

CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Apr-18 08:26 AM GMT

Hello everyone!

Having set up my account almost a year ago, and quietly read the forum since then, it is clear that most of the action happens in Personal Diaries! Now that Spring has finally arrived in the North, it seems like the right time for me to start my own...

A bit about myself, before I make my first entry in the next post. I am based in the foothills of the Yorkshire Wolds, in East Yorkshire between Hull and York. We are lucky to have a local landscape that is chock-full of dry chalk valleys, but sadly are not blessed by many of the species that would inhabit these if we were further south! The exception is Dingy Skipper, which has a number of colonies locally. My favoured local 'patches' are Kiplingcotes Chalk Pit and North Cave Wetlands – both Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserves where many of the commoner species can be reliably found – but if the weekend sun is shining, my partner and I could be found at any of the other great YWT and RSPB reserves scattered around East Yorks, South Yorks and northern Lincs. I am also part of a group that walks a UKBMS transect on Strensall Common, made famous by the final surviving colony of Dark Bordered Beauty moth in England.

In my 'day job', I currently work as a researcher at the University of York, investigating the role of evolution and phenotypic plasticity in shaping the response of our British butterflies and moths to climate change. This is both a blessing and a curse: I get to spend my 9 to 5 thinking about and researching the topic that I love most (butterflies and moths!), but on the other hand, my summers are dominated by fieldwork (often involving lots of travelling) and so even when I can get time off during the summer, travelling to seek out butterflies can feel like a busman's holiday.

I will probably update this diary fairly irregularly; this is both because I don't often get the time to seek out butterflies (see above!) and because when I do, my photos are not often up to the high standard set by most users of the forum!

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 24-Apr-18 08:51 AM GMT

Welcome Callum 😊 Looking forward to your postings however irregular they may be especially if you can shed light on some of our more informal observations 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Apr-18 09:00 AM GMT

21/4/2018 – First signs of spring at YWT North Cave Wetlands

It's been a late spring in Yorkshire (as everywhere) but having finally encountered Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, and both Small and Green-veined Whites last week on Walmgate Stray (an area of common land adjacent to the University of York) I decided to head in Saturday's patchy sunshine to my own 'patch' at North Cave. The reserve is a reclaimed network of sand and gravel pits which is popular with wading birds, but also has some sheltered corners managed for butterflies.

Along a wet ditch on the northern edge of the reserve I finally tracked down my first Orange-tip of the year, patrolling up and down when the sun was out and returning to the same exact leaf on the south-facing bank of the ditch whenever it disappeared behind a cloud. Each time the sun re-emerged he would bask for a minute or two before resuming his vigil, giving opportunities with the camera. I was glad to have my telephoto 'birdwatching' lens with me, and thereby avoid wet feet, but it meant I struggled a little with depth of focus.



I was especially pleased with this shot as he stretched his south-west-facing wing to maximise the sun-catching area!



As I was ready to walk on, a female passed through his territory – but neither he nor I was quick enough to catch up with her!

Further round the reserve, in a scrubby bramble-patch, I was somewhat surprised to find my first Speckled Wood of the year. With everything being so late up here, I didn't particularly expect to encounter this species for a few weeks – and the individual in question even looked a little faded.



A nice first taster of spring – even though it's back to cold and rainy today! When the sun and the warmth next re-appear, I will be keeping an eye out for Dingy Skippers at Kiplingcotes Chalk Pit and Green Hairstreaks at Strensall Common.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Apr-18 09:05 AM GMT

Thanks for the welcome, Wurzel – I hope I can make an interesting contribution to this excellent forum!

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 24-Apr-18 10:00 AM GMT

Hi Callum, and welcome from me as well. 😊

Your location interests me – though based near Heathrow, I regularly visit my sister in Wilberfoss, which isn't a million miles from you. While up there, I usually go to a few spots along the Wolds Way (where I believe the country's northernmost Marbled Whites are found), and one or two near Pocklington. If you dredge back through my PD you can see where I've visited and what was there. My sister's garden in summer is also notable for hosting large numbers of Peacocks! She works at offices near the University site and has identified some elms which need future investigation for White-letter Hairstreaks... You may be aware of these, of course. I have for a while been meaning to look at Kiplingcotes, but haven't got round to it yet.

I may well bump into you this summer sometime – you'll find this quite often happens with membership of this site! 😊

All the best, and I'm very much looking forward to some more of your images and ideas for other spots to visit while I'm up in Yorkshire.

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Apr-18 12:52 PM GMT

Hi Dave – thanks for the welcome!

In fact, I commute past Wilberfoss every day on the A1079, as my home is in Pocklington itself. Having had a quick flick through your PD, I'm very intrigued to learn that Calley Heath is a reliable Small Copper site (SC being my favourite of all butterflies) – as I've driven past the site many times since moving to the area last summer, but haven't yet been in. One to try in the coming weeks! Millington Dale and its side-arms I discovered over the winter whilst looking for Short-eared Owls, and will definitely be visiting regularly again in the summer as it's within easy cycling distance of home.

If Marbled Whites are your flavour, then definitely pop down to Kiplingcotes during their flight period – numbers well into the hundreds in a fairly small site. The best spot is the south-facing meadow above the pit itself.

Hopefully I will bump into yourself and others from the site – I look forward to it!

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 24-Apr-18 01:50 PM GMT

Hi! Callum, welcome from me has well 😊 I also live in the North, Greater Manchester, I'm lucky in the fact I live only an hour from the Lakes and still get to see some rare species up there, I think your lucky to see the Marble White's so near you, I usually only see them when I visit my daughter in Kent, like you said most species are in the South.

Looking forward to seeing more of your photographs Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Apr-18 04:40 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie! Lucky indeed. My parents have just moved to the North Lakes so I'm hoping to use their house as a base to explore a few of those special sites around Arnsdale & Silverdale (none of which I've previously managed to visit).

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 24-Apr-18 07:23 PM GMT

Welcome from me too, looking forward to seeing images from your part of the world as the season develops 😊

Re: CallumMac

by jonhd, 24-Apr-18 09:30 PM GMT

Welcome Callum – bearing in mind your professional life, any comments on <https://www.nhbs.com/british-and-irish-butterflies-an-island-perspective-book> – I'm most definitely an amateur (electronics engineer, professionally), but a sucker for almost any lepi literature! Just wondered whether it might be a tad academic, for an amateur!

Cheers, Jon

Re: CallumMac

by trevor, 24-Apr-18 10:12 PM GMT

Welcome from me, Callum.

It will be good to get more reports from your neck of the woods.

Looking forward to more,
Trevor.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 25-Apr-18 08:27 AM GMT

Thanks for the welcomes, Bugboy, Jon, Trevor!

Jon – I saw that was on its way – looks intriguing. I suspect it will be very interesting but probably not light bedside reading! When the price is set that high it usually indicates the book's intended for, and written to suit, an academic audience (i.e. it will mostly be university libraries buying it rather than private individuals). However, the field of natural history in general – and in my opinion this is especially true for butterflies and moths – is highly unusual in that the 'enthusiastic amateur' is usually more expert than the so-called 'professional' – so it might be worth a try.

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 25-Apr-18 10:09 AM GMT

Hi Callum, and welcome. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 25-Apr-18 06:01 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

Having set up my account almost a year ago, and quietly read the forum since then, it is clear that most of the action happens in Personal Diaries! Now that Spring has finally arrived in the North, it seems like the right time for me to start my own...

Welcome from me as well, Callum. Nice to see another member joining the PD brigade.

This time of year is always busy, particularly in 2018 after a winter that seemed to go on forever.

I look forward to reading more from east Yorkshire.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 26-Apr-18 08:10 AM GMT

Thanks Andrew, David!

25/4/2018 – Nothing doing on Walmgate Stray

With the weather back to "it's grim up north" mode, butterflies are very thin on the ground again. Having seen a couple of Orange-tips at the weekend, and heard several more reports around the county, I decided to pop out to Walmgate Stray at lunchtime to see if I could find any eggs on the small patch of Cuckooflower. No luck – but many of the flowers were still budding, so there is plenty of time left for the butterflies to emerge and do their business when the weather improves. I suspect I'll still be reporting spring butterflies long after the rest of you have progressed to high summer!

Re: CallumMac

by Pete Eeles, 29-Apr-18 07:29 AM GMT

And a belated welcome from me too, Callum! It was good to chat with you at the BC symposium and I look forward to reading your posts!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: CallumMac

by Neil Freeman, 02-May-18 09:09 PM GMT

Just caught up with your new PD Callum, a belated welcome from me too and looking forward to see what is around your part of the world.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 04-May-18 06:55 PM GMT

Thanks Neil, Pete!

04/05/2018 – Yorkshire springs into life

After a couple of very dull weeks (with frost on the windscreen on Tuesday morning!) the sunshine returned with a vengeance today. A lunchtime wander on Walmgate Stray produced almost the complete spring butterfly hit-list – only Holly Blue and Speckled Wood missing. My first Large Whites of the year (1m 1f), and at least 8 Orange-tips (all male). One of the days when all the butterflies are running on Duracell, so photo opportunities were hard to come by! However, a shady moment let me get up close and personal with a very handsome Orange-tip.



There were dozens of Small Tortoiseshells, and quite a few Peacocks, along the nettle beds on the eastern edge of the Stray, but most looked rather worse for wear.



I stopped in at Calley Heath on the drive home. Despite commuting past this site twice a day for the last year, I'd never been in before. It looks to have plenty of potential once the Common Blues and Small Coppers are on the way – but today I only added Speckled Wood to the day's list, and found the four Pierid species besides.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 05-May-18 07:41 AM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

...One of the days when all the butterflies are running on Duracell, so photo opportunities were hard to come by!

Don't we know it!! Much as we love good weather, one of the negatives is for it to make butterflies hyperactive (and spring species seem more hyperactive than any).

Good to see things catching up further north though.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 06-May-18 09:13 AM GMT

05/05/2018 – Sunny but windy on Strensall Common

I started yesterday morning with a moth-trap – my first of 2018. Seemingly the spring moths have not responded as quick as the butterflies to the improvement in the weather, though, as I caught only a single Clouded Drab. Moths have some great names but this definitely is a case where the species is more interesting than its name implies! In a normal year, this would be quite a late individual, but it's not a normal year and the moth was quite fresh and well-marked.



Having counted up all of the moth and drunk my coffee, I headed out to Strensall Common to walk the UKBMS transect there. Again my first of the year – I'm part of a group that shares the workload of this relatively long transect, which we newly established last year. I had high hopes of Green Hairstreak: last year we recorded this species throughout May, peaking at the end of the month. It's a large site and GH appears to be present at low densities throughout most of it, so seeking it out is usually less effective than just walking and hoping! I twice saw things in flight that might have been GH, but lost track of both before they settled and couldn't rule out some of the day-flying moth species that are also present.

The transect was a bit quiet due to a brisk southerly wind, but



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 06-May-18 09:24 AM GMT

I'm not sure what happened there!

Despite the wind, I recorded six species along the transect, with Speckled Wood the most abundant. As is often the way with these things, the most exciting wildlife turned out to be not the butterflies I was looking for, though, with great sightings of Common Lizard, Barn Owl and Curlew. The latter flew right past me before landing nearby and singing its famous bubbling song – it's easy to forget just how enormous these birds are!

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 06-May-18 02:33 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

I'm not sure what happened there!

Look like you hit 'post' prematurely, Callum. 😊

If it happens again just go into the edit feature (the pencil icon) and update it before resubmitting.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 08-May-18 09:31 PM GMT

Ah - I was looking for an edit button but didn't immediately spot it! Next time I'll know.

06/05/2018 - YWT Potteric Carr

Having failed to find Green Hairstreak on Saturday, I didn't rate my chances of finding anything other than the common spring species, so my partner and I headed out to Potteric Carr. This is YWT's flagship reserve - a sprawling mix of reedbeds and wet carr woodland nestled between Doncaster and the M18. We recorded most of the species you'd expect, and this Holly Blue (only my second of the year) was a nice surprise.



Besides that, only a female Orange-tip stopped long enough for a snap!



With the butterflies again in supercharged mode, I couldn't get close enough to anything to use my compact camera (which has an excellent macro mode). I have been getting frustrated with the poor results I get with my Canon DSLR + telephoto 'birdwatching' lens recently when photographing butterflies, and might bite the bullet and invest in a proper macro lens before long. Any recommendations gladly received!

So, a slightly frustrating butterfly day, but it would be churlish to feel hard done-by when the reserve offered up some truly AMAZING birds...



On **Monday** I compromised between pottering after butterflies and more vigorous exercise by cycling the 30 km each way to **Kiplingcotes**. No sign of the Dingy Skippers here yet - in fact almost no butterflies about at all. I'll be back later in the month, when the chalk pit will come alive with Skippers and Common Blues.

The first report of a Duke came in from the public site near Helmsley in the North York Moors on Monday - a single individual seen. I'll definitely be popping up there at some point in the next few weeks!

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 09-May-18 11:23 AM GMT

I've not seen Black-necked Grebes looking like that for a very long time Callum, not since a trip to Poland, stunning 🤩👍👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 09-May-18 04:48 PM GMT

Hi! Callum, I priced a micro lens for my Canon DSLR and the price was rather high, I'd to settle for a Sigma lens which has a micro switch which I must admit I don't use much, but the 70=300 mm is good for bringing objects closer that you would normally not be able to get close to, I suppose it's good for me because not being too young any more I find that a great help 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 09-May-18 09:41 PM GMT

Great waterfowl shots, Callum. Perhaps that's a first for this species on UKB?

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 10-May-18 09:18 AM GMT

Those are amazing looking birds, very nice Callum. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 10-May-18 02:10 PM GMT

Thanks all! They really are stunning birds. Almost worthy of honorary butterfly status? The colour-scheme reminds me a bit of a Marsh Fritillary... We're lucky to have quite a large chunk of the UK's breeding population across several sites in the Humber catchment. We may not have so many of the best butterflies up here but we have some cracking birdwatching.

Goldie - thanks for the tip, that Sigma lens looks very interesting, especially at the price. Do you use it with a tripod or hand-held? Some of the reviews online say it's too heavy to shoot hand-held at full zoom. I use Canon's 70-300mm at the moment, but the minimum focal distance is not great (about twice that of the Sigma) and I often find myself actually backing away from butterflies to try and focus. Depth of focus is also not brilliant, so photos aren't always that sharp (see the Orange-tip and Holly Blue in my previous post for prime examples!) - I'm therefore reluctant to try adding an extension tube to reduce the focal distance as that would of course also reduce the depth of focus. A colleague of mine brought a 105mm macro lens (I think it was also a Sigma) out on fieldwork for a couple of weeks last year and took some really stunning photos of Scotch Argus with it - which is why I'm tempted!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 10-May-18 08:03 PM GMT

10/05/2018 - Walmgate Stray

I made a very brief trip out onto the Stray during my lunch break today. Few butterflies about, as there was quite a strong, cooling breeze and the sunshine was rather patchy. However, this male Orange-tip posed beautifully!



The flowers of the Stray are also just starting to come through - in particular, there are a few really spectacular patches of this flower at the moment, which I think is Germander Speedwell:



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 10-May-18 08:23 PM GMT

Great OT shot Callum 😊 A lot of people on UKB know a lot more about lenses than me but I wear by my 105mm mirco lens. One person who is very knowledgeable about lenses is MikeOxen – you could send him a PM 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 11-May-18 07:03 AM GMT

Nice OT image, Callum. Sometimes it pays to observe them when the weather is less than ideal.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 11-May-18 10:42 AM GMT

Thanks both. Wurzel – useful to have another vote for the 105mm focal length. Sounds like this is about right for butterflies.

David – absolutely. That photo came about as a result of following the butterfly during a sunny patch, watching where he landed when a cloud covered the sun, and sitting with him until the sun returned a few minutes later to snatch a couple of pictures in the few seconds it took him to warm up again before flying off. Patience the key – I'm sure I don't need to tell anybody on UKB about that!

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 11-May-18 09:28 PM GMT

That is a nice Orange Tip, and that technique is spot on for catching them in good poses. Today was a perfect day for that. 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 12-May-18 09:08 AM GMT

Hi! Callum, I'm no expert on Len's , I found the Sigma was better for me because I'm older and if I knelt down I'd struggle to get up 😊 the len's brings every thing closer to you, it is heavy but I don't have a tripod, I take shots by hand, i find it's easier to take shots of Butterflies this way for me because if they move I can some times catch them in flight 😊

Wurzel is correct though, Mike Oxon knows a lot about camera's etc and I'd definitely ask him. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 12-May-18 11:29 AM GMT

Hi Callum, I too use a Sigma 105mm macro lens with my Canon DSLR. My recently purchased zoom lens, the Sigma 150 – 600mm, has also proved to be more versatile than I anticipated but it is pretty weighty. Both have the optical stabilizer which makes a big difference with hand held photography, I've never used a tripod.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 12-May-18 07:06 PM GMT

Thanks for all the tips on lenses. Lots of votes for the Sigma 105mm!

11/05/2018 – Walmgate Stray

After Thursday's lunchbreak success with the Orange-tip I decided to turn my focus to Green-veined Whites for Friday's break.



This immediately proved even more successful than I'd anticipated, as the male I was following led me straight to a pair already in cop! They had better things to do than worry about me, allowing me to take close-ups from all angles.





Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 12-May-18 07:50 PM GMT

12/05/2018 - **Wheldrake Ings** (YWT, part of the Lower Derwent Valley NNR)

Another warmish morning with patches of sunshine meant that the butterflies were very obliging!



This pair of Green-veined Whites caught my eye – the male had obviously been startled by something and was flying along with female still attached. When he landed, she was left literally dangling...



The stars of the show were undoubtedly the Orange-tips, who were in good numbers, in great condition, and in unusually approachable mood!





Besides the butterflies, there was plenty more insect life about...



...and I was delighted to see my first ever Great White Egret. I guess some of you down south must be quite familiar with these by now, but they are still a novelty in Yorkshire!



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 13-May-18 09:20 PM GMT

13/05/2018 – North Cave Wetlands

You're probably getting bored of seeing Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites from me... but there's not much else around up here at the moment! Today the butterflies were showing much greater interest in nectar than they have so far this spring, which really made for some great photo opportunities.



A couple of Brimstones whizzed past too quickly for photographs. My impression is that these have had a really good spring up here – I can't remember ever having seen them this regularly. I wonder whether the lack of late frosts might have helped – we went straight from very wintry cold to a very mild spring, with no return.

Actually, we spent a lot longer looking at Odonata than Lepidoptera today. My partner's area of expertise is ponds, and she can ID a lot of the UK dragonflies and damselflies from their nymphs – but her knowledge ends when they leave the water and start flying around! We made a pact in autumn to learn to ID the adults together this summer. Today was a good start, with three species ticked off, positively identified, and hopefully locked into memory:

Broad-bodied Chaser



Four-spotted Chaser



Blue-tailed Damselfly



Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 13-May-18 09:43 PM GMT

It's almost the websites motto '*you can never have enough Orange-tip photos*'; so don't worry about posting them 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 14-May-18 10:25 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

You're probably getting bored of seeing Orange-tips...

Not when they're nectaring from white tree/shrub blossom, Callum.

Few sights are finer in spring!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 17-May-18 08:29 PM GMT

17/05/2018 - Walmgate Stray lunchbreak

Well, I did it! After getting nothing but positive reviews on here, from colleagues at work and online for the 105mm macro focal length, I bought Sigma's version on Wednesday. I took it out for its first spin on the Stray this lunchtime.

Predictably, my first butterfly photo with the lens was... unorthodox!



I actually quite like it. "The ghost of Speckled Wood flown"...

It was cloudy and windy, so there was not much to chase butterfly-wise. I followed that first Speckled Wood for a bit, and then found another that was less worn (but only slightly!).



I've been searching an area of the Stray this week that is rich in Common Mouse-ear, the foodplant of the Small Yellow Underwing moth. Peter Mayhew recorded the moth in good numbers on Monday but I'm yet to find any - it's been too cool for the last couple of days. However, my search today revealed something just as interesting - these two *Glyphipterix simpliciella* sharing a buttercup. They were both coated in pollen. I think we are often guilty of underestimating the potential contribution of moths to pollination.



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 19-May-18 08:19 AM GMT

18/05/2018 - another Walmgate Stray lunchbreak

A nicer day than the 17th, so I was a bit more hopeful about what I might find. Sure enough, there was plenty of life on the Stray.

This Small Tortoiseshell was something of a surprise, as it's been at least a couple of weeks since I last saw one. For a butterfly that must be 8 months old or more, it was in remarkably good condition!



I then watched this male Orange-tip for a while. He was moving exclusively from cuckoo flower to cuckoo flower, steadfastly ignoring all other possible

nectar sources. As there were only about 4 cuckooflower plants in that part of the Stray, it made it very easy to predict where he'd go next and set up the shots I wanted!



Having found the *Glyphipterix simpliciella* yesterday on just a single flower, I was interested to see if I could locate them anywhere else on the Stray now the sun was out. As it turned out, they were on almost every buttercup I checked – a very healthy population!



Finally, I managed to connect with the Small Yellow Underwings, having got some more detailed information from Peter on where to find them. These really are delightful little moths, and make our smallest butterfly look like *Cupido maximus*! 😊



If all goes to plan today (19th), then by the time most of you read this post I will have seen my first ever Duke of Burgundy... 😊

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 19-May-18 12:30 PM GMT

Good luck with the Dukes. If you're in the right place you shouldn't have any trouble finding them, they're not the most shy species out there!

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 19-May-18 11:04 PM GMT

Your Yorkshire Tortoiseshells are a lot better preserved than the soft southern ones round here, Callum. 😊 I shall be very interested in your Duke findings too, if they are from that part of the world...

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 20-May-18 12:07 PM GMT

bugboy wrote:

If you're in the right place you shouldn't have any trouble finding them

Thanks both. I must have been in the right place...

20/05/2018 – Hawnby Hill (North York Moors)

Oh, boy. Honestly, this was one of the most mind-blowing experiences of my butterfly-chasing life. I spent yesterday morning with some colleagues from work and the Yorkshire Mammal Group, checking Longworth traps around the university campus, so it was lunchtime before I set off for the North York Moors with Andy Suggitt and Charles Cunningham, and around 2 before we arrived at Hawnby Hill near Helmsley. Walking out from the carpark, we immediately started to see Latticed Heath moths...



...and very soon after, found a decent colony of Green Hairstreaks in the lee of a stand of conifers.



We carried on round the Hill, following the contours and seeing more moths and a *snipe en route*. After a short while we reached the dry-stone wall that marks the edge of the Duke of Burgundy's favoured haunt. I will admit that I was a ball of nervous energy – after seeing all of your amazing pictures of this species down south, would they be flying? Would we see one? Would it live up to the expectation?

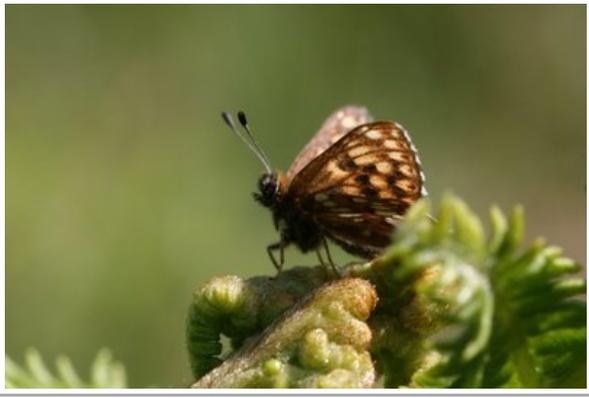
...yes, yes and yes! Within less than a minute, Andy shouted "I've got one!". I rushed up the slope to him, and sure enough, there she was – my first Duchess. Every bit as dainty, delicate and perfectly formed as I had been led to believe she would be.



We moved further into the site and met several others with cameras, who relayed that their estimate was ~35 individuals on the wing. This sounded high at first but over the course of the afternoon it became clear that it might have even been conservative! The population here is really strong. At one point I followed a pair of battling males as they were joined by another – and another – and more, until there was a little melee of 7 barreling along! I think I saw a few drop out and be replaced during this process, so my estimate was that there were 10 males along a section of footpath about 5 metres long. Just jaw-dropping.

Obviously, I took hundreds of photos. I hope you don't mind me sharing quite a few here, as this will probably be my one and only encounter with this species in 2018!







Having spent around an hour in the company of the Dukes, we agreed to carry on around the Hill and to walk back over the top to get the views. As we climbed the hill, we briefly encountered a few, quite fresh, Dingy Skippers. I hope to have some better photos of this species to show this evening, as I'll be spending the afternoon at Kiplingcotes, but for now:



As we passed over the summit of the Hill, we were very surprised to see, first, a Red Admiral, shortly followed by what we were almost certain were two Painted Ladies. All three bombed through too quickly for photographs. Having not heard many reports of migrants from down south yet, we weren't really expecting an influx so far north – will these turn out to be the first 2018 records of these two species for North Yorkshire? Quite possibly, but time will tell.

Descending back to the car park, we decided to spend a final few minutes in the company of the Green Hairstreaks. Surprisingly, although there were considerable numbers of GH by the wood next to the car park, we barely saw any elsewhere on the Hill, despite the general flora of bilberry and heather being the same all over. I noticed that most (but not all) individuals had a clear line of white markings on the underwings. I'm sure I've seen this discussed in the last few weeks in somebody's PD, but I can't remember the significance – can anybody enlighten me?





A fantastic day of butterflies, enough to slightly reduce the jealousy built up over the last few weeks of browsing all your PDs! As a final book-end to the day, I spent sunset in a hide on the Lower Derwent Valley NNR listening to corncrakes calling. Now, there's a reintroduced population in East Anglia but a truly natural English corncrake? *That's* something you have to be in East Yorkshire to experience! 😊

P.S. whilst sat in the front room writing this post, I have on three occasions spotted a female Holly Blue in the front garden over the road testing their bushes for egg-laying. Each time I've sprinted out the front door, camera in hand, and finally on the third managed to get some photos, which I'll include in today's PD. The neighbours must think I'm crazy!

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 20-May-18 12:18 PM GMT

Well done with the northern Dukes. Your excitement sounds very similar to how I felt a few years ago when I saw my very first, also a Duchess 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 20-May-18 04:08 PM GMT

Looks and sounds like a fantastic day Callum, great stuff. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 20-May-18 09:51 PM GMT

Thanks. It's looking forward to days like those that makes the long winter months bearable!

As promised, here is the Holly Blue from lunchtime today.



20/05/2018 – Kiplingcotes Chalk Pit

After the excitement of yesterday, I decided to just have a relaxing afternoon today at Kiplingcotes. It's a lovely reserve but way off the beaten track and, to be fair, probably holds little interest except to botanists and lepidopterists. As a consequence, it's always really peaceful there. I have a favourite spot to sit and decompress, at the top of the bank above the pit, and as usual I headed there first to sit and enjoy the sun.

Today the Pit was absolutely chock-full of Dingy Skippers (Chocolate Skippers? Best I can come up with so far...). They were mostly supercharged and quite unapproachable. I spent a happy couple of hours following them and trying my best to get the photos I wanted!



Apart from the Chocolates, there was not much else about, but I did come across my first Small Heath of the year.



Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 20-May-18 10:38 PM GMT

It's great to see the Dukes of Yorkshire clearly thriving up there miles from their southern strongholds. It's also good to see strong populations of Dingy Skippers in both locations. I think I've missed my chance to come up for a peek this year, but who knows? Do you still have Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Yorkshire too?

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 21-May-18 09:17 AM GMT

Hi! Callum, will please chase some of those Dukes over the Pennines to Lancashire 😊 Only one or two at a time being seen at Gait Barrow in the Lake's, Lovely shots of them, have you any Pearls you can chase over as well 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 21-May-18 09:32 AM GMT

Thanks Dave, Goldie. I don't know if they are thriving exactly – there are only a few sites, and I believe Hawnby is by some distance the strongest, and some attempts to generate new colonies through translocation to increase the metapopulation size have not all been successful. That said, I think their persistence owes an awful lot to the hard work of Butterfly Conservation in this region. The same is true for the PBFs as well (yes, we do still have them): as far as I'm aware there are about 3 remaining colonies, the locations of which are a very closely-guarded secret that quite a few people nonetheless seem to know...

As for the Dingies, they certainly seem to be doing just fine up here. Since a large chunk of the dry chalk valleys of the Wolds became open access land, it's become clear that there are loads of colonies that weren't previously known – a lot of those found, I think, by Sean Clough (CBR for East Yorks). Certainly the colony at Kiplingcotes seems to be pretty strong. I can't help but look around that site and imagine it full of all the southern chalk downland species, though, especially Small Blue. The conditions are about right and most of the foodplants are present. Wishful thinking, perhaps!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 22-May-18 12:07 AM GMT

22/5/2018 – Walmgate Stray

Just a quick update from me this evening. A busy couple of days at work means I missed my usual lunchbreak butterflying, and expect to miss it again tomorrow. We have colleagues visiting from Liverpool and Bristol for a big meeting, so instead I took one of them out to the Stray at the end of the day to show them the Small Yellow Underwings. The moths were performing well but the undoubted star of the show was my first 2018 Small Copper.



Absolutely my favourite British butterfly, and seeing it always makes my day! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 22-May-18 07:41 AM GMT

Hi! Callum, Your doing better in Yorkshire it seems than we are, 😊 I've yet to see a Small Copper here yet, i really like the small Butterflies best, Holly Blues, Hair Streaks, Coppers their all so delicate , you even get the lovely Marbled White there, I think it's too wet this side of the Pennines, every time I see the weather map the rain always seems to be heading West for us 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 23-May-18 08:59 AM GMT

Things have certainly started to catch up after a very late start, Goldie! As you suggest, I suspect that we are slightly warmer and drier with more hours of sunshine over here.

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 23-May-18 02:26 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

As for the Dingies, they certainly seem to be doing just fine up here. Since a large chunk of the dry chalk valleys of the Wolds became open access land, it's become clear that there are loads of colonies that weren't previously known – a lot of those found, I think, by Sean Clough (CBR for East Yorks). Certainly the colony at Kiplingcotes seems to be pretty strong. I can't help but look around that site and imagine it full of all the southern chalk downland species, though, especially Small Blue. The conditions are about right and most of the foodplants are present. Wishful thinking, perhaps!

Small Blues aren't a particularly "southern" species – I believe they are found in Scotland right up to and including the northern coast along from Cape Wrath. If there is kidney vetch, then Small Blues should be quite happy – but they have to find their way from another colony of course. For Chalkhills, you need horseshoe vetch, and I don't know if that thrives up there. I suppose gradual warming of the climate might allow this to happen, but a natural spread north of Chalkhills might take many years, and I don't think the chalk downland habitat is sufficiently continuous either. Nice thought, though!

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 23-May-18 06:56 PM GMT

Of course you're quite right, Dave – the existence of (very) northern colonies of Small Blue suggesting that there's no climatic barrier to their survival this far north. In fact believe there's already been an unlicensed release of this species at a site somewhere in North Yorks a few years ago, so I am clearly not the only person thinking these thoughts! There are occasional records of Horseshoe Vetch up here but it's not established as far as I know. I imagine that both the hostplant and the butterflies would need a helping hand to reach the Wolds – though as the climate warms I think the possibility of them thriving there gets more realistic! A man can dream... 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-May-18 09:50 PM GMT

24/05/2018 – North York Moors

With butterfly season now in full swing and the weather forecast set fair, I decided to cash in one of my days of annual leave today. It turned out to be a great decision!

The brother of a friend is involved with monitoring some of the more fragile Duke of Burgundy sites on the edge of the North York Moors, and they very kindly invited me to help them with today's surveys. I met them around coffee time, and we started by exploring a new area a couple of kilometres from the known sites. No luck with butterflies here, but a remarkable close encounter with a Tawny Owl was reward enough.



We moved on to the known Duke sites. On the track in we noticed the large number of healthy elm trees and speculated as to whether the wood might contain White-letter Hairstreak. On parking up, we started checking some feeding damage on elms, and remarkably we were able to locate a late-instar larva almost immediately, and within just two metres of the car. It's incredible what can be found when you take the time to look closely!



We managed to locate small numbers of Dukes in both of the main areas, and also saw at least one individual some distance away from these sites in an area coppiced with the express intention of allowing the species to expand into new parts of the site. Numbers here are nothing like as strong as at Hawnby Hill, but the signs today were encouraging, and it appears that the management work done has had a positive effect.





Having completed our surveys, the afternoon was still young, so we decided to pay a visit to the main colony of Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Yorkshire. There were plenty of individuals on the wing, and with females moving among the piles of dead bracken seeking out violets and laying eggs, photo opportunities weren't too hard to come by!



On a couple of occasions, we saw females rejecting the unwelcome attentions of inquisitive males. They have an interesting dance-like response, raising their wings and flapping aggressively. I tried to capture it but it happened too quickly!



Another wonderful day, and very glad to have caught the Pearls. With the next two days forecast to be pretty miserable, I wonder whether today might have been my last chance this year!

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 25-May-18 10:35 PM GMT

Definitely a day to remember, Callum, and well worth cashing in that day's annual leave.

I also never knew PBFs were present in Yorkshire so you learn something every day!

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 25-May-18 10:58 PM GMT

It's great to see those two particular butterflies thriving in their Yorkshire niches, Callum. And another example (if one were needed) that White-letter Hairstreaks are found wherever Elms still grow – brilliant! 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 26-May-18 01:34 PM GMT

It's certainly nice to have relatively accessible populations of both – saves me from the moral dilemma of whether to drive all the way down south to see rare and beautiful butterflies! Chambers Farm Wood in Lincolnshire is similarly a good resource – thinking of going there tomorrow.

No butterflying today as the weather is overcast and windy. I thought I'd share a couple from this morning's moth-trap instead!

This Pale Tussock came to rest on the wall above the trap. I'd love to know whether it chose its position deliberately, as it was almost perfectly camouflaged on the mortar!



By contrast, this Lime-speck Pug was extremely visible.



Finally, the Spectacle is a really smart moth, but this one was a little shy, and only showed half of its flying-goggle pattern.



Re: CallumMac

by Pauline, 26-May-18 05:03 PM GMT

Well done on finding that WLH larva Callum. I am convinced that the species is massively under-recorded although there isn't as many Elms on my patch as there used to be. Paul (Harfield) has spent a lot of time in this area searching them out (both the Elms and the butterflies) and has discovered several new sites. May be worthwhile to keep checking. Love the owl shot too – that was a great find 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 27-May-18 10:19 PM GMT

Thanks Pauline. The same seems to go for all of the hairstreaks!

27/05/2018, am – Chambers Farm Wood

Having seen some really nice Marsh Fritillary photos from the Little Scrubbs Meadow SSSI at Chambers Farm Wood posted on Twitter earlier in the week, I decided to drive down and have a look for myself. I found myself faced with a photographic challenge like nothing I've experienced before...



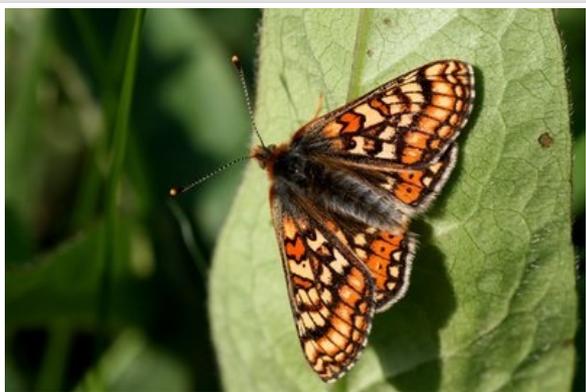
The butterflies were flying – and by the hundred (somebody even said thousand!). Getting close enough for a photo was not a concern – at times, the reverse was true...



Even whilst sitting to eat my lunch, the close-up views came to me.



I stayed for around 4 hours, and took over 300 photos of the fritillaries alone. Amazing.





Given that this site was apparently down to 4 individuals (peak transect count) as recently as 2013, this seems to be a remarkable success story for BC! I have never experienced anything like this, in terms of sheer density of butterflies. I do wonder whether there will be enough host-plant on the site to support the thousands of caterpillars this generation will produce – will the population self-regulate itself at the site's carrying capacity, or will this boom lead to a bust?

Although they were the main attraction, the Marsh Frits weren't the only attraction. A few Dingy Skippers joined them in the meadow, and a Broad-bodied Chaser had taken up station over the pond in BC Lincolnshire's Butterfly Garden.



A Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth was enjoying the Red Valerian, and I spent a while trying to get that perfect in-flight shot! It had a huge mass of pollen at the base of its proboscis. The potential role of moths as pollinators was a key theme of my PhD thesis, so seeing moths covered in pollen in this way always makes me feel vindicated!





Shortly after lunch (and bang on the Met Office forecast), things started to cloud over and cool down. Given that it was supposed to remain sunny all afternoon in Yorkshire, I decided to head for home via:

27/05/2018, pm - Calley Heath

I was really hoping for my favourite species, Small Copper, here. I was disappointed in that regard, but there was still plenty of interest. Several Brimstones were whizzing around, but didn't stop for photos. I was really surprised to spot several fresh Brown Arguses – although this species has now moved right through East Yorks, I hadn't heard it reported from this site before.





On my way out of the site, I spotted a pair of Common Blue in cop.



A nice end to another astonishing day!

Re: CallumMac

by Katrina, 27-May-18 10:32 PM GMT

Wow! Amazing Marsh Frit photos and Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth too! 😊😊😊

Re: CallumMac

by trevor, 27-May-18 10:40 PM GMT

Your first image of the Marsh Fritillaries on Ragged Robin is spectacular. You clearly had a fantastic experience on that visit.

Great report Callum,
Trevor.

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 27-May-18 10:43 PM GMT

Shame there weren't any Coppers for you at Calley Heath, Callum, but the Brown Argus doesn't surprise me as I photographed them there back on 24th August 2014. I reported this to the warden(?) at the time.
<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=6157&start=620> (down towards the bottom of the page).

The Marsh Fritillaries look terrific and sound magnificent! They do have boom-and-bust years so next year may be different – but it would be good to

think otherwise. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 28-May-18 02:37 PM GMT

Thanks Katrina 😊 I was particularly pleased with the hawkmoth – the Marsh Frits somehow seemed too easy when there was that much choice!

Thanks Trevor 😊 There wasn't much nectar about so the little that there was, was covered in butterflies!

Thanks Dave 😊 Ah interesting – I've emailed the CBR to check whether he's aware of the colony, but I imagine he will be. Yorks Wildlife Trust have some great reserves but in my experience are not very good at keeping the information attached to those reserves up to date! Sounds like the Marshies have been building up for a few years running at CFW, so you'd imagine the bubble will burst at some point.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 28-May-18 09:07 PM GMT

28/05/2018 – Kiplingcotes

Today wasn't supposed to be warm and sunny, so when it turned out that way I decided to stay local and pop to Kiplingcotes. Compared to last week, the Dingy Skippers were almost over (I only saw four) but had been replaced by good numbers of Common Blues. I spent a happy hour trying to follow Duracell-powered males for long enough to snatch a photo or two as they nectared!



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 02-Jun-18 02:13 PM GMT

01/06/2018 - Walmgate Stray

A real shortage of butterflies this week up here. We missed the thunderstorms that seemed to cover the rest of the country, but the consequence of that is that the weather has remained mainly muggy and overcast. Nothing but the braver Whites and the occasional Speckled Wood flying!

On Friday lunchtime I went for a targeted search on the Stray, with two specific objectives in mind. The first was to check on an Orange-tip egg I had found - the only such egg I've found on the Stray this year despite some quite extensive searching. There is both Cuckooflower and Garlic Mustard in abundance here; the egg was on a fairly isolated Cuckooflower, and after a short search I was able to track down the first-instar larva!



I've found some of the stories told on this forum of following butterflies through all of their life-stages quite inspiring, so I'll be checking in on Orpheus the Orange-tip for as long as I can find him/her...

The second target was Marsh Pug, which had been recorded the previous day by Peter Mayhew. This is a pretty scarce day-flying moth which wasn't previously known to inhabit the Stray - though the food-plant is in abundance. I didn't track down the pug today, but did find a nice selection of other day-flying species.

Celypha lacunana (Tortricidae)



Blood-vein *Timandra comae* (Geometridae)



Straw Dot *Rivula sericealis* (Erebidae)



I also caught a very nice example of Waved Umber in my garden trap last night. Amazing camouflage – imagine trying to spot this on a Silver Birch!



Re: CallumMac

by Pauline, 02-Jun-18 08:32 PM GMT

Some very nice moths there Callum, especially the last one. I'm thinking it's just as well Orpheus is on an isolated plant given their cannibalistic tendencies but they do tend to grow incredibly fast.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 03-Jun-18 11:25 AM GMT

Some wonderful stuff on this page, Callum, but I must say I'm particularly impressed with how you've captured those four Marsh Fritillaries on the ragged robin. Normally, they are swaying in the breeze when nectaring from these delicate plants but you've managed to somehow get them relatively still.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 04-Jun-18 09:35 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline. It's strange, there were loads of Orange-tips flying on the Stray this year, and I checked loads of plants without joy. I only checked Orpheus's plant because it was so isolated – I'd probably have ignored it otherwise!

Thanks David. Probably one of the best photos I've ever taken! It was quite a blustery day, but I think I got lucky with the combination of a sheltered corner and a lull in the wind. I think I took 5 versions of that photo, and this was the only one where all four butterflies were facing the camera open-winged. Just lucky!

03/06/2018 – North Cave Wetlands

With the weather on Sunday hot, but more overcast and muggy than sunny, it seemed a good day for my partner and I to head to North Cave Wetlands and resume our quest to learn the British dragonflies – or so I sold the idea to her! In fact there are also some large patches of Birds-foot Trefoil around the dragonfly ponds at NCW, making this one of the most reliable spots for Common Blue in the region, and I was hoping that any breaks in the cloud might bring some fresh individuals out. 😊

Well, my hunch was correct! Only three Common Blues seen in the end (2m, 1f), but they were some real stunners. 😊



I'm not sure if this was a trick of the light or because she was so crisp and fresh, but you can actually see the underwing patterns through the wings from the upperside on this female!



The same thing was evident on this male, and the chequering on the margins of his wings might have given me pause for thought if we were less than about 200 miles from the nearest Adonis Blue site!



Having got my butterfly fix, I joined my partner in following the dragonflies. Photographing them proved something of a challenge, as there were so many flying that as soon as one settled, it would be up again to chase off a rival. Sounds familiar, somehow... 😊 However, I managed to get decent shots of the three most abundant species, which we identified as:

Emperor *Anax imperator*



Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*



Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*



The nicest surprise of the day was a Stoat which ran down the footpath towards us for a few metres before darting into the undergrowth – I was too stunned to react in time, and missed the photo opp! 😞

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 04-Jun-18 10:54 AM GMT

Fantastic Marshies Callum. 🍷 And a great moth selection, good job with the Hawkmoth. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 04-Jun-18 11:01 AM GMT

Great shots of the Marsh Frits callum 🍷 lovely, Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 05-Jun-18 09:00 PM GMT

Thank you both!

05/06/2018 – Askham Bog

In the interests of variety, I decided to detour to the YWT reserve at Askham Bog on my way home from work this evening, without really knowing what to expect. It turned out to have some really nice flower-rich damp meadows, one of which in particular was dancing with very fresh Large Skippers – my first of the year!



Just as I was thinking of leaving, one of the Skippers chased up what must by now be a very geriatric Comma!



And on my way out, a Large White posed nicely on a thistle.



I'm off to the Lake District tomorrow evening to spend a few days at my parents' house. Hopefully I'll manage to connect with Mountain Ringlet and Small Blue whilst I'm there.

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 06-Jun-18 07:25 AM GMT

Just catching up Callum, a few of these for those Marshies 🍷🍷🍷. It's been a few years since I've seen them. Fantastic shots of the Bee Hawkmoth as well.

I got my first pictures of Large Skipper yesterday too, they really do look magnificent when fresh don't they, and also mirroring your day I found an old Comma too, a female still relieving herself of eggs! Good luck with the Mountain Ringlets, my only UK species left to see!

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 06-Jun-18 10:17 PM GMT

Seems like Large Skippers are proliferating everywhere right now. I must catch up with them over the next few days.

Lovely dragon/damselflies too, Callum. A real feature of summer.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 06-Jun-18 11:14 PM GMT

Thanks bugboy, I love the return of the little golden rockets too!

Thanks David. I'm really enjoying trying to get to grips with the dragonflies this summer. I added this Golden-ringed Dragonfly this evening up the lane behind my parents' house, in the tiny hamlet of **Uldale** in the North Lakes – apparently an upland specialist of small moorland streams, precisely the habitat in which I found it.



The influx of Silver Y has reached the Lakes as well, with good numbers around the village; and my Mum pointed out several larval webs that I believe belong to Apple Ermine moth – principally because they were exclusively on Crab-apple *Malus sylvestris* despite other potential host-plants of similar Yponomeutids (e.g. Hawthorn) being locally plentiful.



I took not a single butterfly photo today! Quite a few GWs around, and even a couple of very late Orange-tips. Tomorrow we go looking for Mountain Ringlets... 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 07-Jun-18 11:01 PM GMT

07/06/2018 - Whin Rigg

Well – another one of those days!

We have a PhD student in our research group who's just embarking on her first field season surveying Mountain Ringlets. A couple of us went out with her today – her first day of fieldwork on the project – to help out and ensure it all went smoothly. My main job for the day was to teach her how to distinguish the males and females – despite never having encountered *Erebia epiphron* before, I have plenty of practice of sexing *E. aethiops*, and many other species besides! Being such a lovely day, and with the combined promise of a rare butterfly and two more Wainwright peaks to tick off their wall-chart, my parents tagged along as well! 😊

The target today was the Irton Fell population – being relatively southerly, westerly, and low-elevation, often the first site to see MR flying. It didn't take long for us to find a very obliging female...



She was quite happy to pose – and sat patiently as we tried out best to move stray grass stems and shadows out of the way! Having seen a lot of Scotch Argus, and seen in photographs that the two *Erebia* species look fairly similar, I had wrongly assumed they were the same size as well, so I was charmed by these dainty little butterflies!



We moved further up the site, and it quickly became clear that there were hundreds of Mountain Ringlets flying. The site is massive, and we pretty reliably saw a butterfly every few metres for almost three kilometres, so the population must number in the thousands here. The population of Small Heaths will be ten times that – but I didn't even attempt to stalk one today!

The females were the more obliging, of course, and in retrospect most of the photos I managed to get were of females.





It looks as though I caught this one in the act of laying an egg – amazing, and a great pay-off for my habit of always trying to get a few face-on shots!



There were a few interesting moths about on the fellside as well. We netted a rather tired looking Clouded Buff, and then found this much fresher Mother Shipton.



Having completed the day's surveys, my colleagues headed back to their car whilst my parents and I headed onwards for the summits of Whin Rigg and, up a spectacular ridge-walk above the Wasdale Scree, Illgill Head. The Mountain Ringlets were also flying on the summit of the latter – at much higher elevation, and with some distance walked between the two peaks without a single MR seen, I presume this functions as a largely independent population from the main Irton Fell colony. As we started our descent into Miterdale, just before leaving the MRs behind, the mountain had a final gift for me – as a Mountain Ringlelet came to sip my sweat, first from my leg before fluttering, without any encouragement, up to my hand. 😊



The descent through Miterdale was long, hot, and not so interesting as we had hoped, but there was a last surprise in store halfway down – my first Wall Brown of the year!



Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 07-Jun-18 11:47 PM GMT

Terrific report on the Mountain Ringlets, Callum, a species I have yet to catch up with. If you get the right weather at the right time of year in the right place, it seems you just trip over them! Great set of photos. 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by trevor, 08-Jun-18 06:28 AM GMT

I am in awe of your Mountain Ringlets, a distant dream for us southerners !. It is quite surprising how often one hears, ' I've seen every UK species, except the Mountain Ringlet '. I suppose it's because of their remoteness. For me I've yet to see any of the Northern species, must put that right !.

You must take some mrgreens Callum ! 🍀🍀🍀

Trevor.

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 08-Jun-18 10:25 AM GMT

Fantastic to see those Mountain Ringlets Callum, well done. 🍀😊

Re: CallumMac

by Pete Eeles, 08-Jun-18 07:05 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

Having completed the day's surveys, my colleagues headed back to their car whilst my parents and I headed onwards for the summits of Whin Rigg and, up a spectacular ridge-walk above the Wasdale Screes, Illgill Head.

Excellent report, Callum! I may well be retracing your steps on Sunday/Monday! I've always wanted to get a photo of Irton Fell from Whin Rigg!

Cheers,

- Pete

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 08-Jun-18 07:27 PM GMT

trevor wrote:

I am in awe of your Mountain Ringlets, a distant dream for us southerners !. It is quite surprising how often one hears, ' I've seen every UK species, except the Mountain Ringlet '. I suppose it's because of their remoteness. For me I've yet to see any of the Northern species, must put that right !.

You must take some mrgreens Callum ! 🍀🍀🍀

Trevor.

I've seen every UK species except for Mountain Ringlets! 🍀🍀🍀

Re: CallumMac

by Neil Freeman, 08-Jun-18 08:11 PM GMT

Just catching up on your diary Callum, I love the shot of the 4 Marsh Fritillaries at Chambers Farm Wood and great shots of the Bee Hawk Moth 🍀😊

Great report on the Mountain Ringlets at Irton Fell, brings back memories of when I was there a few years back. I really must get back up there to see them again sometime.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 08-Jun-18 09:09 PM GMT

Thanks all. Was really fantastic to see them and I would recommend a visit to anybody asking!

trevor wrote:

It is quite surprising how often one hears, 'I've seen every UK species, except the Mountain Ringlet'. I suppose it's because of their remoteness.

I agree – and I find it particularly confusing that those people have seen Chequered Skipper before Mountain Ringlet. You have to drive past the MRs and on for another 4 hours to reach Glasdrum! Perhaps some folk are put off by the 'Mountain' element – though having done both, I can confidently say that walking from the foot of Denbies Hillside back to the car-park on a hot day is harder work than climbing Irton Fell... 😊

Pete Eeles wrote:

I've always wanted to get a photo of Irton Fell from Whin Rigg!

...something like this one? 😊



If you get up Whin Rigg and have a bit of energy left then it's definitely worth continuing to Illgill Head. The MRs are, I would estimate, a week or so fresher up there, and the views of Scafell and Great Gable are smashing. But then retrace your footsteps back to the car-park – the extra distance to turn it into a full loop is not worth it!

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 09-Jun-18 12:30 PM GMT

Great shots Callum, I also have yet to see the MR and I live in the North (shame on me) 😊 Your shot have spurred me on 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by kevling, 09-Jun-18 02:06 PM GMT

Callum,

Sorry your diary passed me by, so now catching up with it.
Your Marshie encounter at Chambers Farm Wood was incredible by all accounts. Lovely group picture of the fab four!
And then the Mountain Ringlets by the hundreds too.
Before you go on your next outing, save me a place in the car, you obviously have the Midas touch this year 😊

Kind Regards
Kev

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-18 08:53 PM GMT

Mountain Ringlets 🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬 I can't quite justify the travelling to see this species yet, plus I'm waiting for driverless cars so that I can have a kip on the way up 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 09-Jun-18 09:06 PM GMT

Thanks Kev. If you can get to the North Lakes for first thing tomorrow then the targets are Small Pearl-bordered and if we're lucky, a late Marshie or two 😊

Thanks Wurzel. I agree, it's a long way to come for a butterfly. Hard to justify. I'm lucky that my parents live so near by to some great butterfly sites!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 09-Jun-18 09:29 PM GMT

08/06/2018 – Maryport

The weather forecast for Friday was a bit iffy, so in the morning I went for a long bike ride (actually not that long, but in the Cumbrian hills you feel like you've gone twice as far!). About halfway round the sun came out, so I spent the ride home weighing up options for the afternoon! I plumped for Small Blues – with only one site (that I know of) in Yorkshire, and that a very recent, unofficial reintroduction, I figured this to be my best chance to connect with this delightful species in 2018.

There are three main colonies in the North Lakes, two within sight of each other along the coastline at Workington and Maryport and a third further south at Whitehaven. I opted for the Maryport site, which is slightly less industrial! I'd not visited before but had a pretty clear idea of where to look. At the site entrance, I quickly located a small patch of Kidney Vetch – and no sooner had I done so than a Small Blue flew in and settled there! I spent an hour or so walking through the site and saw good numbers of Small Blues, many still quite fresh. Lovely!





This female had a perfect beak-mark in her hind-wing from an earlier brush with death. There was a male Stonechat holding station in the middle of the colony, so I wondered whether it was his beak!



I took a series of this female performing the much-discussed 'wing-roll' behaviour - I've turned it into a gif which I'll try and put into the relevant thread later. Here she is mid-roll:



09/06/2018 - mostly moths!

We were up in the high fells for much of today - amazing views but few butterflies! The hazy conditions meant a couple of Small Heaths were more approachable than usual.



In the late afternoon the sun came out and we headed up the lane behind the house to check out a colony of Chimney-sweeper moths. I first spotted the moths here on my bike ride yesterday but wanted to try and establish how large the colony was. Quite good numbers, but confined to a stretch of road verge of only 20 metres or so.





Finally, I just had to share this Beautiful Golden Y we trapped last night!



Re: CallumMac

by essexbuzzard, 09-Jun-18 09:42 PM GMT

Just catching up on your wanderings, Callum. Great scenes from Irton Fell. I've been there a few times, too. Fantastic place- with views to match!

Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 09-Jun-18 10:13 PM GMT

Hi Callum, I've just been discovering your posts and I am absolutely blown away by your Marshies! And pretty much all the others! You have clearly been in the right places at the right times, unlike me who has managed to be in the right places at mostly not quite the right times this year 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 10-Jun-18 08:25 PM GMT

Thanks essex, Janet. I just seem to be on an amazing run of luck with the butterflies this spring – keep wondering when it will end! On which note...

10/06/2018 – Finglandrigg Wood

I had a little bit of time to burn this morning before I needed to leave the Lakes behind and head back for Yorkshire, so Dad and I decided to head to Finglandrigg Wood NNR. Of the 20 or so Cumbrian sites where Marsh Fritillary have been reintroduced, this is the public one, and it's had good numbers reported this year (not quite Chambers Farm Wood good!). There were still plenty around – I conservatively guessed that I saw 40, which would have been a fraction of those flying – and although most were starting to show their age, a few were still fresh.



However, my attention was completely distracted away from the Marshies by a good number of stunning Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries! We got there quite early, so they weren't quite super-charged yet, and I was able to get a couple of shots I was pleased with.



It became clear after a while that there was a good range of the more common species present as well. A pair of Wall Browns scrapped for territory, but neither stopped for a photo; likewise, my first Meadow Brown of the year refused to pose. Dad spotted a Large Skipper being 'skulky' and was able to locate her egg.



And a Small Copper – slightly tatty, but even so and as always, a lovely surprise!





Back in Yorkshire this evening, and tomorrow it's back to work for a rest!

Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 10-Jun-18 10:36 PM GMT

Another lovely Marshie, Callum! 🍷🍷

The Coppers are gorgeous, they'd brighten anyone's day whatever condition they're in 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 11-Jun-18 09:09 AM GMT

That is brilliant sounding name for a reserve Callum 😊 Great shots of the Frits – Marshies in particular seem to be having a really good year 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 12-Jun-18 10:23 PM GMT

You know summer's arrived when the SPBFs are starting to fade! They've had a good year, as have Marshies so let's hope the weather trend continues.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 13-Jun-18 10:57 AM GMT

Thanks Janet! I love the Coppers too. It's telling that I was in a meadow full of Marshies and Small Pearls, and still spent a good ten minutes following the Small Copper round! 😊

Isn't it just, Wurzel? I think its literal meaning is something like 'the wood on the ridge above the meeting-place'. It's a really nice reserve, too, and full of butterflies.

David – indeed! They looked quite fresh at the time (especially by comparison to the Marshies), but you can certainly see some early signs of wear in the photos.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 14-Jun-18 11:04 AM GMT

There is so much going on on the PD page that I've only just noticed your Mountain Ringlets, Callum. Well done!

They look a little worn so I presume the flight period must have begun at the back end of May, which is pretty early even for Irton Fell.

I really must get back up there one day...hopefully during a spell of early June weather like we've just enjoyed!

Re: CallumMac

by Maximus, 14-Jun-18 11:19 AM GMT

Hi Callum, I agree with David, great report and images of the Mountain Ringlets, one I have yet to see. I'm one of those who has driven by on the way to Glasdrum 😊

I am in full agreement with you about the 'trek up' Denbies Hillside, totally lung-busting 😊

Mike

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 15-Jun-18 08:11 PM GMT

David M wrote:

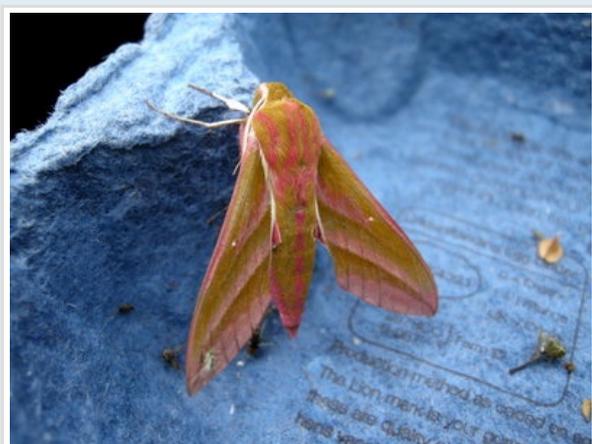
I presume the flight period must have begun at the back end of May, which is pretty early even for Irton Fell.

Thanks David! 24th May was the first report but I'm not sure whether a site like that will be checked every day, even in the immediate run-up to the flight period...

Thanks Mike! Whereas I have never seen Chequered Skipper – despite having been to Glasdrum Wood, at the wrong time of year!

15/06/2018 – Walmgate Stray

I've been really busy at work this week – I have a project student working for me over the summer on a pilot study into the relationship between wing length and body mass in moths, so I've spent most of the week teaching her how to trap and identify moths. We're already generating some really nice records for the University of York campus, including two species of hawkmoth, Eyed and Elephant:



I've also been trying to do the Wildlife Trusts' #30DaysWild challenge, taking a photograph of the natural world every day and posting them on my Twitter page (https://twitter.com/Macgregor_Cal). This found me out on Walmgate Stray at 17.30 this evening, in a howling gale and under thick cloud, searching for something – anything! – for today's post. Sadly my Orange-tip larva, Orpheus, is nowhere to be found – there are cattle grazed on the Stray and his plant had been trampled. Walking on, though, I was surprised to startle up a brand new Meadow Brown – not my first of the year, but the

first that was moving slowly enough to approach for pictures!



Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 16-Jun-18 11:33 AM GMT

That's a very impressive Eyed Hawk Moth, Callum - I have never seen one of those. Good luck with the 30dayswild challenge - it can indeed be a challenge sometimes!

Re: CallumMac

by Pete Eeles, 16-Jun-18 04:42 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

Pete Eeles wrote:

I've always wanted to get a photo of Irton Fell from Whin Rigg!

...something like this one?

Yeah - something like that. Although I decided that you can get a better indication of the habitat closer up. But I did enjoy the exercise 😊



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 16-Jun-18 10:40 PM GMT

You're sure doing your bit at the moment, Callum. Thanks for posting those beautiful hawk moth images, They are, to me anyway, the most desirable of all families of moth.

Re: CallumMac

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jun-18 10:33 AM GMT

Hi Callum,

Great report and photos from Finglandrigg Wood, I have heard of it but never been there, sounds like a great place.

I am jealous of the Eyed Hawk Moth, that one is still on my wish list for my garden trap although there is no reason for it not to show up sooner or later.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 17-Jun-18 05:30 PM GMT

Thank you all. That was actually my first ever Eyed Hawkmoth. We caught another (definitely a second and not the same again!) the following night – I'm having a hard time convincing my student that moth-trapping isn't always this exciting!

17/06/2018 – RSPB St Aidan's

This is quite a new reserve and has some smashing birds, including breeding Bitterns and Black-necked Grebes (plus, today, a totally unexpected fly-past from an Osprey!). However, as BC Yorkshire's species writer for Ringlet, I've noticed that it also pops up fairly regularly among both the earliest and the largest counts for this most under-rated of Browns! Having heard a couple of reports of Ringlet in the last couple of days, I was optimistic that we might run into one today.

Our first insect was a nicely-posed 7-spot Ladybird. In theory a common enough species, but nowadays it's a pleasant surprise to see anything that's not a Harlequin.



And then, sure enough, we started to see Ringlets! Surprisingly, there were a fair few around and some even looked a bit worn.





Most were trying their hardest to extract whatever they could from the weak and watery sunshine, but after a little while I managed to find one showing off the fantastic underwings!



Besides the Ringlets were plenty of Meadow Browns and Large Skippers.





And good numbers of these Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnets.





Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 17-Jun-18 06:27 PM GMT

That looks an interesting reserve Callum, and within striking distance being not too far off the M62.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 17-Jun-18 11:40 PM GMT

If Ringlets are about further north then I must try and catch up with them here in south Wales in the next few days. Although they're ridiculously common by me, they are stunning little creatures when fresh.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 18-Jun-18 08:30 AM GMT

Janet - yes, interesting, but also a bit frustrating. As I understand it, it used to be a country park before the RSPB took over management a few years ago. Somewhere along the line a decision must have been taken to continue running it as if it were still a country park - allowing access to dog walkers, cyclists, horses etc. I don't have a problem with that *per se*, but it's astonishing how many dog owners completely ignore the many signs and, out of the entire (huge) site, take their dogs to swim in the one bit of reedbed where all the rare birds are nesting! 😞

David - stunning indeed. I've a real soft spot for them!

Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 18-Jun-18 08:55 AM GMT

CallumMac – Nice underwing shot of the Ringlet. I can't understand why I have not seen any yet. It must be the first year I have ever seen White Admirals BEFORE Ringlets!

Also – I like the side shot of the 5–spot Burnet. Not to mention those moth pictures you got a few days ago.

Cheers

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 19-Jun-18 04:46 PM GMT

Thanks Ernie. I think that St Aidan's is a very early site for Ringlet – I checked Walmgate Stray extensively this lunchtime in ok-ish conditions, and found plenty of Meadow Browns & Large Skippers but no Ringlets.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 19-Jun-18 08:54 PM GMT

Great stuff Callum 😊 What features can you use to separate 5–Spot and Narrow Bordered 5–spot Burnets – I have both round this way but don't know the key features to use? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 20-Jun-18 08:50 AM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

What features can you use to separate 5–Spot and Narrow Bordered 5–spot Burnets – I have both round this way but don't know the key features to use?

Ha! Well, up here the key feature is "if it exists, it's a Narrow-bordered" 😊

Seriously though, they are *really* tricky to separate where the ranges overlap. I tend to think that if there are five clearly separated spots, it's most likely to be a Narrow-bordered, whereas if any two or more of the spots are fused, it's a Five-spotted. That's reliable in most cases but not 100% accurate – Five-spotted with five separate dots do occur fairly frequently. Then there's the wing-tips, which are supposed to be more pointed on Narrow-bordered and more rounded on Five-spotted, but that can be hard to see unless you've got both next to each other.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 20-Jun-18 09:11 PM GMT

20/06/2018 – Walmgate Stray after work

Yesterday lunchtime I popped out onto the Stray for half an hour, and amongst hordes of Meadow Browns, I thought I saw a Small Skipper. Having lost track of it before it settled, and with the next three Skippers I saw all being Large, I dismissed it as optimistic – but later saw on Twitter that two separate people had seen their first Yorkshire Small Skippers of the year, including one on Walmgate Stray! Should have trusted myself...

It was sunny, though quite breezy, when I left work this evening, so I elected to pop out onto the Stray and have another search for yesterday's Small Skipper. The first thing I found was a Ringlet – my first away from the very early St Aidan's population. I only got one, slightly unfocussed, shot before a dog chased it off ("oh, sorry, he just really likes people with cameras" 😊), but my impression was that I have rarely seen Ringlets with such a well-formed sixth ringlet on the hindwing underside.



There were lots of Meadow Browns and Chimney-sweeper moths in the ungrazed areas where I saw the mystery butterfly yesterday, but no Skippers of any species.



I started to walk back through the grazed area towards the university car-park, but just before leaving the Stray, there was a little bouncing blob of gold... it settled... and yes! My first (definite) Small Skipper of the year. 😊



I followed this male for a while and took lots of pictures, and saw at least two others.



It clouded over after a while, and with the strong wind, quickly became quite chilly. The Skipper I'd been following then did something that I've only ever seen in moths before – settled on a leaf, it started to beat its wings rapidly to keep its flight muscles warm. Has anybody else seen a butterfly do this?



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 20-Jun-18 10:50 PM GMT

Cheers for the ID features – obviously it a bit easier for you 😊 You can see the rings clearly enough on that Ringlet Callum, if I had a quid for every time a dog has put up a butterfly I'd be a rich man 😊 Mind you Guy Padfield has the right idea, he has a trained butterfly hound 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 21-Jun-18 10:01 AM GMT

That's a beautifully marked Ringlet, Callum. Interesting too that Small Skippers are out and about round your way. Hopefully I'll get to see them down here before I go to France next week.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 22-Jun-18 09:09 PM GMT

22/06/2018 – Kiplingcotes Chalk Pit

I've been keeping a sharp eye out for Yorkshire sightings of Marbled Whites, and looking forward to their arrival on my 'patch' at Kiplingcotes. Yesterday they started to appear at a couple of sites in South Yorks, and as I'm travelling south for a week first thing tomorrow morning, I decided to detour to Kiplingcotes on my way home from work to see if they had arrived yet.

They had! I counted good numbers – maybe as many as 30 – without covering the whole site. There was a strong north-easterly blowing, and the Marbled Whites were mostly flying in the more sheltered parts of the site – I'm not sure whether they were congregating there, or just not flying as enthusiastically in the windier sections. Anyway, it was nice to see them back 😊





Besides the Marblies, there were quite a few Large Skippers about – no Small here yet though.



And also literally hundreds of Common Blues. With the temperature dropping into the evening, there was a good mix of Blues basking photogenically and roosting, giving opportunities for all styles of photograph!





There was an amazing, almost metallic, green sheen on the underside of this one.



Hoping for some good weather and good butterflies on my trip south – the first is forecast, and with luck it will bring the second!

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 23-Jun-18 10:53 PM GMT

Lovely Marbled Whites Callum 😊 I hope your trip south is bringing you all and more than you hoped for 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 23-Jun-18 10:57 PM GMT

Good to see the Marbled Whites up in Yorkshire, Callum. I think your trip south coincides with one I have planned up there, so I'll keep an eye on them for you! 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 23-Jun-18 11:14 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel & Dave!

I'll write up full reports later in the week when the current madness subsides. But I couldn't wait to share a trailer of what's to come with you all! The best result of a flying visit to the lovely Daneway Banks – I'll definitely be back again in the future, with hopefully more time on my hands.



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Jun-18 09:45 PM GMT

Another day of madness in Devon, but again managed to squeeze in some butterflies. As with yesterday, an early trailer for the burst of PD updates that will come when things calm down!



Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 25-Jun-18 07:29 AM GMT

Callum - I went to Daneway Banks yesterday. Looks like we missed meeting up by one day! Great shot of the Large Blue by the way.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 25-Jun-18 10:00 PM GMT

Thanks Ernie. I often wonder in places like that if I'm talking to anybody I 'know' from online! I was going to go on the wing-roll thread to add my observations of Large Blues doing it, but it looks like you've already got that covered!

Today's trailer for the upcoming PD entries. Things should calm down tomorrow as I leave Devon behind and seek a couple of days of solitude in Dorset to recover.



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 26-Jun-18 10:19 PM GMT

Today's trailer. One of those days when you start praying for a bit of cloud to slow everything down!



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 27-Jun-18 09:55 PM GMT

Another trailer. I travel home tomorrow, and begin the process of writing PDs over the weekend!



I've been having fun trying to quickly select only one favourite image from each day's butterflying this week as I've travelled around Devon and Dorset – a harder task than you might think, especially when most days have featured several species worthy of inclusion! Therefore, with one day to go, I propose a bit of a game for anybody interested...

I've posted a photo each day from Saturday to today (Wednesday) and intend to do the same tomorrow, provided my planned stop *en route* home is a success. The first part of the game is to identify the species (easy) and guess the site (hard!) for each photo. Let's say one point for the species, one for the broad location, and one for the exact site: so for Saturday (where I've already given the game away), you would get a point for saying "Large Blue"; two points for "Large Blue, Cotswolds", and the full three points for "Large Blue, Daneway Banks".

So that is four photos – Sunday to Wednesday – offering a maximum 12 points. Let's say there are also double points available for guessing the species and site of tomorrow's post before it goes online, taking us to 18 points! And in case we need a tie-breaker, you can also guess the total number of butterfly species I've recorded on my jaunt this week.

Good luck – have fun – I look forward to your guesses!

Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 27-Jun-18 11:11 PM GMT

I know how hard it is to select a fave of the day! But today's Grayling is lovely. Wouldn't have a clue about locations though – no good me trying to guess! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 28-Jun-18 08:48 PM GMT

Haha, maybe that was a bit mean as nobody's stuck their necks out to have a go! Feel free to have a guess as I start to fill in the PD over the next few days. I'm back in Yorkshire now, and although I spent almost the entire day in the car, it still produced one extremely memorable butterfly encounter...



Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 29-Jun-18 09:42 PM GMT

23/06/2018 - Daneway Banks

With a long drive to make from East Yorks to East Devon, Large Blues in full flight at Daneway Banks, and sunny weather forecast, I sensed this was finally my chance to meet this most famous of British conservation success stories. I got up extra-early, to maximise the amount of time I could spend on site, and drove straight through from home to the Daneway Inn without stopping - an experience I'm not in a hurry to repeat! - to arrive just before 11am.

Entering the site, I didn't really know where best to look, but I could see a likely-looking couple working along the bank to the left, so I decided to take their lead. Walking through the gate, I saw something flying. It was blue... it was large... it was...!



"This is going to be easier than expected!", I thought, so of course this individual immediately disappeared over a hedge and I failed to see another for a good 20 minutes! I moved further into the site and discovered the reason why - the crowds were in another part of the site. I think my first individual was an early emerger of the Marjoram brood.

Having found several fresh individuals flying in the top field, I spent a good hour thoroughly enchanted, and managed a number of photos with which I was quite pleased.





A particular highlight was capturing a female in the act of seeding the next generation!



As always, it wasn't all about the rare 'top hit' species! I also enjoyed seeing good numbers of Marbled Whites, Small Heaths, and Ringlets...





...and my first Small Tortoiseshell of the summer brood...



...whilst this female Common Blue was undoubtedly the most heavily suffused with blue that I've ever seen, quite spectacular.



Alas, all too soon it was time to hit the road south again! I was quite overwhelmed by my brief toe-in-the-water at this fantastic reserve – this grasshopper seemed to sympathise...!



I will be back!

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-18 10:25 PM GMT

Great stuff Callum 😊 I had a very similar experience the first time I visited Daneways; we found one and then it seemed to take what felt like an age until the next one 😊 Looking forward to the next stop on the tour 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 29-Jun-18 11:15 PM GMT

Well done with those Blues, Callum! The early start was well worth it. I love the 'commoners' too – that female CB outshines her rare cousin 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 30-Jun-18 06:14 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel & Janet. In pure rarity stakes I have now seen more Large Blues than completely blue-form Common Blues in my life – so the 'commoner' wins out in that regard too! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 30-Jun-18 06:37 PM GMT

24/06/2018, am – East Budleigh Common

Sadly, this was always going to be the hardest day of the trip south: trying to fit some time outdoors around 'visiting hours'. My parents and I were staying in a pub a little way south of Exeter, and only a few minutes' drive from Woodbury Common, so I suggested that a morning trip up there to look for Silver-studded Blues would still allow us to be back for coffee-time.

I had read (on this site!) that the part of Woodbury known as East Budleigh Common was a good place to start looking, so that's what we did. I didn't really have any more detailed info than that, but happily it only took 10 minutes or so to spot our first SSB – a crisp, fresh male. My Mum in particular was very taken with this dainty blob of blue!



We didn't have very long to spend, and so in total we saw only four SSBs – all males.



There were plenty of Ringlets and Large Skippers dancing along the trackside as we headed back towards the car.



And on returning to the car-park, we found a Silver-washed Fritillary dashing about. It briefly paused to nectar on a Bramble, allowing me to grab one of those frustrating almost-in-focus shots!



24/6/2018, pm - Dunsford Meadow

After lunch we had a little longer to play with, so we decided to head to the Dunsford reserve. We used to come here to walk my Grandad's dog in dappled sunshine along the River Teign, but more importantly, it's listed on this site as having High Brown Fritillaries in the glades and the open SSSI meadow! Dad and I left Mum reading her book with feet dangling into the river, and went a-seeking Frits. By this point the day truly qualified as 'stinking hot', so of course whilst we saw good numbers of Fritillaries, they were all dashing about madly! We definitely saw Silver-washed and Small Pearl-bordered, and as one butterfly paused for a moment only to nectar on Marsh Thistle, I fired off a single frame. One of those serendipitous moments when the light, focus, and composition are all perfect first time, but sadly confirming this one as "only" a Dark Green!



As we walked back, a smaller Fritillary – no, wait – a Comma! – alighted on a leaf in front of us and posed for some pictures. I'm not entirely convinced by markings alone that this is a *hutchinsoni*, but to be flying so early in the summer, it surely must be?



Not a hugely productive trip, but given the hot weather, not so bad as it might have been.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 30-Jun-18 08:47 PM GMT

25/06/2018 – Dartmoor

On Monday morning, I was up bright and early to see my parents back up the road (via Daneway Banks!) before heading off myself to meet Richard Fox on Dartmoor. Richard was one of my PhD supervisors, and is an ongoing collaborator; he had kindly offered to show me Dartmoor's best butterflies whilst catching up on projects past and present. I arrived at 8am at Aish Tor to find Richard already there; he said the fritillaries were already at full speed in the heat of the morning, but all those he had gotten a clear look at were the much longed-for High Browns!

Spending the best part of an hour wandering along the tracks strimmed through the bracken, we saw quite a few High Browns, as well as smaller numbers of Dark Greens and Small Pearl-bordered. With the butterflies on Duracell, it was of course impossible to photograph them; this was the best I managed, but I am far from happy with it, so I guess I'll just have to try again next year! 😊



Once we'd filled our boots, Richard suggested driving across the top of the moor to the Lydford Old Railway reserve; Heath Fritillary had had a good year there this year, and he reckoned there was a chance of one or two late-flying individuals still being on the wing. This was another species I'd never seen so I was pretty keen!

After a couple of false Ringlet-shaped alarms, suddenly there was a Heath Fritillary! Unlike its larger cousins, it was happy to sit and very approachable. 😊



Wandering up and down the top of the bank, we eventually decided there were at least 5 individuals flying.





We returned to the National Trust tea-room for coffee and cake, and hashed out some technical details of our latest study (using the UKBMS and BNM data that many of you have no doubt contributed!). We decided to head back via Great Plantation, to check for White Admirals. Walking into the wood, we had gone only a few metres before we saw a Silver-washed Fritillary. As with the HBFs and DGFs, these were supercharged and impossible to photograph, so I decided to try another site for them later in the week.



There were several SWFs around, and they were very soon joined by at least 3 White Admirals. Richard had to head off to do some "real" work but I decided to stake out the large patch of bramble where we'd seen the first SWF, in the hope that one of the Admirals would eventually get thirsty. It took a while, but it worked!



So, a five-Frit day with White Admiral to boot! Now that's something.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 30-Jun-18 10:32 PM GMT

Mouthwatering stuff Callum! 😄😄 I was wondering if the Silver-studs were from Devon but I didn't want to chance my arm as I couldn't remember the name of the site 😄 That DGF shot is totally rocking 😄👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 01-Jul-18 07:34 PM GMT

26/06/2018, morning - Alners Gorse

On Tuesday it was time to leave Devon behind and begin mosying eastwards, with a couple of nights in YHAs allowing me some flexibility before my ultimate destination of Weymouth. Having failed to take that perfect SWF photo for two days running - and being slightly dissatisfied with my White Admiral as well - I decided to try and do something about it, and so I headed to BC's Alners Gorse reserve near Yeovil. I first visited here last year during peak Purple Hairstreak season, which was an incredible experience, and also saw a *valezina* on that visit.

Although not a very long drive, Dorset roads are slow, so it was almost 10am before I was walking down the slope into the reserve. There were lots of Ringlets, Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites flying in the meadow, but worryingly they were all supercharged already, and the ponies were huddled under a tree for shade! I headed straight to the row of buckthorn where I'd seen the PHs last year. Sadly this year's visit was probably a week too soon, and I saw 'only' one (before last year's visit I would have been delighted to see even one PH - how spoil I've become!). It drifted down from the top of an oak before seeking shade under a leaf, just within reach of my zoom lens.



There were one or two White Admirals, and about the same number of SWFs, all dashing about madly, and I started to doubt my chances of a good photo. Fortunately I got chatting to another photographer who directed me to a patch of brambles off a public footpath a few hundred metres outside the reserve - I would never have found it on my own. Arriving there, I was almost immediately greeted by a White Admiral posing nicely.



There were also four or five SWFs (at least) jostling for position and stopping to nectar with enough regularity that I could pick out particularly nice bramble flowers and be reasonably confident that a fritillary would arrive before long!





The only danger was in dallying too long to take the photo – it seemed that the most appealing bramble to each fritillary was "the one that's already got a fritillary on it"! I caught this one just moments before it was ambushed...



With the day only getting hotter, and no sign of the PHs descending, I decided to cut my losses and head on to the next site, with the idea that I might return for another try once the temperature started to drop in the evening...

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 01-Jul-18 07:50 PM GMT

26/06/2018, afternoon - Lulworth Cove

I was planning to stay the night in the Lulworth Cove YHA, so I decided to head straight down there and try my luck on Bindon Hill in the afternoon, reasoning that there would be a good chance of a sea breeze to cool the air and encourage things to fly. That proved to be correct, but of course the pretty stiff breeze made sharp photographs that much harder to take!

Arriving on Bindon Hill, I began following skippers. The first couple turned out to be of the Large variety...



...and then a couple of Smalls.



As the old saying almost goes, "third Skipper Lulworth", and I soon found pretty good numbers of Lulworths happily nectaring on Bugle.



I spent a while following the Skippers on both this side of the Cove, and on the section of coast path to Durdle Door, and managed to get some nice images showing off the 'starburst' wing markings.



This image demonstrates nicely the size contrast between the 'Small' Skipper and the even tinier Lulworth!



I headed back to the YHA over the summit of Bindon Hill, where at least four Dark Green Fritillaries were nectaring on a large patch of thistles. With the wind now buffeting the hill, I entirely failed to take any sharp pictures – but I quite like this one, where the focus fell on a neighbouring Small Skipper!



26/06/2018, evening – back to Alners Gorse

I did pop back up to Alners in the evening, but it turned out to be a mistake; rather than coming down in the cool evening, the butterflies had headed further up into the trees! I saw a cloud of at least seven White Admirals jostling for position at canopy level beside an oak tree, but the only butterfly to stray within range of my camera was this Comma.



There were a few dragonflies around, and my best picture of this evening visit was of a Black-tailed Skimmer.



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 01-Jul-18 10:33 PM GMT

Greta to see someone else feature Lulworths Callum, they can sometimes seem to be the forgotten species on UKB. I might have seen some of those Lulworths myself as I was there the day before 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 02-Jul-18 08:31 AM GMT

Hi! Callum, you've posted some great shots , lovely Butterflies 🦋 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 02-Jul-18 10:47 AM GMT

Thanks both! 😊

Wurzel wrote:

Greta to see someone else feature Lulworths Callum, they can sometimes seem to be the forgotten species on UKB.

Yes, it's strange – I guess they have the unfortunate combination of being roughly as restricted to a few sites in a small range as a Swallowtail, whilst also being relatively small and drab. I find them quite charming though.

Since you were also at the Cove, perhaps you might be able to corroborate something I observed! On Bindon Hill, I noticed that at least half of the Skippers (of all three species) were carrying *Trombidium breei* mites. I've never really noticed high densities of these mites on anything other than Marbled White before (though I know they can be found on a range of species). However when I moved over to Hambury Tout, just the other side of the valley, I couldn't see a single mite, despite equally high densities of Skippers – but there also seemed to be fewer MWs. Could the large population of MW on Bindon Hill be transferring the mites onto other butterfly species?

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 02-Jul-18 02:11 PM GMT

"I find them quite charming though." Being a Dorsetian they're obviously the best species in the country if not the World 😊

When I visited I only got have way up the cliff path from the Eastern side of the Cove and most of my shots came from the beach. Interestingly I don't recall seeing any of the mites on the Lulworths that I saw though Ill go back and have a proper book though your hypothesis of transference from the MW certainly sounds plausible 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 02-Jul-18 06:32 PM GMT

27/06/2018 – more Dorset rambling!

On Wednesday I decided to draw on the excellent advice of all you lot, heading to three of the sites you kindly recommended. First up was **Durlston NNR**. Although it was still hot and sunny, the strong wind that was buffeting Bindon Hill on Tuesday had not gotten any weaker! There wasn't a huge amount flying round the cliff path, except this (just for Wurzel 😊)...



...which might be my best Lulworth effort yet, and a few Marbled Whites.



Heading into the meadows, there were a few extremely ragged Blues flying about.



Conscious that the site has both Adonis and Common, and both had been reported still flying a week prior to my visit by **millerd**, I did my best to get record shots that would help me to ID them later. This was the most 'Adonis-ish' of those I saw, but I can't entirely convince myself it's not Common. Any thoughts?



There were good numbers of Burnets flying, including this pair of Six-spots getting frisky.



From Durlston I decided to move on to **RSPB Arne** in time for a mid-morning coffee and cake at the reserve cafe. Well, that proved to be the best decision I made all day – not because the huge slice of marble cake went down well (although it did 😊) but because as I arrived at the cafe, there was a flash of bright yellow from the butterfly garden outside...



Now, this is another which I'd like opinions on! It seems quite pale, and there is only one white dot on the hindwing underside. Is it just a paler-than-normal Clouded Yellow, or perhaps an *f. helice*, or maybe, just maybe, even a Pale Clouded Yellow?

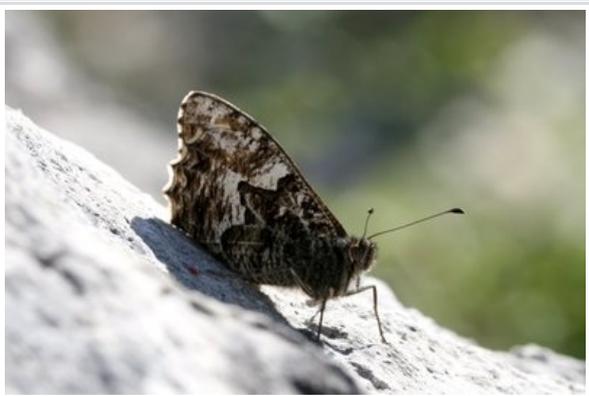


I spent a couple of hours wandering the reserve in search of Silver-studs, picking up my first Gatekeeper of the year, and a nice Green-veined White.



In the end I only found one SSB here, and although I watched him posing nicely on a series of heather flowers, it was too far from the path to photograph.

So, I decided to move on again, closing in on my final destination of Weymouth by heading for Portland and **Tout Quarry** in search of greater numbers of SSBs. To my surprise, the first butterflies of note I saw here were several very fresh Graylings, which posed nicely among the moonscape rocks of the quarry.



Wandering deeper into the quarry, I did indeed come across a couple more male SSBs.



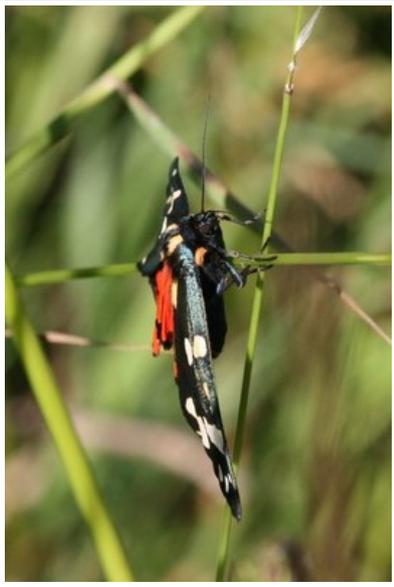
I still hadn't seen a female at this point, and I momentarily thought I'd found one as something very small and brown flew away from me and settled on a rock. However, extraordinarily, this was the first of three extremely tatty Dingy Skippers. It seems too early for these to be of a second brood, but for them still to be going at such a southerly – and microclimatically hot – site is equally remarkable to me.



Eventually I found my female SSB, but with her situation making me unwilling to risk disturbance and her positioning not great, this was the best I could manage... 😊



Heading back towards the car-park, there were a few Scarlet Tiger moths flying about, doing their utmost to convince me they were Red Admirals!



So ended my Devon/Dorset sojourn – a highly productive few days with several species I'd never previously had the privilege of seeing. Only the drive home remained, but I had grand plans for that, too...

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 02-Jul-18 08:13 PM GMT

Hi Callum, for my money that's a Common Blue and the Cloudy looks like a normal female standard issue one to me, sorry 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 02-Jul-18 08:15 PM GMT

Callum, that's fantastic, 🍀🍀🍀 it deserves three greens 😊 I think your CY is the first seen this year and to get all the other BF has well ! What a fantastic time you've had 😊 I'm no expert on Clouded Yellow but some one will know. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 02-Jul-18 08:52 PM GMT

Great Cloudy and Grayling Callum 🤔👍 Looking forward to 'the trip home' 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 03-Jul-18 09:04 AM GMT

bugboy wrote:

sorry 😊

No need to be sorry, bugboy! As I said, I really didn't think that was an Adonis Blue but just wanted a second opinion to be sure, as I've not seen one this year (and probably won't). As for the Clouded Yellow, I was delighted with it just as a Clouded Yellow – my first since 2014, as far as I can recall. It was only when processing the photos that I started to wonder. 😊 But then, I often struggle with IDing species when it requires distinguishing between two similar colour shades – I am one of the 8% of male moth-trappers who has to identify Green Carpets and Green Pugs by their patterns alone! (Does that deserve a :mrrredgreen: ?)

Thanks Goldie. Not sure I've seen a Cloudy on here yet this year but somebody must have already seen one somewhere?

Thanks Wurzel. Those two were probably my favourites too just because they were not 'in the plan' for the week. I love a surprise bonus!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 03-Jul-18 07:29 PM GMT

28/06/2018 – Bentley Wood

Given that my route home from Weymouth to Yorkshire could be easily diverted to almost any Purple Emperor site from Salisbury to Peterborough, I was spoilt for choice! I toyed with the idea of heading straight for Fermyn, which I used to visit annually as a teenager (with mixed success at best, not having a reliable source of flight period information like UKB back then!). Instead I plumped for the much-hyped Bentley Wood, reasoning that if I failed there I could still divert to Fermyn later in the day.

I arrived at Bentley at around 9.30. Turning into the car-park there were several butterflies watching the only empty parking space, which was an interesting conundrum! Once the occupier – a White Admiral – had flown off, I pulled in and, after a brief chat with the folk in the car-park, headed down the main track towards the Crossroads, where a couple of Emperors had apparently been recently spotted.

At this point I must thank **Peter Eeles** for his excellent guide to Bentley posted on the Bentley Wood thread last week, which meant I knew that PEs were a possibility almost immediately on leaving the car-park. I was fair marching towards the Crossroads but had just enough alertness to spot the large shape on the track before I scared it off. And there he was, my first Emperor in years!



He was wandering in and out of shade at the edge of the track, repeatedly returning to some pretty crusty dog muck to feed, which gave me the chance to take almost every variant of 'grounded PE' photo you can think of! There was a much fresher patch of dog muck about 50 m down the path – who knows why he picked this one instead.





By this point a couple coming up from the car-park, and a pair returning from the Crossroads, had both spotted my excitement and joined me in a little circle around HIM, so I stepped back to give them their chance at a photo and just soaked up the moment. It never gets any less exciting, does it? 😊

I walked on to the Crossroads and turned right, hoping to find White-letter Hairstreak on some wych-elms I'd been directed towards. In the end I "something Hairstreak-ish" lift briefly off the top of one of the elms, and that was it - but on the way there and back, there were lots of nice 'commoners' and also a friendly SWF.



I had a long drive left ahead of me and reasoned that it couldn't get better than the experience I'd already had, so I decided to head for the car. On my way back past the dog muck, there was a Comma proving that there was nothing wrong with the fresh pile the Emperor had turned his nose up at!



An Emperor briefly buzzed me as I neared the car-park – perhaps the same one as earlier. On returning to my car, I learned that another Emperor had actually spent a while settled on my driver's-side wing-mirror whilst I was gone! Some folk there had taken some great photos of it, and I've been keeping an eye out for them both on here and on Twitter – but no joy so far. Still, I now have an excuse to leave it even longer than usual before I next get the car washed... 😞

Re: CallumMac

by Pauline, 03-Jul-18 08:09 PM GMT

Hi Callum – just catching up on a few diaries. Great shots of the PE but my favourites are those lovely images of that beautiful Clouded Yellow 🍷 Like Goldie, I haven't noted any reports of them this season, not locally anyway. That GVW isn't half bad either! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by jenks, 03-Jul-18 08:34 PM GMT

Hi Callum,

I've enjoyed reading the report of your travels and viewing your excellent photos--you've certainly had a productive week or so ! I always face a difficult decision when I visit Bentley Wood. Do I stay in or very close to the car park in the hope that PE will fly in, or do I walk off down the switchback, turn left at the crossroad, and head to Donkey Copse. I've been successful in seeing HIM in all of those places in past years, it's a question of luck, being in the right place at the right time. So although you missed out on seeing one land on your car, you still got cracking photos of one on the ground. Well done.

A trip to Bentley Wood for me this coming weekend so hope to see some purple and also UK butterfly contributors.

Jenks.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-18 10:31 PM GMT

It's great that Bentley Wood paid off 😊 – I had a similar experience the very next day – though it'll probably be October before I get round to posting about it 😊😞 Great to see so many different types of shots of His Nibbs 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 04-Jul-18 09:34 PM GMT

Thanks all for your kind words. Good luck at Bentley this weekend, jenks. Wurzel, sounds like we kept just missing each other – Lulworth, Bentley! Oh well.

29/06/2018 – Thixendale

Oh hoh hoh! I may have been back home in Yorkshire but don't be thinking that means the fun stopped. 😊 With only two days left of #30DaysWild I was pretty determined to finish strongly. After work on Friday I decided to divert on my drive home up to Thixendale, one of the lovely dry chalk valleys in the Wolds not far from home. The point of interest here is that it formerly hosted a population of Northern Brown Argus. I say formerly, because since Brown Argus swept up through Yorkshire, it's unlikely that there are any remaining 'pure' NBAs remaining in the county – certainly not in the Wolds. However, studies have suggested that NBAs have hybridised with BAs in their former sites rather than being pushed out, so I reckon seeing an *Aricia* here counts!

My colleague Andy Suggitt had given me some precise pointers as to where the Arguses might be flying. I parked up, walked all of three metres from the car, and sure enough there was an Argus nectaring on a thistle!



I watched for a while as it moved flower a couple of times.



After losing track of it over a barbed-wire fence, I decided to wander down the road and check out some other possible spots. No luck here, but plenty of other species around, including Marbled White.



I returned to the car and before leaving, was able to relocate my original *Aricia* for a final snap, now on Bird's-foot Trefoil.



Only one day left of the challenge... where would I go?

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-18 10:03 PM GMT

Interesting to read about the hybridization, so were the NBAs that you saw *salmacis*? Looking forward to where you're heading next, Mountain Ringlet?

Have a godun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 06-Jul-18 09:07 AM GMT

Original population would have been *salmacis*, yes. Nowadays they will have a lot of genes from *A. agestis* as well. However they are still breeding on Rock-rose, even though most of the local *agestis* are on *Geranium*.

MR is a good guess – you know I love a northern butterfly – but actually there was a species rather closer to home that I hadn't seen yet this year... hopefully I'll get the pics up this evening! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Neil Freeman, 06-Jul-18 08:47 PM GMT

Hi Callum,

Just been catching up on your travels to Devon and Dorset. A great series of reports, I really enjoyed reading them 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 07-Jul-18 03:11 PM GMT

Thanks Neil!

30/06/2018 – Fen Bog

Large Heath was the one species amongst the Yorkshire specialities which I hadn't caught up with this year, so the decision on what to look for on the last day of #30DaysWild was an easy one! I was conscious that the flight period had been underway for a while, so rather than going for the nearest site (the Humberhead Peatlands NNR), I decided to head northwards, to Fen Bog. This YWT reserve is a little gem, set in a steep-sided river valley cutting through the North York Moors. If you are unsure whether to believe the claims of grouse shooters that their version of moorland management is good for biodiversity, come to Fen Bog and see what a northern moor should really look like!

I didn't even have to leave the car-park before I started seeing fritillaries – both Dark Green and Small Pearl-bordered are in good numbers along the roadside. Everything was a bit too active for photographs, but no matter – there would be plenty of time for that! I walked down into the reserve and soon spotted this Common Lizard sunning himself on a fence beside the track.



There were lots of Common Blues flying, though most were looking a bit tatty!



With Large Heath the objective, I found myself chasing lots of Small Heaths "just in case" – and there were lots to chase!



I struck out across the bog as the track dwindled to a fairly indistinct path. Ahead of me I spotted something flying – Small Heath-ish, but somehow it seemed less orange. I watched it settle, crept up, and sure enough...



I followed it for several minutes as it repeatedly settled deep in vegetation or in dappled shade! Eventually I got lucky as it settled in a nice pose, and let me get quite close.



I lost track of it after this photo, and it turned out to be the only Large Heath I saw. Still, there was plenty else to keep me entertained. I got some nice photos of both fritillary species...





...and both Large and Small Skippers. I still haven't seen an Essex Skipper in Yorkshire, though they have certainly arrived.



Besides the butterflies, there were some nice examples of other insects of heathlands, including this smart Latticed Heath...



...and two rather nice dragonflies: Keeled Skimmer (this is a female), and Golden-ringed Dragonfly.



That's my PD up to date! I walked my UKBMS transect at Strensall Common on Sunday, but didn't take any photos – just too busy scribbling, as it was the largest count (in abundance and species richness) I've ever had on that transect! Then it was a busy week at work, so I haven't really done any butterflying in the meantime; except that my first Yorkshire Brimstone of the new generation fluttered through the garden earlier this afternoon. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 08-Jul-18 07:30 AM GMT

Another species I've yet to see 🤔🇮🇪 I really need to do a Northern safari (well they do say it's a bit wild opp North 😊) one year. I didn't know that Large Heath would still be flying 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 09-Jul-18 10:36 PM GMT

Sounds like an enjoyable day, Callum. It's always interesting to see Large Heaths from various parts of the country. Yours look a little like mine in Wales.

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 10-Jul-18 07:14 PM GMT

Some lovely sights from your tour Callum, great to see that Clouded Yellow. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 10-Jul-18 07:29 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel! Hard to do the whole North justice in just one tour – you might find you want to come back 😊

Thanks David! Depending on which part of Wales you're in they might be the same subspecies – I believe we have *polydama* here which would be the same as in many parts of N & W Wales.

Thanks Andrew! It was a really nice bonus to my travels, and someone at BC Dorset reckons it's the first report they've had this year. 😊

08/07/2018 – Bempton Cliffs

We drove up to the coast on Sunday, to meet up with a friend of my partner's who recently moved to the area. We initially met at YWT's Filey Dams reserve, but found this to be a bit disappointing – the dragonfly pond being largely overgrown. There were a few nice birds about though, including a flock of Tree Sparrows.



Having exhausted the possibilities here in fairly short order, we voted to move on to the RSPB's centre at Bempton Cliffs. Obviously the main targets here are never going to be butterflies – but it still comes highly recommended!



That being said, there were good numbers of Painted Ladies flying up and down the clifftop paths. Probably the largest count of these that I've had in a single day since moving up north. I managed to get a couple of half-decent photos, although for the most part the butterflies were pretty restless.



I watched this female showing quite considerable in a thistle nearby to a large patch of nettles – though I don't think she ended up laying an egg.



I know that some fritillary species will lay eggs *near* the hostplant rather than actually *on* it – does the same go for the vanessids, or was this Lady just a bit jet-lagged after her long journey?

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 10-Jul-18 10:57 PM GMT

I reckon I might have to do a few 'Grand Tours' Callum 😊 Cracking shots of the Razorbills, Puffins and Kittiwakes 😊 Interesting behaviour, sometimes they seem to do a fair amount of 'ovi-posturing', almost as if they really want to lay but they somehow know that the plant is wrong 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 11-Jul-18 08:30 AM GMT

Liked you Large Heath encounter, Callum – but I am a bird nut too and I particularly like your shot of the pair of Razorbills. The Puffin goes without saying.

Cheers,

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 11-Jul-18 10:01 PM GMT

Hi Callum – I see you visited Fen Bog a few days before I did – with similar results! What a splendid place with some terrific butterflies. I'm sending you a PM about something I saw up there which you may be able to shed some light on.

Interesting you should mention the Brown Argus situation up on the Wolds – I took some photos of one up at the Wolds Lavender Farm a few years back which I was persuaded was not a NBA (this was in August I think, so I assumed it was a second brood individual and therefore had to be the southern species). It does look from what you say that the border zone is very mixed these days! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 11-Jul-18 11:09 PM GMT

Love the seabirds, Callum, especially the puffins. I didn't know they nested round that way.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 12-Jul-18 08:43 AM GMT

Thanks all. Bempton's a remarkable place. Not huge numbers of puffins (I once visited Staffa and Lunga, off the west of Mull, which were far better for puffins, being more rolling and grassy and full of rabbit holes) but you can get really close views of the full range of cliff-nesters. For me the huge colony of gannets is the main draw as you can get some great in-flight shots of them lifting off the clifftops.





Dave – yes it's very complicated! There are some bivoltine populations and some sites without rock-rose which have to be *agestis*. Then dotted amongst them there are still populations which are univoltine and using rock-rose, which makes it tempting to think they're *artaxerxes* – but the Mallet et al. 2011 paper which you may or may not have read (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1752-4598.2010.00122.x> – PM me if you want a full PDF!) suggests they are probably hybrids.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 12-Jul-18 10:13 PM GMT

I've seen plenty of gannets on the Isle of Man over the years but never one like in your first image. Is the reason it's marked like that because it is a juvenile?

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 12-Jul-18 10:29 PM GMT

Great shot of the sub-adult Gannet Callum (2-3 years old?) and also the behavioural shot showing regurgitation 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by philm63, 13-Jul-18 09:29 AM GMT

Hi Callum – Reading your diary with great interest. I am not that far from you in Bingley, West Yorkshire. Clocking up a few to visit locations from your posts. I used to multi-drop in the York area a long time ago, YO4 out to Riccall and Holme O S Moor and YO6 up to Helmsley and Kirby Moorside, so some of the place names are familiar. I am not familiar with Kiplingcotes, what is the nearest village? – Phil

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 13-Jul-18 12:31 PM GMT

Hi Callum, I'm still playing catchup after my northern quest. Interesting to read about the Argus situation up there. Sounds like it's far from straightforward at the moment.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 15-Jul-18 07:51 PM GMT

Thanks David! As Wurzel says, it's a sub-adult (thanks Wurzel!). They don't get the full adult colouration until their fifth summer, amazingly. Thanks Phil! Kiplingcotes is a couple of miles north-east of Market Weighton, so not far from Holme-oSM. Definitely worth a visit though it may be past its peak for this year by now. Last week of June is the best time, when it's crawling with Common Blues and Marbled Whites! Thanks bugboy! I'm a bit behind reading your diary too but I imagine you saw a few genuine NBAs on your travels!

14/07/2018 – North Cave Wetlands

With some of the big Hawkets around now, we decided to head to North Cave Wetlands for an afternoon stroll, to continue our quest to learn the dragonflies around the ponds there. There was the added bonus for me that I had seen photos on Twitter from NCW that appeared to show a male Essex Skipper. These arrived in Yorkshire a few years ago and are continuing to spread northwards, but despite checking hundreds of Small Skippers last summer and this, I was yet to see an Essex in Yorkshire!

Arriving at the reserve, we soon saw a good number of Gatekeepers – but all either out of camera range or not settling! However, the ragwort along the eastern edge of the reserve was proving very popular with a range of butterflies. We saw all four of Small Tort, Peacock, Red Admiral and Comma in

quick succession, as well as all three Whites.



There were quite a few new dragonflies for us to figure out around the ponds – although the water is getting dangerously low. My favourite was this – a Ruddy Darter.



We moved on around the reserve to the butterfly area, which as the name might suggest, is stuffed full of nectar! The gatekeepers here were settling a bit more, mostly on bramble.



There were plenty of golden Skippers here, mostly on knapweed. I checked quite a few, all of them Small...



...but eventually, this little guy poked his face above a flower, and with that I had my first Yorkshire Essex! 😊



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 15-Jul-18 08:22 PM GMT

Congrats on an Essex in Yorkshire Callum 😊 You've managed to catch the defining 'ink dabs' perfectly 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 16-Jul-18 06:53 AM GMT

Well done on your Essex Skipper, Callum.
Or should I say "Yorkshire" Skipper? 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 16-Jul-18 08:17 PM GMT

Thanks both 😊

15/07/2018 – Pocklington Canal

With only an hour or two to spare yesterday between returning from a long bike ride and lighting the barbecue, we decided to pop out for a stroll down Pocklington Canal – a SSSI which winds its way through the East Yorks countryside for miles, eventually emptying into the Lower Derwent Valley NNR.

The upper reaches of the canal, just below its head a mile from home, are not navigable, and the banks are completely covered in Rosebay Willowherb and other flowers. In turn these were covered in Whites – most of which were Green-veined – as well as a few Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks.

The undoubted highlight, though, was this pristine summer-brood Brimstone!



Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 16-Jul-18 09:54 PM GMT

Apart from confirming their spread northwards, that is a great cheeky shot of the Essex Skipper, Callum! 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 16-Jul-18 10:44 PM GMT

Lovely shot of the Brimstone, they're always value for money whatever the season 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by philm63, 17-Jul-18 08:21 AM GMT

Thanks for the info on Kiplingcotes Callum. I was more intending a visit next year anyway; so will be looking at a few sites in that general area. My next holidays are in August and I intend to do both Fairburn and Blacktoft in the days I have available to myself
Your diary is good reading, especially as it relates to places I actually know in most cases – Phil

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 17-Jul-18 09:27 PM GMT

Good to see a few Brimstones on the PD page, Callum, whilst your Essex Skipper is absolutely definitive for this species.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 18-Jul-18 08:34 AM GMT

Thanks Dave. It's nice when they make the identification easy! It was such a hot day that doing them on sex-brand was impossible – everything had wings tightly closed. But getting down low and watching the knapweed paid off.

Thanks Wurzel, David. I have surprisingly few good Brimstone photos as my normal experience is of them dashing about madly – so it was lovely to see one so settled and approachable. If you look at the EXIFs you'll see that this one kept returning to the exact same thistle for over 15 minutes between my first and last photos!

Thanks Phil. I will be at Kiplingcotes later today, actually, so I will send you an update! If you're visiting Fairburn then it is well worth sticking your nose into the new reserve at St Aidans as well – just a couple of miles up the road. They have breeding Little Owls regularly visible right outside the visitor centre. Don't go on the same day as me though – I've never seen them in three visits! 😊😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 21-Jul-18 06:08 PM GMT

20/07/2018 – Spurn Point

I spent every morning last week out catching Speckled Woods around East Yorks. We specifically needed females, to get some eggs from them for breeding purposes, but although we caught good numbers everywhere we looked, the sex ratio was almost 100% in favour of males. Perhaps a week or so too early!

On Friday, my partner's research group were heading out to Spurn Point for a day out. Plus ones were welcome and I'd never been to Spurn, so I decided to take the day off and join them! We parked at the new (and controversial!) YWT visitor centre, and a group of us decided to embark on the long walk all the way to the tip of the point.

We were barely out of the carpark when this Magpie Moth fizzed past us and dived deep into a hedge. This gave me a chance to experiment with the fill-flash techniques MikeOxon had told me about earlier in the week! I'm not 100% happy with the results, but undoubtedly the picture with flash was better than the one without.





We set off along the beach, and a Grey Seal drifted past, keeping a close eye on us.



After a while, the peninsula widens out and there are some lovely grassy meadows with plenty of nectar. We recorded most of the common butterflies here. Among them were several fresh second-brood Common Blues, which came as something of a surprise to me – this species is univoltine in many Yorkshire locations.

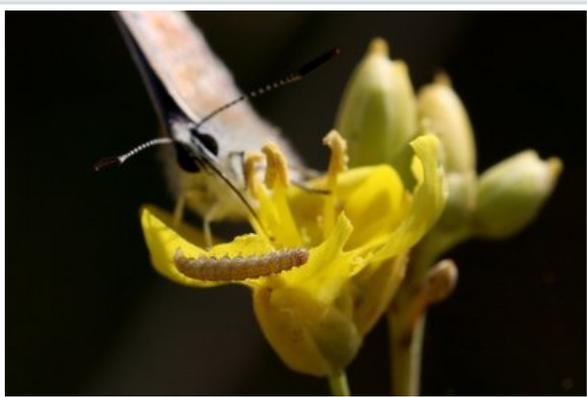




This individual appeared to be, possibly, a subtle aberration – with the spots on the unh elongated into ovals. I can't find this on British Butterfly Aberrations but it may be too minor to have gained a name!



It actually wasn't until processing these photos yesterday evening that I noticed the caterpillar of Diamondback Moth *Plutella xylostella* sharing the flower! Luckily, by chance, it was in focus in a couple of shots, including this – possibly one of the best 'arty' photos I've taken, and completely by accident... 😊



Spurn was the first place in Yorkshire to get Essex Skippers and I was able to confirm a record of one, though not with a particularly good photo!



Representing the migrants, Large Whites were present in huge numbers, as were Silver Ys, but we saw only one Painted Lady and sadly no Clouded Yellows, which I had been hoping to show to the others.



Besides the Whites, the next most abundant species was probably Gatekeeper, but it was hot enough to keep them mostly on the move.



We started back for the visitor centre, recording a range of interesting non-butterflies on the way, including: Six-spot Burnet, Brown-tail, vast numbers

of Cinnabar caterpillars, Common Darter (m & f), Oystercatcher, Snipe, and an obliging pair of Swallows actually nesting inside a bird-hide.





A really nice day out, and proof that you don't need to be a hard-core twitcher to enjoy a visit to Spurn!

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 21-Jul-18 11:30 PM GMT

Fascinating report from Spurn, Callum, somewhere I've always wanted to go since seeing how weird it looked on a map when I was a kid. I'm up in Wilberfoss at the end of next week, so may make that a day out! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 22-Jul-18 08:13 AM GMT

Great report from what sounds like a great day Callum 😊 The heatwave could be the explanation for the possible 2nd brood Common Blue and possibly for the unusual markings? 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 22-Jul-18 08:16 PM GMT

Sounds like a fabulous day out at Spurn, Callum. I didn't know Essex Skippers had found their way up there! If we get many more summers like this they'll be in Scotland before long!

Great selection of other wildlife too. Looks like a special spot.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 23-Jul-18 09:22 PM GMT

Thanks all. I did wonder whether it might be a heat-shock ab rather than a genetic one.

23/07/2018 - my garden!

The best butterfly sightings are the ones that you don't have to work for! It's still roasting hot in Yorkshire. I was watering the garden this evening when I got in from work when my partner said "is that a blue?". She looked on bemused as I dropped the hose and hared into the house for my camera! Fortunately this particular Blue - a female Holly - wasn't going anywhere fast, having decided to capitalise on the droplets of water that had gathered on the leaves of one of our shrubs!





I love Holly Blues, and I don't think I've ever seen as many in one year as I have this summer. Hopefully this drought doesn't cause problems for the larvae of this brood. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Old Wolf, 23-Jul-18 09:41 PM GMT

Congratulations on the Essex and a great shot of it too. I like it 😊

Looks like you had a good trip with plenty of photo opportunities. I love the grey seal!

It is always great when a visitor comes to the garden. Like yourself I have had Holly Blues visiting for a few weeks now but have failed to get shots as good as yours.

Re: CallumMac

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

Cracking set of shots Callum 😊 That looks like a useful trick for this year, I might take a water pistol out with me, spray a few leaves and wait for the butterflies to come to me 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 23-Jul-18 11:20 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

I love Holly Blues, and I don't think I've ever seen as many in one year as I have this summer.

Me too, Callum. Just like Brimstones, they're relatively common but they can't be totally relied upon so when one settles in a convenient spot, then it's your absolute duty to pay attention! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Jul-18 10:42 PM GMT

Thanks all. It seems that the butterflies have been taking the advice in your signature, Old Wolf, and staying hydrated!

24/07/2018 - Fenns and Whixall Moss

Fieldwork this week has taken me and a field assistant to the Welsh borders, and today specifically to Fenns Moss. This may be familiar to you as a good site for Large Heath, and also for White-faced Darter – though both species are now over for the year.

The weather was not sunny, but it was very warm and muggy, so a surprising number of butterflies and dragonflies were active. It took us mere minutes to find the Speckled Woods we needed – a stark contrast to last week's efforts in East Yorks! With rain in the air, we decided to save our next site for tomorrow and spend some time exploring this huge and diverse reserve.

The first butterfly on the list, to my delight, was a Small Copper – always a treat!



There were good numbers of Common Blues on the wing, though they were mostly not as fresh as those seen in Yorks at the weekend. Could there be a third generation coming down south – or will the drought conditions put paid to that?



Given the earliness of the year, we were extremely surprised to see a very fresh Large Skipper! I'm not aware of any circumstance under which this species has a second brood, so presumably this was just an extreme straggler.



And, talking of extremely fresh surprises...



Besides the butterflies, there were some nice odonates around, including Black Darter and Emerald Damselfly; and large numbers of immature toads, perhaps leaving the water in response to the first rainfall in a while.





Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 24-Jul-18 11:05 PM GMT

That is a late Large Skipper Callum, and not in too bad nick either 🤪 Cracking shot of the Emerald Damsel 🤩🌿

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 26-Jul-18 06:05 PM GMT

Cheers Wurzel!

25/07/2018 - Llanymynech Rocks

Fieldwork took us slightly further down the border to Llanymynech yesterday – another burning hot day. Starting our search in the lower quarry, we were slightly surprised to come across a Silver-washed Fritillary. The literature for this site (including on UKB!) lists several fritillary species but not this one. Nevertheless we quickly saw several more, with a peak count of 5 individuals in sight at the same time!





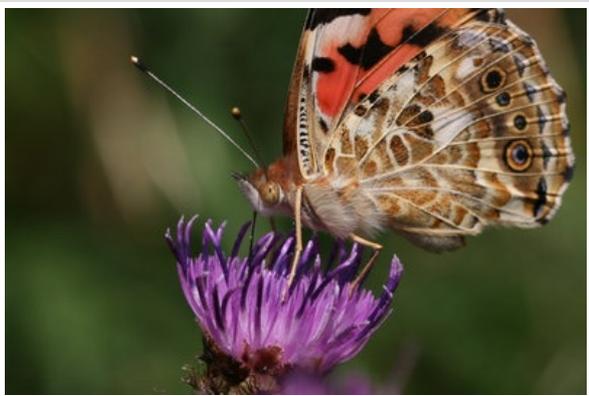
This one certainly has some stories to tell...
Lots of the 'commoners' were around too, including a *Pyrausta purpuralis*.



However, Speckled Woods were in fairly short supply, so we decided to walk up through the golf course towards the top meadow. We were met there by an absolute bonanza of colour, with dozens of SWFs, plus lots of very fresh Peacocks and Painted Ladies.



This might sound strange, but I've never really looked hard at the underside of a Painted Lady before. But it has to have one of the best undersides!





It was lunchtime, so we headed back down to the car park. While eating, we thought we saw a couple of things that might have been White-letter Hairstreaks, but with no close views and a few Holly Blues also present, we couldn't be certain.

With Speckled Wood surveys complete shortly after lunch and plenty of time to kill, we decided to walk up into the top quarry. We knew that Grayling records are very occasional here but we figured our best chances were in this area. Splitting up, we both independently glimpsed something that we were pretty sure was a Grayling – it flew off too quickly for certainty. I wasn't disappointed for long, because I can always be distracted with a nice Small Copper!



Leaving the top quarry, Rob mused that the steep slopes to the west looked like similar habitat to the Grayling sites he'd visited in Lincs. We decided to search this area a bit more closely – I moved up the slope in zig-zags whilst Rob watched from the bottom. As I neared the top (and exhaustion!) something exploded up from in front of me, flying down the slope and landing halfway between us. In the binoculars – a Grayling! It wasn't interested in hanging around, so no photo, but the reserve manager was very pleased to get the records.

By this point we were both suffering in the heat, so we headed back to the car and off in search of ice-cream, pausing only for a brief shot here and there. There's been much discussion on this site of tiny Common Blues in this summer generation, and I was reminded of that chat by this mini female!



The non-Lep highlight was this nice dragonfly – I think a female Common Darter.



Returning to the youth hostel, I went for a brief stroll in the late evening sun, and watched the Common Blues settling in to roost.



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 26-Jul-18 11:12 PM GMT

Cracking Silver-washed Callum 😊 But the star of the show really should go to that Small Copper, I'm used to seeing the chocolate ground colour contrasting to the orange but that one is almost black and orange 🤔👍😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 27-Jul-18 08:53 AM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

that Small Copper, I'm used to seeing the chocolate ground colour contrasting to the orange but that one is almost black and orange

It was a noticeably dark individual, Wurzel, especially when compared to a 'normal' one I saw a few minutes later. I was particularly intrigued by the black streak across the unh which you can see in my second photo – to me this suggests the dark colouration is a heat-shock aberration.

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 27-Jul-18 05:41 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

Wurzel wrote:

that Small Copper, I'm used to seeing the chocolate ground colour contrasting to the orange but that one is almost black and orange

It was a noticeably dark individual, Wurzel, especially when compared to a 'normal' one I saw a few minutes later. I was particularly intrigued by the black streak across the unh which you can see in my second photo – to me this suggests the dark colouration is a heat-shock aberration.

That is a particularly nice Small Copper but I think that black streak is nothing more than a tear in the wing, allowing the upperside of the opposite wing to show through.

Re: CallumMac

by Neil Freeman, 27-Jul-18 08:10 PM GMT

Interesting reports from your travels Callum and illustrated with some great photos. I particularly like the Painted Lady undersides 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 29-Jul-18 10:39 AM GMT

Thanks Paul – looking at another angle of that Small Copper you are spot on! 😊



It's cold and rainy here today – which is a very welcome break after the last couple of unrelenting months! It also gives me a chance to share these photos I took back at the start of the month, of Dark Bordered Beauty. We had agreed this year not to promote sightings on social media until after the flight season had finished, to keep visitors – and the associated trampling – to a minimum on what is a well-known and publicly accessible site. The flight season does now seem to be over, but it's been a record year for these moths at their last English colony – good news! 😊



Finally, I was wondering what software (preferably free software!) people use to process RAW files? I am seriously considering making the switch from shooting in JPEG to RAW...! 🤔

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 30-Jul-18 11:14 AM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

Finally, I was wondering what software (preferably free software!) people use to process RAW files? I am seriously considering making the switch from shooting in JPEG to RAW...! 🤔

I use Photoscape X. It does both Jpeg and RAW and seems very intuitive and able to make very subtle edits to images. I find it very easy to use which coming from someone who's not particularly computer savvy must be good!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 30-Jul-18 09:55 PM GMT

30/07/2018 - Creag Dhubh

We're based in Aviemore this week for fieldwork. A long drive up today, but we were spurred to keep pressing on by the prospect of a stop at Creag Dhubh just before arrival, in the hope of finding a late-straggling Northern Brown Argus.

It was 16.30 before we arrived at the layby, but sunny. We walked up the hillside to the foot of the cliff without seeing anything flying (of any species!). Perhaps we were too late? It has been hot, after all. We were just about to start walking back down to the car when something fluttered up from under my field assistant Rob's feet. A slightly tatty, but still lovely, NBA! With the evening cooling down and clouds periodically covering the sun, it was quite confiding and gave us both the chance for close-ups from all angles.





A good start to this trip. We really should find Scotch Argus on this trip as well – fingers crossed!

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 30-Jul-18 10:04 PM GMT

Cracking NBA Callum, not hard to ID that one 😊🇧🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Janet Turnbull, 30-Jul-18 10:26 PM GMT

Your 'devant jour' photo of the Dark Bordered Beauty is particularly lovely, Callum. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 02-Aug-18 02:58 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel 😊 Makes up for the confusion around the East Yorks hybrids a month earlier!

Thanks Janet 😊 They are lovely little moths. It's a real shame we didn't feel the site was healthy enough to publicise them this year, but maybe in future – the signs are promising.

31/07/2018 – Dava Way nr Dunphail

Tuesday saw us searching a variety of Speckled Wood-ish places in the area between the Spey and the Moray coast; most notably along the Dava Way, a long distance footpath over the moors between Forres and Grantown-on-Spey. The nice thing about searching for Speckled Woods in this part of the world and at this time of year is that the same areas of habitat are also hoaching with Scotch Arguses!





Incidentally, I made my first steps into shooting in RAW this week, setting my camera to "RAW + L" for the first time. I was very glad I did. These two above are edited from the RAW versions of photos I originally thought (when sorting the JPEGs) to be overexposed; but that turned out not to be the case when I looked into the RAW files. I think my camera's auto white-balance mode might not be brilliant when faced with a dark butterfly on a bright day. I had similar issues when photographing Mountain Ringlets a couple of months back, which makes me wonder what might have been... I guess I'll just have to go back next year for them! 😊

The garden of the youth hostel in Aviemore had a nice bonus that evening, though there wasn't enough light for taking really nice photos:



Back in York now, and planning our trip to Oban next week, when no doubt I'll be taking lots more Scotch Argus photos!

Re: CallumMac

by Old Wolf, 02-Aug-18 03:26 PM GMT

Hello Callum.

Great shots especially the Painted Lady undersides 🍷 . I have always loved the wing undersides of this butterfly.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 02-Aug-18 09:57 PM GMT

Fantastic to see the Scotch Argus Callum 😊 A species that I won't be seeing for a good while yet 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 03-Aug-18 10:58 AM GMT

Great shots of the SA Callum, the Small Copper caught my eye though, I've been on holiday in Kent and not seen one and all year I've looked for them here in the North without success , so it was great to see yours 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 05-Aug-18 09:25 PM GMT

Thanks all! 😊 Goldie, I've been quite lucky with Small Coppers this year. Always lovely to see them. On which note...

05/08/2018 – pootling about East Yorks

My partner had a couple of childhood friends visiting this weekend. I agreed to taxi duty whilst they did girlie things in the knowledge that I could drop them off and spend some time exploring a few different sites to usual, in the Hull area, while I waited!

The first such site was the car-park of the **Beech Tree** pub in the suburban 'village' of Willerby (officially this is separate to the city of Hull, but I challenge anybody to look at a satellite photo and tell me where Willerby ends and Hull begins!). This is apparently a good spot for White-letter Hairstreaks, and reports are still dribbling in of these from various parts of Yorkshire. But the bramble beneath the elm was all over, so I wasn't optimistic. I gave it half an hour, during which time several Holly Blues flew by without stopping, but no luck.

With all of the Holly Blues about, I decided to move a mile up the road to **Wood Lane** – a site I have visited several times to sample Speckled Woods, and have often seen HBs close up as they nectared on brambles by the path. Worth a try... 😊

I knew I didn't have long to spend here, but I was only about 100m down the lane when I saw the first HB. It initially seemed to be playing peek-a-boo...



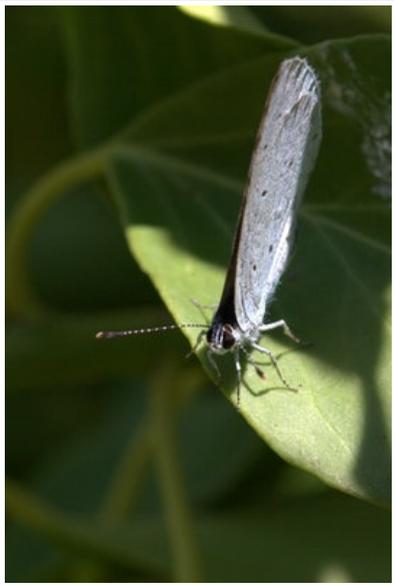
...but soon came around the flower to drink.



In total I counted 6 HB flying together along a 30m patch of brambles – by far the highest density I've ever seen. They were joined by good numbers of Specklies, my sampling evidently not having dented the population! (phew... 😊)



I got the call to pick L up and started heading back to the car, pausing to snap one more HB as it posed on Ivy.



Having seen L's friends back up the road and cooled down with an ice-cream, I suggested we pop into **Kiplingcotes** for a stroll on our way home. I'd not been for about a month as the Marbled Whites would be long gone, but I'd had a tip-off from **millerd** that he'd recently seen Wall Brown here! Worth a try... 😊 😊

There was a tatty, but still nice, Comma on the path down to the reserve which posed nicely.



Lots of Common Blues were flying, many of them pretty fresh – we're borderline here whether this species is univoltine or bivoltine in any given year, but this is clearly a second generation.



Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers are starting to look a little bit tatty, but every one gave me a momentary buzz before I found it was another not-a-Wall!



We spent quite a while searching the sheltered corner where millerd had seen his Walls, but with no luck. Well, not *no* luck – there was a lovely Small Copper! 😊



Just as we were about to give up, I walked to the meadow above the pit and looked back down the bank into it – to see not one but two Wall Browns flying, totally inaccessibly, near the top of the steep slope! Thus ensued about 20 minutes of scrambling, slipping, and near misses, during which I put horrendous grass stains down my best 'smart' shorts! 😊 Nothing better than record shots to show for it...



...but my conservative estimate was that I saw at least 7 Wall Browns – perhaps the population here is a bit healthier than I gave it credit for. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 05-Aug-18 09:53 PM GMT

I'm glad I didn't imagine the Walls, Callum! I wonder if the population is based in the meadow rather than the pit itself. Worth a look in the spring... A healthy number of Common Blues too by the looks of things. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 05-Aug-18 11:56 PM GMT

That is a lovely Small Copper Callum and good job getting the Walls 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 06-Aug-18 11:30 PM GMT

The north of the country has a lot going for it, Callum, especially when the weather is hot like it has been recently.

Love your Walls but your Northern Brown Arguses make me particularly green with envy, especially when the sport a white spot!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 08-Aug-18 06:30 PM GMT

millerd wrote:

I wonder if the population is based in the meadow rather than the pit itself. Worth a look in the spring... A healthy number of Common Blues too by the looks of things. 😊

Thanks Dave. That would seem to fit with my observations on Sunday – they would pop down over the lip of the pit to bask on bare chalk on the slope but often returned to fly over the meadow itself. The CB colony is looking very healthy this year! 😊

Thanks Wurzel, every Small Copper is a lovely Small Copper though 😊

Thanks David. I guess most UKBers, if they have seen NBA at all, will have seen the Cumbrian unspotted (or should that be spotless!) population. All the Scottish ones I've seen have been right at the end of the flight period – I must try to get up there for some freshly-emerged ones some time!

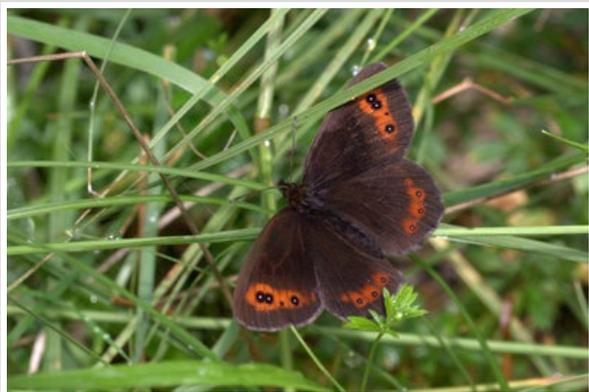
07/08/2018 – sampling the Scotch

Argus, that is! We were up in Oban this week on our Speckled Wood quest. Monday afternoon took us to **Shian Wood**, a wonderfully remote SWT reserve 20 minutes north of Oban, featuring ancient mixed birch woodland and damp meadows perched above a sea loch. Despite the muggy weather and occasional showers, the butterflies were on the wing in decent numbers – these Scottish types are tough, tough, tough! Scotch Argus, Green-veined White, Peacock, and obviously Speckled Wood seen, but the light far too poor for photography.

Tuesday morning, and we went slightly further north to **Glasdrum Wood** of Chequered Skipper fame! As before, lots of butterflies but not much sunshine. Speckled Woods were around in good numbers where the wood opened up into small clearings and meadows – the habits of this population are so different to what we're familiar with down south.



Scotch Argus were mostly found in the same places, and occasionally we even saw the two species scrapping for perches!



We found this nice micro-moth in one of the meadows – *Catoptria margaritella*, a locally-common specialist on cotton-grass.

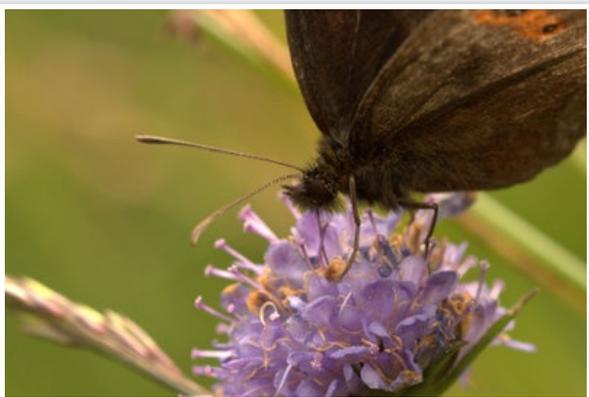
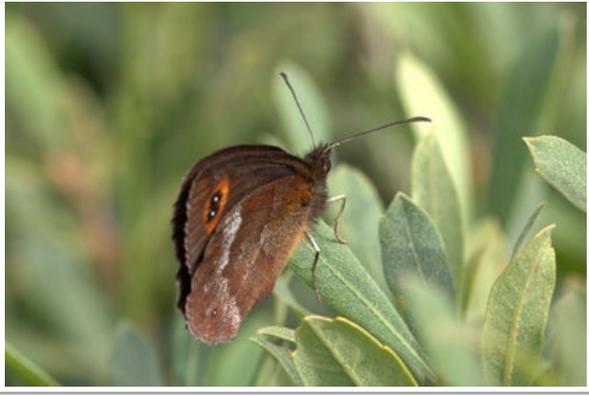


With our surveys finished and the weather closing in, we headed into Oban to try and connect with one of its strangest residents. Black Guillemot is a very rare bird in the UK – but here it nests in pipes set into the harbour wall, mere inches below the feet of the thousands of tourists passing through on their way to and from the Hebrides! We thought we might be a bit late in the year, but happily one pair was still hanging around with a very large chick that must be only days from fledging.



By now the sun had re-appeared, so we decided to return to Shian to see what it looked like in nice weather! In a couple of hours wandering around the reserve we didn't add to our species list from the previous day, but the sheer numbers of both Speckled Woods and Scotch Arguses were jaw-dropping.







I've seen a few comments in the last few days on this forum expressing concern about the plight of Scotch Argus in England. Whilst it would be sad to lose the two Cumbrian populations, you can rest easy in the knowledge that there is no pressing risk to this species in Scotland!

A couple of final treats from Tuesday evening and this morning, seen on the shore outside the Oban youth hostel – Hooded Crows are always a treat, and (record shot only) I was extremely excited to see an Otter!



Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 08-Aug-18 10:09 PM GMT

I was at Shian Wood a few weeks ago, during my Mountain Ringlet quest. It really is a beautiful little reserve, I almost expected to find fairies perched on the moss and lichen covered branches 😊. I was actually after the Marsh Fritillaries which supposedly inhabit there but never got a sniff of them 🤔. I didn't see many butterflies there but there were at least 3 batches of Peacock larvae so it's no surprise you saw them there.

With regard to the English Scotch Argus, things are looking decidedly worrying at Arnside but they seem safe at the other site at Smardale.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 08-Aug-18 10:23 PM GMT

Scotch Argus number 3 fairly jumps out of the screen Callum 🤩👁️ I can't imagine getting that close to a Tystie Callum, on the two occasions that I've seen them it was through a scope 🤔👁️

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 08-Aug-18 11:11 PM GMT

Great that you caught up with fresh Scotch Argus, Callum. It's a lovely but much under-rated butterfly.

It's been a couple of years since I saw it last, so I must endeavour to put matters right at some point.

Re: CallumMac

by Neil Freeman, 09-Aug-18 06:11 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

...I've seen a few comments in the last few days on this forum expressing concern about the plight of Scotch Argus in England. Whilst it would be sad to lose the two Cumbrian populations, you can rest easy in the knowledge that there is no pressing risk to this species in Scotland!...

Good to know Callum, I would love to make the trip sometime to see Scotch Argus in the country it is named after, it only seems right.

Whilst I was concerned about the low numbers of Scotch Argus at Arnside Knott during my recent visit, I believe that they are doing much better at Smardale Gill.

Interestingly I have also seen a couple of photos on twitter of Scotch Argus apparently taken at Grassington in the Yorkshire Dales. According to Jeremy Thomas in 'The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland' this colony became extinct in 1955 and consisted of a distinctive race. Do you know if this is a re-introduction?

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 09-Aug-18 09:17 PM GMT

On that latter point, Neil, I should reveal that I had an ID request lately from that very area and it was most definitely a Scotch Argus.

This butterfly may well be present in locations beside its two known ones in England.

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 10-Aug-18 02:23 PM GMT

Nice South Argus shots Callum, I'll miss them this year so nice to see them in your post 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 10-Aug-18 03:11 PM GMT

Thanks bugboy. Shame about the Marshies. I thought the habitat looked promising and there was plenty of DBS, but didn't spot any larval webs.

Thanks Wurzel. It's so strange to see them so close, I almost switched to the macro lens!

Thanks David, Neil. Glad to hear the Smardale population is healthier. The Grassington population is a relatively recent unlicensed reintroduction. I'm not sure which race they are - I've not been to see them - but obviously they won't be the original unique race. What are people's views on unlicensed reintroductions on UKB? We've had a number of them in recent years in Yorkshire.

Thanks Goldie. That's a shame - you must be just about the nearest UKBer to their Smardale and Arnside populations!

Re: CallumMac

by trevor, 11-Aug-18 07:47 AM GMT

Congrats. from me too for the Scotch Argus images.

Your Speckled Wood looks interesting as well, an ab. possibly ?.

Trevor.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 12-Aug-18 12:13 AM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

The Grassington population is a relatively recent unlicensed reintroduction. I'm not sure which race they are – I've not been to see them – but obviously they won't be the original unique race. What are people's views on unlicensed reintroductions on UKB? We've had a number of them in recent years in Yorkshire.

Thanks for that, Callum. I didn't know they were a reintroduction but I suppose it makes sense given their historic distribution.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 12-Aug-18 08:33 AM GMT

Thanks Trevor. Actually those are two separate Speckled Woods – it's just how they look up in the Oban population. One of many ways in which they are noticeably different to what we're accustomed to in England.

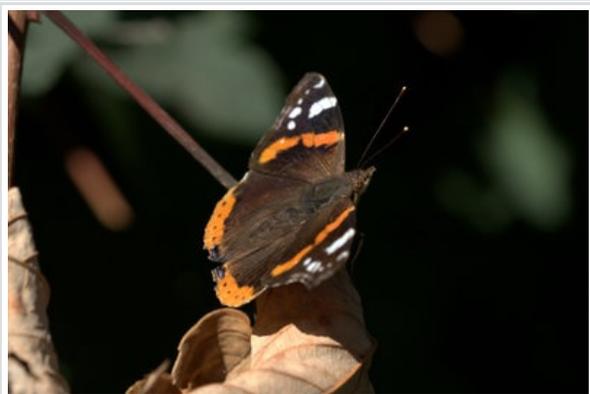
Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 14-Aug-18 08:59 PM GMT

Sad family circumstances meant that I had once again to travel down to Devon this weekend. Normally a trip down south in the summer is something I relish but this time I was dreading it. However, being one to always make the best of any bad situation, I managed to find a couple of opportunities to seek out – and find solace in – some nice wildlife.

13/08/2018 – RSPB Bowling Green Marsh

In the late afternoon on Monday, my parents, my partner and I went out for a quick stroll around Bowling Green Marsh, part of the RSPB's wider network of reserves fringing the Exe Estuary. The sun was out and we encountered this Red Admiral at the top of the lane into the reserve.





After the lane turns and runs along the back of the reserve, we began to see Speckled Woods at regular intervals.



We went down to the viewpoint over the Clyst estuary and were very surprised to see this fox patrolling the far bank. "Far" is a relative term, as it passed within 20 metres of us, staring us down in the certain knowledge that we were no threat in that terrain!





14/08/2018 – Pinfarthings Banks

With the long, long drive back up to Yorkshire facing us today, I had been giving some thought to whether it might be possible to break the journey somewhere more interesting than Hopwood Park Services! But with the weather forecast looking grey and overcast I had stopped short of making any clear plans. As the M5 junction to Stroud appeared a mile ahead, though, the sun broke out. L, who is very good to me, 😊 agreed to pull off the motorway for a short detour! We parked up just above the village of Amberley on the edge of Minchinhampton Common and walked up onto the Banks. It took all of 10 seconds to find what we had come to see!



The Adonis Blues were flying in really good numbers – I estimated a count of at least 30, which were 90% males. Many were very fresh and posed nicely. Hard to do justice to the astonishing colour in a photograph but I think a few of my efforts came close!





Amongst all the excitement, I was able to add another very interesting observation to the 'wing-roll' saga – a male wing-rolling vigorously and constantly whilst in cop! The photos aren't brilliant so I will post them on the wing-roll thread for information, rather than here. 😊

The road ahead was long, and luckily the sun disappeared again after about 15 minutes on site, making the decision to press on for home that much easier!

Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 15-Aug-18 10:02 AM GMT

Hi, Callum. Great pics of Adonis. I used to live in Chalford about 20 years ago, a village at the bottom of Minch Common. At the time, butterflies were not on my radar, it was birds and flowers for me, so I had no idea there were Adonis so close to my then house! I shall take a look at that wing-roll pic of yours.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 16-Aug-18 07:45 AM GMT

Nice Adonis images, Callum, and that's a marvellous view of the fox. They're much more shy when I see them here in south Wales.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 17-Aug-18 10:50 AM GMT

Thanks Ernie. If you left Chalford 20 years ago then the chances are there *weren't* Adonis Blues close to your house! I believe (and somebody will correct me if I have the dates/sites wrong) that they first appeared in the far south of the Cotswolds in around 2001. It wasn't, and isn't, known whether they (a) got there themselves, (b) were put there, or (c) had been there undetected all along! Since then they have flooded through the area and can now be found in decent numbers at a range of sites. In my (limited) experience Pinfarthings Banks on the western edge of Minchinhampton Common is pretty much the best spot, though BC's Rough Bank reserve also has a good population.

Thanks David. I think this one was a young male and it looked pretty thin. Possibly a little bit desperate, struggling for food and driven out onto the estuary mud in hope of a stranded fish. In any case it clearly knew that with 10 m of mud and 10 m of river between us and it, there would be plenty of time to escape if we showed too close an interest!

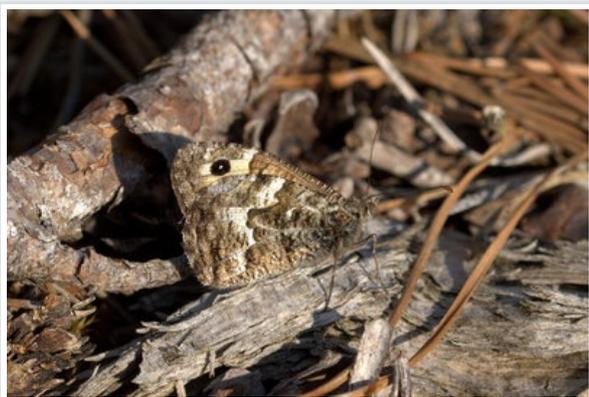
Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 21-Aug-18 09:23 PM GMT

21/08/2018 - **Hollesley Common, Suffolk**

Fieldwork has had us working around the Ipswich area over the last couple of days. A slightly early finish today, with the sun still shining, was too much to resist and we headed to Hollesley Common, which I had previously visited and seen good numbers of both Graylings and Small Coppers.

This visit was no different!





The pine branches and cones on the ground made for some interesting photographic scenes...



The biggest surprise was this Meadow Brown, still clinging on. They've been over for a couple of weeks at least in Yorkshire.



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 22-Aug-18 07:51 PM GMT

Cracking sets of Adonis, Grayling and Small Coppers Callum 😊 Bowling Green Marsh is a great site, the merest mention brings back lots of happy memories - Little Stint, Spoonbills and best of the bunch Glossy Ibis so thank you for making me recall 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 23-Aug-18 10:26 AM GMT

Great selections Callum, especially the Scotch Argus and Adonis. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 23-Aug-18 10:38 PM GMT

Great to see that Graylings are still about, Callum. Makes me wonder whether I still might catch up with then in my area before the end of August!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Aug-18 05:29 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel! I also saw my one and only Glossy Ibis at BGM – I wonder whether it was the same one...

Thanks Andrew, thanks David. Last year I saw fresh Graylings at Hollesley on August 31st (I remember because it was transfer deadline day and the mobile coverage wasn't good enough for me to get minute-by-minute updates on Arsenal buying no players and selling no players 😊).

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Aug-18 05:48 PM GMT

22/08/2018 – Denbies Hillside

Wednesday's only real task was to transfer from Ipswich to Salisbury for the next bout of Speckled Wood sampling. The forecast was warm but overcast pretty much all day, but after a morning sat in queues around the M25, we fancied a break and some leg-stretching regardless of the weather! So we pulled off and made our way up to Denbies.

The forecast was pretty much spot on – warm and muggy but no sign of the sun. To our surprise, the warmth was enough to get quite a few butterflies up! The first to cross my path was a female Adonis Blue.



That was shortly followed by this female Chalk Hill Blue. My first Chalkie of the year, taking me to 50 species in 2018 (the first year in which I've hit this mark!).



If there was any doubt in my mind as to the identity of that female (and there was lots! 😊), then I could be completely confident in the several males I soon found. All slightly worn, making them almost white at first glance.



I spent a happy half-hour chasing Blues up and down the slope, finding many further Adonis (less fresh than those at Pinfarthings a couple of weeks back, but still lovely!) and a couple of Common, plus some Brown Arguses, to go with the Chalk Hills.



As is always on chalk, there was plenty of interest besides the butterflies: a Treble-bar moth, a couple of Rufous Grasshoppers, some nice fungi which looked from some angles rather like they were mimicking Carline Thistles, and lots of empty Roman Snail shells (despite our searching, we didn't find an occupied one!).





Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 24-Aug-18 05:55 PM GMT

Great set of shots Callum even if the butterflies are starting to look a little past their best 😊 Lovely colour on the second female Adonis Callum Also the fungi seem inside out 😊, the gills are on the outside 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

ps the Glossy I saw was in 2002 (I think – it was a long time ago 😊😊)

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 24-Aug-18 05:57 PM GMT

23/08/2018 – Shipton Bellinger

After finishing fieldwork for the week, the year, and the study, we were able to squeeze in a brief visit to Shipton Bellinger on Thursday morning before hitting the road back to York. The target here was Brown Hairstreak – something of a bogey species for me. Many thanks to **Wurzel** and **millerd** for helping me with directions to, and around, the site.

Weather conditions were OK but as soon as we arrived it became clear that things were not going to be as simple as hoped – a sled-dog racing event was in town, and this was the view of the hedge that is supposed to be the brostreak hotspot...



Each of those caravans came with its own pack of Alaskan Malamutes. "These are working dogs, not pets – don't approach them without the handler's permission", said the sign. Oh well! There were other spots to search. 😊

Plenty of browns about, including some surprisingly fresh Meadow Browns and a large emergence of Small Heaths.



I even found that with fieldwork done I could once again take pleasure in just *looking* at Speckled Woods!



And did we see a Brown Hairstreak? Well, yes – a classic hairstreak sighting! A single individual, perched high up in a hawthorn, well beyond the range of even my 'birding' lens, and not interested in descending. Here's the record shot – I'll have to return next year to try for better! 😊



Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 24-Aug-18 06:05 PM GMT

That's one more male Brown Hairstreak than I've seen this year, Callum. 😊🇬🇧 I also see you've had a trip to Denbies – always worth a visit if you are anywhere nearby. Did you see any Silver-spotted Skippers? There were a few whizzing about a couple of days earlier.

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by trevor, 24-Aug-18 06:56 PM GMT

Sorry to read of your disappointment with the Brown Hairstreak.
I believe that Doggyfest at Shipton is an annual event and always clashes with the BH season.
You could always try Sussex if you are down South at the right time. There are some excellent sites here.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 25-Aug-18 08:33 AM GMT

A male Brown Hairstreak this late in August is an impressive sighting, Callum! Shame your attempts to track down females were stymied by potentially dangerous dogs. 😞

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 25-Aug-18 08:33 AM GMT

A male Brown Hairstreak this late in August is an impressive sighting, Callum! Shame your attempts to track down females were stymied by potentially dangerous dogs. 😞

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 25-Aug-18 11:02 AM GMT

Hi! Callum, you've seen more Butterflies than me, we've had about two hours of Sunshine here in two weeks, today we've got the Sun hope fully some thing will arrive in the garden 😊 Glad you saw the Hair Streak Callum, must give you a green for that 🍀😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 26-Aug-18 12:12 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel! That sounds about right for my Glossy Ibis as well.
Thanks millerd! Very pleased with the Brown Hairstreak, my first definite sighting (after a fly-by last year that could have been something else!). No Silver-spots unfortunately, though we were looking. I think the weather was too cool and cloudy - most of our blues were flying fairly reluctantly and spending long periods trying to bask.
Thanks Trevor, David - not really disappointed as we got to see one, and as David says, a male at this point is a decent record!
Thanks Goldie! Yes, it's been pretty grey and grizzly in Yorkshire when I've been back at weekends, hence the lack of PD updates last weekend! I've been glad of the opportunities to get down south for some sun. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 26-Aug-18 02:44 PM GMT

25/08/2018 - North Cave Wetlands

Not a huge amount to report from yesterday's visit to NCW. Conditions had a distinctly autumnal feel to them, and that was reflected in the butterfly fauna. A couple of brief sightings of Painted Ladies fuelling up for the long journey south, but no photos to show for it. Even the small number of second-brood Common Blues are starting to look pretty tatty.





The lack of butterflies meant we spent a little longer with the dragonflies. A nice range of hawkers on show, including these Migrant and Southern.





Finally, this Little Grebe found a good fishing spot right in front of us!



Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 26-Aug-18 04:24 PM GMT

Sorry Shipton didn't deliver the promised bucket load of Brostreaks Callum but at least you got a record shot 😊. The Dog sled thing is an annual event and I would have warned you about it but I thought that it had already happened as there had already been a dog show event here earlier in August and I thought incorrectly that they were the same thing 😞 Next time if I'm around give me a holler/PM and I'll come on over and make sure you get your quarry – I generally just step over their tape lines and check out the main hedge anyway 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 30-Aug-18 10:16 AM GMT

~~[quote]~~Conditions had a distinctly autumnal feel to them, and that was reflected in the butterfly fauna. A couple of brief sightings of Painted Ladies fuelling up for the long journey south, but no photos to show for it. Even the small number of second-brood Common Blues are starting to look pretty tatty.

That's pretty much the way I'm seeing things here in south Wales, Callum. For me, the second half of August is now part of autumn.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 02-Sep-18 06:23 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel – I may well take you up on that offer! 😊

Thanks David. Certainly has been feeling autumnal this week, though today summer showed it still has a little to give!

02/09/2018 – Strensall Common

I'm not expecting much in terms of butterflies from any of the local sites from now on, so with the weather today being gorgeous (much better than forecast), we decided to head along to Strensall where we could combine my UKBMS transect with another round of dragonfly-learning.

Butterfly numbers were about as low as expected, with only four species recorded on the transect. However, one of those was Small Copper, with quite

a few individuals seen, and several of those very fresh.



The most numerous species by far was Speckled Wood. The habitat here is surprisingly open for this species to be doing so well.



If butterfly numbers were on the low side, the same certainly couldn't be said for dragonflies! The most abundant species was Black Darter – a new one for L, and I'd only seen the females before.





On the way out we saw this one, which gave us some pause for thought. I think it is an immature Ruddy Darter.



Re: CallumMac

by Old Wolf, 02-Sep-18 08:50 PM GMT

Hello Callum,

A shame on the clash with the dog event but at least you have the small consolation of actually seeing one.

The second Adonis female photo (Denbies 22/08) is a beauty 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 02-Sep-18 10:05 PM GMT

The Small Copper seems to be doing quite well at the moment, lovely shots of yours Callum 😊 I've still not seen a Black Darter 🙄🇮🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 03-Sep-18 07:12 PM GMT

Thanks Old Wolf! 😊 Sometimes I think the duller conditions can really bring the best out of the less colourful butterflies. C.f. my roosting Common Blue on 25/07 – another picture that I was really pleased with!

Thanks Wurzel. A colleague of mine counted 42 Small Coppers on Walmgate Stray this lunchtime, annoyingly I had left my camera at home and the weather's not going to be good again til Thursday! 😞 The Black Darters are fab, though. Like many of our dragonflies – a bit of a northern speciality! I've learned this summer that what the south gains in butterflies, it loses in dragonflies. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 03-Sep-18 09:12 PM GMT

It's strange how Small Coppers seem to be so common in many areas right now. If there was one foodplant I'd expect to have suffered as a result of this summer's long, dry spell it would have been sorrel.

Somehow though, this hasn't handicapped *phlaeas* in the slightest. Perhaps the butterfly's early stage predators took a bigger 'hit' than the butterfly itself?

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 04-Sep-18 07:59 AM GMT

David M wrote:

It's strange how Small Coppers seem to be so common in many areas right now. If there was one foodplant I'd expect to have suffered as a result of this summer's long, dry spell it would have been sorrel.

Somehow though, this hasn't handicapped *phlaeas* in the slightest. Perhaps the butterfly's early stage predators took a bigger 'hit' than the butterfly itself?

Yes, it's remarkable how well they seem to have fared! Somebody (**millerd?**) said to me recently that the drought seemed to have broken at just the right moment, with fresh green shoots of sorrel coming up at around the time when the 2nd gen *phlaeas* were egg-laying. So maybe they just got lucky!

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 05-Sep-18 09:48 AM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

David M wrote:

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That's perfectly plausible, Callum. Clearly, there MUST have been sufficient LHP for so many to have emerged lately.

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 05-Sep-18 09:53 PM GMT

Hi Callum – yes, I did mention it. On my visit to Calley Heath, though the grass over the rabbit warren was still brown/grey and lifeless, the green leaves and shoots of sorrel were already emerging and the Small Coppers were taking advantage. This has been repeated at both the Surrey Heathland sites I've been too recently. It looks as if sorrel comes back more rapidly than other plants after drought and consequently the Small Copper is doing well. However, it sounds as if the timing of the return of the rain was all wrong down at Dungeness – though hopefully all will recover in due course.

Interesting to hear about the flood of them at Walmgate Stray, though! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 06-Sep-18 09:10 PM GMT

06/09/2018 – Summer's last hurrah

With all the chatter about Small Coppers, and the remarkable count reported from the Stray on Monday, I've been keeping an eye out all week for suitable conditions to go and have a look for myself. I really didn't think today would be the day – it was so autumnal when I got up! But I glanced up from my computer screen at around 2pm to discover the sun had broken through! I dashed down to my car, grabbed my camera and headed out onto **Walmgate Stray**. It took all of 20 seconds to find a Small Copper!



There were a couple trying to fly, spending long periods basking between short hops. Soon the sun went in – probably just as well as it forced me back to my desk before my absence had been noticed!



By the time I left to drive home after work, the skies had cleared to mainly blue, with the occasional cloud skudding across the sun. Buoyed by my earlier success I decided to pop into **Calley Heath** for half an hour.

Again, it only took seconds to find the first Small Copper, with one flying in the area immediately inside the gate.



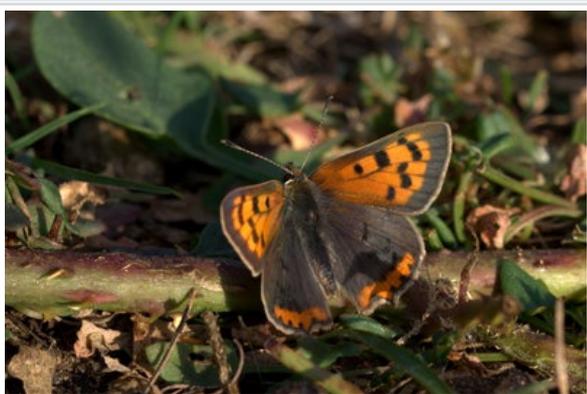
I wandered further into the reserve but without seeing any further butterflies. After a few minutes a larger cloud covered the sun. With at least 5 minutes to wait before the next sunburst, I decided to head to a small patch of Rock-rose where I had previously found Brown Argus. I must have put my lucky pants on this morning, because sat on a sedge right above the Rock-rose was a roosting female!



The sun soon came back out, and my female began to bask. Pretty shortly another flew in a couple of metres away.

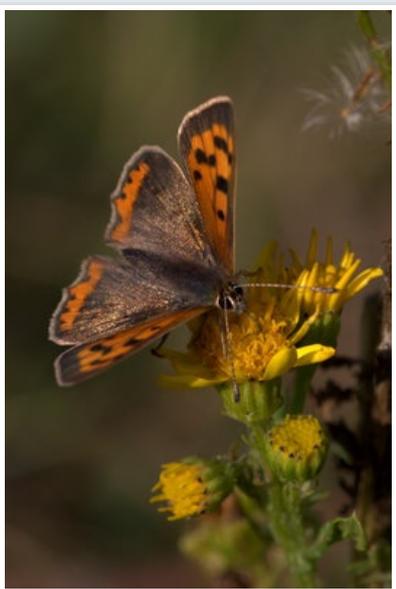


Time was slipping by, so I decided to head back and spend another 5 minutes in the first area and search for more Coppers. This turned out to be a good decision, as there were at least four flying around!



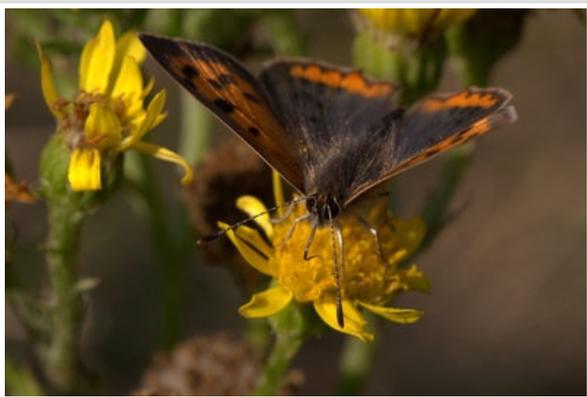


These were super-freshly emerged. I think this is the first time I've seen a Small Copper with a genuine coppery sheen – really something to behold!





Anyway, after some stiff competition this year from Adonis Blues, this afternoon has cemented Small Copper back into the top spot as my favourite species! 😊



Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 06-Sep-18 10:20 PM GMT

Good to see the next generation coming along nicely at Calley Heath, Callum! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 06-Sep-18 10:46 PM GMT

Great set of Copper images Callum 😊 – they're having a cracking end to the season 😊 Also your Brown Argus looks good as an ab. snelleri (at least I think that's what it's called) 😊

Have a goodun
Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 07-Sep-18 08:31 AM GMT

They seem to be doing pretty well, Dave, and the place looks a lot greener than last time I was there so this gen shouldn't have any problems (barring an early frost).

Thanks Wurzel 😊

Wurzel wrote:

your Brown Argus looks good as an ab. snelleri

– yes, I thought so too. In fact those are the two separate individuals (look at the hindwing wear) both showing the same feature, so perhaps it's quite frequent in this population. Seeing that particular ab. in a population on Rock-rose (although bivoltine), right on the edge of the former NBA range, it's quite tempting to imagine there are a few NBA genes still knocking around!

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 07-Sep-18 11:23 AM GMT

Really lovely Coppers Callum. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 08-Sep-18 12:08 PM GMT

I second that Callum, there does seem to be an abundance of them at present 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 08-Sep-18 05:56 PM GMT

Thanks Andrew & Goldie! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 08-Sep-18 09:42 PM GMT

For reasons that I'm yet to reconcile myself with, late August/early September of this year will be remembered for an abnormally high preponderance of Small Coppers.

They seem to be about in numbers in many areas both north and south where they are often only seen in single figures (if at all).

Long may it continue though, as I reckon most of us would have them in our favourites list.

Re: CallumMac

by Old Wolf, 14-Sep-18 02:39 PM GMT

Hello Callum, I am trying to catch up on diaries.

Lovely Copper shots especially the one showing the copper sheen on the hind wings. What a beauty 😊

Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 17-Sep-18 11:03 AM GMT

Hi, Callum. Glad to hear the Small Copper is your top fav again. I particularly liked the shot of the one you took with the glitzy copper scales on its hind-wings. I have sometimes seen this sheen but its hard to get a pic of it.

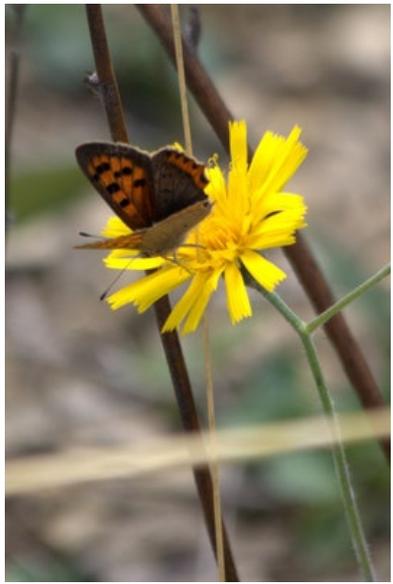
Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 19-Sep-18 11:16 PM GMT

Thanks David, Old Wolf and Ernie! 😊 That copper sheen was really something. If you pressed me, I would guess that on that occasion I was helped by the fact it was quite late in the day, so the angle of the sun was relatively low.

09/09/2018 – Aire Valley RSPB reserves

A brief and belated report from my birthday outing! In a good year, the timing of my birthday can allow for some good butterflies to be found, but unfortunately this year the weather was overcast, with a cool and brisk westerly. L and I decided to prioritise birds instead! I hadn't been back to **RSPB Fairburn Ings** for over nine years, since I spent a week volunteering there. We had an interesting enough walk around the place, which had changed a lot, with areas that were previously inaccessible to the public opened up by a series of new footpaths. There wasn't a huge amount to be seen, with highlights being several Spoonbills and my first-ever Cattle Egret – both beyond the reach of even my longest lens. Other than a few Whites, the only butterfly was this Small Copper; even that disappeared before I could switch to my macro lens! 😊



Believe it or not, this is the first decent photo I've ever managed to get of a Magpie. I love the character of these birds, and the wonderful folklore that surrounds them!



With the afternoon still relatively young when we returned to the car park, we decided to take a short detour from our homeward journey to look in on **RSPB St Aidan's**. This site has featured in my PD at least once before; we have visited reasonably regularly since 'discovering' it back in spring, because there is a pair of Little Owls that supposedly nests right next to the main reserve car park! Now owls are by far my favourite birds, and if they weren't so hard to find I would happily spend as much time chasing them as I do butterflies! In three previous visits we had not yet been lucky enough to see them, but clearly somebody had tipped them off that it was my birthday, as one was sitting out in full view. 😊



The weather's continued to be cool, cloudy, and often windy ever since – I've hardly seen a butterfly. Definitely autumn up here now.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 19-Sep-18 11:29 PM GMT

Great shots of the Little Owls 😊 Magpies are a right bu\$\$er to get shots of as they always seem to be on the move 😊 Probably trying to avoid the clutches of the Law 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 21-Sep-18 07:05 AM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

...Now owls are by far my favourite birds, and if they weren't so hard to find I would happily spend as much time chasing them as I do butterflies!

Agreed! Nothing in the bird world beats an owl (except, possibly, a hummingbird). The one you got there is probably the cutest of the lot too! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 21-Sep-18 10:11 AM GMT

Love those Owl's Callum, you don't see too many in England, I've only heard them at my daughters house at night in Kent but I've never been able to find them, she lives near Blean Woods Canterbury 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 23-Sep-18 10:16 AM GMT

Wurzel wrote:

Magpies are a right bu\$ser to get shots of as they always seem to be on the move 😊 Probably trying to avoid the clutches of the Law

Thanks Wurzel 😊 maybe just busy carrying news around! 😊 You'll know this song if you love the BBC comedy Detectorists, which is about a hobby that involves spending lots of time out in the countryside and which 99% of the population think is totally weird... feels very familiar to me!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6EIFD80f90>

David M wrote:

The one you got there is probably the cutest of the lot too!

Thanks David 😊 I do love their grumpy little faces, but I must admit I have a particular fondness for beautiful Barn Owls.



Goldie M wrote:

Love those Owl's Callum, you don't see too many in England

Thanks Goldie 😊 Actually I'm pretty lucky living in the East Yorkshire Wolds in that it's probably the best place in England for owls – I think the fairly low-intensity cattle/sheep grazing in some of the steep dry chalk valleys (which look a lot like the South Downs) makes very good vole habitat. The chap who bred the one in my photo above says that East Yorkshire has the highest density of Barn Owls of anywhere in the country, which I can well believe as I quite often see them out hunting in the daytime when I go for a cycle ride. There are quite a few reliable spots for Little Owls which I'm hoping to visit more often over the winter, when it's easier to "pop out" at dusk and still be home for dinner! Then we get lots of Short-eared Owls overwintering along the banks of the Humber estuary (if they make it through the summer on the Moors without being gunned down by a gamekeeper 😊). And we have Tawny Owls living in the cemetery behind our house – we can sometimes lie in bed and listen to them hooting!

Re: CallumMac

by ernie f, 23-Sep-18 10:27 AM GMT

Callum – Love the Owl pics. I have not seen an owl for ages so your shots are very welcome. Like you I have heard them though. At our house we usually hear the Tawny hoot from nearby trees but a couple of weeks ago I am sure we heard Little Owl too.

Last year I was lucky enough to get pics of the Short-eared Owl for the first time. Its about 30 years between my first sighting and my first pic but well worth the wait.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 23-Sep-18 11:12 PM GMT

That was a brilliant show 😊 – I just wish they'd have done another season they left me wanting more 😞 I read somewhere that a real life detectorist found a gold piece only to discover that he'd found one of the props from the show 🤪😂

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 24-Sep-18 07:15 AM GMT

I do love their grumpy little faces, but I must admit I have a particular fondness for beautiful Barn Owls.

How can anyone not love a Barn Owl? Not just gorgeous looking, but sleek, elegant, silent and unerringly efficient at what it does.

Always best when miracles of nature look as beautiful as they do.

Re: CallumMac

by bugboy, 26-Sep-18 08:31 AM GMT

Just trying to catch up on a few weeks worth of posts 😊 . Love the owls, sad to say though I've never seen a wild Barn Owl.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 27-Sep-18 09:55 PM GMT

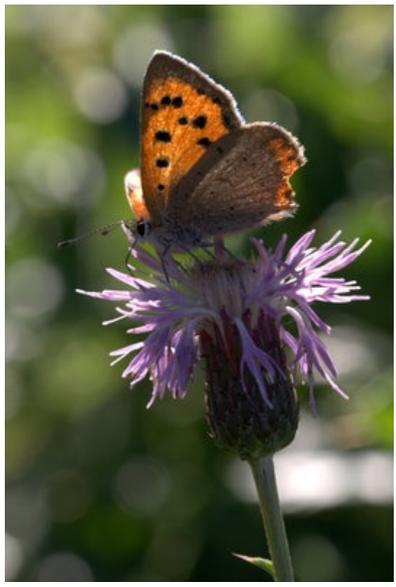
Thanks all!

27/09/2018 – Walmgate Stray

I really, **really** didn't expect to be writing another diary entry this year! However, at 3.15 this afternoon I came out of a particularly intense meeting with my postdoc advisors and saw the sun shining outside, and it was too much to resist! I grabbed my camera from the car and wandered out on to Walmgate Stray. There was a fairly stiff breeze blowing, but I knew of a nice corner that's sheltered from sou-westerlies and full of thistles, so there I headed, hoping for both Coppers and Tortoiseshells Small!

The Coppers were easy – there were still a good 5 or 6 at least flying. Some of them were beginning to show their age!





This one had a photobomber...



...and this one was (finally!) my first blue badger of the year! 😊



There was one other species, but it was certainly not what I expected. I've heard of Brown Argus records from the Stray before, though I'd never seen one there myself. Regardless, it is *extremely* unusual to see a third-generation Brown Argus up here in Yorkshire! But surely this one, looking pretty fresh in the last week of September, in an early year, must be exactly that...



In the end, I did see my Small Tortoiseshell as well – it whizzed past as I was walking back to the office, but didn't stop for a photo. The next few days look to be set fair as well – perhaps a bit of an Indian summer?

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 27-Sep-18 10:19 PM GMT

Amazing to see a Brown Argus up there at the end of September as you say, Callum. They seem to be rewriting the books completely this year. 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by essexbuzzard, 27-Sep-18 10:20 PM GMT

Just shows you need to savour every moment you can, Calum!

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 28-Sep-18 09:30 AM GMT

Thanks Dave, and indeed essexbuzzard – what I would have missed if I'd just assumed it was too late in the year to bother!

Just to add to the above – I said that the last SC was my first blue badger of the year, but on reviewing my photos on my larger desktop monitor at work, there is also a faint scattering of blue scales visible on the second individual... 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 28-Sep-18 10:24 PM GMT

A great way to recover after an intense meeting Callum, a just rewards 😊 A cracking little Brown Argus 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 29-Sep-18 02:24 PM GMT

Hi! Callum, don't put your Camera away just yet, you can still see Butterflies to the end of October, even into November, mind you , it has been an hot Summer 🤔 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 30-Sep-18 10:28 AM GMT

I find whenever I get fed up I'm only ever one butterfly away from redemption! You saw many, including a wonderful surprise with that Brown Argus.

You definitely made the right decision.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 30-Sep-18 11:47 AM GMT

29/09/2018 – Skerne Wetlands

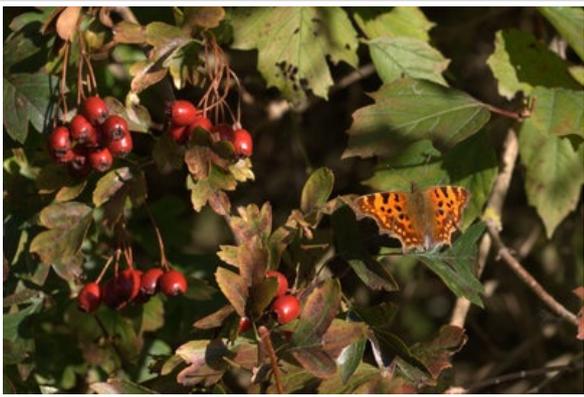
If my post earlier in the week was about summer's last hurrah, this is definitely about autumn's first halloo! I'd not been to this Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve before, but my partner had and suggested it was worth a visit. YWT bought the land fairly recently and have set about converting a former fish farm into a network of ponds and waterways strung out alongside the most northerly chalk stream in England – the upper River Hull.



Plenty of big brown trout visible in the streams, and we could really see the potential for spotting otters here (others have!). Likewise barn owls! A kingfisher briefly spotted, and tree sparrows on the feeders by the reserve workshop. And this is a water vole hole!



As we walked along the banks of the Hull, we spotted a few Commas dashing about, making the most of the warm sunshine for a last glug of nectar before the winter comes! The colour really shines against a backdrop of browning leaves and autumn berries. 😊



Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 30-Sep-18 11:59 AM GMT

Lovely shots of the Comma's Callum, your right the Berries really do set them off 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 30-Sep-18 02:40 PM GMT

That is a very seasonal Comma, Callum. Their colours really fit an autumn setting. 😊

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 30-Sep-18 10:36 PM GMT

Lovely autumnal colours on the Comma Callum 😊 DO you know what breed of cattle that was (guessing Belted Galloway)?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 01-Oct-18 09:06 AM GMT

Thanks Goldie, Dave, Wurzel. Yes, that's a Beltie all right – a young bull. They had a herd of maybe 20-odd.

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 01-Oct-18 07:58 PM GMT

Cheers for the confirmation Callum, we've got Dexters round our way which are similar build but don't have a massive 'belt' 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 03-Oct-18 12:03 PM GMT

That first Comma image looks like it would make a nice Christmas Card, Callum! 😊

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 04-Oct-18 08:22 AM GMT

David M wrote:

That first Comma image looks like it would make a nice Christmas Card, Callum! 😊

Yes indeed! I had it earmarked for the December page of a calendar... 😊

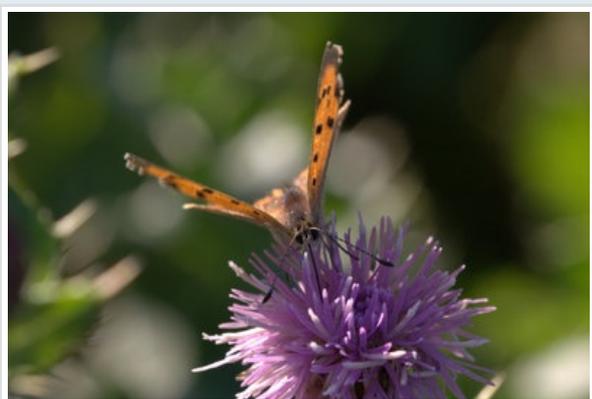
Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 10-Oct-18 07:25 PM GMT

10/10/2018 – Walmgate Stray

I keep expecting every butterfly outing to be the last of the year! On Sunday that appeared to have been the case, because we spent the morning in bright sunshine at North Cave Wetlands without seeing a butterfly (a lovely Kingfisher making up for any disappointment!). But this afternoon was not just sunny, but also warm, so I popped out of the office to check out 'Copper Corner' on the Stray.

At least four individuals still flying, and surprisingly one of those looked very freshly emerged:







Re: CallumMac

by millerd, 10-Oct-18 09:14 PM GMT

That one does look fresh, Callum – and those two forewing spots are joined into an unusual-looking splodge. Is there a third brood out now at Calley Heath do you know?

Cheers,

Dave

Re: CallumMac

by Andrew555, 11-Oct-18 02:13 PM GMT

Very nice Callum. The Coppers have been putting on a great show. 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Wurzel, 11-Oct-18 08:32 PM GMT

Lovely fresh Copper Callum and here is definitely something different with those wing markings; they seem quite minimal and then there's the 'splodge' 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 12-Oct-18 08:40 AM GMT

Thanks all. I did think that one looked a little unusual.

millerd wrote:

Is there a third brood out now at Calley Heath do you know?

There certainly has been a third brood out at Calley, and since they're still flying on Walmgate Stray I guess they might still be out at Calley. I haven't been in for a couple of weeks though.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 14-Oct-18 11:43 PM GMT

More lovely Coppers to delight us, Callum! I don't recall such numbers at any time of year (aside from at Hoggers' patch at Dungeness, of course). Hopefully this is a trend that will continue.

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 19-Nov-18 07:11 PM GMT

17/11/2018 – Donna Nook
or; *"And now for something completely different"*

Over a month since I last posted in my PD, and only one butterfly spotted in that time – a Red Admiral very briefly in the garden. I thought I would break the silence to relay my experience from the weekend as, even though there were no butterflies, it was still a remarkable wildlife experience.

On Saturday we headed to Donna Nook, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve that spends 11 months of the year as a little-frequented and barren strip

of coastline on the southern bank of the mouth of the Humber. However, every November it comes alive with one of the largest colonies of Grey Seals in the country coming ashore to pup. The count on Friday was 1058 cows, 943 pups; and it appeared that many more pups had arrived overnight.





I make this post as a curiosity. I've never seen so many members of the general public (i.e. people who are very clearly *not* in a regular habit of visiting nature reserves) travelling to such a remote location, on a chilly winter's day, to see wild animals. I suppose it shows the power of a well-publicised natural spectacle.

Re: CallumMac

by David M, 22-Nov-18 08:19 AM GMT

That is quite some spectacle, Callum. Not surprising that so many people made the journey to see the seal pups...those numbers are amazing. I can't imagine being amongst 2,000 or so of these creatures.

Re: CallumMac

by Goldie M, 22-Nov-18 10:54 AM GMT

What lovely shots Callum, I'd love to have seen them, Goldie 😊

Re: CallumMac

by Maximus, 24-Nov-18 03:36 PM GMT

Nice shots of the Grey Seals, Callum, it must have been quite a sight to see them in such numbers. I've read that despite their numbers dropping to about 500 in the early 20th century, it's estimated that there are now more than 120,000 grey seals in Britain, representing 40% of the world's population, amazing.

Mike.

Re: CallumMac

by PhilBJohnson, 27-Nov-18 10:18 AM GMT

Hello Callum,

Thank you for speaking at the Butterfly Conservation members day recently in Nottingham.

I took some notes regarding your talk.

I thought that some of those white flowers under street lamps, that were more frequently pollinated, were more obviously seen by moths there because of white's reflective qualities. (a moonlit or mute point possibly, for the future).

Some plants are grown indoors (particularly in aquariums) with grow lamps (the better lights for photosynthesis).

If you did relate that to different types of street lighting, I might not have been paying attention (sorry).

Are different moth species attracted more to different lamp types than others?

#moth trap.

Just south of you in Yorkshire are the Lincolnshire Wolds (LW), (which are chalk, so possibly much different from the Yorkshire Wolds). I once lived much closer to the north and South Chalk downs, where chalk grassland species such as Marbled White, Chalkhill Blue and Adonis Blue were locally numerous. In Lincolnshire, I thought that there was an opportunity for Chalk Grassland Habitat Restoration on the LW. I thought that some Blue species, also depended on species of ant as well as larval food plant.

I think that it is worth a future investigation,

Kind Regards

Re: CallumMac

by CallumMac, 04-Dec-18 02:40 PM GMT

Thanks for some interesting questions, Phil!

PhilJohnson wrote:

I thought that some of those white flowers under street lamps, that were more frequently pollinated, were more obviously seen by moths there because of white's reflective qualities. (a moonlit or mute point possibly, for the future).

That is certainly one of our top hypotheses for the observed pattern. Similarly, the White Campion plants tended to be taller than the surrounding sward, which may also have helped them to stand out.

PhilJohnson wrote:

Some plants are grown indoors (particularly in aquariums) with grow lamps (the better lights for photosynthesis).

We did wonder about this but it's unlikely to have had an impact in our study, because the White Campion plants were only under the street lighting treatments for four days each whilst being pollinated, but were all in the same greenhouse under the same conditions beforehand (when growing) and afterwards (when setting seed).

PhilJohnson wrote:

Are different moth species attracted more to different lamp types than others?

Yes. Off the top of my head, from the most abundant families, the Erebidae are most strongly attracted to light, and prefer light right at the blue/ultraviolet end of the spectrum (i.e. LED lamps). Noctuidae are slightly less strongly attracted but also prefer blue/UV. Geometridae are less strongly attracted still, and may have more of a preference for longer blue/green wavelengths. But this has not been very solidly established yet.

PhilJohnson wrote:

Just south of you in Yorkshire are the Lincolnshire Wolds (LW), (which are chalk, so possibly much different from the Yorkshire Wolds). I once lived much closer to the north and South Chalk downs, where chalk grassland species such as Marbled White, Chalkhill Blue and Adonis Blue were locally numerous.

In Lincolnshire, I thought that there was an opportunity for Chalk Grassland Habitat Restoration on the LW. I thought that some Blue species, also depended on species of ant as well as larval food plant.

I've had the same thought in parts of the Yorkshire Wolds (which are also chalk!). We still have Marbled White in quite a few places, and Brown Argus breeding on Rock-rose. I can certainly picture those Blues present, especially under future climate change, though they wouldn't get there without assistance, I suspect.