

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 01-Jan-17 06:34 PM GMT

Happy New Year to all.

Well, December was not unexpectedly quiet from a Butterfly perspective. We did see 2 Red Admirals and a Peacock, but missed out on a few sightings of Brimstone in the Hamstreet area. One or two Common Darters managed to linger on into the start of the month but a few early frosts put paid to late insect activity. A few moth species put in an appearance but we had put our trap away for the winter.

Thanks David M. Like everywhere else in the Country this area is continually being developed and all those little secret corners are disappearing. With the farmers around here now ploughing up the margins it will be even harder to find wildlife. Not sure what the answer is as people need houses and food, but nature is definitely second best at present. Nature reserves are too far apart to give wildlife corridors. Only Road verges and Railway lines seem to offer any opportunity.

During the year we did find White Legged Damselfly, Willow Emerald Damselfly and Sickle-bearing Bush Crickets in areas not recorded before, so maybe some hope.

Anyway, 2017 is with us and so another year starts. Lets hope Butterflies (and everything else) can recover from the poor year of 2016.

As mentioned in my last Diary update I attach a few photos taken in late 2016. The content, mainly birds, reflect the cold and often windy period in question.

Best wishes to all.



Small Coppers were one of our last butterflies of 2016. This one was at Faggs Wood (Hamstreet). Aberration?



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This 1st Winter Fosters Tern was a most unexpected, but appreciated, Kent tick on the coast at Hythe.



This 1st Winter Fosters Tern was a most unexpected, but appreciated, Kent tick on the coast at Hythe.



Probably one of Britain's most recognisable birds. This Waxwing was at Pegwell Bay (Kent).



Desert Wheatear on the beach at Normans Bay (East Sussex).



This Ring Necked Duck seems to have taken up residence at Dungeness RSPB.



A distant Dotterel resting on the beach at Dungeness during a break in its migration.



Snow Buntings are often approachable but hidden like this one at St. Marys Bay.



This Shorelark was hunkered down out of the wind and rain at St. Margarets.

Re: Dave Brown

by Wurzel, 01-Jan-17 06:48 PM GMT

Some great birds there Dave –though for me the Dotterel would be the most envy inducing 🐦 The Small Coppers are worthy of a few : 🐦 mrgreen: too as that is a great ab –radiata I think it's pronounced.
Have a goodun (2017 that is!)

Wurzel

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 10-Feb-17 01:44 PM GMT

The wonders of DNA.

In my update of the 25th December I mentioned a species of Stonechat at Dungeness that had been identified scientifically using DNA from a poo sample.

To cut a long story short, and following queries from a number of birders, the laboratory ran the test again from another collected sample. The outcome this time is that the bird is not the rare species that had been claimed. It is in fact just an odd individual of the common British species of Stonechat.

The laboratory has gone back over its protocols and identified a mix up with a genuine sample of Stejneyers DNA from another bird sample taken in Yorkshire at the same time, leaving a lot of Kent birders disappointed. Still, its better that we get it right and science prevails in the end.

Moving quickly onto a positive note. We have seen our first butterfly of 2017. A Red Admiral on the 21st January near Camber Sands flying in a temperature of only 4 degrees. I can only think that it must have been disturbed from hibernation, perhaps by being in a warm sun trap. Anyway, we

were wrapped up in heavy clothing even if the butterfly was not.

Well January is the month when we all we can do is bird watch and dream of warmer times ahead. We have so far resisted temptation to visit a number of long staying rarities like the Blue Rock Thrush in the Cotswold's and the White Billed Diver in Lincolnshire. Staying loyal to Kent though has meant that we have seen very little new from previous updates, with the long staying Ring Necked Duck at Dungeness probably the pick of the bunch. January produced for us of note 2 Iceland Gulls, 5 Taiga Bean Geese, Red Necked Grebe, Long Eared Owl and the usual mix of Caspian Gulls. Otherwise its just look forward to February and hope for better things to come.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 28-Feb-17 05:13 PM GMT

Butterfly species Number Two.

Joining our sighting of Red Admiral in January is now Brimstone in February. In fact two Brimstones on the 19th February near Faversham. It was a warm sunny day, although we were still a little surprised to see Brimstone in mid February. What a welcome sight and a good reminder of times to come.

We still have not been for the long staying rarities elsewhere in the country, and Kent has been fairly quite wildlife wise. Due to the cold nights we have still not put our Moth trap out although we are aware that some have started, but with little reward. Birdwise the best bird has been the Pine Bunting near Sittingbourne, although this has tested birders resolve with very few sightings, and then fleeting and distant views. Many birders have waited 3 or 4 hours for just a couple of 10 second glimpses. Not so bad when its warm and sunny in June, but in a cold February a little testing.

The long staying Ring Necked Duck and Long Eared Owl remain at Dungeness RSPB and we are seeing on most visits. Can't say the same of Smew and Bittern which remain very scarce, and where have all the Great White Egrets gone? We see one or two most days but this time of the year there are often up to ten around. We did see 11 Waxwings at Ramsgate on the 5th Feb. Also on the same date we caught up with the two Taiga Bean Geese near Monkton. There are two main populations in Britain. One centered around East Norfolk and the other in Scotland. This year we have seen a few in Kent and Sussex, at the same time as numbers reported in Norfolk have fallen. So presumably this scarce bird has dispersed for some reason this year. Another bird, the Scaup, has been seen a few times this winter. We saw 5 on the 11th Feb at Dungeness RSPB. In the Nineties we used to see a small flock of about 200 at Dungeness, but for the last 15 years or so it has become less than annual.

The final treat in February has been the presence of up to 3 Iceland Gulls at Dungeness, mainly on the sea around the patch. An area of waste cooling water from the Power Station. Whilst we have seen all three we have yet to get an acceptable photo of any of them.

I attach a couple of photos of the Stonechat at Dungeness that caused all the excitement at Xmas. You can see that it looks nothing like Stonechats normally shown in bird guides, and caused some head scratching when first found. Luckily DNA (finally) sorted it out.

Here is hoping March brings welcome changes.



Little Owl near Dungeness soaking up the sun.



This small group of 4 Pink Footed Geese was a welcome sight at Dungeness. A scarce bird here.



Red Necked Grebe at Camber (East Sussex).



A remarkable cold colour Stonechat at Dungeness. Appeared almost black and white in the field.



A remarkable cold colour Stonechat at Dungeness.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 01-Mar-17 04:29 PM GMT

Great shots of the birds Dave, believe it or not I've never seen an Owl in England yet except for captured ones, I must take a trip to Dungeness next time I'm in Kent, last year I couldn't get the family motivated and Husband wasn't well, hope fully this year will be better. Goldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 22-Mar-17 03:35 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie. You normally visit Kent in the Summer months and regrettably Dungeness, and indeed most of Kent, is poor for Owls during the Summer.

I will bear you in mind and let you know of any before your next visit. Little Owl and Tawny Owl are present all year but more difficult to find in Summer, whilst Long Eared and Short Eared Owls are Winter visitors.

With still a week or so to go March has been a mixed month. We have seen Comma (maximum of 7 on the 21st), Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone, probably about all you could expect so far, but for us Moths have been disappointing. Our trap remains packed away as we have yet to see a moth flying in the garden. However we have seen Hebrew Character, Common Quaker, Clouded Drab and March Moth at another location. Its been excellent for plants with Primrose, Wild Garlic, Cuckoo Flower, Lesser Celandine, Early Dog-Violet, Wood Anemone all in flower.

Bird wise very quiet. Two of the Iceland Gulls remain at Dungeness, as does the long staying Ring Necked Duck and Long Eared Owl. A Black Brant (American version of our Brent Goose) seen for a while at Seasalter. Our first Wheatears of the year were present at Dungeness on the 18th March. Our first returning Sandwich Tern was today at Hythe. Chiffchaffs are starting to sing at most woods around here, but still in low numbers. Common Buzzards are displaying everywhere, and in good numbers. Otherwise its pretty much the usual woodland birds for March and little else. A fine Drake Hooded Merganser caused some initial excitement at Dungeness on the 10 March until one photograph showed a Green ring on its leg, indicating an almost certain escape.

This weekends forecast looks better so maybe a chance of early bird migration and some more butterflies.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 23-Mar-17 03:35 PM GMT

Thanks Dave, I'm also there at Christmas but things are very active then more's the pity, I'd love to see the Owl's though when I visit in Summer if possible thanks Goldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 08-May-17 08:08 PM GMT

Twice out of Kent.

It's been a while since I updated my diary. To be honest it has been fairly quiet and good wildlife days have been few. We have had one or two really sunny and warm days but in the whole it has been cold with a biting North or North East wind. One notably feature has been the lack of rain with plants suffering bad. In particular the early Orchids. On the odd good day we have seen butterflies with all the expected early ones seen in reasonable numbers.

Small Coppers at Dungeness in particular seem to have done well. They seem to especially like Hoary Cress and on one day last week we counted 23 on a patch about a metre square. We have yet to catch up with Green Hairstreak but will look once the weather turns for the better.

This must sound odd for all those on the West Coast and Scotland who have had some glorious days (18-20 degrees), but believe me temperatures of 9 degrees, and a biting wind making it feel more like 5 degrees, is disappointing in late April, early May.

So why the title, Twice out of Kent. Well the first was a quick dash down to Eastbourne on the 6th April for the once in a lifetime opportunity to see the migrant bird, Blue Rock Thrush. Sounding a bit like an advert for a flash sale, it was available for one day only. Found mid morning by Beachy Head lighthouse it stayed and showed well to all comers. Photos have proved it to be the one that wintered at Stow on the Wold. One or two have muttered that this bird could be an escaped cage bird, but most accept that its credentials look good for the real thing. Even more so when it moved to migration hot spot of Beachy Head for one day only, presumably on its way back to the Continent.

The other outing was to finally catch up with Spring Speedwell at a well known location in the Breckland. Talk about a plant that is small. Hands and knees job, and with a magnifying glass. 3 or 4 plants were in flower but at a height of only about 20mm, or one inch in old money, this plant is almost impossible to find without help of local knowledge and we had that help. Thanks to a friend who knew where to look this Nationally rare plant was found reasonably quickly allowing more time to ensure the delights of Breckland. On the way we called in at Therfield (near Royston) to catch up with this years wonderful display of Pasque Flowers. Literally hundreds were in full flower. Magnificent site and public too.

I will not list all the things we have seen, just a few highlights. Dungeness has had two White-marked moths this year and we managed to catch up with one. A very rare moth for the South East and most likely a migrant (4th April). Alpine Swift around Sandwich on the 16th April, Cattle Egret at Stodmarsh, also the 16th April. Lesser Yellowlegs at Dungeness 22nd April. Hundreds of green Winged Orchids in flower at Marden Meadow. Crane and Short Eared Owl Dungeness on the 4th May.

I am aware that the Duke of Burgundy have emerged at Bonsai Bank. Something to look forward day on the next suitable day. Also yet to catch up with Pearl Bordered and Dingy Skipper.



Whimbrel adjacent to the RSPB approach track at Dungeness.



Early Purple Orchid near Canterbury



One of many Small Coppers at Dungeness



Blue Rock Thrush Beachy Head Lighthouse



Blue Rock Thrush Beachy Head Lighthouse



Blue Rock Thrush Beachy Head Lighthouse

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 29-Jul-17 08:57 PM GMT

The Diary comes out of hibernation.

It's nearly 3 months since I updated our diary. We have been so busy doing what seems very little. In between the gardening and paint brush we have managed to see a lot of wildlife. Too much to update so I will summarize the highlights.

May Highlights.

This has to include a Deaths Head Hawkmoth seen at Dungeness on the 20th. What a magnificent beast. Surely one of moths greatest, if not the best looking. Only the second one we have ever seen. Portland Ribbon Wave was another good moth, this time caught at Ruckinge. All the common butterflies of spring were noted although Grizzled Skipper took a bit of finding. Duke of Burgundy at Bonsai Bank were in good numbers, as was the Small Blue at Kingsdown (98 plus).

Many of the Orchids were early but of concern were the very low numbers of both Early and Late Spider Orchids, presumably badly effected by the almost drought conditions. On the bird front a male Woodchat Shrike at Dungeness on the 12th was appreciated.

Our first two White Legged Damselflies of the year were at Hamstreet on the 29th, followed the next day by a Purple Cloud (moth) at Dungeness. We ended the month (31st) looking at the very small Forked Spleenwort (plant) near Brenzett as a Red Kite flew over our heads.

June Highlights.

We planned to go and see the Large Blue but events conspired against us. It was either wet, windy, Glastobury Festival or issues on the M25. The southern half of this motorway can seem like a car park at times. It normally only takes one incident to bring it to a standstill. We did however have a very good, no excellent day, on the 7th in the Brecks looking for flowers, under the brilliant guidance of a local birder and general wildlife watcher, without whom we would have struggled. Thanks LG.

We saw such goodies as Small Alison, Small Cudweed, Fine-leaved Sandwort, Spanish Catchfly, Yarrow Broomrape, Drooping Broom, Bur-medick, Smooth Rupturewort, Tower Mustard, and Black Spleenwort. We ended the day with Military Orchid. Butterflies were few, but still a great day out. The bird of the month has to be the Elegant Tern that spent a few days at Pagham Harbour. Our views were distant or in flight, but we can't complain. All the usual butterflies seen with the Heath Fritillary at Blean probably the best of the bunch. With 5 White Letter Hairstreaks at Warehorne a close second. Having opted out of the Large Blue we also decided against going for Black Hairstreak and Marsh Fritillary. Moths were generally quiet although we did see our first ever Hornet moth, perched and allowing photographs.

July Highlights (to the 27th).

The month when we nearly all make the effort to see the Purple Emperor. No matter how many we see we keep going back. This time only 3 available at Mark Beech but 3 stonkers, all defending their territory around the master tree. On this occasion they would not come down, but still worthy of their crown. We also took the plunge (via the M25) on the 8th and made what we thought was a long journey to Durlston Country Park. The last 30 or 40 miles seemed to take forever with all the holiday traffic about. Our target was the Lulworth Skipper, of which we saw 30 plus. A lifer for us, although of course not a rare butterfly, just a journey we have never made at the right time of the year. Also seen were 4 Dark Green Fritillary. Nearby 2 Grayling were at Morden Bog. The 5th only saw 2 Silver Studded Blues at Ashdown Forest. This species seems to be hanging on here but must be of concern. Management of the habitat seems good so not sure what the problem is. Also seen on this date and location was 2 Golden Ringed Dragonflies. One of Britain's most impressive dragonflies.

Locally we managed to find a record count of 16 Willow Emeralds at Kennardington. Only the 2nd year we have seen them there. Hopefully a sign of good numbers ahead.

Bird wise the Bonapartes Gull has returned to Oare Marsh for about its fourth year. Of National interest has been the confirmed breeding of a pair of Black Winged Stilts on the RSPB reserve at Cliffe. The site and news has been well broadcast by the RSPB, who are rightly proud of this record. On the 15th they were joined by a Marsh Sandpiper. We managed to see all on the same pool on the 15th.

For the 2nd time this month it was off patch and to Canvey Island to see the recent colonist, the Southern Migrant Hawker. Much to our surprise we found 26, mostly males, along a ditch nearly a mile in length. Considering this species has only been in Britain for 5 or 6 years this is a good number and signs that they are becoming established. Hopefully they will spread to nearby Kent and Suffolk. In the same ditch was Scarce Emerald Damselfly. Despite the downturn in weather we ended the period with some excellent moths. In particular Pale Shoulder (mega moth), Tamarisk Peacock, Ringed Border (mega moth), Speckled Footman, Beautiful Marbled, Dotted Footmoth, Dark Crimson Underwing and Shining Marbled (mega moth). None caught by us I hasten to add, but all available to view on the day at Dungeness. Thanks to the excellent team of mothers in the Dungeness and surrounding area this has been one of our best moth periods ever and unlikely to be repeated. Plenty of other good moths were on offer including the locally rare Dogs Tooth and Red-tipped Clearwing.

We end this period just as the number of Clouded Yellows and Painted Ladys increase. Hopefully there is still time for the Long Tailed Blue, if only the rain would stop.

Now I have made the effort to update the diary I must download the photos to help it all make sense.

Dave

Re: Dave Brown

by Pauline, 30-Jul-17 06:49 AM GMT

I've enjoyed reading about your recent exploits Dave and can only wonder at the range and diversity of sightings 🤔🌿 I'm now looking forward to seeing a few of the images 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 31-Jul-17 09:10 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline.

I still have not had time to go through my photos, but I take this opportunity to show photos taken on our trip to the Brecks by our guide and good friend LG. Anyway, he has a far better camera than my bridge camera so they will be of greater quality. These were all taken on the 7th June 2017. I will only give a general location due to their rarity although most plant enthusiasts will know their exact position.

No butterfly photos this time but plenty to download.



Drooping Broome taken at Lakenheath RSPB



Small Alison (and I mean small, hands and knees job) How Hill.



Fine-leaved Sandwort. This took four of us one hour to find. It blended so well into it's environment. Maidscross Hill.



Yarrow Broomrape. One of Britains rarer Broomrapes. Lakenheath.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 03-Aug-17 07:49 PM GMT

A few photos taken over the last three months. Bearing in mind that Pete feels that the website, left unaltered, probably because of the large amount of photos in Personal Diaries although he does not say, is again nearing the upper limit of files allowed, I have culled them a little. Leaving off Butterfly species that everyone seems to post. i.e. Brimstone, Peacock. I am probably guilty as most, especially as I often include photos not of Butterflies but of another wildlife that I hope will be interest. That is why I like Pete's idea of the previous years being loaded onto PDF files and archived.

Well onto this sequence of photographs.



The returning Bonapartes Gull at Oare Marshes. Where does this American Gull go to during the summer?



Norfolk Hawker . Taken at Grove Ferry (Kent). They have expanded their range in Kent and are now easily viewable at Grove Ferry NNR.



Small Red Damselfly at Ashdown Forest. Found around the boggy pools.



Willow Emerald Damselfly. This was one of 16 seen at Kennardington. Only the second year at this site and surely signs of more range expansion.



Ringlet at Hamstreet Woods. Always nice to find the first ones of the year.

Now if Pete's not looking I will start viewing my moth photos for possible uploading 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 11-Oct-17 05:24 PM GMT

Despite my best of intentions I am finding it increasing difficult to find the time to update my diary. Hence the long gap since the last update in August. We still get out a lot to see wildlife but I am all behind on the decorating.

Anyway enough of the excuses. I suppose the highlight of this period was seeing the Queen of Spain Fritillary at Peacehaven. We only saw one of the two present on the 2 September but that was enough to send us away very happy. We have waited many years to see this species in Britain, having dipped on the last ones near Chichester and not even trying for the previous ones in Suffolk. It was also very pleasing to meet again a certain member, who was on his 6th visit (Neil just couldn't get enough).

It was also pleasing to find that the Sickle-bearing Bush Crickets had survived the winter and were in good numbers at the Wye NNR site. We cast the net a little wider at the area we discovered last year and were rewarded with a record count of 45 individuals on the 26th August 2017. Their preferred area was basically left untouched from last year and they seem to have responded well. Many thanks to the Warden for his sympathetic management. Another highlight was the finding of several new colonies of the Willow Emerald Damselfly around the Kennardington / Hamstreet area and one on the edge of Walland Marsh. Considering we found the first 4 Damselflies only a year ago this is a massive expansion. It can't be long before they enter East Sussex. Not only new sites, but in good numbers, with 50 being seen around Kennardington.

We managed 29 Silver Spotted Skippers at Lydden on the 13 August so they appear to have had a good year as we only checked one field out of the three we normally find them in. Just recently Clouded Yellows have appeared in good numbers, together with Red Admirals. We have also seen reasonable numbers of Hummingbird Hawkmoths.

Whilst good moths seemed to have dried up we have managed to see Beautiful Marbled (15th Aug) & Convolvulus Hawkmoth (5th Sept) at Dungeness. Probably the most satisfying was the Scarce Bordered Straw in our garden trap on the 23rd August.

On the bird front the Wilsons Phalarope at Oare Marsh on several recent dates, and still present as I type this, was probably the best. Although we have managed to see 3 in Kent over the last 30 years of this rare American bird.



Spoonbill at Dungeness on Dengemarsh.



Great White Egret from Hanson Hide, Dungeness



Speckled Bush Cricket at Dungeness



Sickle-bearing Bush Cricket at Wye NNR.



White Legged Damselfly at Hamstreet.



Black Darter at Ashdown Forest



Ringed Border (moth) at private site near Bewl Water



Dogs Tooth. Not a particularly rare moth but unusual at Dungeness



Shining Marbled at Dungeness

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 11-Oct-17 05:58 PM GMT

Part Two



Queen of Spain Fritillary at Peacehaven



Queen of Spain Fritillary at Peacehaven



Silver Spotted Skipper, Lydden NNR.



Jersey Tiger at Dungeness. Now increasing in numbers across Southern Britain.



Purple Cloud at Dungeness.



Pale Shoulder at Dungeness. Sorry about the poor photograph but not allowed to take out of the pot.



This Clouded Yellow was very white on the upperside, almost like a Small White, and could have been Helice.



Convulvulus Hawkmoth.

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 11-Oct-17 11:02 PM GMT

Looks very much like a *helice* to me, Dave. Well done...not to mention your other specimens which are all highly desirable....particularly the QoS.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 12-Oct-17 05:59 PM GMT

It looks like an Helice to me Dave 😊 I saw one at Temple Ewell when I was in Kent, my first 😊 Goldie 😊