

Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 06:55 PM GMT

Winter Work Over

As March drew to a close it was very pleasing to look back at all that's been achieved through the 2009/2010 work party season, by a large number of hard-working volunteers, and highly supportive individuals that work for a variety of government and private organisations. Most of the remaining (known) Duke of Burgundy sites in Sussex are now under active management, although the amount of habitat maintenance or improvement required on each varies greatly. This species now gives such cause for concern that Professor Jeremy Thomas recently wrote 'it is a moot point whether the High Brown Fritillary or the Duke of Burgundy is the next most probable butterfly to become extinct in the British Isles'. Hopefully we have now got a sufficiently detailed understanding of its autecology to get the management just right for this notoriously tricky species. Below are some images of recent habitat works performed for the benefit of 'the Duke', on a number of different sites in Sussex.







Much has been written recently about the disastrous ‘blitzkrieg’ at Straits Enclosure. While the FC were given a thorough ‘roasting’ over the situation here, it’s important to see such an unfortunate event in context. In Sussex I regularly deal with bodies such as Natural England, South Downs Joint Committee, National Trust, Forestry Commission, Sussex Wildlife Trust, West Sussex County Council, several Downland Trusts, Estate owners and farmers, some of which are very close allies of BC. Over a four year period I would say that the success rate in achieving a positive outcome for butterflies and moths is certainly greater than 95%. I think this represents a much higher level of co-operation than was prevalent in the past, as attitudes have changed for the better. Similar work will be going on in all other BC Branches, so if you don’t already do so, please support them with your membership! I know that some of the regular contributors to UKB get involved with winter work parties, and I’m sure they would all agree that you get a great sense of satisfaction from seeing your local patch flourish, assisted by your own labours – as well as keeping fit, without paying exorbitant gym fees!

Dave Brown made a very important point in the Alice Holt thread – in some areas the FC are doing a sterling job, so it’s far from an ‘institutional’ shortcoming. Last spring I joined some BC staff at Denge Wood in Kent, where positive experiences in managing sites in both the North of England and Sussex were used to inform conservation efforts for the Duke of Burgundy here. The BC Denge Wood Project Officer, Fran Thompson, is doing a great job and her ‘management suggestions’ report was adopted in its entirety by local FC staff. I agree with Dave’s views that things are set to improve for the species here, although it might take a few years for the benefits to really kick in. In Sussex the FC are doing valuable work to benefit the Pearl-bordered Fritillary, at places like Rewell Wood and Abbots Wood.

Although we should all ‘kick up a stink’ when things go seriously wrong, it’s in the nature of all ‘media’ that the negative stories get highlighted, often at the near-total expense of the positive. For every ‘bad’ story, there are literally hundreds of ‘good ones’ out there.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 06:56 PM GMT

Butterfly Conservation 6th Annual Symposium

I'd like to 'second' Lynn's comments about this fantastic event, held over a number of days in late March at Reading University. Although there were many sad stories of 'decline', I was left with a feeling of optimism, as there are so many like-minded people both in the UK and mainland Europe, doing everything within their powers to reverse these worrying trends.

It was a great opportunity to either meet or catch up with some of the 'big names' in the world of butterflies, many of whom gave inspirational presentations. In the evenings the campus bar was packed with delegates, exchanging valuable experience over more than a few pints. I'm already looking forward to the next one!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 07:09 PM GMT

Recorders Conference



On Saturday April 10th the Sussex Branch held a Recorders Conference at Haywards Heath, attended by 100 delegates. Anyone with an interest in butterflies, that has set foot in Sussex, will know the name Michael Blencowe – a legend in his own lunchtime (lunchtimes being quite important to Michael). However, it was his equally hard-working partner, Clare Jeffers, who was the star of this show. Aply assisted by other members of the committee, she put together a fantastic event, designed to both enthuse a new army of butterfly recorders, and launch a five year project to culminate in the production of 'An Atlas of Sussex Butterflies'.

Supported by an Opal (Lottery) grant, there was a lavish spread (including fancy cakes) and no detail had been missed – even down to the provision of sherbet lemons on each table!



Michael gave a talk on the currently-known distribution of the 45 (possibly 46!) species in Sussex, followed by Clare's summary of the 'nitty-gritty' of recording techniques. Crispin Holloway gave an excellent presentation on the changing fortunes of the Silver-spotted Skipper – a 'climate change winner'. Tom Ottley gave a very informative talk on how to differentiate Small and Essex Skipper (one only has to look at UKB later in the summer to realise how problematic this issue continues to be!).

Apart from performing 'MC' duties with more panache than Dale Winton (well, perhaps not a good comparison) yours truly spoke about how to survey for some of our more elusive species; how to locate potentially good habitat for 'Dukes' (and other difficult habitat specialists) using 'remote sensing'; and how some recording techniques (single species timed counts) feed more directly into conservation efforts, by assessing the effectiveness of ongoing habitat management.

It was nice to see a few UKB faces there, together with friends from adjacent counties. Congratulations to Clare & Co.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 07:13 PM GMT

New BC Sussex Annual Report

This week saw the distribution, to Branch members, of Issue 2 of our new-style, all-colour, Annual Report. At 44 pages, and containing many interesting articles, the cover price of £2 to non-members represents much cheapness. Amongst other things, there is a lengthy article on the Queen of Spain Fritillary in Sussex. This subject was also covered (a different paper) in the latest edition of 'Atropos'. I'll bring some copies along to the UKB photographic workshop. All proceeds go towards the 'saving butterflies in Sussex' fund.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 17-Apr-10 07:20 PM GMT

And most excellent the Annual Report is too! I love the new format with great articles and wonderful colour pictures. Well done to you and everyone involved with its production 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 07:30 PM GMT

New Camera Comes Out Of Its Box

On 13th April I gave my new camera, the Panasonic Lumix FZ38, its first test drive. In some woods near Arundel I found my first two Green-veined Whites of the year. This is one site where recent habitat management work for the Duke of Burgundy really does look like 'doing the bizz'. When first discovered two years back, a small population was hemmed-in to a small area of greatly overgrown habitat, with nowhere to move on to. A two hour search failed to find a single food plant! A huge area of habitat has now been opened up and I was delighted to see vast quantities of both cowslip and primrose.

I later moved on to Mill Hill at Shoreham, where I saw my first Grizzled Skipper of the year on the 6th April. Numbers had built quite nicely and I was fortunate enough to see a mating pair. I'm definitely 'very pleased' with the FZ38.



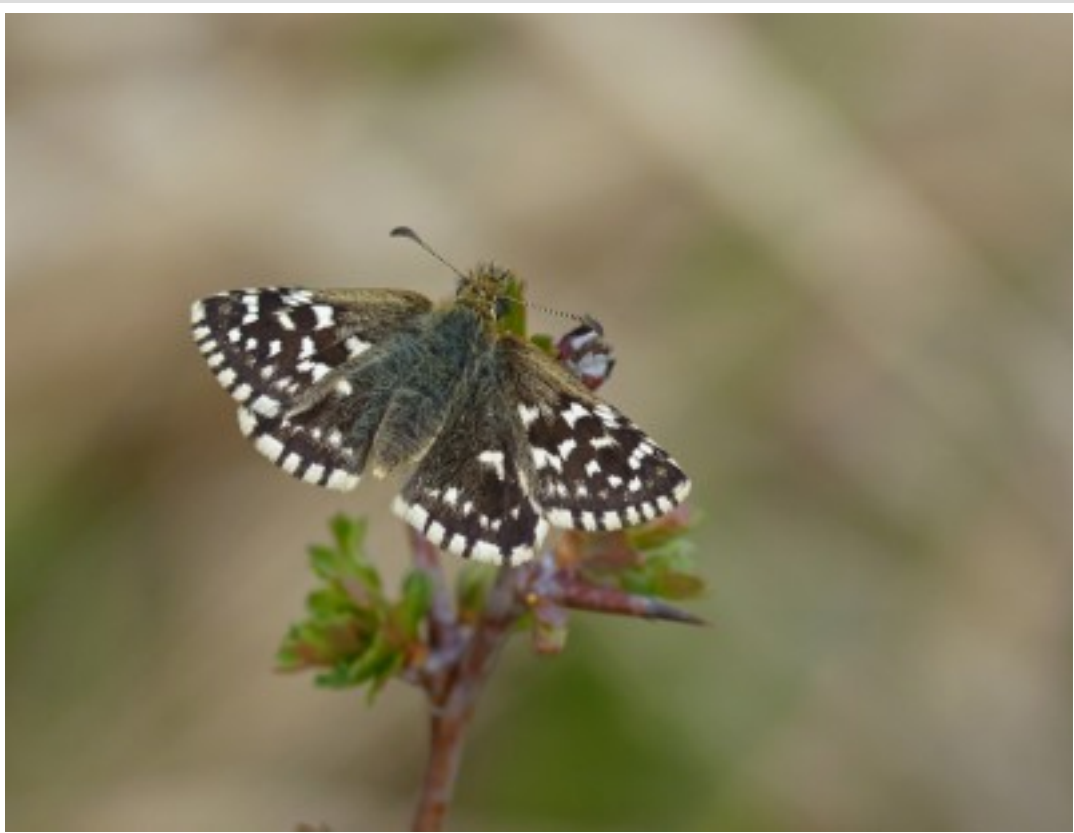


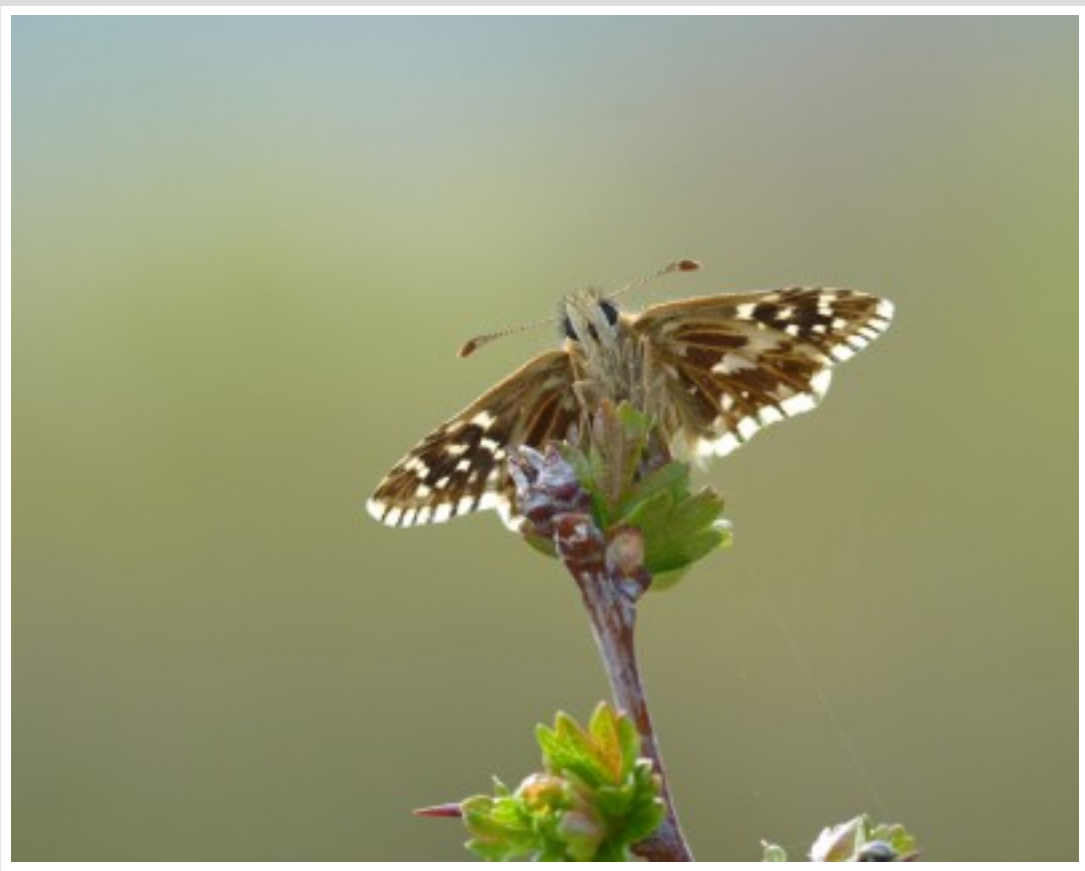
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 07:35 PM GMT

Mill Hill Again

On Thursday 15th April I returned to Mill Hill with my brother and his family, visiting from Antwerp. Double figure numbers of Grizzled Skippers have now been joined by the first Dingy Skippers of the year, although I failed to get a decent shot of this species. With a NE wind continuing to blow hard, the SW-facing lower slope is providing a really warm and sheltered area at the moment. A good number of Small Tortoiseshells are present here, supporting the observation made by many others, that the species may be making a 'comeback' this season - let's hope so!





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 17-Apr-10 07:51 PM GMT

Cracking Grizzled Skipper photos Neil. By jove, I think you're starting to get the hang of it 😊. Save some for this month's competition.

Congratulations also on the latest Sussex annual report. It is a credit to your good stewardship and all involved.

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-10 07:55 PM GMT

Thanks Susie and Vince – sun's shining, so I'm outta here!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 17-Apr-10 11:19 PM GMT

Excellent summaries, Neil. And apols for interrupting your personal diary. I'd like to "bagsy" a report if that's OK – looks superb! 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Lee Hurrell, 19-Apr-10 04:00 AM GMT

Likewise Neil, I'd like a report on Saturday if ok.

That last photo would get my vote....

Cheers

Lee

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Apr-10 06:32 AM GMT

Hi Pete and Lee,

I'll bring a good number of reports on Saturday 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Apr-10 06:06 PM GMT

Small Tortoiseshell Demonstrating Bouncebackability

It's great to see so many Small Tortoiseshells around this year and, like many others in the South, I'm seeing them in numbers (and locations) that I haven't done so for many years.

In response to some of the questions posed by Lee Hurrell (Sightings – 'Small Tortoiseshells' thread) – there may be a numbers of factors at work here Lee.

Firstly, an explanation of your observation of 'a higher number of STs this spring than can be explained by the *apparently* lower numbers seen late last autumn'. The post-hibernator butterflies emerge in spring, mate, and their offspring are around through June, July and August. These butterflies mate and give rise to another emergence of adults, which are on the wing through late summer and autumn. Soon after these second brood adults start emerging (which may be over a quite prolonged period of several months), some individuals start tucking themselves away, well in advance of late autumn/winter, and largely un-noticed. So their 'disappearance' from the countryside is a greatly staggered event, with a relatively modest number being active and on the wing at any given time from late August onwards. This phenomenon can also be 'exaggerated' by the fact that we are now seeing a partial third brood of STs in the South, meaning an additional but small emergence of adults very late in the year. Also, (particularly further North and following long, hard winters such as 08/09 and 09/10) a few of the adults that emerge in mid summer (first brood) go straight into hibernation, rather than mate 'this' year. This is a good survival strategy at species level, in the same way that a small percentage of pupae of other species will 'hold back' from emerging until the following year – a little bit of 'insurance' against particularly poor years.

Whereas the STs from a 'previous' year have gone into hibernation over a very prolonged timeframe, when spring arrives they all emerge over a very short period – and are all on the wing at the same time. So this gives the impression of a much higher number than could be explained by the numbers seen at any given time through the preceding late summer/autumn. The same effect can often be seen with Peacocks, which start to tuck themselves away in August. With fewer species around in the spring, we also tend to notice these particular butterflies more. If over-winter survival rates are particularly high (my second point), the whole effect becomes even more obvious.

The over-winter survival rate of STs (and other species) is undoubtedly high this year. This will have been helped by the cold weather, which reduces losses through moulds, parasites, pathogens and some predators. The situation with ST may be even more complex. Although research into the effects of the parasitoid *Sturmia bella* is ongoing (see photo of a project 'release'), and Owen Lewis' team is yet to make a 'final judgement', this tachinid does seem to have exacerbated the decline of the species. We still don't know the over-wintering strategy of the fly, but being a 'warm climate invader', it might not have thought very much of the cold 08/09 winter! With the 09/10 winter being even colder, we might be seeing an 'upward spiral' and I'm optimistic that numbers might be even higher next year, perhaps returning to the level that many of us have not experienced since our youth!

However, in the longer-term, it is possible that *S. bella* might start developing a tolerance to colder winters, and we might have a long re-run of warmer, damper winters. This might result in another 'crash' in the future. This cyclicity has always, and will always, affect the fortunes of some of our butterflies.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Senior, 19-Apr-10 06:21 PM GMT

Hi Neil

I was at Mill Hill on Thursday so I must have seen you but not realised it was you and your relatives .

I visited Ouse Estuary NR on Saturday , Peacock , Small T , Comma , Large W , Green V White and possibly Small W seen . When if at all would you expect any Clouded Yellows to emerge ?

Cheers

Mark

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Lee Hurrell, 19-Apr-10 09:34 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Many thanks for your feedback, that does answer a few questions.

If ok, rather than clutter up your diary, I'll respond via the original thread: viewtopic.php?f=8&t=4060

Cheers

Lee

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Apr-10 04:44 AM GMT

Hi Mark,
I'm sure we'll 'locate' each other sometime this season! Unfortunately I doubt that any Clouded Yellows made it through that winter. Bearing in mind the area has been thoroughly searched, it would also appear that no Queen of Spain Fritillaries over-wintered in the adult stage at Chichester. If eggs or larvae got through, I would expect to see adults in late June/early July.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Apr-10 04:54 AM GMT

Dingy Skippers Now 'Fully Out' On Mill Hill

During a brief stop at Mill Hill this afternoon, it soon became evident that Dingy Skipper numbers have started to build. Plenty of dogfights going on with the now numerous Grizzled Skippers – mainly on the lower slopes, far end. Good numbers of post-hibernators too.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Danny, 21-Apr-10 08:28 AM GMT

Have a feeling Small Tortois are avoiding me..wondering what I've done to upset them?

Danny

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Padfield, 22-Apr-10 01:55 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Bearing in mind the area has been thoroughly searched, it would also appear that no Queen of Spain Fritillaries over-wintered in the adult stage at Chichester. If eggs or larvae got through, I would expect to see adults in late June/early July.

Is there no possibility of pupae having survived? This is a common hibernation stage (my adult hibernators in the Rhône Valley are the exception, rather than the rule) and leads to emergence in April/May in much of France. Tim Cowles, in Lyon, has yet to see his first Queens this year, making it the latest year in his recording history – and I would expect Chichester to be later than Lyon.

Sorry to interrupt the flow of your diary – but it's your fault for making it so interesting. I'm particularly interested in your Queens, a butterfly I always wanted to see when I lived in England and would make a point of visiting if they did set up in Sussex.

Guy

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 22-Apr-10 03:16 AM GMT

This must have been discussed before, but surely the lack of breeding success must be down to the fact that male Queens are confused?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Apr-10 07:43 AM GMT

Hi Guy,

That is a possibility, but my gut feel is that there would have been insufficient time for the larvae to develop to the point of pupation, before the colder weather set in. The single copulation that I (or anyone else) observed was on October 12th, and even assuming significantly earlier pairings (males were on the wing from mid/late September) it would probably be 'cutting it fine'. Under much warmer conditions the females apparently need about three days post-cop before oviposition commences. I hope that the odd one did pupate in time, as this would probably be the 'best' stage for over-wintering here.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Apr-10 08:05 AM GMT

Orange Tips And First Small Copper

While waiting for a courier delivery today, I had just enough time to sprint to some local woods to attempt photography of Orange Tips (never easy!). I got lucky. As I was chasing one male, that was alighting with a little more regularity than usual, I slipped at the top of a drainage run-off ditch beside the track, ending up in an undignified heap 🤪. Right next to me was another male OT, sitting on a clump of primrose. I suspect it had emerged that

morning, as it hadn't budged by the time I had to leave.



Later in the afternoon I joined a friend at Malling Down, near Lewes. He had already photographed a mating pair of Small Coppers, and it wasn't long before I found my first of the year. Our target species, Green Hairstreak, failed to show, although we did see Grizzled Skipper and a few Small Tortoiseshells.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-10 03:49 AM GMT

[More Orange Tips](#)

A quick visit to some old chalk workings near Chanctonbury Ring failed to find the desired Green Hairstreak – they are relatively 'late' in Sussex this year. I did find a Grizzled Skipper, but best of all, as I got back to the car, I found a male Orange Tip taking its last bask before going to bed.



Re: Sussex Kipper

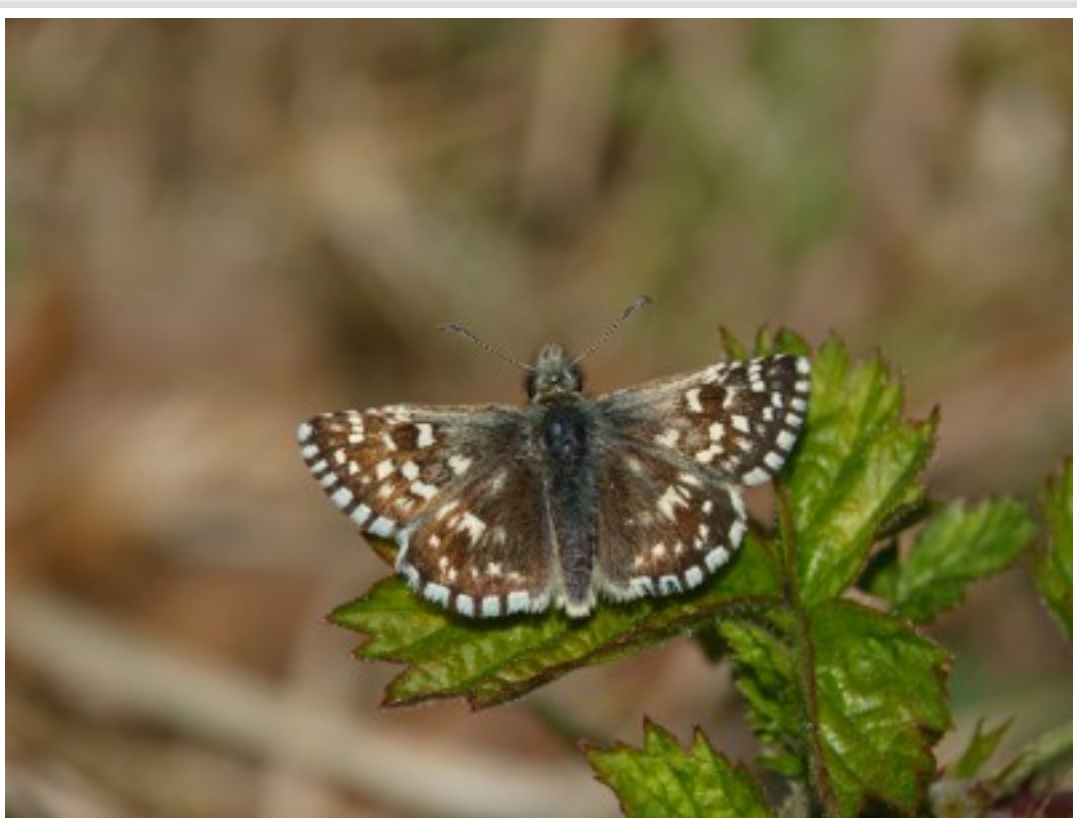
by Neil Hulme, 24-Apr-10 06:13 AM GMT

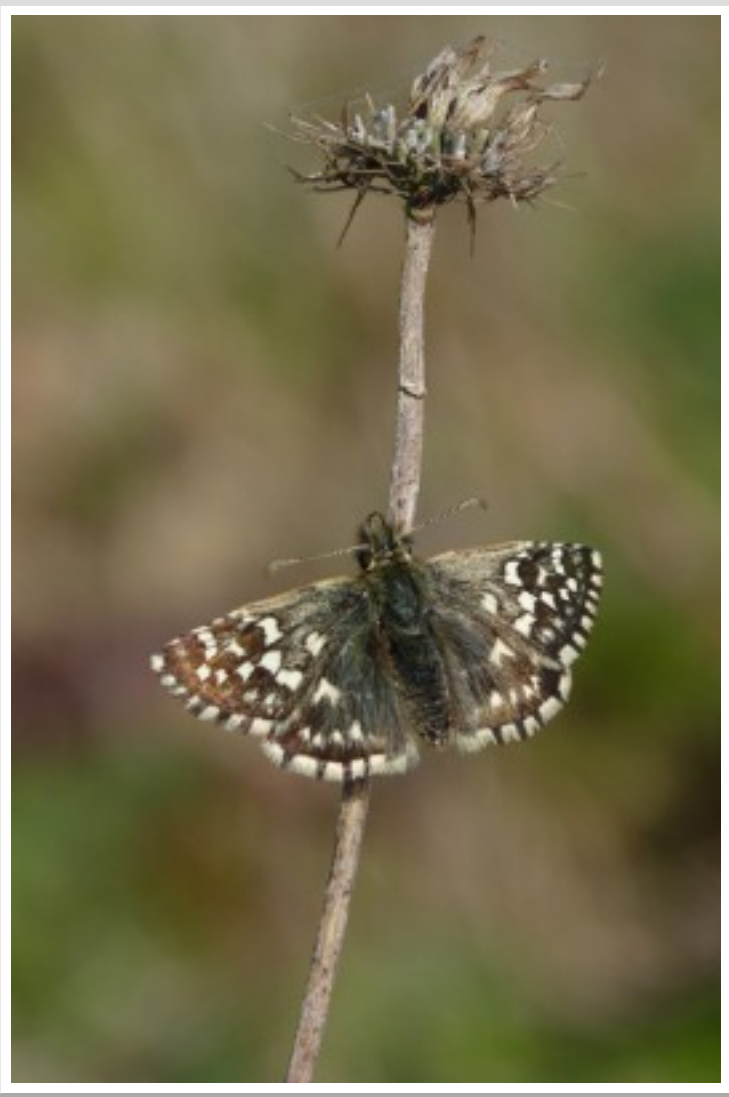
First Sussex Duke On The Wing

This morning I led a small group from the Environment Agency to look at one of the Duke of Burgundy sites their volunteers had helped work on in the winter. As of yesterday the species hadn't appeared yet (in Sussex) and I reckoned the chances were slim – but we got lucky and I found one still 'drying off', having emerged earlier in the day.



Later I revisited some old chalk workings near Chanctonbury, and by searching a different area to yesterday, found a nice little colony of Grizzled Skippers (7) and a couple of Dingy.





I was also pleased to find the solitary mason bee *Osmia bicolor*, which seems to be doing well and spreading in Sussex. It nests in empty snail shells, which it camouflages by building a wigwam-like roof of dry grass stems and thin sticks. These are picked up from the surrounding area and carried to the nest, and the bee then either hovers above the shell and drops them, or occasionally lands to rearrange the structure.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Apr-10 08:34 AM GMT

UKB Photography Workshop - Longstock 24.4.2010

I had a fantastic day out at the UKB Photography Workshop. It's always a pleasure to get together with like-minded people and this event was enjoyable from start to finish. Great talks by Roger Buchanan, Roger Harding (nice camper van/mobile palace), John Bogle, Mervyn Grist, Gary (Gruditch) Richardson, Matthew Oates and Pete. Congratulations and many thanks to Pete, Lisa & Gary, and anyone else who had a hand in putting it together. This was my first UKB Workshop, but it won't be my last. It was nice to catch up with old friends and to meet a few new ones.

The field session on Danebury was timed perfectly. There might not have been much about yesterday, but the butterflies had emerged in force and put on an excellent show - great venue! Having failed to find a Green Hairstreak yet this season, I was delighted to find a mint condition male almost immediately, about 2 metres from where Gary predicted they would be (can't beat local knowledge!). I went home very happy. Thanks again folks.



Re: Sussex Kipper

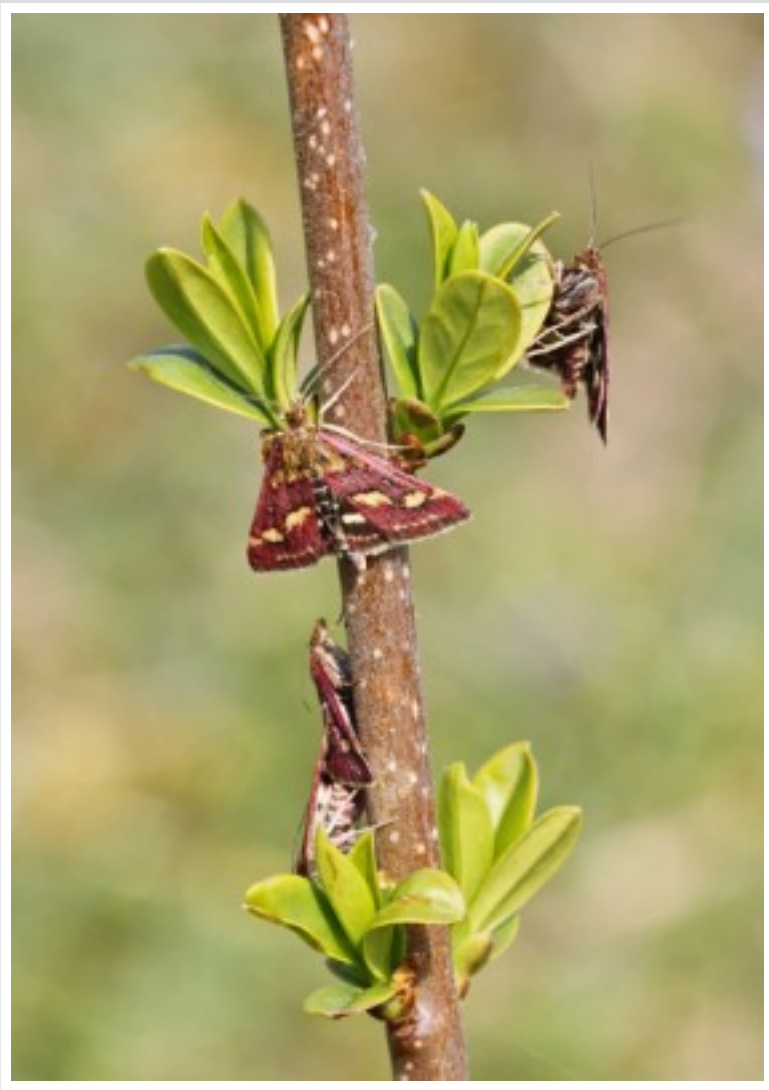
by Neil Hulme, 25-Apr-10 06:32 PM GMT

Family Photos!

A couple of weeks back my brother and family visited from Antwerp, spending quite a lot of time at Mill Hill! I thought I'd post a couple of nice images they went home with. First is this lovely close-up of a Grizzled Skipper, taken by my nephew/Godson Tomas. Not bad for a twelve year old!



Below is an interesting behavioural shot taken by my brother Mark. A mating pair of *Pyrausta purpuralis*, a diminutive moth characteristic of chalk grasslands, has attracted the attention of several other amorous males. They will have been attracted by the waft of pheromones, and have turned up 'in hope' - mimicking in miniature the world of the mighty Purple Emperor!

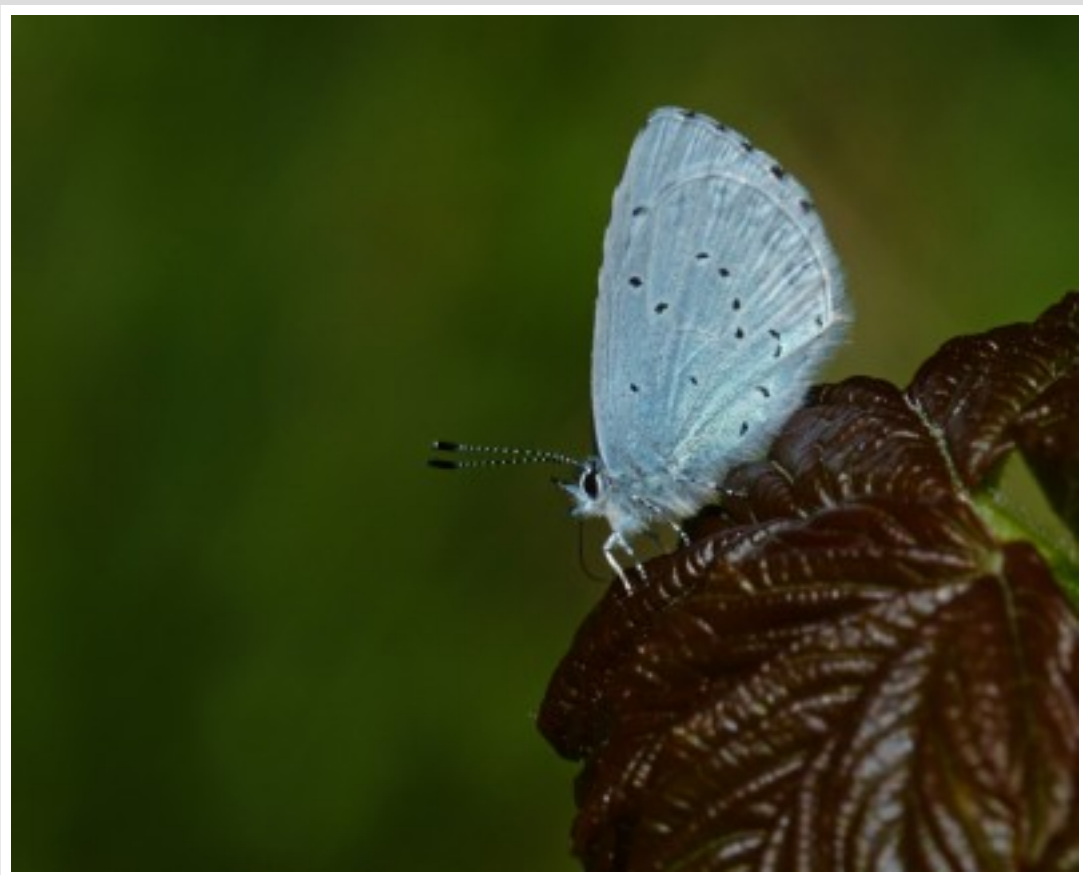
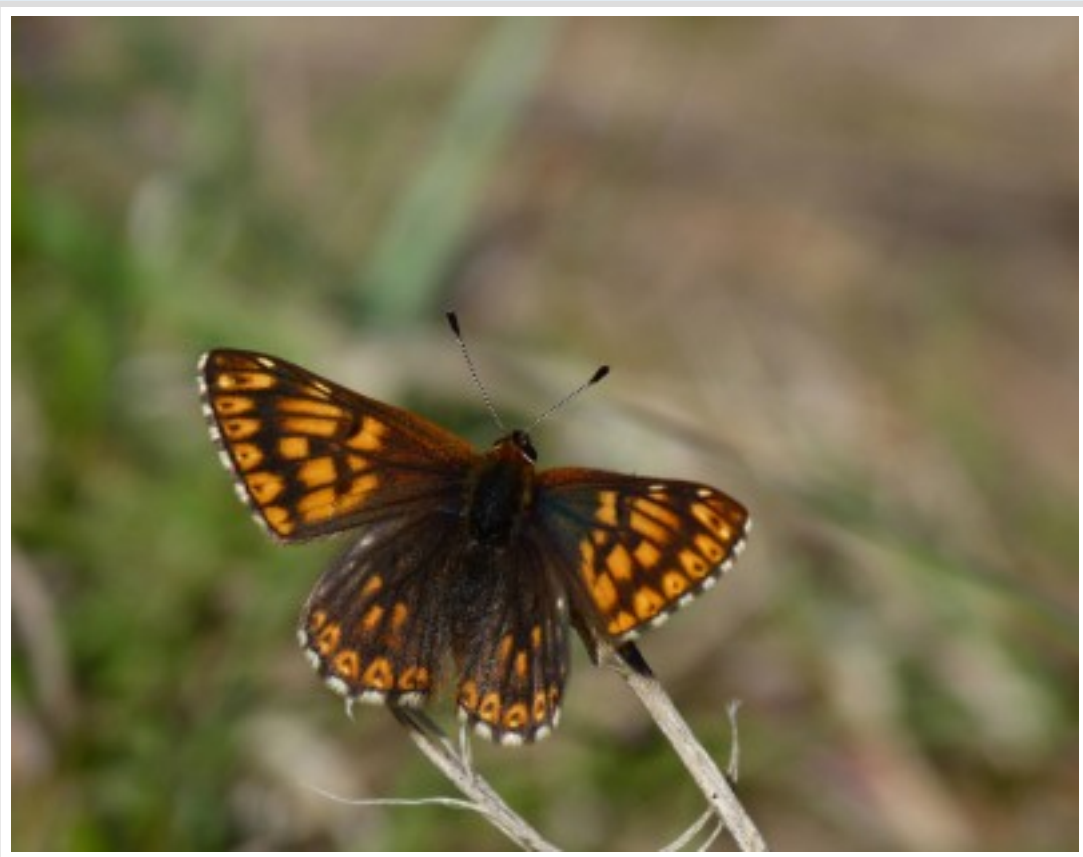


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 28-Apr-10 07:06 AM GMT

First Holly Blue

While walking through some local woods this morning I sighted UKB member M_galathea, and shared both a very pleasant hour or two with him, and some very fine butterflies! I was delighted that this was his first 'Duke' in Sussex, as he was one of the grafters that turned out to help improve the habitat here last winter – just deserts! We saw 4 Duke of Burgundy, including an ab. *gracilens* female, several female Orange Tips on the look-out for egg-laying sites, a Grizzled Skipper and a very freshly emerged Holly Blue – my first of the year.

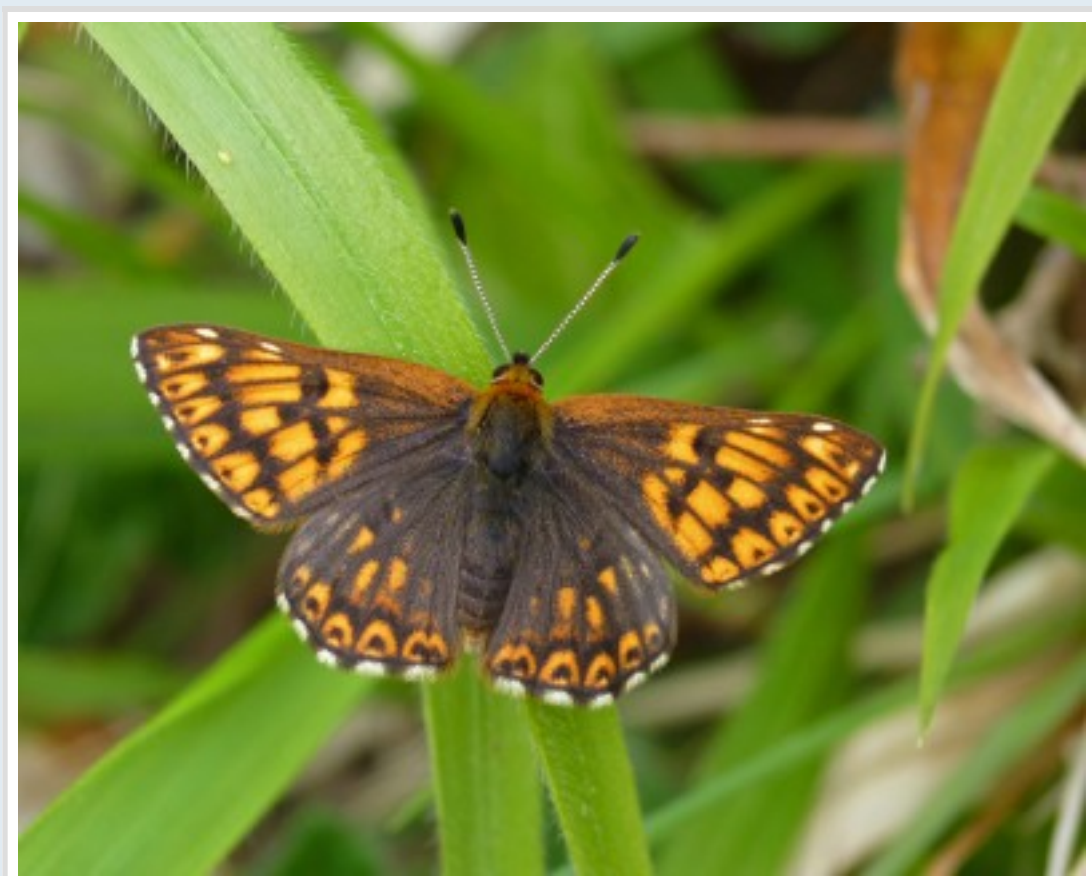
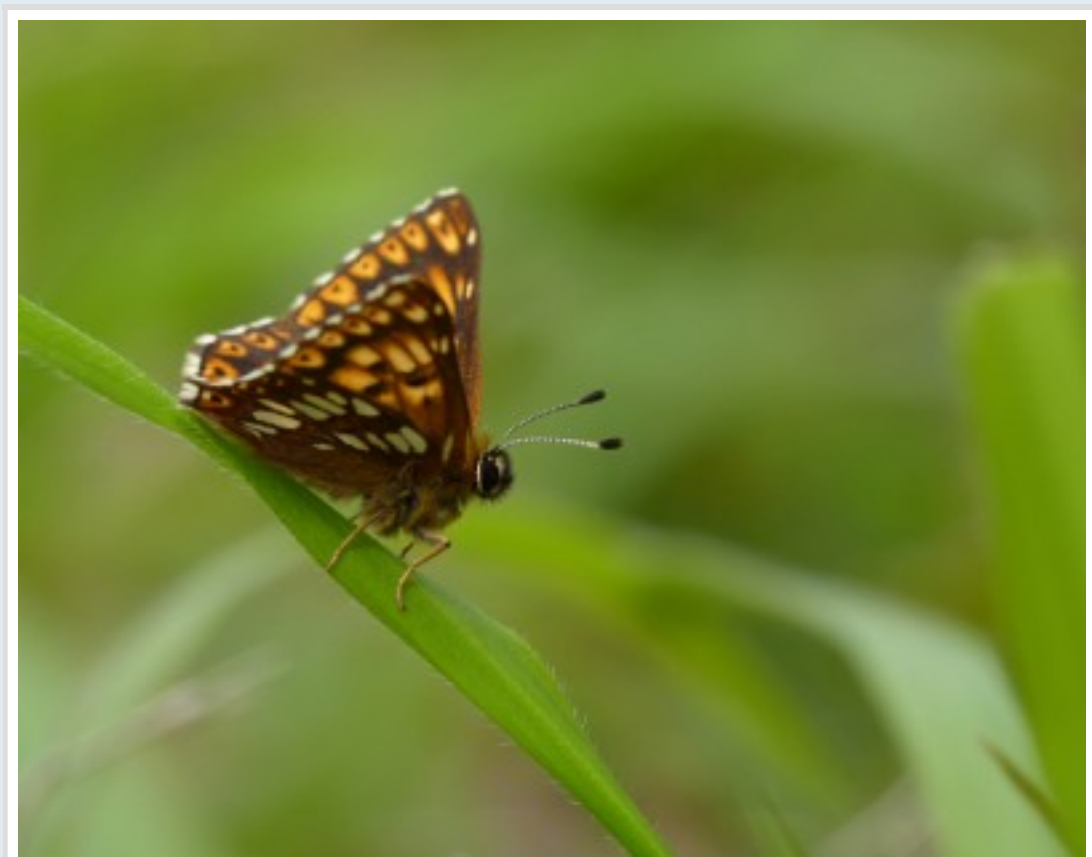
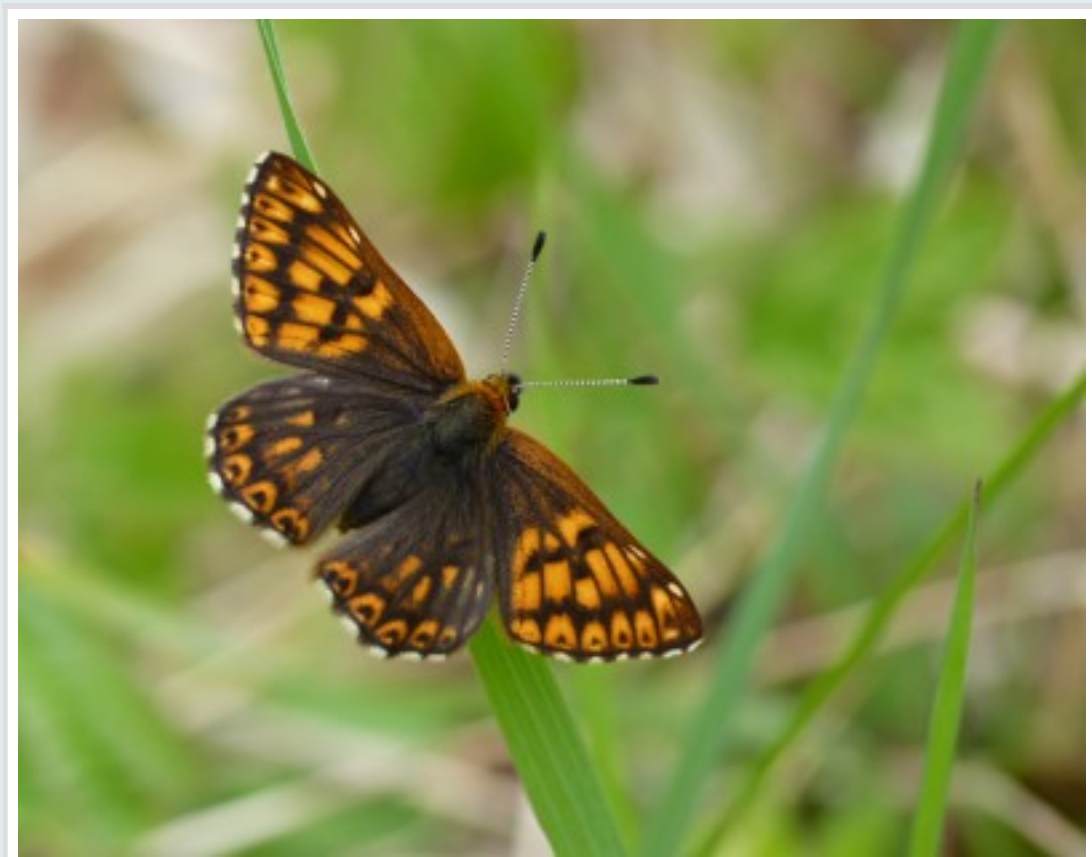


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Apr-10 07:18 AM GMT

Jack's Holiday Comes Good!

On Wednesday I joined up with a couple of local 'butterfly buddies', and 'guest of honour' Jack Harrison of UKB fame. After a couple of dodgy days, I was delighted that Jack's trip was to end on such a 'high'. It was one of those days that makes a good season! We started at a Duke of Burgundy conservation site, seeing three males. Later we moved to the central part of Rewell Wood, where a well-concealed depression acts as a real heat-trap. If we were to find 'early' Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, they would be in this clearing. Jack soon spotted a flash of orange-brown and we were 'in business'. 3 males and female entertained us until it finally clouded over. We also found a Grizzled Skipper here (with 2 others elsewhere), which obligingly fell asleep. Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Green-veined White, Speckled Wood, Brimstone, Peacock and Comma made up the supporting cast. We ended up at the 'Sportsman's Inn' in Amberley, which has 'probably' the best views from a beer-garden in England.



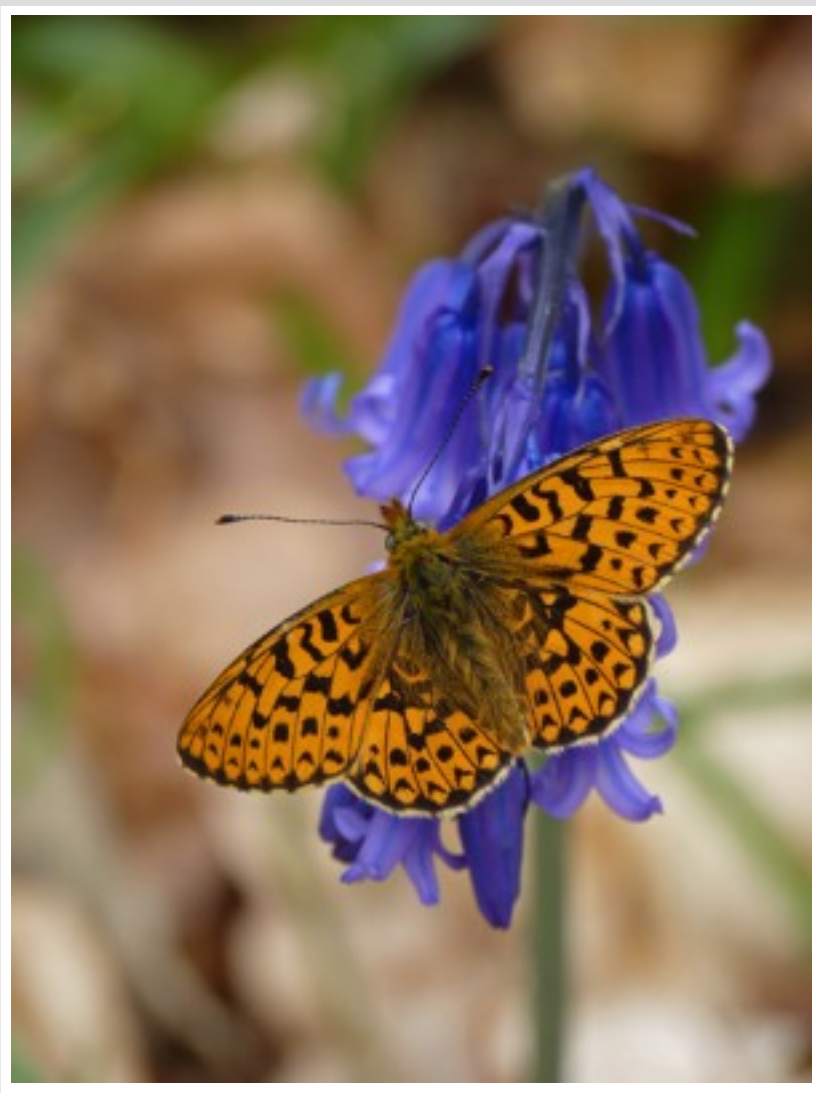


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Apr-10 05:32 PM GMT

Sitting Pretty

Yesterday I had to visit Arundel Arboretum to pick up a new Acer tree for the garden. So I couldn't resist another go at the Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Rewell Wood. It was warm and quite overcast, but the hazy sunshine occasionally broke through, keeping the PBFs active – but a little more approachable than yesterday. In full sunshine the males hardly ever stop moving, until things cool down in the late afternoon. I failed to get the underside shot I was after, but was well pleased with this chap!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 30-Apr-10 11:26 PM GMT

Some great pics here, and i am in awe of the local knowledge that goes with it. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 01-May-10 12:00 AM GMT

Some great pics here, and i am in awe of the local knowledge that goes with it. 😊

Yes indeed. Neil smokes them out 🙄

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-May-10 08:35 PM GMT

Thanks Zonda and Jack,

I'm dead chuffed with the new camera. I'm certainly finding it easier to get some reasonable shots with the Mark II Box Brownie 😊

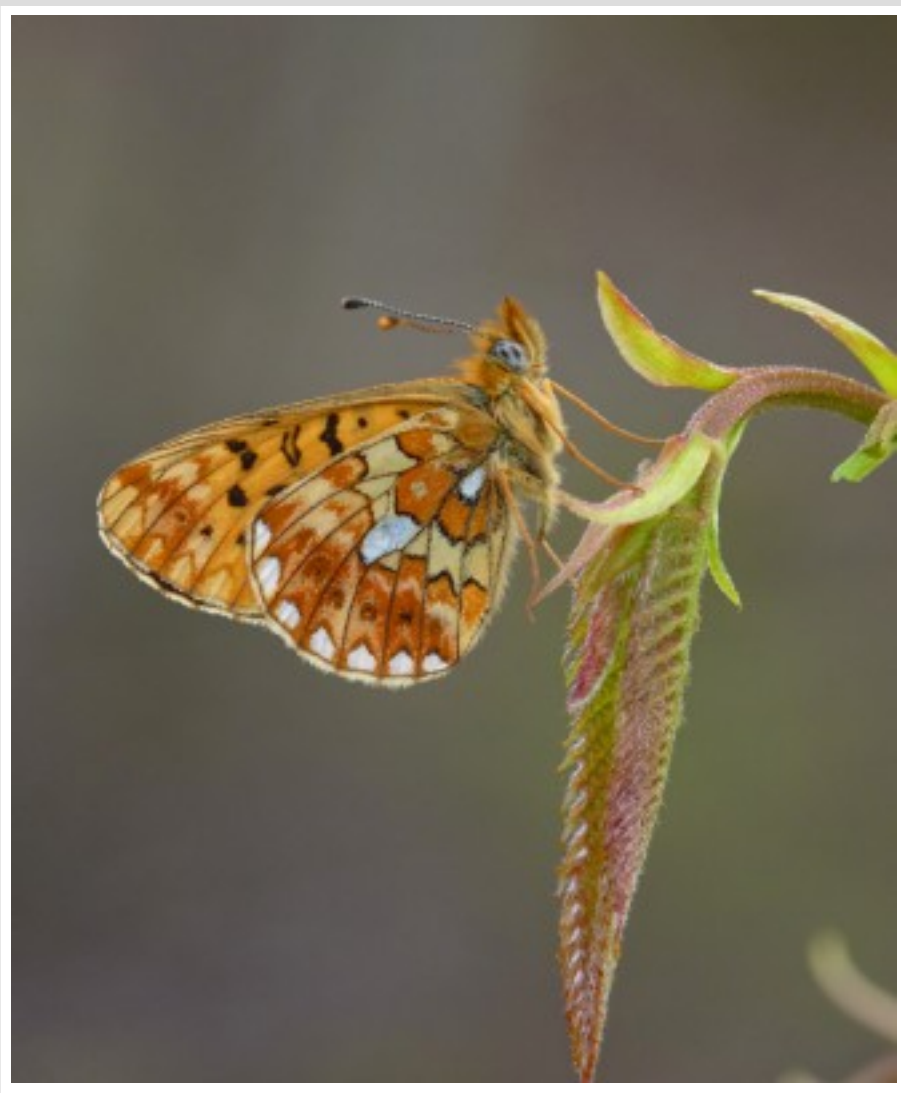
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-May-10 02:02 AM GMT

Bedtime For PBFs

Yesterday I spent the late afternoon and early evening watching Pearl-bordered Fritillaries go to roost, hoping to find out more about their choice of bedding-down locations. Almost without exception, they chose coppice stools (sweet chestnut) or taller trees (sweet chestnut and birch) in a sheltered spot, on the leeward side of the nearest tall wind-break (mature woodland block). Roosting height was anywhere between 0.5m and c.7m, with the majority at c.1m. Some coppice stools were clearly considered particularly favourable, with clusters of up to 4 fritillaries per stand. They were quite happy to settle on the outer margins of the sweet chestnut, although in inclement weather I imagine they would crawl into a more sheltered position further 'inside' the plant.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 03-May-10 04:27 AM GMT

What superb observations. How many in total?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Gruditch, 03-May-10 05:05 PM GMT

Tis an interesting observation. Last year I had a cunning plan to photograph Small Pearl-bordered Frits when they went to roost. Of the dozen or so I was watching only one chose the bracken as it roosting site, the others went to the trees. I also found a tree roosting Pearl-bordered on Saturday. Sorry to butt in Kipper, regards Gruditch

P.s nice pic's 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-May-10 07:07 PM GMT

Hi Jack,
That was based on watching 15-20 individuals turn-in for the night.

Hi Gruditch,
Interesting to hear about the habits of the SPBF you watched. At Park Corner Heath Reserve the SPBFs *usually* roost in low scrub (e.g. gorse) and on dead seed-heads etc, although I have also seen them 'go high'. It's certainly useful to get to know their sleeping habits on your local site, particularly if you're

into photography!

The larger fritillaries seem to show a clear preference for resting up in the canopy. I'm sure that many on here have watched in awe as Silver-washed Fritillaries start swooping down from the tree-tops when the sun breaks through, following a period of overcast conditions. Last June I spent several days watching High Brown Fritillaries on Dartmoor. Rather than retire to the apparently suitable refuge of bracken, the majority would descend to the base of the hillside and then roost quite high in a line of oak.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-May-10 06:01 AM GMT

Bank Holiday Monday Blues

Bank Holiday Monday was a bit of a struggle in these cold northerly winds. Things started OK when I walked out the door to find a male Holly Blue posing on a *Fatsia japonica* in my back garden. I'm not sure whether this large, 'architectural' plant has been discussed in the Foodplants and Gardening section before, but it's one of the best for providing a winter nectar source.



Despite short periods of sunshine, virtually nothing was flying in Rewell Wood. So I had to fall back on moth caterpillars! Close to where I had hoped to find Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, I noticed the characteristic larval feeding pattern of the Spotted White Plume (*Pterophorus galactodactyla*). This species has quite a widely scattered distribution, but is very localised and far from common, with East Anglia being its stronghold. The image below shows the caterpillar, a recently-shed skin, and the telltale, white-lined holes that this species makes in the leaves of burdock.



Hannah and I finished the afternoon off by taking a stroll around Slindon Common – at least the cold didn't stop the bluebells from showing!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 05-May-10 06:42 AM GMT

I've had a false castor oil plant (*fatsia japonica* to you clever types) in my garden for as long as I've had my own gardens (nearly 20 years now) and I've never seen a butterfly on it feeding. I'll have to keep a look out next year if my plant recovers from last winter.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-May-10 07:14 AM GMT

Hi Susie,
Mine attracts good numbers of Red Admiral every autumn (and later in mild winters) and last autumn it had 9 Painted Ladies on it at the same time. Always covered in bees too. I'm surprised they don't go for yours 😊.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 05-May-10 03:25 PM GMT

They have always been good for bees, that's one of the reasons I have it. I would guess that lack of butterflies is due to positioning as I have always grown it in shady parts of the garden. It grows happily in shade and is good to brighten up a dull corner, bees don't need the sun, but butterflies probably prefer it.

Thanks for the initial observation, that's another one for the list. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

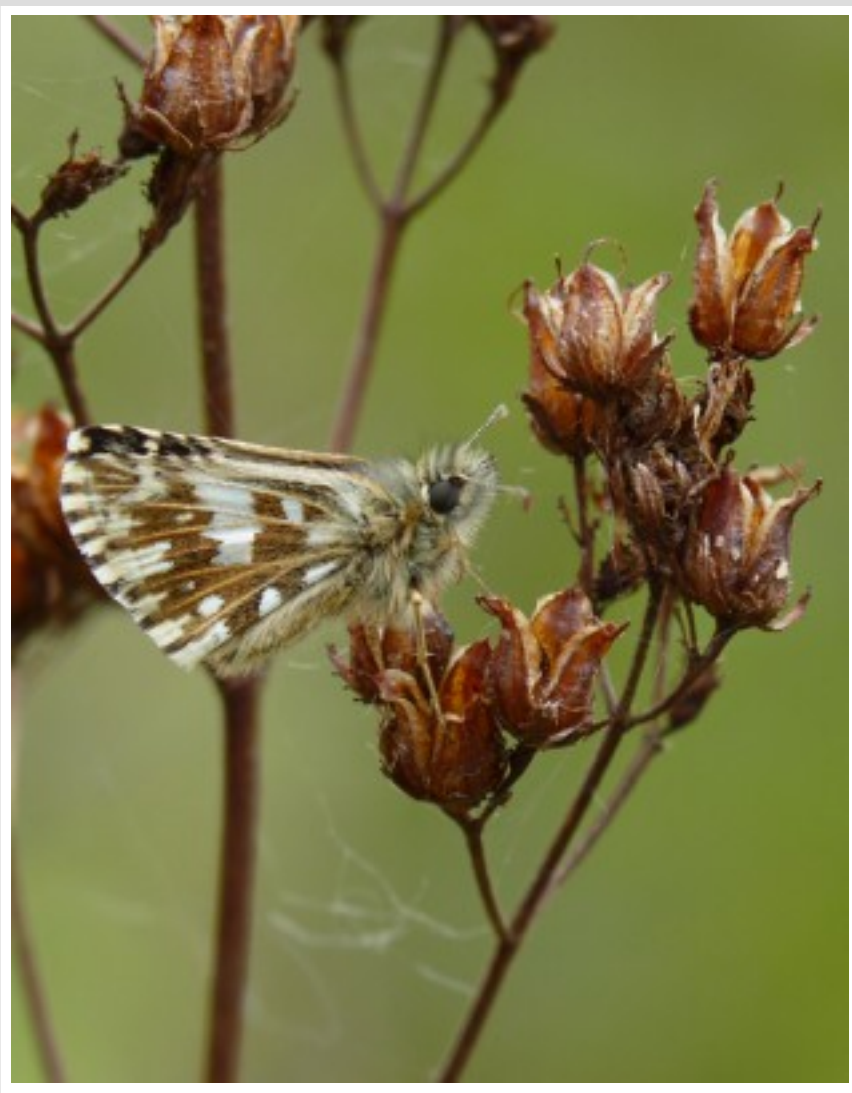
by Neil Hulme, 06-May-10 04:45 PM GMT

Heyshott Down

On Tuesday (4th May) I visited the stunningly beautiful Heyshott Down (near Midhurst), meeting John Murray of the Murray Downland Trust, and BC Sussex friends Colin Knight and Roger Martin. The MDT are doing a fantastic job in managing this site for Duke of Burgundy – although many other interesting species also live on these long-abandoned chalk workings.

In order to assess the effectiveness of ongoing habitat management, it is essential to accurately record how the population is reacting. As it has become increasingly difficult for me to 'look after' all of the 'Duke' sites across West Sussex, the assistance offered by Colin and Roger, in regularly surveying Heyshott, is much appreciated. We walked the escarpment and designed a survey route and method to hopefully gain an accurate picture of the increasing butterfly numbers. This is not a strictly defined Transect as such, which is a method that fails to adequately assess 'Duke' numbers in particular (being a 'successional' species, it shifts between different areas over time), but more of a 'single species timed count'. We want to see those graphs and histograms moving one way only!

The cold northerly winds and grey skies scuppered our hopes of seeing Duke of Burgundy on the day, but short periods of sunshine eventually moved the odd Grizzled and Dingy Skipper.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-May-10 06:43 AM GMT

Wood White Wind-up

On Wednesday (5th May) I met Simon Mockford of the South Downs Joint Committee and WSCC Ranger John Knight, both being enthusiastic supporters of local conservation work for butterflies. Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled Skipper and several other species appeared before us as we talked, as if to show their appreciation of our efforts. A freshly-emerged Speckled Wood posed on a beech log for some photographs before I headed off in search of Wood White.





It wasn't long after reaching Botany Bay, near the Sussex/Surrey border, before I came across Wood Whites fluttering along the track in that characteristically aimless manner. Now don't get me wrong, I'm delighted with this image of a Wood White sitting on an Early Purple Orchid – but just prior to me finally attaching an adaptor and lens, after fumbling/dropping/cursing for several minutes, there had been two there! Of course it was a 'couple', sitting face-to-face, waving their heads, flicking their tongues and bashing 'antlers' with each other. Will I ever get another chance at that shot? Who knows, but that's all part of the fun..... I think!



Re: Sussex Kipper

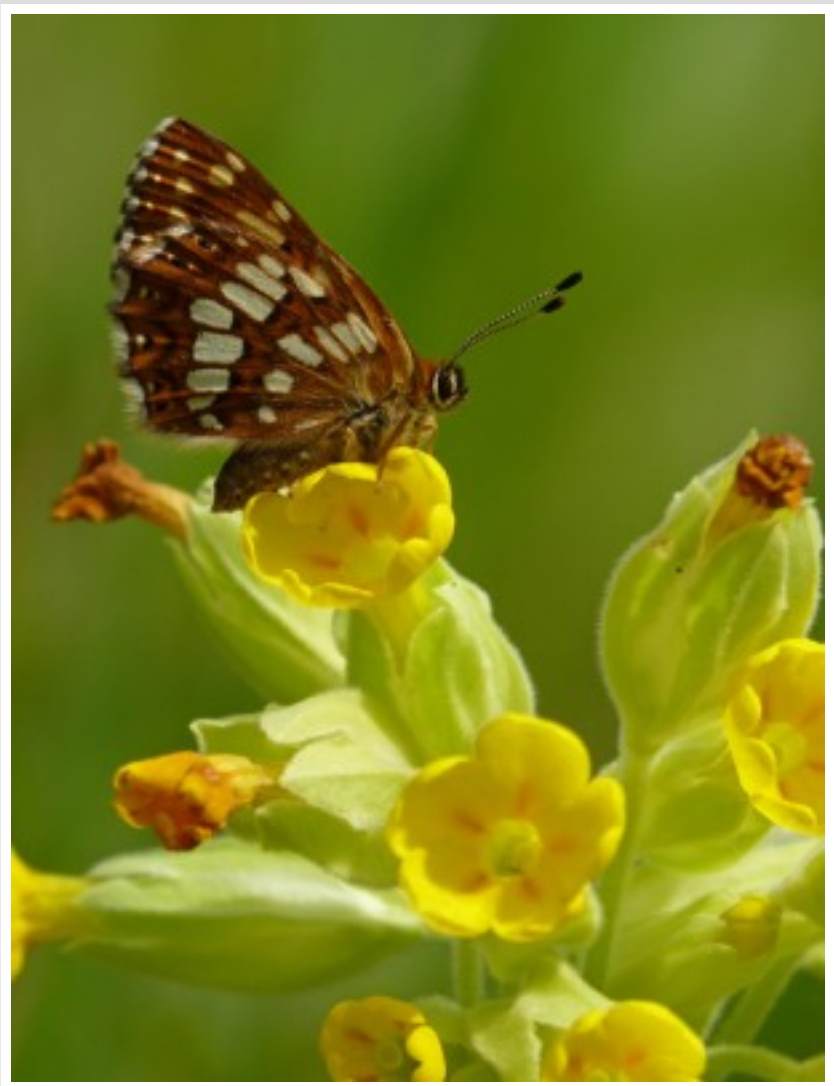
by Neil Hulme, 08-May-10 07:14 AM GMT

More Dukes And PBFs

Yesterday I met up with Matthew Oates and local GP Dr Martin Kalaher, touring some of the more scenic parts of West Sussex. Martin is an expert on the Honey Buzzard and Red Kite and it soon became clear, after listening to tales of his painstaking research work, that he'll make an excellent Purple Emperor worker! I'm not sure what he made of Matthew's car head-lining, after we all piled into the Oatesmobile (see below).



Our first venue was far from productive. Duke of Burgundy are very late in emerging on some of the north-facing slopes this year, after being blasted head-on by cold winds for some time now. However, the second venue was more sheltered and we saw nine, including three freshly-emerged females. That might not sound like many, but it's a 200% increase over the 2009 maximum daily count, after this colony was discovered and saved just in the nick of time.



After fruitlessly searching a 'possible' new Duke site, we headed to Rewell Wood for Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. These provided a colourful end to a great day out.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-May-10 05:07 PM GMT

Taras At Last!

One of my long-held ambitions has been to see and photograph the beautiful *taras* aberration of the Grizzled Skipper. Last year I photographed the slightly less 'extreme' aberrant *intermedia* in Beckley Woods (East Sussex), but the hunt was still on. So I was delighted to get a call from local BC hero Michael Blencowe, telling me he had found 'one, possibly two' in a private woodland that the Sussex Branch is being paid to survey (a nice way to generate funds for further conservation work!). I travelled there at a velocity approaching the national speed limit 😊 and was pleased to spot one immediately. It didn't take long to differentiate three specimens of *taras*, on the basis of their slightly variable ornament (two individuals below) and degree of 'wear and tear'. Very pleased!





Afterwards we travelled on to our Park Corner Heath Reserve and newly-acquired Rowland Wood extension. The habitat works performed by Michael and his band of trusty volunteers looks excellent. The re-shaping of Rowland has only just started (a brief window of opportunity last winter), but the potential here is already crystal clear. By the start of the 2011 season this will start to look like one of the best bits of 'butterfly woodland' in the SE.

As the sun was still shining we travelled onwards to Abbots Wood, but it soon became obvious that the PBFs had turned in for the night. Re-introductions of butterflies are notoriously difficult to achieve, so the recent tally of 100+ PBFs on the wing makes this project a major success story.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Trev Sawyer, 09-May-10 05:54 PM GMT

Superb stuff Neil,

Knowing my affinity with the Grizzled Skipper, you mentioned these to me at the photography workshop. Glad you got to take such good shots – they really are lovely little insects aren't they.

Trev

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-May-10 06:15 PM GMT

Hi Trev,

Sex on wings! 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by traplican, 11-May-10 04:22 AM GMT

I have a similar photo of Grizzled Skipper. I have noted a very light Grizzled Skipper with large white spots and succeeded in snapping one photo only:

http://traplican.rajce.idnes.cz/Motyli_2010-05-08/#10508_064.jpg

Is it the *taras* aberation?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-May-10 07:32 AM GMT

Hi traplican,
That's the slightly less 'extreme' aberration *intermedia*.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

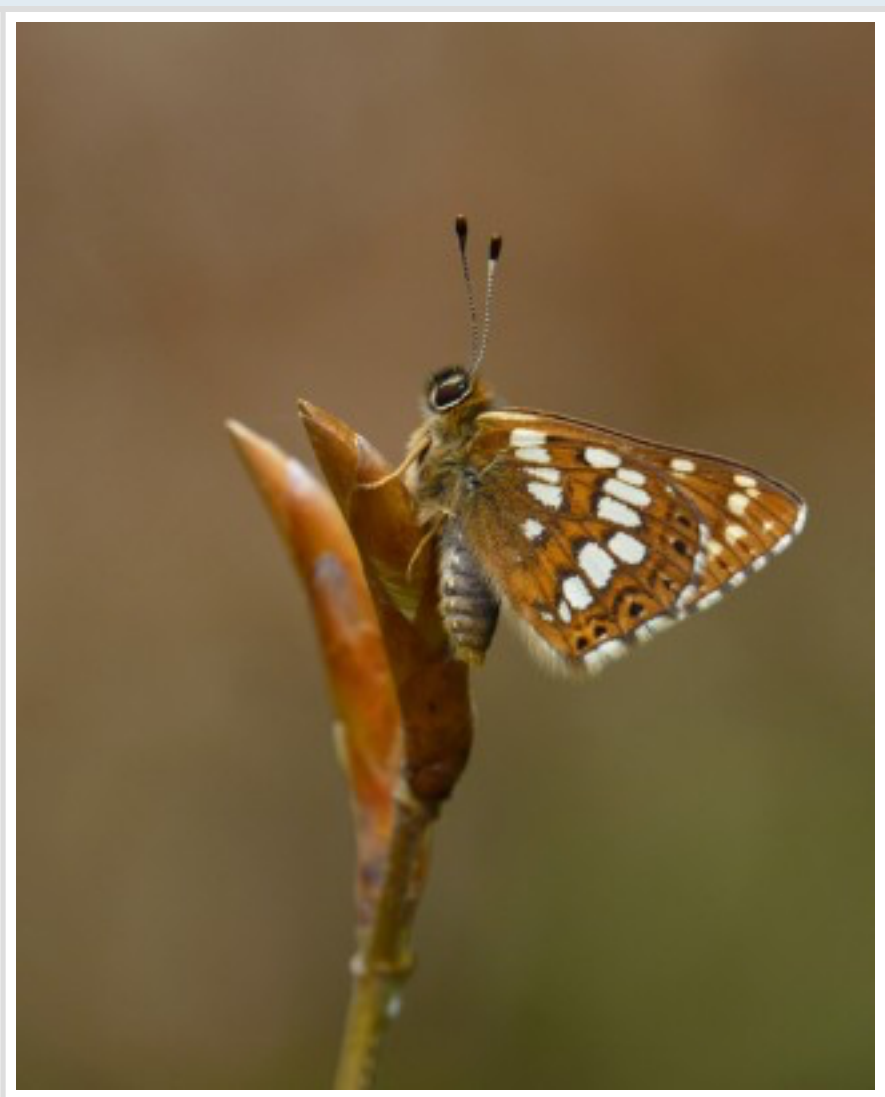
by Neil Hulme, 12-May-10 05:38 AM GMT

Dukes Still Struggling With Cold Weather

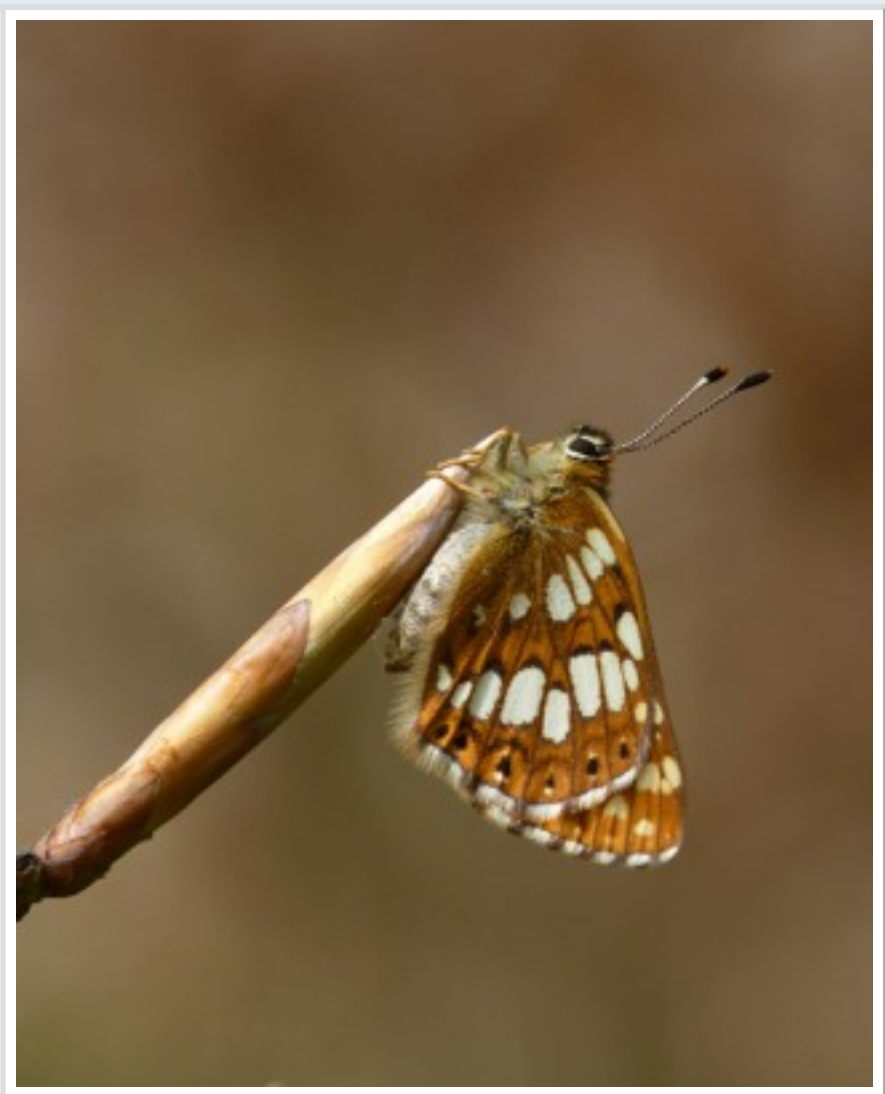
This seemingly endless run of cold, northerly winds and low overnight temperatures can only suppress the emergence of species such as the Duke of Burgundy for so long! Today I visited a private site where a strong and healthy population exists, to find a 'mass emergence' underway in what can only be described as unsuitably cold conditions. Throughout the morning fresh specimens appeared around me, only to encounter temperatures (12 degrees) that are borderline for the species to operate at. Recently-emerged specimens are always a little clumsy on the wing for the first few hours, as their wings dry off, but even those that had been around for a few days were flying very weakly. As so many specimens were lying around in the grass, desperately trying to heat up during the brief periods of sunshine, I decided to suspend a cross-site survey for fear of treading on one!

I watched three virgin females take their first flights, which would usually trigger an immediate response from amorous males. However, the low temperature appeared to preclude courtship, and as many Dukes retired to stunted beech trees during the particularly overcast and cold spells, I watched a virgin female sitting very close to two males – atypically unmolested! These conditions made for a rare photographic opportunity. Female Dukes are usually very discreet and are only really seen while out on egg-laying runs, when they are constantly fidgeting over cowslips or primroses. So it was a chance to get a really close look at the bloated abdomen of a static female. This inflated 'bag of eggs' seemed quite cumbersome to drag around! When the sun did break through the butterflies would gradually open their wings, giving wonderful views of both top and undersides. When the weather warms up I'll be back to count them properly.

Male Duke at rest on beech



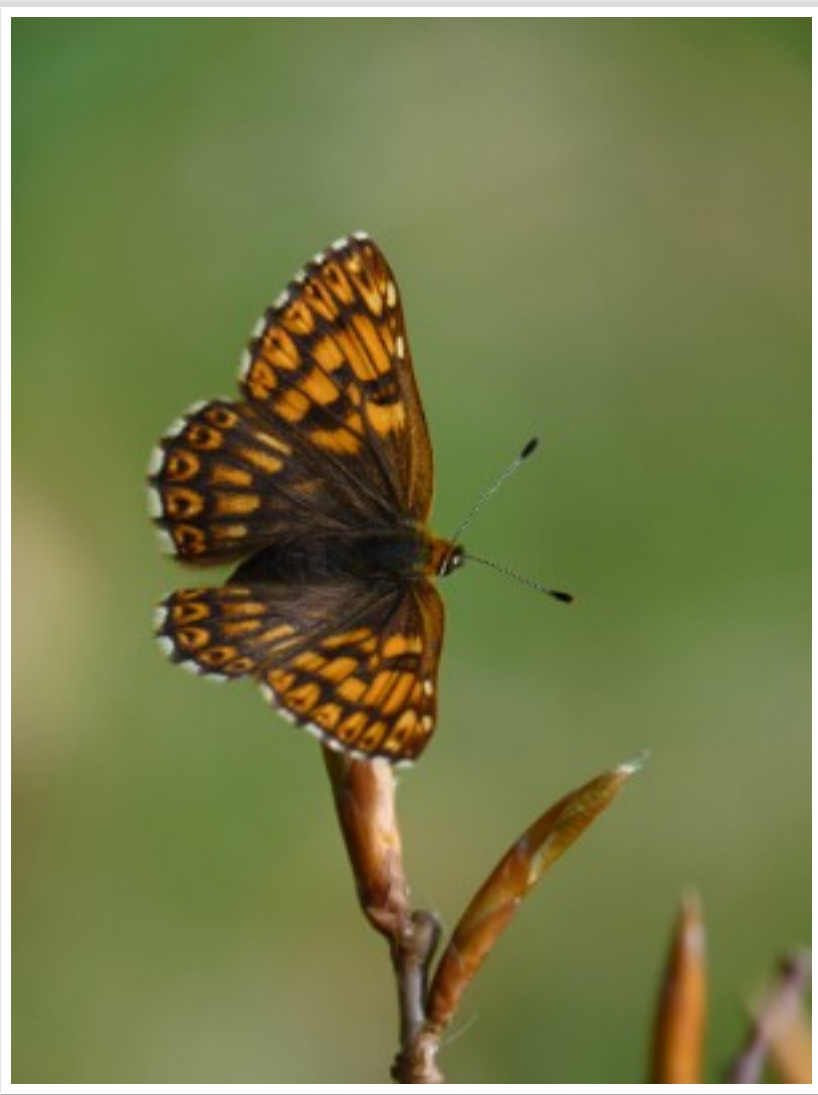
Female Duke at rest on beech



'Bag of eggs'



Take-off!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-May-10 06:26 AM GMT

Out With The RSPB

Today I led a walk on the stunningly beautiful Heyshott Down near Midhurst, primarily for a local RSPB group, but open to BC members too. This SSSI/reserve is managed by the Murray Downland Trust, who are doing a fabulous job of improving the habitat for the Duke of Burgundy – our main target species.

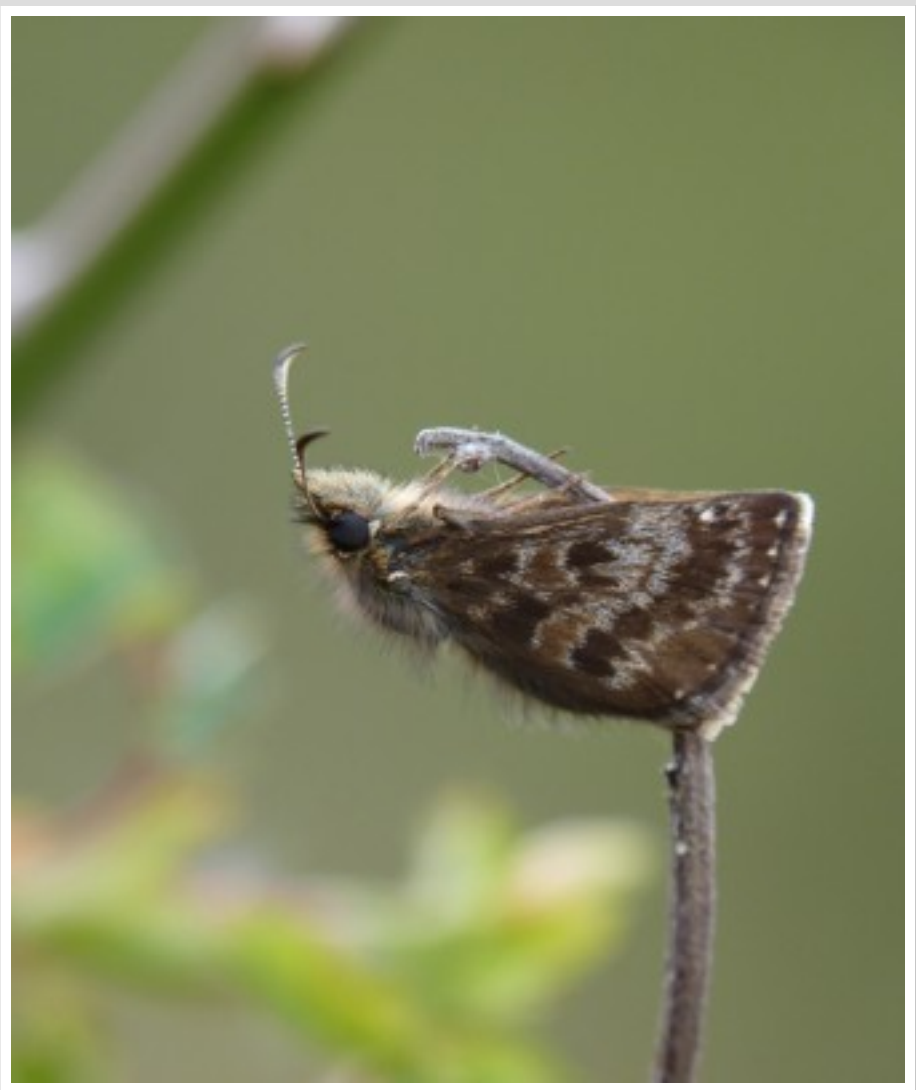


Almost all of the seven Dukes we saw had emerged that morning, so they sat around drying off their wings in a most obliging manner. With a crowd of

30 people it is sometimes difficult for everyone to get a good view of the butterflies, so I teased a Duke onto my finger and showed it around, so that all could get a good view of the underside markings. For most of the RSPB contingent this was their first sight of the species, and they seemed suitably impressed with this little gem of a butterfly.



The Dingy Skippers are only just out here too, so they were still nice and fresh-looking. As cloud moved in for a while one went into typical 'Dingy roost mode', wrapping its wings around itself like Batman's cape!



Other species seen included Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper, Small Heath, Orange Tip and Green-veined White. All in all a good day out.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 13-May-10 03:21 PM GMT

Neil.

Clearly you have unsurpassed knowledge about the Duke and its requirements. The Duke is often considered to be England's most endangered species and you are making a valuable contribution in that direction. Sorry I meant to say that you are making a valuable contribution to aid its survival 😊

You seem to know of numerous colonies (many on private ground – thanks for showing me one a couple of weeks ago). Doubtless many colonies remain undiscovered. The Duke's requirements, eg cowslip/primrose in warm sheltered localities where the plants do not become desiccated, don't seem to be too demanding. So just how endangered is the Duke in England?

Incidentally, long before we adopted modern – and sensible conservation procedures – I found it very easy to breed in captivity. Caterpillars from eggs found in the wild fed quite happily on ordinary garden primulas the resulting adults being returned to the original locality. (Westbury Hill below the White Horse if you anyone is interested).

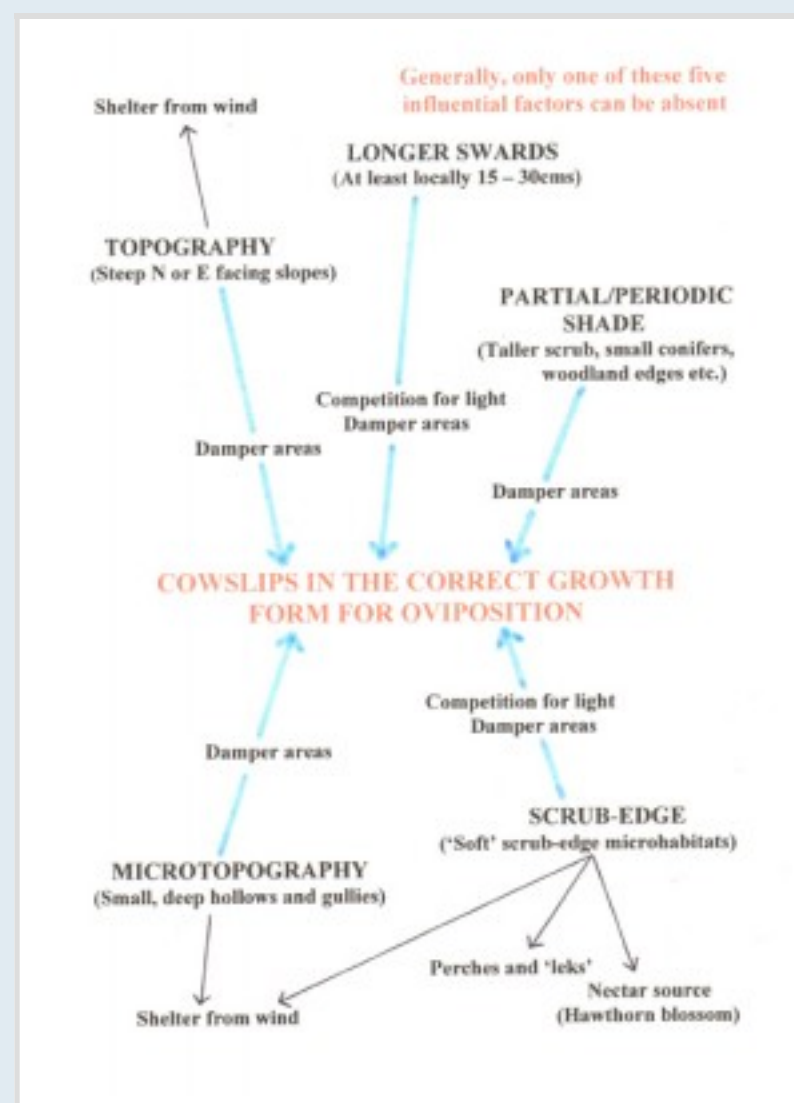
Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-May-10 06:19 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

Thanks for your comments. I could write reams on this, but for now I'll keep it brief! The diagram below is something I put together a few years back, showing what makes a Sussex downland Duke colony 'tick'. It doesn't apply in whole to sites elsewhere, and certainly not to those up North, but some of the basic principles are common to all Duke sites. In a nutshell it's all about the food plant growth-form or certainly mainly so.



So your comment "The Duke's requirements, eg cowslip/primrose in warm sheltered localities where the plants do not become desiccated, don't seem to be too demanding" does hold true. The trouble is that many sites might look like that *now* (they do in Sussex), but lots of them have not always looked this way, either through changes in land usage, grazing regime etc. It doesn't take long to graze the Duke off a site! These days the problem is getting it back, when the habitat again becomes suitable for whatever reason. Being a successional species it is used to moving from one habitat patch to another – but it doesn't travel well. Populations are now so fragmented and isolated that areas that today look suitable are simply out-of-reach of potential colonisers. Landscape-scale conservation is the only way forward.

Yes, there are still colonies out there to be discovered, but there is absolutely no doubt that the species is in dire trouble! Of the c.80 *known* colonies we still have left in the UK, the vast majority will have peak daily adult counts amounting to no more than 'a handful'. That's not many butterflies!

If the species is to be saved it is imperative that we get it back into its traditional habitat of well-managed woodlands. While its current stronghold remains on scrubby, calcicolous grassland it will always be in danger, not least from 'conservation grazing' (with sheep). If I get onto that point I'll still be typing at midnight!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

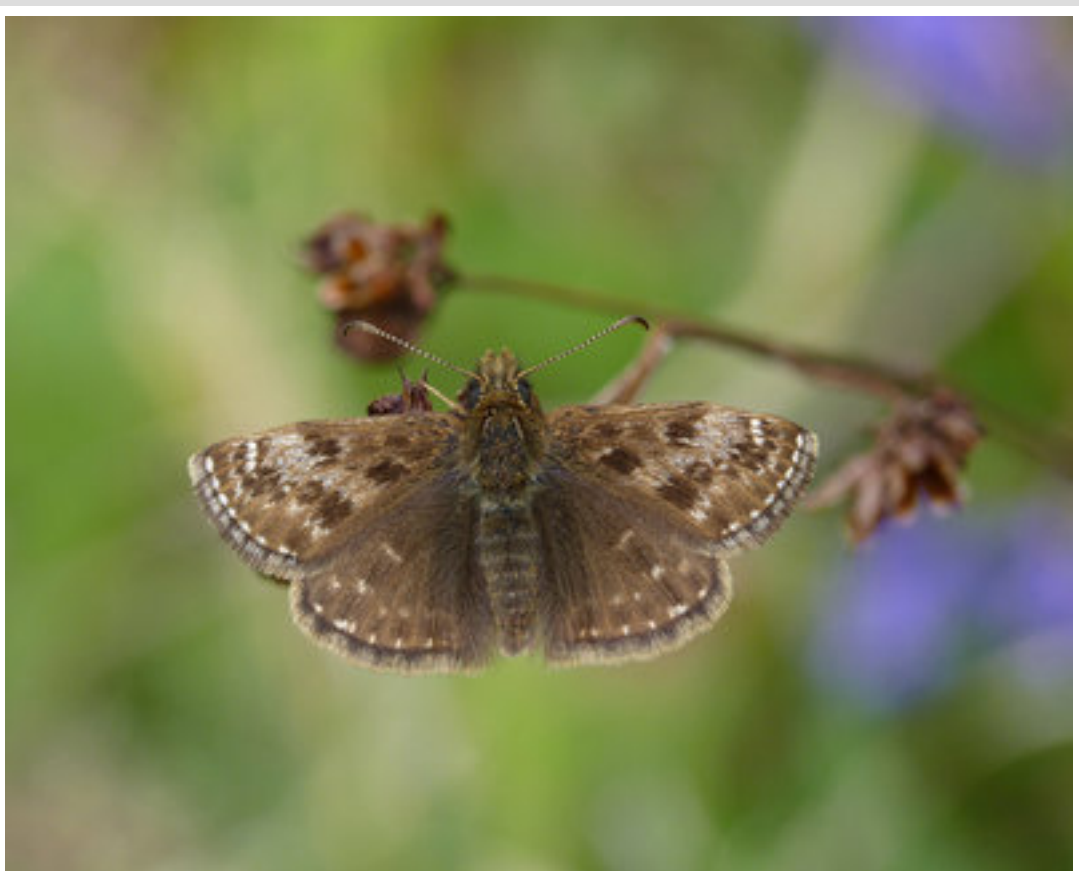
by Neil Hulme, 16-May-10 07:40 PM GMT

Counting Dukes

Last Thursday (13th May) I met up with Judith and Jim Steedman to count Duke of Burgundy on one of our conservation sites. It's always a pleasure to spend a day in the company of people that have contributed so much to the Sussex Branch of BC over many, many years – and still continue to offer words of wisdom to the younger generation of committee members.

As has been so often the case this spring, the weather was against us. However, even under a blanket of grey cloud and low temperatures we still managed to find 23 Dukes. Knowing that this represented only a relatively small proportion of what was likely to be here, I made plans to return as soon as conditions improved.

Rather than photograph the Dukes again (Hannah always asks me "how many photos of them do you need?" – to which I reply "I can tell you precisely how many I've *got*, but I can't tell you how many I *need*"), I decided to photograph the Orange Tips. It won't be long before the numbers of 'Mr Lewington's Favourite' sadly start to drop. I also managed some shots of Dingy Skipper, another species that looks set to benefit from the habitat management work done here, primarily for the benefit of His Grace.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 16-May-10 08:21 PM GMT

Sussex Kipper wrote:

Hannah always asks me "how many photos of them do you need?"

Ask her how many different seemingly identical pairs of shoes* she needs.

*Substitute appropriate item of attire.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-May-10 05:20 AM GMT

Weatherbadger Signals 'Wind Of Change'

I was beginning to think my nextdoor neighbour might be right when he recently joked that I might have accidentally painted the weatherbadger on my garage roof into a permanent position! It hadn't moved from indicating northerly winds since he saw me crawling across the roof with a tin of Japlac in my hand. So it was quite a relief when it turned to the southwest last Thursday.



With temperatures rising nicely on Friday (14th May), I joined Dr Martin Kalaher to look at a number of sites along the North-facing escarpment of the South Downs. We saw a lot of butterflies (at last!), including good numbers of Duke of Burgundy and some 2010 'firsts' for me – Small Blue, Common Blue and Brown Argus. There was some full-on butterfly violence going on in one meadow we visited, with a male Duke of Burgundy beating up 3 Dingy Skippers and a Common Blue simultaneously.



But the real stars of today's show were Green Hairstreaks, which had undergone a mass emergence. We saw 17 pristine specimens, including a mating pair. With male butterflies invariably emerging in advance of the females, mating shots usually include a male that's 'been around a bit', so I was particularly pleased to find this couple, as both were in mint condition. Happy days!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-10 05:56 AM GMT

Committee Day Out

On Saturday (15th May) I organised a day out with BC Sussex committee members, to look at our strongest Duke of Burgundy colony on private estate land. The reasons for this were two-fold; firstly to show where the money I annually request for committee 'clearance' goes, and how the conservation effort here is meeting with success; and secondly, to provide a rare opportunity to see this species in really high numbers, in recognition of all their hard work for the Branch. There may also have been an ulterior motive in getting help with the count!

One of the reasons that this population is thriving is that we are either maintaining or creating a mixture of habitat types, all of which are agreeable to the Duke! Woodland ride, coppice, areas of lightly and more heavily scrubbed chalk grassland, and conifer plantation (suitable until the trees get too tall) are all present, and the abundant cowslips and primroses are both used.

Despite sub-optimal weather conditions we counted 53 males and 3 females on the main site, and 2 males on a small satellite colony. Today (17th May) I returned to count 69 and 3 individuals respectively. It is a very sad fact that these numbers only persist on a handful of sites in the UK.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-10 09:32 PM GMT

Weather Beaten!

Eleven people attended my BC walk on Mill Hill at Shoreham on Sunday afternoon (16th May). Despite overcast skies and a strong, cold wind, the butterflies performed well! Many stayed on after the official end of the walk, eventually enjoying spells of quite warm, late afternoon sunshine – and some fabulous butterflies. Approximately 25 pristine Adonis Blues provided the 'star turn', including a mating pair. Several other chocolate-brown females were seen. Other species included Dingy Skipper (15), Grizzled Skipper (3), Common Blue (2), Green Hairstreak (1), Small Copper (1), Brown Argus (1), Small Heath (2) and Holly Blue (1). Those that showed a lot of faith in turning up on such a dreary Sunday afternoon went home very happy. It

was great to see the look of amazement on one or two faces, as a male Adonis Blue slowly opened its wings, giving them their first ever view of this living sapphire.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-May-10 04:36 PM GMT

Small But Beautifully Marked

On Monday (17th May) I visited the Downs above Amberley, to photograph the recently-emerged Small Blues here. I bumped into M_galathea, who had spent a very rewarding day wandering around this part of West Sussex (see his diary). We started off by spotting a roosting Common Blue, as the first part of my visit was under cloudy skies.



However, it wasn't long before the sun finally broke through the clouds and other species started to show themselves. But I only had eyes for the beautiful Small Blue, which although still in low numbers, put on a good show for us. This species can be quite variable in both size and colour. Last year I photographed a female that was the size of a Common Blue, and I've seen others so small that they could probably be beaten-up by a lacewing! The females are sometimes quite brownish, but we soon found what I was looking for – a male the colour of that dark blue Quink Ink I used in my schooldays.



Adonis Blues

On Wednesday (18th May) I headed for Mill Hill at Shoreham, to look at the rapidly building flight of Adonis Blues. It was a little late in the day to get the best from the site, although I did manage to get a few nice underside shots of the butterflies at roost.



On Thursday, as I watched the thick mist starting to allow the first rays of milky sunshine through (perfect for photography) I was out of my office and in the car in minutes! The mist and low cloud came and went throughout the rest of the afternoon, suppressing occasional bursts of butterfly activity. There must have been in excess of 100 fresh Adonis here, with quite a few females and a couple of mating pairs. When they 'put down', during cooler periods, the males littered the grass around me, open-winged and making a stunningly beautiful picture. It was interesting to watch, as the temperatures rose again, that the females were able to 'operate' in slightly cooler conditions than the males. While the 'sapphires' still languished in the grass, the females were already up and egg-laying. This is because their chocolate-brown wings absorb the heat more rapidly – a very sensible strategy when egg-laying is so much more important than just looking pretty!





As the air once again became awash with patrolling males, I noticed one that stood out from the rest, about 30 metres up on the steeper slopes. I immediately gave chase, sensing this might be something 'a little special' – more of which later!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-May-10 07:14 AM GMT

polonus!

As I got closer to the blue butterfly that concluded my last diary entry, I started to get more than a little excited! I was pretty sure that this was *Polyommatus coridon* ab. *polonus* (Zeller, 1845), which in fact is not an aberration of the Chalkhill Blue at all! '*Pollonus*' is the rare hybrid between the Adonis Blue and Chalkhill Blue, and more aptly attributed the label *Polyommatus bellargus* x *coridon* – for me, a bit of a 'mythical beast'. It clearly has characteristics of the males of both species. Although I didn't get a shot of the underside, this was very pale and more akin to the underside of a male Chalkhill Blue. Happy with my topside shots I returned home and started seeking a more expert opinion.

Although I was pretty confident of my identification, I sought the opinions of UKB's own Piers Vigus (Felix) and Rupert Barrington – both top 'abs' men. Here is an excerpt from the reply I received from Rupert (I'm most grateful!).

"Yes, that hits me between the eyes as *polonus*, without a doubt. A really beautiful example (and an excellent photo).

It is a very early specimen too. most have been recorded towards the end of the first Adonis brood, in late June (i.e. to some degree it emerges between the main emergence period of both species, as you might expect).

I am certain it has never been recorded at Mill Hill before. The late Robert Craske, the famous Sussex variety hunter, found just one in his lifetime. I don't know where it came from, but I am sure it was not Mill Hill. The other famous Sussex variety hunter, Reverend John Marcon, also captured one specimen, but again not from Mill Hill.

No one has yet managed to create this hybrid in captivity, although I don't think much effort has been made to do so.

The hybrid is known from the continent too and chromosome analysis has proven such specimens to be genuine hybrids."

Piers had been even quicker off the mark, confidently pronouncing it as *polonus*. Although Piers is aware of a few more specimens than the estimate given by Rupert, it is without doubt a rare and very beautiful insect. Many thanks to both Rupert and Piers for their replies.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 23-May-10 04:20 PM GMT

Fantastic find Neil – if you could PM me next week's winning lottery numbers, I'd appreciate it 😊

I assume that the hybridisation would also be manifest in females as well, although I've never heard of such a thing being observed – possibly because it's harder to see any real difference?

Although this is classified as an aberration, I think I might need to introduce a whole new category for the main species pages! But I believe this is the only hybrid known to occur within the British butterflies (and breeding in captivity doesn't count!).

Sorry to hijack your diary!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-May-10 05:35 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

I *would* send you those numbers, but I'm blissfully unaware of how the Lottery even works 😊. Standing in the queue at the newsagents, waiting for people to fill the cards in (or whatever they're doing – apart from depriving me of my Mars Bar 'sugar-hit' 😡) does seem to initiate worryingly psychopathic tendencies in me 😡😡😡.

Yes, there must be female *bellargus x coridon* around, but I imagine the chances of winning the Lottery would be much higher than spotting one in the field!

Best Wishes (but don't come to my newsagents 😊), Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-10 02:35 AM GMT

Major Successes In Battle To Save The Duke Of Burgundy

Last week I joined a volunteer and staff from the BC Fundraising Team (Helen Corrigan, Poppy Mackie, Catherine Napper and David Bridges, the Head of this enthusiastic group) on our biggest Duke colony in Sussex ('Site A' in our Annual Report). The idea was to show the butterfly to those in the team that had yet to see it 'in the flesh', and to demonstrate how focused conservation measures are meeting with a high level of success, at least locally. Despite 100% cloud cover we flushed a huge number of Dukes from the grass. While we enjoyed a picnic on an orchid-rich bank, I wandered a short distance and saw 5 male Dukes sitting close together on a single, stunted, knee-high beech. I had a strong feeling that a survey under more suitable conditions would produce the sort of count that I had first dreamed of five years back, when work here began in earnest. On returning I soon realised that my optimism was not misplaced, counting **128 Dukes!** A major milestone in the Sussex Branch conservation campaign had been reached. This great success is shared with our partners, the South Downs Joint Committee, without whose help (both financially and in terms of labour and wider support) these results could never have been achieved. Elsewhere in the county, their assistance looks set to bring future successes in years to come.

Perhaps even more remarkable are the successes being achieved at Heyshott Escarpment. Regular readers of the Sussex Branch 'Sightings' page will have been surprised by the numbers being reported by the dedicated 'Team Heyshott' surveyors Colin Knight, Roger Martin and Steve Morgan. I wanted 'a piece of the action' myself, so returned on Friday 21st May for the first time since leading a BC walk here earlier in the month. I could scarcely believe my eyes! I teamed up with Bart Reason to go over the site with a fine toothcomb. We got stuck on a count of 47 for over an hour, wandering over the western flank which has remained Duke-less for decades, but where the others had seen a couple of butterflies on an earlier visit. After a while it suddenly dawned on me that these would have been wandering females, 'spreading their wings' and spreading the population, as the direct result of this meteoric population increase. We had only one chance left to meet our newly assigned target. We returned to the lowermost pit where we had seen nothing, several hours earlier under unsuitable conditions (the males are highly territorial and don't move around much). We immediately found 4 males, bringing the grand total to **51 Dukes**. For many, many years this colony has survived on maximum daily counts of 'twos and threes'. The abundance sequence now reads 2 (2007), 7 (2008), 8 (2009) and 51 (2010). It is seldom that the term 'population explosion' can be applied to the Duke of Burgundy these days!

Although the Sussex Branch has acted in an advisory role here, the lion's share of the credit must lie with the Murray Downland Trust

<http://www.murraydownlandtrust.org.uk> who do a marvellous job in managing this and their other reserves, spread between East Hampshire and West Sussex. They are worthy of anyone's support and their winter work parties (contact them A/A) will be swelled by those eager to help continue this very happy story.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-10 04:09 AM GMT

Other Wildlife Around Sussex

On my travels to see as many of our beautiful butterflies as possible each year, it's always nice to stop and look at some of the other interesting wildlife that often lives nearby.

Here is the very rare Fly Honeysuckle (*Lonicera xylosteum*), which is restricted to Sussex in its wild form. A few of these shrubs occur on the road verge up to one of my favourite butterfly sites, on the Downs near Amberley.



Only a hundred metres or so away, on the opposite verge, is this beautiful and rare variety of the Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula* cf. var. *alba*). The pure white form '*alba*' is itself a rarity, but this particular plant varies in having delicate purple spots on the labellum.



At this time of the year, if I'm in the area (Fittleworth) and the evening looks set to be warm, I often drive to the heathland called Lords Piece. It's a magical place to sit and watch the sun set, to the hypnotic song of the Field Cricket. This is the last place in England that a wild population existed, as it faced extinction, although it is now thankfully being re-introduced to a number of other sites in the South. This female was tempted to briefly leave a burrow using an old trick, much beloved by the naturalist Gilbert White – wagging a grass stem down the hole!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 24-May-10 04:23 AM GMT

**"Sussex Kipper" wrote:
Major Successes In Battle To Save The Duke Of Burgundy**

That's an amazing story, Neil. Keep up the good work, and well done Sussex BC and the Murray Downland Trust!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-10 04:45 AM GMT

Thanks Pete,
Where the will is there – and sheep are not! – this species *can* be saved!
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 24-May-10 03:39 PM GMT

Neil

I never ceased to be amazed at your understanding and dedication to the ecology of the Duke of B. Finding 128 in one locality is amazing! Your work and co-operation with the right people, has probably made the Duke safe (unlike those Dukes in the "other place"!)

I think you mentioned that you might be passing on the everyday responsibility to looking after the species; I am sure they will be in good hands whoever gets the job.

So your next challenge Neil – the Wall Brown perhaps? This is surely one of Southern England's most puzzling species and is possibly in real danger. If you are able to find the time to study the Wall, I am sure you could do the same for them as you have done for the Dukes and ensure their continued viability.

By the way, let us know Neil when the Small PBFs are flying well in Park Corner Heath. After that *faux pas* I made last week when I thought I had seen them in Bentley, I still "need" my year tick and Park Corner is my nearest site.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-May-10 04:27 PM GMT

Hi Jack,

I won't be giving up on my responsibilities to the Duke – that would be like losing my right arm! This will be a 'life's work' job, and local successes such as these must be seen in the context of a national 'nose-dive', which continues as we 'speak'. What I *am* doing is getting other people enthused and signed up the cause, as it has become increasingly difficult to cover all of the sites now under management. The more I've surveyed, the more sites I've found (still a very low number) and the more work that needs to be done – in terms of both detailed population monitoring and habitat management. What this does prove is that the battle is potentially 'winnable', and it must be won before we face another Large Blue situation.

Wall Brown is a real head-scratcher. It's done well in Sussex since spring 2009, probably reacting to a return to colder, drier conditions through the winter and early spring. The evidence is as yet circumstantial, but my gut feel is that only Mother Nature can help out with this species.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-May-10 07:18 AM GMT

Busy Weekend!

Last weekend became a blur of BC activities, with one event running almost seamlessly into another! I started off on Saturday morning, leading the Branch 'New Members Day' event on the Downs near Amberley. A nice array of species were seen, including (of course!) the Duke of Burgundy. Green Hairstreak (doing exceptionally well this year after a late start), Small Blue (Kidney Vetch only just out in time to keep them happy!), Brown Argus, Common Blue, Small Heath, Dingy Skipper, Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Brimstone and Green-veined White also turned up for the event.

In the afternoon Michael Blencowe arrived with a large group from the Identification Workshop he had held earlier in the day. So it was round the meadow again to help his disciples hone their newly acquired skills. After this event there was just enough time to chase up a report of a Duke, some distance away from a known colony a couple of miles away. I was very pleased to find that two females had managed to find some suitable new territory, having passed along nearly 0.5 Km of narrow, shady track through dense woodland.

On Sunday morning I led a walk for 'The Friends of Wolstonbury Hill' on their home turf. At the end of a very enjoyable and scenic walk the 'scores on the doors' were Adonis Blue (2), Small Blue (3), Common Blue (15), Green Hairstreak (6), Small Heath (4), Dingy Skipper (15), Speckled Wood (7), Orange Tip (3), Green-veined White (1), Holly Blue (1), Brimstone (1) and Small Tortoiseshell (1).

By now my voice was going, my knees were going – and my face was going very brown. But meeting lots of good people and seeing lots of nice butterflies isn't a bad way to spend the weekend!

Can't have a report without some pictures – so here's a few recent images from the wonderful Heyshott Down.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-May-10 07:17 PM GMT

Glanville Dash

On Tuesday (25th May) at 2pm I managed to wrestle a report out of the door for a client. Being tired from working through much of the previous night, I did the only sensible thing – go searching for the beautiful Glanville Fritillary! Ensuring a safe journey by imbibing an unhealthy volume of the drink that 'gives you wings', I headed off to a small mainland colony. Our BC Branch Membership Secretary Linda was on holiday in the area, and had seen three the previous day. However, they had been hyper-active in the heat and she had failed to get the photographs she wanted, this being her first experience of the butterfly. I assured her that my plan to get there late afternoon, and follow them to roost, would work – but it would be a close-run thing and a race against the clock.

We both arrived at the same time (5pm), with me having done a 'route march' while Linda took a more leisurely, alternative mode of transport to the venue! We immediately spotted a couple of Glanvilles and followed our plan to each track an individual. Under thin cloud cover and hazy sunshine they both 'put down' almost immediately. We had a couple of minutes while the butterflies allowed us some topside shots, before resolutely closing up and shutting down for the night. It took a lot of patience and a lot of button-pressing to get anything sharp, as an onshore breeze kept everything in motion. But we both went away very happy, perhaps tinged with the feeling that it had been 'all too easy'. 'Too difficult', 'too easy' – never satisfied!!!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 27-May-10 08:17 PM GMT

That's good to hear. I guess last Wednesday, 19th, I was too early in the season as I saw none in perfectly adequate weather.

How did Linda get back then? I thought the "alternative" transport stopped at 1800 hours. So did she have to return the difficult way?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-May-10 10:38 PM GMT

Lights, Camera, Action!

Last Wednesday (26th May) I spent a very enjoyable day with Simon Barnes, David Bebbler, BC Chief Executive Dr Martin Warren and Sussex Branch Reserve Manager Michael Blencowe. Simon is the award-winning sportswriter and wildlife columnist for The Times, as well as being an accomplished author. David is one of the UK's top media photographers, and I was left in awe at his proficiency with the camera – I couldn't even work out what he was up to most of the time, as he wielded his Canon (of course 😊) with such consummate ease! Unsurprisingly, we were out doing an article on butterflies and conservation.

We started off at the BC Park Corner Heath Reserve, before Michael gave us a tour of the newly acquired and adjacent Rowland Wood. Cool and overcast conditions precluded any sightings of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, or any other butterflies, with only the occasional Speckled Yellow moth on the wing.

After lunch we travelled to Mill Hill at Shoreham, where I was confident we would find some nice butterflies shivering in the grass. Sure enough, Adonis and Common Blues, plus the odd Small Heath, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper were there to smile for the cameras. Simon's article will hopefully appear in The Sunday Times Magazine in a few weeks from now. It was a real pleasure to spend a day with such 'greats' – and by that I mean *all* of them.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 30-May-10 11:07 PM GMT

You were privileged to meet Simon Barnes. He is one of my favourite writers both when writing about wildlife and about sport. But I do reckon that my beard is less scruffy than Simon's!

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jun-10 07:41 AM GMT

Near Miss For All Of Us!

I can now add to the theme 'Hazards of Butterflying'! This morning I was out on the Downs behind Storrington with local GP Dr Martin Kalaher, surveying for butterflies. After photographing a couple of male Wall Browns on the edge of the bushes in the first image, we had descended into a deep coombe below. As we waited in vain for some better weather, we remarked on the fact that a large proportion of the gliders from the local airfield must have been up there enjoying the Bank Holiday break. Quite a number were circling above us.

As we re-joined the path running along the peak of Chantry Hill we heard an almighty rush of air and a metallic thud, shaking the fence-line beside us. We turned to see a glider which had ditched no more than 50 metres from us! Fortunately the pilot was in a reasonable condition, and very fortunate that Martin could use the "I'm a doctor" line. While he administered first aid I sorted out the emergency services – and at the pilot's request (he was fully conscious) rang his wife. It wasn't long before several fire-engines, an ambulance, the police and an air-ambulance were on the scene. I'm very glad to say that the pilot will be fine, but it was not difficult to envisage a rather worse outcome. As the situation wound down, and we walked away, it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps we had been a little fortunate too!





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 01-Jun-10 07:43 AM GMT

That Jack'll do anything to get in close for a butterfly photo. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jun-10 07:46 AM GMT



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 01-Jun-10 04:16 PM GMT

I stopped gliding a few years ago while I was still "on top" and before the inevitable happened.

That is in fact a pretty routine gliding accident by the look of things with minimal damage. I never hit a fence myself but did once catch a wingtip when landing in a sloping field – entirely my fault of course. It cost the insurers a bob or two – and some annoyance from my syndicate partner.

I can't quite make out what sort of glider it is but it's decidedly elderly and probably worth little more than your average Canon DSLR/macro kit.

You told me Neil recently that you are tempted to take up gliding. No one would pretend it's 100% safe, but you do get good training including how to pick and land safely in a field. Most clubs will have their own experts who will talk you through insurance claim forms 😡

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 03-Jun-10 07:12 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:
polonus!

I've been thinking. Adonis larvae are diurnal, and Chalkhill larvae are nocturnal. Would polonus larvae come out for breakfast and supper?

Since these have never been reared in captivity, perhaps we'll never know 😊 I'll get me coat.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Piers, 03-Jun-10 09:07 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

The interesting thing is which combination is required to produce polonus; male coridon x female bellargus or male bellargus x female coridon; or would both combo's result in the hybrid? and what percentage of pairings produce fertile ova, if any ova at all?

This is certainly one to attempt with captive reared coridon and bellargus stock...

Apologies for hi-jacking your diary Neil..! 😊

...grab my coat while you're there Pete....

Felix.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jun-10 02:15 AM GMT

Hi Pete and Felix,

The occasional hijacking (pioneered by Jack 😊 – see what I did there?)) is most welcome. It would be very interesting to know what combination of Adonis and Chalkhill is required, and if the caterpillar suffers eating disorders 😊.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Trev Sawyer, 06-Jun-10 02:24 AM GMT

If the caterpillar can eat both day *and* night, maybe you would get a Large blue 😲😄😄

Trev

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jun-10 03:02 AM GMT

His Grace Meets His Grace

A few weeks back I was more than a little impressed, and honoured, that the Duke of Norfolk agreed to meet me to discuss the conservation work being done on his Estate, for the benefit of the Duke of Burgundy. We spent more than an hour looking at the very encouraging progress already made here, and I was delighted that he, his Estate Manager and Head Forester are fully supportive of ambitious plans to continue this work.



Most landowners are happy to co-operate with conservation measures these days, but the assistance given by the Norfolk Estate is second to none that I've experienced. Estate foresters Mark Aldridge and Tony Hart have provided machinery and their own labour to get this project off the ground and every single request I have made on behalf of the Duke of Burgundy has been gladly met with.

An article appeared in this week's West Sussex Gazette, covering this happy success story. There can't be many Duke of Burgundy colonies given protection by a Duke and the Earl Marischal of England!

Butterfly saved thanks to conservation project

A CONSERVATION project on the Norfolk Estate in Arundel has helped save the nationally-threatened Duke of Burgundy butterfly. Thanks to a quiet, wooded area of the estate, the project is showing early signs of success.

Along with the High Brown Fritillary, the Duke of Burgundy has shown such serious declines in recent years that we are now in danger of losing this small but characteristic species from the British countryside.

Most of the remaining populations are very small, comprising no more than a handful of butterflies at any time through to late April to early June flight period.

In last stronghold occurs in the Cotswolds and on scrubby chalk down across Wiltshire, Hampshire and West Sussex. Isolated populations occur elsewhere in the UK, but all must be considered at risk. Woodland habitats such as the one on the Norfolk Estate are particularly rare nowadays.

David Hulme, chairman and West Sussex conservation officer for the Sussex branch of the charity Butterfly Conservation, said: "The Duke of Burgundy is the strongest champion of the butterfly world. It might be less than some other native species, but it has the intricate markings and attitude of a much larger butterfly. Its wings are brown, orange and black, and it is a very early and late flying butterfly with very little that is more than a few inches that it flies across the heavily detailed territory. It is a quiet character and it is vital that we protect further declines, particularly in our newly-protected National Park."

The Duke of Burgundy was thought to have become extinct on the Duke of Norfolk's Estate in 1980, but the rediscovery of a tiny colony in 2008 led to the immediate launch of a rescue plan.

This joint project between the nature, Butterfly Conservation and the South Downs Joint Conservation has also enlisted the help of countryside management students from Strawberry Chichester College. Work is now well underway, improving the existing habitat and creating new areas suitable for the butterfly to move into.

Mr Hulme added: "These days the majority of landowners are happy to assist in our fight to save British butterflies from further decline, but the level of support we have received from the Norfolk Estate is exceptional."

Estate Foresters Mark Aldridge and Tony Hart have provided machinery and their own labour to get the project off the ground.

"Every single resident I have made on behalf of the Duke of Burgundy has been met with an enthusiastic 'yes'."

He appreciated his meeting with the Duke of Norfolk and his estate manager Peter Knight recently, allowing the opportunity to thank him personally for his help.

"It was genuinely inspiring and it gave me the greatest of pleasure to report an at least 200 per cent increase in the Duke of Burgundy numbers over the last year. It was really enthusiastic to tell me of the successful conservation projects to assist down-

land birds such as the Grey Partridge, Skylark and Corn Bunting along with other species of ground-nesting birds. With the backing of the Duke of Norfolk, the Foresters of the Duke of Burgundy look set to improve here."

Local butterfly news can be viewed on the Butterfly Conservation Sussex branch website at www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk which is updated daily.



The male Duke of Burgundy butterfly.

Re: Sussex Kipper

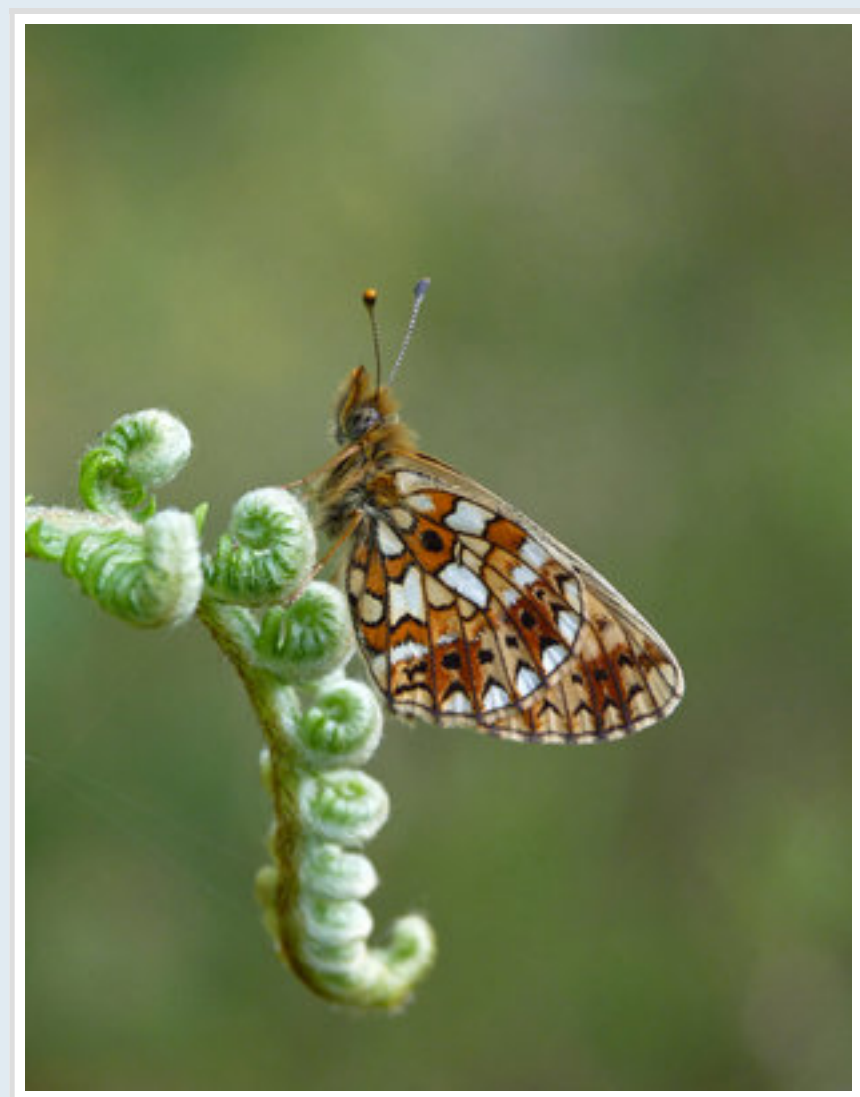
by Neil Hulme, 07-Jun-10 07:04 PM GMT

SPBF At PCH

Last Tuesday (2nd June) I spent a very enjoyable evening at our Park Corner Heath Reserve, watching the sun set and the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries coming to roost. Michael Blencowe and his team of trusty volunteers have done a superb job in managing this very small and delicate site, in order to hang onto the species – until the cavalry has arrived in the shape of the adjacent Rowland Wood, which should be open to visitors next year.

The PCH reserve is only 9 acres and the breeding area for the SPBFs comprises only small, localised parts of this. The roping-off of these areas might be frustrating for some, but bearing in mind that the population has survived for years on the progeny of only a handful of pairings, this is a precautionary measure until the species starts to spread into adjacent, newly created habitat. Numbers are now looking good for 2010 and it appears that some work on adjacent, private land (STRICTLY NO ENTRY) is beginning to bear fruits. This augurs well for a rapid colonisation of Rowland Wood, once the habitat is knocked into shape this winter.

If you do visit the site, and wish to photograph the SPBFs, please do observe the restrictions – a decent image is never achieved by chasing testosterone-charged males around in the heat of the day (we have had a few problems this year). Be patient and go on either a partly cloudy, cooler day; or better still, wait until the evening a watch them settling down for the night. Apart from providing the photo-opportunities you'll never get in the heat of the day, it's the best time to enjoy this beautiful location.





Re: Sussex Kipper

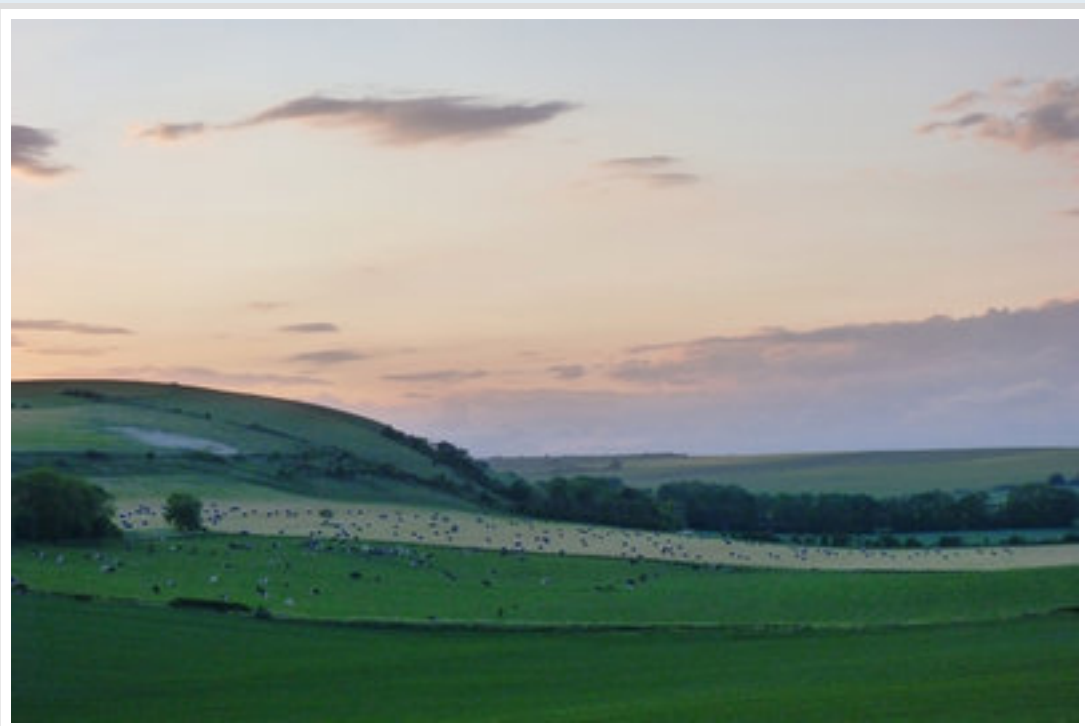
by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-10 12:06 AM GMT

New National Park

Last Friday (4th June) I joined members of the National Park Authority, and representatives of Natural England, National Trust, English Heritage, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Parish and District Councillors, local estates and the farming community, to look at how this beautiful landscape has been managed in the past – and how it might be managed in the future, under its new status.

Although I welcome the new National Park status with open arms, it will be a little sad to see the name 'South Downs Joint Committee' pass into history. The SDJC, who organised the tour, have been guardians of the Downs for many years, and they have been absolutely fantastic in helping out with a large number of projects to conserve butterflies.

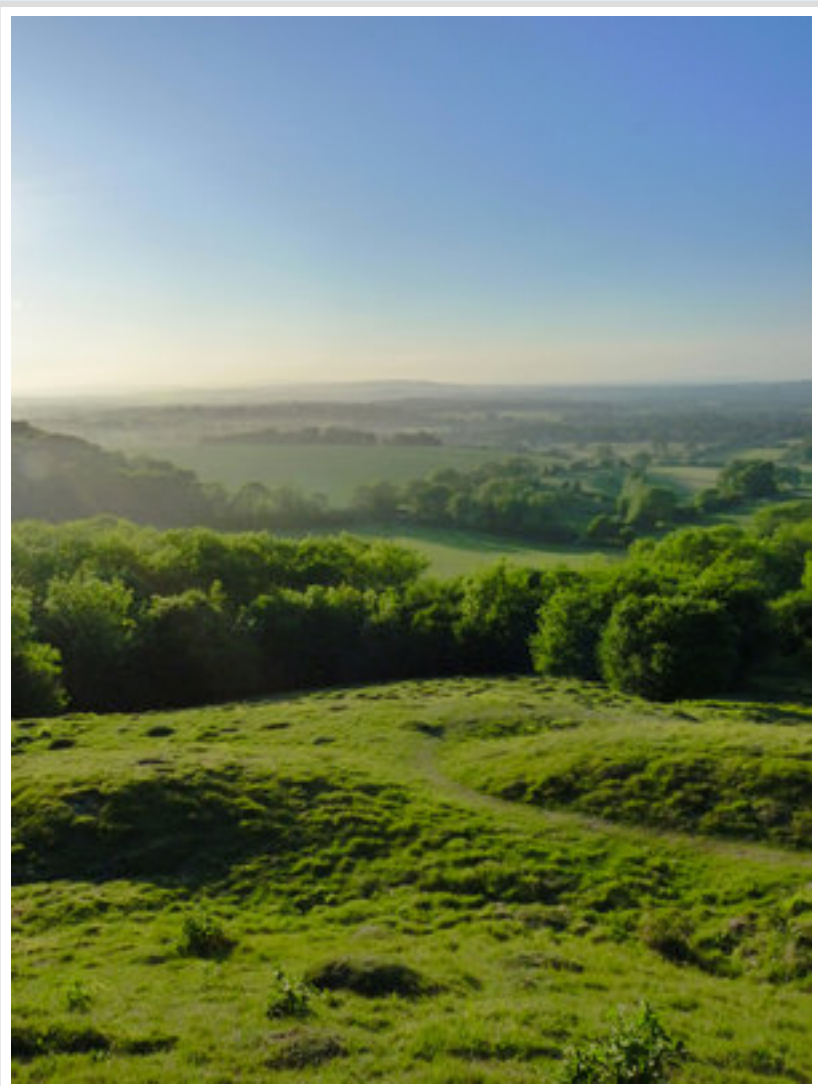
After doing my bit, I went off to enjoy an evening gazing over the countryside that I love so much.



One of Kipling's 'blunt, bow-headed, whale-backed downs', liberally scattered with cattle and hay rolls.



View from Chantry Hill. The deep gully below contains an abundance of rarely visited, downland butterflies.



The numerous ant-hills in the foreground are matted with rockrose. Brown Argus, Common Blue, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, Wall Brown and Small Heath all live here. Later in the summer Silver-spotted Skipper can be found, having re-colonised the area in the last few years.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 09-Jun-10 01:33 AM GMT

Neil

Were those landscapes taken using the FZ38's High Dynamic Art Mode?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 09-Jun-10 01:39 AM GMT

Neil,

Have you received my e-mail? Regards

Ian

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-10 02:43 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

Yes indeed - thanks for the tip-off. Reading the manual *might* happen in the winter 😊.

Hi Ian,

Only just picked up the message. Have sent you a PM.

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 09-Jun-10 04:06 AM GMT

"Art Mode" is just that; ideal for "pastel" landscapes but not appropriate for butterflies.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 09-Jun-10 06:03 AM GMT

It looks gorgeous, Neil.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jun-10 05:36 AM GMT

East Blean Heath Fritillaries

Last Sunday (6th June) I took a spur-of-the-moment decision to dash over to Kent, to see the Heath Fritillaries at East Blean Woods. The weather forecast was pretty dire, but I knew that I only needed a short spell of sunshine to locate a few. I was sweating a bit as I drove most of the way under leaden skies and through several bands of rain. The predicted thunderstorms failed to materialise, but there was 100% grey cloud cover as I arrived. After a prolonged wait, with nothing on the wing, a spell of weak sunshine finally did the trick. Less than a dozen of them took to the wing, including a female which was constantly hassled by amorous males. They would repeatedly land next to her, curling their abdomen tips around to try and make a connection – no chance! I stayed (through several showers) until they went to roost. Even when she was asleep the odd male would wake up and have another go! 🤪





Re: Sussex Kipper

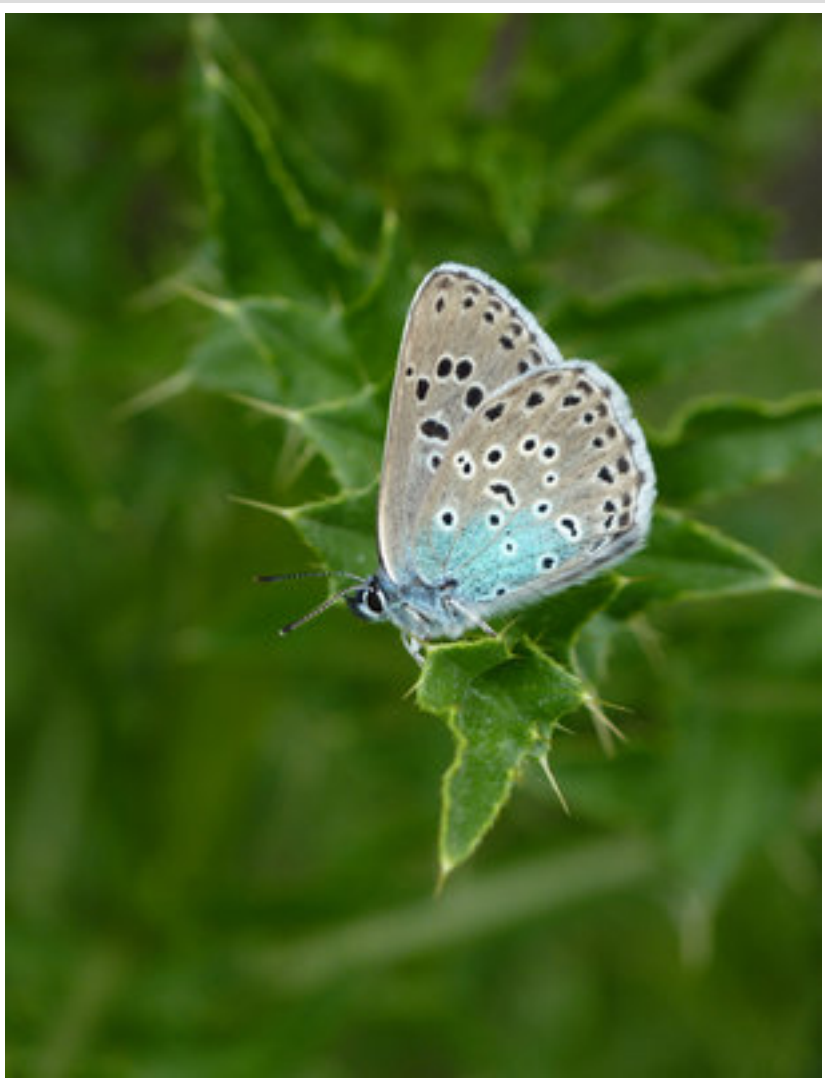
by Neil Hulme, 12-Jun-10 07:54 PM GMT

Collard Hill Grueller

I travelled down to Glastonbury last Wednesday (9th June), so as to be ready for an early start and full day on Collard Hill. For anyone making this pilgrimage from afar, and wanting to stay overnight, I can recommend the Belle Vue B&B (<http://www.bellevueglastonbury.co.uk>).

To say the weather was a disappointment would be an understatement. The northerly wind direction did ensure that the lower slopes remained sheltered, but it also kept the temperatures just below the critical point for butterfly activity. Hours were spent watching a conveyor-belt of grey cloud move across the spectacular landscape. At least I had the company of two excellent NT site wardens, Sarah Meredith and the hugely-experienced Roger Smith.

Just after midday the sun broke through for about 15 minutes, and that was it for the day! However, this brief window of opportunity was seized both by the Large Blue and myself. A short flight over 50m along the base of the eastern bank was all that I saw, before the butterfly put down in some scrub. I managed a reasonable underside shot before it launched at a Speckled Wood, the cloud returned – and that was that! Those visiting this weekend will do much better.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jun-10 02:37 AM GMT

Large Kippers

Today I spent an hour on a local downland site at Amberley, where it soon became obvious that we're well into the 'June gap'. There were still quite a few Small Blue on the wing and it was encouraging to see an egg-laying Wall Brown. The latter species has been absent from this site for quite a few years now, but its reappearance is very much in line with the observed East to West repopulation of the Downs. The species started to recover in Sussex after the hard winter of 2008/2009. There were also a few freshly-emerged Large Skippers buzzing around.



The most interesting aspect of their behaviour, which I've never seen before, was the systematic search for nutrients gained from bird droppings. The male below was actively seeking out bird poo, visiting three different deposits along a hedge-line.



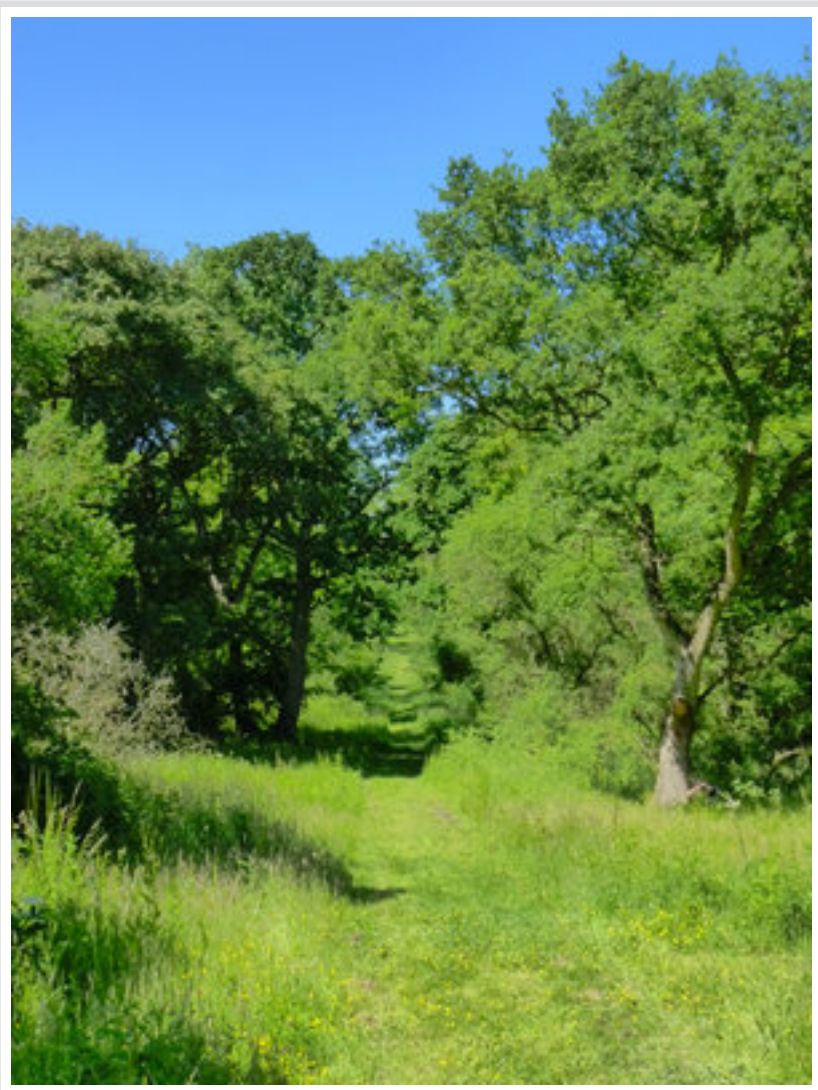
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Jun-10 11:25 PM GMT

Road Trip 14-19th June (Part 1)

Last Monday Hannah and I set off to visit some of the UK's rarer or more localised butterflies, none of which I've ever photographed before. We had three species in mind and I had high hopes that our timing would be 'spot on' for all of them. With Hannah's eagle-eyes to help me out (she manages a SpecSavers store) we ended up doing better than I could have reasonably hoped for!

The first on our hit-list was the elusive Black Hairstreak. Thanks to some good information from Jack (Harrison) and a chance meeting with Phil Bromley (perhaps not such a 'chance' as it appears he very sensibly lives at Monks Wood at this time of year!), we didn't have to try too hard. We had 'two bites at the cherry', as we returned under more favourable conditions on the way back out of Norfolk. Phil gave us some valuable pointers and I later modified his sugar-spray technique, by dipping terminal blackthorn leaves in Lucozade (orange flavour). Being a Purple Emperor worshipper I have every confidence in silly tricks and devices. It did seem to hold them on these carefully chosen parts of the bush, suppressing their usually constant fidgeting (none got stuck). Phil will be most welcome when he visits West Sussex for other species later this summer.



Black Hairstreak country

Over two visits I got the images that I had hoped for, much helped by Hannah who constantly had 'a better one' in sight. Perhaps not the most impressive species to the non-specialist, but a very interesting butterfly in a beautiful, ancient woodland setting. Satisfied that Part 1 of our trip had been a success, we headed off in search of the Swallowtail.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-10 01:55 AM GMT

Road Trip 14-19th June (Part 2)

While in Norfolk we stayed at Clippesby Hall (<http://www.clippesby.com>) which offers self-catering chalets of different sizes, together with various camping options. It's an ideal base camp for those wishing to stay in the middle of Swallowtail country.

We spent the first day at How Hill and got lucky almost immediately. Although Hannah had been mildly underwhelmed by the Black Hairstreak, she was completely wowed by the Swallowtail. Hardly surprising as they made an impressive sight as they battled against a stiff NE breeze, swooping to and fro across the River Ant. We found it far more productive to walk along the banks of the Ant (turning right from Toadhole Cottage) than to search the famous 'meadow' at the start of the nature trail, although this was where we saw our first. Several hundred metres along this bank was the hotspot, close to where a JCB is working, with getting on for a dozen on the wing.



Swallowtail country

The wind was so strong that it was impossible to get a decent shot of the butterflies while they nectared on the numerous thistles here. Fortunately they would occasionally put down on the alluvium between the River Ant levee and the first ditch. It reminded me of photographing Purple Emperors. While I was stalking grounded male and female Swallowtails, Hannah got a bit of a shock as a Chinese Water Deer came thundering past her.



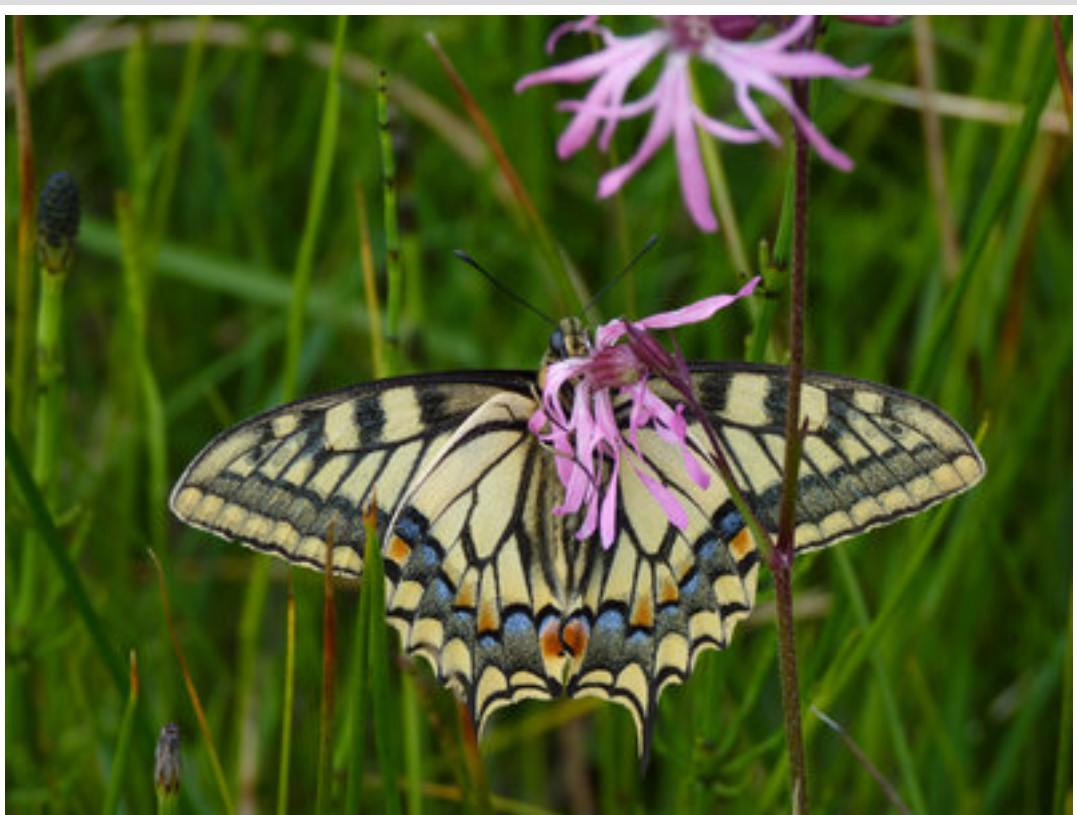
Male Swallowtail



Female Swallowtail

The second day was spent at Strumpshaw Fen. Cloudy skies and a chilling wind made for a slow start, although we were entertained by a Marsh Harrier on more than one occasion. Swallowtail numbers were lower here, but there is always the option of shooting ducks in a barrel in the Good Doctor's garden. A marvellous spectacle but to me they just don't look quite as good nectaring on Sweet William!

We spent most of our time at Strumpshaw in the beautiful, orchid-strewn water meadows on the other side of the visitors centre. In warm sunshine it was a real pleasure to track the Swallowtails as they glided between the Ragged Robin flowers, stopping only briefly to nectar at each plant. Again it was too windy for easy photography, although I did manage one arty shot on a thistle.





After two very enjoyable days with the Swallowtails, we wondered whether our third target was going to be quite so obliging!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jun-10 08:01 AM GMT

Road Trip 14-19th June (Part 3)

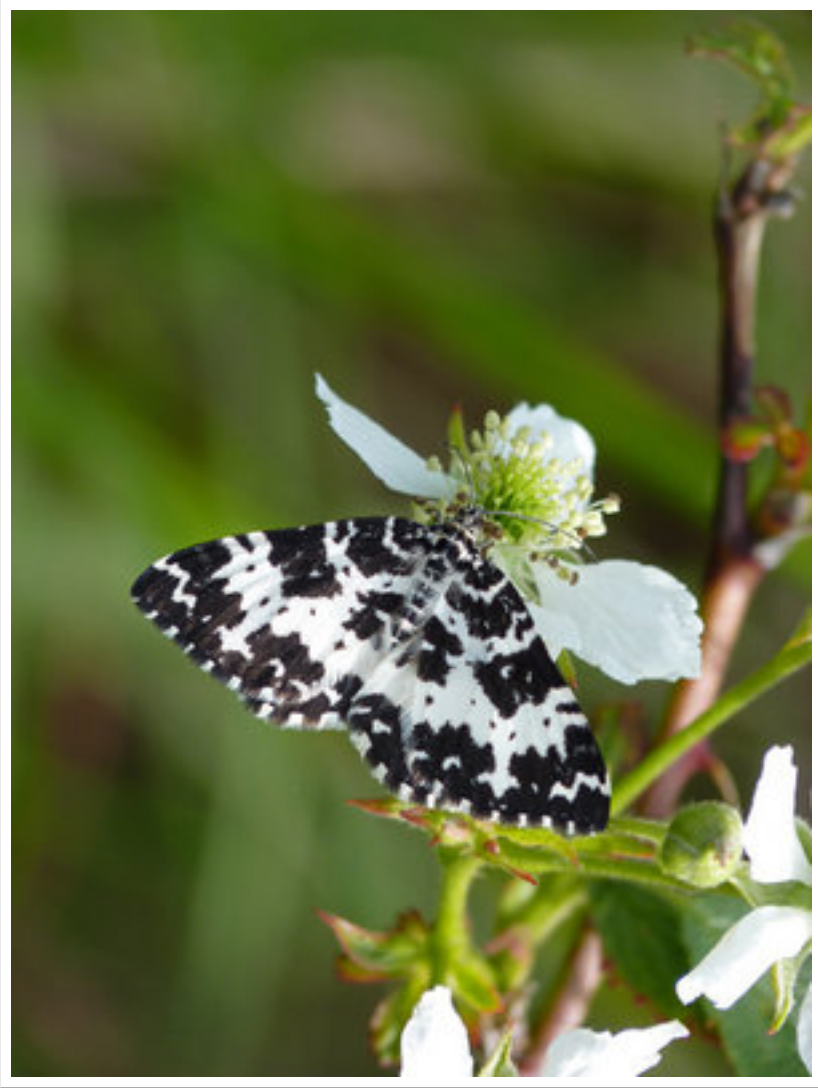
The third and final part of our trip proved most difficult, mainly due to a collapse in the previously good weather (until sunshine reappeared on Day 2), and the difficult terrain. We stayed in a very pretty holiday cottage in the small village of Clive, to the South of Wem (Shropshire/Welsh borders).

Whixall Moss is an interesting place, but I can imagine it's pretty bleak out there in the winter. Aside from the fact that you require a permit to do so, stepping off the trackways is a hazardous business! Although it was very early in the flight season, we hoped to see the Large Heath.



Large Heath country

We were soon off the mark with a very smart-looking Argent & Sable moth, eventually seeing three of these delicate beauties over our two visits to the site. Other interesting bugs included the very rare White-faced Darter.



Argent & Sable

Despite the dull weather it only required a thinning of the cloud, and a modest rise in temperature, to activate the Large Heaths. It was very difficult to approach them as they have excellent eyesight – and a frustrating habit of shooting off across the impenetrable bog, if flushed off the trackways. I imagine that they 'escape' over these considerable distances in order to avoid predatory Meadow Pipits. It is the most attractive of the Large Heath forms, *davus*, that occurs here, with large and very attractive eye-spots. It was almost entirely flighty males on the wing during our visit, but on the second morning I found what I was looking for – a couple of more obliging females!





Sadly it was time to leave for home, but it had certainly been a lot of fun – and three out of three ain't bad!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jun-10 03:29 AM GMT

The Longest Day

On Monday (21st June) I had to address the inconvenience of some work, but of course still wanted to see some butterflies. So it was up at the crack of dawn for an early session at Iping Common near Midhurst. As I drove along the crest of the Downs behind Arundel the sun was just breaking the horizon, and the Arun Valley looked stunning as it held on to its shroud of mist. Mist still clung to the low parts of Iping Common as I arrived and started the search for Silver-studded Blue roosts.



Iping Common in early morning mist

It didn't take too long before I found them, still dozing in tightly packed groups. Gradually they started to stir, until they made a spectacular sight as one by one they opened their wings and turned into the sun. I visited a number of colonies on the heath, eventually seeing about 100 butterflies.





After watching the wonderful spectacle of nature waking up, I saw my first Small Skipper of the year on the way back to the car. It was 'done and dusted' by 9am.

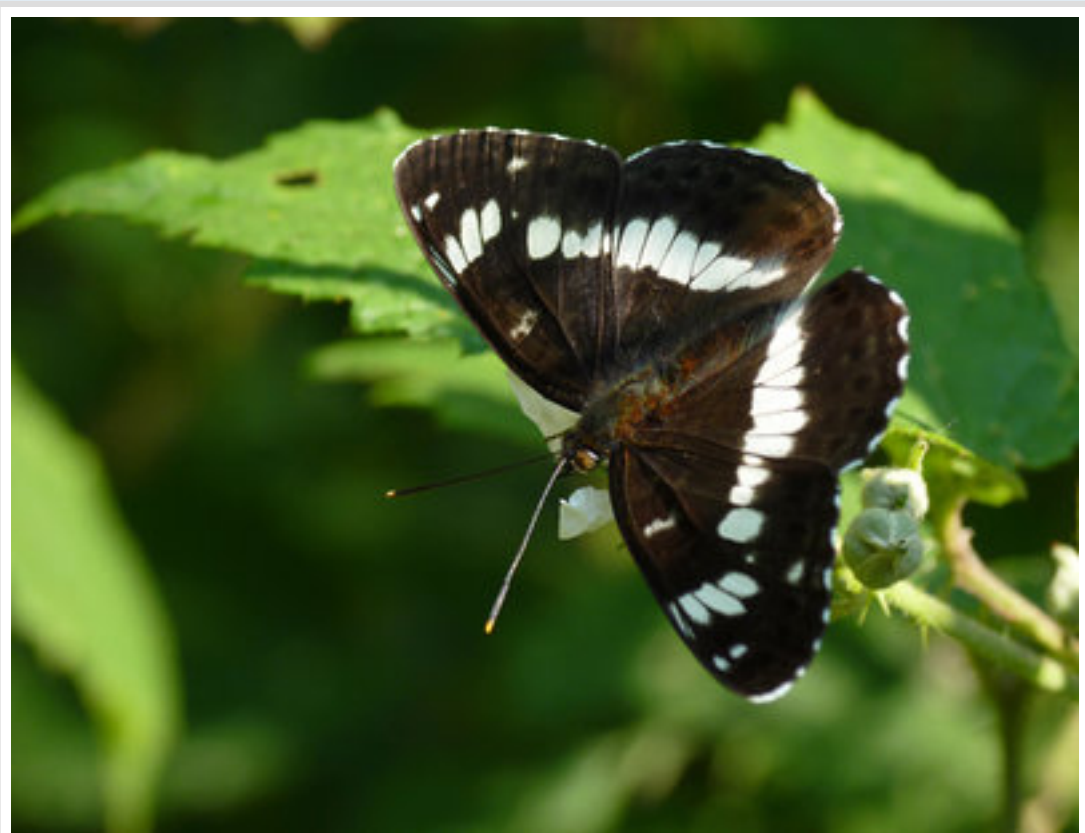


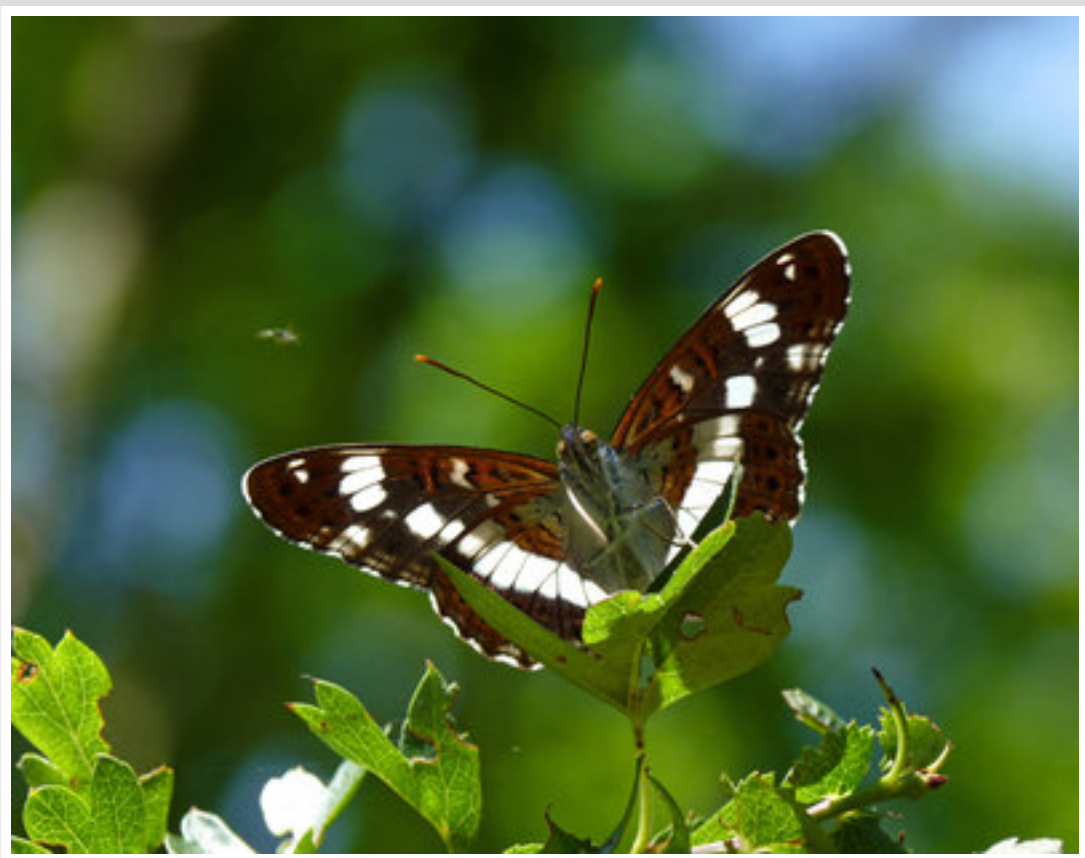
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Jun-10 08:23 AM GMT

Southwater Woods 'Come Alive'

In the last couple of days Southwater Woods have taken on that summer 'buzz', with large numbers of White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries now on the wing. I spent most of the day with Matthew Oates, who later phoned me to say that he'd seen two 'black admirals' on the way back to his car. I know that Ken Willmott has already seen *nigrina* at Bookham Common, so it looks like we might be in for another summer of aberrant forms 😊.



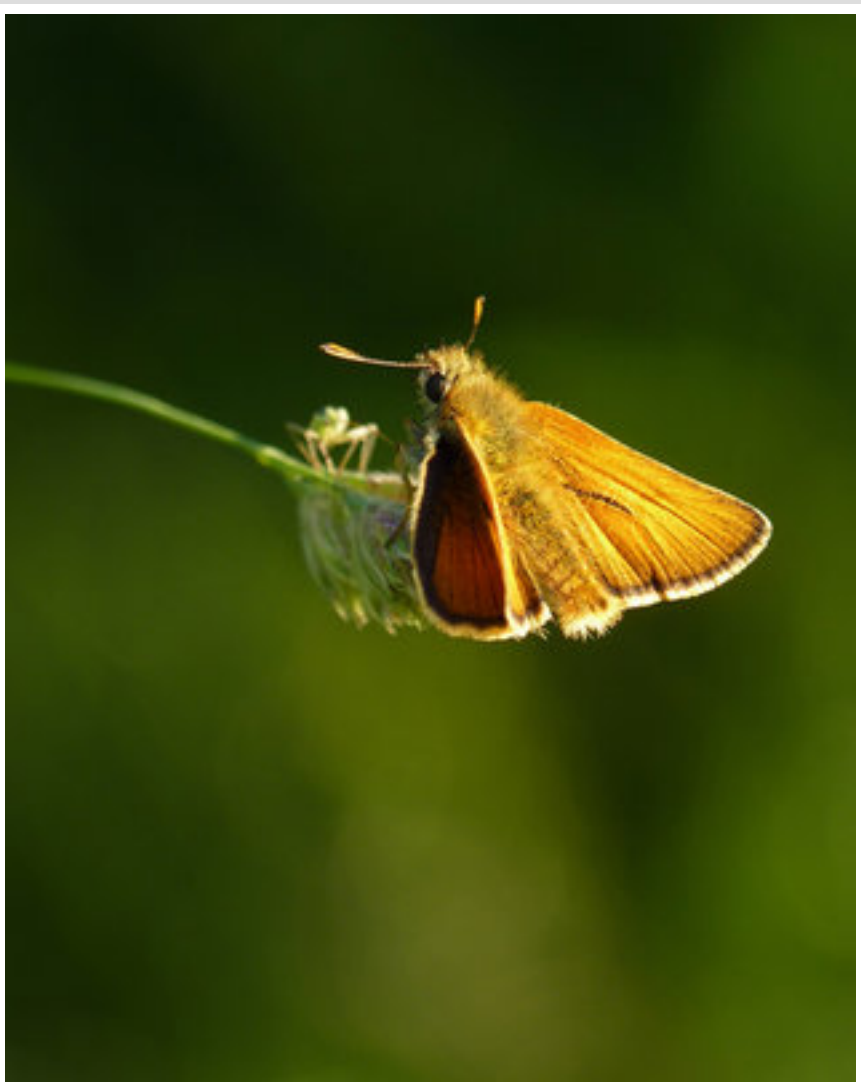


The Dragon Estate did some 'thinning' of the woodlands here in the winter, and I reckon the Silver-washed Fritillary numbers will 'explode' over the next year or two. During my last visit, before I'd seen any female SWF, an unusual shape caught my eye as I walked past a Silver Birch. It was an early 'couple' that seemed oblivious of my presence as I invaded their privacy for a few moments, before leaving them to their love-in.

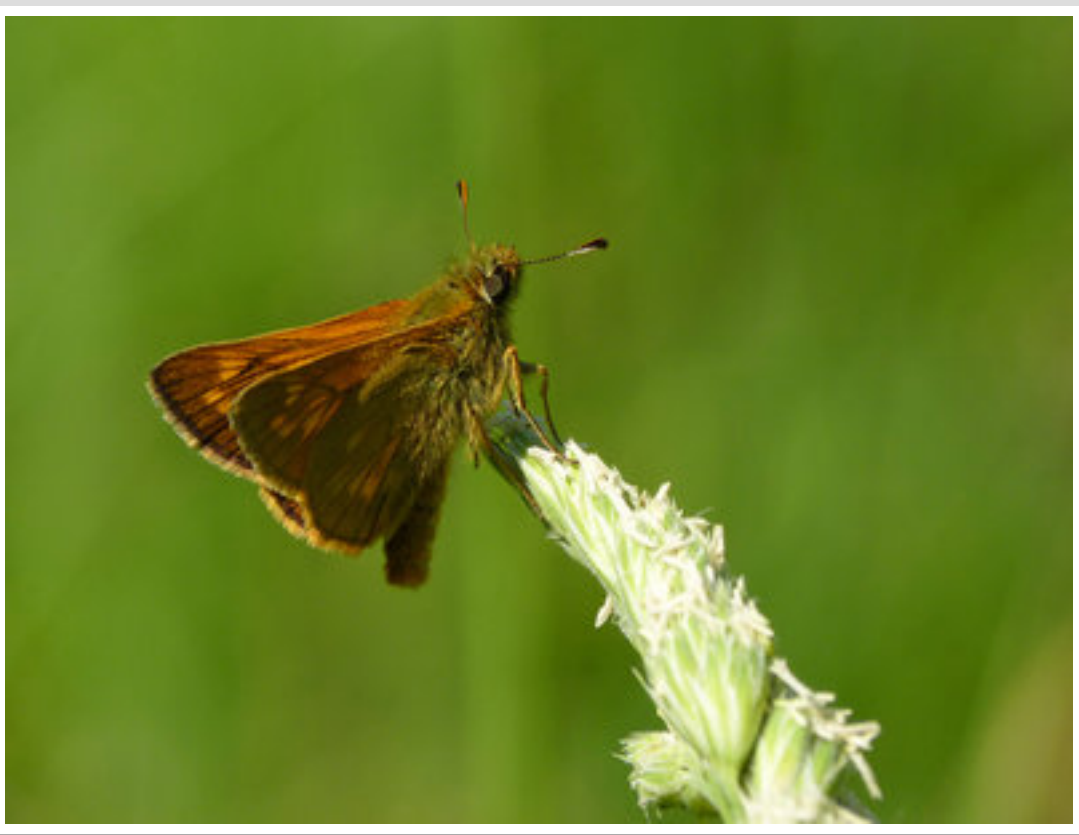




Ringlets and Small Skippers had emerged in good numbers today, joining the already numerous Large Skippers. I was particularly pleased to see so many Small Skippers, which had a poor year in Sussex in 2009. I found a communal roost of 23 alongside one ride during the evening.



Small Skipper



Large Skipper

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-10 08:15 PM GMT

BC Walk At Botany Bay

On Sunday (27th June) I led 30 people around Botany Bay, in temperatures that soon exceeded 80 degrees, despite an early (9am) start. Several BC Sussex members stayed on after the official end of the walk at midday, by which time most of the butterflies were over-heating and looking for shade (like us!). Some respite was to be found in a small stream-bed, where we watched 3 male Silver-washed Fritillaries and a *hutchinsoni* Comma from a low concrete bridge, as they repeatedly returned for a drink.



Much-needed drink!

It turned out that we were one day too early to see the hoped-for Purple Emperor, but we did see an impressive list of butterflies, with excellent views of all species. Our tally included Silver-washed Fritillary, White Admiral, Wood White, Purple Hairstreak, Ringlet, Comma, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Common Blue, Brimstone, Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood and Meadow Brown.



Small Skipper

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Jun-10 08:31 AM GMT

Purple Patch Begins

On Monday (28th June) Hannah and I headed for Southwater Woods, eager to kick-off the Purple Emperor season. The woods were now bulging at the seams with butterflies, and it didn't take long to notch up 50+ White Admirals and c.30 Silver-washed Fritillaries.



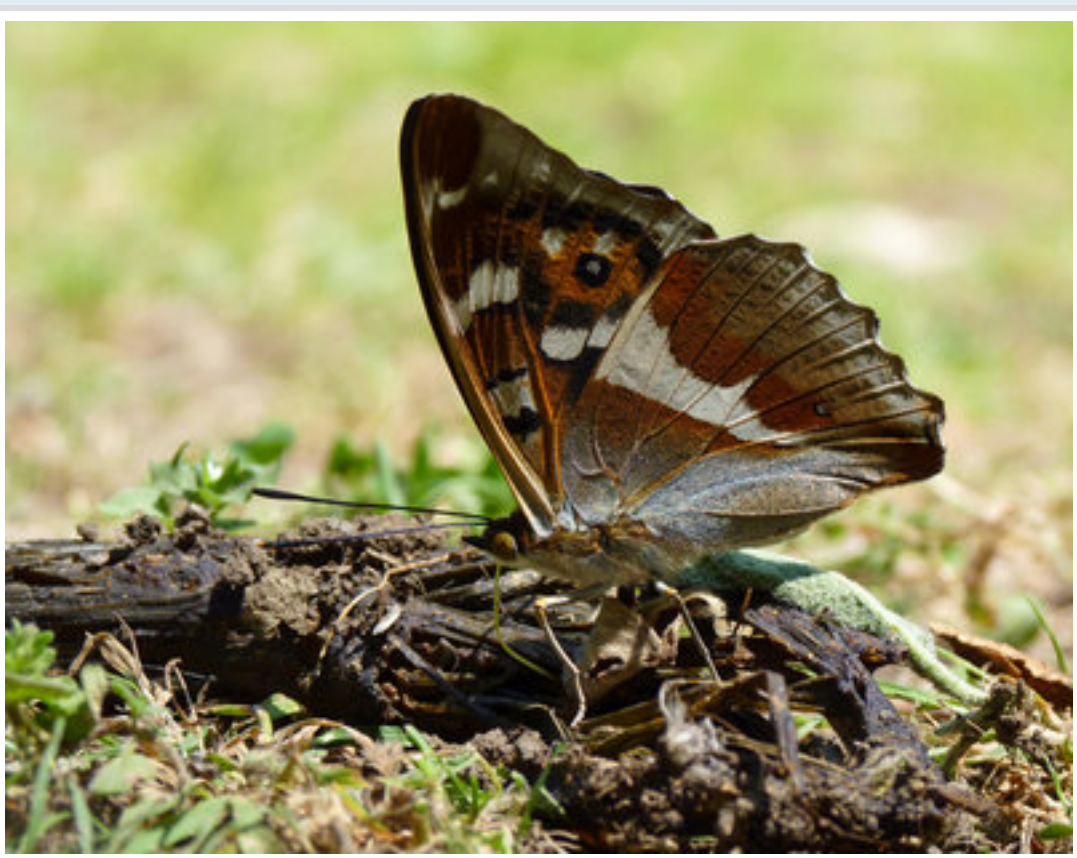


We had not long started before I saw the first of two *valezina* SWFs, which are far from common in Sussex. Wading through the piles of brash, generated by recent 'thinning' works, was not easy, and a stealthy approach proved almost impossible. *Valezina* heats up very quickly, so prefers these shadier areas, and she wasn't go to make things easy for me by breaking cover. After missing a shot of a pristine specimen last year, I could see frustration and disappointment looming. In the end dogged determination won the day, and at the cost of cuts, grazes and bites I finally got some nice images, before she drifted up into the canopy to find respite from the rapidly building heat of the day.





A BC buddy of mine wandered over, to say that he had just seen an Emperor on the main pathway, although it had only 'put down' momentarily. When a salt-searching male has failed in his quest, he will always descend again. So it was off to stake out the part of the ride garnished with the smelliest fox poo – we just followed our noses. It wasn't long before His Majesty made the first of several visits, giving us our first close-up views of the season.



The butterflies just kept on coming, with Hannah spotting a full *nigrina* White Admiral while I was otherwise engaged. At 15.45 hrs we saw another Emperor – the first 2010 resident at the Madgeland Master Trees. It was doing what male Emperors enjoy most, and do best; beating up every passing Purple Hairstreak and Speckled Wood.

Having had a fantastic day in the woods we retired to celebrate the season in time-honoured tradition, at the picturesque 'George & Dragon' in Dragons Green.



Re: Sussex Kipper

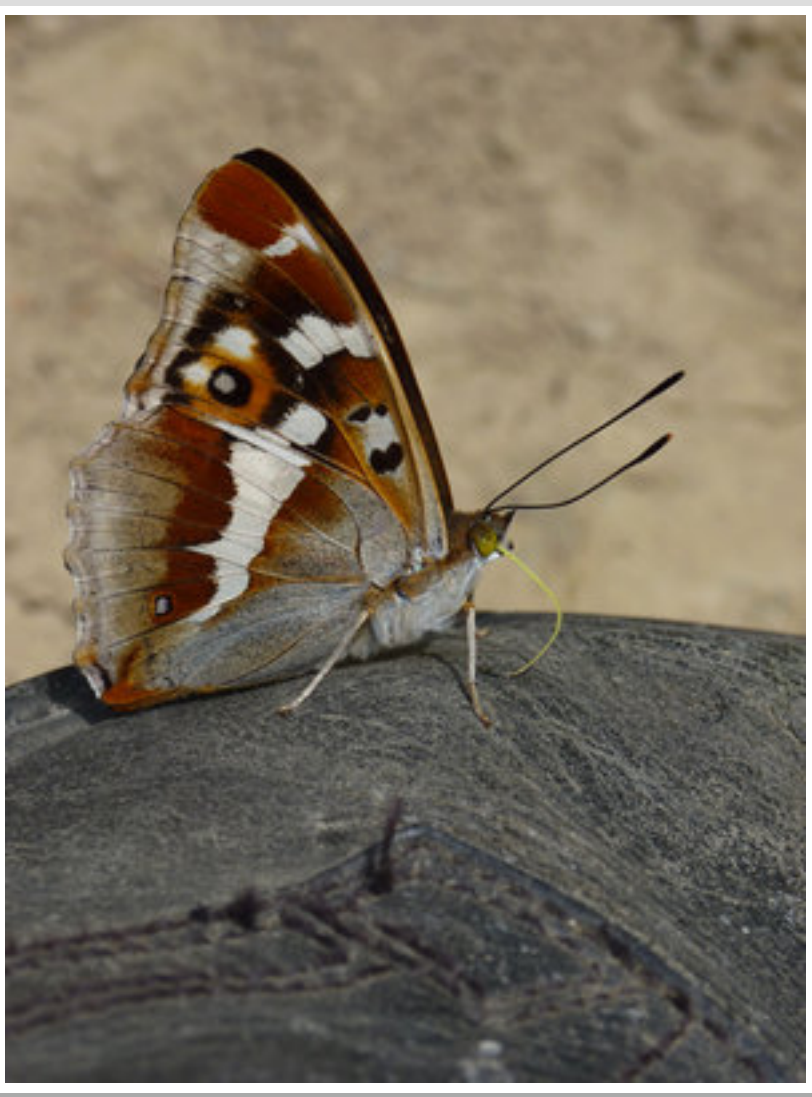
by Neil Hulme, 02-Jul-10 07:54 AM GMT

More Southwater Goodies!

Not enough time for a full narrative, but here are some recent images that tell their own tale. Southwater is blindingly good this year! The highlights were a 'good' *obliterae* White Admiral, and a Purple Emperor that descended to my Mam Tom belachan soup at 4pm, before 'hanging up' to sunbathe in a hazel. As it caught the sun it 'burned out' a fantastic turquoise blue across all four wings – magical!



Image courtesy of Colin Knight



The result!



obliterae White Admiral



One of more than a hundred



SWFs



Mrs Hulme (a.k.a. 'Mum') watching PEs battle above the Madgeland Master Trees



Comma pupa fit to burst

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-10 06:06 PM GMT

Botany Bay – Thursday 1st July

It was one of those days when, in retrospect, I realised that I should have turned right instead of left! My day at Botany Bay was a bit of a 'grueller', but highly enjoyable nevertheless, particularly as it was nice to spend time with the likes of Vince, Steve Meredith and Dave Miller, in pursuit of The Purple One.

My moleskin trousers and old army boots again played host to His Majesty, who it seems will perch somewhere on my anatomy almost every day throughout the season. Kids – if your parents tell you to put your trousers in the wash during July forget it! Hide them under the bed from mid June onwards.

The jungle drums beat loud at this time of the year, and it wasn't long before I heard that butterfly buddies Colin Knight and Richard Roebuck had 'filled their boots' with PEs at Southwater. Colin (<http://colinknight.blogspot.com/>) had seen 5 on the deck, and Richard sent me some gorgeous macro shots of the underside. It was only the previous day that I had watched Richard become thoroughly 'Purpled', and for like many of us, this was the start of a rapid descent into serious addiction. Vince had moved on to Southwater in the afternoon, bagging his lovely Small Tortoiseshell aberrant..... must have, must have! A BC Sussex member also sent me a photo of a fine, very dark Silver-washed Fritillary 'ab.'. It would be back to Southwater tomorrow.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-10 06:38 PM GMT

Black Magic At Southwater

On Friday (2nd July) I returned to Southwater Woods, where large numbers of eager Emperor-watchers were now amassing at the key points in the

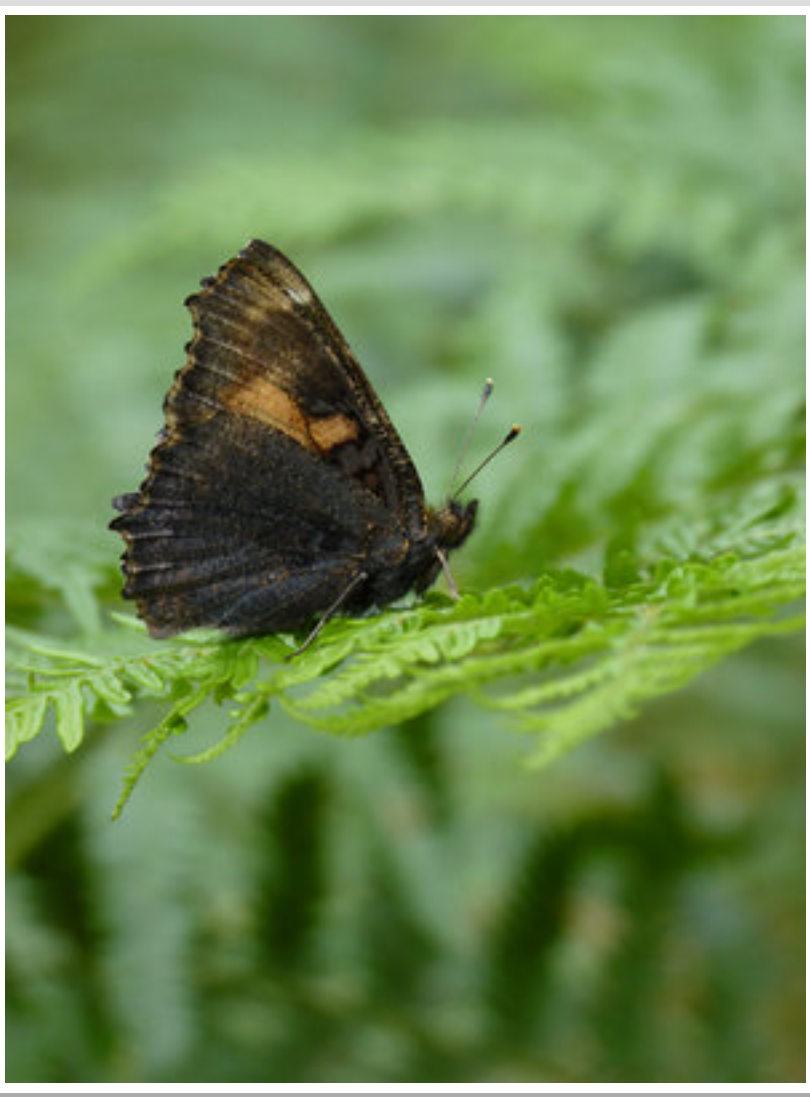
wood. Various observers saw at least 5 males coming down, with some 'fresh out of the shell' that morning. Aerial activity was now increasing at the Madgelands Master Trees, with spectacular dogfights breaking out periodically.

The number of dark-coloured aberrant White Admirals, Commas and Silver-washed Fritillaries looks to surpass even last year's spectacular showing – it is only a matter of time before a dark Emperor appears. Having seen numerous WA ab. *obliterae* and the odd ab. *nigrina*, I was keen to get a good image of the latter. As the crowds thinned, and I was left talking to a nice couple, a perfect *nigrina* descended to my Mam Tom 'soup' bait – top and underside nailed at last!



Andrew Burns, Paul Day and I then went in search of Small Tortoiseshell ab. *vincent-van-massimoii* (it does look close to *nigra*), with some success! I'm sure that UKBers Mark and Lee (nice to see you both) saw the same odd-looking beast.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-10 07:28 PM GMT

A Game Of Two Halves

On Saturday morning (3rd July) all of my energies were directed at ensuring that others were entertained by the Purple Emperor. I led a BC party of 30 across Southwater Woods, where we saw everything on our wish-list. At one point an Emperor made a vicious attack on one of our party, flying into his blue T-shirt repeatedly, in an apparent attempt to knock him to the ground. We saw 'Black Admirals', an aberrant Comma and a mating pair of Silver-washed Fritillaries. Rather than retire to a secluded tree-top, to conduct his nuptial rights in privacy, this SWF male just dragged his partner from bramble blossom to bramble blossom, while continuing his drinking session – scandalous behaviour! Nice to see UKBers Roger and Rose 'on tour' here – thanks for the cuppa in your mobile palace.

By prior arrangement we met up with BC Chief Executive Dr Martin Warren, Chairman Maurice Avent, Head Fundraiser David Bridges and guests, who I'm pleased to say were also highly successful in their wished-for encounters with the Purple Emperor.

I really enjoy the social side of butterflying, and particularly the look on people's faces after their first 'purple encounter', but occasionally it's nice to escape the crowds and find the solitude that invariably leads to the best photo opportunities. I departed for Botany Bay, where I knew the rides would be deserted after the morning rush. I saw 7 different males on the deck, which obligingly opened up for my first decent 'purple shots' of the season. Happy days!





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 05-Jul-10 08:23 PM GMT

That's brilliant Neil, I'm so pleased you managed to catch up with the Small Tortoiseshell (you even got an underside, which I missed). Was it in the same place?

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-10 09:19 PM GMT

VIP Trip To See The Emperor

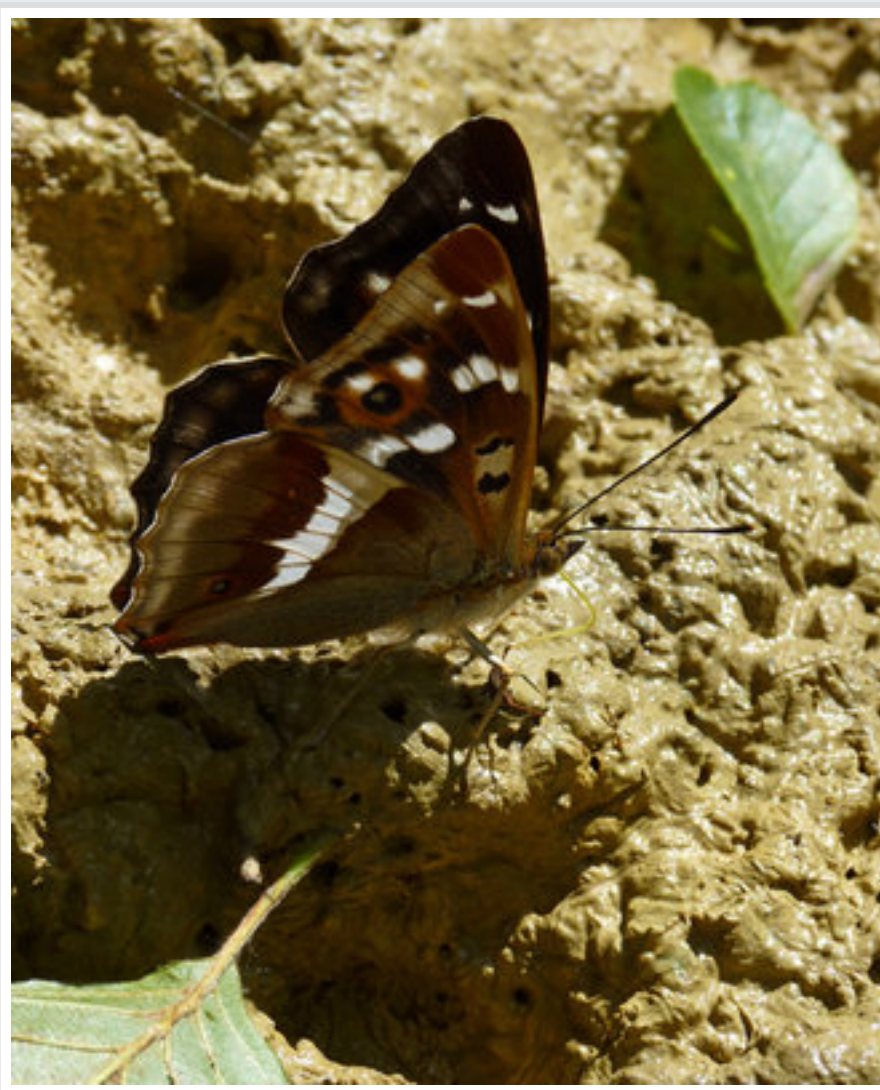
I sometimes get asked to arrange for special guests of BC to see special butterflies, but I've never felt more pressure (or should I say a desire to succeed) on behalf of others than on Sunday (4th July). I had promised Ellie Corrigan, aged 10 and already an accomplished natural historian, an up-close-and-personal encounter with a Purple Emperor, and I had better not let her down! Brother Tom (13 and three quarters) had also given up the chance to play tennis in order to join in the fun, along with Mum and Dad (Helen and Chris).

At Botany Bay we bumped into Malcolm Bridge and his BC Surrey Branch party, who I'm glad to say was successful in the hunt. It was a slow start for us – worryingly so! As the wind strength increased I knew that our chances were ebbing away. The Emperor doesn't like the strong gusts that catch his huge 'sail' and can turn him on his back as he paddles around on the ride floor, in search of salty delicacies. We had seen one nearly alight, but the job was far from done.

As we started a slow return to the cars, we had some luck. I noticed a Silver-washed Fritillary and a White Admiral both hesitate several times, above something high up in a hazel. With binoculars I could just make out the wing-tips of an Emperor. A little patience, and a dab of something fragrant, soon saw the pristine male on the ground for nearly an hour. Several other couples/families were in the right place at the right time and I was delighted that other youngsters were able to share this magical moment.



The Emperor spent some time in the stream-bed nearby, taking a drink alongside Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals. Close examination of my full-sized image shows the mud to be covered in tiny butterfly footprints and proboscis trails, where numerous insects have dropped into this hostelry over the past few weeks.



Soon after the Happy Corrigans departed, I was walking back along the ride when I heard that characteristic 'clicking' of wings. He landed on my right shoulder, just for a second, then was off into the woods. We both knew it was 'mission accomplished'. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jul-10 03:27 AM GMT

More Abs Than Five

If you don't 'get' the title, don't ask 😬! Never have I seen so many aberrant forms as I have this year – and I thought last summer was good! Congratulations to Matthew Oates and Paul Kipling on 'bagging' the gorgeous Purple Emperor ab. *lugenda* 🍷, and to 'our Susie' and Colin Knight on their Silver-washed Fritillary bilateral gynandromorph – how good can it get? Southwater Woods are still packed with dark, aberrant Admirals and Fritillaries.

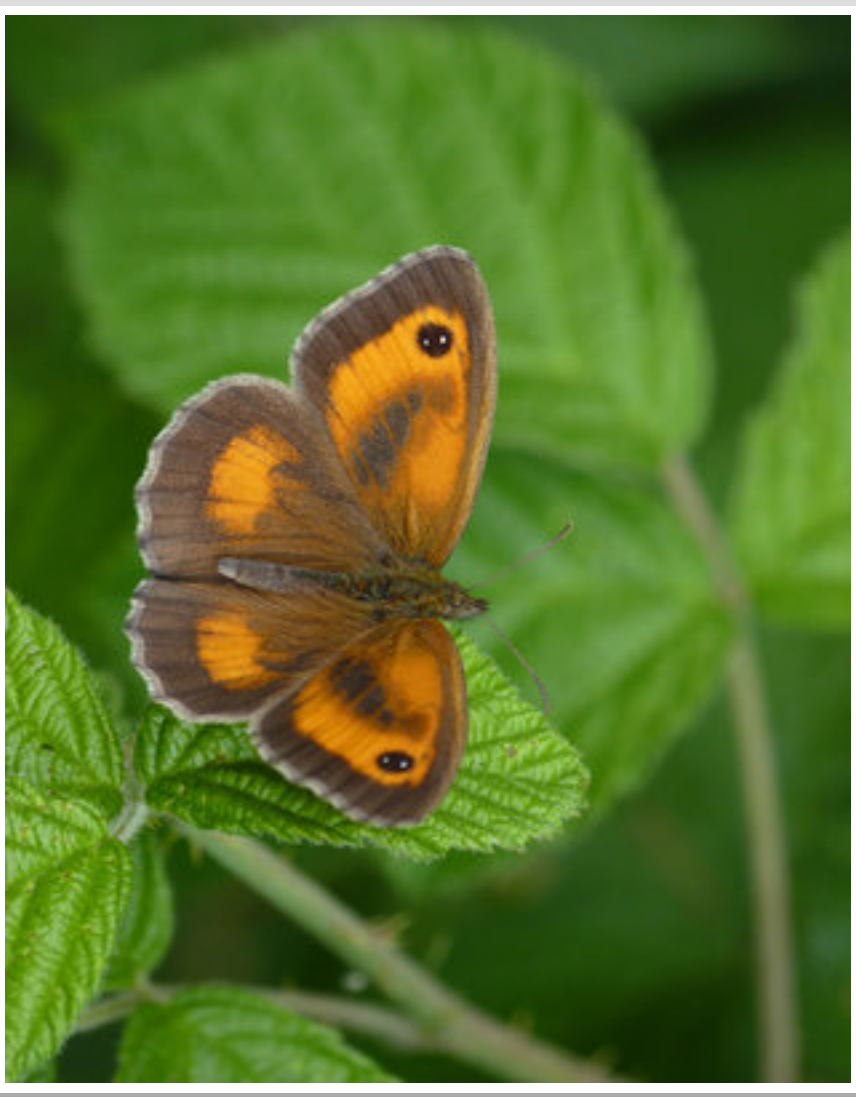
I'm still racking up a few of my own. Here's a ringless Ringlet ab. *arete* I saw while out walking with Hannah



and a Silver-washed Fritillary ab. *confluens* that Susie led me to (many thanks!).



In these exciting times it would be a shame if we were to totally overlook the subtle beauty of our commoner species, such as the Gatekeeper, which is now on the wing here.



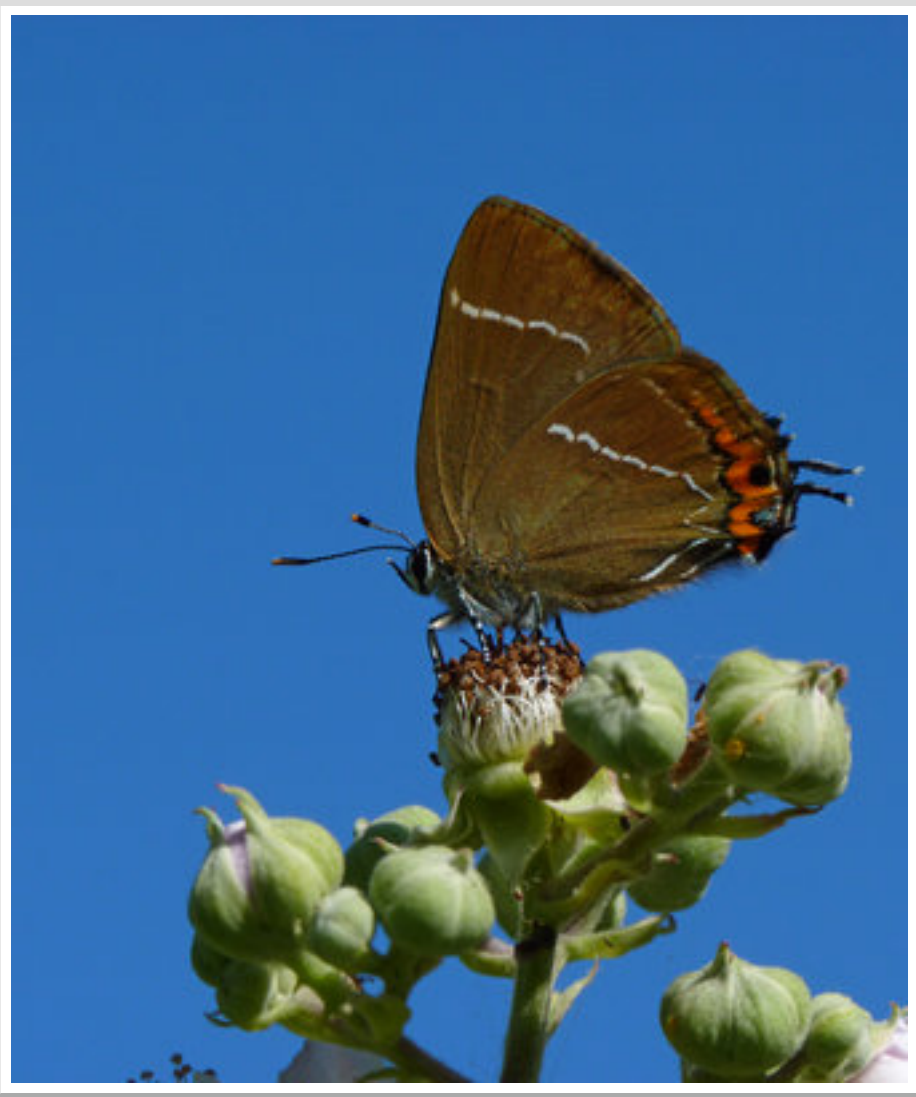
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jul-10 06:02 AM GMT

White Letter Day

Last Thursday afternoon (8th July) I followed up a lead from fellow enthusiast Bob Eade, who put me onto a site where White-letter Hairstreaks had been visiting a conveniently located bramble patch, near Alfriston in East Sussex. This part of the county falls within the Dutch Elm Disease Control Area, so thankfully is still home to a large number of these much-missed trees. White-letters occur widely throughout this landscape, but getting them down from their lofty perches to smile for the camera can be tricky - it's a species I've struggled to photograph in the past. Luckily it was one of those days when everything just seemed to go to plan, and it wasn't long before slightly tatty males were joined by some rather gorgeous female butterflies. Once they get their faces stuck in a nice fresh blossom.... they're 'anybody's'!





After getting the shots I was after, I noticed the most monstrous great fly, sitting on a bramble leaf. It was a particularly large specimen of the giant horsefly *Tabanus sudeticus* (Europe's heaviest dipteran), and it made a hornet look small!



Earlier that day I'd made another visit to Southwater Woods, hoping to see Susie's 'abs' 😊 . My father and I met up with Vince and Mark Bunch from Essex, who makes regular visits to sunny Sussex. We didn't see the Silver-washed Fritillary aberrants, but my father's trousers were visited by a knackered old Purple chap with one leg. Vince did the honours with the camera as the 'old soldier' then crash-landed in a nearby hazel.



Dark-coloured White Admirals continued to appear with some regularity,



and we took an enjoyable stroll through the beautiful meadows, where the first summer brood Peacocks were busy nectaring – a snapshot of how England *should* look!



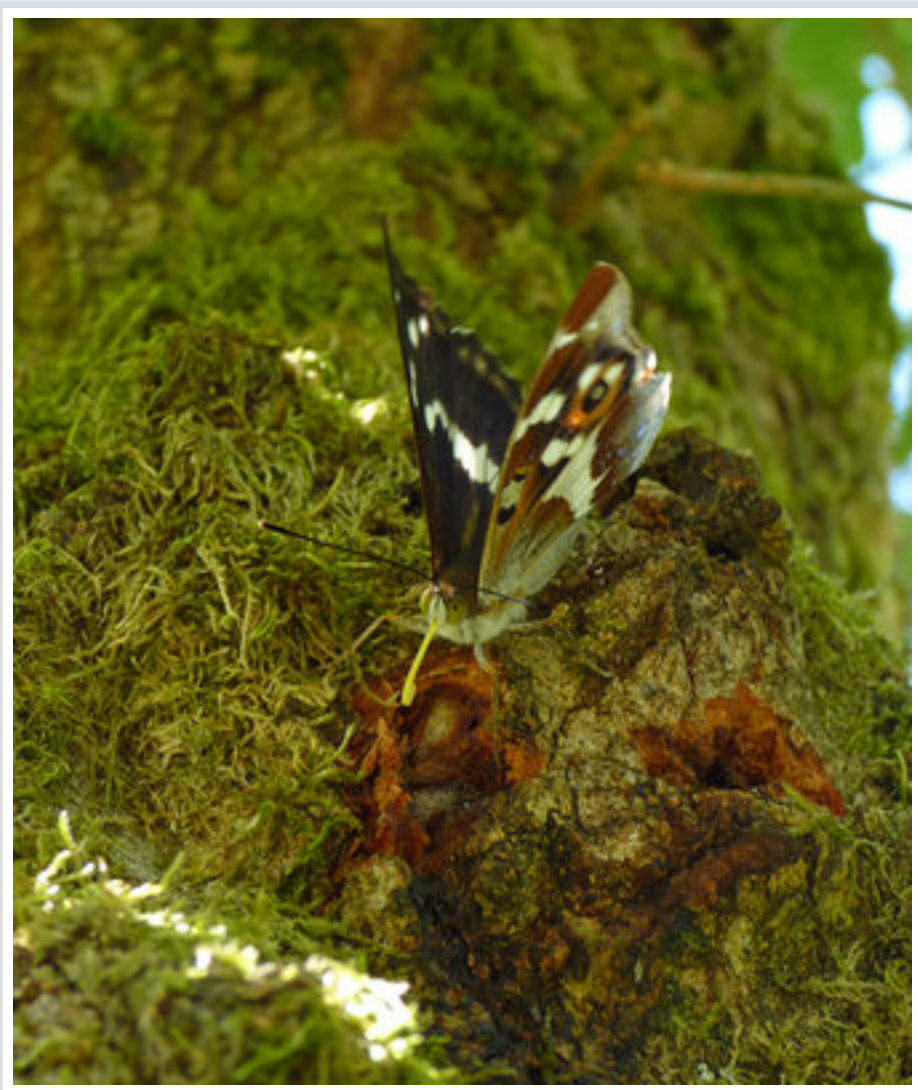
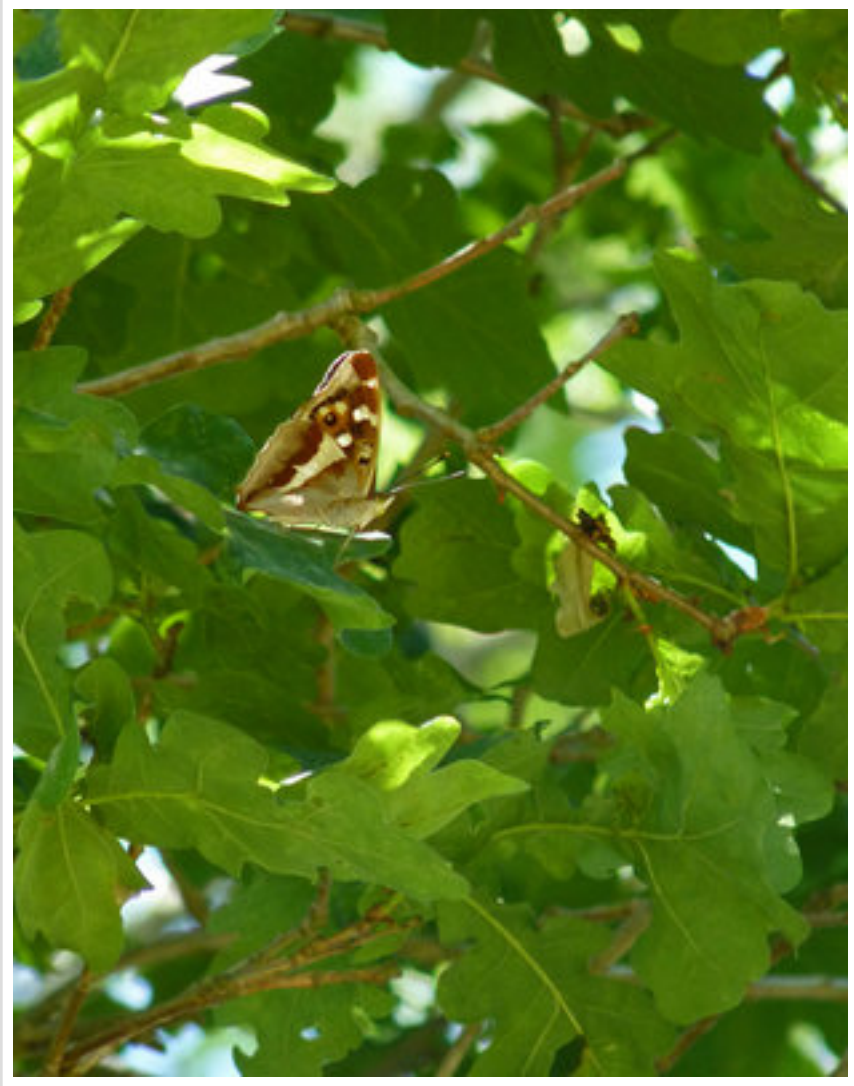
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jul-10 09:53 PM GMT

Emperors At Peak

Last Friday (9th July) I started the day with a visit to Botany Bay, which I suspected would be the last chance to see Emperors in good condition 'on the deck'. Although it will still be possible to see males descending to the rides for some time, the number of close encounters is definitely beginning to tail

off now. I met Bob Eade, Peter Farrant and Keith Capon – and four male Emperors. All came down, some perched 'just too high up' in oaks, and another visited a sap run. One specimen was still in pristine livery, but the 'all Purple' shot I was just about to get was scuppered by a pesky cleg, which bit me at the critical moment.



Then it was off to Southwater Woods to meet up with Matthew Oates. Unfortunately time is just too tight this Emperor season (precluding even my pilgrimage to Fermyn), and I was sad to have missed Derek Longhurst (webmaster of the Purple Empire), who had just headed off to the New Forest.

Having had the benefit of the morning session here, Matthew's count of male PEs went well past 20 for the day, and in the late afternoon sunshine we watched Emperors in some far-flung and seldom visited parts of the wood. At 6.30 pm they were still doing battle with bundles of Purple Hairstreaks,

with frenetic action above the Marlpost car park assembly area.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jul-10 10:08 PM GMT

BC Field Trip – Saturday 10th July

Many thanks to the tough expeditionary force of 14 that joined me for the lengthy BC walk up the steep face of Heyshott Down, and then along to Graffham and back on Saturday. Given the terrain and energy-sapping heat, this was not a walk for the faint-hearted. However, it attracted a good number of individuals that are actively involved in 'hands-on' aspects of butterfly conservation, including members of both the Murray and Graffham Downland Trusts, and volunteer surveyors. It was also one of the most enjoyable walks I've ever led – no pain, no gain!

The views along this beautiful stretch of the Downs were stunning, from start to finish, and the butterflies did not disappoint us. We saw Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Small Copper, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Comma, Silver-washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Small Heath. On Heyshott Escarpment we stopped to look at the characteristic feeding damage caused by Duke of Burgundy caterpillars, and spent some time discussing recent achievements in the conservation of this species here.

But the stars of the show were of course the high-altitude Purple Emperors of Graffham Down. The first sighting was of a large female, which soon disappeared as she was clearly on a furtive egg-laying run. The male assembly point here is 728' amsl, and we watched a total of 4, constantly doing battle across their territory. Several times we watched a pair of males indulging in a dogfight worthy of 'The Blue Max', tailing each other to heights in excess of 100' above the very crest of the Down, silhouetted against a crystal clear, azure sky. For me this is the very pinnacle of butterfly-watching – pure butterflying ambrosia!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jul-10 04:11 AM GMT

Downland Beauties – And Strange Goings On In The Back Of A Horsebox

On Sunday (11th July) I took a short break from the tedium of writing articles for the BC Branch newsletter and Annual Report (apologies to members... I *do* enjoy this in the *winter* months), and headed up onto the Downs behind Storrington. It was very obvious how drought conditions have suppressed the chalk grassland flora this year. The banks that are usually a riot of blues and purples in high summer, looked sparse and rather subdued. However, the butterflies were there in good numbers, including freshly-emerged Chalkhill Blues and second brood Brown Argus. I just love mint-conditioned CBs!



It was then I heard the call "cooooo, are you the butterfly man?" (I have a number of conservation projects on the go up here, so am part of the furniture). A Purple Emperor was fluttering around a horse's bottom, as he stood in his box. I thought to myself 'patience is a virtue', as it was pretty obvious what the butterfly expected. I later saw another male launch itself at a Wood Pigeon, as it flew low over the canopy of ash. This is another of the unusual, high altitude *iris* colonies of West Sussex, at 558' amsl.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jul-10 06:42 AM GMT

Roadside Butterflies

At this time of year the camera is always in the car so, when 'nature calls', even the briefest stop beside a flowery road verge can turn into a photoshoot. This lovely, fresh Brown Argus struck a number of poses as it fidgeted in response to the rapidly alternating cloudy/sunny conditions.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jul-10 08:18 AM GMT

Chalkhill Roost

On Saturday (17th July) I managed to escape from the inconvenience of weekend work, if only for just over an hour. The period 7-8 pm might seem a little late to go butterfly-watching, but it's perfect for enjoying the spectacle of Chalkhill Blues going to roost. As soon as I stepped into the meadow I could see dozens of beautiful, powder blue males hanging face-down amongst the long grasses. A more thorough search revealed a few freshly-emerged females, together with the odd Brown Argus and Common Blue. By the time I departed, and the shadows had reached across the field, just a scattering of pale triangles was visible. If it wasn't for the fact that I had to be elsewhere the next morning, I would have returned early, to watch them all open up again.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Jul-10 10:49 PM GMT

Purple Season Curtailed

On Sunday (18th July) I joined BC Sussex committee members Michael Blencowe and Tom Ottley to survey a private wood, hoping to determine whether the Purple Emperor occurs here. It seems not, although our chances of seeing them were severely curtailed (as they are elsewhere) by the big 'knock-down' of the species during the mid July gales. Unsurprisingly for a large arboreal species, very high winds over several days spell disaster for the Emperor. If associated with heavy rain, as in July 2008 (6th/7th), all the worse! This year, the big 'knock-down' occurred *after* the last males would have emerged, marking a rapid tail-off to The Season.

A walk around this wood did, however, demonstrate that it is clearly at the top of the Premier Division for Purple Hairstreaks. By early evening the numbers swirling around the oak crowns were impressive to say the least! On several occasions, where oak branches draped low down, my head was literally in the middle of a mass 'bundle' of Hairstreaks – a great place to have your head on a beautiful, warm summer evening!



Female Purple Hairstreak



Mating Gatekeepers

A late afternoon trip to meet my parents at Southwater Woods on Monday (19th July) confirmed the Purple Emperor situation (few males left), but it soon became apparent that Silver-washed Fritillary females are still emerging – and I almost immediately found a quite freshly-emerged *obliterae* White Admiral.



obliterae

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jul-10 06:19 PM GMT

Cissbury Ring Roost – And The Skipper Dilemma

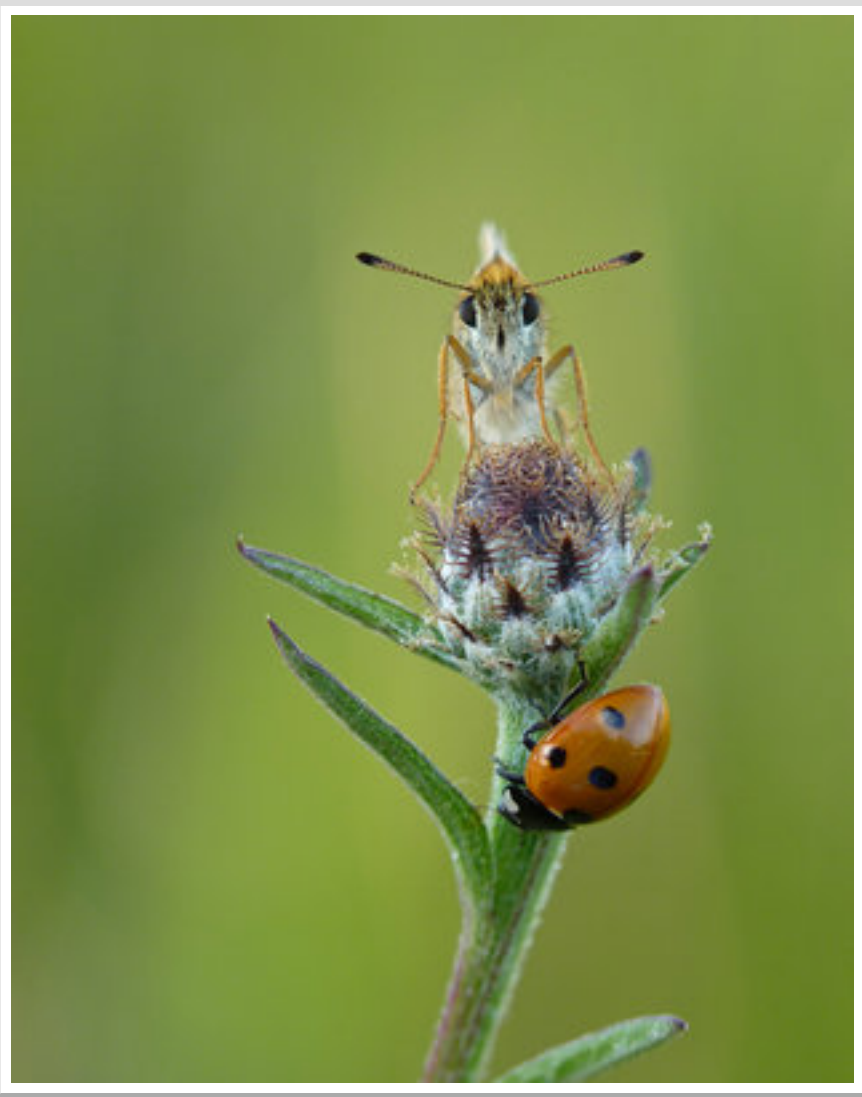
An evening walk around Cissbury Ring confirmed, beyond all doubt, that the Common Blue has made an excellent recovery this year, at least in Sussex, with huge numbers of second brood butterflies found in communal roosts. Almost every sheltered clump of longer grass was packed tightly with them. It's a few years since I've seen them in such abundance – a welcome sight.



As I've noticed previously (and elsewhere), the Common Blues were snoozing away in different areas to the Chalkhill Blue, which tends to scatter itself more widely across areas of long grass and low scrub. However, the CBs were quite happy to share a bed with numerous Brown Argus and a few Skippers.

Some of these were Essex Skippers, so I took the opportunity to get some 'head-on' shots to illustrate the diagnostic features of the antennae. Differentiating Small and Essex Skippers causes problems every season, but the 'antennae rules' are really quite straightforward. Other methods, such as the length, strength and angle of the sex brand (which of course only applies to the males), and the degree of contrast/definition between the areas of orange and grey colouration near the tips of the forewing undersides, *do* work well. But I tend to think that these methods are perhaps too subtle and confusing for those that are agonising over the identification in the first place, based on the antennae. As Pete, Guy and others have mentioned previously, the colour of the upper surface (including the tips) of the antennae is irrelevant – they can be anywhere between pale brown and almost black in both. But the *underside* of the *tips* is a glossy black in Essex Skipper, and the age-old guide 'they look as if they have been pushed down onto a pad of black ink' holds good.





We've made quite an effort in the BC Sussex Branch to get people recording these species separately, as the grouping 'Small/Essex' might mask serious fluctuations in the population of particularly the Essex Skipper. Of course we don't expect our recorders to spend all day on their stomachs differentiating every specimen – but a definitive presence/absence on each site provides very useful data. Based on my own observations, on 'my patch', the Essex Skipper suffered an absolute 'stinker' of a season last year.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 24-Jul-10 03:22 AM GMT

On the local news this morning on GMTV they ran a short article about Butterfly Conservations and showed some photographs that reminded me an awful lot of your Queen of Spain Fritillary shots from last year, Neil. Were they? 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jul-10 05:45 AM GMT

Hi Susie,
Possibly, but I was probably watching Jeremy Kyle 😊 . BC HQ have a whole batch of my stuff from last year. They have a carte blanche to use them at will, so they occasionally crop up here and there – and perhaps on the GMTV sofa.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jul-10 05:03 PM GMT

Silver-spotted Skippers – 23rd July

A brief, early evening visit to Newtimber Hill, just inside the West/East Sussex border, soon produced my first Silver-spotted Skippers of the year. With thickening cloud and falling temperatures they were already shutting down for the night, burying themselves deep within the grasses. A decent mugshot would have to wait until another day. The only time that the camera came out of the bag was for this very pretty Common Blue female, which opened up to bask as weak sunshine momentarily broke through.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jul-10 01:42 AM GMT

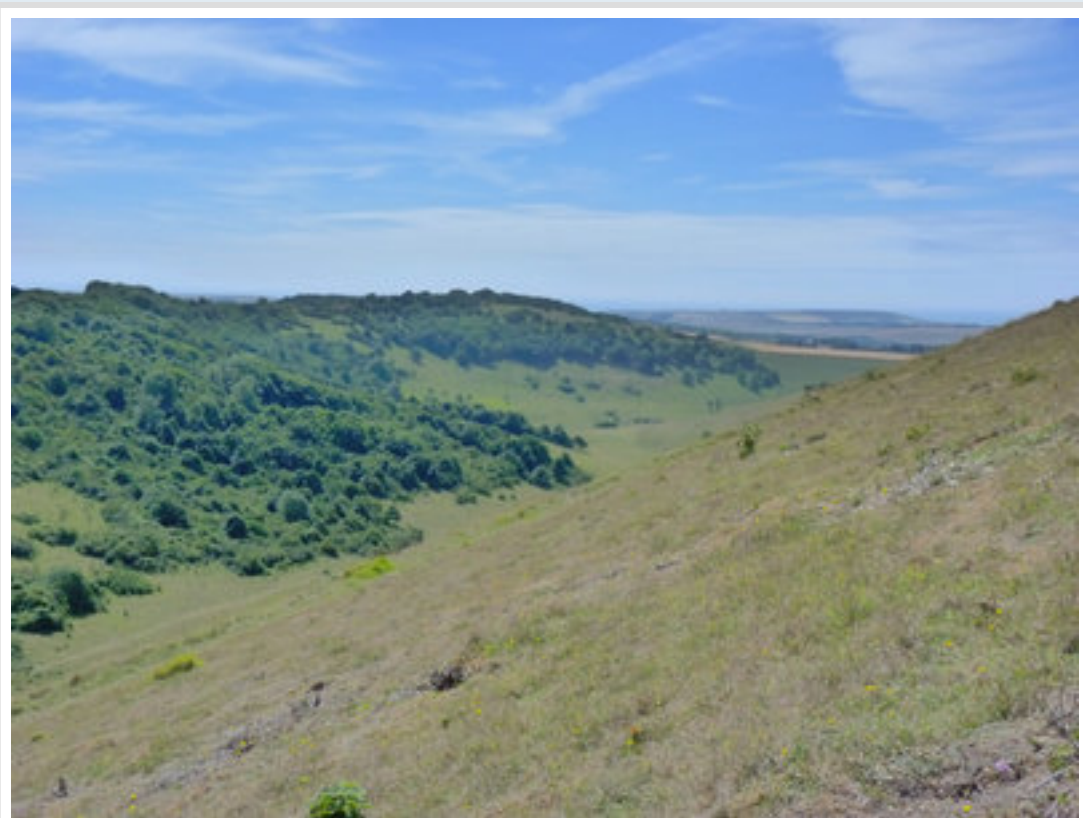
Late Summer On The East Sussex Downs

Yesterday (24th July) I headed over to my favourite part of East Sussex – the Downs around the beautiful Cuckmere Valley. First stop was Windover Hill, with the steep climb affording wonderful views back towards Firle Beacon. At this time of year the now sun-baked agricultural landscape of The Weald shimmers through the heat-haze.



View towards Firle Beacon

On the chalk track towards the summit I encountered Chalkhill, Small and Common Blues, Brown Argus, Marbled White and a Dark Green Fritillary. But it was Grayling I was after, which sadly is a highly localised and far-from-common species in Sussex these days. I then descended into the valley behind Windover – Grayling country.



Grayling country

It wasn't long before I encountered the first of these fascinating butterflies, sweeping powerfully across the slopes on V-held wings, searching tufts of grass, scrapes of bare earth and rabbit burrow entrances for virgin females. They have only recently started to emerge here, so out of the dozen I saw, only one was a female. This is Michael Blencowe's favourite butterfly; to the extent that not only has he adopted it as 'Species Champion' for the Branch – he runs an annual 'Sussex Grayling Festival'!



Male Grayling



Female Grayling

I then moved a couple of miles to Frog Firle, descending into Cradle Valley – a real butterfly 'hotspot'. It wasn't long before I found my second target species of the day, the Silver-spotted Skipper – about 20 of them. Of these, a significant proportion were females, with the usual high speed pursuits, crash landings and abdomen-curling in evidence as the males 'tried it on' relentlessly.



For the third year running I watched some macabre goings-on here. The Hornet Robberfly (*Asilus crabroniformis*) was on the hunt for skippers, and I saw one successful kill. Predatory insects develop highly-tuned hunting skills, usually only attacking while their prey is off-guard. Wasps tend to ignore butterflies most of the time, but if they come across one ovipositing it often results in a lightening-fast attack. Hornet Robberflies would probably be no match for a SSSk in 'level flight', but a split-second of vulnerability arises when a skipper lands, and is unready for simultaneous take-off. It's now that the robberfly pounces, usually resulting in a near-miss, but occasionally leading to a gory end. The robberfly doesn't take long to drain all the juicy bits from the skipper. 🤢

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Piers, 26-Jul-10 02:15 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

The Hornet Robberfly (*Asilus crabroniformis*) was on the hunt for skippers, and I saw one successful kill.

Go *Asilius*...!! Don't be such a wuss Neil, these are the most beautiful and awesome flies, and now fairly rare too (thanks to a significant degree to oral insecticides administered to grazing animals to prevent internal parasites). Spare us a Skipper, Kipper; for a hungry Robber Fly...

😊 Felix.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jul-10 02:33 AM GMT

But Felix, they've got cute, fluffy 'teddy bear' faces and don't deserve to die 😊! You're right though, the HR is an awesome beastie.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-10 04:11 AM GMT

Betulae Begins

For me, the only species that can rank alongside the Purple Emperor and Duke of Burgundy, in terms of getting me as excited as my first Clouded Yellow did in the mid 70s, is the stunning Brown Hairstreak. Every single sighting gets my heart racing, none more so than the first of the season. On Monday (2nd August) I saw two females – one on private land where I'm performing a survey for the owner, and the second at Steyning Rifle Range. The former was particularly exciting, being the first record for this previously unexplored site. I had been very confident of finding Brown Hairstreaks here, but to be honest if the habitat *looks* right, you'll find the species across most of West Sussex. That said – they're never easy!



On Tuesday (3rd August) I travelled to Povey Cross, just North of Gatwick Airport. I had arranged to meet Jack (Harrison), who of course hoped to add Brown Hairstreak to his 50+ 2010 species tally. I chose this venue as a female BH had been spotted here a few days previously, and being further inland (and warmer) than my local sites, I thought it gave us a better chance of success, being a few days 'ahead'.

Never having visited before, it took a while to get a feel for the place and assess the most likely areas. As I was walking along a raised pathway by the River Mole, a Gatekeeper suddenly turned into a male Brown Hairstreak. It perched in a Field Maple, just above head height. Luckily Jack had brought his Hairstreak Hooking Stick along and I managed to gently pull the branch down, getting a decent enough shot as the butterfly crawled around – not easy holding the camera in one hand and a branch in the other! As I snapped away another male BH landed less than a metre away, and at that point I knew we had found a master tree. A conservative count was four, but later on we saw hairstreaks fluttering around the crown of the tree, almost immediately energised every time the sun broke through. Jack needs to visit more often – we always have a good day!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Hatfullofsky, 05-Aug-10 04:53 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

You are getting some really awesome images, I think you have great skill with a camera. I don't put good photos down to camera equipment alone but you know the hefty gear I take around with me and I am being tempted to ditch it all in favour of the camera you have. My only concern is the noise levels, though I don't see any noise in your web images.

Congrats on finding the BH at the new location and I just *knew* you'd find one at Steyning even though I'd been there for hours and not seen a one! On a different topic - is it still a good time for me to look for Wood White tomorrow at Botany Bay?

Sherie

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-10 05:52 AM GMT

Thanks Sherie. "My only concern is the noise levels" - talk to my nextdoor neighbour about it! 😊. Seriously, I don't really take much heed of the technical aspects of photography, preferring to remain clueless, but Gary (Gruditch) - who knows his onions - has blown some FZ38 images up, and I get the impression that noise isn't too bad. There's a dedicated FZ38 thread on here where you might like to seek more expert advice. I can send you a full-sized image of something to play with. I wouldn't want to persuade anyone to change a camera for another model, as I think it's a case of what suits the individual. I've seen your stuff and used it in our magazine - so the only thing I would say is "yes, that's a mighty hefty load you drag around!" The one thing I *do* know is my 'quarry', so by being in the right place at the right time, again and again, I can't fail to get a good shot eventually!

Wood Whites? Yes, get to Botany Bay tomorrow - they're awesome!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 05-Aug-10 12:31 PM GMT

Look in the FZ38 thread for noise comments.

viewtopic.php?f=7&t=4403&p=35852#p35852

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Gruditch, 05-Aug-10 03:17 PM GMT

As Neil says, I've blown up some of his images from the FZ38, and they are totally noiseless. There are areas where a camera like this will fall down, but macro work certainly isn't one of them. That said if someone never produces good images, and I'm not referring to you Sherie, as I've never seen your work, then changing cameras won't help much. Neil is one of those lucky few who has the artistic eye, and regardless of camera, will always produce wonderful pictures.

Regards Gruditch

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-10 03:49 PM GMT

Thanks Gary - the cheque's in the post 😊. Sherie's stuff is very good (very), so really I think the issue here boils down to the weight. If I was in your shoes Sherie (in which case I might get arrested 😬), I certainly wouldn't dump the current set-up, but if funds allowed, I'd get an FZ38 to add to the arsenal, particularly as you shoot a lot more than butterfly close-ups.

Good luck at Botany Bay today - but you won't need it.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 06-Aug-10 03:59 PM GMT

Hya Neil,, sorry to scribble in your diary, but what time of day and conditions did you get the BH open wing shot? Great pics BTW. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Aug-10 04:52 PM GMT

Hi Zonda,
It was 11.45 am on the third stroke.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Aug-10 06:59 AM GMT

Wall Building

I'm pleased to say that the Wall Brown is continuing its recovery in Sussex, moving westwards along the Downs and regaining lost territory. At Chantry Hill (Storrington) I saw a solitary female Wall a couple of summers back – the first record from here for many years. On Thursday (5th August) I counted ten males around the old earth workings, just below the summit.



Wall country





Male Wall Browns

Today (6th August) I flushed at least a dozen Wall from the south-facing flank of Steyning Rifle Range. Unfortunately the weather collapsed just as I arrived here, but I still managed fleeting glimpses of two female Brown Hairstreaks. Elsewhere in Sussex the Wall has been seen in very good numbers again, following a spectacular resurgence in 2009. Bob Eade, who does a standardised walk around the Frog Firle area at Seaford, has had daily counts in excess of 40 lately. It's nice to see this species 'on the up' again.



Female Wall Brown

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Hatfullofsky, 07-Aug-10 07:01 PM GMT

Hi Neil (and everyone),

Thanks for your comments re: the FZ38. I had a quick look at a thread on here about it a couple of nights ago and there was mention of another camera coming out by Panasonic (the FZ100) so I may take a hard look at that one too. It's certainly worth considering for those days when I don't feel like humping 5+lbs of camera gear plus water, provisions etc around with me for hours and hours. And then there are those trips where my main focus is something other than photography when I want a camera with me (I always want a camera with me) but cannot always be close to my camera equipment and don't want to have to worry about security for my more expensive gear. I will take a closer look at the thread on here that you mentioned Jack and keep my comments on it off this thread which is Neil's diary.

Neil, I did indeed not have to worry about finding the Wood Whites. I posted a message about the trip on the Sussex BC site. Great day 😊. BTW, I also love Wall Brown. I think calling them a Brown is unfair as the Browns are generally quite dowdy but the Wall Brown is spectacular. I particularly love the underside of their wings. I may be wrong but I don't think any other (UK) butterfly has quite the same amazing patterning.

I may be breaking polite protocol writing in your diary Neil, sorry if I am. I'm new here and will look around properly and read on etiquette before posting anything else.

Sherie

PS Thanks for your kind comments re: 'my stuff' – I shall have to send you a cheque and that will help you to pay for the cheque you need to send Gary!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Senior, 07-Aug-10 09:01 PM GMT

Hi Neil

Hope you are well . On recent visits to Lancing Rings , there have been ever increasing numbers of Wall Browns , around 20 seen last Tuesday in around 1 1/2 hours before the clouds came .

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Aug-10 04:37 AM GMT

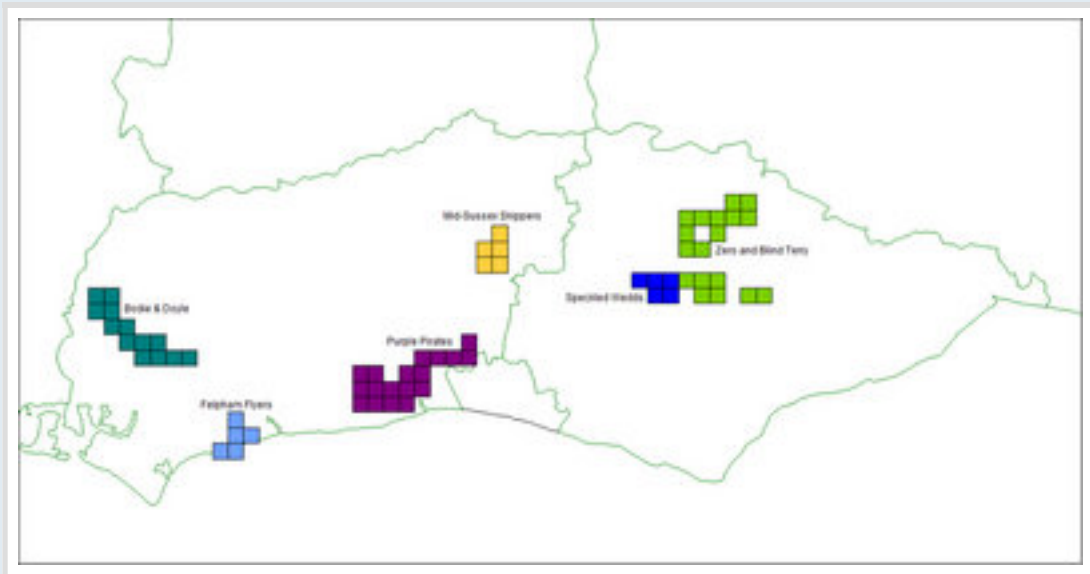
Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch Square Scramble

On Sunday (8th August) I took part in the BC Sussex Branch Square Scramble – a four hour race to record as many different species as possible in different tetrad squares. The event was organised by Michael Blencowe and Clare Jeffers; a cunning scheme to collect butterfly records for our Sussex Butterfly Atlas project (2010 – 2014). I teamed up with fellow 'Purple Pirate' Tom Ottley. Elsewhere in Sussex The Felpham Flyers, Zero and Blind Terry, The Speckled Wedds, Bodie and Doyle and The Mid-Sussex Skippers keenly contested the trophy. It was one point per species of butterfly per tetrad, with a bonus of three points for a Hummer Hawkmoth.

In second place were Zero and Blind Terry (Clare and Michael), who opted for a different gameplan to ours. They went for a brief dip into a higher number of squares (some of ours were just driven through), but struggled in some tetrads under inland cloud cover. However, they had us rattled when they started picking up Small Whites on churchyard floral tributes. Michael's text about the sighting of a Bath White in Hampshire *did* 'get me going' for a second or two, but I rapidly regained my composure and focus.

There were several highpoints along our journey, including a gratifyingly high number of Wall Browns. Best of all, I spotted a male Brown Hairstreak flitting across a downland coombe at Edburton. A rapid chase resulted in the discovery of a master tree, with several other males congregating around the crown of an ash tree.

We bagged a good tally of species at Lancing Circle, but here I twisted my ankle badly and thereafter hobbled and crawled when necessary. The Purple Pirates finally grasped victory on the spectacular Cissbury Ring, ending up with 157 points (boosted by a three point Hummer at Mill Hill).



Team Territories



The Final Count

Re: Sussex Kipper

by A_T, 11-Aug-10 01:18 AM GMT

Just looked through this thread and wanted to congratulate you on some wonderful photographs.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Aug-10 02:38 AM GMT

Many thanks A_T. Hopefully a few more opportunities before the season's out.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 11-Aug-10 04:13 AM GMT

The brown hairstreak photos are stunning and I am amazed at how good the FZ38 is for detail- see attached small tortoiseshell.
Thanks all contributors for a great thread.
Ian



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Aug-10 07:51 AM GMT

BC Walk Goes Into Extra Time

On Sunday (15th August) I led my penultimate BC walk of the year to Chantry Hill near Storrington. The target species was Silver-spotted Skipper, which was first seen at this location in late August 2007, having made a gigantic 'leap' along the Downs from the nearest known colony at Newtimber Hill, 18 kms to the East. They are now doing well here and a few days previously a group of four of us had managed to flush 38 from the grass in 'no fly' weather. Bearing in mind that maximum daily counts during the 2007 - 2009 period had been in single figures, this now looks like a well-established population.

We soon saw a few skippers, although they were difficult to spot with a strong north-easterly blowing straight onto the Down. Other species seen included Wall Brown, Chalkhill and Common Blue, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Small White and Brimstone. The strength of the wind persuaded me to shelve my plans for a survey of Silver-spotted Skipper numbers, so I offered the party an alternative plan. Bearing in mind that Richard Roebuck had sent me a text reporting that Brown Hairstreaks were active at Steyning, five of us headed to the Rifle Range.

I barely had time to say 'hello' to Sally and Pete of the Steyning Downland Scheme before a female Brown Hairstreak dropped from a Field Maple and opened her wings. She sat for quite a while before warming up sufficiently to go on an egg-laying run. A large party on an organised walk with 'Project Fred' soon joined us - and went away rather happy after many had their first experience of this fabulous butterfly. Several more hairstreaks appeared in the next hour or so, and if added to the total seen earlier by Richard, there were probably about seven active on this part of the site.

Those visiting the Rifle Range should not be put off by the fencing around the 'hotspot' beside the sunken, spring-fed ponds. This is not intended to exclude the keen hairstreak-watcher; it's to prevent cattle from grubbing out the regenerating blackthorn and bullace, and to retain a longer sward around the base of the suckers. Just walk to the far end of the enclosure (nearest the village) and around the end fence-post by the kissing gate. It's very encouraging to see so much egg-laying going on within this area, which will next year be inaugurated as a 'Brown Hairstreak Reserve'.

The fencing around the Rifle Range is to facilitate grazing of the grassland area, which has recently been brought under a Higher Level Stewardship scheme. After just one winter the waste-high Tor Grass and thatch has disappeared, and botanical surveys are showing early signs of the vast improvements that will follow year-on-year. Old anthills have been revealed, and as the ground warms up again the ant activity will increase. This is very much a site to keep an eye on, as I expect it to go from strength to strength in the next couple of years. It's a real credit to the Wiston Estate and volunteers of the Steyning Downland Scheme.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 17-Aug-10 10:46 PM GMT

More Brown Hairstreaks At Steyning

Yesterday (16th August) I met my brother and nephew (visiting from Antwerp) at Steyning Rifle Range. Hatfullofsky (Sherie) was already there with her sister and brother-in-law, waiting in eager anticipation of the first Brown Hairstreak of the day. We thought we would try to 'convert' her guests, both

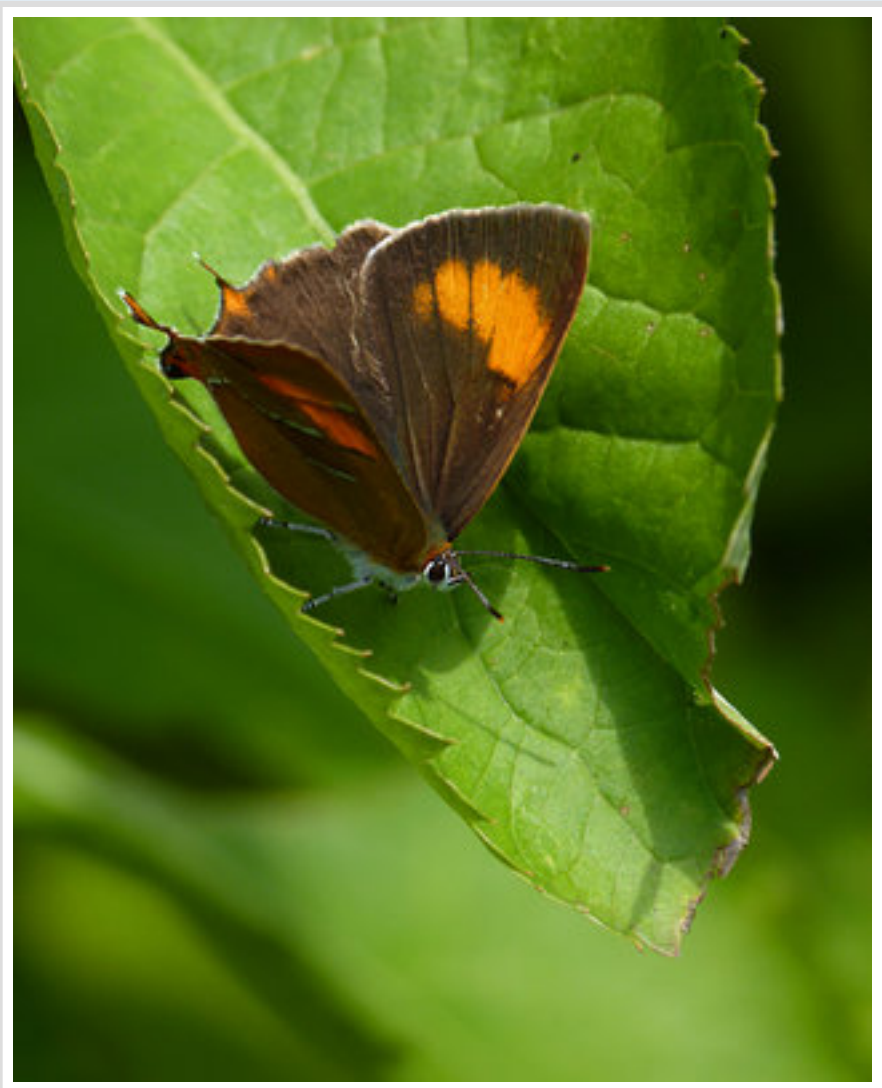
being keen birders! After only a couple of minutes my brother shouted 'got one', marking the start of a real hairstreak-fest.

Throughout the day (I was still seeing them at 3.30 pm) a total of about 21/22 were seen, including 13 females, spread between the bowls club right on the edge of the village, right up to the furthest corner of the Rifle Range. Males were showing very well all along the mature hedgerow shown to the left in the image posted yesterday, sometimes descending (albeit briefly) to ground level below the two ash they use as master trees.

It was interesting to watch the difference in behaviour of the more mature females, which were out egg-laying, and the quite high number of mint-condition females which generally just lazed around, just out of reach of the camera, in the ash and field maples, waiting for their eggs to ripen. This takes quite a while in this species (a week?), but once they indulge in their regular descent through the spiny *Prunus* suckers (they seem to prefer the bullace here) they soon start to pick up the scratches and nicks which allow differentiation of individual insects. The image directly below shows the characteristic, semi-circular notch in the wing margin which is picked up as the butterfly backs into a cylindrical blackthorn spine.



The next sunny morning (hopefully tomorrow 😊) will probably see a new batch of pristine females descend, to start going about their business. Bearing in mind the over-enthusiastic cutting of the blackthorn here last winter (some was necessary in order to re-instate the new fence-line), I'm pleasantly surprised at the numbers showing this year. This probably reflects a particularly good breeding season, and demonstrates how the species relies upon a landscape-scale population structure – the surrounding countryside is rich in blackthorn. The upside is that the vast majority of the *Prunus* stock on site is now in early re-generation phase, and can be hand-managed to keep it in perfect condition for the species in future. It will be interesting to see just how good this site can get. As Richard 'lucky' Roebuck's image shows <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings.html>, it's already possible to frame two in one shot!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 17-Aug-10 11:47 PM GMT

Neil

You kindly gave me map references for Steyning but perhaps others would appreciate. I don't think there's anything confidential is there?

It did seem when I made a brief recce of the area in poor weather that parking could be tricky. So any chance of a map with details of parking, allotments, hedge line? My favourite map-source is:

<http://www.streetmap.co.uk>

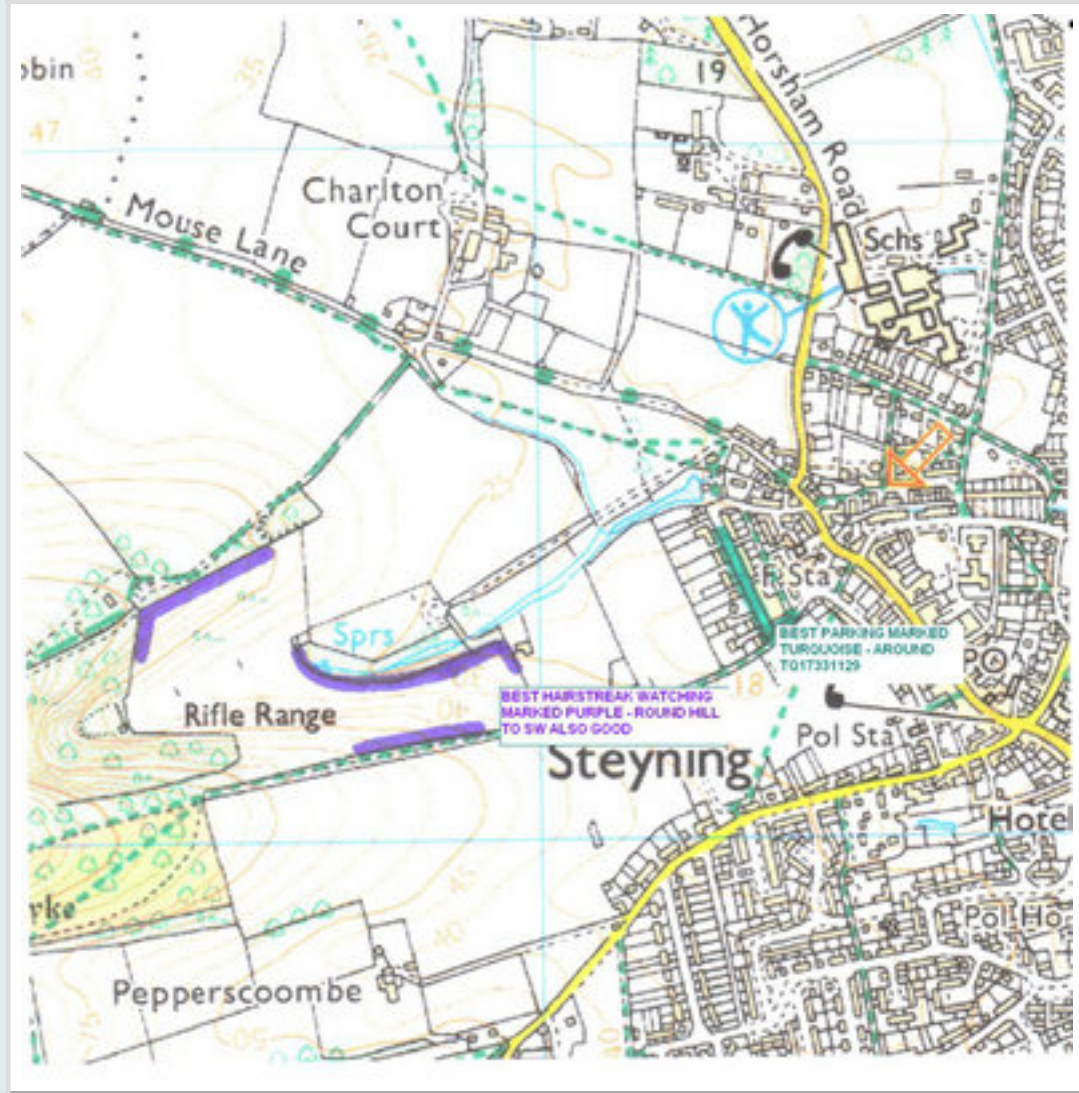
with the 25,000 scale being ideal for details such as this.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 18-Aug-10 01:05 AM GMT

Hi Jack,
They're here for all to enjoy! Map as requested. I'm leading a walk here on Saturday 28th August at 10.30 am, starting from the grid reference given on the map. The Brown Hairstreaks will be at peak then.
Neil



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Aug-10 03:22 AM GMT

Saved By A Moth!

Today (18th August) quite a number of us congregated in the hope that the Brown Hairstreaks of Steyning Rifle Range would descend from the trees to put on a show for us. Unfortunately it was one of those days when borderline weather conditions kept several of us standing around waiting 'too long', while pressing DIY jobs remained undone (Alan's cupboard and my bath panel). The Hairstreaks would become active within minutes every time the sun broke through, but the cloud never cleared for long enough to tempt them down to either lay eggs or nectar.

'Saving the day' was this Hummingbird Hawkmoth, which my brother found sheltering amongst the blackthorn suckers. With such sleek lines, and in full combat livery, I looks ready to appear at the Shoreham Airshow this weekend.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 26-Aug-10 10:38 PM GMT

Fit To Burst

I've always been intrigued to know how butterflies manage to deal with some of the problems associated with prolonged periods of atrocious weather, such as that experienced here in Sussex over the last few weeks. Brown Hairstreaks are usually notoriously fussy about the weather conditions under which they're prepared to go about their business – but what if they have no choice? In a 'normal' August they generally won't go egg-laying unless it's warm and sunny, and mostly between 11am and 3pm. In an average summer they will happily sit around doing nothing for a few days, until the weather dictates that every other species is on the wing, and you can hear the 'song' of grasshoppers and crickets.

At least locally, conditions have been unsuitable for oviposition since 16th August. A brief spell of milky sunshine on the 18th saw them starting to move around the canopy, but they weren't tempted to descend and lay eggs. After a further five days of rain, high winds and zero sunshine the females must have been fit to burst, and the necessity to get rid of some eggs must have become the over-riding factor in their behaviour.

On Tuesday (23rd August) I joined Colin Knight at Steyning Rifle Range, in conditions only marginally better than of late. Nothing else was flying – not even Meadow Browns, which remained cowering in the grass. However, with a brief thinning of the cloud and a modest rise in temperature, a couple of female Brown Hairstreaks were busy laying eggs – very busy! On a warm and sunny day they are usually very particular about selecting an oviposition site, constantly testing and rejecting numerous candidates before finally popping one out. This might take 15 minutes of indecision between lays, following many prolonged 'tests' on a number of blackthorn suckers. However, on Tuesday we watched a female crawl straight to the base of a sucker and squeeze out four eggs on the trot, in less than five minutes. Two were laid side-by-side and the others just above and below (one just out-of-frame in the image below). Five minutes later and a heavy shower brought the day's action to an end.

In previous years I've noticed how extended spells of particularly bad weather can influence the egg batch size in Duke of Burgundy. Whereas the 'norm' might be anything between one and three, after one particularly lengthy period of 'no fly' weather I found two batches of eight and one of ten eggs! Never a good idea to have 'all your eggs in one basket', but it seems that butterflies are quite capable of changing their behaviour when 'needs must'. Which is why of course, that our butterflies are so adept at surviving our b****y awful summers!





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 26-Aug-10 11:08 PM GMT

A really intuitive insight, coupled with experience. Thanks for those observations, which will be of benefit to all the butterfly watchers on this site. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 27-Aug-10 12:05 AM GMT

I am trying not to give you too inflated opinion of yourself Neil, but I have to say that your insight into habitats, behaviour and the general ecology of our butterflies is second to none.

Have you ever thought of writing – illustrated of course with your own photographs and drawings – a tome to be a worthy successor to South, Frohawk and Ford? If you can't write it, then who could?

You would doubtless find among ukb members many willing contributors who can fill in the few gaps in your knowledge; the Mountain Ringlet doesn't usually get a mention in your reports from Sussex for example! I certainly can't offer anything useful in the way of such missing knowledge, but I would be only too happy to do proof reading. My wife Suzie is doing a Masters Degree at the moment and she gives me her essays to look at for any glaring errors or to suggest improvements when the meaning is not entirely clear, My efforts seem to be working well enough (Suzie reckons my contributions are worth an extra 0.1%!) However, I wouldn't anticipate needing to make many suggestions in the case of your writings.

(And don't forget to mention that you once bowled Patrick Moore!)

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 27-Aug-10 12:18 AM GMT

Nah! People that actually write books on things generally know nothing themselves. They are just good at accumulating facts that other people have gathered. Neils place is with people,,, and showing all the young ones the places and the species we all love. We can't tether Neil like a goat to publishing. That's a life indoors, and a life of hell. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 27-Aug-10 12:32 AM GMT

Some thoughts:

1. Of the 58 or so species regularly found in the UK, only 8 or so have been studied in any detail (often after years of research!).
2. Suggestions on how we can capture such observations efficiently on UKB, and "attach" these to the species descriptions, would be appreciated!
3. Neil is the epitome of naturalists that don't just take photos, but also make valuable observations. I wish there was more of the latter on UKB!
4. And finally, I've come to the conclusion that the following favourite quote of mine is a true measure of how "in touch" you are with nature: "I do pity unlearned people on a rainy day". I suspect Neil could make himself busy on the rainiest rainy day in rainyland 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 27-Aug-10 12:46 AM GMT

I do stay indoors on rainy days, or wear a waterproof. If the butterflies liked rain,,,,, i'd be out there. I do know what you mean tho. Gosh!!! We are cluttering up Neil's personal diary. My apologies and delete all i have said. 😞

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Hatfullofsky, 27-Aug-10 12:57 AM GMT

Neil, as you know, I've been traipsing back and forth to the Rifle Range day in and day out for over a week, in all kinds of weathers, looking for Brown Hairstreaks. I recall, on one day, meeting a knowledgeable-looking chap (you) who assured me that I would not find them unless the weather was very sunny, I could hear the song of crickets, and see butterflies of all kinds everywhere. So, on that Tuesday, I looked out at the weather and decided that since a) it was NOT warm and sunny and b) nothing else was flying and c) I could not hear any grasshopper and crickets singing, I would stay home and get something 'useful' done. Arrgghhh! Still, you live and learn and the exception proves the rule etc and I have to confess that I would never have seen a Brown Hairstreak – ever – without your help. I really appreciated seeing them on the Tuesday my visitors were here – thanks. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 27-Aug-10 01:53 AM GMT

Blimey! Thanks all for such kind comments. I would write more in response, but I'm just off to the Arundel Festival to watch a play wot Ernie Wise wrote.



Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 27-Aug-10 02:04 AM GMT

Neil:

to watch a play wot Ernie Wise wrote.

Proof reading hat on:
"...wot Ernie Wise *rit*"

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 30-Aug-10 01:08 AM GMT

Grand Finale

The BC Sussex field trip calendar reached a spectacular grand finale at Steyning Rifle Range on Saturday (28th August), blessed by initially clear blue skies and warm sunshine. It was difficult to assess the number of attendees as a sizeable group forged ahead for an early start, and helped out by spotting Brown Hairstreaks for us (thanks Colin, Tom, Roger et al.); and quite a few left before midday after seeing the main party amassing on the slopes in a scene straight out of 'Braveheart'! Earlier I had counted 49, but at one point there must have been 55 enthusiasts simultaneously looking at these beautiful butterflies. There was no effort required in spotting this usually elusive species, as there were regular shouts of "two together here", "one here", "another one here". Despite an over-sized group everyone managed to get up close and personal with a Brown Hairstreak, many for the first time. Without trying too hard we notched up 7 during the course of the walk.



Part Of A Very Large Group!

I stayed on with a few others until mid afternoon, finding more hairstreaks on the northern flank of the Rifle Range. We were down to a group of three (and up to a total of 12 BHs) when a chap wandered up the field and joined us, having made the long journey from Dartford in the hope of seeing his first. The afternoon was now cooling down and we were coming to the end of the main, daily flight 'window', but I was determined to find one for him. After travelling such a distance no one wants to hear "you should have been here earlier – they were everywhere!" By 3.30pm I was cutting it fine to meet up with Hannah, so reluctantly said "goodbye" to this chap. As I turned away and walked up the slope I almost tripped over another female hairstreak, nectaring on one of the last thistles in flower. Big smiles all round!



Yet Another Beauty

The species list (including those seen after the official walk) comprised Brown Hairstreak, Wall, Adonis Blue, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small Heath, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White and Brimstone. The Adonis Blue was particularly significant, as this is the first sighting here for many years, and probably reflects the early signs of habitat improvement after just one winter's grazing. I suspect a female Adonis reached the Rifle Range during the spring brood, probably from Mill Hill.

All-in-all it was a great way to finish my walks for the year – and great to see so many friendly faces. Our Susie gets a mention in despatches, for spotting a high altitude male Brown Hairstreak before we even reached the Rifle Range!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 30-Aug-10 09:13 PM GMT

It must have been a very satisfactory day to get 55+ attendees. Well done Neil.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 02-Sep-10 08:04 AM GMT

VIP Trip To See The Hairstreak – And Return Of The Adonis!

Following our very successful outing to find Purple Emperors (see VIP Trip To See The Emperor, posted 5th July) I arranged to meet Ellie Corrigan, plus Mum and Dad (Helen and Chris), at Steyning Rifle Range on Monday 30th August. Ellie had seen a Brown Hairstreak's tail as it disappeared up a tree during her last visit in poor weather, so today we were going to do better! However, her plan to start early, leaving Dad to wait for me, very nearly backfired. As Chris and I walked up the path towards the Rifle Range a female hairstreak dropped down beside us and posed beautifully. A second female fluttered around the top of the ash above us, and I later returned to find a male here.



Meanwhile, down at the Brown Hairstreak Reserve, things were slow to get going and Ellie was patrolling up and down scanning the blackthorn in the hope that she wasn't going to be outdone by Dad. Others started to arrive, including my parents, with some having ventured from as far as Dover. As the temperature rose the hairstreaks started to descend and we were all treated to fantastic views of three different females and a male, ranging from very shabby to near-perfect in condition. After Ellie had seen enough to keep her going until next year we said goodbye and I headed for the upper flanks of the Rifle Range, along with a few others.

Having seen a male Adonis Blue here on my last BC walk of the year two days previously, I was keen to see if there were any more, giving greater confidence that they were emerging on site. Five perfect males and a female Adonis later, it was a case of toasting the return of this species after many years of absence. The management plan for the Steyning Downland Scheme area is seemingly ahead of schedule!



As we enjoyed the sight of these sapphire stunners I heard my name being called from below. A dapperly dressed figure was marching across the valley bottom towards us, waving his cane. A quick scan with binoculars confirmed it was butterfly buddy Reg Trench, followed by his lovely wife Sophie. Reg is still very capable of ascending a steep slope – especially if there are pristine Adonis Blues to be seen! Happy Birthday Reg – 90 years young today and an inspiration to us all!

As I headed for home I bathed in the satisfaction of another great day out with fantastic butterflies – and fantastic people. So often the two go together, and it really doesn't matter if you're 10 or 90!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 03-Sep-10 06:22 AM GMT

Family Photos (Part 2)

While visiting Sussex recently, from their Antwerp home, my brother Mark and nephew Tomas showed me some of the photos they've taken in recent months. The Hairstreaks (Brown and Purple) were reared at home, the Stag Beetle was found in their garden, and the Purple-edged Copper (high altitude form *eurydame*) was snapped while on holiday in the French Pyrenees. The Purple Hairstreak and Copper were taken by my brother, and the Brown Hairstreak and Stag Beetle by Tomas. At the age of 13 he's showing great promise as a photographer, artist and naturalist – I don't doubt he'll make a career of it!



Stag Beetle, Tomas Hulme



Brown Hairstreak, Tomas Hulme



Purple-edged Copper *eurydame*, Mark Hulme



Purple Hairstreak, Mark Hulme

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 03-Sep-10 03:07 PM GMT

What an irritatingly talented family 😊 Hulmes left right and centre.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Michaeljf, 03-Sep-10 03:36 PM GMT

Lovely photographs – I especially like the one of the Purple Hairstreak.

there's far too many talented people out there. It's tough enough being competitive here, let alone against 13 year olds... 😊

Michael

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 04-Sep-10 12:47 AM GMT

Despite this being a butterfly-centric website, I have to say that the shot of the Stag Beetle really took my breath away – absolutely incredible!

I'm sure you'll pass on our appreciation Kipper 😊 And thx for sharing.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 04-Sep-10 02:06 AM GMT

Ditto,,,,,, i saw a female Stag trotting down my garden path last year, but the males stayed very elusive. Quite a hard beetle to garden for, but a log pile, or several is a must. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 04-Sep-10 02:14 AM GMT

Stunning photographs. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Hatfullofsky, 04-Sep-10 03:48 AM GMT

Ditto what Michael said about 13yr olds! C'mon guys, I'm getting old and cannot cope with this kind of competition. My partner held up the winning photo from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust competition the other day (it had made the papers), a beautiful shot of a bee approaching a flower. Lovely composition, exposure, sharpness and I'm not at all surprised that it won but now I'm getting "Why don't you get shots like this?" from my own partner.

Good grief! Mind you, out of those shots you've posted Neil, I would find it hard to pick a winner. They are all fabulous. That Stag Beetle poised for flight as it is, that is something really very special. The BH and reflection shows enormous creativity. The colours and DOF in the purple-bordered Copper (I think that's what you called it) shot are magnificent and you couldn't get a better shot of a PH if you tried. There is some serious talent in your family Neil.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 04-Sep-10 08:38 PM GMT

Thanks

Many thanks for the appreciative comments made about the images in **Family Photos (Part 2)**, both from me and the Antwerp contingent. For the sake of accuracy, my brother informs me that the Purple-edged Copper shot was taken at Lac d' Allos (in the Parc du Mercantour).

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

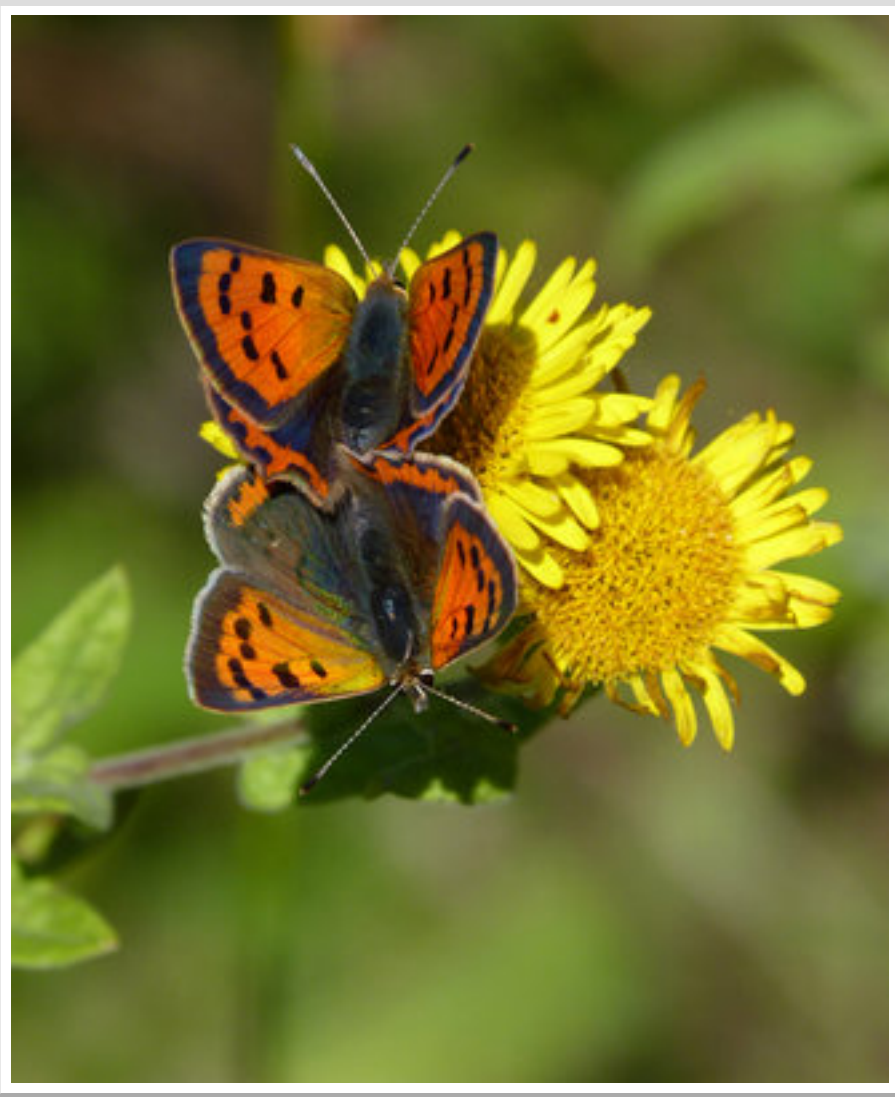
by Neil Hulme, 04-Sep-10 09:08 PM GMT

Small Coppers

On Tuesday (31st August) I re-visited the private woodland, mentioned in my 4th August posting, to assess the size of the Brown Hairstreak population here. This was the first opportunity to return in suitable weather since 2nd August, when I'd seen a single, early season female here. It wasn't long before I'd counted seven females – very encouraging for a 'new' site!

Once the hairstreak activity had subsided I went looking for Small Coppers. This is a species I always 'save' for autumn, and the late brood on sites such as Cissbury Ring and Kingley Vale always provides one of the highlights of the season. There were only a few on this particular site, but I quickly located a very fresh-looking female, which was immediately courted by an amorous male. As with many species, this involved no more than a high speed chase, and once the female had landed they joined almost instantly.





It was then off to meet Hannah at Cissbury Ring, where the Small Coppers were only just beginning to emerge. There were no particularly good photo opportunities, but a bag of parasol mushrooms for dinner more than made up for it.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 04-Sep-10 11:53 PM GMT

Kipper wrote:

....a bag of parasol mushrooms for dinner....

My old mate Peter M tells a wonderful story about the particular type of mushrooms he and a friend enjoyed for dinner some years ago. Suffice it to say that the *psilocybe semilanceata* experience resulted in over-enthusiastic use of the wood-burning stove. To their great embarrassment, the local fire brigade had to be called. The events were published in the in-house magazine, the author's identity being somewhat thinly disguised.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Sep-10 07:22 AM GMT

Clouded Yellows Make 52

Today started slowly, with poor weather dictating an early departure from Steyning Rifle Range. I met Paul Crook here, in the hope of locating Brown Hairstreaks, but nothing was flying and the 100% cloud cover looked set-in for the day. Of course an hour later it was warm and sunny! 😊

By this time I was sitting on Mill Hill, a couple of miles away. Several people had reported a Clouded Yellow here over the previous few days, so I was keen to see my first of the season – making 52 species for the year. Almost immediately I saw a male CY patrolling the lower slopes at speed, then later encountered an only slightly less energetic female. She did 'put down' to nectar on a couple of thistles, but I got nowhere near photographic range.

The Adonis Blues are still providing a stunning, late season splash of colour here, with well over a hundred on the wing. Females are still emerging and I saw half a dozen mating pairs, including this nice ab. *krodeli*.



It was then onwards East to Hope Gap near Seaford. Here I got the briefest glimpse of the Small Copper ab. *schmidtii* reported to the BC Sussex website yesterday by Mike Kerry. It whizzed past me in the stiff breeze and I never managed to locate him again. I did manage to find one or two 'regular' coppers, but it was very much a day of 'ups and downs'.



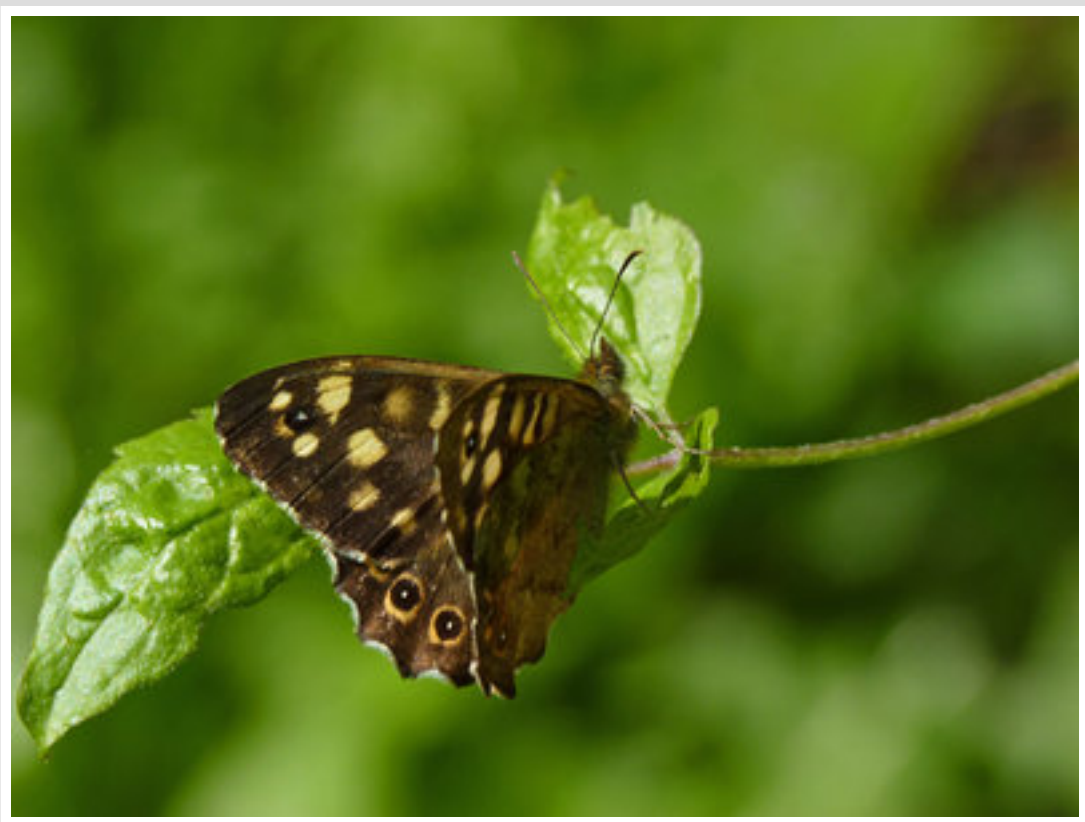
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Sep-10 04:01 AM GMT

Speckled Woods

Last week I spent quite some time, at several locations, just watching Speckled Woods. With the rush to see all of my local species now out of the way, it was nice to spend a bit of time looking more closely at some of the butterflies which are too easy to overlook in the hectic pursuit of fritillaries, admirals and emperors.

I was particularly intrigued by some of the techniques that female Speckled Woods use to deter amorous males. As with many species, this includes crawling underneath a leaf and just hanging there, in the hope that he'll eventually give up. One method that I hadn't previously observed, is for the female to keel over sideways, with wings closed and pressed flat against the leaf. This results in a strange spectacle, particularly when the male shuffles round in front of her and continues his rapid wing-flicking. Unfortunately I didn't manage to get a shot of this, as I was just too enthralled by the goings-on!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by alex mclennan, 08-Sep-10 04:53 AM GMT

Hi Neil

see my post and picture on this forum on 30th April, 2007. I watched and photographed a female sp. wood basking in the sun on the ground when she was approached by an ardent male. She simply fell over onto her side, 'dead', and lay there totally immobile. He persisted for a short time then flew off whereupon she immediately 'came back to life'!

Alex.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Sep-10 05:22 AM GMT

Hi Alex,

Not sure which thread that would have been in (I tried 'sightings'). Sounds like she was up to the same trick, so I'd be interested in seeing your posting/photo. Please can you provide a link to the page.

Ta, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Piers, 08-Sep-10 06:39 AM GMT

Hi Alex and Neil,

I have seen this behaviour in the Speckled Wood in captivity as well.

Felix.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 08-Sep-10 12:22 PM GMT

I have photos somewhere (big search coming up!) of this behaviour which I have observed several times. However, to the best of my recollections, it was only seen with the late summer/early autumn Speckled Woods and never earlier in the year.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 08-Sep-10 03:41 PM GMT

Here we are from 15 September 2008.

Jack



Re: Sussex Kipper

by alex mclennan, 08-Sep-10 04:08 PM GMT

Hi Neil

To find the post/pic, click on Members at the top of this page. On the next page click on the letter 'A', then on my name. When that page comes up, click on 'posts 168'. Find page 6 and halfway down the heading 'speckled wood behaviour'. Click on 'jump to post' and there it is! (Pete will probably tell us there is a simple way to do all this with two clicks!)

Alex

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 08-Sep-10 05:44 PM GMT

Hi Alex, Felix, Jack,

Thanks for your input. Found your post Alex! Jack's image, in particular, captures this behaviour perfectly (great shot). 'Playing dead' to deter predators is well-documented in a number of species (Camberwell Beauty being a classic case), but it's the first time that I've experienced a female butterfly doing it to avoid the amorous advances of a male! All we need now to complete the thread, is for someone to admit to a woman feigning sudden death to avoid their 'chat-up' lines at a party. Jack? 😊😄

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 08-Sep-10 05:52 PM GMT

Neil:

...to avoid their 'chat-up' lines at a party...

Not at a party Neil, but it does remind me a little of my ex 😊

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 09-Sep-10 02:16 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Hi Alex, Felix, Jack,

Thanks for your input. Found your post Alex! Jack's image, in particular, captures this behaviour perfectly (great shot). 'Playing dead' to deter predators is well-documented in a number of species (Camberwell Beauty being a classic case), but it's the first time that I've experienced a female butterfly doing it to avoid the amorous advances of a male! All we need now to complete the thread, is for someone to admit to a woman feigning sudden death to avoid their 'chat-up' lines at a party. Jack? 😊😄

Neil

Been there, done that! lmao

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Sep-10 06:08 AM GMT

Speed Butterflying

Today (9th September) I broke my personal best time for speed butterflying. After a brief chat with Perseus at the top of Mill Hill: arrived bottom of slope 4.10pm, photographed Clouded Yellow 4.13pm, got wetter than I've been all season 4.15pm, back in car 4.20pm, trousers start steaming 4.25pm.

For those wanting to see Clouded Yellow this year, Mill Hill remains a good bet, despite there being only two in residence at the moment.



Re: Sussex Kipper

Hunt For Migrants

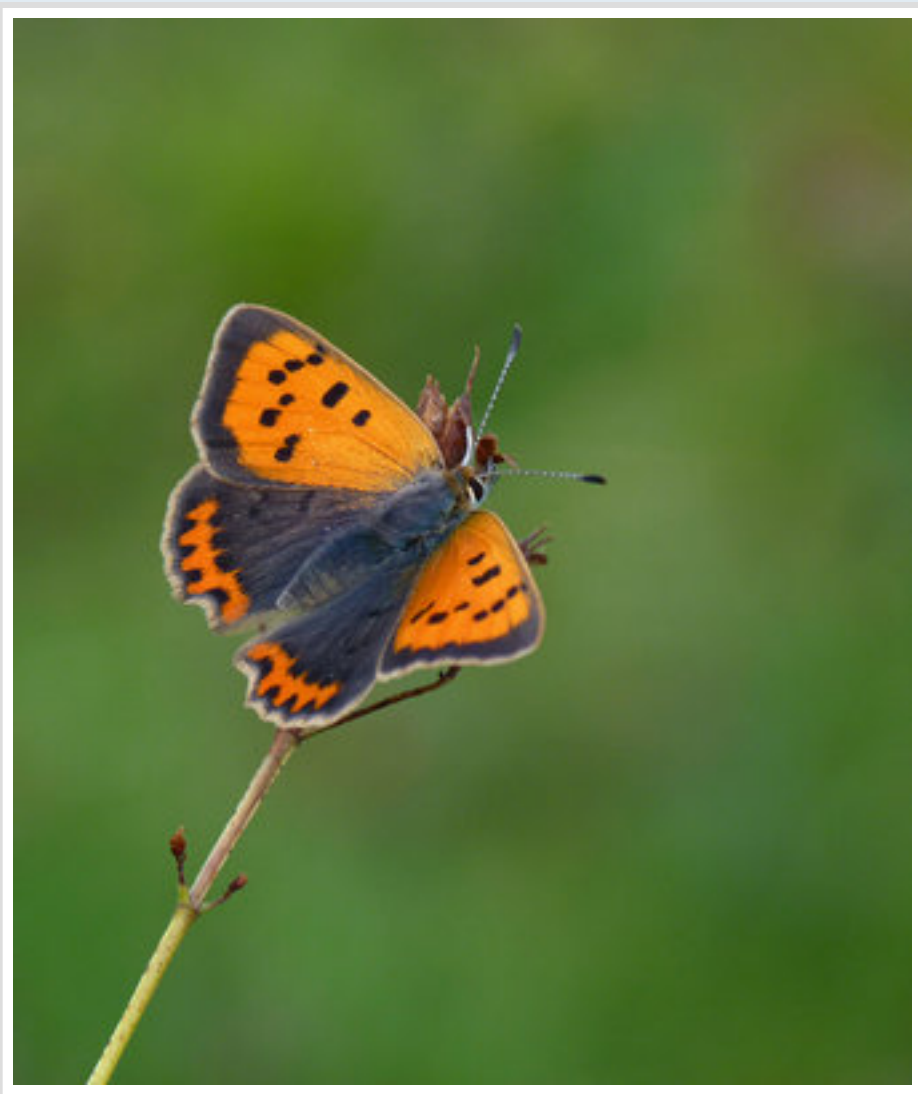
Today (12th September) I decided to search the Sussex coast for migrants, rather than make the long journey to Portland for the Long-tailed Blue (which I suspect has gone looking for peas!).

First stop was the Ouse Estuary Project at Newhaven, where a single male Clouded Yellow was relentlessly searching the perimeter ditch. Butterfly numbers were quite low here, but I did find a couple of Small Coppers and a few freshly emerged Common Blues.



Common Blue, Ouse Estuary Project

There were many more butterflies at Hope Gap, including at least a dozen Small Coppers. Amongst the three Clouded Yellows here was my first *helice* (pale form female) of the year, which appeared to be in excellent condition. Meadow Browns and Small Heaths are still emerging and I saw several mating pairs of each.



Female Small Copper, Hope Gap



'Seven Sisters' viewed from Hope Gap

A brief stop at Mill Hill on the way home gave me my fifth Clouded Yellow of the day. I was pleased to hear that Paul had managed to film this butterfly earlier – it's a long way from Nottingham!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Paul Wetton, 13-Sep-10 07:08 PM GMT

Hi Neil

Nice to hear you got to see my number 58 butterfly before it went off to roost. I'll probably try Hope Gap next Saturday if the weather is any good. Would be nice to get some film of the helice form or any female for that matter. I've checked through all my footage of Clouded Yellow from last year and all appear to be males.

May bump into you next weekend all being well.

Cheers

Paul

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-10 07:24 PM GMT

Hi Paul,

He made two more sorties then went to bed soon after 6pm. I suspect the female has departed after being constantly hassled by the male over the last week.

I'll be in Devon as of tomorrow (Tuesday) and out of email range until either Friday or Saturday, so if you go to Hope Gap on Saturday – the two males were periodically around TV509974 and I saw the *helice* at TV507978. As with all CYs they are constantly on the move, so a good walk both East and West should get you there!

Good luck, Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Paul Wetton, 13-Sep-10 07:50 PM GMT

Nice one Neil

Many thanks for this information.

Cheers

Paul

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Sep-10 12:44 AM GMT

Devon Delights

Last week Hannah and I spent a few days in North Devon, staying with her parents on a smallholding near Torrington. Each day we took turns in deciding where to go, after feeding the resident sow.



On the Wednesday (15th September) we visited Black-a-Tor Copse, an oak woodland set high in a sheltered Dartmoor valley. It was quite a hike to get there, but well worthwhile. Stunted, gnarled oaks cling to the hostile landscape, poking their way up between huge granite boulders. Beneath the woodland canopy the boulders are thickly carpeted with lichens and mosses, giving the place a unique atmosphere. Hannah was convinced that goblins and trolls live here.



By the time we descended, and the temperature had risen sufficiently, the tracks were littered with fully-grown caterpillars of the Fox Moth, which had emerged from the vegetation to enjoy the sunshine. Even more abundant were the Dor Beetles that attended almost every pile of sheep's poo.



On the Thursday (16th September) we visited the beautiful, coastal village of Clovelly. Despite this being a 'tourist trap', and somewhat artificial in its existence as a 'living museum', it's an enchanting place to spend some time – particularly as the crowds diminish later in the day.



We took a long walk along the wooded cliff-tops to the West of Clovelly, seeing Speckled Woods in every suitable spot. The views towards Lundy were

spectacular, but getting too close to the edge is inadvisable if you suffer from vertigo.



As we walked back through the gardens of the Visitor's Centre, Hannah spotted this fabulous Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar.



Our last full day was spent walking around the RHS gardens at Rosemoor. Having seen relatively few nymphalids in Sussex lately, it was nice to see so many Small Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals and Commas on the Verbenas and Sedums.





We decided to break the long journey home on Saturday (18th September) by stopping off for a walk along Southbourne seafront. There were plenty of Whites all along the undercliff, and a few Small Coppers, but we finally located a couple of Clouded Yellows at the far eastern end of the promenade. For those still trying to see this species in 2010, they were at SZ15079104.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by jenks, 20-Sep-10 04:46 AM GMT

Clouded Yellow at Southbourne seafront.

Can you confirm the OS grid ref; SZ15079104 ? There seem to be 2 numbers too many. ! I have relatives in Bournemouth and a visit might be due.

Many thanks.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 20-Sep-10 05:20 AM GMT

Hi Jenks,
An 8 figure grid reference gives you a 10m square, whereas a 6 figure reference gives you a 100m square. The 6 figure reference for this area is SZ150910. You will find that there is a semi-circular embayment to the promenade here, with inset benches. If you scramble up the bank there is a small 'green' between the beach and residential area - you may find the CYs here, as well as over the slopes. Good luck!
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 20-Sep-10 04:13 PM GMT

Grid refs are normally two letters followed by 6 digits. That defines a 100 x 100 metre square. Adding two extra digits defines a 10 x 10 metres square. The Kipper was being (pedantically!) precise.

So if you come across such an 9-digit ref, you won't go far wrong by knocking off the 4th and 8th digits to convert to a six-digit ref. So SZ15079104 becomes SZ150910

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 20-Sep-10 04:14 PM GMT

Sorry Neil, we crossed in the post. (At least we said the same thing).

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Piers, 20-Sep-10 10:16 PM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

So if you come across such an 9-digit ref

...you're going to get horribly lost, Jack..! 😊
Felix.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 21-Sep-10 12:25 AM GMT

Not my day for typos is it? Of course a 9-digit ref might define a strip 1 metre x 10 metres (or would it? – maybe I'd better shut up)

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by jenks, 21-Sep-10 01:46 AM GMT

Thanks both. I never knew that, despite having an A level in Geography ! Or, I`d forgotten with the passage of years. Bournemouth this weekend.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 21-Sep-10 01:57 AM GMT

jenks:

I`d forgotten with the passage of years.

When you get to my age, you can't count up to 8 correctly even though BSc in mathematics 1960

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 21-Sep-10 07:06 AM GMT

"Felix" wrote:

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

So if you come across such an 9-digit ref

...you're going to get horribly lost, Jack..! 😊
Felix.

You'd be OK in ireland 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 22-Sep-10 03:59 AM GMT

A politically incorrect poster said about 9 digit map referencec:

You'd be OK in ireland 😊

Now now! There could be trouble for comments like those 😊 I got big stick for a spoof Irish Pilots' Exam that I published some years ago on a pilots' website. But I'll risk repeating a few of the questions here.

1. You wish to fly from A to B (marked on the question paper). Using the pencil and ruler provided, draw the shortest route from A to B. Extra paper is available if required (ask your invigilator if needed).
2. The circular instrument usually known as the Artificial Horizon (now technically called the ADI but you don't need to know what ADI stands for) is often coloured coded in two segments, blue and brown. When in level flight would you expect the brown segment to be at the top or the blue segment to be at the top?
3. The undercarriage selection lever has two positions, UP (retract) DOWN (lower). Which position would you select prior to landing? FAILURE TO ANSWER CORRECTLY WILL REQUIRE A RETAKE OF THE ENTIRE PAPER.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 22-Sep-10 04:14 AM GMT

Actually, crossed wires 😊

"So if you come across such an 9-digit ref ..." threw me. I was simply thinking that a grid ref with an odd number of characters is valid – but only in Ireland where they have single-letter grid squares!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 22-Sep-10 04:54 AM GMT

Amazing what a simple typo can do! Just because I hit the 9 key instead of the 8 key we risk a diplomatic incident!

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Michaeljf, 22-Sep-10 05:56 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

Amazing what a simple typo can do! Just because I hit the 9 key instead of the 8 key we risk a diplomatic incident! Jack

At least this time we've left out the Welsh and East-Englians 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 22-Sep-10 08:03 PM GMT

Autumn Feeding Frenzy

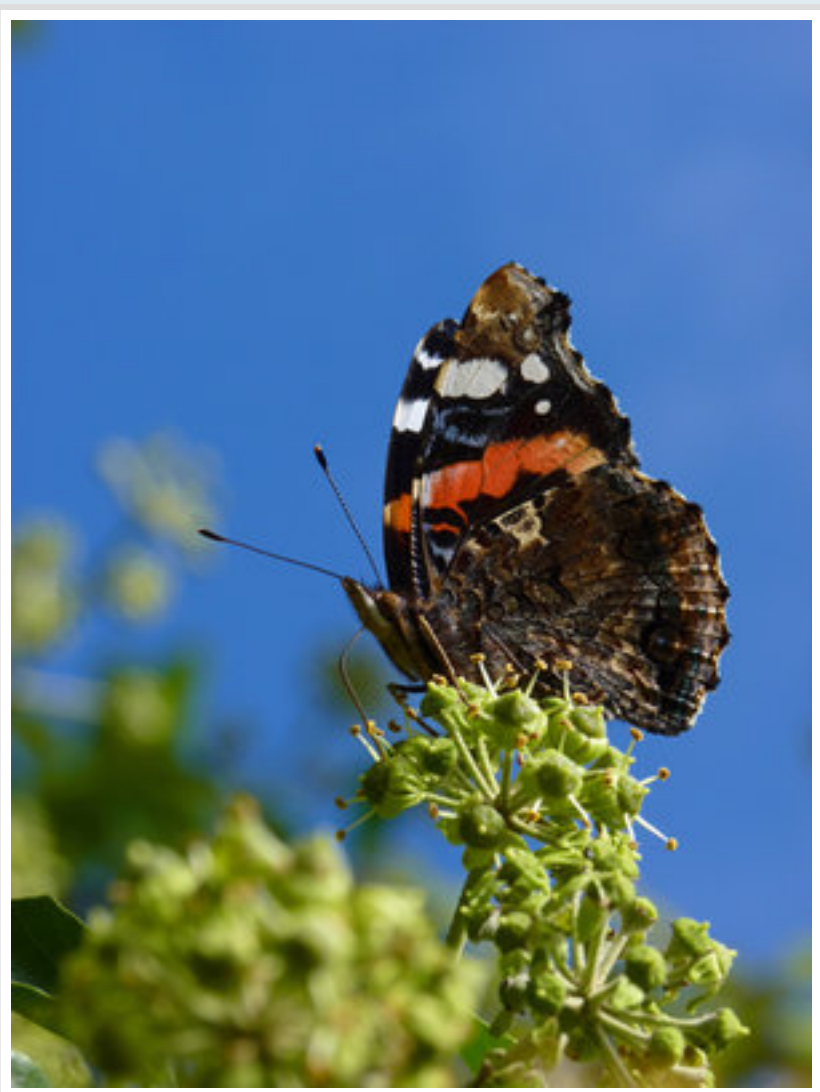
Yesterday (21st September) I took advantage of the lovely weather to make a trip over to East Sussex. In Friston Forest, on one of the main tracks, I came across a dozen Commas busily feasting on the ripe and fermenting blackberries on a single stand of bramble. They made such a beautiful sight that when I checked my watch I'd been standing by the bush for an hour! In situations like this time can just melt away. They were so engrossed (and probably a little inebriated) that they allowed me to pick them up, and at one point I had three sitting on my fingers.



As I cycled around the woods I saw half a dozen Brimstones (mainly females), all searching for a pre-hibernation feed. With much of the nectar now gone, they were having to travel quite some distance before finding a late thistle or the last dregs of 'pink' in hemp agrimony.



But the highlight for me was on the way out of the woods, when I found five majestic Red Admirals fuelling-up on ivy flowers beside a cottage in West Dean. One of them posed nicely for the camera, creating an image that is quintessentially 'autumn'.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 22-Sep-10 09:05 PM GMT

The unfortunate "9" typo that I made needed decisive action to avoid the possibility of a repeat.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by David M, 23-Sep-10 02:45 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

They were so engrossed (and probably a little inebriated) that they allowed me to pick them up, and at one point I had three sitting on my fingers.

LOL! I've done that several times with Red Admirals on my mother's buddleia. The same ones appear every day and on a sunny day can be there from mid-morning till early evening. By 6pm they're all too pissed on nectar to care what you do to them.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 23-Sep-10 06:29 AM GMT

Kingley Vale Coppers

This afternoon (22nd September) I joined BC buddy Brian Henham to share a late season grand finale of Small Coppers at Kingley Vale. On the way up we stopped to watch Brimstones, Speckled Woods, Small Heaths, Meadow Browns, Commas, and single Red Admiral, Brown Argus and Painted Lady. It wasn't until we reached the more open area that the number of Small Coppers rose sharply. The slopes and gullies were teeming with them and we saw well in excess of 50 of these beautiful butterflies. Many freshly emerged females were being pursued by amorous males, while others were left in peace to lay their tiny 'golf ball' eggs on sorrel. As the season approaches its end, days like this seem all the more precious.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 01-Oct-10 04:43 AM GMT

Last Of The Many

It's been a very good season for many species, and a welcome improvement over the last couple of years, but there's little doubt that things are winding down very rapidly now. Hannah and I walked through Friston Forest in beautiful, autumnal sunshine this morning (30th September), but the Commas and Red Admirals seen in good numbers here only ten days back had all but disappeared. A couple of Commas were still imbibing boozy blackberry juice and one was so sozzled we watched it fall of its perch and deep into the bramble. Single Small Copper and Common Blue occupied a grassy glade that previously supported quite a few butterflies. While I was photographing perhaps my last butterflies of the year, Hannah stumbled across her first adder, something she's been keen to see for a while.





We then moved on to Frog Firle, but failed to see the third brood Wall Browns that I'd hoped for. I'm not sure that this species will go to a significant third brood this season, although the odd one will probably turn up here or there.

With the season all but over it's now time to start planning habitat management work for the winter. I'll be attempting to get my hands dirty at least once a week.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Mark Senior, 01-Oct-10 09:20 PM GMT

Hi Neil ,
Somehow I don't think this year will have as good an end to it as last year . I saw the very last Clouded Yellow at Ouse Est on November 10th and Speckled Wood Small White both in early November with other Clouded Yellows .

Re: Sussex Kipper

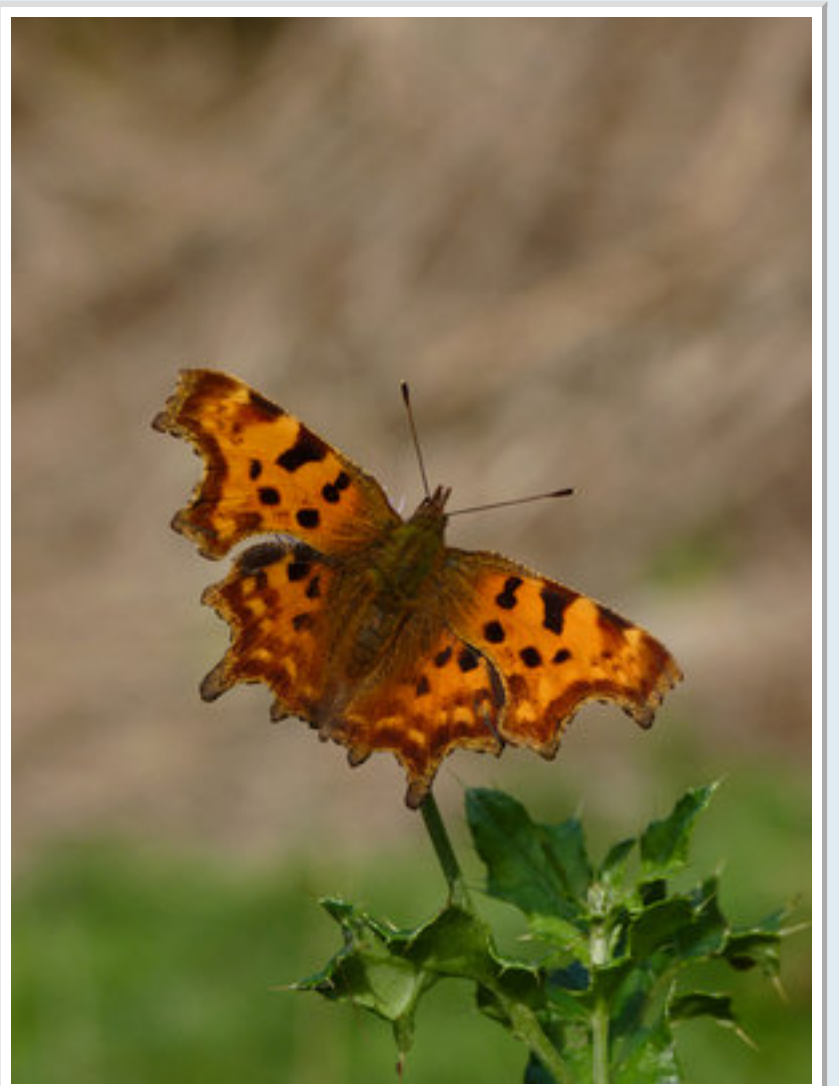
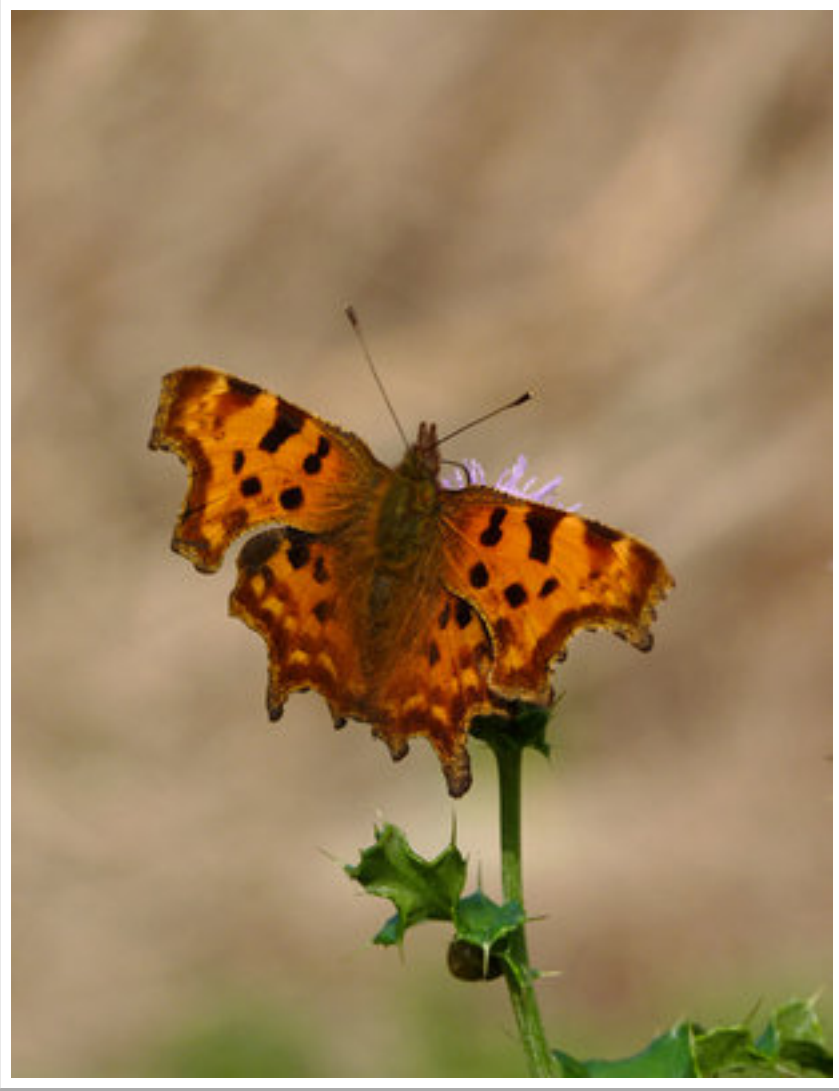
by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-10 05:31 AM GMT

Recent News

Monday 4 October – In my Worthing garden I watched a Red Admiral 'guttering'. This is how I describe that slow and deliberate fluttering around the eaves of a house, as butterflies search for somewhere to 'hole-up' for the winter. I see large numbers of Small Tortoiseshell doing this every autumn, but it's not a behaviour pattern I associate with Red Admirals. I opened an upstairs window to see if it would make an attempt to enter the house. After half an hour I closed the window, only to find it fluttering against the glass ten minutes later! A Comma was also seen nectaring on the ivy on my garage roof.

Thursday 7 October – On a beautiful, warm, sunny morning I met up with the Head Forester of the Norfolk Estate, to discuss this winter's habitat management work in the woods near Arundel. As always the Estate could not have been more helpful and generous in its assistance. As I walked around the woods I saw 6 Commas and single Red Admiral, Peacock, Brimstone and Speckled Wood, the latter having only just emerged.

Saturday 9 October – During a flying visit to finalise work party plans at Rewell Wood, I saw 10 Commas and a battered old Speckled Wood.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Oct-10 08:49 PM GMT

BC Sussex Branch AGM

Eighty six people attended the Branch AGM on Sunday. I moved the official business on as rapidly as possible, but made time to list some of the more major advances made through the 2009 – 2010 period by our hard working committee and associates – it's a privilege to work with such a great group of people. These included the acquisition of Rowland Wood (80 acres next to the existing reserve at Park Corner Heath), the launch of the Sussex Butterfly Atlas (2010–2014), the formation of the 'Rother Guardians' (to continue SE Woodlands Project Officer Steve Wheatley's work in the area), the launch of the new, all-colour Annual Butterfly Report, the launch of the Big Biodiversity Butterfly Count in Brighton, the adoption of new data capture and manipulation software by the Recording sub-committee and the increase in Transects and Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey squares being monitored.

I also listed the organisations, bodies and individuals that have all, in some way, helped us in our efforts to conserve butterflies and moths: South Downs Joint Committee (staff, contractors and volunteers), Natural England, Forestry Commission, National Trust, West Dean Estate, Norfolk Estate, Barlavington Estate, Wiston Estate (Steyning Downland Scheme), Springhead Estate, Murray Downland Trust, Graffham Down Trust, Brinsbury (Chichester) College, West and East Sussex County Councils, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, Environment Agency, Mike Mullis and, of course, our own trusty volunteers (apologies to any that I might have overlooked).

Covering more up-to-date news (post-March 2010) I reported on the spectacular increases in Duke of Burgundy numbers on several sites we have been working on, the positive reaction of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary to habitat management on and adjacent to our Park Corner Heath Reserve, and the unique project being run by Dr Dan Danahar on the playing fields of the Dorothy Stringer School in Brighton. Here, the creation of a chalk grassland Butterfly Haven has attracted species including Small Blue, Adonis Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Green Hairstreak and Marbled White into urban Brighton. Youngsters, who might not have such easy access to the countryside as others, have been turning up here to see beautiful downland butterflies!



Then it was time for the fun to begin. Patrick Barkham treated us to several passages from his new book 'The Butterfly Isles' and recounted some of the highs and lows experienced in the pursuit of all the British species in a single season. It's a beautifully written book – but I'll leave that for you to find out. The 30 copies he kindly signed for our members were snapped up very quickly. After his talk I presented him with a framed photograph of the butterfly that first ignited his passion as a child – the Brown Argus.



It was time for Michael Blencowe. Those that have heard one of Michael's talks know that he has a unique talent in getting the serious message of 'conservation' across, while at the same time reducing the audience to tears of laughter (we always have to mop the floor afterwards). 'Thank you' to all those that helped with logistics, and for so many of our members for attending what was a most memorable and enjoyable day. Appended are a couple of slides from Michael's talk (I would like to point out that I have better legs than Danielle Hulme) and thanks to Colin Knight for the other AGM images.



MALCOLM LE BLENOWE
CONSERVATION OFFICER FOR EAST VANCOVER ISLAND



DANIELLE HULME
CONSERVATION OFFICER FOR WEST VANCOVER ISLAND

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Piers, 13-Oct-10 09:09 PM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

I would like to point out that I have better legs than Danielle Hulme

..but that's the face of a woman who's shown many a man a good time.. Let me have her number Neil..!!

Felix.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Oct-10 09:31 PM GMT

Hi Felix,

Join the queue..... she's only a second cousin! 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 13-Oct-10 10:41 PM GMT

Well done Neil & Co.

I am now a member of the Sussex Branch (country member in reality at my distance) and would have loved to have been able to attend. But I guess I'll see many of you much nearer to home when the BC Members' Day is held in Cambridge on 20th November.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 14-Oct-10 12:59 AM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

It was time for Michael Blencowe. Those that have heard one of Michael's talks know that he has a unique talent in getting the

serious message of 'conservation' across, while at the same time reducing the audience to tears of laughter (we always have to mop the floor afterwards). Appended are a couple of slides from Michael's talk (I would like to point out that I have better legs than Danielle Hulme)

Michael's presentation was as innovative and enjoyable as always, but I'm still getting some unsettling flashbacks.

Book me in again for next year 😊 .

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 14-Oct-10 03:46 AM GMT

Danielle Hulme? Neilella more likely.

Good PhotoShop effort there 😊

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Oct-10 02:39 AM GMT

Clouded Yellows And Ammonites

While spending a couple of days in Bournemouth with Hannah, it was inevitable that we'd have to take a walk along Southbourne undercliff, to see if there were still a few Clouded Yellows around. On a beautiful, warm Saturday afternoon (16th October) we saw a total of four (3m, 1f), including a three-way chase. Other butterflies included a dozen Small Whites, two Large Whites, a Small Copper – and two Red Admirals which came off the water, over the beach and straight up over the cliff!



As always there were plenty of Stonechats about, but we were rather more impressed by three Dartford Warblers which gave excellent views as they perched high up on the scrub.

On the previous afternoon we had taken the mini-ferry out to Mudeford Spit, where I found this impressive ammonite lying on the beach. I can recommend the moules frites in the resaurant here 😊.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 19-Oct-10 09:11 PM GMT

Work Party Season Kicks Off

On Sunday (17th October) I joined a mix of South Downs Joint Committee and BC Sussex volunteers to continue habitat management work for the Duke of Burgundy, on Norfolk Estate land near Arundel. A good deal of heavy scrub clearance and beech removal had already been achieved during the previous week, thanks to the very generous assistance of Head Forester Mark Aldridge and his team. The first image shows the recently cleared, lower part of a triangular area, separated from the upper strip (which was cleared in the winter of 2008/2009) by a retained scrub-line. A similar scrub-line runs down the hill, to form sheltered, warm compartments. Male Dukes will set up their territories against these linear features and females will find suitable *Primulas* on which to lay eggs both within and on the edge of these areas. The upper and lower compartments will each now be partially 'rough-mown', in an irregular mosaic pattern, every other year.



The second image shows a view upslope, and the narrow track which separates the up/down scrub-line from a maturing conifer block to the right. When this colony was discovered in the spring of 2008, the edge of this short track provided the last fragment of suitable habitat available to the butterfly, which was trapped on all sides by impenetrable woodland. The triangular area of scrub and beech was becoming so densely overgrown that it was difficult to find any food-plant at all. The situation looks vastly better today and is improving rapidly, with habitat corridors being opened up to both the North and South, connecting to other suitable areas - one of which was colonised by Dukes in the first spring following the initial cut through 60' tall conifers.



The last image shows Sunday's volunteers working along the woodland edge from where the first picture was taken. Here, the hazel understory is being removed to allow dappled sunlight through, and exposing a bank which will be planted with Primrose. Cowslip occurs in the more open, cleared areas, giving the butterfly the choice of both food-plants.



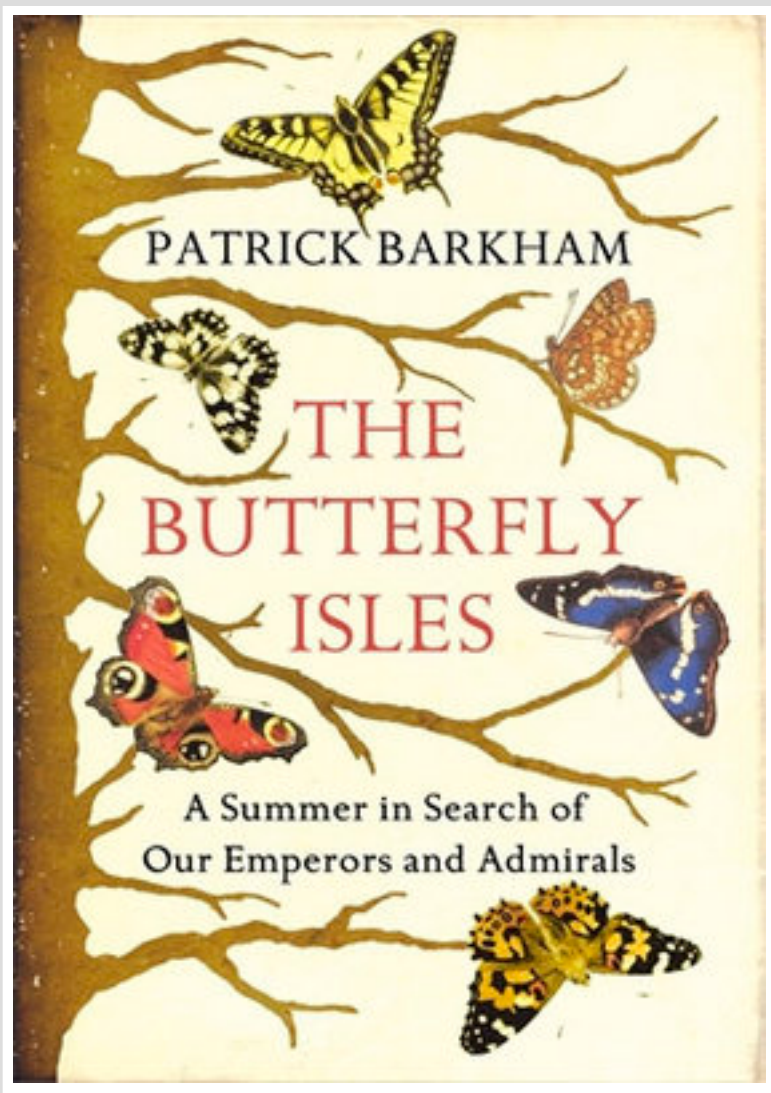
Sunday's local heroes were: Helena Lewis, Frances Court, Leonie Haines, Cris Savill, Allen Watts, Paul Day and Simon Mockford.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Oct-10 11:11 PM GMT

Boozy Book Launch

On Tuesday evening (19th October) I travelled up to London to attend Patrick Barkham's launch party for 'The Butterfly Isles'. By the time I arrived at the Crown Tavern on Clerkenwell Green, the place was buzzing with an eclectic mix of butterfly enthusiasts and journalists. A couple of young women were wearing butterfly masks, forcing them to drink through proboscis-like straws – a most welcome sight at the end of the flight season. It was a great evening, fuelled by Patrick's generous free bar and providing an opportunity to catch up with the likes of Gail Jeffcoate, Prof. Jeremy Thomas, Dr Martin Warren, Matthew Oates, Mike McCarthy (The Independent and author of the fabulous 'Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo') and, of course, Patrick himself. In the past I've spent a lot of time in London pubs, but this was the first time I've ever had the opportunity to talk about butterflies!



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 21-Oct-10 11:31 PM GMT

More Work For The Duke

On Wednesday (20th October) I attended another work party on Norfolk Estate land near Arundel. With so many hands at work it wasn't long before a once-dark-and-dingy narrow track was converted into a beautiful, wide and sunny ride. Some 'blocks' had already been cleared last winter, so by connecting them up we created a linear strip with sections of alternating age, in terms of regeneration. These will be managed in a rotational manner, to retain an uneven profile of low scrub. This should give the Primrose just sufficient in the way of protection from the sun, to provide Duke of Burgundy females with the correct conditions for egg-laying.



Wednesday's 'roll of honour' reads Diana Sadler, David Gibson, Nick Egerton, Mike Carter, Roger Townsend, James Tolson, Dick Cole, Ivan Standing, Ron McCann, Jake Wright, Simon Mockford, Martin Kalaher, Colin Knight, Roger Martin and Paul Day.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 22-Oct-10 01:22 AM GMT

Neil name dropped:

....Mike McCarthy (The Independent and author of the fabulous 'Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo')....

I'm on the last chapter. Marvellous book but a sad story. Highly recommended.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by NickMorgan, 22-Oct-10 05:11 AM GMT

That's fantastic work on the Norfolk Estate. I really wish that something like that could be done up here, but the landowners are determined to use every square inch for wheat or barley. I have been trying to create a little oasis on a couple of fields that are owned by the Council, but after various chunks of hedge were pulled up by the neighbouring farmer he then went in and sprayed the margins with weed killer. I can't even get the Council to phone him to ask why he did this. Now everyone involved in the project has completely lost heart.

At least it is good to know that there are successful projects elsewhere in the UK.

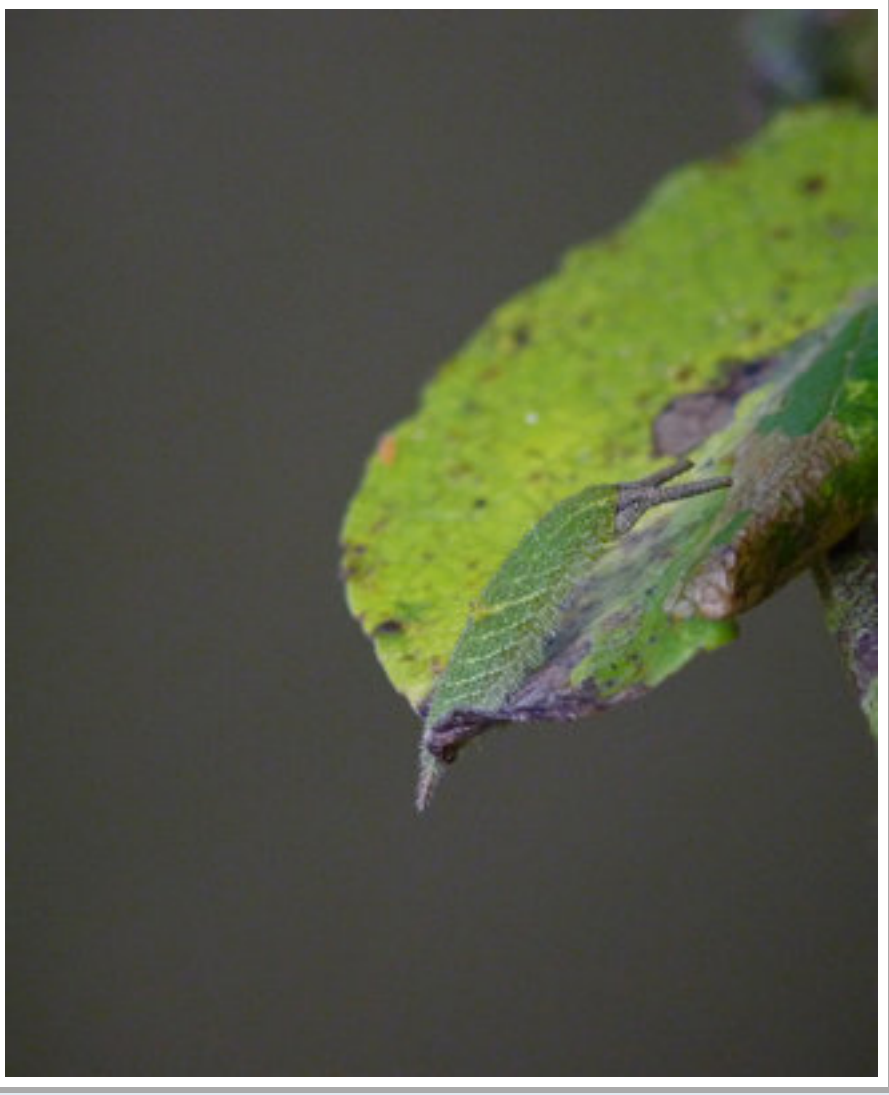
Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 25-Oct-10 08:10 PM GMT

Emperor Prepares For Winter

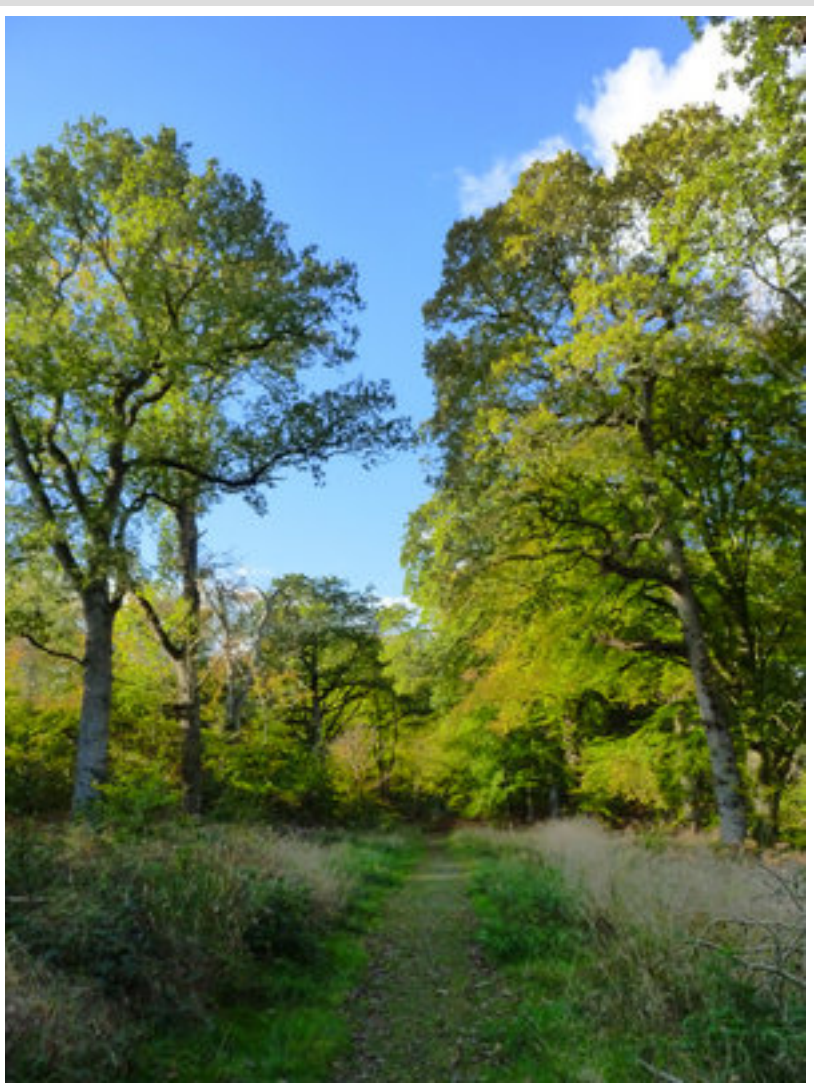
Firstly, 'congratulations' to Pete on taking over the Chair for the Hants & IOW Branch – an excellent 'signing' for Butterfly Conservation. The Branch will also benefit from having Gary (Gruditch) on board too. Only a stinking cold prevented me from attending the coronation.

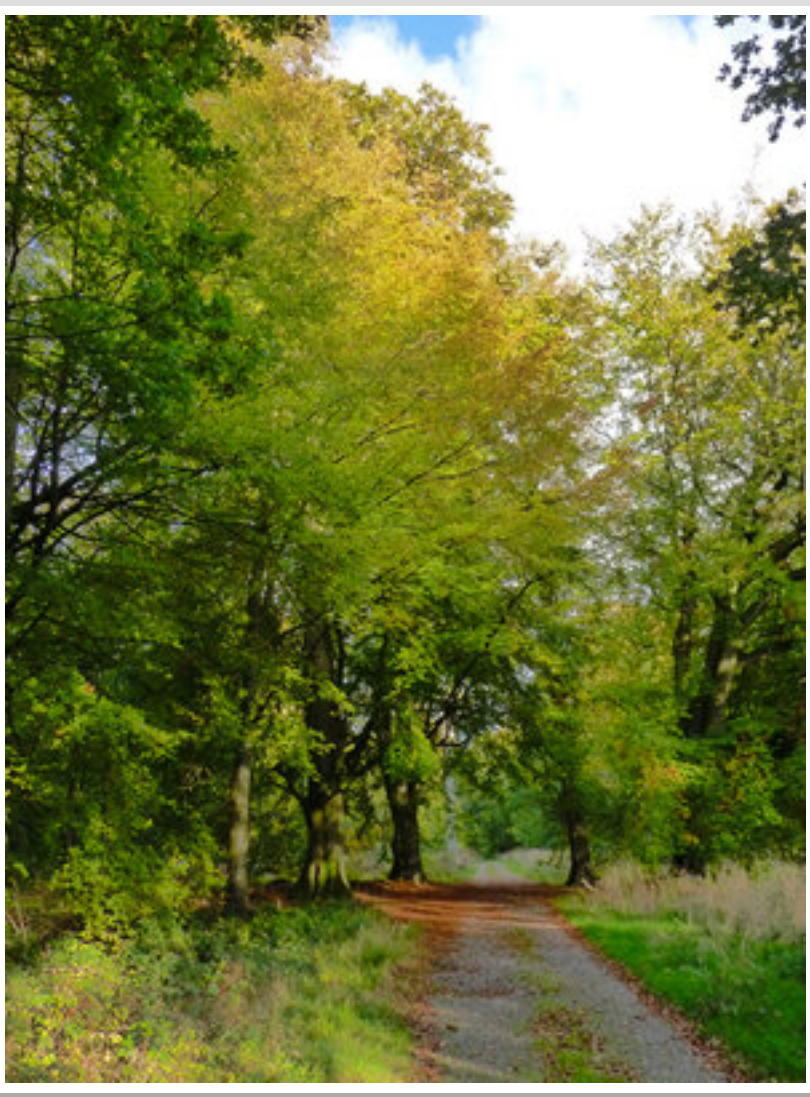
After raiding the medicine cabinet my 'man flu' was no longer life-threatening by Sunday (24th October), so I headed off to meet Matthew Oates and some of the Purple Emperor caterpillars he's studying. Some are still bright green and feeding – we watched one having a poo. Others are turning colour rapidly and will soon be taking a wander, to find a nice crevice in the bark, or a terminal or lateral bud, against which they'll spin a silk pad to keep them secure. The odd one had already bedded down for the winter, taking on a remarkable, mottled, dull greenish grey camouflage. The best count (including a couple of newbies) was 6 on a single willow.





These fascinating little creatures were the highlight of the day, but it was a pleasure in itself just to be out in the woods in such beautiful autumn sunshine.





Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 31-Oct-10 10:27 PM GMT

Death's-head Hawk-moth

A Butterfly Conservation press release on Friday (29th October) asked members of the public to report any 2010 sightings of the spectacular Death's-head Hawk-moth. The article can be read online at <http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=2369> on the fabulous BirdGuides website (some great stuff on Waxwings here). My older brother Mark supplied some nice images of the adult moth that he and my nephew Tom raised from a caterpillar they found in France.





The nearest I've ever got to seeing this mythical beast in the UK, was when a friend walked into an Arundel pub a few years back, and described some 'giant caterpillars' he had found in his garden the previous week. I knew immediately that they were hawk-moths when he confirmed they had 'spikes', but I started to get excited when he described the base colour as yellow! Aware that he had a tiny, paved garden in the middle of the 'old town', I asked him if he had grown any potato plants - "yes, two.... how did you know?". Unfortunately he had taken them in and put them in a jar (with leaves), just at the time when the two full-grown cats were about to pupate. No happy ending I'm afraid (one shrivelled corpse was later discovered in the basement) - and I still give him a hard time about it today. Ouch!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-10 04:34 AM GMT

First Project Completed

On Friday (5th November) I met another group of South Downs Joint Committee and Butterfly Conservation volunteers, to complete the first phase of our 2010/2011 work in woodland on the Norfolk Estate at Arundel. A large, 'new' area has now been cleared in readiness for the Duke of Burgundy.



Although butterflies have disappeared for the year, creating new habitat such as this fills me with optimism for next season, and makes the dark months ahead feel a little less daunting.

Brian Blaber, Steve Alberry, Simon Mockford, Martin Kalaher, Paul Day, Colin Knight and Roger Martin moved mountains of brash to leave the place looking perfect for the butterfly. We'll return later in the winter, to an adjacent area, but for now it's time to move on and improve another site.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 10-Nov-10 05:21 AM GMT

Well done Neil & Co. The habitat looks superb.

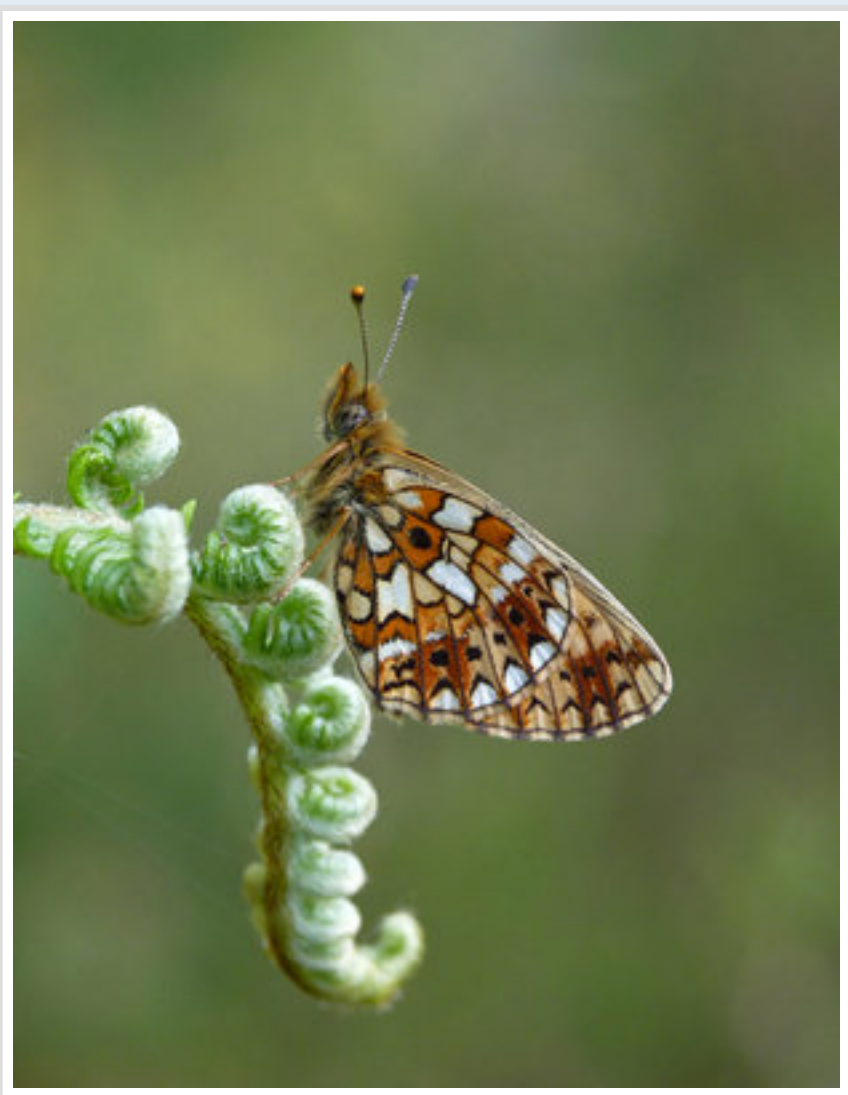
PS Had you noticed that D of B pupa just beneath those bushes on the right? 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-10 05:26 AM GMT

Best Of 2010 (Part 1)

One of the (few) advantages of the longer evenings is that there's now time to sort out the piles of 2010 data for our BC Branch Recorder, and time to curate the best photographs taken during the season. The following images bring back a few very happy memories.



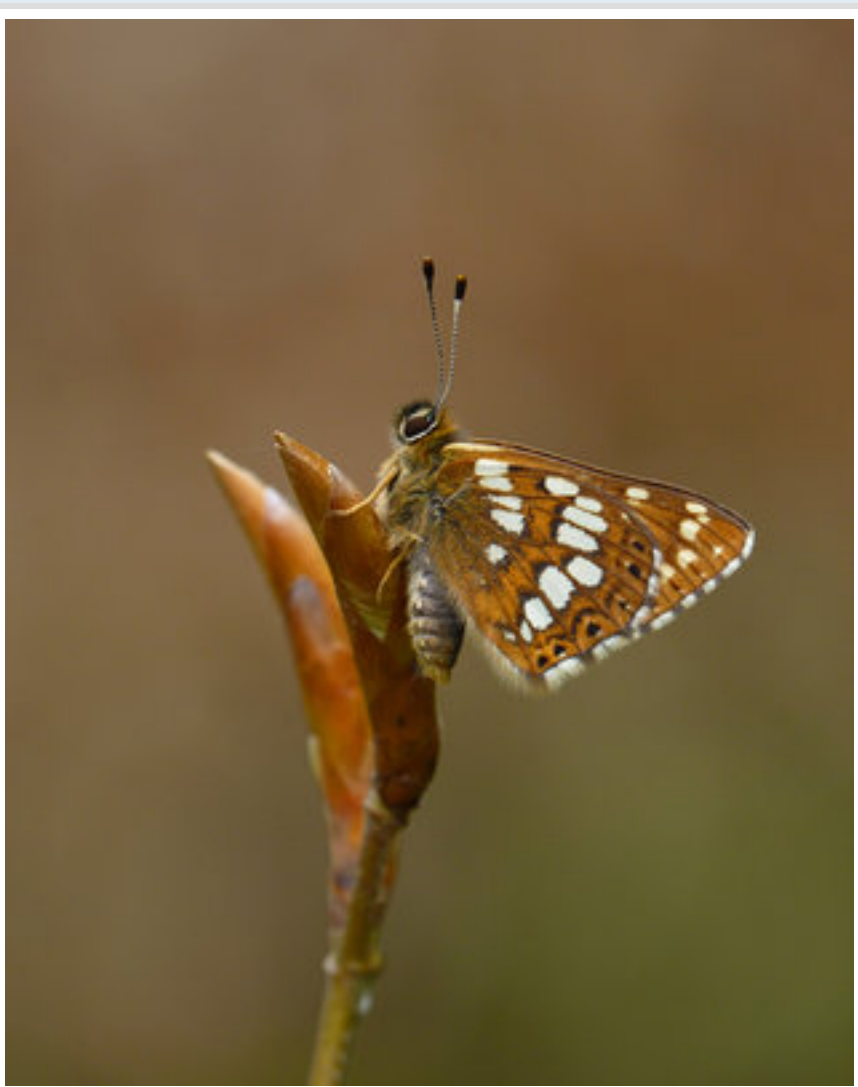
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary



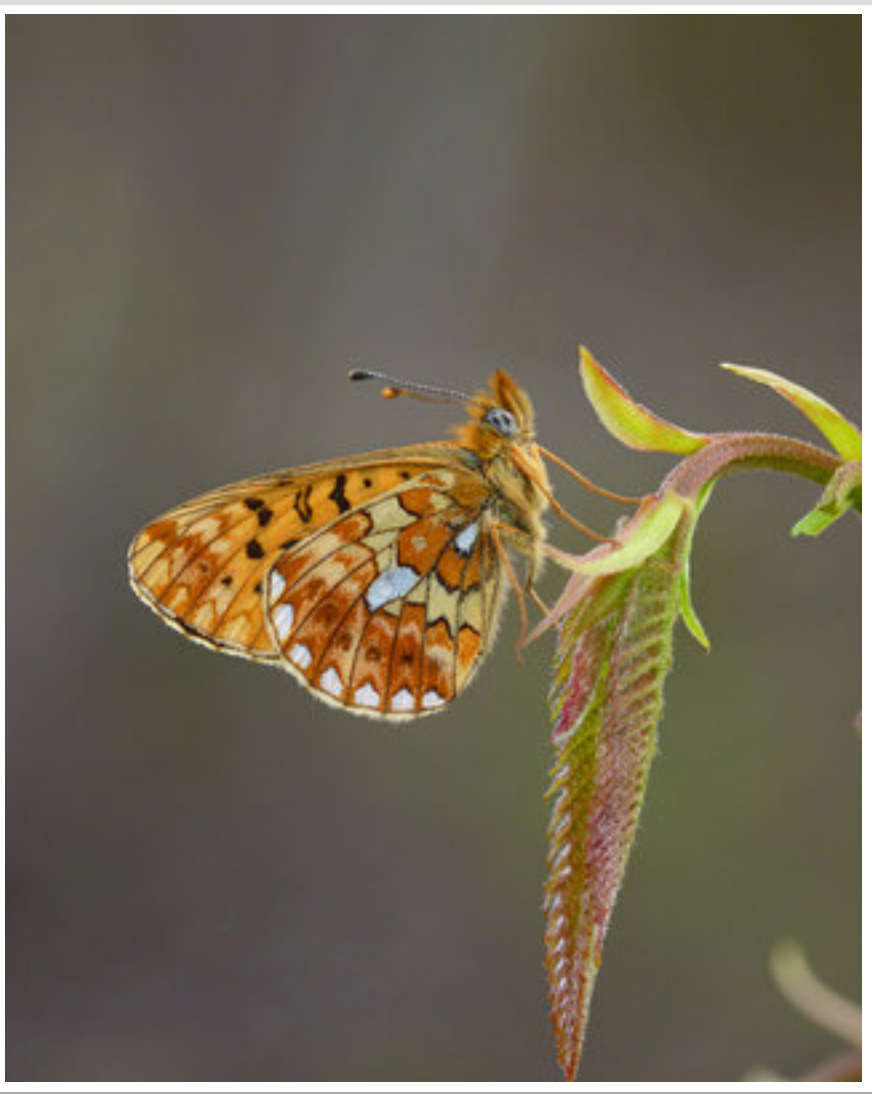
Wood White



Purple Emperor



Duke of Burgundy

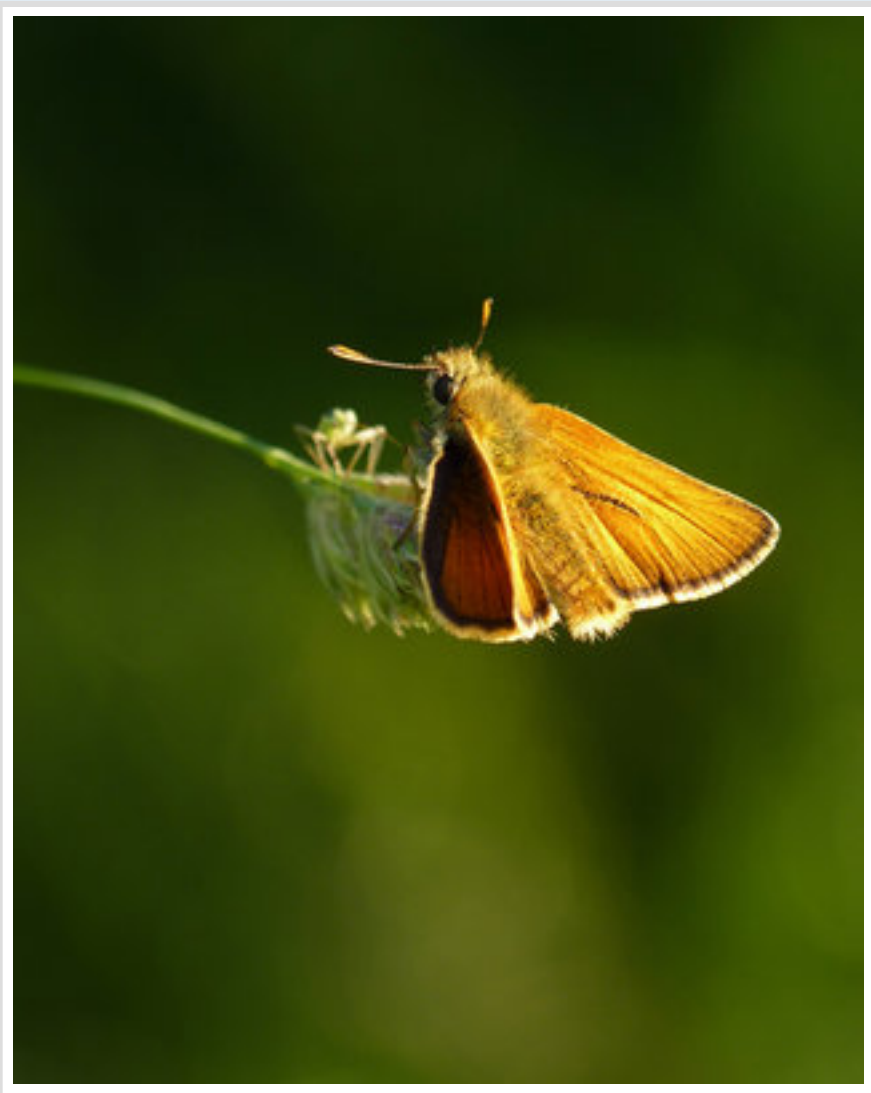


Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Green Hairstreak

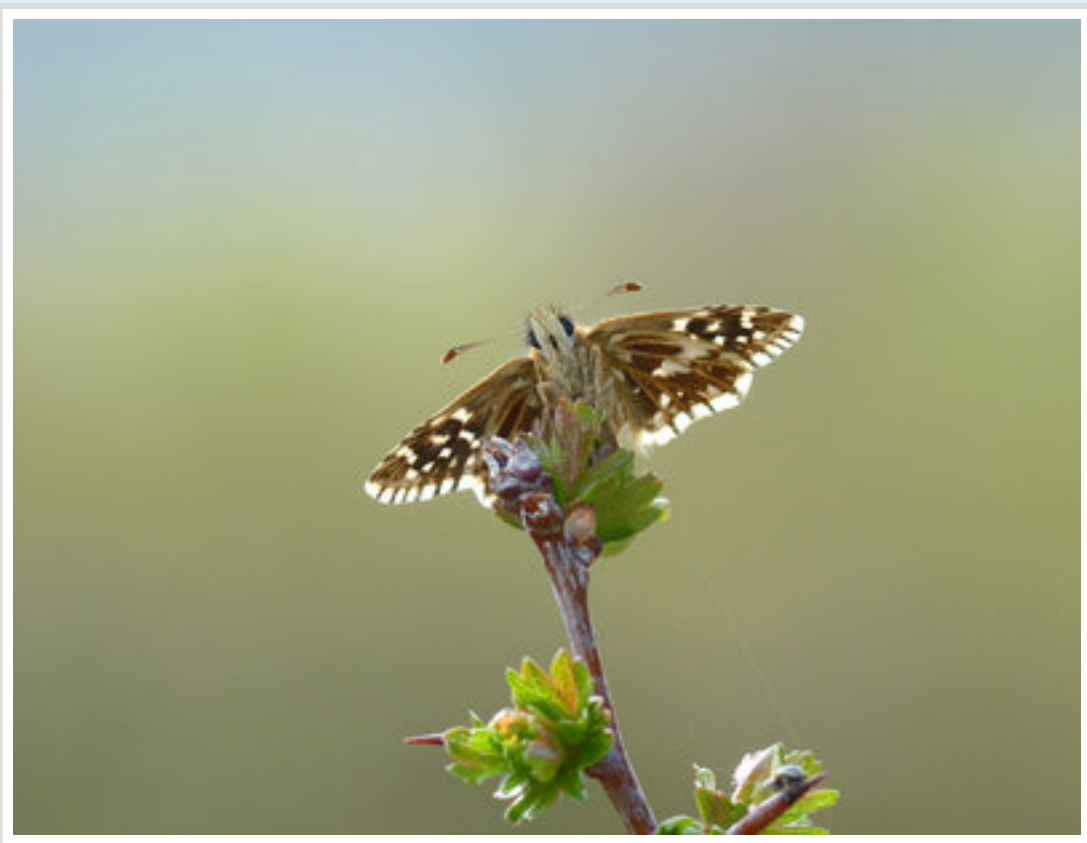




Small Skipper



Black Hairstreak



Grizzled Skipper



Brown Hairstreak



Heath Fritillary



White-letter Hairstreak



Adonis Blue



Chalkhill Blue

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 10-Nov-10 05:50 AM GMT

Great photos Neil! Glad you were recognised in the awards. I look forward to part 2. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-10 05:57 AM GMT

Thanks Ian,

I was delighted to get onto the podium, especially in a category where there were only ever two places available after Phil posted that Silver-studded Blue shot!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 10-Nov-10 06:05 AM GMT

"Well done Neil & Co. The habitat looks superb"

Thanks Jack,

You're welcome to a tour if you make your usual trip South in the spring. Aside from increased numbers of Dukes, I'm expecting Pearl-bordered Fritillaries to show up here soon. To see the two species flying side-by-side would be fantastic – and a rare sight these days!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 10-Nov-10 03:41 PM GMT

Sussex Kipper:

You're welcome to a tour if you make your usual trip South in the spring

And I will be able to do so with a clear conscience next year being now a paid up member of the Sussex Branch. And I don't think you'd be giving any secrets away: can you confirm that the new area is close to where you showed me the Dukes last year?

One thing I always notice about your photos Neil: you have delightfully diffuse backgrounds, clearly an excellent recipe.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-10 02:41 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

Yes - the area we've just completed is close-by, but it's hard to recognise! Looking at that last image, only a couple of years back there was nothing but impenetrable vegetation between the viewing point and the tall beech in the furthest distance.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-10 03:27 AM GMT

Brinsbury Campus Visit

On Tuesday (9th November) I visited the Chichester College Brinsbury Campus near Pulborough, to talk to a group of students about the conservation of butterflies, and particularly the Brown Hairstreak. One of the students (Lee) had spotted a female hairstreak on the campus in the summer, and he and his colleagues had already found a few eggs. After a classroom session we headed out to the far reaches of the estate, and after a slow start we hit a more productive stretch of blackthorn-rich hedge, finding a dozen Brown Hairstreak eggs in all. In future, the blackthorn will be managed with this butterfly in mind, by cutting back the mature, spindly, lichen-covered bushes to promote the growth of new suckers.





At Brinsbury they run a wide range of agricultural, countryside management and forestry courses.... in beautiful surroundings. Their staff and students have provided valuable assistance to the BC Sussex Branch, by performing habitat management work that would otherwise come at a prohibitive price. If students are to learn the art of cutting down trees, where better to direct this effort than at saving rare butterflies? It's an excellent relationship all round.

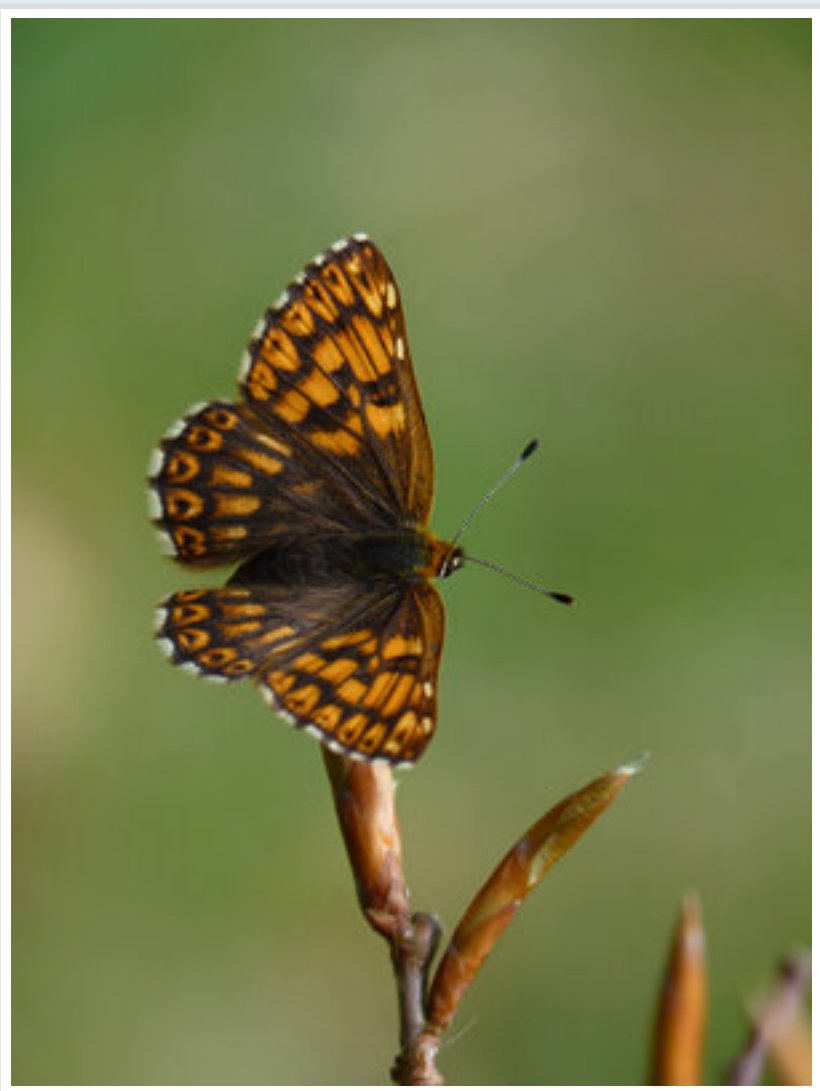
A group of local archaeologists were also at Brinsbury, working on Palaeolithic finds recovered from one of the campus fields. I was shown some stunning flint arrow-heads and a ceremonial dagger. If butterflies didn't take up so much of my time, I'd probably be doing some of this stuff!

Re: Sussex Kipper

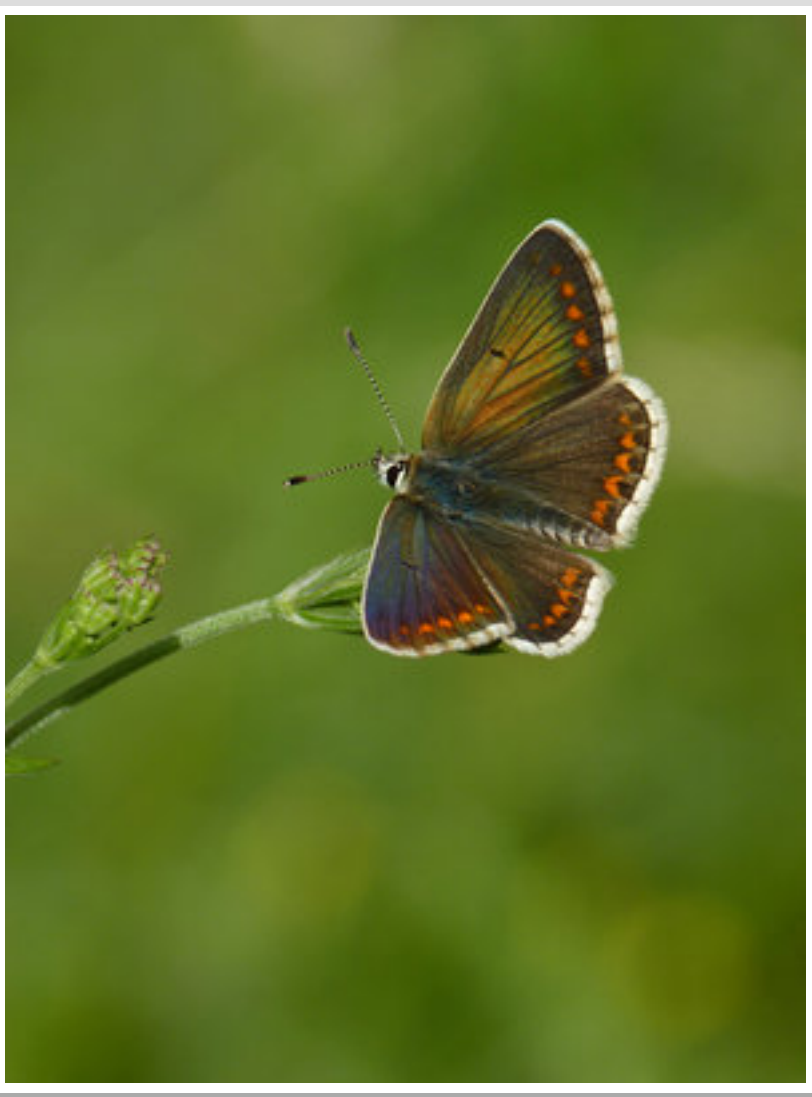
by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-10 03:54 AM GMT

Best Of 2010 (Part 2)

More happy memories!



Duke of Burgundy



Brown Argus



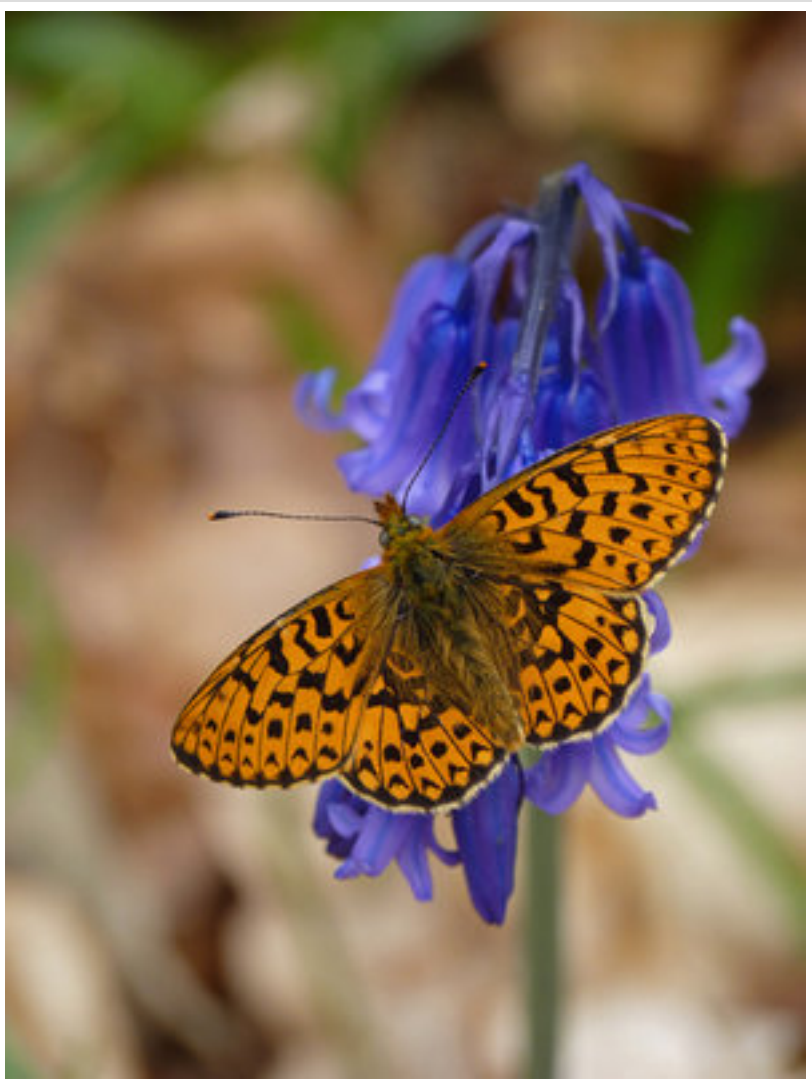
Common Blues



Silver-studded Blue



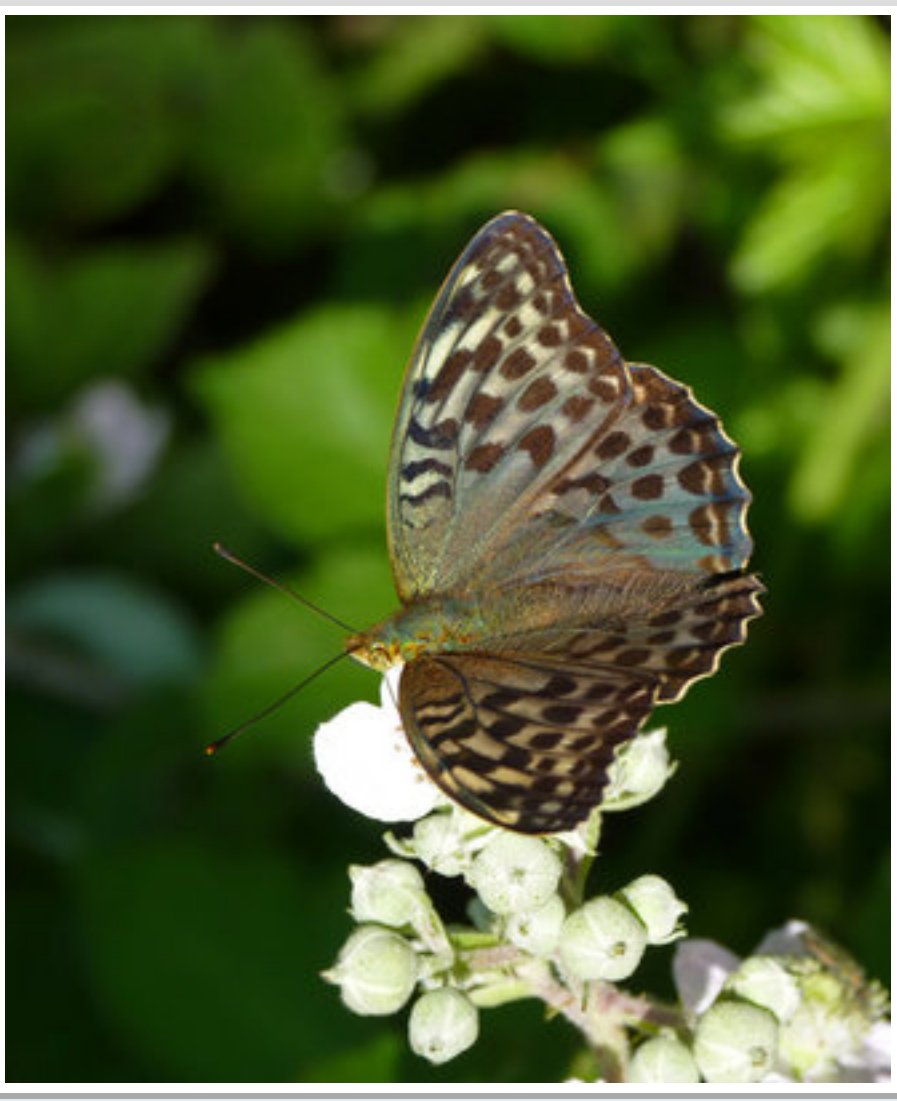
Brown Hairstreak



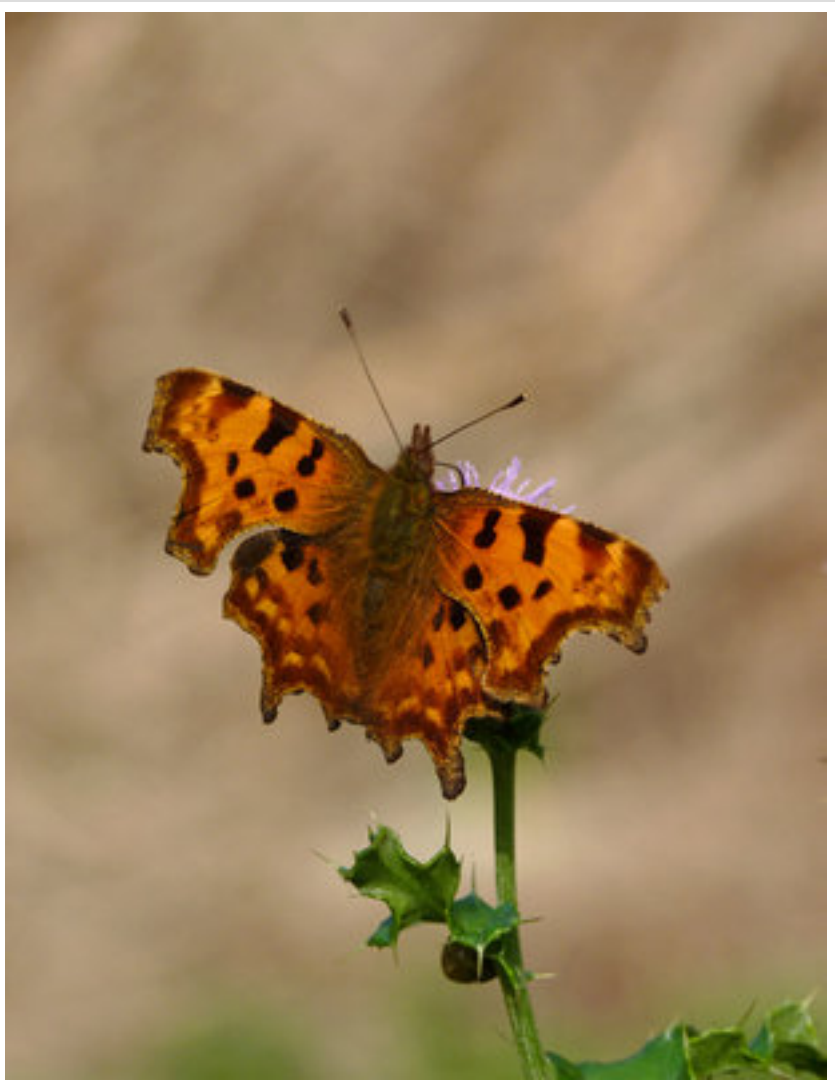
Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Silver-spotted Skipper



Silver-washed Fritillary (*valezina*)



Comma



Large Heath (*davus*)



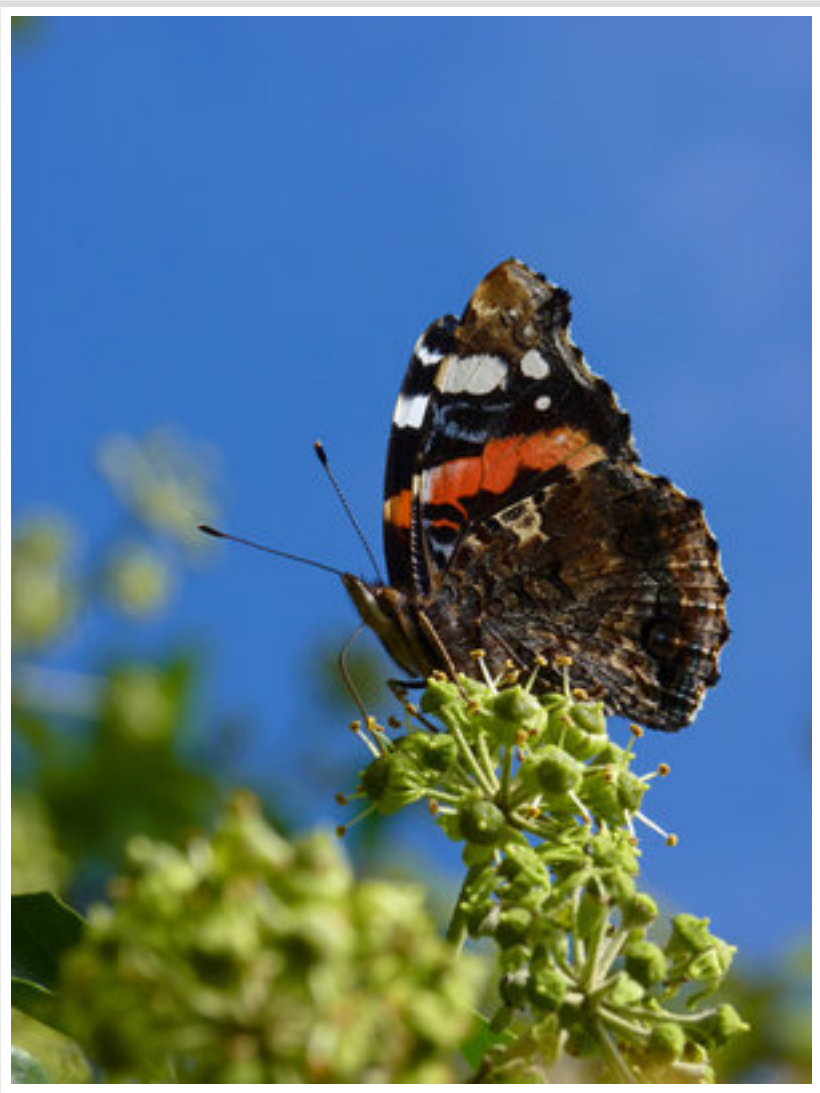
Small Copper



Common Blue (female)



Small Blue



Red Admiral



Essex Skipper


Re: Sussex Kipper

by 59 SPECIES, 11-Nov-10 04:15 AM GMT

Smashing set of images Neil. Great memories I'm sure!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 11-Nov-10 04:26 AM GMT

Were all the photos taken with the Panasonic Lumix? 

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-10 06:46 AM GMT


Thanks 59 SPECIES – compared to the previous couple of seasons it was certainly a good one. I'm already planning my memories for next year, with Chequered Skipper at the top of my list.

Yes Ian, all images were taken with the FZ38 and Panasonic close-up lens. The camera might be (relatively) cheap, but I reckon it's the best in that general price/spec range.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Vince Massimo, 11-Nov-10 09:44 AM GMT

Those are really beautiful images Neil,  are there any more to come? Aberrations perhaps? Nevertheless I would have to say that my favourite image of yours is the one of the Pearl Bordered Fritillary at roost on Sweet Chestnut at Rewell Wood (posted in part 1).

The past season has certainly been very different from 2009, but I think it was most memorable for the large number of aberrations that it produced. Like you, I do not consider winter as a time to be endured, but as a breathing space to sort out all of the photos and plan those all-important trips for next year. On that note, I see that you will be going for some of the northern species next year, so let me know if you need any information on Arnside Knott, Meathop Moss or Cumbrian Mountain Ringlet sites.

Vince

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-10 05:10 PM GMT

Thanks Vince and 'yes', I will probably be in touch for some up-to-date info before heading North next year – thanks for the kind offer. I've scraped together a last batch of '2010 bests', and then I'll sort out the 'aberrants and oddities' – not least because I've promised Pete that I'll move some to the species gallery pages.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 12-Nov-10 05:23 PM GMT

I've already commented on the lovely pastel out-of-focus backgrounds to your shots Neil, but another thing strikes me. You rarely fill the frame so they are more than simply pictures of butterflies. That is a good lesson for many of us to take on board.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by hoverfly, 13-Nov-10 05:08 AM GMT

Great photos Neil, the colour on the Brown Argus is something to behold.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Nov-10 05:12 AM GMT

Thanks hoverfly,

The Brown Argus might be 'under-stated', but in certain light conditions it's a real stunner!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

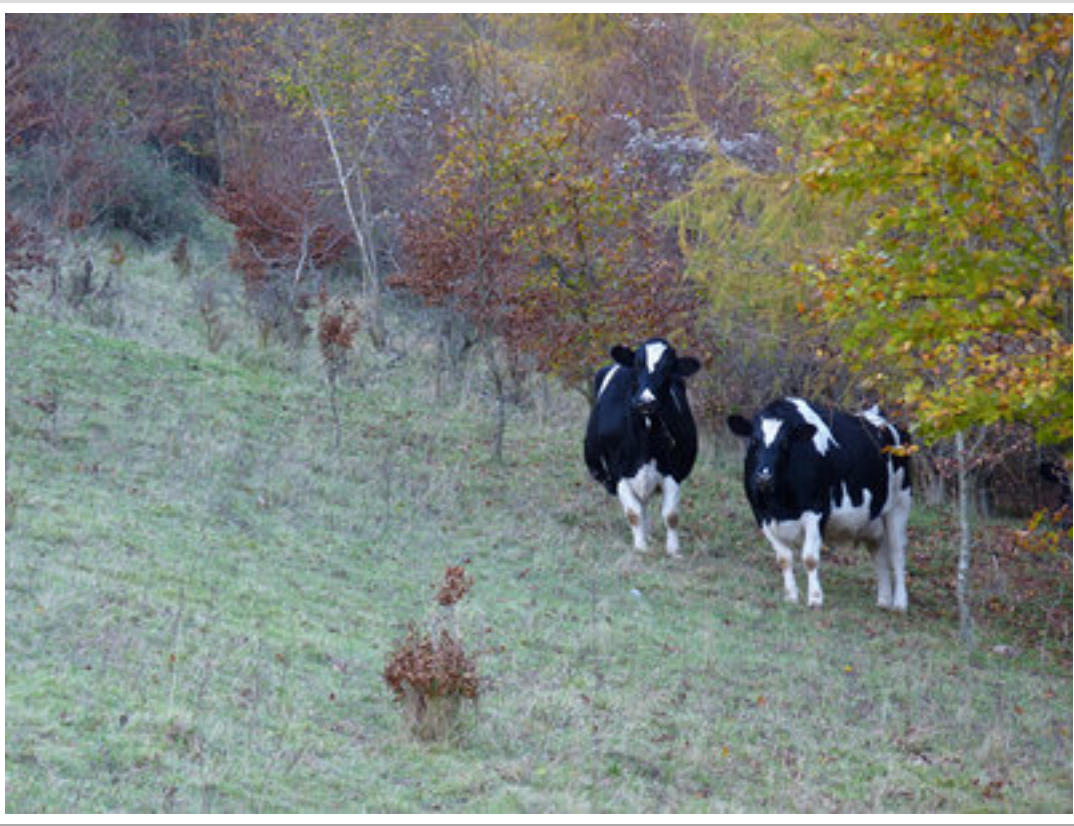
by Neil Hulme, 13-Nov-10 05:17 AM GMT

Conifers Out, Cows In

On Wednesday (10th November), after first dropping in on a farmer to give butterfly-friendly farming advice, I headed over to our best Duke of Burgundy site in Sussex, situated on private land near Chichester. My first job was to assess the recent habitat management work performed by the South Downs Joint Committee contractors and volunteers. A large number of rapidly growing conifers had been removed from the slope – an ongoing project. These don't have to become particularly tall before they start shading out and cooling the habitat, particularly when growing on steep East or West facing slopes, where they cast 'exaggerated' shadows. As the image below shows, the small 'failed' conifers and beech were retained, as the Duke of Burgundy often thrives amongst particularly conifer trees of this size, which provide wind-breaks, localised semi-shade (providing suitable oviposition sites), and perches for the territorial males. It's when these mini-trees become too tall that ideal Duke sites rapidly 'go downhill'. Similar problems were encountered at the well-known 'Bonsai Bank' in Kent, although the situation has now been rectified.



I was also there to assess the progress made by the half-a-dozen elderly dairy cattle which are currently grazing the site. Over-grazing, particularly by sheep, is the single biggest threat to the Duke of Burgundy, so even winter cattle grazing must be done with care. On this site they are being used to control the much longer, coarser grasses at the base of the slope, preventing the build-up of the 'thatch' that will ultimately shade-out the cowslips. The grazing action of cattle results in an ideal, uneven sward mosaic. Cowslips growing within or adjacent to the longer clumps of grass are given protection from UV and are less likely to become desiccated in warm summers – and it is these plants that the female Duke seeks out.



The last image shows an embayment in the tree-line at the base of the slope. This is a firm favourite for the females to lay eggs in. A few years back I sat here for nearly an hour, watching a large batch (8) of Duke eggs hatching out. Unfortunately this was before I owned a camera!

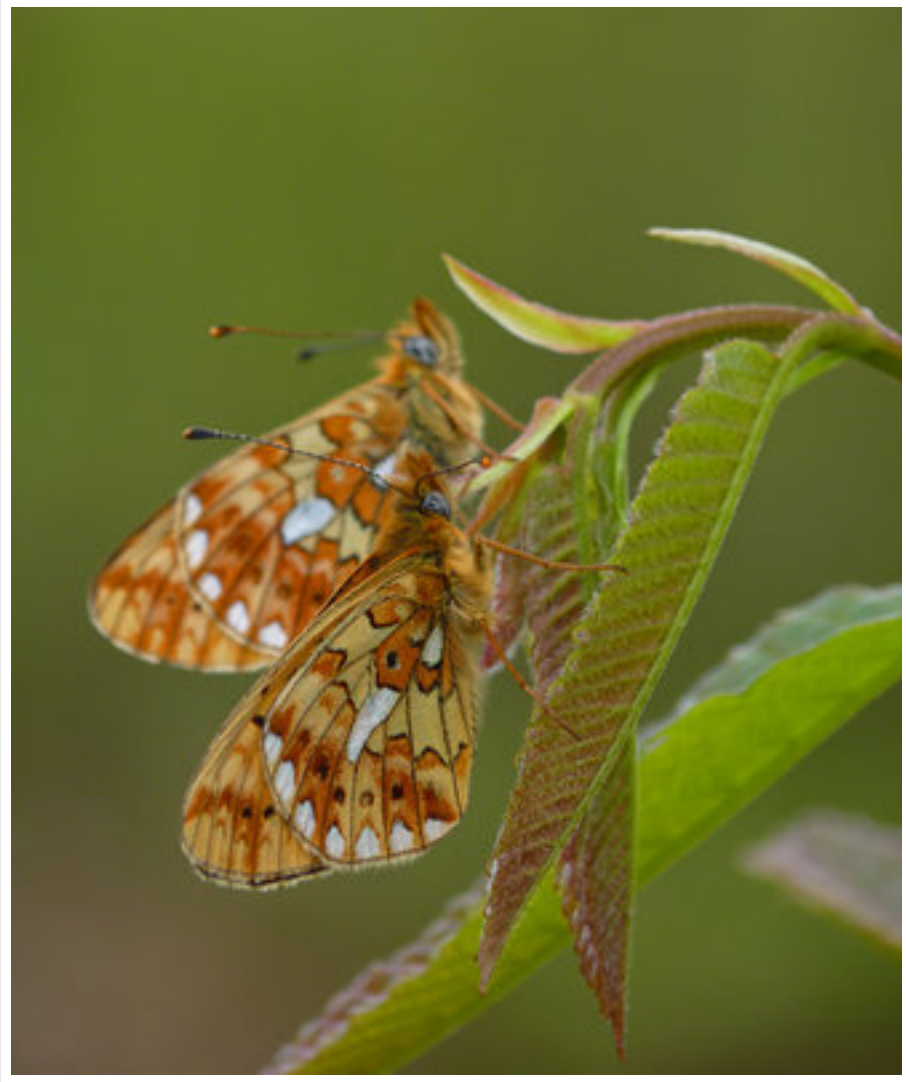


Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Nov-10 09:47 PM GMT



Large Heath (*dorus*)



Roosting Pearl-bordered Fritillaries



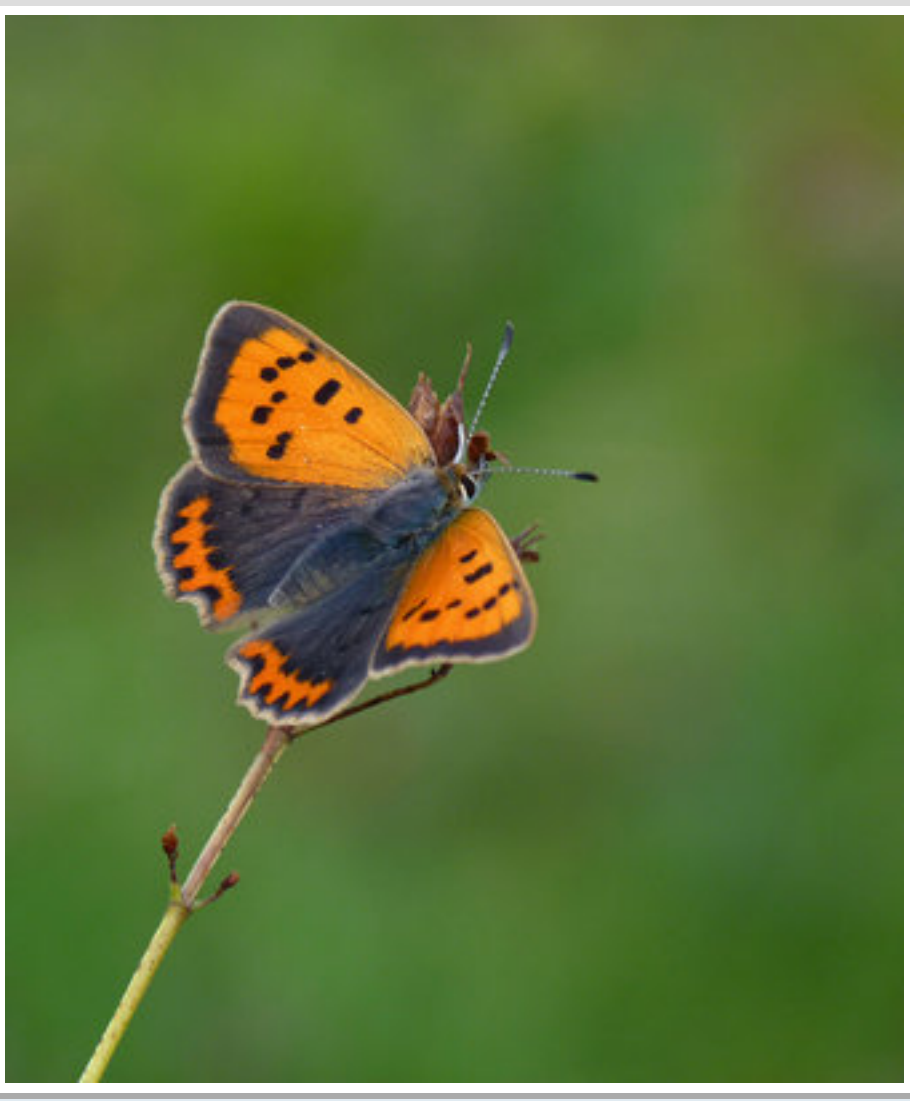
Mating Green Hairstreaks



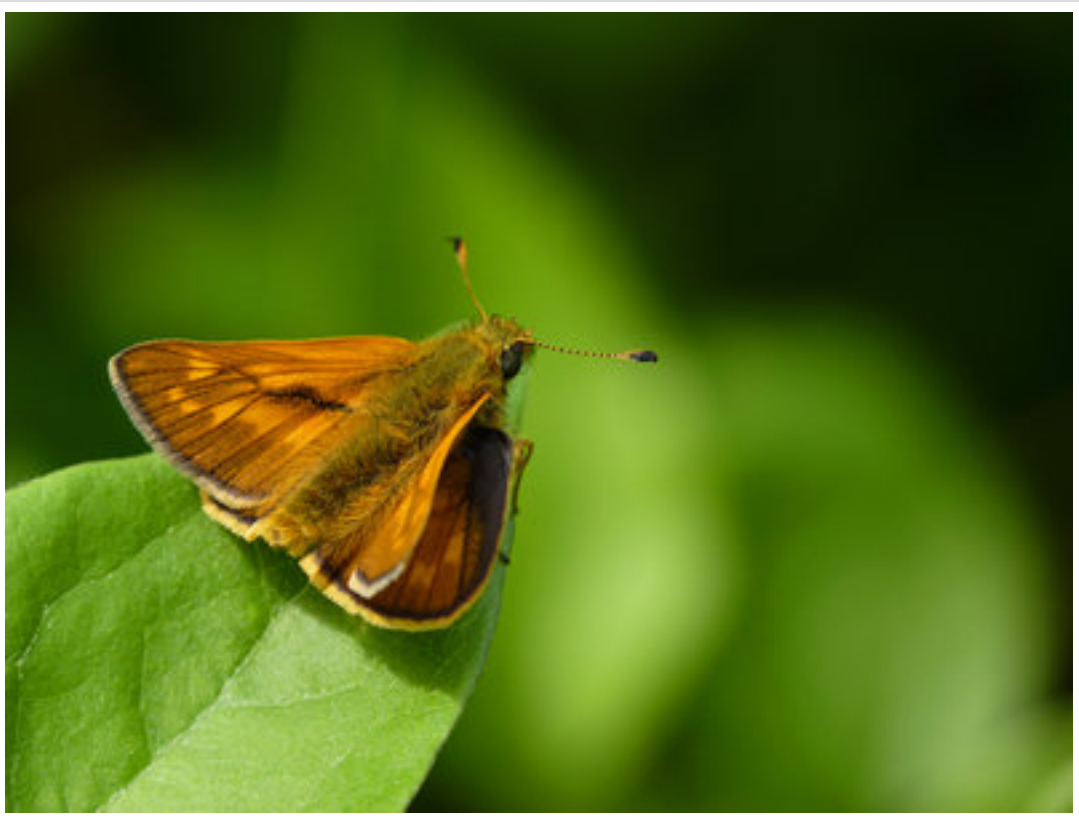
Black Hairstreak



Chalkhill Blue



Small Copper



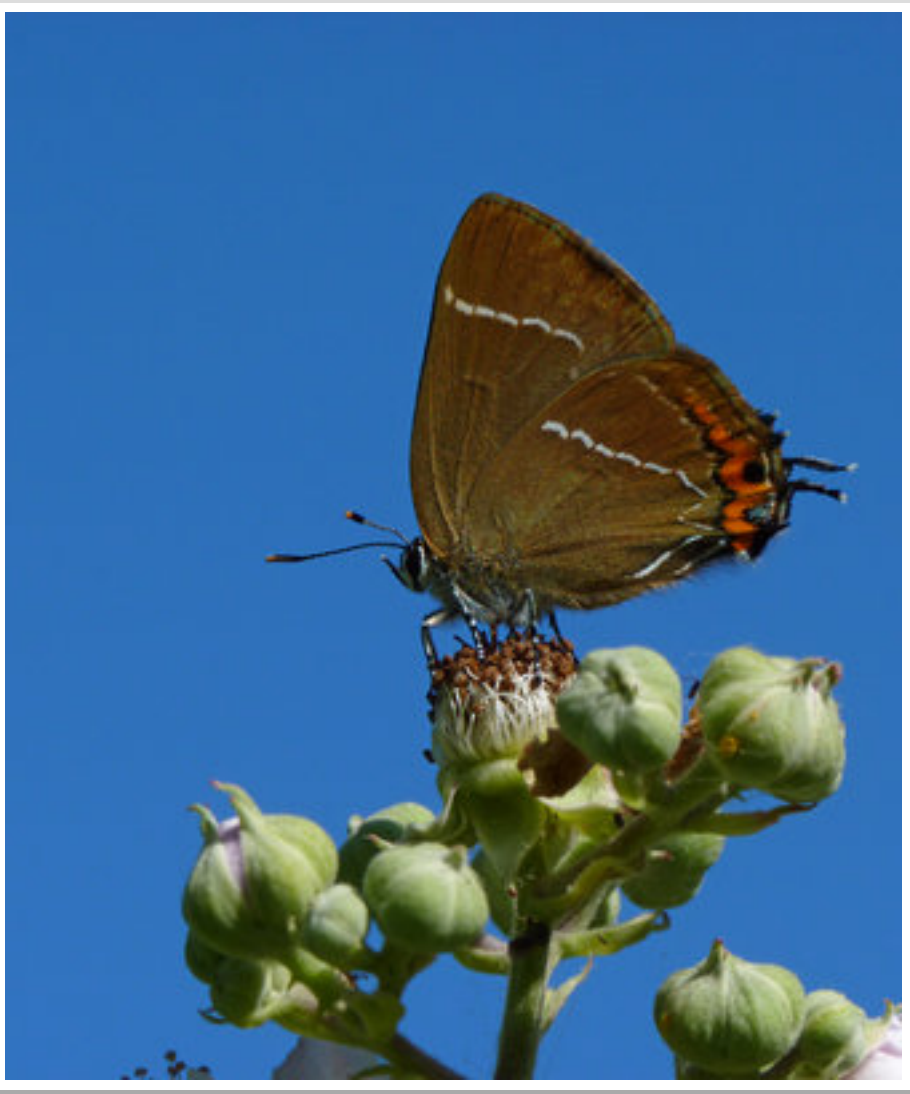
Large Skipper



Brown Argus



Grayling



White-letter Hairstreak



Purple Emperor



Silver-washed Fritillary



Heath Fritillary



Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Mating Small Blues



Duke of Burgundy



Brown Argus



Dingy Skipper



Swallowtail



Grizzled Skipper

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Zonda, 13-Nov-10 11:29 PM GMT

Some real beauties there Neil. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 13-Nov-10 11:41 PM GMT

Thanks Zonda. I can't wait to do it all over again next year. 😊
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 14-Nov-10 04:54 AM GMT

Superb photies, Neil.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Nov-10 06:05 AM GMT

Thanks Susie. You'll probably recognise the Silver-washed Fritillary I'm about to post in 'Best Of The Aberrants'. 😊
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Nov-10 06:39 AM GMT

Best Of The Aberrants

It was another good year for aberrants and oddities in West Sussex (2009 was also very good). Along with the Dukes and Emperors, the *polonus* and *taras* (below) were my favourite butterflies of 2010.



Hybrid Adonis x Chalkhill Blue, 'ab.' *polonus* (*bellargus* x *coridon*)



Grizzled Skipper ab. *taras*



Grizzled Skipper ab. *taras*



Silver-washed Fritillary ab. *confluens* (thanks Susie!)



White Admiral ab. *nigrina*



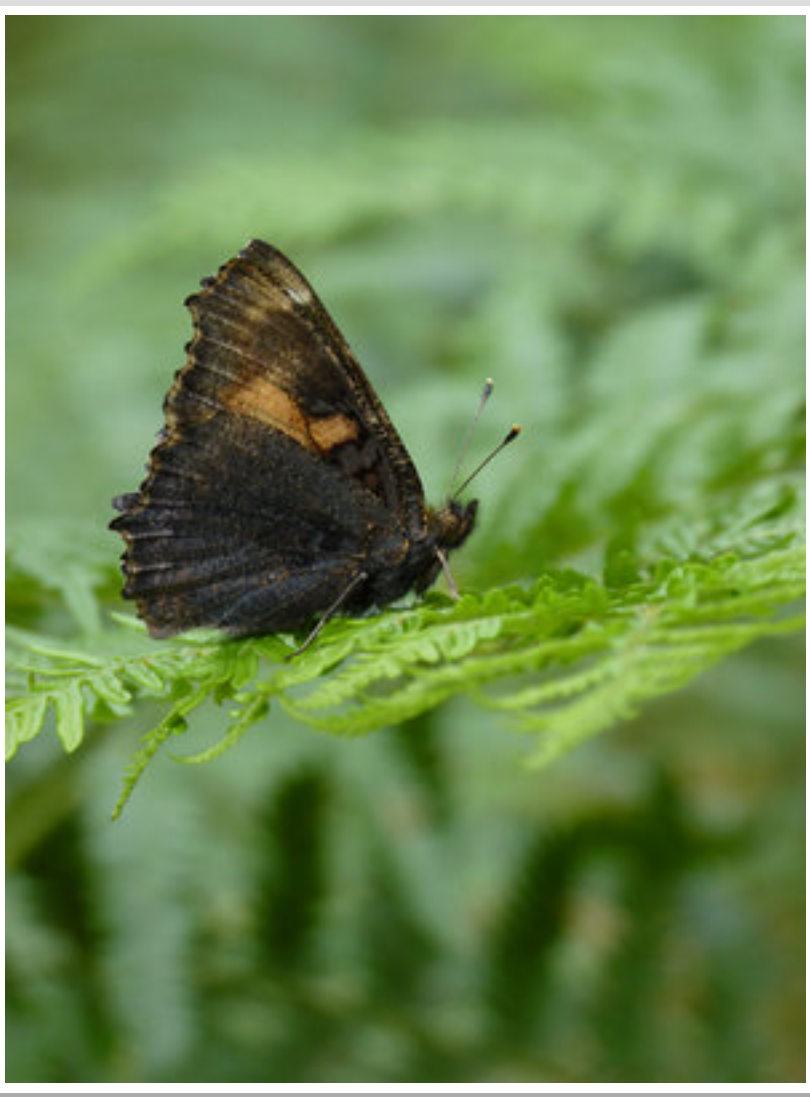
White Admiral ab. *nigrina*



Silver-washed Fritillary form *valezina*



Small Tortoiseshell ab. *nigrita* (thanks Vince!)



Small Tortoiseshell ab. *nigrita*



Ringlet ab. *arete*

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Ian Pratt, 16-Nov-10 04:28 PM GMT

Stunning photos all round- I give up!! Well done for taking so many really wonderful pictures and for sharing them with us. 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Nov-10 07:44 PM GMT

Thanks Ian. I'm just heading off to Fuerteventura for some sunshine 😎. It's not a butterfly holiday (just in case Hannah reads this!), but if anything happens to land on my sangria glass, I'll have the camera ready.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

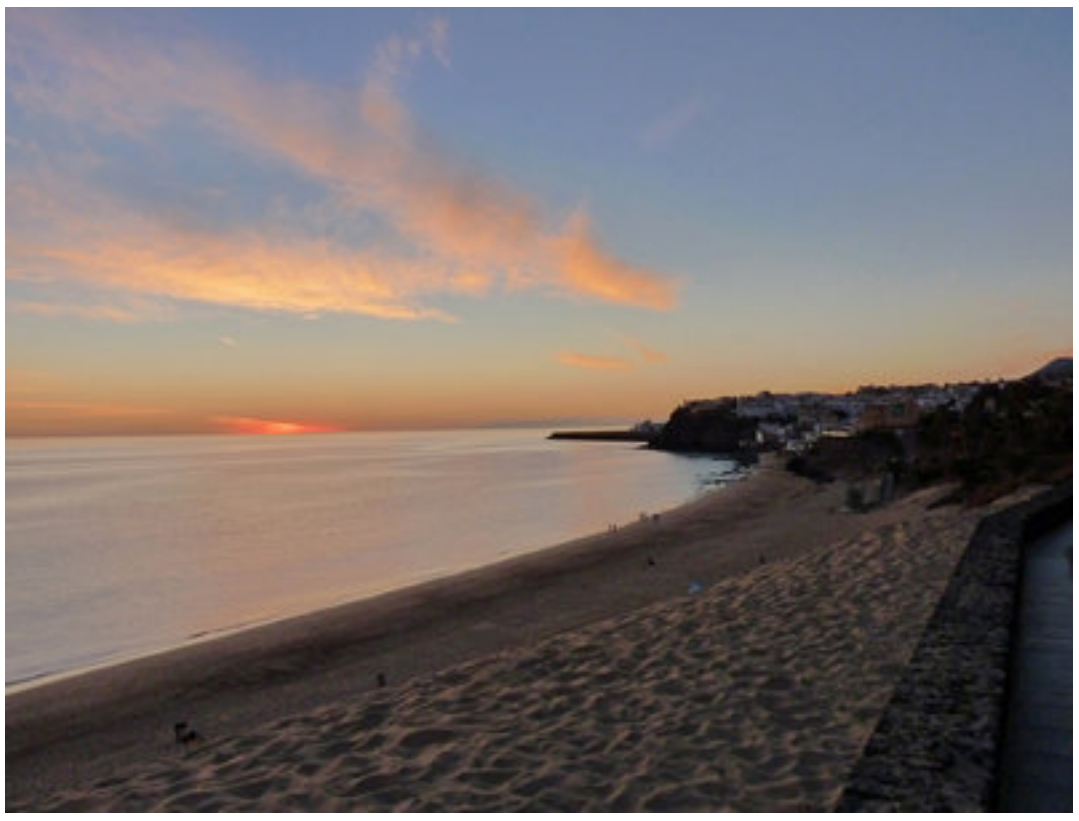
by Neil Hulme, 05-Dec-10 06:39 PM GMT

Fuerteventura (Part 1)

I recently returned from a few weeks in Jandia, on the southern tip of Fuerteventura. I've visited a number of the Canary Islands in the past, and different resorts on Fuerteventura, but having been here with Hannah last February, this is currently my favourite spot. Lovely (golden) sandy beaches, spectacular terrain and of course lovely winter sunshine 😎. The often strong winds usually blow 'up' the island, so on the occasions when cloud forms over the landmass and covers much of Fuerteventura, the Jandia area offers more 'sunshine hours' than the norm. Just what the doctor ordered for a severe SAD sufferer! The resort is also within walking distance of Morro Jable, a lovely little fishing village with some excellent restaurants on the waterfront. It's quite quiet down here and 'mainly German' (many being naked 😳), so it's blissfully free of Union Jack shorts and 'lager louts' 😊.



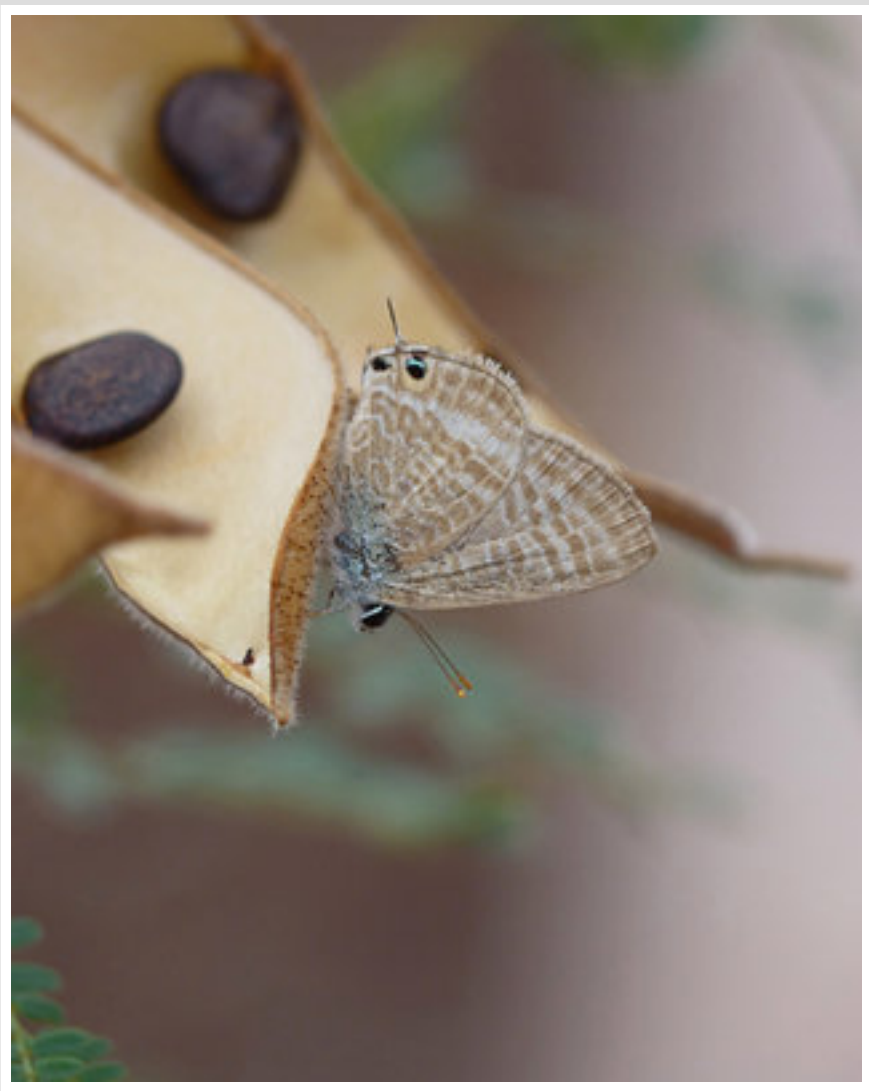
Jandia Beach



View Towards Morro Jable

While here last February we saw very few butterflies, so it was a nice surprise to see seven species and some nice moths, as well as some good birds and other wildlife. We kicked off with Long-tailed Blues, seeing a total of 40 – 50 over the entire holiday. Our first floor balcony was level with the crown of a medium-sized tree and Hannah soon spotted 'little butterflies' flitting around it. This turned out to be the main assembly point for male Long-tailed Blues in the hotel grounds! Every morning 8 – 10 of them could be seen sunning themselves, and racing around close to the canopy until meeting a rival and spiralling high into the air. Their behaviour was very similar to White-letter Hairstreaks. Elsewhere, single male L-t Bs would fiercely defend their territory from isolated *Aloe vera* plants, day after day. In the mornings we sometimes saw quite a number of these butterflies on the short grass around the accommodation blocks, where they would congregate to enjoy a drink supplied by the plant sprinkler system.





Long-tailed Blues

Towards the end of the holiday, as the numbers of worn and tatty L-t Bs started to decrease, we started to see much fresher-looking Lang's Short-tailed Blues. These were much rarer, with only a couple of males and one female present. They were similarly aggressive and attacked the stripy local bees and passing dragonflies.



Lang's Short-tailed Blues

Last of the Blues was a single African Grass Blue. Often referred to as the 'flower bed blue', this species seems to make a habit of hanging around hotel gardens.



African Grass Blue

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 05-Dec-10 07:10 PM GMT

Neil. Were your landscape shots taken in HDR mode on your FZ38? Those pics do come out rather well – makes me want to go to Canaries. I like the HDR mode but resolution is less good than in other modes, presumably because HDR always uses an ISO of 400.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 05-Dec-10 11:54 PM GMT

Hi Jack,

Yes they were. I agree about the resolution, but for some landscape shots I think the slightly 'blurred' effect is rather nice, with the 'feel' of the image being more important. With shots showing e.g. dark tree branches against a snowy background, I think sharpness is very important.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-10 01:34 AM GMT

I've put a post on the Photographic page about HDR with some interesting links.

Go here: viewtopic.php?f=7&t=4803

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Dec-10 03:09 AM GMT

Thanks Jack,

Luckily I only have to turn a dial and press one button on the FZ38 – I wouldn't want to get more technical than that 😊.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-10 03:27 AM GMT

And Neil, you might recall who initially told you about that mode 😊 I didn't think it would be too technical for you 😊

It is indeed just a rotation of the little wheel but you do have to do some preliminary setting up to ensure that is the mode you get when you select Scene (SCN). We are of course talking here about the FZ38 – but no doubt some other cameras have similar controls.

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Matsukaze, 06-Dec-10 04:02 AM GMT

They were similarly aggressive and attacked the stripy local bees and passing dragonflies.

I've seen this behaviour with Speckled Woods and Small Tortoiseshells this year. For a lycaenid to try it seems particularly suicidal. I'm surprised it is a behaviour that persists.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Dec-10 05:38 PM GMT

Hi Matsukaze,

I agree that it does seem 'suicidal', but sometimes attack is the best form of defence! It's often a behaviour pattern which signals 'vulnerability' that triggers a predatory attack, which is why wasps, hornets etc pick their moments very carefully – rather than constantly chasing everything 'willy-nilly'. This doesn't usually include attacking a potential predator, which is why we so often see small birds mobbing sparrowhawks and 'getting away with it!' That said, I do remember Matthew Oates recounting an attack on a Spotted Flycatcher by a Purple Emperor, only for the flycatcher's mate to zoom in from behind and nail the angry butterfly – a great dogfight by all accounts!

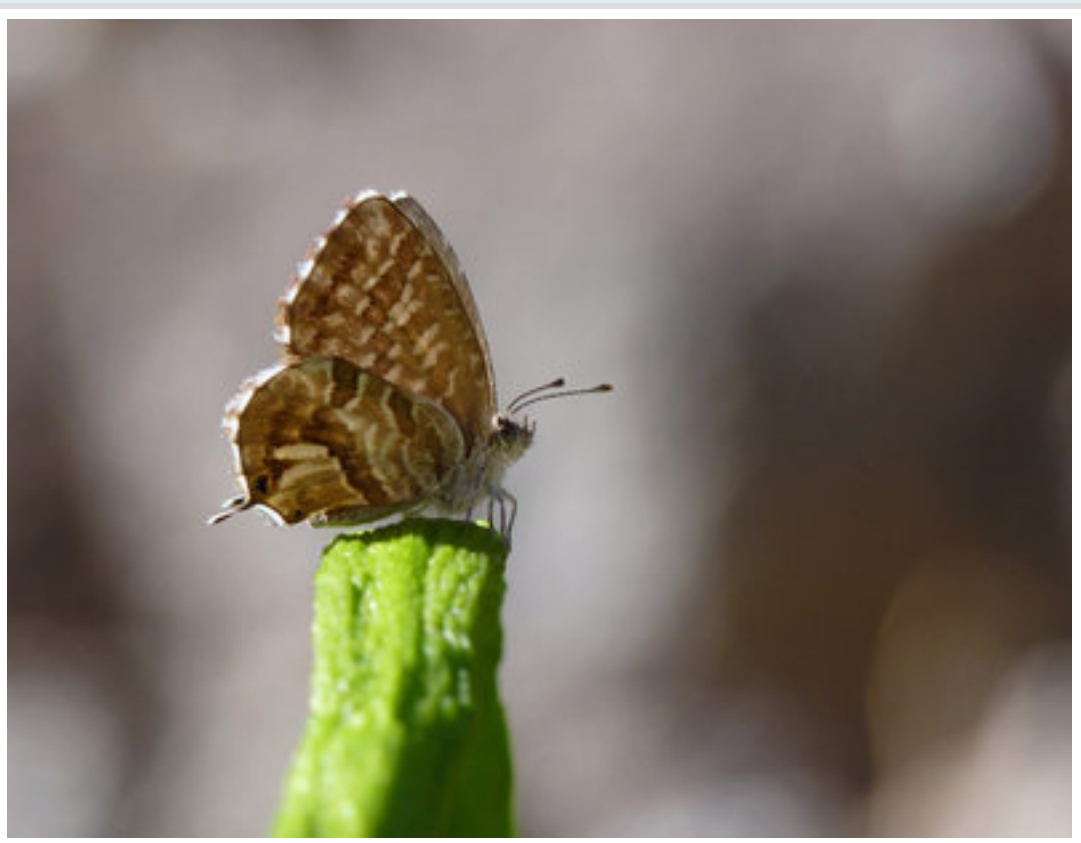
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Dec-10 06:34 PM GMT

Fuerteventura (Part 2)

The butterfly that I most associate with Mediterranean and Canarian holidays is the Geranium Bronze (once famously found in Crispin's East Sussex garden!). In our Jandia hotel grounds they were few-and-far-between this time, and I saw only one battered female and this handsome little chap. Being quite elusive, it took three days of 'delays' on the way to or from our room or the pool before I found it sitting nicely for a photo. Like many 'little brown jobs', when fresh and observed at close quarters, they really are quite beautiful.



Geranium Bronze

Our fifth species of butterfly was the one I'd hoped to see most. One afternoon, as Hannah and I ascended the zig-zag path at the southern boundary of the hotel, we were met by a magnificent Monarch, as it glided down the slope. It very nearly settled, but one of the many resident cats decided to try and knock it out of the air. Off it went, never to be seen again.

Also hanging around the hotel were a few dragonflies, including a Lesser Emperor. However, the most common species was Red-veined Darter, one of which obligingly sat right behind our room for most of the holiday.



Red-veined Darter

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-10 07:58 PM GMT

Neil

With the Geranium Bronze infestation (for want of a better word), how are the cultivated geraniums managing in Fuerteventura?

I ask because on a visit to Malta in October 2008, the geraniums were few and far between, the most successful plants being on first and second floor balconies (presumably Geranium Bronze doesn't normally fly that high). Yet on a visit to Malta in March this year, geraniums were much more in evidence in public gardens and street-side plantings. Of course, the difference could be purely poor observation on my part. But much more likely is that the garden/street examples in March were newly planted from nursery stock that had been sprayed with insecticide.

When I found the species in 2008 (not a great surprise I have to say) I did wonder given the paucity of lepidopterists in Malta, if I might have made the initial discovery of the species there. Indeed I don't know of any Maltese lepidopterists since Anthony Valletta died in 1988. That brings back memories. Tony and I used to go butterflying together in the 1970s.

Pete. I think you have contacts in Malta. Is there anyone interested in butterflies?

Anyway, research when I go back home showed that I had not made the first observations of Geranium Bronze in Malta; those had been made by frustrated gardeners a couple of years earlier.

Another scenario does occur to me, one I have mentioned in another thread. Perhaps initially, the Geranium Bronze population could literally explode in the absence of natural (eg predator/parasite) control. Maybe the local bird population has now discovered just how tasty the caterpillars are. Or perhaps their natural parasites from their place of origin, southern Africa, might now also be present in the Mediterranean population so after the initial huge increase in numbers, the situation might have become in better balance. Just ideas.

I do agree. Pretty little butterflies but a shame about the choice of foodplant. Pity they don't use tomatoes. I cannot stand tomatoes (foliage has a fine smell, but the fruit very annoyingly, the merest taste makes me gag)

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 06-Dec-10 09:46 PM GMT

Hi Jack,

The Geraniums seemed to be thriving – and the gardens here were generally very well looked after. Nice spot for a bit of winter butterflying. I reckon going at the start of November would be very rewarding.

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 07-Dec-10 05:06 AM GMT

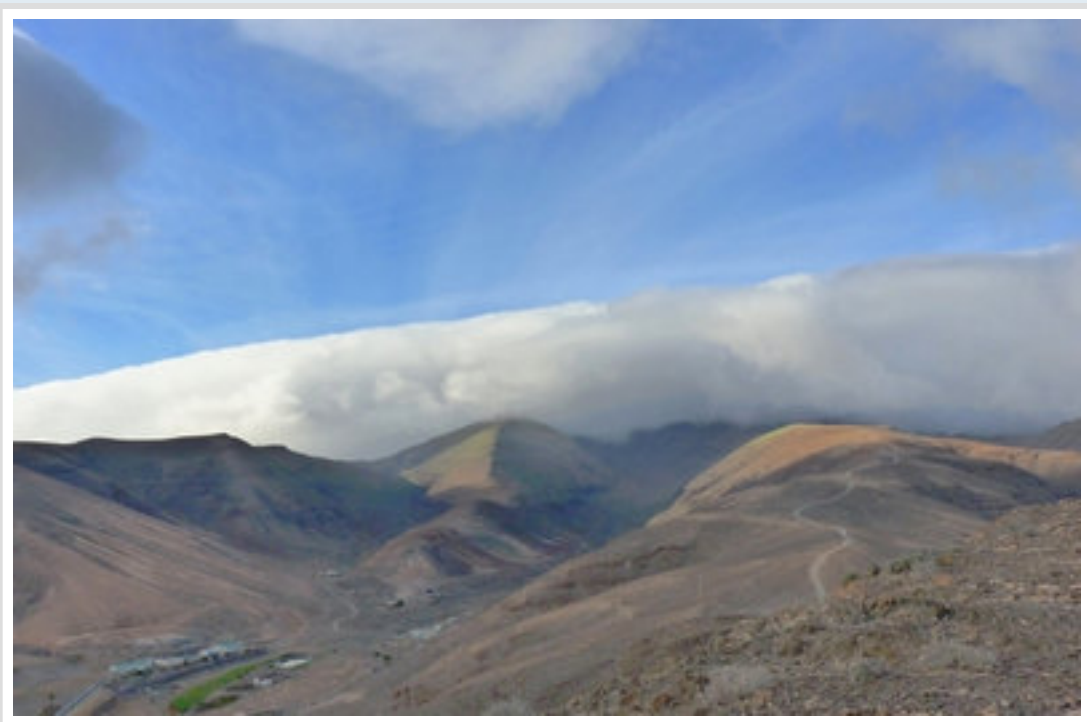
Fuerteventura (Part 3)

The sixth and seventh species of butterfly seen around Jandia were rather more familiar. Every afternoon a pair of Red Admirals would cavort around the rear of our accommodation block, often landing on the wooden balustrades to sunbathe. It felt a little odd seeing them here, having spotted one in my garden the day before leaving home!



Red Admiral

We also saw 8 Painted Ladies; a couple around the hotel and a small group at the rocky summit in the hills behind Jandia.



Jandia Hills



Painted Lady

As dusk fell we occasionally came across Striped and Hummingbird Hawkmoths hovering at the garden flowers. On our excursions around the SW of the island we spotted a few interesting birds, the best of which included Hoopoe, Southern Grey Shrike, Fuerteventura Stonechat, Ruddy Turnstone, Berthelot's Pipit, Whimbrel, Little Egret, Raven, and a pair of resident Kestrels at the hotel.

It's always tempting to try somewhere 'new' for a holiday, but I think I'll be returning to Jandia at least once more.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Matsukaze, 07-Dec-10 05:20 AM GMT

the geraniums were few and far between, the most successful plants being on first and second floor balconies (presumably Geranium Bronze doesn't normally fly that high).

whilst in southern Spain this year, I noticed two sparring around a balcony shrub two floors up, and have seen them fluttering in the street at well above head height. They may be spreading out as I saw one along a woodland ride about half a mile from the nearest housing and no *Pelargonium* in sight.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Colin Knight, 09-Dec-10 02:36 AM GMT

Neil, great holiday photos, your island had more butterflies than mine...

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 09-Dec-10 03:56 AM GMT

I think geranium bronze cats feed on cape daisy and other flowers as well as pelargoniums/geraniums though, don't they?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Dec-10 09:19 PM GMT

Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunt And Species Mapping

On Saturday 11th December Michael Blencowe and I held a masterclass in Brown Hairstreak egg hunting at Steyning Rifle Range. It was very pleasing to see twenty BC members turn out for an event in winter! After giving some background information on the very successful Steyning Downland Scheme project, followed by a description of the Brown Hairstreak's life-cycle and egg hunting tips, we entered the Brown Hairstreak Reserve area and ensured that everyone managed to 'get the hang of it'. It was like shooting ducks in a barrel, with c.60 eggs being rapidly found in a relatively small area; the reserve is certainly proving to be a success!



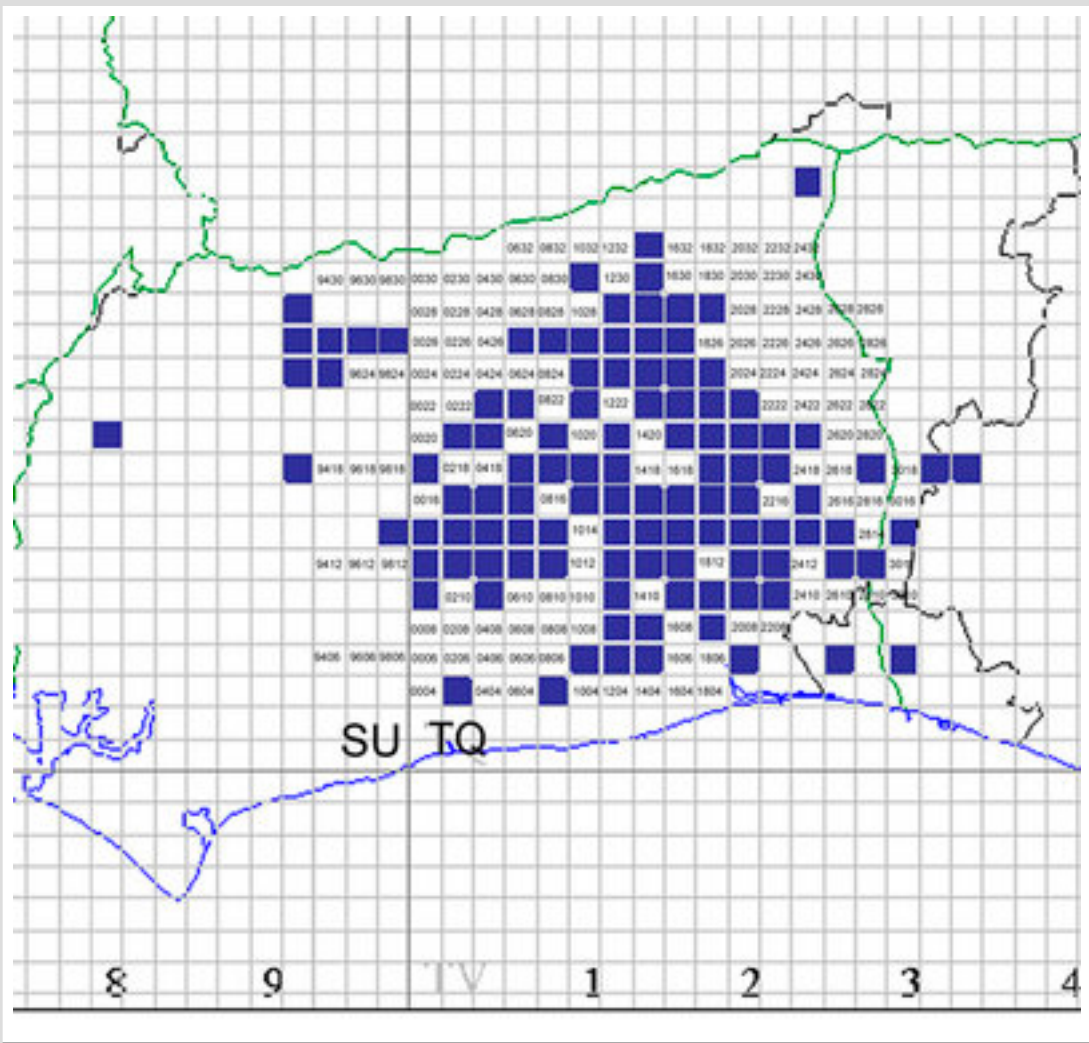
Branch committee member Penny Green (and 'other half' Dave) brought along a microscope/laptop set-up, so the attendees could get a really close-up view of the detailed ornamentation on the surface of the eggs. It was also useful in getting close-up images of the more elongated eggs, laid in pairs in similar locations, of the Blue-bordered Carpet moth. It was important to highlight these differentiating features, as we then sent the group off in different directions to continue our survey of the Brown Hairstreak.



Throughout the afternoon I received calls and texts from members who excitedly reported their successes (including Susie who had found them in Southwater Woods). I struck gold in three tetrads around Cissbury Ring, and found eggs in two new tetrads around Steyning, and a further two beside the A24 between Ashington and Buck's Barn. Almost every blackthorn sucker I looked at held Brown Hairstreak eggs, including this 'lucky three' at Bay Bridge.



By the end of the day we had increased the number of tetrads known to (currently) support this species from 83 to 109. All of this data is being fed into our 2010–2015 Sussex Butterfly Atlas Project. By 2015 I imagine we will have a very accurately constrained distribution for Brown Hairstreak, which is clearly sprinkled widely across West Sussex. Michael Blencowe subsequently sent me the up-to-date campaign map.



Re: Sussex Kipper

by Padfield, 14-Dec-10 10:55 PM GMT

I'd be interested in a follow-up on the 'lucky three'. I found a triplet last winter and only one of the three ever hatched:



Around 50% of the eggs I found locally hatched out.

Guy

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Dec-10 11:02 PM GMT

Hi Guy,
I'll let you know how Tom, Dick and Harry get on in their attempts to bury out.
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 14-Dec-10 11:08 PM GMT

I found a triple on Saturday at Southwater which should be easy to find again (I cunningly marked the location) so I will see how they progress too and report back.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 14-Dec-10 11:54 PM GMT

Hi Susie,
Names, names, vee must have zerr names!
Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 15-Dec-10 01:10 AM GMT

Anne, Emily and Charlotte and the single egg on the same shoot is Bramwell.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Padfield, 15-Dec-10 01:30 AM GMT

Ah! Bronte Hairstreak eggs.

Guy

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 15-Dec-10 01:47 AM GMT

Well done!

Perhaps I should have chosen something less obvious 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 15-Dec-10 03:11 AM GMT

A brilliant exercise finding so many. Well done Neil.

You could of course name them after members of the dynasty of the Duke of Norfolk. The family tree gives plenty of scope:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dukes_of_N...amily_tree

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Dec-10 04:23 AM GMT

Thanks Jack,

I might pass this on to Mr Oates – it would be an ideal source of names for his Purple Emperor caterpillars in 2011/12. 😊

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Susie, 15-Dec-10 04:35 AM GMT

There are 20 odd eggs on the potted blackthorn in my garden who need names, but they're going to be greek gods and goddesses.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 15-Dec-10 04:41 AM GMT

Hi Susie,

Presumably you'll start with Jack and Neil?

Greek God 😊

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 15-Dec-10 01:47 PM GMT

Perhaps Capt. Oates would have a longer list to choose from if he used the present Royal Family. The line of succession to the throne is listed in Wikipedia as far as no 1893.

There are some really catchy names there, for example (picked at random) no.1679 *Countess Anna Luisa Schaffgotsch genannt Semperfrei von und zu Kynast und Greiffenstein*

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Lee Hurrell, 15-Dec-10 10:30 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Is there a key to your distribution map?

I.e. what does the blue mean and are the numbers in the tetrads the number of eggs recorded?

PS – good work!

Thanks,

Lee

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Dec-10 04:40 AM GMT

Hi Lee,

No key to this map (yet), mainly because it's just a working document which we are updating as records come in. The blue denotes the 2 Km squares in which we have found either adults or eggs in 2010. The numbers are the four figure grid references (mainly in TQ) for the 1 Km square that lies in the bottom lefthand corner of each 2 Km square. We are actually mapping at 1 Km level, but will show distribution maps at the 2 Km scale in our 2010–2015 Atlas of Sussex Butterflies. These grid references are displayed in empty (unsearched) blocks, in order to guide our surveyors to 'terra nova', thus avoiding duplication of effort.

Even more blue squares have been added since I posted that map – I believe the total is now 115. Adult butterflies were observed in fewer than 10,

which demonstrates quite nicely just how elusive the Brown Hairstreak can be!

Neil

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Neil Hulme, 16-Dec-10 07:08 AM GMT

Rowland Wood Reserve Taking Shape

On Sunday (12th December) I joined one of Michael Blencowe's work parties at Rowland Wood, the recently acquired Butterfly Conservation Reserve in East Sussex. This absolute gem will be opened this summer, although I can't give much in the way of detail as plans are still being made. The one thing I can say is that it will be well worth a visit.

A large group worked incredibly hard into the afternoon, opening up yet another ride within the 80 acres here. Volunteers meet every second Sunday in the month through the winter, with many having turned up year-after-year to look after the 'old' Park Corner Heath Reserve next door. Sunday's 'have a go heroes' were Clare Jeffers, Marie Buss, Wendy and Keith Alexander, Mike Mullis, Bart Reason, Roy Wells, Andrew Burns, Dave Mitchell, Colin Brinkhurst, Peter Coyston, John Luck, Roger Carter, David Bradford, Vince Massimo and, of course, Michael Blencowe. Vince deserves a special mention for travelling so far, having been exiled to Surrey.



The main feature of Rowland will be the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, which started to venture into the newly cut habitat from Park Corner Heath last summer. PBFs will also be making a welcome return in the future, with stock being sourced locally from the now thriving population at Abbot's Wood. Another wood in the area is also being managed with a view to creating suitable habitat for PBFs. Within a few years it is hoped that a significant area of East Sussex will again be populated by this species. The Rowland Wood and Park Corner Heath Reserves represent a piece within a much larger jigsaw; this is another BC conservation project being conducted on a landscape scale.

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Lee Hurrell, 16-Dec-10 08:56 PM GMT

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Hi Lee,

No key to this map (yet), mainly because it's just a working document which we are updating as records come in. The blue denotes the 2 Km squares in which we have found either adults or eggs in 2010. The numbers are the four figure grid references (mainly in TQ) for the 1 Km square that lies in the bottom lefthand corner of each 2 Km square. We are actually mapping at 1 Km level, but will show distribution maps at the 2 Km scale in our 2010-2015 Atlas of Sussex Butterflies. These grid references are displayed in empty (unsearched) blocks, in order to guide our surveyors to 'terra nova', thus avoiding duplication of effort.

Even more blue squares have been added since I posted that map - I believe the total is now 115. Adult butterflies were observed in fewer than 10, which demonstrates quite nicely just how elusive the Brown Hairstreak can be!

Neil

Thanks Neil, fascinating stuff!

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Matsukaze, 17-Dec-10 07:47 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Would the return of the High Brown be a possibility one day? By the look of it you have the management and monitoring in place - is there suitable area and will the habitat be suitable?

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Jack Harrison, 17-Dec-10 07:20 PM GMT

Matsukaze asked:

Would the return of the High Brown be a possibility one day?

Kingspark Wood, some 4 kilometres to the south east of Tugley Wood, used to be superb in the 1970s. I understand that it is now in private hands. Certainly when I drove past in August 2010, there was no access and the wood looked badly neglected and overgrown.

Kingspark had Dark Green Fritillaries. One day when watching DG Frits, I found a High Brown and excitedly dashed along the ride to tell Ken Willmott. He was far from dismissive about my sighting and he clearly knew much more than he let on. It didn't take a Sherlock Holmes to realise that there had been an attempted introduction. That didn't work and the DG Frits disappeared as well.

I then moved to another part of the country and was not able to return for many years by which time the wood had been closed off.

Better luck Neil if you try HBFs in Rowland Wood but I doubt that anyone really understand its precise woodland habitat requirements; indeed, why did HBFs disappear from (as far as I know, **all**) woods in England? Dark Greens also used to be woodland butterflies. Do they still occur in any woods?

Jack

Re: Sussex Kipper

by Pete Eeles, 24-Dec-10 05:34 PM GMT

Neil (Kipper) is having Internet problems and just wanted to wish everyone a Happy Christmas. Normal service will be resumed ASAP!

Cheers,

- Pete