

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-Jan-17 03:50 PM GMT

I'm still working through all my New Zealand photos and will be for some time yet! No more butterflies, I'm afraid – they really were thin on the ground – but I thought some forum members might enjoy this simple animation that I made from a few photos of a Kiwi feeding.



Otorohanga, NZ – 17th November 2016 Olympus E-M1 with 45mm lens – 1/50s@f/1.8 ISO 6400

The photos were taken in near-darkness, using a wide-aperture lens. I used manual exposure and focus (taking advantage of the electronic viewfinder of my Olympus, which acted as an image intensifier)

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 17-Jan-17 05:41 PM GMT

I take it that Kiwi wasn't truly wild? I note the feeding bowl.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 17-Jan-17 07:34 PM GMT

Nice, looks like one of the Spotted species as opposed to one of the more familiar Brown species. 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-Jan-17 10:11 PM GMT

Thank you for commenting, Jack and Bugboy. Sadly, much of New Zealand's unique wildlife was destroyed by introduced alien species, such as stoats and hedgehogs. A number of predator-free reserves have been created, mostly on offshore islands, together with rehabilitations centres to provide safe havens for endangered species. My planned visit to Kapiti Island was, unfortunately, cancelled, as a result of the November earthquake, so I took my photos at one of the mainland rehabilitation centres. Species seen included both Large and Small Spotted Kiwis, and the Brown Kiwi.

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 21-Jan-17 09:13 AM GMT

Really interesting sequence Mike of a fascinating species 😊 🌿

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 21-Jan-17 05:25 PM GMT

Glad you like it, Wurzel. I see Guy is off the mark already with QoS Frit. I suspect it will be some time yet before we see any butterfly action here. In the meantime, i keep ploughing through all my NZ photos 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 22-Jan-17 09:57 AM GMT

Hi! Mike, it's been enjoyable looking at your posts especially the Kiwi, feeding 😊 I hope you've got a few more shots for us to enjoy 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22-Jan-17 07:51 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, thanks for looking in I'm still sorting through all my NZ pics and plan to put some pages on my website 'in due course' – whenever I get there 😊 I'll let you know.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 22-Jan-17 08:14 PM GMT

Mike says he plans: [quote]to put some pages on my website 'in due course' – whenever I get there Don't tell me about the time all that takes 😊. I am currently struggling through thousands of photos of eg birds to select only the best and then get them uploaded. But there's always something new that just **has** to be included – like the Crested Tits imaged for the first time last week.

Jack

RHS Wisley – 28th February 2017

by MikeOxon, 01-Mar-17 08:41 PM GMT

I decided to pre-empt the new butterfly season and also take the opportunity for some photo-practice, by visiting the '**Butterflies in the Glasshouse**' event at **RHS Wisley**, yesterday (28th Feb.)

The day started bright and sunny but then clouded over, with some rain by mid-afternoon. Light-levels inside the glass house were not too good for most of the time, so I decided to use flash for most of my photos. Usually, I prefer to avoid flash, because the results can be very unnatural so, during this visit, I was experimenting, to try and optimise the results.

The conditions inside the glasshouse are very warm and humid, so I prefer to avoid changing lenses and, on this occasion, used my 40-150 mm zoom throughout, on my Olympus E-M1 camera. This camera does not have a pop-up flash but is supplied with a small clip-on unit, which is powered from the camera battery.

By working at distances of around 1 m or more from the subjects and setting the clip-on flash to under-expose by -0.7 EV, I managed to avoid the 'soot and whitewash' effect, often associated with flash at close range. I set a manual exposure of 1/125s @ f/10 and relied on the automatic flash control, to manage exposures. The advantage of the additional light from the flash was that I was able to use quite a small aperture, to increase the useful depth of field.

This year's event finishes this coming weekend (March 5th) and, already, the number of species still flying was fairly limited – good numbers of 'Owls', a few 'Morphos', and a sprinkling of smaller species. I was especially pleased to photograph a White Morpho (*Morpho polyphemus*), which I had not seen at Wisley before



The familiar Common Morpho (*Morpho peleides*) was also present, and my flash did a good job of bringing out the iridescent colour, when one opened its wings:



The 'Owls' appeared to be the Forest Giant species (*Caligo eurilochus*) and I observed that two of these had chosen to roost inside a small 'cave', which formed the lobby to the lift. The flash was essential here! Other 'Owls' were making use of the feeding stations, where I took a close-up view of one feeding on Pomegranate



Other large species included the Great Mormon (*Papilio lowi*) and the Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*)



I should mention that I have used Guy Padfield's <http://www.guypadfield.com/butterflyhouse.html>, to aid my identifications.

Many of the smaller, colourful species were of South American origin, of which I show a selection below:



It was a good visit, both to dispel Winter blues and to prepare for the new UK season.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Padfield, 01-Mar-17 10:29 PM GMT

Glad my page has provided a few helpful hints, Mike!

I'm currently reading a new OUP book on the genus *Heliconius*. What an amazing genus – I don't think I'll ever look at them the same again. But also extremely difficult for a non-specialist to identify, with all the rampant mimicry and hybridisation, especially if you don't know where a particular individual comes from (as you never do in a glasshouse).

Guy

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Mar-17 11:13 PM GMT

Thanks for commenting, Guy. The <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-ecology-and-evolution-of-heliconius-butterflies-9780199566570?cc=gb&lang=en#> looks very interesting, especially as it uses the genus to explore many underlying issues in evolution, such as mimicry. I shall add it to my reading list.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 02-Mar-17 08:20 PM GMT

Great set of glasshouse shots Mike 😊 I've yet to see a White Morpho what a cracking looking specimen 😊 Some of the Heliconius are a right nightmare to ID due to the mimicry rings 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 02-Mar-17 10:37 PM GMT

A butterfly house 'fix' is irresistible, isn't it? With any luck, we'll all be able to enjoy our own indigenous species very soon....roll on!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 03-Mar-17 10:55 AM GMT

Pleased you like them, Wurzel. The White Morpho was flying when I arrived, like a white ghost, but then settled for the rest of the time I was there. I didn't even attempt to identify the Heliconids.

The 'fix' is even better when it's wet and cold outside, David 😊

Dry Sandford Pit – 13th March 2017

by MikeOxon, 13-Mar-17 08:20 PM GMT

At last, a beautiful sunny, Spring-like day and a couple of **Brimstones** flitting through my garden (without stopping to pose for photos). I decided that it was time for a look at my local reserve – **Dry Sandford Pit**, which is part of the Cothill reserves complex.

A clump of Snowdrops greeted me by the gate and, once inside the reserve, I went to look at the large area of Primroses, just East of the gate. It's a

good spot for Brimstones but there was none there, yet.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 13th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm lens (21 mm) - 1/800s@f/11 ISO640

The path continues to the quarry-face, above the central fen, and there I soon spotted my first **Comma**. As I approached to take a photo, it flew up, not disturbed by me but by another Comma that had entered its air-space. An upward-spiralling tussle followed, before they each returned to their favoured spots, one on the ground close to me and the other to a perch on the vertical cliff-face.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 13th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens (400 mm) - 1/800s@f/11 ISO640

Another sally to chase an intruder was much shorter and I realised that, this time, the other butterfly was a **Peacock**. This specimen had extra small blue spots inside the main 'eyes' on the hind wings, a variation that I have not noticed before.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 13th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens (195 mm) - 1/640s@f/9 ISO640

I continued my walk around the reserve and witnessed similar encounters at various different locations but only these two species seemed to be on the wing. There were some large banks of Violets, which may augur well for other butterflies, later in the year.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 13th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens (236 mm) - 1/800s@f/8 ISO640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 14-Mar-17 12:27 AM GMT

Great shot of the Peacock Mike - I can see the extra eyes that you mention 😊👍 I saw my first today but it didn't stop for any photos 😞
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 14-Mar-17 01:12 PM GMT

Glad to see you too getting in on the act, Mike. That's a striking patch of violets...must keep my eyes out for these next time I get out.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 14-Mar-17 02:22 PM GMT

Thanks for looking in, Wurzel and David The extra blue spots on the Peacock are rather small and best seen by clicking on the image, to enlarge.

The Violets are very profuse this year, with both white and violet forms present , some in large 'drifts'. Some have even 'volunteered' in corners of our garden. Let's hope it'll lead to a good year for Fritillaries.

Dry Sandford Pit - 26th March 2017

by MikeOxon, 27-Mar-17 03:38 PM GMT

I made my third visit this year to **Dry Sandford Pit** reserve, Cothill, on Sunday. Although the breeze could be heard in the branches of the trees overhead, it was still and very warm, at the foot of the old quarry face, and my visit turned into an excellent butterfly-watching experience. Another sign of Spring was the persistent calling of Chiffchaffs from vantage points high in the trees.

My first surprise was to spot a rather small male **Orange Tip**, patrolling the length of the quarry face. I think it was the earliest date that I have seen an OT at this site. Occasionally, he paused to rest or to nectar on the Violets, which are abundant this year:



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 26th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/5000s@f/7.1 ISO 640

The Peacocks and Commas that I had seen on earlier visits were also present but I did not spot any Small Tortoiseshells. I took an unusual view of a **Peacock**, which shows both the cryptic underside markings together with light shining through from the upperside markings.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 26th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/9 ISO 640

By far the major interest during my visit was provided by male **Brimstones**, which were enjoying the large area of Primroses near the entrance to the reserve.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 26th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/2000s@f/8 ISO 640

I decided to watch these in some detail, as they flitted from flower to flower seeking nectar. The rest of this entry takes the form of a 'photographic essay', covering my study of their behaviour. Most of the photos were taken using the high-speed frame-rate of my Olympus E-M1 camera and I've provided more photographic details at the end of this entry, for those who may be interested.

These butterflies have an unusually long proboscis, which enables them to penetrate deep into the tube of the primrose flower in order to find nectar. The amazing versatility of this proboscis is illustrated in the following sequence of photos, taken as individuals approached the flowers, unfurling their probosces in flight. Please click on each group of photos to see the details more clearly.



When the butterfly lands on a flower, the proboscis is extended fully and inserted past the 'Style' at the mouth of the tube. A detailed description of the structure of the Primrose flower can be found on the http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/devon_bap/prim2.htm website.

My next photo sequence shows a Brimstone visiting a pin-eyed flower, where the proboscis has to be pushed past the pinhead shaped Stigma as the butterfly reaches down deep into the flower, to find nectar:



When the proboscis is withdrawn, pollen grains from the Anthers, placed half way down the flower tube, adhere part-way down the proboscis, as shown in the following photo. From here they are readily transferred to other flowers, especially those of the 'thrum' variety.



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 26th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/4000s@f/8 ISO 640

I also took a close-up view of a butterfly's head, where the proboscis can be seen disappearing deep into the flower:



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 26th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/2000s@f/8 ISO 640

Some of my high-speed photo sequences captured the moments when the Brimstones showed their elusive upper surfaces, as they approached flowers, as seen in the following pair of photos (*click to enlarge*):



The economy of movement as these butterflies moved rapidly from flower to flower within a single cluster was remarkable to observe. Sometimes only a single wing beat was sufficient to propel them between flowers and, even at 10 frames per second, only five frames (0.5 sec) covered the transitions between flowers, as seen in the following <http://home.btconnect.com/mike.flemming/animation.html>:



Dry Sandford Pit, Oxon - 26th March 2017 GIF animation from 5 photos

I hope that others will enjoy these sequences, which illustrate the relationship between the butterfly and the flower, by which the pollinator receives its 'reward' in the form of nectar.

My final group shows the last sequence that I took, as the Butterfly disappears out of the frame.



What a great start for me to the new season 😊

Technical Information

All my photos were taken using my Olympus OM-D E-M1 camera, fitted with a Leica 100–400 mm lens.

This lens provides an angle of view equivalent to that obtained by an 800 mm lens on a 35 mm camera. It also offers a close-focus capability to within 1.3m, where it delivers almost macro capability, coupled with a long stand-off distance. This is extremely useful when photographing nervous subjects, such as Spring-time butterflies.

In order to capture the high-speed sequences shown in this post, I made use of the electronic (silent) shutter in the camera, which provides a shooting rate of 10 frames per second. I also set continuous focus-tracking (C-AF), which uses the on-sensor phase-detection system, to adjust focus to follow a fast-moving subject. When shooting in RAW mode, the buffer holds around 40 images before the shooting rate slows down.

I prefer to use RAW + JPEG mode in the camera since, although the Olympus usually provides excellent JPEG results, the RAW image can be useful for 'difficult' subjects, in which I include pale-coloured butterflies in bright sunlight. Most of the photos I show in this post were taken directly from the JPEG results but, in a few cases, I processed a RAW image, where there were extremes of contrast, to be controlled in post-processing.

To ensure a reasonable depth of field, I used Aperture-priority mode, setting the aperture to f/8, which still allowed a shutter speed of around 1/2,000s in bright sunlight, at ISO 640.

I was pleasantly surprised by the success rate the camera achieved, in what was for me an experimental photographic trip. After using my Olympus camera in a wide range of conditions, I have become increasingly confident in its ability to produce good results under difficult conditions, from tropical rainforest to winter birding trips.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 27-Mar-17 03:51 PM GMT

Great photography Mike and incredibly interesting observations – really enjoyed reading.

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 27-Mar-17 04:34 PM GMT

Mike

Nice shots and glad to find another enthusiastic Olympus user. I am considering the 100–400 lens myself. I am using the 40–150 2.8 with teleconverter and that is a brilliant combination but I do like what results I have seen from the Leica lens. I shall look back further in your diary for more pictures. Lovely to see an Orange Tip so early.

best wishes

Peter

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 27-Mar-17 06:26 PM GMT

Fascinating stuff Mike. It's a regular thing for me now to pay attention to the springtime Brimstones and try and get some open wing shots. It helps they flap their wings relatively slowly. I know what you mean about their flexible tongues as well, I like watching them on dandelions where without moving anything other than the tongue they are able to probe every individual flower on the head 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 27-Mar-17 06:47 PM GMT

March Orange Tip! When I was young, a sighting before end of April was something special.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 27-Mar-17 08:15 PM GMT

Thank you for the comments, Pauline, Bugboy and Jack. It was an exciting afternoon for me and involved a lot of photo-sorting afterwards, as a result of all that high-speed shooting. I had about 500 frames, many with no butterfly in them after it had moved on!

Peter, I expect you have read reviews on the web, such as <https://www.ephotozine.com/article/panasonic-leica-dg-vario-elmar-100-400mm-f-4-0-6-3-asph-review-28971>, while <http://www.stevhuffphoto.com/> is a good source for information and reviews about micro 4/3 equipment.

In my opinion, the 'real world' performance of the Panasonic/Leica 100–400 is remarkably good. Reviews indicate that edge sharpness deteriorates beyond 300 mm but I have not found this a problem in practice and its remarkable close-up performance is a real 'secret weapon'. It's also a light and portable lens, unlike its DSLR 'equivalents'. While AF performance is excellent on my E-M1, it is much less good on my older E-M5 Mk.1. I don't know how other Olympus bodies fare.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 27-Mar-17 08:24 PM GMT

Thanks for posting that sequence, Mike. Some delightful spring images there of course, particularly your early Orange Tip, but you've posted a very

interesting Brimstone mosaic which I really liked.

Looks like we've got the earliest start to a season for 5 years with all these March sightings. The long range weather forecast looks okay, so we must all hope that we finally get some respite from damaging early conditions that have directly followed warm spells in March!

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-17 10:45 PM GMT

I agree with Trevor a cracking OT 🤔🇮🇪 And the Brimstone essay was fascinating, I'd never really noticed the uncurling of the proboscis before but I have seen the 'headbanging' when they're really probing deep for the nectar, and those open wing shots are to die for 🤔🇮🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 28-Mar-17 12:28 PM GMT

Thanks for looking in again, David and Wurzel. It was a thoroughly enjoyable day with which to start the season. I gather that Trevor also saw an OT down in West Sussex. Of course, as Mr Trump tells us, these ever-earlier sightings cannot possibly be due to global warming 😊 Let's hope that the added turbulence in the atmosphere doesn't cause another 'difficult' summer.

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 28-Mar-17 02:36 PM GMT

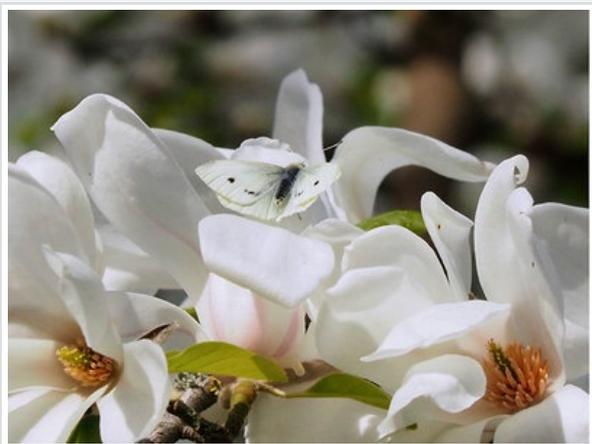
Fantastic shots Mike, it's great to know the Orange Tips are coming out even if it is rather early 😊
The weathers taken a turn for the worse here today(cloudy all day) Goldie 😊

Nuneham Courtenay Arboretum – 30th March 2017

by MikeOxon, 30-Mar-17 08:35 PM GMT

It was another pleasant afternoon, so I decided to take a walk around the Oxford University Arboretum at Nuneham Courtenay. There are always interesting plants to see at any time of year and, for today's visit, the highlights were provided by the Magnolias and Camellias.

Several Brimstones were ranging across the grasslands amongst the trees, although I didn't see many signs of feeding. My only butterfly photo was of a Small White *, which paused quite high in one of the beautiful white Magnolias. It's quite a distant shot but the setting was very lovely 😊



Nuneham Courtenay, Oxon – 30th March 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 40-150mm lens – 1/1000s@ f/10 ISO 640
Mike

* EDIT – see below – my initial thought had been GvWhite.

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 30-Mar-17 08:59 PM GMT

Lovely image Mike but sorry to burst your 'first for the year', pretty sure that's a Small white 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 30-Mar-17 09:14 PM GMT

I thought it might be, although the underside looked very green when it flew – it was rather distant high in the tree. I'm happy to take your word for it since my ID skills are not great – even though I looked at the examples on this site first 😊 I'll edit my post now.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 30-Mar-17 09:24 PM GMT

No worries Mike, I just saw your post in the other thread re. Whites so I don't feel so bad pointing it out now since you weren't 100% sure anyway 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 31-Mar-17 08:10 PM GMT

Love the composition of that shot Mike, it firmly 'places' the butterfly and it's an interesting angle 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 31-Mar-17 08:20 PM GMT

I assure you, Wurzel it was not a carefully planned composition! My wife spotted it, high in the top of a large Magnolia, and it promptly disappeared behind the flowers. I had a wide-angle lens on at the time and hurriedly changed it for a tele. Amazingly, the butterfly re-appeared, momentarily, before flying off, when I lost sight of it.

Having said that, I do like the way the butterfly is a 'whiter shade of pale' against the slightly pink magnolia petals. Glad you liked it, too.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 31-Mar-17 08:25 PM GMT

It was a very serendipitous shot then Mike, which makes it all the sweeter 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 02-Apr-17 12:06 AM GMT

That image could easily be in a washing powder ad, Mike. Not sure if I've ever seen a Small White on Magnolia before, but it certainly looks good.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Apr-17 05:19 PM GMT

David, these butterflies really are 'whiter than white'. See this scientific report for more details: <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep12267>.

From the abstract to this paper "...the attachment of butterfly wings to a solar cell increases its output power by 42.3%, proving that the wings are indeed highly reflective." No wonder their brightness causes problems for photographers 😊

Abingdon, Oxon – 5th April 2017

by MikeOxon, 05-Apr-17 05:51 PM GMT

The air temperature was not high today but the sunshine proved sufficiently strong to bring out the first Holly Blue that I've seen, this year, in my garden. I remember that last year, these Spring butterflies proved very hard to photograph, so I was determined to stalk this one for however long it took! This year, I also had the advantage of a much longer lens on my camera.

After continuously twisting my neck around, trying to keep following the butterfly in its erratic 'jinxing' flight, I eventually spotted it land, high up in a climbing rose at the end of the garden. Initially, it sat side-on to me but, even as I raised my lens, it turned to face me head-on and almost disappeared from sight! I was anticipating another difficult session!

Fortunately, I managed to move, without losing the position, to get a better view, which shows off the 'warm coat' it appears to be wearing.



Abingdon, Oxon – 5th April 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm lens – 1/320s@f/6.3 ISO 640
A little later, a burst of sunshine persuaded it to open its wings, revealing him to be a male.



Abingdon, Oxon – 5th April 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm lens – 1/1600s@f/11 ISO 640
He was quite settled after the previous exertions and, after a while, I noticed the antennae beginning to droop – a sign that he was having a doze, I think. He was not allowed much peace before another insect, a Hoverfly I think, disturbed him and he flew up again and disappeared over the top of the shrubs.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 06-Apr-17 08:40 PM GMT

More lovely shots Mike, especially like the way the chequering on the leading edge of the fore wing stands out 😊 I got my first HB the other day – a blue blur against the stick background 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 06-Apr-17 11:41 PM GMT

Such a beautiful insect, Mike, and you have done well to provide an image with a perspective that few would notice.

Last summer was good for this species, and this spring seems to be similar. One presumes we're at the peak of the 7 year cycle?

No doubt numbers will plummet soon, so let's make the most of them.

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 07-Apr-17 06:22 AM GMT

Very nice shots of the Holly Blue Mike showing off his true colours. In bright sunlight that lovely blue sheen can often be difficult to capture.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 07-Apr-17 12:07 PM GMT

Thank you again for all the welcome comments. I've been taking butterfly photos for many years now, so am trying to find different 'perspectives',

rather than keep repeating the same types of shot, over and over again.

Like you, Pauline, I was struck by how deep the blue colour looked, at the angle of that shot. We did our own bit of 'animal rescue' yesterday. Coming home from a trip to Aston Rowant, I almost trod on a Holly Blue that was lying on our driveway. I think it had become chilled and was fluttering very weakly, unable to take off. I took it into a sunny spot in the garden and my wife brought out some grapes and squeezed a little juice for it. After a while, a proboscis unfurled and it lapped up some juice. A few moments later, it took off with renewed energy. Later I watched two males spiralling over the garden – perhaps 'ours' was one of them 😊

Durlston NNR – 20th April 2017

by MikeOxon, 21-Apr-17 11:52 PM GMT

Yesterday (April 20th), I visited **Durlston Country Park**, near Swanage, Dorset. It was not primarily a 'butterfly' trip but there were several **Speckled Wood** on the wing:



Durlston NNR – 20th April 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO 640

and I also saw one **Holly Blue**. The aim of my visit was to see the Early Spider Orchids (*Ophrys sphegodes*) and I was pleased to see that there were many more flower spikes than I have found on previous visits.



Durlston NNR – 20th April 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm lens – 1/800s@f/11 ISO 640

I was experimenting with using the 'stacking' facility of my Olympus E-M1, in conjunction with the 60mm macro lens. Fortunately, the breeze was very light, so the flowers stayed sufficiently still to prevent blurring, during the multiple exposures. This particular flower looked rather aggressive!



Durlston NNR – 20th April 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/1250s@f/5.6 ISO 640 (8 images stacked)

Other orchids seen included Early Purple (*Orchis mascula*) and Green-winged (*Anacamptis morio*). Off-shore, there were plenty of sea-birds: Guillemots, Fulmars, Shags, and several types of Gulls, while a Peregrine Falcon made a rapid fly-past, scattering Pigeons in all directions.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 22-Apr-17 08:10 PM GMT

The Slipper Orchid will be out soon Mike at Gait Barrow, the Orchids are lovely flowers Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22-Apr-17 10:09 PM GMT

Thank you for the reminder, Goldie. Last year, I was too late to see them in flower and I may not be able to visit this year, either. It's good to know, though, that they do seem to have been saved from imminent extinction.

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 23-Apr-17 07:04 PM GMT

Cracking looking Orchid Mike 😊 They look like Japanese cartoon characters (Anime or Pokemon – not sure what the difference is 😊) 😊 You can see how the idea of 'fairies' and Gnomes might have come about 😊

Have a good

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Apr-17 07:36 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Cracking looking Orchid Mike 😊 They look like Japanese cartoon characters (Anime or Pokemon – not sure what the difference is 😊) 😊 You can see how the idea of 'fairies' and Gnomes might have come about 😊

For Orchid 'faces', South American species take some beating – especially the 'Dracula' family. See <http://www.ecuagenera.com/WebRoot/Store/Shops/ecuagenera/MediaGallery/ContentSlider/slider41.jpg> for examples 😊 As their name implies <http://www.ecuagenera.com/> supply many orchids from Ecuador.

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 23-Apr-17 07:55 PM GMT

They are totally mad and scary looking 😱

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 23-Apr-17 10:56 PM GMT

The majority of those are very 'simian' looking, Mike. I can't think of a reason why that is.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 24-Apr-17 05:56 PM GMT

I suspect it's just chance, David. The structures and markings have evolved to attract the appropriate pollinator, which is usually a small insect, and I doubt whether these creatures perceive the faces we humans see.

Isles of Scilly, May 2017

by MikeOxon, 30-May-17 07:21 PM GMT

I have just returned from a very enjoyable week's holiday on the Isles of Scilly. It was not a 'butterfly' trip but just a general family holiday, in peaceful and beautiful surroundings.

It is worth remembering that these islands are not just about the coastline and the surrounding sea, and I can strongly recommend a visit to the Holy Vale Nature Trail in the 'interior' of St. Mary's. This is a delightful reserve, managed by the IoS Wildlife Trust and contains mature Elm woodland around the only flowing stream on these islands.



St.Mary's IoS - 24th May 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 12-50mm lens - 1/200s@f/5.6 ISO 640

Butterflies seen throughout the holiday included plenty of **Common Blues**, which seemed widespread, and rather fewer **Holly Blues**, mainly on the edges of wooded areas. I also saw a few **Red Admirals** and **Peacocks**, and a sprinkling of 'whites'.

Unfortunately, I had not done my homework and did not realise that these islands host a distinct population of Speckled Wood, described as **ssp. insula**. In fact, this species was one of the most frequently seen but I didn't pay it the attention I should have done! My only photo was taken on St. Martin's and does seem to have the rather stronger colouration and markings characteristic of the sub-species but I must leave it to others to decide if my photo is, indeed of the **ssp.**



St.Martin's IoS - 25th May 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 12-50mm lens - 1/320s@f/10 ISO 640

One good thing is that this provides an incentive for a return trip 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 30-May-17 10:09 PM GMT

I think it must be the subspecies Mike as I don't think they have our subspecies 😊 Did you catch up with any interesting bird species whilst there - any long staying 'yanks'?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 30-May-17 10:40 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel – I wasn't sure if all Specklies on Scilly are *insula* or if there's a mix.

No exotic 'megas', I'm afraid, but I enjoyed seeing Manx Shearwaters, Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, etc. plus one Great Northern Diver. All interesting to me, as we don't get many seabirds around Oxfordshire 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 31-May-17 10:37 AM GMT

Hi! Mike I wondered where you'd gone, (no posts from you since April) and just a week on holiday, I look forward to your posts and thought you might be ill, glad to see your posts again Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 31-May-17 01:38 PM GMT

Thank you for your concern, Goldie. I can assure you that I'm well 😊

Aston Rowant NNR – 13th June 2017

by MikeOxon, 13-Jun-17 10:38 PM GMT

On a warm sunny afternoon, I decided to take a walk at Aston Rowant NNR.

I was surprised to find very few 'blues', while the Small Heath was, by far, the most common species on the slope above the M40.



Aston Rowant NNR – 13th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 12-50mm lens – 1/320s@f/10 ISO 640

Although this may seem a somewhat dull species at first glance, a closer look reveals subtle and delicate patterns in the underwings.

Other species seen, but only in small numbers, were Brimstone, Small White, Green Hairstreak, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, and Meadow Brown. In addition, there were several small *Cistus* Forester (*Adscita geryon*) moths skimming rapidly across the short turf in search of Rock Rose plants.

With continuing warm weather in the forecast, I expect butterfly numbers will increase soon.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 13-Jun-17 10:57 PM GMT

Interesting to see what a spectacular site at a particular time of year holds in store away from that peak period, Mike.

I'm not surprised Blues were at a premium. After all, Common Blue is starting to go over now whilst the other members of this species will be more abundant in a month or so.

Good to see Small Heaths are doing well somewhere in the UK though. I'm seeing ever fewer of them on my travels.

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 13-Jun-17 11:10 PM GMT

Interesting to read what you saw there, Mike. I make regular visits, but there is always a lull before the DGF, Marbled Whites and then Chalkhills take over the hillside – probably starting in only a week or so with the current sunny forecast. 😊 That's a lovely Small Heath, too, beautifully marked. 😊

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 14-Jun-17 11:03 AM GMT

Thank you for commenting, Dave and David. The "lull" was very noticeable and, when I first arrived, I thought for a while that I was going to see no butterflies at all, despite the warmth and sunshine! Once the Summer species emerge, I'm sure the site will, once again, become its usual 'spectacular' self 😊

Bernwood Forest – 18th June 2017

by MikeOxon, 19-Jun-17 02:18 PM GMT

Yesterday (Sunday), my son suggested we meet up for a butterfly walk, especially hoping to find Black Hairstreak. We decided to visit Bernwood Forest, partly because the rides are 'buggy-friendly', so accessible to my one-year old grandson.

It was a hot day, with thin cloud and extended periods of full sun, so it was not surprising to find plenty of very active butterflies. Even before leaving the car-park, we had already seen three White Admirals:



Bernwood Forest – 18th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 100-400mm lens – 1/250s@f/6.3 ISO 1000

We made our way along rides lined with Meadow Browns, Ringlets, and Large Skippers, together with several Silver-washed Fritillaries dashing by, to the Meadow, which was a shimmering carpet of Chamomile and Yellow Rattle, surrounded by Blackthorn hedges, with their attendant butterfly-seekers.



Bernwood Meadow – 18th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 100-400mm lens – 1/1000@f/9 ISO640

I had expected to find **Marbled Whites** but they were still very few in number. No doubt many more will soon be skimming over the flowers, if the hot weather continues. I photographed this beautifully marked, freshly-emerged female:



Bernwood Meadow - 18th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 100-400mm lens - 1/400@f/8 ISO640

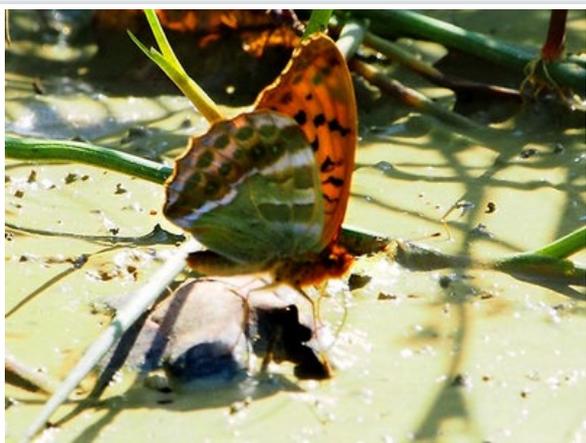
Our first sighting of a **Black Hairstreak** was of one high in an Oak tree, which provided a few long-range 'record shots' but then we spotted a female busily egg-laying, deep inside the hedge. Photography was tricky, especially as the light-levels were dancing between deep shade and brilliant sun, with great rapidity.



Bernwood Meadow - 18th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 100-400mm lens - 1/400@f/8 ISO1000

Another Black Hairstreak flew up from nearby, while we were watching the first example, and then we spotted another low down in the front of the 'hedge'. My son took several photos before it flew up and, like the others, disappeared deep inside the foliage. We were pleased to have seen at least four individuals and I suspect there were many others lurking out of sight. I was surprised to see them in such fresh condition, since there have been sightings in the meadow since the very beginning of this month.

Afterwards, we made our way up to the pond beside the main ride, where a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly was posing on the top of a convenient stick standing up from the water. I also found a **Silver-washed Fritillary** 'mud-puddling' around the edge of the pond - behaviour that I have rarely seen in this country. Butterfly and dragonfly interacted occasionally but the dragonfly made no attempt to take it as prey.



Bernwood Forest - 18th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 100-400mm lens - 1/500s@f/8 ISO 1000 (+1.7EV compensation)

While on the main ride, we met MichaelJF, who has written under <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=8&t=9331&start=40#p121123> about his finding of two male Purple Emperors. We were not so fortunate but this is by far the earliest date that I have known them to be on the wing in Bernwood Forest!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 19-Jun-17 02:43 PM GMT

Great shot of the Black Hairstreak Mike – as you say, not easy to photograph but a butterfly I would love to visit a second time 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 19-Jun-17 05:08 PM GMT

Thank you, Pauline. I was very pleased to see such a fresh-looking specimen, since the season started so early, this year. She was a devil to photograph, as she walked through ever-changing patches of brilliant sunshine. This was the only reasonable photo that I got.

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 20-Jun-17 03:25 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, another Butterfly (BHS) i've yet to see 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Jun-17 06:32 PM GMT

Hi Goldie. Because they are almost on my doorstep, it needed a call from my son to get me out looking for them 😊 I may be coming up to Cumbria myself, soon, to look for the Dark Red Helleborine, which is one of the British orchids that I've not yet managed to photograph. I shall keep a look out for Northern butterfly species, too.

Re: MikeOxon

by kevling, 20-Jun-17 09:01 PM GMT

Mike,

Nice photos from Bernwood. I like the angle on that White Admiral. Glad you got a good shot of the Black Hairstreak. Not the easiest to capture. I saw my first ever ones last weekend and they were very obliging too. It's been a bumper summer for them this year at most locations.

Regards Kev

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Jun-17 09:36 PM GMT

Thank you for commenting on the White Ad, Kev. It was a little too high for comfortable photography and I was struggling to get into a position where I felt there would be sufficient depth of field to keep a reasonable amount of the butterfly in focus. It was another of those occasions where I took lots of shots and only this one was adequate – thank goodness for digital 😊

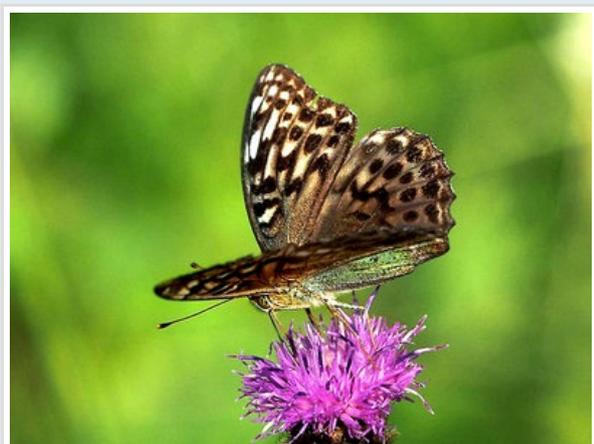
Bucknell Wood, Northants – 25th July 2017

by MikeOxon, 25-Jul-17 10:19 PM GMT

It's been a difficult few weeks for me, with a combination of poor weather, baby-minding duties, and a miserable cold all conspiring to prevent butterfly-watching activities. A free afternoon, today, with a good weather forecast was, therefore, too good an opportunity to miss!

After reading a recent post by <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=9248&start=100#p122097>, I realised that **Bucknell Wood** is only about 45 minutes drive from my home but it's a place that I've never visited! Since it is many years since I last had the opportunity to photograph the *Valesina* form of the **Silver-washed Fritillary** (*I notice that the photo on my website is dated 1991*), I thought it was well worth making a trip, even if only to put down a marker for future years.

In the event, *Valesinas* were a bit like buses – you don't see one for ages and then a group all arrive together. And so, after an initial sighting of one very battered example, I soon found another, in much better condition.



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 25th July 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens – 1/800s@f/9 ISO1000
Not long after that, I had the totally unexpected opportunity to photograph two together!



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 25th July 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/1000s@f/8 ISO1000

Someone I was talking to in the wood said that about 30% of the females there are the *Valesina* form and I found it quite extraordinary to see four different individuals in a short space of time.



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 25th July 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/400s@f/7.1 ISO1000

Some of the undersides were particularly striking, with iridescent blue/green areas close to the body.



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 25th July 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/1250s@f/11 ISO1000

Apart from these 'special' forms, there were plenty of 'regular' SWF on the wing, both male and female, and I also watched two of the *Valesinas* being chased actively by males on separate occasions.

Overall, the list of butterflies seen in this wood was impressive, including **Large and Small Skippers, Brimstone, Small and Green-veined Whites, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Purple Hairstreak, White and Red Admirals, Comma, Peacock, Painted Lady, Ringlet, Gatekeeper,**

Meadow Brown, and Speckled Wood – so 20 species in one short visit!

A Painted Lady to finish my post from a very satisfying day.



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 25th July 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100–400mm lens – 1/1250s@f/11 ISO1000

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 25-Jul-17 11:57 PM GMT

So pleased you got your *valezinas*, Mike. It's a beautiful form of a beautiful insect and highly coveted by everyone.

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 26-Jul-17 06:41 AM GMT

Fabulous sightings Mike 🍷🍷🍷 Lovely images too – you've captured the colours and sheen very well indeed. I've only ever seen that form once but 2 at a time.....!!!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Jul-17 11:39 AM GMT

Thank you for commenting, David and Pauline. I had not gone with great expectations, especially since it's over two weeks since <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=9248&start=100#p122097> posted his wonderful photos. The *Valesina* sightings came quite late in our walk and I had already been impressed by the 'quality' of the wood and the wealth of species we had seen.

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 26-Jul-17 12:54 PM GMT

Lovely shots Mike, 🍷🍷 It's a wonderful looking Butterfly the Valesinas and I love the colours you've caught. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 26-Jul-17 06:07 PM GMT

Mike

I'm glad you got there and that you saw so much and took some lovely shots 😊 . I will be going for a walk this Friday if the weather clears up.

Last time I visited I saw a slow worm in addition to a huge butterfly haul. It has become a favourite with me.

I was desperate to find a male pairing with a Valensina. Nearest I got was the over and under flying but another male pushed in and the female took flight. With the numbers there it must be a possible shot...for someone

best wishes

Peter

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Jul-17 09:03 PM GMT

Thank you Goldie and Peter. I've been sorting through the 200 or so photos that I took yesterday and find that I have quite an interesting collection!

I wish you luck on Friday, Peter. There's still plenty to see, although most of the butterflies are showing signs of wear, apart from some very fresh Brown Argus and Common Blues. I did take a few (rather blurred) shots of *Valesina* females being harassed by ardent males, so there's still the chance of

photographing a pairing, I think.

Is she sticking her 'tongue' out at him?



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 25th July 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/500s@f/8 ISO1000

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 27-Jul-17 09:44 AM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

Is she sticking her 'tongue' out at him?

Well he's not much of a catch (been around the block a bit!) ...so I'd say yes!! 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 27-Jul-17 09:50 PM GMT

Ah but what he lacks in looks he might make up for in stamina Peter 😊 Seriously though Mike I think it's a good year when I see one Valesina, let alone see two in one sitting and get a photo 🤖 🤖 🤖

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 27-Jul-17 11:50 PM GMT

He certainly had stamina, Wurzel. He chased her along the ride for about 150m, far faster than I could follow and I lost them at the first bend 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by kevlng, 28-Jul-17 06:25 AM GMT

Nice photos of the Valesina Mike. I feel a bit envious of all these sightings this year. I have yet to see one in my life, but when I do, you'll all know about it for sure 😊

Regards Kev

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 28-Jul-17 02:47 PM GMT

Thank you, Kev. Looks as though this wood might be a good place to try 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 28-Jul-17 05:05 PM GMT

That's a great shot Mike. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 28-Jul-17 06:26 PM GMT

That's a VERY impressive haul of *Valesina*'s and two in the one picture 🤩👍

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 29-Jul-17 12:02 AM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

I did take a few (rather blurred) shots of *Valesina* females being harassed by ardent males, so there's still the chance of photographing a pairing, I think.

That surely would be **the** money shot, Mike. I spent a fair while getting a *valezina* in the same shot as a normal SWF in France recently, but a mating pair would trump that hands down!!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 31-Jul-17 02:32 PM GMT

I'm sure this would be a good place to try for a mating pair photo. I don't intend to join a race for it, though 😊

Otmoor, Oxon – 25th August 2017

by MikeOxon, 26-Aug-17 02:36 PM GMT

With warm, bright sunshine around, at last, I decided to take a walk along the Roman Road, leading onto **Otmoor**. This is a favourite location for finding Brown Hairstreaks but, on this occasion, I failed to find any, although there were plenty of the usual 'decoys'.

Speckled Woods were especially abundant, sallying forth from their respective perches to investigate every passing insect.

There was an autumnal feel to the vegetation and the Speckled Woods were enjoying the fruits:



Otmoor, Oxon – 25th Aug. 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens – 1/200s@f/6.3 ISO 1250

At one stage, I spotted another possible BH candidate, with a ruddy brown look to its forewings, but it turned out to be a **Meadow Brown**, basking high amongst the leaves:



Otmoor, Oxon - 25th Aug. 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/800s@f/10 ISO 1250

Another butterfly, which I don't usually associate with basking high in a tree was this **Brimstone**:



Otmoor, Oxon - 25th Aug. 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO 1250

And a strongly marked **Green-veined White**:



Otmoor, Oxon - 25th Aug. 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/500s@f/8 ISO 1250

Vanessids were surprisingly few in number - I saw one bright Comma and one **Red Admiral**:



Otmoor, Oxon - 25th Aug. 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO 1250

A pale moth caught my attention, while it was looking for moisture amongst the grasses on the ride. The wings had a bluish lustre, which reminded me of 'mother of pearl', so I was delighted to find, when I got home that this is, indeed, its common name! Apparently, *Pleuroptya ruralis* is one of the largest of our 'micro-moths' and my photo shows the extremely long proboscis, with which it probed the ground for moisture. I also noticed the curious way in which it waved its antennae alternately up and down.



Otmoor, Oxon - 25th Aug. 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO 1250

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 29-Aug-17 09:58 AM GMT

Hi! Mike ,trying to catch up on posts, I love the Speckie on the Blackberries, really brings Autumn to the fore. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 29-Aug-17 06:36 PM GMT

Hi Goldie,

I'm pleased you like that photo. I am trying to capture aspects of behaviour, through the seasons, rather than just producing yet more standard portraits of familiar species.

Mike

Annual Review

by MikeOxon, 04-Oct-17 05:41 PM GMT

Now that Wurzel has announced the beginning of the 'Favourite Photos' thread, to take us through the Winter, I guess it's time to draw up my own review of my butterfly season.



The 'puzzle pic' in the second group may be easier, if you spot the small purple patch on the wing – it was very high up in a tree and hiding behind a leaf, so I was pleased to spot it at all!

For various reasons, I've not made many specifically 'butterflying' trips this year, so most of the 'special' species are missing from my collection. The trip I did make, to Bucknell Wood, following a recommendation by '<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=9248&start=100#p122097>', proved very successful, providing me with sightings of 20 species in one afternoon, not to mention several *Valesina* Silver-washed Fritillaries – and that was on a day rather later than the optimum time! Something to look forward to for a return visit next year 😊

Other highlights were an interesting photo session at my local Dry Sandford Pit, where I managed to take several Brimstone top-sides by practising in-flight photo techniques, and a visit to Bernwood (also local), where I saw several Black Hairstreaks, although I missed a Purple Emperor that others saw on the same day.

I was sorry to miss several favourites, including Adonis Blue and Marsh Fritillary in particular but, hopefully, there's always next year

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 04-Oct-17 06:57 PM GMT

All good things come to an end Mike but there's always another year, (Hope fully) 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 05-Oct-17 09:07 PM GMT

Shame you weren't able to get out as often as you would have liked, Mike, but your images are beautifully presented and encapsulate an entire year in a remarkably small bandwidth.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Oct-17 07:45 PM GMT

Pleased you liked my photos, David. While I was looking through my collection, I noted that the Meadow Brown shown below had particularly well-marked spots on the underwing.



Bernwood, Oxon - 18th June 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 100-400mm lens - 1/250s@f/6.3 ISO 1000

That inveterate namer of aberrations, J. W. Tutt, described his *ab. biocellata* as having "two well-marked ocelli on the underside of the hindwings". It's a matter of opinion what constitutes "well-marked" and, since Meadow Browns are so variable anyway, almost any specimen could probably be described as an aberrant by someone!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 06-Oct-17 10:12 PM GMT

I'd count those as well marked, they have a nice orange margin around them 😊 Great look back Mike, that Brimstone image in particular is resplendent 🌈 Hope to see you at the Social, if not keep on keeping on 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Waterperry Gardens - 5th October 2017

by MikeOxon, 08-Oct-17 11:48 AM GMT

For many years, I have made a visit to the Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, during the first week of October, both to see the wonderful herbaceous border and for an end-of-season viewing of the Vanessids in attendance. Over the last few years, however, I have noticed a marked change in the apparent 'season' at the times of my visits. Five years ago, I could photograph butterflies in abundance, as shown below:



Last year, I made a negative report <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=7459&start=700#p114758>, with no butterflies seen, at all!

This year, I could not help noticing that the herbaceous border was looking distinctly past its peak. When I got home, I compared my latest photos with those taken in earlier years and it was clear that, five years ago, the 'season' seemed less advanced, on almost the same date.



Of course, the timing of the seasons does vary, according to our fickle weather conditions, but my continuous record of photos, all taken around the same date, demonstrates a trend over several years. Regarding butterflies, I had a little more success than last year, with a very few Red Admirals and Commas seen, and an opportunity to photograph a Small Copper:



Waterperry, Oxon - 5th October 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm macro lens - 1/250s@f/9 ISO 400

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 08-Oct-17 11:37 PM GMT

Not surprising that growing conditions in your part of the world seem ahead of normal, Mike. I don't think I can ever remember nature winding down so early in a year as this one. If the flowers are going over early, it stands to reason that butterflies will be doing likewise.

Still, there are a few weeks yet to get out and observe species on the wing, and with a bit of luck we'll get a decent cold spell to refresh things prior to the 2018 season getting underway.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 31-Oct-17 01:51 PM GMT

Now that the dark evenings have set in, I've been looking at alternative ways of practising my photography. My wife brought in a Venus Fly Trap (*Dionaea muscipula*) plant from the greenhouse, which had caught a fly, and offered it to me as a photographic challenge.



Fly in Venus Fly Trap – 29 October 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/13s@f/11 ISO1250

As regular readers of my diary will know, I have spent some time exploring the <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=7459&start=540#p107764> of my Olympus camera, which include the ability to 'stack' a number of photos so as to increase the apparent depth of field in the final combined image. I decided to push this capability to the limit and test its capabilities at the 1:1 magnification limit of my Olympus 60mm macro lens. To light the subject, I used my LED ring light, supplemented by a 10w LED floodlight, of the type intended for outdoor garden lighting.

At first, my results were a little disappointing but I soon realised that, to obtain the maximum amount of detail, it is necessary to use the maximum aperture of the lens – in my case f/2.8. Even stopping down to f/5.6 was sufficient for diffraction to 'take the edge off' the finest details in the fly's eye. Of course, when using a wide aperture, it was essential to use focus stacking, to maintain sharp focus across the full depth of the subject.



Fly in Venus Fly Trap – 29 October 2017 Olympus E-M1 with 60mm macro lens – 1/100s@f/2.8 ISO400 (8 images stacked)

The fact that the fly was imprisoned by the plant provided me with a subject that was already held in a good position for photography. Perhaps, it might be possible to achieve similar results on a 'chilled' butterfly.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 01-Nov-17 09:39 AM GMT

A great result there Mike, I must admit to not fully exploring some of the features that may be useful or interesting to me, with the camera's I've owned.

Cheers

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Nov-17 11:15 AM GMT

Thank you Andrew. I like to use the Winter to explore photographic ideas that I can then use in the following season. I keep intending to tackle early life stages but haven't got around to it yet. In the field, as I've aged, I've moved to using longer lenses, which avoid some bending down and kneeling. Long lenses also have the advantage of causing less disturbance to the butterfly. There are some subjects, though, that really do need a macro lens.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 01-Nov-17 06:48 PM GMT

Excellent, detailed close up of the fly, Mike. Maybe you need an early start next spring to try the same on roosting Orange Tips!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 01-Nov-17 09:56 PM GMT

Thank you, David. It took me several goes to get the lighting and everything else arranged for optimum results. If I can practise more, over the Winter, I might be ready for an attempt on a live specimen but it will have to be very dozy, to stay still while I set up 😊

Re: Super Moon

by MikeOxon, 04-Dec-17 04:10 PM GMT

We're now well into that time of year when we reminisce about the good times we enjoyed over the past season (with the help of the 'Favourite Photo' thread), while planning next season's adventures.

I am just getting to grips with (*yet another*) new camera and exploring its capabilities. I have greatly enjoyed my two Olympus OM-D cameras, although my E-M1 had a somewhat chequered history. A strap lug parted company with the body during my New Zealand trip and, although it was repaired by Olympus under warranty, it did dent my confidence in the camera somewhat. When I recently suffered a shutter failure, it spurred me into a decision I'd been considering for some time, and led to me buying an Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii.

At first glance, the new version looks and feels very similar to the earlier model but there are significant improvements to the performance. I don't expect these changes to have much effect on butterfly photography but I have already experienced the very considerable improvement in the tracking auto-focus capability, when photographing birds-in-flight. This is a feature that I have missed, since changing systems from my Nikon D300s.

The new E-M1 Mk.ii does seem to have re-acquired that ability to lock onto a moving bird and to stay with it, even when it passes in front of background 'distractions' (trees, shrubs, etc.) I haven't had much time to practise, yet, but show an example below:



Radley GP, Oxon - 25th November 2017 Olympus E-M1MkII with Leica 100-400mm lens - 1/2000s@f/5.7 ISO1250 [trackAF]

The new camera retains the automatic 'stacking' facility, which I found particularly valuable for flower photography, and provides even faster sequence shooting, which I shall hope to use in the Spring, to record Brimstone feeding behaviour, as I did last year.

In fact, I used stacking last night, to process a burst of around 50 shots of the 'super moon'. The final image is as much a product of computer processing as it is of photography! I followed a 'recipe' I found on the web at <https://darkastsastro.ca/lunar-image-stacking-is-it-worth-it/>

This recipe involved pre-processing the individual shots with <https://sites.google.com/site/astropipp/>, then using <https://www.astronomie.be/registax/> to 'stack' the individual images and, finally, using Lucy-Richardson deconvolution (available in the <http://rawtherapee.com/> image processor), to remove the blurring caused by atmospheric turbulence. My final result is shown below:



Abingdon, Oxon – 3rd December 2017 Olympus E-M1MkII with Leica 100–400mm lens – 1/1250s@f/8 ISO640 [49 images stacked]
By the Spring, I shall hopefully have gained confidence with the camera and be full of ideas for a new season's photography 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 05-Dec-17 07:38 PM GMT

That image of the Moon is extraordinarily good, Mike. You certainly put some effort into that!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Dec-17 10:48 PM GMT

Thank you David. It's a good way of using dark winter evenings. Even before all the computer processing, I was impressed by the performance of my Leica 100–400 mm lens, which has the added ability to focus as close as 1.3m for near-macro results.

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 06-Dec-17 11:36 AM GMT

Great moon image Mike, impressive kit you have there. 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-17 12:40 PM GMT

That moon photo is fantastically sharp but I wonder if it is a little over-processed?



The white dots/crater edges or whatever are far more prominent (artefacts?) than I have seen in other pictures of a full moon. That's just a crop to illustrate.

Next challenge is to use the same technique for Jupiter. The planet is still very low in the dawn sky but better placed by next spring. Opposition on 9th May but even then still rather low in southern sky.

And for those who might not understand planetary motions (you will no doubt skip this Mike), a planet is in opposition when it is directly opposite the sun so it rises when the sun sets, and sets when the sun rises, ie visible all night.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Dec-17 02:07 PM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:

..... I wonder if it is a little over-processed?.....

You are by no means alone in thinking that, Jack. I have had similar comments from the <https://e-group.uk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=46739>, where I also posted the photo. I wanted to bring out the '3D' look of the photo and, in that area you pointed out, the chain of the Apennine Mountains shows up quite well. It wasn't meant to be a 'moon map' (there are plenty of those already).

I was 'playing' with a new technique and, frankly, I was amazed by the amount of detail that my 100-400mm lens could reveal. Full moon is always a bad time for photographing the surface, since the flat lighting removes shadow detail, which would need far less processing in other phases. It's all part of a learning curve and I'm looking forward to trying other subjects.

Andrew555 wrote:

.....Great moon image Mike, impressive kit you have there.....

Thank you Andrew. Although the E-M1 Mk ii is similar to the previous model, there's still plenty to learn and I'm hoping to find features that will be useful next season.

I had a vivid dream last night about being in the garden and seeing a Silver-washed Fritillary, which would be remarkable at any time of year, let alone December! It gives me an excuse, however, to post an SWF image from Bernwood, a couple of years ago:



Bernwood, Oxon - 9th July 2015 Olympus E-M5 with 40-150mm lens - 1/100s@f/22 ISO400
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-17 03:28 PM GMT

You mentioned that you have **yet another** camera

Here's (some of) my equipment.



Are you going to show us yours Mike? 😏
Two or three more cameras that I couldn't find.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Dec-17 05:30 PM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:

You mentioned that you have *yet another* camera

Here's (some of) my equipment. [attachment=0]cams119.jpg[/attachment] Are you going to show us yours Mike? 😏
Two or three more cameras that I couldn't find.

Jack

... and the one you took the photo with, I assume 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-17 05:41 PM GMT

[quote]... and the one you took the photo with, I assume 😊 No no no. I set it up on 10 seconds self-timer and then put it in the pile with the others. Only just had time to do that before the shutter went off 😞?

Had a silly issue earlier in the day (this should really be in my diary but here goes).

Wife had gone out. I was still getting dressed. Knock on the door. Incredibly early postman with a new printer. I apologised to him that I was only wearing one sock 😊

He replied that he could overlook the fact that I wasn't wearing any trousers but only one sock - disgraceful.

No dour Scots in these parts.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 06-Dec-17 07:06 PM GMT

LOL! Do you ever throw anything away, Jack? 😊

That's quite a collection!

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 06-Dec-17 07:36 PM GMT

[quote]David: LOL! Do you ever throw anything away, Jack? 😊 Sometimes - like a wife or two 😏

Jack

Snow in Oxon

by MikeOxon, 10-Dec-17 06:00 PM GMT

No butterflies in the garden today:



Abingdon, Oxon - 10th December 2017 Olympus E-M5 with 12-50mm lens - 1/125s@f/5 ISO640
Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 22-Dec-17 08:23 PM GMT

I'm trying to contact you on your usual e-mail address but it keeps bouncing. Drop me an e-mail please to resume contact.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22-Dec-17 11:31 PM GMT

Sorry you had difficulty, Jack. Should be solved now.

Mike