

Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-Mar-10 08:39 PM GMT

This diary is a continuation of my original blog which can be found at: <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/blog.php?u=3>

Cheers,

- Pete

11th March 2010

by Pete Eeles, 11-Mar-10 02:33 PM GMT

I had a great start to the day - seeing my first butterfly of the year - a Small Tortoiseshell flying frantically across my driveway. I was very surprised that it was a Small Tortoiseshell, since they've not done that well in my local patch over the last few years. Hopefully things are picking up for them.

After my disappointment at failing to find any Purple Hairstreak eggs at my two favourite sites this winter, I'd just about given up. I took the dogs for a walk this morning and we found a field that is on the opposite side of the road from a housing estate, and 200 yards from my house. A line of oaks border the field and one had partially collapsed, giving easy access to the south-facing branches that were still very much alive and had wonderfully-plump buds! After 30 minutes I'd found 7 Purple Hairstreak eggs and confirms my suspicion (in my mind, anyway!), that I've seen hairstreaks flitting around the tops of oaks in the middle of the estate. Made my day.



Oaks and dogs



A collapsed oak



Plump oak buds

12th March 2010

by Pete Eeles, 12-Mar-10 03:28 PM GMT

I decided to go back to the same site as yesterday, this time armed with a "proper" camera to get some shots of the Purple Hairstreak ova. I think I've finally found a setup that works (I've tinkered with all sorts before now and never really been happy)! Here goes – the equipment is as described in my updated photography report (http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/reports_photography.php):

Canon 30D
150mm Sigma macro with 3 extension tubes
Ring flash (mounted to one side of the subject)
Tripod
Remote cable release
Wimberley "plamp" (an essential piece of equipment for photos of immature stages!)
ISO 200
Shutter speed of 3 seconds
f11 aperture

The reason for the slow shutter speed was to get the right mix of flash and ambient light – to the point that the flash is barely noticeable (I hope!). Anyway – I'm pleased to say that this setup gives better results than anything I've managed with my 105mm Sigma macro, which will now be going on sale 😊

The photos below show the contrast between a "clean" egg and one that has been discoloured by algae. In fact, I only found the latter when the twig it was on broke off and I took a closer look in case there was an egg there – which there was! This is now in safe keeping and the larva will be put back on the tree once it emerges.



Egg laid at the base of a pair of oak buds



Close up of the same egg



Close up of a discoloured egg

26th March 2010

by Pete Eeles, 26-Mar-10 09:42 PM GMT

What a week! I've now seen Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral and Brimstone this year, interviewed Richard Lewington (watch this space – I had a wonderful time and managed to get everyone's questions asked!) and am currently attending the BC Symposium. Many superb presentations and I wouldn't know how to start summarising. So I won't, but will write up a brief account when the symposium concludes on Sunday. Very full days, a joy to attend, and exhausting! Being surrounded by the "who's who" of the butterfly world, with experts from the UK, Netherlands, France, Hungary, Japan, USA, south America and even Australia is very very humbling. I've come away with the feeling that we're all pushing in the same direction which is quite uplifting.

Cheers,

– Pete



Richard Lewington – a man at work!



Sir David Attenborough opening the BC Symposium

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 13-Apr-10 05:18 PM GMT

At last! A proper trip out. Despite the cool breeze, I thought I'd take the dogs out to a local site, not expecting very much at all. However, the sheltered conditions around Midgham Lakes (SU561658) provided spots that were noticeably warmer than their surroundings. The result - 11 Orange-tip (10 male, 1 female), 2 Green-veined White, 1 Small White, 1 ovipositing Brimstone, 11 Peacock (most feeding on sallow flowers), 2 Comma and 1 Red Admiral. Spring has sprung!

Cheers,

- Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Apr-10 04:39 PM GMT

A return trip to Midgham Lakes on the way home from work gave me sightings of 6 male Orange-tips, some heading for a roosting spot every time the sun went in!

Cheers,

- Pete





Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 19-Apr-10 03:27 PM GMT

A trip out to the Butterfly Conservation reserve at Magdalen Hill Down came up trumps with sightings of 11 Grizzled Skipper, 5 Green Hairstreak, 6 Orange-tip (all male), 5 Brimstone (2 male, 3 female), 4 Peacock and "a white" (that didn't stop). Nice to see several other UKB and Hants BC members there! The Grizzlies were difficult to find in the often-breezy conditions, but weren't so bad once you had "gotten your eye in", and realised that they were all sheltering at the bottom part of the reserve. Some observers had also seen a couple of Speckled Wood, which evaded me on this visit.

Cheers,

- Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 23-Apr-10 07:43 PM GMT

I spent a couple of hours relaxing at the Hartslock reserve near Goring, a site known for its orchids. The mild breeze meant that most butterflies were found in sheltered areas, but I managed to notch up 2 Green Hairstreak, 12 Grizzled Skipper, 6 Dingy Skipper (my first of the year), 2 Peacock (both very warn), a single Small Tortoiseshell that had set up its territory in a section of the main path, 7 Orange-tip (all male), 5 Brimstone (2 male, 3 female), a Green-veined White and, most surprising of all, a single Painted Lady! On the moth front I saw 4 Burnet Companion, a single Mother Shipton, a single *Pyrausta aurata* and either *Pyrausta cingulata* or *Pyrausta nigrata* (unfortunately, I didn't manage to get a photo). All in all, a worthwhile trip for sure!

Cheers,



Grizzled Skipper



Dingy Skipper



Burnet Companion

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 30-Apr-10 09:53 PM GMT

I had an hour or so this morning to get out - and returned to Midgham Lakes. Although the weather was turning, I decided to venture out anyway. As it happened, there were prolonged periods of sun!

I managed to get my first sightings of both Speckled Wood (12 seen) and Holly Blue (1 male seen) for the year. One Speckled Wood, in particular, was extremely territorial, launching itself from its perch at every passing insect before returning back to its "patch"; the intersection of two paths and in full sun. The handful of Green-veined Whites seen were all male, and one was extremely small and clearly the result of an under-developed larva.

But the highlight was seeing a ridiculous number of Orange-tip. I saw over 30 males, along with 4 females, confirming this particular site as a real hotspot for this species. At one point I just waited next to the nearest Garlic Mustard plant and waited for them to come to me! I also managed to find quite a few Orange-tip eggs and one particular patch of foodplant had an egg on just about every flowerhead. On occasion, I found 2 eggs on the same flowerhead, so removed one to breed through at home (and release next year), given that the larvae are cannibalistic. Some patches of foodplant also had a large number of eggs laid on the leaves just below the flowerhead, presumably because the seed pods weren't developed enough for the female to lay there.

All in all - a welcome diversion from a ridiculously-busy week at work 😊

Cheers,

- Pete



1st May 2010

by Pete Eeles, 06-May-10 07:50 PM GMT

Some photos from 1st May. Despite the cold breeze, I managed to find a male Orange-tip sheltering from the wind, nicely camouflaged on a Garlic Mustard flower head. Meanwhile, back home, the captive Orange-tip larvae are starting to hatch.

Cheers,

- Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 06-May-10 08:23 PM GMT

That last shot in particular is amazing, Pete. 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 06-May-10 08:36 PM GMT

Thanks Susie. It takes quite a while to get a rock-solid platform so that any vibration is minimised, but having the mount on the collar of the Sigma 150mm lens I use (to attach to the tripod, rather than the mount on the camera body) makes a big difference.

Canon 30D
Sigma 150mm macro
Off-camera flash
Remote shutter release
Tripod

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 06-May-10 08:38 PM GMT

Mount on the collar. I'll try and remember that. Thanks.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 10-May-10 04:51 PM GMT

Just back from a weekend away to see my niece get married in Malta (and had a marvellous time) !!! It turns out that one of my sister's nephews (Michael Sammut), who I last met around 15 years ago, has grown up into a full-blooded Lepidopterist and Ornithologist, although I'm not sure I can take any credit! At that time, I remember my fascination with butterflies "got around" and I was invited, with Michael, to visit a family friend – Anthony Valletta – who happened to be the region's Lepidoptera expert (and a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society and author of the island's first book on the butterflies of the Maltese islands). I remember being shown an extensive collection housed in large wardrobe-like cabinets (which are now looked after by his son since Anthony passed away several years ago) as well as a selection of livestock. After a good long chat at the wedding exchanging stories, Michael gave me some tips regarding good locations on the island for butterflies.

While many were nursing their hangovers on Sunday, and with my family settled in at the beach (which, uncannily, was right next to a certain recommended nature reserve 😊), I headed for the hills for a couple of hours to see what I could find. I notched up several species, including Eastern Bath White, Small White, Small Heath, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Clouded Yellow, Wall and Common Blue. But the highlights were finding a small colony of Lang's Short-tailed Blue and several Swallowtails hill-topping. I also managed to find a female Swallowtail ovipositing around a very plush area of Fennel (which is a common weed on the island), giving away her intentions by flying noticeably slower than the ever-mobile males. The pale yellow eggs were remarkably easy to find after the female had flown off. I also forgot to take a hat and currently look like a red snooker ball, according to my youngest son 😊

Back home after an early-morning flight and while out looking at some local elms I've "discovered" this spring, I managed to find my first Comma larva of the year.

Cheers,

– Pete



Lush Fennel Plants



Swallowtail



Ovipositing female Swallowtail



Swallowtail ovum



Swallowtail ovum close up



Comma larva about to undergo a skin change

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 12-May-10 06:02 PM GMT

A quick jaunt to the Hartslock nature reserve near Goring (famous for its orchids) gave me my first Small Heath (British!) and Small Copper for the year. Still very cool at the moment, but the occasional Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak showed their faces. Hope warmer weather reaches us soon! The skippers are starting to look a little worn, with hairless thoraxes in some cases!

Cheers,

- Pete



Small Heath



Small Copper - record shot!



Not-so-hairy Dingy Skipper

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-May-10 07:51 PM GMT

Botany Bay

I managed to get a couple of hours at Botany Bay (part of the Oaken Wood complex) in Surrey this morning - target species was Wood White. I really wasn't sure if they would show themselves because it was really quite cold - just 11 degrees according to the thermometer in my car. I walked to the spot where Wood White are typically found and the temperature was noticeably warmer. No sooner had I thawed out when a Wood White launched itself into the air just below my feet! This was the start of a very memorable time, with 14 Wood White seen in total, along with 3 Brimstone (2 male, 1 female), 1 Holly Blue (male), 2 Green-veined White (both male) and 4 Speckled Wood. The clouds were quick to arrive, but there was always intermittent

sunshine. This resulted in perfect conditions for seeing Wood White, where they would constantly fly while the sun was shining, and then go to roost as the sun went in and temperatures dropped. As a result, I managed to catch them resting on a variety of plants, allowing me to experiment with some artistic poses!

One weird sighting was of a male Wood White that can only have emerged that morning. This species doesn't fly particularly strongly at the best of times, but this particular chap was behaving like a concussed snail on drugs 😊 Anyway, it settled, only for another male to land next to it, which then proceeded to start the courtship display of tongue-flicking and wing-flapping! Suffice to say, his efforts were in vain. All in all, getting out whatever the weather seems to pay off more often than not!

Cheers,

- Pete





Re: Pete Eeles

by lee3764, 14-May-10 08:52 PM GMT

Brilliant & very artistic photos Pete! 😊 What a wonderful & dainty species the Wood White is!
Lee Slaughter.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-May-10 06:44 PM GMT

Thanks Lee – I also tried some backlit shots, but they didn't come out as well as I'd hoped, although this one ain't too bad! The equivalent shown above was taken when the sun wasn't shining.

Cheers,

– Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 16-May-10 09:22 AM GMT

Pete

I used to go butterflying with Anthony Valletta in the early 1970s while visiting Malta when in the RAF and have many happy memories. In those days I was much more mobile and used to get around the island on the bike I had taken with me in the back of a C130 Hercules. On one occasion I even had a bike ride at 25,000 feet while on the way there!

One evening I was invited to have dinner with Anthony and wife and he showed me numerous Swallowtail chrysalides on walls, picture frames, woodwork and other places to where they had “escaped” much to the irritation of his long-suffering spouse.

I have been on holiday in Malta twice in the past couple of years. I love the place and its friendly people (despite the hobby of bird shooting, seemingly slowly dying out). I didn't see that many butterflies during recent visits but did come across Geranium Bronze in three widely separated locations. Lang's short-tailed Blue is in the hotel garden (The Phoenicia just on the outskirts of Valletta) presumably breeding on plumbago.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 16-May-10 09:29 AM GMT

It's a small world! Yes – Michael also mentioned the Geranium Bronze infestation that has swept across the island! Good for them!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

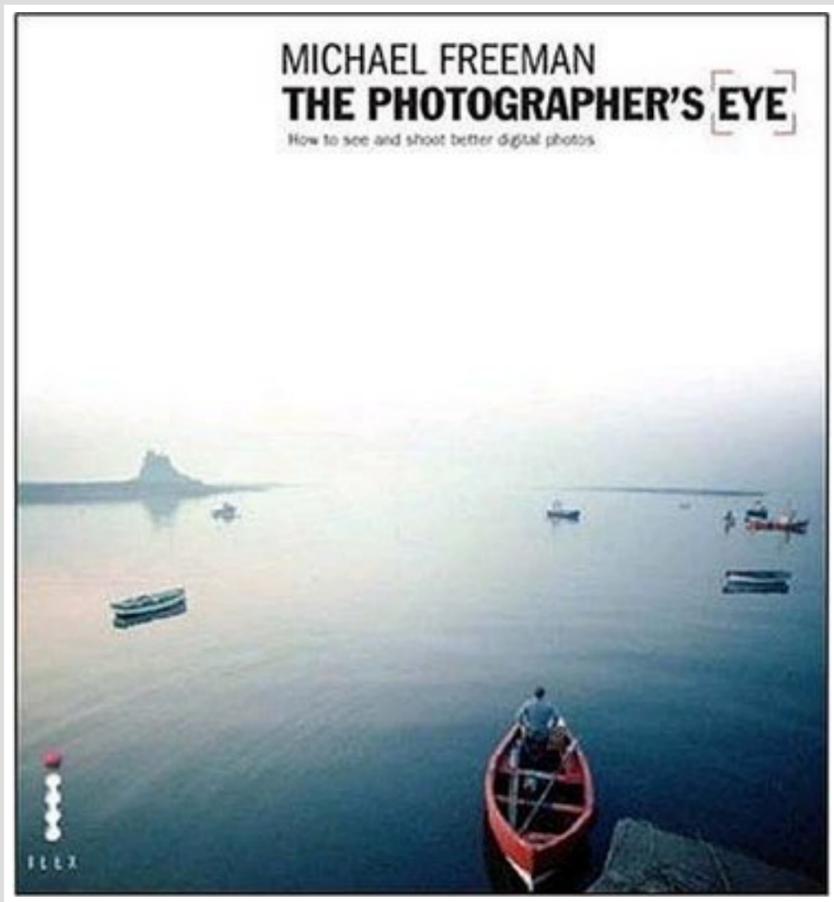
by Pete Eeles, 17-May-10 08:40 PM GMT

The Photographer's Eye

One of my favourite photography books is "The Photographer's Eye" by Michael Freeman. It focuses on composition and discusses not only lines, curves and the like, but also colour (and which colours work well together). A newly-emerged female Duke (the result of an egg I bred through last year) gave me the opportunity to try different poses and colour schemes - before she was safely released where she came from. The combination of advice from the book, and advice from John Bogle (Fishiee) and others at the 2010 photography workshop, all came into play. Result below. I'll definitely be getting up early from now on to catch the critters while they're still roosting 😊

Cheers,

- Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Rogerdodge, 17-May-10 09:19 PM GMT

Pete

Stunning image.

I wish I had taken it (you don't get higher praise than that!)

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 17-May-10 09:20 PM GMT

Really lovely. 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-May-10 08:45 PM GMT

Thanks both ... 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-May-10 09:10 PM GMT

Hants and Wilts

Probably the best day I've had so far this year for butterflying! After a dismal day yesterday with 100% grey skies for the better part of the day, I woke up to a cloudless sky. I was in the car within 15 minutes 😊 My first port of call was Bentley Wood, where Gary (Gruditch) had tipped me off that the Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers were the best for several years. He wasn't kidding! Unfortunately, I arrived at 0845 and the males were already very active and none settled for photos, so I resigned myself to finding ovipositing females and mating pairs. I managed to find 4 ovipositing females who seemed to lay on pretty much anything but the foodplant! Eggs were laid on grass stems, bracken, bramble, dead leaves and one, just one, on Dog-violet! But the numbers were quite something – just standing in the same spot in the eastern clearing, I'd have 3 or 4 passing by me every couple of minutes!

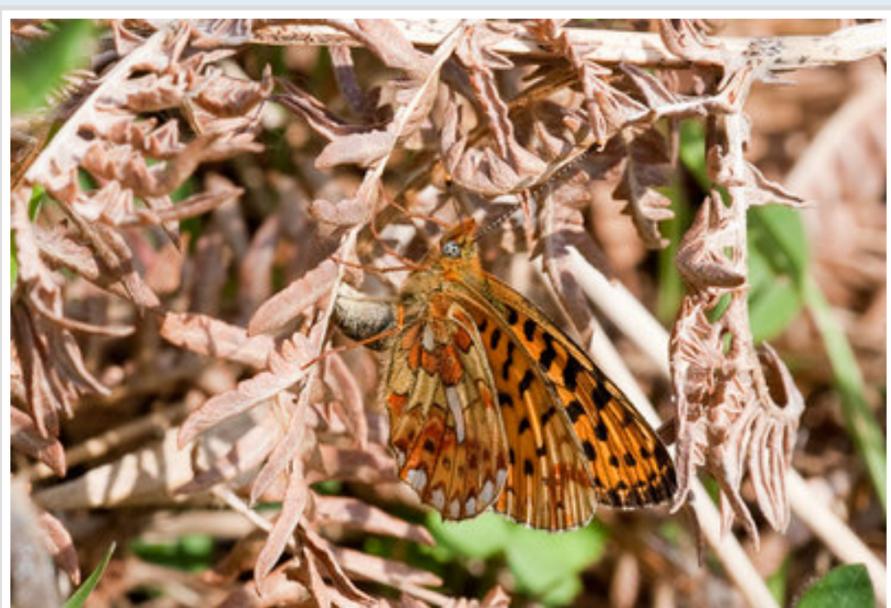
I met up with "Tony from Sheffield" as well as Ashley Whitlock, the Purple Emperor and Duke of Burgundy coordinator for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight branch of Butterfly Conservation. Now, I've never seen a Duke of Burgundy in Bentley Wood before, and was amazed when Ashley pointed one out to me – right in front of us! Possibly the highlight of the day, given the dire straits this particular species is in. And Ashley assures me he hadn't brought it with him! We also saw the very local Argent and Sable moth – looking very much like a miniature Marbled White! We also saw a couple of active Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary – although neither stopped for photos. Several Brimstones were also around, with females ovipositing on the abundant Alder Buckthorn. My tip for the year is "never add extension tubes to your camera in the field" – lots of "dust spot removal" in the images below!

A quick jaunt over to a copse within a Wiltshire Wood then revealed a good number of Marsh Fritillary at this very sensitive site. Devil's-bit Scabious carpeted the floor and bodes well for the future of the Marsh Frit. here.

Heading back home, I decided to stop at a woodland clearing near Stockbridge Down, and am very glad I did! Numerous Duke of Burgundy were flying at this private site, together with double digits of very fresh Brown Argus, together with several male Common Blue – both firsts for me this year. But the "piece de resistance" was an almost-white Dingy Skipper, and my first aberration of the year.

Cheers,

– Pete



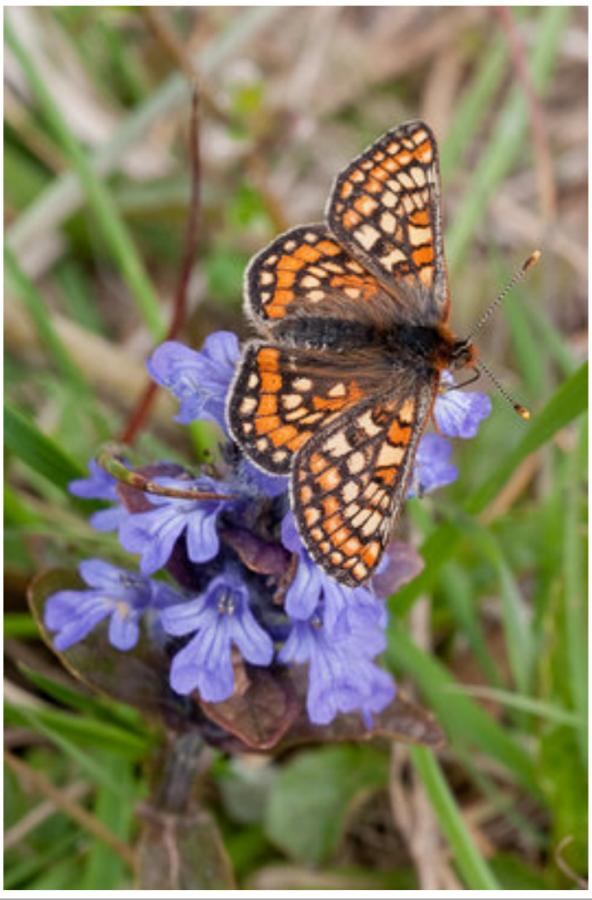
Female Pearl-bordered Fritillary ovipositing on Bracken



The resulting egg



Brimstone ovum



Marsh Fritillary



Marsh Fritillary underside



Duke of Burgundy



Duke of Burgundy underside



Brown Argus



Brown Argus underside



Common Blue



The Ghost of Dingy Skippers Past

Re: Pete Eeles

by Bill S, 21-May-10 10:22 PM GMT

Lovely images Pete, the Duke from the 17th is excellent.

Cheers

Bill

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 22-May-10 06:16 PM GMT

Thanks Bill!

Hampshire and Isle of Wight New Members' Day

The day started off with a quick visit to Magdalen Hill Down. I have to say, the numbers of Brown Argus are like I've never seen before – I counted over 100 individuals on the lower slopes of the original part of the reserve in 15 minutes, including 4 mating pairs – most of which were being hassled by other males. Several females had only just emerged and would undoubtedly have ended up with deformed wings, given the attention they were getting as their wings dried.

I then went on to the new Holiday Inn that has been built, just up the road, to support the Hants and Isle of Wight new members' day, where I presented on the butterflies found within the area covered by the branch. This was followed by presentations from Robin Turner (website), Dave Green (recording), Lynn Fomison (gardening for butterflies and moths, and reserves) and Tim Norriss (the moths of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight). All ably hosted by Roger Buchanan, the branch chairman.

The afternoon was spent back at the BC reserve at Magdalen Hill Down where, following a picnic lunch, we split into groups for a tour of the site. As well as extraordinary numbers of Brown Argus, there were also good numbers of Common Blue, and the occasional Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper. Orange-tip, Brimstone, Peacock and Red Admiral also put in an appearance. 2 Small Blue, my first of the year, were also seen. Also nice to bump into UKB members Clive and Shirley on the reserve! All in all, a really great time, and a pleasure to welcome around 30 new members to the branch – including the younger generation, which is always great to see!

Cheers,

– Pete



Picnic on the down among the Cowslips!



Mating Brown Argus



Mating Common Blue

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-May-10 03:58 PM GMT

Martin Down

With the current heatwave, I thought I'd get to Martin Down at a ridiculously-early 0730 and still get to work on time! The Adonis Blue are starting to emerge in force, with over 30 males seen and 4 found expanding their wings, having just emerged from the pupa. I also found 2 females, one of which was surprisingly worn. I found that a great way of finding newly-emerged adults was to follow those that were flying, since they were much more adept at finding things rummaging in the short turf! I also saw good numbers of Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Small Blue, Green Hairstreak, Small Heath, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Brimstone, together with single sightings of Peacock, Orange-tip and Small Copper.

Unfortunately, while sitting watching an Adonis Blue male crawling up a grass stem to expand its wings, I heard a mighty crash behind me. I turned around to find my camera on the deck, and my beloved 150mm macro lens in pieces, literally 😞 Hopefully it won't take too long to fix. But don't expect any photos for a while 😊

Cheers,

- Pete



Adonis Blue



Adonis Blue expanding wings



Small Blue

Re: Pete Eeles

by Rogerdodge, 24-May-10 06:10 PM GMT

Ouch.....

Pete I really feel for you. I remember, a few years back, the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach when my beloved Sigma 180 macro decided to split in two following years of hard use.

I sent it off to those nice people at the Sigma repair centre (in Milton Keynes if I remember correctly) and got it back, better than new, in only about 10 days.

Chin up old boy.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-May-10 07:06 PM GMT

Thank you sir! Their service centre seems pretty responsive so far (i.e. they answer the phone and give sound advice – seem to know their stuff).

I'm pretty much out of action now until the 14th June anyway. I was hoping to spend some time at Glasdrum Wood this week but my meetings in Scotland got canned today 😞, and I'm in the US the week of 7th anyway. What could possibly be big news next week? Given the current emergence, quite a lot I suspect 😞

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 24-May-10 08:28 PM GMT

One significant advantage of a Box Brownie is that when you drop it, you don't cry quite as much – you simply buy a new one for the equivalent cost of the repair of a DSLR macro lens.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-May-10 08:55 PM GMT

I think going from a DSLR to a Box Brownie (whatever that is!) would make me cry more 😞

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 24-May-10 09:04 PM GMT

Pete:

I think going from a DSLR to a Box Brownie (whatever that is!) would make me cry more 😞

Oh dear. Very sad that you can't appreciate its advantages 😞



Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-May-10 09:06 PM GMT

Oh – I have one of those already, made from a cardboard box and a pin 😊

I just didn't realise anyone still used them.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-May-10 03:48 PM GMT

I spent some time today working on a replacement macro capability! With help from Gary (Gruditch, thanks mate!), my 100–400mm "dust pump", with

extension tube, is now functioning as a very heavyweight macro lens! Went out to a local common to try it out, but could only find some female Broad-bodied Chasers with no butterflies in sight! This setup should tide me over for a while, although I can make out a couple of large dust spots, no doubt of Martin Down origin, so will have to get the body professionally cleaned, unfortunately.

Cheers,

– Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 27-May-10 08:20 PM GMT

White-letter Hairstreak story

I've been rearing a few White-letter Hairstreak from ova this year, and the first larva has just pupated, so time to tell the story through pictures! First, the egg, looking very much like a saucer from outer space which over-wintered, with a fully-formed caterpillar inside.



Ovum

Unfortunately, I failed to get any decent shots of the 1st instar larvae, as they immediately headed for the elm flower buds and seemed to disappear completely! However, the 2nd instar larvae were more-exposed, although perfectly camouflaged against the flowers and developing seeds (and they were quite variable in colour).



2nd instar larva



2nd instar larva

The 3rd instar larvae were also quite variable in colour, but started to move in earnest from the flower buds and developing seeds to the leaves – most of which weren't out yet. The last photo in this series shows how the larva plunged its neck into the developing buds and scooped out the contents – you can see an exit hole at the top! This photo is almost identical to an illustration in Frohawk's classic "The Natural History of British Butterflies". I'm wondering if this behaviour happens in the wild or, as so often happens, growth is accelerated in captivity (despite being kept outdoors!).



3rd instar larva



3rd instar larva



3rd instar larva



3rd instar larva

The final instar seemed to lose most of their variegated colouration, being a more-even green to match an elm leaf. The shape of the larva perfectly matched the outline of the elm leaves it fed upon.



4th instar larva



4th instar larva

The colour changed as the time to pupate arrived, when the larva turns a very dull green.



4th instar larva

And finally, the pupa is typically formed on the underside of a leaf, or on a twig, attached by a silk girdle and the cremaster.



Pupa

Can't wait to see the adults!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 27-May-10 08:25 PM GMT

Fantastic, Pete! Your larvae are well ahead of the one I found today. I look forward to your pictures of the adults emerging!

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 27-May-10 08:44 PM GMT

"padfield" wrote:

Fantastic, Pete! Your larvae are well ahead of the one I found today. I look forward to your pictures of the adults emerging!

Guy

Thanks Guy – and a word of warning – watching immature stages can be addictive!

For some reason, individuals I breed in captivity, irrespective of species and location in my garden, always seem to feed up at an accelerated rate. I can only put it down to the relatively-sheltered conditions (essentially, the larvae are enclosed on all sides!).

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Matsukaze, 27-May-10 10:32 PM GMT

The 4th instar larvae have a remarkable resemblance to a newly-developing wych elm leaf. Like the purple emperor, this is another species where the larva is a master of disguise at all stages.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 28-May-10 04:43 PM GMT

Lardon Chase / The Holies

I managed to get out for an hour this morning, so went to the National Trust sites near Streatley. Among the many Common Blue and Small Heath, I managed to come across a small number (3 !) male Adonis Blue. The brilliant blue of the males is unmistakable when the males are flying alongside Common Blues!

Cheers,

– Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 31-May-10 07:40 PM GMT

The Holies

With the promise of half-decent weather, I went back to The Holies, a really wonderful site! Unfortunately, the weather didn't play ball and, despite a record emergence of Adonis Blue here (and, by all accounts, across the country), I had to make do with roosting Common Blue which, when the sun shone for a brief nanosecond, opened their wings:)



Meanwhile, back home, the Orange-tip I've been rearing are all in their final instar, and a couple have already headed off to pupate (somewhere!).



Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by ChrisC, 31-May-10 11:16 PM GMT

crikey, i have 3 OT caterpillars on my garlic mustard and they are nowhere near probably less than 1cm at the moment. well camouflaged little beggars they are too 😊 It was down to your initial post showing the eggs that i looked for them. weather looking better after the soaking we're in for tomorrow. Chris

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 02-Jun-10 06:11 PM GMT

Adonis Blue fest

Given the recent reports of "explosions" in numbers of Adonis Blue, I decided to visit a Wiltshire chalk downland site to see what all the fuss was about, especially since I'll miss all the fun next week while working in the US. Now I know. I arrived at the site at around 0745 and, despite the cloud cover, found 10s of adults roosting in the long grass found on south-facing banks, along with carpets of Horseshoe Vetch (the larval foodplant). It's really difficult to put into words the sights that unfolded, but watching literally hundreds of blue gems open their wings as the sun eventually broke through is something I don't think I'll forget as long as I live. At one point, standing in one spot, I managed to count 78 adults. If I multiply this figure up to cover the whole site, we're talking over 1000 individuals. I was gobsmacked then, and am gobsmacked now as I write this!

One particular highlight was seeing female Adonis Blue in large numbers, something I've never experienced before, where I was able to observe individuals ranging from almost complete brown, through to almost complete blue, and everything in between. This particular visit has made my year and it wasn't so long ago that I was desperate to get a photo of a female Adonis Blue! I also saw a few Small Blue at the same site, and my first Large Whites of the year.

I stopped off at Bentley Wood on my way home, where the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary also seems to be having a good season.

All in all - very happy 😊

Cheers,

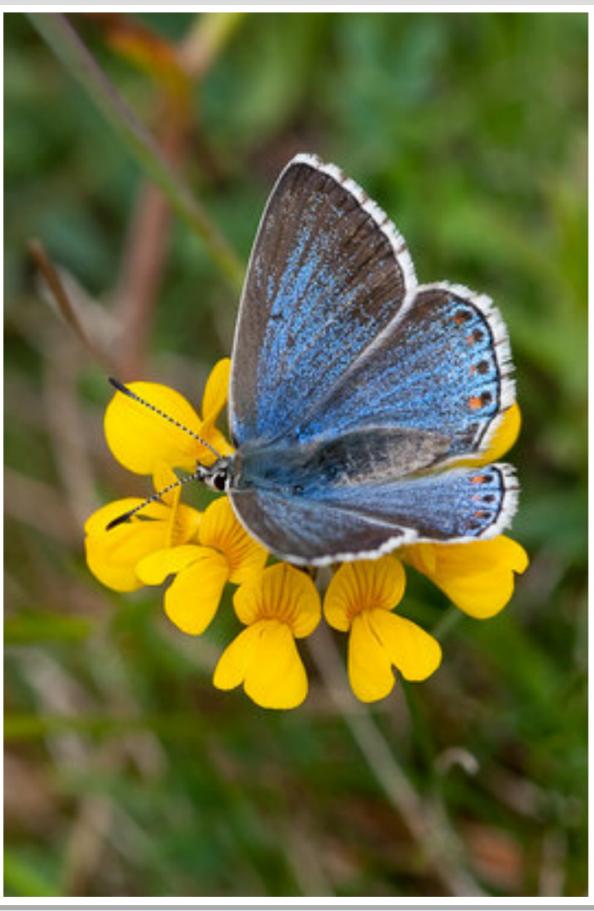
- Pete



Adonis Blue male



Adonis Blue female



Adonis Blue female - rather a lot of blue!



Adonis Blue mating pair



Small Blue



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (male)



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (female)



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (female)

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 03-Jun-10 08:54 PM GMT

Colin the Common Blue

I had a good sortout of my captive-rearing projects today, since I'm away next week with work in the US. If they don't let me through passport control I won't be disappointed, given the current activity on the butterfly front 😊

Anyway – another species I've reared this year is Common Blue. The larval stage was fascinating, as the larvae would fall off the Bird's-foot Trefoil at the slightest disturbance, making them very difficult to photograph, especially as it would take an absolute age for them to crawl back onto the plant. One thing that puzzled me is where the larvae were pupating – so today I took a look. The only possible location was under the soil and so, using a fine artists' brush, removed the topsoil to reveal several Common Blue pupae, each nestled in the most-fragile of cocoons, with just a few strands of silk holding them together. Given that these have been bred in captivity, I wouldn't draw too many conclusions from this. Of course, I've given strict instructions on where to release any adults that emerge while I'm away.

More projects to be revealed in due course.

Cheers,

– Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Rimo, 04-Jun-10 01:17 AM GMT

That matches where I've found Common Blue pupae before, both captive-bred and in the wild – matches both Adonis and Chalkhill blues too

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 04-Jun-10 05:49 PM GMT

Thanks Rimo!

Another Adonis fix

I couldn't resist it – and had to go back to see more Adonis Blues this morning! I stopped off at Gary and Lisa's (Gruditch and Gwenhwyfer's) to see the wonderful job they've done in producing the 2011 UKB calendar as well as a superb set of prints, the photos of which have been contributed by UKB members – really amazing. I'm tempted to buy a print of one of my own photos which, I think, says it all! Make sure you catch up at one of the events that UKB is supporting this year, including the Longstock Nursery Buddleja Collection open day on 24th and 25th July, the AES Exhibition, the Hampshire BC branch AGM and the BC National AGM (in Cambridge). Details to follow.

Anyway – I digress 😊 So – I spent a couple of hours deliberately looking for Adonis aberrations given the numbers of butterflies. Unfortunately, the all-blue female Adonis I was hoping to see materialised, only to disappear as quickly as it appeared! So no photo. However, aside from the many mating pairs (including several pairs where the female was still expanding her wings, having just emerged), I did find an extraordinary variety of colouring in the females, including the regular dark brown, partially blue, almost all blue, blue with a distinct male sheen (see below) and brown with prominent red spots extending to the forewings. As you can tell, named aberrations isn't my strong point – I'll leave that to Felix (Piers)!

Cheers,

- Pete



Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 13-Jun-10 07:01 PM GMT

Back in Blighty!

After a week away in the US, I landed back in the UK on Friday and within a few hours was heading off to Stratford-upon-Avon to celebrate my in-laws' 50th wedding anniversary. This morning we decided to visit the Butterfly Farm which, I have to say, is one of the best I've ever visited! Quite a few different species flying and also a good number of larvae and pupae to see – including some that fill in gaps on UKB. Unfortunately, I only had my compact with me – but the shots are probably "good enough".

Just as we were leaving we noticed a Malachite flying in the grounds near the entrance. Another escapee for sure! It's easy to see how butterflies can "hitch a ride" to escape the greenhouses!

Cheers,

– Pete



Monarch larva



Monarch larva



Julia larva

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 13-Jun-10 07:33 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Just as we were leaving we noticed a Malachite flying in the grounds near the entrance. Another escapee for sure! It's easy to see how butterflies can "hitch a ride" to escape the greenhouses!

The most surreal experience I have ever had was six years ago to the day when I visited Stratford Upon Avon with my husband to celebrate our wedding anniversary. We walked by the river on an exceptionally hot sunny day and there was a regatta taking place, as people punted along in fancy dress these large metallic blue butterflies swooped and glided just above the water. Only years later did I work out they were probably blue morpho and escapees from the butterfly house and that I wasn't hallucinating! 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Jun-10 08:01 PM GMT

BMNH – British Museum of Natural History

A wonderful day spent in the company of Piers Vigus ("Felix") visiting Geoff Martin, Lepidoptera Collections Manager at the Natural History Museum. Not only did we interview Geoff (watch this space), but were also given access to the largest Lepidoptera collection on the planet and a supreme example of our national (and international) heritage! Another lifelong dream for me fulfilled. The interview will appear in due course, and with the paperwork complete, I can share a few images with you. And many thanks to Geoff for a brilliant day – a "top bloke" for sure.

Cheers,

– Pete



There are fewer crowds midweek!



The collection is now housed in airtight containers below ground



A randomly-selected drawer contained Orange-tip bilateral gynandromorphs



My first British Large Copper. Absolutely huge – at least 50% larger than "batavus" – the size of a Small Tortoiseshell



Geoff and Piers examining a selection of Purple Emperor aberrations



A selection of Purple Emperor aberrations

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Jun-10 02:32 PM GMT

Hairstreak Fest

I've been rearing several hairstreak species this year – and they all decided to emerge over the last couple of days! The Purple Hairstreak larvae that I brought to the UK Butterflies photography workshop have all successfully emerged as adults, and have all been returned from whence they came. Although a little early, I managed to rear through 2 male and 2 female, so I hope they find one another. I was up at a ridiculously early hour to see if I could get some decent shots, and was very lucky to get a male and female sitting next to one another.

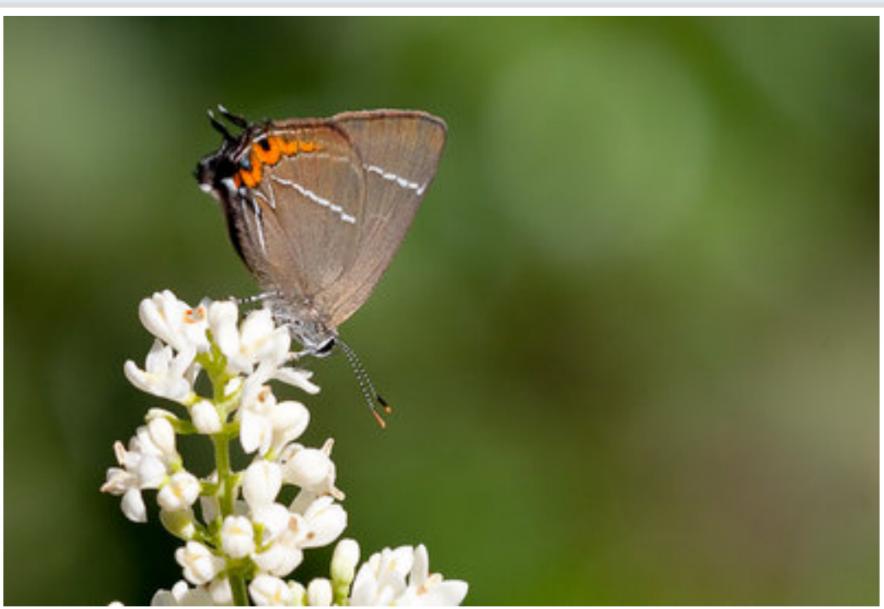


Female Purple Hairstreak



Mr and Mrs

As mentioned in a previous post, I've also been rearing White-letter Hairstreak. Again, they've all successfully emerged and are now inhabiting a row of elms not that far from my house. It'll be interesting to see how they fair. Again, a little early for this species.



White-letter Hairstreak

I've also reared through a small number of Black Hairstreak. At least these critters are in synch with the wild populations.



Black Hairstreak

And, of course, I couldn't resist attempting a shot I've always wanted to get, although highly unlikely in the wild – White-letter and Black Hairstreak sitting side by side. These shots were taken while the adults were feeding up on Privet blossom, and before they were released. These photos really show how badly-named the Black Hairstreak is, when it's much lighter than the White-letter. But at least I now have a decent shot showing this side-by-side comparison.



White-letter and Black Hairstreaks



White-letter and Black Hairstreaks

I have to say that captive rearing is both very rewarding and exhausting – just like children! I'm now looking forward to a nice rest – just one more species being reared this year. Details will follow in due course!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Trev Sawyer, 17-Jun-10 03:01 PM GMT

Oooh, *Niice!*

They would be *very* useful on the identification pages to show the differences (I'm sure you already had that in mind when you were breeding them). I love the pair of Purple Hairstreaks and the last shot of the White-Letter and Black Hairstreaks together is brilliant. Like you, I was amazed at how different the colours are. Never normally seeing the two together it is hard to imagine just *how* different they are. Reminds me of a Spitfire and a Hurricane 😊

I would like to get photos of Purple Hairstreaks in the wild this summer and may have to spend a day sitting on a wooden platform above the oak trees in Norfolk sometime before the kids break up from school.

Trev

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Jun-10 03:27 PM GMT

"Trev Sawyer" wrote:

They would be very useful on the identification pages to show the differences (I'm sure you already had that in mind when you were breeding them).

Absolutely - but more luck than anything planned! 😊

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Jun-10 03:33 PM GMT

Silchester Common

I decided to pay a visit to Silchester Common this morning, on the lookout for Silver-studded Blue. Once I'd found the right spot, they were everywhere, an estimated 40 in total, with several mating pairs, as well as several adults drying their wings, having just emerged. I didn't see that many black ants, although would loved to have seen some in attendance! I also bumped into Graham Dennis, warden of Silchester Common and Pamber Forest, and had a good natter about the season. Great company 😊

Cheers,

- Pete



Silver-studded Blue female



Silver-studded Blue male



Silver-studded Blue male drying wings



Silver-studded Blue mating pair

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 17-Jun-10 05:01 PM GMT

Just a thought. You say captive-reared w-album are generally early developers. Might it be that when you rear them in captivity the caterpillars are at a higher density than in nature, and aware of this, pheromonally? They might accelerate their development to increase their chances of competing on emergence.

The wild w-album I've been observing this year are at a very low density indeed. An unnaturally high density might signal an unusually populous year, with corresponding increased competition for resources.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Jun-10 05:19 PM GMT

Interesting thought, Guy. I'm afraid I have no answers. Although the larvae had more-than-enough foodplant (to the point that they never met!), pheromonal behaviour isn't something I took into account.

I think a much more likely explanation is the relatively-sheltered conditions in my garden, resulting in above-average temperatures throughout the larval stage. They certainly weren't being blown around in the cold wind!

Cheers,

- Pete

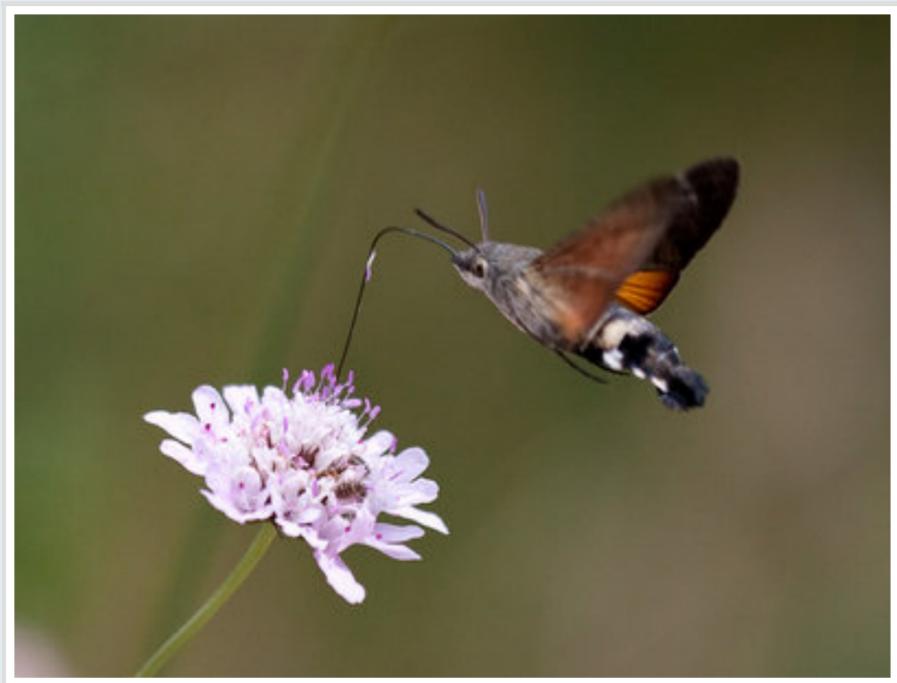
Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jun-10 05:37 PM GMT

Spain - Day 1 (Saturday)

I'm currently in Spain with the usual crowd - based near Tremp in the north East of the country. The trip here was uneventful, with everything running on time for a change, which gave us plenty of time to investigate various sites as we travelled from Barcelona airport to Casa Guilla in Santa Engracia (<http://www.casaguilla.com/>). Since I have quite a few photos to process, I'll just include a selection for each day for my fellow UKB-members back home.

First off, really good numbers of Hummingbird Hawk Moth (yes, I know it's a moth!). Plenty of time to practice getting a decent shot and, before anyone tells me, I realise this isn't one 😊



Another noticeable feature are the numbers of hairstreaks we're seeing. False Ilex Hairstreak are in ridiculously large numbers, and I've never seen so many Blue-spot Hairstreak before either.



False Ilex Hairstreak



Blue-spot Hairstreak

And finally, one of my favourites, the always-obliging Spotted Fritillary.



Spotted Fritillary

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jun-10 05:57 PM GMT

Spain - Day 2 (Sunday)

Today we decided to visit Abella de la Conca, a village nestled in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Despite the breezy conditions, we managed to find some "hotspots" nestled in various gorges. We found good numbers of quite a few species (a fuller report will follow in due course), but there are noticeable numbers of Bath White and Clouded Yellow. We also came across familiar species, such as Scarce Swallowtail, as well as some Spanish specialties, such as the Spanish Purple Hairstreak.

Cheers,

- Pete



Bath White (male)



Clouded Yellow (mating pair)



Scarce Swallowtail



Spanish Purple Hairstreak

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 20-Jun-10 06:22 PM GMT

Bath White photographed like that shows just how beautiful it is. Lovely photo (as indeed are all the others).

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jun-10 09:45 PM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

Bath White photographed like that shows just how beautiful it is. Lovely photo (as indeed are all the others).

Jack

Thanks Jack. It's amazing how the "simplest" of critters appears absolutely beautiful both "in the flesh" and digitally. I guess that's why we love them so much 😊

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

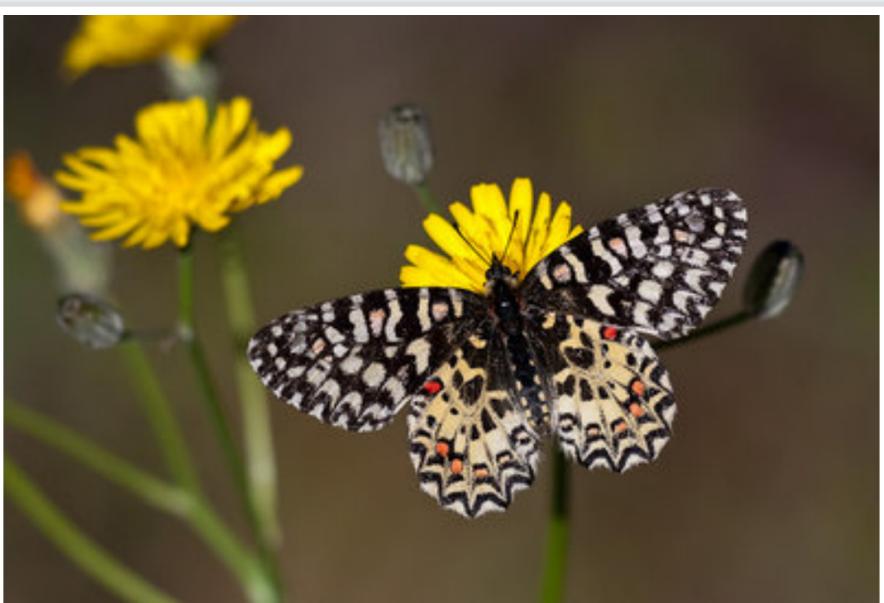
by Pete Eeles, 21-Jun-10 10:41 PM GMT

Spain - Day 3 (Monday)

Today we spent 8 hours in the (very) hot Spanish sun - mad dogs and Englishmen and all that! We visited various sites around the town of Sort, around 30 kms north of Tremp. We managed to look at various flower-filled meadows at various elevations, resulting in quite a variety of species seen. Some specialities are shown below, although I've also included a very colourful female Adonis Blue, photographed in the last couple of hours of sun on the longest day of the year.

Cheers,

- Pete



Spanish Festoon



Iberian Marbled White



Moroccan Orange-tip



Adonis Blue (female)

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 22-Jun-10 10:22 PM GMT

Spain - Day 4 (Tuesday)

An extremely hot day today, spent in a river valley at Reserva del Congost del Mont Rebei – essentially a nature reserve that sits in a valley gorge and absolutely stunning scenery. Despite notching up quite a few new species today, The temperature resulted in an overactive butterfly population for the vast majority of the day so very few photo opportunities, Anyway, a few from today below.

Cheers,

– Pete



Great Banded Grayling



Pale Clouded Yellow (female, and possibly Berger's Clouded Yellow!)



Black-veined White - an old favourite

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-Jun-10 09:56 PM GMT

Spain - Day 5 (Wednesday)

Today we decided to go to higher altitudes - specifically, the Mountains above Lessui. Unsurprisingly, we found a different range of fauna including a number of *Erebia* species, new fritillary species (such as the Twin-spot Fritillary) and a plethora of blues and other species "mud puddling" next to the mountain streams. All in all, a great day out!

Cheers,

- Pete



An Erebia species



Twin-spot Fritillary



Mud-puddling Blues

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-Jun-10 10:08 PM GMT

Spain - Day 6 (Thursday)

A relatively-quiet day visiting a local site in Rivert before heading up into the hills to Creu de Perves. European species seen included Amanda's Blue, Spanish Heath and Turquoise Blue. We also managed to find our first Swallowtail larva. Unfortunately, tomorrow is our last day and we're torn between revisiting sites and venturing further afield (and spending several hours in the car!).

Cheers,

- Pete



Amanda's Blue (female)



Spanish (Chestnut) Heath



Turquoise Blue



Swallowtail larva

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 24-Jun-10 10:22 PM GMT

Great pics, Pete!

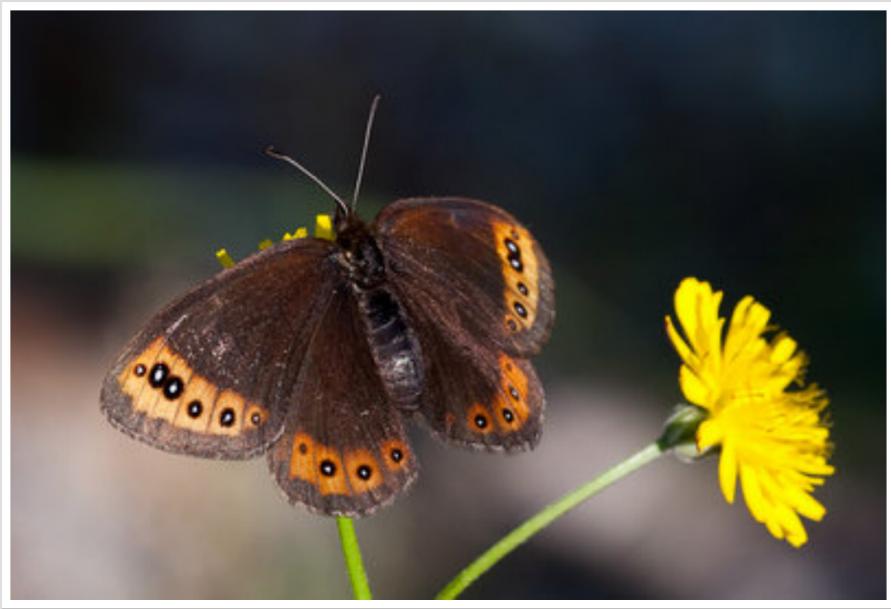
I go for *triaria*! That spot is too much in line for *meolans* and is frequently that far off line in *triaria*. Unfortunately, the characteristic unh is mostly hidden in your picture, but it looks good to me.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Jun-10 09:59 PM GMT

Thanks Guy – and thanks for your suggestions on where to visit! Another view of the Erebia is:



Rest assured, we have a shedload of images that will, in time, require ID 😊

Spain – Day 7 (Friday)

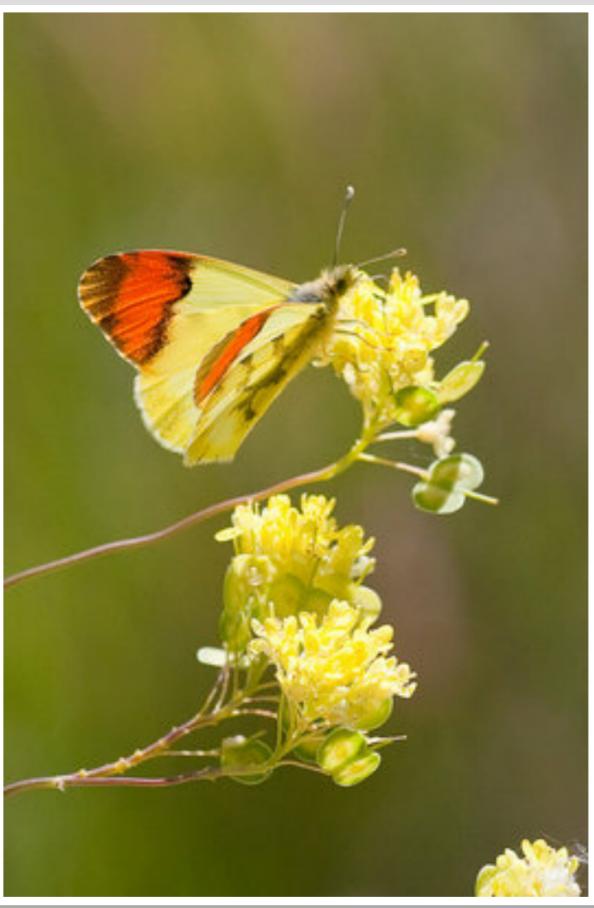
The last day of our trip was spent revisiting relatively-close sites – the 5 hours in the car required to get into the "deep" Pyrenees and back being too much for most! The main port of call was Abella de la Conca. Some images below. All in all, a great week with a provisional listing of over 100 species! That's all folks – complete report to follow in due course!

Cheers,

– Pete



Spanish Gatekeeper



Moroccan Orange-tip



Provencal Fritillary (we think!) recently emerged, with meconium still showing on the tip of the abdomen



Scarce Swallowtail – couldn't resist another shot – this time mud-puddling

Re: Pete Eeles

by Zonda, 26-Jun-10 04:32 PM GMT

Astounding pics Pete, have a good one. I love that Spanish Chestnut Heath. 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 26-Jun-10 06:38 PM GMT

I agree – I'm in awe of your pictures, Pete!

But that's *phoebe*, not *deione*... 😊

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 26-Jun-10 11:57 PM GMT

"padfield" wrote:

But that's *phoebe*, not *deione*... 😊

What would we do without you? Thanks Guy 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-10 07:11 PM GMT

Pamber Forest

I managed to get out for a couple of hours this morning and visited one of my favourite sites, Pamber Forest. I have to say, the habitat has been managed superbly with many new areas opened up for the woodland butterflies. I saw around 25 White Admiral which seem to be having a good year, 40+ Silver-washed Fritillary, 4 next-generation Green-veined White, 10+ Large Skipper, 4 Small Skipper, a single male Brimstone, 4 Comma, 3 Speckled Wood, 2 Marbled White, 20+ Meadow Brown, 30+ Ringlet, 1 male Large White and a deformed female Purple Hairstreak that seem to only fly a couple of feet before crashing into the undergrowth!

Cheers,

– Pete



Male Silver-washed Fritillary



Female Silver-washed Fritillary



White Admiral



Deformed female Purple Hairstreak

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-10 07:20 PM GMT

Eddie the Emperor

I promised photos of one more project this year – saving the best till last, arguably 😊 I managed to successfully get all 3 Purple Emperor larvae I've been rearing through the winter, although I lost sight of 2 of them over the winter and was pleasantly surprised when they showed up! I'm still wondering where they hibernated. This species is a master of disguise in the immature stages! Some shots below – all 3 are now back where they belong – 2 males and 1 female.

Cheers,

– Pete



Final instar larva



In close up



Preparing to pupate. The larvae spend 2 days in this position, creating a silk pad, before turning around 180 degrees and spending another 2 days in that position, before ultimately pupating



Male Upperside



Male Underside

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 01-Jul-10 07:55 PM GMT

Beautiful Pete! How come your caterpillars are guzzling in the sun while mine were hidden away in the shade? Did you move the branches for the pictures?

I'm very interested to know what time your pupae hatched. I will have to get down to the woods early one morning very soon and I don't want to miss it.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-10 08:09 PM GMT

You're quite right, Guy – the larvae seem to spend most of their time in full or partial shade (hence the preference for shaded willows when the female is egg-laying). What you can't see from the photo is that the "seat leaf" is in full shade. This critter had decided to take a trip to the local fast-food diner before returning home – which was in partial shade. As you can see, I moved the branch doing the shading for the shot – well spotted! I've also twisted the branch containing the larva preparing to pupate in order to get a better shot.

I've replied in the other thread regarding emergence times.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 05-Jul-10 06:58 PM GMT

Pamber Forest – again!

I'm determined not to let the summer pass me by, taking every opportunity to get out! I visited Pamber Forest again this lunchtime in order to find some *obliterae* White Admiral aberrations that I'd seen in flight on Saturday, knowing that this species is more-easily found nectaring in the middle of the day and afternoon than in the morning. Although I failed in this mission, I did see not one, but two, valesina Silver-washed Fritillaries – a form that I've never seen in the forest before! This more than made up for the lack of *obliterae*!

Watching this form in flight is quite lovely since it behaves in a slightly-different manner to the normal form, preferring more shady places when flying and nectaring! The first female I saw was nectaring and, before I could get a decent shot, flew up into the air to be immediately courted by a male, subsequently landing high in a bush before mating, where I let them be! Fortunately, I found another nectaring not too far away and managed to get the shots I was after!

Silver-washed Fritillaries are everywhere in the forest at the moment, but there is a definite "hot spot" where I saw 8 mating pairs in total and the characteristic courtship flight continuously on display – where the female flies in a straight line and the male repeats a cycle of flying under, in front of, and over the top of the female while showering her in pheromones from the androconial scales in his sex brands (the dark bands on the forewing of the male). I've yet to see any ovipositing females – they're clearly saving that spectacle for my next trip 😊

Cheers,

– Pete



Silver-washed Fritillary female f. valesina



Silver-washed Fritillary female f. valesina



Silver-washed Fritillary female f. valesina with incoming male -showing the colour contrast



Silver-washed Fritillary female being pursued by 3 males!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-Jul-10 06:27 PM GMT

Purple Fills the Air at Bentley Wood!

After much indecision given the gloomy weather this morning, I decided to pay a visit to Bentley Wood, arriving just before 11am. There were already quite a few enthusiasts in the eastern car park that had already seen a Purple Emperor flying around the tree in the car park. Fortunately, the weather eventually picked up.

It was good to meet up with several friends and I spent my time at Bentley Wood in the company of Roger Buchanan (Hants BC Chairman) and Maurice Pugh. I also met Dan Hoare, the BC regional officer for the area, who had organised an event for BC HQ, who turned up in force to see the work that Dan has been helping with. Good to meet the bunch again!

After the usual chit-chat that starts such meetups, we were on our way! At the crossroads at the end of the "switchback", we had our first Emperor on the deck who refused to stay in a spot long enough for any decent photos, but it was wonderful just seeing this magnificent creature "doing its stuff" and behaving so predictably, circling anyone that moved before flying up into the trees and then back to the deck, always sniffing out potential sources of minerals on the ground.

Once that chap had had enough of us, we wandered south, seeing several White Admiral and many Silver-washed Fritillary as we went, including my first Gatekeepers of the year. Coming to the end of a track we noticed an Emperor circling close to the ground, clearly looking for a place to alight. It eventually landed on its target - a selection of pastes that had been placed on a log, that some other enthusiast must have used at some point. But the "fermentation" of this concoction certainly did the job, with that particular Emperor staying with us for a good 10 minutes. As we were photographing that chap, another flew by, and then another, which decided to settle on Roger's camera bag for a couple of minutes!

With our memory cards filled, we were already on cloud nine and started to head back to the car park, when some other enthusiasts called us over to show us yet another Emperor in all its glory on yet another paste-infested log! Marvellous! This time, the chap had very prominent red markings on its costa (the leading edge of the forewing) - possibly an aberration?

As we walked back to the car park, we found yet another obliging Emperor on the deck, with two busloads of BC employees heading directly towards us - and him! We signalled for them to stop, before they all got out to get a close-up view of a Purple Emperor - a first for some of them! But it was wonderful hearing Martin Warren's commentary on this species as it sat there, feeding, oblivious to the 30 or so people watching it!

All in all - a great morning out after all! I stopped off at Stockbridge Down on the way home, seeing many Marbled White, a few Dark Green Fritillary and the first of this year's Chalkhill Blues for this site. Second brood Brown Argus and Small Copper were also about.

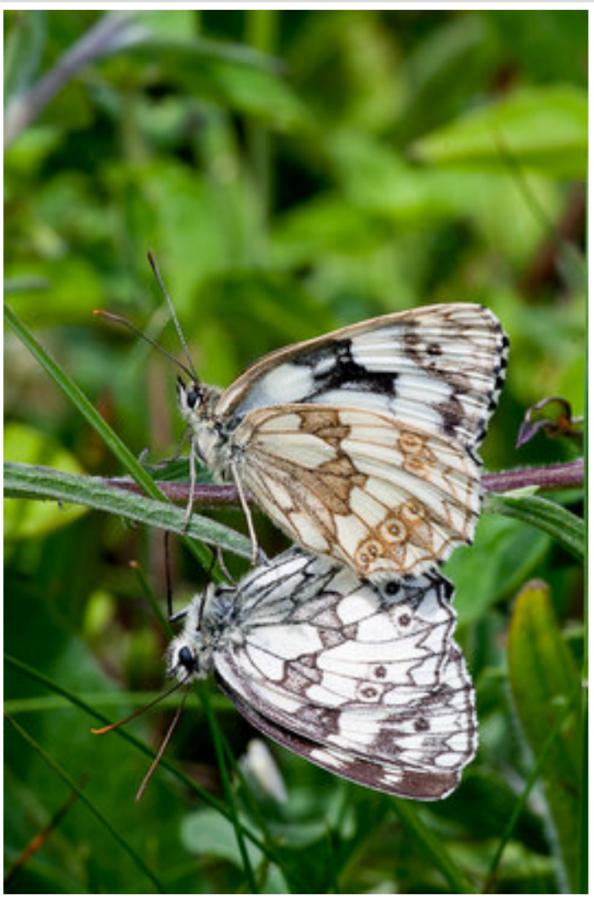
Cheers,

- Pete





Unusually orange costa



Mating Marbled Whites



Brown Argus



Small Copper

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 09-Jul-10 05:49 PM GMT

Pamber Forest - again!

The briefest of visits to Pamber Forest this morning to walk the dogs. Despite the brevity - some interesting sightings! First off, a Purple Hairstreak literally fell out of a tree to the scrub near my feet - I managed to get a single photo before he flew off. Weird! I then saw a "black admiral" that evaded me, before I then caught up with an ab. semi-obliterae, although very very worn! And then I found a f. valesina Silver-washed Fritillary, possibly one I saw earlier in the week. As ever, lots of White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillary to keep me company, along with good numbers of Ringlet and Meadow Brown. And horseflies 🐝

Cheers,

- Pete



White Admiral



White Admiral ab. semi-obliterae



Silver-washed Fritillary f. valesina



Purple Hairstreak (male)

Re: Pete Eeles

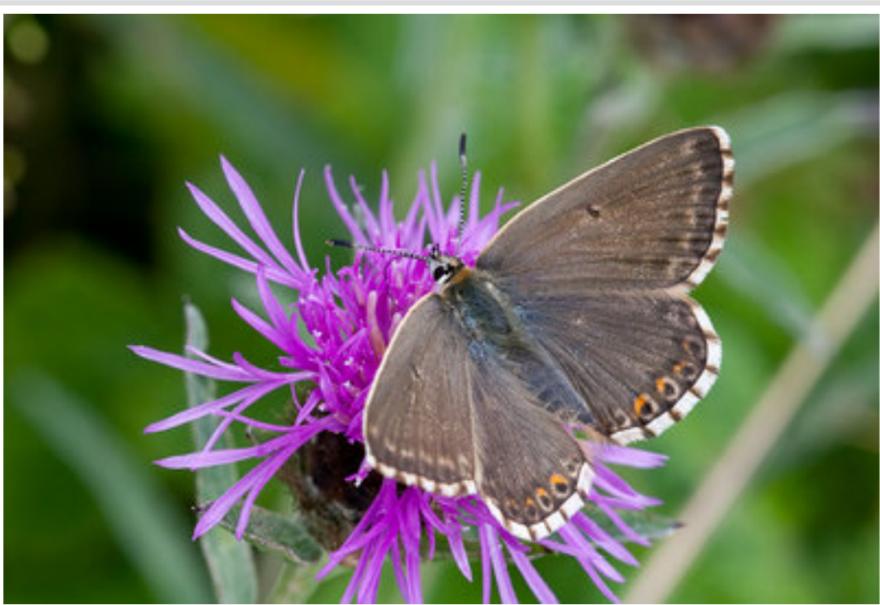
by Pete Eeles, 17-Jul-10 05:16 PM GMT

Stockbridge Down

The weather this past week has been truly awful, with many critters being buffeted by the wind and rain. Things looked up first thing this morning and, despite the wind (weatherwise that is, nothing to do with my intestines), decided to pay a visit to Stockbridge Down with my youngest son, Chris, to see the Chalkhill Blues. With increasing cloud cover as well as frequent gusts of wind, the Chalkhills put on a surprisingly good display, with over 50 seen, including 5 females, in the space of 45 minutes. A few Small Copper and Brown Argus were around too, along with Marbled White (which are on their last legs), a few Ringlets, Meadow Brown and a few Small White.

Cheers,

- Pete





Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 19-Jul-10 06:00 PM GMT

Aston Rowant

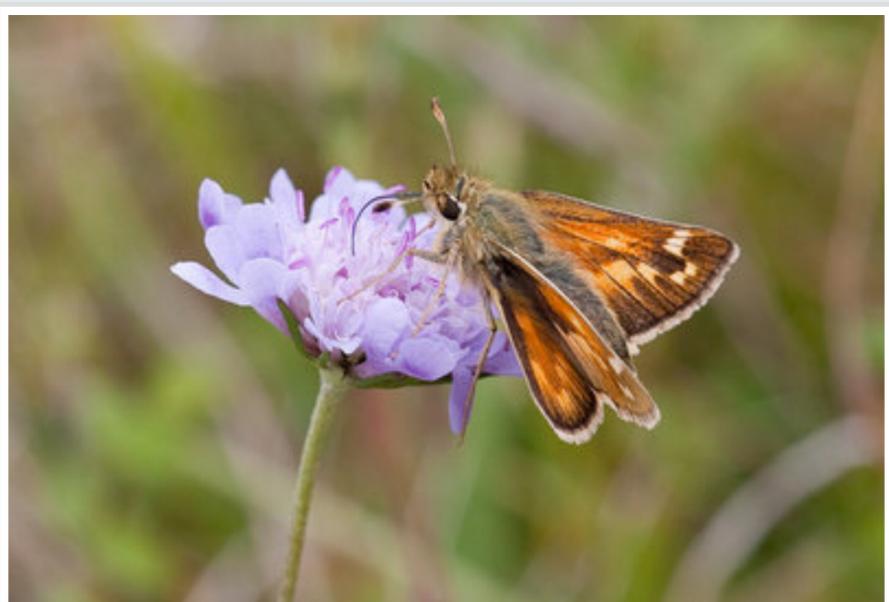
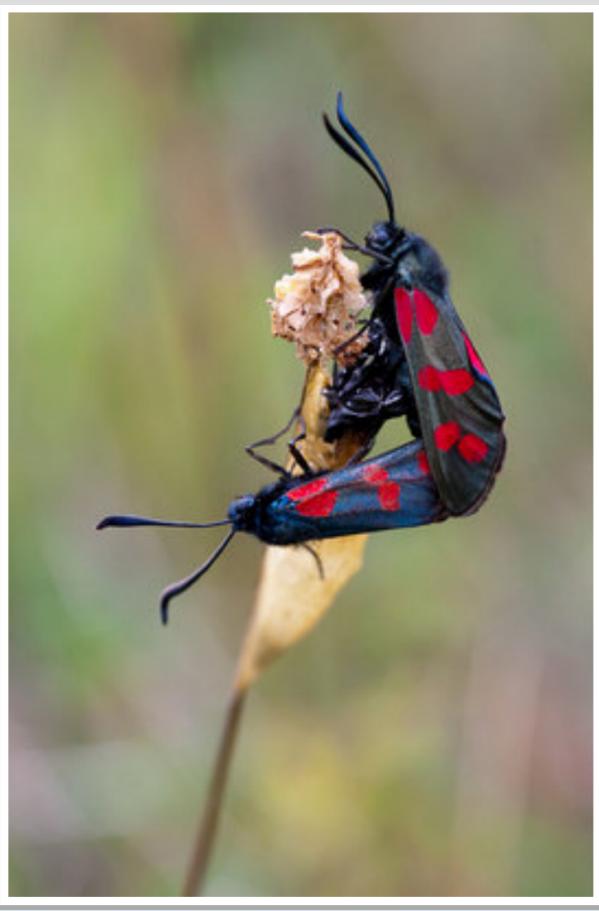
I decided to pop in to Aston Rowant on the way to work this morning – the first time I've visited this extraordinary site. Being "on show" right next to the M40 feels very strange – there's no way you could hear any bird song with the constant rumble of traffic! I wonder what the many Red Kites make of it all? It was very breezy during the time I was there, and the sun didn't come out until I was leaving, so quite difficult finding anything.

Six-spot Burnets were everywhere, with females emerging en-masse, resulting in many mating pairs – some having just emerged from their cocoon and some still pumping their wings up. I saw around 30 Chalkhill Blues (including a few females), 7 Small Copper, 3 Common Blue, 1 fresh male Brimstone, 1 Small Tortoiseshell, 3 Meadow Brown, a single Ringlet, 5 Marbled White, 5 Small Skipper and what I was hoping to find – 9 Silver-spotted Skipper, my first for the year.

Cheers,

– Pete





Silver-spotted Skipper (female)



Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jul-10 10:24 PM GMT

Stockbridge Down

I decided to pop in to Stockbridge Down (again!) on the way back from work today – mostly in the area next to the road. Despite the heat, the butterflies were putting on a good show after their midday siesta. Rather than try and summarise here, I'll take you on a tour of my brief visit 😊

First off, it's wonderful to see so many second-brood individuals about – absolutely fresh (and therefore photogenic!) – including a single Peacock, several Brimstone and Essex Skipper and a good number of Brown Argus and Green-veined White. The Small Coppers, in particular, are doing really well – I must have seen at least 20. This really does feel like a "second wave" of activity for those of us interested in studying second broods and wanting to get photos of pristine individuals! These second brood individuals (as well as newly-emerged first brood individuals of some species just emerging, such as Chalkhill Blue) certainly stand out from the rather worn and faded Meadow Browns and Ringlets. They also stand out from the Silver-washed Fritillaries and even White Admiral (although I only saw one!) that appeared from the woodland adjoining the down.



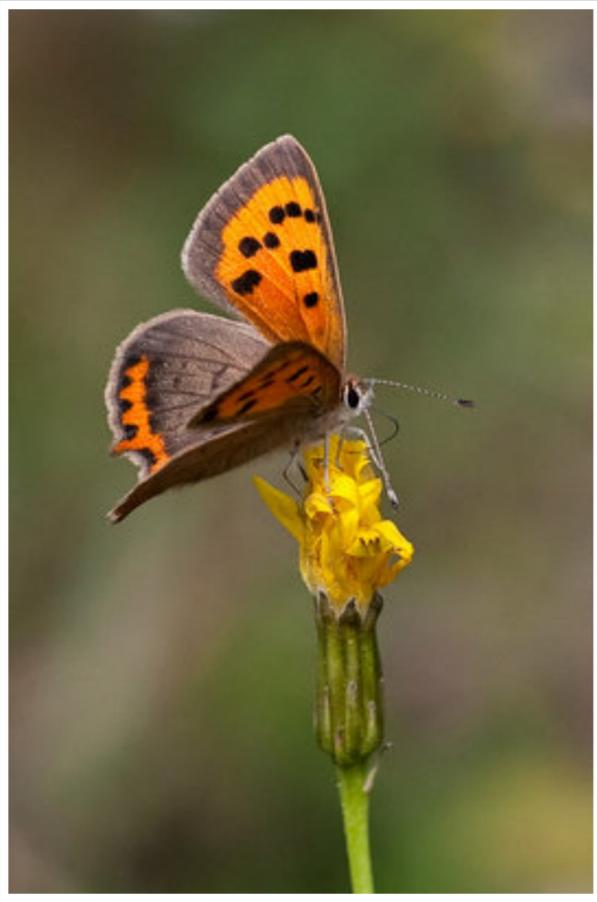
Essex Skipper (female)



Brown Argus



Green-veined White



Small Copper

Even the Dark Green Fritillary are looking worn – not surprising given the weather of late. I saw a single female, although this probably wasn't the best time of day to go "aglaia-hunting"!



Dark Green Fritillary (female)

The Chalkhill Blue were, not surprisingly given the typical numbers at this site, out in force – literally hundreds.



Chalkhill Blue (male)



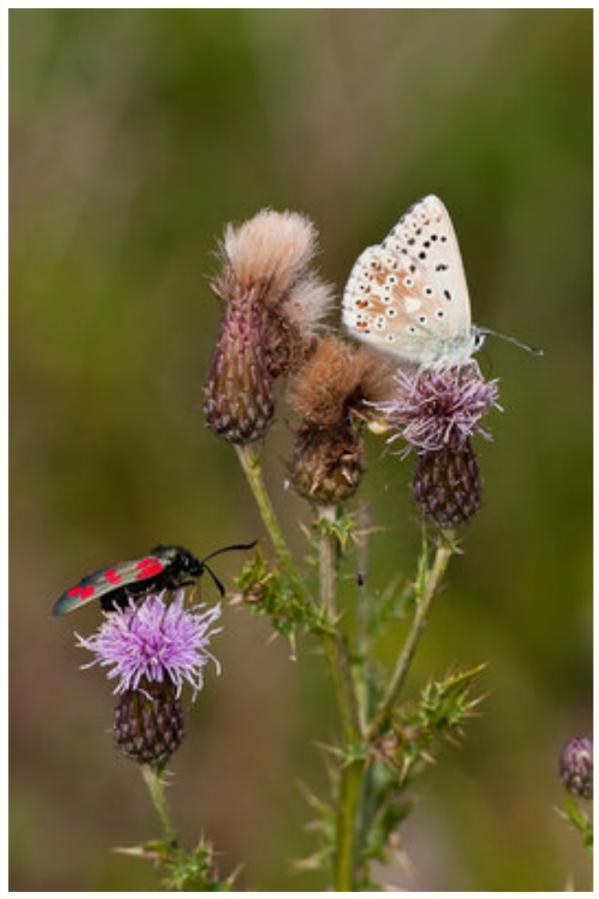
Chalkhill Blue (female)

I paid careful attention to every individual and, eventually, found a rather tatty female that I believe is an aberration (and not because she'd lost her right antenna!). Felix will know!



Chalkhill Blue (female, ab.)

I was also quite pleased with this shot of a "butterfly and moth" (Chalkhill Blue and Six-spot Burnet) sitting side-by-side.



Chalkhill Blue (male) and Six-spot Burnet

The smell of mint was in the air and, sure enough, the Mint moth, *Pyrausta aurata*, was everywhere. Literally hundreds. This tiny creature is quite beautiful when viewed close up and, for some reason, reminds me of an elderly gent in his smoking jacket – the Noel Coward of the moth world 😊



Pyrausta aurata

Just as I was leaving, and as if to tell me "the butterfly year is only just getting started", a second-brood Holly Blue turned up, being easily distinguished from other blues by flying at head height before settling.



Holly Blue (male)

No Silver-spotted Skippers though. I just hope the incessant grazing (cattle seem to be on the down all year round) hasn't depleted their numbers.

All in all – a really good stop off on the way home!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-Jul-10 08:59 PM GMT

Basingstoke and White-letters!

A friend kindly tipped me off regarding a colony of White-letter Hairstreak in the Basingstoke area – saying that he'd seen over a dozen nectaring on Creeping Thistle at midday a couple of days ago – despite the species normally nectaring early morning and late afternoon. This species is particularly scarce in Hampshire so I was intrigued to say the least. I managed to pop out at lunchtime today to take a look. As soon as I found the right area at around 2:30pm, I found a single female nectaring exactly where I had been told. It wasn't until the sun finally broke through for real that I saw another, and another, until I was experiencing the best White-letter Hairstreak "fest" I've ever encountered in the UK. Although all of the adults were slightly worn, this was an amazing spectacle, with at least 9 individuals flitting around the various flowerheads.

This particular site seems, strangely, to be a week or two behind other sites I've visited recently; Silver-washed Fritillary and Ringlet are still in quite good condition. But the "icing on the cake" was finding a beautiful female Gatekeeper ab. excessa.

Cheers,

– Pete





Gatekeeper (female) ab. excessa



Gatekeeper (female) ab. excessa

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Jul-10 10:11 PM GMT

Butterflies and Buddleias

I've spent the weekend (on and off) supporting the "Butterflies and Buddleias" event held within the stunning grounds of Longstock Park, near Stockbridge (near Winchester, Hants). Organised by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight branch of Butterfly Conservation (under the leadership of Roger Buchanan), this event was a resounding success by every measure. Even the weather "played ball"! We had 6 gazebos in total, with one dedicated to UK Butterflies. It's amazing to think that the very first event UKB attended was selling one book and one DVD! Oh how times have changed! Other gazebos were dedicated to BC's work in the 2 counties, moths, games, face painting, paintings and the like. Everyone who attended was suitably impressed. This has to have been one of the best-organised BC events I've attended, with everyone contributing to its overall success. Totally enjoyable and equally exhausting! But great to see many UKB members there – and, for the first time, the majority of visitors had heard of UK Butterflies – so we must be getting noticed!

And my personal thanks, once again, to Gary and Lisa for organising the UKB stand, where we raised a good amount for BC. We'll hopefully be repeating this event next year for those unable to attend this time around. Some photos below.

Cheers,

– Pete



The gazebos!



The UK Butterflies Stand – our largest yet!



THE UKB 2011 calendar looks fantastic!



The grounds were host to many species – including Dark Green Fritillary and Hummingbird Hawkmoth!



Tim Norriss, Hants BC moth recorder, showed off the results of previous nights' moth-trapping – the highlight for many visitors!



Tim brought along the amazing Lobster moth larva. Absolutely alien!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Piers, 25-Jul-10 11:12 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

And my personal thanks, once again, to Gary and Lisa for organising the UKB stand.

Nice one G & L – you two are pretty heroic at this sort of thing.

Felix.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 26-Jul-10 07:37 PM GMT

Stockbridge Down

Despite the cloud cover first thing this morning, I spent an enjoyable time in the company of UKB's very own "Felix", watching Chalkhill Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper (which are emerging in good numbers), while picking his brain on all manner of subject! A couple of shots below – a minor Chalkhill Blue ab. and a male Silver-spotted Skipper.

Cheers,

– Pete



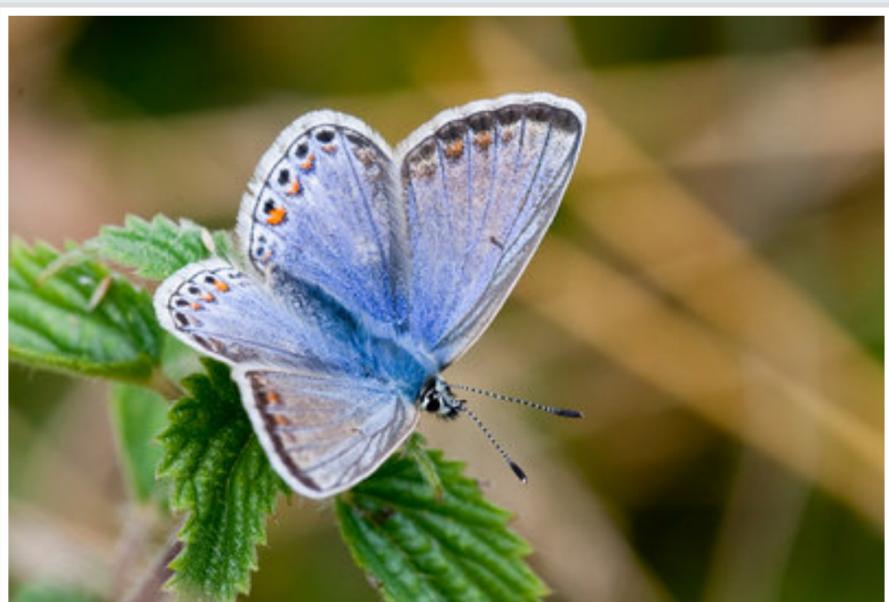
Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 02-Aug-10 04:53 PM GMT

I haven't had much time to go-a-butterflying lately, so some brief reports of my brief trips!

Watlington Hill - 28th July

I popped into Watlington Hill (near Aston Rowant) on 28th, primarily to see Silver-spotted Skipper. By the time I got there at midday, everything was buzzing around without stopping! I saw plenty of Silver-spotted Skipper, but only a couple that settled long enough for photos! However, I did find a mass of Common Blue, which seem to be having a good year all round based on reports I've heard. I did find an extremely blue female, along with a nice Small Copper and some late-developing Cinnabar moth larvae.



Common Blue female



Small Copper



Cinnabar moth larva

Stockbridge Down - 29th July

I had an even briefer visit to Stockbridge Down on 29th, although the cloud meant that not much was flying. I did find a nice female Silver-spotted Skipper, however.



Silver-spotted Skipper (female)

Greenham Common - today! (2nd August)

I managed to spend an hour this morning at Greenham Common looking for Grayling. It wasn't long before I found the hotspot, near some buddleias growing near the control tower. I must have seen about 15 individuals in total. When settled on the ground, the camouflage is amazing. But I did spend a lot of time simply watching and studying them and made 3 observations.

Observation 1 - The Grayling 1-2-3 Shuffle

I noticed that there is a typical series of 3 steps that each individual went through as it landed on the ground:

1. Forewing underside completely exposed.
2. Forewing partially exposed, showing uppermost spot only.

3. Forewing completely hidden.

Hereby known as the Grayling 1-2-3 shuffle. I'm guessing that the spots are exposed in order to divert any potential bird attack away from the body. But after a short time (no bird attack), the strategy becomes one of camouflage. (see observation #3 below).

Observation 2 – Varying Speed

On a related note, some individuals would perform "the shuffle" in less than a second after landing, making them impossible to photograph with their forewings exposed! Others would take a few seconds. No theories for the difference!

Observation 3 – Feeding Posture

I also noticed that individuals feeding typically had the underside of their forewings exposed – presumably because their lack of camouflage when feeding on buddleia or bell heather, so a strategy of showing a "false eye" (rather than camouflage) is the right thing to do.



Camouflaged Grayling



Grayling at Step 2 of the "Grayling 1-2-3 Shuffle"



A rare sight – a Grayling upperside!

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 02-Aug-10 09:12 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

I saw the Grayling shuffle on Sunday! Exactly as you describe. My report is to follow in my diary later this week – I'm still sorting photos!

One further observation I made is that the female looks a little like a worn Painted Lady in flight.

Cheers

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 16-Aug-10 07:20 PM GMT

Reliving my Youth

It's been a while since I last posted – mainly because I've not done anything on the butterfly front! The weather hasn't helped and that, with a combination of an excessive workload, has meant I've been concentrating on other things of late. Although I did get out today to see Brown Hairstreak at Shipton Bellinger (where I saw around 8 individuals, although no photos) where I also saw quite a few Holly Blue (which must be on the "up" this season!), as well as 50 or so Adonis Blue at a site in Wiltshire. Back home, I've been rearing one of the species I've not reared since I was a lad, which is a very long time ago! Despite my "defection to the dark side", I have to say that the Death's Head Hawkmoth has the most spectacular larva, and this is a species that can get from a 2mm egg to a 6 inch larva in a matter of weeks. The deforestation of Privet bushes in the Thatcham area of late is my doing! Right now, 6 of the 7 larvae have decided they're "Going Underground" – possibly the result of The Jam playing in my study (they like warmth – the larvae that is, not The Jam) over the last couple of days (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whSYTSXm8wo>).

Anyway – some photos below.

Cheers,

– Pete



Larva in classic pose when disturbed



Munching away



Munching gear

Re: Pete Eeles

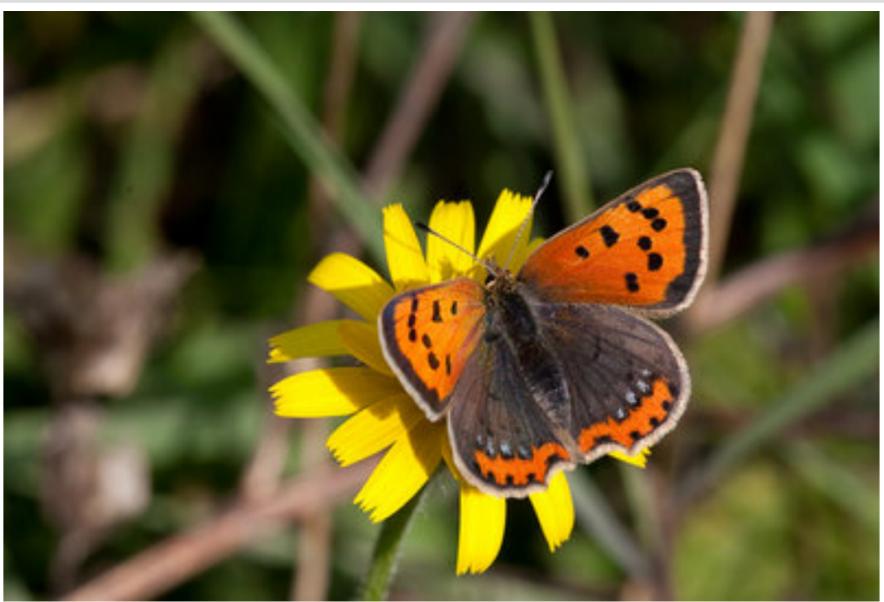
by Pete Eeles, 23-Sep-10 11:16 PM GMT

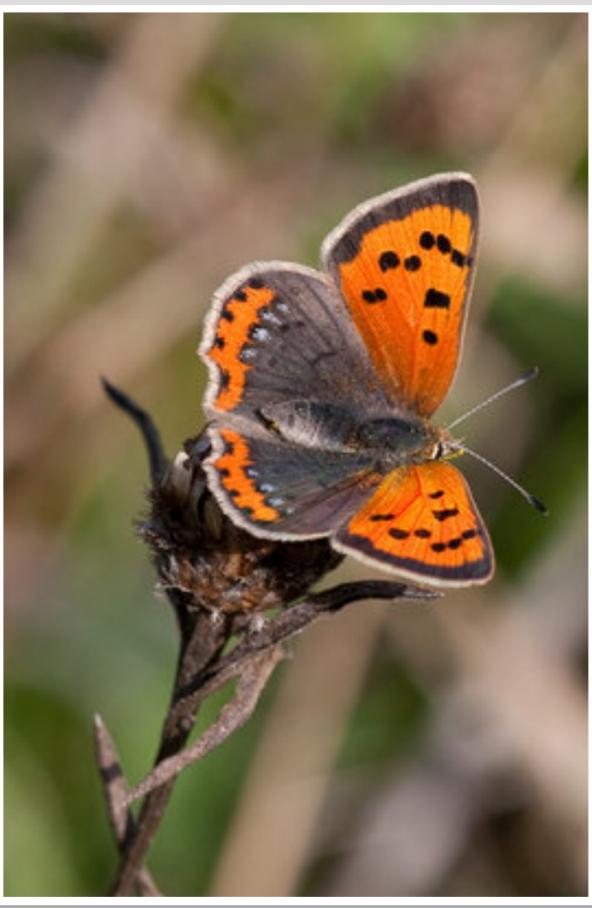
Stockbridge Down

I've just returned from a splendid couple of weeks in Gran Canaria – you can't beat watching Monarchs floating around the hotel grounds with a beer in your hand! Unfortunately, no photos. Very relaxing – too relaxing – the shock of going back to work has made my head spin. So I took a brief break yesterday morning and popped into Stockbridge Down to catch the last of the season's butterflies. I was actually amazed at the numbers of some species. Lots of Meadow Brown, some very fresh (and a mating pair seen), 5 Chalkhill Blue (1 male, 4 female) still "hanging on", several Small Heath, 1 Small White and, best of all, between 15 and 20 Small Copper – some very fresh – and the photos below of *ab. caeruleopunctata* really don't do it justice. Watching several courtship displays was a fantastic bonus.

Cheers,

– Pete





Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 30-Sep-10 07:03 PM GMT

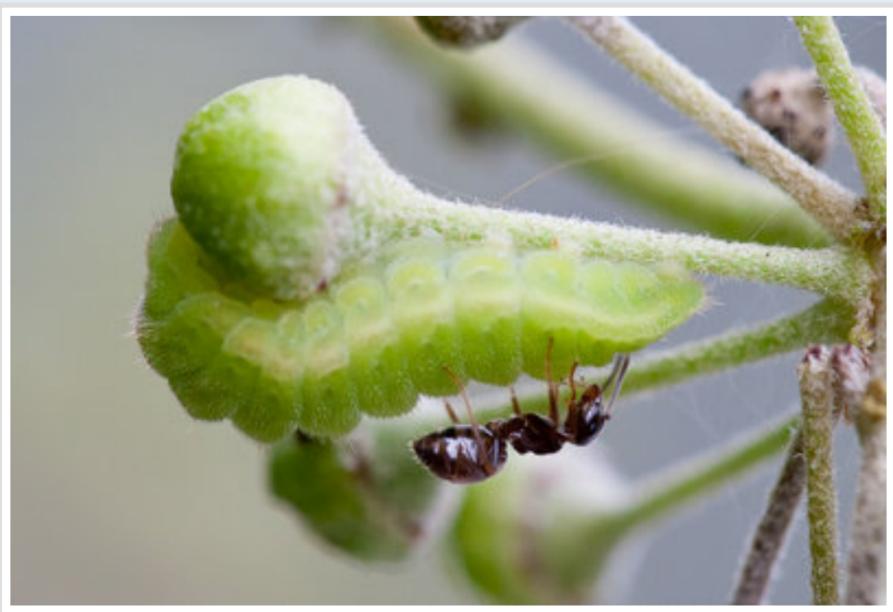
Blues and Ants and ...

Been quiet of late while spending every spare moment preparing an article on variation in British butterflies – consulting over a dozen books to date (and have acquired several that go into the details of genetics!) – and running to over 30 pages. I blame Felix 😊 Anyway ...

Although the adult butterfly season is over, there's still plenty to be seen if you look closely enough – and have time! I was sitting in my study today – but looked out of the window at the ivy that's right outside and noticed an abnormal amount of ant activity. Looking more closely, I could see some large dark "blobs" on the ivy flower buds against the sky. A quick look outside and I found exactly what I expected – a Holly Blue larva. Then another and another. All in all, 7 larvae on a single cluster – with none found anywhere else. Quite diverse in colouring – some were green all over, others with pink streaks down their length. But this was the first time I'd seen ants in attendance (with every larva), especially since the branches are a good 8 or 9 feet from the ground. Absolutely fascinating to watch. Some photos below. In the last shot you can just make out the remains of an egg from which a larva has emerged.

Cheers,

– Pete





Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 30-Sep-10 08:35 PM GMT

Top quality observation that, Pete. Were all the larvae found on the florets or were there some on the leaves?

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 30-Sep-10 08:48 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Top quality observation that, Pete. Were all the larvae found on the florets or were there some on the leaves?

Thanks David! All on the flower buds, as expected, since that's what they feed on – they don't feed on the leaves (although you can't see it, the 2nd photo is the larva eating a flower bud that isn't particularly well-formed!). The larvae position themselves on a particular flower bud and then munch away, eventually "scooping out" the content. In fact, looking again, that last picture has it all – egg, larva, ant, scooped-out flower bud (you can see the "exit hole") from one of the other developing flower buds!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-Oct-10 09:55 PM GMT

Hampshire and Isle of Wight AGM and Members' Day

A wonderful afternoon, yesterday, spent in the company of a good number of like-minded members! The AGM was typically uneventful, although the reports from the various subcommittees and the tremendous results they achieve is always breath-taking, whether we're talking records, conservation, information or reserves. My hat also goes off to every single member, whatever their level of contribution, from those that enter a single sighting to those that walk transects or help with the reserves management week in and week out. It really is a great "team". It was especially pleasing to see several members from the Isle of Wight making the effort to attend – it really was appreciated.

On that note, I had the privilege of taking on the role of branch chairman, succeeding Roger Buchanan (who is a hard act to follow, for sure!) and am really looking forward to my tenure in the company of an amazing group of individuals on the main committee. On that note, I'd like to welcome Andy Bolton and Gary Richardson ("Gruditch") onto the main committee who each received a unanimous vote, largely in recognition of the great work they already do.

A highlight for me was the initiation of an Education Fund, seeded by a legacy left by the late June Bailey, wife of Ken (who was in the audience and who scooped first prize in the Overseas category of the photo competition with an amazing shot of a Reverdin's Blue). This fund will be put to good use in fostering the next generation of Lepidopterists.

Aside from the photo competition, there were stands from UK Butterflies (ably run by Gary and Lisa) and Rosemary Powell (wildlife artist), as well as a selection of wildflower seeds (Brian Fletcher) and a really nice display of images of different stages of Purple Emperor larvae (and various aberrations) from, of course, Matthew Oates!

Our first presenter, Peter Davey, was unable to attend, so I put myself forward to present on the "Variation in British Butterflies", along the same lines as the UKB article recently posted. This was really interactive, which was just brilliant! When I posed certain questions, I was never expecting to get any answers given that I've read around the subject extensively. Here's an example – so what is the benefit of different colour forms of the Red Admiral larva, given that they spend all their time in a rolled-up nettle leaf and only ever move from leaf to leaf in darkness? The bombardment commenced:

... it's not they they gain an advantage, it's more that there's no disadvantage!

... they *do* move from leaf to leaf in daylight – I've seen them! So the different colouration may give one form an advantage

... the different forms will "spread the risk" since a given predator will typically form a single "search image" if looking for a particular larval form

My presentation was followed up by a wonderful presentation from Chris Manley, entitled "Photography as an ID and Reference Collection", where Chris walked through an incredible array of images he's taken over the years and, of course, many anecdotes along the way. Chris ultimately signed a good number of copies of his latest book, "British Moths (and Butterflies)".

All in all, a most wonderful day!

Cheers,

– Pete



Roger Buchanan and Pete Eeles – Roger was presented with an original watercolour of Small Blue by Rosemary Powell

Re: Pete Eeles

by marmari, 25-Oct-10 10:16 AM GMT

i would like to confirm everything said by Pete on the AGM and members day meeting. All of us from the isle of Wight thoroughly enjoyed our day, and we wish him every success in his tenure as Branch Chairperson.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 26-Oct-10 11:05 PM GMT

"marmari" wrote:

i would like to confirm everything said by Pete on the AGM and members day meeting. All of us from the isle of Wight thoroughly enjoyed our day, and we wish him every success in his tenure as Branch Chairperson.

Thanks marmari! Much appreciated!

Cheers,

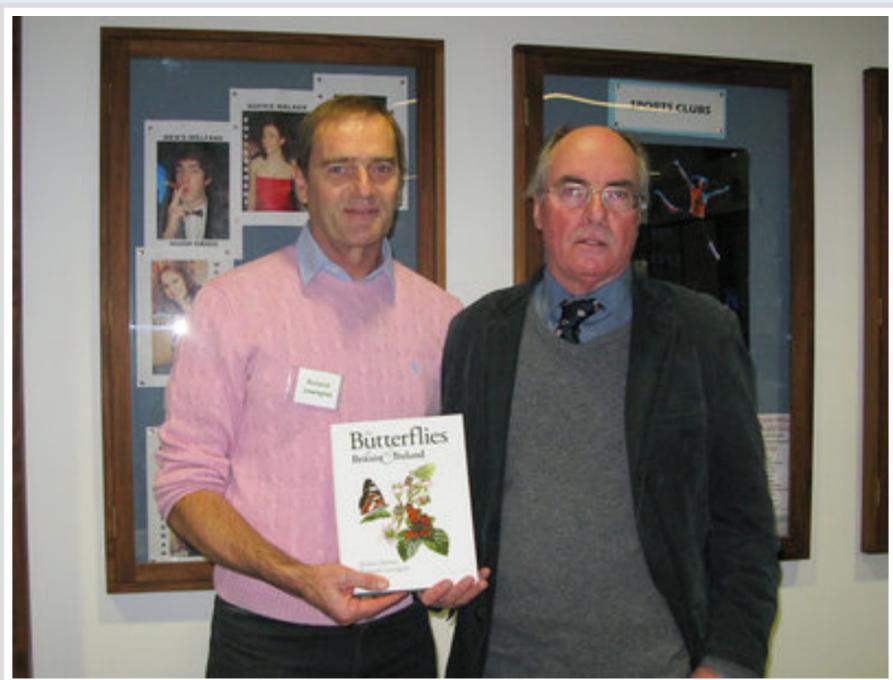
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-Nov-10 10:19 PM GMT

Great to see so many UKB members at the AGM yesterday (just too many to mention!) – definitely a gathering not to be missed! Hosted by my home county of Gloucestershire next year 😊

For various reasons, I wasn't able to attend most of the sessions, usually because I was chatting away with luminaries in the world of Leps behind the scenes – and learning so much. I must have spent at least 20 minutes just listening to Jeremy Thomas discussing various "blues" – some wonderful insights and such an infectious enthusiasm for the subject that is his life's work. On that note, while chatting away with "Thomas and Lewington", I couldn't resist a photo:



Lewington and Thomas!

As well as hearing about the great results that BC have been achieving, I was eagerly-awaiting the Marsh and Volunteer awards since this, to me, is what BC is really all about – bringing together an army of organisations and individuals for the common good – several of which go "above and beyond" to the point that they rightly deserve to be singled out. The awards were introduced by Martin Warren, BC Chief Exec (and presented by Jeremy Thomas):



The "Marsh Award for Lifetime Achievement in Lepidoptera Conservation" was given to Roy Leverton, in recognition of his many years devoted to the recording and study of moths and butterflies. Roy gave the most wonderful acceptance speech and is an inspiration to us all:



Jeremy and Roy

Next up was the award for outstanding contributions to the promotion of Lepidoptera conservation. This year's award was won by the building materials company CEMEX for their dedication to the Small Blue butterfly. I'm naturally suspicious of organisations winning anything (!) but the acceptance speech convinced me that CEMEX really know their stuff and are absolutely committed to supporting BC's aims. Not least because CEMEX funded a Small Blue recovery project in Warwickshire, started in 2007 – which has benefited several other threatened species since.



The final major award was the "Marsh Award for the conservation of Lepidoptera in Europe" and was awarded to Lazaros Pamperis for his lifetime's work studying and documenting the butterflies of Greece, culminating in his prestigious book *The Butterflies of Greece*.



And finally, various "Outstanding Volunteer Awards" were given by BC Chairman, Maurice Avent. All worthy winners and, as Hants and IOW chair, I'm bound to point out the contribution of Colin Matthews – not only has Colin acted as voluntary Reserve Manager for BC's Yew Hill Reserve, but his profound knowledge of botany and habitat management for plants has also been applied to Magdalen Hill Down, the branch's flagship reserve. The worthy winners are shown below (Maurice in the middle, Colin far right):



And, finally, another beautifully-presented UKB stand courtesy of Gary and Lisa, my sincere thanks to them both. I think we should start a caption competition with this shot of Lisa 😊



Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 22-Nov-10 08:57 AM GMT

"98, 99, 100! Ready or not Gary, here I come!"

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Piers, 22-Nov-10 06:36 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

My presentation was followed up by a wonderful presentation from Chris Manley, entitled "Photography as an ID and Reference Collection"

That's quite a timely way to remind contributors to the Species Albums that photographs, no matter how beautiful, have absolutely no scientific value unless accompanied by date and location at the very minimum.

Felix.