

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Jan-18 09:05 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor 😊...although I have seen better High Brown photos posted by others in previous years.

Cheers Wurzel, I am with you on needing to get on a boat to see Glanvilles in their proper place.

Thanks David, I am also yearning for spring although with the wind howling and the rain lashing down outside as I write this it seems a long way off.

Tuesday 2nd January 2018

Back to work today 😞

With the weather over the festive period alternating between cold and frosty and milder but wet I didn't bother putting the moth trap out. The last time it was out was on December 21st when I had 5 moths consisting of 2 Winter Moths and 3 Light Brown Apple Moths(micro). The Winter Moths were the first ones this winter but I had also caught a few of these last January.



Winter Moths - Coverdale 21.12.2017

Plenty of birds are visiting the garden feeders including a pair of Blackcaps. These have been turning up in the garden for the past few winters but I never see them before Christmas, usually from the first week of the new year. The male has mostly been lurking around in the shrubs but the female has been on the feeders more often, usually it is the females that are more secretive.



Female Blackcap - Coverdale 30.12.2017

Plenty of the usual four species of Tits are around, usually hanging around in gangs of mixed types,



Blue, Coal and Long-tailed Tit – Coverdale 30.12.2017

and the Bullfinches are still visiting regularly, at least two pairs,



Bullfinch pair – Coverdale 30.12.2017

Looks like the next couple of days are going to be a bit windy and wet and then another cold snap is forecast by the weekend.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 02-Jan-18 09:10 PM GMT

Again some 🐦🐦🐦 for your avian garden visitors, Bullfinch I only ever glimpse occasionally these days as they dart into the undergrowth and I don't think I've ever seen a winter Blackcap, even though they're everywhere all spring and summer long!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Jan-18 02:24 PM GMT

Great set of images Neil – especially the Bullfinches and the Redcap 😊 Hope you had a great festive break!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Jan-18 08:43 PM GMT

Thanks Bugboy, in my case I notice the Blackcaps more in the winter than the summer...probably because I tend to take less notice of the birds when the butterflies are about.

Cheers Wurzel, we had a great break thanks, been a bit depressing this week going back to work...Roll on Spring.

Looking back at 2017 part 3 – Into Autumn.

With the season advancing from late August into September things were beginning to have an autumnal feeling around my local patch with the usual high summer species – Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and the golden skippers – all finished for the year. Speckled Woods could still be found just about everywhere including my garden where three of four individual males were often squabbling over different corners or chasing after the occasional female that came wandering through. Commas and Red Admirals were also around in good numbers although I was no longer seeing Peacocks or Small Tortoiseshells, in fact these latter two species had been few and far between locally this year. The common Whites had also been noticeably down in numbers through the summer although I was starting to see a few more Large and Small Whites passing through my garden.



Comma – Coverdale 01.09.2017

A few days down in Dorset stopping at Lulworth Cove in the first week of September was our final trip of the season. There had continued to be a lot of cloud about during the latter part of the summer with a stiff breeze blowing on many days and the first couple of days of September had turned cooler with some heavy rain. Overall, butterfly numbers seemed a bit lower during our stay down at Lulworth Cove compared to visits in previous years. This is relative however and I still reckon that this area is one of the best for butterflies at this time of year. The path from Osmington up to White Horse Hill continues to be one of my favourite sites in the area and produced the highest count of Adonis Blues that I saw down there this time, easily 100+ compared with 20-30 that I saw at Bindon Hill and Durdle Door.



Adonis Blue – Osmington 06.09.2017



Adonis Blue female – Osmington 06.09.2017



Adonis Blues – Osmington 06.09.2017

A few late Chalkhill Blues were still hanging in there on Bindon Hill, the only time that I saw this species in 2017.



Chalkhill Blue – Bindon Hill 04.09.2017

Somehow, I had missed seeing Brown Argus so far in 2017 and I finally caught up with these in Dorset with a few showing up at Durdle Door, Bindon Hill and Osmington, albeit mostly worn and faded examples.



Brown Argus – Durdle Door – 04.09.2017

I had also found Small Coppers to be in short supply so far this year with just a couple seen locally and odd ones showing up at various spots around the country. I was pleased therefore to find a few down in Dorset, just half a dozen or so scattered about between Durdle Door, Bindon Hill and Osmington, but nevertheless more than I had been seeing up until now.



Small Copper - Osmington - 06.09.2017

There were plenty of Small Whites flying around Lulworth Cove with Large Whites in slightly lower numbers, both species being present in higher numbers than I had seen so far this year.



Small White - Lulworth cove 04.09.2017



Large White - Lulworth cove - 04.09.2017

The grassy slopes above Durdle Door and the path up to White Horse Hill at Osmington have reliably produced Clouded Yellows in previous years and both sites came up trumps again this year.



Clouded Yellow - Durdle Door 05.09.2017

A few Graylings were still flying at Durdle Door although nowhere near as many as I saw here at the same time a couple of years ago and this time I failed to find any up on Bindon Hill.



Grayling - Durdle Door 06.09.2017

Common Blues and Small Heaths were seen in good numbers as were Meadow Browns which had already disappeared from my local spots. Meadow Browns continue to fly much longer on the these Dorset chalk downs, as do Marbled Whites which I have seen still flying here in early September in previous years although I did not find any this time.

Back home through the rest of September, Speckled Woods continued to show up at most local spots as did increasing numbers of Commas. Red Admirals also seemed to be having a good year all over the country and my patch was no exception with plenty showing up all over the place.



Red Admiral - Hillfield Park Solihull 22.09.2017

Speckled Woods continued into October with the last one seen in my garden in the second week.



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 06.10.2017

My last butterfly photo of 2017 was a Red Admiral in the garden on October 29th. This was not the last butterfly I saw however as I continued to see Red Admirals into November albeit usually as quick flypasts.



Red Admiral – Coverdale 29.10.2017

So then, the cool and cloudy summer had merged into a cool and cloudy autumn, often with a stiff breeze blowing from the North West which kept the temperatures down on many days. This is not to say that there wasn't any nice warm and sunny weather because there was, it is just that the overall impression is of a generally cloudy and breezy second half to the season.

Considering the year as a whole, the nice spring had led to some early emergences and there was a particularly hot spell in early June which continued this trend. After this however, many of the summer species seemed to have suffered due to the deterioration in the weather from later in the month and many seemed to be well down in numbers. As mentioned at the beginning of these lookback reports, this is based on my own experiences and observations and other peoples experiences in other parts of the country may differ from mine.

All in all I saw 41 species in 2017, coincidentally the same final tally as 2016 although the mix of species was a bit different as I had more of a northern focus in 2016 and visited Cornwall twice this year as well as our later trip to Dorset.

This is now the time of year that I start to think about what I would like to see and where to go in the coming season which usually involves doing a bit of research and making plans for a number of trips, all of which gives me something to look forward too on these cold dark winter nights.

Here's to the coming season and lets hope its a good one for everyone.

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 09-Jan-18 09:58 AM GMT

Happy New Year Neil! I'm just catching up on my posts, I love the shots of the pair of Adonis , funny, I never think of them being out in Sept It's always August in my mind, daft I know 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 10-Jan-18 08:45 AM GMT

Great reports and some fantastic shots Neil, I love those Fritillaries. 🍷
I visited Haddon Hill last year as well, I didn't see any Heath Frits but the weather was against me.
But I saw them later, elsewhere on Exmoor so all is well. 😊

It's been a few years since I walked up White Horse Hill, I will do that this year I think as it seems I've been missing out!
Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Jan-18 11:25 PM GMT

Another great report Neil, great shots with a Cloudy 🌥️ and many taken at Durdle Door (my favourite place ever) 🌥️ but the best has to be the male Adonis – it jumps of the screen – I thought I could touch it for a moment there 🤩🌥️🌥️

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 12-Jan-18 07:23 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie, I always think of Adonis Blues as a late August/early September butterfly, probably because that is when I usually see them in Dorset 😊. I am told that they usually fly there well into September and sometimes into October, I believe they emerge a bit earlier in the south east.

Thanks Andrew, I reckon that path from Osmington up to the top of White Horse Hill is one of the best sites in the area in early September but is well worth a visit at any time. I have also been there in early July and seen loads of butterflies including Clouded Yellows then as well 😊.

Thanks Wurzel, I can easily understand why Durdle Door is you favourite place, great scenery and loads of butterflies on the downs around there...plus Lulworth Cove is just over the hill 😊.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 12-Jan-18 11:53 PM GMT

Great to revisit those Dorset sightings, Neil. I was there earlier than usual, in July. I think a combination of the season running a couple of weeks early, and deteriorating weather, may have meant many species were already on the wane by September. For me, the thing I remember most about September was the lack of sunshine, although that reversed in October and November, resulting in new generations of some species.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Jan-18 03:11 PM GMT

Lovely sequence again, Neil (especially the female Large White). Less than 2 months to go till this year's action begins! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Jan-18 08:17 PM GMT

Thanks Mark, unfortunately there continued to be a band of cloud across the midlands for a lot of October and November too and we didn't enjoy the amount of sun that the south east appeared to have.

Thanks David, probably just over two months for me here, depending on how the rest of the winter turns out of course.

Garden Moths – 2017.

Although I had started to run the moth trap in my garden in 2016, this year was the first that I have run the trap for a whole season. The first night was on January 8th and resulted in, appropriately enough, a couple of Winter Moths. The last time I put the trap out in 2017 was on December 21st when the season had turned full circle and I had another couple of Winter Moths.

The season really started to take off in March and numbers increased on and off depending on the weather conditions until by mid summer I was getting up to a couple of hundred individual moths in the trap...although most of these would usually be common 'trap fillers' such as Heart & Darts or Large Yellow Underwings. My largest catch was on the night of 27th August when I counted 203 individual moths which was made up of 159 macros and 44 micros. In reality the catch would have been higher but inevitably with these numbers some of them escape before being counted, especially the micros which are often settled on the outside of the trap and don't sit still for long. This count also included 88 Large Yellow Underwings and 56 Square-spot Rustics which illustrates why some of these are referred to as 'trap fillers' and like the micros some of these escape when the trap is opened.

My tally of garden moth species for the year was a total of 245 of which 151 were macros and 94 were micros. Of the macros 38 were new species for the garden and I also had 40 new micro species, the latter due mostly to the fact that I hadn't started to look at the micros until half way through 2016. There were also a few species that I had seen in 2016 which didn't show up this year. This gives me a garden total to date of 264 species of moth split into 170 macros and 94 micros.

A selection below of some of my favourites from through the year. All caught as single individuals unless otherwise stated.



Oak Beauty – 12.03.2017. 3 of this attractive spring species caught.



Chocolate-tip – 01.05.2017



Maidens Blush – 25.05.2017. I love the name of this one.



Poplar Hawk – 26.05.2017. 6 of these including a second brood example in August.



Swallow Prominent – 28.05.2016. New for the garden.



Beautiful Hook-tip – 07.06.2017. New this year. 9 caught.



Figure of Eighty – 10.06.2017. 3 caught.



White Ermine – 13.06.2017. 2 caught.



Lime Hawk – 15.06.2017. New this year although I reared one last year from a caterpillar found in front of my house.



Elephant Hawk – 24.06.2017. New for garden. 2 caught.



Scorched Wing – 24.06.2017. New for garden.



Swallow-tailed Moth – 24.06.2017. 8 caught.



Coronet – 4 of these caught.



Early Thorn – 04.07.2017. A couple of these caught in spring but this female is second generation so not that early.



Buff Arches – 05.07.2017. Just one of these this year, I had half a dozen in 2016.



White Satin – 25.07.2017. New for this year, 3 caught.



Canary-shouldered Thorn – 11.08.2017



Yellow Shell – 15.08.2017. 6 of these came to the trap.



Dusky Thorn – 20.09.2017. New for garden. A couple of these were caught.



Green-brindled Crescent – 13.10.2017. Another new one.

Compared with some of the moths above, the one below appears a bit drab and although worn and faded was actually the best moth I had in the garden. At first I had trouble identifying it and after posting the photo on a couple of Facebook moth groups an ID of Cloaked Pug was suggested which is a rather scarce migrant / vagrant which is suspected of breeding at a few locations scattered around the country. I also sent the photo to my county moth recorder who confirmed the ID and informed me that it was only the fourth record for Warwickshire in the past forty years, the last one apparently being in 2012. Just goes to show that you never know what might turn up, even in a suburban garden like mine.



Cloaked Pug – 15.06.2017.

So far in 2018 the weather hasn't really been suitable for me to put the trap out, either too wet and windy or simply too cold. Just waiting for a fairly still night with a temperature of about 6c or more and it will be out again.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 20-Jan-18 12:05 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, Lovely Moth shot's, you must be pleased with your find, I really like the Ermine Moth it's certainly well named.

The weather has been really bad this winter all over the country lets hope we've a better Spring and Summer because of it.

I've got a shot of a moth that I've not named yet,(I've no Moth traps but if I see one when I'm out I usually take a shot of it) I've put it in the ID post hoping some one will know what it's called. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 20-Jan-18 06:30 PM GMT

Seeing your beautiful Hawk Moth images reminded me of an image I took in the French Pyrenees .

One night our tour leader set up a Moth trap at our hotel. In the morning this huge Privet Hawk Moth was found in the trap. I placed a £1 coin near the Moth to give a sense of scale. Unfortunately the only image of Moth and coin together was this one.

All the best,
Trevor.



Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 21-Jan-18 12:20 PM GMT

Beautiful selection and a great report Neil. 😊 Amazing variety, and very nicely shot as well. I love the pic of the Canary-shouldered Thorn, that yellow mane! 😊
Fantastic.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Jan-18 06:15 PM GMT

A stunning selection of shots and species Neil 😊👍 If anyone ever says that Moffs are boring again I'll direct them to your PD 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Jan-18 08:03 PM GMT

Thanks for all the comments Goldie, Trevor, Andrew, and Wurzel 😊

Along with a lot of the country we have just had a very wintry weekend with some heavy snow on both Saturday and Sunday although on both days it turned to sleet and then rain so it didn't stay on the ground for long.

The weather didn't deter the birds though and I was pleased to see a couple that are rarer visitors to the garden. On the Saturday there was a Greenfinch which I have only ever seen in my garden once before.



Greenfinch – Coverdale 20.01.2018

The Bullfinches tried to bully him (her?) away from the feeder but he stood his ground...



Bullfinches and Greenfinch having a squabble.

On the Sunday I spotted a Redwing turning over the fallen leaves on the lawn. I usually get one or two of these each year and this was the first this winter. I only had time for a quick record shot though the back room window before something spooked it and it flew off.



Redwing – Coverdale 21.01.2018

The culprit then emerged from the bushes...



Fox – Coverdale 21.01.2017

A bit milder today but wet with it and looks like a another blustery couple of days ahead.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 23-Jan-18 09:24 PM GMT

Dressed in those fine greens and Yellows I'd say that was definitely a male Greenfinch 😊. You did well with that Redwing picture, such a nervous bird. I'm lucky if I catch a fleeting glance as they dive for cover at my approach. I generally hear them deep in scrub or flying overhead. I guess hiding inside your house helps.

Great selection of moths from earlier too, Buff Arches, Swallowtail, Beautiful Hook-tip, Scorched Wing among my favs which I haven't seen myself in many a year 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-Jan-18 10:07 PM GMT

I'd go with male as well Neil 😊 Good to see the Greenfinches putting in an appearance, they've had a bad run. Great work with the Redwing as well, not an easy species to photograph as they are no where near as bold as their boisterous and larger cousins the Fieldfares 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Jan-18 03:40 PM GMT

Great wildlife images, Neil. I love the birds fighting over the feeder, the sneaky fox and, of course, the sequence of moths, my favourite being the Canary Shouldered Thorn, which is an absolute gem!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jan-18 07:41 PM GMT

Thanks for all the comments bugboy, Wurzel and David 😊

bugboy wrote:

... I guess hiding inside your house helps...

Yep, like a great big centrally heated hide, lazy birding at its easiest 😊

To tell the truth, I am usually supposed to be doing jobs around the house and building up the brownie points in readiness for the better weather, trouble is I am too easily distracted when I spot something through the windows.

Sunday 28th January

A mild weekend with a wet and windy Saturday but Sunday was much better, in fact it almost felt like a nice spring like day so I decided to do my bit for the Big Garden Birdwatch. I set up in the back room in the afternoon and counted the birds that I saw during an hour between 1.30pm to 2.30pm with the results as follows;

Great Tit (3)
Blue Tit (4)
Coal Tit (1)

Long-tailed Tit (5) – these turned up together in a little gang.
Dunnock (1)
Blackbird (5) – all working the lawn together.
Chaffinch (3) – first year I have seen these in the garden, they have been there most days this winter.
Bullfinch (2, a pair)
Starling (1) – don't see these around here much these days.
Song Thrush (1)
Robin (1)
Wood Pigeon (3)
Magpie (2)
Blackcap (2, a pair)
Goldfinch (1)

Most of these were around the bushes or moving to and from the feeders too quickly to get photos but I did manage a few shots,



Blackcap male – this shot taken on the Saturday, he was there again on Sunday but stayed in the bushes.



Blackcap female – actually seemed more confident than the male.



Blackbird knocking bits off the fat block – they seem to have developed a habit of doing this and then picking the bits off the ground.



Starling in the bushes.

Since the weekend it has gone colder again and there was a good frost here this morning and it looks like the rest of the week is going to stay cold.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 30-Jan-18 09:22 PM GMT

Wow, a blackcap and redcap, bit jealous of those! 🐦 No greenfinches I notice, but a good haul anyway.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 31-Jan-18 09:10 AM GMT

That's a pretty impressive garden list Neil 😊🐦 and great shots especially the in flight Blackbird 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Feb-18 07:47 PM GMT

Thanks Mark. No Greenfinches on the day unfortunately, they are a bit scarce in my garden and I have only ever seen a couple there.

Cheers Wurzel. I was pleased with that list myself for just an hour. A GS Woodpecker is also there most days but sods law meant that it didn't turn up until later in the afternoon and so missed the list.

Tuesday 6th February

We have just had another similar weekend to the previous one, that is a wet and miserable Saturday followed by a dry Sunday with plenty of blue sky although this time the temperature took a dive through the day.

Since then it has been cold with a bitter wind blowing from the north. Today we have had some light flurries of snow through the day and as I write this it you can see by the light of the streetlights outside that it is coming down fairly heavily.

There were more Goldfinches in the garden at the weekend than I usually see, probably attracted to the feeders by the more 'normal' winter we are having, in other words colder than the last few.



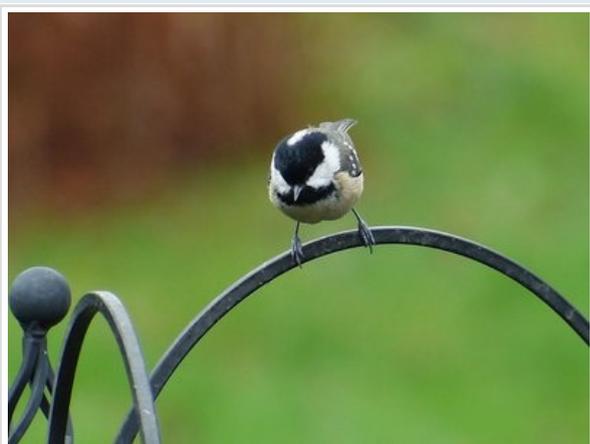
Goldfinches tucking in to black sunflower seeds.

The pair of Blackcaps are still around and the male seems to be getting more confident. Last week he spent most of his time hiding in the bushes whilst the female was visiting the feeders more often.



Blackcap and Blue Tit

I was quite pleased to get the shot below of a Coal tit as they usually dart in and out again too quickly for me to grab a photo.



Coal Tit actually sitting still for moment

One of the local foxes was making the most of a sunny spot at the bottom of the garden and I got the distinct impression it was sticking its tongue out at me.



Fox at the bottom of the garden.

More cold days ahead this week and the slightly milder ones only look to be getting up to 5 or 6 degrees at most so not much sign of spring here yet. Time to get back to thinking about what I would like to see this coming season and making some plans 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-Feb-18 10:16 PM GMT

Definitely – almost a wink as well 😊😊 Great shot of the Coal Tit, they're hard to capture because, as you, say they'll wait for the other birds to feed and then nip in during a slight lull only to nip off quickly again as soon as another species arrives at the table 😊 Despite the terrible weather forecast it shouldn't be too long now 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 06-Feb-18 11:33 PM GMT

Your garden sure is a winter haven for wildlife, Neil. Let's hope in a couple of months time you'll have your usual Speckled Woods to report, along with Holly Blues and all the other spring visitors.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 09-Feb-18 09:51 AM GMT

Nice shots Neil, that Coal Tit is great. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 09-Feb-18 01:50 PM GMT

Your right Neil, we're definitely getting similar birds in the garden, Love the shot of the Coal Tit, Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Feb-18 08:20 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, David, Andrew and Goldie 😊

Another cold week here but at least the past couple of days have seen some nice sun which has cheered things up a bit although the mornings have been frosty. There skies have been getting lighter when leaving for work around 06.00 in the morning this week which is a sure sign that spring is not far off irrespective of what the weather does.

Garden Moths 2017 part 2 – The Micros.

In part 1 of my look back at the moths I trapped in my garden last year, I mentioned that 94 out of the total of 245 species that I caught were micros. Out of these, 40 were new records for my garden, mostly due to the fact that I had only started to look at the micros half way through the previous year. Some of these were seen in large numbers, for example a couple of species of the familiar grass moths of the family Crambidae would often be settled all around the outside of the trap as well as inside. This made accurately identifying and counting them impossible as they would often fly off as soon as I approached so my recorded numbers of these are very much a minimum. Other species turned up in smaller numbers and many were recorded as single examples.

A selection of my favourite micros are posted below in rough order in which they appeared. Some of them overwinter as adults and started turning up in the trap in late February which shows how well they are adapted to the cold despite their tiny size and delicate appearance. The numbers in brackets

in the comments with the photos are the total individuals of that species recorded during the season.



Acleris literana (1) – Hibernates as an Adult. New For Garden. 08.03.2017



Caloptillia sp (1). These can be difficult to ID. 18.03.2017



Alucita hexadactyla (12) – Twenty-plume Moth. 30.03.2017



Ancylis badiana (1). 15.05.2017. NFG



Pseudargyrotoza conwagana (47). 10.06.2017



Anania hortulata (28). Small Magpie. 10.06.2017



Archips podana (1). Large Fruit-tree Tortrix. 16.06.201. NFG.



Archips xylosteana (2). Variegated Golden Tortrix. 18.06.2017. NFG



Tortrix viridana (2). Green Oak Tortrix. 18.06.2017. NFG



Lozotaeniodes formosana (1). 20.06.2017.



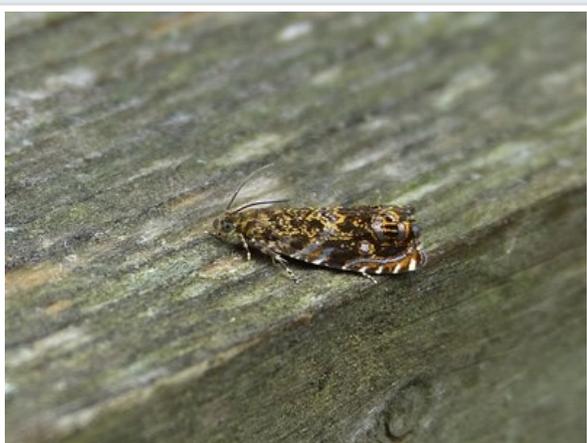
Anania coronata (8). 21.06.2017



Agapeta hamana (1). 21.06.2017. NFG.



Yponomeuta evonymella (47). Bird-cherry Ermine. 21.06.2017.



Enarmonia formosana (1). Cherry Bark Tortrix. 21.06.2017



Spilonota ocellana (2). Bud Moth. 15.07.2017.



Pammene aurita (4). 17.07.2017.



Argyresthia goedartella (15). 19.07.2017.



Carcina quercana (3). 04.08.2017.



Ypsolopha sequella (1). 23.09.2017. NFG.

The most common moths were Light Brown Apple Moths which I recorded in every month of the year and a couple of the grass Crambids mentioned above, of which I managed to identify 7 different species.



Crambus pascuella (236). 09.06.2017



Chrysoteucha culmella (227). 10.06.2017



Crambus lathoniellus (2). 10.06.2017



Agriphila tristella (5). 27.08.2017.

So far this year with the night being mostly either too cold or wet and windy I have only had the trap out a couple of times back in January with very limited success, just 1 Red-green Carpet and 3 Light Brown Apple Moths.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Feb-18 08:45 PM GMT

Even more cracking moths Neil 😊 Those micros give the macros a run for their money in the 'plumage' stakes, especially the *Enarmonia formosana*, what an intricate beauty! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Feb-18 06:27 PM GMT

Another stunning selection of moths, Neil, including a few that most of us would scarcely register were we to actually see them.

I particularly like *Anania coronata*, which I presume is closely related to *funebri*?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 19-Feb-18 02:44 PM GMT

Fantastic line-up again Neil. 😊 Some beautiful colours and patterns on display. The 'wings' of the Twenty-plume moth are fascinating. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 19-Feb-18 07:12 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, looks like the Black Birds are getting more intelligent 😊 Mine was a Lady. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Feb-18 07:40 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, David, Andrew and Goldie 😊

I was totally unaware that most of these tiny jewels even existed until I started getting them in my trap. Even the 'grass moths' that are familiar to most of us from seeing them in grassy meadows in the summer reward a closer look.

David M wrote:

...I particularly like *Anania coronata*, which I presume is closely related to *funebri*?..

Indeed it is David, and to *Anania hortulata* the more familiar Small Magpie Moth.

Saturday 17th February.

With a milder night and light winds forecast last Saturday night I decided to run the moth trap in the garden to see if anything was about. As it happened, the skies cleared and the temperature dropped from around 10.30pm so I turned it off in order to have a Sunday morning lie-in instead. This is because if I run the trap all night I get up to it early in order to beat the birds which soon learn that they can find an easy meal of any moths that may settle on the outside of the trap.

Anyway, I only caught one moth but it was a cracker – A nice fresh male Oak Beauty 😊 This is one of my favourite early season moths with a usual flight period from late February to April and which overwinters as a pupa underground.



Oak Beauty – Coverdale 17.02.2018



Oak Beauty - Coverdale 17.02.2018

Sunday 18th February.

With another cloudy and mild night forecast I decided to make the most of it before the weather turned and put out the trap out again. This time a light drizzle started which turned to proper rain around 9.00pm but nevertheless I left the trap out as I would be getting up early – around 05.15am – for work the next morning.

This time I was rewarded with 2 moths – another Oak Beauty, confirmed as a different individual from the previous night by comparing photos, and a Pale Brindled Beauty which is another species that spends the winter underground as a pupa but in this case can often emerge as early as January.



Oak Beauty - Coverdale 18.02.2018



Pale Brindled Beauty - Coverdale 18.02.2018

With the weather now turning colder (it was -3c this morning on my way to work) and even colder weather heading in for the foreseeable future it looks as if that will be it for a while.

I have seen a few scattered reports of butterflies around the midlands with most of the hibernators being reported, but with the winter we have had so far and it looking like it will stay cold into early March at least, I would not be surprised if the season doesn't properly get started around here until early April now.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Feb-18 08:36 AM GMT

That Oak Beauty certainly lives up to its name Neil 😊 It does look like it's going to be a late season but hopefully that'll mean it'll be a cracker 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 24-Feb-18 03:57 PM GMT

That's great Neil, a beauty indeed. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 01-Mar-18 01:47 PM GMT

Some fabulous February finds there, Neil, although they'll do well to survive this current period of atrocious weather. Hopefully normal service will be resumed very soon.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Mar-18 07:55 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel 😊 I have had enough of this winter now, it has certainly seemed a long one from a cold and snowy earlier December up until this latest cold period.

Thanks Andrew, one of many moths with the appellation of 'Beauty' and one of the few that I think really deserve it.

Thanks David, hopefully they will have tucked themselves away somewhere and gone into diapause. Ironically this may mean that they will perhaps live a bit longer than if they had stayed active in better conditions.

Friday 2nd March

The second day of meteorological spring and it feels like we are still in the depths of winter. We had actually missed the worst of the snow here up until today although it has been bitingly cold and the snow we did have was a light, fine, powdery stuff that blew around in the wind. This afternoon it started snowing with some proper stuff which is still coming down as I write this and is forecast to continue for a few hours yet.

The bird feeders in the garden have been taking a hammering and I have refilled them a couple of times this week although by the time I am in from work I have only had fleeting glimpses of the visitors in the fading light. Last weekend, before the weather turned really cold, there was a nice selection on birds in the garden including all the usual suspects that I see plus a Siskin which is a rare visitor for me. There was also a dinky little Goldcrest which I have seen a few times but are usually too quick for me to get a good photo of so I was pleased to get a couple that were not too out of focus.

A few shots from last weekend, all taken through the window from the comfort of my back room whilst I was supposed to be doing household stuff.



Blackcap – Coverdale 24.02.2018



Bullfinches - Coverdale 25.02.2018



Siskin - Coverdale 25.02.2018



Goldcrest - Coverdale 25.02.2018



Goldcrest – Coverdale 25.02.2018

It looks like it might be warming up a bit over the weekend with daytime temperatures nudging up over freezing and by the end of next week we could see the giddy heights of 6 or 7 degrees.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 02-Mar-18 08:58 PM GMT

That's the first time I've seen a Goldcrest on a garden bird feeder. It's remarkable those tiny birds can survive this sort of weather! Down here it might even be nudging double figures next week, that's hard to believe at the moment!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 03-Mar-18 01:31 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the birds Neil, can't say I've ever seen a Gold Crest, that's one to look out for, I've had a Siskin in the garden a couple of years ago and did manage a shot, if this weather takes up Pennington Flash will have them and hope fully I'll get another shot of one. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Mar-18 05:30 PM GMT

Cracking shot of the Goldcrest Neil and love the pair of Bullfinches 🤗🍴 Hopefully this is it for Winter now and we can crack on into Spring 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Mar-18 08:37 PM GMT

Hi Bugboy, I have seen Goldcrests on my garden feeders before but not often and only to the fat blocks.

Thanks Goldie, good luck with the Siskins.

Cheers Wurzel, things have definitely been a bit more spring like here for the past couple of days.

The snow on Friday continued for most of the night and by the morning it was the deepest we have seen here during the recent cold spell, although we still got off lightly compared with other parts of the country.

By Sunday afternoon the temperature had crept above freezing and a band of rain had begun to wash away the snow.

All the same birds were around in the garden again over the weekend and I took a few more shots, although I find that, despite me experimenting with the settings, my Lumix FZ200 struggles with the exposure against the white background of the snow.



Bullfinch – Coverdale 03.03.2018



Chaffinch – Coverdale 03.03.2018



Coal Tit – Coverdale 03.03.2018



Long-tailed Tit – Coverdale 03.03.2018



Blackcap – Coverdale 04.03.2018

The Goldcrest (I assume it was the same one) was seen visiting the fat block again on both Saturday and Sunday.



Goldcrest – Coverdale 04.03.2018

There are a couple of pairs of Dunnocks that are usually skulking about under the shrubs and these often come out and pick up seeds that are knocked to the floor from the feeders above. I very rarely see these fly up to the feeders themselves but on Saturday I spotted one of them on the mixed seed feeder, no doubt due to the lack of food on the snow covered ground.



Dunnock - Coverdale 03.03.2018.

The past couple of days have seen a return to more normal conditions for the time of year so fingers crossed that after that last sting in the tail that this winter has finally come to an end.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 08-Mar-18 10:27 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, It's not come to an end here UGH! We got up to more Snow, it's stopped now but more is forecast for later and the Schools have been closed again this morning, just when we thought Spring had arrived it's gone back wards again 😞 Goldie 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Mar-18 12:28 PM GMT

They're still cracking images despite the snow/exposure difficulties Neil, especially the Long-tailed Tit shot - looks like it's burying it's head into a muffler 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 10-Mar-18 01:58 PM GMT

Cracking bird shots again, Neil, especially those Goldcrests. There are plenty of these in my area but they dart around like bullets and I've never been able to get an image of them.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Mar-18 08:51 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Goldie, Wurzel and David, very much appreciated 😊

Monday 12th March.

After a very pleasant and spring like Sunday with the temperature getting up to the giddy heights of 12c in my back garden I was tempted to run the moth trap in the garden that night. The weather forecast said it would remain mild with lows of around 7c and some light rain showers heading in overnight which sounded like good conditions as many moths will happily fly in light rain.

Well, as it happened the forecast was right regarding the temperature but seriously underestimated the rain which began lashing down from around 8.00pm and hardly eased all night.

I braved the rain and checked the trap at around 8.30pm and found a March Moth settled on the fence close by which pleased me as despite being a common species this was a first for my garden.



March Moth – Coverdale 11.03.2018

The habit of settling close to the trap rather than actually going in it is something that some species often do and means that it is always worth checking around the trap when approaching it. With the trap already wet, I decided to keep it lit until I got up for work in the morning when I duly turned it off and covered it before bringing it into the garage at 05.30am before leaving for work.

On returning from work later that afternoon, I checked the trap and found that despite the very wet night there were actually a couple of moths in it, singles each of Oak Beauty and Common Quaker.



Oak Beauty – Coverdale 11.03.2018



Common Quaker – Coverdale 11.03.2018

The Common Quaker was the first for this year and checking last years records, I had my first of this common and widespread species on 19th February when I had 2 in the trap. This means that this years first was nearly three weeks later than last year which I suppose is a fair reflection of the winter we have had this year.

The rain continued for most of the day on Monday and after all the snow melting last week has led to some flooding around here and I have noticed on my journey to work from Solihull to Coventry that a number of small rivers and streams have overflowed onto neighbouring farmland.

It looks like we have another cold snap forecast for the coming weekend with possible snow showers around here, fingers crossed that this time it is only short lived.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-Mar-18 11:42 PM GMT

It looks like the weather is back in that pattern of nice in the middle of the week and rubbish at the weekend 😞 Hopefully the cycle will be broken soon 😊
Interesting how the March Moth holds it's wings– does it always fold the same wing over the top? I've said it before but the Oak Beauty is certainly that 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 14-Mar-18 02:10 PM GMT

The bird shots look good to me Neil, I very much like the Bullfinch. Nice to see the moths too. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 15-Mar-18 12:32 PM GMT

At least your seeing Moths Neil if not Butterflies yet 😊 great shots, I've been trying to get the Garden back to some thing like it should be but only managed the front garden before the rain arrived again, I'll have to get to the back garden in the next week but Snow's been forecast again so it's going to be a struggle, I'm praying for the Sun! 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Mar-18 09:33 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel 😊 That resting posture is typical for March Moths, I have checked a few photos online and it seems they will rest with either wing over the other.

Thanks Andrew, glad you like them 😊

Hi Goldie, the spring flying moths do emerge earlier than the butterflies, that is not including the moths that hibernate as adults that can will often come to light on mild nights during the winter.

Friday 16th March.

With a couple of mild nights forecast on Wednesday and Thursday I was tempted to put the trap out on both nights to make the most of it before winter returned over the coming weekend. Both nights turned out to be similar with minimum temperatures of 6 or 7 degrees but with rain during the early hours of the morning.

Wednesday night was also quite breezy which didn't help but nevertheless I had a single Oak Beauty and 3 Common Quakers plus a micro which I still need to confirm the ID.

Thursday night produced another half a dozen moths consisting of another Oak Beauty, and another 3 Common Quakers, all of which I knew were different individuals to the previous night as I still had those in pots in the fridge in order to take some photos in daylight this afternoon. There were also a couple of Hebrew Characters which were my first of this common spring species this year, in this case just over a week later than in 2017.



Oak Beauty (a bit worn) – Coverdale 14.03.2017



Oak Beauty – Coverdale 15.03.2017



Common Quakers showing variation in ground colour – Coverdale 14.03.2018



Another 3 Common Quakers showing more colour variation – Coverdale 15.03.2018



Hebrew Characters – Coverdale 15.03.2018

With the overnight temperature forecast over the weekend and into the early part of next week I reckon it will be a little while before the trap is out again. I am hoping the weather bucks up a bit in time for Easter in a couple of weeks which is probably the first realistic chance I will have to get out and look for some butterflies.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Mar-18 07:30 PM GMT

"I have checked a few photos online and it seems they will rest with either wing over the other" –there goes a possible research project into 'handedness' in moths 😊😊 More great Moths, loving the Oak Beauty still but the Hebrew Character is vying for my affections 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Mar-18 10:05 PM GMT

You're really filling your boots with these early moths, Neil. You have some lovely specimens. I particularly like the Hebrew Characters and I shall keep my eye out for these in my part of the world.

Thanks to your images, yesterday I found a moth roosting on the white wall of the gym I go to and immediately recognised it as an Oak Beauty (they're quite robust, aren't they?)

It was reluctant to move even when I touched it and given that it was totally exposed whilst it was snowing and blowing a gale, I got a plastic vial from my house and I now have it here with me to ride out the wintry weather. I will release it as soon as temperatures get back to normal (probably tomorrow but maybe Tuesday).

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 19-Mar-18 08:55 AM GMT

You've captured the comb-like structure of the antennae on that 2nd Oak Beauty really nicely Neil. 😊
Interesting side by side of the Quakers, so you move the moths from the trap onto a branch or some wood to take your photos ?

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Mar-18 08:28 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, the Hebrew Characters are a common moth this time of the year but like many (most) of those I that now get in the trap I had never seen one until I started trapping.

Hi David, the moths make up a bit for not seeing any butterflies yet but they have also been affected by the weather and are slower to get going this year.

Thanks Andrew, yes I do often move the moths to a more suitable background to take photos before I release them. Some are very docile during the day but others (many geometers and micros) can be very fidgety and fly off before I get the shot.

Friday 23rd March

Still no butterflies for me yet but with the slightly milder conditions overnight on Wednesday I ran the trap again. Moth numbers are still slow to get going in my garden this year but along with a couple of Common Quakers and a single Hebrew Character I had a single Twin spotted Quaker, a species which I have only had a couple of times before.



Twin spotted Quaker – Coverdale 21.03.2018

The weekend doesn't look too bad so I really must try and catch up on a few jobs in the garden which I haven't been able to do on recent weekends because of the weather. It looks like we may be copping for a bit more snow next week as well but hopefully just light showers.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 24-Mar-18 05:33 PM GMT

I was out hunting today Neil, no luck, it's going to be a while yet I think before we see any thing here. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 25-Mar-18 09:08 AM GMT

Great moth shot Neil 😊 Good idea getting caught up with the garden and household jobs because when Spring finally doesn't get here it could be a bit manic with a lot of species all emerging at once 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Mar-18 07:57 PM GMT

These moths add a new dimension to our pursuits, Neil. I find the array you present to us most eye-catching and with every passing year I find my interest in these creatures growing.

I'm confident butterflies will be back in your garden very soon. Give it a couple of weeks and the Specklies and Holly Blues should be emerging. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Mar-18 07:30 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, Saturday was grey and gloomy here but Sunday was much better... 😊

You could well be right Wurzel, it seem there has been a flurry of sightings over the past couple of days 😊

Thanks for your kind words on the moths David 😊 No butterflies in the garden yet but I am now off the mark 😊

Sunday 25th March

At last, a dry weekend and although Saturday was grey and cloudy it did give me a chance to catch up on some jobs in the garden. Sunday was much better with some nice warm sun and although it clouded over a bit in the afternoon, there were still some good sunny spells. I reckoned that the weather had been warm enough to maybe tempt some hibernators out and although I didn't really have a lot of time I figured I could just squeeze in a little wander down to a local park /playing field that is just 10 minutes walk from my house. There is a strip of rough ground along one side of this park with a hedge line of mixed hawthorn and blackthorn and plenty of brambles and a couple of sheltered sunny spots that I thought would be worth checking out. In fact, although this spot is so close to me, despite promising myself I would have a look sometime, I have never checked it out before.

Anyway, I slowly wandered along the hedge line and within a few minutes spotted a bright orange shape flitting across a bramble patch, my first butterfly of the year, a Comma. As I watched another butterfly flitted into view and I just had enough time to identify it as a Small Tortoiseshell before the Comma spotted it and they spiraled up and over the hedge. Relying on the territorial habits of these two species I stuck around hoping that one or the other would return and sure enough a few minutes later the Comma reappeared and settled on a clump of dead grass. I have noticed before that hibernators will often choose to settle on dead grass like this, quite possibly because the lighter colour reflects a bit more heat.



Comma - Wagon Lane 25.02.2018

As I was taking a few photos another Comma came along and was soon seen off by the first one but I managed to keep it in view to where it settled not far away.



Comma - Wagon Lane 25.02.2018

I hung around a little longer hoping that the Small Tortoiseshell would also reappear and was just on the verge of making my way back home when I spotted it heading towards me. Luckily this time it settled before either of the Commas spotted it and I managed to get a couple of shots before it was off again. Looking at the photos afterwards I noticed that the two small black forewing spots are very diminished, almost absent.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 25.02.2018

I then headed back home to continue where I had left off in the garden.

I have mentioned before that my first sightings are often during the last week of March and looking back over my past records gives the following dates;

- March 25th 2011 - Peacock / Brimstone
- March 25th 2012 - Small Tortoiseshell / Peacock / Comma
- April 2nd 2013 - Small Tortoiseshell. A slightly late start to the year.
- March 9th 2014 - Small Tortoiseshell / Peacock / Comma / Brimstone. A very early year for me.
- March 20th 2015 - Small Tortoiseshell / Peacock / Comma
- March 25th 2016 - Small Tortoiseshell / Peacock
- March 24th 2017 - Comma

It can be seen therefore that despite the long and often cold winter we have had that my first butterflies this year fall very much into my average timing.

It now looks like although the weather is forecast to go colder again later this week, it will not be as cold as previously thought...no beast from the east part 3 as such, just a lot of rain instead.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 26-Mar-18 07:47 PM GMT

judging by this evenings glut of posts it certainly looks like the butterflies think winter has finally ended, Hopefully the predicted rain won't put too much of a dent into activity in the near future.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 26-Mar-18 10:52 PM GMT

Looks like you got the sunshine ahead of us down here, Neil, and with it the butterflies. A very nice pair of Commas there. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 27-Mar-18 07:40 AM GMT

Lovely, nice one Neil. 😊

I had my first sighting, a Comma, yesterday. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-18 12:46 PM GMT

Interesting bit of emergence analysis Neil 😊 I like you generally see my first butterfly around the second week of February, and so it was this year 😊 Hopefully there will be a few windows of okay weather so that those butterflies that have emerged can get on with things properly...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 27-Mar-18 04:34 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, so glad you got some shots of the Butterflies looks like they're waking up at last 😊 I took a shot of a moth which Wurzel says looks like the shots of your Oak Beauty, this moth was still there today under the sheltering beam, that's two days now with out moving, I think it knows the weather's not up to much yet. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 27-Mar-18 09:20 PM GMT

Those are interesting statistics regarding first emergences in your area, Neil. As you say, they're very consistent and I suppose it's useful that you generally stick to the same places early on in every season.

Nice to see you off the mark though. Looks like virtually everyone on here has seen some action over the last few days.

Let's hope more will soon be on its way!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Mar-18 07:28 PM GMT

Thanks for all your comments Bugboy, Dave, Andrew, Wurzel, Goldie and David.

I guess that most of us stick to our regular local spots at this time of the year in order to try and see our first butterflies.

Friday 30th March

The end of March approaches and after a brief couple of days on Sunday / Monday the weather has taken a turn for the worse again. Tuesday was wet during the day but dried up overnight and stayed cloudy enough to hold the temperature up to a minimum of 6 degrees which tempted me to put the moth trap out in the garden.

I ended up with 11 moths of 5 species which was the highest catch so far this year and included new for years of Clouded Drab (1- a worn and quite 'drab' individual), Chestnut (1) and Early Grey (1). The rest were made up of Common Quaker (4) and Hebrew Character(4), both in some nice colour variation. I find this variation that can be seen in a lot of moth species fascinating and makes even the common species like CQs and HCs worth a closer look.



Early Grey – Coverdale 27.03.2018



Chestnut – Coverdale 27.03.2018



Hebrew Characters – Coverdale 27.03.2018



Common Quakers – Coverdale 27.03.2018

I did not get any micros and in fact have only had 2 species so far this year, by this time last year I had seen 11 species of micro. For the macros, I am up to 10 species this year whereas last year I was on 13.

I am off work next week and was hoping to be able to get out looking for some butterflies but it looks like being a wet week with the added possibility of some more snow around here on Monday. Fingers crossed that there may be some windows in the weather later in the week.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Mar-18 07:40 PM GMT

I've got my fingers and toes crossed for some good weather later next week Neil 🙏 It's about time Spring got on and sprang 😊 Lovely moth shots as always Neil though I did have to do a double take to make sure that one wasn't named after a type of tea, Earl Grey indeed 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 31-Mar-18 05:26 PM GMT

More spring beauties, Neil, and yes, the colour variation is absolutely fascinating. This phenomenon seems much more commonplace in moths than in butterflies.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 03-Apr-18 02:55 PM GMT

Good stuff Neil, fingers crossed for your weather. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Apr-18 08:13 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel...yes, the Early Grey does get misspelled sometimes on some of the moth Facebook groups that I am on 😊

Hi David, The colour variation of some moth species does seem more pronounced than in our butterflies but once you start looking you start to realise that some butterflies are more variable than often realised.

Thanks Andrew, I had a brief window today and Thursday & Friday are looking promising.

Tuesday 3rd April.

Yet another dull and mostly wet weekend although we did miss the snow that fell a bit further north. From Sunday afternoon until yesterday (Monday) afternoon we had more than 24 hours of non-stop rain which falling on my already soggy garden had left some large puddles of standing water. The rain stopped just after 2.00pm and the temperature actually started to rise a few degrees and with 9 degrees forecast for overnight I decided to put the moth trap out on one of the drier parts of the lawn.

The result was 18 moths, my highest count yet this year although 14 of them were Common Quakers, many of which are now looking worn and faded. The other 4 moths included singles of Hebrew Character and Red-green Carpet plus a couple of micros, Acleris cristana in a colour form I have never seen before, and Eudonia angustea. The micros were the first I have seen for a few weeks, I guess they don't like the weather we have been having lately either.



Red-green Carpet – Coverdale 02.04.2018



Hebrew Character – Coverdale 02.04.2018



Eudonia angustea – Coverdale 02.04.2018



Acleris cristana - Coverdale 02.04.2018

This afternoon, after a cloudy morning, the sun broke through a few times during which it actually felt quite pleasant and almost like spring so I decided to go for it and chance a visit round to my local spot at Bickenhill to see if anything was stirring. On walking along the usual paths it soon became obvious that things are well behind where they would normally be by now at this site. Usually the Blackthorn is in full blossom by now, in fact last year it was already starting to go over in the first week of April, but today it was still in bud. Having said that it will probably only take a couple of decent days of sunshine to burst forth in flower.



Blackthorn still in bud - Bickenhill 03.04.2018

This is usually my most reliable local site for awakening hibernators and although it was very quiet I did manage to see a few butterflies. A single Small Tortoiseshell came close a couple of times but disappeared over a hedge and didn't come back and a couple of male Brimstones were patrolling the hedges. I originally thought the Brimstones were just the one individual doing a circuit until I saw them cross each others path and have a brief 'tussle' before continuing their wanderings.

The usual 'Comma Corner' was uninhabited but I did find an example of this species in another sheltered spot and this was the only butterfly that deigned to pose for me albeit briefly before another bank of clouds came over and it flew up into the trees.



Comma - Bickenhill 03.04.2018

With the clouds now looking like they had set in for a while I headed back home and had just got in when the rain started again.

Tomorrow looks like another wet day but fingers crossed for Thursday and Friday which are looking to be the best days this week...at least if the current forecasts are to be believed.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 03-Apr-18 09:52 PM GMT

Keep hanging in there, Neil. This is the month when things will really get going. Mind you, I said that last month!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 04-Apr-18 04:49 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, at least your seeing Butterflies 🦋🦋 It still feels like the Winter here, we nearly got blown a way today the wind was so strong 😊 Hope fully the

next couple of days will be better 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 04-Apr-18 10:31 PM GMT

Great to see you adding butterflies in among the moths Neil 😊 Lovely bright Comma, they seem to glow even more in the gloomier light of spring 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 04-Apr-18 11:37 PM GMT

Things may be slow, but at least they ARE moving, Neil, as your Comma sighting proves. We should all expect some action fairly soon as the season can only be kept on hold for a finite time.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Apr-18 07:32 PM GMT

Many thanks for all your comments Mark, Goldie, Wurzel and David 😊
Things are slowly getting going and I managed to get out for a couple of hours yesterday...

Thursday 5th April.

After a clear night and a frosty early morning, Thursday slowly turned into a beautiful day with plenty of sun and clear blue sky although there was still an underlying chill in the air from a light but steady breeze from the north.
I spent the morning in the garden accompanied by the music of bird song and spotted a few big queen bumble bees buzzing about plus my first bee flies this year.

With the temperature slowly rising to low double figures by the afternoon I decided to pay a return visit to my local spot at Bickenhill to see if the sun had tempted any more butterflies out.

Following my usual route I soon spotted a couple of patrolling male Brimstones, quite possibly the same ones I had seen here on Tuesday during my previous visit. These were soon followed by a Comma and then a Small Tortoiseshell, the latter being a faded example that was to turn up all over the site during the next couple of hours.



Comma - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell - Bickenhill 05.04.2018

The next butterfly seen was my first Peacock of year which means that I had now seen all the hibernators that I would normally expect to see around here.



Peacock - Bickenhill 05.04.2018

Red Admirals are not a spring butterfly for me and, although there has been some evidence that they are now occasionally overwintering in the Midlands, I don't think that this is the year to change that.

Continuing on my circuit I saw a few more Brimstones, Commas and Peacocks and at least one more Small Tortoiseshell, a lovely condition example that sods law meant was far too flighty for a photo. I was especially pleased to see the Peacocks as the summer brood last year had a very poor showing, I can only guess that they had tucked themselves into hibernation soon after emergence.



Peacock - Bickenhill 05.04.2018

Wandering on around to the other side of the site where most of the blackthorn is I noticed that a lot of it is still in bud but was pleased to see that one short stretch was now in full flower and was keen to see if I would find any butterflies on the blossom. Approaching slowly I was pleased to see a Comma and a Peacock both engrossed in feeding on the blossom and I spent some time watching them flit from flower to flower and managed to take some of my favourite type of photo of this time of year - butterflies on spring blossom.



Comma - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Peacock - Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Peacock - Bickenhill 05.04.2018

The Small Tortoiseshell that I mentioned earlier also turned up here, the 5th time that I had seen this individual in different spots around the site in the previous hour and a half or so.



Small Tortoiseshell – Bickenhill 05.04.2018

As well as the butterflies, I also noticed various types of bees flying around and heard my first Chiffchaffs of the season. It still felt like things were only just getting going here but nevertheless it was a cracking couple of hours on what felt like the first proper spring day this year 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 06-Apr-18 07:45 PM GMT

It's good to see things starting to happen in the Midlands, Neil. indeed I'd say you have had a better time of it than us down here !. Love to see the hibernators on Blackthorn against a clear background, you have captured that to perfection.

Great stuff !
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 06-Apr-18 11:20 PM GMT

Nice shots of the three species on the blackthorn, Neil. I remember a trip to Ryton a few years back, and all the same butterflies were up in the trees like that. A West Midlands thing perhaps... 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Maximus, 07-Apr-18 12:28 AM GMT

Agreed, lovely shots of the butterflies in the Blackthorn, Neil 😊

Mike

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 07-Apr-18 11:07 AM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil 🍷🍷 I'd tried to get a shot of the Peacocks I saw on the Blossom but they never made the effort to do that just stayed on the ground and I've yet to see a Comma. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-Apr-18 08:06 PM GMT

As others have commented on cracking set of shots of the butterflies in the Blackthorn Neil 😊 Things are shaping up nicely let's hope it keeps on going 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 08-Apr-18 03:07 PM GMT

Great selection Neil, especially the blossom shots. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Apr-18 08:11 PM GMT

Thanks for all your great comments Trevor, Dave, Mike, Goldie, Wurzel and Andrew 😊

Butterflies on spring blossom is something that I always look out for and try to get some photos of every year.

Since last Thursday the clouds rolled in and it has been very grey and gloomy here. We have just had over 24 hours of rain which has turned the garden soggy again.

Before the rain arrived I had the moth trap out a couple of times and had some more of the usual common species such as Common Quakers and Hebrew Characters still appearing in nice fresh condition and some interesting variation.



A nice fresh Hebrew Character.

The pale looking Common Quaker below led to some interesting debate as to its identity when I posted it on the Warwickshire Moth Group Facebook page until I emailed the photo to my CMR who confirmed it as a Common Quaker.



A pale Common Quaker - compare with the example below.



A darker looking Common Quaker.

I am still not seeing many micros, the only ones this week being a couple of Beautiful Plume Moths (*Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*)



Beautiful Plume Moth

I also had another nice example of the moth that reminds Wurzel of a cup of tea 😊



Early Grey - Coverdale 05.04.2018

The next couple of days are looking a bit grotty still but there seems to be a hint of things warming up next week.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-Apr-18 08:20 PM GMT

Unusual Moth the Plume moth Neil, I don't think I've seen one, they remind me of a Daddy Long Legs , that's what we call them up here I don't know their proper name. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Apr-18 10:01 PM GMT

Those are joyous scenes, Neil! I'm sure it was worth the long wait to see so many adult hibernators like you did.

Prepare yourself for next week, as things look to be about to take off significantly! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 13-Apr-18 01:07 PM GMT

Great moths Neil. I especially like the colours and patterns on that Hebrew Character. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Apr-18 03:42 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, I am sure the Daddy long legs you are referring to would be Crane Flies <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/species/daddy-longlegs> I can see what you mean though. There are a few species of Plume Moth in the UK, some of which can be difficult to get the ID right.

Thanks David, yes, always worth the wait to see a few butterflies on spring blossom 😊

Cheers Andrew, I particularly liked the colours on that nice fresh example. A common but variable moth.

Saturday 14th April

Over a week of cold grey and miserable weather came to an end today (Saturday 14th) with a beautiful spring day with plenty of warm sunny spells broken up by occasional fluffy white clouds.

After doing the usual Saturday morning chores, I took the opportunity to try and catch up with some jobs around the garden which have been falling well behind with all the recent rain making parts of it too soggy to walk on without turning it into a muddy morass.

By mid afternoon I reckoned I had done enough for one day and decided to have a walk down to the local park where I had been to have a look around and seen my first butterflies of the year a few weeks ago. As mentioned at the time, although only a ten minute walk from my house I had not previously had a look around this spot until the other week but reckoned it would be worth return visits.

The intervening weeks had brought some stands of blackthorn into full blossom and this was the first place I went to check out, soon finding my first butterfly of the day, a Small Tortoiseshell.



Blackthorn blossom - Wagon Lane Solihull 14.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018

This was the only butterfly around this blackthorn so I carried on a bit further to where it gives way to a mixed hedgerow with bramble patches in front. Here I found my second butterfly, another Small Tortoiseshell...



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018

...closely followed by a couple more who would often take off from their basking positions to challenge each other and spiral up into the sky. These aerial displays would often also include a Comma, a couple of which were also holding territories along here.



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018

I wandered along this stretch of hedge line and saw more Small Tortoiseshells including three separate pairs involved in courtship behaviour although as is usual with this species they all flew off with the male following the female before any result could be observed.



Small Tortoiseshell pair - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell pair - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell pair - Wagon Lane 14.04.2018

As mentioned above there were also a couple of Commas here, at least two males plus a nice large female that came wandering through at one point and stopped for a while to soak up the sun.



Comma male – Wagon Lane 14.04.2018



Comma female – Wagon Lane 14.04.2018



Comma male underside – Wagon Lane 14.04.2018

Along with maybe 8 to 10 Small Tortoiseshells and at least 3 Commas seen during the hour or so spent here, there was also a single Brimstone and my first Small White of the season. The Brimstone didn't stop patrolling but the Small White settled just long enough for me to grab a really ropey record shot (over exposed and with blades of grass all over the place) that I won't embarrass myself with by posting here but which was just good enough to confirm that it was a Small and not a Green-veined White.

I was a bit surprised to not see any Peacocks here today given the nice weather conditions and the other butterflies that were about. I have mentioned before that the summer brood had a poor showing here last year but I didn't see many Small Tortoiseshells locally last summer either and I have already seen more of those than I did of their summer brood here last year.

After yesterday's lovely weather we are back to dull grey overcast here today and with some overnight rain last night everything is all soggy again. Still, with Orange-tip, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue all reported around the country yesterday and with the weather forecast to improve later this week it finally looks as if the season is getting into its stride.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 15-Apr-18 05:04 PM GMT

Fantastic sequenc of shots Neil, those Small Torts look especially resplendent 🤩👍 It seems that finally the wait might be over and none too soon! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 15-Apr-18 06:38 PM GMT

The second Small Tortoiseshell in your sequence is very boldly marked, lovely blue spots. Good to see Spring erupting everywhere now.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 15-Apr-18 08:53 PM GMT

I'm still awaiting a good Small Tortoiseshell experience this year but hopefully tomorrow afternoon will rectify that. Your shots have whetted my appetite though 😊👍

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 15-Apr-18 11:01 PM GMT

Your Small Tortoiseshells really show the amazing variety in colour and markings there actually are in this species. They do seem to have survived the late cold part of winter well this year too. Great set of photos, Neil. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 16-Apr-18 09:40 AM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, isn't it just great to see the Small Tortoiseshell 🤩 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 16-Apr-18 10:49 AM GMT

What a great set of shots Neil, those Torts look gorgeous. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Apr-18 07:16 PM GMT

That's an absolute Tortoiseshell fest, Neil! I particularly like your second individual with the wider than normal hindwing blue border.

Interesting too that your local blackthorn is so well advanced. Ours round my way is only now starting to emerge.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Apr-18 08:19 PM GMT

Thanks all for the great comments 😊

Having looked closely at the Tortoiseshell photos again it appears that all of them, including those in the pairs, are different individuals making 11 in total. I also believe there were a couple more that I didn't manage to photograph meaning my count of these was a little low. This also highlights how variable this species can actually be both in ground colour and size of markings.

Friday 20th April

Talk about one extreme to the other. After all the grey and wet weather last week, this week has been a scorcher...with me stuck in work 😊

I saw my first Orange-tips of the year today, from the car whilst on my way home at lunchtime. Arriving at home I went into the garden to see if there was anything about and immediately spotted a Comma flitting around. A closer look showed it to be a female who was exploring between the shrubs and occasionally settling but with wings closed in the heat. The shot below was taken with a bit of infill flash to light up the shadow.



Comma - Coverdale 20.04.2018

We then went round to pay our usual Friday afternoon visit to my Mom and I took the opportunity to have a quick look around the park down the road from her house. I quick 20 minute circuit produced 1 Comma, 1 Peacock and my first Speckled Wood of the year, none of which showed any sign of stopping in the afternoon heat.

Back home later in the afternoon I spotted 2 Holly Blues in the garden but they too didn't hang around.

The warmer (hot) weather has brought some more moths out in the garden although total numbers have been tempered somewhat by clear nights which have led to a bit of nipiness in the air by early morning when I check the trap at around 05.00 am before getting ready for work. I am now up to a total of 28 species of moth to the trap this year, 17 macro and 11 micro.



Pine Beauty - only my second after having one in 2016.



Early Thorn - a nice fresh male.



Early Thorn female – compare with the male above.



Red-green Carpet – Four of these on Wednesday night.



Acleris cristana – a striking colour form of this very variable micro.

With stunning inevitability it appear we may be having a thunderstorm or two here tomorrow 😬

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freman

by ernie f, 20-Apr-18 10:22 PM GMT

Neil

Stunning clarity in your recent photos. I've not looked at your other posts yet but I will now. I particularly like the way you used the flash on the comma. I might try that myself and see what happens.

Cheers
Ern

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Apr-18 10:04 PM GMT

Yes Neil, I concur with your thoughts regarding levels of frustration when you're stuck in work during the first truly warm spell of the year. Nothing worse than seeing your first Orange Tips of the year whilst driving along in the car. 😞

Lovely Comma image though, along with another array of interesting moths.

At least things can now be considered truly 'up and running'.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 22-Apr-18 08:03 PM GMT

It is the Law of Sod that predicts (more accurately than the weather people) come the good weather those that could benefit most from it will be stuck at work 😞 I can't wait to retire, only another 26 years 😊

Still on a more up beat note – great Comma and I love the dimorphism shown by the Early Thorn 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Apr-18 08:18 PM GMT

Thanks David, yes, things are definitely up and running...or at least they were before the weather took a turn for the worse again.

David M wrote:

...Nothing worse than seeing your first Orange Tips of the year whilst driving along in the car...

Ah!..but better than not seeing them. Just spotting the unmistakable sight of a couple of Orange-tips from the car was a lift to the spirit.

Cheers Wurzel, the Law of Sod was particularly active on Saturday...

Saturday 21st April

A lovely sunny morning whilst we were doing the morning shopping and the usual household stuff, I checked the forecast (I know 😊) and seeing that it was supposed to stay nice for the afternoon I decided to pay my first visit this year to my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull.

I got there at about 2.00pm and almost immediately spotted a couple of male Orange-tips patrolling along the hedgerows. One of these made the briefest of stops on a bright blue flower (Alkanet ?) and I just managed one quick photo before he was off again.



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 21.04.2018

Over the course of the next hour or so I saw maybe half a dozen male Orange-tips actively flying around the various hedgerows here but none were stopping in the afternoon heat. I also saw a couple each of Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma, one of the latter being the only other butterfly that I managed to get a photo of as he kept returning to the same spot. Everything else was just too active.



Comma - Castle Hills 21.04.2018

As I had been wandering around I had noticed that it had steadily been feeling more muggy and I had seen a dark bank of cloud that was steadily approaching. Just before this cloud arrived it all went very quiet, the butterflies had all disappeared and the background noise of bird song had ceased. Uh Oh! I thought...better get back. I was just getting back to where my car was parked when the first big rain drops fell so I increased my pace for the last hundred yards or so and just made it before the heavens opened and a deluge of biblical proportions hammered down. To tell the truth, the forecast had said that heavy rain and possible thunderstorms were heading in but they were supposed to arrive here overnight. In the end we did have more heavy rain overnight along with some very blustery wind but we avoided the thunder and lightening that they apparently had just a few miles to the south.

Sunday 22nd April.

After the wet and wild weather we had overnight, Sunday morning was much fresher although there were still a few sunny spells during which it felt pleasantly warm. Pottering about in the garden I watched a couple of Holly Blues chasing each other about and an unidentified White rapidly passed through.

I also spotted a familiar shape flitting about down the bottom of the garden...my first garden Speckled Wood this year, a nice female no less 😊 She settled where I had earlier been cutting back some brambles and I managed a couple of photos, albeit with an annoying shadow across her wings, before she decided to carry on her wanderings.



Speckled Wood female - Coverdale 22.04.2018

Still no males yet but it cannot be long now before they appear in the garden and set up their territories in the usual spots.

Sunday afternoon was then spent at the Warwickshire BC Spring meeting where more than 90 members enjoyed some interesting talks and plenty of lovely home made cake 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 23-Apr-18 09:21 PM GMT

Very nicely marked female Specklie, Neil.
If you are having Specklie withdrawal symptoms, with no males, then I invite you to my 'local' patch where there are hundreds resident. They are becoming a nuisance, chasing off my quarry, and sending others up.

Spring wouldn't be the same without them.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 23-Apr-18 09:34 PM GMT

Always good to know the first Specklies have appeared in your garden, Neil! 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Apr-18 08:44 AM GMT

Great news Neil - I've yet to see my first Specklie but the season is now definitely going the right way now that you have 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 24-Apr-18 02:28 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, I've not seen my first Speckie yet but hope fully it won't be long now, I must say I love the Orange Tip contrasting with the Blue flower 😊 I hope you manage if you go back there to get another shot of it because it looks great. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 24-Apr-18 07:57 PM GMT

Gorgeous looking Orange-tip, yes that is Green Alkanet it's on 😊. My work transect looks to be on the verge of a Speckled Wood explosion, 6 seen on Sunday, including a mating pair. Hopefully the damp conditions we've had will cause a nationwide explosion. I suspect that's why Green'-veined White numbers are rapidly increasing too, at least in my neck of the woods.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 25-Apr-18 10:48 AM GMT

Great selection of moths Neil. The Early Thorn pair are lovely. 😊
And good job getting the Orange-tip shot.

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Apr-18 06:06 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

..I also spotted a familiar shape flitting about down the bottom of the garden...my first garden Speckled Wood this year, a nice female no less..

The first of many I hope, Neil! Spring hasn't truly sprung till we see images of your domestic Specklies! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 25-Apr-18 06:22 PM GMT

Spring is the first swallow, the first Orangetip - and the first of Neil's Specklies! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Apr-18 07:34 PM GMT

Thanks all for the comments, it is always good to see the first Specklies back in my garden each year 😊

Just out of interest I have looked back at the dates I have first seen them in my garden since I first started taking note;

- 07.04.2017
- 04.05.2016
- 09.04.2015
- 11.04.2014
- 07.05.2013
- 25.03.2012
- 06.04.2011

This shows that despite the long winter and some significant periods of cold and snow, this year - 22.04.2018 - is by no means the latest.

Thursday 26th April

After the brief taste of summer we had the other week it almost feels like we have quickly moved on into autumn around here with an almost constant succession of dull wet and windy days. In actual truth it has returned to what are more normal conditions for this time of year with typical April showers interspersed with brief sunny spells albeit with a cool wind on most days keeping temperatures down.

Looking at the forecast earlier this week, Thursday had seemed to be the best day before more bands of rain would be heading in for the weekend, so I decided to take a flyer and book the day off.

Monday to Wednesday were mostly dull and wet with temperatures struggling into low double figures and some heavy rain showers. Thursday arrived and the forecast was looking to be fairly accurate with a drier but nippy morning and some longer sunny spells that slowly began to make it feel quite pleasant. I spent the first couple of hours pottering about in the garden and was pleased to see a male Speckled Wood had taken up residence in one of the usual corners.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 26.04.2018

By early afternoon the temperature had reached 14 degrees although it was still feeling a bit nippy when the sun was covered by a cloud for any length of time. My purpose in taking the day off was to get out to one of my local spots and hopefully see some Orange-tips and I figured the mix of sun and cloud would mean that they would be flying but settling often enough for some photo opportunities.

Anyway, I decided to try my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull and soon after parking up and heading down the first path I spotted an Orange-tip heading towards me along the hedgerow. Just before he reached me the sun disappeared behind a cloud and sure enough he settled about a dozen feet in front of me with wings still spread to catch whatever warmth he could. This enabled me to sneak up and take a couple of photos before the sun reappeared and he was off again.



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 26.04.18

Over the next couple of hours as I wandered along the paths here, there was a mix of approximately 50/50 cloud and sun which gave me the opportunities to get a few photos of the Orange-tips using the tried and tested method of watching where one settled when a cloud covered the sun and waiting for the sun to reappear when they would open their wings briefly before taking off again.



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 26.04.18



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 26.04.18

It is always nice to see an Orange-tip on a blue flower and a couple of patches of forget-me-nots along one stretch gave me the chance for the shot below.



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 26.04.18

I was watching one particular Orange-tip when a large dark cloud covered the sun for ten minutes and I felt a few drops of rain in the air which luckily didn't develop into much. I did however, see the OT settle on a blackthorn where he immediately closed his wings to sit it out until the sun reappeared which gave me the chance for a nice underside shot.



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 26.04.18

I kept watch on him hoping for an open wing shot when the sun reappeared but just as that happened a gust of wind hit him and he took off straight away.

Most of the Orange-tips seen were males with just one female spotted who seemed to be more interested in feeding than egg laying. In fact I checked numerous cuckoo flower and garlic mustard plants without finding a single egg which seems to indicate that it is still early days for these here.



Orange-tip female – Castle Hills 26.04.18



Orange-tip female – Castle Hills 26.04.18

Along with the Orange-tips, I was hoping to see a Green-veined White or two which I had not yet managed to see this year. In the end I managed to find a couple of these, both males that looked like they had not been out for long.



Green-veined White male - Castle Hills 26.04.2018



Green-veined White male - Castle Hills 26.04.2018

Just like the Orange-tip mentioned above, I was watching one of the GFWs when a cloud covered the sun and he went up onto a nearby blackthorn to sit it out until the sun reappeared.



Green-veined White male - Castle Hills 26.04.2018

There is an area here with some large nettle beds which were playing host to some Small Tortoiseshells, I counted at least 4 and suspect there was a couple more but as they were all moving between the different nettle beds I cannot be certain.



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 26.04.2018



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 26.04.2018

A couple of Commas were also spotted, one of which I was almost on top of as he was settled low down at the side of the path during one of the cloudier spells.



Comma - Castle Hills 26.04.2018



Comma – Castle Hills 26.04.2018

All in all, not that many butterflies were seen during my couple of hours here, maybe 7-8 Orange-tips, 2 Green-veined Whites, 4-6 Small Tortoiseshells, 2 Commas and a single Speckled Wood, but given the wet and cool weather we have had most of this week that is probably not surprising. In any case it was just good to get out and see those that were around.

Today (Friday) has been another awful day with almost constant rain until late afternoon and the weekend is not looking much better...glad I took the chance and took my day off on Thursday 😊.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 27-Apr-18 09:30 PM GMT

Great set of images, Neil, particularly the Orange Tip on Forget-me-nots. Also you have a female OT, they have yet to appear on my patch.

Lousy weather today here, 😞.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Apr-18 11:27 PM GMT

Absolutely cracking shots Neil 😊👍 I too placed all my money on Thursday and so watched the weather very carefully during the week – it was quite worrying as it was getting worse as the week went on but then it all came good – and for you too! If only we could get some settled weather 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 28-Apr-18 10:39 AM GMT

👍 I'm thinking I should have taken a day off this past week but I fear I may have ruined everyone's day given the run of bad luck I'm currently having with the weather. Next Tuesday looked good a few days ago but now looks like another dull wet day is on the cards with things warming up later in the week ready for my weekend at work 😊. At least images like yours are some compensation for not seeing them with my own eyes!

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-Apr-18 08:22 PM GMT

You really are the master of lighting when it comes to taking images of Whites, Neil. Lovely crisp, clear photographs with the butterflies posing superbly.

You were lagging behind my part of the UK but certainly Pierids seem to be more numerous in the Midlands right now than they are in south Wales.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 30-Apr-18 09:50 PM GMT

Sounds like you used the same tactics as I used last week, Neil, when photographing your Orangetips. For picture taking, these cool bright days are invaluable.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 01-May-18 09:32 AM GMT

Fantastic shots Neil 🍷 No GV Whites seen here yet, fingers crossed this coming week-end we'll see some 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 01-May-18 01:13 PM GMT

Great selection Neil, lovely open wing shots. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-May-18 07:02 PM GMT

Many thanks for the great comments all 😊

Since last Thursday the weather has been atrocious here, as I suppose it has most places. Unremitting gloomy clouds, blustery wind and buckets of rain and when the sky has cleared it has been overnight which resulted in frosts on a couple of mornings.

After raining again most of the day today, we had a few sunny spells late afternoon and just after getting in from work I spotted a Green-veined White in the garden through the kitchen window. I watched it settle and with it being the first butterfly I had seen all week I grabbed my camera and shot outside, just in time to grab a couple of shots before it warmed up enough to take off and disappear next door. Shortly after that the dark clouds came over again and so that was that.



Green-veined White - Coverdale 02.05.2018

With the nights being either too cold or too windy, or both, I have not put the trap out in the garden now for over a week. The last time was the night of Monday 23rd April when I had my first Brimstone Moth of the year. These usually turn up in good numbers as the season progresses but the first one is always a cheering sight with its bright yellow colour.



Brimstone Moth - Coverdale 23.04.2018



Brimstone Moth – Coverdale 23.04.2018

Things look to be improving somewhat from tomorrow, just in time for the bank holiday weekend so hopefully we will all be out seeing some butterflies over the next few days.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 02-May-18 10:07 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

Things look to be improving somewhat from tomorrow, just in time for the bank holiday weekend so hopefully we will all be out seeing some butterflies over the next few days.

Yes, it's a pattern we're not used to, Neil...i.e. the weather markedly improving IN TIME for Bank Holiday weekend.

Like you, I hope we can all get out and greet some new species, although in the meantime, a reminder of how lovely Brimstone moths are is reasonable compensation!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 03-May-18 01:56 PM GMT

As David says Neil it's an unusual weather pattern, I'm so used to the best weather days being mid-week and the it steadily getting worse just in time for the weekend...mind you there's still a few days to go yet 😊 The Brimstone is a classy looking moth, I love the almost metallic looking dash on the fore wing 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 03-May-18 03:04 PM GMT

What a lovely moth that Brimstone is Neil. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 04-May-18 05:22 PM GMT

I was thinking about you today Neil and when you read my next post you'll understand why 😊 Some lovely shots there – those OT's are so sharp and vibrant they look like they are about to fly out of the PC 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-May-18 08:12 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments David, Wurzel and Andrew 😊

That yellow colour of the Brimstone Moth is can be remarkably good camouflage against yellowing leaves later in the season, much like the underside of Clouded Yellows.

Cheers Pauline, just seen your post...welcome to the club 😊

Friday 4th April

Although we seem set to have some good weather coming in for the bank holiday weekend it isn't here yet and today was mostly cloudy until later in the afternoon when the sun broke through for a few short periods. Nevertheless it was enough to tempt some butterflies out and whilst pottering about in the garden I was visited by passing examples of at least one each of Orange-tip and Holly Blue. A single Green-veined White stopped briefly before it too continued on it's way.



Green-veined White - Coverdale 04.05.2018

More accommodating were the Speckled Woods, at least three different males in varying condition were seen squabbling over favoured basking spots at the bottom of the garden.



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 04.05.2018



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 04.05.2018



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 04.05.2018



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 04.05.2018

One of them looked to have had a lucky escape that proves the value of the hind wing eye spots...



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 04.05.2018

This individual also tried it on with a passing female that took off next door with the male in pursuit,



Speckled Wood pair – Coverdale 04.05.2018

After a minute or so he returned to his usual spot to find one of the other males there and so ensued another round of spiralling round each other.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 05-May-18 07:44 AM GMT

Those Specklies in your garden are going to be exhausted by Monday night, Neil, what with this warm spell set to cover the entire Bank Holiday weekend!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-May-18 09:06 AM GMT

Good to see the Specklies building in numbers Neil 😊 Interesting to see territorial behaviour 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 05-May-18 02:21 PM GMT

All is now as it should be up your way, Neil, with the Specklies back in their accustomed haunts. Good to see them. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 05-May-18 08:19 PM GMT

Just saw my first Speckie today Neil and had to go to Southport to see it , it didn't even open it's wings, I didn't care 😊 my first this year and you've got all those in your garden 🍀 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-May-18 06:01 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments David ,Wurzel, Dave and Goldie, very much appreciated as always 😊

Saturday 5th May Part 1 – Goings on in the garden.

Saturday dawned with wall to wall blue sky and glorious sunshine but I wasn't building my hopes up as this often happens here and then clouds build quickly though the morning, in fact the forecast had us down for a mostly cloudy day albeit warmer than of late.

After doing the usual early morning shopping we were back in the house by 09.30am and with the sun still shining from a clear blue sky I went to sit in the garden with a mug of coffee and just chill for a few minutes. I then just pottered about for a bit whilst I had a think on what to do later, much depending on whether the clouds would build up or not.

Butterflies were already quite active and I watched a couple of Speckled Wood spiralling around each other down the bottom of the garden. When these finished their tussle one of them went next door but the other settled in one of the usual spots and showed itself to be a quite fresh individual that had already had a close escape, once again proving the effectiveness of those hind wing eyespots.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 05.05.2018

With it rapidly warming up he quickly closed his wings to regulate his temperature and for the rest of the morning whenever I saw a Specklie settled in the garden they had their wings tightly closed.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 05.05.2018

A few 'whites' were soon passing through including at least one each of Green-veined White and male Orange-tip. One of the wandering 'whites' settled briefly and turned out to be a female Orange-tip, the first female of this species I have seen in the garden so far this year.



Orange-tip female – Coverdale 05.05.2018

By midday and with the rest of the day looking like it was going to remain warm and sunny we decided to have a drive down to Snitterfield Bushes...more to come on this in my next report.

Back home later in the afternoon, I was once again pottering about in the garden and watching the various butterflies passing through, most of which were still very active but occasionally one of them would stop for a brief moment.



Green-veined White female - Coverdale 05.05.2018

I then spotted a female Brimstone fluttering about around the alder buckthorns and as I watched she dropped down onto a dandelion which gave me the chance to grab a few quick photos.



Brimstone female - Coverdale 05.05.2018

She then carried on fluttering around the buckthorns and occasionally settled to lay a single egg each time.



Brimstone female laying egg on Alder Buckthorn.



Egg just visible on underside of leaf.

After doing this for a while she dropped down again, this time appearing just to have a rest...



Time for a rest before carrying on.

...before carrying on fluttering up and down the garden and every now and then coming back to the buckthorns.



Time to lay another egg.



Female Brimstone and freshly laid egg – Coverdale 05.05.2018

Whilst on one of these trips up and down the garden she was intercepted by a male who chased her about before they both went next door and I saw them settle high up in one of the neighbours trees. I managed to get a photo at full zoom and a very tight crop appears to show them in cop.



Brimstones in cop – a very tight crop of a shot a full zoom.

Assuming that the female had already mated and was not laying infertile eggs, I have read that some butterflies will mate more than once, but I am not sure how common this is and with which species. Anyway, I have never seen Brimstones in cop before and if this pair is typical then it appears that it may take place fairly high up in trees and shrubs.

Also, a couple of observations; firstly I have read somewhere, not sure where now, that Brimstones are a morning butterfly and not often seen flying past early afternoon. The Brimstone activity in the garden described above all took place after 4.00pm and carried on until well past 5.00pm. Maybe this is down to air temperature which was certainly on the warm side at the time.

Secondly, I have often read that Brimstone females prefer young shoots on small plants in full sun to lay their eggs. Yesterday, and this is something I have seen before, the female seemed to prefer laying on shrubs in partial shade. I have half a dozen alder buckthorn shrubs from whips I planted some years ago and they all receive full sun at some point in the day, some in the morning and some in the afternoon with a transitional period when each is in partial shade.

Anyway, now to sort out the photos from Snitterfield for part 2.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 06-May-18 07:53 PM GMT

Fantastic shots of the Brimstone laying eggs.

And the mating pair is great too. I do not have a shot of that yet.

I am pleased that you are overturning the so-called rules of butterfly behaviours. I keep coming across books that give the accepted wisdom of all sorts of species only to observe in the wild that the butterflies have not read the same books as me!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 06-May-18 08:13 PM GMT

Wow, first class shots Neil. Reminds me of that other egg-laying female that you also captured perfectly – competition winner wasn't it? Really interesting observations too. I believe others on this site have come across this before albeit infrequently so perhaps they can shed more light on it. What I can tell you is that I have taken shots of mating Brimstones a couple of times in the past and on those occasions they were certainly low down – about 2 feet from the ground and well camouflaged under a large leaf. I'm assuming you'll be keeping an eye on those eggs to check that they hatch?

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 06-May-18 08:35 PM GMT

Great Brimstone observations, Neil, especially the egg-laying. 😊 I have to say that this is the first year I have regularly seen them flying late in the day – I spotted a couple this evening at nearly seven o'clock. It wouldn't surprise me at all if they mated more than once: they emerge as early as March and you see both sexes continue flying into June. You see plenty of courtship activity throughout.

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 06-May-18 10:56 PM GMT

Those are notable images, Neil. I believe Pierid females DO sometimes mate more than once but it's difficult to know why they do this when so many other butterflies don't.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-May-18 10:57 PM GMT

Brill shots Neil of the Brimstone behaviour 😊 You certainly have this butterflying lark all taped out; getting shots while enjoying a relaxing beverage and pottering 😊 Looking forward to the Snitterfield report 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 06-May-18 10:57 PM GMT

Those are notable images, Neil. I believe Pierid females DO sometimes mate more than once but it's difficult to know why they do this when so many other butterflies don't.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-May-18 08:16 PM GMT

Thanks Ernie, I reckon a lot of the conventional 'wisdom' has just been copied and repeated from book to book in the past. At least some of the more modern and better tomes seem to be correcting some of these 'facts'.

Cheers Pauline, if I remember right that other photo was back in 2015, I can't believe how fast that time has gone. Interesting comments about the mating Brimstones, I have seen single individuals of both sexes taking refuge from hot sun under underneath low growing foliage so I suppose it makes sense that mating would take place in similar locations.

Hi Dave, yes, given the comparatively long life of the adults, it would make sense.

Thanks David, I have read that some other species mate more than once but despite searching through my literature cannot find the references.

Cheers Wurzel, I am all for 'lazy butterflying' in fact even when I am out in the field I do a lot of standing still and waiting to see what comes along.

Saturday 5th May Part 2 – Snitterfield Bushes.

As I mentioned in my last report, with Saturday afternoon continuing to be much sunnier and warmer than originally forecast here, we decided to have a drive down to Snitterfield Bushes. This is a mixed broadleaved woodland located a couple of miles north of Stratford-upon-Avon that has regenerated on the site of an old WWII airfield and which is managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

Jane likes it here as there are some good firm paths around the reserve which she can manage with her limited mobility and we often visit here at around this time of year to see the displays of Primroses and Bluebells.



Bluebells at Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018

It only takes 30 minutes or so from our house to get to Snitterfield and so it was not long before we had parked up and immediately on getting out of the car we saw a Green-veined White, Orange-tip and Brimstone.

Wandering around the paths for the next hour or so we saw plenty of 'whites' most of which seemed to be an even split between Green-veined and both male and female Orange-tip, but also at least three Large Whites, my first of these this year. With the temperature by now up into the twenties, most of the butterflies were well warmed up and flying practically non-stop which made getting any photos a challenge. Nevertheless, with an occasional small white cloud passing over and watching the butterflies and looking for favoured stopping spots, I managed a few shots.

None of the butterflies were stopping to bask as such and when they did briefly settle it was usually with wings part open or fully closed to regulate

their temperature.



Green-veined White – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Green-veined White – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Green-veined White – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Green-veined White – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Orange-tip – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Orange-tip – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Orange-tip – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Orange-tip – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Orange-tip female – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018



Orange-tip female – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018

A couple of Speckled Woods were seen around the shadier sections...



Speckled Wood – Snitterfield Bushes 05.05.2018

...and also a couple of Commas and a single Peacock which were far too flighty to let me get anywhere close.

In truth, I didn't see any butterflies that I couldn't have seen at my local spots closer to home but this is a much nicer woodland than I have locally and Jane prefers it here where she can see more from better paths.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-May-18 10:41 PM GMT

You've captured the colours beautifully on those shots Neil, they practically leap out of the screen 😊🌿 I like lazy butterflying too, one day I hope to have time to fully embrace it 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 08-May-18 09:54 AM GMT

Lovely shot of the Blue Bells Neil, and the OT's it's always great to see them 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-May-18 08:03 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I am working on a cunning plan which hopefully will enable me to embrace it more regularly in a few years time (translation – looking at taking early retirement in 3 years) 😊

Thanks Goldie, I know it has been said before...you can't have too many photos of Orange-tips 😊

Sunday 6th May

Sunday was another scorcher with not a cloud in the sky all day. I ummed and ahed a bit over whether to go out anywhere but in the end decided to stay at home and just enjoy a lazy day in the garden, pottering about a bit interspersed with plenty of sitting there just chilling out and watching for what came along. I always remember an old feller that I worked with years ago who often said 'time spent doing nothing can be time well spent', a philosophy that I can fully appreciate 😊

Various butterflies were soon seen including the usual couple of Speckled Wood and passing Holly Blues, Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites, all of which were already highly mobile from around 09.00. Apart from the Speckled Woods that kept returning to their favoured perches after chasing various intruders away, the only butterfly that stopped for more than a second or so was a female Orange-tip that visited my only surviving bowles mauve plant.



Orange-tip female - Coverdale 06.05.2018

As well as this plant which is in a container, I had a couple more planted in a side bed, both of which were finished off by the frosts earlier this year. I must remember to take some cuttings this year.

Later in the morning a male Brimstone started to repeatedly flutter around the alder buckthorns, probably in search of a female, but as the morning got hotter he increasingly began settling on other plants.



Brimstone male - Coverdale 06.05.2018



Brimstone male - Coverdale 06.05.2018

I got the distinct impression that he didn't like the heat and was settling for a rest. This impression was reinforced when he took shelter in the shade beneath a nettle leaf and stayed there for nearly an hour before reappearing and continuing on his way.



Brimstone male – Coverdale 06.05.2018

The only other photos I managed all day were of the Speckled Woods who would often settle but with their wings tightly shut which at least gave me the chance for one or two nice underside shots,



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 06.05.2018

Later in the afternoon one of the Speckled Wood took to settling in a patch of light shade where I managed to catch him with his wings open briefly before he closed them,



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 06.05.2018

I also watched this individual visit a patch of damp ground and take up moisture/salts, something that I have not often witnessed this species do, but then again we don't usually get such high temperatures at this time of year,



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 06.05.2018

A quiet but very enjoyable day despite not going out anywhere 😊

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-May-18 10:19 PM GMT

I find Brimstones aren't keen on excessive heat, Neil, so no surprise that yours was seeking shade.

Great way to spend a lazy day, sat in your garden watching the butterfly world go by. This is the time of year when you don't feel too guilty for doing so, knowing that things will get livelier as the weeks pass by.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-May-18 11:27 AM GMT

More interesting behaviour Neil. 😊 I've not seen shade seeking Brimstone before but have seen Specklies taking salts before. Both times it was during a really hot and dry spell of weather 😊 Only three years 🤔🇩🇪🇩🇪 I've still got 26 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 09-May-18 04:35 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, you'll have to get busy with those Boules Mauve cuttings 😊 it's surprising how the Butterflies just love them 😊 I went to HLB my local CP, I love watching the Speckies chasing all opposition a way, except when you get a Butterfly your interested in like a Holly Blue and they dive on it like they did with my HB 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 10-May-18 03:42 PM GMT

A fantastic selection of shots Neil. Great Brimstone observations, and I love the OT's of course! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 11-May-18 07:47 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments David, Wurzel, Goldie and Andrew 😊

Monday May 7th

Bank Holiday Monday...and what a scorcher!

After a gloriously sunny weekend, Monday morning dawned with more of the same and if anything it was looking to be even hotter. Clear skies had led to an appreciable drop in temperature overnight but after an initially nippy morning it was soon warming up and by 09.00am the usual garden butterflies were all active.

Our daughter Sarah popped in with our little granddaughter for a couple of hours so the morning was spent with us all out in the garden taking advantage of the sun.

Having had a lazy day at home on Sunday I had already decided that I would pop out somewhere later today...but where?

I didn't really want to bother with my local spots as I wouldn't yet see anything there that I wasn't seeing in the garden, but I didn't have the time for a worthwhile visit too far away. I had seen that Green Hairstreaks were flying at various sites around the midlands, including the Warwickshire BC reserve at Ryton Wood Meadows, and with this being the closest reliable site for these I decided to head there.

I arrived at Ryton just after 1.30pm and spent the first hour or so just wandering around the wood itself taking advantage of the shadier conditions and enjoying the displays of Bluebells which are quite expansive here.



Bluebells – Ryton Wood 07.05.2018



Bluebells – Ryton Wood 07.05.2018

It has to be said that many of the paths and rides around the main wood are now becoming quite overgrown due to a lack of management following the wood's owner taking over control and this is beginning to have a negative impact on some of the butterfly species found within the wood. Luckily, Warwickshire BC still manage the meadows and also has a partnership with neighbouring Ryton Pools Country Park where a number of initiatives are underway to support butterflies in these areas alongside the edge of the wood.

Eventually I wandered around to the meadows and the first thing that caught my eye was a nice display of Cowslips,



Cowslips – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018

Moving over to the hedgerow which is the Green Hairstreak hotspot here I immediately spotted a couple of males chasing each other around the top of a hawthorn, closely followed by another couple, and the more I looked the more I saw. These would settle occasionally but soon be off again when they spotted each other and numerous times I saw 2, 3 or 4 individuals mixing it up around the tops of the various shrubs along this stretch of hedgerow.



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018

I have previously found that the best way to get a photo of a Green Hairstreak in these conditions is to wait patiently near a favoured shrub and sooner or later one will come a bit lower down and settle within reach. The variable angle screen on my Lumix FZ200 is also a great help in this with many photos taken with the camera held above my head. Using this method over the next couple of hours, I managed some photos I was happy with, along with many shots of blurry butterflies disappearing out of frame as they were very flighty in the heat and there always seemed to be something to chase away. This wasn't helped by hundreds of small day flying longhorn moths that were swarming around the same shrubs which would often become the targets of the Hairstreak's attentions.



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018

It was difficult to be accurate with numbers when many of the Green Hairstreaks were chasing each other backwards and forwards between a number of shrubs but there must have been at least 20 plus along this stretch of hedgerow plus another half dozen or so seen at other spots along the edge of the wood. These were all males going by their territorial antics and I only saw a couple of females. These were fluttering about further away from the hedge line and lower down amongst the vegetation in search of the Birds-foot trefoil which this species breeds on here.



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018

Other butterflies seen were Brimstones in good numbers and Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites although neither of the latter two species were as numerous as I usually see here. Peacocks are another butterfly which I would normally expect to see here but which were notable by their absence today. Maybe they were hiding away on what had become the hottest day of the year so far.

I also had a good look for Grizzled and Dingy Skippers but without success, probably a bit early here but I suspect that given the weather remained good – if not so hot – for a further few days that they may be out by now.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 11-May-18 09:08 PM GMT

Lovely Green Hairstreaks, Neil, from a spot I know very well. I sincerely hope the woods don't go downhill, as they have boasted some good species up until now.

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 13-May-18 10:57 PM GMT

Love the Green Hairstreaks, Neil....and I love the spring flowers equally!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 13-May-18 11:51 PM GMT

Cracking Greenstreaks Neil 😊 Great to see the variation shown by that species, looks like you've a couple of punctata in there 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-May-18 07:29 PM GMT

Hi Dave, unfortunately parts of the main wood are already going down hill a bit and becoming overgrown due to lack of management. Warks BC are trying to compensate along the edges of the wood in the meadows and the country park where they can still carry out some management.

Thanks David, the flowers are an attraction by themselves and plenty of people visit here just to see the bluebells.

Cheers Wurzel, this site always produces a good variation of spottiness in the Green Hairstreaks here. I think the punctata is probably the same individual photographed at different times from different angles.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-May-18 08:26 PM GMT

A bit of a catch up post from the weekend..although I feel a bit like the poor relation compared to all those lovely Dukes, Pearls etc I am seeing posted on other PDs

Saturday 12th May

The weekend arrived and it was back to normal...in other words, a decent sunny start to the morning but with clouds building rapidly to give a dull grey overcast for most of the day.

At least it was dry so between doing stuff around the house I did some pottering around the garden during which the occasional brighter spell – not quite sunny but a thinning of the cloud – produced a few butterflies.

A couple of the resident male Speckled Woods were in their usual corners but looking a bit worse for wear now,



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 12.05.2018

A nice large female came wandering through and stopped to bask for a while before carrying on her way, right in front of the males who were that busy chasing each other about that they completely missed her.



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 12.05.2018

At one point a worn and rather undersized male Green-veined White came fluttering along, it's weak flight in the cool conditions looking very much like that of a Wood White...I wish 😊



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 12.05.2018

The only other species seen today was a Holly Blue that actually stopped just long enough for me to get a quick photo, not exactly up to miller standards but the closest I had got to one of these so far this year.



Holly Blue – Coverdale 12.05.2018

Sunday 13th May.

A similar start to the morning but today the clouds took longer to build up and they didn't form a complete blanket so there continued to be some good sunny spells which made for a much brighter and warmer day.

I did think about going out somewhere but with the more localised species such as Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and Small Blues only just beginning to be reported in Warwickshire I decided to leave it for another week or so to give a bit more time for numbers to build up. I also still have loads of stuff to do at home which at least means the brownie points are being topped up...but as usual I also managed to squeeze in a few sessions in the garden.

As well as the more worn examples, there were some better condition Speckled Woods about today, I counted at least four different males through the day by taking photos and comparing differences in condition and markings.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 13.05.2018



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 13.05.2018



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 13.05.2018

Another couple of females were seen, both of them different individuals to the one seen yesterday,



Speckled Wood female – Coverdale 13.05.2018



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 13.05.2018

Green-veined Whites were far more active in the warmer conditions today and only occasionally stopped for a quick refuel, unlike the couple of Orange-tips I saw which didn't stop at all.



Green-veined White male – Coverdale 13.05.2018

A female Holly Blue was fluttering around the Holly bushes in the garden and kept investigating the flower buds but was always hidden by leaves or shadows. She eventually came out and perched on a nearby Lilac and opened her wings about half way which enabled me to get a better photo than yesterdays before she carried on fluttering down the garden and over next door.



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 12.05.2018

As well as the butterflies mentioned above, I also saw a couple each of Small and Large Whites during the day which like the Orange-tips were constantly flying and didn't settle once whilst I was watching them.

Back to work yesterday (Monday) and you guessed it, clear blue skies all day...and today 😞

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 15-May-18 10:56 PM GMT

Lovely Holly Blue Neil in amongst the Specklies 😊 I know what you mean about all the Dukes and Pearls as over my way we're about a week or two behind everyone else in the East, plus I have try and catch up with my PD 😞 I reckon this weekend could be good for both of us 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 16-May-18 10:32 AM GMT

I agree Neil, we're so late up here as well, definitely the poor relations and having to travel miles to look and then be disappointed when nothing as emerged, I suppose that's butterflying for you, (now you see them then you don't!) at least you've got a nice shot of an opened winged HB to compensate 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 16-May-18 06:24 PM GMT

Fantastic Greenstreaks Neil. 😊 And a very nice garden selection. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 16-May-18 10:01 PM GMT

That is a very nice female Holly Blue, Neil. Most of my local ones are distinctly worn-looking now and yours seems lovely and fresh. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-May-18 10:57 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

At one point a worn and rather undersized male Green-veined White came fluttering along, it's weak flight in the cools conditions looking very much like that of a Wood White...

That is an abnormally 'washed out' Green Veined White, Neil. No wonder you were forced to do a double take.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 18-May-18 06:25 PM GMT

Thanks for all your comment Wurzel, Goldie, Andrew Dave and David, very much appreciated as always 😊

Garden Moths.

So far this year the garden moth trapping has been slow to get going with many nights being either clear and cold or with a blustery wind, neither of which are good conditions for moths to fly in. Despite these less than favourable conditions there has been a steady trickle of species on the nights that I have put the trap out but overall numbers have been low.



Spectacle - Coverdale 12.05.2018

On Tuesday night the forecast was for cloud and a low of 13 degrees so I put the trap out. A fairly blustery breeze to start with eased off during the night and my final count was 30 moths of 20 species, my best tally for quite some time. These included 10 species which were firsts for the year and also 1 that was new for the garden.



Rustic Shoulder-Knot, Common enough but a new one for my garden-Coverdale 15.05.2018



Clouded Silver - Coverdale 15.05.2018



Flame Carpet – Coverdale 15.05.2018



Garden Carpet – Coverdale 15.05.2018



Yellow-barred Brindle – yes, I know its green but they are like this when fresh and fade to yellowish
I was particularly pleased to see my first hawk moth of the year, a Lime Hawk.



Lime Hawk Moth – Coverdale 15.05.2018

The total count count also include a few micros, numbers of which have been even lower than the macros so far with quite a few species that I had already seen last year yet to turn up.



Syndemis musculana – Coverdale 15.05.2018

Whilst pottering in the garden last weekend I found a large caterpillar which I have kept to rear through. After a couple of days looking at various possibilities I finally identified it as that of the Old Lady Moth, a large moth that is on the wing later in the summer.



Old Lady Moth caterpillar

Friday 18th May.

A mostly cloudy day but feeling quite warm and with little breeze. At home this afternoon I had a look around the garden as usual and spotted a little day flying Longhorn Moth, possibly *Cauchas rufimitrella* but not 100% sure of this.



Cauchas rufimmitrella (I think) - Coverdale 18.05.2018

A couple of male Speckled Woods were there as usual, just basking and making the most of the weak sun most of the time.



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 18.05.2018

A little later I also spotted a mating pair of Specklies about 6 feet up in one of the Alder Buckthorns which surprised me a bit as I have seen Speckled Woods in cop before but usually much lower down and hidden away under vegetation.



Speckled Wood mating pair - Coverdale 18.05.2018

About 20 minutes after I first spotted them they separated and first the male flew off and after a brief time the female followed.



Speckled Wood pair – Coverdale 18.05.2018

It looks like a decent weekend ahead of us so hopefully I will be able to get out somewhere.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 18-May-18 08:59 PM GMT

Great mating Speckled Woods.

But love all the moths too. There are so many moths I sometimes don't know where to start. I don't have a moth trap but the more images I see like yours, the more I want to get one.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-May-18 10:28 PM GMT

Speckled Woods in cop is a shot I'd like to have in my collection 🍷😄 Great moths the Spectacle in particular – I've wondered if it's called that because of the 'spectacles' or because it is a bit of a spectacle with those colourings and that 'comb' 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 19-May-18 10:41 PM GMT

Yes, that mating pair of Specklies are splendid – an unusual angle, and something you don't come across very often. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 20-May-18 03:07 PM GMT

Some great Speckled shots recently Neil. 😊

Nice moths as usual. I wonder, how many varieties of Carpet are out there ?

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-May-18 06:39 PM GMT

Thanks Ernie...that was pretty much how I started with my moth trap, 3 years ago now. It is amazing what is flying around at night even in my suburban garden 😊.

Cheers Wurzel, I was going to post the shot below with the previous report but forgot...so just for you 😊,



Spectacle head on shot showing the reason for the name.

Thanks Dave, I think that is only the third time I have seen Specklies in cop...all in my garden 😊.

Cheers Andrew, there are quite a few, you've aroused my curiosity now so I may have to look that up 😊.

Friday 18th May – Nocturnal activities

On Friday night, my son Chris and myself went along with a few other members of the Warwickshire Moth Group to support a Warwickshire BC new members moth night held at Ryton Pools Country Park. Despite a clear night the temperature held up to about 11 degrees by midnight and a good selection of moths were trapped in a number of traps set out around the country park. I am not sure what the final tally was the following morning but I believe something like 36 species had been recorded by the time we left around 01.00am.



Gathered around one of the traps. Chris is the skinny guy on the left bending down.

Saturday 19th May – Bishops Hill.

With it shaping up to be a nice day and after doing the usual Saturday morning chores I asked Jane if she fancied popping down to Bishops Hill to see Small Blues which I had seen being reported from some of the Warwickshire sites for about a week now. This site is just a 40 minute drive down the M40 from our house and Jane likes it there as she can see a lot of stuff from good paths which she can manage easily with her limited mobility.

We had a quick sandwich for lunch and headed down, arriving just before 1.30pm on a beautiful early afternoon with lots of blue sky with occasional white fluffy clouds. We usually see the first Small Blues here in a patch of long grass right inside the gate into the first part of the reserve and so it proved to be with 4 or 5 flitting about here.

A couple of Brimstones were also flying along the hedgerow in this first part and one of them surprised me by dropping down just a few feet in front of us to feed for some time on some common vetch here. I am not used to seeing Brimstones stop for long at this time of year on such a warm sunny day when they are usually constantly on the move.



Brimstone – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

We carried on wandering slowly along the paths and it soon became obvious that there were plenty of Small Blues flying, many of them looking like they had only been out for a day or two at most. In fact numbers seemed to be increasing during the afternoon so they were probably emerging whilst we were there and I would think they are still a week or so from peak numbers here.



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Small Blue - Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Small Blue - Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

This is the site where I often see my first Common Blues as they usually emerge on the warmer calcareous grassland sites in south Warwickshire a good week or so before my spots closer to home which are on heavy clay soils. Sure enough a few fresh looking males were flying and I also spotted a pair in cop.



Common Blue - Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Common Blue pair – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

There were also plenty of Dingy Skippers flying here today which I was pleased to see as numbers of these had seemed well down when we visited last year. Some of these were worn and faded, living up to their name and indicating that they had been flying for a while, but there were also plenty of fresher and more attractive individuals about.



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

Grizzled Skippers have had three poor years on the run here in Warwickshire with numbers declining significantly at some sites. I had seen a couple here last year and was looking out for them today so was particularly pleased to find at least 4 different different individuals with maybe a couple more seen at different spots around the site.



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

A few day flying moths were also seen including a nice fresh Mother Shipton.



Mother Shipton – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

Other butterflies seen but not mentioned already were a few Green-veined and Large Whites and singles of Speckled Wood, Holly Blue and Green Hairstreak.

A cracking afternoon with all three target species seen. The Small Blues and Dingy Skippers were flying in good numbers and the 4 grizzled Skippers although not a large number was a 100% increase on my visit last year.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 21-May-18 09:23 AM GMT

Lovely Butterfly shots Neil, unfortunately we don't get the Small Blue here in the North, it's just one more Butterfly we've to come South for 😊 Love the Grizzled Skipper shots has well, still to see that one. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-May-18 08:33 PM GMT

Thank you for my special shot Neil 😊 A greats sequence of shots and those Small Blues are cracking , the second shot in particular is a joy to behold 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 21-May-18 08:37 PM GMT

I couldn't agree more with Wurzel but my personal favourite is that Grizzlie, 3rd from last 😊

Sorry Neil, things are moving on so fast at the moment I missed those fabulous moths but I love that pair of mating Speckled Wood – lovely shot 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-May-18 08:29 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, I am sure I have read somewhere that there are a scattering of Small Blue sites in Cumbria.

Cheers Wurzel, despite the mid afternoon sun they were surprisingly co-operative.

Thanks Pauline, I know what you mean about things moving fast, trouble is at the moment I seem to be spending half my time in the evenings trying to identify various moths.

Sunday 20th May

With a couple of hours to spare on Sunday afternoon I decided to pop round to my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull and see if things had moved on much since the last time I visited which I was surprised to note was three weeks ago, I can't believe how quick the past few weeks have flown by.

Anyway, it soon became apparent that, despite yet another hot and sunny day, we are still firmly in mid spring mode here with pretty much the same species seen as last time. Orange-tip males were still patrolling the hedges with females about in roughly equal numbers, both sexes being very active in the warm afternoon sun with just the occasional brief refueling stop. There are quite a few Cuckoo Flower plants in one spot here and nearly every one I checked had at least one Orange-tip egg on it.



Orange-tip female - Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Orange-tip female - Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Orange-tip male, note egg on the cuckoo flower – Castle Hills 20.05.2018

A couple each of Commas and Peacocks were contesting favourite perches along one stretch of hedgerow, all of them looking worse for wear now which is not surprising really considering how old they would be now.



Peacock – Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Peacock – Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Peacock - Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Comma - Castle Hills 20.05.2018



Comma - Castle Hills 20.05.2018

Plenty of Green-veined Whites were seen plus a few Large Whites, and Speckled Wood numbers had increased along the paths through the more wooded sections.

A few day flying moths were seen including Latticed Heath,



Latticed Heath – Castle Hills 20.05.2018

I have only ever seen a couple of Small Yellow Underwing Moths around here and none in the past couple of years but by a strange co-incidence with both Millerd and Callum Mac posting photos of these lately I found two today. Difficult little s*ds to get a photo of though.



Small Yellow Underwing – Castle Hills 20.05.2018

Given the warm and dry weather we have had recently I was wondering if I would see Common Blue and Small Heath here today but despite a good check of the usual spots I failed to find any of these, maybe next weekend if I get a chance to have a look.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 22-May-18 09:32 PM GMT

Just catching up, Neil – lovely selection of Small Blues from Bishop's Hill and very encouraging to note that the two Skippers are having a much better year this year as well. I must try and get up there if I can as it's a lovely spot. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 23-May-18 08:32 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I've not seen any reports of Small Blue in Cumbria, it would be good if I found them so near, I'll have to find out if I can where about 's they are. Orange Tips are always a welcome sight, lovely shots Neil 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 23-May-18 08:54 AM GMT

Great shots, Neil. That Latticed Heath is really smart!

Goldie – the Cumbrian Small Blues are on the coast at Maryport and Workington. Grid refs per BC Cumbria here – http://www.cumbria-butterflies.org.uk/species/butterfly/small_blue/.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 23-May-18 04:16 PM GMT

Great selections Neil, those Small Blue's look fantastic. 🍷 😊
I also very much like your Latticed Heath, a fine specimen. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-May-18 10:30 PM GMT

I agree with the others that Latticed Heath is one tidy looking moff 😊 Interesting to see you're still finding Commas and that your Peacocks are nowhere near as tatty as the ones I'm seeing 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 25-May-18 07:53 PM GMT

Thanks Dave, yes, it is a cracking spot, nice and compact and the Small Blues and the two Skippers can all found in the same general area. Also Green Hairstreaks although they can be a bit more elusive there.

Hi Goldie, I see Callum has posted the location of the Cumbrian Small Blues...not sure how far that is for you.

Thanks Callum, Andrew and Wurzel. There were a few Latticed Heath flying but they don't often pose that nicely, they usually settle further down in the grass and can be very flight and difficult to approach.

Friday 25th May – Poplar Hawk Moths

Anyone who read my personal diary last year may remember that I had a female Poplar Hawk Moth to my garden trap in August who laid about a dozen eggs in the trap.



The female from last August

Eleven of these eggs subsequently hatched and I decided to rear them through. As the name suggests, the main larval food plant is various species of Poplars but also frequently Sallows and Willows and as I had easier access to sallow this is what I raised these on.



Poplar Hawk caterpillar early October last year



Poplar Hawk caterpillar early October last year

Poplar Hawk Moths main flight season is usually May to July with a partial second generation in the south in August–September but in recent years this has become a regular event further north and I believe that the female that laid these eggs was most likely an example of this second generation. One concern that I began to have as we went into October, and the larvae were still growing, was that the leaves started falling from the trees and this included most of the willows that I had access to around here. Fortunately, before the leaves were all gone, the larvae had all pupated successfully and were put into a plastic box in a cold part of the garage for the winter.

Towards the end of April I bought the pupae out of storage and laid them out in a netting cage ready for emergence.



Pupae ready for laying out in cage.

This week, on Tuesday night. the first adult emerged, a male...followed the following night by a second one, a female...and last night (Thursday) another male.



Poplar Hawk Moth male – day after emergence 23.05.2018



Poplar Hawk Moth female – day after emergence 24.05.2018

After taking a few photos I released the males as this species will mate readily in captivity and I wanted to avoid inbreeding and was hoping to trap a different male to pair her with.

Last night I ran the trap in the garden and had a male Poplar Hawk, the first to the trap this year. I checked he was definitely not one of the released males by comparing markings, one of the reasons for taking photos of them both before release. I find it fascinating that the reared moths have emerged this week and I have trapped the first one this year at the same time in the garden as although it is cold in my garage, the reared moths would not have been exposed to the same conditions that the wild ones would have been through this past winter.

Earlier this afternoon I put the captured male in the cage with the reared female hoping they would pair tonight but they haven't even waited that long...



Poplar Hawks paired, not a good photo but I didn't want to disturb them too much – 25.05.2018

A horrible wet and miserable day today, tomorrow is looking a bit better but the forecast for Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday keeps changing the amount of sun/rain/storms to expect. Guess we will only know on the day.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 25-May-18 08:21 PM GMT

Probably missing Corrie to post this Neil 😊😄 but couldn't wait to ask if you have any more shots of the development etc as I am sure I'm not the only one who would like to see them. Incredibly interesting post. Thanks for ID btw 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-May-18 10:40 PM GMT

Well done for looking after those hawk moths, Neil, and splendid images of rarely seen behaviour too if I may say! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 25-May-18 10:53 PM GMT

Fascinating stuff, Neil. Another big fat green larva that is so well-camouflaged on willow leaves! Well done on getting them right through their life-cycle so successfully! 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 26-May-18 04:47 PM GMT

Great work Neil, really good to see. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-May-18 09:23 PM GMT

Thank you Pauline, David, Dave and Andrew for your comments 😊

I don't have any other photos of the Poplar Hawk development unfortunately, at least not any worth posting. To be honest, they are one of the easiest Hawk Moths to rear and have previously been well documented.

Saturday 26th May.

After some heavy rain on Friday night, Saturday morning was wet and miserable with continuing light rain and drizzle until around lunchtime when the clouds began to clear, and by early afternoon it was warming up and feeling quite pleasant. I decided to pop back to my local spot at Castle Hills by Solihull to have another look to see if any Common Blues or Small Heath had appeared since I went last weekend.

By the time I got there, just after 2.00pm, the clouds had just about disappeared and the temperature was up into the low twenties although it was a bit breezy. Green-veined Whites had increased in number with a good number of males actively chasing each other about along the edges of the meadows and a few Orange-tips were still around albeit looking worn and faded now.



Orange-tip male – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Orange-tip female – Castle Hills 26.05.2018

I had a good look around for Common Blues without much success and was just beginning to think that they were still not out here when I spotted a nice fresh male in one sunny corner.



Common Blue male - Castle Hills 26.05.2018

This turned out to be the only Common Blue found today and still no Small Heaths here, although I did have a few false alarms for the latter caused by Burnet Companion Moths which can look similar in flight until you get your eye in.

I also checked the spot where I had seen a couple of Peacocks and a Comma last weekend and sure enough I found one of each there today. I initially thought that these were the same ones I had seen last week but looking closely at the photos afterwards shows them both to be different individuals.



Peacock - Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Comma - Castle Hills 26.05.2018

I also saw another Peacock chasing a Small Tortoiseshell around in a different part of the site but lost sight of them when they went high up over a hedge.

I mentioned above that I saw a few Burnet Companion Moths and in fact I saw around a dozen of these as well as half a dozen each of Mother Shipton, Latticed Heath and Silver Y plus four or five Small Yellow Underwings. The Silver Y Moths were typically flighty when disturbed from the vegetation but I was pleased to get some half decent photos of the others as they can be difficult subjects with their habits of settling low down in the grass.



Burnet Companion – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Burnet Companion showing underside which can make them look like a Small Heath in flight – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Burnet Companion – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Burnet Companion – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Mother Shipton – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Mother Shipton – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Mother Shipton – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Latticed Heath – Castle Hills 26.05.2018



Latticed Heath – Castle Hills 26.05.2018

The Small Yellow Underwing in particular is a tiny little moth and I wouldn't be surprised if these are often overlooked or mistaken for something like a Mint Moth (*Pyrausta aurata*).



Small Yellow Underwing – Castle Hills 26.05.2018

Like many others, we had thunderstorms here last night with continuing showers and rumbles of thunder though the afternoon and into this evening. Hopefully tomorrow is looking better and being Bank Holiday Monday I am thinking of venturing a bit further afield but haven't decided where yet.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-May-18 11:09 PM GMT

Fantastic set of Moth shots Neil, that Mother Shipton is a corker 🤔🇬🇧 I'm surprised at how 'tidy' the OTs are still looking 😊 as down this way they're well past their best 😊🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 27-May-18 11:12 PM GMT

You're still seeing Orange Tips, Neil – they've disappeared round here so that's worth a 🍷.

Some terrific shots of those "honorary butterflies" as well – they usually don't keep still and are very unapproachable, especially the Burnet Companion. So that's what the underside actually looks like! 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 28-May-18 09:17 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, lovely Moth shots, I actually had one of those Small Yellow Under Wings in my Garden but has I was trying for a shot it flew off 😞 Great to know what it's called I must look out for it again 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-May-18 04:39 PM GMT

Your second Mother Shipton image absolutely captures the reason why the moth is given that name, Neil. Lovely pose.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 29-May-18 07:44 AM GMT

Great set of shots, my new zoom lens has helped me get some half descents shots of those Burney Companions but not as good as yours 🍷. I'm still seeing a few Orange-tip around here and there too.

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 29-May-18 08:39 AM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

I actually had one of those Small Yellow Under Wings in my Garden

A word of caution, Goldie – Small Yellow Underwing are similar in size and appearance to the Mint Moths <https://www.ukmoths.org.uk/species/pyrausta-aurata> and *P. purpuralis*. These two species are much, much more likely to turn up in gardens than SYU because of a penchant for a range of culinary herbs! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 29-May-18 09:44 AM GMT

Hi! Mac, no Herbs to speak of in my Garden 😊 I wish I'd got a shot of it now 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-May-18 07:59 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, most of the Orange-tips round here are well past their best now...it only seems like yesterday that we were looking forward to their appearance.

Hi Dave, glad you like the 'honorary butterflies'. Some of my mothing acquaintances would have it that butterflies are a type of day flying moth anyway 😊

Hi Goldie, I would be tempted to think that CallumMac is right about the moth in your garden, Mint moths are very similar and far more likely to be seen in gardens.

Thanks David, glad you like that one 😊

Cheers Bugboy, I took those photos at full zoom with my Lumix FZ200, even then I had to move very slowly to sneak up on them.

Hi Callum, yes, I agree...I have had a few Mint Moths in my garden but never seen a Small Yellow Underwing there.

Monday 28th May.

The band of storms that moved north across the midlands on Sunday certainly dumped some rain on us with apparently a months worth falling

overnight which resulted in some quite severe local flooding in some parts of the Birmingham area.

Having spent most of Sunday doing some painting in the house I had earmarked the Bank Holiday Monday to go out somewhere but had not decided where. After weighing up a few options I decided on having a drive down to Prestbury Hill by Cheltenham where hopefully Duke of Burgundy would still be flying. I had realised that I had not seen this species for the past three years and although I had seen that they had been on the wing there for a few weeks I was hoping that there would still be some around. Also, being a Bank Holiday, I was keen to stay away from any motorways and I could do this by going cross country down past Eversham to Cheltenham.

After the heavy rain on Sunday night, Monday morning started off dull and drizzly but the forecast for the Cheltenham area showed it starting to brighten up after midday. Also, Duke of Burgundy tends to be a late rising species with little activity in the mornings so I thought there was no point in rushing out too early and left home just before 09.30 and after a leisurely drive down arrived at 11.00.

As I approached Cheltenham I could see that the line of hills which include the Bill Smyllie and Masts reserves up on Prestbury Hill itself were still ominously shrouded in mist or low cloud and driving round the single track lanes to the parking spot at the top of the hill was an eerie experience with visibility down to just a few yards in front of my car. On a good day the views from up here are fabulous and you can see right across the Severn Valley to the Malvern Hills but today I couldn't even see the start of the first path down the hill.



The mist that greeted me on arrival at Prestbury Hill

Nevertheless, I headed off to have a wander around in the hope that the forecast was correct and that it would clear up later. The path down the hill links up with part of the Cotswold Way and leads through some woodland from the Bill Smyllie reserve to the Masts Reserve. Walking through this stretch of woodland in these conditions felt quite spooky with the light and silence giving the impression that something could appear from out of the mist at any moment.



Your imagination could run wild in here.

Even in these conditions I was surprised to see a good number of moths flying on the grassy hillsides...but then again maybe not so surprising as many moths will happily fly in rain at night as long as the temperature is warm enough and there is no wind. These were mostly Common Heath but also some others which would always settle underneath a leaf where I could not see them. The Common Heath is not as common as its name suggests and I have yet to see any around my local patch where the Latticed Heath seems to take its place.



Common Heath – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

I was also on the lookout for roosting butterflies and managed to find a couple of Small Blues and Small Heath tucked away in the wet vegetation.



Small Blue sitting in the mist.



Small Heath half way up a small hawthorn.

After an hour or so the mist began to lift and whilst it was still overcast the air temperature rose a bit and a few butterflies began to stir with Dingy Skippers, Small Heath and Small Blues taking to the air or basking in the wet grass.



Dingy Skipper in the wet grass.



Dingy Skipper - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Small Blue - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Small Blue – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

Later in the afternoon I also found a mating pair of Small Blues.



Small Blue pair – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

By early afternoon the mist had mostly lifted and the sun was starting to break through occasionally making it feel quite pleasant. Common Blues and Brown Argus were now also flying along with more species of day flying moth with Five-Spot Burnet and Burnet Companions in good numbers plus half a dozen or so Silver Y Moths and singles of Mother Shipton and Fox Moth also seen.



Common Blue – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Brown Argus - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Brown Argus - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

The best moths of the day for me were a Wood Tiger Moth and a Five -Spot Burnet ab. With conjoined spots.



Wood Tiger Moth - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Five-Spot Burnet with conjoined spots

A single Small Copper was my first of these this year plus a female Wall Brown surprised me by settling in front of me on one of the paths. I have read that Wall Browns can be seen here but this was the first one I had actually seen here.



Small Copper - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Wall Brown - Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

So then, did I see any Dukes? In the end I saw about half a dozen all well into the afternoon once it had warmed up. They were mostly well-worn and faded indicating that they are near the end of their flight period here this year which as I mentioned earlier, I thought they might be. As is often the case I met a couple of chaps who came out with the 'you should have been here last weekend, they were all over the place' line.



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Duchess – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

Also seen but not photographed were a couple of Green Hairstreaks flitting about out of reach and flypasts of a few Large and small whites, and my first Red Admiral this year.

All in All it was a great day despite the cool and misty start which did have a strange attraction of its own and I ended up seeing a good number of butterflies along with some nice day flying moths.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 29-May-18 08:10 PM GMT

Neil, what a wonderful day you had. A Wall, a Wood Tiger, mating Small Blues and an ab Burnet, not to mention the spooky woodland mist. I would be happy if I saw any one of these in a day.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-May-18 10:48 PM GMT

Great report Neil replete with the "you should have...", I make it a habit never to start a sentence with those words 😞😞 Still got a cracking sequence of images 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-May-18 03:23 PM GMT

Excellent resumé, Neil, as ever. Even when the forecast suggests mist will clear, it's never terribly reassuring when you're standing in the middle of it with visibility less than 50 yards!

Glad you got your Dukes.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 30-May-18 07:45 PM GMT

Great day out to see all those Butterflies Neil and Moths too, I love that little Common Heath Moth, it's got so many shades of Brown, I've not seen the Mint Moth since to get a photo but I've seen quite a few more moths this year in the Garden than ever before. Great shot of the mating pair as well 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 30-May-18 08:12 PM GMT

That was a great variety of things you ended up with, Neil, after a less than promising start. It is definitely better to encounter everything just as the sun comes out and the temperature slowly rises – if you'd arrived in full brilliant sunshine, everything would have been manic. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Jun-18 09:23 AM GMT

Thanks Ernie...I must admit I was well chuffed with the selection I ended up with 😊

Cheers Wurzel, me neither...but I could be tempted to utter the words occasionally, just to restore a balance 😊

Indeed David, it can be difficult to maintain a faith in the forecasts when they are so often wrong 😞

Thanks Goldie, the Common Heath is very variable as well and I saw loads in all shades from very light ones to very dark coloured individuals 😊

Cheers Dave, as you say, the earlier conditions made it easier to approach the usually very flighty moths 😊. It certainly warmed up in the afternoon and most things got very active and difficult to approach.

Saturday 2nd June.

The past week has seen some dramatic weather around here with a mixture of cloud, sun and bands of thunderstorms sweeping across the country. I have seen very few butterflies this past week with just a few 'whites' passing through the garden plus a couple of now faded Speckled Wood hanging in there.

A mostly cloudy day today (Saturday) so I spent a good few hours in the garden trying to keep on top of the rapid spurt of growth that has been brought on by the warm and wet weather we have been having recently.

Later in the afternoon I reckoned I had done enough and decided to have a walk down the road to the area of rough ground by the local park that I had checked out earlier in the year. By this time the clouds had thinned out a bit and there were some sunny spells and like most days recently it was feeling warm and muggy.

I only did a quick circuit of the area and it felt very much like we are now in the June gap here between the spring species finishing and the summer ones not yet out, no nice rarities to fill the gap around here unfortunately.

Having said that I did see a few wandering 'whites'. At least one of which was a Green-veined, and a couple of Speckled Wood were flitting about along the shadier sides of the hedges. One of the Specklies was that worn it was almost transparent but the other looked to be quite fresh, quite possibly an early next brood...or a very late first brood, difficult to tell with this species being able to overwinter as either larvae or pupae with the follow on broods overlapping.



Speckled Wood - Wagon Lane 02.06.2018

I was also pleased to find singles each of Common Blue and Small Copper.



Small Copper - Wagon Lane 02.06.2018



Common blue - Wagon Lane 02.06.2018

Not great numbers I know but at least it shows that this area is worth keeping an eye on through the summer.

Recent Garden Moths.

The past week or so has seen numbers of moths coming to the garden trap on the increase, both in terms of the overall total and in the number of species. I mentioned in a previous post that many moths will happily fly in rain as long as there is not much wind and it is warm enough, and the recent wet and thundery but muggy nights have seen the best results, culminating in a count of 75 moths of 28 species on Thursday (May 31st) night. This was eclipsed however by my son Chris who is running a trap in his garden on the outskirts of Stratford-upon-Avon and had 188 moths of 46 species on the same night.

Anyway, I was well pleased with my results this week which included new ones for my garden of Scalloped Hazel, Peppered Moth and Small Elephant Hawk Moth as well as the first examples this year of some old favourites that I have had in previous years.



Muslin Moth – Coverdale 20.05.2018



Scalloped Hazel – Coverdale 28.05.2018



Ruby Tiger Moth – Coverdale 28.05.2018



Peppered Moth – Coverdale 28.05.2018



Pale Tussock – Coverdale 31.05.2018

The Small Elephant Hawk Moth is a widespread but more local species than it's larger cousin and is one that I have been hoping for since I started running the trap in the garden in 2016.



Small Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 31.05.2018



Small Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 31.05.2018

I have seen increasing numbers of Silver Y Moths being reported over the past week or so and saw quite a few myself last weekend. On Thursday night I had one in the moth trap which gave me the chance to take a photo of one of these not being half hidden amongst the grass.



Silver-Y Moth - Coverdale 31.05.2018

I seem to be falling behind a bit with my diary and also keeping up with other peoples. Sorting through my moth trap when I get in from work combined with time spent taking photos to confirm the ID of many of them on the nights when I don't run the trap means that before I know it another week has flown by.

Oh well, I suppose there are worse problems to have 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 03-Jun-18 05:18 PM GMT

Wow! I'm now wondering if I should put the moth trap out again tonight but I can't imagine getting that sort of quantity and diversity. Lovely images as usual Neil 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 03-Jun-18 06:22 PM GMT

"Cheers Wurzel, me neither...but I could be tempted to utter the words occasionally, just to restore a balance"...fair play 😊😄

Love the purplish sheen to the Specklie and great Small Copper. 🍷🍷 Those are a great set of Moffs as well, that is the most silver looking Silver Y I've seen, isn't there a grey form 'grammaria' or some such 😊 - that could be one of those 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 04-Jun-18 10:37 AM GMT

Great stuff from Prestbury Neil. Love the Small Blues, always great to see a female Wall. 😊
Very nice moth selection as well. 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 04-Jun-18 11:09 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I mostly take shots of Butterflies but those Moths especially that Small Elephant Hawk Moth will take some beating for colour 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 04-Jun-18 11:31 PM GMT

Nice butterflies, Neil, but even more impressive are those moths, especially that Small Elephant Hawk which is positively glowing!

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 05-Jun-18 07:46 PM GMT

Just catching up Neil, some very nice images there. I like the mating Small Blues. Interesting how we both went to see Dukes and both found a Wood Tiger on almost the same day!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Jun-18 08:18 PM GMT

Hi Pauline, I find it is certainly worth putting the trap out on wet nights as long as it is reasonably warm and there is no wind, in fact those kind of still and muggy nights like we had last week seem to produce the best results.

Cheers Wurzel, I think the silvery effect is a result of the early evening light on that one.

Thanks Andrew, I was well chuffed with that female Wall as they are a species that no longer occurs in my local area and I usually have to travel some distance to see.

I agree Goldie, in fact the Small Elephant Hawk Moth has been a special favourite of mine ever since I first saw one many years ago so I was well chuffed to get one in the garden.

Thanks David, that combination of Pink and yellow seems to work particularly well.

Sunday 3rd June.

Sunday was a warmer day than Saturday with clear skies and the sun shining from the start but with increasing amounts of cloud building up as the day progressed. The morning was taken up with the usual stuff around the house and a stint in the garden during which I spotted a couple of Green-veined Whites and a Large White passing through without stopping.

I also noticed that a better condition Speckled Wood had replaced the two well-worn examples that were squabbling over one of the corners yesterday.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 03.06.2018

In the afternoon I decided to drive round to my local spot at Bickenhill to see what was around. Starting down the first footpath which crosses a meadow, I couldn't help but notice the carpet of Buttercups which were more extensive than I have seen here in previous years, probably due to the warm but wet weather we have had here recently which has led to some lush vegetation growth.



Buttercups – Bickenhill 03.06.2018

Following the path down to a stile into the next meadow I found my first Large Skipper of the year which was chasing off all intruders that dared to enter into his little domain.



Large Skipper male - Bickenhill 03.06.2018



Large Skipper male - Bickenhill 03.06.2018



Large Skipper male - Bickenhill 03.06.2018

I did a circuit of the area and found another half a dozen or so Large Skippers, all males which were very active in the warm sun and trying to see off anything that ventured anywhere near.



Large Skipper male - Bickenhill 03.06.2018

Apart from the Large Skippers, the only other butterflies I saw here were a couple of Green-veined Whites, a single very flighty male Common Blue, and a tired looking Comma still hanging in there in one corner.



Green-veined White - Bickenhill 03.06.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 03.06.2018

More numerous than the butterflies were various day flying moths, mostly Burnet Companions but with a few Mother Shiptons and a single Cinnabar Moth.



Mother Shipton - Bickenhill 03.06.2018



Cinnabar Moth - Bickenhill 03.06.2018

These also included a couple of Silver-ground Carpets and a Blood-vein, both species that are not primarily day flyers but are easily disturbed and can often be seen during the day.



Silver-ground Carpet - Bickenhill 03.06.2018



Blood-vein – Bickenhill 03.06.2018

I then decided to move on to Shadowbrook Meadows which is just a couple of minutes drive away. Things here were much the same as at the previous site with similar numbers of fresh male Large Skippers buzzing about alongside Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton Moths.



Large Skipper male – Shadowbrook Meadows 03.06.2018

There were also a few more Common Blues, again all males and looking either nice and fresh or like they only been out for a few days at the most.



Common Blue male – Shadowbrook Meadows 03.06.2018

Overall, a fairly quiet afternoon with nothing seen in great numbers, but then again that is normal for around here at this time of year and things seem to be getting approximately back on track after a late start to the season.

The appearance of Large Skippers always signifies the transition from spring into summer for me and I usually start to look for them around the end of May or first days of June, depending on how my available time falls in line with the calendar, so those seen today were pretty much on time for around here. It shouldn't be long now before they are joined by the other summer species.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-Jun-18 10:34 PM GMT

Cracking Skippers and Blues and that Mother Shipton is a stand out classic – normally they're skulking around in the long grass so a clear unobstructed shot like that is cracking! 🤩👍 Good to see the Large Skippers out and about – summer is actually here, just in time for the weather to go cool, damp

and cloudy 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 06-Jun-18 07:51 AM GMT

Yep, summer has definitely arrived with both Large Skippers and Meadow Brown's recently being added to my years tally. Where did the spring go though, things are flying by this year in every way!

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Jun-18 11:01 PM GMT

You always know summer's arrived when the fields are a sea of buttercups! Love the Mother Shipton image, Neil. In 10,000 years time, I reckon that species will be classed as a butterfly!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jun-18 09:04 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I have been lucky this year in that I have managed to get some decent photos of day flying moths like the Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton. As you say they have a habit of landing in the depths of the grass.

Hi Bugboy, yes, things are certainly happening at a rapid rate now. We seem to have gone from late spring into an advanced early summer. Oops!, looks like I missed your earlier comment on us seeing the Wood Tigers under similar circumstances...spooky 😬

Thanks David, on the other hand, some of the members of the Warwickshire Moth Group insist that butterflies are just a type of day flying moth 😊😬

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-Jun-18 09:08 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

Thanks David, on the other hand, some of the members of the Warwickshire Moth Group insist that butterflies are just a type of day flying moth 😊😬

Don't I know it! It's like the Judean People's Front scene in Monty Python! I meant to ask too, is your Comma a summer brood specimen?

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 09-Jun-18 09:30 PM GMT

Looks in good nick for a hibernated specimen. On the other hand, it's early for Hutchinsoni, so good question!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jun-18 10:01 PM GMT

Hi David & Mark.

The Comma was a hibernator, a bit worn and faded but not too bad considering how long he had been around. Here's another shot showing a bit of upperside.



There are still one or two hanging on around here but don't forget that my season here in my part of the midlands always runs a bit later than it does further south. In the past I have occasionally seen examples of Comma, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock still flying when the summer brood have started to appear...not often admittedly but it can happen.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 09-Jun-18 10:38 PM GMT

Thanks for that, Neil. I certainly haven't seen any new adults down here yet, and I have been looking. Though it shouldn't be long now, I normally see them from about the 20 th.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Jun-18 05:15 PM GMT

essexbuzzard wrote:

Thanks for that, Neil. I certainly haven't seen any new adults down here yet, and I have been looking. Though it shouldn't be long now, I normally see them from about the 20 th.

Yes, thanks for the confirmation, Neil. I thought it was a little early but your specimen **did** seem in abnormally good nick for the time of year!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 13-Jun-18 03:51 PM GMT

Very nice selection Neil. Great Skippers and Common Blue. That Blood-vein is my favourite of your moths. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Jun-18 07:58 PM GMT

Cheers Mark and David, the new summer ones usually start showing up around here towards the end of the month.

Thanks Andrew, I think that is the first decent photo of a Blood-vein that I have managed, one of those that usually hides down amongst the grass stems.

Just returned from a few days away, staying at a B&B not far from Hickling in Norfolk...no prizes for guessing what we went there for 😊

As usual loads of photos to sort through and reports to follow over the next few days when I have had time to do them.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 14-Jun-18 08:58 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

We are off up to Norfolk tomorrow, probably for the same purpose.

If we are successful I will have two new UK species ticked off this year.

Very much looking forward to your images,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 15-Jun-18 02:40 PM GMT

I was thinking just the other day how few Swallowtail images I've seen so far this year, I guess that's all going to change very soon. Must pencil in a little foray into Norfolk for next year 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 15-Jun-18 07:45 PM GMT

Hi Trevor, good luck with your trip to Norfolk.

Hi Bugboy, I have seen a few posted on Twitter but not that many considering it is such an iconic species.

Norfolk June 10th to 14th - Swallowtails.

Over the past few years we have got into the habit of going away for a few days a number of times during the year in order to spend a bit of time exploring an area and hopefully see some species that we don't get around the midlands. I usually do some thinking about where to go during the winter months and with me having to book time off work in advance, after doing some research on flight times of whatever species we hope to see, I take a bit of a flyer on the timing of our breaks.

Whilst thinking about targets for this year I had realised that I had only seen Swallowtails once before and that was now six years ago on a family holiday to Norfolk, when I had seen a couple at Strumpshaw Fen and just managed a couple of ropey record photos. We decided therefore that our first break this year would be to Norfolk and after looking at Swallowtail flight periods over the past few years decided on four days beginning 10th June. With a B&B booked it was with some trepidation that we watched the winter drag on into a late start to the season and then May arrived with some unseasonably hot spells that seemed to bring on some early emergences. I saw the first Swallowtails were being reported from the middle of May and also read comments to the effect that the warm weather was leading to some shortened flight periods for some species as they burnt themselves out in the heat.

Last Sunday (June 10th) we set off for Norfolk with me feeling fairly confident that there would still be some Swallowtails flying but also knowing that they had been flying for some weeks I was wondering what condition I would find them in.

We had started out at 9.30am and with our check in time at the B&B being the fairly standard 4.00pm we had plenty of time in hand for a stop off at Strumpshaw Fen where we arrived just after 1.00pm. Apparently a Swallowtail had been hanging around the flower beds by the visitor centre all morning ('You should have been here an hour ago....blah, blah, blah'.) but with no sight of it on our arrival we decided to have a wander around the paths. We wandered about for an hour or so and saw a couple of Swallowtails flying across the reed beds and had a close encounter with one which flew right past us on the path. Jane then said she would go back to the reception and sit in the hide whilst I had a bit more of a wander around. I went off down the track to the doctors garden where I found a large group of people by the flowers beds, some of who had apparently been there some time and mentioned that a couple had been seen earlier in the morning ('You should have been here this morning...blah, blah, blah'). After a brief conversation I decided to leave them to it, and carry on to where you re-enter the reserve over the railway track and was just approaching the gate when I spotted a Swallowtail fly off the reserve and towards a small rise on some rough ground a little further back. I decided to wander up this rise and found it covered with yellow flowers which looked like small dandelions (I am not that good with wild flowers - hawks-beard maybe?). I believe this is probably the area that I have seen mentioned in a number of reports from Strumpshaw in the past.. Anyway, My attention was soon drawn to what I presume was the same Swallowtail that I had seen fly in this direction as it flitted from flower to flower to feed. I must have watched this one individual for over 15 minutes and took loads of quick shots as it balanced at the flowers with much flapping of its wings to steady itself. In the end I managed to get a number of decent photos of this one individual before it flew off back towards the fen.



Swallowtail - Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018



Swallowtail – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018



Swallowtail – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018



Swallowtail – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018



Swallowtail – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018

I was well chuffed with this encounter, especially as it was an individual in good condition and if I didn't see another Swallowtail over the next few days I had already achieved my main target. Anything else now would be a bonus.

I then carried on to complete the circuit around the paths and had a couple more flypasts before arriving at the wet meadow area where another large group of people were taking photos of a couple of Swallowtails that were flitting between the many plants of ragged robin that grow there. These were much more difficult to get a decent photo of as the plants were mostly down amongst the grass and the thin stems would bend even lower when the Swallowtails settled on them which along with their almost constant wing fluttering meant that getting a half decent photo was a challenge.



Swallowtail – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018



Swallowtail underside – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018

I then went back to meet up with Jane and we then carried on for the further half hour drive to our B&B up by Hickling.

The next morning, after a good breakfast we had decided to pay a visit to Hickling Broad which was just a few minutes drive away. We arrived at the car park by the visitor centre at just after 9.30am and after paying the entrance fee and having a chat with one of the wardens, went for a walk around the paths. We spent the next three hours here walking the paths and visiting the hides and saw various birds including Marsh Harriers and heard a Bittern 'booming', plus loads of various Dragonflies. We also saw maybe five different Swallowtails at different points around the reserve. It seemed like more but I am sure that some were repeat sightings so I only counted those that were seen in different parts of the reserve. The morning had become very warm with the sun shining from an almost cloudless blue sky and all our Swallowtail sightings here were flypasts and although a couple of them came very close we didn't see any of them settle.

After going back to the visitor centre and seeing my first Meadow Brown of the year whilst sitting at one of the picnic tables and having a coffee, we drove around to Potter Heigham church where there is room to park a few cars and you can follow a footpath that goes across a field and through a wood to pick up the Weavers Way, a section of which passes along the southern side of Hickling Broad. Jane was tired after walking around the reserve in the morning and elected to stay at the car and read her kindle whilst I went to check out the paths. Coming out of the wood onto the Weavers Way I

tuned left and walked along for about 15 minutes before coming to a stretch with a few ragged robin plants growing amongst the grass by the side of the path. Here I spotted a Swallowtail and managed to get a couple of shots before it flew off across the reed beds, although like yesterday in the wet meadow at Stumpshaw, it was difficult to get a photo without grass stems all over the place.



Swallowtail – Hickling Broad 11.06.2018

I then retraced my steps and walked along the path in the other direction for a similar amount of time and saw another 3 or 4 Swallowtails flying across the reed beds. Like earlier it seemed like a few more but I only counted those that I felt fairly confident were different individuals. This meant that during the day I had seen maybe 10 Swallowtails across both sides of Hickling Broad.

Tuesday was dull and cloudy and although we visited How Hill it was too cool and breezy for any Swallowtails to be flying, but there is still plenty to see here and we spent a couple of hours exploring the grounds and walking through the woods to the secret gardens.

On Wednesday we spent the morning at Horsey Gap and then stopped off for a cream tea (great for keeping the brownie points topped up). As it had turned out to be a nice day again with plenty of sunny spells and light fluffy clouds Jane said I could make the most of it and shoot off somewhere for the afternoon. I returned to How Hill to give it another go in better conditions and this time within minutes of walking along the path through the wet meadow there were two Swallowtails flitting from flower to flower on a patch of purple flowers, I couldn't decide if these flowers were some kind of thistle or knapweed perhaps, but they looked different to either of these that I see at home. Like I said earlier, I am not very good with wild flowers. I then spotted another Swallowtail across the other side of the meadow which meant that for a while I had three in view at the same time. I spent the next hour or so in this spot just watching them and taking photos as the opportunity arose and at one point was joined by a couple of members of Norfolk BC and had a pleasant chat about various things butterflies and our thoughts on the current season.



Swallowtail – How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail - How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail - How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail - How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail – How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail – How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail – How Hill 13.06.2018



Swallowtail – How Hill 13.06.2018

Whilst watching the Swallowtails coming and going around this area, I saw a male chase a female and they spiralled high up into the air until the female just turned and dived headlong back down into the grass in an attempt to shake off her pursuer. He followed her down and flew along just above her and seemed to be trying to force her down until she managed to shake him off and made good her escape. I tried to follow them with my camera to catch the action but only just managed to get one shot that wasn't just a vague blur.



Swallowtails – How Hill 13.06.2018

After leaving How Hill and with a bit of time to spare I decided to call in at Catfield Fen which is close by. I followed the narrow lanes and parked up in the small parking area and spotted a chap wearing a Butterfly Conservation top and stopped for a chat. It turned out he was doing a recce for a guided walk he was doing later in the afternoon and invited me to join them but unfortunately I needed to return to Jane before then (hmm!...didn't quite mean that how it sounds).

The interior of the fen here can be dangerous but there is a raised path around the outside from which it is possible to see Swallowtails and so I set off for a quick walk around to see if I could spot any. I only stayed here for about an hour but managed to spot two Swallowtails at different spots around the path, both flypasts, one of which came down the path towards me and flew past within a couple of feet.

So then, all in all I reckon I saw something like twenty two Swallowtails across all the sites visited between Sunday and Wednesday. There may have been one or two more but as mentioned above I have only counted those I was fairly certain were different individuals due to being seen a good distance apart.

My counts for the individual sites were;

Sunday 10th. Strumpshaw Fen – 6

Monday 11th Hickling Broad (inc. Weavers Way) – 10

Wednesday 13th How Hill – 4

Wednesday 13th Catfield Fen – 2

Out of those, I managed to photograph six different individuals, 2 at Stumpshaw, 1 at Hickling Broad by the Weavers Way, and 3 at How Hill.

Some that I saw were showing signs of wear and tear but others were in remarkably good condition still and although I suspect that numbers were just past their peak I think they should be flying for a little while yet.

The Swallowtails were the main target of course but there was plenty of other stuff to see as well...

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Maximus, 15-Jun-18 07:55 PM GMT

Fantastic images of the Swallowtails, Neil, what a trip 😊

Mike

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 15-Jun-18 08:18 PM GMT

Brilliant Swallowtail pictures Neil. What a cracking butterfly! 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 15-Jun-18 08:49 PM GMT

Beautiful, just beautiful.

Neil, your pictures are fantastic. I love them all but you got a couple of great side shots and even one from underneath! Brilliant.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 15-Jun-18 09:28 PM GMT

Just wonderful Neil! Absolutely beautiful. You have no idea how many years I have wanted to make that trip 🍷🍷🍷🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 15-Jun-18 10:36 PM GMT

Well done Neil. That patch of hawkweeds beyond the doctors garden, is exactly where Neil Hulme and me saw and photographed our Swallowtails, I think it was in 2011.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 15-Jun-18 10:43 PM GMT

Beautiful photos of the Swallowtails, Neil. 🍷😄 I haven't seen them for many years and really do need to go again. All being well, there could be a decent second brood this year – not that the first is by any means over yet by the look of things! 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 16-Jun-18 10:28 AM GMT

Right that's confirmed, Swallowtails next year is at the top of my list. My fav picture from your set is those two in flight, I'm a sucker for a good action shot 🍷🍷🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pete Eeles, 16-Jun-18 04:27 PM GMT

Superb images, Neil – and thanks for the extensive writeup. Is a job with the Norfolk tourist board in the offing? 😊

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 16-Jun-18 07:17 PM GMT

Fantastic Neil, your photos make me want to go back there and I was only there a little while ago, it's a beautiful area. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 16-Jun-18 08:15 PM GMT

Fantastic 😊 Stunning 😊 Lush images Neil 😊🍷🍷🍷 Also the report is brill as now when I finally manage to sort out a visit for Swallowtails I'll know exactly where to head and what to expect. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andy Wilson, 16-Jun-18 10:35 PM GMT

Wonderful Swallowtails, Neil. I've never seen the British sub-species and I must organise a trip next year. This year's already too full 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jun-18 11:14 AM GMT

Thanks all for the great comments, very much appreciated 😊

Although heading for Norfolk meant that I will be missing a few cracking species that have been flying elsewhere recently, I am very happy I decided to do so.

A cool and cloudy morning here so a chance to do a bit of catching up on some other diaries and keep up with this.

Norfolk June 10th to 14th - Other Stuff.

Besides the Swallowtails which were obviously my main focus of our trip to Norfolk, there was plenty of other interesting stuff too see.

There were not that many other butterflies about to be honest, mainly due to being in the 'June Gap' between the spring species finishing and the usual summer ones not yet flying in any numbers.

Having said that, I did see a few including my first Painted Ladies of the year, one of which was on the flower beds at the Doctor's Cottage at Strumpshaw on the Sunday afternoon.



Painted Lady - Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018

Red Admirals put in an appearance with one or two seen at most places we went to, their worn appearance, along with the Painted Ladies and a number of Silver-Y Moths that we also saw indicating that a bit of an immigration was going on.



Red Admiral - Hickling Broad 11.06.2018

A good number of Common Blues were seen along the path behind the dunes at Horsey Gap on the Wednesday morning with examples in all conditions from very worn and tatty to almost fresh looking. Small Heath were also here in good numbers, some of which were very nicely marked examples. I was also told that Wall Browns and Dark Green Fritillaries can be found here but unfortunately not on our visit this time, probably being too late for the first brood of the former and a bit too early for the latter.



Common Blue - Horsey Gap 13.06.2018



Small Heath - Horsey Gap 13.06.2018



Small Heath - Horsey Gap 13.06.2018

Other butterflies seen, mostly in ones and twos at most sites were Large Skipper, Large White, Green-veined White, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood.



Large Skipper - How Hill 13.06.2018

Horsey Gap is also home to a colony of Grey Seals and although the winter months are apparently the best time to see these there were a number in good view up on the beach approximately twenty minutes slow walk from the car park.



Grey Seals - Horsey Gap 13.06.2018



Grey Seals - Horsey Gap 13.06.2018

Lots of birds were seen during our stay including Marsh Harriers which appear to be fairly common around this area. I also saw these a few times over the farm fields by our B&B, usually too far away for a photo with my FZ200 but I did get good views through my binoculars. Other birds seen at most of the wetland sites we went to included Herons and various warbler types although not really being a birder I was not sure of the IDs of most of these similar looking small brown jobs.



Grey Heron – Strumpshaw 10.06.2018



Reed Bunting (I think) – Hickling Broad 11.06.2018



Stonechat – Horsey Gap 13.06.2018

Most days a family of Swans could be found in a drainage ditch just down the lane from our B&B.



Swans - Hickling 11.06.2018

I mentioned in the previous report that we went to How Hill on Tuesday morning and although it was too cloudy and cool for Swallowtails to be flying we spent a couple of hours exploring the grounds and walked through the wood to the secret garden. These gardens contain many azaleas and rhododendrons which I reckon would put on a lovely colourful display a bit earlier in the year.



Secret Gardens - How Hill 12.06.2018



Secret Gardens - How Hill 12.06.2018

Not surprising really considering the nature of most of the sites we visited but absolutely loads of various Dragonflies and Damselflies were also seen. I still need to sort through some photos and check some ID's of these so they will follow in a separate post.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Jun-18 11:08 PM GMT

More cracking stuff Neil 😊 Spot on with the Reed Bunting ID 😊 That is a stunning Painted Lady, which had it not been for the Swallowtails would have been the star butterfly of the trip 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 17-Jun-18 11:54 PM GMT

Excellent reportage, Neil. I'm delighted you saw decent numbers of this species and, what's more, that you got some darned good images of them too (they're rarely easy, being big, heavy and fluttery as butterflies go!).

Only been to see them once in Norfolk myself. Perhaps next year might be the time to do so again! The *britannicus* race is, in my opinion, more attractive than the continental *gorganus*.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 18-Jun-18 09:45 AM GMT

I'm blown away by your Swallowtails Neil! 📷📷📷
Fantastic shots, well done. 📷😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 18-Jun-18 09:14 PM GMT

Hi Neil,
I saw your outstanding Swallowtail images on a borrowed lap top, at our hotel in Wroxham.
Really first rate specimens, and you have done full justice to them.
What a difference a week can make. I will go in May next time.

Great stuff,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 22-Jun-18 07:27 PM GMT

Thanks for the confirmation of the Reed Bunting Wurzel 😊

I agree David, I reckon the slightly darker markings on our native race make for a more attractive butterfly...a close thing though 😊

Thanks Andrew, although there was a degree of luck in being in the right place at the right time 😊

Cheers Trevor, I see you got your Swallowtails. I was a bit concerned that we may have left it a bit late when I saw the first sightings in the middle of May but it turned out good in the end. In a 'normal' year I reckon the first week or 10 days of June would still be about right.

Being stuck in work again this week all I have seen in the way of butterflies is a couple of specklies in the garden so here is a final report from Norfolk, this one on the Dragonflies seen.

Norfolk June 10th to 14th - part 3.

I mentioned in my last report that we saw loads of various Dragonflies and Damselflies during our stay in Norfolk. As we were staying not far from Hickling Broad and intended to visit a number of fenland sites I was fully expecting to see good numbers of these insects but to be honest there were times that I was amazed by the sheer numbers in the air. Hordes of Blue Damselflies were everywhere and at Strumpshaw Fen, Hickling Broad, How Hill and Catfield Fen, the air was thick with various Chasers, Skimmers and Hawkers.

Most of the time these were very active and difficult to approach when they did occasionally settle, but there were times when there was more cloud about and it felt a bit cooler which made them a little less lively and I managed to sneak up and to get a few photos.

Banded Demoiselles were especially numerous at Strumpshaw along the path by the river,



Banded Demoiselle male – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018



Banded Demoiselle female – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018

Four-spotted and Broad Bodied Chasers were the most numerous of the larger dragonflies,



Four-spotted Chaser – How Hill 12.06.2018

Black-tailed Skimmers were also seen in good numbers,



Black-tailed Skimmer female - How Hill 12.06.2018

A few Emperor Dragonflies were about and usually stood out amongst the others with their blue colour and larger size,



Emperor Dragonfly - Hickling Broad 11.06.2018

Being in Norfolk, I was obviously on the lookout for Norfolk Hawkers but I was surprised by how many I ended up seeing, I had imagined that being a more localised species that these would be harder to find but I suppose it is like some of our more localised butterfly species that can be surprisingly numerous at some of the locations where they do occur.



Norfolk Hawker - How Hill 12.06.2018

At Catfield Fen in particular there seemed to be a Norfolk Hawker every couple of yards along the raised path around the outside of the fen, often hovering a few feet above the ground in the middle of the path which tempted me to try a get a few in flight shots...with varying success.



Norfolk Hawker – Catfield Fen 13.06.2018

I originally thought that The Dragonfly in the photo below was a male Black-tailed Skimmer but looking at it afterwards I now think that it may be a Scarce Chaser...not 100% sure though so would welcome any comment.



Scarce Chaser? – Catfield Fen 13.06.2018

That completes my reports from Norfolk. All in all a great few days with not only the Swallowtails but loads of other interesting stuff and for the most part we were lucky with the weather 😊

I really shouldn't leave it so long before returning again.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Jun-18 10:44 PM GMT

Cracking set of Dragon and Damselfly images Neil, I was wondering about whether you'd see the Norfolk Hawker and there it is 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Jun-18 06:46 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, once I got my eye in I was seeing them everywhere 😊

Saturday 23rd June.

A couple of hours yesterday afternoon wandering around my local spot at Castle Hills near Solihull produced loads of Meadow Browns and Ringlets along with good numbers of Large Skippers. The weather was warm with a high overcast that made it feel quite muggy and most of the butterflies were very active, but occasionally a cooler breeze could be felt which slowed them down a bit and gave me a few opportunities to take some photos.



Meadow Brown male – Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Ringlet female – Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Large Skipper male – Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Large Skipper female - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

Some fresh looking Small Skippers were also scattered about around the site in lower numbers, no Essex seen so far but given that it looked like the Smalls have only just started then I would expect them in another week or so.



Small Skipper male - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

A few Small Heaths were seen, some looking well past it but some looking in decent condition,



Small Heath - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Small Heath - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

A few Speckled Woods were occupying their usual spots along the shadier parts of the site through the wooded areas between the meadows,



Speckled Wood - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

Having seen Marbled Whites reported from locations not only further south but much further north to me, I was keen to see if they were out here yet. I was pleased to see that indeed they were with a couple of dozen seen scattered around the meadows here, mostly fresh looking males but with with a couple of females also spotted.



Marbled White male - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Marbled White male - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Marbled White male - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Marbled White female - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

I also saw my first summer brood vanessids with a couple each of Comma and Small Tortoiseshell putting in an appearance,



Comma - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Small Tortoiseshell – Castle Hills 23.06.2018

Given the low numbers of Peacocks around here in the spring I was also pleased to find some final instar larvae scattered around the nettle patches by the side of the paths,



Peacock larva – Castle Hills 23.06.2018

Other butterflies seen but not photographed were a few faded Common Blues and flypasts of a couple Large Whites,

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 28-Jun-18 09:36 AM GMT

Beautiful, intense colours in those images, Neil. I like the female Ringlet but that Comma takes 1st prize – what a beauty!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 28-Jun-18 09:42 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I just love those Marbled Whites, your shots certainly do them Justice 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 28-Jun-18 10:09 AM GMT

A lovely new Comma, Neil, and some great Marbled Whites. Summer Commas are one of my favourites, and that one is beautifully marked. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 29-Jun-18 02:41 PM GMT

Terrific Dragon Fly selection Neil, I really like the female Black-tailed Skimmer. Nice capture of the one in flight as well. 😊
And great stuff from Castle Hills. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jun-18 07:30 PM GMT

Thanks for the great comments David, Goldie, Dave and Andrew 😊

Thursday 28th June - Fermyn Woods.

Back in the winter months, when I was having thoughts on what butterflies I would like to see this year, it dawned on me that I had missed out on the Purple Emperor for a few years, my last time being at Fermyn Woods in 2015. This was because I had been focusing on other species that fly around the same time and had booked time off work for breaks elsewhere in the country and I simply cannot be everywhere with my limited time and opportunity. I had therefore decided this year to book a couple of days off work, one this week and one next week, in order to cover my options for what I thought may be the best time for a visit to Fermyn Woods. There is always the option of a weekend visit but to be honest I find that popular sites like Fermyn can become a bit too busy for my liking at weekends and I find that I do not enjoy the experience as much.

So it was that I set out yesterday morning (Thursday 28th) for the drive over to Fermyn which for me is a fairly straight run of about 90 minutes on a good day. I was aiming to get there for about 08.30am but heavy traffic on the M6 past Coventry and then a long tailback on the A14, apparently caused by an accident, meant that I didn't arrive at the gliding club parking spot until about 09.10 with just half a dozen cars already parked up. Even with it being a weekday I had expected to find more cars there but perhaps people have been tempted down to Knepp with the reports of 300 plus sightings by Matthew Oates and Neil Hulme.

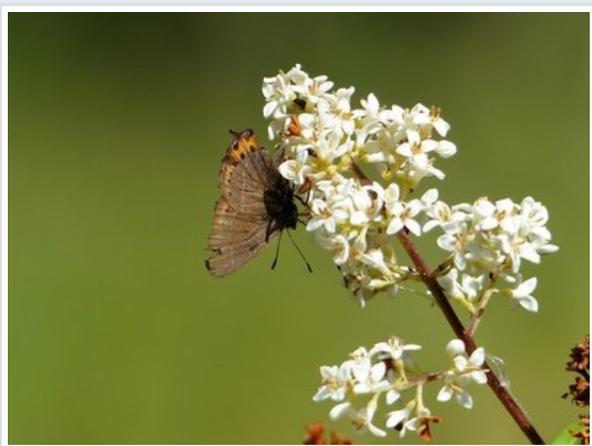
Anyway, I set off down the main ride which has changed a lot since my last visit with the forestry work that has been undertaken here this year. I must admit that I have never lingered long in this part of the woods during my previous visits here, much preferring to walk through to the Lady Wood/Souther Wood complex which I have always found to be more productive. I had also noticed on my last visit in 2015 that this ride was becoming rather shady with many of the trees beginning to meet overhead so, although it looks drastic at the moment, perhaps longer term this work will be of benefit. I spoke to a few people on my way through and opinion seemed to vary between those who saw a longer term benefit and some who were outraged at what they described as 'the carnage'.



Forestry work in Fermyn Wood - 28.06.2018

Wandering through to Lady Wood, I took the left hand fork at the first junction and it wasn't long before I started to see the first Purple Emperors. Some early mist and cloud had lifted and with the temperature rapidly rising these first sightings were either high up or of individuals flying rapidly along the track at about waist height without stopping.

I had seen that Black Hairstreaks had been having a good year but with their short flight period I had thought that this was a species that I would miss this year. I was therefore pleased to find a few on a small flowering privet along this ride, four or maybe five and very worn and tatty but an unexpected and welcome bonus nevertheless.



Black Hairstreak - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Black Hairstreaks – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

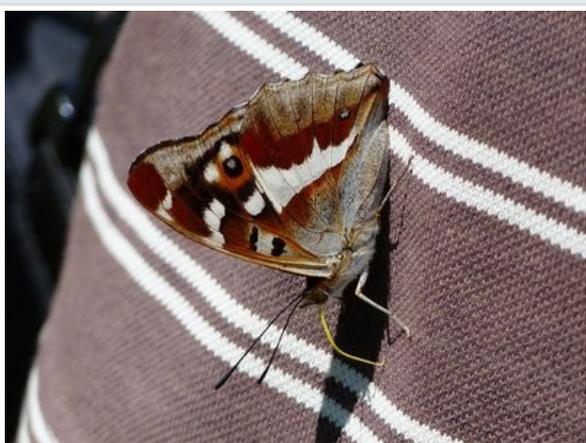
Whilst I was watching these hairstreaks, I spotted a Purple Emperor flying down the track towards me and as it drew level it settled down in the grass on the opposite verge. I started sneaking over towards it but before I got there it took off again and settled a little higher up on a small oak where I managed to get my first Emperor photo of the day.



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

I then slowly wandered on down to the southern end of the woods, seeing more Emperors skimming along the rides without settling. I headed to a spot where I had seen grounded Emperors in previous years which is at a t-junction where a side track joins the main ride and arriving there I found another enthusiast in the act of photographing a grounded Emperor. I stood back until he was finished and then he invited me over to take a few shots myself. We started talking and it turned out that he lives fairly close by and had been here the day before and baited this spot the previous day and again that morning.

As we were talking an Emperor began circling around us and then landed on my top where the other chap, who had introduced himself as Gary, kindly took a couple of photos with my camera. I suppose this cannot be called a 'trousering' as it was not on my trousers but I reckon I can claim to have been 'bellied' 😊.



Purple Emperor on my top – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

I spent an hour or so at this spot with Gary during which we had three or four different Emperors repeatedly coming to ground. As it got hotter and hotter they would sit there with their wings clamped tightly shut so we took turns in trying to shade them with our shadows to see if they would open

up. Sometimes they would open their wings briefly and give us the chance for a photo, but not for long and as midday approached they were less inclined to open up, possible because the air temperature was now very warm despite our shadows.



Purple Emperor - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

As well as the groundings, they would often fly off a short distance and settle on a nearby shrub or tree and extend their proboscis onto a leaf.. I seem to remember reading somewhere that they do this to clean their proboscis after taking up minerals from whatever dodgy substance they have been feeding on.



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

By midday the activity was tailing off and I decided to have a slow wander back up through the woods. This time I took the other track and again saw a number of very active Purple Emperors which appeared to be sticking to the parts of the ride that were in dappled shade. By now they were very skittish in the heat and difficult to approach so I spent most of my time watching rather than trying to take photos.

Heading back through Lady Wood, I bumped into Dave Williams and his brother Steve from West Midlands BC and stopped for a chat. They told me that they had spent some time during the morning with a certain Mr Hulme who had baited a section of track with his magic mixture, and there were still a couple of PE skimming back and forth along this stretch.



Purple Emperor - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

By now I had drunk all my water and used up my camera batteries (beginners mistake - I had gone out with my spare battery only having about a ¼ charge 😊), so I wandered back to the car and left just after 2.00pm. To be honest I had planned on leaving around then anyway as I reckoned it would have got a bit too hot plus I also wanted to be back through the M6 around Coventry before the traffic built up later in the afternoon.

I reckon I saw maybe 25-30 Purple Emperors during my morning here which ties in with what others I spoke to thought, including David James, the Northants Butterfly recorder who was there doing a site survey of the Lady/Souther Wood complex.

There were also plenty of other butterflies seen including loads of Whites, Large Skippers, Meadow Browns and Ringlets with Speckled Woods, Red Admirals, Commas, Small Tortoiseshells, White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries all seen in lower numbers.



Small Tortoiseshell - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Comma - Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018



Green-veined White – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

I also saw a few Purple Hairstreaks and what I think were White-letter Hairstreaks a couple of times high up. The only one of these that came anywhere close was a Purple Hairstreak that I managed to get a shot of with my camera held at arms length above my head.



Purple Hairstreak – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

All in all a great few hours at a location that I really should visit more often given that it is not really that far from me.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-18 07:50 PM GMT

Hi Neil

So sorry to have missed you! I was there all day (report coming). I must apologise for the dreadful stink I left lingering on the rides, but it turned out to be my most successful mix yet. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 29-Jun-18 08:08 PM GMT

Congrats. on your all four wings purple shots, Neil.

Your experience with the Emperors and the heat, was repeated in West Sussex, wings tight shut, then making for the foliage, and very fidgety.

One shot I took might interest you, which I have captioned. It shows the wing texture well, courtesy of the very bright sun and the angle of the Butterfly.

Great report,
Trevor

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-18 09:01 PM GMT

Absolutely brill stuff Neil – two Hairstreaks and Purple Emperor 🤩😄🍀🍀 And a quadruple purple to boot 🍀🍀
Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jun-18 10:00 AM GMT

Hi Neil, yes, a shame I missed you. I had been further down towards the southern end of the woods and didn't start meandering back until early afternoon.

Thanks Trevor, I'll have a look at your PD.

Cheers Wurzel, The Black Hairstreaks were a pleasant surprise. There was a potential for three hairstreaks if a WLH had come lower but it wasn't to be.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 30-Jun-18 09:11 PM GMT

Some wonderful envy inducing purple action there Neil 🍷 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Jul-18 08:35 PM GMT

Thanks Bugboy, it was probably the only chance I will get to see decent condition Purple Emperors this year so I was pleased with the results 😊

Sunday 1st July.

The only spare time that I had over the weekend was a couple of hours each on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and with this being during the hottest part of the day, I just didn't fancy going out anywhere in the current heat.

On both days, from early in the morning, the butterflies in the garden were in hyper mode, particularly a couple of male Large Skippers that were buzzing about like mad chasing anything that came into their zones.



Large Skipper male - Coverdale 01.07.2018



Large Skipper male - Coverdale 01.07.2018



Large Skipper male - Coverdale 01.07.2018



Large Skipper male - Coverdale 01.07.2018



Large Skipper male - Coverdale 01.07.2018

Half a dozen Ringlets were bobbing about almost constantly amongst the long grass and brambles and just occasionally stopping for a refuel,



Ringlet - Coverdale 01.07.2018



Ringlet - Coverdale 01.07.2018

All three species of common White came passing through and were occasionally tempted to stop at some lavender,



Large White - Coverdale 01.07.2018

Also seen were a couple of well faded Speckled Woods and the first summer brood Holly Blue.

I see this hot weather is forecast to continue for a while yet. Looking at the state of a lot of the vegetation around here I am beginning to wonder what effect this will have on foodplants and therefore some of the later broods.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 02-Jul-18 08:42 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, lovely shots of the Emperor's 🍷🍷 I hope to be at Fermyn this coming Sat , hope their still around 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 02-Jul-18 09:00 PM GMT

Cracking set of shots Neil 😊 I've started to wonder/worry about the later broods too and also whether there will be any butterflies left in the autumn having burnt out now 😊 Fingers crossed...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 02-Jul-18 09:21 PM GMT

Fabulous shots from Fermyn Neil – all of them 🍷 and that Large White is not too shabby either! 😊😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 04-Jul-18 08:38 PM GMT

Thanks Goldie, I have seen reports that plenty of Purple Emperors are still being seen at Fermyn this week so you should be good.

Cheers Wurzel, I really am not used to saying this these days but we really need some rain soon to re-invigorate the vegetation. I am old enough to remember the drought of 1976 and the crash in butterfly numbers that followed in subsequent years.

Thanks Pauline, I must admit I was chuffed with those PE shots from Fermyn 😊

I actually have a bit of time to try and do a bit of catching up and UKB seems to be running very slowly tonight...not sure if it just me but other websites don't seem to be affected.

Garden Moths.

I have been running the trap on average twice a week with the actual days varying depending on the overnight weather. Despite some really hot days the clear nights have led to some cool overnight temperatures and sometimes it has been quite breezy.

With six months of the year now gone I had a look back at last year which was my first full year of running the trap and compared notes.

Last year, up until the end of June I had a total of 170 species made up of 103 macro and 67 micro.

This year to the same date I have had a total of 129 species made up of 80 macro and 49 micro.

I have had 9 macro species and 5 micro species new in my garden this year but have missed quite a few that I saw last year.

This shows that I am well behind still this year, mainly due to the late spring this year when things were slow to get going and despite the recent recent hot weather I have not caught up yet. It will be interesting to see what the second half of the year brings.

Anyway, a few photos below of some of my favourite moths to the trap.



Elephant Hawk Moth – 17.06.2018



Light Emerald - 17.06.2018



Blood-vein - 17.06.2018



Coronet - 19.06.2018



Beautiful Hook-tip – 19.06.2018



Common Emerald – 24.06.2018



Smoky Wainscot – 24.06.2018



Nemaphora degeerella, a day flying longhorn moth, this one was attracted to the trap overnight – 07.06.2018



Lozotaeniodes formosana, an attractive micro first recorded in Surrey in 1945 and expanding its range – 24.06.2018

Back in May I posted a photo of a caterpillar which I found in the garden that I was pretty sure was that of the Old Lady moth.



Old Lady Moth larva – 13.05.2018

About a week after I found it, it spun a loose cocoon between the dock leaves that I had been feeding it and knowing that it should emerge this summer I placed the cocoon straight into a cage. I didn't take any photos of the cocoon because all you could see was the back of a couple of leaves and I didn't want to disturb it just to take a photo.

A couple of days ago it confirmed its identity by emerging as a nice example of an Old Lady Moth, a large and impressive species.



Old Lady Moth – 01.07.2018

After taking a few photos I released it into the garden where it flew off with this species' typical lazy flapping flight which seems to accentuate its size.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 05-Jul-18 09:07 AM GMT

UKB was running a bit slow for me last night as well Neil. Got there in the end though.

Fantastic to see that Old Lady moth – well done on rearing it through. As you will well know (but other readers might not) they are quite rarely seen as they don't tend to come to light traps. However during the summer of 2014, when I spent a lot of time 'dusking' in Oxfordshire field margins for my

PhD research, I formed the opinion that they were actually a very common species in that part of the world.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 05-Jul-18 10:07 AM GMT

Fantastic Emperor shots Neil. 🍷😄 And great moth selection, I like the *Lozotaeniodes formosana* and Old Lady. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 05-Jul-18 01:14 PM GMT

I'm pleased to learn the problem wasn't at my end – I just gave up eventually 😞. I also quite frequently get error messages and get blocked out so I try to keep my posts as short as possible. With that in mind I love the moth selection Neil and would be delighted to see that Blood-vein. I was surprised to read about Old Lady Callum as they seem to pop up everywhere here including my bedroom!!! 🤩

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-18 11:04 PM GMT

Great set of Moffs Neil 😊 *Lozotaeniodes formosana* is certainly an attractive Mof 🤩

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 06-Jul-18 09:34 PM GMT

Thanks Callum 😊, I have had Old Ladies to my trap before (hmm...doesn't sound quite right that 😊), I have heard it said that they come to actinic – which I use – more readily than MV.

Thanks Andrew, glad you like the shots 😊

Hi Pauline, I have seen Blood-veins around here before when they can be easily disturbed during the day but that was the first one in my garden 😊

Cheers Wurzel, like a lot of micros, and attractive moth with a tongue twisting name 😊

Wednesday 4th July

This was the second day that I had booked off work earlier in the year in order to cover my options for seeing Purple Emperors. Of course, back then we had no idea that we were going to get this run of hot weather and so I had gone for these days based on the average emergence times over the past few years.

Having been successful with seeing the Emperors at Fermyn Wood last week I decided to go somewhere else this week and asked Jane if she fancied going down to Snitterfield Bushes just north of Stratford upon Avon, this being a favourite spot of hers.

We arrived at 09.30 and at first it felt a bit cool with the sun not quite high enough to shine over the trees onto the paths. It didn't take long to warm up however and as it did so it was like a switch was flipped and butterflies started appearing all around us, mostly the three common whites to start with but also Ringlets and Meadow Browns.

All three of the whites were flying in good numbers and to start with were visiting various flowers along the verges of the paths to fuel up for the day.



Large White – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Large White – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Green-veined White – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Green-veined White – Snitterfield 04.06.2018

One of our prime reasons to come here was for Jane to see Silver-washed Fritillaries which can usually be seen in good numbers here and sure enough it wasn't long before they started appearing and like the whites spending some time nectaring.



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary female – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Snitterfield 04.06.2018

As we were slowly wandering along a pair of SWFs in cop came fluttering along the path and dropped down right in front of Jane, they then took off again but only as far as some bramble a few feet away where I got a couple of photos before they were off again up into the trees.



Silver-washed Fritillary pair – Snitterfield 04.06.2018

I have seen female SWFs of the valezina form a number of times at this location in the past and was on the lookout for one of these today so was particularly chuffed to spot one on a stand of thistles. She was a little worse for wear and it was difficult to get a decent photo with her constant fidgeting about and the harsh light.



Silver-washed Fritillary valezina – Snitterfield 04.06.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary valezina – Snitterfield 04.06.2018

Half a dozen summer Commas were scattered about along the paths along with singles of Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Red Admiral.



Comma – Snitterfield 04.06.2018

A couple of Marbled Whites were also seen along the paths in the woods, these most likely having wandered in from the nearby meadows where they fly in good numbers.



Marbled White – Snitterfield 04.06.2018

I kept scanning the tops of the oaks for Purple Hairstreaks and spotted quite a few flitting about high up and on a couple of occasions one would come a bit lower down but unfortunately none were seen to settle.

Also seen were a couple of Gatekeepers, my first this year with these only just starting around here. The previously mentioned Ringlets and Meadow Browns were seen along every path but there did not seem to be as many as I have seen here in previous years. I know these latter two species prefer cooler conditions, perhaps it is just too hot for them lately.

By midday it had turned into yet another hot day and with a lot of the butterflies now hiding away in the shadier spots we decided to head back home.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 06-Jul-18 09:44 PM GMT

Oh Neil, that Valezina underside shot is simply stunning. I can't remember ever seeing one as good as that. Definitely in the category of 'wish I'd taken it' or even 'wish I'd seen it!' 🍷🍷🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Jul-18 07:21 AM GMT

Fantastic Valesina Neil, always tricky to get as they often seem to prefer the shade and are much more skittish than other SWFs 😊🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 08-Jul-18 07:34 AM GMT

I shall join the queue congratulating you on the Valezina, especially that underside shot.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Jul-18 07:30 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments Pauline, Wurzel and Ernie 😊

Wednesday 4th July - part 2.

After our morning at Snitterfield Bushes we headed home and as it was now too hot to do much we spent a lazy afternoon just chilling out. I watched as increasing numbers of Large, Small and Green-veined Whites passed through the garden and a couple of male Large Skippers dashed about like mad things as they tried to chase off anything that came close to them.

I also saw my first summer Brimstone which spent some time going in and out of the shade by the brambles at the bottom of the garden.



Brimstone - Coverdale 04.07.2018

Later on, about 5.00pm I decided to have a walk down the road to the local park to see if anything was about in the patch of rough ground that is along one side there. I soon saw the usual Meadow Browns and Ringlets along with all three whites, all in the good numbers that the recent weather has brought out at most places.

A number of golden skippers were darting about and along with a couple of faded Large and some Smalls I managed to identify at least a couple of Essex amongst them.



Essex Skipper - Wagon Lane 04.07.2018



Essex Skipper – Wagon Lane 04.07.2018

A couple of Small Tortoiseshells and at least three Commas were also flying backwards and forwards along the hedges here but these were very flighty in the heat and I only managed a couple of photos.



Comma – Wagon Lane 04.07.2018

A rapidly moving object flew along in front to me at one point and at first I thought it was a perhaps some sort of odd stumpy dragonfly but a closer look proved it to be a Hummingbird Hawk Moth. It didn't hang around for me to even get a record shot but I was pleased with this sighting as this was the first of these that I have seen locally.

That night I ran the moth trap in the garden and had my highest count so far this year – 218 moths of 44 species made up by 113 of 26 macro and 104 of 18 micro. Most of these were the usual trap fillers at this time of year e.g. Hart & Darts (19) and Uncertain/Rustic aggs (35) but there were a number of firsts for the year including Marbled Beauty, Buff Footman, Dun-bar, Buff Arches and Square-spot Rustic along with another Poplar Hawk which are always good to see.



Poplar Hawk Moth – Coverdale 04.07.2018



Buff Arches - Coverdale 04.07.2018



Marbled Beauty - Coverdale 04.07.2018

There were also a couple of new species for my garden including a September Thorn. This species is usually considered an autumn flying moth although it can be seen from July to October and I have heard of a few others coming to moths traps in the midlands this week.



September Thorn - Coverdale 04.07.2018

The other new species for my garden was a Small Ranunculus. This species has an interesting history being considered extinct in the UK by the 1940s. It reappeared in Kent in 1997 and since then has spread across the UK and according to our Warwickshire moth recorder is now well established in urban areas in the north and west of the county with sporadic records from the west - where I am.



Small Ranunculus – Coverdale 04.07.2018

I also had 7 Coronets in the trap on Wednesday night which is more of this species in one night than I had in all of last year. This species was considered very local and scarce in Warwickshire just 10 years ago but since then has recovered somewhat and this year seems to be doing particularly well.



Coronet – Coverdale 04.07.2018

It has to be said that taking photos of moths in this heat is a trifle challenging and even though I usually wait until the evening and take the photos in the shade, I usually just get chance for one or two quick shots before they are gone.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 09-Jul-18 08:26 PM GMT

That's a lovely Comma shot Neil – crisp and well composed. It's the sort I'd frame and put on my wall 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 10-Jul-18 10:37 AM GMT

Lovely Valezena, I've still only had distant views of them, they don't seem to appear at my normal SWF hunting ground of Bookham. I do like that Buff Arches too, one of my favourite moths which I've not seen for a few years 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 10-Jul-18 10:49 AM GMT

May I join the queue with the mrgreens for that gorgeous Valezena Neil? 🍷🍷🍷
I have never seen the underside of one, so thanks for that !.
You are certainly making up for that grim early Spring you suffered !.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 10-Jul-18 07:05 PM GMT

Lovely Silver-washed Neil, well done with the Valezina. 😊 Always enjoy your moth selection. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Jul-18 07:00 AM GMT

Lovely *valezina*, Neil, and another fabulous line up of moths. The September Thorn, I assume, ought to be a late summer species. Is it usually around in early July?

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 11-Jul-18 07:38 AM GMT

Neil – great series of moth pics. The Purple Hawk moth is a stunner and the Buff Arches looks like someone has highlighted it with gold paint. Fantastic.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 11-Jul-18 10:27 PM GMT

I'm very envious of the valesina, Neil – such an extraordinary colouration and great shots. I have yet to see one (I must go to the wrong woods!). 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Jul-18 05:28 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline...hmm! may have to look for a frame 😊

Thanks Bugboy, I have had few Buff Arches every year since I started running the trap in my garden. A favourite of mine too 😊

Thanks Trevor, Spring was certainly a bit grim here but it seem so long ago now 😊

Thanks Andrew, glad you like the moths 😊

Thanks David, the September Thorn can be seen from July onwards but is really a late summer/early autumn species.

Thanks Ernie, regarding nice Poplar Hawk Moths see the next post.

Thanks Dave, in Warwickshire valezina can be seen in Ryton Wood if you are lucky as well as Snitterfield Bushes and Oversley Wood.

Friday 13th July.

This past week most days have started off with varying degrees of cloud that has burned off through the day and turned into yet more warm and dry afternoons. We still have not had any rain although there is a forecast for scattered showers later tonight, some of which could apparently be thundery and heavy.

I have been seeing reports of large numbers of most of the usual summer species being seen all around the midlands but with me being stuck in work I have not been able to take advantage of this. I have however noted the numbers of butterflies, mostly whites, passing through my garden when I am back home later in the afternoon with all three common species being more numerous than in the past few summers. At times there have been half a dozen or more in sight at the same time and these have paid regular but usually short visits to my lavender and bowles mauve to top up their energy.



Small White – Coverdale 10.07.2018



Small White - Coverdale 10.07.2018

A couple of Speckled Woods are in residence as usual and these are now being kept company by Ringlets, Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and Large Skippers, all of which appear to be breeding in the patches of long grass around the garden.



Gatekeeper - Coverdale 10.07.2018



Gatekeeper - Coverdale 10.07.2018



Ringlet - Coverdale 10.07.2018



Large Skipper - Coverdale 10.07.2018

Summer brood Holly Blues have been showing up for the past week or so but the only photo I have managed so far has been when I spotted one settle in a bit shade.



Holly Blue - Coverdale 10.07.2018

A couple of Commas have been flitting about all week and a Peacock was hanging around for a couple of days on one of my buddleias.



Peacock - Coverdale 10.07.2018

Back in May, I posted about some Poplar Hawk Moths that I had reared through from eggs that were laid by a female in my garden moth trap last year. All but one of these had emerged by the end of May and although the last remaining pupa did not emerge along with the others, I was pretty sure it was still healthy so I kept it in the emerging cage and continued to keep an eye on it. On Monday I returned home from work to find that it had finally emerged and was pleased to see that it was a nice female of the less common buff colour form, the first of these that I have actually seen in the flesh.



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 08.07.2018



Poplar Hawk Moth - Coverdale 08.07.2018

I ran the trap last Sunday night and had another large catch of 115 moths of 29 macro species and 107 of 22 micros making a total of 222 moths of 51 species.

Among the many common trap fillers I had a few more new ones for the year including Dingy Footman, Small Dusty Wave, Dusky Thorn and Silver Y (I have seen loads of these in the daytime but this was the first in the trap this year).



Dusky Thorn – Coverdale 08.07.2018

I have had a few Elephant Hawk Moths this year but they are always a welcome sight.



Elephant Hawk Moth – Coverdale 08.07.2018

Although we have showers forecast and we could do with some rain around here I am keeping my fingers crossed that we don't get too much tonight because I am off out shortly to meet some of the Warwickshire Moth Group for a moth night at Ryton Wood.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 13-Jul-18 05:35 PM GMT

Oh, well done Neil with that Poplar Hawk moth – great result 😊😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Jul-18 08:01 AM GMT

Congrats on the Polar Moth Neil 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 14-Jul-18 01:45 PM GMT

Those hawk moths are just stunning, Neil. For once, the butterflies will have to be content with a supporting role.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 15-Jul-18 06:38 PM GMT

She's a beauty Neil, well done. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jul-18 08:31 PM GMT

Thanks all for the comments, I was well chuffed with that Poplar Hawk 😊

We didn't have any rain in the end on Friday night, in fact apart from a very light shower yesterday (Monday) afternoon, we still haven't had any rain to speak of for weeks now.

The moth night at Ryton Wood was a great success with a total of 17 traps running from a number of generators. Some of the traps were packed away around 02.00am, including my portable 40w actinic which I took along, and some were left running until the morning when their owners returned to them. The final tally was in excess of 130 species of macro moths with some collating of lists and a couple of IDs still to do but it looks like a couple of new site records once the IDs are confirmed.



Ryton Wood at night - 13.07.2018

A weekend of household chores and family stuff with my daughter and grand kids around on Sunday meant that I didn't get chance to get out anywhere. From what I saw of the butterflies in the garden, everything was either charging around in turbo mode or hiding away in the shade as has become the norm in the recent hot weather.

Even so, I spent most of the time in the garden and managed a few random shots when the opportunity presented itself.



Gatekeeper male - Coverdale 15.07.2018



Gatekeeper female – Coverdale 15.07.2018



Holly Blue – Coverdale 15.07.2018



Mint Moth – Coverdale 15.07.2018

Last night and today have been a little bit cooler with more cloud about but the forecast is for it to warm up again through the week and there is still no sign of any rain here yet.

I have another random day booked off work tomorrow so I am hoping to get out somewhere...don't know where yet, I will decide in the morning.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Jul-18 10:05 PM GMT

A great selection of random shots Neil 😊 130 species in one night 😲 I;m glad I haven't gotten into moffs in a big way, I'd still be writing up posts from

2013 in 2018 🤖😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 17-Jul-18 10:15 PM GMT

Trying to catch up on some posts Neil, with being on holiday it's a bit difficult 😊 Fabulous shots of the Valezina, 🍷🍷😊 also the moths 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Jul-18 12:00 AM GMT

That's an impressive haul of moths, Neil....and nice to see fresh Holly Blues back on the wing. Much to look forward to over the next week or three.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 20-Jul-18 08:07 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, Goldie and David, much appreciated as always 😊

Wednesday 18th July – Oversley Wood.

Wednesday morning dawned with a layer of cloud cover which the forecast said would persist for most of the day albeit with occasional sunny spells and temperatures rising again to the mid twenties. I asked Jane if she fancied going out anywhere and we settled on Oversley Wood down by Alcester which has a good circular track with a hard surface which she can manage with her walking frame.

As it was not as hot as it had been recently we decided to hang on until after the worst of the school run traffic had eased off and following a 45 minute run we arrived at about 10.30.

We set off along the main track and soon saw the usual Ringlets and Meadow Browns bobbing about in the grass verges which were soon joined by Gatekeepers and the three common whites. A couple of faded Marbled Whites also put in an appearance along with the occasional Speckled Wood at intervals all around the track.

One particular male Gatekeeper stood out with its extra spots...one for Wurzel 😊



Gatekeeper male excessa – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Gatekeeper female – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Meadow Brown female – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Marbled White – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Speckled Wood female – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

With the morning warming up, Silver-washed Fritillaries began to show up in good numbers and on a few occasions Jane had these circling around her head, possibly attracted by her blonde hair.



Silver-washed Fritillary female rejecting male – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary male – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary female – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary female - Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

As well as the wide circular track here there are a number of rougher tracks through the interior of the wood and where these meet the main track there are often more open spaces and clearings where Common Blues and Brown Argus were seen along with Small Skippers and a few now faded Large Skippers.



Common Blue male - Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Common Blue female - Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Brown Argus female – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Brown Argus male – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Brown Argus male – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

One particular clearing that was set back a little from the main track contained a large stand of thistles which were playing host to a large number of whites plus a few Silver-washed Fritillaries. I spotted a different looking orangey butterfly flitting about on the thistles and a closer look showed it to be a nice Painted Lady.



Painted Lady – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

I returned to this spot a couple of hours later whilst Jane was having a rest back at the car and found the Painted Lady still in the same spot where it was now alternating between feeding on the thistles and basking on the ground



Painted Lady – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018



Painted Lady – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

On visits here in previous years I have seen good numbers of White Admirals but today only produced the one and a tired looking example at that. Quite possibly these had gone over quickly in the recent hot weather and in truth many of the butterflies seen today were looking the worse for wear.



White Admiral – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

Two Purple Emperors were seen, the first one when Jane was taking a rest on one of the benches scattered around the wood and a large dark butterfly came swooping down and landed on the track a few feet away from her. She called me over from where I was checking out some brambles a short distance away and I turned around just in time to see it take off and fly towards me where it came close enough for me to see the flash of purple as it passed by. The second one was seen on the other side of the wood when we were going along the return leg back towards the car park. This time we saw the PE slowly flying along the side of the track and going in and out of the bushes, quite possibly searching for females. It came level with us and flew around us a couple of times, appearing to check us out, before flying off and going up high into the trees.

As well as the butterflies already mentioned, a number of Brimstones were seen, usually feeding up on the various wild flowers in readiness for their long winter hibernation ahead.



Brimstone – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

A few Commas were scattered around doing their best Fritillary impressions in flight but unmistakable when settled.



Comma – Oversley Wood 18.07.2018

A single SWF valezina was also seen but unfortunately didn't come close enough for a photo and a good number of Purple Hairstreaks also stayed well out of reach up in the trees.

So then, the forecast proved to be accurate with it turning into a mostly overcast but warm day with some brief glimpses of sun. The temperature was warm enough for plenty of butterflies to be flying but it was not too hot as to be as uncomfortable as it has been of late. Absolutely loads of whites were flying along with good numbers of SWFs and a good supporting cast of other species, although Ringlet and Meadow Brown numbers seemed lower than usual, something that I have noticed at a number of sites here in the midlands recently.

All in all a great day.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-18 08:40 PM GMT

That certainly reads as a great day with the shots to boot Neil 😊, I wish I'd been there 🍷 I reckon your Hedge Brown could be even better than an excessa Neil as the extra spots appear to have pupils 🤔😊🍷🍷 That defo goes into 'I wish I'd taken that' collection!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 21-Jul-18 05:14 PM GMT

Nice to see most butterflies 'opening up', Neil. These last few days have been so warm that practically everything I've observed has kept its wings shut at all times once settled.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Jul-18 08:49 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, just a pity he was a bit worse for wear otherwise he would have been a real cracker.

Thanks David, the cloud helped a bit but with it still being warm there were plenty of butterflies that refused to open up.

Saturday 21st July.

Although some parts of the midlands had some fairly heavy rain the other night, we still have not had any to speak of locally, just a very brief light shower on Friday which did not even wet the ground.

A couple of hours spare on Saturday afternoon saw me popping round to my local spot at Bickenhill on what was a mostly cloudy but warm and muggy day.

This is primarily a grassland site with a couple of meadow areas with paths along hedgerows around the outside and normally there would be swarms of Meadow Browns here along with Ringlets which by now would be in the latter stages of their flight period. Gatekeeper numbers should be at their peak around now and both Small and Essex Skippers are usually buzzing about all over the place.

In the hour or so that I spent here, I did see all the species mentioned above but in every case they were in much lower numbers than I usually see. I did wonder if the hot and dry weather we have been having had resulted in some earlier and shorter flight periods for some of these and that maybe they were already coming to an end, but from what I have seen elsewhere around here it seems that the Meadow Browns and Skippers in particular have been well down in number this year.

A few Common Blues were flying but only the females were basking with open wings, the males flying almost constantly and keeping their wings clamped firmly shut when they did briefly settle.



Common Blue female – Bickenhill 21.07.2018



Common Blue male - Bickenhill 21.07.2018

On a more positive note, there were loads of whites everywhere with all three common species being seen in roughly equal numbers. It has been some years since I have seen whites in the kind of numbers that we are around this summer. It was also good to see plenty of Commas with every few yards of hedgerow seeming to have a male vigorously defending his spot from all intruders.



Comma - Bickenhill 21.07.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 21.07.2018



Comma - Bickenhill 21.07.2018

One solitary Peacock was briefly seen plus a few Speckled Woods were flitting in and out of the shadier spots along the hedgerows.



Speckled Wood male - Bickenhill 21.07.2018

A strange day that felt like things were far more advanced than they really should be at this time of year.

Sunday 22nd July.

The forecast for the weekend had Saturday looking to be the better day with supposedly more cloud and lower temperatures on the Sunday. In the end it turned out that the reverse was the case with more sun and hotter temperatures developing through Sunday afternoon. As it was, I had already decided to catch up on some jobs around the house in the morning and potter about a bit in the garden during the afternoon.

Lots of whites were seen again with 7 or 8 of all three species together in sight at the same time on many occasions. A couple of male Speckled Wood were up to their territorial antics in the usual corners and at least 4 Gatekeepers and a couple of faded Ringlets were bobbing about around the brambles at the bottom of the garden. At least 2 Holly Blues kept coming around and a few times were seen chasing each other about but never came anywhere close to settling.

As usual I kept my camera to hand just in case anything stayed still long enough to grab a photo which wasn't that often in the heat although the occasional cloud slowed things down now and then.



Gatekeeper female - Coverdale 22.07.2018



Gatekeeper male excessa – a bit worn and this was the only shot I managed before he was gone.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 22.07.2018



Green-veined White – Coverdale 22.07.2018



Small White - Coverdale 22.07.2018



Small White - Coverdale 22.07.2018

Still no rain in the forecast here for the foreseeable future, I am getting worried now for the rest of the season and the implications for next year with the state of the parched and withered vegetation all around here.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Old Wolf, 23-Jul-18 09:48 PM GMT

Beautiful pictures Neil. Very sharp.

I particularly like the underside Painted Lady 🍷

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Jul-18 10:26 PM GMT

I know what you mean about the flights appearing to be earlier and shorter Neil, it feels butterfly wise that if you blinked you missed the Ringlets and golden skippers 😊 They also seemed down in number this way as well 😊 On the other hand your Hedge Browns cheered me up 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 23-Jul-18 11:00 PM GMT

Yes I agree, things are happening to quickly for my liking, and the heat is making photography difficult. Whoever thought we would be complaining about the hot, dry weather!

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 24-Jul-18 09:47 PM GMT

In spite of the unfavourable conditions, Neil, you've still managed to concoct a sequence of butterfly images where the subjects are seemingly well behaved.

There's no doubt about it, we need rain soon, and maybe lots of it.

At this time of year, there's nothing really to be gained by continued Mediterranean weather. For once, I'm praying for cooler weather combined with precipitation. If we don't get it, then I reckon 2019 could be abnormally austere.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 27-Jul-18 09:15 PM GMT

Thanks Old Wolf, the underside of Painted Ladies are in many ways more attractive than the upperside.

Cheers Wurzel, I seem to be missing quite a few species this year one way or another. The hot weather and early emergence's have played havoc with my plans. Definitely a season when being retired (or otherwise not tied to having to work) would have been a big advantage.

Agreed Mark, it goes from one extreme to the other. Mind you, it looks like the weather will be breaking this weekend.

Thanks David, they weren't as well behaved as the photos make them appear, I also managed lots of blurry butterflies disappearing out of the frame.

Friday 27th June

Despite some parts of the midlands having a bit of rain this week, we still have not seen a drop around my local area although that looks to change with a forecast for sun and showers tomorrow and some wet and wild weather coming in on Sunday...just as we are heading up to Arnsdale & Silverdale for a few days. Oh well, it is certainly needed and the beginning of next week looks to be not too bad up there.

Not much to report in the way of butterflies this week apart from there are still lots of whites and the usual suspects in the garden after work.

Although the nights have been quite warm, they have also been clear with a bright moon and an appreciable drop in temperature overnight so I have not put the moth trap out since last Sunday night when I was pleased to get my first Red Underwing for the garden...even though it was in a bit of a sorry state, looking like its wings had not developed fully as well as being quite worn.



Red Underwing - Coverdale 22.07.2018

The underside of this moth is particularly attractive so I teased it onto my hand in an attempt to capture this.



Red Underwing - Coverdale 22.07.2018

and a few other favourite moths from the last couple of sessions,



Pale Prominent - Coverdale 19.07.2018



Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing - 19.07.2018



Flame Carpet – Coverdale 19.07.2018



Copper Underwing – 22.07.2018

As well as seeing Silver Y Moths during the day they are also turning up in the trap at night which gives me an easier chance to get a photo than when they are rapidly buzzing about with blurry wings.



Silver Y – Coverdale 22.07.2018

Anyway, lets hope that the rain we are due over the weekend helps things before too much damage has been done by the recent hot and dry weather.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 27-Jul-18 11:22 PM GMT

That Pale Prominent is an odd looking moff Neil, it looks like it's missing its head 🤪😬 The Red Underwing underwing is really attractive 😊🌍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 28-Jul-18 06:03 AM GMT

Fabulous selection of moths there Neil – as usual 😊. My favourite is the Broad-bordered Yellow-underwing. Does it really look so metallic or is that just the way the light is catching it? I'd love to see one.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Aug-18 09:25 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel and Pauline 😊 ...my apologies for the late response, I have been away for a few days 😊

I think that is the way the light is catching the BBYU Pauline. They have really attractive deep orange hindwings which so far I have totally failed to get a photo of <https://ukmoths.org.uk/species/noctua-fimbriata>

Arnside Knott 30th & 31st July part 1 – Scotch Argus.

On Sunday (29th July) we set off up the M6 for a couple of days at Arnside. After weeks and weeks of no rain here at home in the Midlands the heavens opened up on Sunday and down it came. With a forecast for rain for most of the day we decided to leave it until around midday before setting off and after passing through a couple of spells when it really lashed it down on the way up the M6 we turned off the motorway 3 hours later for the Arnside & Silverdale area in dull, cloudy and drizzly conditions. With a bit of time in hand before we could check in at our B&B we stopped off at Warton Crag for a quick look, although to be honest I wasn't expecting to see much in the less than favourable conditions. I went for a quick walk along the path through the woods and out onto the slopes and found that the higher I went the windier it became until it was blowing a gale on the higher paths. Nevertheless, I did find a few butterflies with a couple of Speckled Wood and singles of Small Skipper, Meadow Brown, Comma, Red Admiral and Painted Lady all briefly seen before the wind whisked them away. A handful of Common Blues were also hunkered down in the grassy area by the car park.

The following morning (July 30th) was again dull and drizzly but with a forecast for some brighter weather in the afternoon, so we decided to spend the morning at RSPB Leighton Moss which is just a few minutes drive from our B&B, before heading up to Arnside Knott later.

During the few days before heading up to this area I had been wondering how it had been affected by the hot and dry weather that most of the country has had this year and it soon became obvious that, along with the rest of us, they have suffered from a lack of rainfall, with water levels at Leighton Moss being the lowest I have seen there.

Moving on to Arnside Knott just after midday I saw that the hillside was brown and parched which the rain over the weekend had done little to alleviate. The clumps of marjoram that so often attract butterflies here were mostly shrivelled and on their last legs and apart from a couple of small stands of hemp agrimony it was ragwort that was providing most of the nectar sources.

Over the next couple of hours the weather was mixed with some nice sunny spells but also a couple of drizzly showers with the temperature rising up to around the high teens. I had seen Scotch Argus being reported for a week or so before coming up but apparently not in high numbers and I had been wondering what I would find this year. Back home, numbers of some of the 'browns' and skippers seem to have been hit by the dry conditions and I wondered if this would be the case with the Scotch Argus here. I did a circuit of the sheltered clearings where I have always had success in the past and although I found maybe 12-15 scattered about they appeared to be flying in much lower numbers than I have seen here in previous years.



Scotch Argus male – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Scotch Argus male – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Scotch Argus male – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Scotch Argus female – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

The following morning was a bit warmer with some good sunny spells, but with more cloud forecast to build up in the afternoon I decided to make the most of the morning and return to the Knott again. Arriving just before 10.00 it was warming up nicely although it was a bit breezy, as it often is on the more exposed parts of the Knott, and it was not long before I was seeing a few Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers flapping about.

As on the previous day, I did a circuit taking in the usual 'hotspots' but despite the better conditions, numbers were still low with no more than 20 at most seen scattered widely about during the couple of hours I spent here.

This is a species that soon begins to look worse for wear with scuffs and scratches showing against its dark ground colour and many of those seen, both this morning and the previous afternoon, were getting quite worn and faded with some looking like they had been around for some time. Also, the sun kept coming in and out from behind the clouds leading to rapidly changing light conditions which, along with the breeze, meant that getting a half decent photo was a real challenge.



Scotch Argus male – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018



Scotch Argus male – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018



Scotch Argus male – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018



Scotch Argus female – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018



Scotch Argus female – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018

I have already mentioned the dry conditions this year and how it seems to have hit the numbers of some of the species with grass feeding larvae and I suspect this is the case with the Scotch Argus here as well. Also, I couldn't help but notice that the usual prime spots here were becoming choked up with brambles and encroaching scrub which would also be having an adverse effect.

During my wanders around the Knott I met a number of people, including members of both Cumbria and Lancashire BC branches who all expressed concern about the low numbers of Scotch Argus this year. In fact, it appears that numbers have been dropping steadily for a number of years now, a fact that I have noticed on my visits over the past couple of years when I have seen dozens compared to the hundreds I was seeing when I first started coming here. The opinion was expressed to me more than once that the conservation focus has centred on the High Brown Fritillary in this area with the plight of the Scotch Argus here seemingly going under the radar and that the species could be lost from Arnside Knott if the current trend continues. Whatever the truth is, and I suspect that a combination of the habitat becoming less favourable has been exacerbated by the dry weather this year, there is no doubt that something is not right and I was a bit surprised at how few Scotch Argus were flying here this year..

I really hope that I am wrong and that the Scotch Argus population on Arnside Knott recovers, particularly as it is one of only two sites where it can be seen in England.

At least, from what I was told, there are good numbers flying this year at Smardale Gill.

Of course, I also saw other butterflies up there...

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 02-Aug-18 10:15 PM GMT

Considering the worrying situation you mentioned, you did well to get the excellent shots that you did, Neil. Arnside looked parched right at the start of July, so I can't imagine how it was at the end... It would be a great shame to lose one of the two English populations. 😞

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 02-Aug-18 10:17 PM GMT

Lush set of shots Neil 🌈🌿 It is a common problem that whilst you can improve a habitat for one species it can be detrimental for another but hopefully the tide can be turned 😊 Back to a brighter note – looking forward to seeing what else you saw 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 03-Aug-18 10:49 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I was thinking of visiting Arnside but wonder now if I should, your shots are still great and make me want to go but I think I'll visit Gait barrow first then see what happens.

last year when I was up at Arnside the conditions were cloudy and dark but in the afternoon when the Sun shone we saw loads of SA they were even low down near the car park, I assumed then that things were well with them, so it's strange to hear they're not doing well, lets hope they don't go down too much like the Dukes at Gait Barrow.

Sunday is seemingly a good weather day to go so hope fully we'll see some thing 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 03-Aug-18 01:03 PM GMT

Interesting report Neil. I'm off up there for 3 days from tomorrow. It did look rather dry and withered when I was up there a few weeks back. I hope things can change but with climate change, and hot dry summer's set to be the norm, some things are unfortunately out of our hands 😞🤔

Re: Neil Freeman

by Pauline, 03-Aug-18 01:28 PM GMT

Some lovely images there Neil of a butterfly I'm unlikely to ever see. Quite worrying tho' about both the recent decline and current conditions 😞.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 03-Aug-18 02:05 PM GMT

All your images of the Scotch Argus are ' half decent ', and those last two female shots positively glow !. If I came home with a bag full of images like those I would be highly delighted.

One day I must make the pilgrimage to the North for some of those species never seen in the south.

Great report Neil,

Trevor.

PS. Hope the relevant local BC. branch take note of the habitat becoming unsuitable.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 03-Aug-18 08:39 PM GMT

It would indeed Dave, here's hoping that they get some more rain up there soon...it is certainly needed to reinvigorate the grasses on the Knott.

Cheers Wurzel, other stuff coming up soon hopefully when I have had chance to put some words together.

Hi Goldie, it is still worth visiting Arnside, there is plenty to see. I saw plenty of Scotch Argus last year myself but still fewer than the hundreds that used to be there. I have always found them near the car park, just the other side of the tree line and there were a few there again this year. I paid a brief visit to Gait Barrows and didn't see much there but it was dull and cloudy and late afternoon on the Tuesday when I arrived.

Best of luck with your visit to Arnside Bugboy. I look forward to seeing what you find.

You never know Pauline, I used to think that I would never see some species but have managed to see all the mainland residents now.

Thanks Trevor, I was speaking to some of the local BC branch (both Cumbria and Lancashire) up there and they were going to raise it at their branch meetings.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Aug-18 09:11 AM GMT

Arnside Knott 30th & 31st July part 2 - The other butterflies.

As mentioned in my previous report I visited Arnside Knott twice, on the afternoon of the Monday (July 30th) and again the following morning.

The conditions on the Monday afternoon were not too bad, sunny spells and feeling warm but with a bit of a breeze and a couple of drizzly showers. As well as the Scotch Argus which I have already discussed, Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Gatekeepers were all flying but numbers of all these were well down from what I would expect to see here and those I did see were mostly well worn and faded.



Gatekeeper female – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

The Gatekeepers here are often smaller than those I see at home, especially the males, and there seems to be a higher incidence of extra spotting.



Gatekeeper male – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

About half a dozen Speckled Woods were seen mostly sticking to the shadier spots along the tree lines and around the clearings.



Speckled Wood female – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

A few Common Blues were seen including some small brown females that could easily be mistaken for Northern Brown Argus ssp. salmacis which can be found here earlier in the year, although these have been known to occasionally last into early August.

Given the way the season has developed this summer with the hot weather leading to some earlier and shorter flight periods I was not expecting to find any NBA still flying, so I was surprised to find one hanging on near the top of the Knott. At least I assume it was salmacis based on the location as I don't believe that agestis has reached this area despite its recent range expansion. If these two ever fly together here, I for one am not sure if I could tell the difference.



Northern Brown Argus ssp.salmacis – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Northern Brown Argus ssp.salmacis – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

I had seen a Painted Lady during our short stop off at Warton Crag on the Sunday but it was quickly whisked away in the wind before I could get a photo. I was pleased therefore to find another one at the Knott which posed nicely for a while on a patch of ragwort.



Painted Lady – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Painted Lady – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

A little later I saw another couple of Painted Ladies at widely separated spots around the Knott making a total of three for the afternoon. There were also loads of Silver Y moths buzzing about up there indicating a bit of a migration was probably happening.

In all my previous visits to Arnside Knott over the years I have only ever seen one Small Copper here so I was pleased to find at least three during the morning, one in the lower meadows and two higher up. I suspect these have been between broods during my previous visits and this is another example of a species flying a little earlier this year.



Small Copper – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Small Copper – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Small Copper – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

On my return visit the following morning, it was a little warmer and much sunnier up until about 12.30 although it was again a bit breezy on the more exposed slopes. I saw pretty much the same butterflies that I had seen the previous afternoon including Scotch Argus, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers in roughly the same numbers as the previous afternoon.

This time I found four Small Coppers although three of them were probably the same ones I had seen the previous afternoon.



Small Copper – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018

Another pleasant surprise seen towards the top of the Knott was a female Wall Brown, a species that I have never seen here before. Quite possibly these are also between broods when I usually visit around this time but I was also told that they are not often seen here these days. I believe there is a small population hanging on at Warton Crag which is just a few miles away as the crow (or butterfly) flies so maybe she had wandered over from there.



Wall Brown – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018



Wall Brown – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018

One particular butterfly drew my attention as I initially thought it was a Purple Hairstreak in flight but when it settled it proved to be an very small Ringlet. Unfortunately the small size doesn't really come across in a photo but it really was the smallest example of this species I have ever seen.



Ringlet – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018

I had also looked for Grayling the previous afternoon without success so was pleased to find a couple this time on the loose scree above the car park. This was also where the breeze was the strongest so I only managed a couple of photos of one hunkered down in a sheltered part of the path.



Grayling – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018

During all my visits here in previous years I have managed to see a few High Brown Fritillaries and often a few Dark Greens still hanging on, although both these are usually at the end of their flight period and well past their best. On both Monday and Tuesday's visits I had a good look at the usual spots but failed to find either species this year. I suspect that this was yet another result of the hot weather leading to earlier emergences and that both species were over for the year.

Around 12.30 the clouds built up to a blanket overcast and the wind picked up so I left and went back to meet up with Jane and have a bit of lunch.

Later in the afternoon, after we had been back to Leighton Moss for another couple of hours, I popped around to Gait Barrows for a look. Unfortunately it was still overcast and breezy and apart from a few 'whites', a couple of Speckled Wood and singles of Peacock and Common Blue, not much else was about.

The Common Blue was a female that was notable because those that I see up here are predominately the browner variety whereas I see the more blue forms further south. This makes me wonder if the amount of blue on female Common Blues is temperature related with this one seen here after one of the hottest summers for a long while.



Common blue female – Gait Barrows 31.07.2018

I also saw a few Red Admirals and Peacocks scattered about the area but failed to get a photo of either until Tuesday afternoon when I spotted a Peacock in the garden of our B&B where it was flitting about and stopping occasionally to bask on a stone wall.



Peacock – Silverdale 31.07.2018



Peacock – Silverdale 31.07.2018

Also seen during the couple of days but not photographed were all three common whites seen everywhere and a few tired looking Small Skippers plus about half a dozen Purple Hairstreaks flitting about high up around some of the Oak trees around the Knott.

So then, overall the total numbers of butterflies seen here was much lower than I have seen in previous years and just like back home, those species that have grass feeding larvae seemed to have been hit the hardest. On a more positive note I was pleased to see the Painted Ladies and the Small Coppers plus the Wall Brown was a nice surprise. The NBA was also a nice bonus as, given the way the season has been running, I thought that these would have been over for this year.

All in all, it felt as if the season was far more advanced than when I have previously visited the area in previous years.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 05-Aug-18 11:18 AM GMT

An interesting account of your visit to the Knott, Neil. That NBA, as you say, is indistinguishable from a standard Brown Argus, and very late in what has been an early season for most other species. On my visit a month earlier, the DGF were definitely already nearly over and there was only one fresh HBF to be found – though the SPBF were still flying, and NBA were quite widespread... All very confusing! 😊😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 05-Aug-18 02:31 PM GMT

You saw a lot more butterflies up there than I saw yesterday afternoon Neil! I did however see a male Wall so it's interesting you had a female a few days earlier. I too saw 3 Painted Ladies, most likely the same ones you saw, they all had enough wear to put them a few days old at least.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 05-Aug-18 11:41 PM GMT

A fantastic array of butterflies Neil 😊 Interesting to see that the NBAs are still hanging on in there 😊🇧🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 06-Aug-18 12:14 AM GMT

Lovely to see images of Scotch Argus on here, Neil. Not many are prepared to travel up there to see this beautiful insect which is a shame as it is truly a joy to behold and one of the most precious English species.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 08-Aug-18 12:05 PM GMT

That is a great selection from Oversley and Coverdale Neil. 🇧🇪😊 Lovely moths, my fave is the Flame Carpet. Love your Scotch Argus as well. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Aug-18 12:44 PM GMT

Thanks Dave, it is indeed a strange year with different species responding in different ways, some seem to have done well and others less so.

Thanks Bugboy, I think I benefited a bit from the rain they had just before I got up there although it was hard work finding some of them.

Cheers Wurzel, it was strange to see the NBA still hanging on as I have been there at the same time in more 'normal' years and they have finished

Hi David, plenty of people up there looking for them although my impression was that most of them were from north of the midlands.

Thanks Andrew, I get a few Flame Carpets every year, a really attractive moth when fresh.

Arnside 30th & 31st July part 3 – Leighton Moss.

A final report from our trip up north to wrap things up.

I mentioned in my previous couple of reports from Arnside that we visited RSPB Leighton Moss on the Monday morning and Tuesday afternoon and have said before that Jane likes it here as it has good facilities and paths which she can get around easily with her dodgy leg.

There are not usually many butterflies to see here 1) because the habitat is mostly reed beds and wetland 2) because we usually go here when the weather is not conducive for butterflies, but having said that we did see a number of Speckled Wood along the paths through the trees around the outside of the site and numerous whites were around on the Tuesday afternoon when it was cloudy but warm.

A selection of shots below from both days;



Not sure of this one...juvenile Pied Wagtail perhaps? – Leighton Moss 30.07.2018



Swan having a stretch in the rain – Leighton Moss 30.07.2018



A trio of Little Egrets – Leighton Moss 30.07.2018



Some of the Robins were very tame – Leighton Moss 31.07.2018



A few tame young Pheasants were around the back of the visitor centre – Leighton Moss 30.07.2018



Jane watching the Marsh Harriers from the Grisedale Hide – Leighton Moss 31.07.2018



Marsh Harrier, tight crop of shot taken from Grisedale hide – Leighton Moss 31.07.2018



Marsh Harrier, another tight crop taken from Grisedale hide – Leighton Moss 31.07.2018



Red Deer and young – Leighton Moss 31.07.2018

Back to butterflies next with a couple of reports from my local spots to catch up on.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Aug-18 02:37 PM GMT

Spot on with the Pied Wagtail Neil 😊 Great shot of the Swan – I can almost feel it's relief after the heatwave 😊 Great shots of the Marshie (Harrier not Frit 😊) it's been a while since I've seen one of those 🇬🇧 but it looks like a male 😊 ? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Aug-18 11:03 PM GMT

Lovely bird shots, Neil, and nice to see a bit of water and greenery on here after all the baking and arid habitat shots that have become almost *de rigueur* lately!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Aug-18 06:37 PM GMT

Cheers for the confirmation on the Wagtail Wurzel, I am far more used to seeing the adults.

Although Leighton Moss is a wetland site David, the water levels were still much lower than I have ever seen in previous visits.

Now then, a bit of a catch up...

Wednesday August 1st

We left our B&B around 09.30 on the Wednesday morning and with a fair bit of thick cloud around we decided to head straight back home. I was also not looking forward to the M6 which seems to be restricted to 50mph for half of its length between Manchester and Birmingham, so I figured that the sooner we were on it, the sooner we would be off it. In the end, the journey back home went without any hold-ups and we arrived back just before 1.00pm.

After unpacking, I went to sit out in the garden with a coffee and watched the butterflies passing through which consisted mainly of good numbers of whites. As always, a couple of Speckled Woods were in their usual spots plus a couple of Gatekeepers were visiting a large ragwort plant which I have let grow in one side of the lawn. A Holly Blue also kept coming back to this ragwort so I grabbed my camera to take a couple of shots.



Holly Blue - Coverdale 01.08.2018

Thursday August 2nd.

I ran the moth trap in the garden on Thursday night. Clear skies and a bright moon kept the numbers down a bit but a total of 123 moths of 35 species (61 of 19 macro and 62 of 16 micro) included a nice Gold Spot which was a new one for the garden.



Gold Spot - Coverdale 02.08.2018

Friday August 3rd

We popped round to see my Mom on Friday afternoon and I took the opportunity to have a quick look around the small park which is just down the road from her house.

One large patch of brambles was covered with blackberries, some of which were already going overripe and these were playing host to at least half a dozen Speckled Wood which made for a distinctly autumn like scene.



Speckled Woods - Langley Hall 03.08.2018



Speckled Wood male - Langley Hall 03.08.2018



Speckled Wood female – Langley Hall 03.08.2018

Three Commas were also flitting about around the brambles,



Comma – Langley Hall 03.08.2018

Apart from the ever present whites, the only other species seen were a couple of faded Gatekeepers.

Saturday August 4th

As usual on a Saturday morning, we went and did some shopping and then did a few things around the house. By early afternoon, the temperature was once again up in the high twenties and climbing higher and although I realised that everything would either be in hyper mode of hiding in the shade, I decided to pop around to my local site at Castle Hills near Solihull.

As with most places around here now, the previously lush grass growth has turned yellow and the local clay soil has dried rock hard like concrete. Despite this a few plants seem to be coping well with the conditions including some large clumps of Birds-foot Trefoil in one of the corners where I usually look for Common Blues. Sure enough they were here today with about a dozen seen, both males and females varying from well faded to quite fresh looking.



Common Blue female – Castle Hills 04.08.2018



Common Blue male – Castle Hills 04.08.2018

I watched one male persistently chase a female around as she settled on various grass stems until his persistence eventually paid off.



Common Blue pair – Castle Hills 04.08.2018



Common Blue pair in cop – Castle Hills 04.08.2018

I was pleased to see half a dozen Small Heath as this species continues to be of concern in Warwickshire with falling numbers reported year on year.



Small Heath – Castle Hills 04.08.2018

After an hour or so I was heading back towards my car when I spotted a small silvery flash amongst the grass. I followed it in flight until it settled and showed itself to be a Brown Argus. I have seen small numbers of these around Solihull in the past but never at this site so was really chuffed to find this one here.



Brown Argus – Castle Hills 04.08.2018

A few faded Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers were seen but numbers of both of these have been well down around here this year, a common theme which, as I have mentioned before, seems to have affected most of the species with grass feeding larvae.

Apart from the usual whites which seemed to be mostly Small with Large and Green-veined lower numbers, the only other butterfly seen was a single Comma.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Aug-18 08:32 PM GMT

Fantastic looking Holly Blue and that female Common is a right stunner Neil 😊🍷 I know what you mean about the autumnal feel I keep seeing butterflies in certain poses and postures or I'm composing a shot and I have to actually remind myself that we're only just into August! 🥰😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-Aug-18 11:09 PM GMT

That Gold Spot is a real beauty, Neil.

Nice to see Speckled Woods in your posts too, along with Holly Blue, which is always a pleasure to encounter at this time of year.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-Aug-18 02:09 PM GMT

Love your shots from Arnside Knott Neil, I've never seen a Copper up there yet, I think they must but scarce this year, I've not seen one yet not even when I was down in Kent, I know they were at Dungeness but the family wouldn't go because of the heat 😞
Still time yet hope fully!! Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Aug-18 08:41 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel a few more nice female Common Blues coming up, mostly brown ones too 😊

Thanks David, I was particularly please with that Gold Spot as everyone else seemed to be catching then around here except me 😊

Thanks Goldie, I had only ever seen one Small Copper there previously as mentioned in my report, I reckon they are between broods when I usually visit as I believe they are double brooded up there unlike down south where they have three or even four broods.

Another catch up post.

Monday 6th August

A second week off work due to it being our annual summer shutdown and I had planned to get a few jobs done around the house, although I reckoned I could squeeze one or two trips as long as I didn't go too far afield. There are a couple of local spots that I am aware of but never yet visited so on Monday morning I went around to one of these.

A few years ago a new business park development was built at junction 4 of the M42 in Shirley by where you come off on the A34 towards Birmingham. This is known as Blythe Valley Business Park and the layout includes some nature trail footpaths around the back of the park that I reckoned might be worth a visit.

I arrived just before 10.00am with some initial cloud beginning to clear and the temperature again rising rapidly. I quickly found my way onto the first footpath which crossed a meadow full of dry long grass and into a stretch that passed through some woodland where I saw a few Speckled Woods. The path then came out into a more open area with a couple of ponds and meadow areas that looked more promising so I started to have a proper look around.

The first butterflies seen here were the now regular whites with examples of all three common species flying, but I also soon saw Common blues with both males and females in good numbers with some of the females in particular looking very fresh. As the morning was yet again turning into a hot one, the Common Blues were very active but there was a fair amount of knapweed still in flower here that would tempt them to land occasionally for a quick feed.

One of the male Common Blues was a tiny individual, no larger than a Small Blue, but all the others were all normal sized.



Small sized male Common Blue - Blythe Valley 06.08.2018



Common Blue male - Blythe Valley 06.08.2018



Common Blue male - Blythe Valley 06.08.2018



Common Blue female - Blythe Valley 06.08.2018



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley 06.08.2018



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley 06.08.2018



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley 06.08.2018

In the end I counted a minimum of 37 Common Blues in this area making it the most productive local spot for this species I have found so far.

A single male Small Copper was also darting about and the only time he stayed still for longer than a nanosecond was when a small cloud covered the sun just long enough for me to get a couple of photos which showed he had a lucky escape at some time with a bird strike on his right hind wing.



Small Copper male – Blythe Valley 06.08.2018

By late morning it was getting uncomfortably hot again so I headed home.

Tuesday 7th August

On Tuesday morning I had to pop out for a bit and on the way back decided to stop off at Sheldon Country Park for a quick look. This is situated at the end of the runway at Birmingham Airport where there is a viewing area that can get very busy at weekends. I used to come here but have not bothered for the past couple of years as it just gets too busy for my liking with plenty of dog walkers, a higher than usual percentage of who let their dogs run off the lead and don't care who they run at and jump up at...and no, I do not like strange dogs jumping up me no matter how friendly their owners say they are being.

Anyway, a quick half hour circuit of one of the grassy meadow areas turned up around half a dozen Common Blues, a good dozen Small Heath and a single Small Copper. With not a cloud in the sky it was yet another very warm morning so the butterflies were very active, the Small Heath being the subjects who settled the most. Given the situation with the Small Heath in Warwickshire as mentioned in my previous report I was particularly pleased to see them looking to be doing quite well here. I actually suspect that there are small populations of this species scattered all over the place, often undetected in field margins or corners of grassy areas such as this.



Small Heath – Sheldon CP 07.08.2018



Small Heath – Sheldon CP 07.08.2018



Small Heath - Sheldon CP 07.08.2018



Small Copper - Sheldon CP 07.08.2018

Thursday 9th August

Between doing some painting in the house I had a couple of coffee breaks in the garden. The weather had now turned cloudier and cooler but the occasional sunny spell meant that it was still quite pleasant.

The ragwort in the garden is still attracting passing butterflies including another Holly Blue, a female that also posed briefly on a nearby shrub and allowed me to get one of the few open wing HB shots I have managed this year.



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 09.08.2018



Holly Blue female - Coverdale 09.08.2018

We have also had some showers of rain over the past couple of days but so far not had any of the heavy stuff that other areas have had, although it looks like we may be in for some later this coming weekend

That brings me back up to date.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 10-Aug-18 09:12 PM GMT

Lovely Small Heaths, Neil - maybe there are more of them hiding away than are imagined. They seem to pop up in small numbers on almost any grassy site, even managed country parks with a majority of tidied paths and green spaces. Your female Holly Blue is rather nice as well - the hot sun has kept most of the ones I see in the shade and tightly shut. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Aug-18 11:31 PM GMT

A lovely set of Brown Blues 😊🍷, brown like they should be - they've obviously read the Identification guides 😊😊 Lovely Small Coppers as well and a cracking Holly Blue 😊🍷 It's kind of reassuring amongst all the tales of woe to see butterflies still present and thriving in country parks designed for us humans 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 11-Aug-18 07:55 AM GMT

I've been a bit slow, Neil, only just spotted your female Wall Brown at the top of this page. Great image. As Wurzel commented, great brown Blues.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Aug-18 12:16 AM GMT

Nice selection of Common Blues, Neil. Things starting to wane now round me, so I guess we need to make the most of it while we can?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 12-Aug-18 12:02 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, great shots of the Female CB's, at Southport I saw loads, I'd never seen so many before but they were so small, did you find them so? 🤔 Goldie



Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 12-Aug-18 05:00 PM GMT

Amongst all your fine pictures of the last few posts I am most envious of two. The two Speckled Woods on the Blackberries and the 2nd brood female Holly Blue with its wings open. I am especially keen on your Holly Blue because I have been chasing them about and have had no luck with a female open-wing shot. I have the spring brood female but not the summer brood.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 13-Aug-18 07:57 PM GMT

Thanks Dave, yes, getting any kind of decent open wing shots has been a real challenge in the recent hot weather. Last Monday and Tuesday were scorchers here but it has since gone the other way, too cool and cloudy.

Cheers Wurzel, We still get mostly brown female common Blues here although a few of those fancy blue ones have been turning up the past couple of years. 😊

Thanks Trevor, I was chuffed with that Wall Brown, especially as I wasn't expecting it and only the second One I have seen this year.

Yes David, it is feeling like it is winding down around my local patch with no specialities here to extend the season.

Hi Goldie, just the one was undersized, the rest were pretty much normal.

Thanks Ernie, I have not managed many open wing Holly Blue shots this year myself, apart from the one above just one spring brood female.

Saturday 11th August

Not much to report from the weekend, Saturday was so-so, a few sunny spells but overall much cloudier and cooler with a fair breeze blowing. Sunday was very wet with rain all day, although I suppose we needed it. It felt like we had returned to a normal summer 😊

During the brief sunny spells on Saturday I spotted a few whites and at least one Holly Blue passing through the garden but the only butterflies I attempted to photograph were the garden Speckled Woods with at least two different males and a female seen.



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 11.08.2018



Speckled Wood male – Coverdale 11.08.2018



Speckled Wood female - Coverdale 11.08.2018

Monday 13th August

Back to work today and of course the sun came back out to make for a pleasant day, not as hot as last week but much better than the weekend. A couple of different male Specklies were in the garden later this afternoon when I got in from work.



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 13.08.2018



Speckled Wood male - Coverdale 11.08.2018

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 16-Aug-18 07:26 AM GMT

Those are nice, fresh Specklies, Neil. Must admit, I haven't seen too many over the past few weeks so hopefully there'll be a new emergence round my way as August progresses.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 24-Aug-18 01:40 PM GMT

I like your Speckled Woods and Common Blues Neil. And the Gold Spot moth is a beauty. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Aug-18 07:48 PM GMT

Thanks David, loads of Speckled Woods around lately here in all sorts of conditions, some more coming up below

Thanks Andrew, I was chuffed with that Gold Spot, especially as it seemed that everyone else around here was getting them in their traps.

Sunday 19th August

Last weekend was dull and cloudy around here with Sunday being the better day with a few sunny spells to brighten the day up a bit.

I did the usual weekend stuff around the house and then decided to see how many different Specklies were in the garden by photographing them to identify individuals by differences in marking and condition. In the end I identified at least 7 males in varying condition and 1 female with a probable 2nd female that passed through without stopping long enough to get a photo to confirm, but she did look to be in better condition than the one I did get a shot of.

The 7 different males,





and the female that I got a shot of,



Apart from the Specklies, a few Large, Small and GV Whites passed through along with a single Holly Blue.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 24-Aug-18 08:11 PM GMT

A cracking array of Specklies Neil 😊😄 Hopefully this weekend will be okay weather wise, fingers crossed 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 25-Aug-18 11:32 AM GMT

Your weather's been a bit like our's Neil, wet, windy, rainy, and chilly, with the exception of a few hours here and there, it's a good job we've got Gardens where some Butterflies braved the weather 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Aug-18 10:18 AM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, so far the weather this weekend has been worse than last and today (Sunday) is a total washout. Bank Holiday Monday tomorrow is 'supposed' to be a bit better...we'll see.

Yes Goldie, we have gone from one extreme to the other. I'm fortunate in that I have Specklies in the garden and they will fly in dull conditions otherwise I would have seen very little this past couple of weeks.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 26-Aug-18 03:30 PM GMT

Your traditional late summer array of Specklies, Neil! There are some lovely ones around at the moment. 😊 If the forecast is to be believed, after today's wind rain and cold, things should steadily improve into September. Fingers crossed!

By the way, are Brown Hairstreaks persisting up at Ryton?

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Aug-18 05:51 PM GMT

Cheers Dave. Yep, fingers crossed for the weather, I am off down Dorset next weekend for another of my traditions, a late season break down by Lulworth /Durdle Door 😊

The Brown Hairsteaks are still at Ryton I believe although I have only seen one sighting reported so far this year, mind you the weather has not been very conducive up here. There have been more sightings from Grafton Wood over towards Worcester but still a relatively poor showing so far.

Garden Moths - August

With a lot of nights here lately being either quite breezy or going clear with dropping temperatures, I have only run the garden moth trap a few times this month. Most of what I have caught have been the usual common late summers species including second broods of species seen earlier in the year.

There had been some comments on some moth group Facebook pages regarding the lack of Large Yellow Underwings recently with some wondering if the dry summer had effected their numbers, this being one of many moth species that pupate underground. I had been getting a few in my trap over the past few weeks but nowhere near the normal numbers...until last Monday night when I had 43 in the trap. It would appear that the recent wet weather had encouraged them to emerge in numbers at last, whether this is a good thing or not is debatable when you have 40 odd of these blundering around in a trap. There is a good reason why they are often referred to as 'Blunderwings'.



A few of the 43 LYUs in the trap last Monday night

Another common 'trap filler' at this time of year is the Square-spot Rustic and I have been getting a few of this quite variable moth.



Square-spot Rustic - Coverdale 15.08.2018

The Brimstone Moth is another common species that I get regularly through the summer and always brightens the trap with its yellow colour. This yellow colour seems at odds with the mostly green vegetation earlier in the year but blends in well with dying leaves in the autumn, much like Clouded Yellow undersides are effective camouflage underneath yellowing leaves.



Brimstone Moth - Coverdale 15.08.2018

Many will have seen a Yellow Shell as they are easily disturbed during the day and I usually get a small number to my trap each year.



Yellow shell – Coverdale 15.08.2018

I get quite a few Orange Swifts from mid summer onwards, the larvae of this common species feed underground on the roots of many herbaceous plants and grasses and overwinter twice before pupating.



Orange Swift – Coverdale 15.08.2018

I love this head on shot of the same moth above posed on a different twig that makes it look like a little fluffy demon sitting on a branch.



Orange Swift head on shot of the moth above – Coverdale 15.08.2018

Pug moths are often overlooked with many of them being small, little larger than micros, and some species being difficult to identify. The Double-striped Pug is one of the smallest of these but can usually be easily identified, especially when fresh like the example below which is the the most well marked example of this species I have seen.



Double-striped Pug – Coverdale 20.08.2018

Most of us will have seen the common 'grass moths' that are usually disturbed in grassy fields and meadows when we are out looking for butterflies. I have now identified 7 different species of these in my garden which appear in succession through the summer months with 2 or 3 species flying at any one time.



Agriphila geniculea – Coverdale 15.08.2018

And finally an attractive little micro, *Ypsolopha sequella* which is only the second of this species I have seen in the garden with one caught last year.



Ypsolopha sequella – Coverdale 15.08.2018

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 26-Aug-18 11:40 PM GMT

Great set of moths Neil 😊 Good luck down in Dorset 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 27-Aug-18 12:11 AM GMT

Specklies always seem to be 'between broods'. Nice that there are some emerging in mint condition like those in your sequence, Neil. I'm sure they'll keep you company well into October.

Love the moths too. Soon they'll outnumber the butterflies once the colder weather kicks in. 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 29-Aug-18 09:22 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel, heading down on Friday for a week 😊. I really don't know what to expect this year but am guessing that the dry summer will have had an effect.

Thanks David, I can always rely on the Specklies when nothing else is about 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 29-Aug-18 09:30 PM GMT

Good luck in Dorset next week. It didn't perform for us a couple of weeks ago, but the weather is set to improve, hopefully, as the kids go back to school.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 30-Aug-18 11:25 AM GMT

Yes good luck in Dorset Neil, I'll be interested to see your reports. 😊

Nice Specklies and moths. I saw 4 or 5 of those lovely Brimstone's recently while walking through woods. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 30-Aug-18 10:59 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

Thanks David, I can always rely on the Specklies when nothing else is about 😊

Now that you've become expert in trapping these beautiful moths, Neil, I doubt that is ever going to happen.

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 01-Sep-18 08:28 AM GMT

Lovely set of moth shots, Neil. I have a particular liking for the Brimstone.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Sep-18 07:52 PM GMT

Thanks for the good luck wishes Mark and Andrew...they seem to have worked 😊

Ah yes!, good point David 😊

Yes, the Brimstone Moth is a particularly attractive species Ernie, I never tire of seeing them 😊

Dorset August 31st to September 7th - part 1.

We returned earlier this afternoon from a week down in Dorset, staying at Durdle Door Holiday Park. This was primarily a family holiday for us to take my mom away but earlier in the year when we were talking about where to go Jane said I could choose the location...so I just had to go for my favourite early September destination.

Regular readers of this diary will know that I believe that this stretch of Dorset coast is one of the best areas for late season butterflies and have made regular visits here at this time of year. Given the hot and dry summer this year I was curious, and a little apprehensive, as to what I would find this year. As it turned out I needn't have worried. For one thing, we struck lucky with the weather which for most of our stay was dry with plenty of sun alternating with high summer clouds with temperatures rising to 23 degrees most afternoons. This good weather held until yesterday (Thursday 6th September) when it clouded over later in the afternoon and we saw the only rain of the week, but by then we had enjoyed a good week and I had seen plenty of

butterflies, so we couldn't grumble at that.

In total I saw 19 species of butterfly during the week, with large numbers of some and just one or two examples of others;

Adonis Blue – Lots seen at the usual sites (Durdle Door, Osmington, Bindon Hill, etc.)

Common Blue – Quite a few seen at most places.

Chalk Hill Blue – Half a dozen faded examples hanging on at Bindon Hill.

Small Blue – A surprisingly fresh male seen at Durlston Country Park.

Small Copper – Good numbers of fresh 3rd brood seen at most places.

Brown Argus – Good numbers of mostly faded examples at most places.

Large White – A few seen but not as many as previous years.

Small White – Loads about, easily the most common 'white' seen.

Green-veined White – A few scattered about during the week.

Brimstone – 2 seen at RSPB Arne.

Clouded Yellow – 3 seen, 1 each at Osmington, Durdle Door & Durlston CP.

Painted Lady – 3 seen, 1 at Osmington, 2 on Portland.

Red Admiral – Just 3 seen, 1 at Osmington, 1 at Swanage & 1 on Ballard Down.

Speckled Wood – Loads about.

Meadow Brown – Seen at most places but not as many around as usual.

Grayling – At least a couple of dozen at Durdle Door and 1 on Portland.

Marbled White – 1 faded example at Durdle Door.

Wall Brown – 1 on Portland and 1 on Ballard Down.

Small Heath – loads seen everywhere.

It can be seen from the list above that Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma were absent, all three being species that I have seen here at this time of year in the past. Going by comments I have seen elsewhere, it appears that the first two are probably already in hibernation.

Anyway, a few scenery shots to start with from by where we stayed at Durdle Door.



The obligatory shot of the rock arch, this one taken in the early evening light.



Looking towards Bats Head with Weymouth on the horizon.



Man O' War Bay to the left of the rock arch



Man O' War bay looking towards Lulworth Cove

Now to sort through the many butterfly photos that I took and put some words together over the next few days for a few reports.

Next to come...Adonis Blues.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 07-Sep-18 09:13 PM GMT

I'm looking forward to this, Neil. 😊 I was at Durlston very briefly on 3rd and didn't see a great deal, so it will be interesting to hear what your no doubt longer visit threw up...

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 07-Sep-18 09:17 PM GMT

That's quite a haul for the time of year, Neil. Looking forward to your images. Great location shots as well. Hoping for a late season to shorten the Winter !.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-Sep-18 11:07 PM GMT

I too am looking forward to the Butterfly but the scenery shots are wonderful, I've a little tear forming from nostalgia and homesickness 🥺 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 08-Sep-18 11:04 AM GMT

Beautiful scenery shots Neil, looking forward to seeing your photos 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Sep-18 04:43 PM GMT

Some stunning coastline shots there, Neil. I look forward to seeing the butterflies too (especially the Clouded Yellows).

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Sep-18 05:00 PM GMT

Hi Dave, I was actually in Swanage on the morning of 3rd Sept but we went off to RSPB Arne from there. Sorry I missed you at Durlston.

Thanks Trevor, I have visited that area of Dorset quite regularly at this time of year and can usually find 18-19 species 😊, not quite made it to 20 yet.

Sorry about making you well up a bit Wurzel 😊

Thanks Goldie, that is a beautiful bit of coastline 😊

A dull, grey and damp day here has given me chance to do the next report...

Dorset August 31st to September 7th part 2 – Adonis Blues

My main target species when visiting Dorset at this time of year is always Adonis Blues. I don't often get to see the first brood as my plans earlier in the year usually take me elsewhere, so I like to catch up with the second brood in early September on the Dorset coast. During my previous visits I have always found the Adonis Blues in Dorset to build in numbers through the second half of August and reach a peak in the first week of September, hence the timing of our usual breaks down there. Given the weather this year and the fact that many summer species seemed to have had early and comparatively short flight periods, I was a little concerned that I may have missed the best time to see Adonis Blues this year. As it turned out, my concerns were groundless as I saw plenty of good condition examples of both sexes and most sites visited had a good assortment from worn and faded to recently emerged. In fact the timing this year seemed pretty much in line with what I have seen in previous years.

We arrived at **Durdle Door** on the first Friday afternoon just before 4.00pm and after settling in to our caravan and having a coffee, I went for a wander to stretch my legs after the drive down. It was a beautiful afternoon with clear blue skies and I made my way straight to the far right of the the car park and through the gate onto the grassy slopes above the famous arch. As I followed one of the paths diagonally down across the slope I soon began to see the first butterflies here, mostly Small Heaths and a few Meadow Browns and Small Whites. I headed down to the lower part of the slope and began to see a few Adonis and as I moved across the slope I spotted more and more with a few Common Blues mixed in. I spotted a nice fresh male basking down in the grass and took my first Adonis photo of the week.



Adonis Blue male – Durdle Door 31.08.2018

Staying at **Durdle Door** meant that I could visit these slopes easily and most days saw me having a wander along them at some point, either in the morning before we went out somewhere or later in the afternoon after returning to our caravan. The numbers of Adonis seen varied depending on how long I was there and how warm it was and anything up to 50 odd could usually be seen scattered across the slopes.



Adonis Blue male - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Adonis Blue female - Durdle Door 02.09.2018



Adonis Blue female - Durdle Door 03.09.2018



Adonis Blues – Durdle Door 05.09.2018

I have mentioned before that one of my favourite sites in the area is along the bridleway that leads diagonally across the hillside from the back of **Osmington** village up to White Horse Hill. I was keen to visit here again and in fact went twice, on the Saturday afternoon (1st Sept.) and again for a couple of hours on Tuesday afternoon (4th Sept.).

On both occasions there was a mixture of cloud and sun with the temperature reaching 22/23 degrees which meant that there were plenty of butterflies actively flying across the hillsides. This site has usually produced the highest numbers of Adonis Blues that I see down here and I am pleased to say that it came up trumps again with at least a couple of hundred flying all along the slopes above the path.



Bridleway up to White Horse Hill at Osmington. Adonis Blues all along the slopes above the path.



Adonis Blue male – Osmington 01.09.2018



Adonis Blue female – Osmington 01.09.2018



Adonis Blue pair in cop - Osmington 01.09.2018



Adonis Blue male - Osmington 04.09.2018



Adonis Blue female - Osmington 04.09.2018



Adonis Blue female - Osmington 04.09.2018



Adonis Blue female - Osmington 04.09.2018

One particular undersized and slightly worn female turned out to be ab. with reduced spots on her hindwings, although I couldn't get a shot without her being photobombed by another female that was sharing the same flower head.



Adonis Blue female ab. - Osmington 04.09.2018

On Sunday afternoon (2nd Sept.) I decided to have a walk across to **Bindon Hill** above Lulworth Cove. I have walked there a few times in previous years and always taken the coast path across the top of Hambury Tout. This time I decided to take a footpath that I had spotted which led from the entrance of the car park at Durdle Door and followed a route around the landward side of the Tout and came out on the road a little way up from the car park at Lulworth Cove. From there I went back up the road and onto Bindon Hill through the gate just off the main road.

Although the weather was similar to the previous day, e.g. mixed cloud and sun, there was a bit of a breeze which could be felt more as you moved higher across the hillside. Good numbers of Adonis Blues were flying although nowhere near as many as at Osmington, but nevertheless I reckon I saw at least 40 odd individuals of both sexes.



Footpath to Lulworth from Durdle Door



Adonis Blue male - Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Adonis Blue male - Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Adonis Blue pair in cop - Bindon Hill 02.09.2018

On Tuesday morning we popped into Weymouth and then had a drive over to **Portland**. Before heading back we called in to **Tout Quarry** and whilst Jane and my mom wandered about looking at the stone carvings I checked out some of the side paths. Despite the clear skies and warm sun, there were not many butterflies there but amongst those that I did see was a single male Adonis Blue.



Adonis Blue male - Tout Quarry Portland 04.09.2018

Wednesday (5th Sept.) afternoon saw us at **Durlston Country Park** for a couple of hours. Jane and my mom had a slow wander along the tarmac path towards the lighthouse whilst I headed down to the gully to see what was about. I have to say that this site was the driest I have ever seen it and the gully still looked particularly parched. This had obviously affected the butterflies as although I saw the usual expected species including Adonis Blue, with one exception (Small Copper) these were all in lower numbers than seen here in previous years. There were also a larger percentage of worn Adonis here, possibly reflecting an earlier flight period than the sites at Lulworth and Osmington.



Adonis Blue male - Durlston 05.09.2018



Adonis Blue male - Durlston 05.09.2018

The final site visited was on the morning of Thursday (6th Sept.) when I dropped Jane and my mom off in Swanage for a couple of hours and carried on to **Ballard Down**. Good numbers of Adonis Blues were flying here although like at Durlston there was a higher proportion of worn ones flying. From my experiences in previous years and again this year, I suspect that both Durlston and Ballard Down are earlier sites than Osmington, Durdle Door and Bindon Hill.



Adonis Blue male - Ballard Down 06.09.2018



Adonis Blue female - Ballard Down 06.09.2018

So then, plenty of Adonis Blues were seen but what else was there?

Next to come...the other Blues.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Sep-18 09:33 PM GMT

Those are really clear, vibrant images, Neil. Fabulous.

I'm eagerly anticipating your next batch now.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Sep-18 10:42 PM GMT

A truly epic Adonis posting Neil there are stunners aplenty 😊👁️👁️ They appear to have had a cracking end to the season 😊 Looking forward to the next installment 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Sep-18 06:27 PM GMT

Thanks David 😊. My apologies, looks like I missed your previous comment when I was posting my last report. No Clouded Yellow photos unfortunately, they wouldn't settle for me when I saw them in the warm afternoon sun.

Cheers Wurzel. Yes, they seemed to be doing well down there with plenty of fresh ones about 😊.

Dorset August 31st to September 7th part 3 - More Blues.

As well as the Adonis Blues, there were other species of 'Blue' flying at all of the sites visited. These were mostly Common Blues that were usually seen in fair numbers and in varying condition from really worn and tatty to nice fresh looking examples. These were all flying alongside the Adonis Blues and telling the really worn ones apart could sometimes be quite difficult, especially with the females.



Common Blue male - Osmington 01.09.2018



Common Blue male - Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Common Blue male - Durdle Door 02.09.2018



Common Blue male - Portland Bill 04.09.2018



Common Blue female - Osmington 04.09.2018

I have often found Chalk Hill Blues on Bindon Hill in my past visits at this time of year with actual numbers and condition obviously depending on the weather in any particular season. I was curious if there would be any still flying this year and my walk over to Bindon Hill on the Sunday (2nd Sept.) afternoon was in part to find out.

At first I only saw Adonis and a few Common Blues but on making my way around to where the old blocked off cliff path comes out of the trees, I spotted a paler blue butterfly that proved to be a Chalkhill Blue. In the end I found half a dozen of so still flying, mostly well worn and faded males with a couple that were in slightly better condition. I didn't see any definite females, although worn examples of the latter can be extremely difficult to tell apart from worn female Adonis Blues so it is quite possible I overlooked a few.



Chalk Hill Blue – Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Chalk Hill Blue – Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Chalk Hill Blue – Bindon Hill 02.09.2018

At Durlston Country Park on the Wednesday (5th Sept.) I was surprised to find a fairly fresh looking male Small Blue in one corner of the gully where he was actively scrapping with a couple of Common Blues and a Brown Argus. I only managed a couple of photos before he was seemingly driven off by the odds against him and despite lurking around the spot for a bit I could not relocate him. This was the only example of Small Blue that I have ever seen down there at this time of year, hence my surprise.



Small Blue - Durlston 05.09.2018

The last species of 'Blue' (although it is brown) seen during the week was Brown Argus. These also appeared at every site visited although usually in lower numbers than the Common Blues and most were more worn and faded although one or two were not too bad looking.



Brown Argus - Osmington 01.09.2018



Brown Argus - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Brown Argus – Durdle Door 05.09.2018

There was one other Lycaenid seen down there, Small Copper, which appears to be having a good third brood around the country – and Dorset was no exception.

These deserve a post to themselves so they will be next...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 09-Sep-18 07:51 PM GMT

All your September Blues look remarkably fresh, particularly the Adonis. That Small Blue must have been a surprise.

Great images,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Sep-18 08:48 PM GMT

Nothing to feel Blue about with those Blue shots Neil 😊😄 They're positively jumping out of the screen 😊 That Small Blue is in wonderful nick 😊👍 – which begs the question; very late 2nd brood or a 3rd? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 10-Sep-18 09:44 AM GMT

Fantastic Blues shots Neil, love the Adonis shots, 😊👍👍 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 10-Sep-18 07:24 PM GMT

That Small Blue is intriguing – basically what Wurzel said! I saw some flowering kidney vetch there on 3rd, but didn't entertain the possibility of a Small Blue as well... Some lovely shots of the Blues, Neil. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Sep-18 07:42 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor, that Small Blue was indeed a surprise. I was aware that they usually have a second brood at Durlston but thought that it was too late for them, I have never seen one there at the same time of year before.

Cheers Wurzel, I would suspect a late second brood individual. Small Blue second broods are often only partial anyway so I don't reckon they could manage three broods, even in this years summer.

Thanks Goldie, I was well chuffed with the number of fresh ones still around.

Thanks Dave, nearly missed your comment as I was posting this next one, see my reply to Wurzel above.

Dorset August 31st to September 7th part 4 – Small Coppers

From various reports I have seen recently on UKB and elsewhere around the internet it seems that Small Coppers are having a good third brood in many parts of the country and during my week down in Dorset I certainly saw more than I am used to seeing there at this time of year. Every site that I went to produced a few, with at least half a dozen or so seen at Durdle Door and probably getting into double figures all across the hillside at Osmington.

Most of them looked fairly fresh or just a bit worn around the fringes of the wings and a good variety of blue spotting was seen from just a hint to 4 full spots on each hindwing.



Small Copper - Durdle Door 31.08.2018



Small Copper - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Small Copper - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Small Copper - Osmington 01.09.2018



Small Copper - Osmington 01.09.2018



Small Copper - Osmington 01.09.2018



Small Copper - Osmington 04.09.2018



Small Copper - Osmington 04.09.2018



Small Copper - Bindon Hill 02.09.2018



Small Copper - Durlston 05.09.2018



Small Copper - Ballard Down 06.09.2014

The female below, seen at Durdle Door on the Monday (3rd Sept.) was particularly large and attractive with a lovely set of blue spots but sod's law dictated that she wouldn't settle in a position for me to get a photo of her that I was really happy with.



Small Copper - Durdle Door 03.09.2018



Small Copper – Durdle Door 03.09.2018

The jewel in the copper crown however was a nice ab. radiata seen at Osmington on my first visit there on the Saturday (1st Sept.). Again, I would have liked to have got a better photo but with the warm afternoon sun it was mostly sitting with it's wings nearly closed and I just managed the one quick shot when it opened up a bit. I tried to relocate it on my second visit a few days later but without success.



Small Copper ab.radiata – Osmington 01.09.2018

Well, that's the blues and coppers covered. The next report will be mostly shades of brown.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by essexbuzzard, 10-Sep-18 10:37 PM GMT

Seems like you had a good time down there, Neil. I have to say I was a bit concerned for you this time, but I clearly needn't have worried and I'm delighted for you!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Sep-18 10:57 PM GMT

Lovely set of Coppers Neil and a brilliant range of blue badges as you said 😊 Mind you the best one is definitely the radiata – what a cracking butterfly and something I've still to see 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Sep-18 12:30 PM GMT

What an eclectic mix of Coppers, Neil. There are more in that sequence than I often see in a year in swansea but delighted to say that this year has seen plenty.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 12-Sep-18 10:09 AM GMT

Fantastic Coppers Neil, they've done very well this year , we've had a real treat. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 12-Sep-18 10:49 AM GMT

Coppers are great aren't they? I particularly like your ab. *radiata* as I haven't seen that one yet.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 12-Sep-18 03:44 PM GMT

Another brilliant set of Coppers to add to all those we all seem to be seeing! The *radiata* especially is a striking little insect. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Old Wolf, 14-Sep-18 03:56 PM GMT

Hello Neil, I am catching up on diaries.

I love the coast line shots you have taken and that is a mighty load of beautifully taken Adonis images you have posted. Like everyone else, I am eagerly awaiting your next instalment 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 14-Sep-18 05:41 PM GMT

You can consider yourself a fully paid up member of the blue badge club, Neil. What a great selection of bright, fresh Small Coppers.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Sep-18 07:11 PM GMT

Thanks all for your great comments 😊

The next report should have been done last night but I got hijacked into baby-sitting duties for our grandkids...hopefully will have it done shortly.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Sep-18 09:40 PM GMT

Dorset August 31st to September 7th part 5 - Shades of Brown (mostly).

Small Heaths were present everywhere I went during the week, usually in good numbers and often the most numerous species seen.



Small Heath - Osmington 01.09.2018



Small Heath – Ballard Down 06.09.2018

At Durdle door I spotted a mating pair which made me realise that this is something that I don't recall having seen before with this species despite it being such a familiar one.



Small Heath pair in cop – Durdle Door 03.09.2018

Meadow Browns were also flying at all the sites I visited although not as many as I have seen still flying here during my past visits. Mind you, that is all relative and there were still double figures seen at most places including a few mating pairs, usually tucked down in the grass.



Meadow Brown pair in cop – Osmington 01.09.2018

The female below caught my eye at Durdle Door with her large orange forewing patches and slight bleaching of her hindwings. It was just a pity I could not get a photo without intruding grass stems before she took off over the hillside and I lost sight of her.



Meadow Brown female – Durdle Door 02.09.2018

Also at Durdle Door on the Monday (3rd Sept.) I spotted a well faded Marbled White still hanging in there. Like the Meadow Browns these seem to have a much longer flight period on some southern chalk sites and I have seen a few here before in early September in past years.



Marbled White – Durdle Door 03. 09.2018

One of my secondary targets for the week was another species that seems to have a longer flight period on the chalk sites down here...the Grayling. Durdle Door produced most of these with a dozen or more seen on the slopes above the famous rock arch, but curiously I didn't see any the first couple of times I looked here and it was not until the Monday afternoon that I saw the first ones despite the weather conditions being similar each time I was there. I wonder where they had been hiding?



Grayling - Durdle Door 03.09.2018



Grayling - Durdle Door 03.09.2018



Grayling - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Grayling - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Grayling - Durdle Door 05.09.2018

The only other place I saw Graylings was at Tout Quarry on Portland where I spotted a couple down the rocky side paths.



Grayling - Tout Quarry 04.09.2018

Two Wall Browns were seen, both females, one at Tout Quarry and one at Ballard Down. The one at Portland flew on to one of the Buddleias that grow out of the rocks here as I was watching a Painted Lady and I only managed a quick record shot before she was gone.



Wall Brown – Tout Quarry 04.09.2018

The one on Ballard Down looked to be in better condition from the brief look that I got before she too was gone into the distance.

Speckled Woods cropped up at most places, especially along the more shaded paths and hedgerows along the bottoms of hillsides. For example at Osmington I counted 13 along the first part of the bridleway through the trees before it comes out and turns diagonally up the hillside. I didn't take many photos of these though, after all I see plenty back home.



Speckled Wood – Bindon Hill 02.09.2018

One more report to come with a few odds and sods that don't fit into any of the previous posts.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Sep-18 10:07 PM GMT

Great report Neil 😊 The mating pair of Meadow Browns show an interesting individual, with the double pupil and the lighter band across the hind wing you could almost think that a Hedge Brown 😊 Brilliant Grayling shots as well and a September Marbled White – I saw them near there back in June, and they were looking tatty then 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-Sep-18 09:06 PM GMT

Small Heaths, Wall Browns & Graylings are enviable in September, Neil, but a Marbled White?!?

That must have pupated in a fridge to still be around at that time! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 16-Sep-18 02:17 PM GMT

Love the shots Neil of the Grayling on the Berries and the Wall on the Buddeila, you usually see Wall on the ground, your Small Heath will take some beating as well. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by ernie f, 17-Sep-18 10:50 AM GMT

Neil, love the Small Heath "Odd Couple". That was quite a find, but equally love all your ultra-sharp Grayling shots.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Sep-18 07:54 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments Wurzel, David, Goldie and Ernie, much appreciated as always 😊

Dorset August 31st to September 7th part 6 - Miscellaneous Stuff.

One last report from our week in Dorset to cover some miscellaneous stuff that didn't fit into any of the previous reports.

All three species of common White were seen although only Small Whites were flying in decent numbers with far fewer Large and Green-veined Whites about.



Small White - Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Small White - Osmington 04.09.2018

Just three each of Red Admirals, Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows were seen throughout the week with only a couple of the Painted Ladies staying still long enough for me to get some photos and these had both seen better days.



Painted Lady – Osmington 01.09.2018



Painted Lady – Tout Quarry 04.09.2018

By a coincidence I also saw three Hummingbird Hawk Moths, two of these at Tout Quarry on Portland where they were hovering and darting about around the buddleias that grow alongside the rocky paths here. These always seem to move just as I press the button but eventually I managed to get a couple of shots that weren't total blurs.



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Tout Quarry 04.09.2018



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Tout Quarry 04.09.2018

The third HBHM was seen at Durlston Country Park where it was moving slowly over the dry grass down the gully and appeared to be searching for something, perhaps a female looking for some bedstraw to lay on among the still parched vegetation there.



Hummingbird Hawk Moth – Durlston CP 05.09.2018

A visit to RSPB Arne on the Monday afternoon (3rd Sept.) produced a couple of Brimstones along with half a dozen Speckled Woods. Whilst Jane and my mom had a drink at the cafe I went for a walk to the Raptor Hide where I had a distant view of an Osprey sitting on top of a dead tree, much too far away to get a photo with my FZ200 but I did get a decent view through my binoculars.

Back at Durdle Door, a Peregrine was seen on some days above a small valley that goes by the great name of Scratchy Bottom 😊 that runs inland just a short way along the coast path between the rock arch and Bats Head.

Amongst the other birds seen down there were quite few Wheatears on the grassy slopes at Durdle Door.



Wheatear – Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Wheatear – Durdle Door 05.09.2018



Wheatear – Durdle Door 05.09.2018

Also quite a few of these which I think were Linnets but I am never that good at identifying these small brown jobs so would be happy to be corrected.



Linnet (I think) – Durdle Door 05.09.2018

On the Wednesday morning there were loads of House Martins swirling about in the air around the rock arch and nearby grassy slopes, impossible to count with their fast aerial movements but it seemed like hundreds of them and they made for an impressive display. I was watching a Small Copper about 09.00ish when I realised the House Martins had all disappeared, I didn't see which way they went but I guess they had gathered here before heading off south for the winter.



Grassy slope above the arch at Durdle Door.

And to finish off, a few more scenery shots...



Looking down on West Lulworth from Bindon Hill.



Looking towards West Lulworth from the footpath behind Hambury Tout



Durdle Door looking towards Bats Head.



Evening sun shining through Bats Hole at Bats Head.

All in all, another cracking week in one of my favourite parts of the country 😊

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 17-Sep-18 08:14 PM GMT

What an excellent series of shots of lots of different species – very hard indeed to single any one thing out there, though the views are glorious too! 😊
The Marbled White is on the face of it a strange find, though I do recall seeing one at Durlston on the last day of August one year – so perhaps not quite so strange.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by CallumMac, 17-Sep-18 08:33 PM GMT

Amidst some fantastic butterfly pictures, I just have to say that your last photo of the sunset through Bats Hole would not look out of place on a postcard! 🇬🇧

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Sep-18 10:42 PM GMT

Fantastic images Neil 😊 So you saw a 'white arse' at Scratchy Bottom 🤔😏 great stuff 😊 As are those Hummingbird Hawk Moth shots 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 18-Sep-18 10:08 AM GMT

Hi! Neill, love your scenery shots, callum's right they could be post card shots, lovely! Love the Bird shots also 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 18-Sep-18 11:14 PM GMT

That's an exceptionally beautiful part of the UK, Neil. It also has exceptional butterflies, and a few decent birds by the look of things.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 19-Sep-18 03:24 PM GMT

A beautiful selection of shots from Dorset Neil. The Adonis and Coppers really stand out. Lovely scenic views as well, and great shots of the Wheatear. 🇬🇧 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Sep-18 07:54 PM GMT

Many thanks again for all the great comments Dave, Callum, Wurzel, Goldie, David and Andrew.

That part of the Dorset coast really is a great place to spend some time in early September 😊

Dave, I thought I remembered you seeing a late Marbled White at Durlston. I have see a few late ones down that way now, either at the end of August or the first few days in September. I suspect that they sometimes last longer on the chalk down here in a similar way that Meadows Browns also last much longer here than they do back home.

I have had a look back through my photos from previous years and and found these, all taken in the area at around the same time.



Bindon Hill 5th September 2012



Durlston Country Park 2nd September 2013



Durdle Door 31st August 2014



Durdle Door 30th August 2015

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 21-Sep-18 09:06 PM GMT

Fascinating, Neil – it's clearly a regular thing with the species in that part of the world. The majority of those above are reasonably fresh as well. Do you happen to know when they first appear on the Dorset coast in any given year? That might indicate whether they have a late emergence or a protracted one.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Sep-18 11:01 PM GMT

Interesting to see them hanging on so late into the season, especially this year when they were here one minute and gone the next 😲 I wonder if it's because of the maritime climate making it more benign? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 22-Sep-18 12:10 AM GMT

Just checked, Neil. and I can add Durlston 27th August 2016 to your sequence (no photo though).

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 22-Sep-18 10:33 PM GMT

Quite extraordinary to see Marbled Whites flying at all in September, Neil, much less in that kind of condition.

Do they emerge at the usual time in that part of the country, i.e. early to mid June?

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 24-Sep-18 08:12 PM GMT

Thanks for the comments on the Marbled Whites guys 😊

I believe that the main emergence down there is around the same time as most other parts of the country i.e. mid June with numbers building into early July. I have certainly seen them in large numbers down there at the end of June. I reckon that the late ones that I have seen are the last examples of a more protracted emergence than we get at home in the midlands rather than being a later flight period overall.

I have done a bit of reading up on this species and interestingly the excellent 'Butterflies of Sussex' gives an average last sighting of 23rd August.

Anyway, the season is rapidly winding down around here but it can still taunt me with what looks like a week of reasonable weather ahead whilst I am at work after a pretty scabby weekend. Saturday here was awful, gloomy wet and windy all day. Sunday was a bit better with the sun trying to break through but a cold wind kept the temperatures down to 12 degrees at most.

Despite the cool and mostly dull weather a couple of faded male Speckled Woods braved the conditions to chase each other about but that was the only butterfly activity I saw all weekend.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 25-Sep-18 03:22 PM GMT

Somehow I seem to have missed this page in your diary completely, I'm not usually that slow !. Of all the images it's the Grayling on the blackberry that steals the show for me. 🍷 .

Your successful Hummingbird Hawk moth shots took some patience, as they spend a millisecond on each flower before darting off to the next.

There would have been an extra mrgreen for your female Wall, but I've seen one recently.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 26-Sep-18 09:09 AM GMT

Just caught up on your diary, a great way to wile away the time sat on a train down to the south coast for some more Cloudie action. It's very obvious why your south west trip is an annual thing, impossible to get bored visiting places like that 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Maximus, 26-Sep-18 10:29 AM GMT

I've also just caught up on your diary, Neil.

I must admit that when Mark (essexbuzzard) reported that he'd not seen very much during his Dorset visit, I did wonder how you'd fare on your later visit (than his). It's obvious however from your text and photos that not only did you find loads of stunning fresh butterflies, but also a whole host of different species, and some flying quite late in the year, such as the Marbled Whites 😊

Just goes to show that the Dorset coast really is a brilliant place to spend time in early September, for late season butterflies 😊 I'm surprised there wasn't much on Portland though 😊

All the best
Mike

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Sep-18 08:12 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor, I have seen your Wall Brown photos, very jealous as I don't have them near me these days.

Cheers Bugboy. Yes, a beautiful part of the country at any time but I always manage to find some nice late butterflies down there.

Hi Mike, I was a bit apprehensive myself given the summer we had and after reading Mark's report, but we seemed to time it just right (again).

Friday 28th September.

Well, this past week would have been a cracker if I hadn't been stuck in work all week and not able to take advantage of it. On both Wednesday and Thursday afternoons the temperature rose to 23 degrees in clear blue skies but by the time I got home the lengthening shadows are now covering most of the garden although I have seen a couple of Specklies dancing about in the last remaining sunny patches.

The nights at the beginning of the week were clear and very cold with Tuesday night dropping down to 2 degrees here and with a light frost, our first this autumn, when I left for work just before 06.00am. A bit of cloud built up late on Wednesday which led to a milder night so I put the moth trap out in the garden for the first time for over a week. The result was a total of 54 moths of 11 species, 48 of 8 macros and just 6 of 3 micros. Over half of these were Large Yellow Underwings (29) in various states of wear and tear and the 'underwing' theme was continued with Lesser Yellow Underwing (5),

Broad Bordered Yellow Underwing (1), Lunar Underwing (6) and Copper Underwing (4). The rest included singles of Brimstone Moth, Small Dusty Wave and Brick.



Brick – Coverdale 26.09.2018

Another sure sign of autumn is the increasing number of birds coming to the garden feeders including a couple of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. I see – or more often hear – these in the summer but they rarely come to the feeders until the weather starts to turn in the autumn.



Great- Spotted Woodpecker – Coverdale 23.09.2018

After a few warm days it has turned cooler again today with a bit of a bite in the wind but at least it looks to be staying dry and the weekend looks promising. Fingers crossed I may get a chance to get out and see if anything is still around my local patch.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 28-Sep-18 10:29 PM GMT

The 'Brick' seems an odd name for that Moth Neil, it looks more like a 'Golden...something or other' 😊 Good luck over the weekend 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 29-Sep-18 02:18 PM GMT

Love the Wood Pecker shot Neil, I've had one only once in the Garden, they're great to watch 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 29-Sep-18 06:19 PM GMT

Beautiful image of the woodpecker, Neil. Your garden is certainly very popular with a broad range of wildlife.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 02-Oct-18 07:23 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, like many moths the Brick can be quite variable with a ground colour going from a light orangy tint to a darker brick red. Unfortunately I didn't manage to get out at the weekend...I was in demand as 'Grandads Taxi' on Saturday (the better day) and Sunday was dull and a fair bit cooler.

Thanks Goldie, the GS Woodpeckers are regular visitors to the feeders through the winter. They are about during the summer as well but don't often come to the feeders then, I guess there is more natural food available for them then.

Thanks David, It doesn't do too bad for a typical suburban garden that is not tidied up too much.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Oct-18 07:51 PM GMT

Friday 5th October

I have not seen a butterfly all week with being in work and as I mentioned previously, by the time I get in the lengthening shadows now stretch across most of the garden. I only work half a day on Fridays but after a couple of decently warm days the clouds rolled in today and a cool breeze put the mockers on any chance to see anything this afternoon.

Autumn Moths

With some cloud cover keeping the overnight temperature up around 13 degrees here on Wednesday night I put the moth trap out in the garden and was rewarded with a total of 34 moths of 12 species. Some Autumn specialities are now turning up which included a nice Barred Sallow and a Black Rustic, the latter being a first for the garden.



Barred Sallow - Coverdale 03.10.2018



Black Rustic - Coverdale 03.10.2018

A couple of Red-green Carpets were in the trap. The females of this species overwinter as adults and will continue to fly on milder nights throughout the winter when I have had the odd one or two come to the trap (I run the trap on favourable nights through the winter as there are some winter specialists that only fly then.)



Red-green Carpet - Coverdale 03.10.2018

There were also half a dozen Common Marbled Carpets. This species is extremely variable as the examples below show. This species flies in two generations, May-June and late August-October, and the various colour forms can turn up at either time.



Common Marbled Carpet - Coverdale 03.10.2018



Common Marbled Carpet - Coverdale 03.10.2018

Looks like we are in for a bit of a wet one tomorrow, oh well! I have to take the car in for a service anyway.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 06-Oct-18 10:36 AM GMT

A cracking array of Moths Neil 🤔🇬🇧 The last three could almost be the finished images from colouring books – just that the people had different crayons to hand 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 06-Oct-18 01:54 PM GMT

Same here weather wise Neil, although the Sun's out today there's still a cold wind real Autumn weather. No Butterflies spotted yet!! Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 07-Oct-18 06:28 PM GMT

Aah, it's **that** time of year again, Neil! If you need any empathy for your lack of butterflies, I can provide it – precious few in south Wales either. 😞

Love the Black Rustic. I haven't ever seen that species before.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 08-Oct-18 08:25 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, I like the way you describe the carpet moths as being coloured in, the last two especially as they are the same species.

I see you are still seeing Red Admirals Goldie, not seen one of those for ages here.

Yep, that time again David. Butterflies are on their last legs here and we have had a few light frosts recently. The Black Rustic is actually quite a common moth but I had never seen one myself before. If I did not now run the moth trap in the garden there is every chance that I still would not have seen one.

Sunday 7th October

Why is it that the weather forecast is always bang on when they predict horrible weather? Saturday was a stinker with rain starting on Friday night and continuing for most of the day. Not only that but it hardly seemed to get light all day.

Sunday was a bit better but although it stayed dry a layer of high cloud prevented the sun from breaking through for more than a few minutes at a time and with a bit of a cool breeze the temperature struggled to get above 12 degrees at best.

Despite this a couple of Speckled Woods were squabbling over the one part of the garden that does still get a bit of sun on the occasions that it broke through the cloud. They had both seen better days, in fact one of them had seen much better days but he still seemed to have plenty of life left in him.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 07.10.2018



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 07.10.2018

Although the conditions were less than favourable, I decided to pop out in the afternoon to have a look around my local site at Castle Hills near Solihull on the off chance something might still be about. A wander round the most likely looking sheltered spots produced the grand total of one butterfly, a male Common Blue.



Common Blue – Coverdale 07.10.2018

There seems to have been quite a few third brood around this year, especially further south, and although I believe this was more of a partial brood around here I have still seen a good number of reports from around the midlands.

I reckon that will be my last time out looking for butterflies this year and although the Specklies will probably hang on in the garden for a week or two yet that is probably it for my season this year.

I see that Wurzel has given the heads up for the favourite photos threads so time to start looking back through all the photos that I took through the season.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 08-Oct-18 08:40 PM GMT

Midweek might be worth a punt, if you're not tied up with other necessities, with mid 20's predicted in your neck of the woods last time I looked!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Oct-18 08:28 PM GMT

Unfortunately I am in work during the week Bugboy. Today was a cracker with clear blue skies and tomorrow looks to be even better but I will be stuck inside 😞

Oh well!, I mustn't grumble. The season around my local patch is usually pretty much over by now anyway.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Art Frames, 09-Oct-18 09:54 PM GMT

Neil

Shame you have to work, I remember it did have some upsides as well as the obvious downsides. And one day you will have more time too....

But your tip about the Clouded Yellows (on my own patch) did me proud today. And with the threatened heatwave (for the time of year) it should be even better tomorrow. Sorry you'll miss them.

But looking at your diary you make up for the work-time at other times OK. 😊😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 09-Oct-18 10:55 PM GMT

I share your frustration Neil – the best weather is always to be had when you've got to work and yes they are 100% accurate, precise, spot on when it comes to predicting terrible weather 😞😞 Still at least you have the Specklies in the garden still 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 11-Oct-18 02:28 PM GMT

Love the Woodpecker Neil. I often hear the distinctive 'chirp' of one where I live, and occasionally catch a sight of it flying between the tree tops. Only long range shots though. 😊😊 Very nice selection of moths. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 11-Oct-18 10:51 PM GMT

Looks like your area is akin to mine, Neil, i.e. finally winding down for the year. Sadly, we're not in that 'lucky zone' where people are still seeing 10+ species in a day! 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 14-Oct-18 11:10 AM GMT

Thanks Peter, I must admit I am struggling to see the upsides of work currently...I suppose it helps me to afford to do the things I want to 😊
Glad to hear you got to see the Clouded Yellows 😊

Cheers Wurzel, and by now you will know that after another decent few days last week, we are having yet another weekend of lousy weather. Loads of rain here Friday night and yesterday and as I write this it is lashing down again and looks to be set in for the day 😞

Thanks Andrew, your experience of the Woodpecker by you is similar to mine in the summer but they usually start visiting the feeders around this time and through the winter months 😊

I know what you mean David. I think that one of the effects of the internet these days is that we sometimes see stuff posted from more favoured parts of the country and forget that our own areas can be very different. For example my own patch always starts a couple of weeks later than the south-east corner and finishes a couple of weeks sooner which effectively gives me a local season that is up to a month shorter.

Sunday 14th October

As I look out of the window as I am typing this in the middle of the morning it looks like it has not got properly light yet and the heavy rain is drumming on the windows. Yesterday was similar during the morning and although the rain stopped during the afternoon and the sun attempted to break through a couple of times, the wind was blowing a gale.

All this after yet another week during which there were some nice warm sunny days...Oh well! I am working on a cunning plan which will hopefully see me taking early retirement in a couple of years so I will be more able to get out mid week a bit more.

Anyway, the mild weather last week saw me run the moth trap a couple of times in the garden, on Monday and Wednesday nights. Monday night was a bit breezy and produced total of 23 moths of 9 species (20 of 7 macro and just 3 of 2 micro). Wednesday night the breeze was lighter and produced a total of 31 moths of 10 species (27 of 8 macros and 4 of 2 micro).

Among Monday nights catch was my first Blair's Shoulder-knot for this year. I usually get a few of these each year and it is now a common and widespread species over most of the country. This species was first recorded in the UK on the Isle of Wight on 1951 and subsequently spread north steadily, reaching Warwickshire in 1978 and Scotland in 2001. This expansion was no doubt assisted by the widespread planting during the 1970s and 1980s of its larval foodplant which consists of various forms of Cypress including the infamous leylandii which was used for many a hedge or screen.



Blair's Shoulder-knot - Coverdale 08.10.2018

Tuesday nights catch included a 'new for year' November Moth agg. This is one of three closely related and very similar species - The November Moth, Pale November Moth and The Autumnal. These three are very difficult to separate visually so are usually recorded as aggregates (agg.) unless confirmed by close examination of the genitalia. There is a fourth species, the Small Autumnal but this does not occur in Warwickshire.



November Moth agg. - Coverdale 10.10.2018

Two more NFY's on Tuesday were Feathered Thorn and Red-line Quaker, both species which I get in small numbers at this time of year.



Feathered Thorn - Coverdale 10.10.2018



Red-line Quaker - Coverdale 10.10.2018

This brings this years garden moth tally up to a total of 221 species made up of 138 macros and 83 micros. There are still a number of autumn and winter flyers that I may see this year depending on the conditions and how often I put the trap out before the end of December.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 14-Oct-18 06:34 PM GMT

More great looking Moff's Neil 😊 Good luck with the Cunning Plan - hopefully it won't be a Baldrick 😊 and also hopefully it'll be better than mine, which involves winning the Lotto 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 15-Oct-18 07:30 PM GMT

Your regular moth updates, Neil, are very much tempting me into getting a trap of my own!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 19-Oct-18 07:55 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, like the Baldrick comment, glad to see you got the reference. Hopefully my plan is a bit more reliable than relying on the lottery...hopefully 😊

I had always fancied getting a moth trap David and succumbed to the temptation myself after seeing other peoples reports. I would imagine your location would provide for a nice selection of species including some interesting migrants.

Friday 19th October.

Nothing much to report this week. Following a nippy night that dropped down to just 3 degrees, a nice sunny afternoon tempted me to have a quick look around the park by my mom's house but without any success.

I put the moth trap out just the once this week, on Tuesday night which produced just 17 moths of 11 species, nothing special but a selection of the usual suspects for the time of year, similar to last weeks catch.



Feathered Thorn – Coverdale 16.10.2018



November Moth agg. Coverdale 16.10.2018



Brick – Coverdale 16.10.2018



Turnip Moth – Coverdale 16.10.2018

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 19-Oct-18 10:44 PM GMT

Another lovely selection of Moffs Neil 😊 I take it the Turnip Moth got it's name from the food plant of the larvae as it looks nothing like a Turnip 🤔😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 19-Oct-18 11:40 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

I had always fancied getting a moth trap David and succumbed to the temptation myself after seeing other peoples reports. I would imagine your location would provide for a nice selection of species including some interesting migrants.

Yes. This area may not be great for butterflies but there are quite a number of moths recorded in the area that are notable.

Given that my cottage is in a 'wild' part of the Gower then I would expect a fair smorgasbord of species, so I will look into this and may well become 'nfreem2' over the next few months!!! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Oct-18 08:09 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel. The Turnip Moth's larval foodplants consist of various wild and cultivated plants including Turnips, Swedes and Carrots, makes you wonder why it isn't called the Swede or Carrot Moth 😊

David, I reckon your area is much better than my local patch with Marsh Frits & SPBFs on your doorstep, not to mention Wall Browns not far away, none of which occur in Warwickshire these days.

Saturday 20th October

A decent weekend at last with some nice sun albeit accompanied by a chilly breeze. Although I have seen a few butterflies still being reported from around the midlands, mostly a few Small Coppers and Speckled Woods with the odd Peacock or Small Tortoiseshell, I decided against going out anywhere and caught up with some jobs around the house and garden.

On Saturday afternoon I spotted a couple of Speckled Woods spiraling around each other down the bottom of the garden. They went at it for a few minutes until one of them broke off and disappeared next door. The other one settled to bask in the sun so I grabbed my camera and took a few shots...quite possibly the last butterfly photos I will manage to take this year.



Speckled Wood - Coverdale 20.10.2018

We already had our first frosts here the other week and overnight temperatures are regularly dropping down to low single figures and it seems that a cold front is going to be heading down the country by next weekend so I am not expecting to see anything else around here now.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 23-Oct-18 08:38 PM GMT

Great 'final' shot Neil 😊, though I hope you might manage a few more before hanging up the camera for 2018 maybe the odd hibernator brought out by a warm spell? Fingers crossed...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Oct-18 08:12 AM GMT

~~[quote]~~ I reckon your area is much better than my local patch with Marsh Frits & SPBFs on your doorstep, not to mention Wall Browns not far away, none of which occur in Warwickshire these days.

Possibly, in the near to intermediate vicinity, Neil, but travelling to see the southern English specialities is quite a labour from Swansea, although I'm not complaining, given that I've got Marsh & Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries on my doorstep along with Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper & Wall Brown!

Your moths are rather stunning though, and I wonder what species are present in my locality. There could well be wonderful surprises in store!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 26-Oct-18 08:15 PM GMT

I know what you mean about travelling to see the southern specialities David. That is one of the reasons why I usually try to have a break for a few days or wangle a family holiday down south somewhere as it is too far for a day trip and I refuse to clock up lots of miles just to tick off species every year.

Yes, you may well have some good species of moths in your locality. Not sure if you use facebook but there are some useful groups on there that I use, including these;

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1657981907786185/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MigrantLepidopera/>

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Oct-18 09:32 AM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Great 'final' shot Neil 😊, though I hope you might manage a few more before hanging up the camera for 2018 maybe the odd hibernator brought out by a warm spell? Fingers crossed...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Thanks Wurzel, missed your comment earlier somehow 😊 Yes, there is always the off chance of the odd hibernator but we are not like the more benign southern parts around here and my season is usually done by now.

cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 03-Nov-18 02:34 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

...Not sure if you use facebook but there are some useful groups on there that I use, including these;

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1657981907786185/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MigrantLepidopera/>

Many thanks, Neil. Those are most useful resources. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 05-Nov-18 07:31 PM GMT

With the clocks going back the other weekend it is now practically dark when I get in from work as well as dark when I leave in the morning so not much chance to see anything in the garden now during the week.

During the weekends I am seeing all the usual birds visiting the feeders but the most notable was a small flock of approx 20-30 Fieldfares that descended on to a Mountain Ash in one of my neighbours gardens on Sunday afternoon, no doubt attracted by the hefty crop of berries. I was in my back room at the time and grabbed my camera to take a couple of quick photos through the window (and steady drizzle which put me off going outside 😊).



Fieldfares in neighbours garden. Cropped shot taken at full zoom.

After a cold week last week with a couple of nights dropping down to -3 degrees around here, this week looks to be much milder so I may put the moth trap out a couple of times to see if anything is about.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 07-Nov-18 10:50 PM GMT

Crickety the view of Fieldfares always makes me think that it's almost time to get the Christmas decs ready 🤪🤪🤪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 09-Nov-18 07:59 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

With the clocks going back the other weekend it is now practically dark when I get in from work as well as dark when I leave in the morning so not much chance to see anything in the garden now during the week.

Indeed. Next week will see me not bother to even open my curtains when I leave for work in the morning, as when I get home I would only be closing them immediately.

Nice to see you have some birdlife to keep providing you with satisfaction.

March seems a long way away right now. 😞

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 09-Nov-18 08:03 PM GMT

Indeed Wurzel, a proper winter bird. Mind you I have seen the first Christmas decorations up in some houses around here this past week...bl**dy mental 🤪

Nearly missed your comment David as I was writing this next bit. Yes, the birds keep things interesting in the garden though the winter. Roll on next spring.

A milder week just gone but a bit blustery on most nights so I only put the moth trap out the once in the end, on Monday night which resulted in just 12 moths of 6 species, 5 of 3 macros and 7 of 3 micros. The macros consisted of 3 Bricks, 1 Featherd Thorn and a worn Common Marbled Carpet whilst the micros were made up of 4 Light Brown Apple Moths, 2 Tachystola acroxantha and 1 Eudonia angustea. I did think I may get a few more given the mild conditions but perhaps they were keeping their heads down to avoid being shot down by all the fireworks going off around here 🤪

The Feathered Thorn and Brick are both common and widespread autumn species but I have only had the odd one or two of both these in previous years whereas this year I have been getting them nearly every time I have put the trap out over the past few weeks.

I know I have posted photos of both of these species recently but here's a couple more from this week.



Feathered Thorn – Coverdale 05.11.2018



Brick - Coverdale 05.11.2018

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Nov-18 09:23 PM GMT

In Waitrose they had the Christmas decorations on sale side by side with the Halloween items Neil 😊 Mind you if it means that next season comes sooner I'm all for wishing the months away 😊 I love the little white eyes on that Feathered Thorn 😊🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 12-Nov-18 08:04 PM GMT

Things look to be winding down on the moth front too, Neil. 😊

As for Christmas decorations, I can trump that - in Swansea, the Xmas funfair opened today!! We've barely got Bonfire Night out of the way! 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 16-Nov-18 08:24 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, well I suppose at this rate it won't be long until the Easter Eggs are in the shops 😊😊

Yes David, the moths are winding down now too. Mind you there are still a few about...speaking of which,

Friday 16th November

Some fairly mild nights earlier this week albeit a bit blustery culminated in a promising looking night to put the trap out last night with just a light breeze and a minimum overnight temperature of 12 degrees forecast.

In the end that was exactly what we had and although there was not a great number of moths in the trap this morning (5 macros and 5 micros), one of them was my first December Moth for the garden. This small member of the Lasiocampidae family, which also includes the Eggar, Fox and Lackey Moths, is a common and widespread species but with a flight period usually from late October through to early January it is unlikely to be seen without running a moth trap at this time.



December Moth - Coverdale 15.11.2018

Another common winter flying moth is the Mottled Umber which is one of a number of species with flightless females. The males are very variable and include some attractive colour forms, one of which I was pleased to see had come to the trap last night.



Mottled Umber – Coverdale 15.011.2018

The rest of the catch was made up of a couple of Red-green Carpet Moths and a worn Brick.



Red-green Carpet Moth – Coverdale 15.11.2018

The micros consisted of two Light Brown Apple Moths and three *Tachystola acroxantha*

The temperatures are dropping off a bit over the weekend and next week is looking to be a cold one so I reckon it may be a while before the trap is out again.

Bye for now,

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 17-Nov-18 01:02 PM GMT

Hi! Neil, we get Field Fares in Winter some times, especially when it Snow's and lots of different birds that you don't see a lot in the Summer arrive it makes the Winter worth while, Well! some times, Goldie 😊😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 17-Nov-18 03:38 PM GMT

More great Moffs Neil, dead envious of the Red Green Carpet as I've always wanted to see one of those 🍷 Mind you I see the December Moth is following the lead of the shops and has come early 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 19-Nov-18 05:38 PM GMT

You're still getting some nice looking moths, Neil, which I suppose serves to extend the 'season' for you somewhat. I agree though that the forecast cold snap may well finish things off for the year, although I'm not sure 'Beast from the East' is appropriate as there are no freezing nights predicted...in south Wales at least!

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 23-Nov-18 07:21 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, I don't often get Fieldfares in the garden although I do see them around and about locally most winters. I always notice the birds more during the winter when there is less of interest about otherwise.

Cheers Wurzel, Yes, December Moth in November and I had November Moths in October, mind you that is well within the normal flight period for both species. Not had a Winter Moth yet this year but they are also on the wing now so maybe next time I put the trap out...when the overnight temperature lifts a bit more.

Thanks David, not sure what you ended up with in south wales but we had a couple of freezing nights here, Tuesday night in particular which dropped to -4 overnight and we even saw the first snow around here on Wednesday morning. It didn't last long though and it is looking to bit milder, albeit wetter and windier, next week.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Andrew555, 29-Nov-18 11:50 AM GMT

You've picked out some lovely looking moths there Neil. Very nice. 😊

Cheers

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 07-Dec-18 07:50 PM GMT

Thanks Andrew 😊 A few more moths coming up.

Friday 7th December

With the recent weather being either too cold or too wet and windy on the milder nights, I have not bothered putting the trap out for a couple of weeks. With last nights overnight temperature forecast to be staying up around 12 degrees I decided to light up although it was also forecast to become windy and wet again in the early hours.

When I got up at 05.00 to to fetch the trap in before heading off for work it was in fact raining and quite windy but I was pleased to see that I had caught a couple of moths, a Mottled Umber and a Red-line Quaker.

I had caught a Mottled Umber last month which I posted on the previous page of this diary and commented then that this is a very variable species which can be illustrated by comparing that example with the one below from last night.



Mottled Umber – Coverdale 06.12.2018

After taking the above photo I gently blew on the moths forewings from behind it to try and capture a shot of the hindwings, sometimes this works and sometimes the moth just takes off but I was lucky this time.



Mottled Umber showing attractive speckled hindwings – Coverdale 06.12.2018

The Red-line Quaker is really an autumn flying moth rather than a true winter flyer but there have been some odd reports this year with many species seen well outside of their normal flight periods and this one is not that far out in comparison with some I have heard of.



Red-line Quaker – Coverdale 06.12.2018

There were also a couple of micros, a Light Brown Apple Moth and a *Tachystola acroxantha*, both species that can turn up in almost any month.

I really must put some words together looking back on my season.

Bye for now,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 08-Dec-18 04:15 PM GMT

Those are really attractive hind wings on the Mottled Umber Neil 😊 I'll try and remember your little trick for getting them to show their hind wings as it may come in handy as I think I've got a Vapourer in my lab – I say think because it was handed in by a pupil and by the end of the day when I went to look at it it was already ensconced in its silk bivouac 🤔 If it comes to fruition then I can try for some hind wing shots.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 08-Dec-18 07:22 PM GMT

I'm glad you're still getting moths in your trap, Neil. I suppose it's hardly surprising; we've only had about four frosts this autumn/winter so far.

Nice piece of advice for the uninitiated too. If ever I'm in a similar situation I will try gently blowing on the moth to see if it obliges like yours did.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 10-Dec-18 07:36 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel, hmm! not sure if that is a Vapourer you have, they usually overwinter as eggs.

Thanks David, we've had a few more frosts than that here in the midlands but nothing too hard...yet.

Time to start looking back at my 2018 butterfly year and my thoughts on what was in some ways a strange season. As always my impressions are based

on what I saw around my local patch plus some breaks consisting of a few days or so spent in other areas around the country. Apart from these longer breaks, I only travelled out of Warwickshire a couple of times this year, this being part of a conscious decision I made to try and cut down on clocking up miles running about trying to see the same old species every year. Instead of trying to cram everything in I have found that being a bit more laid back about my butterflying means that I enjoy the season more and if I missed some this year, then so be it. I can always try again next year.

Anyway, to kick off I will start with;

Looking back at 2018 Part 1 – Spring.

To start the year we had a proper winter with a few heavy falls of snow which actually stuck around for a few days on a couple of occasions. February is never a butterfly month around here and this year was no exception with cold weather dragging on well into March. Despite the prolonged cold conditions my first butterfly sightings of the year occurred in late March which is actually very consistent for me here with my first sightings nearly always being sometime around the third week of the month. As usual for me, these first butterflies were **Comma** and **Small Tortoiseshell**, both of which seemed to come out of hibernation in fairly good numbers around my local patch. In particular it was encouraging to see the Small Tortoiseshells as these had been thin on the ground the previous summer.

This initial flurry of activity was cut short by a week or so of cool and cloudy weather so it was another couple of weeks before I had a chance to get out again and see the first **Peacock** of the year and although these eventually appeared at all their usual spots they were well down in numbers again compared to a few years ago.



Small Tortoiseshells – Wagon Lane Park Solihull 06.04.2018



Comma – Bickenhill 05.04.2018



Peacock – Bickenhill 05.04.2018

By the second half of April the weather had warmed up considerably and the hibernators had been joined by **Small and Green-veined Whites, Orange-tips, Holly Blues and Speckled Woods**, all of which were seen at all the local spots as well as in my garden,



Green-veined White – Castle Hills 26.04.2018



Orange-tip – Castle Hills 26.04.2018



Speckled Wood – Coverdale 26.04.2018

Brimstones appeared to have a fairly good spring around here with males seen patrolling most local sites plus a female seen egg laying in my garden. I have previously found Brimstones to be a morning butterfly with activity usually tailing off from early afternoon but this year I also observed them to be more active later in the day, quite possibly due to the warm spell of weather we had in April and into May.



Brimstone – Coverdale 05.05.2018

The first week of May produced my first **Large Whites** which completed the list of common spring species that I would expect to see around my immediate local patch and in my garden.

For me to see any of the more localised species in Warwickshire it requires a visit to specific sites, usually around 40–45 minutes' drive from my house. The first of these was a visit to Ryton Wood Meadows on the first Bank Holiday Monday in May, primarily to see **Green Hairstreaks** which I found in good numbers around the usual hotspots.



Green Hairstreak – Ryton Wood Meadows 07.05.2018

Later in May a visit to Bishops Hill produced good numbers of **Small Blues** and **Dingy Skippers** plus around half a dozen **Grizzled Skippers**. The Dingy Skippers were more numerous than I had seen there last year and I was particularly pleased to find the Grizzled Skippers as this species has had a run of bad years in Warwickshire.



Small Blue – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Dingy Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018



Grizzled Skipper – Bishops Hill 19.05.2018

Bishops Hill also produced my first **Common Blues** of the year, these always appearing at this site a couple of weeks before they show up on my local patch which is a bit further north and on average a few hundred feet higher in altitude.



Common Blue – Castle Hills 25.05.2018

One species that I hoped to catch up on this year, having missed it for the past few years, was **Duke of Burgundy**. It was not until the late Spring Bank Holiday Monday however that I managed to get the time for a run down to Prestbury Hill by Cheltenham which was also my first trip out of Warwickshire this year. After a bit of a slow start to the season, the warm weather later in April and into May seemed to have brought things back on track and I had seen that DoB had been flying for some weeks so I was keeping my fingers crossed that I hadn't missed them. In the end I found half a dozen or so, mostly looking a bit worse for wear so it was obvious that I had just caught them at the end of their flight period there.



Duke of Burgundy – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

Prestbury Hill also produced Small Blues, Dingy Skippers, Green Hairstreaks and my first **Small Copper**, **Brown Argus**, **Small Heath** and **Red Admiral** of the year.

A female **Wall Brown** was also seen at Prestbury Hill which was a pleasant surprise as although I had read that they could be found here I had never yet seen one at this site during my visits in previous years.



Brown Argus – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018



Wall Brown – Prestbury Hill 28.05.2018

By the end of May Common Blues were appearing at my local patch but it still felt like we were in spring mode with Commas, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Orange-tips still flying. Also, Large Skippers, which often appear in late May here and mark the transition to the summer species were yet to show up.

It had been a spring of contrasting weather with winter dragging on through most of March before warming up in April. then an unsettled spell from late April into early May followed by some unseasonably warm days through mid May before turning unsettled again at the end of the month.

There were also indications that some more warm weather was on the way for June.

To be continued...

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 10-Dec-18 11:25 PM GMT

A great start to the look back Neil 😊, even if the year itself didn't get off to a great start 😊😊 Fantastic shots – but my favourite it the Peacock with the excellently caught proboscis 😊 brill 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by Goldie M, 11-Dec-18 10:38 AM GMT

I think I like your Wall best Neil, 😊 I didn't get many shots of the Wall this year, infect only one 😊 so it as to be 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 16-Dec-18 10:16 PM GMT

You've captured each of those species in top condition, Neil, and that allied to the general colours of the surroundings make the images particularly evocative.

Colour is what we lack right now, with the landscape in the throes of deepest winter, so many thanks for providing a reminder not only of what was, but also of what is to come.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 17-Dec-18 07:28 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments Wurzel, Goldie and David 😊

I always enjoy looking back through my photos taken during the season and reminding myself of some of the great days out I had. It also gets me making plans in my mind for maybe next year seeing some of the species I missed this year 😊

Hopefully I will get some words together this week for the next part of my look back.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 19-Dec-18 07:41 PM GMT

Neil Freeman wrote:

..Hopefully I will get some words together this week for the next part of my look back.

I shall look forward to that, Neil. Won't be long before we're looking **forward**. The new season is a mere 11 weeks or so away. 😊

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 21-Dec-18 07:57 PM GMT

Indeed David, after tonight the hours of daylight will be getting just that little bit longer each day 😊

Looking back at 2018 part 2 – Summer.

The transition into meteorological summer came with more unsettled weather, in fact looking back at my notes for the beginning of June we had bands of rain and thunderstorms with sunny periods mixed in between which led to some warm and muggy days. These first few days of June saw Large Skippers beginning to emerge in numbers at all the usual local spots and fresh Speckled Woods were still appearing, but otherwise, apart from Common Blues a few Small Coppers plus a few Whites and ageing hibernators, there were not many other butterflies about, a consequence of the 'June Gap' between the spring butterflies and the appearance of the summer species which seemed to be a bit more pronounced here this year.



Large Skipper – Castle Hills Solihull 23.06.2018

The second week of June saw us heading over to Norfolk for a few days. The weather was still changeable but we had some glorious sunny days along with some cloudy ones but apart from a bit of light drizzle we saw no rain during our stay. The main reason for this visit was obviously to see Swallowtails which I succeeded in seeing at Strumpshaw Fen, Hickling Broad, How Hill and Catfield Fen. The last time I saw this superb species was a few fleeting glimpses six years ago so I cannot comment on how they fared this year in comparison to previous ones, suffice to say that I saw plenty to keep me happy during the four days we were there.



Swallowtail – Strumpshaw Fen 10.06.2018

In Norfolk I also noticed that Red Admirals were showing up at most places along with a few Painted Ladies (and Silver-Y Moths) which probably indicated a bit of migration activity. Good numbers of Common Blue and Small Heath were seen along the dunes at Horsey Gap but apart from a few Large Skippers and a single Meadow Brown (my first of the year) we were still awaiting the appearance of the summer species.



Small Heath - Horsey Gap 13.06.2018

Back home and the third week of June saw Meadow Browns and Ringlets emerging in reasonable numbers albeit not as high as some recent years. These were soon joined by the first Marbled Whites and Small Skippers which also seemed to be a bit down in numbers at my local spots.



Ringlet - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Marbled White - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Small Skipper - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

The first summer Small Tortoiseshells and Commas were also beginning to appear locally although the former were few and far between.



Small Tortoiseshell - Castle Hills 23.06.2018



Comma - Castle Hills 23.06.2018

A trip over to Fermyn Woods towards the end of the month produced a good number of Purple Emperors, although nowhere near the numbers I saw reported from Knepp which looks like it has now become THE premier place to see these.



Purple Emperor – Fermyn Woods 28.06.2018

Fermyn also produced White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries amongst the usual woodland species, all of which were very mobile on what was a very hot day and a harbinger of what was to come over the next few weeks.

I was also pleasantly surprised to find a handful of (very worn) Black Hairstreaks at Fermyn. I had been reading reports that these appeared to be having a good year all over their limited range and also about the discovery of the previously undiscovered colony in Sussex, but had thought I would miss this species this year due to using my limited time elsewhere.

Early July saw some very hot and dry weather settle over most of the country and my part of the midlands was no exception. Large Whites were everywhere in good numbers although some of the grassland species were beginning to show signs of burning out quickly in the unusually hot conditions.

Essex Skippers had joined the Small Skippers locally but both of these species seemed to be down in numbers this year and both had a fairly short flight period compared with previous years. Ringlets had practically finished and Meadow Browns also seemed to be going over quicker than usual.



Essex Skipper – Wagon Lane Solihull 04.07.2018

Gatekeepers also appeared in early July but numbers were well down this year around my local spots and this was another species that seemed to go over quickly in the summer heat.

A couple of trips to Snitterfield Bushes and Oversley Wood produced good numbers of Silver-washed Fritillaries along with the usual summer woodland species although many were already looking worn and faded, no doubt due to increased activity in the hot weather.



Large White – Snitterfield Bushes 04.07.2018



Silver-washed Fritillary – Snitterfield Bushes 04.07.2018

Like the Small Tortoiseshells, summer Peacocks were scarce and I only saw a few this year including just one in my garden.



Peacock – Coverdale 10.07.2018

I have heard it said that both these species went into hibernation early to avoid the hot weather and this would make sense, particularly for Small Tortoiseshells, as I didn't see many of those last summer either and yet they were out of hibernation around my local patch in reasonable numbers this spring.

Purple Hairstreaks appeared to be having a very good year all over and I saw loads of photos taken of individuals seen low down although my own experiences were of sightings high up around the tops of oaks, mostly due to my available time usually being in the afternoon rather than earlier in the mornings which seems to be the optimum time to see them lower down.

At the end of July we headed up to Arnside for a couple of days and after seeing no rain for weeks it finally came down by the bucket load on the day we travelled up. Despite this rain, it was obvious that the vegetation on Arnside Knott had become very parched over the preceding few weeks and some species had suffered under these conditions. Scotch Argus numbers were well down from what I have seen in previous years (although I believe they did well at their other English site at Swardale Gill) and Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper numbers were also nowhere near what I would normally expect to see there.



Scotch Argus – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018

In contrast, I saw more Small Coppers at Arnside Knott than I have ever seen there before and a female Wall Brown was a first for me at that site. Also a single Northern Brown Argus was a pleasant surprise given that I expected them to have finished there given the conditions and the fact that many species seemed to be going over early this year.



Small Copper – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018



Wall Brown – Arnside Knott 31.07.2018



Northern Brown Argus (salmacis) – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

A handful of Painted Ladies were also seen scattered about the Knott which meant that, although not exactly a 'Painted Lady Year', I had been seeing them steadily at most places through the summer. In fact so far I had seen more Painted ladies in 2018 than summer brood Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells put together.



Painted Lady – Arnside Knott 30.07.2018

After seeing a good sprinkling of Red Admirals earlier in the summer these had also fizzled out with just the odd one or two showing up here and there. This left Commas as the only summer vannedid appearing in reasonable numbers.

Going into early August, although the weather had become a bit more unsettled, there was still not much rain about and temperatures remained relatively high. Speckled Wood numbers were building up locally and this seemed to be the only species with grass feeding larvae that was actually doing well. Second brood Common Blues, Small Coppers and Small heath were all flying at my local spots in varying numbers, with Common Blues in particular looking like they were having a good year. On the other hand, summer brood Holly Blue numbers seemed to be down after a good spring brood. The high numbers of Large Whites earlier in the summer had tailed off but Small Whites were on the increase with Green-veined White numbers seeming to be about average.



Common Blue female – Blythe Valley Solihull 06.08.2018

After an unsettled start to the summer in early June it had settled down to be an unusually hot and dry July before the weather became a bit more changeable again at the end of the month when more cloud would build up. After a bit of heavy rain at the end of July it reverted to warm and dry

conditions again for the first couple of weeks of August, albeit not quite as hot as it had been, with more cloud about on some days. Whilst in some ways it seemed to be a good summer for butterflies with the overall impression that lots were flying, many sites had become very dry with parched vegetation and this seemed to have adversely affected some of the grassland species with lower numbers being observed and some shorter flight periods than usual.

I probably won't get time now to wrap up my looking back until the new year so let me take this opportunity to wish everyone a

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Neil

Re: Neil Freeman

by trevor, 21-Dec-18 08:25 PM GMT

A very uplifting selection there Neil, and a couple that are mrgreen worthy. Especially the Scotch Argus and pristine Swallowtail 🍷🍷. I think we went to Strumpshaw a little later than you, and only saw three worn ones. But still an unforgettable sight.

Merry Christmas,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Freeman

by millerd, 21-Dec-18 09:23 PM GMT

A lovely array there, Neil, especially the Swallowtail 🍷😊 – definitely one to catch up with in 2019.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 21-Dec-18 10:39 PM GMT

A cracking sort of shots Neil – pride of place must go to the Swallowtails – stunning! 😊🍷🍷 Some interesting observations of numbers which I'll probably echo when I start my look back (eventually 😊😊) I totally concur about the Marbled Whites, they were very much blink and you'd missed them this year whereas usually they're a mainstay species 😊

Have a very Happy Christmas!

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Freeman

by bugboy, 23-Dec-18 06:06 PM GMT

Your roundup made for interesting reading Neil, comparing it to my assessments of the various species which for the most part seemed fairly similar. I definitely need to get myself another Swallowtail fix next year 🍷!

Re: Neil Freeman

by David M, 25-Dec-18 01:20 PM GMT

Beautiful, Neil. You captured some good stuff this year. Hopefully there'll be more of the same in 2019?

Best wishes to you for Christmas and the New Year.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Neil Freeman, 28-Dec-18 08:27 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor, I fell lucky with the Swallowtails this year although I was a bit apprehensive just before going as I had seen they had been on the wing for a while.

Thanks Dave, it took 6 years for me to catch up with them. Hopefully it won't be as long until the next time.

Cheers Wurzel, it was indeed a strange summer with a few species appearing and disappearing rather rapidly.

Hi Bugboy, for me the Swallowtails were the highlight of my year.

Thanks David, hopefully a few different ones as well in 2019 as I missed quite a few species this year.

Friday 28th December.

Not much to report with all the festive family stuff going on this week. It has been rather grey and misty here the past couple of days although fairly

mild for the time of year so I decided to put the moth trap out in the garden last night. Just one moth came to it, appropriately enough a Winter Moth, which will most likely be my last moth of the year.



Winter Moth - Coverdale 27.12.2018

Here's to hoping that everyone has a Happy New Year and gets to see all they wish for.

Neil.

Re: Neil Freeman

by Wurzel, 30-Dec-18 06:06 PM GMT

Happy New Year to you too Neil - here's hoping that 2019 brings you plenty of butterflies 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel