

ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Apr-18 03:02 PM GMT

As this is my first entry let me tell you a bit about myself. My name is Ernie Frost. My stamping ground is north-east Hampshire which gives me a variety of habitats to explore. For example I live a 15 minute drive away from Noar Hill – a famous chalk-hill reserve near Selbourne known for its Dukes and Brown Hairstreaks. Also the Alice Holt Woodland, famed for its Purple Emperors is not far and neither is Broxhead Common, a heathland reserve which harbours quite large populations of Silver-studded Blues and Small Coppers. I am also not too distant from Odiham Common where there is a breeding colony of White-letter Hairstreaks.

I recently retired from work and so have been able to follow one of my passions, that of nature watching. I have an especial keenness for butterflies, birds and flowers but any wildlife will take my interest as I am sure it does for everyone else who has a diary on this website.

I have been pursuing butterflies for a few years now but still consider myself to be a novice. I constantly meet other people out watching butterflies who always seem to know far more than me about them and I am constantly learning from them. You never stop learning do you? If I ever write anything which you know to be incorrect, please do not hesitate to let me know (in a gentle way of course) and tell me what it is and why you know. There are already a lot of participants on this website and some of you have posted hundreds of entries. I cannot hope to read them all so if you wish to comment on anything I have said and can refer to someone's post (either your own or someone else's), please could you supply the page number of the relevant post so I can find it more easily. Thanks.

I have a scientific background and so like to research things and try to find out the answers to questions I have. If you decide to read any of my posts this will probably become very evident, very quickly!

Like all wildlife enthusiasts I have an obsession about taking photographs. I have been known to take over 100 photos of a single butterfly species in an hour and spend many more hours when back at home on my computer agonising over which ones to delete and which to keep. Mine is not a great camera though – its only a fairly cheap bridge camera so any photos I post will not be of exceptional quality. I shall leave that for the true wildlife photographers out there. Nevertheless I hope you like the ones I do choose to show – especially the ones showing interesting behaviours. When I read other people's posts on this website – those are the ones I am mostly drawn to.

I am writing this on Sunday 15th April, 2018 which was a year when spring seemed to come late (at least as far as butterflies are concerned), so I intend to start my entries with some recent historic experiences and musings of mine. I am sure once the butterfly season really gets going this year I shall swap to current stuff.

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 15-Apr-18 03:17 PM GMT

Hi Ernie,

Welcome aboard and looking forward to your posts. There are a number of us on here that use bridge cameras, in my case a Panasonic Lumix FZ200.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 15-Apr-18 04:59 PM GMT

Welcome Ernie 😊 Looking forward to your reports and if you ever want any ideas of other sites to visit then just send me a PM 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 15-Apr-18 06:47 PM GMT

Welcome from me, Ernie. The more the merrier !
You should find yourself among friends on here.
Sometimes you meet the face behind the name, when out and about.
You are located right in the middle of my sphere of operation,
East Sussex as far as Wiltshire.

Good luck,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 15-Apr-18 08:31 PM GMT

Welcome Ernie, looking forward to seeing what you've seen 😊

Re: ernie f

by David M, 15-Apr-18 11:24 PM GMT

A warm welcome from me too, Ernie. I look forward to seeing what you have to share with us.

Don't worry about getting used to the forum....it takes a little while, and excuses will be made on your behalf! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Apr-18 08:04 AM GMT

Thank you for your welcoming comments. I will try my best to keep up with the standard of some of your posts. I spent a few hours yesterday reading a few of them and I have to say I was repeatedly bowled over by some of the things I saw. So I spent some time last night thinking about how I was going to approach my first few posts. I started by thinking that because of the bad weather I would not have any new things to report and so would start by looking back on what I have seen in the recent past in my area but the weather is improving and it looks like I already have new stuff. So its my intention to splice together new stuff with the older, based upon each place I visit – at least in the first year I write on this forum.

So without further ado – I'll take the plunge....

Over the weekend I went to Alice Holt Woodland. This is a fine mixed woodland that supports many species of butterfly, not least the Purple Emperor for which it is famed. But this is not the time for Purple Emperors so I satisfied myself with the antics of a male Comma. He had set up shop in a sunny patch of bracken and was busy defending it against all comers. I was only there for 30 minutes and in that time he successfully chased off two other male Commas and two male Brimstones. He even buzzed around me once. If I had been a butterfly I think I might have been intimidated by him.

[image]24815[/image]

He would perch mostly on the higher points of the bracken, presumably on the lookout for females to mate with and males to bully. I would judge the territory he defended was no more than about 30 paces across but it was a fine, sunny and sheltered little enclave.

Alice Holt Woodland is a fair size. The place where I saw this Comma was near the pond opposite Birdworld on the Farnham to Bordon road. The pond itself is very pretty. On this day a pair of Great Crested Grebes were swimming and feeding on it but alas no courtship display. Regularly in summer in recent years it has been the haunt of Common Tern who come here to fish.

[image]24816[/image]

In autumn, the stretch of wood between the main road and the pond harbours some interesting fungi, not least the Yellow Fan.

[image]24817[/image]

Generally, Alice Holt woods are full to bursting with fungi in Autumn. I once counted over 100 species in a two-hour walk in one of its enclosures. I will come back to that in future posts no doubt.

Well that's it for now folks – first post is short and sweet. The weather is going to hot up this week so hopefully great things are brewing for us.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Apr-18 08:15 AM GMT

OK so the photos come out small when you use [img]

Here is the Comma again as an attachment.



Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 16-Apr-18 09:29 AM GMT

Hi! Ernie, welcome from me too 😊 You live in a beautiful part of England rich in Butterflies so once you get started it will be great to see your shots 😊 I like you knew nothing much when I started being interested in Butterflies but with the help of this site I've learned so much, I live in the North and if you come North, like Wurzel, I can give you some spots that are good for Scotch Argus, High Brown's, etc if you send pm, all the best Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 16-Apr-18 10:22 AM GMT

Great Comma shot Ernie 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 16-Apr-18 10:30 AM GMT

And a warm welcome from me Ernie. 😊
You got that Comma from a great angle. 😊

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Apr-18 11:07 AM GMT

Its a dreary morning so I thought since I saw my first comma of the year the other day and posted about it I would write another showing some of my past pics of this species. I also did a survey last year and would like to share that too.



backlit comma



from above - basking in sun

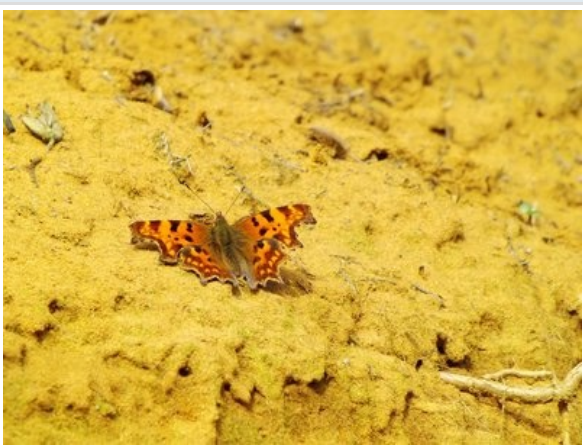


comma with berries in summer



comma showing why it is called a comma

And here is one sunbathing on sand. Its not on a beach at the seaside though (no parasol or ice cream in evidence!), its at Broxhead Common, a sandy lowland heath near where I live.



comma on sand

Here is my 2017 survey of the Comma in my part of Hampshire.



Little should be read into the profile of sightings in this survey. You can see Commas in low numbers nearly everywhere in Hampshire and the fact most were seen by me on Odiham Common and Alice Holt in early summer whereas most on Noar Hill were in late summer is entirely due to more visits I paid to those locations at those times for other butterfly species. For example all the ones I saw at Odiham Common, I saw incidentally as a result of repeatedly going there looking for White Letter Hairstreaks. Indeed this survey is entirely built from incidental sightings, I did not make a concerted effort to go anywhere where Commas might be more common - I do not actually know of such a location although in this particular year The Straits Enclosure at Alice Holt Woods on June 26th looked as though it could be a contender. 2017 was in fact a record count for Commas for me to date, so

the fact I did not make a concerted effort to find them suggests they are on an upward trend around here generally speaking. Also the fact that the first non-Brimstone I saw this year was also a Comma kind of supports this.

I am going to try and split all my posts into two if I can. The first part always focussing on Butterflies (and moths to a lesser extent) and a second which gives a snapshot of non-butterfly wildlife in the same place as my visit (but not necessarily the same day). So for this post...

Non-Butterflies at Alice Holt Woods

As I mentioned in an earlier post these woods are wonderful for Autumn fungi. I used to live in the New Forest in Southern Hampshire (for about five years) and there is quite a lot of fungi of interest there (its where I first got my interest in them) but by comparison, this single woodland in North East Hampshire never ceases to amaze me. There are well over a hundred visible species of fungi fruiting here. In November 2013 for example I counted 102 species all fruiting simultaneously on a single 2-hour long walk. The best location within the woodland for fungi I believe is the Willows Green Enclosure. So my non-butterfly snapshot of the day is of a mushroom. The quite beautiful Dappled Webcap.



Dappled Webcap – Cortinarius bolaris

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 17-Apr-18 05:15 PM GMT

A warm welcome from me too, Ernie – a great selection of Comma shots. 😊 The recent backlit underside one is particularly good. Waiting for more when the summer sunshine arrives tomorrow! 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

by David M, 18-Apr-18 04:14 AM GMT

Interesting Comma stats there, Ernie. Numbers are scant except for that one day in Alice Holt straits but the species seems to crop up regularly enough. Feel free to keep posting your non-butterfly observations. Sometimes these are a wake up call to those of us who might otherwise walk past such sights.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Apr-18 04:27 PM GMT

Site visit: Kingsley Common – 18th April 2018

Kingsley Common is only a mile away from the Alice Holt woods mentioned in my last post.

I saw a female Orange Tip there today. My first of the year.



Also two Brimstone and a Comma and also my first and second Holly Blue of the year (both males).



This gives me the excuse to talk about the Holly Blues of Kingsley Common...

There is a spring "tribe" of Holly Blues that inhabit the holly bushes and trees of Kingsley Common near the pond, there being none later in the year here.



This holly habitat runs along the edge of a patch of lowland heath which is actually one of the best places near me for later brood Small Coppers when the heather starts to bloom. I have seen more Holly Blues here in spring than almost anywhere else.

The book says that the female of the summer brood usually has more black on it than the spring examples because they are different subspecies, but this is not always the case. Apparently there are 34 recorded main types of aberration. These include the degree of blackness on any of the wings or the degree the colour is washed out or the degree of depth and length of the black spots of the underside of the wings. The first of these pictures which follow was taken at Kingsley on April 10th 2017 and is obviously a typical spring brood *Celastrina argiolus*.



But this second picture shows another with a greater resemblance to a summer brood individual, but this was taken on April 17th 2017 at Noar Hill. It's a slightly aberrant form of the usual *Celastrina argiolus* showing slightly larger bands on the upper forewings although I prefer to think of it as natural variation rather than aberration.



The book also says Holly Blues are often nomadic, but they can live in tribes or leks, fairly stable communities in a reasonably tight range.

However in the first week of April 2017 in my back garden I saw one male repeatedly for days. He would fly through or sometimes drop down to rest or nectar for a short while and then he was off again. In that same week I visited one spot at Noar Hill regularly because each day I saw a single male do exactly the same thing there. So it is clear to me that whilst it may be true that some Holly Blues are nomadic and others are tribal, there are also those males mid-way that lead a solitary existence in a fixed patch. My estimate of the size of the territory of the one I saw at Noar Hill in early April 2017 was about a 500 metre diameter circle. The females do wander though. I spent nearly an hour with one last year. She flitted about a holly tree at Alice Holt woodland for about 15 minutes, stopping to take nectar, to lay a few eggs and to bask in the sun, before setting off a little way to another holly tree nearby where she did the same thing. Then again and again until she finally flew over a tree to a place where I could not follow. I do not think she had any intention of returning along her route and I never saw her again.

Many holly locations appear to be devoid of them. Either because of shade or perhaps also lack of aphids from which Holly Blues feast on the honeydew. I found that the best locations are mixed hedgerow that include holly. They do love old churchyards though because these are the location of many a mature holly or ivy. Kingsley Old Church has a yew grove in the centre of the graveyard that more or less surrounds a huge mature holly tree. A number of males battle it out on the sunny side of these yews. I think their territories must overlap quite substantially here.

When nectaring their wings are almost always held together upright, however I did once see a nectaring female with her wings slightly apart. When basking they will mostly be half open, however I have discovered this is not an absolute rule. This one pictured at Kingsley had its wings open in full sun at around 1.30pm. That is why it is shining silver so much.



On the other hand I followed a group of four for ages hoping to take a picture of one with its wings open but all of them were busy nectaring all that

time and kept their wings tightly shut.



They don't fly about in low temperatures even on sunny days and northerly winds are a problem for them. I did see one flying about on a cool but sunny April morning around 10 degrees with a gentle northerly breeze but on that occasion this individual was well protected by a thick, mature and very high laurel hedge and was on its sunny southern side so was in a microclimate.

The book says they have a lifespan of between 2 and 3 weeks. During that time the males seek females by patrolling and will confront other rival males on occasion. I found three males at Kingsley all having a jousting match together before they each went their separate ways. In fact three different points of the compass! I followed one male patrolling a hedgerow for about 500 metres until it veered off to one side and up over a tree. Their speed while patrolling is often faster than normal human walking pace so I had to be quick on my feet to follow it in full spate.

They tend to siesta in mid-afternoon and become almost invisible when sitting on a leaf with their wings closed even in full sunlight and they won't spook unless you get very close to them. The shininess of their wings is a camouflage when resting on the shiny surface of a holly leaf! This one, again at Kingsley has almost "lit-up" in the sun but I had to have my camera on full zoom to capture it. I only noticed it because I saw it fly to this perch otherwise I would have walked right by completely oblivious to it.



As with many butterflies the mating process can take some while. I saw this pair connected for 40 minutes before I walked away.



I don't know how true it is but one enthusiast I met said Holly Blues have been known to stay connected overnight but I cannot personally vouch for this story which may be apocryphal. Do any of you know the truth of this at all? The female in this shot is on the left. You can just about see her black wing edge. It is also evident from this picture that the underneath of the male is slightly bluer than the female, although he was more raggedy than her and probably a little older, so age may have had an effect on his scales. I know how he feels!

In the next picture you can see the abdomen of a female curling beneath her to deposit an egg below on a clump of holly buds.



Egg-laying can carry on for some while. One female I found egg-laying was quite old and faded in colour.

Sometimes they come down very low to lay eggs and can be slow to spook when they are thus engrossed. I spent over 15 minutes taking photos of this female. At one point she was only about a foot off the ground on a holly bush. I took this picture while sitting on the ground beside her! It is even possible at times to gently move the holly bough while the butterfly is still on it in order to get a better close-up.

The book says their numbers increase and decrease quite dramatically in cycles. Counts creep up year on year to max for a couple of years and then quite often are decimated, only to then start back up again. For example the official record for Noar Hill in the following years was:

1989 75
1990 270
1991 207
1992 5
1993 1
1994 1
1995 11
1996 74
1997 77

My surveys for 2015 and 2017 follow:



I did my 2015 survey before I found the tribe at Kingsley, but I did a comparison survey in 2017 and that did include Kingsley.

In my survey the Kingsley annual count was only bettered by Noar Hill but what makes Kingsley special is that all these individuals were found in just one area around the pond whereas at Noar Hill you more or less had to cover the whole reserve to get the numbers. Note, I always take care to try and not double count across different days. So consecutive records at Kingsley for example were done in different locations at least 500 metres apart. Of course there will always be some double-counting but I always think this is balanced out by the ones I completely miss.

My annual count of 16 in 2015 at Noar Hill was low but on the up side. Up to April 19th 2017 I saw 11 at Noar Hill rather than just 2 as of 2015 by the same date so it looks like they might be rising there. It is thought the reason the numbers crash rather than merely decline is due to the cycle of the parasitic ichneumon wasp (*Listrodomus nyctemerus*). When the wasp has a good year the Holly Blue has a bad one, when the wasp has a bad year, the Holly Blue population eventually bounces back over time. This see-saw between the two species is normal it is said.

By the end of 2017 it was clear that numbers were good for the spring brood but not so great for the summer brood. We did have rather a wet August with a few very windy days that year which might have accounted for it. After a promising ramp-up in June and July – there were for example six along the zig-zag path at Selborne on July 30th, I only saw three in total in August 2017, two at Noar Hill and one at Broxhead. I have seen just such a population crash amongst Duke of Burgundy numbers after a spell of bad weather too and this year the early spring was so bad I am only just now seeing my first Holly Blues on 18th April. It seems our smaller butterfly species are very susceptible to unseasonal, inclement weather.

Non-butterfly Snapshot

The pond at Kingsley is a haven for Dragonflies and Damselflies. The Downy Emerald Dragonfly is right at the start of its emergence right now. It is scarce nationally but commonplace where it can be found, so many of the heathland ponds around here can harbour them. If you see one on a sunny day it shines brilliant emerald green. This picture does not do it justice but I consider myself lucky to be able to have got it at all because this dragonfly hardly ever seems to stop and perch. It just flits back and forth, back and forth searching for prey and females constantly. This one is a male as it has a much narrower waist than the female. (Obviously all that exercise it does is paying dividends).



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 19-Apr-18 01:28 PM GMT

Very interesting report/survey Ernie with some lovely shots. I've really struggled to get open wing shots of males over the years and I've had more luck with females. Holly Blues to me are the most Hairstreak-esque of the Blues in terms of their behaviour. 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Apr-18 06:40 PM GMT

Wurzel

I agree. One year recently I got my first shot of a male Holly Blue with its wings open and I was over the moon. Then my computer crashed and I was unable to get the picture back because I had not backed it up. A warning to us all! It took me two years to get another picture that was its equal.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Apr-18 07:14 PM GMT

Site visit: Noar Hill - 18&19/April/2018

I am sure you know about this location because of its Dukes and Brown Hairstreaks but since it is one of my closest nature reserves I thought I'd give an overview.

Noar Hill is near Selborne, an area famous for the very first British book on wildlife, "The Natural History of Selborne" written by the vicar of Selborne Parish who lived in the old house known as "The Wakes" in the centre of the village which is now open to the public. Even today the area around Selborne is a wildlife haven, from its grass downland, arable fields, tall hedgerows, miniature gorges and its Beech Hangers to its pristine chalk stream and small lakes.

Noar Hill in particular is one of the best places in the country for butterflies and orchids found together. This site, within the western-most enclave of the North and South Downs near Selborne village itself was once a Medieval Chalk quarry, long ago abandoned. The habitat now is one of chalk grassland dotted with juniper and edged by beech hanger. The hill commands extensive views in most directions over neighbouring farmland and woods. The reserve is grazed in summertime by a small herd of cattle. Although it is owned by a local farmer it is managed as a nature reserve and they have an awkward job striking a balance between conserving the habitat for the orchids while at the same time conserving the environment for the butterflies.

For its size it is perhaps one of the most rewarding wildlife reserves in Hampshire. I have seen 36 species of butterfly here (and am aware of at least two others on record I have not seen) and 13 species of Orchid (with at least one other on record I have not seen) as well as plentiful birds, moths and other flowers, some of them quite rare.



Looking toward Noar Hill from a neighbouring hill

Dukes are regularly seen here in spring and indeed I have seen them here much earlier in the year than this, but the recent bad weather had put me off coming here until now. I met Pauline while I was there today and up until the point where we parted neither of had seen any. I bet as soon as my back was turned she saw one!

Did see 6 Brimstone, 2 Comma, 3 Small Tortoiseshell and a male Orange Tip. The next pic was taken last year.



Small Tortoiseshells getting friendly



Male Orange Tip posing on a blossom

Non-butterfly Snapshot

But really it was the birdlife that was the feature today and yesterday. We had Yellowhammer, Blackcap, Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Goldcrest, Skylark, Chaffinch, Green Woodpecker, House Martin, Buzzard and Red Kite. Nothing rare but all very welcome. There were two pair of Red Kite and three Buzzards in the sky all at once. One Kite came down to head height and circled again and again low over the ploughed field next to the reserve. He had obviously found potential prey but it must have eluded him because he did not land. As he started to ascend once more one of the Buzzards came down and "mobbed" him repeatedly. What a sight.



Red Kite

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 19-Apr-18 09:11 PM GMT

That is a beautiful Orange Tip shot.
Also enjoyed your Holly Blue post.

Keep up the good work,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Apr-18 02:59 PM GMT

Site Visit: Noar Hill – 20th April 2018

Still no Dukes.

New since yesterday...

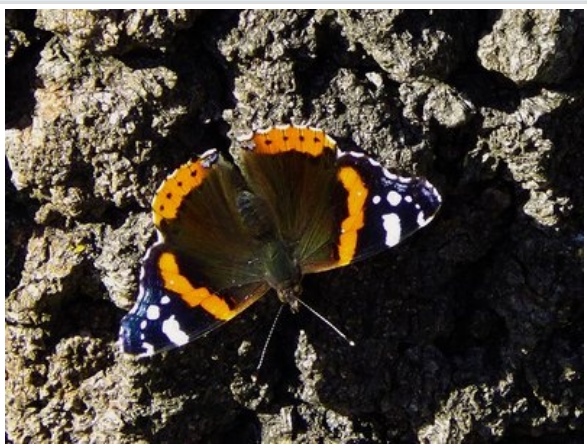
Numbers of Brimstone increasing nicely. Interestingly of the 9 I saw on the reserve itself only 2 were male and one of those was in a pair doing their spiral aerobatic dance. There were many more on the road leading up to the reserve and throughout Selborne village.

Three Small Tortoiseshell males were patrolling their own part of a long hedgerow.

One Red Admiral.

Last year I witnessed an interesting behaviour of Red Admirals.

A peculiar event on Thursley Common (MOD section). Two Red Admirals were circling a Birch Tree again and again. I went up to them and they didn't care about me, they were more interested in the tree. They stopped on the tree. One of them held its wings together and appeared to be searching for something. It fluttered its wings open then lurched forward. It did this repeatedly until it got to the base of the tree. Then two Hornets came up and settled in exactly the same place. Both butterflies flew away but one returned even though one of the hornets made a lunge for it. Finally the hornets left and this one Red Admiral remained. It appeared to be nectaring from Birch sap seeping out from a damaged patch at the base of the trunk and it risked its life to get at it. I have seen a Red Admiral take Birch sap subsequently but without the hoo-ha with hornets.



Red Admiral nectaring from Birch Sap



Another one

While I'm on the subject of Red Admirals I may as well add my historic survey of them here.



Although I saw a total of 40 Red Admirals at Noar Hill over the year in 2016, that was across 9 visits. I only visited St Catherine's hill once in 2016 and in two hours found a total of 28 individuals.



Red Admirals sharing something tasty at St Cat's Hill

The reason why 2016 was such a bumper year is probably because of the mild winter we had then and the winds coming from the south for a couple of weeks in summer which probably boosted the number of continental migrants. The book says that most of the Red Admirals we get in our country are the offspring of these migrants.



Red Admiral on Vipers Bugloss

The 2016/17 winter was relatively mild in Hampshire, with no snow but quite a lot of rain. The Spring was dry and mild. The northerly winds of early May 2017 switched around by mid May and started to come in from the south. I was up on Old Winchester Hill when I saw three individuals coming in on the breeze. It was obvious to me that they were exhausted from their migration journey. One of them literally crashed into a shrub, but its compulsion to continue meant that this did not deter it. It merely took off again unperturbed.

Although I did not do a proper survey in 2017, there did appear to be good numbers of them right from the get-go. There were times when Red Admirals were perched on the ground at regular intervals all along many of the sunnier paths at Alice Holt. Obviously each one was quite literally standing it's ground inside its territory.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The Tawny Mining Bees are back in my garden. They are solitary bees and make separate nest holes in the ground, but for some reason we get rather a lot of them. The nests are dug by the females who create their own miniature "volcanos" and then sit inside them. The males are drab little grey jobbies but the ladies are very pretty, being the ones that are tawny-coloured.



Female Tawny Mining Bee



Female Tawny Mining Bee digging its "volcano" nest

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 20-Apr-18 07:45 PM GMT

Some really interesting observations in your recent reports Ernie and great photos to go with them...great stuff 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

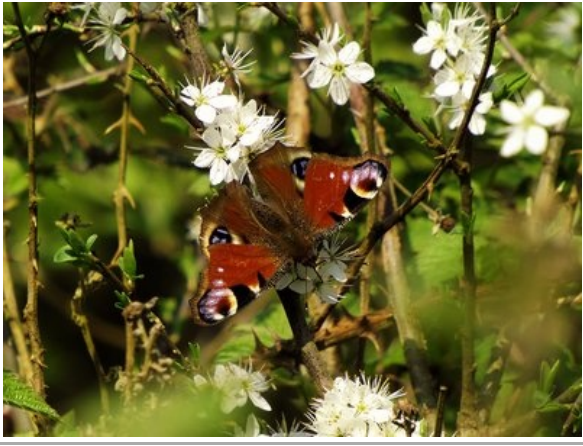
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Apr-18 02:14 PM GMT

Site Visit: Old Winchester Hill – 21 April 2018

Here is a stunning site with all-round views for many miles across the chalk downlands. It centres on an Iron Age Hillfort which itself in turn surrounds a set of Bronze Age Barrows. Along the ridges one finds blackthorn-sloes, crab apples and elderberry often attracting modern-day hunter-gatherers! There are grass-covered hills and deep shady wooded coombs where dormice lurk although you would be lucky to ever see these shy, normally nocturnal creatures. Just below the hillcrest and beside the fort is a remarkable example of a small native yew woodland and just as notable, the small juniper wood at the bottom of the hill on the other side.

It is normally best a little later than April but I thought I'd give it a try. Sunny morning but all I came away with was a nice pic of a Peacock. Never mind I know there will be much more to come later in the year here.



Peacock near the car park at Old Winch Hill

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Some years ago I lived in Chalford in the Cotswolds (Unfortunately before they re-introduced the Large Blue near there). But we had a day trip out to Cricklade on one occasion. The water meadow there is one of the few places I know of that has Snakeshead Fritillaries. There were hundreds (or even thousands? of them). Recently I have discovered there is a far smaller group of them growing near me at the Wakes in Selborne and of course they are blooming right now.



Snakeshead Fritillary at Selborne

Re: ernie f

by Art Frames, 21-Apr-18 04:30 PM GMT

I have planted some Snakeshead frits in the garden, not as nice as seeing them in huge numbers in the wild, but they are beautiful and I believe not too challenging if you have damp ground. they have survived for two years so far!

Some lovely pictures in your diary Ernie.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 21-Apr-18 04:40 PM GMT

Love the Peacock on the Blossom ernie, tried to capture a shot like that but mine always seem to like the grass better 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Apr-18 05:25 PM GMT

Thanks Neil, Peter and Goldie for your recent comments. It helps to know if I am on the right track.

Swelling Hill Pond - 22 April 2018

This is a pretty but small pond near the village of Four Marks. Well hidden on a country by-road it is a haven for wildlife of many types.



Swelling Hill Pond

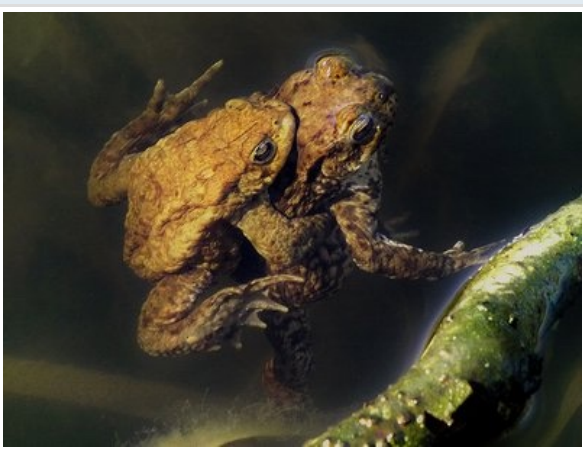
At different times of the year I have seen many of the more common butterflies here but the Green Carpet Moth begins to emerge now. Here is one trying to hide from me, pretending to be the lichen on a tree trunk.



Green Carpet Moth

Non-butterfly snapshots

But really the real reason for coming here at this time of year is not the butterflies or moths but for the frogs and toads instead. This pond is a magnet for them to come and breed in early spring. Common Toads in particular come here en-masse.



Common Toads mating



Common Toad

The breeding is finished now (it occurred a week or so before I started this diary), but the tadpoles have hatched in the last few days. They can form large "clouds" before the majority are predated.



Tadpole Cloud

Incidentally last year I visited in mid-summer and found a Daubenton's bat hawking back and forth repeatedly over the surface of the pond in the full sunshine of mid-day. No photos though because it was moving far too fast.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 22-Apr-18 08:27 PM GMT

More great stuff Ernie, I'm really enjoying the 'non-butterfly feature of the day' 😊 I agree with Goldie – that is a great shot of the Peacock on the blossom 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Apr-18 05:03 PM GMT

Site Visit: Upper Farringdon Churchyard – 23rd April 2018

My first Speckled Wood of the year. It decided to come down to nectar from a daisy right in front of me so I just had to take its picture didn't I?



Speckled Wood – spring

However what I came here for stood right beside this young little butterfly. It was at the other extreme: old and big!

Non-butterfly snapshots

The Yew in the churchyard at Upper Farringdon is possibly Hampshire's oldest tree – in fact Hampshire's oldest living thing.



The Farringdon Yew

It is almost impossible to date it with any accuracy though as the core of the tree long ago rotted completely away so we cannot count its tree-rings but its girth (around 30 ft max) tells us it has to be ancient. However girth alone does not measure its absolute age. Even the tree rings only measures the minimum age. Weather conditions over hundreds of years change the rate of growth and some of the older yews have been proven to stop growing wider altogether when they reach a certain age. Indeed Gilbert White measured the girth of this very tree in the late 1700's and it was the same as it is today.

A few years ago the old yew in Selborne churchyard blew down in a severe storm and an archaeological dig was performed below its roots. Skeletons from burials which could be dated to around 1200 AD were discovered underneath. The Selborne Yew had a girth of 26 ft. Since it is not far from the one at Upper Farringdon we can assume climate conditions over time were the same for both trees. The girth of the Farringdon Yew is about 4 ft wider than the one at Selborne so the Farringdon yew is probably older by about 125 years, getting on to be 1000 years old.

It astonishes me that a tree like this can still be living when most of its core-wood has long ago rotted away. You can actually walk inside it quite easily and look out at another yew tree which is smaller but is still probably many hundreds of years old as its widest girth is 22 ft.



Inside the heart of the tree

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 23-Apr-18 05:16 PM GMT

That Speckie looks so fresh, nice shot, none here yet, Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Art Frames, 23-Apr-18 05:41 PM GMT

Ernie love those toad shots. Just perfect patch of sunlight to bring out the textures and colours. I am a huge toad fan.

I went to my own local toad pond today, but it was deserted and sadly no tadpoles. Deserted apart from a couple of smooth newts 😞. So sad. In previous years I have seen hundreds of toads with masses of toad and frog spawn. But I suspect the pond is being used by dogs or something else as it is churned up and the bank is in a mess.

best wishes

Re: ernie f

by David M, 23-Apr-18 10:58 PM GMT

I'm loving the eclectic nature of your images, Ernie, from the toads to the butterflies, the carpet moth and the magnificent yew.

Keep 'em coming!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Apr-18 04:50 PM GMT

Thank you Goldie, Peter and David for your kind comments.

Site Visit: Hartley Maudit – 24th April 2018

Another pond today – this one is beside an old church out in the styx surrounded on all sides by open countryside, its village long ago abandoned and demolished (probably after the plague in the Middle Ages).



Hartley Maudit Church and Pond

Part of the churchyard is given over to wild flowers and the roadside verges are also bedecked, particularly with cuckoo-flower at this time of year.

I saw my first, second and third Large White of the year today. Two were a courting pair doing their aerobic spiral dance but they parted company without mating.



Large White – my first of 2018

There were also three Orange Tips, all male. I followed one for some minutes as he patrolled the roadside verges. He did not retrace his steps and I gave up following after a while. He was obviously nomadic and had no intention of returning along his route.

Site Visit: Noar Hill – 24th April 2018

As the sun had come out for a while (rain was forecast later) I decided to also visit Noar Hill for half an hour. No Dukes (still!) but there were four Orange Tips, all male and two were jousting. Also a Small Tortoiseshell, a Peacock and two female Brimstones egg-laying. I decided to try and get a shot of one of them actually laying eggs so after much scrambling over hummocks and hillocks giving chase, only pausing to detach myself from the odd bramble I took my shots and crossed my fingers (although not at the same time – that is not recommended!). She stopped on a Buckthorn bush for no more than a couple of seconds to lay an egg underneath a leaf and no sooner had she finished then she was off again. To get a pic you almost had to anticipate where she might stop and I had barely two seconds to focus and click each time. I managed to get a few blurry images but one I am quite pleased with follows.



Brimstone egg-laying

This also gives me the excuse to share a few photos of Brimstones from previous years.



Brimstone having a rest after nectaring



Male Brimstone backlit while nectaring in the morning sun last summer



Brimstone bookends on a common knapweed

I once had a picture of a female who while on the ground opened her wings flat in order to reject an amorous male but it was one of the pics I lost when my old computer crashed and I had forgotten to back up my files. A sad loss.

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

The pond at Hartley Maudit was of interest. A pair of Canada Geese were making a bit of a din for no apparent reason, my first Swallows of the year were hawking for insects for a couple of minutes over the surface of the pond before continuing their migration northbound and one lazy big carp came to the surface. When they open their mouths at the surface they make a distinctive "glooping" sound that is quite comical.



Carp "Glooping"

Re: ernie f

by David M, 25-Apr-18 12:41 PM GMT

Your image of the church reminded me a touch of 'The Haywain'. Very rustic!

Nice to see a female Large White too. One of my favourite butterflies (you can tell I'm not a vegetable grower)!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-Apr-18 02:47 PM GMT

David – from one non-veg grower to another – yes, I like Large Whites too. Interesting that they, themselves can tell gender difference by seeing ultra-violet markings..

Site Visit: Lowton's Copse – 25th April 2018

Lowton's Copse is a fine deciduous woodland in the parish of Clanfield famed locally for its carpets of Bluebells. Today the sun broke through the clouds sporadically, lighting up the woodland floor.



Lowton's Copse

I came here to see if there were any Speckled Woods – but no. It seems that I could only come away with a Peacock shot again and even then it was a bit nibbled.



Peacock on a Bluebell

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Most people come here this time of year for the Bluebells but flowering now there are also Wood Anemone, Wild Strawberry, Yellow Archangel, Lords & Ladies, Ramsons, Primrose, Celandine, Greater Stitchwort, Garlic Mustard, Bugle, Daffodil and more Solomons Seal than I have ever seen growing in a single location anywhere else. But the real star is easily overlooked – this is the Toothwort – a strange-looking, whitish-pink, chlorophyll-free plant that is parasitic on shrubs, particularly Hazel. I have only ever seen it here so its rare, or as the book puts it “locally common”.



Toothwort - Lathraea squamaria

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 25-Apr-18 08:26 PM GMT

Cheers Ernie I saw one of those plants the other day and I couldn't remember what it was, Toothwort 😊 Lovely Bluebell shots and a sneaky Peacock 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 25-Apr-18 10:03 PM GMT

Some nice images there, Ernie – that is indeed a weird-looking plant. 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

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

What a beautiful carpet of bluebells that is, Ernie. Hopefully we'll all get chance to see this over the next couple of weeks if the weather plays ball.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 26-Apr-18 02:35 PM GMT

Dave, Wurzel and David, many thanks for your comments.

Many of those Toothworts were going over but there were still a few in full flush – if you can call it that. Similarly I spoke about the Snakeshead Fritillaries recently and these too are now going over but I am pleased to report that I have found two further locations near me that have them. The churchyard areas set aside for wildlife at both Selborne and Upper Farringdon churches. How many have been planted and how many seeded themselves naturally I do not know.

Site Visit: Selborne Church Meadow – 26th April 2018

The village of Selborne has some wonderful habitats which I shall post about as the year wears on and today I went to one of these, the meadow just below Selborne Church.



Looking up the hill from the Water Meadow at Selborne

Last year in May this damp meadow with its stream and its surrounding trees and shrubs were a haven for Orange Tip and Holly Blue so I thought I'd pay it an earlier visit this year to see what was brewing.

I am glad I did.

Two male Holly Blues passed by but did not stop. Also there were three male Orange Tips jousting with each other, stopping from time to time to nectar from Cuckoo-flowers before getting back to the matter in hand.



Orange Tip on Cuckoo-flower

One of them split off to pursue what I thought was a female, they even appeared to do a courtship spiral together but when the female "Orange Tip" landed I realised it was instead a Green-veined White. My book says the first brood are the smallest of the year and it appears some can be so small they even confuse Orange Tip males! This was my first Green-veined White of the year, quickly followed by my second and third, both males and females were represented.



Green-veined White from the front



And from the side

One female dropped very low down amongst the undergrowth and I guessed she must be egg-laying and I was right. I only captured one shot of her before she was off and away so far I could not follow. This one shot was lucky though because you can just about see her abdomen curling round to lay an egg. The blur is because she was actually flapping her wings a bit while she did this. I had never seen a Green-veined White lay an egg before so I am quite pleased I got a photo even though it was a bit distant and in the shade.



Green-veined White laying eggs

As usual, my first sighting of the year gives me the excuse to share some past photos I have taken of this species.



On a leaf - just resting



On the ground - collecting minerals



Mating pair

Non-butterfly snapshots

The pond in the village of Selborne can be full of Common Newts courting and mating in late Spring. The pond itself is in the grounds of Gilbert White's house and there is a charge for entrance. Here are two pics I took in recent years.



Common Newt



Common Newts getting friendly

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Apr-18 03:48 PM GMT

Home Patch - 27th April 2018

Opposite my house is a pond with a path that runs round it. It is called King's Pond and was once a millpond but the paper mill which it powered has long gone. Because of its proximity to me it is no problem for me to pop out for five minutes or so whenever I can.



Kings Pond

It can be good for all sorts of wildlife. Within the last three days I have seen two Holly Blues (both male), three Orange Tips (two male and one female) and one Large White (male).



Orange Tip at Kings Pond

Today was pretty much a damp squib other than a brief splash of sunshine for a few minutes so I shall instead list a few moths I have found resting around my house and garden over the last couple of years. I don't have a moth trap so its always just luck of the draw when I find one.



Angle Shades



Clouded Border



Garden Carpet

This next one is The Flame I think, but it has its wings more open than shown in my book. If it's not can someone correct me?



The Flame?



Orange Swift

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Birds have also been quite wonderful around King's Pond lately. One Grey Wagtail was flitting from its chosen perch – a branch over the surface of the pond, grabbing a fly and then going back to its perch to eat it. It did this again and again. The Moorhens have a brood of chicks which were playing “at the shallow end” of the pool. Little Grebes were “laughing”, a Little Egret was roosting in a tree and the Tufted Ducks that had arrived here in winter are still here. A Tree-creeper crept up a Sycamore Tree opposite our house and Bullfinches and Goldfinches were very much in evidence. It was all very jolly.

We are lucky enough to have a heronry at this pond. There are three nests in total at the moment and two have chicks in them. The nest shown is by far the easiest to view and after waiting a few minutes I was just about able to get a shot of the chick (circled in pic below – note the tufty head). Although the outside of the beak of this chick is yellow I was at one time able to see it had a red-coloured gape.



Grey Heron with chick in nest (circled)

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 27-Apr-18 07:04 PM GMT

Some more great reports and photos Ernie, I am finding your posts very interesting 😊

ernie f wrote:

...This next one is The Flame I think, but it has its wings more open than shown in my book. If it's not can someone correct me?... (4).JPG

I think you are correct in your ID of The Flame, I have had a few of these to my garden moth trap and their more usual resting posture is with wings tightly rolled up to resemble a twig.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 27-Apr-18 11:17 PM GMT

Having a site on our doorstep 🇮🇪 Looks good for a Flame to me Ernie quite unusual to see one adopt that pose, normally they look like a twig or old fag butt 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Apr-18 11:49 AM GMT

Neil and Wurzel: Thanks for the moth ID confirmation. It's kind of nice to have experts around to help me in areas I am unfamiliar with.

Home Patch: 28th April 2018

Overcast, cold and rainy all day so here are some more archive shots of moths from around my house and garden over recent years.

First off is the Many Plumed. It's larvae feed on Honeysuckle and we do have this plant in our garden.



Many Plumed

Then the Buttoned Snout. It's larvae feed on hop. Alton was once a brewery town and the centre of a hop growing industry and some hop-fields still exist nearby.



Buttoned Snout

Then the Bee Moth. It's larvae feed on wasp and bee nest detritus. Unfortunately for us, we live in a house that attracts wasps to nest almost every year in our loft or chimney for some reason.



Bee Moth

A Common Pug (I think)



Common Pug?

And finally, a Small Dusty Wave



Small Dusty Wave

Non-butterfly (or in this case Non-moth) Snapshots of the day

Last year there came a day when there was quite a commotion in our back garden. I looked out to see that a male Sparrow-hawk had come down and made a kill. At first I couldn't quite make out what it was but soon realised it was a Collared Dove. Blast, I thought to myself - it couldn't have been a Wood Pigeon, could it? We've got far too many of those around here and only a very few Collared Doves.



Sparrow-hawk killing a Collared Dove

It proceeded to peck away at the feathers - cleaning it ready to eat.



Sparrow-hawk cleaning its kill

The unfortunate dove however did not eventually make for a meal because a moment later next-doors cat came over and frightened the Sparrow-hawk off. The cat was not hungry though, it merely sat there guarding the kill. I ended up having to go and get the dove and bury it. Oh well, such is nature I suppose.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Apr-18 12:05 PM GMT

I forgot to post this entry on the 23rd April because I was only there for 30 minutes while my wife was in the garden centre nearby and it slipped my mind.

Site Visit: Alice Holt Arboretum – 23rd April 2018

This is a fine part of the Alice Holt woodland containing a number of trees planted as an Arboretum in 1957 and now quite mature. At the right time of year, regular as clockwork a number of Purple Hairstreaks use an Ash as a master tree here. Even though there are Oaks either side of it and of course they do go onto the Oaks too, for some reason they prefer this Ash for jousting instead.

However, that is later in the year and I will post more about it closer to that time. Today near the Purple Hairstreak's Master Ash I came across this lovely Orange Underwing Moth dancing around in the air. I followed it and at one point it came to rest on the gravel track and opened its wings wide. Fantastic!



Orange Underwing

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 29-Apr-18 10:33 AM GMT

No worries Ernie, though I wouldn't call myself an expert I just got lucky in that that was one species I can ID 😊😄 More great moth shots especially the Orange Underwing 🐛🌱

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Apr-18 12:42 PM GMT

Another dreary, wet and cold day so I thought I would present a little diversion. An enigma (to me at least).

Some of the butterflies in the Lycaenidae family perform an odd behaviour – a kind of “wing-roll”.

I first noticed this behaviour in the Silver-studded Blue colony on Broxhead Common. If a Silver-studded Blue settles for any length of time, it may move its hind wings in what appears to be a circular motion. Both the males and the females do this and I have seen them performing this behaviour with wings partly open, fully open and closed – its fascinating. I have seen them do “the wing roll” whilst nectaring from mature heather and resting on the ground or on a tightly cropped bed of young, un-blooming heather but not while basking, courting or mating. They do not seem to be conscious of neighbouring individuals when they do it, although I did see one stop when another butterfly flew past but that may just be because he was preparing for take-off if the need arose. And they do not always do it all the time – I have seen umpteen individuals not doing it while nectaring and quite a few who did. I have taken a few videos and it looks to me that one male was doing it perched upside-down on a heather flower at full stretch while probing inside the bell for nectar but as he withdrew he stopped. However in a video of a female on a heather bell she was just relaxing on top of it and she was still rolling her wings. Another female was doing it on the bare sand. Another male was on a heather plant that had no blooms and was clearly not nectaring from it. He did the wing roll with wings open and then closed. Video still shots of this male doing the wing roll follow. Please open word doc to see video stills. The top two shots in the attachment show the behaviour with wings open and the lower two shots with wings closed. This was the same individual on the same perch over a period of only 5 minutes. He changed from the open wing posture to the closed wing stance after being buffeted by a brief breeze.



Looking more closely at my videos what it seems to be doing when it has its wings closed is to very carefully roll one hind wing forward and then slightly open it before closing it and rolling it back again. It does the same with the other hind wing and alternates this action a few times – indeed one hind wing is moved forward as the other is returned simultaneously but it keeps its fore wings, body, antennae and legs still while doing this although it does seem sometimes the females move their middle legs up and down as part of the motion but not the males who only stand on their back four legs. It seems the intensity of the action is variable too. I have seen it done fast with some urgency but also slow and leisurely. When the wings are open it looks even more like a circular motion and in the male its clear that the extent of the wing roll is across the black band on the inside upper hind wing. It appears what this action does is to rub the fore wings and hind wings together over this black band and the effect of opening the wing slightly at the end of the roll might be to release any rubbed-off scales onto the plant or ground where the butterfly is perching. The female of course is brown but it seems to me that she too has a slightly different shading along this band and may also be rubbing off some of her scales across it. Why would a butterfly purposefully rub off some of its scales when clearly its not to attract a mate?

I have also seen the following do it: Small Blue, Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue and on a single occasion amongst hundreds not doing it, Chalkhill Blue.

Does anyone have any ideas?

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 29-Apr-18 03:03 PM GMT

I've watched various Lycids do this countless times over the years and I've always presumed (I'm not sure if I've read it somewhere or just made it up) that it's a form of protection against predation. Given that most species have false eyespots or antennae(tails) to draw attention away from the real head, by moving them around in this manner they are further enhancing the distraction.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Apr-18 02:53 PM GMT

Bugboy, that's a neat idea. I like it. It explains why both sexes do it. But I wonder why not all of the family does it – at least I have not seen Dukes, Green Hairstreaks or Brown Argus do it for example. I have just read another idea and that is it is one way of the butterfly warming up its flight muscles on cool, overcast days but I am sure I have seen already flying butterflies land on sunny days and then proceed to do a wing-roll. This year (if we ever get a warm, sunny day) I shall check that out in the field.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Apr-18 03:11 PM GMT

30th April 2018

Damp and with an icy breeze. It barely reaches 7 degrees in Hampshire today – so here are some more archive shots of moths in my house and garden.

Large Yellow Underwing with its wings sufficiently parted at rest to see a portion of the yellow underwing.



Large Yellow Underwing

Willow Beauty? Unsure but it looks like it and its larvae feed on deciduous trees and shrubs and there are a lot of those in our garden. Can anyone

confirm ID or otherwise?



Willow Beauty?

The Snout (1st Generation). It's larvae feed on nettle which grows around King's Pond opposite.



The Snout

Small Magpie. This picture was taken without a flash inside the house at night under artificial lights hence the orange flush.



Small Magpie

Grey Dagger Caterpillar showing the shark-like protrusion on its back while crawling over a leaf in our front garden.



Grey Dagger

Non-butterfly shot of the day

A few years ago I found that someone had "released" a pet Caspian Turtle into King's Pond opposite my house. I just assumed it would not survive the first winter but how wrong could I be? I saw it again just a couple of days ago as healthy as any turtle could be.



Caspian Turtle

The weather is supposed to be a bit better here tomorrow. I hope so because I am running out of archive moth shots 😊

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 01-May-18 01:31 PM GMT

Nice moth shots Ernie, something I always like to see. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-May-18 01:53 PM GMT

Andrew

Yep - you can't beat a good moth shot. I keep thinking about getting a moth trap but the cost of a good one stops me.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-May-18 02:29 PM GMT

Site Visit: Noar Hill - 1st May 2018



Noar Hill Cowslips and Early Purple Orchids

AT LAST!!! My first Duke of Burgundy of the year. Only one and only fleetingly - I was only able to get a record shot of it that is not good enough to post here. I met Pauline while here and she saw an additional one, perhaps two and got there at least 30 minutes before I did, so I cannot be the first to claim a sighting this year here. Thanks Pauline 😊

My first sighting gives me the chance to review my past experiences with Dukes at Noar Hill.

They love the low, sheltered areas afforded by the overgrown medieval chalk-pit workings at Noar Hill. They will often sit on low plants such as cowslips and nectar from them.



Duke on a Cowslip

Males perch awaiting females to pass by and will attack any males that enter their chosen territory.



In the very best years just about every pit at Noar Hill will harbour a few Dukes but the central pits are the best bet in a typical year. The pit right in the centre of the reserve can also hold a small number of the late-summer brood.

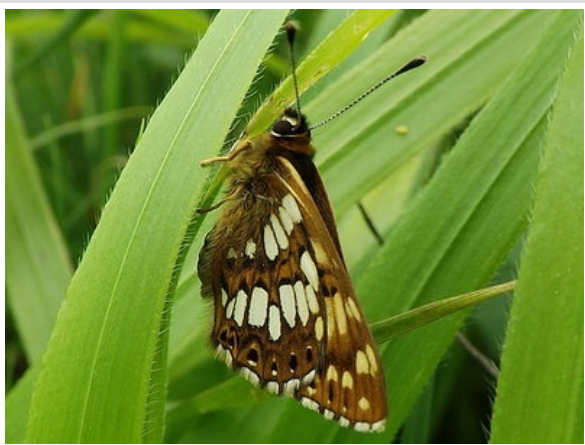


They do not wander far. The Dukes of each pit will typically stay in that pit and the shrubs around it. At worst they will wander into the next pit along for some part of the day.

Dukes are normally low fliers keeping close to the ground and low shrubs but on the odd occasion they will stop off on the lower boughs of trees. The one pictured below landed just above head height and stayed there nectaring for a long while.



On overcast days I once wondered where they had all gone. Well I found in these circumstances they can perch in bushes and on tall grasses and hardly move from their chosen spot until it has warmed up again. Someone else on UK Butterflies posted he witnessed an Orange Tip do this for four days and when it got sunny and warm once again it flew off, none the worse for it.

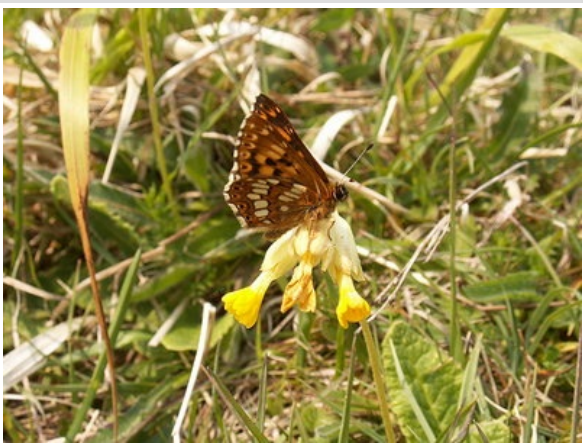


When they hold their wings very wide open so that the front wings part slightly from the rear ones, then the leading edge of the hind wings show two startlingly white dots on them.



The white spots

The numbers at Noar Hill can be good or they can be bad – it depends it seems on the weather. One year I found 42, another year they maxed-out at only 12.



But you only need to see one to get hooked on them. Last year in early April I found one on the main central path and within the space of a couple of minutes I was surrounded by eager butterfly enthusiasts, some of whom had come a long way to see one here and this was the first time they had ever seen one. Out came all the cameras and luckily the butterfly was very obliging, staying stock still for them for some minutes before getting bored and flitting off.

One year recently at Noar Hill I witnessed some odd behaviour from a male Duke who seemed to have got very confused. He continually pestered a Burnet Companion Moth as though it was a female Duke. He followed the BCM for ages, sometimes apparently nudging it but surprisingly the BCM did not fly off. It just walked through the grass. Obviously it was not too perturbed by this odd attention it was getting.



Duke with Burnet Companion Moth

Perhaps it thought it was being pursued by a male BCM! A weird co-incidence if it did.



It has to be said that when the BCM spreads its forewings, the revealed hindwings do have a passing resemblance to the hindwings of a Duke but you would think a male Duke would not be so fooled for so long.

Maybe it thought it was another male Duke and was trying to shoo it away. Who knows? I don't. Has anyone else got any ideas?

Also here today, one female Brimstone and one male Orange Tip and that was it butterfly-wise but the Whitethroats were in fine song.

Site Visit: Selborne Church Meadow – 1st May 2018



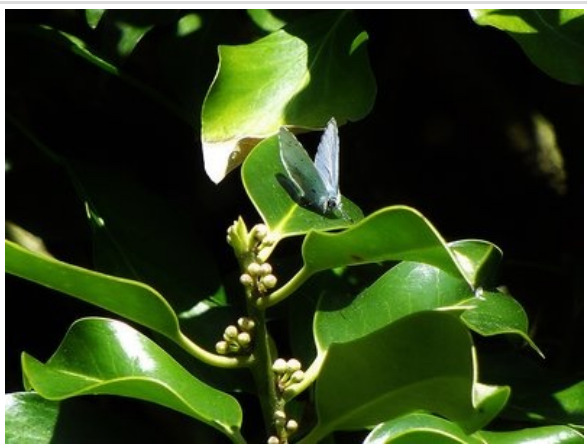
Across Church Meadow

Took the opportunity while it was sunny of revisiting the Church Meadow. Two Orange Tips, two Small Whites and two Holly Blues – all male.





The Holly Blue photographed was a bit high. He just would not come down to play.



Also a Kestrel, a Red Kite and a Pergrine Falcon! Fantastic.

Non-Butterfly Snapshot of the Day

Noar Hill at this time of year shows its first orchid, the Early Purple. Amongst the thousands of cowslips you will find perhaps over a hundred of these orchids. They tend to cluster in certain areas. Typically the best bunch is along the main central path (which is my first picture in this post). and where I found this particularly purple one just opening up. The colour of their blooms can vary quite a bit, from deep purple to rosy pink. The only other orchid they can be confused with is the Green-winged Orchid but that species does not grow at Noar Hill.



Very purple Early Purple Orchid at Noar Hill

Re: ernie f

by Pauline, 01-May-18 02:52 PM GMT

Hi Ern, first off can I just say that I am loving your diary – a fresh approach to all things natural – and I am wondering why I had to nag you for so long to start one 😊😄 Secondly, I cannot claim to have seen the first Duke as Mark Jones spotted one last week – nevertheless it is great to see them. After the level of predation last Autumn I am interested to see how numbers pan out this year.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-May-18 04:40 PM GMT

Pauline

Thanks for your comment.

Also, on a quick review of the pics I posted for Selborne Meadow I said they were Small Whites. They were of course Green-veined Whites. Oops!

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 01-May-18 05:53 PM GMT

Great reportage on the Dukes Ernie 😊 Good to see they're off the mark 😊 Beautiful crisp whites shots 😊🍀

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 02-May-18 07:44 AM GMT

Good to see your Dukes, particularly the one on the Cowslip. I have always thought that combination makes for an ideal image of a Duke.

Some great reports recently,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 02-May-18 09:50 AM GMT

I love your shots of the GWV's there so crisp and I think Whites are very hard to get good shots of. 🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by David M, 02-May-18 11:49 AM GMT

Great news, Ernie! I can't remember the last time it took till May for Dukes to appear. With the warm bank holiday to follow they may have just timed their emergence perfectly. Let's hope so!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-May-18 01:11 PM GMT

Wurzel: Thanks for the support on my reports when I make them. I can't wait for when the Silver-studded Blues start up 'cos I have a whole bunch of observations on them as I have a sizeable brood near me.

Trevor: I always like peoples photos of butterflies best when they are associated with blooms of some kind.

Goldie: Thanks. I was pleased with the Green-veined White shots. Most of the ones I had already were of the underside of the wings or a bit washed-out top shots. I got lucky this time.

David: Yes it is very late for the Dukes. I was starting to get tired looking and getting no results.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-May-18 01:33 PM GMT

No site visit today. Bad weather and my car is in the garage anyway.

Hopefully this is the last wintery spring day for Hampshire. The forecast is one of improvement so I'm keeping my fingers crossed. But today - its another moth archive picture event I'm afraid.

I have run out of the ones seen around my house and garden so I'm "spreading my wings" a bit to sample a few seen further afield.

Brimstone moth at Noar Hill. Is that an egg on the leaf next to its wing?



Brimstone moth



Blood Vein at Odiham Common



Clouded Buff (male) at Broxhead Common



Tawny Barred-angle at Longmoor



Speckled Yellow at Oxenbourne Down



Wood Tiger at Old Winchester Hill



Large Emerald at Broxhead Common



Hummingbird Hawkmoth at Old Winchester Hill



Scarlet Tiger at St Catherine's Hill riverside



Cinnebar at Noar Hill



Ruby Tiger at Kingsley wayside

And finally, a couple of years ago at Magdalen Hill there was a swarm of Six-spot Burnet.



Just about every Knapweed had a bunch of them on it and there are a lot of Knapweeds at Magdalen Hill!



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

As you know I try if I can to add something different to the end of my posts and this one is certainly different. Its not wildlife at all but instead an unusual weather phenomenon that I saw toward the end of last year while searching for Small Coppers at Kingsley Common – one of my closest nature reserves. I saw a TV program that showed this happening and explained it. It said that super-cooled raindrops seed into ice crystals inside part of the cloud and drop down under their own weight only to evaporate before reaching the ground. It punctures a hole in the cloud and looks for all the world as if the sky is falling in.



Weird sky over Kingsley Common

Re: ernie f

by CallumMac, 02-May-18 03:32 PM GMT

I would agree with your Willow Beauty, Ernie (Monday's post) – a really smart individual as well.

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 02-May-18 09:06 PM GMT

CallumMac wrote:

I would agree with your Willow Beauty, Ernie (Monday's post) – a really smart individual as well.

I would too. I get both these and the very similar Mottled Beauty in my garden trap and have found the web page at the link below useful with these;

<http://www.eakringbirds.com/eakringbirds4/beautymothidmottledandwillow.htm>

I am jealous of your grounded Orange underwing, a cracking shot 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 02-May-18 10:16 PM GMT

That truly is a 'weird' sky, Ernie. I thought you'd manipulated the image at first!

Nice array of moths, some of which are species I rarely see. No doubt you're champing at the bit for a butterfly fix this weekend?

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 03-May-18 02:01 PM GMT

More great stuff Ernie 😊 Especially like the Clouded Buff, they can be a right bugger to get a shot of free from errant glass blades 😊🇮🇪 I hope Asterix or any other Gauls weren't around when you took that cloud shot, that's their biggest fear 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 03-May-18 03:08 PM GMT

Beautiful selection of moths Ernie. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-May-18 04:59 PM GMT

CallumMac, Neil, David, Wurzel and Andrew

Thanks one and all for your kind comments on my moths, and for confirming ID on the one I was unsure about.

Wurzel

I have read a few Asterix books when I was younger (but surprisingly not that younger than I am now) and I don't remember about the cloud. I'll have to search it out.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 03-May-18 05:15 PM GMT

Their only fear was the sky falling on their heads and that's what that weird sky looked like to me 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-May-18 05:36 PM GMT

Site Visit: Noar Hill – 3rd May 2018

I arrived around 9.30 am and for the first thirty minutes I did not see a single butterfly. The bird life was very fine though. The Whitethroats were in song again and appear to be favouring a patch in the centre of the reserve. Perhaps they are nesting there. Also Chiffchaff, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Red Kite, Linnet, Yellowhammer and Blackcap as well as a Song Thrush that I could not see which was singing away in a tree close by. Skylarks were singing in the sky. What appeared to be a Tree Pipit appeared to have nest material in its beak as it landed on a hedge-top but he did not stay around long enough for a proper identification (nor a pic).

At around 10 am it started to warm up. I met Hazel who had seen a Duke in the centre pit but it had flown off. We looked around for awhile without success. Then Mike came on the seen and spotted it again. Here it is sitting on a Cowslip.



Duke on a Cowslip

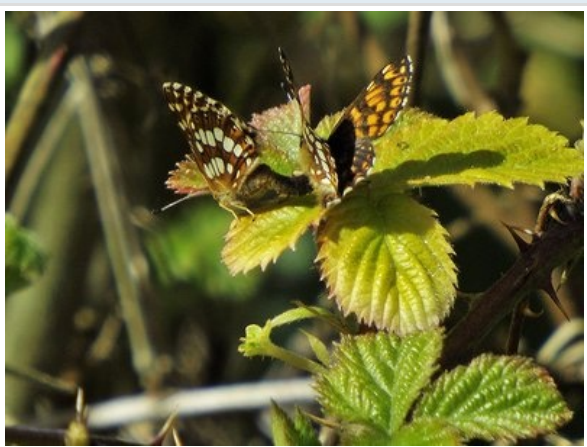
While there, Pauline was in the pit next-door also looking at a Duke. Pauline eventually came around to our pit and a little later we saw three in the air all at once. A freshly emerged female was being pursued by a male. They fluttered a while in the air and then landed together on a leaf. This is the point where we all started taking pictures of course – in eager anticipation of what might come next! If you have read Pauline's post today, what follows are my observations of the same event that she recorded so well.

One flapped its wings (I guess the male) and then crept up to her from behind giving her a little nudge and then he curled his abdomen underneath him, searching for its "target". Other courtship pics are on Pauline's pages.

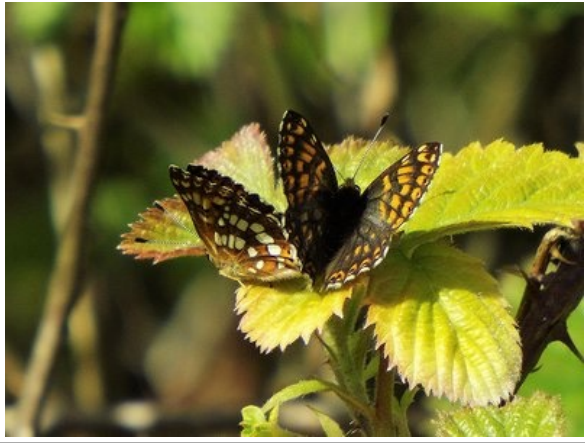


Searching for the target

They made contact but he was still facing her rear end! He started to move round bit by bit until finally they were back to back.



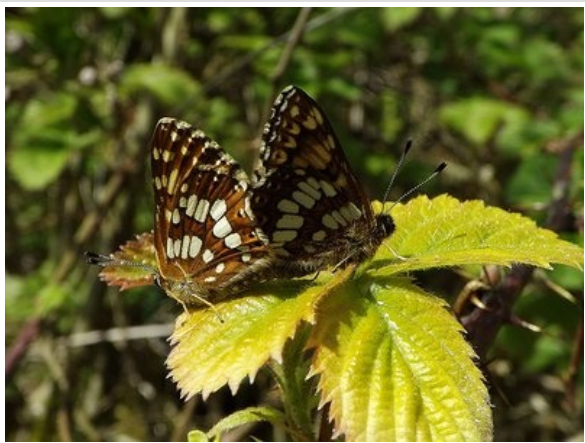
Starting to turn round



Now turned through 90 degrees

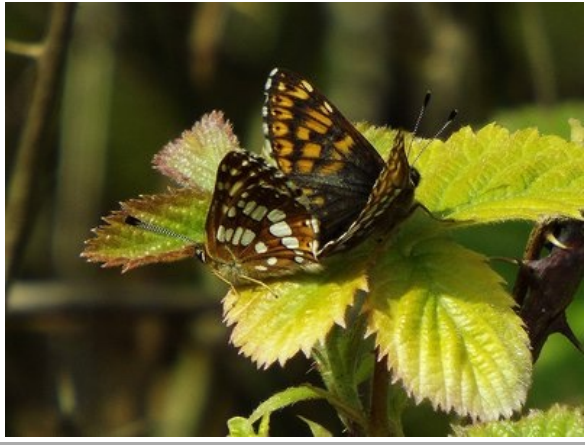


Finally back-to-back



A bit closer

They stayed like that for 36 minutes (by Pauline's watch). In the mean-time Alan came along just in time. We discussed why no-one ever saw them open their wings while mating. A few minutes later the male dropped his wings down a little while still in contact - just to prove us wrong.



Male lowering wings while mating

Then he laid them completely flat against the leaf and proceeded to disconnect from her.



Male with wings open but now disconnected

He stayed there for a few seconds with his wings down to gain energy from the sun and then flew off leaving the female resting on the leaf.

What a fantastic thing to see.

Also Pauline who as you know is an expert on the early stages of the butterfly life-cycle was kind enough to show me a couple of vacated Brown Hairstreak eggs. I took a pic which did not seem to be a very good one on the camera screen but as it turned out when on the computer it wasn't too bad after all. Can you spot them? You may have to enlarge the pic.



Brown Hairstreak eggs

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Around the same time as the Dukes were mating, the Whitethroats were getting a bit frisky too. There is a dense area of shrub backed by trees along the pit ridge that they seem to like a lot. Here is the male who was flitting along the tops of the trees and shrubs, stopping to sing awhile – declaring his territory. There was another hiding away in the shrubs, likely his female partner. He did not know there was a tasty meal right behind him in the shape of a St Mark's Fly!



Whitethroat with St Mark's Fly

Re: ernie f

by Pauline, 03-May-18 07:04 PM GMT

You're embarrassing me Ern 😊😊 A much better, fuller description of events than the one I quickly rattled off 😊 Great sequence of shots too! (even if you did have to get to within 2mm 😊😊). Smashing morning tho wasn't it with perfect weather and great company not to mention the butterflies 😊

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 03-May-18 09:09 PM GMT

that really was a freaky looking sky! Great sequence of shots of the mating Dukes too. That's still one I have to get, Dukes in cop 🇹🇲

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 04-May-18 08:15 AM GMT

Absolutely cracking stuff Ernie 😊, and there's me stuck in work 🇹🇲

Have a goodun

Wurzel

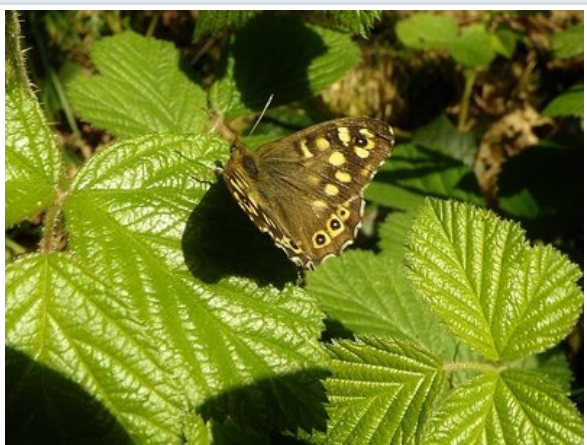
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-May-18 03:02 PM GMT

Site Visit: Kingsley - 4th May 2018

Part I: Kingsley Common

Two male Large Whites having a fight in flight. Two male Holly Blues arguing over the best position on a prime, mature, fruiting Holly. Two male and one female Orange Tip and one female Specked Wood.



It has to be said this location should be better than this at this time of year but it was OK today.

Part II: Kingsley Old Churchyard

Two male Holly Blues on the yews. One repeatedly came down to the Bluebells. He was a bit tatty but seeing a Holly Blue on a Bluebell has to be good.



One female Brimstone also enjoying a Bluebell.



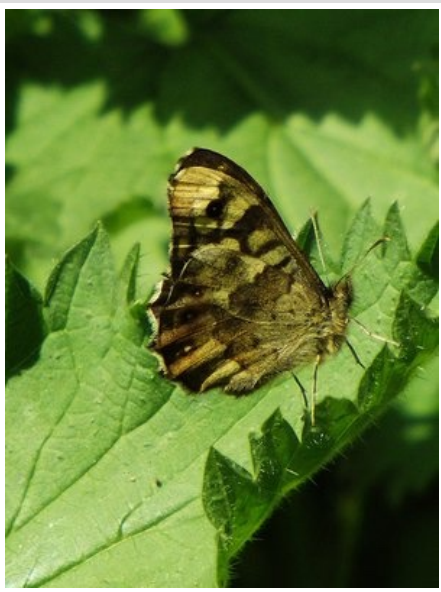
A Green-veined White also visited a Bluebell fleetingly but I could not get a picture.



Then an Orange Tip did the same.



A male Speckled Wood also visited the churchyard.



And three Green Hairstreaks, I presume all males because at one point there was a 3-way jousting match going on between them. They too liked to come down onto the Bluebells.



I mentioned in a previous post my observations regarding some of the members of the Lycaenidae that perform a behaviour of wing-rolling. I have in the past seen the following do the wing-roll: Small Blue, Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue and only once, a Chalkhill Blue. I have now as of today also seen a Green Hairstreak do it but it moved its hindwings in a circular motion while holding its forewings still. All the others moved their forewings.



Green Hairstreak wing roll step 1



Green Hairstreak wing roll step 2

These were my first Green Hairstreaks of the year and so this as usual gives me the excuse to include here some pics from the past and some survey data.

As you know the Green Hairstreak always rests with its wings firmly shut showing the bright green off to its fullest. It is a nondescript brown on top which can only be seen in flight. This pic is a video still shot.



Upper-side of a Green Hairstreak in flight

They never seem to fly very high, anywhere from ground level to just above head height is usual in my experience, but when they stop, the green of the wing acts as perfect camouflage against the background of green leaves so even if I am right in front of one, I often won't see it until it moves.

I have seen them land on sand at Broxhead, presumably warming up on it to recharge their energy before zooming off once more. And zooming is what they do best.

Often is the time I am aware a Green Hairstreak has just sped past me because it looks like a coppery-green leaf blowing laterally in a strong breeze rather than a more typical butterfly flutter.



On Sand at Broxhead



On a tree at Beacon Hill



On a shrub at Noar Hill

I have found they tend to stick to one area. At Noar Hill I once watched three Green Hairstreaks for ages all flitting around a single juniper bush in the centre of the reserve. One seemed to leave, but all he did was circle around the back of the bush, only to appear again on the other side! The same happened at St Catherine's Hill on a bush there. Its like a scaled-down version of a Brown Hairstreak master tree, a master shrub in fact.

When a male meets a virgin female there appears to be no lengthy courting ritual. One gives a brief wing flutter revealing the brown upper sides of its wings momentarily and copulation begins immediately back to back, both with wings firmly up. Its probably the male that gives the wing-flutter in order to waft scent in her direction but I do not know for sure. They do not seem to fly off anywhere but stay on the master shrub to mate. Like most butterflies they remain in this position for at least 30 minutes and can fly joined together if the need arises, say to avoid a predator or an overly-keen butterfly enthusiast.



Green Hairstreaks mating

In the picture of the mated pair above, the individual on the left appears smaller so one might conclude it is the male.

Because the colour is metallic, even this is not always an indicator of gender. The colour and intensity changes with the angle of the wing to the sun. The photo below shows the same mated pair from a different angle. Neither photo has been colour-enhanced; this is a real change in the colour due entirely to the angle the picture was taken.



This picture below seems to show a female perching on all six legs, but it sometimes is not obvious to me as the male sometimes places its front legs down as though perching on them as the one in last picture of the mated pair above seems to have done.



Female standing on all six legs

There follows a survey attached. Beacon Hill comes out best in Hampshire but of course numbers do vary year on year.



2015 Green Hairstreak Survey

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

One of the oaks along the Oak Ride on Kingsley Common has a trunk which branched into two and then remerged some time later to form a porthole!



The Porthole Oak

Re: ernie f

by Matsukaze, 04-May-18 09:01 PM GMT

[quote]I mentioned in a previous post my observations regarding some of the members of the Lycaenidae that perform a behaviour of wing-rolling. I have in the past seen the following do the wing-roll: Small Blue, Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue and only once, a Chalkhill Blue. I have now as of today also seen a Green Hairstreak do it but it moved its hindwings in a circular motion while holding its forewings still. All the others moved their forewings.

Wing-nuggling, as my wife and I call it. I have no idea why they do it, and do not particularly want to find out, as usually it looks to me as though the butterflies are doing it out of sheer pleasure and I would prefer not to have that particular illusion shattered (the exception is the Geranium Bronze where there is something obsessive-compulsive about the movement). To add to your list – Common Blue, Brown Argus and (overseas) Long-tailed Blue and probably others; whilst it's common amongst blues and hairstreaks, I've never seen the behaviour amongst coppers. Amongst British species the Green Hairstreaks are the supreme exponents of the art.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-May-18 10:24 PM GMT

Matsukaze

Yes, they do appear to enjoy it don't they?

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-May-18 10:32 PM GMT

I made an error.

I said the Green Hairstreaks do a wing-roll with their hindwings while the other species did it with their forewings. This is wrong. The other species wing-roll their hindwings.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 05-May-18 07:54 AM GMT

Breathless stuff, ernie! What a selection of species you've seen there, topped off by the mating pair of Green Hairstreaks.

Re: ernie f

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

That was a very detailed and interesting report Ernie – I'll look out for wing rolling a bit more now – I've seen it in a few species including Small Copper. The mating Greenstreaks 🍄🍄🍄 I have an album of Butterflies in cop and that is one that I would love to add to it 🍄🍄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 05-May-18 02:17 PM GMT

A very nice compendium of Green Hairstreaks, Ernie. A lovely species. 😊 I have often witnessed their "wing-rolling" – the female I encountered the other day indulged in this a lot in between the egg-laying. I'd love to get a good upperside shot, but even with very short exposures and "burst" mode the butterfly moves so fast it's out of shot in an instant and the camera misses it. Glimpses show the upperside to be a rich chocolate brown in new specimens – it would be great to see it properly.

Dave

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-May-18 05:37 PM GMT

David M: Thanks. I was a bit breathless rushing around taking their pics. Its difficult to believe all those in the churchyard were within the space of about 30 minutes! I was very lucky the day I saw the Green Hairstreaks mating and I don't ever expect to witness it again.

Wurzel: Aha! You have seen the wing-roll in the Small Copper have you? I have seen hundreds of Small Coppers in my time but never looked for this because I was not au fait with the antic at the time. I shall keep a sharp eye out for them doing it from now on.

Millerd, Dave: I came across a Green Hairstreak today with one of its wings badly damaged which allowed me to see part of the upper-side of one wing while it was at rest. Unfortunately all the pics I took of this were in silhouette because he chose to sit with his "best" side toward the sun.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-May-18 06:24 PM GMT

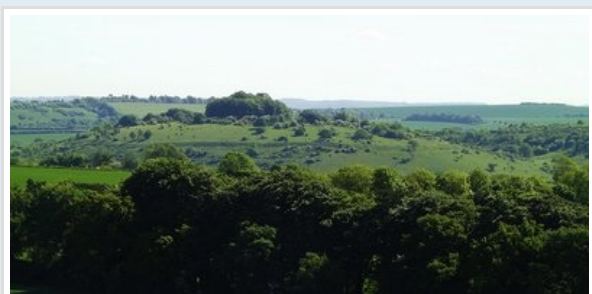
Site Visit: St Catherine's Hill & Water Meadows – 5th May 2018

Because of the combination of habitats here, this is the location where I have counted more flowering plant species on the same day than anywhere else in Britain and because of this, the butterfly community is varied too. The height of the hill offers great vantages over the countryside in one direction, and the city of Winchester with its notable cathedral in the other.



View from top of St Catherine's Hill

There is a huge Iron Age Hillfort enclosing the crest of the hill, which unusually incorporates a Medieval-style turf-cut miz-maze.



St Cat's Hill from Yew Tree Hill

There is a wooden stairway path leading to the top that I call the "Stairway to Heaven". Given there used to be a church on the top of this hill I think the name is apt.



The Stairway to Heaven

Summertime species of plants seen in great numbers of note here are Dropwort, Betony, Hounds Tongue and Rock Rose.

Butterflies include Common Blue, Holly Blue, Chalkhill Blue in hundreds, Brown Argus (my day max 14), Brimstone, Green Hairstreak, Orange Tip, Small Tortoiseshell, Clouded Yellow, Peacock, Red Admiral (my day max 28), Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Heath, Large Skipper, Small Skipper and Grizzled Skipper (my day max 10 for the latter), Large, Small, Marbled and Green Veined White.

So I went there today to see if the Grizzled Skippers were out yet. They were not. But did get umpteen Brimstone and another shot of one laying eggs.



Brimstone pretending to be a leaf



Brimstone laying eggs

There were a few Peacock, Large White, Small White (strangely my first this year) and Orange Tip. I got a pic of the Orange Tip egg-laying but it was far too fuzzy a shot to show here. Here is my first Small White of the year instead.

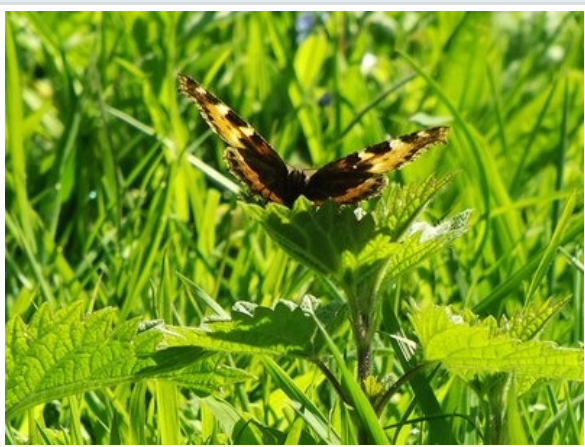


Small White at St Cat's Hill

Also Small Tortoiseshells.



Small Tort from the side



Small Tort backlit

And at least four Green Hairstreaks using a mature Sycamore as a master tree. In a previous post I remarked upon their use of "master" shrubs but now I find they also use master trees too, just like Brown, Purple and White-letter Hairstreaks. I didn't realise this until now – learning all the time 😊



One of the Green Hairstreaks on the master Sycamore

Because I was a little disappointed in not getting my target species I stopped off at the base of Magdalen Hill nearby on my way home. There were even more Brimstone there (I lost count), Large White and Holly Blue and yes, a single Grizzled Skipper!



The only Grizzled Skipper at Mag Hill (so far)

It seems this is another species that is late flying this year. There were five at St Cat's Hill at this time last year and 14 at Rake Bottom at the base of Butser Hill too.

Since this is my first spot of this species this year and I have set a precedent in adding in past shots when this happens – here are a few...





Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

The river that runs through the Water Meadow at the base of St Cat's Hill is the haunt of the somewhat elusive Water Vole, however when you do see one, if you stay quiet and still you may be rewarded with long, close views. I did not see them today but this one I saw from the small bridge across the river near St Cross Abbey to the south of St Cat's Hill a couple of years back.



Water Vole munching something tasty

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 05-May-18 08:13 PM GMT

Ernie, WoW!! 🍷🍷 I'm catching up on your Butterflies and the mating Dukes are fantastic 🍷🍷 then coming back to the Green hair Streaks another WOW! 😄 The Grizzle I'm really jealous of 🍷🍷 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by David M, 06-May-18 12:21 AM GMT

You're setting a high standard with your landscape shots, ernie, and I particularly like how you add a random non-butterfly image to your posts. A water vole is hard to beat so well done with this.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 06-May-18 07:55 AM GMT

Cracking Grizzlies Ernie 🤔🌱 'Stairway to Heaven - like it 🤔 (that's as close as I could get emoji wise to 'Rock' 😊)

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-May-18 05:46 PM GMT

Goldie, David, Wurzel

Thanks all for your comments - it is appreciated.

Site Visit: Sleaford - 6th May 2018

Across the road from Broxhead Heath is Sleaford. It has grassland, a stream and woods, mature high ancient hedgerows alongside the path and an active sand and gravel extraction works! There is a separate small parcel of heathland which is more or less an annexe to the Broxhead Heath.

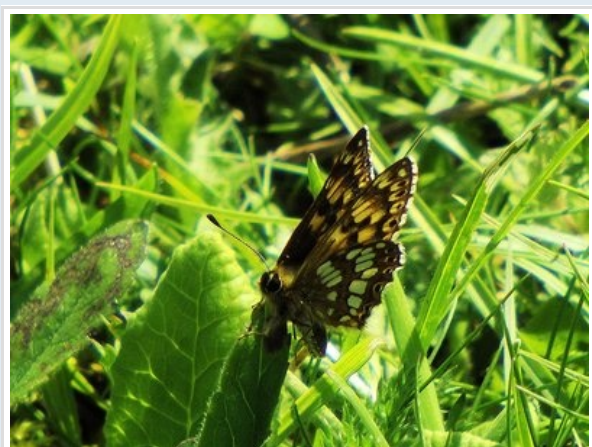
Today there was Speckled Wood, Orange Tip, Green-veined White and Brimstone, but on the heath itself was a moth that I think is the Latticed Heath. It is heavily backlit in my photo below which disguises it a bit. Can anyone confirm or otherwise?



Latticed Heath?

Site Visit: Noar Hill - 6th May 2018

There were 14 Dukes today and I only covered about 1/3 of the reserve. Two in pit 2 were sparring. They spiralled up very, VERY high into the sky. So high I lost sight of them. The next thing I knew the one I had been looking at on the ground had returned to his perch. He was the victor!



The Victor!

Plus my first Dingy Skipper of the year. Here it is...



Dingy Skipper

And of course as usual this gives me the excuse to add some past pics.



Female



Male



Mating

I state the sexes as though I am confident of it – but I'm not. I won't be offended if someone can correct me if I'm wrong.

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day come from Sleaford

The ancient hedgerows harbour Tree Sparrow. The stream has Kingfisher and Mandarin Duck. The woods have Chicken-of-the-woods bracket fungus and a natural beehive in a hollow tree.



Chicken of the Woods – Laetiporus sulphureus

The gravel works has a large nesting colony of Sand Martin not to mention Bewick Swan, Tufted Duck and Little Grebe, Reed Bunting and Lapwing on the lakes. Today there was a pair of courting nuthatch in the woodland. One, presumably the male, danced back and forth along a branch next to the female and flicked his tail feathers up right in front of her face. They then both flew off together. Unfortunately my pics of this were very blurred.

The Sand Martin colony was active. I went today because on Sunday the gravel works are silent. Please click on pic to enlarge – then you can see the Sand Martins better.



Sand Martin Colony

Re: ernie f

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

Fantastic image of the sand martin nests, ernie. Well done too for 'bagging' your Dingy along with the Dukes. I'm not a moth expert, but I've seen Latticed Heath many times and I'd be reluctant to identify it as anything else!

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 06-May-18 11:05 PM GMT

More great shots and reportage Ernie, good to see some more Dingies appearing on the PD board 😊 Does the Chicken of the Woods actually taste of chicken – most things do? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 07-May-18 07:42 AM GMT

Hi Ernie, your moth is a Common Heath 😊 . Great shots as always

Re: ernie f

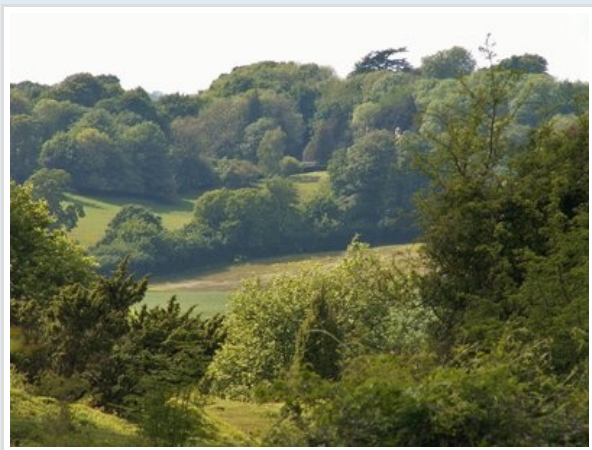
by ernie f, 07-May-18 01:49 PM GMT

David & Bugboy: Thanks for the moth ID. Some of these moths vary so much within their species it is often difficult to say what it is.
Wurzel: Chicken-of-the-woods apparently tastes like chicken and has the texture of cooked chicken although some people get nausea from eating it. I would always urge people not to eat any wild mushroom unless they know precisely what it is.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-May-18 02:21 PM GMT

Site Visit: Noar Hill – 7th May 2018



View from top of Noar Hill

I was only here yesterday and I did the same transect over 1/3 of the reserve as yesterday and the number of Dukes has suddenly blossomed from 14 to 25 in just those few hours! I spoke with Tony who is the official recorder for the butterflies at Noar Hill who tells me that his predecessor one day scored a count of 100 Dukes on his round. Of course that was some years ago. But if I am getting 25 across 1/3 of the reserve today, that could mean anything up to 75 across the entire reserve right now and I do not think we are at peak yet.

I saw 4 Green Hairstreaks and after talking to other people while there, worked out there must be at least 10 at Noar Hill at the moment.

Also the usual line-up of Brimstone, O Tip, S White, H Blue and a single Red Admiral. The Dingy I saw yesterday was nowhere to be seen and I saw no others either. I didn't bother taking a butterfly pic today. The heat was getting to me a bit (26 degrees!). So here is one from the past at this site.



The Early Purple Orchids are right at their peak now and look wonderful.

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

I saw a bank vole scuttle past me while at Noar Hill today. I have seen them here before. Here is one I photographed on a previous encounter.



Bank Vole

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 07-May-18 10:37 PM GMT

Cheers for the info Ernie I've often wondered whether it was named because of taste or because in poor light with drastic myopia it looks like a chicken 🤪😂 Philzoid and I were at Noar Hill yesterday afternoon must have missed you but we say about 12 or so Dukes – it's a great site but also one that's very easy to get lost in! 🤪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 08-May-18 11:56 AM GMT

That Noar Hill view on such a fine day looks positively intoxicating, ernie. The bank vole was a nice bonus for you – you'd have thought it'd have preferred to stay in the water with those stifling temperatures!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-May-18 06:29 PM GMT

Wurzel: Great you could get to Noar Hill, my local reserve. Sorry I missed you.

David: I think the vole was staying in the shade. He crossed the wooded entrance path to the reserve.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-May-18 06:59 PM GMT

Site Visit: Butser Hill/Rake Bottom – 8th May 2018

Opposite the Queen Elizabeth County Park near Petersfield is the open downland of Butser Hill. From the top there is a 360-degree view of the neighbouring countryside for many miles around.



View from top of Butser Hill

Around the car park at the top of the hill in the right season you will find Vipers Bugloss, Montbretia, Toadflax, White Bryony and the largest mass of Rosebay Willowherb you will ever see. There are the usual chalk grassland orchids, especially large numbers of Early Purple Orchid and wild herbs such as marjoram out on the open hillside with masses of Cowslips in spring. Birds up here include Meadow Pipit, Bullfinch, Spotted Flycatcher, Whitethroat, Yellowhammer, Linnet, Goldfinch, Chiffchaff, Red Kite, Raven, Kestrel and Cuckoo. On the hill itself butterflies include Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Common Blue, Small & Essex Skipper, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Heath, Gatekeeper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Small White, Orange Tip and Painted Lady. However as I am sure you are aware what most butterfly enthusiasts come here for is a visit to Rake Bottom, a dry river valley "round the back" of the hill.



In Rake Bottom

Its a rather steep descent but its worth the effort because here is a good location for Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Duke of Burgundy all in fair numbers at the same time. In May 2017 on a sunny day there was a Duke of Burgundy, Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper at my feet all at one time within a couple of metres of each other while in the air just above my head two male Green Hairstreaks circled round and around in a sparring battle and in the distance at exactly the same moment, two male Cuckoos called to each other to establish territories. It can certainly be an enchanting place to visit on a warm spring morning if you have the stamina to negotiate the slopes.

This year I counted 10 Dukes, 12 Grizzled Skips (one was on the hill near the top), 1 Dingy Skip and 1 Green Hairstreak. Compared with last year on May 6th when there were 17 Dukes, 14 Grizzled Skips, 20 Dingy Skips and 3 Green Hairstreak. Of course there were the usual Brimstone, Orange Tip, GV and Small White, Speckled Wood, Comma (which on this occasion was walking on the ground taking salts from a dried up muddy puddle), Mint Moth and Cinnabar but even these were in lower numbers than the same time last year. Also last year at this time I saw 11 Small Heath and 2 Common Blue here but so far this year I have not seen these anywhere. It seems everything in Hampshire no matter where I go is still running a week or so later than last year despite the wonderful weather we are having now. The Dingies in particular are in noticeably low numbers.



Dingy Skip



Grizzled Skip



Duke



Green Hairstreak



Comma taking salts



Mint Moth

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

The Cuckoo is regular here. It is one of the few places I actually expect to see cuckoos rather than just hear them.

In 2016 for example two males were chasing each other, then they came to rest on the ground for a face-off! I had never seen a cuckoo on the ground before. They didn't actually come to blows but for a moment I wondered if they might! And as I said above, two males were here in 2017 too (perhaps even the same two?) but merely cuckoo-ed at each other across the valley on that occasion. At least one male was here this year too. He cuckoo-ed and then I saw him fly low between trees in the distance.



Cuckoo

You may have to click to enlarge to see the Cuckoo face-off pic below better.



The Cuckoo "face-off"

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 09-May-18 11:15 AM GMT

Great set of shots Ernie 😊 I know what you mean about the butterflies being behind – I just hope that the weather stays reasonable until they've had a chance to catch up with it – fingers crossed 🙏

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 09-May-18 11:49 AM GMT

I'm really enjoying your landscape images, ernie. The butterflies aren't bad either, particularly that Green Hairstreak with the full row of streaks on the hindwing.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-May-18 12:25 PM GMT

Cheers Guys – its good of you to say you like my pics. I have seen other people's efforts on this site and they simply blow me away at times – some look very professional.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-May-18 12:41 PM GMT

Site Visit: Noar Hill – 9th May 2018



Juniper at Noar Hill

I am well chuffed. Why? I have just broken my record for the number of Dukes I've seen in any year at Noar Hill. On my visit on 7th May 2018 (2 days ago) I found 25. Today I made a point of going to other parts of the reserve I did not visit on the 7th and I found a further 27. A total of 52 so far and my previous annual record here was 41. Not only that but I found none at all in "The Scrape" and at peak you expect to find two or three there so it seems they are still not at their peak. I took a picture of the last one I spotted today (because I guessed it would be given the route I had chosen). Here is number 52!



Number 52

I added two more Dingies and an extra Green Hairstreak to the counts here today too.



Duke and Dingy

Plus more Orange Tips and Brimstones that I long ago lost count of. One of the Orange Tips landed on an Early Purple Orchid and drank some nectar but he flew off just as I was about to take his pic. Blast!

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

While at Noar Hill today there was still the remains of a muddy puddle near "The Triangle" that the recent spate of exceptionally hot days had failed to evaporate entirely. As I approached it a Hornet came down and decided to have a drink and a bathe. Here he is.



Hornet bathing

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 09-May-18 04:10 PM GMT

Really enjoying your posts ernie, lovely views and Butterflies, that sounds a great spot for Butterflies, just wish I lived a bit nearer to these places Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by David M, 09-May-18 09:44 PM GMT

Keep the eclectic mix of images coming, ernie. It's a welcome diversion from what most of us post on here (myself included).

Great that you got a Dingy in shot along with a Duke (although they DO seem to be bedfellows at most sites).

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 10-May-18 09:04 AM GMT

Some really lovely shots and sights Ernie. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-May-18 02:54 PM GMT

Goldie, David, Andrew: Thanks for your comments. I hope to keep going with my non-butterfly snapshot, but I wonder how long before I run out of opportunities?

Cheers

Re: ernie f

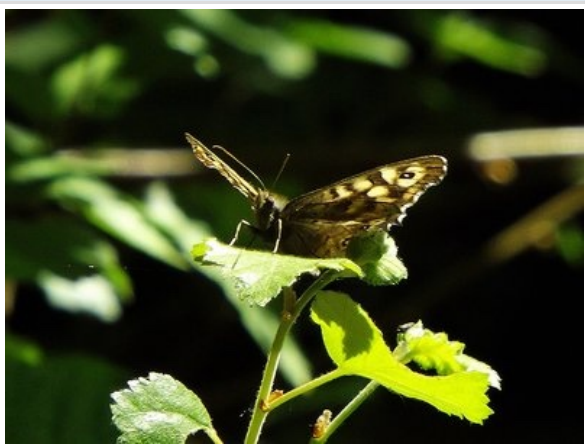
by ernie f, 10-May-18 03:09 PM GMT

Site Visit: Kingsley Common - 10th May 2018



Kingsley Pond

I was here checking for Small Coppers but none were around yet. Instead I spent quite a while with a couple of Speckled Woods. One liked to perch on a patch of bramble but another came down and sat less than a foot away. This was just too much of a provocation for the incumbent of the bush, so he gave chase. They did their sparring spiral right up into the tree canopy and a moment later my friend came back down to his perch unhindered by his foe. I took a few pics of him, trying to get him backlit if I could. Then down came the other one again and battle ensued once more. Again the one I was taking pics of found his perch and we continued with the photo-shoot. Then a few moments later the whole thing kicked-off again with this nuisance getting in the way - repeating the sparring spiral. I left them to it at this point guessing that this was going to happen all day long neither one yielding to the other.



Back-lit Speckle

Then I came across a female Orange Tip. Nothing could have been more different from the Speckled Woods. She perched on the stem of a Bluebell quite serenely, minding her own business and just stayed there in a roosting pose for ages - completely still because a cloud had come over at that moment.



Orange Tip resting

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

There is a river valley with a small stream the other side of the heathland at Kingsley Common. It surprised me to find Mandarin Duck there some years ago. They still pop up from time to time so they must be thriving. My guess is that a few years ago there must have been an escape from Birdworld – a bird zoo only a couple of miles away from Kingsley, and they found a new home here in this secluded, overgrown watercourse.



Male Mandarin up a tree

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 10-May-18 07:38 PM GMT

Interesting seeing the Hornet bathing something I'd never seen or even thought that they would do 🤔 Great shot of the OT from today and the Mandarin 😊👍 I remember reading somewhere that there are more of those feral here than wild in China 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-May-18 08:25 PM GMT

Wurzel: Yes – I have never seen a bathing hornet before either. Interesting note about the Mandarin you made. I have seen them in quite a few places in the wild now, including a pond in the New Forest when I lived there many years ago.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-May-18 08:41 PM GMT

I just had to do another post today because I decided to check on the progress of the heron chicks in my local heronry. If you recall I recently posted about the heron nests in the trees beside Kings Pond in Alton opposite where I live. I showed a picture of a very tiny chick. Now look at the nest as of this afternoon.



Heron's nest



Kids home alone



Flexing those flight muscles

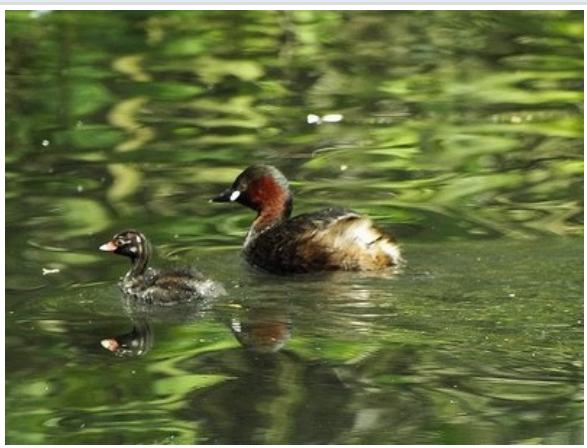
And a quick walk around the pond produced...



Coot on a nest



Grey Wagtail on insect hunting perch



Dabchick chick

... and not a single butterfly!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-May-18 12:48 PM GMT

Noar Hill: 11th May 2018

This is one of the entrance paths to Noar Hill when it has not been maintained to ease access.



Entrance path

A quick visit today to see how the Dukes are coming along and yes, I found yet another three in a pit I had not yet visited bringing my annual record total here to 55. Still none in "The Scrape" so probably still not at peak but must be getting there now I would think.



Number 55

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

The Early Purple orchids are definitely at their peak now, just as Noar Hill's Orchid number 2 is starting up. The very common, Common Twayblade.



Common Twayblade just starting up

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-May-18 11:55 AM GMT

Oaken Wood

Once a mainstay reserve for Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Purple Emperor and Wood White Butterflies but alas, out of these, I have only seen the Wood White here.

I have to admit that although I have visited this site on two occasions in recent years and seen Wood Whites both times I have not visited this year, nor intend to, so these shots are historic. However since it is the right time of year and I have not posted them before...



I was lucky enough to witness a courting couple on one occasion and not only took pics but also a video. They grappled with each other face to face for some while and just like the book says, the male waved his proboscis and antennae back and forth in front of her.



Wood White pair courting

Also he seemed to move his head from side to side as he did this. When he flicked out his proboscis it unfurled until it was completely straight. He then touched her wing with it. At the start of my video I counted him do this five times in a single second, extending – touching – retracting. But he did it many more times while I was watching; at least 25 times in 16 seconds.

At first I thought it looked as though she didn't want to know because she kept flapping her wings, seemingly to try and escape his affections but he held onto her tightly. At one point though he did let go and sat on the leaf next to her but still facing her and she did not fly off. He continued to do his proboscis whiplash routine and now I could see he would also sometimes flick his front legs toward her at the same time. He would flap his wings occasionally and she would reciprocate. It also looked as if much of her wing flapping was in response to being touched by his proboscis. It seemed after all that they were getting along fine. He then flew off and she followed him but to a more private place where I could not go – so sadly I have no pics of them mating.

I have selected a number of still shots from my video as follows. They would not insert as JPGs for some reason so they are in this attachment. Apologies for the fuzziness of the images.



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

I once saw a female White-legged Damselfly near one of the ponds here.



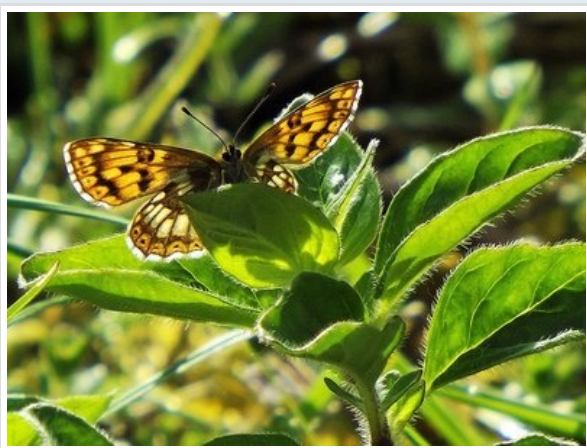
White-legged Damselfly

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-May-18 02:57 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 13th May 2018

A cool start around 9.15am but in the sheltered areas there were Dukes right from the get-go. I completed my survey of the reserve today, going to those places I had not been before and to those that had no Dukes before. There were, for example three Dukes in "The Scrape" that were not there two days ago when I last visited. Dukes in "The Scrape" usually indicates that this species is at its peak at Noar Hill because it is one of the last places that they inhabit, being one of the least sheltered from the wind. My total count for the entire reserve this year now stands at 65, smashing my previous record of 42 and there may still be some second-brooders later in the year to add to this. At one point in one of the more sheltered pits I had four Dukes flying around me all at once with another in sight. Two of these were repeatedly doing their spiralling, sparring antics. When they landed they were only 2 metres apart from each other. This appears to be the minimum "safe" distance between two males.





A very bright female



A very dark male

My last counted Duke of the survey, number 65 had a nibbled hind-wing. It was in "The Scrape".



Duke number 65

There were three more Dingies bringing my total here now to a mere six. It is taking some time for their numbers to increase. Just like the Dukes before them, it appears the Dingies in their turn are about two weeks later than last year.



Dingy number 6

I saw no Small Heaths and indeed have seen none so far this year anywhere, again they appear to be very late.

I did see a Carpet Moth. I have problems identifying Carpet Moths, so I usually default them to Common Carpets unless I can prove otherwise. I think this is a Common Carpet. Can anyone confirm or otherwise? Sorry its a bit blurred – it was in the shade and my zoom was on max so there was a deal of camera-shake.



Common Carpet?

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

For a number of years around this time you would always hear Turtle Doves at Noar Hill and sometimes if you were really lucky you would see them. Usually they would sit in the trees beside the Bridle Path near Charity Farm but unfortunately for the last two years I have had no luck. I know this species is in dramatic decline across the UK but I live in hope of their return to Noar Hill one day.



Turtle Dove

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 13-May-18 10:34 PM GMT

Lovely Dukes Ernie, especially that bright female 😊🌿 I heard a few Turtle Doves today at Martin Down but no Dukes, perhaps we could do a swap 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 13-May-18 11:25 PM GMT

{quote} I just had to do another post today because I decided to check on the progress of the heron chicks in my local heronry.

Fabulous stuff, ernie. It must be a full time job keeping heron chicks from going hungry! I see plenty of these birds near me but had no idea how they raised their young. Thanks for sharing.

Seems like you've also had a productive weekend on the butterfly front. Wood Whites and Dukes are notable species in this country, and I only wish I had them both (much) closer to my doorstep!!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-May-18 04:45 PM GMT

Tell you what Wurzel. I'll give you a few of my Dukes in exchange for a male and female Turtle Dove. How's that?

David, yes I am over the moon Duke-wise. Greatest ever count, pics of courting and mating and variation in colour range. Best Duke year for me ever.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-May-18 04:51 PM GMT

Site Visit: Swelling Hill Pond - 14th May 2018

This pond area today gave me Small, Large and Green-veined White, Holly Blue and Orange Tip all in around 20 minutes of each other. I am sure I read someone on this site comment that you could never have enough pictures of Orange Tips. So here we are - another one...



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Swelling Hill pond is one of those places that is great for the Bogbean. A very fine plant indeed. It grows straight out of the water like the reeds around it and is flowering now.



Bogbean

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 14-May-18 08:11 PM GMT

Hi! ernie, you've seen far more Dukes than I have and Dingy skippers, my total is Nil so far. Goldie 🍷🍷

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-May-18 04:18 PM GMT

Goldie

Do you have a Duke site where you are?

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-May-18 04:52 PM GMT

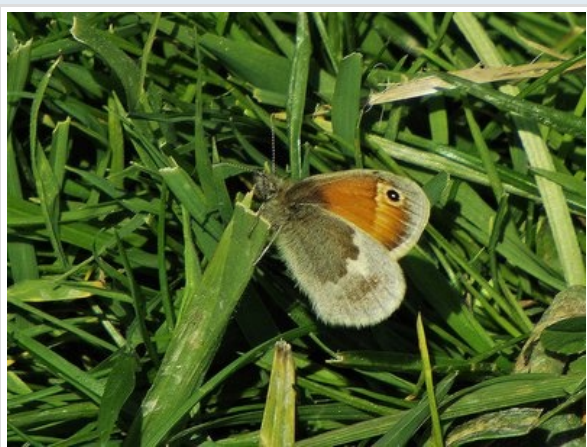
May 15th: St Catherine's Hill

From the top of the hill there is a wonderful view across the water meadows to St Cross Priory.



St Cross Priory from St Catherine's Hill

Today was a beautiful hot, sunny day when I got here around noon and if you got out of the breeze it was wonderful for butterflies. I had been observing Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks when I saw what I thought was a "big" butterfly go by and land in front of me. It turned out to be a Small Heath - my first of the year. This is it.



First Small Heath of the year

It astounded me that size is so relative. I got so used to looking at truly small butterflies that this looked big by comparison.

There were eight Green Hairstreaks all in one location. Two pairs of males continuously battled it out while I spotted the others only when two male Holly Blues came by, patrolling the hedgerow and the Green Hairstreaks went up to shoo them off. Of course the Holly Blues just carried on looking for females regardless of these "pesky" little greenstreaks. That meant that every time the Holly Blues came by (and they kept on coming by, back and forth), the greenstreaks would "buzz" them.

There were plenty of male and female Brimstones, GV Whites, a single Small White and one Peacock.

One of the Grizzled Skippers was on the ground laying eggs. Here are two shots. Not the best in the world (grass gets in the way a lot at this height) but its the first time I have captured this so I am quite pleased. I guess you will have to click on the images to enlarge them to see the action better.



Grizzled Skipper laying eggs at St Cat's Hill



Ditto from a slightly different angle

I then decamped to nearby Magdalen Hill. There is a quick way to get to the bottom of the hill from the bottom gate on the Winchester by-pass road so I used that. It is yet again a very sheltered location and immediately (now 1 pm) I saw another Grizzled Skipper and this one was being hounded by a Brown Argus. This was my first Brown Argus of the year. Then I spotted a second Brown Argus and they found one another and proceeded to spar. I was only here ten days ago and saw none so these two were fresh "out of the box".



First Brown Argus of the year at Magdalen Hill

I spoke to one guy who was passing me. He was doing a transect of the site and told me the first Small Blue of the year for Mag Hill was in the Scrape at the top of the hill. Nice to know, but I didn't have the energy to climb all the way up there to see it. I took his word for it. I will see them another time when they are closer to their peak. Its more fun when you are surrounded by them.

Just as well because I then spotted my first and second Common Blue of the year. Here is the first. Amazingly bright blue - another freshie.



First Common Blue of the year at Mag Hill

It did a "wing-roll" a couple of times while I watched it too, just to add icing to the cake.

There was also a female Orange Tip and another Green Hairstreak and more Brimstones.

In my previous posts I have used my first sighting of a species in the year as an excuse to show past pics. I spotted three new species today - so there is a lot to get through, so here goes...

Starting with the Small Heath.



From a previous year



Backlit



Mating



Wings ajar

And a video still of the upper wings.



Video still of upper wings

Next moving on to the Brown Argus.



Brown Argus on a log



Underside





On Forget-me-not



Amongst the scrub



Dark and freshly emerged



And finally the Common Blue.



Mating



Female with a Blue Rinse



Underside

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day.

Both hills have Skylarks but Magdalen Hill has protected areas where they nest. I think this may be a youngster just out of its nest because it was accompanied by an adult from time to time while I watched it.



Skylark – possible youngster

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 15-May-18 10:39 PM GMT

I know what you mean about the relative size Ernie I had it in reverse over the weekend when I was used to seeing Grizzlies and Dingies and then saw my first Small Blue which seemed miniscule 😊 Great shot of the Skylark, really tricky to get one of those 🙌🇺🇸

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 15-May-18 10:44 PM GMT

It's not often I'm envious of Common Blues, Small Heaths and Brown Arguses, ernie, but given that I still haven't seen any then I'll remain 'green' for the time being. 🍃

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-May-18 04:40 PM GMT

David. Well you wont be green for long. You will definitely see these species soon. But for me to see the PBFs like you have done recently will require a lot of effort from me as they are some distance away.

Re: ernie f

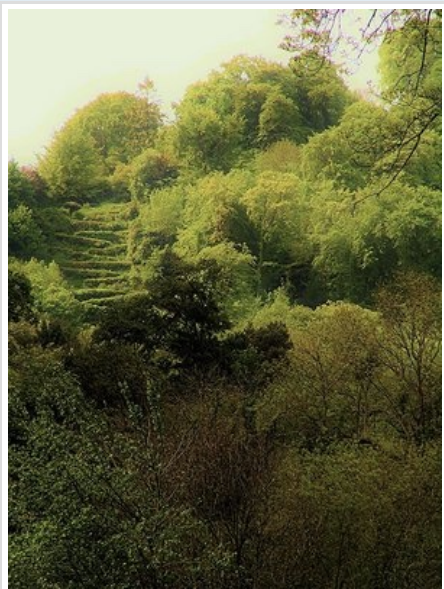
by ernie f, 16-May-18 04:52 PM GMT

May 16th - Selborne Church Meadow

If you pass through Church Meadow to Long Lythe and look back you will see what is known as the Zig-Zag path. It is the main route up from the village of Selborne through the Beech Hanger to Selborne Common. An unusual sight from here.



The Zig-Zag from Long Lythe



I made a concerted effort to find Small Coppers here today but there were none. I have not seen any so far this year. Where are they? I have a theory that Hoggars has got them all. 😞

I did see the usual spring-time crew though. Three Orange Tips (all male!), one Holly Blue and eight Green Veined White. No Small or Large Whites - all of them were Green Veined. It appears the Holly Blues are now off their peak and on decline.



GV White – slightly nibbled

Also this rather nice Garden Carpet moth on a Yew in the churchyard.



Garden Carpet moth on a yew

Non-butterfly snapshot(s) of the day

There seem to be good numbers of Beautiful Demoiselle building up. I have seen them so far this year at Broxhead, Kingsley, Sleaford and now here at Selborne.





Re: ernie f

by millerd, 16-May-18 10:06 PM GMT

A very comprehensive report from St. Catherine's Hill, Ernie – a spot I plan to visit sometime soon. Those Common Blues and Small Heaths didn't waste any time getting on with the next generation either! 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-May-18 04:06 PM GMT

Dave, Thanks for your comment. If you do come down to St Cats, make sure you set aside enough time for Magdalen Hill too.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-May-18 04:40 PM GMT

17th May 2018

Old Winchester Hill



Path down hill below the car park

Although very sunny this morning was breezy and quite cool (or should I say downright cold).

All the butterflies were at the bottom of the hill keeping out of the wind, but it was quite good. There were two Grizzled and four Dingy Skips, two Common Blue, two Speckled Wood, two Red Admiral, one Small Heath, a few Small and Large Whites and quite a few Brimstone, one of which landed at my feet on the path at a very peculiar angle. It looked like it was exhausted and holding itself up on a blade of grass!



Dingy



Grizzly



Brimstone using grass blade as a crutch

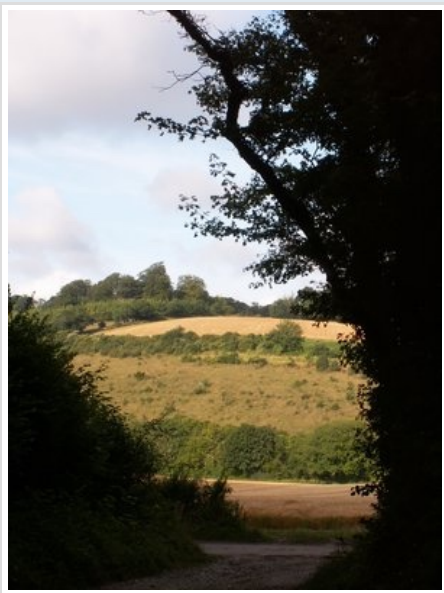
I came here to see if there were any early Adonis Blues around. Last year around this time there were, but of course so far this year - none.

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

If you drive back to the nearest village to Old Winchester Hill, a village known as West Meon, and take the road to the fly fishery you will come across a wonderful woodland. Many of you who love our wild orchids will have heard of this place and may even have visited it. It is called Chappett's Copse.



Chappett's Copse



View from the car park!

It harbours six of our native orchids and if you get the timing right (some-time in June) it is feasible to see them all on a single trip but since two of them are Common Spotted Orchid and Common Twayblade I would recommend visiting a bit earlier, say very late May or very early June when the "Big Four" are at their best. The "Big Four" are White Helleborine, Fly Orchid, Birdsnest Orchid and Sword-leaved Helleborine (aka Narrow-leaved Helleborine).

All four were in flower on my visit today but I was a bit early (by two weeks).

In particular the Sword-leaved Helleborine is one of our rarest orchids and is in decline. It is known to grow in a few places around Britain and Ireland but Hampshire is its stronghold and Chappett's Copse is arguably its best site, there being thousands of them carpeting the woodland floor here.

So here they are - the "Big Four"...



Birdsnest Orchid



Birdsnest Orchid



Fly Orchid



Fly Orchid with fly

The last pic shows a fly on the orchid actually trying to mimic the orchid – or is it the other way round?



White Helleborine



White Helleborine - as open as it gets

And finally the Sword-leaved Helleborine ...







Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-May-18 10:10 PM GMT

A little while ago I mentioned a behaviour that I termed the wing-roll that I had observed in some members of the Lycaenidae family. Since MikeOxon has just shown an animation of this in the Green Hairstreak, I thought now would be an opportune moment to provide an expanded report of my findings and thoughts to date. Please open the attached doc.



I am also going to try and open a topic on the general board if anyone wants to follow up on their own observations and ideas - keeping it all in one place.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 17-May-18 10:23 PM GMT

this might make interesting reading on the subject 😊

<http://www.actazool.org/temp/%7B60285654-DA5D-4EC9-B934-7B4665C84688%7D.pdf>

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-May-18 08:12 AM GMT

Thanks, Bugboy. You are right - it does make for interesting reading. I have read it once but it will require me to read it a couple of more times before it sinks in properly.

My first response right now though is that the tests were performed with the idea that the hind-wing movement is to make any tail or rear markings appear even more like a head and antennae and therefore increase the likelihood that would-be predators would be confused and go for the "wrong-end", allowing the butterfly to escape with only hind-wing wounds.

I have seen the wing-roll in Purple Hairstreaks and such a hypothesis would certainly work there, and perhaps to a lesser extent Green Hairstreaks too. But I have seen the wing-roll in Holly Blue, Common Blue and Small Blue and in these species there are no tails or hind-wing markings that resemble eyes. The Silver-Studded Blue does it a lot, to varying intensities and with wings open too at times and they also do not possess "eye" wing markings or hind-wing "tails".

I shall read the paper again though, because there is definitely something in it.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-May-18 04:08 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 18th May 2018

Another sunny day with a cool start. Ideal. I continued my Dingy count today. I clocked up 17 newcomers in parts of the reserve I had not found them to date so I can add them to the 6 I had already found here - a grand total so far of 23. I found a male making advances to a female who was not keen. You can see in this picture how she moved her abdomen away from him. After this picture she flew off and he, taking the hint, flew off in a different direction.



A Dingy male being rejected by a female

As the Dingy numbers increase, so the Duke numbers slowly decline. There are still a lot of Dukes here, but in some places that I saw a few in previous days, now they were either absent or in dwindling numbers and some were tatty old examples struggling along. However it has to be said, in some pits there were still groups of three or four and some were quite fresh. I wanted to check out the Dukes for wing-roll since they are a member of the Lycaenidae. I have never witnessed it in this species to date but then I was not looking for it before - now I was and in none of the 20 or so individuals I scrutinised, did any give even the slightest hint of a wing-roll and I looked at a couple of them for a good long time, actually following their movements, while nectaring, basking and also both before and after territory disputes. In some cases I gave them room and looked through binoculars at them while at others, after I let them settle for a while I slowly crept up on them. No wing-roll, they merely flew away.

But I found a female Holly Blue that stopped low down close to me who immediately started to wing-roll. Obviously I was not considered predator material otherwise she would not have landed obligingly so close to me. I noted that as soon as she landed, she wing rolled two or three times. After licking aphid honeydew from a leaf, she basked in the sun for a while then flew to a nearby leaf. As soon as she landed she did a couple of wing-rolls then stopped. She basked in the sun a while longer, flew off a little way, landed and then did a couple of wing-rolls then stopped. Well, you get the picture. Here wing-rolls always occurred directly after landing. I cast my mind back to a Holly Blue I saw last year and remember it was exactly the same then. The wing-rolls for that Holly Blue were also short-lived and directly after landing. My picture below is of the lady Holly today at Noar Hill. Note she only did a wing-roll with wings closed, not when open like this.



Holly Blue resting

Other butterflies today at Noar Hill were Large White, Brimstone, Green Hairstreak, a couple more Small Heath, an Orange Tip and a Peacock which sat neatly for his picture on a log.



Peacock on a log

I also saw my first Small Blue of the year here today but although it flew around my feet for some while it did not stop so I could not get its picture, however as usual since this is my first of the year, it gives me the excuse to share some past pictures I have taken of them – mostly from that fine location at the top of Magdalen Hill where a sizeable colony make their home.



Typical fresh individual



If you get the angle right and usually if the picture is not taken in direct sunlight you can obtain an image of a Small Blue with a blue sheen.



Showing Blue sheen



Pair courting

This pair did eventually go on to mate but the male connected to the female while he was still facing her rear. Awkward.



Mating the wrong way round

But this couple got it right.



Mating the right way round

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Roe Deer are commonplace in Hampshire, you see them at all our reserves but Noar Hill gave me one of my closest ever encounters.



Roe Buck

Re: ernie f

by David M, 19-May-18 08:11 PM GMT

Nice selection of species (and images to go with them), ernie. I still haven't seen Dingies yet so your first shot is making me green. 🍷

I wonder how old that Peacock is? Must be getting on for 11 months!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-May-18 09:42 PM GMT

David – This Peacock was quite fresh looking and I saw another today equally fresh.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-May-18 10:04 PM GMT

Broxhead – 19th May 2018

Broxhead is a very fine reserve for just about all forms of wildlife, from mammals to birds, bugs to butterflies, fungi to lichen. However it is usually far better from mid-summer onwards.



Broxhead sand cliffs

But I visited today mainly to check if there were any spring brood Small Coppers because there were four here last year at this time, but no. Yet again I drew a blank on the Copper front.

There were a few Common Heath.



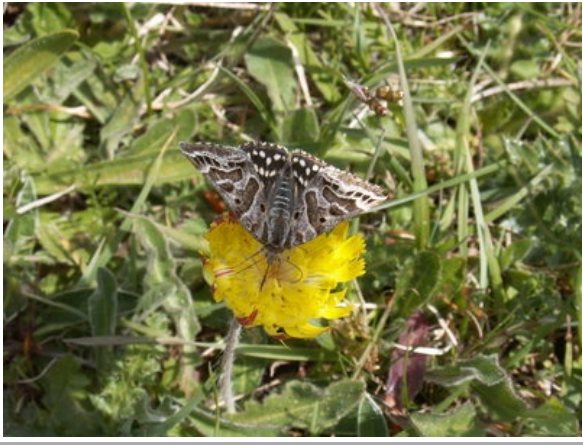
Common Heath

And I counted three Cinnabar.



Cinnabar

Kingsley Common is just across the road so I went there too, or to be more precise I visited that patch of ground in front of the Victorian church beside the pond. I saw a Mother Shipton moth – my pic was not great so this is one of my past pictures of one.



Mother Shipton

And two Brown Argus which I had never seen at this location before and the first one I came across was doing a wing roll – the first time I have seen a Brown Argus do this. I took a video but here is a photo of it, although of course you cannot actually see it in action from this.



Brown Argus

He was doing the wing-roll with his wings ajar (as in the photo above) and just as I have noted in the Silver-Studded Blue, parts the fore and hind wings slightly at the end of the roll. Just like the Small Blue he does not keep the forewings still when he rolls the hind-wings.

And then, at last, my first Small Copper of the year but he was very low down in the grass so my pictures again were not great, therefore I shall rely on my historic photos. As usual my first sighting of a species in the year gives me the excuse to show some of my past encounters. However for the Small Copper I am going to have a bit of a Hoggars moment. Because Broxhead and Kingsley Commons are usually excellent for this species in late summer since they nectar from the heather then, I have been able to do a study of them. There is such a lot to cover I am going to have to break my report down into smaller chunks. I will not start today as its a bit late as I write this but here is a photo of one to start with.



Small Copper

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

There were quite a few Green Tiger Beetles flying about. These are quite common on our sandy heaths around here and are always fun to watch. You find them basking in the sun and if disturbed they rarely go far so you can follow them easily.



Green Tiger Beetle at Broxhead



Pair mating

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 19-May-18 10:51 PM GMT

Broxhead is a spot I've been meaning to visit at some point, Ernie. Is it good for Silver-studded Blues and Graylings in the summer, as well as the Coppers?

Dave

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-May-18 08:09 AM GMT

Dave

Broxhead is the best location I know of near me for Silver-studded Blues. There is a major lek and a number of satellite colonies, in total one year recently I counted over 700 individuals here and last year, although I did not count them – I estimate there were even more than this, perhaps over a thousand? The brood flies right at the start of the usual flight period shown in the books so it also falls off earlier too. I will obviously post about it closer to the time when I start to see them fly there. You can then plan your visit. If you let me know when you want to visit, let me know. If you like we can arrange to meet up and I can give you the "guided tour".

I have never seen a Grayling at Broxhead (which is a bit of a surprise I suppose) but there are good numbers at nearby Longmoor and at Folly Hill.

As you will see in my next post – Broxhead can also be excellent for Small Coppers in late summer. Its a pity they don't peak when the Silver-studded Blues peak. It means two visits!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-May-18 08:24 AM GMT

Study into the Small Coppers of NE Hants and its border with Surrey



This is not a scientific paper. I am not a butterfly expert. I want to underline that from the outset. I am an interested and sometimes intrigued amateur. Intrigued because this little butterfly has some surprises up its sleeve as I am sure you are aware if you have read Hoggars diary on this forum.

I shall from time to time be referring to Hoggars diary because of his fascination with the species and the fact that he is lucky enough to live close to one of the largest Small Copper populations in the UK (arguably the largest of all). I have not sought his permission beforehand - I hope you are OK with that, Hoggars if you are reading this.

This is a report on an observational study I have made of this species in my own area over the last two years and is not complete because I will continue to study the Small Copper throughout 2018 as well. The reason why I am able to do this is because on my doorstep (well within a radius of a few miles anyway) there is a network of lowland heaths and grassy commons which harbour good numbers of this species. In particular, from summer onwards they inhabit a group of heathlands which can be considered continuous, these are Broxhead, Kingsley, Sleaford and Shortheath and form the main study area. However there is a good-sized lek in the reserve at Broxhead and my study centres there.

I am going to split my report into parts that I shall post separately and they will cover all sorts of things such as population, abberation, behaviour, habitat, etc.

First some book data to set the scene.

Flight Periods

All May, June wks 1,2. All July, August and September, October wks 1,2,3. There are usually three broods per year but as these dates suggest, the latter two broods can overlap. On very good years there might even be a fourth brood overlapping the third which takes them well into October.

Primary Habitat

It likes dry grassland, meadow, grassy heath and shingle coast.

Larval Food Plant

Common and Sheep's Sorrel, and to a lesser extent Dock.

Central study area

Broxhead, along the sandy path of the southern section of the reserve that runs down to the sheep field where there is a fair-size lek in a sheltered enclave.



Part of the Broxhead Small Copper lek

The habitat of the brood at Broxhead is grass intermixed with heather and sorrel banked with scrub containing plenty of bramble and some fern on a

very sandy soil. The area is dotted with high gorse and low trees such as young oak, birch and elder but the butterflies stick mainly to the open ground near the sandy path toward the bottom of the hill where it meets open fields normally populated by a flock of sheep. The area coincides with a rabbit warren. The picture above shows part of the location where the sorrel grows giving the ground a rust-red wash in late spring/early summer.

It is in late August and all of September which sees the brood at its best. The sheep's sorrel flowers have died back by this time though so you cannot see them anymore but the heather is out in full and this attracts the nectaring butterflies. On very sunny days in early September its perfume fills the air while you watch the butterflies whirling and chasing about. The males are very territorial and even chase other butterflies away, for example the Brown Argus which also has a small brood here at this time. On one occasion I witnessed one Small Copper chasing off a Red Admiral successfully. They are feisty little creatures. Another time I stood in the centre of the grassy open lekking area to have at least six Small Copper and two Brown Argus all circling around me at once.

There are, relatively speaking, fewer Small Coppers to be seen elsewhere on the reserve and I think this is because the areas that do have them also harbour rabbits. The rabbits chew away and keep the scrub and heather down and also keep the grass low. This makes an attractive habitat for the sorrel to grow and this is just what the larvae of this little butterfly need to sustain them.



To put my study area into context here is a list of the sites I have found in NE Hants and its border with Surrey.

1. Kingsley Common, anywhere where heather and grass meet. There is also a spring brood here but in the main at this time of year they hug the area behind the houses and in front of the church as there are more nectaring plants there such as stitchwort and white dead nettle.
2. Shortheath, around the Bronze Age Barrow and with a lek to its east. Can also occur in and around the grassy plat in the reserve to the west, closest to the village.
3. Frensham Little Pond, on the right-hand hill flank near the first car park if driving from Frensham.
4. Woolmer, beside the sandy hillock behind the pond (but this is MOD land with extremely tight opening times).
5. Folly Hill, dotted about the reserve away from the pond.
6. Longmoor, the heathland paths parallel to the main track between the car park and the first crossing.
7. Frensham Big Pond, either side of the main car park.
8. Thursley anywhere on the dry heath away from the bog. Also the MOD tract of heath down a dirt lane on the opposite side of the road to the main reserve. There is a car park at its end and Small Coppers can be found in the grassier areas near this.
9. Sleaford Heath, could be anywhere but its a very small area.
10. Binswood, beside the meadow.
11. Noar Hill, typically in the central pits of the reserve.
12. Ludshott Common. Surprisingly for such a large reserve there are few parts that have the grass/heather/sorrel combination but I did find one Small Copper here so there must be others.



In front of Kingsley church in October 2016

Small Copper Survey

Part 1 of my report is going to focus on the population numbers. I would argue this is the most boring bit to read about but it was not the most boring bit to research as it enabled me to make comparisons between locations and ponder the reasons why different populations exhibited subtly different

behaviours.

Lets start therefore with some data I have collected so far in the form of the spreadsheet attached.



This table attempts to show results without double counting. For example the repeated values of 9 recorded at Broxhead on the 28th and 29th of September are of different individuals, they are not the same count of the same butterflies in the same place counted twice. I visited entirely different parts of the reserve each day and the fact that the total was 9 each time is a co-incidence. Equally I counted 7 at Shortheath on October 5th but have not included them for fear of double-counting those I saw there on September 25th, because I went to precisely the same part of the reserve on that occasion. I was still seeing Small Coppers at Broxhead on 15th October 2016 but guessed these were individuals already flying on 30th September even though they were mostly in very good condition, bright colours with no nicks or tatty edges.

In locations where there are a lot of Small Coppers, investigation has shown that the end-of season decline falls off gradually as per the chart attached below.



That is, if there were, lets say, 40 at peak, then during decline there would be 20 after a given time period, then 10 after an equal period, then 5, then 3, then 1 and finally none. Given an individual in a brood can live for up to three weeks, averaging around 2 weeks, these time periods can be anything between 1 and 3 days. In 2016 it was 3 days. Of course this natural fall-off is largely dependent on clement weather conditions throughout this time. If there was a sudden cold snap or if torrential rain occurred for a few consecutive days, the fall-off would be more abrupt.

What follows are the more specific results from a survey of numbers of Small Copper at the Broxhead Lek only. See attached chart below.



It seems that there was a fast ramp-up of the 3rd brood from early September with a gradual decline of the 4th brood into mid October. The weather across this entire period was fairly good and quite even although there was of course a slow natural decline in temperature, this being Autumn. Some of the nights toward the end fell to 5 degrees centigrade but the daytime temperatures were usually between 14 to 19 degrees with many, long sunny spells. There were no truly bad windy days and never any long runs of days of rain here. Even on days when the ambient air temperature never increased beyond 15 degrees, at the Broxhead Lek on sunny days, being sheltered on all sides, direct sunlight brought the ground temperature microclimate on the valley bottom closer to 19 degrees. For this reason there were more Small Coppers in the lowest parts of the valley than the higher parts. They only moved to the higher parts if the nectaring plants were available up there when they ceased elsewhere. For example there came a time toward the end of the study period when one of the last blooming bell heather clumps could be found on the ridge when almost all the rest in the lek had gone-over. It was only then that I started to find a few Small Coppers on or near the heather on the ridge.

The red bars on the chart are the actual numbers seen on the days the numbers were surveyed, the blue curve estimates the rate of increase and decline based on the actuals.

The survey was from the 8th September to the 15th October 2016. All these figures were taken between 10 am to 1 pm on the survey days. If one visited before 10 am usually the Small Coppers would be hiding themselves away in shrubs and low in grasses because the temperature was too cold for them at that time. If you visited after 3 pm the lower sun at this time of year with the ridge on the west side in the way caused a larger shadow across most of the valley so even though the air temperature could be higher at that time of day, there were fewer opportunities for the butterflies to bask in the sun, so again they hid away, being reluctant to expend energy in flying when there were few blooming plants from which to gain nectar AND little direct sunlight to replenish their energy needs.

A bit of recent history from the 2015 Hampshire & Isle of Wight Butterfly Report now. It does not mention Broxhead as a recorded site. In 2015 the only recorded site in Hampshire that had Small Coppers in double figures was Keyhaven on 15th May, totalling 24 in one day. It appears that the autumn numbers only increase during "Indian Summers". 2016 certainly fell into this category, at least for Southern Britain with hottest temperatures on record for September. Therefore this survey may have been anomalous for its great numbers over an extended period so late in the year. The Broxhead reserve as a whole peaked at a count of 24 between September 8th and 11th.

There were still 24 across the whole Broxhead reserve from September 28th to October 1st but the profile had changed, they increased in some areas and declined in others so although the number was 24, they were largely different individuals and it is just a coincidence that they totalled 24 in both periods.

Also there was a peak at adjacent Kingsley Common of 29 around September 29th and taken together (you can walk from the edge of the Broxhead Reserve to the edge of Kingsley Common in a few minutes) thats 53 at peak.

These results are quite remarkable for Hampshire. Other locations in Hampshire usually record Small Coppers in singletons or less often in twos and threes. There was only one site better than this in the official 2015 report for Hampshire and you had to cross the Solent for that. In 2015 there were 55 at Whippenham Fields on the Isle of Wight. It must be said though that the IOW site had a count of 351 across the whole year of 2015, not something that could ever occur at Broxhead and Kingsley for lack of nectaring plants earlier in the year (all the heathers flower in the summer and there are few other plant species to take their place earlier than this). The official 2015 report calls Whippenham Fields a "star" location for Small Copper but I would suggest that in 2016 at least, Broxhead & Kingsley was no lesser a location later in the season.

After my initial 2016 numbers count it subsequently come to my attention that an area of the Broxhead reserve that I did not visit in 2016 because the entrance path was overgrown by ferns was visited by someone else who reports he saw upwards of 200 Small Coppers there. I cannot myself vouch for this but if true, that would make the Small Copper count for the whole of Broxhead, Sleaford and Kingsley, an area of heathland we can consider to be contiguous, to be greater than that at Whippenham Fields! At least in 2016.

Unfortunatley 2017 was no so good for the Small Copper at Broxhead or Kingsley so when I visited this new Broxhead location in the same year it did not yield anywhere near 200 individuals, more like a dozen or so instead. Nevertheless although it is difficult to access for humans, the Small Copper does appear to like it there too.

Because of the notability of the Small Copper in Hampshire I decided to extend my survey to cover a period of 12 months. Most surveys I do cover a whole year but in 2016 my count of the Small Copper started mid-year, so I just completed the 12 month period by wrapping round into spring and early summer of the following year. All the data is in the spreadsheet attached above.

There were no great surprises I suppose. The numbers at all surveyed locations were low but consistent. I guess my only finding was that there were a fair number on Odiham Common in 2017. I found this site for the first time in 2017 and visited repeatedly because of the White Letter Hairstreaks there

but in the places where the council had cut the grass low so that people could walk across the otherwise tall grassland meadows they had, perhaps inadvertently created the right habitat for Small Coppers. Without actually searching for them, I came across 4 in the time period surveyed – but outside these dates and inside the White Letter Hairstreak flying period there were more Small Coppers that I have not accounted for in my survey. I think they must like the dock here as their food plant because I did not find their preferred sorrel.

There were sufficient males along the “Elm Walk” on Odiham Common in mid-July 2017 to exhibit some of the lek behaviours I have become accustomed to at Broxhead although I would not class this site as a lek per se as their territories align along the path rather than exist in an “area”. It reminded me more of the situation you find Red Admirals in along many a woodland ride at Alice Holt. You could almost pace-out individual territories of male Small Coppers along the Elm Walk. Something like 15 paces or so for each one.

Now all of September and the beginning of October 2016 was remarkable for a long heatwave, a veritable Indian Summer as I have said, but August 2017 was wet, cold and windy, and the start of September was very variable with frequent thunderstorms and higher than average winds, so I thought I would make a comparison.

The first two observation days saw a drop of around 1/3 on the same period the previous year. Indeed I went to the Broxhead lek twice not shown on the spreadsheet because it was devoid of Small Coppers. (I guess I should have recorded these entries on my spreadsheet with zeros – but as I said at the top of this post – I am an amateur!) The visit on August 26 also yielded two Brown Argus in exactly the same spot in the lek as last year when I saw six in early September but by the time the storms at the end of August finished, the Brown Argus had been wiped out. A far cry from the previous year. The observation for September 2017 was on the first warm, sunny day for a week but hides the fact that there were only 3 Small Coppers in the lek and two of these were at its bottom extreme, the area most secluded from winds. The other seven all came from the Broxhead area mentioned earlier that I suspect the unconfirmed sighting of 200 Small Coppers was witnessed by an individual I do not know personally. In 2016 I tried and failed to get to it so all my Small Copper records in that year exclude this area, thus the figure of 10 this year on this date being almost the same as it was last year on Sep 9th cannot be taken at face value.

The weather had not improved into the middle of September. I wanted to monitor the Broxhead lek in particular because in 2016 I spoke to others about this location, so the lek got a bit of trampling underfoot (not least by me). I needed to see if it effected the population of Small Coppers by comparing it to other known sites, for example neighbouring Kingsley Common and Shortheath which suffered the same weather conditions but not the trampling effect. I am pleased to say that I am pretty sure the crash in numbers is due to the very inclement weather. I visited Kingsley Common on 12th September 2017 and only found three Small Coppers, 1/10th of the number around this time the previous year. All of them were far flung from each other and all in the most sheltered locations possible. The heather, both ling and bell had mostly gone over by that time so there was little opportunity for nectaring out on the heath. This explains why they were so far flung from each other as they hung around the last few remaining heather blooms and these too were far flung from each other. At Shortheath it was the same story. On 19th September 2017 I found only 1 in the lek there and none elsewhere. This is 1/3 the number seen the previous year on September 14th 2016. After visiting Broxhead, Kingsley and Shortheath in 2017 what struck me the most was how little Bell Heather had bloomed. This may have been critical as the Small Copper favours this plant to nectar from in late summer.

This ends part 1 of my Small Copper Report – as you can see its a bit of a marathon but please stick with it because it gets more interesting when I start to talk about behaviours. Honest.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-May-18 01:01 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 20th May 2018

To compensate for my last verbose post – this one is far shorter!

Although the Dukes are well in decline at this reserve now, a run of sunny days has brought out the Dingies. I completed my survey of the site today, visiting all those areas I know Dingies like (and even a couple that they normally don't) and clocked up another 10 today. This brings my grand total for this site this year to 43. OK, it might not seem “grand” but it smashed my previous annual record for Noar Hill which was only 15! Indeed it also broke my 2017 counts for Rake Bottom (20) and Oxenbourne (15) by a wide margin.

Also today another, very fresh male Small Blue. This one performed a wing-roll for me. Just like the Holly Blue the other day, he started to do it as soon as he landed, but unlike the Holly Blue he kept it up for longer and sporadically on and off for some time. He did it with wings closed and with wings ajar but he never once opened his wings fully flat so I don't know yet if they wing-roll in that situation. I will investigate at Magdalen Hill when the Small Blues in the scrape congregate at peak time. I will get more opportunities to observe more individuals then.

In the meantime – this is the Noar Hill fellow.



Also here today were Speckled Wood, Large White and Comma.

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Well it appears its time for Noar Hill's Orchid number 3 to show itself. One of the Fly Orchids began to bloom today. All the others I found were still only in bud.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-May-18 05:47 PM GMT

Magdalen Hill - 21st May 2018

Magdalen Hill is another great chalkhill reserve a short drive from me. It is equally good for butterflies and for flowers. Here is a picture from the hill across the vale in July.



Today I was a man on a mission. OK, not a very big mission – but it is my own.

I needed to find out if the Small Blue can do a wing roll with its wings wide open. I had seen it in males who had their wings closed and those who held them ajar, but never fully open.

The top of Magdalen Hill in “The Scrape” is the best place near me for Small Blues and since I had already seen two at Noar Hill I thought I might increase my observational chances at this better location for them.

And so it turned out to be. There were seven in all, six males and one female. The fourth male I saw landed on my camera case. I was wearing the camera case at the time so effectively he had landed on me! I looked at him for awhile expecting him to spook but he didn't. He just sat there without a care in the world. But my camera was IN the case. I thought “He'll fly off in a minute”, but he didn't. Maybe if I just undid the flap of the case he will fly off. Nope – I got the flap open so I struggled to get the camera out. Still he just sat there. I got the lens cap off and was just about to take his picture when, yes – you guessed it – he flew off! Huh!

But not very far. He flew down to a blade of grass and immediately started to do a wing-roll there. First with wings shut, then ajar and then....

.... he walked along the blade of grass, stopped and continued his wing roll with wings ajar. Then he walked a little bit more and repeated the process.

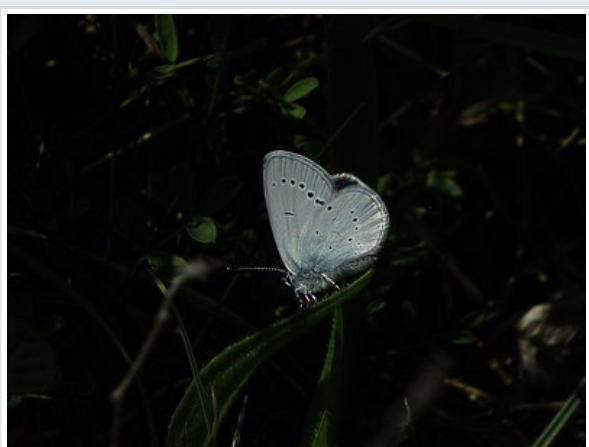
Next he flew to a leaf nearby and wonder of wonders, opened his wings wide and did a wing-roll there. Success. Mission accomplished – and I had really only been there for a few minutes.

I saw quite a lot of Brimstone, an Orange Tip, a few Common Blues, one in pursuit of a female, one of which did a wing-roll, a female Holly Blue egg-laying, a Mother Shipton, a Mint Moth, a Burnet Companion and a Common Carpet.

Then I saw that female Small Blue that I mentioned above. She rested awhile with wings ajar and then opened them wide and did a wing-roll. I could not believe my luck. This was the first Small Blue female I had seen this year, the first time I have seen a female Small Blue do a wing-roll and she just so happened to do it with her wings flat. Mission accomplished twice.

Finally to add icing to the cake I saw a Grizzled Skipper. Now at Magdalen Hill you usually see these at the bottom of the hill. This was the first time ever I had seen one on the top of the hill.

Here is the Small Blue who landed on my camera case and finally did an open-wing roll for me. I have no pictures or video of the open wing roll but I do have a picture of him doing it with his wings shut.



male wing-rolling with wings shut



And here is the picture of the female - ditto.



female who also did the wing-roll

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

A couple of weeks ago the northern slope of Magdalen Hill was carpeted with Cowslips.



A little bit later in the year the nearby fields will be populated by masses of poppies. One year recently a farmers field close to the base of Magdalen Hill even got into the local paper because it was fully covered with poppies as far as the eye could see and there was open access to it.



Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 22-May-18 08:26 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, if there's one thing I love to see it's a field full of glorious red Poppies 😊 I don't think there's many things can beat it.
Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-May-18 05:13 PM GMT

Goldie – yes it was stunning. I had never seen anything quite like it before or since. I edged my way a little into the field being as careful as I could and then took a 360 degree video of it.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-May-18 05:33 PM GMT

Minely Manor – May 22nd

This is a new location for me. A large network of meadows, scrubland and woodland that form part of the Minely Estate near Fleet.



Minely Manor - The Meadow

Today I came across six Green Hairstreak, four Small Copper, many Common Blue, Small and Large White, one Peacock, a Speckled Yellow moth and a few Brown Silver-line moth.



Brown Silver-line

This Green Hairstreak sat pretty for me so I could get a pic of him against the skyline.



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

There were quite a number of Green Woodpecker. I wasn't counting but think I saw six and heard the yaffle of others in the distance.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-May-18 03:43 PM GMT

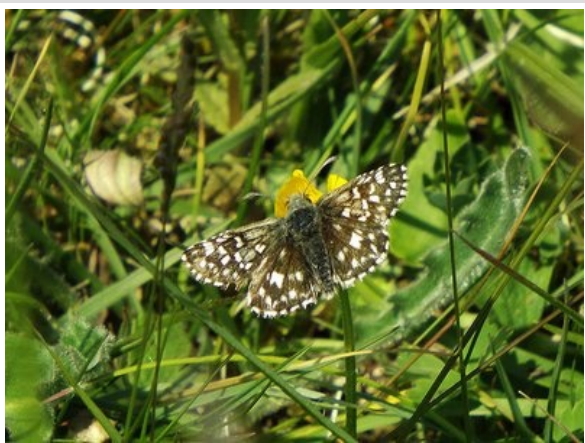
Yew Hill - May 23rd

A small-ish chalkhill reserve bordered by grass meadows, arable fields and wooded rides near Winchester. It forms part of a group with Magdalen Hill and St Catherine's Hill.



View of Yew Hill from the lower path

Small Heaths were the flavour of the day. I counted 45 and I did not cover all the pathways. There were a dozen or so Common Blue, 11 Dingy Skippers, 3 Green Hairstreak, 3 Holly Blue, 1 Orange Tip, 1 Grizzled Skipper, a few Brimstone and lots of Small and Large Whites. It seems like only yesterday I was seeing my first Grizzled Skippers and Common Blues and yet here a few of them were already showing signs of wear and tear.



Grizzled Skip starting to look a bit tatty

One pair of Small Heath had found a quiet place out of the breeze to mate. Unfortunately not "quiet" enough because I came bumbling along to invade their privacy.



Small Heaths mating

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

The flowers here are wonderful. There were the usual things like Russian Comfrey, Yellow Rattle, Milkwort and Horseshoe Vetch but also vast "banks" of White Campion and Wild Mignonette. Also Hound's Tongue, Columbine, Common Broomrape, Salsify, Common Spotted Orchid just starting to bloom and Greater Butterfly Orchid in bud.



Bank of Mignonette



Salsify



Common Broomrape

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 23-May-18 10:27 PM GMT

Great set of reports recently Ernie with some lovely accompanying shots – great Greenstreak, Mr Yaffle and that poppy field 🤩😄🌱

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-May-18 10:05 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel – The poppy field may have been a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

Love your shots of a Speckled Wood on your hand by the way.

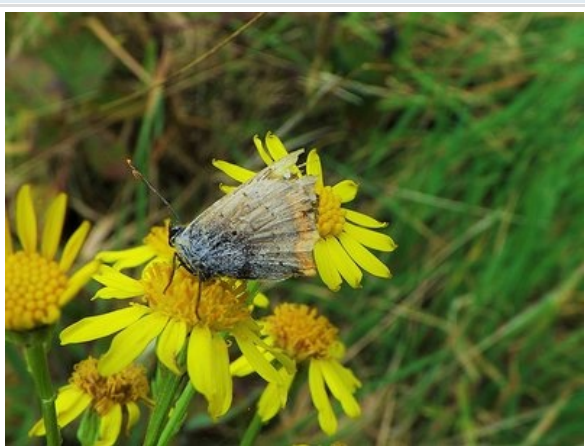
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-May-18 10:56 AM GMT

It's a cool, cloudy and wet day here in Hampshire and the forecast is for this to be with us all day. Next to no chance to get in a spot of butterflying today for me so I thought I would report the next instalment of my study into the Small Coppers of NE Hants and its border with Surrey.

This is part 2. In part 1, I explored the population fluctuations of the Small Copper colonies near me, especially those in my central study area at Broxhead. In part 2, I want to share my experiences regarding the visual characteristics of the butterfly. As I stated in part 1, I am no expert and am learning all the time, especially from others who post on this forum but I take an interest in those species that I can study regularly and easily at close quarters, and for me the Small Copper is one of those.

At first glance it is not obvious that it is a cousin of the Blues other than the orange zig-zag markings on its hind-wings which resemble that of the Brown Argus and the small black dots under the wings which are reminiscent of the Holly Blue. However, when an old one fades, I have found they can have bluish scales appearing under their wings like this one sitting on a Ragwort.



Bluish tinge of worn scales

Also sometimes its body can have a distinctively blue-ish tinge or even the upper hind-wings on a fresh one if the sun is at the right angle.



Bluish hue to upper hindwings

This is a great little butterfly to watch, especially the antics of the brood at Broxhead where in an area of no more than 50 paces in any direction you can witness males sparring, males courting females and mating with them, egg-laying, nectaring, basking in the sun, doing the "Turkey Strut" and the "Stem Dance", etc. Terms aptly coined first by Hoggars in his own diary entries.

I find them mostly close to the ground on low vegetation, grass or actually on the ground, also at head height on trees and shrubs. On occasion one might decide to fly high but they rarely perch high in my experience. I have seen one fly over the top of a Silver Birch tree without stopping on it for example.

Because there are so many males and females flying around at the Broxhead lek this is the best place to be able to tell them apart in my neck of the woods (North East Hampshire). There are few clear differentiators between the sexes and therefore I sometimes find it difficult to tell a male from a female when seen singly. The females are very slightly larger than the males on average and their wing-tips are slightly more rounded, but I find this hardly noticeable really. It has to be said that the size ranges between males and females overlap by 6 mm and thus it's possible to find males that are larger than females so size is not an absolute indicator of gender! Personally I don't see a great difference in wing shape between males and females that cannot be explained by wing-set in different circumstances or natural variation but I do still try and use this at times.

The orange patches on the tops of the rear wings are just a little bit narrower in the female and the dark blobs on the upper forewings are a bit bigger in the male. Also the black patches adjacent to the forewing edge are darker in the male than they are in the female, but there is a lot of aberration in this species.

Being a Lycaenid, the male is disposed to perch using only its rear four legs, keeping its front two tucked up in front of it but this is not always readily observable.

And finally, the body of the female is fatter than that of the male.

But despite knowing all this, I still often get gender wrong. I think this next picture is that of a male.



It has large-ish forewing blobs, nice fat orange zig-zags on the hind-wings and a slim body. If it's not can somebody correct me and tell me why? I would genuinely appreciate it. Thanks.

But the way I usually tell is by behaviour. The males are territorial of course and can come to blows in fast, wheeling, sparring matches with each other (and other species) whilst the females generally fly lower and slower or crawl amongst the ground vegetation in search of egg-laying sites.

On very sunny days, especially early when the sun is lower, the wings of the Small Copper actually shine like metal, just like the real thing in fact – this is an aptly named butterfly. Unfortunately when you take a picture of it under these lighting conditions, the sheen just appears white or yellow. See pictures below to see these changes in sheen. The wings have to be in motion to get the full reflective, burnished-metal effect.



I have noticed that if you look closely at the brown upperparts of the hind-wings of fresh individuals in full sun and move your head from side to side you will see some of the scales glinting against the brown like copper-dust. The picture below gives an idea of what I mean but just like the burnished effect of the forewings, you have to actually be there to see the sparkle properly.



If you find a freshly emerged Small Copper with its wings partially up when the sun is directly behind you then the colour can be most vibrantly orange. Of course there is a great deal of natural variation in this too. Some individuals are yellowish orange whilst others are a very reddish orange like the one below. They almost seem to glow with an inner light.



Like one other commentator I have read on this forum, I wonder if there might even be an element of ultra-violet about them that the human eye cannot detect with clarity. I may get an ultra violet lamp one day and test this idea.

Even its antennae tips are coppery-orange!



Aberrations amongst Small Coppers are common and widespread.

The freshly emerged individual below is so pristine you can see the line of silver-blue dots on the hind-wings, a fairly common aberration known as *ab. Caeruleopunctata*. About 1 in 7 have this aberration at the Broxhead reserve (one day I counted 3 with this aberration out of 22 individuals seen in total).



One of my books suggest there are 140 different, named, aberrant mutations but it doesn't include the one I saw at Broxhead last year which was a midget form. The normal wingspan for this species is between 26mm to 36mm wide for the male and between 30mm to 40mm for the female. Although I estimate this one had a forewing-span to be about an average 30mm, its body and hind-wings were wasted by about a half their normal dimensions. I almost mistook this one for a mint moth! It still flew around OK and was chasing off other butterflies too! See picture of it sitting on a fern leaf below. Its chasing behaviour suggested it to be a male and its relatively wide orange rear-wing bands and slim body seem to confirm this. I have read other butterflies have midget forms too known as *ab. minor* and have seen an example of a midget Silver-studded Blue on this same reserve.



Midget form

The size of the brown dots and the thickness of the brown borders both suffer a great deal of natural variation in both males and females and is one of the ways I can get confused about gender. This individual has a slight aberration where the dots on its forewings are smaller than average. I guess its a male despite this because its orange hind-wing zig-zag is thick and its body is slim.



Smaller than average spots

One dramatic aberration replaces the copper with white but I have not seen this one. If anyone has seen this, photographed it and posted it on this forum, could they provide me with a link to it so I can take a look? Thanks.

Another, known to occur at Broxhead, has elongated brown patches on the upper forewings.

Note: Hoggars pages are famed for their pics of aberrant Small Coppers.

Well that's it for part 2 of my Small Copper study.

In part 3, I would like to cover behaviours; a most interesting aspect of this butterfly.

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 24-May-18 11:01 AM GMT

I do particularly like your Green Hairstreak with the background context, Ernie. 😊

And the Broomrapes are a strange group of plants – parasitic (often with specific hosts) and lacking chlorophyll. I think this one is parasitic on the yellow flowers around it (some sort of legume, by the look of it). Fascinating.

Interesting stuff about the Coppers too. This is a link to the page about ab. *schmidtii*, the striking "white" variation.
<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/app.php/gallery/album/1860>

Dave

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-May-18 01:22 PM GMT

Dave – Thanks for the reference to the "white" Copper. I took a look. Its great.

Re: ernie f

by Hoggars, 24-May-18 04:56 PM GMT

Hi Ernie, I'm absolutely thrilled to read your Copper Posts and by all means refer to my diary entries as you see fit.

Not being an entomologist I came up with "Turkey Strut" and "Stalk Dance" to describe what I was seeing in the field so I'm glad you've found these non-scientific terms helpful!

That's a male in the lovely photo you've posted – forewing shape pointed and a thin abdomen (but there are real experts on this forum who can tell you a lot more about physical characteristics and aberrations than I possibly could.)

I was over the moon to see your mini-Copper! (Nearly typed "mini Cooper" ! But as I've said before, I regard the Small Copper as the Austin Mini Cooper of the butterflying World!)

I too have seen smaller individuals, but what REALLY excited me about your photo of the Little One was its pose! Resting with wings flat out!

I have seen this only once : on a moderately breezy day at Dungeness, a male flattened himself out just like your one, hugging the pebbles close and snug.

I managed to get a photo (somewhere in my diary – I will have a look) but as I say, never seen one do that before or since that day, until I saw your photo!

Excellent! And just what this forum is all about : sharing!

Best wishes,

Hoggers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-May-18 05:29 PM GMT

Hoggers – Thanks for your very supporting comments. The next "rainy day" instalment of my Copper tome covers behaviours so you know what that means!

The "mini cooper" was, as you say, a great find. The day of the picture was sunny, warm and mild – no breeze that I remember. While I watched he flew and settled again. On both occasions he perched with his wings flat out, so he seemed to like it that way.

Incidentally – how many Small Coppers have you seen at the Dungeness site, that is, the max on a given day and total in a given year?

Best Regards

Re: ernie f

by Hoggers, 24-May-18 08:05 PM GMT

Hi Ernie, one weekend I counted just over 500 Coppers and I covered only a small part of the Reserve.

I remember one year seeing around 2500 in total through the season.

The Copper I saw behaving like your Mini-Copper was back on 3rd July 2016. Fascinating!

Hoggers

Re: ernie f

by Allan.W., 24-May-18 09:20 PM GMT

Hello Ernie ,

Some excellent observations on the Small Coppers and also Excellent photos ! I loved the fiery orange ,with wings half open shot ,on what looks like sand ,I,m guessing a very warm day,when they seem to be very reluctant ,to open their wings fully.

Like yourself a few years back ,I found an absolutely minute Copper (AB; Minimus.....or something like that !) with a wingspan of definitely no more than 15 mm ,but in other ways perfect,i,ve actually found 2 , but unfortunately (with mine at least) with nothing to give it scale

my pics are just another Copper, talking of small butterflies I often come across ,minute Common Blues ,especially in the Dungeness area.

Keep up the good work ! Regards Allan.W.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-May-18 08:04 AM GMT

Hoggers wrote:

I remember one year seeing around 2500 in total through the season.

I don't think I have ever seen anywhere near that many of the same species of any butterfly in a single year. What a great site you have near you.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-May-18 08:09 AM GMT

Allan.W. wrote:

I loved the fiery orange with wings half open shot, on what looks like sand. I'm guessing a very warm day, when they seem to be very reluctant to open their wings fully.

Yes, you are right. It was a warm, sunny morning and the picture was taken on a sandy heath.

Also - I am sure I have seen a midget Common Blue too, but it was fleeting and he did not stop for his picture.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-May-18 12:33 PM GMT

OK, so its another cool, overcast day here in Hampshire which limits my butterfly outings so here instead is the next instalment into my study of Small Coppers in and around the Broxhead lek.

My previous two reports covered my observations of the population fluctuation and characteristics of the Small Coppers in my area. This is part 3 and will cover their behaviours.

Courtship, mating and mating-rejection tactics

In the courtship the butterflies seem to walk around each other for awhile, typically the male pursuing the female.



Courting pair

Often courtship is long and involved. I have seen a pair follow each other around for 15 minutes or more, stopping to touch and rub up against each other. One couple went to all this bother for ages and then the male just flew off, not to return. She was just left in the lurch, stood up at the altar as it were. Given that males are always on the look-out for a virgin female, and this obviously was a virgin female showing an interest in him, I cannot understand why he just flew off like this. There was another Small Copper in the vicinity and it could have been a male for him to see off, but I hung around and was sure he did not return to the female, and neither did any other male while I was watching. Maybe it was me taking pictures that put him off!

In the picture below I believe the male is nestling the female from behind. An entry in Hoggers diary shows this too. In this instance the female is receptive but on this occasion I did not witness mating.



Male "nestling" a female

If you are very lucky you will find a mated pair. I was amazed to see a pair making their first contact, performing a courtship dance, making their initial connection, mating while perched and in flight and the final abrupt disconnection with each flying off in different directions. The whole process took just over 30 minutes. During coitus it appeared that one was tickling the other with its leg, I thought at first that this was done by the male to stimulate ovulation. But now I question this.

Coitus can be a protracted exercise for Small Coppers and one cannot presume it is because it is pleasurable. If it isn't for pleasure then the length of time must be for some other reason and that might simply be that it takes a long while for the male to fertilise all the females eggs. The male needs to

know when he has accomplished that effectively. So I thought it may be that there is some chemical signal released onto the surface of the female's body when full fertilisation has been achieved and the male is testing for this with his feet. However, later I witnessed the female also moving her legs to touch the male so now I am not so sure that the male is either stimulating ovulation or testing for a chemical after all.



Mating pair - wings closed and doing leg-tickling

Hoggers diary shows a female reaching out with her leg in a similar picture to my own here. I took a video and from what I can tell both the female and the male use their hind legs to tickle the other's body. Because the male stands on his back four legs, he moves his front legs out in front of him to keep balance on the other three when he lifts one of his hind legs to tickle.

It may be that this two-way, leg-tickling is some form of communication going on to do with fertilisation completion and chemical release has nothing to do with it. Butterfly semaphore! Does anyone know?

I saw a TV programme about Painted Lady butterflies which showed precisely the same leg behaviour when they mated too. How many species do this I wonder?

It surprised me how abruptly the mating pair I saw at Broxhead parted company. After 30 minutes connection, disconnection was over in a split-second, just as though suddenly the male got the signal he was waiting for and was off immediately.



Mating pair - wings open

Males try and mate with any female they can in the time that they are alive so its surprising you see them do this so rarely.



Mating pair – wings closed

If the female is not interested in a male but she just walks off (as she does while searching for egg-laying spots) rather than flying off he may not let her off the hook so easily but continues to pursue her. Her next tactic in mating rejection might be for her to go into the "Turkey Strut" posture. She raises and drops her forewings and flutters her hind-wings from side to side and up and down in a fast, vibrating motion. One aspect of this is that the back wings are able to lay flat while the front wings are up or ajar, hence giving the impression of a turkey. She does this while walking along in a jerky way, hence the strut part of the expression.



Female doing the "Turkey Strut"

Hoggers has a much better photo than I do of this – see his diary entry dated Sun May 6th 2018 under page tag [68].

I twice videoed this behaviour. On one occasion she was fluttering all four wings at once for some while; the forewings moving up and down and from side to side at the same time as the hind wings but independently of each other. Plus they were moving at different frequencies to each other AND the frequencies varied during the performance.

In the other video the female then took flight but still appeared to be trying to do the Turkey Strut in flight! A peculiar and not particularly simple manoeuvre.

Vibrating like this will make the actual ability of the male to connect with her that much more demanding so it may have a practical purpose for the female who has no wish to mate.

Another explanation for why the female does the "Turkey Strut" has been suggested by Hoggers and that is she may be wafting a pheromone at him which says "stay away" and when this does not work it might be because she is running out of the chemical scent. Nice idea. The importance of scent in the world of butterflies is probably widely overlooked.

Of course this tactic need not work either and the last resort for the female is to fly out of her tormentors territory altogether. In locations with lots of Small Coppers, females are constantly pestered in this way by all the males who have overlapping territories. Its amazing they find time for nectaring and laying eggs!

Although I cannot be absolutely sure, I think the following picture shows an already mated (gravid) female (farthest left) doing the Turkey Strut to ward off the unwanted sexual advances of a male close behind her while an un-mated female looks on from a distance. If only the male turned around he might find his ideal mate! Of course this is just one of a number of possible interpretations.



Perching and Roosting

At night Small Coppers roost head down on grass and other plant stems with their forewings retracted and closed up. They can also go into this position on cool or breezy days. Not only is this position the best to retain heat and restrict buffeting from the wind but it also means they are camouflaged from predators better. Quite literally they keep a low profile. They can actually look like part of the grass they are perching on. They can often be much further down the stem than the picture below suggests. I once disturbed one that was roosting on a grass stem just millimetres above the ground surface. When that one flew off thinking I was a predator it did a pretty good impression of a yellowing autumnal birch leaf blowing along the ground. It had me fooled for a while. For such a brightly-coloured butterfly it has some very clever camouflage techniques.



Roosting position

It is well known that during the day, males have regular perch points from which they make sparring and nectaring sorties. I have observed these perch points to be on flowers such as heather or bushes such as bramble or even pebbles lying on the ground. Anywhere where they can get a good all-round view. Of course females are also on watch for eligible males.

Pebbles can be useful to any Small Copper wishing to recharge its batteries because not only can it bask in the direct radiance from the sun but also gain borrowed energy from the heat re-radiated from below because the stone has also warmed up in the sun. This one in the picture below has decided a pine cone is a choice perch. It never occurred to me at the time to check if he might be licking pine sap from it but he probably wasn't.



Sparring fights and intimidation strategies over territories

I have read that not only do males perform fighting flights over territories but also when tired, they intimidate one another as they perch. Below is a possible example of what might be intimidating behaviour between two males although I have to say the one in front has a fat-ish body and may be a female. It could just as easily be a courtship dance.



After a night in the second week of October 2016 (the 11th) when the temperature crashed to below 4 degrees it did not warm up above 10 degrees until 11 am. This saw the demise of all the older, tatty Small Coppers at Broxhead and only three were left flying in the lek, all of them relatively fresh and strong and one of them a male. When disturbed he would fly a long way and if disturbed again he would do the same again and he was never once challenged by another male because there were no others. He was "King of the Lek". My focus all the while has been on lek behaviours but what I think I was seeing here is what is probably the more usual behaviour when individuals live alone outside of leks. Then there are always fewer males to spar with and also fewer females to mate with, so although the lek is a tiring place for a Small Copper to exist in, the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages of a more solitary existence. In a lek there are lots of small overlapping male territories and lots of females flying through them. Outside of the lek the male territories are potentially much larger and less likely to overlap but they must spend more time patrolling and waiting for a female to pass through.

I have subsequently witnessed the mid-way situation, neither lek nor solitary existence of a small group of four males along a grassy path on Odiham Common. Here what they seem to do is work out their own territories so that they do not overlap and only occasionally then need to fight to protect the borders. Such fighting is quite rare in this instance. The distance for each territory could be paced out along the path. There was about 15 paces between each perched individual in this instance.

Unlike in the Broxhead lek where the territories overlap and there are constant disputes between males, all here was more usually calm between neighbouring males while they basked in the sun waiting for a female to pass through. Unfortunately while I was there no female passed through so I could not see if the dynamic changed when a potential mate entered the scene.

Egg-laying

After mating the female will fly off and walk about on the ground searching for sorrel patches on which to lay her eggs. It appears she favours smaller, younger sorrel in areas with close-cropped grass just like the one pictured below. She will use her antennae and also her front legs to feel her way and when she finds a good spot she will bring her abdomen forward underneath her in the usual butterfly egg-laying posture, in this way she positions it how she wants. I videoed this behaviour and was surprised at her precision.

You can see the abdomen being thrust forward in this shot below but with her forewings retracted I have seen a female push her abdomen much further forward than this.



Egg laying

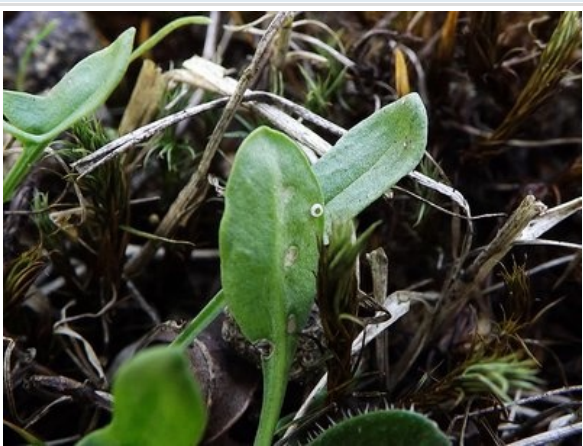
It is surprising how much time and effort a female will go to, creeping around in the undergrowth, testing and searching for what she considers to be the very best locations for her offspring. I followed one for 30 minutes doing this.

The eggs are tiny, pinhead-sized golf-balls needing a field-glass to see properly. With help from Pauline who found this egg below I was able to get a rather shaky picture. Notice the egg is laid directly on a leaf of sorrel here. This need not always be the case but it will always be near this plant at Broxhead.



Egg

When the egg hatches it is as though a hole is punched right through it. The larva does not eat the egg but just leaves it behind still attached to the leaf. This picture below shows a hatched egg.



Hatched egg

The larvae develop through a number of instars. This (again not very good) picture shows an early instar. Pauline as usual has done a better job than me recording these images so please go to her diary-pages.



Larva

My books tell me that when they are very tiny they eat away the sorrel leaf from below which produces transparent white lines in the leaf without actually cutting right through. Only later when they are in their final instars might they create damage that penetrates right through the leaf. There can be as many as 5 instars, especially in those that overwinter. The overwintering ones attach themselves to a sorrel leaf or leaf stem using silk in order to survive the ravages of winter. Later, a green caterpillar with purple stripes down its sides develops to a size of about 16 mm. They hide underneath sorrel leaves in June, August and October. The last brood's progeny overwinter in one of its instar forms from October to March.

This medium term instar I came across is showing the first vestige of a stripe.



Medium-term instar with stripe

They may be this colour for camouflage against the sorrel leaves because as the leaves start to go over they are often green and red in the same hues as the larva.



Sorrel leaf turning red

The Stalk Dance – a bit of a mystery

Here is a behaviour I haven't quite figured out yet. The Small Copper perches on the top of a stalk, then moves around so that it faces downward as if to roost but then walks down the stalk, tapping the stalk with one of its front feet as it goes. When it gets part of the way down it flies off abruptly and then perches on a neighbouring stalk. The first one I saw do this did so repeatedly many times while I watched. Sometimes on a long grass blade, sometimes on a stalk or some other vertical twig, sometimes on a fern spine and once on a bramble stem. It would walk vertically down or horizontally. Hoggers says he has seen one walk up a stem in such a fashion!

The one shown below was on its own as far as I could tell.



The Stalk Dance

The Hoggers diary mentions this behaviour that he calls the "Stalk Dance" as being predominantly a male activity and is more frequent than you might imagine, its just I had never seen it before I took a video of this one – the picture is a still shot from that video.

The Hoggers diary refers to page 106 of Thomas and Lewington which states, in relation to male Small Coppers : "It is sometimes said that he marks his territory with scent." The book does not expand on this so we cannot know whether it is correct in its presumption that scenting is taking place – especially now we think that some females might also perform this act.

Another experience reported on this forum is that one individual tapped blackberries that he walked over!

So why might they do it? Here is a recap of some ideas put forward by others on this forum. None have been proven unfortunately.

Option 1: Testing for females (Assessing territory viability)

It may be a way of determining if a female has visited his patch in the recent past with an intention to lay eggs. Perhaps he is trying to establish how many mated females are laying eggs in his territory and whether or not the offspring are likely to be his. Of course if this is the reason one has to ask why he is doing this on the stalks and not on the leaves of the sorrel which after all, is where the females are more likely to leave their signature. This assumes that there are receptors on the feet of this species of butterfly capable of testing for female presence. It is known some species such as Red Admirals have foot sensors which can pick up sugary substances so it would not be unheard of for this to be true also for Small Coppers.

Option 2: Testing for Sorrel (Improving mate-finding efficiency)

It could be that the male is testing pieces of foliage to see if it's sorrel or not to gauge how popular his patch is to any prospective partner wishing to lay eggs. If he discovers it isn't a good territory he might decide to muscle in on some other male's territory. Until recently I was under the impression that the butterfly does not walk all the way to the bottom of the stalk. Sorrel blooms spring along the stem down to about a third of the stalk. If you are testing a plant to see if its sorrel (without actually looking at it) and have not found evidence on the stem of sorrel buds, flowers or seeds on the top third by touch, there is no point in testing lower down than that. It could mean that the male is testing to find sorrel so as to gain a mental picture of all the prime sorrel in his territory and he does this in order to increase his chances of encountering a freshly emerged virgin female. If he knows where all the sorrel is, he can patrol just those areas where he knows it is growing in order to reduce the flying effort to search for virgins in his domain as they emerge. He will also get to them quicker for mating than other males outside his territory can. He may even shift his master perch point to enable greater efficiency in female-finding. I now have two issues with this. One is that Small Coppers have eyes and should be able to see a plant so why would they need to use touch? But can they see the plant well enough? If you stand perfectly still next to a Small Copper it will not spook. This is true of most butterflies I think. If you move in its vicinity it knows you are there and will fly off. Many male butterflies use scent to attract females in the first instance, suggesting that at the very least the females cannot see them until they get close. It may well be butterflies such as Small Coppers cannot see static objects very well at distance, instead they may only perceive movement, colour and smell. I once witnessed a Holly Blue circling round and round, settling for a moment and then doing the same again and again in ever decreasing circles until it finally landed on some fresh dog poo beside a path and started taking salts from it. It clearly could not see this non-moving object clearly until it got close and seemed to be relying totally on its scent perception until the final landing! Of course they must be able to see static objects that are close to them otherwise they would never be able to perch. However issue 2 was shown by Hogggers quite recently when he photographed one walking all the way to the bottom of the stem. I also saw one individual do it on Sheep's Sorrel a few times. This sorrel had gone over but still retained its fruits. The butterfly in this instance did not stop when the fruits ended but continued to work it's way much further down the stem than would seem necessary. This same butterfly was also doing it short distances on a fern leaf almost laterally and tried to do it on a grass stem but it bent over too much so he flew on. All this probably overturns the hypothesis that it is testing to find sorrel with its feet. It would know pretty soon by walking over the top third so would not need to progress further. Also why would it do it on a large bramble branch for example. Surely as soon as it perched on it, it would know it was not sorrel and so would not need to do any walking and tapping.

Option 3: Signposting a territory (Improving mate-finding effectiveness)

It could be a way of marking out a territory. The foot-tapping may be a means by which a male could deposit a scent on these stalks. An investigator on this forum (sorry I cannot remember who) who followed a particular male Small Copper around for over an hour discovered that the Stalk Dance is a regular part of its daily life, no less important than sparring, courting, sunbathing and nectaring and it shares its time amongst these behaviours. The investigator also noted that the Stalk Dances were done from a few feet to anything up to 40 feet away from its master perch point. This would seem pointless in a lek where territories are determined by sparring and may explain why I have only seen it well outside of lek situations and only once on the edge of the Broxhead lek. In a non-lek situation, the male has to broadcast his presence to any passing female and so he may leave a scent trail on a number of stalks leading toward his master perch point for her to follow. Observers have written that the flight between Stalk Dances is lazy, like it is for nectaring, rather than as it is for sparring or the pursuit of females so it is a relatively relaxing passtime for the butterfly. Another observer noted when one male took over the territory of another male, he would spend quite a lot of his time doing Stalk Dances. It does indeed appear this behaviour is part of the quest to improve the chances of finding a mate but how exactly it achieves that aim is still a mystery although scenting any stalk in this way to act as guideposts for females (this option) is a favourite of mine. Bugboy in one of his posts, concurs and adds they may be displaying UV patterns on their wings we cannot see and I think this is very likely but does not explain the foot-tapping.

Although it is said it is mostly males that do this, Hoggers says it is not exclusively males. In fact I thought the video I took, from which the still is shown above, was that of a female but I have said before that I still sometimes have difficulty identifying gender in Small Coppers. However, if females do this as well as males that brings doubt on all these interpretations.

I have already mentioned it is a feature of the Lycaenidae family of butterflies, of which the Small Copper is one, where the male only uses its rear four legs on which to stand whereas the female uses all six. The books I have read suggest the front legs are not used and are vestigial but that is clearly not the case with the male Small Copper. Instead they appear to have become adapted specifically for this tapping purpose, whatever that is for.

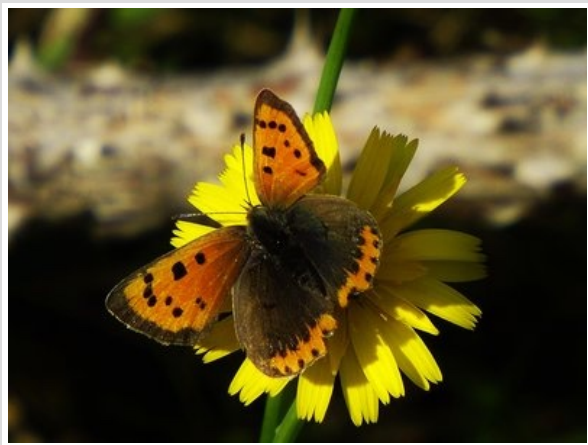
If that is the case, all butterflies that only use their rear four legs to perch may use their front legs for specialised purposes: that is all Lycaenidae males (Hairstreaks, Blues, Coppers and The Duke of Burgundy) and both the males and females of the Nymphalidae family (The Fritillaries, Browns and large butterflies such as the Painted Lady, Purple Emperor, Peacock and Red Admirals etc). This is definitely true for Silver-studded Blues for example where I have seen a male use his front legs to hold onto a female and fight off unwanted intrusions of other males while he is mating. They are used more like arms than legs in this instance.

Behavioural Shifts

At the end of the fourth brood flying season at Broxhead in 2016 I saw no evidence of males sparring, instead rather a lot of females laying eggs instead.

There were only a couple of heather patches left in bloom in the Broxhead lek by October 2nd. Four Small Coppers were nectaring on one of them and two on the other. These last heather patches were only about 1 foot in diameter each and so the butterflies were falling over themselves to get at them but the amount of fighting was greatly diminished, almost to zero, perhaps because they were all females who were sharing a territory rather than fighting over one.

The ones I saw at that time were starting to switch from nectaring on the heather which was in final decline, to the fresh Autumn Hawkbit and the remaining Ragwort which enabled the extension of fourth brood Copper activities at Broxhead even further into October.



On Autumn Hawkbit

Note that the very late flowering garden-escape asters on the car-park verge beside the Victorian church on Kingsley Common attracted one Small Copper until the end of the second week of October in 2016! She was there on and off for some days. There are small amounts of Sorrel, Sheep's Sorrel and Dock here, so she had a choice of larval food plants to lay eggs on.



On Aster

This is one of only two places on Kingsley Common where I have seen spring-time individuals and that is because unlike the main part of the common which is predominantly heathland, this fringe area has spring-flowering plants.

Well that is the end of part 3 of my study into Small Coppers. Behaviours of all butterflies are interesting but Small Coppers for me take it one step further.

Part 4 is the final part and will cover the Broxhead flora in a little more detail because it is the plants that make this habitat so enticing for the Small Copper.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 26-May-18 06:11 PM GMT

Kingsley Common – 26th May 2018

Spring is still with us. 2 Green Hairstreaks and 1 Holly Blue and a single spring brood Speckled Wood seen here today.

Also a Brown Silver-line moth and a Silver-Y moth.



Brown Silver-line



Silver-Y

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

But the real gems here at the moment are the dragonflies.

Here are Azure Damselflies. The green type female is on the left and the blue type is on the right.



Azure Damselflies egg-laying

But the Beautiful Demoiselles are certainly that - beautiful.



Male



Female



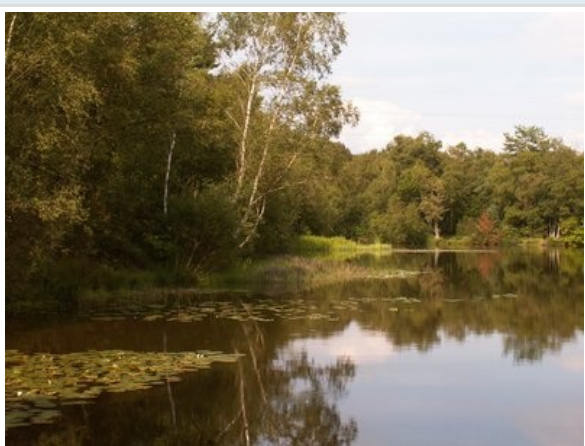
Glinting in the sun

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-May-18 05:08 PM GMT

Shortheath Common - 27th May 2018

The heathland that is closest to where I live. Here there is dry heath, mire and a slightly acidic lake all interspersed with unimproved grassland and bordered by woodland.



Today I walked around the lake. Here I found a Common White Wave moth.



Common White Wave

A Common Heath moth showing how well camouflaged it can be against the heather.



Common Heath

And another Brown Silver-line moth.

Also the caterpillar of the Yellow Tail moth.



Yellow Tail caterpillar

The car park has a newly laid sand and gravel surface and a Red Admiral was making the most of the salts it could obtain from it. I followed it around for a good while as it walked about.



Red Admiral in the car park

I am hoping that later on in the year this bodes well for ground sightings of the Purple Emperor because many of the paths at the Alice Holt woodland have been similarly repaired recently and the last time they did that it was a bumper year for close-up views.

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

But again, as for yesterday's diary entry on Kingsley, it was the dragonflies that featured most.

I counted 34 Downy Emerald Dragonflies battling for supremacy over the lake. Often they would leave the lake surface and flit around me but never once did they stop.

Large Red Damselflies were busy mating and egg-laying.

And for the first time this year I saw Four-spotted Chaser and Emperor Dragonfly. There must have been over a dozen of the former and maybe one (or two) of the latter.



Downy Emerald



Large Red Damselfly pair



Four Spotted Chaser



Emperor Dragonfly

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-May-18 05:33 PM GMT

Bentley Wood - 28th May 2018

This location (The Salisbury one) is a bit of a trek for me. Most people would probably consider a 1 hour drive to a site about par for the course but due to my other commitments I usually stick far closer to home than this. However I have seen so many great pics of Pearls on this forum that I got a bit envious and the forecast was pretty good for today so I decided to make the trip.

So I walked onto the pitch and the very first thing I saw was a pair of mating Speckled Yellow moths. Not a bad start.



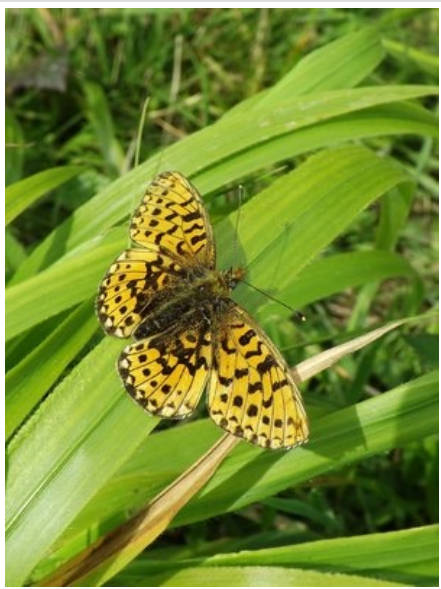
Speckled Yellows mating

There were rather a lot of these moths and one obligingly stopped higher up so I could get a pic underneath.



There was also a Burnet Companion and a few Brown Silver-line and an unexpected Grizzled Skipper.

So that was the starter. Then on to the main course. There was still a fair number of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries flying about. One or two males patrolling and many females (I presume but I am no expert) on or close to the ground.





I struggled to get a properly focussed shot of the underside of the wing..



Then I spotted a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. It did not move around much and I guessed it was newly emerged because no-one else I spoke to so far (and there were quite a few people there) had come across one yet. I called it out and immediately wish I hadn't because suddenly there was a crowd of people around this single butterfly, cameras of all types bristling! Thankfully we all got our shots.





So that was the starter and main course and for dessert....

Well I noted on this forum that someone had spotted a Marsh Fritillary here only yesterday but I didn't expect to see it. Instead I saw three all flying at once and when I moved on, there were another two.





I freely admit I had only ever seen one Marsh Frit before and that was in Wiltshire years ago, before I got into butterflies, so seeing five today was amazing (for me). Not only that but these were on the Hampshire side of the border (just) and somehow seeing something that is reasonably rare for the county in which you live is extra special. I don't know if other people feel that way.

For after-dinner coffee let me share a pic from last year that I was lucky enough to snap. A PBF and a SPBF on the same Common Spotted Orchid at the same time!



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

WARNING TO ARACHNOPHOBES! This diary entry contains images of spiders.

I was over the moon at seeing the two Frits on the same Orchid and being able to get a picture but when the SPBF flew off I wondered why the remaining PBF had not moved. I waited but it didn't even flutter its wings. Odd I thought. Then I walked around it and looked from the other side to see a macabre scene unfold.

There was a *Misumena vatia* crab spider predated it. Being yellow with a red stripe, this was a female. It had injected its prey with venom and was gorging itself on the juices of the butterfly. I learnt that these spiders are ambush predators of insects such as bees, flies and butterflies. They lie in wait, hidden in the blooms of flowers, sometimes even changing colour from yellow through pale green to white in order to match the colour of the

blooms when necessary. The chameleon of the spider world.



Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 29-May-18 11:27 AM GMT

Well done with the Marsh, PBF and SPBF's Ernie. How great to see the PBF and SPBF together as well. 🍷🍷
Also liked your Small Copper observations and pictures. 😊

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 29-May-18 02:35 PM GMT

An added bonus with your first Small Pearl find, it happens to be a lovely little female.
On my three visits to the Park Corner site in East Sussex, for SPBF, I've only found one female so far.
The captive bred SPBF were re-introduced at Park Corner last year, after a previous extinction,
and the wild offspring this year seem to be doing quite well.

Fingers crossed,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-May-18 03:45 PM GMT

Andrew: Thanks for reading and giving positive comments on my Small Copper reports. Its difficult to gauge how these would go down as they are a bit verbose.

Trevor: Its good to hear the potential for success of the SPBF re-introduction at Park Corner. We need all the good news we can get with our more fragile species. There is an attempted re-introduction of the Marsh Frit near me this month but I do not expect to hear any results until next year.

Regards,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-May-18 04:02 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 26th May 2018

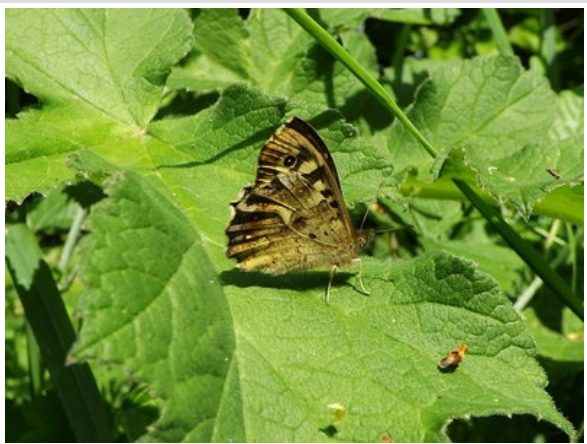
Today I explored the lower slopes and pits of the reserve (the area least frequented) and I am glad I did. In one sheltered location I came across Small Blue, Common Blue (m+f, the female had a blue wash), two Holly Blue, a Brimstone, Small White, Green Hairstreak, Duke of Burgundy, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath, Brimstone Moth, Common Carpet Moth, Hummingbird Hawkmoth, Burnet Companion Moth and Mint Moth. All in the space of around 30 minutes. I suppose the area all this was going on in could only have been around 30 paces across. At one point a Common Blue and a Small Blue nectared from the same Trefoil patch at the same time only inches from each other which was odd because only minutes before they had been chasing one another!





Common and Small Blue on Birds-foot Trefoil patch

On the entrance path to the reserve was Large White, Speckled Wood and another Holly Blue.



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day.

I had decided to look around the wooded fringes of the lower slopes because that is where the White Helleborine has grown in the past. In one recent year they cut back some of the scrub which had got out of hand here and over 100 White Helleborine erupted – and in full daylight too. Of course, they do not like full sun generally speaking, being more normally a woodland species and the following year there were far fewer. Unfortunately I saw absolutely zero today. Not even any in bud. I wonder if the cut-back that at first looked so promising has actually decimated this species here. I hope they are merely lying dormant and will come back soon.

Nevertheless, this orchid, which should be Orchid Number 4 for Noar Hill is my snapshot of the day but the picture is from a better time.



White Helleborine

Re: ernie f

by Maximus, 29-May-18 08:03 PM GMT

Hi Ernie,

It's great that you got to see Marsh Frit as well as Pearl and Small Pearl during your Bentley visit. Also interesting posts on your local sites.

Mike

Re: ernie f

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

Thanks, Mike. Yes, its nice to have some good local sites but I have always thought that no matter where you live you can always find some great wildlife and the diary entries of the people of this forum bear this out.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-May-18 10:05 AM GMT

Its a dreary, rainy day in North-east Hampshire today so its time for another instalment of my Small Copper study.

This is the last part of this four-part series of posts on Small Coppers in my area. This one covers the specific plant life in and around Broxhead in the late summer that makes this area such an attraction to the Small Copper at that time.



Small Copper on an acorn at Broxhead

Small Copper larvae eat Sorrel leaves and sometimes Dock leaves as their food plant. Sorrel is in fact a member of the Dock family of plants.

At Broxhead itself, being a dry heathland, the Sorrel here is the Sheep's Sorrel species. Common Sorrel favours open woodland or meadow grassland settings on alkaline to neutral soil (the Small Coppers to be found on the meadow at nearby Binswood and on the non-heath areas around the Broxhead reserve therefore are looking for Common Sorrel). Sheep's Sorrel grows in places of relatively low grass on dry acid soil such as you find on heathlands.



Sheep's Sorrel

I presume it is called "Sheep's" Sorrel because of this preference for short grass, of a height that sheep grazing produces, but of course rabbit grazing will do the same thing and it is rabbits that create the habitat at Broxhead. Actually on the reserve itself it is rabbits but on the other side of the fence is a sheep field so the sorrel on that side of the fence is maintained by sheep. Rabbits and Sheep – an unusual partnership with Butterflies! It has a long flowering period, between May and August. It turns a distinctive reddish hue which en-mass can be quite a sight for such an otherwise small and insignificant plant on its own. It grows to a maximum height of 30 cm but often only reaches 10 cm. The stalks can be very flexible and can curve quite dramatically under the smallest pressure. Even the slightest breeze can make them bend; not great when you are trying to take a picture of a Small Copper on one.



Sheep's Sorrel leaf

The tiny flower heads are green when new and are rough to the touch. They cluster tightly along the top third of the plant's stems. Stems can be single or branched. There are male and female plants. Sheep's Sorrel has no scent and is not pollinated by insects. Each male plant makes copious pollen

which is blown by the wind to the female plants. The female plant's seeds are white and dense and like dandelions are also taken by the wind to find a new home for a new plant nearby. This is why when you find Sheep's Sorrel it is usually in massive carpets sometimes covering entire fields if the habitat is right.

The leaves are carried on short side stalks. Leaves are narrow but can be up to 4 cm long and have an unusual shape, the technical term being "Halberd-shaped". A Halberd is a kind of ancient sword with this shape which was further developed during Medieval times for pikestaffs. Being so distinctive, you quickly learn to spot these leaves on their own, without their accompanying flower heads which is useful for us as Small Copper lovers! The leaves can stay fresh and green for some while, even after the stalks lose their colour entirely although they too are liable to spot red and even go completely red themselves.

Individual plants send out quite long underground rooting runners and thus can spread out and establish a strong network. You would not want this plant growing as a weed in your garden! This is good news for the Small Coppers at Broxhead though because it means their food plant is a very hardy and long-lasting one, not affected unduly by even our worst British winters.

The juice from its leaves was once used to treat kidney and bladder infections in humans so it appears the Small Copper larvae are feasting on what is actually a medicinal plant. They are a healthy bunch of butterflies and they need to be when you think about the lives they can lead on the wing!

On the fringes of the Broxhead heathland, and its connected Kingsley and Sleaford heaths, Common Sorrel and Dock more commonly grow and these areas too have Small Copper, albeit in far smaller numbers, who favour these as their larval food plant instead of Sheep's Sorrel. Common Sorrel is taller (up to 60 cm) and stronger in the stem than Sheep's Sorrel. The leaves are much larger and are not borne on stalks. Common Sorrel is used as a culinary herb and enters many dishes around the world.

Despite health-giving benefits and uses in cuisine, the Docks and Sorrels contain Oxalic Acid which is a mild toxin. The calcium salt of Oxalic Acid is called Calcium Oxalate and this forms tiny needle-sharp crystals called raphides. These when eaten can cause damage to cells by puncturing their membranes. To humans, this has little effect in small doses but can be dangerous in larger ones. Obviously to the Small Copper larvae they pose no threat at all otherwise they would not be able to subsist entirely on this plant type. However they may cause danger to some types of predator who may prefer to stay well clear of eating Small Coppers in any of their stages of development as a consequence! Yellow and Red are colours often used in nature to indicate danger. This "Blue" butterfly may be copper instead as a warning sign to would-be predators that it is not good to eat!

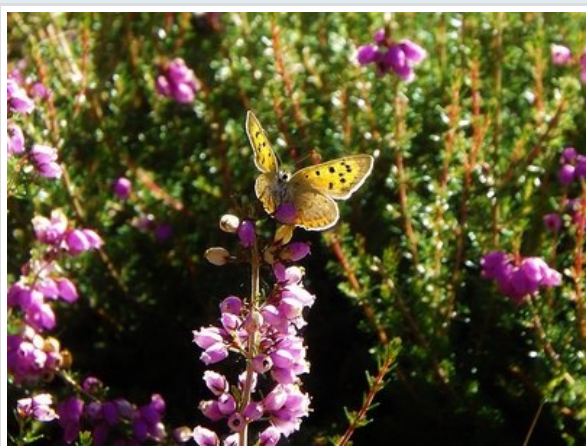


The fact that the Small Copper can swap between these plants of the Dock family gives them an ecological "edge". They can exist in a number of habitats as a consequence.

Specific to the heathland Coppers now. There are three types of heather that grow regularly in the lowland heaths in and around Broxhead. There is Heather itself (aka Ling) but also Bell Heather and Cross-leaved Heath. The latter of these prefers the damper areas of heathland around bogs, mires and ponds and because both Sorrel and therefore Small Coppers like drier conditions, it does not feature often in the Small Copper habitat.

At the Broxhead lek therefore one finds examples of both Ling and Bell Heather. From a distance Ling Heather looks softer and denser in texture and less vibrant in colour than does its companion, the Bell Heather and the individual blooms of the latter do, indeed resemble crimson or purple bells.

Because the Broxhead lek is so very dry and sandy, the Bell Heather is the most abundant because it prefers the driest conditions of all. The backlit individual in the picture below is showing how much it enjoys this Bell Heather.



It is a wonderful co-incidence of nature that this nectaring plant, plenteous on very dry heaths also has a very long flowering period, from late June to early October, four months in all! The reason why the second, third and even fourth broods of Small Copper overlap at Broxhead is I think down to this lucky quirk of nature and the reason for there being such a substantial lek here is the amount of both sheep's sorrel and bell heather side-by-side in a

sheltered south-facing location. The Small Copper community at Broxhead has their adult nectaring plant and larval food plants in abundance in a relatively compact area for a long period of the year.



And that is it. The end of my report on the Small Coppers of Broxhead. I hope you enjoyed it. I love the antics of these little creatures and hope to continue finding out more about them during this coming year.



Re: ernie f

by David M, 30-May-18 09:39 PM GMT

Well done with the mating Small Coppers, ernie, but 10/10 for the Speckled Yellow pair – I struggle to get images of singletons of this skittish insect.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 31-May-18 09:15 AM GMT

David – You got me thinking. I had seen all three of these Frit species before but I had never seen a mating pair of Speckled Yellow moths before. The more I thought about it, do you know I don't think I have ever seen a pair of moths mating before of any type, let alone get a pic of it.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 31-May-18 03:06 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 30th May 2018

So I went to Noar Hill on a gloomy day not expecting to see any butterflies and that exactly what I saw – not even any roosting.

So instead today I thought I would post the spreadsheet that I keep for my records on what I have seen, when and where I have seen it. If anyone is ever visiting my neck of the woods in NE Hants, you may find it useful.

Note these are my own records of what I have personally seen – they are not official in any way.



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day.

But the summer-time orchids are beginning to show. There were quite a few Common Spotted Orchids starting up and one Fragrant Orchid. These are numbers 5 and 6 of the Noar Hill Orchids. Obviously the Twayblades were in full force still and the Fly Orchids are getting good, but the Early Purples, while still out in places are well into their seasonal decline.

I took some record shots but they are not good enough to show here, so instead here is a pic I took at Noar Hill from a previous year that has both in it.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 01-Jun-18 12:46 PM GMT

Cheers for posting the spreadsheet Ernie I'm always wondering what others sites there are out there to visit so that'll come in handy 😊 I managed to find a few Fragrant Orchids on a down near me yesterday – I was struggling to work out if that's what they really were and then I thought about their actual common name 😊, kneeling down sure enough they're fragrant 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Jun-18 04:44 PM GMT

Wurzel – glad you liked the spreadsheet. Obviously its not fixed. I update it all the time – but it is firmed-up enough to use now.

And yes – Fragrant Orchids are fragrant as you rightly point out. They also have more open spacing between their blooms than the Common Spotted Orchid (and the slightly later Pyramidal Orchid too).

Best Regards

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Jun-18 05:30 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 1st June 2018

Is this the end of Spring and the start of Summer? Well it was warm but very overcast, although the sun did peep through on occasion.

I came here primarily to check up on the Fly Orchids but of course any butterfly that came by would be a treat. And unlike the other day when it was very gloomy, they did actually come by today. Lots of Common Blue, Small Blue, Small Heath, one Green Hairstreak and one Small White. Usual moths for this location seen were Cinnabar, Mint, Silver-Y and Common Carpet.

I am pleased with the way the Small Blue is ramping up at this site. I have lived in Alton and visited Noar Hill for a number of years now but it was only a couple of years ago that I started to see them here and in very low numbers in only one or two pits. Then last year there were a few more and in places not seen the previous year, now they seem to crop up just about anywhere at this reserve. But today was really the day of the Common Blue. Even though the ones I saw were really just those I disturbed roosting (so there must have been a lot more), even so numbers were good. I didn't actually keep count but there must have been more than a couple of dozen. OK so not notable numbers but surprising for such an overcast day as today.

And being overcast they were not as skittish as they may otherwise have been allowing me to get in close.

Here is one of a male – we were almost eyeball to eyeball for this pic.



And as Pauline has just mentioned in her post today – the variety of blue on the females varied quite a lot.



I got in close with an underside shot of one of the females too.



Although I have already posted about Common Blues before, I forgot to add some of my past pics of them at the time – something I have been doing when I spot a species for the first time in the year. Mind you – my pics today beat most of my others I already had except for the mating pair pics and conventional brown female. So here we are ...





Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

As I said at the top of this diary entry – the main reason to come here today was to see how the Fly Orchids were doing. Well, they were all in full bloom. And like every year, there was a green variety also in bloom. This is the "ochroleuca". One normally grows on the bank and is usually easy to find because of the muddy footfall marks where people have climbed up to get a picture but I could not see it today. However the new one was not in a position I had noted one grow before and it had a degree of speckling that I had also not seen. Here is the one I saw today.



And here is a pic of the one on the bank from last year.





I was only here a couple of days ago and saw a few Common Spotted Orchids starting to bloom and just one Fragrant Orchid. Now, this short time later they are blooming everywhere.

So, yes. Summer is here after all.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Jun-18 04:13 PM GMT

Beacon Hill – 2nd June 2018

A South Downs chalk hill, topped with a small woodland. A stream passes below which supplies the watercress beds here.



Beacon Hill from the Watercress beds

There is a good variety of butterflies here but I usually visit at the beginning of June to combine them with the orchids.

Today's butterflies were...

Lots of Common Blue and Small Heath. Fair numbers of Small Blue and Brown Argus. Large, GV White, Brimstone. One Speckled Wood, one Green Hairstreak, three Meadow Brown (1st for year) and a Grizzled Skipper (1st for this location).



Grizzled Skipper at Beacon Hill



Meadow Brown at Beacon Hill - male

And the moths...

There were a good number of Silver-Y and Burnet Companion and one Mother Shipton moth.



Burnet Companion at Beacon Hill

As usual I will add some past pics from the species I saw for the first time in the year. The Meadow Brown.



Meadow Brown – female



Meadow Brown – pair mating

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

Not only is Beacon Hill probably the best location in this area for the Green Hairstreak that I have found, it is I believe the only remaining place in Hampshire where one can find the Man Orchid. This is a small but amazing-looking orchid and even here is a rarity. To many people the blooms look like little men, hence the name – but I would go further and say they are wearing cycling helmets that are a tad too big for them.

In 2015 I counted only three Man Orchids, in 2016 there were six. This is good considering for many years they were thought to be extinct here. However in 2017 I found none at peak flowering time. But this year there were five in full bloom.



Man Orchid – yellow form

The flowers can range from completely yellow to those with red edges on the same plant. Because of this some plants are noticeably redder overall than others.



Man Orchid - redder form

I have read one report that these have been an unofficial reintroduction from elsewhere because one seemed to have been crossed with a Lizard Orchid (Kent harbours both species in local abundance and the argument has it that hybrids could have occurred there and been seeded here), but until this year the ones I had seen on Beacon Hill were all standard Man Orchids, no hybrids, so for some time I questioned this interpretation of their recovery. However on June 2nd 2018 I found one that was hybridised strongly with a Monkey Orchid and this could only have occurred had the plant seed originated in Kent or Oxfordshire.



Man Orchid x Monkey Orchid

Re: ernie f

by David M, 03-Jun-18 12:51 AM GMT

Some stunning flowers amongst those butterflies, ernie. This is the time of year to make the most of the shorter sward, before the grasses and the bracken gain the upperhand.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Jun-18 02:10 PM GMT

David - You are right. When you are keen on butterflies, you just can't help getting into flowers a bit too.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Jun-18 02:36 PM GMT

Old Winchester Hill - June 3rd 2018



Old Winch lower slope path

Quite a fair number of butterfly species here today. Small Heath, Common Blue, Small Blue, Small Copper, Small, Large and GV White, Brimstone, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Dingy Skipper. Also Burnet Companion moth.

However, my target today was the Adonis Blue. Old Winch was the location for a reintroduction programme for this species some years ago and there has been some success. Both the late spring and late summer broods are still here. It has to be said – not in the kind of numbers in some locations posted on this forum but nonetheless any success is good. I counted six males today. Because it was so sunny and warm they were pretty skittish but I was able to get a couple of decent shots. They are to be found on the lower slope below the car park as shown in the photo above.

These are today's pics.



Underside of male



This years Adonis Blue on last-years Dwarf Thistle



As this is my first spot of this species this year, as usual here are some past photos I have taken of Adonis Blues, both here and at Magdalen Hill.



The metallic blue sheen can flash into the green end of the spectrum at the right angle.



A mated pair at Old Winchester Hill right beside the path. They can stay like this for a long time. This pair were stuck fast for at least 30 minutes and hardly moved in all that time. I walked away before they parted so I did not time their total contact.



Adonis Blue – pair mating

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

Sheep are kept on the hills and surrounding fields. No I am not in a helicopter for this shot. This was the view of a flock from the hillside above.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Jun-18 03:04 PM GMT

Noar Hill - June 2nd 2018



The Noar Hill "Meet and Greet" Butterfly

A short trip yielded a few butterflies but nothing new. For the record in 1 hour I saw five Small Blue, many Common Blue and Small Heath, a 6-spot Burnet, a Green Hairstreak and 2 Dingies, one which had wings so tatty and torn it was a wonder it could fly at all – but it could.



6-spot Burnet

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

While the Common Spotted Orchids and Fragrant Orchids were coming up nicely, none yet were in full bloom – almost but not quite. And there were now a few Pyramidal and Musk orchids in bud, but only one pyramidal had started to put out a couple of blooms. I shall wait until they are in better bloom before I post pics of them.

Also coming up were the Knapweed Broomrape. This location has a lot of them because it has a lot of Knapweed which it is parasitic on.



Knapweed Broomrape not yet in flower

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 04-Jun-18 03:50 PM GMT

Hi! ernie, I love the shot of the Adonis mating pair , it's great to see a lovely scenic back ground like that, it adds to your photo 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Paul Harfield, 04-Jun-18 10:12 PM GMT

Hi Ernie

It looks like you have had a busy few days 😊 . Fantastic Adonis Blues from Old Winchester Hill 😊 . If only they did as well here as they seem to do at some of those sites over the border in Sussex.

And those Orchids are quite spectacular. Beacon Hill is one of my favourite sites 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Jun-18 09:21 AM GMT

Goldie – Thanks. I like pics of butterflies in their setting. I know there are techniques one can use to get the background and foreground in focus at the same time but I don't really know how to do it – in any case I actually don't mind the blurring of the background.

Paul – Yes, I like Beacon Hill a lot too. In a week or so all the CS and F Orchids will be in bloom and there are thousands of them carpeting the hillside.

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 05-Jun-18 11:55 AM GMT

You do have some great spots within a relatively small radius of where you are based, Ernie! The mating pair with the scenery in the background is a great shot. 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Jun-18 04:07 PM GMT

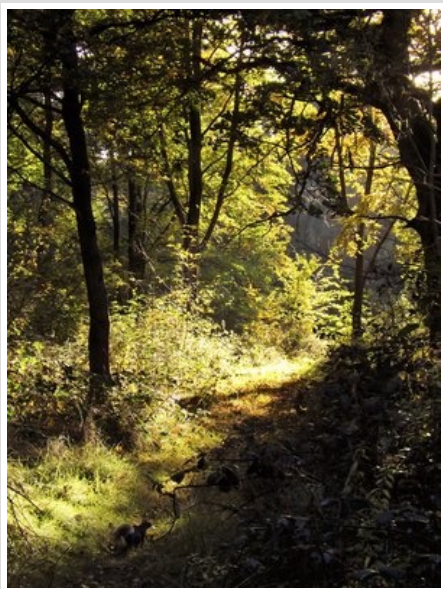
Dave – Yes I do consider myself lucky. I am always surprised at what I find every year – there is always something new; and I have been living here for 17 years now.

Regards

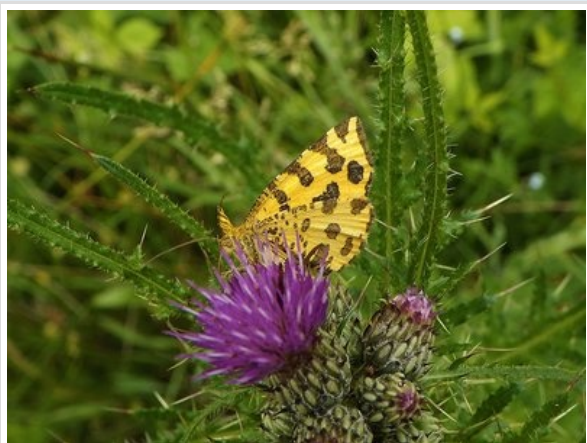
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Jun-18 04:16 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woodland – 4th June 2018



For an hour in the afternoon things brightened momentarily enough to get out. The woods were quiet on the butterfly front with only three fresh Speckled Woods, a Speckled Yellow moth and a micro-moth. I have no idea what species it is. Can anyone help? There was a pair of Banded Demoiselle perched on a bush and a greater-spotted woodpecker calling from within the wood.





The micro-moth is in this picture

In early autumn last year at Alice Holt was the biggest capped mushroom I ever saw. It was growing all alone out of the grass lawn beside the road that leads to the cafe. I have never been fully successful in identifying it but think it might be a *Boletus aereus*. I called him "Big Bert".



"Big Bert" the Bolete

Also - can you spot the squirrel in the woodland picture above?

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 05-Jun-18 07:33 PM GMT

Hi Ernie,

Just catching up on your recent posts, some really interesting observations, particularly the series of reports on the Small Coppers.

I am going out on a limb with the micro moth but it could be *Celypha lacunana* <http://www.ukmoths.org.uk/species/celypha-lacunana>

Just found the Squirrel! 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 05-Jun-18 10:28 PM GMT

Great set of reports and shots recently Ernie 😊 Those Orchids are quite stunning 😊 Big Bert is huge, more of a stool than a Toadstool 🤪 Love the 'meet and greet' butterfly - does it fly off and lead to the highlights of the reserve? 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Jun-18 08:12 AM GMT

Neil - Yep. I am sure you are spot-on with your moth ID of *Celypha lacunana*. I checked my pic against your reference. Thanks.

Wurzel - I was amazed to find a plant so much like a Monkey Orchid in Hants and I nearly missed it too. I was on my way out of the Man Orchid area when I decided to return and take one more look around. I don't know why and that was when I found it. Spooky.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Jun-18 04:46 PM GMT

Today was one of those good days where everything seemed to go right. I visited three reserves to make the most of the sunny weather - these were Farley Mount Country Park, Magdalen Hill and Broxhead Heath. There is so much to report that I'll do each location on a separate day, in order starting with...

Farley Mount Country Park - 6th June 2018

I try to visit this site once a year around the peak of the Greater Butterfly orchid blooming period. But it is usually good for butterflies too at this time.

Today there were many Common Blue, including this very blue female. There were loads of Small Heath, a Red Admiral, a Small White, a Grizzled Skipper which was quite fresh looking and a fading Burnet Companion moth.



Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

I know there are better locations for numbers of the Greater Butterfly Orchid in the south of Britain (particularly at Badbury Rings in Dorset so I am told), but this is my closest site. Today I found 13 which is about average for Farley Mount. The ones at the top of the slope were already going over but the ones at the bottom were either full or about to get that way, with only a couple of buds remaining.



Re: ernie f

by kevlng, 06-Jun-18 09:14 PM GMT

Ernie,

Just catching up with the diary. Love the Adonis Blues. Their striking colour is wonderful. Some nice orchids too. The scenery in your neck of the woods look beautiful. What could be better on a nice sunny day. I was stuck in the office 😞

Kind Regards Kev

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Jun-18 11:14 AM GMT

Kev - I know what its like to be stuck in an office all day - I had a few decades of it until I retired.

Thanks for your comments on my efforts with the Adonis Blues and the Orchids. All I need to do now is get a picture of an Adonis Blue sitting on an orchid! 😊

Re: ernie f

by Pauline, 07-Jun-18 12:05 PM GMT

Hi Ernie

I believe SSB's were reported from Iping and Broxhead a couple of days ago - I know you were interested in going there.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Jun-18 02:56 PM GMT

Thanks for the info Pauline. I went to Broxhead and found five fresh males so I am well happy. Now waiting for the females to make things interesting.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Jun-18 03:32 PM GMT

Magdalen Hill - 6th June 2018

After visiting Farley Mount Country Park as I reported yesterday, I then went on to Magdalen Hill as it is on the way home from there but I also wanted to check out the Small Blue population in "The Scrape" at the top of the hill plus I wanted to see if I could get my first Large Skipper of the year.



The "Scrape" at Madgalen Hill

The first butterfly I saw at Magdalen Hill was indeed a Large Skipper. There were at least two in the grassy-flowery verge alongside the top path.





I saw one land beside another butterfly. On closer inspection this turned out to be a very faded Green Hairstreak.



For a short while they both nectared from the same plant but the skipper skipped off before I could get their picture together.

The usual Common Blues were very much in evidence as well as the odd Small White or two.

Next I entered "The Scrape". This is an area at the top of the hill which was gouged out back to the chalk bedrock some years ago and has now rejuvenated. See picture above. It is here where most of Mag Hill's Small Blues congregate. It is almost a lek situation with feuding males, mating couples, egg-laying females, etc.

I met Pete Eeles while there and he showed me some Small Blue eggs on the Kidney Vetch.



Small Blue eggs - how many are there in this pic?

Then he spotted a couple of Small Blues courting so we set up shop next to them to see what might happen - if anything. They spent a long while together. The male following the female around, sporadically nestling up to her side. They did not fly. She was obviously interested but kept walking away from him. She was playing hard-to-get!



Small Blue pair courting

From time to time he would extend his abdomen toward her but even though she did not reject him, she did not connect to him either. What a tease! You may need to expand this picture to see it better.



After about 10 minutes of this she flew down and hid inside a clump of plants and grasses. He flew about for awhile – first going off a short way, then returning and perching near to where she was but eventually he gave up and flew off.

I also witnessed a number of females egg-laying. Again click to expand.



Egg-laying

At this point Pete departed. I stayed and I am glad I did because I saw my first Painted Lady of the year and she posed for a number of pics of which this I think is the best.



Next a male Small Blue was trying to woo a female who did not want to know. She rejected him by fluttering her wings rapidly and walking away from him. At one point she also vibrated her body up and down. I managed to capture this in a short video. He moved away but still within pestering distance. She nonchalantly started to lay an egg next to him. The final brush-off as it were!

I got a pic of this but its a bit fuzzy as the male was always in motion.



Male trying to woo a female who is egg-laying

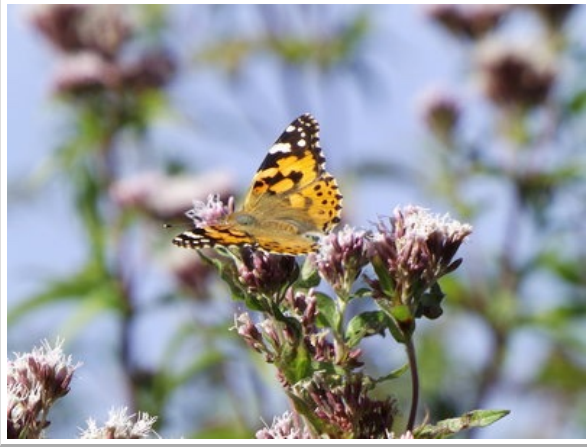
Then a female Black-tailed Skimmer, flitted past and then back and forth – I presume hunting the butterflies.

Now, its usual, its time to post some past pictures I have taken of the butterflies I have seen today for the first time this year. On this occasion its two species. Firstly the Large Skipper and secondly the Painted Lady.



Large Skipper





Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

The female Black-tailed Skimmer. This Dragonfly had wandered some way from water. The Scrape is a dry chalk gully at the top of the hill. Looking at my map of the area, the nearest large pond appears to be 1000 metres away and the nearest river is about 2500 metres away.



Black-tailed Skimmer

Re: ernie f

by Pete Eeles, 07-Jun-18 06:59 PM GMT

ernie f wrote:

I met Pete Eeles while there and he showed me some Small Blue eggs on the Kidney Vetch. Then he spotted a couple of Small Blues courting so we set up shop next to them to see what might happen – if anything. They spent a long while together. The male following the female around, sporadically nestling up to her side. They did not fly. She was obviously interested but kept walking away from him. She was playing hard-to-get! From time to time he would extend his abdomen toward her but even though she did not reject him, she did not connect to him either. What a tease! You may need to expand this picture to see it better. After about 10 minutes of this she flew down and hid inside a clump of plants and grasses. He flew about for awhile – first going off a short way, then returning and perching near to where she was but eventually he gave up and flew off. I also witnessed a number of females egg-laying.

Great to meet you Ernie; it's always a delight to meet fellow UKBers in the field! I'm afraid I can't improve on your shots, especially since I had completely the wrong setup (since I was taking habitat shots!). My best is attached, which does show the male making a valiant attempt to "do the business"!



Cheers,

– Pete

Re: ernie f

by Pauline, 07-Jun-18 07:45 PM GMT

Some lovely shots of the Painted Lady Ernie, especially the first one. I always look forward to seeing this butterfly so hope I don't have to wait too long.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Jun-18 08:29 AM GMT

Pete – It was great to meet you too. I think you got a better shot than me of the male attempting to mate with the female. Thanks for showing me those eggs. The pics I got of them weren't as bad as I thought in the end.

Pauline – Mag Hill always seems a good spot for the Painted Lady. There is a buddleia at the top of the hill beside the notice-board they seem to like every year. Of course the best year was 2009 when they were everywhere across Britain in large numbers and I went to Mag Hill then and got this picture...



Painted Lady invasion of 2009 at Mag Hill

I count about 50 in this picture. If I had taken another three pictures covering all four points of the compass still standing in this spot, there would have been another 50 in each shot.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Jun-18 04:07 PM GMT

Broxhead Common – 6th and 8th June 2018



The SSB lek at Broxhead

The third of the three sites I visited on the 6th. I came here specifically to find the Silver-studded Blues and found four on the left bank and one in the lek – all male. They were only to be found where the heather had just started to bloom of course. One or two looked freshly emerged. One was reluctant to fly and the other had a slightly concertina-shaped wing as if it was not yet fully pumped-up.

Two were well-endowed enough to have a prolonged sparring match with each other, flying first this way and then that until they parted company and landed each to their own patch.

I repeated my visit on the 8th June and now there were 6 males in the lek and an additional two females on the bank. My first female SSB of the year was mating!

The Silver-studded Blue is one of my study butterflies because in a week or so this area of the Broxhead Heath will be thronging with them. Three years ago I walked the entire reserve counting them and came to 550 in total – but most of these were males as they were easier to see from a distance. My assumption is there were probably as many females lurking around. Last year I did not count them but there just seemed to be more than before. My guess is this reserve regularly harbours over a thousand Silver-studded Blues. These are today's pics (8th June).



Silver-studded Blue male



Silver-studded Blue female



Silver-studded Blue pair mating

I studied the behaviours of this species quite closely last year so I have a couple of posts on them in the near future which I shall save for a rainy day or two. It was for example the first species I witnessed performing the wing-roll. Indeed all the males I saw on both days were doing it immediately when they landed after flight and the lone female also had a go.

Also there were a number of moths including Cinnabar, Common Heath (m & f), Brown Silver-line and a Grass Wave.



Grass Wave moth

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

In the lek a Birch tree had fallen and growing from it were three patches of Dogs Vomit Slime Mould (*Fuligo septica*). Lovely. All of them were in their ageing crusted brown stage, but scratch the surface and they were still bright yellow underneath.

Here are two pics of one as seen on the 6th. As it was, and with its surface scratched.



Dogs Vomit slime mould aged tan



And showing its still yellow inside

And here is a pic of a patch in its early yellow stage seen elsewhere on a previous occasion.



Yellow when fresh

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 08-Jun-18 08:15 PM GMT

Cracking Silver-studs and Painted Lady shots Ernie 🤔🌿 As for the 'Dogs vomit ou could have warned me, I've just eaten my tea 🤔🤔

Have a goodun

Wurzel'

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Jun-18 08:56 AM GMT

Wurzel, sorry if I spoiled your tea. I promise - no more dogs vomit slime mould. It's also called Scrambled Eggs Slime Mould - that would have been more apt for tea!

Glad you like the SSB shots. As I am doing a study of them - you can expect to get a few more in the near future! 🤔

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 09-Jun-18 12:17 PM GMT

Some lovely shots there ernie, so many Painted Ladies and I was thrilled to see just one 🤔 Goldie 🤔

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Jun-18 06:11 PM GMT

Goldie – like you I am thrilled to see just one. Some years that is all I manage to see. It's just luck of the draw.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Jun-18 06:29 PM GMT

Broxhead Common – 9th June 2016

Broxhead is my study area for the Silver-studded Blue. It can be anywhere on this reserve but certain to be found on the short grass and heather beside the main road lay-by. Step around the metal barrier and you are there. Here there can be many hundreds across the whole reserve and perhaps over 50 in the lek beside the lay-by with as many as another 100 immediately around it on the heather-clad banks. In 2017 on June 20th, of the 151 individuals I counted in one hour in and immediately around the lek, 17 were females and there were three mated pairs. Within about 40 paces of the lek down a side path there is another smaller community and on June 21st 2017 there were three mating pairs which could all be seen at the same moment and while standing on the same spot. In one recent year I scoured the entire reserve counting 550 in all but these were mostly males that could be seen at a distance. It may be possible to assume double this if factoring-in the females that must also have been there. The 2017 numbers appeared to be more than this but the effort to count them is exhausting so I haven't ever done it again. It is sufficient to know this is one of the best locations for them in North Hampshire. I have read that other locations in Britain have more, sometimes in the tens of thousands but they are very few and far between.

An alternative location near me is Longmoor Common where there are many small "pocket" colonies dotted across the heath.

Today we saw the start of the ramp-up of the brood at Broxhead. There were 13 males in the lek whereas there were only 6 yesterday. There were 5 males and 2 females along the bank facing the lek giving an extra male more than yesterday. There was an additional one on the bramble patch down a side track and two around the pond which normally has a good-size satellite community. A total of 23 individuals in all today.



The pond at Broxhead



Male – wings open



Male - wings closed



Female - wings open



Female - wings closed

Also today there was Meadow Brown, Green Hairstreak, Small White, Large Skipper and White Wave moth.



The Large Skipper was freshly emerged and with very fine markings, particularly the extra-large sex brands.



Large Skipper - freshly emerged



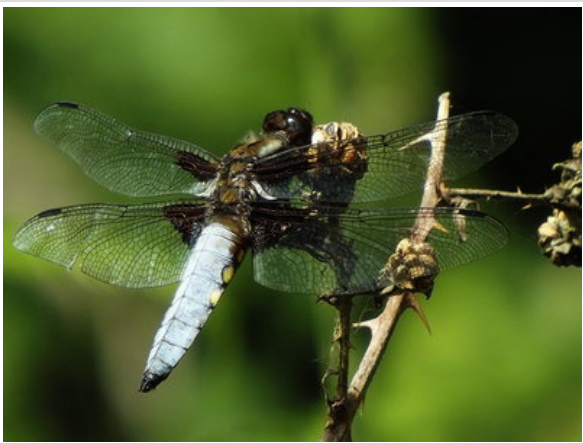
Remarkably fine markings

Non-butterfly snapshots of the day

Because of the pond, Broxhead is home to a number of dragonflies. Today I saw Four-spotted Chaser, Emperor, Broad-bodied Chaser and Beautiful Demoiselle. I was very pleased with the perching Broad-bodied chasers because both the male and female stayed put long enough for me to get in close.



Beautiful Demoiselle



Broad-bodied Chaser - male



Broad-bodied Chaser - female



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-18 09:01 PM GMT

Cheers for thinking of my digestive processes Ernie 😊 Lovely set of Silver-studs 😊🍷, I really need to see if they're out at Slop Bog 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 09-Jun-18 10:53 PM GMT

Lovely photos of the Silver Studded, Ernie. Broxhead is a lot further south – our nearest is Prees Heath. I'll have to get down there sharpish to see if they have emerged!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Jun-18 09:54 AM GMT

Wurzel and Janet – hope you have luck in your SSB searches.

Wurzel – I am sure "Slop Bog" is a lot nicer than it sounds. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Jun-18 04:07 PM GMT

Broxhead – 10th June 2016

Silver-studded Blue numbers continue to increase gradually. This afternoon there were 16 males in the lek and for the first time there were females with them, I counted 4. There were 11 males on the bank facing the lek and I know there are two females there too. Also three others dotted around the reserve but I could not find the two I found the other day near the pond. In any case the total is now 38. I met a guy who was doing a transect and he had counted 45 but he had ranged a bit further than I did.



Today I thought I would start my report on observations I have made about this species at Broxhead to date. I have only been studying them properly from last year even though I have seen them here for a few consecutive years. As for the Small Coppers I shall break it down into parts but unlike them, my starting point is the variation in the brood.

Variation of the Silver-studded Blue at Broxhead

There is a slightly aberrant subspecies known as "*ab caernensis*", the female of which has a blue sheen. The books I have read suggest it only exists on the Great Orme in North Wales, but this example I found at Broxhead may be a female.



One of my books shows the male of this subspecies. It typically has much thinner black wing bands and the bands on the hind-wing are interrupted so they appear more like discrete blobs. My study of the colony at Broxhead shows there may be a few like this. They are also noticeably smaller than the standard species. I wonder if someone at sometime has introduced them from the other known locations without telling anyone but it is very hard to tell because there is a fair deal of natural variation in the main species and this is a fact at Broxhead.

I followed one male which appeared to be of this subspecies for about 20 minutes and unlike the main species it seemed to reach much further. It travelled in a wide arc from the lek and around it – I estimate at least 40 metres, twice the normal range.

I once saw a standard male giving this smaller male the attention it might give a female. The smaller size and reduction in black markings is not just confusing to humans it would seem; and the blue flush on a female won't help matters for them either.

I must say though that I am not entirely convinced. These differences in size, colour and habit may all just be natural variation or other aberrations of the main species or in some cases even due to the age of the butterfly. Given that *ab caernensis* inhabits a limestone grassland environment on the Great Orme and Broxhead is a sandy heath also adds suspicion that natural variation is really the cause.

Here are some of the variations I have seen at Broxhead. Starting with the darkest. The borders are thick white and black. The blobs on the rear-wings are almost unnoticeable as they join up so much. The butterfly when fresh is quite a deep blue.



Next a variation has thinner black forewing bands and the rear band is starting to break up so you can see blobs of black. It is not quite as deep blue overall.



The variation shows even thinner forewing bands and now the hind-wing bands are completely broken up. This is the one that look most like the *abcaernensis* male I think.



Finally this variation has the thinnest forewing bands, almost no white edge and has brownish patina, although this might be an aged specimen.



Another aberrant can also be found at Broxhead. This is a micro-sized version of the standard species type (ab minor). Its wings are half the normal size while the body is normal. Here is a picture of a female. The wing size makes the body look very cumbersome and club-like but the fact that the body is normal sized means it is capable of mating.



There are 33 recorded aberrants for this species of butterfly nationally so I have read.

Well that's it for my short sojourn into the variation of this species at Broxhead. I shall keep looking this season to see if I can find any more.

Does anyone else have any odd-looking SSB's? I would love to see them. If you have already posted any in the past could you give me a reference? Thanks.

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

A Beautiful Yellow Underwing caterpillar being taken by a Sand Wasp – *Ammophila sabulosa* for his dinner.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Jun-18 07:21 PM GMT

... or I should say HER offspring's dinner!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Jun-18 03:37 PM GMT

Broxhead - 11th June 2018

So now there are 46 SSBs in the lek and on the bank nearby of which 5 were female, three of which were mating and one was rejecting a male by "buzzing" her wings in his face.

The same Large Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Broad-bodied Chaser and Beautiful Demoiselle were still hanging around the bramble patch but today they were joined by an Emperor Dragonfly and a female Common Blue.

Elsewhere on the reserve, moths were Clouded Buff, Yellow Shell and Grass Wave.

Today I witnessed two newly emerged males still being attended by ants. One had finished with them. He grew agitated, turned around a couple of times to brush them off and then part hopped, part flew about 6 inches away from the ant nest to the top of a low heather and immediately did a wing-roll a couple of times.

This gives me a reason to continue the report of my studies to date about the SSBs of Broxhead.

Relationship with Black Ants

Last year I saw one female laying eggs onto a food-plant within a black ant nesting area. These were fairly small ants. I only realised their presence because one crawled over the female Silver-studded Blue as she was actually laying her eggs. This species of butterfly is in a near-symbiotic relationship with these ants. They protect her caterpillars by deterring predatory wasps, spiders and carnivorous bugs while harvesting the caterpillar's honeydew-like secretions which they get from a gland on the caterpillar's back. They even have the chrysalis underground in their nest as it too provides secretions for them. I guess the lekking area is here because the ants nest here. I do not know what species of ant this is for certain although all the references I have read suggest it has to be either *Lasius niger*, *Lasius alienus* or *Lasius psammophilus*, all reasonably common black ants in the UK. *Lasius alienus* can be discounted at Broxhead because it prefers chalky soils. It could be the very common *Lasius niger* (aka The Common Black Ant) which inhabits many kinds of soil but my money is on *Lasius psammophilus* which prefers sandy soils and of course Broxhead is a very sandy heath. The workers are only around 2mm to 4mm long so they fit the bill in size too. *Lasius niger* workers are 3mm to 5mm - not a lot of difference I suppose but perhaps enough to make the ones at Broxhead seem smaller than usual.

The relationship between the Silver-studded Blue butterfly and the *Lasius psammophilus* ant is not symbiosis in the true sense though. An experiment was performed rearing larvae in an area protected from ants and all the larvae died, whereas the ants thrive with or without a larva's secretions.

When the butterfly first emerges from the nest it takes about an hour to dry out and expand its wings and even during this time it is attended by ants so it still has the honeydew available in its adult form before it dries out. My book suggests it is the only butterfly species in the UK that has such a relationship with an ant species in all its stages of development.

Pic of newly emerged male being attended by ants.



Pics of male still "pumping up" but able to fly.





... and the moths



Clouded Buff



Yellow Shell



Grass Wave

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

I was resting against a five bar gate at Broxhead one day looking out over the adjacent sheep's sorrel-covered grassy field when a fox ambled by.



Red Fox

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Jun-18 12:36 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 12th June 2018

I'm giving the lovely Silver-studded Blues of Broxhead a bit of a rest today. Noar Hill gave me 3 Red Admirals, 2 Dingies still in remarkably good nick, 8 Small Blue, 4 Speckled Wood and 4 Large Skipper plus the usual numbers of Small Heath, Common Blue and Meadow Brown. None of them were doing anything unusual or striking any special poses but one of the Large Skippers had lost an antenna.



Large Skipper missing an antenna

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

But I had really come here for a different reason. Today was an orchid day for me. I came to Noar Hill to see if the Musk Orchids were out yet and was completely floored because there must have been hundreds in bloom already. People I met were remarking about them being early this year – and this after the bad weather of early spring making things late!

So let me recap the orchids of Noar Hill so far:

1. Early Purple
2. Common Twayblade
3. Common Spotted
4. Fragrant
5. Fly
6. White Helleborine (which I hadn't seen this year but have been reliably informed has been by others)

So my Noar Hill Orchid number 7 is the Musk Orchid.



Musk Orchid

But its time for the Pyramidal Orchids too. Many were just budding, many others were about 50/50 but one was in full bloom. So Noar Hill orchid number 8 is the Pyramidal.



Pyramidal Orchid

But totally unexpectedly I also saw one Frog Orchid in bud and one with a single open bloom on it. I shall wait until they bloom more before posting pictures. Nevertheless this is Noar Hill's Orchid number 9.

Noar Hill used to have Greater Butterfly Orchid so I am told. I have searched but never found one here. There wasn't one today either. I am beginning to wonder if they are extinct here now.

But I guess the real humdingers of the day came once again from the Fly Orchid Department.

First a strange mutant that had two conjoined lips on a single bloom curled upside-down.



And second, another one that was in the process of being pollinated by a Digger Wasp.



Digger Wasp mating with a Fly Orchid

My Orchid book tells me that the Fly Orchid gives off a scent like that of the female Digger Wasp. The male Digger Wasps come out before the females and so they are attracted by what they think is a female but is actually the sneaky Fly Orchid. They then try to mate with the Orchid and it dabs pollen on their heads just to add insult to injury. This picture shows the wasp on the bloom. He was there for some minutes having no clue it was not a female Digger Wasp.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 12-Jun-18 11:39 PM GMT

Fabulous, eclectic mix of images, ernie. I must say though that your fox wandering across such an exposed tract of terrain caught my attention more than anything else. I presume it was unaware of your presence?

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 13-Jun-18 12:36 AM GMT

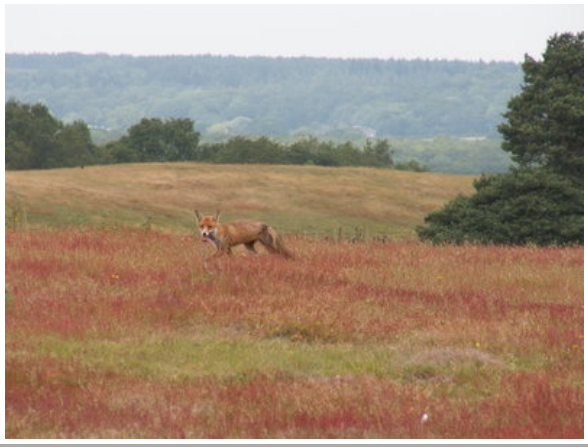
What a wonderful couple of days you had Ernie! I'm particularly impressed with the orchids, at least two of which I have never seen: the fly and musk orchids. And that fox! 🐾

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 07:33 AM GMT

Thanks Janet and David. I think the fox was aware of me but he just didn't care. Here is the full sequence of pics...





Best Regards

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 13-Jun-18 10:28 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, I love the Fox photos 😊 I think we've got the Fly Orchid at Latterbarrow, I've not seen it but the Hillside there is full of Orchids , I don't know too much about Orchids but next time I go to Latterbarrow I'll certainly look out for it 😊
My mind was fixed on looking for the NBA when I was there recently. 😊
Your shot of it with the Digger Wasp is super 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 11:18 AM GMT

Goldie – thanks. I loved the way the fox just looked at me, realised I wasn't a threat and just went about his business.
Hope you have luck with the Fly Orchids. The ones at Noar Hill are in the shadow of a copse of trees but do get some sun, the ones at Chappett's Copse are in woodland and the Burghclere Quarry ones are right out in the open sunshine for the most part, so you can never really be sure where to look for them.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 11:41 AM GMT

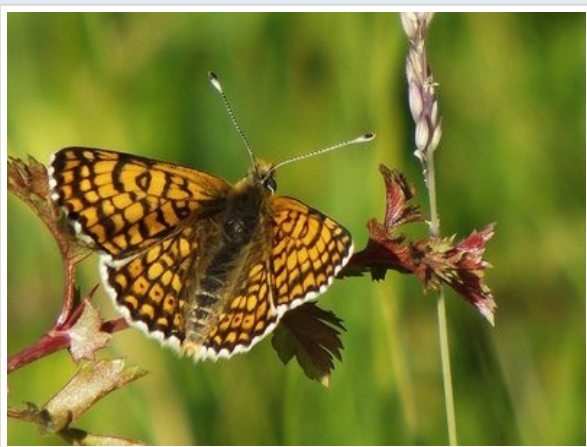
Wrecclesham – 11th June 2018

Wrecclesham before the bulldozers moved in (you don't want to see it now!).



My thanks to Pauline (and ultimately Hazel) for drawing my attention to the fact that the Wrecclesham Glanvilles were out and about.

I tried my luck this evening while it was still sunny and warm and came up trumps with at least two of them. Here are a few pics. Feel free to correct me if I'm wrong but I think this and the next pic is of a male – very orange

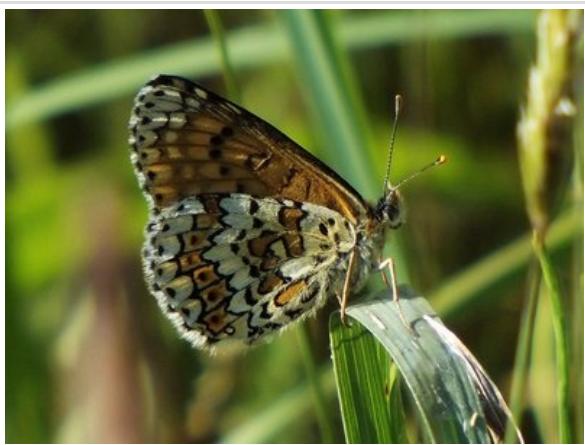




... and this is a female perhaps? Darker looking, a bit more on the yellower side of orange – fatter body.



And I haven't a clue about this next one – possibly male again?



Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

When the pond was still there its edges were crammed with bulrushes.



Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 13-Jun-18 03:06 PM GMT

Great Glanvilles Ernie, and recent selections. 😊 I especially like your Painted Lady and SSB's. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 05:34 PM GMT

Thanks Andrew. I was lucky with the PL. I'm glad you like the SSB's cos there's a lot more of them to come.

Re: ernie f

by Katrina, 13-Jun-18 05:52 PM GMT

Just catching up , love the fox photos – beautiful colours!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 05:54 PM GMT

Greywell Common and Conford Common – 13th June 2018

Today I spent mopping up a couple of orchids you can't see at Noar Hill!

First at Greywell Common, the Southern Marsh Orchid. This first pic is of one alongside its main pollinator – the Large Skipper.



But its not the only one. This fly is giving it a go.



A couple of years ago this new variety was discovered but I have not seen it since.



Then at Conford Common, the Heath Spotted Orchid. Conford Common at one time had over 1000 of them but it is not a managed site and numbers have plummeted over the years due to being overtaken by bracken. However I did manage to find 47 of them in about 30 minutes of trying.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 13-Jun-18 07:07 PM GMT

Great to see the Glannies still at Wreclesham, hopefully they can hang on in there, fingers crossed 😊 I've been enjoying there various Orchids you've posted about – is there a distribution map for the various UK species available somewhere?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 08:52 PM GMT

Thanks, Katrina. Yes a Red Fox in a Red field.

Wurzel: My primary orchid book is the WILDguides series title "Britain's Orchids" by David Lang published by English Nature. It has distribution maps for all Britain's Orchids. I have not bothered to look on the internet for them because of this. Also you may have seen the recent posting of Burnt Orchid. Did you know you have recently visited a reserve near you that has them? Martin Down! This species has two flowering periods but I don't know which one happens at Martin Down (or indeed if it may have both).

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 13-Jun-18 10:59 PM GMT

Cheers Ernie, I'll do a bit of internet searching to see if I can come up with anything 😊 I saw the Burnt-tip Orchids at Martin Down (to feature in a later

post) and there were Frog and Butterfly Orchids here a few years back. I'd like to add a few more photos to my Orchid folder 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-Jun-18 10:10 AM GMT

This morning is pretty bleak here in Hampshire so I thought I'd post more on my study of the "Broxhead Blues".

Territories (or the lack of them)

The Broxhead location just the other side of the metal bar gate appears to be a lekking area for the Silver-studded Blues. I have seen dozens of males strutting their stuff here. The full gamut of behaviours from nectaring and basking to positioning between males and courting and mating with females, females laying eggs and emerging adults.

They rarely fly more than about 20 metres from where they emerge and never fly high, always hugging the ground and low heather. The main lek at Broxhead is longer than 20 metres and I have not seen a standard species individual on one side of the lek travel to the other side and I once spent 30 minutes with one to see where he went and he did stay only at one end. One reference I have read suggests that a few individuals do travel and it is these that are often responsible for the small satellite communities that pop up around the main lek sites and it keeps the genetic pool mixed. Officially recorded travel distances have sometimes been clocked at up to 1.5 km with at least one max distance at 4 km.

It seems the males in the lek have no preferred daytime perch but constantly flit about the heather searching for unmated females, stopping on occasion to bask in the sun or to nectar from a heather bloom. Each male does not appear to have its own territory but instead shares the lek with all the other males. They do not so much "joust" as for example Small Coppers or Duke of Burgundy's in a lek do, but they "jostle" instead. They are in fact remarkably tolerant of each other. I have seen 6 males all together in a small patch no larger than 1 square metre all getting along fine. I have seen three roosting together on the same heather bush no more than a foot away from each other. I saw two sitting on the same leaf for awhile without any noticeable forms of intimidation between them and as you can see from the photo their wings were almost touching.



On another occasion one male came across another perched motionless on a heather branch but he just flew off without any interaction. The one on the heather didn't even flinch. Of course, just when you believe you have found a rule of thumb, the butterfly breaks it. The above observations were during the height of the 2017 flight-period. In the first few days of the flight period of 2018, there were only four males along the heathery bank beside the lek and two of them were performing a standard sparring match - just like normal territory protection. So it seems their behaviour changes dependent upon population density! Because territories are loose where this butterfly is more tightly packed, there is less need to fight and if it is clear two males both only intend to sunbathe then all is OK between them. The longest I have seen two males tousele without a female present in a full lek is about 5 seconds. More usually it only lasts 1 second or even less. However, the full joust in an almost empty lek I saw this year lasted for about 10 seconds.

When another butterfly species enters the lek a male Silver-studded Blue can get a bit shirty with it. I saw one male Silver-studded Blue chase off a Small Heath Butterfly. He pursued it with some vigour, following and parrying its every dip and swoop until he was sure it would not return. Then he nonchalantly went back to the lek. I have seen the same kind of chase between a Silver-studded Blue and a Common Heath Moth and also with a Large Skipper. Another male displayed even more bravado and chased off a Common Blue Damselfly! The only times I see males properly fight is when competing over a female. In one instance a female flew about 20 metres in fast direct flight with two males chasing her and fighting each other all the way. I had to run to follow them. Finally the three of them whirled around each other for about two minutes then the female flew off without the two males (and me) realising it at first. The males continued to fight each other sporadically for another couple of minutes. In the gaps between bouts, one searched for the lost female and the other landed and fluttered its wings, presumably in a courtship display. He still hadn't realised the female had gone.

Courtship and Rejection

Which males get the females seems to be dependent solely on which males come out best from courtship. Courtship can include a kind of dance in flight, low to the ground. I have seen a male flutter up and down while circling a female for example. On occasion a male and female might settle next to each other. The male might flutter his wings while he perches on the ground and the female stays still and watches.



If he gets close enough he might approach her face-to-face and touch her. He may even rest in close proximity facing away from her and will flap his wings open a few times in her direction hoping to grab her attention with the vibrant blue and black markings of the upper side of his wings (or maybe to waft scent at her?). However, if a perched female is not interested, she may vibrate her wings very fast or just give them a quick flick. If she is already in flight she will simply fly off and the male may pursue but he usually gets the message in the end. It always surprises me how often a female rejects a male but if there are ten times as many males in the lek as females which is about the ratio early in the flight period then I suppose she can afford to be choosy! As the flight period progresses more females emerge and you see more mating going on, but of course that just means there are more gravid females flying around to reject males! Once mated they don't mate again. There was one time when two males were trying to mate with a tiny, micro-sized female that had wings clearly half the size of a normal female but after repeatedly trying and failing they both gave up. Although she was trying to fend them off by doing the wing-flapping routine and she was able to fly, she preferred instead to walk down heather stalks and try and hide away from them. This is the action of an egg-laying female, so whilst she was petite she had still been able to mate successfully I would guess.

It appears males randomly flit around looking for females by sight, but they can only see no more than between one and two feet away from them (which is my experience to date) so the jostling by males in a lek may be more to do with searching for a female and then finding when they get close and seeing its a male instead, having to swerve off at the last minute. I saw just this happen when a male got close to a mating pair. He saw the female I imagine and only when he landed by her did he seem to realise she was already doing the business with another male! He did not hang around for long. However on occasion, especially when the lek is full to bursting with males, you can find times when a number of males fight over a female even if she is already mating. In these instances the mating male will flutter his wings and try to arrange for his open wings to be between the female and the unwanted additional suitor but its often a futile gesture if a bunch of males get in on the act from all directions. The picture below shows a mating pair on the right with the male's wings open to fend off the intruder on the left.



I have never seen an intruder win in such a battle – the mating male always succeeds in fending off the other males once he has connected with a female.

If not mating, sometimes when there are a lot of males around, a female will run the gauntlet of male attention and in these instances if she is not willing, a male may persist for some time. They will dance around her, flapping their wings, close in and get right "in her face" and sometimes even grip onto her and maybe even walk over her back. She will even go to the lengths of kicking him away with her front legs (video still picture below shows this). You may need to click on it to enlarge it.



He will use his front pair of legs to try and hold onto her or to beat away other interested males. However despite all these desperate bids to mate, no male I have seen has succeeded in mating with an unwilling female!

It is commonly mentioned in the books that all the male butterflies of the Lycaenidae family, and the Silver-studded Blue is one of these, do not “use” their front pair of legs by which it is usually meant they do not use them to walk on or stand on but now I find they can use them to grip onto a female or to fend off other male suitors when they are trying to mate with a female. They are certainly not vestigial or redundant – they are simply specialised. They are used more like arms than legs so it seems to me.

Although the pair in this picture below might seem to be courting face-to-face, in actual fact this is a male bothering a gravid female. He just would not leave her alone for at least 30 minutes and she kept backing away from him all this time. It appears she had no effective rejection strategy and was not willing to fly off or even walk away, presumably because she was at her chosen egg-laying site (they were in the centre of the lek). She did not once vibrate her wings or try and fight him off while I was watching them. Perhaps she had done this earlier but the male persisted anyway so she stopped to conserve energy. This is exceptional behaviour on the part of the male that I have never witnessed again.



Some females I have seen seem to like to rest on the fringes of the lek. Often when they do this they tuck their hind-wings behind their forewings to show the minimum profile, almost as if hiding away for a spot of “me” time. Given their diminutive size, brown colour and tendency to hide like this, any count of females at a lek site will always be under-estimated. This low-profile is the normal roosting position for both males and females of this species of course. Not only does it protect them from airborne predators and reduce buffeting by wind but it also conceals females from ardent males to some extent.



Well that's it for another Broxhead Blues instalment.

Re: ernie f

by Maximus, 14-Jun-18 10:25 AM GMT

Hi Ernie,

I remember Wrecclisham before the bulldozers moved in 😞 But it's nice to see that the Glanvilles are still going.

Mike

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 14-Jun-18 10:35 AM GMT

A fascinating account, Ernie – I wish I'd seen that before my encounter with the SSBs yesterday, I'd have watched them differently!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-Jun-18 05:45 PM GMT

Mike – Yes its great they are still there. I went to Hutchinson's Bank in Surrey (which is actually a bit of a trek for me) twice last year but could not find any there, so its nice to have some virtually on my doorstep.

Janet – Thank you for your kind words about my account and we should both thank the SSB's for being so fascinating.

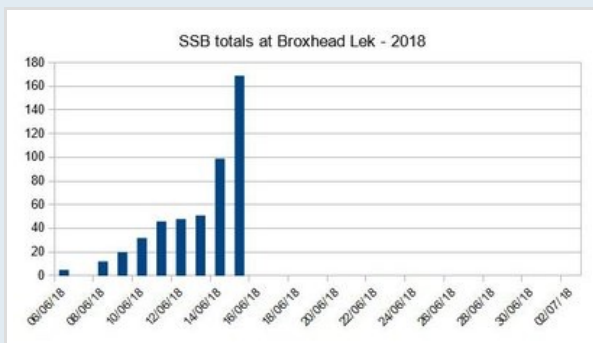
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Jun-18 12:00 PM GMT

Broxhead – 15th June 2018

A quick update on how the Broxhead Blues are getting on. I have been doing almost daily surveys of the lek and its surrounding area and on occasion a quick survey of the local satellite communities of SSB's. Note this is only a small portion of the entire reserve.

The long anticipated "eruption" has occurred!



Today there were 169 in and around the lek with a further 38 in the immediately adjacent satellite communities. I am now seeing all the usual behaviours in a brimming lek. Males jostling with each other, egg-laying females, mating, females rejecting males by buzzing them with their wings, roosting, groups of males fighting for a female, etc. There are places where you can just stand and watch clouds of them flit around your feet completely oblivious to your presence.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 15-Jun-18 01:18 PM GMT

Interesting post on their courtship behaviour Ernie, something to look out for when I eventually get round to making a visit to my Silver-stud site 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Jun-18 03:19 PM GMT

Wurzel – Yes its great to watch them when they get to this stage. Its like watching a butterfly soap-opera unfold.

Re: ernie f

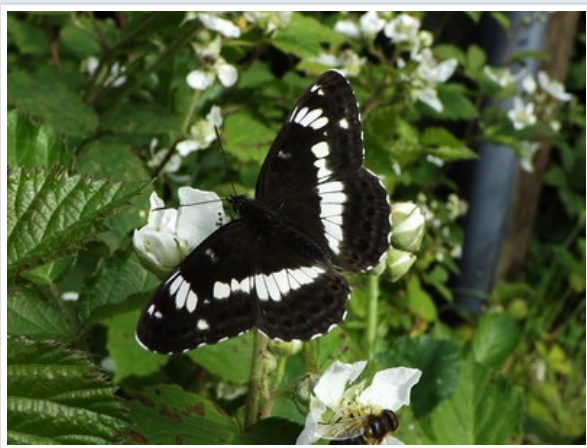
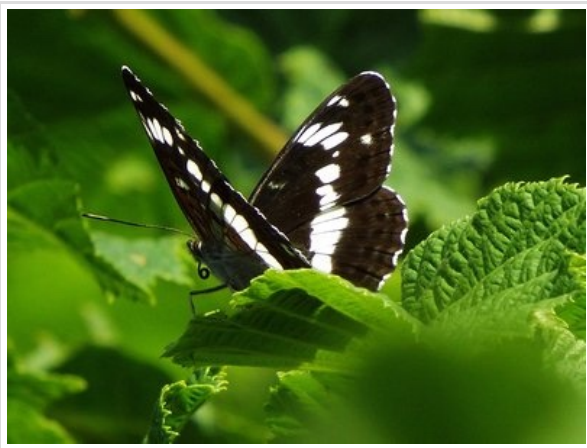
by ernie f, 15-Jun-18 03:35 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woods – 15th June 2018

This afternoon found me strolling along the paths of Alice Holt looking for White Admirals. I had not seen any so far this year and today I saw three. One male just would not stop patrolling back and forth. Another was flitting about an oak tree. He would fly right over my head and glide so I could see clearly his white wing bands against the blue sky. Then another one came on the scene and they battled it out in a spiral sparring match for a while. The interloper flew off and my one decided (at last) to settle – but he settled a long way up the tree so this was the best shot I could get. It was like he was playing peek-a-boo with me around a leaf.



As usual my first sighting of the year gives me the excuse to share a few of my past pics of this species.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

In autumn as I have mentioned before, Alice Holt is great for fungi, so whenever I post about this location in future I shall probably add a fungus or two for good measure.



White Saddle - Helvella crispa



Black or Elfin Saddle – Helvella lacunosa

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 16-Jun-18 11:37 AM GMT

Lovely shots of the White Admirals Ernie 😊 I'm hoping to catch up with them next week when we're on holiday further south. Interesting fungus too – I especially like the first one.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Jun-18 11:48 AM GMT

Thanks Janet – I usually switch to fungi when the butterfly season is over. Some of them are just as colourful as many of our butterflies and can be just as interesting – and they don't move about quite as much when trying to get their picture. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Jun-18 03:43 PM GMT

Another overcast day in Hampshire so its time for another of my posts on the results of my study to date on the Silver-studded Blues of Broxhead. Today it is all about...

Mating

Once connected they may stay together for about an hour. I saw one pair linked for 50 minutes but did not see them meet or part so their connection must have been longer than this. If you approach them when newly connected they easily spook and fly off together still connected, the male doing the flying while the female keeps her wings closed, effectively being towed along by the male. A strategy I have seen many other mating butterfly species use. However, if they have been mating for some while and are well-settled down I have found you can get very close indeed.



They like to perch back-to-back while mating like most UK butterflies do and they will walk along and around a stem together, usually the male forward and female backward until they are broadside to the direction of the sun (although I have seen the female lead and the male follow backward too). I tested their predilection for doing this. With the pair shown above I twisted the heather branch they were on through 90 degrees and indeed they moved around until they were side-on to the sun again. I repeatedly altered the angle, sometimes vertical, sometimes horizontal and at various angles in between and each and every time, they moved into their preferred position. They may do this to gain the energy they need for copulation although it must be said they are hardly energetic in this act as they will just stay there, otherwise motionless, until they have finished what they are doing.

On occasion they may not be completely back-to-back but some contorted variation on this theme; for example the extreme case in the picture below where one male has curved round completely to actually face the female. His back legs and one middle leg is standing on her body while one of his front legs and one of his middle legs is resting on the heather tip. The remaining front leg is resting on one of her forelegs. Her four front legs are standing on the heather tip but I cannot see her back legs. If she has no back legs, perhaps lost in a close call with a predator, this might be the reason for this awkward manoeuvre.



Mostly they will have their wings closed when copulating but I have seen males open their wings from time to time during coitus even when there are no other males about trying to muscle in.



And somehow in this next instance the male has managed to spin around and hangs down below the female. Most unusual.



On very rare occasions, even the female will open her wings during mating. This next pair were taking it in turns to open their wings. I think it had something to do with the fact that the whole morning had been overcast on this day and it only brightened up in the afternoon when I took this picture, so they were probably trying to combine mating with a spot of sun-bathing in order to store up energy that they were unable to obtain that morning. Of course to achieve this effectively they had to position themselves parallel to the direction of the sun's rays (or nearly so) rather than broadside as mentioned in the previous examples. Butterfly behaviours never follow a simple rulebook – they are more complex creatures than we give them credit for sometimes. In this case I seem to have found that Silver-studded Blues orientate themselves in different ways dependent upon how much warmth is available to them.



If you look closely and for a long while at a mated pair you may be lucky enough to witness the male repeatedly penetrating, withdrawing and re-penetrating the female. Here is a sequence of video stills of the action. The male has a tatty wing - I presume from a close call with a bird but this did not seem to worry the female unduly. (Please open text doc for pictures).



This sequence is then reversed to re-connect and then repeated. All the while neither butterfly moves anything other than its genitalia.

I presume this next pair are trying to disconnect and for some reason are having a bit of trouble. It looks like a painful tug-of-war going on!



Egg-laying

The females lay their eggs close to the ground on the food plant, usually a heather species at Broxhead and of course close to a black ant nest. The ants like the bare soil and close-cropped areas so the female butterfly chooses the young heathers close to bare or cropped ground. They are aware of the ants by the odorous trails they leave on the plants. The ants too are then aware of the butterfly's eggs before they have even hatched because the female has laid them on or close to their usual runs or even beside or actually on their nest! You may have to click to expand the next two pics.



The females land low down and then crawl down heather stalks and across and through fresh, un-blooming carpets of heather fronds to lay their eggs by curling their rear-end downward beneath them as is usual butterfly practice. They intersperse egg-laying sessions with nectaring and sun-bathing sessions.



That's it for this instalment of the Broxhead Blues. Next time: Roosting, Emergence & Decline.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 16-Jun-18 08:01 PM GMT

Interesting information about the SSB Ernie particularly as I've not got any photos of this species in cop, to know that they join for such a long time is good to know, now I just need to find a pair 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Jun-18 03:07 PM GMT

Wurzel. Thanks. Yes finding a pair is the thing to do and now is probably the time to do it. 😊

Just need a sunny day that's all.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Jun-18 03:22 PM GMT

Two overcast days on the trot here – so here is my last instalment of the Broxhead Blue study to date.

Roosting preferences

At the Broxhead lek around 8.30 am one day in late June 2017, I counted 11 females of which 9 were roosting together on heather in the space of a 5 metre square; four of them on a single heather bush no more than one metre diameter. When the sun shone, they all opened their wings, and when a cloud came over they all closed them back and sat once again in the roosting position. The males roosted more or less at random spacings across the lek while this was going on – only the females were roosting communally but some of the males were already active and flying about. I wondered about this all-female roost because the books say nothing about single-gender roosting, so two days later I went back at 6 am just after sunrise with the idea that none would have moved from their night roosting positions at that time. The place where I saw 9 females all together, with 4 on one bush was precisely replicated. They were all there again, even the four on the same bush, but they were accompanied by one male this time. This suggests that roosts are “rooted” so to speak. The same individuals appear to go back to the same locations to slumber overnight it seems. I found another communal roost at the other end of the lek which had four males and two females and another just outside the lek which had four males and one

female but there were a number of males dotted around not in communal roosts which must have been still in their night-time positions because I prodded one with my finger and he did not fly off. This shows that all the communal roosts were bi-gender after all but additionally it proved that not all individuals roost communally. I did not observe a female roosting singly though.

They roost pointing downwards to minimise the effect of predation of course. This explains why they often have bits missing from the edge of their wings. This is where it has had a close call with a bird. If they roosted face-up, a bird, usually approaching from above would get the head end first, more likely killing the butterfly. But roosting face down means the bird is more likely to peck at the rear and tips of the wings. A butterfly in this position can just drop from its perch and fly off and away from the bird's beak more effectively with only a tatty wing-edge to show for it. This was proven to me during the roost around 6.15 am when a predatory insect in the shape of a dragonfly approached one roosting male from above and he merely dropped from his perch down to a lower perching point, effectively evading the dragonfly entirely in this one simple, energy-conserving move. Incidentally it seems that the more insidious predators take their opportunities at night or around dawn. One morning I saw a poor male Silver-studded Blue that had succumbed to the ambush of a *Misumena vatia* crab spider which was sucking the juices from its victim where he rested, still in his roosting position; and I kept seeing harvestmen and hunting spiders on the move at this time.



4 males and 1 female roosting

Wing-rolling

A behaviour where the hind-wings are "rolled" over part of the forewings. This was the first species I saw do this. I don't intend to go into this here as there is a discussion topic on UK Butterflies under the "General" theme, entitled:

"Wing-roll behaviour of some of the members of the Lycaenidae family"

<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=9738>

Please feel free to add your own experiences and comments there. Thanks.

The only thing to re-iterate here is that SSB's are capable of wing-rolling with their wings fully open and ajar as well as fully closed. When they do it with their wings open it reminds me of the Samba dance move!

Emergence and Decline

My book tells me that after the eggs have been laid, the larvae emerge in the following spring during March or early April and grow through four instars before they are ready to form a chrysalis. The ants either take or goad the caterpillar to their nest and the chrysalis forms within the nest. Three weeks later the butterfly emerges on a warm morning.

As a brood the Broxhead bunch begin their adult emergence in early June just around the time that the new blooms start to appear on the "pioneer" heather which the butterflies need for nectaring. The butterflies as a brood are then on the wing until mid August although individuals only last a couple of weeks within this time frame. There is usually only one brood in this country because we are at the northernmost limit of its temperature endurance. In warmer climes in Europe and elsewhere in the world there can be more than one brood and on the rare occasion even southern England may get a small second brood but I have not yet seen this happen at Broxhead.

One day I noticed a melee of males getting very excited in one spot on the Broxhead lek so I went over to investigate. Their centre of attention was what at first appeared to me to be a mutant male - I thought they were mobbing the poor thing for some reason. Then I spotted this "mutant" was climbing away from a black ant nest that had "erupted" with ants scurrying everywhere and then the true nature of the event came to me. This was a newly emerged butterfly just appearing for the first time from the ant nest where its chrysalis had been. Its wings were contorted into a crumpled mass as it had not yet had time to inflate them. Thus it could not yet fly but only walk. The crowd of male butterflies had congregated around it because they hadn't yet worked out whether it was a male or female. Each one wanted to be first in line should it turn out to be a female. After a while the group dispersed, I guess once it was realised amongst them that it was a male after all.

Video stills of the general melee...



Silver-studded Blues crowding

...and the newly emerged male with its still-crumpled wings.



This incident made me cast my mind back to a previous year when I saw what I thought was a mutant male mating with a female. I now realise it was more likely a newly emerged male with its wings partially folded up. At the time I just noted it and walked on without taking a picture. I am now regretting that!

Even when a newly emerged male has inflated its wings, it may still not be ready to fly. I have seen a mature male bothering such a newly emerged male not realising it was not a female. The newly emerged male did not seem to be able to open its wings fully yet, just setting them very slightly ajar at best, and so could only walk away through the heather. What this seems to suggest is that males tell other males from females by seeing the blue and black markings of the other males' upper-wings or brown of the females', not by the bluish tinge of the underneath of the male and not by scent. If gender recognition is only achieved by this butterfly looking at the upper-sides of the wings one has to ask why they have evolved the silver studs on the undersides of their wings that give this species its name. I have as yet no definitive answer to this but it seems it has nothing to do with mate finding; perhaps it has more to do with predator evasion. After all the studs only appear along the edge of the hind wings, those wings that remain visible while roosting. There are no studs along the edges of the forewings. Perhaps the reflectivity of the studs against the non-reflective background of the rest of the wing is an adaptation that confuses some types of predator, for example dragonflies.

Because the Broxhead brood normally starts quite early in the season and there is only one brood, it can also finish quite early. The decline tails off gradually if the weather is fine all that time. By 10th July 2017 I counted only 3 males and 3 females in the Broxhead lek, all looking pretty tatty. There were none at all in the immediate surroundings and only one elsewhere. My book suggests the main flying period is from the beginning of July to mid August, but in 2017 at Broxhead, the brood was one month ahead of this timing and I am told Bramshott is even earlier. It was also true when I quartered the reserve in 2015 to count how many there were in total. In that year the decline was very evident by 8th July.

And that is it for my report on the study of Silver-studded Blues at the Broxhead reserve to date, although it is by no-means complete and I still have lots to find out about them yet.

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 17-Jun-18 06:42 PM GMT

Interesting observations about the roosting habits of the SSBs, Ernie – but my goodness you do get out early! They were certainly a month ahead at Prees Heath – the first was spotted on June 12th this year.

Re: ernie f

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

Nice images (and commentary) on the White Admirals and SSBs, ernie.

Surely it can't be long before His Imperial Majesty makes an appearance?

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Jun-18 09:01 AM GMT

Janet – Thanks. I don't want to give the impression I am always out at 6.15 am. Sometimes I have a lie in and don't get out until 6.30 am. 😊

Dave – Glad you like my posts on White Ads and SSBs. Of course while looking for the White Ads I also looked for the Purple Emperors on one of their master trees but so far, none at Alice Holt – but it surely must be any day now.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Jun-18 09:54 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woodland - 18th June 2018



Road alongside Abbots Wood Enclosure in Alice Holt

Still no Purple Emperors yet, but good views of White Admiral, Red Admiral, Large Skipper and Meadow Brown. One of the White Ads was nowhere near the three I saw the other day so there must now be four.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day



Yellowleg Bonnet - Mycena epipterygia

Re: ernie f

by essexbuzzard, 18-Jun-18 10:35 PM GMT

I think the emergence dates in the books is out of date for all colonies of SSB. On the dunes in Cornwall, they emerge even earlier than your population there. And they finish much earlier, too. In fact, they finish at around the time the books suggest they should be starting!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Jun-18 11:10 AM GMT

essexbuzzard - Just one of the local affects of global warming I imagine.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Jun-18 03:14 PM GMT

Chawton House Estate - 19th June 2018



Chawton House is at the centre of a large estate

Thanks to Paul Harfield for the heads-up on how to find the White-letter Hairstreaks at Chawton. I am very happy because Chawton is a village that is right next to Alton, the town where I live. If I was younger and fitter I could walk to this Hairstreak location from my house!

It was a bit overcast so I was not expecting much. I found the location without a problem and walked along the row of medium size Elm trees. There was no obvious Hairstreak activity around the tops of the trees so I stood in front of each one and scanned it with my binoculars. Nothing. I was scanning the last tree and was just deciding to leave when out of the corner of my eye I spotted movement at the top of the tree next to the one I was looking at. Sure enough, there they were. There were three on this single Elm, two repeatedly sparring with each other.

I stood there for at least half an hour watching their antics but not once did they come down so no pictures were to be had. Some thistles are growing in front of this line of elms which are not yet in bloom but they are in bud. Perhaps in a few days time when the thistles come out, one or two Hairstreaks might come down to nectar from them.

Other butterflies here were Small White, Large Skipper and a few Meadow Brown, one pair of which were mating.

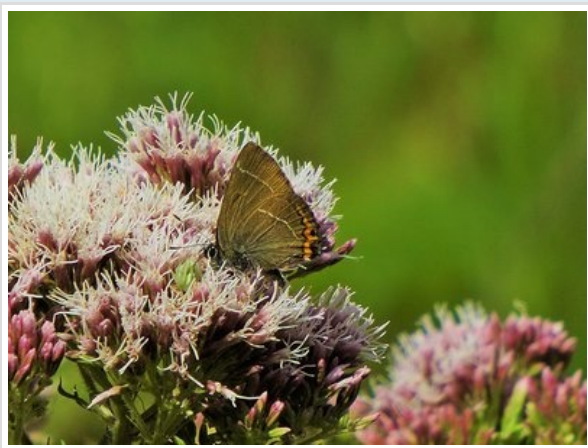


As this is the first spot of WLH's this year so here are a few of my pics to date. I don't have many because I only saw my first one recently.

The first one I ever got a picture of was at Odiham Common last year but it was a bit tatty.



But then I got seriously lucky at Noar Hill when a fresh one came right down next to me.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Part of the estate at Chawton is a managed woodland. Larch feature a great deal.



Number 1: The Larch

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 19-Jun-18 08:50 PM GMT

Are you sure that's not No.3? 😊😄 Great set of White-letters – here's hoping you can add to your collection 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 19-Jun-18 11:51 PM GMT

Patience, ernie, for Emperors are surely only a matter of time. I feel that this weekend is going to see them around in decent numbers.

Prepare yourself!

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 20-Jun-18 08:40 AM GMT

Lovely White Admirals Ernie, and well done with that WLH. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Jun-18 11:16 AM GMT

Andrew – Thanks. I was over the moon with the fresh WLH that came down at Noar Hill. I was there looking for Brown Hairstreaks actually (a bit early in the year it must be said) and at first I thought this was a male Brown one until I looked more closely. My camera does not have a very good zoom but it has a "super-macro" setting that works quite well so I can get in very close to take pics. To get these pics therefore I was only a few centimetres away from it.

Dave – I shall heed your advice. "Patience" and "Be prepared". I was a boy scout when I was knee-high to a G. 😊

Wurzel – Thank you also for your kind comment on my WLH pics. Plus – Its clear you know "How to recognise different types of tree from quite a long way away". 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Jun-18 11:31 AM GMT

Broxhead Common – 19th June 2018 – 9am–10am

Overcast, humid, very light breeze, 18 degrees C

I had not done a count of the Silver-studded Blues for two days due to cool, overcast weather but yesterday I did between 3 pm and 4 pm and then there seemed to be a decline in numbers. Not so today! The numbers in and around the lek jumped to 262. This area is just one fraction of the reserve. A few years ago I tramped the whole reserve over a period of about five days doing a total count and came to 550. There were more than half that in and around the lek alone today so heaven knows how many there are this year across the entire reserve. In the lek itself – an area no more than around 100 paces long by 20 paces wide, there were 90 SSB's, seven pairs of which were mating and nine individuals that were wing-rolling (8m and 1f).

Alongside two of the mating pairs there was a further male just waiting within a centimetre or so of the action. Normally these secondary males try to

fight their way past the mating male to get to the female but I guess because of the sunless day (and the fact that only a couple of hours before it had been raining), they didn't have the energy to do so, even though they did have the energy to fly. All they could do was sit and watch.



One fresh male was doing a very fine impersonation of a Large Skipper! He would fly OK, then perch with his wings tightly closed, then he would open them flat as normal but then slowly (and every time no matter where he perched) his hind-wings would part and raise up above his fore-wings. Most odd.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

On a bramble patch not far from the lek, a Robber Fly was perched on a heather frond feeding off the remains of a Common Heath Moth. As he flew around, he would carry his snack with him – a bit like a packed-lunch.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 20-Jun-18 10:40 PM GMT

Interesting to see your unusual Silver-stud Ernie, it's like it's got dislocated wings, I wonder how that came about? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 20-Jun-18 11:20 PM GMT

Fabulous numbers of Silver Studded Blues, ernie. I think I am now compelled to go and search for them at my south Wales site this weekend. It'd be a shame to miss out on them when they appear to be having such a good season.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Jun-18 08:14 AM GMT

Wurzel – Its the first time I have seen such a thing. It flew around OK – no problem.

David – And the numbers are still on the increase too! There were 312 in and around the Broxhead lek yesterday with a further 113 between the lek and the lake. Good luck at your location.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Jun-18 07:49 PM GMT

Old Winchester Hill – 21st June 2018

Today my target species were Marbled White, Dark Green Fritillary, Ringlet and Small Skipper because so far this year I had seen none of these. By the end of the day I had seen dozens of Marbled White and Ringlet, 1 Small Skipper and 2 DG Frits. So – all targets met, but of course en-route I came across many others including Common Blue, Speckled Wood, Small and Large Whites, Small Heath, many Large Skippers, 2 Small Torts, 2 Red Ads, 1 Painted Lady and so many Meadow Browns they were actually becoming a nuisance because they would chase other butterflies that I wanted to get photos of from their perch.

However a lengthy ongoing battle was going on between one Meadow Brown and a Ringlet. They would charge one another and swirl around and then charge again. It was actually quite exciting to watch. Then they ran out of energy, rested together side by side for a while before continuing where they left off. This went on for some minutes before they parted, apparently neither the victor.

The Marbled Whites were difficult to photograph as they just would not stay still for long. This was the best I could achieve today.



Marbled White

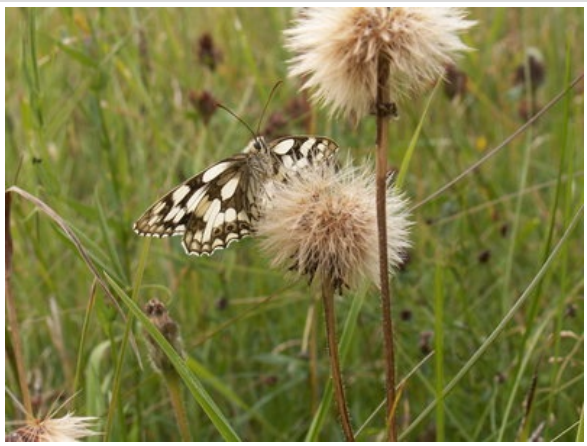
But here are some of my previous attempts.





mating pair





I thought the same was going to be true for the Dark Green Frit as it barrelled back and forth along one of the flowery ditches of the Hillfort. But with patience I worked out where it stopped to nectar and stood beside the flower for a while. Sure enough the DGF came back to the same flower a few times and although it never stayed long on each occasion I could get my self prepared. These are todays results.





And here are some past shots...



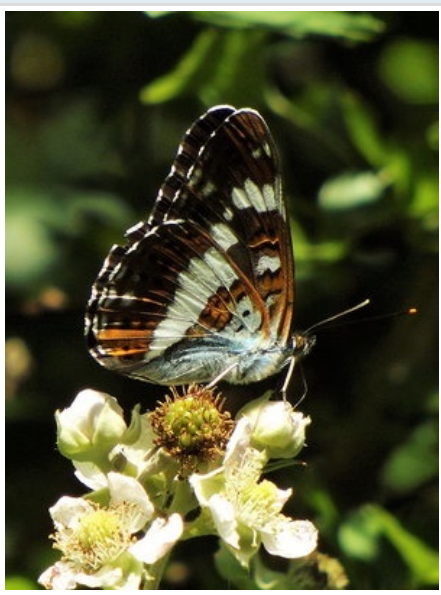


I'll do the Small Skip and Ringlet another day because I also went to another location today and I want to cover that instead.

Alice Holt Woods: The Straits Enclosure 21st June 2018

I counted 8 White Ads here today and adding these to the ones seen recently in the same woodland but in the Abbots Wood Enclosure this totals 12. If anything there were even more Ringlets here than at Old Winch. Its amazing how you can see none for ages and then a dozen all come along at once - like Red London buses!

But I really wanted to capture a pic of the underside of a White Ad. I had some good ones in the past but forgot to back them up and then of course my computer crashed and could not be repaired. I lost the lot. At last I have managed to get them back. Here is one of the better efforts.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Just below the ridge path leading to the Iron Age Hillfort at Old Winch there is a small Yew Woodland.



Re: ernie f

by Maximus, 21-Jun-18 08:22 PM GMT

Well done staking out the Dark Green Frits, Ernie, some lovely shots to show for your efforts.

Mike

Re: ernie f

by David M, 21-Jun-18 11:16 PM GMT

Good effort with the Dark Green Frits, ernie, as well as the courting Marbled Whites.

It's all too much right now with all these species emerging.....and that's before Purple Emperors even get going!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jun-18 07:28 AM GMT

Thanks, Dave and Mike. Yes its a bit crazy at the moment. The Purple Emps will be out at Alice Holt any minute and that usually requires repeated visits, then there is the Purple Hairstreak to track down again and I want to see if I can improve my White-letter Hairstreak pics. I am even toying with the idea to go to Daneway Banks for the Large Blue but that may be a little too far for me.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jun-18 01:32 PM GMT

The Purple Emperors are out at Alice Holt. I have just seen a male "barrelling" down the main path of the Straits Enclosure, it came past me at a cracking pace at about knee high but did not stop so no pics. I followed with binoculars until it flew out of sight. On my return along the same track I saw it again coming at me from the other direction and exactly the same thing happened again, passing me at knee height in pretty much a straight line dash.

I also counted 15 White Ads, 1 Red Ad, loads of M Brown and Ringlet, a Comma, many Large Skippers having sparring matches, a Large White, so many Specked Woods it took me by surprise and three Silver-washed Frits (my first of the year).

Plus a fairly good look at a Goshawk as it flew from its perch and off through the woods to avoid me as I bumbled along. The Straits Enclosure is a recognised regular nesting place for the Goshawk but in all the years I have visited this place I have never seen the nest and only ever have seen the actual bird twice. Today was the second time.

I shall provide a proper post later in the day but thought I'd raise a Purple Flag for Alice Holt seeing as the weekend looms!!!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jun-18 05:06 PM GMT

Odiham Common 22nd June 2016

I am exhausted. I went to three locations today starting with Odiham Common. This is a little known grass and flower meadow bordered by woods. A few locals walk their dogs here but for such a large area of land a short walk from the town of Odiham it is surprising how few people use it.



WLH Corner at Odiham Common

I come here for the Hairstreaks. There are a lot of Oaks here, so there are a fair number of Purple Hairstreak too. One large Oak stands at the corner of a woodland facing the meadow so you can stand back and get a good view of it. Today there were three Purple Hairstreaks busying themselves around the canopy while being hunted by a Hornet. Unfortunately on this occasion none of them came down for a pic but they have in the past and I will post some of my past pics another time since this is my first spot of this species this year. This tree gets the sun all day so whereas in other locations the master tree is only used by this species at certain times of day, not so here. They stay put. They merely move around to the sunny side of the tree.

I saw one White-letter Hairstreak on the Elm in the corner of the field (one of them in the photo above). Again he did not want to come down and was fairly inactive even though it was sunny and warm, possibly because he was the only one and had no other males to fight or females to pursue, so most of the time he just sat up there looking around him; like some couch potato.

Lots of sparring Large Skippers, plus quite a few Marbled Whites and Meadow Brown plus a Small White.



Alice Holt: Straits Enclosure

My next stop was Purple Emperor country and yes, today there was a Purple Emperor. I mentioned in my previous mini-post about his barrelling antics which while fascinating behaviour to witness and exciting when he actually whizzed by me also meant no pics. But in this post I will share my past pics of this species as its another or my first spots of the year.

Last year was a record count for PE's for me at Alice Holt - I saw 14 individuals in all and one came down to ground long enough for me to get a four-wing purple picture.



In a recent year the Forestry Commission re-gravelled the main track through the enclosure and this meant the PE's would come down a lot. I spent 50 minutes with one as he mooched along licking salts from the new gravel mix. At one point I actually sat down on the ground next to him for about 10 minutes and he showed no concern for me at all. I got loads of pics and a nice long video of him doing it.



When the wings really get the sun, the purple can shine out.



I have also seen a courting pair up in the trees.



Courting pair

And a pair of males having a face-off on a tree trunk. They just perched there for ages giving one another meaningful glances but not actually coming to blows.



Eventually one just gave up and flew off leaving the other to stay there. Eventually I just walked away, leaving him to it. Whatever "it" was.



Also today, 15 White Admirals, 3 Silver-washed Frits (another first of the year) and others mentioned in my previous mini-post today. Plus that Goshawk!

Broxhead

I checked out the two master trees I know of for Purple Hairstreak here but none had emerged yet.

I also continued my count of the Silver-studded Blues in locations of the reserve I had not visited for them this year. In an area known as "The Anvil" I found 72 SSB's and on the reserve the other side of the road in the part I call "Copperside" because of the Small Copper lek there, I found 19 SSB's. This brings the total across the reserve to 516 so far - but I have still not visited it all.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

There is a great variety of wildlife at Broxhead. Here is a Devil's Coach-horse beetle crossing a sandy path there.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Jun-18 01:39 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woods - 23 June 2018

Well the Purple Emperors may not have stopped for me yesterday but today it was a whole new ball-game. One came down to the ground and after licking something dungy for awhile decided to have a rest and so perched around head height on a nearby tree giving us lucky observers some photo opportunities.





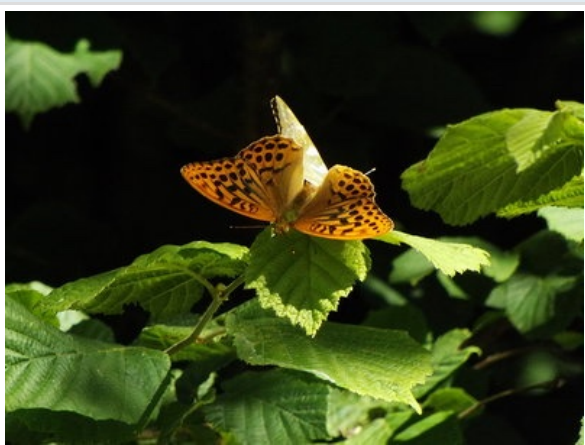
This is just an interim post today as I have to be off but part 2 will follow later.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Jun-18 05:28 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woods - 23 June 2018 - Part 2

The Purple Emperor on the ground was fantastic as always but it was not the only thing today. Yesterday there were three Silver-washed Frits and today there were six, but two were already mating.



mating pair



Yesterday the SWFs just would not stay still but today they just wanted to pose for the camera.



Is it a monster? No its a SW Frit's bottom!

There were two Purple Hairstreak that did not hang around, at least two Small Skips, 2 Comma and the (by now) usual crowd of Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Red Ads, White Ads, Speckled Wood, Large Skip, Large and GV White but also a single Marbled White.

Since these are my first SWFs of the year its time for some of my past pics of them...





Broxhead 23rd June 2018

I also paid a quick visit to see how the Silver-studded Blues were doing, fully expecting they had started to go past the peak. They hadn't! There were now 346 in and around the lek, at least 29 of which were female. The reserve count is now 550 which matches my record of recent years but I have not visited all parts, so the number has to be more than this.

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

Back at Alice Holt the dragonflies were out in force hunting the butterflies.

For example the following...



Female Black-tailed Skimmer having a meal

And two Golden-ringed Dragonflies, both of which perched for some time and allowed me to get very close.



Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 23-Jun-18 08:42 PM GMT

Those are cracking shots of the SWFs Ernie – I especially like the frit's bottom! 😊 It shows the undersides off perfectly.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 23-Jun-18 10:41 PM GMT

Fantastic set of posts recently Ernie 😊 You're working up quite a yearly tally 😊 I've still to see both Purp s, SWF and a Whitter 🇩🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Jun-18 01:13 PM GMT

Janet – Thanks. Its always nice to get a different angle if its possible and when this one presented itself – I could not resist! 😊

Wurzel – Thanks also. This is getting to be one of my better butterfly years and we are still in June!

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Jun-18 01:38 PM GMT

Daneway Banks – 24th June 2018



I hardly ever leave Hampshire, the county I live in, to look at butterflies. Perhaps I skip a few miles across the border into Surrey but that's about it. But I have to thank Janet and her recent post about the Large Blues for today's visit. Ever since I was a kid and collected picture cards of wildlife from tea packets and had one of a Large Blue I have always been fascinated by it. Perhaps because even when I was a nipper it was rare – I don't know.

Why Daneway Banks? It is I think the nearest colony to me even though it's nearly a 2-hour drive, but more because I used to live in the village of Chalford just a few miles away from the site many years before this butterfly was re-introduced here. But this meant I had no problem finding it because I already knew the location (or more honestly – the location of the very fine Daneway Pub next door!!!)

I awoke at dawn and arrived on site at 6.30 am. Yep. 6.30 AM! But even then I was not the first there. 😊

It took me a while to find the best spot for the Large Blue but by around 8 am they were up and about. I am glad I came early because by 10.30 am they were buzzing about and difficult to photograph. Coming early meant they settled more.

So here are some of the results...







Other butterflies seen were loads of Marbled White, Meadow Brown and Ringlet, plus Common Blue, Small Heath and a single fresh Brown Argus.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Jun-18 01:43 PM GMT

Oh, yes. I forgot to say. I saw one do a wing-roll. First with its wings closed and then with wings ajar. Fantastic. Another one to add to my list. I shall make a note as usual under "General".

Re: ernie f

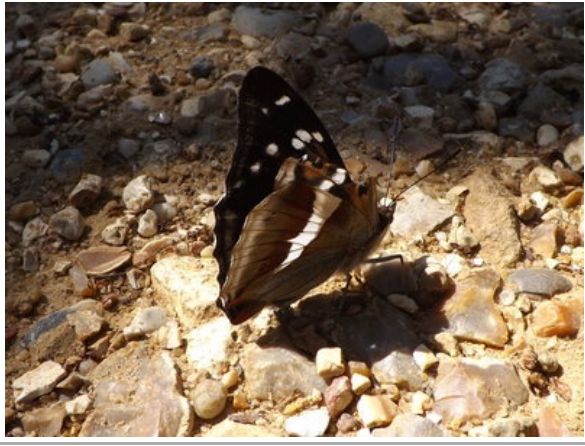
by ernie f, 25-Jun-18 03:13 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woodland: Abbots Wood Enclosure – 25th June 2018, 9.30 – 10.30 am

Another purple day, today. I saw at least four, maybe six at the first crossing by the master tree. Two individuals came to the ground.



One had one of its fore-wings torn in half but that did not stop it flying or even sparring with another male!



At one point it appeared that three were having a dog-fight at about two foot above the ground. There was a swirling flight in one small area. One of them almost landed but not quite. Instead it "hovered" a couple of inches above the ground buzzing its wings really fast. This seemed to put the other two off and they flew away. This third flitted around for a little while longer and when it was sure the coast was clear, it too flew off. In retrospect, I wonder if this was two males pursuing a gravid female who used a buzzing wings routine to fend them off. I have not ever heard of this, nor read about it for this species.

It was not possible to get pics or video as it was all over in a minute.

There was a male in the canopy scouting for a female.



Another flew around the same Oak as a Purple Hairstreak.

Also while I was looking at two Purple Hairstreaks on another Oak, a Purple Emperor flew inches above my head.

Having them at all heights and all around me within the space of only 1 hour was a fantastic experience. I never tire of them.

Odiham Common - 25th June 2018

Same day but in the afternoon. Here once again for the White-letter Hairstreak. I did not expect much as its really the wrong time of day to see them, especially in this heat - clocked at 28 degrees C in open sunshine. But one did zig-zag down and for a moment I almost thought it was going to land and nectar from a bramble but it didn't. It just flew on and back up again. I saw it about three times but then the heat finally got to me so I left.

Greywell Common - 25th June 2018

Came here to see if the Marsh Helleborine's were out yet. They were, as was a mass of Marbled Whites.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

Marsh Helleborines are one of my favourite British wild orchids.





Type: *Ochroleuca*

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 25-Jun-18 10:23 PM GMT

You had a wonderful day with the Emperors, Ernie - I particularly like the third shot which really shows the colour to full advantage. I need to get down to Fermyn Woods asap!

The Marsh Helleborine is lovely - I've never seen one of those.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 26-Jun-18 07:07 AM GMT

Thanks Janet - The Purple Emperors seem to be having a good year so far.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 26-Jun-18 03:47 PM GMT

Broxhead - 26th June 2018

I did a count of the Silver-studded Blues in and around the lek today and although I was early (8-8.30 am), there were 294 that I could see. My last count (on 23rd) was 346, so although I probably missed a few roosting out of sight it looks like we have now gone past peak flight time. On the 23rd I estimated about 10% were female, but today that figure was more in the region of 20%.



Roosting buddies

Alice Holt Woods: Abbot's Wood - 26th June 2018

And then it was on to Purple country. Again a bit early (8.30-9.30 am) but I struck lucky again. At about 8.45 am two males took it upon themselves to

have a sparring match low down rather than in the canopy and amazingly they used me as a referee! They zoomed around me, this way and that, up and down, round and round. It made me quite dizzy. Then just as quickly as they had appeared, then they disappeared into the woods once again.

Then at about 9 am I found yet another Purple Emperor giving chase to a White Admiral. Who knows, perhaps he thought it was a female Purple Emperor, I know I did at first, but when the male flew off, the White Admiral stuck around and it was clear to me it was not a Purple by then.

Also Purple Hairstreaks, the usual Meadow Brown, Large Skipper, Comma and Ringlet. Also Small and Large White and Silver-washed Frits.



Backlit SWF



Backlit Ringlet – not nearly as effective as the SWF

Chawton Park Estate – 26th June 2018

Saw four White-letter Hairstreak here today but they showed no indication of coming down (again). Good views through binoculars though. Some thistles were now in bloom but there were no other flowers and no bank of Bramble. I don't think this is a location where they will ever come down.

Also Small Skipper and Green-veined White.

Noar Hill – 26th June 2018

To finish my morning round I ended up at Noar Hill. I got plenty of Marbled White, Small Heath, a couple of faded Common Blue and ten or so Speckled Wood.

I was really here for the Frog Orchids though and yes, they are now blooming alongside the Musk Orchids. The Pyramidals are now in full bloom too.

Up until now I had not had time to share my past pics of Ringlet. Now seems as good a time as any.



This one has a blue flush





Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

Noar Hill's orchid number 9. The Frog Orchid.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 26-Jun-18 10:53 PM GMT

I was at Daneways today Ernie and saw the 'wing roll' so I was going to let you know only for you to have seen the same thing two days ago! 😊😄 Great Purp shots again 📷📷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Jun-18 02:35 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel – yep I saw my first Large Blue wing-roll the other day. Thanks for thinking to let me know when you saw it too.

I'm having a grand time with the Purples at the moment. They seem to be doing all sorts of interesting things that you just cannot capture on camera.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Jun-18 02:52 PM GMT

Odiham Common 27th June 2018

A hairy day, today. There were three White-letter Hairstreaks on the corner Elms at Odiham Common and five Purple Hairstreaks on the Master Oak. Not stupendous numbers but nevertheless a nice tally. I went prepared and took a portable chair so I could sit and watch. With the full sun beating down I really needed a parasol too (and maybe a pint of ice-cold beer)!

No pics 'cos they were all a bit far up but great through binoculars. Two of the male WLH's did their sparring spiral. Up and up they went and then broke apart at the top of the spiral to fly back down to the canopy in straight lines away from each other. One came down close to me and even landed for about 10 seconds but unfortunately was wing-edge toward me and by the time I had moved – so had he.

One of the Purple Hairstreaks left the tree and made a bee-line for the Elms! A little while later another Purple Hairstreak flew from behind me, over my head and joined the others on the Oak. Could this have been the same individual on a circular scouting mission for females I wonder?

Since I have been seeing Purple Hairstreaks almost daily now, its about time to post some past pictures I think.







This one (from Odiham last year) has hermaphrodite colouration. It has a fore-wing pattern similar to that of a female but the hind-wing colour of a male. Does anyone know what is going on here? I guess its a male but with a slight aberration.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

A Hogweed or some such umbellifer beside the Elm walk.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 27-Jun-18 11:24 PM GMT

Cracking Purps Ernie 😊 I need to get out this weekend I think 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 27-Jun-18 11:39 PM GMT

Why did the Purple Hairstreak cross the road? I love that photo Ernie! 😊

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 28-Jun-18 07:52 AM GMT

Ooooh those are some wonderful Purple Hairstreaks Ernie 😊👍

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Jun-18 08:49 AM GMT

Wurzel, Janet and Bugboy – Thank you all. To answer Janet's question – Why did the Purple Hairstreak cross the road. It was not to get to the other side in this instance. She just stayed there. She must have known how beautiful she was and posed for my camera! All the ground shots I have of this species are from this one individual. As she let me walk round her she fluttered her wings at me so I could get those upper wing shots.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 28-Jun-18 09:11 AM GMT

ernie! I may have got some decent shots of the WLH but your PHS shots are fantastic 🍷 I hope I can get some of the PHS

as good as yours 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Jun-18 01:42 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. I was really lucky with the ground shots.

Re: ernie f

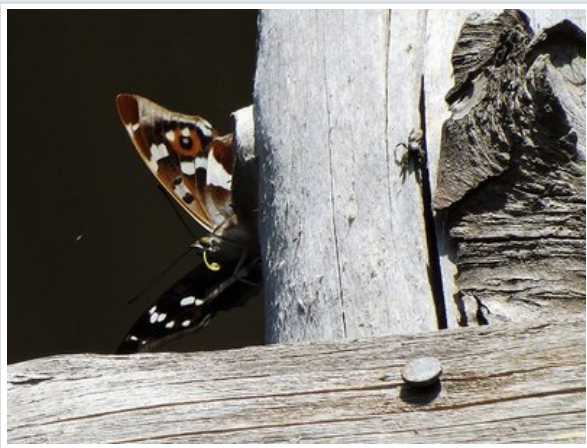
by ernie f, 28-Jun-18 01:57 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woods - 28th June 2018

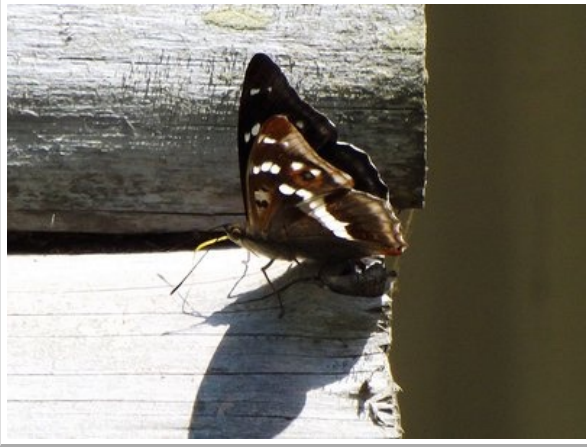
Welcome to the Purple Towers Hotel.



A deluxe 5 star hotel nestling deep within the Alice Holt Woodlands. Stay in our penthouse suite for two with views in all directions along the sunny woodland rides.



Or dine out on our al fresco veranda. Choose from our extensive menu. We serve an all day breakfast of pine resin or you can lunch on dogs poo or have an evening meal of aphid honeydew enhanced by the ambient light from glow-worms.



Why not try a spot of sun-bathing in our secluded tree-top garden.



And afterwards take in the minerals in our award-winning spa.



We are sure you will enjoy your stay and will return again next year.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Jun-18 09:16 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woods - 28th June 2018

I went "purpling" this morning. As my last post suggests - it was a good one. It is the first time I have counted more Purple Emperors than White Admirals in one location in one day (well 2 hours to be more exact).

I met Ashley and Mike in the Abbots Wood enclosure and while there we saw four Purple Emperors in the vicinity of the "master" tree opposite Skipper Alley. Two were sparring, another was sitting part way up a tree, another was skimming the herbage. One flew down a shady wooded pathway and

flitted back and forth there for longer than you might imagine it would. Ashley got a fantastic four-wing purple shot of one when it came to sit down on a fern near him for a moment. A great hour spent in the company of butterflies (and people).

I then went on to the Straits enclosure. I actually didn't expect too much - I went for the Hairstreaks but here again it was Purple paradise. I saw 8 in total here which brought my morning total to 12 and this year's annual total (removing all double-counts) to 13. One was "barrelling", two were sparring just above head height, three were dog-fighting around the first tower and one came to ground beside a Red Admiral and a Comma. These three butterflies were no more than 2 metres away from each other licking salts from the freshly-laid gravel.

But the real experience of the day was at the first deer lookout tower - my "Purple Towers Hotel" of the last PD entry. Three Purple Emperors were whizzing about this tower at the same time, often they would fly through the lookout windows at the top and on at least two occasions two went inside together and stayed awhile side-by-side in the shade. One of the pictures in my last post shows them together. At one point there were two clinging to the outside of the tower licking away at the wood while another circled above them as if waiting in line at a canteen.

Its almost an afterthought to mention the 6 White Ads, 3 Red Ads, 3 Comma, 2 Purple Hairstreaks, 1 Speckled Wood, the Large and Small Skips, Small and Marbled Whites, SW Frits and the host of Ringlet and Meadow Brown. The Ringlets outnumbered the Meadows for the first time this year here.

As well as the dragonflies which included Emperor, Southern Hawker and male Black-tailed Skimmer.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Its that male Black-tailed Skimmer...



Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 29-Jun-18 02:14 PM GMT

Amazing Purple Hairstreak sightings Ernie. 🍀🍀 I like very much your Silver-washed Frits and Emperors, and of course the Large Blues. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Jun-18 04:51 PM GMT

Thanks, Andrew. There's a lot going on at the moment.

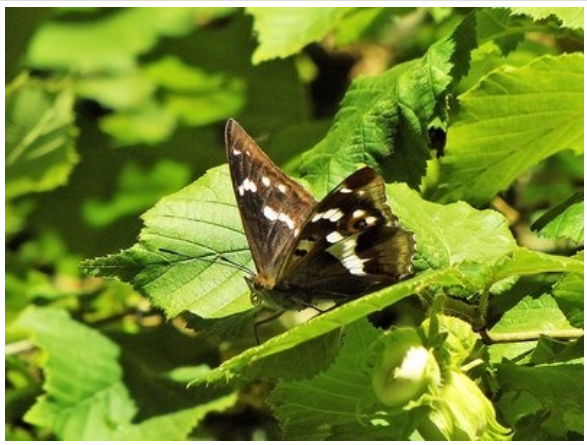
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Jun-18 05:01 PM GMT

Alice Holt Forest - 29th June 2018

More purpling toady. I started off at the northern end of the Abbots Wood Enclosure with the idea I would increase my annual count of Purple Emperors by going to a place I had not yet been this year and sure enough I found two there. My total this year is now 15, beating my previous annual record by 1. Its not the 300+ of another site recently publicised but its always nice when you have achieved a personal best. Of course I have had far more sightings than this but I try and clip out all those I believe are double-counts. These two stayed in flight even though they came down low.

Then I thought I would try and repeat my recent success at the Purple Towers Hotel and yes, there were two there again around 12 noon. One came down to ground repeatedly and once landed low on a tree. The other landed on the tower itself like they did yesterday.



Also seen today, two Purple Hairstreaks low on trees. Also White Ads (but only three), Red Ads, three Commas all came to ground close to each other, Small and Large Whites, SW Frits, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Large and Small Skippers.

Since I am seeing Small Skippers almost daily now, its time to share a few of my past pics of this species.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Yesterday I took a pic of a Small Skipper along the Straits Enclosure and only when I got back home did I notice that it had perched beside a pair of mating *Strangalia maculata* beetles.



Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 29-Jun-18 06:54 PM GMT

Hi Ernie,

Great accounts of your recent 'Purpling' outings. I love the shots of the Purple Hairstreak crossing the road (or even just sitting there) 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-18 08:47 PM GMT

Cracking resort write up Ernie – are there any vacancies? 😊😄 Fingers crossed I can have my own purple patch this Sunday 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 29-Jun-18 11:33 PM GMT

Another enjoyable report Ernie – and like Wurzel I'm looking forward to some purpling of my own on Sunday!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Jun-18 08:32 AM GMT

Janet, Neil and Wurzel – Thanks. It seems to be a good year for Purple Emperors. I wish you all well on your purpling forays.

Also, Wurzel. Sorry but we are fully booked at the Purple Towers Hotel at the moment; but we do have vacancies from the second week of August right through until late June next year. So if you would like to book now I am sure we can accommodate you. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Jun-18 04:42 PM GMT

Alice Holt Forest – 30th June 2018

Seeing as I had attained by own personal annual record count for Purple Emperors yesterday, I thought I would try other parts of the forest today to try and push the number up further. This time I explored the area known as the Willows Green Enclosure and there I found two more. Neither stopped but both came low in flight, one circled me at waist height. This increased my annual best total to 17.

I used two entrances to this enclosure.

From the High Thicket Lane pull-in was 1 PE, 3 White Ad, 1 Red Ad, 3 Small White, a few Large Skipper and SW Frits, 1 Comma, 1 Speckled Wood and of course the Meadow Browns and Ringlets (which I shall shorthand in future to MB&R).

From the Boundary Road Car Park there was 1 PE, many MB&Rs, S&L Skips, 1 S White, 1 Red Ad, 3 Comma, 2 White Ads and 1 Purple Hair (or is it Purplestreak to keep it in line with the Greenstreak contraction?). This last flew low many times but did not stop.

I didn't get any PE pics today but my consolation prize was some close-ups of the White Ads instead.



Broxhead Common – 30th June 2018

A quick visit to count the Silver-studded Blues. They continue their slow decline. I counted 166 in and around the lek of which 32 were female. The last time I did a count I guesstimated that the females took up 20% of the total population, a rise of 10% over the week before and now I have some figures I see it actually comes out at 19.28%, so my original guess wasn't far off the mark.

River Itchen at Ovington – 30th June 2018

Really this was an afternoon in a pub garden beside the river Itchen, supping alcoholic beverages with my wife. The sun was out, we were under a shady parasol and there were butterflies visiting the flowers in the garden all around us. Lovely. Without moving from our chosen table there were Small White, Large Skip, M Brown and even a fresh Brimstone as well as Banded Demoiselles. We made a short walk to the bridge over the river Itchen to look for the Brown Trout that always make their home there.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Today's picture comes from Broxhead. This heathland often holds a few Dartford Warbler each year but you don't see them that often – mostly you just hear them. Incidentally it has a few Nightjar and Woodcock too but you only see these at dusk and my camera (and photo-taking ability) is not good enough to get pics of these.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 30-Jun-18 10:16 PM GMT

Great White Admiral Ernie 🤔👍 Love the shot of the Dartford, takes me back to my childhood that does and messing about up on the Heath 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 30-Jun-18 11:31 PM GMT

That sounds a lovely butterflying day, and it must have felt special to be eyeballed by the PE! 😊 It sounds as if you were lucky to get the shot of the Dartford Warbler – a bird I have neither seen nor heard.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Jul-18 08:33 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel and Janet. It's an ambition of mine to try and get a much closer shot of the Dartford Warbler but they don't stay still for long and mostly they hide away in the heather and gorse. I used to live in the New Forest (for about 5 years), a prime location for them and was never able to get close

then either.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 01-Jul-18 10:37 AM GMT

Really lovely shots ernie of the Emperor, I hope I'm has lucky next week-end, also like the shot of the Admiral. Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Jul-18 05:52 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. The PEs are still flying around so you might get lucky with them.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Jul-18 06:22 PM GMT

Broxhead Common – 1st July 2018

My final non-lek count of Silver Studded Blues in a part of the reserve I had not visited for them this year yielded only 7 more individuals so my overall annual total for this reserve now stands at 557. However one fresh female was doing a very elaborate wing-roll with wings ajar and with a quite wide parting at the apex of the roll. My only pics of this were too blurred to be of any use though.

One of the master oaks is now inhabited by a Purple Hairstreak (singular). But its not really a just one oak, in fact I have found it is a small group of oaks that they like here.

One Comma came down to the sand near the pond which made for a good photo opportunity because it stayed there for some time basking in the sun.



A Large White nectared from a bramble long enough for a decent photo too. I think this is a summer brood female because it is so pristine but my book suggests their second season begins at the end of July. I am plumping for summer brood though on the basis that the heat we are having at the moment might have fooled it into thinking it was August already. 😊



Also seen was a single jaded Brown Argus, a SW Frit, Large Skipper, a pristine Small Tortoiseshell, the usual MB&R's and my first Essex Skipper of the year. It perched on a grass which blew in the wind so again my pics were not good enough to show.

Alice Holt – Abbot's Wood Enclosure – 1st July 2018

I started off from the usual (southern) entrance so could not count the only two Purple Emperors I saw as part of my annual tally. The circuit I did that I had not visited so far this year here yielded no further individuals.

One was on the ground and for a while we (me, Nick and Pauline) thought it may have been a female. If it had been it would have been wonderful because although no purple would have shown, I have never seen a female land on the ground before. But on closer inspection it turned out to be a male after all. It also had a massive chunk taken out of its wing but it could still fly OK.



I went searching for further Essex Skippers which have a small colony here. I found one that sat for a long while nectaring so I was able to get close for a load of pics.

But was it an Essex Skipper or not? It seemed to have black antenna tips...





But finally I got the shot that confirmed it was in fact a Small Skipper after all.



Here are past pics from this location of an Essex Skipper.



It just shows how easy it is to get confused between these two species.

Further butterflies seen were White Ads, SW Frits, a Comma, S&L Whites, a summer brood male Holly Blue fly-by and a male Purple Hairstreak on the ground. I have seen them on the ground a few times but this was only the second time ever I was able to get pics before it flew off.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Both Broxhead and Alice Holt had Brown Hawker dragonflies today. This one is from Broxhead.



Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 01-Jul-18 08:37 PM GMT

Hi Ernie, I reckon that Dragonfly is an aged female Keeled Skimmer *Orthetrum coerulescens*. The general look doesn't look right for an *Aeshna* sp. and Brown Hawkers have a more even spread of brown to the wings than this individual. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Jul-18 09:20 PM GMT

Bugboy. I checked again with my book and I do believe you are right. It certainly is a Keeled Skimmer after all. Its pesky when these things get old and a

bit faded isn't it?

Now I wonder what the one I saw at Alice Holt was the same day. (No pic of that unfortunately).

Best Regards,

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 01-Jul-18 10:37 PM GMT

Great Purple Hairstreak down on the deck Ernie 😊👍 In much better nick than the one I got today, it was a right state though it'll be a while until it gets posted 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 02-Jul-18 08:26 AM GMT

Lovely little PHS ernie, it's so hot nothings opening their wings up which is a shame. Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by CallumMac, 02-Jul-18 08:53 AM GMT

What an amazing glut of PEs, Ernie, and glad you made it over to Daneway – sorry to have missed you there by a day!

ernie f wrote:

Bugboy. I checked again with my book and I do believe you are right. It certainly is a Keeled Skimmer after all. Its pesky when these things get old and a bit faded isn't it?

I agree that this looks like Keeled Skimmer – in that light you can clearly see the keel! It's difficult to judge the size from that photo, but there is also a massive size difference between these two species – Brown Hawker is a **big** dragonfly, not much smaller than an Emperor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Jul-18 12:31 PM GMT

Wurzel – Thanks. The Purple Hairstreaks are really "taking off" now (forgive the pun). There are loads of them around.

Goldie – Yep, I have not had one open its wings while at a standstill for ages now. The only reason I know the one on the ground yesterday was male is because it flew around me a couple of times and I could see all four wings were fully purple.

Callum – Thanks for your additional info regarding the dragonfly of yesterday. Its a funny coincidence that you should mention that the size of the Brown Hawker is of some stature. I was back at Alice Holt today when someone called out the Brown Hawker. As it flew by I could clearly see how big it was and the colour of its wings suffused throughout. Not only that we kept seeing it and cursing because we kept thinking it was a Purple Emperor! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Jul-18 03:09 PM GMT

Alice Holt Forest – The Straits Enclosure – 2nd July 2018

Another purpling day but this time the Purple Hairstreaks far outnumbered the Purple Emperors. Saw two fresh PE's at the end of the enclosure walk. One low down on a tree for over 30 minutes while another circled above it from time to time. Also 9 Purplestreaks, 6 Comma, five of which were on the ground, Red and White Ads, MB&R's L&S Skips, Small White and two Brimstones. A dozen or so SW Frits, plus a Brown Hawker (really this time... honest!) 😊



Alice Holt Forest – Anne’s Meadow – 2nd July 2018

A new location for me. I found another Purple Emperor, two Purplestreaks, a Small Skip, and lots of Marbled White and Meadow Brown.

This brings my annual PE tally to a cool 20. There are still one or two places in the Alice Holt Woods I can go to increase this slightly and I shall take these in over the next couple of days.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The typical toadstool found in children’s books, usually with a pixie sitting on top – the Fly Agaric. Imbibe this and you definitely WILL see pixies!

Note: It is of course illegal to take hallucinogenic mushrooms so I am not proposing you actually do this. Not only that but as you are probably already aware – it is very poisonous.



Amanita muscaria

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 02-Jul-18 08:46 PM GMT

Great to see more PEs Ernie 😊🍄 Also an interesting view of Fly Agaric, not the typical shot 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Jul-18 07:00 AM GMT

It’s the Pixie’s eye view, Wurzel. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Jul-18 04:12 PM GMT

Alice Holt Forest: The Arboretum Enclosure – 3rd July 2018

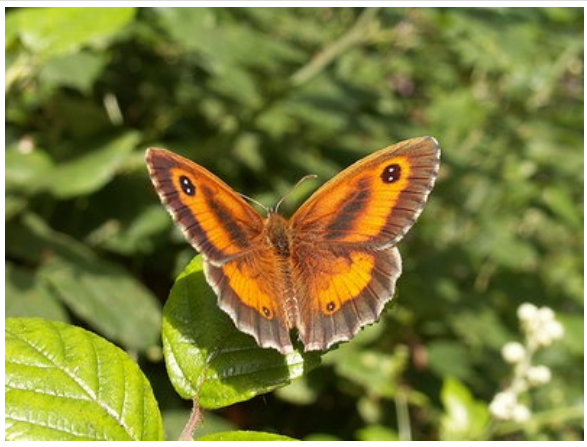
Last year I saw a couple of PE’s here, not so this year so my annual count has not increased. However I did see 6 Purple Hairstreaks, mostly low but none staying still. Also 5 White Ads, 2 Red Ads, 2 Comma, some Large Skippers but starting to show some signs of wear in one or two, and Small Skippers had blossomed – there were loads of them, mainly feeding off the thistles. There were a few S&L White and the usual teeming MB&R’s, a male Holly Blue flying down a forest track and my first Gatekeeper of the year.





Also Bullfinch and Greater Spotted Woodpecker quite close but fleeting.

Since this is my first spot of Gatekeeper this year – here are some of my past pics of it. My pic today was a blurry record shot only so I won't show it.





Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

The Maple walk in the "Arb" is spectacular in Autumn.





Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 04-Jul-18 12:11 AM GMT

Nice pic of the Gatekeepers in cop, Ernie. The arboretum looks glorious; you can't beat maples for colour.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Jul-18 07:44 AM GMT

Thanks, Janet. The Arboretum is an interesting place at any time of the year and there is no entrance fee. It is not publicised and there is no signpost from the road. Its really just another forest enclosure which has been planted up with some foreign trees. I have a special affinity for it because most of it was planted in the year I was born! It is amazing to see how tall and wide the Wellingtonia is. It gives you some idea of my age (but I am not telling).

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 04-Jul-18 09:34 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, great shots of the Gate Keepers, it's always great to see them, and thats a good shot of them in cop, 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Jul-18 03:54 PM GMT

Goldie - Thanks. Gatekeepers always mean the onset of high summer to me. I feel its the turning point in the butterfly season when they come on-stream.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Jul-18 04:39 PM GMT

Thursley Common – 4th July 2018

Today was not primarily a butterfly day for me although I was on the look-out for Grayling which I have seen here in the past. It was a general wildlife day really.

Thursley is a reasonably large heathland. Bits are acid bog, bits are dry heath, bits are grassland, bits are woodland and there is a small, less-acidic lake that enables fish to breed and water lilies to bloom.



Today I did see some butterflies, including four Large Skipper, two Silver-studded Blue, a Dark Green Frit fly-by and both Small and Large White. Also the Common Heath moth.

Other things seen today were Common Lizard, Stonechat, Redstart, Goldfinch (which everywhere seems to be far more common than it once was),

Woodlark, Linnet, Dartford Warbler, Black Darter, Bog Asphodel, Cottongrass, Sundew, one last remaining Heath Spotted Orchid still partially in bloom and Common Liverwort.

Also what I think was a Leaf Cutter Bee on the boardwalk.



I would appreciate a better ID if anyone knows.

I have been visiting this reserve for over 15 years so I have built up a stock of photos of its wildlife. I have selected a few which you may like to take a look at.



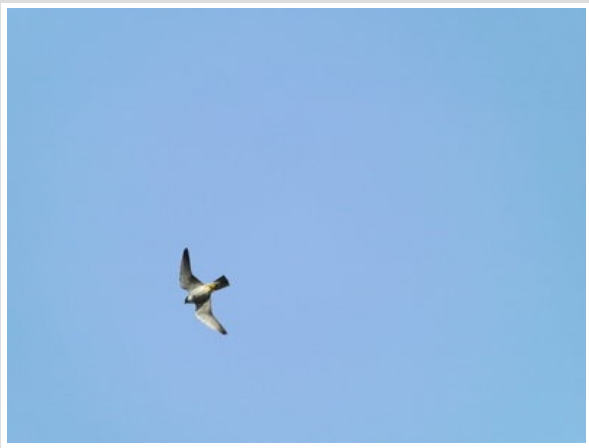
Emerald Damselfly



Sundew



Lesser Bladderwort



Hobby



Crossbill



Common Liverwort



Bog Beacon



Raft Spider



Great Diving Beetle



Slow Worm



Common Lizard



The Bendy Birch

As usual, if you know I have an ID wrong, please let me know, and why. Thanks.

Butterfly Snapshot of the day

I saw two SSBs here today. A male and a female and both kindly did a wing-roll for me. Although neither were entirely fresh, neither were they old and tatty. There is still some mileage in the SSB's this year.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 05-Jul-18 08:42 PM GMT

Great set of shots Ernie 😊👍 Glad you gt another wing roll – I wonder if that's their way of greeting you? 😊 I reckon that's a good call for the leaf cutter Bee 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

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

Thanks for the beetle ID confirmation, Wurzel.

Also, I know you meant it as a joke but since I am taking all wing-roll ideas in the spirit of a brainstorm, I shall add the "greeting" idea to my list.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Jul-18 07:09 AM GMT

Odiham Common – 5th July 2018

There were hundreds of butterflies flitting about over the common today, you almost did not know where to look for the best. There was S & L & GV & M White, S & L & E Skipper, MB & Rs, Gatekeepers were on the up, a few SW Frits, 2 Commas, 6 new Purplestreaks, 1 WL Hairstreak and 1 male Holly Blue. No Small Coppers yet but I am sure they are soon to come. They were here last year near this time.





There were a few Lesser Cream Wave moths.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the Day

A dead shrew, very sad. But it was alive until recently so its a valid wildlife record for this site.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Jul-18 04:05 PM GMT

Folly Hill – 6th July 2018

The site I call Folly Hill in Farnham is actually named Tuxbury Hill on old OS maps. It was once an Iron Age Hillfort (aka Caesar's Camp) begun in the Late Bronze Age but was converted into a park in medieval times when it was annexed by Farnham Castle and some of the earthworks today may be from that later time as a "Park Pale" or park boundary.

It is mainly dry heath but does have a large pond and is fringed by woodlands.



I came here today for Grayling because I had no luck at Thursley the other day. Here I found seven! As usual they were on the ground and in flight but two individuals perched on tree trunks too. When disturbed they can fly for some way and very fast, often too fast to follow, but they can on occasion come right up to you and fly around you to see what it was that disturbed them. In the past I have had them land on me when they feel they are not threatened.

Here are some of the pics I took today. Even though it was morning it became hot quickly and I got the impression they sought out the shade whenever they could.







Since this is my first spot of the year for this species, here are some of my past pics. Mostly today they had their forewings retracted (for camouflage as well as heat reduction I expect) but in the past I have had some decent shots of the forewings of both genders.





On one occasion a pair circled around me and landed on the ground in front of me facing each other.



The male proceeded to flap his wings slowly and lift the hairs on his back. It appeared he was wafting scent at the female. You almost never see them with their wings open at rest so I was astonished by this.





Whatever he was doing must have worked because a moment later they were back to back in-cop. At one point with their wings down...



But then one with wings up!



It was one of those "moments" – you know what I mean, an experience I will never forget.

Also today, I must have seen well over 100 Gatekeeper. Only a couple of days ago there were none. Plus MB&R, S, L, GV and M White, S, E and L Skip, 1 Small Heath, 1 DG Frit and 4 SSB's, two of which were wing-rolling for me – one was an aged female.



Essex Skip



More obvious antenna tips

The birds were no less interesting. There was Jay, Swift, Stonechat, Linnet flocks, Goldfinch flocks, Coot on the pond and Dartford Warbler on the gorse.

There was also a Roe Deer.

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

There was one large patch of the heath that was regenerating after what must have been a fire because only fresh, low heather was growing there except that it was covered by Common Dodder – a parasite of various plants in Southern England but mainly of young heather. I have seen Common Dodder in bloom only twice before, once I had it pointed out to me by the ranger at Arne Nature Reserve in Dorset and the other time, small amounts of it along a sandy track across the heath at Longmoor in Hampshire. But here it grew liberally in masses over all the young heather. Quite amazing.



Common Dodder en-masse



Detail

Also there were many species of dragonfly buzzing around. Here are a couple of my better shots of them. As usual - if I have got the IDs wrong, please correct me.



Black-tailed Skimmer - male



Common Darter - female

And finally - beside the pond was a blighted tree which the local House Martins were using as a roosting point.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Jul-18 09:06 PM GMT

Magdalen Hill - 7th July 2018

My target species today was Chalkhill Blue. I had heard from the Butterfly Conservation website that they were flying already at Magdalen Hill.



I found five males, all in one area of the reserve, here are two of them.



And two of the five were wing-rolling!!! Last year I scrutinised many from the thousand or so at peak flying time at Old Winchester Hill and only found one that gave a hint that he might do so if there was a good reason to. He seemed to do just one stilted roll then stopped so later I wondered if I had just imagined it as none of the others I saw last year did it. But no. They were doing proper, full-blown wing rolls today at Mag Hill.

So the Chalkhill Blue is another butterfly to add to my species log of wing-rollers on the "general" thread of this website.

Interestingly I had observed this difference with the SSB's this year too. When there were a lot of them in a densely packed area such as a lek, the frequency of wing-rolls seemed to reduce (but not disappear) and when there were fewer butterflies in a given area, the wing-roll activity appeared to increase. Hardly scientific it has to be said, but it may be worth further investigation. If it is done to deceive predators, then it may be that they take "safety in numbers" into account somehow. Perhaps if there are a lot of them about, they expend more energy in bouncing off one another than those in less dense areas so conserve energy for this by dropping the time they spend wing-rolling. It is not therefore a conscious decision on the part of the butterfly (I never thought it was of course) but a natural consequence of how energy is expended in differing circumstances.

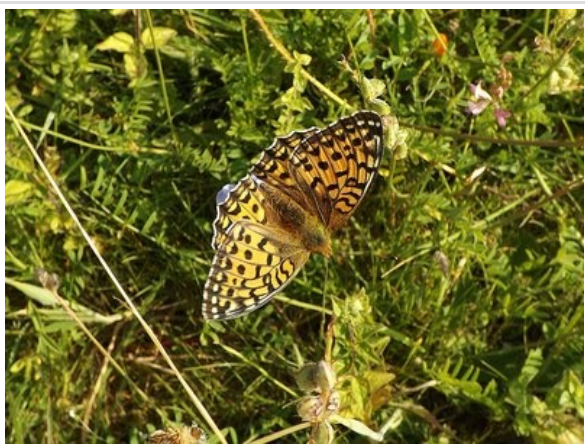
Since this is my first spot of this species this year, here are some past pics.







Also seen today were loads of S&L&M&GV White, MB&R&G, L&S Skip, 7 Brimstone, 4 Peacock, 3 Small Torts, a single DG Frit, Comma and Holly Blue. Also many 6-spot Burnet.





There are signs up around the reserve telling of the efforts to re-introduce the Duke of Burgundy here. I mentioned some time ago the thousands of Cowslips that grow on the lower slopes of the hill beside the road. It would be great if in future years this site eclipses Noar Hill for Dukes.

Non-Butterfly Snapshots of the day

Yellowhammer and Linnet are a feature of the birdlife on this reserve.



Re: ernie f

by Pete Eeles, 07-Jul-18 09:57 PM GMT

ernie f wrote:

On one occasion a pair circled around me and landed on the ground in front of me facing each other. The male proceeded to flap his wings slowly and lift the hairs on his back. It appeared he was wafting scent at the female. You almost never see them with their wings open at rest so I was astonished by this. Whatever he was doing must have worked because a moment later they were back to back in-cop. At one point with their wings down ... It was one of those "moments" – you know what I mean, an experience I will never forget.

Hi Ernie,

What you're experienced here is the Grayling courtship. Here's an excerpt from a book coming out next year 😊

When the male is successful in finding a potential mate, he undergoes an elaborate courtship that was first spelled out by the Nobel prize-winning Dutchman, Nikolaas (Niko) Tinbergen, who dedicated his life to the study of animal behaviour and found the Grayling an interesting enough subject to include in his work. The courtship is normally preceded by the male flying upwards toward and overhead a passing female. The pair land together with the male near and usually behind the female and the male then moves around the female, always facing her, until they are facing each other. An unreceptive female will flutter her wings to deter the male, while a virgin female will remain still, encouraging the male to perform an elaborate courtship that comprises four main stages – quivering, fanning with antenna spinning, bowing and clasping.

1. Wing quivering. The male starts the courtship by slowly raising his forewings, so much so that the orange patches found on the underside of the forewings are revealed, with the wings held slightly apart, before rapidly closing and lowering them.

2. Fanning with antenna spinning. The male then, with forewings held up and the wings held slightly apart, vibrates his wings rapidly in front of the female. During this fanning, the male spreads his antennae horizontally and rapidly rotates them.

3. Bowing. The male then undertakes the most elaborate aspect of the courtship; with his wings steadied and held open, he bows forward, drawing the female's antennae across the sex brands on his forewings, gently closing his wings with the female's antennae held between them. The androconia on the sex brands, to all intents and purpose, emit a scent that seduces the female. This is one of the few occasions when it is possible to catch a glimpse of the beautiful Grayling upperside.

4. *Clasping.* With a willing subject, the male then moves to the side and slightly behind the female while facing the same direction as her. He then bends his abdomen round to mate with her, before moving to adopt a typical mating position with male and female facing away from each other. The pair remains coupled for between 45 minutes and two hours before parting.

This description may give the impression that the courtship always rigidly follows this sequence, but this is not the case; this sequence may be repeated, steps may be performed out of sequence and some steps may be omitted altogether. The description is, however, an excellent rule of thumb regarding the typical sequence.

I've also filmed this sequence (in Ireland) and you can find the two videos here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNat4V3XlwI/>[video]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vHzlVviUv8/>[video]

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: ernie f

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

You're very lucky to see that courtship Ernie. I've been after some upperside shots for several years now and that's the best time to get them but I've yet to stumble across a courting pair. I did get to watch and photograph an egg laying female last year though which was rather satisfying 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 08-Jul-18 07:42 AM GMT

Great to see the upper wing Grayling shots Ernie, I too have been trying for those for a while but still haven't found a courting couple 🍀🍀🍀

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Jul-18 07:54 AM GMT

Pete – Thanks for the information on Grayling courtship, its fascinating. I shall go back to my pics and zoom in to see if I can interpret them in this new light. I could not access your video though. How do I do that?

Bugboy – I am thinking it might be a good year for Grayling. I saw seven at Folly Hill and its close to the start of their season. Just need to be there when a male and female meet. Easier said than done though. 😊 I need to read up about them more, especially if I am to copy your success in finding an egg laying female.

Wurzel – I was very, very lucky. I only spotted it because they flew around me to start with. This must have been the start of the courtship ritual as Pete recounts "The courtship is normally preceded by the male flying upwards toward and overhead a passing female". In my case I got in the way.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Jul-18 04:18 PM GMT

Longmoor – 8th July 2018



Buoyed by my success with Grayling at Folly Hill the other day I decided to pay Longmoor a visit. Another heath I have seen them at in past years but I found none today.

Instead there were the masses of S&L White, M Brown and Gatekeeper (but surprisingly no Ringlet), loads of Large Skipper (this is the best site for them I have found near me), a single Small Skip and Speckled Wood, also 3 Red Ads, 3 Purplestreaks and 6 Silver-studded Blues.



This one kept her fore-wings tightly closed while her rear wings were held ajar. She was like this for some minutes.

Later in the day I went to a local garden centre with my wife (but without my camera) and while we sat down outside in a shady nook polishing off a couple of ice-creams, out in the sunshine there were 2 Red Ads, a Comma, a Purplestreak, a Brimstone and again loads of Small and Large Whites. One of the Large Whites flew in through the open door of the garden centre building but I don't think they had what he wanted. 😊

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

Back at Longmoor, the ruts in the sandy tracks are the ideal location this time of year for a plant called the Coral-necklace because they usually hold damp patches. In recent years I have captured pics of this rare plant but today the tracks were bare. The weeks of blistering heat has totally "evaporated" any chance of seeing it this year I would guess. 😞



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 09-Jul-18 12:32 PM GMT

I can see how the Coral-necklace got it's name Ernie 😊 Good to see the Silver-studs still hanging on in there 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 09-Jul-18 03:38 PM GMT

Love the Grayling shots and info Ernie. I hope to see my first of the year very soon. Great Chalkhills as well. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Jul-18 03:55 PM GMT

Wurzel - Yes the SSB's are in their final decline now but there is still a surprising amount still at Broxhead too.
Andrew - Thanks. Good luck with your Grayling.

Regards

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Jul-18 04:20 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 9th July 2018



Butterflies plentiful here today. All the usual characters: Teeming S&L&GV&M White, S&E&L Skips, MB&R&G&SW, plus 3 Brimstone, 4 Red Ads, 2 Comma, 1 Purplestreak, 2 SW Frits doing their courtship flight, and 2 DG Frits in separate parts of the reserve, one of which landed on different flowers in different places but only fleetingly on purpose to make me run about after it for pics. What fun we had! 😊



Plus the Small Heath that kept flapping its wings open while at rest – the first time I have ever seen this. I got a few fuzzy shots but I am happy because these are my first actual photos of the upper wings – before now I only had a video still of them.





Yesterday I reported on the Silver-studded Blue that held its rear wings ajar while keeping its forewings closed. I wonder if this prolonged heat-wave, with very high morning temperatures, is making these butterflies do things they would not normally do in order to try and cool themselves while nectaring.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The Spotted Flycatchers are in evidence – a danger to any unsuspecting insect and the bane of Noar Hill's butterflies.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Jul-18 03:38 PM GMT

Folly Hill – 10th July 2018



Heather-covered ancient ramparts

I saw my first summer brood Small Copper today. I was getting a bit worried for them because the parching heat was drying out the sorrel and the bell heather was going-over quickly for I guess the same reason, but there was one spot here at Folly Hill that seemed to provide both. He was repeatedly doing the stem-dance on flimsy grasses, time and again walking down a few steps tapping and then flitting to the next, etc, etc. This seemed to be occupying his entire time while I watched. Unfortunately my pics all came out blurred because the grasses blew in any breeze and he too would make them bend over. At one point, one bent over so much he fell underneath it, gripping onto it for dear life while fluttering his wings to try and right himself.

A moment later I came across a male Silver-studded Blue, looking very faded and jaded by now.

A moment after that I came to the place where the other day I was able to take pics of a Grayling on a tree trunk. He was not on the trunk anymore but was still in the vicinity. However, this time so was a rival and they spent some time fighting a border dispute. The aerial acrobatics was quite something to see. They finally split up and went their separate ways. I found one perched on the ground in "camouflage" mode with wings down. Even in this relatively close-up shot he is not easy to see straight away!



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

I spoke to one guy who said there was a pond on the common where Crested Newts lived. I found the pond but not the newts, however there was an amount of Water Fern floating on the surface which is an odd aquatic plant. I have seen it before at Greywell Moors covering a shallow pond there, but here a number of "leaves" of the fern had detached and were floating freely by themselves so that you could see the roots beneath them.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 10-Jul-18 10:49 PM GMT

Interesting to see the Small Heath opening up, I reckon it is down to the heat as the butterflies round my way have been acting oddly, we've had DGFs in gardens and I've seen some butterflies actively seeking shade 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Jul-18 08:33 AM GMT

I agree, Wurzel - this long period of sun and heat is certainly having an effect on them.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Jul-18 03:34 PM GMT

Alice Holt: The Straits Enclosure - 11th July 2018

I had not intended to revisit here this year – my usual purpling expeditions I thought were finished but I was in the area anyway so I stopped by. I am glad I did. The place was throbbing with butterflies – hundreds of them. Not only that – 2 more Purple Emperors and no less than 12 new Purplestreaks. Loads of L&S&GV White, Brimstones, Peacocks, SW Frits, Red and White Ads, S&L Skips, tons of MB&R&G as well as 2 Holly Blues and a Comma.

I spent much of my time getting backlit pics of some of the closer butterflies – the SW Frits were very amenable in this respect.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

I saw this pair of beetles mating. I think they might be *Rhagonycha fulva* beetles but I am not entirely sure. Any suggestions?



Re: ernie f

by millerd, 11-Jul-18 09:50 PM GMT

A fascinating series of reports, Ernie. I have often watched Grayling and there are some past observations buried deep in my PD from 2nd August 2015 that you might be interested in, including some open wings seen during mating. <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=29&t=6157&start=960> (You'll need to scroll down the page a bit.) It's a real shame you rarely see the uppersides as the female in particular is a beautiful creature.

Dave

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 11-Jul-18 10:44 PM GMT

Great to see the Silver-washed Ernie 😊 I really need to get back to the woods before they disappear for the year 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Jul-18 07:48 AM GMT

Wurzel – re the SWFs, they seemed to me to start late this year but they are in full swing now.

Dave – I checked out your reference to see your unbelievable pics of Grayling. Two males mating with the same female at the same time?!? Stunning encounter. Plus all those crisp upper wing images, not to mention around the same time those mating Wood Whites.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 12-Jul-18 08:14 AM GMT

Just catching up on your PD, ernie. Everything looks dry and arid which is unsurprising, I suppose, given the hot spell. It's quite strange to see female SWFs looking so tattered in the first half of July!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Jul-18 12:09 PM GMT

So many species are looking a bit tattered. My back garden is a yellow carpet of hay where the grass once was. We haven't had rain here for ages (maybe a month or more).

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Jul-18 12:19 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 12th July 2018

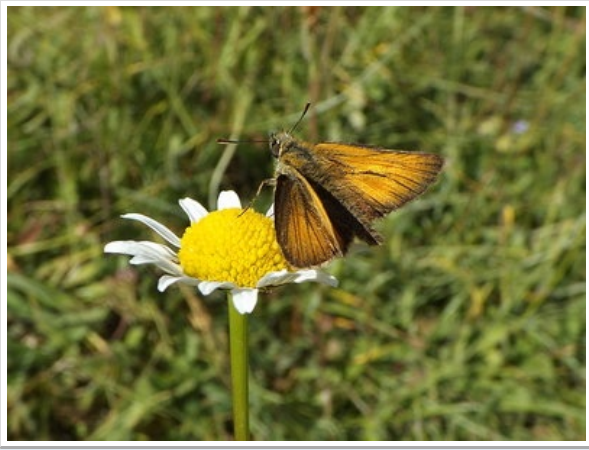
More fun with Dark Green Fritillaries today. I went back to see if I could get some backlit underwing pictures. I went early for two reasons, first the sun would be lower, and second I hoped being (slightly) cooler would make them more likely to stop. I was right on both counts to some degree however the two I saw were still pretty active even though they were a bit old by now.



Also today, Peacock, MB&R&G&SW, S&L&M White, S Skip, R Ad, SW Frit and an elderly Painted Lady with a tatty wing-edge.



One of the Small Skippers was strongly marked and its wing colour had a golden sheen to it, not altogether obvious from my pic of it.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Many of the summer flowers are now out such as Wild Marjoram, Hemp Agrimony, Rosebay Willowherb, Hedge and Ladies Bedstraws and Dark and Great Mulleins.



A mass of Dark Mullein

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 12-Jul-18 10:32 PM GMT

Those DGFs are throwing some interesting shapes Ernie 😊 Cracking Painted Lady 🤩🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 13-Jul-18 06:37 AM GMT

That's a veritable forest of mullein, ernie! Well done with the DGFs, although they don't look as though they've got long left.

Re: ernie f

by philm63, 13-Jul-18 09:24 AM GMT

I particularly like the third DGF, looks like it would not be out of place on a Dr Who episode - Phil

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jul-18 05:07 PM GMT

Thanks for your comments guys.

Phil - A friendly Dr Who "monster" though don't you think? 😊 I don't think I have ever seen one actually sitting on the ground like that before now.

David - You're right. I have seen four DGFs here in the last few days and all had some evidence of wear and tear.

Wurzel - I've got to admit, after the DGFs I was actually on my way back to the car and not really paying too much attention when I stumbled across the Painted Lady. The icing on the cake.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by Pauline, 13-Jul-18 05:16 PM GMT

Hi Ernie

When did you take that shot of the Mullein? Where on Noar Hill is it as I'd like to check it out for larva?

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jul-18 05:25 PM GMT

Binswood – 13th July 2018

Today started dull, then we had some sun and then it threatened a thunderstorm, so all in all a bit iffy for butterflying but I got out for around an hour at noon. I decided to visit Binswood. I had not been here for a few years because in the interim I had discovered Alice Holt Woodland and its Purple Emperors but today I decided to return to my older haunt.

Binswood is an old hunting woodland which is still surrounded by its now derelict ha-ha in places which was used to keep the deer in. It is overlooked by a hill which at one time had a medieval wooden hunting lodge on top and takes its name of King John's Hill (or Mount) because of that association. The hill itself bears the banks and scars of a small Iron Age Hillfort and is skirted by a Roman Road now called "Pookles Lane". (I do not know who or what "Pookles" are, nor why they should chose this lane in which to live). 😊



King John's Mount (above Binswood)

Now in fact Binswood is only 3 miles away from my house and is the first place I ever knowingly spotted a Purple Hairstreak (and got some distant pics of five on one tree). What I had neglected to do that other time was to check out each oak tree along the meadowside. I rectified that today and could not believe it. Every oak I looked at bore at least one Purplestreak and more usually two or three. I counted a total of 41 before the sun failed me and the stormclouds bubbled up. These Purplestreaks were just those in the single row of oaks beside the meadow, where you can stand back and see each tree well. Heaven knows how many there must have been across the entire wood, this being predominantly an oak wood!

Not only that, they came down. I saw two on bramble, a few at head height and the rest about mid way down each tree – none were up in the canopy that I could tell and this was 12 noon don't forget. I assume the dull morning had delayed things a bit.

The only problem I had while taking their pictures was I could never really get close. Even when they came down to brambles there was always a lot of bramble between me and them (I have the scratch marks on my arms to prove it). Thus my pics today are not perfect by any means but my proximity to this site means I can revisit often now I know they are there in such numbers.



Licking aphid honeydew?



Fuzzy pic but deeply coloured



From "above"





I had seen a Purplestreak do a wing-roll last year at Browdown but another one was doing it today at Binswood and this time I got a pair of pictures showing the action. Again not too well focussed but at least it records the performance!



Also there were the usual Browns and Whites, 6 second-brood Common Blues (of which 1 female) and a second-brood male Holly Blue too.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The winter scene across the lake below the hill.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jul-18 05:38 PM GMT

Hi, Pauline – Although both Mullein species are blooming at present this is a picture from a previous year. However there is no reason why they should not be there in the same mass now as they were then (they can be found in smaller numbers at many places across the reserve). This particular batch was notable for its size which is why I included it in my post. It was along the tree-line just inside the reserve boundary. You take the second path that runs beside the farm but enter the reserve in the normal way through the gate. Climb the hill on the bridle-path and just before you get to "the scrape" find a way in amongst all the grass and flowers on the opposite side of the path. There are a couple of pits hidden amongst all this and I found the Mullein there. At the time the picture was taken, there was a way through. There may still be, but you might have to beat a way through. Take tick repellent! 😊

Re: ernie f

by Pauline, 13-Jul-18 05:42 PM GMT

Yeah, but when did you take it Ern? I've not seen mullein like that for years! I tried to find your Sand Martins but the locals told me that path had been closed off for over 10 years!!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Jul-18 05:59 PM GMT

Pauline

The Mullein was taken within the last three years, I don't remember if it was last year or the year before. Also you have been misinformed about the track to the Sand Martin colony. I visited this year and it was most certainly open to the public when I went. In fact the first time I went was more recent than 10 years ago too. So as far as I am aware it has never been closed off in the last 10 years. It may be you was misinformed on purpose. The track to the colony passes a number of big properties, one of which has recently fenced in a small woodland alongside the path. Its just within the realms of possibility there are a few locals who resent the public footpath!

Regards,

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 14-Jul-18 08:06 AM GMT

Particularly like the second Purple Hairstreak shot Ernie, nice and dreamy 😊 Have you got Greenstreak on the list of wing rollers?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-Jul-18 08:11 AM GMT

Wurzel – Thanks. "Dreamy" as a substitute for "Out of Focus". I must remember that in future. 😊

Also, yes Greenstreak is on my list of wing-rollers but I have not got a pic of it. However Mike produced a great two-image composite gif a little while ago which does the Greenstreak proud.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-Jul-18 03:42 PM GMT

Broxhead – Silver Studded Blue – End of 2018 season survey results

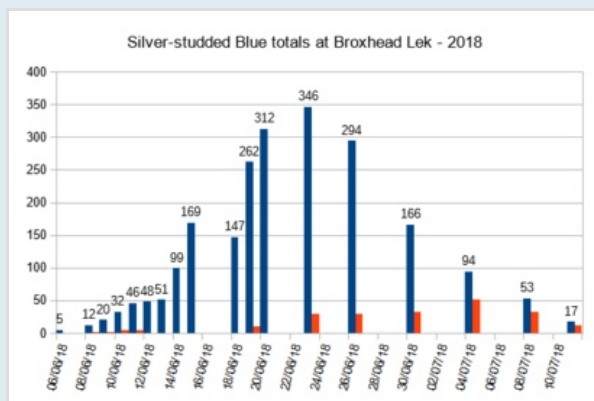
The Silver-studded Blue season is pretty much at an end now so I have completed my survey of them this year. This is the first time I have done a complete season count of this species here. It is coincidental that the year I chose to do this just so happened to have fine weather throughout the period. I cannot actually remember any bad weather at all during their flight period at Broxhead. Indeed it was the driest June on record I believe and we had some of our hottest days so far, peaking at 31 degrees in late June and early July. In one way therefore this might be an anomalous year – certainly it is not the norm weather-wise but on the other hand it does provide insight into the ideal population profile here since the conditions were perfect.

I took two gauges of the population, firstly I visited many times throughout the flight period to count the number in and around the area I have termed “The Lek” in a transect of my own devising to maximise the count and in order to obtain trend data at the same time. The second gauge was to ascertain the total population by scouring the whole reserve on a number of days close to their peak.

My method is not the standard transect method because I wanted to try and count as many individuals as possible but I did try to avoid double-counting. My method was to walk fast, not retrace my steps and never count a butterfly that flew from behind me into my field of view. In theory one can never be sure one has not double-counted but this is balanced out by the ones you don't see. I tested this method in a previous year with White Admirals along the main path at The Straits enclosure at Alice Holt Forest. First I counted them one way using this method, and then I repeated the process on the return walk along the same track in the same hour. My counts in both directions tallied to within 1 individual, 25 one way and 24 the other. A potential error of 1 in 25. Of course to count butterflies accurately you need to take into account their behaviour too. This method seems to work well for those species that do not roam far from where they emerged or have predictable flight patterns at given times of day. The White Admirals at Alice Holt for example appeared to stay on or close to their nectaring plants in the sun of late morning when I performed my counting test. The Silver-studded Blues at the Broxhead Lek largely do not roam more than 20 metres from where they emerge.

Lek count

I was advised that at other locations further south people had started to spot SSBs in the first week of June, so I started my survey then but I counted none at the Broxhead Lek until the 6th June when there were 5, all male. It was on this day that I realised that male SSBs do spar like many other butterflies but that in previous years I had only seen them at peak and they don't do it in a pronounced way when the population density increases, they merely “bounce off” each other sporadically but repeatedly. The numbers increased smoothly and rapidly over the coming days with one slight “blip” on the 18th June which is more to do with my early morning timing of the count that day – it is artificially low because I could not count all the roosting individuals that I could not see low down amongst the heather but must have been there at the time.



My max count for the lek and its immediate surroundings was 346 on 23rd June; a smidgen under 2/3 of the total individuals on the reserve at that time – see next section.

This year I decided not only to count the totals but also the male/female ratio, although I did not always do this every day of my survey. Females started to appear in very small numbers only about three days after the males started to appear. I saw my first female on the 8th June and this one was already mating. On the 8th and on the 9th, although the number of males was increasing well, I only saw what I believe to be the same 2 females each day.

I was surprised by the results here. Of course it is more difficult to spot a female and know it is a female on a fast walk but the disparity between my count of males and females each day I did this is so large it cannot be the primary cause. I think what surprised me most was not that there were fewer females than males at all times (even right at the end of my survey the males still out-numbered the females) but more how long the females took to get to their peak numbers. The total figure (and the male-specific figure) peaked around the 23rd June but it was not until around the 4th July that the females peaked, 12 days into the male decline. The surveyed flight period was only 36 days, so this delay between male and female peaks was around 1/3 of the entire flight period.

Reserve count

The second gauge I took was the total count for the reserve at peak and this was 557 in the few days around the 23rd June. I performed a similar survey in 2010 when the total came out as 550, so it appears Broxhead may hold a very stable population.

Given the female peak was 12 days after this “total” means I have undercounted the total numbers for this reserve because I have not counted the peak of females and the peak of males together – only the peak of males and those females that happened to be flying around then. Taking this undercount into consideration the total number of individuals across the whole reserve over the whole time period was closer to 594.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 15-Jul-18 03:49 PM GMT

Those are very interesting statistics, ernie, and I applaud you for the effort you've put in. There are certainly some very positive counts during the flight period, although as you say this has been just about the perfect year for SSBs, with the warm spell coinciding with their emergence and continuing right the way through it.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Jul-18 04:27 PM GMT

Thanks, David. Having them so close to where I live made it possible. I almost feel privileged to have them as my "Neighbours".

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Jul-18 04:39 PM GMT

Binswood – 15th July 2018



Two days ago I came here and found 41 Purplestreaks. Today I took a different path through the woods and glades and counted 52 more. So that's a total of 93 so far for this site. Not only is this a record location count for me, but 52 is also a daily record and an annual record too. The other day took me about 1 hour to get 41 but today was a three hour stroll to get the extra 53. Well I say stroll but really it was punctuated repeatedly with short periods of standing still and craning my neck up to check out each oak tree I passed. Almost all of them had at least one Purplestreak zipping about but one had six flying all at once, another had four and many had three. Mostly they were half way down the tree or even lower to begin with but as the day wore on, they would retreat more to the higher canopy. That said, one of two came down to bramble even around 12 noon but only fleetingly. Only one opened its wings briefly today but flew off before I was able to take my picture, but I got a few closed wing shots.



Also seen here today, Comma, SW Frit, L&GV White, Brimstone, MB&R&G&SW, Red Ad, Holly and Common Blue and one Small Copper that did stop but was fidgety, so no clear pic.

One Gatekeeper posed on a Yarrow for awhile and let me get close to take pics which was nice of it.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

I have seen what I believe is the Dark Bush Cricket here on occasion in previous years (but not today).



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 15-Jul-18 08:16 PM GMT

Good to see even more Purple Hairstreak shots Ernie 😊 A couple of years back them coming down was nowhere near the 'given' that we seem to be experiencing now.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Jul-18 07:27 AM GMT

Wurzel – I've only really been butterflying for a few years so I don't know what the trend is. The first one I ever saw was low down. I had to have them pointed out to me in the canopy. This year though most of the ones I have seen have been part-way down the trees and very few "high silhouettes". Could it be too hot for them up there at the moment? I have noticed some of the ones that do come down try to find shady places under leaves to perch.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Jul-18 02:17 PM GMT

Binswood – 16th July 2018

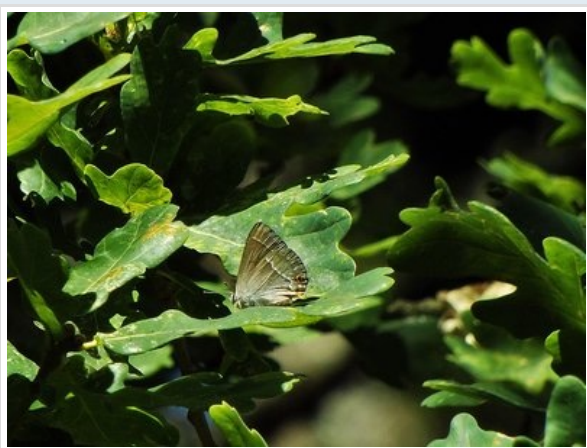
Day three of my Purplestreak count at Binswood. I took the last of the tracks that would enable me to stand back and see oaks in sunshine. There are other tracks but those are through the depths of the woods and limit the ability to see canopy butterflies.



Today's walk

This time, in a two-hour stroll, I was rewarded with views of a further 31, bringing my grand total for this location to 124 in the last few days. It is by far the best location for numbers of Purplestreaks that I have visited. I know Browndown can get more but when I visited last year I did not see that amount or anything near it.

And yet again one or two came down, these in an open glade along a wooded path. They would sit on the bracken and low oak boughs fleetingly and then off they went again. Not once did any of them open their wings while at rest so again today my pics were of them with wings firmly closed.

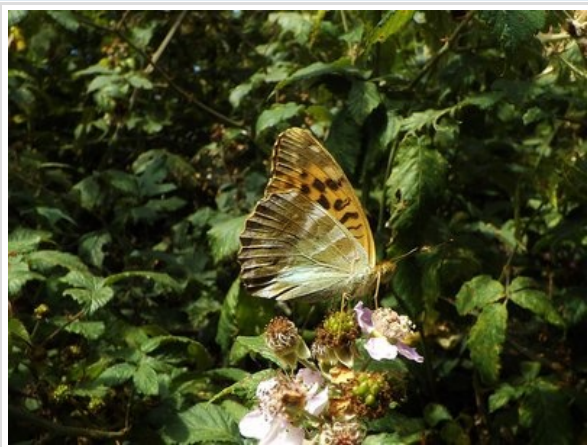




There was a time when I would have been over the moon to get any pic of a Purple Hairstreak. It just goes to show how once you have got one pic, you strive for more and better.

All the other butterflies I saw were the same species as yesterday. However, while I was waiting for the Purplestreaks to come down in a bracken glade, a stonking great butterfly zoomed down at me out of nowhere, passed me at waist height and then flew fast away and up into the canopy. I got a fine view of the underside as it passed me, and an even better view of the upperside as it turned in front of me. It was, to my utter amazement, a Purple Emperor. I have never seen one in this woodland before. The encounter was all over in a few seconds, so no pics of course but – wow! I was not even looking for them. This brings my annual tally of Purple Emperors this year to 21, all the others were at Alice Holt Forest. Binswood is closer to where I live than Alice Holt being almost exactly three miles by car, so this was the closest Purple Emperor I have seen to where I live.

I was also able to get close to a reasonably fresh Silver-washed Frit for a pic – here it is.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

I disturbed a few grasshoppers today as I walked through the grass but I didn't stop to try and identify them. On past visits here I have come across what I think is the following:



Meadow Grasshopper



Common Field Grasshopper



Speckled Bush Cricket

As usual, please correct me if I have any of the ID's wrong. I am not absolutely convinced I have any of them right.

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 16-Jul-18 09:16 PM GMT

Nice Purple Hairstreaks Ernie, and other selections. 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 16-Jul-18 10:22 PM GMT

More great stuff Ernie 😊 I've only been into this butterfly lark for a while as well but I recall reading that they'll come down when there isn't enough honeydew higher up the tree. So they're often encountered down low on sunny days after its rained recently. I suppose with the prolonged heat their source of fuel could have totally evaporated? 😊

On matters wing rolling – I saw a male Chalkhill doing so this afternoon.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 17-Jul-18 12:06 AM GMT

Everyone is filling their boots with Purple Hairstreaks....except me!! 😊

Time I got out and looked for a few.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Jul-18 11:55 AM GMT

Thanks, Guys. The Purple Hairstreaks seem to be having a bumper year. Either that or as Wurzel says, the evaporation of honeydew from the canopy leaves is bringing them down more so we get to see them better.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Jul-18 04:32 PM GMT

Binswood (yes again) – 17th July 2018

You just can't keep me away from this place at the moment. I had finished my Purple Hairstreak count for this location yesterday but thought I would get here early today to see if I could get any more open-wing pics because later in the day the little blighters kept them tightly closed yesterday.

I had some reasonable success. Not the full, open-wing, brilliant purple pictures I wanted, but nevertheless some interesting angles. One came down onto brambles a few inches from the ground. Others stayed on the low boughs of oaks. At one point I had four Purplestreaks on one low oak bough all at once. Another came down to a "baby" oak and opened its wings for quite a while but never fully.





I thought I would try and copy Steve L's closed wing-edge shot that he did for the White-letter Hairstreak to see what the "tails" looked like from a similar angle on the Purple Hairstreak. Just as I suspected, because they are stubbier than the WLH's, they do not appear to splay out. Of course - my shot is nowhere near as good as his and it is not really from above either as my subject was just above the level of my head.



There were also three times as many Small Copper here today than there was yesterday. Sounds a lot, but there was only one here yesterday. One had a very odd mutation to one fore-wing.



But this one was OK.



None of them were doing Stem Dances, Turkey Trots or Wing-Rolls. I have never seen one do a wing-roll although I remember someone on this forum saying he saw one do it. I shall keep looking.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the Day

I saw a Scorpion Fly today on the same oak bough as the four Purplestreaks mentioned earlier. I have seen them here before too. I did not get its pic so the one below is from a past encounter.



Re: ernie f

by David M, 17-Jul-18 10:44 PM GMT

Fill your boots with these Purple Hairstreaks while you can, ernie. It's a difficult species normally but this year it seems to be as accommodating as is possible.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Jul-18 07:40 AM GMT

David – I shall heed your sage advice. I was wondering if I should go somewhere else for my next sojourn but I think I might stay put at Binswood today. My boots are full with them by now – so I shall have to buy another pair. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Jul-18 02:10 PM GMT

Binswood – 18th July 2018

Heeding David's advice I visited Binswood again this morning during a two-hour period when the sun came out. More pics of Purplestreaks low down on the oaks and brambles. Yet again, none opened their wings flat but a few set their wings ajar. Many are getting a bit faded and jaded by now. Some have bites out of their wings and abrasions to the wing surfaces. Because there was more cloud at times this morning it seemed there were no hairstreaks there at all when the sun didn't shine because they were all perching. I saw one land low down and observed its activity for around 30 minutes before it flew off. It landed on an oak leaf that was at an angle to the horizontal. It walked down the leaf and stopped awhile. It opened its wings ajar for a minute or so then closed them, turned around and walked up the leaf to its tip and turned around. It sat there wings closed awhile then opened them ajar again for a minute or so. Then it closed them and walked down the leaf again. It repeated this a few times, up and down, open and closed. Always when it opened its wings it was facing down the leaf as thought in a semi-roosting position, never facing up it with wings open.



Licking honeydew in the shade



Shining silver when the sun came out



A little bit of purple



Walking up the leaf

When the sun came out for some time the tree I was under "erupted" with six Purplestreaks all flying at once as if to make up for lost time. Two came down to the bramble patch next to the trees I stood by at the same time. I was able to get backlit shots of them. On one occasion I could swear I could discern the purple of the upper wing penetrate through so it was partially visible underneath.



Is there a tinge of purple coming through underneath?

The Small Coppers were still there of course. Still no wing-roll for me though.



Kingsley Common

Since Binswood had so many Purplestreaks I thought I would try and make a comparison with the nearly adjacent Kingsley Common. As I observed the oaks there the clouds started to cover the sky and nothing moved in the trees except for a robin. I could not tell if there were any hairstreaks there at all. As I walked back to the car of course I kept looking and then I saw one. It was sitting low on a small oak tree and did not move one bit for the five minutes I watched. I was quite pleased with myself though. I usually only see them at rest when I see them fly to the perch in the first place. But by now I was getting so used to what to look for, I was seeing them as they sat. It helped of course that this one was so low down.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Today beside the car-park at Kingsley Common an army of Wood Ants had decided to start a nest beside one of the wooden boundary markers.



Re: ernie f

by Old Wolf, 18-Jul-18 08:07 PM GMT

Ernie, it looks like the PH jackpot. Loads of great pictures.

Hopefully the open wing shot will be arriving for you shortly 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Jul-18 12:51 PM GMT

It certainly is a jackpot, Old Wolf. I went again today and got some nearly decent open-wing shots just as you predicted.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Jul-18 01:57 PM GMT

Binswood - 19th July 2018

I am thinking of buying a tent and camping out here, I visit so often at the moment. Today was overcast early but as the sun started to peek through the clouds I immediately descended on my local Purplestreak haven. To my delight a whole bundle of Purplestreaks were willing to come down low and open their wings for me in the hour I was there between 8 am and 9 am. OK, so they were mostly a bit faded and jaded by now but they came down to bramble and low oak boughs so often I was actually getting used to it!

Today's pics...







Yesterday I compared Binswood and neighbouring Kingsley Common where I only found one Purple Hairstreak but I put that down to being overcast when I got to Kingsley. Today I checked two other neighbouring sites to Binswood, namely Broxhead Common and Alice Holt Willows Green Enclosure, both in sunshine. I only found one at the former location and two at the latter. It really does appear that Binswood is a special place for them to be in such great numbers there when all about there are far fewer.

While at Willows Green there were many other species, including White Ad, half a dozen SW Frits, a female Common Blue, a male Holly Blue and the usual MB&R&G&SW, S&L White.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Another Orchid has come on-line. The Broad-leaved Helleborine. They can be found on the Abbot's Wood side of the road but the few I found there were not yet in bloom. However one was in bloom on the Willows Green side.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 19-Jul-18 02:37 PM GMT

You really are having a purple patch Ernie 😊😊🍷 Getting a tent is a good idea, something I've considered when planning ahead for my retirement (in 26 year times 😊😊😊)

Have a goodun

Wurzel

ps – Wing rolling – Long-tailed Blue, Lang's and Geranium Bronze all seen wing rolling in Lisbon and Sooty Copper and Dusky Large Blue in Czech Republic to add to the list.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Jul-18 05:07 PM GMT

Wurzel. Re retirement. Don't forget to add on six weeks. 😊

Thanks for the update on the wing rolling. Hope you don't mind if I copy your text onto the wing-rolling thread under "General" so it doesn't get lost.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 19-Jul-18 05:25 PM GMT

It's the early bird that catches the Hairsreak, Ernie.

As you say they are becoming a bit worn now, but still a great sight.

Now I know the ropes I will hope to catch them dew fresh next year.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 19-Jul-18 11:12 PM GMT

I don't blame you for continuing to pursue the Purple Hairstreaks, ernie. We may not get another opportunity like this for a few years so carry on until they're on their last legs!

Nice helleborine, by the way! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Jul-18 09:08 AM GMT

Trevor – Yes, now I know how good this location is for them I shall be up near dawn for them next year.

David – Glad you liked the Broad-leaved Helleborine. Its getting quite late in the year now, so hereabouts there are only a couple of more Orchid species to go.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Jul-18 02:40 PM GMT

St Catherine's Hill – 20th July 2018

I wrenched myself away from Purple Hairstreaks today. It was very cloudy and I guessed I would not see that many anyway so I changed tack and focussed on Chalkhill Blues instead. There are a lot of chalk hills near me and most of them have this species but today I chose St Catherine's Hill. I concentrated my efforts at one end of the reserve and as usual at this time of year there were loads.

Even though it was overcast they were remarkably skittish and most of them did not allow me to get too close. They could usually sense me coming from a couple of metres away but I did get one or two OK shots.



They are not yet at peak but it can't be far off. Last year at peak Chalkhill flying time I took a video of their antics and this sequence of video stills depicts an unfolding story worthy of a TV Soap.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

There were lots of flowers about today including this thistle. I don't know what made me take its picture because at the time I thought - I have got pics of the Cotton Thistle already. However when I got the picture onto my computer and looked more closely I became suspicious of my ID. It turned out, after looking at one of my plant books, to resemble a Woolly Thistle instead.



And a fine specimen it was too.

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 20-Jul-18 07:35 PM GMT

Just trying to catch up on a few diaries, great series of reports on the Purple Hairstreaks Ernie. I have seen a few this year but all up high and not a single photo so far, unfortunately work and other commitments mean I cannot get out early to catch them down low.

I love that shot of the Wood Ants by the wooden post...it reminds me of one of those old sci fi films where an army of mutant ants erupts from the ground and goes on the rampage 😊

Cheers,

Neil

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-18 08:21 PM GMT

By all means feel free to copy and paste any of my ramblings Ernie 😊 I hadn't factored in the 6 weeks though at work I'm either bang n time or early – which partly explains why my PD is so tardy, while it's a lot more enjoyable it doesn't pay the bills 😊😊 I reckon your underside Chalkhill could be an ab as the spotting is very faint, possibly ab. obscura?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 20-Jul-18 10:36 PM GMT

Lovely images of a beautiful butterfly, ernie. How I wish I had them close by me.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Jul-18 08:07 AM GMT

Neil – I've seen wood ant nests in Dorset and they can get to be huge piles. One day this nest here might get so big it could consume the wooden post. Re the old sci-fi film – I can imagine nowadays someone coming along with a big spray-gun of Nippon or Ant-stop. End of movie! 😊

Wurzel – After your comment I looked again at my Chalkhill pic and I do believe you are right. One of the spots is completely absent and many others are much reduced. Thanks for pointing it out.

David – Thanks. I know what you mean about butterflies far away. I am always envious of other people's pics of say Mountain Ringlet or Swallowtail.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Jul-18 02:40 PM GMT

Folly Hill Heath – 21st July 2018

The view north from the top of the Iron Age Hillfort. It appears the aliens have landed!



A different route across the heath yielded a further 8 Grayling today, bringing my total this year at this location to 15. My previous record here was 13 and I have not covered all the heath yet. Looks like another butterfly species that is doing well this year. Today's pics...



Also 1 Common Blue, Large White, many Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood and 1 Small Copper.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

I came across this beetle today. I cannot quite work it out. Does anyone know what it is?



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 22-Jul-18 07:58 AM GMT

What is that Spaceship Ernie? 🤔 I don't know what beetle that is but my pupils would describe it as 'hench' 🤔🤔

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jul-18 08:51 AM GMT

Wurzel - I honestly don't know what the "Spaceship" is. I guess its something military because its not far from Farnborough airfield.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jul-18 09:23 AM GMT

Wurzel - After a bit of online research about that "Spaceship" I have found that the official line is that it is the Bourley Hill Covered Reservoir near Aldershot. However it is on active MOD land part way between the Farnborough Air Research establishment and airfield, Odiham Chinook Helicopter airfield and Aldershot army barracks. So whether you believe this or not depends on whether or not you believe something this elaborate would be constructed to cover a water supply.

I still prefer the grounded spaceship idea. 😊

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 22-Jul-18 10:21 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, two Butterflies I've not seen this year yet ,(your shots of a Grayling and of all things a Small Copper) 🍷🍷😊 I usually see the Grayling at Southport or Gait Barrow but none had emerged when I was at these places, in fact the North was completely opposite to the South this year in that respect. 😊 so your shots are good to see, I don't think the Grayling are in Kent so I'll have to try again when I get home. 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jul-18 05:26 PM GMT

Goldie – I hope you have some luck with Grayling and Small Copper soon. Its quite odd down here, the Grayling are doing well but the Small Copper don't seem to be at the moment.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Jul-18 05:30 PM GMT

I could not get out today as I was feeling very poorly so no butterfly post today. It may have been heat stroke. I hope so because the only alternative I can come up with is Lyme disease and I certainly don't want that! 😞

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 22-Jul-18 10:52 PM GMT

'They' say it's a covered reservoir but we all know that it's an Alien craft hanger a la Roswell 😊😄
Hope you're on the mend and it was only heat stroke 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Jul-18 02:45 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 23rd July 2018

Feeling a bit better today I got out for about an hour, trying to stay in the shade as much as possible. Noar Hill is one of my closest Nature Reserves and around now and throughout August is Brown Hairstreak time so today my quest was for this butterfly.

I saw quite a few species including MB&R&G&SpWd, Lwh&Swh&Mwh&GVwh, Brimstone, Peacock, Small Skip, Comma, Common and Holly Blues, SW and DG Frits, 1 Purple Hairstreak, two 6-spot Burnet, a Silver-Y and yes 2 male Brown Hairstreaks. They repeatedly sparred up in the canopy but that is where they stayed. They were on their usual master tree which here, unusually, is a Beech Tree. In past years the numbers of males on this single tree can climb to six but I must admit I wasn't expecting any today being right at the start of their flight season.

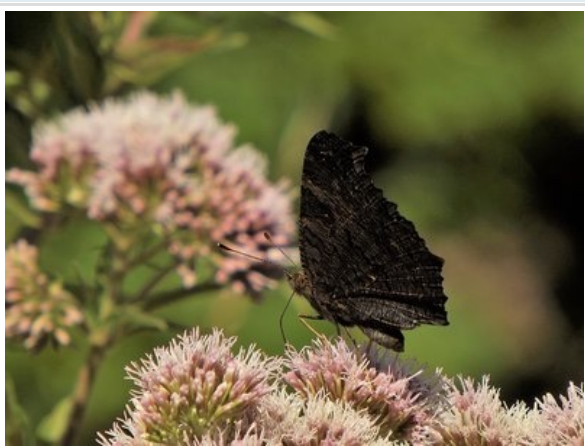
Here is todays pic taken around 9.40 am but its really only a record shot. Can you see him?



It is rare that I am able to take pics of both the Silver Washed and Dark Green Frits in the same place on the same day but today was one of those – both were showing signs of wear by now though.



And I am rather pleased with my underwing shot of a nectaring Peacock showing its patterning, normally just a silhouette.



As it is my first spot of the year for the Brown Hairstreak, its time to share some of my past pics of this butterfly. All of them from Noar Hill.









Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

Because its so unusual to find Brown Hairstreaks using a Beech Tree as a master tree, here is its picture. Just a regular, although mature Beech, but it does have Ash, Blackthorn and Hemp Agrimony adjacent. It is the highest tree in the immediate vicinity so perhaps its not that much of a surprise after all.



Re: ernie f

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

I've got a few of those type of Hairstreak shots Ernie 😊😊😊 Won't be long now until they're coming down proper 😊
With Ash die-back hopefully this switch to a different master tree will catch on 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 23-Jul-18 11:16 PM GMT

I'm sure there'll be plenty of Brown Hairstreaks this year to bring the curtain down on the season, ernie.

Looks like everything's set for them.

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 23-Jul-18 11:24 PM GMT

Those previous shots of Brostreaks are gorgeous, Ernie – may you have as much luck this year! Hope you're feeling 100% again now – the heat certainly gets to us.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Jul-18 07:22 AM GMT

Thanks, all.

Janet – I am feeling a little better now but even an hour in the sun is exhausting for me at the moment. Whenever I can I walk and stand in shade. I must have had a mild form of heatstroke but it kept me bedridden for almost a day.

David – I hope so too. This is the only place I will be going that I know has them, so I'm hoping for a bumper crop here this year.

Wurzel – It may be that all the Hairstreaks are trying out new "homes". So far this year I have seen Purple Hairstreaks on Ash, Green Hairstreaks on Sycamore and Brown Hairstreaks on Beech. Its a bit like that children's party game where they all walk around some chairs while music plays and when it stops they have to find a seat, but an adult has removed one of the chairs so one child cannot sit and so loses, .. etc, except this game is played with trees and butterflies! Of course I am trying to make a joke of something that is quite serious. I only learnt last week of a virus sweeping across Europe that is infecting and killing a whole variety of trees, including Oak! We have already had problems with our Chestnut trees around my way recently too.

Re: ernie f

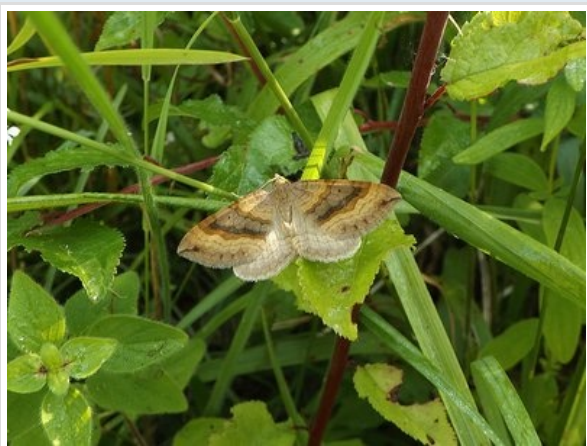
by ernie f, 24-Jul-18 03:21 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 24th July 2018

Today there were three male Brostreaks (thanks Janet for the name contraction) all flying at once on the Beech but none low down. (They only come down for Pauline at the moment). 😊

I can add Red Admiral and Small Heath to yesterday's roll-call of species. Whilst most of the summer nectaring flowers are blooming now, I was surprised how few butterflies there were. Only the Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper were getting into double figures. I did get there early so this may have been a factor but I left at 9.45 am and it was already 22 degrees.

This lovely moth stayed in the shade as much as possible. I think it is a Shaded Broad-bar but it has almost unbelievable clarity in its markings. All the times I have seen this species in the past, the patterning is far more evenly coloured. Maybe this is the first time I have seen a very fresh one. If I have the ID wrong – please let me know.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

This is I think the Robin's Pincushion Gall. I've seen this common Wasp Gall before at different places at Noar Hill but today, this one was in "The Scrape".



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-Jul-18 03:14 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 25th July 2018

I was here half an hour later than yesterday and the number of butterflies had more than doubled so coming early, even when its hot does seem to have an effect. Many won't have fully "woken-up". For example I saw 4 Holly Blues today, 8 Speckled Wood and the SW Frits and S&L Whites joined the Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers in double figures. I also got a Comma and a Peacock plus the usual Common Blues and Small Heaths. There were 2 Red Ads but one was very tatty with a large chunk out of one of its wings.

I didn't get any decent pics today so here is one from the past at around this time of year to compensate. I always like pics when at least three species are all represented at once but the opportunities don't present themselves that often. I did see all the species on this pic, just not all at the same time today.



There were still three male Brostreaks on the Beech Tree. One visited the tops of the Hazel that line the path here. There was another on an Ash beside the top gate into the reserve and another flitting around near but not in "The Triangle" so the total I have seen here this year so far is now five and numbers will continue to increase over the coming days I would hope.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

There won't be any butterflies here in late autumn and I won't be posting anything then so I thought I'd show a pic of what Noar Hill can look like then. Its still a lovely location.



Does this picture of approaching winter make you feel any cooler?

No, me neither!

Re: ernie f

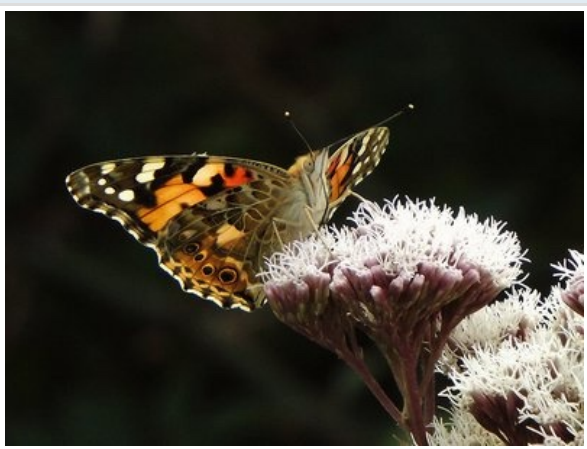
by ernie f, 26-Jul-18 02:56 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 26th July 2018

As per Pauline's recent posts I decided to visit Noar Hill in the early afternoon instead of the early morning to see if I could get lucky with Brostreaks on the ground. So I plastered myself with factor 50+ and took a broolly as a sunshade and when I got there...

... I saw not a single Brostreak, not even in the trees. This was between 12 noon and 1 pm and the temperature had already hit 31 degrees. I did see Pauline though. She had seen them earlier nectaring and was just about to leave.

Never mind – I thought I shall have a short walk into the reserve now I am here and I am so pleased I did because an absolutely pristine Painted Lady was nectaring from the Hemp Agrimony. She was there for a long time so I got 60 shots of her, of which I was able to ditch 30. Here is just a small sample from the photo-shoot.





Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

Well, what do you know. I have run-out of non-butterfly snapshots for Noar Hill, so I am going to bend my own rule a bit (the rule that says my pic should come from the place I visited) and instead cut across to the other side of the village of Selborne (where Noar Hill is situated) to the wonderful Selborne Lavender Farm. I have to drive by this place to get to Noar Hill. They recently had their open days. My wife and I have been to these twice in recent years, they are great fun, but this year it was just too hot and indeed only a week or so afterward, everything is turning to hay so these pics are historic, say within the last three years as far as I can remember.







Even I think the sunflower shot looks faked but it is not. This is exactly as it was on the day.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 26-Jul-18 10:57 PM GMT

Great stuff Ernie, lovely photoshoot 😊👍 I got my own PL as part of an epic day, something to look forward to reading about in the drear of October 😊
😊 I also saw a female Brostreak wing rubbing :)One to add to the list?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Jul-18 07:23 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. Yes – definitely one to add to the list.

I'll add your text to the "General" stream topic.

The list is getting to be quite a long one now. I am currently compiling a summary of it all which I shall post there at the end of the season.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 27-Jul-18 08:54 AM GMT

Terrific shots of the Painted Lady Ernie, I like your Brostreaks as well. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Jul-18 11:53 AM GMT

Thanks, Andrew. That Painted Lady was very accommodating – but I guess that is their nature! 😊
And as for Brostreaks...

Noar Hill – 27th July 2018, 8.00 am to 9.30 am

I did not get as far as the reserve proper today. I got as far as the first gate and just stood watching the Brown Hairstreak Master Beech. At one point there were four males in flight on the tree all at once. I wondered if any might come down (as you do), particularly I wondered if they would come to the ground. I saw a butterfly out of the corner of my eye. It landed! But it was a tatty old Ringleet. Then another came down. It was a Speckled Wood. Then a Silver-Washed Frit came to the ground, followed quickly by a Red Admiral, then two Meadow Browns landed. Everything was coming down to the ground – except those pesky Brostreaks!



A Vapourer Moth flew by, and then a Holly Blue, Small White and Gatekeeper. I contented myself with the antics of the male Brostreaks on the tree for a while when suddenly a female Brostreak landed right next to me on a low shrub and in plain view. She was absolutely spotless, straight out of the showroom and the sun was just at a perfect angle. I got some closed-wing shots and then she started to open her wings. Wow, the upper-side colours were just as vibrant as the underside in the sunlight.



Then she started to flit. I thought that was it for me as far as close-up shots were concerned but no, she flitted down to the ground and stayed there for at least 5 minutes allowing me to get as close as I dared for pics.





Eventually she did push off and I didn't see her again. I was well chuffed but things had not yet finished. One of the males came down off the Beech tree to the precise spot she had vacated a moment before and zig-zagged back and forth no more than an inch above the ground almost as if he had been attracted by her scent where she landed. It may have been that as she was licking salts from the ground, she was also scenting the vicinity under the tree. The male quickly realised she was no longer there and zipped back up to the tree again.

10 minutes of Brostreak bliss!

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 27-Jul-18 10:56 PM GMT

Fantastic Brostreaks Ernie 🤔👍 Open wings might be a premium this year with this heat as I can't see any of the the butterflies needing to bask 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Jul-18 11:44 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. I think you might be right. However there is a brief temperature dip over the next few days so maybe we will get lucky.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Jul-18 01:19 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 28th July 2018



Well we finally had a thunderstorm in the night after many weeks of dry days. It was bright by 8 am although a cool 13 degrees and it was very breezy. It was the breeze rather than the temperature I think that was stopping it being a hairstreaky day. I saw one male Brostreak flitting about on the Master Beech but only the once. I was beside this Beech twice, once outgoing at 8.30 am and again on my return around 10 am when the temperature had by then increased to 17 degrees. In the meantime I had persevered across most of the reserve but no others came out. Instead it turned out to be a Common Blue day. There were quite a few but I only really saw them when I flushed them from cover as I walked by.





I saw one female with whitish patches on the upper-sides of her wings. There was no symmetry to these patches. She did not appear to be old so I do not think it was a fade-out due to her longevity. I checked the list of ab's and it was not amongst them. It was probably just some kind of scale deformity but it was quite distinctive in the field - more so than is apparent in the pictures I managed to get of her.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

The Noar Hill fruits are starting to show now. What's your tippie, Gin or Cider?



But its better to stay clear of this one.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 29-Jul-18 09:14 AM GMT

In answer to your question Ernie, and a very important question it is, both 😊 Those irregular white or pale patches are often put down as 'pathological' Ernie 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Jul-18 05:22 PM GMT

It seems a reasonable all-encompassing catchment category for the effect. Thanks Wurzel. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Jul-18 05:33 PM GMT

Summary of forum entries on the wing-roll topic as of 29th July 2018

Its a wet day all day today so I thought I would trawl through the entries people have made regarding the wing roll behaviour of the Lycaenidae family and create a summary to date. I wish to keep this summary as short as possible while maximising the ability for people to comment, debate points, add more observations and thoughts and conclusions over time, so everything here is by numbered list. Please feel free to make a comment or addition on any of the sections below:

1. Name of a species that you see wing-rolling
2. Field observations of the activity
3. Specific ideas as to its purpose
4. General thoughts on wing-rolling

This summary is copied to both my own PD and the general topic section called: Wing-roll behaviour of some members of the Lycaenidae family

Please add your comments and additions under the general topic so it keeps things neat and in one place. Thanks.

1. Wing-rolling Species list

I have not seen all these species do it but others on this forum have reported they have.

1.1 UK

1. Small Blue
2. Large Blue
3. Holly Blue
4. Common Blue
5. Adonis Blue
6. Chalkhill Blue
7. Brown Argus
8. Northern Brown Argus
9. Purple Hairstreak
10. Green Hairstreak
11. White-letter Hairstreak
12. Brown Hairstreak
13. Small Copper

1.2 Elsewhere

1. Common Posy
2. Blue-spot Hairstreak
3. Ilex Hairstreak (both species)
4. Long-tailed Blue
5. Lang's Bronze
6. Geranium Bronze
7. Sooty Copper
8. Dusky Large Blue

2. Observations

1. Some species do it only with wings closed (eg Green Hairstreak), others with wings open or closed or even ajar (eg Silver-studded Blue). I have seen a single individual SSB do a wing roll with wings closed then moving to do it with wings open.
2. Some species who have tails are known to wing-roll (eg White-letter Hairstreak), others without tails also wing-roll (eg Small Blue).
3. Both males and females do it.
4. Whilst wing-rolling can occur while the butterfly is doing something else such as nectaring they also do it when they apparently are doing nothing but perching.
5. They will do it while perched on something or simply standing on the ground.
6. I have not seen them do it while roosting, egg-laying or mating.
7. Butterflies of all ages do it. I have seen a newly emerged SSB and a faded old SSB do a wing-roll.
8. The frequency of wing-rolling can be slow (almost leisurely) or fast (with some vigour).
9. They are more likely to wing-roll when first perching after flight (but they can and do perform it at other times).
10. I saw one SSB do a wing roll for 40 seconds and then he stopped for at least 5 minutes. In that time I did not approach and I could see no other external "cause". Of course that does not mean there was not one.
11. They wing-roll in sun or when it is overcast.
12. Sometimes the wings open slightly at the apex of the roll.
13. The front wings of SSBs can part as well as the rear ones when wing-rolling but they keep the rest of their body as still as possible.

3. Ideas (Open Brainstorm - no analysis, other than to arrange into groups of similar ideas)

1. Predator distraction/redirection/audible or visual warning (not just birds, but dragonflies, lizards, mantids, spiders, etc)
2. Agitation
3. Wing flexing/Improving agility in flight
4. Itching/preening/cleaning/scale alignment/scale roughening/parasite removal
5. Keeping balance
6. Greeting/mate attraction/ant (or other symbiote) attraction
7. Enjoyment/pleasure

4. Thoughts of forum members (Open Brainstorm - no debate)

1. Perhaps all butterflies with tails in this family also wing-rolled but some evolved to lose their tails.
2. Perhaps there are two evolutionary tracks, one developing tails, the other developing wing-rolls and some developed both.
3. When and for how long and what frequency wing-rolling is performed could be dependent on how "safe" a butterfly thinks it is - how much risk it is under.
4. When and for how long and what frequency wing-rolling is performed could be dependent on how much or how little energy it has at the time.
5. There appears to be less wing-rolling going on when there are more individuals in a given area, perhaps wing-rolling activity decreases as population density increases. Safety in numbers may be a factor which regulates the activity.
6. Keeping still might be a better predator evasion technique than moving wings.

I have purposefully not got a section on debate yet as I feel I am still in an information-capture stage.

Best Regards to you all,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 31-Jul-18 01:09 PM GMT

Longmoor - 31st July 2018



The "Irish Harp" Tree

Here for the second time this year for the Grayling and this time I was successful. I counted 8 in total of which 6 were in a group around the trees growing out of the Bronze-Age burial barrow.



Bronze Age barrow

Six in one place is good because I could see the inter-actions between them. The males were doing quite a bit of sparring, three were at it all at once, but I saw no courting or mating here this time as I have spoken of on a previous occasion.

This is the first year I have seen Grayling perch on tree trunks. I first saw it at Folly Hill recently, but here at Longmoor they were doing it all the time. In fact it was what appeared to be their favourite type of perch point. When on the ground, you can walk up to be within about a foot of them, then they spook and fly off, but somehow they may believe they are safer on the trees because I was able to get within a couple of inches of them. Indeed in these circumstances they would let me get as close as I liked with my camera.





The downside of today was that one of the other Grayling communities that has been here in recent years seems to have died out. Only as recently as 4th Aug 2015 I counted 14 in total at Longmoor because of this extra group and a couple of extra singletons. On the same transect today on the 31st July 2018, the numbers are almost half of that.

Also saw 6 Common Blue which is odd because I have never seen them here before, plus 2 Speckled Wood, 1 Red Ad, 1 Silver-Y and loads of Gatekeeper.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

I have only ever seen the Bog Bush Cricket once in my life and it was here at Longmoor a few years back.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 31-Jul-18 07:44 PM GMT

Perhaps they were on the trees because the ground was boiling hot (I've heard reports of dogs getting burnt feet over the last week or two) and that could explain why they were easier to approach, they were cooler? Just a thought...Great set of shots either way, it's nice to see the whole butterfly without grass, gorse or other plant material in view 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Aug-18 02:25 PM GMT

Interesting idea Wurzel. It would certainly explain why so many are up in the trees. I think I have counted 6 doing this now this year.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Aug-18 05:53 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 1st Aug 2018



Back to being hot again (around 24 degrees) and the butterflies were enjoying it because it was not 31 degrees! I must say I agree with them.

I spent three hours here today, my bout of heat-stroke well and truly over now. My count of Brostreaks increased. I saw 12 today, double my previous daily record (set in 2016). 4 were on the beech tree (seen already recently), 6 were in the triangle (one seen near here recently) and two were in the top pit (new location for me). If I work it out that means I have now seen 14 individuals here so far this year and that figure doubles my annual record count of 7 (set in 2017).

Not only that but I met Nick a couple of days ago and he said he saw another two on the Ash trees beside the Scrape, so there are certainly more than this flying at Noar Hill at the moment.

Four of the ones I saw today came down to nectar on the Hemp Agrimony. One in the top pit and three in the Triangle. At one point I had two nectaring within my field of view at the same time and while I was taking their pictures, a Holly Blue came down to within about a metre of one of them and a Silver Washed Frit landed to within a few inches of me. I almost didn't know where to point my camera (well I did really - the Brostreak, but you know what I mean).



In flight





Up close and personal

The numbers of individual butterflies and number of species has increased in recent days. There are now so many S&L&GV Whites no matter where I was on the reserve there was always at least one nearby.



There were still a lot of Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper but only one Ringlet. There were 5 Red Ads, 3 Painted Ladies, 3 Comma, 4 Speckled Wood, 2 Holly Blue, 1 Peacock and 1 old, tatty Large Skipper still hanging on.





Common Blues were in profusion, but only 2 Small Heath. Also plentiful Silver-Y and Mint moth.

There were also rather a lot of Silver-washed Frits and some of them were reasonably fresh-looking. One pair were doing a courtship spiral flight.

Given all this was going on I was actually surprised I did not see any Clouded Yellows as they are a regular visitor to Noar Hill at this time of year.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Even though the relentless sun has beaten down on this reserve for some weeks parts are still a riot of colour from the variety of plants flowering now. I particularly like the Campanulas (e.g. Clustered Bellflower, Harebell and Nettle-leaved Bellflower).



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 01-Aug-18 08:55 PM GMT

Cracking Brostreaks Ernie 🤔👍 At this time of year when it comes to choosing which species to focus on always go for the Brostreak 😊😁
A Large Skipper still hanging on in there 😊 fair play to the old timer he's giving hope to many 😊😁

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 02-Aug-18 07:10 AM GMT

You are having a great time with the Brown Hairstreak, Ernie. 😊
Great images too. So far they are playing hard to get for me.
When I do find one, I will have photographed every UK Hairstreak species, and all of them in Sussex !.

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Aug-18 07:51 AM GMT

Wurzel – Thanks. Yep its Brostreak every time when deciding what pic to take – you get so little opportunity to see them down low for such a long while. I have come across an odd "rule-of-thumb" when it comes to retaining butterfly pictures. For me at least. The number of pics I have of a butterfly species is inversely proportional to its rarity. I have only a few pics of the Large White but loads and loads of the Brown Hairstreak!!! I think it must have something to do with making the most of the opportunity of picture taking when it arrives by taking loads of shots and then back home, being very reluctant to get rid of any – even if the images are almost identical!

Trevor – Hope you get a decent pic of one this year to "complete the set" of Hairstreaks in Sussex. Its not something I can do in Hampshire (unless someone finds a Black Hairstreak colony here too). 😊

Best Regards,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Aug-18 07:57 AM GMT

Wurzel – or is it proportional to its rarity?!? I may have built-in a double negative in my choice of words. Never mind – you catch my drift I hope.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Aug-18 04:25 PM GMT

Old Winchester Hill – 2nd Aug 2018



If I had to choose the best month to visit Old Winchester Hill it would have to be August and today was one of those amazing days. Firstly the Chalkhill Blues are out at peak around now. There must have been over 1,500 of them – the hillside shimmered blue. There were also quite a few females, eight of which I saw mating in the 2 hours I was there. As usual when it gets to this stage, the males fight over females whether or not they are already mating.



Mating face-to-face



Mating back-to-back



Mating face-to-back



Mating wings-open



2nd male pushing in on mating pair



Ditto

I was wondering if I was perhaps a bit early for Silver-spotted Skippers but no, I found two and one posed for a picture probably because he was otherwise engaged in supping from dung. This was my first of the year.



At the bottom of the hill, Chalkhill Blues gave way to Common Blues to some extent and while many were full-size, a great number were miniscule, half the size of the Chalkhill Blues and pretty much the size of a Small Blue, both mini male and mini females were seen. You can't really tell from the pictures below as there is no reference point to judge but these were mini ones.



Then came the Clouded Yellows, three in total, 2 standard and 1 "helice". It was the helice I saw first and got the pic of. The standard ones just would not stay still. When it flew, I could see the upper-sides of the helice wings, a light creamy yellow, almost white – but with two very noticeable orange patches on its hind-wings. I don't know which type I prefer, they are both beautiful in their own way. Again my first spot of this species this year.



I came across a pair of butterfly wings, I presume Chalkhill Blue, just laying beside the path. I have heard that dragonflies chew off the wings of butterflies before flying off with the body. Could this be the remnant of such a dastardly deed?



Also seen today were Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, S&L White, Brimstone, Red Ad, Painted Lady, Brown Argus and Small Heath. However no Adonis Blues as yet.

To round off a wonderful morning, a Hummingbird Hawkmoth visited a number of Dwarf Thistles right beside the path and I managed to get a rare, half-decent photo of it (rare for me that is).



Since this is my first spot of the year for both Silver-spotted Skippers AND Clouded Yellows, as usual I shall post some recent past pics.







... and past helice shots.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Late Summer flowers in the south downs around here means the "big three": that is the Carline Thistle, the Autumn Gentian and the Autumn Ladies Tresses. This site has all three in profusion but only the former of these was blooming at present. The other two cannot be too far behind now, maybe a couple of weeks or so.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 02-Aug-18 10:00 PM GMT

Cracking stuff Ernie especially the Helice, I've still not seen one of those! 😄🇩🇪🇩🇪 I've not seen butterflies in that position when mating before, they invariably 'back up' to one another, to be honest I didn't know where to look 🤔😅😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Aug-18 07:49 AM GMT

Wurzel – I have only seen the helice twice, last year and this – both times in exactly the same spot and at around the same time of year. Quite a coincidence.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 03-Aug-18 10:01 AM GMT

Fantastic shots ernie, 🇩🇪🇩🇪 you've got just what I was looking for the SSS and missed, also I've never seen a Brown HS yet and your open wing shots are great 😄 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Aug-18 12:47 PM GMT

Goldie – Thanks for your comments. I am really lucky in that one of my closest nature reserves is so good for brown hairstreaks, which means I can return again and again whenever I want. If I don't see them one day, there is always the next.

Best Regards,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Aug-18 01:08 PM GMT

Folly Hill – 3rd Aug 2018



The realm of the Grayling

Today it was back to Grayling. I wanted to see if I could beat my previous annual record for this species, so I explored another part of Folly Hill heath where I had seen them in previous years and sure enough there they were. I counted 11 today which increased my tally for this location this year to 26 and my annual total this year to 34. These figures break my location and annual records by a fair margin so I am well pleased. The numbers were boosted because I found a small colony in the proximity of the picture above.

Even at 10 am it was a hot 24 degrees and crept up to 27 degrees by the time I left at 11.15 am. I was exhausted in the heat and it was noticeable that the Grayling sought out shade wherever possible. When they were in the sun however, they often arranged themselves long-ways on to the direction of the sun to minimise exposure. Clever.



Ripped wing showing top of other wing beneath



In the shade – can you spot it?



Also seen today: 1 Small Copper doing a stem dance on thin grass stalks, many Common Blue – one was a “mini” ab and another was up in a tree doing a wing-roll, plus S&L White, MB&G, Small Heath and 8 Specklies.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Folly Hill has a few patches of ground that are suitable for Bilberry. Its not everywhere and I did not see any today because I did not visit those areas but its about the right time of year for the fruit I think, if the heat hasn't desiccated them that is.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 03-Aug-18 06:52 PM GMT

Found it! 😊 Great set of Grayling shots Ernie 😊 My only view of the upperside of a Grayling is from the one which I found with damaged wings although the best way is to find a courting couple...

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Aug-18 01:24 PM GMT

Glad you found the Grayling shading itself Wurzel. If I had not seen it fly down there I would never have seen it just as I walked by. Their camouflage works in so many situations.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Aug-18 04:33 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 4th Aug 2018



The Triangle – prime Brostreak country

Only two Brown Hairstreaks seen today but one male came down quite low and opened his wings.



And this pic is from a couple of days ago that I forgot to post at the time.



There were plenty of other butterflies as usual. Today I got some fair pics of Small Heath, Meadow Brown and a pair of courting SW Frits although these were getting a bit long in the tooth to be getting so frisky.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

But I got a bit side-tracked off butterflies today. I met a guy who told me he was surveying the Violet Helleborine, an orchid I thought to be extinct here at Noar Hill. How wrong I was. He was kind enough to lead me to where they were. We counted six, mostly gone-over but one was in full bloom. So this is Noar Hill's orchid number 11. Here is a not very good pic of the one in full bloom - it was very shady under the Beech hanger where they grow.



It was very small, but there was also a multiple-stemmed one there although its blooms had dropped. He told me that they take about 15 years to establish themselves before they put up a flower spike and then in subsequent years, if the conditions are right, they will put up a further spike from the same root stock every year. He said he had a record of one with 35 flower spikes, making it at least 50 years old!

I found one at nearby Four Marks a couple of years ago that had 18 flower spikes. Picture below.



Difficult to believe that something that can grow to be that big, starts off like this...



I also checked the Four Marks one with multiple spikes today to find it was way behind the ones at Noar Hill. It was only about four inches high and only in bud. Maybe it will be out in full in two weeks or so.

He also confirmed that no-one had seen the Greater Butterfly Orchid bloom at Noar Hill for over 8 years but nevertheless showed me where it once grew so I could check on it whenever I wanted. Because Mike (Oxon) of this forum recently told me that orchids can lie dormant for many years before blooming again when the situation is right - I thought it may be still there just waiting its moment. I'd like to be there when its "moment" arrives.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 04-Aug-18 08:06 PM GMT

Lovely shots of the Brostreaks Ernie 😊 I was out at Shipton again today and didn't see any females - where are they? I'd be expecting to be seeing mainly females no with the odd, old tattered male? 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Aug-18 07:23 AM GMT

Thanks again Wurzel.

I don't know the answer to your question. Most of the ones I have seen are male and as yet, mostly fresh ones.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Aug-18 12:11 PM GMT

Oxenbourne Down - 5th Aug 2018



Another chalkhill reserve not far from me - at this time of year the speciality is Silver-spotted Skipper. I came here early hoping they would be a little more lethargic and stay still for close-up pics. One was quite obliging but didn't really want to open its wings for me.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Last year almost to the day I saw this Hawthorn Shield bug here.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 05-Aug-18 11:50 PM GMT

Silver-spots are the cutest butterflies I reckon Ernie - like little Teddy bears 😊 I've not been to Oxenbourne before so it's useful to see what the place looks like 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Aug-18 12:53 PM GMT

Wurzel – Oxenbourne is a beautiful location but its a shame that the main road runs along one side at the base of the hill. It can get a bit noisy in places.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Aug-18 01:05 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 6th Aug 2018

I cannot with all honesty say I saw any Brostreaks here today. There were a couple of false alarms due to Vaporers moths and even Holly Blues. I saw three Brostreaks yesterday but they were all far flung from each other. I think I am witnessing the end of the Brostreak flight period here. I saw my first here this year on the 23rd July and today its the 6th August – that's only 14 days! In all that time I only saw one that I could positively confirm to be a female. It's all a bit worrying for next year.

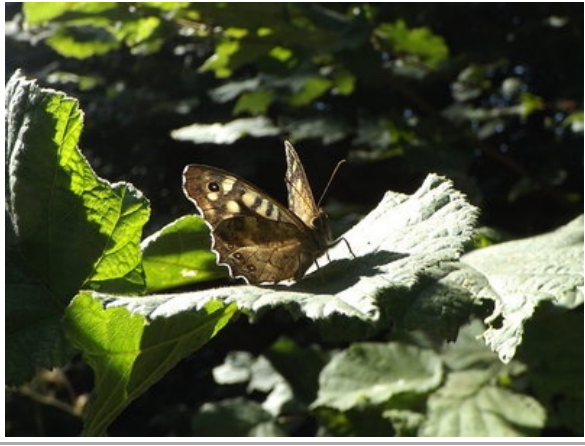
Most of the Noar Hill butterfly species are in decline now – many of those that remain are old and tatty. Surprisingly there was even a Small Skipper around although a mere "ghost" of its former self. Someone else posted that description recently and I liked it. It's so apt in this case.



There were a few tidy Small Heaths and a pristine Painted Lady but really the butterfly that was the most prolific and in the best condition was the Common Blue. I only visited one small part of the reserve and was not really counting but I must have seen over 50 of them. Given the size of the reserve compared to the bit I visited, there could have been as many as 300 in total.



I counted 7 Speckled Wood along the dappled shade of the entrance track.



And a first for me, a Magpie moth.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

So many plants are going over now but some do so with panache. I am pretty certain these are the seed-heads of Traveller's Joy.



And what's this? A herald of autumn in a shady oak and beech copse beside the Triangle while its still over 30 degrees in full sun? A bolete, most likely the Rooting Bolete.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Aug-18 01:23 PM GMT

Or it could be the Sepia Bolete. The Sepia cracks on top but the Rooting has a yellow stipe or stem. Both have yellow pores that bruise blue but the sepia bruises a darker blue. This one was starting to crack on top and bruised dark greenish blue but it had a yellow stipe. I'll I have to flip a coin with the ID on this one... 😊

Re: ernie f

by David M, 06-Aug-18 11:40 PM GMT

Those are very 'frank' images, ernie, showing evidence of a season that's fast coming to its end.

Things generally are starting to look a little worn now, underlining my belief that August is progressively becoming an autumn month (given that February, or at least the second half of it, is now a bona fide spring month).

I **do** hope some species will fit in an additional brood this year, giving us all one last audience with fresh specimens around late September/early October.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Aug-18 11:43 AM GMT

David – Lots of summer insects appear to be struggling. I met a guy who mentioned he had not seen many grasshoppers or ladybirds this year and come to think of it, neither have I. Some – but not heaps.

However on a more positive note, others on this forum are still seeing Brostreaks and females egg-laying so its not all over for them yet as I feared. I shall give it another bash at Noar Hill over the next few days.

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 07-Aug-18 01:41 PM GMT

Great Brostreak pics Ernie, I've had very few encounters myself. I also like your Graylings and Clouded Yellows. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Aug-18 05:26 PM GMT

Thanks Andrew – Its been a good year for me so far with a lot of quite lucky moments.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Aug-18 05:38 PM GMT

Old Winchester Hill – 7th Aug 2018

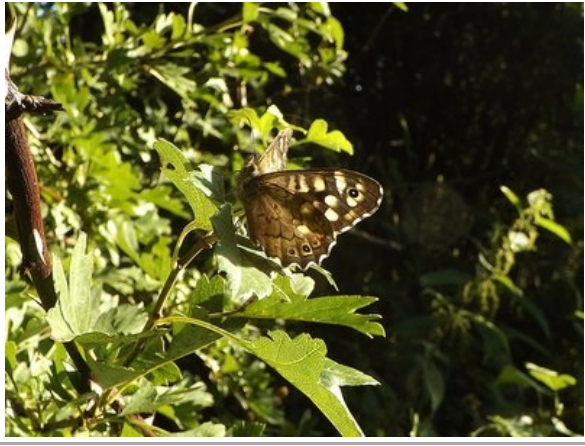
Parts of this reserve are now looking very parched indeed. This is a patch of gorse!



I was here a few days ago when I saw 3 Clouded Yellow and 1 Silver-spotted Skipper. Today my fortunes mysteriously reversed with sightings of 3 Silver-spotted Skipper and only 1 Clouded Yellow. The multitude of Chalkhill Blues were still there, as were the Common Blue, Small White, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Silver Y and even the Hummingbird Hawkmoth again.

Still no 2nd brood Adonis Blues though.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Old Winchester Hill can have some amazing skies. I snapped this here last year. I think they are called Cirrocumulus clouds. Whatever they were, they were quite stunning.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 07-Aug-18 08:14 PM GMT

Lovely shot of the SSS Ernie 😊 Interesting that further West at Broughton Down I saw several 2nd brood Adonis yesterday. Usually the west is somewhat behind the east of the country when it comes to emergences 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Aug-18 08:02 AM GMT

Wurzel. I must admit I have never seen a 2nd brood Adonis at Old Winch until the second week of August but thought since other forum members were having luck elsewhere the Adonis's might be here early – but no. Unless of course I have been extremely unlucky.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Aug-18 04:44 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 8th Aug 2018

I found another new Brostreak today. This was yet another male and was actually fairly fresh, having no nicks or abrasions. It was nectaring on the Hemp Agrimony half way down the first bridlepath between the lay-by and the last gate into the reserve. This brings my annual total to 16. There is a slight risk of double-counting with the one I saw a week ago by the last gate but this one's relative freshness makes me take that risk. Unfortunately I had already seen 12 Speckled Woods and when I first saw this I assumed it was another one but to check I got in too close, too quickly and it flew off just as I was able to ID it properly so no picture.

I met Hazel while there and together we trawled the area around the Traingle for more Brostreaks but without success.

There was the usual line-up of species but I was surprised to find a fresh Meadow Brown and a fresh Gatekeeper. A female Small White was raising her abdomen up in front of a male to ward off his sexual advances (Thanks to Bugboy for letting me know a while ago what that behaviour meant).



There were a few Common Blue "minis" – including this amazingly petite female. It looks big 'cos it's so very close of course.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

A little while back I tried to tempt you with Gin and Cider. Now its time to try my lovely home-made Elderberry wine. Yummy! 😊



Re: ernie f

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

Judging by the background vegetation that is a real minimum butterfly 🤔😄 The Elderberry wine sounds delectable Ernie 😊😄🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

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

Thanks for your feedback, ernie, and yes, it does look parched by you, so hopefully you'll catch a bit of the heavy rain forecast so that the colour green can belatedly return to your landscape.

I'll keep my eyes out for further Brown Hairstreak news.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Aug-18 12:18 PM GMT

Wurzel – There are a lot of mini Common Blues around but this was one of the smallest I have ever seen.

Dave – Yep – got that rain at last – its been coming down most of the day but no big thunderstorms. Don't have to water the garden for a few days now. 😊

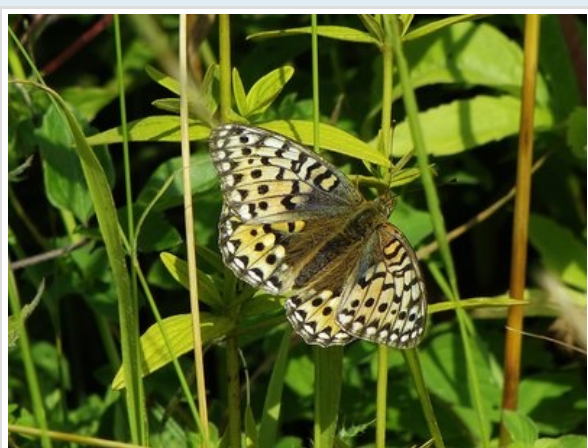
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Aug-18 03:53 PM GMT

So, much needed rain today here in Hampshire but of course it limits going out butterflying. Instead I decided to tidy up my pictures and delete a few as I was running the risk of busting my back-up hard-drive limit!

I got to the folder containing my Dark Green Fritillary pics and found two from a few years ago that I had labelled as aged butterflies as they were a bit faded out. But I got to wondering, could they instead be of an ab – perhaps "pallida"?

Here are the pics...



Does anyone have a view? Are they of an ab or is it just fading due to old age? Thanks in advance.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 09-Aug-18 08:21 PM GMT

Interesting shots Ernie 😊 It's a tricky one as they do fade with age but the margins are only very slightly worn, there's a good covering of hair on the thorax and abdomen and no noticeable tears or damage to the wings which you see with aged and tired DGFs. I'd be inclined to go for an ab with this one 😊👍 but then others might not agree. It would get my vote 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 09-Aug-18 10:26 PM GMT

Playing catch-up again Ernie – and I noticed your mini Common Blue. I have seen several really tiny butterflies this year and was wondering if it has to do with the extreme hot weather or if they happen anyway.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 09-Aug-18 11:14 PM GMT

Is there such a thing as *semi-pallida*?

They DO have a symmetrically washed-out look, but whether that qualifies them as an ab I'm not sure.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 10-Aug-18 02:00 PM GMT

Hi! ernie, I was at Southport yesterday and was surprised at the size of some of the Common Blues they were so tiny Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Aug-18 03:32 PM GMT

Wurzel, David – Re the DGF. I have looked on this website's abs and on the specialised website for UK aberrant butterflies and I admit to being no wiser. It looks a bit like the photos shown but mine does not appear to have a green wing edge.

Janet, Goldie – Re Small Butterflies. I guess it must be the long spell of heat that has caused it. Just when I think I have seen the smallest Common Blue I have ever seen, a few days later I see one even smaller! Just how small can they get I wonder?

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Aug-18 05:56 PM GMT

I have been waiting in for a delivery today and by coincidence it rained most of the day so I wouldn't have had a great time butterflying anyway.

Instead I continued my trawl of old pics. Today I thought that I would collate some I took before I got into butterflies. I came across this one from a photo I took over 10 years ago with an analogue optical camera. I had to scan it in.

Do you recognise it?



Yes, correct – it's a Mourning Cloak. I saw it while I was in America.

I have never seen a Camberwell Beauty in the UK and its unlikely I ever will, so this is the only pic I am ever likely to get of this species.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 10-Aug-18 07:40 PM GMT

That's much better than my shot Ernie 🤩🤩🤩



Have a goodun

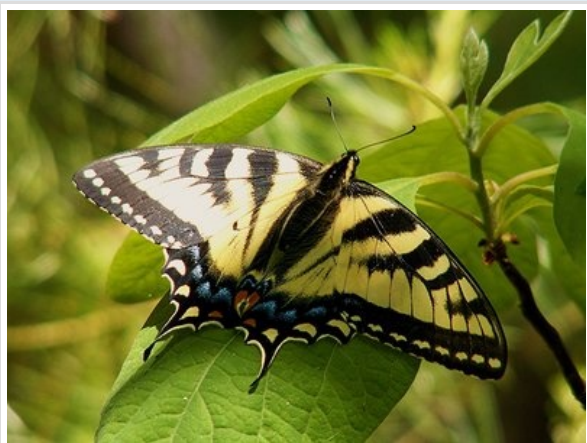
Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Aug-18 10:18 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. Of course at the time I didn't know for sure what I was taking a picture of. I knew about some of the UK butterflies of course and had heard of the Camberwell Beauty but you don't expect to see the same species in a country so far away (even if it was on the east coast of the USA).

In a similar vein – I have also never seen the British race of the European Swallowtail. But during my last visit to America in 2006 I got these pics...



These are of the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. Not precisely the same species as ours but not far off by the look of it. 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 11-Aug-18 11:18 AM GMT

That is a very similar looking butterfly to 'our' Swallowtail Ernie 😊🍀 I haven't got one of those to match 😊🍀

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Aug-18 03:23 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 11th Aug 2018

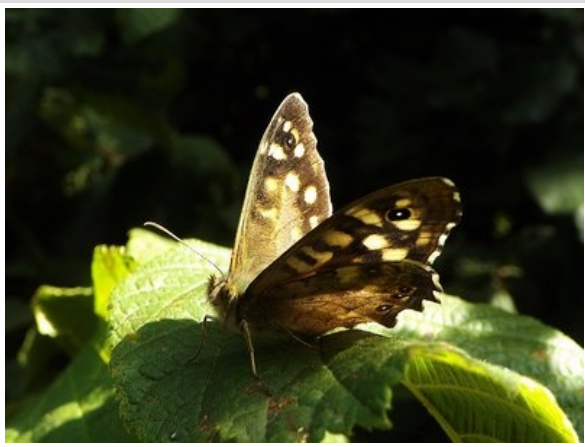
If I thought the end of the Brown Hairstreak season had finished early at Noar Hill I could not have been more wrong. I visited again today and found an absolutely fine, fresh female (only my second here this year). She landed on the hedgerow beside the last entrance gate to the reserve. Blackthorn is one feature of this hedgerow and although she was not actually egg-laying in any of the pics I took of her, nevertheless she must have been thinking about it.





This brings my total at Noar Hill this year to 17; increasing my personal annual record for this species.

Also one of the many Speckled Woods allowed me to get within a couple of cm of its face with a camera.



Also seen - Red Ad, L&S&GV White, MB&G, Small Heath, Common Blues still in abundance after the rain of the last two days and four Holly Blue (3m+1f). Plus Mint Moth and a Carpet Moth of some kind. No pics.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The Hazelnuts are just starting to ripen at Noar Hill now.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 11-Aug-18 10:23 PM GMT

That's great news Ernie and great shots too 😊👍 I was wondering when the ladies were going to make a showing 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 12-Aug-18 11:45 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, 🍷🍷 I've yet to see the Brown Hair Streak although I've seen their eggs, does that count 🤔🤔 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 12-Aug-18 04:02 PM GMT

Wow Ernie – those Brown Hairstreak pics are stunning! 🍷🍷

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Aug-18 05:31 PM GMT

Thanks, Janet, Goldie and Wurzel.

I am having a bit of difficulty with my camera after dropping it. It seems to want to focus off-centre so now I have to compensate by moving my camera off target, focussing and then moving back on target. Its annoying, but it was the way I got these latest brostreak shots.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Aug-18 05:36 PM GMT

Another day not butterflying. Persistent showers and drizzle for the most part. So here is a past pic of another American butterfly that can sometimes be found in the UK. Yet again I took this in the USA.



The Monarch

Re: ernie f

by David M, 13-Aug-18 06:36 AM GMT

Monarchs, Camberwells and Swallowtails! You sure know how to make the most of a drizzly day, ernie!

Good to see fresh looking Brown Hairstreaks in action. If only the weather would clear up in south Wales I'd go and track some down myself.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Aug-18 05:36 PM GMT

David – I am sure the weather will improve where you are soon. Its still summer – kind-of.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Aug-18 05:56 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 13th August 2018

It was a bit overcast when I went out today but I wanted to try out my new camera, the Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ72 – getting used to its controls, settings and features. It has the ability to optically zoom by x120 and of course this is novel for me so I keep pushing the camera to its extreme. As a result many of my pics came out blurred because the anti-shake device was not capable of handling it on its own. I don't have a tripod and don't intend to get one either so I must remember to keep the zoom reined in!!

Enough about that though. I did get some fair shots today, including one I have been hankering for some while – an open-wing 2nd brood female Holly Blue.



Some others that weren't perfect but didn't come out too blurred which I am sure I can improve on over time.





I also saw a female Brown Hairstreak being chased off by a male Common Blue. No pic of it though. It was close to where I saw a female the other day and was probably the same one.

And this moth. I think its a Mocha but it has a greener tinge to it than the picture in my book.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

A Buzzard in silhouette just before it flew off.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 13-Aug-18 06:54 PM GMT

Looks like your really getting to grips with the new gear Ernie 😊 Cracking close up shot of the SWF 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-Aug-18 03:22 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. There are so many settings on this new camera it will take some time to suss it all out.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 14-Aug-18 03:36 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 14th August 2018

More experimentation with the new camera today. Not everything I tried worked (well you wouldn't expect it to) but some things did.

Got a nice crop of the regular butterflies...





And a Clouded Yellow passed though and stopped off at a few blooms momentarily – just enough time to rattle off a couple of shots.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The Autumn Gentian is starting to flower now, there are quite a few in fact, mostly in a combination of bud and bloom.



Re: ernie f

by trevor, 14-Aug-18 06:03 PM GMT

Well done with the Clouded Yellow, Ernie. I've not seen one yet this year. But the UK bred specimens sometimes extend my season into November !.

Great stuff,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Aug-18 10:16 AM GMT

Trevor - Thanks. I'm still trying to improve my focussing ability with this new camera..
Re the Clouded Yellow - yes there is plenty of time left to track them down.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Aug-18 01:56 PM GMT

Noar Hill - 15h Aug 2018

Overcast but warm at 20 degrees with a slight breeze. As the butterfly season winds down at Noar Hill, many of the butterflies are faded, nibbled and tired-looking. Most Common Blues had some kind of wear and a fair number of the Meadow Browns and Whites likewise. I only saw one Gatekeeper after a period of plenty.

The exceptions to the wear-and-tear rule-of-thumb seem to be the Speckled Woods and the Small Heaths which are still going strong (of course the Speckled Woods have a lot of mileage in them yet). I was re-setting my camera when I noticed two Small Heaths fly past me and down onto the ground. I didn't realise what I was looking at until it was all over a few seconds later, but one held its wings open and flat on the ground and then juddered before zooming off once more. I guessed this was a female rejecting a male although I have never seen this before so cannot be sure. No pics of it though unfortunately.

Did get another Painted Lady and also a Small Tortoiseshell (not seen one of these since spring). These were both reasonably fresh.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Yesterday I mentioned that the Autumn Gentian are beginning to bloom at Noar Hill. I have been visiting Noar Hill getting on for 15 years and until today I have never seen a white one here.



This is only my second ever time of having seen one anywhere. The first one was at Old Winchester Hill a couple of years ago. At that location you can see upwards of 10,000 normal purple Autumn Gentian on a single slope of the hill. Looks like its a 1 in 10,000 chance of finding one and yet here it was again today at Noar Hill. For me its been almost as good a year for wild flowers as it has for butterflies.

Re: ernie f

by Old Wolf, 15-Aug-18 10:16 PM GMT

The Buzzard silhouette picture is brilliant. Love it 🍷

You seem to getting to grips with the new camera very quickly 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Aug-18 10:45 PM GMT

Thanks, Old Wolf. The new camera takes a bit of getting used to. For example I have only just figured out how to force the flash in daylight to front-light a backlit subject. Also the buttons look the same in many ways as my old camera but the functions are switched round in some cases so I am constantly pressing the "wrong" button and cursing when the butterfly flies off without having its picture taken first! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Aug-18 11:11 AM GMT

Broxhead - 15th August 2018



In the afternoon it was still mainly overcast but the sun peeped through on occasion. Broxhead Heath was festooned with heather in full bloom, including Bell Heather, plus the Sheep's Sorrel had sprouted green leaves. If the Small Copper larvae has survived the hot spell we may get a good late brood flying here – fingers crossed. By my estimation we still have about three weeks to wait before it kicks off, if indeed it does at all.

At Noar Hill I only spotted one Gatekeeper. Where did they all go? It was Broxhead! There were still quite a few here in sheltered spots but they were all quite faded on top by now. The undersides were sharper though.



There was also a single Small White, a single Common Blue, a Meadow Brown and two Speckled Wood – so very low numbers altogether.

However I did see what I think is a Peacock moth even though my book says they only fly in May–June and this is mid–August! Do they have a second brood I wonder?



Non–butterfly Snapshot of the day

The tree branches here can be covered with lichen. The picture below is one amazing example I found two years ago during the time of the Small Copper boom here but I espied many different types today in the birch and oak copse en–route to the Small Copper lek.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Aug-18 04:21 PM GMT

Old Winchester Hill - 17th Aug 2018

The main target today was the 2nd brood Adonis. At this time of year though it is common to find Adonis, Chalkhill, SS Skip and Clouded Yellow all in the same place at the bottom of the hill below the car park and indeed this is just what happened today. I counted 27 male Adonis Blues on my way down the hill between 9 and 10 am but on my return along the same track between 10 and 11 am I only spotted three! However my return trip was solidly along the path - I did not go "off-piste". This tells me that to see the numbers you have to wander off the path on occasion.







I saw 7 Silver-spotted Skippers.





2 Clouded Yellows.



And umpteen Chalkhill Blues.



There was one marvellous moment when I saw all four of the aforementioned species close-by within the space of a minute without moving from my spot.

Other species seen today were Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Small and Large White, Common and Holly Blue and Red Admiral.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

This location last year had hundreds of Autumn Ladies Tresses Orchid but today only one was starting to bloom. There will be more over the next few weeks I am sure. This is also Noar Hill's Orchid #12 but so far I have only seen them in bud there.



Re: ernie f

by Maximus, 17-Aug-18 04:58 PM GMT

That's a lovely shot of a very fresh looking Adonis Blue, Ernie, and 27 males is not a bad count, at least they're hanging on in there.

Mike

Re: ernie f

by David M, 18-Aug-18 01:21 PM GMT

Lovely sequences of late summer butterflies, ernie. That second brood of Adonis is always welcome at this time of year, and your first image shows the vivid, striking blue colour extremely well.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Aug-18 09:12 PM GMT

Thanks David and Mike – I always look forward to this time of year at Old Winch. Most of the Adonis looked fresh. One or two had nicks in their wings but on the whole a healthy bunch. They may have started later here than at other locations in the south.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Aug-18 04:47 PM GMT

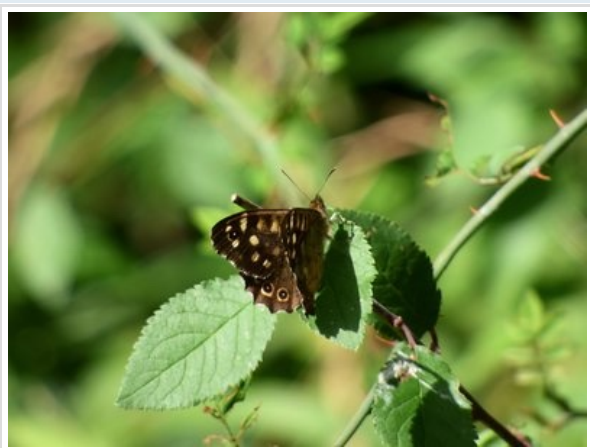
Selborne Common – 19th Aug 2018

It brightened up in the afternoon which gave me the chance to get out and I decided upon Selborne Common. Its a climb up the zig-zag path so there is some effort involved but I try to visit at least once a year.



View from the top of the zig-zag path

This time of year usually yields good numbers of Speckled Wood in all the deciduous woodlands near me but I had never come up here to count them. Today I did and got 49 in total.



There were also 6 rather faded Holly Blues.



And a few Common Blues.



Because of this I assumed the next pic was a female Common Blue but on my return when I enlarge it on my computer I question whether it may instead be a Brown Argus. I really should know this for sure but have to admit in this case I do not.



It came across as being brown all over but at certain angles in the field it did shine toward blue in places but this may have been due to fading. It also was not as small as the confirmed Brown Argus's I have seen in the past.

Also seen were Red Ad, M Brown, S&L White, SW Frit and Comma.

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

As autumn draws ever closer, so more fungi appear. These two on the same blitzed old tree today.



Southern Bracket



Pale Oyster

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 19-Aug-18 05:24 PM GMT

Love the fly flyby on the blue and your possibly Brown Argus is 100% a Brown Argus, the narrow abdomen indicates it's a male! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Aug-18 10:42 AM GMT

Thanks for the Brown Argus ID confirmation, Bugboy.

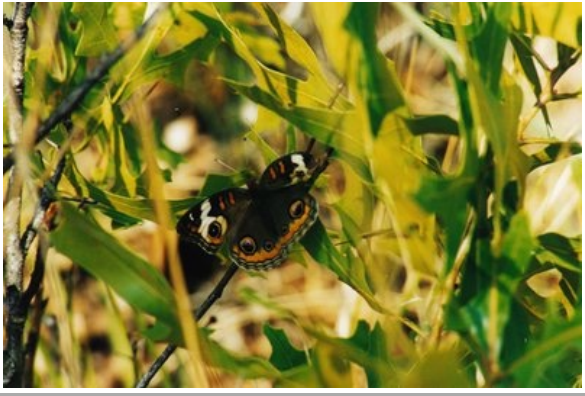
Also - the fly that buzzed in actually unseated the Common Blue and took over his flower-head!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 20-Aug-18 12:12 PM GMT

Its been a bit overcast today so no butterflying for me so far.

Other forum members have been sharing their wonderful pics of butterflies they have seen on their hols recently and I feel a bit left-out because I cannot travel far this year, so instead here are a few more pics of some I have seen stateside over the past years.



The Buckeye



Gulf Fritillary



Mormon Metalmark



Funeral Dusky Wing

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Aug-18 01:44 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 21st Aug 2018

Today I was here really for the "big three" late summer chalk-down flowers but butterflies seen were the usual Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Small White, Red Ad and Common Blue.

There were plenty of Mint Moth and the new camera enabled me to get in for a close-up.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

And so to the main course. I have shared pics of all three of these before when I saw them bloom for the first time, but now they are all out at Noar Hill at the same time. Indeed on one occasion I saw all three in the same patch.

Firstly, Noar Hill's last Orchid of the year.



Autumn Ladies Tresses



Autumn Gentian



Carline Thistle

I also saw this red-arsed bee...



I looked it up and my book called it the Red-tailed Bumble Bee. My terminology might differ slightly but it seems I got close to the real name without realising it! 😊

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 21-Aug-18 03:48 PM GMT

Excellent shot of the Mint Moth Ernie, especially when you consider how small they are. Must look out for some Autumn Ladies Tresses too.

Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Aug-18 09:22 AM GMT

Thanks, Trevor. I counted over 100 AL Tresses in bloom at Noar Hill, few were fully out but all had some blooms. If you know where to look in your area I am sure you will find some out now.

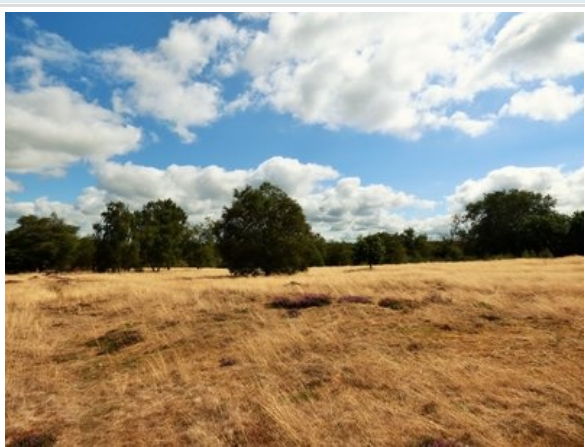
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Aug-18 09:31 AM GMT

Kingsley Common – 21st Aug 2018

The sun came out in the afternoon and it got quite hot. I thought I might go and see if the Small Coppers were out at Kingsley yet. I didn't expect them to be because this location harbours a late brood and typically this begins around early September.

But being an eternal optimist I explored the grassy heath. It still showed the parching effects of our long hot summer...

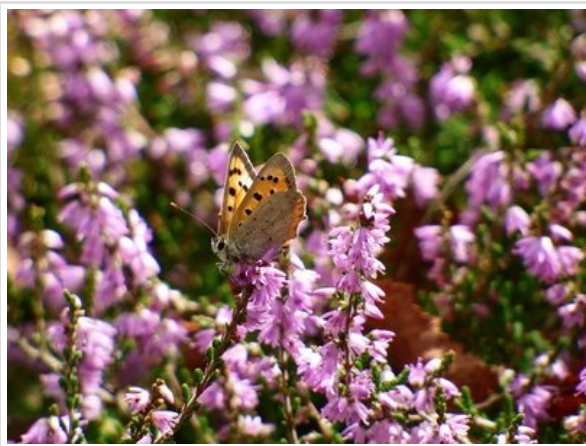


But perseverance paid dividends because there was one Small Copper. His home was in a little mini-valley covered with fresh, green Sheep's Sorrel and flowering Bell Heather but also rather a lot of creamy-white lichen.



I stayed awhile to take pics and found he was the only one there. In fact he was the only one I saw on the entire heath today. He must have been around for some while because he already had a nick out of his wing from a close encounter with a bird. He also had one wing with cream where orange should be. Possibly yet another individual with a slight mutation formed during pupation. I have seen other species with such minor deformities this year and put it down to the heat.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The creamy-white lichen that covers the heath where the Small Copper lived is most probably *Cladonia portentosa*. My book says it can form extensive carpets and loves heathland.



Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 22-Aug-18 12:29 PM GMT

A great selection of shots from Old Winchester Hill Ernie, and I like the look of those stateside butterflies. 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 22-Aug-18 08:12 PM GMT

Lovely sets of reports recently Ernie, those Adonis and Silver Spots were cracking looking specimens 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Aug-18 07:16 PM GMT

Thanks Wurzel and Andrew. Old Winch Hill has been pretty good recently.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Aug-18 07:22 PM GMT

Kingsley Common – 23d Aug 2018

Here once again for Small Coppers. Today I went to the same area and found two more Small Coppers but I did not see the one from the other day. I could tell because of the difference in the nicks in the wings between them all.





I checked for wing-roll but none have done it so far.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Aug-18 07:26 PM GMT

I submitted my last post before adding the Non-butterfly Snapshot!

I was going to mention that the fungi and lichens here are increasing in leaps and bounds. Although dogtooth lichen is out now, its mostly the grey sort. This location however in a few weeks time should have some of the rufous dogtooth lichen.



[attachment=0]

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 23-Aug-18 07:43 PM GMT

Great set of Coppers, especially the last shot 😊👍👍 That's such a good copper it's even got a bit of verdigris on the leading edges of the forewings 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Also for wing rolling; Short-tailed and Provençal Short-tailed Blue and Mazarine Blue.

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 23-Aug-18 10:51 PM GMT

Those are terrific Small Copper shots, Ernie. 😊 That white lichen is common underfoot at Dawneys Hill, where I go to see SSB and Graylings. It seems to thrive in very dry places and someone told me it makes very good tinder for starting fires – but I've never tried myself... 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

by David M, 24-Aug-18 12:04 AM GMT

Those are interesting habitat shots, ernie, as they are in stark contrast to the green and verdant surroundings that have retaken the upper hand round my way.

The Small Copper looks as though its coming out in sympathy with its pale markings to reflect the parched terrain.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Aug-18 11:39 AM GMT

Thanks, Guys.

Wurzel - I'll add your wing-rollers to the wing-roll topic.

Dave (Miller) - The white lichen is profuse where it occurs here but its by no means everywhere. Most of this heath is dry but I have yet to figure out what other factor plays a part in its presence.

David (M) - I agree. Usually when the Coppers first emerge they are vibrant orange but all three of the ones I have seen so far are very muted and as mentioned one was actually bleached on a forewing.

Cheers,

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Aug-18 05:38 PM GMT

Old Winchester Hill - 24th Aug 2018

Adonis Blues again. There are still a lot of them here and pretty much all of them fresh. I was able to add one female to my annual count bringing my total here for 2nd brooders to 30 and my annual count here (both broods) to 36. This is in fact a record for me and I have been told there is another batch on the far side of the Iron Age Hillfort, still on the same reserve, but I am not sure yet whether I shall make another visit this year in order to find them.

The Adonis Blue is a "Pootiful" Butterfly!





Also one SS Skip, a few Chalkhills, some fresh but far fewer than seen recently, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, but no Clouded Yellows. I think they must have been there but hunkered down as it was cool and breezy and while I was there it got quite overcast after a sunny start.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Another thing that was not there were the usual thousands of Autumn Gentian. Here is a picture of the hillside that they like from a previous year at around this time (perhaps a week or so later). You may need to click on the pic to enlarge it to see the plants better.



But today I was hard-pressed to find one or two even though they are out and flourishing at Noar Hill at the moment. On a better note though, the Autumn Ladies Tresses are coming out now and there are quite a few of those along the path at Old Winch.

PS.

Talking of things that "aren't there". What has happened to all the Brimstones? I saw one on the 2nd Aug and none since then.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 24-Aug-18 05:50 PM GMT

That is a cracking Adonis shot Ernie 🍷 even if it is on something much less pleasant 😬😬😬

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 25-Aug-18 08:31 AM GMT

Wow! I needed sunglasses for that first Adonis, ernie. You should put a warning on such posts!! 😊

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 25-Aug-18 11:07 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, I can only give you greens for all those lovely Coppers and Adonis Blues 🍷🍷🍷 not having seen any of them this year so far and with the weather we've had not lightly to either 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Aug-18 06:10 PM GMT

Thank you all. I think I am finally getting the hang of the new camera.

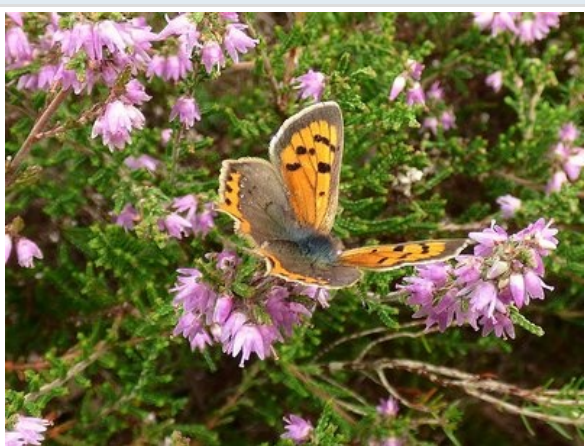
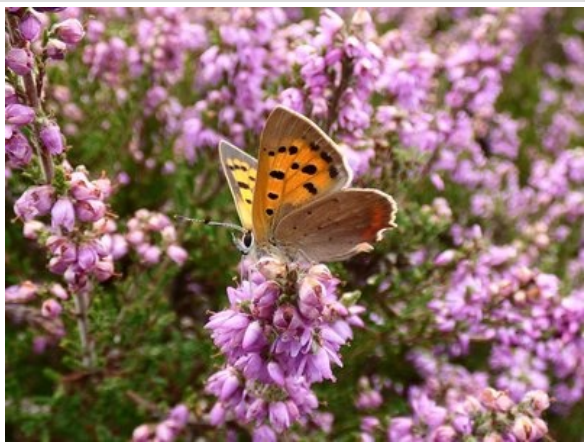
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Aug-18 06:28 PM GMT

Broxhead Common - 28th August 2018

I was worried about the possible plight of the Small Coppers at Broxhead after the long, hot summer days (remember those?) But today I counted 11 here. Only a couple in the lek though. Four were amongst the heather at the top of the path and two of those were males who really had it in for each other. They had one sparring match and then rested but then resumed and this bout lasted for around two minutes. I left them to it as I walked on but its my guess they were doing this on and off every time they had recouped enough energy to do so.





One settled on some heather and looked as though he might do a wing-roll for me but he didn't. He was just arranging himself properly on a bloom so as to nectar from it. Blast! I have never seen one do a wing-roll yet.

But I did get a first for me – a Beautiful Yellow Underwing moth (I think). You may need to click on the image to enlarge it.



Also a Speckle, a Small White, a single Meadow Brown and a few female Common Blues.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Last year in September while coming here for the Coppers I came across a Cup fungus growing directly out of the sand beside the path. I think its a *Peziza michelii*.



Re: ernie f

by millerd, 28-Aug-18 09:15 PM GMT

The Copper in the third shot down is a splendid individual, with understated forewing spots and a blue-badger to boot! Very nice. 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 29-Aug-18 06:35 PM GMT

I echo Dave's comments Ernie, great find that one 😊 Also great is the way that you caught the golden sheen from the fore wing on the penultimate shot 🤩👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 29-Aug-18 08:48 PM GMT

So good to see the Coppers flourishing, ernie, not to mention the robust heather, which doesn't appear to have suffered too much as a result of the hot, dry spell in June & July.

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 30-Aug-18 11:30 AM GMT

Nice shots of those Coppers Ernie. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Aug-18 02:32 PM GMT

Thanks, Guys. I'm really happy that the Coppers are coming along now around here. I was fearing the worst until now.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Aug-18 02:44 PM GMT

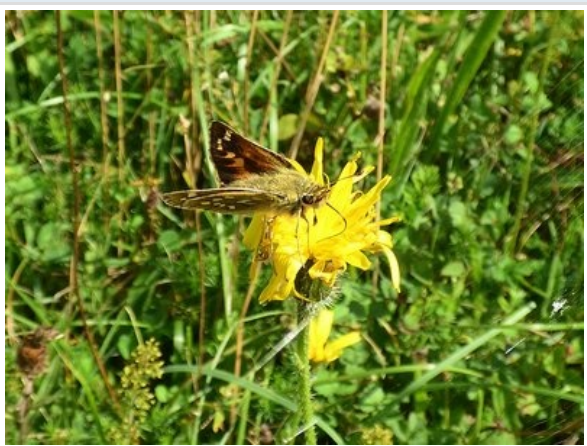
Old Winchester Hill - 30th August 2018

The last time I came here I met someone who suggested there was a good Adonis Blue location the other side of the hillfort. I was in two-minds whether to look but this morning was sunny so I gave it a try. WOW. How could I have missed this? I have been visiting Old Winchester Hill for many years now. I counted 27 Adonis Blues altogether and I am sure there must have been others (my count is conservative to try and avoid double-counting). If I add these to the ones I have seen on the other side of the reserve this year I get a total of 57. That for me is a location and annual record.

I came across a female Adonis with a blue wash - very pretty. And a male Adonis showing signs of wear but still scintillating to look at.

Also 4 SSSkips, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue (but only two), Brown Argus, Small Copper, S,L&GV White, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood and loads and loads of Small Heath.







Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

On the side of the hillfort bank today, a small cap mushroom - most likely the Pleated Inkcap.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Aug-18 06:05 PM GMT

I just had a pleasant surprise. I said my total Adonis Blue count this year at Old Winch Hill is 57 but I forgot the spring brooders. The total this year for me is therefore actually 63!

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 30-Aug-18 08:21 PM GMT

That is a lush looking female Adonis Ernie 🍄🌱 I've become a bit temporally confused recently what with the heatwave breaking, then going to France where it is high summer and then coming back to a cooler, damper UK so to see those Silver-spots was a bit of a shock. Then I remembered that we're still in August! 😊😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 31-Aug-18 12:28 PM GMT

Nice work, ernie. Always good to see a personal best eclipsed.

There's still time to push the total upwards too!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 31-Aug-18 01:21 PM GMT

David – Yes – The Adonis population at this reserve has been wonderful so far this year. I am now waiting to bump into someone who will tell me another Adonis location on this reserve that I don't know about! 😊

Wurzel – Hope you had a great holiday. I'm confused too and I have stayed here! But then, I am always a little bit confused. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 31-Aug-18 01:32 PM GMT

Broxhead – 31st August 2018

Lovely. The Small Copper community here is growing nicely. The hot spell does not seem to have affected them too much. I counted 22 here today. Only two days ago I counted 11. Double the number over just two days. In 2017 there was only 2 along this transect around this time and the year before that, 2016, there was 6. Now 2016 was the year of the long "Indian" summer and the numbers of Small Copper at Broxhead/Sleaford/Kingsley /Shortheath – a set of almost connected heathlands was eventually to become a bumper year in September. My annual record to date in fact. So far it appears to be almost 4 times better than that year – of course we need the weather to stay fine for the numbers to continue to climb.





Also, 3 faded Brown Argus, 3 Speckled Wood and a Clouded Buff.





Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

Soon it will be autumn and the fungi which has already begun here will come to the fore. For example this marvellous one, the Golden Scalycap.



Re: ernie f

by millerd, 31-Aug-18 04:16 PM GMT

I particularly like that first Copper shot, Ernie! 😊🍷

Cheers,

Dave

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 31-Aug-18 06:02 PM GMT

That is a cracking stain glass shot of the Copper Ernie 😊 Also that Brown Argus practically jumps out of the screen it's s sharp 🤩😊 I like the fungi too but not as much as the Pleated Inkcap – that looks like an upside down fungus 🤩😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Sep-18 08:45 AM GMT

Thanks, Guys. The Coppers sure are coming along now. I have a feeling its going to get really good soon.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Sep-18 01:58 PM GMT

Sleaford/Broxhead/Kingsley/Shortheath – 1st Sep 2018



Rainbow in a dewy morning web at Sleaford heath

A bit of a marathon this morning. Because this appears to be getting to be a good 3rd brood for Small Coppers I decided to do a spot survey of the best locations of these almost connected heathlands near me.

The Results were:

Sleaford 16
Broxhead 44 (a daily record for me)
Broxhead Extn 04
Kingsley 03
Shortheath 06

Total 73

This is at a time when my book shows we are in what is supposed to be a low population gap between the 2nd and 3rd broods.

I know we are at the start of the third brood rather than its peak, because at peak I usually find some along the sandy path close to the lay-by at Broxhead and today there were none there.

Also, in 2016 – the recent bumper copper year on the heaths, Broxhead peaked with a daily count of 10 on Sep 9th and Kingsley peaked about a week later with 29 on Sep 15th (Note the annual counts in that year were Kingsley 36 and Broxhead 67). I have already seen 4 times as many at Broxhead on a single day as I did that year, 9 days earlier than then so I am hoping the same thing will happen in about a weeks time on Kingsley Heath.



At both Broxhead and the Broxhead Extension (a small area with a separate entrance path close to the road junction) I saw three males sparring at once. At the Broxhead Extension I also witnessed a female fending off an ardent male with a Turkey Strut routine which I managed to get a not-very-good picture of.



Male advancing



Female Turkey-strutting

At the bottom of the hill at Broxhead it is a sun-trap and there were many Small Coppers there mixing it up with at least 6 Brown Argus, one Common Blue, a Small White and a Comma.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day.

Its flowers!

Beside the road at Sleaford, a Common Hemp-Nettle (White form).



Growing wild, a garden escape, Montbretia (*Crococmia x crocosmiiflora*), at Shortheath. Its so pretty but is an invasive plant which really has no place here.



At Home

This moth. I think it might be a Flounced Rustic. Can anyone positively ID it? Thanks.



Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 01-Sep-18 04:06 PM GMT

Love your Copper's ernie, like you say, "you never get tired of them," I'd never seen so many before when I went to fleetwood last week, I was so pleased 😊 Also liked your Tree of Fungus 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 01-Sep-18 05:35 PM GMT

Great set of Copper images Ernie and a great number seen and they haven't even peaked yet, 44 in one sitting 🤩👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Maximus, 01-Sep-18 05:46 PM GMT

Broxhead 44, and not yet peaked 🤩 you've found a place to rival Dungeness, Ernie 😊 Lovely shots by the way 👍

Mike

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Sep-18 08:56 AM GMT

Thank you, all

Of course even though there will be more Small Coppers at Broxhead to come it will never get close to Dungeness. For one thing, the first brood does not appear here. 😞

But in good years we do get a late (fourth) brood which takes us into October. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Sep-18 02:16 PM GMT

2nd Sep 2018 – Kingsley and Broxhead Heaths



Kingsley

I visited different parts of both of these heaths this morning to see if I could increase my Small Copper counts and I could (a bit). Kingsley only gave me one more bringing its total to 5 but Broxhead gave me another 5 bringing its total to 49. Not only that but I got a trifle lost and stumbled across another patch at Broxhead that I did not know about which seemed ideal for them – lots of Sheep's Sorrel and mixed heather low on a sheltered incline facing south. There were none flying there at the moment but I would be very surprised if they did not soon.

But my quarry for pictures was not the Small Copper this time but the Brown Argus. I counted 8 at Broxhead today.



Now while I have seen hundreds of Small Copper over the years and none of them have done a wing-roll for me, one of the Brown Argus landed right in front of me and immediately started to wing-roll with its wings open. I managed to get a short burst of shots of which I attach two here.





Not brilliant but you get the idea.

And I came across this Garden Tiger caterpillar (aka Woolly Bear) clinging to a heather frond. Well I think that's what it must be. Can anyone let me know if its not? Thanks.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

And so more fungi flourishes as autumn approaches. This one today was in a woodland verge at Broxhead. Its the Tawny Grisette. Apparently its edible and even tasty but being a member of the Amanitas I personally would not touch it with a bargepole. It's in the same family as the Death Cap and the Destroying Angel, both deadly - need I say more!



There was also a Brittle Gill with a red cap but it was severely munched by slugs. It was most likely The Sickener, which likes heathland. Its poisonous to us but obviously it wasn't to the slugs. Here is an archive picture of what it should have looked like.



Re: ernie f

by Old Wolf, 02-Sep-18 09:46 PM GMT

Hello Ernie,
You are seeing a real bumper load of Copper at the moment.

You also seem to be getting some great 'Oily' shots too. I see it in the Coppers and Argus from 1st and 2nd September. Oh, and of course on the web too 😊😊😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 02-Sep-18 09:58 PM GMT

That looks like cracking habitat Ernie 😊 You've caught the butterfly in just the right light to get those great oily sheen shots 😊🇩🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Sep-18 10:57 AM GMT

Thanks, guys. I have noticed that sheen before and "oily" describes it to a tee.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 03-Sep-18 11:13 AM GMT

Broxhead (Anvil End) - 2nd Sep 2018 (pm)



Anvil End – Broxhead

Another three Small Copper bringing the Broxhead total now to 52. One kept coming back to this Ragwort despite all the heather around about.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

I have got a few shots of Dartford Warbler but today I came across a family of 2 adults and 3 young and I got a bit closer than I have been able to in the past.





Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 03-Sep-18 08:31 PM GMT

Great shots of the Dartford Ernie 😊 That scratchy call they have was one of the sounds of my youth when I was a nipper messing around on Canford Heath 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 03-Sep-18 09:18 PM GMT

ernie f wrote:

...Another three Small Copper bringing the Broxhead total now to 52. One kept coming back to this Ragwort despite all the heather around about....

I find Small Coppers go for yellow-coloured flowers more than any other, ernie, so I'm not surprised ragwort was favoured over heather.

PS - just seen the main index page - many happy returns!! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Sep-18 08:37 AM GMT

Wurzel. Its amazing how those Dartford's can throw their voices. I began "stalking" them for pictures and many was the time I could hear their "scratchy" calls all around me (which is how I knew there were five - 'cos I didn't see them all at once). I scanned the distance, expecting one to fly up and sit on some gorse if I kept very still and was surprised when the one I thought was in the distance suddenly flew out of the heather only a few feet in front of me!

Dave. I have seen Coppers visit the Ragwort here before. I don't know if its the colour that attracts them or the all-round-view. Typically the ragwort here grows in singletons away from other plants so its a very good vantage point for males.

Thanks for the birthday greetings by the way. Another year older, but none the wiser!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 04-Sep-18 06:41 PM GMT

Broxhead - 4th Sep 2018

Another trip to Broxhead and I clocked up another 14 Small Coppers - these are in addition to the ones I have already seen here and my total for Broxhead and the Broxhead Extension (which are just different entrances to the same reserve so I shall add the two together) is now a cool 70. This exceeds my best count for this reserve by 3. I have now achieved my best daily count and my best location count for Small Coppers. It remains to break my record annual count but that will take some doing because that stands at 177 in 2016 when I visited a large number of reserves near me with the purpose of creating that personal record in the first place.





One of the newbies today had quite big blobs on its wings.



As Hoggers et al will probably tell you, the best shot of a female Small Copper doing the Turkey Strut is to get one where her forewings are pressed together while her hindwings are set wide apart. I had a few opportunities to try and capture this today. I have improved on my past attempts but the ideal shot still eludes me. Here are the best of today's efforts.





Also 4 Speckled Wood, 9 Brown Argus, a couple of Small Whites, one Comma but no 2nd brood Silver Studded Blues, despite looking specifically for them in their prime mid-summer haunts.



And this very fine caterpillar mooching across a sandy path, a Fox Moth caterpillar?



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Yesterday it was birds, specifically the Dartford Warbler so today I keep with the theme. I didn't see one today but Broxhead is an annual nesting site for Stonechat. Here is a past pic from here.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 04-Sep-18 07:58 PM GMT

Interesting shots of the Turkey strut, which is exactly what it looks like 🤪😄 I've not seen that before but now I'm going to keep an eye out for it 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Sep-18 05:29 PM GMT

Hi, Wurzel. I've got so many pics of Small Coppers now I don't know what to do with them all. I am using the burst mode on my new camera a lot to try and capture that Turkey Trot "essence" so I am keeping sequences of shots of them now. I will be sorting through them all the way up to Christmas no doubt and then of course I'll be eating the Turkey!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 05-Sep-18 05:56 PM GMT

Broxhead - 5th Sep 2018

I went back to the Small Copper lek area today. My intention was not to increase my count because I had been here before recently so would only be counting ones I had already seen but instead to yet again try and improve my Turkey Trot pics. They did not disappoint.

A male would get in tight close behind a female and follow her around, nose-to-tail for the most part. From time to time she would just shudder but often would then go into a full Turkey Trot stance. She did this on the ground, on a twig and on a heather bush, sometimes at a standstill but sometimes while walking along with the male in tow.

There was one sequence where she shuddered, then put her forewings up and hindwings down, then brought up her hindwings up to meet her forewings and then dropped her forewings to hide them behind her hindwings. At this point the male flew off, but the female then flitted away about a metre and did another Turkey Trot without any male being there. She probably was not absolutely sure he had gone so gave it one last burst - just to be on the safe side.

Turkey Trot sequence 1





Turkey Trot sequence 2





There was also a lot of male sparring going on. In the heather on the path uphill from the lek, there were two sets of two males sparring in flight at the same time while another was perched on a heather frond near them – the referee?

One perched on an old gorse stump, an ideal look-out.



Another perched just above me so I could get a pic against the blue of the sky.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Another bird. This time it is a Jay. I saw this one today not far from the Small Copper lek in fact.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 05-Sep-18 07:21 PM GMT

The Turkey Trot seems like a much nicer way to ward off unwanted advances Ernie 😊 Silver-studs flap their wings incessantly and almost aggressively

and Whites raise their abdomens like a middle finger so this by comparison is much more genteel and ladylike 😊 Looking forward to more of these interesting sequences 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Sep-18 08:17 AM GMT

It certainly is fascinating to watch, Wurzel. I like the idea of a genteel butterfly brush-off.

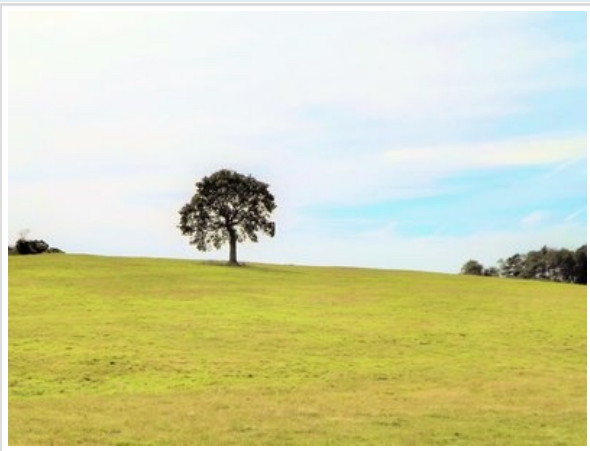
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Sep-18 08:29 AM GMT

Sleaford - 5th Sep 2018 pm

Back to Sleaford Heath. I was here a few days ago. Its a small heathland remnant - you can walk across it in any direction in just about 5 minutes.

A field with a lone tree lies between the Broxhead Heath and Sleaford Heath and is really the only thing that separates them.



The Lone Tree at Sleaford

Last time I was here I counted 16 Small Coppers and because the place is so small it doesn't take long to do a full recount and again I got 16 (likely all the same ones so I cannot increase my annual count). It appears that this heath is at max capacity for them now. However this time I noticed there were Brown Argus here too, some were quite fresh, and I counted 8 of those. Also a Small White and a Red Ad.

Some Brown Argus pics from today at Sleaford. It was late in the day so the sun was low. Great for the backlit pics.





Today for the first time I have seen a Small Copper do a wing-roll. I was knocked out about seeing it. As I recently posted I have seen hundreds of the little devil's and none have ever done a wing-roll for me. This one did two perfect rolls and then stopped. That was it. Nothing else. It certainly could not be mistaken for a Turkey Trot and the fact it was two perfect ones meant it was not merely adjusting its balance on its perch. Unfortunately I was not able to get any pics because of how fleeting it was but I don't care. I've seen it and that's all that matters to me after all this time.

But it seems this was just for openers because I then saw not one but two Brown Argus wing-rolling with wings open. The last time I saw a Brown Argus do this it was with its wings open too (I posted a couple of shots of it recently). Either its a coincidence or Brown Argus really do prefer to do it that way.

There was another female Small Copper doing a Turkey Trot in the face of a male while they were both on the top of a heather bush. Then she crawled down the heather stem and hid close to the ground inside the bush. He sat on the top of the bush a bit bemused as to where she had gone.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the Day

There is a roadside verge between the Sleaford and Broxhead Heaths where the huge Parasol Mushroom grows most years.



Fresh



Ageing

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 06-Sep-18 02:56 PM GMT

Interesting Copper observations Ernie. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Sep-18 05:13 PM GMT

Thanks, Andrew.

I one way its good because I love Small Coppers but in another its sad because it means the butterfly season is nearing its end.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 06-Sep-18 05:36 PM GMT

Broxhead – 6th Sep 2018



Broxhead Heath from the footpath connecting to Sleaford Heath

Yesterday afternoon I think I established for myself that Sleaford was at peak 3rd brood Small Copper time so today I wanted to test Broxhead. Now normally you see Small Coppers on the path near the lay-by when Broxhead is at peak but there still weren't any there. As I went round the reserve I noticed that some areas had fewer individuals than I saw recently whilst others had more. Since all of the Small Coppers I did see were fresh (no tatty ones at all) I presumed that what has happened is that the males have moved around from the place where they emerged and each has found a niche for itself after many battles with their neighbours. As if to confirm this, I found that some had moved down to the bottom of the lek where there were none before and there were fewer at the top of the lek and on the path above. Of course there were still sparring battles between neighbouring males but they were now standing their ground more. I managed to get some pics of one pair doing battle. Here are the best of the batch.



But what I think I have found is that Broxhead may too be at peak like its neighbour Sleaford and that for some reason the ones by the lay-by are absent (and may never materialise this year).

The Brown Argus were fresh and fine at Broxhead today.



Yet another one was doing a wing-roll with its wings open.



I was beginning to think all butterflies of this species only did it with their wings open when the one I was currently observing re-arranged itself and started to wing roll with its wings closed.



Then one did a wing-roll with its wings open but decided it only wanted to roll one of its hind-wings, leaving the other fixed. I have no idea why or how

it was able to do this and it kept it up for some while. Maybe the other hind-wing was pressing up against the heather bloom and this restricted its movement.



I will place the complete sequences on the wing-roll topic under "general".

I did a quick visit to Kingsley Heath on my return home expecting that as in 2016, the numbers of Small Copper would be steadily on the increase there because peak seemed to be a week later than at Broxhead. However I could only confidently add a singleton to my count for this site bringing the total at this location to a mere 6 – a far cry from the 70 at Broxhead only a few hundred metres away! I don't know why for sure. There is plenty of Sheep's Sorrel although it is in pockets and there is plenty of Heather even though its starting to go over. One difference I noticed at Kingsley that I did not see at Broxhead though is that there was a sand wasp of some kind which seemed to be getting to plague proportions here. There were many clouds of them dotted over the sandier parts of the heath just where you might expect to see the Coppers. Maybe they are predatory on larvae and this perhaps may have drastically reduced the Small Copper population this year at Kingsley?

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Broxhead is a good place to watch Nightjar and Woodcock at dusk in summer-time. I have done so in previous years but never even tried to get a picture. However last year I came across a Woodcock dead by the side of the road that bisects the reserve.



One day I must try and get a picture of a living one.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 06-Sep-18 10:22 PM GMT

Lovely fresh Brown Argus Ernie and the Small Copper in flight shots are wicked 😊👍 Woodcock are a right pain to see unless you can find them Roding.

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Sep-18 08:11 AM GMT

Thanks Wurzel. I was lucky the sparring coppers had a protracted fight right above the more or less blank canvas of the sandy path so they could be seen well.

I have seen Woodcock roding at Frensham Common in Surrey. It was exciting because they flew only a few feet right above my head doing that funny sound they make. I never tried to get their picture though. The only way to get it really is if you see them do it against a cloudless evening sky before it gets too dark. It also means carrying a tripod around to mount the camera on which with my back is probably a non-starter! 😞

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 07-Sep-18 03:08 PM GMT

Broxhead - 7th Sep 2018

Just as I thought Broxhead might be at its max for Small Coppers - I find it isn't really. Today I covered one part of the reserve and found 55 Small Coppers of which three I can claim to be ones I have definitely not yet counted this year yet. Yesterday I was hinting that the area near the lay-by may not get them this year and it seems no sooner had the words left my mouth (figuratively) than one emerges at that location. I saw it today.

55 is my daily record and the extra three today added to the 70 I have already seen here = 73 and this is a reserve record for me.

There was definitely at least four females amongst them all as three were Turkey Trotting and one was creeping amongst the Sorrel looking for egg-laying sites.

No pics today because in order to do the count I was on a reasonably fast walk so as to reduce the effect of double-counting.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

Walking about the reserve fast and brushing against heather, gorse and ferns disturbs the Grasshoppers. There were loads of Mottled Grasshopper which likes the heathland around here.



Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 08-Sep-18 11:54 AM GMT

Hi! ernie, love your Copper shots, in fact all your Turkey Trotting shots are interesting 😊

I thought of you the other day when I saw the Red Admiral in my garden, I watched him rolling his/her wings, lots of Bee's and flies were round him so he was doing this constantly and it made me wonder about the Wing Rolling and if this was another reason for it, warding off other insects 🤔

I've seen other Butterflies just fly off when disturbed but the Admiral doesn't move, only rolls it's wings. What do think 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Sep-18 05:51 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. I am into Turkey-trotting at the moment. It's almost "up-there" with my obsession with Wing-rolling.

Interesting observation you made with your Red Admiral. I have not seen this and of course its not in the same family as the other Wing-rollers. I shall add your comment about warding off insects to my brainstorm list on the topic under "general".

I still don't really know why they do it for sure. I constantly waver between one idea and another.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 08-Sep-18 05:57 PM GMT

Sleaford & Broxhead – 8th Sep 2018

Recently on two separate days I counted the Small Coppers at the remnant of heath at Sleaford and it came to 16 each time. On the strength of this I assumed the population had arrived at its peak. I have lost count how many occasions this year I have come to the wrong conclusion about something that seemed sensible based on the facts I had at the time. Today the count there went up to 20! Its as if there is some subtle, invisible force at work determined to prove me wrong. I don't mind though – I like being wrong in this way when things are better than I expected.

The Brown Argus were also about.



This little friend cadged a lift. I don't know what it is though. Bright green with a brown head, it was no more than 2 inches long and moved quite fast.



A short hop round the corner to Broxhead and I found one, further Small Copper in a location not yet visited for them this year so I can increase my record location score here by one to 74.



Incidentally my annual total for this species this year now stands at 143. I still have a way to go to exceed my annual record of 177.

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

This one from Broxhead some months ago now. A Woodlark singing.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 08-Sep-18 10:47 PM GMT

I've not seen Woodlark for years now Ernie –the best one was sitting on a wire at the edge of the Białowieża Forest 😊 I love their descending 'lu, lu,lu' call 😊 Anyway enough birds I love the shot of the Brown Argus 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 08-Sep-18 10:51 PM GMT

Lovely Woodlark, ernie....and your Brown Argus makes me green too. They seem to be everywhere at the moment except on my patch. 🍷🍷

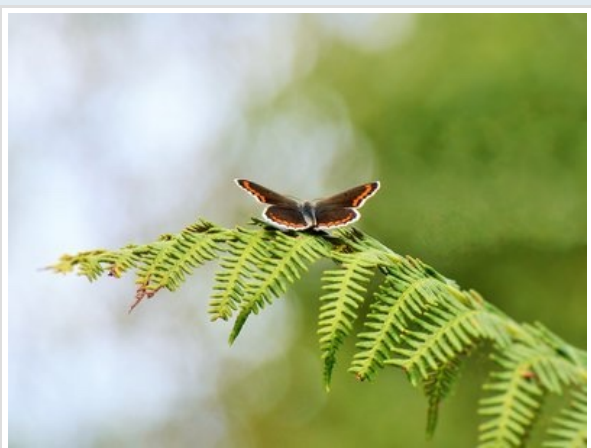
Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Sep-18 10:11 AM GMT

Thanks, guys. I always like shots of butterflies with blue sky behind and this one was very obliging.

In fact he hung around a bit longer and it turned into a bit of a photo-shoot.

Here is another from the same shoot...



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Sep-18 05:14 PM GMT

Folly Hill – 9th Sep 2018

One last visit here this year. There were still 5 Grayling seen and heaps of Small Heath. Also Speckled Wood, Large White and even a faded Common Blue. Only two Small Coppers.



There was a Treble Bar moth too.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

The Common Darters were swarming. There were four pairs for example ovipositing in one small puddle. Others were mating and others perching. In fact they were the main feature of the reserve today.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 09-Sep-18 08:45 PM GMT

Interesting to see how the orange from the top of the fore wing pales into the cream with age on the Grayling Ernie 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 09-Sep-18 09:18 PM GMT

Good to see Graylings extending their flight period into September, ernie. Nice too that there are still plenty of Small Heaths about near you.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 10-Sep-18 09:32 AM GMT

No Graylings at Southport when I was there ernie , you've got a great shot of one there 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Sep-18 07:54 AM GMT

Thanks, everyone. I must admit I went there for the Coppers. I assumed Grayling would still be there but I did not expect to see any – so seeing five with at least two unfrayed albeit faded examples was a bonus. They did that thing of flying around and then landing on the ground directly behind me as someone recently posted – but now I know that trick, I have the upper hand. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 11-Sep-18 03:05 PM GMT

Broxhead (Sandcliff-end) – 10th Sep 2018



One Comma, one Speckled Wood and a Marsh Tit flock. No Small Coppers – and I covered quite a distance through habitat one might expect them to flourish in. It was in fact a long walk where nothing much happened.



On sand

More fungi, though. See below.

Broxhead (Small Copper Lek)

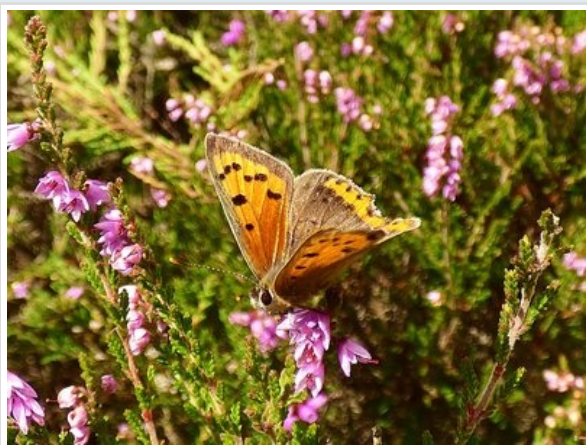
Many Coppers flying, some still very fresh, one or two fraying. Brown Argus still about.



Frensham Little Pond



A short visit late in the day just across the country line into Surrey. Five Small Coppers in a relatively small area on the heath closest to the car park. This brings my annual total to 151. I am not likely to improve on my annual record of 177 unless Kingsley takes off in a big way like it did in 2016.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

And so Autumn progresses. The Grey Dogtooth was very prevalent and there was one Earthball (a fungus that can become very common on the heaths around here). The Tawny Grisettes are now growing in "bunches" and there was a nice, fresh Brown Birch Bolete.



Grisette bunch



Brown Birch Bolete

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 11-Sep-18 10:57 PM GMT

Hopefully we'll get a bit of an Indian Summer and you'll reach your target Ernie, not far to go 😊 Love the shot of the Brown Argus on the Heather 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 11-Sep-18 10:58 PM GMT

That bolette looks good enough to eat, ernie! Is it *comestible*?

I wouldn't rule out breaking your Copper record in all honesty. This is a butterfly that can still be on the wing in early November so there are several weeks left yet for you to see them.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 12-Sep-18 10:05 AM GMT

Lovely scenery shot ernie, you can always tell when Autumn's here with the Fungus, 😊 I watched a program this morning about it and it said it was nature's way of cleaning up 😊 It then showed Kew Gardens where they'd stored loads of dried fungus in drawers, very interesting program. Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 12-Sep-18 11:06 AM GMT

Wurzel. To get the Brown Argus with both wings underside in shot I had to rest the camera at an angle on the ground and press the button without being able to properly see what I was taking. Lucky or what?

David. That particular mushroom is edible. I am told all the pore-cap mushrooms are but I am certainly not an expert and I would never advise anyone to pick them and eat them.

Goldie. Fungi as simply essential to nature. They do far more than we think. For example I once saw a TV programme which showed that trees are able to communicate chemically with their neighbours through the root-like fungal mycelia that form a dense network under the soil surface.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 12-Sep-18 10:44 PM GMT

The lucky one's are always the best Ernie 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 13-Sep-18 10:29 AM GMT

ernie f wrote:

David. That particular mushroom is edible. I am told all the pore-cap mushrooms are but I am certainly not an expert and I would never advise anyone to pick them and eat them.

Certainly looks tempting, ernie, though like you say it's best to err on the side of caution.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 13-Sep-18 03:32 PM GMT

Shortheath - 13th Sep 2018



Bronze Age barrow at Shortheath

In my quest to increase my Small Copper count I am aware I must be very critical about double-counting. I am almost paranoid about it now because I think it might be a close-run thing beating my annual record count which as I said in at least two previous posts stands at 177 (See how obsessed I am getting about it?).

My last visit to Shortheath was on 1st September 2018 and on that day I found 6 in the lek area. Today I found 7 in the lek area but an additional 7 around the Bronze Age burial mound. So that's 14 today minus the 6 on the 1st assuming they were the same ones leaves 8 new ones to add to my total.

Kingsley - same day

My last visit to Kingsley was on the 6th Sep when I saw one Small Copper and the time before that was the 2nd Sep when I again saw another one and the day before that when I saw three others. Now removing the double-counting is a bit more complicated here. The place where I saw three, today I only saw one. The place on the 6th where I saw one, this time I saw one about 50 paces away so I am going to consider that to be the same one so it cancels out. The remaining place where I saw one, today I saw none. I covered the entire reserve. It was exhausting because I found I had to disturb them to see them and that meant continually criss-crossing the paths of the reserve where the prospect for them looked most promising. By my calculation that leaves 17 new ones at Kingsley today. In my last post I said I did not stand much chance beating my record unless Kingsley took off like it did in 2016. In 2016 I counted 29 here so after a shaky start its certainly picking-up now.

My annual count now becomes 151 (from previously) + 8 + 17 = 176

Crumbs I thought to myself. I am now only 1 away from my previous annual record and 2 from breaking it.

Exciting stuff, eh? Well, no - probably not for you reading this but it is for me doing it.

Here is a picture of one encounter that I was fascinated by. This one had the light glancing off it at just the right angle to make its hind-wings appear

blue.



I also saw a female Common Blue with a very blue flush and it was pretty fresh considering this is mid-September.



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day

This one from Kingsley today. A male Southern Hawker taking a short rest – and I do mean short as it buzzed off after I managed to take two quick shots of it.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 13-Sep-18 11:09 PM GMT

I like that number, 176, Ernie 😊 That is a lush looking Common Blue female, in very fine fettle for September 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 14-Sep-18 09:30 PM GMT

Nothing obsessive about your Copper count, ernie. We all have our 'pet' projects near to where we live – just look at Hoggers!

Personally, I like to take in my local rarer species such as Marsh and Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, as well as more general habitat species such as Holly Blue, Brown Argus, Orange Tip, Marbled White and.....yes, Small Coppers!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Sep-18 05:37 PM GMT

Thanks guys. Its nice to know my obsession is shared. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Sep-18 05:50 PM GMT

Thursley Common – 15th Sep 2018 am



Today I came across a Grayling here. Just the one, but with a bit of patience and perseverance and a lot of stamina running after it each time it flew I was able to get some shots of it close-up.





I also saw a single Small White and a single Small Copper. I was here for two hours. Three butterflies in two hours!

Frensham Common – Big Pond area – same day pm



Six Small Coppers here. Two in one area but the other four all far flung from each other.

So with the one at Thursley this morning that is Seven Small Coppers altogether today. I bet you know what I am going to say next. Yep – I have broken my annual record of 177. It now stands at 183. Hooray! And I still have a couple of other nature reserves up my sleeve where a may get a few more.



The "Record Breaker" – number 178

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day.

All at Thursley. Firstly there was a group of mushrooms on stubble grass on sandy soil right beside a heather moor. I have seen plenty of Deceiver mushrooms at Thursley over the years and I just assumed this was another one. When I got home to look in my books however it just did not have the right coloured stem or surface graininess for a Deceiver. There were only two others that looked like mine that grow on grassy heathlands. One is the Pink Domecap but my one was not really pink, and the Heath Waxcap. Now whilst Heath Waxcaps can be very waxy and yellow when young they can fade to a tan or brownish-orange with age and also this one had greyish gills underneath just like the Heath Waxcap has. So I am plumping for this being a Heath Waxcap although I must say I am not 100% sure.



Then there was a whole bunch of both Common and Black Darters.



There was one Dartford Warbler, one Stonechat and one Kestrel.



And last, but by no means least, the Common Lizards on the boardwalk. I once counted over 100 on this boardwalk in 1 hour. They come out to sun themselves on it. I didn't count today - instead I concentrated on photographing them. One individual did not scare off as I approached. I was able to use the super-macro setting on my new camera and place one edge of it on the boardwalk to minimise camera shake and got as close as I could before it would not focus properly - about 2 cm away from his face! Amazingly he stayed there. He even moved to adjust his pose while I was taking my pictures. In fact after the photo-shoot I walked off but still he stayed put.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 15-Sep-18 10:29 PM GMT

Great looking Grayling Ernie, I don't think I've seen one in that particular hue before 😊🇮🇪 And I've never seen a Black Darter 🇮🇪

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 16-Sep-18 12:13 AM GMT

That's a lovely Grayling Ernie - and like Wurzel I have never seen a Black Darter either, although I went looking for them at Rixton a couple of days ago. I see you are into mushrooms too! I shall look forward to seeing more.
Janet

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 16-Sep-18 01:51 PM GMT

I agree with everyone ernie that's a great shot of a Grayling, there so hard to get shots of so well done 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Sep-18 02:02 PM GMT

Longmoor – 16th Sep 2018

Another heathland which normally harbours a few Small Coppers and so it did today. Another three to add to my count; but this is only half the number I have seen in the past. One was doing a wing-roll. I almost didn't notice because it was so imperceptible. Perhaps this is why I have missed it in the past. It kept it up for a while too.

Also a Speckled Wood.



Woolmer – same day

Woolmer Heath is used by the army for training and is only open some Sundays. It was open today.



They use the cows for target practice. (Only joking).

And this was the last of my nearby heathlands that gave me the possibility of Small Coppers, but sadly it gave me just one more Small Copper. Again a fraction of what I have seen here in the past.

The heather in all places is now mostly gone—over with very few other plants to act as nectaring sources. Even if we do get warm days over the next couple of weeks, the Small Coppers I am sure will continue to go into decline hereabouts.

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

You can tell that summer is moving into autumn when the number of species of fungi you see outnumbers the number of species of butterfly!

I saw eight fungi species today and only two butterflies species.

Of the fungi seen, here are two...



Brown Rollrim – toxic



Cep (aka Penny Bun)

Another pic of the Cep – showing the distinctive net on its stem.



Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 16-Sep-18 05:18 PM GMT

Thanks for the fungi shots Ernie – it's good that nature always provides something of interest even when there are no butterflies!
Janet

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 16-Sep-18 06:56 PM GMT

Cracking colours on the Small Copper Ernie 😊 Is the Penny Bun edible – you'd hope so with a name like that 🤪😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Sep-18 11:35 AM GMT

Thanks, Janet and Wurzel. I got "switched on" to fungi when I lived in the New Forest some years ago and now I found they are even better near where I live now. Of course I still do not consider myself an expert and never will. To become one you have to be prepared to collect them (which I never do) and scrutinise their spores under a microscope! Only in that way can you be sure you know what you have seen if you have any doubt.

The Penny Bun is one of the most edible and tasty of all the mushrooms. If you have ever had mushroom soup you have almost certainly eaten them without even knowing!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 17-Sep-18 01:59 PM GMT

Broxhead – 17th Sep 2018



Ballooning over Broxhead

I have visited all my local Small Copper haunts now and each time the location came up with fewer than in recent years, except that is for Broxhead. Today there were still 19 Small Coppers in and around the lek at the bottom of the hill and one near the lay-by. I cannot count any of these to my annual total of course as I have most likely seen them all already. There was plenty of activity in the lek with jousting males and turkey-trotting females. Also 6 Brown Argus and 2 Speckled Wood.



More "trotting"

I lost my lens-cap over here a few days ago and I found it again today. What's the chances?

Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

Not an image recorded today but one from the recent past alongside the path just above the Copper lek. I've always assumed this was some kind of protective web made by caterpillars but I never could see any. Does anyone know what this is?



Re: ernie f

by CallumMac, 17-Sep-18 08:25 PM GMT

ernie f wrote:

Not an image recorded today but one from the recent past alongside the path just above the Copper lek. I've always assumed this was some kind of protective web made by caterpillars but I never could see any. Does anyone know what this is?

Your assessment is pretty much spot on. Given that it looks like it's on Gorse, it's more likely to be Brown-tail *Euproctis chrysorrhoea* than any of the various species of Yponomeutidae that also build such webs.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 17-Sep-18 10:33 PM GMT

Interesting observations and great shots Ernie 😊 I saw a mating rejection from a female Copper today but she did a manic wing flap rather than the strutting 😊 Did do a hind wing roll though 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 17-Sep-18 11:19 PM GMT

Well done on officially breaking your Copper record, ernie. It's certainly been a good year for them.

Good that you caught up with a September Grayling too. I suspect that'll be the last you see in 2018.

Re: ernie f

by PaynterQ, 18-Sep-18 03:20 AM GMT

Nice photos. The webbing on gorse is due to the gorse spider mite *Tetranychus lintearius*, if you zoom in on the image you can see tiny orange dots in the webbing (easiest to see on the edges of the webbing), which are the mites. Cheers Quentin

Re: ernie f

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

PaynterQ wrote:

The webbing on gorse is due to the gorse spider mite *Tetranychus lintearius*

I stand corrected! Every day's a school day. Thanks Quentin 😊

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 18-Sep-18 09:14 AM GMT

Very interesting shots ernie, love the Coppers, I've never seen a Penny Bun fungus before, keep the shots coming they make the awful weather here forgetful for a while 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Sep-18 01:55 PM GMT

Wurzel – Nice to see you found a Copper do a wing-roll and (almost) a Turkey Trot.

Quentin – Thanks for the ID of those web-weavers. I wondered why I could see no tell-tale larvae inside.

David – Thanks re my Copper Count. I am rather pleased about it.

Goldie – Thanks for your enthusiasm about my recent posts. I thought today would be too bad to get out but I was wrong, we got a little bit of sunshine around mid-day and I was really happy because it enabled me to get out and I found a rather nice bracket fungus. See next post.

Callum – That's one of the great things about this forum. We all learn from everyone else. I know I have learnt from others here many times and more than once from your good self.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Sep-18 05:58 PM GMT

Kingsley – 18th Sep 2018

A short trip today but in the 30 mins I was there I saw three Speckled Woods, 2 Small Coppers and a Common Blue. They were all in reasonably fine fettle for the 3rd week of September after a night of strong winds and a dousing of rain.



Alice Holt Woods – same day

Then it was on to the woods at Alice Holt to see what fungi might be coming up. Often you come across a Speckled Wood here at this time of year, but there were none – in fact no butterflies at all. Even the fungi were absent, except for one notable exception...

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

Alice Holt is a mixed woodland. One part is mainly larch and on previous years I have come across the Dyer's Mazegill here which is a bracket fungus that can grow from the trunks or roots of such trees. There was a big one here today which was bedecked in its fresh yellow and orange colours. An unusual fungus.



I have read that it is called "Dyer's" Mazegill because before the advent of synthetic dyes in 1856, it was used to dye yarn yellow, orange or brown. All I can say is there must have been an awful lot more of it about then than there is now, because its not a species I come across too frequently.

The following pic show how difficult it can be sometimes to identify fungi. This is a rosette form of the same species in exactly the same spot as the one above but during a previous year. It is a bit more aged too, being a lot blacker in the centre as it gets older. In fact they blacken progressively and deliquesce until they finally melt away altogether.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 18-Sep-18 10:26 PM GMT

Lovely pristine Speckle Ernie 🍄🍄 and some really fascinating fungi 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Sep-18 05:55 PM GMT

Wurzel – Glad you like the fungi. As the butterflies slowly decline its likely there will be more fungi in my non-butterfly section. The next one is no exception!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 19-Sep-18 06:02 PM GMT

Sleaford – 19th Sep 2018

My wife wanted to go to the garden centre so after I dropped her off I had 30 minutes at Sleaford Common nearby. This location had been excellent recently for both Small Copper and Brown Argus but we had blustery winds and a morning of rain. Luckily the sun broke out for a short while early afternoon. There were however only 2 Small Coppers that I found and no Brown Argus at all.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

But now as if to replace them, there were rather a lot of Common Darters. One stayed on the ground while I crept up to take a picture. I got so close I almost banged my camera lens into him but he only flew off when I moved away.



Alice Holt - same day

Looking for fungi and found three species. Another example of the one I reported on yesterday but also, this time there was a Scarlet Brittlegill and a *Scleroderma cepa* Earthball under the Oaks in the car park. The beauty and the beast!





There are a few red-capped Brittlegill species but this one can be identified as it prefers to be under Oak trees.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 19-Sep-18 11:16 PM GMT

Cheers for more fungi info Ernie - I've got some fungi shots and your PD is finally helping me get them identified 😊 One of my retirement plans is to restudy Mycology 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 21-Sep-18 07:02 AM GMT

Wow. You've certainly got your eye in for fungi lately, ernie. This time of year is usually best for them so next time I'm out I must remain on the alert for them (though I'd have no idea which are the good ones!)

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 21-Sep-18 10:16 AM GMT

Fascinating Fungus ernie, 😊 It always amazes me that Butterflies can stand up to the strong winds and rain, lovely Copper's.Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 21-Sep-18 11:10 AM GMT

Great variety in your reports Ernie, I like the fungi too. 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Sep-18 12:40 PM GMT

Thank you all for your very welcome comments. I'm glad you like my fungi reports. Another one is on its way..... 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 21-Sep-18 12:48 PM GMT

Broxhead - 21st Sep 2018

The butterfly season is certainly closing around here. I only counted 7 Small Coppers here today but one was in a new area where I had never seen any before so can count to my annual record of 188.

The following pic is of one showing a vast range of colours including that oily purple-blue and yellow-green sheen I have been noticing recently.



Only one remaining Brown Argus too but I have never seen one flying as late as this before.



Even the Speckled Woods were absent today and I might have still expected those.

The only other butterfly was on my drive back – a single (probably) Small White. The severe gales of yesterday and the day before have taken their toll it would seem.

There are still some sunny days forecast over the next week so I am not at the end yet but its definitely in sight.

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

And so the fungi numbers increase. I saw 7 species today. Here are a couple.

A huge, fresh Birch Polypore growing from a fallen Silver Birch.



And the common but colourful Sulphur Tuft.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 21-Sep-18 10:30 PM GMT

Lovely Small Copper Ernie 😊 I was hoping for an Indian Summer but that looks less likely at the moment 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Sep-18 10:29 AM GMT

Maybe not an Indian Summer, Wurzel but there are still a few warmer, sunnier days forecast.

But first we have to get through this weekend. 😞

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 22-Sep-18 10:44 AM GMT

It's amazing ernie, all the different Fungus you can find and the lovely colours, may be we should take more shots of fungus in the Autumn to replace the Butterflies once they've gone 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Sep-18 10:57 AM GMT

Goldie – the fungi do fascinate me (but not as much as butterflies it must be said). There is at least one fungus that crosses the boundary into the world of butterflies. I have found it many times in the past and have pics but it does not appear to have sprung up yet in the places I know about. Whether I find it this year or not I shall add it into one of my diary entries over the next week as it is amazing.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Sep-18 11:17 AM GMT

Noar Hill 21st Sep 2018 pm

The wind gusted at 40 MPH+ at times. Bracing I think is the best description of this afternoon at Noar Hill.

I saw only one butterfly and that is one more than I expected to see given the conditions. This was a Small Heath. It was hiding in amongst the bramble trying desparately to stay out of the wind – I think successfully.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

But he was not the reason I came here today. I braved the breeze to find the Ivy Bee nesting site. I was told about this earlier in the year and today I found it. Ivy Bees are a relative newcomer to our shores from the continent. They choose to nectar from Ivy blooms and so they emerge around mid September and do their stuff until sometime in November. They seem to like south-facing slopes and this is where I found them at Noar Hill. There was one cluster that had set up shop in and around what appeared to be a rabbit hole and the rest just made holes in the ground of the nearby banks and also the pathway through the centre of the reserve, pushing up little volcanoes of earth.



I stood and watched their antics for ages. A fascinating species. Although termed a "solitary bee", they make nests close together and so can swarm across a suitable site.

While I watched I saw one or two perform what seemed to me to be a little "dance". They wagged their abdomen and fluttered their wings first to one side of their body and then the other. Being solitary I do not think this behaviour was a communication telling others where a nectaring site was, as we know Honey Bees do. It may have been a courting dance instead – I don't know.

They would search for the entrance to a nest hole and then suddenly dive in head-first. If you waited you would see them emerge again head-first. Sometimes they would just stay there with their front-end sticking out. I imagine this was the male guarding the entrance hole of a nest site and presume the female was inside laying eggs. On another occasion one bee (a female?) was in the process of entering a nest hole while another (a male – her mate?) stood beside it, again as if on guard. To be honest I do not know enough about this species of bees to be certain. Nevertheless it was all very interesting to watch.



Ivy Bee in flight



Landing at nest site



"Dancing"



Searching for the nest entrance hole



Ah, found it!



"Diving" down the hole



Coming back out again - guarding entrance?

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 22-Sep-18 10:20 PM GMT

Great shots of the Ivy Bees Ernie, if I remember correctly they're a more recent arrival than the Tree Bees and definitely a more striking addition 😊 Great work to find a butterfly in those weather conditions 😊😊 That Small Heath deserves a medal for bravery! 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 22-Sep-18 11:50 PM GMT

Your wide field of interest in the natural world means you can enjoy a trip out even when butterflies are in short supply, ernie. I enjoy seeing the eclectic mixture you serve up and you have posted many things that I probably see but generally walk past when I'm out.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Sep-18 10:42 AM GMT

Thanks, Guys. I do like just about anything in nature and no matter what the time of year or where I have lived, there has always been something of interest.

I have only just found out about the Ivy Bees at Noar Hill (my closest nature reserve) this year. What will I find on my doorstep next year that I don't yet know about I wonder?

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 23-Sep-18 12:40 PM GMT

Its a rotten rainy day in the south of England so my post today is historic and not strictly about butterflies although it is related (rather it does affect some of them in an awful and somewhat macabre way).

The Scarlet Caterpillarclub

I mentioned in a previous post that there is a fungus that bridges the world of fungi and butterflies and this is it. I have not seen it yet this year but there is plenty of time. I have seen it previously on Nov 2nd at Alice Holt Woods for example.

This bright red fungus is parasitic on the buried larvae of butterflies and moths. Its spores may end up on a caterpillar. Those species of caterpillars that enter the ground to pupate suffer the fate of having their insides consumed by the growing, feeding fungus. If dug from the ground the fungus is often to be found still attached to the carcass of the larva. I have never dug one up and don't intend to but I have seen pictures of them attached to their unwitting hosts in both their larva and pupa forms.

They are not easy to find because they only grow to be about 2 cm tall and when they grow in grass it is usually higher than the fungus. You really have to get your eye-in as they say. I have read they grow in woodland and other habitats too but have never seen them other than in cropped grass. I guess they occur wherever their hosts thrive.

They are vibrantly orangey-red (well scarlet I suppose) so once you know what to look for, the more likely you are to see more of them.

The best location near me is the regularly mown grass of the graveyard in front of the main entrance to Kingsley's Victorian Church (which is on the shadier, northern side). I have no idea what their host larva is here, it could be moth or butterfly but I suspect a moth of some kind as the most common butterflies (and thus butterfly larva) around here are the Holly Blue and Small Copper, neither of which I think I am right in saying ever go "subterranean". Although the fungus only really needs a cover of leaf-litter to start it off.

My record count for them in one location on one day is seven individual and widely-separated club spikes at Kingsley Churchyard on 22nd Nov 2016. So that was seven moths that never made it to adulthood at Kingsley that year.



Cordyceps militaris - Scarlet Caterpillarclub



Three growing from the same larva?

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 23-Sep-18 11:16 PM GMT

Wow that is fantastically sinister yet intriguing 😬😬 I seem to recall seeing something similar on a Simon Reeves show where there are fungi that feed/grow/parasitize caterpillars in a similar fashion in Mongolia(?) and they are highly prized and exceedingly valuable 😬😬

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 24-Sep-18 07:16 AM GMT

Thanks for enlightening us with those miniature fungi, ernie. Again, I'd personally not heard of them before but I'll be sure to keep my eyes out when next in the field.

Rather gruesome way to reach maturity though!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Sep-18 04:36 PM GMT

Thanks, Guys - It sure is an amazing fungus. There is a distribution map on the internet which shows this family of parasitic fungi popping up all over the world.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Sep-18 04:53 PM GMT

Broxhead - 24th Sep 2018

I was last here three days ago. On that occasion I found 7 Small Copper, 1 Brown Argus and no Speckled Wood. Between then and now we have had 40 mph winds, persistent rain and last night the temperature plummeted to 2 degrees. You would I hope forgive me for thinking all this had decimated the remaining butterflies but I am an optimist and my final mission of the year was to see if I could find a Brown Argus in flight in the last week of September. I had never seen one that late in the year before you see.

And what did I find?

I found 20 Small Coppers, 3 Brown Argus and 3 Speckled Wood!

What on earth is going on?

At one point 2 Brown Argus and a Small Copper were in a sparring circle together. At another point there were two male Small Coppers battling it out. Then a male pursuing a female who proceeded to do a Turkey Trot. It was as though the bad weather had never happened and they just continued where they left off.

I can understand that I may have missed 2 Brown Argus on the 21st Sep but in no way could I have missed 13 Small Coppers. Whilst the Speckled Woods, Brown Argus and some of the Small Coppers were faded and jaded, some others of the Small Coppers were quite fresh. Now the third brood of Small Coppers was early here this year so I am wondering now if the increase in their numbers is due to the fourth brood emerging early too and overlapping the remaining tatty third-brooders?



One old geezer was trying his luck with a young lass but of course he was getting the brush-off.



More Turkey Trotting



Brown Argus still in pretty good nick for 24th Sep

One of the Speckled Woods had a blue-ish hue to its wings.



Fading to blue?

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

I have already posted about the Fly Agaric but this example at Broxhead today was very unusual. It had a crazy-paving design to its cap where usually its a solid colour either red or orange.



And I have also posted the Peziza michelii cup mushroom before, but that was more like an advance warning as it wasn't actually out then. Today it was out and about and in exactly the same spot as before, growing straight out of the impacted sand beside the path.



And I came across this nice (Garden) Spider making a web between the fronds of heather. Not good news for those two Small Coppers I saw flying dangerously close-by! There is not a lot of heather still in bloom and so nectaring possibilities for the butterflies are diminishing. Notice how this crafty spider has set up shop right beside a remaining blooming heather.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 24-Sep-18 10:54 PM GMT

It's good that the recent low pressure and storms didn't have a negative impact Ernie, though I suspect that you didn't get hit too badly over your way 😊 Looks like the Small Coppers are warming up ready for the Indian Summer 😊 Could the crazy paving on the Fly Agaric have something to do with it's development as it looks a little deformed? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-Sep-18 03:38 PM GMT

Wurzel – It wouldn't surprise me if that Fly Agaric was deformed for some reason. Its not the first time I have seen mushrooms in the wild not performing to standard and it won't be the last.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 25-Sep-18 03:47 PM GMT

Broxhead – 25th Sep 2018

Here again as it's probably the best location near me at this time of year. As per yesterday there was a bundle of Small Coppers, 3 Brown Argus and 2 Speckled Wood, plus a White of some kind flew by fleetingly. I saw three Small Coppers up by the lay-by where so far this year I have only found a singleton. That means I can increase my annual count by two to a 190 personal record and a location record at Broxhead to 77.





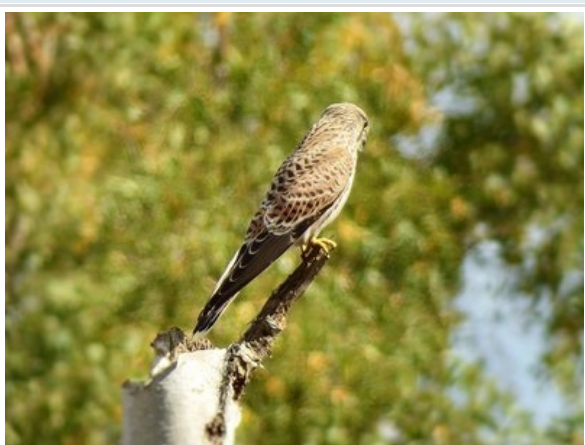
Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day.

If you remember a couple of days ago I made a special effort to find the Ivy Bee nesting colony at Noar Hill and was successful. Today quite by accident I came across another colony of bees at Broxhead which to my untrained eye looked exactly like Ivy Bees. They behaved in the same way, nested in the same fashion but they were nectaring from heather - not ivy.



I get back home and look them up and what do I find? The Ivy Bee has a close relative called the Heather Bee! This was obviously a colony of Heather Bees.

Also a nice Kestrel, perching and hawking over the heath like a Hobby!



And this mushroom partially hidden under mixed birch, oak and gorse. It is one of the Brittlegill family but this one does not have brittle gills! I always default Brittlegills of this colour to the Charcoal Burner because it is so widespread and common. Even though the cap colours can vary quite dramatically they usually have a tint of violet about them. Apparently it gets its common name from the colours created by a charcoal flame. Never having seen the colours of a charcoal flame I could not comment.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 26-Sep-18 08:56 AM GMT

Well its nearing the end of the butterfly season so I thought I'd update my Hampshire butterfly spreadsheet.

Here it is. If you live close or are ever visiting this way I hope you find it useful.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 26-Sep-18 05:57 PM GMT

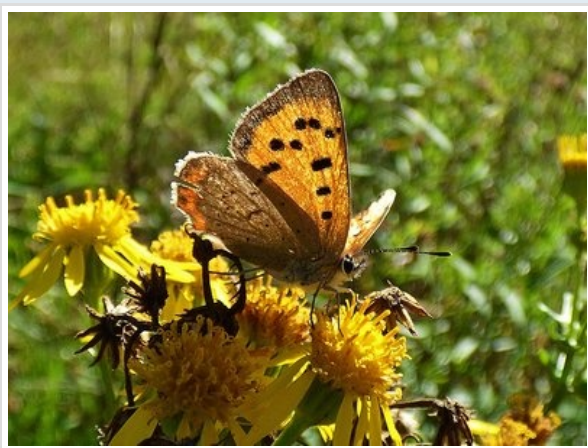
Kingsley Common – 26th Sep 2018

My annual count of Small Coppers was getting dangerously close to that milestone 200. I wondered if I could reach it, so today I visited all those parts of Kingsley Common where I have seen them in past years but so far had not seen them at all this year. I found 9 in all which brought my annual total up to 199. Blast – I was one away.

I then remembered that in the Small Copper boom year of 2016, there were three flying at Shortheath Common at the end closest to the village of Oakhanger and I had not been back there since. So...

Shortheath Common – same day

I saw four more, bringing my annual total to 203.





One had some nice big blobs on its wings.



Frensham Common (Little Pond area) – same day

And then in the afternoon I managed to squeeze 2 more out of Frensham bringing the total to 205!

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

From Kingsley Common, two fungi, both common and widespread.



Bay Bolete



Common Earthball

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 26-Sep-18 10:53 PM GMT

Congrats on breaking the 200 mark Ernie 😊 Some nicely marked ones there in the mix 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 27-Sep-18 09:04 AM GMT

Things looking quite autumnal now in your images, ernie. Perhaps we only have this burst of fine weather left before all we're left with are the adult hibernators?

I'm glad you surpassed your Copper milestone. I've a feeling there'll be room for a few more before they disappear.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Sep-18 01:04 PM GMT

Wurzel, David - Thanks for the congrats re the Copper Milestone and David you were right in your forecast. I found some more today!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Sep-18 01:10 PM GMT

I am nearing the end of my planned posts to this forum this year so its time to recap my findings regarding wing-rolling.

I'll add it as an attachment here but also under the topic under "general".



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 27-Sep-18 01:21 PM GMT

Binswood - 27th Sep 2018

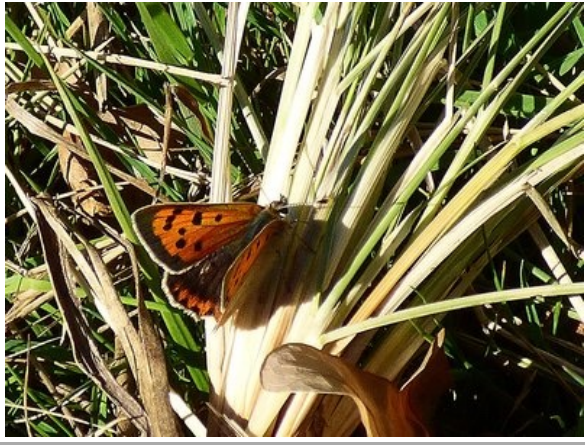
I had not visited this location since my spate of almost daily visits when the Puple Hairstreaks were flying. I remembered I saw a few Small Coppers on the path beside the meadow then, so on the off-chance I went again specifically for Small Coppers. I had never done this at this location at this time of year before.

I found 5, all reasonably fresh.

Great - my record annual count has now become 210.

But something struck me as a little odd. I looked around and I could not see a single, solitary plant in flower. No ragwort, no autumn hawkbit, no dandelion, no scabious, yarrow or daisy, no last remaining thistle hanging on. No shrubs with flowers, only berries out now. So no opportunity to get nectar at all that I could see. Can adults survive on sunshine alone for a short while? Perhaps they resort to insect honeydew? There were cows on the meadow and consequently cow-pats were fresh but come to think of it I am not sure I have ever seen a Small Copper come down to one, although rabbit poo may have been an attraction to a few I have seen in the past.

Anyone have any ideas?



Shortheath Common - same day

As it was just around the corner I did a quick visit to the Small Copper lek at Shortheath and found only two Small Coppers but I cannot add these to my count for fear of double-counting ones I had seen here already recently. But they were definitely in decline here.

Non-butterfly Snapshots of the day

I only saw today some fungi that I have already posted and this being a butterfly website I can get away with posting lots of pictures of the same species of butterfly every day but not of mushrooms.

I like to put something under this heading every post I make so today I thought that since I will be stopping my posts at the end of September, that will not give me the opportunity to share pictures of some of the wonderful fungi I have found growing around here in October and November. Now I have literally hundreds of pictures of over 100 species of fungi in my collection so I am going to focus down on my favourite family, the Waxcaps, and its best location near me, Kingsley Victorian Churchyard. All these that follow can be found growing in the short-cropped grass in an area no greater than 50 paces square. The same location in fact as the Scarlet Caterpillarclub I described in a recent post.



Golden Waxcap



Scarlet Waxcap



Blackening Waxcap



Snowy Waxcap



Parrot Waxcap



Crimson Waxcap

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Sep-18 10:56 AM GMT

Just a quick entry. I actually saw a Brimstone today. Nothing remarkable about that perhaps, except I looked back through my records and found that the last time I saw one was on Aug 2nd.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 28-Sep-18 04:53 PM GMT

Noar Hill – 28th Sep 2018

My last visit here this year I think. I didn't expect much but it was warm and sunny. I saw a total of three butterflies and all of them in one of the centre pits on a sheltered bank. Two Small Heath and one Small Copper. The latter counts toward my annual total which is now 211. Both Small Heaths on occasion held their wings slightly ajar.





Non-butterfly Snapshot of the Day

Its difficult to keep this slot going right at the end so now I am resorting to breaking all my rules. This is not at Noar Hill, its at Farlington Marsh and its not this year but it is within the last 12 months.

People have been posting about falcons and owls recently to I thought I'd share this. When it happened it bowled me over. I still have goose-bumps thinking about it now.

A wild Short-eared Owl in flight close to me and I just happened to have my camera out and set at the time.



And then two on the ground.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 28-Sep-18 10:27 PM GMT

Short-tailed Owls Ernie 🤔🤔🤔🤔 And I love the Parrot Waxcap, what a brilliantly coloured fungus 🤔🤔 I've been trapped in all week so your PD is one of those that has helped me get to the weekend cheers! 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Sep-18 12:17 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. I'm glad to help. Now its Saturday and sunny I hope you are able to get out. There can't be many more butterflying opportunities this year now, sadly.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Sep-18 01:01 PM GMT

My penultimate post for 2018

Broxhead (Anvil End) – 29th Sep 2018

I was last at this part of the Broxhead Reserve on 2nd Sep. Today I saw 4 Small Coppers, 2 of which I can be confident I had not seen before because they were on sections of the walk I had seen none this year.

This pushes up my total this year at Broxhead to 79 and my overall total this year to 213.



Non-butterfly Snapshots of the year.

As the butterflies decline and the mushrooms increase I thought I'd show a few more fungi I have seen in the past near me. They might not move about quite as much as butterflies or have such interesting behaviours but they can be worth searching for even if you don't intend to eat them. I am always astonished by the colours and variety you can find.



Yellow Stagshorn (even though it is usually orange)



Golden Chanterelle



Wrinkled Club (this one contorted like a statue)



Trooping Funnel (actually doing some trooping)



Saffron Milkcap



Yellowleg Bonnet



Beefsteak Bracket



Common Earthstar (this one I found in my garden)



Earthtongue (yet another from Kingsley churchyard)



Deceiver



Jelly Rot (looking a bit like Bryce Canyon -USA)



Rosy Bonnet



Wood Cauliflower



Woolly Milkcap (this is the woolliest one I have found)



Yellow Brain



Candlesnuff



Stinkhorn (the rudest of all fungi)

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 29-Sep-18 01:41 PM GMT

Hi! ernie, love your Owl shots, how lucky can you get 😊

You've got some great Fungus shots as well, love the colours, I've never seen some of them before, fantastic 😊

You've no need to switch off posting ernie, come the cold weather lots of us post other pics that keep us going, plus Wurzel does a post in which you can post your favourite shot starting with A for Adonis, you might fancy doing that. Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Jenks, 29-Sep-18 03:05 PM GMT

Fantastic photos, Ernie, and what a collection of fungi!

I remember reading somewhere that when a guide to British fungi was being compiled in the late 19th century the publishers refused to print the picture of Stinkhorn, the reasoning being that it would offend sensitive members of Victorian society (too phallic)!

Jenks.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Sep-18 04:20 PM GMT

Goldie - thanks for the info regarding what you lot get up to in winter. I shall not go completely to sleep and hibernate until Spring then. I shall merely slumber and poke my head up above the parapet from time to time.

Jenks - I believe it about the Victorians. I once read they covered their piano legs with material for much the same reason (!?) Of course that may be a modern story poking fun at their mis-placed sensitivities.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 29-Sep-18 04:33 PM GMT

Just to round-off the Stinkhorn thing. As you are probably aware - it stinks. In fact you can know one is around by its smell of rotting flesh before you ever see it.

It seems to start off when freshly fruiting with a smelly goo on top which attracts flies.



After a while the goo goes and you get a grey, pimply top. The pic I showed already.



And as it ages it goes white, loses its smell, kind of evaporates from the inside leaving a gauzy husk, amazingly light to the touch. I don't know if you know what a gas mantle looks and feels like but its just like this.



And then there is its rarer cousin, the Dog Stinkhorn. I have only ever seen this once.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 29-Sep-18 06:21 PM GMT

Some amazing fungi again Ernie - I need to have a sit down with your PD and my fungi photo collection over the winter months and start naming my shots using your excellent 'reference library' 😊 No luck getting out today, fingers crossed for tomorrow 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 29-Sep-18 06:40 PM GMT

Love your Short Eared Owls, Ernie.

I've never seen one, but a couple of years ago I was woken up by a loud, strange, Owl call.

Five or six rapid hoots at a time. I found some Owl call recordings on the net, and the Short Eared Owl was on the recording.

The Bird was calling from a large Oak at the bottom of my garden. (Spooky in the dead of night !).

All the best,
Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Sep-18 09:54 AM GMT

Wurzel - I'm glad I've given you something to do during the winter. 😊

Trevor - I was lucky to get the pic of the Short-eared Owl in flight. I knew they were at Farlington but never thought I'd get that lucky. I have seen them a few times in my life - particularly on a holiday in Orkney some years ago. But I have never, ever heard one call like you have. Maybe they only do it at night - for maximum spookiness! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 30-Sep-18 10:02 AM GMT

The Last Post - 30th Sep 2018

Today is my last planned diary entry of my first year on UK butterflies. Its been great to read about the things that other people have seen and I have learnt a lot from you all.

I thought I'd take this opportunity to recap the best moments that I remember from other people's posts. I have not looked them up again so I cannot refer to them by whom, where and when they were posted so I'll merely list them - they are not in any priority order but I have only selected those that I remember which were specific to butterflies and moths in the UK.

- The image of a mating pair of Purple Emperors on the ground.
- The 4-wing Purple Emperor pic from underneath.
- The image of a White Letter Hairstreak from above showing how the tails splay out to mimic antennae.
- The image of a Brown Hairstreak ditto with not only its tails splayed but also bulges on the hindwings imitating a head when seen from above.
- The image and the text on how the image was obtained of a mating pair of Peacock butterflies.
- The announcement of the Black Hairstreak population at Ditchling Common in Sussex.
- My realisation for the first time of the true size and potential for European significance of the Small Copper community at Dungeness.
- The incredible numbers of Purple Emperor counted at Knepp Woods.

- The site near Steyning in Sussex where there were so many Adonis Blues that someone posted they could see many mating all at the same time.
- The ab White Admiral that was completely black.
- Animated GIFs of butterflies such as Green Hairstreak and Small Blue wing-rolling and thanks to Bugboy for animating my own efforts.
- A group of whites "mud puddling" in Britain.
- The knowledge of the unusual courtship behaviours of the Grayling.
- The knowledge that there is a limestone-based Grayling community at Portland.
- The picture of two male Grayling mating with the same female at the same time (OK it wasn't posted originally in this year but it was referred to me this year).
- The charming photo of a Small Tortoiseshell using a set of dandelion blooms as a "Stairway to Heaven".
- The close-up of the Orange Tip which showed how the wing-pattern was made-up.
- The Common Blue with one hindwing miniaturised.
- The pair of Lulworth Skippers in-cop.
- Large Blue egg-laying.
- Adonis Blue male wing-rolling while in-cop.
- The series of Gifs of the Hummingbird Hawkmoth in-flight and feeding.
- The picture of three Grizzled Skippers on the same plant but separated, each to its own flowerbud.
- An almost black female Adonis with a speckling of blue scales.
- The mating Small Heath "Odd Couple". One mini ab and the other with an odd variant of spotting on its wing.
- Pic of Purple Emperor with purple hindwings but black forewings.
- The knowledge that late-flying Small Coppers seem to be able to get sustenance from ripe blackberries or the dew from the surface of unripe ones when there are no flowers around to nectar from.
- The picture of a pair of Wall butterflies in-cop.
- Bugboys mission completed.

I know there were many, many others which I liked at the time but I cannot now remember their specifics. Age is getting the better of me I am afraid.

Non-butterfly snapshot of the day

I was exploring a part of the Alice Holt woodland which was wild and secretive when I came across a marvellously rare thing. I have seen books and TV shows about this creature but I never thought I would be lucky enough to see one for real, let alone get a photograph of it.

I only caught a glimpse as it went by.

I do not think it saw me as it seemed to be in deep conversation with a small mouse.



Best Wishes to you all.

I won't be going away completely. I shall be dipping in to read your PDs and to add replies from time to time and I may even add to my PD if something really good comes up. But this is the last of my (almost) daily PD posts.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 30-Sep-18 11:17 AM GMT

Great reading about the highlights Ernie and a great first year with your PD 😊 Hopefully you'll be able to make it to the winter Social 😊 And didn't you know there's no such thing as the thing you got a photo of? 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 30-Sep-18 11:55 AM GMT

Bye, Bye, for a little while ernie, 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by millerd, 30-Sep-18 02:48 PM GMT

Cheers, Ernie – it's been fascinating reading your posts and seeing your photos. It's great getting different slants on things! As Wurzel says come along to the social, it really isn't far from you. And by the way, he's having you on – I saw one of those a few years ago in a deep dark wood somewhere... 😊

Dave

Re: ernie f

by David M, 30-Sep-18 11:16 PM GMT

It'll be a shame to lose you, ernie (albeit temporarily). Your list of highlights is pretty impressive, particularly the mating Emperors, which is something even Neil Hulme only gets to see occasionally!

Please drop back in occasionally, even if it means updating us with your non-butterfly stuff, which is worthy in itself.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Oct-18 07:31 AM GMT

Thank you all. I'll see if I can make it to that social.

I think I have ID'd the beast in the wood as *Grufallus silvestrii*. I have also heard that the even rarer *Hominis stickus* has been seen there too. I'll let you know if I see him. 😊

By the way – I looked it up. It was Neil Hulme who took those wonderful pics of Purple Emperors mating on the ground. Well remembered, Dave.

Re: ernie f

by CallumMac, 01-Oct-18 09:30 AM GMT

What a lovely post to finish your year's entries, Ernie. There is always so much going on in the PDs, and so many amazing photographs, that it's wonderful to recognise a couple of my own posts in your list – what a lovely warm feeling for a Monday morning! 😊

As someone else who started posted on UKB this year, I also echo your sentiments about learning a lot from everybody!

Re: ernie f

by David M, 01-Oct-18 08:56 PM GMT

ernie f wrote:

...It was Neil Hulme who took those wonderful pics of Purple Emperors mating on the ground. Well remembered, Dave.

I thought a few others had been present during this episode, ernie? I hope Neil didn't bag it all for himself.

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 02-Oct-18 12:33 PM GMT

I made it onto your highlights 😊 .

You're welcome to come to the winter social btw, to put faces to some of the regular users 😊

<https://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=9917>

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 10-Oct-18 11:55 AM GMT

Broxhead – 9th October 2018

In my last post I said I would add to my PD on occasion if I found something of note.

Today at Broxhead I found a Brown Argus still flying – but only just as it was very frayed by now. This is the latest in any year I have ever seen a Brown Argus in flight! I recognised him too as I had seen him before. I remember the first defect he suffered, a straight slice cut out of his left hindwing and it was still vaguely discernable today among the remaining ragged edges. An old friend.



And there are still 8 Small Coppers flying about here too. Two males were in pursuit of females doing Turkey Trots.

One landed on a ripe acorn on the ground.



Another landed on a small leaf which the breeze blew away with him still on it, but it turned him upside-down as he clung on for dear life!



Non-butterfly Snapshot of the day.

On my doorstep. This is a Western Conifer Seed Bug, one of the Squash Bugs. I read up on it. Apparently it was introduced from the USA into Europe in 1999 (by design or by accident I don't know) and has from 2008 made its home over here. It likes to hibernate in buildings and seeks out suitable sites in Autumn which I suppose is why it was on my doorstep. He's a pretty smart-looking fellow.



Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 11-Oct-18 09:49 AM GMT

Love the Short-eared Owls Ernie, well done. 😊 Your fungi selections have helped me identify some that I have seen so thanks for that. 😊

Cheers

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 11-Oct-18 08:16 PM GMT

Great stuff Ernie 😊 Thanks for the Squash Bug ID, I saw one a couple of days ago and wondered what the hell it was 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Paul Harfield, 13-Oct-18 12:11 PM GMT

Hi Ernie

Great first year 😊. I am already looking forward to the next one. I am sure at some point we will bump into each other. I have learned quite a bit from your in depth analysis on various topics and your 'non-butterfly shots of the day' 😊

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 14-Oct-18 09:48 AM GMT

Hi Ernie, You have posted some really interesting stuff in your diary during your first year. I usually keep mine ticking over through the winter with various stuff, usually birds or moths from my garden.

I have had a few of those bugs in my moth trap recently and was going to try and ID them so thanks for posting that photo 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 15-Oct-18 12:08 PM GMT

It's always satisfying when you see an individual butterfly that you recognise from several days previously, ernie.....especially when it's a Brown Argus in October! 🍷

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Oct-18 06:01 PM GMT

David M - Yes I was amazed a Brown Argus was still flying so late in the year. I now wonder if I shall see a Small Copper in the fourth week of October - not something I have ever seen before. But maybe after the storm we just had, that is asking too much.

Neil - That's the first time I've seen that squash bug. If our climate warms up more (as it will) I think we can look forward to a few more newcomers to our shores. Unfortunately we shall lose some too.

Wurzel - It looks like those bugs are getting to be quite common over here now.

Paul - Thanks for your comments. No doubt we will meet up at some point. I am already starting to make it a habit of asking people I meet at my local

nature reserves if they know about the UK butterflies website. If I don't I could easily talk to someone who posts here and I'd never know it.

Andrew - I'm glad to help with your fungi id-ing. I am no expert though and so I am constantly surprised by the variety of any given species, especially as they age. Even the more common ones can sometimes be difficult because of that.

Bugboy - You was always going to be on my end-of-year list as soon as you met your mission target - and what a way to do it too!

Callum - It was a pleasure to include stuff from your year on my end-of-year list.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 16-Oct-18 06:08 PM GMT

Today I came across one of the fungi I have been wanting to see ever since I bought a book on fungi years ago and saw it in there. And there was a dozen or so of them along the roadside verge at Kingsley.

It is the Magpie Inkcap.

One of them was about 8 inches tall! Another had a cap that was flipping up at the edges and another was melting (common stages for the Inkcaps to pass through). There were ones with a black ground colour while others were brown. If you are lucky sometimes the white flecks lift off and stick out. None of the ones I saw today were doing that though. My book says it is a mushroom of Southern Britain, only rarely being found in the north but I have to say - I have had an interest in fungi for a great many years and have always lived in the south and this is the first time I have come across them so they can't be that common down here either really.





Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 16-Oct-18 10:12 PM GMT

That's a really interesting looking fungus Ernie 😊 I'd say that I'd keep my eye out for some but if they're as scarce as you say then perhaps the best way would be to just stumble upon them 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 18-Oct-18 09:23 AM GMT

After delighting us with a diverse range of fungi this year, ernie, it's only fair that you stumbled upon your holy grail!

That's a fascinating looking work of nature and, according to the information I've looked up, quite scarce too!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Oct-18 05:51 PM GMT

Wurzel and David

Thanks for your comments. It was so great to see this mushroom species that I went back again today. The caps don't last very long. A couple I saw the other day had caps that had already melted away. It was strange to see just the stalks poking up and nothing on top! But a few others were coming up to take their place.

This one looked just like some kind of hat.





Butterfly pictures of the day

Just across the road beside the Kingsley Church Car Park every year a load of Asters grow. They attract butterflies. Today there were two Red Admirals and one Small Copper. This being the third week of October matches my record for the latest flying Small Copper around here. This one was fresh. The forecast for the next few days is fine so who knows – it may still be around in the fourth week!



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 18-Oct-18 11:19 PM GMT

That is a very natty hat Ernie 😊 and a very natty Small Copper 😊🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 19-Oct-18 08:04 AM GMT

Those fungi look quite different to the ones you posted earlier, ernie. I presume they have a fast metabolism!!

Love the Copper on the asters...a lovely colour contrast.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Oct-18 06:11 PM GMT

David - you are right - those Inkcaps come and go very quickly. Also I was lucky with the Copper on an Aster shot too. I have subsequently been back twice and it was nowhere to be found.

Wurzel - Its a great time of year. Still got the butterflies to a certain extent and also the fungi at the same time. Not long to go now though and it will be just the fungi.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Oct-18 06:42 PM GMT

20th October - Four Marks

A Red Admiral at close range in flight? What amazingly good luck.



No. I admit it. I cheated! This one was actually perched on the polythene roofing of the garden centre at the village of Four Marks.

21st October - Kingsley

Speckled Wood - note that wear is causing its forewing tip to go blue at certain angles.



None of the Magpie Inkcaps of recent days appear to remain. It seems they sprout, open and melt all within about 3 days or so. Quite a few other kinds of fungi though, all common species, but...

... this appears to be a pale and spotless version of the Fly Agaric.



Here is what it should look like and this one was only a couple of dozen metres away.



And a Blackening Brittlegill. Its cap was a bit shiny so it reflected the blue of the sky from this angle.



And on the asters beside the church car park were a host of bees. I think maybe Common Carder Bees but I am not sure.



21st October - Alice Holt

I love these little Bonnet mushrooms, there were literally hundreds of them in large clusters on the car park verges at Alice Holt woodland.



Plus a few Wood Blewit.



22nd October - Broxhead

I have never seen a Small Copper flying in the fourth week of October before. I know they can fly into early November in good years so I came here to Broxhead on the off-chance.

I found this dragonfly, what I think is a fading Common Darter, en-route to the lek.



A good start I thought.

I got to the lek trying desperately to keep my expectations in check but I didn't have to wait long for them to be met. Yep, a Small Copper. This one had blue badges and a nick out of its right forewing.



But then - what was that I saw just flew past - another one? Yes. No wing nick. Fantastic. Mission well and truly accomplished.





A Red Admiral bowled in and a Small Copper had a go at chasing it off. First of all it appeared to succeed but the Red Admiral came back, wheeled around with a bit of bravado to let them know who was boss and then flew off.

I was just about to leave when I saw two Small Coppers chase and then land on the ground. I quickly snapped a picture when I realised it was a male pursuing a female.



Neither had blue badges so this was a third individual. So from never having seen one fly in the fourth week of October before I now ended up this year seeing three! But then to add icing to the cake, the female did a Turkey Trot.



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 23-Oct-18 07:55 PM GMT

Great stuff Ernie 😊 Seeing Small Coppers still must be great 🍷 - things are a bit cooler already over this neck of the woods although a Wall was recorded yesterday further north in the county 😊 You've got the right ID for the bee 😊 A great selection of Fungi again - interesting to see the pale and spotless Fly Agaric - I'll be featuring a few Fungi over the coming weeks so hopefully you'll be able to ID them for me 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by bugboy, 24-Oct-18 08:46 AM GMT

Nice Coppers Ernie, they're still out and about all over place it would seem. I've been reliably informed they are still on the wing up in Yorkshire!

I think your dragonfly is an aged Keeled Skimmer, it doesn't look right for a Darter to me 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Oct-18 10:11 AM GMT

Wurzel – Thanks for confirming the Bee ID. Although my book says its common, it is in fact the first time I have ever noticed it. One for my lifer list! Also, I will be sure to look out for your fungi pics. As I say, I am no expert and fungi are devilishly difficult to ID sometimes.

Bugboy – Thanks for suggesting my dragonfly is a Keeled Skimmer. If it is (and I have no reason to doubt it) this would be the first time I have seen one at Broxhead and according to my book, a clear month after the end of its normal flying season. It sure has been an odd year this year.

Re: ernie f

by Matsukaze, 24-Oct-18 08:02 PM GMT

Surely the dragonfly is female Common/(?Ruddy) Darter – general shape, appearance and flight time are correct for that whilst female Keeled Skimmer ought to have clear antehumeral stripes and pale pterostigmata.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Oct-18 09:44 PM GMT

Matzukaze.

Ah, so I'm not going mad then. My original assumption was that it was a Common Darter, but it was an assumption at the time rather than really knowing. I have been fooled before you see. See a previous diary entry of mine re my confusion between Darter/Skimmer. On that occasion my "Darter" was a Keeled Skimmer. I looked closer at my pic this time and on enlargement I can see the four red dots on the top of the thorax. OK, so they are not red now being faded out quite a bit but still indicative.

I have never seen a Keeled Skimmer at Broxhead and I have never seen a Ruddy Darter there either.

I am not a Dragonfly expert so I take advice on ID wherever I find it. Thank you for your comments.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24-Oct-18 09:52 PM GMT

Broxhead 24th October 12.15 – 1.15 pm, full sun, warm at 16 degrees

I thought I might be really pushing my luck with Small Coppers at Broxhead today. I was here on the 22nd with the aim to get 4th brood fliers in the fourth week of October and achieved my aim – I saw three on that occasion if you remember.

Now any sane person who did not know any better (I think I'm sane and I certainly don't know any better!) might have expected there might be fewer of them flying today. One might have hoped to see all three again but perhaps, if really unlucky, none at all.

Instead, at the top bank of the lek, I saw four all at once right in front of me and further down, one was busy nectaring. I also thought I saw another down there in flight as I watched the nectaring one. So that's definitely five Small Coppers today and possibly six. In fact since I did not see the one that I saw on the 22nd that had a nick out of its forewing close-up today and I saw five up-close, I might assume that my presumed sixth was the one with the nick.

With some degree of confidence therefore I believe I can say there were actually six individuals in the lek today. So are the numbers increasing rather than decreasing?

Not only that, a lot was going on...

One basked in the sun while sitting on an acorn on the ground.

At least two females were creeping across the herbage looking for egg-laying sites.

One was taking salts from rabbit poo.

One male was pursuing a female who like yesterday was Turkey-Trotting in his face.

And I saw one on the ground with its wings up do a very definite, single wing-roll! It was as good a wing-roll as any Green Hairstreak or Silver-Studded Blue might perform, but it was a single roll. I got closer. It stayed still. I thought, just in case it does it again I would do a photo-burst. I did a photo-burst. Anything?

Not a sausage – it just sat there.

Then a Brimstone flew past and the Copper flew off too.

I saw that dragonfly again too and it was accompanied by a second – I think the same species.

In the later afternoon I ended up at a garden centre at the village of Lasham (not the one I was at the other day) and here I saw another Red Admiral.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 25-Oct-18 08:11 AM GMT

I love your Coppers but your images of various fungi continue to fascinate, ernie. I'm especially intrigued by your 'spotless' agaric. I never knew such forms existed!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Nov-18 01:03 PM GMT

Thanks, David. Glad you like the fungi. You may well regret you said it though after my next few posts which concentrate on fungi rather than butterflies. 🤔

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Nov-18 01:34 PM GMT

I went to Broxhead on the last day of October and found no Small Coppers - in fact no butterflies at all. Although the temperature got up to 11 degrees this was after a spell of cold, wet and windy days. It may well be the end of the butterfly season around here so since I have had some welcome support for my fungi entries, I thought I'd add a few I've seen over the past few days. As I have said before I am no expert and so I can sometimes not be sure of my ID. Where I am not sure I give an estimate as a percentage of how confident I am in my ID. I make no excuses for this as even experts can get some species wrong at times. Indeed they recognise that fact and warn people from taking a mushroom they think is edible if it has any chance at all of being mis-identified. Some species can look very like others that are poisonous and there are plenty of horror stories of people who have taken the risk and fallen foul, sometimes resulting in an upset tummy, sometimes being rushed to hospital for an emergency organ transplant and sometimes not making it at all. I am told that you can handle mushrooms of any kind and be OK, it is the eating of them that causes the danger but I am always more careful than that. Even the ones I think I know I will use a stick to clear away any surrounding leaf debris before I take a picture.

So what have been my recent fungi encounters?

I was going to post them in a single entry but then wondered how I would feel if I got close to the end and lost my internet connection before confirming the entry - so I am going to present them as I saw them each day instead. Starting with...

Chawton Park Woods - 25th Oct 2018

The Turkeytail is a very common species but it is always fascinating to look at because there are so many different colour combinations in the banding.



Now here is a fungus you probably don't want in your garden, the Honey Fungus, although this one is the Dark Honey Fungus which I have found is usually far less invasive.



There are a number of species of Rollrim. I have already shown the Brown Rollrim in a previous post. This one I am pretty sure is the Oyster Rollrim which unlike its cousin, grows out of trees and often resembles a Bracket fungus because of that. This is a singleton but they more usually appear in tiers. 80% sure of ID.



Now Deceivers are just that. They are so variable they are often a devil to identify. This one is no exception. It took me ages to realise it was even one of the Deceiver species because of its pale colour. It is I believe the Bicoloured Deceiver. The book says it has a lilac base but just my luck this one's base is covered with hairy white fibrils. Everything else about it is right though. Inrolled cap, slightly decurrent gills, striated stipe. I took a picture underneath the cap of a larger one right beside this bunch and its gills were faintly lilac. Of course it could equally be a completely washed-out Amethyst Deceiver, so only 50% sure of ID, surprisingly.



So even the Amethyst Deceiver is a bother sometimes. This one is certainly amethyst though.



The Small Stagshorn – like small flames bursting spontaneously from the wood.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Nov-18 08:49 PM GMT

Frensham Little Pond – 26th Oct 2018

Bay Bolete.



Chanterelles are one of the best edible mushrooms. However I am only about 90% sure of this ID. The remaining 10% is because these were perhaps the biggest examples I have ever seen.



Conical Brittlestems arranging themselves atop a tree stump. I am only about 80% sure of this ID though. The caps are rather dark but then this kind of thing happens as a fungus ages.



Conifer Tuft. This is like the Sulphur Tuft shown in a recent diary entry but this one grows on Conifer stumps. 90% sure of ID.



Liver Milkcap, very common around here in the open pinewoods.



Freckled Dapperling. Not so common but widespread in Southern England. This one has a cap that has a superficial resemblance to its cousin the *Lepiota hystrix* but that one is much rarer and has brownish gill edges. This one didn't, they were white.



And nearby, the Stinking Dapperling.



The Beeswax Bracket I found was a very fine example indeed. I got a bit excited when I first saw it because I thought it might be the super-rare Red-belted Bracket. It resembles the mature form of that species but it's very unlikely, so 80% sure its a Beeswax. It is still only the second time I have seen this species and the first time I have seen it actively in growth.



The Peeling Oysterling, but I have to say I am only about 60% sure of this ID. It had gills rather than pores so it cannot be any of the Brackets/Polypores.



Bicoloured Deceiver again but this one was aged. However it still showed the vertical striations on its stipe quite well. The cap was distorted somewhat. 80% sure of ID. It could be an aged standard Deceiver but the length of the stipe was at least 5 inches (too tall for a standard Deceiver), and the small cap relative to the stipe length was distinctive. Unlikely to be any of the other Deceiver species as this one was in the open.



Purplepore Bracket. There are a lot of brackets that form tiers but this was obviously the purple one.



Tubulifera arachnoidea Slime Mould. Almost every tree-stump I came across on the hill top had some of this.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Nov-18 09:02 PM GMT

Alice Holt Woods - 27th Oct 2018

Common Rustgill.



False Death Cap - Separated from the real Death Cap by its light citrus tinge (usually!).



Hairy Curtain Crust - A fine example spreading across the end of a log. The first pic is from above. I then rolled the log over for the second picture of

the underside. Of course I rolled the log back as it was again afterward.



Above



Below

Kingsley Churchyard – 27th Oct 2018

Parrot Waxcap – The first waxcap species so far this year in this churchyard. I have posted a past pic of this species before but today they were growing in small groups.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01–Nov–18 09:18 PM GMT

The Brocas – 28th Oct 2018

Purple Swamp Brittlegill – I'm not sure why they are called "Swamp" Brittlegills as I have only ever seen these on dry acid or sandy soil in or on the edge of woods; but the "Purple" part is obvious.



The False Death cap again but this one is the "alba" variety I think, showing no signs of the citrus cap colour (90% sure).



There were four clumps of Wood Cauliflower each to its own tree, all within about 20 paces of each other.



A good example of the Charcoal Burner. A pair fighting for space!



The False Chanterelle was extremely prevalent in the pinewoods.



Then the Saffron Milkcap – always nice to see, it is one of my favourite Milkcaps. The stipe is the real indicator though (not shown). It always seems to have orange “blobs” on it.



The Funeral Bell as its name suggests, is very poisonous. Normally found in groups, this was on its own (for the moment). Noted for the regularity of the spores discolouring the ring as they have here. (90% sure of ID)



Then two Bolete species not far from each other. First the Bovine Bolete.



Then the Velvet Bolete. Again the stipe is the main ID feature. The top part just under the cap is often yellow (as it was in this case - not shown).



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Nov-18 09:29 PM GMT

30th Oct 2018 – Bushey Leaze Wood

Larch Bolete.



Yellow Stagshorn.



The Common Cavalier. This one fooled me for a while. The stipe and gills were obviously correct for this species but the cap was grey. All the Common Cavaliers I have seen (they even grow in my garden occasionally) have a brown cap. My book showed it with a brown cap too, but looking it up in the internet indicated there are times when grey variants appear. This was my first.



This is what it usually looks like.



And also my first ever encounter with what I think must be the Hairy Earthtongue. They were on the mossy stumps of pine trees. Only 60% sure of the exact species ID but they were definitely Earthtongues of some kind. The stems were not smooth - thus the "Hairy" tag. The trouble was, they appeared to be "going over" and were far lumpier than they would be when freshly fruiting so don't match precisely any of the Earthtongue pics I have seen. They could have been the *Geoglossum fallax* which also has a scaly stem but they are dark brown rather than black.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 01-Nov-18 09:41 PM GMT

31st Oct 2018 - The Brocas

My first ever Jellybaby fungus. A few were growing out of the moss of an old tree-stump. They were aged but still definitely recognisable. The name is very descriptive, especially as they are only a cm high or so when fully grown.



The Sheathed Woodtuft was showing very well on a few trees.



I showed the Wood Blewit a few posts back but today I found a group of what I think to be its cousin the Flowery Blewit. 80% sure. Its called "Flowery" due to its flowery smell but that was not altogether evident to me today. But then my sense of smell is appalling!



Hairy Curtain Crust again (aka *Stereum hirsutum*) but this time in its resupinate form under a branch, going grey-brown as it ages. There is an outside chance it might be its cousin the *Stereum rameale* but since that is rarer and prefers small branches and twigs, I shall plump for the common species. 90% sure.



Birch Mazegill. There are a few Mazegill species but since this was growing on a Birch Tree, I am 90% sure of this one.



You can clearly see the maze-like gills on this underside shot.



The very common Birch Polypore, as fresh an example as they come. Lovely tones.



A Blushing Bracket I think. If I had bothered to look underneath I could be certain but because its on a Birch close to the Mazegills I pictured above, I have to be a little cautious, say 90% sure.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 02-Nov-18 06:58 PM GMT

Kingsley Churchyard – 2nd Nov 2018

Continuing the fungi foray. Recently I found that the Parrot Waxcaps were out at Kingsley. They are still there but now three more waxcaps are in residence.

First the Snowy Waxcap. These were dotted around in fair numbers in two locations either side of the church in the short grass.



Second the Crimson Waxcap which was just erupting in one bunch near the war memorial. The caps of these were a brownish hue rather than the usual crimson but there are examples on the internet to confirm this is possible. I have seen them here before in previous years with their Crimson hats on.



And thirdly, the Blackening Waxcap. These start off with orangey-red caps and orangey-yellow stipes and finally go completely black. Although I was only here a couple of days ago and saw none, it appears they can sprout and then go through their colour change to black rapidly because all the ones I saw here today (and there were about a dozen in one patch) had all turned black already (although I looked at the gills of one and these still showed a hint of yellow amidst the blackening effect).



Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 04-Nov-18 09:17 AM GMT

A veritable Fungus Foray Ernie – some really interesting looking species but the one that stands out (again) for me is the Parrot Waxcap – stunning looking mushroom 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 07-Nov-18 07:26 PM GMT

Wow! You sure know your fungi, ernie, and I would say that those last few posts have presented more diversity within this class than any ever posted on UKB prior!!

Keep seeking out the butterflies though. I'm sure there'll be a few before the real winter weather starts by the back end of November.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Nov-18 10:58 AM GMT

Wurzel: Yes, the Waxcaps are my favourite fungi and the Parrot Waxcap is odd being green – not a colour you find in mushrooms often.

David: Thanks. I'm glad you like the fungi entries. Some years are good, others bad. This year has been OK, around average I would say. And of course I am always on the lookout for butterflies. If I could get one to land on a mushroom it would make my year!

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Nov-18 11:10 AM GMT

Alice Holt – 3rd Nov 2018

The fungi season marches on!

The Butter Caps are out now for example. They can vary a lot. This one is fairly typical of var. asema.



But it is “hygrophanous” and as it ages it tends to lose its cap colour quite dramatically like this one nearby.



Then the Club Foot. The base of this mushroom can get very big compared to the rest of the stipe. I inadvertently deleted the pic I took today. This is a past shot.



The Lilac Bonnet is fairly common in these woods but this is the first I have seen this year.



On the other hand the Clouded Funnels were just about anywhere you cared to look. This bunch had decided to grow in an arc of a "fairy ring". Nice.



And lastly today, growing right beside where I had decided to park my car, a group of Blushing Wood Mushrooms.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Nov-18 11:18 AM GMT

Chawton Park Wood - 4th Nov 2018

Now Stinkhorns stink to attract flies to them to distribute their sticky spores. I was lucky enough to see two Stinkhorns side by side, one fresh with its gelatenous spore mass and the other gone-over without its gelatenous mass but both still attracted the flies.



There was a very nice example of a Stump Puffball.



Then there was what I think was the Flat Oysterling, these going darker as they aged. 80% sure of ID.



A group of the tiny Variable Oysterling. This shot from below. 90% sure.



And this one I think is the Greyling Bracket – showing the pore surface underneath. 80% sure.



And the very widespread and common Coral Spot.



Turkeytails again, this time a bunch of them from underneath.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Nov-18 11:29 AM GMT

The Brocas - 5th Nov 2018

This pic taken today is not my best pic of the Bloody Brittlegill but shows enough for a positive ID.



Kingsley Churchyard - 5th Nov 2018

A parasol mushroom just emerging.



Sleaford – 6th Nov 2018

On the grassy bank were a large number of Earthy Powdercaps...



... and Common Bonnet ...



... and Moss Bell – this shot taken from below. It's a tiny mushroom so I had to rest the camera on the ground and point it upwards looking at the view-screen from a very acute angle.



In the woods on the other side of the road there were...

Yellow-cracked Bolete - 90% sure.



Tawny Funnel



Soft Puffball – 90% sure.



Psathyrella bipelis – 60% sure. I had trouble ID-ing this one. There were a lot of them growing from the mossy path-side verge in the conifer woodland and they all had this colouration no matter whether they were newly fruiting or old. I am not even absolutely certain it is one of the Brittlestem species (*Psathyrella*).



And fallen on the ground, an oak twig with the remains of two Marble Galls. You can clearly see the wasp emergence hole on one of them.



Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 09-Nov-18 11:46 AM GMT

Broxhead – 8th Nov 2018

A nice group of False Chanterelles



With close-by, some Fleecy Milkcaps.



And some Ugly Milkcaps too. The Beauty and the Beast of the Milkcap world.



There was a Sulphur Knight under an Oak. This is similar to its cousin the Yellow Knight but those usually grow under Pines and are more frequent in the north of the country than in the south.



Also a clump of Veiled Poisonpies a couple of metres away.



A Blackening Brittlegill was gone over almost completely. They start off whitish but end up totally black.



There was a small section of Birchwood with green colouration shot though it, clear evidence of the Green Elfcup, although as usual, no fruiting bodies. I have never seen the fruiting bodies of this species – their incidence is quite rare.



Kingsley – 8th Nov 2018

Right beside the car park, a number of standard Poisonpies.



Deadwater Valley woods – 8th Nov 2018

A large number of Sheathed Woodtufts growing along a single log.



Lumpy Bracket. There is a kind of green algae that loves to grow on this fungus just as it is doing here.



Also Jelly Rot.



The Waxy Crust fungus was doing its thing of making the bark of a tree unfurl.



I am pretty sure these are Milking Bonnets (80% sure).



But the highlight for me today was my first ever Benzoin Bracket. It was a little shabby but quite substantial.



And what is this? Not a fungus! Is it some kind of Butterfly perhaps? It was near the trail-head close to where I had parked my car and was flitting around in the sunshine.



I looked back through my records and found that I had never seen a Speckled Wood as late as the 2nd week of November before. In fact the latest I had ever seen one before was the 2nd week of October, a clear month difference! And this one wasn't in bad shape either.

Re: ernie f

by Neil Freeman, 09-Nov-18 07:36 PM GMT

Great to see that Speckled Wood in the last photo Ernie 😊 I've occasionally had them into early November in my garden but my last sightings are usually in the first or second week of October.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: ernie f

by David M, 10-Nov-18 08:54 PM GMT

Fabulous, ernie. Your interest in fungi extends the season markedly.

In addition, it allows you to get out when you perhaps wouldn't have done to see very late season Speckled Woods! 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 10-Nov-18 09:19 PM GMT

I fantastic set of Fungi Ernie 😊😊 and congrats on getting a November Speckle 😊🍄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Janet Turnbull, 12-Nov-18 08:40 PM GMT

A wonderful set of fungi pics Ernie – you are inspiring me to get out more! Didn't have any luck today though.

Re: ernie f

by trevor, 12-Nov-18 09:18 PM GMT

Hi Ernie,

Like others I am enjoying your fungi forays, a subject on which I have no expertise. It would be good to know which varieties are prized by chefs, and those which would cause an urgent trip to Hospital if eaten, or worse.

Trevor.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Nov-18 05:04 PM GMT

Trevor, Janet, Wurzel, David and Neil – thank you all for your welcome comments.

I am glad you are liking the fungi. I seem to be quite lucky where I live for them. I have seen over a hundred species within a 10 mile radius of my house over the years.

And the November Specklie was an added bonus of course.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 15-Nov-18 05:21 PM GMT

Broxhead – 12th Nov 2018

Despite all the wind and rain we have been having recently, it has remained reasonably warm and even today was around 10 degrees.

Usual fungi already noted in previous diary entries but three newcomers...

The Birch Brittlegill was very common, some were ageing white.



Angels Bonnets festooned many a tree wherever they found a rotting foothold (80% sure – they were often smaller than I have seen before).



And hundreds (perhaps thousands) of Slender Club growing up from the path in the woodland beside the road.



But what really surprised me (this being nearly the middle of November) was:

A Common Darter still flying around the pond.



And a Fox Moth caterpillar marching purposefully across the sand.



Deadwater Valley - 13th Nov 2018

More fungi...

First the Black Bulgar.





Then the Rusty Porecrust.



And another Amethyst Deceiver. I have already shown this species before but I liked this sunny shot from above.



Finally another pic of the Coral Spot. The last shot I showed of this species was in its orangey pre-sexual stage (Conidial Stage). When it becomes sexually mature (Perfect Stage) it turns red. This latter stage includes the coral-pink fruit bodies which give the species its name.



I was here a couple of days ago and saw a Specklie if you remember. He was here again today dancing in the dappled sun.



Back Garden – 14th Nov 2018

Dave (Miller) is not the only one lucky enough to be having fun with Red Ads in Mid November. While I was raking some leaves up in my garden, a Red Admmiral swooped down and landed on the trunk of our Beech Tree and stayed there just long enough for me to rush in, get my camera, come back out, set it and snap a quick pic. Then it flew off!



But I have not seen a fresh Holly Blue for some time like Dave has. How do you do it, Dave?

At Home – 15th Nov 2018

However a Peacock butterfly came inside our house today but decided it wanted to go back outside again. I opened the window and he flew out, up and over our neighbours house – but not before I had taken a couple of pics of him!



Re: ernie f

by millerd, 15-Nov-18 07:39 PM GMT

I think the relatively warm weather is deceiving the butterflies, Ernie. Nice to see that Speckled Wood – I haven't had any near me for a few weeks now – and the Peacock too. No doubt it will find a suitable hibernation spot over the next day or two. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: ernie f

by Allan.W., 16-Nov-18 07:29 PM GMT

Great posts Ernie ! Loving the Fungal forays ,me and Lynne tend to move on to fungi when the last of the butterflies (and most of the moths !) have finished for the year ,looking at your excellent pics ,has helped me to put names to a few fungi we,ve stumbled across .

I think we may have found the Green elf cup (fruiting bodies) last year,(i,ve got one or two pics) we may get out for a look for ourselves over the weekend,weather permitting ! Keep up the good work ! regards Allan.W.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 17-Nov-18 01:22 PM GMT

Well done with the Butterflies ernie a Peacock has well, not had one of those in the Garden all year 😊 Love your shots of the Fungi Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 17-Nov-18 03:27 PM GMT

Some great sightings Ernie 🍷🍷 I can't remember the last time I saw a butterfly – I've already gone into winter mode 😊😊 Love the Angels Bonnets 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Nov-18 01:41 PM GMT

Dave – You are right. The (relatively) warm weather is allowing some butterflies to get out and about still.

Allan – I am envious of your seeing the fruiting bodies of Green Elfcup. Here is a green elf to prove it. 🍄

Goldie – It is my first Peacock at my house too this year. Amazing to think the first will also be the last this year.

Wurzel – While the fungi are out I have an "Autumn" mode. I think my "Winter" mode will begin soon though.

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 18-Nov-18 01:59 PM GMT

Kingsley Churchyard – 17th Nov 2018

The Waxcaps of this Churchyard and really getting going now. We now have...

Golden Waxcaps



Meadow Waxcaps



A not yet fully black Blackening Waxcap



And the fuscescens variety of the Snowy Waxcap – slightly darker in the cap than the normal variety.



Deadwater Valley – 17th Nov 2018: 11.30 am, temp 9 degrees – full sun

Wrinkled Crust.



But I was really here today to see if my Specklie friend was still about. If he was, this would be the first time that I have ever seen a Specked Wood in the third week of November.

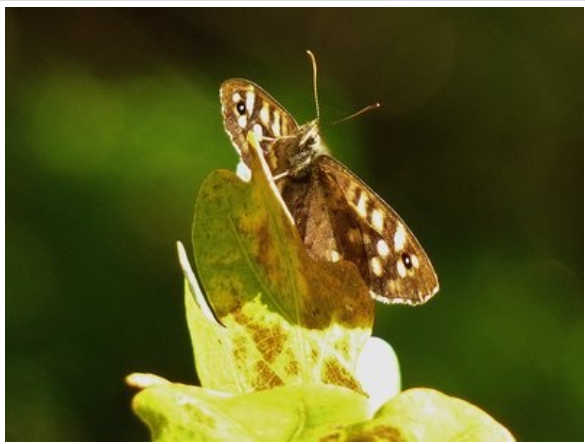


He was!

Deadwater Valley – 18th Nov 2018: 12.30 pm, temp 9 degrees – full sun

The forecast from tomorrow onward is for a sharp fall in temperature, possibly with daytime maxima struggling to reach 7 degrees. I thought therefore that this might be my last chance to see a butterfly this year so I came back to Deadwater Valley and there he was again, my Specklie friend. He would flit back and forth between three of his preferred trees where he would perch and bask in the sun. Sometimes he would chase a falling leaf in the mistaken view it was a rival male. Sometimes he would perch on the carpet of ground leaves. It made for a variety of photo opportunities.





I decided to call him Woody. (I never was very creative!)



Woody's Realm

Looking back through my notes I realised this was, for me, a record. This is the latest in any year I have ever seen a free-flying outdoor butterfly.

Re: ernie f

by Padfield, 18-Nov-18 05:21 PM GMT

Glorious pictures, Ernie. It's a week or two since I last saw a speckled wood here in Woodbridge, though the red admirals are still going strong. But I especially love your shroom pics. You have found some very interesting species. You've inspired me to go out for a last forage – I noticed there were still a few *Russula* around last time I took a trip to the woods.

Guy

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 18-Nov-18 06:41 PM GMT

More fabulous fungi and splendid Sporocarps Ernie 😊 The Golden Waxcaps really caught my eye as they don't look 'real' 🤪 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by David M, 19-Nov-18 12:02 AM GMT

Good work with the fungi again, ernie, and top marks for bagging your late Speckled Wood, as well as the surprise appearance of that Peacock! 😊

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Nov-18 01:29 PM GMT

Guy, Wurzel, David – Thanks for your comments on my mushroom experiences and of course on Woody! The fungi are still out there to be found but tempus is fugit-ing away. Soon it will be only the winter birds to keep us going...

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 22-Nov-18 01:37 PM GMT

Deadwater Valley – 19th Nov 2018

Brrr. It never got above 6 degrees today and settled around 5 degrees for the most part so no sight of Woody today but did get a few interesting fungi.

A small amount of Yellow Brain.



And Birch Woodwart.



Peniophora quercina.



And an *Arcyria* Slime Mould, poss sp. *Ferruginea*.



Yellow Swamp Brittlegill, a bit nibbled.



Ochre Brittlegill.



Frosty Funnel.



Deadwater Valley – 22nd Nov 2018 – 4 degrees at 12 noon.

Last night temperatures went down to –4 degrees and there was a frost well into the morning. But it was sunny this morning so was there any sign of Woody?

No.

He was probably my last butterfly of the season and I don't think I will be seeing him again now.

And this being the fourth week of November, I expect the fungi season will be closing soon too.

Re: ernie f

by Goldie M, 23–Nov–18 04:32 PM GMT

That Ochre Brittle almost looks good to eat ernie 😊 (Cheese and Mushrooms) in a pastry 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 23–Nov–18 11:34 PM GMT

More interesting fungi Ernie 😊 I'm really interested in that red slime mould – is that one mycelia or several?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by ernie f, 24–Nov–18 10:25 AM GMT

Goldie – The Ochre Brittle (aka The Common Yellow Russula) is known for being a bit bland and peppery. Not one for your pastry I am afraid.

Wurzel – I know nothing about slime moulds other than from a TV programme about them I saw years ago and found out they are not fungi and that they are weird. Special time-lapse photography showed them moving across the surfaces of rocks and stumps, etc. Because I did not know the answer to your question I looked them up. The Wikipedia pages describe their lifecycle very well. I won't repeat it other than to say what I photographed was lucky because they apparently only last about a day in this stage.

Re: ernie f

by David M, 24–Nov–18 06:30 PM GMT

That slime mould is particularly impressive, ernie. Reminds me a bit of fish roe.

Re: ernie f

by Wurzel, 25–Nov–18 06:13 PM GMT

I think I might have seen that TV program too – 'Magic of Mushrooms' wasn't it presented by Richard Fortey?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: ernie f

by Andrew555, 29–Nov–18 11:22 AM GMT

Great fungi selections Ernie, very interesting. I like some of the names as well. 😊

Love Woody!

Cheers