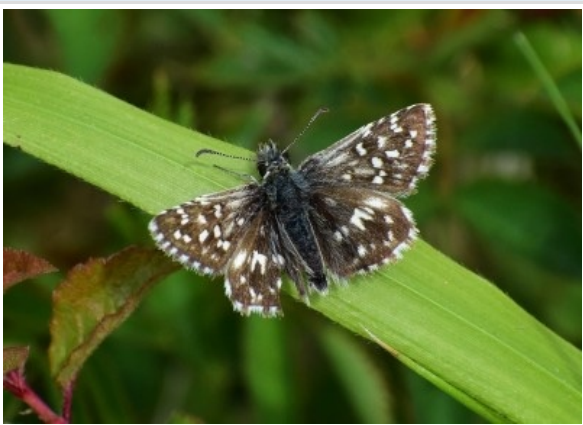


Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

I have seen Grizzled Skippers here in the past but only usually in small numbers so am always pleased to see them here. The first one that I saw was looking a bit worse for wear but a bit later I spotted another one basking on the path. I also think I spotted a third one but this may have been one of those already seen.



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

As with the Grizzlies, I have often seen the occasional Green Hairstreak here and was chuffed to see two different individuals today. The first one was a real raggedy looking example but the second one was a bit better albeit not exactly fresh.



Green Hairstreak – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

This is often the site where I see my first Common Blues but this year my local spot at Castle Hills has beaten it. This is undoubtedly due to the warm spells we have had this spring bringing them out earlier than usual. Even so, numbers here today were much higher than my local spot showing that the season, as usual, is that bit more advanced on the limestone here.



Common Blue – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Common Blue – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

Other butterflies seen were a few Brimstones and unidentified whites plus a single male Orange-tip. All of these were actively patrolling apart from a female Brimstone that was checking out the scrub for buckthorn.



Brimstone female – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

Day flying moths seen included a couple each of Mother Shipton, Burnet Companion and Cinnabar plus a few of what I think were Lesser Treble-bar, although these are difficult to separate from the very similar Treble-bar.



Lesser Treble-bar Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

It was also noticeable how dry everything looked here. It is a dry site at the best of times but we have not had much rain recently and this was the driest I have ever seen it here with some of the vegetation looking parched and desiccated. We don't have much rain forecast for here in the foreseeable future either.

So then, my first trip away from my local patch this year and four species that not too long ago I thought I would be leaving for next year. This has helped a bit to take the sting out of the fact that we would have been going down to Cornwall this week but, as mentioned before, this had been cancelled.

We have also now heard that our next trip, a week's family break in Dorset in June, has also been cancelled. This was not unexpected as it would have been on a caravan site and most sites are closed until at least early July pending further guidance from the government.

Things are looking up but there is still some way to go, lets hope that circumstances continue to improve and we don't get any setbacks.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-May-20 07:42 PM GMT

A cracking selection again Neil 😊 Those Small Blues are lush as are the Greenstreak, Common Blues but I wish I'd not said anything about butterflies on Dandelion clocks now 🤔🤔🤔🤔

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-May-20 11:21 PM GMT

Great that you got to see a few species that don't occur locally, Neil. You've done justice to all of them, especially the Small Blues.

The second Dingy is particularly impressive. It's a surprisingly lovely butterfly when mint fresh.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 22-May-20 09:32 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, lovely sequence of shots there, all the Butterflies with the exception of the Common Blue we don't get locally and we've to go to the Lake District for the other's, I bet it felt great to get out and about, it did for me 😊 Those Small Blue shots are great

🤔🤔 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-May-20 07:14 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, David and Goldie, it was certainly good to get out a bit further 😊

Tuesday 19th May

With a nice sunny morning and the day forecast to become rather warm in the afternoon I took a morning walk down to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park before it got too hot.

A few whites were already in full on patrolling mode as were a couple of Orange-tips and a single male Brimstone but that was it in the way of butterflies. It looks like all the ex-hibernating nymphalids have gone now for this year.

Given the number of Small Tortoiseshells that had been here a few week ago, I thought I would have a look for larval webs and quickly found a couple.



Small Tortoiseshell Larvae - Wagon Lane 19.05.2020



Small Tortoiseshell Larvae – Wagon Lane 19.05.2020

Most of the nettle beds are now deep within lush vegetation and are not easy to reach so I reckon there are more hidden away out of sight.

Wednesday 20th May.

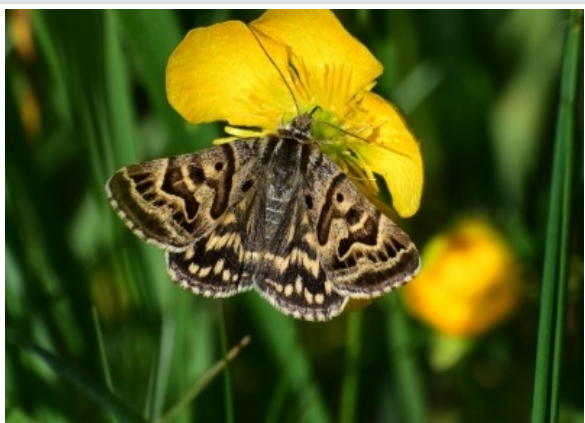
With another hot one forecast we took a short drive around to Sheldon County Park for a morning walk. I have walked here from our house a couple of times during the past few weeks but today we drove round to the car park so that Jane could come with me as she could not manage the full distance with her limited mobility.

As with the previous day at Wagon Lane, butterflies were now in short supply with just a few patrolling whites and a couple of male Orange-tips seen to start with. Common Blues can usually be found here and we found just a single male zipping about one meadow area, far too lively for any decent photos so just grabbed a couple of record shots. I might have another look next week to see if any more have emerged.



Common Blue – Sheldon Country Park 20.05.2020

A number of Mother Shipton and Burnet Companion Moths were also seen. These can both be difficult to approach at the best of times and today was no exception with the warm sun shining down from cloudless blue skies.



Mother Shipton – Sheldon Country Park 20.05.2020



Burnet Companion – Sheldon Country Park 20.05.2020

This site runs alongside Birmingham Airport which is usually busy with take offs and landings every few minutes but in the hour and a half we were here today we only saw one plane.



By 11.00 it was getting rather warm so we headed back home.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-May-20 07:25 PM GMT

Stunning shot of the Mother Shipton Neil – did you use manual focus on that one – as whenever I try for a shot using autofocus they seem to hear/sense it and they're gone? Interesting to see that they come in different shades and hues – the ones I see are often grey and white but yours has a lovely creamy colour in place of the white 🤔👍

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pete Eeles, 22-May-20 07:53 PM GMT

[quote=Wurzel_post_id=153970_time=1590171954_user_id=9821] Stunning shot of the Mother Shipton Neil – did you use manual focus on that one – as whenever I try for a shot using autofocus they seem to hear/sense it and they're gone? Interesting to see that they come in different shades and hues – the ones I see are often grey and white but yours has a lovely creamy colour in place of the white 🤔👍

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

I agree – and the Burnet Companion. If you'd taken those shots this time, last year, they would have ended up in a book 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 23-May-20 11:18 PM GMT

Nice to see those thriving Small Tortoiseshell larvae, Neil. Means that a fresh brood is in the pipeline. 😊

Even better are those images of the Mother Shipton & Burnet Companion –it's almost as though you've replaced the perfect pose of one with the other seamlessly!

The Mother Shipton is much darker than the ones I'm used to seeing, and although I've seen a few this year, none of them have settled in such a way as to allow me an image even approaching yours!

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 24-May-20 07:34 AM GMT

Superb images on this page of your diary, Neil.
For me the Small Blue selection is the stand out set.
Could you sent some of those Small Tort. cats. down to East Sussex!.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-May-20 09:23 AM GMT

[quote=Wurzel_post_id=153970_time=1590171954_user_id=9821] Stunning shot of the Mother Shipton Neil – did you use manual focus on that one – as whenever I try for a shot suing autofocus they seem to hear/sense it an they're gone? Interesting to see that they come in different shades and hues – the ones I see are often grey and white but yours has a lovely creamy colour in place of the white 😊🌿

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. All taken on auto focus. I always have the assist lamp turned off as this will spook butterflies and moths. They were also taken from about 3 feet away with my 70-300 lens and the photos cropped a bit.
I find Mother Shiptons to be quite variable. Some have a yellow/brown look and some, like you say are grey/white. Not sure if this is a male/female thing or if both sexes show the two forms.

Pete Eeles wrote:

I agree – and the Burnet Companion. If you'd taken those shots this time, last year, they would have ended up in a book 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Thanks Pete. Oh well! I was chuffed with the number of my photos that made it into your book anyway. Maybe a second edition 😊😊

David M wrote:

Nice to see those thriving Small Tortoiseshell larvae, Neil. Means that a fresh brood is in the pipeline. 😊

Even better are those images of the Mother Shipton & Burnet Companion –it's almost as though you've replaced the perfect pose of one with the other seamlessly!

The Mother Shipton is much darker than the ones I'm used to seeing, and although I've seen a few this year, none of them have settled in such a way as to allow me an image even approaching yours!

Thanks David. I will definitely be looking for the summer brood Small Tortoiseshells here in due course.
That Mother Shipton was nice and fresh, they do fade a bit. I have seen a few more last week but very flighty on the warm days we had here.

[quote=trevor_post_id=154029_time=1590302091_user_id=13654] Superb images on this page of your diary, Neil.
For me the Small Blue selection is the stand out set.
Could you sent some of those Small Tort. cats. down to East Sussex!.

All the best,
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor. How about a swap, my Small Torts for your Pearls or Small Pearls 😊😊

Thursday 21st May.

This morning (Thursday 21st) I decided to have a short drive to the other side of Solihull and have a look around Blythe Valley Park. I have visited here the past couple of years and found it be a good site for Common Blue along with a few Brown Argus and Small Coppers plus the usual stuff. There is a large ongoing development here, both commercial and residential and I mentioned in a previous report that I am getting concerned about the amount of development that is going on around Solihull. I have to admit though that the largest amount of building here is taking place on what was open farmland which was previously pretty devoid of wildlife. They have also left a lot of trees and hedges in place and a corridor along the River Blythe itself has become the basis of a country park which includes woodland, meadow areas and ponds.

I arrived at about 09.30 on yet another warm sunny morning with not a cloud in the sky. I soon saw the usual patrolling whites and walking through to the first meadow area started to see a few Common Blues. These were mostly fresh looking males but one female drew my attention with her mostly blue wings although she would only open them partially in the warming sun.



Common Blue female - Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

I decided to try and shade her with my shadow to induce her to open up more and was only partially successful as she still refused to open up fully. Nevertheless, this does once again demonstrate how different lighting can make the same butterfly look quite different.



Common Blue female - Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

I then spotted what appeared to be a freshly emerged Common Blue male still drying his wings.



Common Blue male - Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

He was approached by another male which made him flick his wings open and briefly display the lovely new blue of his topside.



Common Blues – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

Carrying on around the paths I saw more Common Blues and ended up seeing between 25 to 30 during the time I spent here, all males apart from that first female.



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

As the morning warmed up they became much more flighty and when they did settle they kept their wings firmly closed.



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

I was pleased to find four different Brown Argus, two in one corner of a meadow and two in another meadow. These were all males which spent most of their time chasing the Common Blues around.



Brown Argus – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020



Brown Argus – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

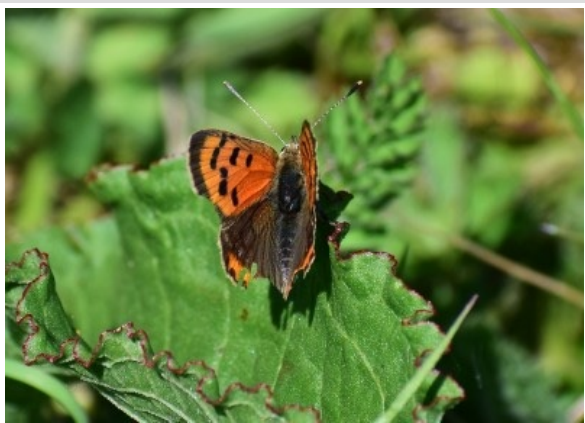


Brown Argus – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020



Brown Argus – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

Two Small Coppers were also spotted, one raggedy one and another looking much better. The law of sod meant that I lost sight of the better one and only managed a ropey record shot of the other.



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

A couple of male Orange-tips were patrolling the hedges and one of them actually stopped for a bit despite it now being around 11.00 and the temperature well over 20 degrees.



Orange-tip - Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

Lots of Burnet Companion Moths were flying along with a few Mother Shipton and a couple of Latticed Heath. Again, all very flighty and difficult to approach but I did spot one Latticed Heath settle in the shade under a hedge.



Latticed Heath - Blythe Valley 21.05.2020

Soon after 11.00 I headed back to my car and on the way saw a single Peacock flying back and forth along one stretch of path.

Another beautiful morning but it would have been nice to have a few clouds about to slow things down occasionally. Still no rain here and this was another site that was looking very dry.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 25-May-20 09:08 AM GMT

Garden Moths update.

Between the night of May 9th and last Sunday (May 17th) we had a run of cold clear nights with a frosty start to at least three of the mornings. This meant that I did not bother to run the moth trap during this time as experience has taught me that these conditions lead to very poor results in my garden.

From the night of Sunday 17th however, the wind direction changed and we lost the cold wind which had been keeping temperatures down. Given the improved conditions, I was tempted to run the trap on the nights of the 17th and 18th and again on the 20th and 21st. I know that some moth trappers do not like to run their traps on consecutive nights in order to avoid trapping the same moths again but I have found that when I do this I rarely see the same moths the following night. I also know a couple of trappers who have done mark and release studies that have shown that moths rarely return to the same trap the following night. Nevertheless, I don't usually run the trap on consecutive nights myself simply because I get up with the dawn chorus in order to get to it before the birds find an easy meal of moths that settle on and around the outside of the trap. With the dawn chorus kicking off at around 04.00am at this time of year, this means that I get up to it at this time, but at least being on furlough from work still, I can then go back to bed for a couple of hours.

Anyway, the night of Sunday 17th produced 30 moths of 16 species made up of 18 of 13 macros and 12 of 3 micros. The best of these were a nice fat female Peppered Moth and an Angle Shades, both species that I only usually get once or twice a year here.



Peppered Moth – Coverdale 17.05.2020



Angle Shades – Coverdale 17.05.2020

Number were up a bit on the night of Monday 18th with a total of 44 of 22 (28 of 16 macros and 16 of 6 micros).



Green Carpet – Coverdale 18.05.2020



Flame Carpet – Coverdale 18.05.2020

The best moth this time was a New For the Garden (NFG) Tawny Shears which is a scarce and local species in Warwickshire and a cracking record for my

garden. One of the guys in the Warwickshire Moth Group told me that he has only seen a couple of these in the county in nearly 40 years of moth trapping.



Tawny shears - Coverdale 18.05.2020



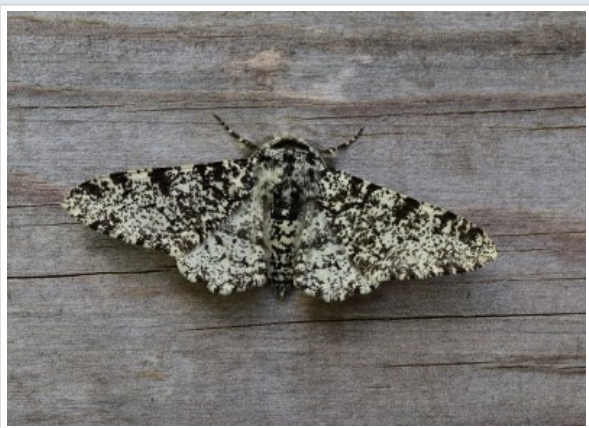
Tawny shears - Coverdale 18.05.2020

I gave it a rest on the night of Tuesday 19th but lit up again on Wednesday 20th. Numbers were up again with a total of 59 of 23. 30 of 11 of these were macros and there was a definite increase of micros with 29 of 12 although none of tonight's catch was anything special.

The night of Thursday 21st started off with near perfect conditions of mild temperature, a thick overcast and almost no wind. Things changed sometime in the early hours however and I got up to the trap to find it raining and a blustery wind. The forecast has said we may get the odd shower from 06.00 onward but this was earlier and much heavier than expected.

Nevertheless, it was the best night of the week with a total of 75 moths of 27 species, 49 of 20 of which were macros with 26 of 7 micros.

Notable moths included my second Peppered Moth of the week, a nice fresh male this time...



Peppered Moth - Coverdale 21.05.2020

...and a Poplar Hawk Moth, my second of the year.



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 21.05.2020



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 21.05.2020

The best moth of the night however was a NFG Toadflax Brocade. This species has been expanding from its core range on the south east coast over the past few years and is slowly spreading north and west, but is still very scarce and localised in Warwickshire. Aware of this I sent a photo to my CMR (County Moth Recorder) who has confirmed that this is the first record in VC38 (Warwickshire) outside of the Rugby area. Rugby is nearly 30 miles to the east of me and a few recent records of this species there have led to the suspicion that it is breeding in the area. I have also been informed that it has not yet been recorded in VC37 (Worcestershire) which begins just to the west of me.



Toadflax Brocade - Coverdale 21.05.2020



Toadflax Brocade – Coverdale 21.05.2020

All in all, a good week for moths in my garden with a couple of great records, one of them quite significant.

With the return to cooler conditions and high winds over the past few days, I have not had the trap out again since last Thursday but things are looking to improve again this coming week, both during the day and at night.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 25-May-20 02:04 PM GMT

More great moth images Neil composed beautifully as usual 😊 Well done with that Toadflax Brocade! 😊 You certainly seem to get a diverse selection.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-May-20 08:33 PM GMT

Brilliant Blues and BAs Neil – that has got to be the bluest female Common Blue that I've seen, it's almost entirely blue 🧐 😊 🍀

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-May-20 06:53 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline. That Toadflax Brocade is the highlight of the year for me so far. The irony is that I would have been in Cornwall last week if not for the virus so you know what they say about clouds and silver linings 😊

Thanks Wurzel. There is certainly a lot more blue females about these days.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Allan.W., 26-May-20 07:45 PM GMT

Nice Toadflax Brocade Neil ,I had my first down here in Kent last year ,a fluke really ,I hadn,t even had the trap on! Lynne ,came in one morning to tell me that a moth was sitting along the washing line.....did I want to have a look , imagine my surprise a Toadflax Brocade !

They have been caught in traps on Romney Marsh for some years ,and judging by all the local records this year they are certainly spreading out ,all over Kent ,I,ve had one so far this year ! They are cracking little moths for sure ! and that is an excellent photograph of one !
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-May-20 10:08 AM GMT

Thanks Alan. A great moth to bring in with the washing 😊

It seems, like a number of moths that until recently were confined to the south, they are spreading steadily north.

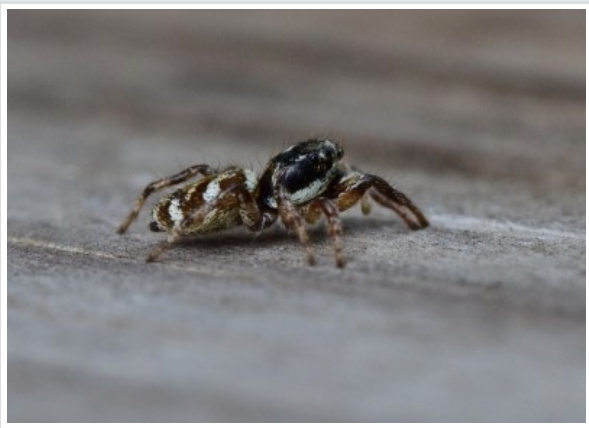
Tuesday 26th May

I was just shifting some stuff about in the garden this morning when I spotted a little Zebra Spider on one of the bits of wood that sometimes use take photos of moths on. I gently laid the wood down and grabbed my camera to take some photos. Luckily I already had the Sigma 105 lens attached in

readiness to take some photos of moths from the trap. I am sure he watched me throughout with those beady eyes. Great little spiders, full of character and quite cute.



Zebra Spider – Coverdale 26.05.2020



Zebra Spider – Coverdale 26.05.2020

Later on I decided to go for a walk to Sheldon Country Park. When I set out around midday there was a fair bit of cloud around and this was forecast to continue through the afternoon with temperatures rising to the low teens. Well, I didn't take long for the cloud to practically disappear to the point that we ended up with yet another sunny and very warm afternoon.

Butterfly numbers are now low around here and we are into our 'June gap' albeit it is more of a 'May gap' this year with all the warm weather we have had leading to an advanced season.

Nevertheless I did find a few butterflies including a surprising half a dozen Peacocks in various states of wear. These were very active and when they settled their wings shut almost immediately which did at least give me the chance for some underside shots.



Peacock – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

A single Small Tortoiseshell was spotted later which, despite a chunk of hindwing missing, would otherwise have been in remarkably good condition still. Having seen a few early summer brood reported from other areas I did wonder about this one...



Peacock – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

I was also on the lookout for larval nests and found four, all of which I think were Peacocks in either 2nd or 3rd instar.



Peacock Larvae – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020



Peacock Larvae – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020



Peacock Larvae – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

Following the single Common Blue I found here last week I found four today, all fresh looking males chasing each other about one of the meadow areas.



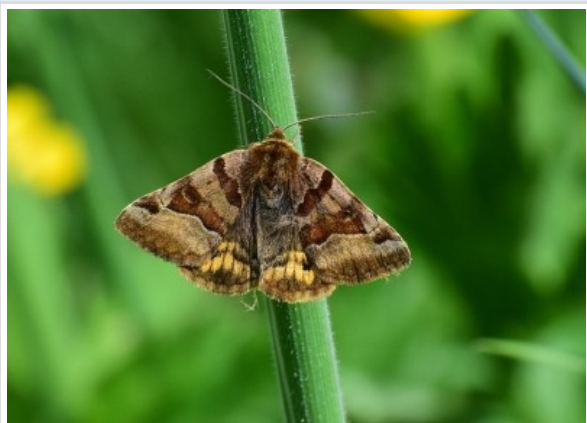
Common Blue - Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

Another species I have seen here in the past and was on the lookout for today is Small Heath and found just two in another meadow area.



Small Heath - Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

As is often the case at my local sites at this time of year, day flying moths outnumbered the butterflies by some margin. These were mostly Burnet Companions again with a good sprinkling of Mother Shiptons.



Burnet Companion - Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020



Mother Shipton – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020



Mother Shipton – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

In one of the meadow areas I also found at least half a dozen Grass Rivulets. These small day flying moths are quite local in Warwickshire so it is always good to find them. They can be little s^{ds} to photograph though being not only very flighty but usually settling on the underside of leaves.



Grass Rivulet – Sheldon Country Park 26.05.2020

After wandering most of the way along the length of the country park I circled back taking a slightly different route and headed back home.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 27-May-20 01:11 PM GMT

Another cracking set of Mother Shipton and Burnet Companion images there, Neil. Must have taken a bit of patience, we know how difficult they can be.

You're right, a very early season, probably the earliest I can remember. The hawthorn and horse chestnut blooms are long gone, replaced by elder and wild roses, which I always associate with June.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 27-May-20 05:25 PM GMT

OMG! A Zebra spider – whoever knew there even was such a thing? Interesting I'll grant you Neil (and beautifully photographed) but cute 🤩😬😬 I suppose they're a good source of bird food but apart from that Having said that my Grandad used to have a 'pet' spider which he called Molly and no-one was allowed to move it from under the sink in the scullery!!!! 😬😬 Mad or what!!!!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-May-20 08:31 PM GMT

Cracking images Neil especially the Boris 😊😬 I reckon you're right about the Small Tort being a newly emerged individual – it does look very bright and fresh 😊😬

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-May-20 07:34 AM GMT

You really DO have the knack with those Mother Shiptons, Neil. 😊

This latest one looks more like the ones I see here in south Wales, though they never pose like that for me.

You're right, that zebra spider is a darling. Certainly doesn't have the 'spook' factor that most arachnids possess.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 28-May-20 08:07 AM GMT

David M wrote:

You're right, that zebra spider is a darling. Certainly doesn't have the 'spook' factor that most arachnids possess.

How can you say that David? 😊😬 I've just looked them up – they jump (over 14 times their own body length!!!) and they bite!!!! 😬 Good job they're only 6mm!!!! Good find Neil tho' I'm not disappointed that I've never seen one. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Jenks, 28-May-20 03:19 PM GMT

I too have to confess to not liking spiders very much! In June 2019 I spent 3 days in Dorset and visited the RSPB Arne reserve. I saw and was able to photograph 2 Great Raft Spiders on one of the heath pools. Now they are big (Britain's biggest spider). I was just grateful they were in the open and not lurking in my bedroom. That was a "lifer" for me as was seeing Sand Lizard, a male, which was bright green. Memories of being able to travel to observe wildlife. Hopefully this can be resumed soon.

Jenks.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-May-20 06:41 PM GMT

Thanks Mark. It helped that there were plenty of them to choose from 😊.

I'm not keen on most spiders myself Pauline but have liked those ever since I first saw one when I was a kid. Yes, they are jumping spiders, good job they are so tiny 😊 I am sure if you look hard enough you will find them in your garden, they are quite common 😊😬

Cheers Wurzel. I've seen a couple more sparkling new Small Torts since then.

Thanks David. Most of those I saw this time were that colour form which I believe is the most common.

Thanks Jenks. I have never seen the Raft Spiders at Arne although I have been there a couple of times before and was due to be in Dorset again next month and would probably have visited again. Maybe next year now.

Wednesday 27th May

A morning walk down to my local spot by Wagon Lane park produced a fresh next brood Speckled Wood and a couple of brand new summer Small Tortoiseshells. These were already fully warmed up in the bright sun so I didn't bother trying to get any photos. A couple of Green-veined Whites were the only other butterflies seen on what was a quiet morning, very typical of around here now.

The only thing I bothered to point my camera at was another larval nest which I think are 1st and 2nd instar Peacocks.



Peacock larvae – Wagon Lane 27.05.2020

Thursday 28th May

A nice fresh Speckled Wood was flitting about the garden this morning but with it being even hotter than yesterday it was very flighty right from the start.

The surprise of the day however was a large orange coloured butterfly that flew in later in the morning and made a beeline for one of my bowles mauve plants...a Painted Lady.

It stuck around for about 20 minutes or so flitting about the bowles mauves and occasionally doing a circle of the garden before returning for some more nectar. This gave me the chance to get some photos before it suddenly took off over the neighbours gardens at high speed.



Painted Lady – Coverdale 28.05.2020



Painted Lady – Coverdale 28.05.2020



Painted Lady – Coverdale 28.05.2020

Interestingly, a Clouded Yellow was reported from a location just a few miles away from me in South Birmingham yesterday. I have also heard of a few more Painted Lady sightings and apparently a couple more Clouded Yellows have been seen in Northamptonshire so it looks like a few migrants are coming in.

Bye for now and stay safe.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 28-May-20 07:19 PM GMT

That's a lovely Painted Lady, Neil. 😊 Let's hope this is the vanguard of another migration, and that it includes Cloudies as well. The latter were a bit thin on the ground in 2019.

Fingers crossed! 🤞

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 28-May-20 07:30 PM GMT

That is a stunning looking Painted Lady Neil – really, really dusky looking 🤩😄🌱 As Dave says hopefully a taster of things to come 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 28-May-20 08:22 PM GMT

Your Painted Lady is a lovely fresh looking specimen.
This warm/hot spell is bound to bring migrants up from the South.

Lovely shots as usual!

Stay well,

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 28-May-20 08:40 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I'll keep an eye on my Bowles Mauve from now on, 😊 that's a lovely Painted Lady, Spiders you can keep 😊 I saw Tarantulas In Hati and they can jump nine feet, that was enough 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 29-May-20 08:02 PM GMT

That's one of the most striking Painted Ladies I've ever seen, Neil. Those hindwing submarginal spots stand out like a set of beacons! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-May-20 08:47 AM GMT

Thanks for the comments Dave, Wurzel, Trevor, Goldie and David. Appreciated as always 😊

Friday 29th May

Friday morning, we drove over to the other side of Solihull to drop some stuff off for Jane's Mom. With it being yet another beautiful sunny morning, she had put some chairs out in her front garden, socially distanced of course, so we could stay for a while and have a chat. After a few minutes Jane suggested I could go off for an hour or so whilst they carried on with their women's chatter, so I decided to drive down to Blythe Valley Park which is not far from here.

Having been there last week on a similar cloudless and warm morning, I had originally hoped to return on a day that was a bit less warm with a few clouds about, but with day after day of the same incessant bright sun, and more of the same in the forecast, I don't know when this will be.

As with my previous visit, I soon started seeing Common Blues with another blue female being one of the first ones spotted. This was in the same spot I had seen the blue female last week and it did cross my mind that she may have been the same one. A closer look soon dispelled that thought as she was too fresh looking to have been flying for a week in the warm weather we have had. Comparing photos back home later also showed slight differences in markings.



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

Some of the males were now looking a bit worn and I saw fewer today than last week, around a dozen this time which was about half as many as last time.



Common Blue male – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

On the other hand, there were more females around today and I watched a number of instances of males chasing females around, usually unsuccessfully. By now, it was late morning and it was getting difficult to keep track of them in flight as they were very quick in the warm sun but I did manage to follow one female after she shook off her pursuer and settled briefly which showed her to be another very blue female.



Common Blue pair – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

Another male was more successful as, following a short high speed chase, they landed on top of an Ox-eye Daisy and after some gyrating about they coupled.



Common Blue pair – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

So far, all the Common Blue females I have seen this year have been similarly 'blue' and I cannot help but think that this is related to the recent warm and dry weather we have had. My impression up until the past couple of years had been that these blue females were more common down south but I am seeing more and more around here, particularly since 2018. The majority of browner females I have seen over the past couple of years have tended to be further north. Of course, this is very much a generalisation and I have still seen blue females up north and brown ones around here and further south. I will be interesting to see what the second brood females look like around here.

Last week I found four different Brown Argus here but today I only managed one tired looking one, quite probably one of those from last week.



Brown Argus – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

I also saw half a dozen or so new summer brood Small Tortoiseshells, the earliest I have ever seen these locally with my previous record being the first week of June. As with everything else, they were very flighty and getting close was difficult but I eventually managed to get shots of a couple of them.



Small Tortoiseshell – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

A single Meadow Brown was also my earliest ever and the first time I have ever seen one in May. I took a couple of record shots but they were so ropy that I will not embarrass myself by posting here.

Burnet Companion Moths were numerous, along with a few Mother Shiptons, but there was no getting close to them today. I did however manage to sneak up on a Latticed Heath and a Yellow Shell. The latter is a common moth of grassy habitats and although really a night flyer, is often disturbed during the day. I usually get a few of these in my garden moth trap throughout the summer.



Latticed Heath – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020



Yellow Shell – Blythe Valley 29.05.2020

All the days are blurring together at the moment with very similar sunny weather day after day. We really do need some proper rain around here now, the vegetation at most local spots is becoming dessicated and I am getting a bit concerned for the later broods if we don't get a good soaking soon.

Bye for now and stay safe.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 31-May-20 09:18 AM GMT

Hi Neil – that's a lovely shot of the Blues on the daisy and very nice Painted Ladies. If you see any more of those very blue females and I wonder if you could keep an eye on their behaviour. Would you consider it to be a bit territorial like that of the males? Have you seen any brown females yet or are the blue females emerging earlier?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-May-20 06:02 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline 😊.

As it happened, with the very active butterflies and the harsh sunlight, I spent more time watching than trying to take photographs. The female Common Blues were behaving normally i.e. they were attempting to be more unobtrusive than the males. Although the females sometimes stick to a given area I have never seen them behave territorially in the same way as males. This holds true for all female Common Blues I have observed over the years irrespective of how blue they are.

I haven't seen any brown females so far this year. To be honest Common Blue numbers seem to be a bit down here so far this year.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 31-May-20 07:01 PM GMT

That first shot of the Female CB is lovely Neil, I made a special journey to Brockholes to see CB they spent most of the time hiding from the Sun 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 01-Jun-20 08:50 AM GMT

Thanks Goldie. I think a lot of butterflies have been hiding from the hot sun, as have I on some days 😊

Sunday 31st May

I haven't seen a spring Small Tortoiseshell for about a week now and the new brood are starting to emerge in numbers around here. There are still one or two old Peacocks around though including this tired old individual that came into my garden on Sunday morning.



Peacock – Coverdale 31.05.2020

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 01-Jun-20 03:04 PM GMT

That Peacock really ought to retire!

I had a real treat this morning (for this area) in the shape of TWO Small Tortoiseshells.

Yourself and Wurzel can be a bit matter of fact about them, but for me they are a desirable rarity! 😊

Getting ready for the silly season.

Stay well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-Jun-20 06:58 PM GMT

Really interesting markings on the last blue female Common Blue Neil 😊🍷 Also love the pair in cop 😊😁 Good to see the next gen of Small Torts coming along nicely 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-Jun-20 07:35 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...I haven't seen a spring Small Tortoiseshell for about a week now and the new brood are starting to emerge in numbers around here...

Same here, Neil. We're getting quite a few. I guess all the wet weather we had prior to mid-March followed by sustained sunshine did wonders for the nettle growth, meaning the early stages had something of a bonanza.

Love the elderly Peacock. Amazing to think it's probably 11 months old now and still going, in spite of showing its age!!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Jun-20 08:47 AM GMT

[quote=trevor post_id=154377 time=1591020241 user_id=13654] That Peacock really ought to retire!
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Yourself and Wurzel can be a bit matter of fact about them, but for me they are a desirable rarity! 😊

Getting ready for the silly season.
Stay well,
Trevor.

Glad to hear you had a couple of Small Tortoiseshells locally Trevor 😊 I'm still jealous of some of the species that some of you guys down south have easy access to that we simply don't get here.

[quote=Wurzel post_id=154388 time=1591034305 user_id=9821] Really interesting markings on the last blue female Common Blue Neil 😊👍 Also love the pair in cop 😊😄 Good to see the next gen of Small Torts coming along nicely 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. I've still not seen a brown female CB here yet this year.

David M wrote:

Neil Freeman wrote:

...I haven't seen a spring Small Tortoiseshell for about a week now and the new brood are starting to emerge in numbers around here...

Same here, Neil. We're getting quite a few. I guess all the wet weather we had prior to mid-March followed by sustained sunshine did wonders for the nettle growth, meaning the early stages had something of a bonanza.

Love the elderly Peacock. Amazing to think it's probably 11 months old now and still going, in spite of showing its age!!

Thanks David. Yes, there was some really lush nettle growth around here a few weeks ago.
I wouldn't be surprised if there are still one or two elderly Peacocks hanging on when the new brood starts to emerge.

Sunday 31st May – Afternoon.

With yet another forecast for clear blue skies and temperatures up into the mid twenties, I hadn't originally intended to go out anywhere today and indeed spent the morning just pottering about in the garden where the only butterfly that I saw was the tired old Peacock previously posted.

By early afternoon however, despite the forecast, some big fluffy clouds started to build up and thinking that this would slow things down a bit I decided to pop around to my local site at Castle Hills.

Setting off down the usual path, I soon saw a couple of fresh Small Tortoiseshells bombing about at high speed. I lingered around this spot trying to keep one of them in view until one of the clouds moved over the sun and was rewarded when one of them behaved as hoped and settled to bask.



Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

I then carried on around my usual circuit and saw a few more Small Tortoiseshells, at least half a dozen all told but these were all very flighty.

In the various meadow areas I found a few male Common Blues...



Common blue – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

...and three male Brown Argus, two of which were well past their best but the third one was looking quite fresh.



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 31.05.2020



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

The most numerous species here today was Small Heath with maybe 25 to 30 split mainly between two separate meadow areas with the odd one or two scattered about around the rest of the site.



Small Heath - Castle Hills 31.05.2020

Having seen Large Skippers reported recently, I was on the lookout to see if any were flying here yet. Indeed they were and I found half a dozen, all fresh males.



Large Skipper - Castle Hills 31.05.2020



Large Skipper - Castle Hills 31.05.2020

Four fresh Meadow Browns were also seen with these being their usual uncooperative selves for photos, although I did catch one with his wings open when another cloud briefly covered the sun again.



Meadow Brown – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

A couple of fresh new brood Speckled Wood were flying in the dappled shade along a path through a wooded section between two meadows.



Speckled Wood – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

A few whites were also spotted and at least one of them proved to be a Green-veined White when it landed on an early bramble blossom.



Green-veined White – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

Burnet Companion Moths and Mother Shiptons were seen again as were a couple of Cinnabar Moths but none of these settled in a suitable position to bother taking a photo. The only moth I pointed my camera at today was a Common Carpet, usually a night flyer but another of those that are easily disturbed during the day and often seen when out looking for butterflies.



Common Carpet – Castle Hills 31.05.2020

Despite the overall lowish numbers of butterflies I was glad I changed my mind and went out.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 03-Jun-20 06:09 PM GMT

Lovely set of shots from Castle Hills Neil 😊 That Brown Argus under wing shot taken side-on is cracking 😊😊 Small Heaths do seem to be having a good year – they're doing well down here too from what I've seen 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 03-Jun-20 11:25 PM GMT

That's a beautiful, fresh Small Tortoiseshell, Neil. It's great to see so many right now and this cooler spell will probably suit them.

Quite a shock too to see an early season male Meadow Brown pose with open wings. They normally wait till they're battle weary before they do that. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 04-Jun-20 08:41 AM GMT

Catching a Meadow Brown like that is a definite coup, Neil. 😊 Its wings have a mottled look to them, which can hardly be wear – I think someone explained to me once that very fresh dark-coloured butterflies can look like this very soon after emergence, before the scales "settle" properly and the wings fully dry off. I seem to recall that this explanation was offered in the context of a Purple Emperor which was looking a bit disappointing despite its obvious newness.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-Jun-20 06:55 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Small Heaths have been on the decline in Warwickshire in recent years but they had a better season last year and so far this year seem to be doing well, at least around my local patch, I haven't been much further afield yet.

Thanks David, Yes, lots of fresh ones emerging here and great to see considering their varying fortunes in recent years. The intermittent clouds definitely helped with that Meadow Brown.

Cheers Dave, I remember seeing fresh Purple Emperors at Fermyn Woods a few years ago with that mottled appearance. It was more noticeable from certain angles when the purple wasn't showing so possibly in a similar way the angle makes it show more with the Meadow Brown.

Tuesday 2nd June.

This morning we dropped some stuff off for our daughter Sarah and then on the way back pulled into Sheldon Country Park. Some thin high level cloud softened the sun a bit but with the temperature on the car display already showing 20 degrees at 10.30 it was shaping up to be another warm day.

We followed our usual route, with me zig-zagging back and forth into various likely looking areas as Jane stuck to the main paths which she could easily manage.

Butterfly numbers were again low but half a dozen nice fresh Small Tortoiseshells were a welcome sight.



Small Tortoiseshell - Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020

Other butterflies seen on the way round were half a dozen Small Heath, a couple each of Common Blue and Meadow Brown and a single Large Skipper. The Common Blues were both males and looking a bit worn now but the Meadow Browns and Large Skipper looked fresh out of the tin and full of newly emerged vigour.



Small Heath – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020



Common Blue – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020

A few newly emerged Speckled Wood were also seen along the paths where they went through the wooded sections.



Speckled Wood – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020

I had also found a couple of Peacock larval nests the last time I was here and went to check on them today. Both nests had moved a few feet across their nettle beds and the larvae were now much bigger.



Peacock Larvae – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020



Peacock Larvae – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020

As with my other recent visits here, day flying moths greatly outnumbered the butterflies. Once again these were mostly Burnet Companions with some Mother Shiptons scattered around, many of which are now looking faded and worn.



Burnet Companion – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020



Mother Shipton – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020

Last time we came here I was pleased to find a colony of Grass Rivulets, a small day flying moth which is widespread but quite local in Warwickshire. Taking a slightly different route today I found a small colony of Chimney Sweeper, another day flyer which is quite widespread but tends to be more common further north.



Chimney Sweeper – Sheldon Country Park 02.06.2020

By the time we left just after midday, the thin cloud had completely vanished leaving clear blue skies and yet another very warm day.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Jun-20 08:25 PM GMT

That is a cracking sequence of Small Tort shots Neil 😊 lush colours 😊😊🌿 You've done brilliantly with the Moffs again Neil – adding another one of the awkward little blighters – Chimney Sweep 😊😊🌿

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Jun-20 10:22 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Some of these day flying moths do indeed take being awkward to another level.

Garden Moths.

Since my last garden moths update, the nights through the latter part of May had continued to be clear with a breeze from the north or east which usually led to a drop in temperature from daytime highs of 24-25c down to overnight lows of 9-10c. This kind of temperature drop often gives poor results with most moths preferring cloudy and milder nights with little or no wind. Drizzle or even light rain is much better with some of my best catches being on drizzly but mild nights.

Even so, I lit up on the likelier looking nights and continued to get a steady dribble of new species for the year including Setaceous Hebrew Character, Clouded-bordered Brindle, Middle-barred Minor, Light Emerald, Common Carpet and Cinnabar.

The night of 25th May produced 41 moths of 19 species of which 30 of 13 were macros including a new species for the garden in Freyer's Pug.

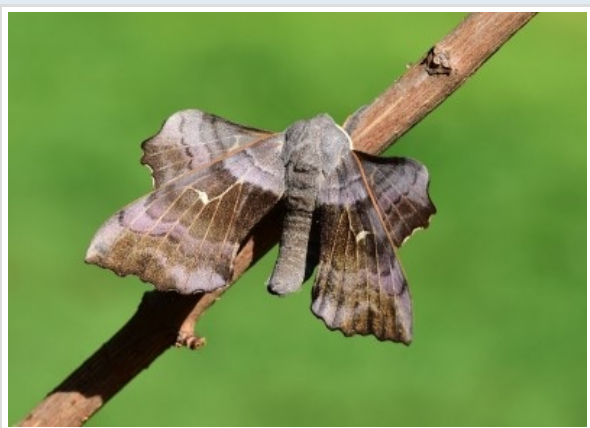
Due to forecasts for partial cloud I also ran the trap on the nights of 26th and 27th of May but on both nights the cloud failed to appear, again leading to poor nights with the 26th producing a coincidental 26 of 19 (17 of 13 macros and 9 of 6 micros) and the 27th a slightly better 32 of 22 (26 of 18 macros and just 6 of 4 micros). I did however have another couple of Poplar Hawk Moths, one on each night. A close look at their markings confirmed them to be two different individuals and shows that it wasn't the same moth returning to the trap the following night.



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 26.05.2020



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 27.05.2020



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 27.05.2020

The night of 27th also produced another Peppered Moth and another Pale Prominent. With both of these species I have now seen as many this year as I have in the previous years since I started running the trap here in the spring of 2016.



Peppered Moth – Coverdale 27.05.2020



Pale Prominent – Coverdale 27.05.2020

I then gave it a rest for a few nights until June 1st when the breeze swung around to come more from the west which led to a slight rise in the overnight temperature despite it still being a clear night. This led to a rise in numbers to 51 moths of 26 species (37 of 19 macros and 14 of 7 micros) which included a NFG of Brown Silver-line. I see lots of these at my local spots when they are easily disturbed during the day, but surprisingly this was the first one that has turned up in my garden. NFY macros included Willow Beauty which I usually get a few of each year.



Willow Beauty – Coverdale 01.06.2020

One of the micros was *Crambus lathoniellus*, one of six species of 'grass moths' that I have so far recorded in my garden. These will be familiar to

anyone who has seen them, often in their hundreds, in grassy meadows during the summer when they are out looking for butterflies. Despite their familiarity they are attractive little moths when fresh and given a closer look. Having said that, once I have identified a species, I usually get so many to the trap that I give up trying to count them all.



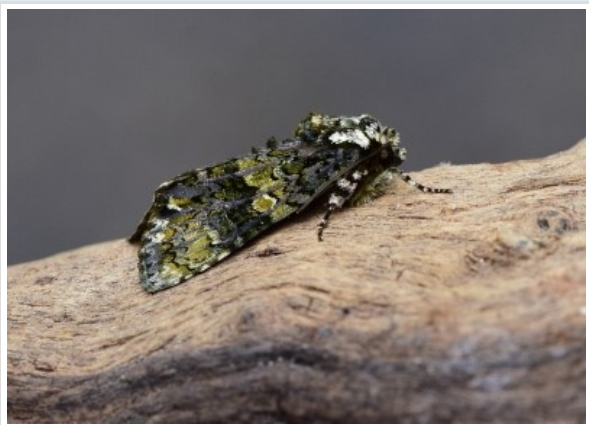
Crambus lathoniellus - Coverdale 01.06.2020

The night of 2nd of June finally produced cloud which persisted all night and the resulting milder overnight temperature led to my highest number of moths so far this year, 112 moths of 34 species made up of 90 of 25 macros and 22 of 9 micros. These were mostly the usual species that I have already had this year but they did include NFYs of Buff Ermine, Clouded Silver, Riband Wave, Small Dusty Wave, Grey Pug and Snout.



Buff Ermine - Coverdale 02.06.2020

I also had a nicely marked Coronet.



Coronet - Coverdale 01.06.2020

Since then, the weather has turned cool, wet and windy so the trap has not been out again. Things look to be settling down a bit next week so that will probably be the next time it is out.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Jun-20 09:45 AM GMT

I always look forward to your moth parades, Neil; there are frequently some real eye-opening specimens. The obvious pick is the poplar hawk moth but for me the buff ermine takes the award – absolutely beautiful.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 08-Jun-20 10:29 AM GMT

Wow! Neil, your moth photography is way better than I have seen in many published reference books. That Pale Prominent IS beautiful but that Buff Ermine how do you get them to pose like that???? You really inspire me to push myself harder when photographing moths!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jun-20 07:05 PM GMT

Thanks David. Glad you like the moths. I was particularly pleased with that Buff Ermine 😊, I only get a few of these here and didn't get one at all last year.

Oh, I don't know about that Pauline but many thanks anyway. I was trying for that Buff Ermine shot on purpose to show the attractive abdomen. I got it by waiting for it to start vibrating it's wings as they do when warming up before take off and switching my camera to sports mode and firing of a couple of bursts, hoping to get one or two in focus. Must admit, I was chuffed with the result 😊.

Friday 5th June.

Another visit to the other side of Solihull this morning (Friday 5th) gave me the opportunity to drop in to Blythe Valley Park again. After a cool and showery start to the morning, the clouds cleared a bit to give us some nice sunny spells although there was still a blustery wind blowing from the north and some dark grey clouds lurking on the horizon.

Things were much quieter this morning and it seems that the first brood Common Blues have now finished here, not surprising really as they would have been constantly active in the recent warm weather.

The first butterflies I saw this morning were a couple of Meadow Browns and during the hour or so I spent here I counted eight, all of which would settle low down in the grass out of the breeze.

A couple of fresh Small Tortoiseshells were also on the wing plus at least four male Large Skippers.



Small Tortoiseshell – Blythe Valley 05.06.2020



Large Skipper – Blythe Valley 05.06.2020

On the way back to my car the path passes through a nice wooded area where I came across a single male Speckled Wood



Speckled Wood – Blythe Valley 05.06.2020

The day flying moths that were seen here last week were all noticeable by their absence this time, whether they have also gone over now or were just hunkered down in the grass on what was still a mostly cool and breezy morning, I am not sure.

I timed my departure well as I had just got back to the car when another heavy shower came down.

Since then we had some horrible weather over the weekend. The rain was welcome if a bit heavy at times and I could have done without the wind and hail on Saturday. Sunday was a bit quieter but still cool and overcast with a dreary mizzle hanging in the air. Today (Monday 8th) has been cool and mostly overcast and the week ahead looks very unsettled but at least the temperature looks to be rising a bit as the week goes on.

Bye for now and stay safe.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-20 05:59 PM GMT

Cracking Moffs Neil – I love the subtle greys and moss green of the Coronet 😊 Good to see another Small Tort – they look quite dark – an effect of the very hot weather during the final days of their development? 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Jun-20 07:22 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Things were much quieter this morning and it seems that the first brood Common Blues have now finished here, not surprising really as they would have been constantly active in the recent warm weather...

Same here, Neil. There were heaps of Common Blues a couple of weeks ago but on Monday and yesterday when I ventured out, I only saw one. Looks as though they literally burned themselves out in the hot weather.

That said, Small Tortoiseshells and Meadow Browns have emerged in significant numbers to fill the gap left behind. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Jun-20 09:49 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. I quite like the Coronet myself. They were quite scarce and local in Warwickshire until a few years ago but have increased in both range and numbers recently. I

Thanks David. Yes, loads of Small Tortoiseshells and Meadow Browns here now plus one or two others as below.

Tuesday 9th June – part 1.

I had seen reports that Dark Green Fritillaries and Marbled Whites were starting to emerge around the midlands so I started thinking about getting to see these. I can usually see Marbled Whites at a couple of spots around Solihull but up until now I had never yet seen Dark Green Fritillaries in Warwickshire. I have seen plenty of DGFs previously and usually catch up with them on our various trips further afield around the country, but with a couple of our breaks away this year already cancelled and another couple hanging in the balance, my brain cogs started whirring.

A few years ago, the Dark Green Fritillary was restricted in Warwickshire to a few sites centred around Combrook in the south of the county but around 2011/2012 it began to be seen at Harbury Spoilbank and since then has colonised some other sites including Bishops Hill which is just a few miles from Harbury. I had seen DGFs reported from both of these sites over the past couple of days so I decided to pay a visit to Bishops Hill and then go on to Harbury, and looking at the weather forecast for this week (yes, I know) it looked like Tuesday would be the best bet with a mixture of cloud and sunny spells.

So it was that we left Solihull just before 10.00am for the forty minute drive down to Bishops Hill. We didn't bother leaving earlier as a thick overcast was still keeping the temperature down in the low teens at first but we were crossing our fingers that the cloud would break up a bit as per the forecast.

We arrived at Bishops Hill under similar conditions and at first all we saw were a few Meadow Browns which kept settling low down in the grass.

We also spotted a nice Bee Orchid in the grass at the side of the path.

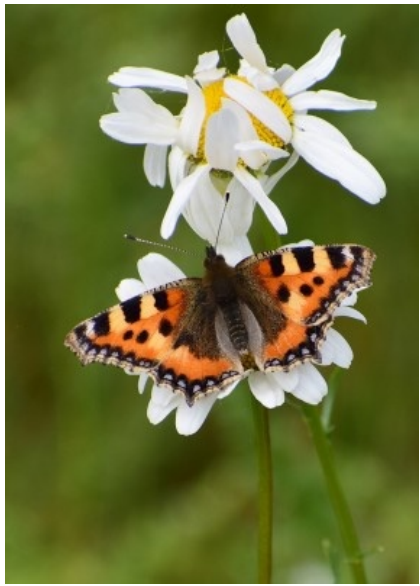


Bee Orchid – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

After a while the cloud did indeed begin to break up and allow the sun through which soon warmed things up a bit. Before long the numbers of Meadow Browns increased and we started seeing Small Tortoiseshells popping up regularly.



Small Tortoiseshell – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

We followed the path around to the far side of the site where one particular large bank of brambles was facing the sun and found a nice fresh Dark Green Fritillary. As it happened, most of the time he kept his distance towards the far side of the brambles but came close enough a couple of times for me to get a shot or two. Not the best photos and cropped a fair bit to post below but my first DGF ones taken in Warwickshire.



Dark Green Fritillary – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

During the hour and a half spent here, apart from the Meadow Browns and Small Tortoiseshells there were also a few Small Heath and Large Skippers...



Large Skipper - Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

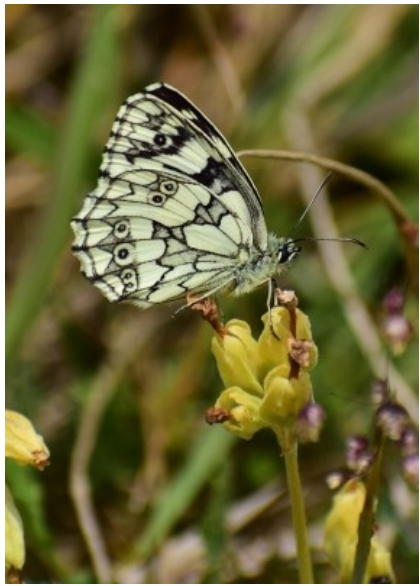


Small Heath - Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

plus I was pleased to find a couple of fresh Marbled Whites.



Marbled White - Bishops Hill 09.06.2020



Marbled White – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

At one point another Dark Green Fritillary did a high speed flypast but as this was during one of the periods when the sun was shining strongly, it just kept going.

A few faded Common Blues were also seen and a couple of Small Blues were still hanging in there.



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 09.06.2020

We then circled back to the entrance to the reserve and decided to move on to Harbury.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 10-Jun-20 10:01 AM GMT

It's always good to find a new species at a site you usually visit for something else. Very nice DGF shots, especially the underside. 😊 Unfortunately I no longer pass by Bishops Hill in the regular way I once did, but it's good to see it still thrives with a variety of species.

I shall be interested to see what Harbury came up with! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-Jun-20 11:58 AM GMT

Lovely shots Neil 🍷🍷 your second Tort shot as unusual large dark spots hasn't it? That DGF is great to 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Jun-20 07:25 PM GMT

Thanks Dave. It was the first time I have been to Bishops Hill later in the year than mid May and it was interesting to see the differences.

Thanks Goldie. I find a surprising amount of variation in the size and shape of the spots on Small Tortoiseshells.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 11-Jun-20 07:57 PM GMT

DGFs are a cracking butterfly – I love that they seem to be the least fussy Fritillary – I've seen them in woods, grasslands and sea cliffs – brilliant 😊 You did well with the underwing shot 📷 Looking forward to Harbury 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 11-Jun-20 10:11 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Like you I have seen DGFs in all sorts of habitats including woodland clearings, bracken covered slopes, cliff tops, dunes and grasslands but, like I mentioned above, strangely enough this was my first time in my home county.

I've been meaning to do the report from harbury for the last couple of days. I am still on furlough and the weather has been lousy so you would think I would have had plenty of time but I have got distracted by some jobs in the house, always useful for those brownie points of course 😊 Hopefully I'll get it done tomorrow now.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Jun-20 09:27 AM GMT

Those Marbled Whites are immaculate, Neil. 📷 Fewer species are lovelier when freshly emerged.

I'm itching to get out and find a few myself!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jun-20 07:09 PM GMT

Thanks David. Hoping to get out and find some locally soon.

Tuesday 9th June – part 2.

From Leaving Bishops Hill, Harbury Spoilbank is only few minutes drive up the road. This Warwickshire Wildlife Trust reserve is on banks of lias clay spoil thrown up from when the Leamington to Oxford Railway was constructed in the 1840s and consists of two areas either side of a short central path from the entrance. I have been here before, like today, sometimes after visiting Bishops Hill, but usually earlier in the year when looking for Dingy and Grizzled Skippers.

There is an open meadow area to the right of the entrance path and this looked the likeliest area for Dark Green Fritillaries and so this is where I started looking. No sooner had I gone through the gate into this area when I spotted one flitting about from flower to flower. There were numerous dandelion or hawkweed type flowers in this area and as I looked I spotted more and more DGFs flying about and nectaring on them. The conditions by now were pleasantly warm with the temperature in the high teens and about 50% cloud which meant that the DGFs were active but not so much that I couldn't sneak up and get some photos.



Dark Green Fritillaries – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillaries – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillaries – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020

Allowing for double counting, I reckon there were about 14–15 Fritillaries in this side of the reserve. I also saw another 4 in the other side when I had a look there a bit later before leaving. This other side of the reserve was looking very scrubbed up compared with how I remember it from the last time I visited a few years ago and this was reflected in the lower number of Fritillaries seen there.

All but one of those that I saw were males, mostly looking nice and fresh but with a couple already showing damaged wings, probably from bird strikes. Just the one female was seen which unfortunately looked as if she had also suffered an attack by a bird with a hindwing and the tip of her abdomen looking damaged.



Dark Green Fritillary female – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020

Curiously, apart from the DGFs, the only other butterflies that I saw here were all Small Tortoiseshells with something like 15–18 seen, mostly in the open area with the DGFs. I must admit that I didn't take many photos of these as my attention was mostly on the Fritillaries. I guess that just shows how many Small Tortoiseshells I am (happily) seeing this year.



Small Tortoiseshell – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020

I kept my eye out for a DGF settled with wings closed for an underwing shot but despite the clouds covering the sun on occasion, they were all settling with wings spread. Oh well, can't have everything and I was chuffed enough to just see them all flying around me.

A cracking day and given the weather that we have had here since then I definitely picked the best one of the week.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 12-Jun-20 07:50 PM GMT

Brilliant DGFs, Neil! Simply gorgeous butterflies. 😊 I see some of yours were doing something I've observed in the past, which is to sit and bask companionably in pairs or sometimes more. They seem to seek each other out somehow (though they are difficult to miss!). Good to see numbers of Small Tortoiseshells too – I wonder if there are nettle beds that have gone unmown this year allowing more to survive?

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 13-Jun-20 06:00 AM GMT

Stunning images, Neil. Every butterfly fresh and vibrant. I don't think that female DGF will contribute to the next generation.

The silly season has started!.

Keep well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Jun-20 07:51 PM GMT

Love the DGFs Neil – the really really fresh ones light up the screen 😊 Mind you my favourite is that female – a lovely dusky lady 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 13-Jun-20 08:02 PM GMT

Lovely DGF's Neil, I'll have to go to Southport to see them in the Dunes, a bit to far at present 😊😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Chris L, 13-Jun-20 09:34 PM GMT

Stunning DGF photos Neil. Those Small Tortoiseshell photos are a bit special too. Really crisp, pristine looking specimens.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Jun-20 03:58 PM GMT

You've captured those DGFs really well, Neil. They can be difficult subjects but they are voracious feeders and will often stick around when they've found a good nectar source.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jun-20 09:16 PM GMT

Many thanks for the comments Dave, Trevor, Wurzel, Goldie, Otep and David 😊

[quote=millerd post_id=154819 time=1591987807 user_id=9839] ...I see some of yours were doing something I've observed in the past, which is to sit and bask companionably in pairs or sometimes more...

Cheers,

Dave

Yes, I have seen this behaviour in the past myself, both with Dark Greens and also High Browns. They nearly always seem to pick spots where the grass has been flattened a bit, either on animal trails or where foxes or deer have been lying down.

[quote=millerd post_id=154819 time=1591987807 user_id=9839] ...Good to see numbers of Small Tortoiseshells too – I wonder if there are nettle beds that have gone unmown this year allowing more to survive?

Cheers,

Dave

Not sure about that around here Dave, as soon as they could our local council were out scalping the verges. I reckon it is more to do with the good numbers that came out of hibernation in spring and then lots of warm weather that enabled the next brood to get through their development quickly.

[quote=trevor post_id=154822 time=1592024435 user_id=13654] ...I don't think that female DGF will contribute to the next generation.

Trevor.

Indeed Trevor. Such a shame.

Saturday 13th June.

From Wednesday onwards last week, the weather went downhill and was unseasonally cold with the temperatures barely rising in to the low teens. A cold wind from the north along with a gloomy grey overcast on most days made it feel like we had prematurely passed from summer into autumn. We also had quite a bit of rain with some really heavy downpours at times, although there is no denying that we needed that.

Following another good soaking of rain on Friday night, Saturday brightened up considerably with some nice sunny spells in the morning. I was in the kitchen around mid morning and looking out of the window spotted something fluttering around one of the bowles mauve, so grabbed the camera and went out to have a look and found my first summer Comma.



Comma - Coverdale 13.06.2020



Comma - Coverdale 13.06.2020

By the afternoon there was about 50/50 cloud and blue skies with some nice warm sunshine so I decided to have a walk down to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park to see if anything was about.

The first butterflies I saw were a couple of Small Tortoiseshell chasing each other about above a bank of brambles and as I watched them I saw a few others, making something like half a dozen around this patch. I then carried on around the outside of this first area and reckon I counted at least 17 or 18 Small Tortoiseshells, mostly on and around the various bramble patches along the boundary hedges.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

I then walked along the path that passes through the tall hedge line into a second area where I immediately started seeing more Small Tortoiseshells. This second area also has some large patches of brambles around the boundary hedges and as I wandered along these I reckon I counted a further 23 Small Tortoiseshells. As usual, being wary of double counting, this was very much a minimum number and there could well have been more.

All of these were very active in the warm afternoon sun but the clouds slowed them down just enough for some photos. I have mentioned before that I think that Small Tortoiseshells are a surprisingly variable species so have chosen a few shots below to illustrate this.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

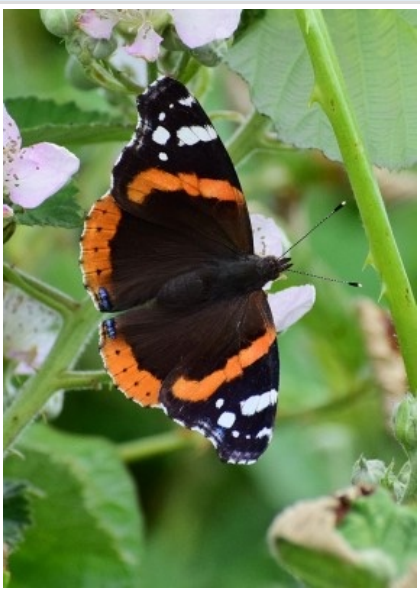


A different view of the one above - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

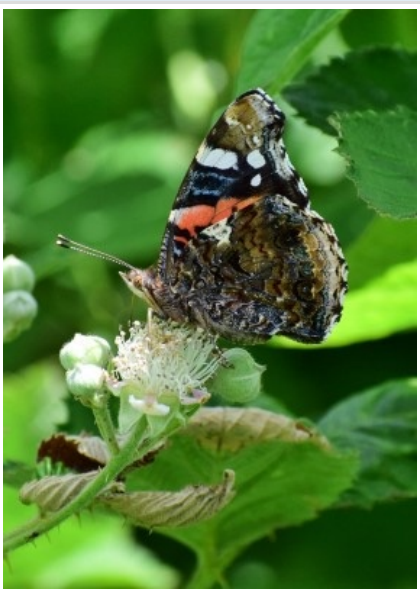


Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

At one point a larger, darker butterfly showed itself to be a nice Red Admiral, a female I think, which kept trying to nectar on the brambles but was rarely left in peace for long by the Tortoiseshells. I have also noticed before that, in warm sunshine, Red Admirals have a tendency to go into the brambles to get bit of shade.



Red Admiral - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020



Red Admiral - Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

I then circled back to my starting point and was walking back though the first area when I spotted a second Red Admiral, this one definitely a female that was fluttering around some fresh nettle growth in part of the meadow that had previously been cut. I watched as she checked the nettles and appeared to occasionally lay on them but going to have a look after she had carried on I only found the one actual egg.



Red Admiral – Wagon Lane 13.06.2020



Red Admiral egg – Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

Apart from the Small Tortoiseshells and Red Admirals mentioned above, the only other butterflies I saw was a single fresh Green-veined White that wouldn't sit still long enough for a photo and a single Large Skipper.



Large Skipper – Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

I expected to find Meadow Browns and Ringlets here today which was part of my reason for coming for a look. I also found a single Marbled White here a couple of years ago but none of these were seen this time. Mind you, I can't complain at 40 odd Small Tortoiseshells in what after all is a fairly small area surrounded by housing.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Jun-20 08:18 PM GMT

Cracking stiff Neil 😄 I'd go for female for the first Red Admiral; a lovely rounded abdomen 😄 That H.Comma is gurt lush – it looks almost unreal 🤩🌿

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Jun-20 12:00 PM GMT

Those are good numbers of Small Totosishells, and images of some lovely individuals to support it.

They are around in force here in S. Wales right now, and there has also been a recent surge in Red Admiral numbers too. Still not seen a summer brood Comma yet though. 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 17-Jun-20 03:39 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, lovely shots, We're short on the Red Admirals here, only seen the one or two, or Comma's seen, that could change if we get some Sun for more than an hour. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jun-20 06:35 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. That Comma does look a bit garish on the bowles mauve.

Thanks David. I have seen a few more Commas and Red Admirals since then.

Thanks Goldie. Sunday and Monday were decent here but it has gone downhill since then with thunderstorms and heavy downpours.

I don't know if the storms are affecting our internet but I've been losing connection on and off all day. I tried to post the next report a couple of times so far without success so let's hope I stay connected long enough this time.

Sunday 14th June.

The weather forecast said that we may get the odd isolated thunderstorm on Saturday night but what we actually got was three distinctly separate episodes of thunder and lightning with clear breaks in between. The first thunder arrived around 7.00pm which was accompanied by a short spell of rain. There was a second bout around an hour later and this heralded a downpour of biblical proportions that went on for some time. The final load rolled in about 10.00pm with steady rain that carried on until past midnight. I am not sure what time it finally finished as I had gone to sleep by then.

Needless to say, the garden was extremely wet first thing on Sunday morning but with a few warm sunny spells it is surprising how quickly it dries out at this time of year.

With a bit of time to myself on the afternoon I decided to pop around to my local spot at Castle Hills, despite the forecast threatening more thundery showers.

Meadow Browns were certainly out in numbers here now and during the couple of hours I spent wandering around the various paths I must have seen hundreds. By now it had turned into a rather warm and muggy afternoon and they were almost constantly on the move although some would occasionally stop for a refuel on some tall thistles.



Meadow Brown – Castle Hills 14.06.2020



Meadow Brown – Castle Hills 14.06.2020

Amongst all the Meadow Browns I managed to spot a couple of Ringlets, my first this year, but only managed a couple of record shots of one of them as he settled down in the grass.



Ringlet – Castle Hills 14.06.2020

A couple of dozen Small Heaths were flying in the usual spots. Some of these were looking old and faded now but some of them were looking to be in better condition and with this species overlapping broods, I am not sure if these were late first brood or early second.



Small Heath – Castle Hills 14.06.2020

Large Skippers were more in evidence now, especially the males chasing everything about, including each other. I also saw the first females today but couldn't get a photo as they were constantly harassed by the males.



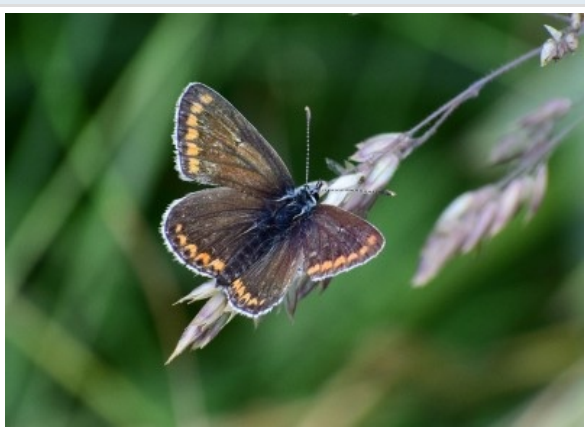
Large Skipper - Castle Hills 14.06.2020

My first Small Skipper of the year was also mixed up with these, just the one of these seen today and my earliest sighting by a week.



Small Skipper - Castle Hills 14.06.2020

I was surprised to find a faded Brown Argus still hanging on along with a couple of Common Blues, one of which wasn't looking too bad still, although again, I am not sure whether he was late first brood or early second. Flight times this year seem to be all over the place.



Brown Argus - Castle Hills 14.06.2020



Common Blue - Castle Hills 14.06.2020

I also spotted the Comma below which I assumed by his condition was a hibernator still hanging on in there. It is not that unusual for me to find hibernators occasionally still flying into June around here but given the exceptionally warm spring that we had, he must have been on the go a fair bit and I thought he looked remarkably good still considering.



Comma - Castle Hills 14.06.2020

The next Comma I spotted was obviously a new summer one and a lovely female *hutchinsoni* at that. Some years I see very few of the *hutchinsoni* form around here compared to normal flavour summer Commas, lets see what this year brings.



Comma - Castle Hills 14.06.2020

Small Tortoiseshells again popped up regularly with a couple of dozen seen all around the site. I watched a couple of instances of courtship type chasing behaviour although as usual they disappeared off in to the distance before reaching any conclusion.



Small Tortoiseshells – Castle Hills 14.06.2020

I also saw a couple of Marbled Whites which I couldn't get close to. I reckon a return visit here in a week or so should see more of these on the wing.

All in all, nothing really out of the ordinary but a nice couple of hours with some of our common species...and the thundery showers never appeared 😊

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 17-Jun-20 06:56 PM GMT

That's a lovely set of shots Neil 😊 That Ringlett looks like it's taking off not landing 😊 still to find a Small Heath, lets hope the weather returns to normal, it's ready for another rain shower here 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 18-Jun-20 05:44 AM GMT

You're in advance of us down here Neil, no Ringlets or Small Skippers at Chiddingfold on Tuesday, and I had plenty of time to look for them. I agree with Wurzel about the Red Admiral and Comma, great stuff!

Keep well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 18-Jun-20 06:23 PM GMT

Lovely sequence Neil – I'm pretty 'jelly' (as the yooof say) of the Ringlet – I've still not knowingly seen one this year and that one looks lovely and shiny 🤩! I was listening to Radio 4 on the way home yesterday and they seemed to think that there are some local problems with Broadband because of the number of people working from home, pupils working from home/gaming all day 😊 so hopefully things will sort themselves out for your connection?

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 19-Jun-20 12:13 PM GMT

That certainly does look like a spring Comma, Neil. Haven't seen one myself for weeks now. I wonder what would happen if it bumped into a summer *hutchinsoni*?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Jun-20 11:51 AM GMT

Thanks all for the comments, much appreciated 😊

It seems that I have an intermittent fault on my router that gets worse the longer I am connected so it is touch and go as to how long before it kicks me off.

I've got the report below already written in word so lets see if I can stay on long enough to copy and paste and add the photos then post it.

Monday 15th June – Oversley Wood.

With the coming week looking to be unsettled with potential thunderstorms from Tuesday onwards, we decided to make the most of a promising day on Monday and have a drive down to Oversley Wood.

We arrived just turned 10.00am to find a surprisingly full car park for a weekday and just managed to park in one of the last remaining gaps. As we got out of the car we saw a fellow Warwickshire BC member who lives locally to the wood and who told us that he had also come here on Saturday when it was absolutely rammed, mostly with dog walkers and cyclists but also families in general out for a walk. It seems that quite a few popular spots have become even more popular recently, maybe down to more people being off work one way or another, or not being able to go abroad yet, and all of these finding places to go to for a day out at home.

Anyway, we carried on up the main track and followed the circular route around the wood, occasionally meeting up with the Warks BC member again plus a couple of other fellow enthusiasts at various spots and had some nice socially distanced conversations. We had all seen Matthew Oates report of the first Purple Emperor at Knepp at the weekend but we all agreed that it was a bit early for them to be flying here yet, maybe by next weekend.

The first butterflies seen were Meadow Browns with loads of them bobbing about at the sides of the ride. A couple of Ringlets were also seen but I reckon it needs another week or so for their numbers to reach the hordes that normally fly here.

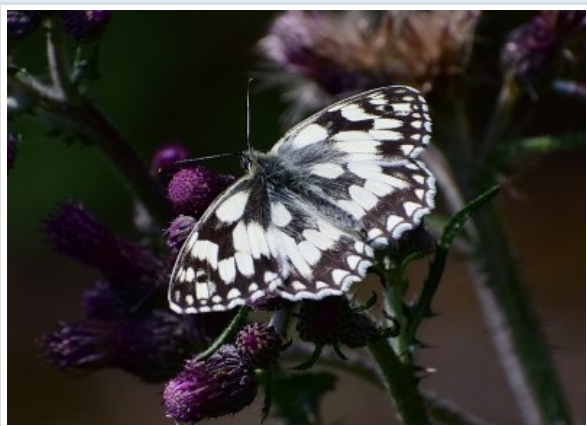
One of the first track side clearings that we came to produced half a dozen Marbled Whites and a couple of Small Tortoiseshells.



Small Tortoiseshell - Oversley Wood 15.06.2020



Marbled White - Oversley Wood 15.06.2020



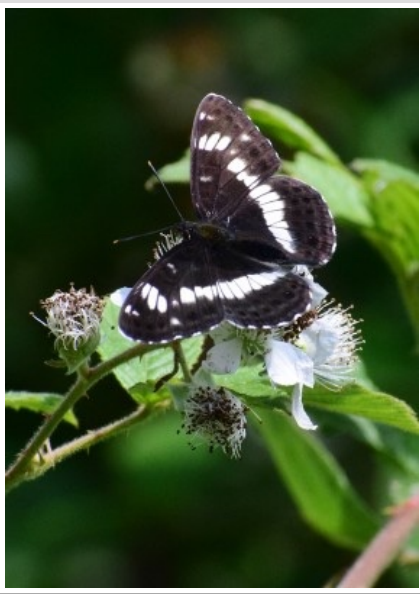
Marbled White - Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

I was aware that both White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary had been reported around the midlands over the weekend and these were my main reason for coming here today. As we wandered along we saw our first White Admiral as it flitted and glided gracefully between the trees to the side of the track for a hundred yards or so before disappearing deeper into the wood.

A little further along we checked out a large bank of brambles and spotted a couple of White Admirals on the flowers. As this species so often does, they seemed to spend more time in the shadows within the brambles, a practice which leads to them quite quickly picking up nicks and tears in the wings. These ones looked to be nice and new although getting a clear shot was a challenge as they flitted in and out of the shadows in their usual uncooperative way.

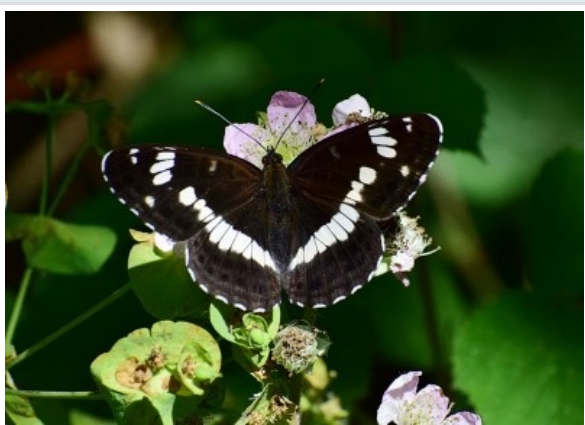


White Admiral – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020



White Admiral – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

As we carried on around the circuit, we saw half a dozen more White Admirals, usually high up and quite mobile in what was turning into a warm and muggy day. At one stage we had one flying low along the track in front of us and occasionally touching down in search of moisture but the ground here was extremely dry despite the heavy rain we had recently. Occasionally this individual would divert onto some brambles, which slowed him down a bit so I could get some photos, although again they were often in partial shade.



White Admiral – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020



White Admiral – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

As mentioned above we were also on the lookout for Silver-washed Fritillaries and had a couple of high speed flypasts but only saw the one male actually settle briefly for a refuel and then he kept his wings shut.



Silver-washed Fritillary – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

I reckon that it was still a bit early for these here too and another week should see numbers build. Having said that, at one point one of the other enthusiasts called us over to where he had spotted a pair in cop up in a tree. They were out of reach for a decent photo with my 70-300mm lens so the shot below is cropped quite a bit.



Silver-washed Fritillary pair – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

Other butterflies seen were a few Large Skipper, a couple of Speckled Wood, lots of Small Whites plus a few Green-veined Whites and a tatty old male Brimstone. Also a few Commas of both *hutchinsoni* and normal summer forms.



Small White – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020



Comma – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

Snitterfield Bushes.

After a good couple of hours at Oversley we decided to make a move and head back past Stratford-upon-Avon so that we could call in to Snitterfield Bushes for a look.

By now it was very warm with the temperature in the mid twenties and although there was some cloud about, it was only making it feel muggy and humid.

After having a good walk around Oversley earlier, Jane said she would have a rest in the car and read her book while I went to see if there was anything about.

It was fairly quiet here compared with Oversley with fewer butterflies seen although Meadow Browns were numerous enough along the sides of the rides. One particular female was a nice individual with the extra orange markings that I have been seeing more regularly in recent years.



Meadow Brown – Snitterfield Bushes

I didn't see any Ringlets here, nor White Admirals or Silver-washed Fritillaries either, although there were a few Small Tortoiseshells and Commas, again in both normal and *hutchinsoni* flavours, plus at least three Red Admirals. A few Whites were also seen, at least one of which was a Large White, one species that I have not seen many of so far this year.



Red Admiral – Snitterfield Bushes



Comma hutchinsoni – Snitterfield Bushes

I reckon another week should see the SWFs flying here and hopefully White Admirals, although the latter are not numerous here these days with only one or two seen in my visits in the past couple of years.

A couple of Marbled Whites were flying in the meadow by the gliding club but again another week should see more of these here. After all it is still early for all of these summer butterflies which I would usually see later in June or in July.

After just over half an hour here we made a move for home thinking that we will probably come back in a week or so.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Jun-20 12:19 PM GMT

That last *hutchinsoni* is beautifully marked, Neil. A real stunner.

Well done too with the White Admirals, a butterfly definitely best seen fresh.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Jun-20 06:41 PM GMT

A fantastic set of shots Neil 😊 Pretty envious of the White Admirals – they're just not playing ball for me this year 🙄 Those H.Comms are really well marked but the second one looks very interesting – well marked near the centre and then rapidly fading 😊 🙄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Jun-20 07:08 PM GMT

Thanks David. I am often a bit late to see White Admirals at their best but seem to have timed it nicely this time.

Cheers Wurzel. White Admirals can indeed be frustrating subjects, often hiding in the shade or at awkward angles within the brambles.

I had a new broadband router fitted this morning which seems to have sorted my connection problems 😊 . The technician was surprised my old one

had lasted as long as it had, apparently the model was discontinued years ago 😊

Monday 22nd June - Back to Snitterfield.

The weather certainly went downhill during the second half of last week with temperatures dropping significantly and a stiff wind blowing in a number of thunderstorms. We had the Mother of All Storms on Thursday afternoon with a torrential deluge that led to a lot of flash flooding around some of our local roads. Friday was quieter but still dull and cool with some light showers, but then the weekend improved a bit with some decent sunny spells although there was still a lot of cloud around with a blustery wind.

Last Monday (15th) we had called in to Snitterfield Bushes on the way back from Oversley Wood and having found it fairly quiet with regards to butterflies we had said that we would probably return in a week or so. With the temperatures forecast to be rising again this week and possibly getting up to 30c here by Wednesday, we decided to go back today whilst it was still comfortable.

Jane had to pop in to the doctors at 10.00am for one of her regular blood checks but that only took 10 minutes and then we carried on straight from there for the half hour or so drive to Snitterfield. We arrived just before 10.45 and pulled into the car park on the Bearley to Snitterfield road which bisects the reserve into two halves. We headed off for a wander around the north side first and soon saw plenty of Meadow Browns and a couple of Ringlets bobbing about in the long grass to the side of the paths. Some occasional clouds meant that some of the Meadow Browns could still be found basking.

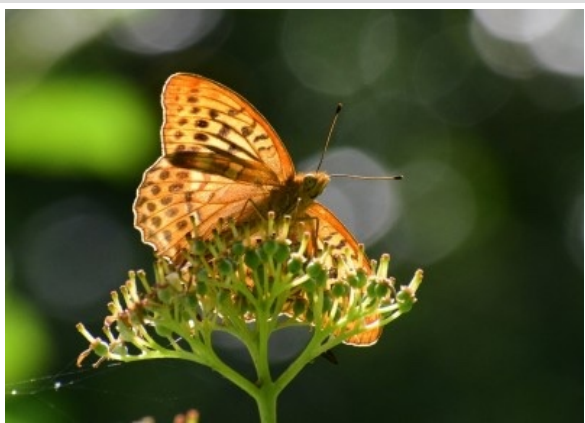


Meadow Brown male - Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



Meadow Brown male - Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020

After not finding any Silver-washed Fritillaries here last week we were pleased to see one flying back and forth along the path and occasionally stopping on some brambles, although it wouldn't stop still for long and refused to show a decent top side pose.



Silver-washed Fritillary male - Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020

We spent an good hour or so doing a slow circuit around this side and saw a good selection of butterflies including loads more Meadow Browns, a few

more Ringlets, at least half a dozen Red Admirals, three or four each of Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Speckled Wood and Large Skipper plus a few Small and Green-veined Whites.



Red Admiral – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



Green-veined White male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



Green-veined White female – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020

A single Marbled White was also seen on this side.



Marbled White – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020

We then returned to the car and nibbled a few biscuits before checking out the south side of the reserve. As we wandered up the main ride we came to a large bramble patch in full sun that had four Silver-washed Fritillaries chasing each other over it. By now the temperature was up into the low twenties and all the butterflies were highly active although some thin high level cloud occasionally took the brightness out of the sun just enough to slow them down a bit. I managed to get a few photos although they were mostly taken at a distance over the brambles and the shots below have all been cropped to varying degrees.



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020

One thing that I have noticed before and saw again today, is that Silver-washed Fritillary males are quick enough to chase each other around, but are big wimps when it comes to other butterflies. Today I watched males of Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood and Large Skipper all going for the SWFs and in fact this was the biggest obstacle to getting a decent photo because nearly every time a Fritillary settled, it was accosted by one of the other three species.

After watching this squabbling for a while we carried on along the path and ended up counting at least eight Silver-washed Fritillaries on this side of the reserve, most of which were now bombing about at high speed in the warm early afternoon sun

The supporting cast was similar to the other side of the reserve with the only difference being that there were more Marbled Whites, around a dozen or so, in a meadow to the side of the wood. Once out of the shelter of the trees it was apparent that there was a stiff breeze whipping across this meadow that meant that any butterfly that ventured out of the grass was whisked off at speed.

We then retraced our steps back to the car and made a move for home with the temperature on the car display now reading 23 degrees.

All in all we spent about three hours wandering around both sides of the reserve and saw a nice selection of butterflies. I was pleased to see the Fritillaries although I reckon they are still only just getting going here with no females seen. We didn't see any White Admirals but, as I mentioned in the last report, their numbers are never high here these days.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Jun-20 08:12 PM GMT

A great set of Silver Washed shots Neil especially the first one 😊😄 I prefer to think of the Silver Washed as 'gentle giants' rather than wimps though because the smaller butterflies all seem to have 'small man' syndrome 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Jun-20 04:03 PM GMT

Always good to see fresh Silver Washed Fritillaries, Neil. It's one of those butterflies that becomes ragged rather quickly (along with its bedfellow, White Admiral). It's a good time of year right now with all the high summer species being joined by second broods of Whites, Commas and Tortoiseshells.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jun-20 07:30 PM GMT

[quote=Wurzel post_id=155241 time=1592939579 user_id=9821] ... I prefer to think of the Silver Washed as 'gentle giants' rather than wimps though because the smaller butterflies all seem to have 'small man' syndrome 😊😊

Good point Wurzel. Male Large Skippers certainly behave like 'little men in big jackets' as my dad used to say 😊

David M wrote:

Always good to see fresh Silver Washed Fritillaries, Neil. It's one of those butterflies that becomes ragged rather quickly (along with its bedfellow, White Admiral). It's a good time of year right now with all the high summer species being joined by second broods of Whites, Commas and Tortoiseshells.

Indeed David, the woods are full of butterflies at the moment 😊

Garden Moths update

Before I carry on, I just thought that I would mention that my Toadflax Brocade from last month made the Birdguides May Moth News. Scroll down to just past half way on the following link:

<https://www.birdguides.com/articles/other-wildlife/invertebrates/moth-news-may-2020/>

Anyway, after the warm and dry weather that we had been having through May, things changed during the first couple of weeks of June with a lot more cloudy and wet weather. The second week in particular saw a number of very heavy rain showers here followed by a cluster of thunderstorms culminating in The Mother of All Thunderstorms on the afternoon of Thursday 17th..

Prior to these storms, I ran the moth trap a few times with overall numbers being on the low side due to the erratic weather although species numbers have held up quite well with a total of 129 species up to 18th June, made up of 87 macro and 42 micro. In comparison, by the same date in previous years the numbers were;

2019 - 62 macro + 24 micro = 86 total.

2018 - 76 macro + 45 micro = 121 total.

2017 - 90 macro + 62 micro = 152 total

This is not a totally accurate comparison as it does not allow for differences in the number of trapping sessions but it does give an idea of how the moth season is doing here so far.

My best moth during the past couple of weeks was undoubtedly a Pine Hawk Moth which despite not being in the best condition was a new one for me and a great record for my Solihull garden.



Pine Hawk Moth - Coverdale 08.06.2020

This large Hawk Moth used to be confined to two distinct areas in Suffolk and Hampshire but has expanded its range massively in recent years and can now be found as far north as Yorkshire on the eastern side of the country although only up to the midlands in the west. In Warwickshire it now regularly comes to light traps in the south of the county and is steadily spreading north so hopefully this is one I will be seeing more regularly in the future.

Other highlights were a couple of Elephant Hawk Moths which are always a delight to see. I had one on the night of the 8th and another on the 9th, different individuals as confirmed by a close look at their markings.



Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 08.06.2020



Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 09.06.2020



A different view of the one above.

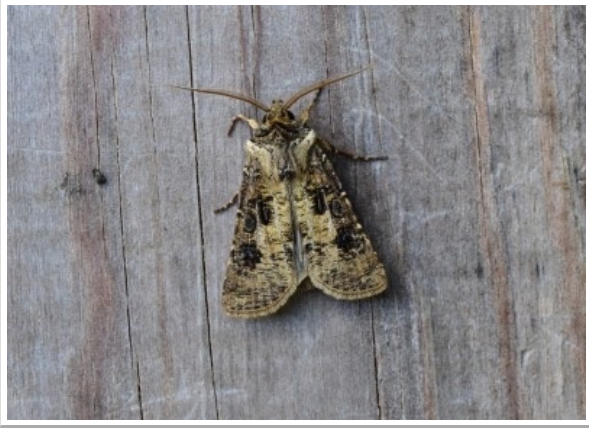
I also had another Buff Ermine on the night of the 8th and this time took a photo of it in their more usual resting posture.



Buff Ermine – Coverdale 08.06.2020

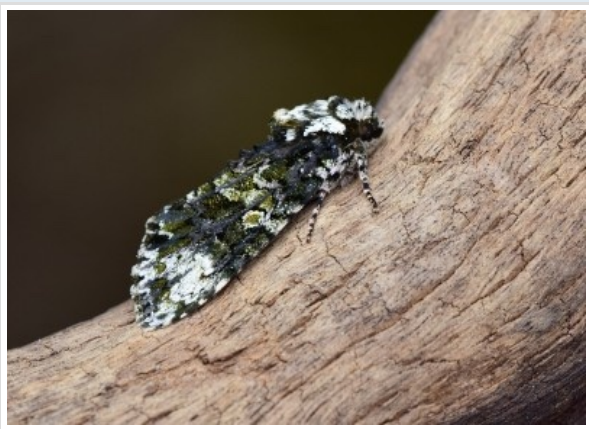
A nicely marked Heart & Club on the night of the 14th was one of those species that I only get one or two of each year, unlike it's close relative the

Heart & Dart which is a common trap-filler being second in numbers here only to Large Yellow Underwings which should start turning up any time now.



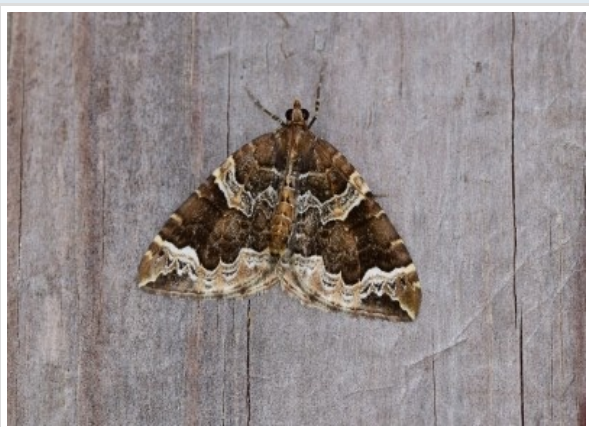
Heart & Club – Coverdale 14.06.2020

Another Coronet on the 15th was an example of a nice colour form which has more white in the markings. The difference in forms can be seen if compared with the one posted on the previous page in this diary.



Coronet – Coverdale 15.06.2020

The Phoenix is another one of those species that I usually just get single examples of each year with one on the night of the 18th being only my third garden record, the previous ones being one each in 2016 and 2019.



Phoenix – Coverdale 18.06.2020

Since then the weather has swung the other way again and we are into another spell of very warm weather which will no doubt bring some decent moth nights this week before, according to the current forecast, we are in for another series of thunderstorms on Friday.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 26-Jun-20 09:49 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I tried to get some shots of a Humming Bird Hawk Moth that was my Garden the other day but this time it was too quick for me 😊 (Disaster) shots 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Jun-20 11:11 AM GMT

Hi Goldie. I have not seen a Hummingbird Hawk Moth yet this year although I may have done if I had been in Dorset this week as was originally planned until it got cancelled. Oh well! there's always next time.

Friday 26th June.

This week we should have been on a family holiday down in Dorset, stopping in a caravan at Durdle Door, but as I mentioned in a previous post it had been cancelled due to covid19. Having seen the news reports of the crowds down there and some of the idiotic behaviour on display, part of me is glad that we weren't there.

We thought about going out on a couple of day trips this week but in the end, with places looking busy and temperatures hitting 25c by 09.00am, we just chilled out around the house and garden for a few days...so not much change there then 😊.

Come Friday morning and we went on our now regular run to both mine and Jane's mom to see if they needed anything doing and to drop off some stuff. After the past few days of sweltering hot weather, we were originally forecast to get some thundery showers this morning, but the latest update to the forecast showed that these would now pass further over across the east midlands and miss us. Therefore, with the relaxing of the rules, we made the most of another warm and sunny morning to sit in my mom's back garden for a bit before carrying on to Jane's mom. We had agreed that I would drop Jane off there and then be off the leash for a couple of hours before going back to pick her up.

As I had done on some previous Fridays, I then drove the ten minutes or so to Blythe Valley Park to have a look and see what was around since my previous visit a couple of weeks back.

The first thing I noticed was that, as expected, Meadow Browns were now everywhere with hundreds seen across the various meadow areas. Ringlet numbers had now increased as well and these were particularly numerous along the more shady spots nearer to the hedgerows. In fact with the mid-morning temperature already up in the mid twenties many of the Ringlets were choosing to fly in the shade.

Small Skippers were zipping about all over the place and despite taking quite a few record shots of the all important underside of the antennae, I failed to find any Essex Skippers here today.



Small Skipper – Blythe Valley 26.06.2020

I was particularly pleased to find at least twenty Marbled Whites in one large Meadow area, although like everything else, they were hyperactive in the warm sun. The males were not stopping for anything but one or two females would settle occasionally to feed on some tall thistles.

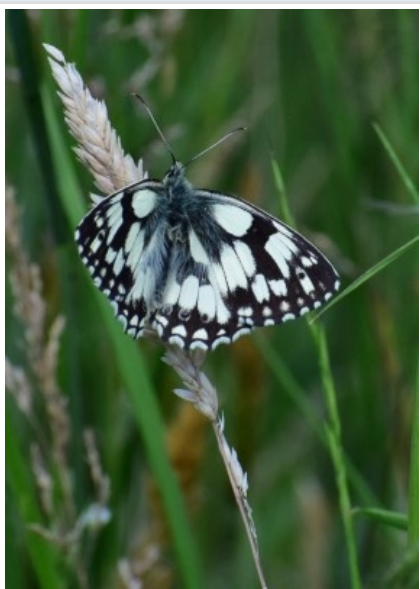


Marbled White – Blythe Valley 26.06.2020



Marbled White – Blythe Valley 26.06.2020

The only time I saw one stop with open wings was when one of a few random clouds covered the sun briefly, just long enough for me to grab one shot.



Marbled White – Blythe Valley 26.06.2020

This is the first time I have seen these here although that is probably because my previous visits here have either been too early or too late in the year and it is only because of being on furlough from work that I have paid this site more attention this year.

A couple each of Speckled Wood, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell were also seen. Most of the Tortoiseshells that were flying a couple of weeks back have now disappeared and I am starting to see reports on various social media of people finding them tucked up in sheds and outhouses etc. This is amazingly early to be doing this but I saw similar reports last year and it would certainly explain where all the Tortoiseshells came from this spring after an apparent shortage last summer.

A single Red Admiral was also fluttering around some brambles and, as this species often does in hot sun, spent more time in the shade than out in the sun.



Red Admiral – Blythe Valley 26.06.2020

At just before 12.30 I circled back to the car to go and pick Jane up and noticed on the drive back that the temperature on the display was reading 30 degrees.

In the end we did not see any of the anticipated thunderstorms all day and it turned into another hot day, similar to those we have had all week. Things do look to change over the weekend though and as I write this on Saturday morning we have had some rain in the early hours and just had another good soaking with some of that really heavy stuff coming straight down like stair-rods as my dad used to say.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Jun-20 05:47 PM GMT

"Little men in big jackets" – that's a great phrase and one I intend to try and use 😊😊 A cracking collection from your most recent 'escape' 😊 I wouldn't worry about Dorset break Neil – all that's happened is that we've been inundated by idiotic Grockles with no sense of self preservation or social responsibility – is this natural selection in action I wonder? Also in the heat the butterflies are exceedingly twitchy and never seem to settle 😊 So you'll probably have more luck round your way and you'll certainly be safer and 'surrounded' by a better class of people 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Jun-20 08:39 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

Garden Moths update

..My best moth during the past couple of weeks was undoubtedly a Pine Hawk Moth which despite not being in the best condition was a new one for me and a great record for my Solihull garden...

...Other highlights were a couple of Elephant Hawk Moths which are always a delight to see. I had one on the night of the 8th and another on the 9th, different individuals as confirmed by a close look at their markings...

Fabulous, Neil. Who said moths were drab? 😊 That Elephant Hawk Moth is a work of art, and the others in the line up are all highly attractive too.

Well done with the Toadflax Brocade. Nice to see it making some headlines.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 28-Jun-20 05:46 PM GMT

I really love seeing your moth images Neil. It is not just the variety but also the way that you present them. I don't know how many different ways I can say it but each time you seem to excel yourself and motivate me to the point where I'm saying to myself 'must get the moth trap out'. Well done with the Toadflax Brocade.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jun-20 02:36 PM GMT

[quote=Wurzel post_id=155370 time=1593276453 user_id=9821] ... So you'll probably have more luck round your way and you'll certainly be safer and 'surrounded' by a better class of people 😊😊 ...

Wurzel

Oh, I don't know Wurzel, I reckon half those idiots that went down there were from up here and they are all back now 😊

David M wrote:

Fabulous, Neil. Who said moths were drab? 😊 That Elephant Hawk Moth is a work of art, and the others in the line up are all highly attractive too. Well done with the Toadflax Brocade. Nice to see it making some headlines.

Thanks David. The Elephant Hawk Moth is certainly a beauty, I have had a couple more since then so another photo or two may well grace this PD in due course 😊

That Toadflax Brocade was the record of the year for me so far 😊

[quote=Pauline post_id=155427 time=1593362780 user_id=1095] I really love seeing your moth images Neil. It is not just the variety but also the way that you present them. I don't know how many different ways I can say it but each time you seem to excel yourself and motivate me to the point where I'm saying to myself 'must get the moth trap out'. Well done with the Toadflax Brocade.

Thanks Pauline. Being on furlough from work still gives me plenty of time to try and get the photos. They don't all sit still though, some of them are off as soon as I point the camera at them 😊

I am really beginning to wish that we could have just a day or two of average weather, the kind with reasonable temperatures and some summer clouds drifting across the sky. After last week's uncomfortable 30 odd degrees, we had some hefty rain on Saturday and although Sunday was drier, it was cloudy and blowing a gale here. Today (Monday) is again very blustery with a thick layer of dull cloud and the temperature is no more than 15 degrees. I have seen a couple of Speckled Wood, Ringlets and Meadow Browns attempting to brave the wind in the garden during the occasional brighter spell but that is it for the past few days.

Just to prove that I can take as bad a photo as anyone, the shot below was my attempt at a Green Woodpecker at Blythe Valley on Friday. I fired off three quick shots as it flew across and only managed to get the bird in frame in this one 😊 .



Spot the Green Woodpecker...

Hoping to get out again this week but the weather is looking a bit hit and miss so will take each day as it comes.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-20 08:20 PM GMT

I've seen worse shots than that Neil – a lot of them currently sitting in my 'recycling bin' 😊 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 29-Jun-20 09:20 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Just to prove that I can take as bad a photo as anyone, the shot below was my attempt at a Green Woodpecker at Blythe Valley on Friday. I fired off three quick shots as it flew across and only managed to get the bird in frame in this one 😊

You've actually done pretty well with the bird, Neil. It's in decent focus....just the trees that are shaking! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jun-20 07:38 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, you and me both 😊

Thanks David. The trees are blurred because my camera was moving trying (unsuccessfully) to track the bird. That was the last day we had before the winds blew in when the trees would have certainly been shaking 😊

Tuesday 30th June

After a dull and very windy Monday, Tuesday started off again with a thick overcast although the wind had dropped somewhat. By late morning the cloud was turning a lighter grey which made it feel a bit brighter even though there were not as yet any breaks to allow the sun through. This did however brighten things up just enough for a couple of butterflies to put in an appearance in the garden, a faded looking Small White and a nicely marked female Green-veined White.

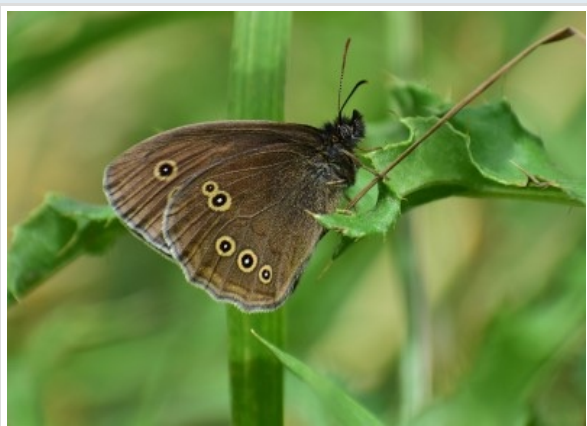


Green-veined White female - Coverdale 30.06.2020

By early afternoon, it had improved enough for me to walk down to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park. It was still mostly overcast but the sun was occasionally poking through for brief spells which made it feel almost pleasant. The first butterflies seen were Ringlets and Meadow Browns, both species that will happily fly in cloudy weather, and both flying here in good numbers today.



Ringlet male - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Ringlet male - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



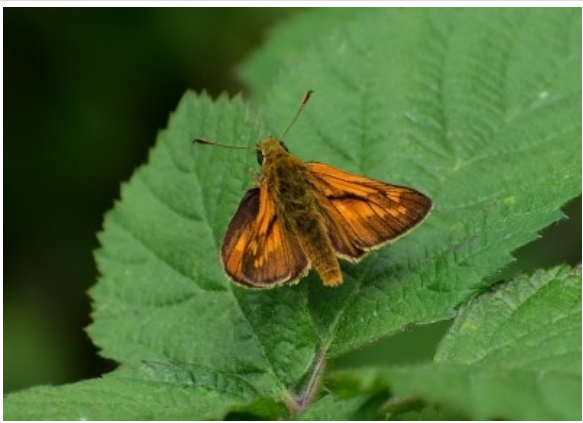
Ringlet female - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

One particular female Meadow Brown was well marked with additional orange patches on her hindwings. This is the second individual like this I have seen this year already and as I mentioned in a previous report, I am seeing more like this every year.



Meadow Brown female - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

A dozen or so Large Skippers were seen spread between three distinct areas.



Large Skipper male - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

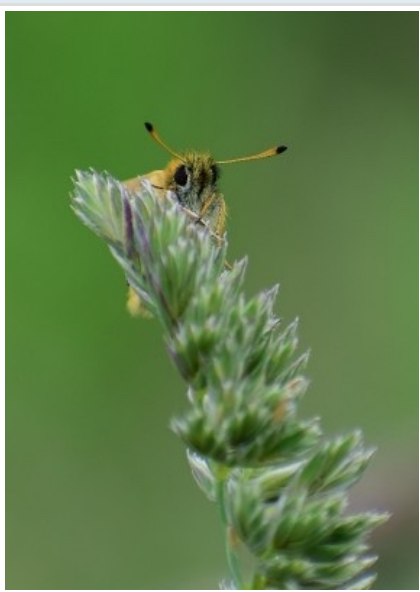


Large Skipper female – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

A few Small and Essex Skippers were also seen. I took head on shots of a couple of each and noticed of those that I positively identified, the Small Skippers were all in one area and the Essex Skippers in another, with a hedgerow and large bramble patches separating the two groups.



Small Skipper male – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Essex Skipper male – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

At least three different Red Admirals were seen, identified as such by the degree of wear and damage, with one looking particularly tatty, one a bit better, and one in quite good condition. The last one circled around me a few times, as these often do, and landed on my trouser leg.



Red Admiral (on my trouser leg) - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

Eight or nine Commas were also seen which is more in one afternoon than I saw in this spot all spring. Comma numbers were quite low around here when they came out of hibernation this year, certainly well down compared with Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks, but there seems to be good numbers around now with both *hutchinsoni* and normal summer ones appearing at all my local spots.



Comma - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

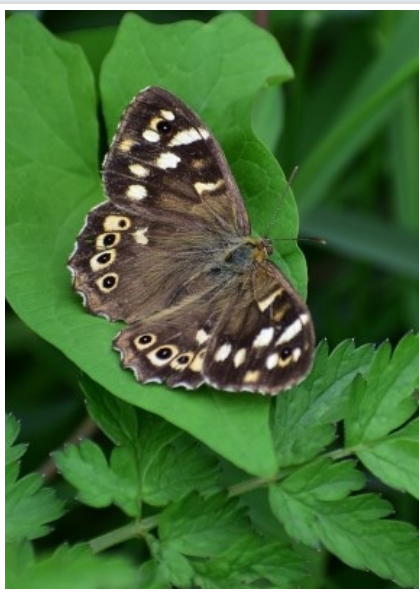


Comma - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Comma – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

A couple of Speckled Wood were also flying here, one female and a single very tatty male that was guarding a gap in the hedgerow between two separate areas.



Speckled Wood female – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

There were also lots of Small Tortoiseshells here but I am going to give these a post of their own.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-Jul-20 10:14 AM GMT

Great report Neil 😊 Lovely set of shots especially like the cheeky "I'm definitely an Essex me" shot 😊 Bit envious of all the Commas as well I love the two tone orange-brown of the Hutchinsoni 😊 of 🇬🇧

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 01-Jul-20 11:21 PM GMT

You've done well to see anything at all these last few days, Neil. 🇬🇧

The Green Veined White with its heavy spots is lovely but your Essex Skipper takes the plaudits overall – that's a candidate for any tutorial as to how to identify one definitively!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Jul-20 08:15 AM GMT

[quote=Wurzel post_id=155541 time=1593594853 user_id=9821] ...especially like the cheeky "I'm definitely an Essex me" shot 😊

Cheers Wurzel, no doubt about that one 😊

David M wrote:

You've done well to see anything at all these last few days, Neil. 🍀

Thanks David. That was the only half decent window in the weather this week, it has been more like autumn some days with the wind and rain.

More below from the same session;

Tuesday 30th June part 2 - Small Tortoiseshells.

For me, Small Tortoiseshells are the butterfly of the year for 2020, at least so far anyway. I appreciate that some areas, particularly it seems in the south east, are not seeing the same numbers, but around the midlands and further north they are flying in the kind of numbers that have not been witnessed for some years.

Following on from very good numbers coming out of hibernation this spring, the summer brood has been really impressive around here with good numbers at my local sites.

Yesterday (June 30th), as well as the other butterflies in my previous report from my local spot by Wagon Lane Park, I also counted more than 30 scattered across the whole site.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



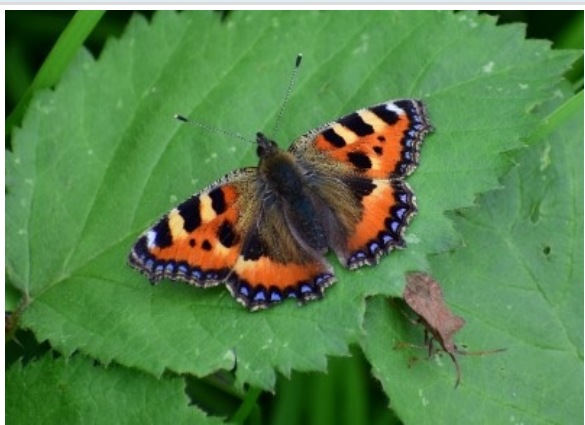
Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

This was still down a bit on a previous visit in better conditions a couple of weeks back when I counted well over 40 here in an hour. It is worth remembering that this is a comparatively small site, essentially some rough ground to the side of a local park which is surrounded by housing on the Solihull/South Birmingham border. The map below copied off Google Earth shows the area which I have highlighted within the white line.



Wagon Lane Park with area of rough ground circled in white.

I mentioned in a previous report that I had seen courtship behaviour a number of times with this summer brood and today I found plenty of evidence of success with over a dozen larval nests found in various stages of development. This is the largest number of nests I have seen in one spot for many a year and points towards a good second brood, assuming that a reasonable portion of them evade predation, parasites, disease etc. and make it through.



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

As well as the summer breeding, I also mentioned in a previous report that I am seeing reports of some individuals being found tucked up in typical hibernation spots already. This behaviour of early hibernation would certainly help to explain where the good numbers came from this spring after a comparative scarcity last summer.

I am not sure if both types of behaviour happen every year or if the higher numbers are making it more apparent this year, or if indeed there is a change in behaviour in response to climate change, but it would certainly make sense as a survival mechanism for some individuals to produce a second brood whilst others hibernate early and therefore spread their options.

After all, Commas do something similar with some summer brood (*hutchinsoni*) producing a second brood in the autumn, whereas the normal summer brood individuals go straight into hibernation. Maybe Small Tortoiseshells are evolving to behave in a similar way...maybe, maybe not, I could be totally wrong. Something for further research perhaps?

Whatever the case, along with the other butterflies seen, they certainly made for a great sight in what has otherwise become a dull and dreary week.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 03-Jul-20 10:21 AM GMT

Lovely images of both adults (particularly the last one which is stunning) and larvae.

Clearly, there ought to be a healthy late summer brood this year. Perhaps the abnormally early emergence of the mid-summer brood has triggered this?

Normally, I see my first around 10th June but this year it was over two weeks earlier, prior to the late spring Bank Holiday.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-20 06:11 PM GMT

Cracking Small Torts Neil 😊 They're having a great season round my way as well as I've seen several in different places and normally only catch the odd one in the summer – they seem more intent in getting on with it than the spring/hiberator Torts. 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Jul-20 08:51 AM GMT

Thanks for your comments David and Wurzel. Good to see the Small Tortoiseshells are doing well in other areas too 😊

Wednesday 1st July

Another pretty grotty day to herald in the new month. Most of the day was very dull and blustery with the odd shower and it wasn't until later in the afternoon that it began to brighten up a bit. Even then the brighter spells were just an occasional thinning of the overcast so that you could just about make out the disc of the sun above the cloud layer.

Nevertheless, even in these challenging conditions some butterflies will do their best to carry on and I was looking out of the kitchen window when I spotted a strange fluttery white fly in to the bottom of the garden. I grabbed my camera and went to investigate and found it was a pair of Green-veined Whites in cop.



Green-veined White pair – Coverdale 01.07.2020

After taking a couple of photos, I left them in peace and was on my way back up the garden when I spotted a splash of white that turned out to be another female Green-veined White sitting with her wings open and trying to make the most of the poor light.



Green-veined White female – Coverdale 01.07.2020

I checked the mating pair were still where I had last seen them, which indeed they were, just to make sure that this one wasn't the female from that pair having separated and flown past me.

After that the clouds thickened up again and a strengthening wind blew in some more heavy rain showers. Still, that was a couple more butterflies than I had expected to see today.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-20 07:44 PM GMT

Lovely set of shots Neil 😊 The last one is really interesting as there are the bold, dark spots/streaks across the wings yet the triangles on the tips are washed out and muted – lovely contrast 🤩👍

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 06-Jul-20 04:06 PM GMT

You seem to have the 'knack' with Whites, Neil. That female GVW is superb.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Jul-20 06:53 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I have seen a few GVW females like that this year, I posted one from my garden on June 30th which had washed out looking tips with darker black marking superimposed on them.

Thanks David, I would probably have missed her as well if I had not gone out to look at the pair in cop.

Thursday 2nd July.

The wet and windy theme continued this morning (Thursday 2nd) but the forecast looked a bit more promising for the afternoon with a potential window of sunny spells between 2.00 – 4.00pm so I decided to pop out then and have a look at my local spot at Bickenhill.

In a 'normal' year this would be one of the first of my local spots that I would visit as it is usually reliable for Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas coming out of hibernation, but with the lack of travelling earlier in the year due to covid 19, this meant that I had not visited then. In fact, due

to concentrating on some of my other local sites, I had still not yet been to Bickenhill this year, hence my decision to have a look today.

I arrived just after 1.30pm with some promising bits of blue sky heading in my direction and set off along the usual path alongside a hedgerow and towards a couple of meadow areas. Meadow Browns and Ringlets were soon seen in good numbers along with Small Skippers and a few Large Skippers.



Ringlet – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Large Skipper female – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Small Skipper male – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Small Skipper male – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Small Skipper male – Bickenhill 02.07.2020

I was also on the lookout for Essex Skippers which in the past have often outnumbered Small Skippers here once they get into their flight period, which usually starts a week or so after the Smalls. Today, because of the stage that each species is at in their flight period, I reckon that the ratio was still something like 70–30 in favour of the Small Skippers. Many of the Smalls were still looking very fresh and it is usually noticeable that when the Essex Skippers are at their peak, many of the Smalls are getting worn and faded.

Most of my photos to confirm the ID's of the Essex Skippers were ropey record shots with grass stems all over the place, the one below showing a male being about the best of a bad bunch.



Essex Skipper male – Bickenhill 02.07.2020

I also spotted a pair of Essex Skippers in cop which as far as I can remember is the first time I have seen this with this species although I have seen both Large and Small Skippers in cop plenty of times before.

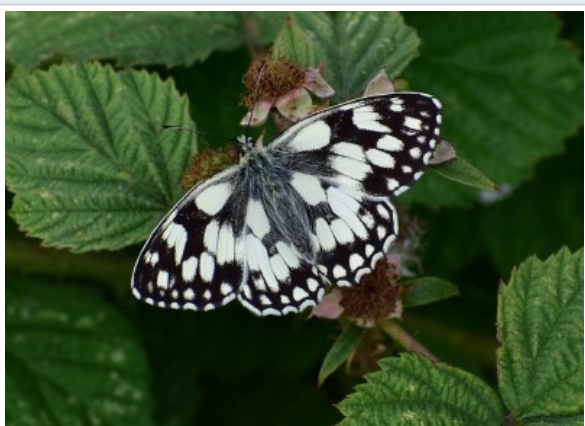


Essex Skipper pair – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Essex Skipper pair – Bickenhill 02.07.2020

I was also pleased to see more than thirty Marbled Whites here today. Last year and the year before I found single examples here and it was good to see that they have obviously colonised this site now.



Marbled White male – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Marbled White female – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Marbled White male – Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Marbled White female – Bickenhill 02.07.2020

It is not that many years ago that Marbled Whites would not be found around Solihull and were considered a scarce and local species in Warwickshire so it is pleasing to find them in increasing numbers at a number of my local spots.

Small Tortoiseshells were flying here although not in the numbers at some of my other local spots with 'just' half a dozen seen today.

Commas also seem to be around in reasonable numbers at my local spots this summer, certainly more so than I saw in the spring, with half a dozen seen scattered around today.



Comma - Bickenhill 02.07.2020



Comma - Bickenhill 02.07.2020

Also seen was a single Red Admiral that buzzed me a couple of times but showed no sign of landing.

For once, the forecast was almost bang on and I enjoyed a couple of hours of nice sunny spells and light cloud from around 2.00pm until just before 4.00pm when some approaching big black rain clouds prompted me to make a move back home.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-Jul-20 07:47 PM GMT

It's a good feeling getting back to a reserve you've not visited in a while Neil 😊 The travel restrictions were a bit of a bind at times but I don't think we had it as bad as in Wales - they've only just lifted the '5 miles travel' rule 🤞 Great set of Smessex skippers - the male Essex nicely shows those important distinguishing features - great work with the pair in cop - I've only got one set of those in my collection 😊🇬🇧

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Jul-20 06:24 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

....I also spotted a pair of Essex Skippers in cop which as far as I can remember is the first time I have seen this with this species although I have seen both Large and Small Skippers in cop plenty of times before.

Well done, Neil. I don't personally recall seeing mating pairs of this species although like you, I have regularly seen both Large and Small Skippers in cop.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Jul-20 07:30 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Funnily enough, I did not mind the travel restrictions that much, I have enjoyed paying more attention to my local spots this year. Yes, I have missed some species but I can live with that, there is always another year.

Thanks David. It's weird how it is quite easy to see some species in cop and not others.

Friday 3rd July.

After the short period of better weather on Thursday afternoon the dark clouds returned and we had some more rain overnight. Friday was back to mostly cloudy with occasional drizzle or light rain to make it another dull and dreary day. Nevertheless, after our Friday morning visit to my Mom, I dropped Jane off at her Mom's and carried on once again to Blythe Valley Park for a walk. My excuse was that despite the dull and wet conditions, I wanted to check out a couple of footpaths that I had previously noticed but not explored before.

I wandered along these paths for a bit and found some nice hedgerows and spotted a few of those dull weather specialists, Ringlets and Meadow Browns, bobbing about. For a few minutes the clouds thinned a bit, not enough for the sun to break though, but enough for me to spot a Marbled White flying over the long grass to the side of the path. Despite the cool and dull conditions he was very flighty but I managed to creep up on him and get a couple of shots.



Marbled White – Blythe Valley 03.07.2020

The only butterfly I photographed today.

Sunday 5th July.

Saturday was a stop indoors day, not only cloudy and quite cold for the time of year but blowing a gale for most of the day.

Sunday was better in that it was much brighter although the blustery wind was still very much in evidence. It brightened up enough in the afternoon to tempt me out to my local spot at Castle Hills for a couple of hours although the blustery wind was still very much in evidence.

As expected, Ringlets and Meadow Browns were everywhere with probably hundreds of both species flying over the various meadow areas here.



Ringlet – Castle Hills 03.07.2020

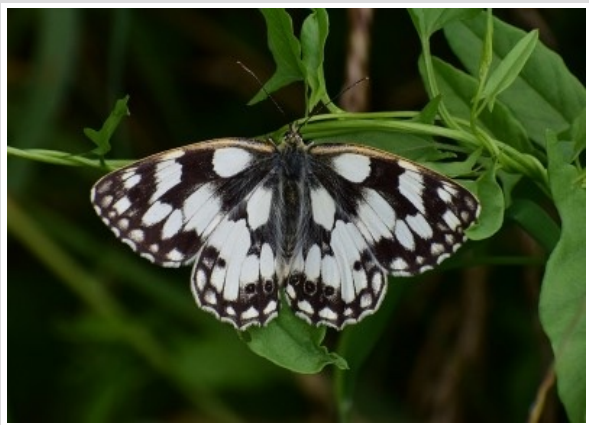
Strangely enough, I didn't see many Skippers here today, just a few each of Large and Small with no Essex spotted amongst them.



Small Skipper - Castle Hills 03.07.2020

Given how fresh many of the Small Skipper were at Bickenhill the other day, perhaps they are just starting here and the Essex not yet emerged ...or perhaps it was just the weather keeping them tucked down in the grass. Speaking of the weather, a lot of this site is fairly open to the full effect of the blustery wind which meant that any butterfly that ventured out of the grass was quickly whisked away. Those that were settled were either low down in the grass or bobbing about on the end of their perch.

The last time I came here, a couple of weeks ago, I had seen a couple of Marbled Whites and was keen to see how they were doing today, this being one of the first places I had found them at around Solihull when they started spreading here a few years ago. Sure enough, there were plenty here with over fifty counted across a couple of areas. Some of these were in a more sheltered corner of a field where I managed to get some photos even though they were still moving about a fair bit.



Marbled White - Castle Hills 03.07.2020



Marbled White - Castle Hills 03.07.2020



Marbled White - Castle Hills 03.07.2020



Marbled White - Castle Hills 03.07.2020

A few Small Heaths were seen, mostly a bit worn looking now so probably between main emergences here which tend to overlap with a peak in June and again in August.



Small Heath - Castle Hills 03.07.2020

Commas and Small Tortoiseshells were also seen, about half a dozen of each, but they were usually blown away into the distance or settled out of reach.

A nice couple of hours despite the blustery wind which almost blew my hat off a couple of times.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-Jul-20 08:19 PM GMT

Lovely Marbled Whites Neil 🍷🍷 – they are stunning looking butterflies, I never get bored of them 😊 WRT some butterflies in cop being easier to spot...I found a pair of Small Skippers in cop the other day, I'd been in the same place scanning about for about 10 minutes and not seen them and then all of a sudden they were there, the wind had changed direction ever so slightly and so they'd turned and I could just make out their profile, if it hadn't have been for that minute change in the wind I would have totally missed them 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-20 09:39 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Marbled Whites are Jane's favourite butterfly, she likes the simplicity of the black and white scheme. I am quite partial to them myself, especially as they have only been around here for a few years. They have been doing well all around the midlands in recent years and are steadily increasing their range.

Sunday 5th July - Something a bit different.

Over recent years, a number of pheromone lures have become available and many people have started using them for Emperor Moths and various Clearwings, an interesting group of day flying moths that mimic various species of wasps. Recently I became aware that some members of both Warwickshire and West Midlands BC branches have been using Clearwing lures to try and get a better understanding of the distribution of these. The results so far seem to indicate that at least some of them are more common and widespread than previously thought, so I was keen to see if any turned up in my garden.

Last week, I decided to jump on the bandwagon and ordered some lures and a couple of traps to use with them. These arrived on Friday afternoon but the wet and windy weather that day and on Saturday precluded me from trying straight away. The following day (Sunday 5th) was not exactly ideal with blustery winds but at least it was dry with some sunny spells so I decided to try one of the lures in the garden. The one I chose to try first was for Current Clearwing, one of the more widespread species which is usually on the wing in June and July. I hung the trap up at the bottom of the garden and checked it every now and then but without any initial success.



Pheromone trap hanging up at the bottom of the garden

I then left the trap hanging up whilst I went out to Castle Hills as described in my previous report. On my return I checked the trap again and was pleased to see a Current Clearwing Moth showing though the plastic side.



Yay!...there's one in there.

I then carefully used a plastic pot to move it onto one of the bits of wood that I use as a background to take a couple of photos before releasing him.



Current Clearwing - Coverdale 05.07.2020

Given the generally early season this year, I was not sure if this species was still flying and this one was looking well past his best, but I was well chuffed with seeing it on my first attempt.

I have lures for other species to try but just need to wait for it to stop raining now.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 08-Jul-20 09:45 AM GMT

That really is interesting Neil and congratulations on your successful first attempt. I shall be interested to know how you get on with the remaining lures. I've toyed with the idea myself but with the poor results from my moth trap

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jul-20 09:41 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline. I have had a bit more success with another lure but I have a couple of other reports to do first to keep the timeline.

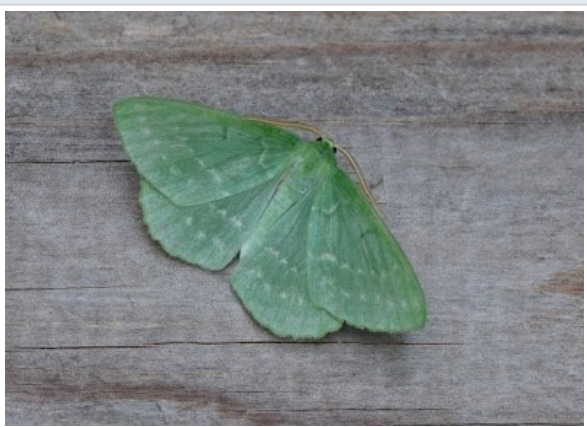
Meanwhile, the grotty weather has meant I can catch up with another update from the garden moth trap.

Garden Moths

The second half of June carried on with conditions swinging wildly between hot and dry for most of the third week and wet and windy for the rest of the month. The conditions for running the moth trap continued to come in periods of a few consecutive nights of reasonable conditions alternated by nights when it was just too windy.

The best period was from the night of 22nd June to the 26th when I ran the trap every night and during which I had 15 new species for the year (NFY) and 1 new one for the garden (NFG) on the night of the 23rd.

The NFG was a Large Emerald, the largest member of this group of green moths, this one being all the more attractive due to its size which is not far off that of a Peacock butterfly.



Large Emerald - Coverdale 23.06.2020

The same night (23rd) also produced a nice Scorched Wing, one of my favourites and one which I have only had to the garden trap once before, in 2017.

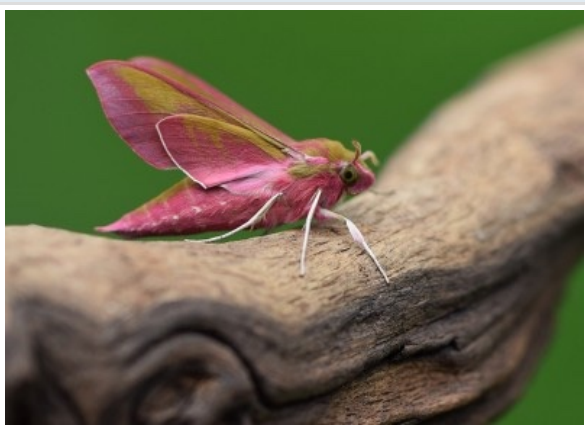


Scorched Wing – Coverdale 23.06.2020

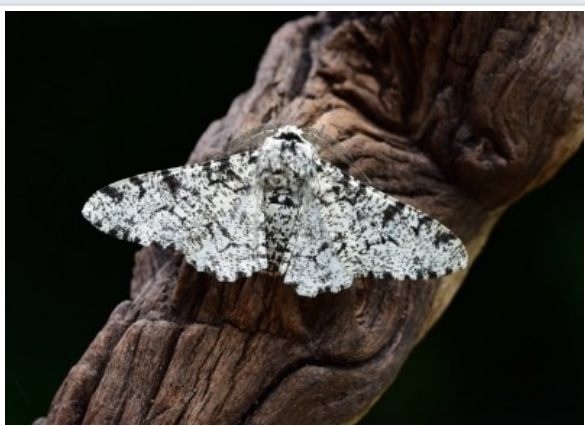
The most productive night was on the 24th June when I had 147 moths of 48 species made up of 74 of 28 macros and 73 of 20 micros, although most of these were the common species to be expected at this time of year. This was closely followed by the night of 26th which produced 142 of 39 (75 of 25 macro and 67 of 14 micro) with highlights of another Elephant Hawk Moth and a nice fresh male Peppered Moth.



Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 26.06.2020



Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 26.06.2020



Peppered Moth – Coverdale 26.06.2020

The night of the 26th also produced another nice Phoenix, my second this year and another species that has made a liar of me after saying I only get one of these a year. I'll have to try that with a few other species to see if it prompts them to turn up.

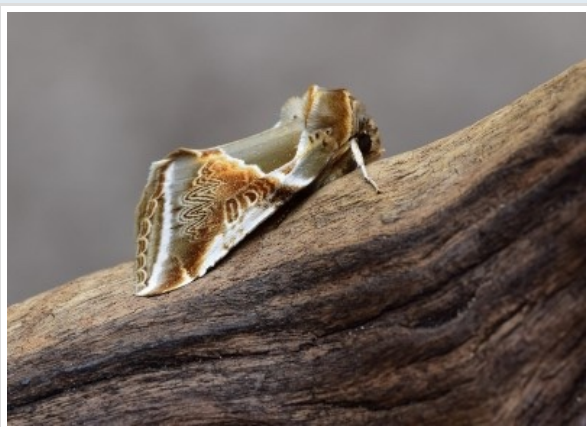


Phoenix – Coverdale 26.06.2020

The last night of the month (30th) produced a reasonable 106 of 31 (59 of 17 macro and 47 of 14 micro). The best moth of the night for me was a Buff Arches, a lovely species that I have had previously but one that did not turn up last year.



Buff Arches – Coverdale 30.06.2020



Buff Arches – Coverdale 30.06.2020

Another species that did not turn up here last year, although I have had half a dozen so far this year, was The Flame. This moth takes its name from the small 'gas flame' like marking on its forewings although I think a more appropriate name might be The Stick.

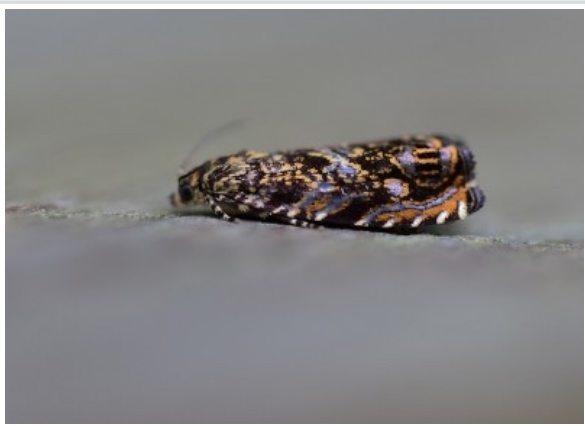


Flame - Coverdale 30.06.2020

Amongst the many micros I have had a couple of my favourites that only turn up in ones and twos each year.



Lozotaeniodes formosana - Coverdale 23.06.2020



Cherry Bark Tortrix - Coverdale 25.06.2020

Since then, I have only lit up a couple of times this month, on the night of Friday 3rd and then this week on the night of Monday 6th. The first of these was quite blustery and only produced 67 of 23 (46 of 15 macro and 21 of 8 micro) all of which were the usual suspects for this time of year with nothing outstanding. The night of Monday 6th produced 72 of 25 (42 of 17 macro and 30 of 8 micro), again mostly the usual common species but also including a NFY Gothic, a widespread but fairly local species and only the second I have had, the first being in 2017.



Gothic – Coverdale 06.07.2020

Since then we have had almost incessant rain, some of it quite heavy, and it looks like a few more days yet before I will be running the trap again.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Allan.W., 09-Jul-20 11:41 AM GMT

Hello Neil ,

Thoroughly enjoying your moth reports ,and like yourself I,ve also been experimenting with Pheromone lures ,its good to be able to watch species that are otherwise practically impossible to see under normal circumstances . Funnily enough I was going to put a short report and pictures last evening concerning Clearwingsbut never quite got round to it ,although I did put a couple of pics on the June sightings page ,I,ve managed 3 species so far (Yellow -legged ,Orange tailed ,and Six belted) I,ve tried for Currant and Red-Tipped ,but as yet no joy!

At Dungeness yesterday ,a local lured 25 Lunar Hornets ! in ten minutes .(Owen Leyshon on twitter ,pictures and video) , and another local has just recorded his tenth garden species ,its certainly a very different (and entertaining !) way of Mothing .

PS; That Cherry Bark Tortrix is a little stunner !

Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Allan.W., 09-Jul-20 11:53 AM GMT

Sorrytell a lie ! posted the Clearwing pictures in the May sightings ! Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 09-Jul-20 03:50 PM GMT

That Buff Arches is gorgeous Neil. Looking forward to reading about your other successes 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jul-20 05:58 PM GMT

Thanks Alan 😊 I must have missed your previous Clearwing pics. Just had a look, great stuff 😊

I had some success with the new LUN lure for Lunar Hornet Moth both yesterday and this morning during brief windows in the rain. Report to come, hopefully soon in the next couple of days once I have got a couple of others done and posted.

The weather is looking better from tomorrow so I am hoping to try for Yellow-legged, Six-belted and Red-belted over the next few days.

Thanks Pauline 😊 The Buff Arches is a beauty and one I am always glad to see. See my comment to Allan above ref. the next Clearwing report, hopefully soon.

Another mostly grotty day has given me the chance to catch up on the next report.

Monday 6th July.

On Sunday night (5th July) I checked the forecast for the coming week and saw that Monday looked to be the best day before bands of rain swept across the midlands from Tuesday on. We therefore decided to have another run down to Snitterfield Bushes in the morning, a site that Jane is particularly fond of and one where the woods provide a good measure of shelter from the persistent wind.

We got up on Monday to a much cloudier and cooler morning than the forecast had predicted, and indeed when I looked at the forecast again, it had changed to show overcast for most of the day. I see that happen a lot these days, the forecast changes to reflect what the weather is actually doing at the time so it becomes less of a forecast and more of a current status report. Anyway, we decided to carry on to Snitterfield although we hung on for a bit and didn't leave until 10.00am in order to allow it to warm up a bit.

We arrived about forty minutes later and headed off through the north side of the reserve. It still felt fairly cool under a thick overcast, no more than 16 degrees at most but good numbers of Ringlets and Meadow Browns were fluttering about along the sides of the paths.

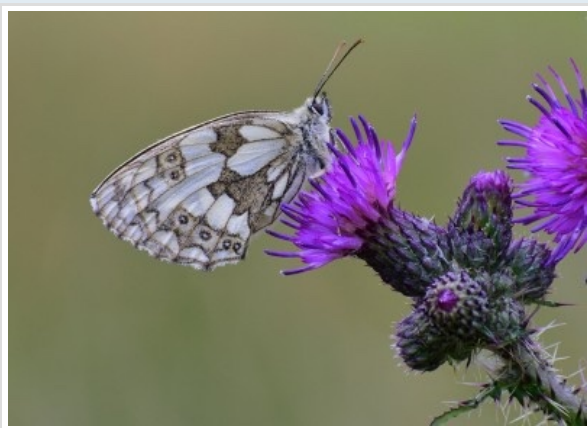
At one point the path passes through a clearing and as we reached there the clouds parted to allow some blue sky to be seen and the sun shone through for a few minutes. This immediately brought half a dozen Marbled Whites up into the air which pleased Jane as they are her favourite butterfly.



Marbled White – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020

The clouds then covered the sun again and as we circled around the paths we felt some light rain drops for a few minutes which luckily faded away before they amounted to much. By this time it was getting on for midday so we returned to the car for a drink and a snack. Jane then said she would stop in the car and read a book while I had a look around the south side of the site where the paths are more uneven and which Jane finds more difficult to manage.

It was still very dull and overcast and a couple of times I felt some drizzle in the air as I made my way through the wood to a meadow where Marbled Whites can usually be found. In this meadow I found quite a few roosting up on some thistles and took some photos as they bobbed about in the wind and a light drizzle continued to come down.



Marbled White – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020



Marbled Whites – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020

This is not the first time I have photographed Marbled Whites here in the rain, I remember some years ago taking a shot of my son Chris photographing roosting MWs here under an umbrella as it rained on us.

Looking up at the sky, I noticed a patch of blue heading towards us so made my way back into the woods to a large bramble patch that I figured would be a good spot if the sun came out. I timed it just right because as soon as I arrived the sun did come out and almost immediately a female Silver-washed Fritillary drifted down from the trees.



Silver-washed Fritillary – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020



Silver-washed Fritillary – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020

She was soon joined by a couple of males and for ten minutes or so they flitted about the brambles until the clouds once again covered the sun and they went back up into the trees.



Silver-washed Fritillary – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020

I also spotted a nice female Meadow Brown, yet another example with extra orange markings like those I have mentioned previously.



Meadow Brown – Snitterfield Bushes 06.07.2020

With thick clouds again stretching as far as the eye could see, I made my way back to the car and we headed home.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Jul-20 07:27 PM GMT

That Buff Arches 🤪 – it seems to be an optical illusion – I look at it looks like the wing is rolled over because of the grey panel. 🤪😄 What a cracking looking species 🍷

Lovely set of Silver-washed 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Jul-20 07:03 PM GMT

Beautiful parade of moths again, Neil, especially the Buff Arches which is one I haven't seen before.

It's amazing how well those pheromone lures work. Moths seem to have an incredibly acute sense of smell so no surprise you got your target.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Jul-20 07:33 PM GMT

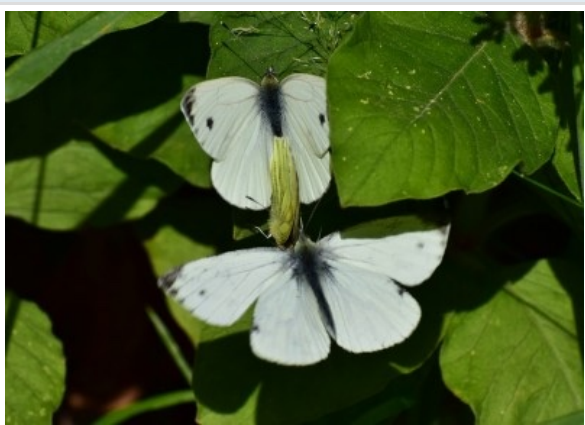
Cheers Wurzel. I see what you mean with the Buff Arches...although I hadn't until you mentioned it, you have an 'interesting' eye for things 😊😄

Thanks David. Pheromone lures are becoming a lot more popular as a way of seeing these elusive moths but they are species specific and some work better than others.

Monday 6th July – part 2.

After a mostly dull and cloudy couple of hours at Snitterfield as described in the last report, we returned home. Later in the afternoon, it began to brighten up a bit more so I went into the garden to potter about for a bit.

As it warmed up a few whites started to pass through and my attention was drawn to a bit of a fluttery commotion in one of the borders. This turned out to be a male Green-veined White trying to intrude on a mating pair.



Two's company...three's a crowd.

After putting up with the attentions of the second male for a couple of minutes, the pair made their escape and fluttered further down the border before coming to rest in a nice pose for a photo.



Green-veined White pair – Coverdale 06.07.2020

The persistent male soon followed them though and they took off again over into next doors garden.

As well as the Green-veined Whites, a few Small Whites were also passing though and occasionally stopping on the brambles at the bottom of the garden, as well as at least one Large White that didn't stop. I'm still not seeing many Large Whites around here but numbers of Green-veined and Smalls are definitely on the increase.



Small White – Coverdale 06.07.2020

Anyone that read this PD back in the spring may remember I had part of old elder tree that had fallen down, that I left lying in place and which became a favoured perching spot for a number of Speckled Woods and Peacocks. Well, it is still lying there although half of it is now somewhat overgrown with nettles and brambles. It is still used as a perching spot and today a Comma found it and kept returning between doing circuits of the garden.



Comma - Coverdale 06.07.2020



Comma - Coverdale 06.07.2020

Also seen in the garden later in the afternoon was a single Meadow Brown and a couple of Ringlets plus a male Large Skipper that had been hanging around for over a week.



Ringlet - Coverdale 06.07.2020



Large Skipper – Coverdale 06.07.2020

Since then, the weather has been horrible here with almost constant rain from Tuesday morning. Up until today (Friday) it only stopped briefly a couple of times, once on Wednesday morning for an hour or so and again on Thursday morning for a similar amount of time. Today was a bit better, at least we didn't have any rain, but instead of the forecast sunny spells and light cloud we got some more heavy overcast until later in the afternoon when it brightened up a bit, although with a cool blustery wind still.

The weekend is looking better, fingers crossed.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 11-Jul-20 06:48 PM GMT

"you have an 'interesting' eye for things" – possibly a misspent youth 😊

Brilliant set of White shots Neil 🍷🍷 I just can't seem to get close to fresh Green-veined Whites this year – I blame my knees I reckon they can hear me creaking my way to them 😊😊 Hope the weather got better for you 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jul-20 09:06 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. The weather improved a bit yesterday (Saturday), at least it was dry even if there was still a lot of thick cloud and a cool breeze here. As I write this on Sunday morning it is looking much better for today 😊

Wednesday 8th July

One of the other pheromone lures that I now have is the new LUN lure for Lunar Hornet Moth. This lure is on trial for 2020 and reports so far are indicating that it is very effective with many people having success with it.

After yet more rain on Tuesday night, Wednesday started off damp and dismal but the rain had stopped early in the morning and although it stayed dull and overcast it felt fairly mild. I had seen reports and had a number of online conversations with members of Warwickshire Moth Group which indicated that the LHM was happy to fly in surprisingly dull conditions, unlike most other Clearwings that seem to prefer warm sunny days. This tempted me to try my lure out in the garden for the first time.

I put the lure out at around 09.00am and kept an eye on it every so often, as much to make sure it hadn't started raining again as the lures are not supposed to get wet, although the plastic trap does provide a bit of protection from showers as long as they are not too heavy.

Just before 10.00am I spotted something flying around the trap and went to investigate and sure enough, it was my first Lunar Hornet Moth. It wasn't showing any intention of actually entering the trap so I caught it in a small net that I have (which I usually use to try and catch any escapees from my normal moth trap when I am going through it) and potted it for some photos before releasing him.



Lunar Hornet Clearwing – Coverdale 08.07.2020



Lunar Hornet Clearwing – Coverdale 08.07.2020

Not long after, it started raining again and then carried on all day so that was that for the day.

Thursday 9th July.

Thursday mornings weather was a re-run of the previous day, i.e. it stopped raining first thing but remained overcast but reasonably mild. I decided to give the LUN lure another go and again put it out around 09.00. Once again, just before 10.00 the first one arrived but this time went into the trap. As I was looking at this one, another one arrived and started flying around the trap. I potted these two and took them into the garage so that if any more arrived I would not be counting these again. Around 10.30 the rain started coming down once more so I went out to fetch the trap in and found a third one sitting on top of the trap. I took some photos and then released them.



Lunar Hornet Clearwings – Coverdale 08.07.2020

As on the previous day, once it started raining again, it settled in for the day. A bit of a Groundhog Day in that respect.

The Lunar Hornet Moth has always been considered to be the most widespread of the Clearwing Moths but this lure is proving that it is far more common than previously thought. Alan W mentioned a count of 25 at Dungeness in his reply to my earlier post and I saw a report earlier in the week of 32 at Ryton Country Park in Coventry where the rangers are specifically targeting Clearwings this year to find out which species they have in the park. The new lure is also providing new insights into the LHMs behaviour, i.e. flight times and the conditions that it will fly in.

The amazing mimicry will be obvious from the photos but I will also mention the effect this can have. Even though my brain knew they are harmless, I still felt a little nervous when getting close to them. We must be hard-wired to be wary of yellow and black stripy things, especially big ones like these. They even move and sound like Hornets or Wasps when they are in flight.

The weather has finally bucked up a bit this weekend and hopefully this will continue into next week so I can try for some of the other Clearwing species that I have lures for.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Jul-20 04:43 PM GMT

That Lure certainly proved successful Neil 🤖🤖🤖 I might have to invest in some of those as 🤖 Lunar Hornet Clearwings are one of the moth species I'd dearly love to photograph – the mimicry is amazing! 🤖🤖🤖

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Jul-20 09:46 PM GMT

Yet more amazing moth images, Neil. It'd be so easy to believe they were hornets which, I suppose, is the whole point of the strategy on their part.

It'll be good to see how well your next lure works.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jul-20 09:20 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. If you want to give them a try ALS is the place for lures <https://www.angleps.com/pheromones.php>

Thanks David. I've now had another three species, report to come in due course.

Friday 10th July.

Another Friday morning and another visit to both mine and then Jane's Mom with me then leaving Jane chatting to her Mom whilst I went for a look around Blythe Valley Park.

The theme of the week continued at first with an almost continuous blanket of cloud that began to thin just occasionally to allow the briefest glimpses of the sun. Nevertheless, with an air temperature in the mid teens, the usual Meadow Browns and Ringlets were flying in good numbers although many of both species are now looking a bit tired and faded.



Ringlet – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

One female Meadow Brown looked interesting with almost 'blind' eye-spots on her forewings with just the slightest hint of a pupil showing in each spot.



Meadow Brown – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

My first Gatekeepers of the season were also flying here now, all fresh males with about fifteen seen around the various hedgerows.



Gatekeeper – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020



Gatekeeper – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

One individual stood out as being particularly attractive with a bronze/gold flush inboard of the sex brand on his forewings.



Gatekeeper – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

A few Small and Green-veined Whites were seen but seldom settled despite the distinctly average temperature.



Green-veined White – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

A handful of Small Skippers were also flying and again I failed to find any Essex Skippers here.



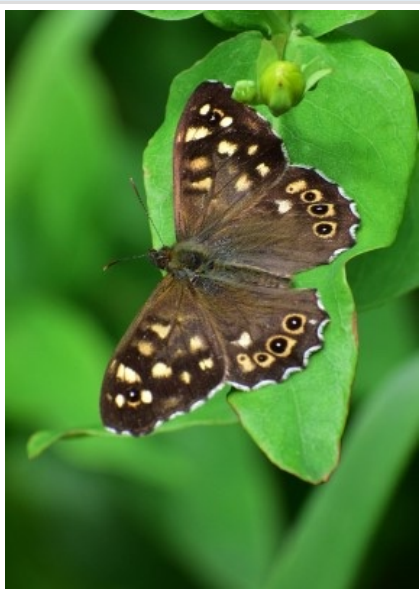
Small Skipper – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

A single fresh male Common Blue was also spotted, the first of the summer brood here. Hopefully by the time I return here next week (weather permitting), he will have been joined by others along with the next generation of Small Coppers and Brown Argus.



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 10.07.2020

Back home again later, it eventually turned into a reasonable afternoon with some pleasant sunny spells and a male Speckled Wood was back in one of the usual spots.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 10.07.2020

A few Whites also passed through, mostly Small and Green-veined but I also saw a couple of Large Whites...or maybe the same one coming round again on repeat circuits.

A nice Comma also came and hung around for ten minutes or so before deciding to carry on and investigate next doors garden.



Comma – Coverdale 10.07.2020

After three days of almost constant gloom and rain with just a couple of short interludes in which it stopped raining but stayed cloudy, it was good to see the sun again.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 15-Jul-20 07:46 PM GMT

Cheers for the info Neil I'll look into that – mind you it might have to wait until September so I can store them in the freezer at work I don;t know how well storing them at home would go down... 😊

Great set of photos – really interesting to see the 'blind' Meadow Brown it's surprisingly eye-catching 🤔👁️👁️👁️

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-Jul-20 10:04 PM GMT

Those are lovely, fresh Hedge Browns, Neil. I guess it won't be long before the females are almost equally as numerous.

For all the tired looking specimens right now, the second half of July heralds new emergences of butterfly species that we've already seen in earlier broods this year, as well as the final handful of new ones, such as Silver Spotted Skipper, Scotch Argus and Brown Hairstreak. Much still to look forward to.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jul-20 07:27 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. I store my lures in small airtight plastic pots which then go into a dedicated plastic food (sandwich) box in the freezer.

Thanks David. Yes, the females have been appearing around here this week.

Sunday 12th July

After the dull and dismal weather last week, Friday finally began to brighten up a bit later in the afternoon, as mentioned in my previous report. Saturday also stayed dry, although it did not brighten up as much as the forecast had indicated and a thick overcast returned for most of the day along with a fairly cool breeze.

Sunday finally brought some proper warm weather back, in fact once again we went from one extreme to the other with temperatures shooting up to the mid twenties by late morning.

With a couple of hours spare in the afternoon, I decided to pop around to my local site at Castle Hills, although I knew that the butterflies would be fully warmed up by now and taking photos would be a challenge. My main reason for going today was that, with the work going on around there for the new JLR logistics centre, it can get busy during the week by where I park the car and Sundays are much quieter. I was also keen to see if any summer brood Common Blues, Small Coppers or Brown Argus were out there yet.

I set off on my usual circuit and immediately started seeing the expected Meadow Browns and Ringlets plus Small and Essex Skippers, all of which were very active in the warm afternoon sun.



Essex Skipper – Castle Hills 12.07.2020

Small Tortoiseshells are still flying around here but no longer in the same numbers they were a couple of weeks ago. Most of them have either gone into hibernation or done their bit towards producing a second brood later this year and going by other reports I have seen I suspect a combination of both.



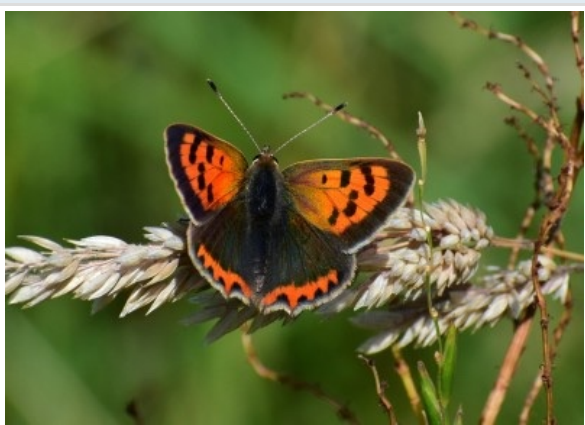
Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 12.07.2020

Gatekeepers are appearing here now and I also saw my first females of the year, only one of which sat still briefly for me to get a photo. It wasn't until I looked afterwards that I noticed that the orange patches on her hindwings were a bit on the small side, in fact I have seen some female Meadow Browns over the past couple of years with more orange on their hindwings than this.



Gatekeeper female - Castle Hills 12.07.2020

I carried on and checked out the usual spots here for Common Blues and Small Coppers and found just one of each, a fresh male in both cases.



Small Copper - Castle Hills 12.07.2020



Common Blue – Castle Hills 12.07.2020

No second brood Brown Argus here yet but that just means that I will have to come back in a week or so for another look.

I have commented in a couple of my recent reports about the amount of rain we have had here and there were plenty of puddles and muddy spots along the paths here. As I wandered along these paths in the warm sun today I came across a number of instances of butterflies taking moisture or minerals up from around these spots, usually Small and Green-veined Whites but occasionally Small and/or Essex Skippers.



Green-veined and Small Whites – Castle Hills 12.07.2020

Most of the butterflies I saw today were either too flighty to get close to for photos or when they did settle they kept their wings firmly closed. There are always exceptions though and I came across a male Green-veined White sitting with his wings open.



Green-veined White – Castle Hills 12.07.2020

A couple of male Commas were also chasing things about and summer Peacocks are starting to emerge around here now. I saw half a dozen fresh looking Peacocks but only managed couple of shots of one individual as he came down on the damp path and flicked it's wings open a few times.



Comma - Castle Hills 12.07.2020



Peacock - Castle Hills 12.07.2020



Peacock - Castle Hills 12.07.2020

A good couple of hours with lots of butterflies even though it was too warm for many good photo opportunities. The bright sun also meant the light was too harsh really for decent photos, but for me, afternoons like this are more about seeing the butterflies flying about naturally and doing their thing.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-Jul-20 09:01 AM GMT

Sunday 12th July - Garden Clearwings update.

My experience over the previous week or so of using the new LUN lure for Lunar Hornet Moth, along with other reports that I have read, has shown that

this species is happy to fly in surprisingly dull and cloudy conditions.

As far as I am aware, most other species of Clearwing prefer warm and sunny weather and with Sunday being the first real sunny day for over a week, this was my first chance to try some of the other Clearwing pheromone lures that I have.

I chose to try two lures, MYO for Red-belted Clearwing (also known to attract Red-tipped Clearwing) and VES for Yellow-legged Clearwing (can also attract Orange-tailed Clearwing).

I hung the MYO up down the bottom of the garden and the VES nearer the house so that there was a good separation between them.

Just before going out to Castle Hills in the afternoon as described in the previous report, I checked the lure and found a Red-belted Clearwing in the MYO trap.



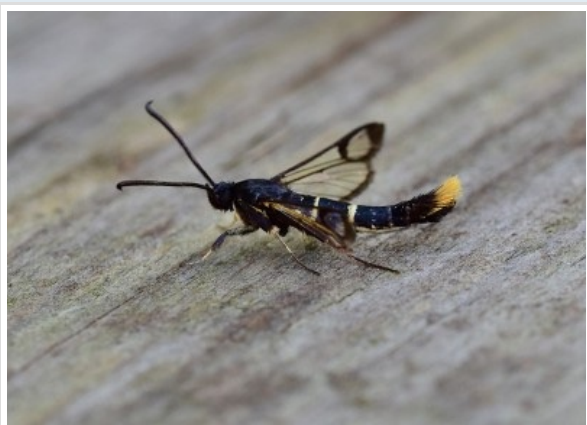
Red-belted Clearwing - Coverdale 12.07.2020

There was also a Clearwing in the VES trap that looked like a scruffy Orange-tailed but as it's tail was a bit threadbare, I wasn't too sure, so I potted it to look at more carefully on my return from Castle Hills.

I returned from Castle Hills and checked the lures again, finding another Clearwing in the VES trap, this time a definite Orange-tailed. Comparing this one with the previous one confirmed that one was indeed an Orange-tailed that had seen better days.



Orange-tailed Clearwing - Coverdale 12.07.2020

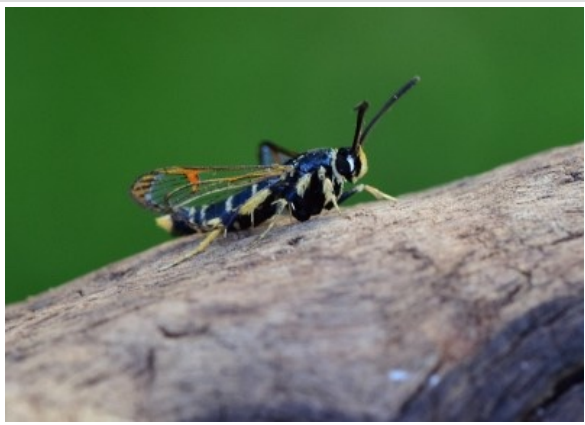


Orange-tailed Clearwing - Coverdale 12.07.2020

I left the traps out for a bit longer and was just thinking about bringing them in at around 6.00pm when I found a Yellow-legged Clearwing in the VES trap.



Yellow-legged Clearwing – Coverdale 12.07.2020



Yellow-legged Clearwing – Coverdale 12.07.2020

This meant that I had three species in the garden in one day which I was rather chuffed with. Along with the Current Clearwing the other week and the Lunar Hornet Moth, this brings me up to five species in the garden. There is one more species that I have a lure for and can try for here, Six-belted Clearwing, so I will hopefully try for that one next week (weather permitting).

Bye now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 18-Jul-20 09:42 AM GMT

Interesting report on the lures and Clearwings Neil – lovely photos as always. You're definitely tempting me.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Jul-20 08:54 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline. It may be worth hanging on to next year now. There are a few Clearwing species still flying and should be for a week or two yet but after early August their season will be just about over.

Bye the way, I thought of you when I took one of the photos below 😊

Tuesday 14th July.

The return to warm sunny weather didn't last long here, just the one day. Monday morning saw a return to the thick overcast we have seen so much of and by midday it was raining again.

Tuesday (14th July) was much the same but with less rain, a bit of drizzle in the morning which had cleared up by the afternoon. Despite the dull and cloudy conditions and a temperature barely reaching the mid teens, I went for a walk down to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park.

To start with, not much was flying apart from the usual Meadow Browns and Ringlets that I put up as I wandered about, but a slight thinning of the clouds brightened things up just enough for a few Small and Essex Skippers to join them.



Essex Skipper - Wagon Lane 14.07.2020



Essex Skipper - Wagon Lane 14.07.2020



Essex Skipper - Wagon Lane 14.07.2020



Essex Skipper - Wagon Lane 14.07.2020

A couple of Small Tortoiseshells were also spotted basking on the brambles along with a single red Admiral.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.07.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.07.2020

As I stretched across the brambles to take a photo of the Red Admiral, my foot snagged a trailing bramble shoot and it took off rapidly into the distance so I only got the one shot which had an out of focus bit of grass in the way.



Red Admiral – Wagon Lane 14.07.2020

A few whites were also flying and I managed to ID a couple each of both Small and Green-veined but no Large Whites again today.



Green-veined White – Wagon Lane 14.07.2020

There were also lots of Small Tortoiseshell larval nests still to be seen around the various nettle beds and I counted a good dozen in various stages of development.



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 14.07.2020



Small Tortoiseshell larvae – Wagon Lane 14.07.2020

I often see urban foxes out during the daytime around here but they are usually too quick for me to get a photo. This one stood his ground just long enough for me to get a shot before he turned and legged it.



Fox warily watching me – Wagon Lane 14.07.2020

After about an hour here I felt some more drizzle in the air so made my way back home.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 19-Jul-20 09:24 AM GMT

Interesting to see your Clearwing successes, coincidentally I came across a 6 belted one the other day and you've remind me I need to send the sighting to the county recorder. Also coincidentally I found a 'blind' meadow Brown this past week to add to my growing collection of Meadow Brown abs. I've been seeing this year 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-Jul-20 08:18 PM GMT

Cracking Clearwings Neil – they're really attractive looking little moths 🤩👍 Great sets of shots in your recent reports – the Green-veined and Small side by side is a brilliant shot – worthy of being in an ID guide that one 🤩👍👍 Looking forward to some 6 belt action 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 20-Jul-20 07:44 AM GMT

These Clearwings are fascinating, Neil. Generally, they remain out of sight but it's amazing how use of a lure can tempt them out so readily.

Beautiful image of the fox. You definitely captured it on 'high alert'.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Jul-20 09:18 AM GMT

Thanks Bugboy. Six-belted is the last species that I am trying for in my garden this year, although it is probably the least likely one for me to find here. Having said that, I know someone that had one come to a lure in a garden in South Birmingham just a few miles from me so fingers crossed.

Cheers Wurzel. Considering they have few scales on their wings they can be a remarkably attractive group of moths.

Thanks David. Until this year I knew very little about the Clearwings but the more I find out, the more fascinating they become.

Thursday 16th July.

Another week that had turned out to be dull and cloudy so far but Thursday afternoon looked like it might brighten up with some promising sunny spells forecast for the afternoon. This tempted me to return to my local spot at Bickenhill to see what had changed since my visit two week ago.

The first thing that struck me was the number of Peacocks. Just inside the first field there is a patch of brambles against a hedge and there were at least half a dozen fresh looking examples flitting around here.



Peacock - Bickenhill 16.07.2020

As I continued around the usual paths I saw loads more Peacock with every patch of brambles playing host to anything up to a dozen or more...and there are lots of patches of brambles here.



Peacock - Bickenhill 16.07.2020



Peacock - Bickenhill 16.07.2020

They were also on clumps of ragwort or thistles...



Peacocks – Bickenhill 16.07.2020



Peacock – Bickenhill 16.07.2020

A few weeks back, people had been reporting lots of Peacock larval webs and there was a lot of speculation that there would be a good summer emergence. This afternoon was the first evidence of this that I had come across around here with dozens of fresh examples flying all over the site.

As well as all the Peacocks there were a few Commas scattered about and a single Small Tortoiseshell put in an appearance.

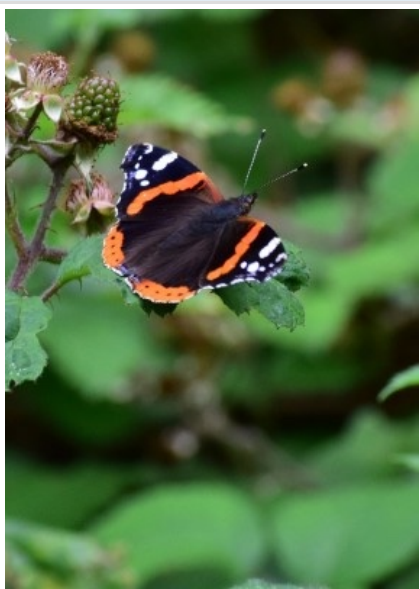


Comma – Bickenhill 16.07.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Bickenhill 16.07.2020

A couple of Red Admirals were also flying about but these were even more restless than everything else and seldom stayed settled for long.



Red Admiral – Bickenhill 16.07.2020

Meadow Browns were everywhere as usual but Ringlet numbers had dropped substantially with most of those still flying looking tired and worn now.

Marbled Whites had practically disappeared from here with just one seen. On the other hand, Gatekeepers were on the increase with lots of males and a few females along the hedgerows and on the brambles.



Gatekeepers – Bickenhill 16.07.2020

Both Small and Essex Skippers were zipping about all over the place but once I had confirmed the presence of both species I didn't pay them much attention apart from when I spotted a mating pair of Small Skippers.

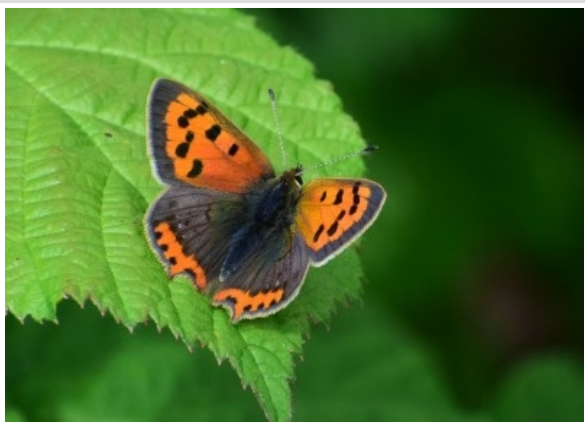


Essex Skipper – Bickenhill 16.07.2020



Small Skipper pair – Bickenhill 16.07.2020

I was particularly pleased to find three Small Coppers in three different parts of the site...



Small Copper – Bickenhill 16.07.2020



Small Copper - Bickenhill 16.07.2020



Small Copper - Bickenhill 16.07.2020

... although I only found one Common Blue here today.



Common Blue - Bickenhill 16.07.2020

I reckon it is still a little early for the second brood of Common Blues to get going around here, maybe another few days or a week depending on the weather we have. The season had been running early due to the warm spring but it is beginning to feel like the collapse in the weather we have had here over the past few weeks has brought things back closer to where they would normally be about now.

Lots of Shaded Broad-bar moths were also here. These are really nocturnal moths but are so easily disturbed from long grass during the day that they are often thought of as day flyers.



Shaded Broad-bar - Bickenhill 16.07.2020

A cracking couple of hours in what was for once really pleasant conditions, not too hot and with some fluffy summer clouds drifting across the blue sky.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Jul-20 07:14 PM GMT

Friday 17th July.

After a clear and chilly night, Friday morning was again quite pleasant for my weekly visit to Blythe Valley Park, although a lot more cloud once again built up as the morning progressed. This site today produced the same selection of species as the previous day at Bickenhill albeit most of them in differing numbers.

Fresh summer Peacocks were out here in lower numbers than at Bickenhill with a total of 'only' around a dozen seen.



Peacock - Blythe Valley 17.07.2020



Peacock – Blythe Valley 17.07.2020

Small Tortoiseshells, Commas, and Red Admirals were represented by a couple of each.



Small Tortoiseshell – Blythe Valley 17.07.2020

Gatekeeper numbers had increased from last week and females had now joined the numerous males.



Gatekeeper – Blythe Valley 17.07.2020

Meadow Browns were again everywhere but Ringlet numbers had dropped now and only just edged into double figures.

In a reversal of the numbers seen at Bickenhill the day before, three Common Blues and a single Small Copper were seen.



Common Blue - Blythe Valley 17.07.2020



Common Blue - Blythe Valley 17.07.2020



Small Copper - Blythe Valley 17.07.2020

On my previous couple of visits here I had seen plenty of Small Skippers but failed to find any Essex Skippers. I finally succeeded with the latter today with a dozen or more confirmed by the usual antennae shots.



Essex Skipper – Blythe Valley 17.07.2020

Lots of whites were flying, mostly Small and Green-veined and for the first time this year I also saw more than just the one Large White with maybe half a dozen seen during my wandering around here.

Back home later in the afternoon the cloud had built up once again to a 100% overcast but it was still warm enough for a few butterflies to be passing though the garden. These included a Holly Blue that paused for a refill on the brambles and a couple of Green-veined Whites that both found something inviting about the same spot.



Holly Blue – Coverdale 17.07.2020



Green-veined Whites – Coverdale 17.07.2020

With uncanny predictability, we had some heavy rain again overnight to get the weekend off to a wet start. At least with me still being on furlough from work, my butterflying this year has not been mostly restricted to the weekends. I am not sure how much longer this is going to last though, my guess is that I will probably be back in work after what would be our summer shutdown in a couple of weeks.

Bye for now and Stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Jul-20 08:31 PM GMT

It has been an extraordinary summer for Peacocks Neil – I can't recall seeing as many, they're all over the place 😊😄 Lovely shot of the Essex Skipper – they always seem a bit more 'sandier' rather than orange to me as in your shot 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Jul-20 09:42 PM GMT

That's a great angle you've got for the Essex Skipper, Neil. No mistaken identity possible there!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 21-Jul-20 10:37 PM GMT

That Skipper shot is fantastic Neil 🍷😄 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 22-Jul-20 07:59 AM GMT

Lovely selection of summer species recently, Neil, and every one in fresh condition.

A mrgreen for the Small Tortoiseshells you keep finding 🍷.

My East Sussex total so far this year stands at three!

Stay safe,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Jul-20 09:50 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. Yes, loads of Peacocks around now. With all the Small Tortoiseshells that we had around here a few weeks back it almost feels like the kind of summer we used to have...if only we could have a bit less of the gloomy cloud cover we keep having here.

Thanks David. The tall thistle made that one easier.

Thanks Goldie. Glad to see you are having a great time in Kent.

Thanks Trevor. Small Tortoiseshells have had an excellent year around here and judging by the number of larval nests I am finding there should be a decent second brood to come.

Sunday 19th July

Saturday started off very wet after heavy overnight rain and although we didn't have any more rain during the day, we didn't have much sun either, and it remained dull and damp for most of the day.

Sunday was much better with some nice warm sunny spells throughout the day but I ended up staying at home doing a few little jobs in the house and pottering around the garden.

Small and Green-veined Whites were seen passing through and often stopping for a refuel on the dwarf buddleias or bowles mauve plants.



Small White – Coverdale 19.07.2020

The males of both species spent most of their time chasing after the females and each other and I saw a few instances of attempted courtship, all of which were received with the rejection display.



Small Whites – Coverdale 19.07.2020

I also saw a couple of Large Whites passing through but these were flying strongly as if on a mission rather than fluttering apparently aimlessly about like the others.

Singles of Peacock and Red Admiral were hanging around for most of the afternoon and alternating between visiting the buddleias and basking on the neighbouring plants.



Peacock – Coverdale 19.07.2020



Red Admiral – Coverdale 19.07.2020

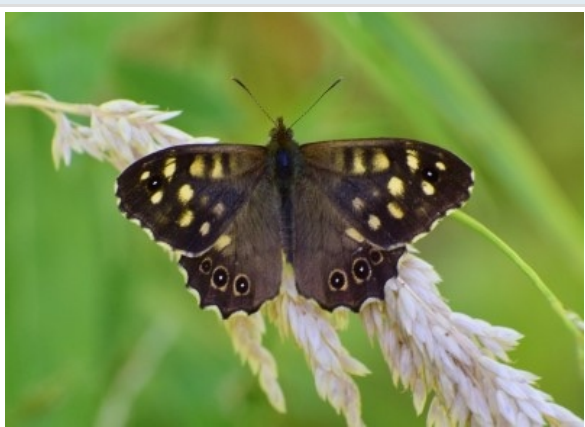
I also had brief visits from singles of Comma and Small Tortoiseshell that dropped in but didn't stop.

Given that I didn't see many spring brood Holly Blues here, I was pleased to see a couple of summer brood today, one of which was a nice new female that stopped briefly but only opened her wings part way to tease with a partial view of her lovely fresh topside.



Holly Blue – Small White – Coverdale 19.07.2020

A couple of male Speckled Wood were in their usual spots and one of them seemed to take particular exception to the Red Admiral and relentlessly chased after it whenever came anywhere near.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 19.07.2020

A pleasant and chilled out day just watching the butterflies in the garden and I managed to get a couple of little jobs done which all helps to keep the brownie points topped up 😊

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Jul-20 08:23 PM GMT

I reckon the gloomy weather is here for a while now Neil as the School Holidays have started – so that's it for the weather until September 😊😞 Lovely set of shots as always especially like the almost inky black Specklie – lush that is 🍷🍷

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Jul-20 10:26 PM GMT

That last post is almost a return to spring, Neil. Pick of the bunch is that female Holly Blue.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 23-Jul-20 07:26 AM GMT

Lovely shot of the fox Neil 😊. Always guaranteed to get my attention – eventually!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Jul-20 09:21 AM GMT

I fear you could be right about the weather Wurzel, fingers crossed you are not. That Specklie shot was taken in one of the cloudier spells, hence the dull light.

Just a pity she didn't open up a bit more David. Lovely to see in any case.

Thanks Pauline. I thought you might like that one.

Monday 20th July.

Monday dawned once again with a blanket overcast that stuck around all day with just an occasional thinning to make it feel less gloomy. Nevertheless, with temperatures lurking around the mid teens, it did not feel too bad and so in the afternoon I walked down to my local spot at the side of Wagon Lane Park.

The first butterflies I noticed were a couple of Speckled Woods and during the hour or so I spent here I saw half a dozen males and a couple of females.



Speckled Wood female – Wagon Lane 20.07.2020

Most of the other butterflies I saw were either put up as I wandered around or spotted basking and trying to make the most of the poor light. These included the expected Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers and a few Ringlets plus a couple of each of Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell (Sorry Trevor) and Comma.



Peacock - Wagon Lane 20.07.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 20.07.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 20.07.2020



Comma - Wagon Lane 20.07.2020

I also searched a couple of known spots for Small and Essex Skippers and found a few of each but these were roosting low down in the grass which involved some scuffling about on my hands and knees to get some shots, even using the vari-angle screen on my camera.



Essex Skipper - Wagon Lane 20.07.2020

In the past I have seen the odd one or two Common Blues here and I was chuffed find a male flying about today in one of the few brighter spells when the clouds thinned just enough for the sun to be made out as a dim disc.



Common Blue - Wagon Lane 20.07.2020

I was even more pleased to find a male Brown Argus chasing after the Gatekeepers in one corner as this was the first time I have ever found this species here.



Brown Argus – Wagon Lane 20.07.2020

A few Small and Green-veined Whites were also seen but all in all there were not many butterflies about today, although there were just enough to lift the spirits on a mostly dull and gloomy day. Plus the Brown Argus was a welcome bonus being a first for this site.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Jul-20 06:41 PM GMT

Cracking set of shots Neil especially the oily sheen Brown Argus 😊 I love it when they catch the light like that 😊 Looks like I was a bit pessimistic about the weather – better that an it turn out better than the other way round 😊 Fingers crossed 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 24-Jul-20 09:10 AM GMT

Love your Brown Argus shot Neil 🍷 It's one I've missed some how down here, also the Small Heath, strange really when they're being seen every where else. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jul-20 07:07 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, the weather bucked up during this week although we have still had a lot of cloud here, especially in the afternoons.

Thanks Goldie, That is the first second brood Brown Argus I have seen here this year and Small Heaths seem to be between broods here too.

Tuesday 21st July.

Tuesday morning I went round to my mom's to do a bit of gardening as she now finds some of the heavier and more awkward jobs a bit much for her, not that I find some of the heavy stuff much easier these days myself but she is nearly thirty years older than me.

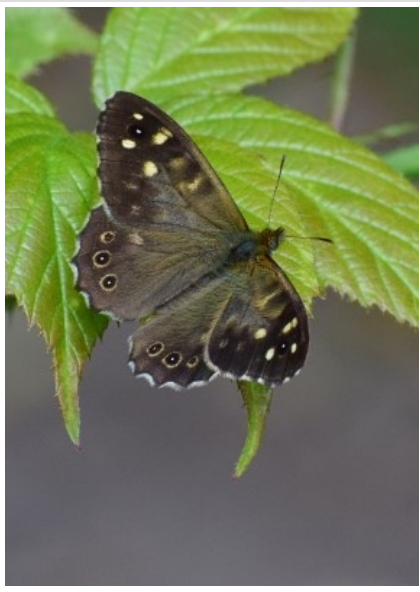
After doing the jobs in mom's garden, I went for a walk down to her local park just down the road. I have often been for a walk round there in the past when visiting but this year, first with the lockdown restrictions and then with our habit now of visiting both my mom and then going on to Jane's Mom on Fridays, I had not yet had a look this year.

The weather this morning was much improved from Monday with plenty of blue sky and warm sunshine. All the expected butterflies were seen including Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Gatekeeper, Small Skipper and some random passing whites, all of which were very flighty with the late morning temperature up around 22-23 degrees.

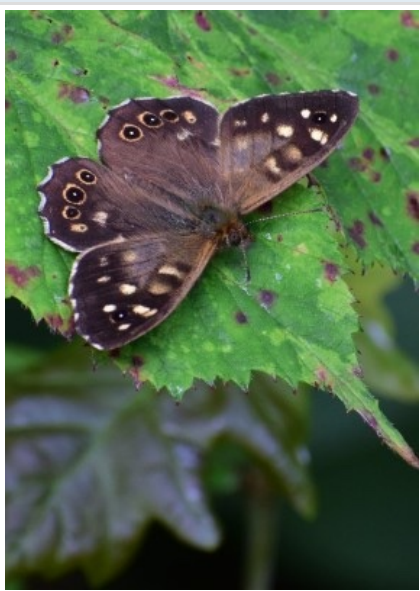
A few fluffy white clouds were drifting across the sky and covered the sun occasionally prompting some of the butterflies to open their wings.



Gatekeeper – Langley Hall 21.07.2020



Speckled Wood – Langley Hall 21.07.2020



Speckled Wood – Langley Hall 21.07.2020

One male Gatekeeper had the extra spots of ab. excessa.



Gatekeeper ab. excessa – Langley Hall 21.07.2020

A couple of Peacocks and Commas were seen along with a single Red Admiral with just one of the Commas settling long enough for a photo.



Comma – Langley Hall 21.07.2020

I also checked some large oaks and spotted a couple of Purple Hairstreaks flitting about the higher reaches. I think I am one of the only people to still not see a Purple Hairstreak low down this year, although I do realise that is probably because I am not usually out early enough for the best chances.

I only did a single circuit lasting about 30 minutes before returning to my mom's and then heading back home but it was nice to acquaint myself with this little spot.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 24-Jul-20 07:32 PM GMT

The markings on those Speckled Woods seem particularly subdued, even for summer brood butterflies. That's a nice extra-spotted Gatekeeper too, Neil. None of the hundreds in my locality manages even the smallest of extra spots! 🍷🍷

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-Jul-20 04:57 PM GMT

I was going to say about the lack of markings on that Specklie but Dave beat me to it Neil 😊 Cracking ab.excessa I've not seen one like that for a few years now 🍷🍷

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Jul-20 06:18 PM GMT

Beautiful, velvety Speckled Wood, Neil. I guess he won't look like that after a week amongst the bramble blossom. 😊

By the way, I'm also in your 'club' regarding Purple Hairstreaks. Not seen one lower than 15 feet this year, sadly.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Jul-20 09:11 AM GMT

Thanks for your comments Dave, Wurzel and David 😊

Those Specklies were nice and new and I noticed that they looked more like those that appear in the autumn. Mind you the weather has felt a bit autumnal here on occasion lately 🙄

Wednesday 22th July

On Wednesday afternoon I decided to go and have a look at another local spot that I haven't been to yet this year, in fact I haven't been here for a few years now. This is not a self contained 'site' but rather a stretch of public footpath near to the village of Catherine-de-Barnes just outside of Solihull which heads back across farmland and some meadows back towards Solihull.

With the temperature in the low to mid twenties and lots of big fluffy clouds drifting across the sky it was a 'typical' summers day and plenty of butterflies were seen along the hedgerows that the path follows for most of the route. As expected these were mostly Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers with a few Ringlets still hanging on.



Gatekeeper male – Henwood Lane 22.07.2020



Gatekeeper female – Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

Where the path passed alongside some grassy meadows, good numbers of Small and Essex Skippers were also buzzing about.

In some of the corners of the meadows there were large patches of thistles and these would be covered in lots of Peacocks, I reckon I must have been something like 50 to 60 before I got to the end of my walk and retraced my steps.



Peacock - Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

A few Small Tortoiseshells and Commas were often amongst all the Peacocks but usually just one or two of each on each patch of thistles.



Comma - Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

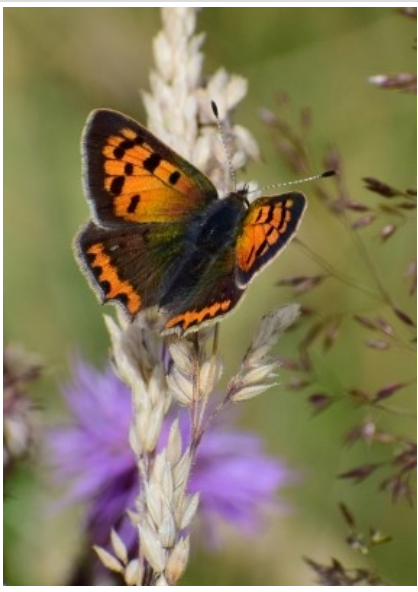


Small Tortoiseshell - Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

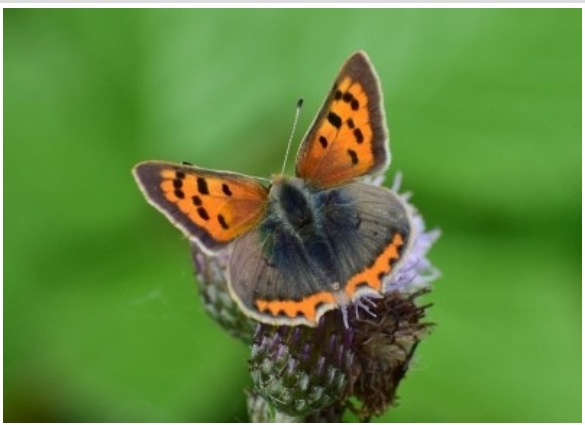
The stars of the afternoon for me however were Small Coppers with 15 to 18 seen, mostly in a couple of meadows towards the end of the walk. This may not seem like high numbers compared to areas like Dungeness or parts of Cornwall where I have seen high numbers before, but this is a species that usually only turns up in ones and twos around my patch with anything above half a dozen at any given site being notable. The condition of these varied with some being quite worn but others looking nice and fresh.



Small Copper - Henwood Lane 22.07.2020



Small Copper - Henwood Lane 22.07.2020



Small Copper - Henwood Lane 22.07.2020



Small Copper – Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

A few showed varying amounts of blue spotting and sods law dictated that the one with the best looking spots refused to sit still and pose nicely.



Small Copper – Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

The last I saw of that particular individual was him chasing off after another male SC and despite lurking around that spot for a while I failed to see him again.

Most of those I saw were males which were quite obvious with their territorial posturing and habit of usually returning to favourite perches. Just one female was seen and she was in a different part of one of the meadows to where most of the males were chasing each other about.



Small Copper female – Henwood Lane 22.07.2020

Lots of whites were also flying here and numbers of both Small and Green-veined Whites have been increasing steadily recently. Still not many Large Whites around here although I am beginning to see a few more over the past couple of days.

A couple of Speckled Wood and a single Common Blue were also seen before thick clouds once again built up and it turned quite breezy which prompted me to make my way back.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 26-Jul-20 07:50 PM GMT

A cracking set of Coppers Neil 😊 It's always the way isn't it? I had a similar thing with a Valesina this year – she just wouldn't sit still whereas all of the other Silver-washed were falling over themselves to get in front of my lens 😊 Perhaps they're just being modest? 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Jul-20 08:57 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. I suppose if it was too easy we would not have any challenges left. It all adds to the fun even if it can be a bit frustrating at times 😊😊

Thursday 23rd July.

Yet another mostly overcast day although at least the temperature was up in the high teens which made it feel reasonably pleasant and even quite humid by the afternoon.

Around mid-morning I went for a walk to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park. When I walked through to the first meadow area I found that the grass had been cut and apart from a few Meadow Browns and gatekeepers around the edges there was very little butterfly activity in this part. A couple of nettle beds had also been cut down along with a few Small Tortoiseshell larval nests that I had seen on them last week. To be honest, I was expecting this spot to be cut sometime as it always is around this time of year but there are other parts of the site which are left alone and this is where the largest nettle beds are with most of the Small Tortoiseshell larvae.

As I moved on more butterflies were soon seen including more Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers plus a couple each of Speckled Wood, Comma, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell.



Speckled Wood – Wagon Lane 23.07.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 23.07.2020



Comma – Wagon Lane 23.07.2020

Also a Red Admiral that had seen better days.

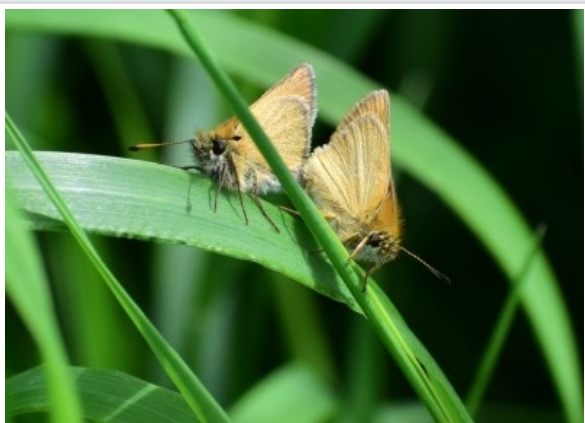


Red Admiral – Wagon Lane 23.07.2020

Quite a few Essex Skippers were seen, including a mating pair, but Small Skipper numbers have now dropped and those I saw were all looking tired and faded.



Essex Skipper – Wagon Lane 23.07.2020



Essex Skipper pair - Wagon Lane 23.07.2020

After finding the single male Common Blue here at the beginning of the week I was pleased to find another three today in a different part of the site.



Common Blue - Wagon Lane 23.07.2020



Common Blue - Wagon Lane 23.07.2020



Common Blue - Wagon Lane 23.07.2020

I also managed to re-connect with the Brown Argus from the other day (the first for this site)...well, I thought I did but close scrutiny of the photo afterwards showed it to be a different individual. This one was a bit more faded, which could be explained by a few days wear, but the discal spot is smaller and the orange lunules are slightly different.



Brown Argus - Wagon Lane 23.07.2020

A few Small and Green-veined Whites also were seen flying about along with a single Large White during the hour or so I spent here this time.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Jul-20 08:16 PM GMT

"A couple of nettle beds had also been cut down"...somehow they always seem to pick the worst spot to cut back and a lot of the I can't fathom why they need to cut back at all? 😞

A cracking set of images as always Neil but that Comma really stands out for me – such a vibrant ginger colour 😊😄🌿

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Jul-20 07:45 AM GMT

It'll be interesting to see how the second brood Common Blues do given that the first enjoyed a prolonged warm, sunny spell during its flight period.

You've caught that Essex Skipper beautifully, Neil. I daresay it won't be too long before they reach my neck of the woods on the Gower; they've already been recorded in Bridgend.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Jul-20 09:16 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Cutting the meadows is a bit of a balance. Despite being relatively small, this site is split into three distinct areas separated by dense hedgerow and there is a mixture of cutting regime. The one area has been cut a couple of times this year but despite this has been full of butterflies between cuts. A second area is never cut, I believe due to difficult access, and is full of rank grass which supports relatively few butterflies. The third area is cut on a rotational basis with approx a third of the area cut at any one time and supports the greatest diversity of species.

Thanks David. The first brood were not particularly numerous around my patch but, although it is early days yet, the second brood is already looking to be doing better.

Friday 24th July.

Friday morning again so no prizes for guessing where I went. Yep, back to Blythe Valley Park again after dropping Jane off at her Mom's for a couple of hours.

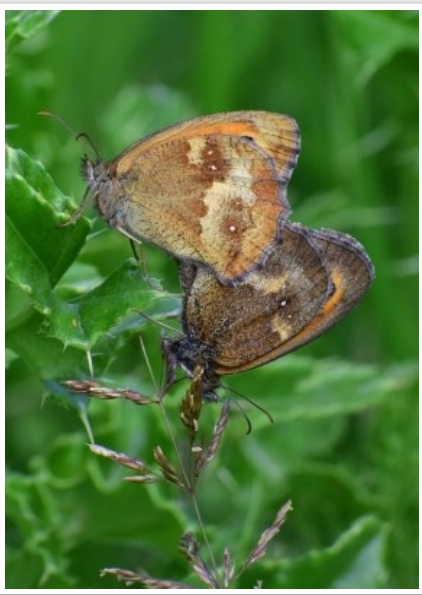
The morning was quite pleasant with good spells of warm sun alternating with banks of cloud that built up as the morning progressed, until by the time I left just after midday to pick up Jane, it was once again 100% overcast.

Along with the usual Small and Green-veined Whites I saw a few more Large Whites than of late, about half a dozen, and one of them even settled for me to get a shot, one of the few I have managed of this species so far this year.



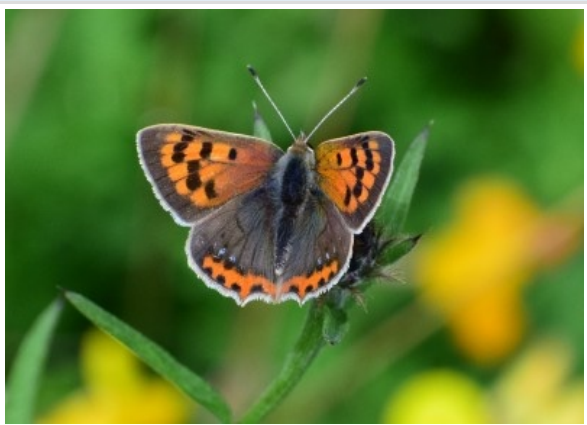
Large White - Blythe Valley 24.07.2020

Lots of Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers were here again, including a mating pair of the latter.



Gatekeeper pair - Blythe Valley 24.07.2020

I found a single Small Copper here today, a nice male with a decent set of blue spots.



Small Copper - Blythe Valley 24.07.2020

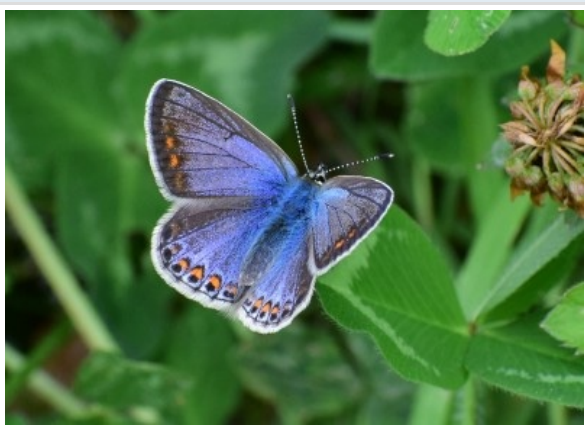
Second brood Common Blue numbers are now starting to build here with a good dozen or more males seen along with half a dozen new females.



Common Blue male - Blythe Valley 24.07.2020



Common Blue female - Blythe Valley 24.07.2020



Common Blue female - Blythe Valley 24.07.2020



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley 24.07.2020

Some of these were already involved in ensuring the continuation of the species here with three mating pairs spotted.



Common Blue pair – Blythe Valley 24.07.2020



Common Blue pair – Blythe Valley 24.07.2020

A few Peacocks and a couple of Commas were seen but no Small Tortoiseshells this morning. This must be the first time for a few weeks now that I have not seen a Small Tortoiseshell.

Another pleasant couple of hours at a site that I have enjoyed visiting more often this year and seeing the changes as the season progresses.

Bye for now and Stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 28-Jul-20 09:29 AM GMT

Female Common Blues are a particular favourite of mine, and there are some lovely ones you've come across there Neil, from right across the spectrum of blueness. 😊 They seem to be doing well in their second brood, having had a pretty good first round as well – assuming the weather doesn't collapse horribly in September, there could well be a decent third brood too. 😊 You've been seeing some really nice Small Coppers as well, with their characteristic endless variety. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Allan.W., 28-Jul-20 07:50 PM GMT

Terrific female Common Blues there Neil ,a favourite of mine also ,i struggled to find any in the first brood ,but thankfully things have now improved and i,m seeing them in good numbers ,also of interest ,i had a female Gatekeeper in the trap last evening.
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 28-Jul-20 08:22 PM GMT

Cracking set of female Common Blues Neil – I don't think that I've seen a properly Brown one for a few years now 😊🍷 Lovely Blue Badger too 😊🍷

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jul-20 09:35 AM GMT

Cheers Dave. The Common Blues were actually fairly thin on the ground around here this year, early signs are that the second brood will be better, which is often the case with many species. I have never seen a definite third brood Common Blue around here although the summer brood usually extends from late July through August and September.

Thanks Allan. Numbers of Common Blues seem to be building nicely here to. I have had a Speckled Wood in the trap before but not a Gatekeeper...yet.

Cheers Wurzel. We still get a good mixture of females here with blue ones seeming to be on the increase over the past few years.

Sunday 26th July.

Saturday was a horrible day here, very windy and some torrential rain showers all day and into the night.

The rain stopped sometime overnight and Sunday was much better with some decent warm sunny spells, particularly in the morning.

The usual selection of butterflies were seen in the garden during the day, including a female Holly Blue that stopped for a refuel on some ragwort that I leave growing in a patch of long grass.



Holly Blue female – Coverdale 26.07.2020



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 26.07.2020



Green-veined White – Coverdale 26.07.2020

Tuesday 28th July.

Back to a dull grey overcast for most of the day on Monday which included some periods of drizzle and rain showers, fortunately none as heavy as we had on Saturday.

Tuesday was better again, well at least it was dry but with a cool wind and plenty of cloud. Even so, a few spells of sun brought the usual butterflies out in the garden including four Gatekeepers that were there at the same time, two males and two females.

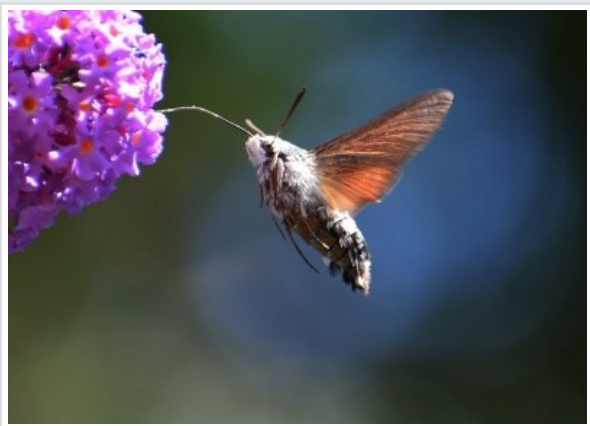


Gatekeeper female – Coverdale 28.07.2020

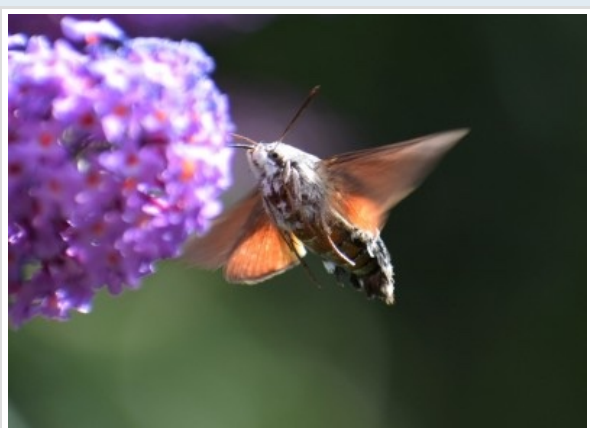


Gatekeeper male - Coverdale 28.07.2020

At one point in the afternoon I spotted a blur of motion on one of my buddleias which I almost ignored as I often see Silver Y moths like this. A second look however proved this one to be a Hummingbird Hawk Moth. Sods law dictated that my camera was in the house when I spotted it and so ensued a mad dash inside to grab it and back out again to take a few quick shots before it disappeared. I was in such a rush that I didn't even think to put it on sports mode otherwise I would probably have got some better shots but under the circumstances I was reasonably happy with the results.



Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Coverdale 28.07.2020



Hummingbird Hawk Moth - Coverdale 28.07.2020



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Coverdale 28.07.2020

This is the first HBHM that I have ever had in the garden although I have seen plenty before, usually when down in Dorset or Cornwall.

Just goes to show that even on days with borderline conditions, you never know what might turn up.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jul-20 08:06 AM GMT

Garden Moths update – July.

Throughout July, I have continued to put various pheromone lures out in the garden when conditions seemed suitable (which hasn't been that often here) and have had some more success, although I have so far failed to attract a Six-belted Clearwing here.

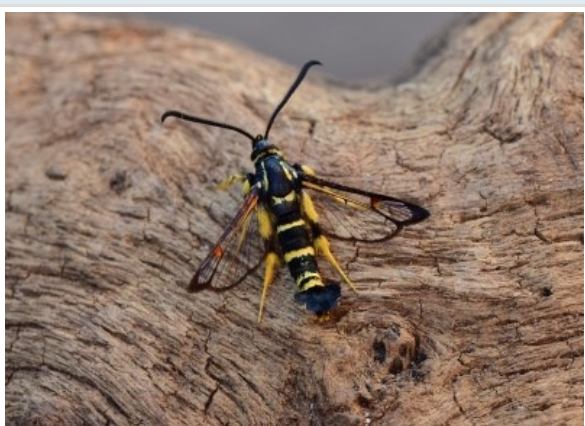
I have had a few more Lunar Hornet Moths to the LUN lure, all arriving before midday and in all sorts of conditions including quite thick overcast.



Lunar Hornet Moth – Coverdale 16.07.2020

The most successful day was on the 17th which was warm and sunny all day. I deployed the LUN lure down the bottom of the garden in the morning and had a couple more Lunar Hornet Moths to it.

In the afternoon I brought the LUN lure in and put the VES lure out and had no less than 5 Yellow-legged Clearwings. The first two arrived mid afternoon and I potted them so as not to count them again and later in the afternoon had another three in the trap together.



Yellow-legged Clearwing – Coverdale 17.07.2020



Yellow-legged Clearwing - Coverdale 17.07.2020

The conditions for running the normal trap this month have continued to be very unsettled with wild swings between clear and cold, and cloudier nights which were usually milder although often a bit breezy. We have also had a lot of rain here with some torrential downpours, both during the day and at night.

Total numbers of moths to the trap continue to be on the low side for the time of year although species numbers are still holding up pretty well with a total to date of 202 (124 macro and 78 micro species).

A selection below of some my favourites from this month,



Swallow-tailed Moth - Coverdale 12.07.2020



Scalloped Oak - Coverdale 12.07.2020



Scalloped Oak – Head on view of the one above



Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing – Coverdale 16.07.2020



White Satin – Coverdale 21.07.2020



Ruby Tiger – Coverdale 21.07.2020

A Poplar Hawk Moth on the night of the 21st would be a second generation with these being increasingly double brooded as far north as Scotland.



Poplar Hawk Moth – Coverdale 21.07.2020

I had a September Thorn on the night of 23rd which was quite worn and looked like it had already been around for a while. This species has an unfortunate name really as it actually flies from July to early October, as does the very similar August Thorn, a fact which often leads to confusion between the two species.



September Thorn – Coverdale 21.07.2020

Some nights I get loads of 'grass moths' of the family Crambidae and have previously identified 8 different species in my garden, although the vast majority are made up of 2 or 3 species depending on the time of year. Just to prove that it can pay to look a bit more closely at these, on the night of 15th July I had a beautiful example of *Catoptria pinella* which was a new one for the garden.



Catoptria pinella – Coverdale 21.07.2020

All in all, I am seeing a good variety in my garden this year with 8 new species of macro and 9 new micros so far, although with total numbers of moths still on the low side as mentioned above, it is definitely a case of quality over quantity.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freman

by Allan.W., 30-Jul-20 08:50 AM GMT

Excellent Neil ! Some great pictures there , your trappings seem very similar to mine ,i,ve had high numbers of Scalloped Oak and Ruby Tigers ,but by far the most numerous,at present are the Rustic/Lesser Common Rustic . I had a try for Orange tailed Clearwings yesterday ,where back in late May i had up to six to the lureyesterday ,not one ,think thats it for them this season . Earlier in the year (as you know)there was an influx of different Fern (Horisme Tersata) ie;Cryptic or Dark Fern ,and i was fortunate enough to trap one

,i caught another last night ,but haven,t heard of any more as yet.
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 30-Jul-20 10:06 AM GMT

You have excelled yourself this time with those moth shots Neil! I can always rely on your diary for high quality images and reports. Love the shot of the Poplar Hawk moth, the Hummingbird Hawk moth and that Lunar Hornet moth – never even knew such a thing existed 😊 and yes, it was a Ruby Tiger in my trap as your photo has confirmed.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Jul-20 08:55 PM GMT

Brilliant set of Moffs Neil 😊👍 The one that stands out for me is the Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing (and not just for the mouthful of a name 😊😊) because the way the light hits it reminds me of the carapace of some of the Shield bugs 😊😊
Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Aug-20 05:14 PM GMT

Wow! That's probably your finest ever moth post, Neil, and there is plenty of competition for that!!

The *Catoptria pinella* is particularly beautiful, and good to see how productive your lures continue to be.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Aug-20 07:55 PM GMT

Many thanks for your comments Allan, Pauline, Wurzel and David. Very much appreciated as always and apologies for the delayed reply, I have been down in Cornwall for the past week with intermittent WiFi that was usually commandeered by my daughter or grand kids when it was working.

Well done Allan with the Cryptic/dark Fern, I had seen the reports earlier in the year, fascinating stuff.

The Lizard – July 31st to August 7th Part 1.

Last Friday (July 31st), Jane and myself set out for Cornwall with our daughter Sarah and the grand-kids, Frankie and Chloe, for a weeks holiday staying at Kennack Sands on The Lizard. This was the first of our booked trips this year that was actually going to happen with two previous trips (to Cornwall in may and Dorset in June) being cancelled due to the pandemic. It was also the first chance this year for Sarah and the kids to have a break as her partner is in the Army and currently on deployment down in the Falklands.

I must admit that I was a bit nervous of what we would find down there this time, with media reports painting a picture of packed tourist spots. The journey down on the Friday did little to dispel this with traffic queues and stop start traffic from well before Bristol all the way down to the Weston-super-Mare turn off, after which the traffic mysteriously thinned out and we made good progress for the rest of the journey. As it happened, during the week, we found the Lizard itself to be no more crowded than at any other times we have been there in early August and given that this is peak holiday season, some parts were actually less crowded than we have experienced on previous visits.

The Friday we had travelled down was really warm with the car display showing temperatures in the mid thirties (god bless air con systems in cars)...until we reached Cornwall when we hit cloud and showers of rain and the temperature dropped down to 18-19 degrees. On the whole however, we enjoyed some good weather down there with Saturday to Tuesday being especially pleasant with plenty of warm sun and white summer clouds drifting across the sky. Wednesday was cloudier and we had some rain later in the afternoon and Thursday saw a lot of low cloud and sea mist rolling in until later in the afternoon.

This was primarily a family holiday and the timing had been determined earlier in the year, before the pandemic reared its head, and the booking made to accommodate some of my fixed holidays from work and the kids from school, plus Sarah works as a support teacher which means she also has school holidays. In the event, none of this mattered as we were all off work or school anyway due to the virus.

I was confident that I would be able to squeeze in some butterflying and I did indeed enjoy some walks along the paths around Kennack Sands and towards Cadwith Cove. Sarah and myself also enjoyed a walk from Lizard Point to Kynance Cove on the Monday morning whilst Jane looked after the kids.

I managed to see 22 species of butterfly, some in large numbers and some in just ones and twos, including everything I would expect to see down there at this time of year. I have lots of photos to sort through so in my usual fashion these will be posted in due course over the next few days but in the meantime here are a few general shots.



Kennack Sands 01.08.2020



Looking towards Kennack Sands from near Carleon Cove 01.08.2020



Near to Lizard Point 02.08.2020



Pentreath Beach south of Kynance Cove 02.08.2020



Frankie and Chloe – Kennack Sands 02.08.2020



Sarah, Frankie and Chloe – Lizard Point 03.08.2020

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Aug-20 08:12 PM GMT

Great to hear that you managed to get one trip away Neil 😊 Looking forward to finding out what you were able to fit in amid the family time 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Aug-20 09:32 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. It was great to get away from the midlands for the first time this year 😊

The Lizard – July 31st to August 7th Part 2.

Second Brood Small Pearls.

Being on The Lizard in early August meant that one of the butterfly highlights that I was hoping to see would be second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. This species is increasingly producing a partial second brood in other parts of its range but I believe that Cornwall is still the only area that produces a regular second brood, usually from the end of July or early August.

It didn't take me long to find the first one, as on the Saturday morning (August 1st), whilst Jane and Sarah were getting the kids ready for a morning on the beach at Kennack Sands, I took a short walk along the coast path to Carleon Cove at Poltesco. This is a very picturesque little cove with the ruined remains of a serpentine processing factory and a freshwater pool behind a pebble beach. Of more interest to me was the vegetation that has taken over some of the ruins which includes stands of bracken and lots of clumps of valerian which attract a selection of butterflies, including this morning, a couple of fresh looking male Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.



Freshwater pool behind the beach at Carleon Cove - 01.08.2020



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Carleon Cove 01.08.2020

I returned to this spot later in the afternoon when I went a bit further along the path, as I also did a couple of times during the week and each time I saw a couple of SPBFs with four different individuals identified on my various visits to this spot.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Carleon Cove 01.08.2020

On my Saturday afternoon walk, I carried on past Carleon Cove to Enys Head which has proved productive for a number of species in the past including Small Pearls. Once again it came up trumps with half a dozen fresh SPBFs seen on the grassy slope of the head itself and a couple more in the stands of bracken between the path and the head.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Enys Head 01.08.2020

This is another spot that I returned to a couple of times during the week, usually later in the afternoon after we had been out somewhere and the others were chilling out back at the caravan.



Grassy slope at Enys Head – 03.08.2020



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Enys Head 06.08.2020

On the Sunday morning Jane offered to look after the kids for a couple of hours while Sarah and myself went for a walk from Lizard Point to Kynance Cove. Sarah is more into landscape photography and after parking up on the green in Lizard village we both wandered off to do our separate things for a while and arranged to meet at the top of the undercliff area to the south of Kynance Cove before walking back. This spot has proved productive for Small Pearls in the past and clambering down the slope I soon saw some bright orange butterflies skimming low above the vegetation. I reckon that during the 45 minutes or so I spent down there that I saw maybe half a dozen, all fresh looking males.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Kynance Cove 02.08.2020



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries – Kynance Cove 02.08.2020

I have seen higher numbers in this spot before but, given the fresh condition of most of the males and the fact I didn't see any females, I believe that it was still early in their emergence and if I had returned later in the week numbers would have been higher. As it was I didn't get a chance to come back but I did see a couple of females elsewhere.

Back in August 2017, during a previous family holiday here, I had found a few SPBFs behind the beach at Kennack Sands, although I failed to find any here during a fairly brief visit in August 2019 when Jane and myself stayed in a B&B in Lizard Village. Staying at Kennack Sands again this year gave me time for a better look and I succeeded in finding a couple, once again fresh males, in the area of bracken between the beach and the coast path.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Kennack Sands 03.08.2020

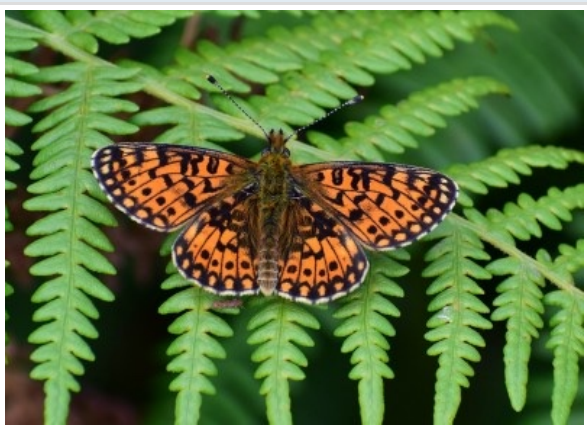
As well as those in the spots already mentioned, I also found a few scattered about along the coast path between Kennack Sands and Enys Head. There is a lot of likely looking habitat along here although much of it is inaccessible being on steep slopes between cliffs.



Coast path looking north between Poltesco and Kennack Sands 01.08.2020



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Between Kennack Sands and Poltesco 03.08.2020



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Between Kennack Sands and Poltesco 03.08.2020

The SPBFs that I have mentioned and posted so far have all been fresh males and these did make up the majority of the individuals that I saw. I did see a couple of females, both as it happened on Enys Head. The first one was on the afternoon of the Saturday (1st Aug.) and looked like she had just emerged that day.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary female – Enys Head 01.08.2020

The second female also looked brand new and was spotted late on the afternoon of the Thursday (6th Aug.) when it brightened up a bit after a lot of sea mist and drizzle earlier in the day.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary female – Enys Head 06.08.2020

All in all, I reckon I saw a conservative estimate of 30 to 35 individual SPBFs during the week, allowing for repeat sightings of some which I recognised when I paid return visits to some spots. Most of them were to the south of Kennack Sands with the area around Enys Head being the most productive single location. The fresh condition of most of the males and the lack of females (just 2 seen) indicated that it was still early in the emergence so I would expect numbers to build over the next week or so.

Most of the locations mentioned above also proved productive for other species too.

To be continued...

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pete Eeles, 09-Aug-20 10:23 AM GMT

Great report, Neil! Makes me want get down there 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Freeman

by kevlng, 09-Aug-20 10:29 AM GMT

Neil, What a great way to start a Sunday by reading your diary. Fantastic photos of the SPBF. Some interesting variations in their markings too. The scenery is to die for. I think that place is now on my to do list.

Kind Regards
Kev

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 09-Aug-20 10:40 AM GMT

Congrats. for ' getting away ', Neil.

Those 2nd brood Small Pearls are magnificent, with images to match!. Sometimes their markings are quite different to the Spring brood as in your third and second to last images.

I'm looking forward to the appearance of those at my local site, none were seen earlier in the week.

Have a great time, and stay well.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Aug-20 07:41 AM GMT

Some beautiful scenery from one of the most picturesque parts of the British Isles, Neil. Looks like you had a great trip, especially with those second brood SPBFs, some of which are very nicely marked. 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Aug-20 09:29 AM GMT

Many thanks for your kind comments Pete, Kev, Trevor, and David. It is certainly one of my favourite parts of the country and it was great to be able to return again.

The Lizard - July 31st to August 7th Part 3.

There are two species that I often catch up with on our trips to Cornwall (or Dorset, or sometimes Cumbria), neither of which can be found in Warwickshire, although there are still colonies of both further afield around the midlands, especially in Shropshire and the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire.

The first of these is the Grayling which is a butterfly that I don't think has ever occurred in Warwickshire, certainly not in my lifetime anyway.

On the Lizard last week I found Graylings in two distinct locations. The first was near to Kynance Cove with a noticeable concentration on the higher part of the undercliff area to the south of the cove. I only managed a few ropey record shots here as they were difficult to get close to and kept flying off down the cliffs.

The other location was around Enys head between Poltesco and Cadgwith Cove where I saw a dozen or more each time I walked there from Kennack Sands. Whilst still difficult to approach, especially on the warmer afternoons, I had a bit more success here in getting some photos.



Grayling - Enys Head 01.08.2020



Grayling - Enys Head 03.08.2020



Grayling – Enys Head 03.08.2020

On a couple of occasions I saw females rejecting the advances of males by flicking their wings open but unfortunately I was on the wrong side to get a decent photo, those below of one instance on the Thursday afternoon being the best I managed.



Grayling pair – Enys Head 06.08.2020



Grayling – Enys Head 06.08.2020

The second species is the Wall, or Wall Brown as I still prefer to call it. I remember these being common around Solihull when I was a teenager in the 1970s but the last confirmed Warwickshire sighting was in 2007 so it is now considered extinct in the county.

The first Wall Brown I saw last week was on my short walk on the Saturday morning when I had only gone a few yards from the caravan park when I spotted a male on the path in front of me.



Wall Brown – Kennack Sands 01.08.2020

Further along I saw another male patrolling the path but I couldn't get close to this one as he kept flying off down the cliff

On the Monday morning (August 3rd) Jane and Sarah had decided that they wanted to go into Lizard village and then walk to Lizard Point as the path to the lighthouse is flat and separated from the road and farm fields by stone walls making it easy to walk and safe for the kids. So it was that we parked up on the green in Lizard village and started wandering down towards the lighthouse on what was turning into a beautiful and warm morning. The stone walls that I mentioned have grass and wildflowers growing over them in many places and I soon saw loads of Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns plus whites of all three common species. I also spotted a number of Wall Brown and by the time we got down to the lighthouse I reckon I had counted 7 or maybe 8, mostly males that were actively chasing all the Gatekeepers about between returning to their basking spots.



Wall Brown – Lizard 03.08.2020



Wall Brown – Lizard 03.08.2020



Wall Brown – Lizard 03.08.2020



Wall Brown – Lizard 03.08.2020

Later in the week, on my afternoon walks towards Enys Head, I saw quite a few more Wall Browns with the area around the head itself once again proving to be the most productive with more females appearing here.

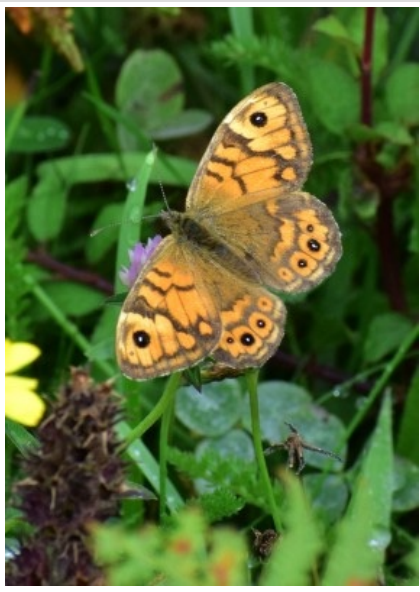


Wall Brown – Enys Head 04.08.2020

The afternoon of the Thursday (August 6th) was cloudy after earlier mist and drizzle and I was surprised to see a number of Wall Browns flying in these quite dull conditions, although this did make them a bit easier to approach. Although it was dull and overcast, it was still warm and humid and I suppose this was a case of the air temperature being high enough for them to warm up despite the lack of sun.



Wall Brown – Enys Head 06.08.2020



Wall Brown – Enys Head 06.08.2020



Wall Brown – Enys Head 06.08.2020

I also saw individual Wall Browns during the week at random spots along the paths around Kennack Sands but either couldn't get close to them or only managed ropey record shots.

That's two reports from The Lizard and I have only covered three species, still a few to go.

To be continued...

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 10-Aug-20 10:06 AM GMT

Lovely shots of the Wall Brown Neil – and I totally disagree with you about the Grayling. I think they are some of the clearest open-winged shots I have seen. Would love to see what you could have managed if you'd been on the other side 😊. The scenery shots alone deserve a few of these 🍷🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Aug-20 08:25 PM GMT

Fantastic Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary shots Neil – such variation 😊 And those open wing Graylings – I need to get me some shots like those 😊🍷🍷
Looking forward to the next installment 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Aug-20 09:24 PM GMT

You may not be fully satisfied with the angle of those Grayling upperside images, Neil, but you've done a great job in capturing what looks to be a very fresh female in that pose.

Similarly, any Wall Browns that allow you several images have to be cherished. This is neither a common nor easy UK species. 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 11-Aug-20 09:29 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline. Oh!, you know how it is, we are our own harshest critics 😊

Cheers Wurzel. Next installment coming up.

Thanks David. With those Graylings I couldn't help but wish I was a couple of feet further over but she flew off before I could move.

The Lizard – July 31st to August 7th Part 4.

This next report contains a number of species that I had already seen back home this year but seeing them down on The Lizard as well was no less of a pleasure for that.

The first butterfly that I saw down there was just a few minutes after our arrival on the Friday afternoon (July 31st) when I spotted a Red Admiral fluttering about outside the caravan as I was unpacking the car.

These proved to be one of the more numerous butterflies seen during the week with multiples seen everywhere we went. Some were really raggedy whereas some looked fresh out of the box and I reckon that they were a mixture of home grown and recent arrivals, indeed I spotted quite a few flying in off the sea on some days.



Red Admiral – Kennack Sands 02.08.2020



Red Admiral – Kennack Sands 03.08.2020



Red Admiral – Kennack Sands 06.08.2020



Red Admiral – Carleon Cove 06.08.2020

A fair number of those seen had the white spot in the red band that marks them out as *ab. bialbata*, although I must admit that I see this that often that I consider it a normal variation.



Red Admiral – Kynance Cove 02.08.2020



Red Admiral – Roskilly's Farm 05.08.2020

Anyone who read my PD this time last year may remember that I saw loads of Painted Ladies down here, particularly between Lizard Point and Kynance Cove where there were literally hundreds of them along parts of the path. There was nothing like that this year unfortunately, although I did see half a dozen or so during the week, mostly bombing about at high speed around the coast paths. I managed to get close to photograph two of them, one just to the west of Lizard Point on the Sunday morning...



Painted Lady – Lizard Point 02.08.2020

...and one on Enys Head on the Thursday afternoon.



Painted Lady – Enys head 06.08.2020

Small Tortoiseshells have had an amazing year back home and I also saw half a dozen last week, all nice and fresh looking.



Small Tortoiseshell - Kennack Sands 02.08.2020



Small Tortoiseshell - Enys Head 03.08.2020

A couple of Peacocks put in an appearance at Carleon Cove but I didn't see any others anywhere else.



Peacock - Carleon Cove 03.08.2020

Carleon Cove also produced the only Comma that I saw during the week.



Comma - Caleon cove 01.08.2020

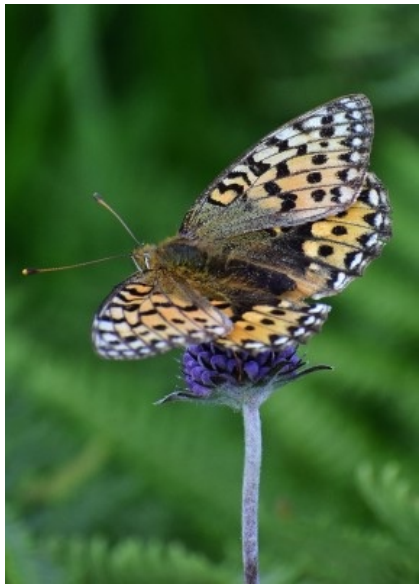
A few faded Dark Green Fritillaries were still hanging on. I am not sure when these first emerged in this part of the world, but considering that I was watching fresh ones in Warwickshire back in early June, they must have a long flight period down here. They popped up in ones and twos on most days at various spots between Kennack Sands and Enys Head and also between Lizard Point and Kynance Cove.



Dark Green Fritillary - Kynance Cove 02.08.2020



Dark Green Fritillary - Between Lizard Point and Kynance Cove 02.08.2020



Dark Green Fritillary – Enys Head 03.08.2020

Still got a few more species to cover so I reckon one more report to finish off.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 11-Aug-20 08:26 PM GMT

I'm ashamed to say I've never been to the Lizard 😞 But your fantastic shots have made it a must see for me Neil, I've not seen a Painted Lady this season yet either so I'm looking forward to seeing what's coming next 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Aug-20 07:43 AM GMT

Great continuation, Neil. I must get myself down there some day. The scenery as well as the range of butterflies are exceptional. 🌿

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Aug-20 09:47 AM GMT

Thanks for your comments Goldie and David. It is a great part of the country and worth a visit at any time.

The Lizard – July 31st to August 7th Part 5.

This will be my last report from our week down on The Lizard and will wrap up the remaining species not already mentioned.

Common Blues were seen in fairly good numbers on most of my walks, in fact they seemed to increase in numbers as the week went on with more fresh looking examples joining those that I saw in the first couple of days.



Common Blue – Kynance Cove 02.08.2020



Common Blue - Enys head 06.08.2020

I have noticed in previous visits down here that many of the females are predominantly brown with some particularly attractive individuals to be seen.



Common Blue female - Kennack Sands 01.08.2020



Common Blue female - Enys Head 06.08.2020



Common Blue female - Lizard Point 02.08.2020

I was a bit surprised to only find one Small Copper all week, at Kynance Cove on the Sunday (2nd August) morning. In the past, Early September has proved to be the prime time for good numbers of Small Coppers here but I have always found a few at most spots here in early August too but they were noticeable by their absence this time.



Small Copper - Kynance Cove 02.08.2020

On the other hand, I have usually only seen one or two Small Skippers still flying at this time in previous years but last week there were good numbers about, particularly behind the beach at Kennack Sands and in a couple of spots between Lizard Point and Kynance Cove.



Small Skipper - Kynance Cove 02.08.2020

A couple of well worn Large Skippers were also seen by Kynance Cove and Kennack Sands.

Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns were everywhere in good numbers with Meadow Browns being the most numerous at some spots and Gatekeepers at others. As expected at this stage of the season many of these were well past their best but fresh looking examples of both species could be found.



Meadow Brown male – Enys Head 01.08.2020

As is usual for me these days, I was on the lookout for female Meadow Browns showing more orange than usual and found a couple, One at Kennack Sands...



Meadow Brown female – Kennack Sands 03.08.2020

...and one at Enys Head. I would have liked to get a better photo of this one without the shadow from a rock outcropping close by but she flew off and following anything on the steep grassy slope here was difficult with needing to keep your eyes on your footing as well as the butterfly.



Meadow Brown female – Enys head 03.08.2020

All three common white species were seen with Large Whites easily the most numerous, being seen in good numbers everywhere.



Large White – Carleon Cove 03.08.2020

Two Clouded Yellows were seen, the first on the caravan park at Kennack Sands when I watched one fly in off the sea and stop on a clump of knapweed for a brief refuel before setting off again.



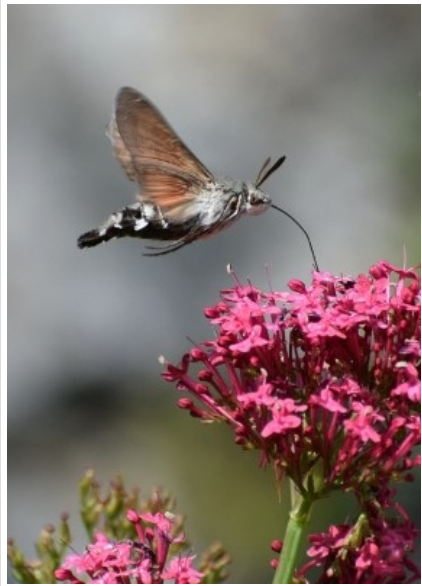
Clouded Yellow – Kennack Sands 02.08.2020

The second one was bombing about at high speed on the grassy slope at Enys Head on Tuesday afternoon where I had no chance of following it even if it had stopped...which it didn't.

As well as all the butterflies, I also saw half a dozen Hummingbird Hawk Moths. These were all seen at various spots between Kennack Sands and Enys Head with the red valerian at Carleon Cove being a favoured spot with one seen there on the Saturday and two on the Tuesday.



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Carleon Cove 01.08.2020



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Carleon Cove 03.08.2020

As mentioned in my first report, I saw a total of 22 species, including a couple that I didn't photograph for one reason or another.

In no particular order these were;

Meadow Brown – Lots everywhere.
Gatekeeper – Lots everywhere.
Speckled Wood – one or two at most places.
Wall Brown – Good numbers, particularly on the path to Lizard Point and around Enys Head.
Grayling – Good numbers around Enys Head, Also a few near Kynance Cove.
Ringlet – A few worn ones seen at Kennack Sands.
Red Admiral – Good numbers seen everywhere.
Painted Lady – Half a dozen seen scattered about.
Small Tortoiseshell – Half a dozen seen between Kennack Sands and Enys Head.
Peacock – Two seen at Carleon Cove.
Comma – Just one seen at Carleon cove.
Dark Green Fritillary – Half a dozen faded ones seen scattered about.
SPBF – Good numbers between Kennack Sands and Enys Head . Also near Kynance Cove.
Large Skipper – A couple of worn ones seen at Kennack Sands and by Kynance Cove.
Small Skipper – Quite a few scattered about at most places.
Common Blue – Good numbers at most places.
Holly Blue – A couple seen at Kennack Sands.
Small Copper – Just one seen near Kynance Cove.
Large White – Loads everywhere.
Small White – Good numbers most places.
Green-veined White – A few appeared at most places.
Clouded Yellow – Two seen, at Kennack Sands and Enys Head.

So then, all in all a great week. Jane, Sarah and the kids all enjoyed it and I managed to squeeze in some good butterflying.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 12-Aug-20 11:47 AM GMT

Your camera has 'frozen' that Hummingbird Hawkmoth beautifully.
Of course to get shots like that you have to get the subject in frame and focussed.
The way they dart around none of the above is easy!

Great stuff, keep well.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 12-Aug-20 07:27 PM GMT

A brilliant collection of shots Neil especially the Clouded Yellow and the Hummingbird Hawk 🤩👍👍 It's interesting that there seem to be more and more of the 'extra orange' Meadow Browns as that was what they looked like in France when I was there two years ago and if I recall they're the continental race – is the increasing frequency of this variation a sign of climate change? 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 13-Aug-20 01:43 PM GMT

Looks like you had an excellent break, Neil. Some lovely butterflies there, and, of course, one spectacular moth which you have captured superbly.

I guess Essex Skippers haven't made it that far west yet? 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 13-Aug-20 05:45 PM GMT

Great set of reports and glad you managed to catch up with a few species you would have missed had you not been able to get away from local spots. I agree with you about the Red Admiral Bialbata being a dubious aberration. Apparently it's only an aberration if seen in the male, it's considered normal in the females 😊😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 14-Aug-20 05:32 PM GMT

What a terrific week you had in Cornwall, Neil, and a great record of what you saw down there. 😊 I think for me the highlight would always be the Small Pearls – plus the open-wing Grayling! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Aug-20 07:13 PM GMT

`{quote=trevor post_id=157212 time=1597229250 user_id=13654}` Your camera has 'frozen' that Hummingbird Hawkmoth beautifully. Of course to get shots like that you have to get the subject in frame and focussed. The way they dart around none of the above is easy!

Great stuff, keep well.
Trevor.

Thanks Trevor. Definitely not easy, I just managed a couple of decent shots out of 30 odd taken each time.

`{quote=Wurzel post_id=157233 time=1597256873 user_id=9821}` A brilliant collection of shots Neil especially the Clouded Yellow and the Hummingbird Hawk 😊😊👍 It's interesting that there seem to be more and more of the 'extra orange' Meadow Browns as that was what they looked like in France when I was there two years ago and if I recall they're the continental race – is the increasing frequency of this variation a sign of climate change? 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel. I think it probably is related to climate change, either that or simply that I am looking for them now more often at a time when they are often overlooked in favour of more 'premium' species.

David M wrote:

Looks like you had an excellent break, Neil. Some lovely butterflies there, and, of course, one spectacular moth which you have captured superbly.

I guess Essex Skippers haven't made it that far west yet? 😊

I believe that Essex Skippers have made it to Cornwall but are still only to be found there in a few isolated colonies. I have certainly not seen one there yet.

`{quote=bugboy post_id=157263 time=1597337152 user_id=13753}` Great set of reports and glad you managed to catch up with a few species you would have missed had you not been able to get away from local spots. I agree with you about the Red Admiral Bialbata being a dubious aberration. Apparently it's only an aberration if seen in the male, it's considered normal in the females 😊😊

Thanks Bugboy. Yes, there are a few aspects of some so called named abs that I feel are a bit of a nonsense. I certainly feel that some of them in some species fall within normal variation. I suppose it is down to our aurelian forebears obsession with putting everything into a nice neat box when in reality nature is more fluid than that.

`{quote=millerd post_id=157277 time=1597422720 user_id=9839}` What a terrific week you had in Cornwall, Neil, and a great record of what you saw down there. 😊 I think for me the highlight would always be the Small Pearls – plus the open-wing Grayling! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Thanks Dave. Yes, a great week with so many highlights, especially the Small Pearls which were nice and fresh.

Tuesday 11th August

After returning home last Friday (7th August), the weather has been very warm and muggy and we have had a number of thunderstorms, some consisting of littler more than a few rumbles, but others that have been accompanied by torrential rain or even hail.

The only time that I have been out to look for any butterflies this week was Tuesday morning when I dropped Jane off at her mom's for a couple of hours and I went to have a look around Blythe Valley Park.

It was still quite wet to start with after a thunderstorm the previous night but with the temperature already up into the mid twenties by mid morning it was drying out rapidly although feeling quite humid. Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns were flying in good numbers with some of both species still in good condition.



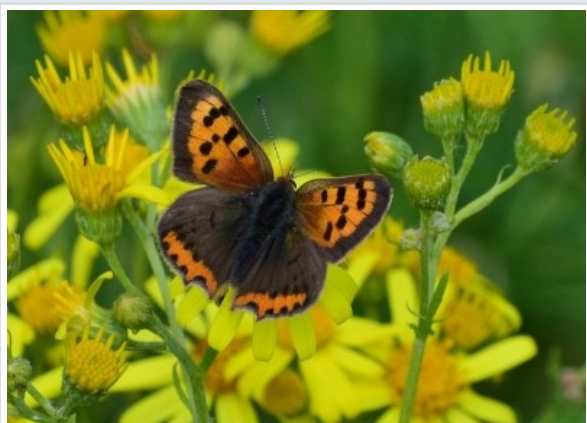
Gatekeeper female - Blythe Valley 11.08.2020

Quite a few Common Blues were seen scattered about the various meadow areas here although it has to be said they were not as numerous as I have seen here in the past. The males were too active for photos as they chased each other about but a nice blue female was more accommodating as she fluttered about more unobtrusively.

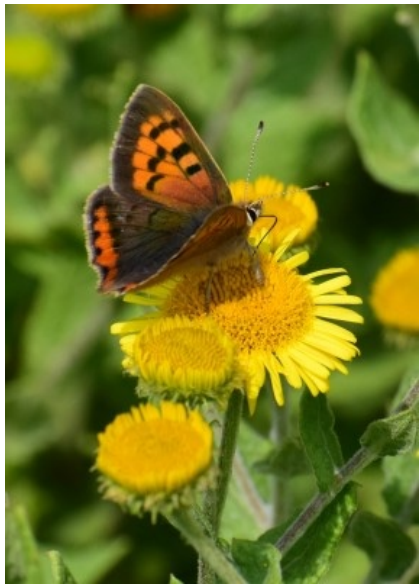


Common Blue female - Blythe Valley 11.08.2020

I also spotted three Small Coppers in separate parts of the site, all males that were actively chasing off everything else before returning to their favoured perches.



Small Copper - Blythe Valley 11.08.2020



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 11.08.2020



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 11.08.2020

All three common whites were seen and seemed to be an even split between all three species. These rarely stopped in the warm conditions but I did find a pair of Small Whites in cop that provided a photo opportunity.



Small White pair – Blythe Valley 11.08.2020

Small Tortoiseshells have been ubiquitous for me this year and sure enough I saw a handful again today although the only chance for a photo was when it clouded over a bit later in the morning.



Small Tortoiseshell – Blythe Valley 11.08.2020

By midday the clouds had built up to about 80% cover which made it feel uncomfortably muggy and humid so I wandered back to the car and went back to pick up Jane.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Aug-20 08:02 PM GMT

Cracking set of shots Neil 😊 – I've not seen a Gatekeeper in such good nick for a while now – where's she been hiding 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Allan.W., 14-Aug-20 09:01 PM GMT

Thoroughly enjoyed your Lizard reports Neil, brilliant ,can,t wait to get back there again ,we absolutely love it there ! and like yourself we stayed at Kennack sands ,last time we were down. Didn,t see as much,as yourself butterfly-wise but found some incredible plants . This year we had a last minute booking further up near Newquay.....very busy ! but still managed to find some exceptional plants ,and three butterfly species I didn,t expect to see in 2020 ,Grayling ,Silver –studded Blue and Dark Green Frit ,actually found Silver Studs at Lands End Most unexpected. Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 14-Aug-20 09:29 PM GMT

Great report from Cornwall, Neil. Truth be told, I'm a bit 🍋 with envy, having shelved our plans to go there at the same time. But it goes without saying, I'm delighted it worked out for you and your family.

And a great set of pictures for the rest of us to enjoy!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Aug-20 08:54 AM GMT

{quote=Wurzel-post_id=157287-time=1597431733-user_id=9821} Cracking set of shots Neil 😊 – I've not seen a Gatekeeper in such good nick for a while now – where's she been hiding 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Cheers Wurzel. There are still some decent looking Gatekeepers around here although most are looking a bit tired now and well past their best.

{quote=Allan.W.-post_id=157292-time=1597435308-user_id=13628} Thoroughly enjoyed your Lizard reports Neil, brilliant ,can,t wait to get back there again ,we absolutely love it there ! and like yourself we stayed at Kennack sands ,last time we were down. Didn,t see as much,as yourself butterfly-wise but found some incredible plants . This year we had a last minute booking further up near Newquay.....very busy ! but still managed to find some exceptional plants ,and three butterfly species I didn,t expect to see in 2020 ,Grayling ,Silver –studded Blue and Dark Green Frit ,actually found Silver Studs at Lands End Most unexpected. Regards Allan.W.

Thanks Allan. Yes, I love it down there myself and hope to return many times. I have seen Silver–studded Blues down there in past years, usually at Upton Towans near Hayle in late May/early June. We were planning on going again around that time earlier this year but that was one of our trips that got cancelled.

{quote=essexbuzzard-post_id=157294-time=1597436946-user_id=11426} Great report from Cornwall, Neil. Truth be told, I'm a bit 🍋 with envy, having shelved our plans to go there at the same time. But it goes without saying, I'm delighted it worked out for you and your family.

And a great set of pictures for the rest of us to enjoy!

Thanks Mark. I must admit, I was a bit nervous about how we would get on this time, especially after a horrendous journey going down on the M5. I have since heard that the usual tourist traps were busy, especially Newquay and St Ives, but we found the Lizard to be no worse than usual in early August given that it is peak holiday time then anyway.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 16-Aug-20 09:05 PM GMT

That's a beautiful female Hedge Brown in your last sequence, Neil; the Common Blue is lovely too.

I guess it's tricky to come back to reality and just see your usual 'local' species, but you managed to get away this summer which is a feat in itself given the situation.

I hope you find plenty to interest you before autumn closes in.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Aug-20 07:32 PM GMT

Thanks David. Hopefully I have another trip to look forward to in a week or so 😊

Thursday 20th August

This past week has seen some pretty grotty weather here with lots of rain, some of it very heavy, over the last few days. With an improvement forecast for Thursday, I decided to drive over to Grafton Wood in Worcestershire for an attempt to see a Brown Hairstreak this year, having missed them for the past couple of years.

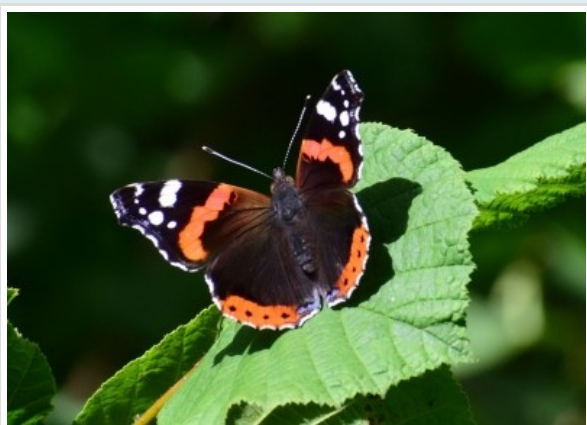
A couple of weeks back I had seen reports of lots of males coming down at Grafton, with one report of 16 different males recorded on one day, an unprecedented number for there. With us being down in Cornwall the other week, followed by some very unsettled weather since then, yesterday was the first chance I had to get over there.

It is about an hours drive to Grafton Wood for me and I arrived just before 10.00am, parked by the church and took the path across the farm to the wood. It was a pleasant morning with plenty of blue sky and white fluffy clouds and would have been perfect conditions if it wasn't for a stiff breeze blowing across the open fields. I hoped that it would be a bit more sheltered within the wood itself but on passing through the entrance gate and setting off along the ride, I noticed how much the upper reaches of the trees were being blown about which did not look too promising for hairstreak activity.

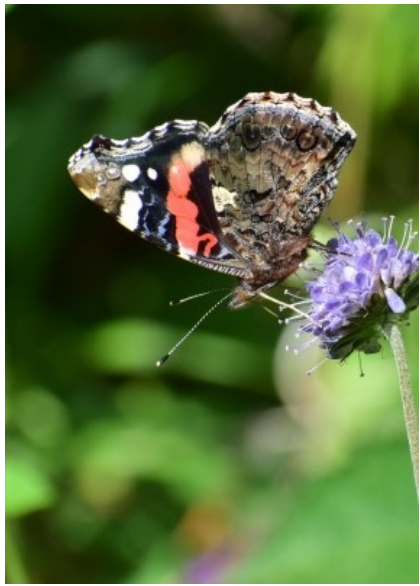
I spent the next three hours wandering around the various 'hotspots' in the wood and had just two sightings of females that fluttered about within stands of blackthorn and stayed well out of reach for a photo. I also saw a couple more 'possibles' flying higher up but think that these were probably male Vapourer Moths which also fly here at this time and are often mistaken for Brown Hairstreaks from a distance.

During my wanderings, I met up with a few other enthusiasts, including a couple of acquaintances from West Mids. BC, and we all seemed to be having a similar day with just two of them having managed record shots. I also met and had a chat with John Tilt, the reserve manager, and his view was that the recent bad weather had ended the good numbers of males coming down and we were back to the normal 'state of play' with random females coming down on their egg laying forays. He also agreed that it was a bit too windy for them today and he had only seen a couple himself.

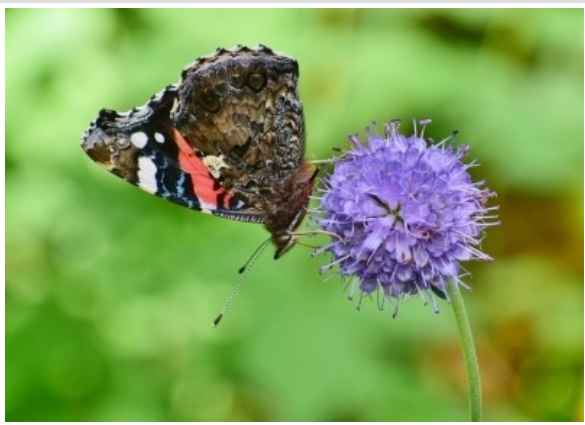
There were plenty of other butterflies to be seen along the more sheltered rides although it has to be said they were mostly whites with good numbers of all three common species seen. Amongst the other species were a few fresh looking Red Admiral, and singles of Comma, Brimstone, Small Copper and Common Blue. Also, a couple of raggedy old Silver-washed Fritillaries were still flying about.



Red Admiral - Grafton Wood 20.08.2020



Red Admiral – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020



Red Admiral – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020



Comma – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020



Brimstone – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020

As well as the butterflies, there were loads of Dragonflies in the wood, mostly Common Darters and Migrant Hawkers. At one point I was photographing a pair of darters in cop when another chap came along and said they were Ruddy Darters. Looking at the photos back home, I am sure that I can see stripes on the legs which would make them Common Darters.



Common Darters (I think) – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020

One quite dramatic little episode occurred when I was chatting to one of the West Mids BC members and he called out something that had landed just behind me. A closer look showed this to be an Emperor Dragonfly that had brought down a Migrant Hawker and was proceeding to devour it on the ground, a proper case of the hunter becoming the prey.



Emperor Dragonfly with Migrant Hawker prey – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020



Emperor Dragonfly with Migrant Hawker prey – Grafton Wood 20.08.2020

I know that all dragonflies are efficient predators and I have seen larger Dragonflies take Damselflies before, but this was the first time that I had witnessed one take another large dragonfly.

All in all, a pleasant trip even if I was only partially successful in my main goal with just the two Brown Hairstreaks briefly seen and no photo opportunities.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 21-Aug-20 09:00 PM GMT

Hi Neil, great pics as usual, particularly the Emperor Dragonfly shots. I know they do this but I've never witnessed it myself, the takedown must have been impressive! I agree, those definitely aren't Ruddy Darters, the legs are clearly striped.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 22-Aug-20 03:00 PM GMT

That's a great shot of the Emperor Dragonfly Neil!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Aug-20 05:35 PM GMT

Sorry to hear that the Brostreaks didn't play ball Neil 😞 – they have been a bit tricky at times this season but then there's always next year 😊 Mind you the shots of the Emperor must have offered some consolation 🤔 🍀

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Aug-20 08:49 AM GMT

Thanks Bugboy. I didn't actually witness the takedown myself, they were already on the ground by the time I turned around. As you say, it must have been an impressive thing to see. Thanks also for the confirmation on the darters.

Thanks Pauline. A species that I see fairly often but have very few photos of.

Thanks Wurzel. At least it wasn't just me, a couple of the chaps I spoke to are locals who know the wood well and they were struggling too. Just too breezy.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Aug-20 07:08 PM GMT

Monday 24th August.

Not much to report from around here over the past few days with some very autumn like weather bringing in bands of rain, some of it very heavy, along with some blustery winds.

Up until today (Monday 24th), the only butterflies I have seen since last Thursday have been a couple of the ever reliable Speckled Wood in the garden and a few passing whites during the occasional brighter spell.

This morning started off once again with a thick gloomy overcast and it felt quite cool up until mid morning when the clouds began to thin a bit. As it warmed up the garden Specklies appeared with at least two males up to their usual territorial antics.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 24.08.2020

A female was also spotted sneakily making her way through the garden and avoiding the attention of the males.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 24.08.2020

By mid-day, some blue sky could be seen and some nice sunny spells were making it feel quite pleasant so I decided to take a walk down to my local spot by Wagon Lane Park.

The most numerous butterfly seen there today was Speckled Wood with about a dozen seen scattered around the site, including a number of females.



Speckled Wood male – Wagon Lane 24.08.2020

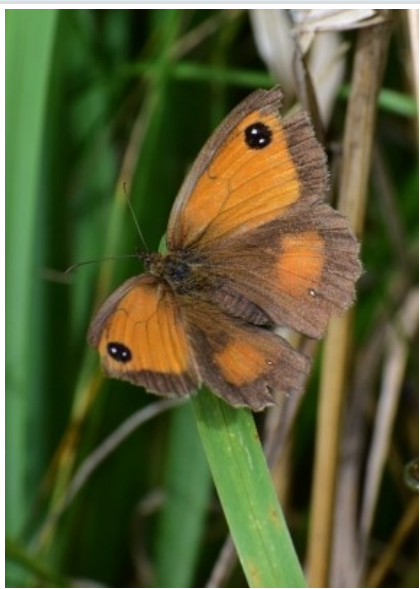


Speckled Wood female – Wagon Lane 24.08.2020



Speckled Wood female – Wagon Lane 24.08.2020

Meadow Browns look like they have finished here now but a few female Gatekeepers were still hanging on albeit well past their best now.



Gatekeeper female – Wagon Lane 24.08.2020

A couple of large buddleias are growing wild in one corner and these played host to a single Comma and Red Admiral.



Comma - Wagon Lane 24.08.2020



Red Admiral - Wagon Lane 24.08.2020



Red Admiral - Wagon Lane 24.08.2020

For me, the best butterfly seen here today was a single Small Copper. Despite it being a bit worn this is only the second one I have seen here with the other one being back in 2018. It had a decent set of blue spots too, a pity it was no longer in best condition.



Small Copper – Wagon Lane 24.08.2020

A few Small and Green-veined Whites were also seen during the hour that I spent here before I circled back and headed home.

Back home again, the garden Specklies were still performing and I reckon I identified a couple of different males making it four separate males plus the one female seen in the garden today.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 24.08.2020



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 24.08.2020

Looks like time to batten down the hatches again tomorrow with storm Francis bringing more rain and gales.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 25-Aug-20 11:32 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, the Dragon Fly always looks frightening to me, I saw one attacking a High Brown Frit, at Gait Barrow once , it was huge and put me off them for life 😊 Lovely shots of the Speckie, when their fresh they seem to have a slight greenish tint which you've captured 😊 Weather's awful here, we can't seem to get rid of the storms, hope fully we'll get the sunshine back for the week-end 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-Aug-20 08:47 PM GMT

Interesting to see the difference in the wear and tear on those Specklies Neil – a lovely sequence of shots but the Small Copper pips them to the post for me 😊😄🍀 The weather will get better next week and we'll probably have a heatwave in a fortnight's time, once all the schools have started back 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 26-Aug-20 03:47 PM GMT

Good to know you're still seeing a few butterflies, Neil. Conditions have been lousy here too, and now that it's about to settle down it's set to go much cooler. 😊

Amazing images of the dragonfly 'snatch' in your previous post. That Emperor must have been hungry to take such sizeable prey down.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Aug-20 09:45 AM GMT

Thanks Goldie. Lots of Specklies here at the moment in all sorts of conditions.

Thanks Wurzel. I'm with you with the Small Copper, especially as it was only my second one from that site. Fingers crossed for the weather next week, I will be down in Dorset for a few days.

Thanks David. I have heard stories of Emperor Dragonflies taking down sizable prey including (unfortunately) a female Purple Emperor at Ryton Wood.

Garden Moths update – August.

So far this month I have only had the moth trap out a few times. The first week of the month we were in Cornwall and much as I would have liked to take a trap down there, with Jane, Sarah and the grand kids plus all their luggage, there simply wasn't room in the car. Since then the weather has been very unsettled (to say the least) with some heavy rain and high winds on some nights.

Nevertheless, there have been some suitable nights and when I have lit up I have continued to get a nice selection of moths albeit with nothing particularly outstanding for here.

Total numbers are still fairly low but species numbers are continuing to hold up with my tally so far this year standing at 228 species made up of 138 macros and 90 micros. Two new (albeit classed as common and widespread) species for the garden have turned up during this period, a Tawny Speckled Pug on the night of 13th August and Six-striped Rustic on the night of 15th. I actually had three Six-striped Rustics on the 15th and curiously this is the only night so far I have seen these.



Tawny Speckled Pug – Coverdale 13.08.2020



Six-striped Rustic – Coverdale 15.08.2020

The Old Lady Moth is a nice chunky late summer species of which I usually get a few each year. I often read that these don't often come to light but I think that they possibly come to actinic traps like mine more often than to M.V.



Old Lady - Coverdale 09.08.2020

The Dusky thorn is another late summer species that I usually see a small number of each year.



Dusky thorn - Coverdale 09.08.2020

I probably see just as many, if not more, Yellow Shells during the daytime when they are easily disturbed. They only have a single generation but, in a similar way to Meadow Browns, can be seen throughout the summer and often turn up in my trap into September.



Yellow Shell - Coverdale 18.08.2020

Other moths have included a number of second generations of species that I have already seen earlier in the year.



Willow Beauty - Coverdale 11.08.2020

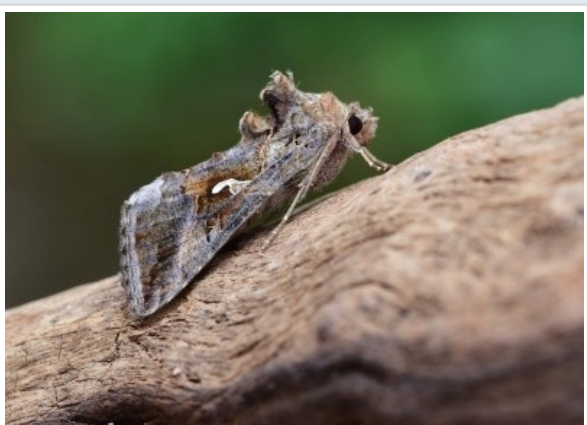


Spectacle - Coverdale 13.08.2020



Flame Shoulder - Coverdale 13.08.2020

I have had a few Silver Y and Diamondback Moths, both of which are migrant species, but in both cases they could just as easily be home grown descendants of earlier arrivals.



Silver Y - Coverdale 13.08.2020



Diamondback - Coverdale 09.08.2020

The nights are noticeably drawing in now and I should soon start to see some of the typical autumn species turning up.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Aug-20 07:56 PM GMT

Love the way the Dusky Thorn has Brylcreemed it's antennae back, looks like a proper Teddy Boy 😄
Hope you have a great time next week; "Freemans go mad in Dorset" 😄 😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 29-Aug-20 07:32 AM GMT

Lovely moths again, Neil. The spectacle and the flame shoulder stand out for me. It'll be interesting to see what autumn brings in your trap?

Safe journey to and from Dorset. I look forward to finding out what you see in due course (maybe a migrant or two?)

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Aug-20 08:43 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Heading down tomorrow (Sunday) until Friday, just Jane and myself in a B&B this time so not too mad...that is if wandering around hillsides looking for butterflies can be classed as sane 😄 😄

Thanks David. By the time I get back from Dorset, there should be a different selection starting to turn up, depending on the weather of course.

Friday 28th August.

Not much to report for the rest of this week in the way of butterflies apart from the odd Specklie and passing white during very brief intervals in the awful weather.

This morning (Friday) I had a wander around Blythe Valley Park and despite it being a very dull and windy morning with a few spits of light rain I managed to see a few Meadow Browns and singles of Speckled Wood, Green-veined White and a really tatty male Common Blue. Nothing that tempted me to take the camera out of it's bag though.

I also noted a couple of large flocks of Goldfinches, a few Buzzards and a couple of 'families' of Green Woodpeckers, all of which managed to stay too far away for photos.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-Sep-20 08:04 PM GMT

Dorset - August 30th to September 4th Part 1.

Fontmell Down - Sunday 30th August.

Our fourth (and final) planned trip for this year but the second to actually take place and as has become traditional for us, Jane and myself were booked for a few days down in Dorset, this time returning to the farmhouse B&B not far from Corfe Castle that we had stayed at last year.

With all day to get down there, we had arranged to first head to Bristol to visit our youngest son Danny and his girlfriend. After a coffee and a catch-up we then continued on our way and with plenty of time still in hand had decided to stop off at Fontmell Down so that I could hopefully catch up with Silver-spotted Skipper(s). I had not yet seen these this year and this would be my only chance, although I was aware that it was getting on in their flight period and the horrendous weather that had recently clobbered much of the country well have finished them off.

Last year we had also stopped here on what I remember was a warm and sunny afternoon and found the car park rammed, so I was wondering how busy it would be today. On arrival we found a few empty spaces, no doubt due to the weather which was fairly cloudy with a cool breeze. I headed off along the path and down the slope onto the down and immediately saw a few Meadow Browns closely followed by a couple of Small Heath. Going through the gate onto the reserve proper, a flash of electric blue drew my attention to a male Adonis Blue, my first this year.



Adonis Blue – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020

During the hour that I spent here, the clouds thinned a couple of times to let a bit of sun through and I reckon I saw 40 to 50 Adonis Blues including maybe a dozen females. The condition of all these varied considerably with many looking like they had been caught in the the previous bad weather, but there were still some nice condition ones to be found.



Adonis Blue – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020



Adonis Blue – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020

Anyway, I was hoping to see more Adonis Blues over the next few days and I was more on the lookout for Silver-spotted Skippers here. In the end I

reckon I saw 4 different females and a couple of males, all showing various degrees of wear and damage with the males looking particularly battered. Still, I was pleased with these as they were likely to be the only ones I see this year.



Silver-spotted Skipper female - Fontmell Down 30.08.2020



Silver-spotted Skipper female - Fontmell Down 30.08.2020



Silver-spotted Skipper female - Fontmell Down 30.08.2020



Silver-spotted Skipper female – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020



Silver-spotted Skipper male – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020

A few Common Blues, lots of Small Whites and a couple of Large Whites were also seen before I headed back up to rejoin Jane and continue on our way.

To be continued,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 04-Sep-20 11:41 PM GMT

Glad to see you got your Silver Spotted Skippers, Neil.

Numbers never seem to build at Fontmell, even in peak season, I've never had more than 10 to 15 per visit. But this colony persists from year to year, and all sightings are very welcome.

And it is an excellent Adonis Blue site, and very scenic too.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Sep-20 09:39 AM GMT

Thanks Mark. I only discovered Fontmell Down last year and up until then had not realised how close we had been passing it on our trips to Dorset. Even better, this year I realised that by taking the 'alternative' route to Blandford from Shaftsbury, we would actually be going right past so stopping off was a no brainer.

Dorset – August 30th to September 4th Part 2.

Adonis Blues.

One of my targets for our late season trips to Dorset is to see Adonis Blues. I usually miss the first brood as they emerge around the same time as so many other species and I am often looking elsewhere at the time, although of course this year the travel restrictions also came into play. The second brood in Dorset usually reach their peak in early September and have always provided a good reason to spend a few days down there, along with a good supporting cast of butterflies and other attractions.

I have already mentioned the Adonis Blues seen at Fontmell Down when we stopped there on the way down and the next few days produced varying numbers at all the usual sites.

Osmington.

The first full day down there was Bank Holiday Monday (31st August) and we had already decided that we would keep away from the more 'touristy' areas. A reasonably pleasant morning with 50/50 cloud and sun and a temperature varying from around 16 to about 19 degrees when the sun was out, tempted me to drive around to Osmington for a walk up the bridle path to White Horse Hill. This has always proved to be a good spot for butterflies in the past, although it has to be said that last year a persistent cold wind had kept numbers down a bit. Conditions were not dissimilar this time with a

cool breeze once again being felt once you came out of the shelter of the lower path.

I spent around an hour and a half here this morning and saw a couple of dozen Adonis Blues, similar to last years numbers and still well down on the hundreds that could be seen here just a few year ago. The cool breeze meant that I had to work the slope for them but the occasional sunny spell would quickly bring them out from their hiding places down in the grass. The condition of the males varied considerably with many of them showing considerable wear, probably from the high winds and heavy rain just prior to our going down. Nevertheless, there were some nice fresh looking examples to be found that would have emerged more recently.



Adonis Blue – Osmington 31.08.2020

A few females were seen, all of which looked to be in much better condition.



Adonis Blue female – Osmington 31.08.2020

I also returned to Osmington on the morning of the Wednesday (2nd September) in similar conditions and with much the same results.



Adonis Blue female – Osmington 02.09.2020

Purbeck Ridge west of Church Knowle.

Last year I had visited Stonehill Down, a Dorset Wildlife Trust reserve up on the Purbeck Ridge not far from our B&B, where I had found a small colony of Adonis Blue. Later on Monday afternoon I went up to have a look and found it to have been very heavily grazed and apart from a scattering of Meadow Browns and Small Heath and a couple of G.V. Whites along the lower hedgerow, the site was practically devoid of butterflies. I didn't waste much time here but set off for a wander back along the ridge in the direction of Church Knowle. There is some likely looking habitat along here but with much of the path crossing through farmland a lot of it also heavily grazed. I remember thinking last year that Adonis Blues could probably be found scattered all along the Purbeck Ridge and was therefore pleased to find further confirmation this afternoon with a couple of males spotted along here.



The Purbeck Ridge behind Church Knowle, view from the lane outside our B&B.



Adonis Blue – just west of Church Knowle 31.08.2020

Durlston Country Park.

Tuesday (1st September) looked to be the warmest day of the week and we decided to head for Durlston County Park first so that Jane could have a wander around the better paths there. We arrived at around 10.00am under a clear blue sky and warm sun but at first saw very few butterflies, just a scattering of Meadow Browns and Small Whites in the upper meadows. As Jane continued along towards the lighthouse, I diverted down the gully and found where the butterflies were all hiding. In a fairly short space of time, just long enough to wander down to the bottom of the gully and back up, I reckon I saw 25+ Adonis Blue males, all of them in the higher half of the gully. Although not exactly high numbers, this was double what I had seen here last year and as at Osmington, their condition varied from well worn to nearly fresh.



Adonis Blue – Durlston Country Park 01.09.2020



Adonis Blue – Durlston Country Park 01.09.2020

Just one female was seen here, although given a bit longer I may well have found more.



Adonis Blue female – Durlston Country Park 01.09.2020

Some may remember that I posted some photos last year showing how dry it was here compared with earlier years. This year, despite the more recent wet weather, it still looked practically the same as last year, no doubt due to the hot and dry first half to the year.



View up the gully at Durlston 01.09.2020

Ballard Down.

After spending the morning at Durlston, we popped into Swanage for a coffee and then continued out the other side to the lay by at Ulwell so that I could have a look on Ballard Down. I only spent about 45 minutes here and during that time saw around a dozen Adonis Blues, mostly males in a mix of conditions and a couple of nice fresh females.



Adonis Blue - Ballard Down 01.09.2020



Adonis Blue male - Ballard Down 01.09.2020



Adonis Blue female - Ballard Down 01.09.2020



Adonis Blue female – Ballard Down 01.09.2020

Bindon Hill.

The final site that I visited for butterflies was Bindon Hill at Lulworth, on the afternoon of the Wednesday (2nd September). It had turned quite cloudy and with a cool breeze up on the hill I concentrated on the more sheltered lower part of the slopes around where the old blocked off path comes out. At first I didn't see much but a thinning of the cloud allowed the sun through to warm things up for about twenty minutes and butterflies started appearing around me. These included half a dozen male Adonis Blues plus a couple of females. As at everywhere else I had seen them, the males were in a mix of conditions with the females looking fresh or nearly so.



Adonis Blue – Bindon Hill 02.09.2020



Adonis Blue female – Bindon Hill 02.09.2020

If the weather had held, I would probably have braved the walk over to Durdle Door, but a thick grey overcast settled in for the rest of the afternoon so we went and had a cream tea instead.

My overall impression at most sites was that Adonis Blue numbers were similar to last year, apart from at Durlston where they were definitely higher, albeit still not in the kind of numbers that could be seen there just a few years ago. The cool, breezy conditions on the Monday and Wednesday made it a bit of work to find them and they would often be settled with wings closed. Conversely, Tuesday was warm and sunny all day which meant that they were often settling and closing up immediately on landing.

In previous years I have noticed that Durlston and Ballard Down seem to be slightly earlier sites than those at Lulworth, Bindon Hill, Durdle Door and Osmington with a higher proportion of worn individuals. This year, all the sites I visited seemed to be around the same level with the butterflies being in a very similar proportion of conditions, all varying from well worn to nice and fresh.

I have concentrated on the Adonis Blues in this report but of course there were also other butterflies at all of the sites visited...

To be continued,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-Sep-20 07:50 PM GMT

Looks like you had a cracking time there Neil – a fantastic collection of shots 🤩👍 Looking forward to the other reports that are following 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Sep-20 09:33 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, another cracking trip to your homeland. Very much like last year, most butterfly numbers were down on what they were a few years back but still plenty of interest to be found.

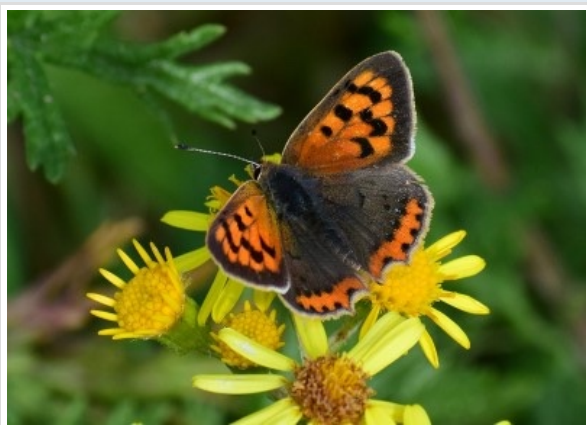
Dorset – August 30th to September 4th Part 3.

Small Coppers appeared at all the sites visited with some nice fresh examples seen so I think that they deserve their own report.

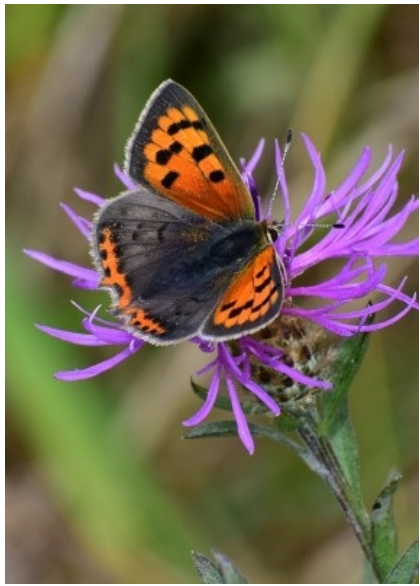
This is a species that I rarely see in large numbers at any one site, usually appearing in ones and twos on each occasion so to see at least half a dozen at Osmington on the Monday (31st August) morning was especially pleasing.



Small Copper – Osmington 31.08.2020



Small Copper – Osmington 31.08.2020



Small Copper - Osmington 31.08.2020



Small Copper female - Osmington 31.08.2020

I saw another four there on the Wednesday (2nd September) morning. By comparing photos I confirmed that they were all different individuals to those seen on Monday and included a particularly attractive fresh female with a nice set of blue spots.



Small Copper - Osmington 02.09.2020



Small Copper - Osmington 02.09.2020



Small Copper female - Osmington 02.09.2020



Small Copper female - Osmington 02.09.2020

I saw a couple later on the Monday afternoon when I walked along the Purbeck Ridge to the west of Church Knowle.



Small Copper – Purbeck Ridge west of Church Knowle 31.08.2020

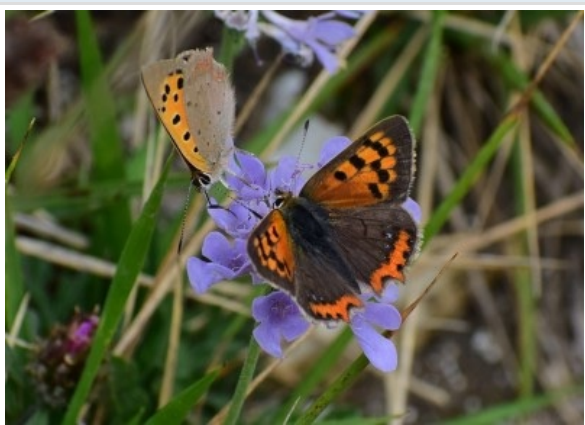
Durlston produced just one on the Tuesday morning, a male that was hyperactive in the warm sun and didn't sit still for longer than a second or so before chasing off whatever came too close to him.

There were half a dozen at Ballard Down on the Tuesday afternoon with these also being very active in the warm and sunny conditions on that day.



Small Copper – Ballard Down 01.09.2020

Bindon Hill produced at least four different individuals on the Wednesday afternoon when the cooler and cloudier conditions made them more amenable to sitting still for some photos. In fact, at one point I even spotted two males sharing the same flower head without squabbling.



Small Coppers – Bindon Hill 02.09.2020



Small Copper – Bindon Hill 02.09.2020



Small Copper – Bindon Hill 02.09.2020



Small Copper – Bindon Hill 02.09.2020

It is always a delight to see these characterful little butterflies and especially so when there are a few around.

To be continued,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 07-Sep-20 03:27 PM GMT

Superb Adonis Blues and Small Coppers, Neil.

You are in danger of out Hoggering Hoggers ! 😊 . All are very fresh too.
Love the fourth image down, it seems to glow.

Great stuff, stay well,

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Sep-20 10:16 PM GMT

[quote=trevor-post_id=157996-time=1599488821-user_id=13654]...You are in danger of out Hoggering Hoggers!

Yes. Agree with that (whatever happened to Hoggers? I quite miss his regular Copper hunts).

The Adonis Blues and the Small Coppers are positively radiant, Neil. Some nice variety in the latter as well. 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Sep-20 08:01 PM GMT

Cu got plenty of Coppers Neil 😊 There are some fabulous specimens in your latest report Neil – a lovely collection of Blue Badgers too 😊😊🍷 They seem to have a good year this year 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Sep-20 08:59 AM GMT

Thanks Trevor. I think I have a log way to go to rival Hoggers and his Small Coppers at Dungeness.

Yes, David, I hope that Hoggers is alright. Not seen him post for a while now.

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, it appears that Small Coppers are having a good year around most parts.

Dorset – August 30th to September 4th Part 4.

As would be expected, Meadow Browns were seen everywhere we went with many still in good condition. Keeping my eye out for any females with additional orange patches on their hindwings, I found a nice example at Osmington.



Meadow Brown female – Osmington 31.08.2020

Small Heaths were also everywhere and particularly numerous on the higher slopes at Osmington.



Small Heath pair – Osmington 31.08.2020

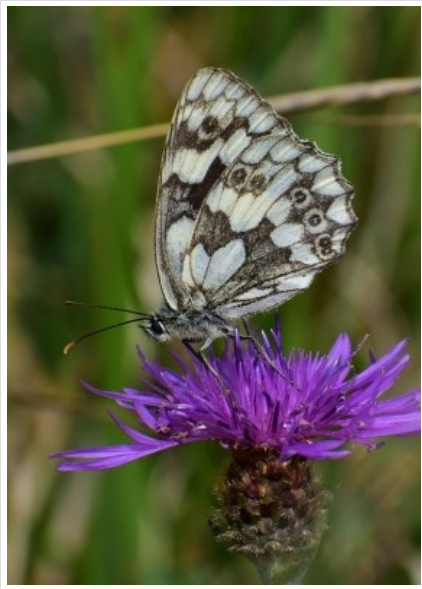
Speckled Woods were usually seen in ones and twos along most hedgerows such as the lower part of the path at Osmington or the lower paths at Bindon Hill and Ballard Down. They were also seen along the woodland walks at RSPB Arne when we spent some time there on the Thursday (3rd September) on what was a mostly a cloudy day with just a couple of spells of brightness in the morning.

Just one Wall Brown was seen, a female at Durlston on the Tuesday morning, that was very active in the warm sun and only settled briefly, just long enough for me to get a record shot.



Wall Brown female – Durlston 01.09.2020

Anyone who has read this PD over the past few years will know that I have often found one or two Marbled Whites still flying down in Dorset in early September. Sure enough, I found one again this year, a faded example at Osmington on the Monday morning. I saw this same individual again still hanging on when I returned there on Wednesday morning



Marbled White – Osmington 31.08.2020

Another species that appeared at every site I visited was Brown Argus. These were usually seen in small numbers at each site and were mostly well worn and faded, but there were a few around that were in not too bad condition still.



Brown Argus – Osmington 31.08.2020



Brown Argus – Purbeck Ridge just west of Church Knowle 31.08.2020

Common Blues also appeared everywhere but were mostly well past their best.



Common Blue about to have a squabble with a Brown Argus – Ballard Down 01.09.2020

Amongst the fresh looking female Adonis Blues at Osmington I spotted one individual on the Monday morning that was more worn and faded. A closer look showed it to be a female Chalk Hill Blue, the only one seen down there this time with none seen anywhere else.



Chalk Hill blue female – Osmington 31.08.2020

A single Holly Blue showed up on my wander along the Purbeck Ridge to the west of Church Knowle on the Monday afternoon.



Holly Blue – Purbeck Ridge just west of Church Knowle 31.08.2020

The three common Whites were all seen with Small Whites being numerous on most days. I paid particular attention to these when they settled on the off chance of one being a Southern Small White but they were all our normal variety.



Small White – Durlston 01.09.2020

Large Whites were also around in reasonable numbers but I only saw a handful of Green-veined Whites with just one or two turning up at most places.



Large White – Osmington 31.08.2020

A couple of Brimstones were seen, one on the Monday morning along the first part of the path at Osmington and one in the woodland at RSPB Arne on the Thursday morning.

There were not many Vanessids about this year with just singles of Small Tortoiseshell at Durlston and Comma at Ballard Down although there were a few more Red Admirals around with a few seen on most days.



Red Admiral – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

This was the first time I have been in Dorset at this time and failed to see either a Painted Lady or Clouded Yellow. This lack of migrants was also evident in that I also failed to see a Hummingbird Hawk Moth this time.

Including the Silver-spotted Skippers seen on the way down, I saw a total of 18 species this time. Some of these were in reasonable numbers although a few were only seen as single individuals. It has to be said though, that overall numbers were similar to last year, that is, not as high as I would see down here three or four years ago.

I reckon this is mostly down to our erratic weather the past couple of years which have seen long hot and dry periods in the first half of the year which have no doubt dried out some food plants which the early broods have rely on. This year we also had Storm Francis blow across the country the week before we went down and the heavy rains and strong winds that this brought probably didn't help.

As well as the butterflies, there was also some other stuff of interest, so one more report to come to wrap up the remaining random stuff.

To be continued,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Sep-20 08:46 PM GMT

Some lovely images there, Neil. I'm glad you had a decent trip away (something few of us can lay claim to in this most extraordinary of years).

Your Marbled White seems really out of place. We lose them here in Wales before July is out, so to see them on the cusp of September is exceptional.

Well done with the mating Small Heaths too. Despite this being a common butterfly, I've only ever seen a coupling pair a handful of times.

Re: Neil Freeman

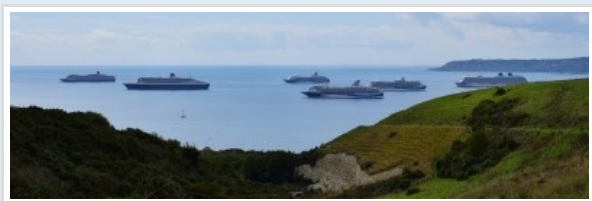
by Neil Freeman, 11-Sep-20 09:18 AM GMT

Thanks David. Yes, the Marbled White does seem out of place, like you they disappeared around my way weeks ago. I often find one or two still around down there though as you will no doubt remember from my past reports.

Dorset – August 30th to September 4th Part 5.

A selection of random stuff to finish off my series of reports from our trip to Dorset.

With cruise holidays not happening this year due to the virus, what happens to all the ships that are not being used? Well, some of them were anchored in Weymouth Bay whilst we were there with six fairly close together and another one further over towards Portland. There were also a couple more off Bournemouth which could be glimpsed in the distance from the Purbeck Ridge and the higher viewpoints at RSPB Arne. Apparently, the numbers of these large ships have been varying over the summer with up to nine or ten off Weymouth on occasion and have become a bit of a tourist attraction in themselves. The shot below was taken from the road to Ringstead Bay on the Monday afternoon.



Cruise ships in Weymouth Bay 31.08.2020

On the Tuesday morning at Durlston, I noticed lots of small pyralid moths fluttering about the short turf towards the higher parts of the gully. They were very active in the warm sun but I managed a couple of photos which enabled me to ID them as *Pyrausta despicata*, a common moth of chalk and limestone habitats but often overlooked due to its small size.



Pyrausta despicata – Durlston 01.09.2020

We often visit RSPB Arne during our trips to Dorset and did so again this time, later on the afternoon of the Tuesday (Sept. 1st) and again on the Thursday (Sept. 3rd) which was a mostly dull and cloudy day and when we spent a lot longer there. Jane can manage the better paths here and we spent some time wandering through the woodland walks and towards Shipstall Beach.

We saw a couple each of Speckled Wood, Brimstone and Red Admiral which I have previously mentioned but one of my favourite aspects of the woods here is the moss that grows on many of the tree roots and rocks and which give this part of the reserve a nice atmospheric character.



Mossy Tree roots – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020



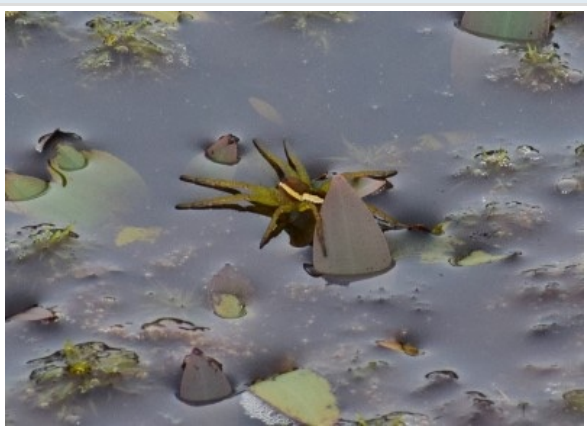
Mossy Tree roots – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

I am not absolutely sure what all the birds are in the shot below, probably mostly Cormorants I think with a few others, but it looks like they can't read.



"What does that sign say?"....

Although we have been to Arne a few times in the past I had never seen the Raft Spiders here, mainly due to the fact that we usually spend most of our time on the northern side of the reserve where the paths are better for Jane. On the Thursday, having spent most of the morning there, Jane was getting tired so she said she would go back to the car and read her book for a bit while I carried on wandering around. I headed on to Coombe Heath and found the pond with the wooden viewing platform, which I had read was probably the best place to see Raft Spiders, and after scanning the floating vegetation around the side of the pond found my first Raft Spider.



Raft Spider – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

Looking carefully around the pond, I spotted a couple more, one a bit further away and another one a bit closer which was in a nice side on position for some decent photos.



Raft Spider – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

I then carried on around the Coombe Heath path to the hide/screen by the channel where I could see a selection of waders including Curlew, Godwits and Greenshanks (I think).



Curlew taking off – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

By now there was a light drizzle and circling back across the exposed top of Coombe Heath was quite blustery but before returning to Jane, I decided to check out the raptor hide. There was one other couple in this hide who told me they had been there about thirty minutes but seen nothing apart from a couple of ducks. As they were telling me this a large bird took off from the reed beds in and flew off away from us, a Marsh Harrier which gave me just enough time to grab a couple of record shots of as it flew off through the drizzle into the distance.



Marsh Harrier – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

Not long after the Marsh Harrier had disappeared another Large bird appeared. As this one got closer it was apparent that it was larger than the Marsh Harrier and a view through my binoculars confirmed it was an Osprey carrying a fish.



Osprey – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

The Osprey then circled around in front of us, a bit too far away for decent shots with my 70–300 lens, especially in the dull light and drizzle, but giving good views through my binoculars.



Osprey – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020



Osprey – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

It then dropped down and landed in the top of a tree on the far side of the reserve, again too far away for any decent shots through the drizzle but at least with a tight crop, you can tell what it is.



Osprey in the distance – RSPB Arne 03.09.2020

It stayed there for some time with it's fish and was still there when I left about thirty minutes later to head back to Jane.

That's it from our Dorset trip. Back home since then it has definitely been feeling like autumn is just around the corner although looking at the forecast for next week (if it can be believed), summer may still have a bit left for us yet.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 11-Sep-20 08:19 PM GMT

That really was a cracking visit Neil – worth it for the birds let alone the butterflies! I've not seen Marsh Harriers at Arne before – that one looks like a female – I wonder if they've bred? 😊 Arne is a cracking reserve – when I was a nipper I used get the train from Poole and cycle the rest of the way there form Wareham –don think I'd be able to do that now though 🤔😞😞 Cormorants are notoriously rebellious, they just don't care 🤔😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 12-Sep-20 07:47 PM GMT

Just catching up with your series of posts from the Dorset coast, Neil. There appear to have been wall-to-wall Adonis Blues, and there were clearly some lovely females among the brilliant males. I particularly like the dark ones with dustings of blue scales – great shots. 😊 The Small Copper fest was also a terrific set of images! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Sep-20 04:09 PM GMT

That looks to be one hell of a reserve for birds, Neil. You've managed to capture some impressive images, especially the curlew taking to the air.

I too saw several cruise liners in Weymouth harbour when I visited Portland in late July. I guess they've got to moor somewhere as they're unlikely to be at sea for some considerable time. Cruises will probably be the last leisure activity that returns to normal post-Covid-19.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Sep-20 09:48 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. I believe the Marsh Harriers are breeding at Arne, I know they do at Lodmoor and Radipole Lake at Weymouth.

Thanks Dave. Yes, plenty of Adonis Blues, but it has to be said, not as many as I used to see down there a few years ago.

Thanks David. Arne is a great reserve that covers a large area with a mix of different habitats.

Monday 14th September.

Last week was cloudy and quite cool here. I had a couple of wanders down to my local spot at Wagon Lane but only saw a couple of worn Speckled Woods and Small Whites.

As has been the pattern this year, it went to the other extreme on Monday with clear blue skies all day and a warm sun which pushed the temperatures here up to 24 degrees by the afternoon.

This time of year it is around 09.30 before the sun clears the house to shine on the bottom of the garden but as soon as it did a couple of Specklies were up and about.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 14.09.2020

Later in the morning I went around to my Mom's to do a little job for her and whilst there, I had a walk down to her local park for a look. Half a dozen Speckled Woods were fluttering around the usual spots, all looking a bit worse for wear now and all closing up on landing in the warm sun.



Speckled Wood - Langley Hall 14.09.2020

A couple of Small Whites were the only other butterflies seen.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 15-Sep-20 08:23 PM GMT

Love the pose that first Specklie is throwing Neil with thrown forward 😊😁 Hopefully there will still be some reasonable weather for the weekend – although I daren't look at the forecast 😊😁

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 16-Sep-20 09:13 AM GMT

Yes, Monday was a cracker, Neil. I'm surprised you didn't see more butterflies. It was 23c on the Gower coast; we're lucky to see those kinds of temperatures in mid-July!!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-Sep-20 08:25 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. That Specklie was certainly making the most of the early sun.

Thanks David. I was not surprised really, this is the time of the year that my season always runs down around here. Mind you, having said that...

Wednesday 16th September.

Small Coppers seem to be having a late flourish around many parts of the country and over the past week or so I have seen reports of good number being seen around the midlands. These don't always have a third brood around my local patch or sometimes they may have just a partial brood...that is, we didn't used to, but the past couple of years have seen a proper third brood around around here and it appears that with climate change this may be a more regular occurrence in the future.

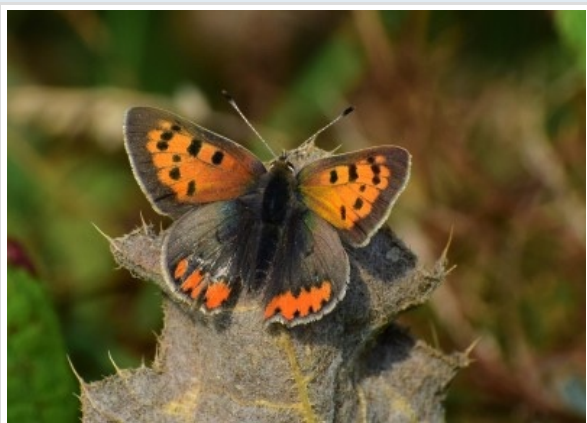
On Wednesday morning, I went to have a look around Blythe Valley Park, this being one of the sites where I had seen some first and second brood earlier in the year. During the hour or so that I spent there I saw half a dozen different individuals, all males in varying states of wear. Four were in one meadow where they were constantly chasing each other about in the warm sun and two more were in a corner of another meadow. Despite the clear skies and warm sun, the breeze had shifted to come from the east and had a cooler feel to it. This slowed them down occasionally and gave me some photo opportunities before they were off again chasing each other about.



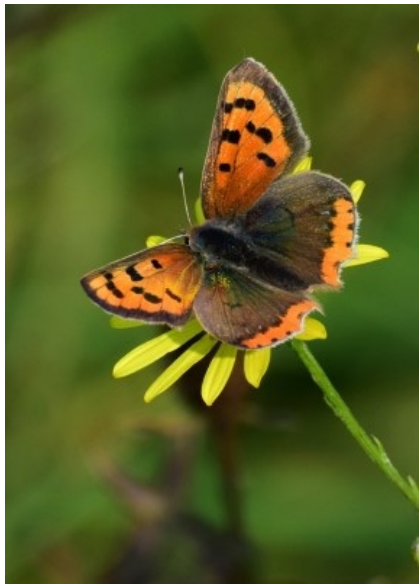
Small Copper – Blythe Valley 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Blythe Valley 16.09.2020

Apart from the Small Coppers, I saw three faded Speckled Wood and a just a couple of Small Whites.

Bye for now and stay safe.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-Sep-20 06:47 PM GMT

Lovely Copper shots Neil 😊 That is individual with the damaged hind wing is an interesting looking thing, at first glance it looked like the orange band wasn't properly formed but then I had a closer look and it's got a set of parallel tears – I wonder what caused that, can't be a bird strike as they don't have teeth – Bramble possibly?

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Sep-20 09:28 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. That damage was quite possibly caused by brambles, there are some large patches close to where he was flying.

Thursday 17th September.

Having found the Small Coppers at Blythe Valley yesterday (Wednesday 16th), I thought I would have a look at another local site this morning to see if I could find any more. The spot I chose to visit was a stretch of public footpath through some meadow areas just outside of Solihull. I had walked this footpath back in July and found good numbers of second brood Small Coppers here (reported on page 167 of this PD) so I figured there was a good chance of one or two third brood examples being about today.

The path runs from Catherine-de-Barnes, a village just outside of Solihull back towards the town itself and as I didn't want to walk all of it this morning I parked at the Solihull end which is closer to where I had seen most of the Small Coppers previously. I arrived just before 10.00am and set off along the path with it still feeling a bit cool. There was a mixture of about 50/50 cloud and sun but a cool easterly breeze was keeping the temperature down a bit and with the sun lower in the sky at this time of year it takes a bit longer to start warming things up. Nevertheless, as I slowly wandered along the path and it slowly warmed up I spotted a Small Copper, and then another one, and then a bit further along another one, and then two chasing each other about. During the next hour or so I ended up counting at least nine with maybe one or two more, mostly males in varying conditions including some that looked nice and fresh, plus a couple of large females as well.



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020

There were quite a few molehills along the side of one meadow and some of the Small Coppers were basking on the bare earth of these and on other patches of bare ground to warm up.



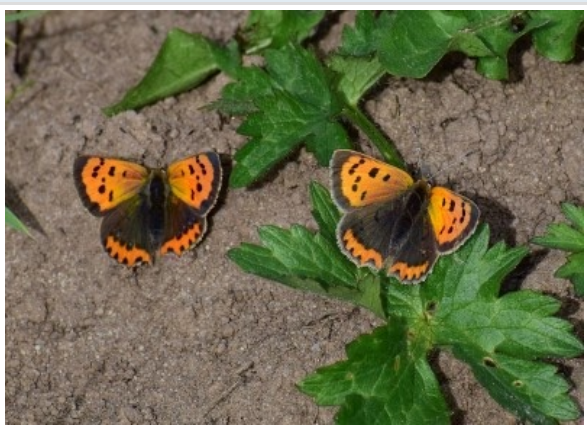
Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Coppers – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020



Small Copper – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020

As with most of my local spots at this time of year, other butterflies were thin on the ground with just a couple of Small Whites and a single Comma being seen.



Comma – Public footpath Solihull 16.09.2020

I then doubled back to the car and decided to try another local spot.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 20-Sep-20 02:26 PM GMT

Some lovely autumnal colours there Neil 😊. Commas seem to have vanished off the face of the planet though, they are normally to be found gorging on overripe Blackberries on most days at this time of year but the one I saw yesterday was the first I've seen for several weeks! It was however very fresh so perhaps there'll be a glut of fresh emergents down here in the coming weeks 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Sep-20 07:40 AM GMT

That's a delightful set of Small Copper images, Neil. I'm pleased to report numbers are good round my way too, so hopefully they'll hang on for a few more weeks to provide a little autumn colour to enjoy.

Nice that you saw a Comma. Apart from the early part of spring I haven't seen that many this year.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Sep-20 08:55 PM GMT

Delightful range of variation there Neil 😊 Really like the second one basking on the footpath and the last one – the way the orange on the fore wing goes right to the edge of the wing – really makes the orange stand out 😊😊 Nice to see a Detective Inspector in your constabulary too 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Sep-20 09:05 AM GMT

Thanks for the comments Bugboy, David and Wurzel 😊

I don't think that any Small Copper is exactly the same as any other one, there is always some degree of variation even if it is sometimes slight. This is also true with many other of our butterflies when looked at closely, a fact that makes me somewhat cynical of trying to give every slight difference a name.

Thursday 17th September - continued.

From where I had parked for the public footpath, it was just a short hop onto the M42 and along to the next junction to Bickenhill where I arrived 10 minutes later.

As soon as I parked up and got out of my car I was greeted by a male Speckled Wood that came to investigate the intrusion into his space and then settled in the adjacent hedgerow.



Speckled Wood - Bickenhill 17.09.2020

I then wandered around my usual circuit but it was obvious that things are nearly finished here with no more than a dozen butterflies seen despite it now being a nice and sunny late morning. These consisted mostly of a few Small Whites plus a couple of Green-veined Whites.



Green-veined White - Bickenhill 17.09.2020

A single Small Copper was found in one of the usual corners.



Small Copper – Bickenhill 17.09.2020

The Comma I had seen earlier in the morning at my last stop was the first I had seen for some weeks and I found a couple more here. One was alternating between basking on the path and going up onto some nearby brambles to nectar on the over-ripe blackberries and the other was on another nearby patch but deep within the brambles and wouldn't come out for a photo.



Comma – Bickenhill 17.09.2020

I have not seen a Comma for a while now although that is fairly normal for here with a gap between from when the summer brood tails off and the autumn emergence. They were a bit thin on the ground around here in the spring although the summer brood seemed to do better with reasonable numbers showing up at most of my local spots so it will be interesting to see if any more show up this autumn.

After doing the one circuit here I returned to the car and headed home to catch up on some more household stuff.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 23-Sep-20 08:40 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

I don't think that any Small Copper is exactly the same as any other one, there is always some degree of variation even if it is sometimes slight. This is also true with many other of our butterflies when looked at closely, a fact that makes me somewhat cynical of trying to give every slight difference a name.

Neil.

I entirely agree with you, Neil. Small Coppers especially are enormously variable and the contrast between shining orange and black spotting highlights this – which is probably why so many "abs" have been named for this species. It does however mean that a nice selection like yours provides quite a bit of interest! 😊

I've also seen hardly any "autumn" Commas this year (nor the usual Red Admirals that appear at the same time). Maybe they hibernated early?

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Sep-20 10:19 PM GMT

Lovely set of shots Neil 😊 I was lucky enough to find an Autumnal Comma at the weekend – I generally don't see that many in the autumn, probably

because I can't get out as much, but maybe because they know something I don;t and so are nicely tucked away in their hibernation spots early before the really lousy weather hits? 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Sep-20 06:09 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...As soon as I parked up and got out of my car I was greeted by a male Speckled Wood that came to investigate the intrusion into his space and then settled in the adjacent hedgerow.

😊 That's a habit of theirs with which I'm most familiar, Neil. They're almost car park attendants at some of the sites I visit.

There may not have been many butterflies during your visit, but you've seen two species I've hardly encountered at all this month – Green Veined White & Comma. Over here, it's been a bit of a Tortoiseshell/Small White fest, with precious little else.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 25-Sep-20 09:01 AM GMT

Thanks for the comments Dave, Wurzel and David, appreciated as always 😊

It seems that Commas are thin on the ground everywhere this autumn.

Tuesday 22nd September.

With a change to much cooler and more unsettled weather forecast from mid week onwards I figured I would pop out this morning to have a look around my local site at Castle Hills at Solihull. The footpath that I would normally have used is now blocked off by the work going on for the new JLR distribution centre, whether it will remain closed when this work is complete remains to be seen. All was not lost though as there is another public footpath which crosses the site further down and from which I can connect to my usual circuit.

Speckled Woods were easily the most numerous species seen today with about a dozen seen scattered around the various paths. These were mostly males that had seen better days but a couple of females were looking to be in better condition still.



Speckled Wood – Castle Hills Solihull 22.09.2020



Speckled Wood – Castle Hills Solihull 22.09.2020

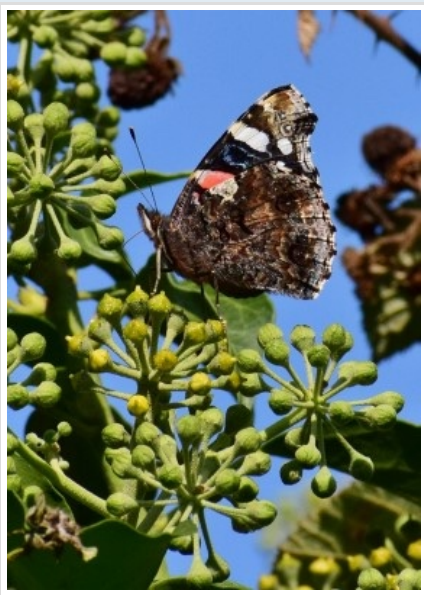
A few Small and Green veined Whites were seen but none of them settled for long on what had turned into a warm and sunny morning.

A single Comma was spotted making it just my fourth Comma seen so far this autumn.



Comma - Castle Hills Solihull 22.09.2020

I am not seeing many Red Admirals this autumn either with a single one seen here this morning being my first for a while now.



Red Admiral - Castle Hills Solihull 22.09.2020

There is lots of ivy in flower here at the moment but the Red Admiral above was the only butterfly seen on any of it.

A single male Common Blue completed the tally for the morning.



Common Blue - Castle Hills Solihull 22.09.2020

I am not sure if he was a third brood or a late second brood. Some flight times this year have been all over the place and I suspect that brood timings,

for some species at least, are not as clear cut as we sometimes think they are, or are becoming more blurred with climate change.

With the weather turning this week, that may well be the last time I get a chance to look for butterflies around here. I may still see the odd Speckled Wood or Small White in the garden but without the Clouded Yellows and Wall Browns of more favoured areas this is the time of year when my season usually comes to an end here.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 25-Sep-20 11:52 AM GMT

Some glowingly fresh Small Coppers there Neil. 🍷
Especially the 2nd and 3rd images down from the top of your post.
Autumn has (momentarily?) caught up with us in the South ie. cold wind and rain.
Still, up until Wednesday I think most areas had a good run for their money.

Hope I don't have to put the camera away just yet!.

Stay safe and well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 26-Sep-20 07:17 PM GMT

Lovely Autumnal selection Neil 😊 I've also lost track of which brood things were from this year – things were a bit chaotic this year with some being early, others normal time 😊 That second Specklie is really lovely looking, I think it's the massive 'eyes' on the hind wing, they draw you in 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 29-Sep-20 06:10 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...I am not seeing many Red Admirals this autumn either with a single one seen here this morning being my first for a while now.

They've increased in number round my way this last 3 weeks or so, Neil, but they are about in single figures mainly, rather than the 20s and 30s I'm more used to at this time of year.

I daresay if you can find a good patch of flowering ivy in a very sheltered position you may strike lucky.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Sep-20 09:14 AM GMT

Thanks Trevor. I am sure you won't have to put your camera away just yet, your season lasts a good bit longer down there than mine does up here. Mind you, I never actually put mine away even when I run out of butterflies to photograph 😊.

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, there were lots of early sightings this year, especially in the first half, but then the weather collapsed in June and complicated things somewhat for the later broods.

Thanks David. I have been paying particular attention to the flowering ivy around here but there is nothing on any of it apart from bees and wasps.

Garden Moths update – September.

September typically sees a transition from late summer to autumn and this year is no exception with a series of weather fronts bringing wet and windy weather over most of the country. As well as the nights growing longer, they are also becoming colder with a few dropping down to single figures around here.

I have had the moth trap out a few times in the garden although the increasing number of cold or windy (or both) nights means that the frequency has dropped a bit this month, as it usually does for me here.

I was away (in Dorset) at the start of the month but on running the trap from the beginning of the second week I was still catching a similar mix of late summer species as I was seeing though August, although overall numbers started dropping as usual. As the month progressed I began to see more examples of the Autumn generation of species I was seeing earlier in the year including Common Marbled Carpet and Spruce Carpet.



Common Marbled Carpet, an attractive form of this very variable moth – Coverdale 07.09.2020



Spruce Carpet – 28.09.2020

Another species of carpet moth that turns up at this time of the year is the Red-green Carpet which I often see in the spring when the females take to the wing again after hibernation. The main flight time however is from September to November when both sexes are on the wing. The males then die off and only the females enter hibernation and lay their eggs when they re-emerge in spring.



Red-green Carpet – Coverdale 28.09.2020

The first of the typical autumn species also started appearing, the most numerous of which is Lunar Underwing. I remember commenting before on the various colour forms of this species and have put together the combo photo below showing three different forms all caught on the same night (22nd Sept).



Lunar Underwing colour forms – Coverdale 22.09.2020

The Black Rustic is another typical autumn species that I usually get a few of. I love the subtle shades of black on these that always remind me of the underside of a Peacock butterfly.



Black Rustic - Coverdale 16.09.2020

I rather like the way the light has caught the eye on the Black Rustic below, giving it a red glow which combined with the black base colour makes it look almost evil, like a sort of vampire moth 😬.



Black Rustic - Coverdale 16.09.2020

The colder nights also lead to reduced numbers of micros although there are still some around including *Carcina quercana*, an attractive little moth that graces the cover of the Field Guide to the Micro Moths of Britain & Ireland <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Field-Micro-Moths-Britain-Ireland-Guides/dp/1472964527>



Carcina quercana - Coverdale 07.09.2020

My tally so far this year is now at a total of 235 species, made up of 143 macro and 92 micro species. The forecast is not looking too good for trapping for the next week or so with most nights looking to be cold, windy and wet but with a bit of luck there should be a few more species still to turn up this year.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Sep-20 07:38 PM GMT

A see what you mean about the Evil Black Rustic Neil very much ready for Halloween 🤩🤩 Really like the *Carcina quercana* – although to my eyes the main brown coloured areas remind me of the shape of a flattened toad on a road 🤔

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 04-Oct-20 10:34 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...The Black Rustic is another typical autumn species that I usually get a few of. I love the subtle shades of black on these that always remind me of the underside of a Peacock butterfly.

Doesn't it just! Some of these supposed 'duller' moths can be rather attractive when you look closely. Then you have brighter ones, such as your *carcina quercana*, which reminds me of those rhubarb and custard boiled sweets that we ate when we were kids (don't know if they still make them).

235 species is impressive. What's the most you've had in a calendar year?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Oct-20 07:38 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel,

{quote=Wurzel post_id=158551 time=1601491129 user_id=9821} ...although to my eyes the main brown coloured areas remind me of the shape of a flattened toad on a road 🤔

I have said it before but I will say it again, you have a fascinating ability to see strange things sometimes 🤩

Thanks David,

David M wrote:

235 species is impressive. What's the most you've had in a calendar year?

I will need to check but I think this year is the most I have had. I will do a round up sometime during the winter and include a comparison.

Not much to report for his past week or so. It started raining heavily on Wednesday 30th September and for the next five days it carried on almost constantly, often with a cold wind. When it did ease off a bit it remained damp and gloomy...a horrible few days. This week has been a bit brighter with some sun breaking through occasionally but it has remained cold with a very nippy wind.

I have not seen a single butterfly for well over a week now, even the garden Specklies have called it a day although I can't blame them given the grotty weather here last week.

The weather has not been too good for running the moth trap either, the best (and only one this week) night being this Monday (5th October) when the overnight temperature just about stayed in double figures, although it started raining again sometime in the early hours and I got up to a wet trap and garden. The result was 22 moths of 10 species with 19 of 9 macros and the micros consisting of just 3 Light Brown Apple Moths. The best of these for me were NFYs of Red-line Quaker and Barred Sallow, both species that I usually get just one or two of each year.



Red-line Quaker – Coverdale 05.10.2020



Barred Sallow – Coverdale 05.10.2020

It is always good to see another nice fresh Red-green Carpet.



Red-green Carpet – Coverdale 05.10.2020

The rest of the catch consisted of; Lesser Yellow Underwing (5), Large Yellow Underwing (1), Lunar Underwing (3), Shuttle-shaped Dart (3), Common Marbled Carpet (3) and Garden Carpet (1), all common and widespread species that I would expect to see this time of year.



Shuttle-shaped Darts female(L) and male (R) – Coverdale 05.10.2020

The weekend is looking to be a cold one so fingers crossed for a few better nights next week as there are still a few autumn species that I normally get that I haven't yet seen this year.

Bye now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Oct-20 08:09 PM GMT

I have said it before but I will say it again, you have a fascinating ability to see strange things sometimes 😊 Cheers Neil it's down to a mis-spent youth poring over Peter Cross books – they were stunning and now ridiculously expensive 😊 Saying that I'm struggling to see the red on the Red-Green Carpet 😊 stunning moth but misnamed I feel 😊😊

Have a gooun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Oct-20 10:22 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. No, not very red, but there is some reddish brown which is apparently enough to give it the name. There are quite a few moths, and some butterflies, that play a bit fast and loose where colours are concerned in their names 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 20-Oct-20 09:15 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...There are quite a few moths, and some butterflies, that play a bit fast and loose where colours are concerned in their names

Indeed there are, Neil. The whole 'carpet' family is a mystery to me, although there are some highly apt ones such as Silver Y and Box Moth!

I guess the most bizarre one amongst UK butterflies would be Duke of Burgundy.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Oct-20 09:06 AM GMT

Hi David.

The 'carpet moths' – those in the geometer family, not the very few micros whose larvae actually do feed on natural fibres, including those in carpets – apparently have wing patterns that reminded our forbears of carpets of the day.

I had this book as a present last Christmas which contains lots of interesting info on the names of butterflies and moths and where they (may) have originated.

<https://www.nhbs.com/emperors-admirals-chimney-sweepers-book>

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Oct-20 07:59 PM GMT

My butterfly season has definitely come to an end for this year now, I have not seen any at all this month with a couple of walks down to my local spot at Wagon Lane on the most promising days producing absolutely nothing.

The garden moths are still turning up though, although it must be said that overall numbers are low with many nights being poor for trapping with low temperatures and/or blustery winds. Despite that, some species seem to be doing well. I mentioned in my last garden moth update that I usually get one or two Red-line Quakers each year but so far this year I have had half a dozen with three turning up together on the night of October 16th.



Red-line Quaker – Coverdale 16.10.2020

Spruce Carpet is another species that I am seeing more of than usual this year with two or three appearing nearly every time I have run the trap recently.



Spruce Carpet – Coverdale 19.10.2020

The most numerous species overall lately has been Common Marbled Carpet in it's numerous variations.



Common Marbled Carpet – Coverdale 19.10.2020

The Brick is another regular at this time of year which has started appearing over the past week.



The Brick – Coverdale 19.10.2020

A sure sign that we are well into autumn is when the November Moths start turning up here. These usually start flying from mid October and actually consist of a group of three very similar species – November Moth, Pale November Moth and Autumnal Moth – all of which are quite variable and cannot be reliably separated on appearance alone and are usually recorded as aggregates (aggs.)



November Moth agg. - Coverdale 16.10.2020



November Moth agg. - Coverdale 16.10.2020



November Moth agg. - Coverdale 20.10.2020

With Wurzel's favourite photos threads now started I reckon it is time for me to start looking back at my season and put some thoughts together for a 'looking back' post or two.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Oct-20 11:24 AM GMT

Nice collection of Moffs Neil - particularly like the under wing view of the November moth 😊😁 Looking forward to your 'Look Back' 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Oct-20 10:58 AM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

I had this book as a present last Christmas which contains lots of interesting info on the names of butterflies and moths and where they (may) have originated.

<https://www.nhbs.com/emperors-admirals-chimney-sweepers-book>

Thanks for that link, Neil. I have *Rainbow Dust* by the same author, which was a fascinating read. Perhaps the Emperors-Admirals-Chimney Sweepers should go on my own Christmas wish list. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Oct-20 09:18 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel and David, appreciated as always 😊

I think the 'look back' will be a while yet, I need to check up on what I did and remind myself of what I saw and where.

It is now that time of year when I start taking a bit more notice of the birds in the garden. All the usual stuff has been coming to the feeders but instead of taking the same old shots I have been trying to get some of when they come a bit closer to the house, still taken through the window from the comfort of the back room 😊



Robin - Coverdale 25.10.2020



Blue-tit - Coverdale 26.10.2020



Chaffinch female - Coverdale 26.10.2020

I have only had the moth trap out once this week, last night which was mild but turned quite blustery. Nevertheless, a result of 15 moths of 8 species was not bad considering the wind and included a couple more NFYs, Blair's Shoulder-knot and the dark form of Green-brindled crescent.



Blair's Shoulder-knot - Coverdale 29.10.2020



Green-brindled Crescent (dark form) - Coverdale 29.10.2020

I also had six examples of The Brick which was notable for me, these usually only turning up in ones or twos here.



Brick - Coverdale 29.10.2020

It looks like it is 'batten down the hatches' time over the next day or so maybe a good time to start doing that reminding myself of what I saw to start my 'look back'.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Allan.W., 30-Oct-20 09:41 PM GMT

Nice to see the Blairs Shoulder Knot and the Green Brindled crescent Neil ,i always look forward to seeing a few of the latter in the Autumn ,sadly my trap has "bit the dust " and have really missed the Autumn species ,good to see yours ! suppose i can,t really complain ,i,ve had a few good-uns ,mainly Jersey Tiger , Cryptic fern , Vine moth, Restharrow probably being the best . but overall numbers in general have been well down . Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 01-Nov-20 06:19 PM GMT

Great shots Neil – you must have very clean windows to get those sharp shots through it 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Nov-20 07:44 PM GMT

Thanks Allan. Sorry to hear of the demise of your moth trap. Do you plan to replace it?

[quote=Allan.W. post_id=159139 time=1604090492 user_id=13628] ...i,ve had a few good-uns ,mainly Jersey Tiger , Cryptic fern , Vine moth, Restharrow probably being the best . but overall numbers in general have been well down ...

Good-uns indeed, all species I have never seen here although I have come across a few Jersey Tigers in past years down in Dorset. Overall numbers have been down here too this year but species numbers are actually up.

Thanks Wurzel. I must admit that the only cleaning that the windows have had recently is the heavy rain we had last week 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Nov-20 07:30 PM GMT

With my 60th birthday coming up next year, I had been contemplating an early retirement and over the past couple of years have been making plans that would hopefully make this a reality. With the covid pandemic this year, after an initial period of working from home, I was furloughed which in effect gave me a bit of a practice run at retirement, even if there were some restrictions in place for some of it. With the end of the furlough scheme at the end of October, I returned to work. Initially this was actually back to working from home although from next week I will need to spend some time back in the office in order to catch up on some stuff that I cannot do from home.

Anyway, on returning to work the other week, it did not come as much surprise to be informed that the company were offering a limited voluntary redundancy program. Well, from my perspective, this could not have come at a better time so I immediately put an application in and have heard this afternoon that this has been approved with a leaving date at the end of this month.

So then, I will soon be joining the ranks of those with plenty of time to go butterflying (he say's quietly in case Jane is listening 😊)

Back to the present and I have put the moth trap out a couple of times recently and had a few moths including a couple more autumn favourites. A slightly worn December Moth on the night of the 8th November, a species which despite it's name usually flies from late October and through November into December.



December Moth – Coverdale 08.11.2020

And a Feathered Thorn, one of the chunkier moths to be seen at this time of year.



Feathered Thorn – Coverdale 10.11.2020

Looks like a bit of a wet and windy weekend ahead but next week is looking like it may be quieter and milder again so the trap will probably be out again then.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Nov-20 07:44 PM GMT

Love the colour combination of the December Moth Neil 😊😊 Congratulations on the early retirement, also I'm reminded of the catch phrase of teh Prisoner from Life of Brian 🤝🤝🤝 21 more years for me 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 14-Nov-20 02:30 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, love your Moth and Bird shots, 😊 I'm trying to get rid of some pigeons that keep arriving and take over the feeder chasing all the small birds a way, they're not Wood Pigeons, I even stopped putting food out for a few day's , thought I'd got rid of them but back they came 😞 I must admit to nearly using the hose once or twice 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 14-Nov-20 08:37 PM GMT

Congrats. on your early retirement Neil, I'm sure you won't regret it. 😊
I packed up early too, on the last working day of June 2012. On the following Monday I was in Chiddingfold forest looking for Purple Emperors.

Never looked back!.

Keep safe and well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Nov-20 06:02 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Anyway, on returning to work the other week, it did not come as much surprise to be informed that the company were offering a limited voluntary redundancy program. Well, from my perspective, this could not have come at a better time so I immediately put an application in and have heard this afternoon that this has been approved with a leaving date at the end of this month. So then, I will soon be joining the ranks of those with plenty of time to go butterflying...

Good for you, Neil. 🤝

The magic words 'voluntary redundancy' would be music to my ears too, even though working from home since March has felt rather like being retired anyway.

You'll be able to devote more time to what you enjoy doing most. Let's hope by the time spring comes we'll all be less restricted than we are now and that you can do justice to your first season *à la retraite*.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Nov-20 07:32 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. 21 years eh! The thought makes me shudder 😬

Thanks Goldie. I get a lot of Wood Pigeons here. I must admit they not my favourite birds, flying dustbins with their insatiable appetites for anything green and growing. They can look comical though, the way they waddle about after each other around the lawn.

Thanks Trevor. I'm looking forward to next year, although I had plenty of spare time this year with being on furlough for a large part of it, the circumstances were somewhat restrictive for half of the season.

David M wrote:

...even though working from home since March has felt rather like being retired anyway...

Indeed David, and my extended period of being on furlough gave me a good practice run at it. In fact it was this that convinced me to take the opportunity if it arose, which I am happy to say it did 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 26-Nov-20 06:44 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Indeed David, and my extended period of being on furlough gave me a good practice run at it. In fact it was this that convinced me to take the opportunity if it arose, which I am happy to say it did

If the vaccines prove reliable, you could be in for an *annus mirabilis* in 2021, Neil.

I wish you all the best and will look forward to seeing your first reports 'post-travail'!

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 26-Nov-20 10:31 PM GMT

I've just caught up with your news about being able to retire early, Neil. Many congratulations!

It really is very liberating and no more of that frustrating gazing out of the office window at hours of spring and summer sunshine. I'm sure you'll make the most of it and take the opportunity to travel (even more than you already manage to do!) once the pandemic starts to recede as eventually it will. It's time I bumped into you again somewhere... 😊

All the very best,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Nov-20 09:24 AM GMT

Thanks David and Dave.

I ended up missing quite a few species this year and with a bit of luck I will see some of them next year now.

To be honest, I won't be chasing all over the country too much, I will still have limits on the distance I am prepared to travel for a day trip. My current long distance travelling usually revolves around the breaks away for a few days in B&Bs that we have done for the past few years and I intend to carry on in much the same way, just with more freedom of timing now without having to plan around work holidays 😊 Also I have really enjoyed spending more time around my local patch this year and this is something that I want to continue doing.

I am only putting the moth trap out in the garden on average once a week now to see what will turn up. This has just resulted in a few Bricks, Red-lined Quakers and Common Marbled Carpets, mostly worn and faded now but a nice December Moth showed up on the night of 24th November.



December Moth 24.11.2020

I really like this small relative of the Oak Eggars which looks like it is wearing a fur coat against the cold.

Having finished work this Friday (27th), I should now have time to get on with my 'look back' at this past season.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-Nov-20 07:22 PM GMT

That's a very smart looking moth Neil – I checked the image out first and thought "looks like it's wearing a fur coat" and then I read the text and now I'm left wondering if it's a case of 'great minds' or the other? 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 30-Nov-20 02:17 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, retirement is great, you can do just what you please 😊 I've not seen too many Moths this year, in fact I think I've only taken a couple of shots of them, roll on the Vaccine 🙏 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Dec-20 12:08 PM GMT

`{quote=Wurzel-post_id=159630-time=1606677722-user_id=9821}` That's a very smart looking moth Neil – I checked the image out first and thought "looks like it's wearing a fur coat" and then I read the text and now I'm left wondering if it's a case of 'great minds' or the other? 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Oh! Great Minds Wurzel 😊😄

Cheers Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Dec-20 12:10 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Neil, retirement is great, you can do just what you please 😊 I've not seen too many Moths this year, in fact I think I've only taken a couple of shots of them, roll on the Vaccine 🙏 Goldie 😊

Yes Goldie, I'm definitely looking forward to having more freedom with my time.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-Dec-20 08:53 PM GMT

Lovely December moth, Neil. It looks suitably well-wrapped up for the time of year. 😊

I guess even moths may be hard to come by these next few weeks, so I guess we'll all need to prepare for an enforced 10 week 'sabbatical' till the lengthening February days bring the promise of a return for our winged friends again.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Dec-20 10:48 AM GMT

Thanks David. Yes, it is that time of year now when running the moth trap often results in a blank, especially in the kind of weather we are having now. Nevertheless, I will still put it out on the occasional suitable night through the winter to see if anything turns up.

Cheers,

Neil.

Now for the first of my looking back at the season reports.

Looking back at 2020 Part 1 – Spring.

The 2020 season certainly turned out to be a bit different for most of us, especially the early part which I will be looking at in this first retrospective report for the year. The big elephant in the room is obviously the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated restrictions and I will mention this where it affected me although I will try not to dwell on it too much.

As always, my thoughts are mostly based around my observations around my local patch plus some trips further afield that I eventually managed to do later in the year.

To start with, following a mild and wet winter during which we only had a few light snow showers here and not many frosts, the first week or so of spring began with a continuation of this wet and mild theme.

My first butterflies around here often appear sometime during the second half of March and this year was no exception with my first sightings on March 21st when a walk down to the area of rough ground by my local park produced more than half a dozen Small Tortoiseshells plus a few Commas and a single Peacock. This was my highest ever tally of first sightings and was an indication of what was to follow over the next few weeks. This period often presents opportunities for some of my favourite 'butterfly on blossom' shots and this year was no exception.



Peacock – Wagon Lane 26.03.2020



Small Tortoiseshell – Wagon Lane 24.03.2020

As we carried on from March into April, we had a lot of clear nights and frosty mornings, in fact we had more frosts during this period than we had throughout the winter. These clear skies often carried on through the day with the middle of April in particular being unseasonably warm and dry, although by the end of the month we had returned to more normal unsettled conditions with a lot more cloud and some spells of heavy rain.

During this period, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was initially working from home, and then put on furlough. This gave me more opportunity than I would have normally had to visit my local spot by the park, this being where my daily exercise walk took me on most days. It was soon apparent that both Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks had come out of hibernation in good numbers. In the last couple of years, both species have been a bit scarce in the summer brood and there has been a lot of speculation as to whether this is because they are going into hibernation earlier. This appears to be supported by previous observations and the numbers now appearing would also back this up.

Commas were also seen on most days but in comparison with the Tortoiseshells and Peacocks these were far fewer, although I now actually think that their numbers were about average, just seeming to be lower at the time compared to the other two.



Comma - Wagon Lane 26.03.2020

The last week of March produced my first Small White and Orange-tip of the year but then a run of cold dreary days meant that we were into the second week of April before I saw any more examples of either of these.

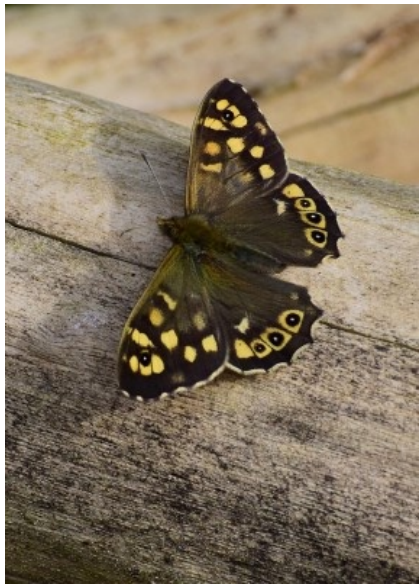


Orange-tip - Wagon Lane 09.04.2020



Small White - Wagon Lane 09.04.2020

Speckled Wood also appeared during the second week of April with the appearance of these in my garden always being an event I eagerly look forward to.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 12.04.2020

By the middle of April, Brimstones and Green-veined Whites were appearing in numbers along with the first Holly Blues, although the latter remained very thin on the ground around here this spring with just a handful seen.



Green-veined White - Coverdale 14.04.2020



Brimstone - Coverdale 23.04.2020



Holly Blue – Coverdale 14.05.2020

My first Large White did not show up until 21st April with this completing the ten species that I would expect to see locally by this time of year.



Large White – Coverdale 21.04.2020

So far, apart from the Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks appearing in particularly good numbers, Orange-tips were also having a good year around here, but the other whites were not so numerous, with just one Large White seen by the end of April. Speckled Woods seemed to be having an average spring brood and Comma numbers also seemed to be about average.

We had another spell of dull and cloudy weather with some heavy rain at the end of April and this continued into early May. The skies then cleared again, and we went into another run of warm and dry weather. This was accompanied by a nippy wind at first but by mid-May we were into a very warm spell although the clear nights still led to a couple of light frosts first thing in the morning.

Up until now, all my butterflying had taken place within walking distance of my house, although to be honest that is usually the case with me during this early part of the season. Although the travel restrictions were still in place, it was now being said that we could drive somewhere to take our exercise walks, as long as it was a 'reasonable' distance and the journey did not take longer than the exercise.

I figured it was now time to check out some of my other local spots around the outskirts of Solihull, all of which require a short drive of 10 minutes or so to get to, so during the second week of May I began to visit my spots at Castle Hills, Bickenhill and Blythe Valley. On the 17th May Castle Hills produced my first Small Coppers, Common Blues, Brown Argus and Small Heath of the season, with all except Small Heath soon following at the other two sites.



Small Copper – Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Common Blue – Castle Hills 17.05.2020



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 17.05.2020



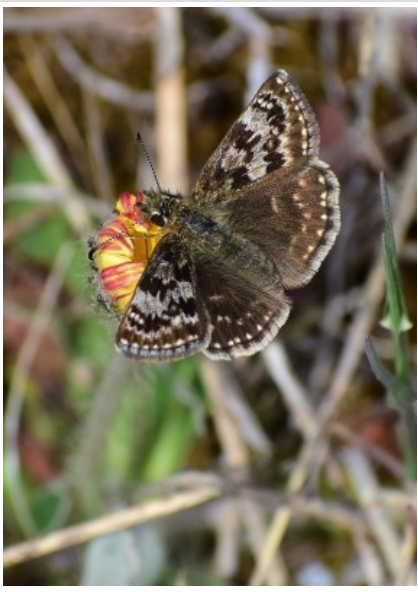
Small Heath – Castle Hills 17.05.2020

Small Copper and Brown Argus both looked to be having good spring broods here with multiples seen at both Castle Hills and Blythe Valley whereas in most years I am lucky to find them here at all in the spring. Common Blue numbers were low, although they were flying at all three sites whereas Small Heath are only found at Castle Hills where numbers seemed about average.

In mid-May the travel restrictions were relaxed further which meant that I could now drive the 45 minutes down the M40 to Bishops Hill and catch up with Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Green Hairstreak and Small Blue. These are all species that do not occur around Solihull and I had been thinking that I would be missing all these this year. As it turned out, my visit to Bishops Hill on the 18th May would turn out to be the only time that I saw these four species in 2020.



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Green Hairstreak – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 18.05.2020

The second half of May was very warm and sunny with no rain for days. This, along with earlier periods of warm weather, was leading to an early season and by the end of the month the first of the summer brood Speckled Woods and Small Tortoiseshells were starting to appear, a good week or so earlier than is usual for around here.

My first Painted Lady of the year showed up (in my garden) on 28th May although it would be well into the summer before I would see another one.



Painted Lady – Coverdale 28.05.2020

The last day of the month also produced my first Large Skippers and Meadow Browns of the year. Large Skippers often appear here around the end of the month, but we are usually well into the first or second week of June before I see any Meadow Browns here.

So far, I had been lucky and only missed a couple of species that I had hoped to see this year. One of these was Pearl-bordered Fritillary which by all accounts had a good showing in the Wyre Forest and were still flying when the travel restrictions were lifted but by then were well past their best. I had also hoped to see Marsh Fritillary and SPBF down in Cornwall in May but this trip was cancelled due to Covid – or rather I should say that this trip was postponed as we have shifted it to the same dates in 2021 so one to look forward to.

That brings me up to the end of May. The next report will take us into June and the longer – although not necessarily warmer – days of summer.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Dec-20 07:45 PM GMT

Fantastic set of Spring images Neil 😊😊 Nice to think that they're only a few of months away now 😊 That Green-veined White is a lovely specimen so smoky and sultry – I can't wait for March now 🍷😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Dec-20 03:20 PM GMT

That's a lovely reminder of last spring as well as an appetiser for the next one, Neil! That period when the blackthorn blossom is out is one of my

favourite times of year, which also coincides with the emergence of the pupal hibernators to complement the earlier adult overwinterers.

Must say that Painted Lady is a nice-looking example with those bold hindwing spots, but the Small Copper is, for me, the pick of the line up. It's absolutely immaculate and shows up really well against the buttercup. 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 11-Dec-20 07:14 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, lots to look forward to next year with it hopefully being back to more like 'normal' (whatever that is).

Thanks David. I'm already looking forward to that period with the first blackthorn blossom, one of my favourite times too.

Looking back at 2020 Part 2 – High Summer.

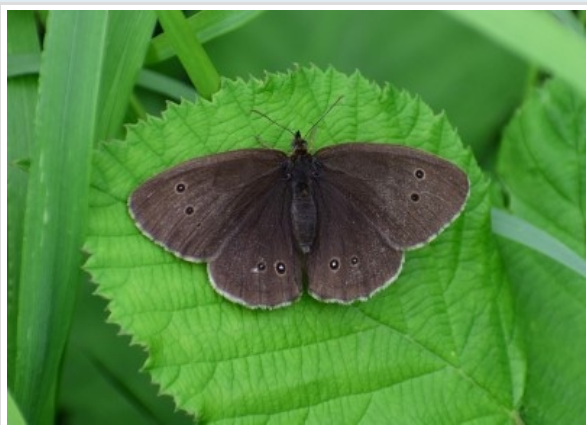
I have heard it said that a poor spring is often followed by a good summer and a that a warm spring is followed by a poor summer. Whatever the truth of this, it has certainly been the case around here in recent years with 2020 once again going downhill after a decent spring. The first few days of June continued on from May with some lovely warm and sunny weather but after the first week it collapsed into a week or so of dull and wet weather with thunderstorms and some particularly heavy rain, not that we didn't need it after the dry spring had left much of the vegetation here looking quite parched. After this, the rest of the month was very unsettled with lots of cloud and a cool wind keeping the temperatures down and although we did still get some sunny spells, flaming June it was not.

Large Skippers had appeared at the end of May and the first couple of weeks of June saw their numbers build up at all the usual sites around here with once again a few turning up in my garden. Although they seemed to have a decent emergence around here, their flight period proved to be fairly short one compared with some years.



Large Skipper – Blythe Valley Park 05.06.2020

Meadow Brown numbers also built up through June and were joined in the second week by Ringlets with lots of both species flying together at all my local spots over the next couple of weeks.



Ringlet – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

Fresh Speckled Woods had started appearing at the end of May, a little earlier than usual, and thereafter would be encountered nearly everywhere through the summer without the short gap between broods sometime in June that I often see.

The second week of June produced my first Small Skipper (14th June), my earliest sighting of these here by a good week.



Small Skipper – Castle Hills 14.06.2020

Summer brood Small Tortoiseshells had started emerging earlier than usual with the first ones seen at the end of May and by mid-June these were flying in the kind of numbers not seen around here for some years.



Small Tortoiseshell Wagon Lane 13.06.2020

These were soon joined by summer Commas and with a few old and faded spring examples still hanging on I saw these old hibernators and fresh new summer ones both flying at the same time at a couple of spots. I also noticed this year that these first summer Commas consisted of both hutchinsoni and normal forms flying together as opposed to all the first ones to emerge being hutchinsoni which is often assumed to be the case.



Comma – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

On the 9th June we visited Bishops Hill and Harbury Spoilbank, specifically to look for Dark Green Fritillaries, a species that I had never actually seen in Warwickshire before, although I have seen loads of these previously during our travels further afield around the country. We found a couple at Bishops Hill on a mostly cloudy morning but later in the afternoon a bit more sun at Harbury produced well over a dozen, mostly fresh males.



Dark Green Fritillary – Harbury Spoilbank 09.06.2020

Later in June I began to see reports of Small Tortoiseshells starting to tuck themselves up in sheds and outhouses, seemingly going into early hibernation as has been observed in the past few years. I am still not clear exactly what was going on with this species this year but it appears that at least some individuals were going into early hibernation whereas others were staying out and going on to produce a second brood later in the summer/autumn. I certainly saw many more larval webs around my local spots than I have seen for a long time.

Red Admirals also started appearing in numbers through June, especially in some of the Warwickshire woodlands that we visited around the middle of the month such as Oversley Wood and Snitterfield Bushes.



Red Admiral – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020

These two woods also produced Silver-washed Fritillaries, although we only managed to find White Admirals at Oversley Wood this year.

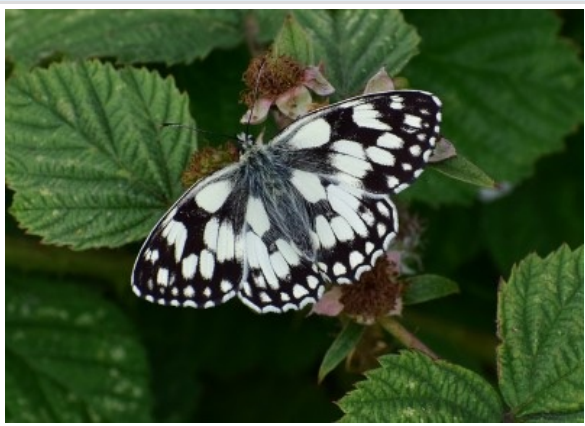


Silver-washed Fritillary – Snitterfield Bushes 22.06.2020



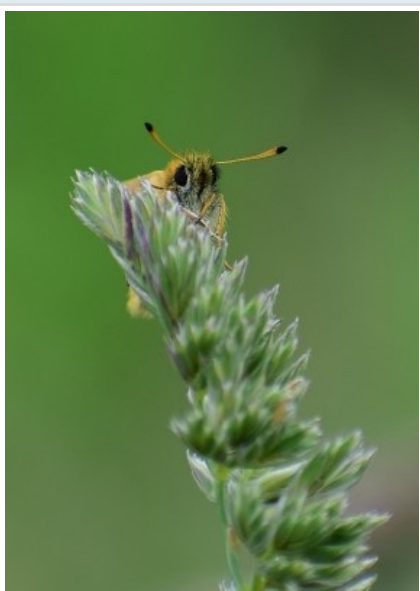
White Admiral – Oversley Wood 15.06.2020

Oversley also produced my first Marbled White of the year (15th June) and by the end of the month and into early July I was seeing these in good numbers around my local sites. I was particularly chuffed to find a wandering individual at my local spot at Wagon Lane, only the second time I have ever seen one there.



Marbled White – Bickenhill 02.07.2020

Essex Skippers always emerge a couple of weeks later than the first Small Skippers here and it is often well into July before I manage to confirm any. With the early emergence of the Small Skippers here this year I was not surprised to also find my first Essex Skippers also emerging earlier than usual with a few seen at Wagon Lane on 30th June.



Essex Skipper – Wagon Lane 30.06.2020

The unsettled weather continued into July with most days feeling unseasonably cool although when the sun did break though we would get some decent warm spells.

The summer species already mentioned were all flying in good numbers around my local sites and were joined on 10th of July by Gatekeepers which emerged with a bang around here, one day there were none and then all of a sudden they were all over the place.



Gatekeeper – Blythe Valley Park 10.07.2020

A couple of days later, summer peacocks started to appear and over the next couple of weeks emerged in large numbers to join the Small Tortoiseshells, making it a very memorable summer around here for these two vanessids.



Peacock – Bickenhill 16.07.2020

The summer broods of my local lycaenids also started to emerge around this time although these were to be a bit 'patchy' this year. Small Coppers did well at some sites and Common Blues at others, but neither species managed to do well everywhere.



Small Copper – Henwood Lane 22.07.2020



Common Blue – Blythe Valley 17.07.2020

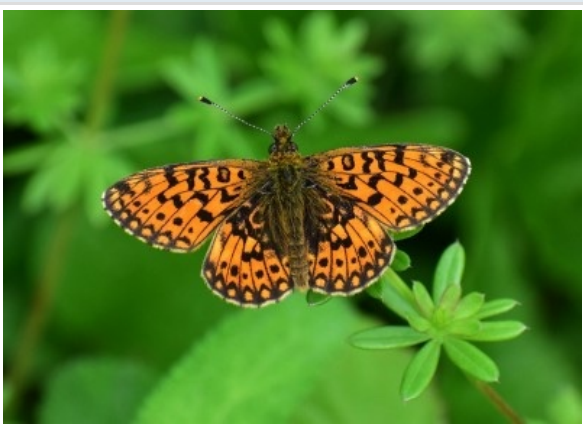
After a promising spring brood, Brown Argus returned to being a bit hit and miss around my local sites although I was pleased to find a couple just down the road at Wagon Lane.



Brown Argus – Wagon Lane 23.07.2020

Green-veined and Small White numbers built up again through July, but Large Whites were still thin on the ground and remained the least numerous of the whites around my patch throughout the summer.

At the end of July and into the first week of August, after having a couple of trips earlier in the year cancelled due to covid, we managed to get away at last. This was a week's family holiday down on The Lizard in Cornwall with our daughter Sarah and the grandkids. Of course, I managed to squeeze in some good butterflying with the highlight of this being the good numbers of second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries that I saw, mostly along the coast to the south of Kennack Sands but also at the usual spots between Kynance Cove and Lizard Point. Most of these were fresh males with just a couple of very fresh females seen later in the week which indicated that they were still early in this second flight period and I reckon that numbers would have been even higher in the following week or so.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – Carleon Cove, Lizard 01.08.2020

Other species that were seen in good numbers everywhere on the Lizard included Red Admirals and Common Blues with Wall Browns and Graylings occurring in good numbers at a couple of spots. Large Whites were also far more numerous down there than around my local patch, I assume due to recent migrants adding to their numbers. A few old and faded Dark Green Fritillaries were still flitting about down there too.



Wall Brown – Enys Head, Lizard 07.08.2020



Grayling – Enys Head, Lizard 03.08.2020

I also saw my only two Clouded Yellows of the year on the Lizard, plus half a dozen or so Painted Ladies, the latter being pretty scarce this year after last year's amazing numbers. This is something that I have noted before with Painted Ladies, a good year for them is often followed by a poor one.

Back home, the second week of August saw some thunderstorms accompanied by heavy rain and the rest of the month consisted of bands of rain crossing the country interspersed by some spells of drier albeit still quite cloudy and cool weather. This seems to have become a pattern over the last few years with the remnants of the Caribbean hurricanes reaching us as stormy weather during August.

Whilst we were down in Cornwall, there had been good numbers of male Brown Hairstreaks seen low down at Grafton Wood in Worcestershire and so I was hoping to get over there later in the month. Unfortunately, by the time I made it, this good showing had finished, and the females seemed to be staying high up in the trees, no doubt sheltering from the unsettled and rather breezy weather we were then having. I did manage a couple of sightings but nothing that came anywhere close for a photo.

That brings me up to the end of August and the end of meteorological summer. It was still a strange year in many respects. Travelling was no longer restricted but I still felt reluctant to travel too far away from my home patch for just day trips and apart from our week down in Cornwall I stayed close to home for most of this period.

At the start of the summer, many species had been emerging early, albeit with shorter flight periods than usual. So much so that some, such as Marbled White and Ringlet, were all but finished here by the time the Big Butterfly Count started. I have since read that, according to this count, both Marbled White and Ringlet numbers were down this year, but that is only down to the count starting too late to properly catch either species. To be honest, for a number of reasons, I feel that this count is more useful as an awareness tool for the general public than as a good source of accurate data. Oh well, I guess the true numbers will be more apparent once transect data and such like are analysed.

The next report will take us into Autumn and the winding down of the season.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 16-Dec-20 10:55 AM GMT

Fine selection of species, Neil. Your observations regarding the season largely correspond with mine, with many species emerging earlier than normal due to the warm April & May, and burning themselves out rather more quickly than usual.

I too noticed Small Tortoiseshells behaving strangely. The first brood emerged in mid-May but had largely disappeared 3 weeks later. There was then another resurgence in August which again dropped away by mid-September.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Dec-20 06:44 PM GMT

Thanks David. It will be interesting to see how many Small Tortoiseshells re-emerge here in the coming spring.

Looking back at 2020 Part 3 – Into Autumn and Winding Down.

At the end of August and into the first few days of September, Jane and myself managed to get away for our second trip of the year, staying for a few days in the same farmhouse B&B not far from Corfe Castle that we had stayed at last year.

On the way down we stopped off at Fontmell Down which was the only place that I managed to catch up with Silver-spotted Skippers in 2020. It was getting on in their flight period and there were only a few still flying but nevertheless I was chuffed to see them considering this was a species I was thinking I might miss this year.



Silver-spotted Skipper – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020

There were also good numbers of Adonis Blues flying at Fontmell which added another species to my 2020 tally. These are always one of my main reasons for heading down to Dorset at this time of year as I never seem to get the chance to see the first brood.



Adonis Blue – Fontmell Down 30.08.2020



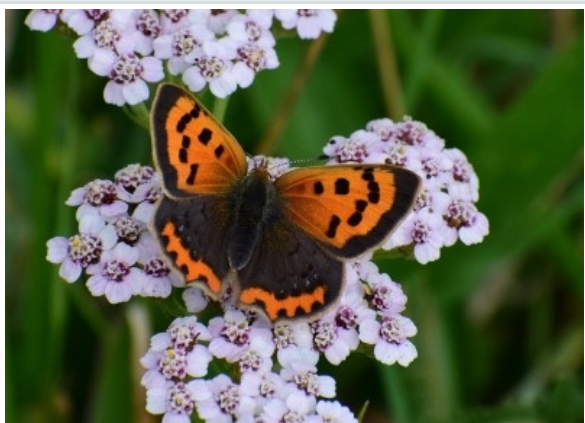
Adonis Blue female – Osmington 02.09.2020

The following few days in Dorset produced more Adonis Blues at all the usual sites albeit not in the kind of numbers I was seeing down here a few years ago.

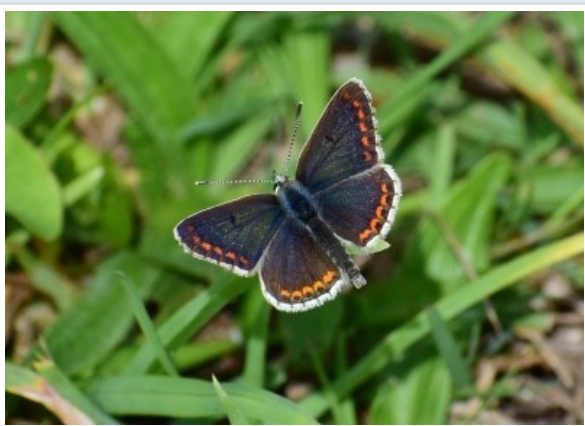


Adonis Blue - Bindon Hill 02.09.2020

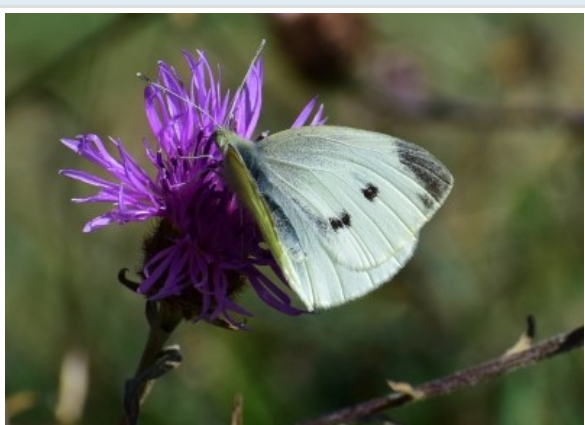
Other species seen down there in good numbers included Small Coppers, Brown Argus, Small Heath, Meadow Brown and both Small and Large Whites.



Small Copper - Osmington 02.09.2020



Brown Argus - Osmington 31.08.2020



Small White - Durlston 01.09.2020

As has been the case over the past few years, I also found a late Marbled White, this time along the bridle path up to White Horse Hill at Osmington.

Overall, the total numbers of butterflies that I saw down there were similar to last year, that is not as high as I was seeing a few years back. I reckon the dry weather during the first half of the past couple of years has not helped with some species larval foodplants drying out on the more exposed hillsides.

Unusually for my Dorset visits, I did not see any Painted Ladies or Clouded Yellows this time, nor any Hummingbird Hawk Moths either. I put this down to the wind direction which was coming from the north or north-west during our stay. In fact, the only vanessids seen in reasonable numbers were Red Admirals which turned up at most places each day.



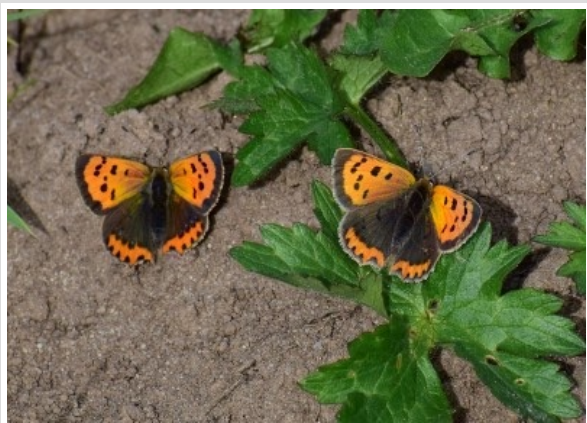
Red Admiral – Arne 03.09.2020

Back home, through the rest of September, things were definitely winding down. Speckled Woods were putting on a brave late showing but most were now looking well past their best and numbers were not as high as I often see at this time of year.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 14.09.2020

The stars of September for me were Small Coppers which put on a really good show, especially for around here where the third brood is often just partial or sometimes non-existent.



Small Copper – Off Solihull Bypass 16.09.2020

A few Red Admirals and Commas were still flying through the second half of September but both species were very thin on the ground compared with

some previous years.



Comma – Bickenhill 17.09.2020

A few whites were also still to be seen at most places but now only in ones and twos at each site.

A single male Common Blue was seen on 22nd September, whether a genuine third brood or a late second brood, I wouldn't like to say. Either way, we certainly didn't get the late season high numbers that were reported from other parts of the country.

The butterflies that I saw on 22nd September (Red Admiral, Comma, Speckled Wood, Common Blue, Small White) turned out to be almost my last of the season, a single Large White in my garden on 27th being the very last one.



Large White – Coverdale 27.09.2020

A week of cold, wet, windy and really gloomy weather at the end of the month finished things off around here and with no Clouded Yellows, Wall Browns or LTBs to extend things here, that was it for me.

In the end, I managed to see 37 species over the season, more than I had thought I would back in March and photographed all of them apart from the Brown Hairstreaks at Grafton Wood which stayed stubbornly out of reach. I could no doubt have added a few more by driving further afield more often, but even when the rules were relaxed, I didn't really feel comfortable going too far just to tick off another species for this year, especially ones that I have seen plenty of times before. Besides, I found that with more time in hand due to being on furlough from work, I enjoyed spending more time around my local sites, especially those I had neglected somewhat over the past few years. Anyway, I still really enjoyed my season this year and anything I missed this year gives me something to aim for next year.

It will be interesting to see what next year brings. The covid vaccine(s) offers a glimmer of hope but it looks like it will still be a while before things get back to normal, or at least something that passes for something like normal.

I guess that Christmas this year is going to be somewhat different for many UKB members, especially those that live in a high tier area, but wherever you are, I would like to wish everyone a...

Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year.



Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Dec-20 07:52 PM GMT

A great set of catch-up reports Neil – really interesting to read them as the way you describe the weather and the waxing and waning of the butterflies was very familiar 😊 Brilliant shots to accompany it and that DGF from a post back practically springs out of the screen 😂😂 I too invested a lot more time in my local sites this year which was great 😊 I hope you and yours have a brilliant Christmas and a marvellous New Year – let's hope things take a turn for the better in 2021 😊

Have a goodun and say safe

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 23-Dec-20 10:35 PM GMT

A very enjoyable roundup of your year, Neil.
Your female Wall Brown is a lovely specimen, and always a prize as they are usually much harder to find than the males.

Have a great Christmas, and a fulfilling retirement!.

Stay well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 31-Dec-20 12:11 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel 😊, I am looking forward to this coming season but I must admit I will still probably spend more time locally than travelling all over the country. I have a few targets in mind that I missed this year but we will have to see how things pan out.

Thanks Trevor, looking forward to doing things at my own pace...hopefully 😊

I hope that everyone had a great Christmas and a **Happy New Year** to all.

Bye for now and stay safe,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 31-Dec-20 07:40 PM GMT

A nice few posts outlining your season, most species you saw mirrored mine as far as shortened/early flight periods are concerned so it must be nationwide and therefore climatic reasons for it 😊 Here's hoping 2021 is an improvement on this car wreck of a year and you can have a relaxing introduction to retirement 😊