

Hampshire & South Wales Trip – June/July 2017

Part 1 – Hampshire

Having toyed with a few ideas of what to do with our remaining holidays this year I finally decided that we should focus on the Butterflies and Dragonflies we were yet to see. This would require another summer trip, so we crossed our fingers for better weather than we had last year in Scotland. Andy had bigged up South Wales to us so we were definitely going there for one of the weeks. I originally had plans to go to Mull for the first week after our day trip there last year but this idea went out the window when Wendy's Nephew decided to get married on the Saturday which should have been day 2 of our holiday. This meant we'd have to go away on the Sunday morning boat instead of the Friday evening and our first week would be cut short to just 5 days. I didn't want to trek all the way up to Mull for a measly 5 days so we needed to think of somewhere else. We'd been watching lots of Youtube videos from Butterfly Conservation Sussex and I got it into my head that we'd never seen Chalk Downlands and needed to. After a bit of researching the South Downs in Sussex seemed ideal but Wendy wasn't that keen. As she had no alternative I set about trying to find a cottage but at such short notice it was practically impossible to find somewhere to stay. In the end I had a choice of two which normally I wouldn't have chosen at all, which had all the hallmarks of a disaster so we went for the cheaper one to take the sting out of it. The cottage was on the western edge of the South Downs National Park and just inside Hampshire and although it was small and basic it looked like it'd do the job. It was equally difficult to find somewhere for our 2nd week in South Wales, so we really need to get things sorted earlier in future to give us more options before all the decent cottages are booked up.

With summer being peak season for the Steam Packet our Manx Wildlife Trust raffle prize of a boat journey for 2 passengers and a car was an absolute godsend and all we had to pay for was Lyca and a cabin :). During the run up to our trip I ordered various books to help me research where to go, as both places were completely new to us and I needed all the help I could get. Luckily as my mate Andy lives in Cardiff and works for Gwent Wildlife Trust we arranged to meet up at the weekend when he wasn't working. He knew where to take us to hopefully see the likes of High-brown Fritillary and Marbled White Butterflies as well as White-legged Damselfly to name but a few. I hadn't had time to do much research into where to go in Wales but I planned to do that during the evenings of our first week while we were in Hampshire. The last hurdle was trying to find somewhere to visit on the way down. The only time we've been down the west side of England is on the way to Cornwall and then we only stop overnight at a Travelodge. I didn't have a clue what to do but a few days before we were due to leave I managed to pull a rabbit out of the hat and found a place to look for Marsh Fritillary and also the rarest Butterfly in UK the Large Blue. It looked like it might be too late for the Fritillary and too early for the Large Blue but it was better than nothing and would also give Lyca a bit of a walk. Obviously our chances hung in the balance and would be totally reliant on the right weather conditions, which felt like a very tall order.

Wendy had started the packing on Thursday to allow for her being at work on Friday and the Wedding on Saturday, so she was off to a good start. On Saturday she got herself ready for the Wedding and quite confidently said that she'd pack her clothes when she got back. When I finally heard from her she was in no fit state to pack, was very lucky not to smash her head off the pavement and when she got home she went straight to bed. That could have been the end to our holiday before we'd even left!

Sunday 25th June

Wendy was rudely woken by her alarm at 6am and she felt terrible! She quickly realized that she still had to pack her clothes, so complete with hangover she flung a couple of items into the case and hoped for the best. Unbelievably she was ready in time and we left for the Sea Terminal at 7.52am and arrived 6minutes later to join the queue. It was a nice calm day, which was very lucky given Wendy's delicate state and we didn't have too long to wait until we boarded at 8.17am. There were **Herring Gulls** flying around and we could hear **Oystercatchers** kicking off about something but there was nothing in the harbour to start off our list. We made ourselves comfortable in the cabin and departed early at 8.39am, allowing Wendy and Lyca to get some more sleep.

After a bit of a doze Wendy was awake again by 10.30am by which point we'd both started to feel a bit peckish. She got up, had a look at the menu then rang the bell for room service, which was super quick as always. I'd ordered my usual chicken burger and chips but this time Wendy had ordered herself some chips, as she knew there wouldn't be enough of mine to satisfy her craving for carbs. I had a look out of the window to see if we could add any sea birds to our list and saw my 1st **Manx Shearwaters** of the year. Usually we'd have already seen tons up at the Point of Ayre in May but for some reason this year we hadn't seen any up there. Wendy had a look next and added **Gannet** and **Guillemot** but apart from that it was quite dead. When our food arrived her eyes came out on stalks when she saw her chip mountain PLUS a little pot of free beans. Ever hopeful, Lyca sat looking up at us longingly and this time it paid off when I dropped a chip off my plate and it landed on the floor in front of her. Obviously it lasted all of a nanosecond before it was gobbled up and she looked very impressed, having probably only ever eaten one other chip before that one. When we were suitably stuffed I took the tray out to the corridor to remove it from Lycas reach and we sat back to digest our strange breakfast. It was a very calm crossing fortunately and when we were approaching Heysham Wendy took a photo of Blackpool out of the cabin window.



Blackpool

Since we were getting close we thought we'd better see if Lyca needed a wee before we set off on our long drive. It was nice to be out in the fresh air finally and Lyca performed, so we were free to get going as soon as I drove off.



Nearly there

We went back to the cabin and gathered up our stuff and were docking at 11.50am. We could see **Great Black-backed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and a flock of **Feral Pigeons** from the cabin window. Annoyingly we were right at the back of the queue on the ferry and we disembarked next to last at 12.13pm.



And we're off

This was the first time I'd had to drive from Heysham in the daytime for about 6-7 years, so I was very interested to see what difference the new bypass made. Last time I'd done it Lancaster was a complete nightmare and almost laughable but this time however it was

perfect and even the bypass was quite quiet! We got onto the M6 about 40-50 minutes quicker than when we had to go through Lancaster and got stuck in the all the traffic. That was a great way to start the drive but I just had to hope the M6 and then M5 weren't going to be too bad with weekend traffic.

We were well on our way down south but had only added **Blackbird** by the time we reached Northwich and we couldn't help but snigger as we drove past "Dong Energy Plant" :P. Although it has an amusing name it's actually a brand new waste treatment facility that separates recyclable materials from household waste and generates green electricity at the same time. It's also the 1st full-scale bio plant in the world capable of handling household waste through enzymes, mechanical sorting and anaerobic digestion. Oooooooo, you learn something new every day :P. We finally started to see more birds when Wendy pointed to a group of **Swifts** zooming about followed by 2x **Buzzards**. Next up was **Carriion Crow**, some **Goldfinches** feeding on some roadside thistles and a **Kestrel** hovering above the verge. Further south we added **Wood Pigeon**, **Magpie**, **Swallow**, **Starling** and **Black-headed Gull** but at 1.40pm it'd started to rain :(As if that wasn't bad enough I spotted a sign for a lane closure near Wolverhampton and knowing our luck it was going to throw a big old spanner in the works. A **Mallard** flew over and it was only 16c, not the kind of temperatures we needed to be finding Butterflies and Dragonflies!

By the time we'd reached Birmingham we found ourselves caught up in congestion, probably to do with the lane closure. We were now crawling along like a snail on valium and looking out of the window wasn't proving very rewarding either. All we managed to see, apart from a huge line of traffic, was a dead Fox plus a dead Grey Squirrel.....how jolly! Eventually we'd cleared it and were in Worcestershire at 2.43pm where we saw a **Jackdaw**. It was 22.5c and so stuffy in the car, so I really wished my air con wasn't broken.....Urrghhhh! Wendy decided to eat her bap and crisps and a **Mistle Thrush** flew over the road ahead of us. We were relieved to finally hit Gloucestershire at 3.10pm, which was where we planned to stop for our 1st location of the trip. Nothing is ever that simple though and not only did my sat nav decide to have a senior moment and become totally confused but we were heading straight into some nasty looking black clouds....Eeek!

Luckily my sat nav finally composed itself and got us to Oakridge without too much trouble. The roads were narrow in this quaint and typically English Village and for some reason it was really busy with people milling around everywhere. We quickly discovered a sign saying, "Gardens open for charity", which explained the busyness but didn't giving us much hope that we'd find a parking space, especially when my research had said, "Do not park on the village green when visiting the reserve!" I drove right to the end of the road without any joy but we found the green, which despite the warnings had about 6 cars parked on it. With no other options available and definitely not wanting to leave without being to my 1st site I followed suit on the grounds of special circumstances and parked up on the grass at 3.45pm. I had to presume that the village must've allowed parking there whilst the open garden thing was on :).



When in Rome :P

When we got out of the car it was raining lightly and overcast, which was bad news but not to be deterred we set off to Strawberry Banks regardless, where we hoped to find ourselves a Marsh Fritillary or two. Things were starting to look a bit more hopeful when we spotted a couple of **Ringlet Butterflies** while negotiating the gates, which provided us with a bit of an obstacle course. Looking around we were very pleased to find our 1st lifer of the trip in the form of a **Marbled White Butterfly** and there wasn't just the 1 either we ended up finding four.



Marbled White

There were Ringlets everywhere, so with Butterflies on the wing, we kept our fingers crossed we'd find what we were looking for. The footpath lead into some trees and Wendy groaned when she saw that we had to climb up a hill. We were feeling pretty tired already

especially Wendy who was still paying for her indulgences the day before, so she wasn't too impressed. I reminded her that it was only a short walk and it'd definitely pay off if we found a Marsh Frit, so she carried on albeit lethargically. An elderly couple passed us on their way down, so they put her to shame and gave her a bit of a nudge to keep going, and then the sun peaked out to give us even more incentive. There were quite a lot of midgies about and we heard a noisy **Jay** calling from somewhere in the trees surrounding us. At the top of the hill we came out at Strawberry Banks itself just as the sun went in....Typical!



Strawberry Banks

Wandering around there were more Marbled Whites, which having never seen one before appeared to be common as muck. I stopped to try and get some shots of them, as they certainly didn't disappoint in our expectations.



Marbled White

We kept our eyes peeled for anything that fluttered and next up was a **Meadow Brown Butterfly**. It seemed crazy that, although common at home, they were outnumbered vastly by Marbled Whites! In the grass we noticed loads of weird webbing like a spiders web but we knew that it wasn't and thought it might've been made by Marsh Fritillary Caterpillars?



Weird web

When we got back to the woods we heard a **Chiffchaff** and then a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** but despite seeing more Marbled Whites than you could shake a stick at we hadn't managed to find any Fritillaries despite our best efforts. It was still 18c but it'd started to rain lightly again by the time we were back at the car at 5pm. There were still people wandering in and out of the gardens and standing around chatting in seriously posh accents :P. Although it was getting close to teatime we still had another place to visit, which fortunately was nearby.

At 5.14pm I parked up next to a gate at the entrance to Daneway Banks and the sun had come out again!



Daneway Banks

Daneway Banks is one of a handful of key sites lucky enough to have the UK's rarest Butterflies – the Large Blue. The Large Blue is globally endangered and is fully protected under UK law and along with the High Brown Fritillary is considered the UK's most threatened Butterfly! If we were ever going to see a Large Blue it was going to be there, so I was adamant I was going to give it my best shot (even though I was very worried we were too early). Wendy on the other hand was flagging and feeling worse for wear but as it was self-inflicted I had no sympathy! There was a guy standing at the gate pacing around, staring at us as we entered, at the time we thought nothing of it. It wasn't until later that we realized that he may have been keeping a close eye on the reserve due to an obsessive Butterfly collector weirdo having been arrested in 2015 for capturing and killing Large Blues there!

We checked the reserve board to try and work out where to go as I had no idea where we needed to look. The board didn't give any specifics but like Allt Muic in Scotland there were Butterfly posts about, indicating a good place to look from. With this info we set off across the field aiming for a loop path but with no idea how long the loop actually was.



Daneway Banks

We found a **Garden Carpet Moth** on the way and it was boiling with the sun beating down on us. Yet again there were loads of Marbled Whites and we'd already started to ignore them even though they'd been a lifer for us as little as an hour ago! We carried on and the walk climbed up but got us to a pond, which I'd seen on the reserve board. I'd hoped for a nice pond caked in Dragonflies but instead we found this.



Puddle

There was nothing on it, but to be fair it looked like it'd dried up a lot. As it'd taken us quite a while to reach the pond we decided to turn around and retrace our steps rather than complete the loop. It was a bit annoying that we hadn't seen a Large Blue but it was a bit of a long shot. I remembered from the map that there was a top path that went back to the car park but we couldn't find it so ended up on the lower one again.

We continued walking trying to spot the turn off to the higher path when I spotted what I thought was a Blue Butterfly fly across me. It looked quite dark though and not like any Blue I'd seen before so I went into an auto mental state. Hahaha :P. I quickly alerted Wendy by bumbling out "BLUE BLUE THERE THERE!" I didn't see where it had gone but traced the line it went on in a massive panic. It'd gone somewhere across the area towards some long grass, so I handed Lyca over to Wendy and went to investigate.



Needle in a haystack?

I walked its flight path and luckily it popped up again and I was sure it was a Large Blue but hoped with everything I had that it'd drop back down where I could get a proper view. All of a sudden it dropped down, so I had a good look through my bins. It was sat with its wings up but I couldn't quite believe what I was seeing and shouted over to Wendy, "**Large Blue!**" She looked bewildered as though I was making it up but I could see that it very obviously was and it was another lifer for us both. After Wendy had seen it I went with the camera to get a shot and some video of it, it's not every day you get the chance to photograph the UK's rarest Butterfly! It's just a shame it never opened its wings but you can't have everything :).



Large Blue

Annoyingly, while I was concentrating on the Butterfly I got bitten by a Horsefly and crossed my fingers that it didn't swell up. That was all I needed on day 1 of our holiday but Wendy informed me that she had some antihistamines in her bag of tricks....Phew! Wendy was getting bored by then and had started to notice the plants at her feet. She was rather taken by a small yellow flower and got me to get a shot of it to ID later but we failed miserably :P.



We heard a **Skylark** singing above us and a **Six-Spot Burnett Moth** fluttered past. We'd already decided that we were going to like it in Hampshire if what we'd seen so far was

anything to go by. When we got back to the car we still had a bit of time to kill, so we decided that we'd go and find a Pub and have a drink outside.

I knew there was a pub literally next to the reserve from the research I'd done called The Daneway.



Pit stop

This looked like a good bet, so I parked up and sat down on a bench outside with Lyca while Wendy went in to get the drinks in. I'd ordered a Diet Pepsi but she'd bought herself a ½ Shandy as a 'hair of the dog' in an attempt to make herself feel a bit better. Although it wasn't exactly what you'd describe as hardcore it seemed to do the trick and took the edge off the remainder of her hangover. While we sat in the sun we heard another GSW and couldn't help noticing the comings and goings of the people at the tables around us. There was a very posh family nearby who'd ordered food and when it arrived their youngest child (of only about 9 or 10) protested very loudly that there wasn't enough chips. The precocious little brat got what he wanted and the waitress took his plate away to get the chef to give him more.....Grrrrrrr! The food looked really good but it was one of the pubs where you ½ expected Hugh Fernley-Whittingstall to pop up to get all the local community involved in a road kill barbeque or something! It was really busy too, so I couldn't relax and wanted to get away as quickly as possible to get the last leg of the journey done to arrive at the cottage before Tesco did!

We headed off at 6.35pm by which point I was hungry, so Wendy gave me the bap and crisps I should've had for lunch but I had to stop eating when we got to Cirencester because my IBS had kicked off. We were in Wiltshire by 6.48pm and discovered that there were delays on the M4 at junctions 12-14, so knowing our luck we'd get stuck in them and miss our Tesco delivery :(Unbelievably we came off at junction 13 and saw no delays, so we breathed a sigh of relief and carried on. By 7.35pm it was 20c, the sun had come back out and the sky was bright blue. Handy.....not!. There were some baby **Rabbits** at the side of the road when we turned off at Buriton then a flock of **House Sparrows**. We laughed as we passed "Faggs" Farm and a **Wren** flew over the road. It was such a beautiful evening that we were shocked as to how dark it was under all the trees on the narrow and winding road

that lead to our HQ. It was like nighttime but we eventually saw the sign for New Barn Cottage and I drove into the entrance and parked up at 8.18pm.

It'd been a long day and we'd made it before Tesco with 40mins to spare.....Yey! It was in the grounds of a main house and I'd read on the instructions that the cottage had its own private entrance, so while Wendy got out to check our HQ out I drove back out into the road and found our entrance. Our 1st impressions of the cottage were that it was quite small but it was clean, minimalistic and looked like it'd be fine for the next few days, especially for the cheap price.



Basic

Upstairs we found that the shower had been built for just ½ a person and there wouldn't be much room for me to move in it but that was a minor problem. After I brought everything in Wendy set about unpacking all the stuff for the kitchen then went upstairs to organize our toiletries but chose to leave our clothes in the case as we weren't staying there for long enough to bother hanging everything up.

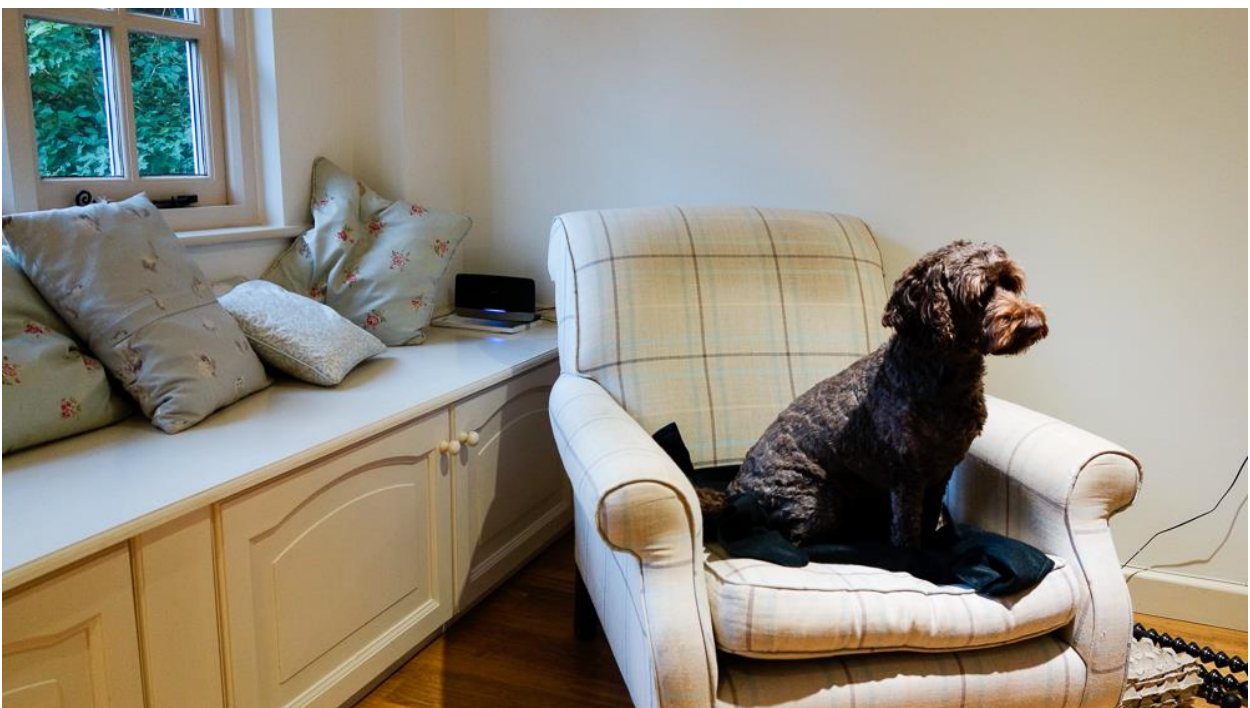


Upstairs

Tesco came very shortly after 8pm and after everything had been put away Wendy went off for a shower. Even she found it a bit of a squeeze, so I wasn't looking forward to my turn but despite the lack of room it was a great and quite powerful shower. Wendy was hungry again after that but it was too late eat anything else, so she settled down to finally relax and watch some TV. It was quite chilly in the cottage but it seemed a bit excessive to put the heating on. Lyca had to go out on a lead, as the garden wasn't dog proof but we're well used to that. I think we'd done quite well to stay up for as long as we did, considering, but by 10.45pm we were totally shattered and more than ready for bed.

Monday 26th June

It was 6.52am when we woke up and Lyca was totally hyper and obviously excited to explore her new surroundings.



Disappointingly it was overcast outside, which wasn't what we needed especially comparing it to the previous day. After Lyca had performed I reached for the gate and duly broke the latch, which didn't look as though it'd been opened for 50years.....Oooops!



Garden

I couldn't be bothered the night before so after I'd taken Lyca out I went back out to the car to bring the moth trap in from the car. While I was out there a **Hobby** zoomed over being chased by 3x Swallows. Nice! Up until then we didn't know if there was anyone in at the big house next door but I noticed that the car had moved since last night so we definitely had neighbours.....Boooooooooo. Back inside I had to reshuffle my plan for the day, as looking at the forecast it seemed as though this was going to be the only decent day of the week! The rest of the week was forecasting rain from what I could gather, which was really bad news :(There was torrential rain forecast on Tuesday, heavy rain on Wednesday, no sun on Thursday and we were leaving on Friday, so it was beginning to look as though this year's summer holiday was going to be another washout! I was trying to look at maps to see where we were going but at 0.9mb down the internet was so slow it was taking forever to load them up, which was frustrating to say the least :(I love the way cottages are advertised as having wifi but when you get there it's practically useless.....NOT! Looking out of the living room window we could see a **Robin**, a juvenile **Dunnock** and a **Blue Tit** in the garden but we didn't have time to sit around and started to get our stuff together.

While Wendy finished making the sarnies and packing the lunch bag I went upstairs to do my teeth and get the sun cream, so I didn't burn on the 1st day. I couldn't find it anywhere and went downstairs to ask Wendy who could've sworn she'd packed it and reckoned it'd be in the bathroom with all our other toiletries. She said she'd go for a look and just as she left the kitchen I heard her shriek and curse very loudly. It was quite dark in the hallway and there was a weird step at the bottom of the kitchen door, which was neither use nor ornament. It was only a matter of time before one of us ended up doing it and she'd just bashed her big toe on it....Ouch! She cursed very loudly and quite a lot after that but I'm sure she's not the 1st and won't be the last guest to do the same! What happened to health and safety eh? Speaking of which, I'd noticed that there didn't seem to be a smoke alarm in the building! After all that kafuffle and still not being able to find the sun cream we

reckoned we needed to get going. Wendy was pretty sure that there was some in the car anyway, which was lucky seeing as the sun had finally come out by the time we were leaving. Lyca was totally disinterested in her breakfast, so that had to come out with us for her to hopefully eat at lunchtime. There were 2x **Song Thrushes** outside on the lawn as we drove away at 8.59am.

Although it was a lovely sunny morning driving down the road under the trees you'd have been forgiven for thinking that it was the middle of the night! Through the darkness we spotted a **Grey Squirrel** foraging at the side of the road and heard a **Blackcap** singing in the forest. Our walk from the doorstep that I'd planned was in this forest, which was called Queen Elizabeth Country Park and it looked really nice but would be more suited to a day with worse conditions as there wasn't any specialties in the CP. I had other plans today though and we were off to look at some ponds where Brilliant Emerald Dragonflies would be on the wing as well one of the best wet bogs in the UK for Dragonflies and there being a slight chance of seeing Sand Lizards on the dry heath area, both be lifers for us. Andy had informed me of this place and said he was blown away with the amount of things to see and photograph. High praise from Andy indeed! There'd also been a Red-backed Shrike reported from the dry heath area, which is always a nice bird to see and highly unusual in the middle of the summer.

Amazingly as we were quite far north in the NW of the South Downs we were only about 30 mins away from Thursley in Surrey! On the drive northwards we went through a really long tunnel, which was very exciting for us manxies! :)



Tunnel

When we arrived at Thursley Common car park it was 9.34am and already looked busy with dog walkers. I'd read online though that all dogs must be on a lead there so it wouldn't be too tricky....or so I thought. Wendy found the sun cream in the dash, which I liberally applied while we hung back in the car park and waited for some dogs to go 1st then headed off when the coast was clear. There were signs up asking for dog owners to keep their dogs on leads which confirmed what I'd read online but it would have to be seen to be believed! We set off through the car park and onto the path where we met a woman with a dog on the lead. Further along and our suspicions were justified when a dog off the lead

came hurtling round the corner and freaked Lyca out.....Grrrrrrr! Just to make matters worse it was a black Lab, which apart from Border Collies, is her most hated of all dogs! Luckily I managed to skirt her around the other dog and we arrived at Moat Pond without anymore hitches.



Moat Pond

A small blue butterfly was the 1st thing we saw flying around at the side of the pond. We got a bit excited as we knew there were Silver studded blues in this area but once we got a view of its underwing we knew it was just a **Common Blue**.



Common Blue

Scanning the water Wendy spotted a Dragonfly zooming around and when the light caught it from a certain angle she noticed that it appeared to be green. Oooooooo :O! We scuttled up to the far corner, where I'd found out was the best place to look from and raised our bins for a better look at it. It was so fast and it took a moment to get our eye in but once we did it was obviously an Emerald of some sort, so I grabbed a very poor record shot to help me ID it! When I looked at it my heart sank when I realized that it wasn't what we'd hoped for and it was just a **Downy Emerald**.



Downy Emerald

We'd seen our 1st Downy last year in Scotland, so we couldn't sniff at it but even so we felt disappointed as I was pretty confident we'd get to see Brilliant Emerald there. Wendy then decided that she was bursting for a wee but there was no WC at Thursley, so her timing couldn't have been worse if she'd tried. I suggested she just went where she was, as it was relatively secluded but if we could see the people on the other side and they could obviously see us! We wandered into the trees in the hope of finding somewhere else more suitable but there were more paths and dog walkers behind them and it was too risky. This diversion was also stopping me from looking for Dragonflies while the sun was out, so in the end she ended up back where we'd started and deciding to just go for it and hope for the best. Unfortunately for her just after she'd squatted down I spotted some dog walkers coming along the path towards us, so she tried to hurry up. Obviously in such a situation things never go to plan, so she did the 1st thing that came into her head, grabbed Lyca and pretended to be fussing her, which looked more like she was searching for fleas or ticks or something....Hahahahaha! Anything had to be better than the reality, so she didn't care what it looked like. She then threw her a couple of fir cones for good measure and I think she even managed to get away with it....Phew! I was keeping a close eye on where we'd been watching the Downy from and all of a sudden something caught my eye in the water. When I realized it was a **Grass Snake** we legged it back over to see if we could get a closer look but it'd long gone by the time we got there, so Wendy didn't see it at all. There was a **Blue-tail Damselfly** and the Downy Emerald was still whizzing around but there didn't seem to be anything else.

We then tried to work out which way we needed to walk to get to 'The Boardwalk,' which is one of the best areas in the UK for Dragonflies. I could tell that to the right was the dry

heath where we wanted to go later so guessed that we needed to head left to find the wet bog.



Path to the dry heath

Heading that way we went through some trees and found a very nice **Redstart**, which we hadn't expected round there. We scanned the next pond and found an **Emperor Dragonfly** while we wondered what the bird calling constantly was.



Pond

When we found that the culprit was a male **Reed Bunting** we realized why we hadn't recognized its call. Sadly these birds have become harder and harder to see back at home and I can't remember when the last time we saw one was :(! The sun was beating down and I was boiling but that was what we needed, so I couldn't complain too much. Next up we found **Black Darter** and then we noticed absolutely loads of blue Skimmer type

Dragonflies that were flying so quickly it was hard to pin any one of them down. There were so many of them we didn't know where to look and we couldn't stay where we were either due to there being dogs off leads everywhere....Grrrrrrr! If only people followed the rules! We moved off quickly to avoid any dogs and walking past a ditch we finally got a decent view of one of the blue Dragonflies. They were **Keeled Skimmers**, which we'd only ever seen at Holt Lowes in Norfolk before.



Keeled Skimmer

Also along the ditch we spotted some tiny red Damselflies and stopped to have a proper look. We knew they had to be either large or small red and after getting a good look we reckoned **Small Red Damselfly** after double checking our Dragonfly ID app on the phone we were 100% sure they were Small Reds and a lifer! :)



Small Red Damselfly

Carrying on we had a **Four-spotted Chaser** and then found a small tributary with some photographers standing around the sides.



Four-spotted Chaser

This looked interesting, so we thought we'd go for a look in the hope that they were onto something good.



"What you got?"

There were **Common Emerald Damselflies** resting on practically every blade of grass in sight at the entrance and all the Common Damsels you'd expect but nothing leaped out at us as being different. It's terrible how rusty you become at ID'ing Dragonflies over the year,

especially as we only have a handful to get to grips with on the IOM. Wendy spotted some **Sundew** along the bank and there was so much of it that it was impossible not to trample it as we walked! I got fed up wondering if there was anything we should know about there and decided to ask the photographer on our way past. As we got closer we could hear the woman he was with saying, "There's a nice green one here" and "here's a blue one" so it was obvious that they weren't the experts I'd hoped they'd be! I asked them, "Have you had anything decent?" and "Do you get Scarce Chaser here?" anyway and wasn't surprised by his reply of, "I don't know I'm just taking photos of this nice green one here." Urrghhhh :\. Along this small tributary were tons more Keeled Skimmer and Emperor Dragonflies and Common Emerald and Common Blue Damselflies. I didn't know what to have a go at so decided to try and get a better Keeled Skimmer.



Keeled Skimmer

We carried on along the path and came to the next pool, which was just a stagnant looking water filled hole in the ground that looked as though it'd be dead.



Hmmmmmm?

The ground around it was so dry and dusty that there was no vegetation anywhere near it. We nearly didn't bother paying it much attention until we spotted a blue dragonfly flying around. Initially I just dismissed it as another Keeled Skimmer but Wendy had other ideas and was adamant that it was much more squat than the others and appeared a lot paler. I quickly noticed it was flying really oddly so had another look by which time there were 2 of them flying around. Wendy was convinced but I needed to be 100% sure before I got too excited, so I grabbed a record shot which we both mulled over on the back of the camera screen. In the end I had to agree and was very pleased to have finally caught up with **Broad-bodied Chaser** after years of them having evaded us and adding another lifer :).



Broad-bodied Chaser

Nearby I spotted some weird long bodied wasps on the ground and one dragged what looked like a caterpillar larvae into tiny holes in the dry ground!!! Wendy ID'd them later as **Sand Wasps**.



Sand Wasp

While I was trying to get some decent shots of the Dragonflies and Wasps a bloke with 3 Cocker Spaniels off their leads came round the corner heading towards us. I had to pick Lyca up because the dogs were running at full belt towards us, which really freaked her out. I carried her round to the back of the pool as far away as possible while Wendy stayed put. The 3 dogs launched themselves right into the filthy pool, came out soaking and covered in thick black mud and then proceeded to run over to Wendy and jump all over her! The bloke made no attempt to call his dogs back and seemed to think the entire event was hilarious, so we were both livid! He walked past us without an apology and laughing so Wendy shook her head at him and said something like, "Errrr yeah thanks!" in a suitably annoyed tone.....Grrrrrr! It wasn't just the fact that Wendy was now caked in mud or his total lack of dog control but the fact that dogs were meant to be on leads not running into and churning up pools where there are breeding Dragonflies! Ignorant ****! On the way to the next pool it was so hot that Wendy dried out in no time at all and the black mud luckily just brushed off her clothes, so it could've been worse. Still, it would be nice if you could just nut horrible people with no consequences :).

This pool was meant to be the best one as it was the one with the famous boardwalk that we had been looking for and there was certainly no shortage of Damsel/Dragonflies. We've never been anywhere with so many on the wing at one time or with so many different species before, so it was pretty impressive.



The Boardwalk

We heard the squealing of a **Water Rail** and then we started to wonder why we hadn't seen any Hobbies with so much food around for them? There was a photographer dressed from head to toe in camo, sitting on the edge of the boardwalk. He must've been boiling in all his gear but he was obviously there for a reason and must've known his stuff. I reckoned that if there was anyone around that would know if there was any Scarce Chasers about it'd be him, so I asked him as we passed. Unbelievably he said he didn't know, so I started to wonder if anyone there actually knew what they were taking photos of at all! It wasn't until later on when we were talking about the lack of Hobbies that it clicked that he was probably a bird photographer waiting for the moment when a Hobby flew in and took a Dragonfly from the pond.....Doh! Although there were loads of Dragonflies, none of them were new for the day, so we carried on. We met another bloke and asked him about Scarce Chasers but he told us he was just into birds, so didn't know either. He'd seen a Hobby earlier, so they were around somewhere, just not while we were there. There were some small blue Damselflies, which I reckoned were **Azure Damselflies**. We heard a **Whitethroat** singing from the bushes, a flock of **Linnets** flew in and we added **Large White** to our Butterfly list. As we walked along the boardwalk we flushed a **Common Lizard** that was sunning itself ahead and also a **Brown China-mark Moth**, which as usual landed upside down underneath a leaf so I couldn't get a decent photo! There was nothing else of note until we were back to the car park where there was the nice male Redstart flitting about in the trees.

It was 12.25pm when we got into the car and Lyca must've been feeling the heat as she was very thirsty but turned her nose up at her breakfast again.....Urrghhh! The car was showing that the temperature was 30c!!! Ridiculous! We ate our lunch, added **Great Tit** and make the sad decision not to go to the heath to look for the Red-backed Shrike, all dry heath specialties and reptiles because although it was a great place, dogs off leads had ruined it for us and due to the poor forecast we knew we had to try and make the afternoon count. We left at 12.57pm and drove past a lake with a **Coot** on it to try our luck at finding the Holy Grail of Butterflies the Purple Emperor.

I'd bookmarked a place called Alice Holt Forest, which looked really good for Butterflies and luckily it was really close to Thursley! It was a place that had featured in several

youtube videos about Butterflies and was also in my little Butterfly Conservations Reserves book. I parked the car in Bentley Station car park at 1.21pm and went over to buy a £2 ticket from a machine.



Bentley Station

This sounded easy enough but I got a bit confused as I was expecting a normal parking ticket machine but was met with a massive screened multiple option thing. I stood there for ages trying to work out what option I needed, realizing this machine also did train tickets. Eventually after far too long for someone who is tech minded I finally defeated the machine and got myself a car park ticket. Get in! With the ticket bought and displayed in the car we set off through the station and over the railway lines where Wendy decided she needed a wee! Thinking there'd be a WC in the station building she went to investigate but the building was locked, so she settled for taking a photo instead.



Bentley Station

Wandering up the path it had a real Norfolk feel to it and reminded us of Holt Lowes. Straight away we saw a large bright orange Butterfly flying at speed along the hedgerow, which was joined by another and landed on some brambles at the back of the hedge. We peered over for a look and confirmed that they were **Silver-washed Fritillaries**. Shortly after we added **Red Admiral** and **Comma** as well as adding **Nuthatch** to our bird list, which I picked up on call....Skillz :P. We carried on walking up the grassy path looking up at the tree tops in the hope of catching a glimpse of a Purple Emperor but without any foul smelling bait around like at Theberton Woods in Suffolk it seemed like a tall order.



Alice Holt

Trying to see one in a natural situation is a different kettle of fish, in fact a stinking kettle of fish would've been very useful come to think of it...Hahahaha! Wendy all of a sudden let out the kind of wind that would put an Elephant to shame! The sound almost shook the forest, so when a very respectable looking bloke with a notepad popped out from a side path a split second later we walked on a bit then out of ear shot nearly died of laughter. Of course the bloke would've heard it, as would anyone else within a 10mile radius but worst of all was that Wendy started saying, "PETER THAT WAS DISGUSTING" :O ! After we'd calmed down our attentions turned to something fluttering around in the tree above us. It landed on a branch and when we looked at it we saw that it was a Demoiselle. On closer inspection we were really pleased to find that it was our 1st ever **Beautiful Demoiselle**, a male to boot and they really do live up to their name...Wow! It was a complete surprise, I had no idea they were in this area so that added to the joy.



Beautiful Demoiselle

With another lifer under our belts we continued up the path seeing a very tatty **White Admiral** and more Marbled Whites until we realized that we were a bit lost. I checked the map on my phone and got us back on track and we added **Speckled Wood** before we started to head back. We walked through an amazing field, which was full of wild flowers and grasses and more Butterflies than you could shake a stick at.



Wow!

It was a real eye opener for us to see just what could be achieved with the right management and conservation methods. It seemed that this little section was another cracking reserve managed by Butterfly Conservation called Bentley Station Meadow Reserve.



Info board

Every time we visit one of their reserves it's amazing, which makes me more happy that we're members of Butterfly Conservation, as they seem to be doing a great job. We spotted a **Bullfinch** in the trees and had more Beautiful Demoiselles, a funky looking Grasshopper, an Emperor Dragonfly but disappointingly no Purple Emperors :(The trees were huge, so looking up at them constantly had been hard going on our necks and it was so hot I was feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

Back at the car it was 3.11pm and luckily I'd parked in the shade, so it wasn't too much like a furnace inside it. We really needed to make the most of this day, as it was the only one with sun forecast. I decided to make the effort and drive to a place that was a bit out of our way to give us a chance of seeing something I'd wanted to see since getting interested in Dragonflies. I was quietly confident as well as I knew they'd been seen there the day before!! We drove past a roadside pond we'd driven past before, which we weirdly recognized because of its uncanny resemblance to the one near Burnham Overy in Norfolk. We saw 2x juvenile **Grey Wagtails** and my car was still reading 23.5c. It was refusing to cool down but on the other hand we still needed the sun out. We hadn't come across any shops on our travels so when we spotted a Spa I screeched to a halt outside it and nearly drove into it in desperation! Wendy bailed in to get us some more drinks and pick up some stuff we'd forgotten to order while she had the chance. I was so hot I decided to unzip the legs off my trousers, which horrified Wendy who doesn't consider it a good look at all. We drove through Haslemere, which was really busy and it was obvious that school had just finished. Unlike at home where the kids all flock into the nearest shop to stuff themselves full of sweets the kids of Haslemere all flocked to The Milk Bar! Very wholesome! We passed the Sussex Bat Group building and reckoned they have a much better time than the Manx version. There was a dead Fox in the road at Fittleworth and we finally parked up outside The Swan pub at 4.19pm.



The Swan

From the instructions I had, we just needed to walk down the road a few hundred yards then turn off at the bridge.

We walked past the pub and down the side of a busy road until we got to the bridge over the river and luckily the weather was still holding up and it was full sunshine! Just what we needed :). After going through a gate we followed a footpath, which ran alongside the river through fields. Looking down at the reeds there were **Banded Demoiselles** everywhere as well as **Sand Martins** zooming around feeding over the water. I couldn't resist trying to get some shots of the Demoiselles while Lyca and Wendy started to get impatient.



Banded Demoiselle

Wendy was concerned that it was nearly teatime and Lyca still hadn't eaten her breakfast and had been out all day, so she wanted to get a move on. It was looking as though we'd have to go to The Swan for tea seeing as it'd be late when we got back to HQ and Wendy still had to make hers from scratch. We just had to hope that there was something for us both on the menu and that it wasn't too poncy for me! We carried on up the river seeing a **Grey Heron** and hearing a **Moorhen** until we found a load of cows in the field up ahead.....Uh oh!



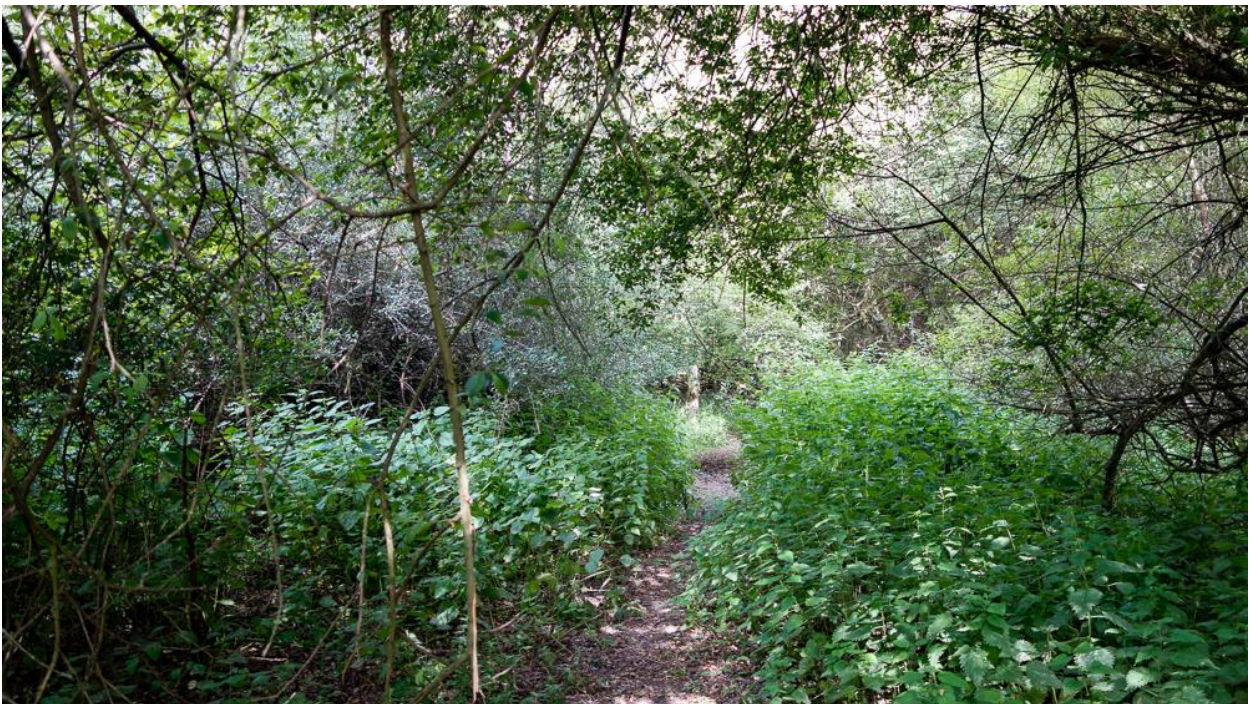
Fittleworth

I kept Lyca close to me on a very short lead and she didn't seem that bothered by them but Wendy was a different matter.....Hahahaha! She doesn't like walking through cows at all especially when they all start coming towards you for a nosey, so she was using me as a human shield/sacrifice and telling me to hurry up. They were fine though and we passed them without a problem, so Wendy was very relieved. She then decided she needed a wee and shrieked when a Horsefly landed on her bum! She managed to get it off before it bit her, so she'd been lucky there :P! Oh the joys of the great outdoors! At the end of the field we came to a boardwalk into some trees and according to my calculations that was the section we needed to get to.



Really?

We ventured in but it was so overgrown with brambles and nettles that I had to leave my camera and go back to pick Lyca up and carry her through with Wendy protesting big time behind me. If she thought she'd had it tough I then had to repeat the process to go back to get my camera and the fact that I had shorts on meant my legs were getting stung to bits by nettles, so the whole thing was quite unpleasant...Grrrrr! We thought we'd cleared the worst of it and it'd be plain sailing from then on but when we turned a corner we were faced with a wall of nettles about 7ft high.



That's not the worst bit!

That was the final straw for Wendy and she refused point blank to go any further and reckoned that we'd gone wrong somewhere along line anyway. By this point I was starting to get angry as there was no way that anyone in their right mind had been going there to see my target species of Common Clubtail Dragonfly. It's debatable that anyone into

Dragonflies is in their right mind though, so I felt very reluctant to give up as we had come this far but eventually I had to admit defeat and we turned back. I had to make 2 trips again with my camera and Lyca, so I was not in a good mood. I scanned the river and checked the report again on my phone. The entry didn't make a lot of sense, but after looking at it and now the river area in front of us I suddenly realized the area in question was only about 200 yards from the bridge! Arrghhhh! We'd walked over a mile from the bridge by then! What a goof up. I then started to get paranoid that we hadn't been checking the river in that section properly as I'd had it in my head we were way off the right area.....Nooooo! :(.

On the way back Wendy spotted a small Warbler skulking in the bushes but I wasn't interested, I needed to find the spot where the Clubtails were! If I didn't find them now then we'd never see them, as the weather was against us for the rest of the week.....Arrghhhh! I had a quick look for Wendy's Warbler, which was hanging out with a juvenile female Blackcap. Eventually it came out into the open revealing itself as a **Garden Warbler**, so I could get back onto the trail of the Clubtails. Annoyingly on the way back the weather had started to break and there was a lot of cloud cover :(A **Cormorant** flew over and we saw a **Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly**, more Emeralds and **Large Red Damselflies** but there was no sign of any Clubtails :(I was pretty sure we found the exact spot and could see that the habitat was perfect but there wasn't even any Banded Demoiselles out with the sun having gone in :(Totally depressed, knowing that our one and only chance had gone (Clubtails are only found down south) we trudged back.



Fittleworth Bridge

It was 5.50pm when we got back to the car and Lyca still refused to eat her breakfast! There was a **Spotted Flycatcher** in one of the trees and a few people sitting outside the pub with a dog. It was a Black Lab, Lycas most hated of all dogs, so we didn't know what we were going to do next. If the pub wasn't dog friendly we'd have to sit outside but if there were dogs running around the beer garden then it'd be stressful with Lyca. While we were wondering we noticed a woman walking over towards us staring at us. She came right up to the window and bent over to ask where the reg of my car was from. I told her it was the Isle of Man and apparently they'd all been wondering and had to find out. Wendy ran across the road to ask if the pub was dog friendly, which it was, so came back to let me

know. We managed to get Lyca past the Lab down the side entrance rather than the front with only a growl or 2 and into the pub where we found out that they didn't serve food until 6.30pm.....Nooooooooo! We had no choice but to get a drink and sit down to wait for ½ hour, which felt like ages. This gave us plenty of time to mull over the menu, although mine didn't need any consideration being the only thing I could have. Wendy had to ask a few questions before she knew what to have and eventually the clock struck 6.30pm and she went up to the bar to order. I'd ordered BBQ chicken and chips (without salad or veg obviously) and she ordered the quinoa, spring greens and goats cheese salad off the starter menu (of course she did).....sorted :). Luckily service was very quick and the food was very nice, although Wendy's was absolutely huge and by no means a starter, so she couldn't finish it!

We were both suitably stuffed when we got back to the car at 7.07pm and it was still 21.5c! It'd been a long 1st day in Hampshire and the joke was that we'd spent most of our time in Sussex where we'd wanted to stay in the 1st place! Shame we couldn't find anywhere to stay there but luckily no sites we wanted to visit were too far away from the HQ we had. When we were driving through Hindehead Wendy was looking at the shop fronts when she spotted one for "Sussex Conservatives and Office to Jeremy Hunt." Booooooooooooo! I have to admit that I considered turning the car and smashing straight through the window in the hope I could squish that little turd flat! We passed a huge Castle in Easebourne and noticed a tractor spraying chemicals all over the huge sterile lawns :(I don't think we're alone in thinking that a few weeds in a garden full of insects and birds is preferable to something you'd imagine from the book Silent Spring by Rachel Carson! Then again we were in a Conservative area, so what more would you expect? Further on we heard a **Yellowhammer** singing from the hedgerow and a hot air balloon floated over the rolling hills, which was a pretty cool sight on such a gorgeous and still summer evening.

We finally arrived back at HQ at 7.54pm and as soon as we put Lycas bowl down she wolfed down her breakfast! I decided that she should have her tea too, which Wendy disagreed with for fear of her exploding :P. I poured her tea into her bowl and Lyca stood staring at Wendy wagging her tail and wanting her Dentastick.....Typical! Wendy put some broccoli in her bowl and Lyca scoffed the lot and trotted off to eat her Dantastick with her tail held high. That dog can't half eat.....when she wants to! Wendy went off for a shower and then came downstairs to inform me that I was next :(That shower has to be the smallest I've ever been in and I could hardly move in there! After that I started to go through all my photos. We went outside to put the Moth trap out and had a go with the Bat detector. It was nice to hear **Tawny Owls** calling in the background. One of the Bats was definitely **Common Pipistrelle** but there was another at a much lower frequency but we had no idea what it was.....Doh! We were quite excited to see what kind of Moths we could trap in Hampshire but it was quite depressing to think that this would be our one and only chance while we were there :(We'd done 18,000 steps during the day and by 10.42pm we were tired so we packed up and went to bed.

Tuesday 27th June

It was 6.30am when we woke up, or was it when we were woken up by Lyca? It was overcast and quite chilly outside when we went out to see what we had in the Moth trap. The 1st thing I noticed was that the Perspex was all buckled and I'd never seen anything like it before. It must've been something quite heavy so my conclusion was that one of the cats that seemed to live in the main house must have jumped on it to try and get the moths!! :(Our local Cats are a real nuisance at home when we put the trap out at home and they sit there waiting for moths to come in before catching them and eating them :O! Anyone would think they were starving but no, they're just greedy.....Grrrrrr! When we peered

inside we were very pleased to see that we definitely had a lifer or two and the most obvious one was a couple of huge Privet Hawk-moths up at the top of the trap.



Ooooooooo

List as follows (* = lifers):

Privet Hawk-moth x2 *
Elephant Hawk-moth x2
Pyrausta Purpuralis x1
Clouded border x5
Buff Tip x2
Light Emerald x1
Coronet x2 *
Peppered Moth x1
Single-dotted Wave x1
Riband Wave x1
Heart and Dart x2
Heart and Club x1
Mottled Beauty x2
Willow Beauty x1
Pretty Chalk Carpet x1 *
Purple Bar x1
Beautiful Carpet x1
Flame Shoulder x1
Clay Triple-lines x3 *
Buff Arches x1
Buff Ermine x1
Northern Rustic x1 *
Kent Black Arches x1 *
Common White Wave x1
Common Wainscott x1
Bramble shoot moth x1 *
Phycitodes binaevella x1 *

Rustic x2
M7 x1

Total = 42x moths (x29 sp)



Elephant Hawk-moth



Privet Hawk-moth

It'd been a decent haul and we ended up with 8x lifers out of that lot but we couldn't help but wonder what else we'd caught that the Cats had eaten! Amazingly and totally against the forecast the sun came out so knowing that it couldn't last we had to get out pretty sharpish if we wanted to do anything before the rain came in. I had to think on my feet and

decided on a place nearby so we could at least see some proper Chalk Downland in some sunshine.

By the time we'd had breakfast and had everything packed up and ready to go it was 9.35am. We decided against making lunch because we weren't going far away and the weather wasn't set to be good for long enough, so we could come back to HQ for it. Wendy grabbed a few shots of the cottage while the sun was out and it looked at its best before we headed out.



HQ

Driving through the dark under the trees we narrowly missed a young Grey Squirrel at the side of the road. They certainly have a death wish in those parts! It was only 18c but we hoped that was because it was still early and a Yellowhammer flew over the road ahead of us. We saw a **Pied Wagtail** sitting on top of a barn at a farm and could hear a lot of Skylarks singing above us. My plan was to visit Old Winchester Hill NNR in Hampshire, which is an Iron Age Hill Fort set in lovely Chalk Downland. We were really keen to see the rolling chalk hills of the South Downs as it was habitat we'd never seen before and was also great for the specialist Butterflies such as Chalk Hill Blue, Small Blue and there'd been some Adonis Blues released there too.

When we arrived it was 10.05am and unexpectedly sunny, so we both had to put sun cream on before heading out. When we got out onto the reserve we saw the impressive hill fort in the distance.



Old Winchester Hill

The 1st section of the walk was down a really steep hill through fields and after that was an equally steep climb up the other side to the fort. We heard a **Goldcrest** calling and Yellowhammers singing and realized that after struggling for Yellowhammers in Norfolk and Scotland they weren't in such short supply in the South Downs. Going down the hill we spotted some **Small Heath** Butterflies and heard a **Corn Bunting**, which is a sound we hadn't heard for years. Wendy had by then started to notice that we were kicking up loads of small brown Moths and we stopped to check them out. We were quite surprised to see that they were **Pyrausta Despicata**, which along with *Purparalis* in the trap earlier we were used to seeing up at Ballaghennie, which is a different habitat entirely! We weren't used to seeing *Despicata* in such great numbers either, with just the odd few being found when we go looking for *Sanguinalis* in the Isle of Man. The path skirted alongside one hill whilst looking down over the valley.



Old Winchester Hill

At the bottom the path then went through an area of trees, which we found out later are called 'hangers' in The Downs.



Hanger

I thought there might be loads of things in this wood but it was very quiet. The floor was so green with so much vegetation growing there compared to back at home. When we came out of the woods we were faced with a hideously steep hill, which even Lyca made look like harder work than usual. The photo just doesn't show how steep it was though.



Killer hill

We weren't sorry when we got to the top but the views around us were stunning.



Nice

The path was relatively flat after that and weaved along the side of the hill and up to the hill fort itself. By the time we got up there we were well and truly pooped and the heat didn't help matters either! We stood taking in the scenery and it was every bit as nice as we'd imagined, so we were really pleased we'd chosen it as our summer holiday destination.



Rolling Hills

As we started walking along the path around the top of the fort we spotted **Small Skipper** and **Dark Green Fritillary** Butterflies and a **Buff Footman** Moth. There was a woman coming towards us with some kind of flat-faced dog who gave Lyca a run for her money in the grumpy stakes. It got up on its back legs and started to growl at her and its owner was very apologetic. We told her not to worry and that Lyca has the same issue but it was nice to see that it's not just her that does it. Wendy was in total awe of the views and tried to phone her Mum to tell her about it but her phone was out of credit, so she had to settle for

taking loads of photos to remember it by. I was just in awe of the Hill Fort, the path went right round what was the perimeter wall and it was massive.



Perimeter wall path

Inside the perimeter it was absolutely caked in a carpet wildflowers and with it a mass of Butterflies and other insects. When we turned a corner a **Green Woodpecker** flew in from some trees and landed in the long grass. It'd obviously found itself an Ant's nest and didn't budge while we walked past and left it far behind. There were Yellowhammers all over the place and with Butterflies everywhere I reckoned I needed to get some video of Marbled Whites while I had the chance. This was a great idea but in reality none of them had the decency to actually land for me!

When we got to the gate to head back we came across a group of people who we're pretty sure were some kind of Butterfly Group on an organized walk. We heard a **Willow Warbler** and were chased by a Horsefly, which is always annoying. We took a different route back to the car, which went across the top and avoided any more hills on the way. In an overgrown area with a sub-station in it there was a bloke in a boiler suit and safety glasses strimming back all the overgrown plants. We reckoned it was a very svelte Father Christmas doing his summer job before he built up his reserves again in time for all that travelling he does in December :P.



Father Christmas doing his summer job

Back at the car it was 12pm and the 1st thing Wendy did was try and top up her mobile. Unfortunately the credit card details she used were of the card she'd left at home, so she couldn't do it....Doh! We'd failed to see any of the Blue Butterflies we'd hoped for and I started to wonder if we were just a tiny bit too late for them. Next up we had to find a shop, so Wendy could buy some air time for her phone, which we knew was going to be easier said than done. I drove back to HQ and we kept our eyes peeled but there was nothing until we got to a small village called West Meon and spotted the Village Shop.....Woo Hoo! I parked up at the side of the narrow road and Wendy squeezed out of her door trying not to hit it with the wall. Luckily there was a tiny Post Office out in the back of the shop, so she was able to get her voucher. The shop was more like a Deli, so she had a look around and bought some pressies to take back but didn't overdo it, as she thought there'd be other Delis on our travels. When she was walking back to the car we heard a **Greenfinch** flying over but when she tried to top her phone up there was no reception.....Grrrrrrrr! West Meon reminded us of Stiffkey or Weybourne in Norfolk with its narrow roads and high walled gardens and was nearly as much of a nightmare to drive through. After we'd left Wendy watched the bars on her phone and when she got a reception she quickly topped up before the signal was gone again.....so annoying! I took an A road back to HQ thinking it'd be quicker or easier than on the single-track roads. This was another great idea in theory but I found myself stuck in a huge jam and had to turn back anyway. Back on the single track roads something caught our eye in the road and it was a tiny **Shrew**, which stopped dead in the middle of the road. If it stayed there it was dead meat, so I jumped out and ushered it across to the other side. With the Shrew safely in the hedge I was free to carry on but Wendy had lost the signal again and still hadn't been able to phone her Mum.

After all that palaver it was 1.05pm when we got back to HQ and later than we'd expected! We made our lunch and ate it quickly because we didn't know how long we had before the rain set in. I reckoned we had enough time to go to another nearby place though and Iping and Steadham Common was perfect. We had the chance of Dartford Warbler, Woodlark, Tree Pipit and Reptiles, so it was worth a shot. It was still sunny and warm by the time we left again at 1.54pm and we saw our 1st **Collard Doves** of the trip driving through Buriton and went through a charming sounding place called Dumpford :P!

I parked up at Iping and Steadham Common car park at 2.15pm and there was a large group of people standing around. They looked like another organized group and most of them were staring over a fence into an overgrown area, so we wondered what was there. We heard one of them telling everyone that, "It must be a Common" so we reckon they had a Lizard, as there were info boards about Lizards just next to the path.

We set off to explore Iping Common 1st, as I reckoned it was the best of the 2 and the sky had started to turn a bit grey. Not long after we'd left some idiot with 2 Border Collies appeared from round a corner, looked straight at us and then decided to let them both off their leads! Obviously they came charging straight towards Lyca, who freaked out big time even though I'd tried to lead her away from them. Although the dogs were just being friendly poor Lyca is really unhappy around Border Collies (as well as black labs) for some bizarre reason. You'd think that anyone with ½ a brain would've waited until they'd gone past us before letting them off? After he'd gone we carried on along the path hoping that there'd be no more incidents now that Lyca was already on edge.



Iping Common

We heard a call and then scanned around until we found the culprit, a **Tree Pipit** at the top of a tree. Next we heard something that we'll never forget after one of numerous meetings with John at Kelling Heath. It was a **Dartford Warbler** so we stopped and had a look around to see if we could spot it. It was lying very low and we noticed the lack of Stonechats that would've given us a clue as to its whereabouts had they been around. Wendy went off to follow its calls down a side track through some Gorse to see if she could find it but it only lead to thicker Gorse that she couldn't get through. Peering over the top of it she could see a nice clearing, which looked like a great place for a Dartford Warbler. While she was off doing that I heard another call and then realized that I had a **Corn Bunting** sitting in a tree just next to me :O! This place was great! I showed it to Wendy and we watched it until we started to feel some very fine spots of rain starting.....Uh oh! :(.

Thinking we'd better get a move on we scuttled off to see what else we could find before the weather totally cracked up. All we could hear was the sound of Yellowhammers, which is exactly what it should be like in such a place. Even Kelling Heath in Norfolk where we could always guarantee a few Yellowhammers seems to have gone very quiet over the

years, which is a sad state of affairs. A small brown Butterfly flitted across the path, so we tried to follow it but it was too fast for us and we lost it.

I looked up at the sky to see if it was worth our while carrying on and following The Serpent Trail. Although it was still rather overcast it was still warm and the rain seemed to have stopped for the time being so we decided to go for it, it was a nice walk if nothing else. We were glad we did when a Dartford Warbler with its long tail trailing behind it flew across the path ahead of us.....Cool :). Wendy spotted another small Butterfly and this time we could tell that it was a **Common Blue**, so the brown one from earlier must've been a female. Although there were Silver-studded Blue Butterflies in the area we were sure these were just Commons unfortunately. She then saw a couple birds landing on the path ahead and when we looked our eyes nearly popped out of our heads when we saw that they were 2x **Woodlarks**! Again we used to see them at Kelling Heath but haven't seen any for a few years now. This was too good an opportunity to miss and I handed Lyca over to Wendy and slowly approached the birds with my camera at the ready. The birds were confiding and I was just getting close enough to consider getting a shot and also contemplating capturing some video as I had my little Gorillapod with me when a woman on a Horse with a Black Lab trotting alongside her came round the corner towards me....Noooooooo! I had to turn back and get Lyca off Wendy and pick her up as I knew she'd be edgy from earlier. Fortunately the Lab was very well behaved and stayed next to the woman paying no attention to Lyca...Phew! Obviously the Woodlarks flew off as soon as they saw her coming and although we stuck around waiting for them to return they didn't....Booooooooo :(I was gutted, as this was easily the best chance I'd ever had at getting a Woodlark shot :(Reluctantly we left and further down the path there was a Yellowhammer sitting in a Gorse bush totally unfazed by us. Wendy took a point and click shot just to show how close it let us get and we could hear another Dartford Warbler calling from somewhere too.



Point and click Yellowhammer

All of a sudden another dog off the lead was coming towards us, so I'd had enough by then and ran off with Lyca to get her out of the way. Wendy followed behind us down a hill where the ground was so dry and covered in dried up Gorse where we reckoned the Adder area was. Obviously we didn't see any! The heath path then carried on round and climbed back up towards the car park and the whole area looked fantastic.



Heath path

When we got back to the car park I reckoned we had just enough time to go across the road to have a quick look at Steadham Common, which adjoined Iping Common in one long belt west to east. Our 1st thought were that it looked brilliant for Nightjar, then we saw a notice for a Nightjar walk from 8.30-10.30pm on 30th June, the day we left. You could just imagine hearing them churring around you as the sun went down. We wished we could be bothered to make the effort to go out at night to hear it again but we're always too tired! Wendy spotted a bird sitting on top of a conifer but as usual it was too far away to ID it but we suspect it was a Crossbill but we'll never know for sure. This side of the long common belt seemed to have more big trees than the other side but there also seemed to be much less wildlife activity.



Steadham Common

The group of people we'd seen in the car park earlier were on their way back and heading our way with a dog off the lead, so I ushered Lyca into the trees at the side of the path and we waited for them to go past. By then the rain had returned and was getting heavier and there wasn't much to see either, so we turned around and headed back. It was throwing it down on the way back and we were pleased to get back to the car at 3.53pm. I'd made the right call to do Iping Common 1st as it was by far the best of them. It was still 19c despite the rain and the group were still hanging around the car park, now in their waterproofs. Wendy remembered that we needed washing powder so we could wash our clothes, so I had to go on another shop hunt....Urrghhhhh! As luck would have it we found one and they had what she was after. I turned off at Ryefields only to see a female **Roe Deer** and her fawn running over the road. They went straight into the cover of a crop field (Rye by any chance? :P) and apart from the tips of the adults ears they'd totally disappeared.

We were home early at 4.24pm but it gave Wendy the opportunity to cook her veggie concoction so she finally had some food. I wasn't in the mood for anything that I had in the cupboards and wondered if there was a takeaway nearby that would deliver. There was a menu for an Indian in Petersfield, which was the nearest town to us, in the pile of leaflets on the side, which was recommended in the visitor's info file but Wendy pointed out that there was no mobile signal to order it...Doh! I had a brainstorm and looked on Just Eat, but decided to give Dominoes, also in Petersfield, a go and put in my order online to get round the lack of mobile reception. After I'd done it I started to worry that they didn't deliver to the address as it was so out of the way or that they wouldn't be able to find it....Arrghhhh! If they couldn't there was no way of contacting me to ask for directions or anything....Uh oh! I had to hope that the directions I'd given made sense and that it wasn't too far out of their delivery range. I watched the order being processed and when it got to being out for delivery I started to sweat. Unbelievably and very quickly after I'd ordered we heard a car outside and it was the Dominoes car...Yey! The driver was very friendly and really impressed by my directions apparently.....Skillz :P. Wendy sat down to her bowl of veggie, beany, lentilly mess (which she said wasn't as nice as usual due to her having burned it slightly at the bottom of the pan) while I tucked into my Pizza feast....Om nom nom :). The rain was still pouring down outside and Lyca was very tired and slept for most of the evening. Wendy put some washing on, had a shower but it was so cold in the house that we had to put the heating on for a bit! Before releasing the remaining moths from the morning I grabbed some photos. Especially one of the Kent Black arches as they are classed as Nationally Scarce B so I wanted to be 100% sure of that one. Annoyingly it escaped in the kitchen as I tried to get a photo so only got one of it sitting on a bottle of water!



Kent Black Arches

The whereabouts of the sun cream was bugging Wendy, as she was convinced she'd packed it. She went on a hunt and couldn't find it in any of the toiletry bags in the bathroom, so she was baffled. She finally resorted to opening the suitcase in desperation and low and behold there it was....Doh! I felt really weird all evening and reckoned I had sun stroke, which made Wendy very annoyed and she told me not to be so stupid. It'd been a much more eventful day than we thought it'd be and we'd done 16,833 steps. That wasn't as many as the day before but even so by 9.50pm we were all more than ready for bed.

Wednesday 28th June

Lyca must've been either very tired or feeling kind and let us sleep until 8.20am! After going to bed before 10pm we reckoned we must've needed a good sleep. We knew there wasn't any point jumping out of bed early as the forecast was for rain all day but it was going to be better on Thursday although not sunny :(We got up leisurely and spent the morning drinking tea, (slowly!) amending the Tesco order for Wales, checking weather forecasts and looking longingly out of the window. We just wished the rain would stop and that the sun would come out so we could go out and explore the amazing places we wanted to :(While Wendy was upstairs she looked out of the window and saw a Spotted fly in the bush, so she shouted down to me. Spotted fly is a nice garden tick especially on a boring and rainy day. Wendy found a toastie maker in the cupboard but it was filthy, so she pushed the boat out and set about cleaning it up. When it was suitably scrubbed she made toasties for lunch, which was a nice treat considering we'd be living on sarnies for the best part of 2 weeks. They were nice but Wendy got paranoid that we'd get ill after we'd eaten them....Hahahaha! The rain had petered off to fine drizzle after we'd finished and the weather radar was saying that it'd be dry where I decided we might as well try, so we headed out at 12.34pm. With the sky being so dark it was worse than ever driving down the road under the trees! It had gained itself the name 'Suicidal Wildlife Road' by then and I didn't enjoy driving it at all for fear of hitting something. The route to Ebernoe Common was on similar roads and was quite far to the East (nearly an hour away), so I didn't get a break from it and had to stay alert for the duration. I didn't squash anything but the sky

started to turn black just before we arrived, which wasn't ideal. I was concentrating on finding where I needed to turn off and also had to navigate an old guy on a mobility scooter up ahead. When I went past him it turned out to be an old guy on a ride on lawnmower! Of course! What the.....? My sat nav decided to turn us off at Ebernoe Church, so I parked up outside scratching my head as to why.



Ebernoe Church

When I checked my map it turned out to be spot on, so we got our stuff together and we set off in the rain at 1.22pm. We walked through some dense Woods and although it was very dark, damp and spooky in there it was at least sheltered from the rain.



Ebernoe Common

This wood was meant to have breeding Lesser-spotted Woodpecker and Nightingale but although we didn't think we stood a chance you never know unless you try! We came

across some brick works and then were surprised to see a Silver-washed Fritillary flying about in the dismal conditions....Nutter!. With each step we felt like we were walking into the set of a horror film and it didn't feel like somewhere you'd want to be on your own on a dark evening :/. Wendy went off to get a photo and was surprised to find loads of baby **Common Frogs** hopping around in the wet grass and had to be careful where she stood.



Brick works

A Tit flock was working its way through the trees, so we had a quick check of it. It was mainly **Long-tailed Tits** with a juvenile **Coal Tit** tagging along behind but then I heard a rapid drumming deeper in the trees. It definitely sounded different to the drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker but Wendy was having none of it. I got the Collins bird book app out and played the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming and it sounded identical! ARHGGHGHGH! We needed to see the bird so we stayed there for ages but the drumming got further away then stopped completely. Typical! As we didn't see it we couldn't count it as a lifer and I have a horrible feeling that it was the closest we'll ever get to seeing a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker :[.

As we walked up a hill we came across a pond and another Brown China-mark Moth and **Fanfoot Moth**.



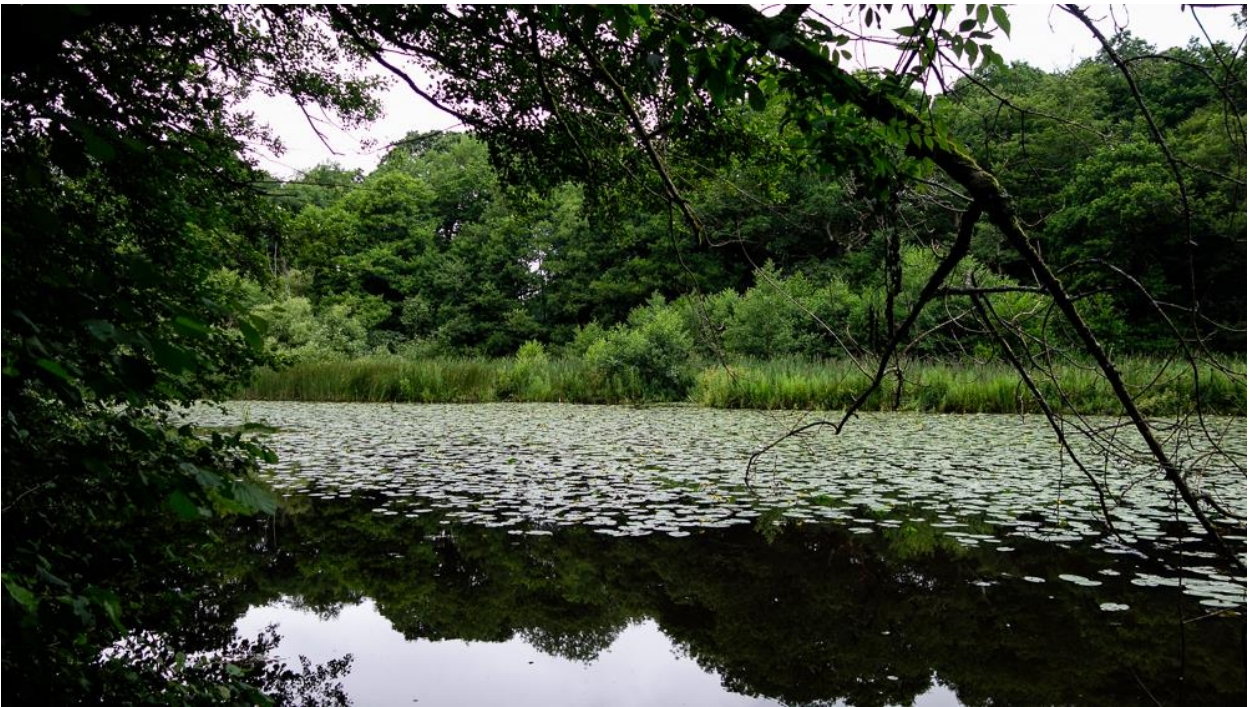
Pond

I wished we could have seen this area in the sun, I could just imagine the insect life! This section of the path was really muddy and I had to try and skirt Lyca around the worst bits. We found a baby **Common Toad** on the path, so all the rain was certainly bringing all the amphibians out! At the top of the path we turned right and the trees were full of birds, so we started to look around. There was a **Treecreeper** as well as Nuthatch, Blackcap and more Tits. The next part of the walk was through a really old Oak Woodland, which looked great but despite our efforts we didn't find anything remotely interesting. After going through a gate we found ourselves in an open meadow and walking along the path through the long grass we were surrounded by Meadow Brown Butterflies and Grass Moths. I wasn't 100% sure this was the right way but thought we might as well continue as we had nothing else to do! :).



Meadow

Up until then we hadn't seen many Meadow Browns and it'd mainly been Marbled Whites! At the end of the meadow we went back into the trees and found Furness Pond, which was meant to be good for Dragonflies.



Furness Pond

We stopped and had a look but there was nothing flying around at all, not even a midgie! Flipping weather! We turned around and caught a glimpse of something whizzing by and kept an eye out for it. When it came back round we could see it was a **Southern Hawker** but for some reason it wasn't over the pond where you'd expect it to be but was preferring to hawk around the run off area on the other side of the bridge....Weird!



Whatever

I tried to get some pics of it but it just wouldn't land and when it did it was either in an inaccessible place or behind a load of leaves....Grrrrr! I gave up in the end and we carried on up the hill and back to the Church car park.

By then it was only 3.15pm and we had no idea what we were going to do next, if anything! I spotted an interpretation board for the reserve so wandered over for a look.



Info board

It certainly looked like it had been there for a while, but I liked how it had Nightingale and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on the picture. More interestingly was the Nightlife paragraph where it said that 14 of the 18 British Bat species were found there and it's one of the best sites in the whole of the UK for Bats :O. I had no idea about that but that's an amazing amount for one place.

We needed the sun to be out for it to be worth our while visiting anywhere else or it'd just be a waste of time. I let Lyca into the car and gave her paws a wipe down with some baby wipes we keep in the dash. We were aware of a disease called Alabama Rot that affects dogs and has no known cure yet. They don't even know what causes it but it seems to be contracted after walking in muddy areas. Call us paranoid but it can be fatal, so we'd rather be safe than sorry and Wendy had seen that there were known cases in the area. A very posh woman came out of the Church and hopped onto a bicycle that'd been propped up against the wall and peddled off. We'd heard the Church Bells ringing probably 15mins ago, so it looked as though she'd been the 3pm Bell ringer!

After we left Wendy wanted to phone her Mum before going home so when she had a signal I swung the car into a driveway while they had a chat. There wasn't much point going anywhere else so we decided to head for home. We passed some **Greylags** on a pond near Easebourne and then hit loads of traffic. Going through (more like crawling through) Midhurst we saw a sign for something that made us laugh. Neither of us have ever heard of a 'Stoolball Club' and we had no idea what it was but all we can say is that it sounds a bit smelly :P! On the opposite side of the road we noticed 6x McLaren supercars and an old 1930s contraption drive past, which I realized must've been heading down to the Goodwood Festival of Speed, which was on at the weekend. We passed Dumpford again

and wondered what its history was to have gained such an unappealing name. When we turned off the main road we were back on slow and narrow winding roads again. Wendy spotted a field full of **Red Deer** and could only think that it was actually a Deer Farm :(. (We found out later it was called Maplehurst Farm in Horsham).

We got back to HQ early again at 4.43pm and Wendy went straight to the kitchen to unpack our stuff. Lyca started to hiccup frantically and then looked as though she was going to puke, so I panicked and grabbed her to see what was up. Wendy came running out to see what all the commotion was by which point Lyca was looking at me like I was mad and then ran off to try and find a rug to roll on. It's a ritual of hers that whenever she gets home she goes straight to the rug in the living room and has a good old roll around it while making stupid noises. Unfortunately for her there wasn't a rug in the cottage which left her not knowing what to do with herself when she got back :P. I don't know what was wrong with her but it wasn't Alabama Rot and she certainly seemed OK after her initial outburst! Wendy put her dinner down for her and she scoffed the lot and trotted off to devour her Dentastick. Wendy couldn't face another bowl of burnt casserole, so I looked at Just Eat to see if the Indian would deliver to us. I was gutted to find that we were just over the 3mile cut off point, so we had to bin the idea. I rustled up some Pasta while Wendy struggled her way through hers looking very uninspired. After tea we both went for showers then got bored, as there was nothing on TV and we had hideously slow wifi, so couldn't even do anything on our devices! The wind was picking up outside and we just hoped it'd die down before the morning. I wanted to watch 24hours in A&E but Wendy wasn't having any of, saying that it was depressing, so I had to settle on watching Comedy Central, which wasted the rest of the evening. We'd only done 8,500 steps which came as no surprise given the bad weather in the morning. Even so we were still tired enough to hit the sack at 10.15pm!

Thursday 29th June

It was 7.41am when we all woke up and peering through the curtains I could see that it was overcast again, which wasn't what I wanted for my Birthday.....Grrrrrr! Last year I'd spent my Birthday in Ardnamurchan and the weather had been awful, so it looked as though I was in for more of the same :(. After I'd let Lyca out for a wee Wendy handed me the Birthday cards she'd hidden in the suitcase for me, which I duly opened and she put on display on top of the cupboard. I'd already had my presents before coming away, which worked a treat because they were all things I'd brought away with me :). I wasn't really feeling in the Birthday spirit and got really annoyed by the slow wifi and then Wendy playing with her hair constantly. I hate that! She wasn't in the mood and told me to shut up and said I was getting old and more cantankerous! My plan for the day was to visit Burton and Chingford Ponds, which were also meant to have Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but also Scarce Chaser dragonfly. Lyca wouldn't eat her breakfast, so Wendy resorted to hand feeding it to her just to get it eaten and her bowl washed before we went out. When we left at 10.30am my heart sank when I saw that it was only 15c! On the way we drove past field after field of blue and Wendy wanted me to stop so she could get a photo. She'd never seen anything like it before but was reliably informed by Andy that it was Flax.

We arrived at the car park to Burton and Chingford Ponds at 11.13am and Wendy noticed a small Warbler flitting about in the Bracken on the bank in front of us. We waited for it to show itself and added **Reed Warbler** to our list. We crossed over the road and went through a gate to Burton Pond (lake!) and had a scan while listening to the sound of Reed Warblers all around us.



Burton Pond

There was a **Great-crested Grebe** out in the water but not much else and surprisingly we still hadn't seen a Little Grebe yet. I found a drowning Common Blue Damselfly just out from the little jetty, so I ran off and found a long branch, fished it out and then put it on a nearby rowing boat that was tied up to dry out. While I tended to my damsel in distress Wendy noticed that the GCG had a nest in the middle of the pond. There were literally Reed Warblers everywhere and we wandered over to a platform and took in the rather pleasant view.



Burton Pond

Scanning the water we found more Damselflies sitting on the lilies and noticed that they had red eyes, so I needed to get a record shot. We'd already seen Red-eyed in Norfolk, or was that Small Red-eyed? Try as we might we couldn't remember and we had no way finding out either because there was no way the wife at HQ would let me load up my

website to check back at my pictures! Whatever, we were really hoping that these were the type of Red-eyed that we hadn't seen yet and that we'd just bagged ourselves another lifer. Even though they were quite a way off I managed to get a good enough record shot to confirm it as Red-eyed Damselfly. Although we still didn't know if that was a lifer or not.



Red-eyed Damselfly

Next we wandered over to a weir then had to walk up the road to find an entrance to the footpath into the Woods. According to the book this was a lovely loop walk all the way round Burton pond then across the dam between Burton and Chingford ponds then round the other side and back again. We found the gate in the end much further down than the map said, after thinking that we'd missed it or were going the wrong way entirely. The 1st thing we heard was a Woodpecker drumming from deep in the woods but this was definitely a Great Spotted. Wendy stopped when she heard a song she recognized and sure enough we found a family of Woodlarks, which was great :). Next she found a bright yellow Grasshopper, which jumped into the grass before I could get a pic. We found ourselves going down a hill through a heathland area, which was really sandy and I hadn't expected that sort of habitat on the walk at all.



Heathland area

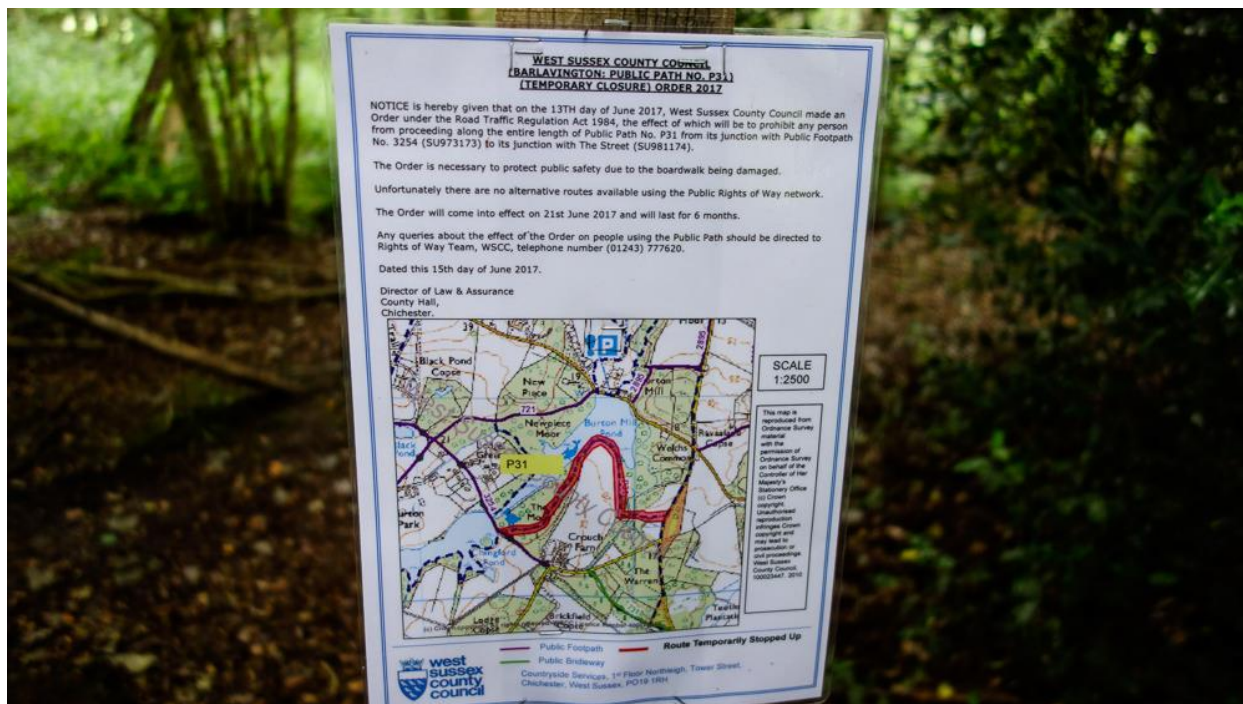
It looked similar to heaths in Norfolk that used to be Coastal millions of years ago so we wondered if this was the same sort of thing. A Dragonfly whizzed past us and Wendy caught a brief glimpse of blue, so when it landed we were keen to find out what it was especially considering that our target species was a bit further on. We tried to creep up on it but it must've sensed us coming and flew right off and landed in the heather to our right :(I decided to go in and try and re-find it but I had no joy and lost it completely. Nooooo!! So near and yet so far, although looking back I don't think it was the right habitat to find a Scarce Chaser but you can't help but get carried away sometimes.

At the end of the path was a gate into more woods, which we followed until we found a small pool, which again looked great for insects if the sun was out!



Pool

Carrying on we ended up coming out onto a road, which wasn't right, so we'd managed to get lost somewhere along the line.....Oooops! We retraced our steps and discovered that the footpath we needed was closed....Noooooooo! Apparently it was too broken down and dangerous to walk on, so it was awaiting repair :(.



Noooooooo!

You can see from the map above how the path in red would have gone right round the pond but I now had to find another route to get to Chingford Pond, not that we reckoned there'd be anything flying. After consulting my phone map we turned around again and headed back up the muddy footpath. We basically had to go to the start of the red path, out onto a road and go all the way round to a farm on the single-track road. Handy.....not! All of a sudden Lyca jumped and limped on one of her back paws, so Wendy quickly crouched down and lifted her paw up. She instantly found a thorn in it and removed it as quickly as possible. The thorn had gone into her pad quite far, so no wonder she jumped! As soon as it had gone Lyca jumped up at Wendy wagging her tail and covered her trousers in mud.....Bahahahahaha! We left the footpath and came out onto a narrow, single-track road that climbed up a hill. Eventually we got to the farm and negotiated a farm track thick with cow poo so we couldn't complain too much when we saw that the footpath ahead of us was really overgrown. We came out into the open and walked across a path, which was lined by the nicest fencing we'd ever seen.



Nice fencing :P

It's not that we go around rating fences or anything but this was unlike any we'd seen before and it looked really nice.....for a fence :P. Eventually we saw a huge pond ahead of us which was Chingford Pond....Phew!



Chingford Pond

Wendy could smell a familiar smell and looked down to find there was mint growing at edge of the pond near us.



Water Mint

Even in these conditions there were Common Darters flying around and landing on the fence but no sign of any Scarce Chasers despite it supposedly being the exact spot for them. We didn't know if that was because of the bad conditions or what so we scanned the water instead and finally found a **Little Grebe**...Yey! With nothing about we didn't hang around and carried on up the footpath, which took us out onto a Green surrounded by some very posh huge country houses in some kind of select looking community. It was really odd as the road was quite far off so they were all up the same long driveway. Weird.



Very elite

We could only imagine the types of people who lived there, so we didn't fancy it much nor would we want to upset the applecart! One of them was for sale but the 'community' probably already had someone suitable approved and ready to move in. I'd seen on my

map app that there was another pond nearby so we went for a look. Annoyingly you couldn't view it because the nettles were so high you'd need a stepladder to see anything.



There's a pond behind that lot somewhere!

Having exhausted the area we walked back to Burton Pond where I checked to see how my rescue Damselfly was. It'd gone, so I was pleased that I'd helped it but when I looked up at Wendy I noticed she was wearing her 'Shocked' face. Eh? She was pointing at something behind me so I turned my head to see a Reed Warbler out in the open right next to me :O! Obviously it flew as soon as I moved but I couldn't help but wonder what kind of shot I could've got if only she'd told me. We'd given up on Lesser Spotted Woodpecker by then after realizing just how hard it must be to spot one and the only Woodpecker action we'd had was hearing one drumming twice and a Green calling.....Bah! There was a **Tufted Duck** out on the pond, which wasn't inspiring but new for the trip nevertheless.

Back at the car it was 1.31pm and time for lunch but we had to shut the windows when we realized that we were surrounded by wasps, flies and midgies! We ate our lunch in relative peace watching all the insects desperately flying at the windows. We'd done 8,700 steps, which was better than the day before already and we hadn't finished yet. When we left we'd realized by then that there were no public toilets anywhere. It'd started to go very dark and was only 15c but we had somewhere else we needed to visit before we gave up. We needed some sun for our visit to Amberley for our last chance for Scarce Chaser and a remote chance of Common Clubtail, but we weren't holding any hopes.

As we approached we drove alongside a sheer rock face at the foot of a hill, which was the backdrop of a Railway Line.



Amberley

Looking out of her window Wendy glimpsed a white bird flying over the field below the rocky face and announced, "Little Egret!" I nearly split my sides when I saw that it was actually a **Barn Owl**.....Doh! Her excuse was that her brain was still set on Manx mode and a white bird certainly doesn't mean Barn Owl at home. Yeah, she'll never live that one down :P.

I parked up in Amberley Station car park at 2.08pm and Wendy picked up our bag of rubbish to dispose of when we went past a bin. It was a busy car park and a relatively big station (for Manxies), so Wendy found her bin and then took a couple pics.



Amberley Station

It also looked like there was some sort of Heritage Centre there but we didn't have time to pay it much attention. We walked down the hill and then had to cross a busy road right on

a corner, which wasn't very pleasant but we finally found the riverside footpath we were looking for. The fields next to the river were full of long grasses and flowers and there were Teasel growing along the river, so it looked great for Wildlife.



River Arun

Wendy commented how weird it was that during all our river walks so far we hadn't heard a single Sedgie. She had a point, we hadn't, even though the habitat had been perfect for them. Looking ahead of us we could see that there was rain incoming, which was exactly what we didn't want and I felt pretty sad that we wouldn't see the area in sunshine :(. Not long after Wendy's comment our ears pricked up when we heard our 1st **Sedge Warbler** of the trip. Looking behind us we could see the station and the cliff face, which looked good for Peregrines.



Looking back at Amberley

We walked down the river towards a bridge and a large bird caught my eye and I called, "Marsh Harrier!" then quickly changed it to, "**Red Kite!**" Oooops! Wendy tried to use it in an attempt to recover herself from her Little Egret incident but it was no match for that absolute corker by any stretch of the imagination! Again, all we could hear was the lovely sound of Reed Warblers and we just wished we had them at home. We'd had the path all to ourselves up until this point but now we could see a line of runners coming over the bridge and heading our way. One by one they ran past us puffing and panting as they went and luckily Lyca didn't get too excited and try to jump on any of them. Further down the river, from what we could see of it being miles away from the path, it looked perfect for Kingfisher, which we were also surprised to have not seen yet. We scanned the banks as far as we could see but there were no birds, just loads of invasive Himalayan Balsam :(When we got to the bridge we wandered up there but the view was pretty rubbish and the water in the river was dirty, not nice and clear, so we weren't impressed.



Bridge

We carried on until we came to a field of cows, which Wendy said she wasn't going through this time as they had calves and we all over the path. I reluctantly agreed as I am aware Cows can get quite defensive around calves and Lyca certainly wouldn't help!



Eeeek!

We turned back but instead of retracing our steps I reckoned we should go back to the bridge and over it to walk on the Bury side of the river, as it looked like the path was closer to the water. We'd seen no Dragonflies and even the Butterflies weren't on the wing and the sky was beginning to look very threatening indeed. We were pleased to find 2x **Peregrines**, which we watched flying around for a while until they vanished, surely they must live on that cliff by the train station? Eventually the rain started and it was quite heavy, so we trudged along feeling deflated. We'd been lucky it'd held off for this long but it was our last day to explore Sussex and it looked like it was going to be pointless.

All of a sudden the rain stopped and the sun came out again, so it was all eyes on the river. There was no shortage of Banded Demoiselles, so the Clubtails had to be around somewhere surely, but where and why weren't they flying? Were we too late in the season or something? With the sun out again it was very pleasant and the sound of Yellowhammers and Reed Warblers filled the air. The Demoiselles were being chased by Meadow Brown Butterflies and the whole place had come to life again. We were going to miss this part of the world but I was looking forward to seeing what South Wales had to offer. Further down the river there was a woman climbing down the bank and we wondered what on earth she was doing. Was it something to do with Clubtails? After she'd gone we peered down there but could see nothing unusual at all, apart from more Demoiselles.



They've got to here somewhere?

We wandered through a gate until we were walking up on a bank and through some houses next to the river in Bury. A friendly bloke out doing some gardening said, "Hello" as we passed and it looked like the same sort of set up as at Fettleworth Bridge. We came up to a bench, which had a path behind it that seemed to head off into the quaint little village.



Chill time

We sat on a bench for a while next to the river until heading back and even Lyca jumped up and sat taking it all in with Wendy.



Stop the clock

We couldn't sit there all day, although I think Wendy was having one of her moments and would've been happy to stay forever! On our way back we found an Azure Damselfly on the path but we'd failed yet again to find any Clubtails and that'd been our last hope. When we got back to the car park we went to check out the info board about 'Amberley Museum and Heritage Centre,' which looked quite popular considering the amount of cars parked up and people milling around. We didn't go there but it looked huge and seemed to be the 'Beamish' of the South.

Back at the car it was 4.18pm and my toe was killing me, so I took my shoe and sock off to discover that I had a blister on it from it rubbing on my bunion.....Ouch! I wanted something to put around it in an attempt to cushion it but there was nothing in the car, so I had to just leave it. We left at 4.23pm and I drove down the road to Amberley Village, which had an RSPB reserve in it, which seemed a shame not to visit while we were in the area. It was a very picturesque village with Tudor style cottages, thatched roofs and traditional English country gardens.



Amberley Village

The only downside was that the road was very narrow and the cars parked at the side made it hard to negotiate, so finding a parking space looked like it was going to be fun....Not!

Luckily, at 4.28pm, I found a park pretty easily and we all wandered over the road and found the path that lead down to RSPB Amberley Wildbrooks. There was a very aggressive Dalmation down there that was snarling and barking at us, so we were quite put off. Fortunately its owner came out and brought it into the garden and shut the gate, so we were free to go past although it'd made Lyca a bit edgy. The path through the reserve consisted of rock hard and uneven chalky type soil, which wasn't easy to walk on at all.



RSPB Amberley Wildbrooks

Going through the puddles was like walking through very wet clay and our boots were covered in white mud, like cement, in no time. Just before going through a gate we found a **Hornet** on a fence, so scuttled past it as quickly as we could and came out onto a grassy track through the middle of some overgrown fields with a ditch running down the left hand side.



Ditch

It was pretty warm again, so we kept an eye on the ditch for anything that flew. We found a **Meadow Pipit** sitting on a fence post then a Dragonfly flew along the ditch. I wanted to have a look at it but there was a woman with a dog coming up behind us, so I had to take Lyca off the path to let them past. By the time they'd gone so had the Dragonfly, which wasn't a surprise. I kicked up a Moth from the path and we re-found it further along hiding in the long grass on the path. Wendy bent down and said that she reckoned it was a **Black-neck Moth**, which was definitely not one I was familiar with and made me wonder how on earth she knew!



Black-neck

Just to prove herself right she looked it up on the Moth app on her phone and sure enough she was spot on. But how? Apparently someone had put a photo of one on Manx Moths Facebook page, so she'd recognized it from that....Ha! Nice lifer though! We'd started to feel pretty tired by the time we were nearly at the end of the path and with nothing about we headed back. What an odd RSPB reserve that was. Maybe someone gave them the fields in their will or something? We needed to be back at HQ early to pack all our stuff up before leaving in the morning and seeing as it was my Birthday we wanted to get tea out somewhere.

Back at the car it was already 5.32pm, so we reckoned we'd have to find a pub somewhere en-route as we were so far east of our HQ it would take at least an hour to get home. No wonder we were tired, we'd done 21,090 steps during the day and we still had loads to do before we could sit down and relax too! Not long after we'd set off at 5.37pm we started to notice the roads getting busier and busier and quite a lot of sports cars about. I started to think, "Hmmm I really hope Goodwood isn't in this neck of the woods." Then rounding a corner there was a 'road closed' sign ahead of us. Hmmm. "Maybe its just road works?" I thought. I followed the diversion signs and then hit another road closed sign. What the? At some lights I quickly checked my sat nav and was horrified to see that we were smack in line for Goodwood and this was the weekend of the Festival of Speed!!!



Nooooooooo!

We knew it was going to be busy but I hoped there'd be some back road we could find somewhere to get back on track, even though it'd be slow going. There were a lot of Vineyards in the area and turning off one of the roads we could see the sea and the Isle of Wight in the distance! There were loads of coastal trees too, which made me wonder if it was any good down there in migration times. After driving for what seemed like ages yet still being smack in the Goodwood traffic we seemed to end up driving straight through the middle. Goodwood Racecourse was massive, much bigger than either of us had imagined and every field we passed had Campervans and tents in them. Wendy tried to get some drive by shots but none of them showed the sheer size of the event site.



Goodwood Festival of Speed site

My hopes of nipping up a side road were shot down when we noticed that every single one had a barrier over it so no one could go up them, so we were well and truly stuck in the

chaos. It was like being herded into it really, as we had no choice even though we were only trying to get home and didn't even want to go to Goodwood! The next road I planned to get off on was closed too, so we had to keep going until we hit a huge traffic jam! We sat there for ages and any movement was just to crawl along for a few feet and then stop again. We got near the bottom of the queue and found a bloke at the side of the road taking video of all the supercars! He was asking the drivers if it was OK 1st though and a couple of them even played up for him and revved the nuts out of their engines before pulling off at the lights. The bloke was buzzing.....Hahahaha! The whole thing must be humungous but we finally cleared it at 6.28pm, which was 3mins after our eta at HQ should've been :(It'd all been a bit stressful and we were now way too late to go out for tea but we'd seen Goodwood and it'd been an experience if nothing else!

Shortly after the sky turned well black and the heavens opened again. This was an inconvenience for us but a total disaster for some toff with the roof of his car down and the Wedding party congregating outside a venue! They must've all been soaked! A line of Vespas came round a corner and I was so distracted by them that I missed my turning....Doh! Like we needed any more hold ups! Eventually we were back in Petersfield, so we didn't have too much further to go. All of a sudden I had to slam my brakes on when I nearly went into the back of someone after going round a lethal corner and finding out that it was a junction. Who thought that was a good idea?

At 6.58pm we breathed a sigh of relief and felt our blood pressure drop as we arrived back at HQ.....Phew! Wendy went straight in and did Lyca's dinner then went upstairs for a shower while I order the Dominoes for my birthday tea :). As it was so late we'd decided against going out and that Dominoes would be the quickest option. Wendy put a load of washing on and our food arrived quickly again. This time however, the delivery driver wasn't as jolly and begrudgingly said, "I didn't think we delivered this far out?" I knew it was pushing it but it'd worked last time so I just said, "Oh, I just took a chance." I don't suppose there was much he could say to that and he replied with, "Fair enough." If we lived there I don't think I'd be doing it again :P. While I was outside I noticed 2 cars pull up outside next door each containing woman who both looked at me shiftily as they walked over to the main house. It'd all been very quiet over there and you wouldn't have known we had neighbours at all so my mind went into overdrive as to what the two shifty women were doing going to the house. The only person we'd seen was a bloke in his late 30s, which didn't seem to match the antique décor we could see in the windows of the very large property. Very strange. I'd ordered myself some chocolate brownies as a substitute for the lack of Birthday Cake, which did the job nicely :).

After tea Wendy noticed that Lyca's paws were all clogged up with rock hard dried clay like stuff, which was obviously from the Amberley Wildbrooks walk. She couldn't leave it as it'd be painful in between her pads, so she filled a jug with warm water and one by one washed it all out and dried off her paws. The water afterwards was so grey and murky and we were finding bits of it on the floor for ages, which was as hard as rock! Poor Lyca! While Wendy rushed around packing stuff up I went through my photos and confirmed that we had indeed got another lifer as it was Small Red-eyed Damselfly we'd seen before in Norfolk Yey! We had a look at the website for our cottage in Wales and I started to get seriously excited about it. It looked amazing and far better than where we were, so I was looking even more forward to the week ahead. Wendy, as usual was reserving her judgment until we got there and saw it in the flesh :P. Knowing we had a long day ahead of us we switched the lights off for the last time and went to bed at 10.30pm.

Friday 30th June

We woke up at 7.30am and again it was overcast outside. When we went downstairs it felt like a sauna because we'd forgotten to turn the heating off last night....Ooops! I opened the windows to try and let some of the heat out before the cleaners came in and were onto us. We had our breakfast but yet again Lyca just wouldn't eat hers, so Wendy resorted to hand feeding her again just so we could pack everything up for the journey up to Wales. Dogs! While I was shuttling back and forth from the car loading up as much as I could I heard a Green Woodpecker. I was starting to get impatient waiting for Wendy to pack the big case because I needed to get that into the boot 1st but she seemed to think she had all the time in the world.....Urrghhhhh! Wendy took the bin bag and recycling over to the bins in the grounds of the main house, as instructed. She lifted the lid of the bin to find at least 6 large heavy duty plastic bags that had contained crystal rock salt.....Eh? We started to conjure up images of some kind of drug factory being run next door and then realized that it probably had something to do with the swimming pool in the back garden. I liked the 'Breaking Bad' theory better and it would've explained a lot.

There wasn't much time to spare when she finally finished and after she'd taken some photos of inside HQ it was 9.50am when we waved, "Goodbye" to New Barn Cottage. Lyca didn't want to go though and was all curled up on the sofa refusing to budge.



Reluctant dog

It'd been a good find for the very cheap price especially with it being summer. It was small but was clean, well equipped and comfortable and had more than served its purpose. Having said that it could've done with a bigger shower, a landline phone, a mobile reception and an usable internet speed but you can't have everything :P.

As we drove through the Hampshire countryside we realized we were going to miss the sound of Yellowhammers everywhere we went. Even though we'd spent most of our time in Sussex it'd been a lovely place to stay and we wouldn't think twice about going back. It felt like we were in the middle of nowhere even though Petersfield, which is the size of Douglas, was only 3miles away and about a 10minute drive. We'd struggled for shops but there's an Asda in Petersfield, so we wouldn't have been totally stuck if we'd run out of anything. It didn't feel in any way touristy and there were no Gift Shops or Delis just local shops and tiny Post Offices. Wendy was a bit gutted at the lack of Delis and was still on the

hunt for some more pressies but we still had a week in Wales to go yet. I realized we had no change for the Severn Bridge Toll, so I stopped off at the West Meon Village Shop again and Wendy ran in to get me a drink so I was now prepared with some coinage. She counted out £6.70 and put it somewhere safe for later. We drove past the blue Flax fields again and this time Wendy made me stop so she could get out and take a photo.



Flax fields

With a sea of blue flowers and the sound of Yellowhammer and Skylark surrounding us it made us realize how quiet the countryside at home is :(. Our 1st stop of the day was Magdalen Hill Down NR, which I'd wanted to visit since we'd arrived and had been quite worried that we wouldn't get to visit it at all. This reserve was Butterfly Conservations first ever reserve and it'd been expanded since then as well. They had the full range of Chalk Downland Butterfly specialities there so we were really looking forward to it. We just needed good weather though, which we hadn't really had for the past few days.

I found a space in the car park opposite Magdalen Hill Cemetery in Winchester at 10.47am and the sky was showing some patches of blue. We crossed over the road and walked up a path at the side of the massive cemetery until we came to a gate onto the reserve.



Magdalen Hill Cemetery

There was a sightings board at the entrance, which wasn't very inspiring and the info board also boasted Green Hairstreak and Brown Argus Butterflies. It also stated in bold capitals that dogs **MUST** be kept on leads at all times, which we liked the sound of. Someone else on the other hand hadn't seen it in a good way and made some snide comment about it being discrimination and that they wouldn't be back. Good! If it wasn't a good enough reason in itself to keep dogs on leads there were Ponies on the reserve that are semi feral and may bite!



Info board

Apparently they were quite nosy and prone to going up to people, so there was a warning about not feeding them too. After we'd gone through the gate we were out onto another Wildflower Meadow, which was caked with Butterflies.



Magdalen Hill Down NR

There was nothing new though but still an impressive sight. It was getting warmer too, which was exactly what we needed. Since there was a ton of Marbled Whites about and we knew this would probably be the last time we would see them for a very long time, I put some effort into trying to get a nice photo.



Marbled Whites

Lyca was absolutely loving the area so, I am assuming there were some amazing smells there.



Happy dog

We walked through the meadow and came across the Ponies that were busy munching away on the grass.



Exmoor Ponies

I kept Lyca close to me and although she knew they were there she didn't make too much of a fuss. Wendy wasn't happy though especially when they started to come towards us, so I was surprised that she stopped a couple of time to get a photo! There was a bloke standing at a gate at the end of the path with a clipboard, obviously doing a survey, so we asked him if he'd seen any Small Blues about. Disappointingly he hadn't, so Wendy warned him of the incoming Ponies that he didn't seem to know about. We carried on through the gate and out onto the original Magdalen Hill Down Reserve. Looking back at the bloke he was surrounded by the Ponies, who'd obviously gone to investigate him.



Hopefully he didn't get eaten!

The path took us along the side of the hill, which was also caked in wildflowers and Butterflies and looked down towards Winchester.



Winchester

We kept our eyes peeled but there were no Blues on the wing at all, just the usual Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites. The area was brilliant and I was really impressed though. There were so many different types of plants and flowers all of which were providing vital food for the insects.

The last section of the path was a dry path with a rough area that seemingly had no layer of soil at all, which had a completely different variety of flowers.



Chalky

Wendy stopped and said she'd found a **Gatekeeper** but I wasn't so sure and presumed it to be another Meadow Brown. She wasn't best pleased with my lack of faith and pointed to all its features until I realized that it was and the 1st we'd seen all week. Back at the entrance we were absolutely boiling and it's turned into a scorcher of a day (even though it was complete cloud cover) but we had to get going so we could get up to Wales in time for Tesco at 7pm. Wendy was reluctant to leave Hampshire and wanted to stop time and skip through the meadows forever. Hahaha what a pansy! She'd liked it so much that she was doubtful that South Wales was going to be anywhere near as nice. It was a hard act to follow but it was going to be another adventure for us if nothing else. It was 11.43am when we got back to the car and Lyca was very thirsty after her walk. So were we come to think of it and we hadn't expected it to be quite so hot.

By 11.46am I was driving away but we still had time for 1 more walk before we left in a place called Broughton which was on the way towards Wales. Originally I had planned to go to two proper reserves on this drive, one being RSPB Ham Wall in Somerset and a nearby reserve for Large Blues. As we didn't need Large Blue anymore I switched our 1st stop to Magdalen Hill Down and we then didn't have time for Ham Wall so that all went up the swanny. We still had to find another place to visit on the way to stop us getting into Wales way too early and Broughton looked perfect for that. I'd found it the previous night as I desperately searched for this elusive stop for the journey. It looked like more Chalk Downland and supposedly had Adonis Blue, which would be very nice to see. Driving through Stockbridge Wendy was rather taken by all the poncy shops and looked longingly at the Deli, as I drove straight past them all.....Mwahahaha!

I'd chosen a route that didn't involve walking up a steep hill and found myself driving down a really rough track, so it was a really bumpy ride. My poor car, I really need to change to a 4x4! I parked up at the bottom near where there was a capped reservoir so that we could eat our lunch. An old guy and his dog were walking towards us and he came right up to my window and said, "Blimey, you're a long way from home!" We just laughed and when we mentioned the IOM he told us that he thought my reg was from Malta! No wonder he thought we'd come a long way! It turned out that he had friends with family over on the Island and asked us what we were doing at Broughton. We told him we were on our way

reckoned we should and see. He gave us some directions that were totally different to the ones that I had, which was confusing but as usual the conversation quickly turned to the TT and he started talking to me about bikes. Yawn.....I hate bikes! He was friendly enough though, so I let him bend my ear for a while :P. After he'd gone I didn't know what to do. What if we went on my route and we saw him again? Surely he'd wonder why we hadn't taken his advice? That would look really rude wouldn't it? Arrghhhhh! In the end I settled on sticking to my original plan and we set off at 12.57pm, we can see Orchids at home and they'd be past their best by then anyway!

Crossing our fingers that we didn't bump into him again we headed off through a dark wood hoping that it got better further on. Eventually we came out on the Chalk Downland I'd expected and there were Marbled Whites everywhere!



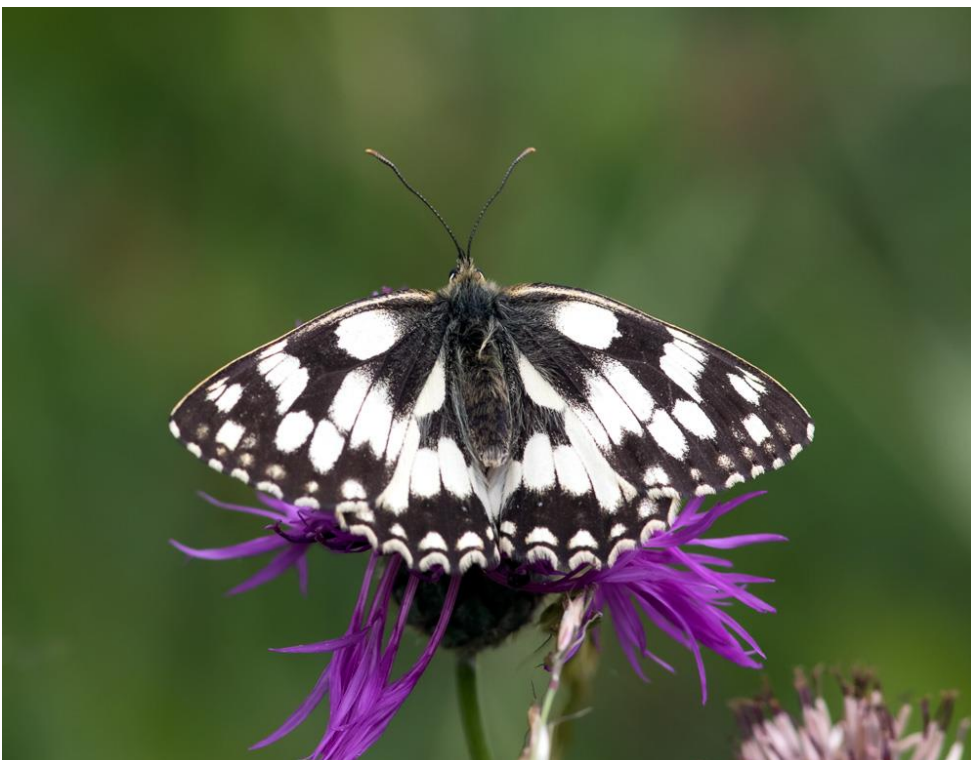
Broughton

We'd become so used to seeing them seeing as they were common as muck that they didn't really impact on us anymore. It'd be lovely to have them in the IOM though. We saw a Dark Green Fritillary and I grabbed a quick shot of it.



Dark Green Fritillary

Wendy pointed out that she could hear Crickets, which was new for the trip and then found one in the long grass. It was brown but by the time I'd got there with my camera it'd scuttled off and totally disappeared into the long grass. Looking into it she reckoned it was most likely to be a **Dark bush-cricket**, which are common in southern England. There were loads of **Cinnabar Moth Caterpillars** on the Ragwort on the way back but no sign of any Blues never mind Adonis! By this point I was 100% we were too late in the season for the special Blues of this region. Bummer! There were so many butterflies about and knowing this was the last place in the South Downs we'd visit we went photo crazy, I got some video and even Wendy got in on the act!



Marbled White

We wandered around seemingly trying to absorb it all and I think we spent a bit longer there than I had planned due to the amount of things to look at.



Look at all the Butterflies! You may need a magnifying glass

When we finally snapped out of it we quickly scuttled back off to the car.

We were back at the car at 2.09pm and it'd been a nice end to our time in Hampshire. Although Wendy still wanted to stop the clock and stay in the meadows forever I had to bring her back to earth by reminding her that we couldn't afford to miss our Tesco at 7pm. We left pretty sharpish but had to stop when Wendy found a Micro Moth in the car and wanted me to get a pic of it, which I did before letting it out.



Eudonia Mercurella

It was 19.5c when we got to Wiltshire at 2.39pm but we ended up getting stuck in a traffic jam and there were so many Campers, Caravans and Lorries ahead that we couldn't even see how far it went. I had amended the sat nav route so we didn't have to go through the middle of Bath but this looked like a massive mistake as it took us on the main East to West route from the south and it was only a Dual carriageway.....Arrghghhhh! It was total gridlock because all the traffic ahead of us was having to merge into a single lane 10miles down the road. Single carriageway for this amount of traffic?! That is proper stupid. After clearing it but losing 35mins of our eta time already we drove past Stonehenge, which was really busy. Wendy grabbed a few quick drive by shots as we went past.



Stonehenge

There was another dead Badger in the road and being near a culling zone we weren't surprised. Looking at the clock I knew I was right to have ditched off RSPB Ham Wall. This was a reserve right next to Glastonbury (where Wendy had wanted to revisit anyway) so it'd been a great idea in theory but we just didn't have the time. Not only would we have had the chance of seeing breeding Little Bittern, Great White Egret, Cattle Egret and Purple Heron but there was a Night Heron being seen there daily. In hindsight we probably should've ditched some of our earlier locations off in favour of Ham Wall but I would have kicked myself for not visiting Magdalen. We were gutted but the old blood pressure was starting to rise and stress levels were increasing because of our deadline of 7pm! From what we'd already seen of the traffic it wasn't looking favourable anyway, so we couldn't afford to waste a single minute :(I had to stop at a Eurogarage to fill my car up with petrol, which was a nightmare in itself! After filling up I noticed a really non-obvious sign on the door informing customers that the card machines were down, so they could only accept cash....Urrghhhh! There was a huge queue at the machine and I dread to think what would happen if it ran out of money! Luckily I had enough cash to pay with but when I got inside I hadn't taken enough and had to go back to the car to get more.....quite embarrassing!

Wendy was sad when we drove straight past Glastonbury and left it way behind us and by then we were starting to get a bit hungry and thirsty. Wendy told me to stop at the next shop, which was easier said than done but we were used to that by then. We spotted one, so I pulled in and parked up over the road and Wendy got out to go over to see what she could find to tide us over. There was a woman standing next to her car holding her mobile

and looking lost and stressed who asked Wendy if she was local. When Wendy told her she wasn't she looked flustered and they both crossed the road and went into the shop. While Wendy wandered around looking for something edible and failing miserably the woman had gone up to the counter and asked the woman behind it if she knew where a certain address was. Apparently she was there visiting a friend but she couldn't find her house and couldn't get a mobile signal either. No wonder she was stressed out! The shop keeper let her use her landline and it was agreed that her friend would meet her outside the shop to make life easier....Phew! It makes you realize though just how much you rely on your mobile and without a signal you're screwed! Wendy, as well as a drink for me, only managed to find some pastries at the counter so grabbed one for us to share. It would have to do and was better than nothing. While she'd been in there I'd been looking into new routes that would get us to Wales quicker. We set off again but then I realized that it was still going to send us straight through Bath, which wasn't good at all! I quickly reset my sat nav and we ended up skirting round it and ended up on a small road looking down the valley over Bath from the top of the hill. It was slow going again and when I took a sharp right hander and ended up going down a hideously steep single-track lane we knew it was wrong. I turned round and got back to main road hoping that the next turn off was going to be better. I found it but it was equally as narrow as the last one and reminiscent of the back road down into Laxey.



Where are we?

We started to wonder where on earth we were but at 4.53pm I'd successfully managed to bypass Bath, which whether a good or bad thing had been my intention :/. Eventually we got back onto a main road and found another traffic jam.....Nooooo! In the queue on the opposite side a woman had got out of her car and was shouting irately at the driver of the car behind her, "What's wrong with you?" He must've been right up her **** or something to make her that mad? When we hit even more slow moving traffic we started getting seriously worried that we were going to miss our Tesco delivery. Wendy pointed out a **Brown Hare** miles away on a hill to relieve the tedium but it didn't work. We'd only done 9,800 steps over the course of the day but with all the unexpected stress it felt like a lot more! At 6.21pm we'd finally reached the Severn Bridge, our gateway into Wales.



Severn Bridge

Continued in Part 2