

Marsh Fritillaries at Cerne Abbas

by Andy Wilson, 21-May-16 11:53 AM GMT

Last Wednesday afternoon I visited the Giant's Hill at Cerne Abbas while on a journey from East Sussex to Somerset on family matters. After driving for hours through torrential downpours along the south coast, I didn't hold out much hope of even having a walk – much less seeing any butterflies. However, to my amazement, the skies cleared as I drove north from Dorchester, and I arrived at Cerne Abbas in sunshine. Almost immediately, as I got on to the slope below the Giant himself, I saw a Marsh Fritillary – but it went to ground a long way ahead of me and I couldn't find it. However, about 10 minutes later, I found one roosting right next to the main path. Later still, the sun came out more brightly and I reckon I saw about 15 of them in total. All were quite bright and fresh, although one had a damaged left forewing.



Marsh Fritillary, Cerne Abbas, 18/5/2016



Marsh Fritillary, Cerne Abbas, 18/5/2016

Also seen were Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Small Heath.



Grizzled Skipper, Cerne Abbas, 18/5/2016

Glanville Fritillaries at Hutchinson's Bank

by Andy Wilson, 23-May-16 06:48 PM GMT

I first heard about the Hutchinson's Bank site a couple of years ago, but today was the first opportunity I've had to go in Glanville season. I was particularly keen to see the site because I grew up a stone's throw away in the early 1960's (that's giving away my age!). Leaving aside the ethical dilemma of whether they should have been introduced here, I just want to say that I had an incredibly enjoyable morning in the company of several other enthusiasts, and I filled my boots (actually my SD card) with photographs.

There were several individuals present. I reckon I saw about 15, and these included a some newly emerged females. One of these was quickly pounced upon by a male, and 3 of us were lucky enough to witness what was apparently the first observed coupling at this site. How lucky is that! They stayed firmly "in cop" for well over an hour, and were still in each other's embrace when I left.

Other species I saw were Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Small Blue, Holly Blue, Common Blue and one very nice Green Hairstreak.





Re: Andy Wilson

by Goldie M, 23-May-16 07:46 PM GMT

Wow! great shots Andy, love the mating pair. Goldie 😊

Re: Andy Wilson

by kevling, 23-May-16 07:58 PM GMT

Andy,

Nice photos from Hutchinson's Bank. I was there a couple of years ago and the Glanvilles were lovely to see. Also like your Marshies. I am but a few days away from my holiday to Wiltshire/Dorset, so anticipating seeing my first ever sightings of these.

Regards Kev

Butterfly biodiversity at Friston Gallops

by Andy Wilson, 05-Jun-16 04:33 PM GMT

I spent about an hour and half walking around Friston Gallops in the heat of the day today. It was great to see so many butterflies on the wing after the cold weather we had earlier in the week. By far the most common species was Small Heath, with one seen every few yards. Common Blue were also present in good numbers. I saw just 2 Adonis Blues (a courting couple). This site seems to have a relatively small population of them (at least compared to its enormous number of Chalkhill Blues) and I've seen 2nd generation individuals here at the end of August, but never 1st generation before. There is certainly a large amount of Horseshoe Vetch, which forms a carpet of yellow in some areas.



Adonis Blue couple

Other species seen were several Large Skippers (my first of the year) and Small Coppers, a single Painted Lady (also my first this year), Red Admiral, Wall Brown, Grizzled Skipper, Holly Blue, Brown Argus and a very worn Green Hairstreak. Add in the inevitable Small and Large Whites and that makes 14 species seen in total.



Grizzled Skipper



Brown Argus



Large Skipper

Small Pearls (and one not small) at Bentley

by Andy Wilson, 08-Jun-16 07:27 PM GMT

Today, I continued my quest to see each of the 8 UK-resident Fritillary species this year. Now that we have sadly lost the Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary from my home county of East Sussex, the nearest reliable site I am aware of is Bentley Wood on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border. So, off I went today, and arrived in warm, humid but somewhat overcast conditions. At first, nothing was flying, but suddenly as the sun briefly shone, a couple of SPBF's appeared as if by magic. I got a few photos and continued around the eastern clearing. All in all I saw 5, maybe 6 individuals, before the cloud came over again. I also noticed another Fritillary which was behaving somewhat differently and seemed a paler colour. It was constantly fluttering low down in the dead bracken and kept on the move. Eventually, I managed to get a couple of shots of the underside. Later inspection proved it to be a (not Small) Pearl-Bordered Fritillary. So, 2 Fritillary species in one day, although I saw Pearls a few weeks ago much nearer to home at Abbots Wood.

I saw very few other butterflies – a few Brimstones, Large Whites and a single Large Skipper. The only species that was plentiful at this time was Speckled Wood.



Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary



Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary



Pearl-Bordered Fritillary (apologies for poor quality)

4 species done – 4 to go (Heath, Dark Green, High Brown and Silver-Washed). Does anyone know if Heath Fritillaries have been seen on the wing yet in Kent or Essex?

Heath Fritillaries in Kent

by Andy Wilson, 15-Jun-16 06:51 PM GMT

Continuing my quest to see all 8 native species of Fritillary this season, I had the opportunity to visit East Blean Woods near Canterbury today. The weather was unpromising at first, and a heavy shower hit the area just as I arrived at about 1 pm. This forced a delay and a detour to a local pub for lunch (what else can you do?). Despite the very unsettled recent weather, I got lucky and the sun came out during the afternoon. Butterflies were few and far between, but I eventually spotted my quarry, a Heath Fritillary. The first individual was a slightly worn female, but after a while I saw two more which were very fresh males with brand new white fringes to their wings. One of these was quite small with a much darker brown background.



Heath Fritillary (female)



Heath Fritillary (female underside)



Heath Fritillary (male)



Heath Fritillary (male)

I'm not sure where we are in the flight season at this site, but this was nothing like the numbers I found a few years ago when they were everywhere. On that occasion, I photographed one on a bank beside the car park, without even leaving my car! It would be interesting to hear any other reports this year from this site.

Anyway, on my Fritillary quest it's now 5 down, and just the 3 "big ones" to go. Dark Green and Silver-Washed I should be able to see easily close to my home in East Sussex, but the High Brown will demand another road trip. Any suggestions?

Large Blues on a cloudy day

by Andy Wilson, 20-Jun-16 11:05 AM GMT

During a brief family visit to Somerset on Saturday, I couldn't resist the opportunity to try to see some Large Blues, despite the rather cool and cloudy weather. Instead of Collard Hill, I went to the original reintroduction site, which I had been told about a while ago. I'm not sure how "secret" this site still is, since if you Google its name, the search result immediately comes up with details about the Large Blue. Anyway, suffice it to say that the site not only offers views of the Large Blue, but also of trains on the busy London-Penzance railway line.

Because of the weather, not a lot was flying, although I did see my first few Marbled Whites of the year. Finally, I disturbed a blue butterfly which seemed to have the characteristic deep royal blue colour of the Large Blue as it flew off up the steep slope of the site. I didn't clock the exact spot where it landed, but I was lucky enough to see it again 5 minutes later, hunkering down in the grass. I managed to get one rather poor record shot before it flew off once more.



Large Blue

I later saw one more Large Blue, but didn't get a picture. Also several Meadow Browns and a single Large Skipper.

Silver-Washed Fritillaries at Knowlands Wood

by Andy Wilson, 30-Jun-16 05:23 PM GMT

My fritillary quest continues, and during a break in the awful weather this afternoon, I went to Knowlands Wood near Barcombe, East Sussex. I saw my first few Silver-Washed Fritillaries of the year, plus a handful of White Admirals. I just got one poor-quality record shot of a SWF, and the WA were very camera-shy. The woods were also full of Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Marbled Whites. Additionally, I saw a few Speckled Woods, Large Skippers, a Red Admiral and a very large scary hornet which caught and killed a bee before buzzing off.



Record shot of Silver-Washed Fritillary, Knowlands Wood

I have now seen 7 of the 8 UK-resident fritillary species this year, although I failed to get a photo of a probable Dark Green I saw on Monday afternoon at Friston Gallops, so that doesn't count yet. Hopefully, that will be rectified soon, but I really need a break in both my diary and the weather to make a trip to the West Country to try to see High Browns.

Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 01-Jul-16 09:55 PM GMT

Good luck on your quest Andy 😊 Don't High browns have a reasonable flight period so you should be able to make it – fingers crossed!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Knowlands Wood – Take 2

by Andy Wilson, 08-Jul-16 05:38 PM GMT

A second visit to Knowlands Wood enabled me to bag a better picture of a Silver-Washed Fritillary, as part of my quest to see all UK fritillary species this year. We saw a few, including one female, in warm but rather overcast conditions -- not ideal. We also saw 3-4 White Admirals, but once again they didn't stay still long enough to be photographed.



Silver-Washed Fritillary (male), Knowlands Wood

I also saw a Small Skipper which obligingly let me photograph the underside of its antennae, thus proving it was Small and not Essex.



Small Skipper, Knowlands Wood

Purple Emperors at Tugley Wood

by Andy Wilson, 14-Jul-16 07:00 PM GMT

In Sussex, most of the Purple Emperor action these days has moved to Knepp. However, despite the large numbers reported there, I have to confess that I find it a rather frustrating, neck-cricking site because they rarely come down to ground. Instead, I took the opportunity today to venture just over the county boundary to Tugley Wood in Surrey, which I have found in past years to be one of the best sites for grounded Emperors.

I was in luck within 10 minutes of arriving at the southern entrance to the woods, when I found a fresh male Emperor and Red Admiral arguing over squatter's rights to a tasty morsel of poo. Strangely, the Emperor quickly gave up and flew away, leaving the Red Admiral to have its snack. 10 minutes later further north up the track towards the place known as The Triangle, I spotted another Emperor on the ground. He stayed there for over 15 minutes while I took pictures, and eventually I decided to just leave him there and continue along the track. I didn't see any Emperors at The Triangle, but there was one gliding around high up further along at The High Point.

Retracing my steps, I met a couple of other enthusiasts, one of whom had found an Emperor on the same piece of poo as my first sighting. It may well have been the same individual, and this time the Red Admiral was not around, so the Emperor stayed for over 20 minutes while we took more pictures. Eventually, he moved off and then flew away.





Purple Emperor, Tugley Wood

The 2 (or maybe 3) individuals I saw at close quarters were very fresh, and so I am guessing they have only recently emerged. Also, numbers of other species were well down on what I have seen in previous years. I saw about 5 Silver-Washed Fritillaries and only one White Admiral. There were more Ringlets than anything else, and they easily outnumbered Meadow Browns. There were a couple of Gatekeepers, which are just starting, 3-4 Red Admirals and a single Comma.

Re: Andy Wilson

by keving, 14-Jul-16 07:42 PM GMT

Andy,

Good report from Tugley Wood and nice photos to accompany.

Regards Kev

Friston Forest and Gallops

by Andy Wilson, 17-Jul-16 06:22 PM GMT

I walked along the top of Friston Gallops today, as part of a longer circuit from West Dean through Friston Forest. Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites were present in good numbers. At a conservative estimate, I saw couple of hundred of each. Gatekeepers were doing nicely, with about 50 seen. Also seen were plenty of Ringlets and Small Skippers, several Red Admirals, a Comma, a single Dark Green Fritillary on high-speed patrol, and finally at the top end of the Gallops I saw two Chalk Hill Blues, my first of the year. Back in the forest, I also saw my first 2nd-generation Holly Blue of the year.

I will be back over the next few weeks to observe the Chalk Hill Blue flight period and see what sort of numbers we get in this very disappointing year for butterflies, at least so far.

Friston Gallops – the Chalk Hill Blues have got the blues :(

by Andy Wilson, 25-Jul-16 06:11 PM GMT

I made a quick visit to Friston Gallops today, just surveying the sheltered north-eastern corner of the site. It was rather breezy but there were good numbers of Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Small/Essex Skippers, a few Small Heaths and Marbled Whites, and a single Dark Green Fritillary seen at a distance.

But... WHERE ARE THE CHALK HILL BLUES???

Eventually, I saw one male, which was very fresh. Over the course of about 20 minutes, I saw 3 more. Two years ago, there were hundreds, probably thousands, at this time of year. Is the season running very late, or have numbers totally crashed? It's very worrying.



Fresh male Chalk Hill Blue, Friston Gallops

Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 25-Jul-16 11:00 PM GMT

Great shots of the grounded Emperor 🦋 I'll have to try Tugley one year as Bentley Wood near me can be a bit hit and miss – some years they come down all over the place and other years they stay aloft and mobile. Hopefully the Chalkhills will pick up 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Friston Gallops turns blue at last

by Andy Wilson, 06-Aug-16 07:12 PM GMT

Waking to a clear blue sky and warm sunshine, I decide to visit Friston Gallops again. As those who have read my previous posts will know, I have become very worried about the population of Chalk Hill Blues at this site -- one of the best in Sussex over the past few years (possibly THE best).

When I first arrived at the sheltered NE corner (approx. TV554997), my fears seemed to be confirmed, with just a handful of Chalk Hills being seen. However, as I walked the areas with the shorter grass and clumps of wild thyme, I flushed up a few more males, maybe a dozen in total. I decided to climb up to the higher slopes, and disturbed several more Chalk Hills as I did so, including a couple of females (my first of the year). By this time, I had seen maybe 25 in total, and remember that this is a site where it was estimated that there were several hundred thousand a few years ago.

Feeling very disappointed and fearful, I eventually reached the upper area at the north end of the site (approx. TV552999). To my delight, here it was a different world. Swarms of male Chalk Hill Blues were chasing around in the sunshine, madly looking for females, fighting with each other and any other species that came too close. The females mainly kept their heads down, but each time I disturbed one, it was quickly pounced upon by a male or two, sometimes several. This was more like the Friston Gallops I knew of old!

The colony at this northern end covers approximately three 100x100 metre squares on the OS map, so that's 30,000 sq m. If we say there was one Chalk Hill every 10 sq m, (and from my observations today, I think that's a very conservative estimate) this means that there were 3,000 individuals. So, nothing like the numbers of recent years, but still a fair-sized colony.

In a large patch of thistles at the edge of the grassland, I also saw some Painted Ladies with that very fresh orange/salmon-pink colour, together with several Red Admirals, a Small Tortoiseshell and a Peacock.

I then walked south down the western margin of the gallops to the SW corner. The grass along most of this section is long and rank with Meadow Browns and little else, but along the path I did see several Wall Browns flitting along in front of me (about 20 in total). Marbled Whites were plentiful here a few weeks ago, but have now finished. On reaching the far SW corner (TV544991), the habitat is better and there is another small colony of Chalk Hill Blues, but nothing like the numbers in the northern area. However, I also saw some Common Blues and a couple of Brown Argus here, together with many second-generation Small Heaths.

So, to summarise what I actually saw (as opposed to extrapolated)

Chalk Hill Blue – let's say 300+ at the very least
Common Blue – 5
Brown Argus – 3
Meadow Brown – several hundred, but declining now
Gatekeeper – 50+
Small/Essex Skipper – 30+
Small Copper – 4
Painted Lady – 4
Small Tortoiseshell – 1
Peacock – 1
Red Admiral – 20
Brimstone – 4 (1 female)
Small Heath – 50+
Wall Brown – 20

I didn't get many good photos – the butterflies were too active in the heat, but here are a few record shots.



Chalk Hill Blue (male)



Chalk Hill Blue (female)



Brown Argus



Wall Brown (female)

Re: Andy Wilson

by Wurzel, 07-Aug-16 10:30 PM GMT

20 Wall Browns is an incredible haul Andy 🤩👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Andy Wilson

by Andy Wilson, 08-Aug-16 12:02 AM GMT

20 Wall Browns by today's standards – yes I agree. But when I was a young butterfly nut in the 60's, we hardly paid them any attention, so common they were 😊

Re: Andy Wilson

by David M, 18-Aug-16 11:27 PM GMT

Andy Wilson wrote:

20 Wall Browns by today's standards – yes I agree. But when I was a young butterfly nut in the 60's, we hardly paid them any attention, so common they were 😊

Absolutely. And they were common inland...unlike now. 😊

Seaford Head

by Andy Wilson, 24-Aug-16 05:28 PM GMT

I went for a walk at Seaford Head this afternoon, not with butterflies as the objective, but mainly to escape the oppressive heat further inland. However, almost as soon as I arrived, I saw a Clouded Yellow, my first of the year. This was followed quickly by 2 more, and I saw a total of about 8 in the course of an hour. It was nice to break my duck in grand style!

There were also plenty of Common Blues and Meadow Browns, which were good to see in this otherwise poor year, and quite a lot of Small Heaths.

Adonis Blues in Paradise

by Andy Wilson, 30-Aug-16 03:33 PM GMT

I visited Paradise (aka Friston Gallops) once again this morning. The sun was shining out of a clear blue sky and there was a gentle sea breeze starting to blow in from the south.

On my last visit, I said that Meadow Brown numbers were declining. I need to withdraw that comment, because they now seem to have had a resurgence. In the course of an hour and a half's walk around the site, I must have seen several hundred. People commented earlier in the summer about the shortage of Meadow Browns, but on this site at least, it seems that a lot of them delayed their emergence until the weather got better. Many of those I saw today were quite fresh, and if the weather holds, they will be on the wing well into September.

There were large numbers of Small Heaths too, and in some areas there were swarms of half a dozen or so, chasing each other (or perhaps it was several boys after one girl). If anything, I would say there were more Small Heaths than Meadow Browns.

On the Blue front, there were good numbers of Common Blue, and also some Chalk Hill and Adonis Blues. However, Chalk Hill numbers are now well down, having peaked (if that is the right word) probably some time around the date of my last visit on 8th August. Hopefully, they laid enough eggs for the colony to recover to the sort of numbers we have seen over the last few years.

The Adonis Blues were in the northern section of the site, where the males were flying around restlessly close to the ground, presumably searching for females. I also saw one male Adonis in the south-west corner of the site. Fortunately, this one seemed to be more interested in drinking than looking for the ladies (I know the feeling), so I got several photos of him.



Adonis Blue (m)

Finally, I saw about 10 Clouded Yellows around the site. As usual most were dashing around at high speed, but I did manage to get some pics of a couple of individuals.



Clouded Yellow (f)