



Black Hairstreak

During lockdown I was walking in the countryside, well almost! Wormwood Scrubs can feel like it at times when I spotted an unfamiliar butterfly.

Referring to *The Complete British Butterflies* by Mansell and Newman, given to me for my tenth birthday, I identified it as being a Black Hairstreak which my local branch of Butterfly Conservation confirmed. This was the first reported sighting of one in Middlesex & Hertfordshire which I was told had probably been released by someone making the chance encounter feel slightly less special.

Nevertheless, seeing this rare butterfly fired me up enough to want to revisit the subject. Something I've been doing over the past few summers whilst also photographing our different species of dragonflies and any other conspicuous insects I happen to see.



Duke of Burgundy

Undeterred by the decline in butterflies and counting on a bit of luck I started journey by setting off for Noar Hill at Selborne in Hampshire in hope of seeing the Duke of Burgundy. A small, chequered butterfly that was thought to be a fritillary until it was discovered to belong to an entirely different family.

My next notable trips were to the Norfolk Fens to look for Swallowtails and to Daneway Banks in Gloucestershire where the Large Blue has successfully been reintroduced having become extinct in the 70s. Seeing twenty-five my day.



Cryptic Wood White

On a visit to Northern Ireland, a dank overcast day in Armagh, I counted myself lucky seeing fifteen Cryptic Wood Whites and five Large Heaths. In Cumbria at Smardale Gill, in similar conditions, I saw a fair number of Scotch Argus on the sheltered path leading to the viaduct and further north in Argyllshire, in glorious sunshine, I counted eight Chequered Skippers at Glasdrum Woods NNR.



Chequered Skipper



Scarce Blue-Tailed damselflies

In Hampshire's New Forest, around its freshwater streams, ponds and flushes I counted a variety of dragonflies, including half a dozen Scarce Blue-tailed damselflies at Ober Water and in the north of the county I spotted a single Brilliant Emerald Dragonfly patrolling a pond on Warren Heath among various hawkers and chasers.



Emperor dragonfly



Winterton Dunes

With the season drawing to a close in early September, thanks to a tip-off from Dave Weaver from Natural England, under a setting sun on Winterton Dunes in Norfolk, I photographed a rare Southern Emerald Damselfly.



Southern Emerald damselfly



Midwinters day celebrations on Brabant Island, 1984

On June 21st next year, celebrating our 40th Brabant Island reunion in Penrith, I hope to sneak off with my daughter Amalia to look for the Mountain Ringlet. I also look forward to returning to Scotland one day in hope of seeing our northern species of dragonflies and perhaps more Mountain Ringlets.

59 UK species of butterflies is not many compared to 237 mainland species in France or 7,500 that are found in the tropics. Thinking back to my time in the Navy, working at the Fleet Photographic Unit in Portsmouth, I remember wanting to apply for an expedition to the tropics but ended up in the Antarctic for a year, the only continent in the world where there are no butterflies. In fact, where there is just one species of insect, the Antarctic midge.



Wasp Spider

There are around 24,000 species of insects in the UK, not all of which I shall be attempting to photograph. Over the last three summers I have seen most of our butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies as well as a few moths, caterpillars, shield bugs, beetles, bees, wasps, chafers, flies, mayflies, ladybirds, grasshoppers, crickets, and spiders.

Whilst I'm able to take these photographs, I'm very conscious of the fact that without the various conservation groups and the dedicated work of thousands of volunteers this simply might not be possible, particularly when it comes to seeing some of our rarer species.

NB. All my photographs are taken in the wild without disturbing the subject.