

Re: David M

by David M, 02-Jan-17 06:01 PM GMT

Happy New Year!

This winter is shaping up better than the last few so far. The constant rain and floods of last year have been replaced by predominant high pressure and even here in Swansea we've had precious little rain. All we need now is a decent cold snap to create conditions more favourable for overwintering stages and, with any luck, a warmer and drier April to enable the early emergers to prosper!

I nipped out for half an hour to the coast today, and although it was no better than 7 degrees, the relative lack of wind made it feel quite pleasant. With cloudless skies I wondered whether there might even be a Red Admiral or two! At Limeslade Bay I noticed this huge patch of flowering hebe in a sunny and sheltered spot. Quite a few bees were nectaring from it and the bergenia adjacent to it is already beginning to flower. This is probably my likeliest spot for an unseasonal butterfly so I'll be back every now and then when (if) conditions are suitable.

Wishing everybody a happy and productive 2017!!



Re: David M

by David M, 18-Feb-17 06:02 PM GMT

Dates of first UK sightings 2017:

1. **Red Admiral** – 18 February, Dan-y-graig cemetery, Port Tennant, Swansea
2. **Small Tortoiseshell** – 9 March, Swansea Vale
3. **Brimstone** – 9 March, Morfa, Swansea
4. **Peacock** – 9 March, Oystermouth Cemetery, Mumbles, Swansea
5. **Comma** – 9 March, Oystermouth Cemetery, Mumbles, Swansea
6. **Small White** – 25 March, Castle Meadows, Abergavenny
7. **Holly Blue** – 26 March, Kilvey Hill, Swansea
8. **Speckled Wood** – 26 March, Kilvey Hill, Swansea
9. **Large White** – 6 April, Kilvey Hill, Swansea
10. **Orange Tip** – 6 April, Swansea Vale
11. **Green Veined White** – 8 April, Whiteford Burrows, Gower, Swansea
12. **Grizzled Skipper** – 23 April, Merthyr Mawr, nr. Porthcawl
13. **Green Hairstreak** – 1 May, Welshmoor, Gower, Swansea
14. **Wall Brown** – 2 May, Kilvey Hill, Swansea
15. **Small Copper** – 6 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
16. **Small Blue** – 6 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
17. **Dingy Skipper** – 7 May, Kittle Quarry, Swansea
18. **Pearl Bordered Fritillary** – 13 May, Ewyas Harold Common, nr. Pontrilas
19. **Common Blue** – 14 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
20. **Small Heath** – 14 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
21. **Brown Argus** – 14 May, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea
22. **Duke of Burgundy** – 20 May, Rodborough Common, nr. Stroud, Glos
23. **Adonis Blue** – 20 May, Rodborough Common, nr. Stroud, Glos
24. **Marsh Fritillary** – 21 May, Welshmoor, Gower, Swansea
25. **Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary** – 22 May, Fairwood Common, Gower, Swansea
26. **Meadow Brown** – 4 June, Fairwood Common, Gower, Swansea
27. **Ringlet** – 17 June, Daneway Banks, nr. Sapperton, Glos
28. **Large Skipper** – 17 June, Daneway Banks, nr. Sapperton, Glos
29. **Marbled White** – 17 June, Daneway Banks, nr. Sapperton, Glos
30. **Large Blue** – 17 June, Daneway Banks, nr. Sapperton, Glos
31. **Silver Washed Fritillary** – 17 June, Lower Woods, nr. Wickwar, Glos
32. **Silver Studded Blue** – 18 June, St Govan's Head, nr Bosherton, Pembrokeshire
33. **Dark Green Fritillary** – 20 June, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
34. **High Brown Fritillary** – 20 June, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
35. **Painted Lady** – 20 June, Old Castle Down, nr. Ewenny, Glamorgan
36. **Large Heath** – 21 June, Cors Caron, nr. Tregaron, Ceredigion
37. **White Letter Hairstreak** – 26 June, Glanymor Park, Loughor
38. **Hedge Brown** – 17 July, Glanymor Park, Loughor
39. **Essex Skipper** – 22 July, Mill Lane Orchard, Abergavenny
40. **Small Skipper** – 22 July, Mill Lane Orchard, Abergavenny
41. **Grayling** – 5 August, The Ayres Nature Reserve, Isle of Man
42. **Brown Hairstreak** – 10 August, West Williamston, Pembrokeshire
43. **Clouded Yellow** – 13 August, A477, Pembrokeshire

UK species seen in France but NOT seen in Britain in 2017:

44. **Lulworth Skipper** – French Pyrenees
45. **Chequered Skipper** – French Pyrenees
46. **Swallowtail** – French Pyrenees
47. **Glanville Fritillary** – French Pyrenees
48. **Heath Fritillary** – French Pyrenees
49. **Wood White** – French Pyrenees
50. **Mountain Ringlet** – French Alps
51. **White Admiral** – French Alps
52. **Purple Hairstreak** – French Alps
53. **Chalkhill Blue** – French Alps
54. **Northern Brown (Mountain) Argus** – French Alps
55. **Silver Spotted Skipper** – French Alps

Non-UK butterflies seen in 2017:

French Pyrenees 23rd – 31st May

56. **Mallow Skipper**
57. **Tufted Marbled Skipper**
58. **Red Underwing Skipper**
59. **Safflower Skipper**
60. **Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper**
61. **Large Grizzled Skipper**
62. **Spanish Festoon**
63. **Clouded Apollo**
64. **Apollo**
65. **Spanish (Iberian) Swallowtail**
66. **Provence Orange Tip**
67. **Black Veined White**
68. **Southern Small White**
69. **Bath White**
70. **Berger's Clouded Yellow**
71. **Cleopatra**
72. **Violet Copper**
73. **Sooty Copper**
74. **Purple-Shot Copper**
75. **Purple-Edged Copper**
76. **Blue Spot Hairstreak**
77. **False Ilex Hairstreak**
78. **Sloe Hairstreak**
79. **Lang's Short-Tailed Blue**
80. **Osiris Blue**
81. **Provençal Short-Tailed Blue**
82. **Chequered Blue**
83. **Green Underside Blue**
84. **Mazarine Blue**
85. **Escher's Blue**
86. **Turquoise Blue**
87. **Amanda's Blue**
88. **Chapman's Blue**
89. **Geranium Argus**
90. **Cardinal**
91. **Queen of Spain Fritillary**
92. **Marbled Fritillary**
93. **Weaver's Fritillary**
94. **Spanish Fritillary**
95. **Knapweed Fritillary**
96. **Spotted Fritillary**
97. **Provençal Fritillary**
98. **Meadow Fritillary**
99. **False Heath Fritillary**
100. **Map**
101. **Camberwell Beauty**
102. **Southern White Admiral**
103. **De Prunner's Ringlet**
104. **Bright Eyed Ringlet**
105. **Large Wall Brown**
106. **Pearly Heath**
107. **Dusky Heath**
108. **Spanish Gatekeeper**
109. **Western Marbled White**
110. **Iberian Marbled White**

French Alps 27th June – 15th July (the following are species seen exclusively in this region that had hitherto not been seen in the Pyrenees in May)

111. **Marbled Skipper**
112. **Alpine Grizzled Skipper**
113. **Carline Skipper**
114. **Foulquier's Grizzled Skipper**
115. **Rosy Grizzled Skipper**
116. **Silvery Argus**
117. **Geranium Bronze**
118. **Mountain Alcon Blue**
119. **Glandon Blue**

120. Idas Blue
121. Alpine Blue
122. Damon Blue
123. Eros Blue
124. Baton Blue
125. Meleager's Blue
126. Long Tailed Blue
127. Scarce Copper
128. Ilex Hairstreak
129. Niobe Fritillary
130. Pearl Bordered Fritillary
131. Mountain Fritillary
132. Shepherd's Fritillary
133. Titania's Fritillary
134. Lesser Marbled Fritillary
135. Cynthia's Fritillary
136. Grison's Fritillary
137. Southern Comma
138. Small Apollo
139. Scarce Swallowtail
140. Mountain Clouded Yellow
141. Mountain Green Veined White
142. Peak White
143. False Mnestra Ringlet
144. Almond Eyed Ringlet
145. Common Brassy Ringlet
146. Lesser Mountain Ringlet
147. Large Ringlet
148. Arran Brown
149. Piedmont Ringlet
150. Sooty Ringlet
151. Great Banded Grayling
152. Darwin's Heath
153. Chestnut Heath
154. Woodland Grayling
155. Dusky Meadow Brown
156. Great Sooty Satyr

Total species seen in 2017 – 156

Last butterfly sighting – **Red Admiral** – 5th December 2017, Sandringham Park, Swansea Vale

Re: David M

by David M, 09-Mar-17 07:12 PM GMT

Thursday 9th March 2017 – Action at last....

After living under a curtain of cloud for over a week, today was forecast mild and sunny (at least in the morning), so I took a day off in the hope that I might see a few emerging hibernators.

It was slow going at first...an hour in Dan-y-graig cemetery surprisingly drew a blank, and it was ironic that I had to go to work (or at least to the car park) to see my first butterfly of the day – a Small Tortoiseshell, pottering around the celandines and dandelions on the bank of the stream that runs through the wild areas a few hundred yards from my workplace:



This area is always good for early spring Torties...I think they're attracted by the strong nettle growth that can be found here:



By midday, I left to go to Morrisons, but on the way I spotted a male Brimstone fluttering around the shrubs on the roadside, so once I'd done my shopping I thought I'd pay a visit to Oystermouth Cemetery in Mumbles given there was no sign of the predicted gathering cloud. It proved to be a good decision. The lowest part of this site is extremely well sheltered, almost a natural bowl. There were two Peacocks here, and a couple of times they jostled with each other, spiralling upwards before coming down in much the same place:



I walked up the hill, pausing briefly to admire this beautiful early March scene:



Something then caught my eye, and I knew by the flight and by the light tone it was a Comma. It came down on a grave and spent about 10 minutes there:



I walked around the perimeter of the cemetery, where from the highest point there is a nice view towards Mumbles Head:



It was then back down to the sheltered area, where a Small Tortoiseshell was fluttering about, along with another Comma and one of the two Peacocks seen earlier:



So, one of those delightfully cathartic days that one can only have at this time of year. By the time I left at 2.40pm it was still sunny and 14 degrees!!

Re: David M

by bugboy, 09-Mar-17 07:40 PM GMT

Great stuff David, it was very frustrating being at work today knowing there would be loads of emergents out and about posing for everyone. The one silver lining is I work mostly outside so I managed a couple of sightings at least 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 10-Mar-17 06:56 AM GMT

Thanks, guys. In many ways, the first warm day of spring is the best of the year and it certainly was well worth the day's annual leave!

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 10-Mar-17 07:11 PM GMT

bugboy wrote:

Great stuff David, it was very frustrating being at work today knowing there would be loads of emergents out and about posing for everyone. The one silver lining is I work mostly outside so I managed a couple of sightings at least 😊

This...only in my case I was stuck in the office so I am still not off the mark.

Glad to see your day off was worthwhile David 😊👍

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 11-Mar-17 07:26 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Thursday 9th March 2017 – Action at last....!

A very respectable haul, David. Worth taking the day off for. You wouldn't have done any better in the South of France.
Chris

Re: David M

by Padfield, 11-Mar-17 08:13 PM GMT

I love cemeteries, David. Good company (silent but wise) and usually a few nectar-hungry butterflies on a sunny day, thanks to acts of floral remembrance.

Up in my mountain I've still only seen two species – a few small tortoiseshells and a peacock. I know you read my diary regularly and see stuff from the valley, but on my local patch I am still well behind you.

Guy

Re: David M

by David M, 12-Mar-17 01:09 PM GMT

Padfield wrote:

I love cemeteries, David. Good company (silent but wise) and usually a few nectar-hungry butterflies on a sunny day, thanks to acts of floral remembrance.

Up in my mountain I've still only seen two species – a few small tortoiseshells and a peacock. I know you read my diary regularly and see stuff from the valley, but on my local patch I am still well behind you.

Yes, I enjoy the restful tranquility of a cemetery, Guy – no dogs or kids racing around or loud voices to be heard. The very nature of these places also means that certain areas are allowed to grow wild in a way that wouldn't occur elsewhere. Butterflies clearly appreciate this...in fact, the other Swansea cemetery I regularly visit is the only place near me I know of where you can watch Wall Browns ovipositing – they are attracted by the long grasses amongst the gravestones!

Regarding your own local patch, you may well be behind at the moment, but you will race ahead in no time at all. Of that I'm sure. 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 26-Mar-17 07:54 PM GMT

Near perfect weekend.....

It's not often you get a full weekend with hardly a cloud in the sky worthy of the name....much less during the month of March. After the lovely spell a fortnight ago, are we risking becoming spoiled?

Saturday 25th March – Castle Meadows, Abergavenny

Domestic commitments meant I couldn't get out till almost 1pm, but my frustration soon gave way to near total contentment during my hour and a half's wander round Linda Vista Gardens and the adjacent Castle Meadows.

Probably the most notable moment was the sighting of my first Small White of the year. Thankfully, the cuckoo flower has already come out and this female spent a few minutes nectaring from one:



The first of the 25 Small Tortoiseshells seen was just beyond this particularly attractive spot in these ornate grounds:



Many more were observed cavorting around the nettle growth near the stream that runs through this site:



This stretch is always popular with them. The stream is just to the right of the fence meaning the nettles are always well watered and consequently grow most vigorously:



9 Commas were seen, including these two in much closer proximity than is usual:



These two, however, didn't like one another's company at all and provided several aerial skirmishes for my delectation:



I especially like the darker undersided individuals with that *Verdigris* sheen:



Four Peacocks were about too:



I tried for 10 minutes to get an underside of this individual but it insisted on keeping its wings slightly open:



Sunday 26th March - Kilvey Hill, Swansea

Just as sunny today but a fair bit windier, so in the main I kept to the sheltered path at the bottom of Kilvey Hill. This place is a real heat trap and butterflies are irresistibly drawn to it:



I saw a male Brimstone before I was out of my car. It may well have been the same one I encountered half an hour later after doing a quick circuit of Dan-y-Graig cemetery, where my only sightings were 2 Commas and another Brimstone. Few things are lovelier than a spring Brimstone....but one thing lovelier is a spring Brimstone on a spring Primrose:



To my great delight, I saw at least 2 male Holly Blues. I spent considerable time on the track near the evergreens they favour, and eventually one came down just in range of my camera:



The biggest surprise came late on, just as I was about to leave. A butterfly caught my eye fluttering weakly, and after a while it made a second flight whereupon it landed and briefly flashed its wings open:



This is only the second time I've seen a Speckled Wood in March, and without doubt the first time I've seen 7 different species during a March weekend! Hopefully this is a good omen, although the last time we witnessed these early emergences, April proved to be a washout and the butterflies never really recovered.

Let's hope it's different this time.

Re: David M

by millerd, 26-Mar-17 09:41 PM GMT

That's quite a selection David. No whites and Specklies down my way yet... 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by trevor, 26-Mar-17 09:49 PM GMT

Spring has caught up with you at last, David.
That really is a fabulous haul for a weekend in March !.

Three mrgreens for you, one each for Holly Blue, Brimstone and Speckled Wood. 🍷🍷🍷

Great stuff,
Trevor.

Re: David M

by David M, 28-Mar-17 09:51 PM GMT

Thanks, guys. Early days yet but the long range weather forecast doesn't appear to hold any cause for worry, so perhaps we'll finally get the break we've been looking for these last few years.

Fingers crossed.

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 29-Mar-17 10:04 AM GMT

Some great shots there Dave , not seen Holly Blues here yet and the weathers broke down but at least that East wind's gone. Goldie 😊

Re: David M

by Janet Turnbull, 29-Mar-17 05:29 PM GMT

What a great haul you had! Lovely shots too. I have seen one Brimstone and 6 Small Tortoiseshells so far – although it was a sunny weekend we're that much further north.

Re: David M

by David M, 06-Apr-17 11:15 PM GMT

Thursday 6th April 2017 – Met Office should be ashamed...

Even last night as I was going to bed, the Met Office AND BBC weather forecast for Wales were predicting heavily overcast conditions throughout today.

In the event, there was barely a cloud to be seen all day in the Swansea area, and I took it upon myself to throw my camera in my car and make a detour to Kilvey Hill at lunchtime.

I saw two male Large Whites, the first of which came down on a bramble leaf in an inaccessible place so I had to settle for a record shot:



Speckled Woods were easily the commonest species, with well over a dozen seen:



Here's an image of the clear blue skies that were **not** predicted even 8 hours prior to daybreak (Mumbles Head in the distance taken from Danygraig cemetery):



Several Holly Blues were again seen, including my first female of 2017. I also saw 2 definite Small Whites along with a possible GVW which I won't count given that it didn't settle and I can't be absolutely sure. Two male and a female Brimstone were also observed.

However, a brief sortie into the wild areas behind my workplace finally saw me break my Orange Tip duck, with at least two seen. Both were flighty though, as you would expect, and this image was the best I could manage:



Vanessids seem to have practically disappeared already. The only member of this group I saw was a solitary Peacock.

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 08-Apr-17 10:31 PM GMT

To my mind, Met Office and BBC have come a long way in forecasting rain and wind, but still have a long way to go in predicting cloud amounts.

Some nice sightings and pictures though, so I'm sure you don't mind them getting it wrong this time!

Re: David M

by David M, 09-Apr-17 09:01 AM GMT

Saturday 8th April 2017 - Extraordinary scenes....

Still a bit early for the likes of Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak here in south Wales, so I thought I'd pay a visit to the dunes at Whiteford Burrows on the north west Gower coast to see if any Small Coppers were about.

Sadly, I saw none, and in fact I was a bit disheartened in the hour or so I spent combing the coastal gullies as I probably saw fewer than 20 butterflies in total, although I did get my first audience with a female Orange Tip for the year:



This Peacock basking on the warm sand also proved irresistible, and is in excellent nick given it is probably at least 9 months old:



By 1pm, I was heading back to my car with a view to checking out Kilvey Hill again, when suddenly I saw a White come down on the copious blackthorn blossom near the path. This turned out to be my first definite Green Veined White of 2017:



I had noticed three or four Holly Blues pottering about by the entrance to the dunes, which I thought was unusual, and after taking the GWV image, I noticed another Holly Blue buzzing around the blackthorn. I trudged through the spiky undergrowth and suddenly I was in a different world. This area was in a warm dip and the woodland management team had obviously done recent clearance work. The result was spring butterfly heaven:



My Green Veined White took my UK tally to 11 for the year, but I could have saved myself time and trouble because ALL ELEVEN were present in this one small area. The most notable was Holly Blue. This is, for me at least, a butterfly that you usually see in small numbers, but there were **dozens** of them in this spot. There were often four or five in the air at once above this stretch of blackthorn, and all those seen nectaring appeared to be males:



I looked beyond this area to try to comprehend what was going on, and it became clear that the evergreen in this image was their focal point:



There were serious numbers tumbling about this tree, and on the other side there were even more flying about, often making sorties close to the ground, bringing them into contact with the dozens of Speckled Woods also present in this clearing:



Two Commas and two Red Admirals were seen in this spot, unsurprising given the lush nettle cover:



Eventually, I just went back to the blackthorn stand, and spent a good hour watching all these species interact with one another. The Brimstones didn't settle, but Orange Tips did:



Overall numbers were:

Holly Blue 40-60
Speckled Wood 40-60
Orange Tip 30-40
Brimstone 10-20
Large White 2
Green Veined White 2
Peacock 2
Comma 2
Red Admiral 2
Small Tortoiseshell 2
Small White 1

Without doubt, it was the finest concentration of spring species I've ever witnessed, and most certainly the best Holly Blue hotspot I've ever come across.

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 09-Apr-17 03:46 PM GMT

You were certainly lucky David, isn't it just great when this happens 😊 nothing so abundant here yet, could be I'm looking in the wrong place like you did at first .Goldie 😊

Re: David M

by Pauline, 11-Apr-17 06:42 AM GMT

Lovely shots of the Orange Tips David. Sharpness, composition etc all spot on to my mind. When I have to go back for a second look at them I know they're a bit special and definitely fall into the category of 'wish I'd taken them' 😊👍

Re: David M

by PhilBJohnson, 11-Apr-17 07:44 AM GMT

Hi David,

Just caught up with your Sunday post. Fab images, particularly like the butterflies nectaring on Blackthorn. Brilliantly captured moments. In my locality in Lincolnshire, Sunday 9th April was the hottest day of the year so far, butterflies were on the wing shortly after 9:00am and after that one needed to be faster than Usain Bolt to keep up with them! 😊
Kind Regards

Re: David M

by bugboy, 12-Apr-17 09:46 PM GMT

It's reports like yours that makes me travel out of London so often. A good day for me locally is seeing 3 Holly blues at once 🐞

Re: David M

by Butterfysaurus rex, 13-Apr-17 09:26 PM GMT

No hurry for the Green Hairstreaks and Grizzled Skippers when you have all those lovely Orange Tips and Holly Blues about David! That Green Veined White looks splendid on the Blackthorn.

ATB

James

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 15-Apr-17 05:56 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Saturday 8th April 2017 - Extraordinary scenes..... The result was spring butterfly Heaven ...

You've certainly got yourself a nice little hotspot there, David. Lovely shots of those species on the blackthorn.
Chris

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 17-Apr-17 10:12 PM GMT

40 Holly Blue is incredible. Certainly they seem to be far more abundant, and have far more stable populations in western areas of the country than in the east. I've only seen two so far. Granted the weather has been much colder and cloudier recently, but I often see them in greater abundance in Cornwall, too, than in Essex.

Re: David M

by millerd, 18-Apr-17 08:34 PM GMT

That sounds like a splendid little area, David - anywhere with those numbers of Holly Blues has to be good in my book! 😊 Some nice photos there too.

Dave

Re: David M

by David M, 23-Apr-17 11:13 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments, all.

Yes, 50-odd Holly Blues is remarkable, and I wonder whether I will see such numbers again!

Sunday 23rd April 2017 – Thank God for Grizzlies....

We're still early in the season, and now that the adult over-winterers have all but burned themselves out, it can be a bit depressing looking for butterflies as the species range and general numbers are rather sparse at this time of year.

However, if you can find a site that is home to a habitat specialist, you can record decent returns.

With that in mind, I paid a first visit to the Merthyr Mawr dune system near Porthcawl this morning in four years.

I'm not really keen on this site. It's a bit of a bind to get to and it's a magnet for day-trippers, not to mention the dry, sandy pathways that mess your clothing up and make walking difficult!!

Familiarity with this site though has taught me not to mess around. The best area for Grizzlies isn't far from the entrance, and I duly notched up a total of 15 in an hour and a half's visit:



This is the best spot for them on this vast site – a steep south-east facing slope with lots of disturbed ground:



Here's another individual:



On my way back, I briefly stopped off at Kilvey Hill, but there wasn't much about. A cloudy spell developed which saw four Speckled Woods take up temporary roosting positions on the foliage. Here's a shot of two of them in close proximity:



Re: David M

by trevor, 24-Apr-17 08:04 PM GMT

Really lovely Grizzled Skippers, David, especially the last one.
A species I have yet to locate so far this season.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: David M

by millerd, 26-Apr-17 09:00 PM GMT

That last Grizzlie is really black-looking – beautifully marked. 😊 Some are much more on the deep brown side. I never would have associated them with sand dunes, having mostly seen them on the chalk over here in the southeast.

Dave

Re: David M

by Lee Hurrell, 26-Apr-17 11:17 PM GMT

Lovely Grizzled Skippers, David!

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: David M

by David M, 01-May-17 05:14 PM GMT

Thank you for the comments, everyone.

Monday 1st May 2017 – Had enough of grey skies...

My patience wore thin this afternoon. The last few days off I've had have generally seen cloudy conditions turning brighter in the late afternoon and evening. At 1.45pm today, I simply drove down to Welshmoor on the Gower determined to wait for any breaks in the cloud.

They took an hour to come, but once they did, a few butterflies came to life, including my first Green Hairstreaks of the year – three in total.

This one I managed to find when skies were grey. The fact that it had settled on a gorse flower was what helped me locate it:



This one had some wing damage, probably when emerging:



This is their favoured area at this site:



Unsurprisingly, not much else was about – 2 Red Admirals, a male Orange Tip, what looked like a Green Veined White in flight and one male Large White.

I **did** see a Holly Blue whilst driving home though. This species has been remarkably prominent this spring.

Re: David M

by Pauline, 01-May-17 05:23 PM GMT

That's a lovely Hairstreak David – well worth waiting for imo 😊

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 01-May-17 08:29 PM GMT

Hi David,

Cracking Green Hairstreak on the Gorse, a lovely colour combination 😊

I also like the two Specklies in the same frame from your previous post 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: David M

by trevor, 01-May-17 08:44 PM GMT

One of the best Green Hairstreak images of the Spring so far.
Someone once told me to look for them on Gorse, but so far I've failed with that combination.

Turbulent weather here today.
Trevor.

Re: David M

by David M, 02-May-17 05:49 PM GMT

Tuesday 2nd May – sunshine makes a welcome return....

As has been far too often the case lately, the weather forecast was hopelessly wrong again. Clear blues skies early on followed by a cloudy afternoon.

In reality, the reverse was true, and my attempts to find Small Blues at Crymlyn Burrows were thwarted by this early cloud, and only Orange Tips and a few Whites were on the wing, and even they weren't as active as normal as these images show:



Shame about the grass blades, but it's rare to see two males in such close proximity! The one on the left stayed basking, enabling me to try to steer a pathway through all the obstructions:



By the time my neighbour and I reached Kilvey Hill at 11.30am, these clouds had vanished and with light winds it was becalmed and mild even at the summit:



On the way down, I did a little diversion to a stretch of grassland that has always been reliable for Wall Browns. Sure enough, two males were seen:



I never get tired of the undersides. The camouflage is superb:



Back at the base of the hill, there were plenty of Speckled Woods about, as well as a fair number of Large Whites, including a mating pair. Two Small Whites were observed in cop too, whilst 3 Holly Blues and a Peacock were also seen.

Small Blues will have to wait!

Re: David M

by millerd, 02-May-17 07:21 PM GMT

I think the weather has gone west for its holidays, David. The forecast here is for almost continuous cloud for the foreseeable future... Consequently I am envious of those glorious shots of the Welsh coast and the accompanying Orange Tips and more especially the Walls. As you say, the underside markings are superbly cryptic.

Dave

Re: David M

by Chris Jackson, 02-May-17 08:25 PM GMT

Jolly good shot of those two male Orange Tips side by side, David.
Chris

Re: David M

by kevlng, 02-May-17 09:00 PM GMT

David, A nice duo of Orange Tips. Your next challenge is a male/female combo 😊
I love the underside of the Wall Brown too. Very nice.

Regards Kev

Re: David M

by David M, 06-May-17 10:25 PM GMT

Saturday 6th May 2017 - Coppers and Walls....

My biggest concern this year has been the absence of Small Coppers from my local visits. This worry was eliminated today as I saw NINE in total, including this *caeruleopunctata* individual:



Eight of the nine were seen at Crymlyn Burrows, a coastal dune site, in decent conditions (14c and largely sunny) between 10.30 and 12.00. Here's another individual....this one is quite heavily spotted and looks like a female:



I had almost given up on Small Blues. They're late round these parts this year but I managed to see ONE briefly and got this record shot:



Orange Tips were again the commonest species with 20 or so seen, including several females, but Dingy Skippers seem to have not yet emerged, although I suppose they will appear, along with Small Heaths, Common Blues and Brown Argus within the next week or so.

Although the forecast had suggested it would cloud over by noon, skies remained invitingly clear, so on my way back I thought I'd try to spend some 'proper' time with a species I've rather neglected over the past few years in the UK – Wall Brown.

These days, the only reliable spot around here is towards the top of Kilvey Hill. I duly surveyed their 'prime' area but couldn't find any, so I made my way to the summit where I have seen them happily cavorting around in the past. Sure enough, within seconds I located this male swishing about at the highest point where there are rocky ruins of an ancient windmill:



Within seconds, I noticed something far more interesting – a mating pair:



It soon became apparent that there was a third Wall Brown – a male – who was keen to get in on the act, much to the female's irritation, and she demonstrated this by retracting her antennae and opening her wings whenever this uninvited interloper appeared:



Such was the level of interference that the coupling pair took to the air several times. In every instance, it was the female that carried the male, which is not normally the case in my experience. Even when they settled afresh, the rogue male would play the role of 'voyeur':



Eventually, and rather fortuitously, the coupling pair came to rest on a rocky outcrop right next to where I was sitting. I felt it was my duty to protect them and simply sat quietly beside them for the next ten minutes, all the while keeping an eye out for other Wall Browns that wished to interrupt them:



Once they had finished, the male simply detached himself and flew off immediately. The female rested for a few minutes with wings closed, but she too took to the air and I felt a bit sorry for her as she was immediately harassed by two nearby males, before she flew down the slope out of their range.

With this action now finished, I was left with three or four males who continued to fly around the rocky outcrop at the top of the hill:



By this time, it was seriously clouding over, but that wasn't an issue as it led to the males resting on rocks with wings fully open:



On my way back down in light cloud, I also managed to get close to a semi-roosting male Green Veined White:



In total, the following species/numbers were seen:

Orange Tip 20-30
Wall Brown 10-15
Small Copper 9
Green Veined White 5-10
Large White 4
Speckled Wood 3
Peacock 2
Holly Blue 2
Brimstone 2
Red Admiral 1
Small White 1
Small Blue 1

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 06-May-17 10:43 PM GMT

Nice to see some sunshine in your images, David. More grey skies and drizzle in the east, and certainly no butterflies, apart from roosting ones!

Re: David M

by Pauline, 07-May-17 05:49 AM GMT

Not only did you find the Coppers David 😊 but that Wall Brown behaviour was extremely well captured. Lovely shots but I'm so 🍴🍴 never having seen a mating pair. In fact, Wall Browns are now quite scarce in my neck of the woods 😞

Re: David M

by trevor, 07-May-17 06:59 AM GMT

Superb sequence of mating Wall Browns, something I have never seen either. As for your other sightings, it would seem that all your Christmases came at once !.

You must of course take a few mrgreens 🍴🍴.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: David M

by David M, 14-May-17 05:01 PM GMT

Thanks, folks. Yes, a mating pair of anything is always handy for study purposes, but when the species in question is Wall Brown, then it is even more satisfying!

Saturday 13th May 2017 – Grey skies AGAIN....

Traditionally, I get my UK Pearl Bordered Fritillary 'fix' on the early May Bank Holiday weekend when I'm visiting Abergavenny, as Ewias Harold Common is only a 20 minute drive away.

Two weeks ago, however, the weather was far from ideal so I risked leaving it till the next time I was down these parts and yet again, in spite of the period 12pm till 2pm being forecast sunny, there was a thick grey blanket over the Common when I arrived at 11.45. 😞



I managed to find three specimens though in spite of this, as the image above is the area with the highest concentration on the site, and by walking around you generally flush one out:



Of course, they weren't as fresh as if had I seen them a fortnight ago, but beggars can't be choosers:



Eventually, at around 1pm, skies brightened a little and I suddenly doubled my earlier full hour's tally within a space of less than a yard!!:



I potted about for another 20 minutes or so given that conditions were improving, and by the time I left I'd seen 12. Unsurprisingly, few other butterflies were seen – single Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and a medium sized White.

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 15-May-17 11:04 AM GMT

Lovely Pearl shots David 📷 But the Wall's mating were the best for me , it's hard to get shots of them, seeing them mate is great and some thing I've yet to see.Goldie 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 15-May-17 10:25 PM GMT

Sunday 14th May 2017 - Common, but welcome nonetheless...

Returning at lunchtime from Abergavenny, the relatively clear skies were enough for me to put down at Crymlyn Burrows on the Swansea coast to see what was about at this sizeable dune location.

The first butterfly to greet me was my first Common Blue of 2017. I couldn't hunt him down but shortly afterwards another one appeared that was far more obliging:



Once out onto the open dunes, it wasn't long before I saw my first Small Heath of the year:



Last time I was here a week and a half ago, I saw just one Small Blue. This time, there were quite a few of them - about three dozen in total:



Most pleasing of all though, was the sighting of a Brown Argus. They're not particularly rare round these parts, but they had a terrible year in 2016 so it was good to notch one up in mid-May:





Other species seen were Orange Tip (30 or so), Small Copper (4), Dingy Skipper (2), Green Veined White (2), Small White (1), Large White (1), Speckled Wood (1).

Re: David M

by millerd, 15-May-17 10:33 PM GMT

A very nice Small Heath, David – and your Walls from earlier were exceptional, especially the mating pair with onlooker! 😊 I do envy you easy sightings of this species, one I took for granted in my youth (long time ago...). 🍷 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by David M, 15-May-17 11:45 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

...your Walls from earlier were exceptional, especially the mating pair with onlooker! 😊 I do envy you easy sightings of this species, one I took for granted in my youth (long time ago...)

I'm old enough to remember that too, Dave. 😊

These days, they're hard work to find away from the coast. Even in Swansea which has miles of beaches you need local knowledge.

Re: David M

by David M, 21-May-17 12:17 AM GMT

Saturday 20th May 2017 – Risks pay rewards.....

With the weather forecasts constantly changing, I had promised my neighbour a trip to Rodborough Common in Gloucestershire this weekend last Thursday.....before predictions of cloud and rain for Saturday morning materialised. 😊

Rain and cloud till noon with conditions gradually improving was the advice first thing in the morning, so I bit the bullet and for once, that advice proved accurate.

Arriving around 11am, skies were heavily overcast with occasional rain showers. I managed to find a roosting Small Heath but my neighbour trumped me shortly afterwards with this roosting Duke of Burgundy:



Little else was seen until skies began to brighten around 2pm, whereupon butterflies began to come to life. The hotspot on this site yet again proved productive with another three or four Dukes seen at the bottom of this steep bank:



Understandably, three weeks or so into their flight period, these combative little insects are beginning to show signs of wear (no doubt due to the constant battles not only with their own kind but the myriad of other species that are equally attracted to this sheltered haven):



In spite of the challenging conditions, upwards of two dozen Brown Argus were seen:



Dainty Skippers were plentiful too, certainly 15+ observed. However, I was keeping a sharp eye out for freshly emerged Adonis Blues, and the patience and hard work paid off, as two were seen and the second individual in particular provided good views as regular cloud cover ensured he remained fairly docile:



With ever brightening skies, it was hard to leave this place, but by 3.45pm, we made our way back to the car with one last look at this magnificent butterfly habitat:



Totals seen in predominantly difficult conditions were:

Brown Argus 25-35
Dingy Skipper 15-25
Small Heath 10-15
Duke of Burgundy 4-6
Small Blue 3
Common Blue 2
Green Hairstreak 2
Adonis Blue 2
Large White 1
Peacock 1

Re: David M

by millerd, 21-May-17 08:00 PM GMT

Not a bad selection at all for a superficially grotty day weatherwise. Splendid Adonis in particular, David. 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by bugboy, 21-May-17 09:14 PM GMT

Oooh yes, that Adonis looks like it's been plugged into the mains!

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 22-May-17 07:56 PM GMT

Great report and photos from Rodborough Common David...I have not been there for a few years now, I must try and fit a visit in sometime.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by David M, 22-May-17 10:26 PM GMT

bugboy wrote:

...that Adonis looks like it's been plugged into the mains!

I like that, Bugboy. In fact, I often describe the Adonis as a 'radioactive' blue to the uninitiated, as it seems to radiate from elsewhere rather than from the butterfly itself. They really are indescribably beautiful when absolutely fresh.

Monday 22nd May 2017 - Local delights....

On Sunday, I visited Welshmoor, a damp, grassy expanse of land about 5 miles from where I live. I duly saw a handful of early Marsh Fritillaries, and I chanced upon 2 or 3 more on Fairwood Common at the back of Swansea airport this afternoon, which is on my doorstep:

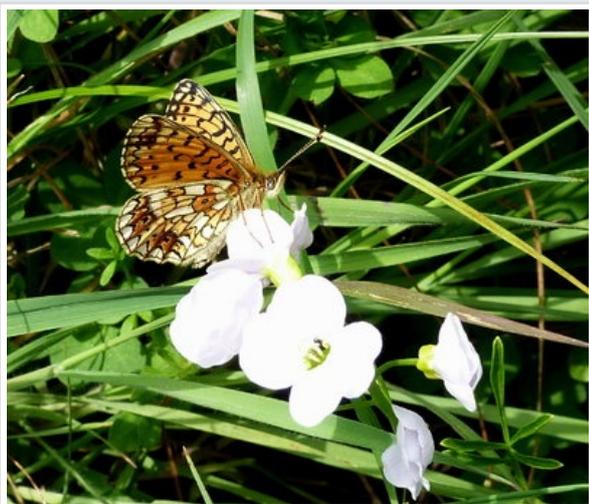


Today though, I was concentrating on Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, as the section of marshland I visited has reliably thrown up a few over the last four years.

Sure enough, there were at least two about:



Part cloudy conditions helped, as these insects weren't quite as hyperactive as is usual:



This individual wasn't in a hurry, and instead seemed content to gorge on nectar from both ragged robin and cuckoo flower blooms, at one point being virtually buried:



Not many other species seen, and they all seemed to turn up in twos: Small Heath, Common Blue, Large White & Green Veined White. A late Orange Tip was also seen on the drive back home.

Re: David M

by David M, 17-Jun-17 09:32 PM GMT

Saturday 17th June 2017 - Double Header

With highs of 25c forecast along with sunny skies, it was incumbent upon me to spend the entire day in the field! I had promised my neighbour a trip to Daneway Banks in Gloucestershire, and we duly arrived at 10.15am and spent a good three hours there taking in the scenery, the flora and, of course, the butterflies.

My first Ringlet of 2017 greeted me shortly after entering the site:



My first Marbled White soon followed:



Meadow Browns abounded, as did Large Skippers:



We DID see a solitary Large Blue at the top of the site, but the warm weather meant it stayed airborne and no sightings were made in the hour that followed. I got talking to the transect walker, who had commented that 11 had been seen yesterday, and I had all but resigned myself to leaving with just a fly by to report.

However, my neighbour opted to take a rest on a wooden seat to the right of this image:



I took time out to potter around on the middle section of the site, where I noticed two guys taking lots of photos near the barbed wire fence. Sure enough, when I got to them, they had a male Large Blue, but too far away to get a decent image of. I somehow got my body over the fence but no sooner had I taken a single record shot, the butterfly was off. I followed it, and suddenly another paler Large Blue (a female) joined it in flight. For the next minute or so, these two whizzed about one another in a frenzy:



The male must have done all the right things, because seconds later they decided to pair:



Three blokes kneeling in the turf soon attracted an audience (for the mating Large Blues I should point out):



On a hot day, this is probably the only opportunity available to see this species becalmed, and becalmed they remained – we watched them for a good 20 minutes before leaving them to it:



Seeing that it was en route, we decided to stop off for a couple of hours at Lower Woods, near Wickwar, on the way back. Four Silver Washed Fritillaries were seen, although none were very co-operative from a photography perspective:



The only down point of the day was the absence of White Admirals, which probably haven't quite emerged yet. Still, we saw a surprise Brimstone as well as this Comma:



18 species in total, including mating Large Blues, meant this gorgeous day of sunshine and warmth will remain memorable. Let's hope this run of weather continues!

Re: David M

by kevlings, 18-Jun-17 07:53 AM GMT

David,

Well done on getting your Large Blues. Nice photos of your day out. What a cracking days weather for butterflying 😊

Regards Kev

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 18-Jun-17 03:50 PM GMT

That's one species I've yet to see David, lovely shots 📷📷 Goldie 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 18-Jun-17 08:50 PM GMT

Sunday 18th June 2017 - Time out...with a little butterflying thrown in....

After yesterday's almost oppressive heat, I headed off to the Pembrokeshire coast today where temperatures were forecast to be a bit cooler. I had promised a work colleague a stress-free day out, and that's ultimately how it proved, although the forecast of 21c highs were so inaccurate that at one point I ended up seeking relief by swimming in the sea!

I reckon 26 or 27c was the order of the day - it certainly felt as though I was in France.

Strangely, Common Blues aside (which were ubiquitous) there weren't that many butterflies about. Sometimes though, that gives you time to concentrate on the surroundings:



There are times when I read UKB reports and forget that the season is much more retarded in SW Wales, and today was one of those. Despite quite a bit of searching, I could only find two male Silver Studded Blues, which was a shame, as in a week's time there'll probably be dozens about but they will have to contend with the usual cloud, wind and regular rain:





Re: David M

by David M, 20-Jun-17 04:31 PM GMT

Tuesday 20th June 2017 - Fritillary-fest...

The hot, sunny weather (27c) today was perfect to see fritillaries active along Old Castle Down in Glamorgan, but would be a poor choice for those wishing to get close to and photograph them!

I'd heard reports they were out in numbers and those reports weren't false - certainly 50ish were observed, and one would expect at least 20 of those to be High Browns!

I latched onto this Dark Green Fritillary shortly after arriving on the site just before 10am, and it's a good thing I did, because I never got another chance to take an image of a settled specimen:



I tried a bit harder with the High Browns, but most efforts were from distance:



Even when I got fairly close there was usually something in the way:



This one nectaring in the semi-shade was probably the most presentable:



Perhaps more surprising were the numbers of Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries still on the wing. I'd estimate the total at 20–25, which I wasn't expecting:



Lots of Ringlets, Small Heaths, Large Skippers and Meadow Browns, and a few Speckled Woods in the shadier areas. Three Red Admirals showed up, along with a Small White, a Common Blue and my first UK Painted Lady of 2017:



I'm hopeful High Browns might have an excellent season on this, their last remaining Welsh site. This spell of warm weather has fallen at just the right time for them, and although the forthcoming weekend is back to cooler and cloudier conditions, I may well drop back in to see if I can get a closer audience with them as well as the Dark Greens.

Re: David M

by Pauline, 20-Jun-17 04:38 PM GMT

My turn now to dish out the 🍷 The High Brown is another butterfly I'll probably never see but what an attractive underside it has – and you show that off well despite 'something being in the way' 😊 . Sounds like a great day 😊

Re: David M

by trevor, 20-Jun-17 06:20 PM GMT

Great to see your High Browns, David. A species that would be a 'lifer' for me. I understand that they were once seen locally in East Sussex. Now alas, the remaining colonies are many miles from here.

Great photo's in the circumstances,
Trevor.

Re: David M

by Andy Wilson, 20-Jun-17 07:52 PM GMT

Hi David. Great photos of the High Browns -- a whole lot better than what I got at Heddon Valley. Sorry I couldn't be with you today.

Kind regards,
Andy.

Re: David M

by millerd, 20-Jun-17 10:36 PM GMT

I do envy you your closeness to a HBF site, even if they weren't playing ball today. 🍷 I've only seen them in Devon and Cumbria – a bit more than a day trip! Nice shots, considering the conditions, and some additional envy for three Fritillaries in one place. 🍷 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by David M, 21-Jun-17 11:49 PM GMT

Wednesday 21st June 2017 – Patience stretched...

I suppose in retrospect it wasn't a great decision – let's take a day off and go studying Large Heaths in 28c temperatures!!

In an attempt to ensure things didn't spiral out of control, I arrived at Cors Caron, in mid-Wales, just after 9am, believing that I might get half an hour or so where the butterflies were relatively subdued.

The activity level of the Ringlets, Small and Green Veined Whites on the path leading into the reserve were a warning sign though, and in an hour and a half, I only saw three of the 46 individuals I counted come to rest. These were the best images I could muster of this *polydamus* form:



I stopped off near Llanelli on the way back, to check out a site where there are plenty of elm trees, as I know of nowhere near to me where White Letter Hairstreak can reliably be found.

To my joy, there were several dozen elms, most of them healthy and mature, so I will return to see if WLH's are about periodically. None were seen today, but this *hutchinsonii* Comma was found resting on one of the elm trees:



Re: David M

by kellmeister, 22-Jun-17 09:23 AM GMT

David M,

The photos are all so stunning and your ability to find even the rarest beauties is truly so inspiring. I am getting more and more fascinated with these beautiful creatures which must surely be the most divine life form in the air. Thanks for the inspiration, your eye, your capture and your knowledge.

thank you so very much, 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 22-Jun-17 11:41 AM GMT

Why thank you, Kellmeister.

Bugboy – I believe the cooler, cloudier conditions this weekend should make you **more** determined to visit Whixhall Moss. I visited 2 years ago in very cloudy weather but there are so many Large Heaths present on this site you are bound to disturb some, whereupon they will be far more co-operative than the Welsh ones were for me yesterday (plus, you'll have the *davus* form, which is the more striking).

Re: David M

by David M, 26-Jun-17 11:18 PM GMT

Monday 26th June 2017 – Doing justice locally.....

I couldn't travel far today given my impending trip to the French Alps, but prior to my departure I had a couple of 'itches' I wanted to scratch.

The first was at Loughor, about 10 miles from my house, where I found an elm copse the other day. I duly travelled down there again this morning and can confirm that White Letter Hairstreaks ARE present at this location. 😊

There are several dozen elms here, many of them mature, and this time I tried to put myself into the head of a WLH to determine where they might be likely to hold court. An elm at a crossroads, facing an ash, in full sunlight proved to be a good choice as several were observed, some in the elm canopy, others pottering around the upper reaches of the ash (which is the tree on the right of this image):



Unfortunately, they remained in the canopy the whole time, in spite of there being copious bramble flowers nearby, which often attract this species down at other sites. I managed to get one of the dozen or so I saw in my zoom though, even if it's as bad an image as I've ever posted on here (and there's a fair bit of competition for that prize):



A Speckled Wood kept me company all the while, continually fluttering around the brambles I wished the WLHs would descend to. This individual was abnormally scantily marked too:



After lunch, and with cloud cover moving in, I decided to pay another visit to the High Brown site at Alun Valley, near Bridgend.

On the way up the hill, I took my first 'proper' image of a Large Skipper this year:



I then noticed something I don't see too often – a mating pair of Ringlets in the long grass:



Once finished, the female decided to take a rest for a few minutes:



As far as the Fritillaries are concerned, there were literally dozens observed. Two Small Pearl Borderededs were still on the wing, but the rest were either High Brown or Dark Green. The latter are starting to lose their lustre now, making in flight identification rather easier. When by the shrub line, the majority seemed to be HBFs, including this female:



This male was momentarily feeding:



In the more open areas however, Dark Greens were in the ascendency:



As 6 o'clock approached, activity died down, but these two species seem to be having a good year in 2017 at this site, which is very welcome.

Re: David M

by David M, 17-Jul-17 09:44 PM GMT

Monday 17th July 2017 - Culture Shock...

This time of year is always tough for me. Having spent nearly 3 weeks in the French Alps where there are butterflies on almost every flowerhead, I find myself transported to a far greener land where in spite of copious and lush plant growth, butterflies are conspicuous by their absence.

An additional day off work saw near perfect weather conditions - 22c, light winds and light cloud.....but only 10 species to see!

There were Whites fluttering around almost everywhere. However, the White Letter Hairstreaks I found 3 weeks ago were still stubbornly esconced in the canopy. Despite bramble and thistle blooms being ubiquitous, these Welsh specimens remained firmly wedded to the Ash canopy, and this image merely records a rather faded individual that refused to come down like all his/her brethren:



There were quite a few Commas about, which was pleasing, and the species total was 10, which isn't a disaster I suppose in this area. A handful of Hedge Browns showed up too, which was welcome as they were my first in 2017:



Re: David M

by David M, 23-Jul-17 04:19 PM GMT

Saturday 22nd July 2017 - *sylvestris* and *lineola*

A brief break in the poor weather saw me venture out towards Castle Meadows in Abergavenny just after midday. However, once I'd parked my car I noticed the Mill Lane orchard, which was first sectioned off 3 years ago on the way down to the meadows, was looking rather appealing with good all round butterfly habitat:



To my delight, both Essex and Small Skippers were present, with two definite *lineola* seen:





One certain *sylvestris* was seen too:



This lovely, fresh Small Copper was irresistible:



I also saw my first female Hedge Browns of 2017:



There were a handful of other species about during this brief visit – Red Admiral, Peacock, Meadow Brown, Green Veined White & Common Blue.

Re: David M

by Pauline, 28-Jul-17 07:06 AM GMT

I do like those Essex Skippers surrounded by raindrops David. For some reason raindrops or dewdrops seem to add something to a composition and reveal a little bit about the butterfly that the usual shots in bright sunshine just don't!

Re: David M

by David M, 07-Aug-17 11:39 AM GMT

Saturday 5th August – Back amongst the butterflies....

After a dismal 11 day spell of grim weather, it was nice to reacquaint myself with butterflies again, and it's ironic that the hundreds I saw were on the Isle of Man of all places!!!

The entire day was one of unbroken sunshine, and I spent a good three hours at the Ayres Nature Reserve at the northern tip of the island.

Graylings were my principal target, and I saw around three dozen:





Here's an image of the habitat, looking towards the Point of Ayre lighthouse:



I was delighted to also see a couple of Wall Browns:



Common Blues were around in excellent numbers, with well over a hundred seen. Island races tend to throw up different forms, and the females here are generally very blue. This specimen is a good example:



Female Meadow Browns are much brighter than the ones on the mainland. The undersides are quite pale with pronounced light shading, whilst the uppersides are very orange:



Speckled Woods are a new species here – they only colonised the island around 10 years ago. They're clearly thriving as I saw at least half a dozen in a small, wooded area up from the car park:



Large White, Small White, Small Heath and Small Copper were also about, along with several Vanessa's. I saw three Painted Ladies:



A couple of Small Tortoiseshells were observed:



Red Admirals were about in good numbers:



Most pleasing of all, however, were the 30+ Peacocks seen, all eagerly nectaring in readiness for their long sleep:



Occasionally, one would bask briefly before returning to feed:



I'm not normally a birdwatcher, but there were dozens of gannets diving into the turbulent, nutrient rich water and I spent a fair while watching them take aim:



Re: David M

by David M, 10-Aug-17 09:23 PM GMT

Thursday 10th August 2017 - Baffling.....

With Brown Hairstreak activity seemingly way ahead of what is usual in much of the south, I visited the prime Welsh site today but could find no females at all! Four males were spotted in the treetops, but the only usable image I could get was this:



I can only conclude that the atrociously unseasonal weather here for the past fortnight has seen a) emergence times retarded and/or b) such adverse conditions that any emerged females have simply not had the opportunity to mate and thus to be ready to lay eggs.

Even worse, this cool, wet and windy spell seems to have decimated numbers generally. The range of species is still pretty good (with 15 being sighted) but Small Tortoiseshells, which are usually quite common here at this time of year, were absent, Common Blues were in low single figures and Hedge Browns were in the 40s rather than the usual 100+.

There's no real sign of it ending, and with Ash die-back being confirmed here, I'm actually starting to seriously worry about the prospects for Brown Hairstreaks going forward.

A couple of things to note – there are still Silver Washed Fritillaries flying. This female looks a bit unusual:



Here's a normal female Hedge Brown:



Now compare her to this one which barely has any orange on the upper hindwing:



So, pretty depressing stuff all round. I'm becoming ever more convinced that August in the UK is slowly turning into an autumn month, rather than a summer one, just as February is evolving into a spring month as opposed to winter. I suppose what is given at one end of nature's calendar has to be taken at the other?

Still, as noted previously, the species range was good, with all the following seen:

Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Peacock
Comma
Silver Washed Fritillary
Common Blue
Holly Blue
Hedge Brown
Speckled Wood
Meadow Brown
Ringlet
Brown Hairstreak
Large White
Small White
Green Veined White

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 10-Aug-17 10:21 PM GMT

Have you noticed the weather changed around St. Swithin's day? Perhaps there is some truth in these sayings after all. On the plus side, recently, the weather has tended to improve in autumn, meaning a good extra emergence of Walls, Clouded Yellows etc. Let's hope this happens again, this year.

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 12-Aug-17 10:22 AM GMT

Lovely SWF Dave, you've still seen lots of Butterflies though but I agree with you about the STS , which is way down on what it used to be a round our way as well, I think September the last couple of years seems to have been good, much better than August so may be we'll see more Butterflies before the season ends, hope fully Tortoiseshells. Goldie 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 13-Aug-17 08:04 PM GMT

Sunday 13th August 2017 - Unpredictable behaviour.....

I don't think I'll ever work out the *modus operandum* of the Brown Hairstreak. After drawing two blanks with females at the Pembrokeshire site last week, I returned again today in borderline weather conditions and ended up seeing SIX in just over an hour!

The first was seen at exactly midday followed by another two minutes later:



This area which was cleared last week looks like being the best spot for them this year:



The fifth one seen was laying eggs – three side by side:



I guess the awful conditions over the past fortnight have led to females wanting to lay as quickly as possible.

Strangely, even though weather conditions improved after the sixth was seen, there were no more observed and I left the site at 2pm. Numbers of other butterflies were depressingly poor again, although I did see a Small Copper this time, along with this female Large White which proved irresistible:



More excitement arrived on the way home as a Clouded Yellow flew across the A477! I was unable to stop on this occasion, but I'll be checking the Gower coast over the next few weeks to see if I can spot any more.

Re: David M

by millerd, 13-Aug-17 10:41 PM GMT

That's a very nice Hairstreak, David. A terrific glimpse of the chocolate orange upperside. 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by trevor, 14-Aug-17 08:28 PM GMT

Great shot of the BH eggs, strange they were laid on the twig, rather than the usual fork, which is nearby.

Re: David M

by David M, 22-Aug-17 07:11 PM GMT

Tuesday 22nd August 2017 – an August to forget....

I don't know about everyone else, but never before have I known a summer to wither away so prematurely. It's not just the butterflies; the vegetation is largely spent and don't start me on the weather!!

With a rare sunny, warm day on the cards, I arrived at West Williamston in Pembrokeshire at 10.25am, and in spite of partly cloudy conditions, stumbled upon my first Brown Hairstreak female just 10 minutes later. She was a ragged specimen but it didn't stop her laying eggs:



Here is the fruit of her labour:



I watched her for 15 minutes or so as she took short flights from one blackthorn sucker to the next, before I moved to the opposite side of the first field whereupon I spotted a second female:



She is probably lucky to be alive, as whatever took the chunk out of her hindwings must have missed her body by about a millimetre! She did absolutely nothing for 20 minutes as it had gone overcast at this point, but when the sun returned, she soon opened her wings:



I wandered onto the foreshore, and by midday the skies cleared invitingly and I soon spotted a third female, with this one being in as good a condition as one can expect in late August:



She flew off after less than 5 minutes during which time she crawled around a mature shrub bending her abdomen around the spines without laying any eggs:



At 1pm, I returned to the first field and started looking for eggs (eventually reaching 17). Whilst doing this, I disturbed a fourth female:



I crossed the field to where I had started when I first arrived, and thought I'd seen a fifth Brown Hairstreak, only for it to turn out to be the one I originally saw almost three hours earlier!! She was in much the same spot too. What a shift she'd put in if she'd been laying eggs all that time:



General butterfly numbers were again abysmal – I've never known things so bad at this time of year. Even Speckled Woods numbered single figures and a mere three Hedge Browns were seen! Half a dozen Large Whites was a positive, with Small and Green Veined seen also. One Silver Washed Fritillary, one Comma, four Red Admirals and two Peacocks was dismal, whilst the only other species about were a single Holly Blue and three, maybe four male Common Blues:



My spirits were lifted slightly on the drive home when I saw a male Brimstone nectaring by the roadside near Pont Abraham, but the truth is that overall numbers are worryingly low. I have visited this site four times in a fortnight now and have not seen a single Small Tortoiseshell, yet upon my return home, my neighbour had THREE on scabious flowers in her small front garden.

I can't work it out! 🤔

Re: David M

by millerd, 22-Aug-17 11:25 PM GMT

Some very good Hairstreak activity there, David. It does seem very autumnal – the blackberries are nearly over, the ivy is flowering and the sunshine has been somewhat missing lately. But as Buggy says, if we get some decent weather (today was very warm here), there might be a late burst of activity and some third broods. We can but hope. 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Aug-17 09:38 PM GMT

Sunday 27th August 2017 – Colourful day...

I decided against travelling to Pembroke for Brown Hairstreaks today due to an 'iffy' weather forecast. Sure enough, it was cloudy first thing, and my chosen destination, which is half way towards Pembrokeshire, was also decidedly overcast when I arrived at 10.05am.

The National Botanic Gardens of Wales, which is near Cross Hands, has had a butterfly house for over a year now, so I spent the first 45 minutes in there whilst waiting for the clouds to lift.

There were several Blue Morphos:



This Malachite was unusually co-operative:



And here are two I haven't seen before:



Outside of the tropical environment, there were plenty of beautiful indigenous butterflies going about their business. Unsurprisingly, Small Whites were very common (40+) given that the walled gardens contain huge numbers of pesticide-free brassica plants. Both Large and Green Veined Whites were about in reasonable numbers too, with this female *napi* being abnormally heavily marked with a rich shade of lemon yellow on the underside:



Sadly, I lost track of it as it flew perpetually around the vegetable patch, which is a shame, as the black markings on the upper forewings were so unusual that I would describe it as an aberrant.

The real joy though was the presence of significant numbers of vanessids, and Small Tortoiseshells in particular.

I've been concerned about Torties for a few weeks now, but today went some way towards allaying those fears as at least three dozen were seen, along with 10 or so Peacocks, 4 or 5 Red Admirals and a couple of Painted Ladies.

The buddleias and verbena in the sheltered walled gardens were an absolute magnet for them:

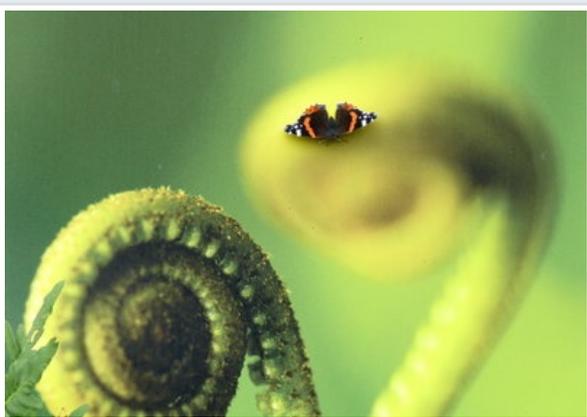




The second Painted Lady was a bit unusual due to it having pronounced blue spots along the hindwing submargin:



This Red Admiral, which has enlarged blue markings on the hindwing, was the winner of the 'posing in strange places' award though....it was trying to warm itself upside down on one of the information panels in the Wallace garden:



Other butterflies seen were 5 Common Blues and a Speckled Wood.

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 30-Aug-17 08:37 PM GMT

Sensational pictures there David. Small Torts are having a good year in the east too, with ones and twos almost everywhere, but not in those numbers!

Re: David M

by bugboy, 30-Aug-17 08:48 PM GMT

I think the last time I saw Nymphalids clustering over Buddleja like that I was a young teenager looking at the one growing at the bottom of my garden in the 80's, and I'd probably reared most of them as well!

Re: David M

by David M, 17-Sep-17 10:09 PM GMT

Sunday 17th September 2017 - Autumn setting in....

Another visit to the National Botanic Gardens of Wales saw plenty of butterflies, both inside **and** outside the glasshouse. However, since my visit 3 weeks ago Large Whites have seemingly disappeared, with only a handful of Small and Green Veined Whites on the wing. That said, there were dozens of Large White larvae munching on the cabbages, nasturtiums and sprouts. Next year's brood looks guaranteed!

There were decent numbers of both Red Admirals and Small Tortoiseshells. With the buddleia flowers practically gone, they made a beeline for this attractive and fragrant plant, which I later learned was *actaea simplex*, or Pritchard's Giant:



I managed to find one Comma, which posed nicely:



This female Green Veined White was very attractive:



The British Bird of Prey Centre had a display at the site today. There was a Red Kite, a Buzzard, a Kestrel, a Merlin (which I'd never seen close up before), a Goshawk, a Tawny Owl and this magnificent Golden Eagle:



I also had the honour of holding this beautiful Barn Owl for a few minutes:



The previous day, I spent the best part of an hour at Port Eynon where I saw this unusual Red Admiral with the black extending through the red band:



Re: David M

by David M, 12-Oct-17 07:46 PM GMT

Thursday 12th October 2017 - Finally.....a butterfly!

Been a while since I've had the chance to get out and on those rare occasions the weather has been suitable, I've been either at work or busy with commitments. Today I had intended to spend an hour or so in the great Gower outdoors, but the early sunshine soon gave way to dark clouds and wind, before it cleared up rather irritatingly after 4pm which seems to be something of a regular event round here! 😞

In spite of this, I **did** manage to see my first October butterfly whilst washing the dishes! I noticed what I initially thought to be a leaf on my neighbour's roof, but the colour and shape suggested it was a butterfly.....and so it was, a lovely Comma, which hung around for a good 15 minutes as it was cloudy and cool:



Re: David M

by millerd, 12-Oct-17 09:25 PM GMT

I'm glad to see you've found another butterfly at last, David. 😊 Things are very different over your way, certainly. 😊

Dave

Re: David M

by Neil Freeman, 13-Oct-17 07:54 PM GMT

David M wrote:

...Been a while since I've had the chance to get out and on those rare occasions the weather has been suitable, I've been either at work or busy with commitments...

I hear that David. I could have spoken those exact words myself. Mind you, the season doesn't usually last much past the end of September around my patch anyway.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 13-Oct-17 09:03 PM GMT

Love the shot of the Owl David and glad you saw a Butterfly, if the weather takes up you'll probably see more. Goldie 😊

Re: David M

by David M, 27-Oct-17 06:31 PM GMT

Friday 27th October - Saying farewell....

Took today off as it was forecast sunny, mild (15c) and wind free and that was precisely what greeted me when I arrived at Port Eynon on the south Gower coast at 1.20pm:



The clocks go back on Sunday, which is something I always dread as it symbolises the onset of winter. So, I wanted one last chance to see a few late season butterflies before the dark evenings and the frosts arrive.

There weren't too many about to be honest. Three airborne Red Admirals were seen but the ivy clad walls at the rear of this site were bereft, surprisingly.

Only one butterfly settled long enough for me to get an image - this Small Tortoiseshell came down in the grassy dunes:



There was a surprise appearance by a Painted Lady as I was walking back to the car park. It was flying towards the sea so I don't know if it was heading south for the winter. In addition, I got another unexpected species when I saw a male Large White fluttering along the roadside hedgerows on my drive back. I'm sure I won't see another of those prior to next spring!

Re: David M

by millerd, 27-Oct-17 06:34 PM GMT

Nice to see a Small Tortoiseshell, David. 😊 They've long since disappeared from my patch.

Dave

Re: David M

by bugboy, 27-Oct-17 07:10 PM GMT

Like Dave, I've not seen a Small Tort for some time now. Hope your one finds somewhere to sleep soon, can't be long before the first frosts hit us.

Re: David M

by essexbuzzard, 27-Oct-17 07:30 PM GMT

I echo that, I also dread the clocks going back, as it goes dark halfway through the afternoon! I don't think I've seen a tort since August, so well done!

Re: David M

by Andrew555, 28-Oct-17 10:57 AM GMT

Agree with the sentiments here..

Clocks going back 😞

Small Tortoiseshell 😞

Re: David M

by Goldie M, 28-Oct-17 05:36 PM GMT

No Tortoiseshell for a few weeks now, It's great you got a shot of one. Goldie 😊

Re: David M

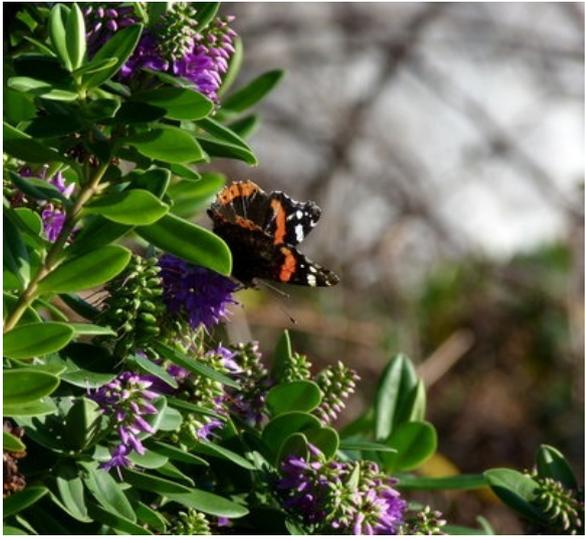
by David M, 25-Nov-17 01:29 PM GMT

Friday 24th November 2017 – Still some life in south Wales....

Decided I needed a bit of fresh sea air today after having been under the weather for a few days. With clear skies, no wind and 8c temperatures, I figured there might be a Red Admiral or two around Bracelet Bay on the Gower coast, especially since I had seen one at around 11am flying opposite my cottage which is further inland:



Sure enough, I'd only been around for about 10 minutes when this individual flew towards the flowering hebe which grows quite profusely at this sheltered spot:



The butterfly is on the right hand side of this expanse of hebe growth:



I saw one (possibly two if the second was a different individual) at nearby Limeslade Bay where I had parked my car. Again, there is a large hebe growing in a south-facing, sheltered spot but this one was actually fluttering around the steep slope leading down to the shore.

With a cold week in store accompanied by northerly winds and night frosts, I doubt there will be any more butterflies for me in 2017. 😞

Re: David M

by trevor, 26-Nov-17 08:03 AM GMT

The Fat Lady has yet to sing in your area then, David.
A very uplifting report.

Best wishes,
Trevor.

Re: David M

by millerd, 26-Nov-17 01:14 PM GMT

Lovely to see them still flying, David. 😊 I think this is the point in the year where milder coastal spots become favoured over even my sheltered (and artificially-heated...) location.

Dave

Re: David M

by Andrew555, 27-Nov-17 02:14 PM GMT

Looks a lovely location David, and some spots as well. 😊