

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 26-Feb-20 10:10 PM GMT

25/05/19

Dunstable Downs and Totternhoe Knolls.

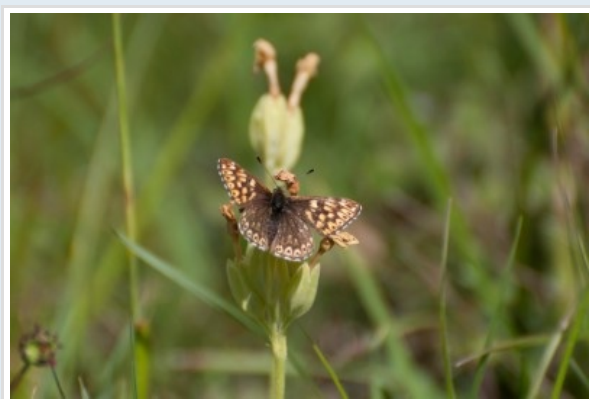
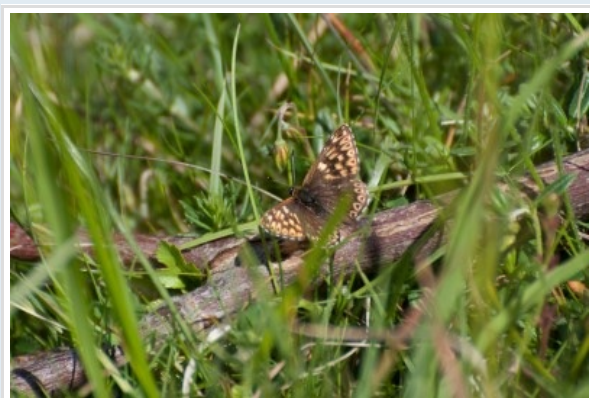
Sorry for the lack of updates but computer problems have prevented me from posting. Hopefully I will be back up and running properly soon. I was lucky enough to receive a zoom lens for my birthday and it arrived the day before the outing which meant I had no time to practice with the unwieldy 70-300 which was a mighty jump from the 18-55 which I had been using. I quickly found out about the minimum focus distance of 1.5m which was a whole different approach to what I had been used to.

I was to attend a Butterfly Conservation walk at Dunstable Downs and Totternhoe Knolls where I was hoping to add the Duke of Burgundy, Small Blue and Grizzled Skipper to my list of first time ever sightings in 2019.

The weather when we set off did not look promising at all as the grey clouds scudded overhead and spits of rain hit the windscreen on the way. I don't mind admitting that I was seriously considering aborting mission as there was grey clouds as far as I could see and I feared a wasted journey. We arrived and I set up the family with a basecamp as the wind began to really pick up and more spots of rain began to fall. I really did think that I would have to pack up at any moment and head back before we got really soaked but with basecamp set up, they insisted I head off with the group that had gathered at the visitor centre 'because you never know'.

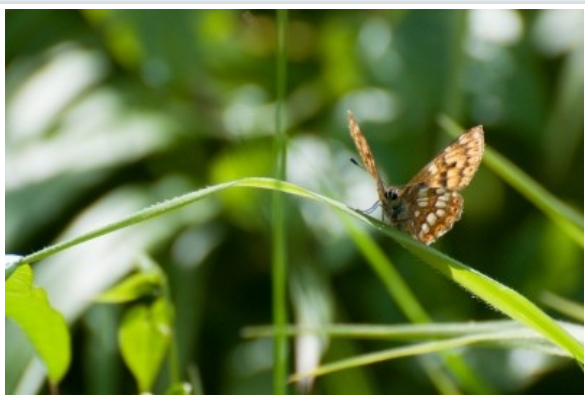
The group were still optimistic as we headed down into Bison Hill which they described as a microclimate and the Butterfly Gods were with us because the clouds began to break and blue holes were soon appearing as the clouds thinned. The track we were taking was a chalky path that cut diagonally down the hill where the odd Brimstone flitted about and soon into the descent the call went up 'Duke!' and there it was that I saw my first ever Duke of Burgundy. As I have mentioned many times, I was surprised at how small it was and as the sun decided to start putting in an appearance, Bison Hill came alive. There were Dukes, Dinghy Skippers, Brown Argus and my First Grizzled Skipper soon appeared making it two firsts.

I must mention before you look at the pics (if you are even reading this) that I was really struggling with the new lens and I am far from happy with the results. I even considering making this a text only entry but at the last minute I decided to include them so that hopefully I notice some improvement as the year goes on.





After a while the track levels and then begins a winding climb where the grasses give way to larger bushes and small trees that we were told the be Green Hairstreak were likely to be and as I had only a fleeting glimpse of one before, I was desperate to get a closer look. It wasn't long before one was spotted and he landed at the top of one of the taller bushes and as we all waited, it was clear it did not want to come down. This picture shows how the sky had cleared by this point and it was turning into a beautifully sunny day.



As we all searched a few more GHS were seen and this time lower and easier to photograph. I managed to snag the only picture I was happy with in over 500 taken of the GHS on the white flowers.





As we reached the top it was time to turn around and head back the way we had come and we all meandered back stopping for anything of interest along the way, of which there were plenty.



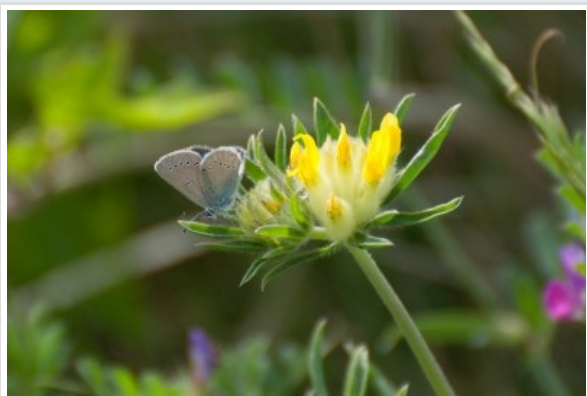
As we neared the entrance someone called out 'Small Blue' and there was the third first ever sighting for my trip. I was really chuffed that I had got to see all three new species that were possible and managed to get a proper look at some GHS.

The plan was to take a lunch break at the visitor centre and head off to Totternhoe Knolls for the afternoon to go in search of more Small Blue and Dukes so I headed back to basecamp for lunch with the family.

After lunch most of the group headed to the Knolls and I was greeted in the carpark by a beautiful fresh male that I tried in vain to photograph but all of the pictures turned out really bad. We continued and were greeted by the twisted wreck of a car that was rusting away which I find fascinating for some reason. Although it angers me that it has not been cleared away it also fascinates me to see the way in which these things deteriorate until only engine parts and bare frame frames are left behind as nature slowly grows around them.



Totternhoe Knolls is a disused quarry that has chalk cliffs and as we headed down to the path that runs along the bottom of this cliff there were Small Blue absolutely everywhere. I saw over a hundred as we walked along with the odd Small Heath and a solitary Small Copper thrown in.



We headed through the quarry to a spot where the Dukes were likely to be, taking in a few more GHs on the way but had no luck at this site. There were more Grizzlies and Dinghys but not a single Duke was seen and it was decided to head back.

As we headed back in the bright afternoon sunshine, I was incredibly happy that I had not decided to abort the mission as I thought I might have to, as I had seen everything that it was possible to see and the day that I thought would end in rain ended up with me having sunburned arms, forehead and ears 😊

It wasn't until I got home I found out that I have taken over 500 terrible photos and one which I was happy with. Oh well, there is always next year

Re: Old Wolf

by trevor, 27-Feb-20 02:29 PM GMT

Good to hear from you again, Old Wolf, and of your adventures at Totternhoe. I've only been there once, right at the end of the Duke season. But the place was alive with Small Blues, and several took a liking to my shoes and landed on them. As I walked they followed me, and again landed on them when I stopped.

Have a great new season,
Trevor.

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 29-Feb-20 07:56 PM GMT

A great report of what sounds like a cracking day Old Wolf 😊 Three lifers in a day is pretty great going 🍷🍷 and it sounds like a pair of really

interesting reserves 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 01-Mar-20 06:04 PM GMT

Hello Trevor,

Thanks, its good to be back. Have you ever thought about returning to Totterhnoe? You can see if they still like you 😊

Hello Wurzel,

Thanks, three lifers in a day was amazing 😊 Now that I know where to go I plan on returning to both sites this year.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 01-Mar-20 06:18 PM GMT

23-07-2019

Glaphorn Cow Pastures

My next trip was to attend to the Butterfly Conservation Black Hairstreak hunt at Glaphorne Cow Pastures which was very exciting as I have never seen one and was hoping that going with the experts would improve my chances of adding another first time ever sighting to this year. If we succeeded then this would bring my lifer count this year to six which smashes last year's record of four first time ever sightings.

We arrived before the sun had broken the thin cloud but the warmth gave me hope that it wouldn't be long before it did. We met with the group in the lane opposite the Pastures and there were members that I recognised as they were also at the Bison Hill event earlier. We were also accompanied by some of the reserve wardens who would be on hand to assist in finding the BHS.

Once inside we headed to the Dewberry that is a popular spot for the BHS and it did not disappoint! In an area no bigger than a tennis court they were on the flowers all over the bushes which allowed us all to get really close to them. Everyone had plenty of opportunity to get in and photograph them which was great as normally everyone is waiting to get a chance with one or two as had been the case on previous trips.

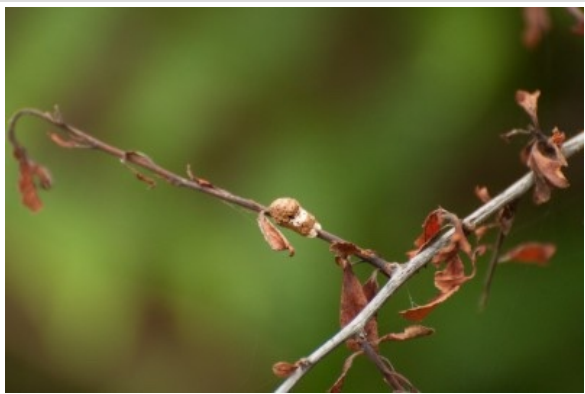




We were joined by five or six lizards who came out to bask in the sun which had broken the clouds on one of the log piles in one of the rides.



After we had been photographing a while it was decided to head further in to see if the Silver Washed Fritillaries had emerged. On the way there were Speckled Wood, Large Skippers and Meadow Browns in the rides and somehow the group split with some continuing on to hunt the SWF and others, myself included, went with the wardens who were very informative with the management of the Pastures and were hoping to find us a pupa. They pointed out Common Spotted Orchids and found us the Pupa we had hoped for. It was on a branch that had been cut recently but luckily upon close inspection it was found to be empty with a small dark emergence split pointed out to us.



The paths through the pastures are all connected so it wasn't long before we came back to the Dewberry hotspot where the BHS were still present but it was much sunnier by now so they were much more active than they had been previously. They were joined by a Painted Lady and Red Admiral and also someone had seen a White Admiral flying over the top. Could this be a seventh for me?

We were all scanning over the Dewberry as it had gone onto the larger bushes behind them when a call came out from down the ride. We all hurried down there but were too late as it had taken flight already and headed over the back again.

We walked back hoping that it would reappear and before long it did, and landed but it was ever so brief as one of the group tripped on a bramble which shook the bush and it was gone again. We continued to wait and it did come back and landed and I had it in my viewfinder for but a second as it took off before I had even managed to get focus. I cannot count this as my seventh as all I ever really saw was a flash of black and white.

We stayed a while longer enjoying the BHS and as lunchtime approached, the group began to head off. I was well chuffed at having such great opportunity to get up close to another first time ever sighting but once again struggled with the new lens as you could probably tell from the pics. Now I know where to go, I will be back!





Edit to add:

Issue 96 of Butterfly Conservation's on the wing had an article about the trip and there is a photo of the group which includes me and my chauffeur who are the furthest on the right 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 01-Mar-20 07:45 PM GMT

Another brilliant report Old Wolf 😊 And as the kids would say "I'm well Jelly" as I've yet to see a Black Hairstreak 🇬🇧 and you managed to get some absolutely cracking shots them! 😊 🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 01-Mar-20 08:24 PM GMT

Nice couple of posts, Old Wolf, and good to see you back.

I'm so glad you got to see a few Black Hairstreaks last year and thanks for sharing the images here.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 07-Mar-20 07:49 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel, Glapthorne was brilliant and I will be returning hopefully this year. I know it is a bit of a trek for you but I was told it is a very reliable

location.

Thanks David, it is good to be back. I really wanted to share sooner as it was a very exciting year for me but better late than never 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 07-Mar-20 08:01 PM GMT

30/06/19

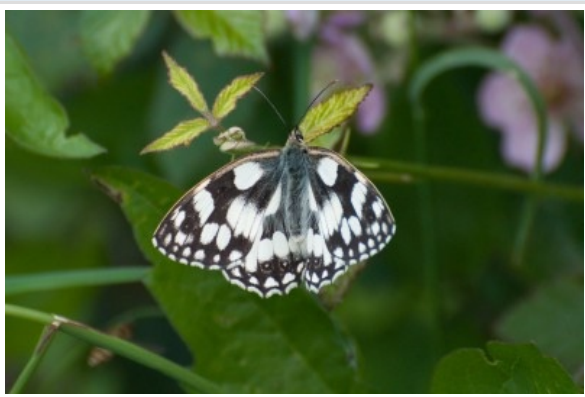
Sharpenhoe Clappers

Butterfly Conservation had arranged an event to Sharpenhoe Clappers which I planned on attending but when the day arrived, inclement weather made me decide that it may be a wasted journey and that I would go back at a later date when the weather was better as the nature reserve is not too far from me. incidentally the rain stopped leaving a warm but cloudy day that gave the people who did attend a chance to see the grassland species that are found there.

Sharpenhoe Clappers is a National Trust reserve which is a chalk escarpment that is part of the Chilterns. I had often passed it when driving to Luton and coincidentally, a work colleague of the chauffeur had recently recommended it as a good place to take the dogs
It would be the first time I had ever been there and my quarry was the Dark Green Fritillary, another lifer for me, and it was made all the more special as I was not only accompanied by my family but by my Dad who was visiting at that time. The weather was far better than the day of the trip I skipped so we set off early with a picnic to hunt another lifer.

No sooner had we left the car park we were greeted by a beautiful downhill meadow, rich in tall wild flowers gently swaying in the breeze that whipped across the hill. I headed in and found another enthusiast laying in the grass next a purple flower, camera in hand and waiting. We struck up a conversation where he imparted that he was lying in wait for a DGF that kept circling the meadow and briefly landing on a few of the same flowers. He had been watching it and chose this particular one to wait for its next circuit. He told me that they are notoriously flighty and difficult to photograph and gave me advise for another field up the hill that was always worth a go.

I waited with him a while hoping that the DGF would appear and sure enough I caught sight of it a little further down the hill where it landed on a flower and gave me a chance to catch a photo albeit from quite a distance. My first DGF, another lifer - 2019 first time ever sighting count at SEVEN!
I returned to the family leaving the gentleman laying in the grass to continue his mission and told them that I had seen one already, within five minutes of arriving and the tips that I had been given. We decided to head up to the field he had described which was by way of a winding path with open empty grazing fields to one side and tall brambles around some woods on the other.



We took in Skippers, Speckled Wood, Red Admirals, Peacocks and Painted Lady along the way and as we climbed the breeze increased considerably until we got to the field in question where it was remarkably stronger than the meadow further down the hill.

There were many more DGF in this field and I could count at least twenty all flitting about and landing for about a second before taking off again. Try as I might, I could not get a single picture as they really were not landing for any length of time. We stayed a while as they lead me all round the field until I decided that it was just not going to happen and that lunchtime was calling.

We headed back down the hill to a picnic table in the shade as the heat had really began to build and the dogs needed to get out of the sun and to have their cool collars refreshed.

With lunch finished, the family stayed in the shade and I headed off into the original meadow to see if I could see any more obliging DGF and take in the Marbled Whites and after a while with a few DGF flitting about and not landing for too long, I decided to employ the waiting tactic as the laying man, who had now disappeared, had used.

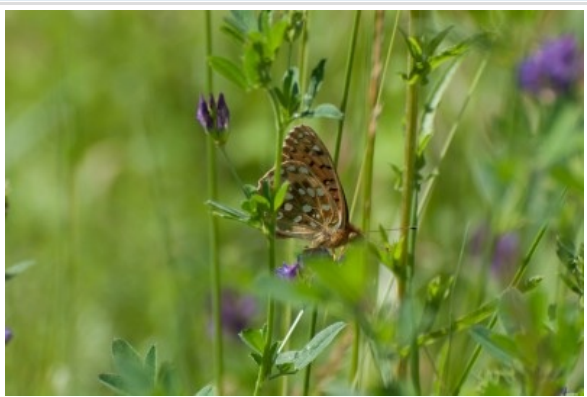


Room for one more?

I watched one as it flew its route taking note of where it landed and after a few circuits, I chose my spot. It was a good idea because I managed to get a few pics of the underside but those pesky tall stems kept getting in the way. The harsh light and my positioning were not ideal but I didn't have a lot of choice because I didn't want to trample the grasses and flowers, so each of the times I saw it something was always in the way.



Pesky stems!



More pesky stems



and even more pesky stems



Still, another lifer for me today so I am really happy with the outcome and with more possibilities to come this is turning out to be one hell of a year.

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 07-Mar-20 08:29 PM GMT

A great report Old Wolf congrats on bagging another lifer 😊 The 'sit and wait trick' works wonders but it's good to have a flask of coffee to and/or a extra hot Lime Pickle sandwich to hand while you're waiting. 😊😂 DGFs can be a right pain, especially when it comes to them perching with blades of grass all around 😊 another good trick is to visit early as they're less frenetic and more chilled or visit late when they're going to roost - this also means that you can get the beautiful golden 'glow' of the evening light 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 08-Mar-20 05:34 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel, I may try earlier or later in the day this year but I don't know about the extra hot lime pickle sandwich though 😊

I did manage a second trip there last year and will post about it soon.....

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 08-Mar-20 05:41 PM GMT

05/07/19

The Pinnacle - part of The Sandhills opposite the RSPB, Sandy.

I took a trip to a local spot today in search of the Purple Hairstreaks that I now know live there. I am still hoping to get a good look at one with its wings open.

Upon arrival I could see them duelling high up in the Oak trees and was hopeful that one may venture down to the lower limbs or even better the brambles or grass below. They buzzed around from one tree to the other but none came down as low as I would have liked. A few did open their wings to bask slightly lower down than the rest and the following are the best I could get, full zoom and very much cropped.

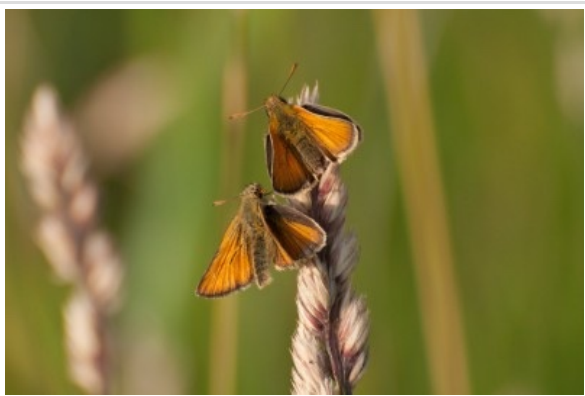




My neck ached from looking up for so long so I headed into the long grasses because I could see many Marbled Whites flitting around. This was a surprise as I have not seen them here before, and I have visited often as The Sandhills is a place I have taken the dogs for many years. To be fair though, I wasn't aware there were Purple Hairstreak here either until I really began looking for them a few years ago 😊

I was buzzed many times by a very angry Red Admiral who would soar along the treeline at the edge and then dive bomb me on his way past. I have no idea what I could have done for him to have taken such a disliking to me.

The Pinnacle isn't very big so you can see from one side to the other and I reckon that there about 15-20 Marbled Whites making their way through the grasses which was great to see.





Small Skippers were also in good numbers as well as some Small Heath, a couple of Commas in the brambles and a few Brown Argus. I was very aware of the absence of any Common Blue as they are usually very plentiful at this site but for this visit I didn't see a single one! This is also a good place to see Small Copper but there weren't any to be found on this trip.

Re: Old Wolf

by trevor, 08-Mar-20 08:27 PM GMT

Great that you have located some Purple Hairstreaks, Old Wolf. You might improve your chances of a close-up shot if you visit that site early am, late June/ early July. At a site near me they can be found basking on bracken or Bramble leaves between about 7 and 9.30am on a sunny or bright morning.

Good luck,
Trevor.

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 10-Mar-20 09:52 PM GMT

At least you can see that it's a Purp Old Wolf - my distant shots are usually of a tiny grey shark fin that could be anything from a Purp to a leaf 😊😌😌
Trevor is spot on with his advice and even if you can't get to a site early checking the Bracken is always worthwhile 😊
No worries about the sandwich filling Old Wolf - it's an acquired taste like 'Marmite & Banana' 😊😌

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 11-Mar-20 10:14 PM GMT

Nice to see you got an audience with a couple of species you'd hitherto not seen prior to 2018, Old Wolf.

Purple Hairstreaks aren't the easiest of subjects, but seeing them at all is a pleasure. Dark Green Fritillaries, on the other hand, whilst they tend to prefer to go about their business at human eye level, can be devilishly skittish, so well done for getting a few images of them.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 14-Mar-20 09:05 PM GMT

Thanks for the advice Trevor, Wurzel and David. Heres hoping that this year I get a chance at a proper open wing PHS 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 14-Mar-20 09:17 PM GMT

07-07-19

Fermyn Woods

I attended yet another Butterfly Conservation event, this time would be my first visit to Fermyn Woods in Northamptonshire to look for SWF, WLH, PHS and another two lifers for me, the White Admiral and Purple Emperor.

The day dawned sunny and warm but there were very large clouds that obscured the sun for prolonged periods. On the way there I was very excited that I might actually get to see what is pretty much a Holy Grail for me, the Purple Emperor. The events I have been attending are making this a pretty much unbeatable year for me and to finally see a Purple Emperor would be the icing on the cake.

As soon as we had arrived and parked in the layby where the others were parked, I was told that someone had just spotted a White Admiral in the brambles at the entrance. I went over and waited a while with them, hopeful that it may return so that I could bag another first time ever sighting this year. I feel that I really can't count the all too brief sightings of one at Glapthorne as it was a couple of split-second glimpses that really can't be considered a sighting. We waited a while but it did not return so we set off up the lane to meet with the rest of the group outside the other entrance.

We set off and people who had been here before were complaining about the aggressive way in which the rides had been cleared giving a good twenty foot of cutback, if not more either side of the path before the treeline. As I said it is the first time for me so I didn't know how overgrown it was previously. The good thing about the wide path was the amount of available light because the sun kept disappearing behind the large clouds. It wasn't long before we started seeing the SWF and I witnessed the corkscrew like, courtship display of two flying along over the cutback for the first time. There were plenty of opportunities for getting photographs and because they were not too close, they gave everyone a chance to see/photograph them.



Further along someone caught a brief glimpse of a PHS as it took off from the ground and up into the canopy. We all waited and looked around hoping there could be more but that was the only sighting whilst I was there.

We stopped at the corner with Elms that I was told was a WLH hotspot but we were not lucky this time as they were remaining hidden from sight.



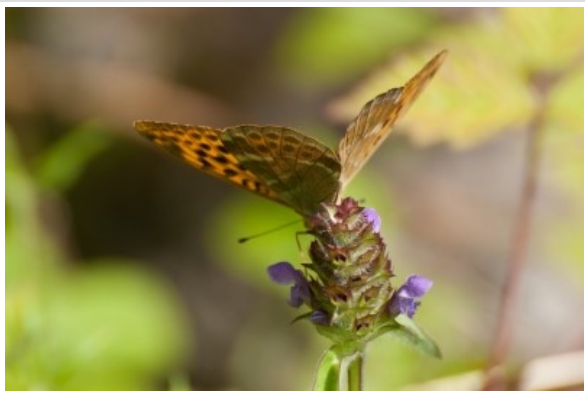
Stay on target



Stay on target



Stay on target



Stay on target



So close

We passed many others coming the other way who were out with cameras and stopping to chat, they told us they were there for the Emperors. It was funny that they had all seen one and had managed to photograph it on the ground and when we asked how far, it was always 'around the corner'. Every corner we took we were hopeful but they were never round said corner. After many corners that were Emperor-less the call went up from the front of the group 'Purple Emperor' and sure enough one flew along the path, past the spread out front of the group and decided to start weaving through a clump of the group that had formed at the back, including me. We all had eyes on it and hoped it would land as the rest of the group rushed back to join us but it sailed over the hedges onto a field that was inaccessible. I couldn't count this sighting as once again it was all too brief.



Being watched from above



The prodigious clouds began to increase in quantity and cover the sun more and more. Someone did spot a White Admiral on one of the bramble covered junctions but it scarpered before I managed to see it. We were not having much luck really and I was beginning to doubt whether I would manage to get a proper look at either of the lifers that I had only but briefly glimpsed.

Finally, we reached a part of the path where we were told that if we were going to see them anywhere then here is where it would be. Unfortunately, at this point the sun was obscured by the biggest cloud but the group had decided to wait for it pass in this spot. The lack of wind meant that this looked like it would take some time and some of the group decided to call it a day and the group thinned out. The chauffeur and I waited as long as we could but after what seemed an eternity of waiting for the cloud, it was decided that we would call it quits. The group may still be there for all I know because the cloud was massive and moving very slowly.

We slowly walked back the way we had come when we got to a junction that we had taken one route earlier but not explored the other so we decided to have a quick try in this direction before we set off home. We had not been walking long when we spotted a member of the group who had left earlier than us in the distance waving to us to get our attention. When he saw we had seen him he pointed to the floor and motioned for us to get over there.

We ran over towards him and slowed down when we got close and I must admit that my heart was thumping at this point because he was still motioning for us to come over indicating that whatever was there was indeed still there.

As we approached, I could see that there on the ground was my first Purple Emperor basking with its wings wide on the gravel path. Another lifer for me this year. It gave us plenty of opportunity for pictures as it was not bothered by the three of us all around it but no matter how hard I tried I could only get one side purple at a time.





We spent a good ten minutes admiring it and getting many, many pictures but I was keen to see the undersides so I asked if anyone would mind if I tried to get it to show us by offering a finger for it climb on. I approached it and very slowly lowered my hand and gently put my finger under it's front legs but it took off and flew a small circle about a foot off the floor and landed about a metre away and there it closed it's wings and walked across the path to a large pile of something nasty which it proceeded to climb and take minerals from. Not the nicest setting but at least I got a good look at the undersides.





We stayed a while longer but the time came that we had to leave, so we left the Emperor on its pile of nastiness and slowly walked back reflecting on how we thought that it was going to be a no-show today. I was so lucky that the chauffeur suggested giving the other route a try before we headed off and was over the moon at another lifer this year. I still have to bag me a White Admiral though!

Re: Old Wolf

by trevor, 14-Mar-20 09:41 PM GMT

Your Purple Emperor was worth every bit of, what I imagine to have been, a very trying day!
It always amazes me just how tame they can be once settled. I've had one on the ground for 56 mins,
(time from first to last image on the camera).

Now your challenge is all four wings purple!
Good luck,
Trevor.

Re: Old Wolf

by bugboy, 14-Mar-20 11:57 PM GMT

There are some species that you will never lose the excitement of seeing every year, the Purple Emperor is one of them!

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 15-Mar-20 08:59 PM GMT

Great stuff Old Wolf 😊 You never forget your first audience with His Nibbs 😊 It can often be the conversion therapy an errant birder needs to get into butterflies 😊 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 16-Mar-20 07:12 PM GMT

Old Wolf wrote:

...We ran over towards him and slowed down when we got close and I must admit that my heart was thumping at this point because he was still motioning for us to come over indicating that whatever was there was indeed still there...

My heart was thumping too just reading about it, Old Wolf! 😊

Nothing finer (in the UK at least) than a descended Emperor and I'm delighted your persistence was rewarded.

As for the White Admiral.....always best to have something to aim for in the future; I'm sure it won't be long.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 17-Mar-20 10:18 AM GMT

[quote=trevor post_id=151000 time=1584218467 user_id=13654] It always amazes me just how tame they can be once settled. I've had one on the ground for 56 mins,
(time from first to last image on the camera).

Now your challenge is all four wings purple!.

Thanks Trevor, 56 minutes is amazing. I had to leave the one I saw and it must have been reaching half an hour on the ground. It had no intention of moving even with my meddling 😊 Hopefully I get the chance this year to see another and get the coveted four wings purple sighting.

[quote=Wurzel post_id=151008 time=1584302366 user_id=9821] Great stuff Old Wolf 😊 You never forget your first audience with His Nibbs 😊 It can often be the conversion therapy an errant birder needs to get into butterflies 😊😊

Thanks Wurzel, I was really very happy because as I said it was one I had been desperate to bag and I really thought that it wasn't going to happen that day. If we hadn't spotted the gentleman in the distance then it still may not have happened.

David M wrote:

Nothing finer (in the UK at least) than a descended Emperor and I'm delighted your persistence was rewarded.

As for the White Admiral.....always best to have something to aim for in the future; I'm sure it won't be long.

Thanks David, I am really chuffed that I can add it to 'the collection' 😊

I also have a feeling that it won't be long until I get to have proper look at a White Admiral too 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 17-Mar-20 10:22 AM GMT

25/07/19

Something rather special happened today.

The day was a scorcher with the breeze pushing what felt like a wall of heat from over the fields and into town.

I came home from work the same as any other day and whilst knelt down greeting the dogs in the front room, a movement caught my eye from the garden through the open back door. It was very much butterfly shaped and I thought it looked like a silvery grey colour.

I headed out to investigate and there on my lawn was a Purple Hairstreak!!!! The very first time that one had visited my garden. I had my phone on me so I managed to get a few snaps before it took off again.



I can only speculate that it had been blown my way from the fields on the wall of heat and had headed down for some shelter in the cool of my garden.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 17-Mar-20 10:35 AM GMT

16/03/2020

Bit of a time jump here as today was my first sightings of 2020.

The sun was shining today and it was really mild as I walked home from work for lunch. I was treated to a Brimstone cruising over the brambles at the

back of someones garden and as I headed over the green to investigate to see f it had landed, I was passed by a speedy Comma who whizzed passed me and over the garden fence.

I couldn't locate the Brimstone on the brambles so turned back to head back onto the path and there were two Commas indulging in a bit of an aerial dogfight. I can't say whether one of them was the one that had zipped passed me but it is very likely that it was. After watching them chase each other for a short while I had to get off and further down the road I spotted another Brimstone but once again, I can't confirm if this was the same one from earlier or not but the sightings were all very close.

All sightings took place in the space of three minutes and a welcome sight they were with the all the rain and miserable weather we have had of late.

At least one Brimstone and two Commas for 2020 so far 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Neil Freeman, 17-Mar-20 08:26 PM GMT

Hi Old Wolf,

I really enjoyed your report from Fermyn Woods, a site I know well although I have not been for a couple of years. I remember the excitement of my first Purple Emperor which was also from there.

And congrats on your first sightings of the new season.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 17-Mar-20 08:32 PM GMT

Thanks Neil, It was a great experience finally getting to see what I have been hoping for these past few years 😊 I do plan on going back this year if this virus business is all sorted by then 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 17-Mar-20 09:27 PM GMT

Well it appears that I am in a bit of a pickle with my diaries doing this playing catch up business as I have missed two very important trips out after Fermyn and before the PHS in my garden. I will combine two trips into one post as there isn't a great deal to share but what I do have to share is something very exciting, well, for me anyway

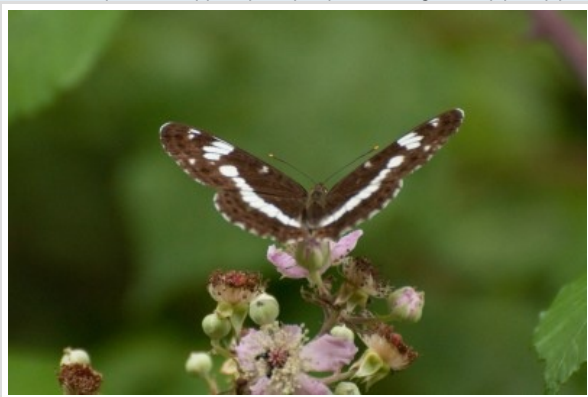
20/07/2019

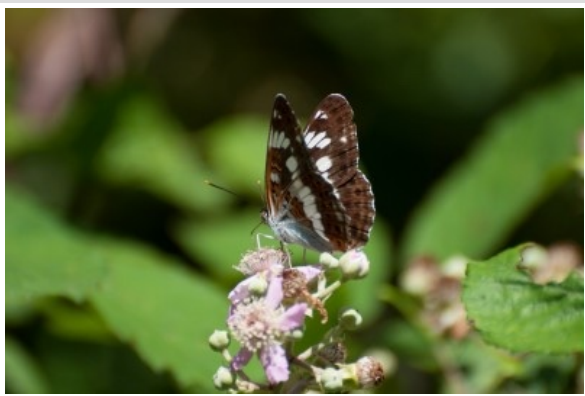
Chicksands Woods, Bedfordshire.

I had quite a few visits to Chicksands this year hunting for Purple Emperor, PHS, WLH and SWF. It is a good place to take the dogs when the weather is too hot for normal walks.

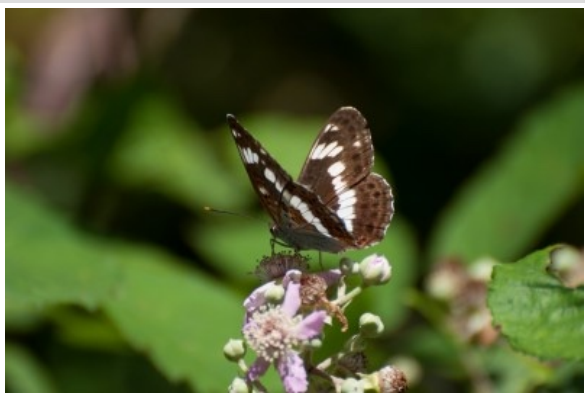
In all the visits I only managed one brief sighting of a solitary WLH that was not in the best condition and I could only positively identify it once I got home from the grainy, full zoom pics I had. SWF were present on all visits which are always nice to see and on one occasion there were over 50 peacocks seen along the main path that runs through the centre and the entire length of the woods. The woods were awash with Ringlet and when they had run their course it was the turn of the Meadow Browns that were everywhere as well as good numbers of Large Skippers and a few Brown Argus but on the visit of 20/07 I had the biggest surprise.

Taking the main path as always we stopped at one of the intersections to check the high walls of brambles when all of a sudden a White Admiral appeared from over the top and landed right near us and I have to be honest that I was so excited that I had finally got to see one properly that I lost the ability of how to use the camera 😊 This is what happen to me when I see something new, I am so excited that I completely forget everything I have learned The pics are clipped, poorly exposed and generally pretty poor but it is my first ever White Admiral, so I am happy 😊





I managed a few minutes with it before it flew off back over the top of the brambles. We waited a while but it seemed clear that it was not going to return so we continued our walk. We did catch another glimpse of another further along but it was fleeting and quite a distance from us. I was under the impression that White Admirals were not in Chicksands Woods so it was a massive and very welcome surprise to finally see one when in a place that I thought was not possible to see one. My ninth first ever sighting this year which by my reckoning makes this an absolutely unbeatable year 😊



21/07/2020

Fineshade Woods, Northamptonshire.

I had planned on attending the Butterfly Conservation trip to Fineshade this year but once again felt the weather on the day was unsuitable as it was

raining when I woke up. I went a few weeks later, once again with the family, the dogs and a picnic and although the weather was good on the way, the clouds began to build shortly after arriving.

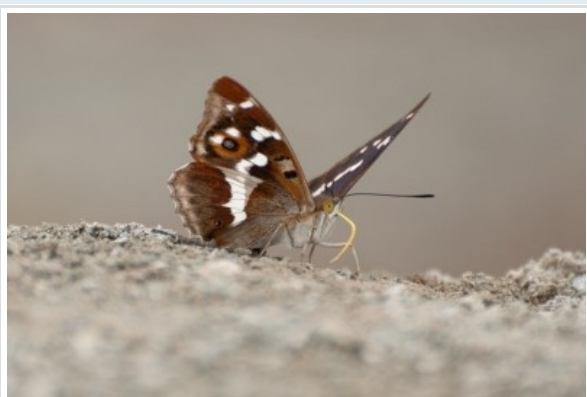
We were greeted by a female SWF at the beginning of our walk but the build up of clouds meant it turned out to be a really overcast and relatively quiet trip.

The only saving grace was a quick flyby by a White Admiral and at one point I noticed something on the ground when my dog Morris almost trod on it, a grounded Purple Emperor! My second one of the year.

Almost being trodden on by Morris caused it to take flight and fly around the clearing in a large circle and land in almost exactly the same spot to continue probing the gravel.



It took flight to a small rock and then again onto a large pile of gravel which I assume was still to be spread over the path. It stayed for a few minutes before taking off and into the trees never to return.





The rest of the walk was fairly quiet with the odd spot of rain and constant cloud cover keeping the butterflies hidden from sight but all in all I still count it as a good trip as I got to see my second Purple Emperor 😊 I still need that four wings purple shot though 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 17-Mar-20 09:33 PM GMT

That;s often the way with His Nibbs – if you go looking chances are you might miss out but when unexpected there he is 😊 I'm thinking that the surest way is to take one of my mates that couldn't care less about butterflies out with me for the day and then just wait for an Emperor to land on them 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 18-Mar-20 09:10 AM GMT

So, you didn't have long to wait for your White Admiral, Old Wolf? 😊

And an Emperor to yourself, in spite of its canine 'near miss'!

Re: Old Wolf

by Andrew555, 18-Mar-20 10:47 AM GMT

Great reports Old Wolf. Well done with the Emperors. 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 19-Mar-20 08:30 PM GMT

Hello Wurzel, well the family although happy to take me definately fall into that category 😊

Hello David, no, not long at all 😊 I just wish that I hadn't got so excited and be all fingers and thumbs 😊

Thanks Andrew, I really am chuffed that I have finally seen one 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 19-Mar-20 08:38 PM GMT

29/07/19

Hexton Chalk Pit & Sharpenhoe Clappers

I was accompanied by the brother in law for this trip. This is the very kind brother in law who has lent me his camera and he quite fancied giving a bit of butterfly hunting a go.

We set off reasonably early as the day was forecast to be an absolute scorcher and arrived at our first stop, Hexton Chalk Pit at about ten. Hexton Chalk Pit is another Wildlife Trust nature reserve in Hertfordshire and is known for its Chalk Hill Blues, a species that I was yet to see this year.

This is the first time I had visited the reserve and found it is quite small and very hilly making photography challenging in places. There are many ditches, depressions and gulleys that the long grasses and slippery chalk patches were making difficult to navigate safely with a camera in hand. It is very similar to Ashwell Quarry nature reserve in Hertfordshire which I visited last year for the Chalkies.

We were greeted by the Chalkies pretty much as we entered the reserve and spent some time trying to traverse the terrain to get close enough for a shot.

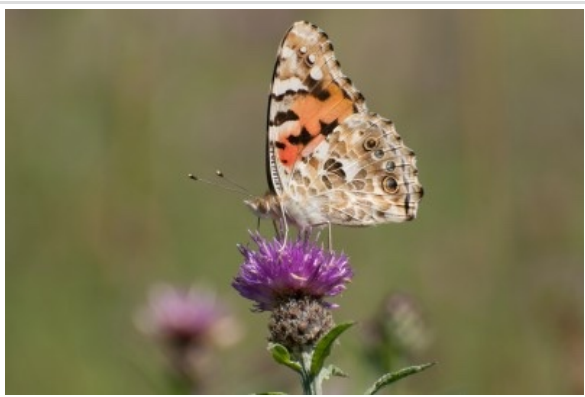


As the heat built the Chalkies became more and more energetic and difficult to approach. A lone DGF was spotted a few times patrolling the site in a large circuit but had no interest in landing for us. We stayed about an hour but because it was getting so hot we set off to our second destination, Sharpshoe Clappers where I hoped to get a decent shot of a DGF.

Upon arrival we found that the hillside was alive with little blue flashes as it really had got very hot by this time. There were Chalkies everywhere, far more than I have seen before which was a challenge because although there were many, they were not staying still for long. One would settle and it wouldn't be long before another would zip by so it would take off again to join in the chase. There were also some DGF cruising across the hillside, they were pretty much all female this time.



This time we headed further than I had the last time I was here a few weeks ago and crested the top of the hill to a field beyond where there were plenty of Painted Ladies present. We walked the path of this large field on the other side of the hill and spotted one or two DGF but they were fleeting glimpses as they sailed past.

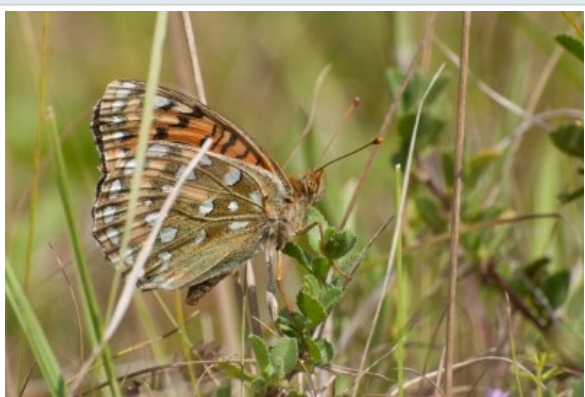


We headed back down the hill to the entrance and the meadow full of Chalkies and decided to go further downhill than I had the last time I visited and here we found a pair of mating Brown Argus (I think), and mating Chalkies.





This far down the hill the terrain becomes very similar to Hexton with short, sharp inclines and exposed chalk in the track making it a bit tricky in places. The track we followed ended up finishing at the road you drive in on and continues across this road which was where we headed next. It was here that there were more DGF than anywhere else and we followed them as they landed and dropped down into the leaf mould which I read afterwards could have been to lay eggs. I tried to get a decent underside shot but the sun was blazing by this point and it was so bright so the best I could get were these.



It was mid-afternoon by now and we were really baked as we had been out in the sun since the morning and decided to call it a day and grab a drink as ours had run out by this time. We headed back up to the car trying to grab some shots of the Chalkies on the way.



All in all a great day and the brother in law really enjoyed it and offered to come again if I ever want to go when he is visiting.

Re: Old Wolf

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

Spot on with the Brown Argus ID Old Wolf 😊 A lovely report and a lovely set of shots – the second DGF is a cracker – they're great butterflies and when the light catches them right those spots silver up lovely 😊 Glad your brother in-law enjoyed himself too – wanting to go butterflying again – that one's a keeper 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 21-Mar-20 10:27 PM GMT

Another excellent sequence, Old Wolf. In fact, in spite of all my foreign travels, Chalkhill Blue was a species I didn't get an image of last year, so those shots of yours are worth a few of these: 🇬🇧🇬🇧

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 26-Mar-20 05:56 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel, the brother in law has been a few times with me since and now he is moving from Torquay to Bedfordshire he already told me he is looking forward to more trips so I have another chauffeur 😊 To be honest, the original chauffeur is really rather pleased about this 😊

Thanks David, the Chalkie is still a relatively new one for me as I only saw one for the first time last year. I am really trying to get a good pic of the silvery shimmer that I was seeing when I was there but it just does not come out in the pics like this 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 26-Mar-20 06:09 PM GMT

18/08/2016 – 24/08/2019

Family Holiday to Bacton, Norfolk (part 1).

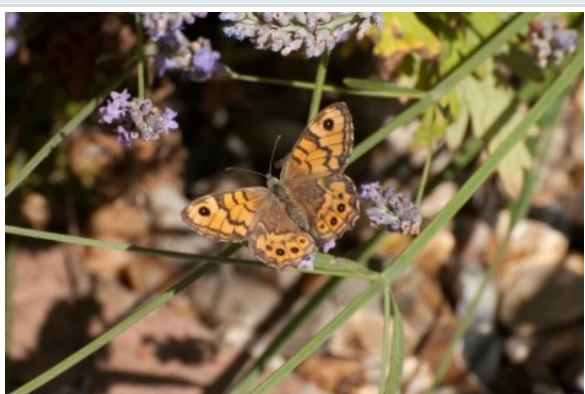
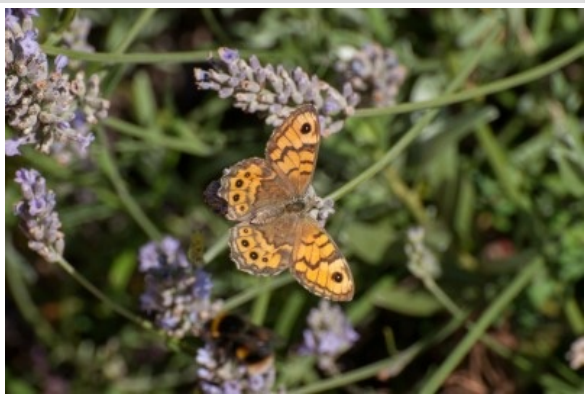
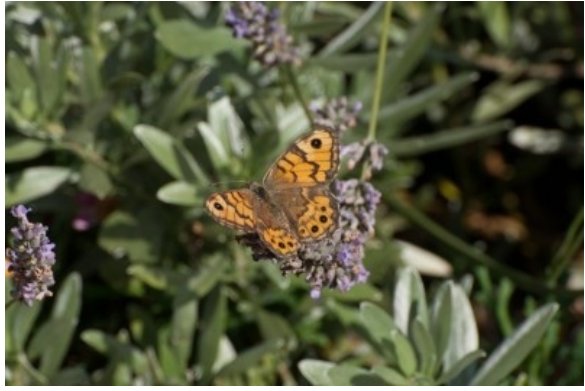
Our family holiday this year was to Bacton in Norfolk. Bacton is one of the smaller places on the north east coast that is less commercial than Great Yarmouth, Hunstanton or Caister. Our choices are very much dictated to pet friendly accommodation so that we can take the dogs, Dougie and Morris with us.

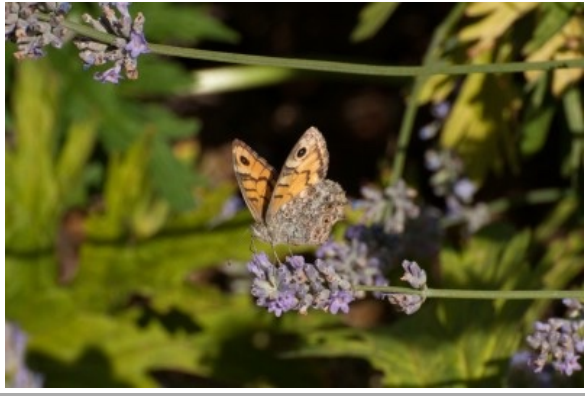
Leading up to our trip I used our very own UKB to see what sites and species were on offer that I might be able to press gang the famille into taking me to. I found that there were many sites that piqued my interest with a possibility of four first time ever sightings on offer. Two were a long shot:

Swallowtail, but only of there was a second brood and Silver Studded Blue, but they would be right at the very, very end of their flight period and very unlikely. The two that I had more of a chance with were the Wall and Grayling. This was all as long as they would take me of course.

We arrived late afternoon on the Saturday to a lovely site that was a two minute walk from a sandy beach. The chalets were situated all round a large communal green and each chalet had a small green in front with plants and flowers lining the paths leading to the outside decking. The sun was blazing so we were very optimistic that it would hold for our stay and spent the first evening exploring the area where I was taking note of places that may require a bit of additional attention, with the camera of course 😊

Our first day dawned nice and sunny and we needed supplies so the chauffeur headed off in search of them and left me with the dogs, sitting outside on the decking enjoying the glorious day. As I sat there a butterfly flew over the top of the chalets and landed on the flowers directly outside our chalet and I absolutely could not believe it but it was a Wall! My first ever, on the first day of the holiday! I ran inside for the camera praying that it didn't fly off whilst I was gone. And luckily, it didn't. It stayed with me for about five minutes and all I had to do was lean over the balustrade of the decking and try to get the best pictures I could.





I was overjoyed at being visited at my very own chalet by one of my targets on this trip and very wrongfully thought that there must be more about. This was the only one I saw in the whole week we stayed.

20/08/19

I was lucky enough that the Famille agreed to take me on a mega trip for the day around the north coast to three sites I had earmarked to search for butterflies.

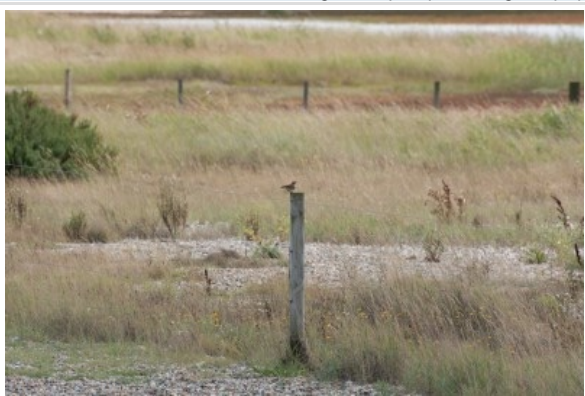
The first stop was Wiveton Down in search of more Wall. We got a little lost trying to find it but luckily bumped into a couple of people riding horses who directed us to the concealed car park entrance. The heath is on a hill and is very scrubby with lots of bare earth and interestingly there are Oaks further down the hill and the path is pretty much running alongside their canopy. This would be an excellent place for observing PHS if they are here but I am a bit late in the year and didn't see any there. In fact, I didn't see very much of anything. We saw a few Small Copper on the heather as we entered and the odd Painted Lady and Red Admiral buzzing around but other than that, it was pretty much butterfly-less. No Wall for me today. We followed the path all the way around and across the road into the cow field but there really wasn't very much about so we decided to head off to site number two.

Our next stop was Cley Marshes Coastal Nature Reserve in search of Grayling which unfortunately we were restricted to only the main paths because of the dogs. The reserve is a large marsh right on the north coast and being very flat, was incredibly windy. I was actually quite cold as we took the main path out to the beach in search of Grayling.

Along the way I encountered a duck and a bird that looked interesting but I have no idea what they are. If any of the birders here can tell from the rather small pictures I managed to get, I would love to know what they are. The only one I could identify was the Small Egret.



One we reached the pebbly beach we headed to the dunes to look for Grayling but there really was nothing there. One butterfly was disturbed and flew off being carried at great speed by the winds but I think it was too dark to be a Grayling but couldn't say what it was. There was another unknown bird that I have no idea what it is so once again, any help will be greatly appreciated.



After searching in vain for a while it was time to head off to the third and final site, Kelling Heath on the off chance that there may some Silver Studded Blue left.

The heath was a mass of ferns with mud tracks through them which we spent some time going around but it was pretty much empty of butterflies. The signs warned of Adders so the dogs had to be kept short to avoid any accidents but there were no snakes to be seen either. I had missed the SSB, but it was a bit of a long shot anyway. I was quite disappointed and felt bad that the famille had given me a day out of our holiday solely for butterflying and it had been a complete washout. 😞

21/08/19

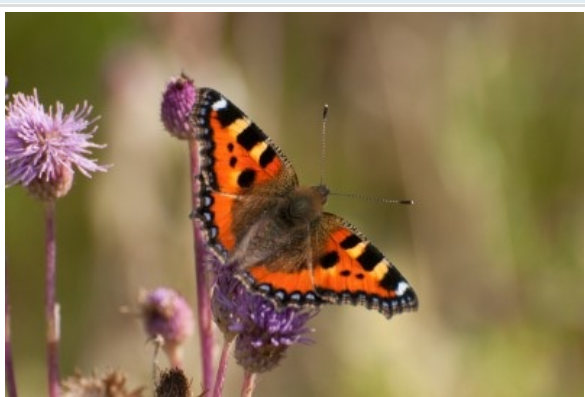
This morning afforded me some spare time to go to the local spots that I had noted from our first days exploration. At the back of the chalet was a small tree covered path that had a few resident Speckled Wood. The path leads into a lane that has buddleia bushes brimming with Small Torts, Painted Ladies and Red Admirals swapping between basking on the side of houses and the gravel and feeding on the plants. It was very reminiscent of the Buddleia bushes of my childhood that used to be covered with them. It was great to see so many Small Torts as they have been really lacking in Bedfordshire lately.



It might be worth noting that the Buddleia was growing in someones drive so I couldn't get as close as I would have liked without trespassing 😊

I had been informed of a wildflower field quite a way along the main road that was used by dog walkers which I decided to visit in the late afternoon. Although the flowers would have been past their best by now, I still felt it worth a try.

The field was a corner of a large crop field that had been left wild and had a track leading through the middle. There were a few Common Blue which were a welcome sight due to the lack of them in Bedfordshire, many Small Torts, a few Brown Argus and the odd Brimstone speeding along the brambles at the edge of the field.





To be continued.

Re: Old Wolf

by bugboy, 26-Mar-20 09:07 PM GMT

You did well with that Wall and going after your first Grayling on the same trip is impressive too. Those two butterflies are probably responsible for more curse words from the otherwise very polite butterfly community than the rest of our butterflies combined 😊!

As for the birds they look like to me (happy to be corrected) a female Pochard, a Reed Warbler, a Little Egret and a Wheatear.

Great shots of those Small Torts as well 📷

Re: Old Wolf

by trevor, 26-Mar-20 09:25 PM GMT

Congrats for that Wall Brown, and a female too, they are normally harder to locate than the patrolling males.

And yes, more people are greeting as they pass than before.

Keep well and safe,
Trevor.

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 26-Mar-20 11:59 PM GMT

Congrats on the Wall Old Wolf 😊 And that Buddleia is a cracking sight 🤩🇩🇪 I'd go with three of Bugboys bird ID's – Pochard and Little Egret. It is a Wheatear but I prefer they original name 'Whitearse' 😊😂 Not sure about the Warbler – it looks a little too yellowy and the head too rounded for Reed Warbler although it could be a juvenile? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 27-Mar-20 08:24 AM GMT

Fabulous shots of the Wall Brown, Old Wolf. It's rare to have them posing like that.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 27-Mar-20 08:29 PM GMT

Thanks BB, I will defer to your birding expertise because I have no idea 😊 It was great to see so many Small Torts as in my area I am lucky if I see a few in a season. Hopefully the Grayling will be easier 😊

Thanks Trevor, I am glad to hear the Wall was a female and it makes it all the more special that they are harder to locate. I didn't locate her, I was lucky enough for her to locate me 😊 Lets hope the courtesy carries on after this is all over.

Thanks Wurzel, once again I will defer to your expertise on the birds 😊 The Buddleia was great to see but due to it being in a drive I couldn't get it all in shot without trespassing but there were many more on the bush.

Thanks David, I thought it would be a Wall-topia after that one visited but it just wasn't the case. Makes it all the more special as it is a beautiful little butterfly.

Re: Old Wolf

by Old Wolf, 27-Mar-20 08:43 PM GMT

18/08/2019 – 24/08/2019

Family Holiday to Bacton, Norfolk (part 2).

22/08/19

The Familie agreed to take me on another butterfly hunting trip today and this was the big one. I was hoping to go to look for a second brood Swallowtail. A butterfly I am so very desperate to see.

There were four sites listed here on UKB that I thought I could look into going to; Strumpshaw Fen, Ranworth Broad, How Hill and Hickling Broad. After the restrictions at Cley I felt it best to double check with these sites as they are reserves and unfortunately all but one did not allow dogs. This cut down my chances by three quarters but I still had one site to check, How Hill. I phoned them to see if there had been any second brood sightings and was told that one was spotted in the secret garden on the previous day. They advised to arrive early on a warm, calm day and today fitted the bill. We set off early and much to delight of my chauffeur, How Hill was at the end of a very narrow winding country lane that only had room for one car for the whole length and she does love country lanes 😊

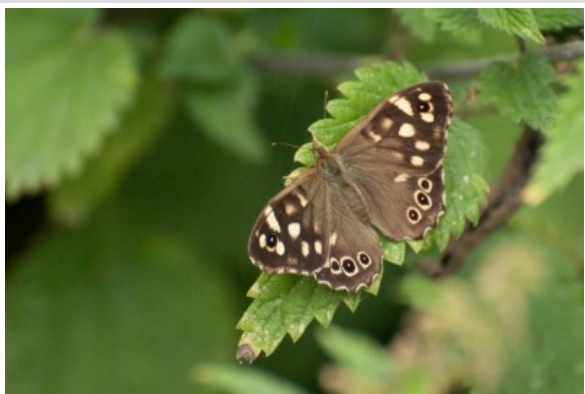
Upon arrival I was disappointed to find out that the dogs were not allowed on the nature trail and the only place we could go was the secret garden which luckily was where one had been spotted but ruled out most of the site for us.

Living up to its name, the secret garden was quite difficult to locate and we had to ask a few people on the way as it was on the other side of a little wood but when we arrived, we found it to be a beautiful little place. The garden was surrounded by tall trees and had ponds surrounded by paths and flowers. As the sun streamed in from above the place seemed a little bit magical. The only sounds were the birds singing in the trees and the slight rustle of the trees from the light breeze.

The familie plotted up on a bench in a clearing to enjoy the sun and left me to hunt the garden. On one of the trees in the garden there was a large Chicken of the Woods Fungi and on the flowers lining the paths there were Red Admiral, Brimstone, Painted Lady, Small Torts and Brown Argus. There were Speckled Wood patrolling the trees on the perimeter of the garden. I walked the paths circling all the ponds hoping that I would find what we came here for but unfortunately it was not meant to be. After a few hours of wandering the garden it was time to head off. There would be no Swallowtail this time.



Back at Bacton that afternoon I went for another wander around the site and to the alley at the back of the site to see the resident Speckled Woods. I was very surprised to bump into a Muntjac here who saw me and fled before I even got hand to camera.





23/08/2019

Well today was the last butterfly trip that the Familie had agreed to take me on and I feel that here I should just say that I am very thankful to have such an understanding Familie who have been most kind in taking me to these places.

We planned a trip to Winterton Nature Reserve to search the sandy dunes for Grayling. This was my last chance to see another first time ever sighting on this trip and bring my total this year to an unbeatable eleven new species.

I was visited at the flowers outside the chalet by a lovely Small Tort so felt that my luck could be in today.





We arrived to a blazing sunshine in a cloudless sky and I was eager to get into the dunes to hunt. The Familie accompanied me as many eyes would help trying to find this master of camouflage. There was the odd Common Blue sailing over the dunes which once again were good to see because of the complete lack of them in my area this year.

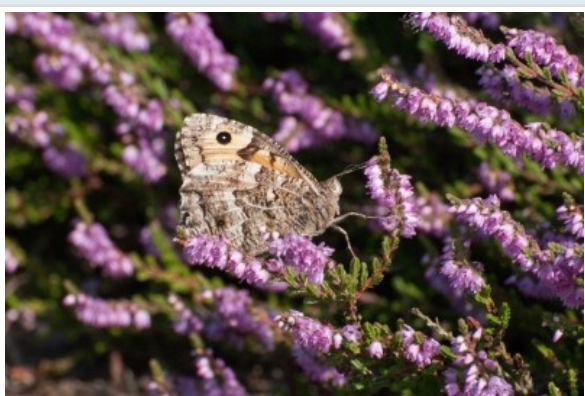


It wasn't long until we saw a brownish butterfly sail past us. We followed it until it landed nearer my daughter who approached it and said 'oh, it's only a speckled wood' which shows that all these trips are rubbing off on her but I told her Grayling look a bit like them and headed towards her and there it was, my eleventh first ever sighting of the year!



Now that they had seen one which is apparently enough for some people, the Familie headed off to the beach and left me to carry on. I found a small clump of heather that had many Grayling around it and gave me a lot of opportunities to observe and get some shots. They really do blend in well with the bracken don't they? And I got plenty of eye spot flashes as I got close.





There was one individual who was very easy to spot as it couldn't retract its forewing so although it looks like it is flashing, it was always like this.

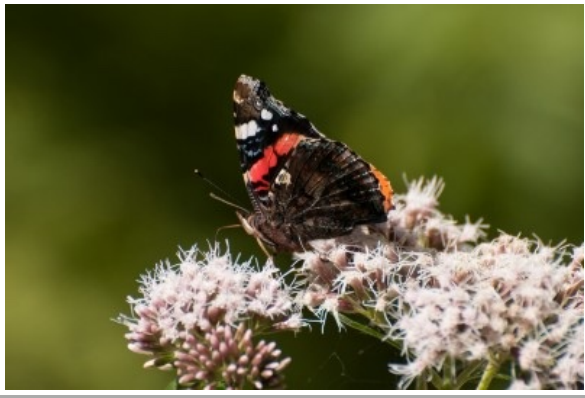


It was all about the Grayling and the only thing that turned my head was this lovely fresh Small Copper.



A brief flash of uppers.

The heat continued to build and the lack of shade meant it was time to grab some lunch and get out of the sun for a while but I was happy. I even managed to convince the chauffeur to swing by How Hill on the way home and negotiate the winding country lane, just in case there was a Swallowtail for me but alas, not this time.



Once again, I want to thank the Famille for allowing me so much of our holiday to devote to my pursuit of butterflies. They really are the best and I couldn't do it without them. You rock guys 😊

Re: Old Wolf

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-20 09:32 PM GMT

Sorry you didn't get the Swallowtail Old Wolf 😊 but you do have to leave something for next time 😊😊 Grayling are a great 'value for money' species, they can be highly entertaining – great stuff with the open wing shot 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Old Wolf

by David M, 28-Mar-20 07:23 PM GMT

I can **feel** your enthusiasm in that report, Old Wolf. It's always exciting to see new species, and Graylings are amongst the most interesting with both their playful behaviour and incredible camouflage.

I see you couldn't resist trying for that open wing shot! Something I find irresistible too. 😊