

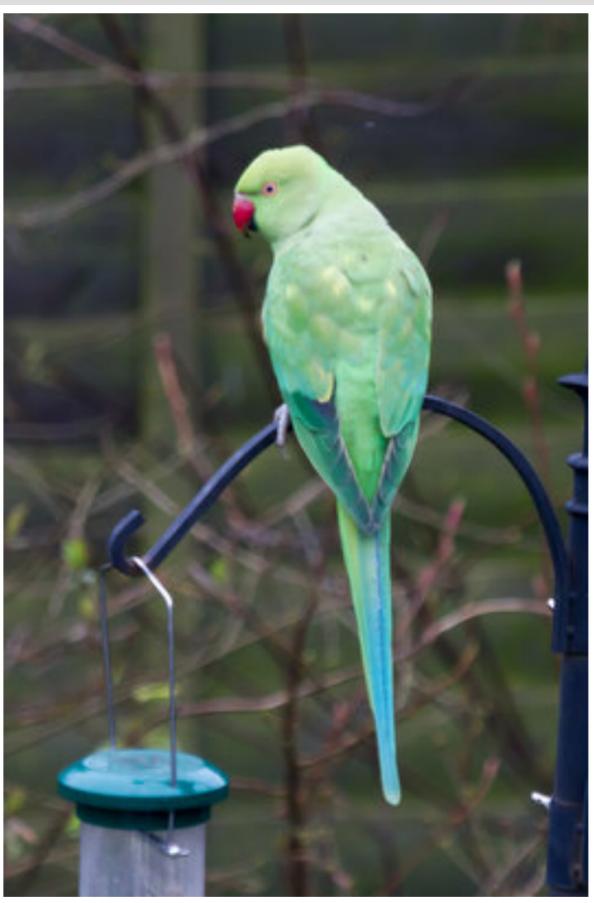
Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 06-Feb-14 01:53 PM GMT

Not a Butterfly!

... but a new record for the garden – a Ring-necked Parakeet! Almost tops the Waxwing we had in the garden a couple of years back, which topped the Sparrowhawk before that! Not bad for a suburban garden!







Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 06-Feb-14 04:19 PM GMT

You might get excited now Pete as did a friend (Mike) in NW London when he first got them in his garden. He now hates them as they monopolise the bird feeders and bully everything else. Mike has had to adopt the equivalent of "anti-squirrel" measures to keep the Parakeets at bay.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 06-Feb-14 05:02 PM GMT

Bring 'em on 😊

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 06-Feb-14 10:50 PM GMT

Great photos Pete 😊 – I think that's a female as the ring is quite subtle so perhaps you might need to try a different type of rearing this year 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 19-Feb-14 06:59 PM GMT

Back on the Green Isle

I had the good fortune of spending some time in Dublin this week, and the even better fortune of having some time visiting a nature reserve to the east of Dublin. This gave me a chance to catch up with the Marsh Fritillary colony found there, which I've been following from adult, to egg, to overwintering larvae. I knew that, if my luck held out, I'd get a chance to see larvae emerging from their larval webs, if I was able to relocate them.

Monday was pretty dire – wind and rain all day and I only had a small window of opportunity due to other commitments. Once I'd reached the favoured spot, I was dismayed to find a lot of it under water – clearly suffering from the recent weather. What was once a rich pasture sprinkled heavily with Devil's-bit Scabious, the larval food plant of Marsh Fritillary, was now a mire. I was so glad that I'd decided to take my wellies with me, although I discovered that nothing will save you if you put your foot down a rabbit hole that's completely hidden under the water!



After squelching around for 5 or 10 minutes, I noticed some webbing that could easily be mistaken as the work of spiders, and was quite easy to see as it caught the raindrops. However, it was soon clear that this was recent webbing created by Marsh Fritillary larvae, who sat dormant inside their shelter. I opened one up to confirm their presence before putting their shelter back together. I managed to find 8 webs in total and was quite happy to leave things there and consider this a worthwhile trip.



And then ... on Tuesday ... the sun came out 😊 I was unable to make a return visit until early afternoon, but am so glad I did, since I was about to have one of those butterfly experiences that I could only have dreamt of. Once I'd reached the favoured area I found an extremely conspicuous larval web with the larvae catching the few glimpses of sun that remained as clouds started to come over. The web reminded me of Peacock larvae since they were so easy to see, even from a distance of 20 feet or so. A little further on I found another, then another, and was really taken aback by just how many there were. In the course of an hour, I managed to notch up an incredible 200 larval webs and decided to stop counting – it was just getting ridiculous. I'm sure a proper survey could easily double that number. And so – some photos below, and I've also added a couple of videos of webs that sat in full sun, when the larvae are most active. Their dark colouring allows them to thermoregulate most effectively as a group, since the increased temperature is a pre-requisite for the larvae to digest their food.





<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dSb-YOB8LE>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U5iCZh-eNk>

I was hopeful that all of the webs had been saved from the waterlogged areas, especially since the larvae are mobile and can move away if they need to. However, I noticed great swathes of Devil's-bit Scabious completely submerged and, on 3 separate occasions, found larvae that were completely cut off from dry land, and clinging for their lives on whatever stems they were attached to. Unfortunately, the larvae at the bottom of these groups were underwater and clearly long gone. I suspect their demise is the only reason that their brothers and sisters had survived since their bodies acted as a floating base on which the others were then able to sit.



And just to finish on a positive note, here's a photo of a typical sight, with several larval webs clearly visible from the same vantage point. At one point, I could see 15 larval webs from the same position. All in all, a visit I'll cherish for quite some time. It will be difficult to top that in 2014, and it's still

February 😊



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 19-Feb-14 07:10 PM GMT

Pete has been

visiting a nature reserve to the east of Dublin

Surely east of Dublin is the Irish Sea?

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 19-Feb-14 07:12 PM GMT

It's North Bull Island, in Dublin Bay!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 19-Feb-14 08:13 PM GMT

Amazing pictures, Pete.

The larvae seem to be doing just the right thing in those waterlogged conditions. The ones at the bottom may never grow old but if their sacrifice has enabled their brothers and sisters to survive they will have fulfilled their biological duty as surely as if they flew and mated.

As for that last picture – I've certainly never seen anything like that! Fantastic stuff.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by millerd, 19-Feb-14 08:33 PM GMT

Astonishing! You can see how, given such numbers, they could eat themselves into starvation. There has to be a huge amount of scabious to support that little lot – maybe 50,000 to 100,000 caterpillars?

Dave

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Feb-14 07:57 AM GMT

Hi Dave,

If there are 400 webs in total, each with 50 larvae (conservative estimate), then there are 20,000 larvae in total – still quite a few and there could be a lot more!

Yes, I think a shortage of food plant could be a serious problem, since it's confined to one particular area. This is certainly the root cause of a population collapse at a colony in Gloucestershire, where the offspring of a "boom" year resulted in all of the available food plant being eaten, the larvae

switching to Honeysuckle in a few places, the larvae being found 500 metres from where they originated, and the population then collapsing.

Anyway, I intend to follow the larvae through to adulthood if at all possible ... will keep you posted!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 20-Feb-14 08:20 AM GMT

You are inspiring me to do a larva search here on Mull – if it ever stops raining. As I write this at 0800 hours, so far today I have recorded 25 mms (that's exactly 1 inch) of rain .

This year to date 610 mms and the official winter (from 1st December) 860 mms. Guy is suggesting that Marsh Fris thrive in the wet. On that basis, there will be a plague of adults this season.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by William, 20-Feb-14 10:43 AM GMT

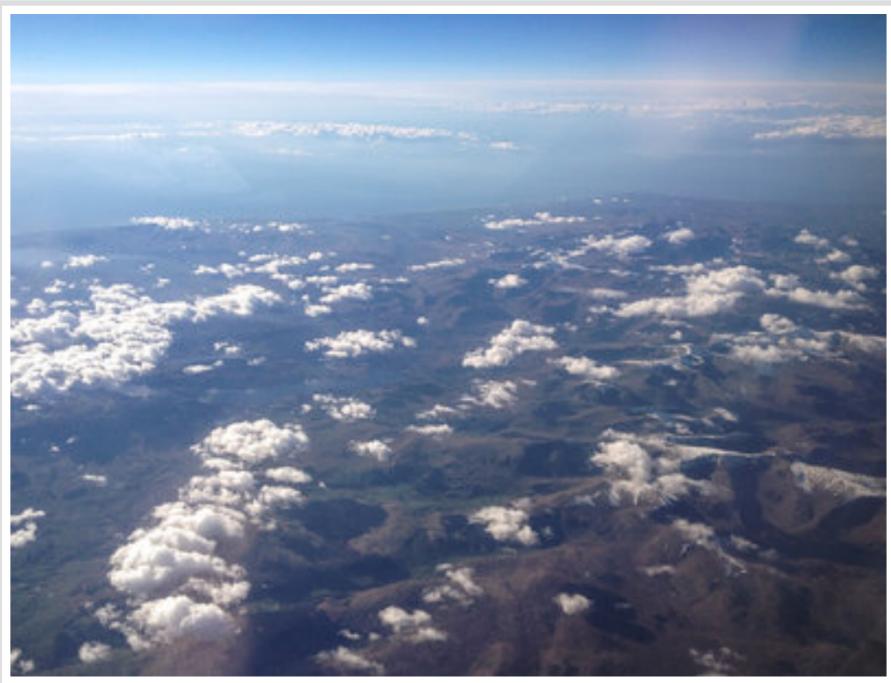
Brilliant Photos Pete 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 05-Mar-14 07:17 PM GMT

Thanks all!

I had to fly up to Glasgow earlier this week and, with the sun shining, Cumbria look rather lovely – with the cloud-covered Isle of Man in the distance. There are Mountain Ringlets in the shot, but my iPhone camera resolution isn't quite up to the job 😊



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-Mar-14 05:02 PM GMT

I usually have a Robin or two following me around the garden but, today, I had a Small Tort to keep me company 😊



Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 10-Mar-14 11:29 PM GMT

The Emperor Awakes!

With spring springing, and a work schedule that required me to travel from Swindon to Winchester, I decided to pop into the Wiltshire wood that is home to a number of Purple Emperor larvae. Most are now changing colour and "greening up" but, unfortunately, many have been predated with over 50% of the larvae I've been following now "missing in action". I'm sure some will simply have wandered off but many more will have become food for the abundant tit population. I just hope I'm able to follow some through to adulthood. Of the 15 that I tried to relocate, I only managed to find 5 and all are shown below.





Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 11-Mar-14 06:53 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

All are great, but the first shot is outstanding. I must try and squeeze in a visit for adults there. I love the forest avenues but have never managed a July visit yet.

BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 11-Mar-14 08:51 AM GMT

Thanks Neil – yes, I can't wait to visit the wood in summer! I also took a wider shot of that particular individual but decided to crop out the more significant bud! Although it does put the size of the 'pillar in context.



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

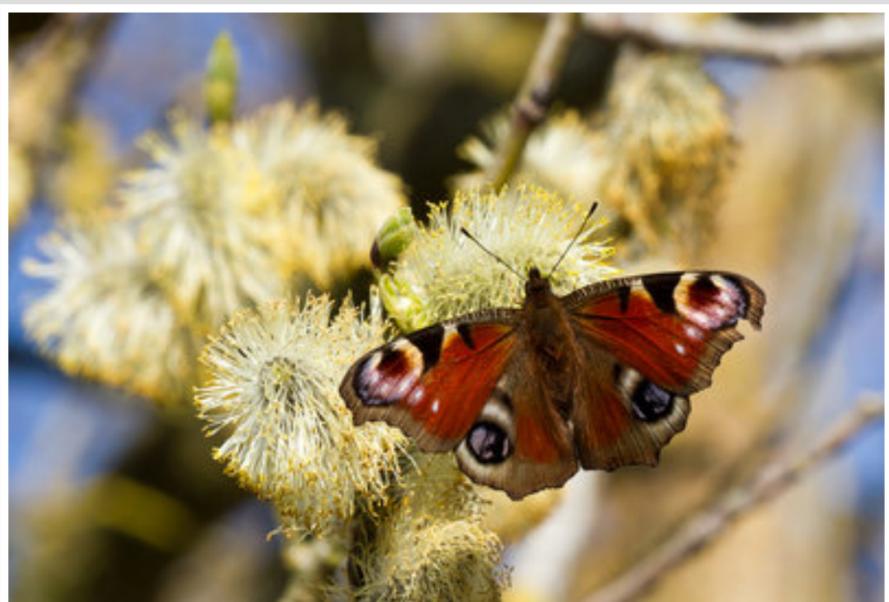
by Pete Eeles, 16-Mar-14 06:25 PM GMT

Highs and Lows

I managed to get out for a couple of hours at the local gravel pits near Aldermaston, which is a great place for butterflies coming out of hibernation with plenty of willow and other nectar sources. Unfortunately, the site was inaccessible, with most entrances still underwater from the recent flooding. Here's a typical sight:



I moved to a part of the site I don't normally visit, which looked really very good and I'll definitely be coming to this part of the site again. One particular field margin was absolutely chock-a-block full of butterflies – I counted 8 Peacock, 5 Brimstone (including 1 female), 3 Comma, 1 Small White (my first of the year) and an incredible 34 Small Tortoiseshell – I've never seen a species bounce back so well! Males were found guarding a territory every 30 feet or so.



The "low" is finding a female Small Tortoiseshell *ab. pallida*, but failing to get any photo at all, despite chasing after it for over half a mile! It was very very skittish and was "spooked" even when I was 10 feet away! It looked pretty fresh and had no colour whatsoever – a black-and-white Small Tortoiseshell, like the one shown here:

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/biodiversity/uk-biodiversity/cockayne/database/image.dsmi?filename=500227X&taxonID=8571&searchtype=taxon&taxonname=urticae&nametype=scientific>

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 16-Mar-14 06:51 PM GMT

Hi Pete,
Bad luck with the ab. You *must* go back for her!
BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 27-Mar-14 12:37 PM GMT

Home Projects

I've had a few White-letter Hairstreak and Silver-studded Blue larvae emerge over the last couple of weeks and they're feeding up nicely. Some photos below. The White-letter Hairstreak larvae always amaze me with their perfect camouflage! And looking at the Silver Studs in closeup, grazing the epidermis of a Bird's-foot Trefoil leaf, is also wonderful to observe.



White-letter Hairstreak larva



Silver-studded Blue larva

Yesterday was also the conclusion of a 9-month project – with the birth of my first grandchild, and future Lepidopterist, Edward Thomas Eeles 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by robpartridge, 27-Mar-14 01:00 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Home Projects

Yesterday was also the conclusion of a 9-month project – with the birth of my first grandchild, and future Lepidopterist, Edward Thomas Eeles 😊

e

Congratulations! I know how that feels – Daniel arrived almost two years ago, on Friday 13th of April, and yes, it was as traumatic as that suggests but he is fine now. Your life has changed forever – again,

Rob

Re: Pete Eeles

by Trev Sawyer, 27-Mar-14 07:39 PM GMT

Many congratulations on the new elver Pete! 😊

I'm sure Edward couldn't have a better guide to all things lepidopteran than you... Good to know another generation of nature-lovers is just emerging.

Trev

Re: Pete Eeles

by Maximus, 27-Mar-14 09:21 PM GMT

Very nice photos Pete, the White-letter Hairstreak larva certainly has amazing camouflage on the Elm. Congratulations also on the birth of your grandson

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 27-Mar-14 09:32 PM GMT

Eddie Eeles! Excellent name 😊 congratulations Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-14 09:42 PM GMT

Congrats on the emergence of the cats – great shots 📷 But more importantly by far congrats on the next generation of Eeles 😊 Are you Grandad, Grandfather or Pops?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 27-Mar-14 09:58 PM GMT

Congratulations Pete! It'll be a while before I catch you up. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 27-Mar-14 10:10 PM GMT

Many congratulations Pete! 😊

Best wishes,

Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 28-Mar-14 08:37 AM GMT

Thanks for the kind words everyone.

Cheers,

– (Grandad) Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by William, 28-Mar-14 08:37 AM GMT

Brilliant Photos Pete, and congratulations on your newest arrival 😊 😊

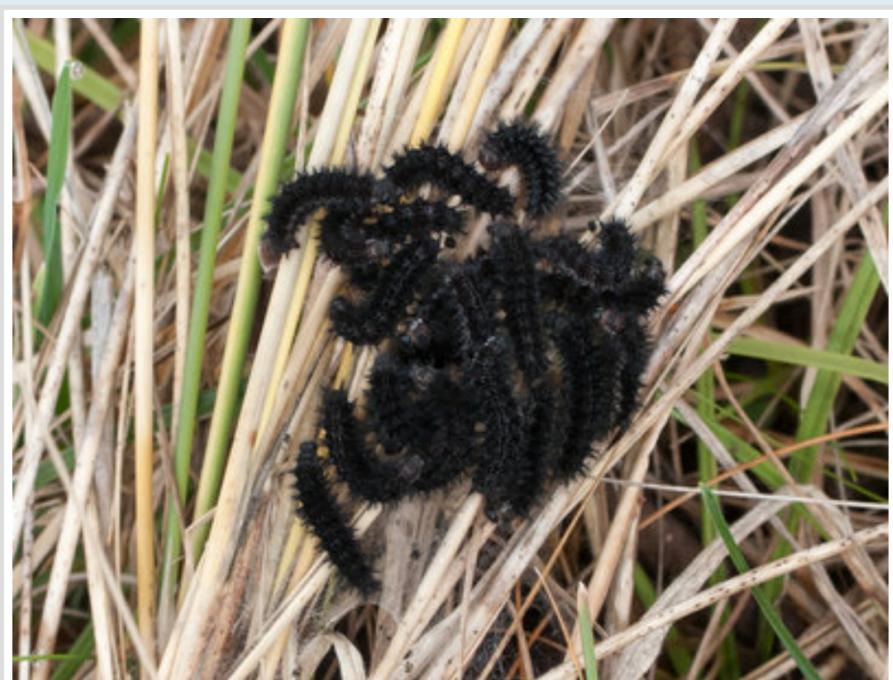
Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-Apr-14 08:00 PM GMT

Thanks all!

Coming up for air

I've had an extremely hectic couple of weeks and seem to be constantly traveling – but did manage to pop in to see the Marsh Fritillary colony on North Bull Island last week to see how the larvae are progressing. I'm pleased to say that the floodwaters have largely disappeared, and larvae are still around in good numbers. Some larvae are in their final instar and will be on the wing in mid-May I suspect ... incredibly early! They're also starting to divide up into much smaller groups, as one would expect. Some photos below. The 2 most interesting photos are the last 2 ... the penultimate photo shows cocoons of an *Apanteles* species of wasp, and the last photo shows that the larvae will munch on even the most leathery leaves of Devil's-bit Scabious.





Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 08-Apr-14 10:26 PM GMT

Great images, Pete. I hope to get out soon to explore the marshy areas near to my home on the Gower to see if I can find any Marsh Frit larvae. Conditions have been decent thus far in 2014 so I expect there to be a good emergence.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 09-Apr-14 09:43 PM GMT

Congratulations for your recent good news, Pete. Fabulous!

Lovely Marsh Frits too.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 13-Apr-14 06:12 PM GMT

Thanks David / Lee!

Busy, busy, busy

The season seemed to go into overdrive today, with a friend informing me of at least a dozen Duke of Burgundy at Noar Hill today. Things at home were also showing signs of the season really kicking off! First off, I had an Orange-tip emerge and released him outside, just long enough for me to grab a shot before we parted company. A female will emerge tomorrow, judging by the colours showing strongly through the pupa. I also had a few Peacock flying around and, this evening, several Holly Blue were attracted to a laurel bush that is in full sun as the light starts to fade ... the individual below is still there now and I'll see if I can get an open wing shot tomorrow if he's not gone!



Orange-tip (male)



Orange-tip pupa (female)



Peacock



Holly Blue (male)

The Silver-studded Blue larvae I'm rearing are just changing into their 4th instar, and getting more colourful by the minute. Both green and brown forms are present, and they're about 8mm in length at the moment. The first photo of the brown form shows the larva extending its Newcomer's glands, which are used to provide secretions to ants that are then attracted to the larva, and provide it a level of protection. I've also included a video showing the larva extending the glands (and will try and get better videos shortly), as well as a comparison shot of the 2 forms. Surprisingly, this species seems to do best on cut foodplant in a plastic box!



Silver-studded Blue 4th instar larva (green form)



Silver-studded Blue 4th instar larva (brown form) showing Newcomer's glands

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m65IU21olvU>



Silver-studded Blue 4th instar larvae

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 13-Apr-14 09:32 PM GMT

Really interesting photographs there, Pete.

You seem to seriously have your hands full right now given all your commitments, so thanks for taking the time to share these.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-Apr-14 06:43 PM GMT

Some Firsts!

I've seen a few new species for me this year over the last couple of days. A brief walk at Woolhampton Gravel Pits turned up several Green-veined White, along with the usual suspects of Orange-tip, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock.



Green-veined White (male)

Given the recent sightings of Duke of Burgundy, one of my favourite butterflies, I decided to pay a visit to Noar Hill and came across my first Speckled Wood and Dingy Skipper of the year while there.

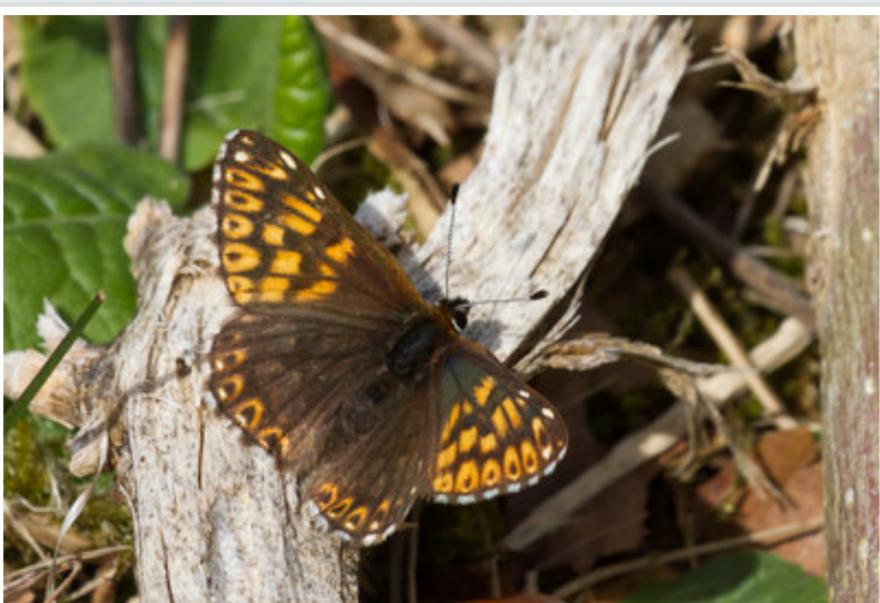


Speckled Wood (female)

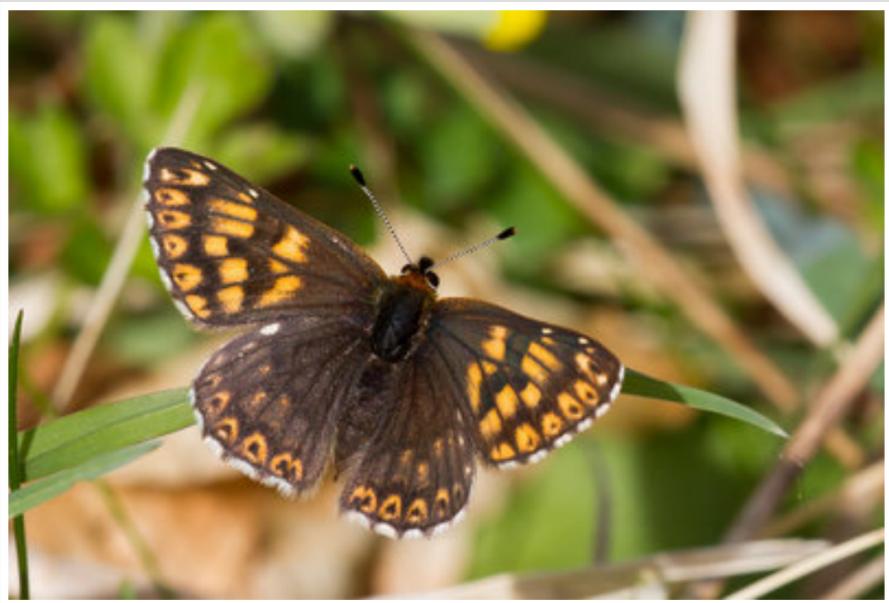


Dingy Skipper (male)

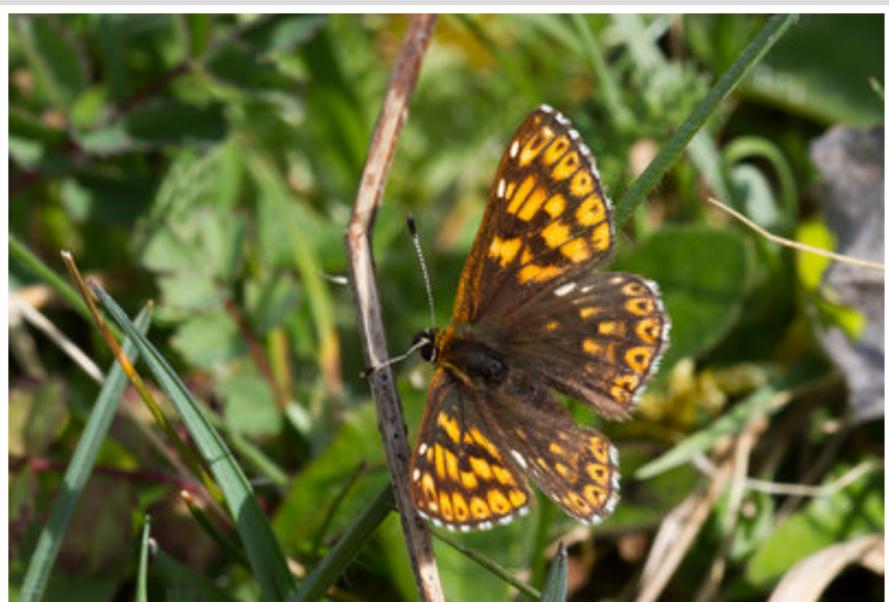
The male Dukes seem to occupy the same territories year after year at this site, and it's rather strange to be able to walk to a particular pit or hollow and expect to find my quarry! But, lo and behold, a walk straight to the pits at the back of the reserve turned up 5 males. I was particularly interested (given recent discussion on the UKB forums) in studying the variability of the colouring on the male hindwing, and a spectrum of individuals is shown below.



Duke of Burgundy (male)

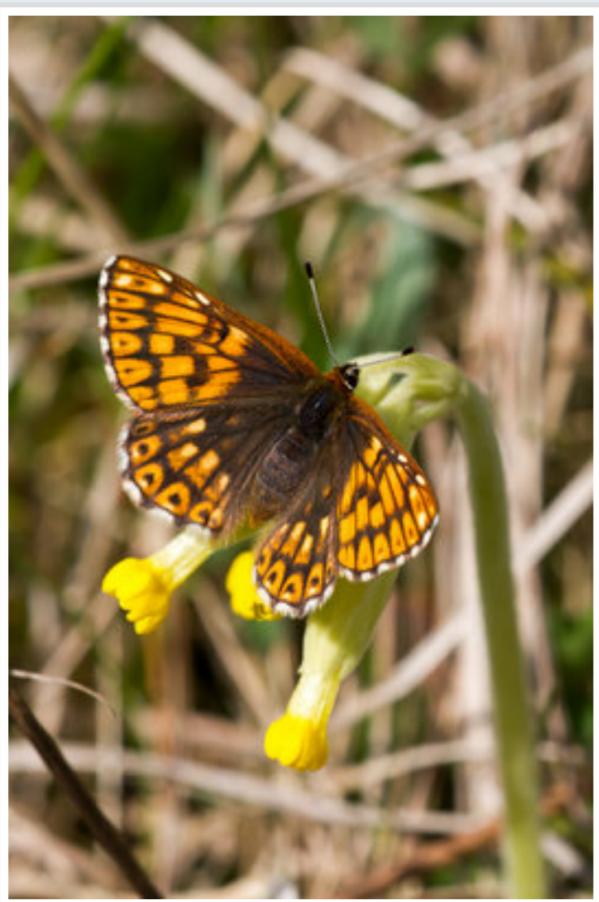


Duke of Burgundy (male)

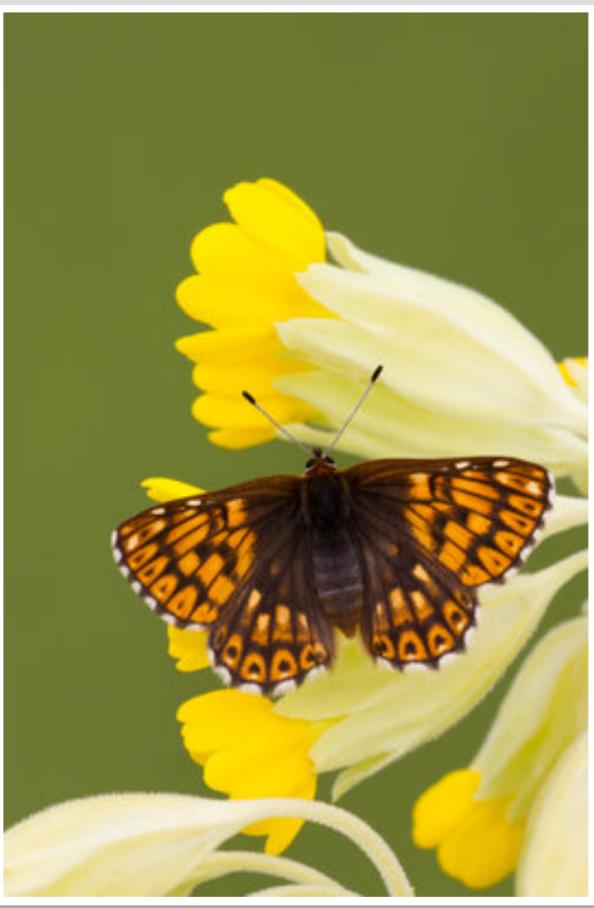


Duke of Burgundy (male)

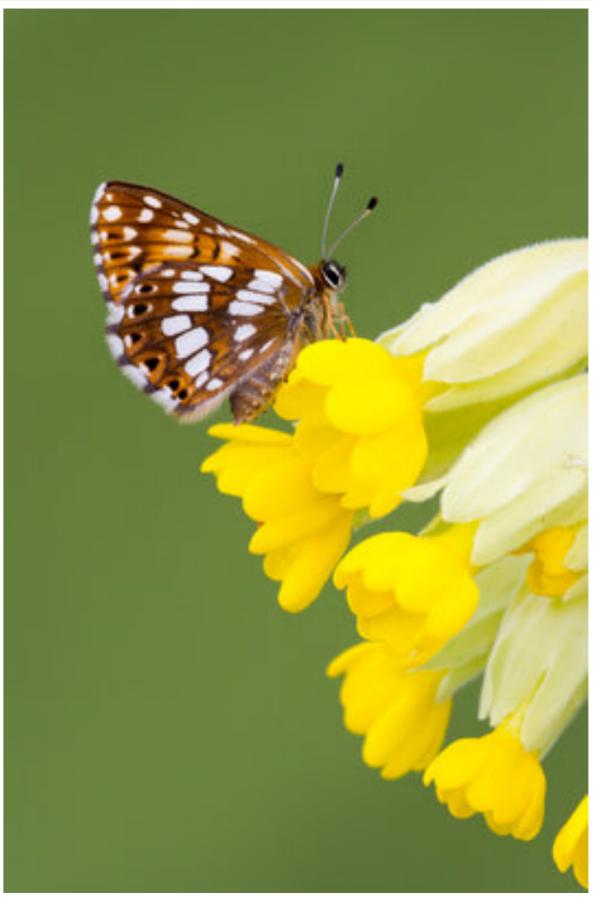
The highlight, however, was finding a fresh female which seemed to stay in one particular area, since I managed to relocate her almost an hour after first finding her. This particular Duchess is full of eggs and didn't fly very far at all.



Duke of Burgundy (female)



Duke of Burgundy (female)



Duke of Burgundy (female)

What an amazing start to the season. I can't believe it's only mid-April!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 17-Apr-14 07:03 PM GMT

I think that last DoB shot is lovely Pete. Glad you had such a successful day.

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 17-Apr-14 07:30 PM GMT

Yes. Great images again, Pete (even though I'm yet to see a female DoB).

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 17-Apr-14 08:14 PM GMT

Hi Pete,

That last shot's a stonker! I wish the mid April to June period would last six months!

BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Butterflysaurus rex, 17-Apr-14 09:25 PM GMT

Those last two female D of B photos sure are some pretty serious eye candy Pete 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 17-Apr-14 09:33 PM GMT

Brilliant, Pete! I kept my eyes peeled for Dukes today but 17th April really would be very early out here.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 17-Apr-14 10:29 PM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Hi Pete,

That last shot's a stonker! I wish the mid April to June period would last six months!

BWs, Neil

Quite.

There's something particularly intoxicating about this time of year.

I don't think there's any moment in the calendar more invigorating than this.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 17-Apr-14 11:50 PM GMT

Agreed about both the last shot 🍷 (any tips there Pete – time of day, habitat as I've been trying for one like that over the last three seasons?) and this time of year lasting 6 months 😊 . Looks like I'll have to try my Duke site tomorrow – oh it's a hard life 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 18-Apr-14 09:18 AM GMT

Thanks for the kind comments everyone!

"Wurzel" wrote:

Agreed about both the last shot 🍷 (any tips there Pete – time of day, habitat as I've been trying for one like that over the last three seasons?) and this time of year lasting 6 months 😊 . Looks like I'll have to try my Duke site tomorrow – oh it's a hard life 😊

😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Hi Wurzel – I found her around midday (I wasn't able to get to the site any earlier) and she was more-or-less in the same spot a couple of hours later. Find any cowslip-covered chalk pit and have a good look around – at Noar Hill those at the back and middle of the reserve (when looking away from the road) seem to be the most productive. The males will be guarding their territories so don't fly too far away if disturbed, and the females can usually be found resting in between bouts of egg-laying.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Maximus, 18-Apr-14 04:08 PM GMT

I know its already been said by others Pete, but that last shot of the Duchess is simply amazing 😊

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 18-Apr-14 11:10 PM GMT

Cheers for the info Pete – I tried my local site but no joy today – perhaps it's still a bit early here so I'll try again in a week or two 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

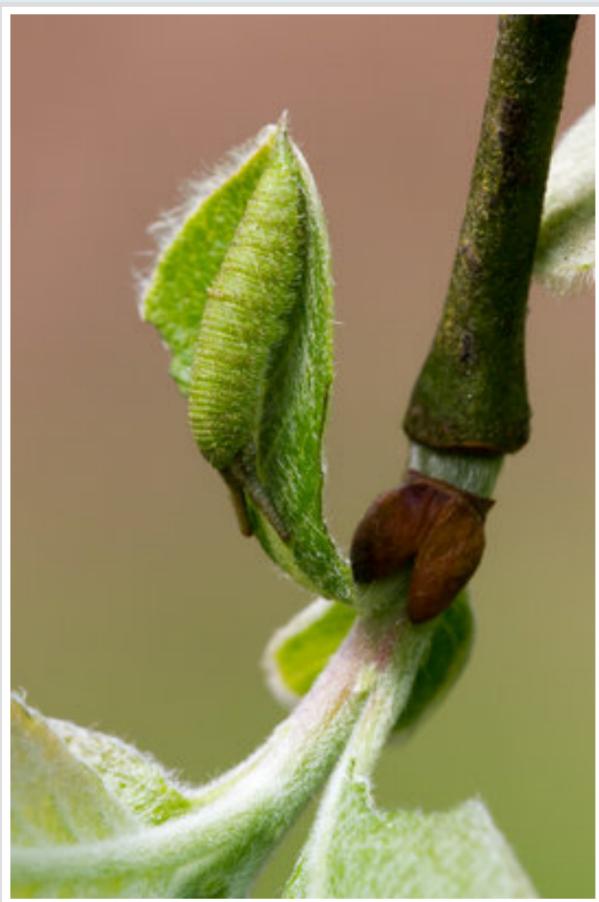
by Pete Eeles, 21-Apr-14 10:53 PM GMT

Savernake Forest

A good day spent in the company of Matthew Oates at Savernake Forest in Wiltshire, re-finding several Purple Emperor larvae that we've been following through. The level of predation seems quite high, with many larvae now "missing in action". Having said that, we did manage to relocate a couple of larvae that we thought were long gone, one of which had travelled an incredible 4.5m since it was last seen. The wood is also alive with Orange-tip and Green-veined White, and the main entrance to the forest has the most incredible patch of Cuckooflower I've ever seen. A wonderful place!



Purple Emperor 3rd instar larva that has yet to recommence feeding



Purple Emperor 3rd instar larva



Purple Emperor 3rd instar larva about to moult



Purple Emperor 4th instar larva, having just moulted



A Purple hat ribbon for a purple day :)

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Paul Harfield, 21-Apr-14 11:19 PM GMT

Hi Pete

Excellent images of the Emperor Larvae 😊 I must try and find some of my own one day but I imagine they are incredibly difficult to find 😊

Echoing others comments, those last two Duke of Burgundy photos are absolutely stunning 😊 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 23-Apr-14 08:15 PM GMT

"jackz432r" wrote:

Excellent images of the Emperor Larvae 😊 I must try and find some of my own one day but I imagine they are incredibly difficult to find 😊

Echoing others comments, those last two Duke of Burgundy photos are absolutely stunning 😊😊

Thanks! Yes, Emperor larvae can be very difficult to find – you need to be in the right wood, with the right willows where females lay (in shade), at the right time of year (when the larvae are easiest to find). So yes – some planning required!

Cheers,

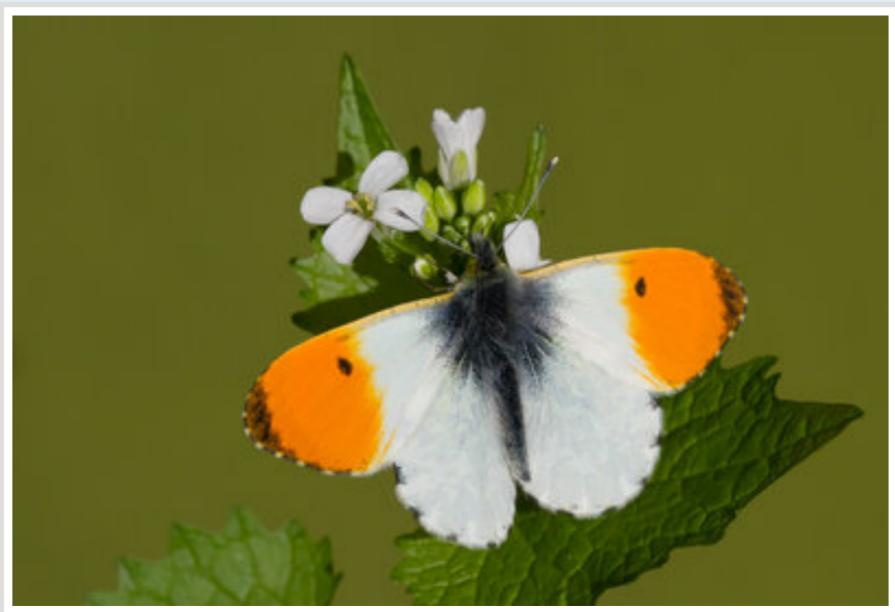
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 23-Apr-14 08:33 PM GMT

Catchup of various bits and bobs!

Well, the Cryptic Wood White may not be out yet at Craigavon Lakes in Northern Ireland, but the Irish Orange-tips are 😊 Of the shots below, the females conform most closely to the definition of *ssp. hibernica* since the yellow suffusion on the hindwing is quite clear, whereas the yellow suffusion on the underside of the male forewing is nigh on impossible to photograph but is definitely there! *"Slightly smaller on the average than the type, the black spots at the ends of the nervures more strongly marked. The male frequently suffused with yellow on the underside of the forewing, the female usually with the hindwing strongly suffused with yellow"*. The last female shown appeared to have unusually-shaped spots on the forewings.



Orange-tip ssp. hibernica (male)



Orange-tip ssp. hibernica (male)



Orange-tip ssp. hibernica (female)



Orange-tip ssp. hibernica (female)



Orange-tip ssp. hibernica (female)

Closer to home, the Dingy Skipper larvae have emerged from hibernation and, without further feeding, have each built a shelter in which to pupate. The pupal colour seems quite variable, with one being particularly dark and very moth-like, the other conforming more to "type" and showing a beautiful combination of green and red hues. One of these pupated in a plastic box and gave me a window onto its world as the larva threaded together leaves with silk, leaving the side of the box clear, where I saw it build a silk pad on the "ceiling" of its chamber before settling down on the pad and, after a few days, pupating.





Dingy Skipper pupa

The first of the Silver-studded Blue have now entered their final instar and are an amazing colour – the contrast between the green ground colour and red dorsal stripe is quite something! It seems that even the brown form of larva are turning green as they move into their final instar, but I'll keep a close eye on this to confirm.



Silver-studded Blue larva



Silver-studded Blue larva

And finally – the first of the White-letter Hairstreak larvae has whizzed through its instars and is now preparing to pupate. This is well ahead of schedule, despite it being kept outside in the coolest place in the garden. Fortunately, the Purple Hairstreak ova I rescued have only just started to emerge, so seem to be in sync with the oak burst in West Berks!



White-letter Hairstreak larva attached to an Elm leaf

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Maximus, 23-Apr-14 09:27 PM GMT

Amazing shots of the Dingy Skipper pupa Pete and the Silver-studded Blue larva are a lovely colour. The White-letter Hairstreak larva look very similar to Purple Hairstreak larva which also seem to speed though their instars too. Brown Hairstreak larva however seem to be a little more sedate.

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 23-Apr-14 09:38 PM GMT

You've excelled even yourself there, Pete.

Magnificent images.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 23-Apr-14 09:57 PM GMT

Great efforts Pete.

Those are superb images of rarely recorded subjects 😊
Also filling a few gaps in the Species Albums.....

Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Butterflysaurus rex, 23-Apr-14 10:18 PM GMT

Some amazing images there Pete!

Best Wishes

B'saurus

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 23-Apr-14 10:55 PM GMT

Agreed with everyone else – real top drawer photos 😊. The final female OT does have noticeably larger spots. I can see the lemony suffusion as well though I have seen that on a "British" OT female before. Good luck with the Cryptics 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Apr-14 03:50 PM GMT

Thanks all!

Another Eggcellent day 😊

With it bucketing down all day, I decided I needed a good soak and went to a site that I visited last weekend and where I saw a female Small

Tortoiseshell ovipositing. The leaf she was laying on was weighted down with eggs – possibly laid by more than one female. Another sprig of nettle, also with a sheltered south-facing outlook, had another egg batch on it. All batches seemed to have a small level of predation, with a few damaged or empty egg shells among them. I'm sure I could have found many more egg batches, but my socks needed a good wringing out so I headed back home instead! Photos below.







Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 25-Apr-14 04:27 PM GMT

Well done Pete, I was hoping you had found some of your own by now 😊

I reckon there at least 6 egg batches on that single leaf. The first three images are also showing a visiting parasitic wasp, while I believe the damage in the last three images is due to slugs.

Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Apr-14 04:30 PM GMT

"Vince Massimo" wrote:

Well done Pete, I was hoping you had found some of your own by now 😊

I reckon there at least 6 egg batches on that single leaf. The first three images are also showing a visiting parasitic wasp, while I believe the damage in the last three images is due to slugs.

Vince

Thanks Vince – strewth, I didn't even notice the wasp! Darn!

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 25-Apr-14 10:02 PM GMT

Lovely close up images Pete.

Do slugs eat the eggs?

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 28-Apr-14 10:33 PM GMT

Hi Lee - not sure what the slugs do.

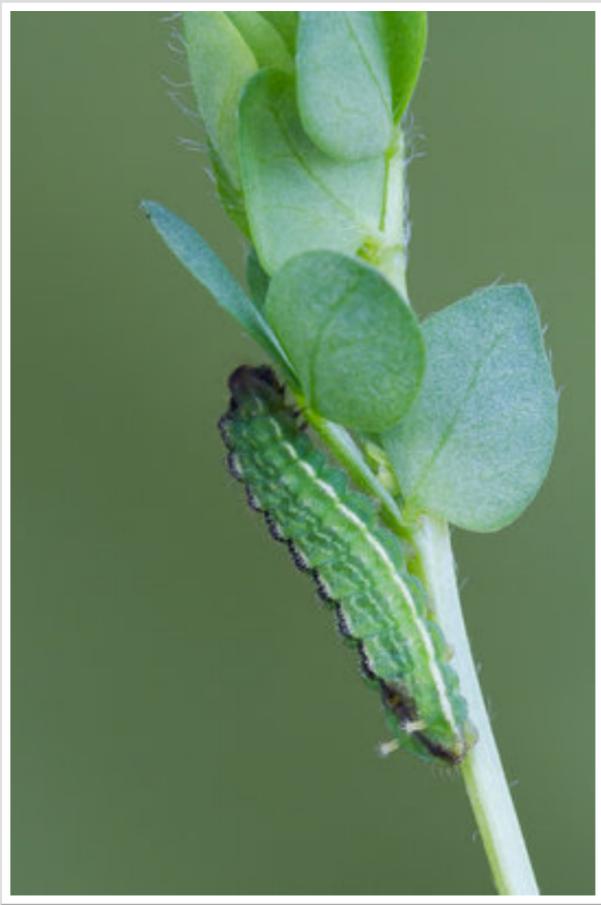
As sweet as sugar

Silver-studded Blue are, without doubt, one of the most interesting species I've ever reared! The organs on the 8th abdominal segment are quite something, so I decided to look into this a little further and learned some things along the way. First off, the Newcomer's gland is found on the 7th abdominal segment and it is this, not the 8th segment organs, that produces the "honey dew" (and is sometimes called the *dorsal nectary gland* as a result). You can see it here:



Newcomer's gland on the 7th segment

The pair of cylindrical organs on the 8th abdominal segment are each topped with a ring of "spikes" that emit chemical signals which are believed to help in communicating with ants (according to Wikipedia). These things are just so prominent when the larva is moving or feeding, and very hard to miss! Here's a variety of shots showing them:





Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Robin, 28-Apr-14 10:44 PM GMT

Those SSB photos are amazing! Did they involve any new kit?

robin

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 28-Apr-14 10:49 PM GMT

"Robin" wrote:

Those SSB photos are amazing! Did they involve any new kit?

robin

Hi Robin – nope, no new kit, just getting the hang of my old kit 😊 But extension tubes help 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 28-Apr-14 11:13 PM GMT

Remarkable stuff, Pete.

Excellent images as ever and a rare insight into the earlier stages of one of Britain's most precious butterfly species.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Maximus, 28-Apr-14 11:35 PM GMT

Amazing photos Pete, revealing the gaps that exist in our understanding of the early stages in the life of some of our butterfly species.

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 28-Apr-14 11:51 PM GMT

Amazing stuff Pete 😊 Can those cylindrical organs on the 8th segment retractable?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 29-Apr-14 08:53 AM GMT

You've really inspired me, Pete! These are amazing pictures of a quite remarkable subject. Something I would love to see for myself, though I doubt my eye or camera could get as good a view as you've given us!

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 29-Apr-14 12:15 PM GMT

Superb photos Pete. Only just been able to see them as I had internet router failure. Five whole days without internet 😞

You asked:

Hi Lee – not sure what the slugs do.

I can answer that. They all move to the Isle of Mull, specifically my kitchen. I have no idea how/where they get in but they are a real pain. Suggestions how to deal with them welcome We have cats so slug pellets might not be a good idea.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by MikeOxon, 29-Apr-14 02:22 PM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

Suggestions how to deal with them welcome We have cats so slug pellets might not be a good idea.

Try beer traps – see <http://www.slugoff.co.uk/killing-slugs/beer-trap>

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 29-Apr-14 03:17 PM GMT

Astonishing level of detail Pete and so interesting. I'm totally intrigued.

Re: Pete Eeles

by MikeOxon, 29-Apr-14 03:34 PM GMT

As others have already said -remarkable photos 😊

I particularly liked the tail-end shot, with the two organs standing like a pair of sea anemones. It's an excellent illustration that caterpillars are much more than merely "eating machines".

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 30-Apr-14 10:21 PM GMT

Thanks all!

"Wurzel" wrote:

Amazing stuff Pete 😊 Can those cylindrical organs on the 8th segment retractable?

They are indeed and I'm still trying to get some decent video footage showing this. I'm sure this weekend will be put to good use 😊 In the meantime, some photos from today illustrating the point:





I managed to have the briefest of visits to a site near Stockbridge Down after work, where the Dukes are just starting to emerge – with 3 males seen. But I was actually surprised by the incredible number of Brimstones at this woodland site – I watched a female being mobbed by 3 males which made for an interesting sight as they pinned her to the ground!



Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 30-Apr-14 10:36 PM GMT

Wow! That's an absolute Brimstone orgy!

I'm still waiting for that rare moment when spring male Brimstone encounters spring female Brimstone.

As I suspected, sparks doth fly when it eventually happens!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 30-Apr-14 11:59 PM GMT

That is a fantastic Brimstone image Pete 😲 I saw four male Brimstones the other afternoon all in the same small spot practically one after the other so I wondered then if they seek females in 'packs' – judging by your shot perhaps they do 😲

Have a goodun

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 05-May-14 07:32 PM GMT

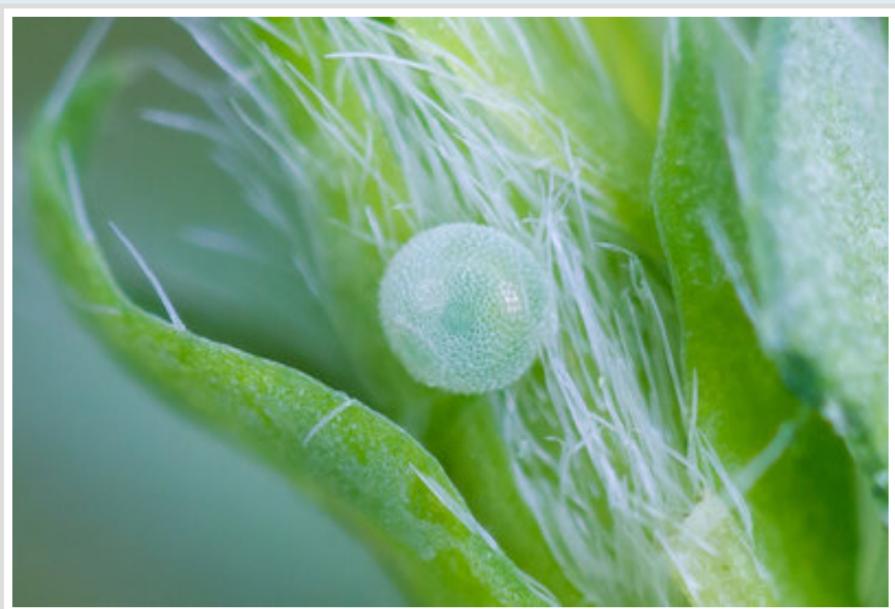
Thanks both!

Greenham Common

I visited a couple of Duke sites over the weekend in Hampshire, and it looks like there's still some way to go since I saw, in total, 19 males and not a single female! Closer to home, the Dingy and Grizzled Skippers are emerging at Greenham Common, and I also found several Green Hairstreak, including an ovipositing female that had me entranced at she probed the tight buds of Bird's-foot Trefoil before laying a single green egg on suitable plants.



Green Hairstreak egg



Green Hairstreak egg

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Butterflysaurus rex, 05-May-14 08:23 PM GMT

Amazing photos again Pete! GHS eggs are so small, I know how tricky it is to photograph things this tiny.

All the best

B'saurus

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 06-May-14 06:12 AM GMT

More amazing shots Pete. I have never seen anything like those Brimstones and I love the GH egg. Saw one laying yesterday but was disturbed before I could look for eggs.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-May-14 04:22 PM GMT

Thanks both – sorry to hear about your "incident" Pauline.

Silver-studs phase 3

And finally, the Silver-studded Blue larvae that I've been rearing through are now pupating. Of all the pupae I've ever seen, they remind me most of Large Blue pupae in that there is no noticeable cremaster; the end of the abdomen being smooth and rounded. I wonder if there's some correlation between this feature and a close association with ants. And on that note, I tried introducing a larva to a few black ants (*Lasius niger*) and, after an initial probing with their antennae, the ants promptly attacked the larva! Suffice to say, I rescued it before things went too far and the larva has now pupated. But I suspect that the larva was lacking the appropriate chemical signals (which may be derived from any host ants in the wild, given that the larvae are known to enter ants' nests).



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 08-May-14 04:49 PM GMT

That's very interesting, Pete. I recall that large blues are only taken in and accepted after they have been attended for some time by ants – and acquired appropriate chemical signals.

I can't remember – were these larvae from wild eggs?

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-May-14 04:53 PM GMT

"Padfield" wrote:

I can't remember – were these larvae from wild eggs?

Hi Guy – they've been reared from eggs and are the offspring of captive-bred individuals.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-May-14 06:33 PM GMT

Noar Hill

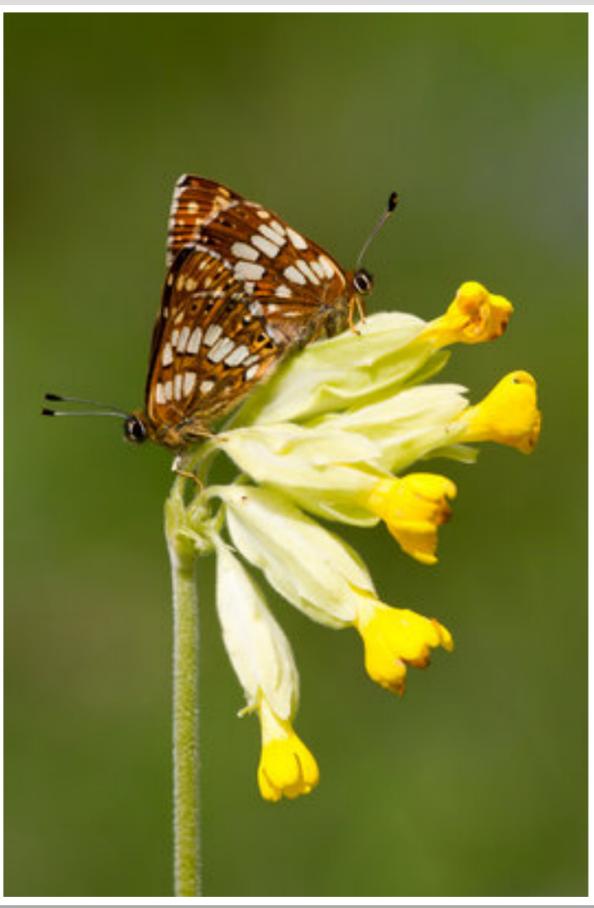
Yesterday I visited Noar Hill and was greeted by a swarm of bees whose queen had clearly flown the nest! Aside from extremely good numbers of Dingy Skipper and the odd Grizzled Skipper, the Common Blue and Small Heath are starting to emerge (a dozen of each seen) and Green Hairstreak are ovipositing all over the site. The Dukes are also really coming out in force! I must have seen over 30, including several mating pairs – and I managed to witness one of the pairings. The most interesting sight was seeing a female land on a Cowslip leaf and then spin on her axis, shuffle backwards until she reached the leaf edge, and then pop out a couple of eggs on the underside of the leaf; it looked quite comical!



Bee swarm



Duke of Burgundy pair



Duke of Burgundy pair

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-May-14 09:53 AM GMT

Not-so-dingy Dingy

The first of 2 Dingy Skippers emerged yesterday, a stunning male, and I took great delight in releasing him where I first met him as an egg! I also had a quick scout around, finding a Dingy Skipper egg on the first plant I looked at, the egg transitioning from the greenish-white hue that it has when first laid to the bright orange that it will eventually show. I also watched as a female deposit an egg in an uncharacteristic spot - certainly not above bare earth - but I guess the decision is made based on the temperature of the local microclimate above everything else, and this spot must have hit the mark! Record shots of the eggs only, since I didn't have the paraphernalia needed to take closeups. I may return!



Dingy Skipper (male)



Dingy Skipper ovum



Newly-laid Dingy Skipper ovum

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

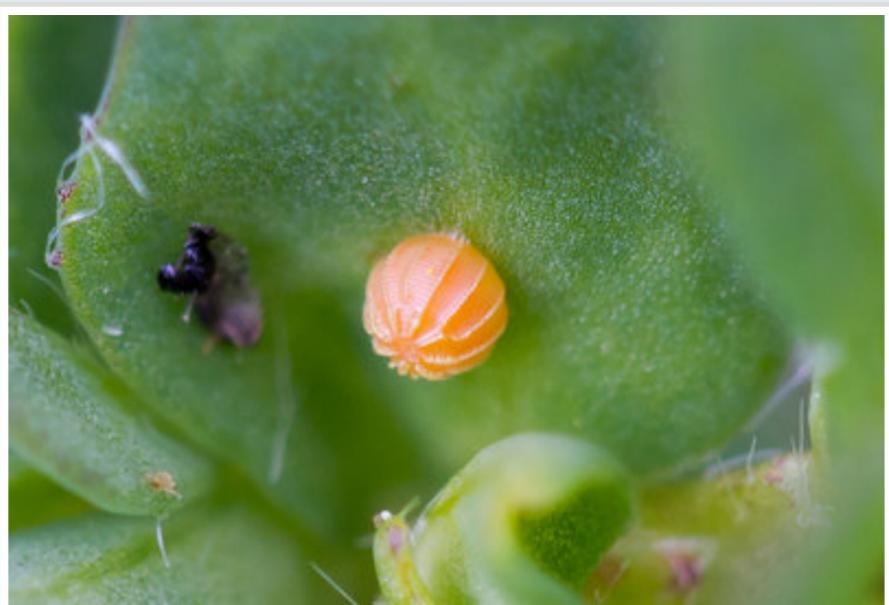
by Pete Eeles, 17-May-14 05:38 PM GMT

Greenham Common

With the second Dingy Skipper emerging today (a rather lovely female), I popped back up to Greenham Common to release her - this time with extension tubes to get shots of Dingy Skipper ova. The most orange I found was the first I found yesterday - but I did manage to find a few more too. A couple of shots below. I also saw my first Common Blue and Brown Argus for the site.



Dingy Skipper ovum



Dingy Skipper ovum

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 17-May-14 05:49 PM GMT

You must have felt enormously proud, Pete! 😊

That last shot is tremendous. What wonderful things these butterfly eggs are.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 17-May-14 06:17 PM GMT

"Padfield" wrote:

You must have felt enormously proud, Pete! 😊

Thanks Guy. Yes, I did feel proud. Just knowing that I rescued the 2 Dingy eggs from almost certain squishing, and managed to see them through to adulthood and emerge at just the right time, does indeed give me a warm glow 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 17-May-14 06:26 PM GMT

I am full of admiration Pete – your commitment, dedication, knowledge, skill and photography. I now know first hand just how difficult it is yet you continue to amaze with all these species.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 18-May-14 09:53 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by essexbuzzard, 19-May-14 12:20 AM GMT

Fantastic Dingy image there,Pete,beautiful markings. To rear two eggs to the adult stage,you certainly must know a thing or two about breeding them. A great reward for your efforts,thanks for sharing.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 23-May-14 05:07 PM GMT

Thanks Mark!

Deja vu, all over again

Yesterday I managed to pull off a repeat of last year, visiting Craigavon Lakes in Northern Ireland, hoping to catch a few glimpses of Cryptic Wood White. The BBC weather report showed a day of cloud and rain, so I knew the weather was likely to be in my favour (which it was!). In fact, conditions were perfect, with hazy cloud cover and relatively-low temperatures most of the morning, meaning that any butterflies spent a good amount of time settled (including the hyperactive males). The shots below, including a couple of videos of courting couples, are self-explanatory 😊 The females behaved quite differently when ovipositing (unsurprisingly), flying very low over the herbage and "sniffing out" any vetch that might be there before laying a single egg on the preferred plants. I also had the good fortune of bumping into Brian Nelson, co-author of "The Butterflies and Moths of Northern Ireland", who gave me a guided tour of the site – marvellous!



Cryptic Wood White (male)



Cryptic Wood White (female)



Cryptic Wood White (male on left)



Cryptic Wood White (female)



Cryptic Wood White (ovum)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUtPTTgl8js>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzYasWLR8Vw>



Brian Nelson

Aside from the CWW, I saw a couple of male Orange-tip (and quite a few eggs, on almost every Cuckooflower head), as well as a few Small Heath and Green-veined White *ssp. britannica*.



Green-veined White ssp. britannica (male)



Green-veined White ssp. britannica (female)



Green-veined White ssp. britannica (female)

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 23-May-14 05:56 PM GMT

Great images, Pete. As you say, hazy cloud cover is ideal not just for approaching the more skittish species of butterfly but also for photography.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Maximus, 23-May-14 06:14 PM GMT

Great photos of the Cryptic Wood Whites Pete and that last Green-veined White is a real stunner.

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-May-14 10:31 PM GMT

Thanks David & Mike!

Influx of Migrants?

There have been quite a few reports this week of both Red Admiral and Painted Lady heading our way. I thought nothing of this until I visited Greenham Common and, surprise surprise, 2 Red Admiral were flying around a bed of nettles ovipositing! To say I was shocked was an understatement, since these are the first Red Admirals I've seen for some time!



Red Admiral ovum

Back at home, some of the Silver-studded Blue pupae are colouring up – a little earlier than their wild cousins. The reason for mentioning this is that I've seen quite a few pupae in my time, but none has ever shown the adult so clearly within the pupa prior to emergence. Here's a male that will emerge tomorrow morning – you can make out every single detail, including the scales on the wings, the antennae and its brown tips, the legs, the eyes, the proboscis, the hairs on the body, etc.. Just amazing!



Silver-studded Blue pupa (male)

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 25-May-14 10:37 PM GMT

That is a stunning image Pete, it's like looking at a plastic prepackaged butterfly, I was even looking for the bar code 🤖 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 25-May-14 10:53 PM GMT

Wow! What a beautiful picture. Lovely stuff, Pete. I'm very much looking forward to seeing his wild cousins very soon.

Had my first Painted Lady of the year today.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-May-14 11:28 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

That is a stunning image Pete, it's like looking at a plastic prepackaged butterfly, I was even looking for the bar code 🤪 😊

Thanks Wurzel! He does indeed look like a vacuum-packed "butterfly in a bag"!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 26-May-14 10:04 AM GMT

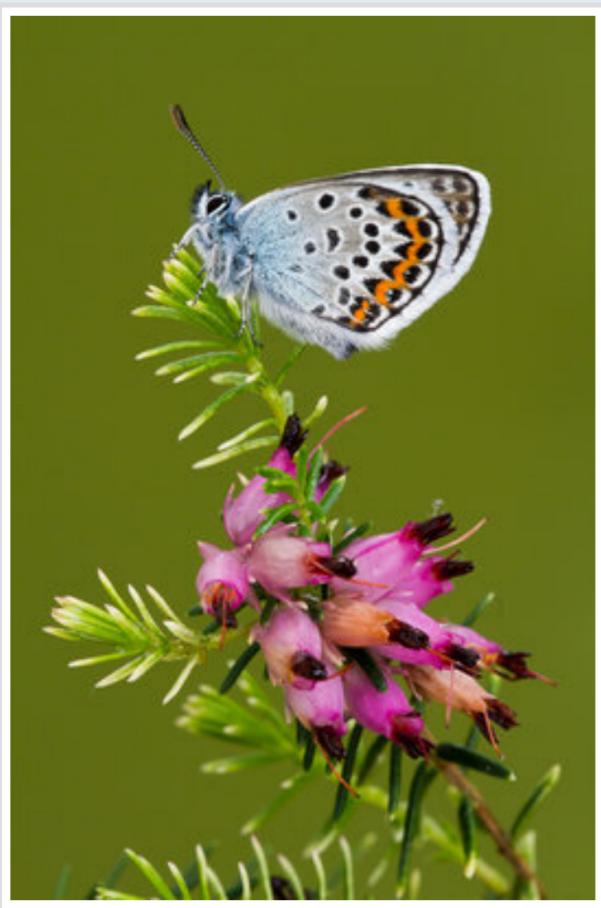
Nothing new I can add to the other comments. Stunning picture. Look forward to seeing him when "unpacked".

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 29-May-14 08:13 PM GMT

Thanks all - and to conclude the story - here's the very man 😊



Feeling rather grot at the mo - but will post my latest forays in the next 10 mins 😊

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 29-May-14 08:23 PM GMT

Oop North

Actually, the Loch Creran area in Scotland, including Glasdrum Wood - the weather being surprisingly cooperative. More Chequered Skipper than I've ever seen before - including several females and a mating pair (the highlight of the trip!). Lots of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary flying too and several *Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni* (record shots only!). Having learned my lesson in previous years, I was armed with wellies, and they were absolutely essential, with large amounts of the site very waterlogged. While at Glasdrum Wood, I also bumped into Iolo Williams (filming for Springwatch) and his crew, and helped them track down a skipper or two. I may even get my face, made for radio, on the telly 😊



Chequered Skipper (male)



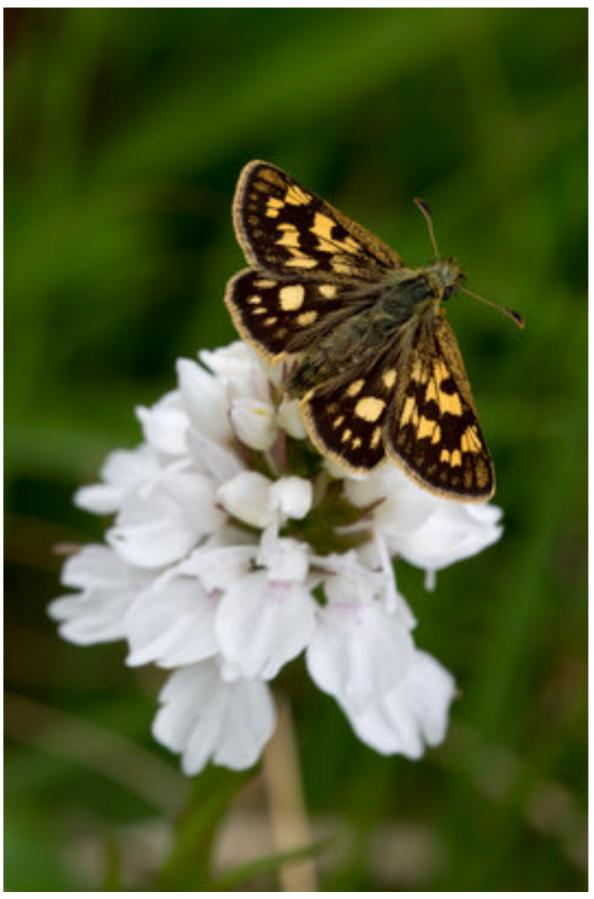
Chequered Skipper (male)



Chequered Skipper (female)



Chequered Skipper (female)



Chequered Skipper (female)



Chequered Skipper (female)



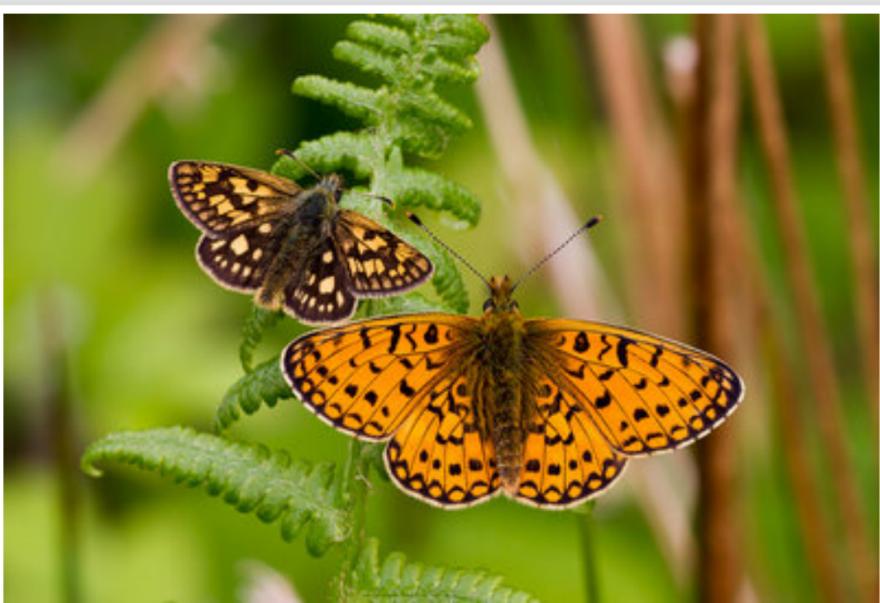
Chequered Skipper (male on right)



Chequered Skipper (male on right)



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (male)



Glasdrum Wood marketing shot :)



Iolo Williams (on the left) – lovely chap!

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Susie, 29-May-14 08:31 PM GMT

Great stuff. Pete 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by andy brown, 29-May-14 08:35 PM GMT

I must concur great pictures Pete

Andy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 29-May-14 09:02 PM GMT

Amazing pictures, Pete! I especially love the chequered skipper with the small pearl-bordered fritillary, though as other have said, that vacuum-packed silver-stud is extraordinary.

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 29-May-14 09:32 PM GMT

Superb stuff. The Chequered Skipper and SPBF shot is an epic. I'm getting itchy feet again!

BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Freeman, 29-May-14 09:45 PM GMT

Great report and beautiful photos 😊, especially the Chequered Skipper and SPBF pair 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 29-May-14 10:01 PM GMT

Stunning Pete! The SPBF and CS pair is a fantastic shot! 😊

I'm a fan of Iolo Williams, he seems like a lovely chap on the TV. His passion for wildlife shines through his reports.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 29-May-14 10:24 PM GMT

Fabulous images, but the best of the bunch is in no doubt (and unique) 😊
Also a very striking colour contrast in the uppersides of the mating pair which I had not observed before.

Brilliant stuff!

Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 29-May-14 10:56 PM GMT

That's surely the first ever image of SPBF and Chequered Skipper in the frame simultaneously!!

I searched for mating pairs myself but didn't get lucky so well done Pete. I hope you enjoyed your visit as much as I did.

Re: Pete Eeles

by IAC, 30-May-14 01:16 AM GMT

Ridiculous Pete...just totally ridiculous!! I was quite contented with how my butterfly season was going until now. What you have done here ought to be illegal....The Small Pearl and McSkipper...thats just better than classic. You southerners need to be stopped at the border. 😊

Iain.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 30-May-14 05:45 AM GMT

The standard on this site just keeps going up and up. Superb shots of the mating pair and your 'marketing' photo must be unique as I doubt anyone else has one like that 🍷

Re: Pete Eeles

by Trev Sawyer, 30-May-14 08:48 AM GMT

Fantastic stuff Pete – you really are on a mission this year.

Trev

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 30-May-14 09:40 AM GMT

Fantastic stuff Pete, those Chequered Skippers are delightful to behold 😊 I might even watch Springwatch now – just in case "our Pete gets on t'telly" 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by nomad, 03-Jun-14 06:08 PM GMT

Very interesting Silver-studded Blue field report Peter. Now that I have seen your image of the Portland Silver-studded Blue female, I see that this limestone population is certainly not the extinct chalk downland race cretaceus . I hope that members will not forget to look for blue females on the English lowland heaths, I will be most interested to see if any are found,

Regards Peter.

Re: Pete Eeles

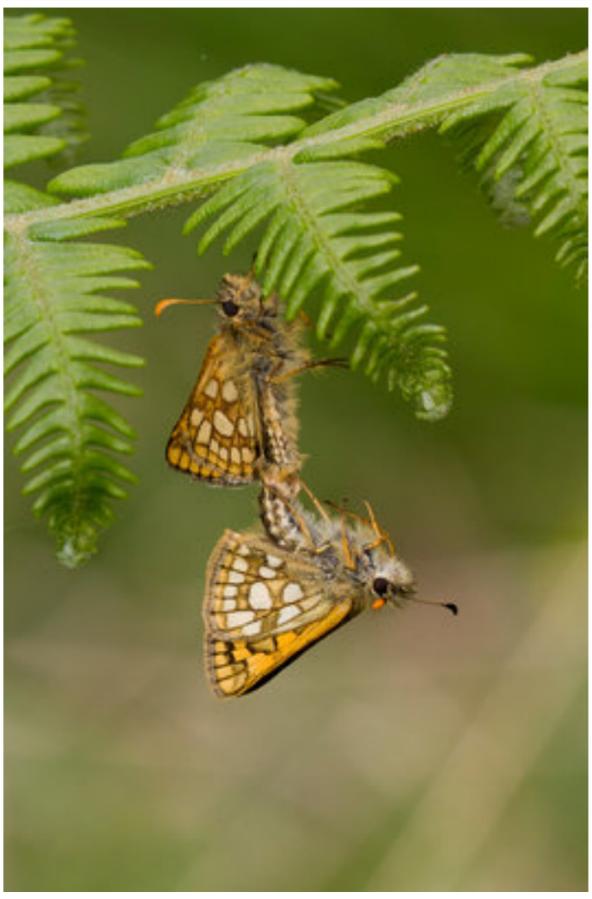
by Pete Eeles, 08-Jun-14 11:09 PM GMT

Thanks for the very kind comments everyone. Here are a few more bits and pieces now that I've finally gotten around to sorting things out! One thing I forgot to mention is that the reason I found a mating pair of Chequered Skipper is because they were noticeably flailing around, with the female dangling in mid-air!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOWgExY7-ZI>



Male with few spots on the hind wings



Mating pair, as first found



Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni (male)



Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni (male)

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-Jun-14 11:16 PM GMT

Green Hairstreak early stages

Having found a Green Hairstreak laying on Bird's-foot Trefoil on a roadside verge, I decided to take the couple of eggs I saw her lay to ensure they survive, although I'm sure they would have been ok (apart from the car fumes!) given that the verges mentioned aren't usually cut until the autumn. Anyway – some shots below of the highly-cannibalistic larvae which were kept completely separated throughout! The final instar larva is quite beautiful and an almost translucent green. I've added a photo of a different egg to complete the story thus far 😊 The last photo is of one of the larvae being returned to the wild.



1st instar larva



2nd instar larva



3rd instar larva



4th (final) instar larva



4th (final) instar larva



4th (final) instar larva



4th (final) instar larva

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-14 12:01 AM GMT

The contrast on the Thomsoni is stunning Pete, not really a 'Green-veined' thought is it - perhaps they could come up with a better subspecies common name for it? The changes between the instars of the Greenstreak larva just remarkable 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 12-Jun-14 10:51 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel!

At last - Common Blue *ssp. maricolore!*

I spent quite a bit of time in Ireland last year looking for various subspecies, and was "tripped up" by the Common Blue population found near Dublin since, despite claims of *ssp. mariscolore* being found across Ireland, the specimens I saw didn't really fit the description. I recently had the good fortune of revisiting Craigavon Lakes in Northern Ireland where the Cryptic Wood White are still about in small numbers, and where I finally came face-to-antenna with what I believe to be *ssp. mariscolore*. Not only did the females have large amounts of blue on their wings, but the orange lunules were something else! While we've probably all seen 1 or 2 Common Blue that might look like this, it's another thing when *every* female in the population looks like this! The males also gave off a tint (especially on the trailing edge of the hindwing) that looked just like the scales on an Adonis Blue, although this is difficult to capture in a photo. My thanks, as ever, go to Ian Rippey (butterfly recorder for Northern Ireland) for giving me suggestions on where to visit this time around.



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (male)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (male)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (male)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (female)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (female)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (female)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (female)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (female)



Common Blue ssp. mariscolore (female)

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 12-Jun-14 10:58 AM GMT

Persistence pays off 😊

They really are very striking individuals (and a full set as well!)

Well done Pete 😊

Cheers,
Vince

Re: Pete Eeles

by Lee Hurrell, 14-Jun-14 12:55 AM GMT

What a beautiful set of lady blues. Very nice, Pete!

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Pete Eeles

by Mike Robinson, 14-Jun-14 08:40 AM GMT

I feel slightly impertinent commenting being a newcomer to the Butterfly Spotting/Watching game but I find these Diaries both informative and enjoyable.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jun-14 09:56 AM GMT

Wow! They're real beauties. Too many butterflies too little time.
BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Jack Harrison, 14-Jun-14 04:53 PM GMT

That amazing picture of a Chequered Skipper and Small PBF side by side: did they just land together or is there some crafty secret behind the shot Pete?
It certainly is a stunning photo.

Jack

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-Jun-14 05:42 PM GMT

Thanks all! They were as I found them, Jack.

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 14-Jun-14 08:31 PM GMT

Cracking shots Pete 😊 Are all the females of this subspecies as blue or do they have some browner ones?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-Jun-14 08:41 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Cracking shots Pete 😊 Are all the females of this subspecies as blue or do they have some browner ones?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel! The formal definition mentions the significance of the amount of blue in the female, so one would assume this is key characteristic. The darkest female I found is the last one shown.

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-Jun-14 09:27 PM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Too many butterflies too little time.

Too right - I'm having to make a real effort at the moment (and see you are too!) and, although it's costing me a small fortune I know that, come winter, I won't regret it! This seemed to work last year so I'm repeating the experience and my head is spinning just thinking about the weeks ahead! And on that note ...

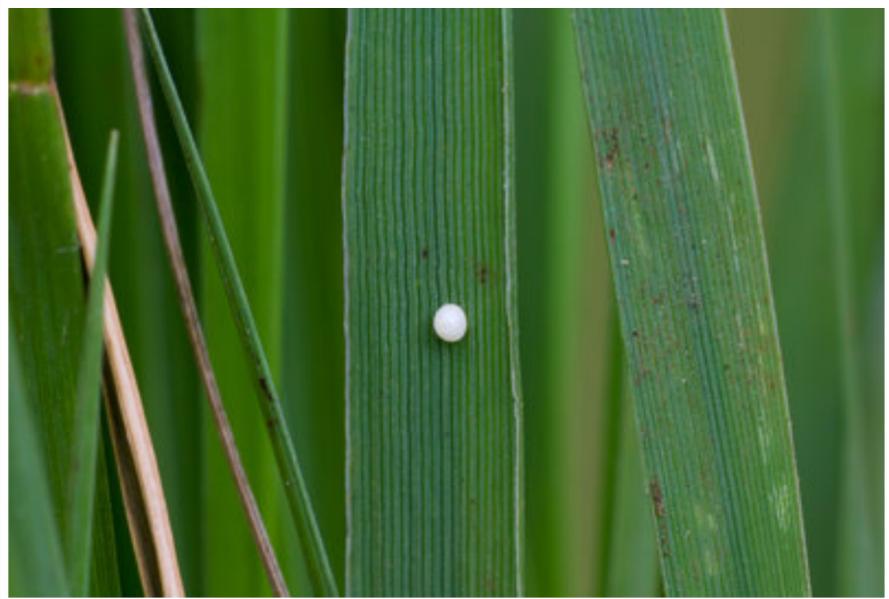
Haystacks and Needles

Wanting to get better photos of Green-veined White *ssp. thomsoni*, I also headed back to Scotland (since I'm spending some time working in Glasgow) and, again, paid a visit to "Midge Central" (also known as Glasdrum Wood) for a couple of hours. The few Green-veined White I saw were well past their best, and the same can be said of the Chequered Skipper and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Having seen several Chequered Skipper females during my previous visit, I had a sense of where they might oviposit, but was too engrossed in other things to make any real attempt at finding any eggs, and so I spent this visit with my head buried (not literally!) in clumps of Purple Moor Grass, where eggs are laid on the underside of a grass blade. I'm pleased to say that, after 2 hours of searching, I managed to locate 3 eggs in total. Not a great hit rate, but not bad either! I've marked where all 3 have been laid, and intend to check on the relevant clumps for the characteristic larval feeding damage later in the year, since I hope to visit the beautiful part of the

world again to find the Grayling *ssp. atlantica*.



The haystack



Chequered Skipper ovum



Chequered Skipper ovum





Chequered Skipper ovum

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-Jun-14 09:33 PM GMT

Silchester Common

Today I paid a brief visit to Silchester Common to see how the Silver-studded Blue were doing, and managed to notch up 4 females and 15 males. Surprisingly, I also found an ovipositing Brimstone, which I thought was rather late in the season. I'm always amazed at the ability of butterflies to find their quarry – whether this is a male Silver-studded Blue finding a female that is hunkered down in the heather, or a Brimstone finding the smallest of Buckthorns!

The main reason for posting is that, elsewhere in these forums, there was a question of whether all Silver-studded Blue colonies have at least some females that have an amount of blue on them and I can confirm that the female shown below does have a few blue scales on her.



Silver-studded Blue (male)



Silver-studded Blue (female)



Brimstone ovipositing

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 14-Jun-14 09:41 PM GMT

Yes, I thought the same today, Pete, at Haddon Hill.

Male Heath Fritillaries would suddenly swoop down into vegetation and lo and behold, another HF would be 'flushed out' as a result.

Butterflies are far, far better than humans at locating their quarry. Sometimes, standing still and watching can be abnormally illuminating.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 14-Jun-14 09:44 PM GMT

Couldn't agree more, David! There's been many a time when I've found a female butterfly by following a searching male. I remember (in our every first photography workshop) that Adrian Riley said that he only managed to find the *scotica* race of Dark Green Fritillary by watching the males diving into the undergrowth!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 15-Jun-14 05:22 PM GMT

Those Mariscolore shots are awesome Pete – how can something so striking be called a Common Blue!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-Jun-14 08:46 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline!

Tour of the North

With both Mark Colvin and I planning a “tour of the north” this year, we decided to coordinate diaries and, last week, made an excursion north of the Watford Gap. My 4am start was eclipsed by Mark's 3:15am start, meeting up near Warwick at 5:30am before heading north in one car and into glorious sunshine. Like several other UKB members, our first stop was Irton Fell and, given the sightings that had been reported, were convinced we'd be too late to see any adults in good condition, but figured we'd just be happy with the experience of seeing Mountain Ringlet, as well as getting some decent exercise! The directions provided by other UKB members was spot on and we had no problem heading up past the base of Irton Pike and onto the fell.



Irton Fell with Irton Pike in the distance

The Cumbria BC website gives very precise details of where to find Mountain Ringlet on the fell, but our experience was that they were almost everywhere, and we congratulated each other on finding a first for both of us – *Erebia epiphron ssp. mnemon* – within 100 yards of passing through the gate onto the fell. The individuals we saw in this area were quite faded and it was easy to determine which specimens were likely to be in better condition since they were noticeably darker in flight. As we walked further up the fell toward Whin Rigg, the *Erebia* seemed to be in better condition the higher we walked and we assumed that this species is not a great wanderer given that the difference in condition from the lowest to highest elevations was noticeable and consistent.



Whin Rigg on the right, with Wast Water in the distance

All in all, we estimated that we saw at least 150 Mountain Ringlet (which Mark has reported on the Cumbria BC website) and I, for one, was surprised just how difficult it was to get a decent shot of the adult given the numbers we were seeing. Very few settled in a position for a decent photo, with most landing among the Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), the larval foodplant, that carpets the fell. Still, it was such a wonderful experience simply seeing so many Mountain Ringlet flying that the photography was definitely a secondary concern.



Mark in action!

As we sat eating lunch at Greathall Gill, a ravine at the base of Whin Rigg, we had at least a dozen Mountain Ringlet for company and decided that, with fantastic views over Wast Water, life doesn't get much better than this! A short while later, we noticed a female fluttering slowly and deliberately over the Mat-grass and, after a couple of minutes, had the privilege of watching her deposit a single white egg on the foodplant which, I have to say, made my trip. The egg is actually quite large for the size of the butterfly and, as Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington tell us, is quite conspicuous at the base of the foodplant. Now that we knew what to look for, we managed to find another 2 eggs within 30 minutes and these seemed to show different stages of "colouring up", with the second egg we found showing a wonderful pattern that is unlike anything I've ever seen on any other butterfly egg. Amazing!



Newly-laid egg



Egg colouring up



Egg fully coloured-up

While we managed to get some shots of the few individuals that remained somewhat docile, the onset of late afternoon definitely gave us the best opportunity to photograph the adults as the temperature dropped slightly, and some shots are below.



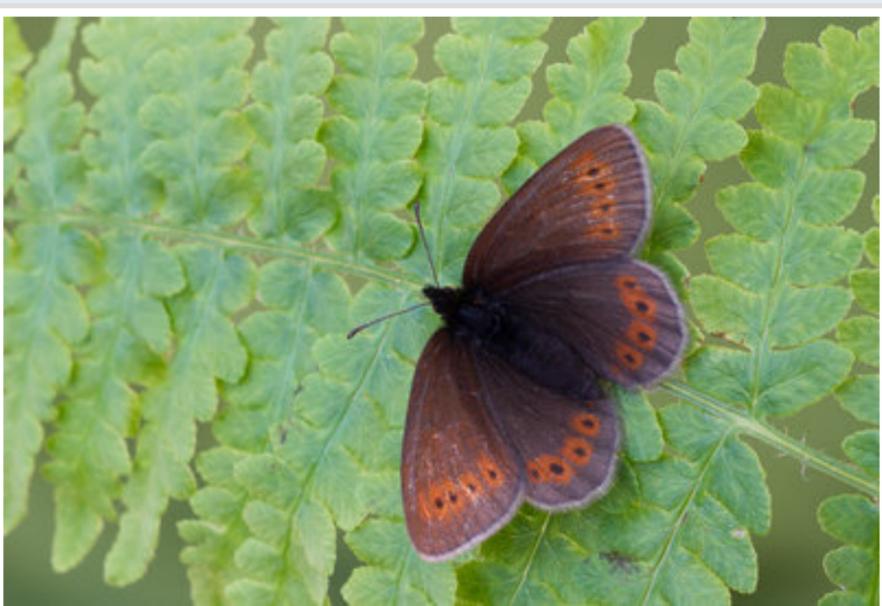
Mountain Ringlet ssp. mnemon – male



Mountain Ringlet ssp. mnemon – male, with spots missing on forewings



Mountain Ringlet ssp. mnemon – male



Mountain Ringlet ssp. mnemon – female

Despite the folklore that Mountain Ringlet only fly in sunshine, we found that they would still fly in bright conditions, possibly because conditions were still sufficiently warm. With the day almost over, we then headed down to Morecambe Bay to find a suitable B&B where we could catch up on our sleep before trying for more local specialties.

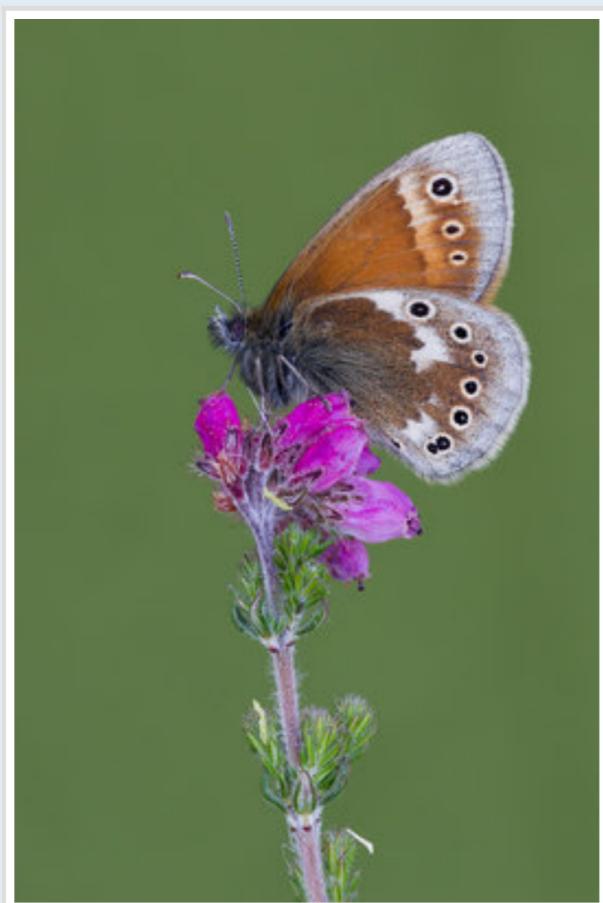
Our first stop on day 2 was Meathop Moss, a well-known site for Large Heath *ssp. davus*, the most colourful of the 3 subspecies we have. Again, we were both amazed at the number of adults that were flying, even at 7:40am! This species was also very difficult to photograph, but we did manage to find some adults nectaring on Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). The boardwalk that leads onto the moss is in need of some repair, so anyone visiting the site should watch their step!



The boardwalk leading onto the moss



*The white tufts of Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), the larval foodplant*



Large Heath male on Cross-leaved Heath

Despite it being early in the season for this species, we did find a few females flying and we decided to track one to see if she would do what we were hoping – and she delivered to order (well, after 15 minutes or so!) – by depositing a single egg on a leaf at the base of the foodplant. This was yet another unexpected bonus for us, adding to this very memorable trip.



Large Heath ovum

Since we were in the area, visiting Arnside Knott (on the other side of Morecambe Bay) was an obvious choice. We knew we were too early for High Brown Fritillary, but enjoyed views of a several fresh Dark Green Fritillary and, to top off an excellent 2 days, the sight of a slight-worn Northern Brown Argus (*ssp. salmacis*).



Dark Green Fritillary - male



Northern Brown Argus - male

All in all, this is one of those memorable trips that will live with you forever. The sight of so many Mountain Ringlet will stay with me forever! And my thanks to Mark for doing all of the driving (all 700 miles of it!) and putting up with any lame jokes I may have cracked! And we've now started a trend of naming the scientific name of each of the British butterflies species while driving - beats 10 green bottles hands down!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jun-14 09:28 PM GMT

Great report from your trip up North Pete, I was up there a couple of weeks back and spent 3 days at Arnside which, apart from the pleasures of the Knott, makes for a great base to explore the area. I was a bit too early for Dark Green or High Brown Fritillaries but saw two 'lifers' myself, the Mountain Ringlets at Irton Fell and Northern Brown Argus at a number of sites in the area, as well as the Large Heaths at Meathop Moss 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 24-Jun-14 10:07 PM GMT

Tremendous stuff, Pete. Lovely image of Large Heath – a butterfly that is notoriously hard to photograph unencumbered by invasive grass blades!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 24-Jun-14 11:30 PM GMT

Absolutely fantastic stuff Pete, getting up at silly o'clock aside you make it seem so easy 🍷 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by William, 25-Jun-14 07:32 AM GMT

That Dark Green Fritillary is stunning pete, and your ability to find wild immature stages equally so 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Jun-14 08:14 AM GMT

Thanks Neil, David, Wurzel, William!

"nfreem" wrote:

Great report from your trip up North Pete, I was up there a couple of weeks back.

Thanks Neil – yes, I took a good look at your excellent report (and from others) to help get my bearings for Irton Fell; I use UKB as much as anyone else – what a great resource! I've been to Meathop and Arnside many times before, but never this early and Arnside seems a different place; I was amazed at the number of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (which I forgot to mention).

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jun-14 08:44 AM GMT

That Large Heath shot is superb. You should enter it for the UKB Summer Photo Comp! 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

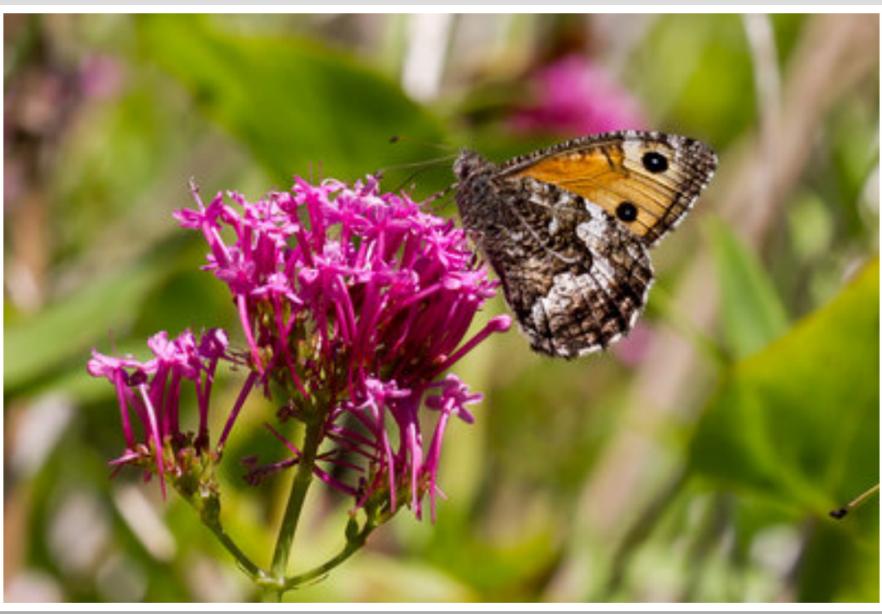
by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-14 09:43 PM GMT

Thanks Neil!

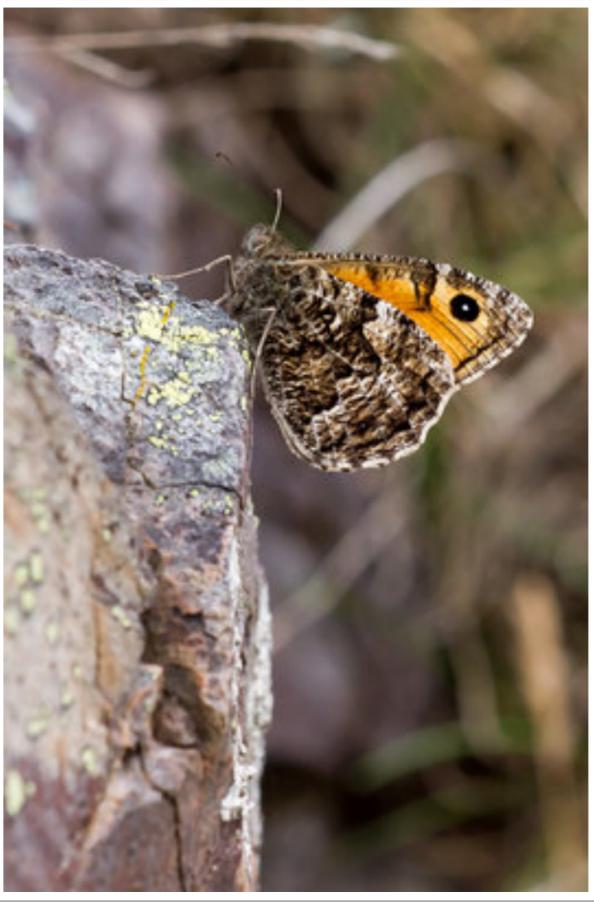
Northern Specialties

Due, once again, to a last-minute change of plan, I had the good fortune of visiting some sites in the Scottish Borders and my thanks, once again, to Iain Cowe (IAC) for suggesting these sites last year! I spent some time at sites near Eyemouth, as well as one of my favourite places; St. Abbs Head. Northern Brown Argus seems to be having a good year and, at one site, I managed to locate over 30 eggs in 20 minutes – not bad going – including several pairs of eggs that had most likely been laid by different females! Unlike the Brown Argus, whose eggs are typically laid on the underside of the leaves of Common Rock-rose, those of the Northern Brown Argus are laid on the upperside of the leaves and can be quite easy to find once you've gotten your eye in.

At one site, I had a great time chatting with the locals about the butterflies found, literally, on their doorstep – including a chap who must be one of the few people who gets Northern Brown Argus in his garden! At St. Abbs I also had the pleasure of meeting "Steve and Jacky" from Brighton, and Sussex BC members. It was a great pleasure to show them a Northern Brown Argus egg or two in an area where they were photographing the adults. Grayling ssp. scota also seems to be doing well, and I found 3 mating pairs at St. Abbs and Meadow Brown and Ringlets were everywhere! Some photos below.



Grayling ssp. scota – male



Grayling ssp. scota – female



Grayling ssp. scota – mating pair



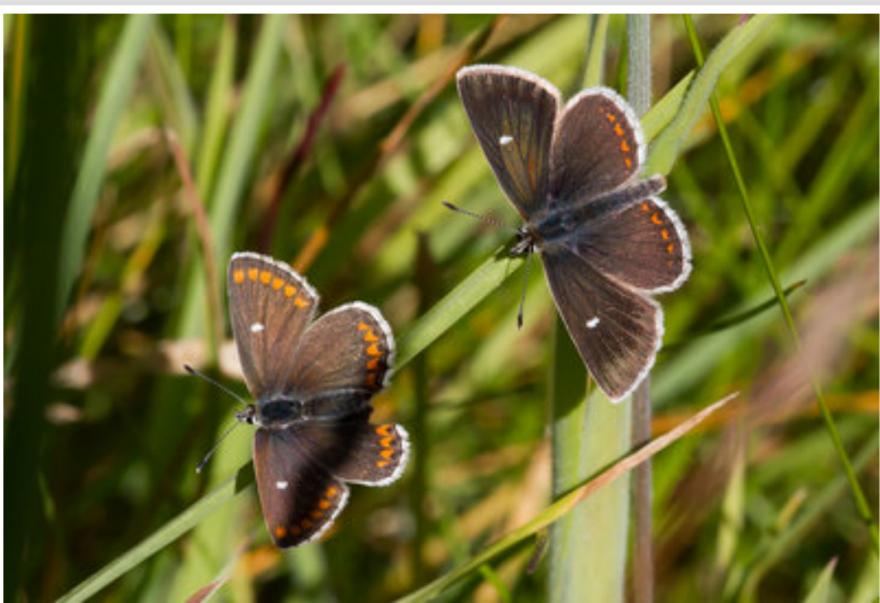
Meadow Brown – male



Northern Brown Argus – male



Northern Brown Argus – female



Northern Brown Argus – male on right



Northern Brown Argus - ovum



Northern Brown Argus - ovum



Northern Brown Argus - ovum



Northern Brown Argus – ovum

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 01-Jul-14 10:39 PM GMT

Those Northern Brown Argus look lush Pete 🍷 😊 They also seem a darker chocolate brown colour than the southern species, possibly because of the contrast causes by the white spot 😊 Do the Northern races of Grayling emerge earlier than those in the south as I can't recall too many records down this way yet?

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 01-Jul-14 10:52 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

Those Northern Brown Argus look lush Pete 🍷 😊 They also seem a darker chocolate brown colour than the southern species, possibly because of the contrast causes by the white spot 😊 Do the Northern races of Grayling emerge earlier than those in the south as I can't recall too many records down this way yet?

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel. Yes, in general, Northern Brown Argus are a darker brown than Brown Argus. I think the Grayling are emerging at pretty much the same time as more southerly colonies ... perhaps it's just that the colonies on the Scottish Borders are so strong that the emergence is more protracted (starting earlier, finishing later).

Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by IAC, 01-Jul-14 10:57 PM GMT

Maybe I should have canned my sojourn onto the high moors and got myself over to the coast. Fresh NBA males a challenge right now...so....hats off mate!! I counted 87 today in the hill burn cleughs a few miles inland from St Abbs and I did not see 1 of that 87 look anywhere near as good as those. And the Grayling are now it seems a little friendlier than they have been....just superb. 😊
Iain.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 04-Jul-14 10:45 PM GMT

Savernake Survivor

I had 2 trips to Savernake yesterday to see how things were progressing. Spending an hour around the column from 0900 didn't turn anything up, other than 2 other enthusiasts, but a return trip after work gave me a result – a grounded male on the track leading to the column. Unfortunately, only a single photo, since a local dog walker decided that his dog's curiosity was more important than my photography! Still, it was nice to think that this butterfly is one of the individuals that Matthew Oates was monitoring over the winter and that I had the privilege of seeing on several occasions! I don't know where this dinner dish sits on Neil's scale that includes "Gorilla's finger" and will have to defer to Neil for any other part of a gorilla's anatomy that

might fit the bill 😊



Oh – and a White Admiral egg that Mark Colvin and I saw being laid in Chiddingfold Forest a couple of weeks back – forgot to post! Possibly the most stunning egg of any British butterfly!



Cheers,
– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Maximus, 05-Jul-14 07:37 PM GMT

Fantastic photos Pete, that Large Heath 😊 the Northern Brown Argus (with the white marks on the wing), and the fabulous Grayling *ssp. scota* 😊. Very near miss with PE open wing shot due to the dog walker 😞

Mike

Re: Pete Eeles

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-14 08:14 PM GMT

Hi Pete,
Nice report from Savernake. Your insect is perched upon scat type 'Primate's Privy Member'.
BWs, Neil

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 07-Jul-14 07:55 PM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Your insect is perched upon scat type 'Primate's Privy Member'.

😊 Thanks Neil! And thanks Mike!

Another Day in Paradise

There are some sites that never, ever, fail to deliver the goods – and Stockbridge Down is such a site. Within the space of a couple of hours this morning I saw more butterflies than I've seen at any point this year – the place is buzzing with activity – with butterflies flying up with almost every footstep in the strip next to the road. I saw a few "firsts" for the year for me, including Chalk Hill Blue (7 males seen), Gatekeeper (4 males seen) and Essex Skipper (2 males seen). The next brood of Small Copper are also starting to emerge, with both a fresh male and fresh female seen.



Chalk Hill Blue (male)



Gatekeeper (male)



Essex Skipper (male)



Essex Skipper (male)



Small Copper (female)

Stockbridge is special not simply because of the number of butterflies (the Marbled Whites in their hundreds), but because there's always something to see on the Lepidoptera front. As well as finding a Ringlet *ab. centrifera*, I took a good look at the mites attached to a Fox moth larva, as well as a female Marbled White that played host to the parasitic red mite, *Trombidium breei*, although such parasitism does not appear to affect the butterfly in any way.



Ringlet ab. centrifera



Ringlet ab. centrifera



Fox moth larva

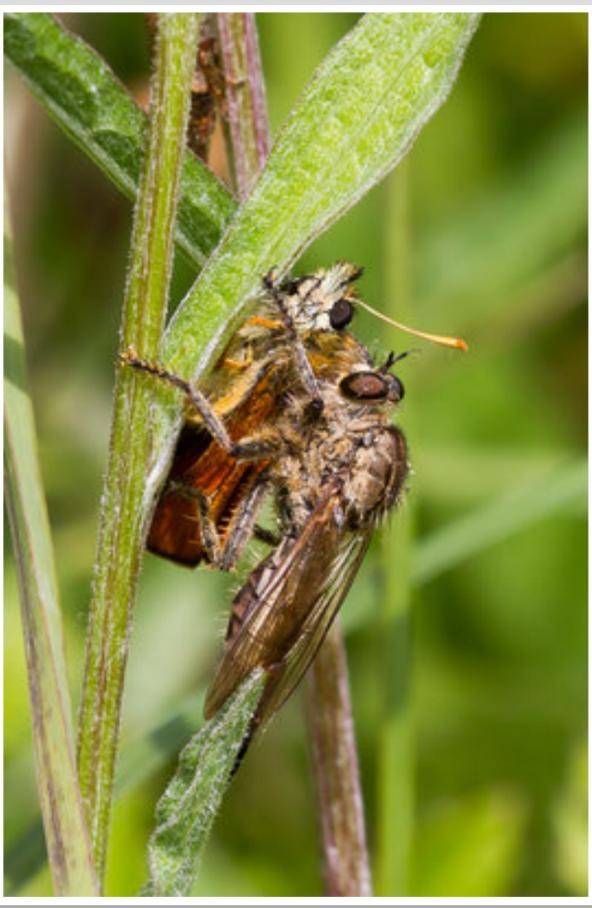


Marbled White (female) with Trombidium breiei



Marbled White (female) with Trombidium breiei

But I was actually visiting to see the Small Skipper, Stockbridge being one of the best sites I know for this relatively-common species; I must have seen at least 50. At one point, I saw a Robber fly snatch a male Small Skipper in mid-air – unbelievable, and nature at its gruesome best!



Small Skipper (male) captured by a Robber fly

And, finally, a selection of Small Skipper images. I found 3 mating pairs and saw 5 females ovipositing in the sheaths of Yorkshire-fog; I'm always amazed how such a small butterfly can get their ovipositor in such a tightly-wrapped grass stem and it's quite amusing watching her "shimmy" down a grass blade and then rotate around the blade in order to find a suitable spot to lay.



Small Skipper (female)



Small Skipper (female)



Small Skipper (female) ovipositing



Small Skipper (female) ovipositing



Small Skipper (ova)

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 15-Jul-14 10:49 PM GMT

Woodland Wonders

I'm very lucky to live near to Pamber Forest – one of the best sites I know for Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral. I recently spent a very enjoyable hour at the edge of some woodland, where female Silver-washed Fritillary would nectar on bramble and rest (while not being hassled by males) before launching themselves into the woodland where they would sniff around on the forest floor for violets, before landing on a nearby tree trunk and deposit a single egg. There was lots of "ovipositing" going on (as Guy would call it) where, despite going through the motions, no egg was laid. I was also surprised to find that several eggs were laid on the moss covering the bark, rather than the bark itself. Eggs were laid at all heights, from 1 inch off the floor, up to 2.5 metres up. Shots below show the general scene of one of the eggs, laid at the base of a tree and where, following egg-laying, I found another egg! I then had a good look around on some of the other trees in the vicinity and turned up several more eggs ... they were a lot easier to find than I was expecting!



Common Dog-violet carpeting the forest floor



Silver-washed Fritillary egg



Silver-washed Fritillary egg



Silver-washed Fritillary egg

Even more fascinating was the emergence and subsequent development of a White Admiral larva. I managed to follow it for over a week before it simply disappeared! But what I found absolutely fascinating (and not something I've ever seen recorded) is that the larva doesn't simply move to the tip of the leaf and start feeding (leaving the midrib intact and leaving characteristic feeding damage) but deliberately constructs a platform, made from silk and frass, at the tip of the leaf. If anyone has seen this documented I'd appreciate seeing a reference to this behaviour!



White Admiral egg with fully-formed larva inside



Newly-emerged White Admiral larva, heading for the leaf tip



White Admiral larva in perspective



White Admiral larva



White Admiral larva



White Admiral larva



White Admiral larva

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 16-Jul-14 09:55 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Pete 😊 Your penultimate shot helps me to understand why I've never seen a White Admiral cat - that is miniscule. I know they get a lot bigger but to start from that early instars must be a nightmare to find 😱

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jul-14 04:44 PM GMT

"Wurzel" wrote:

I know they get a lot bigger but to start from that early instars must be a nightmare to find 😱

Thanks Wurzel - and that's the reason for showing the characteristic feeding damage ... which should make things a little easier!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jul-14 05:27 PM GMT

And I would walk 500 miles ...

Actually 531 miles, and I did use a plane and car, but it's still a long way to go 😊 This year I promised myself a trip to see the last species of Grayling I've yet to see - *ssp. atlantica* - found in north west Scotland. This mammoth journey took me to Ardnamurchan Point (recommended by Adrian Riley in his excellent book *British and Irish Butterflies*), which is almost the westernmost point on the British mainland (the actual record holder being 1km to the south). The trip from Glasgow took me through some of the most spectacular scenery our nation has to offer and made the journey so much more bearable! The Corran ferry also provides a nice 15 minute break in the driving, and takes quite a distance off the trip, dropping you off on the

Arnamurchan Peninsula. What I didn't realise is that you're then confronted with approximately 35 miles of single track road, although there are plenty of passing places, and I think I came across 5 or so cars for the entire length of the drive across the peninsula! Despite driving through drizzle for 30 mins or so, I arrived at my destination to see a good amount of broken cloud.



Ardnamurchan Point

I really had no idea whether I'd see my target and was prepared to visit a few other sites up and down the coast, but started by wandering over the rocky outcrop near the lighthouse. Within a few minutes I flushed up a butterfly and it was unmistakably a Grayling! The contrast on the underside was really quite something – my first Grayling *ssp. atlantica*, and a beautiful male at that!

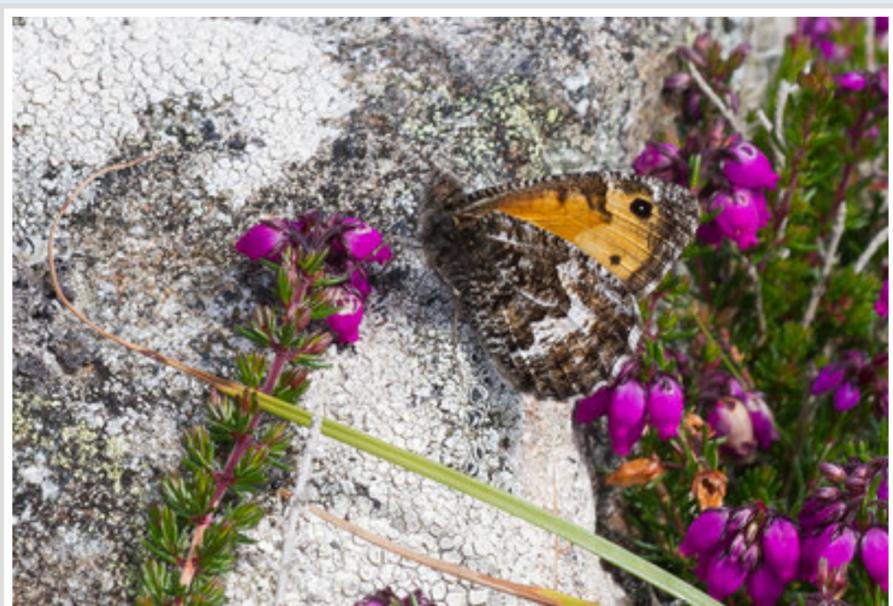


Grayling ssp. atlantica - male

I followed this chap for at least 5 minutes and then, on request, the clouds gave way to bright sunshine, and 5 or 6 Grayling suddenly appeared from nowhere, making the trip totally worthwhile as I managed to get more photos and spend some time just enjoying them, and the view! I saw around 30 individual Grayling in total and a lot of the males had great chunks taken out of the hind wings, no doubt the result of attacks from the local birdlife. As is usual for Grayling, the adults simply disappeared on landing, blending perfectly into their background. I even had several "double takes" while processing the photos – this species being a master of camouflage!



Grayling ssp. atlantica - male



Grayling ssp. atlantica - male



Grayling ssp. atlantica - female



Grayling ssp. atlantica - female

A nice addition was seeing my first ever Meadow Brown *ssp. splendida*, although they were few and far between with just 2 male and 2 female seen in total. However, the adults were quite spectacular, with large patches of orange on their forewings, including the male.



Meadow Brown ssp. splendida - male



Meadow Brown ssp. splendida - female



Meadow Brown ssp. splendida – female

Just as I was leaving the site, an Oak Eggar larva wandered right in front of me – a nice end to the morning! It was also great seeing various islands of the inner Hebrides as I drove back to the ferry, including Mull (sorry I didn't have time to pop over to Tobermory to see you, Jack!), Muck, Eigg and (a destination for next year to see Small Heath *ssp. rhoumensis*) Rhum.



Oak Eggar larva

Since it was on the way back to Glasgow, I decided to pop into Glasdrum Wood to see if I could find the Chequered Skipper larvae that will have emerged from the eggs that I'd found on a previous visit. Unfortunately, 3 of the 4 markers I'd put down (well, twigs) were missing and the last failed to produce anything. However, I did manage to see several newly-emerged summer brood Green-veined White *ssp. thomsoni* and also managed to find a few Speckled Wood *ssp. oblita*.



Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni – male, summer brood



Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni – male, summer brood



Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni – female, summer brood

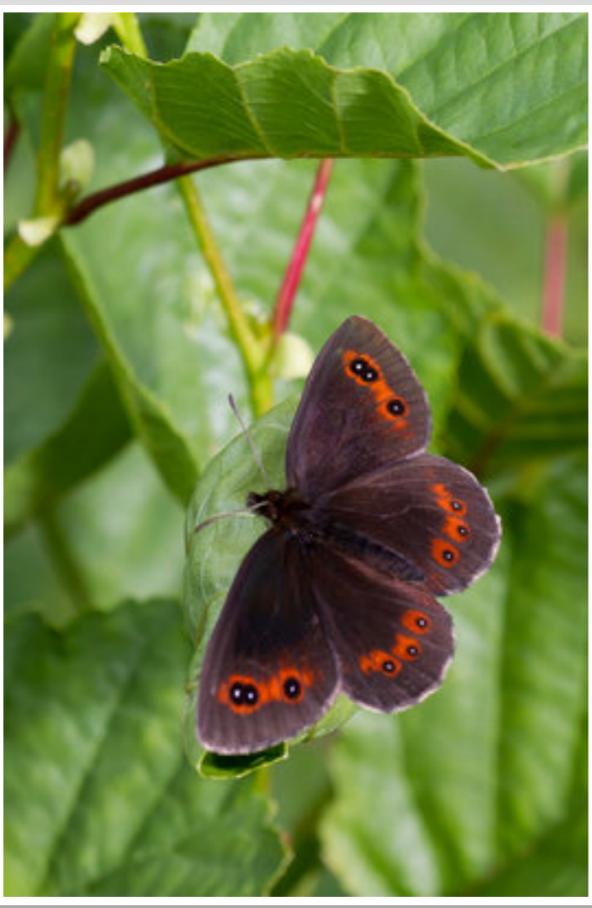


Green-veined White ssp. thomsoni – female, summer brood



Speckled Wood ssp. oblita – female

But the nicest surprise, was finding my first ever Scotch Argus *ssp. caledonia* – a single male that had clearly just emerged, marking the end to an exhausting, but very enjoyable, day!



Scotch Argus ssp. caledonia – male

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 20-Jul-14 09:51 PM GMT

I'm so glad you located your quarry, Pete, having travelled all that way.

Just a shame you didn't see a passing DGF *scotica* which would have put the icing on the cake.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 20-Jul-14 09:53 PM GMT

Thanks David! If *scotica* was still a recognised form (it's been removed in the latest classification), then I might have tried for it! I did see several female DGFs at various points, but none conformed to this form!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-14 11:30 PM GMT

Fantastic stuff Pete – four subspecies in one report 😊👍 The Scotch Argus is a right cracker 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 21-Jul-14 08:50 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. The Scotch Argus is a little out of focus – the blighter didn't want to play ball! Might have to go back 😊

Apparently, the Scotch Argus takes over from the Meadow Brown as the commonest species in the area, from early August onwards. I wouldn't mind experiencing that!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 24-Jul-14 08:36 PM GMT

Small, but perfectly formed

I've spent some time recently looking at the small stuff – the things that often escape our attention. That's "code" for eggs and early-instar larvae 😊 Starting at home, my wonderful wife has decided that Nasturtiums would make a nice change from growing Cabbages, since the latter get eaten each

year by "cabbage whites". I didn't have the heart to tell her that "cabbage whites" love Nasturtiums too 😊



Large White ova



Large White larvae



Small White ovum

At Pamber Forest, I've been keeping an eye on a few Large Skipper eggs – and the first larva has emerged:



Large Skipper larva (1st instar)

Over to Stockbridge Down and the Small Skipper are still busy at it, and I was shocked to find no less than 17 eggs (at least 4 batches laid by different females) in a single grass sheath – especially given the amount of grass on the down!!!



Small Skipper ovipositing



Small Skipper ova - all 17 of them!

And finally, a quick visit to Savernake Forest in Wiltshire, to find my first Purple Emperor ovum of the year - of the "plum pudding" variety!



Purple Emperor ovum



Purple Emperor ovum

What an incredible year this has been - and I'm sure there's more to come!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Vince Massimo, 24-Jul-14 09:18 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Over to Stockbridge Down and the Small Skipper are still busy at it, and I was shocked to find no less than 17 eggs (at least 4 batches laid by different females) in a single grass sheath.....

That's not in the books 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 24-Jul-14 10:19 PM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

I've spent some time recently looking at the small stuff – the things that often escape our attention.

That's why your diary attracts so much attention.

Excellent images.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 25-Jul-14 07:15 AM GMT

Thanks both! It may sound strange, but my focus is always "would this add anything to UKB" when I go out – whether it's hunting down subspecies and forms, observing behaviour and immature stages etc.! This means I'm always after something new – which makes any outings so much more rewarding because I always learn something new.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by dave brown, 03-Aug-14 08:04 PM GMT

But the nicest surprise, was finding my first ever Scotch Argus ssp. caledonia

I didn't appreciate how beautiful the Scotch Argus can be. That photo is a stunner. It may be common in some parts but that surely is worth seeking out. (I have yet to see Scotch Argus having never been to Scotland in August).

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 04-Aug-14 11:39 PM GMT

Thanks Dave!

Arnside Knott

I've spent the last week on a family holiday in Cumbria – staying near Lindale with views over Morecambe Bay and with Arnside Knott clearly visible. I managed to break away one morning, arriving on site at 0730 and leaving by 1000 and back to the house in time for breakfast on the hottest day of the week! I managed to disturb my first Scotch Argus around 0750 on the far side of the reserve where the butterflies seem to be in the greatest numbers at the moment and, by 0830, the place was alive with males patrolling the hillside in search of a mate. I saw approximately 30 individuals in total, although most were past their best. The highlight was watching a female ovipositing. I managed another visit to get a shot of the coloured-up egg that is reminiscent of the Mountain Ringlet ova I photographed earlier in the year. I also found a few Northern Brown Argus ova on the Common Rock-rose.



Scotch Argus (male)



Scotch Argus (male)



Scotch Argus (female)



Scotch Argus (ovum)



Northern Brown Argus (ovum)

Cheers,
- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by CJB, 05-Aug-14 09:43 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

I got a lifer SA a couple of weeks ago.

They are stunning to see, although in the flesh they seem to be more black with red spots than the camera depicts.

Great piccies.

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 05-Aug-14 09:50 AM GMT

"CJB" wrote:

They are stunning to see, although in the flesh they seem to be more black with red spots than the camera depicts.

I agree – there's nothing quite like a freshly-emerged Scotch Argus, with its velvety black wings. I remember seeing my first in 2002 (I think) and I was blown away by just how dark it was, and the contrast with the red markings. Beautiful!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 07-Aug-14 11:56 PM GMT

Bits and Bobs

Catching up with a few things that I've been monitoring or rearing. First off, Guy has been posting some superb images of Purple Emperor ova development, so thought I'd add my 2p here. Specifically, the development and subsequent "disintegration" of the red band, leading to the head capsule of the larva, is definitely something that I'd love to see captured on a time lapse film – it would be spectacular! Even the "immature" egg shows signs of movement, which surprised me; the eggshell must be wafer thin to be this transparent. I don't have a full sequence (a family holiday in Cumbria broke the sequence!), but here's what I do have:



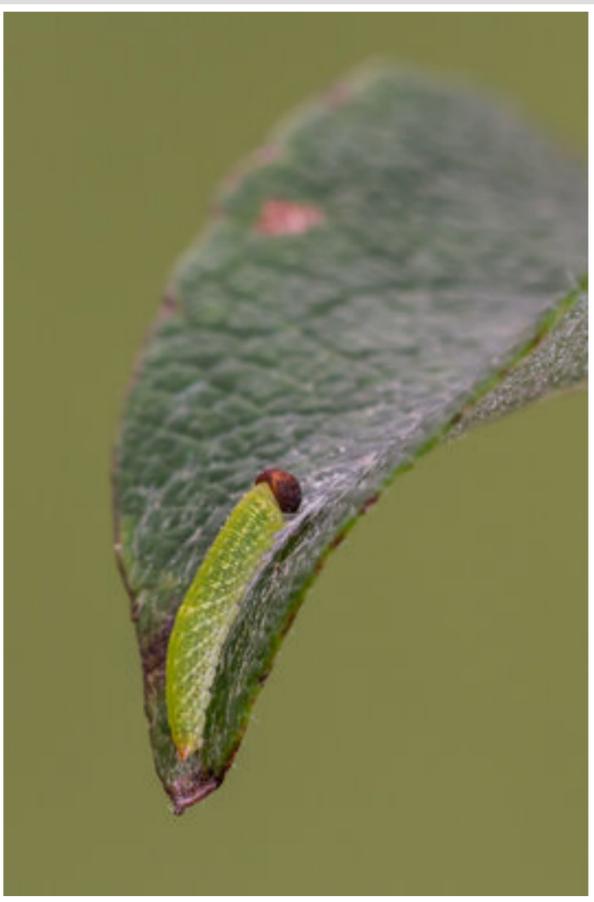
24th July



26th July



27th July



3rd August - 1st instar larva

And here's a 1st instar Silver-washed Fritillary that decided to set up its silk pad (on which it will overwinter) on the same piece of moss on which the egg was laid. The critter is TINY and took ages to find!



Silver-washed Fritillary - 1st instar larva

I also managed to relocate the Large Skipper larva I've been following, but is so hard to photograph - any movement and it retreats back into the grass tube that it's constructed. I came up with the cunning idea of backlighting the tube to see whether or not the larva was actually in there, which it was (it's the dark shadow at the top of the first image)! The first shot also shows the characteristic feeding damage. I managed to get a quick shot when he did finally poke his head out!



Large Skipper larva

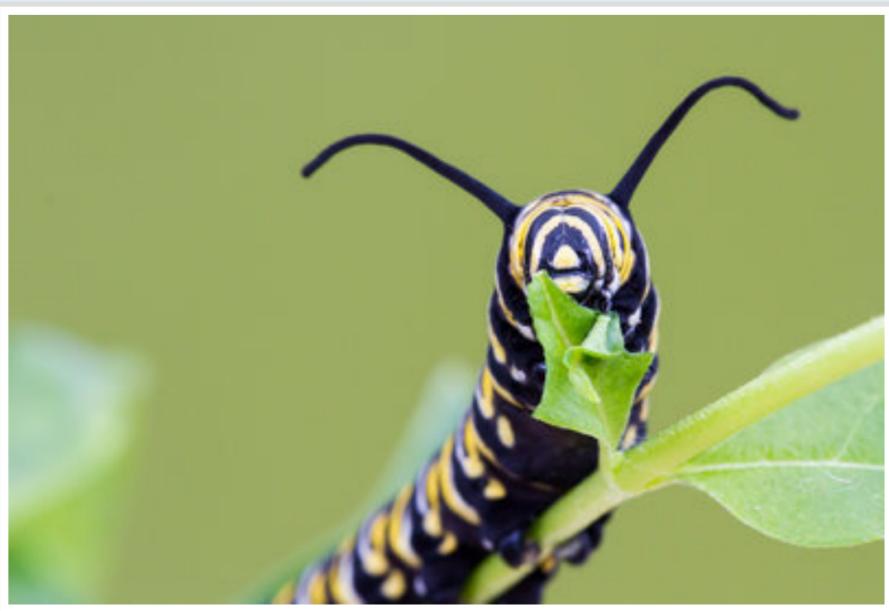


Large Skipper larva

And finally - I've always wanted to rear Monarch since the larva is just so darn weird! Not only was I kindly given a couple of larvae, but also the food plant, with the intention of sending the pupae back to their donor! The gold spangles on the pupa are quite something, and the shot below doesn't do it justice!



Monarch - final instar larva



Monarch - final instar larva



Monarch - pupa

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 08-Aug-14 09:25 AM GMT

How on earth did you get those images Pete, esp SWF – Remarkable! I have been surprised to note that frequently there is little correlation between the size of the butterfly and the size of the egg. Inspirational stuff!

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 08-Aug-14 09:56 AM GMT

Agreed – magnificent shots. Is the *iris* egg (caterpillar now) at home, Pete, or in the wild?

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 08-Aug-14 10:42 AM GMT

Thanks both!

"Padfield" wrote:

Is the *iris* egg (caterpillar now) at home, Pete, or in the wild?

Still in the wild – I'll probably meet up with Matthew to show him the eggs and larvae I've found, so that he can add them to his survey this winter.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 08-Aug-14 09:55 PM GMT

That Monarch cat really is an awesome looking critter, and that Silver-washed is miniscule 🤩 Fantastic stuff Pete 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

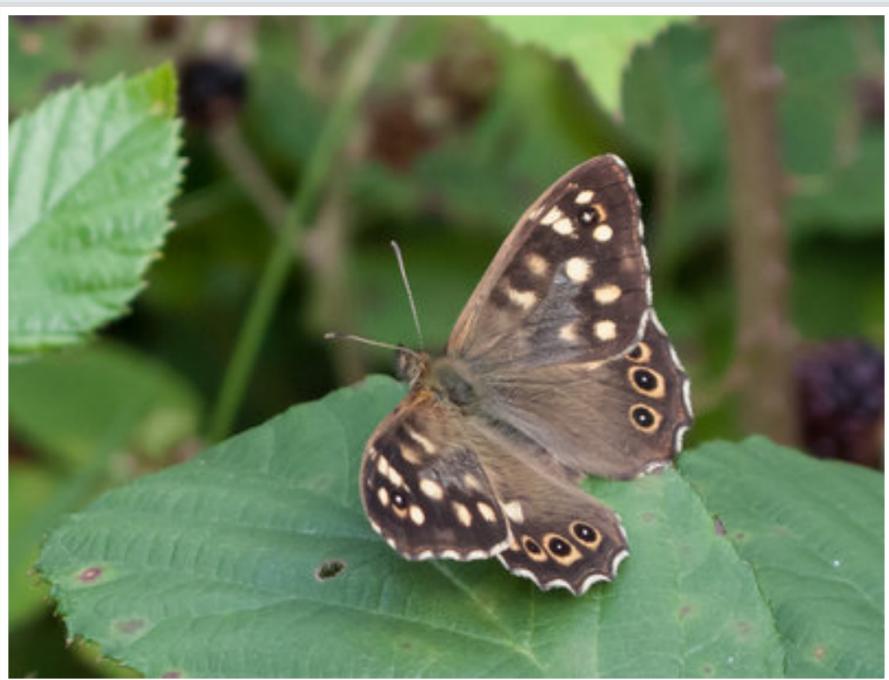
Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 10-Aug-14 05:15 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel!

Geenham Common and Pamber Forest

With the season winding down, I decided to pay a brief visit to Greenham Common yesterday, returning again today. Common Blue and Speckled Wood are doing well, with a few Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown hanging on. The highlights were finding an almost-white 2nd brood Dingy Skipper, and watching a few Gatekeepers ovipositing. At Pamber Forest, the Large Skipper larva I've been monitoring was also out in the open, which seemed strange to say the least! I watched while it created a new home out of a couple of grass leaves.



Speckled Wood (male)



Dingy Skipper aberration



Gatekeeper ovum



Large Skipper larva

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 03-Sep-14 06:56 PM GMT

On the Hunt for Chequered Skipper

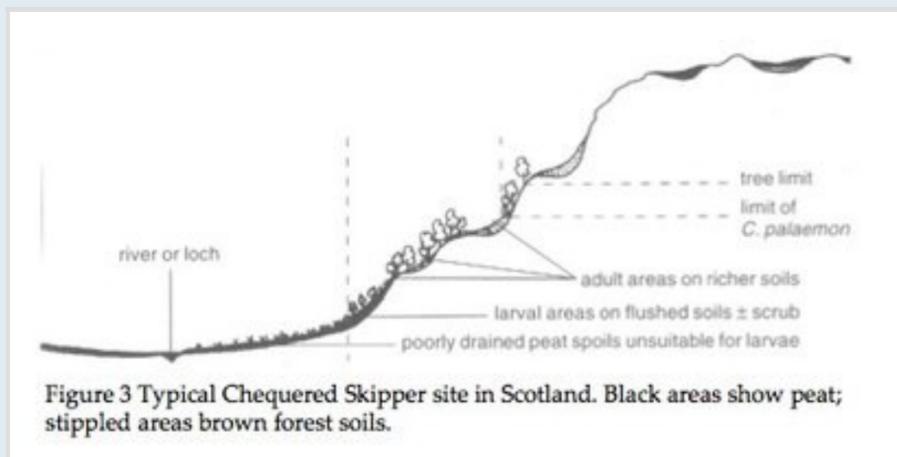
I was fortunate (again!) to be able to spend a good chunk of time recently at Glasdrum Wood in Scotland, on the hunt for Chequered Skipper larvae. Having read the excellent works of Neil Ravenscroft, who studied the ecology of Chequered Skipper for his PhD while at Aberdeen University, I felt full of hope as I arrived on site. Neil's findings are extremely interesting to say the least, and most can be found in Butterfly Conservation's booklet on the

Chequered Skipper, although I did enjoy reading the various papers he's published too along with other articles by other authors, such as David Newland.

Since I was looking for the larvae, I was particularly interested in finding those areas where the larvae were most likely to be found (and having found a few eggs earlier in the season, I had a pretty good idea of where to look). Below is a photo of Glasdrum Wood showing the wayleave that is created to allow the power lines to be maintained, together with Neil's illustration of the topography of typical Chequered Skipper habitat.



Glasdrum Wood



The whole area below the woodland edge is pretty much covered in scrub; Bog Myrtle, Bramble, Bracken and Hazel is everywhere. As Ravenscroft describes, the upper slopes, while rich in Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*), contains plants that are distinctly browner than those found in the lower slopes which, apparently, have the best level of nutrients and aeration to maintain a lush green sward that lasts long enough for the Chequered Skipper larvae to become full grown before they overwinter (and, ultimately, pupate in the spring without feeding further). I have to say the difference in foodplants between the upper and lower slopes is noticeable and, while it's not easy to see from the photos below, the Purple Moor Grass in the larval feeding areas is most definitely a darker and lush green, and the grass blades seem to be slightly wider (which is a benefit to the larvae, since they create shelters from these blades in all but the final instar, when they feed more openly).



Slope below the woodland edge



Purple Moor Grass on upper slope



Purple Moor Grass in larval feeding area

My initial search was clearly in the wrong area, although my heart skipped a beat every time I found a notch in a grass blade (which is characteristic of Chequered Skipper larval feeding damage), but I could put this damage down to Sawfly larvae, Drinker moth larvae or Leafhoppers (*Cicadella viridis*).



Leafhopper (Cicadella viridis) - male



Drinker moth larva



Sawfly sp. larva

A few Scotch Argus were also flying and kept me company, but these were all well past their best, although this female still seemed to have a lot of eggs to be laid, judging by the size of her abdomen.



Scotch Argus ssp. caledonia - female

Eventually I found what I was after - a grass blade that not only had the characteristic notches, but also a tube that a larva would use for protection when not feeding. The first tube I found was empty, but did tell me I was in the right area. I found several more abandoned tubes nearby, telling me that there was at least one larva still likely to be in the area and that these tubes were the result of earlier instars. Eventually, I found a tube made from 2 grass blades that would definitely hold a more substantial beast!



Chequered Skipper larval feeding damage and protective tube



Chequered Skipper larval feeding damage and protective tube



Chequered Skipper larval feeding damage and protective tube



Chequered Skipper larval feeding damage and protective tube

Using the torch app on my phone to act as a "backlight", I was able to see that there was, indeed, a critter inside. On the same plant I found a second tube and, while moving my tripod to get a photo, I must have disturbed the occupant, since a penultimate-instar Chequered Skipper larva reared itself out of the tube (something it does to eject frass) and just sat there. A perfect photo opportunity! I also revisited the first tube and just gently touching it caused this larva to emerge also!



Chequered Skipper larva emerging from protective tube



Chequered Skipper larva - penultimate instar



Chequered Skipper larva - penultimate instar

After looking around for another hour or so, I returned to this spot to find that the second larva was out in the open - something I've only heard they do in the final instar. But I can only assume he was about to head back to his shelter, or was looking to create a new one. Either way, it was nice to get a photo of the wee chap. Unsurprisingly, managing to get these shots was beyond my expectations; I was hoping to get a photo of some larval feeding damage at best! And now I can't wait to go back to see if I can find a final instar larva in a few weeks' time, although I'll be making sure I keep my arms covered since I was bitten everywhere (although I didn't notice at the time!).



Chequered Skipper larva - penultimate instar

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Padfield, 03-Sep-14 08:30 PM GMT

Fantastic observations and photos of the chequered skipper larvae, Pete!

Guy

Re: Pete Eeles

by nomad, 03-Sep-14 09:05 PM GMT

A very informative report from Scotland with some super images, especially of the Chequered Skipper larva. Regards Peter.

Re: Pete Eeles

by David M, 03-Sep-14 10:42 PM GMT

Great images, Pete. I don't ever remember seeing reports of early stage Chequered Skipper on UKB before so to me this is a first.

Thanks for sharing.

Re: Pete Eeles

by Wurzel, 03-Sep-14 10:44 PM GMT

Next time I've lost a needle in a haystack Pete I know who to call 😊 A really interesting read, I'm fascinated by the map showing the habitat partitioning 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 04-Sep-14 01:07 PM GMT

Thanks Guy, Peter, David, Wurzel - the lesson learned is to understand the ecology and habits before setting off. Then finding the needle in the haystack isn't so bad since there's an incredibly small area that (in this case) is actually suitable for larvae!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pauline, 04-Sep-14 04:22 PM GMT

Some fantastic shots in recent posts Pete – really motivational stuff 😊

Re: Pete Eeles

by Pete Eeles, 29-Dec-14 01:04 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline.

Quercus on quercus

I always finish the year off with a search for hairstreak eggs and visited my most local site for Purple Hairstreak this morning for about 20 minutes while walking the dogs. The fallen oak that always delivers has been removed by the farmer, so I had to make do with the lowest-hanging south-facing branches of a line of oaks that are at one end of a field. Still, I managed to find a single egg in the last minute, which was a relief!



Cheers,

– Pete