

Re: David M

by David M, 12-Jan-14 09:24 PM GMT

Christmas period 2013

As is usual, I spent Christmas in Abergavenny. Once again one of my tasks was to create a festive meal for the chickens and this year it was minced lamb, sweetcorn and hot dog sausages. The entire platter lasted barely 10 minutes as the pack descended immediately to rip it apart.

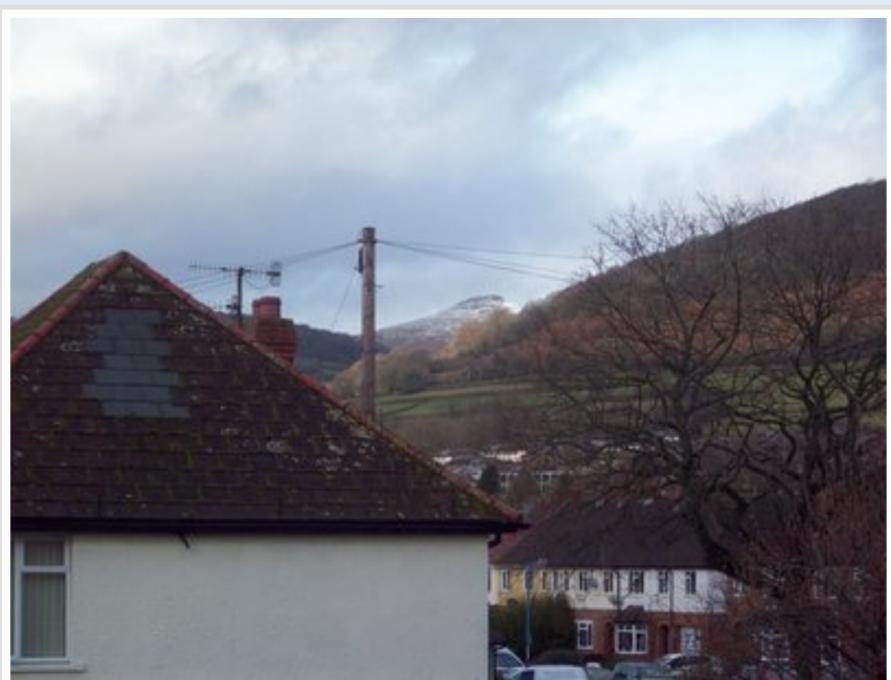
Lucie the Light Sussex is the white chicken in the following image. She is notable for her longevity. If she makes it to March, she will be 8 years of age, which is far in excess of what is expected for any chicken, least of all a particularly large and plump one! She's been a resident since July 2006 and is much loved because of her temperament. She's big but has never been a bully. She's very well behaved for a chicken (never observed attacking the hanging baskets or escaping to dine on neighbours' vegetation, etc). She's also never been ill either. Apart from her minor scaly-leg condition, she's been in rude health since the day she was acquired and even when we've had red mite infestations Lucie never seems to get affected.



Christmas eve was a washout, with rain beating down for the entirety of my journey between Swansea and Abergavenny. However, this led to a 'white Christmas' of sorts, as on the morning of 25th December, ground above 500 metres was dusted with snow – the Blorenge to the south....



....and the Sugar Loaf to the north...



Christmas dinner was capon, which isn't something you hear a lot about in these politically correct times. Living in the agricultural hub of south east Wales though means that if you look hard enough you will find what you are after, and I have to say this particular bird was delicious (and HUGE):



New Year was wild and stormy in south Wales, but there has been no frost to speak of which has started to worry me a little. I actually went out yesterday (Sat 11 Jan) looking for possible butterfly activity in Linda Vista Gardens in Abergavenny, and it wouldn't have surprised me to see some such is the benign nature of the weather right now. I hope we get at least one week of 'proper' cold weather before March arrives. Last year proved that such conditions aren't necessarily a bad thing!

Re: David M

by David M, 19-Jan-14 07:42 PM GMT

Sunday 19th January - Felt like spring.....

Spent between 9.30am and 2.15pm at the Alun Valley High Brown site in Bridgend today. It was a glorious winter's day - a butterfly wouldn't have been out of the question but none were seen, although I DID see two bluebottles basking on walls.

The team is keen to cut a 5m wide 'ride' from the upper west slope down to the 'meadow' at the base of the site. This is being carved out in zig-zag fashion so as not to become a wind tunnel and I reckon the halfway point has been reached. We shifted 13 big bags full of (mainly) Hazel growth so the woodland is becoming ever more coppiced.

Opening up the heavy tree cover will allow more violets to grow and that can only be good news for both High Browns AND Dark Greens.

There's a certain reassuring austerity at this time of year when out in the countryside. Things generally look pretty bleak but if you pay attention it's easy to spot early growth which will bloom within the next couple of months. Some images from today:





Re: David M

by David M, 21-Jan-14 08:14 PM GMT

Wurzel – Yes, HBF and DGF have similar preferences but DGFs are more prone to be found in the open areas than HBFs. That's not to say that HBFs shun these locations, because quite often you'll find a few in exposed territory.

However, if you're going there specifically to get a guaranteed up close and personal audience with HBF then the more sheltered parts will always provide better returns. The Gun Club meadow will always harbour a few and the Fritillary meadow will turn up a few more. The former could also see White Letter Hairstreaks nectaring on brambles/thistles, though this tends to happen more commonly later in the WLH flight period.

The starting point for the new ride has deliberately been created in a sheltered hotspot for High Browns so hopefully the additional abundance of violet growth in the newly cleared areas will make these places even more attractive. Only time will tell.

Chris – The terrain in the image is at its best in early June, prior to the bracken growth extending to its full height (whereupon things can become a little overgrown). I don't have an image taken from a similar spot in the summer but I DID take one 2 years ago from the east facing bank opposite where we've been clearing scrub. The 'bare' region towards the top of the hillside you see is where the ride has been cut. I'll make sure I do a 'before and after' when I return in June:



Re: David M

Dates of first UK sightings 2014:

1. **Small Tortoiseshell** – 24 February, Parkmill, Swansea
2. **Brimstone** – 7 March, Swansea Vale
3. **Comma** – 7 March, Swansea Vale
4. **Peacock** – 9 March, Linda Vista Gardens, Abergavenny
5. **Red Admiral** – 15 March, Parkmill, Swansea
6. **Small White** – 16 March, Ewenny, nr. Bridgend
7. **Speckled Wood** – 11 April, Swansea Vale
8. **Green Veined White** – 11 April, Swansea Vale
9. **Orange Tip** – 11 April, Swansea Vale
10. **Large White** – 18 April, Parkmill, Swansea
11. **Clouded Yellow** – 18 April, Parkmill, Swansea
12. **Holly Blue** – 19 April, Kilvey Hill, Swansea
13. **Small Copper** – 19 April, Kilvey Hill, Swansea
14. **Small Blue** – 21 April, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
15. **Green Hairstreak** – 27 April, Welshmoor, Gower, Swansea
16. **Small Heath** – 4 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
17. **Dingy Skipper** – 4 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
18. **Wall Brown** – 4 May, Danygraig Cemetery, Port Tennant, Swansea
19. **Pearl Bordered Fritillary** – 5 May, Ewyas Harold Common, nr. Pontrilas, Herefordshire
20. **Grizzled Skipper** – 5 May, Ewyas Harold Common, nr. Pontrilas, Herefordshire
21. **Brown Argus** – 14 May, Mumbles Head, Gower, Swansea
22. **Common Blue** – 14 May, Kittle Quarry, Gower, Swansea
23. **Duke of Burgundy** – 17 May, Rodborough Common, nr. Stroud, Gloucestershire
24. **Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary** – 17 May, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
25. **Marsh Fritillary** – 18 May, Welshmoor, Gower, Swansea
26. **Chequered Skipper** – 27 May, Glasdrum Wood, nr. Appin, Argyll
27. **Large Skipper** – 31 May, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
28. **Painted Lady** – 7 June, Langrove Country Club, Parkmill, Swansea
29. **Dark Green Fritillary** – 7 June, Fairwood Common, Gower, Swansea
30. **Meadow Brown** – 7 June, Fairwood Common, Gower, Swansea
31. **Heath Fritillary** – 14 June, Haddon Hill, nr. Upton, Somerset
32. **Ringlet** – 14 June, Collard Hill, nr. Street, Somerset
33. **Marbled White** – 14 June, Collard Hill, nr. Street, Somerset
34. **Large Blue** – 14 June, Collard Hill, nr. Street, Somerset
35. **Black Hairstreak** – 15 June, Compensation Area, Bernwood Forest, nr. Oxford
36. **High Brown Fritillary** – 20 June, Alun Valley, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
37. **Silver Washed Fritillary** – 22 June, Lower Woods, nr. Wickwar, Gloucestershire
38. **White Admiral** – 22 June, Lower Woods, nr. Wickwar, Gloucestershire
39. **Large Heath** – 23 June, Cors Caron, nr. Tregaron, Ceredigion
40. **Silver Studded Blue** – 28 June, St. Govan's Head, nr. Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
41. **Small Skipper** – 28 June, St. Govan's Head, nr. Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
42. **Grayling** – 28 June, St. Govan's Head, nr. Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
43. **Hedge Brown** – 1 July, Alner's Gorse, nr. Sturminster Newton, Dorset
44. **Purple Hairstreak** – 1 July, Alner's Gorse, nr. Sturminster Newton, Dorset
45. **Lulworth Skipper** – 1 July, Bindon Hill, Lulworth Cove, Dorset
46. **Purple Emperor** – 2 July, Bentley Wood, nr. Salisbury
47. **White Letter Hairstreak** – 2 July, Bentley Wood, nr. Salisbury
48. **Silver Spotted Skipper** – 26 July, Aston Rowant, nr. Oxford
49. **Chalkhill Blue** – 26 July, Aston Rowant, nr. Oxford
50. **Essex Skipper** – 26 July, Aston Rowant, nr. Oxford
51. **Scotch Argus** – 4 August, Smardale Gill, nr. Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria
52. **Adonis Blue** – 8 August, Swellshill Bank, nr. Stroud, Gloucestershire
53. **Brown Hairstreak** – 23 August, West Williamston, nr. Pembroke

UK species seen in France but NOT seen in UK in 2014:

54. **Northern Brown (Mountain) Argus**
55. **Swallowtail**
56. **Wood White**
57. **Mountain Ringlet**
58. **Glanville Fritillary**

Non-UK species seen in Parc du Mercantour, French Alps, 5th to 12th July 2014

1. **Mallow Skipper**
2. **Tufted Marbled Skipper**
3. **Marbled Skipper**
4. **Oberthurs Skipper**
5. **Safflower Skipper**
6. **Southern Grizzled Skipper**
7. **Red Underwing Skipper**
8. **Glandon Blue**
9. **Geranium Bronze**
10. **Mazarine Blue**
11. **Geranium Argus**
12. **Green Underside Blue**
13. **Long Tailed Blue**
14. **Lang's Short Tailed Blue**
15. **Mountain Alcon Blue**
16. **Meleager's Blue**
17. **Idas Blue**
18. **Amanda's Blue**

19. Eros Blue
20. Escher's Blue
21. Chapman's Blue
22. Baton Blue
23. Purple Shot Copper
24. Purple Edged Copper
25. Sooty Copper
26. Scarce Copper
27. Sloe Hairstreak
28. Ilex Hairstreak
29. Blue Spot Hairstreak
30. Niobe Fritillary
31. Weaver's Fritillary
32. Shepherd's Fritillary
33. Titania's Fritillary
34. Marbled Fritillary
35. Cynthia's Fritillary
36. Queen of Spain Fritillary
37. False Heath Fritillary
38. Spotted Fritillary
39. Knapweed Fritillary
40. Meadow Fritillary
41. Southern White Admiral
42. Scarce Swallowtail
43. Apollo
44. Small Apollo
45. Black Veined White
46. Berger's Clouded Yellow
47. Mountain Clouded Yellow
48. Mountain Dappled White
49. Cleopatra
50. Mountain Green Veined White
51. Southern Small White
52. Bath White
53. Great Banded Grayling
54. Pearly Heath
55. Darwin's Heath
56. Chestnut Heath
57. Almond-Eyed Ringlet
58. Woodland Grayling
59. Large Wall Brown
60. Great Sooty Satyr
61. Piedmont Ringlet
62. Olive Skipper

Total Species seen in 2014 – 120

Last butterfly sighting – **Red Admiral** – 1st December 2014, Bracelet Bay, Mumbles Head, Swansea

Re: David M

by David M, 01-Mar-14 03:49 PM GMT

Monday 24th February 2014 – Earliest ever sighting.....

Life has been pretty hectic in February. I moved house on 29th January and am now living in a lovely location on the Gower Peninsula. I had Monday 24th February off so thought I'd go and purchase a washing machine. Whilst doing so, I became aware of just how lovely a morning it was (10c and sunny hadn't been forecast that way the night before). As soon as I got back, I decided to drive a couple of miles down the road to a little woodland glade I'd spotted a few days earlier, as it was sheltered, south facing and had potential for an early butterfly.

Well, it took nearly an hour but after having first seen Dippers, Buzzards, Nuthatches and a couple of bumblebees to keep me entertained, I suddenly spied a Small Tortoiseshell fluttering low to the ground near a sparse patch of Celandines.

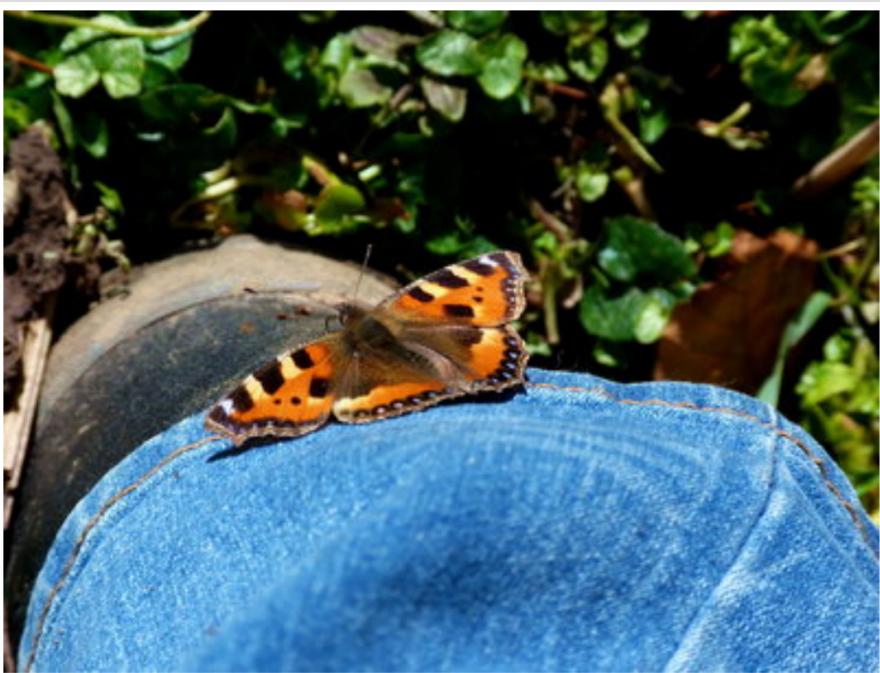
This is the territory where it was seen:



The sighting beat (by one day) the earliest date on which I've seen a butterfly in the UK:



I also managed my first 'trousering' of the season as the butterfly took a swift liking to my jeans:



I spent 20 minutes or so watching it flutter about lazily, wondering too how its presence didn't attract the attentions of the many insectivorous birds that were also present in the glade.

I look forward to exploring this area in more depth when spring arrives properly. Meantime, it's a good feeling to know that butterflies are awake!

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 01-Mar-14 04:33 PM GMT

I look forward to hearing about your new environment David as the year goes on – I've seen your recent selection of "Favourites"! Chris

Re: David M

by Hoggers, 02-Mar-14 12:43 PM GMT

I think being trousered by a Small Tortoiseshell at any time of year is a considerable honour but so early in the season must be a Good Omen!

There are Great things to come David!

Lovely photos as always

Best wishes

Hoggers

Re: David M

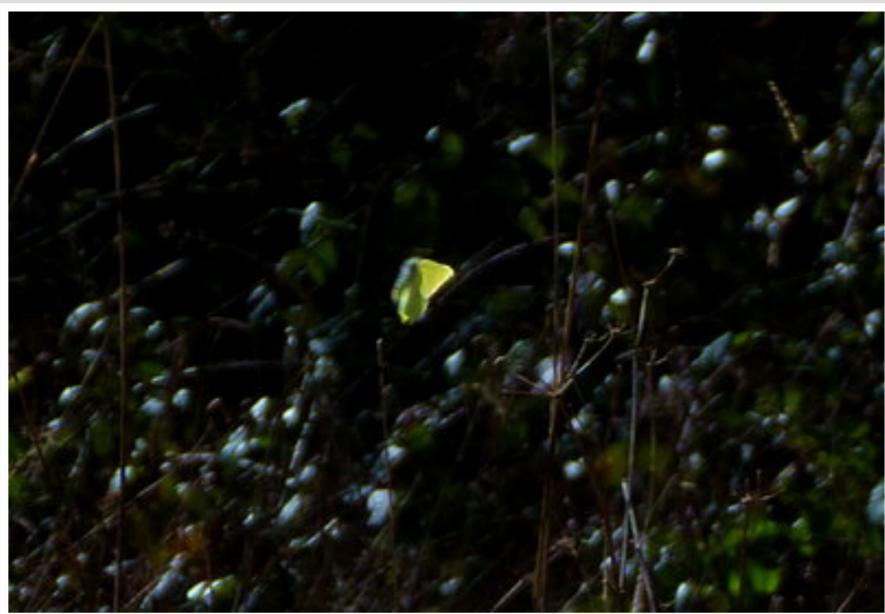
by David M, 09-Mar-14 05:33 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, guys. Yes, I'm very much looking forward to exploring this beautiful area, many parts of which have lain largely untouched by man's influence on the landscape. I'm fairly confident I'll find Marsh Fritillaries and Green Hairstreaks within walking distance, and there are plenty of mature elm and oak trees which could throw up Purple and White Letter Hairstreaks. Time will tell.

Friday 7th March 2014 – First truly mild conditions of the year....

Temperatures peaked at 14c in Swansea this afternoon, so I took a two hour long lunchbreak to go Brimstone spotting in the area around my workplace.

I saw at least three and possibly four if the one seen on my way back was a different individual to the first three seen. All were males and none alighted for more than a split second:



On my way back, I disturbed my first Comma of the year. Fortunately, this butterfly was far more obliging than any of the hyperactive Brimstones and settled fairly readily:



I was quite surprised there weren't more butterflies on the wing, but given the forecast, I expect this to change over the course of the next few days.

Re: David M

by David M, 09-Mar-14 06:13 PM GMT

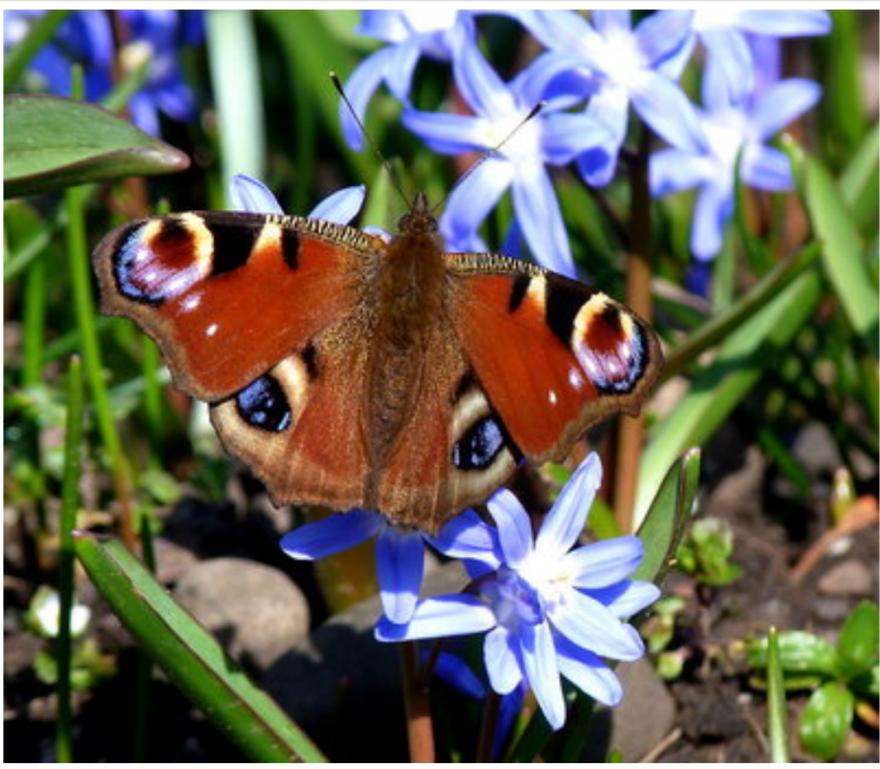
Sunday 9th March 2014 – A taste of May, TWO months early.....

I spent an hour and a half early this afternoon in Castle Meadows and Linda Vista Gardens in Abergavenny. I don't think I've ever experienced such gloriously warm, sunny weather in the first third of March before, and I've certainly never seen FOUR different species on the same day at this time of year.

First up were Small Tortoiseshells – they were all over the place! Definitely at least 30 seen, with many engaging in courtship activities:



I also saw 4 Peacocks, which were kept very busy by the warring Tortoiseshells:



3 Commas were spotted, although these were trying their best to stay out of the line of fire:



Most pleasing of all though was the sight of a male Brimstone, which is the first time I've ever seen this species in Abergavenny. They're fairly common in Swansea but strangely thin on the ground further inland. To make things better still, this male actually settled briefly on some Butterbur giving me a rare photo opportunity:



So, with all the adult overwinterers now firmly awake and in action, we have to hope we don't end up with a repeat of 2012, where conditions took a huge turn for the worse for a whole two months! Fingers crossed.

Re: David M

by Pauline, 09-Mar-14 06:50 PM GMT

Lovely photos David – puts my total of 5 to shame! I have never been to Abergavenny but someone close to me comes from Grosmont – perhaps you might know it?

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 09-Mar-14 09:10 PM GMT

That's a great start David, and some nice photos too!
Chris

Re: David M

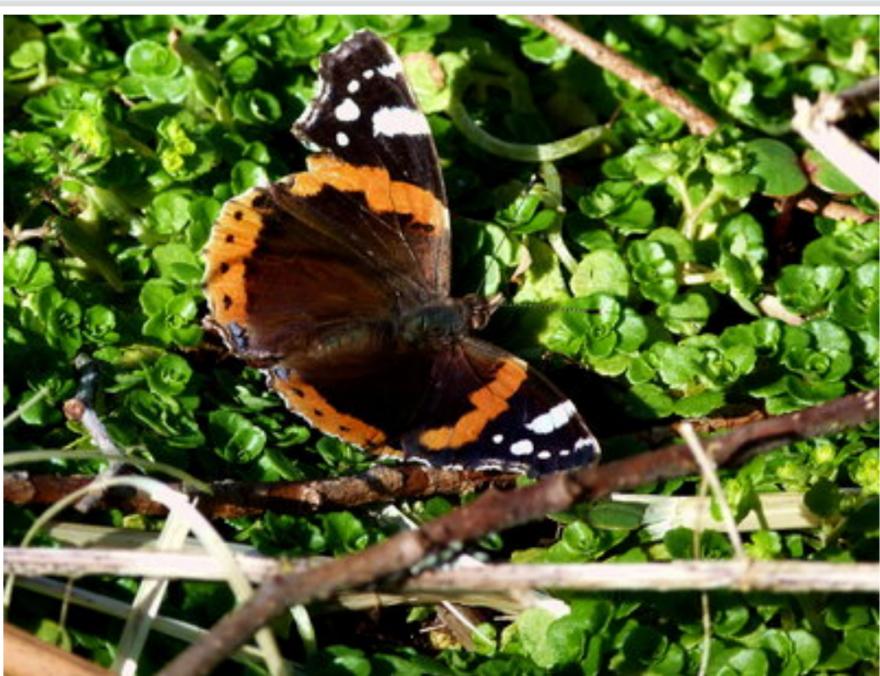
by David M, 17-Mar-14 03:47 PM GMT

Cheers, guys. Yes, things are moving quickly now – I've never seen such butterfly numbers so early in the year. If we can steer clear of poor weather for the next few weeks, we could be in for an absolute bonanza!

Saturday 15th March 2014 – Royal Flush.....

It was a pleasant enough morning so I decided to pop down to the woodland glades at the back of the nearby Gower Inn to see what was about. I'm glad I did, because I racked up a 'Royal Flush' of adult overwinterers.

Half a dozen Tortoiseshells were active, along with 2 Commas and 2 Peacocks. Then, on my way back to the car park, I spotted my first Red Admiral of the year:



A male Brimstone flew by soon afterwards and on the bank near my car was a nice Comma feasting on celandines:



Footnote: The following day, Sunday 16th March, I was helping with scrub clearance work at Alun Valley near Bridgend. Again, it was a mild, sunny day (14c) and although I wasn't surprised to see 2 Tortoiseshells, 1 Peacock and another Red Admiral, I certainly WAS surprised to see a Small White. This insect flew in front of my car at the traffic lights coming out of Ewenny. Last year it took till the second half of April to see the first of the Whites, so this year is remarkably 'early' and given that I've seen cuckoo flower starting to 'whiten' up, I'm confident that Orange Tips will be with us within the next week or so.

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 17-Mar-14 04:05 PM GMT

Hi David,
I'm hoping this good weather will hold out as well and will bring us through fully into Spring. The gaps in my records remind me that this week 1 year ago there was one week of particularly unpleasant weather down here.
Glad you've got a Small White, that must be a good sign. I'm envious of your Comma - for me that's exotic - I may get 1 vagrant Comma once a year if I'm lucky.
I hope you won't hold it against me if I manage to get an Orange Tip a couple of days before you! 😊
Eyes peeled now.
Cheers, Chris

Re: David M

by David M, 11-Apr-14 10:42 PM GMT

Friday 11th April - Couldn't wait.....

With the weekend forecast changing from sunshine to cloud by the day, I took my camera to work today given that 14c, sunshine and light winds was nailed on.

I duly took a long lunch and spent an hour combing the wild areas near to my workplace.

It wasn't long before I encountered my first Speckled Wood of 2013:



Shortly afterwards, I spotted my first Green Veined White of the year, and although this one was too flighty to photograph, I managed a rather poor record shot of another seen later:



Although the cuckoo flower was in bloom by the stream running through the light woodland, I didn't see any Orange Tips until I made my way back over the marshy wasteland adjacent to the path. This was the only one of the three males I saw that settled, and sadly it did so with wings shut:



The full tally was 13 Peacocks, 7 Small Tortoiseshells, 5 Green Veined Whites, 4 Speckled Woods, 3 Orange Tips (all males) and 3 Brimstones (2 of which were females):



It's frustrating that the weather may stay cool and cloudy here in S. Wales this weekend, as now that the first batch of non-adult hibernators is on the wing, I'm always eager to spend as much time out in the field as possible.

Still, it's nice to know that things appear now to be in full swing and there are plenty of species to see for the first time over the next couple of weeks.

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 12-Apr-14 11:56 AM GMT

Hi David, Hi Wurzel,
That's not a bad haul for a long lunchbreak David, particularly at 14°C. Down my way nothing moves at 14°C !! Keep 'em coming.
Cheers, Chris.

Re: David M

by David M, 12-Apr-14 11:56 PM GMT

"cjackson" wrote:

That's not a bad haul for a long lunchbreak David, particularly at 14°C. Down my way nothing moves at 14°C !!

I know just what you mean, Chris.

Whenever I've spent time in southern France I've found butterflies reluctant to fly unless conditions are perfect.

Cloudy, light winds and 23c will see few venture out.

Of course, UK butterflies can't be so choosy. We can observe ours in conditions far less ideal than yours.

Strange, isn't it? The same species will be active 10 degrees further north whilst their continental cousins will remain in a state of inertia in even MORE favourable conditions.

Re: David M

by David M, 18-Apr-14 03:09 PM GMT

Friday 18th April 2014 - Big shock.....

On the Richter scale of butterfly surprises, this one registered high.

I spent a delightful hour and a half in the two large woodland clearings at the back of the Gower Inn, Parkmill, today.



I was watching two male Brimstones interact with an Orange Tip when a grubby orange insect fluttered into view. I thought it was a moth initially but when it settled I crept up towards it and couldn't believe what I was seeing - a male Clouded Yellow!!

I know they've overwintered along the south coast of England but it would be lovely to think this one (and maybe more) has done likewise in south Wales.

He fluttered off and settled a little further away and I was lucky to get a couple of photos before he rose into the tree canopy and out of view:



Peacocks were the commonest species with 15–20 seen, though there were double figure numbers of Green Veined Whites and Small Tortoiseshells too. I only saw 5 Orange Tips (all males) but 4 male Brimstones were encountered along with this female, who rather obligingly settled to have her photo taken:



I also managed to get an open wing shot of an Orange Tip, albeit from a distance:



I saw my first Large White of the year too; a male purposefully meandering down the path no doubt in search of a mate. One Comma and one Red Admiral were also spotted:



Surprisingly, there were no Speckled Woods but I hope to see plenty of these over the next couple of weeks.

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 18-Apr-14 03:36 PM GMT

Well that was an hour and a half well spent David. I could spend plenty of time myself in that relaxing scenery. Looking forward to more.
Chris

Re: David M

by Maximus, 18-Apr-14 03:55 PM GMT

What an amazing find David, and lucky enough to get a photo too 📷

Re: David M

by Padfield, 18-Apr-14 05:23 PM GMT

Wow! A good find and an excellent photograph. His wings look all soft still and my guess is he's a freshly emerged local. Quite remarkable.
Guy

Re: David M

by David M, 18-Apr-14 06:15 PM GMT

"Padfield" wrote:

Wow! A good find and an excellent photograph. His wings look all soft still and my guess is he's a freshly emerged local. Quite remarkable.

Guy

Thanks for the input, Guy. This might also explain its weak flight perhaps? This species usually bombs along at great speed, but this individual was flying feebly and erratically, hence my initial error of mistaking it for a moth.

I saw 4 Clouded Yellows in south Wales in August & September last year, so there will doubtless have been pairings. If it stays sunny tomorrow I think I'll pay a visit to Crymlyn Burrows on the coast which is where I saw an egg laying *crocea* last August.

Re: David M

by Lee Hurrell, 18-Apr-14 08:39 PM GMT

Wonderful stuff David! Glad you got out and what a find!

What a beautiful setting.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: David M

by Willow, 18-Apr-14 08:50 PM GMT

That **Clouded Yellow** is a highly significant record David, if we can find such species in South Wales during mid April...well nigh on anything is possible



Continued good luck for your Easter break and keep em coming mate 😊

Best Wishes,

Bill 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 19-Apr-14 04:00 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, folks. Yes, it was certainly a most pleasant surprise, and I shall be on the alert for more spring emergees over the next few weeks down here.

Saturday 19th April – More routine day, but all missions accomplished....

I had originally intended to check out the coastal area today for more Clouded Yellows, but it was fairly cloudy at 11am and there was a fair breeze blowing. With temperatures only around 12c, it was time to head for a sheltered spot, and I know none better than the lower slopes of south facing Kilvey Hill just above Danygraig cemetery.

This micro-climate was just about the only place in April 2013 where Speckled Woods could be guaranteed in numbers, and they didn't disappoint today, with about 50 or so seen. They favour the lower pathway which has all the right ingredients for them: shelter from wind, reflected warmth off the bare earth slopes and an array of grasses and shrubs for them to potter about in. It was lovely to see them merrily cavorting around, without seemingly a care. This individual was particularly nicely marked:



I had three other 'missions', the first of which was to get my first Large White image of the year. This male duly obliged:



The cool conditions meant Whites weren't as active as they are normally, and I also managed a first Small White image of 2014:



Number two was to spot a Small Copper. I managed to find just one, firming up his lek at the end of a pathway – *cearuleopunctata* to boot!!



My last mission was a date with Holly Blue. Most people will know that going out intentionally to seek this insect can be very frustrating. Well, Danygraig cemetery is huge and full of evergreens, and I ended up seeing SIX!! As ever, they were infuriatingly elusive, spending most of their time flying at the top of the shrubs. I did, however, get a poor image of the only definite female I saw today:



Then, just as I was about to get into my car, I spotted a flash of blue low down near the entrance to the pathway. It was a male Holly Blue who stayed just long enough to end up in this diary:



Re: David M

by Pauline, 19-Apr-14 04:15 PM GMT

What a gorgeous SC David and blue spots too!!! 🍷

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 21-Apr-14 12:10 AM GMT

Great stuff, David! Sounds you're having a great spring so far. Here in East Anglia, I think we've got a bit of catching up to do! No Speckled Woods or Small Coppers or Holly Blues for me so far! The first Speckled is gorgeous! Enjoy the rest of the Easter weekend.

Re: David M

by David M, 21-Apr-14 03:43 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, all.

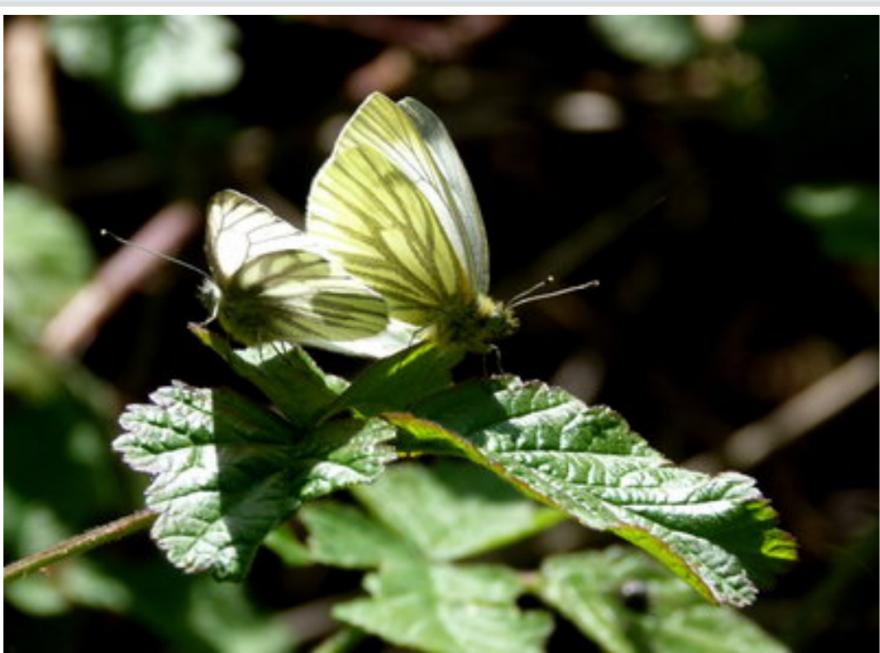
Monday 21st April - Crymlyn Burrows.....

On my way back from Abergavenny this lunchtime, I couldn't resist an hour's stop at Crymlyn Burrows on the Swansea coast, mainly to see if there were any more Clouded Yellows about.

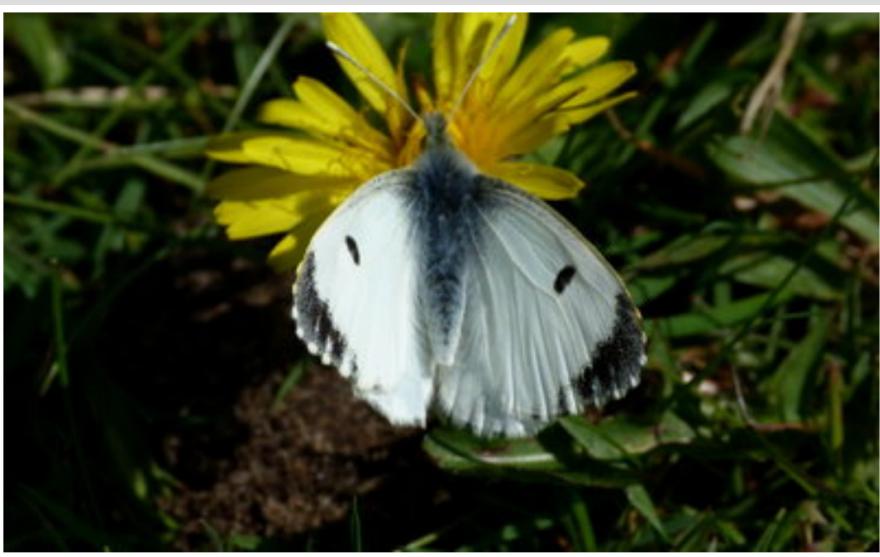
It was fairly windy again, although temperatures were around 16c this afternoon, so there were a fair few butterflies active, though sadly none of them were Clouded Yellows. 😞

I saw my first Small Blue of the year, but I slipped down the bank as I was getting into position to take an image and the insect was swept away by the breeze and despite hanging around for a further 20 minutes, I couldn't relocate it.

Apart from that, it was mainly Pierids on the wing. Green Veined Whites were commonest, with over two dozen seen, including this mating pair:



Orange Tips were in double figures too, including four females:



Still no Dingy Skippers about, though I expect they'll emerge over the next few days, whilst I reckon a another fortnight will be enough for Common Blue & Brown Argus if the weather stays mild.

Re: David M

by William, 21-Apr-14 03:45 PM GMT

Good work with the Small Blue David – sounds like the first one seen this year 😊😊

Re: David M

by Maximus, 23-Apr-14 07:52 PM GMT

I'm sure you saw the first Small Blue last year David, shame you slipped down the bank and missed the photo, I've done that too. You also seem to be blessed with Holly Blues and wing open shots great stuff, I missed a male with wings open really wide recently when it was chased off by another 😬

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 23-Apr-14 07:58 PM GMT

Congrats on the Small Blue David.

I know exactly how you feel with the slipping down the bank thing, done it myself often enough, most often at Aston Rowant 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Apr-14 05:14 PM GMT

Sunday 27th April 2014 – Well behaved Greenstreaks.....

Very unpredictable weather conditions in Swansea this morning but by early afternoon I thought "what do I have to lose?" The answer to that was not very much, but quite a bit to gain if the rain stays off.

Thankfully, apart from a 3 minute shower, it did, and the generally cloudy conditions allowed me nearer to Green Hairstreaks than I've ever been before.

Welshmoor, on the Gower peninsula, is primarily known for its Marsh Fritillary population, but there are plenty of Greenstreaks to be found if one looks

in the right spots. Experience of the site has taught me that the best 'spot' is this 100 metre stretch of field margin:



The first individual seen looked fresh out of the pupa as the wings were still a bit floppy:



As ever, it was interesting to spot the variation in the underside patterns. They ranged from 'blind'...



...to sparse....



...to this beautiful individual with a full array of 'streaks':



At least 8 different individuals seen, along with a couple of Green Veined Whites, a solitary Large White, and two male Orange Tips, one of which proved irresistible on a bluebell:



Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 28-Apr-14 07:49 PM GMT

Hi David,

That first Green Hairstreak has a lovely fresh soft look to it 😊

I don't know if it is maybe a regional thing or something but over the past couple of years I have only taken a couple of photos of GHs with a full set of white marks. All the others have just a couple of spots or none at all and which for me would seem to represent the 'normal' look. It also looks like the ones that I have seen with the full line of spots have been female. It will be interesting to see what I find when they finally get going around here.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: David M

by David M, 28-Apr-14 09:49 PM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

It also looks like the ones that I have seen with the full line of spots have been female.

You may be onto something there, Neil.

In all the other UK hairstreaks, the female is more boldly marked on the underside than the male. Oddly enough though, the two that I saw with these markings were seemingly indulging in the kind of territorial behaviour more associated with males.

The only GH I observed out on a limb on its own was a poorly marked individual, so from these statistics alone I can't make a conclusion, though I accept that you may well be right with your instinctive thoughts.

Re: David M

by David M, 04-May-14 03:01 PM GMT

Sunday 4th May 2014 - 14 species.....

It's always a sign that summer's not far off when you can get well into double figure numbers of species. I visited Crymlyn Burrows on the Swansea coast between 10.30am and noon today hoping particularly to see Dingy Skippers and Small Blues. A solitary Small Heath appeared before either of the aforementioned though, and I managed a single record image:



Dingy Skippers WERE present, but thin on the ground with only two seen:



Having seen a Small Blue here a fortnight ago, I expected there to be quite a few knocking about. However, I only found two isolated individuals:



The kidney vetch is starting to flower, so I daresay numbers will multiply over the next couple of weeks.



I'm pleased to say that Orange Tips were the most numerous species, with about 50 seen (5 females positively identified):



Green Veined White numbers weren't far behind those of Orange Tips, but the next commonest species was Small Copper, with 10 seen:



Other species were Brimstone (5 males), 4 Peacocks, 3 Large Whites (including the first female I've seen this year), 3 Small Whites, 1 Speckled Wood and 1 Small Tortoiseshell.

Danygraig Cemetery

On the way back from Crymlyn, I popped into Danygraig Cemetery to see if there were any Holly Blues and/or Wall Browns.

This faded female Holly Blue (one of 4 seen in total), seemed as though she may be looking to lay eggs as she spent a good 15 minutes on this shrub:



Sadly, she was simply basking, and eventually she zoomed off to some place else.

On my way back to the exit, I spotted my first Wall Brown of 2014. He was a real handful to approach and there was no way I was going to walk across graves to get near him. Eventually I settled for a record image taken from a distance:



Re: David M

by David M, 06-May-14 05:09 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, folks.

Goldie - I'm sure there are a few coastal spots near Workington where you can find Small Blue.

Monday 5th May 2014 - Lots of perseverance.....

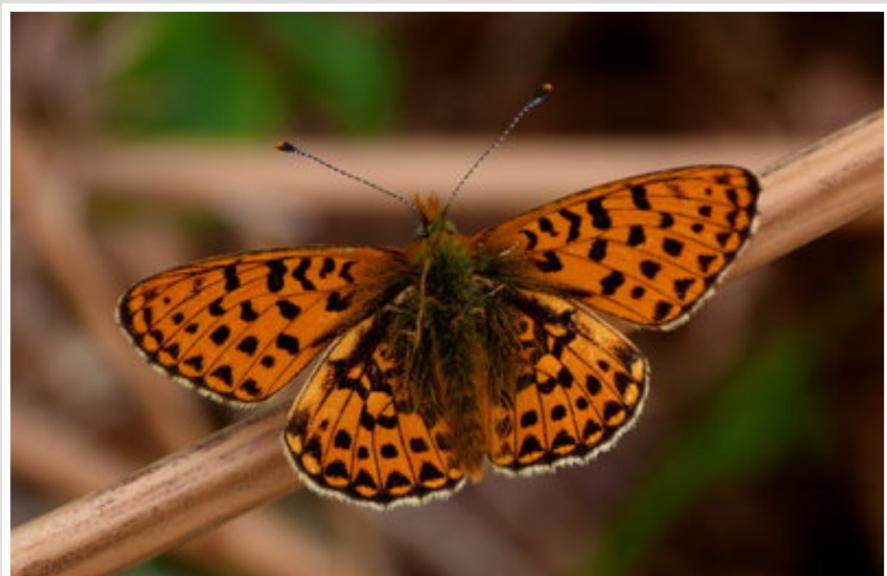
Whenever I plan a trip to Ewyas Harold Common, near Hereford, the weather always seems to take a turn for the worse.

The forecast for Bank Holiday Monday had at first been excellent but then turned to cloudy this far west. However, it was hazy sunshine in Abergavenny at 9.30am so I chanced it and when I arrived at 10.15 little had changed.

Infuriatingly though, in the 10 minutes it took for me to park and walk to the PBF 'hotspot' the sun had been obscured by thicker cloud which showed little sign of budging:



In a way these cloudy conditions played into my hands though as I 'flushed' a male out in the first 5 minutes. I knew he wouldn't be keen to remain on the wing so I got a fair few upperside shots before he obligingly moved to a roosting spot and clamped his wings shut (which is what we all like when we're hunting this species):





My next hour was spent looking at the sky as much as for further PBFs. There were hints of brightness in the distance, and during that time I saw one more Fritillary take a short flight and land invitingly on a sapling:



Just prior to midday, the sun finally broke through and we received a welcome 20 minute burst of warmth. This brought the Fritillaries to life and I saw at least 20 during this period, doing what they always do – flying low to the ground and seeking out bugle blooms. This was one of two females I photographed:



All the while during my PBF 'patrol' I was keeping an eye out for Grizzled Skippers. I've learnt in my many visits here that there are three optimum spots to find them on this vast site, but each walk by yielded nothing. In the end, with the weather not looking like improving, I did one last circuit in the best area. This proved to be most fortuitous:



Very few other butterfly species seen; 3 Green Veined Whites, 2 Large Whites and 2 Peacocks. Not surprising that given the overcast conditions. One day I'll come back here in perfect weather! 😊

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 06-May-14 08:51 PM GMT

Hi David, Looks like you had similar weather to what I had in the Wyre Forest only for me the cloud thickened up a little later. Makes sense I suppose, the clouds were coming from your direction.

Great PBF photos, I didn't manage to get an underside shot, for me they were either low down with their wings open or going higher up in the trees 😞
Oh well, maybe next time.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by David M, 07-May-14 10:34 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Have they been out long at that site because I've noticed that Bentley Wood is often a week or two behind Rewell (which usually seems to be the first) and a week to 5 days behind the South Western colonies?

Wurzel – Bill (Willrow) visited two days prior to me and saw 30-odd so I suspect they've been out since the last days of April.

It's hard to comment on more southerly PBF sites since this one has several warm micro-climates created by south facing slopes with gullies in them that could create conditions for the adults to emerge earlier than on relatively flat woodland sites further south.

Chris – I'm sure there must be a PBF site somewhere in your vicinity. According to my *Llafranchis* guide to French butterflies, this species is definitely present in your département and all surrounding ones too. Are there any areas of relief nearby with coppiced slopes?

Re: David M

by David M, 14-May-14 04:37 PM GMT

Wednesday 14th May 2014 – Stay out of the wind.....

I bagged a half day at work today in order to go looking for Brown Argus & Common Blue. I reckoned Mumbles Head would be the right spot as I've seen plenty here in the past but although the views were magnificent as ever, it turned out pretty windy and all I saw were 3 Dingy Skippers, 2 Peacocks and a Speckled Wood.



I figured that I'd better visit somewhere better sheltered so I decided to walk back to the car park. I **did** see a Brown Argus on the pathway on the way down but a cyclist disturbed it and off it went up the hill somewhere. 😞

Kittle Quarry is just about as sheltered as it gets and is barely a mile from my house. Sure enough, I found another Brown Argus here along with 3 male Common Blues:



Brown Argus underside



Re: David M

by David M, 15-May-14 06:32 PM GMT

Thursday 15th May 2014 – Greenstreaks on my doorstep....

Glorious afternoon so I finished at 3pm and was out exploring Fairwood Common by ten to four.

I'd anticipated Green Hairstreaks might be present here as there are good numbers on Welshmoor which is only 3 miles away and is identical terrain.

I saw 20 in total, all of which were located close to the shrubline at the back of the airport perimeter fence:



Swansea 'airport' – for crop sprayers only!





Other species seen were 4 Small Heaths, a handful of Whites, a Small Tortoiseshell and two Dingy Skippers (there was also the constant accompaniment from a cuckoo which is a sound I haven't heard for a long time).



Given that the presence of Green Hairstreaks replicates that at Welshmoor, I feel confident that by the end of the month I'll find Marsh Fritillaries here too – what a treat to have within walking distance of your front door!

Re: David M

by David M, 17-May-14 11:21 PM GMT

Saturday 17th May 2014 – cloudless skies.....

Given the positive weather forecast, I was up and away from Swansea by 8am heading for Rodborough Common, near Stroud in Gloucestershire to seek out Dukes this morning and I wasn't disappointed.

In total, approximately two dozen were seen, and I had the added bonus of bumping into Bill (Willow) who had clearly gone to bed the previous evening with the same plan in mind.

The view looking westward was, as ever, magnificent:



Unlike last year, no Dukes at all were seen at the base of the 'crater'; instead, at least a dozen were spotted close to the shrubline just to the north of this spot. Puzzling, but nonetheless gratifying because the terrain is significantly easier on the feet.

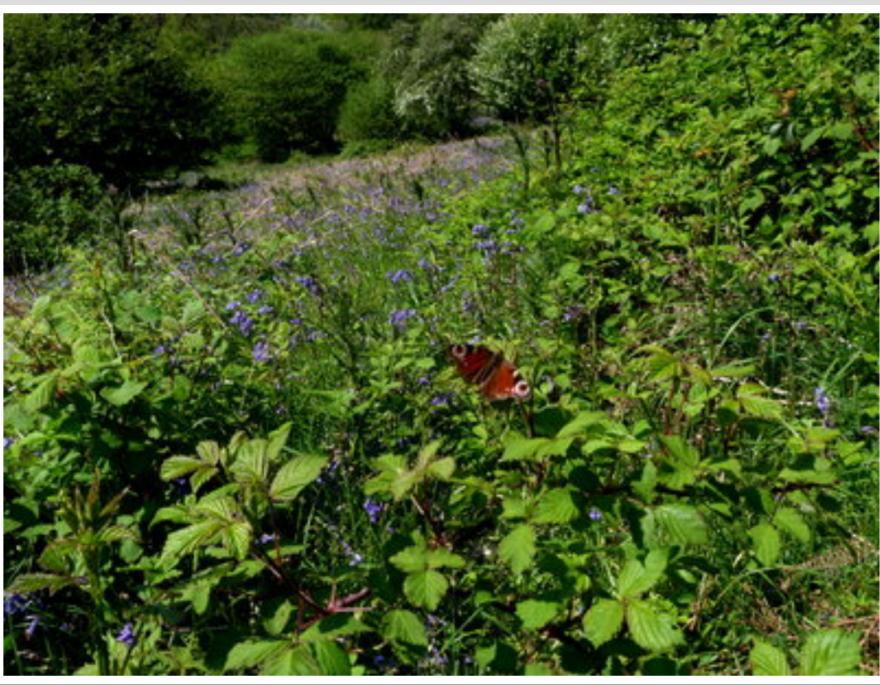


No Adonis Blues at Rodborough so I decamped to Swells Hill Bank but despite a patient wait near the bottom of the hill there were none whatsoever. In spite of that, the species range and numbers were good:

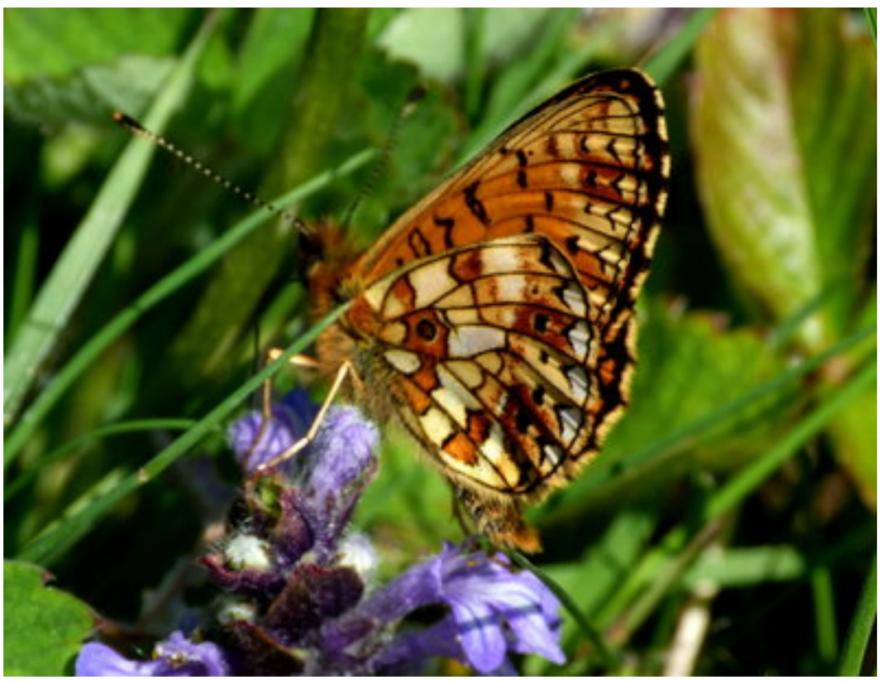
Dingy Skipper 100+
Duke of Burgundy 20-25
Green Hairstreak 15-25
Brown Argus 10-15
Small Blue 10-15
Green Veined White 5-10
Small Heath 7
Peacock 4
Common Blue 2
Large White 1
Small White 1
Brimstone 1
Small Tortoiseshell 1

Alun Valley, Glamorgan

On my way back to Swansea, I decided to check into the Welsh High Brown site for an hour or two to see if there were any Small Pearl Bordered Frits knocking about....there were plenty.....



Peacocks were still around in surprising numbers.....what's more, male Common Blues seemed to have commandeered the Fritillary 'meadow', which right now is full of Bluebells and Campion. That said, I saw 5 Small Pearl Bordered Frits here, and when I made my way onto the south bank I saw 17 more, with a further 14 spotted on the upper west slopes. This augurs well for a strong showing of this species at this site over the next few weeks. I daresay any visitor between 24 May and 7 June could well rack up a three figure total:



With the spring flora still holding sway, there were decent numbers of Brimstones, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Green Veined Whites, Dingy Skippers, Common Blues and Brown Argus present (including this female):



The 'ride' from the upper west slope to the 'meadow' has now been completed, and I promised earlier in the year that I'd provide a photograph looking towards this 'cut'. Here it is:



Even at this time of year, species range and numbers are impressive:

Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary 30-40
Peacock 15-20
Green Veined White 10-15
Common Blue 10-15
Brimstone 11
Brown Argus 8
Dingy Skipper 6
Small Tortoiseshell 4
Speckled Wood 4
Wall Brown 2
Orange Tip 2
Small White 1
Large White 1
Holly Blue 1

Re: David M

by badgerbob, 18-May-14 03:12 PM GMT

Hey David. That is a very impressive count for SPBF. Are they often that numerous at that site or does it look like being a better year than normal for them? Over here the only site is down to single figure counts (if we are lucky) and they generally emerge a week or so later than the West, but you never know, it could bode well for us over here!!

Re: David M

by David M, 18-May-14 07:56 PM GMT

"badgerbob" wrote:

Hey David. That is a very impressive count for SPBF. Are they often that numerous at that site or does it look like being a better year than normal for them? Over here the only site is down to single figure counts (if we are lucky) and they generally emerge a week or so later than the West, but you never know, it could bode well for us over here!!

Bob, this site is vast though much of it is private so most people won't get the chance to do it justice. That said, I believe that in about 10 days time anyone spending a couple of hours on Old Castle Down (the public area) will rack up 40+ SPBFs easily. If every inch of the site were visited, then I'd expect at least 100 and possibly as many as 200. This species really is abundant here.

Sunday 18th May 2014 - Marsh Frits emerge.....

Talking to Bill (Willow) at Rodborough Common yesterday gave me the impetus I needed to check out Welshmoor for Marsh Fritillaries this morning, since he had told me that this species was now out at Aberbargoed Grasslands.

True enough, there were a fair few around (about two dozen in total):



There weren't too many other species about, a handful of Green Veined Whites and a solitary male Large White.....however, Green Hairstreaks (which seem to be having a good year) were commonplace, with at least 20 seen.

Their behaviour has changed since the end of April. Whereas back then they were mainly found perching on shrubs in the field margins, today they were almost exclusively found low to the ground, often nectaring on either bluebell or tormentil. Here's a shot of one 'upside-down' showing the brown markings on the upperside of the tail:



This individual gave me a 5 minute audience after I 'shaded' it on a bluebell. It's definitely probing for nectar but its general behaviour was unusual; it was regularly lowering its antennae and seemed unusually docile:



Re: David M

by David M, 21-May-14 06:55 PM GMT

Wednesday 21st May 2014 - Out for the count; Small Blues & Marsh Fritillaries...

A glorious day, 19c with hardly a breath of wind, so time to do a Small Blue count at Crymlyn Burrows.

Well, I was a tad disappointed as in an hour and a half I only racked up 33 individuals (last year they peaked at 200+). Quite a few were showing signs of wear and tear, although their fellow lycaenids, Common Blues, were looking lustrous.



However, to counter my disappointment, I saw another White Spotted Sable moth – *anania funebris*. I saw a handful of these here last year and they're pretty scarce throughout the UK apparently.



Butterfly species/numbers were:

Common Blue 60–80
Small Heath 40–60
Small Blue 33
Green Veined White 20–30
Brown Argus 8–12
Small Copper 6
Dingy Skipper 4
Orange Tip 3 (2 females)
Brimstone 2 (1 female)
Small White 1
Speckled Wood 1

At 3pm I headed out to Welshmoor, on the Gower, to see if Marsh Fritillary numbers were on the rise. They certainly were. 100–130 were sighted in less than an hour and a half, along with 10–15 Green Hairstreaks, 5–10 Green Veined Whites, 2 Small Coppers, and singleton Large White and Small Tortoiseshell.

Almost all seen were males:



One definite female was seen – I just had to look for an individual struggling to fly!! She was the biggest Marsh Frit I've ever seen, almost twice the size of the smaller males:



The great shame is that from tomorrow the weather is set to turn appalling, so I might struggle for an opportunity to go and see if I can find this species near my home on Fairwood Common.

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 21-May-14 08:25 PM GMT

Hi David,

Just catching up on your diary, some great reports and photos in your last few posts 😊

That White Spotted Sable Moth is a little cracker, never seen one myself.

Cheers,

Neil

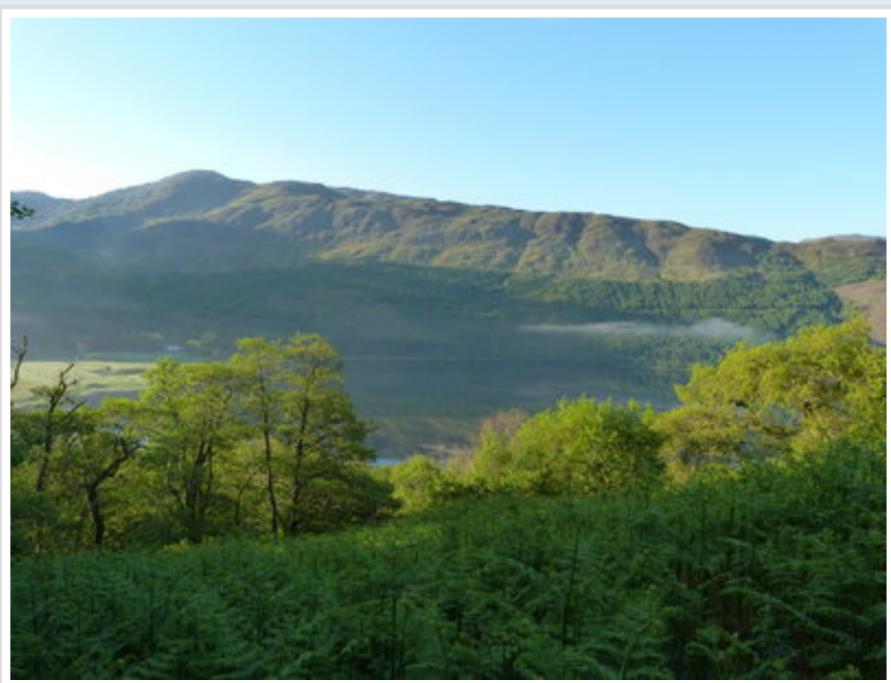
Re: David M

by David M, 28-May-14 03:52 PM GMT

Tuesday 27th May 2014 - The Chequered Flag (Part 1)...

I was already in Liverpool visiting a relative on Bank Holiday Monday, and given the positive weather forecast for the west coast of Scotland for the following morning I decided to drive through the night (with next to no traffic) and see if I could track down the last mainland British species that had hitherto eluded me.

A couple of hours' kip in a lay by at Ledaig, north of Connel between 2am and 4am provided the boost I needed and by 4.20 I had arrived at Glasdrum Wood. I had another little nap until 5.45am but when I opened my eyes there was no way I could go back to sleep - the scene was one of rare beauty and serene tranquility. I knew butterflies wouldn't be active this early, so I made my way up to the higher part of the site and took in the beautiful views which were complemented by the sounds of cuckoos and curlews from way down below:



Here's a view from the same spot a couple of hours later looking northwards:



The conditions were absolutely perfect – clear skies, warm sunshine and no wind whatsoever. I eventually made my way down to the famous 'wayleaves' under the power lines and at 7.10am the first Chequered Skipper of the day zoomed into view:



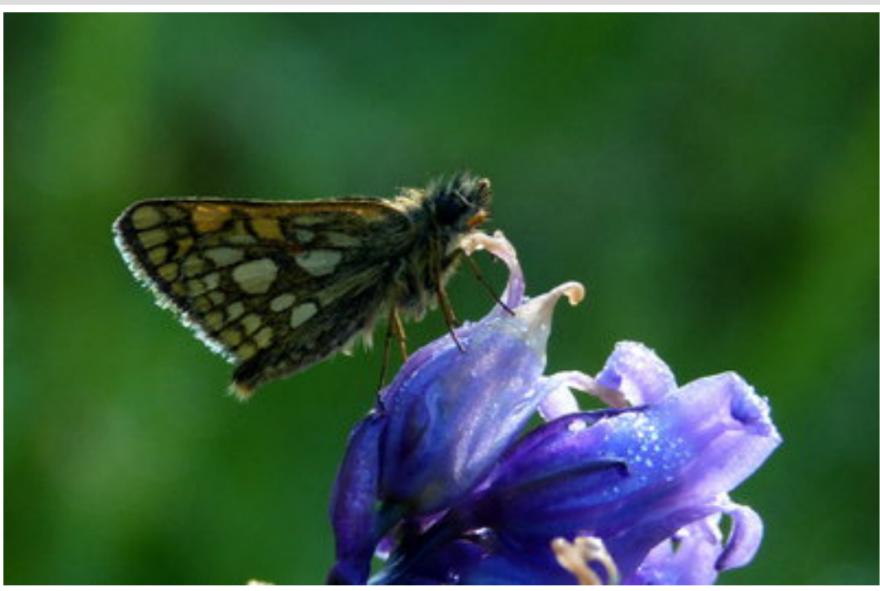
They were subsequently very easy to find; I saw 33 in total in a two hour stay at the site. All but 3 were located in the steep (and, it has to be said, very boggy) wayleaf area pictured:



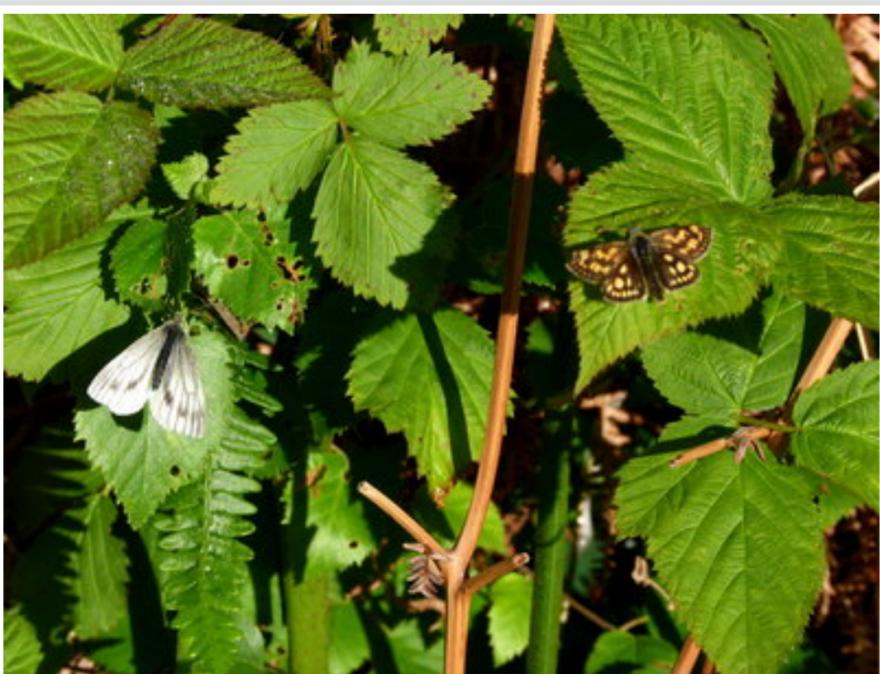
They are easily the most approachable of our UK skippers, basking with wings wide open to soak up the sun:



They seemed equally happy in the shade too:



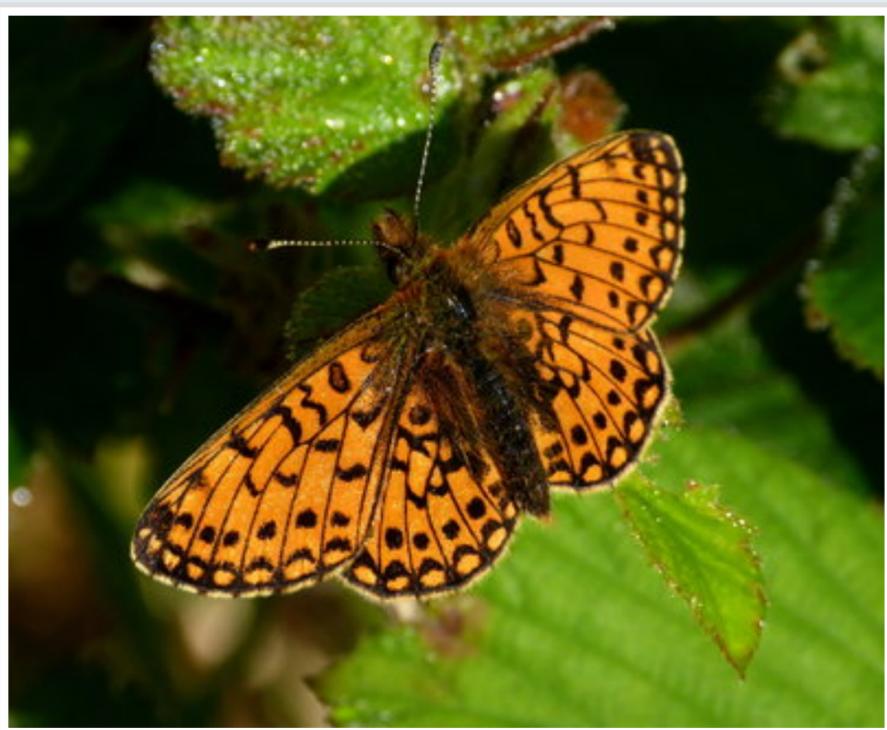
There were several other species around: Green Veined Whites numbered around a dozen and as I went to take an image of this one, a Chequered Skipper gatecrashed:



A similar number of Pearl Bordered Fritillaries were encountered:



This one looks suspiciously **Small** PBF, but I find it hard to believe they are out yet this far north. I never got an underside view so can't be certain. If anyone wants to advise then feel free:



4 Speckled Woods seen, along with a Peacock, 2 male Orange Tips and 3 Small Coppers (one of which was so huge I initially thought it was a Cinnabar moth!!):





It was tough to prise myself away from this beautiful site on such a lovely morning, but I needed to head up to Spean Bridge which is where I'd reserved accommodation and I reckoned that would take well over an hour. I took one last photo from the car park and by 9.20am I was gone:



Re: David M

by Neil Hulme, 28-May-14 04:11 PM GMT

Great stuff David. Happy memories are flooding back already. 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: David M

by Hoggars, 28-May-14 05:14 PM GMT

Thanks so much for sharing that David- the best report I've read in ages and congratulations on seeing McSkipper!

Re: David M

by Padfield, 28-May-14 05:28 PM GMT

As others have commented, great pictures and story, David!

I'd say that definitely is a small pearl-bordered fritillary – so clearly it *is* already on the wing that far north!

Guy

Re: David M

by Maximus, 28-May-14 06:03 PM GMT

Very nice David – brings the memories of last year right back to me 😊

Re: David M

by Willow, 28-May-14 08:05 PM GMT

Great stuff David, I'm delighted that you finally got your last British mainland species, super report and lovely images 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by Lee Hurrell, 28-May-14 10:59 PM GMT

What a lovely report and photos, David! I could feel the excitement.

That was the clearing under the power lines I've read about? It's funny what you picture in your head – I was thinking of huge pylons!

Thanks for posting, it makes me really want to travel to see those species in the UK I am yet to, of which the Chequered Skipper is one.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: David M

by David M, 29-May-14 06:22 PM GMT

Thank you all for your kind comments. Yes, this part of the world is pretty special on a sunny, calm morning. So much so that it's difficult to reconcile yourself with the fact that you're in Britain!!

Jason – you'll have no problem seeing Chequered Skippers this weekend at Glasdrum. The forecast is decent so fill your boots!

"Padfield" wrote:

I'd say that definitely is a small pearl-bordered fritillary – so clearly it *is* already on the wing that far north!

Thanks for confirming my suspicions, Guy. This is the first time I've ever seen both PBF **and** SPBF simultaneously. Very satisfying.

Tuesday 27th May 2014 – The Chequered Flag (Part 2)...

The journey north from Glasdrum to Spean Bridge was breathtaking. Prior to this day, I had never been north of the bridge at Connel and that is a great regret in hindsight. I had to pull my car off road when I saw this panorama with Castle Stalker in the foreground:



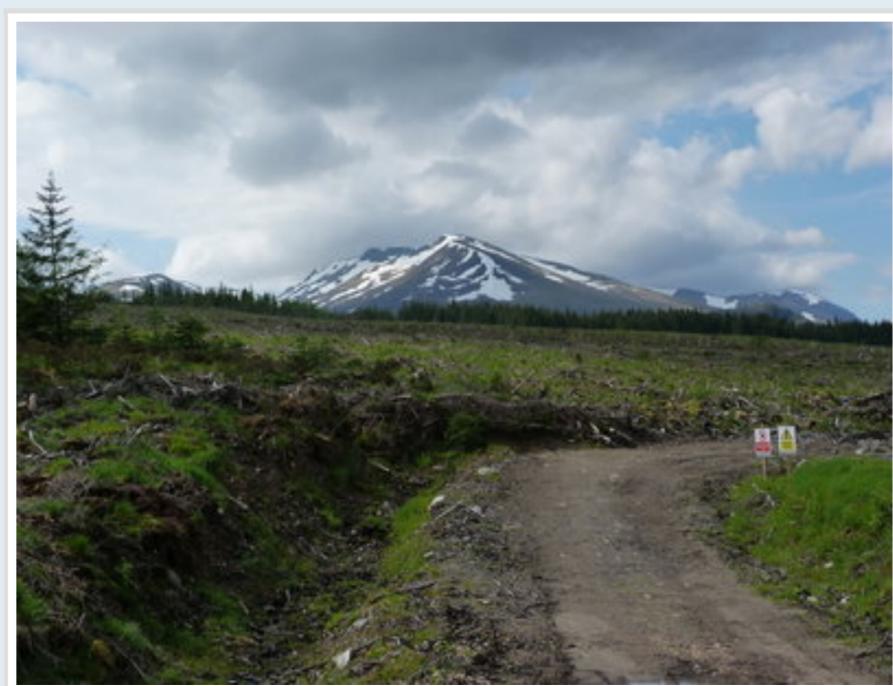
I arrived in the car park of the Spean Bridge Hotel at 10.20am and immediately got my boots back on to go and explore Killiechonate Woods which is just behind the station:



It had clouded over somewhat by now, but the territory looked good for Chequered Skippers:



The higher peaks of the Nevis range were still snow clad:



Sadly, however, despite a good 3 hours searching, the only butterflies I saw were a few Orange Tips, Green Veined Whites and a solitary Peacock. I know that *palaemon* has been recorded here frequently so my tentative conclusion is that they hadn't yet emerged at this more northerly site (practically all were very fresh indeed at Glasdrum 40 miles further south). I had intended to visit Allt Mhuic in the afternoon which is further north still, but the absence of Chequered Skippers at Killiechonate made me change my mind.

I went to bed in the hotel at 3pm and decided to set off home in the late evening, which proved a wise decision as it took me over 9 HOURS to get back to Swansea. Had I left the following morning, I daresay you could have added another two to that total!

So, the price to be paid is a very stiff back which almost left me unable to get out of bed this morning! I wouldn't change a thing though and would encourage anyone to go and visit this spectacular corner of our fair isle – it really is quite amazing.

Re: David M

by Padfield, 29-May-14 07:12 PM GMT

I guess that after September 14th this year there is a chance chequered skipper will no longer be a UK butterfly ... Good plan to go this year, David!

Guy

Re: David M

by David M, 29-May-14 11:45 PM GMT

"Padfield" wrote:

I guess that after September 14th this year there is a chance chequered skipper will no longer be a UK butterfly ...

Very possible, Guy, but my gut feeling is that Scotland will vote to remain in the UK come September.

Neil – you are very lucky to have a site where both PBF and SPBF can be found simultaneously. It's such a shame that PBF became extinct at the Alun Valley site in the early 1980s because given the conservation work that has been carried out since, this habitat would suit them down to the ground, and would be a rare location where all five of our violet feeding fritillaries would thrive.

Re: David M

by David M, 31-May-14 03:57 PM GMT

Saturday 31st May 2014 – Frustratingly cloudy.....

Off to the Alun Valley site, near Bridgend, this morning in spite of rather gloomy looking skies.

Although it never really brightened up, I still managed to see 20 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries.



I also saw my first Large Skippers of 2014:



A new batch of fresh Speckled Woods seems to be emerging too:



Species/totals seen:

Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary 20
Common Blue 6
Speckled Wood 4
Brown Argus 2
Peacock 2
Large Skipper 2
Red Admiral 1
Small White 1
Green Veined White 1

Re: David M

by David M, 05-Jun-14 07:03 PM GMT

Thursday June 5th 2014 - Found them at last (with a bonus thrown in)!!.....

Welshmoor is only a couple of miles from Fairwood Common so I naturally thought Marsh Fritillaries, which are found in numbers at the former, should also be found at the latter given the identical habitat.

My two previous visits had yielded nothing however, which puzzled me greatly. On this occasion I crossed the B4271 to a likely looking spot near Gelli-Hir Wood and sure enough, within a couple of minutes I spotted one.

The marshy ground was replete with Ragged Robin plants and soon I learned that there was more than one species of Fritillary on the wing here. Small Pearl Borderededs were zooming about in every direction I looked, making a bee-line for these flowers. Even the Marsh Frits were settling on them, and I tried waiting to see if I could get an image of both species together but they were all very active and rarely settled for longer than 10 seconds or so.

In total, I saw 30-40 SPBFs, 20-30 Marsh Fritillaries, 5-10 Small Heaths, 2 Common Blues and 1 Green Hairstreak.

Here's a view of the habitat:



The Ragged Robin blooms were a magnet:



This Marsh Fritillary had her head buried:



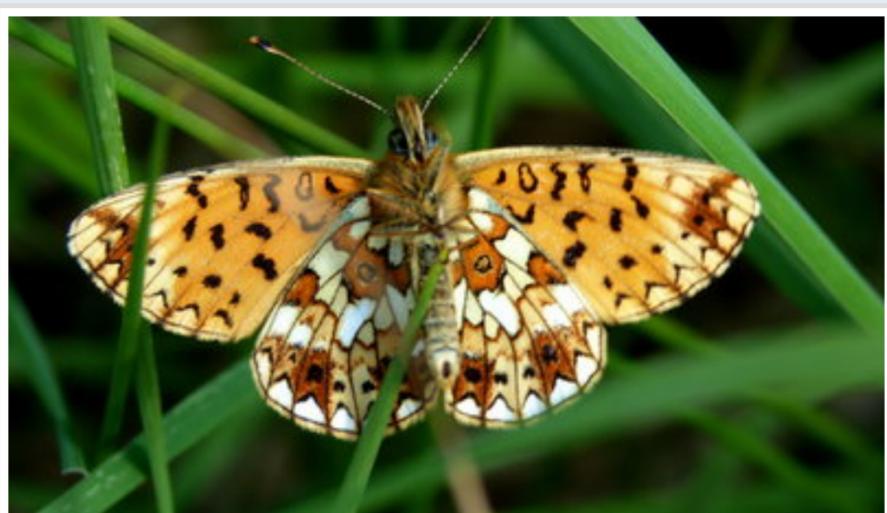
The SPBFs found it irresistible:



This female was a real cracker:



As ever, grass blades proved annoying:



A couple of Marsh Frits were good enough to give me unencumbered views though:



How uplifting it is to know I can see Marsh Fritillaries, SPBFs and Green Hairstreaks within walking distance of my house. Moving to the Gower was a good idea!!

Re: David M

by Willow, 07-Jun-14 03:57 PM GMT

Finally managed to finish off reading your reports David, great stuff, very much enjoyed and I hope your fully recovered from that stiff back momento you brought back from Scotland...all that way in just 9 hours 🤪 ...that's your new 'Adonismobile' for you 😊

Regards,

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

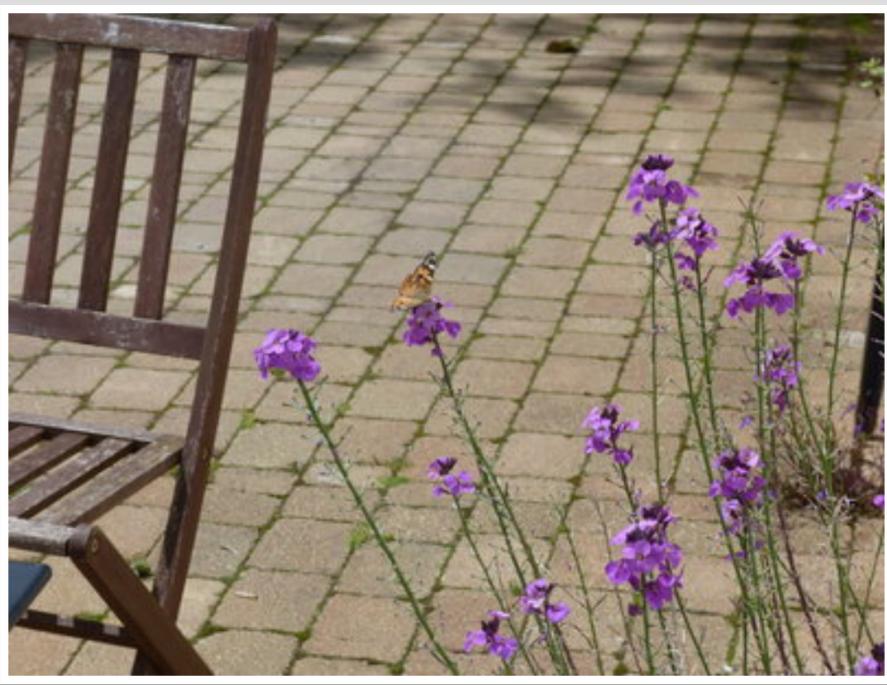
Re: David M

by David M, 07-Jun-14 04:35 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments once again, guys. Much appreciated.

Saturday 7th June 2014 – Backyard Bonanza!!.....

Although my trip on Thursday afternoon was theoretically within walking distance of my home, I actually went in the car as I'd have had to navigate my way across swathes of marshy common otherwise. Today, given that the weather at midday was warm, humid and sunny (thunderstorms didn't arrive till 3pm), I resolved to leave my car on the drive and simply walk to Fairwood Common, which takes about 10 minutes. A good omen was seeing a Painted Lady (my first of this year) on my neighbour's flowers:



What a shock I then got once I arrived on the Common.

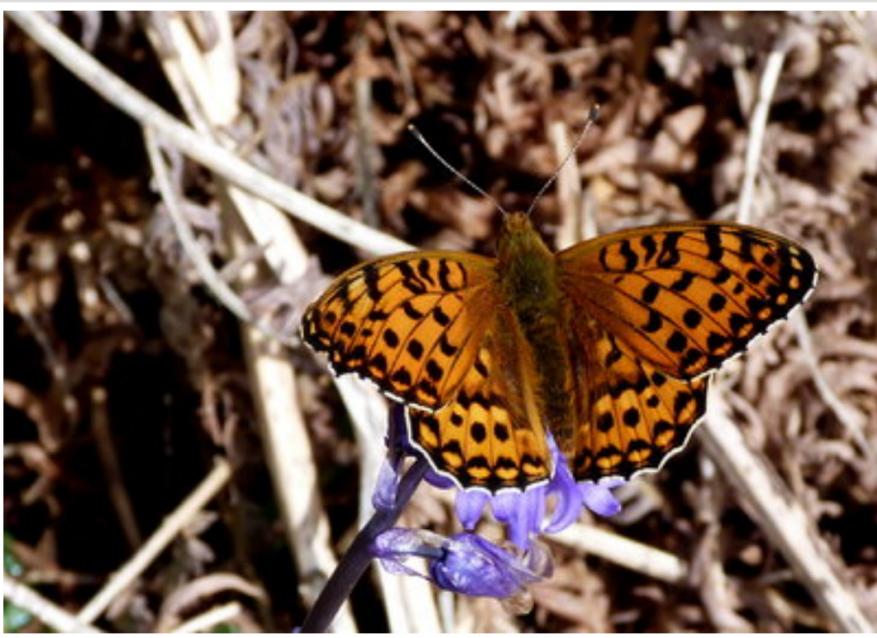
I saw practically nothing until I reached the tree line, but that's when it all changed. This little heat-trap below provided one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life watching butterflies:



I was rooted to the spot, transfixed, as large numbers of both Marsh and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries darted here, there and everywhere:



I suddenly saw a much bigger fritillary – my first Dark Green of the year:



This beautiful, fresh specimen hung around for 20 minutes or so, and so did I, as I watched (for the first time) these three fritillary species continually jousting in the air as they investigated one another. Every now and then, the DGF would descend for a bout of nectaring:



In amongst this maelstrom were a few Common Blues and at least a dozen Green Hairstreaks:



Two Red Admiral fly-bys and my first Meadow Brown of the year rounded things off:



In the two hours I was out of the house I saw:

- Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary 40-60
- Marsh Fritillary 20-30
- Green Hairstreak 15-20
- Common Blue 5-10
- Speckled Wood 3
- Red Admiral 2
- Painted Lady 1
- Dark Green Fritillary 1
- Meadow Brown 1
- Brown Argus 1

Re: David M

by Maximus, 07-Jun-14 08:14 PM GMT

Backyard Bonanza indeed, what a fantastic array of lovely butterflies, you're very fortunate David. Lovely DGF underside shot 😊 It would seem that Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows are beginning to appear more regularly now, lets hope this trend continues, just like last summer!

Re: David M

by Willow, 08-Jun-14 03:03 PM GMT

Almost feel as if summer has truly arrived with such tourists as **Painted Lady** around 😊 nice stuff David 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by Lee Hurrell, 09-Jun-14 11:03 PM GMT

Excellent reports and photos, David – the DGF underside is stunning!

There's nothing like a local patch is there.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: David M

by David M, 14-Jun-14 08:46 PM GMT

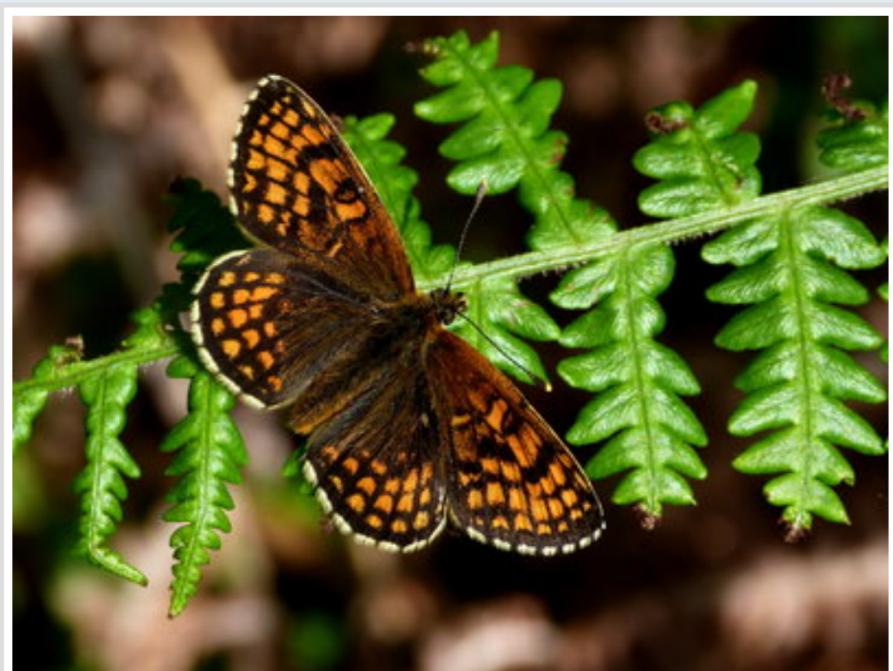
Thanks again, folks. Yes, the local patch is satisfying but there are times when you have to venture further afield...

Saturday 14th June 2014 – Twin peaks.....

Roger Dodge (aka Roger Harding) gave me extremely helpful information regarding locating Heath Fritillaries at Haddon Hill.....in 2011!!!

Embarrassingly, it took until today for me to make use of them, but I'm pleased to say his guidance remains spot on, as practically all the Heath Fritillaries I saw at this site were observed in precisely the area he recommended.

They weren't exactly ubiquitous (about 15 seen in total) but they were the commonest butterfly down in the dip towards the woodland at the end of the main path into the site.



Most individuals I saw in this 'theatre' were males:



I did see at least two females, including this one who was doing her best to ward off an admirer:



Sadly, I also found a newly emerged Heath that is never destined to fly due to some trauma during emergence:



At 11.35am I decided to depart and head for Collard Hill, which is only a 10 mile detour from the M5 on the way back into Wales.

Surprisingly, the slopes were very quiet, with only a handful of other enthusiasts looking for this elusive butterfly. Whilst I was surveying the territory for *arion*, I saw my first Ringlet of 2014 followed by a beautiful Marbled White:



I spotted a couple of Clouded Yellows on the upper slopes, and made the effort to hunt down this female during an overcast period:



Eventually, a Large Blue fluttered into view, but it thundered down a ride and I eventually lost sight of it on open ground towards the bottom of the slope. I reported it to the warden who was on site and he told me that this was the first adult sighting of 2014, which I found almost unbelievable. This species finally emerged on 14th June 2013 after one of the coldest springs on record. Last winter was, in contrast, very mild, and spring was hardly austere either – why has this particular butterfly remained retarded when practically all others in 2014 are 7–14 days in advance of 2013?

One for the experts, perhaps?

Re: David M

by William, 14-Jun-14 09:02 PM GMT

Hi David,

I was walking round with the warden this morning (must have just missed you) and the general thinking is that the emergence of Large Blue and flowering of its Wild Thyme foodplant are very closely linked, being influenced by the same factors (such as soil temperature). Collard has a very clayey soil compared to other Large Blue sites, and so stores far more water, this in turn lowers the soil temperature and retards the development of Large Blue larvae and Wild Thyme, leading to this amazingly late emergence. This is very apparent on the site with only your Large Blue and a small amount of Thyme in flower, nice Marbled White by the way 😊

BWs

William

Re: David M

by Willow, 16-Jun-14 12:49 PM GMT

Fine report David, Haddon Hill is a wonderful location, superb views and the **Heath Fritillary** are great too 😊 I know your a bit casual about them due to your experiences with them in France, but this is 'proper' HF habitat 😊

"William" wrote:

leading to this amazingly late emergence

By coincidence William, David's sighting of Collard's first **Large Blue** of the year was on the same date as last year's first emergence – the 14th!!!
Thought you might be interested in that bit of info 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by David M, 16-Jun-14 06:52 PM GMT

Sunday 15th June 2014 – When in doubt...venture out....

I have intentionally plagiarised Bill's (Willow) signature as it was he who persuaded me to make the trip to Bernwood Forest today. I had grave reservations on account of the gloomy weather forecast – 300 miles is a long, long way to go to see thin air!

Well, Bill's instincts regarding the butterflies were superior to mine and we ended up having a surprisingly good day, in spite of the many frustrating periods when heavier cloud cover put an end to all butterfly activity.

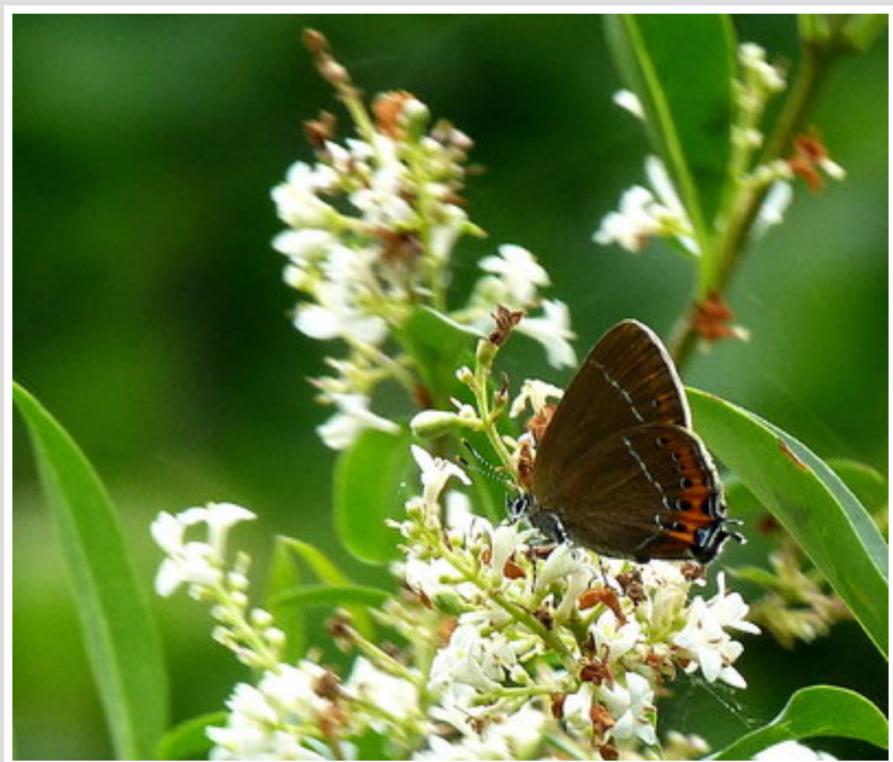
We visited the 'Compensation Area' late in the afternoon last year and decided to spend the entire day there today, ignoring the equally attractive claims of nearby Whitecross Green Wood.

The site is pretty sizeable, and the major positive is that there are many, many areas where Black Hairstreaks can be reliably and easily found, and if we could do it on a cloudy day, I dread to think how many more could be seen on a warm, sunny one.

Here's a small section showing the proximity to the M40, as well as the leaden skies:



Out of a total of 6 hours spent here, I doubt if the sun came out for more than 20 minutes, but when it did the Hairstreaks would immediately come to life, swirling around the canopies and occasionally nectaring on the abundant wild privet. Unfortunately, the lowest descent was to about 6 feet; most were 10 feet or more up, making photography challenging. Many were still in decent nick though.

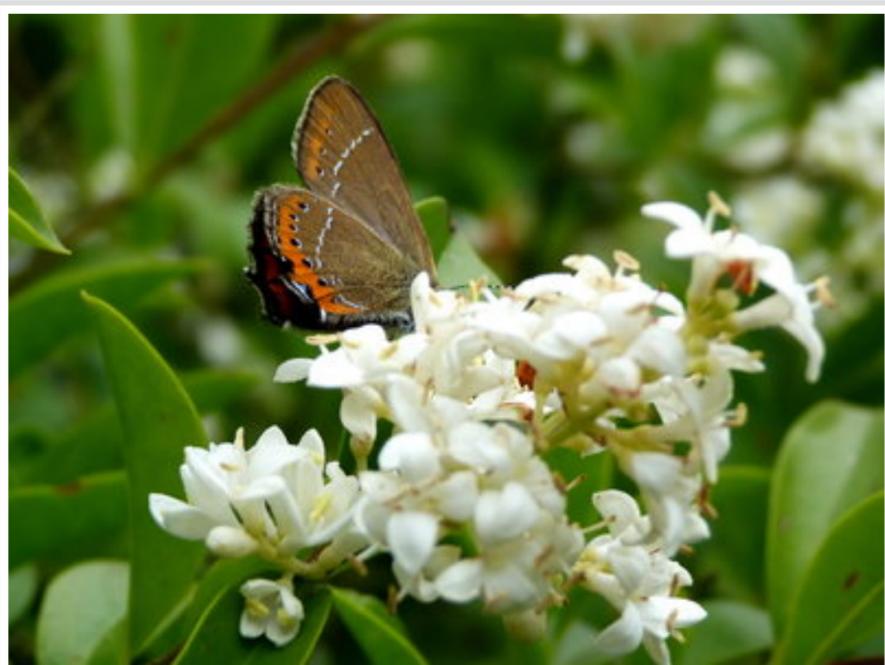


Once the sun went in, they would remain active so long as the cloud cover was fairly light. Once the grey stuff passed over they would disappear, along with everything else.

This gave us opportunities to see a small number of torpid Ringlets and Marbled Whites:



Contrary to the forecast, the skies actually got greyer as the afternoon wore on, so we called it a day at 4.45, but even with such gloomy conditions the occasional insect could be found nectaring:



Numbers seen? My estimate would be about 25, and we found concentrations in at least 3 areas with odd ones elsewhere. Aside from the Hairstreaks, it was nice to see a Comma again today, although White Admirals and SWFs were unsurprisingly absent given the conditions (if they've emerged here at all yet).

Had Bill predicted such numbers in these conditions I'd have told him he was off his rocker. Thankfully, he didn't, otherwise I'd have had to wipe the egg off my face.

Perhaps we owe our good fortune to our canine companion? Guy Padfield has Minnie – well, today we had Millie, who even looks quite similar:



Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 16-Jun-14 08:07 PM GMT

Hi David,

Black Hairstreak is still a species that I have not seen yet despite them only being 90 minutes away down the M40 for me...shameful, I know 😞 I just always seem to be somewhere else when they emerge and by the time I have the opportunity their short flight season is over. Not sure if I will get the chance again this year now so if not, I really must make them top of my list of targets for next year.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by Willow, 16-Jun-14 08:49 PM GMT

Have to agree David, your **Black Hairstreak** numbers tally with mine, surprisingly good considering the weather conditions. Will also take this opportunity of thanking you for both the 'lift' (no..! no..! not for the Hairstreak 😄) and your company 😄 and ain't Millie a real cutie!!!

Must ask, whose the good looking guy taking the photo's of the lady taking the photo's 😄

Super report and pics 😄

Best Wishes,

Bill 😄

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by David M, 19-Jun-14 10:31 PM GMT

"William" wrote:

Hi David,

I was walking round with the warden this morning (must have just missed you) and the general thinking is that the emergence of Large Blue and flowering of its Wild Thyme foodplant are very closely linked, being influenced by the same factors (such as soil temperature). Collard has a very clayey soil compared to other Large Blue sites, and so stores far more water, this in turn lowers the soil temperature and retards the development of Large Blue larvae and Wild Thyme, leading to this amazingly late emergence. This is very apparent on the site with only your Large Blue and a small amount of Thyme in flower, nice Marbled White by the way 😄

BWs

William

Thanks, William. I'm sure you're right. Last year cold temperatures led to a retarded emergence so it's highly plausible, given the habitat requirements

of this species, that abnormally wet weather in spring had a similar effect.

Things look to be improving though right now, and one hopes that the Large Blue will appear in greater numbers than in 2013. With warm, sunny weather forecast for at least the next 5 days, one hopes that this iconic species can enjoy an ideal flight period.

Re: David M

by David M, 20-Jun-14 01:51 PM GMT

Friday 20th June 2014 - Early morning visit....

I had a morning to spare so I nipped off to the Alun Valley site near Bridgend to track down my first High Brown Fritillaries of the year.

Some 30 or so Fritillaries were seen, though Dark Greens were undoubtedly in the majority, with several females indulging in those distinctive jittery flights close to the ground searching for choice violets on which to lay their eggs.

Three HBFs were positively identified, though given the sunny and warm conditions they didn't settle for long. Thank goodness for the marsh thistles in the 'meadow' as these always provide decent photo opportunities.



Species seen between 9.30 and 11.30am were:

Dark Green Fritillary
High Brown Fritillary
Ringlet
Meadow Brown
Small Tortoiseshell
Small White
Large Skipper
Common Blue
Speckled Wood

Re: David M

by Willrow, 20-Jun-14 11:28 PM GMT

Glad your early morning visit paid dividends David, and your fine images suggest that was indeed the case 😊 and there seems to be a good weather forecast for the weekend too 😎 ...enjoy!!!

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by David M, 23-Jun-14 07:20 PM GMT

Thanks, Bill/Wurzel/Pauline. Having HBFs nearby is easily the best thing about living in Swansea.

Sunday 22nd June 2014 - Putting matters right...

For the last couple of years, I've paid mere lip service to two of our most impressive butterfly species: Silver Washed Fritillary and White Admiral.

It seems whenever I'm in an environment where they're present in decent numbers, I'm always on the lookout for other, more elusive species and consequently don't really pay much attention to them.

Today, I decided to put that right by visiting a location where the **principal attractions** are these two stunners, meaning there wouldn't be any distractions.

Lower Woods, near Wickwar in Gloucestershire, is a place I visited in 2010, and one thing I recall was the huge, huge numbers (100+) of SWFs flying about there. This time, there weren't quite so many, but they were still easy to observe, with several welcome overcast spells allowing close approaches:



The way in which this species interacts with its fellows is one of the great joys of British butterflying, and I was treated to quite a bit of it during the two and a half hours I was there:



White Admirals were a bit harder to locate. The odd one would pop up almost anywhere but would remain infuriatingly esconced in the canopy, almost teasing me:



Eventually though, I found the stretch of ride where I'd seen a fair few four years ago. Clearly, the right hand shrub line is a hotspot for them here, because there were decent numbers once again:



Being so early in their flight season, most if not all were unscarred by bramble damage:



Total species/numbers seen on a glorious day (24c and 75% sunshine):

Ringlet 100+
Meadow Brown 60-100
Silver Washed Fritillary 50-70
Speckled Wood 20-30
Large Skipper 20-30
White Admiral 20-30
Red Admiral 2
Marbled White 2
Comma 1
Small Tortoiseshell 1
Large White 1

Re: David M

by Willow, 23-Jun-14 09:14 PM GMT

Fine reportage David, lovely crisp images and you may have tempted me into yet another visit over the border, cos' I've a real soft spot for fresh **White**

Admiral 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by David M, 24-Jun-14 10:28 PM GMT

Monday 23rd June 2014 - Sunshine Central....

I'd spent the weekend in Abergavenny, so given the weather on Monday was so glorious I thought I'd take a detour on my way back to Swansea and pop into Cors Caron, near Tregaron in Ceredigion, to reacquaint myself with Large Heath.

Conditions were as perfect as one can ever expect in this hilly part of mid Wales - 24c, virtually cloudless skies and a light breeze. The site looked inviting in the extreme from the entrance:



I spent about 1 hour 20 minutes there and in that time counted 27 Large Heaths, most of which were highly active and in no mood to settle. Thankfully, one particular male decided to alight quite close to the boardwalk and remained in situ for at least 2 minutes:



Males and females are easily distinguishable in flight so I resolved to wait for the more sandy coloured females in the hope that their greater propensity to settle would enable me to better approach them. Although this proved correct, I reckoned without the grass stems as their tendency was to settle rather low in the undergrowth:



One thing that struck me for the first time was how blue the 'pupil' of the hindwing eyespots was (pardon the poor image but this was as close as I could get):



The shrub line in the distance is the southerly limit of this wetland site, and is also the demarcation point for Large Heaths in the UK – south of this line they do not exist:



Dragonflies abound here for those who are into these insects, and Red Kites are a constant presence overhead. All in all a beautiful location on a day such as this and although the butterfly species range is poor (Large Skipper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown & Red Admiral were the only others seen), watching Large Heaths merrily cavorting over a rare landscape such as this is one of the more 'off-beat' pleasures of the UK lepidopterist.

Re: David M

by millerd, 24-Jun-14 10:41 PM GMT

What a lovely looking site! And great pictures – I still need to see this butterfly.

Your comment:

"...the southerly limit of this wetland site, and is also the demarcation point for Large Heaths in the UK – south of this line they do not exist..."

is fascinating – this is the same latitude as Worcester, Northampton and Cambridge! So it's not really a northern species at all... 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by Pauline, 26-Jun-14 06:46 AM GMT

Smashing shots of the Large Heath David. Is it just the angle or is that female ovi-posting? Your photo prompted me to look up their larval food plant but I have no idea what jointed rush or cottongrass look like.

Re: David M

by David M, 26-Jun-14 06:42 PM GMT

"Pauline" wrote:

Smashing shots of the Large Heath David. Is it just the angle or is that female ovi-posting? Your photo prompted me to look up their larval food plant but I have no idea what jointed rush or cottongrass look like.

Cotton grass is unmistakable, Pauline, but she wasn't settled on this when the image was taken. I agree that she looks in 'ovipositing mode' though.

"Wurzel" wrote:

Is there any reason why they shouldn't be found further south – is it because of a certain food plant that only grows in more northerly areas or at higher altitudes?

I think the distribution of Large Heaths in the UK very much follows that of blanket/raised bogs, although this doesn't explain their absence from a few sites further south of their range. For instance, there is a perfect location for them just west of Carmarthen near the A40, but they are absent there. I believe there are similarly suitable sites in the SW of England too.

Re: David M

by badgerbob, 26-Jun-14 09:00 PM GMT

Hi David. I stayed at a Bed and Breakfast a couple of times with my son birdwatching in the winter in Tregaron. This spot is fabulous and would be great to revisit in the summer for the Large Heath. You have put a thought in my head for maybe next year. Great stuff. Mind you I wouldn't mind coming over for all those High Browns near to where you are!!

Re: David M

by Willow, 26-Jun-14 09:47 PM GMT

Couple of good reports from some good days out by the looks David 😊 I've got Cors Caron on my radar for the next week or so 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by David M, 29-Jun-14 11:42 PM GMT

Saturday 28th June 2014 – Uplifting day....

Bill (Willow) and I decided to spend an entire day searching for Silver Studded Blues on the Pembrokeshire coast today given that the weather forecast favoured the far west of the country for a change.

This proved to be a real blessing as we counted an incredible 101 individuals in a delightful 6 hour visit.



Females were hard to find at first, but we eventually racked up a dozen or so:



I saw my first Small Skippers of the year including this mating pair:



Another first for 2014 was Grayling, including another mating pair:



I watched the finale to this episode and it was the female who 'detached' herself and simply flew off, leaving the male looking rather bewildered:



Regular 'breaks' were taken to soak up the incredible coastal views, and these provided notable moments of pleasure. For instance, several Guillemots were observed on the stacks:



Even better was a very close encounter with a chough, which we first saw bathing in a freshwater puddle:



It then provided another close encounter whilst drying off on the cliff face:



Shortly afterwards, we were treated to a parent teaching a juvenile how to feed:



We decamped 3 miles east and just when we thought things couldn't get any better, we discovered eight more Silver Studded Blues in a location that seemingly isn't included in their distribution maps – Broadhaven Bay:



A couple of magnificent Emperor dragonflies served to heighten the mood still further:



Butterfly numbers were:

Meadow Brown 150–200
Silver Studded Blue 101 (8 more at Broadhaven Bay, 5 males and 3 females)
Ringlet 30–50
Dark Green Fritillary 20–30
Small Skipper 20–30
Small Heath 15–25
Large Skipper 15–25
Grayling 10–15
Small Tortoiseshell 5–10
Common Blue 3
Red Admiral 2
Large White 1
Small White 1
Green Veined White 1

Re: David M

by David M, 30-Jun-14 05:34 PM GMT

Sunday 29th June 2014 – Large Blue Central....

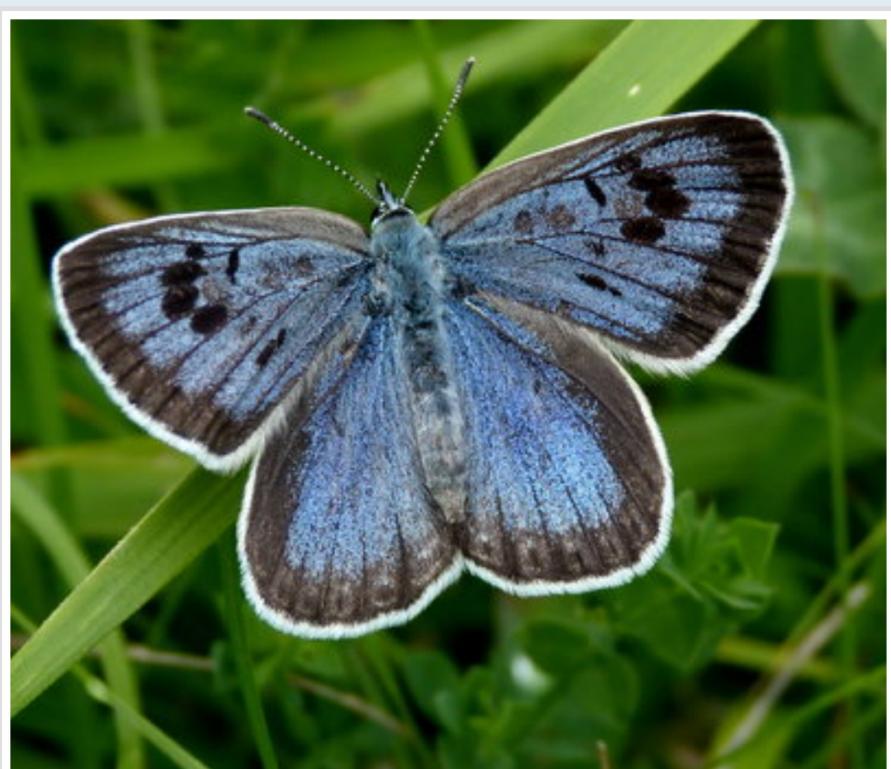
Bill (Willow) and I visited Daneway Banks today following the positive feedback from others on this site, and we both absolutely concur; it is a **magnificent** location.

Walking down the lane from the lay by this precipitous hillside emerges into view, imperiously dominating the landscape.

It is a vast site, and, I have to say, much easier on the feet than Collard Hill. What's more, it has capacity to deal with large numbers of visitors which Collard sometimes does not, with often crowds of people setting up 'camp' in the known hotspots.

There is a grassy field adjacent to the entrance to the main site, and Bill & I decided to take a quick look. As I was opening the gate, I spotted a Large Blue on a marsh thistle, so the omens were already very good.

Once on the main site we soon found a very obliging male who was more than happy to pose during an overcast spell:



We moved up towards the upper entrance gate, from where this image was taken:



Adjacent to this gate is another which leads to the upper part of the site. We went through it and hung around for a minute or two as the territory looked promising. That was judicious because a male flew by and came to rest right by us:



Whilst we were observing this male, a much brighter specimen zoomed into view – our first female of the day:



We spent a delightful 10 minutes or so watching her, but her behaviour perplexed us. Correct me if I'm wrong, but her plant of choice appears to be marjoram:



She had no interest in any other plant, and she kept bending her abdomen as if to oviposit, but she never actually laid because I checked several times once she'd moved on and found nothing. Curious.



In total, we found 15 different Large Blues, although the area with the greatest abundance of wild thyme was strangely bereft of their presence. One male that we **did** find in this spot was unusually dusky:



Other interesting features of the day were the amazing numbers of Marbled Whites. If I were to put a figure to them then it'd be more than 1,000. They were everywhere (Meadow Browns in similar numbers too).

Species range/numbers were:

Marbled White 1,000+
Meadow Brown 1,000+
Ringlet 200+
Small Heath 50-100

Small Skipper 50-100
Small Tortoiseshell 30-50
Large Skipper 30-50
Large Blue 15
Common Blue 6 (badly faded, which makes their ground colour similar to LB)
Dark Green Fritillary 5-10
Green Hairstreak 2 (practically all the green had worn off these two)
Silver Washed Fritillary 2 (both seen adjacent to the woodland to the west of the site)
Speckled Wood 1
Painted Lady 1
Green Veined White 1

Re: David M

by Maximus, 30-Jun-14 09:07 PM GMT

Nice stuff David, during our visit to Daneway we saw several females ovipositing on Wild Marjoram and were we were able to find the eggs with the aid of our jeweller's eyeglass. While we were there we bumped into Sarah Meridith of the Large Blue project and she confirmed to us that the females do oviposit on Marjoram as well as Thyme.

Re: David M

by David M, 30-Jun-14 11:32 PM GMT

Interesting stuff, Mike. I'd always thought Large Blues laid exclusively on thyme. Appears not.

Monday 30th June - Calm before the storm....

With all the travelling over the weekend, I resolved to go local today and check into the Alun Valley High Brown site.

Things look to be just a little early yet; the bramble is generally not yet in flower, nor are the creeping thistles. I think it'll be another 10 days or so before everything really takes off here.

That said, I positively identified 5 High Browns on Old Castle Down, with 7 Dark Greens clocked too. Another dozen or so unidentifiable Frits whizzed by in flight so I suspect numbers haven't reached their peak yet.

I did see my first female HBF of the year though, eagerly nectaring by the shrub line on the Down:



A decent range of species seen, though in a week or so Whites, Common Blues, White Letter/Purple Hairstreaks, Small Coppers, Peacocks, Brown Argus and Graylings should become far more ubiquitous:

Ringlet 40-60
Meadow Brown 30-50
Large Skipper 20-30
Small Skipper 15-25
Small Heath 10-20
Dark Green Fritillary 7 (probably 15+)
High Brown Fritillary 5 (probably 10+)
Red Admiral 5
Speckled Wood 2
Small Tortoiseshell 2
Small White 1
Brown Argus 1
Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary 1

Re: David M

by William, 01-Jul-14 11:19 AM GMT

Hi David,

Nice shots of the Large Blues, Marjoram is in fact one of their foodplants and the larvae will survive on it if eggs are laid there (though I think this occurs on the continent more so than in the UK). Females will also lay on Selfheal in the absence of thyme, but larvae will not survive.

BWs

William

Re: David M

by David M, 02-Jul-14 11:13 PM GMT

"William" wrote:

Hi David,

Nice shots of the Large Blues, Marjoram is in fact one of their foodplants and the larvae will survive on it if eggs are laid there (though I think this occurs on the continent more so than in the UK). Females will also lay on Selfheal in the absence of thyme, but larvae will not survive.

Interesting stuff, William. The two females we saw in this area were interested in nothing else, so I suppose what you say is highly credible.

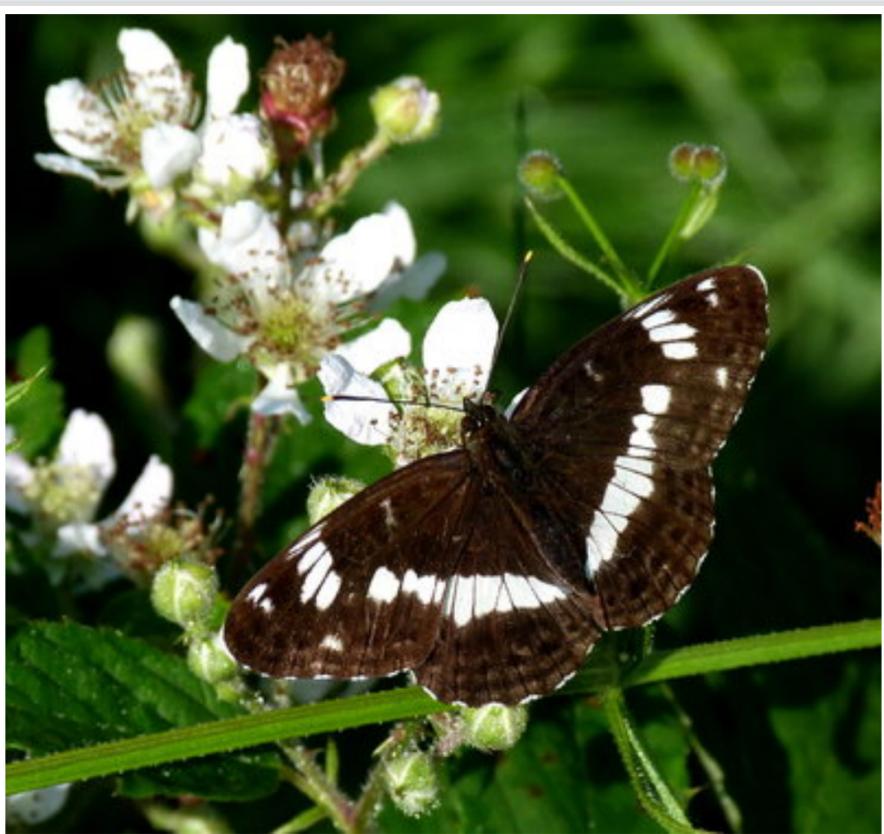
The wild thyme further up the slopes harboured no females at all, so maybe there is a distinct preference between individual Large Blue sites?

Tuesday 1st July 2014 - Cloud cover proves irritating....

I decided to get up real early to drive to Alner's Gorse this morning, and throughout my journey skies were clear and my sun visor was permanently employed!!

Annoyingly however, once I'd arrived at the site, there was a heavy overcast layer in close proximity, which ultimately stymied my efforts to observe Hairstreak activity here.

Prior to the sun disappearing, I chanced upon the first of 4 White Admirals I saw at this site:



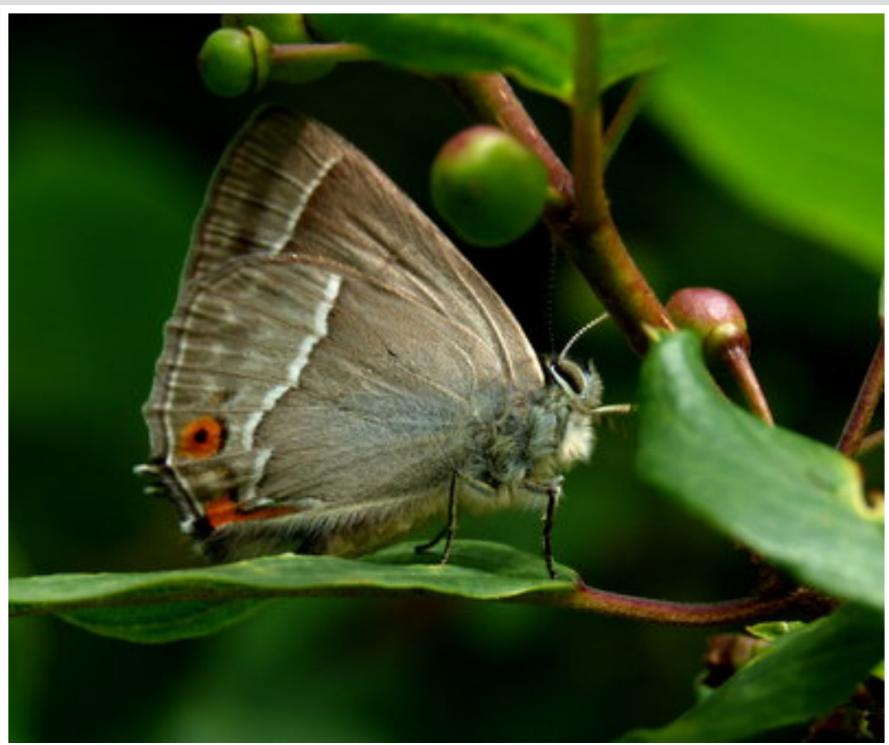
In the nearby vicinity, I also spotted my first Hedge Brown of 2014:



A newly emerged male Purple Hairstreak was encountered on the ground, but after taking a few images he disappeared into the thick undergrowth and did not re-emerge. I rummaged around gently in the ground layer but beat a retreat eventually as any attempts to clear the ground litter could have damaged him:



The wind allied to the overcast conditions meant that I was unable to locate any White Letter Hairstreaks in the many elms here, but I did observe a second Purple Hairstreak taking in fluids from the berries of this shrub:



I saw a couple of Commas too, which was reassuring given their scarcity earlier in the year:



In just over two hours, the following species were seen:

Meadow Brown
Marbled White
Ringlet
Small Skipper
Large Skipper
Small Tortoiseshell
Green Veined White
Silver Washed Fritillary
White Admiral
Comma
Purple Hairstreak
Speckled Wood
Hedge Brown

Re: David M

by Willow, 03-Jul-14 12:49 PM GMT

That's a very rewarding tally David, you should be well pleased 😊

Have a great French butterflying holiday and I hope you manage to see the species wished for, in the meantime **we** have all our British species to enjoy...so no envy 🍷 ...enjoy...*Bon Voyage* 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by David M, 03-Jul-14 06:13 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, guys. Yes, Bill, I'll be absent from the UK for a week but I managed to squeeze in all the 'essentials' before my departure on Saturday. When I return, I look forward to tracking down the late season species (though I daresay I'll stumble across some of them in France).

Tuesday 1st July 2014 - Jurassic jaunt....

Leaving Alner's Gorse just prior to midday, the clouds still hadn't shifted when I arrived at Lulworth Cove an hour later. The walkway from the beach to Bindon Hill is closed too due to rockfalls, so I had to detour back up the road to find an alternative means of entry.

Eventually, I got up onto the hillside and managed to track down 6 Lulworth Skippers (4 females & 2 males), which wasn't bad going given the overcast conditions:



I had a momentary shock when I saw a Small Heath resting with wings open....before I realised it had been a victim of predation:



Thankfully, this pair were very much alive:



Other species seen were Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Small Tortoiseshell, faded Common Blue & Brown Argus, Large & Small Skipper, Dark Green Fritillary and a surprise appearance by 2 Dingy Skippers:



Re: David M

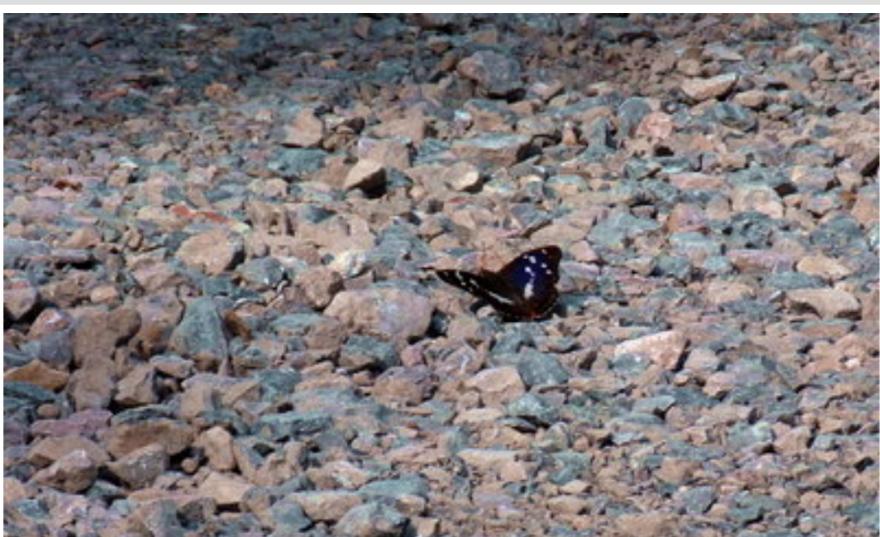
by David M, 03-Jul-14 11:15 PM GMT

Wednesday July 2nd 2014 - Emperor hunt....

After my visits to Alner's Gorse and Lulworth Cove, I stayed in Salisbury overnight so as I could visit Bentley Wood early the following morning.

I arrived at 9am to encounter several other PE devotees assembled in the car park, and by early afternoon only two of them had seen a grounded Emperor.

I should be grateful that I too managed to witness this spectacle, albeit for less than a minute, as at 9.30am I saw a guy with binoculars eagerly focusing on an area by the first 'crossroads' up the main ride. Sure enough, a male was down imbibing on salts contained within the moist path surface. This was the only shot I got before He rose into a nearby oak:



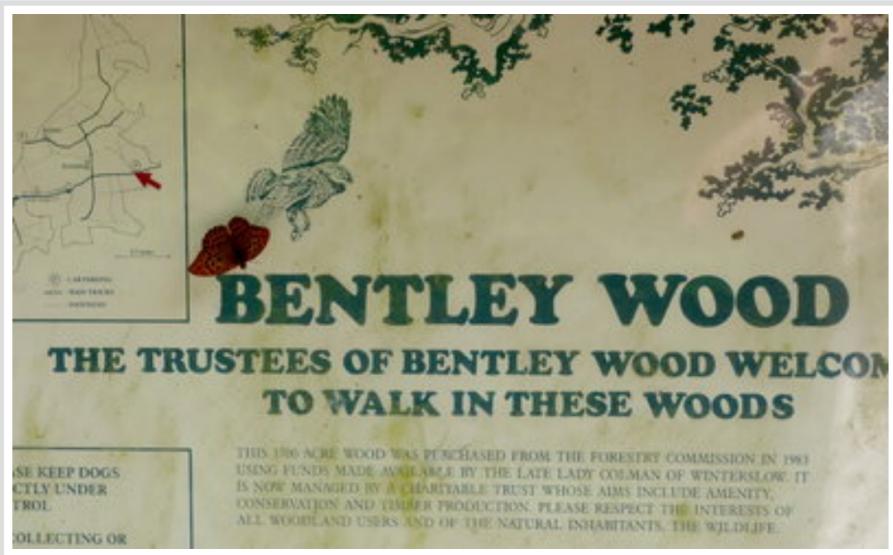
I only saw one other definite in the 6 hours I was there - a male which did a circuit of me and two others before vanishing into the canopy.

Thanks to another sharp eyed enthusiast who I spent some time with, one female *valezina* Silver Washed Fritillary was observed:



The elms harbouring the White Letter Hairstreak colonies were replete with activity, but all of it was happening right at the tops of the trees, so it was impossible to get any image of these insects. Those who know sites where WLHs can reliably be seen nectaring at lower levels are lucky indeed – my Alun Valley location is one of these, but unfortunately this species tends to descend later in the season when the insects are faded.

One amusing incident was the enthusiasm this male Silver Washed Fritillary showed for the main sign at the entrance to the site. He kept coming back to take fluids from the verdigris-stained perspex:



Species/numbers seen:

Ringlet 200+
 Meadow Brown 100+
 Large Skipper 40-60
 Small Skipper 30-50
 Silver Washed Fritillary 30-50
 White Letter Hairstreak 10-15
 White Admiral 10-15
 Marbled White 10-15
 Small Tortoiseshell 5-10
 Hedge Brown 5
 Comma 4
 Red Admiral 3
 Green Veined White 2
 Purple Emperor 2
 Speckled Wood 1

Re: David M

by Willow, 04-Jul-14 07:54 PM GMT

Your really zipping about on your pre-holiday excursions David, keep some of that energy for the Alps mate 😄 good reports and nice pics to go with them 😊

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jul-14 07:59 PM GMT

Hi David, just catching up on your diary, some great reports and photos in the past few posts 😊

It looks like we were at Lulworth the same time as you on July 1st during our family holiday at Weymouth. We had just stopped off there for an hour in the afternoon that day, I returned by myself the following afternoon which was when I saw the SSBs up on Bindon Hill.

Funnily enough I looked up towards the hill and saw a figure wandering about, I wonder if that was you 🤔

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by David M, 15-Jul-14 05:53 PM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

Funnily enough I looked up towards the hill and saw a figure wandering about, I wonder if that was you 🤔

If it was early afternoon and the individual was wearing brown trousers, then it was probably me! (I only saw two other people up there).

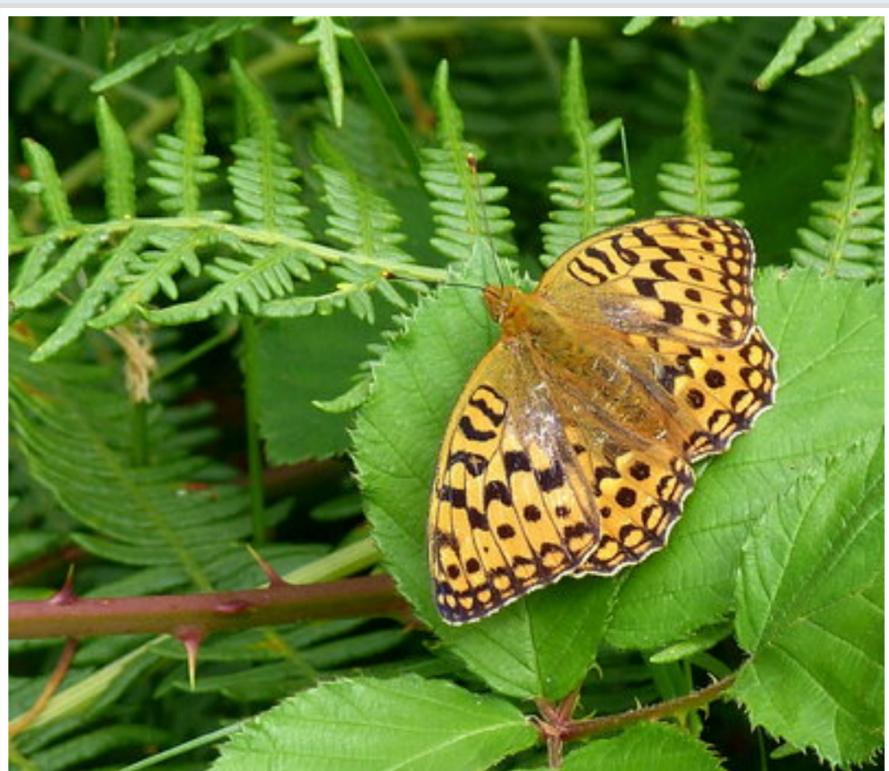
Tuesday 15th July 2014 – Vanessids reappear.....

I did a transect on the Alun Valley High Brown site this afternoon, but prior to that I decided to check out the public access area on Old Castle Down as well as the elms and oaks which support White Letter and Purple Hairstreaks here.

Well, not a single Hairstreak was to be seen, and even High Brown Fritillaries were thinnish on the ground, with only 6 definite sightings along with 4 or 5 more 'probables'. This species certainly is not having as good a year as it did here in 2013. That said, some of them are still in good condition and I expect to still be seeing them come August:



Even though it was fairly cloudy, most of the Frits were very active. Only this female was relatively torpid:



19 different species were seen, including a female Silver Washed Fritillary on the afternoon transect (this species only occurs in low numbers here). The real joy was seeing vanessids in numbers again after their relative paucity in France. Only Painted Lady was absent and numbers of Peacocks were particularly good, with at least 15 seen, all as fresh as a daisy:





Re: David M

by David M, 17-Jul-14 04:11 PM GMT

Another visit to the Alun Valley site today saw 4 more certain High Browns plus another half dozen probables. I also saw a Purple Hairstreak and two White Letter Hairstreaks, one of which was just about in camera range:



It was steamy in the lower valley today and the bracken has surged to beyond head height. Dark Green Frits now look almost spent as only very raggedy individuals remain.

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Jul-14 01:53 PM GMT

Saturday 26th July 2014 – Aston Rowant.....

I spent four and a half hours at this excellent site on Saturday and saw 20 different species. Numbers of Silver Spotted Skippers weren't huge – perhaps it's still a bit early in their flight period. I observed 24 definites plus 10+ probables (Large Skippers were few and far between so I suspect most if not all I saw in the air were SSS).

Didn't see any females at rest, and the warm weather meant photographing individuals was tough:





Although Meadow Browns were the commonest species, with probably 1,000+ encountered, Chalkhill Blues weren't too far behind with 500+ seen:



At least one hour of my time was spent trying to identify Essex Skippers. This proved troublesome as most of the males were quite faded meaning the sex brands weren't terribly prominent. Here's the best example I could find:



The females were in rather better condition, but kneeling down for a face on shot was necessary to be sure of the correct ID:



Other notable observations were the tremendous numbers of Brimstones fattening up for winter on the numerous betony plants by the lower shrub line:



There must have been more than three dozen fluttering about:



There were plenty of them about elsewhere on the site. Thistles proved attractive too:



This Meadow Brown was very strangely marked:



Species seen (in descending order of abundance):

- Meadow Brown
- Chalkhill Blue
- Hedge Brown
- Small Skipper
- Essex Skipper
- Brimstone
- Peacock
- Silver Spotted Skipper
- Marbled White
- Ringlet
- Green Veined White
- Common Blue
- Brown Argus
- Small Heath

Small Tortoiseshell
Large Skipper
Comma
Large White
Speckled Wood
Small White

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Jul-14 08:02 PM GMT

Lazy day today spent walking down the cycle path in Clyne Valley approx 3 miles from my home.

Not much to report except that I saw my first Small Copper for several weeks fluttering amongst the grass at the car park at the lower end of the site.

On my way back up I also encountered a male Holly Blue which again is a first for quite a while.

5 Silver Washed Fritillaries were the other notable sightings. They only occur in low numbers round here so this was a particularly satisfactory experience.

Re: David M

by David M, 02-Aug-14 05:00 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

That Meadow Brown does look unusual with a scalloping of the wing margins and that lighter band – was it differently marked on the upper side?

It was, Wurzel. Very extensive orange markings (including on the hindwing).

Saturday 2nd August 2014 – Surprises close to home....

A very interesting hour and a half spent at Kittle Quarry this afternoon. I went there looking to see if there were any Graylings. There weren't, sadly, but it looks like there's a small colony of Wall Browns as I saw 4 in total, including this female feasting on buddleia, which isn't something you see every day:



Perhaps an even bigger surprise was the appearance of a male Silver Washed Fritillary:



Common Blues certainly like this spot. I must have seen 40+:



I also saw, for the first time this year I think, double figure numbers of Red Admirals:



There were a handful of Commas knocking about:



Other species seen:

Meadow Brown (starting to get ragged now)
Hedge Brown
Ringlet
Speckled Wood
Brown Argus
Peacock
Small Tortoiseshell
Small Skipper (very faded)
Large White
Small White
Green Veined White
Painted Lady (pristine specimen)

Again, there were no Small Coppers. What's happening to them this year? The habitat here is perfect for them – lots of bare, stony ground with plenty of their LHP.

Re: David M

by David M, 09-Aug-14 10:24 PM GMT

Monday 4th August 2014 – Arnside NOT.....

A chance encounter with a fellow wildlife enthusiast on Old Castle Down (the Welsh High Brown site) last month persuaded me to neglect Arnside Knott this year and instead turn my attention to the other English stronghold for Scotch Argus – Smardale Gill.

This site is centred upon a railway line which used to transport limestone products to Barrow in the west and county Durham in the east. It is long since disused, but the track has been converted into a relatively easy to navigate linear path which takes in a spectacular viaduct and also plays host to huge numbers of this species.

The location is just west of Kirkby Stephen, on the road to Brough (junction 38 of the M6) and is absolutely delightful. Here's the information board at the entrance:



The individual who informed me about this site told me I'd have to walk the best part of a mile before I hit the area where Scotch Argus became commonplace, and he was absolutely right. It wasn't until I was within 200m of the viaduct before I saw my first *aethiops*. The grassy slope to the left of this image was where the bulk of them were seen:



Here's the reverse view from the main area where the butterflies were concentrated:



You can walk over this impressive construction and there's an interesting quarry area on the other side:



In four and a half hours, I reckon I saw about 500 Scotch Argus, and the part cloudy conditions meant that there were times when they practically disappeared, only to reappear en masse when the sun came out again. Most individuals were slightly past their best, but there were a few that were in excellent condition:



Such were their numbers that you needed to be careful where you stepped, as during cloudy spells they had a propensity to settle on the pathway with little thought for their own safety! Even on the gravel path which has replaced the old railway, many individuals could be encountered searching for mineral rich fluids:





The limestone banks were replete with knapweed and scabious flowers, the latter proving to be particularly magnetic:



This individual caught my eye as he has an additional submarginal spot on one wing which is absent from the other:



There were plenty of other butterflies about, but Hedge Browns were notable absentees (I presume they don't occur inland this far north). I got briefly excited when I saw what I first thought was a late (and scruffy) Northern Brown Argus:



The underside seemed, at first, to confirm my earliest suspicions, until I played it back and noticed the blue suffusion around the thorax which screamed Common Blue female:



The steep banks of the former railway cutting were full of knapweed and scabious, and the numbers of butterflies were quite notable for this latitude:



Species/numbers seen:

Scotch Argus 400-600
Green Veined White 40-60
Common Blue 10-20
Meadow Brown 10-20
Small Skipper 10-20
Small Heath 10-20
Red Admiral 10-15
Peacock 5-10
Dark Green Fritillary (all females) 4
Small Tortoiseshell 2

Speckled Wood 2
Large Skipper 1
Small Copper 1
Large White 1
Small White 1

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 10-Aug-14 11:41 AM GMT

Hi David,

Great reports and photos in your recent posts 😊

Seeing your female Common Blue at Smardale Gill reminds me of similar looking ones that I have seen in previous years at Arnside Knott in early August and have looked like NBA at first glance, right down to being smaller than normal. I often see NBA being reported late in the season from Arnside and wonder...

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by David M, 10-Aug-14 10:32 PM GMT

"nfreem" wrote:

Seeing your female Common Blue at Smardale Gill reminds me of similar looking ones that I have seen in previous years at Arnside Knott in early August and have looked like NBA at first glance, right down to being smaller than normal. I often see NBA being reported late in the season from Arnside and wonder..

Having now been in that situation, Neil, I agree.

I was fairly confident I'd seen a NBA until I reviewed my images, whereupon it became evident that I hadn't. I reckon that practically anyone who doesn't take a photograph could easily be fooled.

Friday 8th August 2014 - Window of opportunity.....

I missed out on first brood Adonis Blues earlier this year because a) I was a little too early, and b) because I didn't have the time or patience to search for them properly.

Given that I needed to travel from Liverpool to Abergavenny last Friday, I took the opportunity to take time out from the carnage on the motorways (why do people behave so stupidly on the roads on a Friday irrespective of the time of year?) and pay a first ever late summer visit to Swellshill Bank, near Rodborough Common, Gloucestershire.

Well, the terrain in this spot was far removed from what I'm used to. The grass was long and the species range not at all what I'm familiar with in this part of the world. Chalkhill Blues were everywhere, and Common Blues initially proved most distracting.

However, I knew that any Blue in pristine condition would merit further attention and so it proved, as on **three** occasions my instincts were pricked, and on all these occasions it was a fresh Adonis Blue that was responsible.

Here's a view from the upper section of Swellshill Bank prior to my descent:



This was the first Adonis I saw, and mainly overcast conditions meant that for once they were very accommodating as regards their propensity to sit still and pose:



This individual was also happy to pose with wings closed:



The next specimen seen was just as fresh:



Chalkhill Blues could be disturbed with practically every step. Most were a little past their best:



The third Adonis I saw was notable because he had a 'two tone' look to his forewings – is this natural or is it simply because he is freshly emerged?



I could only spend three quarters of an hour here before time beckoned and I had to be on my way, but numbers/species seen were as follows:

Chalkhill Blue 100–200
Meadow Brown 30–50
Hedge Brown 5–10
Green Veined White 5–10
Common Blue 4
Small Skipper 4
Adonis Blue 3
Brown Argus 2
Marbled White 2 (surprising, and surely the last I'll see in 2014)
Dark Green Fritillary 1
Large White 1

Re: David M

by Padfield, 11-Aug-14 11:01 AM GMT

"David M" wrote:

The third Adonis I saw was notable because he had a 'two tone' look to his forewings – is this natural or is it simply because he is freshly emerged?

Hi David. It's completely natural but only evident in really fresh specimens. It is the androconial patch that gives the 'furry' blues their name and is more usually associated with the subgenus *Agrodiaetus* but is equally prominent in many *Lysandra* (now a subgenus too, of course). That's a fantastic picture of it!

Guy

Re: David M

by Willow, 13-Aug-14 08:12 PM GMT

Some really excellent recent reports David, your **Smardale Gill** images portray a location worthy of serious consideration for a visit next year – **Scotch**

Argus are among those northern species I'm yet to enjoy 😊

Kindest Regards,

Bill 😊

"When in doubt...venture out"

Re: David M

by Maximus, 14-Aug-14 04:15 PM GMT

A great report and photos of Scotch Argus from Smardale Gill, David. We had planned to visit Smardale this year, but it just did not pan out for us! I agree with Bill and Neil, perhaps this will be on our next years agenda.

Mike

Re: David M

by David M, 15-Aug-14 10:16 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, folks.

Pauline – Graylings love buddleia, but it's not often you see Wall Browns on it. Hopefully I'll get another chance to see them indulging this weekend.

Smardale Gill – This site is **nailed on** for Scotch Argus. I'd recommend it to anyone because it is so spectacular from a scenery perspective alone. Yes, there are disadvantages in that you won't see High Brown Fritillaries here (nor Hedge Browns), but unlike Arnside, it has a gentle gradient and a very easily accessible hotspot for Scotch Argus.

One of the loveliest sites I've ever visited.

Re: David M

by David M, 23-Aug-14 08:14 PM GMT

Saturday 23rd August 2014 – Finally.....

I travelled down to West Williamston in Pembrokeshire with my neighbour this morning in glorious conditions. Once at our destination, however, the skies were starting to cloud over and I thought to myself 'here we go again'.

I think my neighbour must be my lucky charm though, as we were no more than 10 metres into the horses' field adjacent to the car park when we disturbed a butterfly. Being 9.35am I assumed it was a Hedge Brown, but it was, amazingly, a female Brown Hairstreak in impeccable condition resting amongst the grasses:



It was still quite cool (approx 14c) and when the sun went in it was definitely not T-shirt weather so it was a major surprise to see this butterfly so early and in such a location. She flew onto the lower branches of a nearby Ash tree and seemed to go into roosting mode so we left her and searched (unsuccessfully) for males in the canopies of the trees that surround this field. After 15 minutes we headed back and she was still in the same spot but by now the cloud cover was quite comprehensive so I felt it was prudent to show my companion the extent of this beautiful site hoping that the sun would re-emerge later.

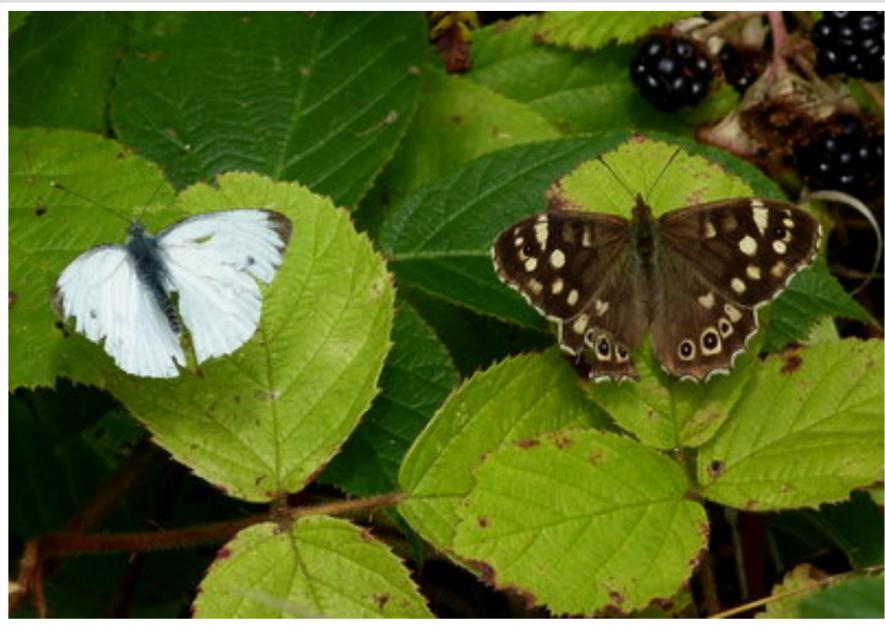
We popped up to the limestone ridge and found autumn gentian:



We were back in the 'glade' by 11.35am but conditions didn't really improve for at least an hour. We were kept company by a Comma though, who was busy imbibing on the blackberry fruits:



A Green Veined White posed next to a Speckled Wood:



By 12.45pm the skies had brightened and I felt confident we'd see a few females descend to lay eggs. I kept checking the line of young blackthorn suckers on the outside of the glade but there was nothing doing. Suddenly though, at 1.20pm, whilst we were chatting away, I spotted another female who gave us a decent show for 20 minutes or so. Sadly, she had a big chunk of her hindwings missing but it didn't impair her ability to get about:



We saw her lay just one egg in between bouts of basking, but as she took flight I lost her and when I saw a Brown Hairstreak a minute later I thought it was the same one. It was a different individual however, although again there was wing damage:



Eventually this one disappeared, but the original one returned and it was only when she retreated to a nearby hawthorn that we decided to make our way back to the car. A quick look in the adjacent clearing gave us a bonus – a female Holly Blue (albeit elderly):



Other species seen were 20 or so Small Tortoiseshells, 3 Hedge Browns, 3 Small Coppers, 2 Silver Washed Fritillaries, 2 Common Blues and a solitary Peacock.

Re: David M

by Maximus, 25-Aug-14 01:53 PM GMT

Very nice Brown Hairstreak shots, David, the first female is a real stunner 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 31-Aug-14 10:23 PM GMT

Sunday 31st August – fabulous end to summer....

Pembrokeshire is a cloudy place. Even when the previous evening's weather forecast suggests sunny conditions one has to be cautious.

On Saturday the forecast suggested largely cloudy conditions in spite of the ridge of high pressure pushing up from the south.

I set my alarm on Sunday for 7.30am and things had changed. Sunny and 18c till 2pm it said. Given that my part of Swansea was unremittingly gorgeous I drove down to the West Williamston reserve and thankfully weather conditions didn't change one iota en route.

I arrived at 9.45am and this was the scene at the car park:



The previous weekend when I visited this site I saw a Brown Hairstreak at 9.35am!! No such luck this time, but the horses' field in the image above proved productive in a different way as just about the first butterfly I encountered was a male Clouded Yellow:



I tracked him for a quarter of an hour, and managed to get a half-decent image of him wings open in 'sport-mode':



I was determined to devote time to looking for Brown Hairstreaks in different parts of this site to those where I had seen them in the past which meant that I spent until just gone midday in the horses' field. This strategy paid dividends because at 11.27am, I saw my first *betulae* in the sheltered area of the field just beyond where the conservation team had cut last year's growth:



This individual had a very pale underside, very reminiscent of a male:



I saw SEVEN females in total, and all were seen individually, meaning that I can be absolutely accurate in terms of times and places.

No. 2

Seen at the opposite end of the horses' field at 11.55am. This individual was a little wing damaged:



No. 3 I moved through the main gate into the reserve and saw another BH at 12.10pm in the 'circle' just to the left of the first field. This is the first time I have seen one here, and she was in decent nick:



No. 4 At 12.23pm I saw another female within 30 metres of the entrance to the foreshore. This one was possibly the 'cleanest' of the lot:



There was nothing happening in the 'old' glade, so I moved to the newly cleared one adjacent and saw my first ever BH in this location at 12.49pm.

No. 5



I moved along the foreshore and by the time I reached the last 'stand' of blackthorn at 13.06, conditions were absolutely ideal. I waded in amongst the blackthorn scrub and there in front of me was a rather beaten up female resting on the tip of a sucker.

No. 6

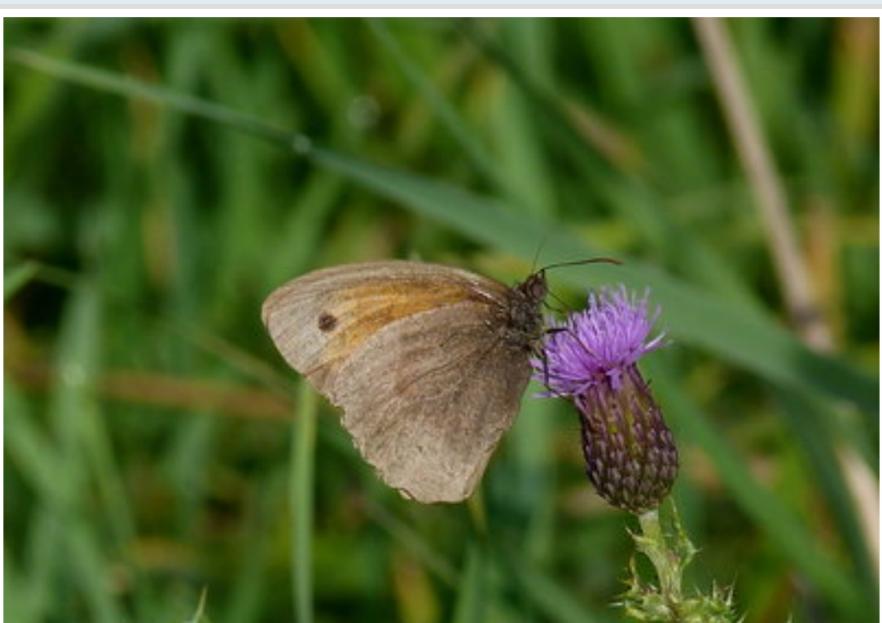


I wanted to spend my final half hour in the horses' field adjacent to the car park. Even though it was 1.45pm when I got back in there, I still saw one final individual at 1.59pm, though she flew into an ash tree within a minute of me spotting her and I was prone to recollect Neil Hulme's assertion that BH activity 'stops' at 2pm. Well, it was exactly that time when she flew upwards into the canopy so I have to concur with this observation. Still, seven Brown Hairstreaks is quite an event at this site and I definitely won't be complaining.

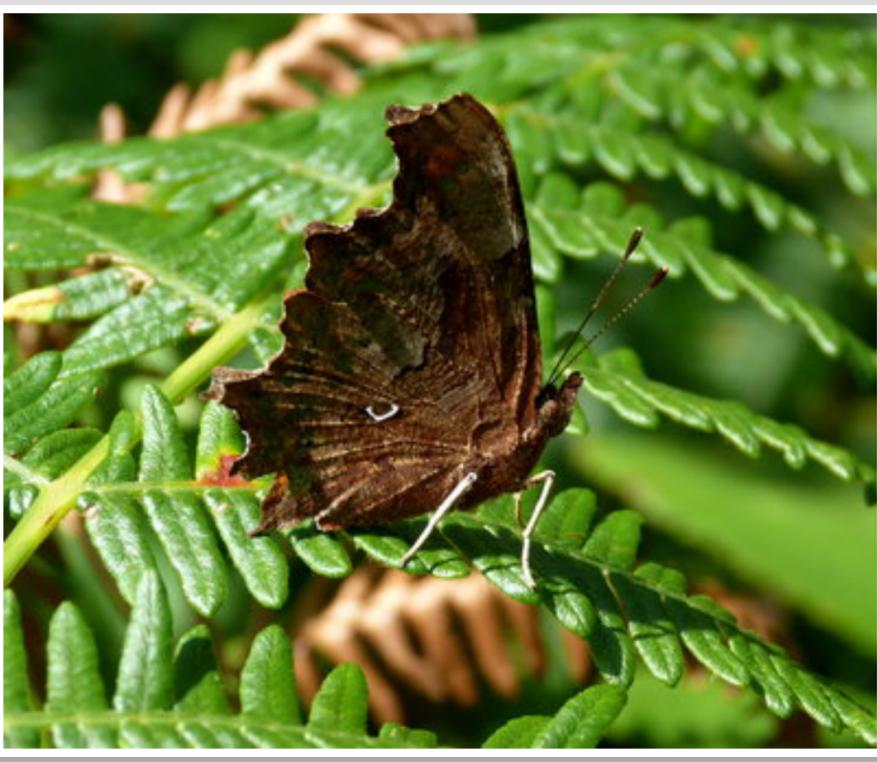
No. 7



Aside from the Hairstreak activity, I recorded a solemn moment: surely, my final Meadow Brown of 2014:



I also saw a pristine Comma that was irresistible from a photography perspective:



I also had one of those 'eureka' moments. For a while now I've wondered why Brown Hairstreaks are marked the way they are. It seemed very unnatural in the beginning but now I'm starting to get it.

Spending so much time in an area where blackthorn is rife made me possibly understand why a butterfly should be uniformly chocolate brown with golden wing patches.

On many occasions my eyes were drawn to what proved to be vegetation rather than a Brown Hairstreak. Take a look at these blackthorn leaves which are 'on the turn':



Re: David M

by David M, 14-Sep-14 06:05 PM GMT

Sunday 14th September 2014 - Taste of July in Autumn.....

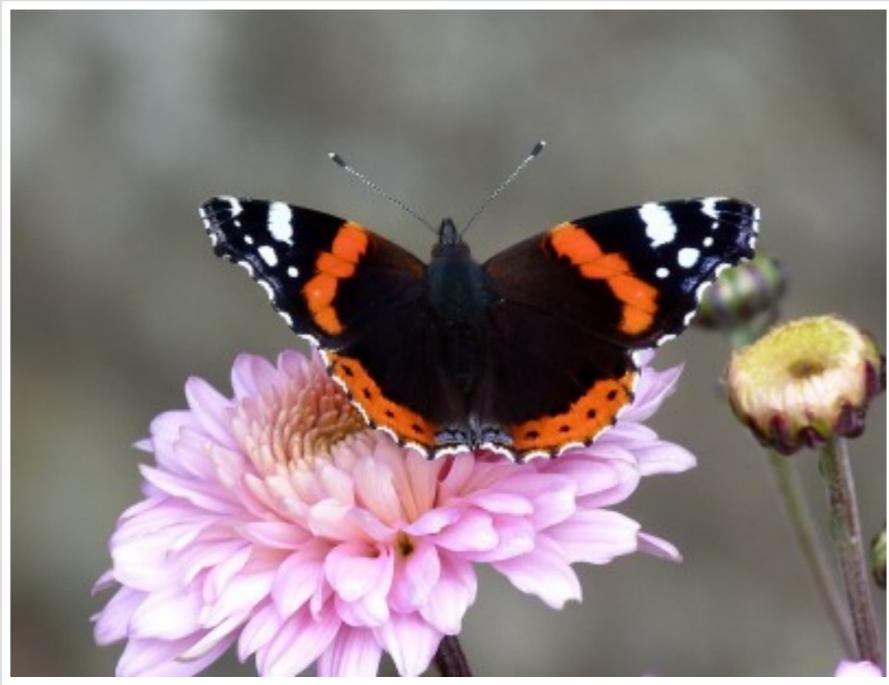
A visit to the delightful National Botanic Gardens, near Cross Hands, Carmarthenshire, today saw so many flowers in bloom that it felt like high summer!

Of course, most of these plants are not native species, but they were, nonetheless, a delight to the eye and proved irresistible to a fair range of butterflies.

The sheltered walled garden below played host to several Small Whites and Red Admirals:



All the Red Admirals seemed fresh:



From a distance, I initially thought this sign was some kind of artistic work. Only when I got to within 20 yards did I realise nature was responsible (interesting how they're all attracted to capital letters!):



There were plenty of Small Tortoiseshells around, as well as three Commas:



4 Speckled Woods noted, and a couple of female Large Whites were fluttering around the *brassica* plants in the vegetable area. Single Common Blue and Small Copper were also seen.

Re: David M

by millerd, 18-Sep-14 10:16 PM GMT

I think on Sunday at least there will be sunshine almost everywhere. Good luck with the Brown Hairstreaks, David!

Dave

Re: David M

by David M, 22-Sep-14 12:28 AM GMT

Sunday 21st September – Mass disappearance....

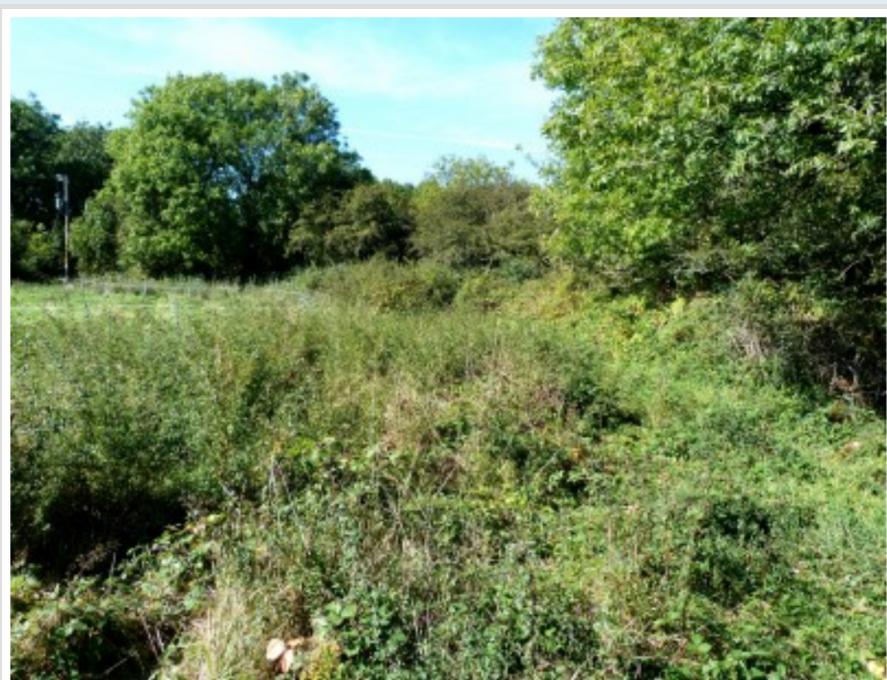
Three weeks exactly since my last visit, I was back again at the Brown Hairstreak epicentre in Pembrokeshire at 10 o'clock this morning on a quite beautiful autumn day. Temperatures reached 20 degrees and not a cloud rolled into view. Winds were practically absent too.

Had these conditions occurred a month ago, there would have been a butterfly bonanza. Sadly however, the passing of time from summer to autumn has had a major effect. Here are the full totals of species/numbers seen during my 3 hour visit:

Speckled Wood 7
Small Copper 5
Red Admiral 5
Comma 3
Small White 2
Large White 1
Painted Lady 1
Small Tortoiseshell 1

With the sea asters gone, the foreshore was practically bereft of butterfly activity, which was so sad given the ideal weather conditions. Not a sniff of a Brown Hairstreak to be had, and what's worse, I could only locate 30 eggs, which is a drastic reduction on the three figure total I racked up at much the same time last year.

The laying preferences of females have undoubtedly changed here. Last year, the foreshore was the hotspot. In 2014, it was this section of the first field (horses' field) that proved by far the most productive:



It was nice to be reacquainted with Small Coppers though. I saw 5 in total, all of which looked to be in excellent condition:



Another pleasant diversion was the appearance of a beautiful female Large White. This is, I think, the first time in 2014 that I have been comfortably able to record an image of this species:



So, the season looks like it is drastically on the wane, save for those areas of the UK which are benefitting from additional emergences.

It'll be a fortnight before I get out again, at which point I expect to only see the adult, vanessid hibernators.....unless we get another freak immigration event! 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 31-Oct-14 10:01 PM GMT

Friday 31st October 2014 - Unique Halloween....

This Halloween has been the warmest on record. 23c has been recorded in Gravesend and the general forecast was for the London area to bask in average temperatures of around 21c.

Swansea was set to be around 17c, but that was mainly because cloud cover was expected. In the event, at around 11.30am, there were no clouds at all, and as I drove to my traditional late season butterfly spot at the southern end of Cwm Clydach, 21c was showing on my car thermometer.

It was quite bizarre to experience such warmth when the sun was so low in the sky, and I wasn't at all surprised to see a handful of Red Admirals once I arrived at the ivy-clad railings on the southern stretch of this sheltered, south-facing location.

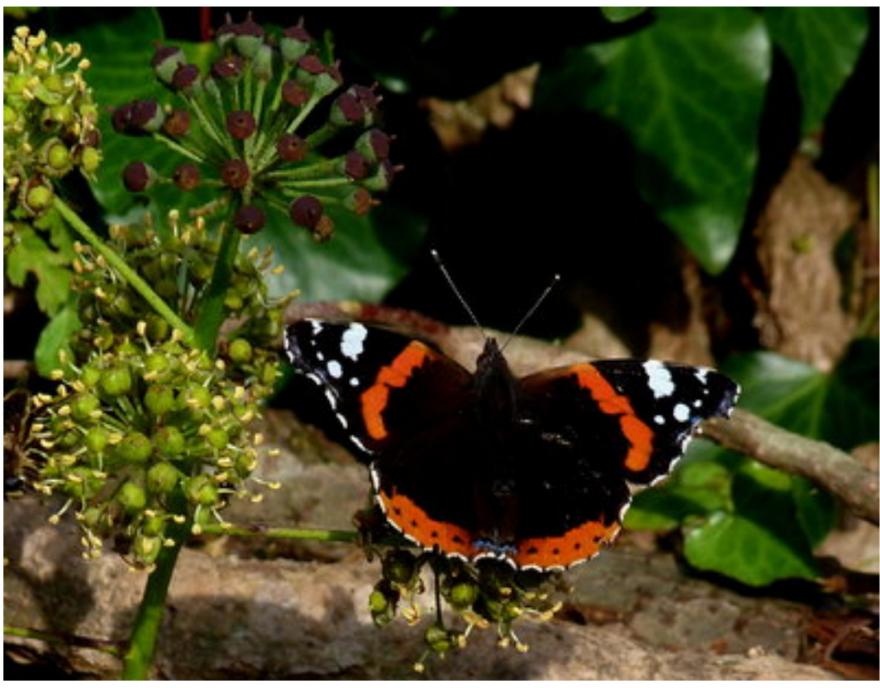
Butterfly returns were quite staggering after I'd finished my 40 minute visit:

Red Admiral 12
Speckled Wood 5
Brimstone 1
Small Tortoiseshell 1
Comma 1

I really struggled to comprehend how it could be so warm at this time of year. Visually, it seemed like late autumn, but physically, it was more like mid-August. Here's a snapshot of the terrain at this location:

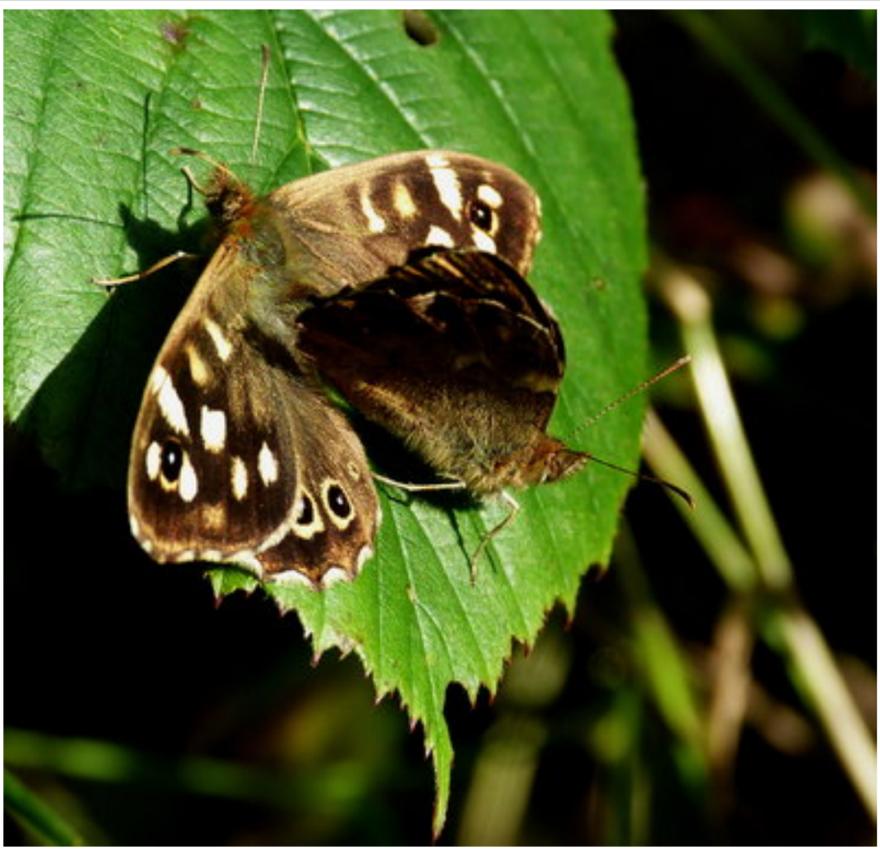


Most of the Red Admirals were nectaring on what remains of the ivy:



As I ventured further into the valley, I noticed a flash of yellow – a male Brimstone, which sadly didn't stop (reminiscent of spring). Within a minute, I spotted a Small Tortoiseshell too. Again, this butterfly didn't offer a photo opportunity; he/she was up and away into the tree canopy and with all the falling autumn leaves I couldn't keep track of it.

I moved into the upper clearing, and soon saw a flight pattern I wasn't expecting. It turned out to be a Speckled Wood, and I cursed at having disturbed it until a few yards further on when I got a real surprise:



This sighting proved to me beyond doubt that an additional brood of Speckled Woods has emerged even in south Wales. These two individuals were fresh and have obviously recently emerged. Their nuptials may well be to no avail, but I personally haven't seen many instances of Speckled Woods in 'cop', so to see such an event on 31st October was a real treat and I expect this species to still be about in small numbers throughout November if conditions permit.

My last significant sighting was of a Comma. As ever is the case, it was defending a 20 metre territory in the dappled sunlight along the woodland ride:



To further add to the enjoyment of what would have been a spectacular 3/4 of an hour anyway, I also saw a Kingfisher flying towards the bridge on Clydach High Street.

All in all, one of the best 40 minutes I've spent this year!!

Re: David M

by Maximus, 01-Nov-14 12:54 AM GMT

Nice stuff David, glad you had that 40 minutes of pleasure, and it's well deserved. Amazing what's been happening due to the prevailing weather conditions, superb 😊

Re: David M

by trevor, 11-Nov-14 11:51 PM GMT

Hi David,
I can imagine having Marsh Fritillaries on the door step is a little tiresome, I have the same problem with the Pearl Boardered Frits .less than 3 miles away,if that's not enough Small Pearls 8 miles away. 😊
.Hard life!!
TREVOR.

Re: David M

by David M, 15-Nov-14 09:13 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, folks.

Saturday 15th November 2013 - Winding up.....

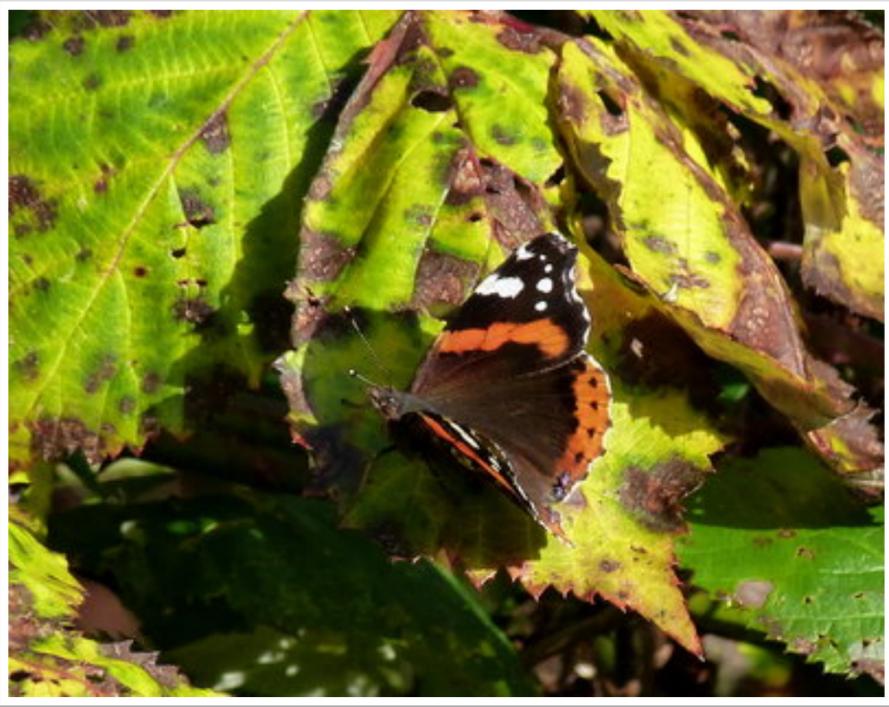
After seeing 5 Speckled Woods (two of which were fresh) on 31st October, I thought I'd revisit Cwm Clydach this morning given the benign conditions (13c and largely sunny).

It was certainly quite mild once I arrived at the site and I was struck by how many leaves were still clinging to the trees. A quick 'recce' of the ivy growing around the lower pathway revealed very few flowers still offering nectar, and although there were a few flies buzzing about, no butterflies were seen, which was something of a disappointment.

I ventured further up the valley to where I'd seen the Speckled Woods a fortnight ago:



In spite of spending roughly half an hour in this area, there wasn't a sniff of a Speckled Wood to be had. I did a couple of circuits of this sheltered section and on my second 'tour' I sensed a larger insect movement – it was a Red Admiral, flying weakly over my head and looking as if it was coming down on the other side of the bramble cover. I retraced my steps and positioned myself on the sunlit side of this bank of vegetation, and after a few seconds scrutiny found what will almost certainly prove to be my final butterfly sighting of 2014:



This is the area where it was seen:



I doubt I'll go out looking for butterflies again till next February (3 months seems one hell of a long pause!!). If I see any more they will be chance encounters but 2014 has been quite a year. It is the first time I've ever seen all 58 mainland British species in the same year (albeit 5 were encountered in France).

I'm already very much looking forward to **2015**.

Re: David M

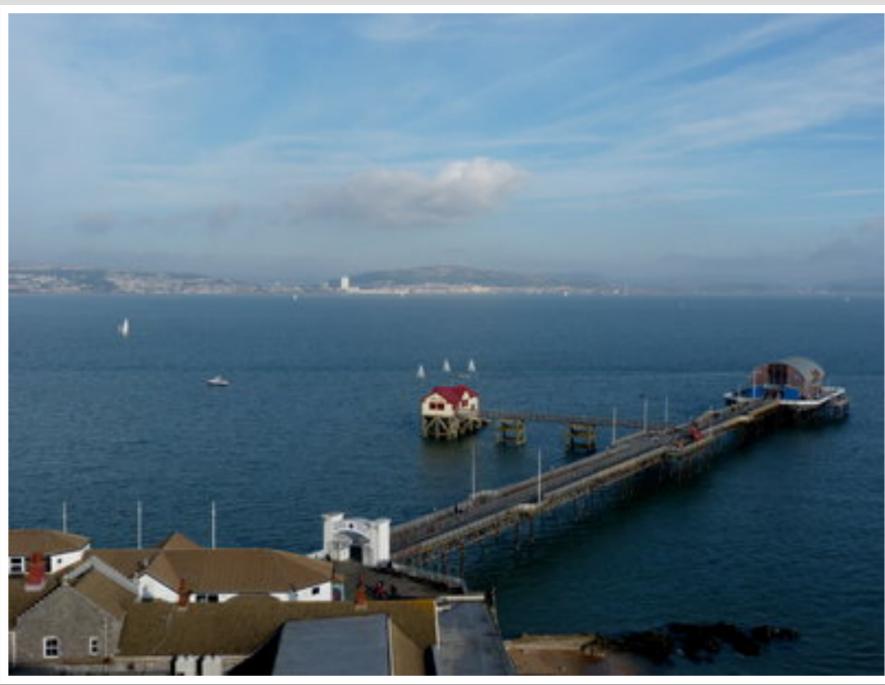
by David M, 30-Nov-14 04:21 PM GMT

Sunday 30th November 2014 – Month end surprise No. 2....

After last month's final day proving to be abnormally mild, so too was November's.

I know I said in an earlier diary post that I wouldn't go out searching for butterflies again till next February, but I'm afraid conditions were so mild at 11.30am that I broke off from studying and took a trip to Mumbles Head, figuring that the coastal strip might be the ideal spot to seek a Red Admiral or two.

Well, two I duly saw, although both were airborne and I could manage no images of either. I decided to take a few scenic photos instead. This one is of Mumbles Pier (with Swansea on the other side of the bay):



The first Red Admiral was seen in the foreground of this image of Bracelet Bay (notice that there are some people on the beach and note too the coastguard's hut on the right):



I meandered back down to the seafront, where it was sheltered and really very mild for the time of year (a peak of 13c). I noticed there was a fair bit of winter-flowering heather as well as Hebe in bloom, so I hung around the back of the coastguard's hut to see if anything was about:



My instincts proved sound, as within 2 minutes I spotted my **third** Red Admiral of the day, busily flitting from one Hebe floret to the next:



On one of its flights, it disturbed a much paler butterfly....a Painted Lady:



I don't think I've seen more than half a dozen of this species all year so to see one on the eve of December was quite a surprise:



There are more reliable nectar sources here than anywhere else I know locally, so I may pop back if we get a decent day in December as I daresay the butterflies here won't stray too far!

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 30-Nov-14 05:37 PM GMT

Hi David,

Looking at your photos, I must say that you live in a beautiful part of the UK, at least when the sun is shining 🌞.

The Red Admiral sighting is understandable, however, your Painted Lady sighting is surprising.

Even down here in the Marseille area, on a good day I may see a Red Admiral, but I haven't seen a Painted Lady for a couple of weeks now.

Chris

Re: David M

by David M, 01-Dec-14 07:03 PM GMT

Thanks, Chris. Yes, the Gower isn't a bad spot as far as the UK is concerned, though as you rightly point out, it very much depends on whether the sun is shining (with ocean one side and mountains the other this is rarely a given).

Monday 1st December 2014 – Couldn't resist.....

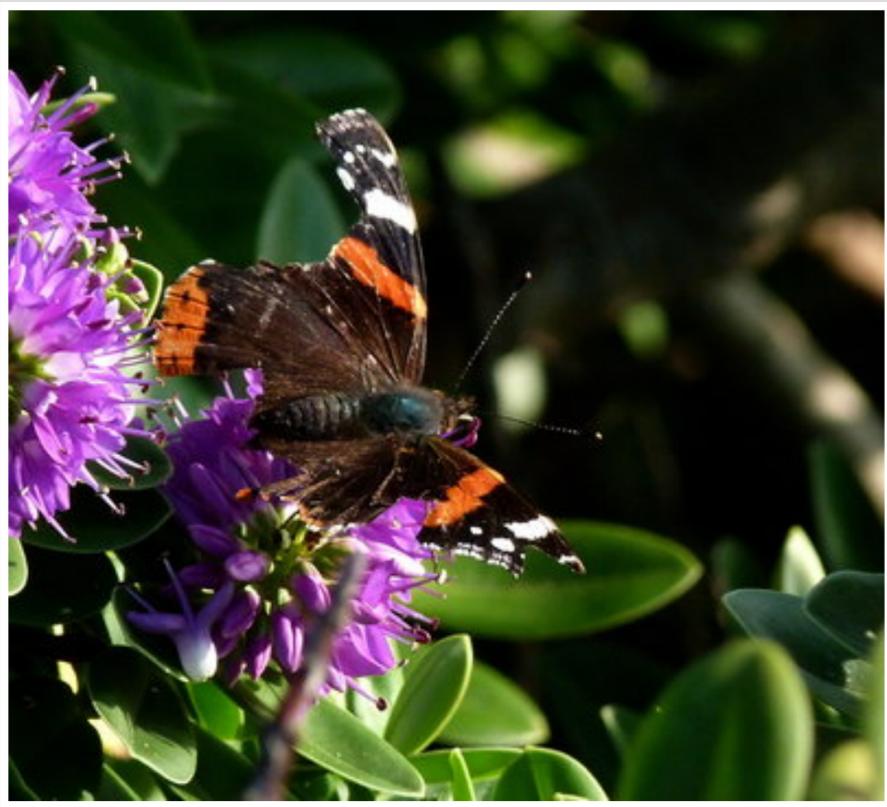
I seriously hope I don't fail my exam this coming Thursday, because if I do, I'll have Hebe and Red Admirals to blame!!

After yesterday's sightings of 3 Red Admirals and a Painted Lady at Bracelet Bay on Mumbles Head, I knew as soon as the sun started to burn the cloud back at 10am that I would weaken in resolve and head back up there for that most precious of things – a December sighting.

The cloud was still a threat when I arrived at 11.15am, but it didn't take long to clear and by midday the temperature had risen to 11c and with barely no wind at all, it felt uncomfortably pleasant (deliberate oxymoron) for the time of year.

Well, I hovered around the hebe for nearly an hour watching bees and flies make the most of the unseasonal conditions, but even though I was losing precious study time, I felt confident I'd eventually see a butterfly as it was almost as warm as yesterday when I had seen four.

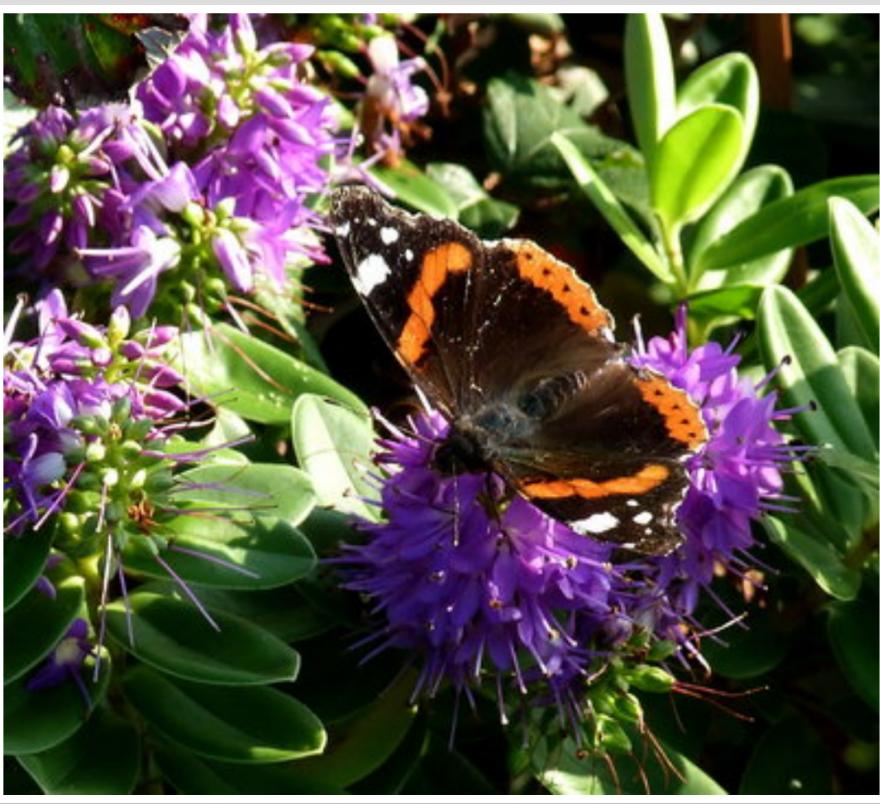
Sure enough, at 12.10pm I spotted a Red Admiral fluttering about (though I'm not sure I can claim it as a **full** sighting, given that it more resembled **half** a Red Admiral):



I'd hitherto only ever seen one butterfly in December, and that was a chance encounter in 2008 around Burtons' hanging baskets in Abergavenny town centre. After taking several images I stood transfixed for at least 10 minutes just soaking up the scene:



Then, along came a **second** Red Admiral....and this one was much more presentable in appearance:



I could have stayed all afternoon watching them but by 12.40pm, guilt took over and I left them behind, still merrily nectaring on the hebe flowers.

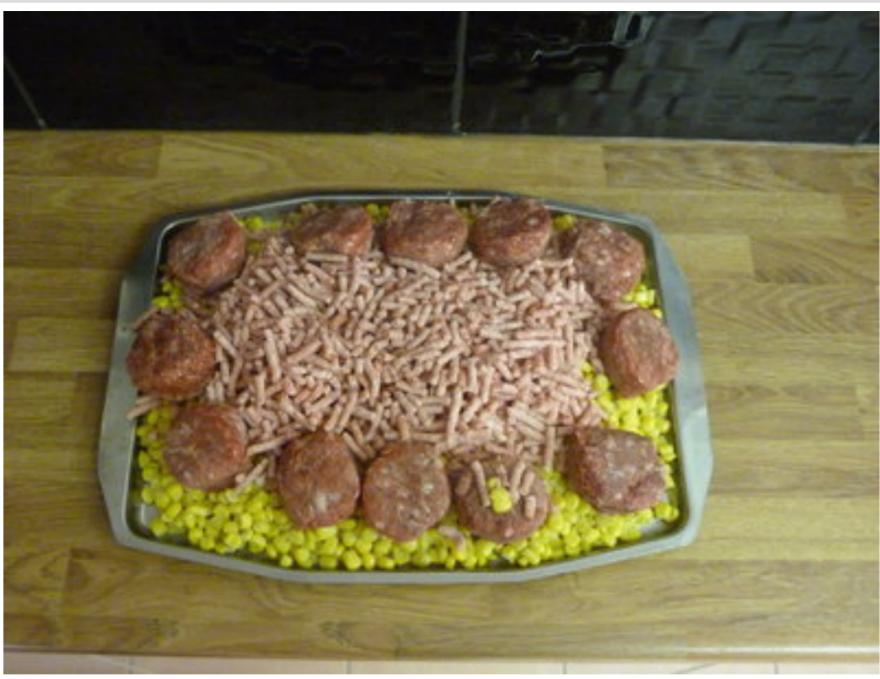
Re: David M

by David M, 27-Dec-14 11:51 PM GMT

Christmas 2014....

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were both very benign this year, with daytime temperatures reaching 8 degrees which meant that travelling from Swansea to Abergavenny was just about as easy as it gets at this time of year.

As ever, I prepared a Christmas breakfast for our chickens – 1kg of sweetcorn, 500g of minced meat and a dozen raw mini burgers for the flock to rip apart:



Rip it apart they did. I timed it this year, and after a mere 12 minutes this was all that remained:



At 11.30am on Christmas Day, the sun was shining and clouds were largely absent, so I thought I'd take a half hour walk round the 'hot-spots' of Castle Meadows on the off chance that there might be a butterfly about. Sadly, there wasn't, but I **did** see something I've never experienced in December before.....a daffodil in flower:



Back to HQ and things were as chaotic as ever. We have a new African Grey Parrot which seems to like spending most of its time in the coal bucket:



There has also been a disaster which has led to something good. A few days ago, Kevin noticed a Kakariki trapped behind the nesting box. Sadly, when he investigated, both the male and female had got stuck there and had died leaving 5 chicks aged between 2 and 3 weeks. The only solution was to bring them all into the house and attempt to hand rear them. As you can see, all of these babies are eager to be fed:



They're quite a handful. Kakariki are lively and robust parakeets and feeding 5 of them is a major operation lasting nearly half an hour (three times per day):



They are pretty crafty as birds go so heaven only knows what dilemmas they're going to present us with, but this is a situation forced upon us and I suspect that at least one of them will remain a household pet with the others being sold to responsible bird lovers. Here is the full family of siblings (there's about 8 days between oldest and youngest):

