

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jan-20 07:52 PM GMT

Thanks, David. Wishing you a butterfly-filled 2020.

The snowy scene is the peak of Chanctonbury Ring. The northern slope historically supported Duke of Burgundy and I very much hope it will again in the future.  
BWs, Neil

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jan-20 07:54 PM GMT

#### New Helpers

Many thanks to all who attended Sunday's (12 January) conservation work party in Rowland Wood. Among the 12 participants we welcomed first-timers Gill, Simone and Kevin; it's always great to see a few new faces and we hope you'll join us again.

We increased the size of a south-facing scallop at the eastern end of Big Beech Ride, to the north of Rushy Meadow, creating more breeding habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

As we waited for the fire to burn through, a group of us took a walk around both reserves. I sensed a (completely justified) collective feeling of pride over what we've achieved this winter, with just two more work parties to go. I'll be spending a lot of time here in the spring and summer of 2020.



### Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Jan-20 09:31 PM GMT

#### Neil Hulme wrote:

..The snowy scene is the peak of Chanctonbury Ring.

Thanks, Neil. I had a feeling it would be a place you were familiar with.

[quote]...I sensed a (completely justified) collective feeling of pride over what we've achieved this winter, with just two more work parties to go. I'll be spending a lot of time here in the spring and summer of 2020.

You've clearly been very busy again, Neil. Let's hope we get a set of favourable weather conditions so that numbers of the target species do justice to the work that has been put in. As ever, I shall read with much interest further developments.

Might you have a surprise or two for the 2020 season?

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Feb-20 09:22 PM GMT

#### Masters Of Disguise

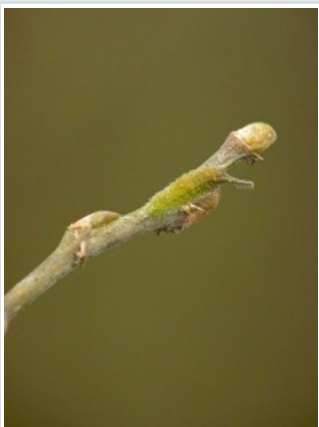
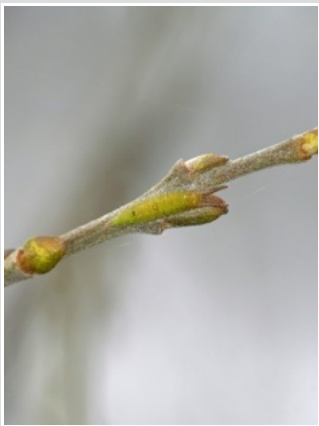
On Sunday (2 Feb) I spent a few very happy hours in the company of friends, one of whom has invested a huge amount of effort in searching out overwintering Purple Emperor larvae in a West Sussex wood; incredibly, he's located more than 50! We must have looked at about 30 although, as expected, quite a few had been chomped by titmice, with the Long-tailed variety being the main suspect.

The majority were in the usual hibernation spots, including scars, forks and against buds. Several were securely attached to leaves, demonstrating the strength of the silk pads and tethers; these were the first examples of 'leaf-sitters' ever seen by Matthew Oates, and he's probably seen more overwintering *iris* larvae than anyone else.

Here is a selection of the caterpillars, demonstrating the variety of hibernation spots and the range of colour forms which provide such amazing camouflage against the chosen substrate. These creature are, quite simply, amazing. I usually try to limit the number of images I post, but on this occasion I make no apologies.











**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 05-Feb-20 09:03 AM GMT

Amazing selection of images, Neil.  
Hopefully with minimal predation from now on, we might have a bumper 2020 Emperor season to look forward to if this find is anything to go by.

Well done Ben.

All the best,  
Trevor.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 05-Feb-20 09:43 PM GMT

No need for any apologies for those images, Neil. It's a fascinating sequence and an insight into the obstacles immature stages have in getting through the winter.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Padfield, 05-Feb-20 10:19 PM GMT

Fantastic, Neil – and 50+ is an outstanding haul. Now I'm stranded so far from my own *iris* woods it would be wonderful to be able to see more photos of these as you follow them through.

Guy

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 08-Feb-20 07:07 PM GMT

Many thanks, Trevor, David and Guy. Ben has indeed done very well to find this many, and continues to add to his tally. I will certainly be revisiting these larvae as they develop, hopefully following a few through to adulthood.  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by bugboy, 09-Feb-20 10:40 AM GMT

That man Ben really does have a good eye for finding larvae. I think every time I bump into him in the field he's got his nose down in some turf searching for one species or another 🤔

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Sij, 25-Mar-20 09:47 PM GMT

A great diary. very good. Do you happen to know where (if anywhere) I could purchase a copy of the Butterflies of Sussex book?...

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-20 10:16 PM GMT

Thanks, Sij.  
The book sold out some time ago now, so I suspect a secondhand copy is your best chance. I've been very quiet on UKB lately, but there'll be some updates next week.  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 28-Mar-20 11:48 AM GMT

### Sussex Butterfly & Wildlife Habitats

Those of you who are kind enough to read my diary, may have noticed that I changed my avatar a while back, which reflects a change in my status and the way in which I'll be continuing to work flat out to help butterflies and other wildlife in Sussex.

After completing my *Fritillaries for the Future* project for Butterfly Conservation in the spring of 2018, I was unable to find further employment in the conservation sector. Although I continued working as a volunteer for 18 months, there came a time when I needed to find paid work again, not least as a way of funding more of the work I've been doing over the last 15 years, to assist the recovery of species such as Duke of Burgundy and Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

The only realistic way of achieving this has been to continue my work on a commercial basis, so I am now trading as *Sussex Butterfly & Wildlife Habitats*. I will continue to build on my close working relationships with the South Downs National Park Authority, statutory bodies, NGOs, county and borough councils, local conservation organisations, landowners, farmers, foresters, private individuals and, of course, Butterfly Conservation. However, with the risk of 'conflict of interests', as I'll be charging for my work, it is important to clarify that I no longer *represent* BC; "all views my own", as they say.

Any new business takes time to get going, but I'm pleased to say that things are looking good for the future, despite the problems which will dampen down activity while the awful COVID-19 situation continues. In a weird twist of fate, I started work as a Tesco delivery driver before Christmas, as a way of earning some money while I drummed up new business. This stop-gap measure proved to be a good move, as I can now continue to help alleviate some of the hardship being suffered as a result of the pandemic, at least until it is all over. Bearing in mind that I'm very grateful to Tesco for taking me on (it's not easy finding employment at the age of 59!), and that I've found the job surprisingly rewarding, I may stay for considerably longer than I originally intended, at least on a part-time basis.

As for many others, my world has changed out of all recognition of late. Keep safe, everyone.

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Mar-20 02:50 PM GMT

#### Woodland Management

One of the first contracts I took on as *Sussex Butterfly & Wildlife Habitats* was the grant-assisted improvement of a private wood near Pulborough. I've previously worked with the owner to develop a large area of naturally regenerating woodland, following the removal of a block of non-native conifer. This has already created some fantastic habitat with an open structure of scrub and young trees, much loved by Cuckoos and Nightingales in the spring. Dingy and Grizzled Skippers have already set up home here.

Over the winter I have been working to restructure a more mature block of mixed woodland which is contiguous with the first area, providing a rare mosaic of very different wooded habitats. This more mature area already supports Purple Emperor, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary, but lacked much in the way of sunny open spaces. The rides were quite narrow and shady and the woodland itself was in urgent need of management.

Contractors had been employed to perform some thinning work over the previous winter, but this was done in the traditional manner, which involves the removal of a proportion of the trees from a compartment to a quite regular and even pattern, designed to improve both the growth rate and form of the remaining stock. However, it is a common misconception that the process is hugely beneficial to wildlife. The increase in light levels will trigger an improvement in the ground flora, but this will be short-lived, as the canopy soon starts to close again. More importantly, it does not create the larger areas of sunny habitat, nor the vital connections between them, that butterflies and many other invertebrates require.

What's more, the owners are keen to see their wood improved specifically to benefit wildlife, rather than produce a commercial crop. Given that a high proportion of the wood comprises Silver Birch, which has limited value as timber, there is little point in assisting this species to simply grow more rapidly!

In the areas I've worked on, I've taken a different approach, which involves some more traditional thinning, but focuses far more on creating joined-up open spaces. This work has included ride widening, the opening of box-junctions, the creation of glades and scallops, and the 'haloing' of the better oaks, to allow their canopies to benefit from unhindered sunshine and space. Brush left around their bases will provide fertiliser long into the future. I've also left plenty of fallows to grow on, which have traditionally been seen as woodland 'weeds' and removed by many foresters; no guesses as to why!

I'll be back here to continue the work next winter, but the wood has already changed out of all recognition. I can't wait to return in the summer months.









**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 29-Mar-20 05:55 PM GMT

Thanks for the update, Neil. I noticed you had been on the site fairly infrequently but I had no idea of the circumstances behind it.

I sincerely hope you can develop your business transforming woodland into butterfly-friendly terrain. I suspect few in the UK know how to do it better than you.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 29-Mar-20 06:37 PM GMT

Thanks, David. It doesn't really matter which flag I'm sailing under, as long as I'm saving butterflies!  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 29-Mar-20 07:01 PM GMT

**Coppicing Hazel**

Although I've had to turn my conservation work into a business, there is one long-term project which I'll continue on a voluntary basis, not least because I've already invested three years in it. Assisted by Chris Letchford of the National Coppice Federation, Paul Day and national park rangers, I recently completed (pre-pandemic restrictions) the cutting of the fourth coppice coupe in our eight year cycle on the Angmering Park Estate.

The coppicing of Hazel on this scale is rarely performed these days, and seldom in a joined-up manner with the specific aim of attracting rare woodland butterflies such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and Grizzled Skipper, all of which occur just 5km away at Rewell Wood.

Having spent so many happy days working on this and similar projects nearby, I've come to love 'Hazel coppice below standards' as much as I love chalk grassland.









**Re: Neil Hulme**

by essexbuzzard, 29-Mar-20 10:54 PM GMT

I wish you all the very best in your new venture, Neil.

And thanks for the updates, for all the work you have done, and continue to do. Sussex is a richer place because of it.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 30-Mar-20 02:14 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark, much appreciated. Plenty more to do!  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 30-Mar-20 02:30 PM GMT

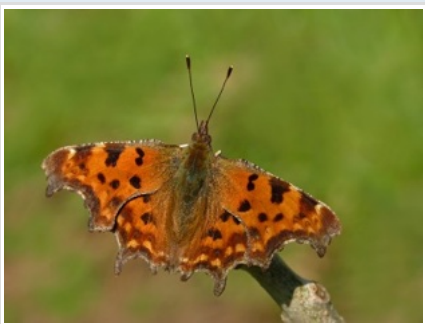
**Daily Exercise**

On Friday (27 March) I took my daily exercise on two wheels, using the old mountain bike given to me by my brother last year. It hadn't moved since then, but the opportunity to travel a little further in the hope of seeing a few butterflies couldn't be missed.

I can't recall the last time I rode a bike, but it's probably the best part of 40 years ago! By the time I'd traveled from Worthing to the top of Lancing Ring and back, I had rediscovered some muscles that I forgotten existed.

Having read some visit reports by Lindsay Morris on the BC Sussex website, I was specifically hoping to find a few Comma; I wasn't disappointed. In such challenging times even this common species provides a welcome distraction. Just being outside, in contact with nature, feels like a real treat at the moment.





**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 30-Mar-20 03:52 PM GMT

You've obviously forgotten your one time Japanese commuter bike, it's not that long ago since you hurtled around Chiddingfold forest on it! 😊

Lovely Comma shots, they've done us proud so far this Spring. It's not long now before I'll be exercising over at Abbots Wood.

Take care and stay well,  
Trevor.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Old Wolf, 30-Mar-20 08:26 PM GMT

Hello Neil, I love reading about your work. Best of luck on your new adventure 😊

Lovely shots of the Comma and enjoy those rediscovered muscles 😊 I always find that the day after they are so much more fun!!! 😊

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 01-Apr-20 01:51 PM GMT

[quote=trevor post\_id=151563 time=1585579949 user\_id=13654] You've obviously forgotten your one time Japanese commuter bike, it's not that long ago since you hurtled around Chiddingfold forest on it! 😊

Yes, you beat me to it, trevor! I remember in 2013 being all alone with a grounded PE when suddenly I heard the noise of an approaching bicycle. I stood up to prepare myself to slow the rider down, only for Mr Hulme to appear and immediately dismount when he saw another Emperor had been located! 😊

Happy days!

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 03-Apr-20 08:33 AM GMT

Many thanks, Old Wolf. I'm hoping there'll be plenty of good news to tell, once we're out of the darkness.

Hi Trevor and David. You're right; I'd completely forgotten about that machine, probably because its use was entirely restricted to the rides of Chiddingfold and Fermyn, and because it bore little resemblance to a bicycle (no brakes or gears and driven by an elastic band). Let's hope we can get out looking for emperors by any means this summer.

BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 03-Apr-20 10:21 AM GMT

Echoing your last sentence, Neil, lets hope we can!. There are species I can find locally up until May, but not Dukes, Wood Whites, Small Blues and Emperors etc. One way or another this b\*\*\*\*y virus is going to cramp our style this year.

Keep safe and well,  
Trevor.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-20 08:21 PM GMT

Good to see you're making good use of the 'exercise allowance Neil 😊 Fingers crossed we can have a butterfly summer, only 12 or so days til the peak so I've heard 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Matsukaze, 05-Apr-20 12:09 AM GMT

[quote=trevor post\_id=151675 time=1585905674 user\_id=13654] Echoing your last sentence, Neil, lets hope we can! There are species I can find locally up until May, but not Dukes, Wood Whites, Small Blues and Emperors etc. One way or another this b\*\*\*\*y virus is going to cramp our style this year.

Keep safe and well,  
Trevor.

It may have some unexpected side-effects and opportunities. Exploring the darker recesses of our garage looking for supplies of food amongst our camping equipment, I turned up a jar of shrimp paste with a use-by date of 2009. I am hoping it will encourage the Emperors to travel the 15 or so miles from the nearest colony – or maybe even a visit across the Channel from *Ilia!*

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Apr-20 09:57 PM GMT

Thanks, Trevor, Wurzel and Matsukaze.

I believe that there *are* some upsides to staying local. With restricted opportunities to travel, we may end up appreciating our commoner species more, by spending more time with them and getting to know them better. My next post provides an example of this!  
BWs, Neil

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Apr-20 09:37 PM GMT

#### Comma Courtship

For such a common and widespread species, little is known about the courtship and mating behaviour of the Comma. Most authorities simply state that pairing usually occurs high up on a shrub or in the tree canopy, and this might be true. However, my recent observations suggest that the species' courtship and mating habits are, at least on occasions, very similar to those of the Small Tortoiseshell.

On Sunday (5 April) I stopped at Ferring Rife for my daily walk, while returning from a shift as a Tesco driver. The idea was to take the linear route I have been following for many years, to count post-hibernation Small Tortoiseshells. Sadly, numbers remain pitifully low, with a total of six falling well short of the 194 I recorded here in 2013, when the species recovered to historic levels in SE England, at least for a year or two.

However, I soon became distracted by a pair of Commas. Their chase was not the high speed dash seen when males clash, climbing high into the air, but a much slower, fluttering pursuit; clearly a male and female interacting. For twenty-five minutes this went on (and quite possibly for some considerable time previously), with the female repeatedly leading the male back to the same small area of young nettles and old umbellifer stalks on the bank of the stream.

At times she would crawl deep into the vegetation, in an apparent attempt to spurn his advances. But, as with Small Tortoiseshell females, this seems to be a test of the male's resolve. The male would not give up, chasing her through the tangled stems while fluttering his wings excitedly. Time and again she would take to the air, on several occasions crossing the stream, but always returning to the marital bed she had probably already chosen.

I was beginning to doubt that this would result in a pairing, but at 3 pm she finally gave in to his prolonged wooing. The image appears to show the couple in an exposed position, but was achieved by suffering numerous nettle stings and shooting across the stream bank drop-off. They were perched about 10 cm above the ground and would have been impossible to pick out without having seen them land.

I carefully marked the spot with a stick and continued my walk. They were still there when I made the return journey and I'm sure they would have remained there until morning.

Without the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, I would probably have been chasing Large Tortoiseshells, but I went home equally as happy.



### Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 07-Apr-20 10:18 PM GMT

Really interesting to read about the courtship behaviour Neil something I'd not considered before 😊 and a fantastic image to boot 📷👍

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

### Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 08-Apr-20 09:11 AM GMT

Fascinating, Neil – I've observed the chasing behaviour and interaction before, but never witnessed the culmination. As you say, incredibly difficult to spot if you didn't know that they were there. That's a great shot to get, and definitely worth the nettle stings. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

### Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Apr-20 06:34 PM GMT

Great work, Neil. You're right, being unable to travel makes you concentrate your mind nearer to home....and for longer!

This theory regarding late-afternoon pairings does seem to have substance. I'll take note of your description of the flight patterns during all this and remember it if I happen to see similar behaviour.

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 08-Apr-20 07:00 PM GMT

Interesting description on the Comma courtship Neil.

I have seen Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas all indulge in the low level fluttering type behaviour that you describe but in every case the female has ended either giving the male the slip or up taking off at high speed with the male in pursuit. I have yet to see any of these in cop.

Also a great description of the kind of patience and field-craft required to get images of that standard.

Cheers,  
Neil.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 09-Apr-20 07:59 AM GMT

It is interesting how the wings are displayed, spaced apart. This gives them the appearance of dead leaves rather than mating butterflies. No doubt a survival strategy, less likely to become a snack for a bird, whilst vulnerable, in cop. We have all learned something from your observation, and superb image.

Stay safe and well.  
Trevor.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Sij, 09-Apr-20 09:57 PM GMT

I saw the exact same thing a few days ago....this time the pair vanished (after alot of chasing) into a dense bramble clump....this was afternoon, so i assume they mated there as they never reappeared...

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 15-Apr-20 08:37 PM GMT

Thanks, all. I just need to find a pair of mating Large Tortoiseshells now!  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 15-Apr-20 08:48 PM GMT

**Large Tortoiseshell!**

At 3.15 pm today (15 April) I made a brief stop for a vape at Beach Green in Shoreham, while delivering groceries for Tesco. I immediately noticed a large butterfly heading towards me, over an open area of green space. As it passed me, now only a couple of metres away, I realised that it was a Large Tortoiseshell!

A few have turned up in Sussex over the last week or two, and others further afield. I wonder how many more would have been spotted if we weren't locked down?

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Wurzel, 15-Apr-20 10:39 PM GMT

Great news Neil - I'll keep my eyes open when standing in the queue across the car park for the supermarket 😊😄

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 17-Apr-20 07:41 AM GMT

**Neil Hulme wrote:**

...At 3.15 pm today (15 April) I made a brief stop for a vape at Beach Green in Shoreham, while delivering groceries for Tesco. I immediately noticed a large butterfly heading towards me, over an open area of green space. As it passed me, now only a couple of metres away, I realised that it was a Large Tortoiseshell!

Excellent sighting, Neil! Who said vaping was bad for you? 😊

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 12-Sep-20 08:22 PM GMT

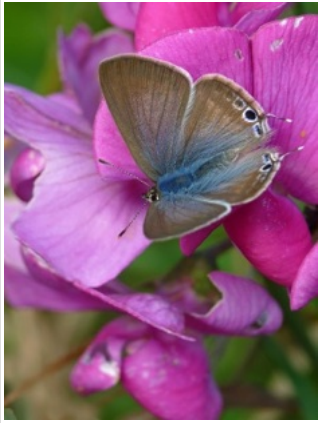
**Brighton Blues Festival (Part 1) 9.9.20**

It's been a long while since I last posted, so I'll take a retrospective look at my butterfly year when the season finally draws to a close. I've been very busy juggling my work as a Tesco driver with starting a new business as a freelance ecologist and wildlife guide (too busy to keep my diary up-to-date), but there's plenty of exciting news to catch up on. I'm pleased to say that I'm now in a position to continue my work with species such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy, by building further on my relationship with the South Downs National Park Authority and local landowners. Both species had exceptionally good seasons in Sussex.

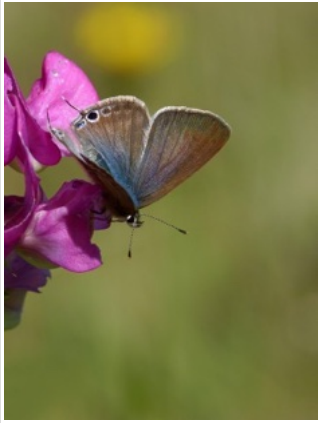
But I'll start with the here and now, where increasingly familiar events have unfolded on the outskirts of Brighton. I spent a wonderful day amongst the Long-tailed Blues at Whitehawk Hill on Wednesday (9 September), in the company of a large number of visitors from far and wide. This was also a chance to catch up with many friends who I haven't seen for a while, making the day even more enjoyable. It was also nice to meet a few enthusiasts for the first time. I think everyone went home happy!

Although difficult to count, I ended up being convinced that there was a minimum of 11 individual LTBs present, and quite probably more. On several occasions we saw bundles of 5 males in combat, with clashes of 2, 3 or 4 being commonplace, often spiralling up to great heights. There was a clearly a mix of late-wave primary immigrants (in various states of disrepair) and at least 3 Sussex-born males in pristine condition. Two Sussex-born females were also present, more of which later.









## Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Sep-20 10:12 PM GMT

### Brighton Blues Festival (Part 2) 9.9.20

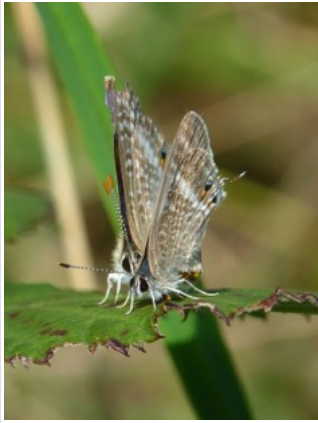
The female in my last post (which had been photographed the previous day, by Ben Greenaway) was never seen again, apparently disappearing around midday. However, in the mid afternoon I saw two Long-tailed Blues involved in a pursuit which looked rather different to the usual male-on-male chases; I immediately suspected that a female was involved. She crash-landed and appeared to be rejecting the male's advances, rapidly quivering her wings and dropping into the undergrowth. I called to Max Anderson, who was standing closeby, and he was in video mode within a split-second.

The much larger male didn't understand the word 'no' and what followed appeared brutal, to say the least. He tried to clasp her, unsuccessfully, several times, before finally locking-on and lifting her off the leaf. It was about ten minutes before she finally stopped struggling and the pair settled down to a prolonged coupling.

As in previous years (2013, 2015, 2019), Sussex/UK-born females are observed mating, but there is, as yet, no evidence of egg-laying in this brood; I believe the gravid females fly south. There appears to be much confusion on social media, and in conversation, about the status and behaviour of LTB in the UK: "are they permanently resident on some sites here?" (i.e. can they survive our winters?) ... no; "will they go on to produce another brood?" ... no, unless new evidence suggests otherwise. Reverse migration will be triggered by day-length, rather than temperature, so an Indian Summer won't tempt them to lay eggs here, although we know that the males will hang around (often until the bitter end), hoping to intercept virgin females. All of the evidence we had at the time, based on a very large body of data, is summarised in *The Butterflies of Sussex* (pp. 261-265) and I've seen nothing since which breaks from the pattern described.

Hopefully, they'll be many more to come, both here and on the better-known sites further afield.





**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 12-Sep-20 10:14 PM GMT

Great stuff, Neil, especially those females. 🍷

A certain law says the females appear the day after my last visit.

I don't think LTB's have ever been so easy to find, or so plentiful as they have been recently.

Let's hope the weather holds, not like last year when it turned for the worse just as fresh specimens started to emerge. Quality shots as usual.

Stay safe and well,  
Trevor.

P.S. Posted the above before you posted the mating pair, so another 🍷 is duel.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Wurzel, 13-Sep-20 04:36 PM GMT

Cracking set of reports Neil 🍷 – really looking forward to your retrospective 😊 What with climate change happening how much longer would you guesstimate before the LTB is a permanent species in the UK? They seem to have set up a pattern of migrating here and conditions can't be too dissimilar now to what they experience on the continent so I'm assuming (and I know that's a dangerous thing to do 😊) that eventually our winters will reach a similar meteorological 'standard' as where they're currently found on the continent and so they will be able to survive the winter?

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 13-Sep-20 08:45 PM GMT

Good to see you back, Neil.

Had you not been latched onto this latest LTB theatre I'd have been extremely worried about your welfare!! 😊

Good to see another 'outbreak' in the UK, something that is becoming ever more common.

Great images as usual and I'll look forward to reading your retrospective account of the season in due course.

All the best.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by essexbuzzard, 13-Sep-20 10:19 PM GMT

Welcome back from me too. Until the last few days, I had no idea that LTB's had arrived in GB this year.

Let's hope for better autumn weather this year, so the adults can continue to emerge.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-20 10:26 PM GMT

Thanks, Trevor. Today was even better; in fact it was one of my top ten butterflying days in 50 years of the chase! Non-stop butterfly sex and violence.

Thanks, Wurzel. LTB can only survive year-round in the Mediterranean belt of Europe, although this zone of permanent residency is clearly moving north as the result of climate warming (hence its annual forays north are now regularly reaching our South Coast). However, the degree of global warming required to make our own climate suitable for the species year-round would probably mean that we, as a species, was seriously considering vacating the planet! LTB has no diapause strategy, so breeds continually as it travels, in a manner not dissimilar to the Painted Lady. It can't survive (in the larval stage) temperatures below c.4 deg, so the talk currently rife on social media, about these colonies being permanent in the UK, fails to recognise the basic autecology of the species. Exciting as it is to see LTB in the UK, the phenomenon does rather highlight the climate crisis we're facing.

Thanks, David. I'm on the case. 😊

BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-20 10:27 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark. Get there if you can ... ASAP.

BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-20 10:52 PM GMT

**Brighton Blues Festival (Part 3) 10.9.20**

By Thursday, a minimum of 15 Long-tailed Blues were flying at Whitehawk Hill, with an increasing proportion being fresh, Sussex-born males. Only one female was seen, this being the one which was unceremoniously mated the previous today. She apparently disappeared around midday, having fed throughout the morning.

Some of the first Sussex-born specimens were already showing signs of wear and tear (LTBs typically lose their shine quite rapidly) and the late-wave primary immigrants were clearly running out of steam, with fewer now being seen.

Again, lots of visitors, and lots of smiling faces.





**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 13-Sep-20 10:54 PM GMT

Climate change could be responsible for the dearth of Small Tortoiseshells in the south. Today I felt really lucky when I was able to photograph my 5th East Sussex ST of the year. Yet from the Midlands northwards they seem to be doing well. When I was a boy they were an everyday sight nectaring on French Marigolds in our Godalming garden.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Katrina, 13-Sep-20 11:39 PM GMT

Beautiful photos. Really pleased your diary is back

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Pete Eeles, 14-Sep-20 10:00 AM GMT

Just catching up ... as others have said, good to see your diary back up and running, Neil! I really enjoy reading about your thoughts on egg-laying, reverse migration, voltinism etc.! Top stuff.

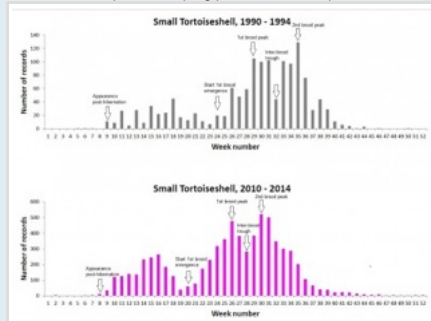
Cheers,

- Pete

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 16-Sep-20 09:03 PM GMT

Thanks, Trevor. I have little doubt that climate change is behind the demise of the Small Tortoiseshell in southern England. I've posted on this topic before, but here's the raw data which shows how the phenology of the Small Tortoiseshell has been affected, to an unprecedented extent amongst the Sussex butterfly fauna, by climate change over just a 20-year period. I believe that this has caused some changes in its behaviour and, unfortunately, some very big problems for the species.



Thanks, Katrina and Pete. Plenty more to come on Long-tailed Blue. 😊

BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 16-Sep-20 09:30 PM GMT

**Brighton Blues Festival (Part 4) 11.9.20**

The situation at Whitehawk Hill didn't change much on Friday, with a temporary status quo being established. There were still an estimated 15 individuals flying and I saw no females. Again, it was good to catch up with many familiar faces and visitors from far and wide.

I spent most of the day away from the epicentre of activity, hoping for a repeat performance of courtship and mating in one of the satellite leks, around a small patch of scrub. This didn't materialise, but I did have fun training a territorial male to land on my sweaty 2-metre pole; not words often read on a family-friendly website!

However, this was the 'calm before the storm' and Sunday provided one of the most exciting days of the 2020 butterfly season.



**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 18-Sep-20 09:24 AM GMT

**Brighton Blues Festival (Part 5) 13.9.20**

Sunday morning proved to be 'business as usual' at Whitehawk Hill, but in the early afternoon, after the majority of visitors had dissipated, the butterfly action stepped up a couple of gears; there had been a major

emergence of Long-tailed Blues that morning and they were now taking to the air. By mid-afternoon there were at least 20 individuals (probably 25) flying, including a significant number of virgin females, which were relentlessly hunted down by fresh, Sussex-born males.

Over just a couple of hours, in just one small area, three courtships and pairings were observed. I suspect that plenty more went unnoticed; it was difficult enough to observe and record what was going on with these amorous couples, much of it simultaneously.

The pattern of courtship that Max Anderson and I observed on 9 September (between a late wave immigrant male and Sussex-born female) was repeated on each occasion (this time between exclusively Sussex-born insects), with the females playing 'hard to get' and at first seeming to vigorously reject the male's advances. The females fly away from the males, in short 'hops', then flutter their wings rapidly while dropping deep into undergrowth, or apparently trying to hide below leaves. The males must pursue them with equal vigour and it takes several attempts for the male to latch onto the female with his oversized claspers. It is tempting to suggest that this ritual is designed to test the male's reproductive 'fitness'.

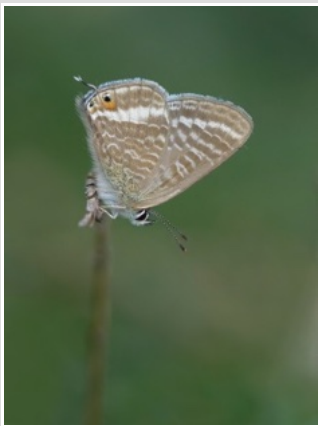
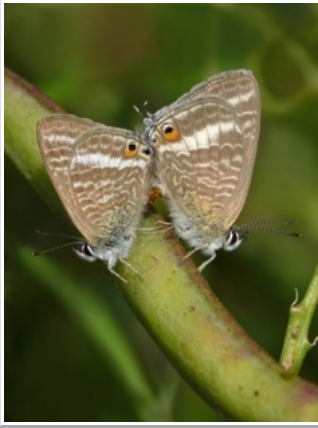
Mating occurs for approximately 45 minutes in the heat, but may last for two hours (or more) if the weather cools significantly. When the female does decide to uncouple, the process appears difficult to achieve (those claspers are strong!). There is much fidgeting, kicking and wing-quivering by the female, and she often takes short flights with the male in-tow, until separation is achieved.

It is interesting to observe what then happens to the females, which immediately begin a phase of frenetic nectaring. These individuals are often seen doing the same, the following morning, but, assuming reasonable weather, they are then never seen/photographed again. The females apparently disappear from the site around, or soon after, midday. Whereas the UK-born males will hang around, and behave in a colonial manner, gradually deteriorating in condition, the females will not. This is the pattern I've observed consistently over the eight years I've been studying the Long-tailed Blue on British soil (across Sussex and Kent).

This is one of the many lines of evidence for reverse migration in the species, much of which is summarised in *The Butterflies of Sussex* (pp. 261-265). Another, of course, is that these females do not lay any eggs on the BLEP plants in Britain, which are now dying off and won't be of any further use to the LTB, at least until the fresh buds and flowers are available to the next wave of migrants in August (occasionally late July) of the following year.









**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Wurzel, 19-Sep-20 06:27 PM GMT

Really interesting to read about the mating behaviour and stunning shots as always 🥰🌱 Thank you for answering my previous question – it's made me look again at the LTB incursions and now instead of elation about possibly (one year) being able to photograph them on UK soil I'm viewing them as an indicator species and starting to see them as harbingers of doom 😞😞

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 20-Sep-20 06:19 PM GMT

Many thanks for the informative commentary, Neil. Learning about the behaviour of butterflies (especially those many of us are largely unfamiliar with) is extremely helpful.

Lovely accompanying images as ever. 🌱🥰

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 21-Sep-20 09:41 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and David.

Amongst all the Sussex sites, Whitehawk Hill has proven to be the best for studying the behaviour of Long-tailed Blues on British soil. There were still approximately 20 individuals flying today, although they are now widely dispersed.  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 21-Sep-20 09:58 PM GMT

**A Break From The Blues**

On Saturday (19 September) I led my penultimate Knepp Wildland safari of 2020. There's always plenty of interest here throughout the year, whether that be Purple Emperors, Cuckoos, Turtle Doves, Nightingales or the wonderful animals. However, the White Storks, which successfully bred this year, are a firm favourite with the visitors. The Red Deer rut, which involves Knepp's gigantic stags, is next on the hit list.

In the afternoon I visited a private garden in East Sussex, where two *gorganus* Swallowtail caterpillars were recently spotted on some potted parsley plants. One had already gone walkabout, looking for a pupation site, but I was just in time to see the second.

On the way home I stopped off at the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves. These reserves have far more to offer than just butterflies, and I found three Adders in just 15 minutes, including a beautiful black example.





**Re: Neil Hulme**

by millerd, 23-Sep-20 09:01 AM GMT

That's a splendid Swallowtail caterpillar, Neil. It does make you wonder how many more there might be lurking in vegetable gardens along the south coast... 😊 All it needs is for them to find one another when they emerge next spring.

I imagine we know more about the behaviour and habits of the Long-Tailed Blue from your observations of its now-regular incursions to the UK than was perhaps known worldwide before! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Allan.W., 23-Sep-20 05:05 PM GMT

Hello Neil, On the subject of Swallowtails , someone in the Rye area of Sussex ,found 8-9 Swallowtail caterpillars on Fennel in their garden ,and took them to the Rye Harbour nature reserve ,where most (or possibly all !) successfully pupated ,and are being kept for release next year .....this was on someones blog ,but i can,t for the life of me ,remember who,s !!  
Regards Allan.W.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Pete Eeles, 23-Sep-20 07:31 PM GMT

[quote=Allan.W. post\_id=158428 time=1606877101 user\_id=13628]this was on someones blog ,but i can,t for the life of me ,remember who,s !!

[https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/swallowtail-diary?utm\\_source=Sussex+Wildlife+Trust+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=7671b85df0-20\\_August2020&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_9f7e3b5ad3-7671b85df0-233861949&mc\\_cid=7671b85df0&mc\\_eid=9dff843170](https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/swallowtail-diary?utm_source=Sussex+Wildlife+Trust+Newsletter&utm_campaign=7671b85df0-20_August2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9f7e3b5ad3-7671b85df0-233861949&mc_cid=7671b85df0&mc_eid=9dff843170)

Cheers,

- Pete

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Allan.W., 23-Sep-20 07:48 PM GMT

Well done Pete ! Thanks for that ! Allan.W.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 23-Sep-20 11:02 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...the White Storks, which successfully bred this year, are a firm favourite with the visitors.

No surprise there, Neil. Absolutely majestic birds...even the branch jutting out to the right of the nest looks like it's paying homage to them! 😊

Good to see a few Swallowtail larvae have been discovered. I don't recall any adults being reported earlier in the year. It's hard to know how such an imposing butterfly goes incognito.

How do you manage to find these black adders? I've yet to see one even though these snakes are pretty common in the Swansea area.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 25-Sep-20 12:07 PM GMT

Thanks, Dave, Allan, Pete and David.

I think there's plenty known about the Long-tailed Blue from around the world, but the real lessons being learned are about what's happening at the very northerly limits of its annual movements. For me, the exciting part is the increasingly large body of evidence for a return flight south, at least by the gravid females. I don't believe that this is a fruitless adventure northwards, as has been widely suggested in the past.

We have seen a few adult *gorganus* Swallowtails reported along the South Coast this summer but, as always, the majority will go unseen or unreported. Only recently I spoke to someone who had seen the butterfly in Deep Dene this year, but hadn't reported it anywhere. A few more larvae have recently been discovered in the Hastings area. I suspect there are far more out there than we realise.

Black Adders seem to be more localised than rare, perhaps reflecting the isolation of some populations. On one site, a few years back, I saw five Adders in a morning; all were black!

BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 25-Sep-20 01:25 PM GMT

**Brighton Blues Festival (Part 6) 17.9.20 & 21.9.20**

The emergence of fresh, Sussex-born females (and a few more males) continued during the period between 'Super Sunday' (13 September) and my next visit to Whitehawk Hill. I'm aware of one pairing on 14 September, and a further three on 15 September! However, things had quietened down again by 17 September, when I saw only about 15 individual males, none being in pristine condition.

21 September was more productive, with a minimum of 20 LTBs flying, including two fresh males and one female. The latter butterfly was tiny (about the size of a Small Blue), with an unusually dusky upperside and lightly marked marbling on the underside. She was last seen being pursued over the allotment fence by a male.

A few freshly minted LTBs have been seen since 21 September, by others, but the emergence will now inevitably slow down, as temperatures drop sharply. However, the rewards for persistence, on warmer days, will still be there for some time yet.

Much of the credit for the spectacular emergence at Whitehawk Hill this year must go to Brighton & Hove City Council. Last year, this site produced very few LTB, despite the large influx along the SE coastline. This was because (due to logistical problems with livestock fencing) the grassland was grazed at the wrong time of year for the species, removing all of the Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea foliage just before the immigrant wave arrived. Following discussions with the local ranger, the council got the timing of the grazing spot-on this year. At some point over the winter or spring, the Herdwicks will return, to give the site the thorough graze it needs.



**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 27-Sep-20 07:09 PM GMT

Great to see this continuation, Neil.

Whilst this particular location has been especially productive in 2020, there aren't similarly good numbers reported from elsewhere. Is there a reason for this?

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by bugboy, 29-Sep-20 07:28 PM GMT

**David M wrote:**

Great to see this continuation, Neil.

Whilst this particular location has been especially productive in 2020, there aren't similarly good numbers reported from elsewhere. Is there a reason for this?

I would say this sites apparent productivity has in part been magnified by social media. Whilst they are around on other sites, once these ones started appearing on facebook and twitter etc it just lead to more people turning up to further fill social media which in turn attracted more people and so on. The site itself, being a hill, also meant that the males hung around hilltopping and lekking, so made easy pickings for their many fans. I'm sure Neil will be able to give a more detailed reply when he's able 😊

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 29-Sep-20 09:08 PM GMT

Thanks, David and Paul. Social media has certainly drawn a closer-than-ever focus on Whitehawk Hill, but there are other factors which have influenced the distribution of sightings.

The main one is that the influx of immigrants all-but-missed a large part of the East Sussex coastline this year; they just didn't make landfall (in any numbers) around Newhaven and Seaford – they were searched for, thoroughly, by expert witnesses. I know of just a single egg being found at Tidemills. However, they certainly occurred in significant numbers further east, at the usual haunt near Dover.

On some sites (e.g. Beeding and Southwick), the hot summer caused the BLEP to burn through very early in the season, providing little breeding habitat for the immigrant wave.

At other sites (e.g. Lancing Station and adjacent areas) the BLEP was either deliberately sprayed off or cut back, to deter butterfly-watchers. I won't comment further on this, as I'm sure we all think the same about such acts.

However, even across the stretch of coastline along which many LTB arrived (certainly Bognor to Brighton), many will have gone unrecorded. Odd ones were recorded at highpoints such as Cissbury Ring and Mill Hill, and there was a small cluster seen at Lancing Ring by Lindsay Morris and others. The truth is, as always, that many people tend to follow people, rather than butterflies.

BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 29-Sep-20 09:20 PM GMT

**Knepp Beasts**

As always at this time of year (and come to think of it, at every other time of year), I've been spending as many hours as possible at the Knepp Wildland project. The Red Deer rut is now underway and will be followed by the Fallow from mid October onwards.

I don't see them on every visit, but it's always a pleasure to come across the Tamworth Pigs. These animals, perhaps more than any others at Knepp, are drivers of vegetation change, caused by their constant rootling and disturbance of the ground. As you can see from the facial expressions, Knepp animals are happy!





#### Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 05-Oct-20 11:14 PM GMT

##### Neil Hulme wrote:

Thanks, David and Paul. Social media has certainly drawn a closer-than-ever focus on Whitehawk Hill, but there are other factors which have influenced the distribution of sightings.

The main one is that the influx of immigrants all-but-missed a large part of the East Sussex coastline this year; they just didn't make landfall (in any numbers) around Newhaven and Seaford - they were searched for, thoroughly, by expert witnesses. I know of just a single egg being found at Tidemills. However, they certainly occurred in significant numbers further east, at the usual haunt near Dover...

Thanks for the response, Neil. It's interesting to see how this 2020 migration correlates with those of previous years. I expect we'll learn a lot more as the time passes by, because this does seem to be a phenomenon that is becoming an almost annual event.

#### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-20 10:47 AM GMT

Thanks, David.

Even though the *Brighton Blues Festival* is over for another year, there are still fresh adults emerging. Recent poor weather cleared out all of those numerous individuals which were flying a couple of weeks back, but I did see a single, freshly emerged male yesterday (9 October), which I failed to relocate after 12.30 pm. I suspect that most adults still to hatch will have a bleak future, as temperatures are unlikely to reach 14/15 degrees for some while.

BWs, Neil

#### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-20 11:01 AM GMT

##### Knepp Red Rut

One aspect of my new freelance role, which is highly rewarding, is assisting in the filming of wildlife documentaries. Recently, I've been covering the Red Deer rut at Knepp with a very gifted cameraman. No 'spoilers', but suffice to say there'll be some spectacular stuff hitting our TV screens in a couple of years time. These stills just don't do justice to the sort of action-packed footage we've achieved; while we're working, my own camera stays firmly in its bag.







### Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Oct-20 09:50 PM GMT

#### Neil Hulme wrote:

...One aspect of my new freelance role, which is highly rewarding, is assisting in the filming of wildlife documentaries. Recently, I've been covering the Red Deer rut at Knepp with a very gifted cameraman. No 'spoilers', but suffice to say there'll be some spectacular stuff hitting our TV screens in a couple of years time.

I shall look forward to that, Neil. If it's to be two years in the making, it must be a fairly comprehensive piece of work.

Shame about the outlook for any October-emerging LTBs. Not surprising, I guess, as this is Britain, not France, and the idea that our mid autumn is suitable for a Mediterranean species of butterfly to thrive is fanciful to say the least.

### Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Oct-20 08:32 PM GMT

#### 2020 Retrospective

Having been too busy to post much this year, until the Long-tailed Blues provided a fabulous finale, I'll be summarising the best of the season over the next month or two.

I'll start by rewinding to April, when it became evident that life might never be the same again; Covid-19 was no longer a foreign problem. Like many, I found this unknown enemy to be a real worry, particularly for people of my parent's generation. With car travel restricted to essential tasks and 'work only', and before short car journeys were deemed acceptable prior to taking exercise, it was a case of 'on your bike' if you wanted to venture any further than on foot.

I simply had to get out to some bluebell woods; there's surely no better sanctuary in times of reflection. This involved some long, sweaty bike rides, but it was worth the effort to find peace and tranquility, while the world seemed to become enveloped in madness.

I only managed a couple of visits to Angmering Park Woods, bearing in mind the effort required, but I pledged to return at every possible opportunity during the 2021 flowering season. I think the pandemic has probably focused everyone's minds on what is truly important in life.





**Re: Neil Hulme**

by trevor, 30-Oct-20 08:59 AM GMT

Once the coming Winter has finished with us I think we will all appreciate scenes such as those more than ever. What your images can't convey is the scent of those bluebells wafting through the Spring air. Magic! 😊

Great stuff Neil,  
Stay safe and well,  
Trevor.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Wurzel, 30-Oct-20 08:37 PM GMT

A beautiful and timely antidote to the dreadful drear outside Neil 😊 Fingers crossed we can enjoy similar scenes next year without similar restrictions 😊

Have a goodun and stay safe

Wurzel

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 07-Nov-20 10:38 AM GMT

Thanks, Trevor and Wurzel. I think we need a new national holiday to celebrate the Bluebell season.  
BWs, Neil

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 07-Nov-20 11:54 AM GMT

**Rowland Wood, Past And Present**

Before returning to my 2020 retrospective, I'll take the opportunity to look back at the huge changes which have occurred on the BC Rowland Wood reserve over the last few years, prompted by a visit on Thursday (5 November). I was there (as part of my freelance work) to direct a contractor, who was mowing the ride network and some of the other permanent open spaces. Both Rowland Wood and the adjacent Park Corner Heath looked magnificent in their autumn colours, and I'm confident that habitat conditions over the entire area are now rapidly moving towards the ideal state.

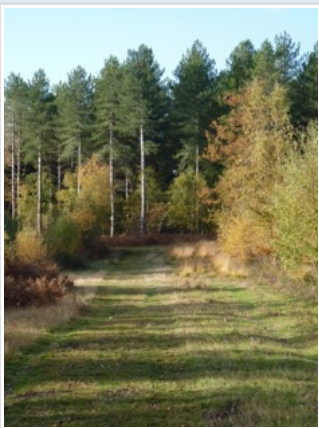
When I later looked back at photos taken immediately after the major restructuring work, performed just a few years ago (2017), it really brought home just how remarkable and rapid the transformation has been. The first four images show how things looked as new rides and open areas were created. This came as a shock to some people, with a few choice comments about wholesale habitat destruction – that's perhaps understandable if you don't understand how habitat creation works; fortunately, most kept faith.

The speed at which Mother Nature can work never ceases to amaze me, despite having been involved in many similar projects over the years. Rowland Wood can already boast a total of 38 butterfly species, including Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary (both reintroduced), Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Wall, Green Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak, some of which are recent natural colonisers. We've also had some guest appearances by Large Tortoiseshell and Long-tailed Blue.

There have also been many other beneficiaries amongst our fauna and flora; Park Corner Heath has always supported an impressive reptile population, but the eastern part of Rowland Wood is now home to many Adders and Grass Snakes. The site is also fantastic for dragonflies and damselflies, although the former are rather too effective at preying on rare fritillaries for my liking.

After the misery of 2020, I suspect that these reserves will bring a much-needed antidote next year; I'm already dreaming of warm spring days here.









**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 12-Nov-20 03:38 PM GMT

Those are highly evocative 'before and after' images, Neil. In the beginning, it all looks rather like a scene from trench warfare, but as you say, nature has phenomenal powers of recovery, and looking at the 2020 images you'd scarcely believe how things were just three years previously.

Good luck with your further endeavours.