



My Blog

July - December 2007

22 December 2007 - Mild Autumn Produces Late Butterfly Sightings

As we enter the Christmas period and 2008 beckons, I spent some time browsing the sightings pages of both the Hants & IoW branch of butterfly conservation and those of some neighbouring branches. Sightings of Red Admirals have continued with almost monotonous regularity through late autumn, relieved by occasional sightings of other hibernators such as Peacock and Brimstone. Whilst by recent year's standards this is not so unusual, it is also clear that the mild autumn produced some very late sightings of non-hibernating species well into November and even December. Some examples include:

- 10 December – Clouded Yellow at Southbourne, Dorset
- 25 November – Speckled Wood at Gosport, Hants
- 22 November – Holly Blue at Gosport, Hants
- 16 November – Small White at Gosport, Hants
- 7 November – Meadow Brown at Martin Down, Hants
- 3 November – Large White at Southbourne, Dorset
- 3 November – Small Copper at Lee-on-Solent, Hants
- 3 November – Brown Argus, Common Blue and Small Copper at Cissbury Ring, W Sussex
- 1 November – Wall at Lancing, W Sussex

Although there has been a “cold snap” during the last few days, we are already returning to higher temperatures and another mild winter looks likely. So we can again look forward to some early butterfly emergences before winter officially ends in late March. I just hope that, unlike last year, the weather doesn't collapse again during May not to recover for several months, causing further devastation to butterfly populations struggling to recover from the deluges of last year.

As far as 2007 is concerned, it just remains for me to wish all visitors to this site. **A Very Happy Christmas** 😊, but don't get too carried away since the 2008 butterfly season is likely to begin early!

11 November 2007 - News From Further Afield

At this quiet time of year in the butterfly calendar, I spent some time browsing the internet for recent news from other parts of the UK (and beyond). A couple of items in particular took my eye. The first item was prompted by an interview last Sunday on Radio 4 by Dr Martin Warren, the chief executive of Butterfly Conservation. He was highlighting the concern in Europe over the decline in butterflies which was discussed at a meeting of conservationists in Laufen, Germany, at the end of October. Dr Warren mentioned the Madeiran Large White, now formally considered extinct (globally) and the first European butterfly to suffer this fate since records began, with loss of habitat in its native Madeira blamed for the extinction. An article in the Telegraph ([click here](#)) paints a gloomy picture of the situation in Europe. The dire prognosis is not limited to agriculturally intensive western European countries but also applies to Eastern Europe, as a result of agricultural modernisation and loss of habitat due to tourism driven developments.

The second item is a Lepidoptera Conservation Update (No. 8) issued by Butterfly Conservation earlier this year. You can download as a PDF file [from here](#) from the BC website. Its content mainly relates to 2006 of course, but nevertheless it provides interesting reading on some of the conservation initiatives in the various BC regions within UK. Some of the items which took my attention are mentioned below, albeit influenced by my personal affinities and knowledge of other regions:

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- Pages 13 & 14. Heath Fritillary colony at Lydford BC Reserve (Devon) has expanded into a nearby coppiced woodland site. The butterfly has also been introduced into Greenscoombe Wood (Cornwall).
- Page 15 onwards. Many of our threatened species depend on metapopulations existing in a wide area (e.g. Marsh Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary). So called "landscape-scale" conservation projects are ongoing in Wales, S-W England and Herefordshire, focused on Mynydd Mawr, Culm Grasslands/Two Moors and Ancient Woodlands respectively.
- Page 20 & 22. On the subject of High Brown Fritillary, core areas are of course S-W England and the Morecambe Bay area, but there is positive news from the very few sites remaining elsewhere. In Wales, management work in the Alun Valley (Glamorgan) is showing good results with High Brown numbers having increased significantly since the project started. There is also some good news from the Malvern Hills where conservation efforts continue at pace and more High Browns were seen there in 2006 than during the previous few years. Incidentally the positive news continues there this year. The Malvern Hills Butterfly Group has an on-line forum accessed via the West Midlands Branch of BC. A posting on 20 July reports an incredible 54 High Brown sightings in Eastnor Deer Park on 19 July, albeit reflecting a somewhat lower number of individual butterflies!
- Page 26. In the South-East, a woodland management initiative (also aimed at landscape scale) aims to secure the future of some of the regions most threatened woodland species, such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and Wood White

However, on a less upbeat note, research at York University on some northern species (page 30) confirms that Northern Brown Argus, Large Heath, Scotch Argus and Mountain Ringlet are all being lost from some former sites. In the case of the Northern Brown Argus and Large Heath, this is mainly attributed to habitat loss whereas for the Scotch Argus and Mountain Ringlet, climate change is the main factor.

20 October 2007 - Reflections On The 2007 Butterfly Season

As late October beckons and the curtain comes down on another butterfly year, it's time for a few reflections on the 2007 season. It would be easy to reach an almost wholly negative verdict by focussing on the summer months, but there were a few good points if you look hard enough, as well as plenty of disappointments along the way. Let's first recall a few of the highs *and the lows*.

- Following a mild winter, Spring arrived very early, resulting in some exceptionally early emergences, including Duke Of Burgundy, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Green Hairstreak and Grizzled skipper, which did quite well at sites where good colonies are established.
- The warm April was probably a key factor in producing a small 2nd brood of Duke of Burgundy at Noar Hill during August.
- A sizeable Glanville Fritillary colony appeared at a new site at Hurst Castle (after sporadic sightings in 2006), however this must be balanced against the weakening (and possibly loss?) of its other Hampshire colony at Hordle Cliff
- 3 months of very unsettled weather began during May (remember the "monsoon rains" of June/July which brought flood chaos to other parts of the country?). The effects on butterfly populations whose flight periods occurred during this period were dramatic, with few species maintaining near normal numbers, and many suffering large declines.
- Those which seem to have fared much worse than normal include the Vanessids (Peacock, Red Admiral, Painted Lady) and many chalk downland species including Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Common Blue, Small Heath and Silver-spotted Skipper. In contrast White Admiral had quite a good flight season, as did the ubiquitous Meadow Brown which again demonstrated why it is such a successful species.
- Whilst butterfly numbers have been much reduced during the summer months, the flight season has extended later than usual. As examples, Silver-spotted Skipper have been reported in mid-October from Hampshire and elsewhere Brown Hairstreak sightings also continued well into the month. Last sightings of these species are normally during September. This is perhaps explained by the lack of structure in the weather and temperature patterns during the summer period confusing butterflies "biological clocks" and resulting in emergence over a much longer period of time. The fine weather in September and early October has also played its part.

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- There have been significant numbers of migrants reported in Hampshire including Large Tortoiseshell, Queen of Spain Fritillary and Long-tailed Blue. I have noticed myself Clouded Yellow sightings are frequent enough even this season not to cause too much excitement now.



New Colony - One of the season's highlights is a new colony of Glanville Fritillary at Hurst Castle

Identifying Trends

On the basis of one particular season (and let's hope a very unusual one at that) it's difficult to draw too many firm conclusions, however considering this season in the context of recent years, it is possible to see some trends.

Several species are expanding their range northwards in UK, probably as a result of climate change. These include the Silver-washed Fritillary, which has now colonised parts of South Cumbria and the Comma and Small Skipper have now reached Scotland. So it would be logical to expect a few continental migratory species will colonise (or in some cases re-colonise) the UK, with Hampshire featuring significantly in such developments. Thus, if further evidence comes to light that Clouded Yellow are regularly surviving the winter in this region, they may warrant being transferred from regular migrant to resident species status. Other species including the ones mentioned above could follow in the next decade or so.

Whilst climate change is benefiting some butterflies, it is notable that these tend to be species which are reasonably mobile, doing well in their core areas, and are not strongly dependant on fragmented specialist habitats. For other species which are either sedentary or depend strongly on special habitats, such as coppiced woodland or damp grassland, the situation is rather different. In many cases these are species which are already vulnerable and in decline as a result of habitat loss due to land usage development, lack of sympathetic management or simply neglect. In this case, climate change is more likely to be an enemy, accelerating their decline by upsetting the fine dynamic balance of the ecosystems on which they depend, with habitats for instance becoming too wet, too dry or too warm to sustain them.

There are examples in Hampshire – the Wall now seems to have finally lost its tenuous hold in SE Hampshire – I am not aware of any reports this season from Portsdown Hill or the nearby coastal areas. It is now possibly confined to just one breeding site in the county in the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve.

Two of the county's small fritillaries, the Small Pearl-bordered and Pearl-bordered are confined to a few sites mainly in the west of the county. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary colonies in Hampshire are very small and vulnerable and there is further indication that the colony at its only site in the North of the county (Pamber Forest) is declining, with two consecutive poor years. The Pearl-bordered Fritillary, as mentioned earlier, had a decent and very early flight season at its main sites in Bentley Wood and several New Forest Inclosures, but it continues to decline at marginal sites which lack appropriate woodland management regimes.

A mention of the Duke of Burgundy here is also appropriate. Whilst it enjoyed a reasonable season at key sites in the Meon Valley including Noar Hill, I am not aware of any reports this year from the few remaining woodland colonies, such as Bentley Wood, and it is possible that one or two of these small colonies are now lost.



A Tale Of Two Species - The White Admiral enjoyed a decent season in Hampshire whilst the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary may be losing ground in the county

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, whilst we might be welcoming additional migrants in the coming years to Hampshire and seeing some of our more vigorous species at least stable or even expanding their range, we should not be falsely lulled into complacency: many of our specialist species continue to decline, despite a tolerably decent season at core sites for some of them. If this trend continues, within a few years some species will have contracted completely to a few carefully managed nature reserves, and even then no amount of careful management can compensate for habitat loss due to climate change. The various regional and national conservation agencies can show the way, as Butterfly Conservation is doing with initiatives like the South East Woodlands Project, which aims to raise awareness of the decline of woodland habitats and make vigorous steps reverse it, to the benefit of species like the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy.

In nature conservation, there is only so much that conservation agencies can do as catalysts for change, and the real victory will be when the wide spectrum of landowners look after what they have in a conservation minded way, from farms and country estates down to us as individuals looking after our gardens.

As for the 2007 butterfly season, let it be a wake up call to realise that the challenges posed by climate change and nature conservation are at least as big as ever.

14 October 2007 - 6 Species Still On The Wing On Portsdown

I had been planning to spend some time this afternoon working on new site features for the website, but the alternative scenario of a walk on Portsdown Hill, on what turned out to be a beautiful mid-October afternoon, was just too tempting. Butterflies are still on the wing there, but in very low densities, mainly confined to areas sheltered by shrubs or on the lower slopes. Six different species were seen: 2 Speckled Wood, 1 Meadow Brown, 3 Red Admiral, 5 Small White (3rd brood), 2 Large White (3rd brood) and 1 Common Blue (3rd brood). Photo of slightly ragged Speckled Wood posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

I am not planning any more butterfly outings this season (really!) but look out for updates to the site at about two week intervals, including 3 more site features.

5 October 2007 - Slow Start To Pennington Visit But Wall & Co Turn Up In The End

For possibly my last butterfly outing of this season, I chose to visit the Pennington Marsh area of the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve. This is the most reliable area in Hampshire for Wall Brown and 3rd brood sightings had been reported last week (in quite decent numbers). Autumn visits for butterflies are often somewhat unpredictable

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– 3rd brood numbers can be very variable, the flight period can be very short, truncated by frost or bad weather, and with nectar in short supply, butterflies tend to disperse quickly.

The outward leg of my walk from the car park at the end of Lower Pennington Lane to the jetty, then west towards Keyhaven was disappointingly unproductive, with just a couple of Peacocks to show for it, but the sighting of a Clouded Yellow along the shoreline signified an upturn in fortunes. Next up was a 3rd brood Small Copper (and no ordinary one – it was a variant called *caeruleopunctata* with blue spots around the hindwing). This was soon to be followed by my first 3rd brood Wall of this season seen along the seawall in front of Pennington Marsh and then 3 more along the footpath leading inland from the jetty back to Lower Pennington Lane, including one rather tatty male which settled on a white plastic bag!. A Red Admiral, a Small White and another Small Copper completed what in the end was quite a productive outing for this time of year.

Whilst there may be no more blog entries on butterfly outings this year (but I won't guarantee it!), I will be preparing features on 3 more of Hampshire's best butterfly sites, as well as posting a few thoughts on this year's butterfly season. Look out for these additions during the next few weeks.

4 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

16 September 2007 - Pleasant Walk In Straits Inclosure, But Few Butterflies

I spent some time yesterday afternoon doing some "reconnaissance" in preparation for adding one or two more site features to this website during the quiet months. One of the places I visited was the Straits Inclosure of Alice Holt Forest, wishfully keeping an eye open for the appearance of a second brood White Admiral (the first record in Hampshire last year was on 7 September, albeit from Boarhunt area). None were seen, and in fact it was very quiet on the butterfly front with only a few Speckled Woods and a couple of Large Whites seen. The most conspicuous insects were Common Darters all along the main ride. Presently there are timber extraction operations in the Straits Inclosure, restricting access on weekdays. These will open up parts of the main track, providing more light and should benefit the butterflies next season.

In view of the limited opportunities for new photos at present (with few butterflies on the wing), I have opened a "2007 Bonus Gallery" (in Photo Archive) and will periodically upload a few additional photos taken during the 2007 season. These are photos which didn't make it first time round (e.g. because I just had too many!)

8 September 2007 - Settled Weather Arrives As Summer Butterfly Season Fade

Early September has at last brought a fine spell of weather, so at least we can enjoy that. The fine spell is likely to be too late however, to revive the very poor 2007 summer butterfly season. I did manage one outing this week (on Wednesday) to one of the North Hampshire heathlands, at Yateley Common. I saw several Graying amongst the heath to the north side of the A30. It's late in the Graying season now and they are looking rather worn and faded, but nevertheless quite active when disturbed.

Like the condition of the Graying, the 2007 summer butterfly season is now fading rapidly and the next week or two will also be the last opportunity this season to see other late summer species, like Brown Hairstreak, Silver-spotted Skipper and Adonis Blue at their various sites. If the weather does manage to remain reasonably settled, we can also look forward to a few third broods (Comma Wall Brown, Speckled Wood, Small Copper and Clouded Yellow) during September / early October, and perhaps a small second brood of White Admirals, hopefully complementing a good autumn showing of Red Admirals.

31 August 2007 - OWH: Skippers Stage Late Rally But Adonis Numbers Still Low.... And Matched By Clouded Yellow!

After the Indian summer of last weekend, it's been a disappointingly cloudy week. This afternoon I visited Old Winchester Hill (OWH), for what might be my last visit there this season. Despite the mainly overcast conditions, it was pleasing to see that Silver-spotted Skippers are reasonably numerous now – I saw about 50 in various locations including the south facing slope near the fort and at the bottom of the car park slope. Adonis Blue numbers compared to previous years (and spring) are, however, still disappointingly low with 4 males seen at the bottom of the car park slope and in the scrub at the very bottom beyond the "flattened" fence. I didn't see any Adonis at the original introduction site today (the south facing slope mentioned above) and no females at all. It will be interesting to see if they can bounce back next spring after such a poor summer season here, which may not be helped by the longer grass which is now a feature of their OWH breeding sites.

Probably the highlight of the visit was a count of 4 Clouded Yellows including two fresh specimens at the bottom of the car park slope - almost certainly offspring of spring migrants. For once I was thankful for the overcast conditions as a dark cloud passed and one settled to roost, making for an unusually leisurely Clouded Yellow photograph! I should also mention that Painted Ladies also seem to be having a late rally (10 seen), the Chalkhill Blue season is well on the wane with females now outnumbering males and the Gatekeeper season is still just hanging on (3 females seen).

3 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery (Adonis Blue and Clouded Yellow).



25 August 2007 - Adonis Doing OK At Martin Down - Even A Mating Pair!

There have been numerous occasions this season when butterfly sightings at a particular site have failed to meet expectations. However I cannot say that about my visit to Martin Down this afternoon – even the weather was glorious for a change. My main target species was Adonis Blue, which seem to be having a poor summer season at other Hampshire sites. I am pleased to say however, that they are doing tolerably well at Martin Down, particularly along the section of the Bokerley Ditch SW of Martin village. I saw about 16 Adonis Blue, (14M and 2F) which included a mating pair, as a highlight. The males are in less than pristine condition now with several quite faded, but at least the species is holding its own at this indigenous site, unlike some of the marginal sites in Hampshire.

There were several other species also in reasonable numbers, including Chalkhill Blue, Common Blue, Small Heath, Painted Lady, Brimstone and Small White. I even saw a Small Tortoiseshell (that's 2 in as many days!) and 2 Brown Argus. As usual Meadow Browns were present in scores. As I was returning to the car park, a Clouded Yellow flew past at speed, as if to remind me that this had definitely been a successful outing.

4 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery. In the sunshine it wasn't difficult to catch the iridescent effects in the wings of the males for the camera.

24 August 2007 - Warmth-loving Species Struggling But Some Better News For Others

Whilst western areas of Britain have enjoyed a taste of summer this week, sunshine has remained stubbornly elusive over much of Hampshire. So it was a case of heading to the western side of the county this afternoon to escape the cloud blanket. Stockbridge Down was enjoying very pleasant sunny spells, making what summer butterflies remain take wing. However, I soon discovered that for Silver-spotted Skipper, it's fast becoming the summer that wasn't. I found only 3 Silver-spotted Skippers on the down, none in particularly good condition, so it looks like a very short and poor season for this species. There was a small colony of Adonis Blue at Stockbridge Down last summer, but I saw none today. These two species are both lovers of dry, sunny, chalk downland slopes, so it's perhaps not surprising that the very wet summer has caused their numbers to plummet.

Several other species however, now seem to be doing a little better than feared. Painted Ladies were present in decent numbers in the flower rich scrub at the bottom of the down and in the area close to the eastern entrance: 8 seen altogether including 3 on a buddleia at the rear of the eastern car park. Feeding there also was also a worn Comma, a fresh Red Admiral, several Brimstones and wait for it – a brief visit by a Small Tortoiseshell! Back on the down itself Chalkhill Blue (~40), Small Heath (~12), Common Blue (~8), Brimstone (~6) and Meadow Browns (abundant) completed the score sheet, not forgetting a fresh Small Copper which added a little splash colour.

A new "2007 Recent Photos Gallery" has been started with 4 photos posted from today's visit.

17 August 2007 - What's Happened To Our Late Summer Butterflies?

I indicated in my blog entry of 3 August that summer butterfly numbers seemed generally low, which is hardly surprisingly after weeks of wet weather during June and July. However, for late summer species like Silver-spotted Skipper, summer brood Adonis Blue and even Brown Hairstreak, the phrase "conspicuous by their (relative) absence" would seem more appropriate. First sightings of these species in Hampshire were reported in either late July or early August, but the expected build up of numbers (and sightings) since then just doesn't seem to have happened.

This afternoon I visited the Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skipper site at the bottom of the car park slope on Old Winchester Hill. A few Chalkhills, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers were there, but I only found one Silver-spotted Skipper and no Adonis Blue. In largely overcast conditions the butterflies were not doing much flying and often had to be disturbed, but such a poor showing of these key species was very disappointing. The situation at Noar Hill was no better, in fact there were very few butterflies on the wing at all. Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, plus the odd Peacock, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and Common Blue were the highlights of more than an hour there (and not forgetting a Holly Blue in the lane!). In fact I would say the highlight was actually watching a grass snake slither into the undergrowth whilst attempting to swallow a large toad!

If the weather improves during the next days there is still a chance that numbers of the key species could rally, but one is left wondering if the consequences of this summer's abysmal weather will have long-lasting detrimental effects on many of our butterflies.

One photo of Silver-spotted Skipper posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery. No photo of grass snake with poor toad – would be considered in bad taste!

10 August 2007 - Successful Return Visit To Noar Hill For Brown Hairstreak!

After concentrating yesterday on the Duke of Burgundy, it was the Brown Hairstreak which was to be the focus my return visit today. Judging from my own experiences so far this year and feedback from other observers, sightings of Brown Hairstreak, especially at low level, are generally proving to be hard work. On the reserve again today there were a number of branch members with similar objectives in mind as well some visitors from further afield. I had a possible sighting of a male in flight close to the entrance gate at ~11.00am and others had more

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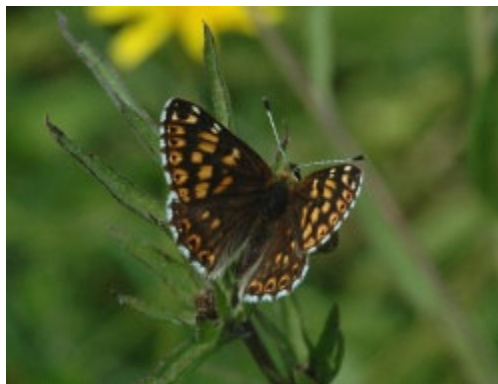
solid successes with photos of a female, then a male (the latter in the triangle) during the following period of an hour or so.

As usual with Brown Hairstreak, the outcome of a visit can change from failure to success in a matter of moments. At 1 pm, whilst chatting to other branch members in the triangle, little did we know what was to follow, as a small bright brown butterfly dropped out of taller foliage into a low blackthorn bush – it was a female brown hairstreak. She stayed in the triangle for more than 20 minutes, never nectaring, but flitting from one shady or partially shady foliage perch to another, or crawling deep inside the blackthorn, at one point seeming to oviposit. Then after a quick zig-zag flight across the thick blackthorn on the right, she was gone. So for me, in respect of Noar Hill this year, with the Duke yesterday and Brown Hairstreak today, it's mission accomplished, but I might just manage one more visit there this summer! 4 photos of Brown Hairstreak posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery, including one of egg-laying behaviour deep in blackthorn.

9 August 2007 - Summer Duke Alive & Well At Noar Hill!

During August, Noar Hill is used to becoming somewhat of a "Mecca" for butterfly observers hoping to see a Brown Hairstreak or two, but this year interest is even greater with the Brown Hairstreak season coinciding with the remarkable appearance of a small summer generation of Duke Of Burgundy. I met several members of the Hants & IOW branch of Butterfly Conservation there this afternoon, including several I had not met before including the branch webmaster, Robin Turner and his wife Pat.

Having managed to see a Brown Hairstreak shortly after arrival - a male nectaring on the hemp agrimony in the triangle (but alas moving off before I captured a digital image), I decided to turn my attention to the aristocracy - or to be more precise, the Duke Of Burgundy. I soon learned a male had made several appearances in one of the chalk pits close to the visitor display board during the morning. After a short lunchtime siesta (when he went AWOL) he duly reappeared, seemingly content to sit for much of the time perched with wings closed or partly closed. The presence of red spider mite on his left side confirms beyond reasonable doubt that he was the same individual seen mating on Tuesday by Pauline Richards. Maybe that explains why he seemed so contented with himself! He made several more appearances in the same pit during the afternoon, watched by a number of observers, including myself. As I sat on the grass at Noar Hill on a warm August day with a fresh Duke Of Burgundy perched a couple of feet away, I couldn't help thinking how unreal the situation was! 3 photos posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.



5 August 2007 - Silver-spotted Skippers Take To The Air At Beacon Hill (Warnford)

This summer is at last delivering a few days of hot sunny weather in Southern England at least. Indeed it is perfect weather for the emergence of Silver-spotted Skippers on their downland sites in Hampshire, if a little too hot for me to be clambering up and down the steep slopes searching for them! The compromise was easy – a late afternoon visit to Beacon Hill (Warnford) as the heat of the day subsided. Towards the bottom of the steep escarpment on the flower rich downland, I only found 2 Silver-spotted Skippers, but enough to make the journey worthwhile. Numbers will increase over the next days as their emergence gathers pace. There were also good

numbers of Chalkhill Blue (about 20) Common Blue (~12) with Brown Argus unusually competing with them in numbers. Meadow Browns were everywhere on the slope! 3 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

3 August 2007 - 23 Species Seen Today But Missed The Duke Of Burgundy!

This afternoon I visited two of the best butterfly sites in Hampshire – Noar Hill and Old Winchester Hill, clocking up between them 23 confirmed butterfly species on the wing. I was greeted at Noar Hill by the news that a second brood Duke of Burgundy had been seen in one of the chalk pits earlier in the afternoon (see posting to Hants & loW branch website) – a rare event indeed and brought on probably by the very warm April we enjoyed. I didn't manage to find it myself, however I did spot a second brood **Dingy Skipper** in the chalkpits – not quite so unusual but a good find nonetheless. The other best find of the afternoon was at Old Winchester Hill where second brood **Adonis Blue** have started to emerge at their original introduction site on the slope south of the hillfort. Only one fresh male seen, amongst masses of Chalkhill Blues. I did check the other Adonis site (bottom of car park slope) but none seen there today. Other highlights at Old Winchester Hill were singletons of Small Tortoiseshell, Clouded Yellow and Dark Green Fritillary. Notable absentees however during today's visits were Brown Hairstreak and Silver-Spotted Skipper. I should add however, that I paid a short visit to Noar Hill on Wednesday and met Peter Eeles there. Whilst we were chatting, what looked like a female Brown Hairstreak made its jerky flight into trees by the main gate to the reserve.

So whilst in my estimation, butterfly numbers for many species are below average this summer, there is still plenty to see and be prepared for some surprises. The species seen today at Noar Hill were as follows: Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Peacock, Silver-washed Fritillary, Comma, Speckled Wood, Ringlelet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White. Complementary additions at Old Winchester Hill were Chalkhill Blue (masses!), Small Heath (1), Clouded Yellow (1), Small Tortoiseshell (1) and Dark Green Fritillary (1) making 23 species in all. 5 photos posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery, including Adonis Blue and Dingy Skipper.

30 July 2007 - Small Blue Flitting Once Again At Paulsgrove Quarry

This lunchtime I made a return visit to the scrub area at the bottom of the Paulsgrove quarry face, hoping to see summer brood Small Blue. There were about 6 Small Blue flitting among the scrub, consistent with the smaller emergence of the summer brood. I had thought that the 2 months of generally wet weather would have put this season more or less back on track (after the very early emergence of many Spring species), however most of the Small Blue today were well past their best, suggesting the season is still running a week or so ahead of normal. Also seen in the area were 3 Common Blue and a Chalkhill Blue (bearing in mind this is not the main area for Chalkhills on Portsdown Hill). One photo of Small Blue, showing typical rather faded condition, posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

27 July 2007 - Summer Brood Wall Brown On The Wing In Hampshire

Following recent news on the Hants & loW Branch website that summer brood Wall Brown were on the wing at the Lymington-Keyhaven nature reserve, I paid a short visit there myself this afternoon, in blustery conditions as the skies were clouding over before light rain arrived. I could not match the numbers reported on the branch website on Tuesday but I was pleased to record 5 Wall Brown today, all males, along the lower level path in front of the lagoons (and mainly along the Pennington and Oxey lagoons which were as far as I got from Keyhaven). As usual, the Wall Brown proved a difficult species to photograph, but I did manage one passable picture, shown below and posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.



Also seen were many Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns, several Common Blues, Small Skippers and Small Heath. If anyone is planning a visit there, numbers of Wall Brown should be greater in a week or so with some females on the wing too – but try to choose calmer, sunnier day!

22 July 2007 - Poor Summer Weather Affecting Butterfly Numbers

I visited Botley Wood this afternoon - a wood which can be damp at the best of times, but I was not prepared for how wet it would be today, in "mid-summer". Areas of the path were so waterlogged that several detours though the woodland margin were necessary. My memories of the wood in high summer are very different - in late July the place should be positively humming with butterfly life, but today ticking over would be a more accurate description. That said, I did see most of the species I would have expected to see - Silver-washed Fritillary, Peacock, Brimstone, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small/Essex Skipper, Red Admiral and Comma, but in much lower numbers than usual for this time of year (half or less typically). A worn White Admiral also made a cameo appearance. Two absentees on today's visit were Marbled White (I have usually seen a few in this particular glade) and Purple Hairstreak. It's hardly surprising that weeks of unsettled weather are beginning to take their toll on our butterfly populations, with fewer on the wing than normal and those in marginal colonies being most at risk of local extinctions. 2 photos of a male and female Brimstone posted to 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

18 July 2007 - Quiet Afternoon At Noar Hill

After returning from a family visit to the North of England, a somewhat shorter journey seemed to be appropriate, especially in view of the still unpredictable weather. I had not been to Noar Hill for several weeks, not since the Duke of Burgundy season in fact, so it seemed a good choice for a short visit this afternoon. I must have arrived after quite a downpour, since a rivulet of water was running down the main path from the reserve, but the sun was shining when I arrived. On the reserve itself, things were generally fairly quiet, although there were a decent number of species on the wing - Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Small/Essex Skipper were most numerous, but Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Silver-washed Fritillary, Comma, Red Admiral, Peacock and Small White all put in an appearance. As the clouds were building again in preparation for possibly another downpour, I made my retreat but look forward to visiting again in a couple of weeks in search of Brown Hairstreak. By the way, during my visit up North, opportunities to visit sites for less common species (such as Large Heath) during clement weather didn't materialise, but I did manage a couple of decent photos of a Small Tortoiseshell near Hadrian's Wall. These plus two photos of a Gatekeeper taken today at Noar Hill have been posted to the 2007 Recent Photos Gallery.

12 July 2007 - Successful Return To The New Forest

Something very rare for this summer occurred again yesterday - it was a fine day! I took advantage of it to return to two areas of the New Forest which I had visited briefly last week, but this time had much more success. Returning to Hawkhill, during early afternoon, I saw 12 Dark Green Fritillaries in the open areas along the Worts

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Gutter, including several in areas I had not visited before. They were mainly feeding on thistles. Several Silver-washed Fritillaries were also seen including a pair engaged in their ritual courtship where the male makes cartwheels around the flying female.

Then it was on to Beaulieu Heath, and a full circuit of the pentagonal track around the old airfield, walking where possible along the margin of the heath, avoiding waterlogged sections and making short forays into interesting looking areas (you won't see much if you keep to the track!). Silver-studded blue were widely distributed, but generally in low density, however a few pockets with higher concentrations (even scores) were found, mainly where the heather was in full flower with gorse bushes around to provide shelter from the wind. Unfortunately many Silver-studded Blues are now looking a little tired although a few were in good condition. About 10 Grayling were also seen, all quite fresh, again quite widely distributed but also a couple of hotspots - one just south of the Hatchet Moor car park where there are areas of damp bare ground between the stands of heather. Dark Green Fritillary were also encountered, mainly as singletons with more on the western section of the heath. The area sheltered by taller bushes and some trees just outside the western apex of the pentagon was quite good for all three key species. So, whilst my whistle stop tour last week was overall quite productive, it just shows how easy it is to get a wrong impression from a quick visit in the late afternoon to a site.

2 photos posted to the 2007 Early Summer Gallery from today's visit - Dark Green Fritillary and Grayling. Also a photo taken in late June of the underside of a Silver-washed Fritillary in Whiteley Pastures.

7 July 2007 - Quick Tour Of Several Key Sites

Now that we are enjoying a respite (albeit maybe a short one) from weeks of unsettled weather, we can expect a surge of summer butterfly emergences. The improvement in the weather also provides an opportunity to see a few of the species which have been around for a couple of weeks but have been hard to find because of the weather. This presented me with a dilemma - do I go and spend a few hours in Bentley Wood or Alice Holt hoping for a Purple Emperor on the ground, or perhaps make do with shorter visits there and go and check-out a few other sites? The latter should offer opportunities to see more key species, such as Chalkhill Blue or Dark Green Fritillary and was therefore my preference. Hence, during the past two days, I worked my way round 5 locations in fits and starts, focussing on the way several key species are fairing after the weeks of inclement weather. Here is the whistle-stop outcome of my findings.

- Martin Down (6th July) - Purpose was mainly to see the Dark Green Fritillaries at one of their best sites in Hampshire. Thankfully they are doing well here with 12 seen in about half an hour on the flower rich downland to the west of Martin village, mostly males but also two females. Many of the males are fading but one in good condition provided both open wing and underside poses for the camera. 2 photos posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery.
- Bentley Wood (6 July) - A lunchtime wait in the car park (lunch break!) produced a brief Purple Emperor sighting in a large oak. Emperor activity, according to other observers during the mainly overcast and breezy morning had been low, however one male in less than perfect condition had been down in the car park at 7.30am! A walk down the switchback and then to the Barn produced about 20 Silver-washed Fritillaries and 2 White Admirals.
- New Forest (6 July) - After all the rain, I was wondering how the Silver studded Blue population would be holding up on the New Forest Heaths so I called in at two locations on Beaulieu Heath. Silver-studded Blues were found at both locations, but in much smaller numbers than I would have expected (a few, instead of scores). I also saw a fresh male Holly Blue on the heath near Crockford (photo posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery). Furthermore the heathland is, not unexpectedly, very waterlogged with large pools of standing water in many places. Although my visits were brief and included an excursion into the Hawkhill Inclosure, I did not see a single Dark Green Fritillary at any of the heathland locations or in Hawkhill. The heathland colonies tend to emerge a little later than the downland ones, and it is possible their emergence has been delayed due to the poor weather and waterlogged conditions.
- Straits Inclosure, Alice Holt Forest (7 July) - An early afternoon walk along the main ride in the Straits Inclosure could have provided another opportunity to see Purple Emperor activity high in the oaks, and even the chance of a low level encounter. However there was just too much else going on for this to preoccupy me. Silver-washed Fritillaries, making the most of the sunshine, were rarely out of sight along

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this lovely ride, one having the audacity to chase off a large patrolling dragon-fly! White Admirals skimming through the boughs with frequent diversions to feed on bramble, take minerals from the track or chase another White Admiral were also very prominent. The variety was enhanced by a few fresh Commas, Peacocks and Red Admirals. Incidentally, whilst White Admirals skim and glide as their normal flight pattern, they can also fly very fast as one Red Admiral found out as it was chased at high speed by a "White"! Photos of White Admiral and Peacock posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery. I also managed to record a video clip of White Admiral so will try to post this in the next few days.

- Magdalen Hill Down (7 July) - My final destination of the quick tour, was Magdalen Hill Down, with Chalkhill Blue being the main target. The walk through the extension, now ablaze with meadow flowers was pleasant enough, although butterflies there were mainly Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites. On the original reserve, Marbled Whites were again prominent but I didn't have to wait too long before spotting my first Chalkhill Blue of the season, and several more followed as I headed west along the lower slopes (7 males in all plus one female). I also saw 3 fresh Brown Argus among the rock rose at the bottom of the slope. 2 Photos of Chalkhill Blue posted to 2007 Early Summer Gallery.

All in all, a very enjoyable quick tour with generally positive indications that our local butterflies have not been affected too badly by the prolonged poor weather. One cause for concern is the waterlogged conditions on the New Forest Heaths which may be presenting, in the short term at least, problems for the Silver-studded Blue and Dark Green Fritillary populations there.

1 July 2007 - Early Grayling Seen At Browndown

I heard one of the BBC weathermen reminding us today that it was a new month, but alas the same old weather - rain and more rain! I was determined however, not let it spoil another weekend at a time of year which is normally considered the peak of the butterfly season. So as the main rain belt cleared our area this afternoon, I made the short trip to the Browndown Coastal Heath (Browndown Ranges) near Gosport. It's normally an early site for Grayling in Hampshire and so it proved today - after a few minutes searching, I was delighted to disturb my first Grayling of the season - a male. It would have been easy to lose it the blustery wind but my determination to follow paid off with a couple of photos. Just as well, since a further methodical search produced no others. Small Skippers and Meadow Browns were numerous in the more sheltered areas along the path at the rear of the Browndown site, and a few Small Coppers, Small Heaths and Marbled Whites were also seen. As a bonus, I called in to Whiteley Pastures on the return, just staying close to the entrance, and found a pair of mating Ringlets. So not a bad outcome at all! 2 Grayling photos plus the mating Ringlets posted to the 2007 Early Summer Gallery.