

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jan-18 07:15 PM GMT

Thanks, both.

Now I didn't say that I couldn't draw or paint, Jack, just nowhere near as good as my brother. But I don't think that the ability to increase/decrease the exposure setting maketh a photographic technician.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jan-18 07:19 PM GMT

Clapham Coppice Coupe Completed

Today (4th January) we finished cutting the first of two Hazel coppice coupes in a wood at Clapham, near Worthing. Many thanks to today's team of Bekah and Chloe (SDNPA rangers), Helen, Ellie and Paul (BC) and Boaz (local hero).



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jan-18 08:44 PM GMT

Working In Pete's Wood

Many thanks to South Downs Volunteer Rangers Jo, Clare, Sathampama, Natasha and Eugenia for helping out today (14 January) at 'Pete's Wood' near Small Dole. Three of us worked with brushcutters to cut bramble and scrub from several small clearings, including two areas that hold the Dutch Elm Disease-resistant cultivars which the Sussex Branch donated in 2010. I'm pleased to report that they're growing very well. Meanwhile the rest of the group cleared and burned-up brash from a recent felling.





While this was going on there was an excellent turnout for the work party at BC Rowland Wood



Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 14-Jan-18 09:12 PM GMT

Haha, looks like Minnie Padfield even turned up to that work party 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Jan-18 05:36 PM GMT

bugboy wrote:

Haha, looks like Minnie Padfield even turned up to that work party 😊

Yes, it DOES look very like her, Bugboy! 😊

Looks like a healthy gathering once again, Neil. I just hope this week's forecast storms don't do any damage. 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 15-Jan-18 06:02 PM GMT

~~[quote]~~David M. I just hope this week's forecast storms don't do any damage. If the October 1987 storm can be viewed as a precedent when it cleared a lot of woodland, Neil's team might regret the wasted effort if nature does it for them 😞

The worse damage from any storms might be the misguided contractors who want to make everything look neat and tidy afterwards.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jan-18 06:13 PM GMT

Thanks, all. The cute Minnie lookalike is Max. He usually gets half the crab-sticks in my packed lunch.

At the risk of doing a 'Michael Fish', what storms? We're due for nothing harsher than a stiff breeze in balmy Sussex.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jan-18 06:16 PM GMT

Cutting For Pearls – Cowdray Estate

Many thanks to the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service for their work helping to create and maintain habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary on the Cowdray Estate today (16 January). Ten of us coppiced an area of Sweet Chestnut and cleared conifer brash from the edge of a recently widened ride. The estate has been hugely supportive of this work and done much itself to benefit butterflies and other wildlife.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 16-Jan-18 06:57 PM GMT

With all this clearance to make PB Frit habitat, one day it might be simpler to produce maps showing where PB Frits DON'T occur 😊

Well done Neil.

BTW. Do you address Viscount Cowdray (Michael Pearson) as Mick or Mike?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Jan-18 05:25 PM GMT

Thanks for the canine update, Neil. Nice to learn Max gets a reward for his attendance!

Love the lattermost image of the clearing. That looks to be a potential violet paradise.....no doubt leading to PBF heaven too!

Good luck!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Jan-18 07:12 PM GMT

Hi Jack. I haven't had the pleasure, but his head forester is as good as they come. Thanks, David. I'm hoping that we've saved a very small and ailing PBF colony here, just in the nick of time. BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Jan-18 07:14 PM GMT

Clapham Coppicers

A group of eleven, comprising SDNPA Ranger Bekah, the regular coppice group, and BC Sussex volunteers Helen and Paul, made great progress cutting the second Hazel coupe of the winter at Clapham Wood today (18 January). The next work party will start here at 10 am on Thursday 1st February, meeting at Clapham Church. All welcome.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Matsukaze, 18-Jan-18 10:20 PM GMT

Excellent works – I would love to be following the woodmen with actinic light and sheet. Is the work likely to benefit many moths as well as the fritillaries?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Jan-18 11:24 AM GMT

Thanks, Matsukaze. I think the short answer is 'yes', although I couldn't tell you which species, as I try to resist being sucked in by 'the dark side'. I would guess that more species of moth are associated with Hazel coppice than with Sweet Chestnut, but these snippets lifted directly from a BC factsheet on Sweet Chestnut give some idea of the huge diversity associated with that plant:

"Over 70 species of moths feed on Sweet Chestnut in the larval stage, although this is not the primary foodplant and larvae (caterpillars) tend to be found at low density. This total is comparable to those utilising Wych Elm Ulmus glabra, Alder Alnus glutinosa and Beech as hostplants. Several nationally scarcer species, such as Scarce Merveille du Jour Moma alpium, typically associated with oak, and Waved Carpet Hydrelia sylvata, have been found feeding on the leaves of Sweet Chestnut, whilst many, more widespread moths, such as the local Brindled White-spot Parectropis similaria, will also eat Sweet Chestnut.

"The diversity within Sweet Chestnut coppice is indicated by the fact that over 200 species have been recorded on a single June night at a site in Sussex. Some species may have a preference for the early stages of the coppice cycle which can support a wide range of woodland herbs in the ground flora. These herbs are fed on by many species, for example the nationally scarce plume moth Capperia britanniodactyla which is associated with Wood Sage Teucrium scorodonia. Others, such as the Waved Carpet, have a preference for six to nine year old coppice, whilst the Bordered Sallow Pyrrhia umbra, more typically a moth of open habitats, seemingly has a preference for low coppice regrowth within woodland. Other species are found more frequently in older coppice (e.g. up to about 20 years in age), and include Oak-tree Pug Eupithecia dodoneata, O. bractella and S. bifasciana."

This tells us that although the fritillaries will only use coppiced habitat in the first (usually three) years following a cut, all stages of regeneration thereafter support their own suites of seldom-noticed moths.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Jan-18 05:53 PM GMT

Brighton Conservation Volunteers

The Brighton Conservation Volunteers visited our reserves again on Tuesday 30 January and set to work with their trademark enthusiasm and efficiency. A large area below the Rowland Wood dam was cleared of its dense Bracken blanket and wood left lying around after earlier visits with my chainsaw, leaving it looking in perfect condition for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Meanwhile, I continued clearing scrub from around the Park Corner Heath shed, where traces of heather can still be found. I remember the days when SPBF used to fly behind the shed, and they will do again. Thanks to the industrious 17 who did, and have previously done, so much to help the cause.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-Feb-18 06:50 AM GMT

**Neil Hulme wrote:
Brighton Conservation Volunteers**

The Brighton Conservation Volunteers visited our reserves again on Tuesday 30 January and set to work with their trademark enthusiasm and efficiency. A large area below the Rowland Wood dam was cleared of its dense Bracken blanket and wood left lying around after earlier visits with my chainsaw, leaving it looking in perfect condition for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Meanwhile, I continued clearing scrub from around the Park Corner Heath shed, where traces of heather can still be found. I remember the days when SPBFs used to fly behind the shed, and they will do again. Thanks to the industrious 17 who did, and have previously done, so much to help the cause.

I love that reference to SPBFs flying once again in the Park Corner area. I look forward to the month of May when the action will get underway. You and your team are doing a great job, Neil, and deserve to see great results.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Feb-18 10:16 AM GMT

Thanks, David. Everything that could possibly be done has now been done, so the wait begins.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Feb-18 10:22 AM GMT

Coppicing At Clapham Again

Many thanks to SDNPA Rangers Bekah and Chloe, local volunteers Barry, Robin, Derek, Tony and Alan, and Nigel and Paul of BC Sussex, for another productive day (1 February) coppicing Hazel at Church Copse, Clapham. The second coppice coupe of the winter is producing excellent habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other wildlife, and a large quantity of material for hedge-laying within the national park.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Feb-18 05:15 PM GMT

Obituary: Major Reginald Allan Chenevix Trench 1.9.20 – 25.1.18

Although greatly saddened by the news that Major Reg Trench passed away peacefully on 25 January, this is surpassed by the gratitude and honour I feel at having known him for many years. Reg was, quite simply, a remarkable man.

Despite reaching the age of 97, Reg never seemed to grow old, at least not while out watching his beloved butterflies. Even after deciding that he should no longer attend our guided walks, for fear of slowing the party down (although he could still hop over stiles and gates as he approached 90), we spent plenty more happy days together watching some of his favourite species, including Duke of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Purple Emperor. While pursuing these he became as enthusiastic and animated as an excited schoolboy.

In recent years, despite occasional periods of poorer health, he was back out on the Downs whenever possible, sometimes disobeying orders and heading off on long route marches. I'll never forget the afternoon spent watching Adonis Blues on the steep slopes of Steyning Rifle Range; as he called my name I turned to see Reg, immaculately dressed as always, in the valley below; "what have you got up there?" He was beside me in a shot, over rabbit holes and through thick scrub, but this would have been no problem for a man who led his platoon of Royal Engineers across Sword Beach on D-Day in 1944.

Reg's joie de vivre was infectious and he lived his life the way life should be led. I've lost count of the times I've told people that "I want to be like Reg when I reach his age". He will always be an inspiration to me, as I'm certain he will be to a great many others.

Reg was a member of Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch from the start and he kindly gave me his early issues, dating back to February 1984. From his hand-written notes it is clear that he enjoyed watching the Duke of Burgundy at Kithurst Hill, near his Amberley home, for at least 35 years; he was delighted when the species reappeared there in 1994, after a period of absence. I would receive a 'phone call in the spring of most years; "how is the Duke of Burgundy Fritillary doing?", but our chats would always last much longer than a discussion of this species alone.

I would like to extend my deepest sympathies, and those of all at Butterfly Conservation, to his wife, Sophie, who accompanied him on many butterfly outings, his children, Ivo, Angus, Kate and Jessica, and to all of his extended family.

The funeral will take place at St Michael's, Amberley, at midday on Thursday 8 February. Donations will be made to Butterfly Conservation. Enquiries: H D Tribe, Storrington 01903 742585



Reg and Sophie on a 2009 outing to see Purple Emperor



My father (centre) with Reg and Sophie watching Pearl-bordered Fritillary in 2013

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 03-Feb-18 06:41 PM GMT

I notice that one of the photos shows the clearing In Clapham to be quite close to the edge of wood with arable land just beyond. Presumably PBF habitat doesn't need to be deep in woodland?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 06-Feb-18 12:07 PM GMT

Thanks for sharing that, Neil. Sounds like the Major was a fine and upstanding individual and sadly there aren't many left now from that special generation that were adults prior to the outbreak of WWII. It was great to see he was still active in the field butterfly-watching even into his nineties, though given his wartime exploits, that's hardly surprising!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Feb-18 07:03 PM GMT

Hi Jack. PBF will happily use woodland edge habitat, as long as it comprises those essential ingredients of bare ground, wood/leaf/bracken litter and violets. Perhaps unsurprising, given that it's an open habitat species in some parts of the country.

Thanks, David. Yes, they don't make them like Reg anymore. He'll be sorely missed, but I'll think of him every time I see a Duke of Burgundy on his favourite site.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Feb-18 07:08 PM GMT

Tidying Up For Pearls

Many thanks to the small but very hardy group of South Downs Volunteer Rangers, led by SDNPA Ranger Bekah, and BC stalwart Paul Day, for their work clearing brash from recently created open spaces in Charlton Forest on Sunday (4 February). I suspect that this area will become a very comfortable home for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary in the not-too-distant future. Clearing the lying wood and large flints will help pave the way for future maintenance of the wide rides, huge scallops and box-junctions created as part of the *Fritillaries for the Future* project.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Feb-18 05:15 PM GMT

Steyning Downland Scheme

On Tuesday (6 February) I spent the day felling trees with volunteers from the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) <http://steyningdownland.org/> and South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) rangers. By doing so, we cleared the vista from the Victorian Viewpoint and removed the shade from an important chalk grassland bank, creating excellent habitat for downland butterflies.

Our companions throughout the day were 16 Dexter cows, which have been munching away on all three areas (Rifle Range, Combe and Pepperscombe Bank) of SDS for some years now. The herd has gradually increased in size and is now a grazing force to be reckoned with. Although it's taken a few years for them to recondition such a large area of overgrown and reclaimed chalk grassland, they have now clearly reached the long awaited tipping point; all of a sudden things are looking very good, with anthills visible everywhere. SDNPA has also called in Flailbot to clear large areas of scrub on Pepperscombe Bank.

Congratulations to SDS and SDNPA for such sterling work. I suspect that ten years of hard graft is about to start paying major dividends. Images by Pete Varkala.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Feb-18 12:25 PM GMT

Your penultimate image briefly evoked memories of a safari park, Neil. 😊

I presume that breed of cattle is at the more placid end of the behaviour spectrum?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 09-Feb-18 01:55 PM GMT

You've certainly been busy Neil this Winter, wish we could get out more but the weather here has been awful,(plus the limbs aren't what they used to be 😊) hope all your time and efforts pay off. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Feb-18 02:21 PM GMT

Hi David. We're hoping to attract some dangerous animals – Duke of Burgundy. The Dexter cattle would best be described as 'charismatic and feisty', but being so small they pose no real threat. There have been a few complaints from dog walkers, but if you don't keep your animal on a lead as requested ... 😊

Thanks, Goldie. I've always found that butterflies are most appreciative of these efforts; give them what they want and they'll usually respond. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Feb-18 02:25 PM GMT

Kithurst (a.k.a.) Springhead Hill

Yesterday (20 February) I joined Simon Mockford of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), to perform the last habitat works of the winter at Kithurst Hill. We cut regrowth in the large scallop created by felling some tall roadside trees in February 2016, and further enlarged last winter. We then reduced the size of some scrub blocks in the meadow, leaving sufficient perches for Duke of Burgundy males to launch their attacks from. Between us (SDNPA, West Sussex County Council and BC), I think we've now squeezed just about every square metre possible out of this flagship site.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Feb-18 03:57 PM GMT

Fritillaries For The Future - Project Update: Restructuring Rewell Wood

The Norfolk Estate at Arundel has long been an enthusiastic supporter of wildlife conservation, doing great things for butterflies, moths, farmland birds and raptors. Unsurprisingly, this support has extended to the co-ordination and execution of a huge amount of work to assist the *Fritillaries for the Future* project, and granting permission for others to do the same.

The winter of 17/18 has seen more such work performed than ever before, with co-ordinated efforts by the estate, commercial contractor, South Downs National Park Authority (and Volunteer Ranger Service), two groups from Plumpton College, Kenny the resident woodsman, and Butterfly Conservation. Everyone's efforts are greatly appreciated, as is the wider support for the project by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and individual donors.

Examples



This image shows a section of the key west-east ride at the southern end of the wood, where scallops cut by volunteers have provided a vital refuge for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary during a period in which the total population has been relatively low. This part of the ride has been a shady 'pinch-point' for many years, but two rows of tall Beech have been removed from its southern margin, and a wide strip of semi-mature Sweet Chestnut has been coppiced along its northern edge. Small blocks of this coppice will in future be managed on a rotational basis by volunteers.



This image shows the resident woodsman, Kenny, at work, harvesting Sweet Chestnut at the western end of the west-east ride, beyond the point where volunteers have worked to date. Again, this will produce additional habitat that can be rotationally managed by volunteers in the future. The same ride is being widened at its eastern end by Plumpton College. A year from now a 1km stretch will be in excellent condition for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary.



The third image shows a newly cut commercial coppice coupe. In recent times the brash and a substantial quantity of wood have been left on the ground following a commercial harvest. Despite this being 'windrowed' (stacked in lines), the procedure inevitably reduces the extent and quality of fritillary breeding habitat. This year the brash has been cleared and stacked along the adjacent ride-side, where it will be chipped and extracted for biomass. It is hoped that this process will prove to be economically viable; if so, I suspect that future coppice coupes will yield significantly higher numbers of butterflies.



The fourth image shows the same Sweet Chestnut coupe and brash pile from another angle (to right of frame). To the left is the lower part of a very large area which has been open for many years. This is shortly to be replanted with a conifer crop, which will itself provide good Pearl-bordered Fritillary breeding habitat for a few years. The posts which can be seen in the distance mark out 'no replant' zones, so as to leave a system of rides and glades once the crop has started to mature.



During my last visit I returned to the large area (1.25ha) which was cleared of birch and scrub last winter, jointly funded by the South Downs National Park Authority and BC Sussex Branch. This is developing nicely and a corridor connecting the clearing to the main west-east ride is currently being widened during felling courses run by Plumpton College.

With all this work going on I'm confident that Pearl-bordered Fritillary numbers will fully recover by 2019, to match and hopefully exceed historic levels.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Feb-18 03:24 PM GMT

I can see why this is a full-time undertaking, Neil. You've been as busy as you usually are in peak Emperor season!

I can't wait to read about the results once the species' respective flight periods are underway.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Mar-18 09:00 PM GMT

BC 50th Anniversary Day Of Action

Many thanks to all who attended the BC 50th anniversary Day of Action on the Sussex reserves today (11 March; most events were held on 10 March), and to Gary Norman and Jonathan Crawford for performing repairs to the Park Corner Heath (PCH) visitor's hut on Saturday.

An old shed in Rowland Wood was dismantled and enough rubbish removed to fill a skip. Meanwhile, another small group burned up some previously felled trees on PCH, where a large new clearing has been created.

Just after 1pm the warm sunshine woke plenty of butterflies from their slumber and we were suddenly surrounded by male Brimstones; in all nine were seen in different parts of the reserves, together with a single Red Admiral. There can be little better to raise the spirits than the sight of Brimstones flying around Hazel catkins and Pussy Willow flowers.

Other signs that winter is over were numerous bumblebees and a slow-worm.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 12-Mar-18 10:55 AM GMT



Here max temperature on Sunday was 6C. However (apart from recent days) it has been a very sunny, albeit cold, winter.

Hope to meet up early May. Be sure to lay on some warm sunshine at Springhead.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 13-Mar-18 11:39 PM GMT

Striking shots of the Brimstone Neil, it fair pops out of the screen 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Mar-18 12:37 PM GMT

Nine Brimstones? That's one hell of a way to put winter to bed!

As ever, your cleared area is looking in good shape. Soon we will find out how the butterflies respond.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Mar-18 09:40 PM GMT

Hi Jack. Springhead is looking better than ever, and ready for a Royal Visit – see you in early May.

Thanks, Wurzel and David. Those Brimstones certainly brightened up my day. I saw another three on my travels yesterday, and a lot more butterflies today. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Mar-18 09:44 PM GMT

Ferring Rife Springs To Life

Following a blank at North Stoke, where the sun refused to really break through, I moved to Ferring Rife, where 13 Small Tortoiseshell and 4 Peacock were found on the east bank between the car park and first bridge upstream.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 16-Mar-18 10:50 PM GMT

Thirteen Tortoiseshells can't be wrong,Neil. Might be the last ones for a while, though...

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 17-Mar-18 07:35 PM GMT

Thirteen Small Torts Neil 🍷 Those are the sort of numbers I'm used to seeing at this time of year and I'm still on 1, fingers crossed we might get some more spring like weather soon 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Mar-18 08:20 PM GMT

Thanks, both. As is often the case with March, it turns into a tug-of-war between winter and spring. It was back to winter again today, but that allowed me the opportunity to get a shot I've been after for years - Wild Daffodils in snow. BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Mar-18 11:34 PM GMT

Your last couple of posts are indicative of how spring has been thus far in 2018, Neil – an array of gleaming adult overwinterers followed by spring bulbs laden with snowfall.

It's certainly been an unusual start to the season.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Mar-18 10:51 PM GMT

Barred Tooth-striped Hunt

Last night (25 March) I performed a reconnaissance trip to Mill Hill at Shoreham, to see if the rare Barred Tooth-striped moth (BTS) had started to emerge. Conditions were perfect, being warm and windless. Between 8.15 pm and 9.30 pm (when rain stopped play) I found 17 BTS in fresh condition.

This evening I was joined by Colin Knight and Jonathan Crawford, in an attempt to find the moth over a wider area. It was much harder going this time, with a cold breeze blowing under the clear sky. Although BTS were thinner on the ground, we still managed a healthy combined total of 20, with seven over the previously unsearched southern end of the slope. These are the highest numbers recorded at Mill Hill for some while, and I doubt that the species is at peak yet.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Mar-18 08:22 AM GMT

Back To The Rife

Yesterday (26 March) I visited a very wet and boggy North Stoke (wellies essential), where things are taking time to get going; just three Brimstone, one Comma and a Bugboy seen. I then moved to Ferring Rife, where there was much more action under a cloudless sky. 18 Small Tortoiseshell, 7 Peacock and a Red Admiral were found on the east bank, between the beach car park and first footbridge.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 27-Mar-18 12:56 PM GMT

Great shots as always Neil 😊 18 Small Torts 🤩 That's the number I see in good years but over this way we're about two weeks behind so fingers crossed they'll be that many over this way in a fortnight 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 27-Mar-18 05:11 PM GMT

That's a perfect looking Tortoiseshell Neil, Colour and every thing perfect, 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Apr-18 12:05 AM GMT

Interesting that you are now diversifying into rare moths, Neil. Must admit, I'd never heard of the Barred Tooth-Striped but I see it has a very sketchy distribution throughout the UK.

More familiar is that lovely Small Tortoiseshell. Hopefully they won't all die of cold/inertia and there'll be a few left to delight us when (if) sunshine returns in April!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 03-Apr-18 07:21 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

A fascinating report on your search for the Barred Tooth-striped and some great images to go with it. That is one species that I am unlikely to see here in Warwickshire although there have been some scattered historical records in the county and it's status here is currently uncertain.

Lovely Small Tortoiseshell photos too, it always amazes me how fresh some individuals can look after being tucked away for the winter months.

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Apr-18 07:58 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. Late seasons are often good seasons, so I reckon the long wait will be rewarded.

Thanks, Goldie. As a kid I used to take the Small Tortoiseshell for granted. These days I think they're one of our most beautiful butterflies.

Hi David. I try to resist 'the dark side', so just focus on monitoring a couple of rarities, for conservation purposes. Next on the list is Drab Looper.

Thanks, Neil. It's taken me a while to sort out a technique for photographing them – never easy on a steep, unstable slope in the dark!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Apr-18 08:01 AM GMT

More Barred Tooth-striped

Last night (5 May) I teamed up with South Downs National Park Ranger Jasmine Owen and Sussex Branch webmaster Jonathan Crawford, to perform the third 2018 survey of Barred Tooth-striped at Mill Hill. We started seeing them at c.8.30 pm and it didn't take long to rack up our total of a dozen. However, the increasingly cold and strong breeze soon dampened down activity. Many of the moths are now showing a little wear and tear, but a few are still in very fresh condition.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Apr-18 09:17 PM GMT

How are you finding these (obviously) night-flying moths, Neil? Do you take a searchlight out with you?

I'm more used to seeing the results from a moth trap the following day so it's interesting to see these creatures in their natural environment for a change.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Apr-18 09:23 AM GMT

Hi David

The Barred Tooth-striped will occasionally come to light-traps, but the best technique for monitoring this species is, as you suggest, by torchlight. On warm (relatively!) windless nights through late March and April, from about 8.15 pm onward, the moths climb up from their daytime hiding places to a height of generally c.1 metre on Wild Privet stems, waiting for a mate.

I do enjoy hunting them out in their natural environment; it's a bit more challenging than emptying out a moth-trap, which is of course essential if you wish to monitor most night-flyers.

There's also ye olde art of 'sugaring' to be considered too, which I used to do as a kid, oblivious to the slightly anti-social business of painting many of our neighbors' gate-posts and fences with black treacle and alcohol.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 11-Apr-18 01:06 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

The Barred Tooth-striped will occasionally come to light-traps, but the best technique for monitoring this species is, as you suggest, by torchlight. On warm (relatively!) windless nights through late March and April, from about 8.15 pm onward, the moths climb up from their daytime hiding places to a height of generally c.1 metre on Wild Privet stems, waiting for a mate.

Many thanks for the feedback, Neil. That's not something I was hitherto aware of. Does this type of behaviour apply across a wider range of moth species?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Apr-18 11:13 PM GMT

Hi David

I believe that BTS is the only species which hangs up on Wild Privet like this.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Apr-18 11:19 PM GMT

Hot Stuff On The Rife

It was 3 pm before I arrived at Ferring Rife, but it was 6.45 pm before I reluctantly headed home. Today (11 April) was by far the best day this spring and the east bank of the stream was heaving with butterflies.

It was great to bump into Mark from Essex (EB), who had traveled some distance to enjoy this brilliant early season venue, guided by 'The Butterflies of Sussex'. Mark helped me finish my standardised count between the car park and first bridge, which produced 47 Small Tortoiseshell, 15 Peacock, 5 Small White (including 2 mating pairs), 1 Brimstone and 1 Comma. Mark also saw a female Large White just before we met.

However, on the return journey it was clear that many butterflies had been missed during the first pass and we reckoned that there were probably 8 – 10 Small White flying, and at least 80 butterflies on the wing. Although most of the hibernators were showing their age, we found a few that were almost scale-perfect.







Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 12-Apr-18 12:16 AM GMT

Fantastic stuff, Neil! What a great place you have there at Ferring Rife. Forty –seven Small Tortoiseshell can't be wrong!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 12-Apr-18 06:52 PM GMT

How the other half live Neil 🇬🇧🇬🇧 We had wall to wall cloud all day yesterday and today as well 😞 In fact it's been a week since I saw my last butterfly 😞 Mind you 47 Small Torts 🇬🇧 that's definitely something to be cheerful about 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 12-Apr-18 10:21 PM GMT

Sounds like a truly stunning afternoon, Neil.

Even here in the west of the country, 40+ Small Tortoiseshells at any time of year would be notable, so it's good to hear that they're present in numbers that much further east.

Nice to see your Pierids are emerging too. Hopefully, that will be replicated over the next few days in my part of the UK (and elsewhere).

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 13-Apr-18 02:04 PM GMT

Same Here! Cloud and heavy rain since I last posted and cold with it, great to see your white's Neil, it means things are just a round the corner. 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 13-Apr-18 08:24 PM GMT

Is that patch of Sussex twinned with somewhere in the south of France? 🇬🇧

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Apr-18 08:24 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark, Wurzel, David and Goldie. I'm very fortunate to live in this part of the world, which has more than its fair share of butterflies.
Hi bugboy. Yes, we're twinned with the quaint village of Papillon-sur-Mer.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Apr-18 09:30 PM GMT

Butterfly ID Course

Fifteen people attended my butterfly identification and monitoring refresher course for the Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) today (14 April). During a quick lunch break, following the morning classroom session, I spotted a Small Tortoiseshell on the High Street, which was the first of many butterflies seen.

Most of us then headed up to Steyning Coombe, where Brimstone, Small White, Comma and Peacock were added to the list. The habitat over the entire SDS area is now in fantastic shape and a great credit to the volunteers who have worked so hard over the last ten years, ably assisted by the Dexter cattle. The only downside to the entire project is the disgraceful sight of so many dog poo bags adorning the bushes, a sure sign that some owners are less intelligent than their pets.

After the event I drove to Billingshurst, but was probably too late in the day to see the hoped-for Orange-tip. However, I did spot a couple of Green-veined White patrolling the verges.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Apr-18 01:42 AM GMT

Perfect weather for a collective trip out, Neil. Shame about the dog mess....it's (sadly) an ever more common sight wherever you go in the countryside these days. 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Apr-18 06:33 PM GMT

First Orange-tips

A lovely day out with my daughter, Mia, today, with our target of five species being easily surpassed. The quiet lanes between Billingshurst and Five Oaks produced only a few butterflies in the very patchy weather, but the regular cloud cover made the Orange-tips (2) very easy to photograph. Singles of Comma and Peacock were also seen.

We then moved down to the coast, where a walk up Ferring Rife under clear blue skies was more productive. Here we saw 14 Small Tortoiseshell (numbers on the wane as the males burn out), 16 Peacock, 9 Small White, 1 Large White, 1 Brimstone and our first Speckled Wood of the year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Apr-18 04:17 AM GMT

Delightful images, Neil, and I sincerely hope we'll all have an audience with this species during the warm spell that's predicted to begin tomorrow. With any luck, there'll be an explosion of butterflies to compensate for the hiatus that has gone before.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-18 07:25 AM GMT

Thanks, David. They're coming!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Apr-18 07:29 AM GMT

Spring Takes Off

Spring accelerated rapidly yesterday (17 April), bursting out in all its glory. In the damp meadows and lanes between Billingshurst and Five Oaks, Orange-tip numbers built throughout the morning, with a total of 9 males seen; at one point, six were in view, together with a couple of Brimstone and both Large and Small White. The banks and ditches in the area are now becoming smothered in Cuckooflower, Lesser Celandine, Primrose, Wood Anemone, Greater Stitchwort and Bluebell.

Later, at Mill Hill, I saw 3 Grizzled Skipper and a few Speckled Wood, Peacock and Brimstone, while a recently arrived Hobby performed spectacular aerobatics at remarkably close quarters. An evening walk on the Knepp Wildland produced my first Swallow of the year, with the soundtrack provided by 2 Cuckoo and a snatch of Nightingale song.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Apr-18 07:49 AM GMT

Too Hot To Handle

Yesterday (18 April) I arrived at my favourite Orange-tip site (near Five Oaks) at about 2.00 pm, with my car's thermometer reading 24.5 degrees. Katrina Watson and Nigel Symington were already there, but reported fewer butterflies than I was expecting, and within a few minutes the two Orange-tips in view had disappeared.

I soon came to the conclusion that it was just too hot for them, and that they had gone into hiding. This was confirmed when we found one asleep on the woodland edge. It was after 3.00 pm before about half-a-dozen males and one female became more active. Garry Philpott then arrived, and the four of us took turns in trying to achieve the desired open-wing shot. Too hot in April – a nice problem to deal with – and a lovely way to let a few hours drift away in the pursuit of Britain's happiest butterfly.

It was hotting up elsewhere in Sussex too, with the first sightings of Green Hairstreak (Mill Hill) and Clouded Yellow (Frog Firle).



Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 19-Apr-18 08:24 AM GMT

Neil

Crumbs. Grizzled Skippers already, after all that bad weather too.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 19-Apr-18 01:35 PM GMT

Fantastic set of shots as always Neil 😊👍 Things are moving on nicely, hopefully the Pearls won't be too far behind 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 19-Apr-18 04:58 PM GMT

Lovely shots Neil, yet to meet up with the Orange Tips 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 19-Apr-18 10:19 PM GMT

I'm still waiting as well, Goldie, but I'm hoping this short spell of decent weather will hold a few more days, as I'm out and about on Sunday. Lovely pictures as usual, Neil!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Apr-18 10:31 PM GMT

Hi ernie – welcome to UKB! The Grizzled Skippers at Mill Hill (a very warm, 'early' site) are now building in number quite rapidly. Hopefully they'll have a better year than 2017.

Thanks, Wurzel, Goldie and Essex. Plenty more action today.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Apr-18 10:37 PM GMT

First Green Of The Year

Today (19 April) I started at North Stoke, which remains so boggy that it's very difficult to move around without losing a welly; unfortunately the site will remain difficult to access this spring. Orange-tip numbers were disappointing, with only a couple seen. Green-veined White is doing rather better (15m, 1f).

I then moved on to Mill Hill, where Katrina and her sister were already scouring the slopes. Grizzled Skipper numbers are now building; I counted 8 during a linear walk along the lower scrub line. Highlight of the visit was a very obliging Green Hairstreak.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 19-Apr-18 11:49 PM GMT

That's a gurt lush shot Neil 🍃🍃🍃🍃🍃

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 20-Apr-18 07:31 AM GMT

It would seem, from the weather point of view, that we have skipped Spring and gone straight from Siberian Winter to high Summer. At least the Orange Tips confirm that it is Spring. Lovely images.

Happy days,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Apr-18 01:16 PM GMT

First class effort, Neil. Interesting to read too your thoughts regarding Orange Tips 'ducking out' from the heat. I guess it's not something UK specimens

have hard-wired into their genes! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Apr-18 07:00 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. Plenty more 🍃 Hairstreaks to come!

Hi Trevor. Blink and you'll miss the transition from winter to mid spring.

Thanks, David. I expect to see the heat suppression of butterfly activity in the midsummer months, but it's seldom observed in April.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Apr-18 07:04 AM GMT

Green Party In The Dyke

Yesterday (20 April) I visited the lower section of Devil's Dyke (Brighton & Hove), which consistently produces good numbers of Green Hairstreak. It's still early days, but I found a total of 11 males holding territories on low scrub beside the main path.

A move to Mill Hill produced a few Grizzled Skipper, but by now butterfly activity was again being suppressed by the heat. On the way home I stopped off at Wiston, where half-a-dozen male Orange-tip and a few Green-veined White were patrolling the damp meadows.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 21-Apr-18 04:19 PM GMT

Lovely Hair Streaks Neil, 🍷 we're still waiting for Holly Blue's, and Speckies here. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 21-Apr-18 10:17 PM GMT

Fabulous, Neil. Things are absolutely moving in the right direction, and I strongly suspect the next species you will showcase for us will be PBF at one of your managed sites. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by John W, 21-Apr-18 10:33 PM GMT

Hi Neil,

It was good to see you, briefly, at Wiston today. Andrew and I carried on to Mill Hill where we got some good pictures of basking Grizzled Skippers.

Would you mind giving out a grid reference or Google maps co-ordinates for your Green Hairstreak location near Devils Dyke? I don't think I recognise it from your photo.

Cheers
John

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Apr-18 08:24 AM GMT

Thanks, all.

John: page 251 of *The Butterflies of Sussex* will give you the grid refs for the best areas. The book provides detailed locations for every Sussex species (in most cases top five sites) in a 'Where to watch' summary box.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 22-Apr-18 08:52 AM GMT

[quote]Neil: John: page 251 of *The Butterflies of Sussex* will give you the grid refs for the best areas. The book provides detailed locations for every Sussex species (in most cases top five sites) in a 'Where to watch' summary box. I like the style. Now they will HAVE to buy the book 😊
Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Apr-18 07:27 PM GMT

South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service Walk

On Saturday (21 April) I led a walk for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service, to thank them for all the hard work they've performed at 'Pete's Wood' (Small Dole) over the last three winters. Although still to peak, there was a fine display of Bluebells on show, together with an abundance of other spring flowers. Butterflies seen included Orange-tip and Holly Blue. The remnants of an old coppice worker's truck lie among the Bluebells, abandoned in the days when woodlands were more regularly managed, but I'm pleased to say that, here at least, the Hazel is being cut again.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 22-Apr-18 08:29 PM GMT

Great set of Greenstreaks Neil 😊🇬🇧 I'm eagerly awaiting your first report of PBFs as I can then work out when to head to Bentley – usually the following weekend 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-18 08:18 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. At the moment I'd pencil in the weekend of 5/6 May for your first attempt at Bentley.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-18 08:21 AM GMT

The Art Of Camouflage

On Sunday (22 April) afternoon I visited Mill Hill to see how the Grizzled Skipper population is faring, which is rather better than last year. I found the first one on the middle level, before even reaching the steps when approaching from the lower car park. I made a linear count of 8 before reaching the favoured north end of the lower level, by which time they were collecting to roost. Here, I found a further 6 already asleep or preparing for bed. I think my closed-wing shot demonstrates why the underside pattern affords such excellent camouflage in this species.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 23-Apr-18 12:44 PM GMT

Cheers for the heads up Neil, I was thinking around then as that is the 'usual time', also it's the Bank Holiday 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 23-Apr-18 05:06 PM GMT

So envious Neil of your Grizzled Skipper, 🇬🇧🇬🇧 if I can get to see one this year it will make my year, they're so far a way from us in the North 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-18 07:56 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel. Will you be going by Lambretta or Vespa?

Hi Goldie - Grizzlies are well worth travelling for.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-Apr-18 08:01 PM GMT

Roadside Orange-tips

It was overcast, cool and blustery as I drove past the damp meadow at Wiston this afternoon (23 April), but I stopped anyway and am glad that I did. Although nothing was flying, a systematic search of the Cuckooflower and Garlic Mustard in the roadside ditch soon started to produce the goods; I found 4 male and a female Orange-tip at roost. A glimmer of sunshine encouraged a male Speckled Wood to briefly open its beautiful wings. On a sunny day I might have waited for several hours to achieve the same results.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 23-Apr-18 11:00 PM GMT

How the hell did you get an underside shot of *malvae* looking upwards into a clear blue sky, Neil?

Your butterfly 'alchemy' is almost supernatural.

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 23-Apr-18 11:34 PM GMT

It's perhaps perverse to come all the way to Sussex to see Orangetips, when I can see them in my garden. But those meadows, and the banks near Five Oaks, look such lovely habitat, I might be tempted! They have such a short season, every day should be treasured!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Apr-18 10:43 AM GMT

Hi David

I always think that the key to butterfly photography is field craft – the more of the critters you find, the more and better the opportunities. On this occasion I found six sleepy Grizzleds in about ten minutes, but only this one was sitting in the right place for a skyward shot. These deadheads are about a metre tall, so you can get down low enough (assuming a degree of flexibility) to shoot upwards. As the butterfly appeared very dark against the blue sky, I used (very soft) flash to illuminate it.

Hi Mark (EB)

Orange-tips are so often seen as widely wandering individuals that locating sufficient to provide good photographic opportunities can be hit-and-miss. Luckily, in West Sussex we are blessed with large areas sitting on Weald Clay, which retains surface moisture and provides plenty of beautiful damp meadows, woodland edges and, most importantly, wet ditches. Cuckooflower and Garlic Mustard occur in such abundance that we're probably blessed with far more than our fair share of Orange-tips, making it relatively easy to find 'sitters' even on a dull day. Just one of many good reasons to visit West Sussex! Drop me a line if you come this way for an Orange-tip hunt.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Apr-18 01:19 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

I always think that the key to butterfly photography is field craft – the more of the critters you find, the more and better the opportunities. On this occasion I found six sleepy Grizzleds in about ten minutes, but only this one was sitting in the right place for a skyward shot. These deadheads are about a metre tall, so you can get down low enough (assuming a degree of flexibility) to shoot upwards. As the butterfly appeared very dark against the blue sky, I used (very soft) flash to illuminate it.

Thanks for the insight, Neil. I've seen some of the overseas *pyrgus* settling a metre or more up, but normally our *malvae* keeps near the ground, so you did really well to get that image.

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 25-Apr-18 06:08 PM GMT

Thanks, Neil. I might just do that early next week, weather permitting. Your habitat down there is very different to what I'm used to, where Orangetips are a hedgerow species, and use garlic mustard as their foodplant. To see them in your habitat, using cuckoo flowers, would be a pleasure.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Apr-18 07:28 PM GMT

Hi David. They habitually keep low during the warmth of the day, but start to sit up high on deadheads to sunbathe just before roosting. That's the time to nail 'em!

Hi Mark. Let me know if/when you head this way – we might be able to squeeze in an early PBF or two.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Apr-18 07:31 PM GMT

Black Beauty

About a dozen Grizzled Skipper at Mill Hill today (25 April), but star of the show was a stunning black Adder. I spent a couple of hours stalking it and watched it hunting a Common Lizard and taking a drink from wet Bramble leaves after an April shower.





Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 25-Apr-18 10:06 PM GMT

What an absolutely splendid reptile, Neil. Is there a black strain in the population at Mill Hill (I think you may have mentioned them before?).

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Apr-18 01:59 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Hi David. They habitually keep low during the warmth of the day, but start to sit up high on deadheads to sunbathe just before roosting. That's the time to nail 'em!

Thanks for the heads-up, Neil. Sadly, this species isn't too common near me so visiting a site at such an hour may prove difficult, but I'll certainly be aware henceforth.

Beautiful adder by the way.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Apr-18 06:32 PM GMT

Thanks, both.

Dave – melanistic (black) Adders occur quite widely, usually in relatively low numbers, but some populations throw up quite a high proportion. Black individuals heat up quickly, so may gain an advantage over those with the standard grey or brown colouration; they can be active, and feeding or mating, at lower temperatures. However, they are less well camouflaged, so may be susceptible to a higher rate of predation.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Janet Turnbull, 27-Apr-18 03:17 PM GMT

I've just learned something from reading your post, Neil – fieldcraft is something I need to develop!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 27-Apr-18 03:42 PM GMT

UGH! NEIL, not my cup of tea at all 😊 I'll keep to Butterflies 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 27-Apr-18 07:23 PM GMT

Thanks Neil, though I may have to wait for a break in the weather! Brilliant black adder, I saw one a few years ago at the bottom of Mill Hill slope, a male.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Apr-18 06:42 PM GMT

The Apprentice

Yesterday (28 April) I took my daughter for a late afternoon wildlife hunt on the lower slopes of Mill Hill. We arrived at c.5 pm, after the other visitors had left, so had the site to ourselves. I soon found 4 Grizzled Skipper roosting on deadheads, Wild Privet and Bramble, then set Mia the challenge of finding more. She found another 4 with very little help, together with a few *Pyrausta despicata* and *P. nigrata*. A short burst of warm sunshine encouraged a couple of the skippers to briefly open up and fidget, but none took to the air. Hopefully I'll be training Mia to hunt for roosting Dukes and Pearls later this week.



Male



Female – one of Mia's finds

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 29-Apr-18 07:56 PM GMT

Shame you didn't arrive a little earlier, I only managed two during a few hours but had to leave before the main bulk of sun sadly 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Apr-18 09:00 PM GMT

Hi bugboy

I'm in the advantageous position of living just down the road, so can keep a close eye on the weather. We passed you walking back from the site, but were too pushed for time to stop for a chat (we got into trouble anyway 😞). Still plenty of time for a return, as Dingy is yet to emerge here and Green Hairstreak has barely started.

I suspect that Thursday will be the tipping point.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 29-Apr-18 09:51 PM GMT

You're very lucky living in that part of the world Neil 🍷 !

Got a week off from the 7th so things should be well underway by then, as long as the weather has decided what it's doing! This Tuesday looks good though I'll probably stay a little closer to home.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-Apr-18 11:40 PM GMT

Superb underside shots of *malvae*, Neil. The *pyrgus* genus is particularly fascinating to me and I know only too well how difficult it is to get the kind of images you have secured there.

I shall apply your science to my forthcoming trips to France and will be on the lookout for members of this genus preparing to roost at the times you have noted.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 01-May-18 09:16 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, great shots of the GS, I'm going to Loggerhead CP in North Wales to see it shortly, hope I can Manage too! Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 01-May-18 05:34 PM GMT

Fantastic Black Adder and Grizzlies Neil 😊 The Grizzlies haven't even made an appearance in Wiltshire yet 🍷 , hopefully this weekend 😊 I'm surprised that you still got into trouble, I always add an extra 30 minutes onto my ETA AH (estimated arrival at home) so I always turn up early and so earn some extra Brownie points 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-May-18 10:14 PM GMT

Hi bugboy. I don't want to tempt fate, but that should be the right week to take off.

Thanks, David. The Grizzles hung up high again before roosting this evening.

Thanks, Goldie. Don't go looking too soon; Mill Hill is an unusually 'early' site even for (usually) Sunny Sussex. Good luck!

Thanks, Wurzel. I'll start to worry when I'm *not* in trouble! I took both my kids to a Bluebell wood on Sunday. They enjoyed it so much we were more than two hours late home 😊 .

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-May-18 10:17 PM GMT

Still Struggling

The (modest) upturn in the weather is still insufficient to really get spring underway and all but the warmest Sussex sites are steadfastly refusing to produce more than a few hibernators and modest numbers of Whites, Speckled Wood and, locally, the Holly Blue. A search of Rewell Wood today suggested that we are still a few days away from seeing the first Pearl-bordered Fritillary of the season. The site looks great, but the best it could offer was a couple of female Orange-tips.

I later returned to the slopes of Mill Hill, currently our only site producing reports of Grizzled Skipper, although they must be out on Levin Down. However, even here, a hiatus between the first wave of skippers and the main course has opened up, with fewer seen (5) than on previous visits, as the early individuals run out of steam; still no Dingy Skipper and the solitary Green Hairstreak has disappeared.

The butterfly season is currently running about two weeks behind the 21st century average, but the promised warm and sunny Bank Holiday should finally stir things up.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-May-18 07:16 AM GMT

You're right, of course, Neil. Spring is still reluctant to get going. I noticed from a local report that Grizzlies were out at the south Wales site near

Porthcawl so I'm sure your area will be buzzing with them by this time next week.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 02-May-18 09:56 AM GMT

Lovely Grizzled Skippers Neil, 🍷🍷 I'll wait while next week and see what the weather produces before I venture to North Wales but David says they're out in South Wales so maybe I'll be lucky. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 02-May-18 11:07 AM GMT

Great Grizzlie shots Neil 🍷, still none in Wiltshire, we seem to get the bad weather from both sides 😞 Does the late running of the season put back your estimate of the Pearls arriving at Bentley Wood?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-May-18 10:18 PM GMT

Hi David. I think we're finally ready for lift-off this weekend.

Thanks, Goldie and Wurzel. This weekend should get Grizzles going elsewhere. PBF will definitely be flying in Sussex this weekend, but I'd leave it to next weekend for Bentley.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-May-18 10:24 PM GMT

Butterflies And Bluebells

Today (3 May) I met up with Jack Harrison, who is visiting from Scotland. We started the day at my favourite Wealden meadow near Five Oaks, where we saw Orange-tip, Large White, Green-veined White and Speckled Wood in good numbers, together with a few Holly Blue, Peacock and Comma. This was probably my last visit to the meadow this year, so it was with some reluctance that I left for Chantry Hill. Green Hairstreak numbers are now building here, with a dozen seen.

I finished the day on the Angmering Park Estate, in the woods near Blakehurst, where the evening sunshine illuminated the vast carpets of Bluebell. The Bluebell season is far too short and should be declared a national holiday.







Re: Neil Hulme

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

Neil

That last bluebell shot is worthy of a wildlife magazine.

Regards

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 04-May-18 08:19 AM GMT

I totally agree with you about having a National Bluebell Day - I'm all for cramming in some extra butterfly days 😊😄 That is a particularly fine shot of the Holly Blue, almost metallic 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-May-18 10:34 PM GMT

Thanks, Ernie. As is your 'Chicken Licken' shot of the sky falling in; I wish I'd been there to see that!
OK, Wurzel. Let's raise this in parliament. I suggest 25 April - good for Dukes and PBF in most years.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 04-May-18 10:41 PM GMT

Looks like my Sussex Orangetip trip will have to wait another year, then Neil. Couldn't agree more about the bluebells National holiday, though we might have to move it about a little.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-May-18 10:53 PM GMT

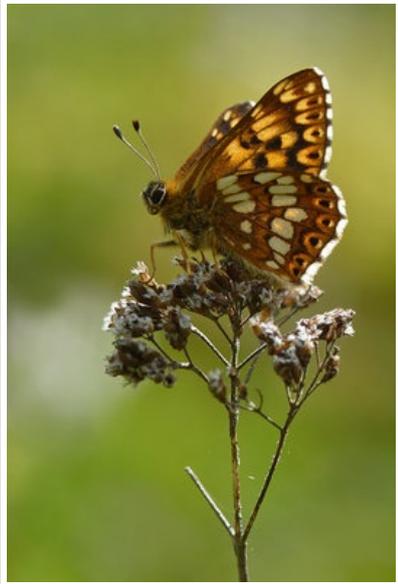
Noar Hill

With so much to enjoy on my own doorstep, I only get to Noar Hill once every two or three years; I went today (4 May) and I'm glad that I did. I spent quite a lot of the day chatting to some old friends, and to a few very nice folk for the first time. Despite this, there was plenty of time to enjoy the butterflies, which went bonkers every time the sun broke through.

Duke of Burgundy was the main target; with the season running so late, I desperately needed my annual 'Duke fix' (Noar Hill is always some way ahead of Sussex). They were clearly emerging throughout the day and one pit alone (probably by far the most productive) hosted 6 males and 2 females. Both of the females (one being ab. *gracilens*) were either coupled when I spotted them, or soon were! Over the entire site I saw 11 individuals, but I didn't search particularly hard. Other species seen included Green Hairstreak, Orange-tip and Holly Blue.

I headed home via Mill Hill, which was still bathed in warm sunshine at 7pm. Here, I found 7 Grizzled Skipper and 6 Small Heath at roost.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 05-May-18 08:07 AM GMT

Beautiful Dukes, Neil...well worth waiting for. As for the Grizzlie... 🍷 🍷

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-May-18 09:49 PM GMT

Thanks, David. I think the patience shown by all is about to be rewarded!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-May-18 09:56 PM GMT

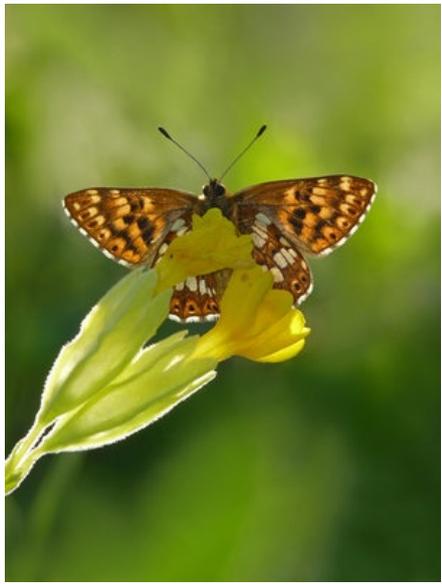
Hooray For May

Yesterday (5 May) I arrived at Heyshott Escarpment to find Mark Colvin and Colin Knight already photographing a Green Hairstreak; not just *any* Green Hairstreak, but one of the most beautiful examples I've ever seen – well found Mr Colvin! The Duke of Burgundy is just starting here, with 3 males and a female seen.

Today (6 May) I started at Chantry Hill, where the Green Hairstreak is doing very well. I counted 47 over just one third of the site. I then moved on to Springhead Hill, to lead a walk for Storm Ministries (Worthing), during which we saw Duke of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper (spotted by my daughter, Mia), Orange-tip, Brimstone (including many eggs), Green-veined and Large White.

April was hard going, but all the signs are that May will deliver in style.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-May-18 10:05 AM GMT

That *rubi* is a gem, Neil. 😊

I find it tends to be the females with the full array of white 'streaks' and yours, like Guy Padfield's snowboarding individual, is certainly a member of that group.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-May-18 08:26 AM GMT

Bank Holiday Peace & Quiet

Yesterday (7 May) I enjoyed the Bank Holiday peace and quiet, sweltering heat and magnificent views from Heyshott Escarpment. Only Katrina Watson, and later Gary Norman, were there to enjoy the wealth of butterflies; the approach lanes and slopes were dripping in Orange-tip, Green-veined White and Brimstone, while the open grassland area supported 19 male Duke of Burgundy and a few Green Hairstreak, Grizzled and Dingy Skipper.

A late afternoon visit to Rewell Wood produced 8 Pearl-bordered Fritillary (including the first female).





Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 08-May-18 08:41 AM GMT

Great Photos Neil, especially the Dukes and PBF's 🍷🍷 my next quest all being well is both 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-May-18 05:54 PM GMT

Nice PBF shot, Neil, particularly given how hyperactive they will have been in those hot conditions.

I look forward to seeing how things unfold at your managed sites over the next week or three.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andrew555, 10-May-18 04:25 PM GMT

Beautiful sights Neil, that Greenstreak is a stunner. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-18 03:09 PM GMT

Thanks, all. Plenty more to report in these times of plenty!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-18 03:14 PM GMT

Fritillaries for the Future Update – May 2018

I would like, once again, to thank our fritillaries captive-breeding team of Theresa Turner, Gary Norman and Mike Mullis, whose efforts over the last few years are now really paying off. Although the funded period of the project finished on 31 March 2018, the work is being continued by BC Sussex Branch and I've taken the summer off to ensure that I can give it my full attention.

Several reintroductions of the Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) are currently underway, conducted in accordance with the 'BC Code on Introductions and Reintroductions 2010' and with all the necessary permissions. I won't be too specific while the programme is underway, so as to give the butterflies the best chance of getting on with the job unhindered. However, the news is good, and many PBF have been released into high quality habitat in the recent fine weather. It's been very encouraging to see so many females being immediately paired by free-flying males from earlier releases; on one day last week I watched this happen twelve times!

There is still much more to do, but I'm filled with optimism. My thanks go to all who have supported the project in any manner.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-18 03:37 PM GMT

Out With Steyning U3A

On Thursday (10 May) I led my annual walk for Steyning U3A. This year we visited Springhead Hill which, given at least reasonable weather, never disappoints. We saw Duke of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Brimstone (plus numerous eggs on Purging Buckthorn), Orange-tip, Green-veined White, Large White, Small White, Holly Blue, Peacock, Speckled Wood and a fabulous display of Cowslips. Thanks to all who came along for such an enjoyable morning.

In the afternoon I monitored the Pearl-bordered Fritillary population at Rewell Wood. I was too late to get around all of the potentially productive areas, so was pleased with a count of 37.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-May-18 04:33 PM GMT

Mill Hill Roosters

This morning (12 May) I'd promised to take my father out on a Duke of Burgundy and Pearl-bordered Fritillary hunt, but the weather clearly wasn't up to the job. We decided that the only option was Mill Hill, where roosting butterflies are relatively easy to find; others had the same idea. A less-than-thorough group hunt quickly produced 10 Grizzled Skipper, 3 Dingy Skipper, 4 Small Heath, 2 Common Blue and an Adonis Blue, the latter two being 2018 'firsts' for me.

I'd like to thank Chris Corrigan, Jonathan Crawford and the passerby for their invaluable help getting my father back on his feet when his knee gave way. He's now fine; many thanks from him too. Any siblings reading this – silent routine.





Re: Neil Hulme

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

I've been thoroughly looking forward to this chapter and am please to say it has exceeded expectations, Neil!

I'm so pleased to know the PBFs are responding positively to all the hard work you and your team have been doing, and it must have been a delight to witness all those virgin females being paired off so soon after release (an even greater delight for the males probably) 😊

That's a particularly fine example of a Duke of Burgundy too. Does it have darker than normal hindwings or is it just that you don't often see this species striking such an extended wing pose?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-May-18 11:15 PM GMT

Thanks, David. I think the pose is more unusual than the pattern.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-May-18 11:18 PM GMT

PBF Doing Well At Rewell

A good time was had by all at Rewell Wood today (13 May). My thanks to Tom Parker for helping me complete my count of Pearl-bordered Fritillary over the entire southern half of the site, with five areas producing a total count of 68. In the evening I watched the butterflies going to roost with Garry Philpott and Nigel Symington. A couple of Grizzled Skipper were seen in the first coppice coupe I looked at, and Tom spotted a Green Hairstreak during our tour.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 14-May-18 05:58 AM GMT

Neil:~~[quote]~~In the evening I watched the butterflies going to roost with Garry Philpott and Nigel Symington. Tell me Neil. Did Garry and Nigel roost on the same plants as the PBFs?

Jack 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-May-18 08:44 AM GMT

Hi Jack

"A good time was had by all"

Good to see you earlier this month, but very frustrating that we missed the first Pearls and Dukes by 24 hours! Next time ...

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 14-May-18 04:30 PM GMT

Hello Neil ,

Rewell Woods looking excellent ! Great work ,Lynne and I was there for about an hour and a half, this morning (14 th) and we counted 14 , really pleased to see them again ,these are the first Pearl -Borders that I,ve seen outside Kent, my last there ,around 93, with the final records around 99-00(not by me !), a few seasons back we had a look in Abbots Wood ,with no joy. We also noted a few large and Green -Veined Whites, A Speckled Wood ,5 Red Admirals ,afew Orange tips. A couple of woodman asked us if we were looking for butterflies, and were really interested, we were able to show them a Pearl, which was good ! We found the bulk of the pearls exactly where you state in your book ,and also another spot ,further along the ride .

Once Again ,Great work Neil ! Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

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

Fantastic photo's Neil 📷 I tried today to see some no luck, I'll have to move South I think Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-May-18 11:05 PM GMT

Thanks, Allan; I'm really glad that you scored with the Pearls. Much of the credit must go to the Norfolk Estate, which has been hugely generous in helping the PBF and other wildlife over the years. After the recent work, that ride will be good for PBF long after I'm pushing up violets.

Hi Goldie. Pack your bags; you'll always be welcome in Sunny Sussex!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-May-18 11:10 PM GMT

Stansted Forest

Today (14 May) I made a late afternoon visit to monitor the Pearl-bordered Fritillary reintroduction at Stansted Forest. It was getting rather chilly by the time arrived, so I only saw nine, one of which was this beautiful male.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 15-May-18 09:29 AM GMT

Only saw nine, Neil! one would be good 🍀🍀 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pauline, 15-May-18 05:47 PM GMT

Still no specs then 😞 I'll get round to going back just as soon as I've built this aviary – panels delivered tomorrow 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-May-18 09:41 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

My thanks to Tom Parker for helping me complete my count of Pearl-bordered Fritillary over the entire southern half of the site, with five areas producing a total count of 68.

Those are highly encouraging figures, Neil, and many thanks for posting that image of the three individuals on the dried flowerhead.

It's surprising just how common this species can be on the few sites specifically managed for it.

I hope yours will continue to thrive as this is undoubtedly a particularly beautiful and precious UK butterfly.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-18 10:53 PM GMT

Hi Goldie. Whatever the numbers we see, we'll always want to see more!

Hi Pauline. I'll keep looking until my lost property box is full.

Hi David. It's always boom or bust with PBF. So easy to lose the species from a site, but give it what it wants, and BOOM!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 15-May-18 11:08 PM GMT

Great to see so many Pearls Neil – hopefully they'll be emerging from Bentley Wood this weekend – they've been seen at nearby Stockbridge now so the emergence is working it's way Westwards 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-18 11:26 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel.

They'll be out, without a doubt. Fill yer boots!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-May-18 11:29 PM GMT

May Magic

I spent a hugely enjoyable day today (15 May), initially with Matt Twydell of the RSPB, looking at the Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) and its habitat at Rewell Wood. This species is now showing its appreciation of all the work which has been done over the last few years; numerous females are already dispersing into recently cut areas, which bodes well for next year. We also saw higher than normal numbers (for Rewell) of Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper.

A later visit to Springhead Hill produced good numbers of Duke of Burgundy and Dingy Skipper, a few Green Hairstreak, and my first Small Blue (2) of the year.

I then returned to Rewell Wood, to watch the PBF going to roost. It was clear that they are still emerging in force and I even found a mating pair at 6.30 pm. Throughout the day I kept meeting a couple of visitors from Oxfordshire; I was delighted to fulfill my promise of finding a roosting PBF for them ... and me! Every month should be May, or July.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 16-May-18 10:19 AM GMT

It's a perfect picture of a perfect Pearl 🍷😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-May-18 06:36 AM GMT

First Browns Argus

My thanks to Andrea Gibbs of BC Sussex for helping host a private event on the Downs yesterday (16 May). After saying goodbye to our guests we visited Springhead Hill to see a few Duke of Burgundy, Small Blue and our first Brown Argus of the year.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-18 07:17 AM GMT

Pearls And Blues

I spent most of yesterday (17 May) monitoring Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF) numbers away from the main Sussex centres at Rewell and Abbot's. One of these sites was Stansted Forest, where I found 11 PBF, including a mating pair. I also saw my first Grizzled Skipper at this location. On the way home I stopped off at Springhead Hill, to watch several Common Blue and Brown Argus going to bed.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 18-May-18 10:03 PM GMT

Some more great images there, Neil. You guys have been doing some great work down there, and you deserve to be rewarded. And there is no greater reward than seeing these butterflies on the sites you are helping to maintain, and improve.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-18 11:08 PM GMT

Thanks, Mark. I certainly got some 'payback' today!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-May-18 11:13 PM GMT

Carpet Of Sapphires

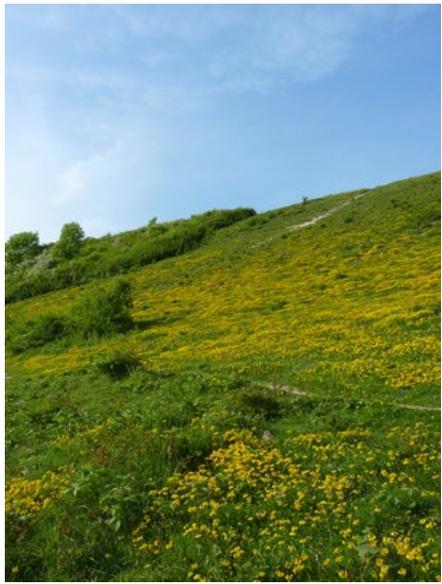
I spent the earlier part of the day (18 May) with my father, looking at Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Rewell Wood and Duke of Burgundy at Springhead Hill. With very little wind and only hazy sunshine, I then decided that the place to be was Mill Hill, as it is under these conditions that the fabulous Adonis Blue sometimes forms large communal roosts, after sunbathing for a while on grasses and other taller vegetation.

When I arrived they were still active, but what surprised me was how many there were; there had clearly been a very substantial hatch. Numbers are difficult to estimate while they are so active, but I guessed that there were in the region of 80 on the wing. However, as the air cooled, many started to drop down the slope to join those which had been active on the lower level, and a large congregation rapidly formed.

The sight of so many in close proximity, all with wings open, was simply breathtaking. I stopped counting at 125, but that was probably the majority. There were a few females in the mix, but they are yet to really get going. Among them were small clusters of Common Blue, in groups of about half-a-dozen, good numbers of Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, Small Heath and a few Small Copper.

This is a really good showing for the spring brood of Adonis at Mill Hill and bodes well for the late summer flight. I'll be going back, very soon!





Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 18-May-18 11:35 PM GMT

When Dave (Millerd) and I were there on Tuesday the Adonis were literally emerging before our eyes Neil. We started the morning with just a handful on the wing and when I left around 1 there were dozens. I saw lots still expelling meconium. With this fine weather set to go on for at least another week I can only imagine how things are set to develop down there! It really is a fabulous site (and sight)

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 19-May-18 07:47 PM GMT

Yes, glorious images Neil from a glorious site. Your report has come at a good time actually, because guess where I'm heading tomorrow...

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 19-May-18 07:59 PM GMT

You have captured the shade of blue to perfection.

What's next this stunning May? Continental Swallowtail invasion?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-May-18 09:59 PM GMT

Thanks, all.

"Stunning May" continued to stun today. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-May-18 10:04 PM GMT

50 Years Of Dukes And Pearls

Today (19 May) I was joined by Will Langdon, to help Matthew Oates celebrate the 50th anniversary of him first seeing both the Duke of Burgundy and Pearl-bordered Fritillary. I had promised that Sussex would deliver, and it did in style.

Before meeting Matthew, Will and I headed to the Steyning Downland Scheme, where we opened the score-sheet with Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Green Hairstreak and 3 Scarce Chaser dragonflies. The three of us then set off on a long walk across the Downs at Storrington, visiting a number of sites. We didn't cover every colony before targeting Pearls at 3pm, but we managed an impressive total of 142 Dukes.

We then moved to Rewell Wood, where we counted 57 Pearl-bordered Fritillary and a further 8 Grizzled Skipper. Matthew went home happy, as did Will and I; a truly memorable day.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 19-May-18 10:20 PM GMT

Fantastic stuff, Neil. It's exploding all around you! 😊

What a great thing for those lovely Adonis Blues to be entering the world to weather conditions like these.

I'm sure there'll be hundreds (if not thousands) more over the next fortnight or so.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 19-May-18 10:59 PM GMT

Those Dukes are in mint condish Neil and 142 in one sitting 🤪🍷🍷🍷😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 20-May-18 07:32 PM GMT

Neil.

You have done a splendid job in saving the Duke of Burgundy in Sussex (does anyone really know why it is called the Duke of *Burgundy*?) You seem to be repeating that success with the Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Butterfly names have always changed. Half-Mourner >>> Marbled White (actually a brown not a white but be that as it may). So I suggest that Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (male and female respectively) be re-named ***Duke and Duchess of Sussex***.

I can't for the life of me think what prompted that train of thought.

PS. I am a closet fan of the "Royals". They seem to be doing a better job than our elected political so-called "leaders".

PPS. Prince Charles asked that his son should be called Harry and not Henry, I trust that Prince Harry will – as a compliment to his father – call any son he has "Charlie" and not Charles.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-May-18 09:35 PM GMT

Thanks, Jack.

The species was named after the 2014 S&M cinematic classic *The Duke of Burgundy*. According to Wikipedia: In his initial review for The A.V. Club, Mike D'Angelo called the film "a beautiful love story disguised as stylish smut".

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are titles already gifted to *Hamearis lucina*.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-May-18 10:41 PM GMT

Rare Species Landscape Walk

Fifteen intrepid explorers turned up for today's (20 May) BC Sussex 'Rare Species Landscape Walk', involving the ascent of Mount Heyshott (good views were had by all), a dip into Charlton Forest, and a circuit of the beautiful Graffham Down Trust reserves. We were out from 10.30 am until 4.30 pm and probably lost a few pounds, but the effort was well worthwhile. I know that others enjoyed it immensely, and for me this was the third in a sequence of truly memorable days out butterflying; already this is a May I'll cherish for a very long time.

My thanks to all who attended, and to Will Langdon for keeping the tally (which once listed will go into our database), and for giving up his lunch break to help with the frenetic counting of Dukes! The highlights were undoubtedly 86 Duke of Burgundy and 19 Pearl-bordered Fritillary (we saw both species laying eggs). Other species included Dingy Skipper (very many), Grizzled Skipper (many), Orange-tip, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Green Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Brown Argus and Common Blue; a total of 18 species.

The impressive flora included Fly Orchid (several dozen), White Helleborine (including a whopper) and a few Greater Butterfly Orchid. Will and I later returned to the slopes, to drink in the magic that Heyshott Escarpment provides at this time of year. Most of the Dukes had turned in for the night, but the Duchesses were now out in force.





Re: Neil Hulme

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

Hi! Neil, when I read about all the Duke's your seeing it seems unbelievable, only one or two have been seen so far at Gait Barrow and no pearl's have been seen there yet, this is inspite of a lot of bushes etc having been cleared, I'm hoping to visit there on Wednesday so I'm hoping they're just that bit later coming out because of the cold Winter we had . Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 21-May-18 10:25 AM GMT

Neil: ~~quote~~The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are titles already gifted to *Hamearis lucina*. Are you going to inform their human counterparts? I suppose your friend Eddie Norfolk might have a hot line to them 😊

Seriously for a moment: renaming Duke of Burgundy the *Duke and Duchess of Sussex* would I am sure be popular. Harry and Meghan might be quite ticked by the idea.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-May-18 11:53 PM GMT

Hi Goldie. It certainly shows that the efforts of Butterfly Conservation (and partners such as the South Downs National Park Authority) really do work. In 2003 only eight Duke of Burgundy (Sussex) were recorded in the whole of the county. On Saturday, William (UKB), Matthew Oates and I counted 62 in one location which is only 0.75 hectare in size.

Hi Jack. Leave this one to me. I'll leave the happy couple to enjoy their honeymoon for now.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-May-18 11:57 PM GMT

Return Of The Small Pearl

After spending this morning (21 May) in the beautiful New Forest, it was after 4 pm before I reached our Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, where I was keen to monitor the initial stages of the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary emergence. I was later joined by Theresa Turner, Gary Norman and Mike Mullis, who all played key parts in last year's BC *Fritillaries For The Future* reintroduction programme.

Early signs are encouraging, with six different males seen; four in Rowland Wood and two on Park Corner Heath. I may be biased, but I think that the habitat for this species, over both reserves, looks spot-on. Theresa and Mike had earlier been to Abbot's Wood, where two Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary were flying.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 22-May-18 07:51 AM GMT

Lovely photo's Neil, there's been lots of reports from Warton on the Pearls but nothing yet from Gait Barrow so I'm hoping some will be seen soon. Gait Barrow used to be the place to definitely see both Dukes and Pearls in good numbers but not any more it seems. Goldie 😞

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-May-18 09:12 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. I hope they turn up soon.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 23-May-18 09:15 PM GMT

Dukes On The Move

I was pleased to see that Paul Day recorded two male Duke of Burgundy in Washington chalk pits yesterday (22 May). I also visited this site, after leading a large group of Natural England ecologists around Chantry Hill, so arrived much later. I also saw two Duke of Burgundy, but mine were both female, suggesting that the species may be gaining a firmer foothold here.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-May-18 10:31 PM GMT

All your news seems to be very encouraging, Neil. I'm so glad that after all the graft throughout the winter, weather conditions during the flight period for your target species have been extremely kind in the main. Let's hope this leads to more eggs being laid and further consolidation/expansion next year.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-May-18 08:32 PM GMT

Thanks, David. There's plenty more good news to come in time, but things are moving so fast on the fritillary (and Duke) front that it will take time to catch up on the reporting.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-May-18 08:40 PM GMT

Fat Cats And Small Pearls

Yesterday (25 May) I paid a brief visit to the Knepp Wildland, to photograph one of the Purple Emperor caterpillars being studied by Matthew Oates. As the skies cleared, I headed to the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, to see how the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) is doing, following its reintroduction last year as part of the BC *Fritillaries for the Future* project. I spent several hours with Peter Farrant, trying to determine their number as accurately as possible, given that they are highly mobile and move from ride to ride. We determined the certain presence of six males and a (egg-laying) female in Rowland Wood, although it is likely that eight SPBF were flying.

We drew a blank on Park Corner Heath, but I believe that Bob Eade saw three there, one of which apparently fell foul of a Crab Spider (photographed by Arthur Greenslade). These numbers are encouraging so early in the flight season, but please report any SPBF sightings to the BC Sussex website; it is vital that we monitor their progress closely, both here and at Abbot's Wood.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 26-May-18 10:05 PM GMT

Excellent work there, Neil. I was at Chantry Hill last Sunday. Never been there at this time of year . Needless to say, I was very impressed!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 27-May-18 07:01 PM GMT

I've only just got round to reading Saturday's edition of *The Times*.

For those who haven't seen the article by Matthew Oates, he gives appropriate credit for Nei's work in helping – perhaps even saving – both the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the Duke of Burgundy in Sussex.

Thanks Neil for what you have done and are continuing to do.

PS. How much did you have to bribe Matthew to write that article? 😏

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-May-18 08:37 AM GMT

Thanks, Jack. I was unaware of this article, but it sounds typically generous of Matthew; I'll try to source a copy.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-May-18 08:41 AM GMT

Beginning Of The End

Yesterday (27 May) I monitored Duke of Burgundy numbers across multiple sites in the Storrington landscape. Although a composite total count of 91 is not to be sniffed at, it was quite clear that the Duke season is now in its last stages; they're burning out fast in the prolonged heat and only one male and two females were in anything like fresh condition. My visit also produced my first Golden-ringed Dragonfly of the year.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 28-May-18 08:49 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I'd a very disappointing visit to Gait Barrow at the Week-end , perfect day, no Dukes seen!! I've only seen two or three reported so far, this was my second visit to GB has well so I can only think they must be declining up there. 😞
It's great to hear yours are doing so well 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 28-May-18 04:43 PM GMT

I feel it is merely the end of the beginning for those Dukes on your managed patch, Neil. It's great how flight conditions were so favourable this year and perhaps this will see them emerge in even greater numbers in 2019? Let's hope so.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-May-18 07:27 PM GMT

Hi Goldie. I've heard on the grapevine that Dukes are having a hard time up there; it's always sad to hear that my joint-favourite species is in decline. Hi David. This long spell of spring weather should do all manner of good for Dukes, Pearls and others.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-May-18 07:30 PM GMT

They're Back!

This morning (28 May) I visited the BC Park Corner Heath (PCH) & Rowland Wood reserves. The first thing I noticed was the new signage at the entrance; many thanks to Ian Hampshire and Bob Foreman for doing such a great job. Thanks also to Michael and Clare Blencowe for finishing the painting of the PCH hut, and to Jonathan Crawford for mounting the banner and display units. The reserves are now looking very smart.

All of the habitat work done over the last couple of years is really paying off and butterfly numbers are clearly on the increase. Unsurprisingly, it was the reintroduced Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) which was the focus of my attention, and I was delighted by what I saw. A thorough survey of almost every ride and open space produced a total of 21 SPBF (16 male, 4 female, 1 indeterminate). Two of the females were freshly emerged, and two were already laying eggs. The species was well distributed across both reserves, with 6 males seen on PCH. There is now every reason to believe that this reintroduction has gone well.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 28-May-18 10:48 PM GMT

Wonderful! Thanks to you and the rest of the Fritillaries for the Future team for everything that you have done, and continue to do.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 29-May-18 08:42 AM GMT

~~[quote]~~Thanks, Jack. I was unaware of this article, but it sounds typically generous of Matthew; I'll try to source a copy.
BWs, Neil It was re-cycle bin day on Monday and unfortunately I had already thrown away *The Times* otherwise I could have sent you a copy.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 29-May-18 09:40 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, three Dukes were reported being seen on Sunday at GB, I was wondering if they'd introduce more up there, it's so sad to see these lovely Dukes disappearing, 😞 the strange fact is the sudden appearance of the Brown Hair Streak up there, it does make you scratch your head a bit. 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-May-18 06:42 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

There is now every reason to believe that this reintroduction has gone well.

Absolutely fabulous news, Neil. Let's hope you're right.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-May-18 08:22 AM GMT

Thanks, Andy. We're all delighted with the way things are going. PBF and SPBF are a lot better off in Sussex than they were just a few years ago. Thanks, again, to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and all other supporters of *Fritillaries for the Future*.

Thanks, Jack. Never mind; I'll ask Matthew when I next see him.

Hi Goldie. I suspect Brown Hairstreak arrived by car.

Hi David. It will be a couple of years before we get a clearer picture, but I'm feeling very optimistic.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-May-18 08:31 AM GMT

Valley Of Adonis

This evening (30 May) I visited Anchor Bottom with my father and brother, Mark, who is visiting from Antwerp. I promised them large numbers of Adonis Blue, based on Jonathan Crawford's recent reports to the BC Sussex website, but we saw more than that.

Over a relatively small part of the site I had counted 75 pairings before my family left, and Katrina Watson arrived. Moving further up the valley this total soon rose to 100. I took a different route back to the car, much higher up the slope, and finally stopped counting at 150 mating pairs. As the butterflies finally settled down to roost there were five or six in a metre square in some areas. At one point the light wind dropped off completely and I was surrounded by hundreds of beautiful sapphire-blue and chocolate-brown Adonis, hanging from the grasses.

Katrina arrived from the top of the valley and confirmed the extent of their distribution. Estimating numbers under these circumstances is difficult, but some simple mathematics suggested that a conservative total of 5000 must have been present; I have never seen so many Adonis Blues in my life. If visiting in the evening or under overcast and cool conditions, please tread with extreme care, as it is very difficult to avoid stepping on them, particularly the mating pairs. This has already been a spring to remember and this evening was unforgettable.







Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 31-May-18 09:11 AM GMT

Neil – Wow. I am lucky if I get to see a dozen or so Adonis in a year and I have only ever seen one mating pair. It sounds a fantastic location for them. Could it be a record site?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 31-May-18 09:24 AM GMT

And to think that not so many years ago, Adonis Blues seemed to be in danger (genetic bottleneck).

One evening around 25 years ago, I saw significant numbers on lower slopes of Castle Hill but I doubt that my total was in anywhere your estimate.

The current showery spell bodes well for second generation of Adonis Blue (and other species) as there must now be much reduced chance of vegetation desiccating.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-May-18 09:49 AM GMT

Hi ernie. This is certainly one of the largest colonies in Sussex, along with Malling Down. A transect count of 3500 was made here for the second brood (usually more numerous) in 2008, which would reflect a population of >10,000. I suspect there may be similar or greater numbers this August, if we get the right weather conditions.

Hi Jack. The Adonis Blue is certainly in much better shape than when I were a lad. The recovery of the rabbit, climate change and increased conservation grazing have all helped. I think you are right to point out the condition/prospects for Horseshoe Vetch (HSV), which is exceptionally lush and vigorous this spring. The availability of HSV is probably one of the key limiting factors on Chalkhill Blue population size (see *The Butterflies of Sussex* 😊), so we could be in for a perfect storm of blues later this summer.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 31-May-18 10:19 AM GMT

[quote]The recovery of the rabbit...However: <http://www.therabbithouse.com/blog/2018/05/15/wild-rabbit-population-declines/>

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 31-May-18 10:54 AM GMT

What fantastic photo's Neil, 🐰🐰 and great to know the Adonis is doing so well 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-May-18 12:14 PM GMT

Thanks, Goldie. The Adonis Blue is just one of the many benefits I get by living on the chalk – by far my favourite rock! True, Jack, and worrying, but they're still abundant when compared directly to the years following the introduction of myxomatosis in 1953. BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 31-May-18 03:19 PM GMT

That's a staggering count of Adonis Blues at Anchor Bottom, Neil, and so many mating pairs! What an amazing site. During a recent visit to the Isle of Wight we also noticed how lush and prolific the HSV was this year. We saw very good numbers of Adonis on Bonchurch Down, where I believe they have been struggling in recent years.

Mike

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 31-May-18 07:03 PM GMT

Hi Neil, great to see your report from Anchor Bottom, and those of others. We were there late summer last year, and there were many hundreds, probably thousands, of Adonis Blues there then. I'm delighted to see this has carried on in the late spring brood, as you know, this is not always the case. Must have been an amazing sight!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 02-Jun-18 12:08 AM GMT

Those are staggering numbers, Neil, and as you rightly say, with conditions having been near perfect, one can only wonder what the Chalkhill Blue population might be next month!!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jun-18 09:06 AM GMT

Hi Mike. The last time I saw HSV in this condition was 2012, when Chalk Hill Blue numbers exploded. Thanks, Mark and David. The late July/August blues festival could be an epic! BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jun-18 09:11 AM GMT

The Rise And Rise Of Knepp Wildland

Yesterday (1 June) I broke off from walking my spring butterfly transect on the Knepp Wildland Southern Block, to meet owners Charlie and Issy (author of the brilliant book 'Wilding'). I was accompanied by my brother and we had already logged several species of interest, including my first Large Skippers and Meadow Browns of the year, the latter marking the official start of summer.

Time didn't permit completion of the survey route (I'll return), but we were drawn to look at a recording compartment ahead of schedule, by a very loud Cuckoo. As I was making some notes my brother casually called out "Dingy Skipper", a species as yet unrecorded at Knepp. I had been waiting for this species to arrive for several years.

As I was photographing it he called "Green Hairstreak", another new species for the site! I could scarcely believe my eyes and have never been so pleased at seeing such knackered old butterflies. These days I seldom photograph butterflies unless they're in perfect condition, or are genuine rarities. However, these old warriors are very important, so I've recorded their modest looks for posterity. This is what dispersing, colonising individuals typically look like; tired, late season adventurers. They may have one foot in the grave, but I suspect they've done their job. They've probably come from my beloved Chantry Hill, where numbers have been very high this spring. We intercepted another Dingy Skipper on the way out.

That's now 36 species of butterfly seen on the Wildland since 2005. Here's to Knepp!





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 02-Jun-18 09:46 AM GMT

And to think that 40 years ago I lived within 4 kilometres (as the Meadow Brown flies) or about 7 km cycling distance from Knepp!

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Jun-18 07:55 PM GMT

Farewell To The Duke

Sadly, it's that time of year again, when I say farewell to the Duke of Burgundy. It's been a good season for the species in Sussex, but not the very best; I'd give it 7 out of 10. With so much of my time in May now spent working on Pearl-bordered Fritillary, I can't give the Duke the same time I once did, but with 800 counts on the spreadsheet I can't complain.

Today (2 June) I counted only 19 across the entire Storrington metapopulation, and I suspect the very last will die well before next weekend. As always, he went down fighting. The last faded and tatty male I saw was still beating up freshly emerged Large Skippers as I left him for another year.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 03-Jun-18 06:05 AM GMT

{quote}...as I left him [The Duke] for another year.Maybe not. Second generation? It's happened before.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jun-18 06:23 AM GMT

Hi Jack. It *will* happen in West Sussex eventually, as climate change continues to impact the phenology of this species. It happens at Noar Hill (UK's earliest site) with some regularity, and occasionally in Gloucestershire, but never yet here. Partial second broods usually require a first emergence date around mid April, but Sussex didn't start until 4 May this year.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Jun-18 11:17 PM GMT

Great to hear new species colonising monitored sites, Neil, and whilst I'm a little sad that the Dukes are set to disappear for another year, you can be satisfied that they have had a productive 2018.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jun-18 10:25 AM GMT

***Fritillaries for the Future* Update: RSPB visit & Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary reintroduction to the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves**

Yesterday (3 June) I spent the entire day on the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, observing Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) behaviour. It pays to make an early start in hot weather, as particularly the males become far more elusive once conditions become too warm for them, and they go into hiding.

I had already surveyed part of Rowland Wood and most of Park Corner Heath before Nigel Symington and I welcomed a visiting group of 20 RSPB staff and volunteers at 11.00am. We had a fantastic few hours touring the reserves, seeing plenty of SPBF (including many females nectaring on Bramble blossom), along with numerous other species, many of which are doing well. We were also fortunate enough to find a very showy Cream-spot Tiger moth.

This season I have seen evidence to suggest that predation rates of both Pearls and Small Pearls by large dragonflies are probably higher than I envisaged: the Emperor dragonfly is unsurprisingly the most effective killer. During our walk one of the participants found the corpse of a male SPBF which bears all the hallmarks of an Emperor strike. Small Pearls and dragonflies share the same damp woodland habitats, so any SPBF population must be able to absorb these losses as part of its day-to-day existence. We also know that the Crab Spider takes a significant number.

The RSPB contingent was very supportive in helping accumulate a total count of SPBF which will fleece their Director of England, Chris Corrigan, of a £10 bet (donation to either RSPB or BC Sussex), dependent upon the success of the SPBF reintroduction (threshold 30). By the time I left at 7.30pm I had logged the positions (see map and stats) of 44 individuals (28m, 15f, 1 undiff.). Chris was unavailable for comment and an anonymous source close to Chris denied that the long-extinct Lewes Wave moth had been seen exiting his wallet (I know that Chris will be delighted to have been mugged in this manner).

It is quite clear that SPBF is distributed across almost the entirety of the reserves, apart from those areas where it will take another year before recent heavy forestry work heals over. There will be additional SPBF breeding habitat in abundance in the future. I was particularly encouraged to find four newly hatched females and a male nectaring in little more than a metre square of Bramble blossom at 10.00am, within the rarely searched area I refer to as the 'Birch Meadow' (Area 3).

Many observers have already noted that all the fritillaries look fresh, each time they return for another visit. I'm getting the impression that individual lifespan is quite short and that the turnover rate is high, due to both the generally warm weather and high predation. It is early days still, but things could not look better here.

STATS

Area 1: 2m, 1f
Area 2: 2m
Area 3: 2m, 4f
Area 6: 2m
Area 7: 1f
Area 10: 1f, 1undiff.
Ride D: 1m
Ride H: 2m
Ride L: 1m, 1f
Ride N: 2m (1 corpse, dragonfly kill), 1f
Ride T: 2m
Ride P: 1f
Ride R: 3m
Ride S: 2m, 1f
Park Corner Heath: 7m, 4f







Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Jun-18 08:05 PM GMT

Purple Preparations

I photographed these two Purple Emperor pupae at Southwater today; I suspect that we have one of each sex, hanging just 1.5 metres apart. Matthew Oates had watched the probable female actually pupating, just 45 minutes before I arrived. At the moment I'm predicting a flight season start on 18 June, although Matthew has his money on 16 June. The weather between now and then will be the deciding factor.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 04-Jun-18 11:54 PM GMT

Love the humour regarding the bet, Neil, and I for sure wouldn't have taken you on given the work you and your team were doing during the winter.

We've still got two or three weeks to enjoy the presence of SPBFs, so here's hoping they continue to thrive on your managed sites.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 05-Jun-18 08:22 AM GMT

[quote]At the moment I'm predicting a flight season start on 18 June, although Matthew has his money on 16 June. There is a retired bookie who contributes regularly to these forums. I am sure he would advise as to where to get the best odds 😊

If you PM or drop me an e-mail, I can discreetly pass you his name 🙄

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 05-Jun-18 11:10 PM GMT

I wouldn't like to call between Oates and Hulme to be honest. I think the safest bet here is the 17th! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 07-Jun-18 07:22 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote: Purple Preparations

I photographed these two Purple Emperor pupae at Southwater today; I suspect that we have one of each sex, hanging just 1.5 metres apart. Matthew Oates had watched the probable female actually pupating, just 45 minutes before I arrived. At the moment I'm predicting a flight season start on 18 June, although Matthew has his money on 16 June. The weather between now and then will be the deciding factor.

BC Purple Emperor pupa 1, Southwater 4.6.18.jpg BC Purple Emperor pupa 2, Southwater 4.6.18.jpg

Hi Neil – there seems to be a marked difference in the proportions of the wing case to the body width – although this could simply be the angle that the photo was taken at. What do you think? It would be nice if there were some simple correlation, and much better than examining the pupal genitalia which would almost certainly require the removal of the pupa from its silk pad! As ever, great observations!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-18 07:44 AM GMT

Hi Pete

I see what you mean, but I think that's down to the angle of the dangle.

This one appears to be fairly straightforward (setting himself up for a fall), based on bulk. Although the images won't show this, the assumed female is much larger.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-18 07:59 AM GMT

Still Going Strong

Yesterday (8 June) I visited one area of Abbot's Wood to see how the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is doing. They're quite difficult to spot now that the vegetation has become very lush, due to the combination of heat and damp, but I saw five including an egg-laying female. I also enjoyed a fly-past by my first White Admiral of the year.

A later search of the Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood reserves produced a total of only 12 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, with females making up most of the count (8). This species is now entering the final quarter of its 2018 flight.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 09-Jun-18 10:53 AM GMT

That White Admiral is remarkably early, their appearance signals the start of Summer mayhem.

Long may it last !.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 09-Jun-18 10:53 AM GMT

That White Admiral is remarkably early, their appearance signals the start of Summer mayhem.

Long may it last !.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 09-Jun-18 12:22 PM GMT

I was hoping to see a White Admiral at Fermyn Woods in July Neil when I go looking for the PE, do think they'll still be there 🤔 Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jun-18 11:02 PM GMT

'Return Of The Small Pearls' Walk

I was slightly apprehensive about today's (9 June) 'Return of the Small Pearls' walk at the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, as my reconnaissance visit of yesterday suggested that the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) flight season was in its late stages, and that we were unlikely to see any freshly emerged butterflies.

How wrong I was; this turned out to be one of the most enjoyable walks I've ever led, perhaps because of the unexpected delights on offer, and also because the results confirmed my long-held belief that this reintroduction has gone very well indeed. It certainly helped that we had an unusually large crowd (48) of very appreciative people. They were very generous too and we received a fantastic £84 of donations at the end of the walk, which will go straight into our conservation pot.

Success came quickly and our guests were soon calling out "another one here" as we discovered plenty of SPBF in the first area (rush meadow) we searched, including some recently hatched females. We saw many other species too, the highlights of which were early examples of Ringlet and White Admiral. But the walk was really about the Small Pearls, which put on a fabulous show for us as we wandered around the rides and glades of Rowland Wood.

The tally increased further when we visited Park Corner Heath, seeing more SPBF, both females and males, in excellent condition. The star of the show was a dark aberrant female fritillary, which provided a wonderful grand finale as she posed beautifully between frenetic bouts of egg-laying. A quick look at my score sheet initially suggested we had seen 18 individuals, but closer scrutiny of my notes later gave me a total of 20. A few more were seen after the walk, in previously unvisited areas. There is clearly life left in the SPBF season. Thanks to everyone who came along; it was great to see so many smiling faces of all ages.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 09-Jun-18 11:13 PM GMT

Great to hear how much of a success the reintroduction has been Neil 😊 That smoky female is a stunner 😊🌍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 11-Jun-18 11:53 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...The star of the show was a dark aberrant female fritillary, which provided a wonderful grand finale as she posed beautifully between frenetic bouts of egg-laying..

I believe that was payback from above for all the work you've done for this species, Neil.

What a beautiful insect she is! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Jun-18 08:28 PM GMT

Black Hairstreak Discovered In Sussex

David Cook has discovered a large population of Black Hairstreak in Sussex, at the Ditchling Common Country Park. This species has never occurred naturally in Sussex, being restricted to the clays running between Oxford and Peterborough, but a very large group of colonies developed in Surrey during the second half of the 20th century, following a 1952 introduction (much of the habitat was ultimately destroyed).

Following the sighting of three elderly, late season specimens last summer, a survey has been underway this June to determine the significance of these sightings and the status of the species locally. The presence of a large population (maximum day counts up to 98) has now been confirmed, extending over at least 1.3km of suitable habitat at Ditchling. The species may have spread to other areas within this landscape.

The history of the Surrey introduction indicates that the spread of even large, healthy populations may be a very slow process, moving at only c.1km per decade (Thomas & Lewington 2014). The size and spread of the Ditchling population suggest that it was established long ago.

It is entirely feasible that this species has remained undetected for a long while, due to its very small size and unobtrusive appearance, elusive habits, short flight season and the typical pattern of boom-and-bust which renders it almost invisible in some years, even on the best sites. This year the species has appeared in unprecedented numbers across its natural homeland, probably reflecting the advantageous conditions for larval and pupal development through May.

The male butterflies are using English Oak as 'Master Trees' and both sexes descend to sit on Bracken, both to sunbathe and feed on honeydew. Although the condition of the males deteriorates rapidly, many females (slightly larger and more orange-brown on the underside) are still hatching and a patient search should reveal these.

The best area to observe the species is the corridor of Blackthorn centred on TQ33441813, but the butterfly can be found on almost every suitable stand of the plant within the country park.

Congratulations to David on making such a momentous discovery. We are pleased to announce that Sussex has a new resident species; the Black Hairstreak is here to stay.

Notes:

The Black Hairstreak is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (for sale only).

Ditchling Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), notified as such in 1986; it is illegal to introduce species to a SSSI (once designated as such) and illegal to collect on a SSSI without consent from Natural England.

It is highly recommended that releases of all-but-common species (back to the site from which early life cycle stages may have been collected for educational purposes or scientific study) conform to the 'BC Code on Introductions and Re-introductions 2010'.

Please report any sightings of this species away from the confines of the Ditchling Common CP.





Re: Neil Hulme

by MrSpOck, 11-Jun-18 08:45 PM GMT

I hope people are also looking at one of the last Surrey sites on the Downs Link track just up from the Sussex/Surrey border, if it has hung on in that area, it should show up this year.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Pete Eeles, 11-Jun-18 08:51 PM GMT

That has to be one of the most amazing discoveries of the decade! Thanks for writing this up, Neil, and the very sensible advice regarding introductions!

Cheers,

– Pete

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 11-Jun-18 10:12 PM GMT

Beautiful images of a lovely butterfly, Neil. What an incredible find – well done to Dave for the discovery. Worth a supplement to the Atlas!

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 11-Jun-18 11:07 PM GMT

Yes, brilliant find. Amazing that it had remained undiscovered for such a long time though, in most years, numbers would have been very low.

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 11-Jun-18 11:45 PM GMT

Amazing stuff, even more so as mentioned above that it has remained undetected for so long. If only I'd known last week I'd have added that to my long day out last Wednesday!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 12-Jun-18 04:23 AM GMT

There has been the suggestion that the "native" population in the Midlands in fact results from an introduction 200 or more years ago. This population is significantly isolated from the nearest other ones in mainland Europe. I heard the name Rothschild mentioned, the family having originated in Germany.

I can't quite recall where that suggestion came from but I think it was an elderly retired teacher from Oundle School who was chatting with us Black Hairstreak watchers some years ago in Glapthorne Cow Pasture, Northants.

Mssrs Rothschild and Cribb are probably having a good laugh at us at this very moment 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 12-Jun-18 06:46 AM GMT

I have to wonder what else might be hiding out there?

I had always thought that the declaration of the extinction of the Large Blue was hasty.

It had never been an abundant species but I do wonder whether it might not have lingered in [albeit] small numbers in some remote valley in North Cornwall or North Devon or more likely, on inaccessible cliffs.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Phil B, 12-Jun-18 08:32 AM GMT

Great news Neil.

Are we now to expect a 2nd edition of your book?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Andy Wilson, 12-Jun-18 10:46 AM GMT

This is an amazing find and only just down the road from me!

~~quote~~ There has been the suggestion that the "native" population in the Midlands in fact results from an introduction 200 or more years ago. This population is significantly isolated from the nearest other ones in mainland Europe. I heard the name Rothschild mentioned, the family having originated in Germany.

I have often wondered why the distribution of the Black Hairstreak in England is so limited, and Jack's suggestion has a ring of truth to it, although we will never know for sure. Another explanation is the underlying geology, because all the known colonies (up to now) are along the outcrop of Oxford Clay that runs south-west to north-east from Oxford to Peterborough. Is it something in the soil that the butterfly needs? Interestingly, Ditchling Common is on Wealden Clay, which is from roughly the same geological age and is similar in composition. Maybe the new colony has a good chance of dispersing east and west along the line of this particular rock formation? I hope so!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 12-Jun-18 12:16 PM GMT

Some species are of course dependent on the geology - Adonis and Chalkhill Blues for example. But that is because the larval foodplant Horseshoe Vetch will only grow on chalk and limestone (I add "naturally" as Horseshoe Vetch makes a splendid rockery plant).

But I cannot see how that argument with respect to Black Hairstreak can apply to certain clays: the foodplant sloe is widespread across many types of soil.

I suggest that the clue to the restricted distribution lies in the slow natural dispersal rate of the Black Hairstreak quoted as being only c.1km per decade - at that rate it won't reach north Scotland for some 600 decades = 6,000 years.

Right or wrong, perhaps the simplest explanation for the Black Hairstreak's distribution is human activity. That might be deliberate introductions or perhaps by farming activities (moving harvested crops, livestock, etc).

We'll probably never know.

I might put my *Butterflies of Sussex* on e-bay as it is - as already mentioned - out of date 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 12-Jun-18 06:07 PM GMT

Andy Wilson wrote:

I have often wondered why the distribution of the Black Hairstreak in England is so limited, and Jack's suggestion has a ring of

truth to it, although we will never know for sure.

Yes, it has a highly curious distribution, and one is prone to question why it is restricted to a small strip of terrain in the middle of England (Sussex apart!!)

In France, the butterfly occurs quite widely, although it is localised in those areas where it is present. A comparison of the two distribution maps **does** raise questions about this species' range over here:

<http://diatheo.weebly.com/satyrium-pruni.html>

Re: Neil Hulme

by Matsukaze, 12-Jun-18 09:50 PM GMT

It is a pretty considerable distance from the Rothschilds' estate at Barnwell Wold to the south-western extremity of the species' range near Uffington, and surely it would not have covered the distance given its slow rate of dispersal? I believe the first British records (1830s?) predate the Rothschilds' interest in butterflies, as well.

There is a history of Black Hairstreak records from Worcestershire (Ent. Rec 102, pp. 253-4) as well as vague old ones for Shropshire and Monmouthshire.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jun-18 10:58 PM GMT

Thanks, all, for your comments. With monitoring, surveying and conservation work currently running at such an intensive level, on top of outings purely for pleasure, I won't have time to respond individually for a while. The imminent Purple Emperor season isn't going to help matters!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Jun-18 11:02 PM GMT

Hairstreak Heaven

I've been very busy mapping the distribution of the now famous Black Hairstreak population of Ditchling Common, finding the species in all suitable habitat as far north as Janes Lane, about 1.3km north of where David Cook first discovered it. Here are some of my favourite images collected along the way (6 - 11 June).







Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 12-Jun-18 11:13 PM GMT

Stunning stuff Neil 🥰🌿, but why can't he be discovered even nearer to home? 😊😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 12-Jun-18 11:34 PM GMT

Fabulous images, Neil, especially the penultimate one where the butterfly has elongated it's wings as if it's having a good stretch!

Good luck for the imminent Emperor season. We understand that you'll be otherwise engaged for a while. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jun-18 07:37 AM GMT

Black, Dark Green And Burnt-tip

Yesterday (12 June) I caught up with butterfly buddies Bob Eade and James Arnott, who I hadn't seen all season. Unsurprisingly, we started off at Ditchling Common, where, despite the rather cool and overcast weather, it was still raining Black Hairstreaks. We then moved on to the Downs near Seaford, primarily to look at late-flowering Burnt-tip Orchids. The orchid search provided the bonus discovery of a very fresh Dark Green Fritillary.







Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 13-Jun-18 07:42 AM GMT

Neil – just now reading through your recent posts. WOW. What can I say that has not already been said. I am gobsmacked. I just wished I lived a bit closer to the location. Maybe I can try and plan a visit next year.

I was still reeling from the Black Hairstreak info and pics that the Burnt Orchid didn't quite register straight away. Double WOW.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jun-18 07:45 AM GMT

Thanks, all. This is turning into the spring and summer we've been hoping for, for many years. 😊
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jun-18 10:15 PM GMT

SPBF Second Brood Expected

I spent a lovely morning enjoying the peace and quiet of our Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves today (13 June); I suspect that most butterfly watchers were at Ditchling Common! It was encouraging to find 15 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary still on the wing (7m, 8f), a month after they first emerged. Most are now faded, but the females were still laying plenty of eggs. With the early emergence, good numbers and warm weather, I'm expecting a partial second brood in late July. Plenty of other butterflies were seen, with the best of the supporting cast being 3 White Admiral.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Jun-18 01:21 PM GMT

How We Brought The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary Back Home

A short film by Justin Ingham <https://vimeo.com/256913210>

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Jun-18 12:17 PM GMT

I thoroughly enjoyed that, Neil. It was particularly good to see a couple of youngsters getting involved. Too often these days kids prefer to meddle with electronic gadgetry than get their hands dirty outdoors! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jun-18 10:20 AM GMT

Thanks, David. I think this film is a great way to celebrate the input of young and old alike. It makes me glow with pride and happiness!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Jun-18 10:22 AM GMT

Red, Green & Blue

Yesterday (15 June) I spent a few hours in Charlton Forest, planning follow-up habitat work for the *Fritillaries for the Future* project. It's been encouraging to see that many species have already invaded what was once an enclosed and shady area of woodland, including Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Marbled White. Numbers of the rare Drab Looper moth have also increased spectacularly. During my visit I saw my first Silver-washed Fritillary of the year.

On the way home I stopped off to photograph the magnificent display of poppies at Bury Hill.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Janet Turnbull, 16-Jun-18 10:36 AM GMT

What a lovely film, Neil. It must be thrilling for the volunteers to see the fruit of their labours!
Love those poppies – what a display 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Jun-18 10:43 PM GMT

Fabulously evocative images, Neil. You are surrounded by beauty whether it be in winged form or just the general landscape.

It's a reminder of just how lovely Britain can be.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 17-Jun-18 10:36 AM GMT

Hi Neil, just catching up on a few diaries after being in Norfolk for a few days last week, amazing news about the Black Hairstreaks in Sussex 😊

It really makes you wonder what else may be hidden away out there if these can remain undetected for so long in what I imagine is one of the most surveyed counties in the country.

Great stuff 😊

Cheers,

Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Jun-18 03:02 PM GMT

Thanks, Janet. I was very pleased with the film; Justin Ingham did a great job for us. Unsurprisingly, he's a very experienced professional film-maker. Hi David. That's why I find it so difficult to travel overseas in spring or summer!

Hi Neil. Despite being a well-surveyed county, Ditchling has remained remarkably unwatched (in recent decades) until the last few years – not anymore! BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Jun-18 03:04 PM GMT

Sussex Emperors

Today (17 June) I saw my first Purple Emperor of the season, in the oaks at the northern end of Green Lane (Knepp Southern Block). A male was observed flying rapidly around the canopy in unsuitably strong wind at 12.15 pm. A second male flew over my shoulder from the sallow scrub behind at 12.25 pm and climbed up to join the first. By 12.35 pm they were dogfighting at breakneck speed; this was silly, as someone could have been hurt.

Earlier in the morning I'd seen 8 Black Hairstreak (the flight is now declining rapidly) at Ditchling Common. I never thought I'd record *pruni* and *iris* on the same day in Sussex!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Jun-18 09:46 PM GMT

David M wrote:

I wouldn't like to call between Oates and Hulme to be honest. I think the safest bet here is the 17th! 😊

Can I claim my prize? 😊

It just HAD to fall between the dates proposed by Oates/Hulme!!

Get ready, folks!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jun-18 11:45 PM GMT

Hi David

There was one isolated early bird, but 17th was the real start to the season. They're already building fast! Matthew had 30 at Knepp today. We're expecting very large numbers.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 19-Jun-18 11:54 PM GMT

Daneway Blues

Not much time for narrative at this time of year, but here are a few images from a couple of sessions (18 & 19 June) at the wonderful Daneway Banks. It was great to catch up with some old friends, and new. Plenty flying, so now's a good time to go.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 20-Jun-18 08:13 AM GMT

Looks like I missed both you and the Large Blues by a day! 😊 Cracking set of shots 📸

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 20-Jun-18 08:32 AM GMT

It's always worth a stop in the lay-by on the climb up **Bury Hill** (A29 south of the village) to enjoy the view, one of the finest in southern England.

For some reason, cyclists often take a break there when climbing the 'gentle' gradient. Youngsters have no stamina these days 😞

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Jun-18 11:53 PM GMT

Fabulous Large Blue images, Neil. Where do you find the time to decamp to a location fairly distant from you at this critical stage of the season?

Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 21-Jun-18 08:34 AM GMT

Neil - amazing pictures of Large Blues, especially the mating pair. I use to live in the village of Chalford which is just a stones-throw from Daneway but that was 20 years ago - before I got into butterflies and I think before they were re-introduced there. Now its a four hour round trip from where I live. How unlucky can I be?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Jun-18 10:12 PM GMT

Thanks, both.

Daneway Banks is even further for me ... but Large Blues - they're worth it! 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 21-Jun-18 11:23 PM GMT

I suppose Large Blues emerge in a convenient window for you, Neil, in between the SPBFs/Dukes and the Purple Emperors.

Before you know it you'll be pursuing Brown Hairstreaks and looking for migrant Long Tailed Blues!!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-18 06:37 AM GMT

Hi David

Too many butterflies, too little time! And that's when I've taken the summer off work, to do nothing else!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 22-Jun-18 07:30 AM GMT

~~[quote]~~Neil: Too many butterflies, too little time! And that's when I've taken the summer off work, to do nothing else! And you won't be watching **Ing-Ger-Land** on Sunday?

Disgraceful.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Jun-18 08:47 PM GMT

Knepp Emperors Go Large

The last few days have seen an explosion of Purple Emperor activity on the Knepp Wildland, although the action is punctuated by long periods when the butterflies remain motionless in the canopy, and one could be forgiven for thinking that there are none present! Much depends upon the weather, and other factors which we don't always understand.

Matthew Oates and I have been monitoring the numbers closely, often over the large areas with restricted access, which we visit as members of the Wildland advisory and survey groups (please keep to the public rights of way and permissive footpaths). However, the emperors can easily be seen from these paths, especially from the bridleway which runs approximately south-north across the Southern Block; many male emperors are coming to ground here (and occasionally to my trousers).

Maximum day counts remained on a plateau on 20 June (61) and 21 June (56), but there was clearly a huge hatch during the generally quiet morning period today (22 June). We stopped at 5.30 pm, as Matthew was beginning to melt, by which time we'd counted 121,120 of which were males. This indicates that we are still in the early build phase, and that we are likely to see a significant further increase, once the females get going.

The bridleway (green lane) is also a great place to watch Purple Hairstreak, particularly after 6.30 pm. Yesterday I counted 100 in the oaks during a relatively short period. A handful of White Admirals and the occasional Silver-washed Fritillary are also being seen.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 23-Jun-18 06:10 AM GMT

[quote]Neil: many male emperors are coming to ground here (and occasionally to my trousers) Presumably the same still-unwashed trousers as last

year? (And from 2016, 2015, 2014.....) 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by EricY, 23-Jun-18 06:28 PM GMT

Lovely shots from Daneway Neil, I thought I saw you climbing up the hill on Tuesday morning when I was there. I was coming down from a long wait in the windy conditions from the top bit. By time I looked again you had disappeared, wish I had introduced myself now. I might go to Fermyn as soon as they start flying. Eric

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jun-18 07:11 AM GMT

Hi Jack. No, these are 'new' old, unwashed trousers, but equally foul.

Shame I missed you, Eric. Please say 'hello' if our paths cross again. I might try to squeeze in a trip to Fermyn mid next week.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jun-18 07:16 AM GMT

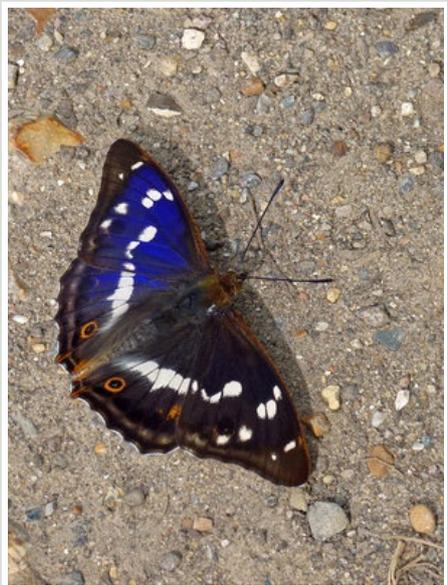
More Knepp Magic

Yesterday (23 June) I gave Theresa Turner and Gary Norman a personal tour of the Knepp Wildland, to thank them for all their brilliant work on the BC *Fritillaries for the Future* project. I was keen to show them both Knepp and the Purple Emperor at their best.

Emperor sightings gradually became more regular and a nice male eventually succumbed to one of my shrimp baits. Then the fireworks started; we turned a corner to find a low-level swarm of butterflies, comprising two females and five males, forming tight twisting bundles and linear chases at head-height and sometimes lower. Occasionally they would land in the grass, as the females attempted to shake off the amorous males. The females also repeatedly chased the males at high speed; something I've never seen before. All seven of the emperors regularly perched in the hedgerow, at or just above head-height. This frantic game of kiss chase went on for the best part of an hour, before the butterflies finally dispersed. During this part of the day we saw 40 Purple Emperors, all viewed from the main tracks and paths.

I later rejoined others in a systematic search (although we covered different routes) of the Sallow scrublands, where activity was at times quite incredible, although I never matched the chase of eight reported by Darcia Gingell and her mother. The tallies at the end of the day read like a late 1970s West Indies cricket team scoresheet; Oates 177, Fosterjohn 158, Hulme 144 (Tutton batted to the end, but the scorer lost count). A Knepp double-century must surely be possible, as the Wildland project continues to demonstrate that 'rare' wildlife need not be rare.

Most visitors had left before 6.00 pm, but I stayed on to enjoy the swarms of Purple Hairstreak which become active in the oak canopy on sunny evenings, the purring of nearby Turtle Doves, and the commotion caused by a family of Tamworth Pigs digging up mussels from the bottom of a small pond.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 24-Jun-18 08:42 AM GMT

I have made a decision. Next year instead of my annual trip down south in early May, it is going to be late June.

And probably stay at the unexciting but convenient (and reasonably priced) Billingshurst Travelodge again.

See you Neil next June.

PS. Are Zimmer frames with seat on the market? I might need one by then 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jun-18 11:31 PM GMT

Hi Jack

I'll try to get you one of these (image by Theresa Turner).

BWs, Neil



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jun-18 11:35 PM GMT

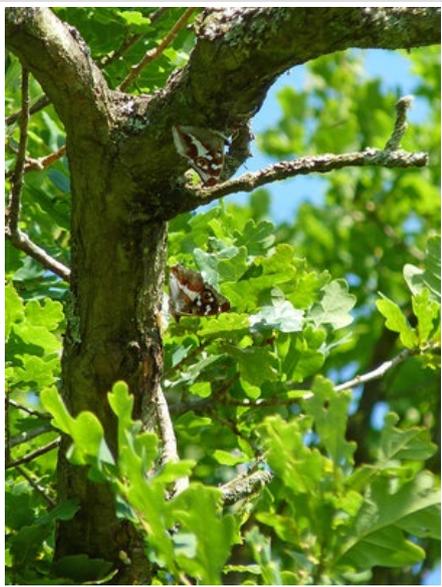
300 Emperors At Knepp

Between 9.15 am and 7.07 pm on 24 June I counted precisely 300 Purple Emperors (only six of which were female) on the Knepp Wildland, spending a fabulous day in the company of Matthew Oates and Paul Fosterjohn. Many thanks to Matthew for helping tease out the remaining two (which took the final hour), when he would probably have rather had his feet in a bath of warm salty water; it had to be done.

Why were we so determined to make 300, when 298 is enough for anyone? The achievement of such a ridiculously large total demonstrates very clearly that a species which many would consider as rare, can in fact be rather common, if only we were to treat at least larger areas of our countryside in a more sympathetic manner.

The Purple Emperor is, in reality, widespread in West Sussex, but its numbers are so heavily suppressed by tidiness that we perceive it as a habitat specialist of mature, healthy woodlands. Knepp is teaching us a great deal, not least that this is a species which thrives in sallow scrub and flies freely along unflailed hedgerows. Our skewed perception is based on a landscape which has become so degraded that we now set the bar very low.

The Purple Emperor is just one of many high profile species which tell a similar tale, but these represent just the tip of the iceberg. It is already easy to forget that this was traditionally farmed land fewer than 20 years ago. Mother Nature can heal very quickly when allowed; we need more Knepps, as soon as possible.



Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 25-Jun-18 07:43 AM GMT

Neil

I'd like to thank you for pointing up the Daneway Banks Large Blues to me (and then Janet for convincing me I should make the effort to go). In four hours there I got some great shots and met some great people yesterday.

Also – crumbs. 300 Purple Emperors. Of course I am pleased you met your target count but I am even more pleased for the Purple Emperors which seem to really thrive there.

My count at Alice Holt stands at 4 so far. 296 to go.... 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 25-Jun-18 08:19 AM GMT

Purple Emperor is known to occur over a huge area of Southern England (including now, East Anglia). In a few places, it has been introduced (eg Suffolk) but in general, the distribution seems to be natural. Is the apparent extension in the past 50 years a real phenomenon or simply a manifestation of greater interest in butterflies? PE for such a large insect is amazingly elusive but maybe we (and cameras) have got our "eye in".

So Neil. Can you make an estimate of the **total population of Purple Emperors in Britain?** (stick to adults – there clearly would be more eggs). The total number might be quite staggering for what was once considered to be a rare butterfly. If that's a too difficult question, do you reckon that the PE population outnumbers that of White Admiral?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 25-Jun-18 12:25 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote: 300 Emperors At Knepp

Why were we so determined to make 300, when 298 is enough for anyone? The achievement of such a ridiculously large total demonstrates very clearly that a species which many would consider as rare, can in fact be rather common, if only we were to treat at least larger areas of our countryside in a more sympathetic manner.

The Purple Emperor is, in reality, widespread in West Sussex, but its numbers are so heavily suppressed by tidiness that we perceive it as a habitat specialist of mature, healthy woodlands. Knepp is teaching us a great deal, not least that this is a species which thrives in sallow scrub and flies freely along unflailed hedgerows. Our skewed perception is based on a landscape which has become so degraded that we now set the bar very low.

This general statement sadly applies to so many species. Not just butterflies and not just in the UK 😞😞

I just hope the example set at Knepp can be taken on board by other landowners and become the norm before it really is too late.

Re: Neil Hulme

by William, 25-Jun-18 11:02 PM GMT

Just catching up Neil, monumental stuff as always – I was (briefly) at Daneway on the 18th too, sorry to have missed you!

Cheers,

Will

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jun-18 10:37 AM GMT

Thanks, all. I'll try to answer questions once the emperor season is over; for the moment, every spare minute must be spent in the woods.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 26-Jun-18 10:45 AM GMT

More Knepp Doings

Following the previous day's exhausting count of Purple Emperors over a large area of the Knepp Wildland, today (25 June) was all about the more relaxed enjoyment of the current glut of this magnificent butterfly. I spent a few happy hours with my father, during which we enjoyed plenty of action, including a fresh male emperor on one of my shrimp lures. At one point this butterfly flew in through the open door of my car and fluttered around the dashboard.

After a short break, I returned to Knepp, but then didn't escape again until after 8pm, when the emperors were still flying. I watched empresses gliding around the canopy with up to four and once five males in pursuit, and observed one pairing (which lasted 3 hours 17 minutes) at the top of an oak. Many emperors were seen visiting sap bleeds; one at head-height. A grounded male (on an organic cowpat; these days, most are plastic) demonstrated an unusual marbled pattern, which I've seen before and suspect is caused by still-soft wings. This theory was supported when it raised its abdomen and ejected a stream of meconium while feeding.

On a couple of occasions I watched classic rejection drops, when an already-mated female tumbles down to avoid unwanted male attention. A male/female chase at 7.30pm initially appeared to be similar, until the female finally shook off her suitor and landed in low scrub; it turned out that she had only just emerged and was not quite ready to copulate, as her wings appeared to still be damp, and she too squirted meconium.

It was great to spend some time with Purple Emperor aficionado Dennis Dell (visiting from Sheffield) and wildlife photographer David Woodfall, among many others.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Jun-18 09:28 PM GMT

You're having a fabulous time of it right now, Neil, and long may it continue as it is well deserved. Those Emperor numbers are beyond notable and Knepp really does seem to be the hotspot for them.

PS - Could your 'dashboard' Emperor smell the essence of unwashed moleskin trousers on your car seat? 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-18 07:56 PM GMT

Hi David

I can't be that specific - the entire fabric of my car stinks at this time of the year. 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-18 08:40 PM GMT

Fabulous Fermyn (Part 1)

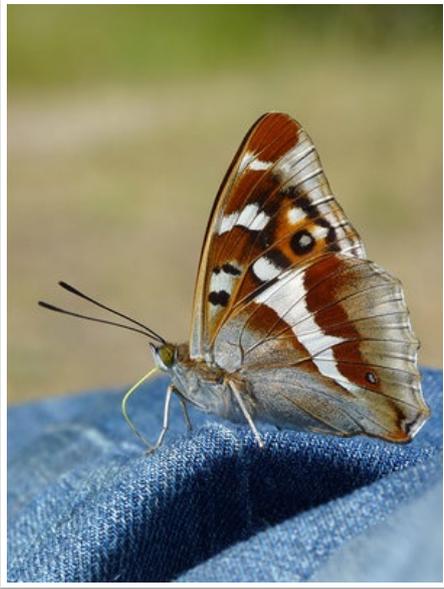
On Thursday (27 June) I headed to Fermyn Woods. Having spent so much time at Knepp recently (and with eight safaris to co-lead there over the next two weeks), I was keen for a change of scenery, and also for the opportunity to photograph some more freshly emerged male Purple Emperors; most/all of the males are now out at Knepp. Although groundings are becoming far more regular at Knepp, Fermyn still outguns Knepp in this respect. In terms of population, Knepp is now in a league of its own. Although still early in the Northants season, I saw no more than c.30 emperors on either of the days I visited, despite the females being well out (three on Thursday, two on Friday).

I spent most of the two days in the excellent company of Dave Walker, who I'd met at Noar Hill during the Duke season. It was also good to catch up again with Dave Williams (plus brother), who I'd recently bumped into at Daneway Banks, and Bill & Mrs Seager (of the Fermyn Light Horse). Unfortunately, it seems I narrowly missed Neil Freeman.

The first thing I noticed on arrival was the excellent and much talked about ride widening through Fermyn proper; well done Forestry Commission! Within relatively few years, if left unmanaged, the Purple Emperors, Silver-washed Fritillaries, White Admirals and White-letter Hairstreaks would all have disappeared, leaving just Speckled Woods; it seems that many would prefer this, and are being quite vocal about it! That said, being such a well visited

site, it would probably have been preferable to lift the brash mats (which protect the ground from the worst of mechanical damage) and chip them; so only 9 out of 10. The next thing I noticed was the constant rain of honeydew (I've seldom seen so much), which eventually started to gum-up my camera.

This first day of my visit was all about trouserings, of which I enjoyed four. In order to get the best angles I spent some time rolling around on the floor, performing contortions that Louie Spence would be proud of. I soon set to work laying belachan soup baits, which proved to be my most successful mix yet; apologies for the stink (not really). 95% of the emperor groundings (about 20 over the two days) came to the lures, together with c.30 Comma, a few Small Tortoiseshell and several hundred flies.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jun-18 09:20 PM GMT

Fabulous Fermyn (Part 2)

My second day (28 June) at Fermyn proved to be even better, with some very fresh males descending to the rides from about 10.30 am onward. Emperors were still flying when I finally left the site at 7.30 pm (six hours later than planned). Although my belachan soup was the main draw, one male showed his appreciation of my Red Bull (other energy drinks are available; never give Red Bull to small children or babies). He's probably now at Knepp.

The best action came just before 4 pm, when a coupled pair of emperors drifted down from the canopy – manna from heaven. This allowed several of us the opportunity of some really rare shots.

As always, Fermyn provided some great experiences and created some wonderful memories. I certainly won't forget the happy hour I spent gazing at a perfect moon hanging low over Brigstock, with the air full of screaming Swifts.









Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 29-Jun-18 09:27 PM GMT

Surely you can sell that Red Bull picture to the manufacturers of the drink? It might make a fortune for BC.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 29-Jun-18 09:28 PM GMT

Extraordinary stuff, Neil. Those photos really cannot be bettered in my book. 😊

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 29-Jun-18 09:35 PM GMT

{quote}Dave: Extraordinary stuff, Neil. Those photos really cannot be bettered in my book. When is your book going to be published Dave?

Jack 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Jun-18 10:20 PM GMT

WOW 🤩 Amazing 🤩 🍴 🍴 🍴 Any chance you could spread some of your soup over at Bentley Wood? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Janet Turnbull, 29-Jun-18 11:23 PM GMT

Fabulous photos Neil – and that couple ! 🍴 🍴 🍴

I'm going to Fermyn on Sunday – have to stock up on Red Bull in the absence of magic soup!

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 30-Jun-18 05:26 AM GMT

A pair in cop. on the ground has to be the ultimate purple experience. We did see a high speed rejection chase along Countryman Lane on Thursday, that was pretty spectacular, if brief. Will Red Bull now outsell Tesco Tuna ?!. 😊 .

A great season.
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 30-Jun-18 07:02 AM GMT

I have to wonder whether a photo of a pair of PEs in cop is a first?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 30-Jun-18 08:09 AM GMT



I could go on but I might crush my phone through shear envy 📱

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Freeman, 30-Jun-18 09:53 AM GMT

Hi Neil,

Yes, apparently I just missed you. Dave Williams told me about the photos on the can of Red Bull but I wasn't prepared for the pair in cop...superb 📱 😊

I am pleased to hear your views on the forestry work which confirm my suspicions. I had noticed how shady that ride was becoming on my last visit 3 years ago.

Cheers,

Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-Jun-18 10:49 PM GMT

Absolutely tremendous, Neil, even by your standards.

How are you ever going to top that?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Enthusiast, 01-Jul-18 04:30 PM GMT

My wife was still not convinced I am not spending my time with drunk mates at the pub when I showed her this:



Was nice to meet you Neil and to watch your shooting technique – I admire your patience though impatience has its dividends as well sometimes:



Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 01-Jul-18 05:49 PM GMT

Neil – What can I say that has not already been said. A mating pair of PE's ON THE GROUND!!!!

And then, almost as an afterthought – one of the most brilliant pics I have ever seen of a male PE with all four wings purple.

Crumbs.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 01-Jul-18 06:32 PM GMT

I wouldn't disagree with comments that these are superb photos. However Neil has been taking photos of PEs for many years and many of the earlier ones are equally good: he really does set the standard. *And take note: Neil uses a bridge camera not a DSLR*

That photo of Neil "getting down to work" shows dedication that isn't really necessary. For many years my arthritis has stopped me from such gymnastics. I am not alone with my difficulties. An articulated screen overcomes these issues. Think about it for you next camera Neil. You'll be older then 😊😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by MikeOxon, 01-Jul-18 10:58 PM GMT

As others have said, a remarkable set of images, Neil, and a just reward for all the work you put into butterfly conservation 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 02-Jul-18 08:05 AM GMT

Hi! Neil, I second what everybody has said about your shots, quite fantastic, 🍷🍷🍷😊

I'm still puzzled though why so many trees were cut down when maybe branches could have been cut that were hanging over the paths and bushes taken out. 😊 I also realise they've so many trees to cut! (Wood to sell)

I was at Fermyn two years ago and it was lovely up that road, I saw my first Emperor's there (on the road,) SWF's, PHS's and even a WLH, the first thing I thought when hearing about the tree's being cut was

" what will happen to all the Butterflies that were in those trees they've cut down",

I believe in conservation but thought this rather drastic, if it helps, great! they've done the same at Gait Barrow for the Dukes when we were there this Spring and only two were seen, the Emperor's do seem okay at Fermyn and I'm hoping to get some shots this coming week-end, Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jul-18 08:15 AM GMT

"Thank you" to everyone for your generous comments. I'm delighted with that set of images, which will help me to relive the experience itself; a truly magical two days during the best butterfly season we've enjoyed for a very long time.

Thanks for that image, Enthusiast, which really captures the balletic nature of our pursuit. We should get a formation team together and go emperoring to music.

Hi Goldie. If you go <https://butterfly-conservation.org/> and type 'woodland management' into the search facility, you will find a wealth of material on the subject, which explains why work of this nature is essential to the health of woodlands. There is a fantastic report at <https://butterfly->

[conservation.org/our-work/downloads-resources-reports/woodland-management-for-butterflies-and-moths](https://www.butterflyconservation.org/our-work/downloads-resources-reports/woodland-management-for-butterflies-and-moths) although it is far from a quick read. I've written two small books on woodland management for butterflies and moths (which are much easier going) and can be requested (free) from Butterfly Conservation HQ.

Looking at Fermyn, I wonder what the outcry would have been like when FC cleared the area many hundreds of times larger than the recent work, towards the end of the last century? It is *only* because of this that the vast swathes of naturally regenerating sallow developed, leading to the creation of the Purple Emperor Mecca we see today; you can't have one without the other. We know from bitter experience, since the mid 20th century, that it is the lack of large scale woodland management which leads to the local, regional and potentially national extinction of some woodland butterflies, particularly the early successional habitat specialists.

It will be interesting to revisit this topic a few years down the line, but for now I would appreciate that any further comments are placed in a separate forum thread; it's very difficult to find the time to maintain this diary while so much is going on out there! Good luck with your visit this weekend; I'm confident that you'll see plenty.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Goldie M, 03-Jul-18 09:19 AM GMT

Thank you for the info Neil, I'll certainly look things up, enjoy the rest of your Butterfly year. Goldie 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jul-18 09:27 AM GMT

On Safari

Matthew Oates and I have started our 2018 Knepp Purple Emperor Safari campaign in good form, which is hardly surprising given the excellent weather and unprecedented numbers of the butterfly. A full-day outing on Saturday 30 June gave us a count of 87, followed by a half-day tally of 56 on Sunday 1 July.

Numbers are now at peak and although more females will emerge, the males are probably all out now. It's great to see so many people enjoying the spectacle. There are plenty of other species showing well too, including more White Admirals than usual. In the last few days we've also seen large increases in the numbers of Comma and Purple Hairstreak, the latter best viewed in the evenings.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Jul-18 10:06 AM GMT

Best To Date – 388

A thorough survey (2 July) of the entire Knepp Wildland Southern Block has achieved our highest count yet; a massive 388 Purple Emperors. 66 were counted on the Green Lane transect and a total of 16 females were seen. I watched 11 'tumble downs' (when already-mated Emperors spiral down to the ground, trying to shake off amorous males), which mostly occurred in the vicinity of 'feeder trees' (those oaks hosting multiple sap bleeds, encouraging large, boisterous drinking parties). At one such tree ('Rosemary's Tree') I enjoyed a chase of nine males, spiraling tightly around my head (at c.7pm).

Earlier, beside a small wooden bridge on Green Lane, I watched six dogfights occurring simultaneously, two of which comprised three males; that's 14 emperors in view at the same time! I ran out of unsearched areas of the Southern Block long before the butterflies became less active at 8pm. Had I not taken a significant break earlier in the day, to chase White-letter Hairstreaks, I would undoubtedly have had time to move into the Middle and Northern Blocks, probably enabling a count in excess of 400 Purple Emperors. However, the route I took allowed me to observe something I've never seen before; just before 8pm I found a mating pair of *hutchinsoni* (summer brood) Comma. Knepp continues to amaze.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Jul-18 08:56 PM GMT

388 of any species is notable, Neil, but for Purple Emperors to be about in such numbers is incredible!

Almost as incredible is that image of the mating Commas. This is behaviour rarely seen and even more impressive when it looks like an image reflected in a calm lake.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 03-Jul-18 10:38 PM GMT

That is a stunning image of the Commas in cop Neil 🤩 😊 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-18 09:33 AM GMT

Thanks, David and Wurzel. I love the symmetry in that Comma shot. Despite having chased butterflies for 50 years, I still get those 'wow' moments which make our hobby so compelling.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Jul-18 09:42 AM GMT

All Change

The Knepp Wildland felt very different today (4 July). Admittedly, I covered much less ground than during recent monitoring visits, but my day-count of 181 Purple Emperor was disproportionately lower. Although I saw one 'Benny Hill chase' of seven, clashes involving more than a pair were rare. The regular bundles of four, five and six or more already seem a distant memory. The head of steam has been lost; they are suddenly getting lazy. I have no doubt that there will be more fireworks to come, but they can no longer be *expected*. The same thing happens every season, reflecting completion of the female emergence.

However, the numbers present remain huge. Knepp has set the bar so high that we have come to know this species, at least here, as a quite common butterfly of scrub and hedgerows; a butterfly of the wider countryside. Of course the emperor will never be Common, but neither will things ever be the same again, and that is something to celebrate.

On the way back to the car I saw my fourth tumbledown of the day. She landed on some Bracken and peered down on me as I edged below her. There is still life in the season yet, but there is now an urgency to squeeze every possible moment from this momentous *iris* year.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Paul Burgess, 07-Jul-18 06:43 AM GMT

Thanks for the Safari this Tuesday – it was amazing to see so many Emperors, and also the sheer numbers of so many other species. We'll certainly be back next summer! Here's a pic of the White Admiral I managed to get on my phone



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Jul-18 09:42 AM GMT

Thanks for coming, Paul – hope to see you next season. If booking a safari, I would always recommend choosing the early dates; we have to ensure that emperors will be flying, taking into account that the flight season may be early/average/late. If coming on your own, keep a close eye on the BC Sussex Branch website or Purple Empire blog, to get your timing spot-on.

Nice White Admiral image – amazing what can be done with a telephone!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

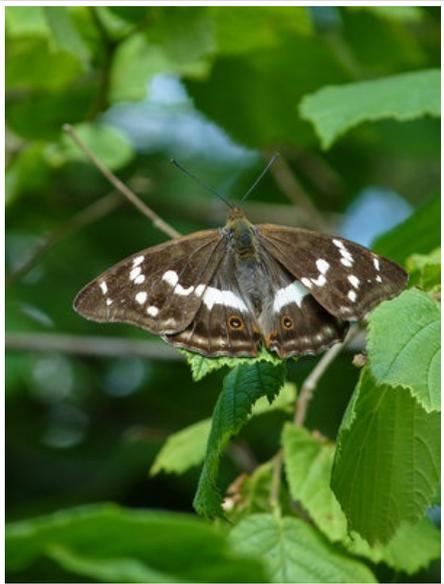
by Neil Hulme, 07-Jul-18 09:46 AM GMT

Beginning Of The End

Purple Emperor activity on the Knepp Wildland has now become sporadic, with afternoons and evenings being by far the best times to watch the butterfly, particularly around oaks which bleed sap. There is now very little activity on hot, sunny mornings.

However, numbers remain high and the sport can still be spectacular if you're in the right place at the right time. During a half-day safari on Thursday 5 July we managed a total of 60 emperors (and a very nice female Purple Hairstreak down low) and a more extensive search on Friday 6 July gave me a total of 81, including several empresses sitting in scrub and a middle-aged male on the ground.

As the Knepp Purple Emperor season moves into its later stages, the Brown Hairstreak flight is already starting.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Jul-18 10:50 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

As the Knepp Purple Emperor season moves into its later stages, the Brown Hairstreak flight is already starting.



That's quite something! I didn't realise things were SO far advanced right now in the UK.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-18 11:33 AM GMT

Hi David

It will still be a few days before I go looking for Brown Hairstreak (and Grayling and Silver-spotted Skipper), but this *is* remarkably early; no peace for the wicked! 😊

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 09-Jul-18 11:37 AM GMT

Still Going Strong ... Just!

Matthew Oates and I led another two Knepp Safaris to see the Purple Emperor over the weekend, seeing 34 on Saturday (7 July) and 37 on Sunday (8 July). Most of the males are now looking tired, and activity is largely restricted to afternoons and evenings. On Sunday we managed to get very close to a male emperor on a head-height sap bleed; he had only three legs and one foot in the grave, but provided us with the opportunity for images of some interesting behavioral activity. A 'tumbledown' female (rejecting a male's advances) also allowed us to get very close, as she sat quietly on Bramble flowers until the coast was clear. Plenty of other butterflies were also present, including Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Purple Hairstreak and golden skippers.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 09-Jul-18 02:07 PM GMT

Brown Hairstreaks already 😬 Are things in danger of peaking too soon – are we going to 'run out' of butterflies by September – or could there be subsequent broods?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 09-Jul-18 06:00 PM GMT

I would expect extra broods of some species Wurzel, if last year is anything to go by. As long as the caterpillar foodplants don't shrivel. Neil, Brown Hairstreaks in early July is remarkable, even by modern standards!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 10-Jul-18 09:48 PM GMT

It seems incredible that Purple Emperors are on the wane barely a week into July. In other years they haven't really got going till now.

The next 'event' will be the emergence of many of the late summer brooded butterflies – Whites, Common Blues, Brown Argus, nymphalids, etc. There could be colossal numbers if this warm spell holds.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jul-18 08:12 AM GMT

Thanks, all.

Wurzel, I don't think we'll run out of butterflies. As others have said, we'll inevitably get some Brucie Bonus extra broods, and hopefully some exotics. But will the school holidays trigger a collapse in the weather?

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Jul-18 08:15 AM GMT

Last Orders For The Emperor

Yesterday (12 July) Matthew Oates and I led the last of the 2018 Knepp Purple Emperor safaris, finishing the season in style. We saw a total of 27 emperors, including two 'tumbledowns', in which both female and male spiral down to the ground. Of the many observed on sap bleeds, we were surprised to see a freshly emerged female, which should still be egg-laying in two weeks time. However, it will be very difficult to see Purple Emperors beyond mid next week. Among the wealth of other fauna and flora, we found this funky pink hopper, showing how not to do camouflage.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-Jul-18 10:05 PM GMT

It's quite something to think that the PE season will be effectively over by mid-July, Neil. Several times recently they have been at their peak during this period. One hopes that their flight season has been successful and that populations will receive a boost next year as a result.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Jul-18 08:43 AM GMT

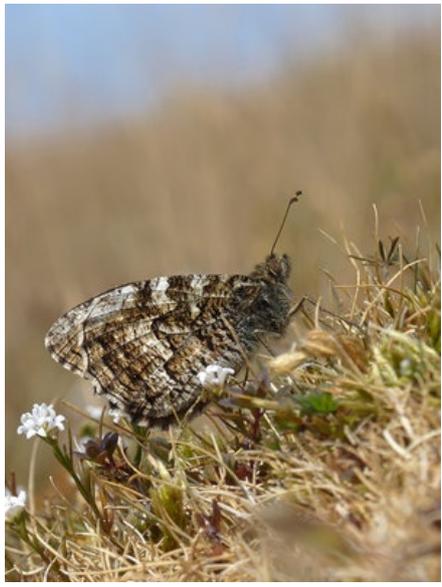
Last Of The Chalk Grayling

Yesterday (19 July) I spent six hours covering almost every square metre of Deep Dene (Windover Hill, Wilmington), in an attempt to accurately determine the numbers of Grayling present, and to see if there are any potentially negative changes in the habitat since I was last here a few years back (there are).

As many will be aware, we have serious concerns about the long-term survival of this unique chalk-based population, so collecting as much data as possible is the first step in any remedy. Thanks to all those who have already been reporting from the site, but it is important that survey visits are spread throughout the flight season, particularly through early and mid August, so please hold some effort in reserve!

Timing is important; during this early, male-dominated stage of the flight season, the butterflies become far less active from c.11.30 am onward, and are almost 'invisible' by early afternoon as they shelter from the heat. During my visit I recorded 24 Grayling, only two of which were females. At 9.00 am I witnessed an impressive chase of five males, which tend to glide down the slope in search of females, before returning to the upper level near the gorse-line; they are very mobile, making counting tricky. I enjoyed a total of seven trouserings throughout the day, as the males sought salts from my jeans. I expect numbers to peak 7 - 10 days from now.

It took me some while to reach Deep Dene, as there was so much of interest to see during the climb up Windover Hill. Highlights included some very fresh Wall, some rather older Dark Green Fritillary, and large (but not huge) numbers of Chalk Hill Blue, many of which were drying-off their recently unfurled wings. During my visit I also saw six Silver-spotted Skipper (including a mating pair) and two second brood Dingy Skipper. As always with this site, the wildflowers and views were breathtaking.







Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 20-Jul-18 08:57 AM GMT

Just catching up with your diary, Neil. I did not realise how many entries I had missed. Highlights for me were the pictures of the four-wing Purple Emperor from underneath, the "mug-shot" of a PE, the pink coloured grasshopper, the Purple Hairstreak pic I have been trying to get but not quite achieved this year and the silver-spotted skipper. Also the knowledge you impart on that chalk-based Grayling community was fascinating as well as the heads-up that Brown Hairstreaks have already started.

Its all great, thanks,

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 20-Jul-18 08:08 PM GMT

Interesting to see a species in a different habitat that you're not used to seeing it in. There was a miniscule population of Grayling on Salisbury Plain a few years back but I think that they've gone now 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 20-Jul-18 08:16 PM GMT

And Broughton Down many years ago.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Jul-18 10:43 PM GMT

Interesting observations regarding Grayling behaviour, Neil. Perhaps this explains why I only saw two on a warm day at a site in Swansea where they fly in good numbers usually.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 21-Jul-18 01:09 AM GMT

Broughton Down SU288331 some 40 years ago had Graylings and Silver spotted Skippers. The SS Skippers occurred on the north-facing slope, a north-facing habitat being perhaps unusual in those days. I would be interesting to know the situation at Broughton today.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Jul-18 09:00 AM GMT

Thanks, ernie, Wurzel, Jack and David. It's shocking to think that this is the last chalk-based population remaining; this race was found (and sometimes swarmed) along the entire length of the South Downs up until the middle of the 20th century. We tend to measure butterfly losses in terms of the UKBMS dataset, which goes back to 1976, but by then we had already lost a great deal. BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 21-Jul-18 10:12 AM GMT

To Jack: Pete let me know about Broughton a couple of years back and it's a cracking place still. Chalkhills are there now as well as DGFs and the Silver-spotted Skippers are still there, it's my preferred site for them 😊 There were 5-6 seen there yesterday and I'm planning a quick check in there tomorrow so I can give you an update.

Sorry for the PD hijack Neil 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 21-Jul-18 08:13 PM GMT

Hi Neil. I was there Wednesday but couldn't get there until afternoon. Your report has put me at ease to some extent as I was rather concerned when I only found four, but that was in the heat of afternoon. Let's hope something can be done, as the situation is looking alarmingly like that of the SPBF at Park Corner Heath in the early 2000's.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Jul-18 11:48 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

It's shocking to think that this is the last chalk-based population remaining; this race was found (and sometimes swarmed) along the entire length of the South Downs up until the middle of the 20th century. We tend to measure butterfly losses in terms of the UKBMS dataset, which goes back to 1976, but by then we had already lost a great deal.

It is indeed shocking, Neil. What do you put their demise down to?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jul-18 07:26 PM GMT

Hi David,

In a nutshell, the extreme weather events of 1947, 1954 and 1956, immediately followed by the impact on grassland structure caused by myxomatosis, which was let loose in 1953. This is described in *The Butterflies of Sussex* (pp.28, 29, 132).

While I'm plugging the book (only a few copies now left before it sells out), there's some discussion of how the risk spreading provided by split diapause timing in Small Tortoiseshell (thread: Early hibernation?; Simon-in-Kent) may have been affected by huge changes in the phenology of this species (p.199).

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-Jul-18 10:20 PM GMT

Thanks, Neil. I will re-read the book as I bought it last year and will pay greater attention to the Grayling issue over the autumn months when things calm down a bit.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Jul-18 10:32 PM GMT

Bracken Bash

There's been a lot going on at the BC Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood reserves over the last two days. On Monday (23 July) I was joined by Andrea Gibbs, Bob Foreman (on the mower), Nigel Symington, Graeme Rolf and Doug Neve, for a day of Bracken control on Park Corner Heath. Similar work was conducted today (24 July) by Mike Fearn and a dozen of his Brighton Conservation Volunteers, this time on Rowland Wood. My thanks go to everyone who took part; a huge amount of Bracken clearance was completed, despite the intense heat.

Summer cutting will allow some areas to become more grassy and herb-rich, which will suit the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. A partial second brood of this species is likely (late July and August) given the hot summer we're experiencing, so the cut will also make more violet accessible. The drought conditions are very worrying (rain please), but the plants in semi-shade around the Bracken margins will hopefully prove usable.

It was encouraging to see a couple of female Dark Green Fritillary immediately start laying eggs in the newly cleared area on Park Corner Heath yesterday. During my walkabout I also saw plenty of Common Blue, Brown Argus and Small Heath, together with a few Silver-washed Fritillary. Andrea and Gary Norman have both seen Wall on the reserve recently, and Gary has reported a second brood Dingy Skipper; the first time I've heard of one in a woodland setting.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Jul-18 10:10 PM GMT

Good stuff, Neil. I'd forgotten that SPBFs occasionally run a second brood, so you are wise to prepare for it.

Meantime, it's good to see that your habitat isn't quite as parched as a lot of others I have seen lately. With any luck, you'll catch a few of Friday's predicted thunderstorms and the vegetation will finally begin to recover.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Jul-18 11:29 PM GMT

Cissbury Silver-spots

Following a habitat management meeting at Rewell Wood with Norfolk Estate forester Mark Aldridge, this afternoon (25 July) I headed up to Cissbury Ring to monitor the Silver-spotted Skipper, which colonised the site in 2012 (first observed 2013). Since then, numbers have been highly variable, largely reflecting the condition of the sward (too rank in damp summers) in the SW compartment, which is in dire need of grazing. In poorer years the species retreats to the southernmost compartment, where I saw most, but not all, today (some in Shipdens Holt meadow and within the ramparts).

Silver-spotted Skipper is clearly doing very well this year and I easily beat my previous best count with a tally of 128, including three mating pairs. Although the currently occupied area is relatively small, the action rivaled the best I've experienced at Malling Down and Newtimber Hill. The place was buzzing with skippers and I watched chases of up to six or seven males in pursuit of a female. However, you need to 'get your eye in', such is the speed at which they move in this heat. Other highlights included Wall, Dark Green Fritillary, Small Copper and a second brood Dingy Skipper.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 26-Jul-18 10:29 PM GMT

Aren't SSS great, Neil, full of lively character. Making the recent increase in this species, especially in Sussex , even more welcome!

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Jul-18 11:57 PM GMT

What a late summer delight these creatures are! At this time of year, many species are fading away but Silver Spotted Skippers suddenly emerge bright and bold to give us all a lift.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jul-18 10:18 AM GMT

Hi Mark and David,

When I was growing up in Sussex the Silver-spotted Skipper was so rare that its existence in the county was a closely guarded secret; I didn't know whether it was *really* present, and certainly not where. Seeing it in such numbers on the closest downland site to Findon village, where we lived at the time, is very rewarding; it's not all doom and gloom!

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Jul-18 11:17 AM GMT

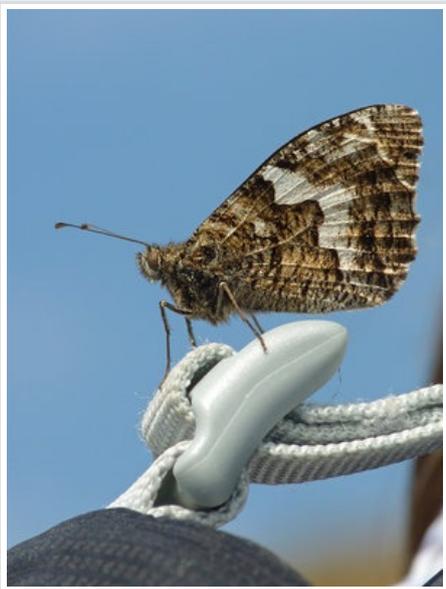
Nature, red in tooth and claw

On Thursday (26 July) I paid another visit to Deep Dean (Windover Hill, Wilmington) to monitor the ailing population of chalk-based Sussex Grayling, where I joined forces with Patrick Moore and Lindsay Morris. Between us, we could muster no more than 8 individuals (all male), although the butterflies were clearly doing their best to hide from us (and the heat) in rabbit holes, scrapes and shrubs. I'm hoping that the subsequent rain will trigger a substantial emergence of particularly females, but observations over the last two weeks give cause for real concern. The chance meeting with Tim Squire (SDNPA) allowed us a useful opportunity to discuss habitat management issues on site, as it is becoming a little clearer where some of the problems may lie.

As I made my final ascent of the steep slope I flushed what I initially thought was a mating pair of Silver-spotted Skippers, but it soon became apparent that this male skipper hadn't been as lucky as first appeared; a rare Downland Robberfly had the hapless butterfly in a Vulcan death grip.

I then visited the BC Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves where, among many other butterflies, I spotted a second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. My fears for any breeding opportunities for a second brood were somewhat alleviated the following day, when a trip to Drusillas Park with the kids ended with a rain storm, which swept over the area.

My final stop on Thursday was at the Knepp Wildland, which seemed strangely quiet after recent weeks. I toured most of the hotspots which have given so much pleasure since mid June, during the best Purple Emperor season I've ever experienced, and may ever experience. I saw just one reasonably conditioned female and a fragment of a male. Time to say goodbye for another year.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Lee Hurrell, 28-Jul-18 01:05 PM GMT

It's a shame to hear of the plight of Sussex Grayling, Neil. I hope any plans for recovery are successful.

I will always remember my first ever Grayling, at that very site. Windover Hill will always be a special place for me and gives so much all through the year. I was enjoying Silver Spotted Skippers at Aston Rowant this week.

Lovely photos, as ever.

Best wishes,

Lee

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Jul-18 09:05 AM GMT

Great set of shots Neil 😊 It's unfortunate that the male Skipper is receiving such an unloving embrace 😞

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 29-Jul-18 09:52 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

While I'm plugging the book (only a few copies now left before it sells out), there's some discussion of how the risk spreading provided by split diapause timing in Small Tortoiseshell (thread: Early hibernation?; Simon-in-Kent) may have been affected by huge changes in the phenology of this species (p.199).

BWs, Neil

Hello Neil,

The Small Tortoiseshell's sensitivity to climate change.

Over the last few years in Lincolnshire, the over-wintered Spring Small Tortoiseshells, generally, have been noticeably fresher in appearance than those seen 2013 & 2014, when I lived in the South (Surrey). This butterfly is very special, in that it is annually 'double brooded' and over-wintered as an adult (imago).

I think that the emergence times of the over-wintering adults and time in flight before hibernation, can dramatically affect the species performance in the Spring.

Kind Regards, Philip

Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 29-Jul-18 09:57 AM GMT

Let me speculate a little about the chalk Graylings.

The usual reason for catastrophic decline in a species is loss of habitat. I am not all that familiar with the South Downs but I get the impression (from comments here and elsewhere) that the habitat there remains good if not even better than a decade or so ago. So perhaps the decline of the Grayling is due to some other cause. Chalk Graylings aren't a totally isolated race like that on the Great Orme but there might be some parallels.

Could chalk Graylings use a species of grass that doesn't do well - becomes desiccated - in our warmer climate? Maybe it is in the process of changing to a different [species of grass] foodplant (compare Comma from hop to nettle) The chalk Grayling might be sufficiently different from heathland race that it is unable to withstand a disease or parasite attack as well. And no doubt, there are many other possibilities.

I'm sure you'll work this out Neil but it could be that habitat maintenance isn't the answer. Maybe we are seeing evolution in action - the chalk Grayling is doomed.

A final question: is there an equivalent of chalk Grayling in other parts of Europe that might offer some clues?

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Jul-18 02:03 PM GMT

Hi Philip,

Our research for *The Butterflies of Sussex* shows that the (local) timing of the early summer brood of Small Tortoiseshell (first appearance and peak, measured over the period 2010-2014) has moved forward by an incredible 3.5 weeks, since the comparable five-year recording period (1990-1994). This probably means that an increasing majority of this flight now goes on to produce the late summer brood, with a decreasing minority now entering early diapause (risk spreading). Further north, where the phenological shift will be less extreme, the degree of risk spreading is likely to have been less severely impacted, so based on this theory the decline in Small Tortoiseshell should be less extreme; this is borne out by the national dataset.

Hi Jack,

"but I get the impression (from comments here and elsewhere) that the habitat there remains good if not even better than a decade or so ago"
Not at Deep Dean, where the degradation of the habitat is sufficiently profound to be visible via remote imagery.

"Chalk Graylings aren't a totally isolated race like that on the Great Orme but there might be some parallels."
The Sussex chalk-based population is indeed now very isolated; the closest I'm aware of are probably those on the IOW.

The main foodplants (on chalk) are Sheep's-fescue and Red Fescue, both of which are drought-tolerant. One of two main problems is the increasing spread of Tor-grass, at their expense.

The spread of Tor-grass, and the reduction of newly created burrows, scrapes and scree patches (the other main problem), appears to be due to the decreasing numbers of the rabbit, probably reflecting the serious impact of lagoviruses.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Matsukaze, 29-Jul-18 04:09 PM GMT

Jack Harrison wrote:

A final question: is there an equivalent of chalk Grayling in other parts of Europe that might offer some clues?

Jack

The Grayling has gone from being common to virtually extinct on the chalk in Normandy – as close a parallel to Sussex as you are going to get – though the decline seems to have set in a little bit later there.

Something similar has happened in Somerset – the Grayling used to be common on the Mendips but is now essentially down to two sites – Brean Down and Crook Peak – which have the thinnest soils and most bare ground. The butterflies here seem to be larger and paler than the Graylings I see elsewhere.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Aug-18 09:19 PM GMT

First The Bad News ...

Today (1 August) I started at Deep Dean, to continue monitoring Grayling numbers. With the help of several others I struggled to a deeply worrying tally of three (2m, 1f), all of which were quite old butterflies. The Sussex Grayling is in serious trouble, so any further sightings would be most welcome, and vital in determining just how critical the situation is. There's plenty more to enjoy up there, including numerous Silver-spotted Skippers and the first second brood Adonis Blues, so it's still well worth a visit.

Things were considerably better on the Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, where I recorded a wide variety of species (25), including Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (5, including 3 egg-laying females), Dark Green Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary, Wall, Painted Lady, Clouded Yellow, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Small Copper, Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Common Blue and Brown Argus. Two female Oak Eggar moths were sitting quietly on vegetation, while several males were seen flying at high speed.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 04-Aug-18 11:44 PM GMT

Just shows how difficult it is to properly conserve butterflies, Neil. Despite all your major successes lately, there are still some species on a spiral of decline.

Is there any likelihood of a concerted attempt to safeguard Graylings in Sussex over the next year or two? Seems like they need it!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Aug-18 10:30 AM GMT

Hi David

The Sussex Grayling certainly needs help, and quickly. I now have a much clearer view of what needs to be done, and how soon, but it remains to be seen whether this can be achieved; plans are being made.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Aug-18 10:34 AM GMT

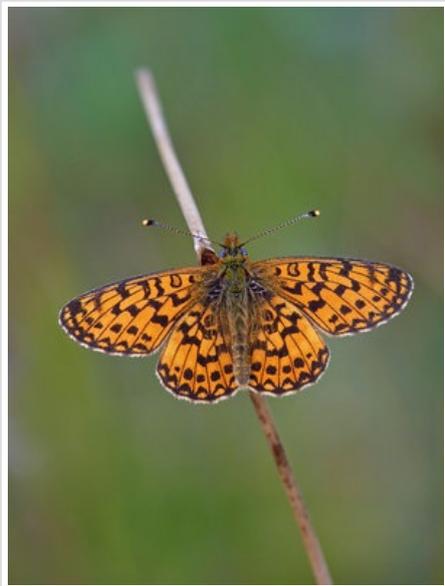
Brownies And Small Pearls

Yesterday (6 August) I joined David Cook, Kirsty Gibbs and her (impressively patient) daughter for a Brown Hairstreak hunt around the Burgess Hill Green Circle. In all we saw the best part of a dozen males high in various master trees, with most being on the Burial Ground site. Four females were also seen in the master trees, with just one settling low in the shade of a Bramble for a few minutes. It wasn't until much later in the day that we finally found one egg-laying at the Batchelors Farm site.

Brown Hairstreak males have behaved rather differently to last year, when unprecedented numbers of freshly emerged butterflies were photographed low down, particularly at Knepp; not so this year. The big difference in behaviour has clearly been driven by this year's lack of nectaring opportunities. Although (now faded) males are descending to feed on Hemp Agrimony (where present) as it comes into flower, the thistles had already seeded due to the intense heat, and the Fleabane flowers were already 'dry'.

However, the behaviour of females has remained remarkably consistent. Although a handful of females have been seen in Sussex through late July, they have been freshly emerged individuals, soon retreating to the canopy. It is only now that the females are starting to egg-lay, to precisely the same timetable as in previous years. This has held true over the twenty year period surveyed by the 1990-1994 and 2010-2014 Sussex atlases; although we've seen some remarkably early males, the female Brown Hairstreak refuses to be hurried. Peak female activity is expected, as always, to be through mid and late August, but we should start to see a few more this week.

I then headed to our Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, where there are plenty of Common Blues and Small Coppers to be seen, together with the odd Wall and Painted Lady. However, my target was second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, of which I saw four (3m, 1f). I had to wait until 7.30 pm before they finally closed their wings.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 07-Aug-18 12:20 PM GMT

[quote]....the Burial Ground site. Have you booked your plot Neil? Sounds a good place to end up. I have already paid for my patch at a Scotch Argus site 😊

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Aug-18 06:13 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

The Sussex Grayling certainly needs help, and quickly. I now have a much clearer view of what needs to be done, and how soon, but it remains to be seen whether this can be achieved; plans are being made.

Thanks for that, Neil, and I wish you every success (similar to those you've achieved with your other target species lately).

It would be a great shame if you lost one after having resurrected the fortunes of others.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 07-Aug-18 11:27 PM GMT

What A Difference A Day Makes

This morning (7 August), in the sweltering heat, I visited Steyning Rifle Range, hoping that the female Brown Hairstreaks had decided to started eggging in earnest; they certainly had! Having blanked here just a couple of days ago, I found six at work in the thorns between 11.20 am and 1.40 pm, all in perfect condition.

I forgot one of the golden rules of hunting the females among the Blackthorn and Bullace – don't wear shorts! Finding them was relatively easy, but getting a clear shot at them, as they twist and turn on their journey deep into the shrubs, was not. In the end I only got a decent image of one, but there's always tomorrow!

Other highlights included a few Wall and some fresh male Adonis Blues. I always think that the start of the Brown Hairstreak egg-laying season marks the beginning of the end to another butterfly year, but I hope that we might see some exotics yet.



Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 08-Aug-18 07:57 AM GMT

But that one Brostreak pic you got was a cracker, Neil. It has to be worth a few blackthorn scratches. (next year you will have the pic but the scratches will be a distant memory) 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 08-Aug-18 11:21 PM GMT

Perseverance pays off, Neil. You only need one to give you an audience to achieve the result you got.

Let's hope this species will be highly conspicuous over the next two or three weeks.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Aug-18 09:34 AM GMT

Thanks, ernie. The scratches have already healed and the grown-up trousers are back on.

Hi David. They were certainly conspicuous yesterday. A large group of hairstreak hunters turned up at Steyning and everyone filled their boots. BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 12-Aug-18 10:30 AM GMT

Brown Hairstreak And Small Pearls Go Large

The annual Steyning Rifle Range Brown Hairstreak festival is now underway, with the site performing spectacularly well yesterday (11 August). I arrived just after 11 am and spotted a pristine female sitting in the first stand of Blackthorn I approached, which was quickly joined by a second. The action came thick and fast and the combined efforts of a search team including Tom Parker, Gary Norman, Trevor Rapley, John Williams and James Arnott located a total of 16 egg-laying females, before activity ceased just before 2 pm. The majority were in perfect or excellent condition, although a couple of tattier examples were seen later in the session.

Gary and I then moved on to the Park Corner Heath & Rowland Wood reserves, to monitor numbers of the second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. We were surprised (and very pleased) to see more than we expected, and it was clear that butterflies are still emerging; four were so fresh that they must have emerged earlier that day. Despite weather conditions varying between unsuitable and borderline, we saw 11 individuals in a couple of hours. We only searched over the most promising areas, so I suspect there are a few more present. The top of the rush meadow, the W-E ride just south of the lake and the patch cleared of Bracken in front of the PCH hut were most productive. We were relieved to see plenty of fresh violets following the recent wet weather, providing a critical improvement in the breeding prospects for this second flight – just in time!

Plenty of other species were seen, including Wall, which seems to have gained a firm foothold here. I'm delighted by the rapid response of the wider butterfly fauna to the recent restructuring work.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 12-Aug-18 05:39 PM GMT

Fantastic female Brostreaks Neil, something that has been hard to find at Shipton during the (at times) insanely hot weather 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-Aug-18 06:49 AM GMT

Beautiful images as ever, Neil. Brown Hairstreaks combined with fresh SPBFs isn't something we see every day!

Looks like *betulae* is gearing itself up now after a slow start.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Aug-18 09:11 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and David. All of the good Sussex sites are now producing plenty of egg-laying females; it's hard to know where best to be! BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Aug-18 09:14 PM GMT

Streaking Again

Another visit to Steyning Rifle Range today (13 August) produced numerous female Brown Hairstreaks, with some bursts of frenetic activity whenever the sun broke through. I didn't keep an accurate tally, but suspect I saw about eight individuals just in the vicinity of the fenced-off area of *Prunus*. Just after 2 pm I finally managed to get up onto the northern flank of the Rifle Range, where I found a further five in as many minutes. Although some are rapidly collecting nicks and scratches, several of those I saw were still in mint condition.

Some of today's visitors saw Brown Hairstreak for the first time, and went home very happy! My thanks go to the Steyning Downland Scheme volunteers for keeping the Blackthorn and Bullace here in such great condition for the butterfly.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Aug-18 09:07 PM GMT

More Brownies

Today (14 August) looked like a write-off for butterflies as the weather refused to live up to the forecast, but as I headed back towards home there appeared to be just sufficient sunshine to make a visit to Steyning Rifle Range worthwhile. It was getting on for 1.30 pm before I arrived, but for 45 minutes there was a flurry of Brown Hairstreak activity, with six different females being spotted by various members of the small group present; three others had been seen prior to my arrival. If the sun shines, this coming weekend should provide plenty of hairstreak action, and there should be plenty still flying for Richard Roebuck's guided walk here on 25 August.





Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 15-Aug-18 10:13 AM GMT

Neil

More great pics of Brown Hairstreaks there – all pretty fresh too.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Aug-18 10:34 PM GMT

Excellent report, Neil. Looks like things are developing nicely on your patch vis-a-vis the Brown Hairstreaks.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Aug-18 08:50 PM GMT

Thanks, ernie and David. Plenty more seen today; they should start to reach peak next week.
Nice Adonis Blues at OWH, ernie.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Aug-18 08:54 PM GMT

Chasing Brownies

This morning's visit (17 August) to Steyning Rifle Range started well, with the first female Brown Hairstreak obeying site rules and appearing just a

minute or two before 11.15 am. Two more showed shortly afterwards, but then a bank of cloud moved in and the action cooled down.

I headed to the much sunnier Knepp Wildland to check on Brown Hairstreak numbers there, and things looked promising as a female flew straight into my face as I reached the first Blackthorn hedge! I found a further three nectaring on Fleabane before the clouds moved in.

A brief stop at another site on the Downs produced four more, but it seems I would have done just as well by staying at the Rifle Range, where the hairstreaks later reappeared in good numbers when the sunshine returned.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 17-Aug-18 09:48 PM GMT

Looks like another trip to Sussex is required! Another set of smashing images, Neil.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 20-Aug-18 05:43 PM GMT

Indeed! They're still looking in mint condition even though we're into the latter half of August.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-18 07:16 PM GMT

Thanks, both. During my travels today I saw (but failed to photograph) two in genuinely mint condition, but it's now a case of sifting through the large number showing varying degrees of wear and tear. In most years I encounter the odd perfect specimen as late as the start of September.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Aug-18 07:20 PM GMT

Brownies Peaking

Today (20 August) between 11.15 am and 2.10 pm I achieved my highest ever count of female Brown Hairstreaks on the Steyning Downland Scheme (26). 13 were seen in some of the less visited areas, such as Pepperscoombe Bank and the Round Hill, and a further 13 were encountered on the Rifle Range, which I didn't reach in time to search thoroughly.

I could have covered a little more ground had I not come across someone I know, out on a butterfly hunt with her two grandsons. The priorities were clear and I was delighted to find them two Brown Hairstreaks, one of which we tracked for quite a while as she sought out small Blackthorn suckers on the southern flank of the range. She laid several eggs while we watched and she occasionally stopped for a rest and opened her wings wide. "She's beautiful" said one of the boys; I hope they'll want to see more.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Aug-18 09:55 PM GMT

Small Pearl Finale

Today (21 August) I visited the BC Park Corner Heath (PCH) & Rowland Wood reserves to monitor second brood Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (SPBF) numbers, probably for the last time this year. While thoroughly searching the entire site I also started making mental notes about what work needs to be done by both contractors and our volunteers this winter; we're going to be busy!

Things started well, with the sighting of four SPBF (3m, 1f) in the upper part of the rush meadow, and a single male in the lower part of the adjacent birch meadow. I then struggled to find more, surprisingly drawing blanks on PCH and the W-E ride to the south of the Rowland Wood lake; both locations have consistently produced SPBF over the last few weeks. However, I had better luck at the west (lower) end of the W-E ride which runs past the fallen Beech, where I found two females at roost in the long grasses. I've never encountered females here before and I hope they've been egg-laying in some of the newly created areas of habitat in this part of the wood.

Although I only found a total of seven SPBF, one female was in absolutely mint condition, so must have emerged earlier today. They're there to be found, but do take some hunting out. Over the two broods I've collated more than 300 SPBF sightings on the reserves this season, which certainly gives cause for optimism.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Aug-18 09:55 PM GMT

Those are lovely SPBFs, Neil. Is the second brood always a bit more heavily marked or have you just picked out the darker ones for your sequence of images?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-18 07:10 PM GMT

Thanks, David. Three of the four (upperside) images are of females, which are typically more heavily marked. However, there's quite a lot of natural variation in both sexes, which seems to be irrespective of brood.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-18 07:25 PM GMT

Fresh Brownies

A visit to Steyning Rifle Range today (24 August), to find more Brown Hairstreaks, was hampered by persistent cloud and suboptimal temperatures. In the end I had to wait for a prolonged period of no-fly weather to pass, before finally locating a female in good condition. I only managed to obtain a rather average image, but it does demonstrate that near-perfect specimens are still appearing.

The combined efforts of today's hairstreak hunters, which included millerd (good to catch up with you Dave), only amounted to seven sightings, but that's not bad given the challenging conditions. Tomorrow could be very good.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 24-Aug-18 08:07 PM GMT

Cracking shot Neil 😊 What sort of temperature counts as suboptimal? The BBC shows temperatures reaching only 16 by midday tomorrow but full sun?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 24-Aug-18 08:23 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. It would only have been 15/16 under cloud cover for much of today's session, but it's not just air temperature alone that counts; sunshine and radiated heat come into the equation. Tomorrow it shows 17/18 for the middle part of the day here, but these are no more than predictions and don't take localised microclimates into account; the Rifle Range is warm. If we get the promised sunshine they'll drop like confetti. You just need to hear grasshoppers and crickets to be in with a shout.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-Aug-18 10:57 PM GMT

I've seen female Brown Hairstreaks active in temperatures of 14c in mid September at the Pembrokeshire site in Wales, so it's not necessarily warmth that's a problem.

Sunshine is usually essential (unless cloud cover is minimal and the light is quite strong), as well as becalmed winds. This seems to be a butterfly that dislikes flying unless conditions are quite benign.

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 24-Aug-18 11:19 PM GMT

As that famous law would have it, that one must have appeared after I left... What a beauty too, she looks nearly perfect. Good to see you too, Neil - your arrival was timed perfectly to coincide with most of those I saw today! 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 25-Aug-18 05:22 PM GMT

Steining Delivers Again

Congratulations to Richard Roebuck on the success of his Brown Hairstreak walk at Steining Downland Scheme today (25 August). I turned up towards the end of the event with my three-year-old son, Jacob, and it was obvious from the many happy faces that the group had done well. People were hanging around chatting, even though there were hairstreaks still posing in the Blackthorn; a sure sign that everyone had had their fill.

We headed up to the northern flank where we joined James Arnott in tracking down plenty more, seeing nine here alone. At one point, while James and I were photographing a hairstreak, we noticed that Jacob was now talking to someone about 30 metres away. I was delighted to discover that my boy had found his own Brown Hairstreak and had pointed it out to the grateful hairstreak-hunter!

By the time we had dropped in on another local site, the total number of female Brown Hairstreaks seen over the Steining Downland Scheme area, on both the guided walk and by ourselves, had risen to about seventeen. A few were still in good condition and there will be plenty more opportunities to see this species over the next couple of weeks.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 25-Aug-18 07:54 PM GMT

Cheers for the info Neil – I went for it and the weather report was back to front so around about 12 noon the temperature lifted off to a balmy 17 clear skies – saw three or 5 females 😊 Didn't hear any Crickets though 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Old Wolf, 25-Aug-18 08:16 PM GMT

Beautiful pictures and great to hear that the Targeting Hairstreak event was a success.

It is such a shame that Steyning is so far from me because I have never seen a Brown Hairstreak. I will put it into my notes for a possible visit next year.

Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 25-Aug-18 11:36 PM GMT

Weather permitting, should be heading for Sussex on Monday, so thanks for reporting this update.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 26-Aug-18 01:04 PM GMT

So glad you had such an excellent day, Neil. Good job it hadn't been scheduled for today!!

Those females are generally in very good condition too – better than the handful I saw yesterday at the Pembrokeshire site.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Aug-18 10:15 AM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel, Old Wolf, essexbuzzard and David. Thursday should see plenty more Brown Hairstreak dropping into the thorns at Steyning, with the chance of a good one still on the cards.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Aug-18 10:20 AM GMT

Adonis Back At Cissbury Ring

Yesterday (28 August) I visited Cissbury Ring, to see if the autumn brood of Small Copper had started to emerge; it had, with a total of six seen, but I'm optimistic that numbers will increase greatly over the next few weeks.

However, the best result was the surprise sighting of so many Adonis Blue, a species which has really struggled for survival here in recent times. The National Trust (NT) has been grazing the site with ponies for a few years now, and the benefits are clearly beginning to show. I found 19 Adonis Blue in the southern compartment at TQ137076.

Even better, I found a further five (including a mating pair and an ab. *krodeli*) in the eastern coombe at TQ142079, above the rifle range. We identified this area as having high potential at a meeting with NT and Natural England in 2017, and the clearance work and grazing with cattle has brought about a rapid improvement in the habitat. There is much more to do, but things are clearly moving in the right direction.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Aug-18 06:55 PM GMT

That's great news Neil 😊 Just out of interest how do Ponies leave the sward? I know that cattle pull out 'chunks' leaving a mix of heights in the grasses and sheep are a bit like lawnmowers closely cropping the grass but are ponies like sheep but not as short? 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Aug-18 10:28 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel. Yes, ponies tend to nibble, but are also good at attacking scrub regrowth, which only the hardier breeds of sheep (e.g. Herdwick) tend to do. As you say, cattle tear at the sward, by wrapping their tongues around the grass, producing a clumpy structure. Different animals graze/browse differently, so a mix of livestock over time is often beneficial.

Glad you got your Purple shots. Unfortunately there's a lot of this behaviour around these days 😞. This year I've seen a new technique used on the emperor; run fast at a grounded butterfly firing your DSLR like a machine-gun. Doesn't work.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Aug-18 10:31 PM GMT

Autumn

As the skies cleared today (29 August) I headed to Steyning Rifle Range, confident that the Brown Hairstreaks would be doing their stuff. I arrived at 12.30 pm and immediately found one sunbathing on a Blackthorn sucker. As the temperature rose the action came thick and fast; at one point I was watching two females when I looked down to see a third sitting on my boot! I saw 12 individuals before the cloud cover returned just before 2 pm.

Several freshly emerged Commas were feeding greedily on ripe blackberries, which for me marks the onset of autumn. I'm hoping that there'll be plenty of Small Coppers to come, and a good third brood of Wall, but I think this wonderful butterfly summer has reached its end.

I then headed to Anchor Bottom, where many Adonis Blues were doing their best to get airborne. After the epic first brood here, numbers are a little disappointing, almost certainly due to droughting of the foodplant. However, the Autumn Lady's-tresses were far from disappointing, with thousands on show.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Aug-18 10:49 PM GMT

A Brostreak on the boot 🤔🤔🤔 Running at an Emperor 🤔🤔 I hope he was tackled to the ground and then told the error of his ways 😊😊 Perhaps their should be an Emperor Etiquette book that people should be forced to read prior to visiting Emperor sites? 😊

Havea goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 29-Aug-18 11:00 PM GMT

High Summer may be over but I hope third brood Walls and some home bred Clouded Yellows will see us into late October. We hopefully have some nice fresh hibernators to look forward to as well.

On a more gloomy note, we went to a garden centre near Melksham, Wilts. and their Christmas display was coming on well !. Obscene !.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 30-Aug-18 10:24 AM GMT

Good to see the Brown Hairstreaks performing so well, Neil.

What are the chances of a Long Tailed Blue invasion this autumn, do you think?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Aug-18 05:12 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel. From *The Butterflies of Sussex*:

TOP TIPS - Photography

Many grounded Purple Emperors are prematurely flushed by over-enthusiastic photographers who, perhaps understandably, sometimes give way to the overwhelming excitement experienced when this magnificent butterfly alights. To approach a grounded male too hastily will inevitably lead to disappointment, as a long-awaited opportunity goes begging. This might also cause friction with other, more experienced enthusiasts present. Patience and stealth are rewarded every time.

It is futile to approach a grounded emperor when it is still mobile, either while it is crawling across the ride surface and probing the ground with its proboscis, or making short, reconnaissance flights low over the ride in an effort to pick up an inviting aroma.

Wait until the butterfly has located a scat, bait, or patch on the ride surface to which it has become fully engrossed. It will then stop moving. It is preferable to use a pair of close-focusing binoculars (the Pentax Papilio II, 6.5 x 21 is highly recommended and unparalleled for all butterfly watching) to ensure that the butterfly's proboscis has also become static. Now, at last, it is time to slowly move in on your quarry. When the butterfly has its wings wide open, the all-purple shot can be achieved by slowly leaning forwards to position your camera directly above the insect.

Hi Trevor. Christmas display up already eh? Let's hope an electrical fault doesn't cause it to burn down. 😊

Hi David. LTB invasion this year? If they were coming, they'd have been seen by now. They're not coming. 🤔🤔🤔

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 30-Aug-18 08:15 PM GMT

That's brilliant Neil – it needs to be displayed in the car parks at Bentley Wood, Alice Straits, Fermyn etc etc 😊

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Aug-18 09:13 PM GMT

Small Heath Impresses!

This morning (30 August) I returned to Cissbury Ring, primarily to assess Adonis Blue numbers. I found a few more than last time (28), but a higher proportion were females, some of which were probably overlooked during my previous visit (28 August).

I was also looking for Small Coppers, but soon became distracted by the abundance of Small Heath, so started counting them; I decided to stop at 150. This easily overlooked species is clearly having a bumper year and I don't recall the last time I saw so many. Best was a bundle of six males in pursuit of a female.

I later moved on to Steyning Rifle Range, where I saw ten female Brown Hairstreak between 11.50 am and 1.30 pm.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Aug-18 07:27 PM GMT

Coppers And Blues

I spent a very enjoyable afternoon (31 August) with Patrick Moore on Cissbury Ring, chasing Small Coppers and Adonis Blues in the warm sunshine. As expected, we saw Adonis Blue in both the south and east quarters of the site, but the presence of at least one in both the north and west quarters came as a nice surprise and is testament to the excellent management by the National Trust over the last couple of years.

Third brood Small Coppers are only just starting here, so I expect the 23 I saw today to be no more than a taste of things to come. By far the most numerous species was Small Heath, which I didn't even attempt to count. This is a fantastic site to visit at this time of year, with plenty of migrant bird interest, including Spotted Flycatcher and Common Redstart.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Allan.W., 31-Aug-18 08:28 PM GMT

Some excellent Copper shots there Neil ,particularly the Blue spot ! Found four 3rd brood at Dungeness today and a fresh (and small) Common Blue male..... but not the hoped for Clouded Yellows ! .
Regards Allan.W.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 31-Aug-18 08:35 PM GMT

Thanks, Allan. This season has been great for many (not all) of our resident species, but we have been short-changed on migrants ... so far.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 31-Aug-18 10:07 PM GMT

That's a terrific looking blue badger Neil 😊🇬🇧

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 01-Sep-18 07:59 AM GMT

Neil – the Coppers are on a dramatic increase around here too and I have found just like you that the Small Heath are too numerous to count.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 01-Sep-18 08:59 PM GMT

Thanks for the information regarding LTB, Neil. Shame we won't get to welcome them again this year but I'm sure they'll be back to these shores soon.

Meanwhile, I love your Small Coppers. That first one is a **proper** *caeruleopunctata*! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Sep-18 08:59 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel, Ernie and David. Thankfully, we get plenty of ab. *caeruleopunctata* in Sussex, to the point where I don't really regard the form as aberrant! Plenty more seen today.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Sep-18 09:06 PM GMT

More Cissbury Magic

I spent a few more happy hours today (2 September) on Cissbury Ring, which is probably my favourite venue at this time of year. I saw good numbers of Small Copper and Adonis Blue, and a bonus female Brown Hairstreak.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Old Wolf, 02-Sep-18 09:12 PM GMT

Hello Neil,

Your photographs are pretty damn amazing. I especially like the crooked antenna female Adonis from Cissbury Ring.

I really am very envious of the amount of butterflies you are seeing. Where I live is pretty sparse.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Sep-18 08:03 PM GMT

Another stunning ab. *caeruleopunctata*, Neil.

I've seen a few myself over the past couple of weeks, and will keep my eyes peeled for more to try and work out whether this form is commoner in later broods.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Sep-18 03:12 PM GMT

Thanks, Old Wolf, that's very kind of you to say so.

I'm very lucky living on the coast of Sunny Sussex, as the butterfly season generally outlasts most parts of the country, apart from the far SW.

Thanks, David. The *relative* frequency of ab. *caeruleopunctata* shouldn't change significantly, as it's genetically, rather than environmentally, controlled, but as the size of each of the three broods tends to build sequentially, we tend to see more in the autumn. The form is very well represented in my part of Sussex, to the point where it becomes the norm in some colonies.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by peterc, 04-Sep-18 04:13 PM GMT

Fantastic photos as usual, Neil.

Regarding the frequency of the 'blue badges' ab. *caeruleopunctata* for Small Copper, I just checked all my Small Copper photos taken this year locally and these are the results for the 22 specimens:

Normal - 11
1/2 badges - 3
3/4 badges - 8

and I am pleased to say that the one in my garden on 4 August was a 4-badger 😊

ATB

Peter

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 05-Sep-18 09:52 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

Thanks, David. The *relative* frequency of ab. *caeruleopunctata* shouldn't change significantly, as it's genetically, rather than environmentally, controlled, but as the size of each of the three broods tends to build sequentially, we tend to see more in the autumn. The form is very well represented in my part of Sussex, to the point where it becomes the norm in some colonies.

Thanks for the information, Neil. I guess it's down to simple mathematics then....the more Coppers there are the more *caeruleopunctata* will be amongst them.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Sep-18 08:08 PM GMT

Thanks, Peter and David. It's now a case of coppers or bust, at least until the third brood Wall emerge, signalling the final act.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 06-Sep-18 08:10 PM GMT

More Coppers

Despite a collapse in the weather this afternoon (6 September), I still managed to find 36 Small Coppers over just the southern part of Cissbury Ring; I suspect there are now many more present. Among the other species seen was another female Brown Hairstreak, this time in surprisingly good condition.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Sep-18 08:49 AM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

..Despite a collapse in the weather this afternoon (6 September), I still managed to find 36 Small Coppers over just the southern part of Cissbury Ring..

That's quite some total, Neil, even allowing for the surge in numbers of this delightful species lately.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 13-Sep-18 10:23 PM GMT

Wall-to-wall With Wall

Mill Hill was wall-to-wall with Wall Brown by the end of today (13 September), as a large hatch of third brood butterflies is underway. I arrived before 11 am but couldn't drag myself away before 6 pm, although it felt like I'd only been there for a couple of hours. David Cook and Mark Jones dropped in for a while, with Mark doing us proud by finding a mating pair. My final tally of 21 Wall Brown included just four females, so there are probably plenty more to come. They were spread over the entire site, at all levels, including the paths running north from the top car park.

There were plenty of other species on offer, including Clouded Yellow (3), Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue, Common Blue (some third brood), Brown Argus, Small Copper, Small Heath, Meadow Brown (including three mating pairs), Green-veined White (third brood), Small White, Peacock and Red Admiral. I had hoped to photograph the second brood Peacock caterpillars that David Cook recently found here, but they've all headed off to pupate.





Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 13-Sep-18 10:36 PM GMT

Lovely fresh Walls, Neil. 😊 Up at High & Over today they didn't look quite as sparkling new as that... 🍷

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 13-Sep-18 11:21 PM GMT

Cracking shots as always Neil but the stand out one has to be the near perfect symmetry of the mating pair, it's almost like a mirror image 🤖 😊 🍷 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 14-Sep-18 07:21 AM GMT

How do you do it, Neil? 🍷

You make the most skittish butterflies behave like obedient pets.

Lovely stuff!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-18 07:51 PM GMT

Thanks, Dave, Wurzel and David. The Wall were back to their usual uncooperative selves today, with many hours effort producing no good images. BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 15-Sep-18 07:54 PM GMT

Back To Coppers

It was harder going at Mill Hill today (15 September), probably due to the much windier conditions than yesterday. Fewer Wall were seen (14), but my count did include a mating pair. Mating pairs of Meadow Brown and Small Heath were also encountered, together with a few Clouded Yellow and Small Copper.

On the way home I made a late afternoon visit to Cissbury Ring (south side) where, in very short time, I counted 67 Small Copper, as many were preparing to roost. I'll return for a fuller count, as numbers must now be very high over the entire site.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 15-Sep-18 10:34 PM GMT

Wow - that is a mighty impressive Blue Badger Neil, when that one got painted they didn't hold back with the paint 🤪😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Sep-18 12:06 PM GMT

That's one of the best examples of *caeruleopuctata* I've seen, Neil. Beautiful specimen.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Sep-18 06:13 PM GMT

Thanks, both. Her sapphires were so impressive that they showed from at least ten paces.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 16-Sep-18 06:16 PM GMT

Second Brood Peacock

My plans to return to Cissbury Ring today (16 September) changed when David Cook contacted me, to let me know that he'd located a second brood Peacock pupa at Mill Hill. David first spotted numerous caterpillars here a while back, and I narrowly missed the opportunity to photograph them on 13 September, when the last one had headed off to pupate earlier in the day.

Mark Jones spotted it hanging up below a nettle leaf as he left the site, and today guided David to the precise location over the 'phone. It's hard enough to find Peacock pupae at the best of times, so to locate one from the occasional, partial second brood is a rare event. The adult butterfly should emerge in early October.

Plenty of Wall were seen, including some freshly emerged males, and I found a female Brown Hairstreak laying eggs near the top car park.





Re: Neil Hulme

by ernie f, 17-Sep-18 11:23 AM GMT

Neil. So many Wall Browns – you are so lucky. Plus a mating pair!
Going back further in your PD page, the Copper with a blue flush to it is just like an impressionist painting.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Sep-18 11:44 PM GMT

That's a truly beautiful work of art courtesy of nature, Neil. Well done to Dave for finding it and thanks for sharing it.
I guess you'll return periodically to see how it's getting on prior to emergence?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Sep-18 08:50 AM GMT

Thanks, ernie and David. Yes, I'll be returning to see how that Peacock pupa gets on.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 18-Sep-18 08:56 AM GMT

Cissbury Autumn Magic

The highlights of a couple of hours on Cissbury Ring (17 September), in glorious autumnal sunshine, were 73 Small Copper (including two mating pairs) and 7 Wall Brown. Plenty of Small Heath and a few third brood Common Blue were also seen, together with some now faded Adonis, including egg-laying females.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 18-Sep-18 05:28 PM GMT

Beautiful images of the mating pair, Neil. Not something very commonly seen.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 18-Sep-18 10:17 PM GMT

Cracking shots of the Small Copper in cop Neil 😊, something I need in my 'collection' 🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 20-Sep-18 07:55 PM GMT

Thanks, David and Wurzel. I probably only average one Small Copper pairing a year, so two in one day was a real treat. I reckon I can probably squeeze in a couple more outings to see them (and Wall) before it's time to remove the bails 😊. But 2018 will be a season to remember 😊. BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 24-Sep-18 11:33 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...2018 will be a season to remember..

Yes. Hot, dry and a bit strange.

That said, it played into the hands (or wings) of all those butterflies you and your group worked so hard to prepare habitat for during the preceding winter, Neil, so the lucky break was well deserved.

Let's hope conditions are sufficiently advantageous for this good start to be consolidated upon in 2019.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Sep-18 10:29 AM GMT

Hi David. I think the key issue is the extent to which drought affected the foodplants of some earlier species (e.g. Duke of Burgundy) before late summer rain rescued the situation; for instance, it came just in time for the second brood of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Sussex. I'm hoping that this was a '1976, without the 1977 crash', but we'll have to wait and see! BWS, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 29-Sep-18 10:51 AM GMT

Wall Explodes

Following the report (BC Sussex website) by Lindsay Morris of 52 Wall on his walk from Lancing Ring to Steep Down on 25 September, I was keen to have a look at this area myself; it's several years since my last visit. Braving the large quantities of dog faeces, much of which is bagged up prior to decorating the bushes and fences, and the aggressive, out-of-control dogs, I spent most of Wednesday (26 September) on Lancing Ring. After four hours I was a little disappointed to have squeezed out 'only' 37 Wall, believing that this was probably where Lindsay had seen most of his. However, there were plenty of other butterflies to enjoy, including 36 Speckled Wood (many of which had only recently emerged), half-a-dozen Red Admiral, two Brown Hairstreak, a Clouded Yellow and a Painted Lady.

It was quite late in the day before I headed north towards Steep Down, and got most of the way there (TQ170075) before I started to encounter large numbers of male Wall on the chalk track. Over this section, and on the return journey via a different path, I counted a further 49, bringing the day's tally of Wall to 86. I've never seen so many third brood Wall in my life, and those on the section near Steep Down were mainly recently hatched butterflies.

Being fairly sure that many of the Wall were coming off the adjacent, privately owned slopes, I contacted Christopher and Hugh Passmore, to ask permission to survey their land (please do not trespass). The Passmore family has been farming at Applesham for more than 100 years and they run a traditional, mixed farm in an ecologically sensitive manner, the key elements of which have remained unchanged for many decades.

There are four fenced compartments which run from the flat arable zone below, up onto the unimproved chalk grassland slopes. The flat areas are under crop on a rotational basis, alternating with periods under grass and clover leys, which are grazed by cattle and sheep (no nitrogen need be added). The animals are free to wander up onto the slopes. This creates an almost unique (these days) turf, as farming to this pattern has become a rarity. I had visited these slopes in 2015, finding a sizeable, unmapped colony of Small Blue, so was keen to discover their potential for Wall when I returned on Thursday 27 September.

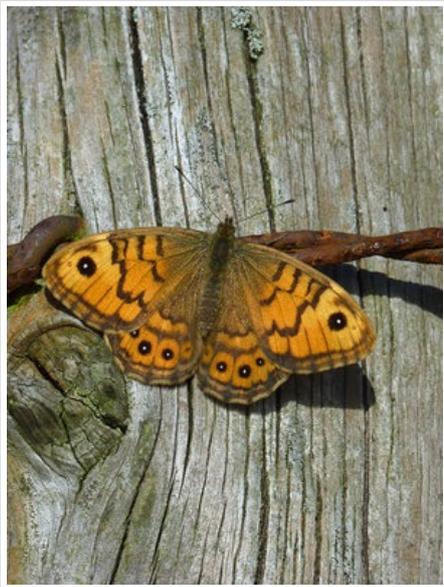
On the path to Steep Down I encountered 36 Wall, all but one of which was male. I then spent most of the day counting Wall in the four compartments, from north to south, with the following results: Ley 4 = 33; Ley 3 = 3; Ley 2 = 14; Ley 1 = 23 (total 73 Wall). Almost all of the butterflies in Ley 4 were egg-laying females, although I did witness two successful courtships and pairings. This demonstrates, quite clearly, that these leys provide the main

breeding areas, with the males using the chalk track above to set up territories.

Other species present included Common Blue (22), Small Copper (3), Small Heath (2), Speckled Wood (4), Red Admiral (7) and Clouded Yellow (3).

I spent only a relatively short time on Lancing Ring, where I counted a further 17 Wall. Having seen a total of 126 third brood Wall in a single day, I now suspect that this general area supports as many of this species as anywhere in Sussex.

I returned again on Friday 28 September, under much cooler and blustery conditions, counting 23 Wall on the path between Lancing Ring and Steep Down, and the path leading down slope to North Lancing (TQ174067). Most were again seen on the chalk path approaching Steep Down. This number included five females, which were laying eggs on the sheltered banks along a sunken section of the track. Although many of the male butterflies were now showing signs of wear and tear, the females were all still in excellent condition.







Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 29-Sep-18 06:03 PM GMT

I've never heard of such a number of Wall Browns being sighted in a single day, Neil. Absolutely fabulous to see there's still somewhere where good numbers of this once common and widespread species can be reliably found.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 29-Sep-18 06:16 PM GMT

Stunning numbers of Wall Neil along with stunning photos 🤩👍🌍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 29-Sep-18 06:25 PM GMT

You've definitely earned 10 points for those Female Wall Browns. Superb. They are always much harder to locate than the males.

Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by millerd, 29-Sep-18 11:19 PM GMT

Wonderful to see such abundance of this butterfly, and in its third brood as well. Fingers crossed this trivoltine strategy is now working out well for the species (in Sussex at any rate), and it will continue to increase in range and numbers. Terrific photos as well. 😊

Cheers,

Dave

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Oct-18 07:17 PM GMT

Thanks, all. The third brood of Wall in Sussex has been unprecedented in size and spread. A fitting way to conclude a brilliant butterfly season, unless your caterpillar feeds on nettle.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 05-Oct-18 07:20 PM GMT

Cissbury Finale

Today (5 October) I enjoyed what will probably be my last outing of the year specifically to look at butterflies, as the conservation work party season is now underway. However, the butterflies seem far from ready to throw the towel in, and some sheltered areas of Cissbury Ring were impressively busy

for October. As a result of the National Trust's recent scrub clearance work, and grazing by both ponies and cattle, some really good areas are developing (e.g. TQ142079), away from the southernmost compartment hotspot.

The stars of today were Wall Brown (33; my best count at Cissbury for many years), Small Copper (41), Clouded Yellow (5) and a late Brown Hairstreak. The impressive total of 16 species also included Brimstone (5; the warm sunshine seems to have roused a few from their slumbers) and singles of Adonis Blue and Brown Argus.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 07-Oct-18 10:27 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

...The stars of today were Wall Brown (33; my best count at Cissbury for many years), Small Copper (41), Clouded Yellow (5) and a late Brown Hairstreak.

🤔 Do you often see *betulae* this late, Neil? 5th October is the latest date I've ever seen one in Pembrokeshire and I'd have thought that site was 'later' than the ones in Sussex.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Oct-18 10:09 AM GMT

Hi David

The Butterflies of Sussex says, "This species is our last to emerge, flying from late July until early October, with a peak in numbers during the last week of August and first week of September. The average flight period recorded between 2010 and 2014 was 27 July to 26 September. There has been no significant change in this timing since the early 1990s." That said, males have started to emerge here in early July in the last couple of years.

So 5 October is a little later than in most seasons, but far from unusual. Without trawling through old records, I think my latest ever is 12 or 14 October.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Oct-18 10:38 AM GMT

Autumn Light

Yesterday (10 October), it was so warm and sunny that I couldn't resist a late afternoon walk around the ramparts of Cissbury Ring. I didn't leave the car park until 4pm, but still ended up seeing a large number of butterflies. The steep, crumbling banks of the south-facing coombe on the east side of the hillfort were particularly productive, with constant chases between Wall Brown, Small Copper and Clouded Yellow (including the pale form, *helice*).

Although most of the Wall are now showing signs of wear and tear, I was surprised to see fresh examples of both male and female. As the sun started to slip below the horizon, the basking butterflies were illuminated by that beautiful warm light which typifies autumn.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 11-Oct-18 08:36 PM GMT

Beautiful golden glow Neil, nicely mellow and fruitful 🍷🍷

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 12-Oct-18 08:23 AM GMT

Not surprised you couldn't resist getting out on Wednesday, Neil. It was a truly beautiful autumn day...even here in Swansea!

The evening light gives an almost sepia-like look to your images. Good to know this species is still flying. I wonder what numbers you'll see them in next year?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Oct-18 12:38 PM GMT

Thanks, Wurzel and David. This season just keeps on giving, at least here in Sunny Sussex.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Oct-18 12:39 PM GMT

Cissbury Again

Another late afternoon walk around Cissbury Ring yesterday (13 October) produced plenty of butterflies, including Wall Brown, Small Heath, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Red Admiral, Peacock, Common Blue and Small Copper. I didn't perform any accurate counts, but Wall Brown and Small Copper remain present in good numbers (probably 15-20 of each), with one or two examples still in excellent condition. I also found four Clouded Yellows in the eastern coombe, which behaved impeccably whenever the temperature dropped during cloudy periods.



Re: Neil Hulme

by trevor, 14-Oct-18 03:02 PM GMT

Clouded Yellows are still emerging, judging by the one in your image.

Superb stuff,
Trevor.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 14-Oct-18 06:35 PM GMT

Indeed Trevor – that is a stunning looking Cloudy Neil 😊👍

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Oct-18 12:12 PM GMT

Fabulous, fresh-looking Cloudie, Neil. There seem to be plenty around at the moment and I wonder whether any stages may make it through the winter if we avoid seriously cold weather this year?

Re: Neil Hulme

by bugboy, 15-Oct-18 05:58 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Fabulous, fresh-looking Cloudie, Neil. There seem to be plenty around at the moment and I wonder whether any stages may make it through the winter if we avoid seriously cold weather this year?

I'm not so sure about this David, from what I can gather they all seem to be moving on very quickly (just a few days in some cases) from where they emerge and I doubt very much they are traveling north! The females in particular do seem in rather short supply from my experience, which makes me wonder whether they are nipping over the channel as soon as their wings are dry?

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 15-Oct-18 07:35 PM GMT

bugboy wrote:

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I'm assuming some of them will have laid eggs, BB. I saw a very fresh male 2 miles from my home in south Wales in April 2014 (following that very mild winter we had) so clearly larvae CAN make it through, pupate and go on to produce adults.

Re: Neil Hulme

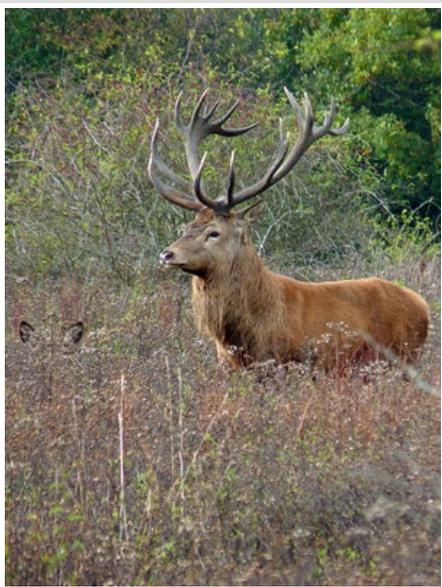
by Neil Hulme, 16-Oct-18 09:04 PM GMT

Come And Have A Go If You Think You're Hard Enough

I spent yesterday (15 October) on the Knepp Wildland with my brother, who was visiting from Antwerp. In generally overcast conditions we saw just three butterflies (two Red Admiral and a Small Copper), but there were bigger attractions on offer; the Red Deer rut is well underway and the Fallow are now joining the party.

Knepp doesn't do things by halves; the Red Deer have rapidly attained massive proportions here. We watched one stag (none of those pictured below), which must have been 10% larger than the biggest I've ever seen, make mincemeat of three wannabes. Well worth a visit!





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 17-Oct-18 07:06 AM GMT

Lovely, autumnal images, Neil. I can almost hear the bellowing of that stag in your first image! 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Oct-18 07:09 AM GMT

Thanks, David. I'll be back, to try and photograph the big boy.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 17-Oct-18 07:23 AM GMT

Conservation Work Party Season

Many thanks to the Brighton Conservation Volunteers for their hard work yesterday (17 October), managing Bracken, Bramble and saplings on our Rowland Wood reserve. While they worked their way along one of the key rides, I started to enlarge a glade which the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary showed particular interest in this year, during both its first and second broods.

For me, this is the start of the most important part of the butterfly season, as it's time to repay some of the immense pleasure they've given me over the warmer months. For those in my area, a list of upcoming conservation work parties can be found on the BC Sussex website at <https://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings/>.

**Re: Neil Hulme**

by David M, 20-Oct-18 09:14 AM GMT

Wow! Is it that time of year already, Neil?

Woodsmoke and golden colours should forewarn us, but the advance of winter is something that most seek to ignore until it's thrust in our faces.

Good luck with your work parties over the coming months. I've seen the timetable and there's a hell of a lot on the agenda. I hope the weather is kind not only during this period but into spring and summer 2019 as well.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Oct-18 09:36 AM GMT

Thanks, David. I've just spent three glorious days cutting on the BC reserves in Sussex, but there's plenty more to do before next spring!
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 21-Oct-18 09:44 AM GMT

BC Rowland Wood Reserve Works

Over the last three days (18 – 20 October) I've been at the BC Rowland Wood reserve, guiding the mowing of rides and glades by our wonderful contractor, Ian Hampshire (who performed the major restructuring works last winter). By working so closely with him, we were able to get every pass with the cutter in precisely the desired place, to optimise the improvement of breeding habitat (for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other species), while avoiding some margins, to reduce the extent of the 'collateral damage' which is inevitable when any invasive woodland management takes place. Different cutting devices (which produce different effects) were used in different areas, which, alongside the works performed in the summer months, will produce the most varied mosaic of microhabitats, to suit as many species as possible.

On behalf of the Sussex Branch, I'd like to thank BC Reserves Officer Jayne Chapman, for her invaluable help with contracts, logistics and plenty of the physical work we conducted well away from Ian's rampant tractor. I'd also like to thank Stuart Sutton (FC) and Tim Squire, who helped with chainsaw work over this period. Together, we have opened up a large new glade to the south of the Rowland Wood lake, in an area which SPBF has shown a clear

liking of, during both its broods.

Despite so much being achieved, there is still a great deal of work to be done on the reserves this winter, so every additional hour that our trusty volunteers can give will be most appreciated. I'm already getting excited about we might see at Park Corner Heath and Rowland Wood next summer, building on the excellent year that butterflies had here in 2018.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Oct-18 12:37 PM GMT

More From The Rut

I've spent quite a lot of time on the Knepp Castle Estate Wildland <https://knepp.co.uk/> lately, and although there have been a few butterflies around (plenty of Speckled Woods, a steady stream of Red Admirals heading south, and a few Small Coppers), it's the deer rut which provides the main draw at this time of year.

The Fallow bucks are now hard at it, but the Red stags have pretty much blown themselves out, with many just sitting around exhausted. Late afternoon visits provide some stunning light across this unique landscape, with Longhorn cattle, Tamworth pigs and Exmoor ponies mingling with the deer.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 22-Oct-18 09:25 PM GMT

Promising stuff, Neil. Nothing's achieved without hard work and there's plenty of that put into these projects.

It's always interesting to see how prime butterfly habitat looks out of season and with heavy machinery present – hope to hear more over the next few months, long after those brooding stags have calmed down!

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Oct-18 01:18 PM GMT

Hi David. I think it's quite important to show what woodland habitats *should* look like, after annual maintenance work has been carried out.

Unfortunately, much time must be given, every year, to allaying the fears of well meaning but misguided people, who don't understand the necessity for felling trees, cutting back scrub, or mowing grass or bracken, usually *on a rotational basis*, in order to keep habitats healthy. It may *look* destructive (if done on a sufficiently extensive scale, it should!), and some larvae/pupae etc. will always be lost in the process, but in the longer term the benefits always vastly outweigh the price.

As you will know yourself, those actively involved in habitat management and the subsequent monitoring of butterflies and moths achieve a much better understanding of why this sort of work is done. After the recent, major restructuring of the Rowland Wood reserve, it looked like a First World War battlefield, but (assisted by a very good summer) the results already speak for themselves; a huge increase in biodiversity. Species seldom seen here, including Dark Green Fritillary, Dingy Skipper and Wall, have become firmly established, while numbers of species such as Grizzled Skipper and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary have increased. I suspect things will be looking very good here by next summer.

If a woodland looks the same, or more overgrown than it did last year, it won't be many years before the problems become evident. We are, in effect, trying to reverse more than half a century of under-management.

BWs, Neil

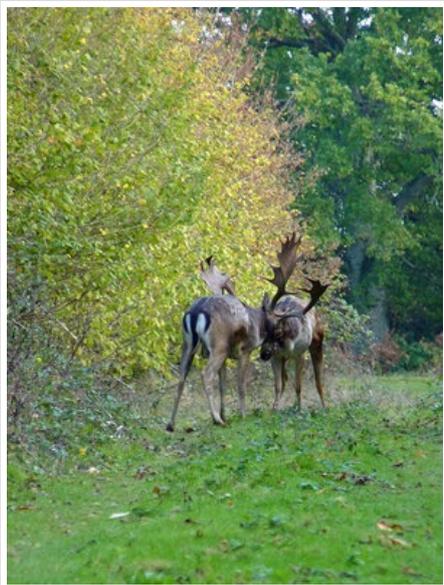
Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 27-Oct-18 01:32 PM GMT

Fight!

On Thursday (25 October) I visited the Knepp Wildland again, for what will probably be my penultimate outing to watch the 2018 deer rut, before it fizzles out for another year.

A few butterflies were flying in the warm sunshine, including numerous Speckled Wood and half-a-dozen Red Admiral, but the highlight was undoubtedly the close-up views of a fierce battle between two large, equally matched Fallow bucks. The victor (dark coloured) was still panting fifteen minutes after seeing off his rival.







Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 27-Oct-18 03:18 PM GMT

Interesting set of rut shots Neil 😊 Do the males use antler size to work out if they stand a chance when fighting – as the darker winner appears to have slightly bigger antlers than the lighter loser?

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 27-Oct-18 07:26 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

..Unfortunately, much time must be given, every year, to allaying the fears of well meaning but misguided people, who don't understand the necessity for felling trees, cutting back scrub, or mowing grass or bracken, usually *on a rotational basis*, in order to keep habitats healthy. It may *look* destructive (if done on a sufficiently extensive scale, it should!), and some larvae/pupae etc. will always be lost in the process, but in the longer term the benefits always vastly outweigh the price..

Yes, we humans now have to do what large, ruminant animals once did before we wiped them all out!!

Tree felling can be regenerative if done sensibly, whilst scrub can kill a site quicker than almost anything.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 30-Oct-18 08:35 PM GMT

Hi Wurzel

Although the bucks appear to be assessing their chances when 'parallel walking' before a clash, I doubt that slight differences in the size of their antlers are evident to them, as they can't really know what they've got up-top themselves! I suspect that general body size is easier for them to use as a yardstick. It may be that their belching provides clues too – I know that this is how the does are impressed; the dominant bucks are those with the most deeply resonating and persistent belch (I know some men who think the same). One thing's for sure, if you take on a much bigger guy, you're likely to get hurt, so the battles are usually between animals of approximately equal size.

However, this doesn't mean that the dominant and most powerful buck (or Red stag) gets all the girls (usually c.60%), as there are other more underhand ways of getting a piece of the action. By hanging around the periphery of a harem, it's sometimes possible to mate with a doe while the dominant animal is busy fighting with, or chasing off, other rivals.

Fighting is really the last option, as some of the deer get injured (and occasionally killed) every year. At Knepp one of the Red stags lost an eye during the rut, and I've often seen Fallow bucks with broken legs at Petworth Park.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Wurzel, 31-Oct-18 11:02 PM GMT

Cheers Neil 😊 I remember seeing the 'underhand' way of securing a mating on Autumnwatch a few years back, though I think of it more as 'survival of

the smartest' 😊😄

Have a goodun

Wurzel

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 01-Nov-18 09:18 AM GMT

Landscape Scale Conservation

Yesterday (31 October), Steve Wheatley (BC Regional Officer) and I joined a team from the Forestry Commission, to sign off on the completion of an ambitious woodland enhancement project. The Veolia funded *Pearls of Charlton Forest* is a partnership project conceived as an offshoot of BC *Fritillaries for the Future* (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Ernest Klienwort Charitable Trust and our members/supporters) and sits within an even larger area encompassing Heyshott Escarpment, Heyshott Down and Graffham Down.

This conservation effort, conducted on a truly landscape scale, will benefit a wealth of wildlife, including butterflies such as the Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper. Rare moths, including the Drab Looper, which has been assisted by another BC project in the area, will also benefit greatly.

This is the largest conservation project I've ever been involved with, and I came away full of optimism for the future of this part of Sussex; I suspect the benefits will be felt far beyond the project area in years to come. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved (too many to mention individually), including funders, partners, volunteers and contractors.

The project has involved the creation of wide rides, huge scallops along woodland edges, and vast box-junctions, which are now being maintained on a rotational basis. These images provide just a snapshot of the work, which extends over several kilometres. Just a few years ago, this was mainly dark and cool 'Speckled Wood country'.

Now comes the task of monitoring such a large area. I will be setting up a fixed route over which butterflies, day-flying moths and other wildlife will be recorded, and welcome any assistance. This will require considerable time and a quite high level of fitness, but the rewards should greatly exceed the effort. Anyone wishing to be involved should contact me over the winter.









Re: Neil Hulme

by selbypaul, 01-Nov-18 10:54 AM GMT

Amazing photos Neil. If only all woodlands were managed in this way

Re: Neil Hulme

by Vince Massimo, 01-Nov-18 12:31 PM GMT

Truly excellent work Neil, the area looks amazing. Congratulations to all those involved.

Vince

Re: Neil Hulme

by Maximus, 01-Nov-18 04:43 PM GMT

Magnificent stuff, Neil, your photos show what CAN be done, and it's truly inspiring. My congratulations also to everyone involved.

Mike.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-18 09:28 AM GMT

Thanks, Paul, Vince and Mike. Over the years I've been involved in many projects of this nature, but I suspect the legacy of this one will last well beyond my lifetime. I'm now too old to wish life away, but I can't wait to walk over this area next spring.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-18 10:19 AM GMT

Rangers At Rewell

On Wednesday (31 October) I made a brief visit to Rewell Wood, to catch up with a group of South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) rangers, who were busy cutting a scallop into the edge of the Sweet Chestnut coppice beside the main W-E ride in the southern area, just north of the sawmill.

A team effort involving the Norfolk Estate, SDNPA staff, South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service, Kenny the resident woodsman, Plumpton College, contractors and BC volunteers, guided by the BC *Fritillaries for the Future* Project, has now created a 1km stretch of prime breeding habitat for Pearl-bordered Fritillary along this publicly accessible ride; this will be a site to watch in the spring of 2019.

Thanks to Becka, Chloe, Kate, Tom and Simon of SDNPA for their ongoing and enthusiastic support for this work.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 02-Nov-18 11:07 AM GMT

Cutting Coppice For Fritillaries

Yesterday (1 November) I joined a small but enthusiastic group of six, to continue cutting Hazel coppice at Church Copse (Clapham Wood), to create suitable habitat for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other woodland wildlife. Some of the more mature 'regulars' have hung up their billhooks after working here for many years, so we're desperately seeking a little more help (tools and guidance provided).

We meet on Thursday mornings at 10.00 am in the car park of Clapham Saint Mary the Virgin (TQ09550664), usually on every other Thursday throughout the winter. However, the next two conservation work parties here will be on the Thursdays of 22 and 29 November. The work is led by the South Downs National Park Authority, so BC attendees such as Paul Day and I work as part of their Volunteer Ranger Service on this project (with benefits for regular participants). Any assistance with this greatly rewarding project would be much appreciated.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 03-Nov-18 02:49 PM GMT

**Neil Hulme wrote:
Landscape Scale Conservation**

Yesterday (31 October), Steve Wheatley (BC Regional Officer) and I joined a team from the Forestry Commission, to sign off on the completion of an ambitious woodland enhancement project.....I suspect the benefits will be felt far beyond the project area in years to come.

I guess that's the number one aim, Neil, for the work you do to have positive knock-on effects elsewhere.

This project certainly looks as though it will keep you occupied. The site is huge....and so will the rewards be hopefully. That habitat looks positively sumptuous.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Nov-18 11:29 AM GMT

Jolly Farmers

On Tuesday (6 November) I joined a large flock of jolly farmers from the Arun to Adur (A2A) Farmers Group, which is doing much to benefit wildlife across the area, including butterflies, farmland birds and arable wildflowers. The event was hosted by the Somerset family at Castle Goring Farm and we toured much of the estate, looking at hazel coppice (being worked with a view to restoring a population of Pearl-bordered Fritillary), areas of arable and pasture, and the lovely sweeping slope of chalk grassland at Long Furlong. The latter area has been grazed by cattle and sheep for the last four years, following a period of c.15 years without any livestock on. I suspect there are now some interesting butterflies here, so I'll be taking a closer look next summer.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 08-Nov-18 02:22 PM GMT

It is so gratifying to hear that today, many farmers are not simply interested in producing food (and thus maximising profits) but recognise wider responsibilities. This is a contrast from some 20 years ago when I was chatting with a farmer in a village where I then lived. I commented on the splendid display of poppies in one of his fields, my goodness what a reaction: "those ***** weeds". When I mentioned butterflies and birds you would think that I was talking about pestilence that would lead to a national famine.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 09-Nov-18 08:11 PM GMT

It's most encouraging to hear of those farmers' attitudes to wildlife, Neil. With any luck, this will be a continuing and progressive trend over the next few years.

It's no longer good enough to pay lip service to wildlife. There are too many critical social media outlets.

I think people are starting to get the message.

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 10-Nov-18 11:39 PM GMT

Fritillaries for The Future

Hello Neil,

Please can you upload this video for the benefit of others and put it under Pearl-bordered Fritillary, category?

I did not want to do it and be seen as "author"(on UK Butterflies and I know that you might not have wanted to do it, to be advertising yourself:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIB_V5JYCCk

Sorry, I will go back and look at the credits at the end, later.
#AuthorandFinishersomething

Kind Regards.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-18 05:56 PM GMT

Hi Jack and David. I think farmers are far more switched on these days, and many have come to realise the wide benefits to the land and crops they farm, not least the pollination services provided by butterflies, moths and other invertebrates. I also believe that this part of West Sussex is inhabited by some particularly progressive land managers.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Nov-18 05:57 PM GMT

Thanks so much for pointing this out, Philip. It's the first time I've ever seen it! I traveled down to the New Forest for the day in May 2017, to help make this promotional video for the sister project of my Sussex-based *Fritillaries for the Future*, as I'm always happy to go in front of a camera. I never heard any more, so I'm somewhat surprised that it's in the public domain ... if rather well hidden away. Sorry I didn't have time for a chat at the (excellent) AGM, but I was 'on a mission' when we passed.

BWs, Neil

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIB_V5JVCCK

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 13-Nov-18 12:27 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIB_V5JVCCK

Delightful footage, Neil, and I see its numbers of views have now rapidly increased!

Amazing how your trousers seem to attract such a broad range of species. 😊

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Nov-18 12:05 PM GMT

Thanks, David. Whenever I'm away butterflying for a day or two, I always book a separate room for my trousers.
BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Nov-18 12:12 PM GMT

Habitat Restoration

Yesterday (13 November) the BC reserves in Sussex were again visited by Mike Fearn and his fabulous Brighton Conservation Volunteers. The team of 14 was split, with one group burning up a vast quantity of brash in the recently created/extended Oaken Glade in Rowland Wood, while the other group continued the restoration of lowland heath habitat on Park Corner Heath (PCH).

One or two visitors have recently queried why we are now clearing so much vegetation, including a few (albeit inferior quality) oaks from Parris Plateau on PCH; I've felled three over the last two winters, from in front of the hut, with the last going yesterday. I think it's important to explain that this area was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to preserve this small patch of grassy heath habitat, which formed part of a once much larger area within the Vert Wood complex, before its near total destruction by post-war and post-1987 'blow down' clearances and coniferisation. We must hold on to what remains of this rare habitat and the rich fauna and flora it supports, including the reptiles which thrive on the more open and warm ground here. In addition to the images from yesterday's conservation work party, I've appended a pair of images taken as recently as 2007, which demonstrate the type and extent of the heathland habitat we're now reclaiming. We'll soon be clearing the young birch and buckthorn (Brimstones prefer the very small regrowths) over one of the favoured areas for Adder, Grass Snake and Slow-worm, but if we were to leave the vegetation to mature much further, the ground would become too shady and cool to support them.

So where are Oaken Glade and Parris Plateau, I hear some ask? At a recent meeting, all of the main rides and open spaces on our reserves were named, and Bob Foreman will soon be publishing a map to show where Skipper Corner, Long Furlong and Boggy Ride are. This will help communicate where you've seen the butterflies, moths and other wildlife which are already reacting in a very positive manner to the recent habitat work.

My thanks go to Mike and the Brighton Conservation Volunteers, and to Jonathan Squire and our own volunteers, who worked on the reserves last Sunday.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 14-Nov-18 07:18 PM GMT

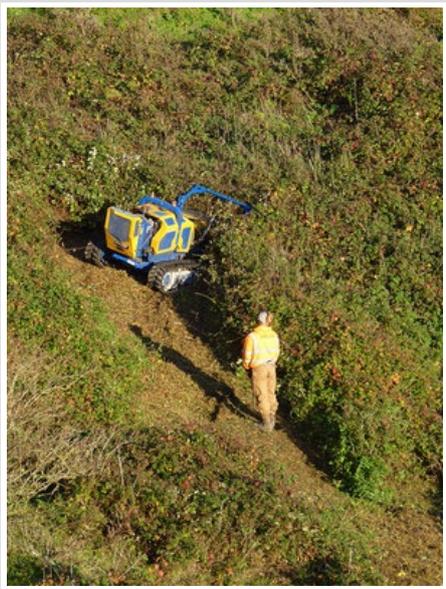
Flailbot At Cissbury

This afternoon (14 November) I couldn't resist a visit to Cissbury Ring, to see the fabulous Flailbot in action. The National Trust has done a fantastic job of attacking the scrub within the south-facing coombe at the NE corner of the site, which we identified as an important target at a meeting in October 2017.

The work done last winter has already brought rapid rewards; the steep slope above the track hosted good numbers of Wall Brown, Small Copper and a few Adonis Blue and Clouded Yellow this summer. With Flailbot now clearing a much larger area of scrub, this is undoubtedly a site to keep a close eye on in the future; I suspect it will become very good, very quickly. As Darren Sercombe, the operator, guided Flailbot through a patch of scrub, I watched

a male Brimstone make a timely exit from its path.

It was good to see that the ponies are still doing a great job of browsing scrub around the ramparts.





Re: Neil Hulme

by Jack Harrison, 14-Nov-18 07:36 PM GMT

I looked up Flailbot and came across this:[\[quote\]](#)..wirelessly operated track mower for challenging terrains that offers the ultimate remotely controlled mowing capability with **zero operator risk** I hope it never turns against its masters 😬

But what a wonderful piece of kit. I want one for my garden.

Jack

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 22-Nov-18 06:34 PM GMT

Coppicing At Clapham

Many thanks to the wonderful Clapham Wood Coppice Group, who made excellent progress cutting more Hazel to benefit the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and other woodland wildlife at Church Copse. Today (22 November) we said goodbye to National Park Ranger Becka, who is moving to an equivalent post in Hampshire; she'll be sorely missed and we wish her every success on her new patch. The next meeting of the group will meet in Clapham Church car park at 10 am on Thursday 29 November. Any new faces will be enthusiastically welcomed.





Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 25-Nov-18 07:46 PM GMT

Epic stuff, Neil. You have already done plenty and it isn't even December yet!

Here's hoping we avoid the wind and rain this winter which will allow you and your groups of volunteers to get a great deal done to consolidate on last year's fine effort.

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 27-Nov-18 02:02 PM GMT

Hello Neil,

Sorry, I have not spent the time to read all of your diary.

Coppice

I was told that low Blackthorn Scrub, was most preferable, compared with mature trees for a Brown Hairstreak to lay eggs on.

I was told that young Alder Buckthorn was more desirable for a Brimstone Butterfly to lay eggs on, compared with an older, maturer tree.

Willow Coppice

I have seen management ideas, from one years growth to 12 years growth.

To encourage the Purple Emperor, please can you advise (with your knowledge of "Knepp") a best practice or good practice coppice rotation (which might mean, treating different areas, differently for diversity sake, avoiding most (or any) overwintering larva.

If you have referred to this already, please remind me of the page number (or numbers).

With Butterfly Conservation in mind, I understand that you might answer with regard to existing United Kingdom laws that protect this species and new laws that might help it more, in the future.

Kind Regards.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 28-Nov-18 04:03 PM GMT

Thanks, David. We've made plenty of progress, but as always there's much more to do. The very nature of coppicing means that you're never finished!

Hi Philip.

Blackthorn: I've found that the best management to suit Brown Hairstreak is to aggressively cut areas of scrub back to ground level on a three or four year cycle. It's impossible to avoid losses of eggs, but this system soon renders the entire *Prunus* stock on a site highly suitable for breeding. The losses incurred by cutting in this manner are vastly outweighed by the advantages, and from my experience the Brown Hairstreak population responds by increasing very significantly. Obviously, you can't apply this to hedgerows, which should be *trimmed* on a similar rotation. Dave Cook and I have negotiated the cyclical mowing of the suckers at the base of hedgerows to a similar pattern across much of mid Sussex, which greatly increases the amount of hedgerow breeding habitat.

Buckthorn: A short rotation as above also suits the Brimstone, with the added advantage that winter cuts don't impact the early stages (the species being asleep in the adult stage).

Sallow: Coppicing or pollarding are both unhelpful and probably detrimental to the Purple Emperor. Sallows are best left alone, even when they collapse, as they just shoot straight back up again!

Protective legislation: Many butterfly species are unfortunately afforded an inappropriately low level of legal protection, particularly when compared to some other faunal groups. While the restrained collecting of Purple Emperors is unlikely to have much effect on populations, the same cannot be said of e.g. Duke of Burgundy, particularly where colonies are small and vulnerable. The legislation is outdated and based on the historical status of some species. This is my personal view, rather than that of any organisation.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Dec-18 10:10 AM GMT

Saving Snakes

We may have been low in number, but the small team that worked so hard on our Park Corner Heath reserve on Sunday (2 December) achieved a huge

amount. Many thanks to Paul Day, Jonathan Crawford and Gary Norman for their efforts. We cleared the majority of saplings and small trees growing over the area favoured by our rich reptile fauna, to reduce the increasing level of shade which would eventually cool the ground and make it less suitable. However, we left sufficient scrub and blankets of collapsed Bracken to afford them refuge when they become active in the spring.

A tour of both reserves revealed that violets and other important larval foodplants, and nectar sources for adult butterflies, are appearing in abundance across most of the recently created habitat.



Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 03-Dec-18 10:53 AM GMT

A27 Arundel Bypass - Consultation Re-run

Please consider taking just a few seconds to add your name to this important petition <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/a27-arundel-bypass> which objects to the environmentally damaging route currently being favoured by Highways England, based on a consultation so seriously flawed that it's having to be re-run. More cost-effective and less damaging options are available, saving woodlands, meadows and chalk streams from destruction, and saving a wealth of wildlife including Purple Emperors, White Admirals and Dormice.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 04-Dec-18 06:12 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

We may have been low in number, but the small team that worked so hard on our Park Corner Heath reserve on Sunday (2 December) achieved a huge amount. Many thanks to Paul Day, Jonathan Crawford and Gary Norman for their efforts. We cleared the majority of saplings and small trees growing over the area favoured by our rich reptile fauna, to reduce the increasing level of shade which would eventually cool the ground and make it less suitable. However, we left sufficient scrub and blankets of collapsed Bracken to afford them refuge when they become active in the spring.

A tour of both reserves revealed that violets and other important larval foodplants, and nectar sources for adult butterflies, are appearing in abundance across most of the recently created habitat.

Encouraging developments, Neil. That looks prime Fritillary habitat (and I have no doubt the snakes will find it to their liking too).

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 04-Dec-18 07:40 PM GMT

Artificial Rabbits

The battle to save the chalk-based race of Grayling in Sussex stepped up a gear today (4 December), as I joined Tim Squire of the South Downs National Park Authority and the SD Volunteer Ranger Service for a conservation work party at Deep Dean. Working around the edges of an area where ponies

have recently been used to strip away the invasive Tor-grass, we mattocked out a large number of features to mimic the excavations of rabbits.

The spread of Tor-grass and reduction of bare ground and scree have been identified as prime candidates in explaining the drop in Grayling numbers over recent years, with both threats probably reflecting a reduction in rabbit numbers due to mortality caused by lagoviruses. The changes in habitat are sufficiently great that they can clearly be seen via remote images taken over the last ten years.

While taking a break from the hard labour I spotted two Peacock, a Red Admiral and a female Merlin.

Many thanks to all who became rabbits for the day.





Re: Neil Hulme

by essexbuzzard, 05-Dec-18 09:34 PM GMT

I wish you every success with your efforts down at Deep Dean, Neil. Certainly the Graylings I see in Cornwall spend much time, especially in cloudy weather, perched among bare rock chippings. Perhaps both for warmth and camouflage.

Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 06-Dec-18 09:01 PM GMT

Neil Hulme wrote:

A27 Arundel Bypass – Consultation Re-run

Please consider taking just a few seconds to add your name to this important petition <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/a27-arundel-bypass> which objects to the environmentally damaging route currently being favoured by Highways England, based on a consultation so seriously flawed that it's having to be re-run. More cost-effective and less damaging options are available, saving woodlands, meadows and chalk streams from destruction, and saving a wealth of wildlife including Purple Emperors, White Admirals and Dormice.

Petition duly signed, Neil. I wish you all the best with your efforts to force a rethink.

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 08-Dec-18 04:08 PM GMT

Birth Of A New Ride

Today (8 December) I joined a large and industrious group of Graffham Down Trust and visiting volunteers (about 30 in all) on the GDT reserves. We made excellent progress in opening up an old and very overgrown ride through an area of Hazel coppice. Work in this area will benefit a wide range of species, including Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Drab Looper moth and Hazel Dormouse.





Re: Neil Hulme

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

Looks like great habitat in the making, Neil. 😊

Surprised you could light a fire though, given the incessant rain this last week or so.

I don't recall having read of this site before. Is it a Duke location as well as PBF?

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 10-Dec-18 12:20 PM GMT

Hi David. I usually find that there's an experienced pyromaniac within every group of volunteers; as you say, getting fires going isn't easy in the winter.

These reserves have been managed for wildlife for many years, but the area has improved in leaps and bounds in more recent times, due to a greatly invigorated Graffham Down Trust, and assistance from the South Downs National Park Authority and Butterfly Conservation. The area forms part of a wider key landscape, including Charlton Forest and the Heyshott Escarpment and Heyshott Down reserves. I believe that this landscape will soon develop into one of the best for butterflies and moths in the South East.

Duke of Burgundy has colonised naturally but currently exists in low numbers. I performed a very large-scale reintroduction of Pearl-bordered Fritillary earlier this year, as part of the BC *Fritillaries for the Future* project. Obviously, it's far too early to claim success, but the preparatory work and release of butterflies went very well. We'll know a lot more by next May. I suspect the area may support an exceptionally large colony of the rare Drab Looper moth next year, which was targeted by an additional BC project.

BWs, Neil

Re: Neil Hulme

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

Thanks, Neil. Useful and informative as ever. Good luck with your further work at this site (along with all the others).

Re: Neil Hulme

by Neil Hulme, 11-Dec-18 08:11 PM GMT

Progress At Park Corner Heath

Many thanks to the fabulous Brighton Conservation Volunteers for their magnificent efforts on the BC Park Corner Heath reserve today (11 December). We continued working over the far, lower level slope where our own volunteers cleared small trees and scrub last Sunday, and started by burning up some large piles of brash. By the end of the day an area of almost 0.25 hectare had been completely cleared, creating a substantial area of breeding habitat for fritillaries and other species.

The combined efforts of BC and BCV volunteers over the last couple of winters have reclaimed a very extensive area of lowland heath from the encroaching scrub and I'm confident that the butterflies and moths will show their appreciation.



Re: Neil Hulme

by David M, 16-Dec-18 10:18 PM GMT

Nice to see once again the hard work that goes into preparing the habitat which allows you to take so many pristine images of the butterflies during their respective flight seasons, Neil.

Here's hoping the recent storms didn't do too much damage round your way.

Re: Neil Hulme

by PhilBJohnson, 28-Dec-18 11:58 AM GMT

Hello Mr Hulme, (Happy fourth day of Christmas).

Have you seen anything which might be of importance to Butterfly Conservation with reference to the life cycle of a "Common Dog Violet" (which was also Latin named).

How were they different from Spring "bulbed" flowers such as bluebells and daffodils with reference to them being grown under deciduous woodland (flora under light blocking summer trees).

#WoodlandTrust

The importance to Butterfly Conservation (in me), is to do with them having been a Primary food source for the larva of at least six of our native Fritillary species,

Kind Regards