

Dry Sandford Pit – 21st March 2018

by MikeOxon, 21-Mar-18 08:51 PM GMT

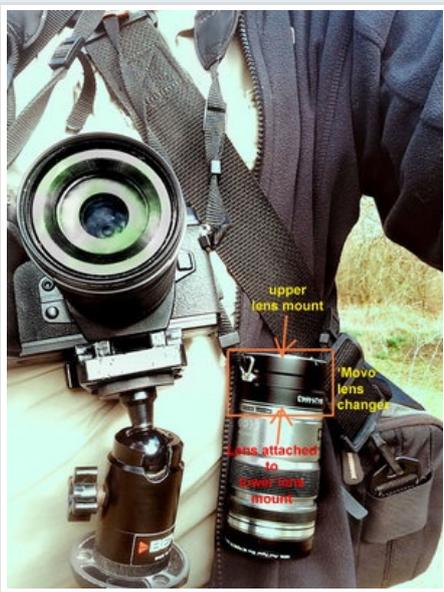
At last, some warmth in the sun to tempt me outside for my first visit of the year to my local Dry Sandford Pit reserve. The air was still too cool for any butterflies to be on the wing but, at least, there were plenty of Spring flowers on the banks – Violets and Primroses – which will doubtless attract Spring species very soon.



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon – 21st March 2018

As a result of a very persistent viral infection and unusually cold weather and snow, this was my first real chance to explore the features of my fairly new Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii camera in the field. Although the layout is very similar to the previous Mk.i, there are a few things to get used to. The viewfinder seems brighter and more contrasty. The overall operation of the camera is noticeably faster, and the three new custom positions on the mode dial are very useful. I've already set one up for 'stacked' macro photography, which I have used for indoor flower photography, while another is set for birds-in-flight. The AF-Tracking, which was somewhat hit-and-miss on the earlier model, now appears to lock-on very securely, although there was little to test it on today.

I recently bought what has already proven to be a very handy 'gadget'. It's called a 'Movo' lens-changer and comprises a short tube on a neck strap with a lens mount at each end. The idea is that you can have a lens fitted to one of the mounts and then, to change lenses in the field, simply take the current lens off the camera, clip it into the empty mount on the 'Movo' and transfer the other lens to the camera – very quick and easy, with no juggling required! The photo shows it slung around my neck, together with all the other 'Christmas-tree' of straps for camera, binoculars, etc. There are different versions for Canon and Nikon lens mounts.



'Selfie' with 'Movo' lens changer.

It was nice to be out 'in the field' again and to get some much-needed camera practise. Hopefully, there will soon be some butterfly subjects 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 21-Mar-18 11:06 PM GMT

Good to see you out and about Mike, let's hope spring is here to stay this time (I've seen rumours of yet another cold snap over the Easter weekend!).

That 'movo' lens changer sounds like a genius idea, might have to look into that what with my most recent purchase.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22-Mar-18 12:36 AM GMT

Thanks for looking in, Bugboy. That Movo gadget is great for smaller lenses but I'm not sure whether I'd trust it with something like your 150–600!

I was using it to swap between my 12–50+Macro and my 40–150 tele, for which it was great. I could probably change lenses as quickly as my FZ200 'Bridge' camera could motor its zoom from one end to the other. It also frees my wife from "could you hold that for a moment while I swap lenses" 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 22–Mar–18 11:13 AM GMT

The movo looks like an interesting bit of kit but what will your wife do now 😊 Good to see you up and at em, we just need some butterflies now 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22–Mar–18 12:36 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. I suppose my wife could always stay at home in the kitchen 😊 . *(that should get the steam rising from the ears of all our female friends)*

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by bugboy, 22–Mar–18 01:36 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

Thanks Wurzel. I suppose my wife could always stay at home in the kitchen 😊 . *(that should get the steam rising from the ears of all our female friends)*

Mike

Well it's been nice knowing you Mike! 😊

With regards to my 150 – 600mm it does have it's own strap but if I'm out with both lenses it would be handy to have the macro within easy reach.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 22–Mar–18 02:44 PM GMT

In fact, Bugboy, my wife is far better at spotting mini–beasts than I am. During our walks, I am frequently called back to look at something interesting, after I've passed by without noticing.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 22–Mar–18 10:26 PM GMT

Aside from the jokes about what your wife might be likely to do to you, Mike, may I comment that your kit marks you down as a very serious practitioner of photography.

I hope your new gear gets some active service over the next week or two. I shall look forward to seeing the results.

Re: MikeOxon

by Jack Harrison, 22–Mar–18 10:47 PM GMT

~~[quote]~~Mike: It also frees my wife from "could you hold that for a moment while I swap lenses" 😊 Works both ways.

You might have met Sandra Standbridge, a rather competent photographer from Hertfordshire. Her husband Kevin doesn't seem to have any great interest in butterflies (I think he works in the City or something like that). But Kevin is a dutiful caddy.

"Kevin, I need the 500 for this shot". So Kevin delves into the bag (it isn't on wheels but is big enough to need them) and produces the 500 mm lens. "Ah, not what I need after all. The 300 please."

I once called Kevin "The Caddy" to his face. He just smiled with – it seemed – a degree of resignation.

Jack

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Mar-18 12:13 AM GMT

David M wrote:

I hope your new gear gets some active service over the next week or two. I shall look forward to seeing the results.

Thank you David. I too am looking forward to getting back to 'active service' after a very slow start to this year.

I do get a lot of pleasure from photography and it has helped me to learn a lot more about the natural world. My priority with my kit is in finding tools that get in the way as little as possible, so I do appreciate the low weight and small size of the Olympus system, combined with versatility and speed of operation

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 23-Mar-18 08:58 AM GMT

Hi Mike, glad you had a nice day out. 😊

And, as someone who will potentially enter the M4/3's world, interesting info regarding your camera and equipment. 😊

Cheers

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Mar-18 03:05 PM GMT

Thank you, Andrew. I always enjoy the pictures in your diary 😊.

I think M4/3 would be a natural route to follow, from your FZ1000, and I feel sure you would appreciate the greater speed and versatility of these cameras. The speed of the E-M1 Mk ii is startling and I am looking forward to trying out the so-called 'pro-capture' mode (I think they mean **pre-capture**) on those highly-active Spring species. (to explain: in this mode, the camera continually cycles shots through a buffer while the release is half depressed. When you actually release the shutter, up to 35 shots from **before** the release are also captured) This could be great for those unexpected take-offs and in-flight tussles, where it's very hard to catch the 'decisive moment'.

I agree, Jack, that an assistant, or willing partner, can be extremely useful in the field, and not only for holding 'photographer's clutter' while struggling with filters, lenses, tripods, and all the other unwieldy stuff we collect. My wife is very good at finding subjects for me and always ready to hold back awkward branches or to hold a flashgun in the optimum place for 'simulated sunlight'. Of course this assistance can work without any gender discrimination 😊 I would not go so far as Ken Rockwell's amusing description of <http://www.kenrockwell.com/leica/leica-man.htm>, who "rarely takes his own pictures. He has others to bother with that for him if he is on holiday. If the Leica man requires art, he has it purchased for him."

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 26-Mar-18 11:13 AM GMT

Thanks Mike 😊, I agree and will be looking at the options. 😊

Cheers

Dry Sandford Pit – 5th April 2018

by MikeOxon, 05-Apr-18 08:28 PM GMT

At last! – some warm Spring sunshine, in marked contrast to the dull, wet days of late.

Today, I made my second visit of the year to the Dry Sandford Pit reserve at Cothill. Even on my short journey there, I saw several Brimstones flying by the roadside and visiting clumps of wild flowers on the verges.

At the entrance gate to the reserve, there was a Muntjac deer, which seemed equally surprised by the warmth, and loped off rather lazily as I approached. Just inside the gate, there is a large patch of Primroses and, unlike on my earlier visit, these were now being attended by several Brimstones.

I mentioned in an early post my intention to try out the so-called 'pro-capture' mode of my Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii camera (in this mode, the camera continually cycles shots through a buffer while the release is half depressed. Then, when you actually release the shutter, up to 35 shots from before the release are also captured) There is something almost surreal about taking a photo before you actually press the button but that is what happens! I had set the camera to take 8 pre-shutter frames, with an overall limit of 25 frames, and a maximum rate of 18 frames per second. In the event, the first movement of the butterfly appeared in the 6th frame, it was airborne in the 7th, and had disappeared out of shot by the 8th. – a really fast mover!



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 5th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mkii with 40-150mm lens - 1/5000s@f/5.6 ISO 320

Since I was keen to see what other butterflies might be about, I didn't spend time on further experiments but moved on to the sun-baked sandstone cliffs, where I found both Commas and Peacocks.

The Comma was perched on the edge of the sandstone cliff in a perfect spot for spotting any passing intruders.



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 5th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mkii with 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/10 ISO 640

The Peacocks were also enjoying the warmth from the stones at the base of the cliff. I am always surprised how bright they look after having spent the Winter in hibernation:



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 5th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mkii with 100-400mm lens - 1/1000s@f/8 ISO 640

One of my shots of a Peacock illustrates how intimidating such a dramatic eyed-creature might look to a potential predator.



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 5th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mkii with 100-400mm lens - 1/1600s@f/10 ISO 1250
There were plenty of other signs of Spring, with many bees attending the catkins and a bee-fly (*Bombylius major*) demonstrating its very long proboscis, used for finding nectar deep inside the Primrose flowers.



Dry Sandford Pit, Cothill, Oxon - 5th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mkii with 100-400mm lens - 1/8000s@f/5.9 ISO 1250
Let's hope that temperature now start to rise and more Spring species appear on the wing soon.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by trevor, 05-Apr-18 08:57 PM GMT

Glad you had a rewarding day too, tomorrow looks reasonable as well.
Good to see a Brimstone open wing for a change.

Trevor.

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 05-Apr-18 09:00 PM GMT

Interesting experiments with that camera, Mike: nice Brimstone. My own (very primitive) attempts have also revealed just how quickly they move! 😊

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 06-Apr-18 11:49 AM GMT

Nice Brimstones Mike, looks like we're all off to a good start 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 06-Apr-18 01:34 PM GMT

Great stuff Mike. 😊 Interesting to see that camera mode in action.

Cheers

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Apr-18 08:06 PM GMT

Thank you for your comments, Trevor, Dave, Goldie, and Andrew. I was very pleased to get some camera action at last 😊 Having got such a 'clever' machine, I'm keen to see if I can find some different 'angles' in my photography.

I might add that I was fascinated to observe the different structure between the butterflies and the bee-fly – broad, deep wings versus narrow 'blades' and yet both types work!

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 07-Apr-18 07:47 PM GMT

Great set of shots Mike especially the in flight Brimstone and the very scary Peacock 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 07-Apr-18 09:13 PM GMT

I'd like to see a few more images from your 'pro-capture' mode, Mike. They look to be sharp and of high quality.

Try it out with Green Hairstreaks when they emerge (that'll be a challenge)! 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 08-Apr-18 11:56 AM GMT

Thank you, Wurzel. I hope your girls like the 'scary' peacock too.

I'm also looking forward to more 'pro-capture' experiments, David. I've a lot to learn about optimising the settings.

Abingdon – 20th April 2018

by MikeOxon, 20-Apr-18 09:46 PM GMT

What a difference a few days can make! I escaped the worst of the heat yesterday by visiting the Durlston Reserve, near Swanage. Not many butterflies on the wing there, apart from a few **Peacocks**, but I photographed Early Spider Orchids and, as a surprise bonus, got some shots of a Peregrine Falcon, busy preening on a cliff ledge.

While I was processing my photos from that trip, this afternoon, I noticed a pair of Holly Blues in amorous pursuit around my garden. After a few false attempts at finding a suitable landing-spot, they finally settled down to pair, high in a shrub outside my 'office' window.

I say 'settled down' but there was quite a prolonged period of circling around, while coupled, and moving back and forth across some leaves. This all presented a considerable photographic challenge, since the sun was strong and, as they rotated, the wings moved rapidly from direct sun to deep shadow.



garden, Abingdon – 20th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 100-400mm lens

In such circumstance, the electronic viewfinder in my Olympus E-M1 offers a considerable advantage over a DSLR, since I get a direct indication of how the sensor is responding and can, therefore, adjust exposure accordingly. Also, although the butterflies were rather distant from my window, I could select a magnified image in the viewfinder, to check and maintain focus. I preferred to use manual focus, because they were constantly moving between leaves that easily distract AF systems.

After several minutes, they ceased moving about quite so much but they also attracted the attention of other Holly Blue voyeurs. These visitors did not stay around for long but I managed to take a few photos of three butterflies together.



garden, Abingdon – 20th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 100–400mm lens



garden, Abingdon – 20th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 100–400mm lens

Although the photos were taken through glass at rather a long range (~ 5 m), I believe that they show some interesting aspects of behaviour.



garden, Abingdon – 20th April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 100–400mm lens – 1/640s@f/10 ISO 640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Janet Turnbull, 20-Apr-18 10:46 PM GMT

A gorgeous set of photos, Mike – I especially like the last one.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 20-Apr-18 11:34 PM GMT

Many thanks for looking in, Janet, and I'm pleased you enjoyed the photos 😊 It's amazing what can happen with a couple of days of hot sunshine. The Holly Blues are usually rather elusive, keeping out of sight, in the tops of the shrubs in our garden, so I was delighted when this pair chose to land in full view of my window – even if rather distant.

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 21-Apr-18 04:15 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, just fantastic the shots of the Holly Blue's coupling, it's not easy to get shots like that, 🍷 I'm still waiting to see just one 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 21-Apr-18 04:53 PM GMT

Hi Goldie, When I looked back through my digital photo collection (since 2004), I found no other photos of Holly Blue couplings, so I think I was very lucky to have been able to spot these from an upstairs window. Even so, they kept dodging behind the leaves, so I was grabbing shots whenever I could.

From looking at the file data, I took my first photo at 14:39 and the last at 14:56. They went their separate ways a few minutes later, so I guess the

coupling lasted for around half an hour. As I mentioned in the original post, they were very active at first, seemingly pushing each other backwards and forwards, as well as pirouetting around each other.

Ashford Bridge, Evenlode Valley 22nd April 2018

by MikeOxon, 22-Apr-18 09:49 PM GMT

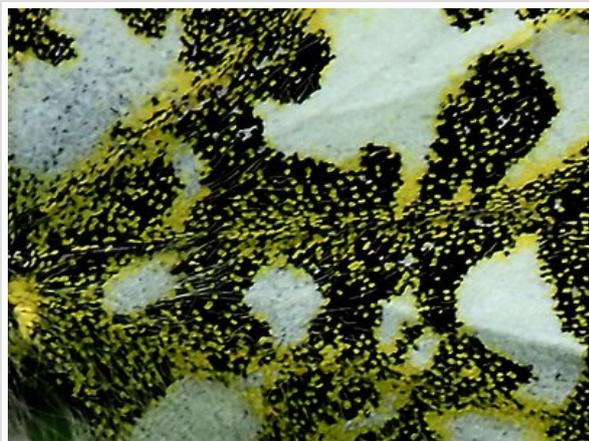
The recent hot weather seemed to break, with thunderstorms last night, but the morning was sunny once again. As well as Holly Blues, an Orange Tip visited my garden but passed through too quickly for any opportunity to take its portrait.

My son phoned to suggest a walk along the Evenlode Valley, North of Witney, after lunch, mainly in search of the Yellow Star of Bethlehem (*Gagea lutea*), in which we were unsuccessful. It clouded over but this was a help when we spotted a male **Orange Tip**, 'grounded' by the sudden chill.



Ashford Bridge, Oxon - 22nd April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 12-50 macro lens - 1/250s@f/10 ISO 640

I find the 'marbled' pattern of the underwings fascinating, especially as the apparently green colour is, in fact, the result of a juxtaposition of black and yellow scales, as shown in the close-up view below:



Ashford Bridge, Oxon - 22nd April 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 12-50 macro lens - 1/250s@f/10 ISO 640

It seems that we can now expect the weather to adopt a more normal pattern for late April - sunshine and showers.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 23-Apr-18 02:36 PM GMT

Great Holly Blue sequence Mike, well captured. 😊

And very nice Orange-tip, a macro shot of the underwing is definitely something I would like to get.

Cheers

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 23-Apr-18 02:39 PM GMT

Great Holly Blue sequence Mike, rally interesting to see the contortionist approach they have to take 😊 Love the really close up close up of the OT 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 23-Apr-18 04:49 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, love the composition shot of the Orange Tip and your photo, I always try to get shots of the closed wings if I can because of their remarkable pattern 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 23-Apr-18 08:02 PM GMT

Many thanks for your appreciative comments, Andrew, Wurzel, and Goldie. Let's hope that the warm spell has been enough to ensure the survival of these spring species 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 24-Apr-18 06:04 PM GMT

Nice work, Mike. The Orange Tip close up is quite striking and well done with the mating pair of Holly Blues – not something I've witnessed personally.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 25-Apr-18 06:39 PM GMT

Thank you David. So far, it's been a very 'hit and miss' spring. It remains to be seen how the season will progress from now on.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 25-Apr-18 11:20 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

...So far, it's been a very 'hit and miss' spring...

Very nicely understated, Mike!!

Certainly, the 'misses' have outweighed the 'hits' by some degree. Like you, I hope things even themselves up very soon.

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 26-Apr-18 08:08 AM GMT

Mike

Lovely Orange Tip shot the U/S is wonderful and would love to see it full sized. And I have never seen Holy Blue pairing, well seen and described.

I see Oxford weather is very similar to here. There were a few Orange Tips at Bucknell Wood but then the weather declined and it has been disappointing. I hope to get some OT pairings, if the weather allows. Hope yours picks up too.

Best wishes

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 26-Apr-18 11:58 AM GMT

I appreciate your comments, Peter. Good luck with the OTs 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 02-May-18 12:00 PM GMT

Still quite a lot of catching up to do Mike but your close up shot of the OT really stands out – stunning!

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-May-18 12:23 PM GMT

Good to see you posting again, Pauline. Butterflying days are still in rather short supply but better weather is forecast for the weekend 😊

Bradenham Woods, Bucks., 14th May

by MikeOxon, 16-May-18 11:21 PM GMT

On Monday (14th May), I received a phone call from my son, suggesting a visit to **Bradenham Woods** in the Chilterns, to look for **Duke of Burgundy** butterflies.

This is a rather special butterfly for us, since it was one of the first of the more 'specialist' species that we found, after my son set the goal of seeing and photographing all the regular mainland British butterflies.

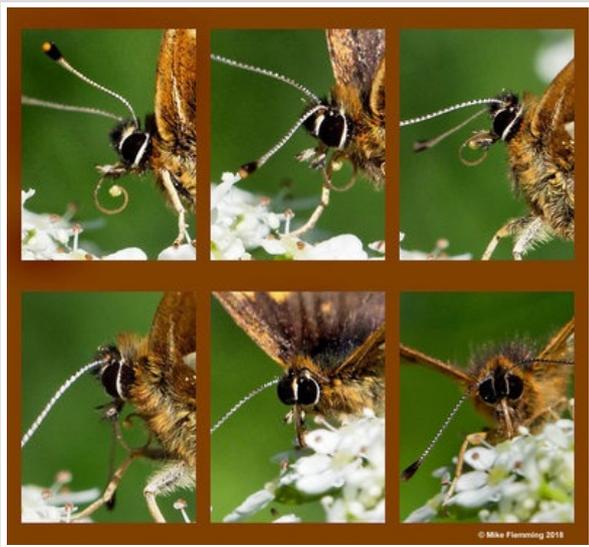


Bradenham Woods – June 1990 Pentax K1000 with 90mm Tamron macro lens

That first visit to Bradenham Woods was made in June 1990, when my son was 13 years old and full of enthusiasm for a new hobby – an enthusiasm that has continued and advanced into a career as a professional biologist.

We parked in the NT car-park on Smalldean Lane and, within a few minutes of arriving, saw our first 'Duke' in the field adjacent to the car-park. During the 28 years since our original visit, this species died out at the Bradenham site but it has recently been the subject of a successful re-introduction, at this and other Chilterns locations.

There were good numbers to be seen, as the day warmed up, including males sparring in their spiralling tussles, high above the clearings. We also watched one individual, trying to deal with pollen that had attached itself firmly to his proboscis. The sequence of photos, below, shows how he drew his proboscis between the two palps and, eventually, was successful and resumed nectaring, as seen in the final photos.



Bradenham Woods – 14th May 2018 Olympus E-M1 MkII with 100-400 lens – 1/800s@f/11 ISO 640

Other butterflies on the site included **Green Hairstreaks**. I am always surprised by how these seem to be such a dull brown when in flight but show their brilliant iridescent underwings, when posed in the sun. I have noticed that these butterflies frequently move their hind-wings rhythmically up and down while perched. I made the following <http://home.btconnect.com/mike.flemming/animation.html> to illustrate this behaviour.



Bradenham Woods – 14th May 2018 Olympus E-M1 MkII with 100–400 lens – 1/1600s@f/11 ISO 640
Grizzled and Dingy Skippers were both present, as well as Brimstone and Green-veined Whites.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 17-May-18 06:14 AM GMT

You must be very proud of him Mike. I expect your grandson is still a little too young to be showing an interest 😊. Great post with illustrations that show off the butterfly behaviour to perfection 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 17-May-18 01:45 PM GMT

What a great reason for making a butterflying trip Mike 😊 A really interesting sequence as well, a behaviour I've not seen documented before 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-May-18 06:03 PM GMT

I'm pleased that you found these sequences of interest, Pauline and Wurzel. rather than posting yet more 'standard' images, I'm exploring various techniques to display aspects of behaviour.

Is this wing writhing a mechanism for dispensing pheromones, perhaps? The area of the forewing over which the hind wing seems to rub has scales of a different colour – could these be scent scales?

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by ernie f, 17-May-18 08:03 PM GMT

Mike – I picked up on this behaviour with Silver Studded Blues last year. I call it the "Wing-roll" but other people have their own names for it. I have seen it in many but not all of the Lycaenidae family. Others tell me they have seen it in members of the same family that I have yet to observe it in.

I also believed it was something to do with scent scales. At first I thought it was an ant attractor (because I saw it in Silver Studded Blues) but now I am not so sure because I have seen species do it who are not known to associate with ants. Nevertheless, with the Silver Studded Blue, it too has a dark band just where it rubs its wings together. It cannot be a coincidence.

Please see my past posts on the matter – in fact I did one post recently mentioning the Common Blue doing it. Also I plan some future posts on the subject. Maybe I shall bring these forward to keep the topic going.

I love the sequence with the Green Hairstreak by the way. It shows the behaviour perfectly.

Re: MikeOxon

by ernie f, 17-May-18 08:14 PM GMT

Mike – I scrolled back through my posts to find my first entry on the wing-roll behaviour. If you are interested it is my post dated Sun Apr 29th 2018 and can be found under button [3]

Cheers,

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 17-May-18 08:28 PM GMT

Mike

I do like the animation. I made one once so appreciate it takes time but it does work. The bit I had trouble with was finding a way to make it function other than viewing it on a webpage. But appreciate you have skills in that area.

The Wood whites are out at Bucknell Wood if it is of interest. 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 17-May-18 09:40 PM GMT

I've read your post now, **ernie f**, and seen that there are various theories. The fact that this 'roll' is performed by both sexes seems to be against the 'scent' idea. I shall see if I can find out more from my various books. Perhaps, when you make your planned future posts, it would be a good idea to raise the topic in the main forum, rather than the diaries, where it might be seen by more of our 'experts'.

That animation was an afterthought, **Peter**, and only consists of five frames. Now that I've tried it out, I shall try to refine the technique, using the high-

speed shutter on my Olympus. Many thanks for the tip re. Wood Whites. It seems that Bucknell Wood is a gem for interesting species.

Mike

Somerford Common, 29th May

by MikeOxon, 04-Jun-18 02:40 PM GMT

Many years ago, my son and I used to make regular butterflying trips to **Somerford Common**, just to the west of Swindon. In those days (early 1990s), there were both Small and regular Pearl-Bordered Frits, Marsh Frits, and Duke of Burgundy, all to be found there. And then, sadly, they all disappeared around the Millennium. It was also a good location for several orchid species.



Somerford Common, Wilts. - June 1992 (historical) digital copy from Fuji Negative

I happened to be in the area again, so looked in, to see what was happening there now. There appears to be management work in progress, with the original open area having been cleared and surrounded by a fence.



Somerford Common, Wilts. - 29th May 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 12-50 mm lens - 1/160s@f/8 ISO640

Along one of the rides, I found many Greater Butterfly Orchid spikes (more than we used to find, years ago) and Common Spotted Orchids. I was also surprised to find a tall Bird's-Nest Orchid in the open area, outside the deep shade that it usually prefers. This last is an unusual plant in that it has no chlorophyll and relies on a fungal partner to provide nutrition.



Somerford Common, Wilts. - 29th May 2018 Olympus E-M1 Mk.ii with 12-50Macro lens - 1/125s@f/8 ISO640

It was a day of sunshine and heavy showers and I only saw one butterfly (a Speckled Wood) on the wing, before the rain forced a quick retreat.

I should be interested to hear from anyone who knows if there are current management/re-introduction plans for this site.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 04-Jun-18 11:40 PM GMT

A sad tale, Mike, but an all too familiar one. Let's hope there is a sympathetic management plan in place to help return it to at least partially to its recent former glory.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Jun-18 03:42 PM GMT

Yes, a familiar tale, David. I used to think that extinction was something one read about in books but now, at my age, 30 - 40 years ago feels quite recent and a lot has changed - although not always for the worse. For example, many woodland Fritillaries are much more frequently encountered and several species have done well from habitat improvement schemes. As we take a longer-term view, we have to appreciate that evolution is a continuous process, which involves many gains and losses, as conditions change - which they will do, with or without our human influence.

I'm still hoping that someone may be able to tell me more about the current status of Somerford Common.

Mike

At the Local Garden Centre - 2nd July

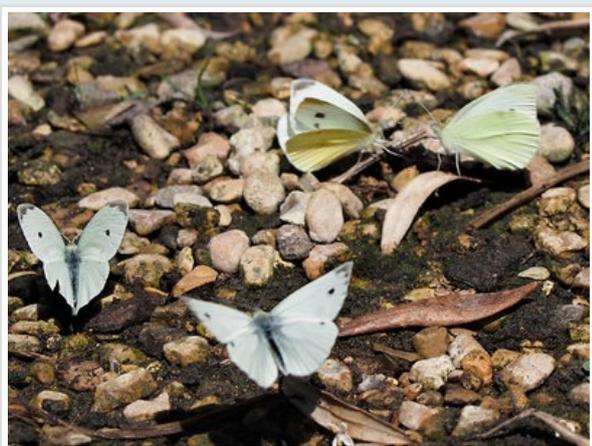
by MikeOxon, 03-Jul-18 08:32 PM GMT

We had been talking over lunch about 'mud puddling', as seen in a recent post by <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=4872&start=3280#p132846>, and I commented that, although widespread in Europe, this behaviour is not commonly seen in Britain. Later that same afternoon, my wife returned from a local garden centre to report that several Whites were doing just that, in areas where plants had recently been watered - she even had photographic evidence on her smart-phone.



Nuneham Garden Centre, Oxon - 2nd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 40-150mm lens - 1/1600s@f/9 ISO 640

The following afternoon (2nd July), I took my camera to the garden centre and was able to record the behaviour for myself. The favoured spots were where there was plenty of gravel and where the surface was damp, rather than wet. Pools of standing water or muddy patches were not favoured, presumably because of the risk of getting stuck or too wet to fly.



Nuneham Garden Centre, Oxon - 2nd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 40-150mm lens - 1/2000s@f/8 ISO 640

Once one or two butterflies had found a suitable location, others rapidly flew in and joined them, so that groups of half a dozen butterflies regularly occurred, although these were subject to frequent disturbance by plant shoppers. Green-veined and Small Whites mixed together freely and it provided a good opportunity to observe the differences in markings between these two species.



Nuneham Garden Centre, Oxon - 2nd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 40-150mm lens - 1/2500s@f/9 ISO 640

Other shoppers seemed to take no notice of all this activity, nor of me lying on the ground with my photo-gear! But, of course, British people would never comment on the strange antics of others.

Suddenly, I spotted a butterfly that was not a White but a Purple Hairstreak. This was not too surprising, since the garden centre is bordered by the woods of Clifton Heath and Nuneham Arboretum. (In fact, in previous years, I have also see White-letter Hairstreaks there.)



Nuneham Garden Centre, Oxon - 2nd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 40-150mm lens - 1/1600s@f/8 ISO 640

Unfortunately, most cultivated plants do not provide nectar, to attract butterflies, but during the current warm weather, the damp ground was a significant draw.

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-18 10:24 PM GMT

Some great shots of the mud-puddling Mike, brill all action stuff 😄 Then you top it all with a Purple Hairstreak as well 🤩 😊 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by ernie f, 04-Jul-18 07:39 AM GMT

What a fantastic garden centre you have there, Mike. Amazing how close you were able to get to the grounded purplestreak.

I have never seen mud-puddling. Thank you for introducing me to this. I wonder if it has anything to do with the long spell of dry weather we are having. Perhaps the butterflies are forced to congregate in this way when moisture is scarce. Do you know why?

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 04-Jul-18 09:38 AM GMT

Hi! Mike, love the mud puddling White's, if they were around here they'd have there work cut out, no rain here just fire!!Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 04-Jul-18 10:40 AM GMT

Very interesting Mike, and well captured. 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 04-Jul-18 11:48 AM GMT

Thank you for the comments. I assume that this is due to the hot weather and that British butterflies are not as used to such conditions as their European cousins, which are, therefore, more adapted to the behaviour.

It was interesting to watch how each burst of activity started with one or two and then others arrived to join in, until a passing shopper made them scatter and re-form somewhere else. As the following (none too sharp) photos show, they often arrived with the proboscis already unfurling.



Nuneham Garden Centre, Oxon - 2nd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 40-150mm lens - 1/2000s@f/8 ISO640



Nuneham Garden Centre, Oxon - 2nd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 40-150mm lens - 1/2500s@f/9 ISO640

I was lying full length on the ground to photograph the PH, with my wife standing by, in case anyone thought I was in trouble - but no-one paid any attention at all. Just a normal day at the garden centre 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 04-Jul-18 01:26 PM GMT

Goldie M wrote:

..... no rain here just fire!!Goldie 😊

I have been saddened by the news of the fires, especially since arson is suspected. I used to enjoy playing in the Lever Gardens at Rivington, as a child, with all their fascinating fantasy structures. One could even climb the 'Pigeon Tower' in those days, despite there being no internal floors!

I re-visited last year to see all the ongoing restoration work and hope very much that this work will not now be destroyed.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 04-Jul-18 04:50 PM GMT

Some great shots there Mike of typical butterfly behaviour in these conditions. I would have liked to have seen one of you taking those shots in the middle of the garden centre as your description made me chuckle 😄

Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July

by MikeOxon, 04-Jul-18 09:25 PM GMT

After my visit to the garden centre on Monday, to observe 'mud puddling', I remembered the visit I made, last year, to **Bucknell Wood**, where I had been delighted to find the *valesina* form of the female Silver-washed Fritillary.



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July 2018 iPhone 5s – 1/760s@f/2.2 ISO32

I had left my visit a little late in the season, last year, so decided to try to avoid making the same mistake again. When I arrived, a little before 10 am on 3rd July, it was already rather warm, with brilliant sunshine. I immediately made my way to the open clearing, quite near to the 'old' car-park, where I was greeted with a display of butterfly activity that I have rarely experienced in recent years. The bramble flowers around the clearing can only be described as a 'seething mass' of butterflies and it was a delight to be surrounded by airborne companions wherever one walked. An unusual sighting was of a Silver-washed Fritillary taking up moisture from moss around the base of one of the trees.



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/800s@f/6.3 ISO640

The vast majority of the butterflies were Ringlets, of which many were smaller than usual – more Hairstreak-sized than typical 'browns'. Amongst them, however, were several larger species, including White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries. It did not take long for me to spot my first *valesina*, busy nectaring at some brambles within an area of long grasses. These obstructions made a close approach difficult, and also created difficulties for longer-range photography, but I simply kept shooting, whenever a fleeting opportunity presented itself. Lighting was very variable, from bright sun to deep shade so, all in all, there was a lot of luck involved in getting good results. I tended to fire the camera in short bursts, hoping to find some shots where the vegetation was not obscuring the subject.



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/640s@f/8 ISO640

It was startling to see the extraordinary iridescent colours of the wings of these butterflies, ranging through cyans and greens, depending on the angle of the light – so different from the normal 'fulvous' colour of 'regular' Fritillaries. A few males were also dashing around, playing 'court' to the females

and, although I didn't realise it at the time, I found afterwards that some of my shots included these 'fly-bys'. The following photo brings out the profound difference between the 'normal' male colour and the *valesina* female.



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens - 1/640s@f/8 ISO640

There were at least two *valesina* females present in the same area, one with some wing damage that provided identification, but there may have been more.



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens - composite image

After collecting a good stock of images, I continued to explore the rest of the wood. As the day was now getting hotter, many of the butterflies seemed to have sought shelter away from the sunny rides, although these were patrolled by several Dragonflies, including brilliant blue Emperor Dragonflies. Most of the butterflies along the rides were Small and Green-veined Whites, together with many more Ringlets. I was probably between broods of Wood Whites and failed to see any, although the wood is noted for them.

I did, however, spot a newly-emerged looking Red Admiral on the surface of one of the rides.



Bucknell Wood, Northants - 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens - 1/800s@f/8 ISO640

There were also plenty of White Admirals, gliding gracefully in their characteristic manner and only making brief stops for nectaring, when I managed to take a few photos.



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/640s@f/8 ISO640



Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/1600s@f/8 ISO640

The *valesinas* were a very remarkable sight and I have tried to show something of the extra-ordinary colours that they displayed in the bright sunshine. Bucknell is a beautiful wood and hosts an excellent variety of butterflies and other insects.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 05-Jul-18 01:18 PM GMT

Tried to respond last night Mike but was unable due to website. Those Valesina shots are amazing especially the first one – a butterfly in gorgeous condition and you have certainly done it justice 😊 Only ever seen one so certainly deserves a couple of 🍷🍷 You're on a roll!! 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 05-Jul-18 01:28 PM GMT

Thank you Pauline. I spent much of yesterday afternoon sorting through the 156 photos I took, to find those which I thought best illustrated the characteristics of this beautiful form. Then I found the website was too unresponsive to post them until quite late in the evening! I suppose it's a good sign that this site is attracting a high level of interest 😊

Beware of visiting the Silverstone area this weekend, since it is the British Grand Prix and traffic will be heavy, with some road closures.

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 05-Jul-18 09:40 PM GMT

sorry duplicate...website issues

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 05-Jul-18 09:42 PM GMT

Hi Mike

I have made a number of visits to Bucknell this year, as it is close enough and is still a favourite for me. There seem to be fewer *valesina* than last year but it is still just the start of the season and the number of Silver-washed in other parts of the wood are very impressive so I hope to see a lot more in a few days. In common with other sites in Northants there are really good numbers of Emperors and I had one grounding earlier in the week (we may have been there the same day!) and several very low passes as well as a dozen battling around the tops of tall trees. But I have had my share of Emperors and have hundreds of pictures to wade through from several good days in Fermyn and Cotgrave Woods...so I will resist trying to get more...unless I weaken...

Thanks for the reminder about the weekend. The number of times I have got caught up in the road closures, diversions and jams should have taught me to mark the calendar, but it had escaped me and I was planning to go at some stage.... 🙄

There were Wood Whites on June 20th but I haven't seen any since then, however it has been a really good year with high numbers.

best wishes

Peter

Re: MikeOxon

by keving, 06-Jul-18 09:33 AM GMT

Mike,

Enjoyed your report about Bucknell Wood and loved the *Valezina* photographs. I had a similar day this week in a local wood to me in Suffolk, with Butterflies everywhere. Saw a *Valezina* but it never settled, unlike the other 49 SWF that did 😊

Kind Regards
Kev

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 06-Jul-18 01:43 PM GMT

Hi Peter, I half-expected to see you at Bucknell. Strangely, although PE seem to be doing well this year, I haven't managed to see any. I was, however, very pleased to see the *valesina* SWF again.

Hi Kev, I agree that it's delightful to be surrounded by active butterflies. Pleased to know you saw a *valesina* – they are very striking, especially when seen in bright sunshine.

Re: Bucknell Wood, Northants – 3rd July

by David M, 09-Jul-18 06:49 AM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

The bramble flowers around the clearing can only be described as a 'seething mass' of butterflies...

Sounds wonderful, Mike, and well done with the *valezinas*, which are always a joy to encounter.

Bernwood, Oxon – 6th July

by MikeOxon, 09-Jul-18 07:35 PM GMT

The hot weather does seem to be affecting behaviour now (both of the butterflies and mine!). I visited **Bernwood** last Friday, where it was already hot at 9:30am. Walking along the main ride was somewhat like walking through a desert – from both the lack of visible wildlife and the searing heat! The small pool near the main 'cross-roads' was almost dry, with no Dragonflies present. In compensation, there were plenty of Purple Hairstreaks in the oaks nearby although none presented an open-wing view.

We turned Southwards at this point and then branched right, onto a much narrower path through the trees. This shady path felt much pleasanter and, wherever there was a small clearing with brambles, these were being visited by (mostly) Ringlets, Small Skippers, and Silver-washed Fritillaries. Further on, in a very quiet part of the wood we found another pool that was not dry and had several attendant dragonflies, including the fairly scarce Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*).



Bernwood, Oxon – 6th July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100–400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/8 ISO640

It was here that we saw our first mating pair of Silver-washed Fritillaries and this continued to be a theme for the rest of our walk. The day seemed to be "mating day" for this species and we had seen around six pairs *in cop* by the end of our walk.



Bernwood, Oxon – 6th July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100–400mm lens – 1/250s@f/13 ISO640

I found it interesting to observe how they regularly flew between different perches, while remaining coupled. I even noted one with its proboscis extended, presumably feeding or taking up moisture, while coupled.



Bernwood, Oxon – 6th July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100–400mm lens – 1/500s@f/8 ISO640

I'm afraid it was too hot for me to experiment with in-flight shots but I did aim take several examples of the great variety of different locations in which they settled, usually quite briefly.



Bernwood, Oxon – 6th July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100–400mm lens – 1/125s@f/8 ISO640

One photographic tip is to use 'fill in' flash to soften the contrasts between light and shade in these harsh sunlight conditions. The small pop-up flash on many cameras is sufficient for this or, in my own case, I used the small flash attachment that Olympus supplied with my camera.



Bernwood, Oxon – 6th July with/without fill in flash

Although this is supposed to have been a very good year for Purple Emperor, I have so far failed to spot any. My son, who was at Bucknell Wood a couple of days after me, saw three there, including a female striking the shallows. Everywhere is just a bit too hot for me at present 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 09-Jul-18 08:15 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

I even noted one with its proboscis extended, presumably feeding or taking up moisture, while coupled.

I expect that was the female Mike – we're good at multi-tasking 😊😄 Seriously, great finds and smashing shots!

Re: MikeOxon

by CallumMac, 10-Jul-18 10:19 AM GMT

That's a really striking demonstration of how the flash can be used even on the brightest of days, Mike! I shall have to experiment myself. What camera do you use? I imagine that it's a much less effective tactic with a DSLR + medium/long lens than with a compact/bridge, when the flashbulb is so much closer to the subject?

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 10-Jul-18 05:04 PM GMT

Pauline, you may think so; I couldn't possibly comment! Thank you for your appreciation of my photos 😊

CallumMac – flash is often extremely useful on sunny days, as portrait photographers know! See for example, this <https://kenrockwell.com/tech/fill-flash.htm>.

As with most things, it's best to practice a little to find the optimum settings – digital makes it very easy to review and correct mistakes.

I was using a long lens (400 mm) on my Olympus E-M1-ii, so was not that close to the butterfly (1.595 m according to EXIF data), but the small on-camera flash was sufficient. For the best results, I would recommend a larger flash unit with a diffuser – see <http://home.btconnect.com/mike.flemming/flash.htm> on my website, but, if your camera has a built-in flashgun, then it's always there with you and well worth remembering in many situations 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 10-Jul-18 06:43 PM GMT

I wish I could take a quick trip to Bernwood. It is a great place and I have seen some lovely sights there too. And those are wonderful SWFs 😊

However Bucknell has its own appeal and is 20 minutes away 😊

I am trying to ignore the heat and get out as much as possible, this summer is a one-off and won't be here for ever.

You'll get an Emperor I'm sure. There are so many about 😊

best wishes

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 10-Jul-18 10:15 PM GMT

Thank you for looking in, Peter. I think that Bucknell Wood has great appeal and am very pleased that you drew the place to my attention.

When I first knew Bernwood in the 1980s it had lost most of its former glory but has been steadily recovering ever since. I usually tend to visit Oakley Wood but Waterperry Wood has a more intimate 'feel' and holds a good range of butterfly species. The 'BBOWT meadow' is another interesting area, which was looking very sunburnt on my recent visit.



Bernwood Meadow, Oxon – 6th July 2018 Olympus E-M1 with 12-50mm lens – 1/1600s@f/8 ISO640 (3 images 'stitched')

I expect that the hay will be cut soon but there were plenty of Large Whites visiting the flowers that are widely scattered amongst the grasses.



Bernwood Meadow, Oxon – 6th July 2018 Olympus E-M1 with 400mm lens – 1/1600s@f/8 ISO640

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 11-Jul-18 06:48 PM GMT

Great reports Mike. Nice White Admiral underwing shot. That Silver-washed Valesina really is amazing, great stuff. 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 11-Jul-18 09:34 PM GMT

The Valesina shots are indeed really beautiful – I've yet to see one and I'm most envious! 😊

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 11-Jul-18 10:36 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

The Valesina shots are indeed really beautiful – I've yet to see one.....

If you can get there, Dave, I would recommend a trip to Bucknell Wood (near Silverstone). For some reason, there seems to be a higher incidence of *valesina* there than at any other location I have visited.

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 11-Jul-18 10:41 PM GMT

Thanks for that, Mike – I know roughly where that is and it's not too far. I'm sure I could work out a round trip with other stops to make a day of it. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 12-Jul-18 06:14 AM GMT

I've never seen Bernwood Meadows looking so scorched, Mike. I remember going there in 2012 and it was so sodden that you couldn't walk through it!

Bald Hill, Oxon – 31st July 2018

by MikeOxon, 02-Aug-18 01:20 PM GMT

July seemed to slip by, as a result of many grand-children distractions, including a bout of chicken-pox and, more pleausurably, visits to attractions such as the Cotswold Wildlife Park. Apart from that, it was usually either too hot for pleasant walking or there was torrential rain during brief thunderstorms! None of these things contributed to butterflying trips.

As the month ended, I decided I should see what was happening at **Aston Rowant NNR**. I prefer the south-western end of the reserve, at Bald Hill near Christmas Common, which is away from the incessant roar of M40 traffic but has similar hillside habitat. After all the hot dry weather, i was surprised to see how tall the grasses had grown and, since there was a stiff breeze blowing, few butterflies were to be seen, at first glance.



Bald Hill – View over Oxfordshire Plain 31st July 2018

Soon, however, I realised that the slope was buzzing with **Silver-spotted Skippers**, keeping low as they zoomed between Scabious flowers.



Bald Hill, Oxon – 31st July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/1600s@f/11 ISO 640

There were also plenty of **Chalkhill Blues**, of both sexes, although these seemed to appear in 'waves' : for a while, nothing to be seen and then a group of 5-6 madly chasing around the slope. Their condition was very variable, with several looking very battered, while others were near pristine. Perhaps, this depended on how they had fared on the recent wet days.



Bald Hill, Oxon – 31st July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/640s@f/10 ISO 640

I took several 'regular' shots but rather liked this one, where the butterfly took off at the end of a short burst of photos.



Bald Hill, Oxon – 31st July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 100-400mm lens – 1/1000s@f/11 ISO 640

One of my main reasons for visiting the site was to see how the Frog Orchids had fared through the hot weather. The answer was 'not well' and I found only two flower spikes, both looking rather scorched.



Bald Hill, Oxon – 31st July 2018 Olympus E-M1-ii with 12-50mm lens – 1/800s@f/11 ISO 640

Meadow Browns were fairly ubiquitous but, of other species, I only saw one or two Common Blues and a few Small Heaths. There were also plenty of Burnet Moths, with several mating pairs on the Scabious flowers. As I mentioned at the beginning, most butterflies were keeping well-down in the wind.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Old Wolf, 02-Aug-18 03:40 PM GMT

Great 'take off' shot Mike. The face really pops out of the picture so that it almost appears 3D 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 02-Aug-18 09:54 PM GMT

As Old Wolf says that is a great take-off shot Mike 😊 Frog Orchids are funny looking plants as I don't 'see' the frog, I get it with Butterfly and Bee and Burnt Tip but I can't see the 'frog' 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 02-Aug-18 10:02 PM GMT

Thank you, Wolf and Wurzel. I almost deleted the photo; it was the last of a series of shots but, then, like you, I found the face rather appealing, so it had a reprieve.

Re: MikeOxon

by ernie f, 03-Aug-18 07:36 AM GMT

Mike, sad about the Frog Orchids but great pic of a SS Blue.

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 03-Aug-18 10:21 AM GMT

Hi! Mike I'm just catching up on posts now I'm home, your shots of the "Valesina" are fantastic , I've seen it twice now but never got a good shot, it was aways at the base of Tree's and hard to get a shot of , I managed one once but the shot was blurred so it was lovely to see your shots of it. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 03-Aug-18 10:32 AM GMT

ernie f wrote:

Mike, sad about the Frog Orchids but great pic of a SS Blue.

Orchids are strange plants and can lie low in the soil for decades without producing a flower spike, when conditions are unfavourable, so I expect these will be fine 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 03-Aug-18 11:01 AM GMT

Hi Goldie, thank you for looking in. As you will know, photos are only a pale reflection of the real thing, so I hope you get to see some real *valesinas* again. I can recommend Bucknell Wood for a good chance of seeing them 😊

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by ernie f, 03-Aug-18 01:13 PM GMT

Mike - re orchids lying low for decades. I am glad you told me that because I once saw a super-rare subspecies of fly orchid 5 years ago and despite looking for it repeatedly in subsequent years in the same place I have never seen it bloom again. As you say, its probably "waiting its moment".

Thanks,

Otmoor, Oxon – 2nd August

by MikeOxon, 03-Aug-18 02:22 PM GMT

It appears that the heat is back 🙄 With the start of a new month, I decided to have a look at the Roman Road leading onto Otmoor, with **Brown Hairstreak** being my target species.

When I arrived, in the early afternoon, it was overcast but hot, and the bridleway was extremely quiet and seemingly lifeless! I soon spotted several dragonflies (mainly Common and Ruddy Darters) cruising up and down but most wildlife was keeping under cover. I did spot a few Speckled Wood butterflies sitting motionless on their perches but, with nothing much on the move, they were not making their usual sallies to investigate intruders. It continued like this, as I walked the length of the ride, with the occasional very lazy-looking White wandering rather listlessly along the verges.

As I reached the open moor, through the gate with all its forbidding notices (almost obscuring the 'Bridleway' sign), the sun came out with full force but I continued a little further, to examine the Blackthorn hedges. On the bleached ground, I spotted some very pale Meadow Browns, almost impossible to see until they moved a little. Is this pale form an adaptation to the hot weather?



Otmoor, Oxon - 2nd August 2018 Olympus E-M1 -ii with 100-400mm lens - 1/2500s@ f/7.1 ISO 640

I soon beat a retreat to the shade of the bridleway again, where I was fortunate to meet a group of three people, who pointed out a Brown Hairstreak that was nectaring on a thistle. Apparently, it had been there for several hours, so I must have missed it on my outward walk 😊 I was very grateful to those people and, should they read this, may I again express my thanks, since I was beginning to feel I had had a very hot walk with little reward. I have been reading the <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=6199&start=3160#p135054> about Brown Hairstreak habits and this was another example of one not following the literature. This habit of spending a very long time nectaring on a single flower (or a small group) has been noted by several people.



Otmoor, Oxon - 2nd August 2018 Olympus E-M1 -ii with 100-400mm lens - 1/60s@ f/10 ISO 1250

The afternoon was wearing on by the time I started taking photos and that side of the ride was, by then, in deep shade, so I was having some difficulty with exposure. As the EXIF data shows, I was down to 1/60 second, even after turning the ISO up to 1250, to keep a reasonable depth of field with my long (400 mm) lens, used near to its closest focus (1.6 m). Only the image stabilisation made it possible to obtain sharp shots, when using my monopod. The technology built into modern cameras never ceases to amaze.

I remembered my use of 'focus stacking' to increase the apparent depth of field, when photographing flowers. The butterfly, however, was constantly rotating around the flower heads and stacking cannot be done automatically on a moving subject. To achieve a similar result, I took a number of shots in rapid succession, focussing alternately on the head and tail ends. By selective cutting and pasting from these pairs of images, I was able to create results that appear sharp overall. I know some purists deprecate such methods but I see it as a valid method to overcome the limitations of the camera, providing one is careful not to introduce artefacts at the 'joins'. I show two original shots, together with the 'stacked' result, below, followed by a larger version of the final image.





Otmoor, Oxon – 2nd August 2018 Olympus E-M1 –ii with 100–400mm lens – 1/250s@ f/8 ISO 1250

Because the electronic viewfinder of my Olympus camera provides a very good indication of correct exposure, I have become rather lazy in using JPEGs from the camera, rather than processing the raw data. When working in difficult conditions, however, the advantages of raw processing do become very obvious, so I processed these images by using the DxO Optics Pro raw converter, which produced a noticeably better range of smooth tones in the final images.

I had intended to follow-up with some macro shots but, while I backed off to change lenses, the butterfly decided it had had enough and made a sudden quick retreat back into the tree-tops. I was very relieved to have used my opportunity to take 'grab shots', as soon as I saw my subject.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 03-Aug-18 07:26 PM GMT

Interesting to see the very pale Meadow Browns perhaps we're seeing more of these because the darker ones have all been eaten 🤔? Also interesting to read about the continued unusual behaviour of the Brostreaks. I had a male 'down' splitting it's time between two thistles for over an hour on two consecutive days at Shipton, they seem to become really attached to a particular flower 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 04-Aug-18 10:12 AM GMT

Hi Mike lovely to see so many nice pictures in your recent reports. I am hoping to get to Otmoor next week (and possibly Whitecross Green Wood on the same day). So glad you had a good trip and hope I find your thistle! I was told there is another area where they are more readily found on brambles. Not the Roman road but a quiet track. If I find it I'll let you know.

kind regards

Peter

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 04-Aug-18 10:29 AM GMT

Lovely shots Mike, it always helps when some people are there to help point them out 😊 I hope I'm so lucky when I go to Gait Barrow to look for the BH soon. Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 04-Aug-18 01:34 PM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

I had a male 'down' splitting it's time between two thistles for over an hour on two consecutive days at Shipton, they seem to become really attached to a particular flower

It seems curious when, at other times, nectaring visits are often very brief. On the other hand, if you are going to spend the day sitting around, it may be as good a place as any.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 06-Aug-18 11:32 PM GMT

Great image of the Brown Hairstreak, Mike. This species gives us all a chance to hone our photography skills at the back end of the butterfly season. Hopefully there'll be lots of them around over the next two or three weeks.

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 08-Aug-18 09:02 AM GMT

Art Frames wrote:

Hi Mike lovely to see so many nice pictures in your recent reports. I am hoping to get to Otmoor next week (and possibly Whitecross Green Wood on the same day). So glad you had a good trip and hope I find your thistle! I was told there is another area where they are more readily found on brambles. Not the Roman road but a quiet track. If I find it I'll let you know.
kind regards
Peter

Hi Mike, Thanks for the tip about Asham Meads, I went there and also to Whitecross Green Wood and by then was all too aware of the state of vegetation and absence of any flowers (and the heat). So I didn't carry on to Otmoor. I found one very poor condition Brown Hairstreak which was fluttering around a green plant at floor level (something I have seen Purple H's doing this year as well) it enabled me to say I have seen all of the hairstreaks this year, but was very sad. My presumption is that the area is so desiccated that anywhere damp is a small relief. On the rest of the reserve there were very good numbers of Common Blues, but around half were small and one or two were tiny. But lots of dragonflies at both sites so a lot to interest and photograph. 😊
So, I think finding a good specimen at Otmoor was a good day. And that one thistle is probably like an oasis.

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 08-Aug-18 10:07 AM GMT

Great shots of the BH Mike, glad you got to see one. A useful feature that image stacking. 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 08-Aug-18 12:00 PM GMT

I agree with you about the heat and consequent desiccation, Peter. I, for one, am relieved to see the change in the weather and I expect the plants and wildlife will appreciate it, too. Hot sun might be fine for a holiday on the beach but it makes everyday life rather difficult.

It seems odd to be talking about the end of the season, David, when we're only just into August. Perhaps the change in the weather will bring a late revival.

'Stacking' is especially useful for static subjects, like flowers, Andrew. It can always be done manually, if you take several photos with the focus set at different distances. You do have to pay careful attention to the overlap areas, to make sure you don't corrupt any of the markings. When doing this type of editing, it is important to work with the image at 'actual size' on the computer screen.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 08-Aug-18 10:00 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

..It seems odd to be talking about the end of the season, David, when we're only just into August...

I believe August in the UK is increasingly becoming an autumn month.

For me, spring starts in late February now, and what we gain at the beginning of the season naturally has to be lost towards the end.

Things are looking 'tired', and although butterflies will continue to be around for 3 months or so yet, the vegetation tells you all you need to know. Yet again we have plants dying back and a very 'end of season' look has descended on the countryside.

A bit of rain might refresh things, and we will no doubt have a few migrants to look forward to, but essentially the best of 2018 is behind us, and but for a handful of late season emergees (Silver Spotted Skipper, Adonis Blue, Brown Hairstreak, etc) we seem to already be in that 'zone' which bears the hallmarks of the more austere times ahead.

Aston Rowant NNR – 25th August 2018

by MikeOxon, 26-Aug-18 12:43 PM GMT

I thought I'd drop in to Aston Rowant NNR, yesterday, to catch the 'tail-enders' of the season. On arrival, I found that the car-park has been refurbished and parking charges introduced, to be paid by mobile phone through the 'Ring Go' system.

Sadly, my first attempt to use this system, at another car-park, led to a very distressing outcome, when I ended up not only paying the parking charge but also a £100 penalty for not following the letter of the rules.

Registering with 'Ring Go' proved to be a lengthy process, through voice recognition software, and then I had to enter my credit card number, but I didn't have my reading glasses and failed to get this right, after several attempts! Since I was due at a meeting, I phoned my wife and asked her to complete the transaction from home but, sadly, in the meantime, an attendant put a parking charge notice on my car!

The time on the notice was just two minutes before the time on my wife's receipt for the payment but 'UK Parking Control' were unmoved by my appeal and, much to my surprise, the ombudsman 'POPLA' upheld their position, so I had to pay up. It seems to me that, ever since Mrs Thatcher declared there is no such thing as society, there has been a collapse of any concern for social justice in business!

It still upsets me today and, until these 'on-line' schemes have some form of closed-loop, where the receipt actually confirms a contract, I shall continue to avoid such systems.

As it happened, the sky clouded over shortly afterwards and a little rain fell, so I doubt there would have been much butterfly activity to report.

Mike

Re: MikeOxon

by millerd, 26-Aug-18 03:24 PM GMT

Hi Mike - I have had a similar experience with this system of parking charges elsewhere, so I have every sympathy. Paying by mobile is ludicrously complicated and fraught with opportunities to mis-key and be forced back to square one. However, as I read it, the charge at Aston Rowant is currently still "voluntary", and it is possible to get an annual permit to park via Natural England. That said, this process is once again complicated and permits have to be picked up in person within a narrow set of hours from an office in Lewknor. This sort of thing certainly doesn't encourage an interest in the countryside, and is hardly going to generate a huge amount of revenue! People will just start parking along the road outside the car park anyway.

All the best,

Dave

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 26-Aug-18 03:27 PM GMT

Mike I totally sympathise. I don't have a smartphone, and don't want one and find more and more car parks and similar expect you to have access to the internet to get receipts or pay. The benefits to me are nil, and as you eloquently say, the penalties are all unreasonable, thinly disguised money-making schemes. Prove yourself innocent indeed - I also choose to avoid.

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 27-Aug-18 11:23 PM GMT

Sorry to hear about your car parking travails, Mike. Technology can be a good thing but it can also be exasperating. I don't much like the way the world is going these days and little things like this merely add to my despair.

What about those people (probably elderly) who don't do things this way? Are they now effectively excluded from spending time at this beautiful location? After all, they're the ones most likely to need to park as close as possible to the site.

Re: MikeOxon

by Janet Turnbull, 28-Aug-18 12:18 PM GMT

Hi Mike - I didn't manage to get to Aston Rowant this year, but reading about your car parking disaster would make me think twice about going! I've looked it up on the internet and can't find anything about charges so it looks as though a lot of people could get caught out. Not everyone goes about with credit/debit cards. Was it not possible to pay by cash either? - Janet

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 28-Aug-18 01:38 PM GMT

We are not alone in disliking these companies.

Have a look at trust pilot....<https://uk.trustpilot.com/review/www.myringgo.com> (worth seeing the range of users that they are enraging)

In contrast the company smugly point out the number of awards they win...<http://www.ctt.co.uk/awards/>

And they say one Council's parking income rose £56,000 on the back of moving to RingGo, and the average transaction value is now six per cent higher than it was six months ago.

However one user (complaining) said they were charged £1.40 for 2 hours when cash would have been £1! so it is easy to see how the council is getting more revenue and more angry users.

Re: MikeOxon

by dilettante, 28-Aug-18 04:27 PM GMT

Those parking apps are very annoying, particularly because there are many different ones and often the one you need is not the one you have already installed and registered with. So you have to download the app there and then and go through the registration process, which may be

difficult/expensive/impossible depending on the network coverage at that spot.

A much better option, which I hope will become the norm, is parking meters which accept contactless payment by debit/credit card.

Re: MikeOxon

by MikeOxon, 28-Aug-18 06:19 PM GMT

Many thanks for the comments on my recent post concerning **Aston Rowant NNR**.

Dave, you are correct that the notice, which has a prominently displayed list of charges, also has a footnote that payment is 'voluntary' Since this is a Natural England reserve, I assume that the facility is supported by tax-payers money. I find it very odd for a Govt body to act as if part of the 'voluntary' sector.

Peter, I'm not against technology, when it is used sensibly. Here 'Ring Go' are middle-men, who presumably charge for their services but carefully disclaim any responsibility – a growing trend in internet 'services'. 'RingGo' <https://www.myringgo.co.uk/help/article/190>: "we simply bank the monies directly to the parking operator, and as such your payment is with them. It is therefore at their discretion as to whether they authorise a partial or full refund of any sort." The 'Ring Go' receipt is, therefore, worthless!

Janet, as Dave said, the charge is currently described as 'voluntary' but there is, nevertheless, a list of charges by time! The 'Ring Go' system collects registration details of users, so the site owner could easily check which cars have not paid and put embarrassing notices on them, for example. No cash payment is possible, presumably to avoid the problem of theft.

Again, **Peter**, I see a woeful lack of regulation of businesses that find easy ways to take money off innocent 'punters'. Apparently, a Court once decided that a charge of £75 was 'reasonable' for not obeying signs setting out the conditions for parking on private land. The result is that all the operators now ask for £100 and put the user to the trouble and expense of mounting a Court case if they wish to make a challenge.

Dilettante, I agree that contactless payment would be better (for those who have the relevant cards) and would provide effective proof of payment, which the current schemes do not.

I see all this as symptomatic of the 'every man for himself' non-society into which we are heading. Thank goodness the butterflies remain beautiful and willing to be photographed!

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 28-Aug-18 10:31 PM GMT

MikeOxon wrote:

...I see all this as symptomatic of the 'every man for himself' non-society into which we are heading. Thank goodness the butterflies remain beautiful and willing to be photographed!

Very well put, Mike. The simplicity is being progressively taken out of everyday life.

In another generation, if you don't have an i-phone, internet banking and a car that drives itself, you'll probably be confined to your house.

With any luck I won't be here to suffer it.

Re: MikeOxon

by Old Wolf, 13-Sep-18 03:31 PM GMT

Hello Mike, sorry to hear about your last trip.

It is shocking what some companies get up to nowadays. I imagine you are not the only one to fall foul of their tactics and it will probably be quite lucrative for them.

Radley Gravel Pits – 4th October 2018

by MikeOxon, 05-Oct-18 11:10 PM GMT

Although it was a warm bright and sunny afternoon when I visited Radley Gravel Pits, near my home, with plenty of clumps of Michaelmas Daisies in flower, I found no butterflies whatsoever 😞 In fact, there was very little wildlife activity of any type to be seen. A lone Heron was fishing on the far side of the Orchard Lake and flapped slowly away as I approached the water's edge. There were also a few rather worn-looking Common Darter dragonflies, mostly resting on the warm gravel.

When <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=7459&start=240#p92364> in the first year of writing my diary, I was delighted to watch and photograph several Clouded Yellows nectaring there, on 28th October 2014.

A lot has changed in the intervening years. The open grassland, which had formed over the ash tips from the Didcot power station, is now a minor forest of Birch trees, while the very cold Spring, this year, followed by a long hot and dry summer, appears to have had a considerable impact on butterfly populations. Somehow, I doubt whether we shall see any more butterfly activity at this site over the remaining part of this year.

I hope that our butterfly species will prove to have the resilience to survive the unusual weather conditions, throughout this year, and that they will return to greet us again in the new year.

When I started this diary, I wrote that I had decided to try the diary format in order to see how a new 'butterfly year' pans out. Well, I have now recorded five butterfly years, which have included many very enjoyable visits to a wide range of sites, throughout the country, and during which I have also tried out various photographic techniques.

I have noticed that there are many similarities between my reports in successive years so, not wishing to repeat old ground too often, I have decided not to continue using the diary format. Instead, I shall report any unusual or interesting events in the regular 'sightings' sections of the forums. I shall also continue to enjoy reading the contributions by the many other members of these forums.

Mike,

Re: MikeOxon

by Wurzel, 06-Oct-18 10:40 AM GMT

I shall miss reading you Diary Mike 😊 but I'll look out for your posts in the sightings page 😊 Cheers for the years 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: MikeOxon

by Pauline, 06-Oct-18 11:51 AM GMT

Hi Mike

the news of your 'retirement' has caused me to briefly interrupt my 'hibernation' – another first for me! I just wanted to say that I have enjoyed reading your diary over the years but I totally understand your reasons. I know that we shall continue to stay in touch but I wanted to record here my thanks and appreciation for all the encouragement and advice you have so readily given over the years, not just to myself but to others too. Your help on the photography front has been invaluable and much appreciated. It may not be long before I follow in your footsteps – who knows?

Re: MikeOxon

by Goldie M, 06-Oct-18 12:52 PM GMT

Hi! Mike, I'm sorry, when I read your Dairy to see you leave, I know what you mean about the disappearance of the butterflies, this year I've not had the same amount visit my garden, not one Peacock has arrived .

I want to thank you also for all your help, like Pauline your advice as helped me with my photography, when I look at some of the shots I took at first and compare them with some I take now, Well!!! 😊

I'm getting older too and my Husband and I can't travel like we used to so we may be joining you shortly in the sighting's column, I'll look forward to reading what you've seen next year, all the best Mike and thank you once again Goldie 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by Art Frames, 06-Oct-18 06:01 PM GMT

Mike

My email has gone wild today. I have a notification set to ensure I see updates to your diary as I like them 😊 . So I have seen your 'last post' and the responses quite few times today. And I would like to add my thanks and gratitude to the growing list. With mixed feelings 😊😊

I totally understand your reasoning as I have tried all sorts of ways to be a member here myself and don't think I have got it right yet. So I will watch and learn from you. I find 'just rinse and repeat' is never the way for me but especially in forums and social media. So if you crack it I may have a go at that way too, for a while... 😊

The main thing for me is I will need to have a notification set up so I don't miss your input. Which I have no idea how to do...but I bet you'll know 😊

Re: MikeOxon

by David M, 09-Oct-18 11:44 PM GMT

[quote] I have noticed that there are many similarities between my reports in successive years so, not wishing to repeat old ground too often, I have decided not to continue using the diary format. Instead, I shall report any unusual or interesting events in the regular 'sightings' sections of the forums.

I became aware of precisely the same thing in my own PD two or three years ago, Mike, so I simply resolved to cut back a little on what I was posting because, as you say, reading it from the start was like perusing a repetitive continuation of the same butterflies at the same sites at the same time of year...

Of course, my now regular forays into continental Europe have made me realise that butterflies in the UK are of limited interest, although there are a few that are still worthy of attention – Large Blue, Brown Hairstreak, Purple Emperor, Large Heath, Chequered Skipper, etc..

I tend to update it these days more as a reminder to **myself** of where I've been and what I've done. Even the best diaries risk becoming repetitive, which is why my favourites are the more 'eclectic' ones, like Neil Hulme's (conservation updates), Pauline's (random anecdotes regarding rescued animals, etc) and Pete Eeles' (rarely seen early stage images).

Even newcomers can buck the trend – I quite like ernie f's approach – insert a random non-butterfly image as well as a couple of habitat shots in every post!

Re: MikeOxon

by Andrew555, 11-Oct-18 02:06 PM GMT

I too will keep an eye out for your posts Mike. 😊

All the best.