

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jan-16 04:20 PM GMT

Thanks, David, and Happy New Year!
I've just kicked off my season with a Painted Lady!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jan-16 04:22 PM GMT

2016 – First Blood

A Painted Lady landed briefly on the *Fatsia japonica* in my Worthing back garden today (6 January), before heading north in a determined manner. Together with the sighting at Halnaker Mill (West Sussex) on 23 December, and others elsewhere in the UK, this suggests that a small influx has occurred over the Christmas and early January period, as last seen at this time of year in 2013. The immigration of Painted Ladies over the festive period has historically been a highly unusual event (it happened in 1987), so such an early repeat performance just confirms that we can increasingly expect the unexpected.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 06-Jan-16 05:39 PM GMT

[quote]....confirms that we can increasingly expect the unexpected. So I guess we should put our money on Jeremy Corbyn to win the next election.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Feb-16 08:02 PM GMT

Making Homes For *Fritillaries for the Future*

I was delighted to see such a healthy turnout (seventeen) for the *Fritillaries for the Future* work party at Rewell Wood today (7 February), including a contingent from the National Park's Volunteer Ranger Service. Four south-facing scallops have now been cut into the sweet chestnut along the edge of a sunny track, providing top quality habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary. There will be guided walks here (morning and afternoon) to see the Pearls and other spring butterflies on Sunday 1 May and Saturday 7 May (all details on the BC Sussex website soon).

After days and weeks and months of endless gloom, it was wonderful to see the sun today. Even better, one of our party found us a Brimstone, which thankfully marks the beginning of the end of winter.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 07-Feb-16 10:48 PM GMT

Great shot of the Brimstone and some really great work on the scallops, here's hoping they yield plenty of Pearls 😊 – though shouldn't they really be called Oysters 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 08-Feb-16 01:05 PM GMT

What a great find Neil, perfect shot of the Brimstone, I'll be in West Sussex in early June and I'm really looking forward to it. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Feb-16 02:51 PM GMT

That Brimstone image has given me a real lift, Neil. I hope this butterfly and many others find your winter endeavours very much to their liking.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Feb-16 03:18 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. I knew you wouldn't clam up at the chance of a mollusc-based wordplay.

Thank, Goldie and David. That Brimstone certainly lifted my spirits. Any fellow SAD sufferers will know how diabolical this winter has been. Bring me sunshine!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 08-Feb-16 04:32 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

I am taking the fact that you have started posting again as a pointer that the new season is not too far away. I can almost smell your 'preparation' for His Majesty wafting through the mid Summer air !!.

Keep well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Feb-16 09:09 PM GMT

trevor wrote:

I can almost smell your 'preparation' for His Majesty wafting through the mid Summer air !!

I take it then that you are familiar with Neil's moleskin trousers? 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Mar-16 08:22 AM GMT

First Comma

Yesterday (29 February) I was surprised to see my second species of the year in our central Worthing back garden, when this Comma spent fifteen minutes sunbathing on the same *Fatsia* plant that was visited by a Painted Lady on 6 January.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 01-Mar-16 09:49 AM GMT

What a welcome sight.
Do you realise that your closed season only lasted for two months !.

Hope your project is going well,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 01-Mar-16 10:05 PM GMT

Crickey Neil everyone is playing catch-up now, two species already 😊 Hopefully the season will start soon over here in Wiltshire...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 02-Mar-16 10:05 AM GMT

Great to see your Butterfly photos Neil they cheer me up because it's snowing here. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Mar-16 11:41 PM GMT

Thanks all.

Trevor: All going well apart from the captive breeding programme – the overwintering caterpillars didn't much like the hot December. 🙄
Hopefully some positive news to announce in the not-too-distant future.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Mar-16 11:45 PM GMT

Here We Go Again!

A good haul of butterflies today, while diligently helping my daughter with her school assignment ("Looking for Signs of Spring"). At Houghton Forest we saw 2 Brimstone, 2 Small Tortoiseshell and a Peacock. At Ferring Rife we counted 12 Small Tortoiseshell. She should get an A* for that lot. The previous day I saw 2 Brimstone while driving through Findon Valley. It looks like it's going to really kick-off this week if the weather forecast holds good.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 14-Mar-16 03:51 AM GMT

If Mia wants an A+++ , then a very good sign of spring is the increase in posts on ukb.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 14-Mar-16 08:09 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Let's hope the wild caterpillars enjoyed the warm December !!.
I have been wondering what effect the warm winter/ cold, wet early spring, will have on the general Butterfly population this year. Few of us alive today have seen conditions like those of recent months.
Well done with your weekend haul.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Mar-16 12:44 AM GMT

More Work For Fritillaries

Colin Knight, Paul Day and I joined South Downs National Park ranger Graham West and a dozen volunteers to improve habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) at a small site north of Midhurst on Tuesday (15.3.16). Amongst the South Downs volunteers was Arthur Greenwood, who floats between the BC Surrey, Hants and Sussex Branches, and who used to monitor this site back in the 1980s, when the PBF was a much more widespread and numerous species.

Our team focused on a strip of sweet chestnut that I had helped coppice last week, which has stubbornly refused to produce much violet since being cleared four years ago. The bracken and leaf litter here had built up to form an excessively deep blanket, so the arduous process of raking a large area began (no recent breeding here).

It soon became obvious that the mounds of cleared material were becoming too large to ideally be left on the slope, so I headed for the local builder's supplier to pick up a Hippo Bag (other brands of large, vinyl, folding, builder's refuse sack are available). This proved ideal for the task (modelled by Paul and Arthur) and before too long the slope was clear.

Hopefully, this clearance and disturbance of the ground will encourage violet to become better established, but some consistently violet-free areas are being seeded and plugged. We also spent some time clearing a ditch and bank structure at the base of the slope, as these features are favoured egg-laying sites for PBF.

Fritillaries for the Future project <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/FritillariesForTheFuture.html>





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Apr-16 07:58 AM GMT

Hairstreak And Adders

Work has kept me indoors for far too long over the last couple of weeks, but on Sunday morning I gave in to the call of spring and headed to Mill Hill for an hour. I saw my first Green Hairstreak of the year and a few Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock, but no sign of Grizzled Skipper yet.

I saw five different Adders, every one being black, including this specimen which is ready to slough its skin.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 11-Apr-16 07:15 PM GMT

Neil! your so lucky, the Butterflies seem to have vanished up here.
The Adder looks quite scary, I've never seen one yet and don't really want to 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 11-Apr-16 08:51 PM GMT

You're seeing Green hairstreaks and I'm only just seen my first Speckled Wood of the year! 🍀🍀🍀

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 11-Apr-16 08:53 PM GMT

Glad Mill Hill is off and running, though I thought a grizzled skipper might have been seen by now, perhaps they are a bit late because of the rain. Slightly better weather forecast this week should tempt the first ones to emerge.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Apr-16 12:49 AM GMT

Hi Goldie. They look a lot more menacing than they really are – unless you're an invertebrate or small mammal. They are much more scared of us and it takes a lot of stealth to get close to them. They only bite us when really pushed, and prefer to run away.

Hi bugboy. I'm still to see a Speckled Wood, but I bagged a few more season's firsts today! 😊

Hi Mark. Grizzlies are now flying at Mill Hill. I loved reading your Scottish reports. Beautiful as parts of Scotland are, I could never move back up there, now that I suffer so badly with SAD!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Apr-16 01:07 AM GMT

Top Tips

Today (12 April) I met up with Jack Harrison, who is visiting Sussex from his new home in Nairn, Scotland. We had high hopes of bagging an early (for this now late spring) Orange-tip, so agreed to meet at a small, damp meadow at Wiston. After over an hour I had only added a single Green-veined White to the increasing tally of Brimstone, so suggested we head inland to the lanes around Five Oaks and Billingshurst, where the slightly warmer climate might have prompted an earlier emergence.

On arrival at a favourite flowery meadow things did not initially look promising, with only Brimstone and a few Peacock and Red Admiral around. Then, in the far distance, I spotted what I guessed was my first Orange-tip of the year. As I closed in on it I noticed another white butterfly rise up from the base of a hedge, and the two were soon tumbling around each other in courtship. They swiftly joined and sat motionless for twenty minutes, before the male headed off looking for more females. This was only the second time I've actually seen Orange-tips couple, although I've found a few mating pairs by chance. I later saw a second male, but the emergence has clearly only just begun. Bearing in mind that this was our sole opportunity to meet up, both Jack and I were very happy with the result – definitely quality rather than quantity.

After fully intending to head home to tackle chores, I couldn't help but make a flying visit to Mill Hill. Despite the weakening sunshine I spotted two Grizzled Skippers. I later discovered that a reasonable number had been seen by other observers earlier in the day. Spring is finally here.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 13-Apr-16 10:24 PM GMT

Great stuff Neil 🍷 . As Salisbury is generally two weeks behind everyone else I'll start looking in earnest next week – thanks for the heads up 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-Apr-16 10:55 PM GMT

So pleased for both you and Jack (who had a fair round-trip to make) that Orange Tips were sighted – and a mating pair to boot!

Lovely images once again.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Apr-16 08:19 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and David.

It was great to spend that magical moment with Jack, which, for me at least, marks the official start of spring. For that first sighting to become a mating pair made it even more memorable. Hopefully a good omen for what lies ahead.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Apr-16 08:22 AM GMT

Extreme Mothing

Last night (13 April) Colin Knight and I decided to go mountaineering by torchlight (don't try this at home) at Mill Hill, to count the Barred Tooth-striped moth. This localised species sits high up on stems of Wild Privet and is quite easy to spot just after dark. We came away with a pleasing tally of 16. However, the photography of a moth while balanced on a very steep and unstable slope, using a basic bridge camera under torchlight, proved challenging.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 14-Apr-16 01:03 PM GMT

Fantastic Neil, I thought only Mike had seen the OT's so it's great you've also got photos too 🍷 also Grizzled Skippers, I live to far a way for them 🤔 Goldie 🤔

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 15-Apr-16 03:55 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Just read about your exploits with torch, slippery slope, basic bridge camera, on the Sussex site.

Mad Dog's and Englishmen spring to mind, still it's in a good cause and obviously bore fruit.

Happy that your day out with Jack H. produced some Orange Tips.

All the very best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-16 10:10 AM GMT

Orange-tip Meadow

On Sunday (17 April) I took my daughter, Mia, to my favourite location for Orange-tips. The quiet lanes, meadows and copses around Five Oaks are now bursting with Cuckooflower, Bluebell, Primrose, Celandine and Wood Anemone, but Orange-tips are still in short supply, with only two males and a single female seen. It's still too early to tell whether they are just late, or are going to have a poor season. I'm hoping it's the former, as suggested by the surprising absence of Green-veined White, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue here.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Colin Knight, 18-Apr-16 10:15 AM GMT

that is a fabulous photo of Mia with the OT, that's what I like to see, youngsters with the butterfly bug...

Re: Neil Hulme

by Mike Robinson, 18-Apr-16 01:06 PM GMT

'The quiet lanes, meadows and copses around Five Oaks are now bursting with Cuckooflower, Bluebell, Primrose, Celandine and Wood Anemone ...' Lucky you; I really like Cuckooflowers but haven't seen one yet; the local Woods are full of the other plants though. Super pictures. And Wow; how lovely to see the Butterfly on her hand. My brother won't let me forget that a Comma Butterfly landed on his hand, three times, last year!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 18-Apr-16 03:06 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, love your own little Butterfly Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-16 04:59 PM GMT

Thanks, Colin, Mike and Goldie. The smile says it all! 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-16 05:23 PM GMT

Dingy Out

With spring still on the go—slow Mill Hill was hardly awash with butterflies this morning (18 April), but perseverance eventually paid off. I spotted my first Dingy Skipper of the year, a total of four Grizzled Skippers (including the first female I've seen) and a Green Hairstreak. Numbers of overwintering species, such as Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell, remain atypically low for the site at this time of year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 18-Apr-16 05:29 PM GMT

Great shot of Mia, Neil – and very appropriate wording on her top 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 18-Apr-16 06:45 PM GMT

If your little Daughter can charm, a usually difficult, Orange Tip, what could she do with His Majesty later this year?. Bring her to Botany Bay! !! 😊

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Apr-16 10:14 PM GMT

Lovely images, Neil, and comforting to know that at least one little girl will hold butterflies dear to her heart throughout her lifetime...

...and God knows we will need plenty like her in generations to come.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 18-Apr-16 10:48 PM GMT

Lovely set of photos Neil – I with spring would get on with it and stop with the go-slow – if we do get better weather soon will we get a sudden rush of species all appearing at once?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 23-Apr-16 08:16 PM GMT

[quote]Lovely images once again.Hmm!!!

Neil claims that he doesn't understand technicalities such shutter speed, ISO, aperture, etc. He certainly knew that to photograph me needed a wide angle.

Grr!

Jack (now back in Sturgeonland)

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 23-Apr-16 11:22 PM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:
Sturgeonland

Never heard of that, but I fully understand its meaning. 😊

Glad you had a great day out with the master butterfly-teaser, and pleased you're now safely back home amongst the majority Beluga!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Apr-16 07:09 PM GMT

Thanks, Pete. I only noticed the wording on Mia's top when I cropped the image. A little bit of luck always helps a composition!

Thanks, all. Wishing everyone a great season, as it looks likely to get underway properly next week.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Apr-16 07:45 PM GMT

New Season

Mother Nature seems to have added a fifth season to the year, although I'm not sure we have a name yet for the period between winter and spring. I don't think this has been her best invention. Let's just hope that the forecast for some warmth next week is correct.

I've not managed to get out much lately due to work, and when I have, finding butterflies has been difficult. Spring species are appearing one-by-one, but numbers of everything have been extremely low. By way of a catch up - an image of the single Green Hairstreak I saw at Chantry Hill on 20 April, and a Purple Emperor caterpillar found by Penny Green (Knepp Safaris) on the Knepp Castle Estate on 26 April.



Today (30 April) was little better, despite long periods of sunshine. A return to Chantry (Storrington) yielded a single Dingy Skipper, two Green Hairstreaks and three Grizzled Skippers, including this recently hatched female. Apricot coloured meconium can be seen on the Cowslip flower.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Padfield, 30-Apr-16 08:21 PM GMT

Lovely to see your emperor cat, Neil. Matthew Oates says the mild, wet winter has been disastrous for the wintering cats he has been following. Let's hope those that made it through will now flourish.

Guy

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 30-Apr-16 11:34 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil 🍷 I'd love to find a Grizzled Skipper, not round here I'm afraid 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-May-16 10:26 AM GMT

Guy - Sadly, I fear Matthew will be correct. I also suspect there will be more than one bad news story as a result of the 'hot' December.

Goldie - Thanks. I'm lucky to live in a part of the world where Grizzled Skippers are quite widespread. I think they're lovely little butterflies; just look at the cute face on the one I'm about to post!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-May-16 10:41 AM GMT

Sussex Dukes Are Out

The Duke of Burgundy is now starting to emerge on Heyshott Escarpment. Yesterday (1 May), Mark Colvin and Mike Edwards (Murray Downland Trust) found a male in the lower pit on the main grassland area, and I discovered another two in pits further uphill, on the eastern edge of the reserve.

For the second year running I found a Duke emerging through the turf, and was able to watch it climb onto low vegetation before inflating its wings. This event confirmed two things; firstly that a large proportion of Dukes seem to emerge during the middle part of the day (many appearing between 11 am and 2 pm); and that they often pupate within thick blankets of moss. I managed to locate the pupal case, but unfortunately it became fragmented during the process of excavation.

Six Grizzled Skippers were also seen, most of which had clearly only just emerged. I'm looking forward to the *Fritillaries for the Future* <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/FritillariesForTheFuture.html> walk here on Sunday (8 May). On the way home I stopped off at Rewell Wood and found my first woodland Grizzled

Skippers of the year.

Although Pearl-bordered Fritillaries are now flying at Abbot's Wood in East Sussex, they have yet to start at Rewell Wood. However, they will be out in time for the *Fritillaries for the Future* morning and afternoon walks I'm leading here on Saturday 7 May and Saturday 14 May, starting at 10.30 am and 2.00 pm each day (details here <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/events.html>).



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 02-May-16 01:41 PM GMT

Your Bluebell [Rewell] Wood picture makes me realise that despite the hustle and bustle of the south east, you still have beautiful places like that. Bluebells only just coming out here in Scotland where they are often open hillside flowers. But I am sure there are some bluebell woods in sheltered locations. Will search.

That's a lovely photo that brings back memories. Thanks Neil for sharing.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-May-16 06:06 PM GMT

Looks like you're in for a hectic time down there, Neil, with so many species now starting to emerge.

Given the weather forecast, the timing couldn't be better. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-May-16 10:09 PM GMT

Thanks, Jack. Look forward to catching up with you again soon.

Hi David. It's certainly kicked off now (at long last). Scorchio tomorrow 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-May-16 10:30 PM GMT

Weekend Walks (Part 1)

A total of 30 people joined me for the morning and afternoon *Fritillaries for the Future* walks at Rewell Wood today (7 May). I would like to think that everyone enjoyed them as much as I did – which was a lot! The sun shone and a total of 13 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were seen throughout the course of the day and evening. Beautiful Green Hairstreaks were seen by both parties, together with a few Orange-tips, Red Admirals, Peacocks, Brimstones, Green-veined and Large Whites, Speckled Woods and a Comma.

After the hustle and bustle of the day I eventually had the wood to myself, and sat amongst the Bluebells until the sun had slipped below the horizon. By this time I must have become part of the furniture, as a couple of Roe Deer passed so close to me that I could almost have touched them. What a fantastic day – but tomorrow might be even better.





While on the subject of PBF, here's a notice I posted on the BC Sussex website recently, in response to concerns raised by one or two members. It does have wider relevance at this time of year, and we should all do our best to ensure we don't damage the things we love so much.

Please Tread Carefully and Help Our Precious Pearls

The Pearl-bordered Fritillary season is now here again and I hope that many of you will be out enjoying this fantastic species over the next few weeks, either on guided walks or on your own. This is a good time to remind everyone, particularly keen photographers, to consider their impact on the butterfly's breeding habitat. The chance of stepping on a chrysalis, an emerging adult, a mating pair, or a roosting butterfly, is relatively small (per visitor), but if too many feet criss-cross a coppice coupe or clearing over the next few weeks it is likely that someone will get unlucky.

This is particularly true if you are intent on following a fritillary as it twists and turns, rather than keeping your eyes on the ground. It won't be long before there are other considerations too, such as breeding Nightjars. **Please try to resist the urge to walk through breeding habitat, unless you are performing an official, structured survey. In good weather the best photographs are always achieved either early or late in the day, when the butterflies will be feeding on Bugle, Dandelion and other flowers along the edge of rides.** Once they are fully active in heat the most likely outcome is unintentional but unnecessary damage. On the best day last year, the total number of adults recorded in Sussex only just exceeded 100. We can't afford to lose a single one of our Precious Pearls.

Thanks for your co-operation and happy hunting!

Neil Hulme
Fritillaries for the Future Project Officer

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 07-May-16 11:13 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Judging by reports, and my own observation, it would seem that we are now seeing a migration of Red Admirals to our shores as a number have been reported this weekend. Up until now few have been seen this year, clearly the hibernators had a bad time. I must confess, having only seen two, so far this year, to being seriously worried about their fortunes if the hibernators had not survived to produce a home grown brood.

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 08-May-16 01:53 PM GMT

Superb Pearls & Dukes, Neil 😊

Further to Trevor's point regarding Red Admirals maybe we'll see some sort of influx of Painted Ladies especially if the winds remain in the SE quadrant (or quarter?). From what I've read so far there has been very few reports of them.

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-May-16 08:14 AM GMT

Hi Both,

We are seeing an influx of Red Admirals from the Continent, supplemented by a few emerging on British soil, having gone through a protracted, over-winter life cycle.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-May-16 08:27 AM GMT

Weekend Walks (Part 2)

Ten people attended the *Fritillaries for the Future* walk at Heyshott Escarpment on Sunday (8 May) and, as always, this wonderful Murray Downland Trust reserve revealed its treasures in abundance. We counted 46 Duke of Burgundy, despite this being just one week into its local flight season; numbers are likely to build rapidly now. Even better, following several false starts, it appears that this species might now be colonising the western flank.

A tally of 13 Green Hairstreak was the highest I've managed here, but they were outnumbered by both the Dingy Skipper and Red Admiral. Grizzled Skipper was seen in single figures and seems to be having a relatively poor season in Sussex. Even the sunken lanes which connect the reserve to the village are outstandingly beautiful, being blanketed in blue, purple, lilac, yellow and white spring flowers, attended by Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites. My thanks to all those who came along and shared in such an enjoyable experience.

For me, the day was far from over. I was keen to look at the Graffham Down Trust reserves, primarily to see how the vegetation is reacting to recent management. Although I've been hoping for it, I was nevertheless surprised (and very, very pleased) to discover a Duke of Burgundy laying eggs on the Scott's Corner reserve. I believe

this is the first confirmed sighting of the species here since the early 1990s. It's too early to claim a sustained colonisation, but clearly very encouraging news.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 11-May-16 04:06 PM GMT

What a lovely photo that is Neil, the Hair Streak on the Blue Bell 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-16 07:23 AM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-16 07:39 AM GMT

The Rise Of Abbot's Wood

My first visit to Abbot's Wood this year (13 May) was well timed. I spent most of the day there, under blue skies and temperatures which climbed so high that they suppressed the activity of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (PBF) in mid afternoon. My visit was made to the soundtrack of Nightingales and at least one male Cuckoo. The beautifully managed rides and open spaces were a riot of colour, with some areas of Bluebell still sufficiently fresh to look stunning, splashed with patches of greenish yellow Wood Spurge.

I performed standardised Timed Counts over two areas, twice, taking an average of the already similar figures. An hour over the large, open slope produced a count of 81, but there would have been far more individuals flying over this area at various points throughout the day. At times there were more males visible, actively searching out virgin females, and at other times the majority of butterflies were egg-laying females. A vast number of eggs were being laid. My request for restraint in wandering over these areas was clearly well-founded, as I had to relocate a happy couple which were tucked away in the shade of ankle-high Bramble in the middle of a path.

A thirty minute Timed Count over another favoured area produced a tally of 23, and a further 8 over a smaller, adjacent patch which has recently been cut. This colony appeared to be slightly earlier in its own flight period, with probably a significant number of males still to emerge. The remainder of the 121 PBF which I encountered were dispersing along various rides, laying eggs as they went. I met wandering females deep within closed canopy woodland, and watched others climbing high over the tops of trees.

Over the last few years I've heard misplaced concerns about the habitat management here (which I can assure you is as close to perfect as could ever be achieved in a commercial woodland – and a huge credit to Stuart Sutton and his Forestry Commission colleagues), and worries about genetic diversity (no evidence or reason to suspect a problem). These concerns have arisen because the PBF population has fallen away from the heady peak of a few years ago. This is what PBF populations do, always have done, and always will do, before building up again. The 'hotspots' will also vary and shift from year to year, as they have done since the species evolved alongside the

activities of Man in this part of the country.

2016 is clearly a year in which the Abbot's population is heading in the direction we all prefer to see. Do get along to enjoy the spectacle while it lasts, but please watch your feet! Photographers – if you wait until late afternoon on sunny days, large numbers of PBF are emerging from the breeding areas to feed on Bugle along the edge of rides. Congratulations to all involved in the creation and maintenance of this wildlife paradise.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-16 07:55 AM GMT

Colonisation Confirmed

Last Wednesday (11 May) I led a group from the Steyning Downland Scheme over Heyshott Escarpment. Despite regular spells of light rain and almost continual coverage with a blanket of grey cloud, we still managed to find 16 Duke of Burgundy, along with Green Hairstreaks, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers.

After the walk I headed over to the Graffham Down Trust reserves, which were bathed in sunshine by the time I arrived. The discovery of a different female Duke of Burgundy (to that seen 8 May), and a worn male, confirm this as an important colonisation. The trust has done a great job of creating some suitable habitat here, so I hope the population will grow.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 15-May-16 12:34 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I was interested in what you said about the PBF and how they can fluctuate from year to year, at Gait Barrow last year I went up there on numerous occasions and couldn't locate any, the Ranger said it was a bad year for them. I don't believe there out yet at GB, some have been seen at Warton.

We made a special journey last week to GB but nothing was seen, Dukes or PBF and I saw no Bugle at all although the weather was perfect so I'm hoping may be another week before I try again, any advice would be welcome. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 15-May-16 05:48 PM GMT

Great news about the Dukes 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-May-16 01:58 AM GMT

Hi Goldie,

Some species, particularly Dukes, can hold out in very low numbers, sometimes giving the impression that they've gone. I remember reading comments a few years back, about a very small site I help manage, suggesting that the Duke could not possibly survive any longer, because nobody saw more than one at a time that year. I saw 15 there yesterday. It's a good idea to get to know your local site ranger or manager – you can't beat local knowledge.

Also, remember that spring is now running about three weeks late (compared to C21st average), so if the plants aren't out yet, the insects won't be out yet.

Hi bugboy,

Yes, it's really good news. Getting Dukes to move and colonise new areas (beyond spitting distance) is tricky. Up late, early to bed, fighting all day, good-for-nothings. They really could do a lot more to help themselves!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-May-16 02:04 AM GMT

Last 2016 Rewell Wood Walks

I led the last of my 2016 *Fritillaries for the Future* walks at Rewell Wood on Saturday 14 May. Over the course of the four walks 50 guests all saw the beautiful Pearl-bordered Fritillary up close. It was particularly satisfying to see the butterflies laying eggs in the areas of habitat cut by volunteers in the winter. I hope that some visitors will come and help us with more management work later this year.

Now that this season's Rewell walks are over, please do observe the following, and remember that this is a privately owned wood. The Norfolk Estate is extremely generous in assisting with conservation work for butterflies, and in allowing privileged access for our annual guided walks. Other than for the attendance of these organised events, please DO NOT drive through the metal gate into the wood, even if it is open, as you may get locked in for the night. Please only use the two parking bays, on the right-hand side of the track, just before the entrance gate. If these are unavailable please access the wood via Fairmile Bottom. Please keep to the public rights of way – we will be creating suitable habitat to ensure that PBF can always be seen from the W – E track (western part) which runs just north of the sawmill. Please do not enter coppice coupes, as Nightjars have now arrived. Thanks for your co-operation.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-May-16 05:46 PM GMT

Your diary has had much uplifting news lately, Neil (along with some beautiful images). Hard work seems to be paying off and long may this continue.

Good advice regarding leaving it till late afternoon to get closer audiences with the PBFs. They **do** seem to burn themselves out a bit by mid-afternoon.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-May-16 12:04 AM GMT

Thanks, David. Some more uplifting news on the way!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-May-16 12:13 AM GMT

New Heights At Heyshott

On Tuesday (17 May) I met Butterfly Conservation's North Yorks Duke of Burgundy Co-ordinator, Robert Parks, to discuss habitat management for our favourite species, while we walked over the slopes of Heyshott Escarpment. Of course the Duke leads a very different life in these two very different places, but there are also features common to both.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from Heyshott is that relatively small changes in the management of habitat (at least "small" when viewed by the casual observer) can lead to spectacular increases in population. Rare species are often rare because they are so fussy, particularly in the early stages of their life cycle. So when it comes to managing habitat for them, nearly-right is not good enough.

As we slowly and methodically covered the entire reserve, discussing the different challenges faced by the Duke in our own areas, and by us in looking after it, we counted them. Robert was delighted when we spotted the first one, but realised that we were in for a real treat by the time we left the first pit. I must admit that I was surprised we were seeing so many, bearing in mind that it was cool and almost constantly cloudy. It was certainly too cold for the females to be active, and we only saw 6 all day, with just one very short period of egg-laying observed.

However, males were in real abundance, although most of them were doing very little, other than sitting around in the hope of some sunshine and a passing Duchess. We passed the half-century mark quite early on, so I knew we were almost certain to break three figures. We did so in style, ending up with a massive count of 135, 129 of which were male. I've never seen so many Dukes in one place before. The lack of sunshine made this tally even more incredible, as many would probably have stayed in bed that day.

As I scaled the steepest of slopes at the very top of the reserve, I noticed that a significant proportion of the male butterflies here were freshly emerged, some with still

slightly crinkled wings. This suggests that the species is yet to reach peak this season. As we moved over to the west flank, Robert spotted the first of four freshly emerged males. If, as it now appears to be doing, the Duke becomes firmly established here, the population is likely to grow considerably.

I was delighted that Robert, who has worked on Dukes for several decades, was able to share such an experience, particularly having travelled so far for the visit.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 19-May-16 11:05 AM GMT

Brilliant news, Neil, brilliant!
And Pearls doing well too.

Perhaps we need more topsy turvy Winter/ Spring's as well 😊 .

From my observations, so far this year, most species seem to be having a good time.
We'll soon see how the high Summer Butterflies have fared.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 19-May-16 11:12 AM GMT

A great report from a lovely site 😊 What a superb conservation story.

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 19-May-16 07:42 PM GMT

After The State of UK's Butterflies 2015 review its great to see that's its not all doom and gloom 😊 !

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 19-May-16 08:34 PM GMT

Great news. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-May-16 01:00 AM GMT

Thanks, all. This is a story which shows quite clearly what can be achieved when people are willing to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in, and if unable to do so, contribute in other ways. There are plenty more examples too, but we need many more.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-May-16 01:34 AM GMT

The Legacy Of Betty Murray

After delivering a butterfly identification and recording workshop for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS), held at the National Park Authority's offices in Midhurst (20.5.16), a large group of us headed to Heyshott Escarpment, to put theory into practice. I was assisted by Jayne Chapman (BC Hants Reserves Officer) and BC/VRS stalwart Arthur Greenwood.

As always, Heyshott risked giving an entirely false impression of the plight facing some of our rarer and more localised species. If one were to live entirely within the confines of the Murray Downland Trust's flagship reserve, it would be easy to think that all was well with the natural world. At one point I became genuinely concerned that people might tread on some of the Duke of Burgundies scattered liberally over the ground. It came as a relief to occasionally find a more common species on which the group could hone its identification skills, but for much of the time it was "Duke of Burgundy, Duke of Burgundy, Duke of Burgundy, Duke of Burgundy".

Having recently made an accurate count of 135 Dukes here (almost exclusively males - 129), and knowing the numbers usually encountered within each pit, it soon became obvious to me that I was looking at a larger population than I've ever experienced before. After our group had departed I returned to make a more accurate assessment, but time only allowed a rapid one-hour count over about one-third of the productive area.

Females were out in abundance today and I saw a total of five pairings without having to search very thoroughly. I also came across only my second ever example of the pale aberrant form *leucodes* (it looks rather like a very faded specimen but isn't!). It's been a very good season for aberrant Sussex Dukes, as I've had the pleasure of sharing two specimens of the rare ab. *albomaculata* (one including traits of the less remarkable ab. *gracilens*) with a few friends on another site.

Over some parts of the reserve which seldom support more than one or two Dukes, today there were many. At times the air was full of butterflies, with males chasing males, males chasing females, and males chasing Dingy Skippers and Green Hairstreaks. In several places I counted the number of individuals sitting within an imaginary one metre square, which reached eight in the most favoured hollow (5m, 3f), during a cool, dull spell. The last species I saw in comparable densities was the African Grass Blue in Furteventura. Even at 4.30 pm, males were descending on recently unfurled wings from the steep back-wall at the top of the reserve.

So how many Dukes were flying over Heyshott Escarpment today? I generally prefer not to estimate or extrapolate, but it is important to record, even imprecisely, the unprecedented recovery of the Duke of Burgundy, on a site where it had come so perilously close to extinction. Today there were at least 200 Dukes on these remarkable slopes.

Everyone who has played a part in the conservation work at this Murray Downland Trust reserve should feel very proud of what has been achieved here. I would like to think that the late Betty Murray <http://murraydownlandtrust.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/dedication.html> is looking down on proceedings with an approving eye.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 23-May-16 08:04 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, when I was at Gait Barrow on Sunday we found only two Dukes, sad really and that's in spite of the area being cordoned off so as not to be walked on, the fact there was so many at the site you visited is amazing Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-May-16 11:25 PM GMT

Hi Goldie,
I do hope your local Dukes recover. While the colony remains there is always hope, as this species is capable of making remarkable come-backs. Fingers crossed.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-May-16 01:40 AM GMT

Tears Of Joy

On Monday (23 May) I headed to the Downs near Storrington, to survey some Duke of Burgundy colonies that are well off the beaten track and which have been doing rather well in recent years. They mark the current easterly limit of the species' range, this side of the cluster of Kent sites. I had a hunch as to where the next colony might spring up, if the slow movement of the Duke eastwards continued, so had asked a very capable recorder to take a look. Fortunately for me, he was tied up with Honey Buzzard surveys, so had not yet covered this ground.

As I traversed the almost featureless, west-facing slope I was delighted to see a Duke, then another, and another I climbed to the top of the slope so that I could systematically count them as I descended this 'crease' in the face of the Downs. I very quickly realised that this new colony was large. As I stood above them, looking down on outstretched wings, I could see 18 Dukes from my position, and further below me I could see 4 or 5 clusters of males indulging in their vertical ascent combat flights.

I really don't know what came over me, but for no apparent reason I was suddenly weeping. These were tears of joy, and as I started to rationalise this atypical outburst, I realised that here was a watershed, at least in my eyes. After eleven years working intensively on the Duke of Burgundy, it just suddenly seemed appropriate to consider the species safe from being lost to Sussex. Many people and a number of organisations have been involved with this recovery work, but some are worthy of particular mention. The Murray Downland Trust and its volunteers, supplemented by a strong BC Sussex contingent, have been outstanding in revitalising the fortunes of the Duke in the west. In the east, around Storrington, national park ranger Simon Mockford has helped at every stage in the work performed since 2005. I can think of no better example of the benefits provided by working in close partnership with other individuals and groups. Along the way there has never been anything other than complete co-operation.

I composed myself and kept counting. I was surprised to find male Dukes lined up along the very base of the slope for a considerable distance to one side of the 'crease'. This new colony, about 0.33km further east than the last to be established, contained at least 74 individuals. Bearing in mind that I know this to have formed since 2013, I suspect the colony is still in the build phase. Looking at the almost identical, contiguous habitat available, there remains the potential for very significant growth here. This colony could become very large.

Realising that the species had clearly undergone a phase of dispersal, I headed east to look at other sites where suitable habitat awaits, much of it as the result of the 2012 - 2015 Nature Improvement Area project. I found a male and female Duke of Burgundy on a site 2.75km further east, which has not been occupied since the early 1990s. A follow-up visit revealed 5 Dukes, so I hope this registers an intention to stay.

On Thursday (26 May) I returned to Heyshott. What a difference a week makes! From the giddy heights of 200 the population had dwindled to give a count of just 56. Admittedly, females were not out and about, so the count was almost entirely composed of males; I am still yet to work out what triggers the en masse appearance/disappearance of the females, although time of day plays a part. But for male Dukes it's a case of "live fast, die young" and with a string of warm, sunny days recently they had burned out at a rate of knots. Under these conditions many will only have a week. Most of those remaining looked like a 55 year old man who has just run one-too-many laps of his local park. The Heyshott Dukes may already be in their tail-end, but the 2016 egg-lay over these slopes must be massive.

Yesterday (27 May) I returned to the Storrington Downs, fully prepared for the start of the tail-end. However, these colonies are significantly later than Heyshott and there had clearly been a good hatch on two of the three main habitat patches. The 'new' colony produced a slightly higher count of 88, but the two established colonies were bursting with freshly emerged males, providing figures of 82 and 51. This stretch of downland, supporting a total of at least 221 Duke of Burgundy, supported none just eight years ago. The Sussex Duke must now be in better shape than for several decades. One thing I do know; a coombe which today supports 82 Dukes did not contain this species in the early 1970s. When my father brought me here, through the iron gate at the base of the coombe which now appears to lead nowhere, to hunt for Green Hairstreaks, I wouldn't have overlooked the presence of the species I most longed to see.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 28-May-16 08:47 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, fantastic all those Duke's and lovely photos, I want to go to GB again and hope fully i'll see a few more. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 28-May-16 09:35 AM GMT

With your enthusiasm – and success – with Dukes, have you considered changing your username to "Duke of Worthing"? 😊 I'm sure Mrs.H would be delighted to be known as the "Duchess of Worthing". And the youngsters too would become....? Better search <http://www.burkespeerage.com/> for guidance

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Vince Massimo, 28-May-16 10:00 AM GMT

Congratulations Neil, a brilliant result 😊
It will be very interesting to see how the species progresses next season.

Vince

Re: Neil Hulme

by MikeOxon, 28-May-16 11:16 AM GMT

How splendid to have all your efforts rewarded in this way 😊

Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 28-May-16 04:51 PM GMT

What an amazing result – very well done! I've already raised a glass to you, the Murray Downland Trust + volunteers, BC Sussex volunteers and Simon. Time for another already 😊

Cheers (hic!),

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Colin Knight, 28-May-16 04:59 PM GMT

It makes it all worthwhile hearing these wonderful reports of the Duke's success in so many places. I'll remember this on a cold mid-winters day when I think "do I really want to hike up Heyshott escarpment today."! Oh, and the bottle is chilling in the fridge ready to toast "The Dukes of Heyshott and friends".

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 28-May-16 11:42 PM GMT

Fantastic. So many conservation headlines are negative, but this great success shows what can be achieved when we are all pulling in the same direction. Many volunteers and organisations have played their part, but you have too, Neil, and without you this success would not have realised. So congratulations from me!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Katrina, 29-May-16 12:24 AM GMT

Really wonderful news Neil. Congratulations – you are a butterfly superhero!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 29-May-16 08:57 AM GMT

Oh well done! Congratulations to you and everyone else who has taken part in turning around the Dukes' fortunes in Sussex. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 29-May-16 05:36 PM GMT

Well done Neil, I'm off tomorrow to check out our Dukes again fingers crossed I'll count more than two. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 29-May-16 09:17 PM GMT

Superb report on the fortunes of the Duke of Burgundy in Sussex Neil, I can feel the emotion coming through in your words...and congratulations to all involved on a job well done.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-May-16 10:02 PM GMT

A totally fantastic result covered in your report and I can totally feel and share your emotion Neil 😊😊😊 Stupendous work by all involved 😊😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-May-16 12:02 AM GMT

Thanks to you all for your generous words.

Jack: I should probably just call myself 'The Duke', after David Dickinson, who I can out-mahogany by the end of May each year.

Vince: The combination of very high numbers, an atypical enthusiasm to disperse, and unusually favourable weather throughout May, all suggest that we may be seeing that rarest of commodities, an upwards spiral. I very much hope that 2017 sees a further chapter in the regional recovery of this species – that is unless we see a summer drought, which is one of the few factors that might possibly spoil the party.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-May-16 01:15 AM GMT

Forty Five Years On

With all of the excitement of recent weeks, yesterday (29 May) seemed like the ideal opportunity for some shameless nostalgia. Until my mother's loss of mobility about eight years ago, I used to spend a great deal of time butterflying with my father, Eric. After a life-changing double hip replacement my mother has now regained significantly more independence, allowing us the occasional chance to team-up again.

Now in his eighties, very steep slopes are not quite as easy as they once were for him, but I was determined to get my father out to see the unprecedented (in modern terms) numbers of Duke of Burgundy now flying over some of our old haunts. After a little map reading, involving a fairly relaxed interpretation of the position of PROws, we approached the Downs from a very different direction to that which I've become accustomed. We worked out that it had been at least forty five years since we had last entered this coombe together, looking for Green Hairstreaks.

Although I later returned to record numbers, our joint visit was entirely about the experience. However, my father probably saw as many Duke of Burgundy in a couple of hours than he's seen in a lifetime. The butterflies were very kind to us – they literally swarmed. Brown Argus, Common Blue, Green Hairstreak, Dingy, Grizzled and Large Skippers, Small Heath and Small Copper were all present, but there was no doubt about who was in charge. One of my favourite recollections of 2016 will be the sight of a Peacock being escorted off the premises by a string of six male Dukes.

I soon spotted a mating pair, which posed beautifully for us, while all around was a blur of high speed activity. I later found another three pairs, proving that the emergence is far from over. We saw a few newly minted males, and pristine females seemed to be everywhere. This magical couple of hours passed too quickly. 2016 is going to produce quite a few memorable days, but I doubt that any will beat this one.





Re: Neil Hulme

by dave brown, 30-May-16 05:28 PM GMT

For pure nostalgia that is the sort of day that will be banked in the memory for ever and brought back into play on those special occasions. There is nothing like sharing magic with your father.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 30-May-16 08:16 PM GMT

Precious memories.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 30-May-16 08:53 PM GMT

That's ever so nice Neil, I bet your Father was in his element 😊 Unfortunately, today , not a single Duke at Gait Barrow. We could do with some of your Dukes up here, they look fantastic pairing off like that, great shots 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 30-May-16 09:02 PM GMT

Sounds like a perfect day in every respect to me 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 04-Jun-16 10:46 AM GMT

This is why I love your posts Neil. Some very special memories.

Re: Neil Hulme

by badgerbob, 04-Jun-16 11:01 AM GMT

Good to see your Dad out there enjoying the butterflies Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jun-16 11:55 PM GMT

Thanks, all. Days like that serve to illustrate the importance and depth of our relationship with butterflies, which is why it is so important to look after them. Psychologists and philosophers have always struggled to define 'happiness' surely the answer is just 'butterflies'.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Jun-16 12:12 AM GMT

They Think It's All Over ...

Today (5 June) I headed out with the intention of saying my annual farewell to the Duke of Burgundy, as I was sure that the recent and quite prolonged spell of poor weather would have seen most run out of steam. As I systematically visited colonies spread along the Downs near Storrington, that initially seemed to be the case. Numbers were well down and only a few battered and faded old males were left, typically refusing to go down without a fight. However, as spring slips into summer they've found new species to rough up. Instead of Dingy, Grizzled and Green Hairstreak they are now pursuing Large Skipper and Painted Lady.

As I reached the fourth colony of the day I got quite a surprise. Here, the season was far from over and amongst the 42 individuals I counted there were three mating pairs. One of these was particularly interesting, as both Duke and Duchess had one foot in the grave. This was the first time I've ever seen evidence of a female Duke of Burgundy being mated for a second time. Although multiple pairings in the females of a few species, such as Green-veined White, are well documented, this behaviour appears to be very rare in the majority of certainly short-lived species. I have only ever seen old females of Common Blue and Small Heath in cop, once before in each

case.

There was still life in the last colony I visited, with several males still in pretty good shape. Over the five locations visited I counted a total of 93 individuals, which for June is remarkable. For me, the title of 'Butterfly of the Year' is already won. Nothing can hope to challenge the 2016 Sussex Duke of Burgundy season. The clock has been turned back for this species by at least 25 years.

I then headed to a site near Madehurst, to look at the rare orchids on display, including Frog and white forms of the Bee, and the Five-spot Burnet moth (subspecies *palustrella*). What I didn't expect to see was a Duke of Burgundy! Days like today remind me how very fortunate I am to live in Sussex, and so close to the wonders of the chalk hills.



Duchess



Duke



Recently emerged female with middle-aged male



Experienced Duke and Duchess



White Bee Orchid



Frog Orchid

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-16 09:54 PM GMT

The Good And The Bad

Tuesday (7 June) was probably my last opportunity to monitor Duke of Burgundy numbers in Sussex this year, although I'll almost certainly pay a farewell visit to the most enduring colony, just to complete a Duke season that I'll remember and cherish for the rest of my days. My personal, running total for the year stands at 1355 counts which, when converted to an approximate hourly strike rate, is easily more than double my previous best years (2011 and 2014).

I watched a virgin female being run to ground by a string of four males; quite rightly, the fastest and fittest won. This was the sixteenth pairing I've observed this season,

equalling my pre-2016 lifetime tally. As I wandered over the open slopes, well away from the lekking areas, I came across numerous females, laying eggs as they dispersed far and wide. The prospects for this species in Sussex have improved immeasurably over the last decade.



However, 2016 has not been so kind to most species. In fact, try as I might, I can't think of another which has done particularly well, even by modest 21st Century standards. Few have even attained a rating of 'average'. Many of our species are still sufficiently widespread and numerous to bounce back from a year (or should I say winter) like this, and many will do so quickly, particularly the multivoltine.

But it worries me greatly that the species which are currently vulnerable, whether nationally, regionally, or locally, are less likely to weather the storm which is blowing. This 'storm' is the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, courtesy of climate change. 2012, the summer that never was, wreaked havoc. I believe it was largely responsible for the subsequent extinction of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Sussex. Lying in wait, I suspect, has been the tropically warm December of 2015. If you are a plant, or if you are butterfly species which over-winters in the larval stage of your life cycle, how do you react to that?

Having spent many years working on Duke of Burgundy as a volunteer, my focus has now shifted to encompass Pearls (PBF) and Small Pearls (SPBF), due to my BC *Fritillaries for the Future* Project Officer role, so I know how bad the 2016 figures for Sussex are going to be. PBF did well at Abbot's Wood, and is currently secure at Rewell Wood, but elsewhere the news is far from good.

On Monday (6 June) I visited Bentley Wood, to catch up with a few species I have to travel for, such as Marsh Fritillary and Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth, and also to spend time observing egg-laying preferences in SPBF. Watching about half-a-dozen female SPBF at work here last year provided some useful data, but this time I was clearly too early in the flight season.

On the bonus side, I bumped into bugboy as soon as I arrived in the Eastern Clearing, who very conveniently pointed out a docile, female SPBF (many thanks). A quick squint revealed that her wings were still damp, so it was just necessary to stand back and wait for the inevitable. She was grabbed without ceremony on a male's third pass over the area. Fortunately, I was elsewhere when an outbreak of selfish behaviour occurred over 'photographic rights'.



Despite it being a late season, what I saw worried me. According to the BC Hants & IOW website SPBF has been on the wing here since at least 26 May. Several observers have reported "five or six" individuals in the Eastern Clearing. I hope they are correct, but I came away only sure of having seen two males and a female. I sincerely hope that there is a significant number yet to come. A trek to more distant parts of the wood failed to turn up either SPBF or Marsh Fritillary.

One issue, the importance of which it is perhaps easy to overlook, is the alarming scarcity of nectar sources in the clearing, particularly the favoured Bugle. SPBF requires a lot of energy to sustain its busy lifestyle, and a shortage of nectar is likely to have a negative impact on the fecundity of females.

I'll be watching the situation here with interest, and hope.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 09-Jun-16 10:33 PM GMT

Great to bump into you on Monday, just a shame it was under the cloud of worryingly low numbers of Fritillaries. I would say there were at least 2 females that day. the first one I photographed was found an hour before the one we saw mating and was seen quite a distance from that spot.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-16 11:08 PM GMT

Beautiful shots Neil 😊 I echo your fears about certain species – Small Pearls and Pearls were nowhere near the numbers that I've seen previously at Bentley, also the other species just haven't been present there either, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers for example and no multiple Duke sightings 😞 On the couple of times I've been there recently most people seem to be of the impression that the management is wrong. 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Jun-16 11:14 PM GMT

Lovely image of the pairing, Neil. One wonders what needs to be done to encourage these Fritillaries sometimes. Goodness knows you've undertaken as much as you can but these insects are fickle creatures.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Jun-16 07:59 AM GMT

Thanks, all.

Wurzel – All of the species you mention have different autecological needs, but with some overlap between them, which is why they can all co-exist there. For them all to be suffering at the same time, as they currently are, therefore points to a more fundamental issue. I've seen unusually low numbers of both Grizzled and Dingy Skipper everywhere this year, on both downland and wooded sites, and on sites which are both actively managed and which look after themselves.

Butterflies (with the exception of Chalk Hill Blue and Red Admiral in Sussex) suffered an *annus horribilis* in 2012 but the majority somehow recovered very quickly. I think we are seeing another trough in the rollercoaster, but it's the resilience (or lack of it) of the vulnerable and feeble that worries me so much. In this part of the world SPBF and PBF are at the top of that list.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Jun-16 08:29 AM GMT

Changing Of The Guard

A late afternoon visit to the Downs at Storrington gave me the opportunity to spend a last hour in the company of Dukes this year. The suitably worn and faded male in front of me launched itself at a Large Skipper as I turned and headed up the steep bank.

As I reached the top of the coombe, pausing to catch my breath, my eye was caught by the characteristically floppy flight of a Meadow Brown – my first of the year. For me, this species marks the official start of summer.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 10-Jun-16 09:06 AM GMT

Hi Neil. I was at Bentley on Wednesday this week, and I posted a report in my own personal diary. I must say I share the concerns about the paucity of SPBF. I saw enough to get a few decent photos, but I reckon I saw 5, possibly 6, individuals at maximum, and this was in the middle of the day when the sun did come out for a few long periods to make conditions quite hot and humid. There were very few nectar sources -- Bugle as you mentioned (although this was going over) and also Ragged Robin. The latter was growing in a few of the more boggy patches, but perhaps more could be done to encourage it. One of my SPBF's kept going back to the same flowers as it greedily tried to get more nectar.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary nectaring on Ragged Robin

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 10-Jun-16 08:01 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Fortunately, I was elsewhere when an outbreak of selfish behaviour occurred over 'photographic rights'.

Thanks for your insights, Neil; although the news isn't always positive, I do enjoy reading your posts. Regarding your comment above, the following has been posted on the Hants and Isle of Wight website:

"What was a pity was that while trying to get these shots a couple of ladies came up and started to also get shots, which is fine but they were getting in my shot and I had to ask them to move a bit. I got a couple more luckily, good shots, then got out of the way to let them have a go. Dave was waiting patiently all this time and we were chatting to the two but one was taking ages and lots of pics. She then said once I get all the pics I can I like to try and move then to a better position! I quietly objected as I don't agree with poking and prodding butterflies just to get a better pic. Also Dave was STILL waiting to get a pic but she started moving them around and poking them anyway. Surprise, surprise, after she got a couple more shots, they split up and flew off, thus spoiling it for anyone else and poor Dave from getting a decent picture at all. I really wish that people would NOT poke or interfere with wildlife just to get a better shot! Not to mention thinking of others and not 'hogging' an opportunity. If the butterfly is not in the greatest position then such is life. Get what you can and make the most of what you get."

I'm so glad I wasn't there since I'm sure that a camera lens would have parted company with its accompanying camera body. Absolutely disgusting behaviour. If any of these "ladies" is reading this – then you should be ashamed at yourselves for putting photography before the welfare of these (very) rare butterflies.

Apols for the rant in your PD, Neil.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jun-16 07:51 AM GMT

Hi Pete,

Entirely justified. At this point in the game the outcome of a single pairing could mean the difference between survival or extinction of that SPBF colony, which probably equates to the survival or extinction of the species on a regional level.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 11-Jun-16 09:33 AM GMT

Sadly I too once experienced that selfish behaviour. There are many reasons not just human selfishness. Some cameras require the user to get very close. For example bridge cameras will often not focus closer than 100 centimtres *at the telephoto end* without supplementary close-up lenses. So they have to get very near and thus prevent others from even being able to SEE the subject let alone photograph it.

But it can be done sensibly.



Fermyn Wood a few years ago. The chap in the wheelchair wouldn't have stood a chance if the others had been selfish.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jun-16 07:30 AM GMT

Grey Sky Blues

Yesterday afternoon (22 June) I visited Iping Common, near Midhurst, to look at the Silver-studded Blues with my father. We purposely chose a dull but warm day, as these conditions provide the best opportunities for photography. The place was littered with them, varying in condition from worn and torn to freshly minted, with several recently emerged individuals squirting meconium. We found two mating pairs and a beautiful female showing an usually large amount of blue – at least for this

population.

Colin Knight is leading a walk for BC Sussex here on Saturday <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/events>



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jun-16 08:14 AM GMT

Raymonda

On Tuesday (21 June) I was involved in filming on the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland <http://www.kneppsafaris.co.uk> where a Purple Empress called Raymonda stole the limelight. She was originally found, as a tiny caterpillar (in 2015), by Matthew Oates and her development has been monitored ever since (see <http://www.apaturairis.blogspot.co.uk>). Based on her pupation date, Raymonda will emerge on 8th or 9th of July. This remains a late season, so the species is unlikely to appear before July.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Jun-16 10:18 PM GMT

Never Underestimate A Road Verge

Last Sunday (19 June) I led a walk for the Clapham & Patching Horticultural Society, starting from Clapham Church. With the season running late and woodland species yet to emerge we headed towards Long Furlong. Having passed through beautiful coppiced woodland and over sheep-grazed downland slopes we reached the butterfly hotspot I had located earlier that day a re-engineered road verge, just north of Clapham village. Although it had clouded over by the time of the walk, we still managed to locate plenty of butterflies here, together with Bee and Southern Marsh orchids. Elsewhere on the slopes we saw plenty of Pyramidal and Common Spotted.

However, the big news was the presence of a significant Small Blue colony. Despite it now being quite late in the flight period (first brood) I counted more than 40 earlier in the day. A late May visit is required next year to determine the full size of this population. Also seen either before or during the walk were Marbled White, Common Blue, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper and Painted Lady. Never underestimate a road verge.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jun-16 09:47 AM GMT

Black & Blue

With free time very rare at the moment, I had to squeeze trips to see Black Hairstreak and Large Blue into a single day this year. On Friday (24 June) I made an early start and arrived at the M40 Compensation Area before 9am, under perfect weather conditions. A quick 'phone call to Phil Bromley confirmed that Black Hairstreak is having a reasonable season at Monks Wood this year, but this Bernwood Forest site is currently performing well below par. Three hours searching produced just 6 or 7 males in various states of disrepair and a slightly worn female.

By 2pm I was at Cirencester, having driven through torrential rain and wall-to-wall cloud, varying in shade from dark grey to black. As is so often the case, the weather bore little resemblance to the forecast offered in the earlier hours of the same day. I nearly decided on the 'snooze and drive home' option, but the tiniest break in the deluge encouraged me to head onwards to the wonderful Daneway Banks reserve.

I was glad that I did, not least because I bumped into a few friends and made some new acquaintances. As always, the site looked stunning; it's a riot of colour at the moment. The Large Blues were taking every opportunity to make the most of even the briefest spell of thinner cloud. By evening the sun was fully out and it was a joy to wander over the slopes looking for roosting Large Blues, Marbled Whites and Ringlets. I only managed to get a couple of hours with the Large Blues of Daneway Banks, but a couple of hours in Paradise is enough well, nearly – I need to get back there as soon as possible.





Re: Neil Hulme

by MikeOxon, 25-Jun-16 10:26 AM GMT

I had thought of going to Daneway myself, yesterday, but allowed the black clouds (and later heavy rain, here in Oxon) to put me off 😊 Your determination was well-rewarded, with excellent views of Large Blue. I particular liked your images of roosting on Pyramidal Orchids 😊

Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 25-Jun-16 03:29 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, I've never seen a butterfly land on an Orchid yet so your shots are great Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Padfield, 25-Jun-16 05:44 PM GMT

Great shot of the *iris* pupa, Neil. I know just how hard these are to find, even if you follow the caterpillar right through to the day of its final Journey.

I could point out that all the experts said my pupa, Trajan, was a female, so I changed its name to Plotina, only to have a beautiful male emerge some time later ... but that would be childish of me! 😊

Guy

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 25-Jun-16 06:33 PM GMT

Question Neil. How big are the introduced Large Blues now that they are established in England? I have heard said that they are smaller than the original native race. My own limited experience suggests no bigger than Common Blues and distinctly smaller than Chalkhill. I have to say that I found the species' name "Large" a slight misnomer.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 25-Jun-16 10:24 PM GMT

Great shots Neil and that really was a whistle stop tour of southern England! Missed you by one day at Daneway, I visited there for the first time today, braving some rather inclement weather!

In response to Jacks question the ones I saw today looked noticeable larger than an average Chalkhill. I can't comment on how they compare to our native race, I was only 8 when they vanished and I've never seen a set specimen in life.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jun-16 09:59 AM GMT

Thanks, all.

Mike, Goldie: The Large Blue on the Pyramidal Orchid is actively feeding, and if you look closely it is possible to see a pollinium attached to its proboscis. This is a clump of pollen grains picked up as the butterfly is probing for nectar. These pollinia can cause butterflies to get a bit 'tongue-tied'!

Guy: I've now managed to track down that discussion. I would demand a refund! 😊

Jack, bugboy: Large Blues are highly variable in size, but the majority of females are significantly larger than Chalk Hills. Males are often a little smaller than females, but occasionally reach the same proportions; and just to confuse the matter, some specimens may be as small as a Common Blue. However, a good sized Large Blue looks BIG.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by William, 28-Jun-16 10:51 AM GMT

Superb stuff from Daneway Neil, you seem to have a knack with Large Blues in particular! With the size, I've always generally thought of females (in particular) being noticeably larger than the other blues, but as you say, there seems to be a lot of variation (compared to other species), and I did find a sweet little male about the size of a Common Blue today.

BWs,

William

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 28-Jun-16 11:14 AM GMT

William [quote]...did have really sweet little male....You might want to edit your post William 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jun-16 07:09 PM GMT

Thanks, William. I've been back again - shame I missed you by a day!

Jack - behave!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jun-16 08:11 PM GMT

More Daneway Delights

With a couple of days booked off to recharge the batteries, an early return to Daneway Banks was inevitable. On Monday (27 June) an early start ensured a very full day in this beautiful location. However, it was remarkable just how rapidly nine hours melted away. Even better ... it meant that I missed viewing the national disgrace of Football Brexit.



For much of the morning I had the site to myself. Even better, I was there in time to see the Large Blues wake up. Conditions were perfect, with very light winds and thin cloud allowing just sufficient heat through to encourage basking. It later became so warm and sunny that most of the Large Blues took their customary siesta. During the quieter spells there is always the profusion of Marbled Whites and Ringlets to keep the visitor entertained.





One of the many great things about our hobby is that there is often something new to see or learn. I was rather surprised to watch a female Large Blue turn her nose up at the Wild Thyme and Marjoram, choosing to lay at least one egg (probably several) on Valerian *Valeriana officinalis* (originally misidentified as *Pimpinella major*).



Daneway Banks is one of those places which really gets under your skin, and soon makes you feel like an old friend. I've only been there half-a-dozen times, but I doubt there'll be many years in the future when I don't return to this little piece of Paradise. Even the park bench is a cut-above.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 28-Jun-16 08:20 PM GMT

Nostalgia reigns. I recall going to Daneway circa 2004 – 06 and seeing just ONE Large Blue.

Lovely pictures Neil.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 28-Jun-16 08:36 PM GMT

You lucky bugger, you got the weather I could only dream off on my visit! I think your plant is Common Valerian *Valerian officinalis*, I saw quite a lot of it there on Saturday.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jun-16 09:08 PM GMT

Thanks, bugboy. You're right. When I looked at the leaves I dismissed Valerian, as I confused it with Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), which it has little in common with – a botanical blooper. It seems that she didn't have much of a clue either!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 28-Jun-16 09:28 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...It seems that she didn't have much of a clue either!BWs, Neil

obviously the real reason they went extinct 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 28-Jun-16 10:03 PM GMT

Great times Daneway Banks, Neil. We were there last week,when that fabulous bench was being put in. What a work of art that is!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-16 10:05 AM GMT

"*What a work of art that is!*". I couldn't agree more, Mark. Unfortunately it wouldn't quite fit in my two-seater. It would be good to find out a little more about its origins (artist etc.) if anyone is in-the-know.

Re: Neil Hulme

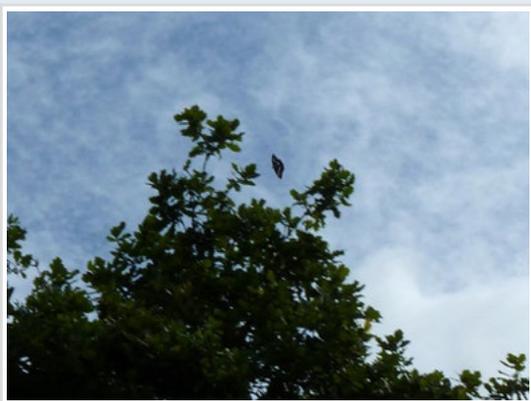
by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-16 10:36 AM GMT

Kicking Off And Kicking Out

It doesn't take long for all that pent-up aggression to spill out, having been imprisoned in a pupa for nearly three weeks. Yesterday (28 June) I arrived at Knepp at 3.30pm. I saw my first adult *iris* of the year at 3.35pm. By 3.40pm it had attacked a Black-headed Gull, a Purple Hairstreak and a second Emperor.

I only had 20 minutes on site before the weather collapsed and I covered only 250m of the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland. However, I still managed to see five individual males, the third of which was also harassing hairstreaks. A different Purple Emperor seen on average every four minutes, while travelling over an average distance of 50m, and observed attacking innocent biodiversity at an average rate of one victim per 6 minutes 40 seconds, suggests a strong start to the season here. Numbers should be very good by the time of the first Knepp Purple Emperor Safari at the weekend <http://www.kneppsafaris.co.uk>

It was also encouraging to see at least nine Purple Hairstreaks, including a bundle of five. This gives hope that the species will have another good year, following its recovery in 2015.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-16 09:38 PM GMT

Knepp Emperor Update

The first three days of July saw the Purple Emperor season really take-off at Knepp. On Friday evening (1 July) I joined Matthew Oates to help him finish his survey of the Wildland, with the day's tally eventually reaching 22. Surprisingly, bearing in mind how early in the season it appeared to be, he had earlier seen a female being courted, although the amorous couple was separated by a strong gust of wind. While with Matthew I spotted a second female, which I can only attribute to the rare aberrant form *thaumantias* Cab. – or very similar. She looked like a giant, faded Painted Lady, but with normal Emperor banding (see <http://apaturairis.blogspot.co.uk/2016/07/strange-lady.html>).

After leaving Matthew I performed a rough and ready count of Purple Hairstreak along the Green Lane, already aware that this species is continuing its spectacular comeback from a run of years in the doldrums. Despite high winds I soon reached the 100 mark.

Matthew and I led very enjoyable Purple Emperor Safaris <https://www.kneppsafaris.co.uk/> here on Saturday and Sunday (2 and 3 July), seeing 30 and 34 individual Emperors, with a further five seen post-walk on Sunday. Sunday's tally included a fresh, grounded male.

Other highlights included Marbled Whites, Small Skippers, White-letter Hairstreaks, Peacock caterpillars, a variety of dragonflies, Longhorn cattle, Tamworth pigs, toads, Red Kite, Common Redstart and, last but not least, Raymonda, the beautiful Purple Emperor pupa.

With warm, sunny, windless conditions on Sunday evening we decided to perform a more accurate survey of Purple Hairstreak numbers. Between 18.20 and 19.20 hours we counted them on 50 Oaks spread over the northern 1.2km of the Green Lane, allowing a maximum of only 60 seconds per tree. The best number on a single tree was 15. Only six trees were barren, most of which were visibly diseased and sparsely foliated with pale, yellowish green leaves. Small and medium sized Oaks with dense, blue-green leaves were favoured. The symmetry of our stats was ruined by a total of 199.



Gate to the Wildland



Knepp Toad



Raymonda



Atypical Emperor habitat



Peacock caterpillar



Longhorns



Male Emperor

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 06-Jul-16 05:05 PM GMT

Oh! Neil, it all sounds so fantastic especially when there's nothing to sing about here. Goldie 🤔

Re: Neil Hulme

by kevling, 06-Jul-16 05:51 PM GMT

Neil,

I'm still getting to grips with where the hot spots are for certain species and read your account of Knepp with great interest. I may be mistaken, but it sounds even better than Fermyn Wood. Thanks for sharing.

Regards Kev

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 06-Jul-16 09:07 PM GMT

kevling wrote:

Neil,

I'm still getting to grips with where the hot spots are for certain species and read your account of Knepp with great interest. I may be mistaken, but it sounds even better than Fermyn Wood. Thanks for sharing.

Regards Kev

From what Neil has said in the past, it definitely does seem that Knepp is the premier UK site for His Imperial Majesty (HIM) these days

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 06-Jul-16 09:59 PM GMT

Some great numbers mentioned there Neil 🍀 Everything seems to be happening so fast now after a spring and early summer when it felt like nothing was going to!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Jul-16 08:32 PM GMT

Thanks, all. Knepp is indeed a marvellous place, and completely fascinating from an ecological point of view.

The Purple Emperor population here overhauled Fermyn last year, but until this season Knepp has been reluctant to provide the delights of grounded males. We have never been sure why. However, this might now be changing, with approximately a dozen seen on the deck in the last two weeks.

Numbers are down on the fantastic 2015 crop and the best day count of 57 is modest by Knepp standards. During the most recent guided event, which I co-led with Matthew, we were lucky enough to watch the successful conclusion to a graceful courtship flight around the crown of an Oak. The pairing lasted for precisely 3 hours 59 minutes – about 20 minutes longer than average for this species.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 08-Jul-16 08:40 PM GMT

[quote]The pairing lasted for precisely 3 hours 59 minutesThat surely beats most people's record? 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-16 05:32 AM GMT

Actually, Jack, rather average 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-16 07:39 AM GMT

Elephant In The Room

On Wednesday (6 July) I visited Chantry Hill (Storrington) in order to see my first Dark Green Fritillaries of the year. Were it not for the fact that I have now adjusted my expectations of the 2016 butterfly season to the very lowest level, I would have hoped to see in the region of 100 – 150 DGF here; I saw nine. On this warm, sunny afternoon there was a very noticeable lack of butterflies in general, over this area of prime chalk grassland. All of the species I would normally see here in abundance were present in pitifully low numbers.



I have heard surprisingly little negative commentary about the 2016 season, bearing in mind just how bad it is, at least in Sussex. Yes, I know there are exceptions, but this posting is not about exceptions. I'm struggling to remember a poorer year for butterflies, aside from the historically dreadful 2012. Many species have suffered a real stinker; others have had it much worse.

Amongst the biggest losers has been the humble Meadow Brown. When I've made this point in discussion the response has sometimes been along the lines: "really? I saw at least 50 at Site A yesterday". The problem is that there should have been 500, or perhaps 2000. There have been days at Knepp recently when Meadow Brown has been outnumbered, or nearly so, by Purple Emperor.

I mentioned the possible reasons in an earlier post ("The Good And The Bad", 9 June) and believe that the evidence is building further. Whereas the increase in the frequency of detrimental, extreme weather events (courtesy of climate change) is sometimes more obvious – such as the wash-out summer of 2012 – other forces may be at work, acting in a more stealthy manner. I've become increasingly convinced that the exceptionally mild (and wet) December of 2015 is largely responsible, with temperatures 5 – 6 deg. C above average in southern England, and an outrageous UK high of 17.2 deg. C.

It is not unreasonable to expect that species which overwinter either as an ovum or pupa are likely to be less adversely affected by a very warm December than those which overwinter as a larva or imago. Caterpillars in particular are likely to become active under these atypical conditions, and the potential consequences are obvious.

Based on my own, personal assessment of the Sussex season so far, I have produced the tables below. It is not difficult to spot the fundamental trend.

Species performing below C21st average in Sussex	
Species	Overwintering stage
Adonis Blue	Larva
Brimstone	Adult
Brown Argus	Larva
Comma	Adult
Common Blue	Larva
Dark Green Fritillary	Larva
Drusy Skipper	Larva
Crozeed Skipper	Pupa
Large Skipper	Larva
Marbled White	Larva
Meadow Brown	Larva
Orange-tip	Pupa
Peacock	Adult
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Larva
Ringlet	Larva
Silver-washed Fritillary	Larva
Small Blue	Larva
Small Copper	Larva
Small Heath	Larva
Small Skipper	Larva
Small Tortoiseshell (relative to post 2011/12 recovery levels)	Adult
Speckled Wood	Larva/Pupa
Wall	Larva
White Admiral	Larva
Wood White	Pupa

Species performing at C21st average in Sussex	
Species	Overwintering stage
Green Hairstreak	Pupa
Green-veined White	Pupa
Holly Blue	Pupa
Large White	Pupa
Silver-studded Blue	Ovum
Small White	Pupa

Species performing above C21st average in Sussex	
Species	Overwintering stage
Duke of Burgundy	Pupa
Purple Hairstreak	Ovum
White-letter Hairstreak	Ovum

(The following species have not been included in this assessment: Brown Hairstreak, Chalk Hill Blue, Grayling and Silver-spotted Skipper; Essex Skipper, Gatekeeper and Purple Emperor; Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and Red Admiral, either because they are yet to emerge, or it is too early in their flight season to tell, or because they are at least primarily immigrants)

We know how resilient butterflies can be and we saw how many species made a miraculous recovery after the gloom of 2012. Multivoltine species in particular are capable of bouncing back quickly. Unfortunately, several species in SE England are currently at extreme risk.

What can be done in the face of climate change? It is becoming increasingly obvious that butterflies are only likely to survive this rollercoaster ride when they form large colonies over extensive areas of suitable habitat in excellent condition. Butterflies have never needed our help so much as they do now.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 09-Jul-16 09:00 AM GMT

That's an excellent analysis Neil and while your data concentrates on Sussex, here in the far north of Britain, sadly the story is similar with one exception: Ringlet (although I have only 2015 for comparison). The dearth of butterflies can be summed up with a story when I was in fact watching Ringlets.

Two cyclists stopped and began peering into the long grass, the Ringlet habitat. It turned out that they were a mum (who looked young enough to be my granddaughter - I must be feeling my years!) and her teenage son. He was on a Duke of Edinburgh's and looking for a plant that smelled of aniseed. I explained that I was watching butterflies and she commented that it was so nice to see a butterfly these days. I directed them to a nearby hedge where Sweet Cicely - smells of aniseed - grows. Tick for the D of E award.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 09-Jul-16 09:32 AM GMT

I agree with Jack, excellent analysis Neil. I can understand how December's ridiculously mild weather could be a major factor and the subsequent 3 (and probably 4) cooler months didn't help either.

Same depressing news in Hertfordshire too with perhaps only the migrants Red Admiral and Painted Lady faring better than last year and probably the Ringlet as well. The worst species apparently are the smaller species like the Small Copper and the Small Skipper although there is some way to go in the season for these two.

The 3 hours and 59 minutes is quite impressive for the PE pair but there is a report of Brimstones copulating for 102 hours (Lindfors 1998) - now that is LONG 😊

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 09-Jul-16 10:41 AM GMT

Sadly I have to agree with you Neil. I've made a couple of comments along similar lines in my personal diary this year about how badly even the supposedly 'commonest' species seem to be doing this year, at least based on my ramblings so far this year. It can never be a good thing when average temperatures in December/January are warmer than the following April!

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 10-Jul-16 12:47 PM GMT

Hi Neil

I've not had much chance to do much butterflying in the wider countryside this year, but the perspective from my Sheffield garden is that this year has been disastrous, even worse than 2012. At least in 2012 there were warm periods and some sunshine, in between the heavy rain. This year has been cold and grey, in between the heavy rain.

The only butterfly in my garden that appears to have had a "normal" year is the Holly Blue.

No Meadow Brown's seen at all yet, despite them being relative common at this time of year. No Gatekeeper yet, despite them normally being my most common butterfly.

No Comma, no Small Tortoiseshell, one Peacock in March, none since. Two Orange Tip's in April, despite them normally being relatively common. One Speckled Wood in mid June, despite them normally being around every day. No Large White, no Green Veined White, and only a couple of Small White.

It's very depressing
Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by MikeOxon, 10-Jul-16 01:49 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

I'm struggling to remember a poorer year for butterflies, aside from the historically dreadful 2012. Many species have suffered a real stinker; others have had it much worse.

That's been my experience in Oxfordshire, too. Places which should have yielded good numbers of common species have only had ones and twos! Bernwood, last Friday, only had Ringlets in any numbers. There also seems to be a longer time-lag behind the Southern sites, with no Commas on the wing at all yet, for example.

The photographic evidence tends to concentrate on 'sought-after' species and, therefore, misses portraying the absence of normally common species.

Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by False Apollo, 10-Jul-16 07:53 PM GMT

Fermyn was very quiet for many species, strangely I only saw around 3 White Admirals and many observers commented on their scarcity. Purple Hairstreaks were evident and Ringlets. Meadow Brown numbers were also low. All Silver-washed Fritillaries seen were flawless, only saw about 10 in my 3 day visit. Good numbers of Small Tortoiseshells, a few Commas and 2 Red Admirals seen. I would expect species numbers to improve in the coming week as the weather is set to improve. The weather has been dull and cloudy in the mornings but vastly different with warm and sunny periods in the afternoon when I was there. At least the Emperors seem to be happy!

Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 15-Jul-16 11:11 PM GMT

Hi Neil,
Many thanks for your time this afternoon, we both thoroughly enjoyed our visit.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jul-16 08:52 AM GMT

A pleasure, Trevor. Didn't we do well! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jul-16 09:00 AM GMT

Quality Not Quantity

On Monday morning (11 July) I led a walk for Steyning U3A at Eartham Wood. Unfortunately the weather was against us, although we still managed to winkle out a White Admiral from amongst the Ringlets and Meadow Browns. As always, the Steyning group was great company, but next year I'll design a walk for them which is weatherproof.

Brian Henham stayed on with me after lunch and the sun eventually broke through, bringing this beautiful wood to life. Rob Thurlow and his Forestry Commission colleagues have done a brilliant job in reshaping Eartham over the last decade; it is now far better for butterflies than it ever was in my youth. However, in line with results almost everywhere, numbers were disappointingly low. It was a case of quality rather than quantity, with lovely specimens of White Admiral and both male and female Silver-washed Fritillary seen. Although there were plenty of Ringlets flopping about, their numbers are still much lower than seen here in most years.

The one species which put on a really good show was the Red Admiral. The significant influx of spring migrants has clearly made the best possible use of lush nettle growth. Expect to see large numbers in some areas, as a major hatch appears to be underway.

We finally located our main target when a male Purple Emperor sailed majestically into sight and did a couple of circuits around some Sallows. I was delighted to get a call from Brian the following day, telling me of his exploits with an Eartham Emperor, which gave the best 'Purple Emperor on hand' shots I've ever seen.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jul-16 09:38 AM GMT

Unicycles For Sale

A recent trip to Fermyn was cut short courtesy of the 'Road to Hell'. But was a total of 10 hours in the car worth just 2.5 hours in Lady Wood? Yes, of course. And this was despite the fact that my trusty steed, which has given such good service for so many years, is dead. He had struggled against poor health over the last few Purple Emperor seasons, losing his brakes, gears, and failing every risk assessment in the book.

We have now departed company – all three of us. I will have to return to bring home his mortal remains, as logistical difficulties meant I had no option but to leave him in some corner of a Fermyn field. Thanks to Mark Joy for taking photographs when my old friend fell apart, and I fell off, and again when I repaired him, and then fell off again.

Oh yes – I did see a few Purple Emperors (7), bumped into a few friends, and had a great time. But Fermyn is performing well below par. Would anyone like to purchase two beautiful unicycles?



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Jul-16 09:09 PM GMT

Knepp Highlights 2016

The guided events to see Purple Emperor at the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland <http://www.kneppsafaris.co.uk> concluded today (17 July), with a walk for 'A Focus On Nature' (AFON) <http://www.afocusonnature.org> Over the six events I've been involved with, mostly co-led by Matthew Oates, we've seen a few more than 200 Emperors.

There have been many highlights and a significant increase in the number of grounded butterflies this season. Only yesterday I saw a huge, freshly emerged Empress on the surface of the green lane, and before I arrived today some of the AFON group had photographed a pristine male on a cowpat. Significantly, this is at least the third sighting of a male feeding on a cowpat, probably reflecting the organic nature of the Longhorn faeces at Knepp. These days, the vast majority of cowpats are probably closer in composition to frisbees, given the level of bovine medication.

Over the last few weeks we have seen numerous Empress 'rejection drops' and one pair ended up in the grass at our feet. A more successful tryst led to a 3 hour 59 minute coupling at the top of an Oak. However, with total numbers well down on 2015 (maximum day count 61 this year), there appears to have been less violence; attacks on birds have been quite rare (although a Common Buzzard got whacked today). Matthew and I have both already located Purple Emperor eggs and the large amount of female activity observed amongst the willow thickets (on-going) bodes well for next year's crop.

This year the star-of-the-show was pin-up girl Raymonda, who we believe is the most photographed Purple Emperor in history. Literally hundreds of people have seen her since she was first located as a small caterpillar in 2015, by resident Knepp ecologist and BC Sussex stalwart Penny Green. It was therefore fitting that Penny was there to see Raymonda hatch and take to the wing on Thursday (14 July), after she had ceremonially 'trouserred' Knepp's owner, Charlie (Raymonda, not Penny).

Although we have now seen the best of the Emperor season, there will still be plenty of action to enjoy through the remainder of July. Winter lasts a very long time, so I will be returning again and again to drink in the magic of Knepp, at least until the cool air of autumn is reverberating to the sound of rutting Fallow bucks.



Raymonda about to hatch



Raymonda has hatched!



Raymonda sitting above pupal case (image Charlie Burrell)



Raymonda on her master's hand



Raymonda – the sequel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Jul-16 09:25 PM GMT

School's Out!

On Friday (15 July) I was joined by 30 children and 6 adults from Laughton Community Primary School for a visit to our Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood reserves. The sight of so many happy youngsters rushing around spotting and learning to identify butterflies and other wildlife is always a welcome relief from the pressures of trying to save our rarer species from disappearing. It is, not least, a reminder of the importance of the conservation work we do, protecting what we can for future generations to enjoy.



On the way home I stopped off at Springhead Hill, where I saw my first Chalk Hill Blue of the year, and the unfurling flowers of Round-headed Rampion (aka Pride of Sussex).





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jul-16 08:18 AM GMT

The Admiral's Fleet

At the end of the first week in May we saw the start of a significant influx of Red Admirals from mainland Europe. These butterflies clearly enjoyed the excellent breeding conditions provided by lush nettle growth, which developed through late spring and early summer. We are now seeing the fruit of their labours as smart, new Red Admirals appear in ever increasing numbers. I'm now seeing them almost everywhere I go.

I photographed a few of those I saw around the beautiful Hammer Pond at Knepp yesterday (18 July), while hoping for a Purple Emperor to land; which it did the previous day, much to the delight of a visiting group from 'A Focus On Nature' <http://www.afocusonnature.org> The Knepp Emperors are still going well and Matthew Oates reached an impressive tally of 46 yesterday. While 2016 may prove to be a rotten year for most butterfly species, the autumn might be really spectacular for the Red Admiral.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jul-16 01:24 PM GMT

The 'W' In 'The One Show'

Some of you may have seen the White-letter Hairstreak making an appearance on 'The One Show' last night (21 July). This sequence was filmed a couple of weeks ago, on 5 July, at a site on the outskirts of Littlehampton. I had been asked to help the BBC get some close-up footage of this species, to provide the last, naturally occurring letter in the presenters' quest to spell out the programme name.

As there was a teachers' strike that day, I was able to take 12-year-old Joseph Reavey (and dad, Duncan) along, in the hope of helping him see his 50th species in the UK. Not only did we achieve this in style, but Joseph had his photograph taken with presenters Mike Dilger and George McGavin! Mike rated this as one of his best butterfly experiences, as the White-letter Hairstreaks swarmed around us. I performed a count later that day and managed a tally of 88, a number which I never achieved even back in the 1970s.

This species has been one of the few to perform well this season, at least in West Sussex where it remains under-recorded. Three colonies on the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland have yielded counts of up to a dozen individuals.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 22-Jul-16 03:44 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil , if I could just find one I'd be happy 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 23-Jul-16 12:11 AM GMT

Great stuff, Neil. You have seen some epic things lately, and more importantly, shared them with many, many others.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jul-16 10:10 AM GMT

Thanks, Goldie: at the 'right' site (and there aren't many of those), they're easy; at the rest, they're a nightmare!
Thanks, David: as you know, spreading 'the word' is vital.

Re: Neil Hulme

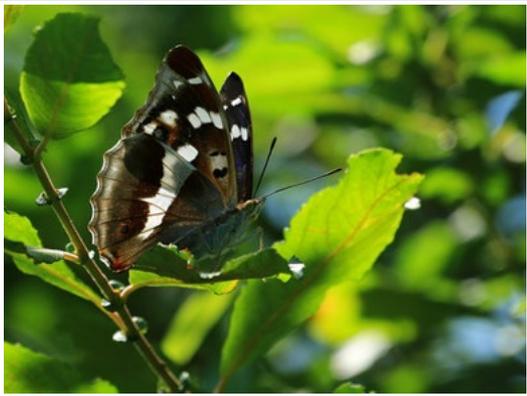
by Neil Hulme, 26-Jul-16 10:16 AM GMT

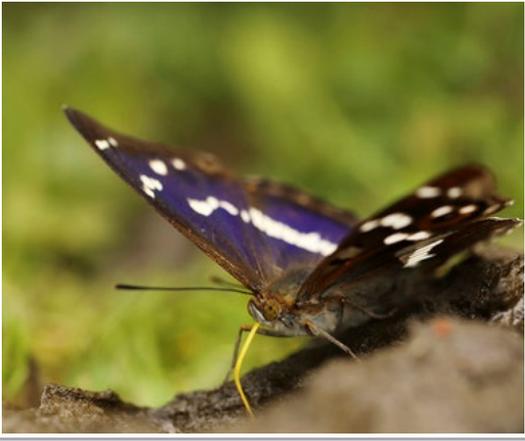
Knepp Emperor Season Fading

The Purple Emperor season at Knepp may just be showing the first signs of winding down for the year, although numbers are still higher than at peak anywhere else in Sussex! On 23 July Matthew Oates and Paul Fosterjohn counted 28 between them, which was followed by a tally of 23 by Matthew on 24 July. In good conditions yesterday (25 July) I could only muster 9 in a couple of hours.

I've recently been sent a few nice images of Knepp Emperors including: a male sitting in a sallow and a close-up of the ripening egg I initially discovered on 15 July, taken during a visit by my brother, Mark, on 20 July; and a male on a cowpat, taken by Matt Adam Williams during the 'A Focus On Nature' <http://www.afocusonnature.org> group meeting on 17 July.

The Brown Hairstreak is also now flying at Knepp, with the first seen by Paul Fosterjohn on 23 July, followed by sightings of 2 and 5 on subsequent days by Matthew.





Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 26-Jul-16 11:59 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Is that 'the' egg?
I'll always remember the 2016 Emperor season for the 'all wings purple' opportunities I had.
Brownies next then !.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jul-16 01:28 PM GMT

Hi Trevor,

It is indeed 'the' egg. Now hatched and shell eaten, leaving just a shiny disc on the leaf surface. I'll let you know if the cat survives.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Jul-16 10:16 PM GMT

You lead a charmed life, Neil. Once Purple Emperors have disappeared, you have Brown Hairstreaks to concentrate on (followed maybe by Long-Tailed Blues!)

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Jul-16 04:13 PM GMT

Hi David,

The possible return of the LTBs has certainly crossed my mind in the last week or two (every day 😊).
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Jul-16 04:27 PM GMT

The Poorest Of Years

A visit to Cissbury Ring on Tuesday afternoon (26 July) provided my first (3) Silver-spotted Skippers of the year, and the opportunity to photograph some beautiful, female Chalk Hill Blues. Despite these highlights, I was shocked by a dearth of butterflies that I have never experienced in the nearly fifty years I've visited the site at this time of year. I suspect that numbers of both these species will build significantly, but there can be little doubt that the overall picture for 2016 is exceptionally grim.



Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 27-Jul-16 06:06 PM GMT

Agreed Neil. I definitely fear that 2016 will be known as one of the worst years ever for butterflies

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-Jul-16 08:48 PM GMT

selbypaul wrote:

Agreed Neil. I definitely fear that 2016 will be known as one of the worst years ever for butterflies

Without a doubt in my opinion. We desperately need a cold winter and a warm April next year.

I'm seeing fewer butterflies than ever before right now, and this time of year is probably when you'd expect to see the greatest numbers! 😞

Global warming, eh? 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Aug-16 10:27 AM GMT

The Bigger Picture – Monitoring At Knepp

On 31 July and 3 August I covered many miles of highly variable habitat, including dry and damp meadows, woodland and copse, parkland and river bank, as part of my annual butterfly monitoring over the Northern and Middle Blocks of the Knepp Castle Estate.

As I have mentioned in a previous post, only those butterflies which form large populations over extensive habitat in excellent condition are likely to resist the worst effects of the weather–extremes driven by climate change. This is why some observers have reported good numbers of some species on some sites in Sussex, although I would argue against the use of the term "abundance" in many cases – this being relative. My surveys of Knepp do not measure the fortunes of our butterflies in the manner which so many others do, on nature reserves or on our carefully managed, premier sites, and in many respects have more in common with the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey (WCBS). They perhaps give a less biased, more generalised snapshot of what's happening in the countryside. I have yet to crunch all of the numbers, but I can already see how shocking the 2016 results are for a wide variety of species. Several have crashed severely.

As always when walking long distances through the beautiful countryside of Sussex (and parts of Knepp are looking increasingly like a more beautiful, ancient Sussex), there were some fabulous butterflies to be seen. Summer brood Holly Blues are appearing and I watched several males processing minerals from cowpats and urine. It was nice to see a couple of second generation Brown Argus in one field, although the species is still struggling this year. The Brimstone will be more highly valued when it stirs from hibernation towards the end of winter, but it will never be more beautiful than it is just now. I saw several Painted Ladies which showed that strong salmon–pink colouration, indicating a very recent hatching on Sussex soil. Best of all, as the last Purple Emperors of the year disappear into the sunset, I watched the next generation clinging to a sallow leaf.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 07-Aug-16 10:55 AM GMT

This has indeed been a very depressing year for butterflies. There are times when I think that it won't be long before we celebrate the appearance of a single Large White or Meadow Brown 😊

However, on a more positive note, my trip to Friston Gallops yesterday (<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=7530#p113055>) did produce respectable numbers of Chalk Hill Blues. Nothing like the numbers of a few years ago, but at least they are still there.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 07-Aug-16 11:56 AM GMT

This year I've found myself actually chasing a Common Blue through dozens of Chalkhills for a rare picture! That is a truly sorry state of affairs to be in 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Aug-16 10:07 PM GMT

bugboy wrote:

This year I've found myself actually chasing a Common Blue through dozens of Chalkhills for a rare picture! That is a truly sorry state of affairs to be in 😞

I empathise with this, Bugboy.

Common Blues and Brown Argus have been SO scarce this year that I've treated them like rarities, to be chased down and photographed on those isolated occasions when they've been flying.

Usually, these supposedly common species recover in a good year, but good years are becoming once-per-decade events, so one wonders what things will be like 20 years down the line?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-16 07:11 AM GMT

Break For Brownies

I've been slaving away over a hot atlas (The Butterflies of Sussex; published spring 2017) for much of this year, and intensively over the last few weeks, to the point where Cabin Fever had really set in by Monday evening. A quick email to a friend and I was heading to Steyning Rifle Range to look for Brown Hairstreaks on Tuesday morning (23 August), for only the third time this year. As I walked down the slope it was obvious from the small huddle of enthusiasts that all the hard work had been done. A perfect female Brown Hairstreak was already posing beautifully.

However, despite the weather being perfect, and this being 'peak week', we only saw another two. My two previous visits were admittedly very short, but only produced singles down low. The Rifle Range is performing well below par this year. This has been due to a problem that I spotted a few weeks back, and that I will be working with the Steyning Downland Scheme and South Downs National Park Authority to resolve before next season. Unfortunately, the Dexter cattle, which were told to eat the coarser grasses on the site, have developed a liking for the tender parts of Blackthorn and Bullace, browsing the shrubs back hard to the woodier growth. Their dish of choice will have been served with caterpillar croutons. However, we know from experience that once the problem is resolved, the population will recover quickly.

Other sightings included a Clouded Yellow (here they come!) and a female Adonis Blue ab. *krodeli*. On one of my previous visits I also found a nice Oak Eggar moth.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Aug-16 07:53 PM GMT

Trees For Hairstreaks

I currently have 13 potted specimens of the Dutch Elm Disease-resistant cultivar LUTECE in my back garden, which have been purchased by BC Sussex. These will be planted at Littlehampton during the winter, to secure the future of an important White-letter Hairstreak colony. I will be calling for assistance from green-fingered Branch members in due course. In the shorter term the trees are providing a steady supply of food for my daughter's pet Vapourer Moth caterpillar. I'm delighted to see that she's now taking a keen interest in butterflies and moths, without too much bribery.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 31-Aug-16 07:58 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

In the shorter term the trees are providing a steady supply of food for my daughter's pet Vapourer Moth caterpillar. I'm delighted to see that she's now taking a keen interest in butterflies and moths, without too much bribery.

Glad to hear it, Neil – sounds like Mia has the "bug bug" 😊 I'm sure the blood, sweat and tears being poured over the atlas will be worth it.

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 31-Aug-16 08:09 PM GMT

[quote]In the shorter term the trees are providing a steady supply of food for my daughter's pet Vapourer Moth caterpillar. I'm delighted to see that she's now taking a keen interest in butterflies and moths, without too much bribery.I hope the Vapourer's not a female. Mia might be disappointed if her moth emerges without wings.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Aug-16 08:48 PM GMT

Thanks, Pete. A little more pain to come, but once it's wrapped up I'll be putting my feet up for the next 25 years. I'm sure I'll write again at some point, but I'll never take on quite so much in the future!

Jack: Knowing Mia I suspect she'll just demand £1 for every egg it lays.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Aug-16 09:07 PM GMT

Finishing On The Brown

Yesterday (30 August) I visited the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) area, primarily to make a final decision on planting locations for Cowslip and Primrose plugs, in readiness for colonisation by the Duke of Burgundy (now only a few kilometres away!). There will be a fab and fun event to get these in the ground on Sunday September 18, so any locals who would like to help out can visit the SDS website to find out more (see <http://steyningdownland.org/event/dukes-planting-day/>).

Of course it would have been rude to visit this fantastic site without having a last look for the Brown Hairstreak. I managed my best count of low-level females this season, with a total of 4 seen in quick succession, all close to the lower gate on the northern flank of the Rifle Range. It was a case of quality over quantity, with one individual being in perfect condition. I suspect she hadn't even reached one of the master trees yet, and will probably still be laying eggs in late September.

The females I see are all given 'condition scores', and this batch rated 10, 8.5, 8 and 6. Apart from being a bit of fun, this has generated some interesting data this year. The usual glut of low-scoring individuals has been notably absent. I'm interpreting this to reflect the problems caused by recent over-browsing of the *Prunus*, with the majority of females dispersing quite rapidly in the hunt for more suitably conditioned plants.

Later in the day, when passing through Findon Valley, I decided on a quick yomp to the top of Cissbury Ring, to catch the beautiful sunset. The reward, apart from the view, was a newly-hatched female Adonis Blue. These will be some of the last butterflies I see this year, so it was great to find a couple of corkers to close the innings.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 01-Sep-16 05:32 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the Butterflies Neil, we're all concerned up here in the North at the lack of Butterflies, this time last year the Small Tortoiseshells were every where, in my garden nearly every day right up till October, so far we've seen none this July or August, I keep looking for them every day, so far nothing, I'm hoping they could just be late. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Buchan Boy, 01-Sep-16 09:34 PM GMT

That female Adonis is gorgeous, not had a great year meself with Adonis's but that shot brings good cheer, nice one. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Sep-16 10:42 PM GMT

Not a bad way to (almost) finish off, Neil, though I suspect that there may well be a twist or two for you before 2016 is out!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 02-Sep-16 06:49 AM GMT

Adonis or Chalkhill. Either you Neil or Pete has made an error.

If you want to send me a PM, I can let you have a membership form for the Mis-Identification Club 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 02-Sep-16 07:24 AM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:

If you want to send me a PM, I can let you have a membership form for the Mis-Identification Club 😊

That'll be me, Jack 😊 I originally posed a question here before sending Neil a PM instead and received a detailed response.

The well-documented characteristic that I was going on was the colour of the scales on the hindwing upperside between the red dots and the margin, where most authorities say that these scales are blue in Adonis, and white in Chalk Hill. However, looking at other photos in the gallery (for Adonis), such as these, then this characteristic is subtle at best:

http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/gallery/image.php?album_id=162&image_id=11587
http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/gallery/image.php?album_id=162&image_id=8196

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 12-Sep-16 07:23 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:**Trees For Hairstreaks**

I currently have 13 potted specimens of the Dutch Elm Disease-resistant cultivar LUTECE in my back garden, which have been purchased by BC Sussex. These will be planted at Littlehampton during the winter, to secure the future of an important White-letter Hairstreak colony. I will be calling for assistance from green-fingered Branch members in due course. In the shorter term the trees are providing a steady supply of food for my daughter's pet Vapourer Moth caterpillar. I'm delighted to see that she's now taking a keen interest in butterflies and moths, without too much bribery.

[attachment=0]BC Ulmus LUTECE.jpg[/attachment]

Hi Neil

Well done to you and BC Sussex for purchasing the DED resistant elms. It's something I'm currently trying to persuade Sheffield Council to do in the current street tree "replacement" (felling) programme. Some good news to come out of the bad hopefully! Are you in contact with Dr David Herling about the DED resistant elms? If not, I highly recommend you contact him sometime. I spent an hour speaking to him on the phone the first time we spoke. A truly remarkable man with an amazing knowledge of everything elm related.

Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-16 04:42 PM GMT

Thanks, Paul, and good luck with your highly commendable plans.

I use this valuable resource <http://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/downloads/Disease%20resistant%20elm%20cultivars%20BC%20trials%205th%20report%201115.pdf> courtesy of BC Hants & IOW Branch.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-16 04:49 PM GMT

Vanessa The Vapourer

Over two days this week the bizarre life of the flightless female Vapourer Moth was played out in our Worthing back garden. The moth emerged at 14:15 on 12 September, having been nurtured over the previous weeks by my five-year-old daughter, Mia, who found the caterpillar in a local park (she's now got three species on the go).

An amorous male Vapourer came calling at 15:39 and was gone by 15:48. By 16:40 she was laying eggs and in just a few hours she had squeezed out more than 130. It seems rather sad that she had nothing now to do, other than wait for her life to ebb away. She died during the afternoon of 13 September, having moved no further than 1 centimetre.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-16 06:11 PM GMT

Sunset On The Season

On Tuesday (13 September) I could no longer resist the urge to get outside and enjoy what may be the last of our Indian Summer. I decided to have a look at a Brown Hairstreak site recently discovered by one of our members (David Cook) at Burgess Hill, also exploring a little further afield. It does look very good and despite being so late in the season I saw two female Brown Hairstreaks still at work.

As I wandered along the course of a small stream I came across a patch of flowers where 11 male Small Coppers were battering the living daylights out of each other – that more than doubled my 2016 tally, demonstrating the resilience of butterflies as this third brood emerges. Having found this 'pot of gold' I dropped in for 30 minutes at

Cissbury Ring on the way home, finding a further 15.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 15-Sep-16 09:41 PM GMT

Lovely Coppers Neil, great to see Mia's moth menagerie is going so well. Great photos of the female Vapourer I'm sure Mia was fascinated by it, I know I am.

Glad to see you got out for a bit, what a relief eh!

All the best. James

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 17-Sep-16 09:24 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Thanks, Paul, and good luck with your highly commendable plans.

I use this valuable resource <http://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/downloads/Disease%20resistant%20elm%20cultivars%20BC%20trials%205th%20report%201115.pdf> courtesy of BC Hants & IOW Branch.

BWs, Neil

Thanks Neil
As you say, an excellent article
Paul

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Sep-16 09:44 PM GMT

Many thanks for that Vapourer moth sequence, Neil. I can't think of any online resource that would bring it to life quite like that!

Fascinating.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Sep-16 07:26 PM GMT

Thanks, all. I must confess that the speed of the entire process took me by surprise. Always something to learn!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Sep-16 07:35 PM GMT

Planting For The Future

This morning (18 September) I joined a crowd of nearly 40 people including special guests South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Members Norman Dingemans (Deputy Chair) and David Coldwell, SDNPA Staff and Volunteer Rangers, and a large contingent from the Steyning Downland Scheme <http://steyningdownland.org/> to plant 1500 *Primula* plugs (1000 Primrose, 500 Cowslip) at Steyning Coombe. This will be followed by a second event to plant a further 1500 elsewhere on the Steyning Downland Scheme area on 5 October, to encourage colonisation by the Duke of Burgundy. A very obliging female Brown Hairstreak dropped by to reward our efforts.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Sep-16 09:21 AM GMT

Wall Of Death

I snatched an hour on the slopes of Mill Hill yesterday (21 September), while en route to a BC Sussex committee meeting. The sun was already sinking and at first I struggled to locate the third brood Wall I was seeking, with just a single female located at the southern end of the lower level. With the temperature gradually falling below ideal I suspected they would most likely be on the part of the scree slope tilted flattest to the sun, which involved some mountaineering.

Please be very careful if you're tempted to traverse the steeper parts of the main slope (not recommended) as the terrain is genuinely hazardous. Here I found a further 2 females and 4 males. I rearranged some old planks to form the perfect sunny perch and within five minutes had a beautiful female Wall posing for me.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-Sep-16 09:45 AM GMT

Lovely images, Neil, specially the second one, which gives an excellent indication of how well camouflaged this species is.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 24-Sep-16 01:47 PM GMT

Neil, those Wall's look great 🍃 and I second David on the second one, it seems to be changing to Autumn colours ready to suit an Autumn back ground 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Sep-16 06:20 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie and David. I always think the underside looks like granny's old Axminster carpet.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Sep-16 06:24 PM GMT

Exodus

While writing the 46th of the 53 species accounts for the forthcoming *'The Butterflies of Sussex'* (at last there is light at the end of the tunnel!) I was distracted by the almost constant presence of Red Admirals in my Worthing back garden today (24 September). This species has provided a welcome lift to a generally very poor butterfly season, but has been heading south in significant numbers over the last few weeks.

Almost everywhere I've been in Sussex I've noticed an almost constant stream of them, although in the majority of cases it's just been ones and twos. However, in some areas near the coast, where Ivy is in flower, they have been congregating to take on supplies before crossing The Channel. A friend has consistently had upwards of 25 in his garden (also Worthing) over the last ten days.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Katrina, 24-Sep-16 06:50 PM GMT

Well done with the writing! There has definitely been more Red Admirals around than usual.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Sep-16 06:56 PM GMT

Bugboy's Shrike

With Hannah looking after a friend's children this afternoon (25 September) it was unlikely that I'd find much peace and quiet at home, so I used this as an excuse to pay a quick visit to Newhaven Tide Mills, where bugboy's Red-backed Shrike is still performing well. Rumours of its extraordinary tameness were not exaggerated and I managed to get some reasonable shots even with a Lumix. Well done that man!

There were a few Clouded Yellows and Common Blues present. No sign of LTBs, but I can't claim to have looked very hard.



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 25-Sep-16 07:23 PM GMT

Glad you had a good encounter with 'my' Shrike Neil 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Butterflysaurus rex, 25-Sep-16 07:51 PM GMT

Pleased to see you made it over here to see the friendliest Shrike in the U.K. Neil. I don't think we even managed a quick look for LTB's after bugboy showed us his photos on the back of his camera. If there are any LTB's there let's hope they won't be made a meal of by this or any other hungry birds!

ATB

James

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Sep-16 08:01 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

No sign of LTBs, but I can't claim to have looked very hard.

Do you think they might be about this October, Neil?

Re: Neil Hulme

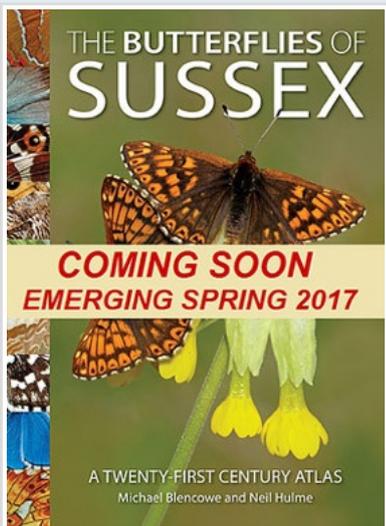
by Neil Hulme, 27-Sep-16 07:26 AM GMT

Hi David,

The Long-tailed Blue has barely reached the UK this year and the number of arrivals is minute compared to 2013 and 2015. I suspect that large influxes, when they occur in future, will make themselves known before the end of August, and mid September at the latest. The main waves started to arrive in early August in both 2013 and 2015. I'm expecting a damp squib rather than fireworks.

BWs, Neil

P.S. DIARY NOW CLOSED UNTIL DECEMBER DUE TO:



Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 27-Sep-16 09:08 AM GMT

Neil, good luck with the book.

Although I do not live in Sussex I spent some of my childhood there and mum lived in Worthing in the last 15 years of her life. I look forward to receiving a copy 😊

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 27-Sep-16 12:09 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

Saw your brief moment of fame last evening on BBC's 'Inside out'. Pity the BBC couldn't find a shot showing full glorious purple, but that pupae was stunning.

All the best with the book,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Oct-16 11:10 PM GMT

I shall look forward to the release of this book, Neil. I'm sure it will provide wonderful images as well as valuable commentary on the impressive range of species Sussex has to offer.

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 22-Nov-16 02:59 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

I was just catching up on a few diary pages. It's great to see the disease resistant Elms and the book progress. I once lived in Surrey and I once bought a book with a "hypnotic purple front cover" 😊😊😊. Although it looks like you are almost there anyway, my advice would be to try and make any technical information easy to understand for ordinary people and leave at least one typo on page 867 for Pete E to spot! 😊😊

Best wishes for the projects,
Philip

Re: Neil Hulme

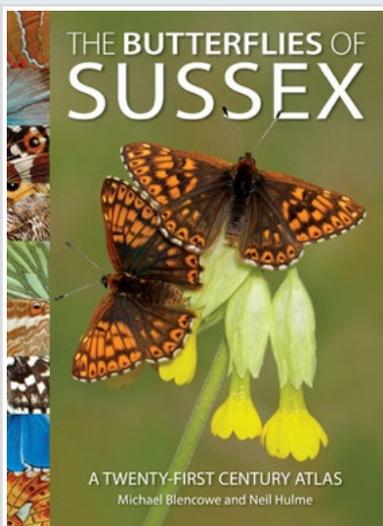
by Neil Hulme, 11-Dec-16 11:15 AM GMT

Thanks, Philip. I think the book should meet your criteria, apart from the typo on page 867, which we cunningly avoided by having only 288 pages. BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

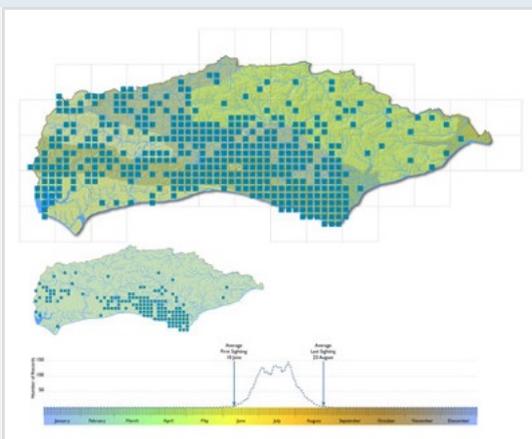
by Neil Hulme, 11-Dec-16 11:41 AM GMT

The Pain Is Over



A few days ago 'The Butterflies of Sussex' <http://www.naturebureau.co.uk/bookshop/the-butterflies-of-sussex-detail> went off to the publisher, comprising >126,000 words (more than 100,000 of which are written in my blood, sweat and tears), >350 images and >100 maps and charts. There are photographic contributions by many UKBers, including Vince Massimo, Mark Colvin, Badgerbob, Susie, Butterfliesaurus rex, William, Trevor, Buchan Boy, Gary.N, Downland Boy, Colin Knight, mud-puddling and, of course, Pete Eeles. Jamie Burston also has a few of his drawings in the mix.

Here's a sneak preview of some of the lovely graphics (DRAFT) produced by Bob Foreman, showing how the distribution of Marbled White has changed between 1990 - 1994 (small map) and 2010 - 2014 (large map).



I've invested approximately 1,200 hours of 'spare time' in the project this year, and although I'm sure I'll look back on the finished article with some degree of pride, it will be the feat of endurance that sticks in my memory. I will hopefully have recovered by the time the first Orange-tip takes to the air.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 11-Dec-16 12:17 PM GMT

Congratulations Neil (and all others involved). I'm sure if they could, the butterflies themselves would thank you 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Mark Tutton, 11-Dec-16 04:53 PM GMT

Congratulations Neil – really looking forward to receiving my copy which I ordered a while ago 😊

Kind Regards

Mark

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 11-Dec-16 05:13 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

After that marathon, hopefully normality will return in 2017.

More than once this year I've heard " haven't seen much of Neil lately "!

Looking forward to my copy.

All the best,

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 11-Dec-16 06:30 PM GMT

Congrats Neil – have a good rest and get ready for 2017, here's hoping it's a cracker 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 11-Dec-16 10:22 PM GMT

Congratulations, indeed, Neil – and like others I can't wait to see a copy. 😊 The work that goes into something like that is phenomenal.

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by John W, 11-Dec-16 11:35 PM GMT

Fabulous Neil, I can't wait to see a copy!

Cheers

John W

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 12-Dec-16 06:55 PM GMT

Congrats Neil – I know how much work you've put into this and I know that there are high expectations as a result (since you always set yourself such a high standard), which I'm sure will be more than met!

I hope you're now able to take a well-deserved break!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 15-Dec-16 06:00 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

The Pain Is Over

I've invested approximately 1,200 hours of 'spare time' in the project this year, and although I'm sure I'll look back on the finished article with some degree of pride, it will be the feat of endurance that sticks in my memory. I will hopefully have recovered by the time the first Orange-tip takes to the air.

1200 hours! Puts my 300ish on Sheffield street trees to shame!!! Well done Neil. If it weren't for the efforts of people like you, the wildlife world would be much worse off. I'm sure I speak for many UKButterflyers on here when I say a huge thanks for all that you do.

Re: Neil Hulme

by William, 15-Dec-16 06:28 PM GMT

Congrats Neil – a mammoth work, look forward to seeing it! Hope you enjoy a good break over the winter.

BWs,

William

Re: Neil Hulme

by Lee Hurrell, 19-Dec-16 11:18 AM GMT

Congrats also from me, Neil.

I am also looking forward to getting my copy.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-Dec-16 10:49 PM GMT

Great effort, Neil, and I'm sure the results will vindicate that mammoth total of hours devoted to the task.

I have the flyer on my desk and will be ordering a copy early in the new year.

Best wishes for a restful Christmas.....you've sure earned it!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Dec-16 08:31 AM GMT



Thanks to everyone for their kind words. I'm now weaning myself off the Red Bull!

bugboy: "*I'm sure if they could, the butterflies themselves would thank you*". I think they do, in their own way. When I discovered a newly colonised Duke of Burgundy site in May, containing at least 88 individuals, it certainly felt like an expression of gratitude for all the work we've done for the species in Sussex.

millerd: "*The work that goes into something like that is phenomena!*". The main part is actually 'invisible' – this being the research and preparation involved before writing the account for each species. I now know a great deal more about butterflies than I did before starting. For instance, I now have very strong suspicions about the reasons for the decline of Small Tortoiseshell in the South of England since the mid 1980s (not parasitoids, at least not directly/mainly), and I no longer believe that the overgrowth of chalk grasslands, as the result of myxomatosis, was the initial *trigger* for declines in Silver-spotted Skipper, Grayling and Adonis Blue (although it clearly exacerbated the problem and, more importantly, prevented any sort of recovery for over thirty years).

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and butterfly-filled New Year.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Susie, 22-Dec-16 01:51 PM GMT

Well done on completing the Atlas, Neil. Looking forward to buying a copy in the new year. 😊

A very merry christmas and a happy new year to you.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Dec-16 04:59 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

I now know a great deal more about butterflies than I did before starting. For instance, I now have very strong suspicions about the reasons for the decline of Small Tortoiseshell in the South of England since the mid 1980s (not parasitoids, at least not directly/mainly), and I no longer

believe that the overgrowth of chalk grasslands, as the result of myxomatosis, was the initial *trigger* for declines in Silver-spotted Skipper, Grayling and Adonis Blue (although it clearly exacerbated the problem and, more importantly, prevented any sort of recovery for over thirty years).

Is this information contained in the book, Neil?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Dec-16 07:43 AM GMT

Hi David

Yes, along with discussion of a wide range of other 'tricky' topics, such as the origin of Sussex Monarchs, status of Large Tortoiseshell since the mid C20th; whether recent events reflect truly migratory (rather than sporadic, dispersive) behaviour in Long-tailed Blue; what *really* reduced the famously vast population of Chalk Hill Blue at Shoreham Bank (Mill Hill) to the small colony which persists there today; why the female Duke of Burgundy has retained six fully developed legs, and much more.

I hasten to add that these are reasoned arguments based on circumstantial evidence, rather than proven facts, but there is plenty of stuff in there which I hope people will find of interest, beyond a rehash of the 'known'.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 23-Dec-16 08:28 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

On the subject of the Long Tailed Blue, we were told that the 2013 influx was a once in a lifetime event. Then in 2015 it happened again. This year I was privileged to witness just one of a couple of reported specimens. This makes me wonder whether they've been visiting our shores for many years in varying numbers. the theory being if no one knew they were here, they would not be searching for them. Until of course an eagle eyed observer happens to spot one, which takes us neatly back to 2013 !

Just a thought.

All the best for next season, 😊 .
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Dec-16 11:15 AM GMT

Hi Trevor,

It's all in the book. No time for spoilers – it's nearly time to start the Christmas shopping!

Hi Susie,

Many thanks. Happy Christmas to you too.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-Dec-16 10:02 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Yes, along with discussion of a wide range of other 'tricky' topics, such as the origin of Sussex Monarchs, status of Large Tortoiseshell since the mid C20th; whether recent events reflect truly migratory (rather than sporadic, dispersive) behaviour in Long-tailed Blue; what *really* reduced the famously vast population of Chalk Hill Blue at Shoreham Bank (Mill Hill) to the small colony which persists there today; why the female Duke of Burgundy has retained six fully developed legs, and much more.

That's more than enough to make me even more keen to get hold of a copy.

Thanks, Neil.