

Re: Maximus

by Maximus, 29-Apr-20 04:37 PM GMT

Thanks chaps, much appreciated 😊

My first post for a long while and like most others we have been 'confined to quarters', apart from our daily walks and trips to the supermarket.

We decided to take our daily exercise at Noar Hill on Monday, as it looked like our last chance before the weather changed for the worst. It's less than a thirty minute drive from us, although the roadworks on the A31 made it exactly 31 mins, door to door. However by the end of our visit we had clocked up almost 10,000 steps, in the five hours that we spent in this beautiful location. Hopefully this falls well within the government's latest recommendations for time spent travelling versus time spent walking in the countryside.

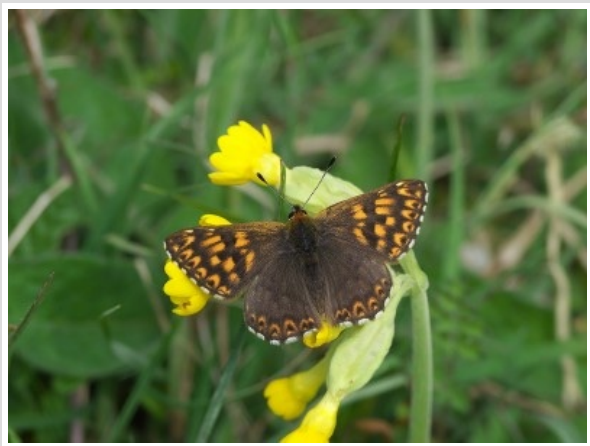
Of course we wanted to see the Dukes, and they certainly didn't disappoint, and we remarked that it was almost as if Covid-19 didn't exist, such is the beauty and tranquility that prevails, at this most lovely of sites.

During our visit we only saw one other person with a camera (at a distance), and a couple walking along the adjoining footpath.



Noar Hill.

Walking up the lane and into the site we soon encountered our first Duke, perched on a Cowslip, a nice dusky individual..



Duke of Burgundy male.

And another just along the path..



Duke of Burgundy male.

And then a different butterfly landed in front of us, which turned out to be a lovely Dingy Skipper.



Dingy Skipper male.

As we neared the end of the pit we found our first Duchess sitting low in the grass, what a stunner..

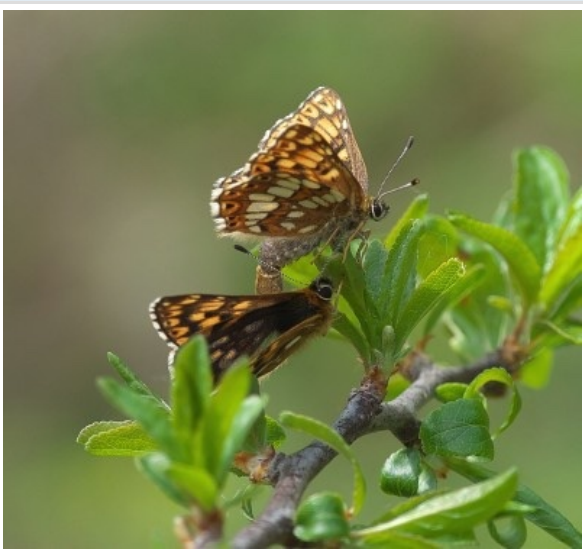


Duke of Burgundy female.



The pit where we found our first Dukes and Dingy Skipper.

We made our way up through the site finding some more Dukes along the way. When we reached the top pit I noticed two Dukes flying very close to one another, and, as luck would have it they both landed on a Blackthorn branch right in front of me at about chest height. I then realised that they were male and female and watched as the male bent his abdomen around and coupled with the female, without any kind of protest from her.



Male coupling with the female.

This is the first time I have witnessed the actual moment of coupling 😊



The mating pair.

One thought I had on looking at the photos is that the female appears to have a very enlarged abdomen, and I wonder if she has already mated? This was a real highlight.

Walking back down through the site we saw a flash of blue and managed a quick shot of a very fresh looking Common Blue, before it was disturbed by a bee and disappeared high into a tree and was lost from sight.



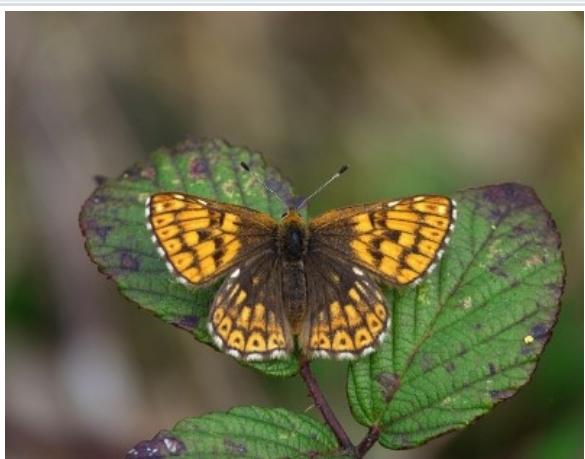
Common Blue male.

We only saw the one Common Blue as we did with the following..



Small Heath male.

We also found this Duchess, with a different ground colour to the others we saw..



Duke of Burgundy female.

What a fantastic way to spend a sunny afternoon, in the summertime 😊

Re: Maximus

by Pauline, 29-Apr-20 06:33 PM GMT

I'm so pleased you managed to get there Mike – lovely image of the mating pair but as you say, not much courtship, is there? Did you manage to check for eggs?

Re: Maximus

by bugboy, 29-Apr-20 07:04 PM GMT

Very jealous of you being able to see them this year, some fantastic looking Dukes and Duchesses there 🍷. Hopefully whatever new normal we are left with next year allows us all to visit these sites again at our leisure 😊😊

Re: Maximus

by trevor, 29-Apr-20 07:19 PM GMT

Superb stuff, Mike. A very pleasing sequence from Noar Hill. I will miss the Dukes this year, so it's good to see your images. And a mrgreen for the mating pair. 🍷.

Stay well,
Trevor.

Re: Maximus

by Wurzel, 29-Apr-20 10:53 PM GMT

Fantastic Dukes Mike 😊🍷 I reckon you're well within the limits for travelling for exercise with that number of steps 😲😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Maximus

by millerd, 29-Apr-20 11:07 PM GMT

What a brilliant set of images from Noar Hill, Mike. 😊 Your ratio of travel to exercise was certainly within the guidelines as stated ! I've been tempted to go there myself, as that site is reachable in 45 minutes from me especially with the reduction in traffic at the moment, but I suspect if officially questioned I'd find it hard to justify... 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Maximus

by David M, 30-Apr-20 08:51 PM GMT

Quite uplifting to see that, Mike, and thanks for the habitat images which help give a sense of context.

Definitely one of the best sites to have locally right now I'd say.

Re: Maximus

by Neil Freeman, 01-May-20 07:06 PM GMT

Some superb DoB images there Mike.

If I had a Duke sight within 30 minutes drive I reckon I would probably be tempted too. The thing is here, I won't see anything 30 minutes away that I can't see within 10 minutes, all the special stuff is 45 minutes or more and that is further than I am comfortable going under the current circumstances.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Maximus

by Maximus, 06-Nov-20 06:45 PM GMT

Its been quite a while since I last posted in my personal diary. My last post was during the first lockdown in May, when we decided that a trip to Noar Hill would not breach the lockdown rules, as the gov. had relaxed them to a certain extent, relating to travel time verses time spent at your destination. That was to be the only trip we made outside our local neighbourhood, and then subsequent events limited our field trips anyway. So a couple more pics from that trip to Noar.



Holly Blue ovipositing on dogwood.



Female Orange-tip harassed by a male, but to no avail.



So she settled down to roost.



The old gate at Noar Hill.

Re: Maximus

by Wurzel, 06-Nov-20 08:11 PM GMT

Sorry to hear that subsequent trips were curtailed – I hope you can make the most of next season 😊 Great shots of the Orange-tips 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Maximus

by trevor, 06-Nov-20 08:22 PM GMT

Good to hear from you again Mike.

Like you the first lockdown restricted travel, and several species were missed as a result.

But, most of us had access to Orange Tips close to home, and were photographed whilst on 'exercise'.

Keep safe and well,
Trevor.

Re: Maximus

by David M, 11-Nov-20 12:54 PM GMT

Spring was made exceedingly tricky due to Covid restrictions, Mike, but at least most of the desirable species can be seen fairly commonly without the need to travel far.

Glad you managed to venture further at least once. With any luck next spring won't be quite so difficult.

Re: Maximus

by Maximus, 15-Nov-20 08:07 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel, I really do intend making the most of next season, lockdowns etc permitting 😊😊

Good to hear from you too, Trevor, the first lockdown was very grim. It was great though as you say, that we had the Orange-tips closer to home to keep us sane 😊

It was tricky, David, but fortunately we found an unexpected species, much closer to home 😊

Following our trip to Noar Hill we looked for locations closer to home to visit, both to get our exercise and to hopefully find some butterflies. One place that we had been to before, looking for post- hibernators with some success, was the historic Brookwood Cemetery, about a ten minute drive from us. During our visits we parked in the layby at nearby Dawneys Hill and walked across to Brookwood. In June we would be back at Dawneys to pay a visit to the colony of Silver-studded Blues to be found here, although their numbers have been much reduced in recent years following the 'improvement' work carried out a few years ago.

On this particular visit to Brookwood, having drawn a blank in the usual places, and as we really needed the exercise, we decided to take a much longer walk, and after a mile or so we decided to cross over the road (Cemetery Pales) from the north side into the southern part of the cemetery. Once through the gate we could see that this was very different to the rather manicured north side, consisting of a much more open environment of grassland containing plenty of wild flowers, and in particular much wild strawberry in evidence. Walking along an unmade track we suddenly became aware of several fast moving blurs darting from side to side along the edge of the track. Keeping our eyes on one of these we followed 'it' until 'it' eventually stopped. Making our way slowly across to where 'it' had settled in the grass, much to our amazement 'it' then revealed itself to be a male Grizzled Skipper!



Male Grizzled Skipper.

We had no idea that they were here, so close to home. Our usual go-to site for these was at Butser Hill, an hours drive for us.

Numbers were not high, with about a dozen seen over two visits, mostly fresh looking and a mix of male and female, perhaps we were late and peak emergence had already passed?



Female Grizzled Skipper.



This shot shows just how small these butterflies are. Fem. Grizzled Skipper.



Fem. Grizzled Skipper on Buttercup.



Male Grizzled Skipper.



Grizzled Skipper on wild strawberry.



Grizzled Skipper about to alight on Green winged Orchid.



Worn Grizzled Skipper, but happily nectaring on Green winged Orchid.

Plus we found some other bonus butterflies too...

Re: Maximus

by millerd, 15-Nov-20 09:43 PM GMT

That's a great find, Mike! 😊 Nothing like turning up something unexpected in an unexplored spot. I may have to check that out next year as it's not all that far from me either. Great shots of the Grizzlies too. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Maximus

by Wurzel, 16-Nov-20 08:21 PM GMT

Brilliant set of shots Mike 😊 I miss the Grizzlies, can't wait for spring and this season has only just ended 🤔😞 They do seem to turn up in unexpected places as I found a couple at Middle Street this year where I wouldn't have expected them to be either – just another reason they're such a great species 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Maximus

by David M, 25-Nov-20 08:56 PM GMT

Serendipity is a wonderful word, and an even greater feeling.

Grizzled Skipper isn't a species that can be found casually over the wider countryside so that's a good one to stumble upon unexpectedly so close to home, Mike. 😊

I reckon there must be colonies on the Gower but I've yet to find any. Nearest place is Pembrey Sands which is on the other side of the estuary near Llanelli.

Re: Maximus

by Maximus, 23-Dec-20 03:09 PM GMT

Thanks, Dave, finding the Grizzled Skippers there was a real surprise. We also stumbled across a large area of heath which looked to be in much better condition than Dawneys. Might be worth a look next year, during the Silver-studded Blue flight period 😊

Thanks, Wurzel, I also can't wait for spring. It is surprising what can turn up unexpectedly, and can really make your day 😊 As you say Grizzlies are a great species, and they're also around at a lovely time of year 😊

Yes, David, serendipity describes finding them perfectly, a joyous occurrence in such dire times 😊 Hope you manage to locate some on the Gower next year.

The areas of meadow we visited at Brookwood were also home to many Meadow Browns, which unfortunately remained deep in the grass until disturbed, and then wasted no time in getting back in again. This was down to the poor weather conditions which coincided with our visits, butterflies just don't seem to like cool and windy conditions! Small Heaths were also abundant but were equally 'jumpy', and were difficult to photograph on the wind blown grass stems. We also found some Common Blues, both male and female and some fresh looking Small Coppers to round off our Brookwood visits.





Given the current unprecedented circumstances we find ourselves in, I sincerely hope that all at UKB have a good Christmas and that the 2021 butterfly season will be a great one.

Re: Maximus

by Wurzel, 23-Dec-20 07:43 PM GMT

More lovely shots Mike – especially like the female Common Blue 🥰🍀 I hope you and yours have a great Christmas and an even better New Year 🥰🍀

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Maximus

by David M, 31-Dec-20 08:12 PM GMT

That's an unusual female Common Blue, Mike – brown in the middle but blue round the edges. They never cease to surprise.

Hope you have more of the same (and a bit more besides) in 2021. 😊

All the best.