

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 02-Jan-18 05:19 PM GMT

For the first time in many years we did not record a single Butterfly in December. There have been many days of either very cold, or very wet weather here in Kent. We have seen quiet a few bees and other insects but not the hoped for butterfly. We had a few November sightings of Red Admirals and Peacocks but even they seemed difficult after the 19th. A pity because October had been good for us including sightings of Clouded Yellow as follows, 1 at Ashford 02/10, 2 at Oare Marshes 03/10, 1 at Oare Marshes 05/10, 3 at Dungeness 14/10, 1 at Warehorne 15/10, 1 at Dungeness 25/10, 1 at Dungeness 28/10, 1 at Dungeness 31/10 and our final one at Dungeness 05/11. I am assuming that they were all different individuals as they were seen on different areas of the reserves.

We fared better with Moths with our last of the year being Scarce and Mottled Umbers on the 21/12. October was very good for us with Delicate and Plummed Fanfoot 01/10, Merveille du Jour and Mallow on the 17/10, Radfords Flame Shoulder on the 24/10 with a cracking day on the 27/10 producing Oak Rustic, Red Headed Chestnut, Cosmopolitan and Sword Grass. All at Dungeness. A good mix of Dungeness, Kent and British rarities.

Despite our many hours in the field we failed to see many rare birds, but still enjoyed ourselves looking and hoping. We did see the long staying Wilsons Phalarope, (4 times actually between the 03/10 and 22/10) at Oare Marshes. The two Long Billed Dowitchers (Adult and 1st winter) at Oare Marshes, Raddes Warbler at Dungeness 14/10 with another at St. Margarets on the 19/10. Cattle Egret on various dates between the 15/10 and 18/11 at Dungeness.

Other goodies included Dotterel at Dungeness 02/11, Grey Phalarope Dungeness 11/11, Bittern Dungeness 09/12, Red Necked Phalarope Pegwell Bay 16/11, 2 Green Winged Teals Oare Marshes 10/12 (on our 7th attempt for them, boy were they elusive), several Caspian Gulls at Dungeness during December, Ringtail Hen Harrier near Charing 19/11.

One of the features of this winter has been the influx into Britain, especially Southern England, of the Hawfinch. This stunning large finch has the habit of sitting right at the top of trees and surveying the world, often after many hours of going missing. They can be very frustrating, but equally charming, when on view with their large bills matching their large size. Often found near Hornbeams, Beech and Yew, this year has seen dozens at some locations although our biggest group was 12 at Orlestone on the 22/12. An early Christmas present you could say.

It's not all good news with a distinct lack of wintering Geese, winter Swans and winter Ducks like the Smew. It appears that the near Continent has not been cold enough to force them West into Britain. Also of concern is the lack of more common birds such as Lapwings and small passerines. Intensive farming practises do not help but it must surely be more than that. Perhaps lack of breeding habitat plays a part. Nature Reserves alone do not seem able to stem the loss despite the very good work done by both wardens and volunteers.

I have had a few issues with my bridge camera of late, getting time for a new one, but I do have some photos to download and post in the near future. Best wishes to all for the New Year and many happy hours of Butterfly watching.

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 05-Jan-18 09:09 PM GMT

Best wishes to you too, Dave, and thanks for the welcome update.

Surprising how you haven't seen a December butterfly in 2017 given your location, but those birds are fair compensation.

We will look forward to your next instalment.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 09-Jan-18 09:51 AM GMT

Happy New Year Dave! the weather in Kent was'n't up to it's usual best when we were there at Christmas so we were in doors a lot, It's good to see your post again and hope we bump into you again in the Summer 🤗 Goldie 🤗

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 25-Oct-18 05:21 PM GMT

We are back again.

We feel it's about time that we did a few diary entries having had a 9 month rest. Why the rest? Well twofold. Firstly, it's difficult to keep writing entries in a different and interesting manner, and without producing photos of much the same things each year. We are not ones to publish many photos of the same butterfly in different poses as this adds to the repetitive nature. We try to add interest to our adventures ensuring that we enjoy and gain a little from our experiences.

Secondly, we have tried to reduce our carbon foot print this year and travelled less often. In a strange twist this was completely thrown into question when our local Council announced planning approval for 6,000 houses. The few gallons that we saved will be small change when the extra estimated local 10,000 daily car journey are made. So much for our efforts to reduce our CO2 and other nasty pollutants.

So what have been our highlights. Firstly it was a bird that made the news in Spring. An American Bittern made landfall at Carlton Marshes in Suffolk. What a super reserve, with ambitions to expand. The Warden and Team were so welcoming, being appreciated by all visiting birders. We ourselves saw the bird after an hour or so, but others were on their 3rd or 4th visit. We tied this trip in with a visit to see Snakeshead Fritillary at Fox Meadow Open Day. Literally thousands were in full flower and a delight to see. A new Plant for us.

Next highlight was our mainly successful attempts to see many of the South East's Clearwings. Anyone with an interest in Moths will know how difficult Clearwings can be to see, needing a lot of effort, a little luck, and sometimes a Pheromone Lure. This year we saw a reasonable total, with two, Red-belted Clearwing and Current Clearwing actually in our own garden.

The third highlight was seeing Black Hairstreak in South East England. Thanks to the news released by Neil H, we, and many others, enjoyed what has to be find of the decade for Sussex at Ditchling CP. Judging by the large crowds others thought so too. We had good views of 4 but I know others saw higher numbers. How they have remained undetected for so long remains a mystery but low numbers, a short flight period, and in a corner of the Park probably rarely visited by Butterflies probably added to there lack of detection. Earlier we paid a visit nearby to see Club Tailed Dragonflies at Frittleworth. This is the first time we have caught up with this species at this site, and although we could only find 6 they were very much enjoyed by the family.

Fourth highlight was the sight of the Oleander Hawkmoth at Dungeness (photo already posted in the Sightings Forum). Finally the last highlight has to be the Beluga Whale off Gravesend. What an unexpected record, especially for South East England in October. When the news came on my mobile phone

it stopped me in my tracks. Surely a hoax I thought. How wrong was I with the finder producing a photograph. A Beluga Whale in the River Thames, less than 50 miles from home. Not on some remote and freezing cold island nearer the Arctic than sunny Kent. What's more it was faithful to a particular stretch of water less than a mile long. So with patience all visitors obtained decent views and well done to the finder for putting the news out straight away.

to be continued...

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 25-Oct-18 09:51 PM GMT

I remember the American bittern, Dave. There have been several off-course migrants this year IIRC, with the rose-coloured Starling being the latest.

Good on you for reducing your carbon footprint. I too have stayed closer to home this year, with only ONE trip into England (as opposed to half a dozen or more in previous years).

I'm sure you're looking forward to more migrant birds over the winter?

I'll read your further reports with interest.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 29-Oct-18 08:28 PM GMT

2018 so far

Despite the lack of Diary entries we have enjoyed some very good moments and wildlife during the year so far. January provided us with some good views of the Hawfinches around Godmersham. This was part of the national influx as we have not seen this species there before. Our maximum number was 42 but on most visits it was normal to see only 4 or 5. A stunning if somewhat elusive bird. Sightings continued on and off until March.

The main attraction for March was a very showy White Spotted Bluethroat near Dungeness. This attracted large numbers of birders, photographers and even some locals. Early April so us watching a Hoopoe near Lydd for several days. Our first decent day for Butterflies was 7th April when Peacocks, Brimstone and Small Tortoiseshells were noted. Orange Tips showed on the 19th April along with Green Veined Whites. Bird wise we saw Short Toed Treecreeper on the 11th April at Dungeness and a Black Winged Stilt at Stodmarsh on the 14th. A day in the Brecks on the 21st found Breckland, Fingered and Spring Speedwells along with Grape Hyacinth and Oregon Grape.

The 9th May produced 3 Emperor Moths at Oare Marshes, one of our favourite moths, and the following day Wall Browns and Dingy Skippers at Samphire Hoe. Bonsai Bank on the 15th found 22 Duke of Burgundy and 3 Green Hairstreaks. A most enjoyable visit into East Sussex saw us looking at over 200 Burnt Tip Orchids. It's been a few years since we have seen this species, which is now very hard to find in Kent, with some years seeing none at all.

A Kentish Plover was at Dungeness on the 20th May and Grizzled Skippers on the 26th May. An oddity in the Orchid world was a totally green Fly Orchid on the 27th May at a site near Wye. With a Pretty Marbled (moth) on the 28th, Great Reed Warbler and an Adult Rose Cloured Starling on the 30th May, all at Dungeness the month drew to a close.

During 2017 a colony of Tongue Orchids had been discovered in Essex. This year special arrangements were made to visit under controlled conditions to the private site on the 2nd June. We were fortunate enough to be able to join one of the guided tours to view 36 plants, slightly down on last year. It will be interesting to see how the species fares next year, especially in light of potential long term future development. It's close proximity to the Essex coast, and the fact that it was not near any footpath, strongly suggest that these were the result of wind blown seed off the Continent and not a deliberate introduction or a accidentally sowing. All the flora around the plants were British Native.

June saw Red-belted Clearwing, Sallow Clearwing, Currant Clearwing, Yellow-legged Clearwing, Orange Tailed Clearwing and Six-belted Clearwing. The main local feature was the excellent numbers of Heath Fritillary at East Blean Woods. We saw a minimum of 169 numbers but numbers of 200 plus were being reported. Perhaps responding to the beautiful summer weather and plenty of Cow Wheat. In some places we just stood in a whirling mass of Fritillaries. For the third year running we saw the rare Norfolk Hawker in the main car park at Blean. Perhaps from the small but growing population at Grove Ferry and Westbere. In addition to good numbers around Grove Ferry and Stodmarsh Nature Reserves. It looks like this species is now established in East Kent.

to be continued.....

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 02-Nov-18 09:34 PM GMT

Hawkers, Clearwings and an unusual plant

Early June saw us invited to a private wood near Ashford where the rare (for Kent) Downy Emerald was present. We managed to see 3. Just as interesting was the huge numbers of Four Spotted Chasers present. Park Heath Corner reserve was next where we managed to catch up with 3 Small Pearl Bordered Fritillaries and 12 White Legged Damselflies. This brings back memories of the late eighties and early ninties when decent numbers of the Fritillary were possible, but I don't remember seeing the White Legged Damselflies then. A field of 50 Greater Butterfly Orchids near Faversham was a great find by others. Mid June saw our first White Admiral and Ringlets of the year.

Late June saw us invited to a private orchard near Cliffe where we caught up with the rare Southern Migrant Hawker. We saw 6 immatures that day of a species that only colonised Britain four years ago. Up until now Essex had been its stronghold but this year Kent came good. They have been present near Cliffe for at least 2 years but on land not accessible. This year they moved into nearby orchards and by good fortune we knew somebody working there. We thought that this was the end of the saga but on the 18 July there was a happy and most welcome twist. We had been watching the Temmincks Stint and 4 Black Winged Stilts at Oare Marshes when we decided to take a walk to the West Hide to see if any Common Emerald damselflies were present. Half way there we noticed 3 Hawkets with very blue eyes and bodies. Surely Southern Migrant Hawkets, but none had been recorded here before or indeed anywhere in Kent other than Cliffe, some 25 miles away. We managed to obtain a photograph which indeed showed SMH, as kindly confirmed by MH of Kent Dragonflies. Better still they were right by the footpaths so available to all who wished to see and photograph them. A thorough search of Oare by ourselves and others over the next few days found at least 12 males and 2 females present. Maybe next year will see consolidation and expansion in Kent of this rare species. Their presence also resulted in other things being noted such as a White Rumped Sandpiper, Small Red Eyed Damselflies, Scarce Emerald Damselfly with several Clouded Yellows and a few Painted Lady's.

Our one regret of late June was cancelling our planned trip to see the Large Blues at Collards Hill. The weather was forecast to be 30 degrees plus and that we felt would have made an uncomfortable day. As it happened only a few were seen in the heat, and they were very mobile. There's always next year.

Having already seen Silver Washed Fritillary, Purple Hairstreak, White Letter Hairstreak, Large Skipper and a remarkable 34 White Admirals in a local

wood we ended June with our second visit of the year to the Brecks to see the very Rare Fen Ragwort, Perennial Knawel and the protected Crested Cow Wheat. I believe the Fen Ragwort is the only surviving true plant but seedlings have been raised and planted elsewhere to ensure it's survival, for the lone plant is right next to a busy main road and not on some protected Nature Reserve. 36 Forester Moths at Cranwich Heath was a good find for us. Thanks to a good friend the 3rd July saw us looking at a Silver Barred moth. Only a few Kent records.

Late July saw us looking at a Raspberry Clearing found by a friend near Hamstreet. This is a recent addition to the British list. It is not a long distance migrant so probably entered this country via Raspberry canes, on which it feeds. It was first reported in Cambridgeshire in 2007 but has since spread. At the start of August someone reported at least 2 Southern Migrant Hawkers on Pett Level. Surely a possible invasion of the species going on. We decided to spread the search into South Kent and bingo. We found 2 males in a ditch near Appledore in Kent. They remained for a week or so but unfortunately we could find no others in suitable habitat. Talking of habitat we found the SMH seemed to prefer ditches with little water and plenty of reed with open spaces.

to be continued.....



Black Winged Stilt at Grove Ferry/ Stodmarsh



Bluethroat. Dungeness



Green form of Fly Orchid Near Wye (Kent)



Hawfinch at Godmersham (Kent)



Tongue Orchid in Essex



Snakeshead Fritillary at Fox Meadow Open Day (Suffolk)

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 04-Nov-18 08:43 PM GMT

Nice to read that commentary, Dave, and the images are lovely, especially the one of that Bluethroat.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 05-Nov-18 04:37 PM GMT



Clancy's Rustic at Ruckinge
Continuing the year.

To be honest this year has been very hard work when it comes to moths. Butterflies and Dragonflies have done well but moths are another story. Numbers and species are well down in our garden and I believe in many other gardens. Despite that, and in addition to the Clearwings, we have seen some good moths. In addition to the Oleander Hawkmoth and Silver Barred mentioned in previous post, we have seen the Ghost moth, Gypsy moth, Golden Twin-spot, Many lines, Pale Shoulder, Deaths Head Hawkmoth (a really impressive moth), Beautiful Marbled, Delicate, Sombre Brocade (mega rare migrant), Clancy's Rustic, Streak, Porters Rustic, Blairs Mocha, Scarce Bordered Straw, Gem, Blairs Wainscot and lots of Hummingbird Hawkmoths. Many of which are Rare or very Rare migrants. We can't complain about the quality.

Despite seemingly good conditions we failed to find any Long Tailed Blues despite searching. We are aware that one or two have been seen this year, but another hoped for invasion failed to materialise. We were lucky and jammed in on a Geranium Bronze that was handed into Dungeness Observatory (22 Oct 2018). Caught in a Kent Garden, fairly near the Coast, and following several days of hot Southerly winds. Whether it was a true migrant or already in this country is anyones guess. Considered by many as a pest I believe the authorities were notified as to it's disposal. Like the Long Tailed Blue it could not have survived the winter, or the cold nights that followed.

One insect that is definitely not welcomed, and is a must notify species is the Asian Hornet. Well Dungeness had the misfortune to see two this Autumn. Luckily both were netted, potted, and handed over to the Authorities who spent a week undertaking a thorough search for any more, but none were found. You can see why they are of concern. They are big and can easily carry off any sort of bee, especially the Honey Bee. You won't mistake this if you see one.



Painted Lady's seem to have been harder to come by this year. Dungeness



Raspberry Clearwing at Ruckinge (Kent).



The Passenger at Hythe (Kent).



Southern Migrant Hawker we found at Oare Marshes.



Southern Migrant Hawker we found at Oare Marshes



Southern Migrant Hawker we found near Appledore

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 09-Nov-18 07:56 PM GMT

You always seem to come up with something unusual, Dave.

Love the moths, especially the Passenger.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 26-Nov-18 01:53 PM GMT

Bringing the year so far nearly up to date.

Doing less travelling this year meant we missed out on a few Butterfly and Dragonfly species. We didn't try for Silver Studded Blue, Silver Spotted Skipper, Wood White, Brown Hairstreak, or even the gorgeous Purple Emperor. All within 100 miles of us but all requiring a effort in mileage terms. As we see them most years it does not really matter, but it still takes some getting used to not seeing them annually. We also failed to visit the New Forest for such goodies as Bog Orchid, Southern Damselfly and Scarce Blue-Tailed Damselfly. We may have to rethink our strategy for next year. We managed to catch up with 2 Lesser Emperor Dragonflies at Dungeness in August near the ARC pit. These are almost annual here in Kent, but what are annual is Red-veined Darter, which we failed to see.

The one plus side was spending more time locally and finding the two new Kent sites for Southern Migrant Hawker, seeing several new locations for us of Flowering Rush and Marsh Mallow. Seeing new species for us of Clearwings. Checking previous locations for Willow Emerald Damselfies, Sickle-bearing Bush Crickets, spending more time looking for migrant species of Dragonflies and Butterflies (other than the two sites mentioned for Southern Migrant Hawker none found), and best of all, just enjoying the glorious Summer that 2019 was here in Kent.

To bring this nearly up to date I will just mention the weekend of 3rd November when one of the Ramsgate boys picked up a large Diver Species off Ramsgate. It turned out to be a White Billed Diver, better still it was in full Summer Plumage. An absolute stunner. Too distant for my camera but there are some excellent photos on the web that show what I mean. A lot of us caught up with it on Saturday, showing well off Margate (Foreness Point). Margate is probably best known for the Turner Contemporary, sticks of Rock and Del Boy's summer outing. It should also be known for Rare birds as it has turned up some real goodies over the years. Then on the Sunday (4th) a Lesser Yellowlegs was refound between Camber and Lydd which we caught up with.

We are still seeing the odd Red Admiral and Common Darter despite the change to colder conditions. Maybe there is still time for another goodie or two although I suspect it will be a Bird rather than an Insect.



Common Blue Damselfly. A fairly common species throughout Southern England.



A record photo of the Adult Rose Coloured Starling at Dungeness. A beautiful plumage.



Burnt Tip Orchid at Mount Caburn (East Sussex) in May. Good numbers this year with 210 counted.



Willow Emerald Damselfly near Appledore (Kent).



Beautiful Marbled at Dungeness. (Too flighty to take out of container).

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 07-Dec-18 08:05 PM GMT

With the Year almost at an end so are our updates. Following on the rest of November was a mixed bag. Butterflies were few with just Red Admirals. Dragonflies were down to the odd Migrant Hawker, our last one was the 17th November, but still a few Common Darters. The garden moth trap was put away for the winter, but a surprise at Dungeness was not one, but two White-specks. This rare immigrant moth usually eludes the South East, having more of a West of England arrival. This year we were lucky to see both, our first sighting of this moth, on the 14th. Another Kent goodie was the Sprawler on the 8th.

November can be a good month for unusual Birds and this year did not disappoint. Any Swift in November is worth a second look. Some years have seen good numbers and suspicion, with some photographic evidence, that many, if not all, are Pallid Swifts. This year several sightings were made of Swifts and all the photos obtained suggest that they were all Pallid Swifts rather than the similar looking Juvenile Common Swift. The differences are subtle but are there. The paler Brown plumage is a good start, with a larger white throat patch and dark eye. Mottling on the breast and blunter wing tips all help to ID the Pallid Swift. As usual most sightings were on the East Coast and followed warm Southerly/ South Easterly winds. Kent did not miss out and we managed to catch up with two near Margate on the 13th. Even better was one that arrived at New Romney on the 16th. Good quality photos taken by the boys with the big lenses proved, due to feather damage, that the New Romney individual was the same one seen two days earlier in Norfolk.

A bit of an anti-climax followed with a change to colder weather and more Westerly or Northerly winds. Still, up to 6 Cattle Egrets at Dungeness, good numbers of Great White Egrets and the odd Caspian Gull have kept the interest going.

That just leaves December and lots of photos to sort.



One of up to 11 Cattle Egrets seen at Dungeness



One of up to 11 Cattle Egrets seen at Dungeness



Foresters Moth. Good numbers as seen by at least 7 on this one flower. Breckland.

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 08-Dec-18 07:18 PM GMT

Wow! It's not often we get an image of a Death's Head Hawk Moth on here, Dave. Is this a vagrant or do we get an influx every year?

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 09-Dec-18 07:48 PM GMT

Hi David. The Death's Head Hawkmoth is an immigrant moth that is recorded in varying numbers most years. Current evidence suggests that they cannot over winter in Britain, even in a mild year. Good years may see 25-30 arrive in Britain but I believe less than 20 are seen most years. Usually arriving from May onwards they can be recorded as late as October. They are really impressive when seen in real life and are Britains largest moth. They can make quite a audible squeak sound if touched or disturbed.

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 11-Dec-18 06:03 PM GMT

Thanks for the information, Dave. You were very lucky to see this if only a couple of dozen are usually recorded each year!