

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 26-Mar-12 01:46 AM GMT

First diary post of the year! Due to significant work pressures (12 hour days for quite a while) I've not been able to focus on Lepidoptera as much as I would have liked. Anyway ...

First off, my Purple Hairstreak ova tally over the winter was pathetic (in single digits), which doesn't bode well for this year. I hope the poor tally is due to incompetence on my part, or simply that this species has moved to pastures new (rather than them sticking around their usual spots).

I'm currently taking a break in Eggesford, Devon (between Barnstaple and Exeter) and spent a couple of hours out walking in Homeland Wood today with my better half. Surprisingly good numbers of both Peacock (27 seen) and Small Tortoiseshell (18 seen), along with 5 Brimstone (all male) and my first non-hibernator of the year, a solitary Speckled Wood. A couple of Dippers on the River Taw were another highlight. I only have a digital compact with me, hence the poor photos 😊

Cheers,

- Pete



Dippers at top right and bottom left!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 28-Mar-12 03:03 AM GMT

After a tipoff from Matthew Oates that Pearl-bordered Fritillary larvae were nearly full-grown (at least, at Cirencester Park in Gloucestershire), I decided to drop in on a couple of Hampshire sites on my way back from Devon. I've never seen a last instar larva of this species before, but have spent several years trying to find them – and have always failed. And it was like waiting for a bus, because I managed to find 2 at the same site. The first larva I found was quite conspicuous as it was initially feeding on a violet leaf and seemed oblivious to the world! The second was found while it was crawling, at speed, along the ground (and I confess that I placed it on the bracken frond to get a shot!). The yellow spots seem to be quite variable – the spots on one individual were quite bright, but quite subdued on another.



And a shot taken a while back at the Hawk Conservancy Trust near Andover, of a beautiful Golden Eagle. I'll definitely be returning there! Very educational and conservation-minded.



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 28-Mar-12 04:30 AM GMT

Those are lovely larvae, Pete. You must be chuffed to bits! It looks as if it will be an 'April fritillary' year this year in Hampshire ...

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Apr-12 06:59 AM GMT

With the weather back to normal, it's taken me a while to catch up with Orange-tips, but I've found quite a few over the last week at Woolhampton Gravel Pits, one of my favourite sites (and renowned for its bird life). Even today, with temperatures barely getting into double figures, I saw nothing until 1048 when, right on cue, 3 Orange-tips arrived at the (literally) hotspot at this site; 2 females and 1 male. This was followed by at least a dozen individuals over the course of the following hour, although I'm sure I double-counted some. As soon as cloud appeared, each adult hunkered down to roost – although there are no foodplants in flower at the moment at this site for them to roost on (when their undersides camouflage them perfectly), so most made do with a branch of another plant. Given the lack of flowering foodplant, I can only assume that the females must be laying on either unopened flowerbuds or leaves – will check next time I visit and have more time.

I did manage to witness a pairing (without any courtship whatsoever!) and also saw the male of the mated pair open his wings to (presumably) let intruding males know that they were out of luck with his girl. Likewise, several females had already paired and showed typical rejection behaviour. I just need to get a shot of an ovipositing female (once the flowers are out). And a bilateral gynandromorph would be nice 😊



Male



Female



Female underside



Mating pair



Incoming!



Not today boys :)

Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 17-Apr-12 07:12 AM GMT

Cracking shots! I thought I was lucky seeing one or two Orange-tips! I really like the "incoming" shot - you snooze you lose 😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Apr-12 07:18 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by NickB, 17-Apr-12 07:43 AM GMT

Nice shots, Pete, and lucky you! We've had cold weather – lots of sun but a NE breeze has kept everything down. Was at a bio-blitz today where the last-night's moth trapping produced *nil points*, due to a frost last night! Visited a Grizzlie site this afternoon (where they have been seen already) but nothing about.

In the mean-time I'll have to make do with what you and UKB can offer.....more please!

N

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 22-Apr-12 03:10 AM GMT

Woolhampton Gravel Pits

A quick jaunt this morning to my favourite local site resulted in my second Cuckoo of the year, 2 Kingfishers and more Reed Bunting than I could count! The place is packed with wildlife! On the Leps front, my day started by releasing a captive-bred male Green-veined White that had safely emerged. I managed to notch up around a dozen Orange-tip, and even found an egg on a leaf of Garlic Mustard, whose flowers are yet to open. It was still white, so recently laid. I also spent a good amount of time watching a few Speckled Wood, including an ovipositing female. I was captivated by the behaviour she exhibited as she flitted from grass blade to grass blade, laying a single egg every now and again. The last surprise, though, was seeing my first Small White of the year.



Green-veined White (male)



Green-veined White (male)



Speckled Wood (male)



Small White (male)



Small White (male)



Reed Bunting (female) ... and a poor photo!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 22-Apr-12 06:13 AM GMT

Nice to know that someone is still seeing more than one species of butterfly! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by NickB, 22-Apr-12 06:21 AM GMT

Yep – *the Butterflies are out there, somewhere.....*

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Freeman, 22-Apr-12 06:54 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

Nice photos, I particularly like the second Green-Veined White shot.

I managed to see 4 species today before the rain came down again. A single Peacock, 2 Small Tortoiseshells, 3 Orange Tips and 3 Speckled Wood, only managed photos of the Speckled Wood in my garden though.

I had a single Small White in my garden a couple of weeks back but have not seen another one since. I still have not seen a GV White around my bit of the midlands yet either.

Cheers,

Neil F.

Re: Pete Eeles

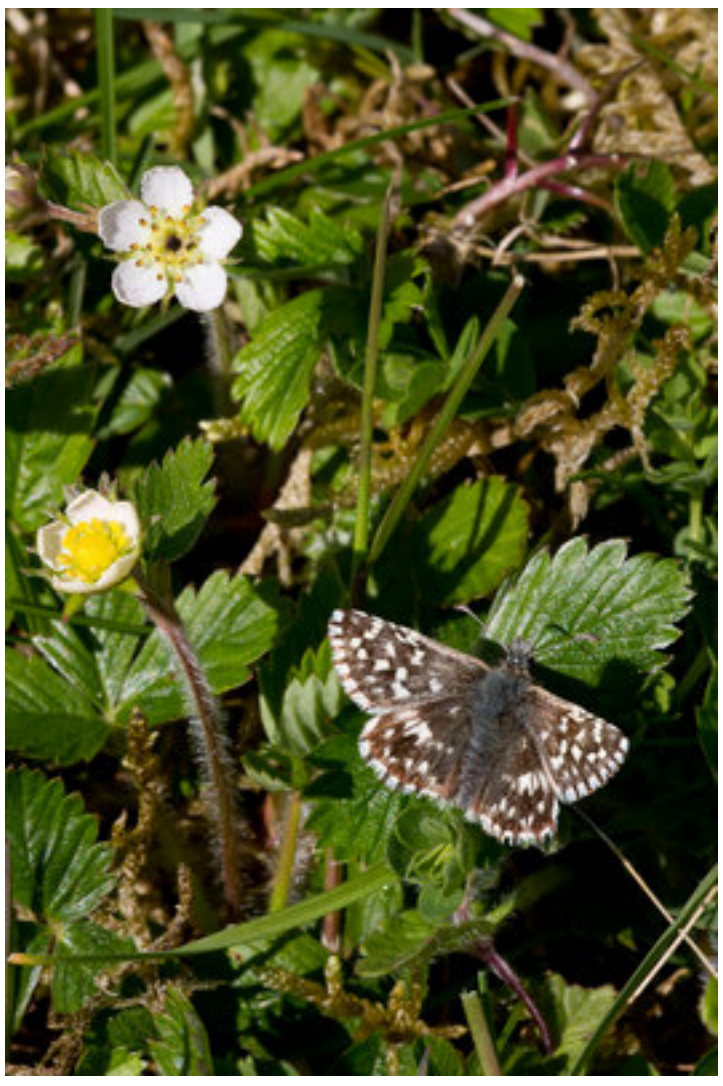
by Pete Eeles, 14-May-12 12:40 AM GMT

Greenham Common and New Arlesford

Some sun at last! And, to be honest, with the intense workload I've had recently, I wouldn't have been able to get out even if it had been sunny! Anyway – today I ventured up to Greenham Common to see how the Dingies, Grizzlies and Green Hairstreak are fairing. I'm pleased to say that the Dingy Skippers are out in excellent numbers – almost pest proportions! I must have seen at least 50 in the hour I spent in a small area near the control tower. A few Grizzled Skipper were also flying around, and I managed to get a photo of one on a larval foodplant – Wild Strawberry in this case. And just as I'd finished taking a photo, a Green Hairstreak flew into the shot; he must have been feeling left out! But this was the only Green Hairstreak I saw, and the breeze didn't help.



Dingy Skipper



Grizzled Skipper on Wild Strawberry



Green Hairstreak

This afternoon we took a walk around New Arlesford in Hampshire, which has some very scenic footpaths on the outskirts of the village and alongside the River Arle. At one point we came across a 50 foot corridor along a track that played host to 7 Orange-tip (all male), 6 Brimstone (5 male, 1 female), 2 Holly Blue (both male), and a single female Comma (which was very tatty, even by Comma standards!). The Comma was egg-laying profusely in the area, and I took great delight in spotting each jewel as she deposited them singly on the upperside of a nettle leaf. All in all, an excellent day!



Comma egg on Nettle

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

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

Pete

The Comma was egg-laying profusely in the area, and I took great delight in spotting each jewel as she deposited them singly on the upperside of a nettle leaf.

That is impressive resolution/depth of field for such a tiny object. Camera technical details if you wouldn't mind Pete.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-May-12 03:28 AM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

Pete

The Comma was egg-laying profusely in the area, and I took great delight in spotting each jewel as she deposited them singly on the upperside of a nettle leaf.

That is impressive resolution/depth of field for such a tiny object. Camera technical details if you wouldn't mind Pete.

Jack

No probs:

Canon 7D
Sigma 150mm
EDIT: Extension tubes
1/160s
50mm focal length
Shutter priority
ISO 200
Off-camera flash
Tripod mounted
Remote release cable
Wimberly plamp
Fingers crossed

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 29-May-12 06:09 AM GMT

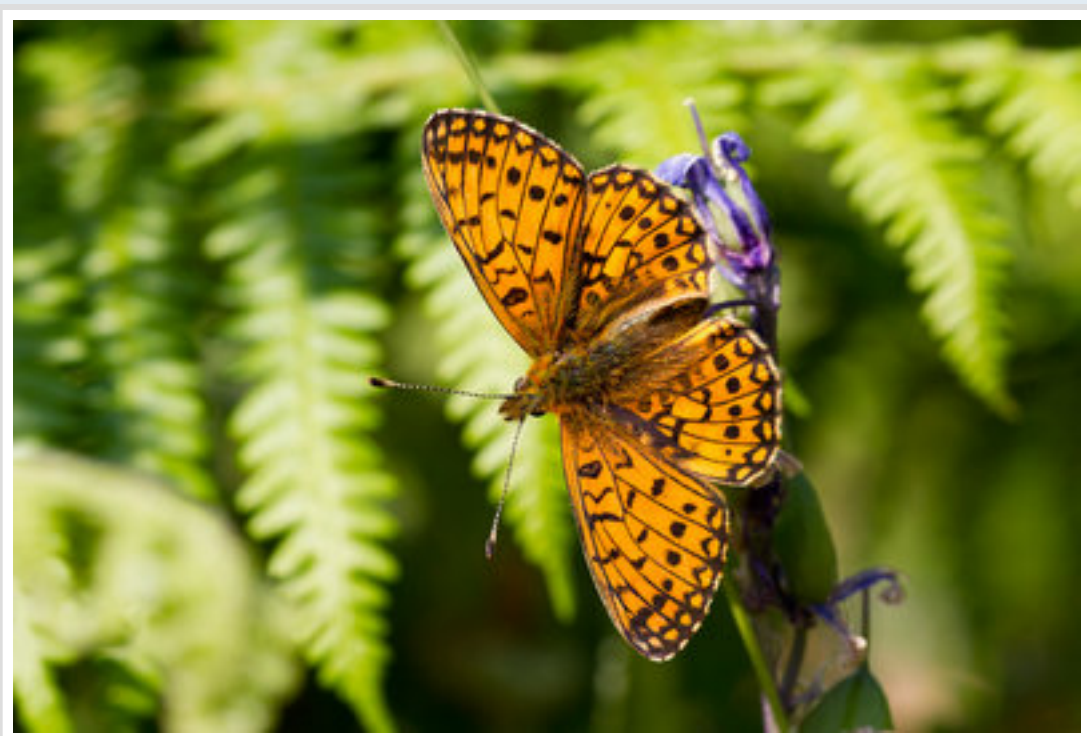
When in Rome

Actually, "when in Scotland" 😊 I'm working in Edinburgh part of this week, and decided to take the opportunity to head north to visit a few sites for Chequered Skipper and other species on the wing. Given the ridiculously-warm weather, I knew I needed to be in the area by 0700 at the latest (really!). And so I'm glad I made the effort to set off at 0430, arriving bang on time at Glasdrum Wood, because the first butterflies were flying at exactly 0722 beneath the electricity pylons – in this case, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary ssp. insularum.



Glasdrum Wood

This subspecies is somewhat brighter than those I'm used to seeing down south, and all individuals seen were extremely fresh. By 1000 none were settling for photos for any reasonable length of time. Males and females were out in equal numbers.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary ssp. insularum (male)

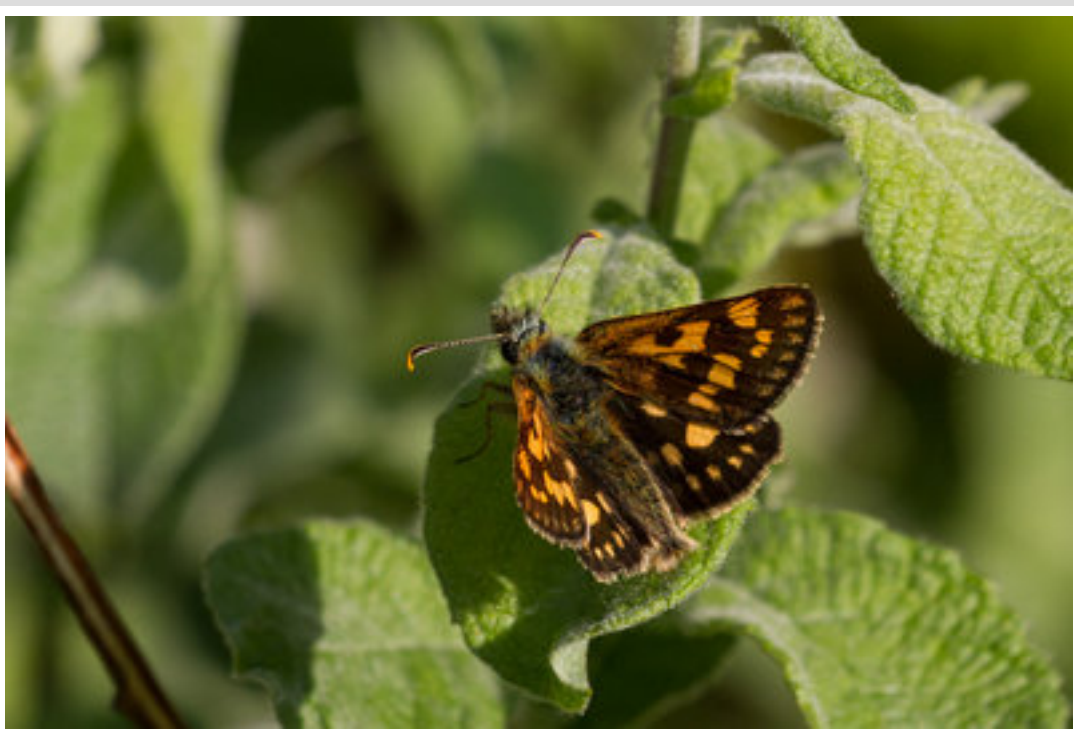


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary ssp. insularum (male)

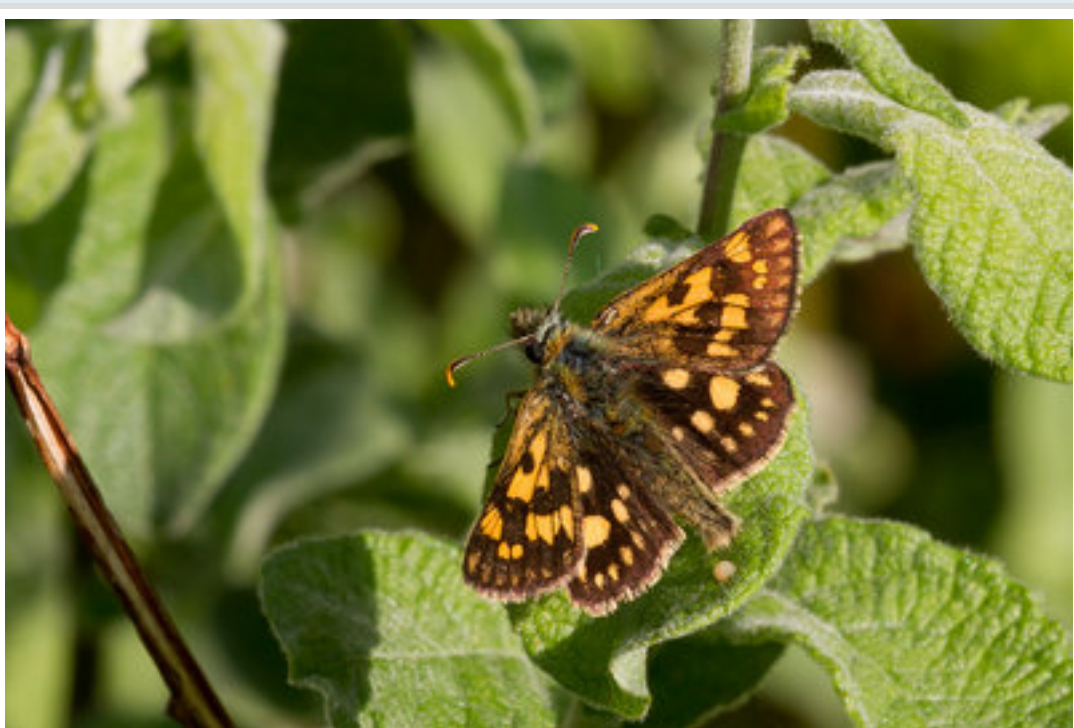


Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary ssp. insularum (female)

I failed to find any roosting Chequered Skipper, but they quickly showed themselves as soon as the Small Pearls started flying, with males actively defending their territories from anything flying nearby. Of the 20+ individuals seen, only 2 were possible females, which are much more secretive in nature. The individuals were in varying states of wear and tear; some had obviously been out for a few days, while others had emerged this morning, including one that seemed to prove the point by ejecting some meconium fluid (a waste product from the pupal stage) from its abdomen.



Chequered Skipper (male)



Chequered Skipper (male) - with meconium fluid



Chequered Skipper (male)



Chequered Skipper (male)

It was great to meet up with fellow UKB member "ScottD" who had led walks at Glasdrum the previous weekend, and was able to give me various pointers as we walked the site. In addition to Small Pearls and McSkippers, we came across Small Heath, Orange-tip and Green-veined White.

Leaving Glasdrum I headed to some other sites that Scott had put me on to. Unfortunately, I came into contact with a mobile phone signal only to find that various emergencies needed me back at work 😞 However, since it was only 1030 I had more than enough of the day left to put various fires out 😊

Aside from the butterflies, the scenery in the Scottish Highlands is simply breathtaking – and certainly gives a sense of space that is difficult to find further south – the highlands are absolutely one of my favourite places on earth!



Glen Coe

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 29-May-12 06:38 AM GMT

Absolutely cracking shots – very, very jealous! 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by essexbuzzard, 29-May-12 06:48 AM GMT

Seconded! We wanted to and see the Chequered Skipper too, but can't justify the cost this year. A hard choice to make—in fact even harder now, seeing those brilliant photo's!

Re: Pete Eeles

by ScottD, 30-May-12 09:21 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Unfortunately, I came into contact with a mobile phone signal only to find that various emergencies needed me back at work 😞 However, since it was only 1030 I had more than enough of the day left to put various fires out 😊

Now that's a shame 😞 Still, I'm glad that you enjoyed what will probably end up as having been Scotland's summer this year 😊 & it was a pleasure to meet you (& the other UKBers that I met over the last few days).

& the scenery *is* looking magnificent in the sun.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 10-Jun-12 04:53 AM GMT

Doings at Home

With a few captive-rearing projects at home showing some significant developments, I thought I'd provide an update. First off, Gerald the Grizzled Skipper turned out to be Geraldine 😊 Anyway – she was released from whence she came a couple of weeks ago, when the weather was much more stable than it is currently.



Grizzled Skipper (female)

The few Dark Green Fritillary larvae I've been rearing have all done really well but show wildly different rates of progression. The early instar larvae appear somewhat different from the final instar larvae in that they have a significant white stripe running the length of the back. This is absent in the final instar larva, whose most prominent markings are red dots along their flanks.



Dark Green Fritillary larva



Dark Green Fritillary larva (final instar)

I also have a few High Brown Fritillary larvae which are remarkably well camouflaged when sunning themselves on bracken. The first few have already pupated, despite the wet weather of late. The pupa is formed in a "tent" of bracken and leaves, held together with strands of silk. The silver flecks on the back of the pupa are quite beautiful when glimmering in the sun; something I've always struggled to reproduce in a photo.



High Brown Fritillary larva



High Brown Fritillary pupa

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 13-Jun-12 10:40 PM GMT

Silchester Common

Inspired by Mark Colvin's dedication, resulting in some superb Silver-studded Blue shots from Iping Common, I decided to venture out in today's break in the monsoon - to visit my local Silver-studded Blue site at Silchester Common. To be honest, I didn't hold out much hope of seeing any, but I was

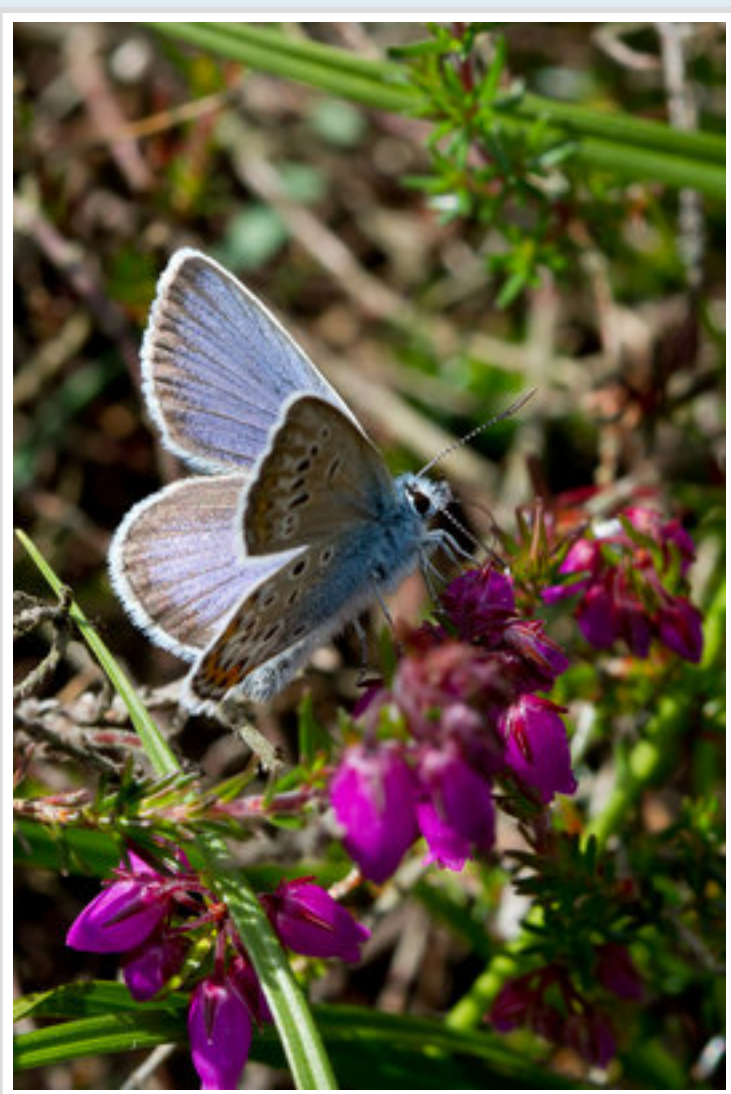
surprised to find 5 males flying in the usual area, along with a male Common Blue acting in a very similar manner, including nectaring on Bell Heather! Not the best of shots, but was nice to see that the critters have survived the recent deluge, and despite the site being more waterlogged than I've ever seen before.

Cheers,

- Pete



Silver-studded Blue (male)



Silver-studded Blue (male)



Oh yes, I'm the great pretender. A male Common Blue.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Mark Colvin, 14-Jun-12 03:55 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

Many thanks for your extremely generous comments about my pictures, that means a lot.

I'm really glad you managed to get out and see the Silver-studded Blue on your local patch, they are certainly one of my favourite species. I too, was pleased to see my local Stedham and Iping colonies after the recent storms. You comment on Silchester Common being waterlogged. I don't generally tend to associate sandy heathland environments being wet, though I know they can be, but I came home absolutely soaked after my excursion due to the standing water.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-Jun-12 01:30 AM GMT

Collard Hill

With the Large Blue at Collard Hill peaking this week (according to Matthew Oates), I decided to spend the morning taking a look. I arrived around 0745, but the first butterflies weren't mobile until 0845, despite the cloudless sky. Of course, a cloudless sky is the last thing you want if you're after an upperwing shot of a Large Blue! I soon bumped into UKB member Trev Sawyer and his wife, and Trev kindly pointed out a mating pair.



Large Blue (female)



Large Blue (mating pair)

I managed to see quite a few individual Large Blue and, even though my brain was "homed in" on the Large Blue, I do believe they were one of the commonest butterflies on the site. I probably saw 40 individual *arion* at least – spread right across the hill, unlike previous years when they've all bunched up at the eastern side of the hill. There were also good numbers of Meadow Brown and Small Heath, several Marbled White, a few Large Skipper and a couple of Painted Lady too.

Of course, the recent weather has caused the grass to shoot up and so most Thyme plants have grass in and around them, so I did my fair share of gardening (as suggested by Matthew and a sign on the reserve entrance) in order to help ovipositing females (and I saw 2 females "in the act" – and the resulting eggs as evidence!). Given that I didn't see a Large Blue nectar on anything but Thyme, I figure that this will help all adult Large Blue.

At around 1000 a few light clouds appeared, but sufficient for the butterflies to finally open their wings, where I managed to get a few shots – and I'm fascinated at how much the spotting on the forewings varies; I'm sure you can ID individual butterflies based on this! By this time there were also quite a few people on the hill (at least 30) and I fully anticipate some of those are UKB members, so we should see more Large Blue photos appearing, hopefully! The only downside of the day was failing to meet up with Dave Simcox and Jeremy Thomas, who arrived at Collard 5 minutes after I'd departed. Unfortunately, I didn't get decent phone reception (and a message from Dave) until several miles away and on my way home!



Large Blue (male)



Large Blue (male)



Large Blue (female)



Large Blue (female)

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 21-Jun-12 01:52 AM GMT

Those Large Blues are **boo'i'ful** as we say in Norfolk.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by ChrisC, 21-Jun-12 02:40 AM GMT

another species i'm yet to see. (lovely shots too) but with regards to identifying individuals, earlier in the spring i thought the very same thing about the hindwing of orange tips, but i haven't really looked at other species. Mark Colvins 2 diary entries from 4th and 8th April are what made me look. but i've embarassed myself far to often on here before to mention it 😊 one of my winter experiments was to google images and see if i can spot the same butterflies in different peoples pictures eg, google sussex orange tips.

Chris

edit: i just did a quick google and found Colin knights pictures in his blog of the very same butterfly as in Marks diary, then i read the blog and it's because Mark told him about it. 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 21-Jun-12 04:11 AM GMT

Nice images, Pete. Yes, hopefully the robustness of the foodplant given the rain will ensure that Large Blue caterpillars will have no problem consuming sufficient nutrients over the forthcoming few weeks.

It'd be nice if the adults were accorded a break from the generally appalling conditions too.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 21-Jun-12 05:13 AM GMT

Conditions need to be right for the ants, too, who don't thrive in long, lush, shady grass! Obviously, that will be managed on Collard Hill but I imagine other colonies struggling on their own (are there some, or are they all managed?) will be challenged by this year's cool weather and rampant growth.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 21-Jun-12 05:16 AM GMT

"padfield" wrote:

Conditions need to be right for the ants, too, who don't thrive in long, lush, shady grass! Obviously, that will be managed on

Collard Hill but I imagine other colonies struggling on their own (are there some, or are they all managed?) will be challenged by this year's cool weather and rampant growth.

Guy

You're right, Guy, of course, and doesn't this show how there is no prevalent type of weather that can be considered perfect for a butterfly? Practically anything can be damaging to some stage of the process, be it the butterfly itself or the creatures/plants it relies on.

Re: Pete Eeles

by David Simcox, 21-Jun-12 11:24 PM GMT

Very sorry to have missed you yesterday Pete but delighted that you saw so many Large blues and were able to take such lovely photos.

I thought I would also try to clear up a couple of points. You are absolutely right that the ant, (*Myrmica sabuleti*), which the Large blue parasitises, needs short turf to prosper in the UK but critically it needs the turf to be short in the Spring and late Summer/Autumn. Ground temperature is a product of turf height and this heat-loving ant needs warm ground to forage during the cooler parts of the year, (therefore needs short turf), during June, July and August the ground is warm enough under taller turf for it to be able to forage. Under warmer climes in southern Europe, it is actually too hot under short turf for the ant so it tends to dominate quite rank meadows, (usually not south facing) and uses marjoram rather than thyme as it flowers above the level of the taller turf and is therefore accessible to egg-laying females.

On Collard Hill this year the turf was short during the Spring so the ants will be doing fine, however, the late flush of grass flowers swamped the low growing thyme so that some of it is inaccessible to egg-laying females, hence the plea to visitors to undertake some 'gardening' to remove flowering grass stems. The site managers are prepared to re-introduce the cattle and ponies at the end of July to reduce the turf height for the critical Autumn period.

Most of the UK Large blue populations are managed to ensure that the turf is short at the appropriate times of year but we do have a few populations that need minimal grazing and in most years subsist on rabbits and deer.

I would expect the Large blue to be on the wing at Collard for another two to three weeks.

Hope to catch up with you Pete in July

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 22-Jun-12 02:52 AM GMT

Thanks for the extensive reply David – much appreciated! And yes, very much looking forward to meeting up with you.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-Jun-12 04:43 AM GMT

Hampshire and Isle of Wight New Members' Day

I spent today supporting (and presenting at) the branch's New Members' Day, which we hold each year, with around 40 new members in attendance. And I have to say that, despite the weather, today was just awesome. The level of enthusiasm all round really blew me away and made me so proud to be a small part of an organisation and community that, if today is any indication, is absolutely thriving. Great support from Tim Norriss, Andy and Linda Barker, Robin and Pat Turner, Jenny Mallett, Jayne Chapman, Brian Fletcher and Roger Buchanan. We were also fortunate in having David Dennis, chairman of Butterfly Conservation, also along. And, although the weather wasn't ideal, a couple of hours on the branch's primary reserve at Magdalen Hill Down turned up trumps – with 12 butterfly species seen as follows:

Brown Argus x 1

Green-veined White x 1

Large Skipper x 5

Marbled White x 1 (newly emerged, drying wings)

Meadow Brown x 12

Orange-tip larvae x 4

Peacock x 4 larval webs

Red Admiral x 4

Ringlet x 2 (freshly emerged and the first seen this year in the branch)

Small Blue (3 adults, 13 eggs)

Small Heath x 7

Speckled Wood x 1



Lunch on the reserve



Magdalen Hill Down



11 Mullein moth larvae on one plant!



A Peacock larval web

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 27-Jun-12 03:22 AM GMT

Magdalen Hill Down - part 2

Since I didn't take my usual camera to Magdalen Hill Down on Saturday (I was there for the BC members, not the photos!), I decided to get up early and get the shots I missed - and still get to work on time! I was particularly keen to get shots of Peacock larvae and Small Blue ova. The former were easy - with several larval webs to see (and 3 of these are within 20 feet of each other). They're each at different stages, but even the "youngest" larvae still have the characteristic Peacock speckling. And when showing those newly interested in this hobby, it's very pleasing to see the reaction when you show them the path that the larvae have taken as they've grown, since they leave their old webs (and skins) behind.



Peacock larval web - early instar larvae

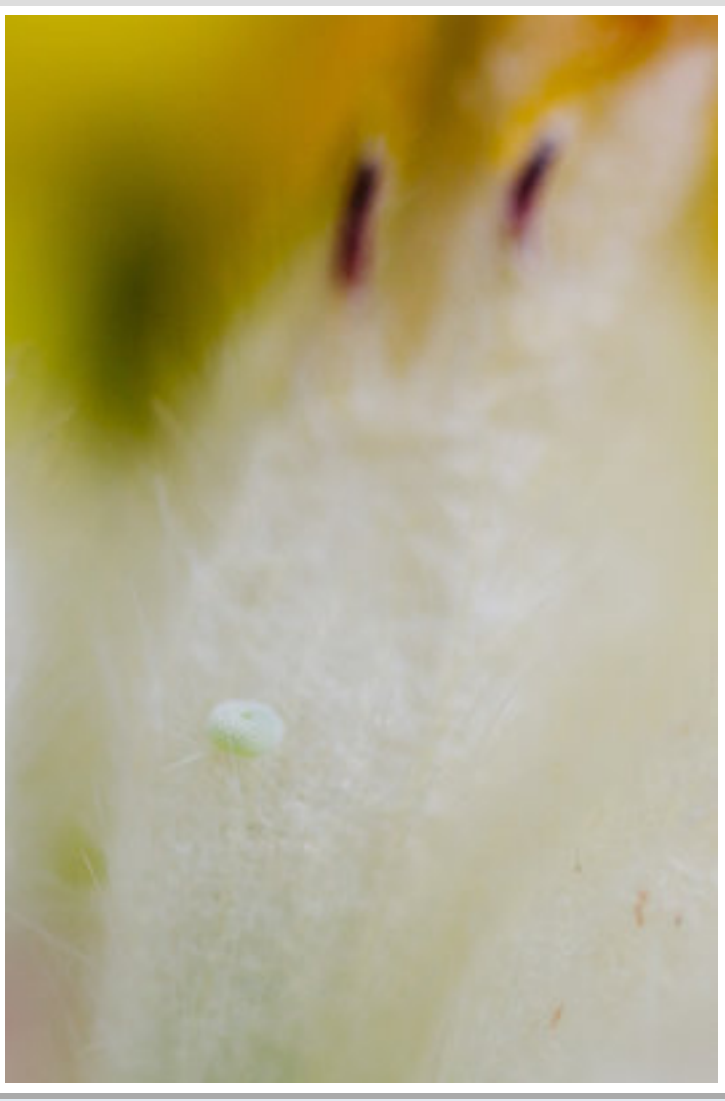


Peacock larvae



Peacock larvae – on the move!

Small Blue ova, on the other hand, are an absolute nightmare! In the space of an hour I found 5 ova – but photographing something so small, with a "white on white" image (given that the ova are laid on developing Kidney Vetch seed heads), with a light breeze ... grrrr. It's a good job this was 0730 in the morning, because I must have looked like a "one man photo studio" with tripod, camera, Wimberly Plamp, off-camera flash, etc. etc. And I'm still not happy with the result! But better than I've achieved before for this species, so I guess that's something!



Small Blue ovum



Small Blue ovum

Just as I was leaving, at around 0845, quite a few Marbled White put on a show, as they patrolled the slopes in search of a female. And a Large Skipper also put on a show, buzzing everything that came within 3 feet, and decided to settle on a very photogenic flowerhead 😊 All in all – a great end to a great morning. I'm almost tempted to do it again tomorrow 😊



Marbled White (male)



Large Skipper (male)

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

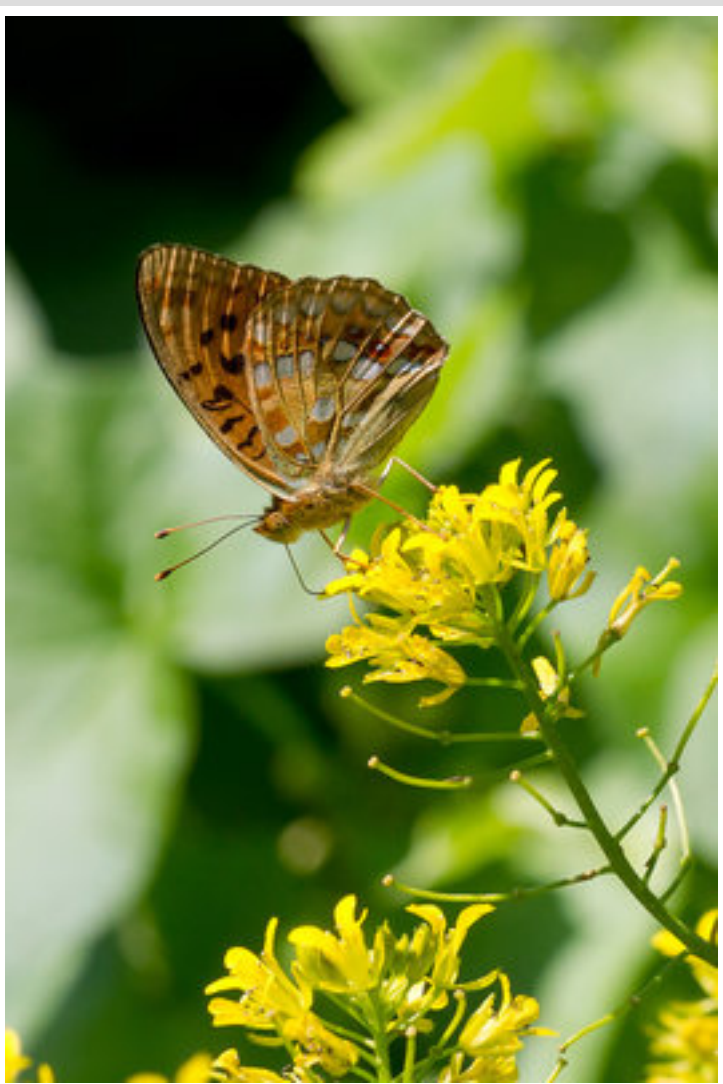
by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-12 04:23 AM GMT

Hungary – day 1

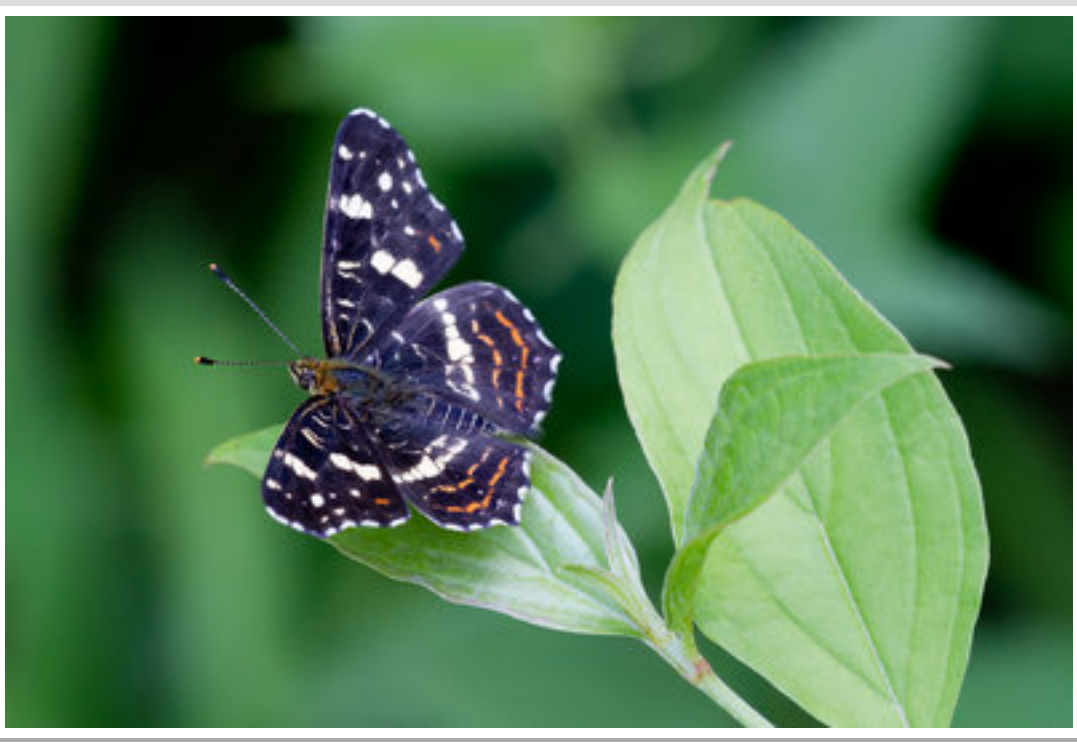
Hi all – I'm spending a week in Hungary at the wonderful Farm Lator (<http://www.farmlator.hu/>) – again! I thought I'd post a few images each day so that you can get a glimpse of the fauna and flora (well, butterflies 😊) from this wonderful part of the world. And today we stayed more or less in the area around Farm Lator, and managed to notch up a total of 51 species – quite amazing! Since a full report will be produced I intend to simply upload a few photos each day. Guy – we've yet to catch up with Hungarian Glider, and so Common Glider had to do 😊



Common Glider



High Brown Fritillary – seen almost everywhere



Map (summer form) – also seen everywhere



Green-veined White enjoying some salts on the road



Marbled White female (f. leucomelas)



Weaver's Fritillary



My nemesis – Woodland Grayling. Only took 6 years to finally catch up with this beast!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 01-Jul-12 04:37 AM GMT

Lovely pictures, Pete! I look forward to your daily offerings...

Can we do requests? How about *Leptidea morsei* for tomorrow?

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-12 04:43 AM GMT

Thanks Guy. Well, we've seen plenty of *Leptidea*, but separating *sinapis* from *morsei* is, I believe, impossible in the field – so any tips you have would be greatly appreciated!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Gothic_dreams, 01-Jul-12 04:45 AM GMT

Some lovely photos Pete, always interesting to see whats about in other parts of the world 😊

Chris

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 01-Jul-12 04:55 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Well, we've seen plenty of *Leptidea*, but separating *sinapis* from *morsei* is, I believe, impossible in the field – so any tips you have would be greatly appreciated!

You're surrounded by experts so I have to be careful what I say, but I thought *morsei* was easy in the field. It's noticeably bigger, conspicuously falcate and a sort of papery white what makes it look very different. I've seen exactly one (in Hungary), which I identified in flight and followed for some time while it ummed and aahed about where to sit down (in that it was very similar to the other *Leptidea*). When it finally did sit down and I could confirm the identity I couldn't get anywhere near it for a photo (1994, SLR, no zoom).

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 01-Jul-12 06:16 AM GMT

I never thought I'd see the day when I'd be seduced by a photo of Green Veined Whites!

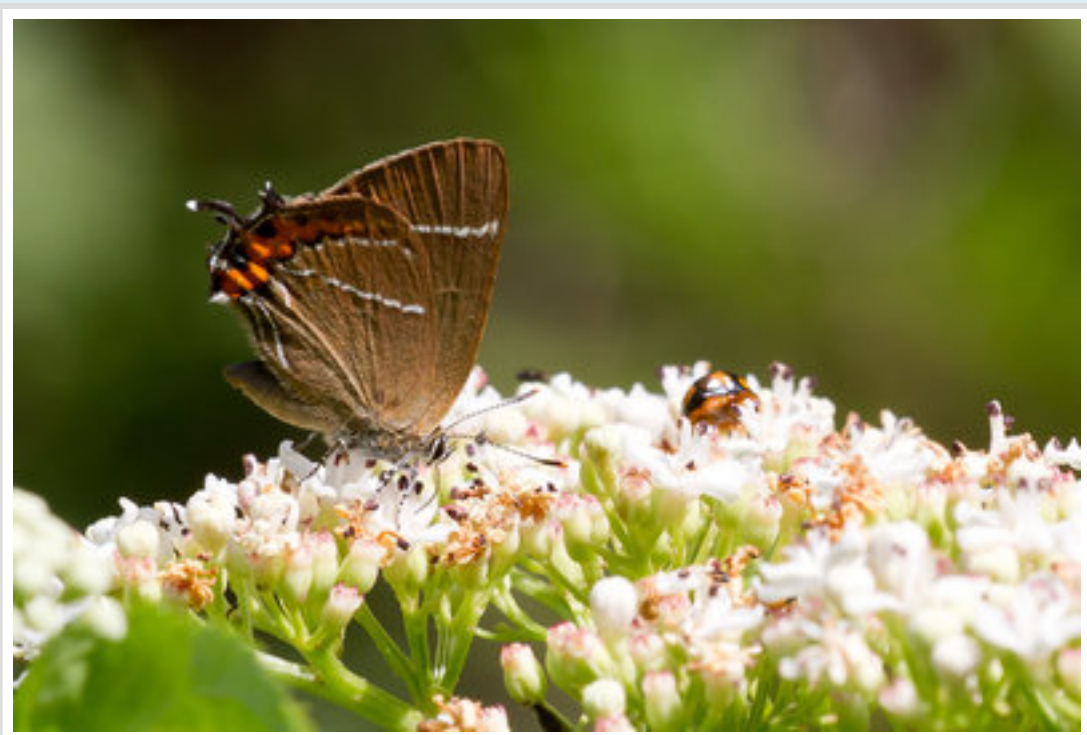
Excellent shot, Pete. That last one just about to land really caps it off. 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

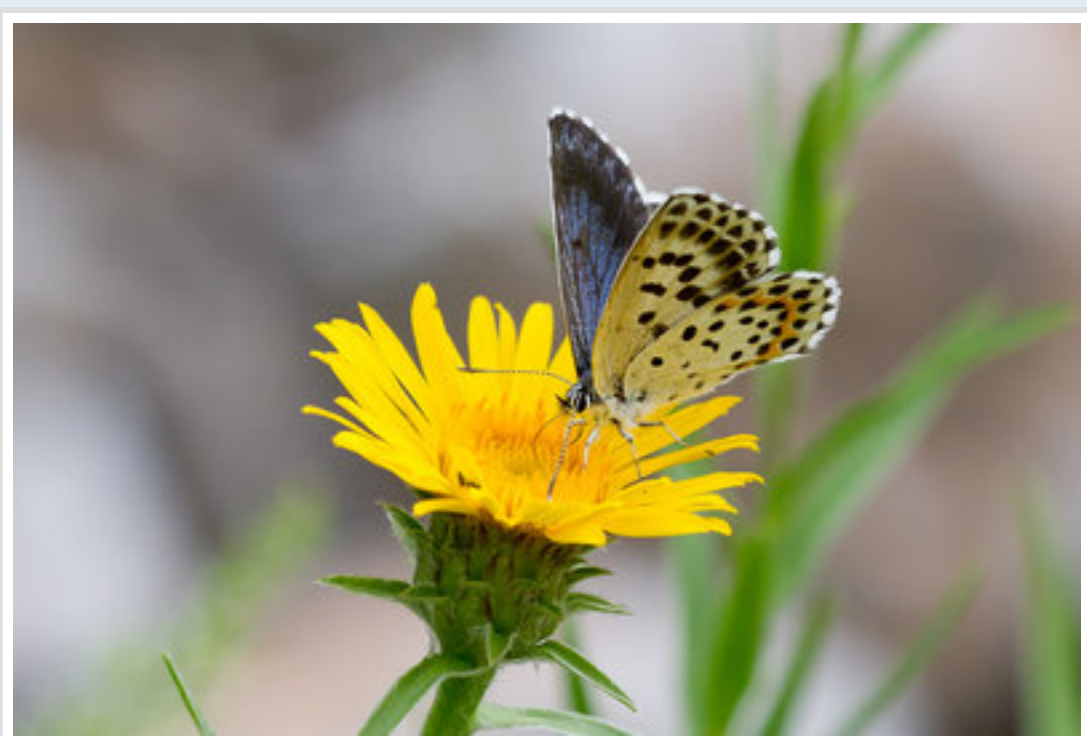
by Pete Eeles, 02-Jul-12 01:13 AM GMT

Hungary – day 2

Thanks for the kind comments all – and for the guidance, Guy! Today was spent in the central Bukk Hills, visiting a couple of sites that gave us several new species for the day. The first site was along a woodland path that opened up into various quarries along the way. Here we managed to get several sightings including White-letter Hairstreak, Chequered Blue and Hungarian Glider (for Guy 😊).



White-letter Hairstreak



Chequered Blue



Hungarian Glider

We then moved onto another wooded area that led up to some meadows – and here we found the *eris* form of Niobe Fritillary that lacks the gold spangles on the underside, groups of Reverdin's Blue and Scarce Swallowtail, and a distant shot of a single Camberwell Beauty that looked very fresh indeed.



Niobe Fritillary f. eris



Reverdin's Blue



Scarce Swallowtail



Camberwell Beauty

And yesterday we visited a site for Pallas' Fritillary, but failed to see it. Anyway, we went for a walk along a path next to Farm Lator this evening, and managed to find 6 individuals of this very scarce species! Beginner's luck I guess 😊



Pallas' Fritillary

The search for Fenton's Wood White continues ... 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 02-Jul-12 06:06 AM GMT

Nice glider! 😊

I'm not (necessarily 😊) questioning your judgment – but why do you say those are Reverdin's blues? They don't look remotely like Reverdin's to me (much more like silver-studs) and if you're right it means this group is far harder than I thought because they must be very different across their range.

The almost total lack of orange on the forewings, the shape of the black crescents and the size of the hindwing spots would rule out an ID of Reverdin's in Switzerland.

Guy

I'll remove this photo from your diary shortly – it's just to illustrate my query:



(Reverdin's blue male, Switzerland)

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 03-Jul-12 01:44 AM GMT

Hungary - day 3

Thanks Guy - now that I've looked more closely, I think you're absolutely right on the Reverdin's front 🙄 Thanks for the ID pointers - and absolutely no need to delete your post!

Today was absolutely scorching and despite leaving Farm Lator at 0700, butterflies and other creatures were more than awake and very active, providing very few photo opportunities. Today we went copper-hunting, managing to find Scarce Copper, Purple-shot Copper and Large Copper (the last two being at the end of their flight period).



Scarce Copper



Purple-shot Copper



Large Copper (ovipositing female)

In the afternoon we stopped off at an Alcon Blue site, which are just emerging (although several Cross Gentian plants were splattered with eggs!).



Alcon Blue



Queen of Spain Fritillary

And to round off this post – a couple of photos of other wildlife; a Hawfinch feeding a fledgling (a shot from Chris Manley taking at 0500 this morning in the Farm Lator garden) and the amazing longhorn beetle *Rosalia alpina*.



Hawfinch



Rosalia alpina

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 04-Jul-12 04:12 AM GMT

Hungary – day 4

A long and excellent day spent at Aggtelek National Park, first stopping off at Josvafo. This is an incredible site and the first thing that strikes you as you head up the village and into the woodlands beyond is the number of butterflies mud-puddling next to the stream that runs through the village. Two photos and a video of mud-puddling Scarce Swallowtail below.



Scarce Swallowtail



Berger's Clouded Yellow

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW9CSzxGclQ>

Moving into the woodlands themselves, it wasn't long before we caught our first glimpse of a Lesser Purple Emperor. Then another. And another. We must have seen over 50 in total – some shots (and a video) below, including the *clytie* form of the male.



Lesser Purple Emperor f.clytie (male)



Lesser Purple Emperor (male)



Lesser Purple Emperor (male) underside

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBTh65xvEMY>

And to finish the day off, we stopped off at another site in the park on the way back to Farm Lator, picking up several new species, including Short-tailed Blue.



Short-tailed Blue (female)

All in all – a most superb day!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Freeman, 04-Jul-12 04:37 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

I am really enjoying these posts, a bit of an antidote to the grey and miserable weather here.

All the best,

Neil F.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jul-12 04:47 AM GMT

Great stuff Pete. We're all wishing we were there!
Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Mark Colvin, 04-Jul-12 05:18 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

Glad you are having a great time.

"Sussex Kipper" wrote:

Great stuff Pete. We're all wishing we were there!

You're not wrong there ...

Great pictures, particularly the mud puddling shots.

Keep them coming.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Pete Eeles

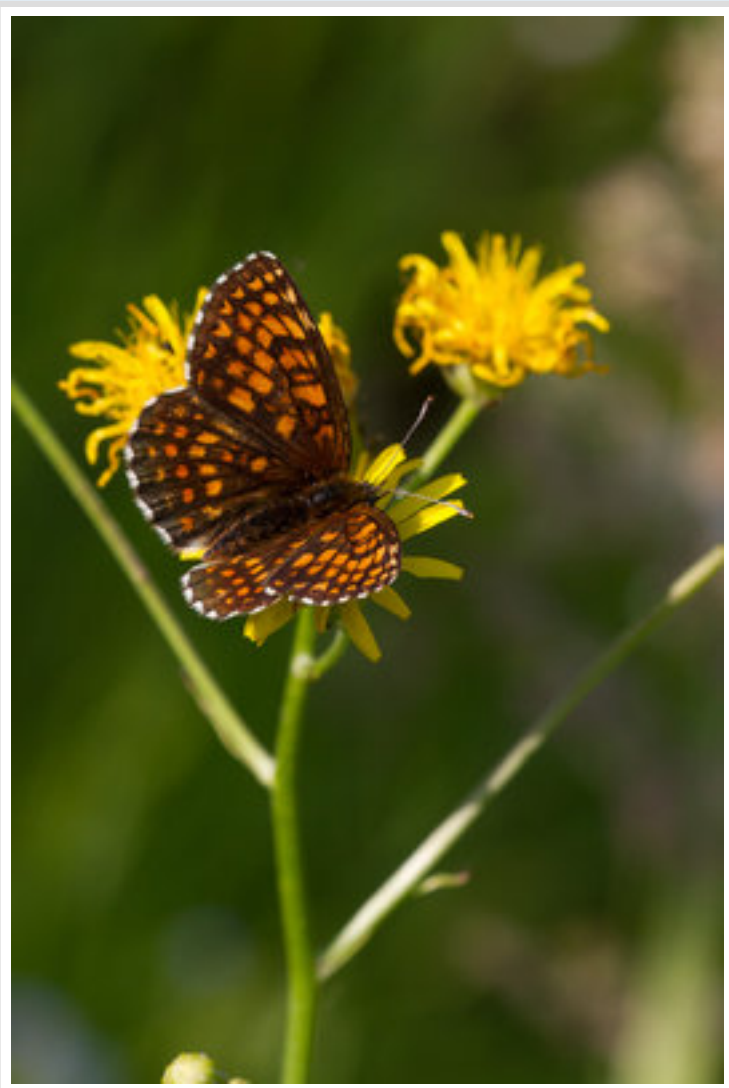
by Pete Eeles, 05-Jul-12 01:52 AM GMT

Hungary - day 5

Thanks for the comments all - although we're all feeling rather guilty that we're wilting in the heat here!

Today was a "quiet" day as far as butterflies were concerned, since we were focusing on birds. However, first thing this morning and last thing this evening brought out the usual suspects - some of which are shown below. Walking up the hill from Farm Lator was slightly bonkers and very reminiscent of a dream - where you're looking for every species on the British list! Within 100 yards I found a 20-strong colony of Duke of Burgundy, a Purple Emperor fly past, several White Admiral flitting about, stupid numbers of Purple Hairstreak and Silver-studded Blue, Wood White here and there, lots of Dark Green and High Brown Fritillary and the ever-present Heath Fritillary (possibly the commonest species we're encountering) - and of course, lots of Ringlet, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Green-veined White, Small Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Holly Blue, Silver-washed Fritillary and a whole lot more!

Not sure what we're doing tomorrow - but definitely not ready to come home just yet!



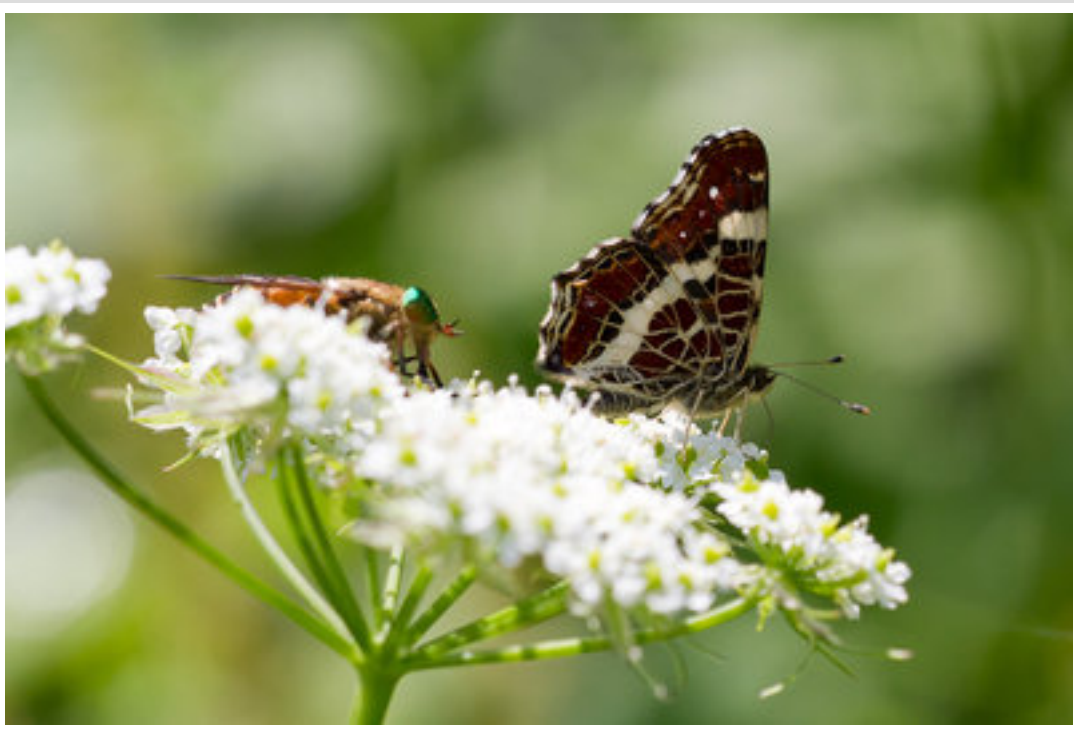
The ever-present Heath Fritillary



Purple Hairstreak – one of many



Spotted Fritillary



Map (and friend) – showing where this species gets its name from



Common Glider – very "common" around Farm Lator

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by millerd, 05-Jul-12 03:33 AM GMT

For me, that Spotted Fritillary is just beautiful. An unbeatable image.

Dave

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 05-Jul-12 05:52 AM GMT

"millerd" wrote:

For me, that Spotted Fritillary is just beautiful. An unbeatable image.

Agreed.

Lovely shot.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 06-Jul-12 04:27 AM GMT

Hungary – day 6

Thanks – once again – for the kind comments! Unfortunately, the somewhat-randomly-selected photos don't really give the full picture, and the full report will take a while; there's just so much to see here and not enough time!

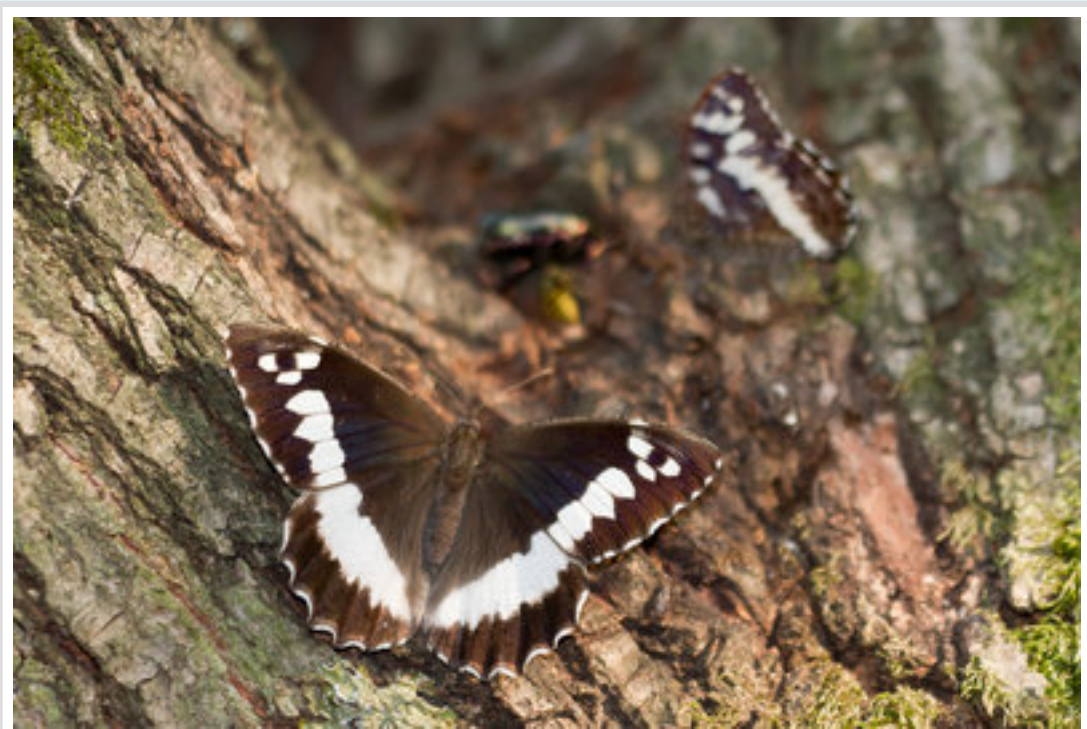
Anyway – today was our last full day, flying back tomorrow afternoon. We'll have some time in the morning for butterflying, but this will be the last "summary post" from Hungary, and I hope you enjoyed the briefest of glimpses into this unspoiled part of the world.

Today was spent revisiting some local and favourite sites – mainly to get shots of things we've not had a chance to study in detail, as well as search areas close by to these sites. Within 5 minutes of getting out of the minivan, we scored with a Dryad (a new species for the trip) and a female Meleager's Blue (blue form) that I've been wanting to find ever since I saw a photo of this spectacular insect in one of my earliest butterfly books – with its amazing scalloped hindwings that are so pronounced in the female. Guy kindly showed me the spectacular all-brown *steeveni* form of the female last year in Switzerland, but, I have to say, this was something else! Realising a childhood dream is always very special, and sitting watching this insect alone for 30 minutes really made the trip for me.



Meleager's Blue (female)

We then moved on to another site and one of the party found a sap run in an oak tree that was attracting a lot of attention from beetles, hornets and, of course, butterflies! Both Great Banded Grayling and Woodland Grayling were ever present, and provided many opportunities to get open-winged shots, which are not always easy to come by! A still and video below.



Great Banded Grayling (female)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLsD3NDeDIA>

And finally, back at Farm Lator, another walk up the path next to our lodgings revealed, much to our surprise, a male Brown Hairstreak! Seeing this critter (one of our latest species back home) fly alongside 2nd brood Duke of Burgundy (one of our earliest species) sounded bonkers then and it feels bonkers now, as I write this. I really should tally up the number of British species seen, because it would be significant!



Brown Hairstreak (male)

And finally, a photo of our brilliant guide, Rob de Jong – here with the massive longhorn beetle *Cerambyx cerdo* below an oak bough. Rob is a Nikon user, but nobody's perfect 😊



Rob – with friend

And should anyone want to relive our exploits, then just visit <http://www.farmlator.hu/> and get yourselves booked in! I have to say, this is one of the best European trips I've been on – and the lodgings and food (cooked by Rob's wife, Barbera) are just perfect!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 06-Jul-12 05:07 AM GMT

More fantastic pictures and write-up, Pete. I'm glad you've got your blue Meleager's females!!

I'd love to see stills of the undersides of those woodland graylings, alongside the rock graylings you posted earlier. Were they definitively identified or was there some speculation in the ID? I'm building a picture in my head of how to separate woodland and rock but it's good to get illustrations from as wide a range as possible.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 06-Jul-12 05:26 AM GMT

That website is tempting me a great deal, Pete.

Safe journey back home tomorrow and thanks for the report.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 06-Jul-12 06:23 AM GMT

I'm just soooooo envious! Thanks for sharing your wonderful photos and trip reports (I think!). 🍷

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 09-Jul-12 04:10 AM GMT

"padfield" wrote:

I'd love to see stills of the undersides of those woodland graylings, alongside the rock graylings you posted earlier. Were they definitively identified or was there some speculation in the ID? I'm building a picture in my head of how to separate woodland and rock but it's good to get illustrations from as wide a range as possible.

Hi Guy – sounds superb! The initial sightings of Woodland Grayling were confirmed by Rob (the first and second images below). Both individuals were comparable with Great Banded Grayling (in size) and seen in heavily wooded areas (i.e. woodland for at least 10k). However, I'm not sure if size or locality are good diagnostics. And I definitely don't want to dissect anything to gain conclusive evidence to distinguish between Woodland and Rock Grayling!

Unfortunately, Farm Lator is right in the centre of where the two species overlap. What I would say is that the more-recent video I posted (on the sap run) contains individuals that are noticeably smaller than the initial individuals we saw and are, therefore, potentially Rock Grayling. I'll ping Rob for his thoughts – especially since he has specialists staying at Farm Lator every year! The latter 2 photos are at the intersection of heavily wooded areas and rocky outcrop. I made the (stupid) assumption that these are also Woodland Grayling – but will check with Rob. The last image below is an individual from the sap run.

I think the terms "woodland" and "rock" are definitely misleading! You'd definitely be doing the "Lepster world" a favour were you to consolidate reliable information on these two difficult-to-distinguish species (and I eagerly await Bozano's coverage of these two!).



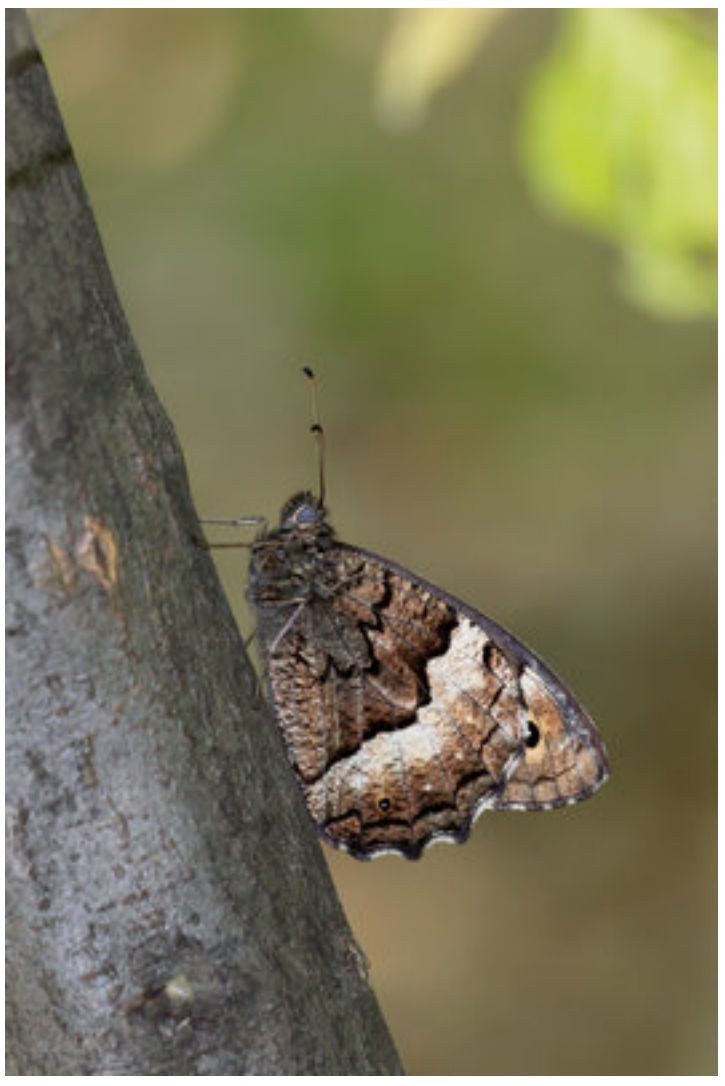
Woodland Grayling (confirmed)



Woodland Grayling (confirmed)



Great Banded Grayling with "something else"!



Grayling sp. on sap run

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 16-Jul-12 03:58 AM GMT

Longstock Event and ...

Along with many other BC members, I supported Hampshire/IOW BC's event at the Waitrose Nursery in Longstock yesterday – our 3rd year at this venue. We had a great turnout of volunteers, but the weather was against us and, as a result, we have very few punters turn up. Gary and Lisa also kindly supported a UK Butterflies "tent". But I do share the sentiment so ably demonstrated yesterday when it comes to conserving the critters we all love so much (through raising awareness at events such as these) that we must never, ever, give up. I saw my first (and very tatty) Small Tortoiseshell for the year today – which seemed to be some kind of omen!



And today, in the fine weather (and having performed my duties, such as cutting the lawn!), I decided to visit the few Small Blue larvae that I've been monitoring locally (being inspired by Vince's exploits!). Unfortunately, 2 of the 3 seem to have disappeared – I hope they've simply gone "walkabout" – especially since it took a few hours to find them in the first place. Despite what some say – I find them very difficult to find, even though they're now feeding on the outside of the Kidney Vetch seedheads; simply looking at the seedhead from a different angle means you lose them! Anyway – a couple of photos below. I managed to find one earlier this week moving around (first photo below), but they generally feed, "arse up" (sorry, "head down") on a seedhead!



Small Blue larva



Small Blue larva

Ever the optimist,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 17-Jul-12 04:01 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

..... I decided to visit the few Small Blue larvae that I've been monitoring locally (being inspired by Vince's exploits!)..... I find them very difficult to find, even though they're now feeding on the outside of the Kidney Vetch seedheads..... I managed to find one earlier this week moving around (first photo below), but they generally feed, "arse up" (sorry, "head down") on a seedhead!

Great stuff, Pete 😊

Good images of Small Blue larvae are few and far between. Hope to see them in the Species Album soon.....

Cheers,
Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-Jul-12 07:30 AM GMT

Cotswolds Large Blue Reintroduction

I've been looking forward to today for some time – I got to spend the majority of the day with Dave Simcox and his assistant, Sarah Meredith (Collard Hill warden a couple of years ago), who are currently in deepest Cotswold territory reintroducing the Large Blue to a couple of sites. This was the first time I've ever seen such a project up close, let alone one associated with one of the most difficult species to rear (for obvious reasons!). I also learned one hell of a lot!

I spent the first few hours in their rented cottage, where the donor stock is also being reared through. Source colonies include Collard Hill and Green Down, and the young larvae are reared through on Wild Thyme and Wild Marjoram (where larvae feed on the flowers in the first 3 instars) – both of which are used as larval foodplants in Britain. A lot of very interesting data has been collected regarding the synchronisation of the emergence of adults with the flowering of these foodplants, with Wild Marjoram flowering around two weeks later than Wild Thyme on average. Given that all colonies originate from the same stock (taken from Öland in Sweden) it has taken only 20 generations for different colonies (using different larval foodplants) to adapt to this difference.

After emerging from the egg, a Large Blue larva will feed deep within the flowerhead and are next to impossible to find. Flowerheads (from donor sites) containing eggs are collected and are left intact until larvae emerge from within the flowerhead and start to feed on the outside of the flowerhead. At this point, they are transferred to individual boxes, given that Large Blue larvae are cannibalistic in early instars. Photos of Dave and Sarah below are of them going through their daily systematic routine of looking for larvae to transfer – together with some photos of larvae pre-transfer.



Dave Simcox



Sarah Meredith



Large Blue larva



... with gnashers made for ant grubs :)

After changing into the 4th instar, the larva literally flicks itself off the foodplant and onto the ground where, in the wild, it would be "adopted" by a host ant that takes it back to the ant nest. This is a crucial time in its development and David and Sarah have a systematic approach for finding those larvae that are about to change into the 4th instar and those that have. These are collected up each day (and possibly twice a day) before being taken out to the reintroduction sites.

At one of the sites we visited we met up with some local "guardians" as well as rangers from Natural England. Dave gave an interesting overview of what he was about to do – before creating a "scrape" in the ground into which a 4th instar Large Blue larva was placed. The reason for creating the scrape is to both assist with visibility of the larva (on bare earth) to ensure it had been "laid down" correctly, but the disturbance also attracts the attention of the *Myrmica sabuleti* red ant on which the Large Blue depends.



Dave and Sarah introducing a Large Blue larva



A post-reintroduction larva!

Larvae are only a few millimeters in length – as shown in the shots below. The first is an ant that decided to walk right over a Large Blue larva before continuing on its merry way! The second is one of several ants that surrounded the larva before "milking" it (unfortunately, no good photos of this!).



Ant and larva



Ants and larva

Although I didn't get to see an ant adopting a larva (this is a very rare sight indeed!), I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dave and Sarah for their generosity in letting me into their world at such a busy time in their project. "Top" people whose work and results are influencing conservation projects around the world. Most definitely the highlight of my butterfly year.

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 21-Jul-12 07:42 AM GMT

Amazing stuff, Pete. Very few people get to see that - you are privileged indeed.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Bill S, 21-Jul-12 03:44 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Cotswolds Large Blue Reintroduction

<snip>

Although I didn't get to see an ant adopting a larva (this is a very rare sight indeed!), I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dave and Sarah for their generosity in letting me into their world at such a busy time in their project. "Top" people whose work and results are influencing conservation projects around the world. Most definitely the highlight of my butterfly year.

Cheers,

- Pete

Brilliant report Pete thanks for sharing.

Bill

Re: Pete Eeles

by Mark Colvin, 21-Jul-12 04:00 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

A great report and a privilege to share the experience.

Good hunting.

Kind regards. Mark

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 21-Jul-12 06:09 PM GMT

An absolutly fascinating account.....and a nice day out 😊

Cheers,

Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-Jul-12 10:29 PM GMT

Thx all. It was, indeed, an absolute privilege. Wish you could all have been there!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Freeman, 22-Jul-12 05:31 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

I really enjoyed reading your report, fascinating stuff, many thanks for sharing 😊

Neil F.

Re: Pete Eeles

by essexbuzzard, 22-Jul-12 06:55 AM GMT

I too wish we could have been there--the story of the Large Blue caterpillar is amazing,and one i never tire of hearing about. But for now,thanks for this fascinating report.

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 22-Jul-12 07:08 AM GMT

That's excellent, Pete. Thanks for sharing those images as well as posting the commentary.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Jul-12 03:41 AM GMT

Bentley Wood and Stockbridge Down

I couldn't resist any longer. With all of the sightings of Purple Emperor, I headed off to Bentley Wood arriving rather late at around 10am (so late that I thought that most of the "action" would be over!). Making my way to the south side of the wood I got sightings of 3 male PE flying around the canopy, including one clashing pair. I eventually bumped into an old acquaintance, Mark Swann, and his friend Peter, who showed me some great photos of a grounded male. After 10 minutes or so, and having seen a couple of male PEs flying around the canopy, a female flew out of a nearby sallow and I finally got to see my first ever ovipositing Purple Emperor as she laid 7 or 8 eggs over the next 10 minutes. Surprisingly, all sallows were in full sun, but were magnificent specimens and no doubt offering the amount of shade that this species likes. Unfortunately, no ova shots since they were all laid quite high up. I must admit, the term "striking the tree" that is often used to describe the action of the female entering a sallow (typically the crown) seems to be misplaced; what I saw was the female delicately flying in and around the sallow branches as she hunted out a suitable egg-laying spot. I managed to get some distant shots of her as she teased us by sitting high in a sallow for 15 minutes and I thought that was it for the day (given that it was now 1230).

As I arrived back at the car, as often seems to happen, I saw the characteristic spiraling flight of a Purple Emperor coming down to the ground. What surprised me, though, was that this was another female! And this time I managed to get some shots (and a video). The amount of orange on the wings of this pristine individual was really quite striking.



Purple Emperor (female)



Purple Emperor (female)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuzZA6HtXEw>

I decided to pop into Stockbridge Down on the way home, where Chalkhill Blues numbers are building up quite nicely. Several Dark Green Fritillary were also around, but mostly worn – together with several pristine Small Copper defending their territories. The highlight, for someone obsessed with studying immature stages, was seeing several female Small Skipper ovipositing. The way in which they land on a grass stem and then shimmy down, before crawling back up the stem probing for a suitable sheath in which to lay is, well, hilarious. I decided, on one occasion, to prise one of the sheaths apart to take a look at the eggs – photo below. The sheath was really quite tightly folded and it took me a while to open it sufficiently to get a shot (with the sheath held in place with a couple of paper clips!); how a small butterfly can manage to oviposit here is beyond me!



Small Copper (male)



Ovipositing Small Skipper



Small Skipper ova

All in all – another excellent day 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jul-12 03:55 AM GMT

Oooo she's nice! 😊 Congratulations. I'm hoping for something similar tomorrow, as I'm heading to a secret wood in Northants. 😊
Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 26-Jul-12 01:58 AM GMT

Terrific Skipper eggs Pete 🍷. They are very difficult to photograph well.

I watched a Small Skipper ovipositing a few days ago. She made a spiral decent of the stem, just like a pole-dancer.....

Really great behaviour to observe.

Cheers,

Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Rogerdodge, 26-Jul-12 02:20 AM GMT

just like a pole-dancer.....

They come over here, taking all the jobs.....



Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 03-Aug-12 09:06 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

I'm still catching up but just wanted to say cracking mini report from Hungary and Large Blue report. Good reading.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 03-Aug-12 09:36 PM GMT

Thanks Lee – great to see you back!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 03-Aug-12 10:26 PM GMT

Thanks Pete 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Aug-12 04:25 AM GMT

Kefalonia

I've spent the last 2 weeks holidaying with my family near Lixouri in Kefalonia, Greece ... watching the brilliant Olympics from the bar next to the pool etc. etc. 😊 Not too many butterflies around, but the hotel was choc full of Painted Lady and these fellas (lots and lots of them!) which gave me the runaround trying various camera settings, but I still never ended up getting a good shot!:



Hummingbird Hawkmoth

The holiday (and island) felt largely devoid of butterflies – although watching a Swallowtail for 10 minutes as it floated (in the same spot) on a sea breeze was something I've never seen before. I could have sworn it was actually enjoying itself (yes, I know I'm "anthropomorphising") 😊 Other species seen include Scarce Swallowtail, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Long-tailed Blue, Lang's Short-tailed Blue, Cleopatra, Brimstone, Large White, Clouded Yellow, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Rock (or Woodland!) Grayling and quite a few Southern White Admiral. While out in a village called Sami (really!) I came across this chap – very dark uppersides – and I'm hopeful that it's a life tick of a Pigmy Skipper – but if someone (Guy / Roger G.) could help me out here I'd appreciate it!



Next report (from today) in the next 30 mins 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Aug-12 04:51 AM GMT

Home, Stockbridge Down and Broughton Down

I managed to get some time today getting back into the swing of things back home. My darling wife has been kind enough to plant some caterpillar-fodder (sorry, "Purple Sprouting" broccoli) and, before we went on hols, I was delighted to see shedloads of Small and Large White ova all over the leaves, although I somehow forgot to let her know ... 😊 Suffice to say, the plants are decimated in parts – with some very large and lovely larvae with happy smiling faces all over the place. I also found a parasitic ichneumon fly, *Apanteles glomeratus*, sitting pretty, so fully expect to see some of the larvae perishing in the fullness of time.



Small White larva – about to undergo a skin change



The boys are back in town :) ... Large White larvae

I also spent a couple of hours visiting Stockbridge Down and Broughton Down. Stockbridge had excellent numbers of Chalkhill Blue (although not the numbers seen at other sites) and the 50% cloud was extremely helpful in that the butterflies held their wings open for most of the time. A four-spotted, red-dotted, female below:



Female Chalkhill Blue

I also came across a female Gatekeeper that was covered in tiny *Trombidium brevi* red mites:



Female Gatekeeper with Trombidium brevi hitchhikers

I managed to find several Silver-spotted Skipper, but decided to shoot over to Broughton Down (my first ever visit!) to see what was around. I bumped into Glynne Evans who was mid-transect ... but he did give me some excellent pointers. Thanks Glynne! I found around a dozen SSS, including 2 ovipositing females with one shown below (not a brilliant pic, but evidence!).



Female Silver-spotted Skipper ovipositing

All ova were laid on either the foodplant (fescues) or dead vegetation close to bare ground, with a few being laid in the "classic" location of "vegetation next to a rabbit scrape"! The photo below is one of over 100 – and it must have taken me at least 5 minutes to get set up with flash, plamp etc. etc. 😊



Silver-spotted Skipper ovum

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 15-Aug-12 05:23 AM GMT

Cracking shot of the possible Pygmy – I've firmly fingers crossed for a positive ID for you 😊 I visited Kefalonia a few years ago so reading through your report reminded me of watching Red Rumped Swallows drinking from the swimming pool 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 15-Aug-12 05:34 AM GMT

Hi Pete. My first impression, on the basis just of that single photo, would be *nostradamus* ... The colour scheme would seem better for that (though I'm very wary of judging colours from photos) and the apparent presence of small pd spots doesn't rule it out because there are light, spotty, ill-defined patches over most of the hindwing (so it's more like a gently variegated, pale wing than a dark wing with pd spots). What would be really useful would be a high-def blow-up of the costa of the hindwing. It looks as if it might be rather densely covered in fine hair, and seems to show a colour change in the right region for *nostradamus*, but at this resolution you can't really make out any hairs.

I don't mind being a party pooper here because it's far better to assume the commoner species, or the species you've already seen, and work to prove the rarity or life tick than the other way around! That's how I work anyway – ultra-conservative. Prove me wrong and I'll rejoice with you! 😊

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Aug-12 06:42 AM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Cracking shot of the possible Pygmy – I've firmly fingers crossed for a positive ID for you 😊 I visited Kefalonia a few years ago so reading through your report reminded me of watching Red Rumped Swallows drinking from the swimming pool 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Yeah – we had Swallows too! Forgot to mention the other wildlife – the highlight of which was seeing the Loggerhead Turtles – just brilliant!



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 16-Aug-12 03:15 AM GMT

Fabulous creature!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 16-Aug-12 03:37 AM GMT

"Susie" wrote:

Fabulous creature!

Me or the turtle? Don't answer that 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 16-Aug-12 05:51 PM GMT

Having studied quite a lot of pictures and descriptions, I've persuaded myself that your skipper is pigmy, Pete! The close-up of the hindwing shows no sign of the cilia brush, which is described clearly in many books. Most pictures show a slightly warmer colour in Mediterranean and a very plain unh, in contrast to an often variegated, greyer unh in pigmy.

I'm no expert, and look forward to someone else's input, but I've come round. Perhaps you had views of the uppersides, too, which would help.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 16-Aug-12 06:28 PM GMT

Marvellous 😊 Thx so much, Guy.

I only saw the upperside in flight (which doesn't help much with a skipper!) and all I can say is that it was a dark chocolate colour.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 23-Aug-12 04:50 AM GMT

Aston Rowant, Greenham Common, Thatcham

Just catching up on the last week where I had the opportunity to drop into Aston Rowant for a couple of hours after work. Following a very hot day, things were cooling down at around 6pm and so were the Silver-spotted Skippers which were everywhere. I can honestly say I've never seen so many at any site before; there must have been several hundred across the site. I found several females ovipositing and even managed to find a few ova around chalk scrapes - I think I've finally sussed out their preferred egg-laying sites! Chalkhill Blue were on their last legs, but I was pleasantly surprised to find a fresh Small Tortoiseshell nectaring on Hemp Agrimony, before it decided to lead me on a merry chase up and down the hillside before I could get a decent shot!



Silver-spotted Skipper (female)



Small Tortoiseshell

Closer to home, I decided to pay a visit to Greenham Common to see if any Grayling were still around. I was pleased to find quite a few Common Blue which seem to have "bounced back" given the poor numbers earlier in the season. I even managed to fill a gap in my photo collection - of a "normal" brown(ish) female. Alongside quite a few fresh Peacock that were nectaring on buddleia, I managed to find a single Grayling too - which happened to be an ovipositing female. After 20 minutes or so, I'd finally managed to get a half-decent shot of an egg that was laid on a fescue.



Common Blue (female)



Grayling ovum

Finally, back at home, I took the dogs for a walk to the local park. Given the treatment this park gets from the local council, I always "rescue" anything I find since I've seen too many things strimmed out of existence in the past, only to regret me not relocating anything I've found. This time I managed to find a Comma larva and two Red Admiral larvae that were in their characteristic rolled-up nettle leaves. I brought all three larvae home and only got around to photographing them today - only to find that the Comma had pupated! The pupa is really quite beautiful. The Red Admiral larva (below) isn't normally found outside of a rolled-up nettle leaf, of course - this critter was being transferred to a fresh supply of foodplant.



Comma pupa



Red Admiral larva

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 27-Aug-12 01:26 AM GMT

Doings @ Home

I've been laid up with a bad back for the last few days - so have been confined to the garden until this morning, when I managed to get to the local park with the dogs, and saw the most beautiful Holly Blue female and, of course, I had no camera! I have to say, I was pretty miffed, but this spurred me into looking on the ivy buds at the back of the house and, lo and behold, found a relatively-young larva right next to its egg! Marvellous! The only other newsworthy item is a Small White pupa (see below). I've spent some time watching both Small and Large White larvae closely over the last couple of weeks and have been wondering where they've all gone. I think I found out this morning when I watched a wasp fly around between the leaves of the foodplant for a couple of minutes before carrying a young larva off.



Holly Blue larva and ovum



Small White pupa

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 02-Sep-12 04:17 AM GMT

Woolhampton Gravel Pits

A 2-hour walk out with the dogs surprised me beyond belief today when, on a very casual stroll around the lakes around Midgham and Woolhampton, I managed to find an incredible 32 Red Admiral larvae and 5 pupae. If you're not sure how to find these - then take a look at <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=3977&start=100>. Possibly the easiest pupa to find in the wild! I've searched for these immature stages every year over the last decade, but have never found as many as this year. I hate to make predictions but, if the weather holds out, I reckon we'll be seeing a significant emergence of Red Admiral over the next few weeks if my findings are anything to go by. Which would be a great end to the butterfly year! One thing that really surprised me, and that I've never seen before, is finding a Red Admiral larva feeding out in the open, rather than within a nettle leaf, or "tent" of leaves. It was clearly nearing pupation - but something I've never, ever, seen before. A random selection of photos below.



The tell-tale sign of a larva in the vicinity – a "curled up" nettle leaf



A "lopped" nettle sprig – containing a pupa



Red Admiral larva found feeding openly



Red Admiral larva



Red Admiral larva "section" showing characteristic pale markings along the flank

And anyone who reads my diary will know that I'm obsessed with studying the immature stages of our British butterflies 😊 What's more, I've become very interested in the relationship that certain species have with ants as well as the various wasps and flies that are parasites. Hymenoptera here I come 😊 Anyway – it may seem strange to some reading this diary that I was quite excited at finding a parasitised Red Admiral larva and, when I got home, the characteristic yellow cocoons of the ichneumon fly, *Apanteles glomeratus*, which deposits its eggs inside a young Large White larva. I've kept both batches of cocoons in order to observe the flies when they emerge; what this space 😊



Red Admiral with cocoons of parasitic fly



Large White larva with Apanteles glomeratus cocoons

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 02-Sep-12 06:27 AM GMT

Some gross yet strangely fascinating shots Pete 🤪 So in the case of the Large White how mobile is it as it looks like a target for a passerine?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 02-Sep-12 04:39 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Some gross yet strangely fascinating shots Pete 🤪 So in the case of the Large White how mobile is it as it looks like a target for a passerine?

Yes – pretty disgusting but an important aspect of the ecology of species – as relevant as what foodplant the larva feeds on, I'd say! I think we need to illustrate significant parasites on the website too. So any shots of known parasites are most welcome! E.g. for Large White (*Cotesia/Apanteles glomeratus*), Holly Blue (*Listrodomus nycthemerus*), Small Tortoiseshell (*Sturmia bella*), Marsh Fritillary (*Cotesia/Apanteles bignelli*).

I'm sorry to say that the Large White larva was still alive when I found it. As for predation, I guess in both cases (Red Admiral and Large White) their defence mechanisms are still intact (the Red Admiral in a rolled up nettle leaf and the Large White with warning coloration).

Cheers,

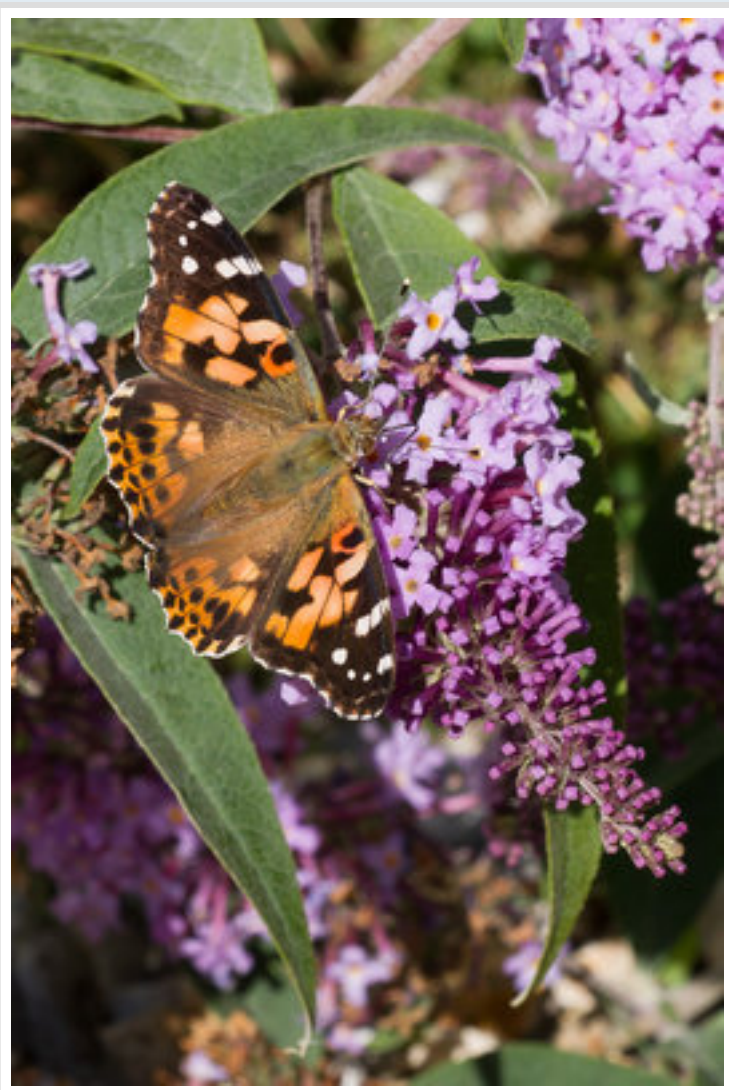
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 23-Sep-12 06:38 AM GMT

BC HQ

I was invited to provide input to a BC event today – a trustee's strategy meeting where progress on the BC 2020 vision was being discussed. As well as a very informative meeting, and a chance to talk with many of the great and the good in BC (Martin Warren, Nigel Bourne, etc. etc.), I also had a chance to grab some photos of the large number of butterflies on the buddleias. An incredible 8 species were on show – in order of numbers – Red Admiral (around 20), Small Tortoiseshell (5), Comma (3), Large White (3), Painted Lady (1), Small White (1), Speckled Wood (1), Brimstone (1). Not bad given the much cooler weather – although the courtyard at Manor Yard provides a good amount of shelter and is a bit of a suntrap. The Painted Lady was definitely on the dark side.



Painted Lady



Red Admiral



Small Tortoiseshell



Large White

Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Goldie M, 23-Sep-12 09:31 PM GMT

Hi! Pete, I've not seen one Painted Lady this year up here in the North, and only two Red Admiral's up to now, things aren't looking too good for them this year. The Large White's have also suffered. Goldie 😞

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 24-Sep-12 06:56 AM GMT

The dark PL is great 😊 I too had a dark one any ideas what causes them to be on the dark side?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

PS are they strong in the force too? 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Oct-12 02:36 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel – I know that temperature can cause extreme variation in Painted Lady – but no idea whether this example is genetic or environmental.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight AGM and Members' Day

Probably the best AGM and Members' Day I've attended (even if I say so myself, as chairman!) – with two outstanding main presentations. And a well-attended event and great to see so many BC members and UKB members there, including Michael Blencowe's chauffeur (er ... Neil/Kipper 😊).

Michael presented on "Once Upon a Time in the East – The Butterflies and Moths of Sussex", which exceeded expectations and was absolutely hilarious – a superb combination of information and entertainment ("infotainment"). You had to be there. He should be on telly (and has been!).

Jeremy Thomas gave an insightful talk on "Butterflies, ants and parasitoids" sharing some of the latest thinking on the relationship between *Lycaenids* (blues, hairstreaks and coppers) and (as the title suggests) ants and parasites. Jeremy covered all aspects of the lifecycle and provided some wonderful insights into the lives of Silver-studded Blue and various *Maculinea* (*M. rebeli*, *M.alcon*, *M. nausithous*, *M. teleius* and *M. arion*) – including the association that each species has with a particular species of ant (and the mechanisms they use to attract ants) and particular species of parasite. Jeremy also touched on some findings regarding Small Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue and Chalkhill Blue. Just brilliant.



Lisa and Gary at the UK Butterflies stand



Jeremy Thomas and Michael Blencowe (not a caption competition!)

[Edit] Thanks to Helen Brock for supplying the photos.

Cheers,

– Pete