

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Jan-12 04:40 AM GMT

After a period of gloomy weather followed by the devastating storm on Tuesday my day was brightened up considerably when I spotted this chrysalis on the corner of my garage as I struggled to carry a generator to the house. Quite how I have not managed to see it before I don't understand as I walk past the garage every day. It is in a bit of a vulnerable position and could easily be brushed off by anyone walking past and it is right next to the bird feeder! It is only 15mm long and I assume from its size that it is a small white.



Re: Nick Morgan

by Vince Massimo, 06-Jan-12 11:38 PM GMT

Nice find Nick. I am inclined towards Small white as well, but have never seen one as strongly marked as that and I cannot completely rule out Green-veined White. A full side-on photo may help to resolve the issue, otherwise you will have to wait until late March or early April to discover which one it is 😊

Vince

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 08-Jan-12 04:08 AM GMT

Vince. This is the most sideways picture I can manage of the chrysalis. I hope this helps. What is the identifying feature I should look for? It certainly is very strongly patterned. There were a number of small white chrysalises on the house last year, but they were all beige/brown (which would have been a much more sensible colour for this one to choose!!).



Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jan-12 04:38 AM GMT

Hi Nick,

That's a Green-veined White pupa. The almost downturned 'nose' and the smooth profile of the main 'hump' (keeled rather than spiny) differentiate it from Small White. The latter also appears more angular and spiky at about mid point. Colour and decoration can be highly variable in both, but that feature alone is more GVW than SW in yours.

Neil

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 08-Jan-12 05:08 AM GMT

Neil,

Thanks very much. That is very exciting for me as I haven't seen a green-veined white pupa before. It is also interesting that there weren't any food plants growing in our garden anywhere near the garage. Maybe it has come from our neighbour's garden.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Vince Massimo, 08-Jan-12 06:01 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

That's a Green-veined White pupa. The almost downturned 'nose' and the smooth profile of the main 'hump' (keeled rather than spiny) differentiate it from Small White. The latter also appears more angular and spiky at about mid point. Colour and decoration can be highly variable in both, but that feature alone is more GVW than SW in yours.

The Kipper has spoken 😊

Yes, the side view is the one that helps the main diagnostic features to stand out. Neil has mentioned a number of elements, but I just wanted a clearer look at the main hump which swings it towards Green-veined White for me.

Vince

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Jan-12 06:34 AM GMT

Thank you Vince.

I was cleaning the windows at the weekend and thought that it was about time I removed the failed small white chrysalises from last year. I noticed that they each had a neat little hole, so presumably those little black wasps that I saw taking an interest, shortly after the chrysalises had formed, managed to lay eggs in some of them. Oh well, at least about half of them emerged into butterflies.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Mar-12 07:27 AM GMT

Still no butterflies for me, although I have received reports of a couple of red admirals, a small tortoiseshell and a peacock from around East Lothian. The excitement for me was the arrival of several frogs in our pond on Friday. So that makes us about three weeks behind Suzie here! My wife brought home some frog spawn for our kids to watch develop about three or four years ago. Since then we have only seen the odd small frog in the pond. I wonder if they take this long to reach sexual maturity and they are now returning to the pond of their birth? We now have a few patches of frog spawn, so potentially more frogs for the future.



I planted my cuckoo flowers at the weekend and my wild flower seeds have arrived, so all set for a good summer!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 22-Mar-12 03:35 AM GMT

A beautiful day up here and at last I have seen my first butterfly. A comma in a field close to where I work. Almost at the same time a small tortoiseshell flew past me!



It is odd to think that commas have only become common up here over the last six years. I checked my records and discovered that last year the first two butterflies I saw were a comma and a small tortoiseshell and it was also on the 21st March!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 22-Mar-12 09:23 PM GMT

I was very excited to see a small white today in Dunbar. They seem to be coming out quite early in SE Scotland with this unseasonably sunny weather. I hope this isn't our summer! Last year we had a fantastic April and then it all went downhill from there!

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 23-Mar-12 02:51 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

I hope this isn't our summer! Last year we had a fantastic April and then it all went downhill from there!

Indeed. Watching the forecast for the next few days, it seems that with easterly winds the west of Scotland is going to enjoy the warmer temperatures and sunnier skies.

I'd prefer for this to take place in late May rather than late March as Chequered Skipper spotting would be rendered far more certain.

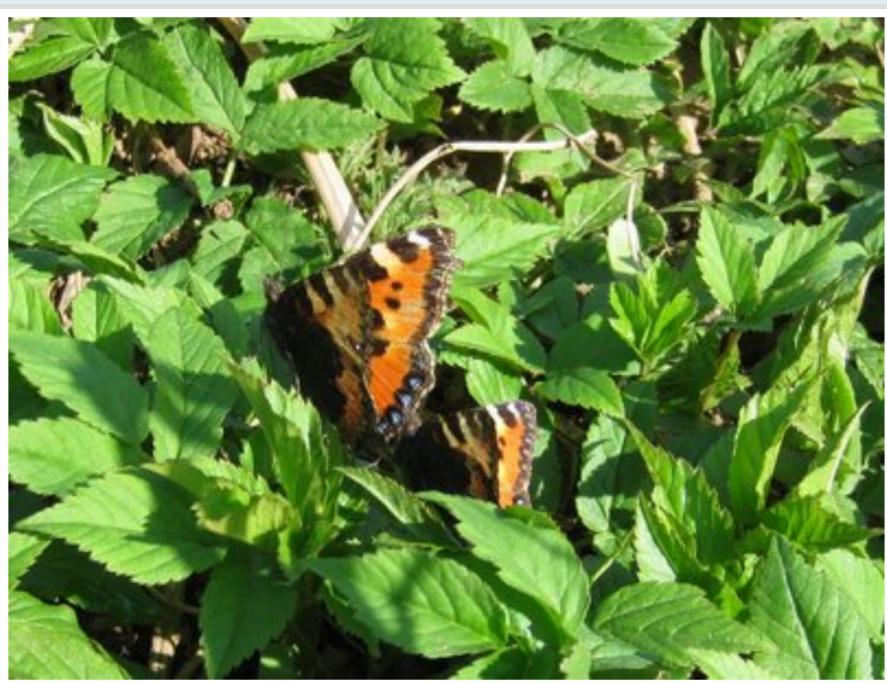
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 27-Mar-12 07:07 AM GMT

I was delighted on Friday to discover, not only that the small copper caterpillar had survived the winter, but there are actually three caterpillars on the sorrel plants in a pot in the garden. Two of them are very fat and must be about 10mm long. The other is about half the size. I spent hours staring at the pot over the winter looking for them, so they must have been hidden in the crown of the plants.



At lunchtime today I walked the route of my transect and saw 12 small tortoise shells and six peacocks. The transect starts next week, so I wonder if I will see so much then. A couple of peacocks flew towards me in close formation and then spiralled up about 40 or 50 feet and disappeared over some trees. Some of the small tortoiseshells were also getting up close and personal.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Mar-12 02:09 AM GMT

Another amazing day here with the temperature registering 20 degrees, full sun and only a slight breeze.

At lunchtime I took a walk along my new path down the River Tyne and saw several peacocks and small tortoiseshells. I walked as far as an area where I saw a lot of orange tips last year and searched again for chrysalises. No luck, though. As I turned around to return to my car I found myself feeling disappointed that I hadn't seen any white butterflies, but then I had to remind myself that it was still March. Just as I was thinking that I spied a white butterfly ahead that was ranging up and down the path. I followed at a safe distance and had to run to keep up with it at one point. Eventually it briefly stopped and I managed one photo on full zoom. It then flew right past me and I saw the distinctive markings of the underside wing pattern of an orange tip. Amazing to have seen one so early. Normally they appear about the middle of April. 😊



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 31-Mar-12 06:00 AM GMT

Yesterday when I arrived home I noticed that the green-veined white chrysalis had changed colour slightly. This morning it had changed further and was now a brown colour all over with the white wings showing through.



When I arrived home this afternoon the chrysalis was empty! I am glad that the butterfly chose a nice warm day to emerge and I hope it finds somewhere sheltered to get through the next few days. I'm also pleased that at last I can now paint the garage!! There were still plenty of butterflies in the air today everywhere I went. I saw my first green-veined whites today near Haddington.





I had a look for speckled woods and holly blues at the two locations I found them last year, but I didn't see any. I was also told of a large white that was spotted near the coast, so that is eight species of butterflies recorded in East Lothian so far this year.

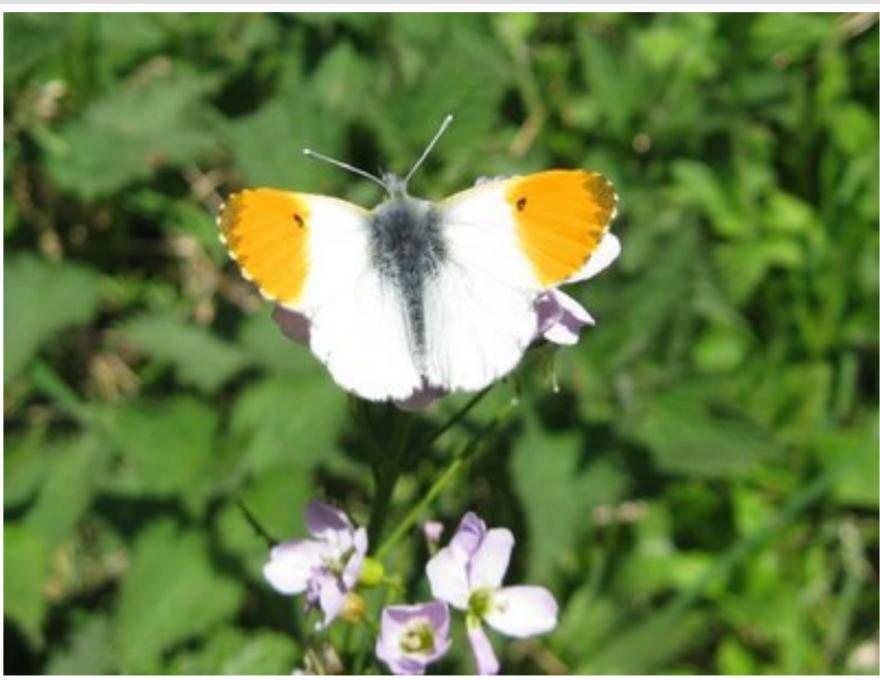
The two larger small copper caterpillars have vanished. I can't see any sign of them in the pot of sorrel, so I suspect they have gone for a wander and have formed chrysalises somewhere close by.

The frog spawn has hatched so the pond is full of tiny tadpoles and I saw my first swallow this morning.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-May-12 05:00 AM GMT

I notice that the last post I wrote was in March, so April was pretty much a write-off. The forecast for today was overcast and cool again, but by lunch time there were clear blue skies. So, I managed to do my transect. Remarkably, despite the lousy weather, I have managed to do a transect each week so far this season. There weren't as many butterflies around as I would have liked, but I was just so delighted to be out looking for them on a sunny day. Still no new species since March, but a few green-veined whites, orange tips, small tortoiseshells and one peacock.



I just love orange tips!!





Looking a little faded, but still hanging on in there.

It is amazing how the good weather lifts your spirits. The forecast isn't very good for the next ten days, but I have a feeling that we have got to have a few sunny spells ahead of us soon. I am longing to check if the new colony of holly blues has made it through to a second season and if the speckled woods we discovered last year are still at John Muir Country Park. A lot to look forward to ... 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 04-May-12 06:23 AM GMT

Looking forward to hearing about them too! Nice to see that at least somewhere had some good weather today and we are definitely due some sunny spells 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 17-May-12 08:03 AM GMT

Hurray, at long last we had some sun shine this morning!! I had to spend the day doing various site visits, so I managed to time them so that I could be at John Muir Country Park at lunch time. I took the opportunity to walk down to the area where I had seen Speckled Woods for the first time last year. And sure enough, as soon as I arrived there I saw one within a couple of feet of the place I had seen them last year. This must be at least the third generation and it is amazing that they seem to occur in such a small area. Some more were seen for the first time last year in an equally small area by the countryside ranger on the other side of the estuary about a kilometre away.



This was the first real chance I have had to use my new camera and I am really impressed with the results.



The biggest advantage I have found with it is that, because I don't need to go any closer than one metre from the butterflies, I don't disturb them at all. So much so that two of the Speckled Woods spiralled up into the air, landed on a leaf together and mated. So, it looks as though there should continue to be Speckled Woods at this site.



Around about midday quite a number of butterflies appeared as I walked around the park. It was great to see them in such numbers again.



This was a lovely patch of forget-me-nots.



I presume this is one of last year's Peacocks that has survived the lousy weather it has suffered for most of its life.





I am really pleased with the results from the Lumix. Still a lot of practice needed, particularly on macro and trying to get better exposure on the white butterflies, but its ability to zoom right into a butterfly from a metre amazes me. Unfortunately, I will have to wait to use it again as we have rain forecast for the next two days solid!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 23-May-12 04:55 AM GMT

Today was a beautiful day - 18 degrees and full sun, so I did my transect at lunch time. Unfortunately, the number of butterflies was much lower than normal for this time of year. I only saw 21 butterflies, whereas I saw 68 this week last year. The warden at Aberlady Local Nature Reserve has reported similar results, so it seems that the poor weather earlier in the year has had an impact on butterfly numbers. Yesterday I walked for three kilometres along the River Tyne and back to an area where there are usually a lot of orange tips and other white butterflies. I only saw two Orange Tips and a Small Tortoiseshell. I wonder if things will pick up now that the better weather is here? This afternoon I went to Aberlady to look for the Holly Blues at the site where they appeared last year for the first time. Sadly I didn't find any. I remember last year that I was constantly distracted by Orange Tips flying past while I was looking for Holly Blues, but this year there were no Orange Tips either! I walked around the area to check further a field, and eventually I came across two Orange Tips mating, which gave me a chance to experiment with my new camera again.



The poor things kept being interrupted by one, and then two other males.



Is this called a menage-a-quatre?

I wonder if there is any chance that the Holly Blues have delayed emergence because of the weather. I'll keep visiting the site for a few weeks yet just to make sure. It would be a real shame if they haven't managed to survive.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 23-May-12 06:11 AM GMT

I'd give them a day or two to dry out and warm up and then hopefully their numbers will pick up – at least that's what I'm hoping 😊 WRT the menage a quatre cracking shot of some unusual behaviour is that down to them trying to catch up after the poor weather?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 23-May-12 08:49 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. I'll keep my fingers crossed.

Re: Nick Morgan

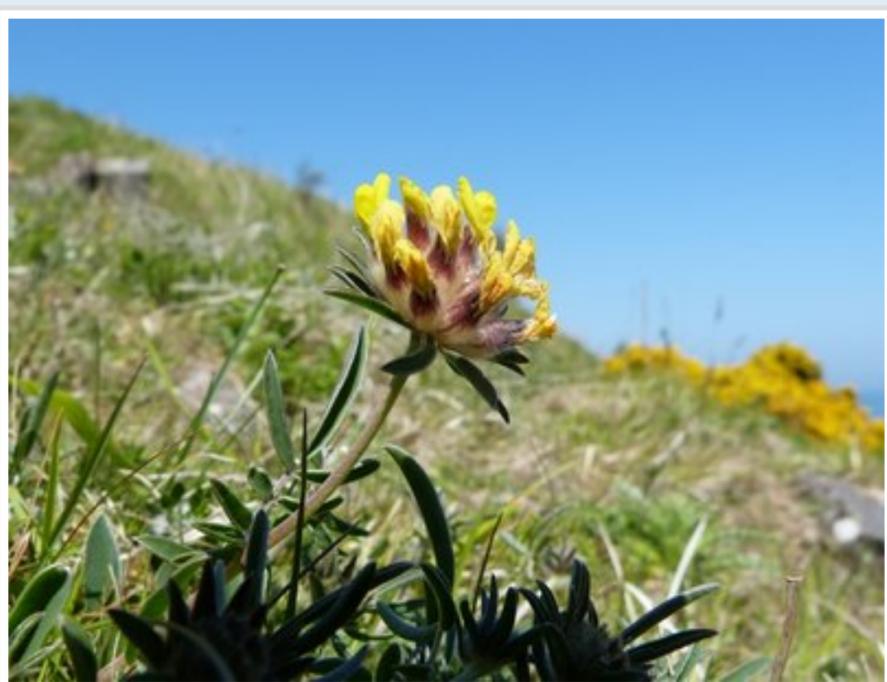
by NickMorgan, 27-May-12 08:40 AM GMT

I took the day of work on Friday to look for kidney vetch along the Berwickshire Coast as part of a Small Blue survey that is being organised by Iain Cowe. I started off by visiting the established colony of Small Blue near Eyemouth, just to get my eye in. To get there involves a walk of over a kilometre along the coastal path, where I remember seeing a lot of butterflies in previous years. However, this time I didn't see one butterfly despite full sun and 17 degrees. When I arrived at the site, almost immediately I saw my first Small Blue. I had forgotten how small they are and initially I thought it was a fly that I had seen!

I spent about an hour and a half enjoying this little colony and I saw about 20 or 30 individuals in that time.



It took me a while to find any eggs, but once I got my eye in I found them on quite a number of flower heads.



These are magical little butterflies and I could have stayed for hours watching them. While I was there a Wall Brown briefly visited and I saw my first Small Heath of the season and on the walk back to the car a couple of Green-veined Whites and a Peacock flew past. I spent the rest of the day visiting various sites along the coast to look for kidney vetch. I only found it at two sites and didn't see much more in the way of butterflies. One area close to Cove had a few Wall Browns and I saw a Speckled Wood on the way down to the harbour.



Cove Harbour



I have to admit to being a little disappointed with the lack of butterflies I saw.

As I drove back home I called in to Bilsdean to see if the East Lothian Wall Browns were out and about. I found six of them along their favourite section of the John Muir Way and an Orange Tip at Dunglass.



It was great to see that the number of Small Blues doesn't seem to have been affected by the poor spring weather. It seems that Wall Browns have also been reasonably unscathed by the weather. Numbers of Orange Tips and other whites are definitely a lot lower than normal and there doesn't seem to be resurgence now that we are having better weather.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-May-12 04:37 AM GMT

I was pleased that the number of butterflies seemed to have picked up yesterday when I did my transect. Good numbers of Green-veined Whites and Orange Tips, a single Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock and, at long last, my first Large White! I wonder if many of them had managed to delay emergence during the cold period we experienced. It was 21 degrees at lunch time when I did the transect and by the time I went home after five o'clock it had dropped to 14 degrees and cloudy. Hopefully the warm weather will return soon.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Jun-12 05:04 AM GMT

What miserable weather! We have had no sunshine for a week now, maximum temperatures of 14 degrees and north winds. The poor old butterflies that appeared to be recovering in numbers last Monday will be finding life hard. There doesn't look to be much improvement on the horizon. Last Thursday I met with the Access Officer from the Scottish Borders and we walked for 16 kilometres across the Lammermuir Hills checking out an estate where we have had a number of complaints of game keepers shouting at ramblers. We received nothing but friendly waves, so maybe they rumbled who we were! It was perfect weather for walking, but sadly too overcast for butterflies. Some new diversions had been cut through the heather to avoid a new wind farm development, so we were walking in relatively unexplored territory and potential habitats for uncommon butterflies. I will definitely have to go back if we get any sunshine.

The highlight of a short walk today was finding some Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars in a patch of nettles. I was delighted, but my wife thought they were disgusting – "a writhing black mass"! Some people have no taste!!



Re: Nick Morgan

by Paul Harfield, 11-Jun-12 07:23 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

The highlight of a short walk today was finding some Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars in a patch of nettles. I was delighted, but my wife thought they were disgusting – "a writhing black mass"! Some people have no taste!!

Hi Nick

Great to see that Small Tortoiseshells are thriving somewhere 😊 I have not seen one at any stage down here for several years 😞 When I was growing up they were perhaps the most numerous of all butterflies for me. I have found Comma and Red Admiral larvae recently. We have huge amounts of Nettle around here as I am sure most people do, so I do not really understand why they are so elusive 🤔

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 11-Jun-12 06:34 PM GMT

"jackz432r" wrote:

Great to see that Small Tortoiseshells are thriving somewhere 😊 I have not seen one at any stage down here for several years

😞 When I was growing up they were perhaps the most numerous of all butterflies for me. I have found Comma and Red Admiral larvae recently. We have huge amounts of Nettle around here as I am sure most people do, so I do not really understand why they are so elusive 🤔

Strange that (as well as worrying). Although Tortoiseshells are fewer in number than I remember as a child, they're still relatively common near where I live in south Wales. Must say though, apart from in spring, it's rare to see more than a handful on any given day. They tend to crop up in ones or twos like Brimstones.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jun-12 03:31 AM GMT

I have only seen two Small Tortoiseshells this year and one of those was in Norfolk. They are much more scarce around my part of the midlands than they used to be. I too remember them being one of the most common butterflies around in my childhood.

Neil F.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Jun-12 03:51 AM GMT

Wow, it is worrying to hear about the decline in numbers further south. I wonder if it is something to do with the recent poor summers or paracitism from *Sturmia bella*? Maybe it is a bit of both and *Sturmia* doesn't do so well up here. We don't exactly get a lot of Small Tortoiseshells up here, but they are the one butterfly that I can usually rely on seeing on the odd occasion when the sun shines. Along the local nettle patch, which is about 100 metres along the side of a track I have regularly seen two or three adults since early March this year. Other than a decline in numbers about four years ago when everyone was concerned about their decline, they have remained as common today as they always have been here.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jun-12 04:28 AM GMT

Hi Nick,

My apologies for the continued intrusion into your diary.

You may be interested in the linked article if you have not already seen it.

<http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/a...inues.html>

cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Goldie M, 12-Jun-12 05:28 AM GMT

The Small Tortoiseshells are doing well here in Lancashire Nick. The nice week we had at the end of March my garden was full for a couple of days, then every time I went to my local haunt Hall-lee-Brook I'd always see them. I've put a couple of pic's in to cheer you up Goldie 😊





Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Jun-12 05:45 AM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

Hi Nick,

My apologies for the continued intrusion into your diary.

Happy to host the party!!

"nfreem" wrote:

You may be interested in the linked article if you have not already seen it.

[http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/a ... inues.html](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/a...inues.html)

cheers,

Neil F.

Interesting, but as they say it will be more interesting to see if the trend continues over the next few years. Given the weather so far, I guess we are looking at the numbers continuing to be low.

It sounds as though there is a north/south divide. As I have said in other posts we have had a few species expand their range into East Lothian over the last few years. Is this a sign of climate change? It's difficult to believe that is the case as we have had two very hard winters at the end of 2009 and 2010 and poor summers in 2010 and 2011. Other species (Ringlets, Orange Tips and Peacocks) arrived about 35 years ago.

Thanks for the pictures Goldie. I remember bright, sunny weather!! Today, despite it being overcast, I decided to go and look for Northern Brown Argus in the hope that the weather was meant to brighten up. All I found was a Small Heath covering in the damp grass. Of course, as soon as I arrived back in the office the sun came out for a while!!



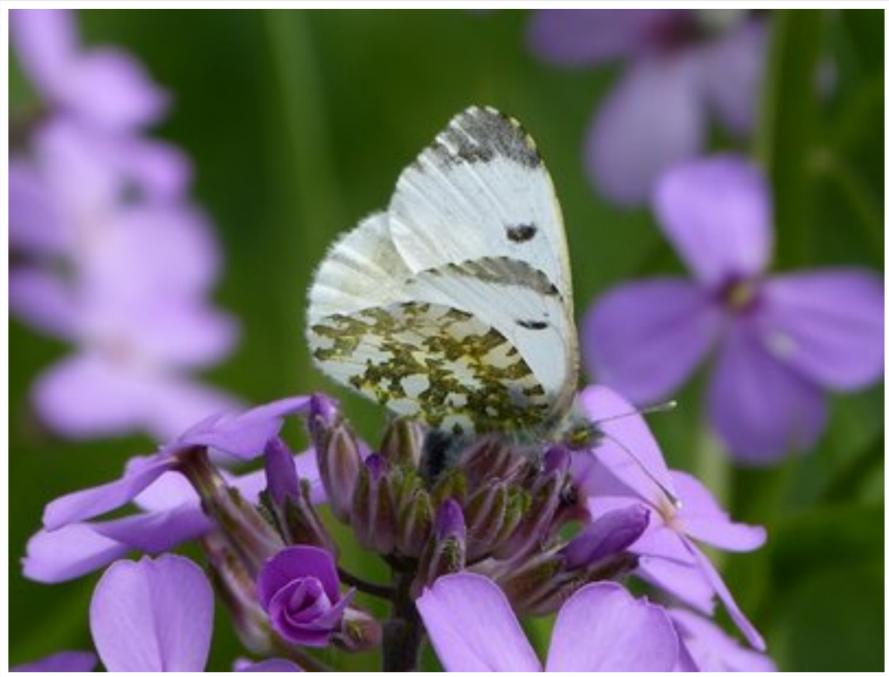
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 14-Jun-12 05:51 AM GMT

The sun shone today, so I was able to do my transect. There weren't that many butterflies around, but still I saw eleven Green-veined Whites, seven Orange Tips, a very faded Small Tortoiseshell and my first Red Admiral of the year. Of course when I walked back I also saw two faded Peacocks. Where were they when I wanted them?!



I watched a female Orange Tip on a Dame's Violet *Hesperis matronalis* and at first I thought it was feeding. Then I noticed that it looked as though it was laying eggs.



When I had a look I saw that it had laid an egg on each flower head.





I have been searching Cuckoo Flowers and Garlic Mustard plants for eggs for weeks and been worried that I hadn't found any. I have never known Orange Tips to lay eggs on Dame's Violet before. I guess they must have been doing so in the past, but I just haven't noticed. It's strange, though that I haven't found any eggs on their more usual foodplants.

I was also pleased to see that there were a few Chimney Sweeper moths in the meadow. Ringlets are usually not far behind them!!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 15-Jun-12 06:56 AM GMT

I was in Dunbar this morning and, as the sun was shining, I thought I should visit John Muir Country Park to see if there were any Ringlets or Common Blue flying. No sign of any Ringlet yet, but there were a lot of Small Heaths along the main path. I gave up counting after 50. At one point there were six of them in front of me squabbling over a choice spot!



Unfortunately there was a strong easterly wind, but I thought it worth checking an area of grassland where I found Common Blue last year. It is in an area that used to be a hill, made of sand. It was quarried away many years ago and is now a grassy area surrounded by trees. There are a few undulations and last year I noticed that one slightly raised area was very popular with Common Blues. Sure enough, this was where I found Common Blue today –three males and a female. I really can't figure out what is so attractive about this particular area (about 10 feet in diameter) compared to all of the rest of the grassland. I remembered that there was another dip where I regularly saw a Common Blue last year, so I had a quick check there and there was another Common Blue. I find it intriguing that year after year particular species choose to live in exactly the same spot as their predecessors.



I had a meeting with an estate manager in the Lammermuir Hills this afternoon, and as I arrived a bit early I thought I would check a right of way to see if some new signs had been installed. Unfortunately it clouded over, so I only saw a Small Heath and a Green-veined White. However, I also saw what I thought were a couple of feathers in the heather. When I had a closer look it was an amazing moth, which was about three inches across its wings. I think I have since identified it from the UKmoths web site as a female Oak Eggar, *Lasiocampa quercus*.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-Jun-12 04:35 AM GMT

I've been thinking of taking up ornithology recently, instead of forlornly looking for butterflies. Each time I go on my transect I see a kingfisher, some herons, dippers, goosanders along with mallards and buzzards. Certainly at the moment I am seeing a lot more birds than butterflies. Strangely, despite the dreadful weather there has been one good day each week to allow me to complete my transect. Sadly the remaining days of the week have been very overcast, wet and windy, so not much chance of seeing much else.

Today we actually had a bit of sun between the showers and as I was passing Blindwells, I thought I should pop in to see if there were any Graylings around yet. This is an old open-cast coal mine that has been filled in and is now waiting to be turned into a new town. One of the few places that Graylings are found in East Lothian is on the old railway siding on this site.

Today my luck was in and I saw my first Grayling of the year in exactly the spot where I saw them last year. The wind was really strong, so I was surprised to see anything flying. It flew up from in front of me and landed in the grass just long enough for a quick record shot. Then it flew up and disappeared into some longer grass.



The forecast looks terrible for the next week, but I am away on holiday to Spain, so hopefully I will be seeing a few more butterflies there!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 30-Jun-12 06:45 AM GMT

Have a great holiday Nick, looking forward to the photos on your return

Have a goodun

Wurzel

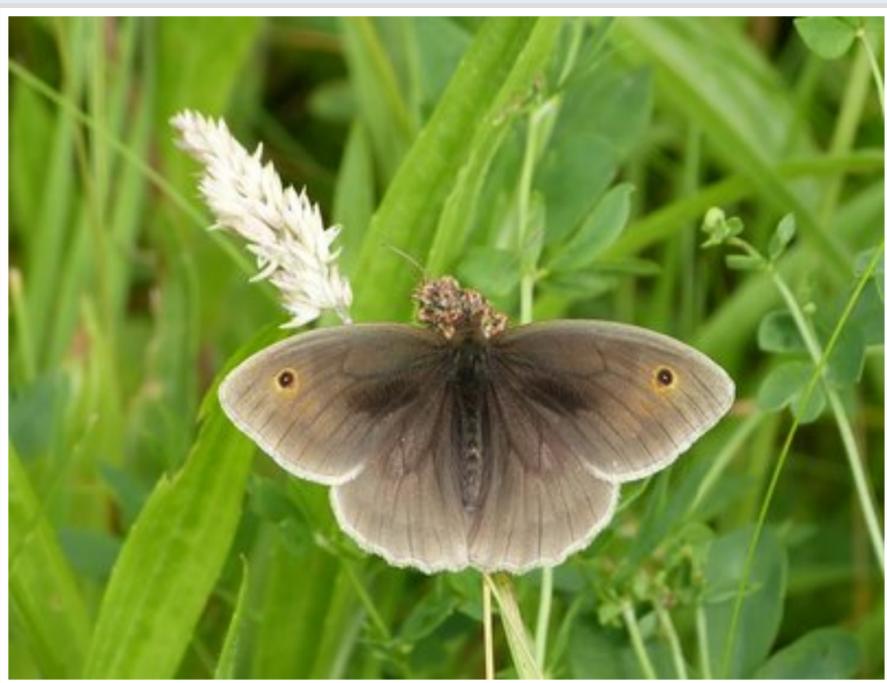
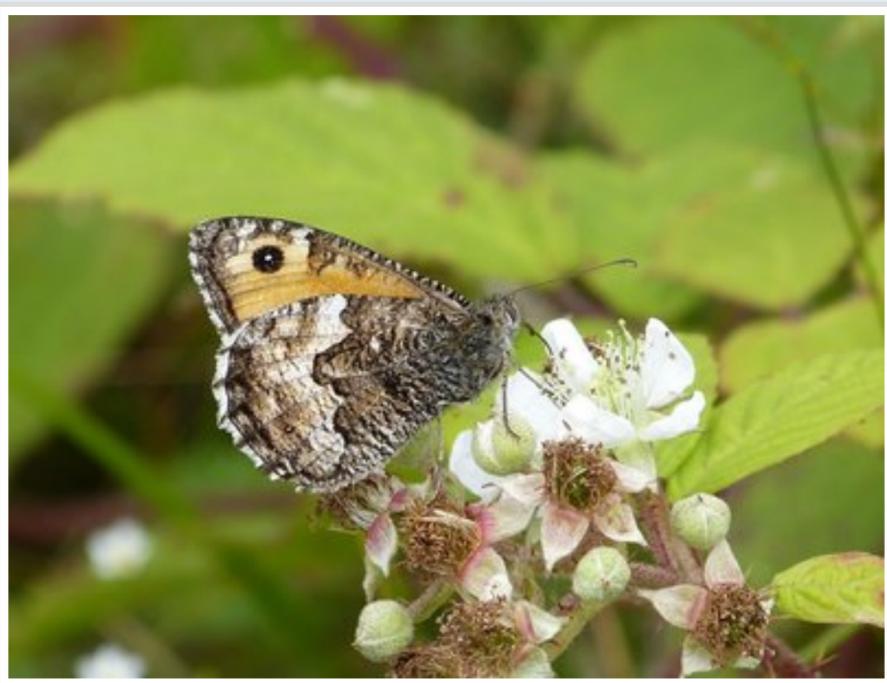
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 22-Jul-12 06:58 AM GMT

We arrived back from our Spanish holiday last Sunday to hear stories of torrential rain and flooding while we were away. Despite that, a colleague managed to do my transect the previous week and the weather was bright, but cloudy on Monday so I was able to do one again this week. It was alarming to see that almost all of my transect route had been under water two weeks earlier. The grass and flowers were all flattened and covered in a film of silt. All of the areas where I had seen Orange Tip eggs before I went away had been submerged and I could find no signs of caterpillars. Even worse, the area where I had been watching the Sand Martins had completely eroded away and there was no sign of the birds at all.

Despite all of the devastation I still counted 15 Ringlets, a Meadow Brown and a Small Tortoiseshell. This is about a third of the number that I would normally expect to see at this time of year, but hardly surprising!

The next three days returned to heavy rain and slight flooding, but Friday was brighter and the sun actually came out at lunchtime. I headed straight for Meadowmill, where there is a re-landscaped coal bing. Last year some Grayling were discovered here and it is not far from the other site in East Lothian where they occur. I was delighted to see probably about 40 of them, six Meadow Browns and a Common Blue around the main pyramid.



In the afternoon I walked down the River Tyne to check for damage to the new path. Over three kilometres and back I only saw a couple of Ringlets, a Meadow Brown and a very disheveled Red Admiral. Then I briefly saw a Green-veined White – the first white I have seen in a few weeks now.



This morning I woke to a beautiful sunny day and took my camera with me when I took the dog for his morning walk. I saw 11 Meadow Browns, 22 Ringlets and a lovely Small Tortoiseshell. Great to see them, but again much lower numbers than I would expect to see.



The forecast is looking a little better for next week and I will be interested to see if butterfly numbers pick up a bit.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Jul-12 05:29 AM GMT

We have been having some rather frustrating internet problems this week and this is my third attempt to post this, so forgive me if it is a bit short!! Our summer holidays this year were spent in the hills about 50 kilometres north-west of Malaga. A lovely area of Spain, but they have been experiencing a very hot and dry spring and summer. We noticed that much of Spain looked parched from the plane and it was certainly very dry around the area where we had rented a villa.

I have to admit to being a little disappointed with the number of species I saw, which I think was partly caused by the heat, but also partly because of my ignorance! Having posted some pictures of skippers in the "Identification" section of this forum Guy and Roger kindly identified them for me. What I had thought were probably two different species turned out to be five.

This one I got right – it is a Sage Skipper.

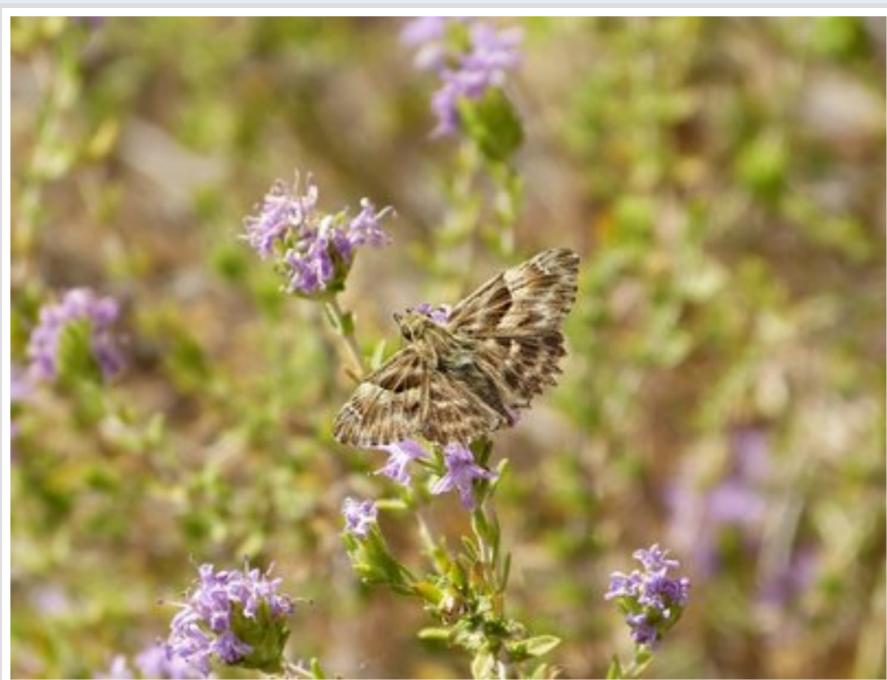


And this one was the other one I got right – a Mallow Skipper.



That was where my expertise stopped! I found the underside views of the skippers particularly difficult to identify. Some species seem to be quite variable, but so many species look quite similar to other species! I noticed from my pictures that even the same butterfly looked quite different depending on how the light hit it. I suppose there are advantages to living somewhere where there are only 15 species of butterflies!

This one was identified as a Southern Marbled Skipper.



And this one was identified as a Southern Grizzled Skipper.



And this was identified as a Red-underwing Skipper.



I am very grateful to Guy and Roger for their opinions on these butterflies. I would never have managed to identify them and even now looking at my butterfly books and Guy's European Butterfly app, I am still baffled!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Jul-12 03:37 AM GMT

It has been a bit of a frustrating week. While much of the UK has enjoyed a belated sunny spell, we have had a front sitting over us, dropping various amounts of rain. On Wednesday we had a bit of sun and I tried to do my transect, but it clouded over just before I started and by the end of section 5 I had seen no butterflies. When I arrived at the burn that I cross it was swollen with brown water and I couldn't find a way across, which gave me a good excuse to abort the mission.

A friend had more luck seeing good numbers of butterflies at the coast, but she commented that the dark clouds came over and switched off the butterflies like a theatre curtain!

On Thursday I did manage to do my transect, but it clouded over towards the end. I don't think it made much difference to the butterfly numbers, as they were much lower than expected. I think due to the flooding three weeks earlier. I saw eleven Ringlets and two Small Tortoiseshells!

Today was much better. At lunch time I went to Linn Dean, a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve consisting of a small, steep sided glen, rich in wild flowers.



The reserve is meant to be a good site for Northern Brown Argus and that was why I went there. Almost as soon as I arrived I saw one chasing a Common Blue.



As I looked around I noticed several of them. Many of them were a little faded, but they were very active.



There were hundreds of Ringlets at that site and I had to be really careful not to stand on them! Naturally, it clouded over while I was there and almost immediately all of the butterflies went to ground. When the sun came out ten or fifteen minutes later the activity was frantic as if the butterflies wanted to make the most of any available sunlight.



To complete the brown butterfly theme, there were also a lot of Meadow Browns around.



The brownness was broken up by the odd Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell and Dark Green Fritillaries.





There was also a brief fly-past from a Green-veined White and a Small Copper. All together a fantastic hour and a half and by far the most butterflies I have seen all year.

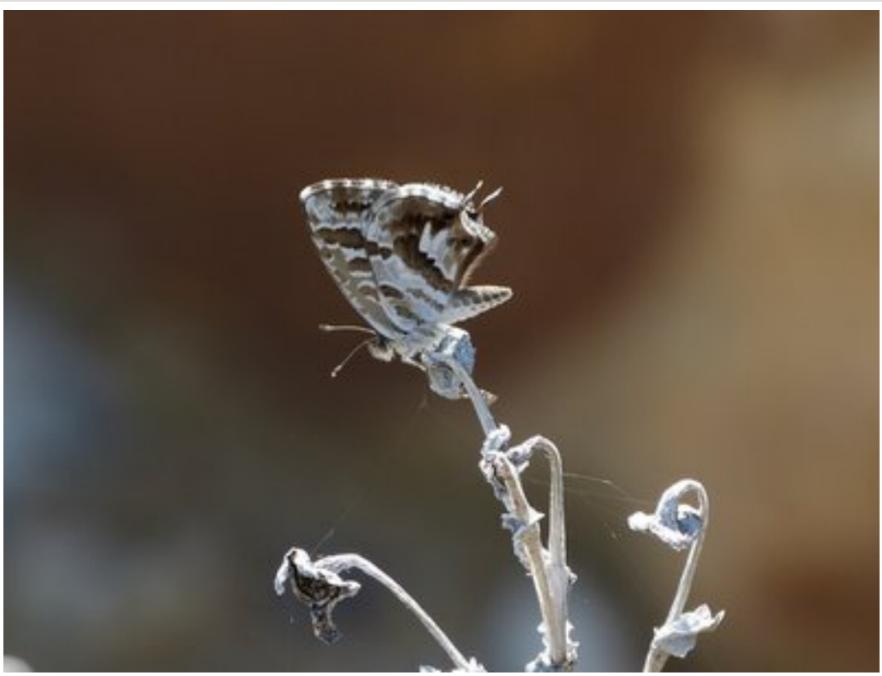
Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-Jul-12 05:35 AM GMT

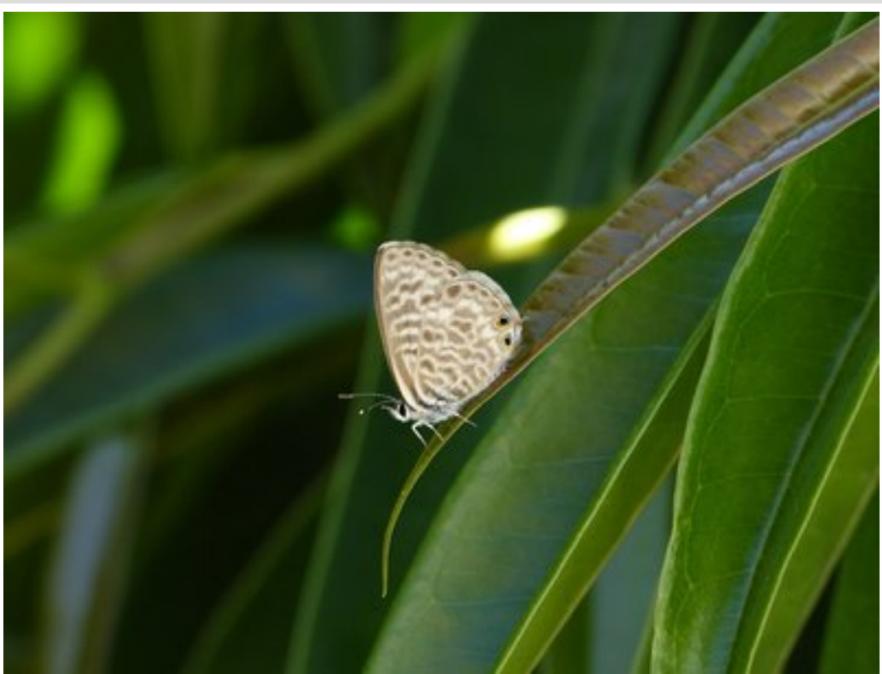
I have managed to sort out my pictures of butterflies from Spain. I didn't see as many species as I had hoped and I think this was because of the exceptionally hot and dry year they have experienced in the south of Spain. While we were there the temperature reached 38 or 39 degrees most days. The garden of the villa we rented was well irrigated, but the surrounding countryside was very dry. There was very little in flower, other than the odd more shaded patch of thyme, however it was obvious that earlier in the year the place must be covered in wild flowers.

I tried searching for butterflies at various times of the day and found that the best time was early morning. I generally left the house at sunrise and searched the surrounding hills until about 9am. By then the temperature had risen to such a degree that the butterflies were taking shelter from the sun and I was struggling in the heat.

Why is it that the first butterfly I see on our Mediterranean holidays is almost always a Geranium Bronze? I only saw these in the garden of the villa checking out the geraniums, but there was no sign of any eggs or evidence of caterpillars. Despite the irrigation the plants were quite dry and tough.



The other butterfly that was regularly in the garden was Lang's Short-tailed Blue.

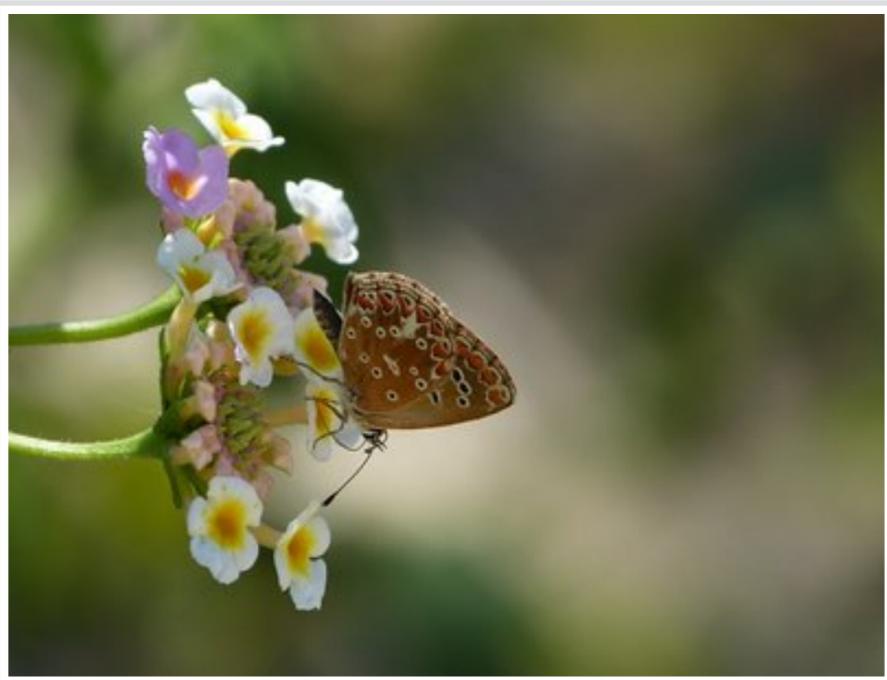


The only place I saw them in the garden was around a plumbago plant, which seems to be their favoured plant to lay eggs on. The flower heads were covered in eggs. I tried to take pictures of the eggs, but they were very small. When I checked the pictures I saw that I had also managed to photograph a caterpillar. I returned to the plant and could barely see the caterpillar, it being about 2mm long.

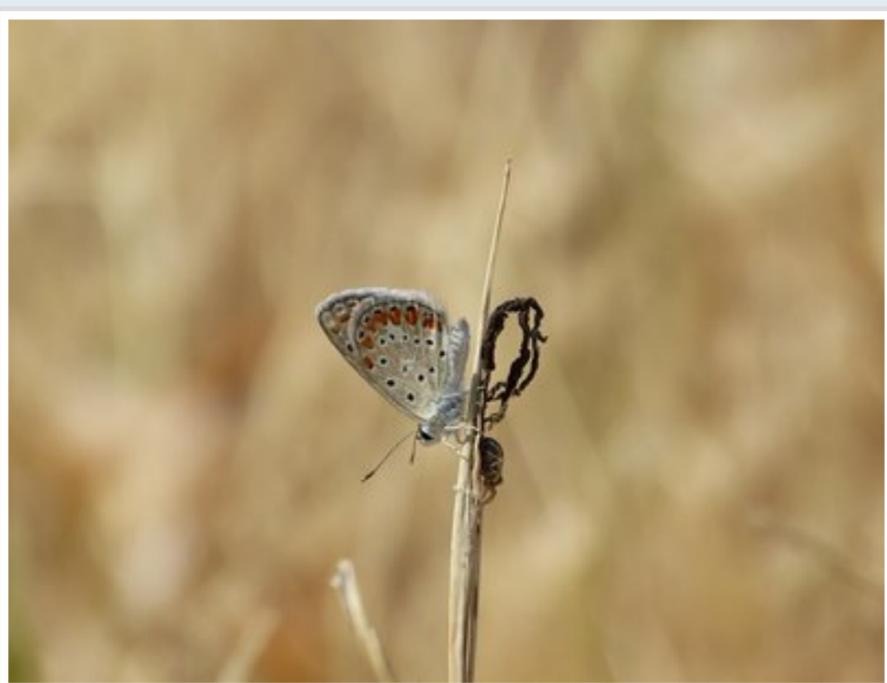


My daughter and I spent hours searching for larger caterpillars without any luck. They are just so well camouflaged amongst the buds.

The other regular visitor to the garden were Southern Brown Argus.



Not far from the villa a track had been cut in the hillside up to an olive grove. This offered a bit of shade to the plants on the track meaning that the thyme was still in flower. This was the area where I saw the most butterflies in the area and was the regular spot that I walked to most days. The first morning I looked there I was really excited to see some small butterflies. When I managed to get close enough to have a good look they turned out to be Common Blues. They were considerably smaller than the Common Blues back home. I wonder if this is because of their food plants being less lush than those in Scotland.



Probably the most common butterfly in the area was the Dusky Heath. I had only previously and very briefly seen one of these, so I was pleased to be able to get a better look at them. Many of them were quite faded and damaged, but there were a few in better condition. They tended to settle in the shade amongst coarse vegetation and fly up when I walked past knocking their wings against the stems, which probably explained the condition that many of them were in. I love the silver edging to their wings.



The other butterfly that was fairly common was the Southern Gatekeeper. Again, they would tend to spend most of the day hidden in the shade and seemed to fly out occasionally for a bit of sun. When they landed they would occasionally flap open their wings, but spent most of the time with their wings closed. The first one I saw flew past me and landed in the shade under the roots of a fig tree in a bit of a ravine. I thought this rather unusual behaviour, but a few days later I walked up a narrow gorge of a dried out stream where there were hundreds of them hiding in the shade. As I walked up the stream bed I would have 20 or 30 Southern Gatekeepers and Dusky Heaths flying up in front of me. Had I been a few feet away from the stream I would have seen nothing!



Those were the main butterflies that I saw during my time in Alora. One day I got up early and walked up to the top of the highest local hill. The only butterflies that I saw on this walk were Wall Browns. The males seemed to have taken up territories at regular intervals along the path. The hills were totally parched and even the rosemary plants were dried out. So much so that they didn't smell at all when I walked on them. I was hoping that a different habitat would have resulted in more butterflies.



I thought that I should try somewhere a little cooler and damper, so took a look along the Guadalhorce River. The river obviously contains a lot more water in the wet season, but there was a reasonable flow of water between the shingle banks. There were also quite a lot of wild flowers still in flower. There were a lot more Small White butterflies here than elsewhere.

A couple of days earlier I had seen a Southern Brown Argus chasing a small grey butterfly and managed to catch a picture, which suggested it had been an African Grass Blue. I was pleased to see a lot of African Grass Blues down by the river enjoying the flowers.



There were also a few more Small Coppers than in the drier areas I had previously searched.



Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 30-Jul-12 05:54 AM GMT

I'm glad you saw Ziz knys, Nick! I seem to remember that was a butterfly you had hoped to see last year but missed. I look forward to seeing more pictures from your trip.

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 30-Jul-12 06:12 AM GMT

Internet Explorer seems to be crashing a lot tonight, so to save having to re-attach my pictures (again) I'll add the others as a separate post.

The other butterflies I saw in Spain were just one-off encounters.

This Clouded Yellow spent more than half an hour feeding on the thyme on the shaded track I regularly visited. I only briefly saw one other down by the river.



I followed this Bath White for a couple of kilometres along a track close to the villa. Every time I thought I was about to catch up with it, it would hop across the track to another patch of thyme. Eventually, I managed to get close enough to picture it, thanks to my camera's X24 zoom! It wasn't until I looked at the picture that I was able to identify the butterfly. This was the only one I saw on my trip.



There were one or two larger brown butterflies I saw during my trip. Some of them were very ragged, but these two look to me to be a male and a female Meadow Brown. I would be pleased if anyone could help me with their identification.





I spent some time looking around an area of pine woodland south west of Alora, but didn't see any butterflies at all there. I also checked an area of woodland to the north of the village, but only saw the same species that I had already seen near the villa. Two days before we were due to leave, and as I thought I may never see any other species a Long-Tailed Blue briefly landed on the thyme on the local track I regularly visited.



On our last day, a small orange butterfly landed in the garden while we were having lunch. I think it is the southern form of the Small Heath, but again, I would be happy to be corrected if I am wrong.



Along with a Large White and the five skippers on the previous page, I think that makes 21 species for the holiday. I have to admit to being a little disappointed that I didn't see more. I thought I may have seen the odd Swallowtail or Fritillary and I would have loved to have seen a few more blues. I suspect that I would have had more luck earlier in the year when there would have been a lot more flowers and the temperatures would have been a little lower. However, after the summer we have had in Scotland, it was fantastic to be able to spend some time every day looking for butterflies and being guaranteed to see some each day.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 31-Jul-12 07:08 AM GMT

During our Spanish holiday my wife and kids were keen to go to Gibraltar to see the monkeys! I was happy to go along with this as I remember Guy saying how good the area is for butterflies. It was an interesting place. We managed to park the hire car on the beach in La Linea on the Spanish side of the border and then walked for about 15 minutes to reach Gibraltar. Once through the border we bought our Hoppa tickets for the buses and made our

way to the cable car. We made our way to the top of the rock and while the family cooed over the Barbary Macaques I kept an eye out for butterflies!



View from the rock looking towards Morocco

It wasn't long at all before I saw a couple of Two-tailed Pashas chasing each other above the trees below. This was a nice surprise as I thought that July was between generations. There were a number of other butterflies flying around, but not stopping to allow identification. Eventually a Scarce Swallowtail landed in a tree near the path and I perched on a wall above a severe drop to get a picture.



Later I saw it again, this time showing off the upper-side of its wings.



A Swallowtail then flew by, but didn't stop for a picture. A Holly Blue was more amenable, but I forgot to take the lens cover off the camera, so only managed a fuzzy picture once I had figured out why everything was black through the view finder!



Safely back down at the bottom of the rock we had lunch and then my family allowed me half an hour to explore the Alameda Botanical Gardens (I always draw the short straw). The gardens aren't enormous, but they are very interesting and were alive with butterflies. On so many occasions, I didn't know which butterfly to watch, there were so many in the air. I think because of this, I struggled to get many pictures. Most of the butterflies didn't stop for long between sampling various flowers. I was keen to get a picture of a Cleopatra, but I didn't see one still for more than a moment and in the end I just pointed the camera towards where one was feeding, but it didn't stay there long enough for me to zoom in to it!



This Small White didn't even stay still that long!



Close by this Lang's Short-tailed Blue was more cooperative.



There is a resident population of Monarchs in the botanical gardens. They looked magnificent gliding between the trees. I would have loved to have had more time to try to catch one in flight.



There were so many smaller butterflies enjoying the various flowers. I'm not sure what these flowers are, but they were proving a great hit with Southern Brown Argus, Geranium Bronze, Common Blue and Small Coppers.



On a shady path I noticed some Speckled Woods enjoying the shafts of sunlight hitting the path. I thought I had seen Speckled Woods up on the rock, but couldn't be sure, so it was good to see them here.



As well as these I saw Clouded Yellows, Large Whites and a Long-tailed Blue. 15 species during a brief visit! I could so easily have spent several days just in the botanical gardens and I am sure I would have found a lot more species on the paths around the rock. Altogether a very interesting place with the narrow streets of the urban areas and the remarkable number of butterflies.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 08-Aug-12 07:57 AM GMT

10:30 this evening, and 13 degree, we were saying goodbye to some friends who had popped round and my wife spotted a butterfly on the buddleia. I had a look and it was a Green-veined White, that looked as though it had settled for the night. I thought that I should try to take a picture, but it isn't particularly good, so a few minutes later I thought I should try again. When I went out the butterfly had flown off! I don't think I disturbed it at all and it is strange to think of butterflies flying around after dark!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Aug-12 06:15 AM GMT

Four days of no rain. That must be the first time since March!! There has been a fair amount of cloud, but quite a few sunny spells, particularly in the late afternoon. There certainly seems to be a regular phenomena of it clouding over at lunch time, but it doesn't seem to impact too much on butterfly numbers.

On Tuesday I was at Barns Ness on the coast where there were good numbers of Meadow Browns and Ringlets. I also saw a few Common Blues and two Green-veined Whites.

On Wednesday I walked along the new River Tyne Path to inspect it for flood damage. There weren't too many butterflies around, but amongst them I saw a couple of Green-veined Whites taking minerals from the silt on the path. I have never seen this before.



Yesterday I did my transect. Much of the route is still suffering from having been flooded. I counted 19 Green-veined Whites, but only one Ringlet and one Small Tortoiseshell. It is odd how the number of Ringlets has dropped so quickly on this site, while numbers are still good elsewhere. Also, I have only seen two Meadow Browns there this summer. It doesn't look as though the whole meadow was flooded. It was cut a couple of months ago, but it was left at about six inches high, which I would have thought shouldn't have impacted on the chrysalises.

Today I went to a long disused quarry in the hills near Haddington and I was delighted to see so many butterflies. I estimate that I saw over 100 Meadow Browns, about 40 Ringlets, 30 Common Blues, 15 Green-veined Whites, 10 Small Coppers, 4 Small Tortoiseshells, a Large White and a Small White. It was super to see so many butterflies in such a small area.



I have never seen more than one female Common Blue in one place in the past, but today I saw more females than males.



This Green-veined White was digging deep to get to this thistle's nectar.



All of the Small Coppers I saw were the aberration *caeruleopunctata*. Some more so than others.



There is also a small area of buddleia, which proved attractive to a number of butterflies including this Small Tortoiseshell.



This is a definite site to keep an eye on in the future and I am grateful to local enthusiast Abbie Marland who introduced me to the place.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Debbie, 12-Aug-12 03:06 AM GMT

Great pictures and interesting 😊😊😊

Debbie

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Aug-12 04:13 AM GMT

Thanks Debbie. 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 21-Aug-12 06:54 AM GMT

There's a fairly limited number of butterflies up here in East Lothian, so please excuse my excitement over what may seem like mundane species! So far I have seen 17 species here, and if I see a Painted Lady then I may manage 18 in total for 2012. Last year we had some Holly Blues, but that new colony didn't seem to make it through the winter, although there were two records in nearby villages, so I remain hopeful that there is a hidden colony somewhere. We also had some sightings of Small Skippers here last year, but none reported this year.

At least the number of butterflies has picked up since July. Good numbers of Common Blue and Small Coppers, and Ringlets and Meadow Browns have been as good as ever.

On Thursday last week, I thought I should check out some possible sites for the Holly Blues. I walked through a wooded area near Aberlady and spotted a small brown butterfly chasing a Large White. It turned out to be a very faded Speckled Wood. Amazingly two years ago they didn't exist in East Lothian. I found a few of them in John Muir Country Park last year and this year they have regularly been spotted around Aberlady and Haddington. So they seem to have advanced by about 15 kilometres a year over the last two years!



There are plenty of white butterflies around just now. Green-veined Whites being by far the most numerous, but also reasonable numbers of Small Whites and Large Whites.

On Saturday I visited my Dad down in the Scottish Borders. I took the opportunity to check out a lovely little valley above his house, which is a great place for Northern Brown Argus. I wasn't anticipating seeing any of them, but I just wanted to check out the valley for Scotch Argus. Unfortunately, it turned out to be very windy there and there were very few butterflies in the air. I only saw a couple of Ringlets and Meadow Browns and three Small Heaths. What really excited me was a Skipper. I have never seen a Skipper in Scotland and this one was battling with a Small Heath. It briefly landed on some knapweed and then flew off before I could pick up my camera. Local expert Iain Cowe said that he was 100% sure it would have been a Small Skipper, which I find very exciting. Another lifer for me this year to add to the four new species of Skipper I saw in Spain last month!

I spent some time checking for Northern Brown Argus eggs on the rockrose. I found several, and all but one had hatched.



Back home on Sunday I was delighted to see our buddleia was proving very popular. All morning there were at least four Small Tortoiseshells on it along with a few Small Whites and Green-veined Whites.





The other two buddleias are still in bud, so hopefully they will continue to attract butterflies for a couple more weeks. Maybe time for a Painted Lady to make an appearance!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Pete Eeles, 22-Aug-12 04:35 AM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

I spent some time checking for Northern Brown Argus eggs on the rockrose. I found several, and all but one had hatched.

Top stuff!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-Sep-12 04:47 AM GMT

We have had a few sunny days here recently. The weekend was great and I seemed to have some resident butterflies on the buddliea. Two Peacocks, three Small Tortoiseshells and four Green-veined Whites every time I looked.

Today's transect in Haddington found the usual Green-veined Whites and one Small White and much more excitingly my first Small Copper for this year on my transect.

On the way back I saw a Comma, which is the first I have seen since April. I also passed a small buddliea which had six Peacocks and a Small Tortoiseshell on it. It's starting to get late in the season, but I think this is the best time we have had for butterflies here this year!





Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 10-Sep-12 05:41 AM GMT

I feel like my life is complete! I was down at my father's house near Selkirk yesterday helping him tidy up some branches along his driveway and my son and I had a bonfire. Between loading branches onto the fire I checked out an area of Garlic Mustard. There were a lot of dried seed heads which I searched all over for Orange Tip chrysalis without any luck. I was thinking that if they had chosen there to spend the winter, they would have been at risk of being flattened if we had heavy snow. I checked some overhanging branches thinking that they would be more robust, but nothing and just as I was about to give up and while I was explaining to my son where I thought the best places to look would be I found one! It was on a Garlic Mustard plant that was growing out of the remains of a wall of an old mill and it was under some overhanging elm branches. The cunning mother of this Orange Tip must have thought it all out prior to laying the egg!



I have been looking for Orange Tip chrysalises for years with no success. I was so delighted to find this one. I didn't think that I had any chance of finding one this year as I have hardly seen any eggs and it has been such a poor season, weatherwise. My son now thinks that I am completely mad, but I think he has been coming around to that view for a while now. I am very happy. It has been a pretty lousy year for butterflies up here, but this chrysalis more than makes up for it! I'll eagerly await my visits down to Dad's to see how it is getting on!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Vince Massimo, 10-Sep-12 07:29 AM GMT

Nice find Nick 😊 .

It's always very satisfying to actually find one of these in the wild. In Orange-tip pupae the green ones are less common than the brown ones and I have only ever seen one in 3 years of searching. In this case it should be interesting to see how the pre-hatch colour changes differ from those of the brown form. I am also monitoring one at the moment so we will both have to wait until April to find out.

Vince

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Sep-12 02:12 AM GMT

Thanks Vince. I'll have to look for a brown one when I next go down. I imagine they would be less easy to find. I tend to go down every three weeks or so, so I will keep an eye on it and photograph it if it changes at all.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Sep-12 03:17 AM GMT

Wow, what a day. There was a definite tinge of autumn in the air this morning when I left the house. Later in the morning I had a site visit near a coastal village called Dirleton. It was only 12 degrees and very windy, but the sun was shining. As I bumped down a farm track a small white butterfly flew across the track and as I got closer I saw that it was actually blue. I jammed on the brakes and jumped out of the car, but unfortunately I didn't find it again. It looked so much like a Holly Blue, but I guess I will never know!

On my way back I drove past a house with a row of yellow, white and mauve buddleia in the garden, which was alive with butterflies. I jammed on the brakes again and had a closer look. I counted at least 11 Red Admirals, 2 Peacocks, 3 Small Tortoiseshells, a Comma (the first I have seen since March) and the first Painted Lady I have seen all year. They were all in remarkably good condition. Along with Saturday's Orange Tip chrysalis this month has been fantastic for butterflies, making up for a miserable year.





Just like buses, I haven't seen either of these in over six months then they both turn up on the same bush!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Neil Freeman, 13-Sep-12 03:09 AM GMT

Great photos Nick,

I really like the Comma and Painted Lady on the White Buddleia, a more subtle colour combination than usual.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 13-Sep-12 06:07 AM GMT

In some ways, this time of year lends itself better to the more spectacular species in the UK than any other. All 5 Vanessids are prominent, Whites still

abound, a few species of Blue can be seen fairly regularly, Speckled Woods, Meadow Browns and Small Coppers are eeking out the last rays of warm sun and the occasional migrant (such as Monarch) can be anticipated.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Sep-12 06:30 AM GMT

I think this is the best time we have had for butterflies all year, but then again this is the best weather we have had all year. Strangely I only had two Peacocks and one Comma on my transect today, though. All of the whites had vanished. It was pretty cold last night, but I wouldn't have thought it was cold enough to harm any butterflies.

Re: Nick Morgan

by IAC, 13-Sep-12 06:49 AM GMT

Hi Nick.....I am just a bit green.....what can I say..... just superb.. 🤔 🍷

Iain.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 13-Sep-12 07:04 AM GMT

I agree with Neil that shot of the Comma and Plnted Lady is ace 😊 Is it just me but are the butterflies more approachable at this time of year too?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 14-Sep-12 06:23 AM GMT

Thanks folks. These butterflies were certainly concentrating on feeding and took no notice of me at all! Quite different from earlier in the year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 14-Sep-12 11:58 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Is it just me but are the butterflies more approachable at this time of year too?

They are as approachable as they ever get as they just want to fill up their reserves before finding somewhere to hibernate. They're not even bothered with courtship, as 40 Red Admirals on a single buddleia bears testimony to.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 09-Oct-12 04:43 AM GMT

Now that I am having to scrape ice of the car windscreen in the mornings, it is always a pleasant surprise to see a butterfly. A Red Admiral is still visiting the last flowers on the buddleia and this afternoon I saw a Small Tortoiseshell in a sunny spot near North Berwick.





Re: Nick Morgan

by Gibster, 09-Oct-12 06:24 PM GMT

"NickMorgan" wrote:

Now that I am having to scrape ice of the car windscreen in the mornings

Aaah, the joys of living on the east coast of Scotland!! 😊

Still t-shirt weather down here....as long as you don't mind getting wet.....

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 27-Oct-12 07:33 AM GMT

Cold and frosty this morning, a light, cold north wind and sleet and hail showers. Much of the day was sunny, though and I was surprised to see a Red Admiral fly across a track in front of me this morning. It was 5 degrees at the time! I suspect that will be my last butterfly of the year.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 10-Dec-12 03:08 AM GMT

I thought I should try my hand at photographing some garden birds to keep me occupied during the winter. I haven't done very well so far as the birds seem to be a lot more nervous than butterflies! As soon as one flies, they all take off! The limited light seems to be the biggest problem just now, but it is fun to have a photographic challenge again!



A waxwing from last month.



This one was enjoying our neighbour's apples.



We shouldn't take starlings for granted. Despite being a little boisterous they are beautiful!



Probably the gardeners' least favourite bird!



And is this their favourite?

Hopefully the sun will shine next weekend and I will have a little more time to try for some pictures.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 10-Dec-12 05:47 AM GMT

Very envious of the first of your "garden" birds Nick! 😊🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel