

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 28-Jan-17 05:43 PM GMT

It is about time I resurrected my diary. 2016 wasn't the best year with us losing my father in February. I spent much of the year after that at his house in the Scottish Borders sorting his belongings and keeping the "garden" under control. It is never a pleasant time, sorting through people's treasured belongings and trying to find new homes for much of it.

My father was a biologist and had many specialist books. The family will be keeping many of these, but we have donated his large collection of limnology books to a field station on Loch Lomond and the Scottish Ornithology Society were pleased to receive most of his books on birds and specialist wildlife books. It was sad to see how little was left after a fascinating life working around the world, but it is comforting that we will be keeping his house and hope to move there in two years once my daughter has finished school and my son is settled in his apprenticeship.

Dad built his house in the middle of 16 acres of woodland, next to a pond with a stream running past it. There are various nooks and crannies built into the house specifically for particular species of birds to nest in. When he did this I thought to myself that sparrows or blackbirds would occupy the various ledges and holes, but no. A redstart regularly nests on the ledge one side of the chimney and this year there was a wren nesting on the other side. A spotted flycatcher nests every year in a hole above the kitchen window and a few feet away is another hole where Dad once counted 15 wrens coming out of their winter roost. This year I also spotted grey wagtails fledging from their nest by the bridge and nuthatches using a hole in an old oak tree.

There is also a badger sett (which does cause some problems) and roe deer regularly walk past the house. The ponds are a haven for frogs and toads, newts and various species of damsel and dragon flies. In the evening you can sit in the sitting room and watch the bats pour out of the apex of the roof to catch insects over the pond. It is a nature-lover's paradise and we intend to keep it that way and maybe enhance it a wee bit more for butterflies.

Already I have planted cuttings of buddleia on a bank opposite the kitchen. This was a project that Dad and I had planned together. I have plans to clear some sycamore saplings from a bank and plant rockrose to see if the nearby colony of Northern Brown Argus will expand into it. And I am intending to work on an area of rough grassland below it to enhance it for wild flowers.

I used to do down to visit Dad every couple of weeks and he would usually put me to work cutting down trees or clearing the guttering, or some such thing. I was always pleased to help out and I enjoy that sort of work and I have managed to heat my house from the resulting logs for the last 15 years! This year I have been staying down at the house a lot, while I have been working there and it has allowed me a little more time to search out the local butterflies. In June I went down for a week and took an afternoon off on a lovely sunny day to explore the lovely little valley above the house. I have mentioned this before as it is a great spot for Northern Brown Argus. It was so nice spending time there and I couldn't believe the number of butterflies that there are in that little valley. In one section about 50 metres long I saw over 40 Northern Brown Argus.



I even managed to get a picture of three of them on a thistle head.



There were even more Small Heaths flying there and a number of Green-veined Whites. I also saw a fleeting glimpse of a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary and I was delighted on my way back down the valley to see it again and take a few pictures of it.



I had briefly seen one before there in 2011, but hadn't managed to photograph it. Now I had proof that I hadn't been mistaken. After a while the butterflies all settled down for the evening and I took the opportunity to wander up the track to the top of the nearby hill with my dog. It was a great vantage point, giving views up and down the valley and it was lovely to take time out from clearing the house.



They're in front of you Midge!



Re: Nick Morgan

by Pete Eeles, 28-Jan-17 08:18 PM GMT

Very sorry to hear about your loss, Nick.

It's lovely to hear about your dad's love of wildlife passing down the generations. And I'm sure that many here will be green with envy hearing about your future home (including me).

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 28-Jan-17 09:13 PM GMT

Nick, from the sound of it, I'd say your father's passing is a loss to all wildlife lovers. What a dedicated fellow he was and what a wonderful place that he has left for you to enjoy.

I'm sure you'll do great justice to it, and as Pete says, I really envy you with such magnificent wildlife on your doorstep....and within the walls!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Jan-17 04:58 PM GMT

Thank you Pete and David,

It is great to think that there are various nature reserves and game parks around the world as a result of Dad's work. That is quite a legacy to leave behind for future generations.

We can't believe how lucky we are to have somewhere like that to go and live. Naturally my thoughts are tinged with sadness, but I know my father would be so pleased to think of us living there, looking after it as he would have liked. I look at some of the big trees there and realise that we don't own the place. We are just lucky enough to be passing through and enjoying it. Many of trees are a lot older than I am and hopefully they will be there for many years after I am gone. I feel privileged to be there and to help look after the place. Of course that opens up a whole debate about whether the trees and vegetation should be just left to do their own thing or whether we should manage the area. The amount of rhododendron growing there almost answers that question for me, though!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Jan-17 05:30 PM GMT

On 22 June I went down to Burnmouth, with my friend Abbie, to look for Small Blues. Abbie had already been in touch with Iain Cowe, so we met up with him while we were down there. It was so nice to meet Iain after corresponding with him by e-mail for so many years!



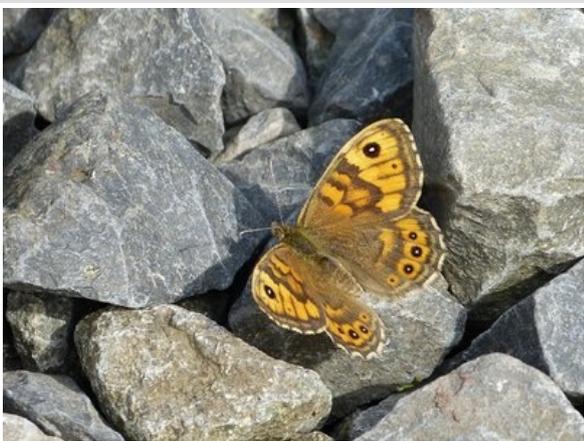
This is the third year that we have gone down to look for Small Blues there and we were quite alarmed to see how dried out the Kidney Vetch appeared to be. 2016 was quite a dry year, but it was noticeable how many eastern winds we had and I think these coastal slopes had simply been dried out by the prevailing wind. We noticed that in a railway cutting on the other side of the coastal path the Kidney Vetch looked much more lush.



I think we only saw twenty or so Small Blues that day, which is considerably fewer than in previous years. Iain kindly pointed out some Large Skippers in an area where he had seen them before. This was to be the only time I saw them in 2016.



We had seen a few other species such as single Red Admiral, Small White, Peacock, Common Blue and four Small Coppers. However, despite the path on the way there looking like an ideal habitat for such species they are never very numerous. I was delighted just as we were leaving to see a Wall Brown. This was the first I had seen that year.



It is always a thrill to go down to Burnmouth to see the Small Blues. Each year I am surprised by just how small they are!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 29-Jan-17 06:37 PM GMT

Condolences Nick – he sounded like a great bloke to have known and worked with, and building nesting spaces into the house – that's just brilliant 😊 Those Northern Brown Argus are pretty spectacular – are they as boisterous as their southern cousins?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Jan-17 08:40 PM GMT

Thank you Wurzel.

Would you believe that I have never seen a Brown Argus. Northern, Southern, Mountain and Spanish, but never a straight forward Brown Argus. I hope to put this right this summer when we go on holiday to Corfu. If not I will have to venture south of the border to add one to my list, along with the various other UK butterflies we don't find up here.

The Northern Brown Argus is quite a bold little creature. They seem to be quite approachable. I am not sure if it is also true of the Brown Argus, but the NBAs are found in quite small colonies here and don't tend to fly any distance. I am only aware of four colonies in East Lothian. One is on a very steep bank at the side of someone's garden and is in an area about 10 feet by 20 feet. Another is on the rough of a golf course on the coast and is even smaller. Both are very vulnerable to being lost.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Padfield, 29-Jan-17 09:46 PM GMT

May I add my sympathies, Nick. These must have been very difficult times. I'm sure you will do your father proud – and you must be proud of him too. He sounds a wonderful man.

Guy

Re: Nick Morgan

by bugboy, 29-Jan-17 10:26 PM GMT

My condolences too. It sounds like he's left a legacy to be proud of though.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 05-Feb-17 06:02 PM GMT

Thank you Guy and Bugboy!

Another trip out in the Scottish Borders last year to look for butterflies was to the colony of Scotch Argus near Melrose. It was great going there on a sunny day for a change. My two previous visits had been on an over-cast evening and even a day when it was raining, but both times the Scotch Argus were still flying!

Last year I wasn't disappointed as there were plenty of Scotch Argus flying in the sun. The real problem was that they were very flighty. It was very difficult to approach them and usually they saw me before I saw them. When they landed they tended to go deep down in the grass, meaning that it was very difficult to photograph them. However, two of them were much more obliging, being engrossed in feeding.



It was quite difficult to judge how many Scotch Argus were there, but I reckon that there were about 60 in that area. There were also quite a few Small Skippers on the small flowers along the track.



There were also a few Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Green-veined Whites, Dark Green Fritillaries and a Common Blue there.



On my walk back to the car I met Iain Cowe. This was the first time I have ever bumped into another butterfly enthusiast when I have been out looking for butterflies!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 06-Feb-17 10:13 PM GMT

Lush shots of the Scotch Argus Nick 🤔🇮🇪 It certainly sounds like the Northern Brown Argus and Brown Argus have similar temperaments - little balls of rage or like their 'initial-sake' B.A. from the A Team 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by SimonC69, 08-Feb-17 09:26 AM GMT

Love these. 😊 Especially the Scotch Argus. Is it just me though, or does the patterning on the DGFs right wing say '1396' ? 🤔

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 09-Feb-17 08:58 PM GMT

Hi Simon. So it does. I'll have to look at others and see what number they are!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 09-Feb-17 10:08 PM GMT

Malaga, Spain - July 2016

From the 1st to 15th July last year we had our annual family holiday in a villa 45 kilometres north west of Malaga. This is the third time we have holidayed there, coincidentally being there for exactly the same dates in 2012 and 2014 previously.

The holiday went off to a really good start, with me seeing a Small White, *Pieris rapae*, as we were driving out of the airport and then a Plain Tiger, *Danaus chrysippus*, flew across the road in front of us.

There is an area that I tend to walk to each day to look for butterflies just a little way up the road from the villa we rent. Over the previous two years I have learned that this is the best local spot to find them. Probably the most common butterfly there is the Southern Gatekeeper, *Pyronia cecilia*, although they weren't as numerous as the first year we visited.



Dusky Heaths, *Coenonympha dorus*, are beautiful little butterflies with the line of silver scales along the edge of their wings. They always seem to be flying around this area.



The track turns into a faint path that climbs along the ridge of the hills through olive groves. On the exposed parts of the path male Wall Browns, *Lasiommata megera*, take up territory, chasing after any other butterflies or large insect they see.



Common Blues, *Polyommatus celina*, were the other butterfly that could be relied upon to be there each day. They seem very much smaller than those that I see back home. I wasn't sure if I was just imagining this, but I also remember when I saw a Small Copper, *Lycaena phlaeas*, how much bigger it looked than the Common Blue. The two species are more-or-less the same size back home.



I only saw a Small Copper once this year. It seems to be a very widely distributed butterfly, but it's never seen in great numbers.



I was delighted to see a Striped Grayling, *Pseudotergumia fidia*, on the first day I walked up the path. It was there again in exactly the same place the second day too, but I didn't see it after that. Two years earlier I saw a lot of them in the next valley, but have never seen them at this spot before.



Mallow Skippers, *Carcharodus alceae*, seemed to have small territories along the road to the villa chasing after anything that flew anywhere near them.



Up the track, on the wild Thyme, Sage Skippers, *Syrnithus proto*, were doing the same thing.



Other butterflies that I saw occasionally were Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*,



... and Bath White, *Pontia daplidice*.



The Southern Brown Argus, *Aricia cramera*, is a beautiful little butterfly, which I regularly saw flying among the wild flowers.



Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 10-Feb-17 05:51 PM GMT

We had three species of butterflies that were resident in the garden of the villa we were staying in. I have always noticed Long-tailed Blues, *Lampides boeticus*, flying around the garden there, but it was only this year that I realised that they were laying eggs on a bush in the garden, which I now think is *Polygala myrtifoli*.



I have previously found the eggs and caterpillars of Lang's Short-tailed Blues, *Leptotes pirithous*, on a Plumbago bush in the garden. This year I could find plenty of eggs, but I didn't find any caterpillars. I suspect that they may have been inside the flower buds judging by the holes I found.





There seemed to be more Geranium Bronzes, *Cacyreus marshalli*, than in previous years. This was confirmed by the number of eggs I found on the Geranium flowers around the garden. Most flower heads had at least one egg on it.



Other visitors to the garden included Large Whites, *Pieris brassicae*, Clouded Yellows, *Colias crocea*, and most commonly the Small White, *Pieris rapae*.



No trip to southern Spain would be complete without me seeing an African Grass Blue, *Zizeeria knysna*. I usually see them down by the river, but this year it took two visits to the Rio Guadalhorce before I saw one. I later saw some on the banks of the lakes at Emblase de Guadalhorce.



While I was there I briefly saw a Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*.



There was also a Bath White, *Pontia daplidice*, flying among the grass there.



On our last full day at the villa I thought I would walk further along the road to see if I could find any other sites similar to my favourite butterfly spot. A couple of kilometres further up the hill I saw a track heading up into the olive groves, so followed it. It was a worthwhile detour as almost immediately I saw a Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*.



There were a lot of Common Blues, Southern Brown Argus and Bath Whites flying around the few bits of green vegetation at the side of the track along with a little Red-underwing Skipper, *Spialia sertorius*.



Under an old olive tree I saw a couple of butterflies having a bit of a squabble. They turned out to be a Meadow Brown, *Maniola jurtina*...



... and a Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*. This is the summer form that occurs around the Mediterranean.



On a trip to walk the Caminito del Rey I only saw Speckled Woods and Bath Whites, which was a little disappointing as I thought there may have been various species of Graylings there.



However, a trip to the Sierra Nevada was fantastic. I have quite a few pictures from there!!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 10-Feb-17 10:42 PM GMT

Cracking set of photos Nick – the Gatekeeper is obviously my favorite but I have to say the markings on the Southern Brown Argus are very precise and orderly so that runs a very close second 🤔👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 10-Feb-17 11:06 PM GMT

Mouth-watering stuff, Nick. Makes me yearn for a trip to the continent but sadly that's three months away!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Feb-17 11:13 AM GMT

Hi Wurzel, It is always a pleasure to see the butterflies in the Malaga area, even though they are usually the same species as I have seen on previous visit. I have my particular favourites, too, including the Dusky Heath, because it is quite different from anything I see here. The Southern Gatekeeper and Southern Brown Argus are beautiful butterflies. Of course I haven't seen either *Pyronia tithonus* or *Aricia agestis* to compare with them!! Dave, It has been fun recounting last year's butterfly activity during these dreary months. You are lucky only having to wait three months. Where are you going? I have five months to wait until our summer holiday to Corfu.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 11-Feb-17 01:25 PM GMT

Two years ago I visited the Sierra Nevada for a day and saw a fantastic variety and number of butterflies. So, this year when we were on holiday near Malaga I took the opportunity for a return visit. There were three different locations that I had visited last year that I wanted to return to, but I had also been recommended another couple of spots to check out by Mike Prentice of Butterfly Conservation's European Interest Group.

It was a three hour drive from our rented villa to the first stop, which was on the road up to the ski resort at Hoya de la Mora at about 2,000 metres. This location had been recommended by Mike, who said I may find Spanish Chalkhill Blues, *Polyommatus albicans*, there. Unfortunately, I didn't see any, but I wasn't to be disappointed with the other butterflies I saw.



Initially I didn't see a lot there, but it was still before 9 in the morning, so a little early for butterflies. There were a few Silver-studded Blues, *Plebejus argus*, flying amongst the scrub, though.



Other butterflies were less numerous there. There were a couple of Clouded Yellows, *Colias crocea*.



And a Wall Brown, *Lasiommata megera*, with a damaged wing.



I was really thrilled to see two Spotted Fritillaries, *Melitaea didyma*. They were very easily disturbed and quickly disappeared. Luckily I later saw another one that allowed me to get close enough to take a picture. This was one of the butterflies that I really wanted to see with its unusual markings.



I think this is a Thread-winged Lacewing of some kind. I had to follow it for ages before it stopped and I was able to get a better look at it. What an amazing creature!



On my way back to the car I saw another little blue butterfly that turned out to be a Lang's Short-tailed Blue, *Leptotes pirithous*. It somehow seemed out of place up in the mountains.



Not far away was this beautiful Blue-spot Hairstreak, *Satyrium spini*.



I had so many places I wanted to visit and so little time that I had to drag myself away to continue further up the mountain ...

Re: Nick Morgan

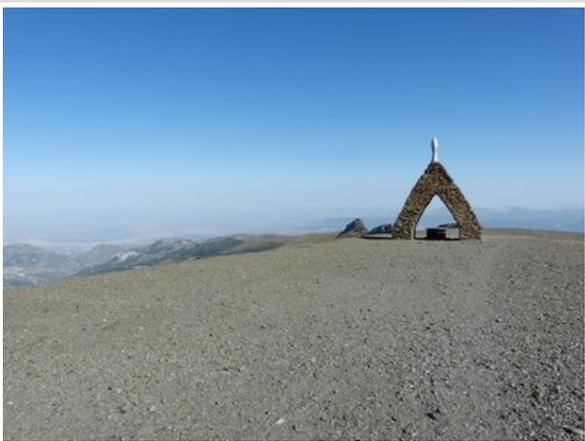
by NickMorgan, 11-Feb-17 04:16 PM GMT

I drove up to the car park at the ski resort at Hoya De la Mora. This is as far as you can drive, although it is possible to take a mini-bus further up the mountain. As I got out of the car I saw a Bath White, *Pontia daplidice*. I had seen a number of similar butterflies on the drive up the hill, so it was good to confirm its identity.

I started to walk up the mountain to another area recommended by Mike Prentice. Almost immediately I saw a Purple-shot Copper, *Lycaena alciphron gordius*.



Then a larger butterfly caught my eye. It turned out to be a Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*. We had just experienced an influx of Painted Ladies in Scotland and evidently they were doing well here, too. I saw another one just a little further up the path.



I was delighted to see so many Apollos, *Parnassius apollo nevadensis*. The sub-species in the Sierra Nevada has orange, rather than red, ocelli. They seemed a lot more approachable this year and a little later when a cloud came over they all landed and on a couple of occasions I very nearly stood on one! I guess with such large butterflies they need the energy of the sun to keep them airborne.



There were a number of Small Whites, *Pieris rapae*, flying in the same area as the Apollos along with one or two Small Tortoiseshells, *Aglais urticae*.



There were also blue butterflies there, which I could only identify by photographing them and enlarging their picture on the camera. They all turned out to be Escher's Blues, *Agrodiaetus esheri*.



A little higher up the Small Tortoiseshells were replaced by Queen of Spain Fritillaries, *Issoria lathonia*. The last time I was in Sierra Nevada I very briefly saw one of these a little lower down the mountain, but this time I saw seven or eight.



My reason for climbing further up this barren-looking mountain side was because Mike Prentice had suggested some sites I could check for Zullich's Blue, *Agriades zullichi*. I was amazed that there continued to be plenty of butterflies despite the apparent lack of vegetation. I didn't spot any Zullich's Blues at the first area he had suggested, but I was over the moon to spot one at the second location, which was at about 2,650 metres above sea level.



I think there were about 15 Zullich's Blues there and I saw some very similar-looking Spanish Argus, *Aricia morronensis*, flying with them. These were both new species for me.



It was lovely to watch them with an occasional fly past of an Apollo, which looked enormous compared to the small *Lycaenidae*. Some Nevada Blues, *Plebicula gulgus*, also joined the party. I spent some time at that location and sat down on a rock with a snack while watching these rare butterflies.



It seemed like such a hostile environment for these small creatures to live in. This was the height of summer, but there was still quite a wind blowing and very little shelter.



Eventually I had to drag myself away as there were so many more places I wanted to explore. However, I was quickly distracted by a Spanish Brassy Ringlet, *Erebia hispania*. Unlike two years earlier these ones allowed me to take a picture. I saw quite a few as I started to descend the path.



Next I wanted to head down to a green area near the stream lower down the valley ...

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 12-Feb-17 09:12 PM GMT

Excellent images of some rarely seen species there, Nick. I envy you.

Regarding your question a couple of posts back, I will decamp to the French Pyrenees Orientales in late May and I can't wait.

This time of year is definitely anticipation of what is to come!!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 13-Feb-17 10:54 PM GMT

Dave, the Pyrenees should be fantastic in May. I spent quite a few holidays in the eastern Pyrenees when I was young, but sadly in those days I wasn't particularly interested in wildlife and was dragged along there by my father who was keen on looking for raptors! I look back on those times as real wasted opportunities now. I would love to go back to the Pyrenees now that I would appreciate the flora and fauna.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 15-Feb-17 10:45 PM GMT

Cracking shots of some cracking species Nick - I wouldn't know where to begin when it came to identifying them 😊🇫🇷🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 15-Feb-17 11:51 PM GMT

NickMorgan wrote:

Dave, the Pyrenees should be fantastic in May. I spent quite a few holidays in the eastern Pyrenees when I was young, but sadly in those days I wasn't particularly interested in wildlife and was dragged along there by my father who was keen on looking for raptors! I look back on those times as real wasted opportunities now. I would love to go back to the Pyrenees now that I would

appreciate the flora and fauna.

I sense your pain, Nick. I too wasted many good opportunities when I was a youngster but I feel as though I'm slowly making up for it now!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 21-Feb-17 10:22 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Cracking shots of some cracking species Nick - I wouldn't know where to begin when it came to identifying them 😊👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Wurzel, there are a number of butterflies that I am not 100% sure of my ID, so I would be happy for anyone to point out any misidentifications!

I retraced my steps towards the car park, but took a shortcut below the observatory as I wanted to head towards a stream in the valley below. I noticed that a small cloud had developed above the valley and it appeared to be stuck there. As I entered into its shade I saw a lovely female Escher's Blue, *Agrodiaetus escheri*, waiting for the sun to come out again. I decided to wait with it to see if I could get a photo of the upper side of its wings.



Thankfully, when the sun came back out it opened up its wings. I have taken many pictures of female Lycaenidae, which I find almost impossible to identify from the upper wing shots. I hope that this picture may help me to identify other female Escher's Blues.



As I walked down the faint path in the mountain side I came across several Spanish Brassy Ringlets, *Erebia hispania*. They were quite obliging as they sat against the rocks warming up once the cloud had passed.



It is difficult to say which blue butterfly was the most common on the way down to the stream. There were probably equal numbers of Escher's Blues, Common Blues, *Polyommatus celina*, and Nevada Blues, *Plebicula gulgus*. With almost every step another would fly into view.



The cloud also slowed the Apollos, *Parnassius apollo nevadensis*, down a bit. I remember on my previous visit watching them for ages drifting up and down the mountain side without stopping. On my descent they were all on the ground, only flying when they were disturbed.



On the short grass by a spring I saw this lovely Safflower Skipper, *Pyrgus carthami nevadensis*.



This beautiful female Knapweed Fritillary, *Melitaea phoebe*, briefly stopped next to the path. This is the first time I have seen this butterfly.



When I reached the grassy area next to the stream I saw a few larger fritillaries. They all turned out to be Dark Green Fritillaries, *Argynnis aqlaja*. A butterfly that I haven't seen in the Sierra Nevada before.



There were also about 20 or so smaller fritillaries. These were Meadow Fritillaries, *Melitaea parthenoides*, another butterfly that I haven't seen before. It is strange that they were so common this year, but two years ago I didn't see any in exactly the same location.



I spent some time down at the stream, enjoying the beautiful clear water cascading through the rocks and the many insects that live alongside it.



I was thrilled to see this cow pat, which was attracting various male blue butterflies. In this picture there are Common, Escher and Nevada Blues.



Every so often I would see a Purple-shot Copper, *Lycaena alciphron gordius*. I love the purple edging to their wings.



Other butterflies seen there, but not photographed were Clouded Yellows, *Colias crocea*, Cardinal Fritillaries, *Argynnis pandora seitzii*, Small Tortoiseshells, *Aglais urticae*, Bath Whites, *Pontia daplidice* and Wall Browns, *Lasiommata megera*. On my way back up the mountain I saw this lovely Heath Fritillary, *Melitaea athalia celadussa*.



It was fantastic seeing so many butterflies and such a variety, but I had to drag myself away as I still had a couple of other places I wanted to check out.

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 21-Feb-17 10:56 PM GMT

Wow, mouthwatering stuff Nick 🍴 Such a fantastic selection! 🍴 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 22-Feb-17 05:09 PM GMT

Some mighty fine images there, Nick, especially the Apollo with its wings outstretched revealing the additional red hindwing spot.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 26-Feb-17 09:33 PM GMT

Thank you David and Wurzel. It was indeed an amazing day, seeing so many different species of butterflies.

And so for the last few sites of the day.

By now it was really time to be heading back to the villa, but I had three quick stops I wanted to make on my way back down the mountain. The first was at a viewpoint I had found two years ago. This is at about 2100 metres above sea level and the last time I was there I saw several Swallowtails hill topping.

I thought that the first butterfly I saw there was a very worn Blue-spot Hairstreak, but when I was looking at my pictures later I realised it was a False Ilex Hairstreak, *Satyrium esculi*.



There were plenty of Blue-spot Hairstreaks, *Satyrium spini*, there to let me see the subtle difference in the white line on their wings.



In contrast to my last visit, I only saw one Swallowtail, *Papilio machaon*, this year and it was very ragged. There was also just the one Spanish Swallowtail, *Iphiclides feisthamelii*, in slightly better condition, but it had still lost its tails!



As with my previous visit there were a lot of Wall Browns squabbling over their territories, but I didn't spot any Large Wall Browns this year. I did see a Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*, which I haven't seen before in that location.



I jumped back in the car and drove down another 100 metres to the spot that Mike Prentice had suggested. There were a lot more butterflies there now than there had been at 9am.

I saw two Graylings, *Hipparchia semele*, one much lighter than the other. I spent ages checking my photographs to see if either of them were Nevada Graylings, but they both turned out to just be standard Graylings!



There were so many different butterflies flying amongst the vegetation there, including Long-tailed Blues, Spotted Fritillaries and Common Blues. They were very active in the afternoon heat, so many of them didn't stop for a picture! I managed to catch a shot of this Queen of Spain Fritillary, *Issoria lathonia*.



And I think this is a Large Grizzled Skipper, *Pyrgus alveus*. I have to admit that I find it very difficult to differentiate between many of the skippers.



Other butterflies there included Silver-studded Blues, Marbled Whites, Great Banded Grayling, Blue-spot Hairstreak and Southern Brown Argus. However, I didn't have long to watch them on my whistle-stop descent!

My final stop of the day was a little further down the mountain at about 1800 metres above sea level. This is a little scrubby area next to some Pine trees that I discovered two years ago. As then, I certainly wasn't disappointed with the butterflies I saw there.

Strangely, exactly as on my visit two years ago, the first butterfly I saw was a Marsh Fritillary, *Euphydryas aurinia beckeri*. Just the one next to where I parked the car.



The place was awash with butterflies, including Southern Brown Argus, *Aricia cramera*;



Essex Skippers, *Thymelicus lineola hemmingi*;



Silver-studded Blues, *Plebejus argus hypochionus*;



And I think this is a female Idas Blue, *Plebejus idas nevadensis*.



There were also Large Whites, Small Whites, Common Blues, Purple-shot Coppers, Cleopatras, a Rock Grayling and an Oriental Meadow Brown. Just like the last time, I saw one Black-veined White, *Aporia crataegi*, but this year it was kind enough to allow me to take a picture!



I spent some time following this Iberian Marbled White, *Melanargia lachesis*, to try to identify it. There are three different species of Marbled Whites found in the Sierra Nevada, but I have only seen the Iberian Marbled White there.



All too soon I had to drag myself back to the car. I had had an amazing few hours in the Sierra Nevada seeing 42 different species of butterflies, with several of them being species I hadn't seen before. It was certainly worth the three hour drive each way to get there.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 12-Mar-17 06:20 PM GMT

A couple of observations from late summer last year:

The first was on my transect on 18th August. I was very disappointed to see so few butterflies that day and I heard from two of the volunteers that they also saw very few butterflies on their transects, despite it being lovely weather.

However, towards the end of my transect I saw a Red Admiral (too far away to count) flying towards a little group of trees. On my return I thought I would go and see if it was still there and I found it on a young oak tree, apparently feeding on something where a small branch left the main trunk.



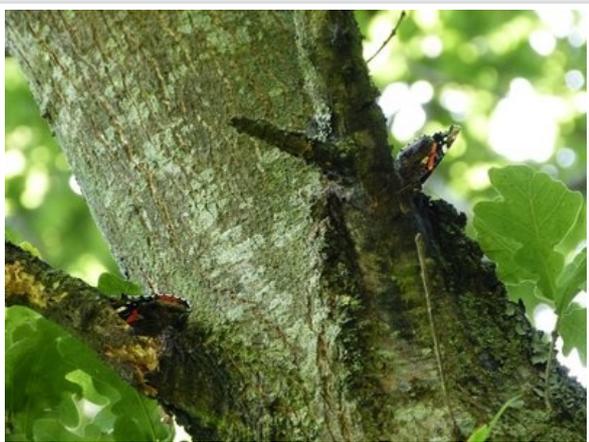
As I looked around the tree I saw another three Red Admirals feeding in the same manor. They were quite difficult to spot until the flashed their wings opened when they were disturbed by another insect.



I noticed a few wasps also feeding in the same locations, each time where a smaller branch joined a main stem. I wonder if there was sap available there?



Looking at the pictures I think that most of the branches where they were feeding were dead, so would there be minerals available? I know that oak contains a lot of tannin. I wonder if that is attractive to insects.



There were some sycamore, ash and other oak trees in this little wood but I couldn't see any Red Admirals on them.

In the middle of September we were staying down at my Dad's house while we were sorting it out. Over the week I had to take time out to watch the

butterflies on his buddleia. It has gone a little feral amongst some other small trees in a flower bed and I have always admired how much longer the flowers last in it, compared with mine in our sunny little garden. This year it was covered in butterflies, mostly Red Admirals, and it was almost like being in a butterfly house. When I walked round the corner of the house to where the buddleia is several butterflies would take to the air and fly around.



The Red Admirals were the first butterflies to arrive each day, usually arriving by about 8.30am. I would love to know where they spend the nights, but they would come drifting down, either from the surrounding trees, or possibly just flying over the trees to get there.



I watched them in the evenings to see if I could follow some of them to see where they went, but failed in my mission! One day was much cooler, about 17 degrees and it was raining, but the Red Admirals still turned up. They tended to feed on the underside of the flowers when the rain was heavier, moving to the tops of the flowers when the rain eased.



I was really pleased to see a Comma among the Red Admirals, as they weren't very common last year.



There were also a few Peacocks preparing for their winter hibernation. And there were also quite a number of Painted Ladies fuelling up for their migration to Africa.



Whilst it was great to see these four species of butterflies, I was sad not to see any Small Tortoiseshells. In a normal year they would be seen in far greater numbers than any other species at that time. In fact I didn't see any flying after July last year.

While I was watching the butterflies and trying to get some photographs, I saw a small bird out of the corner of my eye. It was a Spotted Flycatcher. It was watching the butterflies and other insects flying from flower to flower. My camera was set on video at the time, so the picture below is a screenshot from the video. When my father built his house he asked the builders to make various holes and ledges for birds to nest in. I remember him showing me one hole and telling me that it was for a Spotted Flycatcher to nest in and, sure enough, each year a Spotted Flycatcher took up residence.



Just after I finished videoing, it flew down, narrowly missing a Painted Lady and caught a bee.

I had a look in a bird book to find out more about the Spotted Flycatcher and found out that it visits the UK each year to breed and in September/October it migrates back to sub-Saharan Africa. It is an interesting thought that it could have seen the Painted Ladies later in the year on its journey!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Paul Harfield, 12-Mar-17 08:28 PM GMT

Hi Nick

Just catching up with your diary. Great shots from your foreign trip 😊

Interesting observations on Red Admirals. I have also seen them nectaring on Buddleia in the rain, but did not notice if they were underneath the flower spikes.

I seem to remember somebody posting a photo/video of a large number of Red Admirals at sap on here a couple of years ago, cant remember who it was though 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 12-Mar-17 08:54 PM GMT

I presume there had to be some fluid leak around those smaller branchlets, Nick. Vanessids are known to find such leakages irresistible.

Red Admirals do always appear to be more 'hardy' to inclement weather. I'm not quite sure why this is given that they're essentially a mediterranean species. I suppose if an insect is incredibly mobile then it faces regular climatic challenges that most other species don't. Perhaps that's why they persist even in light rain whilst others head for a temporary roosting spot?

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 12-Mar-17 11:49 PM GMT

Interesting observations Nick, I too seem to recall reading that Red Admirals will take sap and the like from trees though I can't remember where I read it 😊 Great to see the Spotted Flycatcher 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by Vince Massimo, 13-Mar-17 12:09 AM GMT

Paul Harfield wrote:

I seem to remember somebody posting a photo/video of a large number of Red Admirals at sap on here a couple of years ago, cant remember who it was though 😊

Here it is guys (from September 2012) 😊

<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=6526#p65378>

Vince

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 16-Mar-17 10:48 PM GMT

Thanks Vince,

It is interesting to speculate about what the Red Admirals were finding in the video. An impressive sight, though. Those that I saw could have been taking moisture from the base of the dead branches.

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 24-Mar-17 10:53 PM GMT

As it looks as though spring may arrive tomorrow, I thought I should put together a summary of the 2016 season.

The weather in 2016 was very similar to the previous year. I hope this isn't going to become the norm! The winter of 2015/16 was reasonably mild again, with only one dusting of snow. We had very heavy rain in February causing localised flooding, but the rest of the year was reasonably dry. Sadly, it was also quite cool and cloudy with below average sunshine.

One unusual aspect of the weather in 2016 was the number of easterly winds and this seemed to bring cloud with it. We had very local torrential rain in June which washed away the caterpillars I had been nurturing in my garden. I suspect it may have had a similar impact across much of East Lothian impacting on the butterfly numbers later in the year.

Despite this I still received almost as many butterfly records this year as I did last year. The combined efforts of everyone recording butterflies has built up a very good picture of what is going on in East Lothian.

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*



The first butterfly seen in East Lothian in 2016 was a Red Admiral on 3 February and interestingly the last record I received of a butterfly flying was also a Red Admiral on 16 November. In between they were regularly seen with numbers peaking in August. The early sightings over the last few years would

indicate that Red Admirals have been able to survive the last few mild winters we have had.

Peacock, *Aglais io*



The first record in 2016 was on 13 March and Peacocks were regularly seen until early June. Although the numbers in the summer months were lower than we normally see, they continued to be seen flying until 4 November.

Small Tortoiseshell, *Aglais urticae*



Small Tortoiseshells were seen regularly from 14 March until the middle of July as expected, but when we would normally expect to see an increase in numbers in late summer and autumn, numbers were disappointingly low. This corresponds with the national story and I can only imagine that the cool summer weather caused a lot of caterpillars to perish. I notice that the records where more than one Tortoiseshell was recorded were all on the coast. We have been finding a few Small Tortoiseshells hibernating in the usual sites, although fewer than normal, but hopefully enough to boost the population again this year.

Green-veined White, *Pieris napi*



The first record was on 14th April and they were seen through to the 27th September. The spring brood were as numerous as normal, but they weren't seen in anything like the normal numbers during the summer generation. However, when I check the numbers recorded on the transect the summer numbers were better.

Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*



Speckled Woods continued to do well in East Lothian in 2016. The first record I received was on 19 April and they were very regularly recorded with no apparent break between the three generations until 31 October. The peak numbers appeared in August, which is different from previous years, when the numbers were highest in September. The Speckled Wood has spread west and south, meaning that it is now found in most suitable habitats in East Lothian.

Comma, *Polygonia c-album*



Commas were first seen on 19 April in three different locations! There were only 19 records for the whole year, which is considerably down on 2014 and 2015. This is a butterfly that had been building up in numbers since it was first recorded here about 15 years ago, but it certainly didn't seem to do well in 2016.

Orange Tip, *Anthocharis cardamines*



The first Orange Tip was recorded on 19 April and they were seen in good numbers through to 26 June. Being an early species, they were unaffected by the poor summer weather, but let's hope that there isn't an impact on the 2017 population.

Small White, *Pieris rapae*



The first Small White was recorded on 19 April. It was interesting that I received more Small White records in 2016 than in previous years, but with smaller numbers in each record. There was a fairly clear division between the first generation – April to mid-June and the second generation from mid-July to 23 September.

Large White, *Pieris brassicae*



The first Large Whites were recorded on a transect in early April. They were recorded until 10 September in better numbers than normal. I can't imagine why they did so well in 2016. I remember them laying eggs very late in 2015 and I didn't think the caterpillars stood a chance of surviving the early frosts. It seems they can!

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 24-Mar-17 11:09 PM GMT

Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*



2016 was a "Painted Lady year". These remarkable butterflies arrived here in early May and were recorded in good numbers right through to 4th November. Thereafter they hopefully made it back to Africa, from where their great grandparents would have set out back in March.

Small Copper, *Lycaena phlaeas*



The first record of a Small Copper was on 6 May and they were recorded very regularly until 13 September. Nationally, the Small Copper didn't seem to do well last year, but in East Lothian they seemed to buck the trend a bit. The second generation of the year wasn't as numerous as the spring generation. We never see great numbers of them, but in 2016 I received more records than in previous years.

Green Hairstreak, *Callophrys rubi*



The first Green Hairstreak record was on 19 May and they were seen through to 6 June in three different areas of woodland north of the Lammermuir Hills. They haven't previously been recorded at two of these sites. Interestingly there were no records from the more remote and difficult to reach areas of the Lammermuirs, possibly because no one made the effort to search those areas!

Wall Brown, *Lasiommata megera*



The first Wall Brown was recorded on 12 May and they were seen in reasonably good numbers through to 15th September. We are now getting regular records from Bilsdean, right along the coast to North Berwick. Each year we get one or two inland records, but we don't seem to have any inland sites where they are regularly seen year after year.

Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*

Yet again we had a single record of a Holly Blue in East Lothian. This time it was in North Berwick on 15 May. I am sure there must be a little colony of them in one of the coastal towns around there.

Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*



The first Small Heath seen in East Lothian in 2016 was on 15 May and they were recorded until 29 August. Numbers were a little down on previous years, but not by too much.

Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*



Common Blues were first seen on 8 June and regularly recorded through to 3 September. The numbers were very similar to previous years.

Ringlet, *Aphantopus hyperantus*



Ringlets seemed to have a pretty good year, with numbers only a little lower than in previous years. The first record I received was on 19 June and they were seen until 17 August.

Small Skipper, *Thymelicus sylvestris*



The first record in 2016 of a Small Skipper was on 19 June and they were seen through to the end of August. They are very well established now along the coast from Longniddry to North Berwick and at a couple of inland sites.

Meadow Brown, *Maniola jurtina*



The first Meadow Brown record was on 2 July and they were seen in good numbers through to the 30 August. They didn't seem to be affected by the miserable summer.

Dark Green Fritillary, *Argynnis aglaja*



The first record was on 3 July and they were seen in reasonable numbers but only until early August when I received the last record of the year.

Northern Brown Argus, *Aricia artaxeres*



I only received two records of Northern Brown Argus this year on 14 July and 30 July, both from the same site in the Lammermuir Hills. There are only another three locations that I am aware of them occurring in East Lothian, and I think the poor weather prevented other sites from being checked.

Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, *Clossiana selene*



We had a record of a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary from the usual site in the Lammermuir Hills on 14 July. There were also two records of a Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary from John Muir Country Park on the 16 and 18 August. These are quite late in the season, but were recorded by different people in more or less the same area.

Grayling, *Hypparchia semele*



The first record was on 18 July, which is about three weeks behind the norm. They were still seen in reasonable numbers, though. I am only aware of three small sites where Graylings are found in East Lothian, so they are quite vulnerable to habitat loss.

Camberwell Beauty, *Nymphalis antiopa*

I heard of a very exciting record that a Camberwell Beauty had been seen feeding on a Buddleia on 26 August in a garden in Dunbar. It was seen in the same place the following day. This is the first record of this very rare migrant that I am aware of in East Lothian since 1983. I have no reason to doubt this record even though there were no further records of it having been seen elsewhere.

The other butterfly that we may have expected to see was a Large Skipper, *Ochlodes sylvanus*. We had three records of them in East Lothian in 2014, but none since. There is a good colony of Large Skippers just over the border at Cockburnspath and I have no doubt that they are still in East Lothian. It is just that the weather has been very poor over the last two summers so people haven't been down to that corner of East Lothian to look for them. I will certainly make an effort to search for them in 2017.

So, all in all, 2016 wasn't a bad year for butterflies given the weather. Most species did as well as ever, but there were worryingly few Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas later in the year. I thought that this could be because the weather was poor at a critical time just after the caterpillars had hatched. However, Red Admirals and Painted Ladies did well and they would have been caterpillars around the same time. We have found a few hibernating Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks, so hopefully their numbers will bounce back this year. Already, this year, I have received a record of some Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, a Red Admiral and a Comma flying this year!

Re: Nick Morgan

by Wurzel, 25-Mar-17 12:51 AM GMT

Interesting report Nick, I found myself agreeing with most of the general aspects all the way down here 🤔😬 Then main thing I've noticed like yourself is this prolonged cold spell though February and March – three years ago I was regularly seeing butterflies from Feb through but last year and this year it's been a case of having to pick your days 😊
Hopefully it'll get back into the natural swing soon...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 25-Mar-17 07:44 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel,

I wonder if it is more normal to have a cold February and March? I remember where we used to live the apple trees were often caught by a frost when they were in flower. I suspect we have had a few unseasonably mild winters in the early 2010s.

Re: Nick Morgan

by David M, 27-Mar-17 08:55 PM GMT

Lovely report, Nick, although given the time of year it gave me a start when I saw Large and Green Veined White images passing me by as the page loaded! 😊

Re: Nick Morgan

by NickMorgan, 29-Mar-17 01:04 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Lovely report, Nick, although given the time of year it gave me a start when I saw Large and Green Veined White images passing me by as the page loaded! 😊

If only!! It shouldn't be too long now, though. I did actually receive a report of a distant white butterfly seen over the weekend, but sadly the person who told me couldn't catch up with it to identify it!