

## Re: Hilary

by hilary, 16-Apr-13 12:38 PM GMT



*Sm. White on favourite plant*

Spring at last, I had to shed a blanket last night! At least wild Primroses have benefitted from the weather – best ever since childhood memories of over 40 years ago.

In the last week I've seen the first butterflies of the year in my garden: Totoshell, Peacock, Brimstone and Small White.

Am getting a little worried about the lack of Holly Blues; there seems to have been an almost total failure of Ivy berries on most plants, the odd plant is laden with ripe berries but most have only a very few green berries.

Also at a loss to know how Small and Large Skippers ever manage to survive! I left areas of long grass but most of last years stems are a dead, flattened mass and thats without anything to graze and trample them. Still there seem to be plenty of what may be Square Spot Rustic caterpillars benefitting;

The Small White butterfly I've seen is very attached to a small onamental, variagated shrub. Over the last week, whenever the sun comes out, it appears and basks there. It has a slight deformity to its wing but that does not appear to cause any problem flying. Not quite sure whether it is for camaflauge or mistaking the colour for anotjer butterfly that keeps it returning to the plant.



*? Square Spot Rustic*

## Re: Hilary

by hilary, 28-Apr-13 11:16 PM GMT



*1st 2013 Orange Tip*

Saw my first Orange Tip of the year yesterday – nearly exactly a month later than 2011 and 2012. Despite a cold wind and only 10.5 C temperature, he was very active in the sunshine, flying low over the vegetation. Hope he found somewhere safe to spend today which was like winter. Blackbirds have built a nest over my favourite seat in the garden. For a couple of days I didn't realise and was brushing debris of the seat and having near misses with blackbirds when I stepped out of the door. Since I realised I have been avoiding the area but today I noticed that they seem have abandoned it too and started another one in the hedge – they have been using some shredded paper type packaging which stands out. I might have got my seat back but I'll wait a bit longer.

## **Re: Hilary**

by hilary, 19-Jul-13 02:24 PM GMT

A long overdue update, prompted by the unexpected (by me) and very uplifting amount of butterflies around. Earlier in the year the Orange Tips seemed to be around in two bouts, separated by some dismal weather. The first lot layed exclusively on Honesty probably as there was not a lot of flowering stage Garlic Mustard about and what there was, was in the very early stages of bud development. The second 'batch' layed on both.

Unfortunately one afternoon I found all the caterpillars, large and small, missing from the Honesty, except those on a plant near the house. I suspect very hungry Bluetits were responsible. There seemed to be a shortage of food for them and their chicks, and they had been ceaselessly searching the garden with barely a Greenfly spared. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Honesty is not thought to be the best foodplant for Orange Tips; the half eaten seed pods are a dead giveaway for a clever bird like a Bluetit, and when you 'get your eye in' the caterpillars are quite conspicuous. And there was I just beginning to think I was seeing evolution in action.

I am at a loss to imagine how Small Skippers manage to exist – and yet they thrive. From this site and books, I have learnt that their eggs are layed in the sheath of a flowering Yorkshire Fog grass, the caterpillar hatches but stays put and somehow survives in the soggy mass of old grass, until April. This creates a dilemma of how to manage grass for them. It seems it should not be cut, but how then to avoid it becoming out-competed by Thistles, Nettles and Brambles?

A big Birthday bonus was seeing at least 2 Marbled Whites for the first time ever here today. ...now I will have to see if there is Red Fescue anywhere in the field (but will first have to learn to recognise it).

## **Re: Hilary**

by hilary, 06-Aug-13 12:17 PM GMT

There have been many S.Tortishell caterpillar nests on almost every patch of suitable nettle this July, in a continuous stream with even now as some of the early ones are emerging as adults (I think a few pupated in the polytunnel which would speed things up) there are a few nests of only a few days old. I am trying to keep my Buddlia dead-headed in anticipation!

Funnily enough I have never seen a Peacock caterpillar here. I kept an eye on the darker forms of caterpillar but they all turn out to be Tortoiseshells. There are still many Peacocks about so I live in hope.

Whites (Small, Large and Green Veined) are also doing fantastically well and are such a joy to see. Only one Brimstone as yet.

A very hot 1st of Aug. provided my Highlight of the year – a Brown Hairstreak nectaring on the large clump of Hemp Agrimony that we moved last year. I was lucky it was still there by the time I had fetched my camera but it had moved to the far side. Even so I got my best photo yet of one, although I'm not sure if its a he or a she.



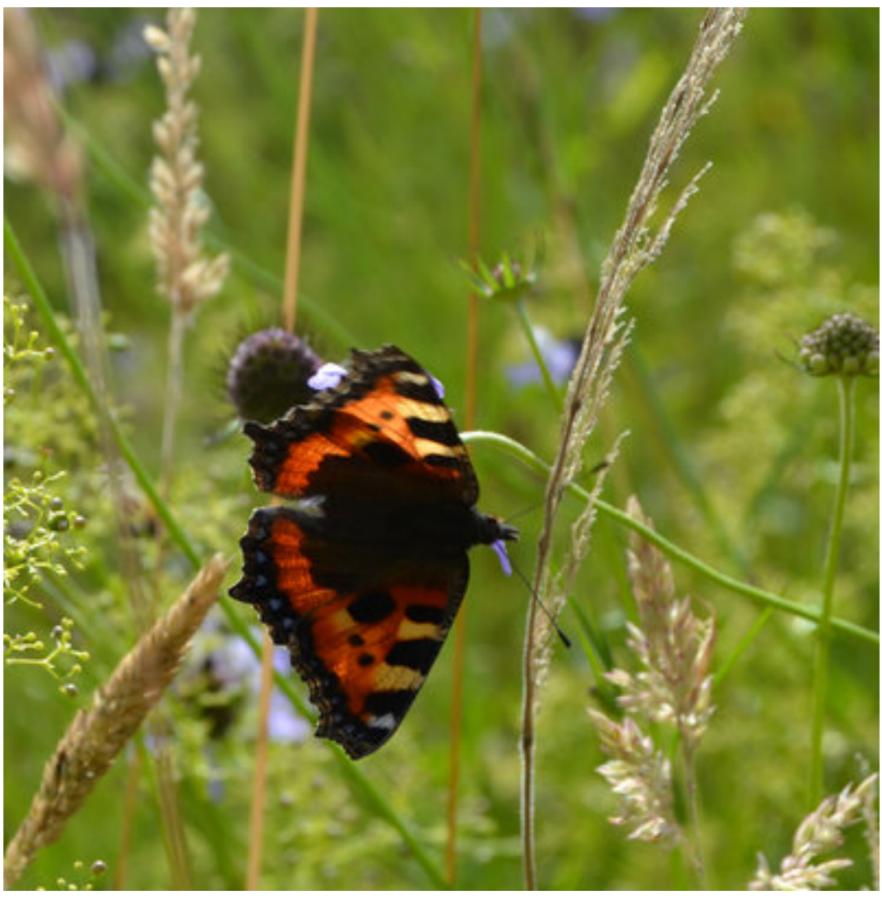
## Re: Hilary

by hilary, 11-Aug-13 06:52 PM GMT

So many butterflies in the garden (and everywhere) that I thought I must add to this Diary.

Huge numbers of small whites (well ...about 40+) - before mid-day they mass on the Lavender and are a spellbinding sight that I cannot capture with a photo. A good sprinkling of Green Veined Whites among them.

Tortoishells numbers are building up. They seem to segregate themselves from the whites in the morning and, I am delighted to say, prefer my patch of wildflowers, The Scabious in particular.



This year is the only time I have seen either a Red Admiral or Tortoiseshell laying eggs Luckily I had my camera with me today when I saw another tortoiseshell laying eggs;



I have noticed many of the early stage webbs come to nothing. I have seen a glimpse of what I thought were Sparrows in a nettle patch with 4 or 5 Tortoiseshell nests and am wondering if they are grabbing beakfuls of the massed tiny caterpillars. A nest that I saw a few days ago, just started at the top of a nettle, today seems to be reduced to 12 small caterpillars and a ragged webb. And they were having to contend with a tiny parasitic Fly/Wasp. Then today I saw a part of a wing flutter down from the Buddlea where a young Robin lurks. Its a wonder any survive!.

Brimstones seem also to be around in better than usual numbers.



I have noticed that the females I've seen seem to prefer eating alone! At first I thought they were taking advantage of their extra long proboscis to use Campion and Salvia, but today I accidentally 'flushed' out a female and she strayed into 'White' territory and became the object of a 'chase' consisting of 4 or 5 spiralling Whites.

Alas, as yet only one male Common Blue and no brown Argus. This as my Birds foot Trfoils and RockRoses are spreading beautifully and brimming with vigour. Still time though!

One the other hand I saw another (or the same !) Brown Hairstreak 7 days after seeing the first one, and on the same plant. She stayed there for at least 30 minutes. If it was the same one she seems to have injured a wing so the hindwing isn't on top of the foreing when the wing are closed.





### Re: Hilary

by Maximus, 18-Aug-13 10:05 PM GMT

Hi Hilary, Maybe the BH wing would have sorted itself out, some nice very nice photos in your posting.

Mike

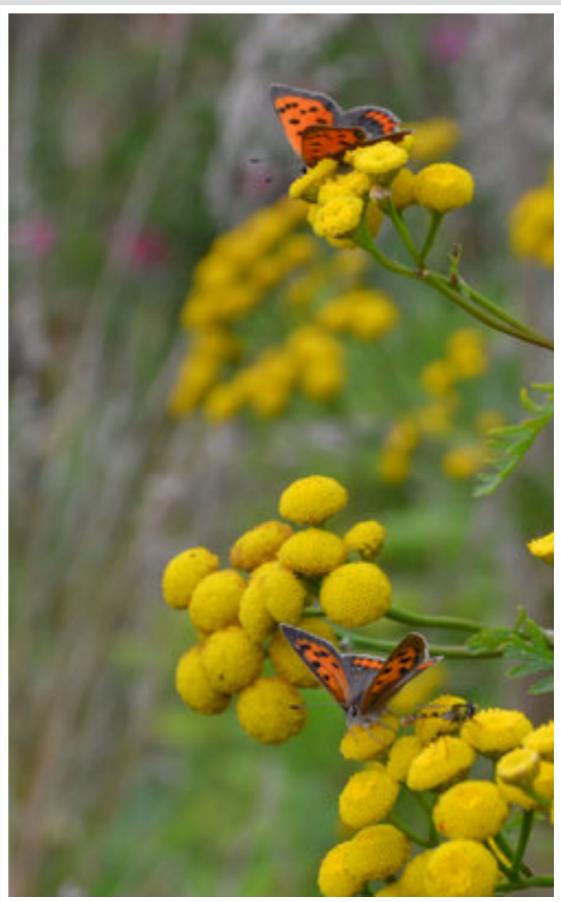
### Re: Hilary

by hilary, 13-Sep-13 04:25 PM GMT

A belated 'thanks' Mike!

My pessimistic outlook of 12 months ago has been grandly overturned and the butterflies have somehow thrived. My massed array of juicy Bird's-foot Trefoil has attracted at least one C.Blue female. I noticed one hovering around and when she'd gone I went to see if I could spot an egg. Whilst I was crouched down she returned and laid an egg right under my spellbound nose. I can see creamy spots around the egg positions and have with the aid of a magnifying glass, seen a tiny green, short sausage shaped thing which I'm hoping is the caterpillar.

Speckled woods have also returned in strength and for over a week there have been two Small Coppers in my 'wildflower' patch. In previous years I'd catch a glimpse of one every now and again but to be on most visits see two is an unexpected treat. Twice I have seen them appear to have a fast moving scrap but then both return to the same plant and feed side by side. Their favourites are Tansy and Fleabane.



### Small Coppers and Golden Rod

by hilary, 30-Sep-13 02:19 PM GMT

I am fairly bursting with pride at the success of Small Coppers in my garden this year. Usually I would only see a the odd one in the garden. Down this way they seem to have had a good year but I am hoping that their relative abundance near my new wildlife patch is due to the Sorrel I planted about 18 month ago.

Golden Rod, although a late bloomer and good for Hoverflies, I had thought not a particularly good 'wildlife friendly' plant. Feeling rather lazy when I was planting out Sweetcorn in June I cut rather than dug out a competing clump with the result it is now in its glory when the rest are going brown.

I'm glad I did because the Small Coppers love it. There are always 3 or 4 on it – always a few more than on the larger clumps of Michaelmas Daisy which is my only reliable late nectar plant (but Ragwort, courtesy of Cinnabar moth caterpillars eating all the flowerheads earlier in the year, is also in full bloom but largely ignored). A late C. Blue was also nectaring on it a few days ago without attracting the S.Copper's aggression unlike Commas and Tortoiseshells that approach too close.

A couple of years ago I also found a B.Hairstreak on Golden Rod, but could not see if it was feeding. But with them it may be height rather than quality that matters as in my (limited) experience I have never seen one settle lower than about 3ft.

### Re: Hilary

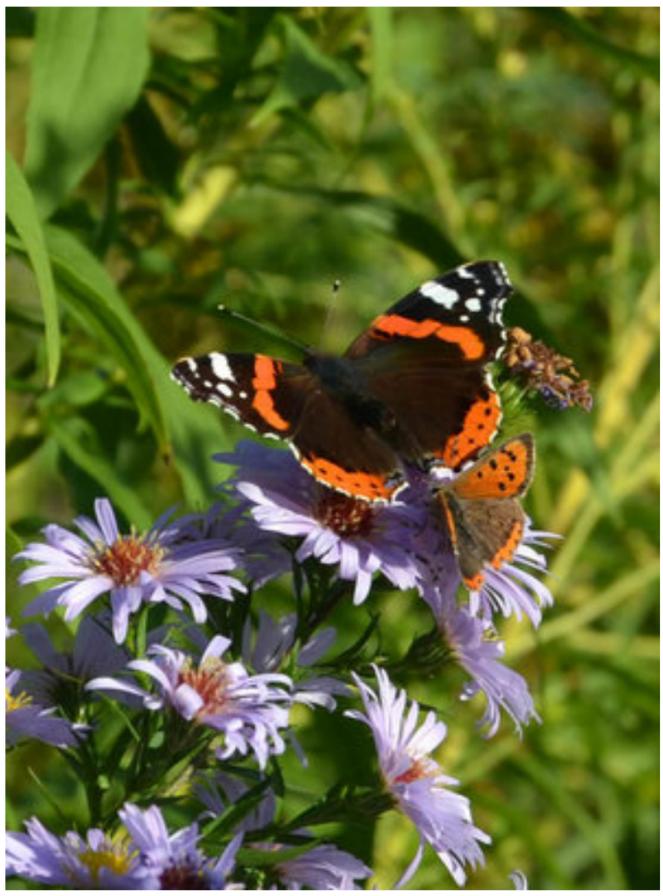
by David M, 30-Sep-13 07:19 PM GMT

Small Coppers DO seem to be unusually drawn towards compact, yellow blooms so I guess Goldenrod isn't beyond their normal remit.

### Re: Hilary

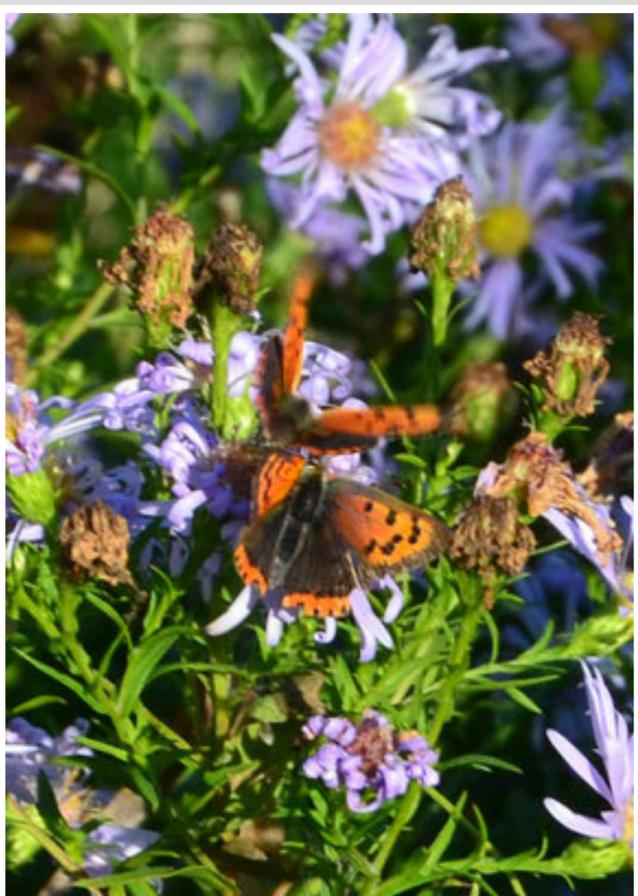
by hilary, 06-Oct-13 11:30 PM GMT

Red Admirals have been in short supply until the last couple of days. Today there were 6+ about, some very large and most very fresh looking, all feeding up on Michaelmas daisies – much to the annoyance of the Small Coppers who have far less company until today brought out lots of Tortoiseshells, Commas and even a few Peacocks which I haven't seen here for a month.



The Sm. Copper didn't have any success in dislodging the Red Admiral. Or any of the others.

A few times I have seen, probably male Sm.Copper approach a (probably !) female which responded by rapidly fluttering its wings which I take to be a brush off as the male eventually wandered off.





The weather doesn't look so good next week so I just hope the Sm.Coppers have done all they need to do and that the hibernators find a good spot.