

Re: William

by William, 20-Apr-16 07:11 PM GMT

Thanks for all the kind comments everyone (not sure why I never replied)!

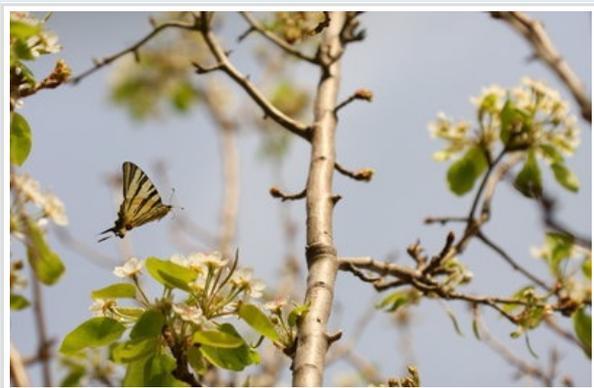
Recent Doings

It's been a rather slow start to the season so far after faffing around with birds over the winter, and like others, I've found hibernators to be in extremely short supply this year, with just the odd Comma, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell in the garden, where often there are several. The dam seems to have burst somewhat over the last couple of days, with my first Orange Tips, Small White, and Holly Blue, though I'm still yet to bump into Speckled Wood and Red Admiral. Surprisingly, despite all this, I saw my first Green-Veined White on the 31st of March – funny old world!

Photographic opportunities have been pretty limited up to this point, but a brief trip to Italy early in the month (where things also seemed rather late, with just hibernators, Speckled Wood, Holly Blue, Wall, Swallowtails, and Whites on the wing), gave me the chance to enjoy Scarce Swallowtails feeding on pear blossom (the most intoxicating Butterfly-Foodplant combination around?), and my first Southern Commas, much bigger and more angular than their English relatives!



Scarce Swallowtail



Scarce Swallowtail



Swallowtail



Southern Comma

Re: William

by Padfield, 20-Apr-16 09:14 PM GMT

All those shots are lovely, William. It was worth going to Italy just for that southern comma, but to add flight shots of scarce swallowtail – brilliant.

Guy

Re: William

by David M, 20-Apr-16 09:34 PM GMT

Great Southern Comma find, William! Even had it been in isolation, that butterfly alone made your trip worthwhile.

Re: William

by William, 22-May-16 12:48 PM GMT

Thanks Guy and David, a case of quality not quantity, Southern Comma has been on my wish list for a while, after 'our' Comma was the one that started it all for me!

Recent Doings

After a fairly slow start to the season, things seem now to be well underway in Somerset. Initial impressions are that hibernators have done very badly, Peacocks were super abundant last year, and are now very scarce, whilst I've only managed to see single figures of Small Tortoiseshells over the last few weeks, and Orange Tips, flying in lower numbers so far, are yet to repeat their communal roosting heroics in the garden this year.

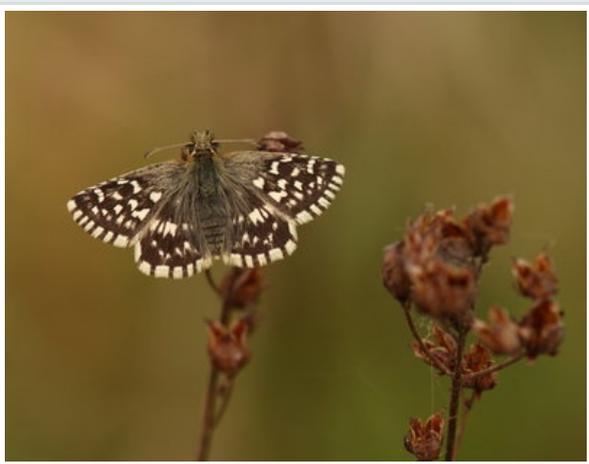


Orange Tips



Orange Tip

On the plus side, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers seem to be doing well at Thurlbear, it was nice to watch the latter settle down to roost last week, most choosing dead stems in the traditional manner, but a couple defying convention and going for young saplings.



Grizzled Skipper



Grizzled Skipper



Grizzled Skipper



Grizzled Skipper



Grizzled Skipper

I finally caught up with a single Duke at Buckland, and Common Blues have started to emerge (rather later than usual), locally.



Duke of Burgundy



Common Blue

Re: William

by Pete Eeles, 22-May-16 02:10 PM GMT

What brilliant photos, William – they've really made me think! Very different!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: William

by David M, 22-May-16 04:01 PM GMT

Love 'em! A bit of context brings them alive.

Great stuff, William!

Re: William

by trevor, 22-May-16 06:49 PM GMT

You have a different approach to Butterfly photography, and it works very well. Super images, very enjoyable!

Re: William

by Pauline, 22-May-16 07:38 PM GMT

Very evocative images William. You have a unique and immediately recognisable style which is a delight to view 😊

Re: William

by bugboy, 22-May-16 07:49 PM GMT

Amazing pictures, very ethereal. I've tried getting pictures like these myself, I now realise I need to try much harder! 😊

Re: William

by William, 23-May-16 07:10 PM GMT

Thanks for the kind comments everyone, it's been nice to get out a bit more this year, and see (and photograph) a slightly wider variety of species.

Thurlbear

On Saturday, despite the heavy rain that fell for most of the morning, and indeed much of the rest of the day, I resolved to make use of a free afternoon, and headed to Thurlbear in search of all things skipper-related. Chief inspiration for this choice of site was Mike Slater's excellent articles on finding Dingy and Grizzled Skipper eggs (<http://www.warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk/downloads/Field-Craft-Lessons/Field-Craft-Lesson-4-Find-Dingy-Skipper-Eggs-2008.pdf> and <http://www.warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk/downloads/Field-Craft-Lessons/Field-Craft-Lesson-2-Grizzled-Skipper.pdf>) which I would highly recommend, there's nothing like a good bit of observation, and from my own brief findings on Saturday, Mike is bang on – egg-finding has never been so easy!

I started off with Grizzled Skippers, scoping out a patch of Wild Strawberry that I'd found on a previous visit, after randomly checking a few plants for 10 minutes, I decided to home in on the plants in scrapes, and sure enough, on one of the smaller leaves dangling over a rabbit scrape, was a Grizzled Skipper egg. This was the only one I found, despite checking various Cinquefoils/Burnets/Agrimomies overhanging other scrapes, but was in textbook position on a rather small plant at the top of the scrape.



Grizzled Skipper Egg



Grizzled Skipper Egg Context

Running out of time (and seemingly luck), I decided to try Dingies, and within 20 minutes, had racked up a respectable 9 eggs, all were laid in hollows amongst fine grasses (the kind made when grasses are squashed by a careless footprint, or the paths made by rabbits), with short grass/dead leaves/moss in the bottom, on short, isolated growths of Bird's Foot Trefoil, growing quite vertically, very unlike the sort of plants that Common Blues prefer (flat and creeping, short and dense, often on bare ground). Fascinating stuff!



Dingy Skipper Egg



Dingy Skipper egg site



Dingy Skipper egg site



Dingy Skipper egg site



Dingy Skipper Egg

I did also find the time to look for some actual butterflies, plenty of both species were roosting on seedheads, with these companionable Grizzlies being particularly nice.



Grizzled Skippers

Re: William

by Pete Eeles, 23-May-16 07:17 PM GMT

Good work, sir! As I often quote: "I pity unlearned men on a rainy day" 😊

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: William

by Goldie M, 23-May-16 07:43 PM GMT

Love the shot of the Grizzled Skipper's William Goldie 😊👍

Re: William

by William, 23-May-16 09:28 PM GMT

Pete Eeles wrote:

Good work, sir! As I often quote: "I pity unlearned men on a rainy day" 😊

Cheers,

- Pete

Cheers Pete - keeps me out of trouble 😊 - I was actually glad it was rainy, it meant I wasn't getting distracted by Green Hairstreaks/Dukes. Fascinating

stuff!

Cheers Goldie!

Re: William

by William, 09-Jun-16 02:30 PM GMT

Recent Doings

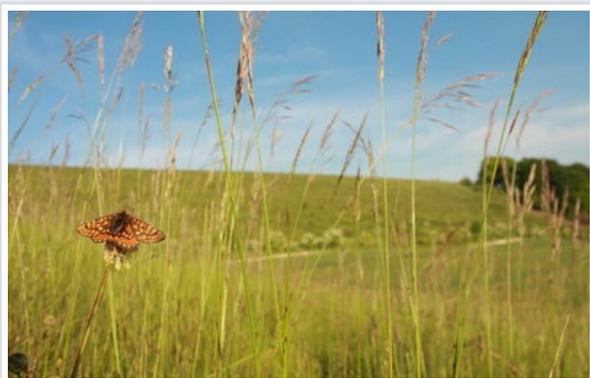
June is such a busy time of year, that it's proved hard to keep on top of things and regularly get out looking for butterflies. Nevertheless, I did manage a brief visit to the legendary Cotley Hill last weekend, the diversity and abundance of butterflies here is really quite astounding, and Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Small Blues, Green Hairstreaks, Wood Tigers, Foresters, and ridiculous numbers of Burnets became mere sideshows in the face of the awesome numbers of Marsh Fritillary on the wing, with a smattering of Adonis Blues and Large Skippers just beginning to emerge. A really impressive site, and weirdly devoid of people – no sound but the jangling Corn Buntings and roundabout below, a strange, but rather enjoyable accompaniment to a memorable afternoon with my favourite of the british Butterflies!



Marsh Fritillary



Marsh Fritillary



Marsh Fritillary



Marsh Fritillary



Adonis Blue



Adonis Blue



Common Blues

Closer to home, it was nice to catch this Speckled Wood larva in the act, whilst also finally finding a Green Hairstreak egg – one that's eluded me for a while!



Speckled Wood Larva



Speckled Wood Larva



Green Hairstreak Egg

Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillaries also look set to have a good year on Exmoor (as do Heaths, though I haven't had a chance to look for them yet), with c.40 at Clatworthy Reservoir last week.



Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary

Re: William

by kevlings, 09-Jun-16 08:06 PM GMT

William,

Lovely shots of the Marshies and Adonis Blue. I was there just over a week ago and you are certainly right about it being an impressive site. The photo of the Green Hairstreak egg is nice too (but am I the only that is seeing a frog in that picture too 😊).

Keep em coming!

Regards Kev

Re: William

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-16 10:52 PM GMT

Great shots of the Marshies William 😊 Good news about the Small Pearls as well as round my way they seem to be having a worrying season. 😊 Let us know when the Heaths start flying 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: William

by David M, 09-Jun-16 11:17 PM GMT

Loving these images, William.

Keep 'em coming!

Re: William

by William, 10-Jun-16 08:50 AM GMT

Thanks for the kind comments guys – it's been nice to see some good stuff lately.

Wurzel – Heaths emerged about a week ago (a day after I went to look for them!), and seem to be having a good year, someone said they saw c.40 at Haddon Hill, and there seem to be similar counts coming from other sites – I can give you directions if you need them.

BWs,

William

Re: William

by Wurzel, 13-Jun-16 08:28 PM GMT

Sorry for not getting back to you sooner William 😊 Directions would be really handy although I don't know if I'll make it this year, still there's always next year.
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: William

by William, 18-Sep-16 08:10 PM GMT

Catching Up

What with one thing and another, it's been a while since I posted on UKB – though not due to any lack of butterflying activity, I hasten to say. Lots of photos from a July trip to the Alps to come!

Like most people, my impression has been of a really poor year for butterflies, with the notable exceptions of Large Blue (amazing numbers about on the Poldens, eggs and adults everywhere – heartening stuff!) and Purple Hairstreak, which seems to have made a full recovery from the year that must not be named (2014). Small Pearl – Bordered Fritillaries seem to have bucked the national trend in Somerset and did rather well on Exmoor, but these gains have to be set against a seriously bleak bigger picture for hibernators (ridiculously low numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks on the garden buddleias), and most of the wider countryside species.

Anyway, some photos. With burgeoning numbers of Purple Hairstreaks, I decided to get out and about to try and photograph them, setting out to find a nice steep Combe on the Quantocks that would enable me to view them at eye-level. I found such a Combe after a bit of searching, and it prove a really delightful experience to get a good close look at them fussing about and fighting on the branches on a perfect August evening, backed up by a strong showing of Grayling along the stony paths nearby.



Purple Hairstreak



Purple Hairstreak

A few Clouded Yellows seem to have arrived in Somerset over the last couple of weeks (much to my delight), for me, few butterflies are quite as powerful and exciting, and, enthralled, I spent several hours photographing a female at a local common. The combination of sulphur yellow wings, and deep purple Devil's Bit haze will live long in the memory!



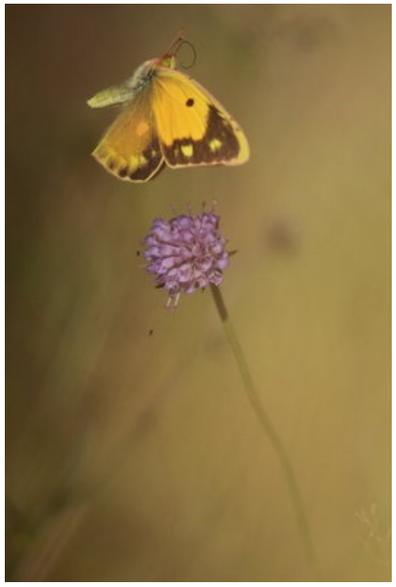
Clouded Yellow



Clouded Yellow



Clouded Yellow

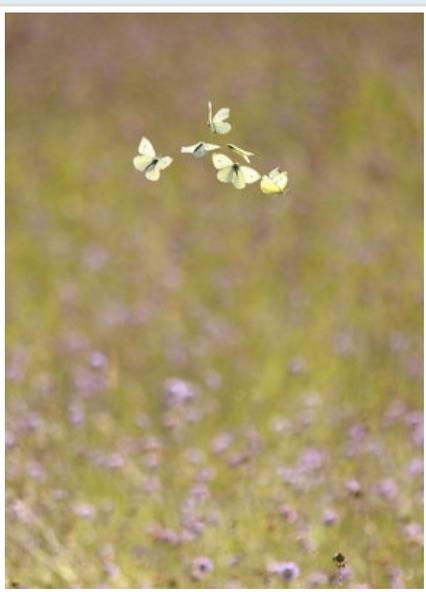


Clouded Yellow



Clouded Yellow

The scabious bounty was attracting good numbers of Small Whites as well, including these spectacular 'balls' of amorous males intent on cornering a distinctly harassed-looking female.



Small Whites



Small Whites

Despite the generally grim state of affairs for Lycaenids locally this year, Common Blues have been up to their usual egg-laying tricks in the garden.



Common Blue ova

Small Coppers have arrived rather later to the party, with 3 females over the last couple of days.



Small Copper ova



Small Copper ovum

I've been quite interested by where they're placing their eggs, there doesn't seem to be any particular preference for the upperside of the leaf. Indeed, in most cases, plants with one egg on the upperside of a leaf have had at least one, more often two on the underside of the same leaf.

Holly Blues seem to have done better than their compatriots, with my first ever eggs in the garden (more, I suspect to do with my lack of thorough searching than anything).



Holly Blue Larva



Holly Blue Pupa



Holly Blue Pupa

Unfortunately, I rather missed the boat for Brown Hairstreaks this year, being away in late August and early September, but did manage a single, glorious female in their local 'Master Ash' yesterday afternoon – real Autumn Gold!

Re: William

by bugboy, 18-Sep-16 08:17 PM GMT

I have to say your in flight shots are simply spellbinding...

Re: William

by William, 18-Sep-16 10:12 PM GMT

Cheers, Bugboy – dead chuffed with how they turned out!

BWs,

William

Re: William

by millerd, 18-Sep-16 10:41 PM GMT

An amazing selection of shots, the Cloudies especially. Brilliant. There are times I wish I lived in Somerset again... 😊

Dave

Re: William

by William, 30-Sep-16 09:04 PM GMT

Thanks Dave – it ain't half bad down here!

Switzerland – Lycaenids

In July this year, I went to Switzerland for three weeks hiking across the Alps with a friend. Carrying all our own equipment, tents, stoves etc, up and over the mountain passes (1000m ascents every day) was hard work in the heat, but made more than worth it by the butterflies we saw. By camping, we were able to immerse ourselves in suitable habitats, and once the packs were off, spend plenty of time on photography and study of the at times overwhelming variety of species. I haven't compiled a trip report, since we never stayed in one place for more than our over-night camping, but thought I'd share a few photos from a trip that will live long in the memory.

(Many thanks to Guy for all the help with tricky IDs!)

Glandon Blues were one of the definite highlights for me, a butterfly I've searched for in vain many times, it was encountered in small numbers at high altitudes – Cynthia's Frit now takes its place as 'most wanted'!



Glandon Blue



Glandon Blue



Glandon Blue



Glandon Blue



Glandon Blue

Alpine Blues, with the similar groovy underside motif were also around in small numbers.



Alpine Blue

Cranberry Blues were another new one for me – and very smart they were too, seen at a few spots, generally slightly damper ones over about 1600m.



Cranberry Blue

Geranium Argus were also fairly thinly spread, as ever, mooching around large patches of the foodplant.



Geranium Argus

Mazarine was one of the commonest blues (Silver-Studded was strangely absent in a lot of places), 3 photos here of the same one, the pink background in the first is the Jungfrau, which we camped under one night, lit by the last sun of the day.



Mazarine Blue



Mazarine Blue



Mazarine Blue

This cracking Silvery Argus was a real surprise, it stayed strangely loyal to the same patch of grass or several days when we visited Zermatt at the end of the trip, and could be found roosting there each morning, hiding amongst the (not very) Scarce Coppers.



Silvery Argus

Purple-Edged Coppers were just edged out by Sooty as the commonest Copper, but were pretty common in most boggy meadows.



Purple-Edged Copper



Purple-Edged Copper

The aforementioned Sooties were ubiquitous, but by no means unappreciated.



Sooty Copper



Sooty Copper

Equally common, were Small Blues, with their foodplant abounding in the rocky soils at high altitudes.



Small Blue

And finally, why you too should visit the Alps:



Blues

Other Lycaenids that didn't make the final cut here were: Silver-Studded Blue, Idas Blue, Large Blue, Turquoise Blue, Common Blue, Eros Blue, Chapman's Blue, Escher's Blue, Northern Brown Argus, Brown Argus, and Chalkhill Blue.

Re: William

by MikeOxon, 30-Sep-16 10:28 PM GMT

Lovely atmospheric pics, William and I do agree about the last one. It's a scene that never seems to happen in Britain

Mike

Re: William

by David M, 30-Sep-16 11:07 PM GMT

Some glorious images there, William. Looks like you had a superb time over there.

I can fill your boots with Cynthia's Fritillary if you wish! We saw many, many dozens in the French Alps in early July.

Re: William

by Wurzel, 03-Oct-16 10:05 PM GMT

Stunning images William 😊👍 Now how can I persuade Mrs Wurzel that hiking in the Alps would make an ideal family holiday? 😞😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: William

by Paul Harfield, 05-Oct-16 10:44 PM GMT

Hi William

Just catching up with your recent stuff. Fantastic images as always 😊. I love the inflight Scarce Swallowtail, Clouded Yellow and the Whites. The Glandon Blue on a Lichen covered stone and the Geranium Argus are lovely 😊.

A Holly Blue pupa is a rare sight on these pages 👍

Re: William

by William, 19-Dec-16 05:10 PM GMT

Thanks chaps, a really great part of the world (more photos to come) – David, I'd love to, but I've already got some stuff in the pipeline for 2017!

Relatively Recent Doings

The season ended well for me, with the local Small Coppers seemingly bouncing back a bit, with plenty of eggs laid in the garden and at other sites. I've noticed that they often seek out rather sickly looking sorrels with red-coloured leaves, does anyone know why this is, unhealthy plants less able to produce toxins? On a trip out in the direction of Birdgwater Bay in a rather speculative search for Clouded Yellow ova (no luck!), I managed to find plenty of adult Small Coppers, as well as a third brood Brown Argus all enjoying the late September sun. I've often noticed the shortage of Sorrels here, and wondered how the site manages to support such good numbers, and after a bit of searching, got my answer – 5 eggs and a well-developed larva on Curled Dock. At the time this was the first time I'd seen/heard of them using this plant, though it's mentioned in Adrian Riley's British and Irish

Butterflies.



Small Copper Ova (on a rather sickly plant?)



First Instar Small Copper Larva



Small Copper Ova



Small Copper Ova, Larva and Feeding Damage



Small Copper Ova



Small Copper Ovum on Curled Dock



Small Copper Ovum on Curled Dock



Small Copper Larva on Curled Dock

The adults were looking really fine too!



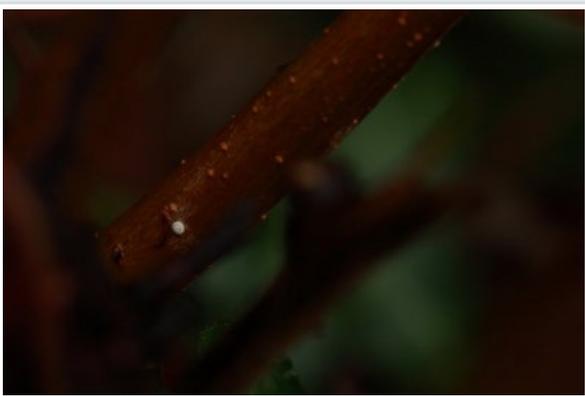
Small Coppers

More recently, Brown Hairstreak eggs have been the order of the day, I've now found 60 in 19 grid squares, though there are plenty more places to search. I also squeezed in a bonus Purple the other day, though I'm yet to start searching properly for these. It's been interesting to see quite a few of the Brown Hairstreak eggs laid in odd places, with 5 or 6 on the trunk of Blackthorn bushes.



Brown Hairstreak Ovum on Blackthorn Trunk

A couple have also been at the base of young suckers, about 5–10cm off the ground.



Brown Hairstreak ovum at Sucker Base

The vast majority have been in typical positions however, at forks, and where spikes meet the stem.



Brown Hairstreak Ova



Brown Hairstreak Ova

I've also found quite a few Blue-Bordered Carpet Ova while searching – a trap for the unwary!



Blue-Bordered Carpet Ova

And finally the Purple Hairstreak.



Purple Hairstreak Ovum

Re: William

by Jamie Burston, 19-Dec-16 05:55 PM GMT

Incredible series of macro photos!! 🍷 I tried to find Small Copper eggs and larva locally, pleased to see you had much better luck! I'm surprised at some of the Brown Hairstreak egg locations, you can't go wrong with Purple Hairstreak 😊

Re: William

by bugboy, 19-Dec-16 06:45 PM GMT

Great shots, You've an almost identical end of the season as me! As to the older looking leaves used, is it possible these are old eggs laid when the leaf was fresher and have failed to hatch? In my recent observations at Bookham Commons I've watched females go mad laying on tiny plants, peppering the small leaves with eggs. Over time I've observed several young larvae feed on the leaves and watched said leaves deteriorate, but there are also still several unhatched eggs on them (at least on my last visit a few weeks ago). Just speculation obviously 😊

Re: William

by David M, 19-Dec-16 10:31 PM GMT

Great sequence, William, especially that Small Copper ovum, which shows how intricately designed some of these ova can be.

Re: William

by William, 19-Dec-16 11:35 PM GMT

Thanks Jamie – I have been too, I've been searching some more atypical Blackthorn (more out of desperation than anything), and was quite surprised by what I found!

That's a possibility I've considered Buggy, but I've seen a couple of egg-laying females seeking out these redder plants (rather than the plants turning red after laying), the photo below is a good example of what I mean, the plant had 6 eggs on, and no larvae – rather more than any others in the vicinity (admittedly it's a nice fresh one in a nice warm scrape, but I've seen red plants in long grass similarly favoured, I'm sure you get the point 😊)



Small Copper Ova

Cheers David – certainly think Small Coppers have the best of the lot!

Re: William

by bugboy, 20-Dec-16 05:07 PM GMT

I guess it's a case of 'mum knows best'. I had a quick flick through *Thomas & Lewington* and the suggestion in there is the nitrogen content (and therefore the nutritional value) of the leaves used, the females favouring leaves with a higher nitrogen content.