

## Max Anderson

by Max Anderson, 14-Sep-20 07:42 PM GMT

I thought it would be worth starting a personal diary of my own so that I can share my experiences and photos.

I will aim to put together longer posts on an infrequent basis, rather than posting regularly with findings from a single day.

Hope my posts can be of interest!

## Re: Max Anderson

by trevor, 14-Sep-20 08:03 PM GMT

Welcome Max!. And good to meet you again today.  
Look forward to your posts and images.

All the best,  
Trevor.

## Re: Max Anderson

by Katrina, 14-Sep-20 09:05 PM GMT

Welcome from me too!

## Re: Max Anderson

by Max Anderson, 14-Sep-20 11:00 PM GMT

### Long-tailed blue

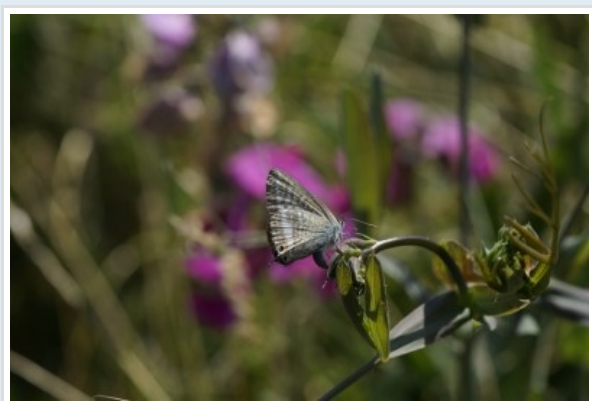
There has been a fair bit of noise generated by the long-tailed blues at Whitehawk hill (Sussex) over the past few weeks. I thought I would provide my angle on some of the events I was fortunate to observe, in the hope of providing a different perspective.

*6th August 2020*

After reading about a sighting of a single individual from whitehawk hill on 5th August, I headed over from 10:00 – 12:00, but I was unable to find any individuals. I suspect the sub-optimal weather conditions were to blame.

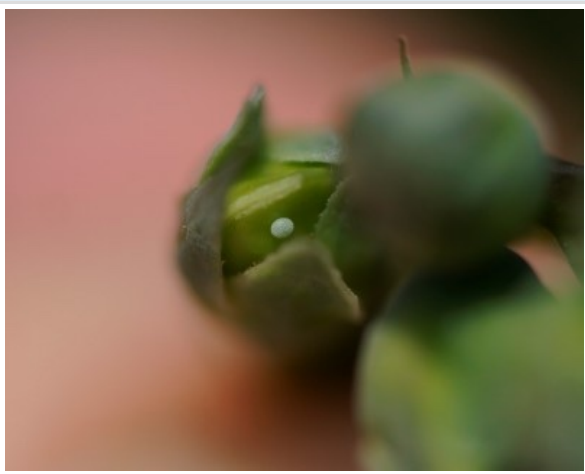
*7th August 2020*

I returned the next day for 09:30 and within about 5 minutes, I had spotted a single female, nectaring from the broad-leaved everlasting pea (B-LEP) and egg laying.



*9th August 2020*

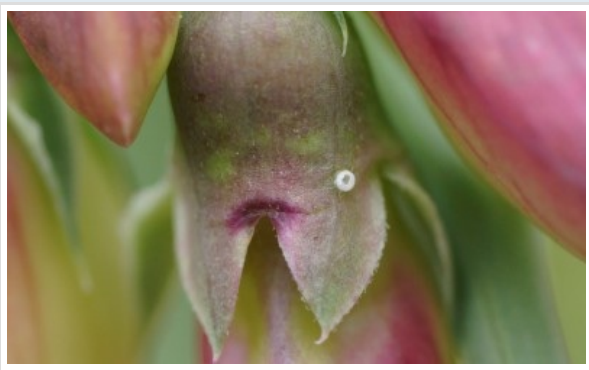
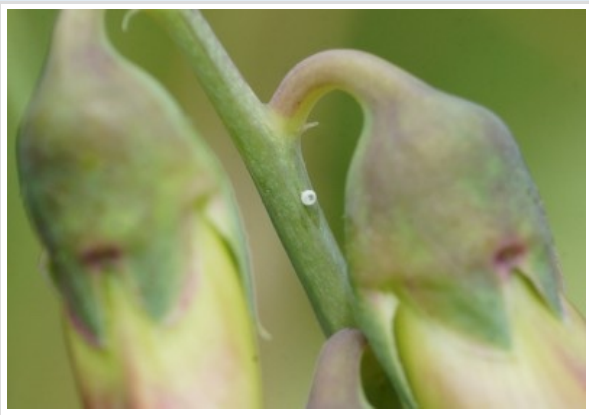
I headed back again, this time with the intention of also searching for eggs. Again, it took me very little time to locate the same female as seen on the 7th. After chasing her around for a while I then spent around 20–30 minutes searching a patch of the B-LEP and counted 7 eggs.



*17th August 2020*

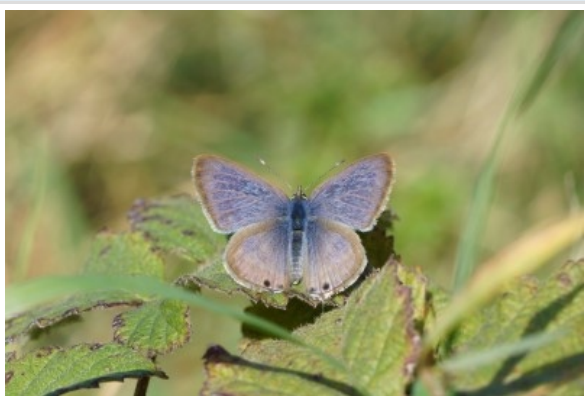
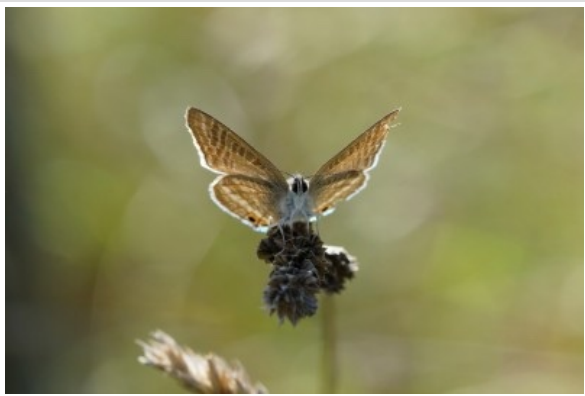
When I returned to the same patch of B-LEP where I had previously conducted the egg count, unfortunately there was noticeable trampling damage and I was only able to locate 3 of the eggs, all of which had hatched. The trampling damage is regrettably, an inevitable part of the process, as the long-tailed blue attracts a lot of attention from enthusiasts across the country.

There also appeared to be a small hole on the flower receptacle, which I strongly suspect is created by the caterpillar as it feeds on the developing flower.



*9th September 2020*

When I arrived at Whitehawk hill, there was already a group of people at the patch of B-LEP adjacent to the allotments. They had already seen a fresh female and we began to watch as groups of 3, 4 and 5 males battled and spiraled high up in the air. After a short while, I wandered around the site to see if any other patches of B-LEP had any activity, but there was none to be found other than within close proximity to the patch adjacent to the allotment. I frequently observed battling males fly away from the allotments and disappear near a stand of bramble, sheltered by some bushes. Despite having no B-LEP, there was a good level of activity, and I suspect the structure of the vegetation and resulting microclimates was partly responsible. Later on in the day, Neil Hulme called my attention as he spotted a male and female amongst the bramble patch. After some very persistent work from the male, he successfully clasped onto the unimpressed female (See [https://youtu.be/RyEIQ\\_v-Z\\_E](https://youtu.be/RyEIQ_v-Z_E)), and they were together for around 2 hours before we all left. They would likely be there until morning. Overall estimates from the action-packed day: 2 females and 9 males, including the mating pair.





*14th September 2020*

The warm weather and reports of increased activity at Whitehawk Hill tempted me back out. I arrived at 09:45 and there were already a number of people crowding around adjacent to the allotments. I drifted away from the crowd to the sheltered spot that had previously produced some good activity and spent some time observing the behaviour of males. As usual, they were incredibly habitual and predictable in their choice of basking spots, most often choosing to land on conspicuous, tall strands of vegetation. At two other B-LEP patches further from the allotment, I found one male, nectaring before moving on.

Before heading back home, I visited a good-sized patch of B-LEP near Southwick to check for any activity, but saw nothing over the course of an hour. From what I understand, the hilltopping behaviour of long-tailed blues is a significant factor behind the success of the population at Whitehawk hill. I would be interested to see whether some spatial modelling of topography and occurrence of B-LEP might allow us to predict where migrating long-tailed blue butterflies are most likely to occur.





### Re: Max Anderson

by Benjamin, 14-Sep-20 11:54 PM GMT

Nice one Max – good to get your perspective. Glad you've started a diary – one to keep an eye on for sure.

### Re: Max Anderson

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-20 07:52 AM GMT

I'll second that. Great stuff!

*"I would be interested to see whether some spatial modelling of topography and occurrence of B-LEP might allow us to predict where migrating long-tailed blue butterflies are most likely to occur."* I think the short answer is "yes". I think there will be plenty of more isolated sightings, which appear rather random in their distribution (although mostly, but not exclusively, within c.10 km of the coast), but the highest concentrations already appear heavily skewed towards topographical high points and river valleys, especially where the two are found in close proximity.

I love your blackberry shots.

BWs, Neil

### Re: Max Anderson

by trevor, 15-Sep-20 08:45 AM GMT

A great and very interesting report, Max, backed up with some excellent images. Also following the progress of the Whitehawk LTB's over such a long period is to be admired.

It seems an age ago that we were trying to sort out fresh Wood Whites from the remaining spring brood specimens at Chiddingfold.

Stay safe and well,  
Trevor.

### Re: Max Anderson

by millerd, 15-Sep-20 10:00 AM GMT

A fascinating in-depth analysis, Max.

One of the other known "hotspots" where LTB have regularly appeared is along the clifftop near Kingsdown (between Dover and Deal) in Kent. From what I have heard they are back again this year. There are decent amounts of BLEP here, and obviously it is the shortest distance for a migrating butterfly to fly to the UK (though 35km is a mere trifle for the near-panglobal species that is the LTB). I imagine this clifftop site fulfills the hill-topping criteria the butterfly seems to prefer. However, they have also been found in previous years near the *north* Kent coast, in flat, low-lying areas where BLEP grows along embanked paths raised only a little above the surrounding marshy land. Here, perhaps the attraction of a suitable food plant overcomes the less favourable aspects of the area.

Hopefully the now regular migration of the species to the UK will allow more detailed studies of their behaviour. I for one am looking forward to reading further insights you have and seeing the excellent illustrative photos that accompany them! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

### Re: Max Anderson

by David M, 15-Sep-20 04:36 PM GMT

#### Max Anderson wrote:

I thought it would be worth startying a personal diary of my own so that I can share my experiences and photos.

I will aim to put together longer posts on an infrequent basis, rather than posting regularly with findings from a single day.

Hope my posts can be of interest!

Welcome, Max. You've certainly got off to a flier – your report of your experiences with the Long Tailed Blues is of **great** interest.

I shall look forward to reading more.

### Re: Max Anderson

by Wurzel, 15-Sep-20 08:26 PM GMT

A cracking start Max – those shots on on the Blackberry are lush 😊😄👍 Looking forward to more reports and as for the LTBs I just wish they'd move a bit more to the West though if this becomes a more regular migration then perhaps they'll arrive in greater numbers and fan out more?

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

### Re: Max Anderson

by Neil Freeman, 20-Sep-20 09:11 AM GMT

Really interesting reports with great photos to kick off your PD Max. I am looking forward to seeing your next posts.

Cheers,

Neil.

### Re: Max Anderson

by Max Anderson, 30-Sep-20 11:30 AM GMT

Thank you all for the kind comments. I'm looking forward to contributing again soon.

### Re: Max Anderson

by Max Anderson, 04-Oct-20 11:33 AM GMT

#### Purple emperor

From mid-June to early July, I spent many early mornings patrolling the woodland rides in search for the purple emperor, working late into my evenings to make up for lost time.

Below is a short account of a few select days from the 2020 season:

#### *16th June 2020*

I spent a good 2 hours trawling the network of paths through Chiddingfold forest, looking for willow and oak trees along woodland rides with sunny spots. From my research, I noted that photos were often taken at points where the rides opened up slightly, or occasionally at crossroads, and so I made a mental note of those locations when I came across them. I also noticed that there were a few references to the occupation of 'master trees' at high points in the landscape, however I couldn't find any substantial evidence to back up these claims. The term 'master tree' is something I've grown more and more sceptical of. It seems to only serve as a term which identifies a tree where significant activity was observed. I find that it tends to be over-used and often in an unreliable and inconsistent way. If anyone has any reason for me to change my mind, I would welcome their comments.

Chiddingfold forest has quite an extensive network of woodland rides, many of which look to be highly suitable for purple emperors, and so I thought it would be best to continue to cover ground in order to maximise my chance of seeing an individual. Bringing a bike would be a smart decision. It took all of 2 hours until I stumbled across my first. At a high point in the forest, there is an opening to the side of the path where I spotted what I initially thought may be a white admiral taking up nutrients on the ground. When I stepped closer, I realised I was wrong. He took flight, circled me a few times and landed again. A lesson I was keen to learn quickly from one or two other enthusiasts, is to fight the urge to jump in and get close, as they are particularly flighty when they initially land. After 30 seconds or so, I took some steps closer and he seemed happy for me to get pretty close and take some photos, though unfortunately, he didn't stick around for any quality shots. He shot up, glided his way along the path, over the trees and out of sight. I stuck around for a while longer, but I saw no return. No complaints, just delighted.





25th June 2020

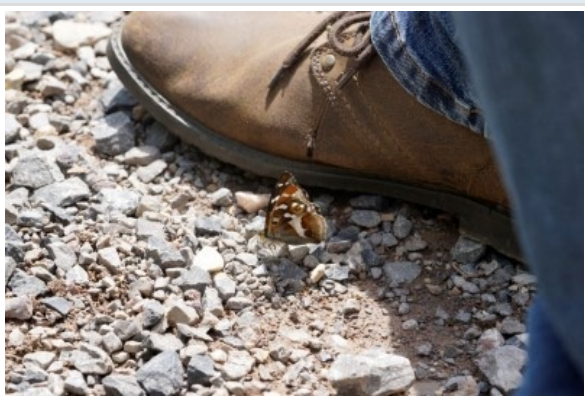
After getting distracted by a solitary purple hairstreak in the very early morning and failing to get any open wing shots despite the bright sunshine, I started walking through the network of paths, looking deep into the distance for any familiar flight patterns. The number of other enthusiasts was reaching a peak, with around 15 people spread across the forest, either pitched up at familiar locations, or patrolling the rides. One thing which did prick my interest was that no one seemed to have much luck, particularly with lures. The wide variety of chemical concoctions chosen by different enthusiasts raises the question of what works best. While I haven't seen any published, controlled experiments, there are many suggestions that fox scat and shrimp paste provide some of the best results. Why this is, I'm not sure, however the tendency to favour carnivorous options raises the question of whether there are relationships between wild carnivores and *A. iris* in suitable habitats on mainland Europe.

Fortunately, after returning to the same location that I had seen my first individual the week before, I spotted another on the ground. I grabbed a few quick photos, but again, they didn't stick around for long. This individual headed down the path, landing every 20 metres or so in direct sunlight, but never settling for more than 10 seconds. After reaching the shaded stretch of the path, they flew up high towards the canopy and eventually exited the ride.



28th June 2020

My next visit to Chiddingfold forest culminated in the most successful day for encounters. Over the course of 3 hours, I made 5 sightings of at least 3 individuals. The first sighting occurred when I ran into two enthusiasts chatting in the middle of a winding stretch of path, adjacent to a shallow valley. We all seemed to spot the male at the same time, and he landed 20 metres in front of us. One of the enthusiasts approached for a photo and he flew up, circled us and landed at the foot of the other enthusiast. I managed to get some photos as he crept onto the shoe, attempting to take nutrients. After around 2 minutes, he flew up and off, and was not seen again. Unfortunately, neither of the other encounters were quite as entertaining, but still as rewarding.





There are a few larger questions which come to mind when I consider the state of *A. iris* in the UK. Firstly, what can be done in terms of habitat management to help provide a buffer to the impacts of climate change? What we do know is that with climate change, the higher spring temperatures will encourage earlier emergences, and potentially result in risky additional broods. Secondly, I'm aware that the lack of suitable habitat and connectivity contribute greatly to the restricted distribution of *A. iris* and many other butterfly species. However, given the reliance on willows as a larval host plant, I would be interested to know whether there are any relationships between unmanaged deer and *A. iris* distributions. Logic tells me that areas with high populations of unmanaged deer are likely to have increased grazing of willow, and therefore potentially reduce the populations of *A. iris*. I will save the re-wilding discussion for another day, but the carefully controlled populations of stock at the Knepp estate does provide an interesting opportunity to address this question.

The general pattern I observed was of consistently low numbers of *A. iris*. As far as I understand, there tends to be a peak in numbers after a few weeks of the first emergence, however the onset of stormy weather with high wind speeds had a particularly devastating impact. Ultimately, the peak never really reached the heights that it typically does. The impacts may be more obvious come next summer, however I will endeavour to spend some time at a local patch during the autumn and spring searching for caterpillars to broaden my understanding of this sensitive species.

### Re: Max Anderson

by Wurzel, 05-Oct-20 09:01 PM GMT

A really interesting report Max – you seem to have picked up some of the key pointers when it comes to finding His Nibbs 😊 However there is a sure fire way that I'm definitely going to try next year – that is to get someone that you know who isn't into butterflies to accompany you as Emperors seem to have a penchant for landing on the deck in front of people that don't know what they are 😊😊 On a more serious note this year wasn't exactly a vintage one as you mentioned, most probably due to the stormy weather that hit at just the wrong time 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

### Re: Max Anderson

by David M, 11-Oct-20 08:50 PM GMT

It's very good to learn about how others go about hunting down butterflies and the strategies they employ, Max.

You certainly put a lot of effort into studying Purple Emperors this year, and you were rewarded better than most of us given how difficult this species has been in 2020.

Your question regarding climate change and how it might affect this species is timely, because up until early June conditions had been abnormally favourable, only for much of the country to endure a dire couple of weeks immediately afterwards. Whether this contributed to low emergence of Emperors I wouldn't like to say, but it's hard to believe that it didn't have an impact on them during the most critical period, i.e. pupation.

### Re: Max Anderson

by Neil Freeman, 13-Oct-20 10:26 AM GMT

Another interesting report Max, great stuff 😊

**David M wrote:**

Your question regarding climate change and how it might affect this species is timely, because up until early June conditions had been abnormally favourable, only for much of the country to endure a dire couple of weeks immediately afterwards.

Indeed. Around my part of the midlands we had one of the driest springs on record and then we hit mid June then had one of the wettest summers. Definitely a year of two half's here.

Cheers,

Neil.