

Pearls at Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood

by Andy Wilson, 27-Apr-20 04:54 PM GMT

I live about 15 minutes drive from Park Corner Heath and the neighbouring Rowland Wood BC reserves, so I hope I was keeping to Government guidelines when visiting there. With the weather forecast to collapse for the next few days at least, I was keen to get there this afternoon.

I saw about 6 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Rowland Wood, along the main SE-NW path that leads away from the A22. There were many more at Park Corner Heath, mainly close to the (now defunct) information hut, but I saw several elsewhere. In all I must have seen over 30 individuals.



It was good to go on a butterfly expedition, and even better to see that the PBF are doing well after their reintroduction last year.

Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 27-Apr-20 08:51 PM GMT

So long as you spent at least 30 minutes on site walking without stopping I think you've been well within the guidelines Andy 😊 Great set of shots – and good to hear of those numbers 😄😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Pearls at Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood

by David M, 28-Apr-20 07:40 PM GMT

Andy Wilson wrote:

..I live about 15 minutes drive from Park Corner Heath and the neighbouring Rowland Wood BC reserves..

That's colossally good fortune at this time of year, Andy. 🍀

Nice to see a few more Pearls on the forum, but tinged with a bit of personal sadness in the sense that unlike its close relative, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, which is on my doorstep, I'd have to drive for over an hour to see these beauties, which at the moment is simply not feasible. 😞

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 07-May-20 12:22 PM GMT

Rowland Wood and Park Corner Heath – Take 2

I visited Rowland Wood and Park Corner Heath for a second time yesterday afternoon. The temperature was about 20C, with the sun shining out of a cloudless sky. Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were seen in reasonable numbers and it was good to see that they have dispersed widely over most of the larger Rowland Wood site. At Park Corner Heath, they seem to favour the higher, drier area near the former information hut.



Many of them are looking a bit faded now, but I followed a fresher-looking individual that I thought might be a Small Pearl. It led me a merry dance, but I eventually got some long-distance record shots that showed it was not. I don't think they have started here yet. Just before I left, I got a nice shot of a male PBF that most considerately settled on a spike of Bugle right at my feet.

Other species seen were Brimstone, Peacock, Green-veined White, Large White, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Small Heath (lots of them).

Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 07-May-20 06:02 PM GMT

Lovely shot Andy 😊 Are you likely to get a second wave of Pearls? At Bentley Wood they seem to emerge in waves so there is the odd fresh one about when the Small Pearls emerge 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Andy Wilson

by David M, 08-May-20 09:20 PM GMT

Thanks for the update, Andy. Seems many of these PBF colonies in the south are thriving thanks to targeted management. The supporting cast is pretty impressive too!

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 21-May-20 06:09 PM GMT

Having a Butchers at Butchershole (aka Friston Gallops)

I went to my favourite South Downs site today and wasn't disappointed. Common Blues and Adonis Blues were everywhere, together with myriads of Small Heaths and a few Dingy and Grizzled Skippers. The Adonis Blues are doing particularly well this year, and I don't remember seeing so many first-brood individuals here before. There are also carpets of Horseshoe Vetch all over the site, including some areas where it is not usually present. I suspect this is because this year's Spring drought has suppressed some of the bullying grasses. Hopefully this bodes well for Chalk Hill Blues and the second-brood Adonis Blues later in the summer.

It was quite hot and the butterflies weren't staying still for long, but I did get a picture of a mating pair of Common Blues and one Grizzled Skipper that rather unusually posed nicely for me.



Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 21-May-20 07:58 PM GMT

Fingers crossed for Chalkhill clouds later in the year then Andy 😊 The downs and fields round this way are a lovely shade of yellow in places too 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Andy Wilson

by David M, 22-May-20 08:01 PM GMT

Andy Wilson wrote:

...The Adonis Blues are doing particularly well this year, and I don't remember seeing so many first-brood individuals here before. There are also carpets of Horseshoe Vetch all over the site, including some areas where it is not usually present. I suspect this is because this year's Spring drought has suppressed some of the bullying grasses. Hopefully this bodes well for Chalk Hill Blues and the second-brood Adonis Blues later in the summer.

Nice to hear, Andy, and yes, I suspect the prolonged dry spell has provided near ideal conditions for both the pupating butterflies and the horseshoe vetch.

It's been dry and sunny, but it hasn't been cracking the flags and there HAS been a little precipitation, so I guess that all adds up to a perfect storm of reasons why species emerging in mid-May have prospered. Certainly, Common Blues are around by my way in spectacular numbers, although Wales is obviously outside the reach of *bellargus*.

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 10-Jun-20 10:00 AM GMT

Knepp still in the June Gap

This is a mainly negative report, I'm afraid. I spent yesterday morning searching Knepp for Purple Emperors, or even His Imperial Majesty's acolytes, the White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary, but with no luck. Conditions were marginal, averaging about 18C and with patchy cloud cover. However, in the sunnier interludes there were plenty of Meadow Browns flying, several Large Skippers, some Whites and a couple of Red Admirals. All fairly standard June Gap fodder and no high summer butterflies yet. It seems the recent cooler weather has slowed down what has up to now been a very early season.

I don't think we are going to see an emergence of the Purple Emperor and other summer butterflies until it warms up -- hopefully this coming weekend. Let's remember that it is still not yet the middle of June.

I consoled myself by taking a few pictures of the nesting storks. A word of warning, though: with all the publicity about the storks on Springwatch and elsewhere, it is getting very popular. I've never seen so many people wandering around the paths of the estate. The car parks were full and cars were strewn around the country lanes and streets of the nearby village of Dial Post. My advice if you're going there, especially at the weekends, is get there early. Either that, or be prepared to park further away and walk.



Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 11-Jun-20 07:52 PM GMT

Great shot Andy. 😊 That's the thing with Springwatch etc – they're a bit of a double edged sword, it's great that the masses learn about the natural world and start to care for it but on the other hand it's nice to go out into the natural world without the masses following you 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Andy Wilson

by David M, 12-Jun-20 09:19 AM GMT

Yes, the season seems to have come to almost a grinding halt lately, Andy. That's no bad thing as we were in danger of things burning out by late July.

For once, I'm glad to have a little cool, wet weather to re-energise things and like you, am sure that normal service will be resumed as soon as the warmer conditions return.

Purple Emperors in early June just doesn't seem right. 🤔

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 14-Jun-20 12:37 AM GMT

First Emperor at Knepp

I had the pleasure of spending today (or yesterday, as I belatedly post this) at Knepp in the company of Matthew Oates and Paul Fosterjohn.

The morning proved fruitless, Emperor-wise, although we saw a Purple Hairstreak, a possible White-letter Hairstreak, numerous Meadow Browns and Large Skippers, and the first few (for me at least) Small Skippers. We also saw a newly-minted *Hutchinsoni* Comma and later I saw a rather faded Painted Lady, which was a good sign that immigrants are on their way.

We were all getting pessimistic when just after 2 pm Matthew and I got a glimpse of something Emperor-like gliding across the canopy at a territory called Burrell's Bane. This was confirmed a couple of minutes later when Paul saw (probably) the same individual do a fly-by in front of the oak tree.

Possibly the first Emperor of 2020 and the start of something big to come. Time will tell...

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 15-Jun-20 04:33 PM GMT

No more Emperors at Knepp yet

I spent about 3 hours at Knepp today. Conditions were mostly sunny and warm, with the temperature in the mid 20's. The moderate south-easterly wind of Saturday had changed to a very light south-westerly. Despite this, and having been shown many of the favoured territories on Saturday, I saw no more Emperors.

I did however see 2, maybe 3, White Admirals in the bramble-filled sunny glade at the north end of Benton's Gorse. So maybe 2nd prize today, after the excitement of Saturday. With the weather forecast to settle down by the weekend and into early next week, let's hope for a large emergence soon.

Re: Andy Wilson

by David M, 16-Jun-20 09:10 PM GMT

It'll be interesting to see how this species has responded to the uniquely warm, sunny spring this year. Their later larval stages were blessed by fine weather and although we've had changeable conditions since, things are warming up again so we may well see good numbers of adults over the next couple of weeks. Let's hope so.

Re: Andy Wilson

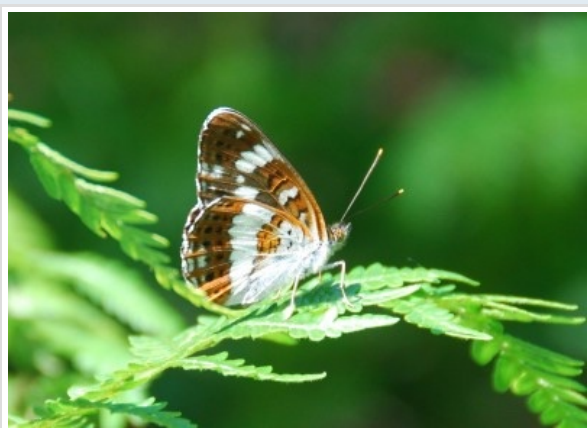
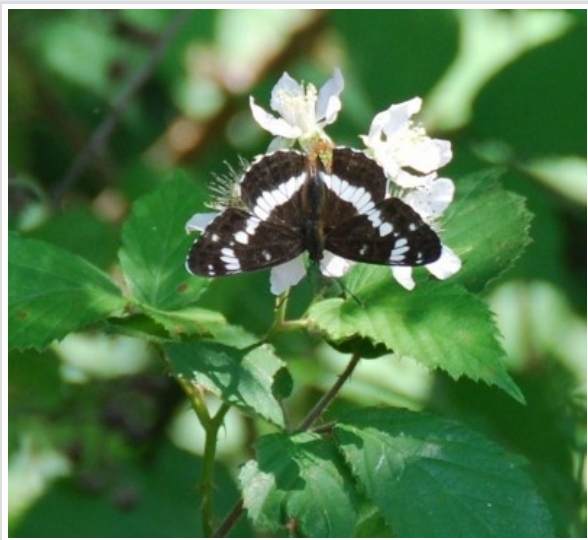
by Andy Wilson, 23-Jun-20 04:05 PM GMT

Slow Progress at Knepp

Purple Emperor numbers are starting to increase at Knepp, but it's still slow going. My wife and I saw a total of 18 in about 4 hours today in very warm conditions with a moderate SE breeze. None came down to ground, but the last one we saw landed fairly low down, just within range of my camera.



We also saw 3 White Admirals and a flyby of a couple of Silver-washed Fritillaries – the latter being my first of the year.



Purple Hairstreaks were flitting around the oaks in fair numbers and I managed to get some shots of one that came down on to some bracken.



Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 23-Jun-20 07:55 PM GMT

Great shots Andy 😊 Bracken is a brilliant plant for Purple Hairstreaks – most of my shots they're on this fern 😊😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

Re: Andy Wilson

by David M, 24-Jun-20 03:32 PM GMT

The Emperors seem to be teasing us so far this year, Andy. 😊

Purple Hairstreak isn't bad compensation though; nor White Admiral.

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 03-Jul-20 09:33 AM GMT

Another visit to Knepp

I had earmarked yesterday for yet another visit to Knepp, on the basis that the forecast had indicated that it would be the least windy day of the week. However, there were heavy showers around when we set off from home at about 1 pm, and almost immediately we ran into a torrential downpour. Thinking that we were mad, we persevered and arrived on site at about 1:40 pm. It was dry, but the ground was wet from an earlier shower, and the sky was largely grey and heavy with just a few blue patches.

It continued like this for about 45 minutes until at last the sun came out for about 10 minutes. Almost immediately, Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites started to fly, and I noticed some Purple Hairstreak activity high in the oaks. However, it soon clouded over again and we had almost given up hope when my wife spotted something very large buzzing around frantically within the canopy of a large spreading oak tree. It seemed almost the size of a bat, but was in fact a Purple Emperor. From its size, I guess it was a female, and it continued to fly around for several minutes before it disappeared, possibly settling somewhere deep within the tree.

I contacted the expert (Matthew Oates) and he said that this meant it was a "feeder tree" that oozes sap that both males and females visit to get plastered on the sugary fluid. It was a tree that he had long suspected had a sap run, but he had never witnessed feeding behaviour in it before. So, that was a nice discovery!

Apart from that, we saw just two other male Emperors high in the oaks, so a rather disappointing total of just 3 in an hour and a half. Still, conditions were very much against us.

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 06-Jul-20 10:25 AM GMT

Friston Gallops turning Blue (despite the wind)

I went for a bracing walk on the South Downs at Friston Gallops yesterday. It was sunny and reasonably warm, despite the fact it was blowing a gale. Most butterflies were hunkering down from the wind, but I saw a lot of Marbled Whites, a myriad of "little" skippers (mostly Small, but some Essex), and several Small Coppers. I also saw about 30 Chalk Hill Blues, which are just starting. In a week or so, and hopefully in less wind, I expect there will be many more of them.

There were a few Dark Green Fritillaries battling against the wind, and one good thing about the conditions was that they were more reluctant than usual to fly, so I got a few record shots (nothing good enough to publish). The skippers also seemed to be coping better than other species with the wind, buzzing around low down and then hanging on the flower heads (e.g. Knapweed) for dear life.