

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jan-12 07:02 PM GMT

Autumn & Winter 2011

The period from late October 2011 until New Year has been so hectic that it's not been possible to keep my diary up to date. It's also been a period of significant change for me, with time constraints meaning that reluctantly some volunteer activities had to go, in order to make way for some new pursuits.

Sadly I had to step down from the BC Sussex committee at our AGM at the end of October. Performing the roles of Chair, Conservation Officer and Publicity Officer, while running a business and juggling a small baby (she loves being juggled) had finally reduced me to total sleeplessness. So it was with a heavy heart that I had to ease off my BC commitments at least for a few years. That said I have still retained the role of Conservation Adviser to the Branch, as it is the hands-on conservation of butterflies that drew me to the organisation in the first place. This is what matters to me the most and I'm pleased to say that I can now do even more of this than before, as those additional roles had started to erode the time available for habitat management.

The AGM was a lively and entertaining affair, as it always is in Sussex. We are totally intolerant of lengthy, boring AGM proceedings. Maintaining the very high standard of guest speakers in recent years was the legendary Torben Larsen. Michael Blencowe then did his always highly entertaining turn which now attracts attendees from far afield. I found it quite difficult to relinquish my position alongside such a friendly and supportive group, but I left without any fears for the continuing success of the Branch. There are some great people on the committee and they have since been joined by some top class new recruits.

Although I've got my hands dirty at a few other sites over the autumn and early winter, most of my own labours have been directed at Heyshott Escarpment. A small but enthusiastic group of Murray Downland Trust and BC Sussex volunteers has made spectacular progress in improving the reserve for the Duke of Burgundy at the weekly work parties. Much of this has been reported in Mark Colvin's diary; he and UKBer Colin Knight have been beavering away here relentlessly. I have little doubt that Heyshott will become known as one of the best butterfly sites in the UK over the next few years.



Images by Colin Knight

During September, October and November I attended a series of South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) autumn workshops. Three were held in each of the counties covered by our newest national park (Hampshire, East and West Sussex), providing an opportunity for stakeholders to have a say in shaping its future, particularly the development of the South Downs National Park Management Plan and the Local Development Framework.

Unsurprisingly I was there to ensure that biodiversity and particularly butterfly conservation issues were given a strong voice, as many of those attending events of this nature come to speak up for business interests and to air planning concerns. I was pleased to see that the entire process was run in a very open, fair and inclusive manner. It also became clear that the SDNPA really did listen to the views expressed both here and via their online

forum (<http://southdownsforum.ning.com/>) as the Special Qualities document evolved (<http://api.ning.com/files/KGYR74em6IU9O...sFinal.pdf>).

I was delighted when the SDNPA took on almost the entire workforce of the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) as it dissolved to make way for the new organisation. SDJC rangers and volunteers had been our greatest allies for many years in helping conserve butterflies and moths in Sussex, and many of our successes would just not have been possible without their assistance. The continuity of experience on the ground and particularly the relationships with landowners built over many years will serve the new SDNPA well in the future. The National Park Authority has thus inherited almost endless reserves of goodwill as far as I'm concerned and it's certainly good for the future of numerous butterfly conservation projects that this excellent relationship continues under another banner. Throughout the autumn and winter we have been working on numerous sites scattered along the Downs of West Sussex, both on established sites and some new ones too. I've also been assisting with an ambitious project proposal which, if it attracts the funding sought, could benefit butterflies (and everything else) along the entire length of the South Downs Way.

In late November and early December I had the chance to put my feet up and catch some winter sunshine in Marrakech. There wasn't much in the way of butterfly interest, but I did manage to fulfill my ambition of seeing Painted Ladies on their home turf, during a spectacular trip over the snow-clad High Atlas Mountains. As you can see, my entomological assistant Mia *Iris* is growing fast.



Following an invitation to attend a social gathering at Knepp Castle (north of Worthing, south of Horsham) and then a meeting of the Estate's advisory committee, I joined the team with a view to assisting with monitoring of the developing flora and fauna here. Some of you may have seen Sir Charlie Burrell talking about his ground-breaking re-wilding scheme on Countryfile before Christmas. A good deal more information can be found on their excellent website at <http://www.knepp.co.uk/>.

I'm a big fan of this bold experiment which has a lot of support, but perhaps unsurprisingly, its fair share of more local opposition. Without knowing the 'whys and wherefores' it may look as if a once productive and efficiently farmed estate is being left to go to rack and ruin, with the development of injurious weeds over some areas; particularly odd as the project is attracting agri-environmental grants (public money). So it is vitally important that the message and the potential benefits of such a project are understood by the wider public. To this end I was asked, along with others on the advisory committee, to make a statement explaining why I think it justifiable that Natural England has committed money to the project. This is how I see the situation.

"Throughout history we have periodically made fundamental changes to the way we manage agricultural land and during the later half of the last century we learnt that intensive farming, with the sole aim of achieving high yields, comes at too high a price to the natural environment and ultimately our own well-being. We are only now attempting to quantify the value of the diverse benefits provided by a healthy environment (Ecosystem Services) beyond food production alone.

The use of agri-environmental schemes to encourage farmers to employ features such as set-aside, conservation headlands, grass buffer strips, beetle banks and to more sensitively manage hedgerows and ditches has brought tangible and measurable benefits to wildlife. However, if we are to have any chance of more fully restoring ecosystems across the landscape, and better connecting those areas which are still rich in wildlife, we need to act on a much larger scale in the future. We must endeavour to achieve a better balance between the production of food and other Ecosystem Services including carbon sequestration, the provision of clean water and elements of biodiversity ranging from pollination to our spiritual connection with nature.

The Knepp Wildland Project provides a unique opportunity to investigate, on a sufficiently large scale, the effects of de-intensification, by encouraging natural processes to reshape a previously highly managed area; central to this is the use of free-roaming herds of large grazing and browsing herbivores (Old English longhorn cattle, Tamworth pigs, fallow & roe deer and Exmoor ponies). By design the project lacks strictly defined targets and as such it errs from the norm. However, it is only by venturing to observe and monitor these processes that we will be able to assess the potential benefits of a step change in the way we might manage the land in future.

This project provides an important test bed for such an innovative and adventurous approach and must surely be seen as worthy of support through agri-environmental and/or other grant schemes."

Being aware of some the fundamental changes to farming and wider land management practices that are ultimately required to save some of our butterflies and moths, it has not been difficult to throw myself wholeheartedly behind the Knepp Wildland Project. I may be looking for some local help with butterfly monitoring here in due course.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 13-Jan-12 09:13 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Quite simply, keep up the fabulous work you are doing. The UK butterfly fauna, particularly that residing in Sussex, would be in a far worse place without your hard work and dedication (though please try turning up on time at the work parties!). 😊

Speak soon.

Kindest regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Colin Knight, 13-Jan-12 10:08 PM GMT

I second that Mark. Keep up the great work Neil.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 14-Jan-12 03:07 AM GMT

Splendid stuff 😊

Mia looks more like you every day! 😊. I bet Christmas with her around took on a whole new dimension.

It's love to read a post in your diary again, you've been missed!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 14-Jan-12 03:14 AM GMT

Neil

Not only are you doing excellent work but that is an extremely well written article. Your conservation work should be recognised more widely. People have been awarded “gongs” for far less worthy activities (I nearly ventured into political in-correctness by mentioning some of those I had in mind 😊)

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 14-Jan-12 06:32 AM GMT

Don't do that,Jack! But i quite agree. Neil,you are a credit to Sussex and to conservation.Not least the Duke of Burgundy,in Sussex and beyond. Keep up the good work and i hope to see you in Sussex very soon.

Kind regards,
Mark.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 14-Jan-12 07:01 AM GMT

I agree with all that has been said before. You are a credit to the butterfly world, Neil. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 14-Jan-12 09:06 AM GMT

Great stuff Neil.....The Dukes and I salute you 😊

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Jan-12 04:28 AM GMT

Thanks for your generous words of support. I've come to expect nothing less from the UKB community. 😊
Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Feb-12 07:32 AM GMT

Back To Work

After lazing around in the Canarian sunshine for a couple of weeks it was surprisingly enjoyable to be back in a cold, damp English woodland today. At Heyshott Escarpment the usual suspects were hacking away at the brambles and hazel to create more new habitat for the Duke of Burgundy. Mark Colvin has posted plenty of action and bonfire shots lately, so I thought I'd show a couple of images showing how the bigger picture has developed over the winter. It's hard to believe that fewer than ten individuals, many well into their retirement years, has cleared this bank of heavy scrub, derelict coppice and secondary woodland, stretching several hundred metres into the distance. The tiny grey smudge in the far background, just to the left of the quad bike coming down the track, is today's bonfire. The second image shows the view through a corridor cut upslope to meet the grassy disused

chalk workings which characterise this Murray Downland Trust (MDT) reserve.



There are still a few weeks to go but the end of the work party season is now in sight. The BC Sussex Events Organiser Penny Green recently collated a few statistics for the Branch and, as usual, the numbers reflect the gigantic effort made by our fantastic volunteers (and those of several partner organisations such as MDT). From Heyshott to Graffham, Barlavington to Rewell Wood, and along the Downs towards Chanctonbury, the amount of suitable habitat for some of our rarer species has increased significantly over the 11/12 winter, a few examples of which are shown below. When the efforts on Michael Blencowe's patch in East Sussex are added, at the Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood reserves, the total comes to 33 work parties and 342 attendances. The bile recently spouted by the out-of-control MP Ian Liddle-Grainger (see 'General' forum), who claimed a total of £166,109 in expenses in 2007 - 2008, can never erode my faith in human nature while people such as these are willing to give so much of their time FREELY.







Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 24-Feb-12 04:00 AM GMT

Marvellous. Can't wait to go to Heyshott in the spring and enjoy the fruit of your (and the others) labour! 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 26-Feb-12 07:10 AM GMT

Great work Neil. Nice to have you back. It was great to see you the other week. Did you see any good stuff while you were away enjoying the sun?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-Mar-12 10:55 PM GMT

South Downs Way Ahead

On Friday (24th February) I was delighted to hear that a bid for major funding of a Nature Improvement Area (NIA) project, linking chalk habitat along the South Downs Way between Winchester and Eastbourne, had been successful. As part of a team led by the South Downs National Park Authority, Dan Hoare and I have worked alongside other partner organisations in bringing together wide ranging aspects of this ambitious proposal. The £608,000 DEFRA grant will be supplemented by other lines of funding, to finance a c. £3 million plan to safeguard and enhance endangered chalk grassland and its flora and fauna, including butterflies and moths.

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is yet to reach its first birthday, but BC Sussex has a long and close working relationship with many of its staff. As former employees of the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) they have provided the expertise and continuity necessary to give the SDNPA a flying start. The SDJC has always been incredibly helpful with butterfly-related projects, providing both financial support and hands-on help via their ever-willing staff and volunteer force. Under the new National Park banner this excellent relationship continues.

Butterflies will be very important in the monitoring process, with indicator species such as the Adonis, Chalkhill and Small Blues providing a measure of chalk habitat health, extent and connectivity. Other aspects of the NIA project focus on habitat creation for the Duke of Burgundy, complementing and extending the successful work done by the Sussex Branch in recent years. This further connects with the new BC national 'Dukes on the Edge' project which is now underway. It is gratifying to see such strong partnerships develop for the benefit of our rarer butterflies.

On Monday (27th February) I joined SDNPA personnel and others at Devil's Dyke, where Lord Taylor of Holbeach cleared some scrub for the benefit of the assembled media. Unfortunately the Downs were shrouded in a thick mist, obscuring the wonderful views that can usually be enjoyed from here.

Emily Brennan, SDNPA's Strategy Lead for Biodiversity, wrote on the South Downs National Park Forum (<http://www.southdownsforum.ning.com>) "We are delighted that the South Downs Way Ahead project, led by the South Downs National Park Authority, has been chosen by DEFRA as one of twelve trailblazing Nature Improvement Areas for England and awarded £608,000 in support."

South Downs Way Ahead will focus on protecting and enhancing South Downs chalk downland, which is vital to the survival of rare and endangered wildlife and is relied on by millions of people to provide clean drinking water and valuable green space. The project is made up of 28 partners including farmers, conservationists, NGOs, community groups, government bodies, research organisations and water companies, as well as the National Park Authority. We will be working together to join up areas of chalk downland along the famous South Downs Way National Trail.

This news has come just one month before the National Park celebrates its first birthday and really shows what can be achieved when people from across the South Downs join forces.

The project has five objectives:

Walk the Chalk: To broaden the South Downs Way National Trail as a semi-natural corridor and improve the natural qualities of the route.

Linking the Fragments: To achieve real improvements to the conservation and management of chalk grassland at the heart of the matrix of downland habitats.

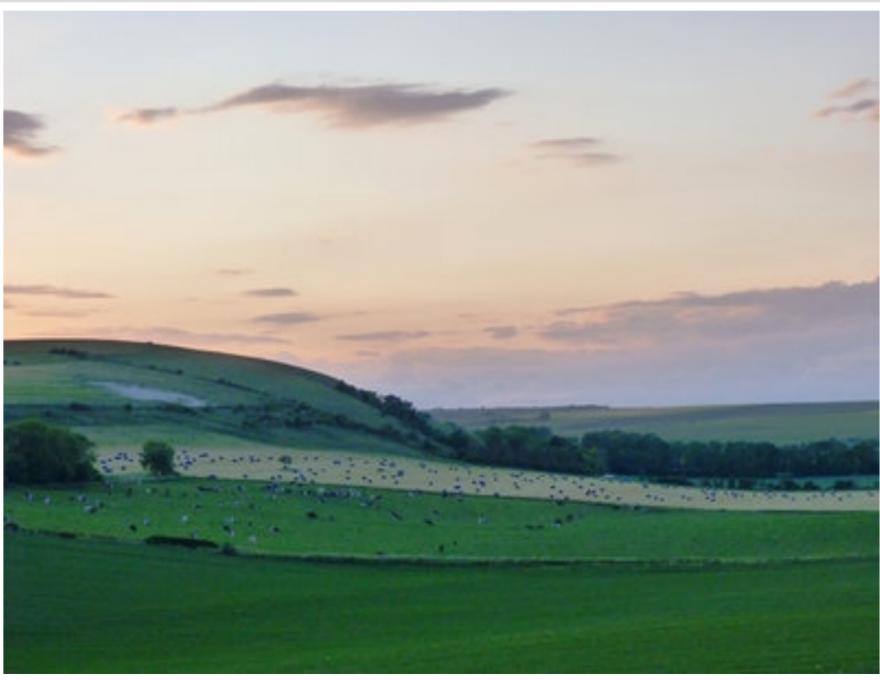
Surface to Groundwater: To demonstrate the viability and benefits of an input based approach to the improvement of groundwater quality.

Town to Down: To assess and demonstrate the benefits of ecosystem services to urban populations.

Valuing the Chalk: To attribute environmental, economic and social values to the benefits and services provided by chalk downland."

We will be asking all of our members and other recorders to make a special effort to record the 'South Downs Blues' (Adonis, Chalkhill and Small) in the future, as these iconic downland species have an important role to play in meeting the aims of this fantastic project.

Neil



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 04-Mar-12 02:18 AM GMT

Some simply stunning scenery there Neil to go with some tremendous work, ace!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 04-Mar-12 02:27 AM GMT

Brilliant as always Neil. No need to say more than that.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Mar-12 05:29 AM GMT

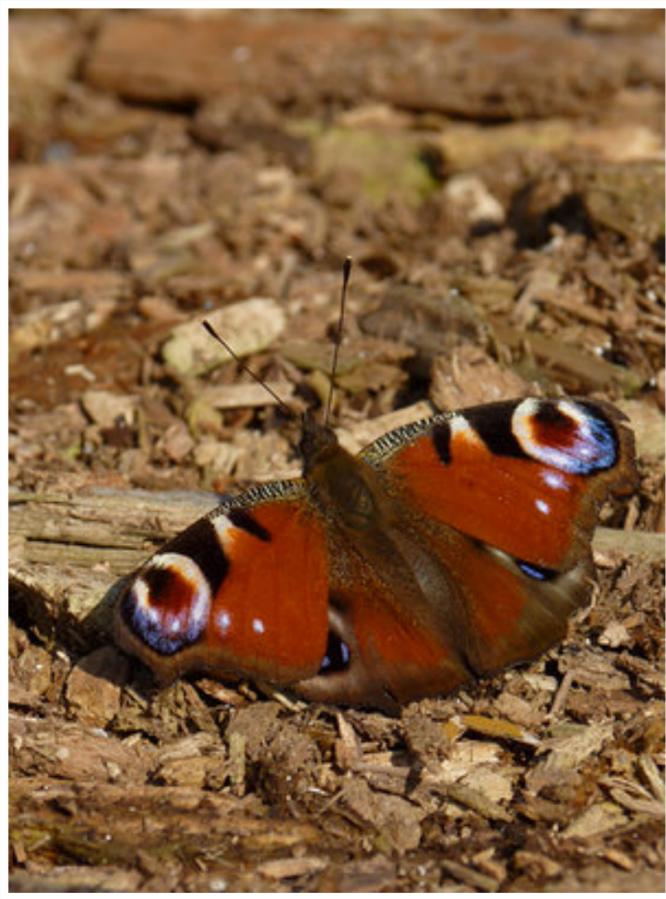
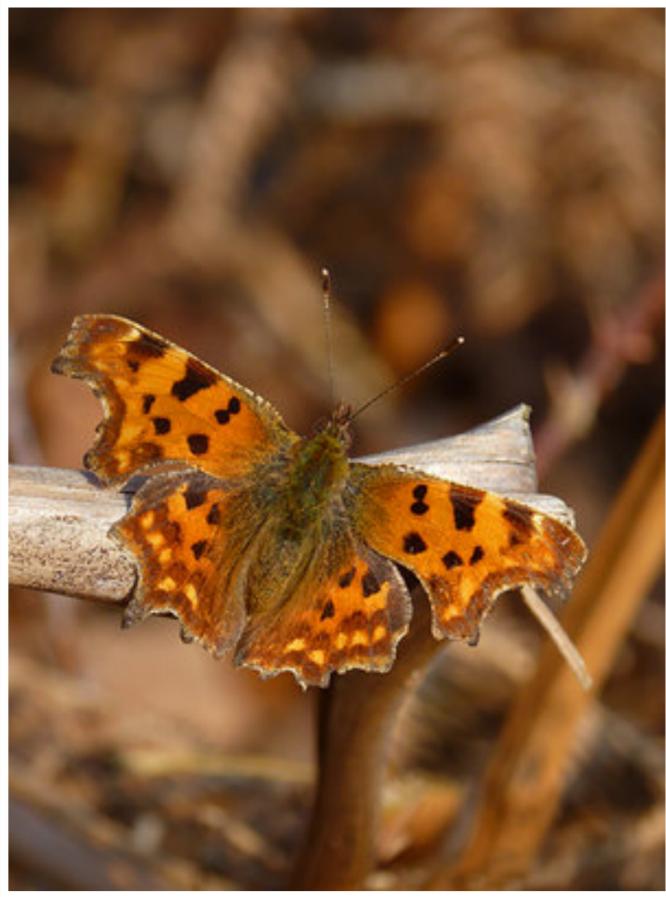
The Great Awakening

In glorious sunshine the hibernators finally came out in force today (12th March 2012), at least in Sussex. Of course isolated sightings can occur at any time from New Year onwards, but the en masse emergence of butterflies from their seasonal slumber, the Great Awakening, is an event I eagerly await each year. It means that winter is all-but-over and the Orange Tips, Holly Blues and Grizzled Skippers of spring are just around the corner. 😊

I spent the day at the BC Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood Reserves, in the company of a few Sussex Branch committee and reserve management group members. Both reserves look fantastic thanks to the efforts of the dedicated volunteer force. A lot of clearance work has now been done over much of Rowland, and the once dark and lifeless conifer plantation has been transformed into woodland that just oozes promise.

As soon as I parked at the entrance my spirits were lifted by a male Brimstone, then another, then three in view at the same time. Every one of the dozen I saw put a smile on my face. Typically, the male Brimstones retired early in the afternoon, having failed to flush any females from the undergrowth. I didn't see any after 2.30pm. However, by the time I retraced my steps around the PCH Reserve at about 3pm it was obvious that many Commas and Peacocks had emerged from their log pile refuges throughout the day, bringing the totals for each species to 9 and 6.

For me the great thing about a passion for butterflies is that the anticipation and enjoyment of each season increases with every year. 2012 will be the best yet.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 13-Mar-12 05:55 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

For me the great thing about a passion for butterflies is that the anticipation and enjoyment of each season increases with every year. 2012 will be the best yet.

Absolutely agree, Neil. This time of year doesn't generate large numbers of species but, as you say, represents promise for what's to come.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 13-Mar-12 06:38 PM GMT

That was a lovely post and I fully share your enthusiasm for the coming year. 😊

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

It means that winter is all-but-over and the Orange Tips, Holly Blues and Grizzled Skippers of spring are just around the corner. 😊

I'm keeping a close eye on the cuckoo flower in my garden. The flower stems are a few inches tall now. As soon as the buds start opening I'll be out looking for Orange Tips!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Mar-12 06:14 AM GMT

Bird's-eye View

Today (14th March) I attended another work party at Heyshott Escarpment with BC Sussex and Murray Downland Trust volunteers. Although Mark (Colvin) couldn't join us on this occasion he sent me a fantastic image of the site, taken while hanging from below a helicopter. The elongate stretch of heavy scrub and secondary woodland cleared over the winter is clearly visible centre left.

At the moment Duke of Burgundy occurs mainly over the open chalk grassland area higher up the slope to the right. The similar topography of long-abandoned chalk workings on the western flank of the reserve (near right) was colonised last season and it is hoped that numbers will increase significantly here this year.

In the middle distance (top right) a habitat corridor can be seen, running along the wooded downland crest. This was cut several years back and connects to the equally interesting Graffham Down Reserve, where Purple Emperors can be seen sparring above the Downs at 730' amsl. This is an area blessed with some fantastic butterflies.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-12 01:52 AM GMT

Earliest of Early Starts

Despite a heavy cold and a touch of tonsillitis, I couldn't resist a few hours on Mill Hill at Shoreham this afternoon (25th March), following Dave Sadler's incredibly early Grizzled Skipper sighting of the previous day. The Corrigan family were already there, so Ellie, Helen and Chris helped me scour the slopes until we got lucky. After several hours without a glimpse I spotted a pair of male Grizzlies indulging in a territorial dispute at the base of the slope. Throughout the afternoon we saw three, possibly four individuals.

We also watched at least ten different Peacocks sunning themselves on the bare earth around rabbit warrens and scrapes, and a male Small White patrolled the lower scrub line. Today also provided my earliest ever records of the diminutive day-flying moths *Pyrausta purpuralis* and *Pyrausta despicata*.

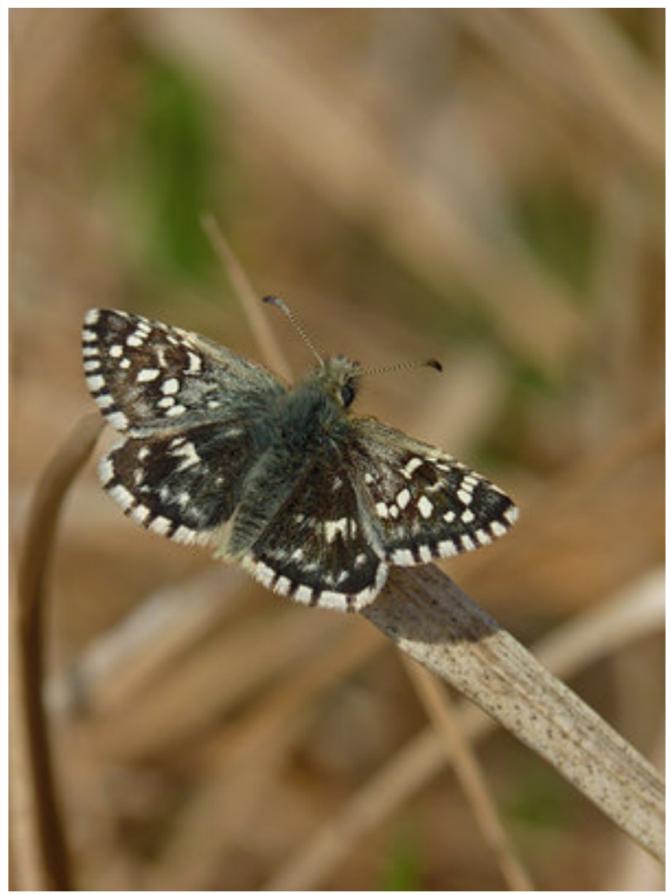
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 28-Mar-12 08:43 AM GMT

March Madness

On 27th March I recorded TEN different species in a day, which I cannot recall ever doing before during the month of March. In just a couple of hours at Mill Hill (Shoreham) I counted 4 Grizzled Skipper, 1 Orange Tip, 1 Speckled Wood, 1 Holly Blue, 1 Brimstone, 1 Small White, 14 Peacock, 1 Red Admiral,

2 Small Tortoiseshell and 2 Comma. Bonkers 🤪.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 29-Mar-12 05:58 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Thats an outstanding number of species for March, I am 🤪 but really impressed 😊

On the couple of times that I have managed to get out recently its been all Peacocks and Commas for me with a single Small Tortoiseshell.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 29-Mar-12 07:41 AM GMT

Yes,such a list in March would have been unthinkable just a month ago. i have just had my first holly blue,orange tips and speckled woods of the year. I look forward to visiting Mill Hill in a couple of weeks,when the dingies should be starting.

Cheers.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 31-Mar-12 03:52 AM GMT

Orange Tip Eggs In March!

This morning I visited a network of quiet lanes near Five Oaks, in the hope of photographing the butterfly that will always mark the beginning of spring for me. Every year Orange Tips are plentiful along the miles of roadside ditches which abound with cuckoo flower and garlic mustard, this being the most reliable site I know of. What I didn't expect was to see female Orange Tips already laying eggs! Five males, which occasionally clashed with male Green-veined Whites, and two ovipositing females was a good tally so early in the season. One amorous male repeatedly 'tried it on' with one of the females, forcing her to adopt the classic rejection posture several times, flopping into the grass with flattened wings and raising the tip of her abdomen.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 31-Mar-12 05:08 AM GMT

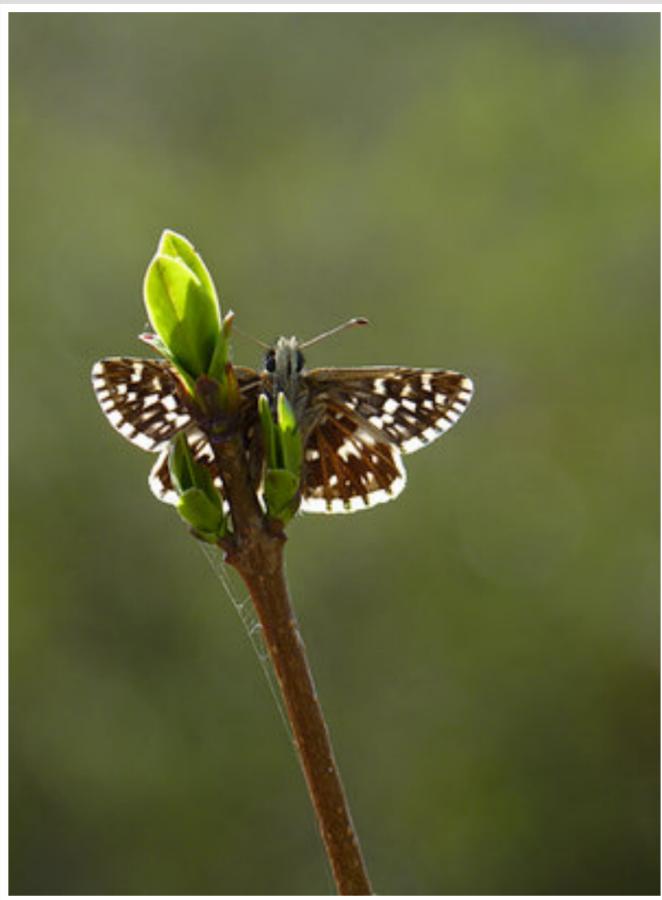
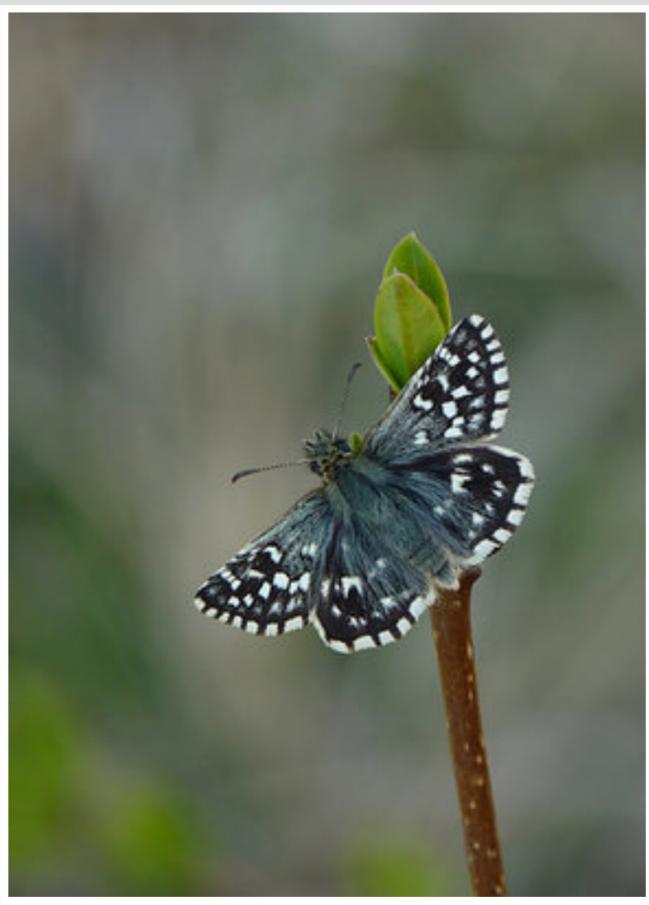
Well done, Neil. I was there earlier in the week and only saw the one. Good to know numbers are building nicely!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Apr-12 03:47 AM GMT

Mill Hill Hots Up

Due to the plague of ear, nose and throat ailments doing the rounds in our house, I haven't been out and about as much as usual. However, this afternoon (3rd April) I spent a couple of hours on the slopes of Mill Hill at Shoreham. I failed to find the early Dingy Skipper that I almost expected, but was more than satisfied with the numbers of fresh Grizzled Skipper on show. Of the 26 I counted only one was a female, suggesting that the species is likely to have a good season. A handful of Peacocks and single Comma and Small White were the only other butterflies seen.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickMorgan, 04-Apr-12 04:02 AM GMT

Beautiful pictures. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 04-Apr-12 04:11 AM GMT

The underside shot is totally lush! 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Apr-12 04:38 AM GMT

Thanks guys 😊. Although I've never lost sleep over the issue it does occasionally niggle me that my lack of understanding regarding resizing and appropriate sharpening for web display means that nothing I ever post looks anywhere near as sharp as it does on my computer 😞.

The only time I've had success is when I've posted images to the South Downs National Park Forum website, but even here the images look very soft when clicked on individually. However, if you follow this link <http://southdownsforum.ning.com/photo/a...hck2o87sj8> to my albums, then click on 'Butterflies of the South Downs National Park', then click on the 'View Slideshow' icon, they actually look like they should do! Answers 'why' on a postcard please.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Lee Hurrell, 04-Apr-12 04:52 AM GMT

Cracking Grizzlies, Neil!

I've had a look at the slideshow, some stunning photos there. I could watch that all day. What a wonderful array of species Sussex has.

I don't think you have anything to worry about with your photos! The ones posted on UKB always look mighty fine to me.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Apr-12 05:59 AM GMT

Thanks Lee ... the cheque's in the post 😊 . Hope to catch up with you once the Dukes and PBFs are flying.

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 04-Apr-12 06:51 AM GMT

26 Grizzled Skippers on the 3rd of April is extraordinary! I hope there are still some left when i visit in a couple of weeks!
Cheers.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Apr-12 01:21 AM GMT

The Orange County

Well ... not quite, but West Sussex is getting more Orange by the day. I didn't have time to do a count, but a flying visit to the lanes around Five Oaks gave me the first opportunity to photograph male Orange Tips this year. Getting close to these butterflies while they are open wide to the sun is always a joy!





Re: Sussex Kipper

by marmari, 05-Apr-12 02:53 AM GMT

Beautiful images Neil of what must be one of my favourite butterflies. Honesty just blooming in my garden so perhaps I will get to see an Orange Tip soon!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 05-Apr-12 02:59 AM GMT

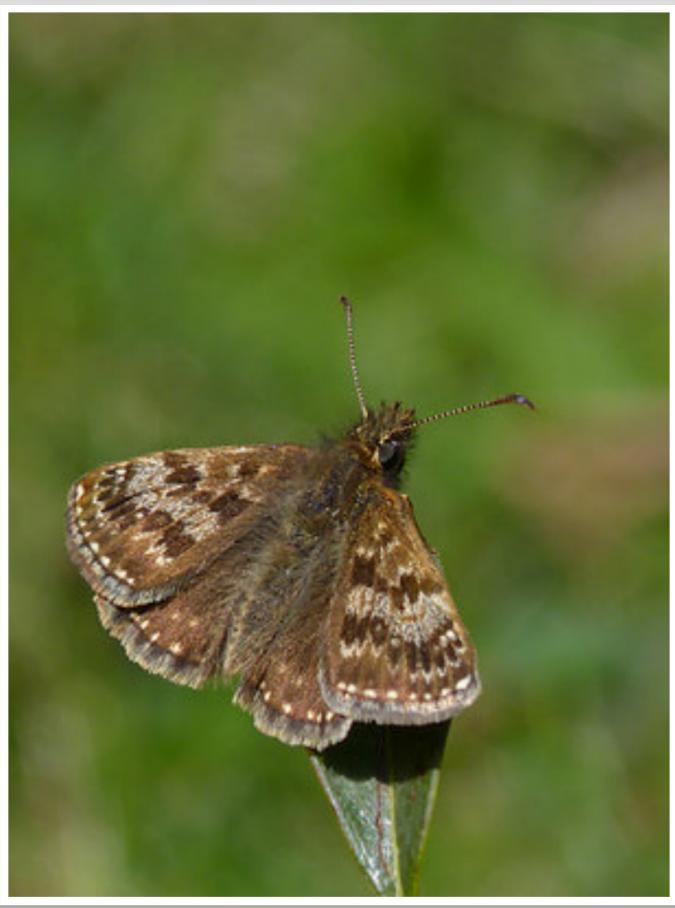
Yes, they are delicate and strikingly beautiful. What's more, because their appearance coincides with early spring, they take on an additional symbolic importance.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Apr-12 04:58 AM GMT

First Dingy And Greenstreak

I made an early start at Mill Hill this morning (6th April) and the butterflies were only just beginning to stir as I made my first pass along the lower slope. However, at the very far end of the site I found my target for the day – a freshly emerged Dingy Skipper. About 30 minutes later I notched up another Sussex first for the year as a Green Hairstreak came speeding past me. Historical data for the county show the emergence dates for these two species to be remarkably well co-ordinated in recent years. There were plenty of Grizzled Skippers on the wing but I didn't have time for a count before moving on to another venue. Other species seen included Green-veined White, Comma, Peacock and Speckled Wood.



By early afternoon Hannah, Mia and I were wandering along the quiet lanes near Five Oaks, having arranged to meet my parents and my brother and his family on holiday from Antwerp. I played the perfect host 😊, went off piste and disappeared for quite a while, having squeezed through a hedge in pursuit of an Orange Tip. As I followed it into a wooded valley I stumbled upon a real Aladdin's Cave of butterflies. The sloping banks of a small but beautiful stream were bathed in dappled, warm sunshine and strewn with colourful spring flowers, including wood anemone, bluebell and cuckoo flower. It was one of those places where time seems to stand still and the area is so sparsely populated or visited that I doubt anyone has been there for years. In one small area 8 male and 1 female Orange Tip, 3 Green-veined White, 2 Speckled Wood and a Comma sunbathed, topped up on nectar and finally, reluctantly, the 'whites' closed their wings for another day. Photographing them under these conditions was not only easier than usual, it was also more pleasurable. It's a magical place and I'll be returning soon.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 07-Apr-12 06:35 AM GMT

Gorgeous photos Neil 😊 I still can't find Grizzlies let alone Dingy Skipper despite trying today 🙄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 08-Apr-12 03:00 AM GMT

Neil

I would have written privately but doubtless others will also be interested.

I hope to visit Rewell Wood for the PB Frits. However, to get a cheap deal (non refundable) at the nearby Travelodge, I need to book 21 days in advance. Short-notice bookings are much more pricey.

So knowing of your expertise, when would you suggest the best time to visit? Very end of April/early May is normally ideal. My thoughts are that they would be a little later this year – say from 5th May – but you will have a far better idea. So what is your best guess for this season? I won't of course hold you to account for getting it wrong, but on past form you are likely to be very close indeed.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Apr-12 06:13 PM GMT

Hi Jack,

As you know, to make the trip worthwhile you need a reasonable number of PBF to be on the wing, so I'll just talk about the ideal timing of a visit, rather than the significantly earlier first appearance date. Killing two birds with one stone, bearing in mind that other readers may wish to participate, here are the details of two trips I'll be leading this spring.

The Pearls of Rewell Wood (Part 1)

Sunday 29th April 2012

2.00pm

Rewell Wood

SU983076

Notes: Open to all. Those wishing to photograph the butterflies will get the opportunity to linger until they settle down in the early evening. At all other times access to Rewell Wood is restricted to the public rights of way, so please use this opportunity if wishing to visit some restricted areas.

Terrain: Flat and easy going.

Distance: 2Km (1.25 miles).

Target species: Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other spring species.

Leader: Neil Hulme

Tel: 07778 306816

Email: nh@nhulme.eclipse.co.uk Meeting/parking place: Park around the woodman's saw mill having taken the concealed, minor turning off the A27 while travelling east between Fontwell and Arundel, and then driven up the track through the open metal gate. The turning off the A27 is difficult, so use the overhead cable crossing the carriageway as a guide to its location when approaching. Please exercise extreme care when leaving and joining the A27.

Dogs - No

Children - yes, accompanied by adult

The Pearls of Rewell Wood (Part 2)

Saturday 5th May 2012

2.00pm

Rewell Wood

SU983076

Notes: Open to all. Those wishing to photograph the butterflies will get the opportunity to linger until they settle down in the early evening. At all other times access to Rewell Wood is restricted to the public rights of way, so please use this opportunity if wishing to visit some restricted areas.

Terrain: Flat and easy going.

Distance: 2Km (1.25 miles).

Target species: Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other spring species.

Leaders: Dr Dan Hoare and Neil Hulme

Tel: 07778 306816

Email: nh@nhulme.eclipse.co.uk Meeting/parking place: Park around the woodman's saw mill having taken the concealed, minor turning off the A27 while travelling east between Fontwell and Arundel, and then driven up the track through the open metal gate. The turning off the A27 is difficult, so use the overhead cable crossing the carriageway as a guide to its location when approaching. Please exercise extreme care when leaving and joining the A27.

Dogs - No

Children - yes, accompanied by adult

Of course setting the date of field trips each year is fraught with difficulty, bearing in mind the degree to which the phenology of particularly the spring species can vary. But I reckon (hope) that those dates are just about perfect for 2012. At the moment I suspect the first weekend would be the best for mint-fresh specimens.

For the benefit of those not in the know, Rewell Wood is NOT an open access area (and nor was it when it was on lease to the FC from the Norfolk Estate), so at other times please keep to rights of way and do not obstruct entrances which may be in use by large forestry vehicles. The organised visits (which allow for relaxed wandering around restricted areas) should be seen as an ideal time to visit, courtesy of the Norfolk Estate.

Those that annually meet me for individual visits are welcome to contact me as usual, so that I can make arrangements with the Estate Office.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 10-Apr-12 04:55 PM GMT

Thanks Neil for the info and invite. I might or might not make it now as the normal cheap hotel deals don't seem to be available.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Apr-12 04:24 PM GMT

Green-veined Whites

It might not be so immediately glamorous as the Orange Tip, but one of my favourite spring species is the Green-veined White. I always feel slightly sorry for the GVW as it undoubtedly gets tarred with the same brush as its Small and Large relatives and, although entirely innocent, is much despised by many vegetable gardeners. However, in habits and behaviour it is much more similar to the Orange Tip, with which it often hangs out.

Yesterday afternoon I spent a couple of hours in woods on the Angmering Park Estate between Worthing and Arundel. This is one of the most reliable spots I know for both Orange Tip and GVW, with 7 and 6 of each being easily located along a short section of track. I was just wondering whether a female GVW I was watching was still virgin (she appeared to be very freshly emerged and still unsteady on the wing), when a male barged in and just got on with the job; courtship it wasn't.

The only other species seen was a stunning, female Holly Blue. She posed with wings flat open but, mesmerised by her beauty, I failed to even point the camera at her before she disappeared into the canopy.



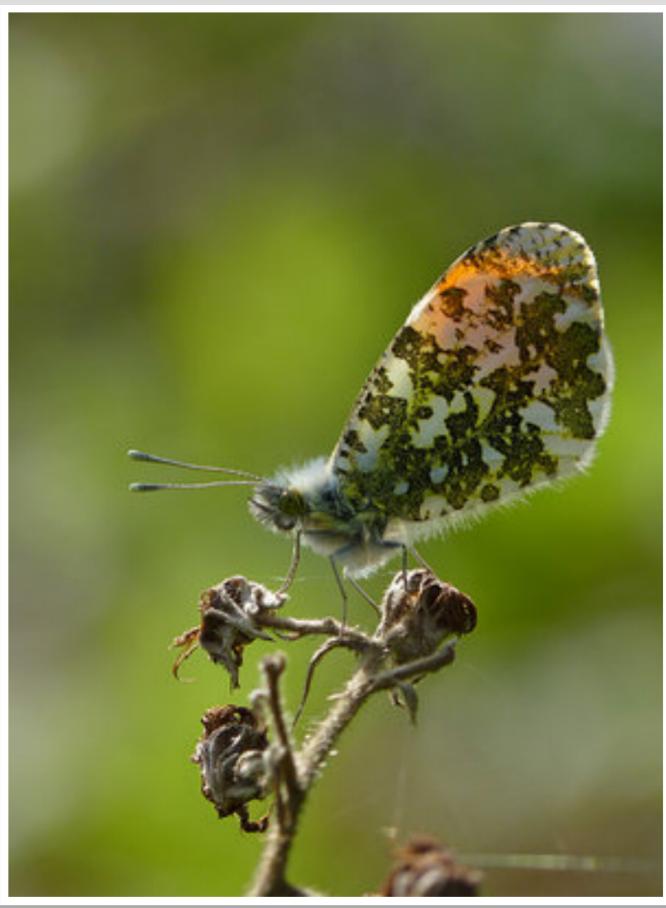
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Apr-12 04:10 AM GMT

More Of The Same

I can't get enough of 'em, and before we know it that magical period of early spring will be over again, so it was back out watching Orange Tips this afternoon (13th April). In Angmering Park Woods the 5 male butterflies that were patrolling a short section of track soon started showing the characteristic signs of getting ready for bed. It pays to keep a close eye on as many individuals as possible, as very often the decision to land and close-up tight can be rapid.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 14-Apr-12 05:25 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Great photos as always and an inspiration to me as another Lumix user.

I have been out looking for Orange Tips myself this afternoon and am happy to say I saw a few, my first this year.

All the best,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 14-Apr-12 06:47 AM GMT

..."before we know it that magical period of early spring will be over again" true, and I'll miss the Orange-tips when they're gone, so I agree lets make the most of them while they last! 😊

On the plus side when early spring is over there will be fritillaries and blues, and Grayling and golden skippers etc etc...So I'll be moving onto my next favourite butterfly 😎

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 14-Apr-12 08:52 AM GMT

Neil F

....an inspiration to me as another Lumix user...

They really are great cameras as Neil so consistently demonstrates. The only problem I have had with my FZ38 is the fixed screen, a limitation for me with my difficulty bending down or otherwise getting low to the subject.. Many wouldn't find that a limitation but I much prefer a flexi-angle screen. So I have just placed an order for a Lumix FZ150 with its free-angle screen. I don't anticipate better quality photos but will be able to take them more easily. (*Incidentally, my FZ38 has a possible worthy new home lined up for it.*)

Jack

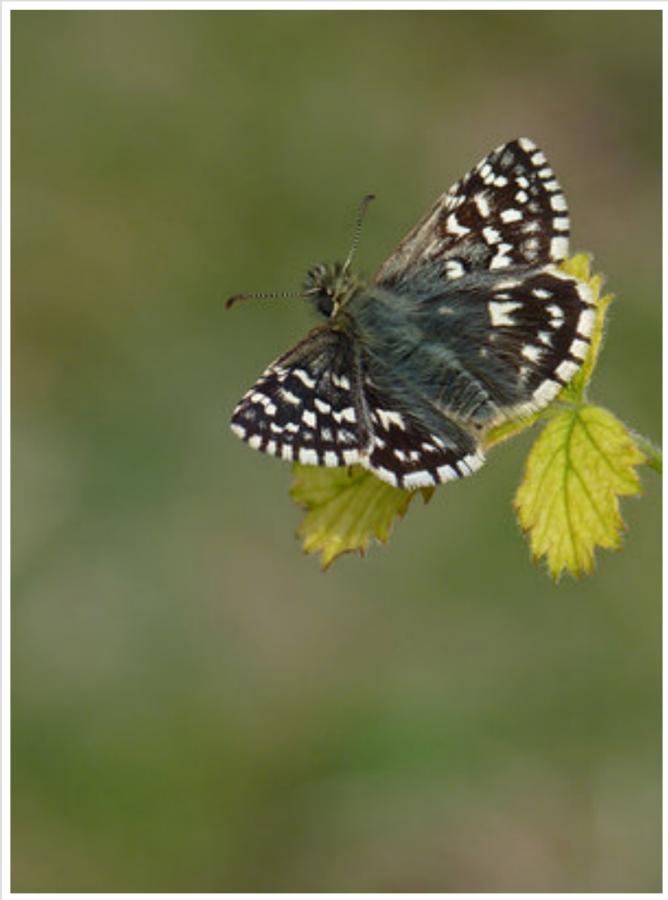
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Apr-12 05:51 PM GMT

The Appliance Of Science

Butterfly photography is made considerably easier by really knowing your quarry, which itself increases the chances of being in the right place at the right time. Yesterday (14th April) I looked out of my study window and, with the eye of faith, convinced myself that there were thinner patches in the cloud on the horizon. When I stepped outside and felt a cool breeze I nearly shelved any thoughts of venturing out. However, I'm glad that I checked the online weather station at Shoreham Beach, which showed a temperature of 10.8 deg and rising, and a NE wind direction. These conditions leave the lower slopes of Mill Hill sheltered and free from any wind-chill factor. The Grizzled Skipper flies at c. 11 deg. It had to be worth giving it a go.

As I walked along the crest of the slope I thought I was probably wasting my time, but sure enough, as I descended the famous bank, conditions became more promising. I soon encountered a freshly emerged Dingy Skipper and eventually located about half a dozen Grizzled. Sure enough, they were all struggling with difficult operational decisions; whether to attempt flight or be pushed back into the hangar for another day. As photographic subjects they were 'sitting ducks', and much easier than had the day been warm and sunny.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 15-Apr-12 06:18 PM GMT

So here in Norfolk with just 4 degrees and a 15 to 20 knot wind this Sunday morning I guess that I might be that I might be wasting my time? 😊

Seriously though, some data as to minimum temperatures, etc, for flight activity would be worth gathering. Red Admiral seems to most cold tolerant being active down to absurdly low temperatures such as a mere 2 degrees. Peacocks seem to need 10 C. Spring species such as Orange Tip, and as you have observed, Grizzled Skipper seem to require about 11C but significantly more if there's not strong. sunshine

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 15-Apr-12 06:35 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Great work ... enough said!

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-12 06:37 AM GMT

Thanks Mark. Your local woodland Grizzlies must be out soon now.
Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-12 06:44 AM GMT

Cool PBFs

It was just a tad warmer today (17th April), but more cool weather ensured there were still very few butterflies on the wing in Rewell Wood. Solitary Brimstone and Green-veined White were only just outnumbered by Pearl-bordered Fritillary and I suspect it will be at least another week or so before the main course is served.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by dilettante, 18-Apr-12 05:17 PM GMT

That's a stunning photo!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by marmari, 18-Apr-12 06:04 PM GMT

Yes, a great shot of a exquisite butterfly.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 19-Apr-12 03:06 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Cool PBFs

It was just a tad warmer today (17th April), but more cool weather ensured there were still very few butterflies on the wing in Rewell Wood. Solitary Brimstone and Green-veined White were only just outnumbered by Pearl-bordered Fritillary and I suspect it will be at least another week or so before the main course is served.

These early emergers are most unfortunate. This species revelled in perfect conditions for the bulk of their flight period last year. Hopefully 2011's progeny are still carrying the cold-resistance gene.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Apr-12 06:13 PM GMT

Thanks dilettante and marmari. I love the underside patterning on all our medium-sized frits.

David – don't worry too much for the 'early birds'. Although some weather conditions can be a big killer (prolonged high winds plus torrential rain for arboreal species; exceptionally heavy rain and hail for open grassland species), even lengthy spells of cold, overcast and wet weather are usually survivable. Individual insects can just shut-down for a week or ten days without any problems. Butterflies are tougher and more resourceful than we often give them credit for, which is understandable given their frail appearance.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by The Annoying Czech, 19-Apr-12 07:53 PM GMT

You're truly working on your photo-skill, Kipper, in this case with very interesting date for this particular species.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 19-Apr-12 08:18 PM GMT

It was said ref Neil:

That's a stunning photo!

We take it for granted nowadays that Neil takes stunning photos.

But he does have a damn good camera. I believe that very model is for sale elsewhere on ukb at an extremely competitive price 😊

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickB, 20-Apr-12 12:06 AM GMT

....surely that is the photographer, not the camera, Jack?



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 20-Apr-12 01:01 AM GMT

Nick rather cheekily said:

....surely that is the photographer, not the camera, Jack?:wink:

True. So many people think that getting a new better camera solves all their problems. But you do need an adequate piece of kit. Even Neil couldn't get good results with a pinhole camera. Or could you Neil? Challenge there.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickB, 20-Apr-12 01:16 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:
Nick rather cheekily said:

....surely that is the photographer, not the camera, Jack?:wink:

True. So many people think that getting a new better camera solves all their problems. But you do need an adequate piece of kit. Even Neil couldn't get good results with a pinhole camera. Or could you Neil? Challenge there.

Jack

But your Box Brownie works perfectly, Jack. Is that what you are going back to?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 20-Apr-12 01:30 AM GMT

But your Box Brownie works perfectly, Jack. Is that what you are going back to?

Not quite. I have just upgraded to this more sophisticated model.



Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 20-Apr-12 02:30 AM GMT

My God. I think I'm beginning to understand why people collected live specimens.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-12 05:47 AM GMT

Thanks Marek. However, that's quite an average date for first PBF at Rewell Wood in recent years.
Neil

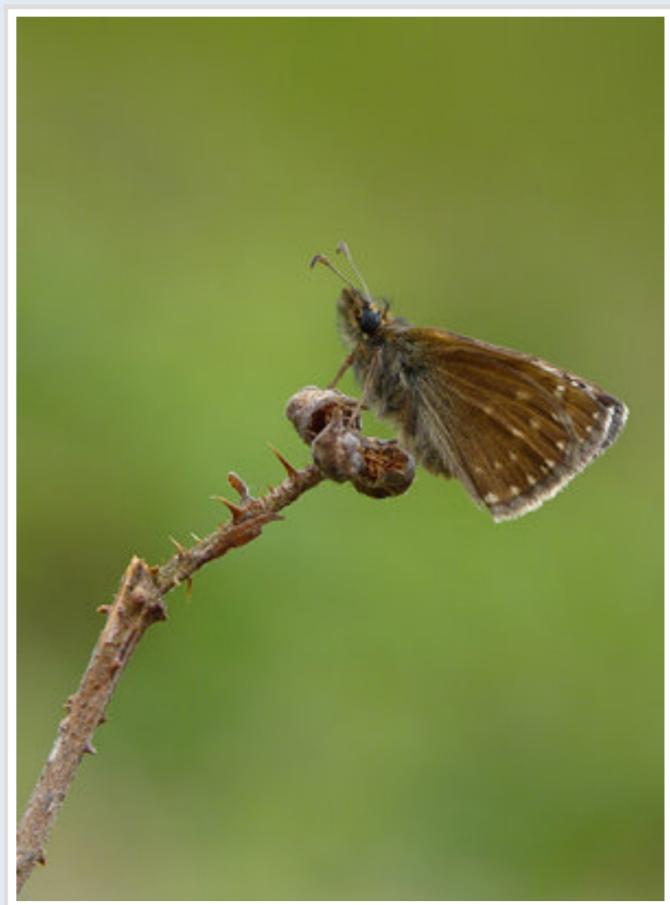
Re: Sussex Kipper

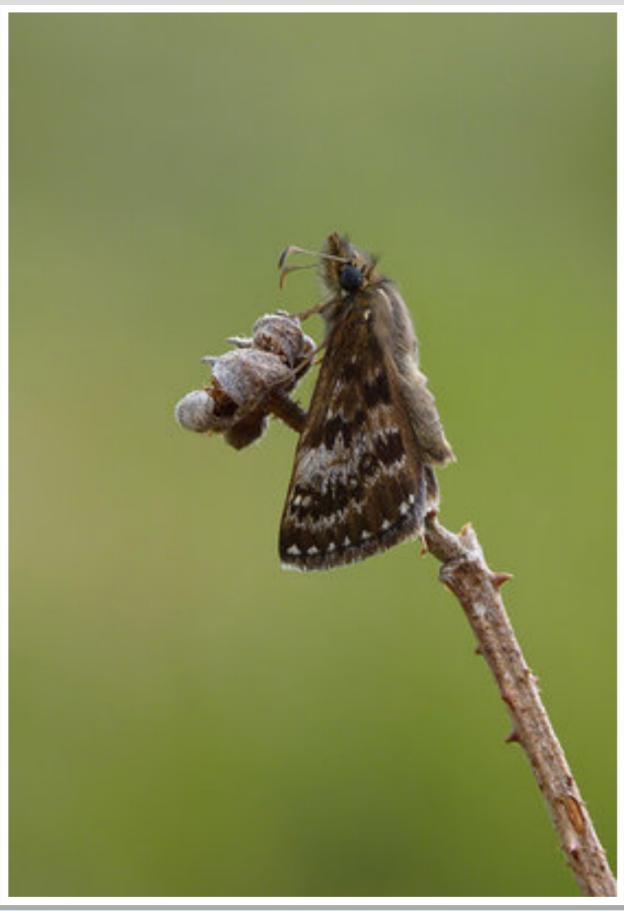
by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-12 06:02 AM GMT

First Sussex Duke

The first of hopefully many Duke of Burgundy emerged at Heyshott Escarpment this morning (22nd April). The first of the season always reminds me why this is one of my two favourite species. The inner, dark areas of the wing still had that beautiful bluish sheen that only the freshest of specimens exhibit. With only a couple of Grizzled and a single Dingy Skipper for company the site is probably a good week away from really livening up this year.

After fruitless searches for Dukes on a couple of other sites I stopped off at Mill Hill en route home. As the dark clouds approached and the temperature dropped the Dingy Skippers soon started closing up for the night. I watched fascinated as one individual gradually pulled its wings tight around its body in the manner that only Dingies do.



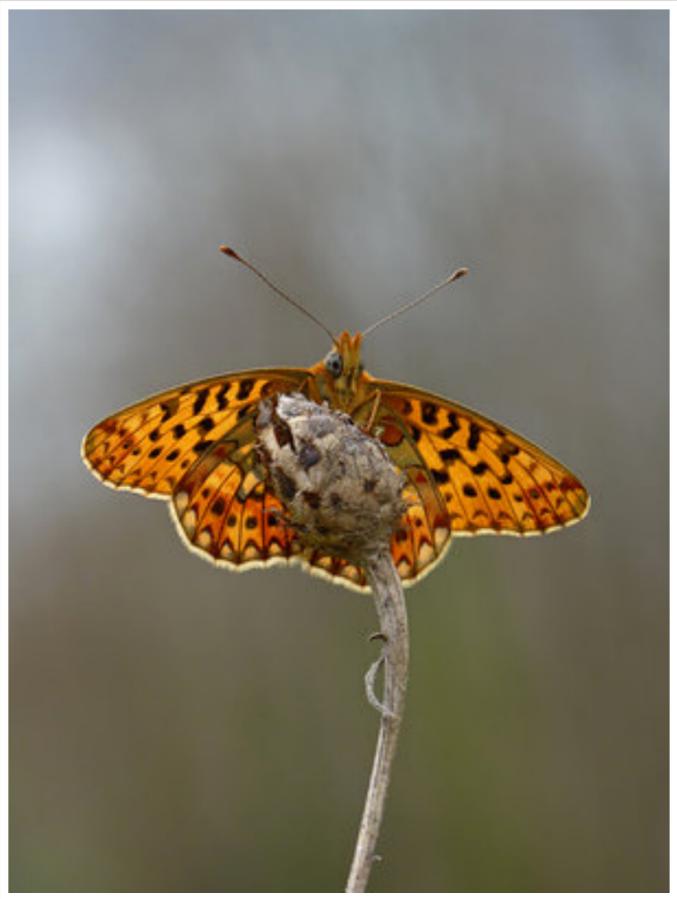


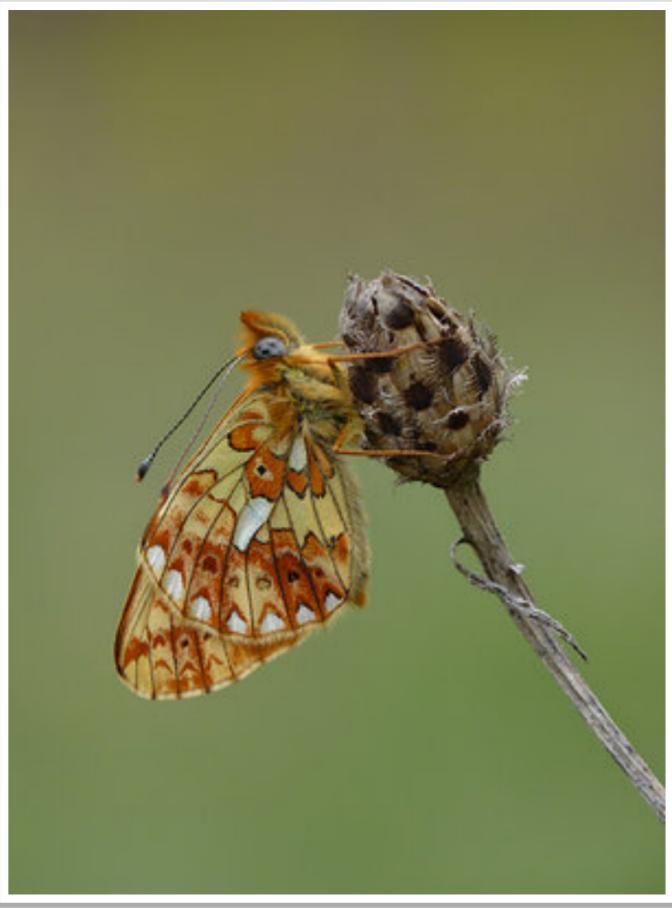
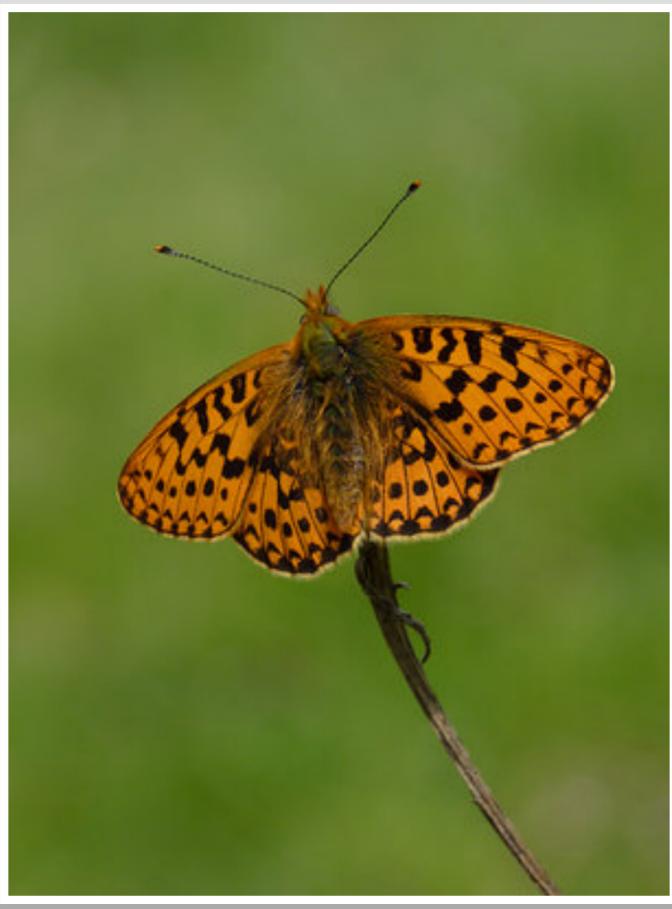
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Apr-12 03:23 AM GMT

Hoping For Sunshine

I'm hoping for at least a little sunshine for the first of my guided walks at Rewell Wood this coming Sunday (see UKB 'Upcoming Events' and my earlier diary posting), although at the moment computer says "no". Only short spells of half-decent weather should see the Pearl-bordered Fritillaries on the wing, but I'm hopeful of finding a few at roost even if the forecast is correct. A brief visit this afternoon (24th April) confirmed that they are now emerging even in the more elevated parts of the wood, which often lag behind. Fingers crossed.





by Lee Hurrell, 25-Apr-12 04:30 AM GMT

Stunning photos, Neil!

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 25-Apr-12 04:57 AM GMT

Absolutely cracking shots of PBFrits and the Dingy is just lush 🍷

Hopefully might be able to get some shots myself this weekend, after the weather we've had here I'd settle for anything! 😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 25-Apr-12 05:16 AM GMT

It's amazing anything is on the wing given the dire weather.

Let's hope things brighten up by the end of April so these species can go about their usual business.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickB, 25-Apr-12 05:48 PM GMT

Lovely shots – as we have come to expect, Neil – to brighten up our day....

(As I watch the rain from my window.....)

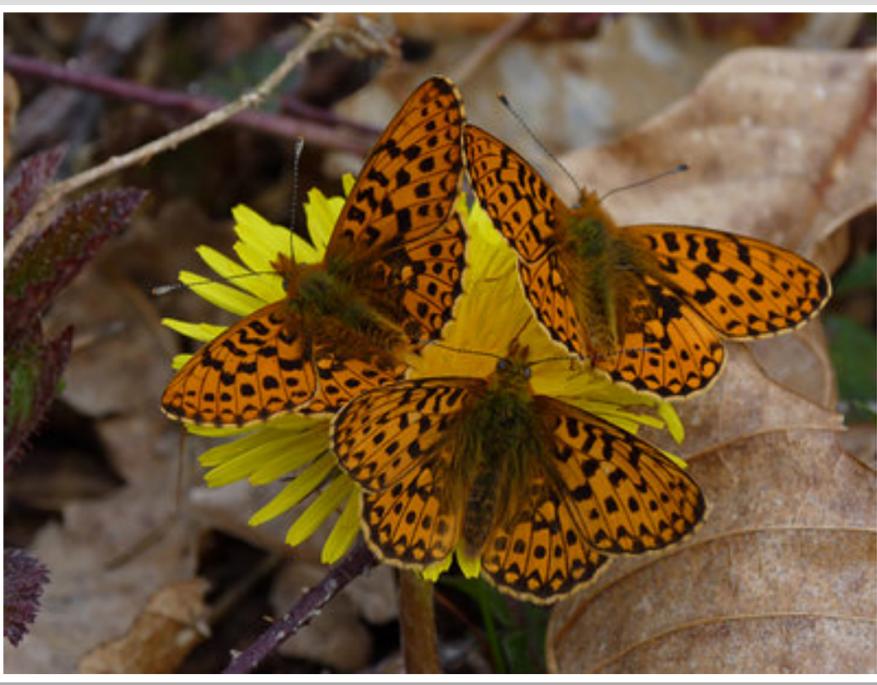
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 28-Apr-12 05:37 AM GMT

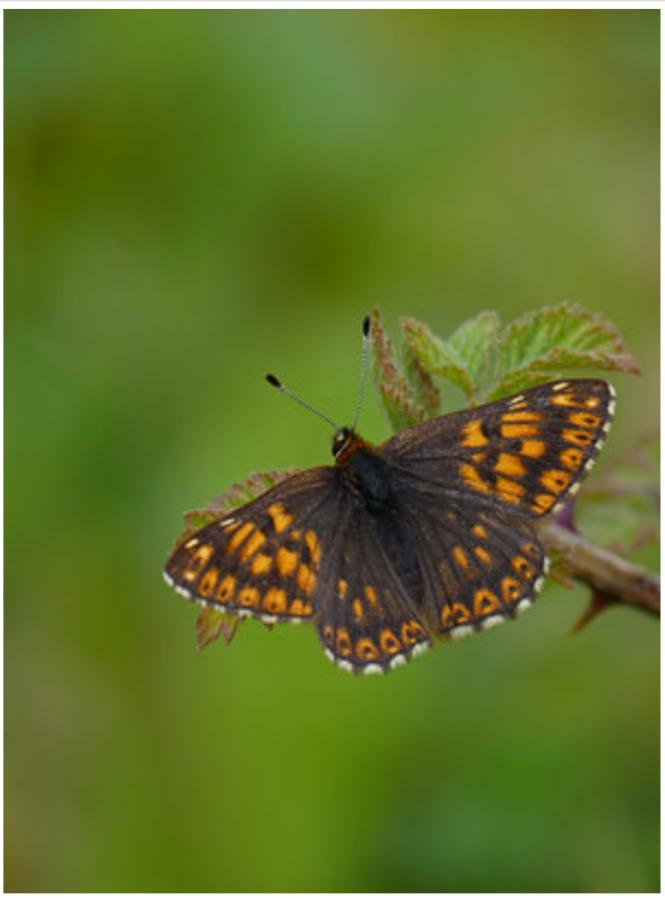
Plenty Of Pearls

This morning (27th April) I started off at Rewell Wood, where Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers are building nicely. I saw a total of 45 across three different areas of the wood, including 2 egg-laying females and a pair in cop. I managed to photograph a nice trio jostling for position on a dandelion, narrowly missing a four-shot! Also seen were 4 Orange Tip, 3 Peacock, 2 Brimstone and a Large White.





Later I moved on to a site nearby where a single male Duke of Burgundy was holding court. A couple of freshly emerged Grizzled Skippers and a brace of Peacock were keeping it company. Unfortunately the weather forecast is for a return to pretty miserable conditions over the next few days, making my first guided walk for PBFs a potential wash-out. 😞



Re: Sussex Kipper

by millerd, 28-Apr-12 07:32 AM GMT

I love the trio on the dandelion!

Dave

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 28-Apr-12 07:46 AM GMT

Me too--and the duke,i can't wait to see this fantastic little butterfly this year!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Lee Hurrell, 29-Apr-12 12:27 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

I managed to photograph a nice trio jostling for position on a dandelion, narrowly missing a four-shot!

Photo of the year, so far...stunning. Good work, Neil!

Best wishes,

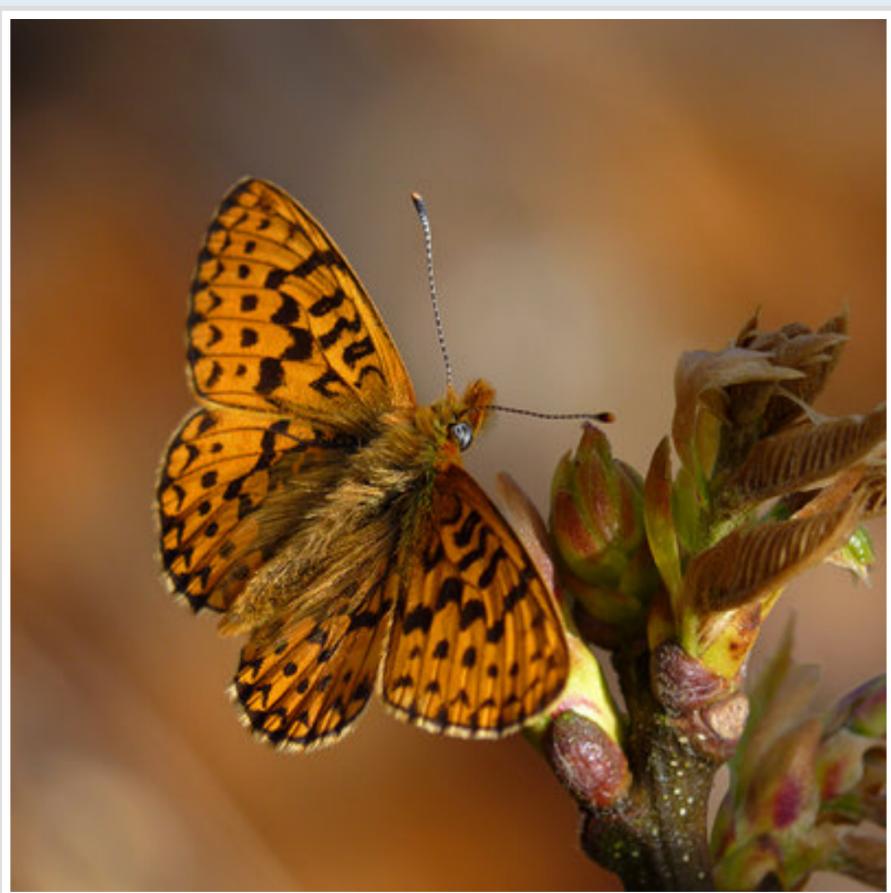
Lee

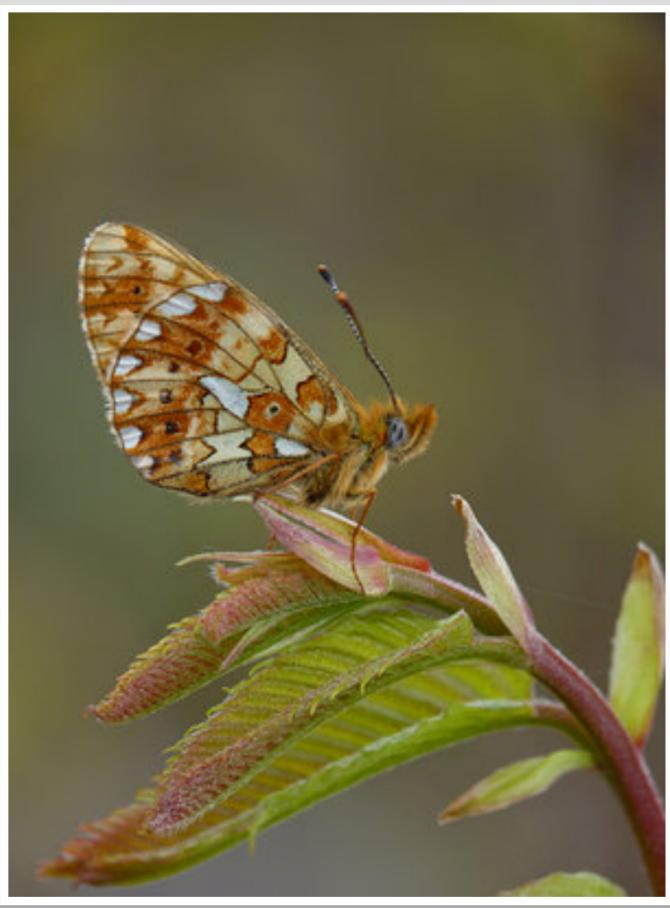
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Apr-12 03:01 AM GMT

Who Dares Wins

I was absolutely convinced that my guided walk at Rewell Wood today (29th April) was doomed. Since yesterday afternoon the area had been battered by near gale-force winds and lashing rain, unrelenting until lunchtime. Although the wind dropped and the rain eased, the forecast was still predicting complete cloud cover for the afternoon. I was rather surprised when cars started to arrive at 2pm and by the time 13 of us set off into the woods at 2.45pm there were thin bands of blue in the sky! After sheltering from a short shower we positioned ourselves along the edge of a coppice block and waited for the fast-approaching break in the cloud to meet the sun. Within 10 minutes Pearl-bordered Fritillaries started to appear around our feet. 5 minutes later the sunny spell was over and the butterflies returned to roost on the sweet chestnut, giving everyone with a camera the opportunity for fantastic close-up shots, while others were content to marvel at the beautiful underwing pattern through close-focusing binoculars. We were undoubtedly given a lesson in how the resourceful and opportunistic behaviour of these insects allows them to survive the worst that the British weather can throw at them! The only other Leps seen were numerous specimens of that crazy longhorn moth *Adela reaumurella*. Thanks to all those that joined me on the least promising of days.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 30-Apr-12 05:04 AM GMT

Cracking shots, I'm watching butterflies vicariously now as I haven't experienced a break in the rain for two days in Salisbury now! 🤔

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Nick Broomer, 30-Apr-12 05:57 AM GMT

Your first photo of the P.B. with its wings open is excellent Neil, one to be proud of, well done.

All the best,

Nick.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by John W, 30-Apr-12 09:10 AM GMT

Agreed, the first shot is fantastic. It really shows that it's the photographer that matters, not the camera – I was there with the same camera probably taking pictures of the same butterfly but none that good!

Thanks for leading the walk Neil.

Cheers

John

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 01-May-12 05:13 AM GMT

"John W" wrote:

Agreed, the first shot is fantastic. It really shows that it's the photographer that matters, not the camera...

Absolutely second that, probably my favourite photo seen on here so far this year 😊

And well done Neil for braving the weather and going ahead with your walk, well deserved results.

All the best,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-May-12 05:46 AM GMT

Thanks all for your generous comments. I can't help feeling we got very lucky ... but sometimes that seems to add to the enjoyment!
Neil

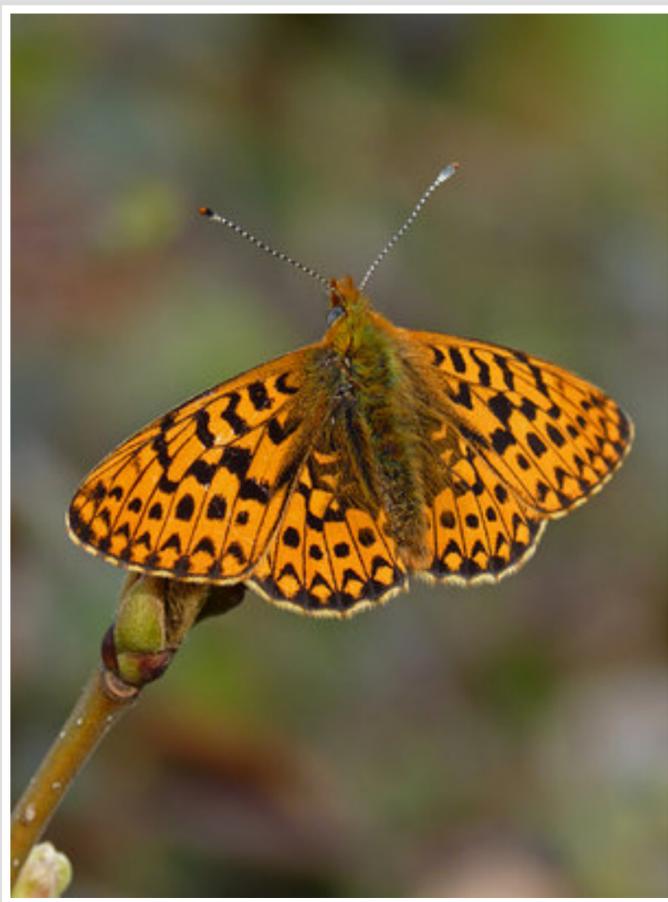
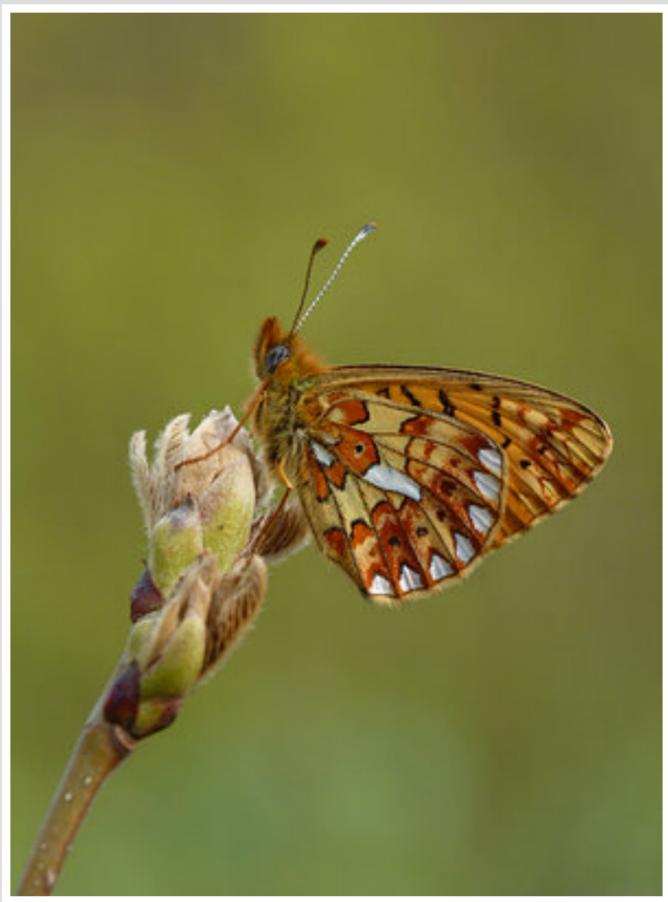
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-May-12 06:14 AM GMT

Sunshine At Last!

Today (30th April) provided very welcome respite from the recent awful weather and butterflies made the most of the warm Sussex sunshine. I started off by meeting Susie Milbank and Mark Colvin at Houghton Forest, where we visited a large clear-fell to assess the size of the newly established Pearl-bordered Fritillary colony here. Many other species have also moved in, which goes to show the immense benefits of opening up otherwise dark and lifeless conifer-rich plantations. Our tally was 8 PBF, 5 Grizzled Skipper, 18 Orange Tip, 15 Peacock, 5 Brimstone, 3 Speckled Wood and a Comma. We then moved on to a site nearby where we added a Duke of Burgundy, a Dingy Skipper, 3 Grizzled Skipper, 2 Speckled Wood and single Peacock, Large White and Brimstone.

In the afternoon I headed to Rewell Wood with my parents and my capable assistant Mia *Iris*, later joining Brian Henham, a friend from Chichester. The Pearls were out in force and I counted 90 over five different areas of the wood. Along a 100m stretch of the narrow ride margin adjacent to a coppice block there were 31 PBFs nectaring on bugle, with 5 or 6 to a square metre on the best patches. Other species included 3 Peacock, 3 Orange Tip, 2 Brimstone and single Large White, Green-veined White and Comma. On the way back to the car we found a large swarm of the longhorn moth *Adela reaumurella* performing their strangely erotic dance at the top of a tree (lower image). Certainly the best day for quite a while.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 01-May-12 06:44 AM GMT

And there was me chuffed about 3 Grizzlies at Martin Down 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 01-May-12 03:45 PM GMT

And there was me chuffed about 3 Grizzlies at Martin Down 🍷

Quite. And I saw the amazing total of **TWO** Small Coppers at Holme NNR. (But not a single Green Hairstreak).

See your Thursday evening Neil. With your significantly greater success this season, the **first beers are definitely on you.**

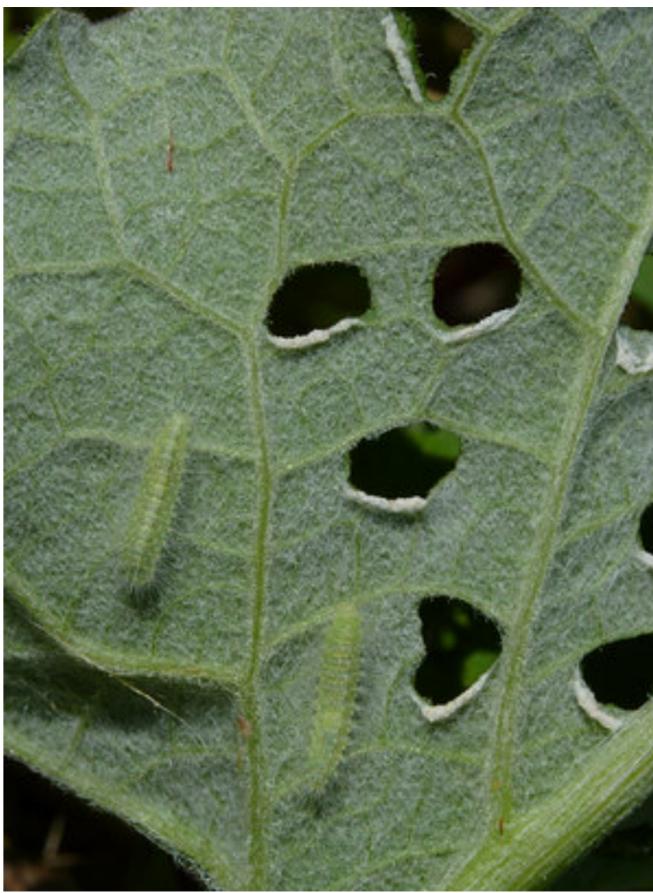
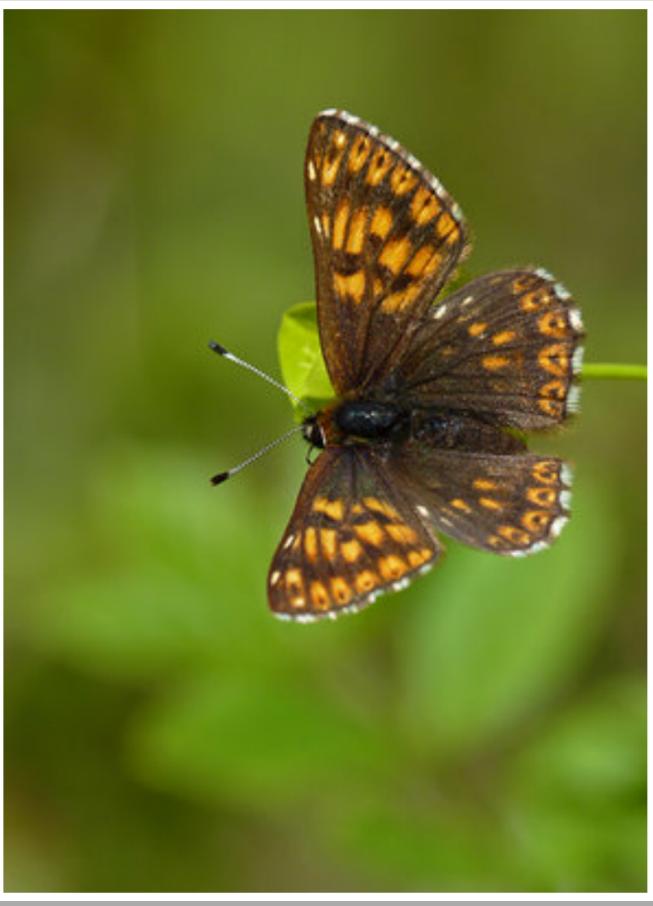
Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 02-May-12 04:32 PM GMT

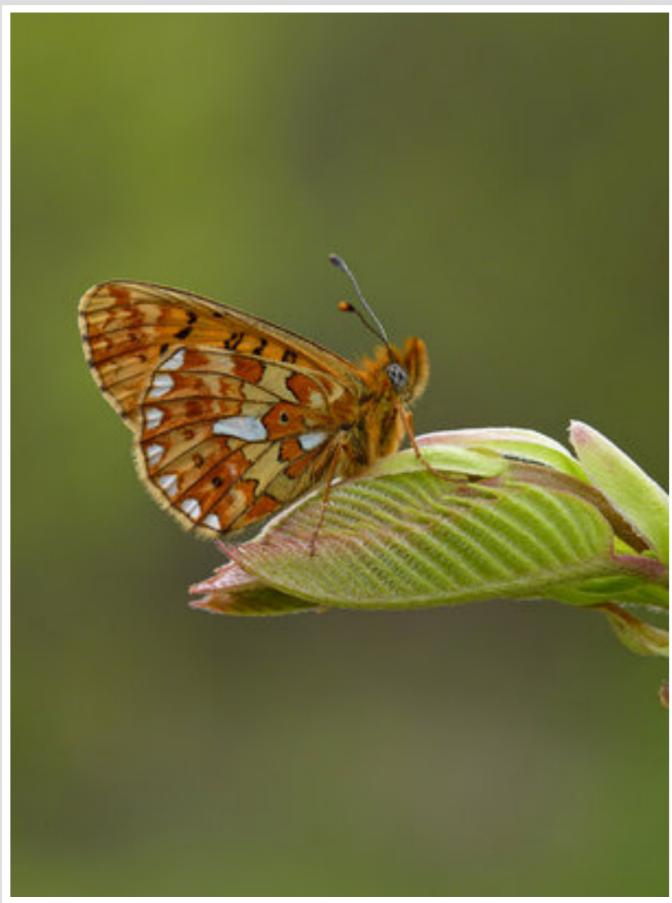
Brown Argus!

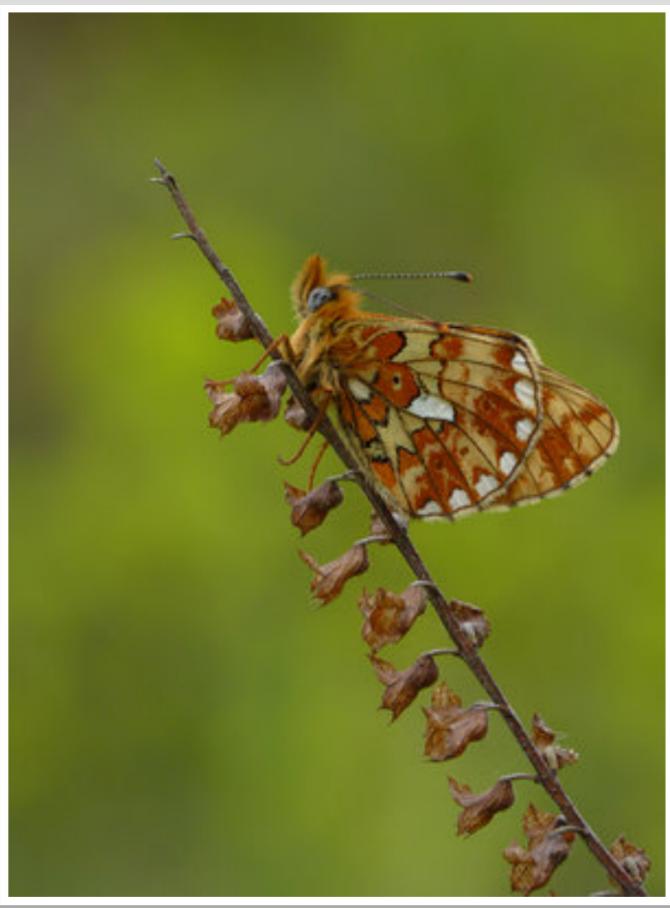
Today (1st May) I made a couple of visits to woodland glades at Houghton Forest and Rewell Wood, later meeting Tom Dunbar and Alan 'Win' Wingrove on one of their regular visits to Sussex. Collectively we bagged an impressive tally of spring butterflies, most notably 2 very early Brown Argus! Other species included Duke of Burgundy (4), Pearl-bordered Fritillary (2), Grizzled Skipper (3), Green Hairstreak (1), Holly Blue (2), Orange Tip (1), Green-veined White (2), Large White (2), Brimstone (6), Speckled Wood (2), Comma (3) and Peacock (3). One slightly worn male Duke was greedily nectaring on wood spurge, something which is seldom observed. I also found some larvae of the rare and very localised Spotted White Plume moth *Pterophorus galactodactyla*, which can easily be spotted via the characteristic feeding damage it makes on the leaves of burdock (large, white-rimmed, rounded holes).



Prior Preparation ...

This afternoon (4th May) under leaden skies and with the temperature struggling to reach 10 degs, I met Jack Harrison at Rewell Wood. I had two tasks in mind, the first being to ensure that Jack's long journey was worthwhile in terms of butterflies, despite the disappointing weather. I also wanted to find some roosting Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, so that my second guided walk would produce the goods for anyone that would brave the elements tomorrow afternoon, particularly those travelling any distance. It was a bit like looking for the proverbial 'needle in a haystack', but patient searching eventually paid off, and I've marked the position of five individuals. I just hope it isn't bucketing down.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 05-May-12 06:42 AM GMT

Usual cracking standard if shots Neil 📷 When Pearls roost do they hunker down in the vegetation or do they cling to stems etc? I was planning on visiting Bentley on Sunday so was wondering where to start searching?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 05-May-12 06:20 PM GMT

I have similar shots to Neil's only of course mine are better 😡😂
I'll post them later when I get home. Meanwhile I am having to use an internet cafe so am slightly restricted.

Brilliant field craft by Neil. I only found one myself and that was when the sun shone for 11 seconds.

Might meet some of you this Saturday afternoon.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-May-12 06:58 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

The roosting positions for PBF will depend on both the morphology of the site and vegetation available. In typical sweet chestnut coppice many will hang off the sweet chestnut leaves on the outer edge of the stools, anywhere between knee and head height. They will generally congregate along one side of the regenerating area, often close to a windbreak created by adjacent uncut coppice. They will also be on low vegetation at ankle to knee height, including brambles and dried seed-heads. I tend to avoid the Eastern Clearing at Bentley (too busy!), so can't recall what's available with any confidence. I seem to remember there being quite a lot of bracken, in which case I would look at this between knee and waist height.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 06-May-12 07:49 AM GMT

Cheers for the info, the weather reports are ranging from 9 to 11 degrees so I'll be looking in the places you suggested. Interesting that you mentioned Bracken as that's what my first ever Pearl was on. I've found Silver Washed, Greenish Silver Washed, Dark Green, and Small Pearl Frit on Bracken and I've also found all of my Purple hairstreaks on it too – bit of a butterfly wonder plant for me!

Have a goodun

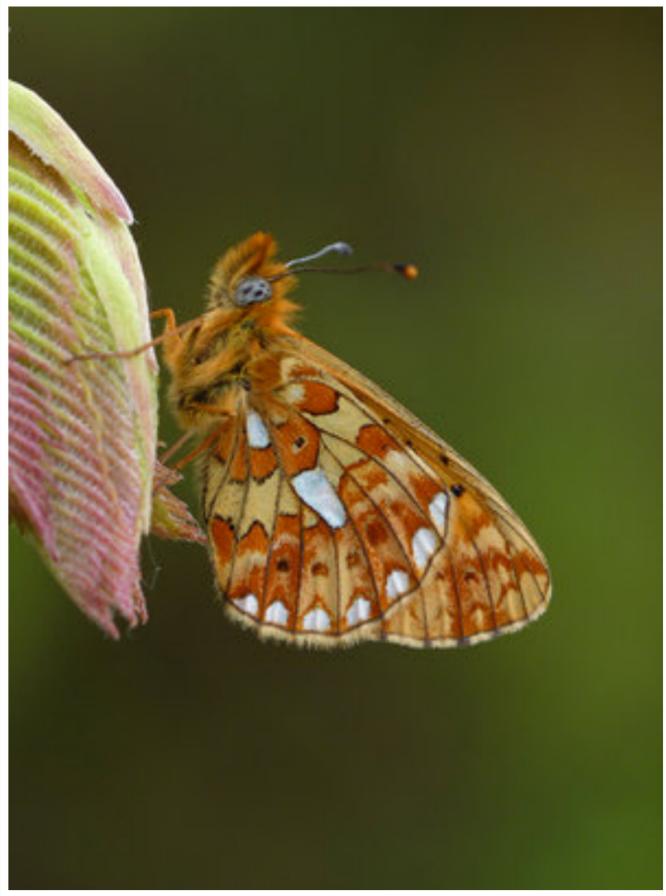
Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-May-12 05:19 PM GMT

Weather Beaten

We beat the weather again on my second guided walk around Rewell Wood on Saturday (5th May). I was always confident that anyone turning up would get excellent views of Pearl-bordered Fritillary, having marked the position of 5 roosting butterflies the day before. Twenty people came along on a predictably cool and cloudy day, but all went away with smiles on their faces. Dr Dan Hoare (BC SE Regional Officer) joined us and did a great job of describing some of the more detailed autecology and habitat requirements of the species. At times the cloud thinned just sufficiently to allow a detectable (just!) improvement in temperature, which caused several of the PBFs to open their wings for the benefit of their admirers. Several attendees managed to find additional butterflies themselves, and the final tally rose to 10. The ubiquitous longhorn moth *Adela reaumurella* was seen in ones and twos, but it was too cold for the erotic group dance (either moths or people). We also saw three (2f, 1m) smart-looking Wheatears in an area of newly cut coppice. Thanks to all that attended and to Mark Colvin for the mugshot below.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 06-May-12 07:34 PM GMT

The fact that you find the dance of long horn moths erotic speaks volumes 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 07-May-12 05:04 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

I have enjoyed reading these reports from Rewell Wood and also those by Mark, Jack and Susie in their diaries. Some lovely photos taken by all, well done 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

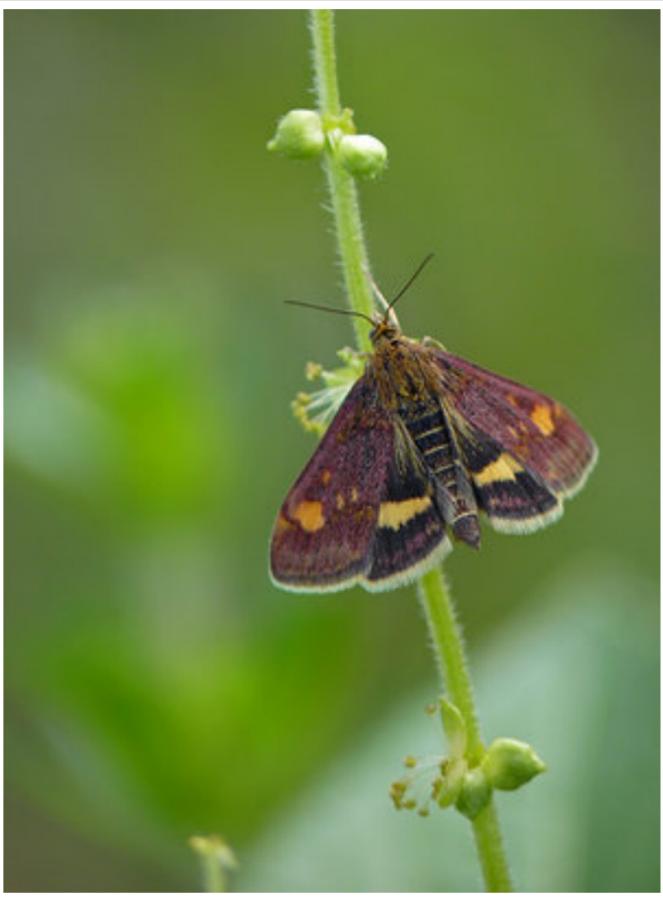
by Neil Hulme, 08-May-12 06:47 AM GMT

Change Of Scenery

I've spent a lot of time in Rewell Wood recently so this afternoon (7th May), while Rewell was under thick cloud, we headed for Springhead Hill near Storrington. I chose this venue as there appeared to be a few streaks of blue in the sky in that direction, and I was with my parents and Mia, so a short walk was an advantage. As the sun broke through the cloud the temperature rose to a level I haven't experienced for far too long now. There weren't

many butterflies about but it was great to see an Orange Tip and a couple of Green-veined White. Just as we were thinking of retiring to the car park for tea and cake I saw the flash of emerald I'd hoped for. This very obliging Green Hairstreak posed beautifully for us, continually hopping from one cowslip head to another. Equally pretty was a freshly-emerged specimen of the moth *Pyrausta aurata*. I finished the day with a solo visit to RSPB Pulborough Brooks, where the song of several Nightingales reached spectacular heights as darkness closed in.





Lady Of The Woods

With the promise of a little sunshine this afternoon (8th May) I slipped over the border to Botany Bay (although I consider this part of Sussex 😊). Within 100m of crossing the concrete bridge I started seeing Wood Whites, and went on to record a total of 11 between here and 'The Meadow'. The first one I noticed was sitting patiently on a dandelion clock, so this became one of the easiest photo-shoots I've ever attempted. Later in the afternoon I met up with my parents, who had stopped to chat with UKBer/BC Sussexer Colin Knight. Colin had located a mating pair of Wood Whites and I watched another female out egging further down the track. Every year I seem to find myself rediscovering the breathtaking beauty of certain species, including the delicate 'lady of the woods'.

Other butterflies included Orange Tip (2), Green-veined White (2) and Brimstone (1). Finally, on the way back to the car, I again met 'moth of the moment' *Adela reaumurella*. With warm sunshine on my back and the sound of numerous nightingales cascading through the wood it finally felt like spring again.



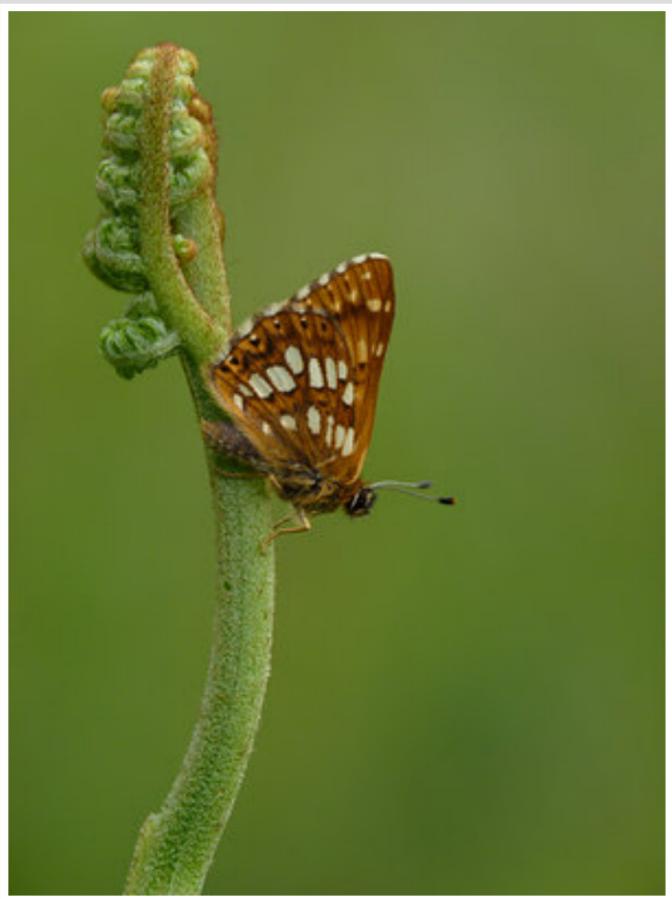


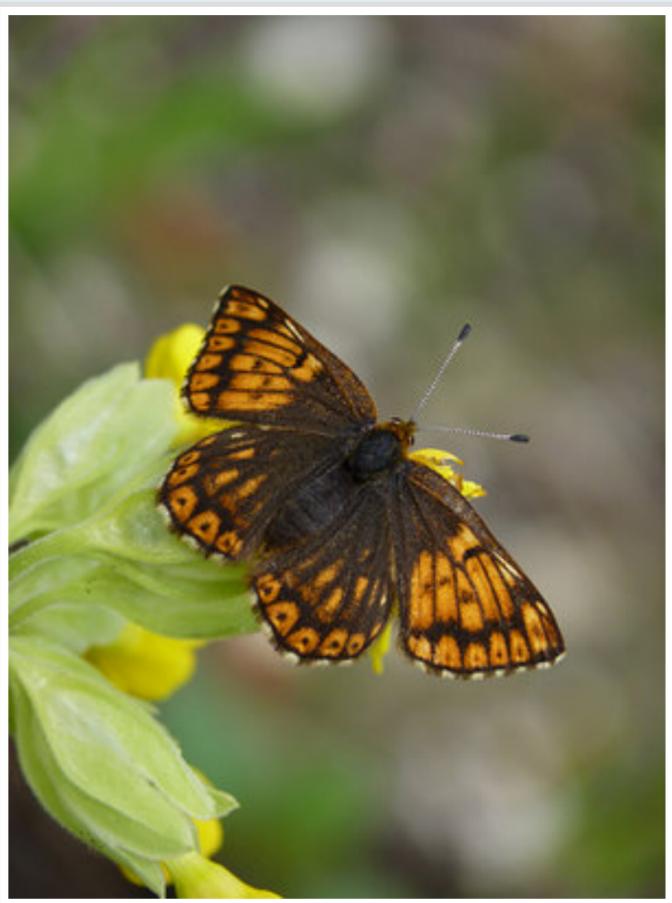
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-12 06:44 AM GMT

Things Hotting Up

Today there was a marked increase in the number of spring butterflies on the wing, with good emergences of some species. I started off at a site near Arundel where there were at least 7 freshly emerged Duke of Burgundy, including a female ab. *gracilens*. Also seen were Pearl-bordered Fritillary (1), Holly Blue (1), Green-veined White (1) and Peacock (1). Later in the day at Heyshott Escarpment things were really hotting up, despite a strong, cool wind. I counted 16 Dingy Skippers which were certainly not around in such numbers when Mark Colvin checked the site earlier in the day, plus another 7 pristine Duke of Burgundy. Additional sightings included Grizzled Skipper (7), Orange Tip (1) and Brimstone (1). While there I spoke to Colin Knight who had just seen the first Adonis Blues of the year at Mill Hill. As I was leaving Heyshott I noticed a female Dingy Skipper which I examined through my close-focusing binoculars. The tip of her abdomen suggested she was still intact, so I decided to track her movements and within a couple of minutes she was accosted by a male, providing a good opportunity for me to photograph a pairing.





by Mark Colvin, 12-May-12 06:58 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Those first two shots looked good on your camera but on the big screen ... absolutely brilliant.

That bar is getting higher ...

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Colin Knight, 12-May-12 07:21 AM GMT

I have to agree!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-May-12 05:08 AM GMT

Thanks Mark and Colin. I was more pleased with the dirty Dingies myself.

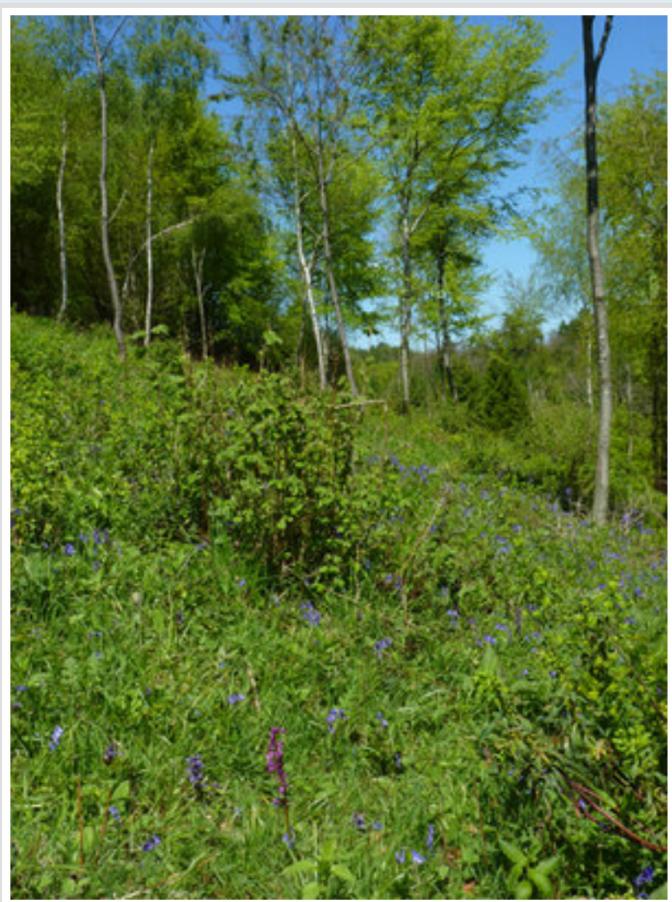
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-May-12 05:41 AM GMT

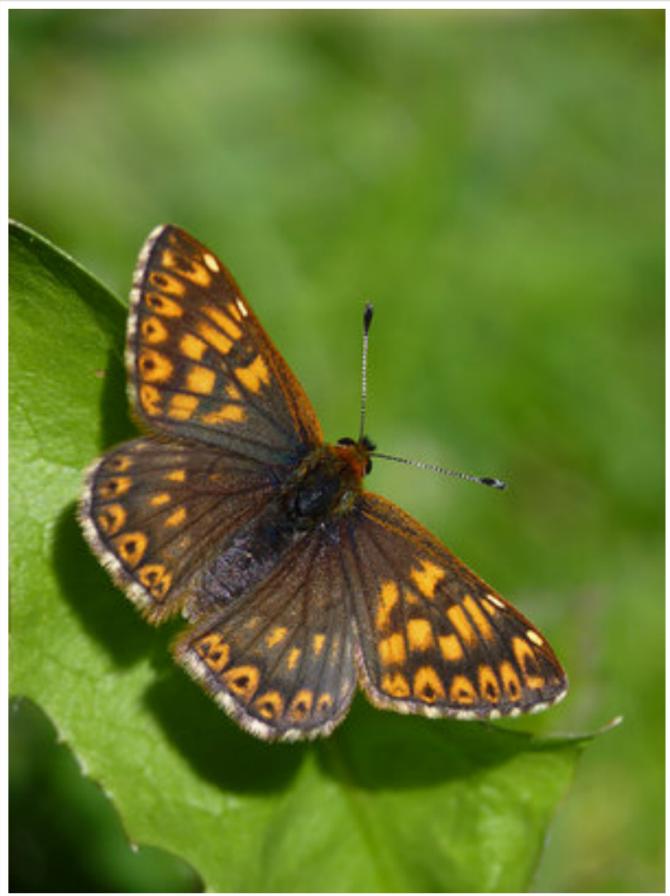
More Dukes

My annual Sussex Duke of Burgundy survey is now well underway. Today (12th May) I started off at a private site near North Marden where I found 7 freshly emerged specimens. Other butterflies included Grizzled Skipper (6), Orange Tip (6), Brimstone (5), Green-veined White (2), Dingy Skipper (1) and Peacock (1). Although less than spectacular, it was the sighting of a tiny and quite dowdy day-flying moth which interested me most. A strip of dark, overgrown coppice that we opened up for the benefit of His Grace a couple of years back now provides excellent habitat for various other species, including the Drab Looper, whose larvae feed on wood spurge. I was quite surprised to see 5 specimens of this quite rare and localised UKBAP Priority Species. This included the rather unusual observation of two mating pairs, both achieved by following male moths which were clearly homing in on scent trails. The act appears to be a rather brief affair for the Drab Looper, with both couplings lasting less than 10 minutes.





I then moved on to visit a woodland glade near Arundel where butterflies seen included Duke of Burgundy (9), Comma (3), Grizzled Skipper (2), Green-veined White (2), Dingy Skipper (1), Holly Blue (1), Orange Tip (1), Brimstone (1). The highlight here was a busy Duchess, who after laying a generous batch of 6 eggs spent a while nectaring on wood spurge (the image below is of a male).



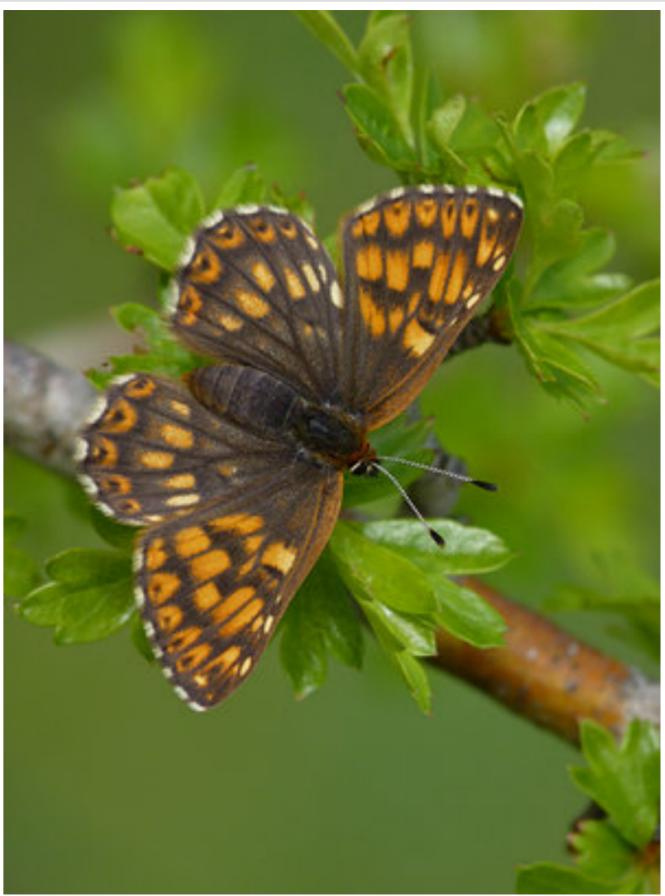
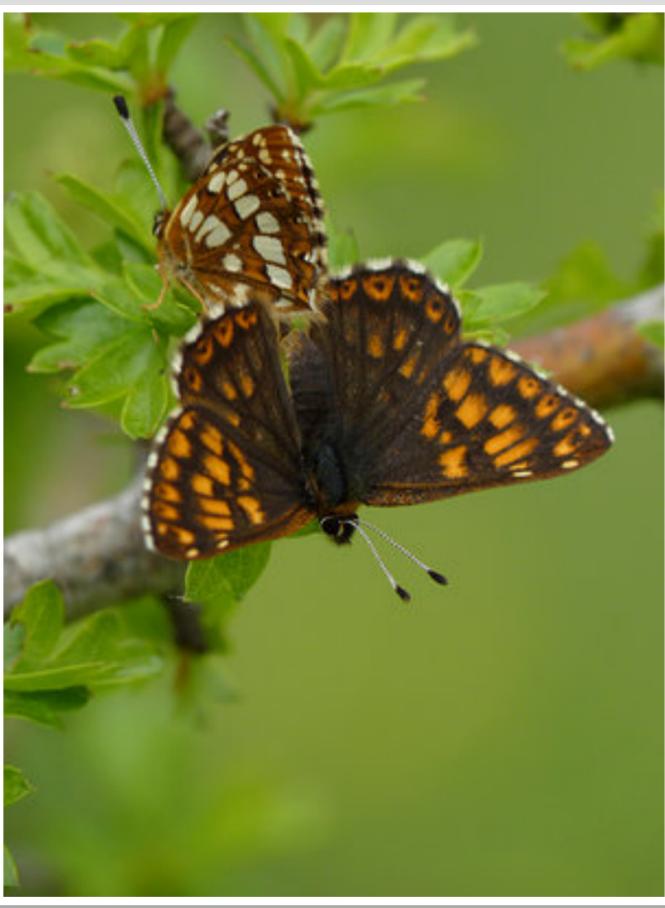
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-May-12 04:56 AM GMT

Springhead Hill

Today (13th May) I surveyed a number of sites but the most interesting action was at Springhead Hill near Storrington. The Duke of Burgundy population here is very small so I was pleased to see 5 different specimens, starting with a mating pair spotted by Bob Palmer. It was very gratifying to see them sitting on a hawthorn perch I transplanted here a few years back. Throughout the day 3 males jostled for top spot in the lek at the bottom of the meadow. By 3.45pm the males had worn themselves out for the day and all sat down together for a meal of hawthorn nectar, at one point all sharing the same bloom with a male Green Hairstreak, seeming to have forgotten their differences until tomorrow. They were so engrossed that they completely missed the arrival of an unmated female at 4.00pm, which soon went to roost in the scrub. I doubt she'll be missed first thing in the morning.

Other species seen here included Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Small Copper, Small Heath, Holly Blue, Large, Small and Green-veined Whites, Orange Tip, Brimstone and Peacock. The most notable observation at the other sites was the number of Dingy Skippers, with 15 and 35 being recorded at each. Unlike most spring species the Dingy seems to be having a good year.



by Neil Hulme, 14-May-12 04:25 PM GMT

Open Invitation

Following the success of last year's event, this is one not to be missed. Now considered an important diary date in 'The Season', it's an opportunity to talk butterflies, hear about butterflies and quaff fine English wines. With Blencowe speaking it's bound to be another success. 100% of profits go towards improving the Park Corner Heath/Rowland Wood BC Reserve, home to the rare Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-May-12 07:43 AM GMT

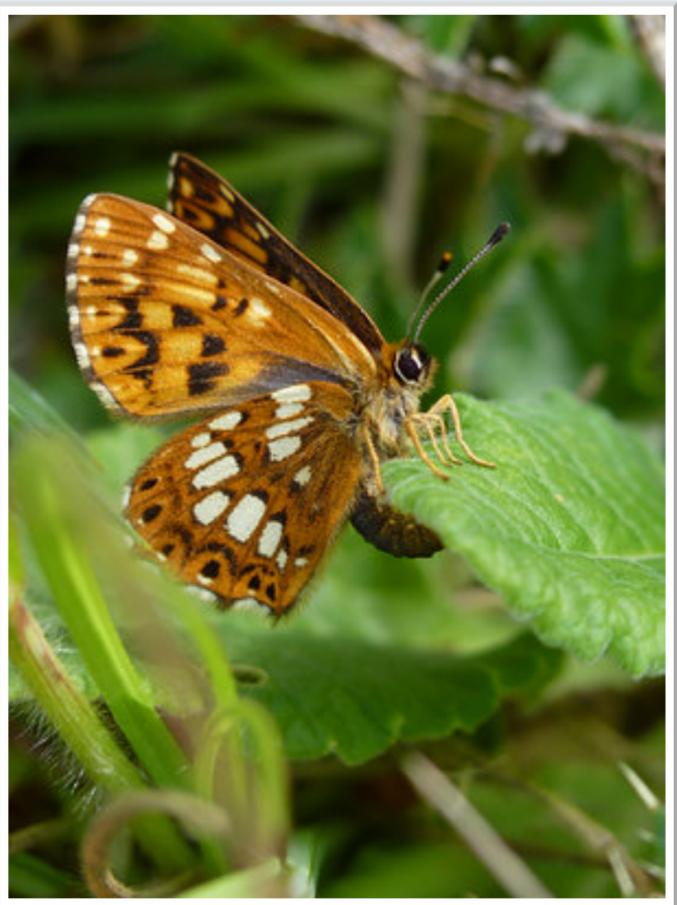
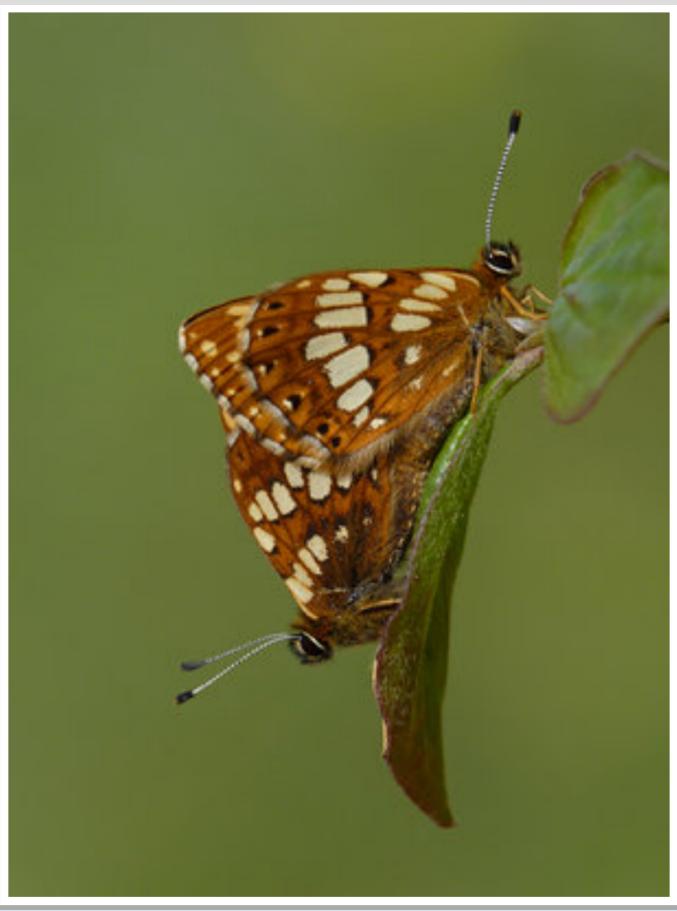
Save Our Butterflies Week Starts In Style

The first event in the Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch 'Save Our Butterflies Week' calendar was run alongside the Murray Downland Trust Open Day at Heyshott Escarpment today (19th May). Of the three guided walks I've led this year (this one with Mike Edwards of the MDT) today's was the most enjoyable, despite having the bonnet of my car severely scratched and dented by a horse's teeth! 😡 As I introduced the event to the participants (51 over the morning and afternoon walks) we were treated to a fly-past by a squadron of Eurofighters (image courtesy of Roger Pendell).

During the first walk we saw a total of 16 Duke of Burgundy, including a number of freshly emerged females, one of which was spotted being pursued by an amorous male by Susie Milbank. We were privy to the briefest of courtships as they settled down for an extended coupling of three hours plus! Two females were observed egg-laying and several males did what male Dukes do best ... fight! Between the guided walks I surveyed otherwise unexplored areas of the site, eventually reaching a total of 31 for the species. Throughout the day other butterflies seen included Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Small Heath, Brown Argus, Orange Tip, Brimstone and Green-veined White.

My thanks go to Mark Colvin for helping with logistics, and to all the representatives of the Murray Downland Trust, which does such a marvellous job in managing this fantastic reserve. It was great to see a lot of familiar faces, and quite a few new ones who I'm confident will wish to visit Heyshott again in the future.







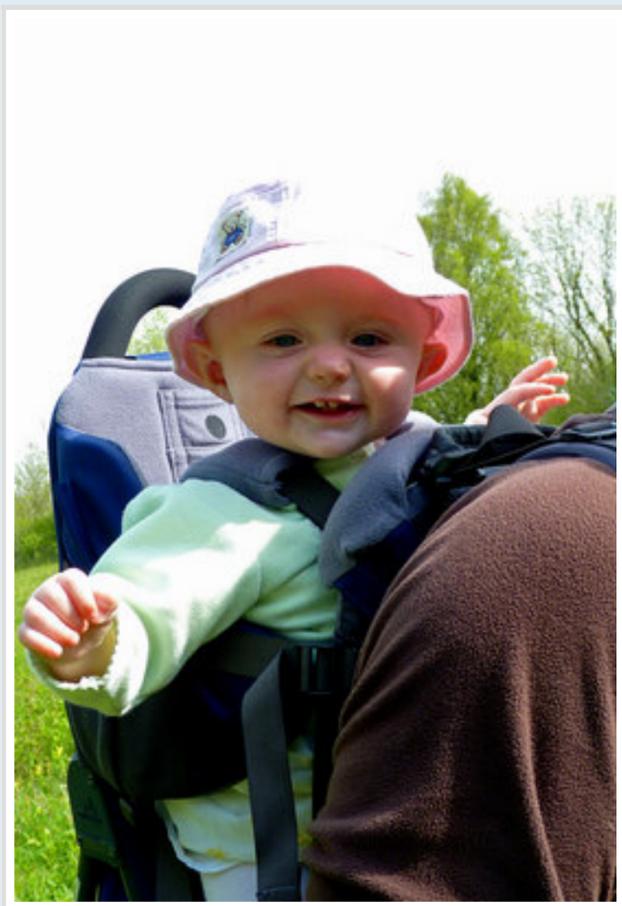
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-May-12 06:49 AM GMT

Small But Beautifully Marked

After surveying a Duke of Burgundy site in the early afternoon I moved on to Springhead (Kithurst) Hill, hoping that a few Small Blue had emerged. Susie Milbank had the same good idea and when I arrived she had already seen several, together with a lovely fresh Duchess. Unfortunately Susie had to leave before the wind dropped, finally making photography of a mating pair of Small Blue possible. My assistant Mia *Iris* and I later found a second pair on the way back to the car. Many thanks to Susie for taking the lovely picture below, which is destined for the family album. Between us we counted 8 Small Blue, 3 Duke of Burgundy, 8 Dingy Skipper, 2 Small Heath, 2 Brimstone and single Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Green-veined White, Small White, Speckled wood and Peacock.



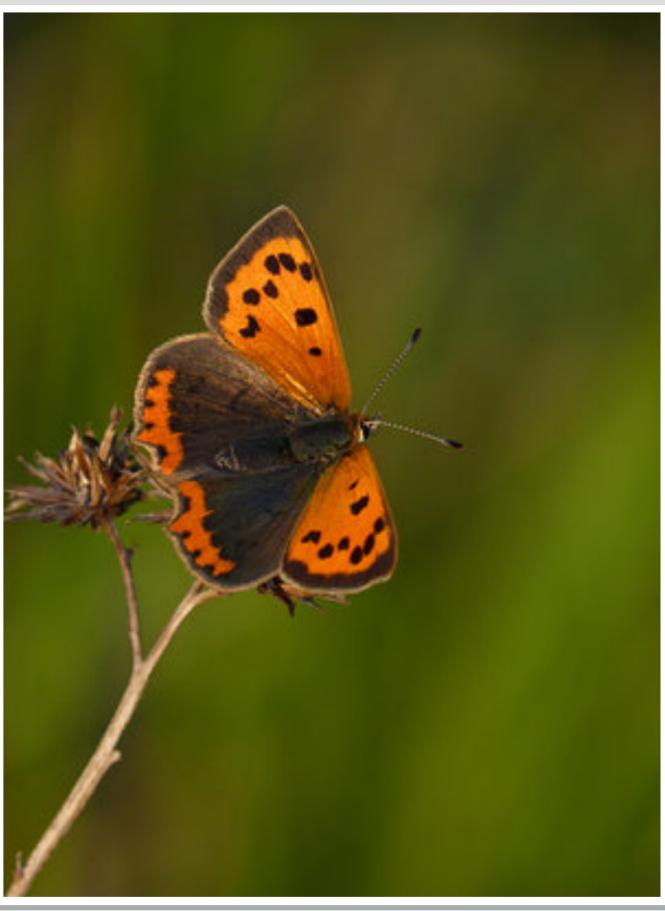


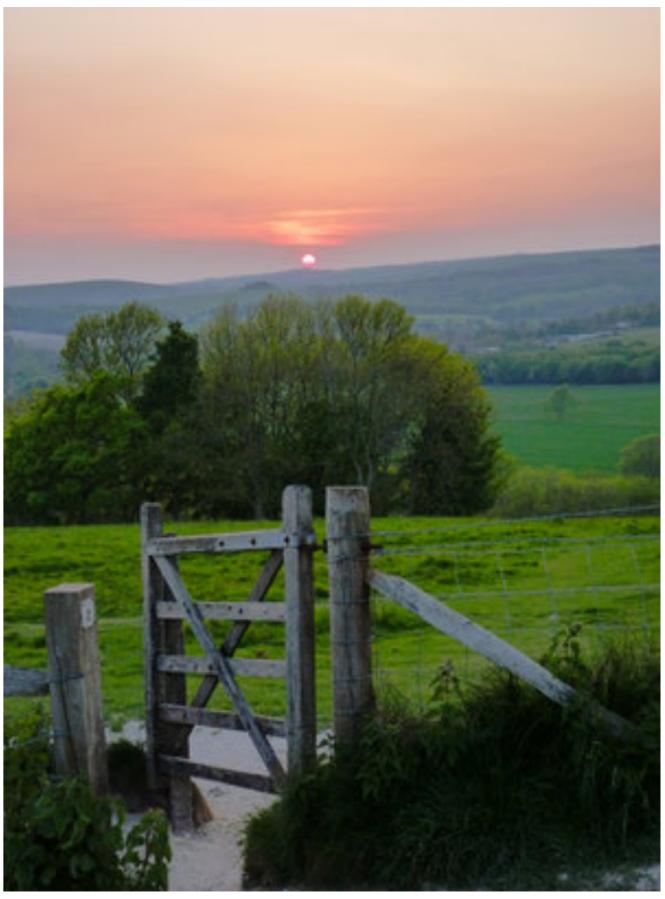
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-May-12 03:38 PM GMT

Sunset At Cissbury

After a hot and sweaty afternoon scrambling up and down the face of the South Downs counting Duke of Burgundy, it was an altogether more relaxed session at Cissbury Ring to finish off the day. At 7pm my brother Mark (on holiday from Antwerp) and I stood on the SW corner of the ramparts watching the butterflies come to roost. This is often the best time to assess numbers, as so many individuals remain unrecorded over the same area during the heat of the day. Our tally was Wall (3), Small Copper (12), Brown Argus (10), Dingy Skipper (5), Grizzled Skipper (3), Common Blue (6), Small Heath (12), Holly Blue (3), Brimstone (3), Large White (2) and Green-veined White (1). Once everything was tucked up in bed for the night we turned our cameras on the sunset. The changing evening light always adds even more character to this wonderful, atmospheric place.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 23-May-12 03:43 PM GMT

Oh I love those sunset photos! Your photos are always good but they're something else and really catch the atmosphere of the place.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-May-12 03:46 PM GMT

Thanks Susie. I know Cissbury is on your list of faves.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 23-May-12 03:55 PM GMT

Indeed, you can call me an old hippy but in addition to the wonderful butterflies, bird, scenery and history (it's a bronze age hill fort for those who may not be aware) there is an energy to the place which I seldom encounter.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Debbie, 23-May-12 07:46 PM GMT

Simply Stunning 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-12 03:41 AM GMT

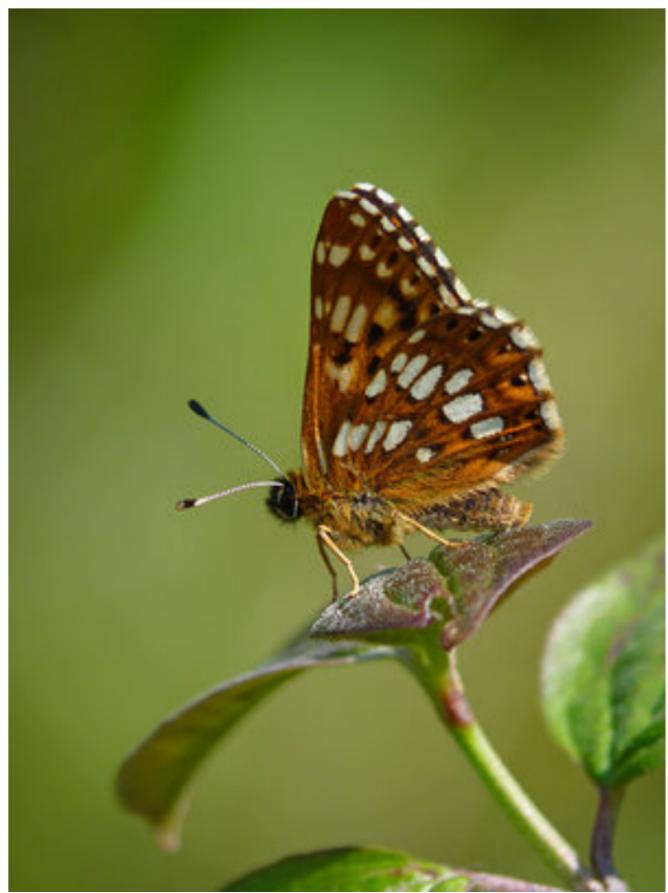
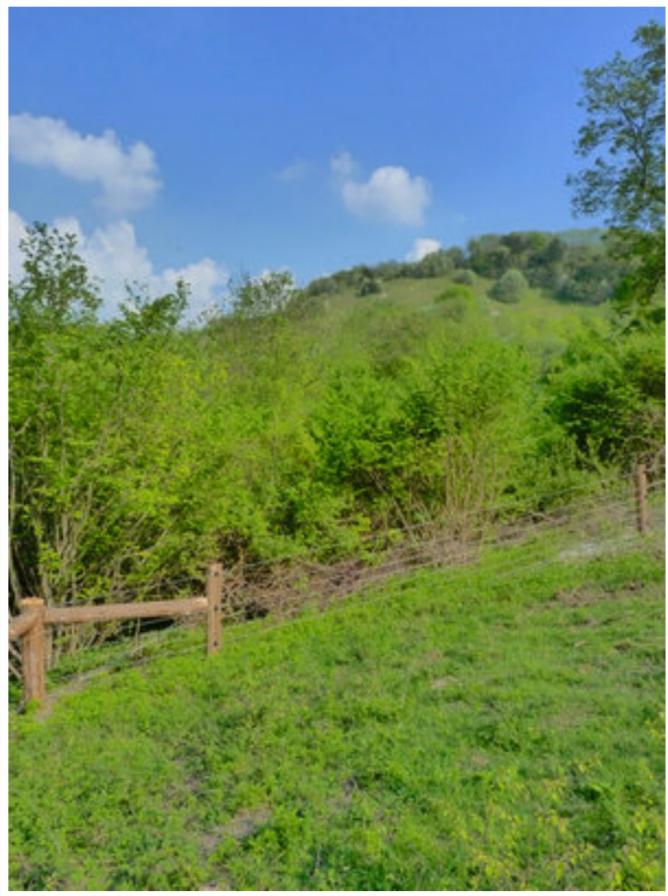
Thanks DMS. If you've never been there before, visit when the Dark Green Fritillaries are out. But Cissbury is *always* good. 😊
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-12 03:56 AM GMT

More From Heyshott

In sweltering heat I counted 27 Duke of Burgundy at Heyshott Escarpment this afternoon (23 May). It was too hot for many of the butterflies, which were actively seeking shade, so I suspect there are a good deal more than this around at the moment. That said, numbers are undoubtedly down on last year – significantly. Grizzled Skippers were more numerous than during previous visits and are clearly still emerging, as are Green-veined Whites. Being so far from any major roads it was a joy to relax in the tranquil atmosphere, to the sound of birdsong alone. When the peace was shattered it was broken by the growl of two Rolls Royce Merlin engines as a pair of Spitfires circled overhead. This was more like the spring I'd been hoping for!





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Matsukaze, 24-May-12 05:34 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

What is the secret to finding groups of roosting butterflies? Sometimes I come across such groups. Whilst they have a tendency to be in long grass in sheltered spots that catch the late evening sun, I find plenty such places that do not interest the butterflies. Is there some other feature they take into account?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-12 06:03 AM GMT

Hi Matsukaze,

It will be a while before I can answer that one – just packing for a 6am start and away for a few days. Back soon!

Neil

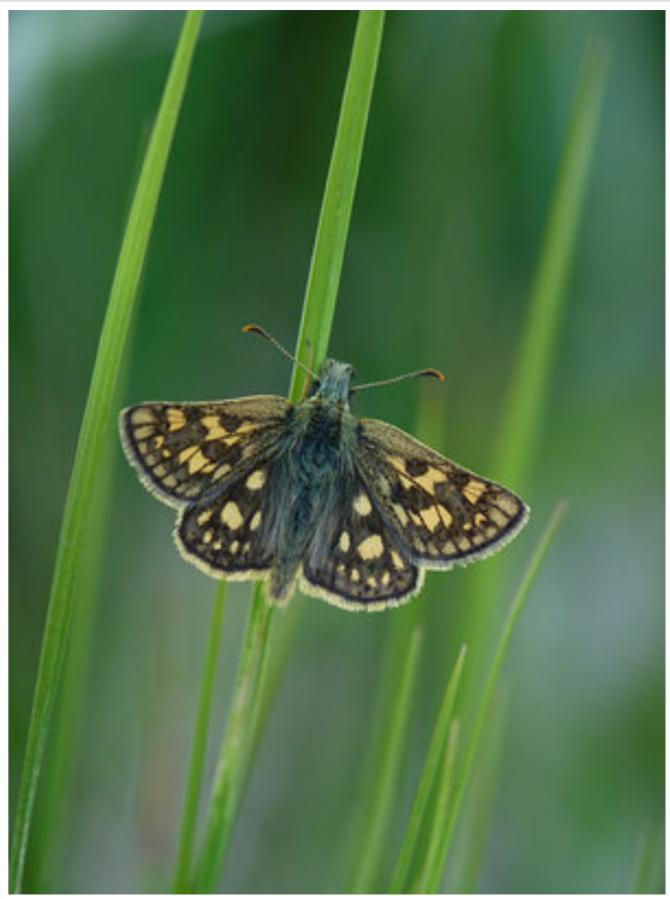
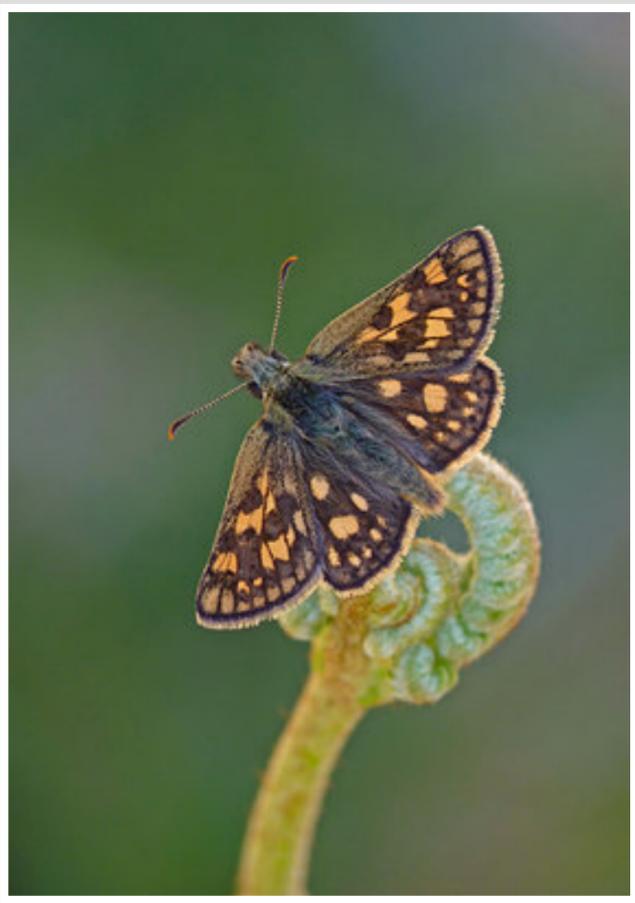
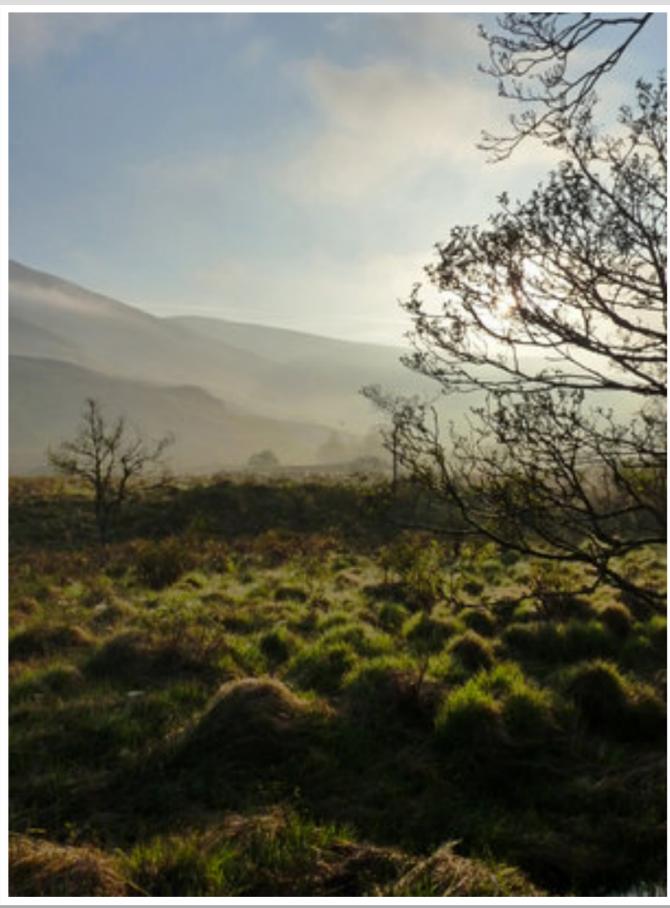
Re: Sussex Kipper

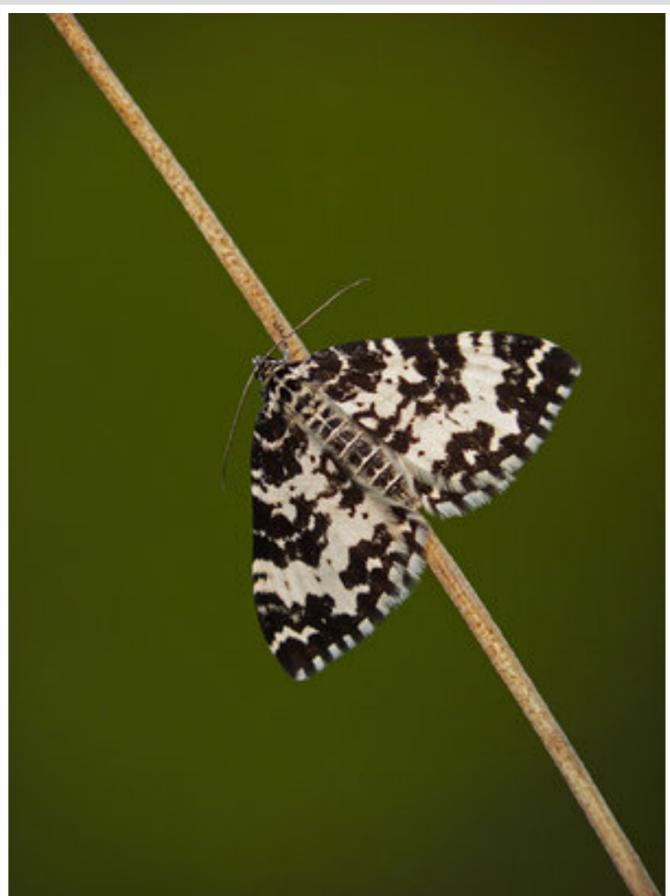
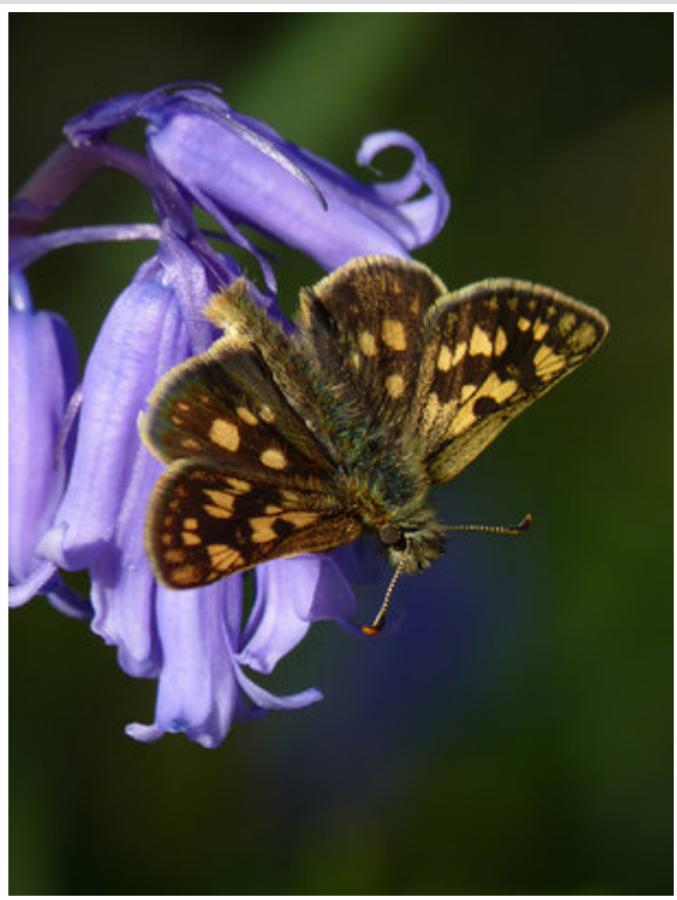
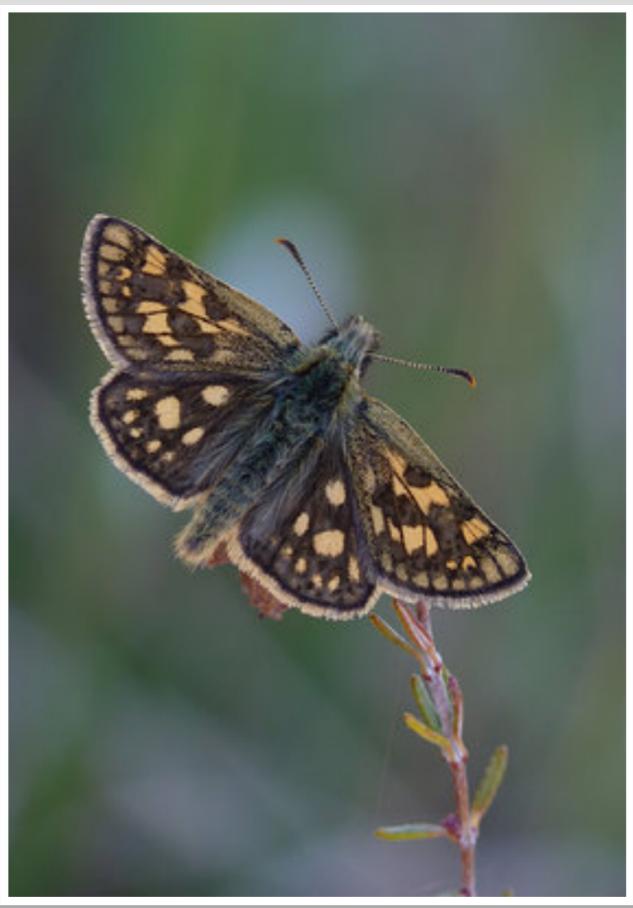
by Neil Hulme, 29-May-12 07:45 AM GMT

Highland Fling (Part 1)

I've just returned from a few days in bonny Scotland, and it certainly lived up to its name. I lived for more than six years north of the border, working in the oil industry, and for a while the west coast became a much loved second home to me. But in all my years I never saw the country look as beautiful as it did this time. The soft-top was down every day as I sped between Glasdrum, Glen Loy and Loch Arkaig (at times almost reaching the speed limit 😊) and I'll never forget the journeys through Glen Coe, without a cloud in the sky and the temperature in the mid eighties. Glasdrum is an early site and the Chequered Skippers had already been around for a while; most were clearly demonstrating the characteristic 'nibbling' along the wing fringes – unfortunately this occurs all-too-quickly. The latter two sites lag behind, being higher and cooler.

I shall mention Glen Loy first, although this wasn't the first location I visited. I knew where to find the butterflies following the accounts of Lee Slaughter and information kindly passed to me directly by UKBers Phil, Rosalyn and Vince. It was here that I met Iain Leach, the only man I have ever encountered who starts butterflying as early as I do (even beating Reverdin's effort at Collard Hill). As the mist began to rise, making way for the sunrise and midges (the Avon Skin-So-Soft does work, but I still got hammered by tics), the sound of cuckoos echoed around the glen. We worked together over the next day or two, as with a complete lack of cloud the only way Mc Skipper was going to 'open up' was by pretending to be a cloud for each other's benefit. It was a case of stunning butterflies and moths in stunning scenery. Plenty of Argent & Sable (image below) and regular meetings with Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoths, one of which bumped into a Mc Skipper, knocking it from its perch on a bluebell. Less than a metre away sat a fresh Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Although I'm pleased enough with the images below they cannot do justice to the experience.





by Colin Knight, 29-May-12 04:20 PM GMT

Stunning images Neil!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 29-May-12 04:29 PM GMT

Highland Fling (Part 2)

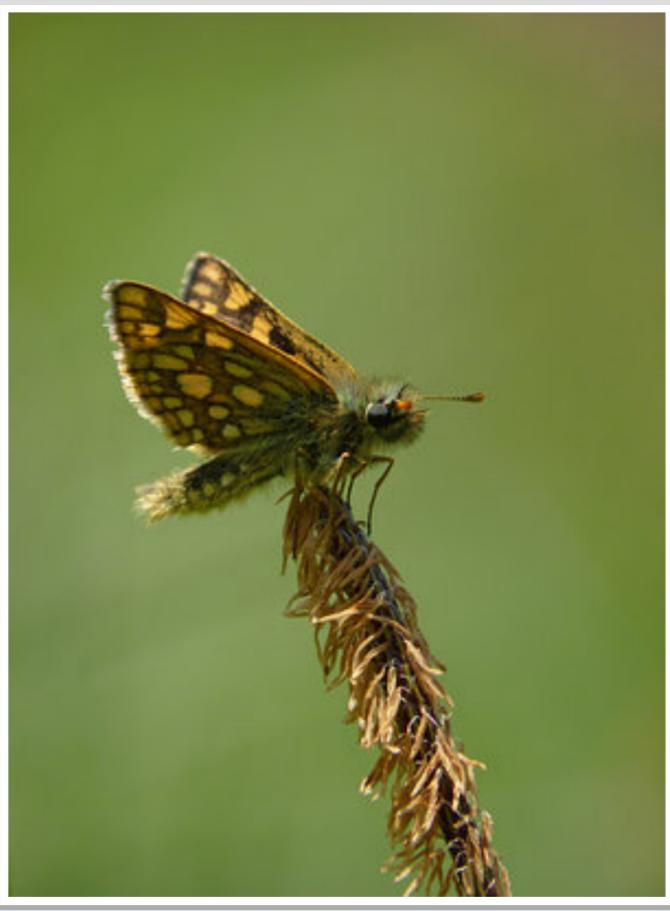
Allt Mhuic Butterfly Reserve lies on scenic banks of Loch Arkaig, which of the three locations I visited for Chequered Skipper was the most beautiful. Despite a strong urge to get there and see the butterfly it was simply impossible not to behave like a tourist and repeatedly stop to take in the views. The first image shows a view over Loch Lochy at the point where it joins Arkaig. Despite it being a weekend this stunning landscape was enjoyed in silence, completely uncluttered by people.

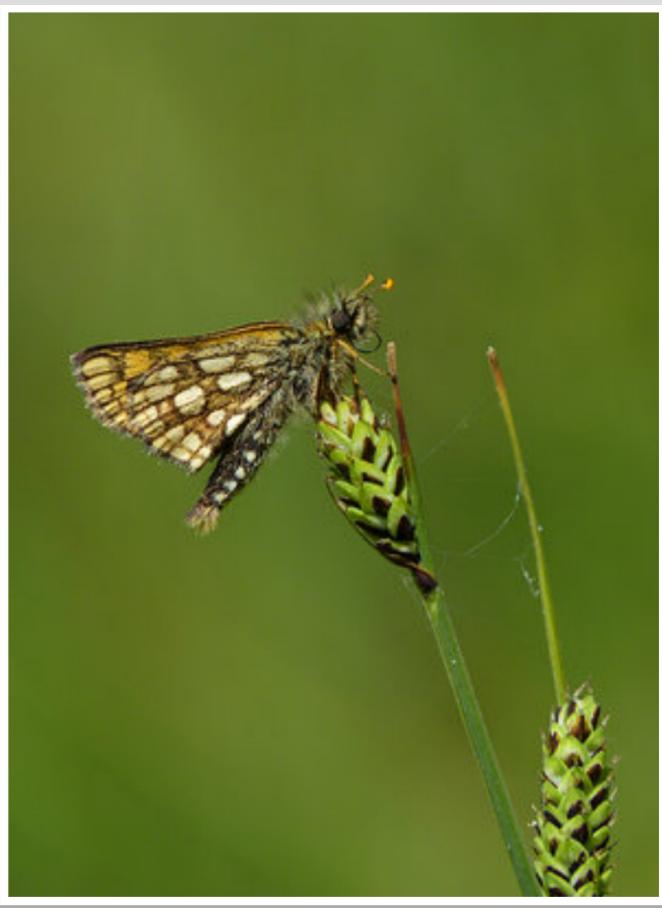


I soon stopped again on the banks of Loch Arkaig, where the reserve can just be seen in the righthand middle distance, between two blocks of conifer.



Here the butterflies were just emerging, usually found in boggy depressions adjacent to the crystal clear mountain streams. It was already too hot for any chance of an open wing shot but the undersides are equally pretty. Although I suspect that many other sites support much larger populations I would say a visit to the area must always include a stop at Allt Mhuic.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-May-12 03:15 AM GMT

Thanks Colin. Last part on its way!
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 30-May-12 03:25 AM GMT

Excellent stuff Neil! If I hadn't managed to make the trip oop north myself I'd be even more gutted than I am at seeing your stunning shots! The region is just so beautiful I do feel that a few rare butterflies is the icing on the cake, and would love to spend an entire summer getting to know the Scottish Highlands (including pronunciations – at least I now know how to pronounce Allt Mhuic thanks to ScottD!). Roll on retirement!

BTW – I forgot to mention that your ovipositing Duchess shot is amazing! Either Dan Hoare or Tim Bernhard (can't remember who!) asked me for just such a thing a while back and I had (and still have) nowt.

Great stuff.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 30-May-12 03:27 AM GMT

Incredible to see snow on the high peaks when the temperature lower down is 26c+.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 30-May-12 04:39 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Great work in difficult conditions.

The shot of Loch Lochy at the point where it joins Arkaig is lovely and reminds me of several visits to Scotland (in my non butterfly days). The first and third McSkipper shots from Part 1 are particularly good. I wish I'd been there ...

Speak soon.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-May-12 04:48 AM GMT

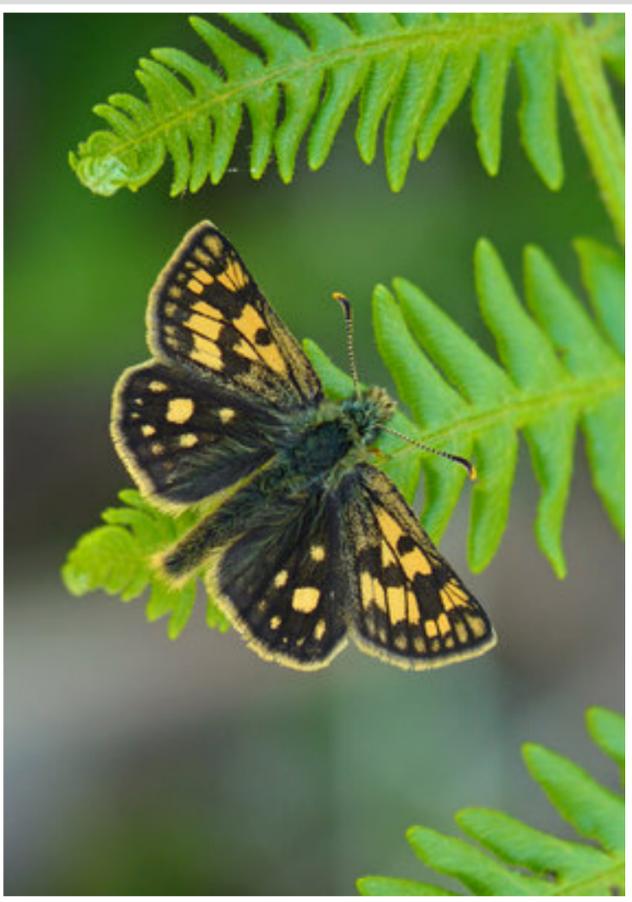
Highland Fling (Part 3)

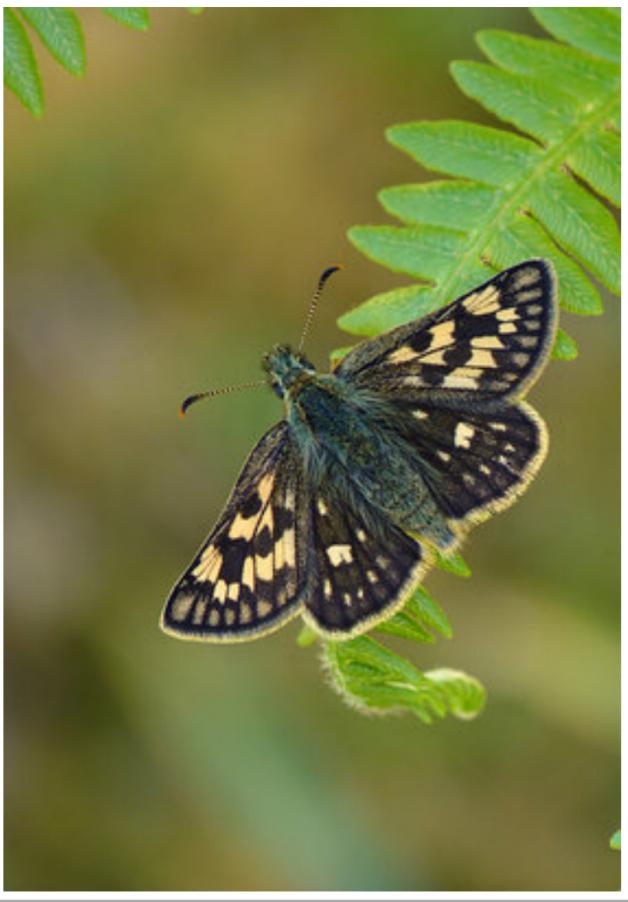
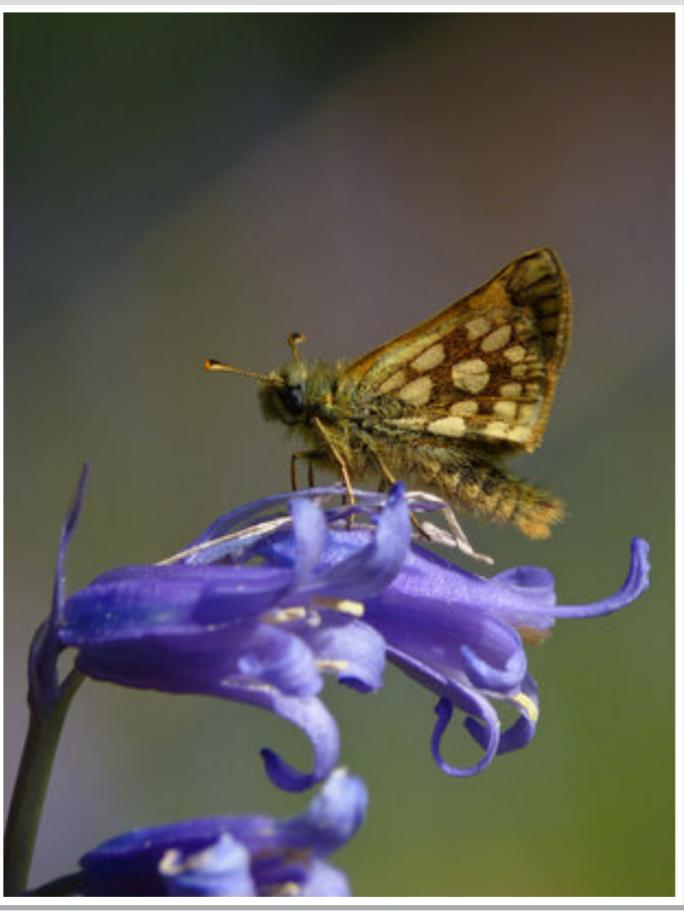
Glasdrum is the earliest, most accessible and probably most visited of the three sites. The one thing that all locations have in common is the stunning landscape in which they are set. The camera was out once more to photograph the view over Loch Creran.



With the local season being that much more advanced this was the only site where I saw female Chequered Skippers (last three images), including one *in flagrante*. As with other species, the female is a good deal more reserved than the highly combative males; she is also slightly larger and the markings are more of a cream colour.

Amongst the carpet of bluebells were also good numbers of Pearl-bordered Fritillary, together with a few very fresh looking Small PBF. As I sat on a rock by one of the small streams, enjoying the last rays of sunshine, the song of a wood warbler came floating down the hillside. I think I'll be returning here next spring.







Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-May-12 04:51 AM GMT

Thanks all. I feel very lucky to have been in the right place at the right time.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Tutton, 30-May-12 06:20 AM GMT

I think you are being modest Neil you have obviously put a lot of effort into being in the right place at the right time – an absolutely stunning set of photos – especially the scenic ones which really set the scene – the weather looked fantastic 😊 Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by MikeOxon, 30-May-12 06:48 AM GMT

Wonderful series of photos, Neil. It looks as though the weather was even better than I had during my visit in 2007!
Mike

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 30-May-12 08:20 AM GMT

Yes, those scenery shots are cracking, and the Skipper ones aren't bad either! Wish I could have been there. It is no surprise that the season is more advanced there—the weather has been consistently sunnier/warmer in north-west of the country than down south this spring.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 30-May-12 06:34 PM GMT

An amazing set of images Neil 🍷.

My favourite butterfly-related ones are definitely those from Glasdrum. I'll be up there myself in 10 days time and hope to get the chance to sneak off to Glen Loy for an hour.

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by selbypaul, 30-May-12 06:36 PM GMT

Hi Neil

Looks like you did exactly the same "tour of mid Scotland" as I did, only a few days later. I too will never forget such glorious conditions and scenery, and the complete tranquility. Simply awe inspiring.

Paul

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jun-12 08:23 AM GMT

Thanks again to all for your generous comments. Certainly a season highlight for me and one for the memory banks.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jun-12 08:40 AM GMT

Dukes On South Today

A couple of days back I took Mia *Iris* (a.k.a. Sussex Nipper) up onto the Downs behind Storrington, primarily to ensure there were sufficient Duke of Burgundy still around for filming by the local BBC. The trip to Scotland was fantastic, but I was even happier spending the afternoon with my daughter, tucked away in a seldom visited corner on my patch. She seemed genuinely fascinated by these little things fluttering around her, although I doubt she recognised the differences between the Duke of Burgundy, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Wall, Brown Argus, Common Blue (images of female below), Small Heath, Small Copper and Small Blue, despite my coaching.





The filming went OK despite initially iffy weather and the piece appeared on BBC South Today this evening (31.5.12). It can be viewed for a while on the BBC IPlayer at http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0...1_05_2012/ from 23.06 onwards.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 02-Jun-12 04:29 AM GMT

She's gorgeous! 😊

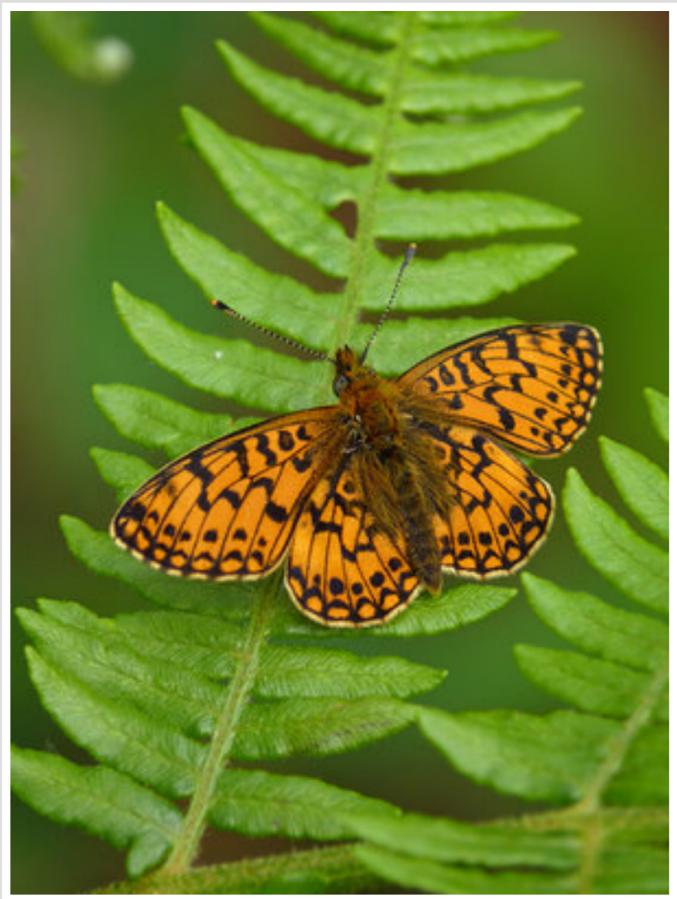
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jun-12 04:19 AM GMT

Small Pearls And A Little Gem

Today (2nd June) I spent a very enjoyable couple of hours with my father at our Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood Reserve near Lewes. The main target was Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which started to emerge last week. Initially we found it difficult to confirm the presence of more than 4 or 5 male SPBFs on the central part of Park Corner Heath, although they are difficult to count as they roam widely over the area. However, just as it was time to depart we discovered a group of 3 at the far, lower end of PCH, which had clearly just emerged that morning and were still a little unsteady on the wing. The dark markings exhibited that purplish gloss that only the freshest specimens show. Also on view at PCH was a pretty Cream-spot Tiger moth and several Grizzled Skippers, including a well-worn ab. *intermedia*.

The best find was on the Rowland Wood Reserve. My father spotted a Grizzled Skipper which in flight had that characteristic pale look of a good 'ab.'. As it settled we were pleased to see that it was a nice example of a female ab. *taras*. Undoubtedly born and bred on the new reserve this gives real hope that the extended habitat will become home to significant numbers of this beautiful aberrant form. SPBFs are yet to emerge in this part of the wood but Small Heath numbers are clearly building well.







Re: Sussex Kipper

by Trev Sawyer, 03-Jun-12 05:15 AM GMT

My wife Yvonne told me to let you know that your abs look very nice Neil! 😳😳😳😳😳

Trouble is, I have no option but to agree with her 😞

Trev

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jun-12 02:12 AM GMT

Thanks Mrs Trev. I do try to work on my abs. If the weather wasn't so poor I might have even travelled north for those buff, white SPBFs, hoping to get Mountain Ringlet on the overshoot.

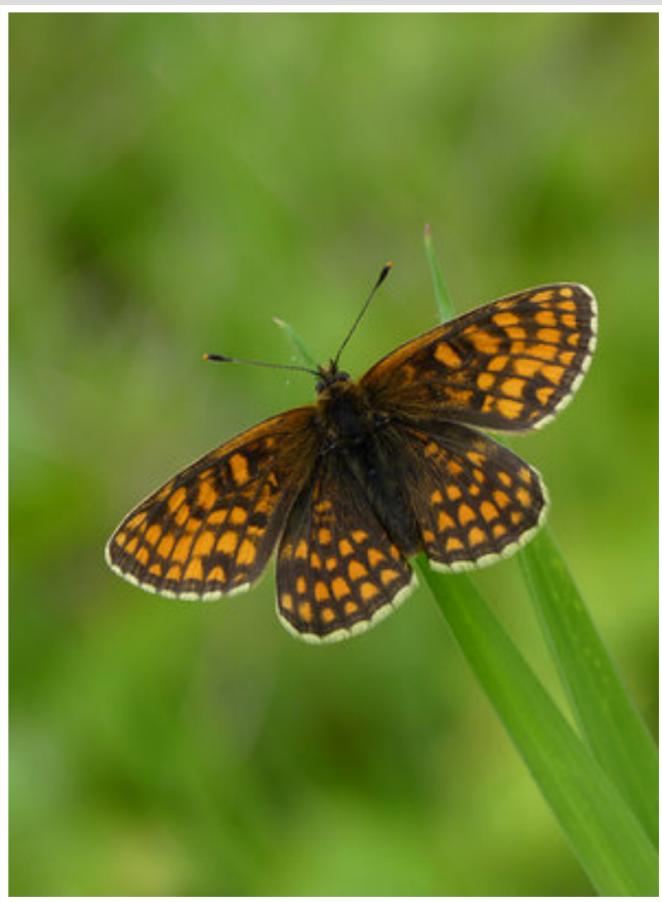
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jun-12 02:22 AM GMT

Sitting Ducks

I delayed posting my first Heath Fritillary shot of the year, taken at the back end of last week, largely because I'd hoped to return almost immediately for another session with them. This being 2012 the weather soon put a damper on that idea. Rare and beautiful as they are, a trip to Blean Woods is always like shooting ducks in a barrel. Park, get out of car, trip over them! That said, it will require a good warm and sunny day or two to lure them out in any numbers.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 07-Jun-12 02:23 AM GMT

Neil:

hoping to get Mountain Ringlet on the overshoot

When I was chatting to Iain Leach in Glen Loy, we said that you had finally "ticked" Chequered Skipper and that just left Mountain Ringlet. We were unsure whether Mountain Ringlet was on your *never-having-seen* missing list or merely on your *not-yet-photographed* list.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jun-12 02:32 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

Mountain Ringlet is the last on the 'never seen' list. I've even see Cryptic Wood White while on a fishing holiday, but didn't recognise it as such at the time, being so cryptic. Bearing in mind I've seen quite a few Queen of Spain and Large Tortoiseshell, and the odd Camberwell Beauty, I really should polish off the UK list now. Cue sunshine. 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 07-Jun-12 02:58 AM GMT

Neil:

I really should polish off the UK list now.

Impressive. Long-tailed Blue, Short-tailed Blue, Pale Clouded Yellow (the two species), Scarce Swallowtail have all eluded me during then past 67 years. And presumably you too Neil.

But I HAVE SEEN MOUNTAIN RINGLET - so there (yah boo sucks) 🙄🙄🙄

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jun-12 03:19 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

It will be mine soon. 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 07-Jun-12 05:26 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

I really should polish off the UK list now. Cue sunshine.

You missed it, Neil. 24–28 May – a once in a decade weather event where NW Scotland was the warmest part of the UK.

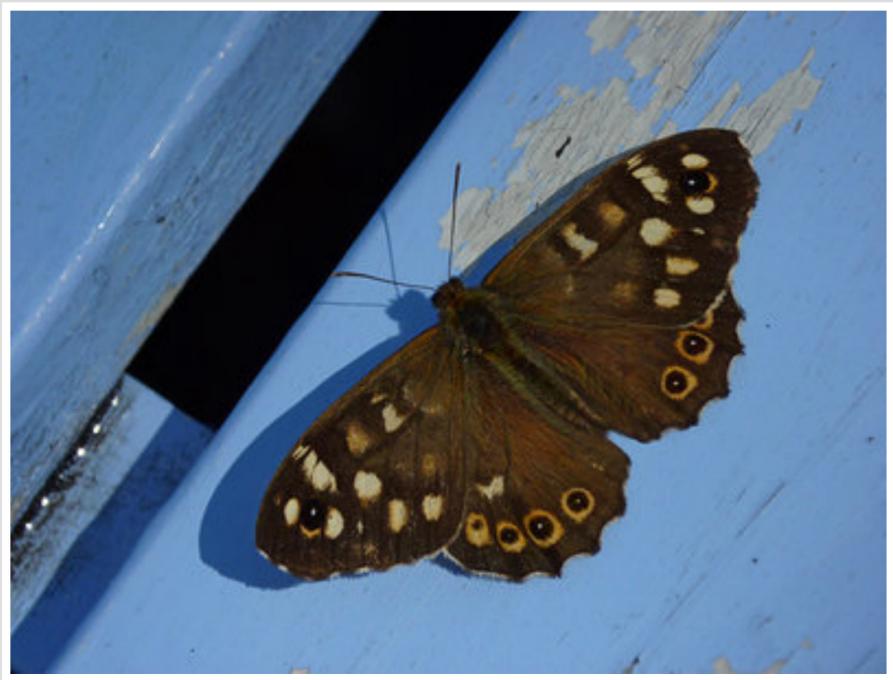
Sadly, I missed it too. 😞

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jun-12 01:44 AM GMT

Quick Off The Mark

With sunshine in such short supply it's hardly surprising that our long-suffering butterflies are reacting so quickly when the cloud finally clears. After yet another miserable day the sun appeared at 4.15pm this afternoon, and within a couple of minutes a male Speckled Wood was basking on my garden bench in Worthing.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jun-12 03:07 AM GMT

I like that Speckled Wood photo Neil, an unusual combination against the blue of the bench 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jun-12 06:52 AM GMT

Thanks Neil. I believe the colour is Double Dutch. Probably needs a coat of paint but I can always claim it's shabby chic.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Jun-12 06:44 PM GMT

Plenty Of Acteon (with apologies!)

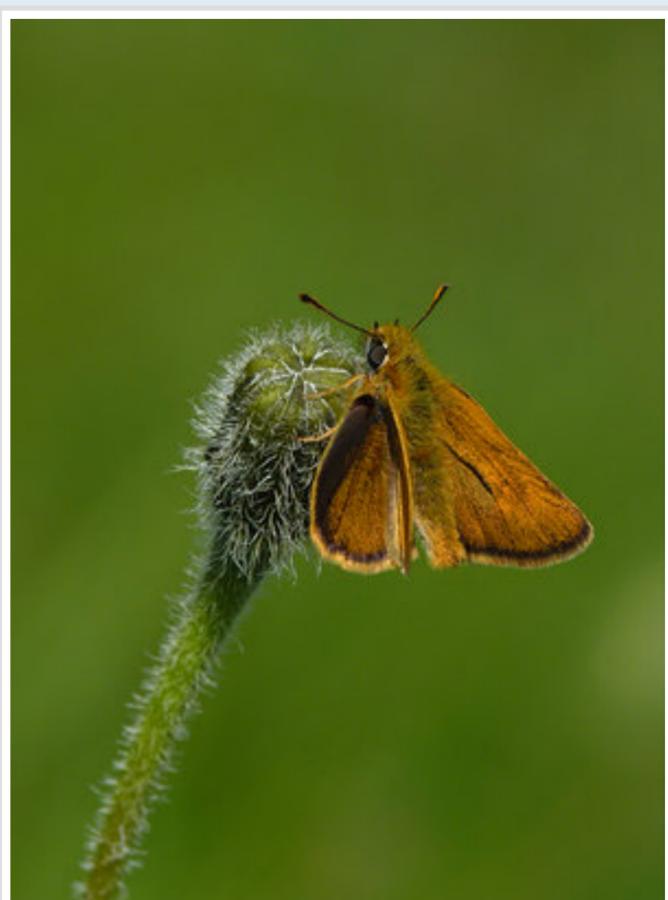
Yesterday (9th June) I headed off early for a trip down Memory Lane. Only twice since our weekend family butterfly outings in the 1970s have I revisited the beautiful Lulworth Cove and adjacent coastline. Once was on a geology field trip in 1978 and on the other occasion, just a few years back, it rained so hard I never left the hotel. This time I was free from the educational tour and blessed with good weather.

It wasn't long before the early morning warmth started to stir my target species, the Lulworth Skipper, and they were soon zipping around at high speed, often fearlessly disappearing over the cliff edges in the stiff breeze. Although individually unspectacular, they made a fine sight jostling for position on almost every stem of Viper's Bugloss, sometimes more than half a dozen at a time. I suppose I saw about 150 individuals in all. We are clearly well into the flight season as the vast majority were quite worn, although the recent weather will have taken its toll on their condition. However, with such a protracted flight period there are still both male and female butterflies emerging, and more will come throughout June. As always they showed considerable variation in colouring and size, ranging from tiny, plain-looking, dusky males, to golden males with a hint of the 'sunshine' pattern on the forewings. The females varied from being almost unmarked in this way, to very strongly marked.

Other species seen around the area included Adonis Blue, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Wall, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath and Red Admiral in modest numbers, together with about 20 Large Skippers. But it was a day with the 'little brown job' I was interested in, and it was quite nostalgic picnicking amongst the butterflies, with the sound of families enjoying themselves drifting up from the beach below.

I later moved on to a site near Corfe Castle. I couldn't locate the Lulworth Skippers here but the visit was far from wasted as the display of Bee Orchids

was nothing short of spectacular. It turned out to be a memorable day and a very welcome respite from the relentless poor weather.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by ChrisC, 10-Jun-12 08:00 PM GMT

hi kipper, lovely shots. if i'd known you were visitig Dorset i would have met you down there, lulworths are on my list 😊

Chris

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Jun-12 09:41 PM GMT

Thanks Chris. With me, trips are often planned at the very last moment, so unfortunately it's sometimes tricky to give advance warning of butterfly operations. Now I have Mia to consider things are usually restricted to the Thursday to Sunday period, but that still means I'm very fortunate to have quite a lot of flexibility. Thursday to Saturday this week might be Mountain Ringlet time if the weather holds!
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 11-Jun-12 02:17 AM GMT

Alright Neil? Cracking shots as usual! 🍷 Being Dorset born and bred I've probably seen this species hundreds of times but I didn't know what I was looking at 😲 They are on of my target species for this year so hopefully they'll be around for a few more weeks. Does your photo looking across from Stair Hole to the cove represent where you were finding them as Newlands recommends the opposite side of the cove(Bindon I think?)? If they are around in good numbers on the eastern side that would be ace as I could then incorporate a walk to my favourite place ever – Durdle Door 😊

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jun-12 02:46 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel,
Yes, there are plenty on the way up and at the very top of the cliff immediately west of Stair Hole at SY82107987 (it is important to note that the cliff-top is unguarded up here). However, most are to be found on the rough grassland of Bindon Hill, immediately above Lulworth Cove. This means crossing the stile in the fence-line onto the slightly scary-looking slope above the water. NOT FOR CHILDREN, not for those with vertigo, but safe enough for sure-footed adults who keep to the uppermost pathway, now with the fence-line close to your left. Everyone going up there should be careful.
Good luck, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 11-Jun-12 03:08 AM GMT

I'd always associated Lulworth Skippers with July – August. Surprised to see so many out in the first half of June.
When would you estimate they'd be at their peak, Neil?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jun-12 03:30 AM GMT

Hi David,
Probably quite soon at Lulworth, some time in late June/early July. The literature is out of date now and I know that quite a few people have been chasing the species far too late in recent years. In the freakishly hot spring of 2007 we saw many species emerge very early, but the Lulworth Skipper seems to have had difficulty sorting out its phenological calendar since then and is now a much earlier species than it used to be in the UK. However, at the moment it does seem to have quite a protracted emergence window, although its entire flight period may be over increasingly early in future years. I reckon end first week June is the best time to see them here if the weather is reasonable. There may be local differences as I haven't seen any reports from Durlston yet, although I'm not sure how closely anyone's looking.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 11-Jun-12 04:16 AM GMT

Thanks, Neil.
This perhaps explains why I failed to see any at Ballard Down in late July last year.
I'll store your advice in my memory bank for future reference.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 11-Jun-12 11:17 PM GMT

You people OK down there is Sussex? I believe you have been getting a little bit of drizzle 💡
Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jun-12 09:21 PM GMT

Hi Jack,

It was a spectacular wash-out down here, with the A27 closed between Portsmouth and Chichester. Hannah had a tough journey to/from work at Eastleigh, via Winchester, Petersfield, Midhurst etc. It's a bad enough journey at the best of times. First time I've seen standing water on my lawn.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 13-Jun-12 12:42 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

First time I've seen standing water on my lawn.

Don't suppose you're inconvenienced by the hosepipe ban then? 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jun-12 01:01 AM GMT

Hi David,

But it's sooo tempting to use one. 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 13-Jun-12 01:25 AM GMT

But it's sooo tempting to use one. 😊

Think outside the box. Use the hosepipe in reverse and pump the floodwater back into the mains, or the loo, or the bath. Now would that be illegal I wonder?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 13-Jun-12 03:02 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Just seen the flooding in Sussex on the news, hope you are all ok down there.

I usually have standing water on my back lawn at some point every winter, except this last one which was unusually dry.

Over the past week or so my lawn has become very soggy....I feel like the year has gone backwards somehow 😊

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by selbypaul, 13-Jun-12 05:34 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Hi David,

Probably quite soon at Lulworth, some time in late June/early July. The literature is out of date now and I know that quite a few people have been chasing the species far too late in recent years. In the freakishly hot spring of 2007 we saw many species emerge very early, but the Lulworth Skipper seems to have had difficulty sorting out its phenological calendar since then and is now a much earlier species than it used to be in the UK. However, at the moment it does seem to have quite a protracted emergence window, although its entire flight period may be over increasingly early in future years. I reckon end first week June is the best time to see them here if the weather is reasonable. There may be local differences as I haven't seen any reports from Durlston yet, although I'm not sure how closely anyone's looking.

Neil

That's really interesting and really useful information Neil, thanks. It certainly explains why I've had so little chance of seeing them in the last two years.

I was wondering though, does this increasingly early emergence explain why the surveys show them in significant decline this past five years. Do you think its another case of only partial adaptation to the changing climate? I'm thinking that maybe they've partially adapted to the increased spring temperatures, and emerged earlier, but their favoured nectaring or egg laying plants aren't in the right condition at that time of year.

What do you think?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 13-Jun-12 05:45 AM GMT

That's an interesting point, Paul.

Given their habitat requirements, Lulworth Skippers, unlike many other British species, cannot really colonise northwards.

Perhaps their response is to alter their emergence pattern to favour an earlier period, where once this would have been too inclement.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jun-12 04:39 PM GMT

Hi Paul and David,

This is a very interesting point. Unfortunately the computer just kicked me out of UKB, losing 30 minutes of work on my answer. Free time has just evaporated so I'll come back to the rather contentious issue of an apparent decline in Lulworth Skipper at another time.

Hi Neil,

We're just about dried out thanks.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Jun-12 06:48 PM GMT

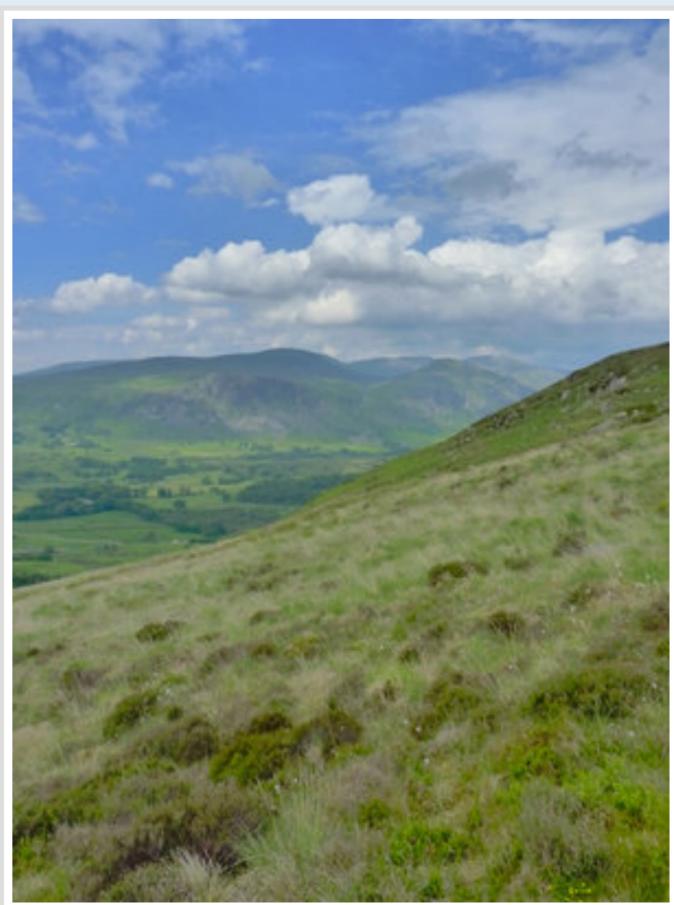
Full House – Just!

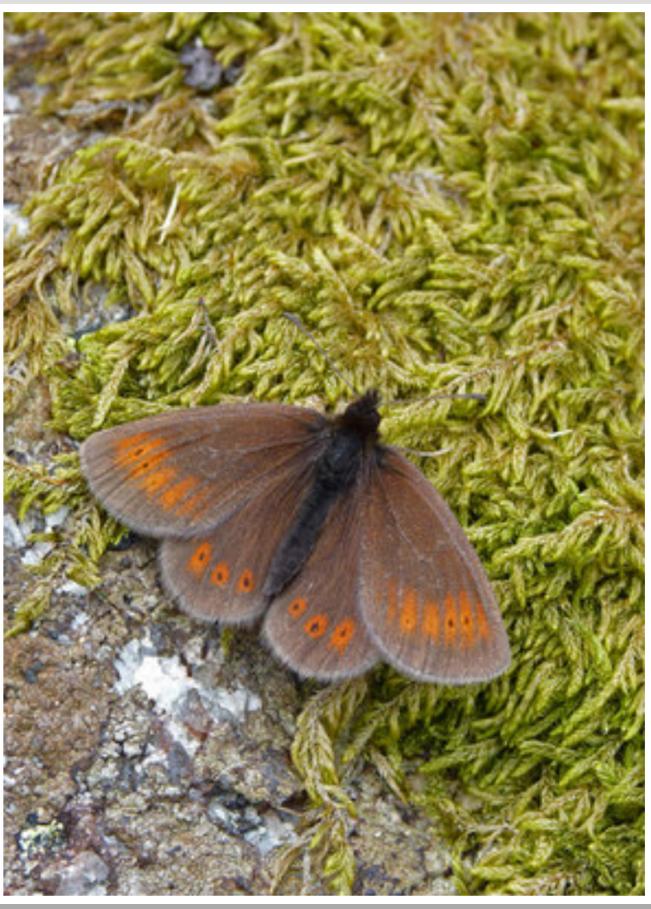
Yesterday (14th June) I finally saw the last UK resident/breeding species on the list of 59, although I've been fortunate enough to see a few rare visitors along the way. But it was a close call and were it not for Rogerdodge's map and a chance meeting with Pete Antrobus (a.k.a. podster) I would have made a monster boob 🤪! . I decided to head to the Lakes at very short notice, when the weather forecasters suddenly predicted a window of opportunity.

In a rush I memorised, rather than printed off, Rogerdodge's map of Irton Fell. I made the schoolboy error of following the main track towards Irton Pike (rather than turning right at the first fork) and wasted several hours of full-on sunshine looking at an abundance of Small Heath! As I drove away feeling that perhaps they were going to be late this year, a growing feeling that this was unlikely caused me to try and recall the map more clearly. The configuration of paths at the top was wrong, so I turned back. Pete was just getting into his car and had a satisfied look on his face that said "I've just seen Mountain Ringlet". After a brief chat he put me on the right track – thanks Pete!

The Mountain Ringlets were soon located and after walking some distance up the ridge I spotted about 25 in all. I was surprised at just how fast they plummet into the grass if the sunshine disappears. Full-on sunshine really is essential for MR watching. During longer periods of cloudy weather they shimmy deep down into the grass and then become 'un-flushable'. This must be responsible for the rapid loss of scales and the greasy appearance that even quite freshly emerged specimens seem to take on. I only saw one female and I suspect the flight season started quite recently.

A stunning location, good weather and a milestone reached. However, the couple of hours I was limited to was insufficient to fulfill my wish to learn more about this interesting species and I'll be back next year, better prepared.





by PhilIB, 15-Jun-12 07:47 PM GMT

Congratulations on your 'full house' Neil.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 15-Jun-12 09:34 PM GMT

Yes well done Neil. I have a mainland full house but not yet the Irish Wood White. My occasionals/extincts (?) are Large Tort and Camberwell Beauty only. No Monarch as yet (in Britain). Is Monarch on your list Neil?

Your initial failure with Mountain Ringlets gave me a little laugh. It's an exact parallel with my experience three weeks ago when I had failed to find Chequered Skipper. I might *not* have found it (although I self-found many years earlier) without your advice when we bumped into each other in Glen Loy. You did me a favour; a few weeks later someone else returned the favour. Thanks all round.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Debbie, 15-Jun-12 10:55 PM GMT

Well Done Neil 😊😊😊

We have 13 so far, but what an exciting journey ahead

Debbie

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Jun-12 11:32 PM GMT

Thanks Phil, Jack and Debbie.

Jack, my exotics include Large Tortoiseshell (5; 3 at Woodhouse Copse, 1 at Newtimber Hill and 1 at Littlehampton Bridge), Camberwell Beauty (1 at RSPB Pulborough) and Queen of Spain (9; 8 at Chichester and 1 at Springhead Hill). I don't include the 2 Black-veined Whites at Stockbridge Down, as captive-bred origin was apparently later admitted to a BC Hants & IOW committee member. So no Monarch yet, but this and Long-tailed Blue are my next best targets.

I think it's worthwhile stating that although an element of 'listing' is inevitable once you've seen the Lion's Share of what's on offer, the real joy of butterflying is the enjoyment of all those associated aspects of the British countryside experienced while in their pursuit, the 'sense of place' they often engender, the study of their fascinating behaviour in ever-increasing detail, the sharing of the experience with similar minds and, high on the list for me personally, their conservation. The British countryside without butterflies would no longer be the British countryside.

Debbie, you are at the start of a very exciting journey. I wish I could do it all again, but like all addicts I now need more and more to satisfy my cravings. Your white SPBFs are the sort of butterflies required to give me the same 'fix' I got from seeing my first Adonis Blue 😊. That said, the first Orange Tip sighting of each spring goes a long way to fulfilling that need.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 16-Jun-12 12:05 AM GMT

Congratulations, Neil.

I would never have risked the trip given the weather forecast but you were brave and it paid off!

PS: Don't be embarrassed – I did exactly the same thing as you last year; turned left and ended up on Irton Pike! Got nice views of the Cumbrian coast and the Isle of Man though, so it wasn't totally without reward.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Podster, 16-Jun-12 01:58 AM GMT

Glad to be of assistance Neil, great photos as well. Being a Birder I've at least pipped you to the Monarch with 10+ seen from over 30 years of visiting their prime landfall of The Isles of Scilly.

See you on a Scillies twitch in the Autumn maybe. 😊

Pod

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 16-Jun-12 05:11 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

... the real joy of butterflying is the enjoyment of all those associated aspects of the British countryside experienced while in their pursuit, the 'sense of place' they often engender, the study of their fascinating behaviour in ever-increasing detail, the

sharing of the experience with similar minds and, high on the list for me personally, their conservation. The British countryside without butterflies would no longer be the British countryside...

I totally agree with this sentiment and could not have put it better.

Well done Neil on your 'full set' and for putting so eloquently into words exactly why I go 'Butterflying' 😊

All the best,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by selbypaul, 16-Jun-12 05:32 PM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

... the real joy of butterflying is the enjoyment of all those associated aspects of the British countryside experienced while in their pursuit, the 'sense of place' they often engender, the study of their fascinating behaviour in ever-increasing detail, the sharing of the experience with similar minds and, high on the list for me personally, their conservation. The British countryside without butterflies would no longer be the British countryside...

I totally agree with this sentiment and could not have put it better.

Well done Neil on your 'full set' and for putting so eloquently into words exactly why I go 'Butterflying' 😊

All the best,

Neil F.

Totally agree with both Neil and Nfreem here. I've loved the last 4 years hunting down all the species, but its not been the "tick" that has been so rewarding. It's the amazing countryside, scenery, and other butterfly hunters that I've spoken to.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by GOLDENORFE, 19-Jun-12 05:19 AM GMT

congrats , well done

just got back from irton/whinn rigg , saw well over 50 ringlets! very good numbers of newly emerged specimens 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 19-Jun-12 05:41 AM GMT

Huge congrats Neil! And also a thank you as reading your report made me realise that I'm not the only one that memorises maps wrong and for cheering me up having got back from Slop Bog and seeing nothing...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-12 02:03 AM GMT

Damp Meadows

With the longest day passed and summer in full swing I had to satisfy my desire to see some butterflies by taking a walk around the damp meadows of Southwater Woods this morning (21st June). Having had to abort a trip to the West Country for HBF due to food-poisoning I needed to cheer myself up and get some fresh air. Irrespective of the weather a walk in the countryside is never a waste of time and without other distractions around I set myself the task of photographing the humble Meadow Brown. I don't remember a summer when I've so appreciated this species. Meadow Browns are notoriously skittish and after getting a few reasonable shots I came away in considerably better spirits.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-12 02:09 AM GMT

Thanks David, Podster, Neil, Paul, Phil and Wurzel. After completing the full set I'm back to Meadow Brown. 😊
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 22-Jun-12 03:44 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Lovely composition in the first shot of a butterfly difficult to photograph well.

Glad to hear you are back on your feet.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

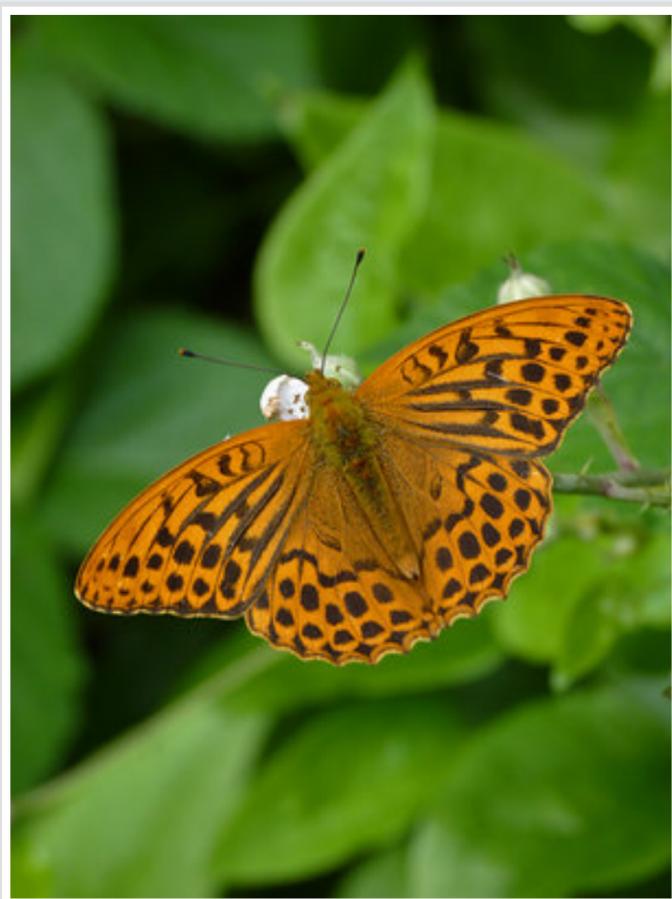
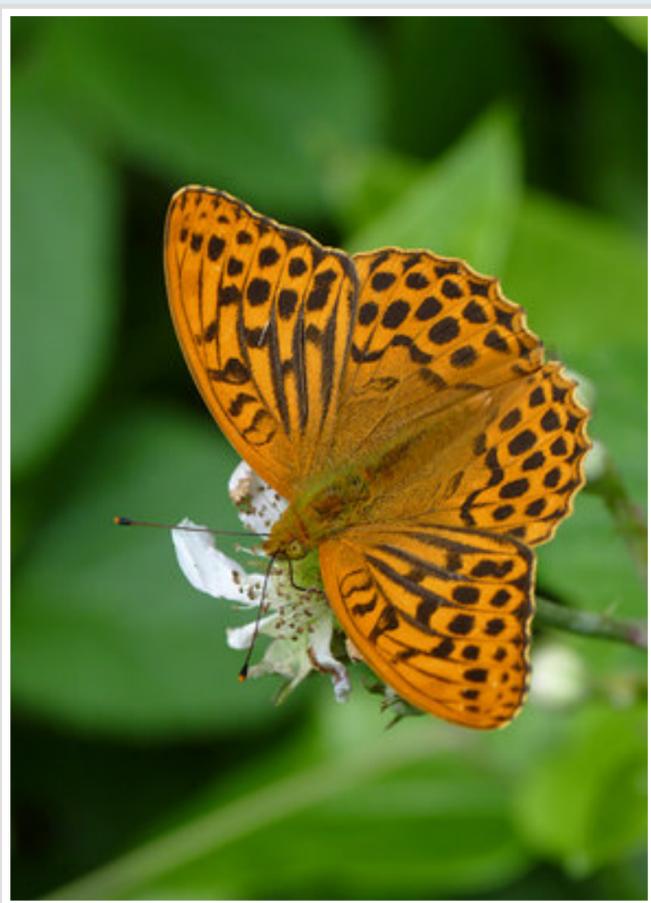
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jun-12 03:48 AM GMT

Southwater Woods

On Saturday (23rd June) I managed to fit in a couple of hours at Southwater Woods before begrudgingly heading off for a social engagement. I

recognised the two vehicles parked at the eastern entrance to Madgeland, so it came as no surprise when I met Mark Colvin and Colin Knight on a similar mission in the woods. At least 7 brand new Silver-washed Fritillaries were loitering in one small area, with some still drying off their recently unfurled wings. I glimpsed just one White Admiral but there was no sign of the Purple Hairstreak. I'll be surprised if the Emperor shows before the month is out, but he'll emerge on the 30th, just to be awkward.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Gothic_dreams, 26-Jun-12 05:56 AM GMT

Lovely photos of the Silver-washed Fritillaries, especially love the top of the 3 😊

Chris

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Jun-12 05:31 AM GMT

Thanks Chris. While I'm at it I'll add my own "welcome to UKB". I trust we shall see some friendly family competition 😊 . You are certainly at no disadvantage with an FZ38 in your hand.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

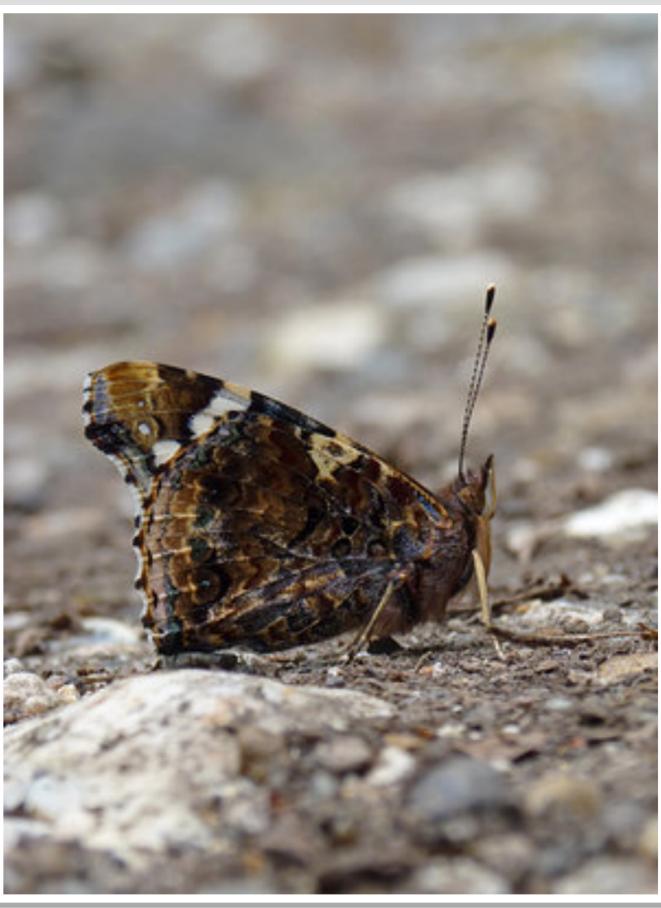
by Neil Hulme, 27-Jun-12 05:53 AM GMT

The First And The Last

While taking a stroll around Southwater Woods with Matthew Oates and new Sussex Branch Chair Nigel Symington this afternoon (26th June) we came across an unusual combination of Skippers. While I was busy trying to photograph a Small Skipper, Matthew spotted a rather tatty Grizzled; as far as I know these are respectively the first and last records for the county this year.

As we wandered further afield we came across our first female Silver-washed Fritillary of the season. We then met up with my father who had managed to see just a single White Admiral on his tour of the woods, adding weight to my fear that this species is going to suffer a real 'stinker' in 2012.

Amongst all the bad news stories this year it's nice to see so many freshly emerged Red Admirals at the moment. A male was holding territory in the Marlpost car park and repeatedly settled on our heads, as Red Admirals habitually do every year in this precise spot!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jun-12 03:02 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

We then met up with my father who had managed to see just a single White Admiral on his tour of the woods, adding weight to my fear that this species is going to suffer a real 'stinker' in 2012.

Hi Neil ,

Last year was a bad year for White Admiral in Warwickshire, numbers were well down with some sites recording their worst year on record. Another cool and wet June and it is not looking good this year either.

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 29-Jun-12 07:29 AM GMT

Yes, the cold dull June is likely to be a disaster for the already small Essex population of White Admirals—and many other species! 😞
At least the strong Sussex populations should be in a better position to bounce back when conditions improve, let's be optimistic!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jul-12 04:56 AM GMT

Hope For The Future

On Saturday (30th June) I spent several hours planting out a couple of hundred primrose plugs in woodland on the Norfolk Estate, in order to further improve the habitat for the Duke of Burgundy. Despite disappointing numbers of the butterfly this spring, due to the foul weather that blighted most of the flight season, it was gratifying to see larval feeding damage to *Primula* which had been planted here the year before. Thanks are due to both my mother and Martin Kalaher, who grew each batch from seed.



I then surveyed the area and was pleased to see good numbers of Large Skipper (34) and Ringlet (c.60). It was even more pleasing to see that the Marbled White (8) has colonised the newly created habitat, adding to the ever increasing list for the site. Other species included Silver-washed Fritillary (5), Painted Lady (2), Meadow Brown (c.25), Speckled Wood (2), Green-veined White (1) and Red Admiral (8), most of which were freshly emerged.

I then moved on to Southwater Woods where more (11) mainly fresh Red Admirals were seen. Silver-washed Fritillary just made double figures but White Admiral numbers (5) are still disappointing. Small Skipper (6) has started to build but as yet there is no sign of the Emperor, which again was absent today (1st July).





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jul-12 06:05 AM GMT

Iping In The Rain

Today (3rd July) I did my annual count of Silver-studded Blues at Iping Common. I always go to record numbers on a dull day for several reasons. SSB are easy to find under leaden skies and given only a suggestion of sunshine will open their wings in an attempt to warm up and go about their business. It's easier to count them (they're always pretty much sedentary under these conditions) and this method provides a more standardised survey technique, without using up valuable sunny days at one of the busiest times of year. As the light drizzle subsided they began to open up and a few even got airborne for a minute or so. Most are now showing signs of wear and tear, although I did find a couple of fresh examples. Numbers are unsurprisingly down and I only counted a total of 36 over several discrete colonies on the heath, with comparable figures for previous years reaching three figures. Although the species has undoubtedly suffered a relatively poor year the SSB seems to have got off more lightly than some of our butterflies. As always it was a joy to see their rich blue wings bringing welcome colour to the damp, dark heathland. Although I haven't had the chance this year I occasionally visit at sunrise, usually on the way to see another species. This is the very best time to enjoy them, as they all wake up together and turn towards the first rays of sunshine. It will now be a long wait before I visit them again.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 05-Jul-12 06:11 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Chris (Gothic_dreams) and I went to Prees Heath today and saw loads of SSBs, I think the weather up there was a bit better than you had, cloudy but warm with even a brief bit of sun.

Just when I was feeling happy with some of the photos that I took, I go and see yours 🎁 😊 😊

Lovely photos,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jul-12 05:00 AM GMT

Thanks Neil, but there's not much wrong with some of your SSB shots.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 06-Jul-12 05:15 AM GMT

Thanks Neil, that means a lot 😊, I suppose we are always more critical of our own stuff.

As hard as I looked, I just could not find one on some heather in a position that I wanted like yours are.

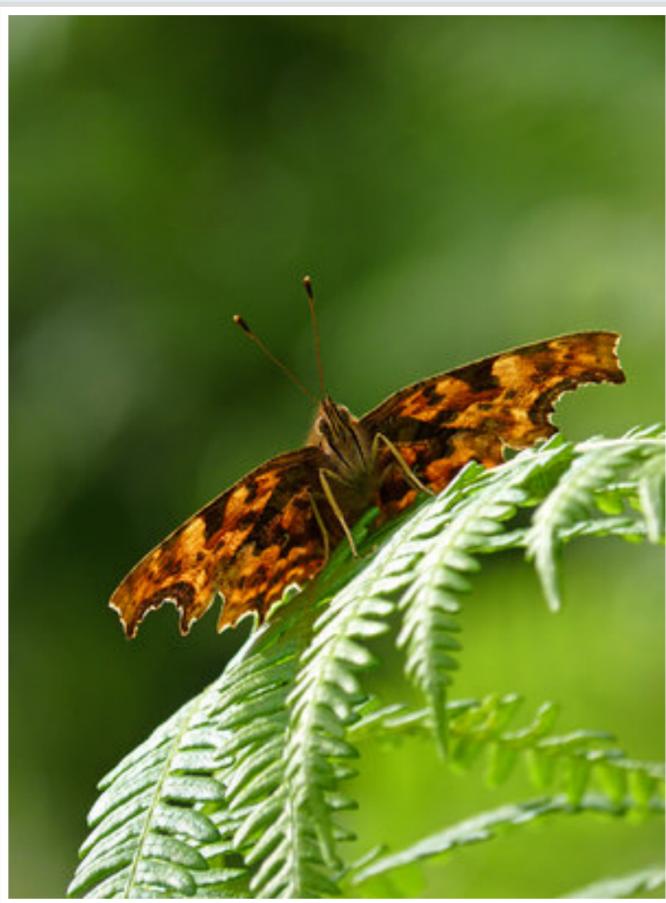
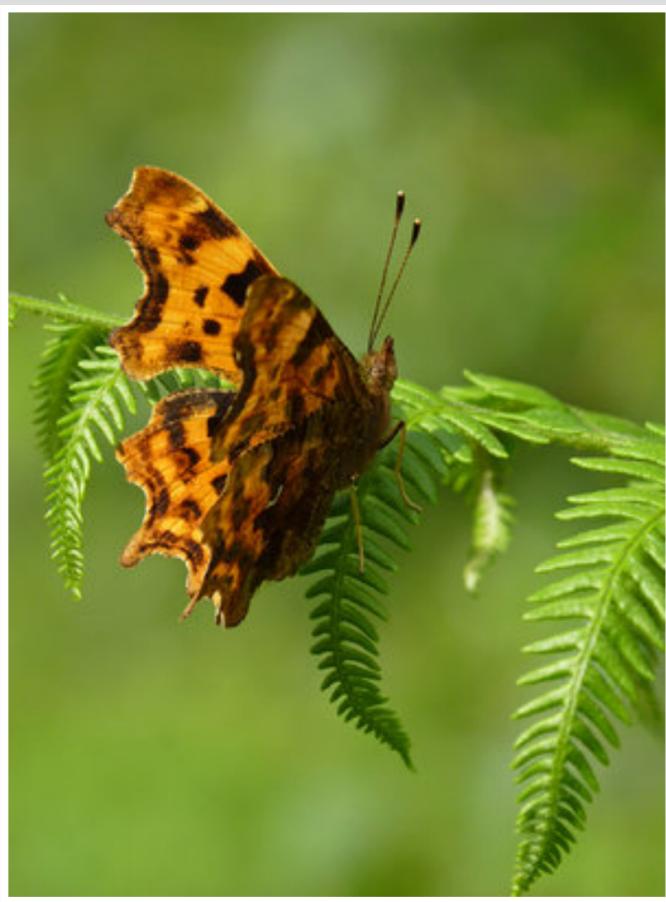
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jul-12 05:22 AM GMT

Park Corner Heath And Rowland Wood Reserve

This afternoon (5th July) I spent a few hours wandering around the BC Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood Reserve. Although butterflies were far from abundant it's always a pleasure to soak up the calm and relaxing atmosphere here. My final tally was White Admiral (7), Silver-washed Fritillary (1), Ringlet (10), Meadow Brown (5), Small Heath (1), Speckled Wood (2), Large Skipper (4), Red Admiral (2) and Comma (4). Earlier in the day, during an unsuccessful search for White-letter Hairstreak at Litlington, I saw my first Gatekeeper of the year.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 06-Jul-12 06:57 AM GMT

Great shots as per normal Neil 😊

The second one is great, almost a "who's watching who?" moment! As the Comma looks like Hutchinsoni it got me wondering – what is the deal with recording Comma and the "summer" form Hutchinsoni? As it is just a seasonal form does it get recorded as Comma or is there any differentiation?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jul-12 07:08 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. For recording purposes it's just plain 'Comma'. I actually prefer their progeny – the late summer/autumn butterflies with much darker undersides.

Neil

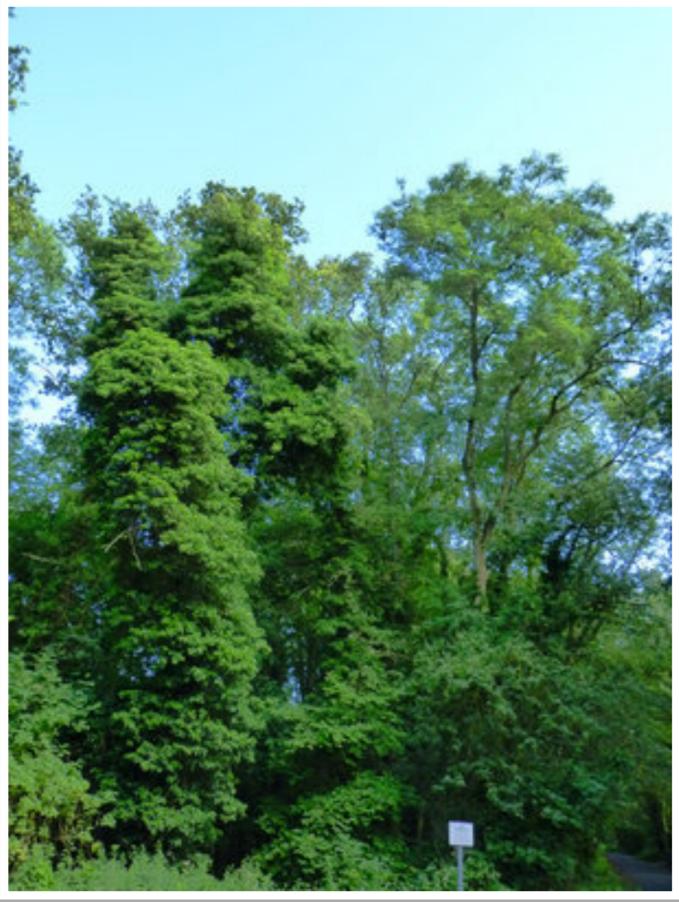
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jul-12 08:37 AM GMT

First Sussex Emperor Of 2012

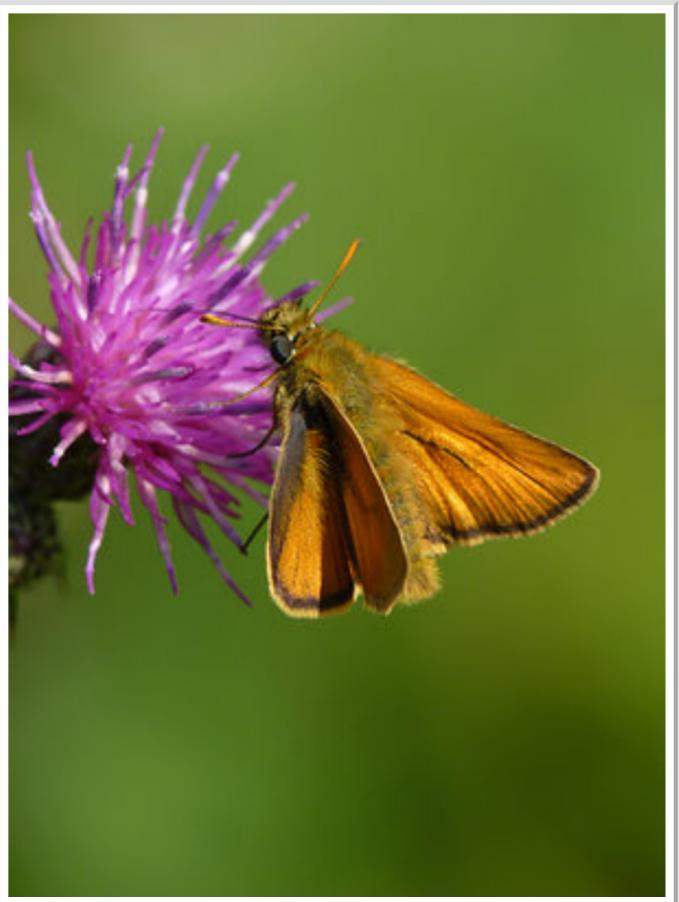
At 15.39 hrs today (6th July) Matthew Oates saw the first Sussex Emperor of 2012 over the Marlpost car park assembly area (Southwater Woods), having patiently waited for many hours of torrential rain to pass (unforeseen by the Met Office). Having returned home to get some work done I was back there

ASAP, just as the first act of violence was committed upon a Red Admiral at 16.16 hrs. While Matthew checked out other assembly areas (all unoccupied) the trouble escalated. A pair of sparring Red Admirals was joined by a third, then a fourth, as they slowly spiralled upwards to full canopy height, before forming a train over the Emperor's perch. The reaction was swift and predictable. With so many freshly emerged Red Admirals around at the moment they may well be beneficial in agitating otherwise inactive Emperors, particularly where master tree occupancy is at the low levels predicted for Sussex this season. Activity continued until c.17.00 hrs.



Crime Scene

While searching other parts of the wood I met new BC Sussex member Gary Philpott. I was pleased to be able to introduce him to his first White Admiral, Comma and Small Skipper, adding to his first Silver-washed Fritillary seen earlier in the day. Four new species in a single session can't be bad.



Small Skipper

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jul-12 04:59 AM GMT

BC Sussex Walk – Botany Bay

Twenty two hardy enthusiasts surprised me by turning up for my walk at Botany Bay (Chiddingfold Forest) this morning (7th July), despite an appalling weather forecast. In the end things were rather better than expected, with brighter spells punctuating sporadic showers. Unsurprisingly we didn't see the Purple Emperor, which is late on the scene this year. However, we were fortunate in seeing a good variety of butterflies and those who stayed on into the afternoon were treated to an additional couple of species. The full tally included White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary (thanks to UKBer Nick Broomer [a.k.a. hideandseek] for finding us a pristine male), Wood White (after lunch), Purple Hairstreak, Marbled White, Ringlet, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood (after lunch). I was more than happy with thirteen species under less-than-ideal conditions. Thanks to all that joined me for an enjoyable day.

Unfortunately the website won't allow me to upload any images 😞

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 08-Jul-12 05:39 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:
BC Sussex Walk – Botany Bay

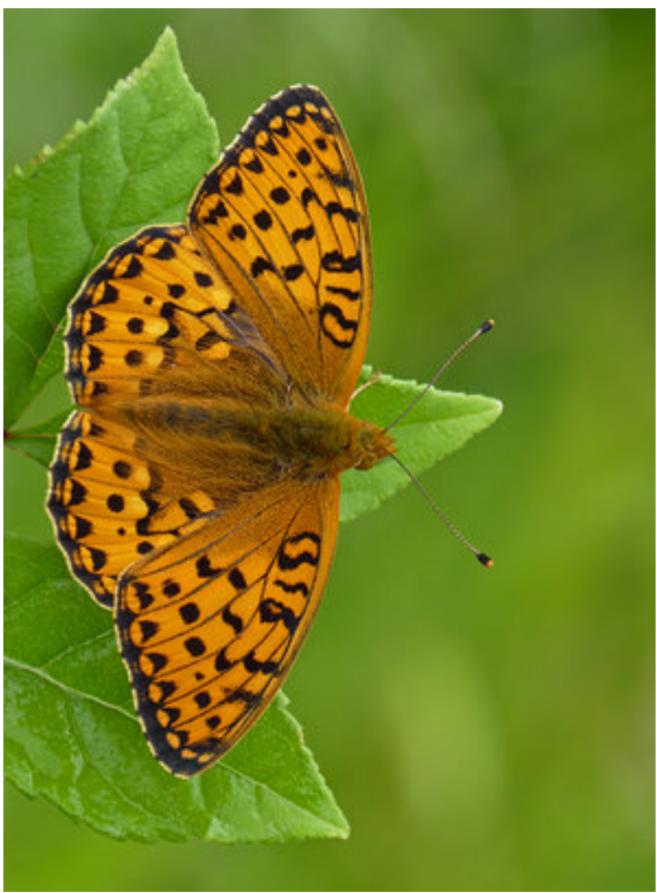
Unfortunately the website won't allow me to upload any images 😞

Try again later as I like to see your photos.Ian

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jul-12 03:50 PM GMT

Thanks Ian. Pete has now resolved the issue by turning his kettle off and on again ... so here are the images from yesterday's walk.
Neil





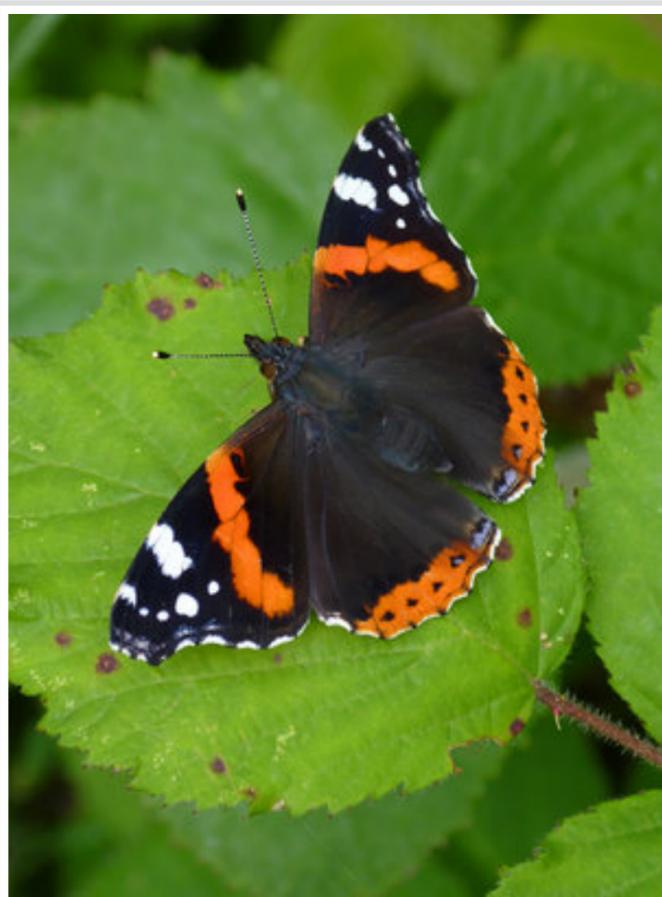
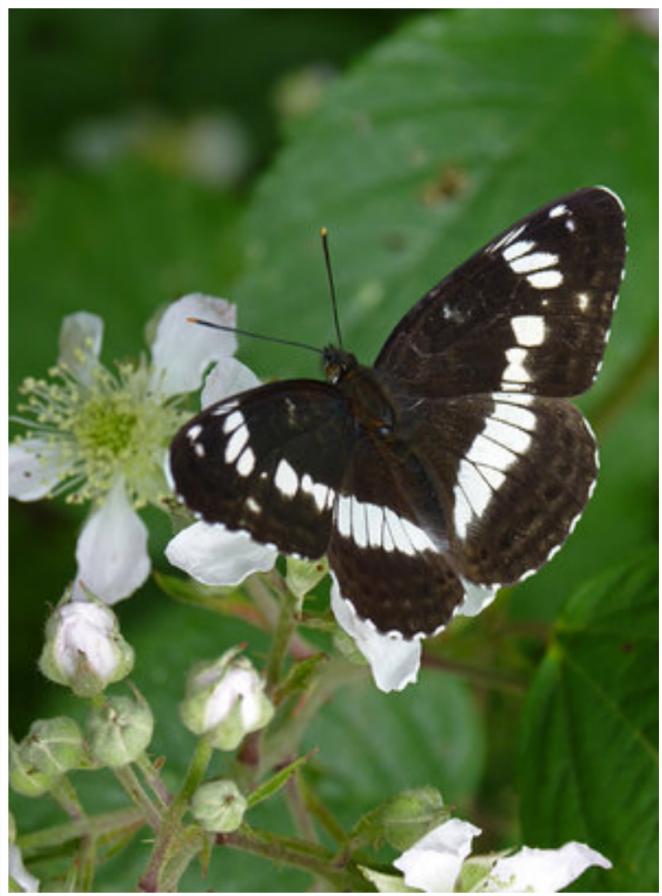
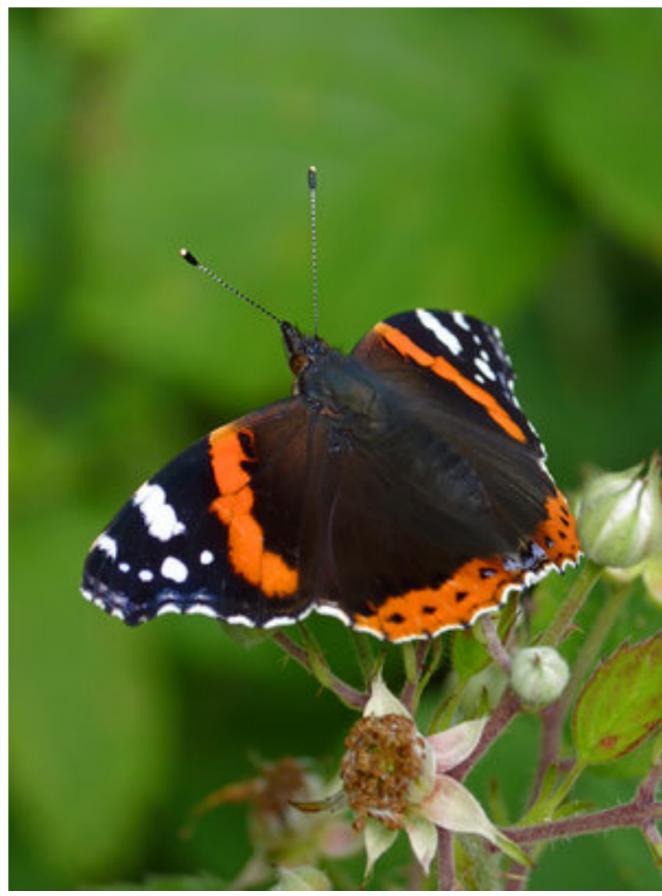
Re: Sussex Kipper

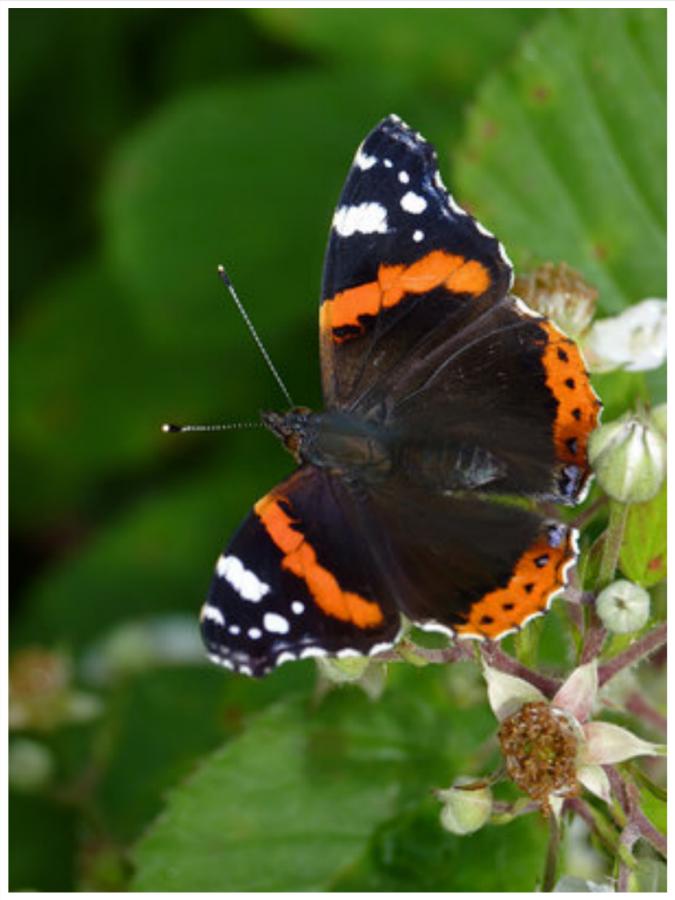
by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-12 05:16 AM GMT

Southwater Soaking

This morning (8th July) I spent a few hours wandering around the wet woods of Southwater with my father, before he left me to get a couple more soakings on my own. I later met Susie Milbank, Su Reed and Dave Sadler squelching through the mud, all searching in vain for an Emperor. This season was always going to be tricky for Emperors and Admirals in Sussex, but with the added weather problems it's barely happening at all. In a brief spell of

sunshine we did visit a nice colony of Small Skippers, and later came across the occasional Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral, but numbers are lower than for many years. The Red Admiral is currently a strong contender for my 'butterfly of the year' and I saw another half dozen today, including an immaculate specimen that posed nicely for me.







Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jul-12 09:23 PM GMT

Big Sussex Butterfly Count

Yesterday (13th July) I took part in the highly competitive Big Sussex Butterfly Count, an event organised by Dr Dan Danahar to celebrate the start of the national Big Butterfly Count (14th July – 5th August <http://www.bigbutterflycount.org>). Two teams battled hard to record as many species as possible across West (Team Purple Emperor) and East (Team Silver-spotted Skipper) Sussex. Team Purple Emperor was led by TV naturalist Nick Baker and comprised Dr Martin Warren (BC CEO), Patrick Barkham (Guardian journalist and author), Trevor Beattie (South Downs National Park CEO), Dr Dan Danahar (BC Sussex, Dorothy Stringer School, Event Organiser), Richard Bradford (Dorothy Stringer Head Teacher), Jan Knowlson (SDNPA Ranger, landrover driver), Colin Knight (BC Sussex, UKB) and me. Our worthy opponents were led by Tony Whitbread (Sussex Wildlife Trust CEO), Nigel Symington (new BC Sussex Chair), John Barradell (Brighton & Hove Council CEO), Pete West (B & H Council Chair Environmental Committee), Matthew Thomas (B & H Council Ecologist), Pete Varkala (Steyning Downland Scheme), Bob Foreman (BC Sussex), Crispin Holloway (BC Sussex) and Paul Gorringe (B & H Council Ranger, landrover driver).





Team Purple Emperor got off to a flyer and took a commanding lead. Before we had driven more than a mile we were slowed by a traffic queue, but seeing a golden opportunity I leapt from the landrover and bagged an Essex Skipper beside the road. At Southwater Woods we notched up quite a few woodland species including the valuable Purple Hairstreak and added several more at Botany Bay, having redrawn the county line. Sadly this did not include either the Emperor or Wood White, potentially our trump cards, although we did get Dark Green Fritillary and Common Blue. However, Martin Warren pulled a cat out of the bag by finding a tiny Dingy Skipper larva. News on Twitter put us way out ahead and complacency set in; I suggested either a leisurely pub lunch or a matinee showing at a local cinema. As we strolled back to the vehicle Dan found a beautiful Elephant Hawkmoth beside the track ... beautiful, but scoring nothing.





By the time we arrived at Iping Common for Silver-studded Blue the opposition had overhauled us and the mood changed. We suddenly realised we were in a real battle as Team Silver-spotted Skipper had bagged a tricky Painted Lady and a surprisingly difficult Large White. We replotted our course and picked up a single Chalkhill Blue at Bevendean (urban Brighton & Hove), having failed at Mill Hill, then headed to Hollingbury Park for the possibility of White-letter Hairstreak. It was now late afternoon and the wind and falling temperature were against us, but we were now looking defeat in the face. As we approached the hedge-line I said to Patrick Barkham "we need to look on these thistle heads". A pristine male hairstreak was perched on the first flowerhead he examined. Following a dash back to the Butterfly Haven at Dorothy Stringer School we recorded a Peacock with only minutes to spare, snatching a 23 - 21 victory over our rivals, with a combined tally of 26 species.





I would like to thank Dorothy Stringer School, Brighton & Hove City Council, South Downs National Park Authority and BC Sussex for providing vehicles, fuel, staff time, packed lunches and financial support for this event. Please take part in the Big Butterfly Count. I went home with a smile on my face, having had a whole heap of fun.

Guardian article at [http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2 ... ly-hunting](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2...ly-hunting)

Nice You Tube clip at <http://t.co/ObvmrWK5>

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 15-Jul-12 01:00 AM GMT

Great stuff! 😊

Enjoyable Guardian article too.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Jul-12 01:30 AM GMT

Thanks Susie. No rarities but one of the most enjoyable days out this year. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 15-Jul-12 01:44 AM GMT

Sounds great fun. Good number of species seen in the circumstances.
Ian

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Jul-12 01:57 AM GMT

Arnside On Top Form

Some venues, very few, never seem to disappoint, and despite a grim season almost everywhere else Arnside Knott delivered the goods during my visit on Wednesday afternoon and all day Thursday (11th and 12th July). Butterflies were in abundance and the weather behaved impeccably. Dark Green Fritillaries were everywhere and during the odd duller spells the ground became littered with them in the better areas. The 70 – 80 I saw on Wednesday was significantly increased by the end of a very warm and sunny Thursday, with fresh males still emerging. The 5 – 6 High Browns I counted on Wednesday had reached double figures before I reluctantly headed for home. The HBF season is still young here and I saw no females. The most common species was Grayling, with 5 mating pairs amongst the 150+ spread over the site. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (11) and Northern Brown Argus (9) were both well past their best in terms of condition, but still going strong. As many UKBers already know, the Knott is a very special place.



HBF



DGF





HBF



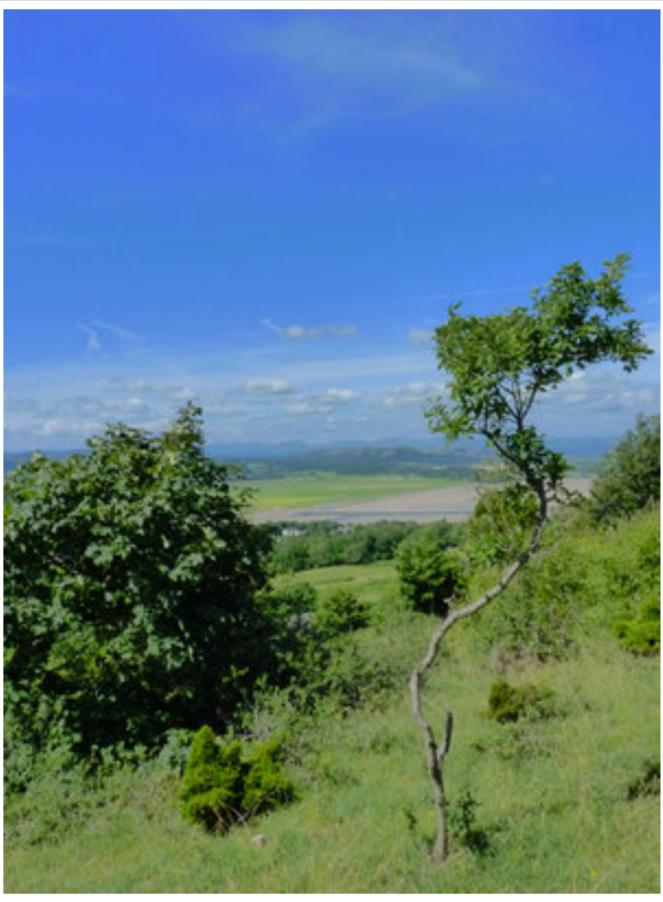
DGF



DGF pair



Grayling pair



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 15-Jul-12 03:32 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

A great report and I'm really pleased you managed to catch some Arnside action.

Although they don't quite have the glamour factor of the HBFs and DGFs, the Grayling pairing is my favourite shot. Great composition and light.

Super stuff.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 15-Jul-12 03:38 AM GMT

All great photos- reminds me of when my wife and I were there a few years ago returning from Scotland to the Isle of Wight!! Sadly only a very short visit. It is a wonderful place.

Ian 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 15-Jul-12 06:02 AM GMT

hi Neil,

I have really enjoyed your last couple of posts. The Big Sussex Butterfly Count looked like a lot of fun 😊

Also very interested in your comments on Arnside Knott, I will be there in 2 weeks time for a couple of days with the wife. I am hoping HBF will still be around plus maybe early Scotch Argus.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 15-Jul-12 03:14 PM GMT

Excellent reports by Neil and the Guardian. Strangely I couldn't find it on my Kindle edition of the newspaper.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jul-12 07:17 AM GMT

Thanks all.

Neil F – yes, I reckon you should get HBF in reasonable condition (some of them), and Mc Argus too.

I agree Mark. The Grayling shot is my favourite and certainly the best I've ever managed of this species.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

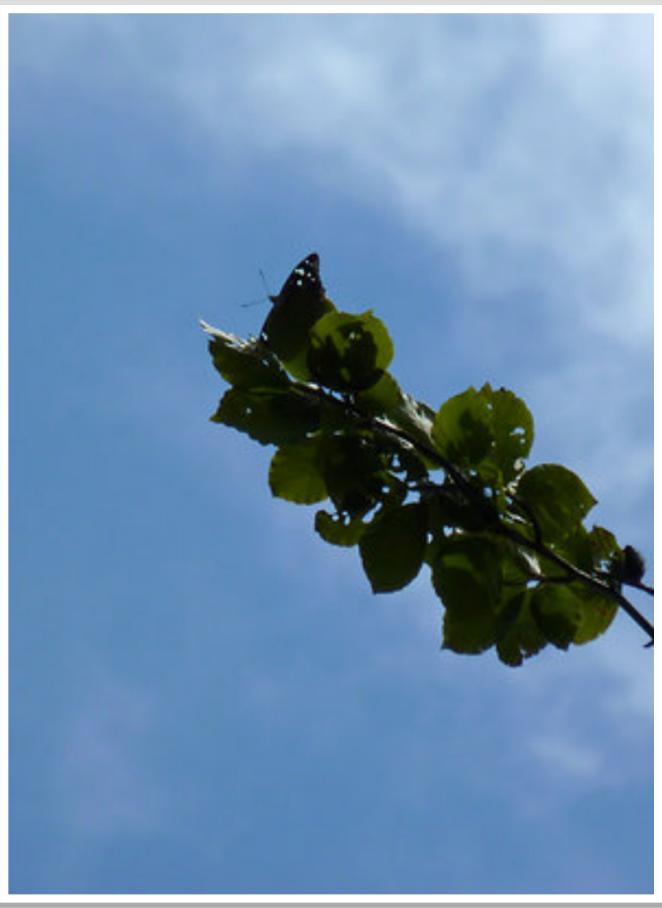
by Neil Hulme, 16-Jul-12 07:46 AM GMT

High Altitude Emperor

Twenty one people joined Michael Blencowe and me for a BC Sussex walk on Graffham Down today (15th July). As expected butterfly numbers were much lower than would normally be expected on this well managed downland reserve. Despite the fact that we only just scraped a double figure species count we were more than pleased that a male Purple Emperor made an appearance. At 728' amsl this is unusually high for Emperor populations in the UK. A fresh looking specimen made several flights around the assembly trees (pines) on the very crest of the downs, at one point sweeping quite low across an open meadow.



I later visited Alice Holt Forest where I met Pauline and Alan Thornbury. The last few butterflies were turning in for the night at Straits, so with brighter weather on the horizon I set off for the Goose Green assembly area where Pauline and others had seen up to 4 Emperors earlier in the day. At 5.15 pm the sun broke through and within minutes I was watching a bundle of 3 males. One particularly aggressive male launched an over-optimistic attack on a passing Swift before rudely interrupting the dance of the seven Hairstreaks. In this difficult season just a fifteen minute period of Emperor action made my short visit worthwhile. Image of the main protagonist below.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jul-12 01:22 AM GMT

Chalkhills In The Rain

This afternoon (18th July) the skies were leaden grey and it was raining hard, so I headed to Springhead Hill near Storrington to find some butterflies. These conditions would have made me think twice about venturing out in the days when I was a very keen angler, but this year it's a case of making the best of it ... or suffering from Cabin Fever. It wasn't difficult to find some beautiful, fresh Chalkhill Blues. There has clearly been a substantial emergence here, although it wasn't the sort of day to attempt a population count. After getting a thorough soaking I returned home much happier and with my sanity intact (I think).





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pauline, 19-Jul-12 02:19 AM GMT

That's a really lovely photo Neil (well they both are but I'm referring to the first one). 2 questions – how did you manage to get that beautiful background colour which so complements the butterfly when so often everything around is green? Next, do you happen to know what that plant is called as I don't recall seeing it before and it provides perfect colour co-ordination?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jul-12 03:03 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline. The base colour was achieved by shooting from the steep road bank here, with the tarmac surface below as a back-drop. The flower-head will develop into the beautiful and localised Round-headed Rampion, also known as the 'Pride of Sussex'.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pauline, 19-Jul-12 03:16 AM GMT

Thank you Neil. Very well thought out composition – beautiful!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Jul-12 07:10 AM GMT

In Pursuit Of The Ridiculous

Today (19th July) I started early at Springhead Hill, where I met Colin Knight who had started even earlier in order to ambush the Chalkhill Blues as they opened their wings to the first rays of sunshine.



I only had an hour before I had to head West to meet Matthew Oates and Brett Westwood of the BBC Natural History Unit. We spent much of the day recording a piece for Radio 4, to be aired in November as part of a series called 'In Pursuit Of The Ridiculous'. This 15 minute programme will investigate 'why we do it' (Purple Emperor obsession), rather than the more scientific aspects of the butterfly. Although I can't say exactly where we were, for trivial reasons, this well-known spot came up trumps for us – spectacularly. For several hours the air was thick with Emperors. Sometimes 3 or 4 in view at a time, occasionally 6 or 7. We even managed to see our first Empress of the season, being hotly pursued by an amorous male. It was great fun to make and hopefully this will come over in the finished article.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Jul-12 05:40 AM GMT

Handful Of Emperors

There is little doubt that the start of the 2012 Emperor season has been much later than in recent years; much later than in any season this century. However, although numbers are now building in some counties there is even less doubt that the species has suffered a very significant setback in Sussex. It was therefore with some relief that Colin Knight and I watched two males clashing over the Madgeland (Southwater) Wood Assembly trees at 3.20 pm this afternoon (20th July), these being the first seen here this year. Even better, we watched an already mated female pass through the Trout Lane canopy at 3.04 pm, only to be immediately accosted. She spiralled down into the top of the tall ash and was joined by her suitor. For several minutes we could see a frantic quivering of wings, before he gave up and allowed her to continue her egg-laying run along the southern wayleave. Sadly, this still only makes a handful of sightings in Sussex this year.

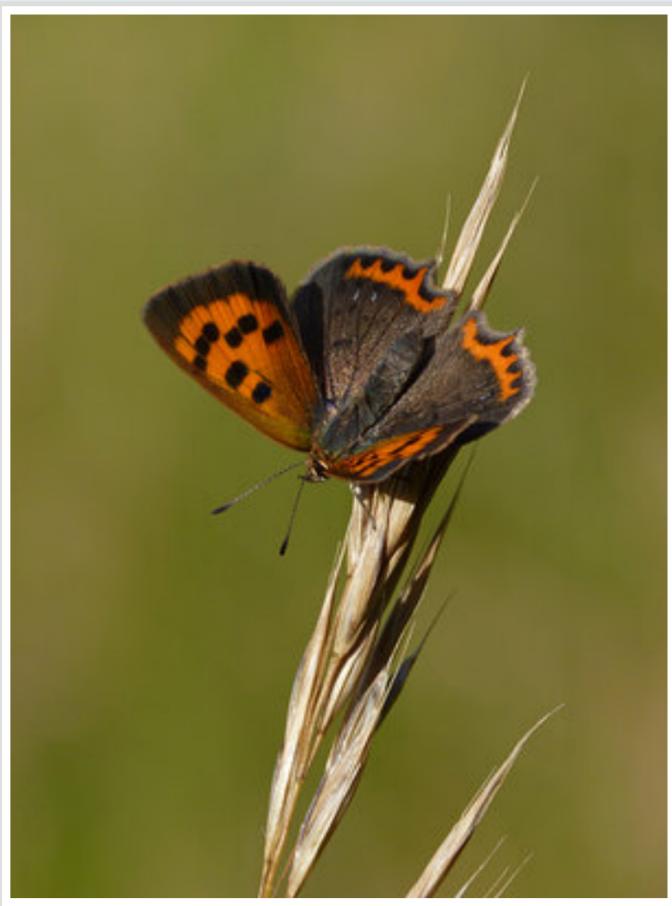


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jul-12 03:34 PM GMT

New Wave

On Sunday (22nd July) I saw the first butterflies of the second brood in several species, unsurprisingly lured out by the better weather. An early stop at Rewell Wood produced my first Small Copper of summer amongst a good selection of other species.

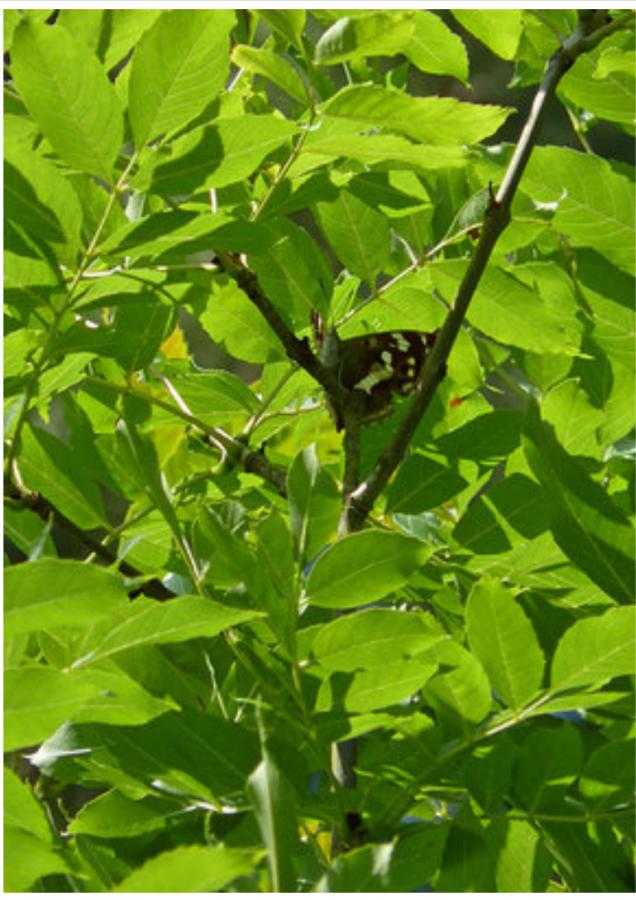




At Botany Bay, while searching out the Emperor, I saw two second brood Holly Blue and three Wood White.



While here, a small group of us watched an Empress feeding from a weeping ash bud scar on the high point beyond The Triangle. She returned to probe the tiny wound repeatedly over several hours, before spending a further lengthy period in a large, adjacent willow. Although we didn't actually observe oviposition there was little doubt about what she was up to, repeatedly 'striking' the upper part of the tall crown. While we were watching her a male passed through rapidly – the only view I had of Him before leaving mid afternoon.



I then moved on to a wood near Billingshurst where I had fleeting glimpses of a male Emperor in a large oak. Six fresh, second brood Large White were seen during the chase, along with a few Green-veined Whites which have been out for at least a week now.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 23-Jul-12 03:47 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

That's a beautiful Small Copper underside – full of mood and atmosphere.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jul-12 04:02 PM GMT

Thanks Mark – that was my favourite shot of the day. You've got good taste. 😊

BWs Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jul-12 05:21 PM GMT

More Coppers And Emperors

Searching for Purple Emperors in Sussex is tough going this year, but numbers have at least now built sufficiently to almost guarantee action at either the Marlpost or Madgeland Wood Master Trees (Southwater Woods). Yesterday (23rd July) two put on a spectacular display over the former location, while at least two (possibly three) were seen over the latter. When woodland butterflies are slow at Southwater there are always the beautiful set-aside meadows to visit, and here I found a freshly emerged Small Copper amongst the numerous Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Marbled Whites and Skippers. The peripheral oaks are now hosting better numbers of Purple Hairstreak and there are still good numbers of Red Admiral about. The soundtrack of grasshoppers and crickets, which has sadly been absent until recently, has finally become part of the outdoors experience – summer at last!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by GOLDENORFE, 24-Jul-12 06:19 PM GMT

Great copper shots , have not seen any in weeks! , as u know ,had Awsome day at Fermyn yest with Matthew Oates , wait until u see pic of the Emp feeding on his hat!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jul-12 03:57 AM GMT

Thanks Phil. I'm heading north myself in the morning.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jul-12 04:25 AM GMT

White Letter Day

This afternoon (24th July) I took a break from Emperor hunting and headed to Hollingbury Park (Brighton & Hove) in the hope of finding a female White-letter Hairstreak. I suspect that this species has suffered the same fate as the Emperor in Sussex, and it's possible that a similar downward spiral in numbers was initiated by the mid July gales and torrential rain which lasted for three days in 2010. Being an arboreal species, working to the same calendar as the Emperor, this seems quite likely. One thing's for sure, they're in short supply this year, despite an abundance of elm trees in the city. In the end I managed to find one, but that's an atypically low return for several hours searching in perfect weather.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jul-12 07:07 PM GMT

Fermyn Diary

Day 1 (25th July): Arrived at Fermyn Wood early afternoon, but Emperor activity had unsurprisingly ceased due to the heat. At 5.30 pm the evening flight began, with 6–7 males sighted before bedtime at c.7 pm. 1 male grounded.

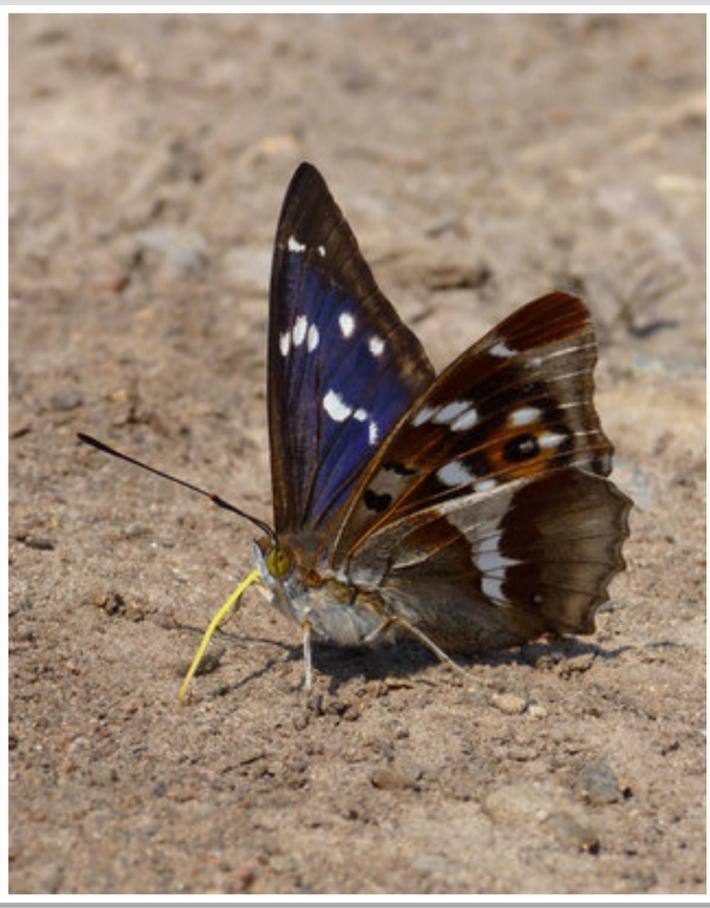
Day 2 (26th July): Thanks to my trusty steed, a folding Japanese commuter bicycle without gears or brakes, I managed to cover a huge area throughout the day, encompassing Fermyn, Lady, Souther and Titchmarsh Woods. Activity started at 8.55 am and I saw 13 different grounded males before 1.15 pm, when things went very quiet. Visitations to various body-parts were regular, with 3 trouserings, a booting and one on my camera case. I had another grounded male at 6.30 pm and at 6.45 pm a short but frenetic evening flight began. Along the straight immediately below the Lyveden Way bend 6 or 7 males were oak-edging and constantly squabbling with the numerous (15–20) Purple Hairstreaks in the canopy. Best bundle was 4 Emperors and 8–9 Hairstreaks (*iris* won). 2 males were seen on a high sap run and male activity stopped suddenly at 7.15 pm. With impeccable timing 2 females arrived here at 7.20 pm and sat motionless in the crowns of adjacent oaks, enjoying the last of the sunshine. 20–25 individual Emperors seen throughout the day.

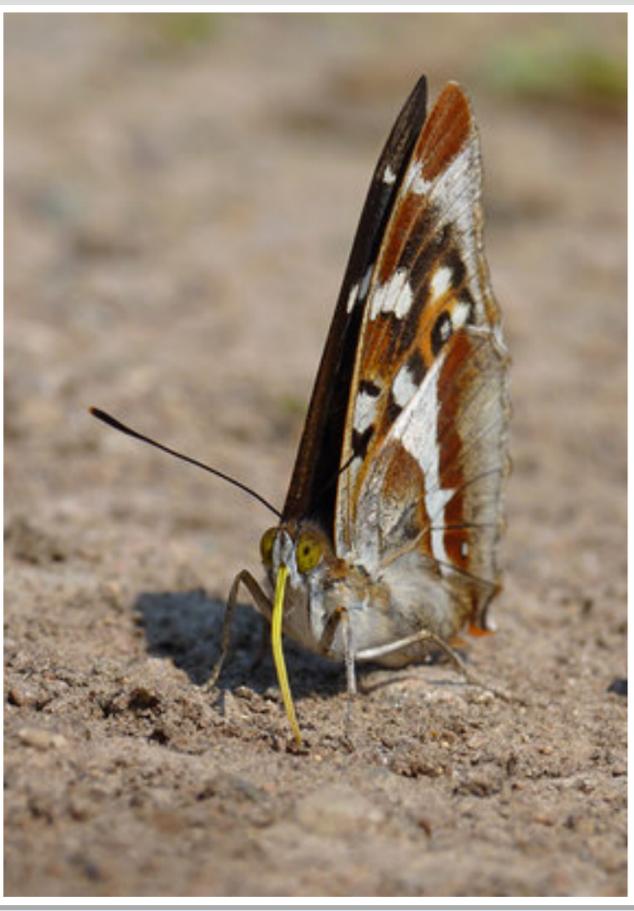
Day 3 (27th July): Constant touring over the same area brought a tally of 16 grounded males, including 2 aberrant specimens. Activity again stopped before 1.30 pm and sadly I had to leave before the evening flight commenced. Visitations were again common, with 2 trouserings, one on my watch and another on my bicycle. Total numbers were similar to yesterday and no freshly-emerged specimens were seen. *Iris* appears to be at peak and it will become increasingly difficult to find examples in good condition.

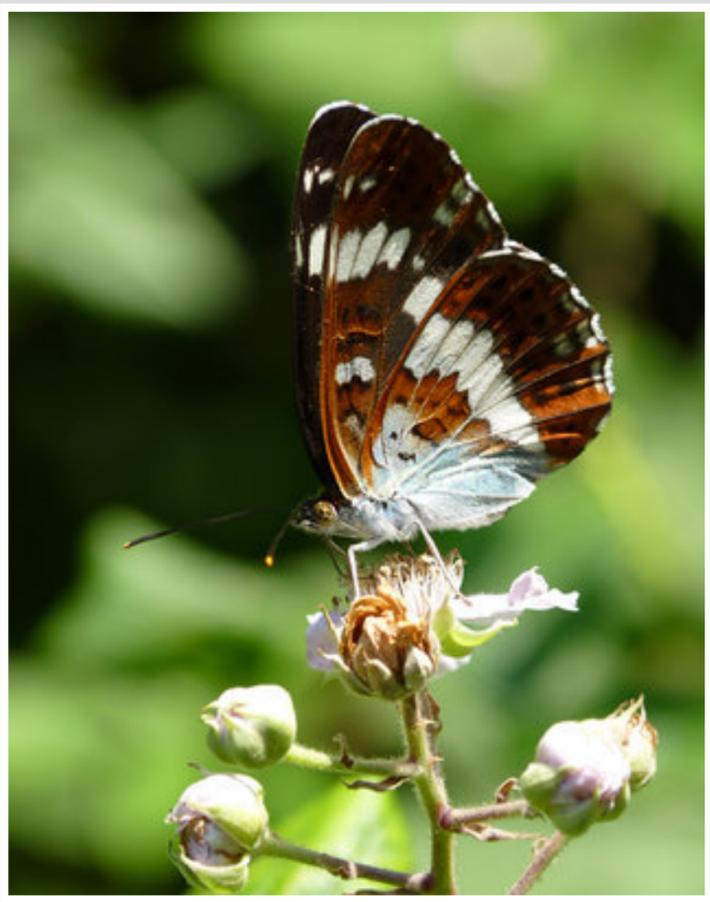
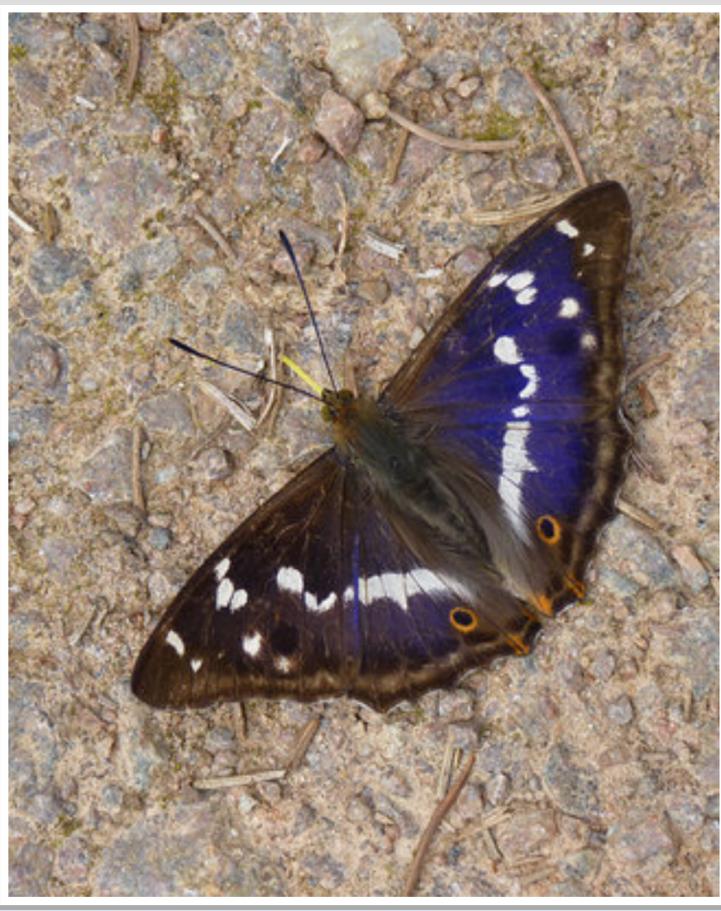
Aberrant Forms: On Day 3 I saw 2 different aberrant males on the ground. The first was in Titchmarsh Wood (pictured). Unless corrected by those more knowledgeable I would call this ab. *stictica*, a determination I would also make for the similar specimen seen by Mike Coleman in Bentley Wood on 23.7.12 (Purple Empire). The second was a much more extreme form, which grounded repeatedly throughout the morning and was photographed by several other visitors, close to where the tracks branch in Lady Wood. Unfortunately my photo opportunity was scuppered by a jogger (you are forgiven madam). This is almost certainly the same butterfly as photographed by Phil Beard on 24.7.12 and Rev John Woolmer on 26.7.12 (Purple Empire). Again, unless otherwise advised, I would call this ab. *afflicta*. The even more extreme form photographed by Charles Nicol on 26.7.12 (UK Butterflies) is undoubtedly a good male ab. *lugenda*, and must be different to the pristine male ab. *lugenda* photographed by others either that same morning, or the day before. No doubt about Matthew's (23.7.12) female ab. *lugenda*!

Other butterflies seen included 3–4 Silver-washed Fritillary and 5–6 White Admiral, most being fresh specimens. 3 White-letter Hairstreak were observed ovipositing, with regular activity at the first intersection on Cherry Lap.

As always it was a pleasure to spend time in the woods here, and it was good to catch up with one or two old friends and meet other like-minded enthusiasts. It seems that *iris* has an ever-increasing band of followers.









Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jul-12 05:53 AM GMT

Great report Neil 😊

I will have to get me one of those little bike if go to Fermyn again, I was there on Tuesday and with fellow UKBer Tuts wandered from Fermyn though to the south side of Titchmarsh woods a few times.

Went home kn*ckered but very happy though 😊

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by dilettante, 29-Jul-12 05:40 PM GMT

So it was you I saw!. I thought I recognised you (from pictures on here) when I was just leaving on Wednesday afternoon as you arrived on your bike. Glad you had a more fruitful visit than I did. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Jul-12 04:07 AM GMT

Shame I missed you dilettante – we must get those UKB T-shirts! Try to get to Fermyn by 10am on 1st July next year (assuming we don't get another deluge and late season). See you there.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pauline, 31-Jul-12 09:30 PM GMT

That's a lovely closed wing shot of the White Admiral on bramble Neil 🍷 . I've been trying to get one like that all season and failed !

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Aug-12 03:19 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline. I wasn't expecting or targeting White Admirals that day – I only had eyes for the Emperor. It always seems easier when you're not trying, and the harder you try the more difficult it gets!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-Aug-12 06:47 AM GMT

Sussex Emperor Update

Following recent Purple discoveries in East Sussex by Peter Farrant (2+ males at Warningore Wood) and Michael Blencowe (single males at Wadhurst and Middleton Plantation/Brocks Wood), I headed to the latter location with Michael this afternoon (2nd August). In the briefest of weather breaks, and

despite strong winds, we saw a pair of males in combat at 15.30 hrs, followed by a very large female in the wayleave at just past 16.00 hrs. We now know the source of the Emperors which have visited the back garden bird table of a B&B in the nearby village of Streat in recent years.

Elsewhere, despite tragically poor numbers in Sussex this season, single Emperors have been seen on several of the unusual sites found along the very crest of the South Downs, stretching from Heyshott in the West to Lewes in the East. Hopefully next year will see the start of a local recovery.

Earlier in the day I was treated to one of the most spectacular sights I have witnessed in over forty years of butterfly-watching, but I'll wait for others to provide an independent assessment of my numbers before spilling the beans. In this generally awful year I have just seen a great big fat pile of them!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by ChrisC, 04-Aug-12 01:52 AM GMT

come on Neil, been waiting all day 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Aug-12 03:34 AM GMT

Chalkhill Explosion!

Yesterday morning (2nd August) I witnessed something rivalled only by the great Painted Lady emergence on the Downs near Keymer in 2009. At Friston Gallops I saw the Chalkhill Blue in numbers rarely seen since Victorian times. I counted the butterflies in a number of 1 metre squares and came to an average of 5.2, with the highest count being 33 (not gathered on faeces – just lying in the grass). I stopped counting pairs 'in cop' at 150. Despite cool, overcast and windy conditions, whenever a little warmth forced its way through the cloud the whole ground appeared to move, shimmering in silvery-blue as far ahead as I could see. I used the bamboo cane I carry to put them up during periods when the majority were grounded, in order to save as many as possible from my foot-fall. It made for an incredible sight. I've seen the species in thousands here before, but currently the numbers are far in excess of anything I've ever experienced, with the exception of the Keymer Ladies. I have used satellite imagery to determine the area over which I saw the butterflies in these numbers; an area substantially greater than 30,000 square metres, although they occurred in lesser densities in large areas of longer grass towards the top of the slope and for some distance to the south. In order to play safe, as these quantities will always be difficult to determine accurately, I estimate that there must be between 150,000 and 200,000 Chalkhill Blues on the wing here, in the relatively small area surveyed.

I asked Michael Blencowe and Mike Mullis to make an independent assessment of these huge numbers, and their efforts to monitor the entire site continued throughout today (3rd August). I also returned this morning, this time with my father, primarily to capture the event on video, but we had to retreat after a thorough soaking. While there, it soon became evident from the large number of paired butterflies (up to 4 pairs seen in a single metre square) that the emergence continues at a phenomenal pace, and will probably peak sometime next week (6th August onwards). After assessing a few more 1 metre squares, and taking into consideration the rather conservative figure used for the area on which to base my calculations, I suspect that the true number is well in excess of my original estimate.

Update: Michael and Mike have now completed their much more exhaustive survey of the entire Friston Gallops grassland area, much of which is improving as the result of a change in the cutting regime, following discussions between the Forestry Commission and Butterfly Conservation. Their total figure of 820,000 does not surprise me, and I suspected that the number just at the northern end of the site might be in the order of half a million, but initially didn't want to venture such a figure without some corroborative evidence.

In such a poor year for most butterflies, why are we seeing such an abundance of Chalkhill Blues? I suspect that the ultimate size of the potentially largest colonies is often limited by the availability of suitable food-plants, with droughting and competition for resources being a common scenario in most summers. This year we are all-too-aware of the conditions that will have led to exceptionally lush growth of the horseshoe vetch, for once capable of supporting a veritable army of Chalkhill Blue caterpillars.

Of related interest, in the last week or so we have had reports of Chalkhill Blue males well off the Downs, at Hailsham Country Park, Horam and Coggins Mill near Mayfield. These three sites plot out on a straight line trending south to north. Friston Gallops lies to the SSW, with the greatest distance from Friston being Coggins Mill at 17.5 miles.

Make no mistake, this is the big butterfly event of the year in Sussex (and further afield). Get out there and enjoy it, but if visiting in dull weather please make every attempt possible to avoid treading on too many!



male



female

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 04-Aug-12 03:46 AM GMT

Wow, Neil!

I know the numbers were good at Denbies a while back and thought it was the same cause as you've stated.

It is a shame there are not enough sites out there for all the thousands off offspring these butterflies will produce.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Padfield, 04-Aug-12 04:50 AM GMT

What an amazing thing to witness. I imagine overspill from the centres of population explosion will provide genetic reinforcement for small or moribund colonies and perhaps colonise fresh areas too – must be good. If the UK is anything like Switzerland there are plenty of insectivorous birds who had a lean spring and will benefit enormously from a good supply of protein to bring up stronger summer broods as well!

I'm sorry to miss this phenomenon.

Guy

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 05-Aug-12 05:32 AM GMT

In an age when the word 'amazing' is often overused, for once this sounds like a perfect time to use it.....Absolutely Amazing 😊

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-12 06:31 PM GMT

Yep, totes amazeballs. That's it ... I'm banned from my own diary.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-12 06:49 PM GMT

Chalkhill Explosion – More

Yesterday (4th August) I returned to Friston Gallops for another helping of this mind-blowing event. This time I retraced Michael Blencowe's and Mike Mullis' footsteps, as I was keen to see for myself how far along the huge site this Chalkhill extravaganza continued. Despite their report I was still amazed at the numbers way back towards the coast, such a distance away from the core area. In previous years, even when the population has been high, there were very few away from the northern part of the grassland. Unsurprisingly, when exceptional numbers appear, the variety in the gene pool comes tumbling out. As the butterflies began to roost I made a quick search for aberrant forms, finding 7 ab. *postcaeca* (6 male and a stunning female) in about 45 minutes.



Male ab. *postcaeca*



Female ab. *postcaeca*



Friston Gallops looking North

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickB, 06-Aug-12 01:30 AM GMT

Interesting report – in Cambs, where our colonies mostly inhabit linear features – Dykes, old railway lines – or are surrounded by agricultural land or unsuitably managed NRS, there is little habitat to colonise outside of these narrow confines. (Over the past few years, a satellite colony *has* established itself about 5 or 6 miles away – again on a Dyke – the Fleam Dyke, where management practices and natural rabbit-grazing provide ideal conditions for the larvae and ants that support them....)

So far, it looks like being another good year – but as it is later and the emergence seems to have been longer this year – the concentrations have not been as high as last year, so far as I can tell.

Nice *abs* Neil!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 06-Aug-12 06:41 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

That's a really super shot of the male ab. *postcaeca*. Its simplicity in composition and detail is really stunning.

Now back from abroad I can see there's some catching up to be done ...

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 06-Aug-12 07:28 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Unsurprisingly, when exceptional numbers appear, the variety in the gene pool comes tumbling out. As the butterflies began to roost I made a quick search for aberrant forms, finding 7 ab. *postcaeca* (6 male and a stunning female) in about 45 minutes.

Beautiful photos, Neil.

Is that what is causing all the abs now? Just genetic chance showing because there are such high numbers? Nothing to do with the exceptionally hot weather we had just over a week ago cooking the wee critters in the ground when they were forming their colours?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Aug-12 04:43 PM GMT

Thanks Susie.

"Is that what is causing all the abs now? Just genetic chance showing because there are such high numbers?". The short answer is "yes". The complex issue of genetically versus environmentally driven aberrations, which in this case involves discussion of spot production, requires the sort of one-finger-typing time available only when the butterflies have hung up their boots for the year. The prolonged, extremely hot weather which sometimes leads to a high incidence of crippled specimens lacking spots hasn't been a factor this year; the short warm spell we had a few weeks back wasn't in the same league as the drought conditions that roasted Denbies last year.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-Aug-12 04:43 PM GMT

Running Slow

There's little doubt that the awful weather we've suffered this year is still affecting the butterfly calendar. Last weekend (5th August) I crossed the county line to look at Southleigh Forest and Havant Thicket (both in Hampshire), where a few Purple Emperors have been recorded this season. Emperors failed to show but at least 15 freshly emerged Brimstones were very busy nectaring along the ride edges, oblivious to members of the opposite sex. The first flush of summer Brimstones is usually seen in the later part of July.

Usually keeping to the same timetable is the Peacock, but it was only yesterday (8th August) that I first saw the species in any numbers this summer. 5 or 6 brand new males were gliding between the thistles in a rough meadow below Cissbury Ring. As Jack mentioned recently, if this was a rarity it would probably be one of the most highly prized butterflies on the planet.

Male Purple Emperors are still being seen with some regularity, even in Sussex where numbers have been low this season. In most years I give up looking for Emperors on about the 25th July. The season is still running two weeks late!

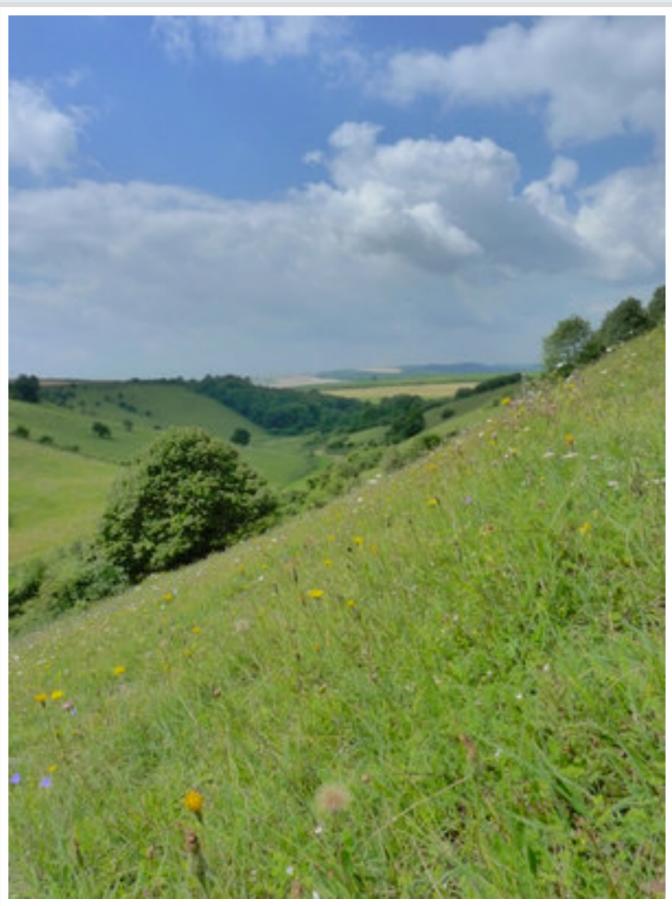


Re: Sussex Kipper

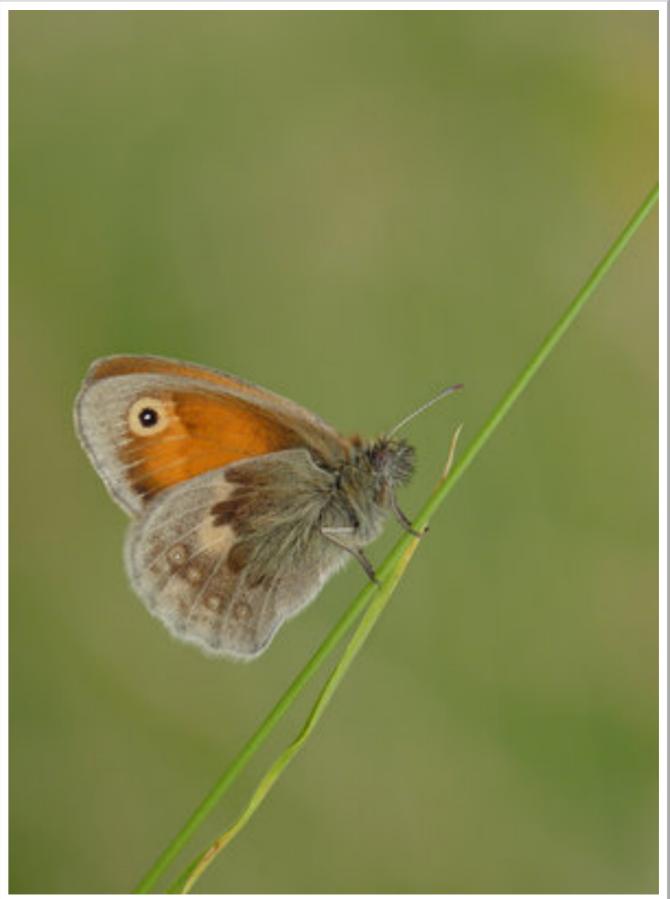
by Neil Hulme, 10-Aug-12 07:57 AM GMT

Rise And Rise Of The Chalkhills

This morning (9th August) I met Simon Mockford of the South Downs National Park Authority to assess numbers on another Sussex site where the Chalkhill Blue population has exploded this year. In a couple of seldom visited valleys on the Downs near Amberley I was astounded, for the second time in a week, by the unprecedented abundance of this species. The isolated flowery slopes were covered in Chalkhills, with huge bundles of males relentlessly pursuing the females, or occasionally forming a large posse to chase a Dark Green Fritillary from their patch. By walking the large area to get an idea of the numbers of butterflies per metre square, then later examining satellite images of the site, I came up with an estimate of c.175,000; not as large an emergence as at Friston, but very impressive by any standards. Other species seen here included Brimstone, Peacock, Small Copper, Common Blue, Marbled White and my first Adonis Blue of the second brood.



After a painless visit to the dentist I then headed back East to re-visit Friston Gallops. Much has changed here in a week and the Chalkhills have clearly passed their peak, with densities over the northern part of the site being (on average) no more than 1-2 per metre square now. I saw only 2 mating pairs and very few fresh specimens. However, it is still well worth a visit as numbers remain very high by normal standards. Amongst the supporting cast I saw very fresh examples of Essex Skipper and Small Heath (see images below), my first Silver-spotted Skippers of the year and some nice Small Coppers.



by Neil Hulme, 13-Aug-12 09:29 PM GMT

Brown Hairstreak Slow Off The Mark

As I suspected would be the case, with the season still running about two weeks behind recent years, my visit to Steyning Rifle Range on Sunday (12th August) to see female Brown Hairstreaks was rather premature. Despite perfect weather conditions none were spotted. However, the assembled hairstreak fans were given reasonable views of 2 or 3 males which teased us into believing they were coming down for a photo-shoot. Anticipation is now building ahead of my guided walk this coming Sunday (19th August), which is open to all and starts at 11 am by the Bowls Club.

I then headed to the Knepp Castle Estate to complete a butterfly survey, surrounded by free-roaming longhorn cattle, fallow deer and Tamworth pigs! The 17 species seen included Essex Skipper (widespread across the re-wilding scheme area), Small Skipper, White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary, Purple Hairstreak, Small Copper, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Peacock, Green-veined White, Large White, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown. I found a Comma posing nicely on a reed by one of the many picturesque lakes here. I'm looking forward to returning in a couple of weeks time, when I get my first opportunity to assess the Brown Hairstreak population over the southern part of the estate.

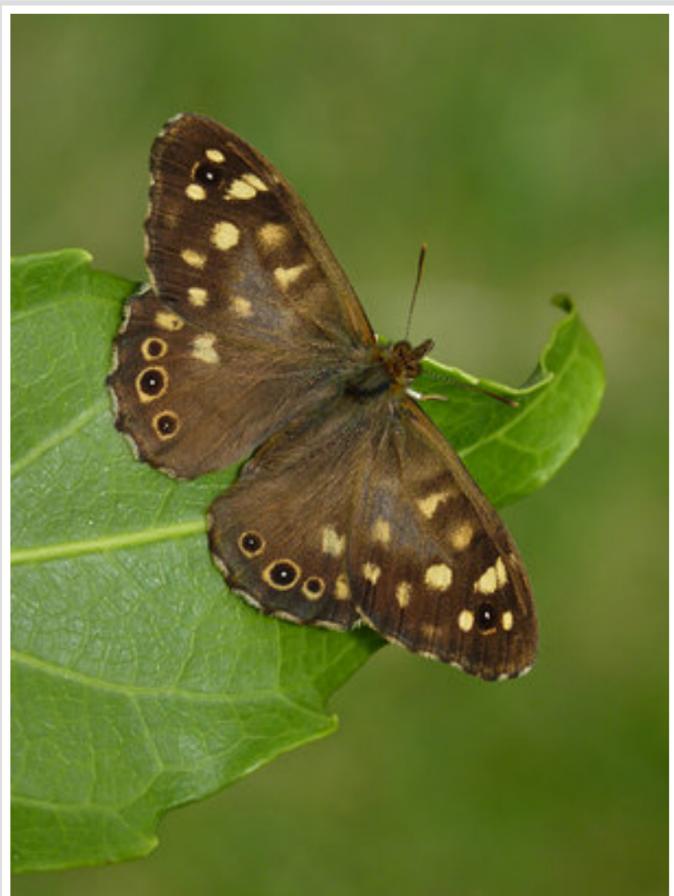


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Aug-12 04:01 AM GMT

Garden And Down

This afternoon (14th August) I decided to check on how the relatively new colony of Silver-spotted Skippers is faring at Chantry Hill near Storrington. Just before leaving the house I noticed a Speckled Wood in the garden, so couldn't resist a closer look. It turned out to be a male, which had set up territory on the large *Fatsia japonica* in a sunny corner. As a small cloud passed in front of the sun it opened its wings to reveal its brand new livery – a beautiful, unblemished specimen.



At Chantry Hill I was pleased to see that the colony is thriving and I easily reached a count of 47 skippers, with only 3 being females. It looks like this species may have quite a good year here. As I was more interested in assessing the population than photography, I didn't get any decent shots ... but there's always next time. Amongst the other butterflies present were a pristine Painted Lady and 3 or 4 Wall.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Aug-12 01:05 AM GMT

Silver-spots Revisited

With much duller, cooler weather conditions than yesterday I returned to Chantry Hill at Storrington to photograph the Silver-spotted Skippers. They were barely active, which of course made them much easier targets. However, the strong wind didn't make things easy, so I was more than pleased to get at least a couple of reasonable images.



Re: Sussex Kipper

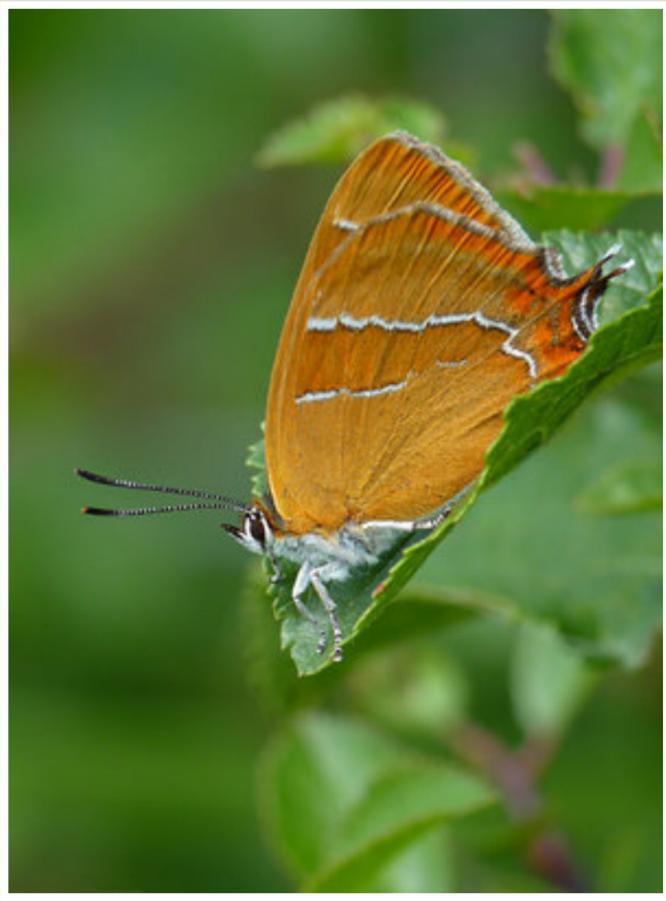
by Neil Hulme, 17-Aug-12 07:41 AM GMT

Mixed Bag

Today (16th August) I started off at Steyning Rifle Range and almost immediately saw a male Brown Hairstreak in a field maple above the BH reserve area. After about an hour my first female of the season descended, but despite suitable weather conditions she made no attempt to lay. I suspect her eggs are yet to fully ripen and all too soon she returned to the canopy, leaving me with just enough time for a hurried record shot.

I then joined my father and Simon Mockford of the South Downs National Park Authority to revisit the valley near Amberley where I saw huge numbers of Chalkhill Blue a week ago. As with the Friston population, numbers had plummeted rapidly after the spectacular peak showing. Adonis Blue males were surprisingly scarce and I don't think the species will have a strong second brood here, as the lush growth of horseshoe vetch which has suited the Chalkhill will not have been to its liking.

I finished the day at Chantry Hill, where female Silver-spotted Skippers are now more common. A brief shower sent the butterflies to bed early and amongst the wide selection of species I managed to find at roost was a female Common Blue – sadly quite a rarity this year.



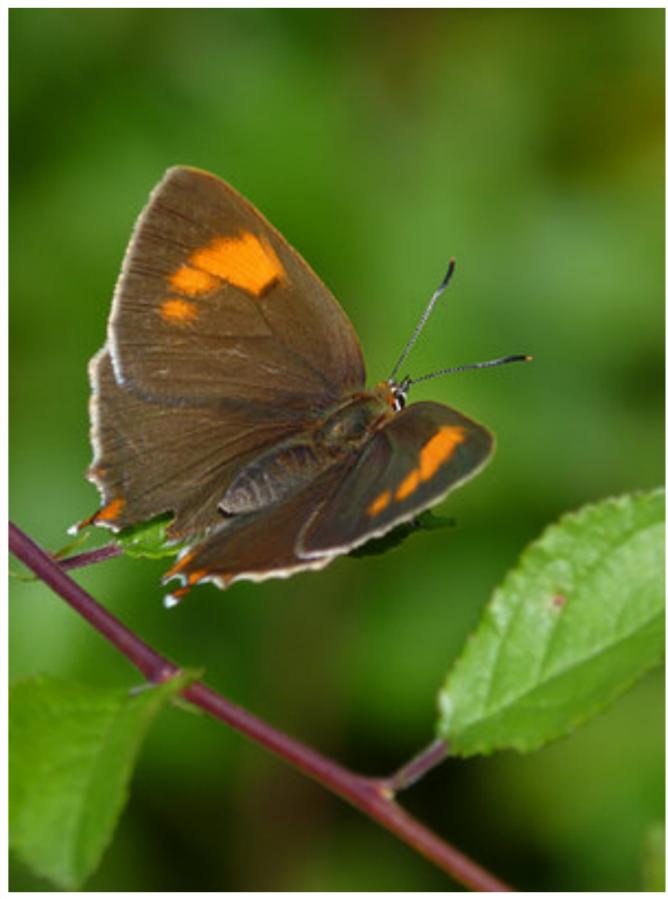
Re: Sussex Kipper

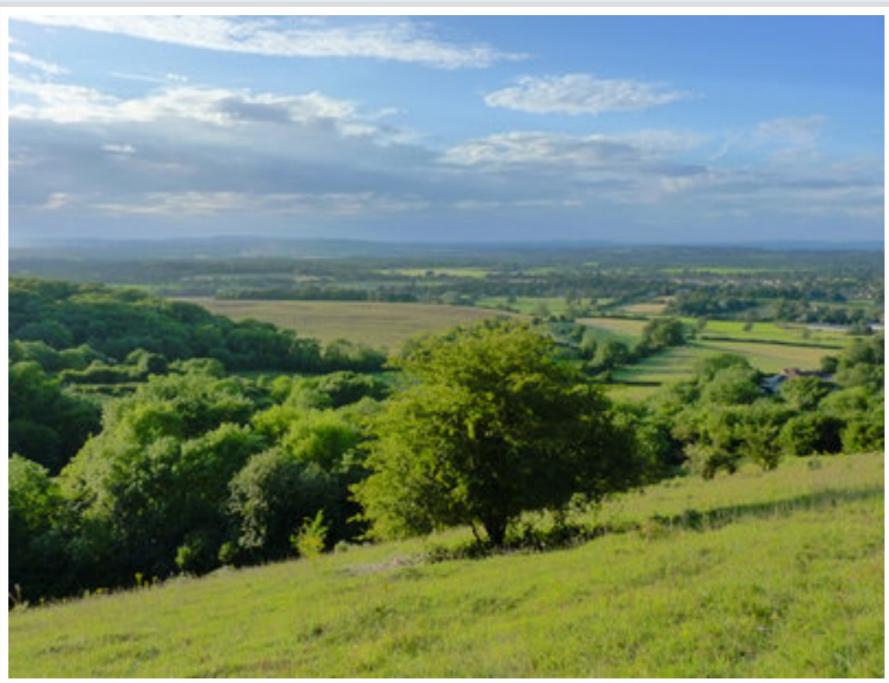
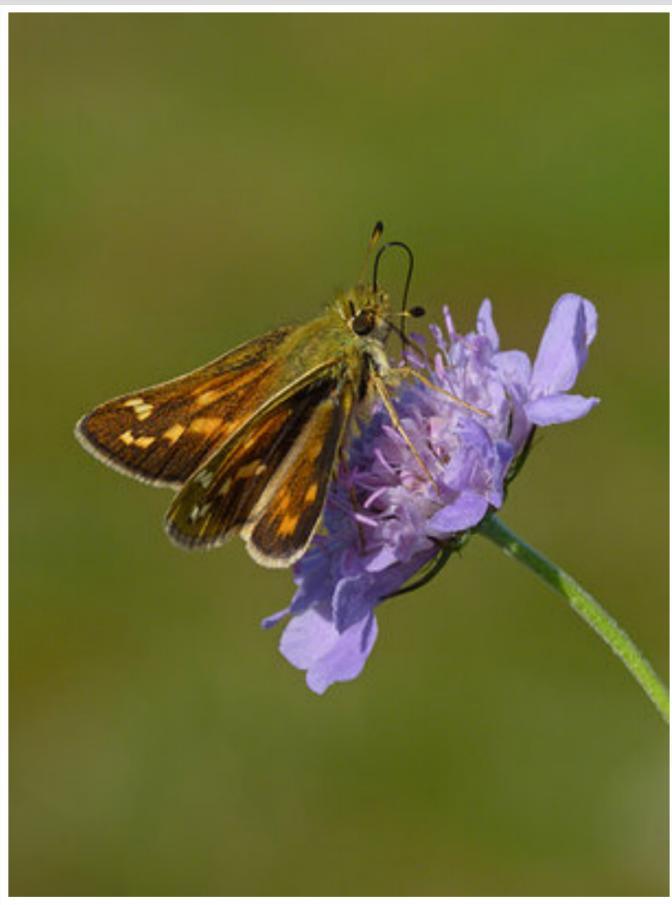
by Neil Hulme, 18-Aug-12 06:28 AM GMT

Hairstreaks & Skippers

Steyning Rifle Range is hotting up for hairstreaks, just in time for my guided walk on Sunday. This morning (17th August) I joined friends from near and far to search for female Brownies in the warm and sunny conditions that the Met Office forgot to predict. By the time I left the site 5 different females had descended from on high. Thanks to Phil Bromley for spotting the first two.

After taking a break I then headed west to watch the sunset from Chantry Hill. This is one of my favourite places on a sunny evening and many of the butterflies move round to a west facing slope to catch the last warmth of the day. A lovely female Silver-spotted Skipper came and sat next to me as I sat looking out over the Weald . I'll never lose sight of the fact that I'm very lucky to live so close to such beautiful countryside.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 19-Aug-12 02:03 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Some super SSS shots 😊

Lovely depth of field ...

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 19-Aug-12 06:38 AM GMT

Lovely photos. Good luck with the walk tomorrow, I'll be thinking of you all most enviously with those beautiful butterflies.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 19-Aug-12 06:45 PM GMT

Yes good luck with the walk. I look forward to reading your report. Weather seems ideal from here on the IOW. Ian 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-12 02:16 AM GMT

Thanks Mark. I was particularly pleased with the last SSSk shot. One of the advantages of the Lumix (small sensor) and close-up lens combination is that we can get a subject like that focused from front to back and still get a diffuse background.

Thanks Susie and Ian – report on the way!

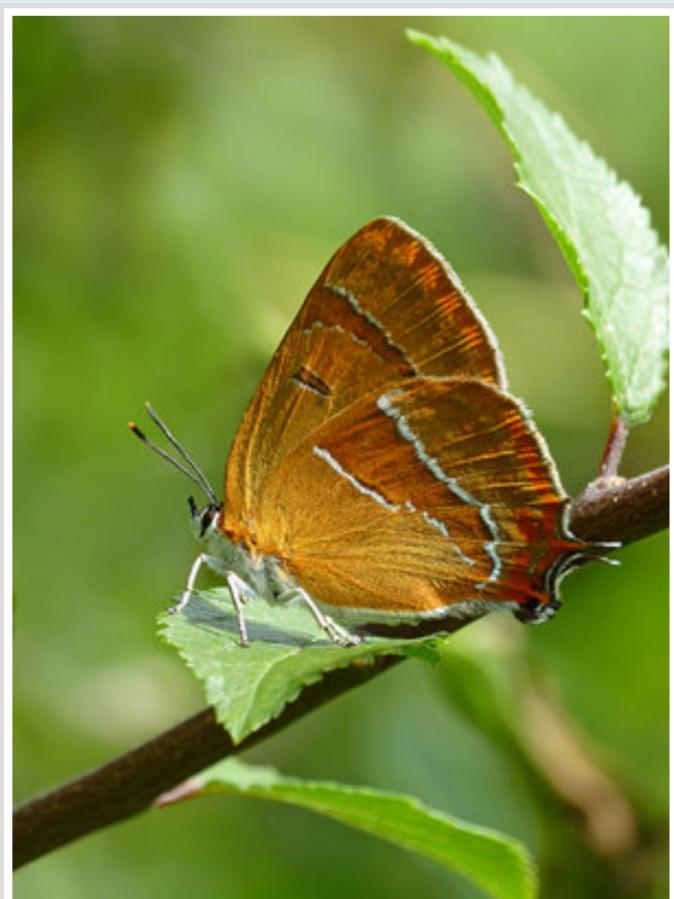
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-12 02:57 AM GMT

BC Walk At Steyning Rifle Range (19th August)

Unfortunately, despite Met Office predictions of full-on sunshine, my guided walk at Steyning Rifle Range was conducted under 100% cloud cover, and unsurprisingly butterflies were rather scarce. We saw the odd Wall Brown, Speckled Wood, Holly Blue, Large White, Small White, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, but it was the Brown Hairstreak we had all come to see. By the time I'd said my goodbyes to the majority of the 30 attendees it was 13.00 hrs and blue sky was just appearing over the top of the Downs. Predictably, I was back on site looking at a mint condition female Brown Hairstreak by 13.20 hrs! Another hairstreak was spotted elsewhere on the site, together with all of the other species we had hoped for. Despite these frustrations I was pleased that two people who had stayed behind managed to see their first Brown Hairstreak, and Essex Buzzard's trip to Sussex had not been in vain.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 21-Aug-12 06:10 AM GMT

It wasn't a wasted trip by any means, this is a lovely site—thanks for showing us around, and for finding the only BH I saw. Slightly envious of your shots, though 🍷 It was good to see plenty of Walls, I don't see much of them these days. And the SSS at Chantry Hill were good, too. Cheers.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Aug-12 06:16 AM GMT

Another Butterfly DVD On The Way

Yesterday (21st August) I met up with Patrick Barkham, who I've only seen a couple of times since he completed his book 'The Butterfly Isles'. Since then we have both become fathers! We sat on the Downs above Storrington and reminisced about past adventures before getting on with the job, which, unsurprisingly, was to talk about butterflies. We were there with Bill Smith, an ex-ITV producer with a similar passion for wildlife. Bill and Patrick hope to get the DVD they've been working on out in time for Christmas. After filming we took a short walk over Chantry Hill and despite the grey skies we soon found some Silver-spotted Skippers. When Patrick asked if there were any Adonis Blue on the site I explained about its rare and sporadic appearance here, with several years having passed since I last saw one.

This morning (22nd August) I met my father on the edge of the Knepp Castle Estate, to look for Brown Hairstreak. As I got out of the car at the allotted meeting place I noticed a small butterfly moving in the canopy of the ash tree above us. We had found a Master Tree and spent the next 10 minutes watching up to 3 Brown Hairstreak males squabbling. Sadly, we failed to find any more, probably due to the lack of prolonged sunshine.

In the afternoon I returned to Chantry Hill and the first butterfly I saw after reaching the point where Patrick and I had been sitting was a male Adonis Blue! It certainly put a smile on my face, not least because it was a perfect specimen that posed beautifully. Other highlights included 8 Common Blue and probably the same perfect Painted Lady we had seen the day before. Several Silver-spotted Skippers were sufficiently well behaved to allow some photo opportunities, but their numbers are already dwindling. I came away with the feeling that I had experienced the beginning of the end of another butterfly season.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Aug-12 04:04 AM GMT

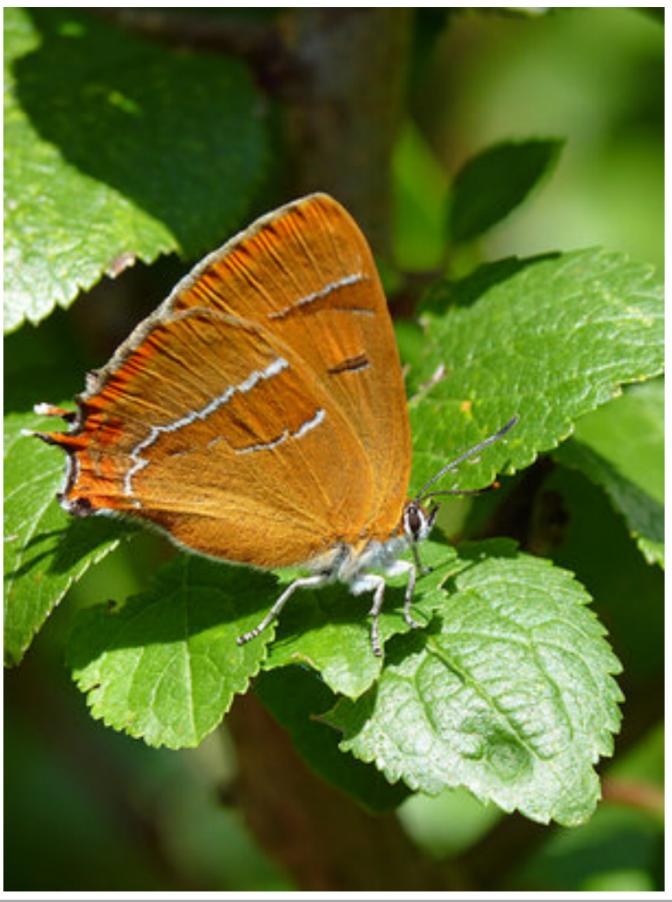
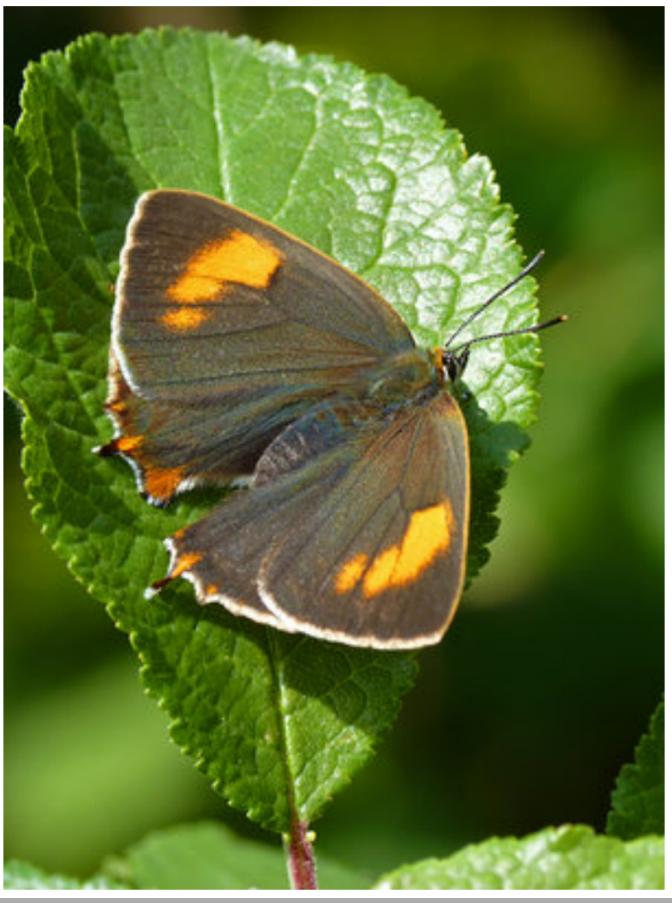
Brownies Go Large

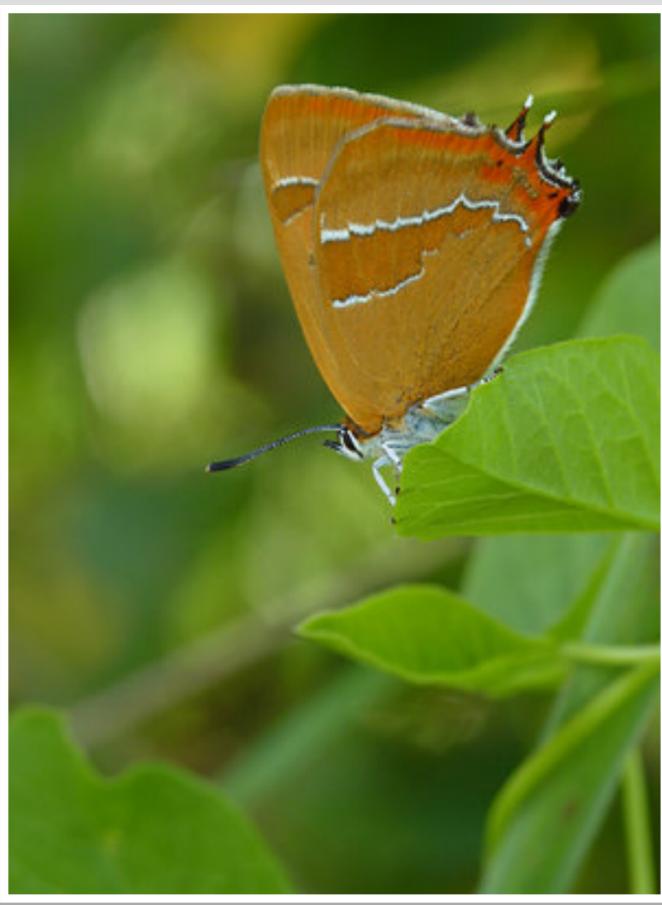
Yesterday (23rd August) I met up with Bill Smith again, specifically to help him find some Brown Hairstreaks to film. When we last met (see previous diary posting) he told me that he still lacked adequate footage of Brown Hairstreak for his planned DVD release. I was confident that Steyning Rifle Range would produce the goods, despite the relatively modest numbers seen so far this year. I suspect that the concerns being widely expressed for the species are a little premature, and that the hairstreak season is simply running late in parallel with the rest of the butterfly calendar. If the two week lag is added to the average date on which we start to see good numbers of egg-laying females in Sussex, then the event should occur on 22nd/23rd August this season. I don't expect female numbers to peak until the second week of September.

When I arrived to meet Bill I was surprised to hear that Colin Knight had seen a low-level female much earlier than the 'witching hour' of 11.15 am. However, the main course was pretty much on-time and at 11.21 am I spotted a pristine female Brown Hairstreak sitting amongst the bullace; the species uses both blackthorn and bullace here, with a preference for the latter. The flood-gates opened and the assembled masses enjoyed prolonged periods with 7 females, 6 of which were in perfect or near-perfect condition. I've no doubt that more were spread around the rest of the site, but hairstreak-watching is a social event here and a large number of enthusiasts collected around each butterfly as it was spotted. After 2.30 pm the hairstreaks and crowds dispersed and we recorded some dialogue, safe in the knowledge that we had secured more than enough good footage. Perhaps the highlight was when a mint condition butterfly crawled onto my finger for a salty drink. As Bill filmed her side-on she slowly turned to the camera and opened her wings. This was one of the better days in 2012 and the stunning hairstreaks of Steyning undoubtedly gave a lot of pleasure to a lot of people. *Thanks to Sherie New for the 'finger shots'.*











Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 25-Aug-12 04:27 AM GMT

Absolutely stunning, Neil.

This is the King (or, more accurately, Queen) of UK small butterflies.

PS: what have you sprayed on your finger to make it so attractive?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Aug-12 04:49 AM GMT

Thanks David. A dab of Chanel No.5 behind the ear does the trick every time.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 25-Aug-12 04:59 AM GMT

Simply exquisite!

Kindest regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Aug-12 05:19 AM GMT

Thanks Mark. The fingering experience was one to remember! Have a great holiday.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 25-Aug-12 05:54 AM GMT

That's simply not fair! Maybe i will have to come back, but, watching the weather forecast, will i get another chance? 🍷

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 25-Aug-12 06:13 AM GMT

Stunning shots Neil 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Aug-12 09:56 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. I can't wait until we get another sunny day – allegedly tomorrow. 😊

Mark – come back for another visit soon. From late next week onwards the forecast looks pretty good. Well worth hunting Brownies for at least another couple of weeks, while fresh females are still appearing.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Goldie M, 26-Aug-12 12:40 AM GMT

I'm 🍷 with envy 🍷 I've never seen one Hair Streak yet, your Shots are superb. Goldie 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 26-Aug-12 01:17 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Well worth hunting Brownies for at least another couple of weeks, while fresh females are still appearing.

Indeed. The females haven't yet laid any eggs at the Pembrokeshire site so the species here may well still be about in early October!

Don't give up!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pauline, 26-Aug-12 03:33 AM GMT

Those are really lovely photos Neil. Something to aspire to next year! I had a BH land on my hand too at SB but not with wings open and it didn't stay long enough for Rob to get a pic.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Aug-12 06:24 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie and Pauline. Goldie – the first one is always the best, so you've got plenty to look forward to. 😊
David – your Brownies must be about ready to lay a few by now, assuming yours are about a week behind ours.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Aug-12 06:34 PM GMT

Brownies Again

Steyning Rifle Range is still producing the goods and during my visit yesterday (26th August) the Brown Hairstreaks continued to entertain the visitors. One female stayed around for more than two hours, retiring to the trees during spells of dull weather and resting low down between spells of egg laying. It's encouraging to see so many being laid on the carefully managed *Prunus* in and around the reserve area. By the time I left at 2.45 pm a total of 3 females had been spotted, although I've no doubt others would have been busy elsewhere around the site.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 27-Aug-12 06:56 PM GMT

Nice ones Neil 😊

I tried Grafton Wood in Worcestershire yesterday, just 2 possibles briefly and high up. I am guessing they are only just starting there.

NEil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Aug-12 09:36 PM GMT

Thanks Neil. I reckon yours should be ready to start in earnest about now.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 31-Aug-12 01:58 AM GMT

Meadow Cream

This afternoon (30th August), while monitoring changes in the habitat at Washington Chalk Pits near Chanctonbury Ring, I spotted this very odd looking Meadow Brown ab. *cinerea*. Over the years I've seen many 'pathological' specimens where patches of one or more wings appear bleached, but never anything quite so extreme as this ghostly example.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 31-Aug-12 02:11 AM GMT

That's quite a find Neil - I've never seen anything that extreme before. Nice find!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 31-Aug-12 02:33 AM GMT

Looks like it's being viewed through a negative.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Sep-12 09:46 PM GMT

Hairstreaks And Helleborines

Yesterday (31st August) I started off at Steyning Round Hill, seeing 3 female Brown Hairstreaks in and around a chalk pit about 1 Km from the Rifle Range. By the time I reached the Rifle Range hairstreak activity had finished for the day, with 3 more females having been seen earlier by others.

Brian Henham then joined me for a trip to Rewell Wood, where a friend from Arundel found some nice Violet Helleborines last week. The best stems were in perfect condition and attended by numerous pollinating flies. On a buddleia near the entrance to the woods we found 3 mint condition Red Admirals and a Peacock. I'm optimistic that the Red Admiral will appear in good numbers over the next few weeks.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 01-Sep-12 10:04 PM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

I'm optimistic that the Red Admiral will appear in good numbers over the next few weeks.

I'm with you there Neil. I'll post in my diary later, but took the dogs for a walk yesterday and found 32 Red Admiral larvae and 5 pupae in the space of 2 hours – never found so many before, ever!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Sep-12 10:27 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

It could be the best showing of RA for some years, at least locally/regionally. Throughout the summer I've seen females egg-laying almost everywhere I've been. Fingers crossed.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by ChrisC, 01-Sep-12 11:50 PM GMT

i think it has started already, 9 in the garden today.

Chris

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Sep-12 12:27 AM GMT

Autumn In Rewell Wood

This morning (3rd September) I returned to Rewell Wood with my father, primarily to revisit the Violet Helleborine as its flower spike reaches peak. When I enlarged my original images it confirmed my suspicion that the numerous tiny flies which had been enticed to the flowers, presumably to provide pollination services, were the Fruit Fly *Drosophila melanogaster*. I was aware that the Cuckoo Wasp *Vespula austriaca* is a known pollinator of Violet Helleborine but could not find any reference to an association between *Drosophila* and British orchids, although it is well documented that male Fruit Flies are attracted to orchids of the genus *Bulbophyllum* in the Middle and Far East, for the purposes of pollination. A telephone call to UK orchid expert David Lang confirmed that this has not been observed in our native orchids before. *Drosophila* were again in attendance today.

The buddleia close to the entrance to the wood hosted a nice selection of butterflies, despite the lack of strong sunshine. Red Admiral numbers continue to build and we saw at least 12 fresh specimens. Other butterflies included Speckled Wood (8), Small Tortoiseshell (1), Small White (2), Large White (1) and a late Silver-washed Fritillary.

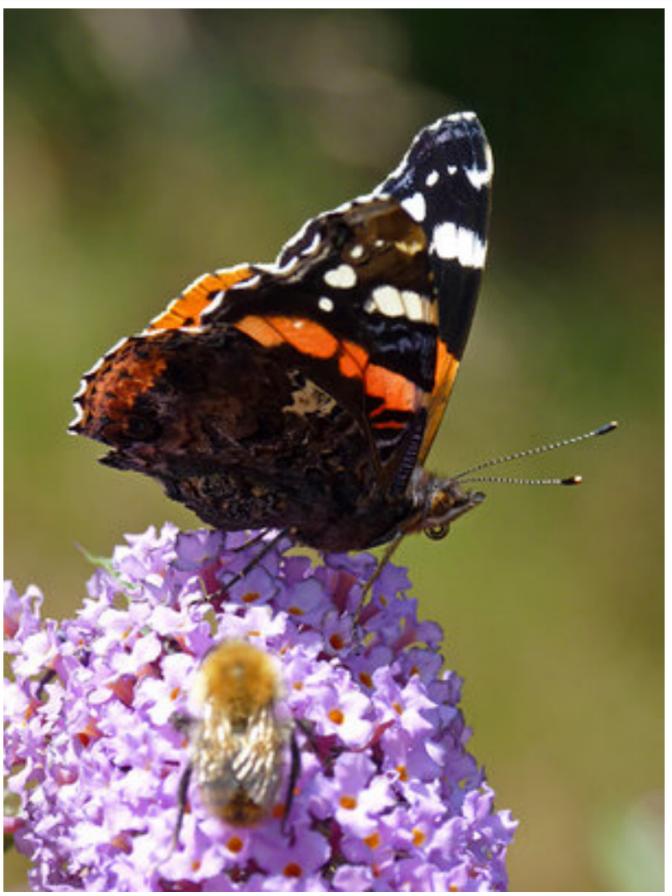
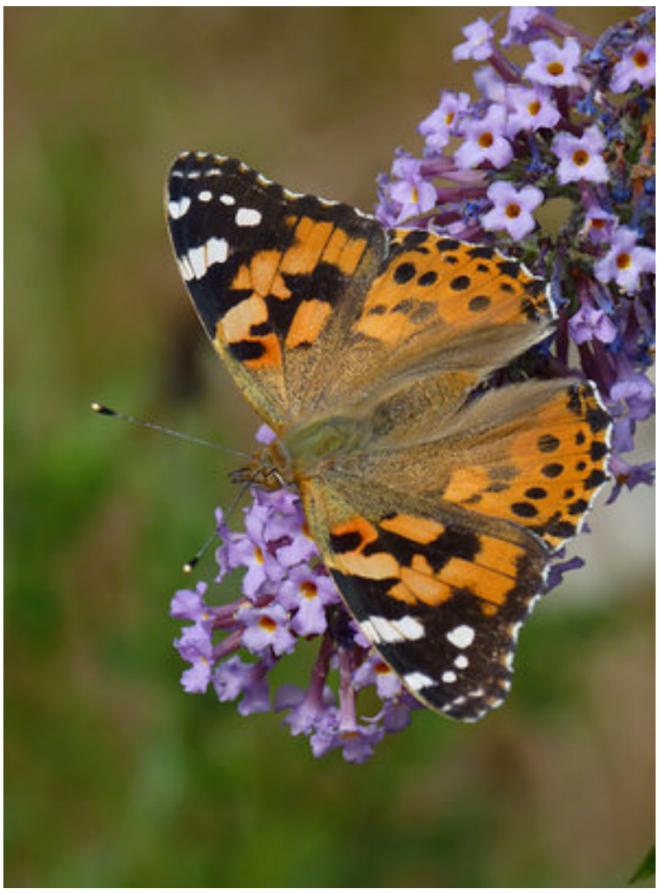
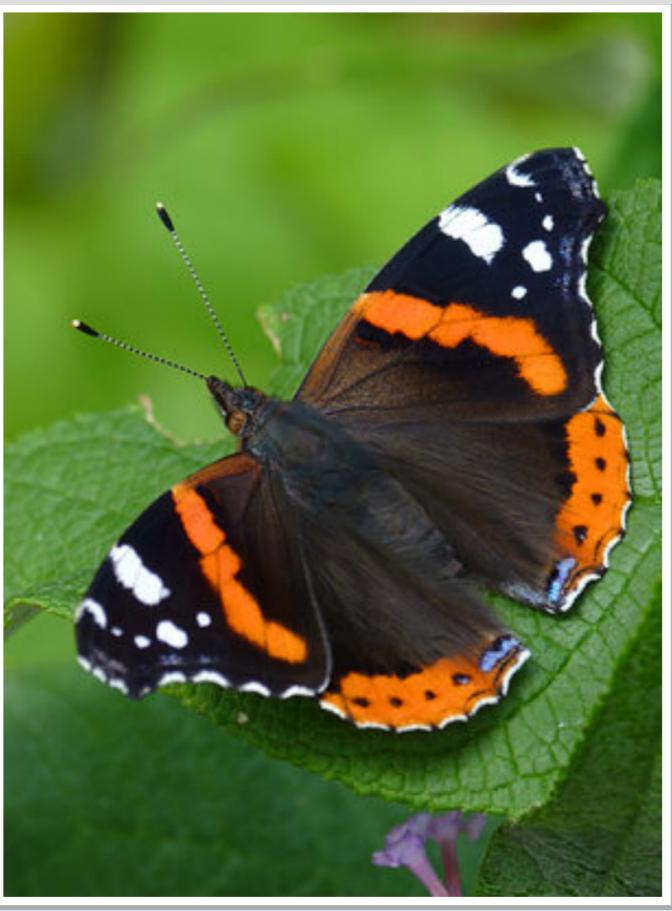


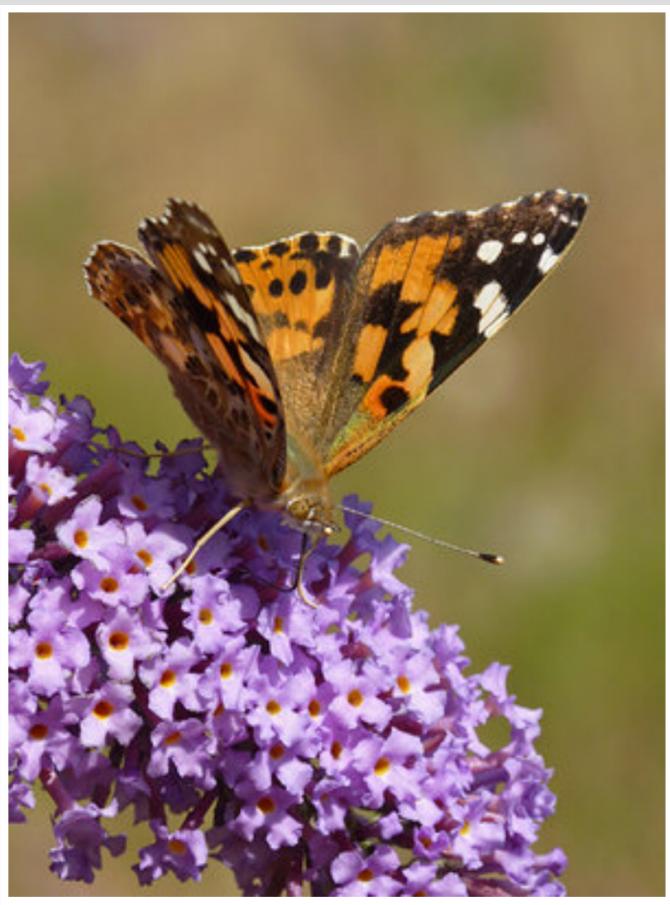
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Sep-12 07:24 AM GMT

Nymphalid Day

This afternoon (4th September) I headed to a different area of Rewell Wood in the hope of finding a bumper crop of Red Admiral. I didn't get far before I found a low buddleia covered in butterflies. It was several hours before I moved on as I was treated to a selection including Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma, all in mint condition. I cannot remember the last time I saw all these species on one bush and I was transported back to my childhood, when this was a more common sight. They were jostling for position with several Brimstone, Small White and a large number of Silver Y moths. Elsewhere in the wood I saw Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Holly Blue.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by millerd, 05-Sep-12 07:33 AM GMT

I remember Septembers like that – Michaelmas Daisies were the flower of choice back in the early Sixties in our garden... Not many Commas, then, though.

Dave

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 05-Sep-12 04:21 PM GMT

I daresay things may improve further as these conditions are set to stay for several days yet.

The rewards will be great for those who have got buddleias that flower past mid september.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Sep-12 03:58 AM GMT

Hairstreaks And Darters

This morning (5th September) I returned to Steyning Rifle Range after a few days break from Brown Hairstreak hunting. The first female appeared at 11.11 am and was followed by a further 6 until things went quiet shortly after 1 pm. I'm pleased to say that visitors from both East Sussex and Kent saw their first Brown Hairstreaks in style, getting excellent images to take home with them. I later had a look around Steyning Round Hill where more fresh Red Admirals were seen, along with good numbers of Common Darter (red males and dusky females).





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 06-Sep-12 04:12 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Lovely composition of the Hairstreak; though the Darters have the edge for me, especially the male and close up.

Great stuff ...

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Sep-12 04:33 AM GMT

Thanks Mark. Glad to hear you had a good holiday abroad – well almost. Catch up soon.

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Sep-12 05:11 PM GMT

In The Beginning

I was recently reminded where my interest in butterflies and moths originated. My father has always kept in touch with 'Uncle' Tommy, who is now 85 and still keen as mustard. Tommy Myall isn't an uncle, but an older school friend who took my father under his wing and engendered his interest in wildlife, which in time was handed down the line. Many years have passed since they cycled the country lanes of Nottinghamshire in the hope of finding a Large Tortoiseshell. He has always been a keen photographer but has resisted the digital revolution. He still breeds a few moths and recently sent us a beautiful photograph of mating Lime Hawkmoths. The scanned image below doesn't really do it justice.

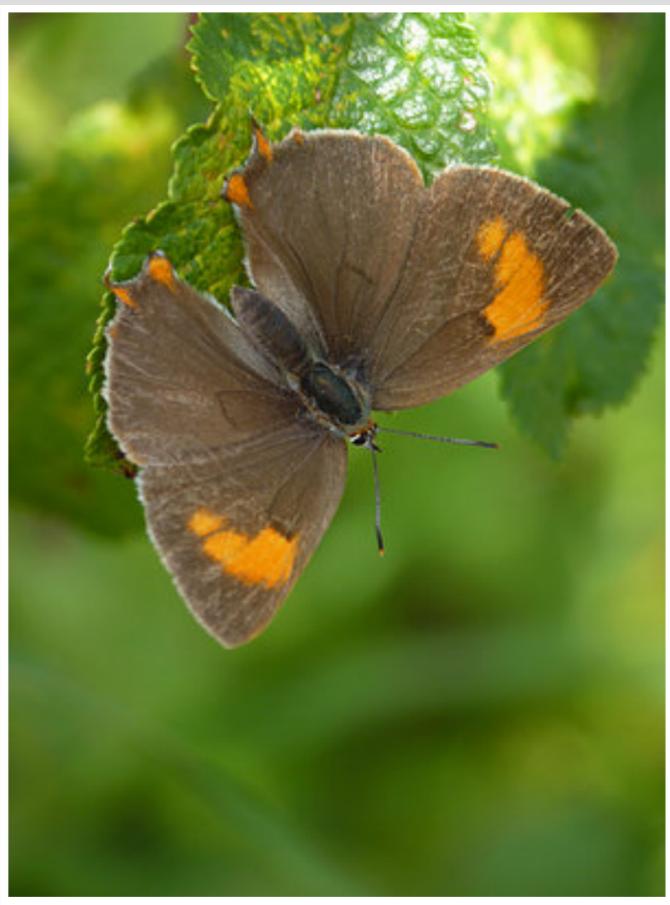


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Sep-12 02:11 AM GMT

Yet More Brown Hairstreaks

At midday today (6th September) I dropped in to Steyning Rifle Range for an hour, before heading off to survey a private site. A female Brown Hairstreak appeared almost immediately, providing yet another visitor with a 'first'. I'm pleased to say that Pauline also managed to get plenty of hairstreak action during her visit. Even in a relatively poor year this site consistently produces the goods. Most females are beginning to show significant wear and tear now, but there's still a chance of a really fresh one appearing.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 07-Sep-12 05:37 AM GMT

Cracking shots as per usual Neil 🍷 Is there some knowledge or trick I'm missing because I seem to do okay for closed wing shots but don't find them basking? Do they bask more during certain times of the day or due to certain climatic conditions?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 07-Sep-12 05:58 AM GMT

Wurzel, I've found that Brown Hairstreaks tend to rest wings open when merely basking rather than when egg laying or nectaring.

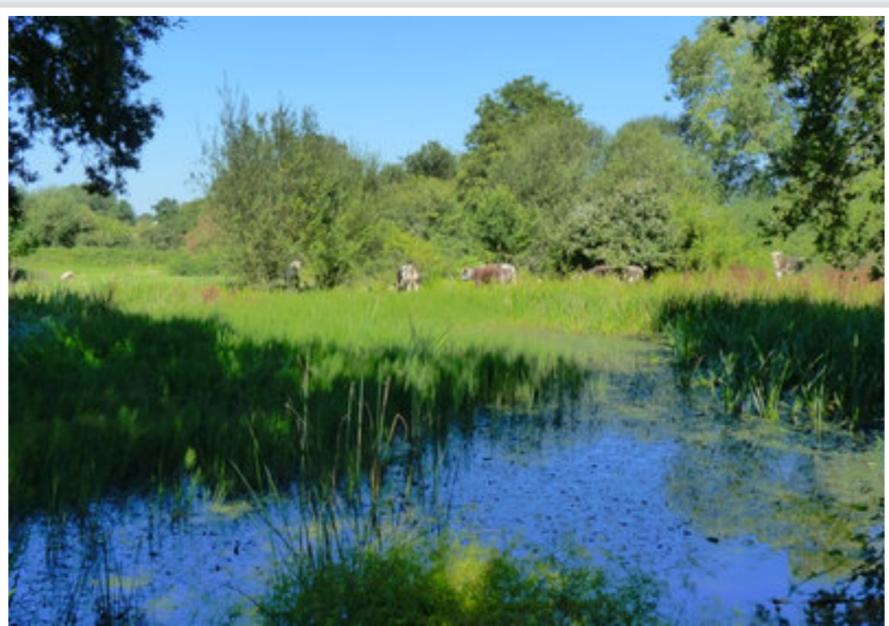
The one I saw last week in Pembrokeshire had her wings closed at first but when I deliberately cast my shadow over her she soon opened them.

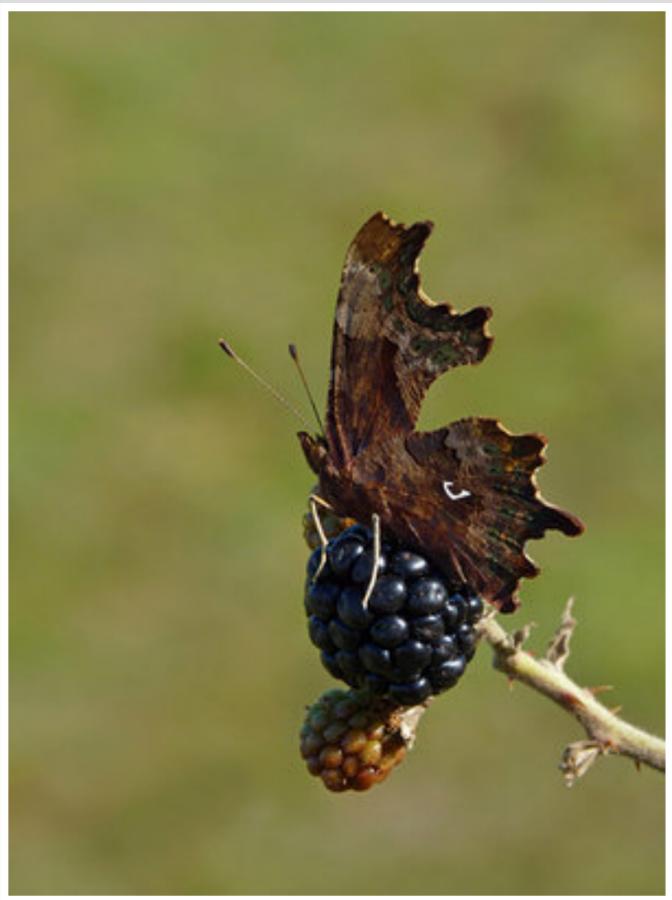
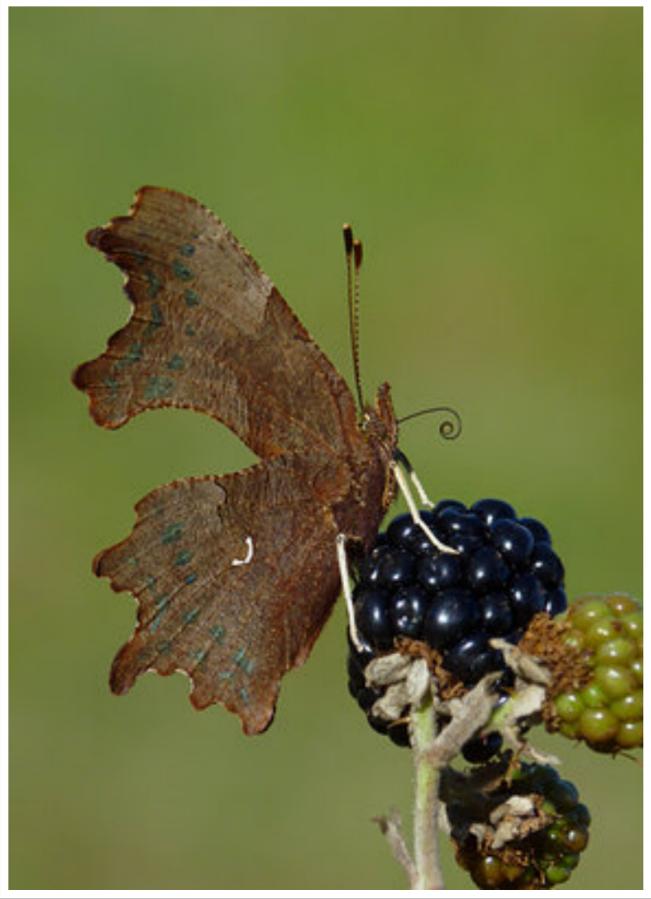
Re: Sussex Kipper

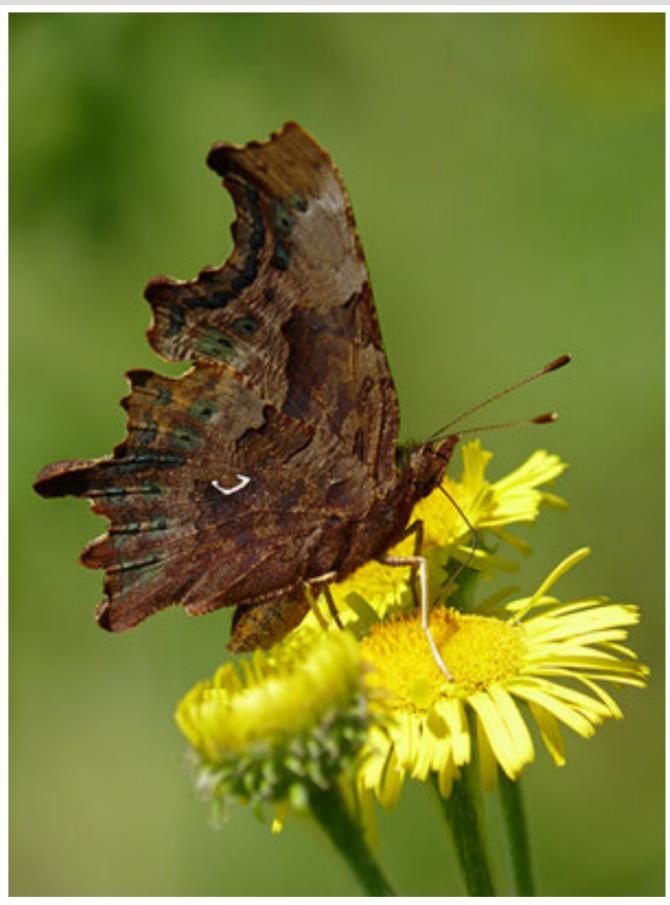
by Neil Hulme, 08-Sep-12 07:09 AM GMT

Wildland

Today (7th September) I performed another survey over the Knepp Castle Estate, where Sir Charlie Burrell's re-wilding project has been running for more than ten years now. It's always an interesting place to visit, not least when you unexpectedly come face-to-face with a Tamworth pig or a herd of Longhorns. Despite seeing 12 fresh Red Admiral in my travels, the real star of the show today was the Comma. It emerged in good numbers throughout the morning and I ended up with a total count of 17. Beautiful as the topside is, it has always been the variable and subtly beautiful underside of this species which has always fascinated me. With good numbers of Comma now on the blackberries we are officially in autumn according to my personal butterfly calendar.







Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Sep-12 04:55 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. It's a straightforward case of thermoregulation, so when the female Brown Hairstreak is not ovipositing or feeding, her wings will be held in a position influenced by her body temperature. As David says, by casting a shadow you can effect a reduction in temperature, which may cause her to open up.

Re: Sussex Kipper

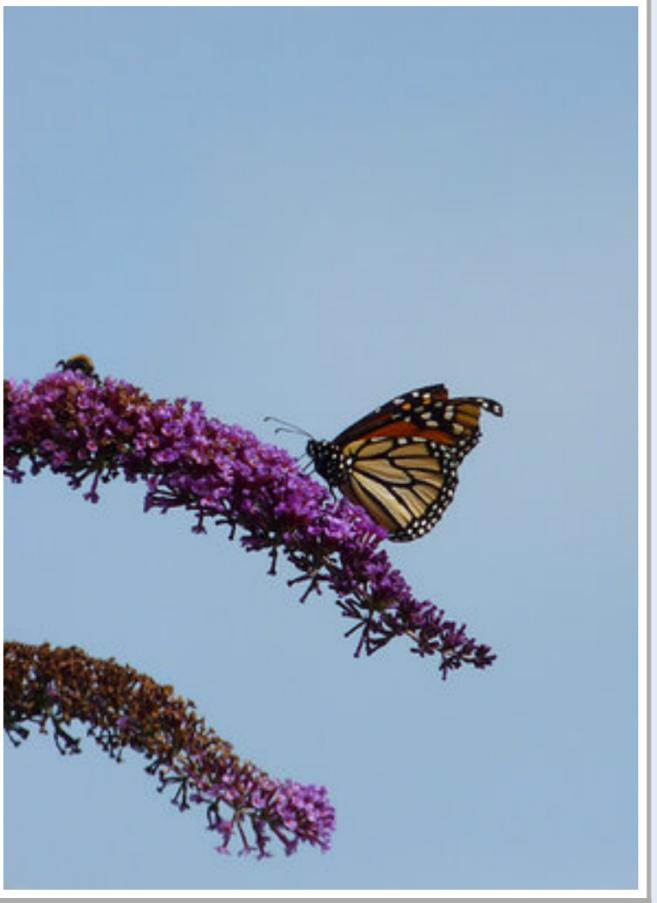
by Neil Hulme, 10-Sep-12 05:23 AM GMT

King Of The Butterflies

On Saturday (8th September) I seriously considered travelling to Portland to see the Monarch, which Pete had kindly tipped me off about the day before. In the end, having decided to go to Findon Sheep Fair in the afternoon, I returned to Steyning Rifle Range in the morning. Although the Brown Hairstreak females were slow off the mark, a total of 5 appeared in the hour and a half I was there. Amongst the visitors it was great to meet UKBers Dave and Mrs Brown, and to see Susie and John W again. I was particularly pleased that Dave scored after coming all the way from Ashford. Another chap had travelled over 200 miles to see Steyning's finest.

Much as I enjoyed the Sheep Fair my feet were getting itchy throughout the afternoon and evening. It had to be done, so on Sunday morning (9th September) I headed west. After almost completing the journey under clear blue skies I began to worry as an ominous bank of low cloud descended on Portland. I arrived to hear that the Monarch had disappeared over a garden fence about 90 seconds previously. For the next hour and twenty minutes the cloud thickened, the wind got up and the temperature dropped. I really thought my luck had run out.

Soon after 12.15 pm the cloud finally thinned and the weak sunshine began to warm things up. More Red Admirals, Large and Small Whites and a Painted Lady arrived almost immediately. And then it appeared, floating effortlessly over the fence, big as a bird. For two hours it put on a fantastic show, occasionally gliding around with barely a beat of its huge wings. As the weather deteriorated once more it finally retired to the lee side of a large conifer nearby. The next time the sun shines on Portland it'll be back on that buddleia.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 10-Sep-12 03:55 PM GMT

You just couldn't resist it, could you! 🥰 it is a really impressive wee beastie and you have produced some great photos despite the minor damage on the wings

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Sep-12 06:45 PM GMT

Hi Susie,
I felt slightly dirty but good. 😊
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickMorgan, 11-Sep-12 02:10 AM GMT

Fantastic. They are lovely butterflies and their effortless flight is enchanting. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 11-Sep-12 02:14 AM GMT

I'm so glad you managed to see this butterfly, Neil. Tell me though, how could you be so confident that it would be in the same place? These are the greatest migrators of all, and though I accept it will be desperate to feed up after its long spell in the air, surely its impulses will cause it to move on at some point?

What will actually happen to it (assuming it's not attacked by a bird)? Will it try to hibernate somewhere or will it move south as conditions get cooler?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Sep-12 05:32 PM GMT

Thanks David. You are correct in that most Monarchs tend to move on quite quickly, and it's quite unusual for one to stick around in one place for long. I regard this as a 'birders butterfly' as you really need to spend long periods on the Scilly Isles each year to have a reasonable chance of bagging one. So as it had already been around for a couple of days I reckoned the gamble was worthwhile, bearing in mind the potential difficulties in ever seeing one on mainland UK. I felt quite confident heading down there – until the weather changed for the worse.

As for its fate I really don't know. Even those with far more knowledge about the Monarch would probably end up just speculating. I can't imagine we have much in the way of data to go on.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Sep-12 07:07 PM GMT

Cats And Falcon

This afternoon (10th September), while tidying up the back garden, I decided to have a quick look for Holly Blue larvae on the ivy. Bearing in mind that

the butterflies are regular and very welcome visitors, I was sure that plenty of eggs must have been carefully deposited on the developing flower buds. It wasn't long before I found the tell-tale boreholes and dead flower stalks. In about 15 minutes I located 2 well advanced caterpillars and a tiny first instar. I was pleased with the images I managed to get, one-handed while balancing on a step-ladder!

In the afternoon I headed to Chichester gravel pits to watch the long-stay Red-footed Falcon. Distance, light conditions and an under-gunned camera made anything but a dodgy record shot impossible, but it was great watching this stunning bird grab dragonflies over the water.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 12-Sep-12 03:23 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Super shot of the Holly Blue cat ...

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

I was pleased with the images I managed to get, one-handed while balancing on a step-ladder!

You go careful – a man of your age ... 😊

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Goldie M, 12-Sep-12 05:32 AM GMT

I'm green with envey about your Monarch BF 🍃😄 You must have felt really up lifted to see such a lovely Butterfly.
I ask myself "WHY"do I live in the North 🤔 Goldie 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 12-Sep-12 07:01 AM GMT

I was just getting to grips with the envy at the Monarch and then you go and get a Red Footed Falcon 🦅🍃😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 12-Sep-12 05:11 PM GMT

Thanks all. Yes Wurzel, with a Monarch and Red-footed Falcon in quick succession I'm on a roll. I expect to trip and fall under Kate Moss next. 😊
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

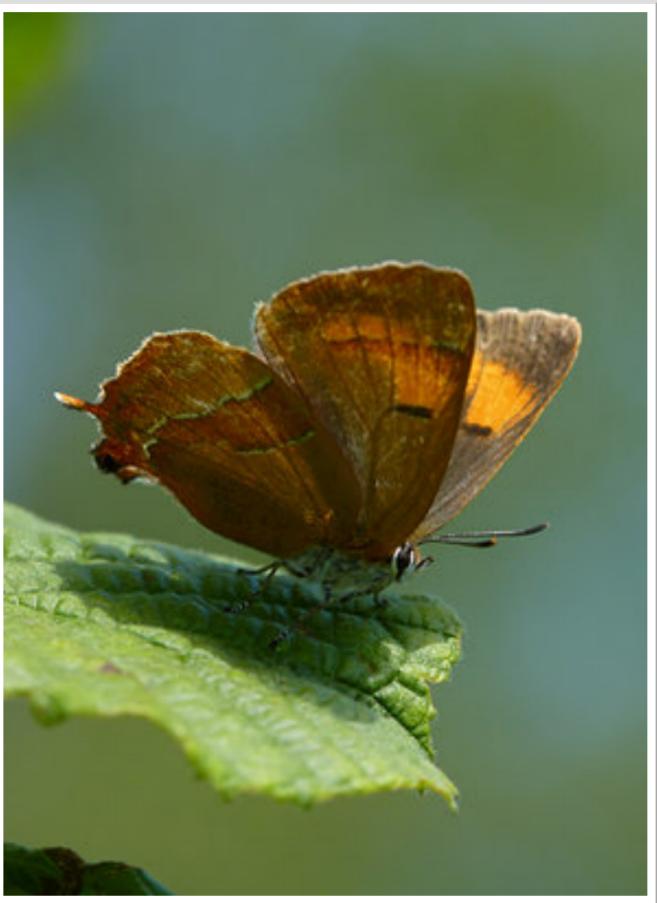
by Neil Hulme, 14-Sep-12 05:52 AM GMT

Faded Beauties

This morning (13th September) I started off at Cissbury Ring, where butterfly numbers are dwindling and everything is beginning to look rather faded and tired. Hopefully there should be another brood of Small Coppers to come, but today's tally on the SW corner of the ramparts included Adonis Blue (3), Chalkhill Blue (2), Common Blue (2), Brown Argus (1), Small Copper (2), Meadow Brown (15), Small Heath (3), Speckled Wood (1), Red Admiral (4), Large White (1) and Small White (1).

At Steyning Rifle Range the female Brown Hairstreaks were slow to start again, but from 12.30 pm onwards they left me in doubt that their season is still going strong. 7 different females were seen, although the 3 in mint condition refused to come within range of the camera. I suspect that these individuals are yet to start egg laying, having only recently been fertilised. Those that did spend time at low level were all fairly worn, but even those that have seen better days are still beautiful.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Wurzel, 14-Sep-12 07:09 AM GMT

Great shots as per usual but where was Kate? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

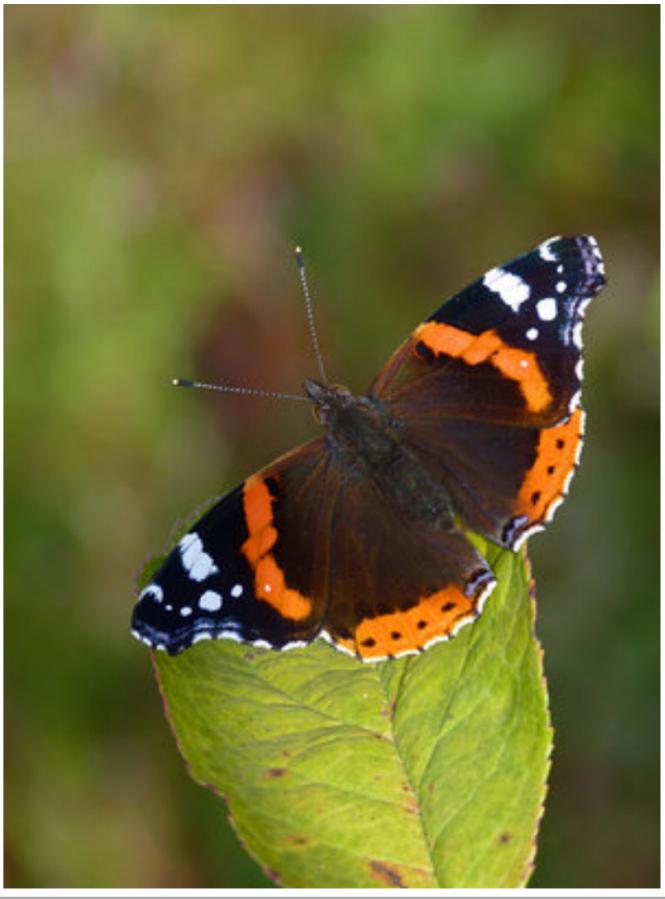
Re: Sussex Kipper

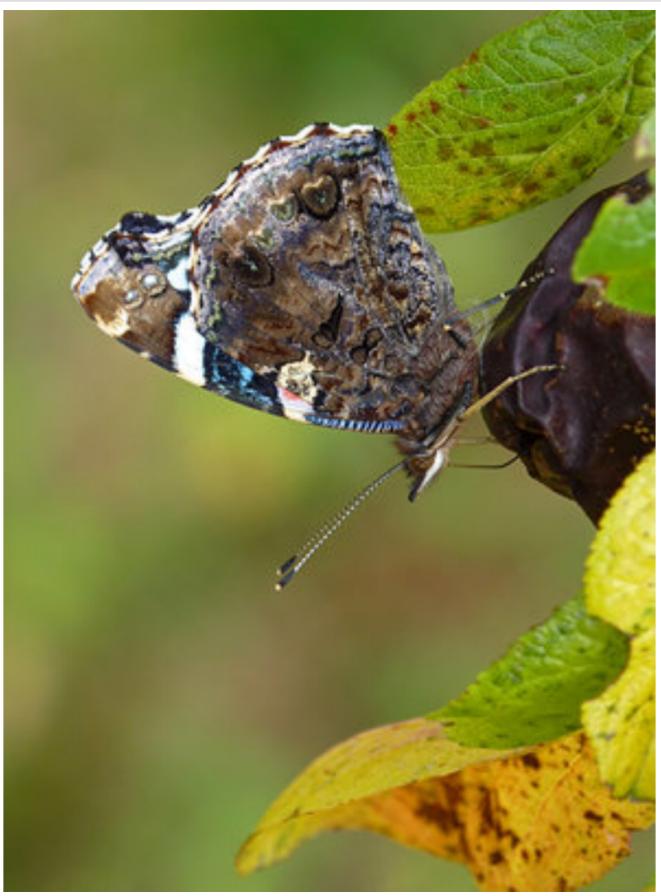
by Neil Hulme, 16-Sep-12 07:47 AM GMT

Brighton Belles And Admirals

This afternoon (15th September) I visited Maynards PYO fruit orchards at Windmill Hill Farm in the East Sussex village of Ticehurst. This family run business is set in beautiful countryside within a part of Sussex I seldom visit. I was keen to follow up on the report of 1000+ Red Admiral made by Tony Lloyd and Malcolm Phillips, who had counted the butterflies which are currently enjoying the decaying 'Brighton Belle' plums. This particular variety has gone unharvested due to discolouration of the skins. The owner Tom Maynard is keen to promote wildlife on this large and sensitively farmed site near Bewl Water Reservoir, and justifiably proud of this unexpected crop.

As soon as I entered this part of the fruit farm 2 Red Admirals landed on my head, which I took to be a good omen. It wasn't long before I was more than satisfied that at least 1000 Red Admirals are here, together with more than 30 Comma. I've never seen so many in one place in over 40 years of butterfly watching. The vast majority are in pristine condition and although we are getting immigrant Admirals coming in, I have little doubt that these are home grown. It's been a very odd season but the best has been saved to last and September will be the month that makes 2012 memorable for me.





by Mark Colvin, 16-Sep-12 04:11 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

A beautiful series of shots to wake to on a Sunday morning ... 😊

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 16-Sep-12 06:24 PM GMT

Cracking photos Neil 😊

Your description of all the Red Admirals reminds me of the mass gathering I saw on the heather behind the Dunes at Studland the other week as reported in my diary. No idea of actual numbers but there must have been hundreds concentrated on the heather just north of Knoll Beach. As in your case, I had never seen so many RAs in one place at the same time.

Interesting that you say that yours are home grown, most of the ones that I saw at Studland were pristine and yet myself and others had seen them coming in off the sea for a few days. When I reported them to Dorset BC, I had a reply telling me that they were part of a larger influx that had been coming in all along the coast.

When I went back to Studland a few days later most of them had dispersed and in fact I had been seeing RAs flying in a generally northward direction at other sites.

Apologies for waffling on in your diary Neil, I just thought it was an interesting comparison.

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by millerd, 16-Sep-12 06:36 PM GMT

They were still flying in off the sea at Southbourne yesterday – only small numbers, but definite new arrivals.

Dave

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Sep-12 07:08 PM GMT

Thanks Mark and Neil.

Neil: There is no doubt that there is a good influx of Admirals from mainland Europe at the moment and I wouldn't question that the majority in Dorset are voyagers. However, the Sussex Red Admiral bonanza is something I predicted way back in the summer, following a sequence of events I've documented on the BC Sussex website, Branch Twitter and, in part, on UKB. Last autumn saw a massive exodus southwards as Red Admirals from further north passed through Sussex in numbers I've rarely seen before. The relentless columns finally halted their progress when the weather became much colder and a good number clearly overwintered in Sussex. These were widely reported as they became more active in spring and a significant number bred. By mid June I was seeing freshly emerged adults wherever I went, including large numbers of egg-laying females (Ken Willmott was also reporting fantastic numbers over nettle fields in Surrey). Soon we were getting regular reports of larvae and even pupae. In July I tweeted "Egg-laying Red Admirals everywhere I go. This generally poor season may be remembered for an impressive late season admiral extravaganza." In Sussex we have had reports of Admirals coming in off the sea, but there has been very little evidence of a substantial movement over the coastal plain. Meanwhile we have even had a report to our website of a freshly emerged butterfly sitting above a patch of meconium fluid, something I've witnessed twice myself. So there's little doubt that the majority we are seeing in Sussex are citizens of the UK, although the proportions of immigrant and homegrown individuals may vary widely on a local/regional basis.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 16-Sep-12 07:40 PM GMT

Thanks for the comprehensive reply Neil, its nice to know that in this 'interesting' year that some species have actually done well in this country 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Sep-12 03:42 AM GMT

Pretty In Pink

Today (16th September) was a 'family day', but I still managed to root around in the garden hedge for 15 minutes. I soon found some more Holly Blue larvae, but rather than the usual camouflaged green uniform, this one was wearing something a little more flamboyant. It stood out clearly, particularly as it was between meals and moving on to a fresh flower bud. She (or he!) is certainly a good-looker.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 17-Sep-12 04:12 AM GMT

Neil, that larva is surely too big to bore into a flower bud.

What will it do from here on in?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 17-Sep-12 04:15 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Neil, that larva is surely too big to bore into a flower bud.

Not at all. It's only the (very extensible) head that enters the bud and the larva scoops out the contents.

I have to say, I've never seen one that pink before; not the best of disguises is it?!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 17-Sep-12 04:20 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

"David M" wrote:

Neil, that larva is surely too big to bore into a flower bud.

Not at all. It's only the (very extensible) head that enters the bud and the larva scoops out the contents.

I have to say, I've never seen one that pink before; not the best of disguises is it?!

Cheers,

- Pete

How the hell does it not get picked off by insectivores? If it buries its head in the buds it will leave a trailing end that resembles a tasty marshmallow!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Sep-12 03:56 AM GMT

Fine Young Cannibals

Yesterday (19th September) I met Brian Henham for yet another visit to Steyning Rifle Range. The flowering ivy beside the track past the bowling greens was alive with bees, hoverflies and a good selection of butterflies, including numerous Red Admiral, Comma and a very fresh Painted Lady. Despite periodically cloudy conditions we still managed a tally of 6 female Brown Hairstreak, 2 of which remained high in a master ash along with a male. I've posted one of Brian's hairstreak images below, together with one of mine showing a Comma with particularly pretty turquoise and blue underside markings.



This morning (20th September) I got the step ladder out to check on the progress of the Holly Blue larvae on the garden hedge. A final instar caterpillar had turned 'Hannibal Lecter' and was busy feasting on one of his much smaller relatives. A thorough search revealed a second larva with cannibalistic tendencies. Although I've never seen reference to this behaviour in Holly Blue it would appear to be far from uncommon.

In the afternoon I took a long walk around Rewell Wood, planning habitat management work for the coming winter. Speckled Wood was the only species of butterfly I saw and most were faded and tatty, so it was a nice young female Common Darter that had me reaching for the camera.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Sep-12 09:17 PM GMT

Darter Errata

Many thanks to Sussex dragonfly expert John Luck, who spotted that my Common Darter (post above) is in fact the rarer and much more exciting Red-veined Darter. I have previously only seen this migrant species in The Canaries. Identifying features include: pterostigma is pale with black edging; underside of eye is blue; yellow veins on leading edge of forewing; black line at top of frons continues down the sides; legs are black without pale stripe. I'm rather glad I took the time to get some decent shots. 😊



Re: Sussex Kipper

by ChrisC, 22-Sep-12 02:44 AM GMT

very nice Neil. just goes to show it pays to get pictures as anything can turn up.
Chris

Re: Sussex Kipper

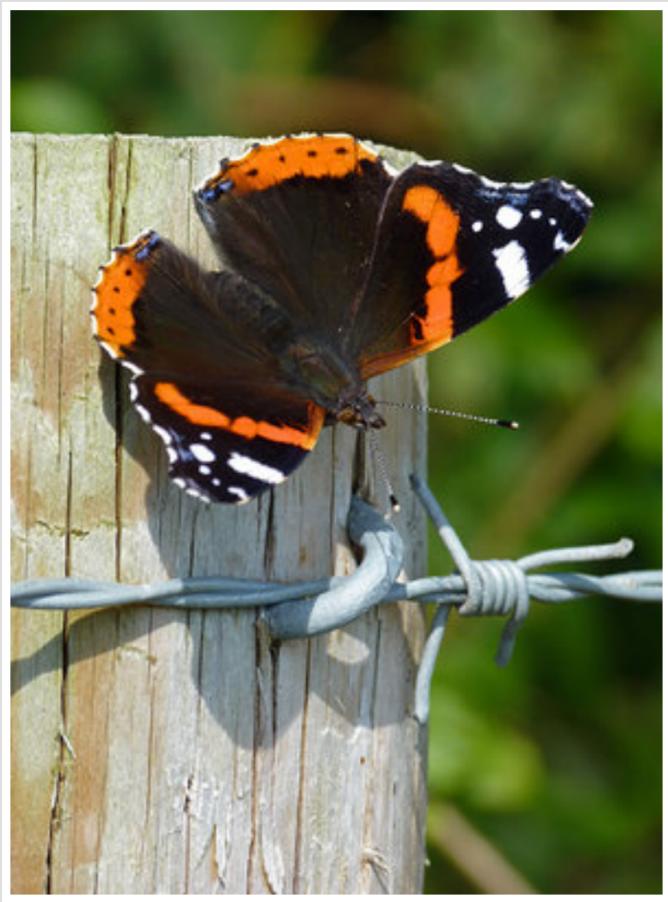
by Neil Hulme, 23-Sep-12 04:43 AM GMT

Grand Finale

With the Indian Summer finally coming to an end I was determined to make the most of today (22nd September) and paid probably my last visit to Steyning Rifle Range this year, at least until the habitat management work commences. I've lost count of the number of visitors who have seen their first ever Brown Hairstreak here, and two more went away happy today. Congratulations John from Tring and UKBer CJB (nice to meet you and the family). Although the predicted weather is likely to slow things down from now onwards, the number of Brown Hairstreak females has yet to drop from peak. 7

different females, all recognisable on the basis of wear & tear, were seen out egg laying between 12.25 pm and 2.15 pm, bringing my 2012 Steyning tally to 52. The weather has been pretty good throughout the laying season and I expect a bumper crop of Brownies here next season.

Red Admiral was the most common species with about 50 on site. Their numbers still appear to be on the increase, with no sign of a southwards migration yet. Along with the Chalkhill Blue this is the big 'winner' of 2012. Some patches of flowering ivy were heavily laden with these beauties, along with a reasonable number of Comma. Amongst the other butterflies present were a couple of fresh Large White. The season isn't quite over yet, but sadly the end is nigh.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 29-Sep-12 04:39 AM GMT

Work Party Season Begins

Today (28th September) I attended the first of many work parties planned for this autumn and winter. Helping to improve habitat for the butterflies which have given me so much pleasure throughout the season seems like a fair deal to me, and has the added benefits of keeping fit and healthy. Today I joined Simon Mockford and Steve Allberry of the South Downs National Park Authority and BC Sussex/UKB member Colin Knight. We began this year's rotational cut of scrub along a ride side in Rewell Wood near Arundel. Each section is allowed to grow for two or three summers, which keeps the habitat in ideal condition for the Duke of Burgundy, but also allows easy upkeep as most of it can still be tackled with a brush-cutter. Following a meeting with the always helpful Norfolk Estate earlier in the week, we now have plans to open up new areas of the wood this winter. Let's hope we get better weather next May, so the butterfly can make the most of it.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Sep-12 11:43 PM GMT

Winding Down

Last weekend I lamented the fact that the 2012 butterfly season was coming to an end – and what a difference a week makes! Despite sunshine and warmth the majority of species had all but disappeared when I visited several sites on Saturday (29th September), with the exception of Red Admiral, Comma and Large White. At Steyning (I couldn't resist a last look!) I failed to see Brown Hairstreak for the first time since August and only a couple of Speckled Wood and Meadow Brown were present, apart from the aforementioned. On Mill Hill it was a similar story, with only two almost unrecognisable Adonis Blue, a Common Blue and a few Meadow Brown on the wing. However, I did see a couple of fresh Small Copper out egg laying. These are the only third brood specimens I have seen this year and the species looks unlikely to produce its normally strong autumn crop. With the season still running two weeks late through September we are now unlikely to see a significant third brood of Wall this year. The situation is in marked contrast to recent years, when a flying start in the warm spring period enabled many species to squeeze in extra broods at the back end.

While on Mill Hill I received a call from Dan Danahar, who had found a mating pair of Large White sitting on sea kale at Shoreham Beach. When I joined him there were about a dozen of these immigrant butterflies flitting over the shingle.

Despite the rapid wind down there is still likely to be some interesting activity through October and early November. At some point we are likely to see a spectacular exodus of Red Admiral in a southerly direction – eyes peeled! Given the huge numbers present in the UK at the moment it would be even more interesting if we don't.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 01-Oct-12 07:27 AM GMT

Hi Neil, at what stage do you think the offspring from this pair of large whites will over winter? Surely they will not make it to the chrysalis stage at this late season?

I have just found an egg batch on my nasturtiums. It will be interesting to see how they fare, as nasturtiums are killed by frost.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Oct-12 07:27 PM GMT

Hi Mark,

Perhaps surprisingly, many Large White eggs around at the moment *will* be able to develop through to the chrysalid stage before really severe cold weather kicks in, although this obviously depends on what gets thrown at us before Christmas. In 2008 vast numbers (1000+) of Large White caterpillars ravaged the allotments at Seaford in mid November, and successfully pupated in late November and early December. A few caterpillars were still feeding at Christmas, although it is unclear whether these managed to reach maturity. It seems that one advantage gained by this late season brood was the avoidance of the usually devastating effects of the ichneumon *Apanteles glomeratus*, which was probably absent (in its adult state) by mid November. Larval/pupal survival rates were therefore unusually high. We also received records of Small White successfully pupating in late November/early December at Warnham.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 02-Oct-12 04:18 AM GMT

Many thanks, Neil, for the comprehensive reply. So it seems they can they can make it through, and even benefit in a way, from the reduction of parasites, which is something I hadn't thought of.

Cheers, and hopefully see you at one of the work parties in the New Year!

Cheers.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 04-Oct-12 08:59 PM GMT

Just got the Autumn 2012 edition of Butterfly magazine. Another front cover Neil 🍷 .
Congratulations.

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Oct-12 02:22 AM GMT

Thanks Vince – I wasn't expecting it! Being a bit picky I would have rather seen it less tightly cropped, and shifted slightly to the right, but I'm very pleased that it was used. 😊

I hope you've got your BC Sussex newsletter by now. I think Leigh Prevost has done a great job in editing his first edition.

While reading it I looked out of the window and saw a Holly Blue; I suspect that'll be the last I see until spring now. 🙄

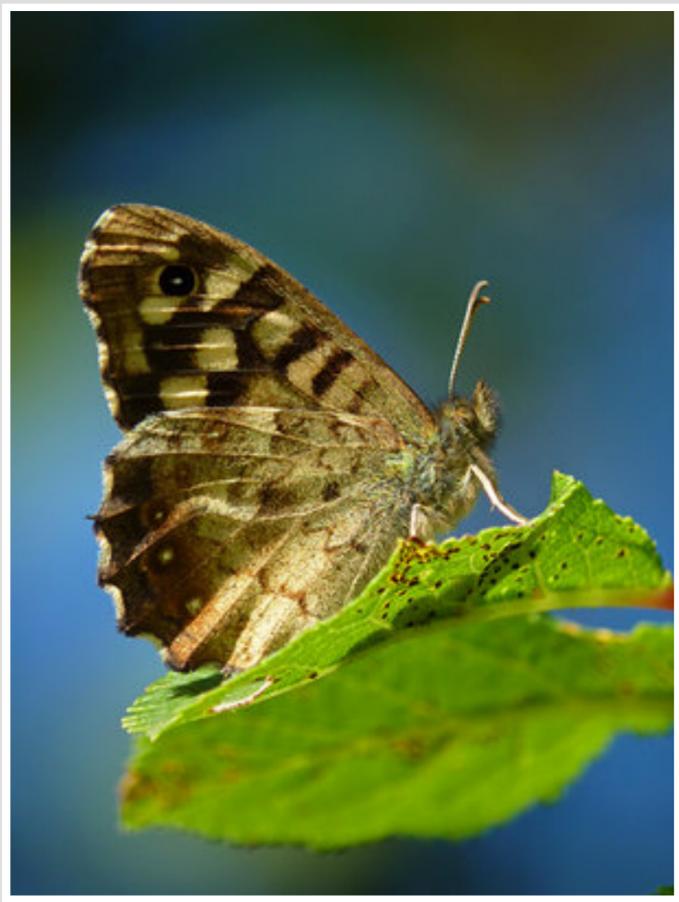
BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Oct-12 05:25 PM GMT

Downs Link

On Saturday (6th October) I joined my parents for a walk along the Downs Link disused railway line north of Henfield. Every patch of ivy hosted a few butterflies and we probably saw a total of 20 Red Admiral and 10 Comma. Even at this late stage in the season we also found a couple of freshly emerged Speckled Wood and a third brood Green-veined White. Recent heavy rainfall had caused flooding of the farmland around the River Adur; the image below shows the beautiful Sussex countryside SW towards Chanctonbury Ring in the far distance.





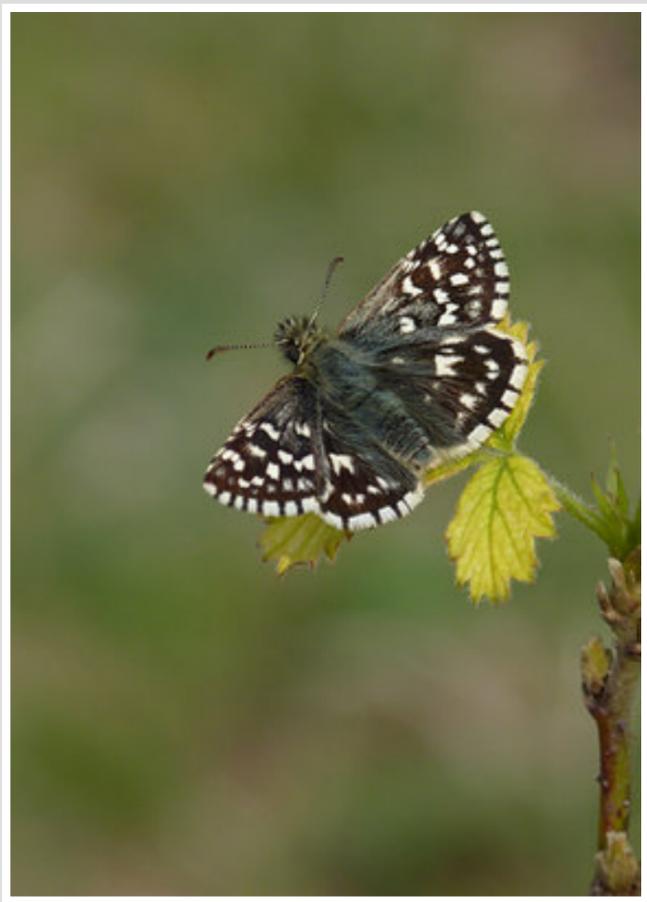
Re: Sussex Kipper

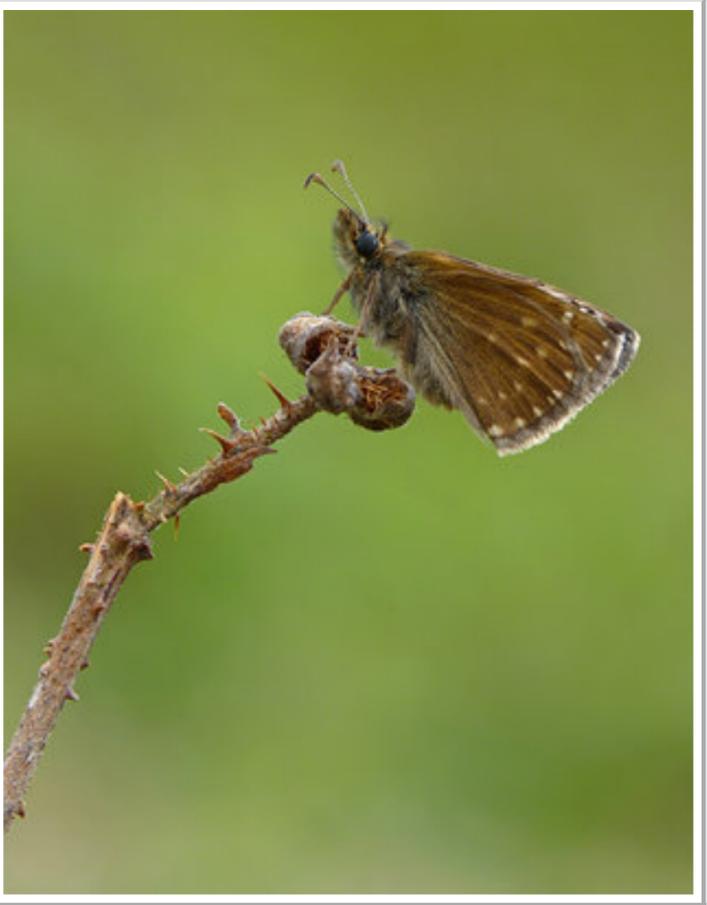
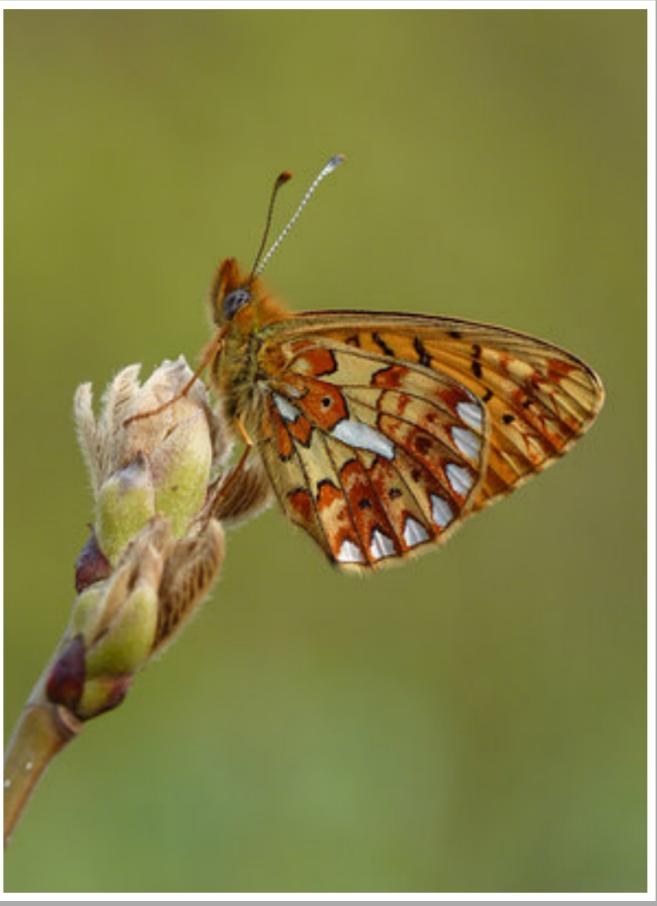
by Neil Hulme, 08-Oct-12 02:49 AM GMT

Best Of 2012 - April

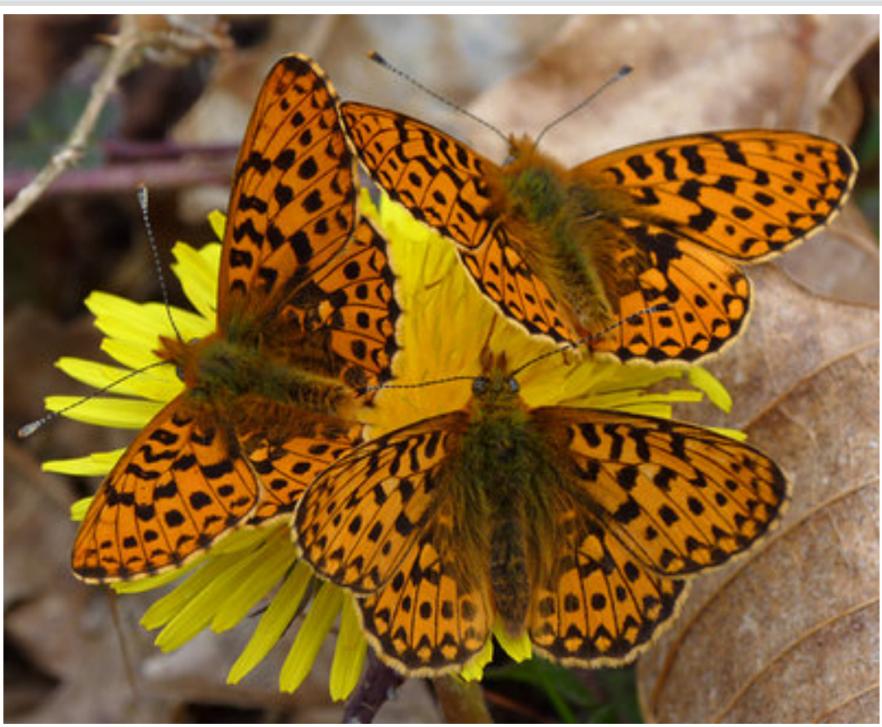
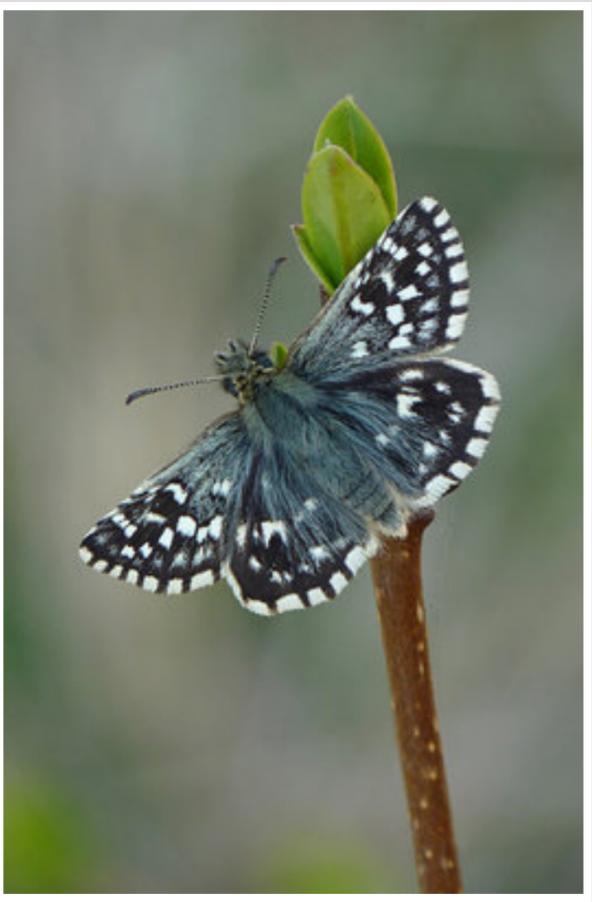
2012 has been a challenging year for butterfly watchers, particularly through the wettest April/May/June period on record. At times it was hard work ... very hard work. I doubt that I'll forget the many days when I, and many others I know, headed out in the most appalling conditions in the hope of finding a few butterflies. Under such conditions it was all the more satisfying when hard won success was achieved. But despite everything, when I look back through my pictorial record of the year, there were a surprising number of highlights.

Grizzled Skipper, Orange Tip and Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers were all down on 2011 and yet they managed to make the most of brief spells of sunshine. Locally at least, the Dingy Skipper did rather well, with numbers about average when compared to recent years.









Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Oct-12 11:32 PM GMT

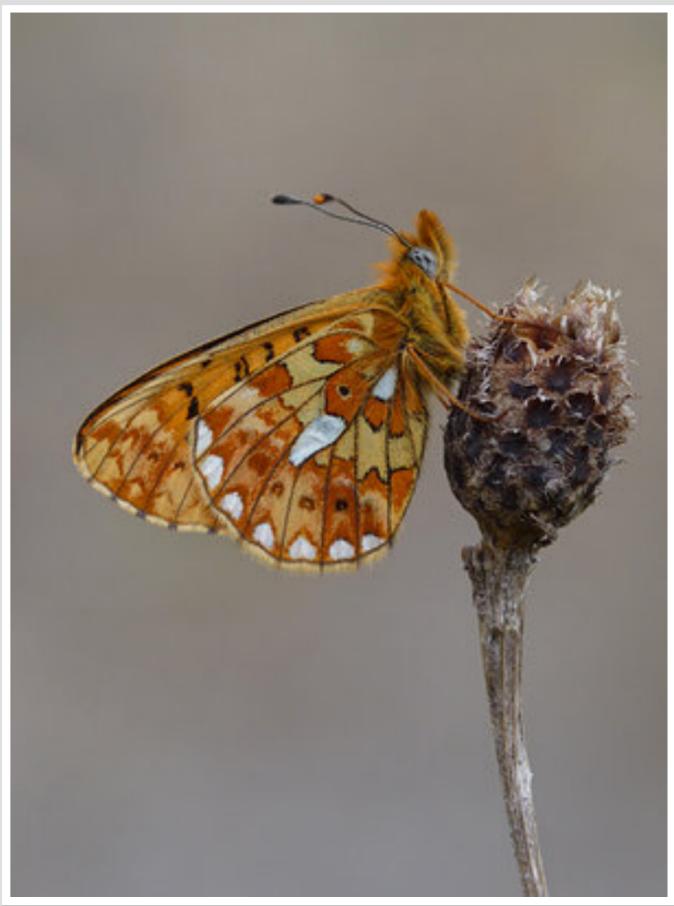
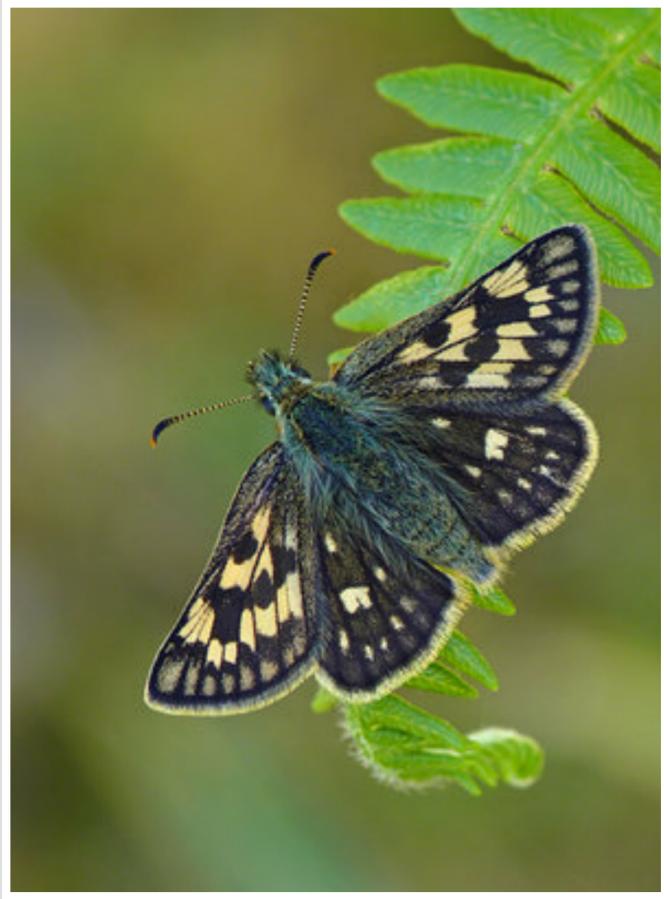
Best Of 2012 - May

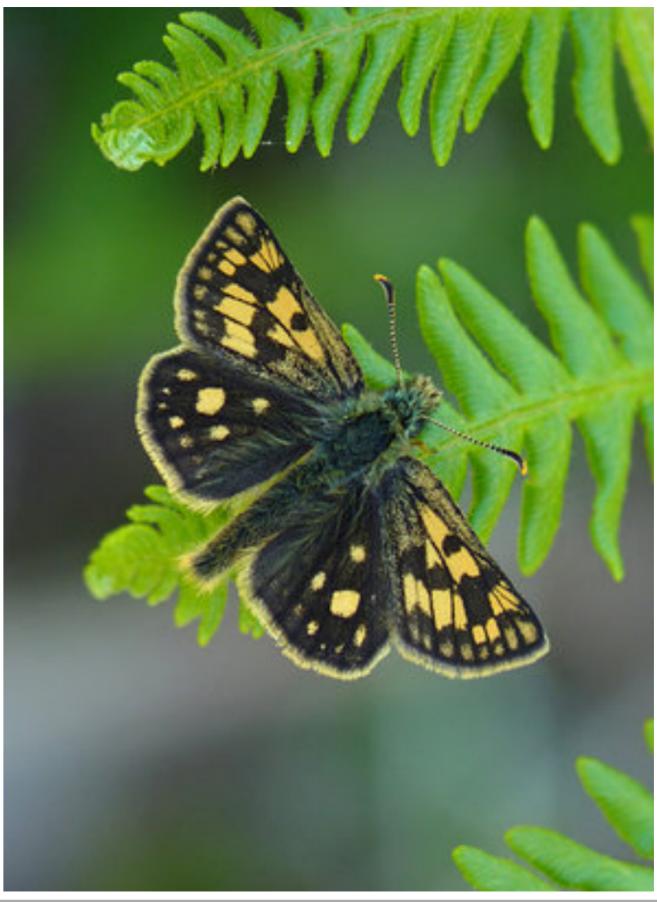
The Duke of Burgundy had a poor season, following several good ones, particularly 2011. In some parts of the country the flight season was conducted under relentlessly cool and cloudy conditions without any significant sunshine – very worrying! In West Sussex, where the butterfly emerges later than in many areas of the South, their delayed appearance overlapped with a few warm and sunny days at the end of May and through early June.

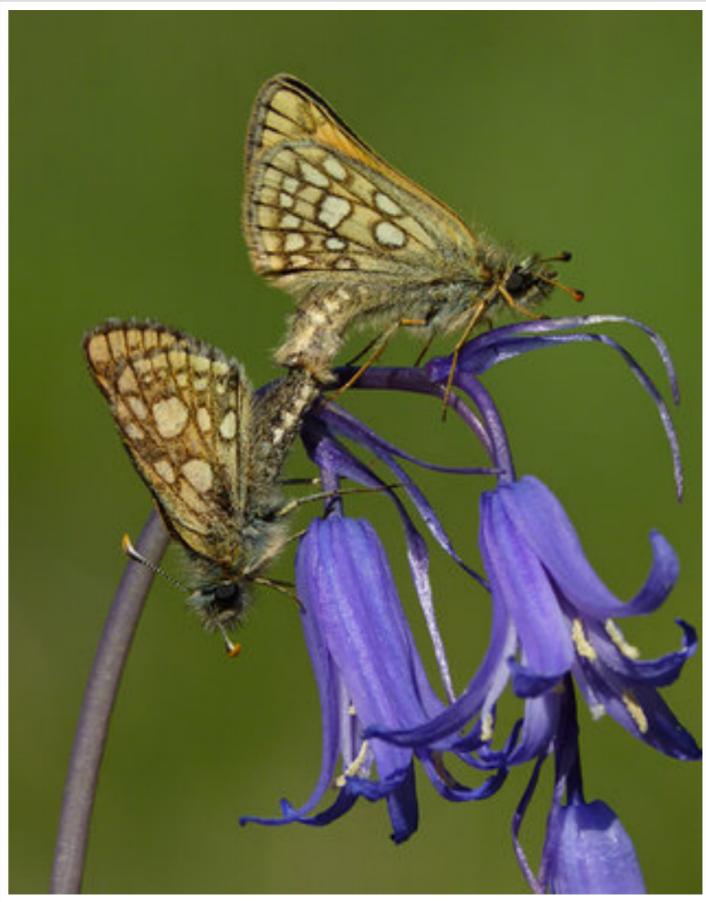
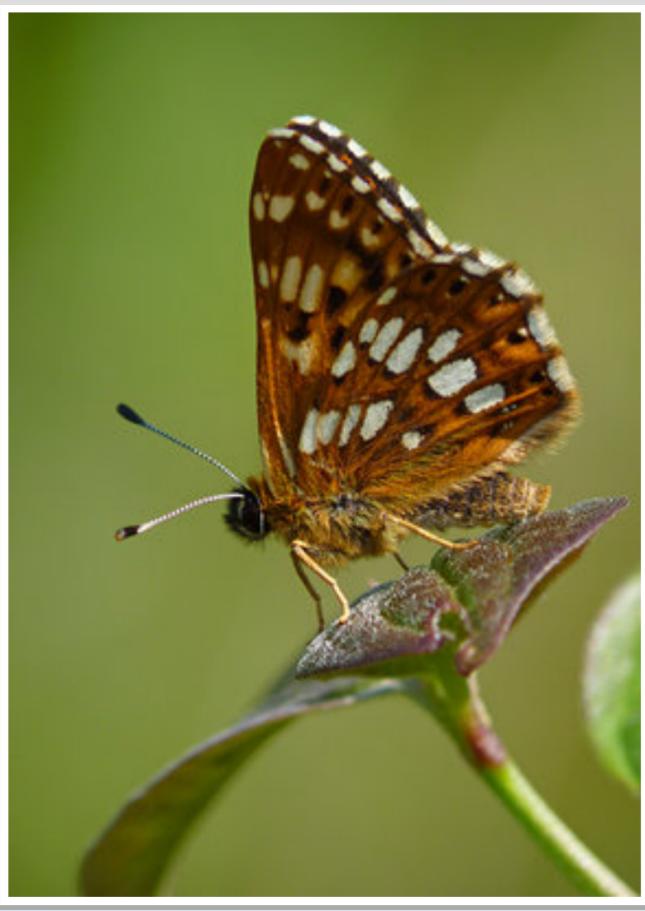
The Small Blue had a poor season and the second brood was very weak on many sites. Green-veined and Wood White were both down on 2011 numbers, although neither disastrously so. The former had a better second brood and the latter coped quite well with the weather, being less reliant upon full sunshine than most species.

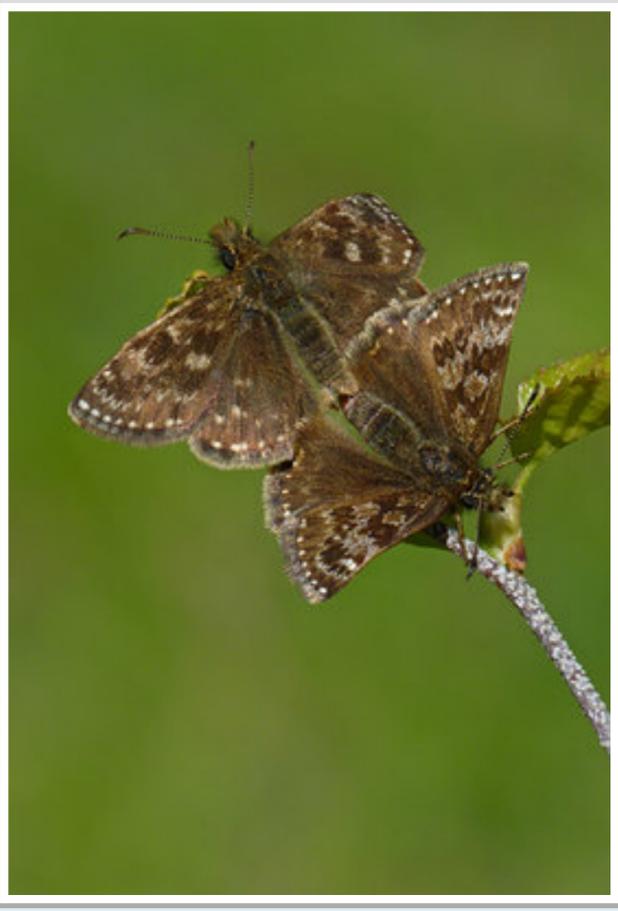
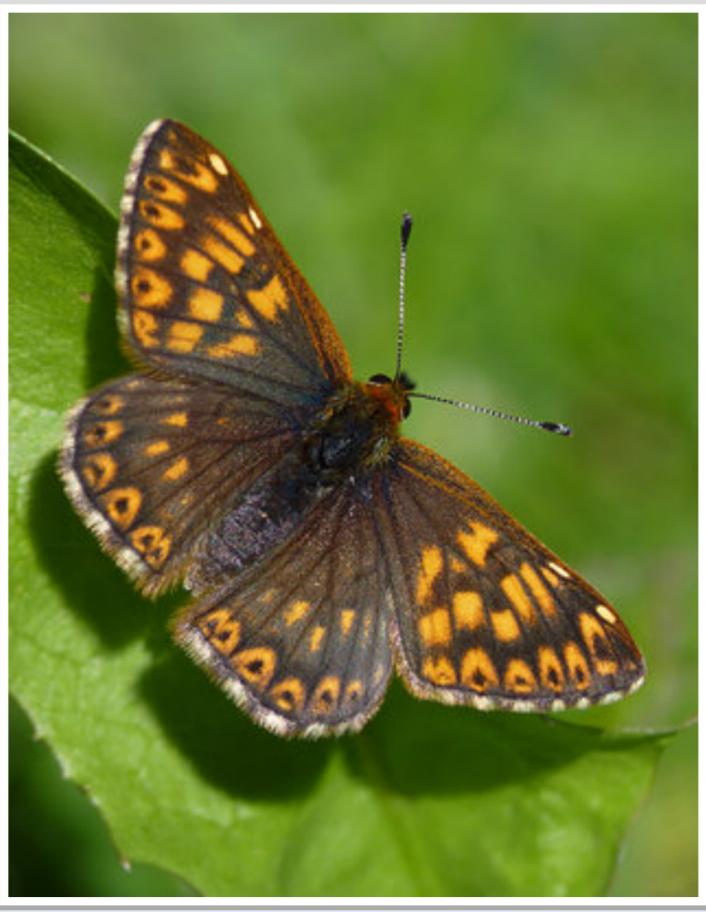
One of the highlights of 2012 was undoubtedly the three days I spent around Fort William, under clear blue skies and with temperatures in the mid 80s. Iain Leach and a few others who were also in the right place at the right time enjoyed a good emergence of Chequered Skipper. Before the sun appeared over the peaks one morning I found a beautiful and unusually obliging Argent & Sable moth.

Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Dingy Skipper remained on the wing throughout May.











Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 09-Oct-12 01:54 AM GMT

Absolutely stunning images. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 10-Oct-12 12:01 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Some really nice shots 😊

The female Chequered Skipper and the male Duke on the bracken frond are in the lead for me ...

Keep them coming.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickMorgan, 10-Oct-12 02:55 AM GMT

Fantastic pictures of a lot of lovely species. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-12 03:20 AM GMT

Thanks Susie, Mark and Nick – much appreciated. Best of June on the way!
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

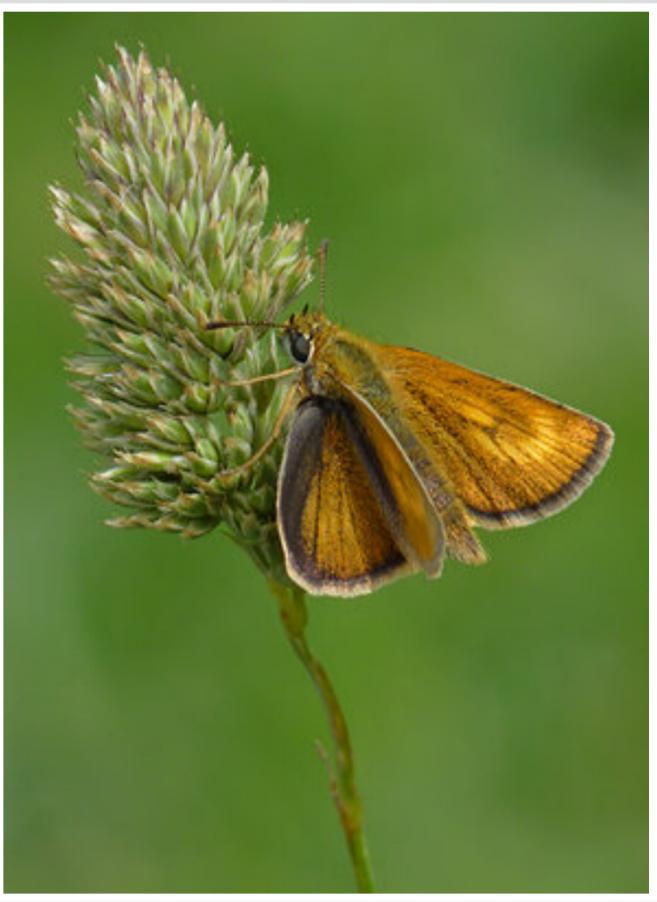
by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-12 04:17 AM GMT

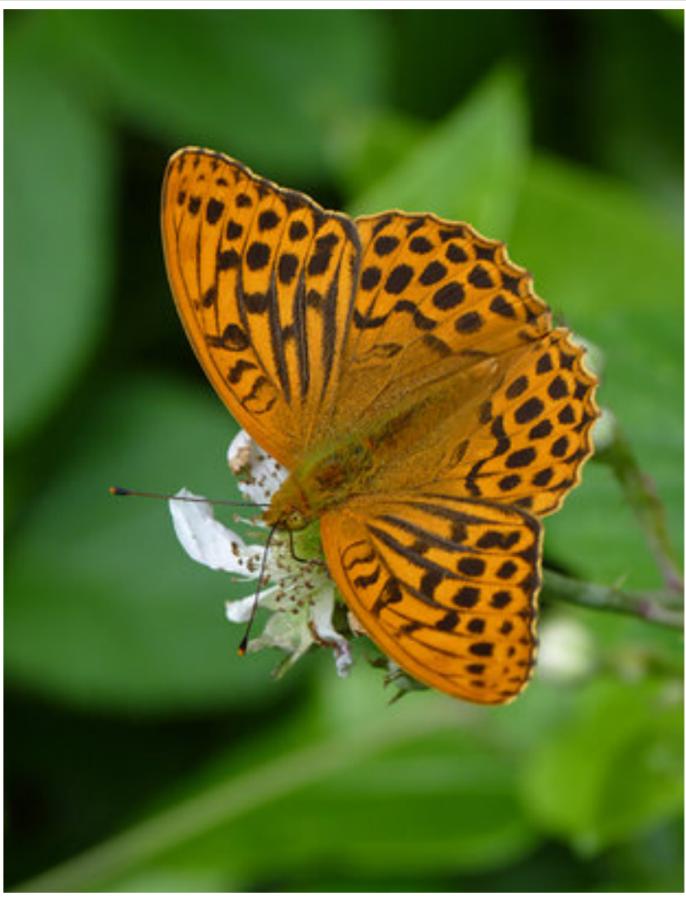
Best Of 2012 – June

On my local patch the Small Pearl-bordered and Silver-washed Fritillary both had poor years, with the latter failing to produce any aberrant forms for me and only a single *valezina*. The Meadow Brown coped well with the lack of sunshine and its performance was certainly no less than average.

It is always more difficult to assess how those species which require a journey far from home fared. However, there were certainly plenty of Mountain Ringlet at Irton Fell and Lulworth Skipper at The Cove. While searching for skippers near Corfe Castle I came across the best colony of Bee Orchid I've ever seen. I ventured to East Blean Wood during the first days of emergence at the start of June, so there was only a handful of male Heath Fritillary on the wing.







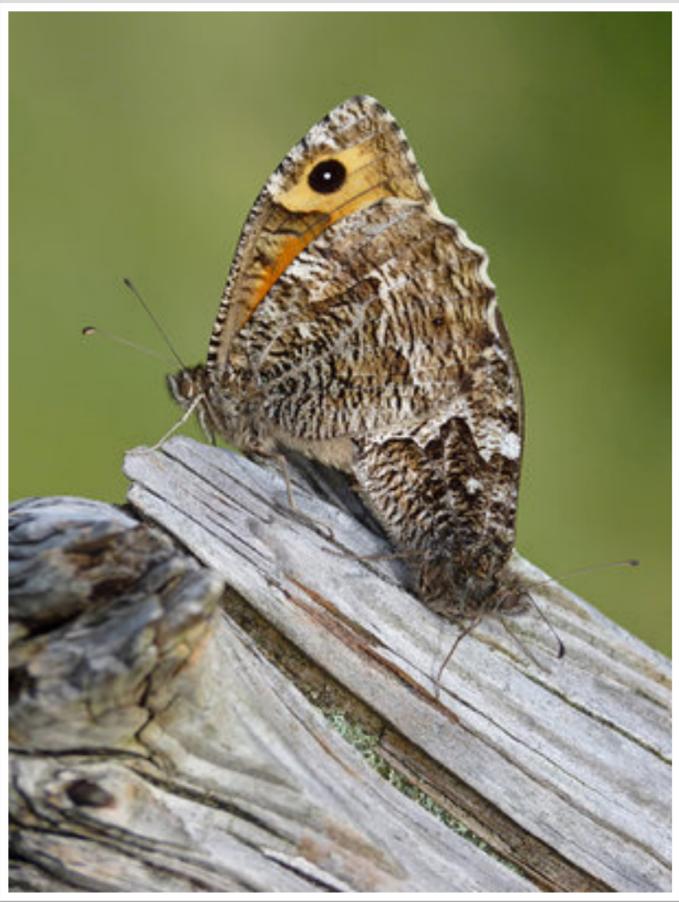
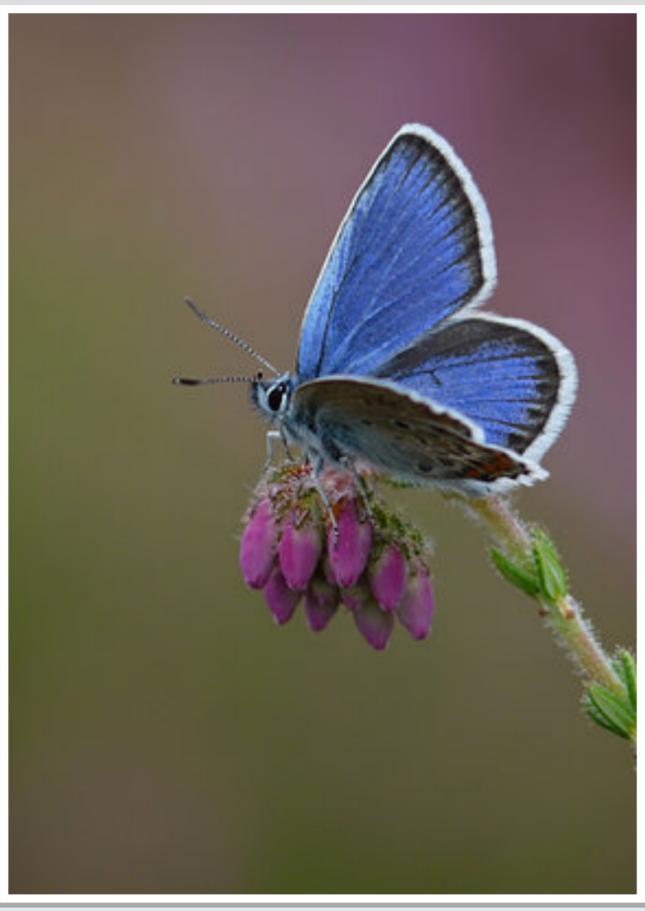
Re: Sussex Kipper

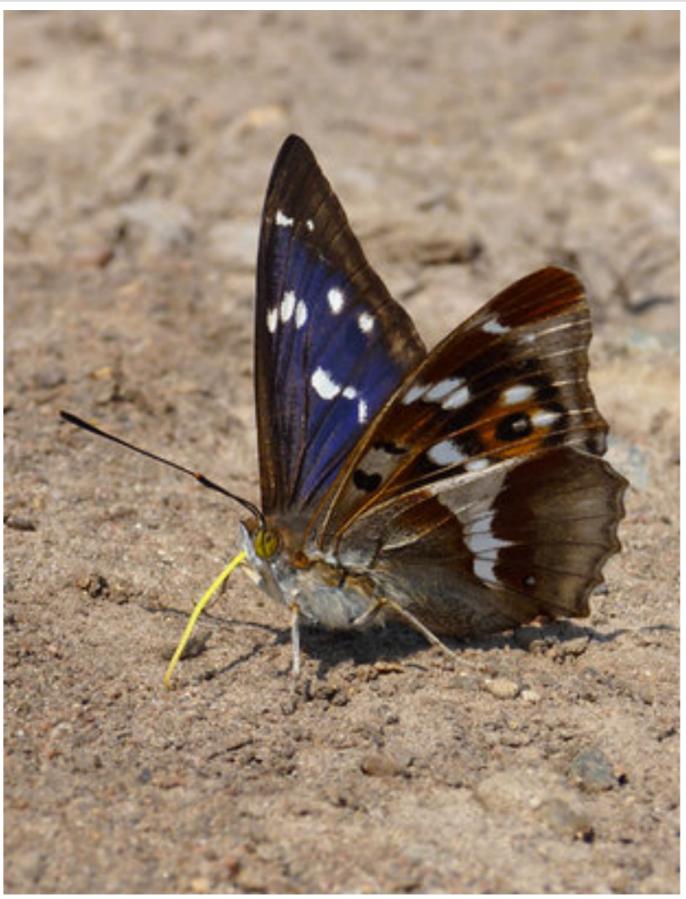
by Neil Hulme, 11-Oct-12 07:00 PM GMT

Best Of 2012 - July

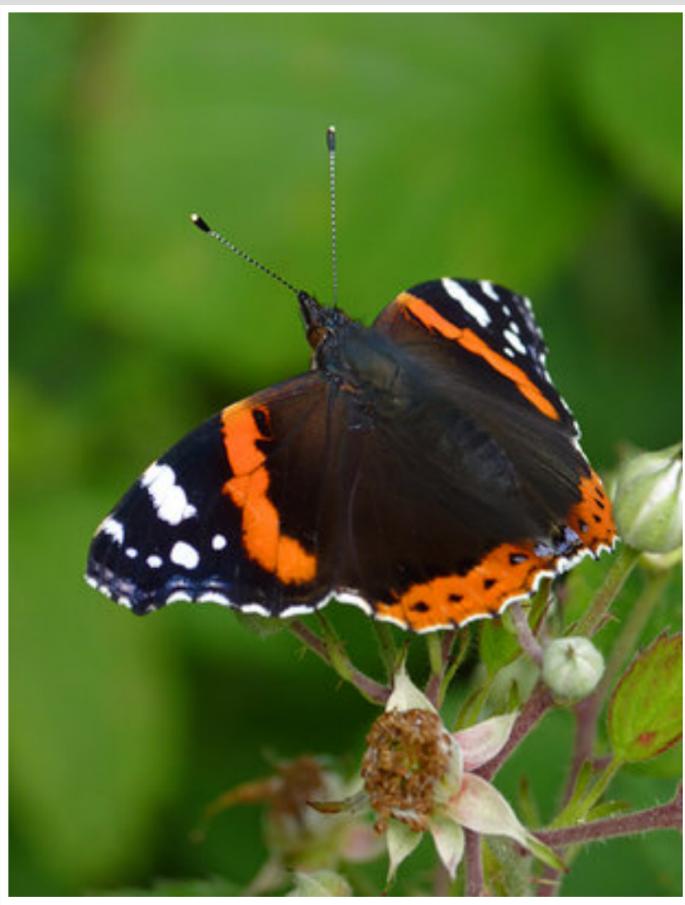
The weather remained poor through early and mid July but finally, around 20th July, the Jet Stream started to move northwards, allowing a glimmer of summer to finally appear. In Sussex the Silver-studded Blue, Dark Green Fritillary and Small Copper (particularly) all had relatively poor seasons. Purple Emperor numbers were down but the species was recorded in some new locations; elsewhere in the UK it did rather better. The same applies to the Grayling, with the hardy northerners of Arnside Knott doing much better than the southern softies. Marbled White and Gatekeeper coped quite well with the 2012 weather, but neither were better than average.

Throughout July I was seeing Red Admiral females at work in the nettle-beds wherever I went, and their subsequent appearance in great numbers during the autumn came as no surprise. As the end of the month approached the Chalkhill Blue started to give indications that an emergence of epic proportions was just around the corner.









Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 12-Oct-12 05:29 PM GMT

Best Of 2012 - August

By far the biggest 'winner' of 2012, of which there were really only two in Sussex, was the Chalkhill Blue. Unprecedented numbers emerged on some sites, with the combined estimate for the peak days at Friston Gallops and Amberley being in excess of 1 million butterflies, at densities of up to 33 per metre square and considerably higher when concentrated at roost. It seems that the soaking summer had allowed atypically profuse growth of lush, nitrogen-rich Horseshoe Vetch plants, capable of supporting a vast number of caterpillars; food-plant availability may well be a major factor in limiting population size in most years. With so many Chalkhill Blues around it was very easy to find aberrant forms and I discovered good numbers of *ab. postcaeca* at Friston (male and female examples below - first and last images). Adventurous males were seen 17.5 miles north of this site, well away from the Downs.

The Adonis Blue, the larva of which has subtly different requirements in terms of Horseshoe Vetch growth form, did not fare so well. A poor first brood was followed by a very patchy second, with only the very best-drained and warmest sites producing good numbers in August. Elsewhere the summer brood was very weak.

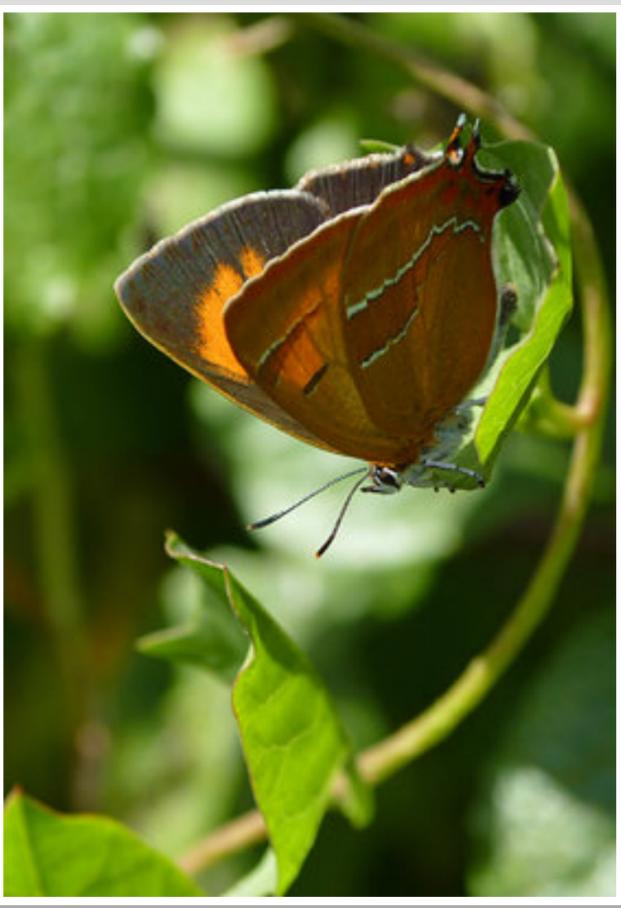
Small Heath did well in the spring but had a poor second brood, while Speckled Wood and Essex Skipper fell just on the wrong side of average. The Peacock had a relatively poor season and the summer brood emerged two weeks later than in recent years, subsequently going into hibernation very quickly.

Both of our late species, the Silver-spotted Skipper and Brown Hairstreak, had quite average seasons, but better weather through their flight periods will have allowed good egg-lays and bodes well for 2013. Warm, anticyclonic conditions may also have assisted colonisation of new sites, so it will be high on my list of priorities next year to look at currently unoccupied habitat patches close to existing populations.









Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 12-Oct-12 07:06 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Some more super shots 😊

My favourites ...

The Meadow Brown from June, the male Chalkhill Blue ab. *postcaeca* from August (weren't they just fabulous), the Grayling pair in cop and male Dark Green Fritillary from July and the female Chequered Skipper from May (maybe next year – fingers crossed). How on earth you managed to find a pristine Peacock (in a photo worthy position AND in a year when there were hardly any around), can only suggest superglue or some element of witchcraft ... 😊

I know it's just another brown butterfly, but knowing how difficult it is to get a really good, well composed shot of a Meadow Brown, even when you might be standing in a field full of thousands, makes it my overall favourite.

Great work.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 12-Oct-12 08:42 PM GMT

Thanks Mark. As always it's a case of being in the right place at the right time. That day (8th August) I got a whole heap of Peacock photos, all of which are better than my previous best (see my August 9th posting for another). In a meadow at the base of Cissbury Ring, above Shepherd's Mead in Findon Valley, there were at least half a dozen Peacocks which clearly had just emerged. There are some very wide, rabbit-nibbled tracks amongst the longer grasses here, with a profusion of thistle and scabious etc along the edges and it was here that I took most shots. As is often the case when looking for a clean background, it helps hugely if the ground is falling away from you, and these days I habitually look for slopes when I'm on a photography mission.

Well worth a visit next year on the way up to the Ring (TQ134067).
BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Freeman, 13-Oct-12 02:59 AM GMT

A great series of posts Neil, and some stunning photos as well 😊

I am very interested in how your experience of the season in Sussex compares with mine in my bit of the Midlands. Common Blues and Small Coppers have had a bad year around here whereas Meadow Browns were well up as were Ringlets at their peak and Silver-washed Fritillaries seemed to be doing at least as well as last year.

White Admiral numbers seemed down again in Warwickshire yet across the border in Worcestershire they appeared to do better, I have no idea why. Also Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries seemed to do well in the Wyre Forest with both species seen in new locations within the forest. Regarding Peacocks, I saw my first summer brood almost 4 weeks later than last year (along with my first second brood Common Blue) and although I saw good numbers at a couple of spots, they were only really about for 2 weeks before disappearing, presumably to hibernate.

Looking forward to your next posts,

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Sussex Kipper

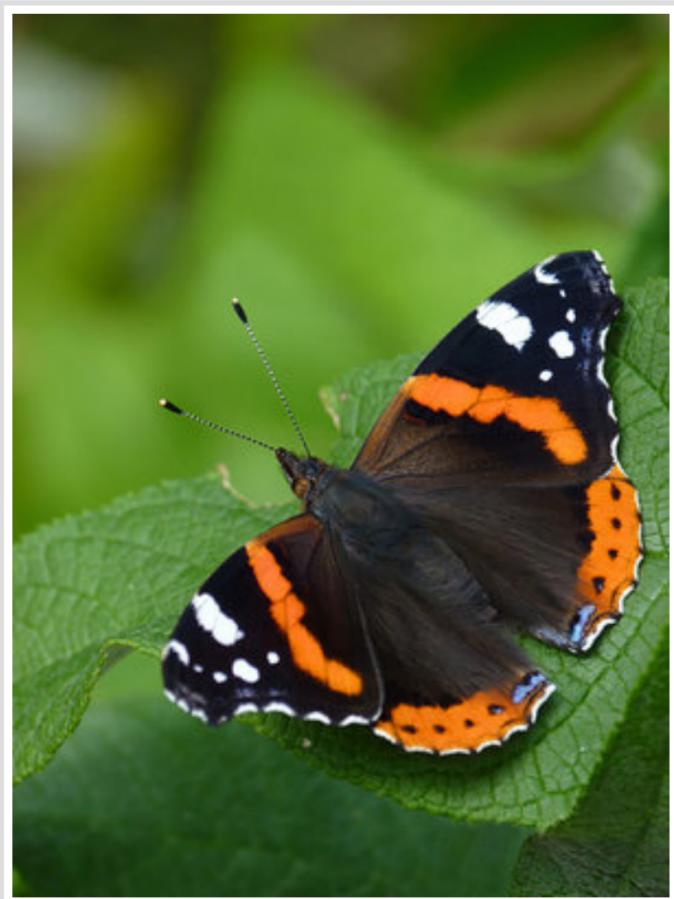
by Neil Hulme, 13-Oct-12 03:48 AM GMT

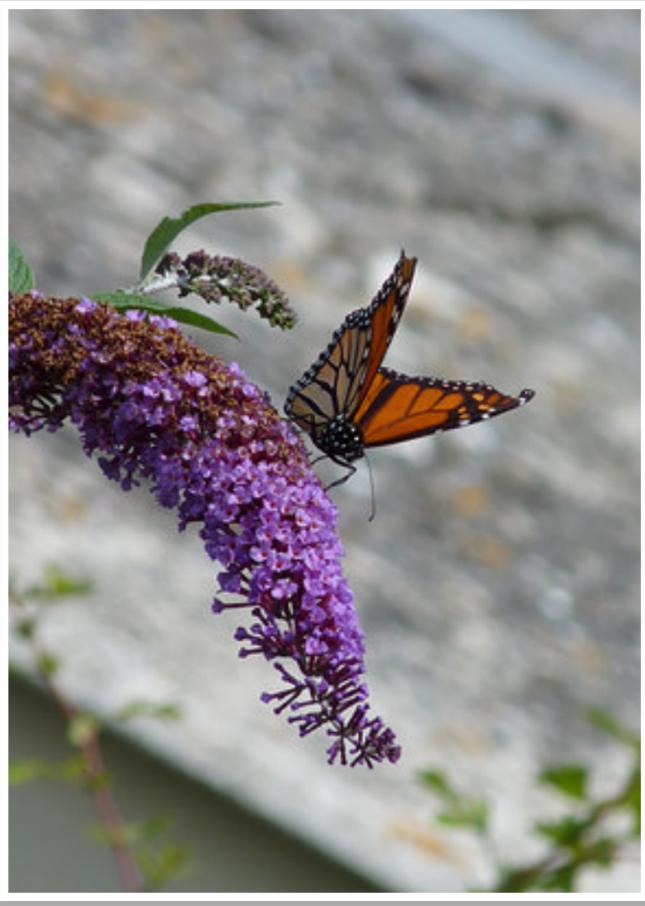
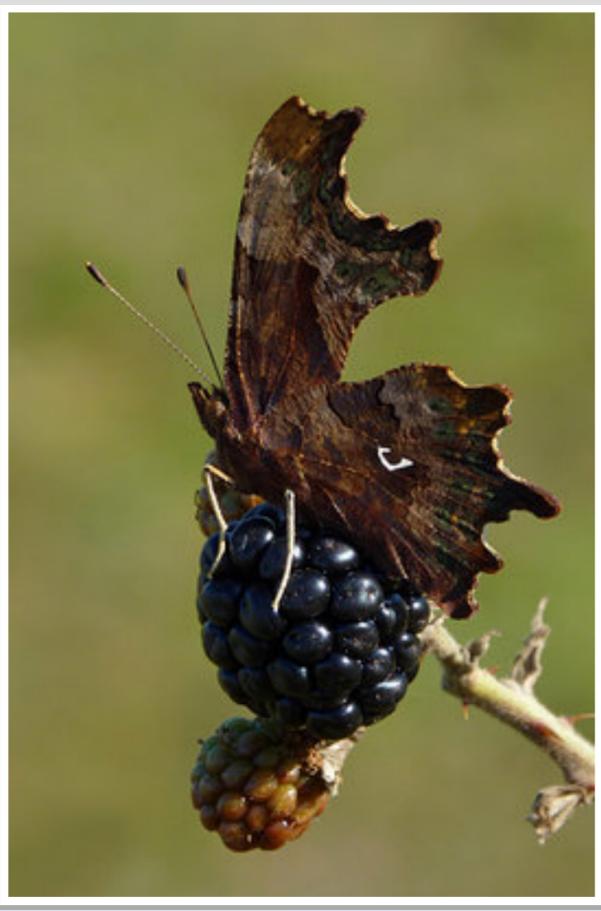
Best Of 2012 – September

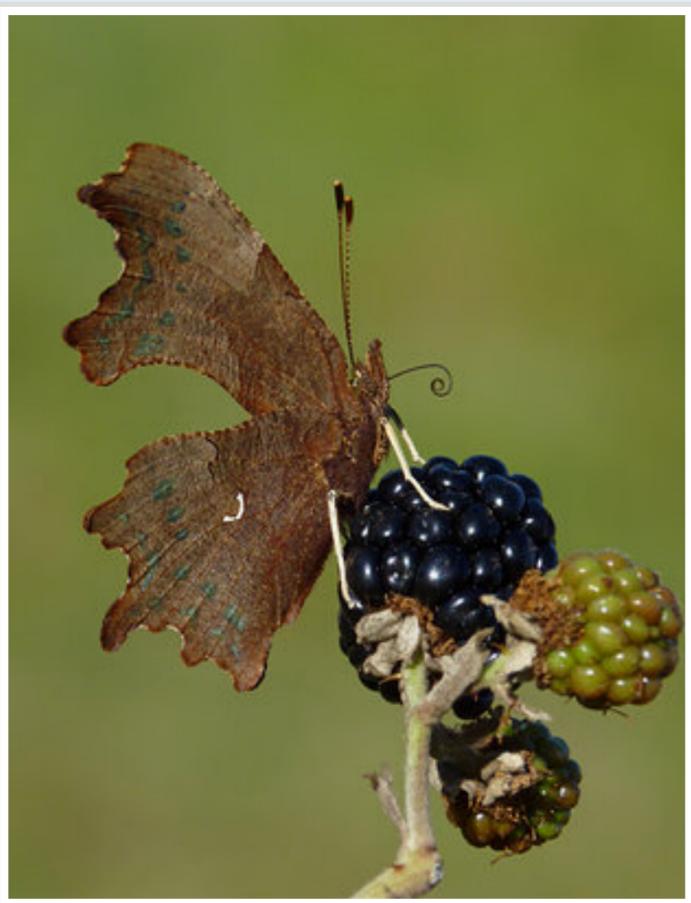
The other 'winner' of 2012 was the beautiful Red Admiral, which even now in mid October is still around in good numbers, although a steady trickle is heading south for the winter. Throughout September almost every sunny patch of flowering ivy and buddleia was covered in freshly emerged butterflies, in numbers better than I remember seeing for a very long time. The best crop, in excess of 1000, was seen at a fruit farm in Ticehurst, where they were feeding on decaying Brighton Belle plums. Also in good numbers was the Comma, following a very average mid summer brood.

After sitting on my hands for a day or two I finally gave in to temptation and headed to Portland to see the magnificent Monarch. This was one of many long journeys I made throughout the 2012 season, but there are always fascinating things to see closer to home. After finding Holly Blue caterpillars in the back garden I then started seeing them on almost every suitable patch of ivy around Worthing town centre. At this time of year the garden shears and clippers tend to come out and many ivy flowers disappear, so in 2013 I will be running a campaign to try and persuade my neighbours to hold off on this aspect of their garden tidy-up for as long as possible.

Looking back on 2012 it was undoubtedly a tough year for butterflies, and species such as the Green Hairstreak and Common Blue suffered their worst seasons I can remember. However, there were some spectacular highlights and a few days I'll never forget. I can't wait for the first Orange Tip of 2013!







Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Oct-12 03:52 AM GMT

Thanks Neil F. Yes, it's always interesting to find out how things vary around the UK. One species I didn't mention in my summary was the White Admiral – another firmly in the 'loser' camp I'm afraid.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by MikeOxon, 13-Oct-12 06:08 AM GMT

A splendid series of reports and photos. I particularly like the last Comma photo, with proboscis in silhouette above the blackberry – a wonderful pose 😊

I hope you have held back the best of the best for the Winter series that Vince Massimo has organised.

Mike

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Oct-12 05:01 PM GMT

Thanks Mike. Plenty more pics in reserve, but the very bestest are being saved for a long-term project, which will take at least one more summer to complete, possibly two.

BWs, Neil

On Saturday (13th October) I spent a very enjoyable day at the Hants & IOW AGM. It was great to see so many friendly faces and I would like to say

'thank you' to Reserves Officer Jayne Chapman for looking after Michael Blencowe and me so well, bearing in mind that we had set off from Sussex without any regard for the need for food and drink between 11 am and 6 pm! It's always nice to hear what's going on over the border and we will be looking at some joint ventures with our neighbours in the future. There was a series of exceptionally good talks and as always Jeremy Thomas was brilliant. I knew that Michael would leave the audience in stitches – he always does. Combining a serious conservation message with such humour is his trademark, and it's unsurprising that he gets asked to talk to so many organisations every winter. Nice to see such a busy UKB stall too.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Oct-12 05:23 PM GMT

Hacking At Heyshott

Winter would be much harder to get through without the hope for the future generated by every work party I attend. Every Wednesday will now be dedicated to further improving on last year's efforts at Heyshott Escarpment. On 10th October I joined UKBers Mark Colvin, Colin Knight, new BC Sussex Branch Chair Nigel Symington and half a dozen Murray Downland Trust volunteers, to hack, slash, rake and burn. The lowest open pit was strimmed and cleared of cuttings, while another team started to work on the currently wooded pits at the very base of the reserve. This area used to be the village rubbish tip, but it will now have a much brighter future. Once all the secondary woodland and heavy scrub has been cleared out, this large bowl will provide a very warm and sheltered home for more Duke of Burgundy. All we need now is a better spring and summer.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by ChrisC, 14-Oct-12 06:27 PM GMT

Michael Blencowe does seem to be a bit of a character. I've never met him but i've listened to all the podcasts he's done on the natural history of sussex <http://thenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> they are very entertaining if you have a few hours to kill over winter.

Chris

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-Oct-12 06:14 AM GMT

Wednesday Work Out

After first setting up a new habitat management project for The Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) on the Norfolk Estate, I headed out to meet the Wednesday regulars at Heyshott Escarpment, including Mark Colvin and Colin Knight. My bones and muscles are still complaining now, after a particularly hard work out. Transformation of the old village rubbish tip is advancing at an impressive pace, as heavy scrub and secondary woodland make way for a return to chalk grassland. This part of the reserve will look very different by springtime. After a few sharp showers the sunshine won through and, as always, the views were magnificent.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Oct-12 11:12 PM GMT

The Ladies Of Lynchmere

In 1998 the Lynchmere Society purchased Lynchmere (Linchmere), Stanley and part of Marley Commons near Haslemere, close to the Sussex/Surrey border. Only remnants of the all-too-rare lowland heath remained here, but 15 years of restoration, much of it performed by volunteers, has reclaimed significant areas of valuable habitat from the invading scrub and unwanted conifer plantation.

On Friday (19th October) I met new LS Chair Judy Rous, Lou Searight and Margaret Hibbard to look at the commons, to assess the habitat for Silver-studded Blue. The last butterfly surveys (2001, 2002) recorded half a dozen here and Judy recalled seeing the odd one or two in 1996. Having walked the area there are several pockets of habitat that might still support SSB. However, before I can provide detailed suggestions on how focused habitat management should proceed with this species in mind, it will be necessary to find out where any remaining populations might be hiding. I will therefore arrange a survey day for next July, later going on to nearby Marley Common, much of which is owned by The National Trust, where two Silver-studs were seen in 2011. All those within striking distance of this under-recorded area will be most welcome and details will appear on the BC Sussex website

in the early summer.

I didn't come away with any photos from my visit, as it never stopped raining, but I am hopeful that some important pins can be put in the map next year. The Lynchmere Society has done a great job here and it would be very satisfying to see their efforts rewarded in this way. Judy, who lives right in the middle of the heath, had a Purple Emperor visit her greenhouse a few years back, so a day out on these commons might provide more than one surprise!

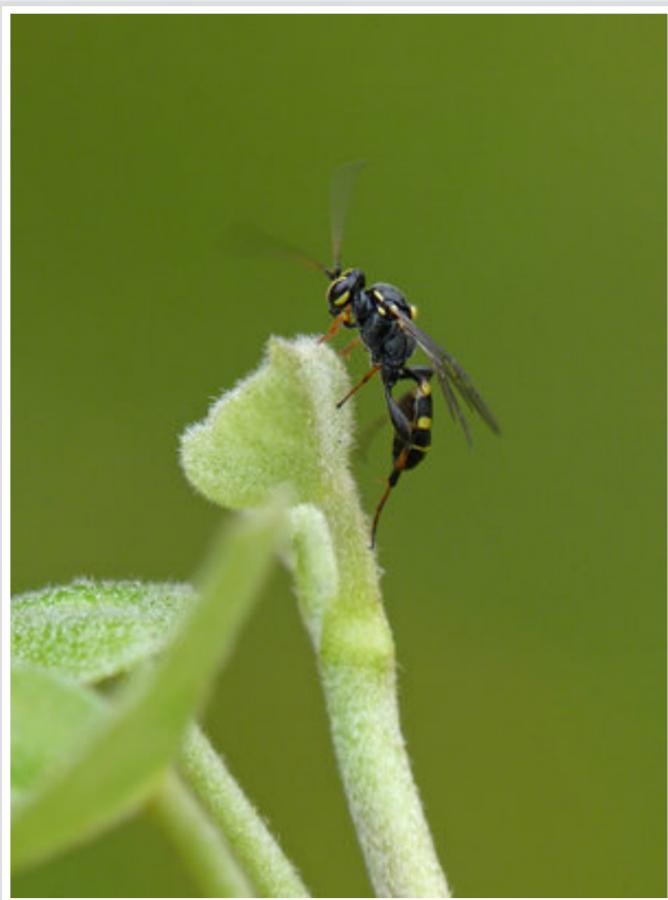


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Oct-12 12:37 AM GMT

Forgotten Images

While searching through a memory card before clearing it, I came across several images which are more interesting than I realised at the time of capture. Back in September, while hunting for Holly Blue larvae in the back garden, I snapped this attractive little wasp. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it's *Listrodomus nyctemerus*, the host-specific ichneumon which parasitises the butterfly's caterpillar.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 26-Oct-12 01:32 AM GMT

Work, Rest And Play

On Wednesday (23rd October) I attended the weekly work party at Heyshott Escarpment, where a dozen of us, including UKBer Mark Colvin, continued to create new butterfly habitat from the old village rubbish tip at the base of the reserve. As you can see from the image below, this once heavily scrubbed area has been opened up and now connects with the lowermost grassy pit. This transformation has been achieved in just four Wednesdays. To the left of the frame is a metal gate, ready for the imminent fencing which will allow this compartment to be grazed in future. With shelter from the elements on all sides this deep depression will create a warm and wind-free playground for Duke of Burgundy, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, Green



In the evening I returned to Heyshott village hall for the Murray Downland Trust AGM. Dr Dan Hoare gave an excellent talk on the BC national 'Dukes on the Edge' project and, quite rightly, paid tribute to the efforts of MDT and BC Sussex volunteers, whose hard work has seen a tiny population of Dukes grow into one of the largest colonies in the UK. Over dinner in the local pub I finally had the opportunity to meet Richard Williamson, son of Henry of 'Tarka the Otter' fame, whose wildlife articles have always been essential reading in my local paper.

This morning (24th October) I received an email from BC Sussex committee member Leigh Prevost, informing me that a handsome male Desert Wheatear was sitting opposite my favourite cafe on Worthing Beach. It didn't take me long to get there. I called Mark to let him know of its presence. It didn't take him long to get there. 😊





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 26-Oct-12 01:54 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Nice!

I love that first shot on the groyne ... 😄😄

Sadly I couldn't get much closer than about 5-6 metres on the shingle but managed to pull a few record shots out of the bag. Rumour has it that it was sitting on your finger at one point!?!

Thanks for the twitch as I missed the last Sussex bird.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 26-Oct-12 04:37 AM GMT

Even to a bird ignoramus like me that looks like a serious 'twitch'.

I've never seen anything even remotely similar.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Oct-12 05:50 AM GMT

Friday Club

This morning (26th October) I joined BC Sussex members Nigel Symington, Mark Colvin and Paul Day and the South Downs National Park 'Friday Club' volunteers to continue habitat management work on the Norfolk Estate. We cleared a sizeable area of hazel scrub which will be planted with a couple of hundred primrose plugs next year. Meanwhile, a contractor used heavy machinery to dig out numerous old tree stumps, to allow for easier 'cut & collect' mowing of the developing grassland area nearby. Thanks to all involved on behalf of the Duke of Burgundy.



I later visited Heyshott Escarpment with Hannah and her parents. It wasn't the best of weather to show them around, but even on a damp and misty autumn day it's a stunningly beautiful place.

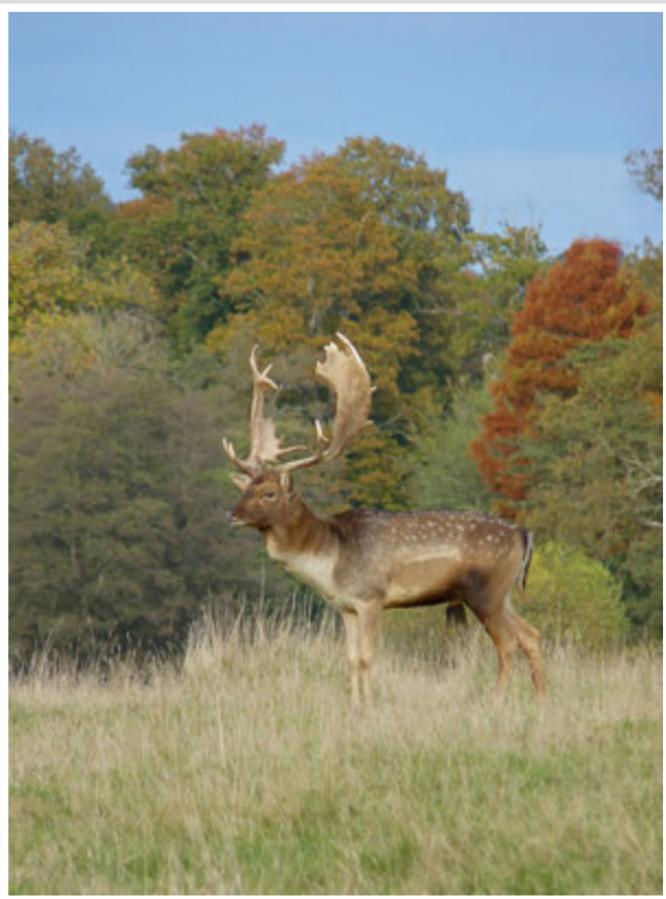


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 31-Oct-12 03:25 AM GMT

A Fine Pair

This afternoon (30th October) I took a long walk around Petworth Park in pleasant sunshine. Although I saw a couple of Red Admiral heading south, it was the rutting fallow deer I had come to see. As always they were putting on a good show. Well worth a visit at this time of year.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 31-Oct-12 05:10 AM GMT

Great photos, Kipper. The deer at Petworth are always the stars for me. Do you know if the white deer is still there? If you stand down wind of the stags at the moment they smell so musky!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-12 05:24 AM GMT

Thanks Susie. I haven't seen a fully white one in the last year or so, although there are one or two very pale individuals.

"If you stand down wind of the stags at the moment they smell so musky!" Ahh, the great smell of Brut. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-12 05:49 AM GMT

Rapid Progress

On Wednesday (31st October) I joined the Murray Downland Trust volunteers at Heyshott Escarpment for the weekly work party. With the assistance of a couple of contractors and machinery, progress has been very rapid this autumn, and the clearance nothing short of spectacular. In addition to the benefits to wildlife, the improvements are also aesthetic and we are creating some spectacular vistas around the reserve. Huge specimen beech trees now stand proud in areas formerly obscured by dense scrub, some perched high on the recently exposed topography. It will be even more of a pleasure walking around the place next spring.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-Nov-12 06:42 PM GMT

Parasitoids Of The Green Hairstreak

In June 2011 my brother Mark was photographing Silver-studded Blue butterflies on his home patch in Belgium, when he noticed a Green Hairstreak caterpillar feeding on a developing flower-head of Cross-leaved Heath (first image). He went on to find another seven over the next few days and attempted to rear them through. It turned out that most had been parasitised. Soon after he collected one of the smallest caterpillars, it stopped feeding, became completely inert and a single parasitoid larva pupated just outside its shrivelled skin, forming a distinctive black and white cocoon. The second image is of a similar cocoon that he found in the wild, while searching for the caterpillars. This belongs to a braconid wasp of an as yet unidentified species. He kept a specimen of the wasp but it will be a while before he can find/photograph it, as he and family are currently moving house.

It's not easy being a Green Hairstreak caterpillar. He soon discovered that a second parasitoid was busy at work on the same batch of larvae. We suspect that this is the host-specific tachinid fly *Cadurciella tritaeniata*. He carefully picked off eggs that were stuck to a couple of the hairstreak caterpillars, and in the first image there are several eggs attached to the flower-head. Sticking eggs to caterpillars and laying them on the food-plant, so they either become attached to the host or are eaten, are two of the strategies employed by tachinids. A typical fly maggot subsequently erupted from each of three moribund hairstreak caterpillars (third image). The flies all rapidly pupated (fourth image) and went on to hatch soon after. Again, he kept a specimen of the tachinid, which he hopes to unearth in the future.

Of the other hairstreak larvae, two survived to produce 'singing' pupae that made a clearly audible scratching sound when disturbed. You can hardly blame them for bursting into song if they manage to survive for this long.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Trev Sawyer, 03-Nov-12 07:40 PM GMT

*"First I was afraid that I was parasitised
(kept thinkin' I could never live with maggots deep inside).
But then I spent so many nights thinkin' maybe I was wrong
and I grew strong ... and I learned how to sing along..."*

I'll get my coat 🧥

Trev

Great photos and highly informative as usual Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-Nov-12 07:49 PM GMT

Love it Trev. You've really made that song your own.
BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Paul Harfield, 04-Nov-12 05:42 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

It's not easy being a Green Hairstreak caterpillar. He soon discovered that a second parasitoid was busy at work on the same batch of larvae. We suspect that this is the host-specific tachinid fly *Cadurciella tritaeniata*. He carefully picked off eggs that

were stuck to a couple of the hairstreak caterpillars, and in the first image there are several eggs attached to the flower-head. Sticking eggs to caterpillars and laying them on the food-plant, so they either become attached to the host or are eaten, are two of the strategies employed by tachinids. A typical fly maggot subsequently erupted from each of three moribund hairstreak caterpillars (third image). The flies all rapidly pupated (fourth image) and went on to hatch soon after. Again, he kept a specimen of the tachinid

Hi Sussex Kipper

I reared through a few Speckled Wood mostly from eggs, collected at the end of September 2011. I also found a couple of early instar larvae at the time which I also reared through. I was able to keep tabs on these two larvae. They both reached pupation but became noticeably lethargic as they grew compared to those which I had reared from eggs. Both produced similar looking fly pupae to those shown in your last photo. The parasitic maggot emerged from both a day or so after pupation.

With regret I did not think it important enough to record the event or to save the resulting parasitic pupae for identification, I did not really consider the importance at the time 😞 If I get the opportunity again I will certainly record it properly.

Love reading your excellent diary by the way. I have learned a lot from it over the last year or so 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Nov-12 11:50 PM GMT

Many thanks Jack. The longer I have studied butterflies, and the deeper I have delved into their autecology, the more fascinating they have become. This certainly includes their intimate relationship with parasitoids. Those who were lucky enough to hear Jeremy Thomas talk on "Butterflies, Ants and Parasitoids" at the Hants & IOW AGM will know just how phenomenally sophisticated some of these relationships are. Rates of parasitism are quite high in many species, so I'm sure you will have adequate opportunity to have a closer look next time. Be sure to post your findings on UKB!

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-Nov-12 04:03 AM GMT

Meeting On The Downs

My Wednesdays are usually spent getting my hands dirty at Heyshott, but sometimes conservation activities are a little cleaner, which is good news for our over-worked washing machine. Yesterday (7th November) I gave a talk to the South Downs National Park Authority Members, on conservation of the Duke of Burgundy across the Park and specifically around Chanctonbury Ring, as part of a much wider Nature Improve Area (NIA) project. It makes a nice change when there's a bit of money around to support these larger scale initiatives. Richard Goring of the Wiston Estate also gave an inspiring talk on the Steyning Downland Scheme, a community-led project on his family's land.

After the morning presentations we took to the Downs, first meeting a large team of volunteers working at Washington Pits. We then moved on to the summit of Chanctonbury Ring, to talk to a local farmer who will be involved in the conservation grazing of the north-facing slopes, once the extensive scrub-cutting has been completed. As always it was sad to hear a sheep farmer talking about the half-a-dozen or more dog attacks on his livestock each year; unfortunately there is more than just a "tiny minority" of dog owners who make the village idiot look like a genius, as these statistics are only average across large swathes of our countryside.

After lunch the SDNPA Members moved on to see the Steyning Downland Scheme 'in the flesh'. For me it was another meeting, this time with a West Sussex County Council Ranger I've known for many years. If all the plans we collectively have for Springhead Hill come to fruition, this site will continue to go from strength to strength.

Later in the day I was rather concerned to hear that Mark Colvin had taken a knock at the Heyshott work party. Fortunately his collision with a tree stump only broke the tree, so he is sore, bruised, but in one piece.



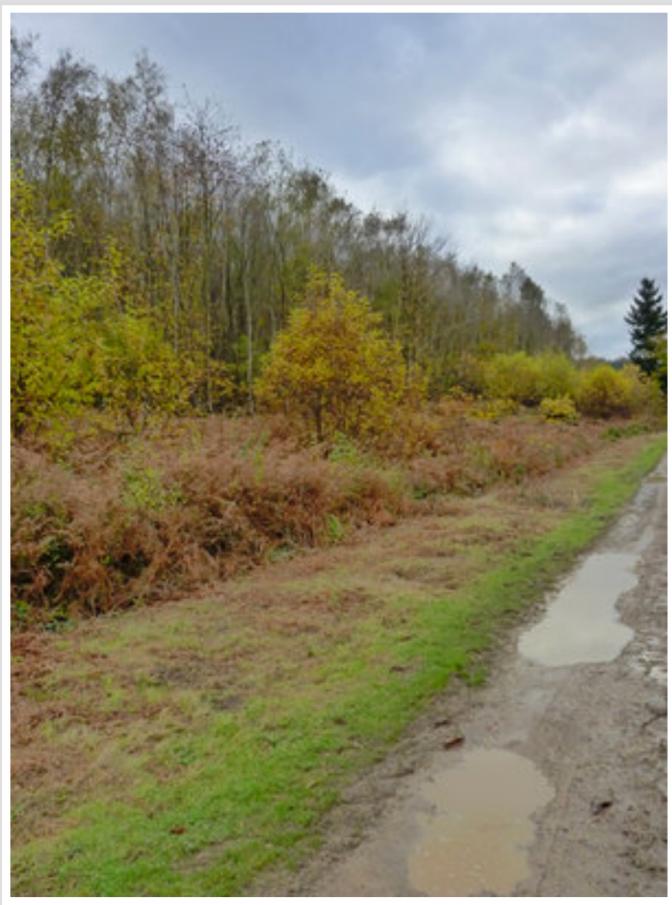


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-Nov-12 04:58 PM GMT

Terra Nova

On Thursday (8th November) I attended a work party in some woods on the Cowdray Estate to the south of Fernhurst. It's the first time I've ever visited this site, which is slightly off my usual patch. I've long been aware of a small but strategically important colony of Pearl-bordered Fritillary here, which was saved from extinction in about 2007 by the intervention of local South Downs National Park (formerly SD Joint Committee) staff and Dr Dan Hoare of Butterfly Conservation. This is a good example of where the efforts of just a couple of individuals, now supported by volunteers from the Midhurst area, have made a huge difference to the fortunes of one of our rarer species. Without the help of such dedicated people these PBF would have gone the same way as so many other colonies in this part of the UK, particularly as there is only a small area of sweet chestnut habitat available amongst a vast blanket of commercial conifer. Every hour of assistance at work parties around the UK makes a huge difference to the butterflies which we all enjoy watching and photographing every summer. By early afternoon a 50 – 60 m strip of coppice had been cut. It was gratifying to hear how maximum daily counts have risen from 2 to more than 30.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-12 02:31 AM GMT

Autumn Gold

Today (9th November) I joined South Downs National Park and BC Sussex volunteers for another work party at Rewell Wood on the Norfolk Estate. We continued opening up an area of overgrown hazel coppice and will probably complete this particular task with one more visit. Apart from the excellent company, today was notable for the beautiful autumn colours. I always think that beech woods look their very best at this time of year, especially if the sun is shining. The Red Admiral which swooped down to have a look at us was an added bonus.

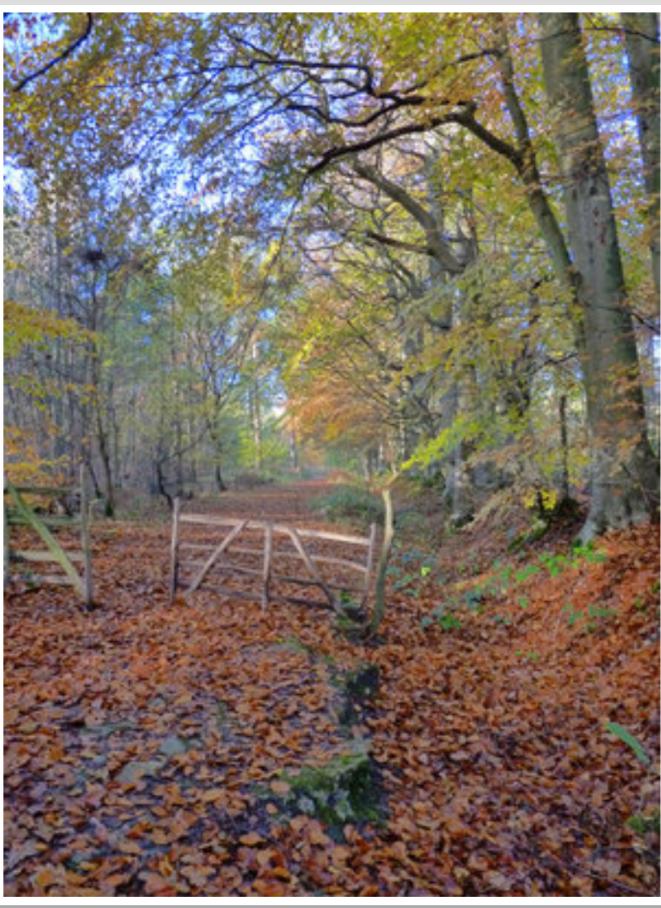


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 12-Nov-12 01:31 AM GMT

Rowland Looking Good

This morning (11th November) I joined a large group of volunteers for the monthly work party at the BC Rowland Wood Reserve. The regulars turn out on the second Sunday of every month through the late autumn and winter, come rain or shine. Today it was definitely a case of shine, and the reserve looked stunning draped in vivid autumn colours. Huge areas of dense conifer have now been cleared by contractors, and the woods look better with every visit. Today we hauled, chopped and burned conifer brash, only pausing to observe a minute's silence at 11 am. After the disastrous summer it will probably be 2014 before butterflies really get going here, but when they do Rowland will become one of the best woodland sites in the South East.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Nov-12 05:46 PM GMT

Wildland Revisited

On Wednesday (13th November) I attended another meeting of the Wildland Advisory Group on Sir Charlie Burrell's Knepp Castle Estate (<http://www.knepp.co.uk>), where a ground-breaking rewilding scheme has been running since 2001. These meetings are always very interesting, particularly as they involve so many ecologists with very different areas of expertise. On this occasion the event focused on the work of Frans Vera (third from left), who believes that the primeval lowland forests of Europe had an open 'woodland pasture' structure, driven by the grazing and browsing action of large herbivores such as tarpan, European bison and red deer. This idea conflicts with the more established model of an extensive, closed-canopy forest. These varied theories obviously have major implications for a project which aims to restore a more natural landscape.

This year I took over the surveying and monitoring of butterflies across the project area and, despite the dismal weather, have already started to see some interesting patterns beginning to emerge (Transect data goes back to 2005 and casual records to 1995). Perhaps the highlight of the year for me was the sight of a male Purple Emperor gliding over a formerly arable field. Equally satisfying was the discovery of three Brown Hairstreak eggs, immediately after taking the image below. These were on the first blackthorn sucker I examined, which bodes well for the egg survey planned for this winter.



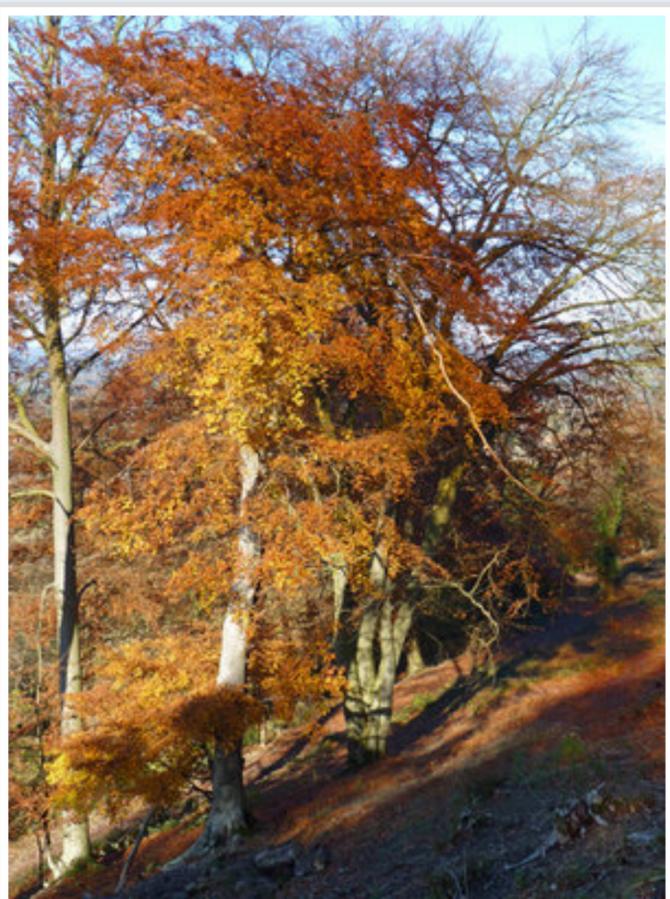
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Nov-12 10:56 PM GMT

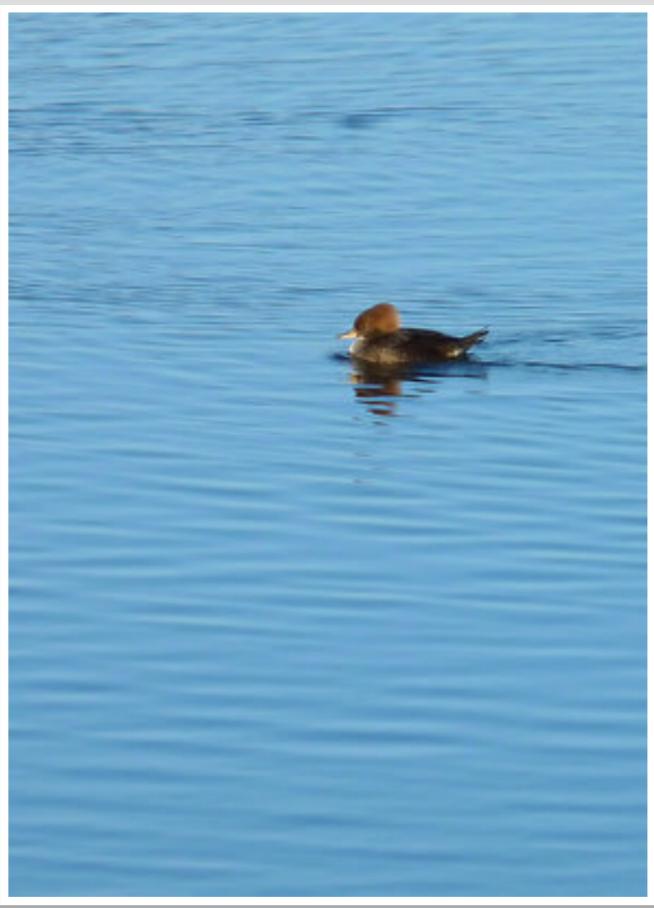
Yellow And Copper

On Wednesday (14th November) I attended the weekly work party at Heyshott Escarpment, where progress continues at an impressive pace. I met Mark Colvin on the way up to the site, although his recent injury has (very sensibly) prevented him from re-joining the labour force just yet. I'm sure I'll feel equally guilty for missing the next couple of sessions myself, from the comfort of a Canarian sun-bed 😎.

With the exception of Red Admirals, I suspect I saw my last butterfly of 2012 while we took a coffee break. Although a common species, and viewed from a great distance, the male Brimstone which was fluttering high around the canopy of the magnificent beech trees pictured below was one of the season's highlights for me. The colour combination of lemon yellow and burnished copper was as spectacular a sight as anything I've seen this year ... simply stunning.



Colin Knight and I decided the day was just too perfect to head home after downing tools. So we headed to Pagham Harbour to twitch the female Hooded Merganser which has been in residence for a week or two. Expert opinion (not ours!) is that this bird is a good'un, rather than the more usual escapes from wildfowl collections.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by hilary, 16-Nov-12 08:14 PM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

On Wednesday (13th November) I attended another meeting of the Wildland Advisory Group on Sir Charlie Burrell's Knepp Castle Estate (<http://www.knepp.co.uk>), where a ground-breaking rewilding scheme has been running since 2001. These meetings are always very interesting, particularly as they involve so many ecologists with very different areas of expertise. On this occasion the event focused on the work of Frans Vera (third from left), who believes that the primeval lowland forests of Europe had an open 'woodland pasture' structure, driven by the grazing and browsing action of large herbivores such as tarpan, European bison and red deer. This idea conflicts with the more established model of an extensive, closed-canopy forest. These varied theories obviously have major implications for a project which aims to restore a more natural landscape.

I found this very interesting. It does fit in so well with what Butterfly Conservation and other Conservation groups are doing by controlling reserves by way of grazing with ponies and cattle to restrict the growth of scrub and then woodland. Given that after the last 'Ice Age' receded we (as hunters) followed the herds of wild ponies, cattle and deer into what became Britain, it does make sense that there must have been decent amounts of grazing to sustain them and us until we changed to farming and began to totally control the landscape and replaced the wild grazers with domesticated ones (except deer and apparently the Exmoor pony may have escaped 'improvement').

I find it easier to believe (and somehow more comforting!) that all the UKs non-forest species didn't have to wait until we began clearing the forests, for their existence.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 17-Nov-12 10:40 PM GMT

You wrote:

On Thursday (8th November) I attended a work party in some woods on the Cowdray Estate to the south of Fernhurst.

As I've mentioned before Neil, some 40 years ago I used to enjoy a strong colony of PB Frits just seven kilometres further south from your "Terra Nova". Doubtless that whole area abounded with PB Frits in the middle of the last century. Keep up the good work and you never know what might be achieved.

Wet here again on Mull (surprise surprise). A leaking roof enables me to estimate the rate of rainfall by counting the drips as they plop into the bucket. The "tame" roofer says it can't be repaired until it stops raining. I moved to Mull well aware that it rains occasionally here 🚫🔍 but indoor precipitation was not in the plans. Still I can watch the Hooded Crows out the window of my "den" - very smart birds (but not loved by the farmers)

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-Nov-12 07:16 PM GMT

Hi Hilary,

You might find this of interest http://www.nhbs.com/wilderness_in_europ..._58846.html, also referencing an earlier work by Frans Vera.

Hi Jack,

Even as recently as the late 1970s/early 1980s the PBF was found in almost every suitable woodland clearing in this part of Sussex. Of the many things we have lost, the shocking decline of this species is particularly lamentable.

I imagine winters will be quite tough up there ... but I know from my time living in Scotland that the spring weather can make the West Coast and Isles one of the best places to be on the planet. Hope the roof gets sorted soon.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-Nov-12 08:11 PM GMT

BC AGM And Members Day

On Saturday (17th November) I attended the BC National AGM and Members Day at the Nottingham Belfry Hotel. I always enjoy these events as they provide a welcome opportunity to catch up with BC staff and volunteers, many of whom have become good friends over the years. David Dennis (Chair of BC) and Bill Bacon (Chair of East Midlands Branch) both did a fantastic job in providing us with a highly entertaining day, with the support of a great many local branch members and Manor Yard staff.

As always the talks were fantastic, but a highlight for me is always the period put aside to recognise the contribution made by branch volunteers, all of which have given huge amounts of time to the cause, often over much of their adult lifetime. This year the Role of Honour included David Redhead, Dr Bernard Watts, Dr Guy Meredith, Steven Palmer and Gordon Mackie. However, I was particularly pleased to see a much-deserved award go to Bob Foreman of the Sussex Branch (far left). Much of Bob's work goes on behind the scenes, and with great modesty, but the branch could not have grown so rapidly in recent years without his huge contribution. Congratulations to all six.

This year, recipients of the Marsh Christian Trust Awards included Dr Phil Sterling and Prof Christer Wiklund. Christer could not attend, but some of his short videos of tits (being terrorised by butterflies) were most entertaining, raising a collective titter. The Marsh Award for Promotion of Lepidoptera went to Patrick Barkham – a very popular choice.

There were some excellent stalls to browse during the break, including firm favourites such as the artwork of Richard Lewington. The exceptional quality and beauty of Richard's paintings never ceases to amaze, and always causes a twitching of the wallet. I resisted, at least for now, the magnificent Monarch pictured below.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Nov-12 02:55 AM GMT

BC Sussex AGM

Although I shall miss the event myself (just off for two weeks in the sun 😎), I can recommend the BC Sussex AGM this coming Saturday 24th November. Official business is always handled at maximum velocity, leaving plenty of time for THREE great speakers. Dr Dan Hoare from BC HQ, Dr Dan Danahar (BC Sussex) and the legendary Sgt. Blencowe will make it a highly entertaining event. If you're within striking distance of the Adastra Hall in Hassocks you really should consider going. More at <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings.html>

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 21-Nov-12 06:14 AM GMT

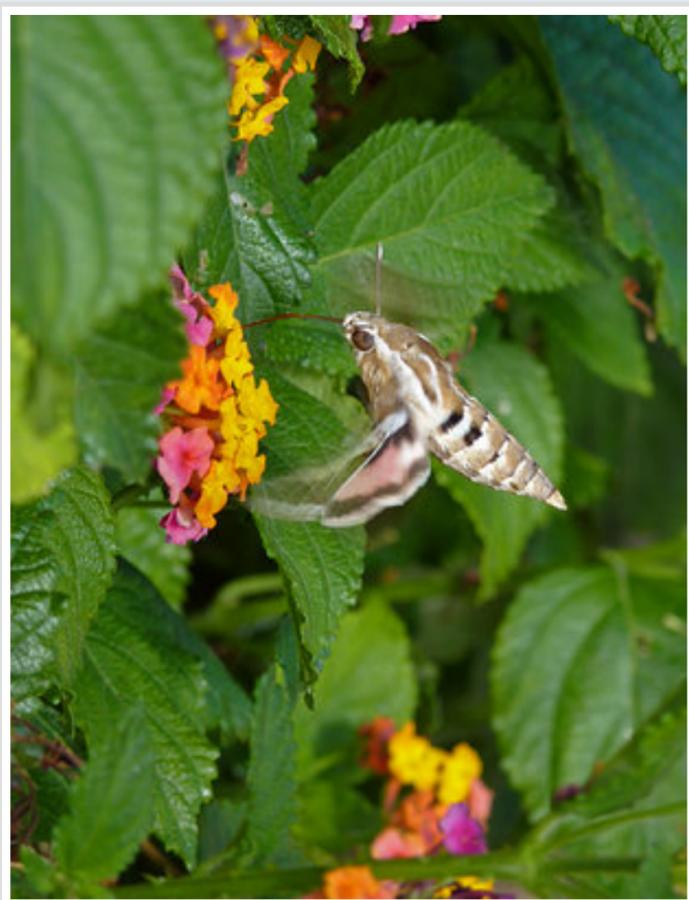
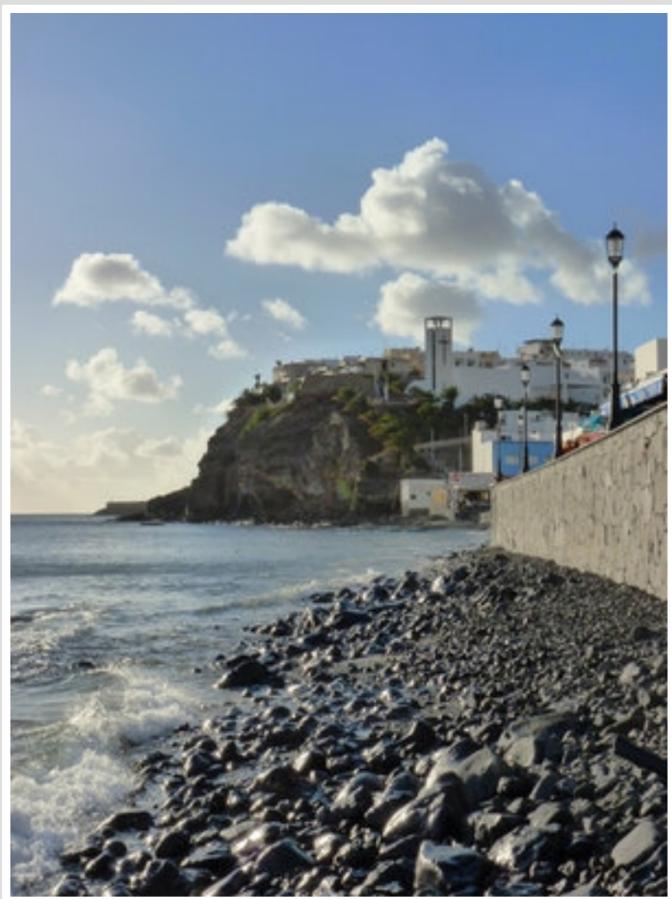
I'll be there. Disappointed to miss you but hope you have a lovely holiday. Hope to see you next year when the orange tips roam the lanes of my neck of the woods again 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

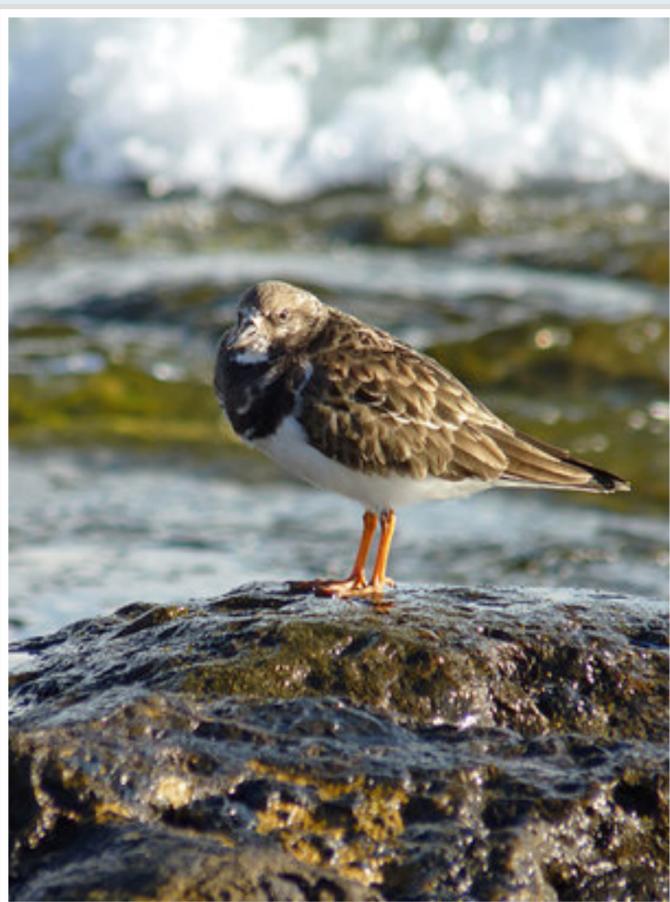
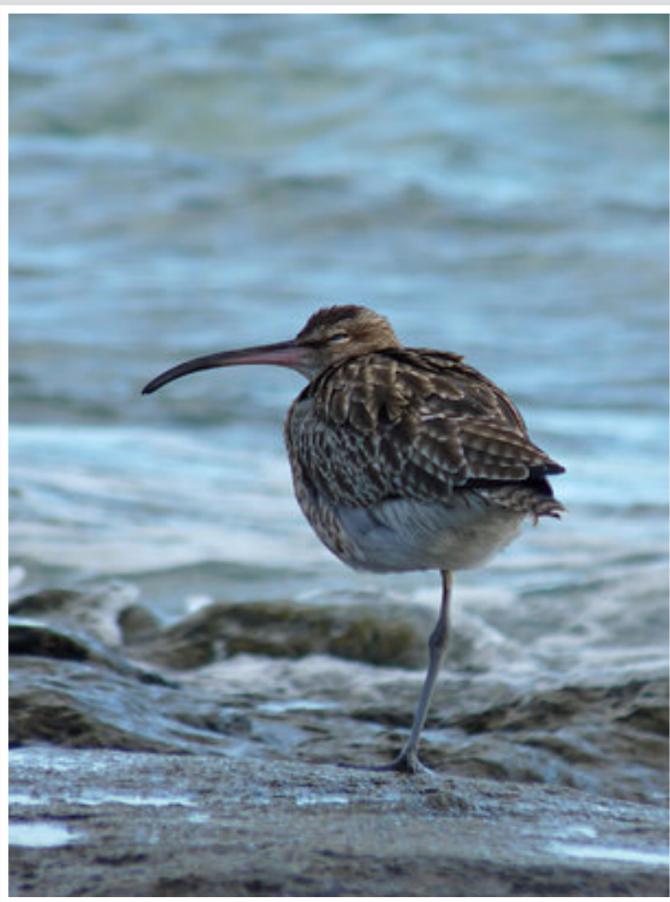
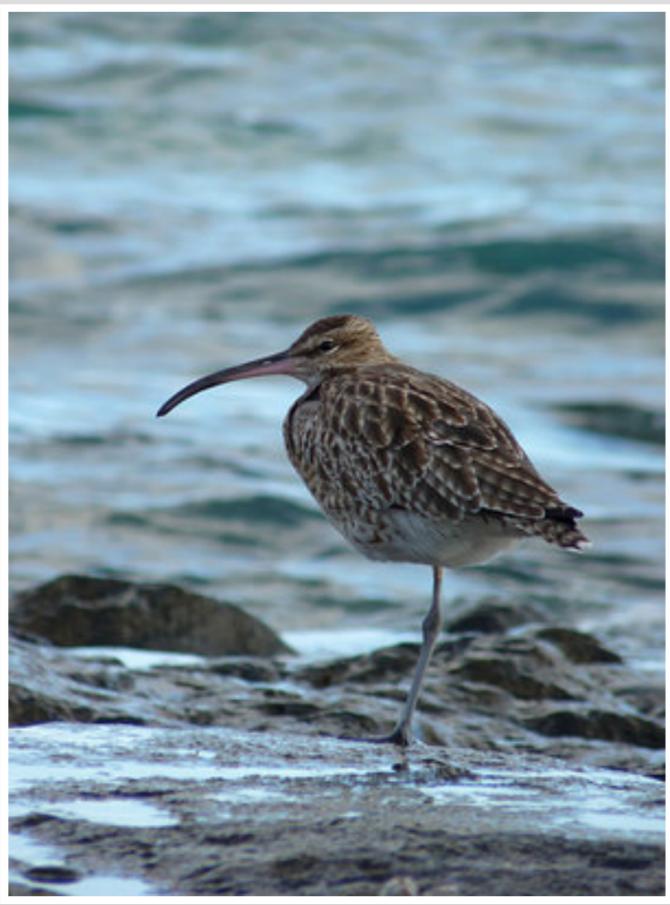
by Neil Hulme, 07-Dec-12 12:46 AM GMT

Fuerteventura 2012

I've just returned from a couple of hot and sunny weeks on our favourite Canary Island, Fuerteventura. As always we headed to the far south of the island, to the quiet resort of Morro Jable. Butterfly interest was quite limited, but we did see at least one Monarch most days, and Hannah managed to get a fantastic photograph of one while out on her own (to be published once the pain has subsided and she takes the camera back to her parent's house for downloading). Other species included the usual Geranium Bronze, Greenish Black-tip, Painted Lady etc, although there were far fewer around than during previous visits. The best image I managed was a record shot of a Striped Hawkmoth.



The birdlife was rather more obliging and I managed to get some reasonable shots of Whimbrel and Turnstone.



Even more confiding was a Little Egret, which allowed a very close approach while it hunted lizards along a dry stone wall. It was highly efficient at picking these off, sometimes at a rate of one every few minutes. This bird was equally oblivious to the African Ground Squirrels which scurried around

its legs.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Rogerdodge, 07-Dec-12 12:55 AM GMT

Neil

Your Little Egret looks like a Cattle Egret to me.

Lovely photos as usual.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Dec-12 01:22 AM GMT

You're right Roger (also got a nudge from Mark C) – Little Egret has black beak and upper legs. Was still in UK mode!

Ta, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 07-Dec-12 01:47 AM GMT

But Cattle Egrets are apparently on the verge of colonising Britain so we will all get confused in the future. Not so here on Mull – no Egrets so far but Herons in far greater numbers than "down south".

By the way Neil, I loved your PE broadcast with Matthew. You two make an excellent double act. TV next?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-Dec-12 05:47 PM GMT

Thanks Jack. It would be great to get the opportunity to do more with Matthew.
Hope you're settling in to life up/out there. Have you taken a ride on Edie McCredie's bus yet?
BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Dec-12 02:20 AM GMT

Winter Wonderland

Heyshott Escarpment looked spectacular this morning, blanketed in a heavy hoar frost that persisted all day. However, the biting cold did not deter the hardy volunteers of the Murray Downland Trust and BC Sussex, and another old chalk pit was cleared of scrub. Although the reserve appeared lifeless today, it is simply in a state of deep slumber and in five months time will be buzzing with insect life.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 16-Dec-12 02:11 AM GMT

Beautiful photos.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Goldie M, 16-Dec-12 09:18 PM GMT

Like I said to Mark you've got to do Christmas Cards with those Shots Goldie M 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Dec-12 09:46 PM GMT

Thanks Susie and Goldie. Heyshott is a great place for landscape photography at all times of the year. The first shot has already been earmarked for a Christmas card.

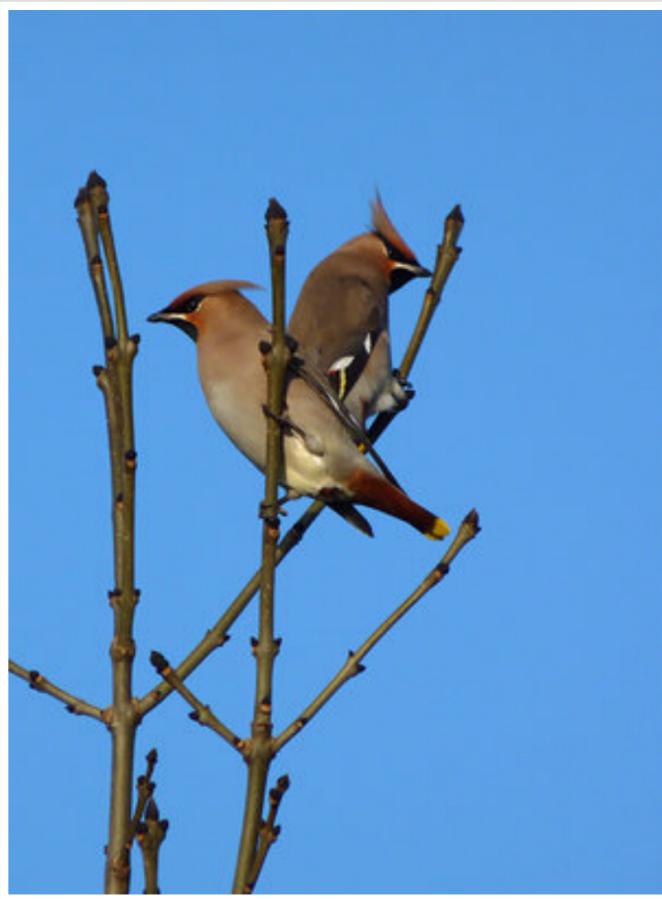
BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Dec-12 11:52 PM GMT

Waxwings

Nothing to report on the butterfly front, and it might be some time before that changes! In the meantime here are a few shots of the gorgeous Waxwings currently hanging around Tesco in Lewes, near the mini roundabout at the southern end of Mayhew Way. The previously reported 4 turned into 6 late this morning. As always, very confiding and a joy to watch.



by Jack Harrison, 22-Dec-12 02:13 AM GMT

Sussex Kipper re Waxwings:

The previously reported 4 turned into 6 late this morning.

And I never knew that they bred at this time of year 😡

The winter solstice and come and gone and we're still here despite the doomsayers. So the days are getting longer now. However, the latest sunrise isn't for another ten days or so – earliest sunset was about a week ago so evening already pulling out. (This is slightly dependent on latitude). I do understand the reasons for this but Guy being the professional teacher will no doubt explain more succinctly than I can. (Equation of Time and all that). Sorry Guy!

Lovely pics by the way Neil

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Colvin, 22-Dec-12 03:44 AM GMT

Nice work Neil,

Particularly the first shot ... 😄😄😄

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 22-Dec-12 05:42 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

The winter solstice and come and gone and we're still here despite the doomsayers. So the days are getting longer now. However, the latest sunrise isn't for another ten days or so – earliest sunset was about a week ago so evening already pulling out. (This is slightly dependent on latitude). I do understand the reasons for this but Guy being the professional teacher will no doubt explain more succinctly than I can. (Equation of Time and all that).

I wish I understood the reasons too! Latest sunset here in Swansea was on 12th December but the latest sunrise isn't till 4th January. So, at the moment the evenings are getting ever so slightly lighter and the mornings ever so slightly darker.

Interesting that the Waxwings are still here. No significant frost likely prior to 2013 so why are they all still hanging about?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 22-Dec-12 06:03 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

so why are they all still hanging about?

Because they ate all the food in the north on their journey southwards 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by MikeOxon, 22-Dec-12 06:34 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

I wish I understood the reasons too!

During the year, the earth spins 364 times on its axis; the additional day is due to the orbit around the sun, thus giving 365 days a year (in round numbers – the spin and rotation aren't quite in an exact ratio). What this means is that by sunset each day, the earth has moved some distance along its orbit around the sun compared with its location at dawn. This movement contributes a small part of the annual orbital day. It is this movement which causes sunrise and sunset times to be slightly out of sync.

Mike

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Dec-12 06:37 AM GMT

Thanks Jack and Mark. They certainly made my day. 😊

David: Susie is correct. Waxwings are driven west and south in the search for food (which can be a function of the weather). This year the crop of rowan (and other) berries has been very poor, pushing them from place to place as they clear the meagre harvest along the way.

BWs, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 22-Dec-12 04:30 PM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Waxwings are driven west and south in the search for food

BWs, Neil

Which is why they've gone to Tesco!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 22-Dec-12 04:51 PM GMT

Waxwing apparently often turn up in shrubberies at Tesco Stores. Perhaps a Waxwing could be used in Tesco advertising.

No Tesco on Mull. However, an Otter is occasionally seen swimming in the bay outside the Tobermory Co-Op. New Co-Op logo?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Dec-12 05:58 PM GMT

Top Ten Waxwing Service Providers

On New Year's Eve 2008 Julian Hughes (RSPB Conwy) published an amusing article ('Mum's gone to Finland') on the excellent BirdGuides website, providing a top ten breakdown of the retailer store car parks which had hosted waxwings. The full article can be found here <http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=1527> At that time his extensive market research revealed that "*Asda lies in third place, with Waxwings seen in 26 of their 356 car parks ...*" However, the consumer can be fickle, and Asda may since have either gained or lost ground on the then-market-leader, Morrisons.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by essexbuzzard, 23-Dec-12 04:56 AM GMT

Those waxwing pics were great, Neil, im jealous. A great find, too-or did someone tell you they were there?

I would like to see some too, and they have been reported in Essex, but i am yet to track any down. 😊