

johnv

by johnv, 05-Mar-12 08:44 PM GMT

OK, I need to start a diary. Not sure I will be able to be as regular as others due to many other commitments but I will try to record most of my expeditions this year.

Only managed to get out for my first butterfly trip this year on 1st March and then only for an hour and a half. It was at my 'local' - Southampton Old Cemetery (see below) a short 10 minute walk away.

And, my first of the year, a solitary Red Admiral. Not in too good a nick, guess it managed to get through winter as an adult. Despite a few nectar sources being available, it was quite content to just bask on the headstones.



Red Admiral - 01/03/2012 Southampton Old Cemetery

This time of year is so good for the spirits. Winter now behind us and spring flora starting to burst through. Spring Crocus, Wild Daffodils, Primrose, Lesser Celandine, Greater Periwinkle, *Pulmonaria saccharata* all adding colour together with Alpine Squill, Snowdrops and Hazel not yet finished. Yews shedding pollen so profusely it looks like smoke and the first of the Prunus trees already well in flower - the Purple-leaved Cherry-plum, *Prunus cerasifera* "Pissardii". And, things can only get better - until autumn at least.



01/03/2012 - Southampton Old Cemetery



SOUTHAMPTON OLD CEMETERY

An introduction to this little city-enclosed paradise. It consists of 11 hectares (27 acres) of Victorian council owned cemetery, opened in 1846. All burial plots had been used by the 1910's; gradually over the following decades it became less manicured and more wild. Following a public consultation in the late 1980's it has been managed since 1990 by a regime "aimed at preserving the character of the existing flora and fauna".



Southampton Old Cemetery

Originally hived off from Southampton Common, much of the woodland stream valley remains to the west (although the stream itself was diverted underground) with several big old Oaks remaining. To the east the acidic soils produce a heath-type environment with Ling & Bell Heather thriving. In the centre is an area of maintained grassland, originally much grazed when part of the Common (since kept as such by scythe, strimmer and volunteer sapling removal) and is home to many huge Yellow Meadow Ant mounds – fast-food restaurants for Green Woodpeckers. Over 300 species of flora are present including quite a few feral exotics and non-native conifers.



Southampton Old Cemetery

I have been walking a transect there since 2006. So far 24 species recorded, plus another 2 off-transect. Species with an Annual Index regularly exceeding 100 are Speckled Wood, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Ringlet; although the MW and MB have both had a very poor last couple of years. Holly Blue and Small/Essex Skippers also reach 100 in good years.



southampton Old Cemetery

The cemetery and adjoining Common are completely surrounded by urban sprawl making it difficult for several species to arrive/depart. The territory would be suitable for Small Heath, for example, but alas the nearest populations are over 10 km away and they have yet to make it through.



southampton Old Cemetery

The friends-group for the cemetery has a good website to which I have contributed the wildlife page and photos - <http://fosoc.org/the-cemetery/wildlife/> Some of the photos shown above are from Gillie Dunkason of the friends-group. I hope to keep updating the butterfly situation in the cemetery as I progress with the transect this year.

Re: johnv

by hilary, 05-Mar-12 10:52 PM GMT

Wish my local cemetery was kept like this. I think it looks very peaceful (as well as being good for wildlife!)

Re: johnv

by johnv, 06-Mar-12 05:17 AM GMT

MEON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE, PRIVATE ESTATE - Part 1

Last year I was lucky enough to have unrestricted access to the core of a large private estate in the Meon Valley. The River Meon, one of England's finest chalk streams, rises in the South Downs and flows south to The Solent where it enters the sea at Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve.

This estate, while straddling a section of the river, is 90%+ on the west bank. Alas, by the time the river reaches the estate it is no longer on the chalk; the bedrock is 55 to 65m year old (Palaeogene) clay, silt and sand. Soils are mainly clay.

While most of the estate is now let out to tenant farmers and orchard cultivators, to which I had no access, the centre of the estate consists of woods and pasture amounting to about 3 km². A long line of pylons cutting through the woods also adds considerable interest as far as butterfly species and numbers are concerned. The woods are partly ancient, a small relic of the once extensive Forest of Bere. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to them for at least a decade and rides are becoming narrower by the year. Some meadows have contract grazing and the others get a couple of cuts for hay each year by a local farmer. There are also 2 man-made lakes.

Altogether I made 19 visits in 2011, including 3 moth nights (none of which were during ideal moth weather). Over the next few posts I will show you some of the butterflies I recorded. I was also photographing the flora, including its fine orchids, but that would just take too much time and is not really 'on topic' for a butterfly site.

MARCH

One visit produced 18 Brimstone, 1 Peacock, 2 Comma and 3 Small Tortoiseshell. No photos.

APRIL

One visit - 17 Orange-tip, 6 Speckled Wood, 1 Comma, 3 Peacock, 1 Brimstone. Didn't manage to get one decent photo of an Orange-tip, in fact I don't remember ever seeing one that was not in flight.



Peacock - Meon Valley - 11/04/2011



Speckled Wood – Meon Valley – 11/04/2011

MAY

First visit – Brimstone, Comma, Green-veined White, Large White, Orange-tip, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small White and Speckled Wood all seen, but the star of the day was a single Marsh Fritillary. This was quite unexpected as the nearest known colony in recent years, the unofficial reintroduction at Botley Wood, is several kilometres away and only a single individual (female) was recorded there in 2010. Apart from that it's 20 to 30 km to another colony. Not that the food plant is absent. Found under the pylon lines, this clearing was revealed later in the year to have almost 'wall to wall' Devils-bit Scabious. If I'm correct in my ID, it's a female – however an extensive search later in the year for larval webs produced a zero count. I hope to get back this year.



Marsh Fritillary – Meon Valley – 03/05/2011



Speckled Wood – Meon Valley – 03/05/2011



Orange-tip - Meon Valley - 03/05/2011



Brimstone - Meon Valley - 03/05/2011



Green-veined White - Meon Valley - 03/05/2011



Comma - Meon Valley - 03/05/2011



Silver-ground Carpet - Meon Valley - 03/05/2011

As mentioned , there are two lakes, attracting a couple of dragonflies posing nicely for me.



Beautiful Demoiselle - Meon Valley - 03/05/2011



Broad-bodied Chaser – Meon Valley – 03/05/2011

Second Visit – an atrociously windy and cloudy day with only about 10 minutes of sunshine the whole time I was there. Concentrated mainly on flora photos but did revisit the area where the Marsh Frit had been seen. It was then that I got my 10 minutes of sunshine and the find of the day – a female Duke of Burgundy. Again, the nearest colony is far away – “about 10km away, which is about the upper limit of their assumed colonisation range” according to BC’s Senior Regional Officer, Dr Dan Hoare. Only managed two photos before it flew away and was lost in the distance. Apart from this little gem only 3 Green-veined White, 1 Small Heath and 1 Speckled Wood were recorded (and no Marsh Frits, alas) – the weather was that bad.



Duke of Burgundy – Meon Valley – 18/05/2011

Where did the Marsh Frit and Duke come from? Despite the chronic under-recording at this site (almost no public access) it seems very unlikely these are both previously overlooked colonies – particularly as only one of each species was seen despite extensive searching. The Duke could have made it from its nearest known colony, but the Marsh is looking more like another unauthorised introduction or a release from nearby captive breeding. This, then, leads one to doubt the (hopefully) natural origin of the Duke.

To be continued (when I find another free day) ...

Re: johnv

by Susie, 06-Mar-12 05:31 AM GMT

Thank you, John. I'm really enjoying your diary.

Re: johnv

by David M, 06-Mar-12 05:46 AM GMT

A Marsh Fritillary and a Duke – that's quite a pair of finds!

Re: johnv

by Wurzel, 06-Mar-12 06:29 AM GMT

Some cracking finds there John – do you fancy coming to Five Rivers in Salisbury and having a poke around to see if there's anything out of place over here? 😊 I'd settle for a few Dukes 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: johnv

by johnv, 07-Mar-12 08:28 PM GMT

"Susie" wrote:

Thank you, John. I'm really enjoying your diary.

Thanks Susie, now I suppose I'll have to keep up the same standard for your continued enjoyment. 😊
John

Re: johnv

by johnv, 07-Mar-12 08:30 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

A Marsh Fritillary and a Duke – that's quite a pair of finds!

Yep, and both totally unexpected at this location.
Unfortunately no further major surprises at this site in 2011. 🙄

Re: johnv

by johnv, 07-Mar-12 08:34 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Some cracking finds there John – do you fancy coming to Five Rivers in Salisbury and having a poke around to see if there's anything out of place over here? 😊 I'd settle for a few Dukes 😄

Thanks Wurzel.
You mean the Avon Valley Nature Reserve? Must admit I've never been there. Your local? What's it like?
Despite there being Cowslip Farm opposite on the NE facing west bank, it looks a bit too built up (and intensive agriculture on the west bank?) for there to be much chance of the Dukes playing ball. 🙄 But you never know!!!

Re: johnv

by Wurzel, 08-Mar-12 04:20 AM GMT

Cheers John it is indeed Avon Valley but I hate using that name as Five Rivers is so much cooler 😄 I guess it is my local patch and this year I intend to thoroughly search it. It doesn't have any rarities but it'll be great for Sunday afternoons as my wife takes the girls swimming in the leisure centre so I'll be able to spend some time getting some shots! I covered it in my book and serialization in my personal diary if you're interested in having a look.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: johnv

by johnv, 11-Mar-12 08:24 PM GMT

MEON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE, PRIVATE ESTATE – Part 2

JUNE 2011

First Visit – 01/06/2011

Sunny periods and a good day for butterflies and flora.

You can only hope to cover about half the interesting places on this estate in a day. I don't charge through mind you – miss too much that way. I'd rather wait by a clump of in-flower bramble of 10/15 minutes to see what turns up than walk by several clumps in the same time and see nothing.

I visited the longer of the two 'under the pylon' clearings, a few of the adjacent wood/meadow edges and one of the smaller woods where some rides are still quite open in places. Sorry to say, but I'm rubbish at scenery photography (and not much better at flora/fauna) so I have no general pictures to show you of the estate.

140 butterflies recorded in all, of which 77 were Meadow Browns. This did take me a little by surprise as I had been to other sites in the previous two weeks and had not seen any. If this was the 'first-sighting' total, what did this suggest for the rest of the year for this species at this site – particularly as 2010 had been a bad year for the MB nationally?



Meadow Brown - Meon Valley - 01/06/2011

Other species seen for the first time were Brown Argus, Common Blue and Large Skipper, as well as additional sightings of Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood, Green-veined White, Red Admiral and Small Heath.



Large Skipper - Meon Valley - 01/06/2011



Red Admiral - Meon Valley - 01/06/2011

Also a good day for day-flying moths, 11 specimens in total - Mother Shipton, Burnett Companion and Brown Silver-line.



Mother Shipton - Meon Valley - 01/06/2011

Not to mention the Micro-Moths. A month before it had been *Adela reaumurella* in HUGE numbers, now the turn of *Nemophora degeerella*.



Longhorn Moth - Nemophora degeerella - Meon Valley - 01/06/2011

Several Dragonflies also.



Damselfly (Azure?) - Meon Valley - 01/06/2011

Second Visit - 14/06/2011

Two weeks later and a glorious day, excellent for butterflies. Five new species, Marbled White, Ringlet, Silver-washed Fritillary, Small Skipper and White Admiral were added to the list.



Small Skipper - Meon Valley - 14/06/2011

Together with Peacock, Comma, Common Blue, Large Skipper, Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood, Green-veined White, Red Admiral, Small White, Small Heath and Meadow Brown that was 16 species in total.

This time I went into the heart of one of the larger woods that has received little TLC for a long while. Rides and paths were very overgrown but in the centre is located a crossroads where all four paths still remained quite open due to some extensive work a decade or so ago. Absolutely ideal for the woodland species with plenty of Bramble, Ragged Robin, Ragwort and other nectar species in the clearings between path and wood.

With White Admirals swooping down to the bramble from above and Silver-washed Fritillaries sweeping along the paths from all 4 directions to the same nectar sources, I just sat there for an hour or so in complete awe.



Silver-washed Fritillary - Meon Valley - 14/06/2011



White Admiral - Meon Valley - 14/06/2011

Nearby a Comma had staked out a patch of bramble and chased off all-comers. A few Meadow Browns drifted by, searching for each other and the Knapweed just starting to flower in the more sunny clearings. Not surprising really that they found their way into this wood in view of the huge numbers in the meadows and under the pylons. All this with just birdsong; no other noise, no people - bliss.



Comma - Meon Valley - 14/06/2011

Could have stayed there forever, but I eventually dragged myself away to search under one of the pylon clearings and then down a long wood/meadow edge. And it was just fantastic – never seen such concentrations of Meadow Browns, a dozen or more at every bramble clump, interspersed with Large Skippers at regular intervals. Also my first Ringlet of the year – still ‘pumping-up’ its wings – fantastic.



Meadow Brown - Meon Valley - 14/06/2011



Ringlet - wings still not fully 'inflated' - Meon Valley - 14/06/2011

Then, on to the Victorian Walled Garden. Long abandoned for horticulture, it now consists of fruit trees trained round the walls, a central mown area but with un-mown strips all round, left to grow as un-grazed meadow – with different areas being cut on a rotational basis to prevent succession to scrub and wood. Small though it may be its diversity of flora is considerable. Just in this small area (approx. 70 x 30 metres) 9 butterfly species were seen that day.

Altogether that day 280 Meadow Browns, 38 Large Skippers, 22 White Admirals and 11 Silver-washed Fritillaries were recorded from a total count of 388 butterflies and 8 moths.

John.

Re: johnv

by David M, 11-Mar-12 10:57 PM GMT

Some excellent images there, John, especially the Red Admiral and female Meadow Brown.

Re: johnv

by johnv, 12-Mar-12 03:02 AM GMT

Managed to get out yesterday and today to **Southampton Old Cemetery** for a few hours. Both were very sunny and warm afternoons. Surprisingly, no butterflies yesterday.



Southampton Old Cemetery - 10/03/2012

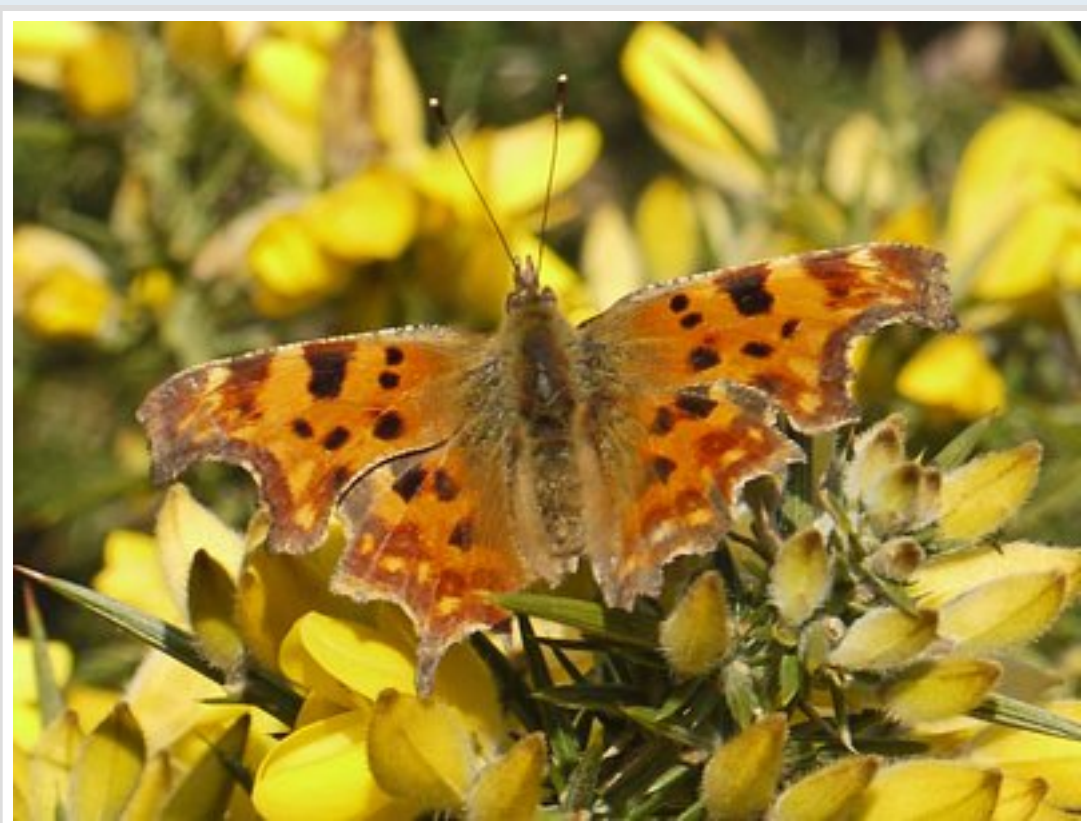
But in my book, spring has finally arrived as I found the first Wood Anemone in flower - a little earlier than last year.



Wood Anemone - 10/03/2012

Of course, it does have another name - Trojan Horse. Get it? 😊 Wooden Enemy. Sorry.

Today I was a bit luckier, two Commas.



Comma - 11/03/2012

The flora has certainly enjoyed the sunshine. Bluebell (alas a Spanish hybrid) and the botanical researchers tool of choice, Thale Cress, both in flower for

the first time today; while Yews continue to disperse pollen.



Thale Cress - 11/03/2012



'Blowin' in the Wind' (actually, I gave the branch a sharp tap) - Yew pollen - 11/03/2012

More details of Wildlife in Southampton Old Cemetery at <http://fosoc.org/the-cemetery/wildlife/>

John

Re: johnv

by johnv, 13-Mar-12 08:26 PM GMT

MEON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE, PRIVATE ESTATE - Part 3

JULY 2011

First visit - 03/07/2011

What a difference a few days make. Only 19 days after my last visit and an explosion of numbers.

Three new species seen: Gatekeeper, Purple Hairstreak and Painted Lady. Also a first Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet, a little out of the usual emergence sequence as had already logged a Six-spot Burnet on my previous visit.

[attachment=8:2olk3ygm]P1050794_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

[attachment=7:2olk3ygm]P1050827_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

[attachment=4:2olk3ygm]P1050866_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

Was a lovely day, long sunny spells with some short cloudy intervals. Spent most of the day in the two pylon clearings. These areas are quite typical of most pylon clearings in woods I have come across in the south - free of trees, not much shrub, not grazed and just left to see what nature makes of it. Grass left to flower and seed, patches of bracken, bramble against the edges and a succession of wild flowers throughout the seasons. Ideal for a number of species.

So, with trousers tucked firmly into socks in a vain attempt to keep out the ticks, I came to the first pylon clearing. Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Marbled Whites and Small Skippers in profusion. Walking through the long grass was akin to Moses parting the Red Sea - they would flutter to one side as I approached and then regroup behind to fill the empty space as I made forward progress. Counting them became increasingly difficult and slowed me down to a virtual stop in places. Just absolutely wonderful to experience such huge numbers in this beautiful setting.

[attachment=1:2olk3ygm]P1050929_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

[attachment=9:2olk3ygm]P1050782_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]
[attachment=6:2olk3ygm]P1050830_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]
[attachment=10:2olk3ygm]P1050776_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

I did manage to get into a wood or two and also along several wood/pasture edges as I made my way around the estate. One of my primary aims that day was to see if Purple Emperors were present on the estate. Plenty of suitable territory with Sallow by the River Meon near to extensive woods with suitable trees and clearings. Alas, I did not find any, although I'm sure they must be there somewhere. Probably because I spent too much time looking down and counting grassland species.

[attachment=0:2olk3ygm]P1050931_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]
[attachment=3:2olk3ygm]P1050867_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

But I did find a single Purple Hairstreak, and low down so I could get a single photo before it flew off. I'm sure there are many colonies of this species on the estate, but I was usually on my way home before that time in the early evening when they display atop the Oaks.

[attachment=2:2olk3ygm]P1050900_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

Numbers: Silver-washed Fritillary 70, Small Skipper 167, Marbled White 236 (up from one 19 days before), Meadow Brown 482 and Ringlet 559 (again, up from one 19 days before). These are considerable underestimates, I was basically just recording those about 5 metres either side (a double transect width). Altogether 1589 butterflies recorded.

[attachment=5:2olk3ygm]P1050853_edited-1.jpg[/attachment:2olk3ygm]

John

Re: johnv

by johnv, 13-Mar-12 08:29 PM GMT

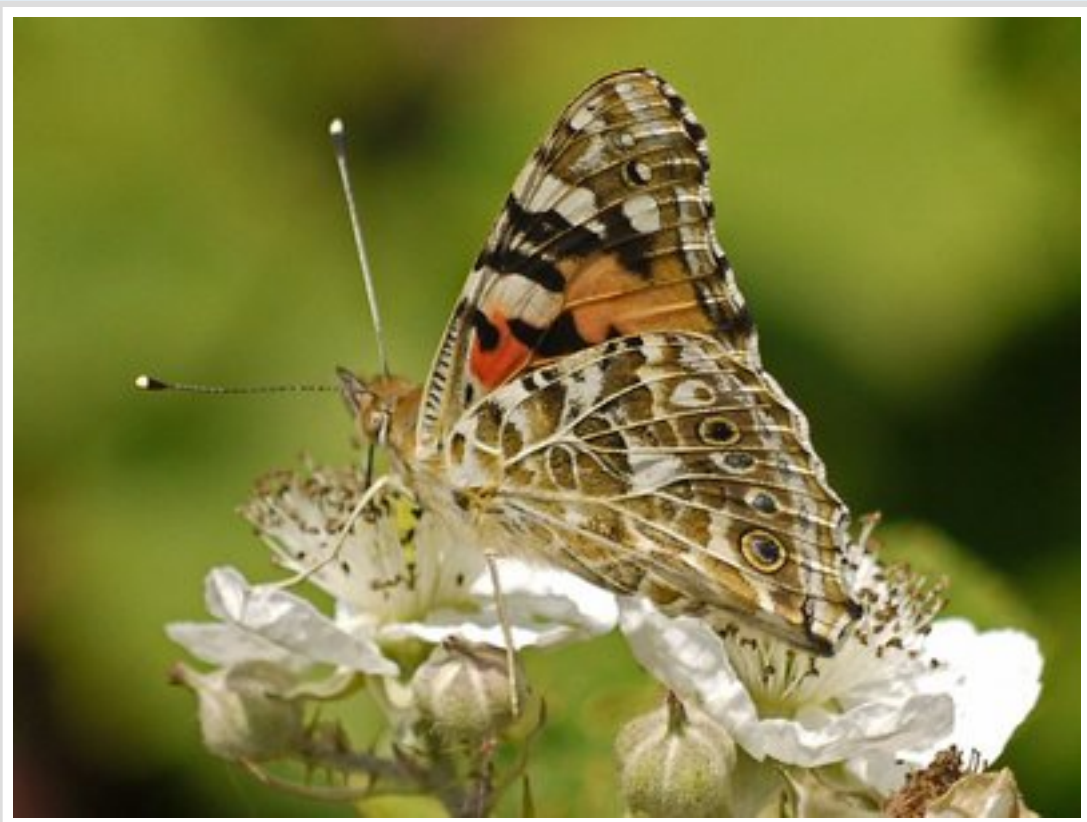
MEON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE, PRIVATE ESTATE - Part 3

JULY 2011

First visit - 03/07/2011

What a difference a few days make. Only 19 days after my last visit and an explosion of numbers.

Three new species seen: Gatekeeper, Purple Hairstreak and Painted Lady. Also a first Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet, a little out of the usual emergence sequence as had already logged a Six-spot Burnet on my previous visit.



Painted Lady - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011





Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011

Was a lovely day, long sunny spells with some short cloudy intervals. Spent most of the day in the two pylon clearings. These areas are quite typical of most pylon clearings in woods I have come across in the south - free of trees, not much shrub, not grazed and just left to see what nature makes of it. Grass left to flower and seed, patches of bracken, bramble against the edges and a succession of wild flowers throughout the seasons. Ideal for a number of species.

So, with trousers tucked firmly into socks in a vain attempt to keep out the ticks, I came to the first pylon clearing. Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Marbled Whites and Small Skippers in profusion. Walking through the long grass was akin to Moses parting the Red Sea - they would flutter to one side as I approached and then regroup behind to fill the empty space as I made forward progress. Counting them became increasingly difficult and slowed me down to a virtual stop in places. Just absolutely wonderful to experience such huge numbers in this beautiful setting.



Ringlet - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011



Meadow Brown - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011 - making sure we get some next year



Marbled White - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011 - ditto



Silver-washed Fritillary - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011

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Comma - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011



Large Skipper - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011

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Purple Hairstreak - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011

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Small Skipper - Meon Valley - 03/07/2011 - my favourite photo of the day

John

Re: johnv

by hilary, 14-Mar-12 08:29 PM GMT

As someone else said, your posts are very enjoyable and uplifting. You mentioned earlier you don't hurry around and that just sets the right mood to enjoy reading your posts!

Re: johnv

by johnv, 02-Apr-12 04:39 AM GMT

Finally managed to get out further than just Southampton today.

But before that it was the first transect of the year in Southampton Old Cemetery. In 100% sunshine it felt quite hot with the lack of wind, but not many butterflies. One Peacock (my first of the year) one Comma and two Speckled Wood. Still, 4 is better than the 2 from the first week in 2011. At the end the thermometer was only reading 11C in the shade.

Had managed a few trips to the cemetery the previous week when it was much hotter. Mainly Red Admiral and Comma earlier, with a first Holly Blue on 25/03. Then the first generation Speckled Wood emerged - none on 25/03, 7 on 27/03 and 10 on 28/03.



Red Admiral - Southampton Old Cemetery - 25/03/2012

I then went on today to BC's Magdalen Hill Down - Original Reserve. Only managed about an hour and a half but chalked up 5 species - Comma, Peacock, Small White, Brimstone and Grizzled Skipper. Managed to find 5 Grizzled Skippers altogether, but spectacularly failed to get an in-focus shot of any of them. They all seemed to be very 'flighty' and would not let me get near. But it was such a delight to see them again after almost a year. Another 'spotter' I met there had also seen two Green Hairstreaks.

Re: johnv

by Wurzel, 02-Apr-12 06:24 AM GMT

The orange trailing edge on the Red Admiral is lush John, congrats with the Grizzlies, I've yet to see them yet this year - which seems like an odd thing to be writing on April 1st! Martin Down is always good for them at the Sillens Lane end

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: johnv

by johnv, 02-Apr-12 08:01 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

The orange trailing edge on the Red Admiral is lush John

Thanks Wurzel, they sure do like basking on the headstones and can usually get a good shot.

congrats with the Grizzlies, I've yet to see them yet this year - which seems like an odd thing to be writing on April 1st!

I know, it's very early - but I'm not the first - several sightings in Hampshire in March, including at 2 different sites on 27/03. Crazy.