

Caterpillars and Chrysalises

by NickMorgan, 17-Jan-11 07:01 AM GMT

Back in September last year my wife arrived home with some cabbages for the hens that a friend had given her because they had caterpillars on them. Of course, as soon as I saw them I wouldn't let her put them in the hen run as they were covered in large and small white caterpillars. The cabbages sat in a bucket of water outside out back door, filling the house with a lovely smell and it cost me a small fortune in substitute cabbages for both the caterpillars and the hens!



In early October some of the small white caterpillars started crawling up the walls of the house.



They mostly chose sheltered areas such as under the windowills where they sat for a couple of days and slowly became fatter and attached themselves to the wall.



By day three they had become proper chrysalises. One day a couple of weeks later I noticed one of the chrysalises twitching and flicking and I noticed a little black wasp on it. As you will see in the picture I squashed it and hopefully it didn't get a chance to lay any eggs.



I found another little black wasp a few days later on another crystalis, which was also despatched. The other small whites didn't form crystalises until the weather had become colder, so hopefully they won't have been attacked by the wasps.

I found 12 small white crystalises on the house, but strangely no large whites. Last year we had four large white crystalises on the house after the kids found a whole load of caterpillars on some nastursiums in the street. Of course they collected them all and put them on the plants in the garden!!

2011

by NickMorgan, 22-Mar-11 07:16 AM GMT

At long last I have spotted my first butterflies of 2011. A short walk from the office at lunch time along the River Tyne in Haddington is a sunny, sheltered spot, which I thought would give my only chance of seeing anything on this windy day. I wasn't to be disappointed as what I thought were two leaves fluttering in the wind turned out to be a comma and small tortoiseshell having a bit of a dispute over this small area.



They landed long enough for a quick picture and then vanished. Had I arrived a couple of minutes later I wouldn't have seen them!

I try to co-ordinate the butterfly records for the Countryside Ranger Service here and they had already spotted a peacock on 22nd February and a small tortoiseshell on 2nd March during an unseasonable warm spell. Today they also reported a peacock and two small tortoiseshells on the coast.

I seem to have been waiting a long time to see my first butterflies this year, but checking back this is the earliest record of a comma I can find for East Lothian. I think that I have just been very impatient having read about the other sightings reported on this forum!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Mar-11 06:12 AM GMT

Another great day here today. 16°C and not a cloud in the sky and I managed to spend most of the day out of the office. This morning I was on the coast up at Dunbar. As well as a lone small tortoiseshell on the coastal path I came across a peacock and four small tortoiseshells on a small patch of celandine. I can't remember the last time I came across four tortoiseshells together like that. It's great that so many have come through such a harsh winter.

This afternoon I was rather disappointed to only see two peacocks while I was surveying the route for a path. Only three days ago I hadn't seen any butterflies, now I'm getting complacent! Last year I didn't see my first butterfly until April!



Costa Blanca

by NickMorgan, 17-Apr-11 04:45 AM GMT

We spent a week in an apartment in Torrevieja, on the Costa Blanca from the 7th to 15th April. This was a cheap family break, so not ideal for searching for butterflies, but I did manage to explore the surrounding countryside on a few occasions. Sadly there were not many butterflies around, in fact there were very few insects as evidenced by the lack of splats on the front of our hire car. Everything was very dry and I wonder if I was a little late in the season for seeing butterflies there. This is a very flat region and I guess that there would have been more to see up in the hills much further inland.

The first butterfly I saw was a white that I spotted from the plane as we taxied along the runway (!) and on the journey to the apartment I saw a couple more from the car. As seems to be the case in many of the towns and villages in southern Spain and Portugal geranium bronzes were occupying the geraniums at our apartment. I have to admit to feeling slightly resentful towards these immigrants.



Lee Hurrell had kindly recommended some likely areas to hunt for butterflies and so I spent a few hours walking along the Rio Segura from Rojales to Guardamar. Sadly this was the only cloudy day of our holiday and there was a stiff breeze blowing, so the butterflies hid away. I only managed to see three speckled woods and a handful of small whites. However, there were quite a few black-winged stilts and little egrets at the edge of the river.



Taken at maximum zoom on my wee compact camera.

As Lee recommended I also followed a small track into some farmland where I found a small colony of black-eyed blues. I guess there were about 30 of them occupying a scrubby knoll. I was very pleased to be able to get such a good view of them.





A solitary swallowtail and a couple more small whites flew past while I was there, but I was surprised not to see other species there. On the way back I stopped the car to look at a text and spotted my first Bath white. I chased after it and tried to photograph it, but it didn't stop for any length of time, so I only managed a few out-of-focus shots!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 17-Apr-11 05:00 AM GMT

Sorry you didn't get your African grass blues, Nick – but the black-eyed blues are great! And the stilt shot brings back happy memories for me too...

I don't think you were too late in the season – perhaps the hotspots are just few and far between now, on the overdeveloped Costa del Sin. I hope I hadn't built up your hopes too much with my diary from Málaga. Quite by chance I think I found one of those hotspots.

Guy

Costa Blanca

by NickMorgan, 17-Apr-11 05:06 AM GMT

The following day we went for a walk around Salines de la Mata, which is a nature reserve around a saline lake. To entice the kids I offered a Euro to the first person to spot a butterfly and within a few feet of the car park my son and daughter were arguing over who had seen the wall brown first. I had to give them both a Euro and tell them there was another Euro for the next butterfly! Very quickly Jemma had earned her Euro with a swallowtail. Robbie soon countered that with a red squirrel, so I had to pay out on that too! It was worth the four Euros to get them interested, though!



Again on maximum zoom!

On the rest of the walk we saw a further two wall browns and six small whites and on the way back to the car a Bath white, but it didn't stop for a picture.

Having decided that the coast was possibly a little too dry I thought that I would travel inland a little the following day. I intended to try to reach some distant hills, but a combination of factors, mostly me getting lost, prevented me getting that far. In the end I settled for a reservoir – Embarrasment de la Pedrera. Eventually, I found an area where I could walk as much of the area was fenced off with “Private” signs. It seems that the locals used this area for clay pigeon shooting and dumping old television sets and initially it seemed that it didn't offer much for butterflies. However, after about 15 minutes I saw a couple of Spanish marbled whites squabbling over a sunny spot. Every time one landed the other flew over and chased it away and I spent ages trying to get a photo. Eventually, I realised that if I just stayed at this favoured spot with my camera ready one of them would fly into view. And sure enough it worked!



Having spent some time in this small area the butterflies suddenly started to appear. It was about midday, but I had imagined that earlier in the day would have been just as good. Over the next hour I saw several small whites, bath whites, black-eyed blues, several more Spanish marbled whites, three painted ladies a swallowtail, wall and a clouded yellow. They were all very active and didn't really present any good photo opportunities, but it was good to see reasonable numbers of butterflies at last. At one point I got the fright of my life as a lizard that must have been almost two feet long broke cover

in front of me. I could hear its footsteps as it ran along the track ahead of me!
The Bath whites were real torments! They rarely stopped for any length of time and proved very difficult to photograph. These were the best two shots I managed. Later in the holiday I had one perfectly framed in my camera and when I pressed the button I realised it was on video. 😬



This one appears to be laying an egg.

On the final day of our holiday I went back to Salinas De La Mata in the afternoon to see if there were any more butterflies around. Unfortunately I only saw only one wall and a swallowtail and a brief glimpse of a red admiral.



So, only 13 species for the trip, along with a few fleeting glances of a few unidentified butterflies.

- Geranium bronze
- Painted lady
- Small white
- Large white
- Swallowtail
- Clouded yellow
- Scarce swallowtail
- Specked wood
- Black-eyed blue
- Bath white
- Wall

Spanish marbled white

Red admiral

As a small consolation, when we returned home on a cool grey day I saw that a small white had emerged from one of the chrysalises on the house. It was too cold for it to fly and it was still there this morning until the sun made an appearance.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 17-Apr-11 06:05 AM GMT

Guy,

There were a number of different species I was hoping I would see, but sadly it wasn't to be. Still, that leaves more for me to find in the future!

So often recently I have seen a butterfly and thought that had I been there just a few seconds later I wouldn't have seen it. I suppose that the opposite will also apply and it shows how much luck can play a part in what we see. On the other hand, with the knowledge and skill that you have, luck doesn't play such a part!

As you say, there is so much development in that part of Spain it is not surprising that the number of butterflies is low. I would have loved to have had enough time to go further inland and up into the mountains.

My wife has already booked our holiday for next summer at a villa north of Malaga, so it will be interesting to see how that goes. I bet I don't see as many species as you did!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Lee Hurrell, 17-Apr-11 06:48 PM GMT

Great report and photos Nick, sorry you didn't see so much. Still, it must be great to see the Spanish Marbled Whites and Black Eyed Blues!

You're right though, it is pretty developed round there isn't it, and where it isn't it's pretty much farmland. I'm surprised it's that dry already, I figured it would be a bit greener this early. Your first landscape photo seems much greener than the times I've been late September/early October where everything's essentially a dustbowl!

I've often looked at those mountains in the distance you mentioned but they do seem a mighty long way away from where you were, maybe I'll try there one day.

Cheers

Lee

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 17-Apr-11 09:20 PM GMT

Thanks Lee.

Although there didn't seem to be a lot of butterflies I was thrilled to be able to get such good views of the black-eyed blues and better views of the Spanish marbled white, both of which I had only briefly seen before. The Bath whites were a new species for me, so that was another joy for me as I have been wanting to see one for years now!

It was funny to take the dog for a walk before lunch today and see six small tortoiseshells, three orange tips and a large white. Despite the intensive farming in this area butterflies are relatively numerous in East Lothian.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 19-Apr-11 06:52 AM GMT

I could have kicked myself this morning as I forgot to have a look at one of the small white chrysalises that I noticed had changed colour yesterday.



Sure enough when I arrived home after work there was an empty chrysalis under the window sill!

There are still a few others left on the house that will hopefully emerge soon.

A good weather forecast turned out to be a cloudy day. However, at lunch time the cloud gave way to hazy sunshine and I was able to do my transect. I recorded 23 orange tips and the first green-veined whites for me this year. Also a comma, three peacocks and four small tortoiseshells.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 22-Apr-11 04:38 AM GMT

An exciting day today. I had heard that some blue butterflies had been seen close to Aberlady Local Nature Reserve and the speculation was that they could only really be holly blues. Only problem is that they are meant not to occur up here. There has been a colony in Musselburgh for a number of years about 20 miles away, which I have always wondered if they had arrived there naturally or had been released.

Last year there was a holly blue spotted in Haddington, ten miles south of Aberlady.

Today I went up to Aberlady and had a look at a right of way that has holly and ivy along it. I saw plenty of orange tips, green-veined whites, peacocks and small tortoiseshells, but nothing blue there. I then wandered along the back of a hedgerow and just as I was about to give up I saw some large holly trees around the back of someone's garden. I took a look and there they were. At least four holly blues flitting between two holly bushes and an apple tree.





The pictures wouldn't win any prizes, but at least they prove that they were there.

I would be interested to know how the holly blues got there. Does anyone know if they move far? Certainly the ones that I was watching stayed within a section of hedgerow about 10 metres long. It is a little worrying if their territory is that small and could easily be destroyed if the house owner decided to cut back the bushes.

Re: Nick Morgan

by IAC, 22-Apr-11 05:08 AM GMT

Hi Nick,

An excellent piece of detective work....well done!!! I have just got your message through the ESBC forum...I will give you some details via e-mail on sightings past and present throughout the Borders. For East Lothian I am a little in the dark on the situation...I know there has been regular sightings, where and when...not sure.

I will e-mail you soon on details.

Iain.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 27-Apr-11 04:55 AM GMT

Great transect today - only four species, but 43 orange tips, 12 green-veined whites, 6 small tortoiseshells and 3 peacocks. On the way back I took a closer look at the butterflies and saw this orange tip which seemed to have more marbling than I have previously noted.



I had a look through previous pictures and noticed that they seem to vary quite a bit. Here is one I took last year.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 15-May-11 06:19 AM GMT

Butterfly numbers have been good despite the continual cool winds we have been suffering up here. I saw my first small copper of the year on Monday, followed by my first red admiral. I have since seen two more red admirals on my transect on Wednesday, another one on Thursday and two more on Friday, all at different locations. I can't remember previously seeing so many so early in the year.

I have been searching various locations around East Lothian to see if I can find any speckled woods, but so far I have had no luck. There have been odd sightings over the last two years on the eastern side of East Lothian and they are just over the Border, so I am still hopeful of finding a colony somewhere.

I nipped down to Dunglass last week to see if I could see any wall browns after they appeared here last year. I didn't see anything other than a brave green-veined white, but I couldn't blame any butterflies for hiding from the cold wind blowing in off the sea.

Today I followed up a lead from a local natural history enthusiast who told me where she had seen green hairstreaks in the Lammermuir Hills about 12 years ago. Sadly I didn't find any and the potential habitat was a very small cleugh with stunted rowan trees in the middle of a large area of grouse moors, which is periodically burnt. The weather was also not ideal for viewing butterflies, but I did see my first small heath of the year.

Earlier in the year I planted a garlic mustard plant in a pot in the garden with the hope of putting an orange tip caterpillar on it. (The local farmer sprays the field margins, killing so much garlic mustard around here, and I often try to re-locate caterpillars away from the areas he sprays.) It seems that I won't need to seed it with a caterpillar as an orange tip has obviously sneaked into the garden when I wasn't looking and laid an egg on it!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 21-May-11 08:01 AM GMT

It has been a very frustrating week up until today. Twice I started my butterfly transect, but had to give up because it clouded over. Yesterday I did manage to complete my transect but the last section was very cloudy. The strong winds have been relentless, which meant that butterfly numbers were low, but I still recorded orange tips, green-veined whites, a small white, two red admirals, three surprisingly unfaded small tortoiseshells and a comma.



The countryside ranger from John Muir Country Park came into the office yesterday and said that she had seen a wall brown at the park on Monday. This is the first record of a wall brown there. She had also seen a fritillary that was smaller than the normal dark green. I showed her a picture of a small pearl bordered fritillary and she said that it was definitely that. The only other record for East Lothian was at Aberlady Local Nature Reserve six years ago, although they are recorded in the Scottish Borders just south of here.

Yesterday the ranger from the east of the county brought me a picture of a strange little orange butterfly that she had seen on the coast at Bilsdean, which turned out to be a wall brown. After discovering these down there last year I had been to look for them last week with no luck. So it is good to know that they have successfully survived a hard winter.

Lunchtime today I thought that I would go and have a look for small pearl bordered fritillaries at John Muir Country Park. The wind was still blowing strongly and there were a lot of grey clouds around, but I thought it worth a try. Things didn't look too good to start with, and it took some time until I saw my first butterfly – an orange tip. Then in a small clearing in the woodland a little brown insect flew up and circled around me. I couldn't believe that it was a speckled wood and there were two of them in this one spot accompanied by a red admiral. They were amazingly well camouflaged when they landed. I managed to get a couple of pictures and then the speckled woods flew up into a sycamore tree. I walked around the woods and to the estuary of the River Tyne for the next hour, but only saw one green-veined white. I suppose 12 degrees and the strong wind with only occasional sunshine wasn't ideal.

When I walked back along the track at exactly the same point there were the two speckled woods and the red admiral. The speckled woods disappeared, but the red admiral seemed very attached to a sunny bit of bracken, which it kept returning to.





To say I was delighted is an understatement. There have been four isolated records of speckled woods in East Lothian over the last two years and I was determined to see if I could find a colony of them somewhere. I have been checking out all the likely woodland on the east coast this year with no luck. This was such a surprise for me. I was also interested to note that they are much smaller than the speckled woods in southern Europe as well as being a very different colour.

I didn't see the small pearl bordered fritillary, but that can wait for some better weather. I have a lot to look forward to in the coming weeks.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Gibster, 21-May-11 05:35 PM GMT

Nick, what an enthusiastic post that was – I'm sure there are plenty of folks reading it and feeling very pleased for you. Well done on re-finding your good luck, hope your determination brings you equal success with those elusive frits! 😊

Gibster.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 22-May-11 06:00 AM GMT

Thanks Gibster. We don't get as many species up here as further south or in mainland Europe. Sometimes I look at other posts on this forum and long for chalkhill blues or brimstones. However, I suppose it makes it even more special for me when I find a new species!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Jun-11 06:01 AM GMT

The weather was good enough for me to do my transect today. However, despite 20 degrees and full sun there were very few butterflies around – a handful of green-veined whites, two orange tips, a large white and two small whites. After a couple of weeks of strong winds and continual cold temperatures I wonder if many butterflies have perished. The forecast is good for tomorrow, so I plan to head to the coast to see how the butterflies are doing there.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 05-Jun-11 06:43 AM GMT

Yesterday I went to John Muir Country Park to have a look for small pearl bordered fritillaries. It was the warmest day of the year at 25 degrees and full sun. That's 12 degrees more than we had all of May! Unfortunately I didn't see any SPBFs but I did see at least three speckled woods. They were all in lovely condition, so I wonder if they are a second generation. The only other butterflies I saw was one small white, one orange tip, one small copper and one comma. It is funny that speckled woods that seem to have only recently arrived in East Lothian were the most numerous butterflies there! The Countryside Ranger saw another speckled wood on her transect last week at the other side of the Park last week and the Ranger at Yellowcraig saw one there too. It looks like they are starting to become common!!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 09-Jun-11 05:30 AM GMT

On yet another overcast day today, I was walking up the track taking our dog for a walk at lunchtime, thinking how nice it would be to live in the Swiss Alps, when I saw a small tortoiseshell. While I was speculating whether it was one that had come through the winter or a new generation I noticed that it was paying a lot of attention to a patch of nettles, landing on a plant and looking as though it was about to lay some eggs and then flying to another plant. Eventually, it chose a plant that it liked and started to lay some eggs. I waited and watched for about half an hour hoping to be able to take a picture of the eggs and eventually I decided to return later as it was taking so long!



I went back a couple of hours later armed with a rubber glove and I was surprised to see that the eggs were piled up in a cluster. I had expected them to have been more neatly arranged!



Not very exotic, but another first for me.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 16-Jun-11 07:06 AM GMT

We seem to have reached the lull between the first flush of butterflies and the next lot appearing.

Yesterday's transect didn't produce very much, just two orange tips, two green veined whites, a small copper and my first ringlet of the year. The weather wasn't too bad and there were hundreds of chimney sweeper moths in the grassy areas. I kept thinking I had floaters in my eyes!

Today I headed off to John Muir Country Park to see what was flying around the dune grassland. Sadly the sunny 20 degree morning turned overcast and grey just as I arrived, so there wasn't as much there as I expected. I did manage to see a few common blues, two small heaths, two small coppers and a red admiral. I am beginning to wonder if there is some link between me going out of the office at lunch time and grey clouds!



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 27-Jun-11 05:54 AM GMT

The weather has been miserable here recently. Friday was warm and sunny, but unfortunately I was laid up in bed with food poisoning. So, I haven't seen a butterfly in 11 days! This afternoon I had a look at the small tortoiseshell egg and at last they have hatched. That's 18 days since they were laid, which seems like a long time to me, but is maybe a reflection of the weather we have been having.



Re: Nick Morgan

by Gibster, 27-Jun-11 06:46 AM GMT

How very thoughtful of them to delay their emergence until you were on your feet again! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by Pete Eeles, 28-Jun-11 09:56 PM GMT

Great photos, Nick. You should stick them in the Species-specific Albums, if you've not already!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Jun-11 07:06 AM GMT

Thanks Pete. I have only just had a look at the gallery and what a fantastic collection of pictures it is. That will give me plenty to look at over the winter. I feel honoured to add some pictures to it!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Jun-11 07:17 AM GMT

Well about time we had some sunny weather! At last I managed to complete my transect, which started off quite disappointingly, but picked up a bit in the grassy meadow area. I saw one fresh new green-veined white and a fresh small tortoiseshell, my first meadow browns of the year and a good number of ringlets. There were hundreds of chimney sweepers trying to put me off too!





Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 01-Jul-11 07:27 AM GMT

I paid a quick visit to John Muir Country Park at lunch time where there were plenty of ringlets on the wing. There were also quite a lot of common blues flying and I spotted a couple of small tortoiseshells, a red admiral, a green-veined white and three dark green fritillaries. They were all very active and wouldn't stop for a picture!

However, I found an elephant hawk moth that was a lot more obliging. What an amazing looking creature. There were also a lot of cinebar moth caterpillars on the ragwort plants





Later when I got home I saw a couple more red admirals, so it is looking like a good year for them.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 03-Jul-11 07:18 AM GMT

A quick visit to Yellowcraig on the East Lothian coast yesterday lunchtime revealed similar butterflies to the previous day's visit to John Muir Country Park. This time, at least, the dark green fritillary stopped and allowed me to take a picture.



Today I went down to see my father who lives near Selkirk. After lunch we walked up to a magical little corner about half a mile from his house. I visited this area a couple of years ago and was amazed at the number and variety of butterflies I saw. As with most times I've gone looking for butterflies this year it clouded over on our way there, but there was still a good number of butterflies in the area. This is a little valley above some woodland that follows a burn up onto the moors. For the first 500 metres the valley is south-west facing and very sheltered. There is a lot of rockrose and other wild flowers growing there amongst the heather and a wetter area along side the burn with meadow sweet and sedges.



The longer grass was swarming with ringlets. Most of them were sitting, waiting for the sun to re-appear, many with their wings wide open. Others were finding other things to do.



It wasn't long before I spotted a northern brown argus egg.



Although the adults were a little more elusive. Eventually, I disturbed one as I walked along the track.



And after that I saw a couple more. After I took this picture this one went on to lay some eggs.



There were a few common blues around...



...and a lot of small heaths. The season seems to be a lot later in the Borders than in East Lothian where most of the small heaths have disappeared for the year. These ones also seemed to be more brightly coloured.



On my way back down the track a small pearl bordered fritillary flew past me, but unfortunately I lost sight of it. However, that was the first spbf I have ever seen. The number of butterflies was amazing. Hundreds of ringlets, probably close to 100 small heaths, about 20 common blues and 10 northern brown argus and that fritillary. It was interesting that I didn't see any meadow browns or dark green fritillaries that I have previously seen there. I can only imagine how many butterflies there would have been if only the sun had made an appearance. Up until recently this area was grazed by sheep, but for the last two years it has been left and some trees planted. I am not too sure if this will be beneficial or not, as there are areas of bracken and heather that could spread and smother the smaller wild flowers.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Pete Eeles, 03-Jul-11 03:55 PM GMT

Nice one Nick! The Ringlet on the left is an aberration, BTW!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 04-Jul-11 06:12 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

The Ringlet on the left is an aberration, BTW!

Thanks Pete. I hadn't realised. In my ignorance I had just assumed that it was different markings on males and females! The last time I visited that area two years ago I took a picture of a mating pair of ringlets and when I looked at the pictures later I realised that one of them was a meadow brown!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 06-Jul-11 07:36 AM GMT

I met a local enthusiast, Abbie Marland, this lunch time at a site near Longniddry where graylings have been reported. I wasn't aware that they occurred there, but it seems that there has been a small colony there for some years.

Abbie has recently discovered narrow bordered five spot burnet moths at the same site and there was an incredible number of them there.



Since this discovery she has seen them at various other sites around East Lothian, so they may have been around for some time and mistaken for six spots!

We chose a nice gravelly area of the site as the most likely place to find graylings and despite the weather we were not to be disappointed. At least they were easy enough to spot when they were in flight, but amazingly well camouflaged when they landed.



Spot the butterfly!

Unfortunately the dull weather and strong wind didn't help with photography, but at least we did manage a few shots.





At times there were five graylings in the air at one time and we estimated that there must have been more than ten of them in the small area we checked. It is interesting that there are various suitable sites along the coast for graylings, but they don't appear to have spread from this site. Unfortunately this area is destined for development, so I hope that a small corner can be left untouched. I hope to go back on a sunny, still day to have a longer look for grayling, but I don't think that will be any time soon judging by the weather forecast! This is the third new species for me in East Lothian this year!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Jul-11 06:05 AM GMT

We have just returned from a two-week family holiday to Lanzarote. I can't really recommend it as a good place to look for butterflies, but it is a fascinating island because of its volcanic history. Much of the island is barren lava with other areas of sparse vegetation.



Apparently in the spring there are areas of wild flowers, but at this time of year there are only a few woody or succulent plants surviving.



The north of the island has more vegetation.

According to the Oxford Photographic Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe there are only 14 species of butterflies recorded on Lanzarote, some of which only occur between December and June when there is more vegetation around.

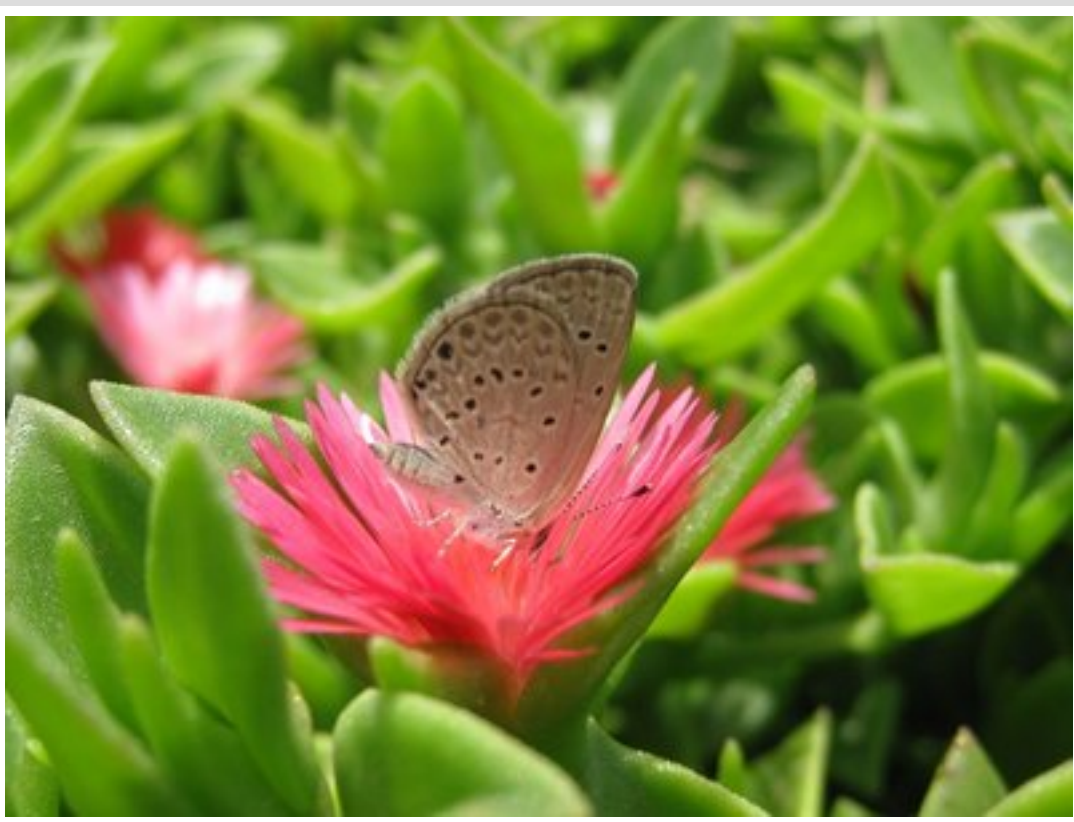
The temperature – high 20s and constant wind of around 30 to 35km/h meant that the few butterflies I saw were very active and not at all easy to photograph. On average I probably only saw two or three butterflies a day and they were all around our holiday resort where the irrigation provided flowering plants for them to feed on.

The first butterfly I saw was a geranium bronze. They seem to have colonised everywhere I have been on holiday for the last few years!

There was another small bluish/grey butterfly around and it took a couple of days before it landed for long enough for me to identify. It turned out to be a Lang's short-tailed blue, but it seemed smaller than normal.



A day or two later a similar looking butterfly flew past me on the coast and briefly landed on a rock at the side of a promenade. I was really delighted to see that it was an African grass blue. It didn't stop long enough for a picture, but later on the holiday I discovered they were inhabiting a small corner of the resort where I was able to get some pictures.





Another new butterfly for me was the monarch, which has recently become established in Lanzarote. There was one that patrolled the shrubs alongside the swimming pool for the first ten days of our holiday. It would constantly fly around from about 10am until 4pm. It was a beautiful bright orange and so large. I mentioned to my wife that I wondered how it would breed if it didn't leave the area. A day or two after it disappeared, I spotted a smaller, less brightly coloured individual flying around the resort. I hope they managed to meet up!



One day this butterfly landed in a bush outside our villa. I could have sworn that it was a brown argus, with dark brown upper sides with a row of orange spots around the edges of the wings. I took this rather poor picture, which now makes me think it was a female common blue. The brown argus isn't recorded for Lanzarote, so the common blue makes more sense!



Other than that I saw a few small whites and a red admiral. So, a total of seven species, two of which were new to me. A better result than I was expecting. An interesting place, though, and if I was to go back I would like to visit in April when the spring flowers are out.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 16-Aug-11 06:30 AM GMT

A colleague offered to take over my butterfly transect whilst I was on holiday, but unfortunately the weather was so bad over the two weeks that she didn't manage to do any walks. The weather was kind enough for me to do one on my return on the 27th July and I was surprised to see a dramatic fall in the number of ringlets. Only two were seen compared to 53 two weeks earlier. There were quite a few green-veined whites around, but only a couple of small tortoiseshells and a couple of meadow browns despite the good weather.

I have also been away for the last two weeks and again the weather was too bad for any transects. However, I have been told that graylings have been found at a second site in East Lothian, which is good news. The other site where they occur is due to be developed into light industrial units in the next

few years.

It was good to see a number of butterflies in the garden on Sunday. The buddleia was a big hit and at one point had four small tortoiseshells, four peacocks a green-veined white and a small white on it. I saw a very fresh looking meadow brown in a local stubble field and a few large whites flying around the village.

Today looked promising for a transect, but it clouded over at lunch time so I hope I get a chance later in the week.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 18-Aug-11 06:57 AM GMT

At last the weather was good enough for me to complete my transect today. The route follows the River Tyne upstream and it was obvious that it had all been under water last week. I guess that is a good enough reason for my colleague not do to have done it then! As it was the water level in a burn that I usually cross was so high that I had to take a 20 minute diversion to get to the other side.

The number of butterflies I saw was lower than I had expected, but all of the thistles and ragwort were covered in silt, so not attractive to them. I did see a good variety of butterflies, though, including large white, small white, green-veined white, comma, peacock, red admiral and small copper.





Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 20-Aug-11 03:09 AM GMT

I made the most of a rare sunny day and headed down to the John Muir Way at Bilsdean to look for walls at lunchtime. They first made an appearance here last year and now appear to be resident. On an 800 metre section of the path I saw 11 walls, more than 10 small whites, a couple of red admirals, a small tortoiseshell and a small copper. It was good to see that the walls seem to be moving further north along the path, but strange that they were all males.





The small copper appeared to be laying eggs on a small dock plant on the path. It was pushing its way under blades of grass and going through the motions of laying an egg, but after it had flown off, I couldn't find any eggs on the leaves.



In the afternoon I had arranged to meet a landowner who had recently bought some land near Dunbar. He wanted to talk to me about public access and landowner liability. It turns out that he is a very keen ornithologist and he has planted up the fields with wild bird cover and a hay mix. This is also very attractive to butterflies and it was lovely to see so many amongst the grasses and wild flowers. There were still a few meadow browns flying there, along with red admirals, small tortoiseshells, small coppers and various whites. On the way back to his house a wall landed on the track in front of us, so they really do seem to be extending northwards!

Mauritius

by NickMorgan, 22-Aug-11 07:15 AM GMT

I was lucky enough to return to Mauritius for two weeks with the family late July/early August. Despite it being the middle of winter, there were still a reasonable number of butterflies around. The temperatures were in the mid 20s, mostly sunny with occasional heavy showers early in the morning. About 40 species of butterflies have been recorded on Mauritius, but ten of them are considered to either be casuals or now extinct. A number of the species or sub-species are endemic to Mauritius.

On our journey from the airport to the hotel I spotted a number of African Migrants - *Catopsilia florella*, which was a good sign. These large white butterflies were quite abundant and the females have both a white and a yellow form. They are very active checking out flowering shrubs and during the holiday I saw plenty, but I didn't see one settle.

The most common butterfly was the African grass blue, *Zizeeria knysna*. These were all over any grassy areas or flowering shrubs. I have never seen butterflies in such numbers.



Zizeeria knysna



Zizeeria knysna



Zizeeria knysna

Almost as common was Lang's short-tailed blue, *Leptotes pirithous*. This is known as the common blue in Africa and they tended to spend much of their time nectaring on *Lantana* and other shrubs.



Leptotes pirithous

The third blue that seemed to be everywhere was the tiny grass blue, *Zizula hylax*. These dinky wee butterflies have a wing span of less than 20mm and their small size proved difficult for my camera's auto focus.



Zizula hylax



Zizula hylax

This small bush in the hotel grounds must have contained over 100 of the above species. I spent a while looking for the clover blue, *Zizina antanossa*, which is very similar to the African grass blue but missing the spot in the basal part of the underside of the forewing. Although I didn't find any I did spot two other species.



This is a faded plains cupid, *Chilades pandava*, missing its tails and eye spots. No doubt bitten off by a bird, thinking it was going for its head.



Chilades pandava

And this is *Pseudonacaduba sichela reticulum*, a subspecies of the African line blue only occurring on Mauritius.



Pseudonacaduba sichela reticulum

The other blue that I saw was the brown playboy, *Virachola antalus*. This species seemed quite bold and tended not to fly off when approached. It would quite often drop from a tree onto some flowers below looking just like a falling leaf.



Virachola antalus

Another butterfly that enjoyed the shade of the trees was *Henotesia narcissus*. It tended to spend most of its time sitting amongst dead leaves in dappled sunlight, flying only short distances and keeping quite low to the ground.



Henotesia narcissus

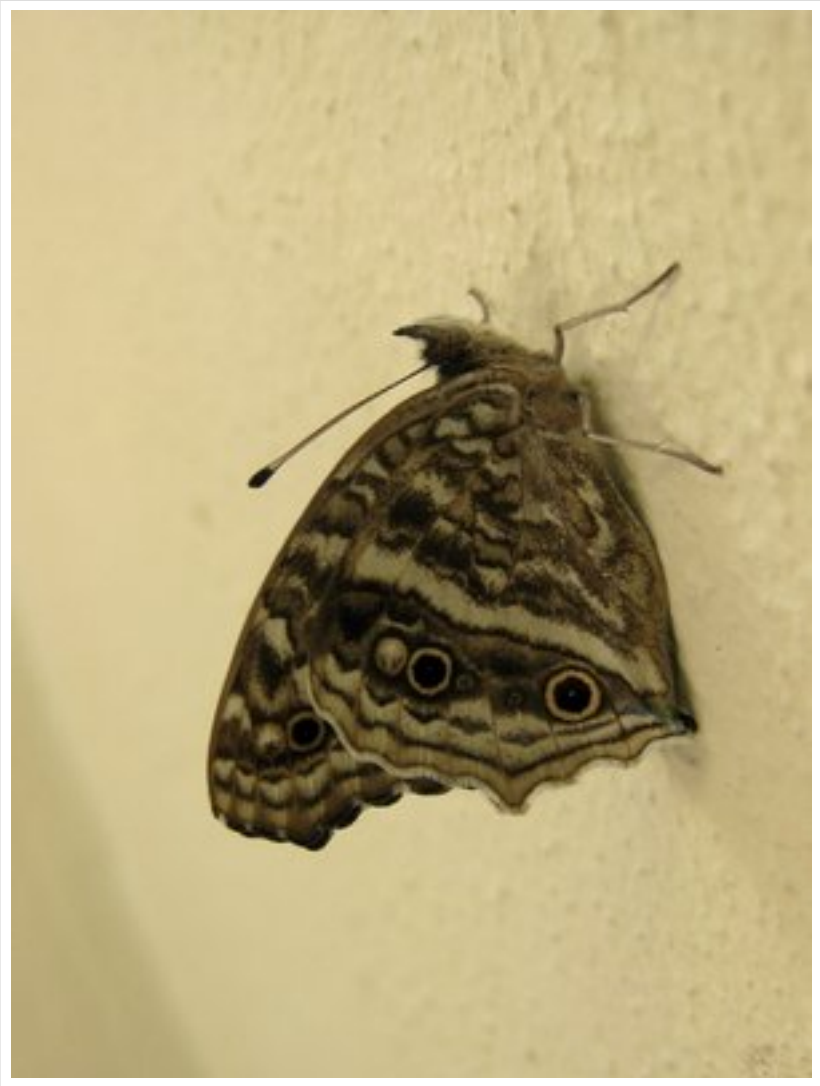


Henotesia narcissus

A butterfly that I really wanted to see was *Junonia rhadama*, the brilliant blue. I was pleased to see quite a few of them, but they were very wary. It was difficult to get within six feet of them, but with some careful stalking I was able to get a few pictures. They have a wing span of about 50mm and the male is more brightly coloured and has one eye spot on each hind wing.



Junonia rhadama



Junonia rhadama

The female has two eye spots and is less blue.



Junonia rhadama

I spent ages one morning following this Malagasy grass yellow, *Eurema floricola*. This little bright yellow butterfly has a narrow black edge to the top of its wings. They seemed to fly quite low and rarely seemed to settle. This one took a break when a cloud came over, allowing me to get a picture.



Eurema floricola

Another butterfly that rarely settled was the common leopard, *Phalanta phalantha*. It would fly from flower to flower, feeding for a few seconds with its wings still flapping slightly. As with most of the larger butterflies, they seemed very wary. On a slightly overcast day I found three of them amongst some vegetation sitting with their wings open and I was able to approach them quite closely.



Phalanta phalantha

I saw two *Hesperiidae* during my visit. The first was a fleeting glimpse of *Borbo borbonica*, the olive haired swift. It flew up from the grass where I was walking and landed a few feet ahead of me. I managed a quick picture and then it flew off and vanished.



Borbo borbonica

Slightly more obvious was the striped policeman, *Coeliades forestan abrogates*. This would flit from flower to flower feeding vigorously with its wings vibrating slightly. I only ever saw them on Lantana flowers.



Coeliades forestan abrogates

Two butterflies that I regularly saw, but which never seemed to land were the plain tiger, *Danaus chrysippus* and the lovely citrus swallowtail, *Papilo demodocus*.

This is an interesting butterfly. I think it is *Hypolimnas anthedon drucei*, but according to the butterfly book I bought "it is exceedingly rare or extinct in Mauritius". Only four specimens have been caught on the island, the most recent in 1953. I am trying to find out more from the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation.



This is the evening brown, *Melanitis leda*. An amazing butterfly that flies in the evening as it is going dark. At first I thought I had been seeing large moths. By day they rest amongst the dry leaves under trees, only flying when disturbed. This one appeared one night in the corridor outside our room.



Melanitis leda

I visited the Ile aux Aigrettes, an island nature reserve looked after by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation. This is a fascinating place and it was great to hear of the work that the Foundation are undertaking to protect indigenous species. It was also very sad to learn of all of the extinctions that have occurred since humans have discovered Mauritius. Not only the dodo, but the blue parrot, giant skink and giant tortoise amongst others have been lost.



Ile aux Aigrettes

Similar species of giant tortoise have been introduced onto the island to help with seed germination and the control of invasive species. Various other species have been brought back from the brink of extinction. It was amazing to learn that most of the natural shrubs have two different kinds of leaves. The lower ones tend to have red or yellow markings and are not palatable for tortoises, whereas the leaves above about a metre are green and lush.



Mauritius Fody

I managed a poor picture of a pink pigeon. There were only nine remaining in 1990 and thanks to an intensive conservation programme there are now over 400 at three locations around Mauritius.



Pink pigeon



Ornate day gecko

There only remains 1.2% of the native forest on Mauritius. Much of the island has been cleared for sugar cane production. What I had thought was natural woodland on the higher land turns out to be mostly invasive species that have taken over after the ebony trees were cleared. It was still a fantastic country to visit with such friendly people. I can't complain at having seen 17 species of butterflies in the middle of their winter!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Aug-11 04:02 AM GMT

On Thursday last week I had to survey a route for a new footpath along the River Tyne. This involved pushing my way through nettles and thistles and various areas of wild flowers, but despite the great weather I only saw two peacocks and a green-veined white.

At lunch time I visited Meadowmill, where an old slag heap has been re-shaped into a pyramid overlooking the site of the Battle of Prestonpans. A colony of grayling was found here earlier in the year and I was keen to see them. Unfortunately, it seems I was too late in the year, but I did see about thirty meadow browns and one of them stopped to lay an egg in front of me!



I then went along to Blindwells to look for the graylings there. Again, I didn't see any, confirming that I was probably too late. However, I watched a small copper and it too went on to lay an egg. There were also quite a few small whites and green-veined whites around.



I photographed this small copper and noticed later that it has longer tails than I can remember seeing on any previous adults.



It seems ironic that these ex-industrial sites seem to be better for butterflies than the natural environment along the river!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 09-Sep-11 06:42 AM GMT

A rare, still, sunny day here today after all of the wind we have been experiencing. Quite a few autumn colours on the trees, but today there were peacocks, red admirals, small tortoiseshells and small whites flying in reasonable numbers. I still haven't seen a painted lady in East Lothian this year. In fact I am only aware of three having been recorded here so far!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Sep-11 07:04 AM GMT

I have had confirmation from the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation that the butterfly I saw while on holiday was indeed *Hypolimnas anthedon dubius*. According to the book I have it has only been recorded on Mauritius four times and was last recorded there in 1953. I guess it may have been spotted a few other times without it being identified. It also occurs on Madagascar, over 600 miles away, but it does make me wonder how it managed to get there. Are they quietly breeding on Mauritius or did this one somehow manage to get there from Madagascar?



It is funny that I quite innocently took the pictures on the second day of my holiday not knowing how rare the butterfly was! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 14-Sep-11 05:27 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. I was so lucky to be able to visit somewhere like that. It was amazing that each species of butterfly I saw was new to me and in some places the density was unlike anything I have experienced in Scotland. I can't imagine what it must be like during their summer!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 21-Sep-11 05:41 AM GMT

I thought I would check out a few sites in East Lothian last Thursday. The weather seemed pretty good – 17 degrees, sunny and still, but there wasn't too much around. I saw a couple of small whites near East Linton and then went to John Muir Country Park where I saw one speckled wood at the (now) usual spot. That appeared to be all there, until just before I arrived back at the car when I saw two small tortoiseshells and a peacock. I did see a nice angles shades moth, though. At lunch time I did my transect in Haddington and didn't see one butterfly. Typically a large grey cloud came over while I was doing it and then the sun shone for the rest of the afternoon while I was stuck in the office!





I borrowed the office's Lumix FZ38, but I'm not too sure about the results. Although it was great being able to zoom in, rather than creep up to the butterflies I wasn't able to get such sharp results as with my Canon compact. I think a bit more practice is required.



After four days of truly miserable weather I thought that I probably wouldn't see any more butterflies this year. However, today I met some contractors by the River Tyne near East Linton and saw six red admirals and a peacock while I was talking to them.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 08-Oct-11 04:36 AM GMT

I did my last transect of the year last Thursday. It was probably the best weather that I have had for my transect all year, but there weren't that many butterflies around – a couple of peacocks, a small tortoise shell, a small white and five red admirals. I felt quite melancholy as I walked along as the forecast for the rest of the week was for rain and strong winds.

At work I am putting in a new footpath following the River Tyne. Thanks to Iain Cowe's description of where to look for red admiral chrysalises I

managed to find one a few days ago where the path was about to go. I used this as an excuse to pick the nettle that the chrysalis was on and I took it home.



Last Wednesday the chrysalis changed from brown with golden flecks to a darker colour with red and white markings showing through. I said to the kids that it may emerge the following morning, and sure enough at seven o'clock on Thursday morning my son came running upstairs to tell me that the butterfly had hatched! I was surprised to see that it had completely firmed up and must have emerged a few hours earlier. I carefully carried it outside to put it on a sunny spot on the house, thinking that it would need to warm up, but it seemed more interested in flying and it did three laps of the garden before disappearing over the hedge.



On Wednesday this week I returned to where we are building the path. Despite it being windy and only 12 degrees I was amazed at the number of red admirals that were sheltering in the new habitat we had accidentally created. More than 40 of them flew up as we walked along a section of about 200 metres. I have never seen so many red admirals in one place.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 08-Oct-11 05:06 AM GMT

I've only just caught up with your diary, after a long ime - I don't know how it slipped under my radar. Fantastic stuff! Wonderful pictures of amazing butterflies.

What book did you use for Mauritius? I'm fascinated by those species, and their relation to other tropical butterflies.

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 10-Oct-11 06:05 AM GMT

Thanks Guy. The book I bought in Mauritius is J R Williams' Butterflies of Mauritius, which was edited and reprinted in 2007. It is only 48 pages. The

ever-helpful Mauritian Wildlife Foundation sent me a link to this paper <http://lepidopteraresearchfoundation.org/pdf/pdf30/30-145.pdf> that was produced shortly after the first edition of Williams' book. I also have Steve Woodhall's Butterflies of Southern Africa, which covers some of the species that are found in Mauritius. It has limited information about the 1800 species occurring in Southern Africa, but it's worth having just to leaf through the pictures and wonder at the diversity of butterflies that live there.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 10-Oct-11 06:21 AM GMT

Thanks Nick. Yes, I have the South African book, and also comprehensive guides to West Africa and Tanzania. Little by little I'm trying to build up a useful library...

You've taken some great pictures of those Mauritian species.

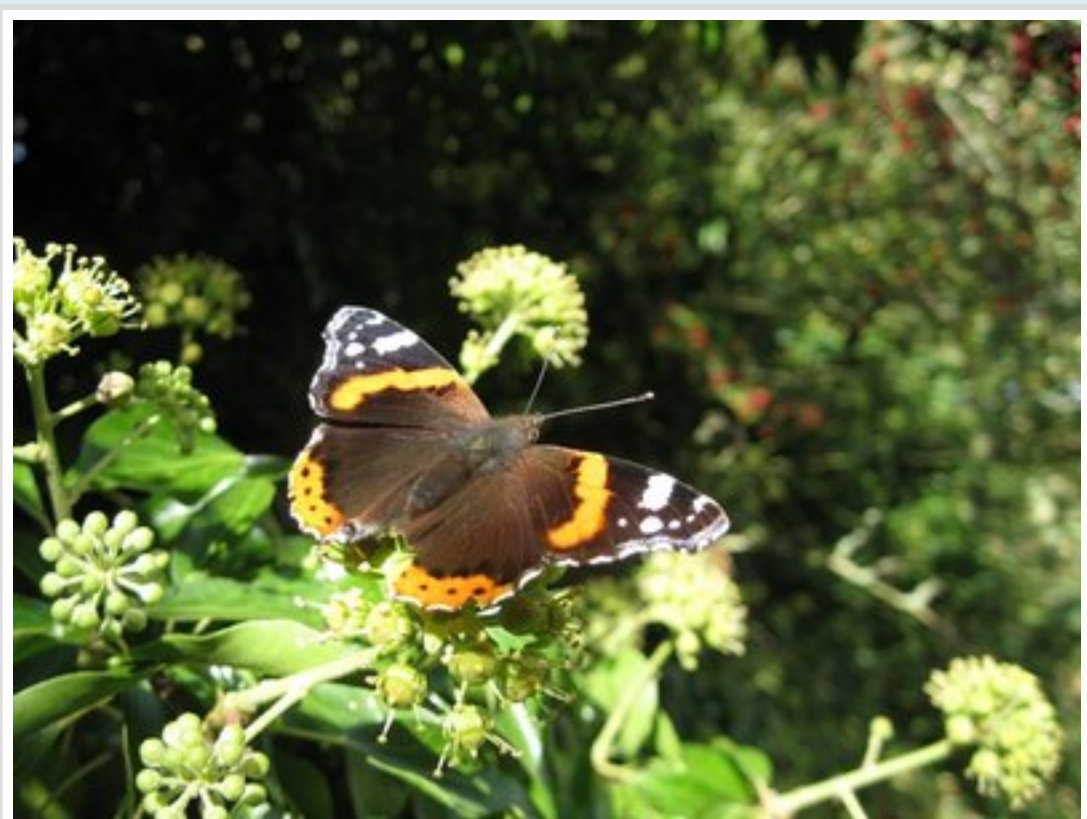
Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 21-Oct-11 04:45 AM GMT

What a difference two weeks make. I walked along the new path we are building along the River Tyne yesterday where I had seen over 40 red admirals two weeks ago, but I only saw one. In fact in over two kilometres I only saw one other red admiral. The river had flooded on Monday, so some of them may have perished, but I hope that most of them have headed south.

It was interesting, though, when I returned to the village where I had parked I saw seven red admirals on an ivy-covered wall. I haven't seen any peacocks, small tortoiseshells or commas for ages and I haven't seen any painted ladies here this year.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 21-Nov-11 07:33 AM GMT

When I was looking for graylings at Blindwells in September I noticed that many of the plantain plants had small copper eggs on them. I know it is a bit naughty, but I dug up one plant with an egg on it and planted it in a pot in the garden. A week or so later I notice that the egg had hatched and a few days later I managed to find a caterpillar. It has slowly been growing over the last couple of months, and I suspect there may even be two caterpillars as some days it seems bigger than others! Its colour match to the food plant is amazing and it is very difficult to spot when it is on a green leaf. I'll be watching it with interest to see if it over-winters as a caterpillar or chrysalis.

