

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 09-Jan-16 06:33 PM GMT

After a lot of head-scratching and sorting of photos, I've finally managed to post some photos from my tour of Sabah, last Autumn.

So far, I've posted selections of both butterflies and birds on my website at <http://home.btconnect.com/mike.flemming/Sabah2015/Sabah2015.htm>
Other groups, including mammals, etc. will follow.

As usual, I welcome any comments or corrections to my identifications.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 09-Jan-16 07:24 PM GMT

Lovely set of shots – and memories.

Some wonderful names there, for example *Hairy Backed Bulbul* almost seems to have been made up specially for the English speaking visitors. I wonder what it's called in the native language.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 09-Jan-16 09:35 PM GMT

Glad you enjoyed them, Jack. 'Common' names can seem very strange at times; my favourite was *Jerdon's Baza*.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by jenks, 09-Jan-16 10:03 PM GMT

That`s a great set of photos, Mike. Something for you to look back on with fond memories and for us to look at in envy.

Regarding bird names, I went on a safari to Kenya in Nov 2007. Whilst it was great seeing the mammals, I got a bit bored after 4 or 5 days seeing the same ones over and over again so spent a lot of my time searching for birds (I had "The Birds of Kenya" Helm field guide with me). The best bird, namewise, that I came across was the "Bare-faced Go-away-bird". It`s a member of the Turaco family. I think that name would take some beating !

Jenks.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 10-Jan-16 03:00 PM GMT

Thanks Jenks. It sounds as though you've had some good trips too. Now, who can come up with some extraordinary butterfly names?

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 10-Jan-16 03:12 PM GMT

[quote]Now, who can come up with some extraordinary butterfly names?Peter Marren in "Rainbow Dust" touches on this. For example Duke of Burgundy


Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 19-Jan-16 11:07 PM GMT

I much prefer these cold but bright days, to the the rain of the past few weeks, even though it's definitely not butterfly weather!

One local sign of the mild winter has been unusually large numbers of birds that used to be considered 'summer visitors'. The local sewage works are a magnet for over-wintering Chiffchaffs – about 20 were present when I visited over the weekend, including 1 or 2 of the *tristis* race, known to birders as 'Sibes', because Britain is at the southern end of their range and they will return to Siberia for the summer.



Chiffchaff, Abingdon SW – 15th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/320s@f/5.6 ISO800



Chiffchaff 'tristis', Abingdon SW – 15th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/640@f/5.6 ISO800
Another sign of a mild winter was the large number of Goldcrests – these tiny birds are very vulnerable in a prolonged cold spell.



Goldcrest, Abingdon SW – 15th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/200s@f/5.6 ISO800

The annual 'Butterflies in the Glasshouse' event at RHS Wisley has now started, so I intend to visit soon for my mid-winter 'fix' of tropical species. After my travels last year, I have a better chance of recognising some of the species, this year.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 20-Jan-16 06:58 PM GMT

Lovely shots Mike, I think I got some shots of a Tree Creeper today, sadly I only had my small lens with me. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 27-Jan-16 11:47 PM GMT

On Monday (25th January) I made my, now annual, visit to the 'Butterflies in the Glasshouse' event in The RHS garden at Wisley. My impression is that this event improves year on year, with a good range of species flying freely in an environment within which they seem to behave quite naturally.

This time, I went with the experience of having seen some of these butterflies in their home environment. It was, therefore, an opportunity to catch up

with some of the species I had seen in Borneo and to see them alongside a range of their 'New World' cousins. The latter group seemed to be in the majority, led by the spectacular Blue Morphos, which seemed to be particularly active, with much courtship activity and groups of, sometimes 4 or 5, chasing each other around the glasshouse!



Morpho peleides, RHS Wisley – 25th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40–150mm lens – 1/250s@f/5.6 ISO400 (with flash)

It was also my first time in the field with my Olympus E-M1 camera (I had used the E-M5 model in Borneo) The results have given me considerable confidence in the capabilities of this camera, which provides DSLR-like image quality from small, lightweight equipment. Most of the time, I used the 40–150mm lens, which had proved very capable in Borneo, but I also tried my new 60mm macro lens for the first time.

The following two sets of photos show a selection of the species that I photographed. As in previous years, I found that the 'Spotter Guide' provided was far from complete and also has several typos in the species names. I've managed to put names to most of the photos but, as usual, welcome corrections and additions!



[Click on group to enlarge](#)



[Click on group to enlarge](#)

One rather spectacular species that I had not seen at Wisley before was the 'Automedon Giant Owl', with remarkable patterns on the undersides of the wings.



Eryphanis automedon, RHS Wisley - 25th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/200s@f/5.6

Finally, I used my macro lens to take some close-up views of one of the 'Pale Owls' feeding at one of the sugar stations. Conditions were far from ideal for macro photography and this shot was hand held, while amongst several other visitors. I particularly like the detail of the tiny claws on the ends of the legs!



Caligo memnon, RHS Wisley - 25th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/125s@f/8 (with flash)

I rather enjoyed my brief return to the heat and humidity of the tropics.

EDIT with additions/corrections by Guy Padfield
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Mark Tutton, 28-Jan-16 09:14 AM GMT

Is that the head of a Gecko i can see on the underside of the *Eryphanis automedon*?
Remarkable!
Mark

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 28-Jan-16 10:49 AM GMT

Thank you, Mark, for pointing that out! It's one of the most remarkable undersides that I've ever seen.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Padfield, 28-Jan-16 03:28 PM GMT

Hi Mike. So, you've got the tropical bug!!

The unnamed species in your second frame are female *Hypolimnas bolina* (mimicking *Euploea* sp.), female *Papilio dardanus*, and probably a hybrid of *Heliconius melpomene* (see <http://www.heliconius.co.uk/photo-pages/heliconius-melpomene-madeira-x-plessini-01.htm>, for example). I think your *Papilio memnon* is more likely to be *Papilio lowi*.

Guy

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 28-Jan-16 05:45 PM GMT

Many thanks, Guy – I've added captions to the relevant figures. I should have known the female *Hypolimnas*, since I saw both sexes of *Hypolimnas misippus* in India many years ago and read up about the combined Batesian mimicry and polymorphism.

From reading the RHS leaflet, I saw that the pupae come from a farm in Belize, which explains the preponderance of 'New World' species. It's hard to convey the brilliance of the large 'Morphos' but I made a short animation, from a series of photos, to show the 'shine' when the wing angle is just right:



Morpho peleides – Wisley 2016
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 28-Jan-16 07:01 PM GMT

[quote]....short animation, from a series of photos....Please do that for Purple Emperor next summer. You would probably need to make your animation from a series of still photos as you moved position around the butterfly : from a fixed viewpoint, they don't readily show the changing purple iridescence.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 29-Jan-16 10:45 AM GMT

Thank you, Jack, I'll see what I can do! I managed to miss seeing any PE at all during 2015, so you have provided additional stimulus for me to try harden this year 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Padfield, 29-Jan-16 12:10 PM GMT

I made a tiny purple emperor gif back in 2001, when I hadn't worked out how to put video on my site:



It doesn't do quite what Jack wants – so I'll wait for Mike to come up with the goods!

Guy

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 29-Jan-16 12:59 PM GMT

Mike[quote]....additional stimulus for me to try harden this yearNice typo there Mike. Should it have been an 'O' and not an 'E'? 😊

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 29-Jan-16 02:38 PM GMT

You've missed your vocation as a proof-reader, Jack!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Feb-16 01:35 PM GMT

Another wild and windy weekend and most definitely not butterfly weather. I took a walk on Otmoor in bright sunshine but bitterly cold and very muddy underfoot. Most wildlife was sensibly keeping well under cover but I took a shot of the reeds against a low sun. The HDR mode on my Olympus camera did a good job of retaining detail in these extreme lighting conditions (in this mode, the camera takes several shots at different exposures and then combines the 'best bits')



Otmoor, Oxon - 30th January 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - multiple exposures (HDR mode)

I showed, recently, in <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?t=4872&start=2420#p107145> how easy it is to modify a photo using Photoshop, by means of techniques I also describe on my website at <http://home.btconnect.com/mike.flemming/layers.htm> While I sometimes 'clean up' obtrusive background artefacts, I would not alter the main subject of a photo in this way, except for demonstration purposes. Nevertheless, people often submit competition photos, only to discover that such alterations are easily detected by simple forensic methods; see, for example, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-35457135>

Sometimes, one can strike lucky and my photo of 'Kites on the Moon' is 'genuine' (in spite of being taken on April 1st), although it involved some waiting around while the birds slowly wheeled into a suitable position.



Radley GP, Oxon - 1st April 2012 Nikon D300s with 300/4 lens + 1.4X TC - 1/500s@f/11 ISO400
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 01-Feb-16 02:47 PM GMT

That Otmoor HDR is pretty damn good.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Feb-16 03:42 PM GMT

Thank you, Jack - I especially appreciate that from you 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 01-Feb-16 10:41 PM GMT

The 'Kites on the Moon' is an absolutely cracking shot Mike, well worth the wait 🤔👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Feb-16 10:54 PM GMT

Glad you like it Wurzel – the idea formed as I was watching the Kites circling around and, for once, they did what I wanted 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 02-Feb-16 02:08 PM GMT

Hi! Mike love the Kites on the Moon shot, Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Feb-16 05:42 PM GMT

Glad you like it, Goldie. As I replied to Wurzel, it was just a case of grabbing the opportunity – sometimes you *can* be lucky 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 28-Feb-16 05:04 PM GMT

During the winter, I have been experimenting with some of the features of my Olympus OM-D E-M1 camera. The 'version 4' firmware added the capability to automatically 'stack' images in the camera, by taking a series of photos at a range of focus settings, in front of and behind the initial focus point. The set-up I use for macro photography is shown below:



Macro Set-up, using Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens and Meike LED ring-light

So far, I have only used this set-up for photographing flowers but the potential for other subjects is obvious. For these photos, I used an aperture of $f/5.6$, where the 60mm macro lens provides excellent sharpness, and set a focus 'step size' of '3', to cover the full depth of the subject, between the tips of the nearest and furthest petals. Apparently, the 'step size' is linked, by the Olympus firmware, to the depth of field, calculated for the chosen lens and aperture setting. My experiments have shown that the '3' setting covers a useful range of distance, without causing noticeable loss of sharpness between the individual steps, when the images are blended in the camera.



Gethyum atropurpureum – 23rd February 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/13s@f/5.6 ISO1000 (8 images 'stacked')
The detail can only be seen when examining the photo at full size. A small section of the original is shown below:



G.atropurpureum (detail) – 23rd February 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/13s@f/5.6 ISO1000 (8 images 'stacked')

The second feature of the camera that I've been exploring is the 'wifi' connection, which allows remote control from a smartphone. This capability is now being added to several of the latest generation of cameras from the main manufacturers, so will soon be widely available.

So far, I have used the wifi connection to photograph birds in the garden. We have a pair of Blue-tits, which are currently exploring a hole in a Tetrapanax shrub, possibly with a view to nesting. I set the camera on a tripod at a reasonable distance from the hole, with a tele lens to get a good view. Another feature of the E-M1 is the option to use a totally-silent electronic shutter, which means no disturbance to the birds when the shutter fires.

I then retreat indoors and use the Olympus app on my smartphone to display the live-view image, 'seen' by the camera. Various camera controls are also available from the phone's touch screen. so I can adjust the focus point, exposure, etc, to optimise the results. It's then just a case of sitting back in an armchair and touching the shutter release on the phone, whenever interesting action occurs!



Blue Tit (Cyanistes caeruleus) – 28th February 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40–150mm lens – 1/500s@f/7.1 ISO640

I am now thinking ahead to the new season, considering what use I can make of these new picture taking capabilities in my armoury!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 28-Feb-16 08:46 PM GMT

Hi! Mike great shots, I've put some photos in my Diary taken with a 70-300mm lens, I'll take a look at your web site shortly, thanks for the info Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by dilettante, 29-Feb-16 01:49 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

The 'version 4' firmware added the capability to automatically 'stack' images in the camera, by taking a series of photos at a range of focus settings, in front of and behind the initial focus point.

That's a really nice feature. Even if it didn't do the stack merging automatically, I've often thought a 'focus bracketing' feature would be really useful.

Have you tried this feature with handheld shots? I'm wondering if / how well it would cope when the images in the stack are a little misaligned.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Mar-16 04:18 PM GMT

dilettante wrote:

That's a really nice feature. Even if it didn't do the stack merging automatically, I've often thought a 'focus bracketing' feature would be really useful.

The Olympus E-M1 (with version 4 firmware) actually has two different modes:

'**Focus bracketing**' takes a series of photos, starting from your chosen focus point and stepping the focus towards infinity. You can choose the step size and number of steps. The individual photos are saved and can be 'stacked' by using external software. The E-M5 Mk.II and E-M10 Mk.II also have this capability.

'**Focus stacking**' only works with the E-M1 and specific Olympus lenses and, in this mode, the camera takes 8 photos, focussed both in front of and behind the initial point; the camera then processes the individual shots internally to produce a 'stacked' image (JPEG only). The individual shots are also saved.

I hadn't tried hand-held 'stacking', so have just given it a go in the garden, in rather indifferent light. On this first showing, it seems to work quite well, especially as these shots really were 'hand-held', in conditions where I would normally have used a monopod. Looking at the individual frames, some movement is apparent, but the stacking process seems to have coped with this. The first shot below is 'stacked' (in the camera), while the second is one of the individual images from the eight that were taken. The increased depth of field in the stacked shot is, I think, obvious. (*click on each image, to enlarge*)



garden - 2nd March 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/40s@f/5.6 ISO640 (8 images 'stacked')

single image
1/40s@f/5.6 ISO640



garden - 2nd March 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/40s@f/5.6 ISO640
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 02-Mar-16 10:48 PM GMT

I can appreciate the effects Mike, they look great 😊👍 but it all seems a bit complicated to me I'm still trying to work out how my camera works 😊😊
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Mar-16 11:11 PM GMT

If you hadn't realised before, Wurzel, you now know I'm a camera geek 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by dilettante, 03-Mar-16 01:11 PM GMT

The hand-held stacked shot looks quite usable. So I'm wondering if this feature will be useful for butterflies to make it easier to get wingtips and body in focus while retaining some background bokeh.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 03-Mar-16 04:46 PM GMT

dilettante wrote:

..... I'm wondering if this feature will be useful for butterflies to make it easier to get wingtips and body in focus while retaining some background bokeh.

Exactly my thoughts, too! I shall be putting in some practice before the season starts. Not too long, hopefully 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 06-Mar-16 10:50 AM GMT

Hope you got my return message Mike, I'm not sure I sent it properly Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 16-Mar-16 02:56 PM GMT

Still no butterflies locally and, with today's cold wind blowing, there seem to be few immediate prospects. While waiting, I have been continuing to practise my flower photography.

On Monday (14th March), I visited the BBOWT reserve known as the Inkpen Crocus Field (SU 370 641). The carpet of flowers was particularly good this year and well-displayed under bright sunshine. NB - if visiting by car, do not turn into Pottery Lane but park in the adjacent recreation-ground car-park.

I took the opportunity to try out the automatic 'stacking' feature of my Olympus E-M1 with its 60mm macro lens. This worked well, without a tripod but with a monopod, to help steady my shots. It was important to ensure that the wind did not move flower petals during the sequence of shots, which

could lead to double images. With that caveat, I found that the technique could be used, under field conditions, to keep subjects, at a range of distances from the camera, all in focus together.



Inkpen Crocus Field - 14th March 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/500s@f/13 ISO640 (8 images stacked)



Inkpen Crocus Field - 14th March 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/800s@f/11 ISO640 (8 images stacked)

Note that I have used quite small apertures, since my aim was to produce an extended focus range, rather than maximise image sharpness. The second image shows the potential to obtain a sharp secondary subject, as well as the foreground image.

I am looking forward to trying this technique with butterflies, where it may assist when more than one individual is present.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 16-Mar-16 05:33 PM GMT

Lovely shots Mike, hope you get some Butterflies soon Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 16-Mar-16 11:16 PM GMT

Thank you Goldie - the forecast for tomorrow says 'sun', so I live in hope 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 17-Mar-16 07:57 PM GMT

I, too, am looking forward to you trying out that technique on butterflies – well, looking forward to seeing the results that is, given that I always have so much trouble trying to get 2 butterflies in focus (tho' I haven't yet put into practice the advice you gave me about that 😊).

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 18-Mar-16 12:43 PM GMT

Thank you, Pauline. There are always dangers, when combining different photos into a single image. Yesterday (17th March), I went to the Alpine Garden Society's garden at Pershore, in the hope that some butterflies might visit the Spring flowers. No luck there, but I did take some more flower photos.

I show an example below, where the wind may have moved the foreground petals slightly between shots. This has resulted in a double image. The danger is that, if these were spots on a butterfly, the result could look like an aberration!



Example of a stacking error

So, this technique needs the subject(s) to be absolutely still and, even then, it is important to examine the results carefully, in case any artefacts have 'crept in'. The Olympus saves the individual images that make up the stack, so it is easy to check if anything odd has happened and, in this case, I could select an appropriate image from the stack, to 'repair' the foreground flower.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 25-Mar-16 08:41 PM GMT

At last, I have broken my 'duck' this year. With warm sunshine this morning (25th March), a **Brimstone** flitted through my garden! After lunch, I visited my favourite local early butterfly spot – Dry Sandford Pit in the village of Cothill. There's a bank of primroses just inside the entrance and when I arrived, there were two Brimstones nectaring there.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon – 25th March 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/1250s@f/11 ISO400

I moved on to the sandstone quarry face, which is a sun-trap for basking butterflies. One of the smallest **Commas** that I've ever seen (it looked like a Skipper at first) was in the usual spot, taking off to investigate every passing insect – one of which turned out to be a rather small **Peacock**, which did not hang around for a photo.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 25th March 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/400s@f/11 ISO400
So, it's a start but, unfortunately, the forecast is for rain again, tomorrow, and through the Easter weekend.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Paul Harfield, 26-Mar-16 01:11 AM GMT

Hi Mike

Glad you are off the mark 😊 Lovely Brimstone.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Mar-16 12:45 PM GMT

Thank you Jack - no chance of any more today under all this rain!

We think of Brimstones as quite big butterflies (in British terms) and yet it's quite small against the Primrose flower.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 26-Mar-16 12:52 PM GMT

Glad you've got your first Butterflies Mike, love the Brimstone, I went to HLB yesterday but saw nothing inspite of the warm weather, so i'm still stuck with just the two species and the weather for Easter looks grim like you say. Goldie. 😞

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Mar-16 03:16 PM GMT

Perhaps yours migrated south, Goldie 😊 I was very pleased to see them and hope for more favourable weather conditions soon.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 02-Apr-16 06:51 PM GMT

Brimstones and Primroses both remind me of Spring Mike, tho' I have never managed to get a shot of them both together 🍷. Tonight it is raining quite heavily here again - Spring has been very much on and off so far in this area 😞

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Apr-16 10:33 PM GMT

A return visit to **Dry Sandford Pit** this afternoon (2nd April) yielded five butterfly species. Perhaps, Spring is here at last!

Just after entering the reserve, I saw a small white butterfly with dark-looking wingtips. A closer view revealed my first male **Orange Tip** of the year but, unfortunately, he did not hang around for photos, nor did I get a second encounter during the next couple of hours. There is an area of Primroses, a short distance into the reserve, and this was attracting several **Brimstones** and several 'bee flies' (*Bombylius major*), one of which had an exceptionally long proboscis:



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 2nd April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO640

The quarry face was fairly quiet at first but, as the afternoon warmed up, I saw several **Peacocks**. This one that I photographed looked in good conditions but, when I examined the photos, I noticed that one antenna-tip was missing. Its absence did not seem to be inhibiting this butterfly, which sallied forth to challenge every passing insect!



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 2nd April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/1000s@f/9 ISO640

My next sighting was a Comma and this was also actively chasing other butterflies. After a while I realised there were several Commas present, many resting on the quarry face but leaping into action when another passed by.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 2nd April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/800s@f/9 ISO640

After walking all around the reserve, I returned to the entrance, where there was still no further sign of the Orange Tip but, just as I was about to leave, I spotted a Small Tortoiseshell - my first this year.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 2nd April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/800s@f/7.1 ISO640

Another 'harbinger of spring' was the monotonous call of the Chiffchaff and one paused low enough down for a photo:



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 2nd April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mmlens - 1/1000s@f/9 ISO640

This evening, it is raining again but the sight of an Orange Tip made me feel that warmer weather must surely be on the way 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 03-Apr-16 05:17 PM GMT

If the OTs are on the wing then things are definitely on the wax - Spring is finally here!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 04-Apr-16 11:59 AM GMT

Just heard the weather forecast - getting cooler 😞 Might have to wait a bit longer yet.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 04-Apr-16 05:42 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

...A closer view revealed my first male **Orange Tip** of the year...

You lucky boy! Hopefully we'll all record this divine annual milestone within the next week or two.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 04-Apr-16 08:32 PM GMT

Thank you, David. I was so surprised that I didn't get my camera to it. The trouble with being a photographer is that you slip into the feeling that it isn't a 'record' without a photo! It wasn't a 'first' for the BBOWT area, since one was reported from Chalfont St Peter on 30th March.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Apr-16 05:42 PM GMT

A return visit to **Dry Sandford Pit**, this afternoon (*5th April*) found it very quiet, in comparison with my visit last Saturday. Today, although it was warm in the sun, there were few butterflies to be seen. No Brimstones nectaring on the Primroses and no bee-flies either.

Along the warm sandstone cliff, there were a few basking Commas and Peacocks, but they were quite difficult to spot, as they rested on the face and the many horizontal ledges. The cliff face is extensively 'quarried' by rabbits, while solitary bees and wasps, including the five-banded tailed digger wasp, have burrowed into the soft sandy layers creating myriads of small holes.



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 5th April 2016

A few Brimstones patrolled along the face, prompting sallies by the Commas and Peacocks but, overall, the amount of activity was low. No sign of any Orange Tips, either.

In compensation, I attach a photo of the underside of a **Peacock**, which I had intended to post after last Saturday's visit, since it shows the striking patterns that are in such strong contrast to the bright colours of the upperwings.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 2nd April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO640 [+0.7EV compensation]
With falling temperatures forecast for later in the week, Spring still seem to be 'on hold'.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 05-Apr-16 05:57 PM GMT

Lovely underside Mike showing the subtle and intricate markings and colours. Raining here this pm so back to the cats for me!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Apr-16 08:00 PM GMT

Glad you like my shot, Pauline. I know you have taken some very nice Peacock-underside photos yourself 😊

I feel it needs a photo to bring out all the subtle shading - in the field, they tend simply to look black.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 06-Apr-16 10:10 PM GMT

That is a cracking Peacock shot Mike, I especially like the way the red 'barnet' is visible 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 07-Apr-16 11:21 PM GMT

That is indeed a beautiful image of the Peacock, Mike, which shows better than most photos the cryptic underside markings which, in poor light, seem almost entirely black.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 08-Apr-16 11:11 AM GMT

Thank you for your comments, Wurzel and David;. I think that an electronic viewfinder, as in 'mirrorless' and 'bridge' cameras, makes it easier to judge exposure for subjects such as this, in comparison with an optical finder. I shot in RAW, which enabled me to keep some detail in the bright foreground, by selective control of shadows and highlights.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 11-Apr-16 04:03 PM GMT

Just catching up with my posts Mike, I love your Peacock Butterfly your so lucky to see one, no sign of them here yet. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 12-Apr-16 11:26 PM GMT

Thanks for looking in, Goldie. Good to know you are feeling better and posting again. I think you have had worse weather than in the South but it's very unpredictable here, as well. I was caught in 'white out' conditions on the M4 near Chippenham last Saturday – not exactly butterfly weather!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 13-Apr-16 11:58 PM GMT

This roller-coaster that we currently call the weather was at a high point today, locally. Just after lunch today (13th April), I spotted my first **Holly Blue** of this year, in the garden, although it did not stay around for a photo.

There was a feeling of real warmth in the sunshine, so I set off for another look at my local **Dry Sandford Pit** reserve. I saw my first **Brimstone** while driving into the car-park, and there were plenty more within the reserve itself. The favourite feeding stations had moved from the Primroses to the plentiful patches of Bugle, where the long proboscis of the Brimstones could be seen delving into the cone-shaped flower heads.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon – 13th April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/2000s@f/6.3 ISO400

Moving on to the quarry, I was pleased to see an **Orange Tip** patrolling along the face. Having missed a photo of this species during an earlier visit, I was determined to get a 'grab shot', which I did just before it disappeared into the neighbouring woodland. This time, however, I found another male, towards the Southern end of the quarry face and this one was prepared to pose for photos!



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 13th April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/400s@f/10 ISO400

I also saw the underside of yet another, on a shrub high up on the quarry face, and had to resist the temptation to try to get closer, against the warnings that the face is very unstable and accidents have happened. The rather distant cropped view that I settled for does show the attractive marbled pattern, which looks a little like stained glass, against the light/



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 13th April 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/500s@f/10 ISO400

A few small **Commas** defended their perches on the cliff against all intruders, which included several **Peacocks**, also enjoying the sun. All this activity did not last long, though, as the sun soon disappeared behind clouds and the temperature started to fall rapidly. Within a few moments, there were no butterflies to be seen at all, but I was very pleased to have photographed the Orange Tips and will now keep watch for Holly Blues in the garden.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 14-Apr-16 10:11 AM GMT

Really envious of your cracking 'Grab shot' of the OT - still haven't seen one this year 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 14-Apr-16 12:39 PM GMT

Fantastic Mike, your the first I think to see the OT's, it feels like Spring now, lovely shots you got as well Goldie 🍷😄

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 14-Apr-16 04:39 PM GMT

Thank you for commenting, Wurzel and Goldie. There should be plenty of OT around soon. the forecast was for rain here, today, but in fact it has been dry and quite sunny. Several **Whites** flying through the garden.

I have always found OTs to be a photographic challenge but the very helpful electronic viewfinder in my Olympus makes it much easier to keep the white and vivid orange in check! Although I shoot both RAW and JPEG, I find that the JPEG exposures are usually fine, so I simply archive the RAWs.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 14-Apr-16 07:55 PM GMT

With everything kicking off at once so easy to miss posts. Smashing shot of the OT Mike. As you say, a difficult butterfly to photograph but this is a lovely example. I'd be happy just to see one in the near future.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 14-Apr-16 10:24 PM GMT

I'm sure you won't have long to wait, Pauline. I'll look out for news in your diary 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-May-16 10:04 PM GMT

After reading other reports, such as Philzoid's from Butser Hill, I decided to head up to the Oxfordshire Downs today (*5th May*), in the hope of a few Spring species. A favourite spot is known locally as '**The Juniper Valley**', a narrow, sheltered valley leading up onto the downs from the village of Aston Upthorpe.



'Juniper Valley', Aston Upthorpe Down - 5th May 2016

Despite bright warm sunshine, there was little wildlife to be seen - either birds or butterflies, although this is often a good location for Spring migrant birds. On the walk up the track to the valley, I saw a few **Brimstones** and **Orange Tips**, though not many and, when I eventually reached the open downland, there was very little to be seen at all - a few bees nectaring on the flowers but no lepidoptera.

The flora on the slopes of the valley include Pasque Flowers. This is a traditional site for them but now they only survive inside rabbit-proof enclosures and it seems likely to remain that way, unless the rabbit population can be controlled.



Aston Upthorpe Down - 5th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/1000s@f/8 ISO640

Red Kites and Buzzards soared overhead but there was little birdsong, not even the persistent tones of the Chiffchaff. It looks as though the recent cold nights in this area have taken their toll.

Walking back down the valley, I came across a very bright **Peacock**, sunning itself on the bare earth of the ride but, apart from those few species already mentioned, it was not a productive day.



Aston Upthorpe Down - 5th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/2000s@f/8 ISO640

I have seen a few **Holly Blues** in the garden but always on the move, jinking to avoid the Blue Tits, which make frequent attempts on them.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 06-May-16 08:02 AM GMT

Hi! Mike, lovely Peacock shot, I went to HLB on Wednesday in the Morning and saw hardly any thing, so I waited for it to warm up and decided to go back in the afternoon when I saw quite a lot more, looks like the Butterflies were waiting for the heat of the day 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-May-16 01:26 PM GMT

Thank you Goldie. Like you, I had hoped that more butterflies would appear as the afternoon warmed up but, unfortunately, they didn't. Night-time temperatures have been very low here and I suspect that this factor has delayed emergence for many species.

That Peacock looks a little lop-sided, with more colour on one side than the other - possibly just an effect of the angles of the wings.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 09-May-16 06:29 PM GMT

Back to cloud and a little rain today (9th May). I had hoped to take a series of photos of the transit of Mercury and then make an animation, but clouds prevented any photography after about 14:30.

For the record, I took my photos by placing one eyepiece of a pair of 'eclipse glasses' over the lens of my Lumix FZ200. I chose to use my Lumix camera because it offers high magnification from a relatively small diameter lens.

Following a series of experiments that I carried out yesterday, I set a manual exposure of 1/250s @ f/5.6 ISO160, although I was surprised to see how much the image dimmed whenever a thin layer of cloud, was present, which made the image disappear in the viewfinder. I managed to get a few reasonable shots by shooting in the brief moments when the sun's disk appeared clearly in the finder.

Mercury looks very small indeed, especially in comparison to the sunspot, which can be seen above the centre of the sun.



Abingdon, Oxon - 9th May 2016 14:22 BST/13:22 GMT Lumix FZ200 at max zoom - 1/250s@f/5.6 ISO160 (manual exposure with 'eclipse' filter)
There were several very flighty **Holly Blues** in my garden and the surrounding area.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Padfield, 09-May-16 09:08 PM GMT

Nice shot, Mike. It looks as if quite a few of us were lying in wait today to pounce on the slightest hint of sun! I didn't get my chance until about 19h00.

Guy

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 09-May-16 09:35 PM GMT

Padfield wrote:

Nice shot, Mike. It looks as if quite a few of us were lying in wait today to pounce on the slightest hint of sun!

Thank you Guy. The clouds were tantalising here. in the early afternoon, there were quite a few blue patches but, from my location, the sun seemed intent on avoiding them 😊 I tried your projection method but couldn't get enough contrast for a good image, so decided to concentrate on direct views through the eclipse filter.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 10-May-16 09:57 AM GMT

Hi! Mike, interesting comments, I've yet to capture a photo of the Holly Blue yet, seen them zoom past though. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-May-16 01:14 PM GMT

Yesterday (16th May), I visited the **BBOWT Warburg Reserve**, at Bix Bottom (NE of Henley on Thames)

This is a wonderful reserve, nestling in a 'hidden valley' in the Chilterns, with a remarkable range of flora and fauna. On a brilliant Spring day, the flowers and Spring-greens in the trees along the broad rides were magnificent:



Warburg Reserve, Oxon – 16th May 2016

My first butterfly was a **Brown Argus**, nectaring on Germander Speedwell.



Warburg Reserve, Oxon – 16th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40–150mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO500

There were several day-flying moths as well, including *Pyrausta purpuralis* (I had almost forgotten how tiny these are!) and some really bright Burnet Companions (*Euclidia glyphica*), which outdid the only **Dingy Skipper** that I saw.

A dark-looking butterfly, skimming over the grass, confused me at first until I realised it was a **Green Hairstreak**. I find it curious how the vivid colour virtually disappears when in flight. This one was radiant, when it eventually paused for a photo:



Warburg Reserve, Oxon – 16th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40–150mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO500

Larger butterflies included **Brimstone** and **Peacock**. I also saw my first **Common Blues** of this year. This one posed for me in a thorn bush:



Warburg Reserve, Oxon - 16th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/800s@f/9 ISO500
He then turned face-on to me, showing the thick blanket surrounding his body:



Warburg Reserve, Oxon - 16th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/640s@f/9 ISO500
There were several interesting plants, including Early Purple Orchids and Herb Paris. Butterflies were not the only insects seeking nectar and I also photographed a Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*) nectaring on the Speedwell. The dagger-like proboscis, which usually looks quite rigid, here shows its flexibility, when probing for nectar. Even a shutter-speed of 1/800s was insufficient to 'stop' the rapidly-beating wings:



Warburg Reserve, Oxon - 16th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/800s@f/9 ISO500
Another interesting insect was the Mason Bee (*Osmia bicolor*), which I watched carefully selecting surprisingly long blades of grass, to carry to the nest it was building in an old snail shell.

My last butterfly photo was of a **Small Heath**, which proved difficult to approach as it flitted low-down in the grass. I always feel that this is an under-rated butterfly, with beautiful colouring and subtle grey patterning.



Warburg Reserve, Oxon - 16th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/500s@f/7.1 ISO500
After such a slow start to the season, it was a great pleasure to be surrounded by wildlife on such a beautiful sunny day.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-May-16 10:39 PM GMT

I took a walk along the Thames Path near the **Cholsey Marsh** nature reserve, this afternoon (26th May).

Sedge and Reed Warblers were making a terrific racket from the reed beds, on either side of the path, but remained largely hidden, except for popping up occasionally, for a quick 'look around'.

I was hoping to find the *Gomphus* (Clubtail) dragonfly, which is a local speciality, but had no luck on this occasion, although there were plenty of Banded Demoiselles, showing off their brilliant iridescent colours. Butterflies were in very short supply, except for a few **Orange Tips**, with a preponderance of females.

As I have mentioned before, the electronic viewfinder of my Olympus OM-D E-M1 makes it relatively easy to judge exposure, when taking these 'difficult' butterflies in sunlight.



Cholsey Marsh, Oxon - 26th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/500s@f/11 ISO500
My underside shots show how the apparent green colour is made up from a mix of yellow and black scales. The seemingly plain grey wing-tips of the female show a sprinkling of yellow scales on the underside. The white antenna tips are also notable.



Cholsey Marsh, Oxon - 26th May 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/640s@f/11 ISO500

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 27-May-16 10:27 PM GMT

Great shots Mike 😊 I love the intricacies of the pattern formation of OTs 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 27-May-16 11:38 PM GMT

Thank you Wurzel – glad you like them! I was surprised to see so many females on the wing, amongst only a few bright orange males. Overall, though, butterflies seem rather scarce locally.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 29-May-16 12:35 PM GMT

Yesterday (28th May), I actually managed a distant photo of one of the **Holly Blues** that have been tantalising me in the garden for the last couple of weeks. I won't use up Pete's precious web space with the (rather poor) photo but hope that, now the butterfly has been caught once, he will become more obliging 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 14-Jun-16 06:34 AM GMT

Like you Mike, I have seen very few OT's – none in the garden this year and no eggs on my Garlic Mustard 😞😞. I've only seen 1 Red Admiral and so far I have seen no Small Copper at all 😞

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 14-Jun-16 10:53 AM GMT

Thank you for looking in, Pauline. I have had very little to write about in my butterfly diary – most of my outdoor time seems to have been spent in dodging showers and heavier bursts if rain 😞

A walk on **Otmoor** last week (9th June) in a rare burst of hot sunshine brought a few summery pleasures – a Hobby hawking for insects overhead and a Turtle Dove purring gently in the distance – but very little insect activity, either butterflies or dragonflies. Even along the Roman Road which is a favoured 'sun trap', I only saw a couple of male Orange Tips, restlessly patrolling, and managed a snapshot of a male **Large Skipper** – my first (and only, so far) this year.



Otmoor (Roman Road), Oxon - 9th June 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/800s@f/9 ISO1000

It's wet again today, so I have been 'keeping my hand in' with the camera by photographing flowers - many of them under glass in the greenhouse!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 19-Jun-16 12:51 PM GMT

I have recently spent a few days in Lancashire and took the opportunity for a quick visit to **Gait Barrows NNR (15th June)**, though in less-than-ideal weather conditions! In fact, my drive North along the M6 was one of my worst-ever driving experiences, with torrential rain bringing the motorway to a stand-still on several occasions, when visibility was reduced to nil.

There were some bright intervals between the 'showers' (understatement), while I was on the reserve and I managed to photograph a few **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**:



Gait Barrows NNR - 15th June 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/800s@f/8 ISO800

One in particular was very docile and seemed to be trying to dry itself, by repeatedly twisting its head from side to side. My two shots, taken with a macro lens, show the partly furled proboscis and, in the second, what I assume are the two palps, being held out to dry.



Gait Barrows NNR – 15th June 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/200s@f/9 ISO800



Gait Barrows NNR – 15th June 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/160s@f/9 ISO800

Otherwise, there was very little butterfly activity but I did take the opportunity to add photos of the <http://home.btconnect.com/mike.flemming/orchids5.htm> (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) to my collection. As expected, the flowering period of the Lady's Slipper Orchids (*Cypripedium calceolus*) was over, but it was good to see several robust plants returned to the wild.

Returning Southwards, I visited the Formby Point NT reserve and was pleased to see that the Red Squirrel population seems to have recovered after the recent bout of squirrel pox. More rain, however, soon forced a retreat to the car.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 20-Jun-16 10:34 PM GMT

Great Small Pearls Mike, they really stand out in those shots 😊 I know what you mean about this weather, it's starting to get just slightly irksome now – it's all the fault of those weather-people again – the minute they say phrases such as "bar-be-que summer" or "we're having a heat wave" you now it's time to buy some waders and start filling sand bags 😞😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Jun-16 11:05 PM GMT

Thank you Wurzel. At least the weather conditions made the Pearls a bit more docile than usual, for photography.

Some people seem to be doing surprisingly well with their sightings – <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?t=6199&start=2200#p111428> reported 10 species in a single visit to Noar Hill, for example, whereas I have been pleased to see one *individual* on some trips (never mind multiple species) 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 21-Jun-16 03:02 PM GMT

Seems like we both picked the wrong time of year for our visits Mike 😊

At least I got to see the Wood White and Silver Studded Blue, like you though that's all I saw. 😊

Glad you got a visit in to see the Red Squirrels at Formby and you got some great shots of the SPBF Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 21-Jun-16 04:22 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

..... and you got some great shots of the SPBF Goldie 😊

Thank you, Goldie – no white ones though 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 21-Jun-16 11:39 PM GMT

During our recent visit to Formby Point NT reserve (*16th June*), we were retreating to the car in the face of one of the frequent showers, when my wife spotted a 'mini beast' on Sorrel plants at the edge of the car-park. The 'weather-resistant' aspect of my Olympus camera and lens proved a valuable asset in this situation.

Whereas I would have recognised the adult insect immediately, I admit that I did not recognise this striking **Small Copper** larva without help from reference books!



Formby Point NT reserve – 16th June 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm macro lens – 1/200s@f/9 ISO500

I really must broaden my interest, to take such beautiful subjects into my photographic repertoire 😊



Formby Point NT reserve - 16th June 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm macro lens - 1/200s@f/8 ISO500
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 22-Jun-16 09:20 AM GMT

Thanks Mike for pointing me in the direction of the Small Copper 😊 I'll make a point of going to Formby now in the future because I don't see them round here now and those were great shot's you took of the Larva. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 22-Jun-16 10:10 AM GMT

There is a form of Small Copper larva without the pink stripe. Very easy species to breed.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22-Jun-16 12:12 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, I think you are very lucky to have such a remarkable habitat as the Ainsdale and Formby dunes close at hand! I wish I had realised how special it is, when I was a child living in the area. My wife is very much better than I am at spotting small insects and other secretive wildlife, such as lizards, toads, etc. I think it is a skill you need to acquire in childhood and it then stays with you.

We once went on a 'caterpillar crawl' organised by the Upper Thames BC Branch and it was fascinating to see various 'Whites' caterpillars 'magically' appearing on grass stems at dusk, for their night feed. There is so much activity going on all around us that most of us never see! Some of it is, of course, unwelcome by gardeners, when precious plants are eaten in the night.

Thank you for the additional information, Jack. Perhaps, when I become less mobile, I shall look into ways of bringing wildlife to me, rather than going out into the field.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 22-Jun-16 07:24 PM GMT

~~quote~~MIKE:....Jack. Perhaps, when I become less mobile, I shall look into ways of bringing wildlife to me, rather than going out into the field. I can see myself moving in that direction. For example, during the past hour, from my "den, I have watched Sparrows and Chaffinches feeding young and juvenile Starlings now self-feeding.

But I did get out today (my daughter is visiting) and found an excellent potential Small Blue locality (it was too cloudy for butterflies but lots of Kidney Vetch in a very sheltered spot).

The moth trap is in a new part of the garden tonight. I could dream of some immigrants from mainland Europe before tomorrow's vote puts paid (maybe) to Camberwell Beauties, Long-tailed Blues, Death's Head Hawks, etc being allowed to visit these shores.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Jul-16 02:12 PM GMT

Daneway Banks - 1st July 2016

My Leica 100-400 mm zoom lens, which I have been waiting for since March, finally arrived last Tuesday. Within an hour of its arrival, the rain set in, so I had little opportunity to test it 'in the field' on my Olympus E-M1 😞

Of course, a long telephoto zoom, like this, is primarily aimed at long-distance photography and my main intended purpose for it is bird photography. This particular lens, however, also has a remarkably close minimum focus distance - only 1.3 m - so it has potential to be used for 'macro' subjects, such as butterflies and dragonflies. There are difficulties in using such a long focal length at short range: the main one being that depth of field is minute! Using the calculator on the <http://www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/dof-calculator.htm> website, indicates that, on my camera, a 400mm lens at f/8 has a depth of field of only about 2 mm when focused at 1.3 m! Care is clearly needed, if using the lens in this mode, but the potential for photographing shy butterflies from a fair distance seems very attractive, if intervening grasses can be kept out of the way!

With these thoughts in mind and a slightly more promising weather-forecast (*in my first draft, I actually typed 'water-forecast', which has certainly been the recent experience*), I decided to make for **Daneway Banks**, yesterday (*1st July*), to give the lens a trial. The outward journey from Oxon was not too promising, with scattered showers along the way, and, on arrival, it was cool and damp but, at least, not actually raining!

Daneway Banks is a wonderful place and looking better than ever, on this latest visit, thanks to management work already undertaken since Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust acquired the site. I took the following panorama from the main entrance gate, half-way up the hill, showing the banks carpeted with Rock Rose, Vetch, Marjoram, and Thyme, as well as plentiful Orchids.



Daneway Banks, Glos. – 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50 mm lens – 1/640s@f/10 ISO800

Not far from the gate, and visible in the right of the above photo, a new seat depicts the life-cycle of the Large Blue butterfly, so one can top-up on the basics, before exploring further.



Daneway Banks, Glos. – 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50 mm lens – 1/400s@f/11 ISO800

Once inside the gate, my first butterfly sighting was of a **Painted Lady**, sheltering from the wind on the damp path. The sky was brightening and, after a few moments, it shook its head a few times and then took off, to disappear rapidly into the distance. I was pleased to manage a single photo:



Daneway Banks, Glos. – 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150 mm lens – 1/800s@f/8 ISO800

As I walked along the valley between the banks of flowers, I saw lots of **Meadow Browns**, **Ringlets**, and **Marbled Whites** and then, after a couple of hundred metres, my first **Large Blue**, in flight and actively pursued by a Meadow Brown. I find that these dusky blue butterflies are difficult to follow by eye, when they are skimming over flowers and grasses. They were staying low down, in the face of a stiff breeze, and it was hard to mark where they settled. A big 'plus', however, was that they were tending to rest with their wings spread – behaviour that I have rarely seen on warmer, sunnier days in previous years. I soon caught up with one, low in the grasses :



Daneway Banks, Glos. – 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150 mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO800

Others were nectaring on the Thyme flowers, giving an opportunity to photograph the undersides, which are much 'plainer' than Common Blues. with no red markings.



Daneway Banks, Glos. – 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150 mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO800

I decided to try the focus-bracketing capability of my Olympus E-M1 on one example that was hunkered-down deep amongst the grasses. This method did enable me to keep both the head and wings in focus, which would have been extremely difficult to achieve without this ability



Daneway Banks, Glos. – 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400 mm lens – 1/400s@f/11 ISO800 (stacked)

Moving up the valley, through this botanical paradise, I spent some time photographing a **Bee Orchid**, using my macro lens. with its automatic focus-stacking capability:



Daneway Banks, Glos. - 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60 mm macro lens - 1/400s@f/8 ISO800 (stacked)
When I started to photograph a **Large Skipper**, a Grasshopper moved into the frame, just as I took the picture:



Daneway Banks, Glos. - 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400 mm lens - 1/500s@f/10 ISO800
At the top of the reserve, there is a flatter area around a dew pond, well-sprinkled with Thyme, Marjoram and other flowers, including Fragrant Orchids, which were attracting several more Large Blues, as well as huge numbers of **Marbled Whites** and a few **Small Tortoiseshells** (as usual, [click on the image to enlarge](#)):



Daneway Banks, Glos. - 1st July 2016 Marbled White, Fragrant Orchid, Small Tortoiseshell
It was here that my wife found a very co-operative Large Blue, posing with spread wings. It seemed fairly bomb-proof but decided to move on, just as I was changing to my macro lens. Fortunately, however, I had already been able to take several shots from further away, with my long lens.



Daneway Banks, Gos. - 1st July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400 mm lens - 1/800s@f/7.1 ISO800

So, after too long a period of feeling house-bound by very poor weather, I was pleased to enjoy an excellent day 'in the field'. I still have a lot to learn about using my new lens but it does seem to be a very versatile piece of equipment 😊

Mike

(edited to reduce excess contrast in first image)

Re: MikeOxon

by kevlings, 02-Jul-16 03:45 PM GMT

Mike,

Nice Large Blue photos from Daneway Banks. Also like the Painted Lady (although it is so long since I've seen one, I could be forgiven for not knowing what one looks like 😊).

Regards Kev

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 02-Jul-16 03:50 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, great shots for you on your day out. 😊

I have a Sigma 70- by 300 lens I fit on my Canon, it's great for taking distant Butterflies, I don't have to go into long grass etc, it's also fitted with Micro which I've to use at 300 to 200, I'm still experimenting all the time with it, 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Jul-16 04:35 PM GMT

Thank you, Kev and Goldie. I admit that I had begun to despair of seeing many butterflies at all this year, in view of the 'monsoon' weather. I agree about the utility of long lenses, Goldie. Not only do they avoid trampling down the grass but they are far less likely to disturb the butterfly. You do have to be careful about camera shake and depth-of-field issues, though. As I get older, it is nice not to have to bend down so much, either 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 03-Jul-16 10:00 AM GMT

Hi! Mike, I'm still getting use to the Depth of field, I get it right some time and other times I'm not too good, talk about press on regardless. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 03-Jul-16 02:05 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

Hi! Mike, I'm still getting use to the Depth of field, I get it right some time and other times I'm not too good, talk about press on regardless. 😊 Goldie 😊

Hi Goldie, the main thing is to learn from your mistakes - look at the 'Properties' of your images, to see what settings you used and get to know what works and what doesn't. Soon, you'll develop a 'feel' for the best settings to use in any given situation. If you use 'aperture priority' mode, it's easy to set an appropriate setting for the type of photos that you are taking but don't forget to keep an eye on the shutter speed as well, in case it gets too low. In that case, you have to think about turning up the ISO. Most modern cameras (at least, those with larger sensors, like your Canon) give good image quality up to at least ISO800. With my older Nikons, quality began to fall above ISO400 but, with the Olympus, I get good results up to about ISO1250.

The old pro press photographers are said to have fixed their camera settings with a piece of 'Elastoplast' so they always knew what to expect. It was up to the darkroom boys to sort things out 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 03-Jul-16 08:37 PM GMT

Thanks Mike for your advice, I've tried various modes on my camera with different results, my camera says ISO 400 is for cloudy sky's yet I've had some good results with that setting in the Sun so I'll just have to keep trying.

I was disappointed today, I saw a Small Tortoiseshell which landed on a Blackberry bush, I used the Micro setting on the 70-300 lens but I didn't change from the P mode so whether that was the reason for slightly blurred wing on the photo I'm not sure the Butterfly certainly didn't move and the rest of the butterfly was okay. I'll have to try the A mode and see what happens. Thanks again Mike Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-16 10:45 PM GMT

Great shots there Mike 😊 I must say that I was impressed with Daneway – the reserve is much more 'user friendly' than its competitors 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 03-Jul-16 11:14 PM GMT

Thank you Wurzel. I have known Daneway Banks for many years and always find it a 'special' place, and not only for the Large Blue. There are many other wonderful places along the Cotswold 'edge'; an exciting area for naturalists 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 04-Jul-16 07:19 PM GMT

Try this info Goldie

<http://www.picturecorrect.com/tips/the-exposure-triangle-explained/>

It doesn't explain depth of field but is a good stating point.

Sorry Mike to hijack you diary and feel free to move this post to a more appropriate forum.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Jul-16 11:16 PM GMT

BBOWT Bix Reserve, 5th July 2016

I paid a morning visit, today, to the splendid BBOWT reserve, tucked away in a narrow valley at Bix Bottom, near Henley, Oxon.

It was something of a surprise to see that we seem to have flipped from Spring to late-season butterflies almost overnight. Yes, there were plenty of Marbled Whites and a few **Large Skippers**:



BBOWT Bix reserve, Oxon – 5th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/640s@f/8 ISO640

But, overall, the impression was of Meadow Browns, Ringlets, and Speckled Woods. I had hoped for a few large Fritillaries but none on the wing as yet. A

mating pair of **Meadow Browns** posed well for a photo, showing the different colouration of the two sexes:



BBOWT Bix reserve, Oxon - 5th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/640s@f/7.1 ISO640

In a more wooded part of the reserve, **Ringlets** were taking advantage of the dew on many of the leaves. I have tended to assume butterfly wings are symmetrical but, on this example, there is an extra small eyed-ring on the right fore-wing that is not on the left:



BBOWT Bix reserve, Oxon - 5th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/320s@f/11 ISO640

The other woodland butterfly was the **Speckled Wood**, here in the classic pose within a sunspot, waiting to sally forth, to challenge any intruder:



BBOWT Bix reserve, Oxon - 5th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/400s@f/13 ISO640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 06-Jul-16 04:40 PM GMT

Great shots Mike, I find Ringlets very hard to photograph they never keep still long enough and the Meadow brown's seem to hide in the grass all the time 😊

I'd trouble with my 70-300 lens on Monday, it just packed in and stopped working, I thought it was the Camera at first, any way I've been to the Camera shop (they're very nice and very helpful) he said it was definitely the Lens and not the Camera, (the Lens was faulty) I thought I'd just tell you with you having just bought a similar one, I got another one which he said was better and took sharper Pic's, I'll soon find out. 😊 I'd had the other lens for about two years, I was just relieved it wasn't the camera. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Jul-16 05:10 PM GMT

Thank you for commenting, Goldie. I'd read your own diary post about your lens and hope that its replacement works well. Sometimes, a new piece of kit can provide inspiration!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 06-Jul-16 10:09 PM GMT

Great shots of the aberrant Ringlet Mike 😊 I always check the Ringlets for odd numbers of spots – it's my warm up before the hedge Browns come on the scene 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Jul-16 10:59 PM GMT

'Roman Road' Otmoor, Oxon – 6th July 2016

I made another visit to the 'Roman Road' on Otmoor, this afternoon. The ground underfoot was much drier than on my last visit and there was plenty of warm sunshine. Nevertheless, there were far fewer butterflies on the wing than I have experienced in previous years.

Most of those seen were **Meadow Browns**, together with several **Ringlets**, many of which were unusually small in size. Apart from these, there were just a few **Large Skippers** and **Small Whites**.

One aim of my visit was to try out the capabilities of my 100–400mm lens, with its close-focus capability. I found that the long reach of this lens made it relatively easy to take close up views of feeding butterflies without disturbing them in any way. For example, the following photo of a Meadow Brown clearly shows the vestigial front legs that are useless for walking, as well as the details of the proboscis:



Otmoor, Oxon – 6th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/800s@f/11 ISO640

The stand-off capability of this lens was even more useful for dragonfly photos, since these insects have superb eyesight that makes them difficult to approach. This colourful insect is a Ruddy Darter (*Sympetrum sanguineum*), keeping watch for prey, from its vantage point:



Otmoor, Oxon - 6th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/320s@f/11 ISO640

The stand-off capability also makes it possible to frame butterflies that are lurking amongst the grasses and very nervous of close approach, as in the case of this Ringlet:



Otmoor, Oxon - 6th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/11 ISO640

I bought this lens mainly for bird photography and, although I have not had much practice yet, I was pleased with its ability to capture a Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) as it ranged along a hedgerow, keeping its distance from me:



Otmoor, Oxon - 6th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/14 ISO640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 07-Jul-16 08:48 AM GMT

The stand-off capability also makes it possible to frame butterflies that are lurking amongst the grasses and very nervous of close approach I might have missed the details so apologies if I did.

What sort of operating distance can you use?

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 07-Jul-16 11:34 AM GMT

Hi Jack. The closest focus distance of the lens is 1.3m (measured from the sensor plane). I guess I was about 2m away, for the butterfly and dragonfly photos. According to the lens specs., the magnification at closest focus is 0.25X. Remembering that the sensor is smaller than a 35mm frame, this is equivalent to 0.5X on a 35mm camera, which was the maximum magnification of my old Tamron macro lens! Put another way, the sensor size is 17.3 mm X 13 mm, so an area of 7cm X 5cm is covered at closest focus. The high image quality provided by the 16MP sensor allows further cropping, to show details such as the head of the Meadow Brown.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 07-Jul-16 05:34 PM GMT

Night Sky – Saturn

Guy Padfield recently posted some night sky photos <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=4872&start=2600#p111886> showing, in particular, two planets that are currently very bright in the Southern sky. around midnight. While he drew attention to Mars, which I think is rather like a glowing coal, I have always been fascinated by Saturn, ever since I first saw it through my small birding telescope. No- one could possibly have guessed that an object like this existed until Galileo first looked through his telescope! He was initially puzzled and thought there might be two moons alongside the planet or that it had something like jug handles! It was later (1659) that Huyghens established that there is actually a system of rings around the planet.

If you have a small telescope, I recommend having a look or it's even possible to get a photo if you have a long tele lens. Don't expect too much since, even with my 400 mm lens, the image only covers a few pixels on my sensor, so there's not much detail. It's actually quite bright, so there is no problem from needing long exposures. I just marvel to see such an extraordinary object!



Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 08-Jul-16 07:51 PM GMT

Bernwood (Oakley Wood), Oxon, 8th July 2016

Having seen reports of Purple Emperor being seen in Bernwood, I planned a visit there this morning. Then, I found the day started very cloudy, with a cool wind, and had second thoughts. Fortunately, the cloud started to break around 11am and the weather forecast suggested the improvement might continue, so I made the short journey to North Oxford and, the sunshine did indeed continue.

There were several hopeful watchers in the car-park but HIM had only been seen briefly at tree-top level, so I decided to walk along the main ride and see what was about. The answer was, rather little, apart from plenty of Ringlets and quite a few **Large Skippers** – this male showing what big eyes he's got:



Bernwood, Oxon – 8th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/200s@f/9 ISO640

I examined the Oak trees around the central cross-roads, in the hope of Purple Hairstreaks but found none, so I continued further along the main ride. At last, I spotted a Silver-washed Fritillary, dashing through the trees along the edge of the ride, but it was definitely not interested in stopping for a photo! The season seems to be running later here than in the Southern woods and I only saw a couple of other SWF during my walk.

We are still in the Vanessa 'lull', so there were no Commas but, then, I spotted a lone **White Admiral** feeding on Bramble flowers. I was glad of my long lens, since the bramble was on the other side of a deep ditch but at least this butterfly stayed around for a few photos:



Bernwood, Oxon – 8th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/160s@f/11 ISO 1000



Bernwood, Oxon – 8th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/800s@f/11 ISO 1000

So, I ambled slowly back towards the car-park, seeing a few Dragonflies near the pond, including a female Broad-bodied Chaser 'striking' the surface of the water as she deposited her eggs. Plenty more Ringlets and the occasional Marbled White, still looking surprisingly fresh:



Bernwood, Oxon – 8th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1250s@f/11 ISO 1000
Another Large Skipper obligingly posed 'head on' – if only Smessex were so obliging!



Bernwood, Oxon – 8th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/200s@f/11 ISO 640
When I reached the car-park, I learned that a Purple Emperor had been 'grounded' on the track for about 15 minutes while i was away. Ah well, we can't always be in the right place at the right time 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 11-Jul-16 11:42 PM GMT

Return to Bernwood – 11th July 2016

Being retired, I prefer to avoid popular sites at weekends but I have been noting that, over the last few days, at least one Purple Emperor has been seen in the Oakley Wood car-park at around 11am each morning.

Today, therefore, I returned to **Bernwood**, arriving at about 10:30am, and there, in the middle of the car-park, was a grounded PE!

I immediately stopped and jumped out of the car but the butterfly was skittish and, after moving around a few different spots, it retreated into an adjacent oak tree. It turned out that he was kindly allowing me to park properly and get all my camera gear together, before descending again, onto the path linking the car-park to the main ride. Once landed, he started to draw moisture from a partially-shaded damp spot, amongst the gravel.

I started by taking a series of photos that show the dexterity with which he could manoeuvre his proboscis around the damp patch:



While most people are drawn to the purple upper-surface, the underside of this butterfly is also extremely striking, I spent some time trying to capture this aspect, while experimenting with the close-up capabilities of my long-focus lens. Using a focal length of 400mm (with a field of view equivalent to an 800mm lens on a 35mm camera), I was able to capture detailed views from a 'safe' working distance, not disturbing the butterfly at all. I am still on a 'learning curve' with this lens and now I was having to learn very quickly 😊, aiming to achieve a suitable balance of shutter speed and depth of field!



Bernwood, Oxon - 11th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/400s@f/10 ISO640

I was keen to try and capture some 'different' views, concentrating on details, such as the very sturdy proboscis and noting how, when collecting moisture from the ground, the tip is 'turned under' to direct the fluid into the groove that runs along the length of the proboscis. To my great delight, my subject proved very co-operative and soon opened his wings to display the royal purple:



Bernwood, Oxon - 11th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/500s@f/10 ISO640



Bernwood, Oxon – 11th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/200s@f/14 ISO1250
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 12-Jul-16 04:14 PM GMT

Well done Mike! Very well done 😊 I don't think there are that many folk who have seen them yet this year (let alone down on the ground) given the dreadful weather. Great shots too – very interesting.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 12-Jul-16 07:12 PM GMT

Thank you, Pauline. I'm trying to find some new ways of showing features of these butterflies, rather than repeating the 'same old photos' over and over again! Imagination is the limiting factor!

My new lens is great for zooming in from a long 'stand-off' distance. I was delighted to find this PE, after too many rather disappointing trips of late.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 12-Jul-16 11:35 PM GMT

Great shots Mike, 🍷 I hope I see one soon Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 13-Jul-16 10:48 AM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

I hope I see one soon Goldie

I hope so too – there's nothing quite like that moment when they open their wings and the brilliant purple sheen catches the light 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-Jul-16 06:04 PM GMT

Bernwood, Oxon – 16th July

I made another visit to Bernwood, yesterday (16th July), this time in the company of my Son and recently-arrived Grandson. Once again it was a warm, sunny afternoon, and a **Purple Emperor** was flying around the car-park when we arrived. This time, he did not land for a 'portrait session' and we soon set off along the main ride.

As on my other recent visits, butterfly numbers seemed rather low, with **Ringlets** the only species present in abundance. These had now been joined by some **Meadow Browns**, which I hadn't seen earlier in the week. This one has a double-pupilled eye-spot:



Bernwood, Oxon – 16th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/640s@f/9 ISO8000

Large Skippers and **Marbled Whites** were still to be seen but **Silver-washed Fritillaries** (SWF) remained few in number. At one point, however, we witnessed a 'mad-cap' chase of three SWF (presumably two males chasing a female) that continued for several minutes around us. Sometimes, they skimmed close by our heads, while at others they rose high over the tree-tops. It was remarkable to watch, and we wondered how long they could keep it up but, eventually, they all disappeared deeper into the forest, so we have no idea of the outcome! I managed to grab a few photos during the chase and made the following triptych:



Bernwood, Oxon – 16th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens

When we returned to the car-park, a newly-emerged **Purple Hairstreak** was skimming low over the ground and pausing occasionally in the grass. I was unable to capture any reasonable photos but it was a female and, after a while, it realised its place was up in the trees and so disappeared from view. We witnessed similar behaviour by another individual a little later, as afternoon blended into early evening.

A **White Admiral** ranged around the oak trees surrounding the car-park and a **Comma** basked on a leaf, soaking up some late sun and showing off the eponymous 'comma' mark:



Bernwood, Oxon – 16th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO800

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 18-Jul-16 11:28 PM GMT

Cracking close ups of His Nibbs Mike 😊👍 If only all retired folk were as considerate as you Mike – round my way it seems that all the retired folk wait until the weekend before doing their food shopping, going to the bank, making inquiries at the library, going to the Post Office etc all activities that I have to try and cram into a Saturday morning as I can't do most of them during the week 😊😊 – oh well one day I might be retired and then I can do exactly the same 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Jul-16 05:06 PM GMT

Thank you, Wurzel I sometimes forget my age and 'status', and find myself muttering about all these oldies slowing down the bus queue! Thank goodness I became 'computer-literate' early on and can do most chores via the internet, rather than in person 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Jul-16 05:40 PM GMT

Old Castle Down, Wales – 19th July 2016

My visits to **Old Castle Down**, near Bridgend in South Wales, have always been somewhat trying; the most recent (*19th July*) being no exception, because of the weather! I had hoped that it would be a little cooler near the coast but, in this, I was disappointed and, apart from some breeze at times, the Down was furnace-like!

My main aim was to see and photograph the **High Brown Fritillaries** (HBF) at this site and, in this, I was considerably more successful than on two previous attempts. On previous visits, the HBF had all been found at the Eastern end of the Down, farthest from the lay-by where I parked (SS 898763). So, I decided to tackle the stiff initial climb from the road straight away, rather than expending energy on chasing the Fritillaries that I could see in the surrounding bracken.

There were several more Fritillaries to be seen during the climb, all dashing at high speed over the bracken. At the top, it seemed much quieter but I pressed on along the now-level track to the Eastern edge. When I arrived at the slope above the railway cutting, there were very few butterflies to be seen, apart from some Ringlets lazily wandering around the bank of bramble flowers, along the edge of the woods. Then, two Fritillaries appeared on the brambles, so I made my way down the slope for a closer look. The butterflies promptly disappeared back into the trees and did not re-appear over the next half-hour.

There is a narrow path that runs along the wooded Northern edge of the Down, leading back towards where I had parked, so I followed this, hoping for more butterflies. At this time of year (a little later than my previous visits), the bracken is pretty well-grown, so negotiating the 'path' was not easy at times but it was much more rewarding, in terms of butterflies. Apart from **Ringlets**, I saw my first few **Gatekeepers** of this year and then, at last, there was a Fritillary, nectaring on brambles!

At first, looking through binoculars, I was very confused – was it HBF or Dark Green Fritillary (DGF)? I kept oscillating between the two, until the reason became clear – one hind-wing was badly damaged, removing most of the all-important red-ringed spots! One remaining spot confirmed **High Brown Fritillary**:



Old Castle Down, Bridgend – 19th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens

Photos do not reveal the full story of chasing a butterfly that flits rapidly from one spray of bramble flowers to another, often visiting sprays that are concealed behind nearer vegetation. It needs patience, plus a lot of wasted shots, to get some that show the main features of this butterfly:



Old Castle Down, Bridgend – 19th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/8 ISO640

Once again, I was very grateful for the long-range capability of my 100-400mm lens, although it cannot solve the problem of intervening vegetation!

Most of my photos were of the damaged individual but I did manage a few of another specimen in much better condition, although it was far less co-operative for photography. My impressions were that HBF were spread widely across the Down and that DGF were much less abundant than on my

previous visits. This may be because my visit was about 3 weeks later than in previous years.



Old Castle Down, Bridgend - 19th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/800@f/9 ISO640



Old Castle Down, Bridgend - 19th July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/9 ISO640

By now, with the afternoon merging into early evening but with little drop in temperature, I was feeling thoroughly well-roasted, so decided that it was time to retreat to the air-conditioning of the car, and the journey home along the M4.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Jul-16 07:32 PM GMT

garden, Abingdon - 23rd July 2016

After several fruitless attempts to photograph members of the Spring brood of **Holly Blues** in my garden, I have had more success with their offspring! Whereas, throughout the Spring, these butterflies stayed resolutely in the highest branches of the trees, I spotted this individual sitting on a more accessible leaf. Moreover, it remained in position while I went indoors and found my camera!



garden, Abingdon - 23rd July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/200s@f/8 ISO800

Although it stayed in the same area of the leaf, it was in fact moving fairly constantly - waving its antennae and rhythmically moving its hind wings up and down, as well as turning slightly to face in different directions.



garden, Abingdon – 23rd July 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/160s@f/11 ISO800

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 23-Jul-16 07:48 PM GMT

Mike: ~~quote~~Moreover, it remained in position while I went indoors and found my camera! I have wondered at times whether I should carry a camera all the while. There was case in point this afternoon.

Green Woodpecker in the garden. Now in this part of the world, it's apparently a real rarity. I went for the camera and.....bird had gone. So now the county recorder wants a tedious description – light angle, what optical device I used, and so on. A mega form for a [mega] rarity. I rather wish I had never seen the damn thing.

Of course in the south, Green Woodpeckers are ten a penny.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Jul-16 08:45 PM GMT

A phone camera covers a lot of things although I rarely remember it at the right moment! If you send me a photo of your garden, i can Photoshop in a CW – for a suitable fee 😊 Or you could make a DAP 'painting' and tell the recorder you dashed off a quick sketch while it was there!

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 24-Jul-16 03:11 AM GMT

~~quote~~A phone camera covers a lot of things although I rarely remember it at the right moment!! had thought of that but the tiny screen of a smart phone is far too fiddly for me and in any case I would struggle with [what are to me] the complications of a smart phone. My "stupid" phone is difficult enough with buttons that have multi purposes. I have been left behind.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 07-Aug-16 02:20 PM GMT

Aston Rowant – 5th August 2016

Silver-spotted Skippers seem to be flying much earlier than just a few years ago. I went to look for them at **Aston Rowant NNR** on *Friday, 5th August*.

Whereas the section of the Reserve to the North of the M40 is, perhaps, better known, there is a much quieter part, away from the constant roar of traffic, just across the lane from the car-park at Cowleaze Wood. This Western-facing slope, known as **Bald Hill**, has plenty of SSSkippers and also has good numbers of the Nationally-rare Chiltern Gentian.

In fact, for botanists, this is a superb part of the reserve, with Frog Orchids also to be found, by diligent searching amongst the rich flora of the slope. One problem is that a great many of these chalk-downland plants have very spiny leaves and stems, which make getting down low, for close-up photography, a rather painful process!



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Flora at Bald Hill

I noticed that many of the butterflies I saw were carrying red mites – which seem to be very common this year, as on this **Meadow Brown**:



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/1600s@f/8 ISO800

I also noticed that many of the **Gatekeepers** were very small – almost 'skipper-size'. Perhaps the poor weather, earlier in the year, hindered caterpillar growth?



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/640s@f/7.1 ISO800



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/200s@f/14 ISO800

As usual, the **Silver-spotted Skippers** were quite difficult to pin down, as they flitted rapidly between the Scabious flower heads. I caught up with my first photo opportunity as one lurked low-down in the grass – apparently egg-laying, although I only spotted this when looking at the photo:



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/2000s@f/8 ISO800

My long-lens proved very useful in catching the Skippers feeding, without disturbing these very alert insects! The 'head-on' shot shows how skilfully the proboscis can be directed into individual florets:



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/2500s@f/8 ISO800



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/1250s@f/11 ISO800



Aston Rowant NNR – 5th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – !/800s@f/11 ISO800

Surprisingly, I saw no Blues – neither Common nor Chalkhill – and only one Vanessa – a Red Admiral that flew over but did not pause for a photo.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 07–Aug–16 10:35 PM GMT

Great Silver–spots Mike 😊 I know what you mean about absence of Blues – could it be that the 'June gap' was late this year and was more like the 'July gap' 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 07–Aug–16 11:02 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. I'm finding this long lens extremely useful for flighty species like Skippers. I can stand back from a likely feeding area, with the camera on a monopod, and just swing around, to track the critters as they nip from flower to flower! I hope you are right about the 'gap' and that we enjoy an extended season 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 09–Aug–16 12:21 PM GMT

Seven Barrows – 8th August 2016

The BBOWT reserve called 'Seven Barrows' is in a quiet valley, north of Lambourn, where the land rises towards the ancient Ridgeway track. This is the site of a Bronze Age cemetery, with about 30 barrows dotted across the site. It is usually an excellent site for chalk–downland butterfly species but, on this visit, as at so many places recently, numbers were severely depleted and I only saw three Chalkhill Blues! After a promising start, the weather turned quite cool, with a strong breeze blowing across the site, so it is possible that many butterflies were 'keeping their heads down'. The flower heads and grasses were all waving in the wind, making photography rather tricky!

As I commented in a previous post, red mites seem prolific this year, with most of the butterflies I saw carrying these, doubtless, unwelcome passengers – in some cases, several.

Both Small and Essex Skippers were present, braving the cool conditions better than other species. At first, I thought the following example was an Essex, since the antennae tips looked very dark, but a closer examination revealed the orange undersides to the chisel-ended tips of a **Small Skipper**. Note the mites clustered under the head:



Seven Barrows, Lambourn – 8th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400 Leica lens – 1/640s@f/9 ISO800

A little later, I saw what, at first, seemed to be the same butterfly, since it had a similar cluster of mites. but then I realised these were on the opposite side of the head and that this was an **Essex Skipper**, with totally-black, rounded tips to the antennae:



Seven Barrows, Lambourn – 8th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400 Leica lens – 1/640s@f/9 ISO800

I saw a couple of male **Chalkhill Blues**, which rapidly disappeared into the long grasses, and just one very well-worn female, with aberrant underside spotting, which was nectaring on the plentiful Knapweed.



Seven Barrows, Lambourn – 8th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400 Leica lens – 1/1000s@f/8 ISO800

Apart from those, there were a few **Gatekeepers**, also carrying mites (barely visible in the photo), very few Meadow Browns, and I saw just one Green-veined White.



Seven Barrows, Lambourn – 8th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40–150mm lens – 1/800s@f/8 ISO800
One unfortunate **Meadow Brown** (I think) had been neatly packaged in silk wrappings by an attendant spider.



Seven Barrows, Lambourn – 8th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm Leica lens – 1/640s@f/6.3 ISO800
The most plentiful lepidoptera were **Shaded Broad-bar** (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*) moths, which were frequently disturbed from the long grasses:



Seven Barrows, Lambourn – 8th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm Leica lens – 1/500s@f/7.1 ISO800
Finally, the Ragwort plants were well-populated with the 'rugby jersey' striped Cinnabar moth larvae.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 13-Aug-16 04:54 PM GMT

Otmoor, Oxon – 12th August 2016

I took advantage of a bright sunny afternoon yesterday (12th August) to re-visit the Roman Road at **Otmoor**, in the hope of finding Brown Hairstreaks.

On arrival, the most conspicuous flying insects were huge numbers of dragonflies, mostly Common Darters, just beginning to develop their red colouration, with larger Southern and Brown Hawkers cruising at a higher-level, overhead.

Butterflies were not particularly abundant but, soon, several smallish brown butterflies started to appear. Many were unusually small Gatekeepers, doing quite a good 'hairstreak impression', as well as some brightly coloured **Meadow Browns** – the one shown here has a barely visible second 'pupil' in the eye-spot, which was more obvious on the underside:



Otmoor, Oxon – 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1250@f/8 ISO800

The sunlight was rather harsh, which created some difficulty for photography, especially when a few **Green-veined Whites** appeared. This one shows the subtle difference in tint between the wings – slightly bluish for the fore-wing and green for the hind-wing:



Otmoor, Oxon – 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/2000@f/11 ISO500

It was good to see **Brimstones** back on the wing again, after a long summer lull. Strong back-lighting make this female a good subject for photos:



Otmoor, Oxon - 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/1000@f/11 ISO800

While I was watching this butterfly, someone told me that others had found a **Brown Hairstreak** further along the ride, so I hurried for a look. I was in time to catch a few shots, as it nectared on a small group of thistles before disappearing high into one of the Ash trees. Again, I found the contrasty lighting was quite difficult to manage, for photography.



Otmoor, Oxon - 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/800@f/9 ISO800

Following this successful sighting, I continued onto the open moor, where there was plenty of bird interest, including Marsh Harrier, a pair of Cranes, and a http://oxonbirding.blogspot.co.uk/2016/08/otmoor-rspb-10th-august_10.html that has been present for a few days. All were too distant for decent photos but added to the pleasure of the day.

I returned to the Roman Road, hoping for more Brown Hairstreak (BH) sightings and, not far from the car-park end, came across a very splendid example that had chosen to nectar on various white flowers. This really created photographic problems and I didn't handle the situation too well. If I had thought more (but it was hot), I could, perhaps, have used some fill-in flash, to even-up the strong contrasts. Alternatively, I could have used my camera's HDR mode for similar purposes. In fact, I did neither, and ended up with some very over-contrasty JPEGs.

Fortunately, I always have my camera set to take simultaneous JPEG and RAW files, so all was not lost, although it took some post-processing effort! Usually, I have found JPEGs from my Olympus are so good that I simply file the RAW images, as a reserve of 'digital negatives', but not this time.

The most extreme example was when the BH decided to visit a white Convolvulus flower and, since this was one of the few occasions when she showed her upper wing surfaces, I was keen to keep the shot. The flower was completely 'bleached' in the JPEG but I was able to recover some highlight detail by processing the RAW file, which I think has improved the shot. I use Corel AfterShot 2 as my RAW converter and find this a good program to use - fast, with a clutter-free, simple screen layout, and plenty of controls for image-adjustment. I chose this software after trialling various alternatives, including Lightroom, which I found rather over-complex.

It's not a great photo but I show the two (JPEG and RAW) results below, to demonstrate the additional detail that can be recovered. To be fair, the flower looked pretty blindingly white in the field!



Otmoor, Oxon - 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/500@f/6.3 ISO500

Several other shots benefitted from RAW processing, to keep some detail in the flowers, while showing the brilliant colour of this freshly-emerged insect. I have never seen such vivid red markings, which looked almost as though she has LEDs concealed in the 'tails'!



Otmoor, Oxon - 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/400@f/10 ISO500



Otmoor, Oxon - 12th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/500@f/10 ISO500

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by trevor, 13-Aug-16 05:08 PM GMT

Lovely Brown Hairstreak images, Mike.
The first one in particular shows the texture of the wings nicely, far from smooth !.

Trevor.

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 13-Aug-16 06:44 PM GMT

My favourite is the final BH image.

I am starting to think that I need to have a few breaks down south next summer especially for Emperor and Brown Hairstreak seasons.

I know a lot of people would die for a Scotch Argus but here they are in every suitable locality (as are Ringlets and Speckled Woods). I had a "butterfly" visitor last week. "That looks right for Scotch Argus" we would say and invariably, it was: we got a blasé about them. I do suspect though – having had plenty of rain but enough sun this summer – that it has been an exceptionally good year for Scotch Argus

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 13-Aug-16 06:56 PM GMT

Superb images of the BH Mike. I had a similar problem with the bright light – even the Hemp Agrimony looked white – but your post processing has obviously done the trick. You must be delighted with the results 🍷

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 13-Aug-16 07:40 PM GMT

Many thanks for the comments, Trevor, Jack, and Pauline. I've seen some pretty good BH posts already on this site!

The second one I saw on Otmoor was such a beautiful specimen that I was disappointed at first not to have made a better job of the photography. Fortunately, post-processing saved the day and the final results do convey something of what a splendid insect this was 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 16-Aug-16 04:57 PM GMT

Aston Rowant – 15th August 2016

A return visit to Aston Rowant NNR yesterday (15th August) – this time to the South-facing slope immediately above the M40 – yielded far more Chalkhill Blues than my previous visit, 10 days ago.

This time, the slope was drenched in sunshine and the clumps of Marjoram along the top were attracting good numbers of Chalkhill Blue and Brown Argus butterflies, together with Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers.

Some of the **Brown Argus** looked freshly emerged and had a colourful oily-sheen on their upper-wings, which produced an eye-catching shimmer of green and purple in the bright sunlight:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/10 ISO640

I followed the path along the top of the slope to the more open grass slopes of Beacon Hill, where I hoped to find Adonis Blue but, apart from couple of distant 'possibles', they do not seem to be on the wing yet. There were, however, several **Common Blues**, including some striking 'blue' females:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon - 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/1000s@f/10 ISO640

It's not too difficult to be led into mistaking a Common Blue for an Adonis, as illustrated below, where the markings on the opposite wing give the impression of a chequered fringe:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon - 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/1250s@f/11 ISO640

But, when she opened her wings, this was another bright 'blue' female CB. The following male CB shows his double fringe very clearly but also demonstrates how, when the outer fringe wears down, the inner fringe can give a chequered impression:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon - 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/2000s@f/11 ISO640

Many of the **Chalkhill Blues** were relatively worn but there were a few examples that still showed the brilliance of their silver upper wings, overlaid with fine silky blue hairs:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/11 ISO640

Again, some of the female Chalkhills were particularly striking, with a strong contrast between their chocolate fore-wings and sparkling hind-wings:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/10 ISO640

Silver-spotted Skippers were much in evidence and, later in the afternoon, some became more sedentary, even basking on the main path:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/10 ISO640

Other butterflies enjoying the late-afternoon sunshine were Brimstones and one or two very bright **Small Tortoiseshells**, which angled themselves to receive the most warmth from the lower sun:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon - 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/800s@f/10 ISO640

Approaching the gate that leads back to the main car-park, one crosses a sort of 'Wallace Line', where the Silver-spotted Skippers of the main slope are replaced by **Small Skippers**, one of which provided my last photo of the day:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon - 15th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/800s@f/10 ISO640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 17-Aug-16 10:22 PM GMT

Just catching up Mike - that final image of the Brostreak is a stunner, I see what you mean about the red markings! 😊 Love the sheen on the Brown Argus too 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 18-Aug-16 11:56 AM GMT

Thanks for 'catching up' Wurzel - yes, that BH was a remarkable specimen! Being retired, I have the luxury of having time to keep up to date - I see you are reporting trips from June!

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 18-Aug-16 08:01 PM GMT

I'm also very envious of that Brown Hairstreak photo - and of your retired status that makes things a bit easier. 😊 🇹🇲

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 18-Aug-16 11:29 PM GMT

Must be great to live within striking distance of this site, Mike.

With all those 'late' species, it's like going back in time a few weeks.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 18-Aug-16 11:47 PM GMT

Noar Hill, Hants – 17th August 2016

It was a very hot and sunny afternoon for my first visit to Noar Hill, near Selborne, for many years. <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=6199&start=2320#p113353> had kindly offered to show me a good place to find Autumn Lady's Tresses orchids (*Spiranthes spiralis*), which were my main target for the day. These small orchids carry their white flowers in a spiral, twisting around the stem, like a plait.

Pauline spotted an unusual double-stemmed plant, which I photographed and I also used the 'stacking' capability of my Olympus camera, to take a close-up of the tiny flowers.



Noar Hill, Hants – 17th August 2016 Autumn Lady's Tresses orchid (*Spiranthes spiralis*)

Of course, we did not neglect the butterflies and, immediately on entering the track from where we left the cars, there were Holly Blues in the hedgerow. We didn't managed to spot any Brown Hairstreaks, which were probably, very sensibly, keeping out of the heat from the strong afternoon sunshine. A vivid **Red Admiral** did, however, provide a striking back-lit photo, as it nectared on the plentiful Hemp Agrimony flowers.



Noar Hill, Hants. – 17th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens – 1/640s@f/9 ISO640

A little later, I saw what was possibly the same individual, collecting moisture or sap from a stem of Hazel. The bright light brought out the remarkable cryptic underside patterns and colours very effectively:



Noar Hill, Hants.- 17th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/250s@f/6.3 ISO640

A very small dark blue butterfly turned out not to be the expected Small Blue but a tiny female **Common Blue**. She appeared to be seeking Birdsfoot Trefoil plants on which to lay, although we didn't manage to spot any eggs.



Noar Hill, Hants.- 17th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens - 1/400s@f/10 ISO640

Towards the end of the walk, I was delighted to spot a Painted Lady - only the second I have seen so far this year. She was, however, being very coy, constantly flitting and circling around numerous flower heads. She had a nick out of one wing but, fortunately, the best photo I managed to get was of her 'good' side. Like the Red Admiral, her underside showed a spectacular array of colours and markings, fully justifying the common name of this species - look at those lipstick shades, blusher, and eye-shadow palette!



Noar Hill, Hants.- 17th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/1000s@f/14 ISO640

Mike

p.s looking at <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=6199&start=2320#p113353>, it seems we both photographed the Painted Lady at the same moment, from slightly different angles!

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 19-Aug-16 05:25 PM GMT

As I predicted Mike your shots are far superior to mine. I particularly like the RA on the Hazel branch which I just wasn't quick enough to get, and that 'stacking' capability is obviously a powerful tool. Great images as usual 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 19-Aug-16 06:02 PM GMT

'Far superior' is quite an exaggeration, Pauline. When I showed my wife yours and mine of the Painted Lady, she wasn't sure which was which. Other people's photos always seem more interesting than one's own, I find. Having said that, I could see you were suffering from the relative slowness of operation of your Lumix but then, I have the weight penalty when I use the long lens. It was a great trip and your help in finding the orchids was invaluable – thank you 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Neil Freeman, 19-Aug-16 07:17 PM GMT

Hi Mike,

Great photos of the Painted Lady and Red Admiral(s). The past couple of years when I have been down at Durdle Door in Dorset in late August/early September, there have been loads of Autumn Lady's Tresses on the slopes above the famous rock arch.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 19-Aug-16 07:58 PM GMT

Thank you, Neil, for the comments and the information about the orchids at Durdle Door. That's a wonderful coast-line, so any excuse for a visit is welcome.

Re: MikeOxon

by Neil Freeman, 19-Aug-16 10:08 PM GMT

Yes, one of my favourite spots. If you do visit, look to the extreme right of the car park and there is a gate in the fence and a path across the higher slope. Follow this and you will come to another fence and a stile. Continue on this path and you will soon see Autumn Ladies Tresses. There are usually plenty of Graylings along here as well. Lower down the slope is a depression just above the lower path where I have seen Adonis blues and Clouded Yellows in the past two years. I also found a late Lulworth Skipper in that spot in early September last year.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 20-Aug-16 10:04 PM GMT

That is a cracking shot of the Painted Lady underside Mike, so sharp it looks like it's about to take off from the screen!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Aug-16 11:14 PM GMT

Thank you, Wurzel. I'm very pleased with the performance of that 100–400mm zoom lens which I bought fairly recently.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 24-Aug-16 07:59 PM GMT

Roman Road, Otmoor – 23rd August 2016

Another visit to the Roman Road on **Otmoor** showed how rapidly the vegetation changes with the coming of Autumn. On my previous visit, flowers were blooming in profusion but now, most of the colours had turned to brown and many of the tall plants had collapsed.

A male **Brown Hairstreak** was still finding nectar in some Blackberry flowers, although most of the plants were already forming fruits.



Otmoor, Oxon - 23rd August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO800



Otmoor, Oxon - 23rd August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/1000s@f/11 ISO800

I saw a female Brown Hairstreak, basking with open wings in an Oak Tree, but she flew out of sight before I had a chance to take her photo.

Later, I watched a tussle for possession of a thistle head, between a **Green-veined White** and a Hoverfly - the butterfly initially flew off when disturbed but then made a second attempt and, this time, the two insects managed to achieve peaceful co-existence:



Otmoor, Oxon - 23rd August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/1250s@f/11 ISO800

Further along the ride, a very fresh-looking **Speckled Wood** showed unusually bright Peacock colours in the hairs around its body:



Otmoor, Oxon - 23rd August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO800

I completed my walk with a photo of that rarely photographed species (!), the **Large White**. The soft evening light made it reasonably easy to capture the details on its white wings:



Otmoor, Oxon - 23rd August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/320s@f/6.3 ISO800

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 25-Aug-16 10:39 PM GMT

Really like the second Brostreak shot Mike, there's a whole palette of oranges you've brought out there 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 25-Aug-16 10:55 PM GMT

It's always nice to receive your comments, Wurzel. Those first two shots show the difference that lighting makes. In the first, the wings were in shadow and I had to lighten them quite bit in post-processing. The butterfly was turning constantly and some shots were impossible, with half the wing in sun and half in shadow but, eventually, he showed his true colours in the sunlight! Patience required, as always 😊

In fact, my favourite shot from this trip is the Speckled Wood, which shows such vivid colours around the body.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by jonhd, 25-Aug-16 11:55 PM GMT

Quickie question, Mike (better suited to the Photography section, I guess)... You have a E-M5 MkI, do you not? What's the focus acquisition performance like, compared to the E-M1 (with the Panny Leica 100-400). I have the E-M5 MkII, and find close shots (from the 1.3m [?] limit, to 3m or so) pretty iffy, at times. Even in good light, it just refuses to focus on the 'fly. Sometimes, twiddling the Panny's manual focus ring can kick it into working (I use "S-AF + MF" mode, with spot focus [and Face Detection, etc. off]). Am using the Panny's IS, with the IBIS off - and hand-holding, using that big tripod shoe as the primary grip.

I wondered whether the E-M1's contrast detection focussing makes a big difference...

Cheers, Jon

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Aug-16 12:33 AM GMT

Hi Jon - good question. So far, I haven't tried the 100-400 on my E-M5, which I keep as a backup. Close focus can be tricky, however, even with the E-M1, especially if there is background clutter to distract the AF sensing.

I used to have to give a 'helping hand' sometimes to my Nikon 300mm f/4 in similar situations, so suspect this is a common problem. My Olympus 60mm macro has switch-able focus ranges, to minimise the 'problem' but, in practice, I find the 'helping hand' is quicker!

You've prompted me to try some comparative tests with my two bodies - I'll let you know the outcome.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 26-Aug-16 06:44 AM GMT

I couldn't have put it better myself Wurzel. I, too love that shot - very Autumnal and the combination of orange and browns really add to the photo. I have been wanting one like this myself for several years now 🍁

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Aug-16 01:49 PM GMT

Very nice comment from a <http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/Photography-competition-winners2016>, Pauline 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by jonhd, 26-Aug-16 10:32 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

...Close focus can be tricky, however, even with the E-M1, especially if there is background clutter to distract the AF sensing...

Yes, that's the typical circumstance (cluttered background), Mike. Would be interested to hear your deliberations (comparing E-M5 [Contrast detect focus] with E-M1 [Contrast & Phase detect focus]).

Cheers, Jon

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Aug-16 11:45 PM GMT

Aston Rowant NNR – 26th August 2016

Another hot and sunny day prompted a return visit to the South-facing slope at Aston Rowant NNR. This time, my objective was the Adonis Blue, which I found along the earthworks around the lower part of Beacon Hill. I always get a buzz from that first glimpse of the intense electric-blue colour of the males, far outshining their Common Blue cousins.



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 26th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens – 1/1600s@f/11 ISO 640

I was pleased to realise a wish I've had for many years – to capture both Common and Adonis Blues in the same photo. An area of flowers was proving a magnet to both species and, eventually, two shared the same flower head and I managed to capture them in (momentarily) identical poses! It's a pity that the Common Blue was somewhat frayed around the edges but the key differences in colouration are very obvious (Adonis on the left):



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 26th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1250s@f/9 ISO 640

A little later the same two butterflies gave a repeat performance, this time showing their undersides. Now, the Adonis is on the right:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 26th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/2000s@f/9 ISO 640

It was hard to tear myself away from the display of all those keenly-nectaring butterflies. Most of the time, they kept their wings closed and then, suddenly, there would be a vivid flash, as one of the Adonis males moved rapidly to another flower-head. I tried to take in-flight shots during these moments but, even with a shutter speed of 1/1600s, I only got blurred results – they are very rapid flyers!

Just as I turned away from all these Blues, I spotted a Clouded Yellow, hotly pursued by a White. The White turned away and the Clouded Yellow seemed to dive into the grasses, some distance away, but I found nothing when I combed the area.

A little later, my wife, who's a much better 'spotter' than I am, noticed an unusual Small Tortoiseshell, with almost uniform red-amber colouring, without the usual yellow areas.



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 26th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1600s@f/11 ISO 640

Small Whites were especially abundant, so I took a few photos to compare with the <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB//download/file.php?id=93989&mode=view>, which I showed in a previous post. The quite strong yellow colour of the undersides was very noticeable:



Aston Rowant NNR, Oxon – 26th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/2500s@f/11 ISO 800

There were still quite a few Silver-spotted Skippers to be seen, although numbers were well down, compared with my earlier visit. Brown Argus and Meadow Browns were still widely distributed, and there were a few Chalkhill Blues, mostly looking well worn.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 27-Aug-16 04:22 PM GMT

jonhd wrote:

Yes, that's the typical circumstance (cluttered background), Mike. Would be interested to hear your deliberations (comparing E-M5 [Contrast detect focus] with E-M1 [Contrast & Phase detect focus]).

Since it's a wet afternoon, I did a quick comparison, by mounting the 100–400 lens on a tripod in front of my computer screen (with a butterfly image on the screen 😊). I could then change cameras, without moving the lens and tripod.

With the E-M1 and the lens positioned close to the minimum distance at which MF could be achieved, autofocus was rapid. I deliberately moved the MF to infinity and tried again. The focus overshot slightly and then locked on, still pretty quickly.

With the E-M5 Mk 1, it was very different. The lens, which was in exactly the same position, was very reluctant to focus and hunted back and forth before stopping with a slightly out-of-focus image and the green AF indicator flashing. I had to use MF to get a sharp image. Pressing AF then held the image but, if I threw it out of focus again, it would not re-capture.

My conclusion is that there are substantial differences in the AF capability of these two cameras. I have no idea, of course, how the E-M5 Mk2 might perform. It's difficult to find out how the E-M1 uses phase detection. Some reports suggest it only comes into play when using legacy non-micro 4/3 lenses or when using Tracking C-AF, where it is used to tell the lens which way to follow the subject. In my experiments, I was using my usual S-AF/MF mode. Regarding stabilisation (which was not needed for these tripod tests): on the E-M1, I usually set IS-auto on the camera and the lens IS then operates correctly. On the E-M5, I have to switch off the IBIS, when using lens IS.

From these tests, I suspect that using the E-M5 Mk 1 with this lens in the field might be tricky. I shall try it when conditions permit.

Hope this helps,
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by jonhd, 27-Aug-16 09:16 PM GMT

Great stuff, Mike – and such a rapid report!

MikeOxon wrote:

Since it's a wet afternoon, I did a quick comparison, by mounting the 100–400 lens on a tripod in front of my computer screen (with a butterfly image on the screen 😊). I could then change cameras, without moving the lens and tripod.

I'd say that is considerably less taxing than real life ('fly on screen is 2-D; 'fly in real life is 3-D). Presumably there was also some screen real-estate around the 'fly (i.e. in the same plane), whereas in real life, distant objects about the 'fly. And, all of that said, you experienced considerably different behaviour (between the 2 cameras, with the 100–400 lens). Blimey! Makes you wonder...

MikeOxon wrote:

It's difficult to find out how the E-M1 uses phase detection. Some reports suggest it only comes into play when using legacy non-micro 4/3 lenses or when using Tracking C-AF, where it is used to tell the lens which way to follow the subject.

What do manufacturers (such as Oly) do to 'cripple' the AF performance – which algorithms do they disable – of the cheaper cameras? I might repeat your test, with my E-M5 II, and my 'old' E-M10...

Thanks Mike, Jon

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 27-Aug-16 09:40 PM GMT

The juxtaposed Common and Adonis Blues make a great photo, Mike. I know the wear is different, but when together, you cannot mistake one for the other. I'm glad they are finally out up there too – I must pay another visit. I also like the unusual Tortoiseshell. It really is quite striking without any yellow on it. 😊

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 27-Aug-16 11:23 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

The juxtaposed Common and Adonis Blues make a great photo, Mike. I know the wear is different, but when together, you cannot mistake one for the other. I'm glad they are finally out up there too – I must pay another visit. I also like the unusual Tortoiseshell. It really is quite striking without any yellow on it.

Yes, I was very pleased to get the two together as it's something I've wanted to do for a very long time. Even better that the wings were at the same angles in the same lighting! Next time, I'll hope for a fresher Common Blue 😊

As I mentioned, it was my wife who drew attention to the Tort. We were trying to think what was different about it and then saw a 'normal' one, which provided the answer!

I hope you manage to fit in another visit – I think AR is at its best towards the end of the season, and you may find an elusive Clouded Yellow.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Neil Freeman, 28-Aug-16 10:28 AM GMT

Hi Mike,

Great reports and photos from Aston Rowant, a favourite site and one I haven't managed to get down to this year. I particularly like the 'red' Small Tortoiseshell, a nice find 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 29-Aug-16 11:26 PM GMT

I keep coming back to that Small Tortoiseshell Mike – it's a beauty – I keep having to do a double take to make sure it's definitely a Small Tortoiseshell and not one of it's rarer cousins 🤔😬🐢

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 29-Aug-16 11:51 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

.....I keep having to do a double take to make sure it's definitely a Small Tortoiseshell and not one of it's rarer cousins...

Thoughts like that flashed through my mind, too, for a few moments – especially when my wife commented that it looked rather large.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 31-Aug-16 10:30 PM GMT

Warburg Reserve, Bix – 30th August 2016

A short, late-afternoon visit to the Warburg Reserve at Bix, near Henley, found it very quiet, even though it was a warm sunny day.

I had hoped I might find a Clouded Yellow, since this area has proved attractive to them in previous years, but no luck this time.

While walking along the main ride, I spotted a juvenile Spotted Flycatcher make a dash at a white butterfly. It successfully carried it back to its branch but then managed to let it escape from its beak, when the butterfly continued as though nothing had happened. Presumably, such encounters are the cause behind many torn wings.

A patch of Marjoram provided an attractive feeding station. Some of the small butterflies that I initially thought were Brown Argus turned out to be Common Blues. A comparison between one of these small males and a 'regular' **Common Blue** is shown in the following pair of photos:



BBOWT Bix, Oxon – 30th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens – 1/1250@f/11 ISO 640
Then, amongst the blues, I spotted a bright **Small Copper**:



BBOWT Bix, Oxon – 30th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens – 1/1000@f/11 ISO 640
At the end of the ride, the path descends through woodland, where Speckled Woods were vying for sun-spots.

Returning towards the car-park, along the lower former rifle range, I also found a few **Small Heaths**.



BBOWT Bix, Oxon - 30th August 2016 Olympus E-M1 with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/800@f/10 ISO 640

A large Buddleia bush near the Visitor Centre attracted both a Small Tortoiseshell and a Red Admiral but they both seemed intent on feeding from the opposite side of the shrub from my camera!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 01-Sep-16 04:55 PM GMT

Great shots Mike and the fact you keep seeing Small Tort's is fantastic , they really are rare these days up here.

I was interested in the photo you took of the other Tortoiseshell on catching up on your posts, it did look like a Large Tort I checked my book and it looks Identical to one except the Large Tort in my book had no White at all, great find though Mike. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 01-Sep-16 05:21 PM GMT

Goldie M says that [quote][Small Tortoiseshells] really are rare these days up herNot quite sure where you are Goldie.

Small Tortoiseshells have been truly abundant here near the coast of the Moray Firth although I suspect that many have already entered hibernation (several attempts to come indoors for example). Equally, Peacocks have been numerous. It is possible that Small Torts don't altogether enjoy the heat these days in the south and are much happier here. August mean daily maximum 19C, mean daily sunshine just shy of 6 hours. August really was a glorious month.

I liked that aberrant Tortoiseshell Mike. Never seen one like that.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Sep-16 06:22 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, I think you will find that the pattern of black spots is different on a Large Tortoiseshell and the ground colour is browner.

If Small Tortoiseshell's are rare where you are, Goldie, I think it must be a Lancashire 'thing', since they seem reasonably plentiful here, although not as abundant as in some years. They had a 'dip' around the Millennium but seem to have recovered fairly well, since.

Good to know they are abundant near you, Jack.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 01-Sep-16 10:18 PM GMT

Ditto.

There's no shortage of Torties in south Wales. In fact, we could send a few up north if you so wished!

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 02-Sep-16 08:24 AM GMT

[quote]David...we could send a few up north if you so wished!Lancashire is down south from here. It's a bit like those road signs you see on the motorways in the far north of England - signs still saying "North" always amuse me.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 02-Sep-16 07:03 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, usually there are loads of Small Tortoiseshell' s at this time of year in my Garden in(Westhoughton Lanc's) that's where here is jack 😊
That's what I and my friends can't understand, I was taking shot's of them from July through to October last year , not just the odd one or two like I've done this year but loads, so far this year I've seen none since the 30th of July that's why I'm concerned, any way they've forecast nice weather from Tuesday onwards so who knows the warmth might bring them out again. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Sep-16 12:00 AM GMT

National Botanic Garden of Wales – 3rd September 2016

A visit to the National Botanic Garden of Wales was not planned as a butterfly trip but was primarily to attend the Orchid Festival. In previous years, I have photographed butterflies that were taking advantage of the many flowering plants in the garden. There seemed to be little chance during this visit, however, in the face of weather that can only be described as wet, windy, and generally horrid! Indeed, all along the M4, signs warned of the poor driving conditions.

It turned out, however, that I had not done my homework and that there is currently a very good butterfly exhibition in progress in the tropical house – <https://botanicgarden.wales/post/2016/09/plas-pilipala-glasswings/>. Since the first butterflies only arrived in June of this year, the progress that has been achieved by the team is remarkable.



Plas Pilipala, Wales – 3rd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 9–18mm lens – 1/320s@f/9 ISO 800

During my visit, I was very impressed by the care with which the team has prepared and is maintaining the environment for the butterflies. Although there were artificial feeding stations, most of the butterflies were feeding naturally from the great variety of flowers in the glasshouse. Such has been the success of the venture, so far, that many of the butterflies now flying are the result of eggs laid by the first arrivals. With help from the staff, I was able to find all the life stages, as shown below:



Plas Pilipala, Wales – 3rd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12–50mm lens – with flash

A wide range of species from both the New and Old Worlds could be seen. Although I did not have any of my 'specialist' lenses with me, I was able to take many photos, using my 'general purpose' 12–50mm lens, which also has good macro capability. The light levels inside the glasshouse were quite low, as a result of the dreadful weather conditions outside, so I had to use flash for most of my photos – limited to a simple on-camera flashgun.



Plas Pilipala, Wales – 3rd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm lens – with flash

The breeding cages were well stocked and, helpfully, the various species were labelled, although staff were on hand, ready to provide further information.



Plas Pilipala, Wales – 3rd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm lens – with flash

One of my favourite shots from this visit was of these Heliconids feeding on Buddleia flowers:



Plas Pilipala, Wales – 3rd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm lens – with flash

Apparently, the exhibition is being extended until December, so there is still plenty of opportunity for butterflyers to get their 'fix', as the British outdoor season draws to a close. The National Botanic Garden of Wales is easy to find – simply follow the M4 to its Western end and then continue on the A48 for a further 10 miles or so, turning off at the brown sign.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 15-Sep-16 09:41 PM GMT

Aston Rowant NNR – 14th September 2016

Although it was a very warm and sunny afternoon on Bald Hill, at the western end of the Aston Rowant NNR, there was no doubting that the butterfly season is nearing its end. Flowers on the slope were rather few and far between, with most having set seed or produced brightly coloured fruits, such as these Black Bryony stems. Do not be tempted by them, since they are extremely poisonous, as are all parts of this plant.

The numbers of photos relate far more to my personal interest and opportunities, than to natural abundance of butterfly species! For example, all 51 photos of Purple Emperor relate to a single individual male, who provided me with an entire repertoire of views, without my having to venture beyond the Bernwood Car-park!

On the other hand, Whites, both Large and Small, have been abundant in my garden throughout the summer but, somehow, I never get round to pointing a camera towards them.

Some low numbers, such as Essex Skipper, merely reflect the effort needed to get into a position from where positive identification can be made. Others, like Clouded Yellow, are just plain difficult to capture on camera, as they zip around a meadow without pausing.

Of course there's still the chance for Clouded Yellow photos – some of <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=7459&start=240#p92364> were taken in October 2014. The season may not be over yet 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 17-Sep-16 07:19 PM GMT

Cracking Meadow Brown Mike 😊 Often underrated they really come into their own at the tail end of the season when there isn't much else around. I know what you mean about the mismatch between actual numbers seen and number of photos taken as this year I seem to have only really concentrated on one particular species on a lot of my trips 😊 Oh well hopefully the disparity will be offset by written records.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-Sep-16 09:33 PM GMT

You've been busy posting this evening, Wurzel! Thanks for your comment. It seemed a little sad to be sitting on a warm sunny slope but seeing so few butterflies still active. They can't keep going, of course, if there are no flowers to provide nectar. They are lucky to have other life stages to take them through the coming Winter 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 18-Sep-16 08:59 PM GMT

I missed you by a day at the Botanic Gardens, Mike! Yes, the butterfly house is doing well, but it's still a work in progress and there's no guarantee of it continuing long term.

I hope to get down there again next weekend and will provide an update. Even without the tropical species, there should still be a fair number of endemics flying around the copious blooms which abound here.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Sep-16 12:28 PM GMT

Autumnal Otmoor – 22nd September 2016

Another visit to Otmoor found it in autumnal mood, although very warm under brilliant sunshine.

Red Admirals were out in force, enjoying the profusion of blackberries along the edges of the rides:



Otmoor, Oxon – 22nd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO640
Several **Commas** were also making the most of this late-season bounty:



Otmoor, Oxon - 22nd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/800s@f/8 ISO640

One Red Admiral took advantage of the <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/download/file.php?id=16612&mode=view>, which leads out onto the open moor (if you have courage to pass all the warning notices) as a convenient perch on which to soak up warmth from the sun.



Otmoor, Oxon - 22nd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/1250s@f/11 ISO640

From the gate, a path runs along the edge of the RSPB reserve under the eaves of the woodland canopy. A Comma was back-lit by the sun, against the dark backdrop of the trees (*is it about to walk the tight-rope?*):



Otmoor, Oxon - 22nd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/500s@f/8 ISO640

Several Green-veined Whites were also actively flitting from one flower head to the next but I managed to catch one pausing to bask for a short while. This photo needed -1.3EV exposure bias to keep detail in the wings:



Otmoor, Oxon - 22nd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/2500s@f/11 ISO640

There was plenty of other activity on the moor, with several raptors in flight, including Kestrel, Hobby, Buzzard, Red Kite, and Marsh Harrier. I was watching a Grass Snake, swimming along one of the ditches, when there was a sudden flash of electric blue and a Kingfisher sped past, to land on a reed nearby, from where it proceeded to catch fish. Although it was a delight to watch, it was very tricky to photograph, through all the intervening reeds, but I did manage to capture one memory of its vibrant colour:



Otmoor, Oxon - 22nd September 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/500s@f/6.3 ISO640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 23-Sep-16 10:34 PM GMT

Great shots Mike as always 😊 That Red Admiral on the gate really stands out 😊 Interesting to read about you seeing a Marsh Harrier, when I was birding when I was younger they were a rarity which you had to travel to Norfolk to see, so it's not all bad news 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 23-Sep-16 11:09 PM GMT

Mike, the King Fisher is still a great shot, they're so hard to photograph, I've got a photo some where of one I took at Mere Sands years ago, I've not seen once since 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 24-Sep-16 02:12 PM GMT

Many thanks for commenting Wurzel and Goldie - your feedback helps to keep me going 😊

I am pleased that my Olympus captured the red of the Admiral so well - other cameras I've used have tended to make them look too orange. Yes, the development of Otmoor as an RSPB reserve has brought several reedland specialists back to Oxon. As well as Marsh Harriers, Bitterns are also 'regulars',

and a pair of Cranes found their way here from Slimbridge. Of smaller birds, Bearded Tits are seen occasionally, although I've not been lucky yet. It does demonstrate that, if you can get the habitat right, the appropriate birds will move in 😊

Even though the Kingfisher is not a great portrait, I do like the shot, Goldie, because it conveys how it felt at the time – glimpses of that wonderful blue amongst the reeds. Keep looking – these gorgeous birds are commoner than many people think.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 24-Sep-16 08:33 PM GMT

That Red Admiral really is red, Mike. As you say it is really difficult to capture the shade they appear in life, and the contrast with the black. You seem to have succeeded! 😊 It's a great shot. I also rather like the semi-backlit Comma.

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 24-Sep-16 11:20 PM GMT

Thank you, Dave. That RA was perched on a very bright galvanised bar, which probably helped, by preventing over-exposure of the butterfly. I find the over-exposure indication in the electronic viewfinder of my Olympus is very helpful for shots like this one and the back-lit Comma.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Oct-16 09:28 PM GMT

Waterperry Gardens – 5th October 2016

I fear that this is a negative report, so far as butterflies are concerned. For several years, in early October, I have visited the magnificent herbaceous border at Waterperry Gardens, near Oxford, both for the display of late flowers and for their attendant butterflies – including, usually, Red Admiral, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, and others.

This year, the flowers were as magnificent as ever but, on a beautiful sunny afternoon, there was not a single butterfly to be seen.



Waterperry Gardens, Oxon – 5th October 2016
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by trevor, 06-Oct-16 10:03 AM GMT

Hi Mike,
The Butterflies were all on the Sussex coast !.

All the best,
Trevor

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Oct-16 11:16 AM GMT

Thanks, Trevor – it's good to know that 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 08-Oct-16 02:43 PM GMT

Still it's a great shot and a good day out for you Mike, Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 09-Oct-16 10:40 AM GMT

Hi Goldie, the huge display of multi-coloured Asters is a wonderful ate-summer treat and there are many other delightful parts of the garden. Just a pity that no butterflies were there to complete the pleasure.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Dec-16 03:18 PM GMT

I wonder how many readers of this diary will be able to identify this one?:



Arthur's Pass, NZ - 28th November 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm macro lens - 1/800s@f/11 ISO 640

The reason for the longer than usual gap, following my previous diary entry, is that I have been travelling through New Zealand since early November. It is an extraordinarily beautiful country, with scenery ranging from active volcanoes, through geysers, glaciers, fiords, snow-capped 'Alps', a wonderful coastline and offshore islands, and many exceptional nature reserves. There are also unique flora and fauna, although both have been severely damaged, as a result of human intervention.

The indigenous butterfly list is short but includes 13 endemic species (unique to the islands) plus 5 other 'native' species. There are also a few other casual visitors from Australia, while the Australasian wanderer *Hypolimnas bolina* puts in an occasional appearance - known locally as the 'Blue Moon'.

My photo above is of a female Western Alpine Boulder copper (*Lycaena caerulea*), which I found in a Southern Alpine meadow at Arthur's Pass, inland from Christchurch, at around 750 m (2500 ft) altitude. My photo looks much brighter and more colourful than most illustrations that I have found on the web - quite a stunning little butterfly.

My visit was a wide-ranging general-interest trip from Auckland across both the main islands and down to Stewart island in the South - last stop before Antarctica - and my encounters with butterflies were somewhat few and far between. By far the most common sightings were of the Small White (*Pieris rapae*), introduced to help the early British settlers feel more at home.



Te Wahipounamu, NZ - 4th December 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/2500s@f/11 ISO 640

The first butterfly I saw was on the island of Tiritiri Matangi, near Auckland, which is an offshore nature reserve that has been cleared of non-native introductions, including rats, stoats, and hedgehogs, which have destroyed most mainland populations of indigenous flightless and ground-nesting birds (there are no native mammals at all). My photo shows Rauparaha's copper (*Lycaena rauparaha*) and this was the only butterfly that I saw on that day.



Tiritiri Matangi, NZ – 10th November 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40–150mm lens – 1/1000s@f/10 ISO 500

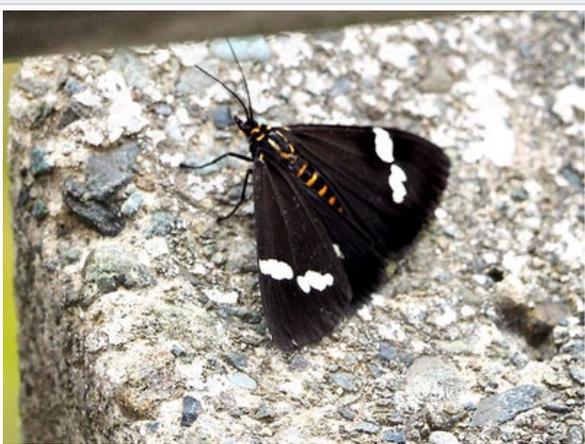
I encountered another Boulder copper on the South Island near Lake Wanaka – this time, a male, though in rather battered condition:



Lake Wanaka, NZ – 3rd December 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 12–50mm macro lens – 1/500s@f/11 ISO 640

I saw a few larger species during my trip but none paused long enough for a photo. These included a couple of Monarchs (*Danaus plexippus*), seen in the Wellington Botanic Gardens, and a few 'Admirals' at various locations – probably *Vanessa itea*. As it was late Spring/early Summer, it was perhaps a little early for good numbers of these species.

Although butterflies are sparse, New Zealand does have around 1600 endemic moth species. I saw plenty of evidence of the burrows made in tree trunks by caterpillars of the endemic Puriri moth. I also photographed the striking endemic 'Maggie moth' (*Nyctemera annulata*) at Bluff on the southern tip of South island.



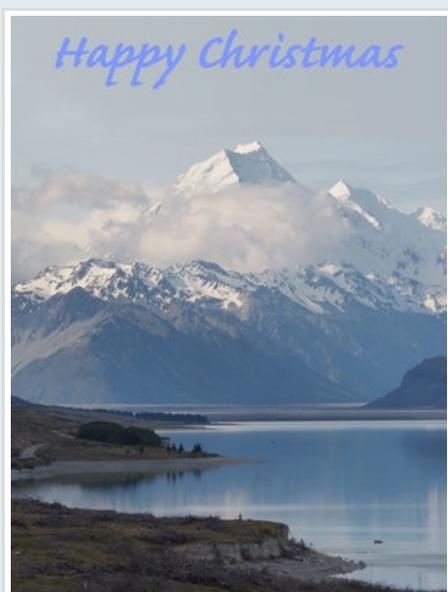
Bluff, NZ – 7th December 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm lens – 1/800s@f/8 ISO 640

New Zealand has many invertebrates, including the huge Weta, which ranks amongst the world's largest insects – about the size of a mouse. Largely nocturnal, I was fortunate to encounter one on Tiritiri Matangi island:



Tiritiri Matangi, NZ - 10th November 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens - 1/500s@f/7.1 ISO 200

Finally, a photo of Mount Cook, the highest mountain in New Zealand and one of many stunning sights. I wish you a Happy Christmas and the hope for a good butterfly season in the New Year



Mike

EDIT I have accepted Guy Padfield's suggestion (later in this thread) that my first photo is *L.caerulea*, formerly considered a sub-species of *L.boldenarum*. I am less sure about the second male copper photo since, although on the South Island, he colouring seems to correspond better with *L.boldenarum* on the few photos that I have seen on the web.

Re: MikeOxon

by Catriona, 20-Dec-16 03:47 PM GMT

Christmas greetings, Mike.

What fascinating photos, particularly the large Weta! Size of a mouse you say? Crumbs! 🤪

Iona

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 20-Dec-16 04:00 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, I believe you were there when the Earth Quake happened !

Mount Cook looks stunning and the Insect enormous but I don't think I'd like to meet it 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Dec-16 04:27 PM GMT

Thank you for commenting, Iona and Goldie. Amazingly, New Zealand has no dangerous creatures – totally unlike Australia – and those Wetas are completely harmless, despite their size. Yes, I was there when the earthquake happened but, fortunately, still on the North Island. It did call for some replanning, however, as we drove South after crossing the Cook Strait. Driving in NZ is delightfully easy and, although we had been warned of heavier-than-usual traffic on the alternative route to Christchurch, that turned out to mean expecting to see another car every minute or so, instead of every quarter of an hour 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 20-Dec-16 05:23 PM GMT

I really envy you, Mike. What a fantastic holiday. Although I know there are only two dozen-odd butterfly species in New Zealand, I'm surprised they are around in such small numbers given how green and temperate the country is.

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 20-Dec-16 05:39 PM GMT

Great stuff Mike, I used to look after some Weta's at work many years ago!

I've been to NZ a couple of times but just short stays visiting friends so no real time to go proper butterfly hunting, the only native I saw was a Yellow Admiral. The Coppers (and also the endemic Ringlets) are interesting groups of butterflies and are I believe in a state of taxonomic flux. There may well be more species than currently accepted, the Coppers I believe are currently grouped in 2 species complexes and since much of the south island is still rather poorly explored there may well be more species awaiting discovery 😊. I'd love to go back some time and do some proper exploring 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Dec-16 05:44 PM GMT

It was one of those now-or-never trips, as the ageing process creeps on, David!

The lack of much visible wildlife was quite a surprise. The unwise introduction of stoats to control the previously introduced rabbits, which had run amok, did huge damage. The stoats showed little interest in the rabbits, once they discovered a plethora of defenceless ground nesting and flightless birds. That doesn't explain everything, of course, and a lot of 'modern' creatures, such as mammals, simply never made it to the islands. It was strange, though, that there seemed to be no flocks of waders on coastal mudflats or water birds on inland lakes – everywhere was very quiet. An exception was Ulva Island, off Stewart Island, in the South, where a huge effort has been made to eliminate alien species. There, birdsong could be heard in the woods and flightless species, including Kiwis, are doing well.

Long geological isolation also means that most of the flora is unique. It feels like 'Jurassic Park', with forests of Tree Ferns and Podocarps, rising above a huge variety of Mosses and Ferns.

Re: MikeOxon

by Padfield, 20-Dec-16 07:19 PM GMT

Hi Mike. Recent works distinguish between *L. boldenarum*, found on North Island, and *L. caerulea*, found on South Island. *Caerulea* is generally brighter than *boldenarum*: my book shows those lovely blue markings on the female. That might explain why yours is brighter than most pictures of *boldenarum* on the internet.

Guy

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Dec-16 10:48 PM GMT

Thanks Guy. It looks as though I couldn't identify my first photo either 😊 I'll edit my post accordingly.

I was also fascinated to see the constellation Orion 'upside down' in the night sky, as well as several objects we never see in the Northern hemisphere – the Southern Cross, of course, and the two Magellanic Clouds, as well as our nearest-neighbour star *Alpha Centauri* plus several other very bright stars. I was surprised by the number of visible artificial satellites that were passing over, while I was watching the sky.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 21-Dec-16 11:19 PM GMT

Wow that sounds like an amazing trip Mike 😊😊👍 I remember reading somewhere previously and then you reminded me about the low species count in New Zealand quite surprising is that down to the climate or species not making it there?. Although it seems what they lack in quantity they make up in quality 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22-Dec-16 03:49 PM GMT

Thank you Wurzel. I suspect there are various reasons behind the low species count of butterflies. The geological isolation is surely one of these, since there are few flowering plants, with much of the native vegetation being ferns, mosses and epiphytic plants. Where else could you find forests that look like this?:



Mike