

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 01-Jan-15 05:55 PM GMT

A Happy New Year to you to Neil, hope to meet you out in the field this year sometime, hopefully along with some Long-tail Blues 😊

Have a goodun (2015!)

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jan-15 07:37 PM GMT

HNY to you Wurzel!

It would be great to meet up somewhere – our previous meeting was all-too-brief and frenetic, as there was so much going on which needed recording. If a return visit is advisable in May, I'll let you know.

If not, perhaps a march around Bentley might be in order (I didn't visit in 2014).

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Mark Tutton, 01-Jan-15 11:31 PM GMT

Happy New Year Neil, hope we bump into each other as frequently this year as we did last 😊

Must arrange those 'cross border Duke exchange visits' this year.

Kind Regards

Mark 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jan-15 02:37 AM GMT

Happy New Year Mark. Yes, I'm still eager to get up the backside of Butser!

Catch up in May.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jan-15 04:20 AM GMT

King Colin

It's not often that I feel compelled to post images taken by others in my Personal Diary. In fact I can only recall posting images taken by my brother, Mark, or his son, Tomas. However, I suspect that many of you will enjoy these, and they illustrate perfectly the potential rewards of dedication.

Butterfly buddy and occasional UKBer Colin Knight has been attempting to take some good images of a Kingfisher for some time now. In 2014 he spent more than 150 hours in the hides at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Centre in Arundel, hoping and hoping. There were some near misses. I remember commiserating with him when he posted a near-perfect image on his 'Postcards from Sussex' blogsite, but the Kingfisher had turned its head away just as he hit the button! Then there was the time when one landed on the desired post in front of the Sand Martin Hide, only for another occupant to thrust his pointed finger through the slat window and loudly exclaim "there he is!". Of course this poor hide etiquette can be very risky, as the hinged shutter might suddenly fall and break your arm. 😡 😊

I was delighted when he finally nailed the shot he was after (see top image), following a couple of 'almosts'. As is often the case with wildlife photography, once you have succeeded in a quest, further successes follow with relative ease. During a New Year break in Sheffield he came across a very obliging Kingfisher in Endcliffe Park. It was so obliging that it provided further close-up views during a couple of subsequent visits (lower three images).

I'm sure you'll agree, these are superb images of a Kingfisher, and just deserts for those many fruitless hours. Congratulations, Colin!





Re: Neil Hulme

by Padfield, 04-Jan-15 04:29 AM GMT

Breathtaking. I can't think of anything else to say.

Guy

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 04-Jan-15 05:01 AM GMT

Well done, Colin!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 04-Jan-15 05:11 AM GMT

Stunning!

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 04-Jan-15 05:52 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Colin has certainly excelled himself this time, as he did with that beautiful shot of that Empress in Houghton forest last summer, Certainly cloud nine material!

All the best ,

TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Mark Tutton, 04-Jan-15 06:06 PM GMT

Wow - what fantastic images! Having spent tens of thousands of hours by the waterside over the last 45yrs following my other passion of freshwater fishing, I can count on one hand the number of opportunities I have to observe a Kingfisher up close and personal - and then it only been for the briefest of moments.

Well done Colin - glad your dedication paid off.

Kind Regards

Mark

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 04-Jan-15 07:39 PM GMT

What can anyone add? Beautiful photos of a beautiful bird (and one of the most widespread species in the world).

I sympathise:

another occupant to thrust his pointed finger through the slat window and loudly exclaim "there he is!"

Parallel experience with a captive bred Large Copper released on a fenland site. The butterfly settled on a convenient perch, I was ready to photograph from about 1.5 metres distance when another camera (*not by a ukb member I hasten to add*) was pushed in front of my camera at about 20 cms from the target. Predictably, the butterfly was spooked and flew off over the reed bed.

Mind you, fieldcraft is a learnt skill.. Neil once chided me – quite correctly – for approaching a grounded Purple Emperor too quickly.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jan-15 04:21 AM GMT

Flutterbys On Flickr

I've finally managed to find time to start uploading some images to my Flickr site, following a very slow and faltering start. I'll be posting more here <https://www.flickr.com/photos/125367544...014014567/> over the next few weeks. Sieving through old images certainly helps to beat the winter blues!

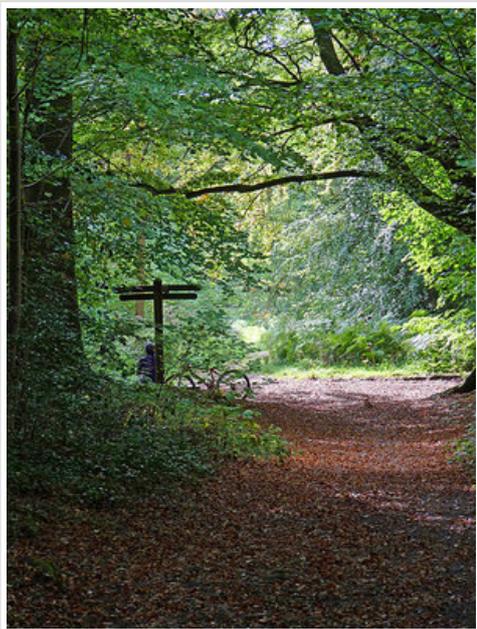
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Jan-15 08:06 PM GMT

South Downs National Park 'Hidden Gems' Photography Competition

I was delighted to hear that I have been awarded second place in the South Downs National Park 'Hidden Gems' Photography Competition, with an image of a cyclist taking a breather beside the Stane Street Roman road in Earham Woods – see <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/about-us/n...ompetition>.

Eight images have now been selected for a further 'People's Choice' vote at <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/about-us/n...ition-2014>. I was even more pleased to see that a second of my images appears in this selection. The Summer Solstice sunset, in alignment with the impressive, 'Devil's Jumps' Bronze Age barrows at Treyford, provided one of my highlights of 2014; I've waited for many years to see this without cloud cover. Rather than travelling through the night to join the sunrise celebrations amongst a large crowd at Stonehenge, I find it more enjoyable to have a good pint in The Royal Oak at Hookway, before making my way up to the barrows, where perhaps a dozen people collect to enjoy this wonderful part of Sussex at a special time of year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 15-Jan-15 09:05 PM GMT

These pictures from someone who claims he doesn't understand the technicalities of photography 🙄 Huh.

Well done Neil.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 16-Jan-15 02:47 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

The artist Terence Cuneo always hid a mouse in his paintings, so where are the Butterflies in your lovely images?.

Well done!

TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Jan-15 06:00 AM GMT

I'm not surprised your images have gained accolades, Neil. Your very being is especially close to nature and it shows in the pictures you take.

Well done (and well deserved).

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jan-15 06:29 PM GMT

Thanks all – much appreciated. And not a butterfly in sight!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jan-15 06:29 PM GMT

For Sale

As many of you know, I (and plenty of other UKBers) use the Panasonic Lumix FZ bridge cameras – I still use the FZ38. Even the older models are still well worth picking up if you can find them. However, the accessories are becoming increasingly difficult to purchase. My nephew has long since moved on to a DSLR, as he does a lot of aircraft photography, so is selling the following items:

DMW-LA3 lens Adapter – fits FZ18, 28, 38 cameras

DMW-LC55 close up lens – fits FZ8, 18, 28, 38, 50, 150 cameras

New, this combination originally cost £67 – £70 from most stockists. **I'm selling these, in perfect working order (just the white lettering on the adapter is wearing off) on his behalf for £30 plus p&p.** Please PM me if you are interested.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jan-15 11:50 PM GMT

Owl Service

The Short-eared Owls which have been overwintering at The Burgh (Norfolk Estate near Burpham) seldom disappoint, and I have spent quite a few sunny afternoons watching them hunt. Some days are a little quieter, but generally I see between 4 and 10 individual owls, along with variable numbers of Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Merlin, Kestrel and Raven. Grey Partridge are now common up here, and I watched one rather optimistic owl try to grab one.

Last Friday (16th January) I went back to The Burgh with my brother, Mark, who was visiting from Antwerp. At least half-a-dozen owls performed well for us, beautifully illuminated by the low winter sun. Below are a couple of Mark's images.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 19-Jan-15 11:59 PM GMT

Love the photo's Neil, your so lucky to have these birds so near to you Goldie 🍷 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 20-Jan-15 01:39 AM GMT

I think Mark has contributed to this as illustrator.

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Ducks-Geese-Swa ... 0198546459](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Ducks-Geese-Swa...0198546459)

I don't suppose he'll see much from the £200 asking price. It must be a very good book at that price.

Excellent photos of SE Owls. I have never managed a decent shot.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Jan-15 02:32 AM GMT

Hi Goldie. Yes, I'm very lucky to have these birds within a 20 minute drive from home. I suspect this area currently holds the highest density of SEOs in the UK. On one occasion a hedge-hopping Red Kite 'pulled up' 6 owls from the corner of a field measuring no more than 100m x 100m - they really don't like each other!

Hi Jack. Yes, he is the sole illustrator. I have several of the original plates on my wall. Sadly, the book is over-priced significantly so.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 10-Feb-15 10:57 PM GMT

**"Neil Hulme" wrote:
Baiting The Emperor**

Following a disgraceful lapse in security a YouTube video has been posted on the Purple Emperor website <http://apaturairis.blogspot.co.uk/>, letting every Tom, Dick and Harry in on a secret which has been guarded more closely than Colonel Sanders own recipe.

Hi Neil,

I've been studying your diary, and found the above on P.91, always one to experiment I tried your recipe and that of Col.Sanders and I have to say that Col.Sanders is very slightly more palatable.

All the best,
TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 02-Mar-15 05:30 PM GMT

The family and I would like to wish you a very Happy Birthday. I'm looking forward to meeting you out there in your element this spring. Here's hoping for a great season. 😊

All the best

B'saurus

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 02-Mar-15 06:11 PM GMT

Happy Birthday Neil!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 02-Mar-15 09:42 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Your parents planned well, being born at the very start of the Butterfly season 😊 .
Many happy returns.

TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Vince Massimo, 02-Mar-15 11:19 PM GMT

Best wishes from me as well, Neil 😊
Hope to see you out there soon.

Vince

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 03-Mar-15 12:52 AM GMT

Don't birthdays come round far too quickly these days?

At least you've had a nice sunny day today. Birthday cake in the garden? Or did the brisk wind blow out all 54 candles?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 03-Mar-15 01:32 AM GMT

Happy birthday, Neil. I hope you saw a butterfly today to mark your day.

Wishing you many happy returns.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 03-Mar-15 01:49 AM GMT

Happy Birthday Neil, hope you had a good day!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Mar-15 02:38 AM GMT

All the best, Neil, both for today and beyond.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 03-Mar-15 02:45 AM GMT

Happy birthday Neil, hope you have a great Butterfly season Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Mar-15 06:04 AM GMT

Many thanks for your birthday wishes B. rex, Pete, Trevor, Vince, Jack, Susie, Buggy, David and Goldie.

I had a great day and some great presents, including the 2014 update of 'The Butterflies of Britain & Ireland' (Thomas & Lewington). I already have the 1991 original, and two copies of the 2010 revised edition, but I just couldn't be without the most up-to-date texts on Swallowtail, Large Tortoiseshell and Long-tailed Blue, amongst others. The publication of multiple versions is to be expected of any Bible.

I didn't manage to see my first butterfly, or even get out in the sunshine, as I've been pretty much tied to my desk for the last few weeks. But I've finally managed to finish a comprehensive report on butterfly monitoring of the 'South Downs Way Ahead' Nature Improvement Area (NIA) project, one of 12 national NIA projects which are now coming to an end. I can only make judgement on the NIA led by the South Downs National Park Authority, but in my opinion this DEFRA-funded scheme has been a great success, in taking the first steps necessary to "rebuild a coherent and resilient ecological network", as recommended by the 'Lawton Report' (2010). I hope that further funding for this type of project becomes available, irrespective of the colour of the next government. It HAS to happen, if the children of my children are going to be able to look forward to seeing Large Blues, Dukes and High Browns, as many of us are, as another season approaches.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Mar-15 08:36 AM GMT

We're Off!

I saw my first butterfly of 2015 today, followed by another eleven. A dozen Small Tortoiseshells were enjoying the mid afternoon sunshine on the banks of Ferring Rife, including a couple of almost scale-perfect specimens. This is my favourite Sussex site for this species and I hope to see numbers increase ten-fold over the next few weeks. The early indications are that the Small Tortoiseshell recovery is set to continue, rekindling childhood memories of days of plenty. I'll never take the Small Tortoiseshell for granted again; a rare beauty is becoming common once more.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Mar-15 04:24 AM GMT

The End Is Nigh

After keeping a Personal Diary on UKB for nearly five years now, I will be making my last few posts through late March, before embarking on some exciting new adventures in the world of butterfly conservation, beginning in April. This will mean that I will have to redirect my time elsewhere, at least for a few years, although I'll still be an enthusiastic supporter of this great website! I will continue to post news about butterflies, but from a different angle. More to come in due course.

This afternoon I continued my now traditional early season forays along the banks of Ferring Rife. Things are hotting up! 36 Small Tortoiseshells were enjoying the warm sunshine, along the east bank between the beach car park and the first bridge, including at least 6 courting couples. Egg-laying should begin very soon now, and I expect numbers to build considerably based on observations over the last few years. This is a fantastic venue to start the ball rolling for another great season of butterfly-watching.



Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 18-Mar-15 07:45 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Please "keep us posted". It is always interesting to know what you are up to even if it is less often. Your diary will be revisited many times because it has such a wealth of information as well as the superb photos. I will definitely be having a look to see "what was Neil doing this time last year?" (it could even be made into a topic itself) just to try and work out how far the season is behind or advanced?

All the best,
Philip

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 18-Mar-15 05:40 PM GMT

May I be 2nd in what I am sure will be a very long queue of UKBer's asking you to reconsider.

In all walks of life people who are at the top if their game, provide inspiration to those who aspire, those who are still learning.

We can appreciate that your superb images are often complemented with time consuming analysis, so maybe just a caption would suffice.

I am sure you will always take your camera on expeditions and even to a computing dunce like myself uploading images doesn't take very long.

The Purple and Brownie seasons without the Kipper's input. Never!!.

Best wishes in your new venture,
TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-Mar-15 01:11 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

More to come in due course.

Don't keep us in suspense, Neil.

You're not replacing Martin Warren are you? 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 19-Mar-15 01:24 AM GMT

Excellent photos, Neil – and congratulations (I'll leave it at that for now!). As a previous winner of the UKB Outstanding Contribution Award (and, therefore, inextricably linked to this community), I know you'll never be far away 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Trev Sawyer, 19-Mar-15 02:39 AM GMT

Congratulations from me too Neil...

Whatever project has snared you will benefit enormously and there couldn't be a better person to achieve whatever it is you are set to do. I can't wait to find out what it is!

Your fellow UKButterfliers will be "chomping at the bit" waiting for future news and any updates you are able to post in the future – wherever you are and however long the gaps in communication may be. 😊

Cheers,

Trev

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-Mar-15 05:18 AM GMT

"Pete Eeles" wrote:

Excellent photos, Neil – and congratulations (I'll leave it at that for now!)

Now I'm REALLY frustrated! 😞

Put us out of our misery, Neil! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 20-Mar-15 01:05 AM GMT

I agree with all that's been said Neil, please let us know SOON! Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by IainLeach, 20-Mar-15 01:54 PM GMT

Good luck with the new venture, hope you are able to keep posting your news somewhere

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Mar-15 06:07 AM GMT

Thanks for all your comments. I won't say any more for now, but the changes will be entirely positive and I will still be posting news and images on a regular basis, perhaps even more regularly than in the past! All will become clear very soon.

No more butterfly sightings for me over the last few days, but I did enjoy photographing this little chap on my garage roof this morning. This one's for Mikhail!

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 23-Mar-15 03:43 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

A very fine little fella, and very good news! 😊 .

All the best ,
TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 24-Mar-15 12:50 AM GMT

Pity this isn't First of April otherwise I would suggest – tongue in cheek of course (I think tongue in cheek ?) – that Neil is standing for parliament for the Green Party.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pauline, 24-Mar-15 02:17 AM GMT

Best shot you've taken all season Neil 😊 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 25-Mar-15 07:07 AM GMT

Well good luck Neil with whatever it is that you're embarking on – if it involves lot's of butterflying and you need a hand give me a call 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-15 08:48 AM GMT

Thanks again, all.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-15 08:53 AM GMT

Dun Cuttin

On behalf of the Murray Downland Trust and Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch, I would like to say "thank you" to all those who have contributed to another highly successful work part season at Heyshott Escarpment. A huge amount has again been achieved. The Duke of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and a wide range of other fauna and flora will benefit greatly from this winter's work. More at <http://murraydownlandtrust.blogspot.co.uk/>



Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 30-Mar-15 05:38 AM GMT

Hi Neil

Since I found this website in 2010, your diary has always been one of the "must reads." Look forward to the "different angle" you say you'll be writing from in the future, but I really hope we don't lose the amazing insight and knowledge you have brought us all.

Can't wait to find out what your big news is!
Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 30-Mar-15 05:57 PM GMT

"selbypaul" wrote:

Hi Neil

Since I found this website in 2010, your diary has always been one of the "must reads." Look forward to the "different angle" you say you'll be writing from in the future, but I really hope we don't lose the amazing insight and knowledge you have brought us all.

Can't wait to find out what your big news is!
Paul

I'll second that!!

TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 30-Mar-15 09:09 PM GMT

Can't wait to find out what your big news is!

Might know on 8th May 🤨

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 31-Mar-15 06:03 AM GMT

I'd like to know sooner than that if at all possible! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Apr-15 04:30 AM GMT

Eggs For Easter

I have yet to be at Ferring Rife under sufficiently good weather conditions to determine the size of this year's crop of Small Tortoiseshells. During my last visit (27th March) it was too cool and cloudy, and I only saw 16 before returning to the car, at which point the sun broke through and the temperature rose rapidly. With only 10 minutes before my deadline to leave for a meeting, I quickly retraced my steps up the east bank. Over only a third of the usual stretch I survey, I counted 64 Small Tortoiseshell and 2 Peacock.

However, today (31st March) it was the turn of strong winds to disrupt my count. I only managed to find 13, but 11 were females, either egg-laying or taking a rest between episodes of doing so. This can be a prolonged business and one female I watched laid approximately 100 eggs, shifting slightly to create a second batch when the first grew to a pile 3 eggs deep.

The fact that almost all seen under such testing conditions for flight were female butterflies, demonstrates the difference in priorities between the sexes. Today was unsuitable for showboating, scrapping and wooing, so the males were largely inactive. I then moved on to the shelter of the chalk garden at Highdown, where 2 Peacock and a Red Admiral were enjoying the abundant early nectar.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Apr-15 05:26 AM GMT

Thanks, Paul and Trevor. David, Jack and others – watch this space!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Apr-15 06:05 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Thanks, Paul and Trevor. David, Jack and others – watch this space!

I've been watching this space for several days now, Neil, and I'm not sure I can stand any more!! 😡

This **has** to be something significant?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Apr-15 06:12 AM GMT

New Challenges

Tomorrow morning I start a part-time job with Butterfly Conservation. For me, it's the 'dream job'. That's all I'll say for now, as I don't wish to pre-empt official announcements, press releases, or the project blog which I will be running throughout the course of the project – that will soon tell you all!

However, that does mean that my priorities will change for a while, not least in terms of time – I'm going to be VERY busy. Far from abandoning UKB, this new role does mean that my contributions must be modified over the next few years. My responsibilities as a BC employee are different to those of a volunteer, so it is very important to distinguish personal views from those of the organisation.

Over the years I've had the great fortune to meet a huge number of butterfly enthusiasts, and many people associate me with BC through my voluntary activities. If, let's say, I posted that I had become convinced that Large Tortoiseshell was breeding on the IOW, it would now be too easy for that view to become attributed to BC, which might differ in its position. For that reason, my Personal Diary will become rather sparse for the duration of the project, although I will post the occasional message relating to my new activities.

My sightings will still appear on the Sightings pages of UKB and BC Sussex, but they will be straightforward records of what I'm seeing, which hopefully will still assist many others in their quest to do likewise.

Much as I've enjoyed keeping a diary for the last few years, and the debates surrounding a wide number of issues, the opportunities I now have of making a real difference to species other than my beloved Duke of Burgundy, more than make up for what is, after all, a suspension, rather than a conclusion. And the Duke won't get forgotten either, as I'll still be doing voluntary work in his service during my time off.

Without wishing to make it sound like a "goodbye", which it isn't, I would like to thank everyone who has read my Personal Diary over the last few years. I may not have time to comment, but I'll still be reading yours.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Apr-15 06:20 AM GMT

Thanks for the update, Neil. I'll sleep easier now. 😊

BC have selected wisely. I wish you all the best.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Chris Jackson, 01-Apr-15 03:17 PM GMT

Congratulations Neil, all the best.

Chris

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 01-Apr-15 06:12 PM GMT

Congrats Neil. BC's gain.

I take it you won't have to move house and home to Dorset? Mind you, Dorset is arguably the best butterfly county in England (after Sussex of course!)

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by badgerbob, 02-Apr-15 01:53 AM GMT

Good luck Neil (as if its needed)!! Hope to still see you out in the field from time to time. Look forward to seeing the odd report from you.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 02-Apr-15 08:54 AM GMT

Congratulations, Neil i'm sure you'll be much appreciated by BC, you're certainly the right man for the job 😊😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 03-Apr-15 06:50 PM GMT

My congratulations as well Neil, I'll keep looking for your imports Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 04-Apr-15 05:58 PM GMT

Brilliant news Neil. Well done

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 06-Apr-15 06:15 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Let me add my congratulations. I will miss reading your own personal viewpoints in your diary but can appreciate that the demands on your time will be different now.

All the best in your new venture,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Apr-15 07:50 AM GMT

Fritillaries for the Future

Many thanks to you all, for both the kind messages left on UKB, or sent directly.

I have now started work as Butterfly Conservation's Fritillaries for the Future Project Officer. This is a part-time (3 days per week) position for the 3 year duration of the project, which is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. I will continue to work as a volunteer for BC Sussex Branch in my free time, but it is important that these roles are clearly separated (hence the limited use of my UKB Personal Diary during the project period, to avoid any confusion).

Details of the project can be found on the BC national website here <http://butterfly-conservation.org/48-87...earls.html>, on the BC Sussex website here <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/Future.html> and a list of project events (which will be updated) can be found here <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/events.html>

I won't be able to respond to any enquiries about the project through this forum, but please feel free to contact me or book attendance at project events through the links provided on those pages.

Best Wishes, Neil





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Apr-15 09:25 AM GMT

Thanks for the info, Neil, and best wishes for the next three years.

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 26-Apr-15 05:11 PM GMT

Neil,

Congratulations on your new 3-year contract with Butterfly Conservation. I remember seeing Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Park Corner NR some 20 years ago and it is really sad to see that the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is no longer present. I am sure you've read about the dramatic numbers of PBF at Grafton Wood last year after re-introduction of the species there in 2011 when 68 adults were released.

Good luck with your project.

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by IainLeach, 28-Apr-15 05:43 PM GMT

Sounds good Neil, congratulations and I'm sure you'll really enjoy yourself

Iain

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 29-Apr-15 01:00 AM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, hope to find them soon at Gaits Barrow but I believe it's Snowed there today so it may be quite a wait 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Jun-15 06:50 PM GMT

Singing The Blues

Hi all,

Here's a rare return to my Personal Diary, not least to prove I'm alive and kicking! My role as *Fritillaries for the Future* Project Officer has kept me incredibly busy over the first few months – but happily so! There is a great deal to do, but I'm optimistic that it can be done. I'll provide an update in due course.

Not much time for narrative, I'm afraid, but here are a few images of the stunningly beautiful Large Blues of Daneway Banks, taken on Friday 19 June. I estimated that 20+ individuals were active (possibly significantly more) and I saw three mating pairs. On two occasions I watched the courtship prior to copulation, both being rather different in nature. One pairing lasted a very brief 16 minutes!

BWs, Neil





Re: Neil Hulme

by Katrina, 21-Jun-15 08:22 PM GMT

Beautiful photos Neil. Looking forward to your update! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 21-Jun-15 10:16 PM GMT

Lovely photos Neil, I've yet to see this Butterfly and didn't realise it's markings were so out standing, Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 21-Jun-15 11:13 PM GMT

Goldie:

....didn't realise it's markings were so out standing

Most photographs, including those I have taken, certainly don't do the species justice. However, as always, Neil's photos are superb.

Glad the Fritillary project is keeping you out of mischief. I trust PBs will soon be flying again in Ambersham and Graffham Commons where I used to enjoy them 40-something years ago. I even found the almost-white ab there once. When I first saw it distantly I thought it was a Magpie Moth but being in my more athletic youth then, I managed to chase it down. (Photo hidden away somewhere).

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 22-Jun-15 01:33 AM GMT

Superb photos, Neil. Possibly the best uppersides I've seen of this amazing species!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-15 04:00 AM GMT

Thanks, all. As most will know, the Large Blue is seldom keen to open its wings, and even less keen to open them wide, so I was delighted to *at last* get the opportunity to record this iconic species in its full glory. It's a privilege just to see the Large Blue, irrespective of photography.

Pete, the event reminded me of the first time we actually met, when we shared a fresh female on the bank at Collard (how dodgy does that sound?). That day supplied my last, best shot, and also the first opportunity to meet Dave Simcox. We have much to thank him, Jeremy and others for!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 22-Jun-15 05:44 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Pete, the event reminded me of the first time we actually met, when we shared a fresh female on the bank at Collard (how dodgy does that sound?). That day supplied my last, best shot, and also the first opportunity to meet Dave Simcox. We have much to thank him, Jeremy and others for!

I remember that day well, Neil ... and you have one heck of a memory! And it was a pleasure to meet Mr. Hulme Snr. 😊 I remember the Large Blues being in good numbers, so much so, that they really distracted from any conversation we were having! An absolutely great day in the company of the one and only Mr. Simcox 😊 I remember taking this shot of you both, deep in conversation:



I couldn't agree more about the work that Jeremy, Dave, Sarah Meredith (Dave's assistant) and many others do ... we often see the end result, but don't always appreciate the deep science, effort, volunteering and funding that sits behind something as simple as seeing a Large Blue on British soil. Which is why I get rather upset when I hear of potential or actual impediments to the work that Dave and others do – but that's a much longer discussion, best held over a pint or two.

Again, fantastic images and something to aspire to.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by William, 22-Jun-15 06:02 AM GMT

I will second the comments on the photography (superb) and Dave and Sarah's work (inspirational), I bumped into them both briefly today whilst

helping out at Collard, a real pleasure!

BWs,
William

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 22-Jun-15 06:03 AM GMT

Cracking shots Neil 📷 Looking forward to the update on FFtF 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-15 05:05 AM GMT

More Fritillaries

Today (28 June) I had an entire day free, and for once this season I wasn't thinking about *Fritillaries for the Future*. However, it was still a day full of fritillaries, particularly if you count the Duke of Burgundy!

After some early warm sunshine a blanket of grey cloud soon invaded my part of Sussex, but it remained mild – perfect conditions to go hunting Dark Green Fritillary. I headed for Fairmile Bottom LNR near Arundel, where recent changes in management by WSCC have brought about some spectacular results, including a dazzling array of orchids. Whenever the cloud thinned and the temperature edged up, the male DGFs would take to the air, constantly examining tufts of grass and low scrub in their search for virgin females. Even light rain didn't deter them, but when the temperature dropped a degree or two they would eventually take a rest, either in the grass or on low brambles.

When the rain became heavier for a while I took time out to photograph the beautiful Bee Orchids. There are so many orchids here (mainly Common Spotted and Pyramidal) that many were being used as perches by the numerous Marbled Whites. However, I wasn't to be distracted, and after 3 hours I found what I was looking for – a newly hatched DGF sitting motionless and atypically easy to approach.

I then moved on for a brief visit to a Duke of Burgundy site near Storrington, in order to assess the quantity of larval feeding damage. I got lucky again, as the first leaf I turned revealed a tiny Duke caterpillar, unhatched eggs and empty shells!





Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 29-Jun-15 05:30 AM GMT

Looks like we had similar weekends Neil 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-15 06:27 AM GMT

The colours on the DGFs are just lush Neil 🍀😊 , any fieldcraft tips on how to find freshly emerged DGFs?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 29-Jun-15 02:42 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Your DGF, on the Common Spotted Orchid really hits the spot, nicely sums up the part of the season we're in at the moment. Talking of which, is your JCB (Japanese commuter bike) oiled up and ready to go?.

Have a Purple one,
TREVOR.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Jun-15 06:16 AM GMT

Thanks, all. I was very pleased with the DGF.

Bugboy: Orchids and butterflies – always a winning combination. I hope you enjoyed yours as much as I did mine!

Wurzel: *"any fieldcraft tips on how to find freshly emerged DGFs?"*

TBH it's just a case of being there at the right time – about three days after the first emergence on any site; in the right weather conditions – marginal for flight; and putting the time in – just keep walking, and walking, and walking. The rewards always outweigh the effort ... eventually.

Trevor: *"Talking of which, is your JCB (Japanese commuter bike) oiled up and ready to go?"*

Oiled up? Oiled up! This machine hasn't seen oil since the turn of the century. No gears, no brakes, no fear. It will be business as usual.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 01-Jul-15 04:54 AM GMT

Love the DGF's Neil, I hope they've arrived at Gait Barrow it was really short on Butterflies last time I went there Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Jul-15 08:00 PM GMT

Fritillaries for the Future PROJECT UPDATE

Since the start of April my feet have barely touched the ground, in a mad rush to get this project up and running. An initial audit of what we have left in Sussex clearly shows that a mad rush is entirely necessary. When the maximum daily counts of Pearl-bordered Fritillary for each remaining site are added together, the total only just exceeds 100 – that's a shocking figure! Of those 8 sites, either NO or just ONE fritillary was the maximum count on 3 of them, if you can call that a maximum. We may already be down to just 5 colonies; but remember what we have achieved with the Duke of Burgundy in Sussex, with a total annual count of 8 in 2005 rising to 1000 today. With your help it can be done.

Assisted by Mike (Butterfly Maker) Mullis, a captive breeding programme is now underway, for both Pearls and Small Pearls (pictured). I have already visited 24 sites to assess their suitability for natural colonisation through habitat improvement, expansion of existing populations, or re-introductions. Work will continue at full speed for the three years of the project. This is a golden opportunity – the last, best chance we will ever have to save Sussex Pearls. BC Sussex members will have received an appeal letter in June, asking for donations. Thank you to all who have responded, and in advance to those who intend to do so. For those who are yet to act, or who may wish to act again, **please Text FRIT15 £5 to 70070 to donate £5 to help this vital work.** If we lose these butterflies we will lose part of our spring.

Many thanks, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 02-Jul-15 01:08 AM GMT

please Text FRIT15 £5 to 70070 to donate £5 to help this vital work

Neil. You slightly flatter some of oldies. I know that texting must be easy as I see four year olds doing it. But I have never bothered to learn how to do so and in all honesty, I can't be bothered to learn now.

How can I send a donation in an "old fashioned way"? Believe it or not, in spite of shunning texting, I can manage a BACS transfer (but I have no idea what BACS stands for!) so I am not totally out of touch. So a bank account to send to would be ideal.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jul-15 04:22 AM GMT

Hi Jack,

I agree that there is the need to provide a further option, to cover all audiences. Although this is a useful addition to the armoury of fundraising tools, a gap remains for those who are not members of BC Sussex (who received an appeal letter with straightforward donation options), but who are uneasy about using this sort of technology for financial transactions. For this reason I emailed the Supporter Development Officer at BC HQ this morning, for guidance on a more traditional, additional option. I'll post that information here, as soon as the SDO gets back to me (not working today).

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jul-15 09:11 PM GMT

Fritillaries for the Future Project Donations

Anyone kind enough to make a donation to the cause, via a more traditional method, can post a cheque, made out to 'Butterfly Conservation', to:

Butterfly Conservation
Manor Yard
East Lulworth
Wareham
Dorset
BH20 5QP

enclosing a note that it is specifically for the Fritillaries for the Future project.

Many thanks in advance to anyone who wishes to support the project, via any of the available options.

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-15 06:15 PM GMT

Knepp Emperors Go Large

Matthew Oates and I led a group of a dozen visitors around the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland today, all keen to see the Purple Emperor. The slow start turned into a very good morning session, before we broke for a leisurely lunch provided by our hosts Charlie and Issy.



However, the real fireworks were reserved for the afternoon. We watched in awe as 4 Purple Emperors (2 being particularly nasty) indulged in the most prolonged and vicious combat that I have ever witnessed. They just wouldn't let it lie. A pattern soon developed, with a regular cycle of high level chases being punctuated by tumbling, tight turns just above our heads. These butterflies had clearly adopted a Motorhead mentality. By the time we had finished the official tour we had clocked up more than 40 individuals. On the way back to Knepp Safaris HQ we stopped to watch at least 4 White-letter Hairstreaks cavorting around the top of some Elms.

Enough is never enough, so Matthew, Paul Fosterjohn and I headed out again, surveying some new areas and bringing the day's tally to 54 Purple Emperor. As the sun started to dip towards the horizon the Purple Hairstreaks became more active, and we watched some impressive dogfights between Emperors and up to 7 hairstreaks at a time. The Purple Hairstreak is clearly making a comeback after several poor seasons and we saw 100+.

There are many ways by which to measure the benefits being brought, sometimes unforeseen, by the innovative rewilding scheme at Knepp, including the unprecedented increases in numbers of Turtle Dove, Cuckoo and Nightingale. But there can be no better measure than the rise and rise of the Purple Emperor. This was meant to be a species of extensive, Oak-rich woodlands, rather than open Sallow scrubland.

Lessons such as this confirm the minimal-intervention philosophy at Knepp as one of the most important and exciting developments in conservation in recent years. Perhaps not the golden bullet, but certainly a critically important addition to the armoury. Aside from viewing these particular species, the clear winners, it is worth visiting Knepp just to view the landscape being created, which increasingly provides a portal back to a time when the British countryside was a much healthier and vibrant place.

Of interest to many will be the news that a few Emperors are now being seen on the ground. Unfortunately I flushed one which had been feasting on a squashed rabbit/fox scat combo! 😞

Good to see Susie amongst the participants, on what turned out to be a very good day!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 05-Jul-15 09:50 PM GMT

I hope today is as good for you. The sun is shining now! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jul-15 06:36 AM GMT

Thanks, Susie. Here's a copy of my report on today's purple proceedings.

Another great day out with Knepp Safaris today, following an initial delay for rain. Matthew Oates and I led another enthusiastic group around the Southern Block of the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland, some of whom had never seen a Purple Emperor before. They have now! Females are yet to emerge and we are still in the male build phase, so it's difficult to predict just how large the numbers are going to get. The tally for today's tour was 72 Purple Emperors, with a further 5 seen during an evening sortie to watch the Purple Hairstreaks swarming. These are counts of individuals (not sightings), only logged when multiple Emperors are all visible, or their positions accounted for, while at each location. We later heard that Mark Tutton from Portsmouth had photographed a male Emperor on the ground, proving that they do occasionally come down here. It's time to get the bait out!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 06-Jul-15 09:47 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I was planning to go to Fermyn Woods early has they say your assured of a PE sighting there, however my plans have had to change, I can't go now until the end of July, (will that be too late do you think) Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 07-Jul-15 04:06 AM GMT

That's grand news, Neil! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jul-15 04:43 AM GMT

Hi Goldie,

You will still see PE at Fermyn in late July, but they will be well past their best, and relatively few will still be coming down. 🍷
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 07-Jul-15 10:44 PM GMT

Thanks Neil, change of plans again 😊 I'm going next week now, i'll get there some how 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Jul-15 08:53 AM GMT

The Beast Of Brighton

First seen skimming the kiss-me-quick hats and candyfloss on Brighton Pier on 6 July, and still resident in Pavilion Gardens. After sitting tight through adverse weather on Wednesday (both of us) I ambushed it coming out to play again at 11 am on Thursday 9 July. Although they are seldom reported, Monarchs have been seen with some regularity by sea-watching Brighton birders in recent years. These are usually mid summer sightings, seemingly from Spain or The Canaries, arriving long before trans-Atlantic examples in September/October.





Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 11-Jul-15 03:21 AM GMT

Brilliant photos of the Monarch Neil.

Where is the nearest big breeding colony of Monarch to the UK? Is it Spain? Seems quite far for individuals to stray, although I guess strong winds can explain that

Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jul-15 07:18 AM GMT

Hi Paul,

Yes, they are resident in Spain, and evidence from recent years suggests that they do occasionally venture north. The Brighton Pavilion Monarch (singular) looked good for a while, in view of the wider picture of incoming, exotic Leps and dragonflies. However:

Brighton Monarch Update

Confirmation of several different specimens of Monarch over the last week (including two individuals in Pavilion Gardens in the last two days), within a small area of Brighton, now makes this look increasingly like an inappropriate and irresponsible release. Multiple sightings alone do not preclude a natural origin, but unless they are observed along a wider stretch of coastline, the weight of evidence now counts against them. They may make an impressive sight, but this sort of behaviour cannot be condoned. However, the White-letter Hairstreaks continue to put on a good show in Pavilion Gardens, and there are stacks of Purple Emperor out across most of West Sussex and the northern part of East Sussex at the moment.

I met quite a few enthusiasts today in Brighton, and took some lovely images of Monarch, but won't be showing them for obvious reasons.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 12-Jul-15 03:50 AM GMT

Thanks Neil.

Shame it's looking like another illegal release

Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pauline, 12-Jul-15 03:55 AM GMT

I believe a couple were seen in Portsmouth recently – presumably also of dodgy origin?

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 12-Jul-15 06:03 AM GMT

I am "staggered" and impressed Neil how you seem to have resisted (this year in your diary) posting pictures of "Him" and "Her" (Particularly Him).

If I could release you from this, I would 😊😊😊

Best Wishes.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jul-15 07:07 AM GMT

Catching Up

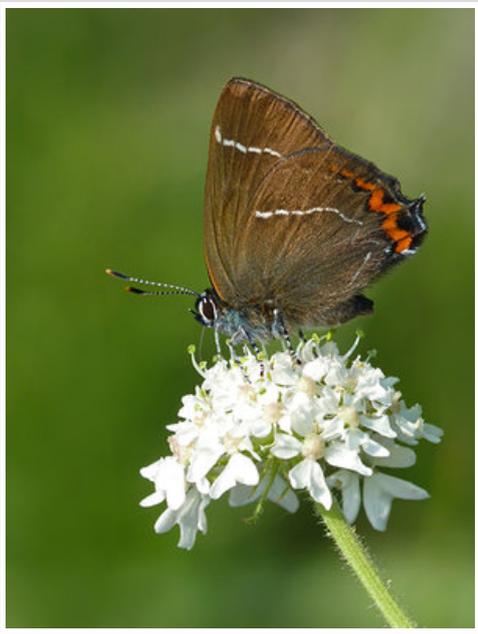
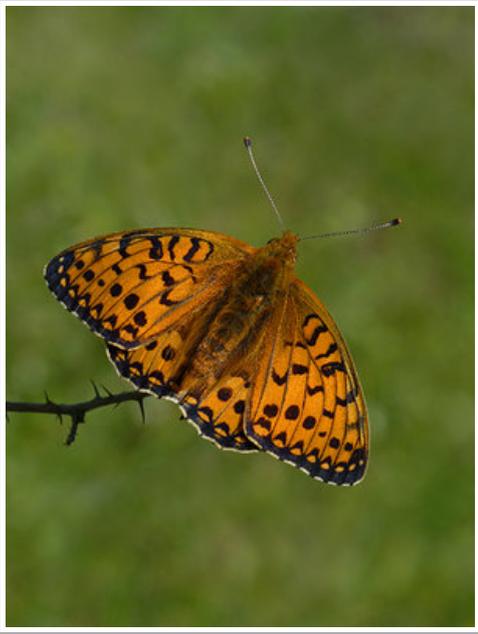
I haven't had much time to post here this season, but here are a few (non Purple) highlights from the last few weeks:

A male Dark Green Fritillary from Chantry Hill on 30.6.15. This species has reacted spectacularly to a change in management here, with daily counts up to 140!

A male White-letter Hairstreak from Littlehampton on 3.7.15. W-l H has had a good season in Sussex, following a string of poor years.

A White Admiral from Eartham Woods on 3.7.15. Sadly, this species is still in the doldrums locally, and sorely missed!

A Silver-washed Fritillary f. *valesina* from Knepp Castle Estate today (23.7.15). My first sighting in Sussex since 2013.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Katrina, 24-Jul-15 07:58 AM GMT

Your last photo is making me rethink my weekend plans 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Aug-15 08:25 PM GMT

Helping Holly Blues

Several female Holly Blues now laying eggs on the ivy flower buds in my Worthing back garden. Please don't cut your garden ivy back until October, to let their caterpillars reach maturity and pupate.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-Aug-15 11:09 PM GMT

What a pose, and on a terminal leaf too! Well done.

Re: Neil Hulme

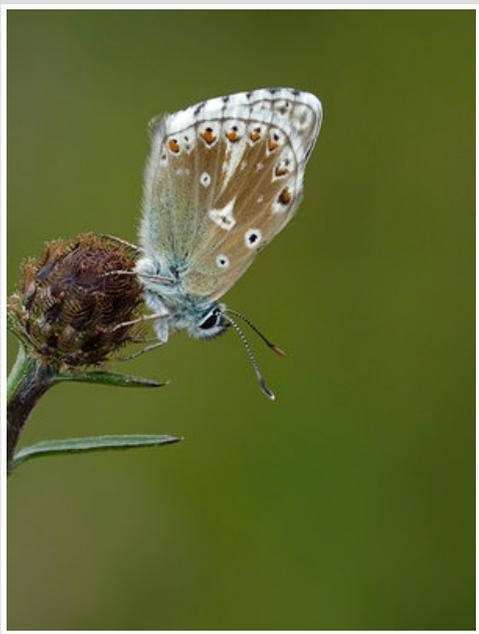
by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-15 04:17 PM GMT

Fun With A Selfie Stick

Here's a bit of selfie stick fun. Dan Danahar from BC Sussex has been making a series of short films about Butterflies of the (Brighton & Hove) Biosphere. In this episode we are successful in hunting down some unusual aberrant forms of the Chalk Hill Blue. The best bit is at the end, after the credits have rolled!

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

This afternoon I joined Dan (and Indi) Danahar, to help make the latest instalment of his popular sitcom Butterflies of the Biosphere. Although we left the Biosphere to visit Butchershole Bottom (watch this episode to find out the story behind its menacing name), we felt justified in doing so by the ample fruits provided by this site. Our target species, Chalk Hill Blue, is yet to peak here, but there were clearly several thousand already flying, despite the grey skies. We were keen to find some aberrant forms and the dull conditions were ideal for this, keeping them inactive for prolonged periods. It didn't take us long to find a few examples of ab. *postobsoleta* (reduced spotting over the hind wings), but I was particularly pleased with a specimen that fell within spitting distance of ab. *caeca* (a blind form), which had just a single, central spot on the underside of its forewing, and just two, tiny spots (in addition to the central key) on the hind wing. Technically, this should probably be referred to ab. *anticaeca* + *postobsoleta*. Who cares, we had fun and didn't tread in any dog poo. Also present were large numbers of Essex Skipper, Common Blue and a few Small Copper and Brown Argus, amongst the usual suspects.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 06-Aug-15 12:53 AM GMT

Hi Neil

I saw your fun and informative 'Chalkie' video with Dan, I've seen all of the "biosphere" videos now and they are most entertaining. Nice bit of comedy at the end too. I usually avoid the area you mentioned for obvious reasons. 😊

Catch up soon

ATB

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Aug-15 07:22 AM GMT

Big Butterfly Count

Today I did my second Big Butterfly Count, again at Cissbury Ring, and included Silver-spotted Skipper, Clouded Yellow and Small Copper in my tally. Although it took me a lot longer than the 15 minute BBC, I eventually found a total of 33 Silver-spotted Skippers. Numbers are building rapidly and it's very clear that this species has gained a firm foothold here.

I then went on to perform a survey at the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland, which included the first Dark Green Fritillary for the site. This brings the Knepp total to 33 species. I couldn't resist photographing the charismatic Longhorns, with the Knepp ruin as a backdrop.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Aug-15 05:40 AM GMT

Skipper Shoots Down Hummer!

The recently established Silver-spotted Skipper population at Cissbury Ring continues to grow, with 76 counted there today (9.8.15). Several Clouded Yellows were also present at Cissbury, including a pure white (topside) helice, and a large number of other species.

I also witnessed an incredible display of aerobatics, as a male Silver-spotted Skipper pursued a female Hummingbird Hawkmoth for ten minutes. I thought a Hummer would be able to outrun and outmanoeuvre anything, but it stupidly forgot to engage its hover mode and had to crash-land to escape. The skipper won.

I was on Cissbury yesterday too, where I saw my first (male) Brown Hairstreak of the year. The 2015 season is still running late, so it will be another week before the females really get going, although there have been one or two isolated sightings.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 11-Aug-15 03:58 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, love all your shots especially the Clouded Yellow the other two i'll have to weep over this year Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Aug-15 03:58 AM GMT

Happy Hairstreaking

The Brown Hairstreak season in Sussex is now fully underway, but we are still in the very early stages, as the butterfly calendar continues to run late.

The best Sussex sites have always been very poor at providing low-level males, although they make amends by producing such high numbers of obliging females. After getting a nice male at Cissbury Ring (8 August) I was even more pleased to get my best ever shot of a male at Steyning on Wednesday afternoon (12 August), when the clouds suddenly cleared and the temperature increased rapidly. 'Pleased' turned to 'delighted' when I subsequently flushed a female from low in a bramble patch – but she didn't go far. 'Delighted' then gave way to excitement, as I noticed the irregular patterning on her hind wing. This ab. *uncilinea* is apparently a first for Sussex!

Today (15 August) started well, as I returned to the same site at Steyning, which is about 1 Km from the famous Rifle Range. I found two females, one of which remained stationary for 45 minutes, despite the warm, sunny weather.

I later moved on to the Range, where quite a few hopefuls were staring up at the Ash trees. Unfortunately, that's where the hairstreaks stayed. I saw ones and twos scattered around the site, including females, but the big descent to start egg laying is still (eagerly) awaited. None of the females I have found to date has shown any interest in ovipositing.

We are still in that period when the Brown Hairstreak is hard to locate, but they are all in mint condition and fairly inactive. A week from now they will be down in numbers, but fidgeting in and out of the thorn and rapidly collecting nicks and scratches.

The main course is yet to come.





While waiting for the hairstreaks there is plenty more to see at Steyning, particularly as the habitat continues to improve, through the hard work of the Steyning Downland Scheme volunteers. Both sites I visited, particularly the first, were awash with Wall Brown. The Rifle Range has always been a good site for Holly Blue, but the numbers there at present are exceptional.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 17-Aug-15 04:07 AM GMT

You've certainly surpassed yourself with that male Brown Hairstreak photo Neil. And the other two aren't too bad either. 😊😄

Best wishes

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Aug-15 06:54 PM GMT

Thanks, James. Hope to see you at Steyning soon!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Aug-15 07:03 PM GMT

Big Bang Imminent

Despite the slow start to the Sussex Brownie season, we are now at the point when good numbers of ovipositing females are likely to become active. I suspect that the next warm and sunny morning will mark the start of a period of plenty, which should extend to mid September this year. If the weather plays ball, Richard Roebuck's walk this Sunday (23 August; see BC Sussex Events Listing) could be very well timed.

On Sunday (16 August) I managed my first open wing shot, during a stop-off on my way to the Rifle Range. By the time I reached the reserve area the weather had caved in and the temperature plummeted. The weather has not been particularly kind recently, so we must be due for a change.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Neil Hulme, 18-Aug-15 08:21 PM GMT

Divine Inspiration

On Monday (17 August) I spent a very enjoyable day with the colourful and charismatic Reverend Peter Owen-Jones (clergyman, author and TV presenter), who will be narrating a documentary being made about the South Downs. Without giving too much away, this will include some glorious footage of some of our best-loved butterflies. In what must have been a carefully orchestrated plan to appear as extras, several BC Sussex friends kept emerging from bushes and rabbit holes.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 18-Aug-15 11:28 PM GMT

Great photos Neil, love the Silver Spotted Skippers 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-15 04:14 AM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-15 04:18 AM GMT

Great Day On The Steyning Downland Scheme

A great day out on the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) <http://www.steyningdownland.org> today. The female Brown Hairstreaks are still reluctant to start egg laying, so this could be a long season for them. I located two females in an area where they haven't been seen before, one of which behaved impeccably for an hour, with its wings flat open for much of the time. SDS stalwart Pete Varkala passed by while doing his butterfly survey, so I was able to call him over to enjoy this beauty. I suspected that Colin Knight was on site, so a quick call enabled him to join us.

Later in the day I found a third hairstreak, again doing very little other than looking pretty. However, more was to come. I flushed a newly emerged Adonis Blue male from the slopes of the Rifle Range and Colin almost certainly saw a second. These are the first seen on the Rifle Range for a couple of years, so it seems that the management is continuing to bring rewards. There was other exciting news too, but I'll wait for Pete to formally announce his find at a SDS event on Thursday evening.





Re: Neil Hulme

by William, 21-Aug-15 02:02 AM GMT

Superb shots as always, Neil – those open wing Brownies and the male Adonis in particular 😊

BWs,

William

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 21-Aug-15 08:54 PM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil, wish we'd continued on to Steyning after Kent , the open winged BH is lovely also the Adonis, but the HS on Blackberries steals the show for me Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Aug-15 06:08 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie and William. Much appreciated.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Aug-15 06:14 PM GMT

Pier Of Poo

Following on from some of the excellent images recently posted by others on UKB, here's another White Admiral larva promenading on his pier of poo. I quickly located 6 of these on a small honeysuckle at our Park Corner Heath reserve yesterday (21 August), followed by another 8 at Brocks Wood, west of Lewes.



Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 24-Aug-15 07:27 AM GMT

Wow! Those Brown Hairstreak images quite took my breath away! 🍷

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-15 10:53 PM GMT

Too Hot To Handle

I met quite a few other enthusiasts at the Rifle Range on Saturday (22 August), where all were hoping for a good day with the Brown Hairstreak. Having stopped at another Steyning site on the way, where Richard Roebuck was filling his boots with Brownies, I too was confident of a hairstreak bonanza. However, it proved too hot for them to handle, as the temperature quickly soared through the 80s mark.

On arriving at the Rifle Range I immediately located 3 females along the southern flank hedgerow, then flushed a female from just outside the reserve area. But by 11.45 am activity slowed and soon after midday it became apparent that most butterflies had stopped flying. A group of us later located a few more female hairstreaks, all seeking shade rather than venturing out to lay eggs. Too cool and cloudy, too windy, too hot and sunny – come on, give us a break!

On the way down the track back to Steyning we stumbled upon a Privet Hawkmoth caterpillar. Hardly rare, but always impressive.

Our thoughts are with all those affected by the Shoreham air disaster. The ominous pall of black smoke visible from our location could not have foretold the extent of the loss being suffered so close by.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-15 10:58 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark. Hopefully plenty more to come in this slow-to-start season at Steyning.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 25-Aug-15 12:05 AM GMT

Nice shots Neil,
m My first thought when I heard about the disaster was to hope no one I knew was in it, I second your thoughts for the suffering Goldie

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 26-Aug-15 02:57 AM GMT

**"Neil Hulme" wrote:
Great Day On The Steyning Downland Scheme**

A great day out on the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) <http://www.steyningdownland.org> today. The female Brown Hairstreaks are still reluctant to start egg laying, so this could be a long season for them. I located two females in an area where they haven't been seen before, one of which behaved impeccably for an hour, with its wings flat open for much of the time. SDS stalwart Pete Varkala passed by while doing his butterfly survey,

so I was able to call him over to enjoy this beauty. I suspected that Colin Knight was on site, so a quick call enabled him to join us.

Later in the day I found a third hairstreak, again doing very little other than looking pretty. However, more was to come. I flushed a newly emerged Adonis Blue male from the slopes of the Rifle Range and Colin almost certainly saw a second. These are the first seen on the Rifle Range for a couple of years, so it seems that the management is continuing to bring rewards. There was other exciting news too, but I'll wait for Pete to formally announce his find at a SDS event on Thursday evening.

[attachment=2:3veac822]BC Brown Hairstreak, Steyning Coombe 19.8.15.jpg[/attachment:3veac822][attachment=1:3veac822]BC Adonis Blue, Steyning Rifle Range 19.8.15.jpg[/attachment:3veac822][attachment=0:3veac822]BC Brown Hairstreak, Steyning Rifle Range 19.8.15.jpg[/attachment:3veac822]

Hi Neil

Are you able to share Pete's "exciting find" now? Or is it still top secret?

Cheers

Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Aug-15 03:30 AM GMT

Hi Paul,

Pete found the first specimen of Silver-spotted Skipper ever recorded on the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) area – so cause for much celebration! Attracting SSSk to the site was one of the stated goals of a Heritage Lottery Fund supported project called *Dukes of Steyning* which I have been involved with, in partnership with SDS, National Park Authority and Millennium Seed Bank (Kew).

This has involved clearance of secondary woodland, scrub-bashing and the re-introduction of long-lost grazing regimes. I've trained many of the locals in butterfly identification and monitoring, so I was particularly pleased when a local volunteer made the discovery.

In the future we will be planting out a large number of *Primula* plugs, with the aim of assisting the spread of Duke of Burgundy further eastwards.

Pete has now enjoyed his 'big reveal' at a Steyning butterfly recorders meeting.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 27-Aug-15 05:11 AM GMT

That's fantastic news Neil.

Really chuffed for you and all else involved in the project. It just shows what can be achieved with a vision and lots of hard effort. Well done!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 27-Aug-15 05:45 AM GMT

You said they would get there Neil, I'm really glad they have. I know that loads of hard work has gone into this, from all parties involved. Great stuff, shows what can be achieved with hard work.

Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 27-Aug-15 06:03 AM GMT

Great news about the Silver Spots Neil 😊 I was looking through your Brostreak shots with increasing envy and the open winged female from a couple of post back is a stunner – is it just me or does she have a lot of Orange on her? 😊😄👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Sep-15 03:46 AM GMT

Thanks, Paul, Mike and Wurzel. Good news indeed. Several others have seen Silver-spotted Skipper at Steyning now, so hopefully they'll gain a firm foothold.

Yes, Wurzel, she's quite orange ... and may have been tangoed.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Sep-15 03:50 AM GMT

Brownies Still Going Strong

The Brown Hairstreaks on the Steyning Downland Scheme Rifle Range site are now performing consistently well. Today I met up with Dan Danahar to help him obtain some more footage for his Butterflies of the Biosphere YouTube video series. From 11.30 am to 1.30 pm we saw a total of 8 female Brown Hairstreaks, two of which were still in good condition. As is the case in most years, as the visitor numbers drop away the hairstreaks come out to play! I suspect that some females are yet to lay their first egg.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-Sep-15 04:41 AM GMT

Good stuff, Neil. There's still at least a fortnight to observe this beautiful butterfly....maybe more.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-15 07:59 AM GMT

Long-tailed Blue; Annus Mirabilis Number Two

After a very average and sometimes disappointing summer for butterflies, we are on the cusp of some late season fireworks, courtesy of the Long-tailed Blue.

The stage is now set for an event which might rank alongside, or even surpass, the historical 2013 *boeticus* annus mirabilis. There is little doubt in my mind that had our August weather not collapsed, the influx of Long-tailed Blue into Sussex would have eclipsed the 2013 invasion.

Whether this statement can be applied to other parts of the South of England is unclear, as I don't know how much effort has gone into searching out evidence of the early stages in neighbouring counties.

Reports of Long-tailed Blue numbers in Belgium and Brittany, together with sparse records in the UK, suggest that a significant movement into northernmost mainland Europe and the South of England started during the period 7 - 9 August. However, it appears that this was preceded by a smaller movement north, with the first British record (Devon) on 5 July and first Belgian record on 9 July.

I posted a couple of messages on the BC Sussex website, encouraging our members to look out for the Long-tailed Blue. A small group of dedicated enthusiasts took up the challenge; "find the pea, find the Pea Blue".

Tracking down these primary immigrants (at least the adults) has proven challenging and time-consuming, but there is always the chance of being in the right place at the right time. At this stage in the migration/breeding cycle the butterflies are highly mobile, so almost impossible to 'twitch'. They tend to lay a few eggs and then move on, unless there is a very large quantity of food-plant readily available.

When the main UK emergence occurs, which I predict is now only a week away, I expect the adults to behave very differently, and they should be much easier to catch up with. If my theory is correct (Thomas & Lewington, 2014, p.109), the females will mate very quickly and fly back south, carrying their fertilised eggs with them. The males will behave in a colonial manner and hang around, hoping to grab more virgin females. I suspect many males will die here, although based on limited data, it is possible that some might also make a late dash for home.

Of those sightings of adults reported to the BC Sussex website (Worthing private garden, 28 & 29 August; Seaford private garden, 30 August; Bognor Regis, Hotham Park and adjacent university campus, 5 & 6 September; Brighton Racecourse, 11 September), only the Bognor adult(s) was in fresh condition (the fringe hairs are lost very rapidly in this species). I believe that this was the first 2015 sighting of a British-born *boeticus*, being the progeny of one the early pioneers.

A few more adults have been seen in Sussex, with the finders preferring not to advertise the locations for a variety of reasons. This species is as likely to turn up, perhaps more so, in urban areas, which is unsurprising bearing in mind the most regularly used food-plants. Locations relating to domestic addresses cannot be made public for obvious reasons.

A few days ago a friend called me to say he'd found a couple of Long-tailed Blues and while I was on my way to join him I heard that they had decided to mate! I arrived just in time to watch the last few minutes of this historic event.

I believe this is the fourth UK record of mating *boeticus*, but more importantly, the first between adults within the immigrant wave. It seems likely that females mate before dispersing (Thomas & Lewington, 2010) and this suggestion fits with my own theory that the mated females in the autumn generation immediately fly south. However, both of these individuals were of considerable age and showed significant wear and tear, sustained over their long journey.

When we see butterflies in cop they invariably comprise either two freshly emerged individuals, or a pristine female partnered by a mature and worn male. However, exceptions do occur and I've witnessed elderly (very worn, rather than damaged) female Small Heath and Common Blue in cop. These must be second pairings of the female.

Furthermore, the worn female *boeticus* we watched in cop was observed ovipositing within ten minutes! Despite much oviposturing, a single egg was eventually located. This therefore appears to have been a 'top-up', second pairing of the female. Bearing in mind the lifestyle of this species, perhaps this is not uncommon (and quite possibly advantageous).

If Jeremy's theory is correct, and migrating females are already carrying fertile eggs, this might explain why they venture north alongside males. It would be useful to have males always in attendance, to help keep these highly fecund females in good reproductive shape, over very long and arduous journeys.

Perhaps the greatest reason for optimism, in believing that we are about to see a widespread emergence of British *boeticus*, is the ease with which I have found their eggs. I first found hatched ova in Sussex on 21 August, and have been searching ever since. A week later, others joined the search, and a clear picture has emerged.

I have personally found Long-tailed Blue eggs in Bognor Regis, Worthing, Lancing, Beeding, Brighton (two sites), Newhaven and Seaford, with my tally fast approaching 100. These locations cover a 50 Km stretch of the Sussex coastline, with my strike rate suggesting that adults must have arrived across this entire front. My highest count was 9 ova on a single raceme of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea!

I wonder how far west and east of my search area this migration front extends? One thing is certain; this must be a very large event.

To see these numbers of Long-tailed Blue entering the UK, so soon after the unprecedented 2013 influx, does suggest that the species is undergoing a significant change in either its geographical range or its behaviour. I suspect that its southern belt of permanent residency in Europe is shifting north in response to climate range, and that annual forays northwards are therefore reaching further into northern mainland Europe and, happily, into the South of England.

While so many of our resident butterflies are facing serious problems, some of which are likely to be exacerbated by climate change, it is good to know that species such as the Long-tailed Blue appear more likely to grace our shores in the future. Only two days ago another *gorganus* Swallowtail was seen near Eastbourne.

The study of the British brood of Long-tailed Blue, including the emergence pattern of males and females, confirmation of pairings, evidence of egg-laying (or lack of it) and any suggestions of departure south, will hopefully start to clarify the autecology of this species, much of which remains speculation.



Female ovipositing – note ovum to left of frame (8.9.15)



Mating pair (8.9.15)



Male, Brighton Racecourse (11.9.15)



Male, Brighton Racecourse (11.9.15)

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 13-Sep-15 04:25 PM GMT

Wow. You make an excellent case for optimism Neil. Fingers crossed.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 13-Sep-15 07:40 PM GMT

Excellent summary and hypotheses, Neil – thanks for sharing!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Padfield, 13-Sep-15 08:23 PM GMT

This is quite amazing. Even allowing for the increased numbers of competent observers, it's difficult not to conclude something significant is going on here.

I have only one observation to add to your brilliantly informative summary, Neil. Here in Switzerland, where *boeticus* is definitely not resident, I see the species every year in exactly the same part of the same field. Some years, when few come through, this is the only place I do see them. Thus, though

the invasions are unpredictable and sporadic, the butterflies themselves seem actually rather predictable. My site is a local area of high ground in the valley, with bladder senna growing plentifully. Long-tailed blues hilltop regularly, which probably accounts for the high ground, and obviously the bladder senna is because it's their foodplant. But it always amazes me that they find this tiny corner of a foreign field with such unerring accuracy. I would expect certain sites in the UK (best kept secret!) to have a similar magical attraction, especially in years when good numbers come north.

Guy

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-15 09:10 PM GMT

Thanks, Guy. I suspect the migrating butterflies are guided by both topography and a remarkable ability to sniff out the food-plant. To locate single, small, scruffy plants within extensive concrete jungles must require a particularly well-honed sensory system. That said, I imagine that peas are quite smelly!

When you combine this with such a rapid and very clever life cycle (hiding in flowers and pea pods), the Long-tailed Blue has the full tool kit for world domination! It's hardly surprising that it is such a successful species globally.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 13-Sep-15 09:17 PM GMT

Hi ,Neil,

Great report on the Long tailed Blues.I think the old school adage "must try harder",which I must admit I did hear a few times from schooldays sums up my efforts ,here over the border in Kent, the wife and I made the short trip up to Kingsdown Leas a couple of weeks back,and wandered around for a couple of hours,and had a few of those "is it ,isn't it" moments, (every one turning out to be a Common Blue), do you know ,it never crossed my mind to check the foodplant for signs of egg-laying ! ,was hoping to go back today for a look ,but the weathers pretty naff,couldn't persuade the wife that it maybe worthwhile ! ,I may try an evening or afterwork visit,the scene is definitely set at Kingsdown,with some excellent clumps of Pea,in good flower,I know a few Kent branch members have been looking ,at Dengemarsch + Dungeness (where the pea grows),and that an individual was photographed at Dungle,a few days back,i think its just a matter of time.....heres hoping !! Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-15 09:53 PM GMT

Hi Allan,

I suspect that the adults of the immigrant wave are running out of steam, so might be very difficult to locate. However, I think it is only a matter of time now. 😊

Good luck!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 14-Sep-15 12:10 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

To see these numbers of Long-tailed Blue entering the UK, so soon after the unprecedented 2013 influx, does suggest that the species is undergoing a significant change in either its geographical range or its behaviour. I suspect that its southern belt of permanent residency in Europe is shifting north in response to climate range, and that annual forays northwards are therefore reaching further into northern mainland Europe and, happily, into the South of England.

When a 'once in a lifetime event' gets repeated (or is likely to be repeated) just two years later, then something has fundamentally changed and your hypothesis is totally plausible.

[Edited by Pete as per Neil's request. See viewtopic.php?f=16&t=8592]

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 14-Sep-15 03:06 AM GMT

Goodness Finding almost 100 eggs!

THE event will be when I find LT Blue eggs on my neighbour's everlasting sweet pea that trails across the fence into my garden. (near Nairn, Highland).

Has LT Blue ever been recorded in Scotland?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 14-Sep-15 04:44 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

You have filled me with optimism, let's hope the season will be extended by an extra month as it was in 2013. I have been searching Ever Lasting Pea the last few weeks, but no luck yet !
I hope you don't mind me posting this image of a five star (potentially) Long Tailed Blue restaurant.

Here's hoping,
Trevor.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 14-Sep-15 04:59 AM GMT

As usual Neil you've put a huge amount of work and effort into every aspect of this event. Particularly when out hunting for eggs, and then collating all the data. Many thanks to you, Bob and Mark for your support in my own endeavours.

See you soon,

ATB

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 14-Sep-15 05:48 AM GMT

A really interesting report Neil, I for one hope that they become a more common sight as a 'common summer migrant' as it, very good luck aside, will be the only way I'll get to see LTBs in the UK. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 14-Sep-15 07:02 AM GMT

Absolutely fascinating stuff, Neil.

I suspect the weather plays a big role in all this. Though we had a mediocre summer in the UK, over the Channel it was a great deal better with a lot of hot weather. This would probably have suited the LTB and it headed north from the Med, leading to good numbers in Northern France and Belgium. Despite generally adverse winds, some of these have made it across to us. If the summer had been poor in northern Europe as well, they might not have got near enough to us to Channel hop. On the other hand, had the hot weather inched a mere fifty miles further north at the right time, who knows how many might have reached the south coast of Britain. If a changing climate provides more of the right weather, this means more migrant butterflies. After all, it was an unusual wind pattern that brought us the Scarce Tortoiseshell last year, remnants of defunct Atlantic hurricanes that bring us Monarchs, and easterlies from Scandinavia that carry Camberwell Beauties to us (not many of those lately! 😊).

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 14-Sep-15 05:25 PM GMT

I would think that the weather over the next few weeks will also be crucial to the possible emergence of home-bred Long-Tailed Blues. In 2013, we had a few unusually warm days in early October, and I was lucky enough to see a LTB at Newhaven as late as 8th October. On the other hand, if we get an early cold snap, I presume they would be wiped out.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Sep-15 05:40 PM GMT

Hi Dave (Brown),

I hope you won't be offended, but I'm going to ask Pete to transfer your post to another thread, perhaps entitled "Do collectors pose a threat to the LTB?" I now have different responsibilities as a BC staff member, so it's best I don't express views on emotive or controversial subjects, which might be confused with the views of Butterfly Conservation, preferring to keep my now less frequent postings to a more factual or report-based nature.

However, on the other hand, by leaving such comments in my diary, without responding to the various points made, I feel there is a danger that readers might think I agree with them. Also, it is currently difficult for me to find the time required to contribute to the discussions which often arise from presenting counter-arguments.

Best Wishes, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 14-Sep-15 08:49 PM GMT

Neil,

Fantastic work as usual.

Following on from Dave's comments about our and Europe's weather, I heard from some expert at the Met Office that the next few years may bring cooler and drier summers in Northern Europe including the UK although globally the next two years will probably be among the warmest on record. Of course forecasters are often wrong but it will be interesting to see how the LTBs will fare if they are right.

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 15-Sep-15 12:22 AM GMT

I've just one thing to say, I wish I lived in the South so I could join in the search for LTB's 😞 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Roger Gibbons, 15-Sep-15 05:31 AM GMT

From the other end of the supply chain here in south-eastern France, I have seen considerably more LTBs in the past couple of years than in the previous decade. I used to see maybe one or two each year but latterly maybe ten or so.

Roger

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Sep-15 06:02 AM GMT

"Roger Gibbons" wrote:

From the other end of the supply chain here in south-eastern France, I have seen considerably more LTBs in the past couple of years than in the previous decade. I used to see maybe one or two each year but latterly maybe ten or so.

That's an interesting observation, Roger, as it seems to contradict any notion that the species is moving northwards at the expense of its Mediterranean range.

Perhaps it is becoming commoner in the southern area of Europe (for reasons we don't yet know), and that is having a knock-on effect on numbers further north?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-15 06:50 AM GMT

Thanks, Roger. That's very interesting and fits nicely with the bigger picture which I suspect is behind these recent, happy events.

David: "*it seems to contradict any notion that the species is moving northwards at the expense of its Mediterranean range*" The idea that this species might be abandoning its traditional homeland, because it might be able to survive year-round at increasingly northerly latitudes seems quite a strange one to me – and *very* risky for a species. Do you have any data which supports any suggestion of reduced numbers in the Mediterranean zone?

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Sep-15 07:13 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

it seems to contradict any notion that the species is moving northwards at the expense of its Mediterranean range" The idea that this species might be abandoning its traditional homeland, because it might be able to survive year-round at increasingly

northerly latitudes seems quite a strange one to me – and very risky for a species. Do you have any data which supports any suggestion of reduced numbers in the Mediterranean zone?

No, Neil. It's just a postulation based on some of the comments that have been made (i.e. that global warming is potentially shifting this species further northwards).

To my knowledge, it has historically been a Mediterranean insect, and its migratory forays further north are largely dependent on weather conditions. I personally don't see how this will change unless there is a **major** climatic event, which would probably take decades to unfold properly.

What's interesting to me (having just read Matthew Oates' book) is how it appears to have temporarily colonised southern England in good numbers twice in three years having been an exceptional immigrant previously.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-15 07:24 AM GMT

Hi David,

"To my knowledge, it has historically been a Mediterranean insect". The Mediterranean is the just the northern tip of its traditional zone of residency, which extends southwards over the whole of Africa.

"its migratory forays further north are largely dependent on weather conditions". I'd be interested to hear your assessment of the weather conditions this year, which would have triggered (another) unprecedented event of this nature.

"I personally don't see how this will change unless there is a major climatic event, which would probably take decades to unfold properly". It would therefore be very difficult to explain away the discovery of Provençal Short-tailed Blue in Normandy this year!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Sep-15 07:32 AM GMT

The Mediterranean is the just the northern tip of its traditional zone of residency, which extends southwards over the whole of Africa.

I'm referring to its European range here, Neil. I'm aware that it exists far more widely than that, but I doubt that sub-Saharan insects venture into southern Europe (although I'm prepared to be proved wrong).

I'd be interested to hear your assessment of the weather conditions this year, which would have triggered (another) unprecedented event of this nature.

Weather conditions in southern France have been abnormally hot in summer 2015. However, they were hotter still in 2003 yet this didn't result in similar numbers of LTBs arriving in England.

It would therefore be very difficult to explain away the discovery of Provençal Short-tailed Blue in Normandy this year!

That's news to me, Neil (albeit very positive news). I knew nothing of this phenomenon until your last post. Please tell us more.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-15 07:58 AM GMT

Hi David,

"I'm referring to its European range here, Neil. I'm aware that it exists far more widely than that, but I doubt that sub-Saharan insects venture into southern Europe (although I'm prepared to be proved wrong". The African range of LTB is not sub-Saharan, it continues all the way up to the north African coastline, just a short hop from southern Europe. But of course butterflies don't recognise geographical terminology, so this is all one contiguous range zone.

"Weather conditions in southern France have been abnormally hot in summer 2015. However, they were hotter still in 2003 yet this didn't result in similar numbers of LTBs arriving in England". Which rather argues *against* the theory that weather (not climate) patterns alone are entirely responsible for such phenomena.

"That's news to me, Neil (albeit very positive news). I knew nothing of this phenomenon until your last post. Please tell us more". This is a 'pers comm.' from one of the world's leading experts on the influence of climate change on our Lepidoptera, who may wish to publish on it, so I won't say more until I clarify his plans for the data.

I've had a bit of time off tonight, and much as I enjoy a good debate on some of the more exciting events we have been seeing in recent years, I must reiterate that generally I'm too short of time to indulge in such discussions at the moment. For now at least, I would ask that this remains a Personal Diary in content, and that discussion topics are started as different threads.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Sep-15 08:26 AM GMT

I have noted your comments regarding the integrity of your PD, Neil, and assure you that this will be the last comment I make here regarding Long Tailed Blues.

You've left me a little perplexed. First of all, you said:

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

The Mediterranean is the just the northern tip of its traditional zone of residency, which **extends southwards over the whole of Africa.**

Yet in a subsequent message you posted this:

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

The African range of LTB is not sub-Saharan, it continues all the way up to the north African coastline, just a short hop from southern Europe.

Surely those two statements are contradictory?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-15 04:15 PM GMT

Hi David,

No, they are entirely consistent with each other. The historical zone of permanent LTB residency extends from the Mediterranean belt, down through the northern coastline of Africa and down through the rest of Africa, i.e. there is no separation between the Mediterranean 'population' and a sub-Saharan 'population', as clearly implied by your statement: "*but I doubt that sub-Saharan insects venture into southern Europe*".

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Sep-15 08:14 AM GMT

Long-tailed Blue; Emergence Of The Brits

The eagerly anticipated emergence of British Long-tailed Blues has begun. This morning (19 September) I headed out feeling quite confident of seeing my first home-grown specimen of the year. The timing of this entire event has borne an uncanny resemblance to proceedings in 2013, so it came as no surprise when I struck gold just one day later than my first sighting of a 'Brit' at Kingsdown Leas that year.

Based on the 2013 model, it was also unsurprising that the females have emerged first, which is of course the opposite pattern to that observed in most species. This year I also hope to be able to test my theory that, once mated, the females will immediately turn south and depart for their homelands.

I chose Newhaven Tide Mills as a venue, as my study of Sussex Long-tailed Blue ova has suggested that this site was visited by the earlier part of the main influx, before it stalled for a significant period due to bad weather in August.

At about 11.15 am I flushed a female from a stand of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea and had the best part of 10 minutes observing and photographing her, before her rapid, twisting flight threw me off her trail.

I thought I had relocated the same insect at c. 11.30 am, but didn't manage to photograph her before she looped up high over an extensive area of bramble scrub and disappeared from view. This later proved to be a second, freshly emerged female, with a distinctly duskier upperside. Having put the news out to a few friends I became worried that I would have nothing to show on their arrival. Moving around to the other side of the bramble patch I began to systematically scan every leaf for sight of her. After 20 minutes I noticed her sitting only a couple of metres away, just as B. rex and Trevor appeared over the horizon. We were later joined by Mark Colvin and Badger Bob, who all enjoyed wonderful views of this perfect specimen before we lost track of her at c.1.15 pm.

I was pleased that a reasonable number of people were able to share in the excitement, including all those who have invested a lot of time in searching for the primary immigrant adults and their eggs.

Only time will tell if the 2015 influx of Long-tailed Blue will produce more adult sightings than the unprecedented 2013 invasion, but on present form it could be neck-and-neck.





Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 20-Sep-15 03:27 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Many thanks for sharing that beautiful LTB yesterday, i had a fabulous day that i will remember for a long time. Also a day spent in great company.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 20-Sep-15 03:27 PM GMT

Marvellous report and photos Neil. I have to say that few people would have been as diligent in their searching and getting due reward.

So the question: could it be that LT Blue immigration and late season breeding is much more regular than had previously been thought and that until now, observer skill and perseverance in tracking them down had been lacking?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 20-Sep-15 05:31 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Wonderful LTB reports and superb photos. I wonder if this influx becomes a more regular event if they may start to come a bit further inland in the future, perhaps even as far as the midlands.

Cheers,
Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Sep-15 05:41 PM GMT

Trevor: Glad you were able to get there and enjoy what must go down as a season highlight for us all!

Jack: I think it's a bit of both. Major changes seem to be occurring (look at *gorganus* Swallowtail too), but I'm sure that observer effort and focus has increased and it is likely that small scale events have been overlooked in the past.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Sep-15 05:47 PM GMT

Thanks, Neil. I think incursions will eventually strike deeper, but you'll probably have to travel south at least until you've gone completely grey. The odd one has managed to get quite far north in the past, so if we were to get a particularly large influx coinciding with an Indian Summer, you might just get lucky.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 20-Sep-15 08:07 PM GMT

Lovely Photos Neil, your so lucky living in the South, I don't think those LTB's would fly so far North, I'll just have to visit relatives later in the year 🇮🇪🇮🇪
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Paul Harfield, 21-Sep-15 08:14 AM GMT

Hi Neil

Lovely images of the Long Tailed Blue 😊 I just wish I had a bit more time on my hands. I received your PM but am unable to send reply (PM disabled) can I email you the information?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Sep-15 05:09 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie and Paul.

Paul, I've just sent you a PM with a direct email address.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 21-Sep-15 05:45 PM GMT

I have to wonder Neil given your record in finding (or seeing) rarities – LT Blue, Queen of Spain, Large and Scarce Tortoiseshells, Continental Swallowtail, Camberwell Beauty – what your next find will be?

Is it possible that for example Short-tailed Blue lurks undetected somewhere? It would be very easy to overlook and if anyone can track it down, I'm sure you are the person to do so.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Sep-15 03:08 AM GMT

Thanks, Jack. I suspect that Provençal Short-tailed Blue or Southern Small White might take us by surprise. Oh, and you forgot to include my Monarch 😊 (but not the dodgy geezers from Brighton, which I don't count).

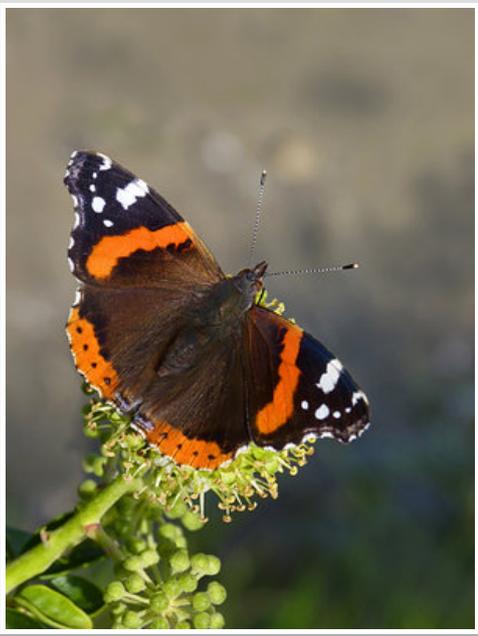
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Sep-15 03:14 AM GMT

Coldstream Guards On Parade

A brief visit to Beeding Cement Works this afternoon (29 October) failed to locate any Long-tailed Blues, but I was more than happy to find half a dozen beautiful Red Admirals feasting on the ivy flowers. Sunny autumn days wouldn't be the same without them.



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 30-Sep-15 04:45 AM GMT

Hope you're keeping an eye out for extra blue spots on the Red Admiral hindwings '*alla ab. Buggeri*' 😊

Gonna have a go at Newhaven tomorrow for some LTB action, hoping this fresh wave of warm weather may have woken a few more up.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 01-Oct-15 12:28 AM GMT

I agree Neil, I've really enjoyed them in my Garden Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Oct-15 06:20 PM GMT

The Assassin

While touring Rewell Wood with Norfolk Estate Head Forester Mark Aldridge on Thursday (1 October), to pick out winter work targets for my *Fritillaries for the Future* project <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/Future.html>, we came across two very impressive specimens of the large, parasitoid ichneumon fly *Dolichomitus* sp.

These were busy scampering across the top of sweet chestnut stumps, sensing for movement deep below, then probing with their ovipositor spikes to inject eggs into unfortunate buprestid or cerambycid beetle larvae. Bob Foreman, who saw one at BC Rowland Wood last year, checked the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre database and these specimens take the grand total of Sussex records for the genus to four. Having seen three quarters of the total, I think that makes Mark, Bob and I the county experts!

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by Goldie M, 03-Oct-15 08:00 PM GMT

I've just read "Fritillaries of the Future project" and I hope you get these lovely Butterflies back Neil.

I was up at Gaits Barrow in May and June and we only saw one of either and they were dodging the terrible weather we had then.

Unfortunately I got no shots of either 😞

They were seen in other places but the Ranger at GB said it was the worse year they'd had for Butterflies especially the Fritillaries for a long time, we can only hope next year is better, I'd hate to see them disappear like they've done in other places Goldie 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Oct-15 09:44 PM GMT

Hi Goldie,

We can't afford to lose any more of these precious butterflies.

You can also read my first project newsletter, which summarises progress so far and discusses some of my plans for the future, here

<http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/docs/Issue1.pdf>

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 04-Oct-15 12:57 PM GMT

You wrote

...some of my plans for the future, here <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/do> ... Issue1.pdf

and

...focus will be firmly on the Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

Fascinating read about the work you are putting in.

I presume that the other Sussex Frits, Silver-Washed and Dark Green don't need much help at the moment. I have the impression that SWF is doing fine without help but how about DGF?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Oct-15 05:15 PM GMT

Thanks, Jack.

The project focuses on just SPBF and PBF, both of which are in dire straits across the entire SE of England. Realistically, it's now or never, with SPBF already below critical mass and PBF spiralling towards it.

You are correct in suggesting that "*Silver-Washed and Dark Green don't need much help at the moment*", although of course this is relative, as these days almost all of our butterflies need a little help, as we've made a bit of a mess of the countryside!

SWF does seem to be doing quite well and spreading, and my gut feel is that DGF is better placed in Sussex than it was during the last couple of decades of C20th. Conservation grazing is now more widespread, although DGF doesn't like turf cropped too tightly.

I have been involved with a couple of projects where rank, very poorly conditioned grassland has been cattle grazed for the first time in ages, leading to an explosion of Hairy Violet and subsequent explosion of DGF.

On the other hand, I know of one relatively small site which used to support a population of c.30 (max daily count) DGF, where SWF turned up uninvited and formed a colony of c.30, at the complete expense of DGF. Cause and effect are often difficult to prove in the natural world, but direct competition does look like a distinct possibility in this case, bearing in mind apparently consistent management over the period.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 05-Oct-15 04:34 AM GMT

Fantastic photos Neil 😊 I had two near me at The Devenish a while back and now I know what they are so cheers for the ID 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 08-Oct-15 05:06 AM GMT

Interesting concept there Neil about the Dark Green Fritillary suffering when the Silver Washed Fritillary arrived. Like you say, correlation does not mean causation, but I wonder if anyone else on here has noticed such effects in their local patches?

Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Oct-15 07:10 AM GMT

Perfect Males Do Exist!

Following a lengthy hiatus I located another British born Long-tailed Blue at 2 pm on Thursday (8 October), at Beeding Cement Works. I flushed it from the clump of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea beside the tarmac area, as soon as I got out of the car. Luckily it didn't fly more than a couple of metres, and the mixed weather conditions worked in my favour. Several times it opened its stunningly beautiful wings, revealing that it was a male. I have seen quite a few British Long-tailed Blues now, but this was my first male in perfect condition.

During a warmer period it moved to the central clump of ivy, where it sunbathed on some clematis leaves. At 3 pm it launched an attack on a passing Comma, and accelerated away so rapidly that I immediately lost sight of it. The males of this species make the Duke of Burgundy and Small Copper look quite slow!

If you visit this site please do not block the track up to the houses (there is really only room for one car to park here). Parking can be found in the layby a few hundred metres further north, on the left-hand side. Please do not walk up the private track which serves these houses. Please do not trespass over the private garden to the left of the track.

I still believe that the main emergence of British Long-tailed Blues is yet to begin, but the forecast of a big freeze next week may yet spoil the party.



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 10-Oct-15 07:40 AM GMT

Jesus thats a bloody good looking butterfly 🤩

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 10-Oct-15 03:42 PM GMT

Gorgeous . 😊👍

Re: Neil Hulme

by keving, 10-Oct-15 05:38 PM GMT

Neil,

Fantastic shots of the LTB. What a beauty.

Regards Kev

Re: Neil Hulme

by William, 10-Oct-15 05:40 PM GMT

Superb, Neil, and congratulations on that Scarce Tortoiseshell image in Atropos – you kept that one quiet!

BWs,

William

Re: Neil Hulme

by badgerbob, 10-Oct-15 06:38 PM GMT

What a beauty!! Thanks again for the call Neil and sorry the back was not up to it!! Having said that from what you said about it chasing off the Comma it would have vanished by the time we would have got there. A brilliant reward for you for the time put into the hunt!!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 10-Oct-15 07:11 PM GMT

Fantastic Neil, lets hope there's no Jap reading about this with his lunch box at the ready Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 10-Oct-15 07:12 PM GMT

Stunning again Neil.

From Jack (temporarily in Ireland)

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Oct-15 07:13 PM GMT

Good work, Neil. Looks like he's the first of the new generation! Hopefully there'll be more prior to the predicted cold snap.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 10-Oct-15 09:03 PM GMT

Oooh – very nice shots (as usual!). Glad you managed to get a decent shot of a male – you certainly deserved it!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 11-Oct-15 04:23 AM GMT

👍👍👍 Cracking stuff 👍👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 11-Oct-15 06:24 AM GMT

I'm really pleased 'and relieved' that you finally got that pristine male Neil, and you took some cracking photos too. I believe you've got a full set now! If by some miracle I manage to see a pristine male LTB I'll be able to join you with a full house. It's a pity the weather has started to deteriorate, I suppose if it all comes to an abrupt end we've both seen our fair share of these fabulous butterflies. Hopefully there will still be a bit more to come.

It's great that we're finishing the season with these fantastic memories, they are sure to help us endure the coming winter.

All the best

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Oct-15 09:20 AM GMT

Thanks, all. The fact that I had waited so long for a perfectly conditioned male LTB made the experience all the more magical.

However, I nearly made a complete hash of things, as when I got home and started wading through the 160 images I had taken, I couldn't find a sharp one! I was aware that my hands weren't too steady when it first opened its wings (how do you control that level of excitement?), but things were looking increasingly bad. I eventually discovered that the dial on my FZ38 had shifted to aperture priority (derrrr, what's that?), rather than my preferred P (idiot) setting, but the 3 or 4 good shots I finally found saved me from meltdown.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Oct-15 09:28 AM GMT

They Think It's All Over ...

Halloween is only a week away, and yet butterflies are still emerging in Sussex. If that isn't spooky enough, the fact that they are Long-tailed Blues surely must be! My confidence that we were still to enjoy a significant emergence of British LTBs was just beginning to wane, as temperatures dropped perilously close to the accepted kill-point last week. However, it seems that the colder snap may have delayed, rather than halted, the lifecycle. The next 7 - 10 days will tell us more.

This afternoon, following a systematic search of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea plants on which I have previously found eggs, I found another freshly emerged Long-tailed Blue at Beeding Cement Works. It never opened its wings, but from glimpses of the abdomen it was almost certainly a female insect. After making numerous phone calls, a long string of visitors were able to share in the excitement, including a friend who travelled up from Swanage! Dan Danahar delayed his end of term celebrations to film more footage for a Butterflies of the Biosphere grand finale.

The sun is forecast to shine on Sunday, so this weekend will hopefully see more emerge. Based purely on my own, unproven theory, I suspect they are emerging and immediately heading south this year, unlike 2013, when day length and weather conditions allowed them to adopt a more colonial behavioural pattern (including mating), before leaving for an all-inclusive in the winter sun.

X Factor, Strictly and The Apprentice may be firmly underway, but the butterfly season isn't finished yet.





Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 24-Oct-15 02:42 PM GMT

Brilliant stuff Neil. It's so autumnal, dank and cool up here in Sheffield, it seems crazy to think they are still emerging.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 24-Oct-15 03:34 PM GMT



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 24-Oct-15 04:59 PM GMT

Really happy for you Neil, also very envious 😊🍷🍷🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Oct-15 05:27 PM GMT

Hi Paul,

This species is perhaps a little tougher than we give it credit for. I've been keeping a close eye on local weather station data, in an effort to determine the tolerances of Long-tailed Blue at the northern extent of its adventures. Only pressure of work has prevented me from placing maximum/minimum thermometers out on the best sites. Data from Shoreham indicate that night-time temperatures fell to 5 deg. on 8th October, and a worrying 4 deg. on 13th October.

It is quite possible that a proportion of larvae and/or pupae have perished, but we can be certain that some have survived, with Sussex adults recorded on 9th and 23rd October. The next 7 - 10 days should give us a clue regarding the wider picture of survivability.

In 2013 the last adult Long-tailed Blue in Sussex was observed on 22nd October at Polegate - a newly hatched male. It will be interesting to see if we can record British Long-tailed Blue in November. I will continue the search whenever time allows. Having spent so long surveying for ova, I'm able to focus my searches around Broad-leaved Everlasting Peas stands which I know have supported good numbers of the early stages. This has probably been the key to success in intercepting newly hatched individuals.

In contrast to 2013, I haven't seen adults on more than one occasion (yet), which makes me think they are reacting differently to less favourable environmental conditions, and making a sharp exit. Tomorrow should be sunny, and although I'm leading a work party I'll return to Beeding beforehand, to see if I can relocate the latest adult and watch how she behaves.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Oct-15 02:27 AM GMT

Sitting Tight

The female Long-tailed Blue was again seen at Beeding Cement Works today, only stirring from its slumber when the cloud thinned and the sun threatened to break through. If visiting the site, please park 600 m to the north, in the layby to the west of the A283. All known Long-tailed Blue sites are well worth visiting when the sun shines tomorrow, and on any sunny days thereafter.



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 25-Oct-15 02:05 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Thanks, all. The fact that I had waited so long for a perfectly conditioned male LTB made the experience all the more magical.

However, I nearly made a complete hash of things, as when I got home and started wading through the 160 images I had taken, I couldn't find a sharp one! I was aware that my hands weren't too steady when it first opened its wings (how do you control that level of excitement?), but things were looking increasingly bad. I eventually discovered that the dial on my FZ38 had shifted to aperture priority (derrrr, what's that?), rather than my preferred P (idiot) setting, but the 3 or 4 good shots I finally found saved me from meltdown.

BWs, Neil

I know that feeling very well, I had exactly the same issues with my Brown Hairstreak lifer a few months back, shaking hands causing me having to bin most my pictures

On a purely selfish setting on my part I do hope no LTB's are sighted at Newhaven tomorrow..... I'm working all weekend 😊

Good luck though with your continuing searches, hope to see lots more fantastic pics..... just none from Newhaven 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Oct-15 10:19 PM GMT

Thanks for the updates, Neil, and well done on finding that female.

I know what you mean regarding settings on the old Panasonic. Many's the time I've been in IE mode instead of close up, or in close up instead of P mode, etc, etc.... 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Oct-15 04:55 AM GMT

Hi bugboy and David,

I think I might try a spot of superglue on the dial setting. These cameras enjoy a little abuse. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Oct-15 05:23 AM GMT

Blue Sunday

Today (25 October) was glorious in every respect. I don't have time for the full narrative this evening, but in addition to the female and 'new' male Long-tailed Blue at Upper Beeding today (the latter of which I missed, as I had to leave to lead a work party), I found two more. On the way home I stopped off at a site I've been watching near Lancing Station. Just before 3pm I found myself looking at two female Long-tailed Blues, sitting just a couple of metres apart. One of them was marked spectacularly over the hind wings, falling outside the range of normal variation. Can it get any better?





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 26-Oct-15 05:36 AM GMT

What can I say? The first picture [especially] is quite amazing.

It wouldn't be sporting to enter the photo in the ukb annual competition: nothing else would stand a chance.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterfliesaurus rex, 26-Oct-15 05:44 AM GMT

I couldn't wait to see this Neil, what a stunning specimen! What a day! Can it get better? All bets are off.

See you soon.

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by badgerbob, 26-Oct-15 05:47 AM GMT

Amazingly beautiful Neil. Simply fantastic and what a find!! With temperatures being cooler than what this butterfly is used to during its stages perhaps more aberrants will appear!!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Oct-15 06:20 AM GMT

Neil, you only got what you deserved given the hours you've put in.

Great shots and hopefully there'll be a few more before the frosts put paid to this joyous late season event!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 26-Oct-15 01:59 PM GMT

"David M" wrote:

Neil, you only got what you deserved given the hours you've put in.

I completely agree 😊

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 26-Oct-15 03:54 PM GMT

Brilliant stuff, Neil. You would think that finding an aberrant LTB there might be a sizable colony at the site. Well done. Can it get any better? It sure can with your sort of luck but well deserved of course 😊

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 26-Oct-15 05:48 PM GMT

Neil! I can't add any thing else I can only agree with what's been said Goldie 🍷🍷🍷😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 26-Oct-15 09:41 PM GMT

Can it get any better? It sure can with your sort of luck but well deserved of course

I don't think Neil has "luck". He has patience, fieldcraft and dedication. Neil has an amazing talent in finding all these goodies - Large Tort, Queen of Spain, LT Blue, etc - but it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as luck.

I recall a [mild] telling off from Neil. It was Purple Emperor time in Fermyn Wood. Neil gently chastised me for approaching a grounded PE too quickly. He was of course absolutely correct. That is a minor example of his skill that not all of us possess.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 26-Oct-15 11:23 PM GMT

"Jack Harrison" wrote:

Can it get any better? It sure can with your sort of luck but well deserved of course

I don't think Neil has "luck". He has patience, fieldcraft and dedication. Neil has an amazing talent in finding all these goodies - Large Tort, Queen of Spain, LT Blue, etc - but it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as luck.

I recall a [mild] telling off from Neil. It was Purple Emperor time in Fermyn Wood. Neil gently chastised me for approaching a grounded PE too quickly. He was of course absolutely correct. That is a minor example of his skill that not all of us possess.

Jack

Of course, Jack. That's why I said it is well deserved 😊 You make your own luck

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Oct-15 02:07 AM GMT

Thanks for the kind words, all.

The accessible area at Lancing Station is very small, but I'd hoped that they would show here as its a good place to sunbathe, being backed by a south-facing concrete wall. I suspect this area has been peppered with a huge number of eggs, as several hundred metres of the adjacent railway embankment (sadly out of reach) support far more pea plants than any other site in Sussex. There was so much in flower until recently that I initially spotted the location from the window of a train!

Just for you Jack, a close-up of this stunning butterfly.

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Oct-15 02:10 AM GMT

Taking Bets

My thanks to Mark Colvin for alerting me to the presence of a male and female Long-tailed Blue at Brighton Racecourse today. I arrived in time to see the male. Even Money that we see a November LTB here.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Chris Jackson, 28-Oct-15 02:29 AM GMT

[quote="Neil Hulme"] ... Just for you Jack, a close-up of this stunning butterfly ... /quote]

That photo is great, Neil. LTBs are not uncommon down here in Marseilles, but I've never seen colours like that. Wow !! Abberation ? Down here (probably due to warmer conditions) these insects don't remain immobile for long, and don't often open their wings.
Chris

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 28-Oct-15 03:49 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

Even Money that we see a November LTB here.

Hope you're right, Neil. I certainly wouldn't bet against you.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 28-Oct-15 04:04 AM GMT



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Oct-15 04:39 AM GMT

Short-tailed Long-tailed Blue

Following an unsuccessful search of several sites I found a beautiful, male Long-tailed Blue at Southwick Basin this afternoon (28 October), just east of the tall chimney. I was doubly pleased as I had offered to help find one for some senior Butterfly Conservation staff from Hampshire, and a friend from Dorset. Following a text alert they made the journey from Beeding Cement Works to Southwick, just in time to see it turn towards the sun and reveal the fabulous purplish blue colour of its upper side.

The tails on this specimen were unusually short, but close examination proved them to be perfectly formed. When I looked at the images on my computer I noticed a small drop of meconium fluid, suggesting that it had not long emerged. This might explain why a friend who had searched the site just before me had not noticed the butterfly, which may have still been drying off its wings.

With sunshine forecast for the entire weekend, the escalating tally is sure to rise further.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 29-Oct-15 04:47 AM GMT

"Neil Hulme" wrote:

With sunshine forecast for the entire weekend, the escalating tally is sure to rise further.

I've seen that forecast, Neil, and it is most unseasonal.

18c maxima with practically cloudless skies. A Hallowe'en Long Tailed Blue is surely odds-on this coming weekend?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Katrina, 29-Oct-15 03:15 PM GMT

I have just spotted you in The Argus website – well done and good to have a good news story. [http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/13903886 ...grassland/](http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/13903886...grassland/)

Re: Neil Hulme

by Brian Arnold, 30-Oct-15 05:12 PM GMT

A very big thank you to Neil for his help in guiding me to see the Long-tailed Blue at Southwick Basin on Wednesday. Without your help I doubt I would have seen one. Regards, Brian Arnold from Swanage, Dorset.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 31-Oct-15 08:44 PM GMT

Neil, that's one gorgeous photo of the LTB, I love it , your a lucky lot down there 🍷🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Nov-15 05:03 AM GMT

Thanks, all. Brian – Glad your long journey proved successful!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Nov-15 05:13 AM GMT

Trick Or Treat?

Trick or treat? Treat! This afternoon (31 October) I had only 90 minutes to find a Hallowe'en Long-tailed Blue for a group of friends who had taken the odds at Brighton Racecourse. After thoroughly searching the area of grassland to the NE of the TV mast for almost an hour, I finally found a female nectaring on *Aster*, near the bench/viewpoint to the SW.

She moved to an area of longer grasses and low scrub to bathe in the afternoon sunshine, where she was soon attended by an ever growing crowd of admirers. Before she disappeared to roost, a dozen people had managed to enjoy her, including several who hadn't seen this species before.

She had similar (but less extreme) markings to the aberrant individual I found at Lancing Station on 25.10.15. This is probably an environmentally driven phenomenon, produced by the relatively large diurnal temperature range experienced this far north at this time of year, during the larval/pupal transition period.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Nov-15 05:18 AM GMT

You never disappoint, Neil!

That white submarginal line **does** seem quite pronounced, and it's interesting to read your theory for it.

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 01-Nov-15 06:28 AM GMT

Beautiful! 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 01-Nov-15 06:16 PM GMT

Your searches Neil and eventual reward makes me all the more inclined (touched on earlier) that LTB is a regular, perhaps even annual, immigrant to the south coast. I can't recall if you made the first sighting of 2015 but you have certainly followed up with finds in localities (eg Lancing, Southwick) about which you had a gut feeling.

It seems that many (most?) casual observers wouldn't just happen to come across LTB. You have shown Neil that diligent searching gets results.

I recall (2011 was it?) when we visited Rewell Wood together on a miserable spring (so-called) day. You found a few roosting PB Fritillaries that I certainly would never have found myself.

A thought about Everlasting Sweet Pea, apparently LTB's only food plant in England (why restricted to Everlasting Sweet Pea?) This plant doesn't, as far as I know, begin flowering until well into the summer. LTB larvae feed on the developing pods so would never start breeding in England until quite late in the summer. It could be (just a hypothesis) that LTBs might never become an abundant summer migrant unless they adapt to a food plant that is available from May onwards after the frosts have finished. Information on LTB breeding strategies in the near continent might be instructive (eg the food plant used on the French coasts).

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Paul Harfield, 02-Nov-15 01:54 AM GMT

Very nice Neil 😊 Looks like I chose the wrong site 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-15 07:45 PM GMT

Thanks, all.

Jack: Long-tailed Blue definitely does use other foodplants in the UK (including Broom) - there was some discussion in another thread here viewtopic.php?p=104460#p104460

I suspect that the timing of the majority of migrant arrivals will always be similar, based on the seasonal movements of the species further south. Although there were pioneer adventurers recorded in early July (UK and mainland Europe), the dates of the main incursions were very similar in 2013 and 2015, around start second week of August.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-15 08:05 PM GMT

Half Century Of Long-tailed Blues

On Sunday morning I received a number of messages that Mark Colvin had found a male Long-tailed Blue at Brighton Racecourse, which was being enjoyed by a growing number of visitors, some of who had travelled a long distance.

This was the first county record for November, but not for the UK; the national record being held by a 20 November 1961 sighting in Devon (per Richard Fox, BC). A second sighting by Katrina Watson subsequently proved to be the same individual, based on photographic comparisons.

With a busy domestic schedule I was too short of time to make it over to the racecourse, so had to make do with a trip to my nearest site at Lancing Station (scruffy area adjacent to the north side car park). Time was running short and in the cool, foggy conditions I was giving up hope.

While discussing the Brighton sightings on the 'phone with Mark, the sun briefly forced its way through, and at 1.35 pm a small patch of bright lilac-blue magically appeared on the bramble in front of me! This gave me the greatest of pleasure, being my 50th (minimum) individual Long-tailed Blue in the UK.

After taking a few shots as the insect warmed up and became mobile, it disappeared northwards over the concrete wall into Sompting Road. I thought that was it, but as I walked out onto the road I saw it flying E - W and then land at the near end of a concrete driveway. It sat here and sunbathed for a few minutes, before heading up over the roof and disappearing. I only had a further 5 minutes available, so never saw it again.



Summary

A number of interesting stats are coming together. When looking at the ratio of sexes recorded during the British brood, the same pattern has emerged as that seen in 2013. Females have emerged before the males, which is of course the reverse of the pattern observed in most species.

Sussex data

19.9.15 - 25.10.15 female:male = 8:3

26.10.15 - 1.11.15 female:male = 2:5

In 2013 the British brood females were invariably photographed in perfect or near-perfect condition, and seldom repeatedly (if ever) in a state of gradually degenerating condition. However, many of the males were photographed over the course of a number of days, demonstrating increasing wear and tear. The insects behaved in a colonial manner and mating was observed - but no egg-laying. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the females may have migrated south soon after mating, whereas the males hung around, presumably hoping to grab another virgin.

In 2015 the British brood has been found and photographed only in perfect or near-perfect condition, irrespective of sex. No colonial behaviour has been observed and only in rare cases has the same individual been photographed on more than one day, always when poor weather would have grounded them. In fair weather, the butterflies have consistently disappeared shortly after midday. Circumstantial evidence suggests that all of the butterflies, irrespective of sex, may have migrated south soon after emerging. The emergence has been later than it was in 2013, apparently due to the slower development of early stages in much cooler conditions. Day length and temperature may have triggered this markedly different behaviour in the emergent adults.

I have now collated a 2015 total of 36 Long-tailed Blues in Sussex, although Colin Pratt has used a slightly different method to achieve a total of 37. I also have a UK total of 62, but this is an underestimate, based on the assignment of just 1 per day, where Kent birders recorded presence/absence on a site, rather than numbers.

Bearing in mind the method of counting during the 1990 event (which included a large number of recounts of the same individuals), I believe that 2015 has seen the second largest ever Long-tailed Blue event in the UK.

Recording effort has been very much focused on Sussex, and it is quite possible that the national picture has been less well recorded than it was in 2013. Had poor weather not stalled the influx through a large part of August, I suspect that the story might have been different.

It is exciting to think what future years may hold for South Coast butterfly enthusiasts.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 02-Nov-15 11:09 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I find your post most interesting, I was down in Kent in 2013 and just missed out on the Long Tailed Blue which was spotted at St Margarets on the Cliffs about 28th August, having seen no reports that they've been seen there since . I'm living in hope that I may see them in Kent on one of my visits mean while your photos are making me want to jump i the car and arrive in Sussex 😄 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 03-Nov-15 01:17 AM GMT

Jack: Long-tailed Blue definitely does use other foodplants in the UK (including Broom) – there was some discussion in another thread here [view topic.php?p=104460#p104460](http://view.topic.php?p=104460#p104460)

Thanks. I had missed that thread.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterfysaurus rex, 03-Nov-15 03:29 AM GMT

Hello Neil,

Thanks to the poor weather you mentioned stalling the late summer influx this time around it has made for a rather different experience to 2013. I've enjoyed that aspect of it, despite the fact we could have seen a much bigger invasion had the weather been more favourable. It's also very interesting that the majority of LTB activity appears to have been seen further west this time.

It would be delightful if this became a more regular occurrence, as now seems quite probable. I makes you wonder what inroads other continental species might make in the future. It certainly makes the south coast an exciting place to live for people like us.

It's been a wonderful end to the year.

All the best

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 03-Nov-15 05:06 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

I have been catching up on your LTB reports and find them fascinating reading. Not having the time to make the trip down there to see them myself it is the next best thing to be able to read about them.

And I have to say, if I could have taken just one butterfly photo this year, your LTB ab. from October 25th would be it 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Nov-15 06:37 AM GMT

I'd be interested to know what influence (if any) the prolonged heatwave in many parts of France and its immediate eastern neighbours had on LTB distribution northwards.

Was the species commoner than normal on the near continent?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Nov-15 02:30 AM GMT

Thanks again, all.

David: Numbers of Long-tailed Blue were reported as being unusually high in both Brittany and Belgium. This was one of the factors which inspired me to go hunting for the eggs.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Nov-15 03:01 AM GMT

A Day To Remember

11.11.15 was a day to remember in more ways than one. Despite chasing the Long-tailed Blue relentlessly during 2013 and 2015, I never thought I'd see one on Armistice Day!

Having been grounded by both weather and work since 1 November, I couldn't resist another hunt for this species when the sun made a now rare appearance. The sheltered hedge line adjacent to Manor Hill near Brighton Racecourse produced the goods, when I flushed a male Long-tailed Blue from the low scrub. I didn't manage to get a decent shot of its upper side, as the wind was quite strong even here. It eventually flew over the road and disappeared into Whitehawk Bottom.

The Long-tailed Blue has elevated the 2015 butterfly season from very average to truly memorable. We will never know, but I do wonder how large this event *really* was in comparison to 2013 (2013 - 109 individuals; 2015 - 63 individuals). I suspect that recorder effort has been much less, and more restricted in spread this year, perhaps because the grand finale developed so late in the season.

Now that the final curtain must surely be coming down, and bearing in mind the sensitivities expressed regarding collectors at Kingsdown Leas, I've refrained from mentioning that site so far. I'm aware of only two sightings of British brood insects there this year. However, I know that migrant Long-tailed Blues arrived in force (up to 8 seen in a day), outstripping the 2013 fall.

I suspect that a large number of Long-tailed Blues will have come and gone unnoticed, but I'm becoming increasingly convinced that they'll be back again, within only a few years.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 12-Nov-15 05:30 AM GMT



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 13-Nov-15 06:46 AM GMT

 November butterfly.

👍👍👍 Stunning shot.
👍👍👍 LTB!

Any chance you could find a few in Wiltshire next year Neil? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 14-Nov-15 07:44 PM GMT

No chance they'll come to Lancashire Wurzel 😞 Looks like I'll have to tap my daughter up for later in the year 😊 my Son-in-Law may not be too happy though 😊😊 lovely shot Neil 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Dec-15 06:16 PM GMT

African Swarm

I've just returned from a fabulous ten day break in Jandia, at the southern tip of Fuerteventura. This was my fifth winter visit to the island and as always it provided welcome respite from the worst of British weather.

I had every intention of continuing my pursuit of the Long-tailed Blue and that looked to be on the cards when I found a fresh specimen roosting on an *Aloe vera* plant in the hotel grounds before checking in. That was the last Long-tailed Blue I saw during my visit! I also saw about a dozen Painted Ladies and a Red Admiral, but it was the African Grass Blue (*Zizeeria knysna*) that stole the show.

In the past I've only ever found this species in ones and twos around the Canarian hotel gardens, and they've usually been worn and torn individuals. However, after spotting a few on the bank behind the sports area I decided to investigate a small patch (c.1000 square metres) of rough but irrigated ground adjacent to the hotel. I'm glad I did, as I was treated to one of the most spectacular displays of butterfly abundance that I've ever experienced.

The ground over this entire area was literally swarming with these minute butterflies, with concentrations of up to 10 per square metre in flight and up to 30 per square metre while at roost over some patches of grass and low scrub. The flight was probably beyond its peak as the vast majority were faded, but a careful search revealed a few fresh specimens and mating pairs. Over the course of several days I did my best to calculate the number present, always ending up with a conservative figure of 3000 – 5000.

There were also some interesting birds around the hotel and adjacent area, including Fuerteventura Stonechat, Berthelot's Pipit, Trumpeter Finch, Sardinian Warbler, Hoopoe and Southern Grey Shrike, the former two species being very tame.

As always, this quieter end of the island provided plenty of sunshine and the chance to unwind. Once the naked Germans had retreated to their hotels, the beautiful sandy beaches became surprisingly uncluttered. The sunsets were consistently spectacular. With only a four hour flight time I'll be returning to Fuerteventura many more times in the future.





African Grass Blue



African Grass Blue habitat



Fuerteventura Stonechat







Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 06-Dec-15 08:45 PM GMT

Your photo's are making me long for a holiday Neil, 🍷 after the weather we've had we'll need one 😊 lovely Butterfly photos as well Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Dec-15 03:38 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. I wish I was back there!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Dec-15 05:44 AM GMT

Great images again, Neil, and what a find it was to get such an audience with that most attractive little lycaenid.