

Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-11 06:04 AM GMT

Having spent some time over the past few months browsing other peoples diaries, I thought that it was about time I had a go myself.

I am still very much a beginner at taking photographs of butterflies, this year being my first proper attempt so to speak.

All photos in the following posts will have been taken with a second Hand Panasonic Lumix FZ38 that I picked up at the beginning of the year off ebay. At the moment I am still finding my way around the settings, I am mostly using the 'P' setting on the dial and experimenting.

Anyway, having had this week off work with some days being spoken for, helping my daughter to move into a new flat for one thing, I promised myself a couple of days butterflying.

First off was last Saturday at [b]Snitterfield Bushes [b] near Stratford upon Avon.

Here the stars of the show were Silver Washed Fritillaries with good numbers of males in evidence plus a couple of females including a beautiful Valezina var.

Also seen were a couple of White Admirals, several Commas and Red Admirals, loads of Meadow Browns and Hundreds of Ringlets. In an adjacent meadow were lots of Marbled Whites.



Male Silver Washed Fritillary on Brambles.



Nice Female Silver Washed Fritillary



Female SWF Valezina var.



Marbled White



Marbled White with incoming.

More to follow.

Neil

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-11 08:01 AM GMT

Monday 4th July - Fermyn Woods

Got up early and drove the 90 mins or so from my house to Fermyn getting there at about 09.30am. Parked by the gliding club after getting very useful directions from UKB member celery on his diary, many thanks for that.

I took a slow trundle through Fermyn and carried on across the fields into Lady Wood. Weather was a bit cloudy at first but by mid morning it had brightened up a bit. I must admit, I was bimbling around Lady Wood without taking much notice of my bearings until I suddenly realised I hadn't got a clue where I was. After a bit more wandering around I recognised one of the rides I had been on earlier, near to the southern side of the wood. It was along this ride that I saw the greatest number of Purple Emperors in one stretch, a least 6 different individuals. At one point I was watching 2 male PEs a Red Admiral and a Comma all sharing a spead out dried splatter of horse dung when another male landed on my trouser leg. Whoppee...I had a photo like those I had seen on this site.



Male Purple Emperor in Lady Wood.

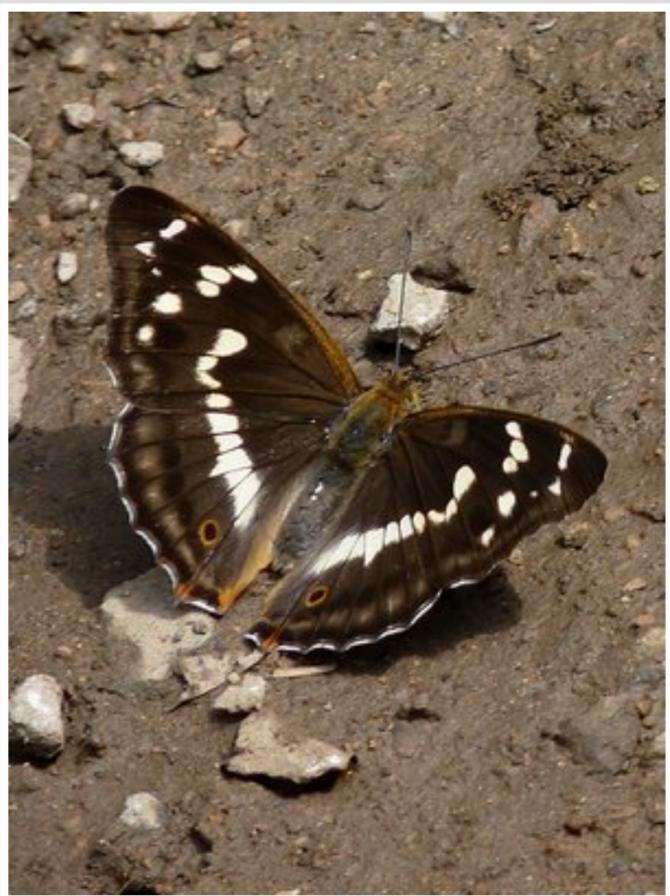


What does he think my trousers smell like?

After spending most of the morning wandering around Lady Wood, I slowly headed back through Fermyn.

At the Elm where celery said he saw a White Letter Hairstreak, I found a small group looking up and sure enough there was a WHL playing peek-a-boo in the branches.

Whilst we were looking at the WHL a PE came circling around and landed by a muddy puddle in the ride. There was some debate if this was a female whilst it had its wings closed but then it opened them and the guys around all agreed that it was a female.



Empress – the first individual

A little later another individual PE landed a bit further along the ride and there was another short debate whether this was male or female.



Empress or Emperor?

If any of the Purple Emperor experts on here could confirm the above one way or another I would appreciate it.

Also saw a few White Admirals and a couple of Silver Washed Fritillaries as well as a number of Purple Hairstreaks flitting high up over the Oaks.



White Admiral impersonating a Purple Emperor

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Lee Hurrell, 08-Jul-11 04:55 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

My vote for image 4 would be an Empress.

Cheers

Lee

Re: nfreem

by dilettante, 08-Jul-11 05:21 PM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

after getting very useful directions from UKB member celery on his diary, many thanks for that.

Actually I think it was me, wasn't it? 😊 Glad you had a successful trip. Lovely photos.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-11 05:41 PM GMT

Oops, sorry dilettante, my apologies....it was indeed you 😞

Many thanks for that.

That just shows that I shouldn't be posting late at night after spending all day shifting furniture, I get 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-11 05:51 PM GMT

"Lee Hurrell" wrote:

Hi Neil,

My vote for image 4 would be an Empress.

Cheers

Lee

Thanks Lee,

I was leaning towards it being female but there was just enough about her to give me doubts.

The thing is, you read about females supposed to be so much more reclusive and not coming to the ground like males and there we were with two females on the ground more or less at the same time and in the same area.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by celery, 08-Jul-11 08:58 PM GMT

"dilettante" wrote:

"nfreem" wrote:

after getting very useful directions from UKB member celery on his diary, many thanks for that.

Actually I think it was me, wasn't it? 😊 Glad you had a successful trip. Lovely photos.

I don't might taking the credit for things I didn't do! (as long as they turn out all right) 😊

That's a very useful map created by dilettante. Incidentally, just a tiny bit further on from the bottom push-pin is the north-south-running ride known as BB's Purple Emperor Avenue – where, throughout the 1970s, Denys Watkins-Pitchford released his captive-reared PE's to help re-introduce them to the area. (Information gleaned from David Newland's excellent 'Discover Butterflies in Britain'.)

I'm enjoying this diary very much nfreem, and looking forward to the next instalment. 😊

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jul-11 11:22 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments celery, I have been out a couple of times since Monday to more local spots. I will post more when I have sorted through the photos.

I think that the North / South ride that you mention is where I ended up when I lost my bearings.

It was along here that I saw most of the male PEs including the one that settled on me 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jul-11 05:44 AM GMT

Tuesday 5th July – Ryton Wood.

The original plan for today (Tuesday) was going to have me helping my daughter move into a new flat but, as these things so often happen, there was a last minute hold up that meant that she could not pick up the keys for another 24hrs.

This meant that I had a bit of time spare and so I had a quick check of the weather forecast and, seeing that the showers should hold off until later in the afternoon, decided to head over to Ryton Wood just south of Coventry.

I arrived late morning and had a good couple of hours wandering through the wood and into the adjacent meadows that make up the Warwickshire BC reserve before it clouded over and started raining.

Photo opportunities were limited as nearly everything that I saw was very mobile and nothing settled for long. These included 5 Silver Washed Fritillaries, 3 White Admirals, 2 White Letter Hairstreaks and a single Purple Hairstreak.

Also seen were 5 Red Admirals a couple of Small Tortoiseshells a fresh Peacock and good numbers of Large and Small Skippers, Marbled Whites and Meadow Browns. Also hundreds of Ringlets. Everywhere that I have been in the Midlands lately there have been hundreds of Ringlets, they are certainly having a good year.

Unfortunately it seems that, in the Midlands at least, White Admirals seem to be having a bit of a poor year. Most places that I have been to where I would expect to see them, they have been there but only in small numbers. Reading in 'The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland' by Thomas & Lewington, it states that WA numbers are influenced by the weather in June and certainly around here the past couple of Junes have not been too good.

Anyway, some piccies below that I did manage.



Male Silver Washed Fritillary



Male Silver Washed Fritillary



Red Admiral



Large Skippers mating in the brambles



Marbled White in the Meadow

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 09-Jul-11 04:59 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

"nfreem" wrote:

All photos in the following posts will have been taken with a second Hand Panasonic Lumix FZ38

You're producing some really nice shots. I'm using a Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ45 and really like the camera. I'm interested to know if you are using your FZ38 with a close up lens and adaptor or whether your pictures have all been taken without additional lenses?

Keep up the good work.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jul-11 05:25 PM GMT

Hi Mark,

At the moment all shots are taken with the camera as it is, usually at between 10x - 18x zoom from about 1m - 1.5m away. I find that this works well for larger subjects such as the SWF but can give me focusing problems for smaller butterflies like the skippers when you automatically move close to try to fill the frame better.

I have got an official Panasonic close up lens and adapter on order and will post some results when I have given this a go.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jul-11 06:20 PM GMT

Meanwhile,

Thursday 7th July - Elmdon Park Nature Reserve.

A bit of a cloudy, showery day but with a few brief sunny spells, I decided to nip out to have a look around a nature reserve at the back of one of my local parks. This is only 5 mins drive from my house, in fact I keep meaning to get hold of a bike to get around these local places....and to get the belly down a bit 😊

Anyway, I wanted to see if there were any Essex Skippers out around here. There were quite a few small orange skippers flying about so decided to get as many head on shots as I could, easier said than done when they kept sttling amongst the grass.

First off some Small Skippers,



Male Small Skipper



Female Small Skipper



Female Small Skipper

And after a bit of seaching, an Essex Skipper.



Essex Skipper

And to finish off, a female Meadow Brown, just because I don't often manage to catch them with their wings open.



Female Meadow Brown

Cheers,

Neil

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 10-Jul-11 06:37 AM GMT

Saturday 9th July.

The close up lens and adapter for my Panasonic FZ38 arrived this morning so I was eager to get out and have a go with it fitted.

Just after midday the sun was shining so I thought I would take a drive to Oversley Wood. B***er me, 30 mins later when I pulled into the car park at Oversley it had clouded over and gone a bit dull and breezy.

I spent a couple of hours bimbling round the wood but the weather had put the mockers on it a bit with a just a couple of occasions when the sun briefly peeked through

Nevertheless, all the usual suspects were seen including Silver Washed Fritillaries, a couple of White Admirals, Purple Hairstraks flittering about high above the oaks, as well as the ubiquitous Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Whites (GV and Small) and Skippers.

Piccies below taken whilst getting the hang of the close up lens. All as taken by the camera apart from a resize and a crop for the portrait format ones.



Female Small Skipper



Male Small Skipper



Female Meadow Brown



Another Female Meadow Brown – despite me saying I don't often catch them with wings open



Male Silver Washed Fritillary

Back on Family duties tomorrow, cooking the Sunday Dinner. Then back to work on Monday so that will probably be it for me until next weekend.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 11-Jul-11 06:41 AM GMT

Well I managed to get out this afternoon after all.

I did a deal with the boss (my Wife 😊) to cook the Sunday dinner early thus giving me time to get out for the Warwickshire BC walk at Snitterfield Bushes this afternoon.

Starting on the southern side we made our way through to the meadow by the gliding club where Marbled Whites were in abundance as well as a few Brown Argus, some fresh Peacocks, Large, Small and GV Whites and a single Gatekeeper, my first of the year.

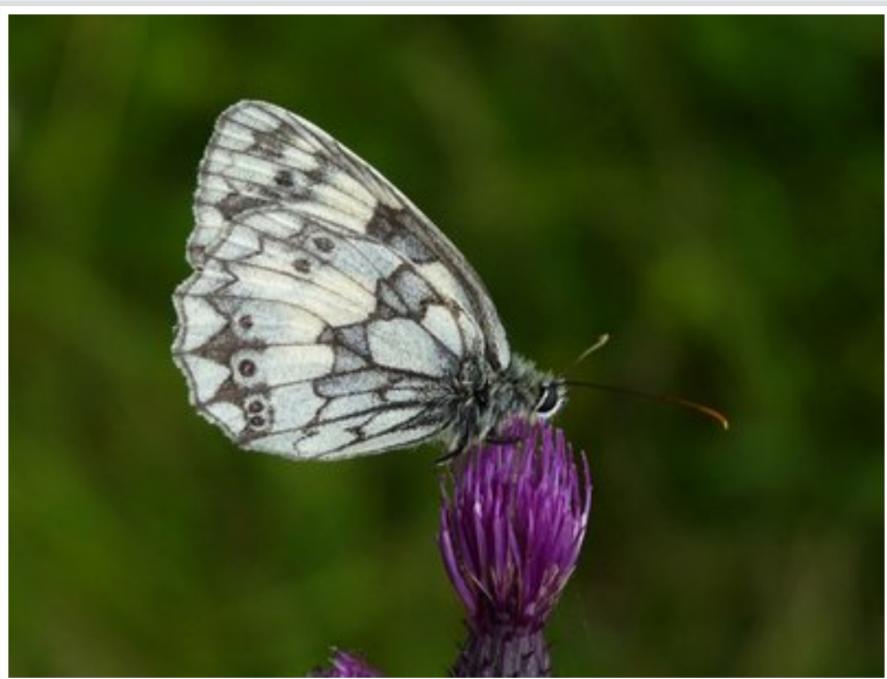
Moving to the Northern side, Silver Washed Fritillaries were abundant, a good 20 – 30 must have been seen including at least 2 different individuals of Valezina. Also a number of Red Admirals, Commas and fresh Brimstones including a few females.

Unfortunately our hopes of White Admirals were not to be realised, they are certainly not very abundant in Warwickshire this year.

Still, it was an enjoyable few hours, and gave me a chance to get some more practice with the close up lens on my lumix.



Nice fresh Peacock



Marbled White



Brown Argus

Also seen were a number of Dragonflies including Southern Hawkers and Ruddy Darters. I am not at all clued up on these, they were Identified by others in the group.



Ruddy Darter Female – I think.



Ruddy Darter Male

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jul-11 05:13 AM GMT

Tuesday July 12th,

I got in from work and looking out into the back garden noticed a couple of Speckled Wood spiralling around above the lawn. I have a small resident population of these that I see every year and this was the first of the summer appearance that I had noticed, the last of the spring brood disappearing a few weeks back. I grabbed my camera and went out to wait for one of them to perch on one of the border shrubs.

After a few minutes one of them obliged and posed nicely for a couple of shots before taking off again to patrol his territory. Just as the books say he was not as bright as his predecessors in the spring with noticeably smaller yellow patches on his wings



Speckled Wood Male – Summer brood

Here's one I took earlier back in April.



Speckled Wood Male – Spring brood

Just as I was about to go back inside, a movement out of the corner of my eye attracted my attention to a Red Admiral that circled around the garden before landing on a rather straggly Buddlia that I keep meaning to replace.



Red Admiral

Also saw a couple of Whites that didn't stay long enough for positive ID and a couple of Holly Blues fluttering around the Ivy before disappearing next door.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jul-11 07:20 PM GMT

Saturday 16th July,

Torrential rain yesterday morning here gave way to showers and eventually some sun in the afternoon. I decided to chance it and nipped down the road to one of my local spots, Sheldon Country Park next to Birmingham airport.

Looking at the skies I thought I would have a quick circle around to see what was about before the next ominous looking black clouds would blow over. During the next 30 minutes or so I spotted a couple of Commas, 1 Red Admiral, 1 Small Heath, A few Meadow Browns and Ringlets and a couple of Gatekeepers. That doubled the number of Gatekeepers I have seen so far around here, they are only just emerging.



Gatekeeper – Male

I was also on the look out for Common Blues and Small Coppers, as I know both species are at this site, but no sign so far. Another week or so probably for these as I know we are usually a bit behind the emergences down south.

Heres hoping the weather bucks up a bit soon.

Bye for Now,

Neil

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jul-11 04:08 AM GMT

Saturday 23rd July.

After a bit of a cloudy and damp week, the sun came out this afternoon so I went out to one of my local spots to see what was about.

Before I even left, this chap was sitting in the front garden on one of my Buddleias.



Red Admiral on Buddleia

The spot that I was heading for is a small number of set aside fields linked together with hedgerows with some mature Oaks and Ash. On arrival it was soon apparent that there had been a mass emergence of Gatekeepers over the last few days...they were everywhere, hundreds of 'em, with males outnumbering females about 10:1.

I didn't notice at the time but looking through the photos afterward there is quite a variation in the number of spots on the males.

I saw a couple like this one.



Gatekeeper – male with extra spots.

Most were like this chap



Gatekeeper – typical male

And some had no spots on the hind wings.



Gatekeeper – male with no spots on hindwings

Along with loads of Meadow Browns and Small Skippers, there were also half a dozen Peacocks nectaring on patches of thistles plus I also saw a couple of Small Coppers, the first of the summer brood that I have seen around here.



Peacock



Small Copper



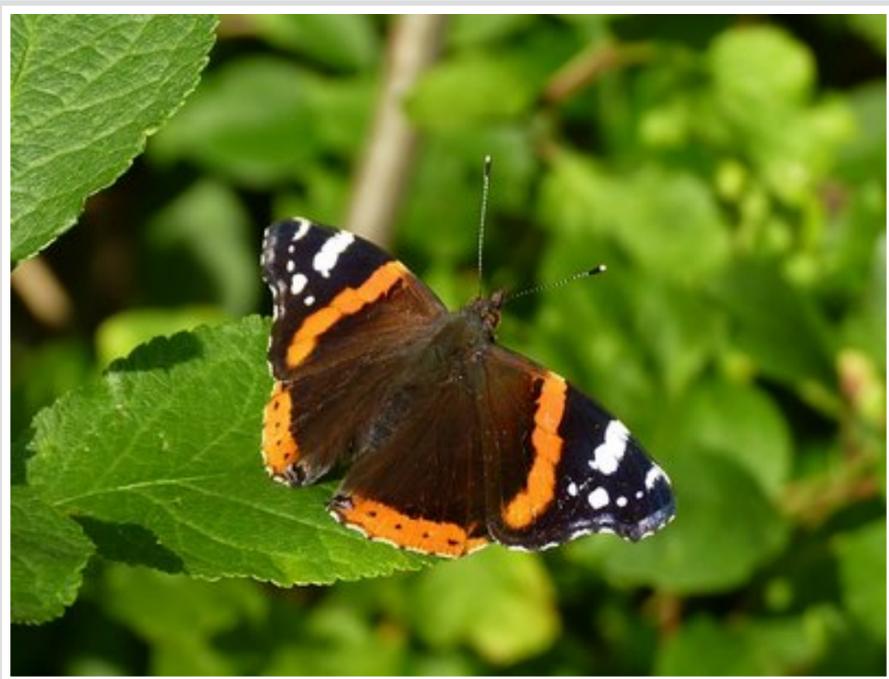
Small Copper

No sign of second brood Common Blues, first brood were plentiful here so I guess they should be out soon.

All in all a pleasant couple of hours.

I was just sitting at the PC going through the photos taken this afternoon when, looking out into the back garden, I saw something flying around in the early evening sunshine.

Grabbing the camera I went out and found this chap trying to sun himself and getting 'buzzed' by a Speckled wood.



Red Admiral in evening sun.

So, a Red Admiral to start and one to finish.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Wurzel, 24-Jul-11 04:23 AM GMT

Some cracking shots Neil! 😊

I too have noticed alot of variation in the spotting of Gatekeepers recently – both in the males and females. Mike Oxen got in touch with me on my personal diary with a list of the taxonomic terms for some of these variations so I'll do a post with mine and see if you can match them up!

Cheers, have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jul-11 04:48 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel, thanks for your comments,

I have just had a look at your diary, interesting about the variants named after the number and postion of the spots.

Its quite amazing really, I have seen Gatekeepers around for years and never noticed the variations until today. It just goes to show how the more common species can be taken for granted sometimes.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Wurzel, 24-Jul-11 05:14 AM GMT

I've just put a thread up for Gatekeepers so if you could add yours that would be great! I know what you mean about not noticing the variations before –

I've spent ages looking through them today despite finding my first ever Grayling this afternoon! 😲

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 25-Jul-11 05:55 AM GMT

Sunday 24th July.

A beautiful sunny afternoon, and as my daughter was at ours to keep my wife company, I dodged out of the female talk and went off to spend an hour or so at another of my local spots.

<http://www.warwickshire-wildlife-trust...-ssi.aspx>

All the usual suspects were flying around including Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Large, Small and GV Whites. There were at least half a dozen Small Coppers that, between bouts of intercepting anything that came close, posed nicely for me.



Small Copper



Another Small Copper



And another Small Copper

I was also pleased to see Common Blues 😊, the first of the Summer brood that I have seen around here.



Common Blue - male

Also found this courting couple cavorting in full view on top of a seed head 😊



Love is in the air.

There were also a number of Dragonflies, the chap below is the only one I managed to get a shot of, I have no idea what it is.



Dragonfly of some sort ?

The weather is looking promising for the next few days and I have some time off work so hopefully I will be able to get out some more.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 26-Jul-11 06:08 AM GMT

Monday 25th July

As mentioned in the sightings thread I was in two minds as to whether to go to **Prestbury Hill** or **Rodborough Common** today. In the end I went I to **Prestbury Hill** this morning. I spent a about 3 hours wandering around both sides of the reserve looking for Chalkhill Blues without success. It was a pleasant morning nonetheless with the following species seen in good numbers,

Meadow Browns

Gatekeepers

Speckled Wood

Marbled White

Small Heaths

Dark Green Fritillary...it took ages to get a shot of one of these, they are hyperactive 😊

Peacocks

Small Skipper

Large, Small and GV Whites.



Dark Green Fritillary – after much patient waiting



Small Heath – finally got a pic of one not surrounded by grass stems

I also saw the following in smaller numbers,

3 Brown Argus

2 Common Blue

3 Small Copper

3 Large Skipper

2 Red Admiral

1 Small Tortoiseshell

1 Silver Washed Fritillary in the valley at the southern end of the reserve busy chasing Peacocks around the brambles.



Brown Argus – male



Brown Argus – female

The Small Copper below had slight blue spotting on the hind wings. Not sure if these are large enough to qualify as an ab.



Small Copper – slight blue spots on hind wing

Being unsuccessful at Prestbury with Chalkhill Blues I decided to carry on to **Rodborough Common**.

Following directions given by Bill Willrow I headed for **Swellshill Bank**. I parked the car and wandered down the bank and within minutes had seen a couple of dozen Chalkhill Blues

I spent about an hour here and must have seen 50+ CBs although I did not keep an exact count.

Also seen here were the usual Meadow Browns, a few worn Marbled Whites and a solitary Dark Green Fritillary.



Chalkhill Blue – male



Chalkhill Blue – male

All in all, another good day 😊

Bye for now

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 26-Jul-11 06:45 AM GMT

Hi Neil.

Glad to see you're are getting to grips with the close-up lens. Great 1st Brown Argus shot.

"nfreem" wrote:

Dark Green Fritillary – after much patient waiting

I gave up waiting!

Keep up the good work.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Lee Hurrell, 26-Jul-11 07:33 AM GMT

"Mark Colvin" wrote:

Glad to see you're are getting to grips with the close-up lens. Great 1st Brown Argus shot.

I agree, that one's a stunner!

Cheers

Lee

Re: nfreem

by Michaeljf, 26-Jul-11 03:27 PM GMT

Hi Neil,
seeing as by your own admission this is your first year – you have got a really nice collection of species (and photos) already. Very nice shots at Prestbury Hill and Rodborough Common, two of my favourite places that I don't have enough time to visit at the moment! 😊😄
Michael

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 26-Jul-11 05:11 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments guys,

Glad you like the shots 😊, I had some really useful tips on using the close up lens from posters on here including Mark Colvin and Sussex Kipper.

I was interested in Butterflies as a lad, like a lot of others, but then life sort of takes over and you lose touch with a lot of things. It was whilst I was on holiday in Cornwall last year that I saw some Dark Green Fritillaries amongst some dunes and they re-ignited my interest. During the back end of last year I attempted to take a few photos of anything that I saw using an old point and shoot compact camera. This soon made me realise that I would need something better and after looking through the various threads on UKB I picked up a second hand Lumix FZ38 last winter.

So, yes, this is my first full season of my re-born interest. I am pretty fortunate in that living in the midlands, I have some very good sites within easy reach. In fact Rodborough Common yesterday was the furthest I have travelled so far, about 70 miles or so from my house.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jul-11 10:36 PM GMT

Thursday 28th July – part 1

After checking the weather forecast the night before and after reading some of the posts in other threads, I decided to head off down the M40 to **Aston Rowant**.

I figured that I could be there for about 09.30am which would give me a good 2-3 hours there and then allow me time to call in at **Bernwood** on my way back up the motorway and still have time to get back home by 6pm-ish when I had to pick up my wife from my daughters.

I left home at 0.800am and following a steady drive down the M40 duly arrived at Aston Rowant just before half past nine 😊

Parking at the car park on the north side, I walked through the wooded area and out onto the hillside.



Aston Rowant – looking West.

Straight away, I saw Meadow Browns and Chalkhill Blues. the Meadow Browns varied from extremely faded and tatty to fairly fresh looking. The Chalkhill Blues were mostly male but there were some females about as well.



Meadow Brown – male



Chalkhill Blue – male



Chalkhill Blue – male



Chalkhill Blue – female

There were also a few Small Coppers about including this pair, the one on the left is form *Caeruleo-punctata* I believe. The one on the right also has some slight blue spotting.



Small Copper var. and friend.

Anyway, the main reason that I had come to Aston Rowant was for Silver Spotted Skippers and, moving a little further along the hillside, It wasn't long before I saw the first one 😊 . During the next couple of hours I must have seen a couple of dozen all along the hillside along with loads of Chalkhill Blues.



Silver Spotted Skipper – male



Silver Spotted Skipper - male



Silver Spotted Skipper - female



Silver Spotted Skipper about to chase off a hoverfly



Silver Spotted Skipper - female



Silver Spotted Skipper - female



Silver Spotted Skipper - male



Silver Spotted Skipper - female

Also seen were a few worn Marbled Whites, some Brimstones, Small Skippers near the base of the hill and a Hummingbird Hawk Moth 😊

After a very enjoyable few hours, I decided to make a move and head back up the M40 stopping off at Bernwood on the way.

To be continued.....

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by EricY, 30-Jul-11 02:00 AM GMT

Lovely pics from Aston Rowant Neil, hope we can do as well on sunday. Eric

Re: nfreem

by ChrisC, 30-Jul-11 02:38 AM GMT

aston looking west pic. hmmm i wonder what the chances are of the dark shape, top right hand corner , being a red kite. (i actually initially thought it was dirt on my screen) I used to go 2 or 3 times a year (before i found butterflies) never knew about the skippers up there. so the pictures are nice to see.

Chris

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 30-Jul-11 03:07 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Nice report.

Aston Rowant looks like a nice piece of ground. Its not a site I know. Is that the M40 to the left of the picture?

I always struggle getting a good shot with Skippers so well done.

Looking forward to Part 2.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by MikeOxon, 30-Jul-11 03:09 AM GMT

"ChrisC" wrote:

i wonder what the chances are of the dark shape, top right hand corner , being a red kite.

Very high, I should think! There are often about 15 of them hanging around over the M40 cutting! The local press recently latched on to a story about Red Kites stealing lunch boxes from kids in a school playground!

Mike

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jul-11 03:24 AM GMT

Many thanks for the comments Guys,

Mark, that is the M40 you can see. You can hear it from the site as a constant drone but after a short while I had shut it out and didn't notice.

Yes, it is a Red Kite in the distance, I remember it being there. In fact during the morning they were a constant presence at some point in the sky.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jul-11 03:36 AM GMT

"Mark Colvin" wrote:

Hi Neil,

I always struggle getting a good shot with Skippers so well done.

They are not easy...sneaking up on them like a ninja, sitting down, lying down, leaning over at odd angles.....one wrong move and they are off like little manic rockets 🤪

Once they take off they are very hard to keep track of. Luckily there were plenty there so it didn't take long before I spotted another one (or the same one again 😊)

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jul-11 04:39 AM GMT

Thursday July 28th – part 2

After spending the morning at **Aston Rowant** as described in part 1, I decided to head back up the M40 to **Bernwood**.

I had read Michaeljf and Lee Hurrells reports on their visit to Bernwood so I had a good idea of where I was heading for and sure enough 30 minutes or so later I had parked in the small car park at Bernwood Meadows and was looking down the long field alongside the road.

First Butterflies seen were Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Common Blues plus a couple of Small Coppers and Brown Argus (Argus's?? Argi ?? 😊).



Brown Argus - male

It had come over a bit cloudy by this time but was still warm so I decided to have a walk through the wood and come back to the meadow later. Butterflies seen in the wood were Silver Washed Fritillaries, Red Admirals, Peacocks, Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Brimstones and Large Skippers.



Brimstone - male

After about an hour or so the sun started peeking out again and I headed back to the meadows.

One of my reasons for coming to Bernwood was to try and finally get a shot of a Purple Hairstreak. I have seen loads at various sites but always up high in the trees. I figured I would look for the 'straggly' Hawthorn described by Michael. I soon found the area in question and sure enough there were numerous Purple Hairstreaks flitting about both the straggly tree and its more healthy looking neighbour. Some of these even landed close enough for me to take some photos, not brilliant pics but at least I now had some.



Purple Hairstreak



Purple Hairstreaks 'eyeballing' each other



Purple Hairstreak



Purple Hairstreak

Anyway, I am getting ahead of myself a little here as I had earlier had my highlight of my visit to Bernwood.

I had gone back into the long field and was about half way along watching a couple of Gatekeepers when another one fluttered in front of me. I thought 'thats a bit dark for a Gatekeeper...hang on a min, that could be a Brown Hairstreak' . Indeed it was 😊. It promptly settled in front of me and spent a couple of minutes nectaring allowing me to get some photos. I did not manage to get a shot of the upperside but it flicked its wings open a couple of times long enough for me to see the orange patches identifying her as a female.



Brown Hairstreak - female



Brown Hairstreak – female

As I was taking these photos, I became aware of a growing 'buzzing' around me and noticed I was getting some rather unwelcome attention from a group of wasps. Looking down, I saw that my foot was about six inches or so away from a hole in the ground from which a rather large number of wasps were coming.

I had nearly put my foot in a wasps nest 😱

I backed away slowly until the wasps were no longer buzzing me but in doing so I had lost sight of the Brown Hairstreak 😞

All in all, an excellent morning at Aston Rowant was added to by an equally enjoyable afternoon at Bernwood. The cherry on the cake was the Brown Hairstreak and I even got away without being stung.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 30-Jul-11 04:46 AM GMT

Two species of Hairstreak photographed in one day!

Now that's going some.

Well done.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Lee Hurrell, 30-Jul-11 06:00 AM GMT

Lovely report and photos, Neil!

Cheers

Lee

Re: nfreem

by Michaeljf, 30-Jul-11 07:35 AM GMT

Neil,

you continue to get great shots and see some lovely species – I really enjoyed the report, which I had been there!! Apart from for the Wasps nest.. 😊
The Purple Hairstreak tree is a little wonder in it's own right, I think!

Must get some sleep now 😊🇬🇧

Michael

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 04-Aug-11 05:53 AM GMT

Wednesday 3rd August.

My oldest son has a pushbike that has been sitting in our garage unused for some months now. I have eyed it up occasionally thinking that I could use it to get around some of my local spots.

Well, this morning I went for it. I wiped the dust off it, put some air in the tyres and set off for Sheldon Country Park which is only a 10 minute bike ride away from my house.

The first part of this area consists of playing fields but once past these there is a nice meadow area and then a wooded bit.



Sheldon Country Park – first meadow

There are some paths through the trees, one of which is tarmac, the others are mown grass. Once out the other side there is an open area right at the end of the runway at Birmingham Airport. There are some benches here and there is often a small crowd of people watching the aircraft taking off. Just past here are some more meadow areas plus more small wooded areas.

I spent an hour or so looking around here as it steadily got warmer and warmer and was pleased to see that Common Blue numbers are starting to build. Also seen were a few Small Coppers, plenty of Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns and also plenty of whites that didn't settle long enough to ID, though I think they were mostly Large Whites.

I also spotted a Brown Argus which is the first of these that I have seen at this location 😊



Common Blue – male



Brown Argus – male



Small Copper

I also spotted this little fella out for a morning Stroll. I am thinking maybe a Buff Ermine but could easily be wrong.



Buff Ermine cat. or not ?

Most of the time I was there I had a buzzard circling overhead. Birmingham city centre is only a few miles from here, how long before they can be seen circling over the Bull Ring? 😊



Buzzard over outskirts of Brum.

The forcast is for heavy rain tomorrow 😞 looks like the paint brush will be out again, oh well.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 04-Aug-11 06:23 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Glad to see you're getting out with the camera. I've been stuck in the house all day today and the weather is forecast for heavy rain tomorrow (when I could get out)! I particularly like the Brown Argus shot. I think they're fabulous creatures and quite often overlooked.

Keep up the good work.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 04-Aug-11 06:31 AM GMT

Thanks Mark,

It was the first time I have managed to get out myself this week. Rain was forcast here for today but we didn't get any, it turned out to be a nice day 😊
Weather not looking good anywhere tomorrow, lets hope the weekend is not too bad.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 23-Aug-11 03:37 AM GMT

Sunday 21st August.

August so far has been a bit of a loss for me regarding butterflying. I seem to have been at work on the best days and when the weekends have arrived the weather has either been lousy or I have been tied up with family duties.

I finally managed to get out yesterday for a couple of hours in some decent sunshine. Not having the time to travel far, I trundled round to one of my local spots, Castle Hills near Solihull.

I was expecting to see the usual suspects, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small Heath, Common Blue, Small Copper, Whites etc. and sure enough all were present in reasonable numbers.

Most of the butterflies seen were worn or faded to some degree and there was a definite feeling of 'winding down' around the site.

There was a slight but steady breeze and this combined with the fact that most of the subjects kept settling low down in the vegetation meant that photo opportunities were limited. Still, I managed to get a few shots including a Small Heath posing nicely instead of hiding down amongst the grass as usual 😊



Small Heath



Common Blue

I am keeping my fingers crossed for the weather next weekend with the bank holiday as I am hoping to get out a couple of times, hopefully to Rodborough Common and Grafton Wood.

Bye for now,
Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 23-Aug-11 05:54 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

"nfreem" wrote:

I am keeping my fingers crossed for the weather next weekend with the bank holiday as I am hoping to get out a couple of times.

You and me both!

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by ChrisC, 23-Aug-11 06:23 AM GMT

i do like that common Blue pic.

Chris

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 24-Aug-11 05:34 AM GMT

Thanks Chris.

I did not realise until afterward that there is some sort of bug on the flower head as well. No idea what it is.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Willrow, 25-Aug-11 11:51 PM GMT

Hello Neil,

You've certainly mastered your Panasonic, when we met at Oversley Wood you were just figuring things out, your results now speak for themselves, they're super, it's a wonderful Common Blue portrait, well done.

Hope you (and all other UK Butterfliers) have great weather for the Bank Holiday and you get to see the species you want...

Regards,

Bill 😊

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 26-Aug-11 03:24 AM GMT

Hi Bill,

Thanks very much for the comments, I don't know about 'mastered', I think there's more luck than judgement involved sometimes 😊

If I remember right, when we met at Oversley it was my first trip out with the close up lens, back in early June. I cannot believe that was nearly three months back 😲

I'm hoping to get back to Rodborough / Swellshill sometime over the bank holiday weekend, I haven't managed to see Adonis Blue yet.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 29-Aug-11 05:21 AM GMT

Sunday 28th August.

Since having her stroke last year, my wife can only walk a short distance with a stick and so consequently has not been able to come with me on my butterflying trips as she would normally have liked to do. This has also meant that I have usually only been able to get out when one of my sons has been home or my daughter has been visiting as I won't leave her for too long by herself in case she needs assistance.

Today my daughter was visiting and as my wife knew that I was hoping to get to **Rodborough/Swellshill** she suggested that we should take a drive there and I could go off wandering whilst they stayed by the car talking women talk 😊

We set off mid-morning in sunshine and duly arrived a couple of hours later at Swellshill Bank after a leisurely drive down past Eversham and through Cheltenham.

The first butterflies seen were Meadow Browns, Small Heaths, a few Chalkhill Blues and Brown Argus and some Common Blues. I also saw a couple of Adonis Blue Males that would not settle for photos.

After about 15 mins or so it went quite dark and an 'orrible big black cloud came over....and then the heavens opened 😞

I legged it back up the bank to the car...or as near to legging it that I can manage these days and jumped in to the sound of the women laughing at my bedraggled state.

We decided to go back to the ice cream factory and have have some ice cream whilst we waited to see what the weather would do.

Luckily, in the time it took to get down a double cornet, there were big patches of blue sky heading our way so as soon as the rain stopped we headed back to have another look for Adonis Blues.



Swellshill Bank - 10 minutes before the deluge

The sun soon came back out and heading back down the bank it wasn't long before the butterflies came out of hiding. This time they were more willing to settle and spend time basking and warming up again. I also saw a few more Adonis Blue males.



Brown Argus - male



Common Blue - male



Common Blue - male



Adonis Blue – male with what looks like rain damage on forewings



Adonis Blue – male



Adonis Blue – male

I also saw a few females but I am not sure if they were Adonis or Chalkhill. Given the condition of these which was for the most part quite faded and worn, I am more inclined to think they were Chalkhill females. Unfortunately the photos that I took of these are not very good, the one below is about the best.



Female Chalkhill Blue....I think?

All in all it was a good day out, I managed to see Adonis Blues which were a first for me 😊 and my wife and daughter both enjoyed their day although I think the highlight for them was the ice cream 🍦

Bye for now,
Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 29-Aug-11 06:12 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Lovely report and pictures. I trust you're as pleased with the Lumix as I am?

I'm glad you managed to get some Adonis shots as I failed to get anything other than a few record shots at Mill Hill recently.

"nfreem" wrote:

Adonis Blue – male with what looks like rain damage on forewings

I wonder if this could be attributed to the wings sticking together at emergence for some reason rather than rain damage?

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 29-Aug-11 06:47 AM GMT

Hi Mark,

The damage on the Adonis could well be caused at emergence as you say.

Looking more carefully it does indeed look as if the wings have stuck together at some point.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Susie, 29-Aug-11 06:57 AM GMT

I would guess that it is damage as a pupa rather than damage on emergence. I've seen several butterflies this year which look like someone has spot welded their wings.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 29-Aug-11 06:16 PM GMT

Hi Susie,

That's a great description. It does look very like a failed spot weld.

I remember your other threads about Adonis aberrations and your interest in unusual variations. I only saw a few Adonis, maybe half a dozen at most and this one was the only one with anything that looked out of the ordinary.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 31-Aug-11 04:38 AM GMT

Tuesday August 30th

I had been promising myself that I would try and get over to **Grafton Wood**, hopefully to see Brown Hairstreak, sometime over the Bank Holiday. I had already booked an extra day off work but the weather forecast was not looking good. Nevertheless, as Grafton is only a 45 minutes or so drive from my house, I decided to 'suck it and see' and set out mid-morning in rather dull and overcast conditions.

I arrived at Grafton and parked by the church with the weather still overcast with horizon to horizon grey clouds and the temperature around 16C, much too dull and cool for Browns Hairstreaks to be about. Oh well, I thought, might as well have a wander around and see what I can find.

Walking across the fields towards the wood and up towards the orchard, I noticed that some of the hedgerows looked like they had been 'tidied up' a bit and I could hear the sound of machinery and saws from further within the wood. I later saw a signs by the entrance to the wood warning that the forestry commision were clearing non-native trees.



Field at west side of wood showing recent tidying of hedgerow



Looking towards the orchard under grey skies

The first butterflies seen were a couple of Small Tortoiseshells in the field before the entrance to the wood. These raised my spirits a bit as they were the first that I had seen for a couple of months.



Small Tortoiseshell



Small Tortoiseshell

I spent the next couple of hours looking around the outside of the wood around the hedges between the orchard and down to the southern end of the wood and also went through the wood to the other side where there are some likely looking Blackthorn thickets. As suspected, I did not get a glimpse of a single Brown Hairstreak, it was simply too dull and cool.

What I did see were plenty of Green Veined Whites and Speckled Woods plus a few Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and a single Common Blue. I realised that I hadn't taken a photo of a GV White since my first attempts back in the spring so I contented myself with getting a few shots of these. I must admit, I think the GV White has a delicate beauty of its own and is often overlooked because it is so common.



Green Veined White



Green Veined White



Green Veined White



Speckled Wood

An enjoyable couple of hours despite the gloomy weather and not seeing a Brown Hairstreak.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 31-Aug-11 05:09 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Glad to see you've been out.

Lovely report and pictures. I do like a report when it has site pictures in as it gives a feel to the reader of the location, particularly when you don't know it. Glad to see you managed to get some Green-veined White shots. I certainly agree with you in that they are a lovely butterfly and generally overlooked for more 'exotic' creatures.

I particularly liked the composition of your Speckled Wood image and the first Small Tortoiseshell picture.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Wurzel, 31-Aug-11 04:09 PM GMT

Some lovely shots 😊 Sorry you weren't lucky with the Brown Hairstreak 😞, still there's always next year 😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 01-Sep-11 03:40 AM GMT

Thanks for the comments guys.

Wurzel,

I did manage to see a female Brown Hairstreak at Bernwood Meadow a few weeks back 😊. I am guessing that there maybe a week or two left to maybe see one at Grafton. West Midlands BC has its Brown Hairstreak day there this coming Sunday 4th September, the weather forecast is not looking too good though 😞

Here's hoping,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 10-Sep-11 05:12 AM GMT

Friday 9th September.

Its well and truly turned to Autumn round here with rain, winds 😞 and a few sunny spells 😊.
Getting up for work last week at 06.00, it was light, getting up this week it is dark 😞

The Speckled Woods are still hanging on in my back garden but apart from the odd unidentified white passing through they are the only butterflies that I have managed to see this week.

There have been a few moths flapping against the back room windows now the nights are darker and the lights are on, nothing has ventured in through the windows though.

Seem to have been invaded by House Spiders (Tegenaria sp.). The seems to be more of these and they seem to be bigger than ever.....but does that seem to be the case every year 😊

Had them stomping across the carpet or clambering up the walls every night this week and one in the bath every morning...except this morning when there was two, at least these were a bit smaller.

Each time I have caught them in a glass or coffee jar and put them outside by the neighbours shed hoping they will go there instead of back in with us.



Spiders out of the bath.

This is the only photo of these that I have managed so far, if I mention getting my camera when one is on the wall or floor, my wife and youngest son (17 and fearless when faced with anything else) insist that I stop messing about and get rid of them.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Wurzel, 10-Sep-11 05:34 AM GMT

I know what you mean about Autumn being upon us – I get to work and it feels like I should be heading home! Mind you I feel like that most of the time 😊

RE spiders – I haven't seen any yet but I know I will soon as they're camping out at the top of my water butt – a few more inches worth of collected rain and they'll be scampering in. Then the fun really starts as the race will be on – me with the jar and paper and my wife with the vacuum! 🤖

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 20-Sep-11 03:43 AM GMT

Monday 19th September.

The weather for the past few days has been really mixed. Some really heavy rain showers and strong winds. A few nice sunny spells but still windy.

The Speckled Woods in my garden are still hanging in there, I have seen 2 or 3 most days recently, but they are starting to look a bit tired and worn now.

Other than that, a single Large White and a single Holly Blue made brief visits yesterday and that's been about it for me recently.

Earlier in the year, I had a large Sycamore tree removed from the bottom of my garden and this has opened up a reasonable area. My intention is to leave this area semi-wild and as such I have not done anything with it during the summer. Over the next few weeks I will be giving thought to what plants to put in there.

The photo below was taken back in April.



Garden before Sycamore removed

The next photo was taken in early August after the tree had been down a few weeks. You can just see the stump amongst the nettles that have sprung up.



Bottom of Garden after Sycamore removed

The shed in the photo above belongs to my neighbour at the bottom of the garden. I am thinking some Buckthorn along there for starters.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 20-Sep-11 04:23 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

You need to get out and photograph some insects ... I can almost feel the desperation!

Good luck with the garden. It looks as if you have a reasonable bit of mature space with some potential. I know very little about plants so wont be making any recommendations.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by David M, 20-Sep-11 05:01 AM GMT

I wish I had a garden like that, Neil. Look after it won't you?

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 02-Oct-11 06:06 AM GMT

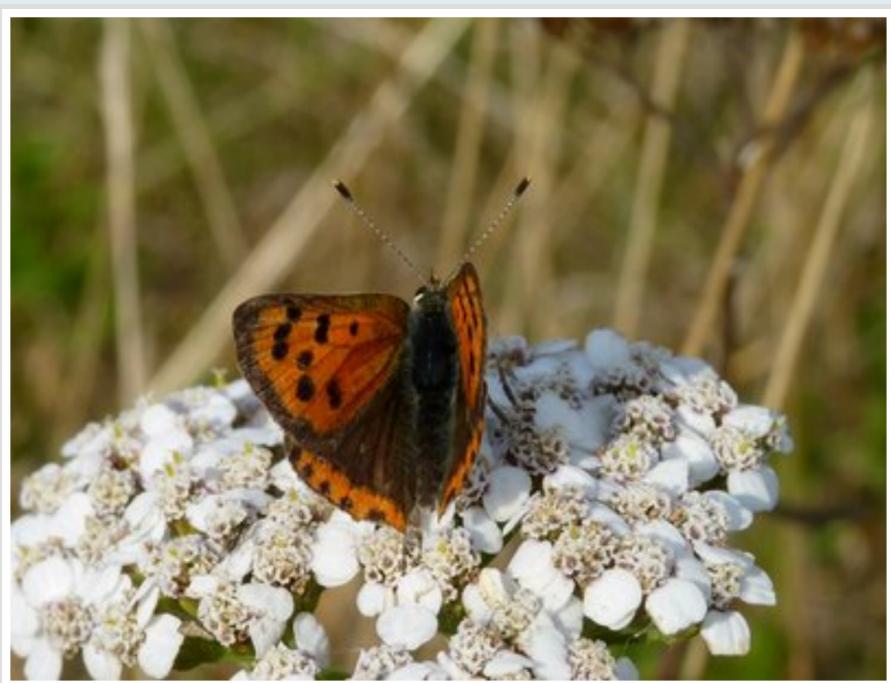
Saturday October 1st

A combination of circumstances including dodgy weather, work and then a bout of Man-Flu (very bad as is always the case with this illness 😊) has meant that I have not been able to get out for the past couple of weeks.

The past few days at work has had me looking out at the rising temperatures and blue skies and wondering if there was anything still about.

This afternoon, with the weather still looking good, I finally managed to get a couple of hours spare and jumped on my sons mountain bike and trundled over to Sheldon Country Park to see if I could find any butterflies still about.

At first it did not look good with most of the meadow areas having been cut back. There were still some untouched areas around the hedges and trees however and one such spot that is in a sheltered dip behind a slight bank produced single examples of Small Copper, Small Heath and Common Blue.



Small Copper



Small Copper



Common Blue

The Small Copper was defending his territory in one corner of the dip most aggressively and would not let the Common Blue anywhere near. I finally managed a couple of shots of the CB when it settled briefly on the other side of the dip.

Both the Small Copper and Common Blue were looking a bit tired. The Small Heath however looked fairly fresh but despite my best efforts at being sneaky I could not get close enough to get a photo.

I also had a brief glimpse of a either a Red Admiral or Peacock as it flew rapidly past and disappeared towards Birmingham airport.

An enjoyable hour or so that showed that the season is still not quite over around here.

Bye for now.

Neil.

Re: nfreem

by Mark Colvin, 02-Oct-11 04:31 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Glad to see you've been out at last!

"nfreem" wrote:

work and then a bout of Man-Flu (very bad as is always the case with this illness)

You must have been seriously ill ... I know I would have been! 😊

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: nfreem

by Neil Freeman, 31-Oct-11 03:15 AM GMT

Sunday 30th October

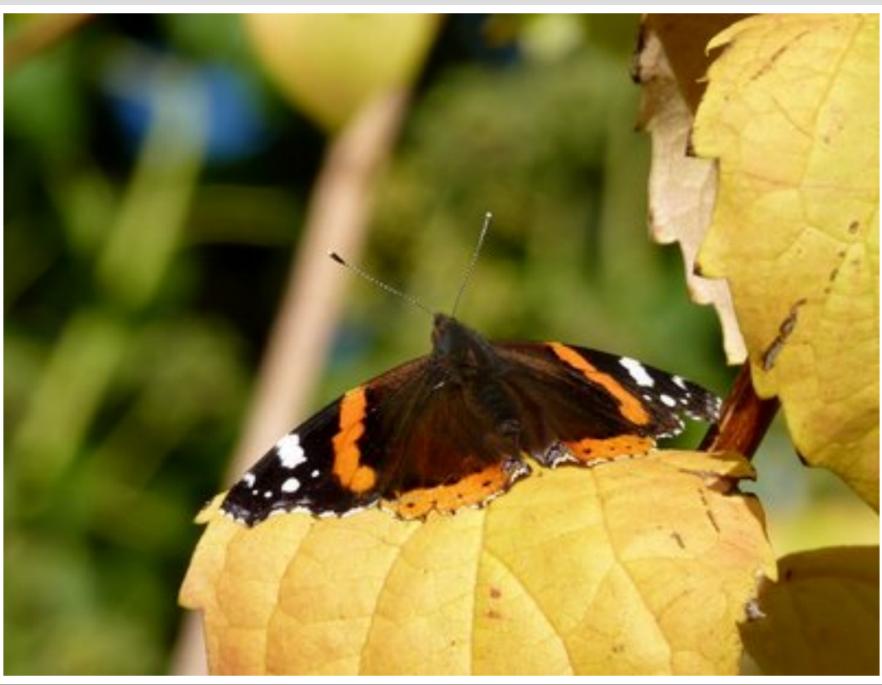
Nearly the whole month of October has passed by without me seeing any more butterflies, the last ones were back on the 1st at one of my local spots. Even my resident Speckled woods in the garden have called it a day.

I don't believe for a minute that there are none around, its just that a combination of bad weather, working when the sun has been out and family comittments at the weekends has meant that I have not been able to get out and about.

Having said that, and reading sightings from other members, it is obvious that the best locations at this time of year are further south than where I am here in the West Midlands.

Gloomy and wet yesterday and cloudy this morning, the sun finally popped out for half an hour or so around 3 o'clock this afternoon. I was looking out of the window into the back garden when a movement caught my eye. Circling around in a sunny, sheltered corner of the garden was a Red Admiral.

Grabbing my camera, I went out and for 20 mins or so clicked away happily as it kept taking off, having a fly around the garden and settling again in the same area and basking in the sun.



Red Admiral in late October sun



Red Admiral against clear blue sky



A very pleasant surprise and made my day 😊

Bye for now,

Neil F.