

Sussex Butterflies: Brown Hairstreak & Summer Blues

16th August 2024
Led by Kat Dahl & Terry Goble



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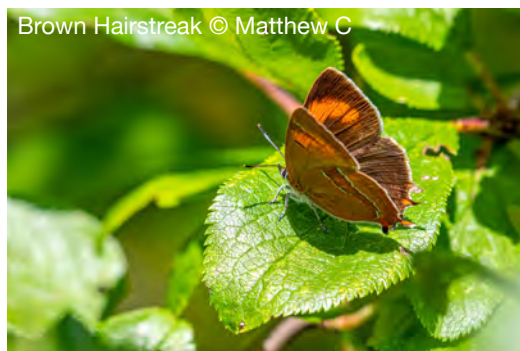
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Thankfully, we experienced almost ideal weather conditions all day. There was some cloud, but plenty of sunshine, and the cloud and a gentle breeze stopped the temperature getting too high. We met at Burgess Hill Station at about 9.00am and then headed along the top of the South Downs, with views of the sea, stopping in Shoreham to use the facilities and pick up drinks and food. We continued towards the River Adur, with magnificent views of Lancing College and its chapel, and on to Steyning. Once parked, we walked to the Steyning Downland Scheme.

The Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) comprises 165 acres of the Wiston Estate in the South Downs National Park, given up by the estate's owners, the Gorings, in 2007 to set up a charity "to bring together the needs of people and wildlife". The land has since been managed for wildlife, but always with community engagement at its heart. 32 species of butterfly have been recorded here in recent years, including Duke of Burgundy, which arrived in 2020 after the SDS became involved with the National Park's project to bring this butterfly back from the brink of extinction in Sussex by planting Cowslip across the Downs. This site is also, arguably, the best in Britain for seeing Brown Hairstreak.

We arrived at the SDS at about 10.30am, on the part of the site where there is a lot of Blackthorn, managed specifically for Brown Hairstreak caterpillars (ie cut carefully in rotation each winter to ensure plenty of young growth without losing too many eggs), as well as plenty of the adult's favourite trees: Ash and Sycamore. Brown Hairstreak males were already active, mostly quite high in the Ash and Sycamore. Like clockwork, the females started to appear on the Blackthorn at about 11.00am, and in due course we saw four individuals at the bottom of the site. We also saw several Speckled Wood, a few Vapourer moth and Oak Eggar moth. Amongst the grasses and wildflowers were several Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, and we saw a Small Copper and a Green-veined White.

Brown Hairstreak © Matthew C



After a little while, we wandered up to the top of the site, where the geology changes from clay to chalk, and we saw several Common Blue, a few Brown Argus, a Wall and a Brimstone. There is lots of Wild Thyme here which was being visited by *Purpuralis aurata* (Small Purple and Gold moth or 'Mint Moth'). There is also lots of Red Bartsia, which was being busily pollinated by the

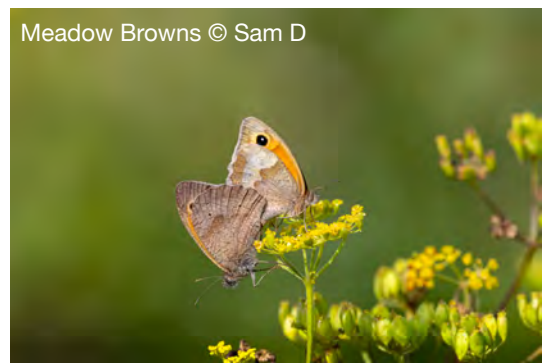
nationally scarce Red Bartsia Bee, which uses these flowers exclusively. Hanging heavily from their *stabilimenta* in their impressive webs among the grasses were stunning Wasp Spiders, which feed primarily on grasshoppers, of which there are plenty here. We didn't see any more Brown Hairstreak in this area however, so we returned to the bottom of the site to find four more female Brown Hairstreak, at least one of which was definitely a different individual from the ones we had seen earlier in the morning. Finally sated with Brown Hairstreaks, we sat to eat our lunch and then returned to the minibus.



Wasp Spider © David T

We drove along the northern base of the Downs and up to our next site. Sheep have been farmed in this area for 3000 years, shaping the landscape that remains today. This site itself has been a farm for over 1000 years and the hill around it is considered to be one of the finest chalk grassland sites in Britain, and one of the best places in Sussex to see chalk grassland butterfly species such as Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, and especially Silver-spotted Skipper. It is now grazed by cattle, in order to preserve the floral biodiversity, which is rich.

We had a quick stop at the farm to use the facilities and to grab drinks, and then we passed more Wild Thyme with plenty of Common Blue, Brown Argus, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper as we headed up the hill. As we arrived there was a fresh Comma flitting about, a dung beetle carrying phoretic mites (phoresy is non-parasitic 'piggy-backing', in this case to be carried to dung containing the fly eggs they eat), and an impressive Hornet Robberfly, a very localised species that is uncommon in the south-east and is Britain's largest fly.



Meadow Browns © Sam D

Further on, we saw Small Copper and Small Heath, and had a magnificent view of one of Britain's longest, deepest and widest dry valleys. We started to see several Chalkhill Blues and Silver-spotted Skippers. Terry and a few of the group



Chalkhill Blue © Alice M

were buzzed by a Dark Green Fritillary. There were many lovely chalk grassland flowers to admire as well, in particular, purple Round-headed Rampion, known as 'The Pride of Sussex', and tiny Autumn Lady's Tresses, a 'Near Threatened' orchid species, one of the last to flower in summer. Finally, just as we were starting to leave the hill, among a flurry of Chalkhill Blues was a single male Adonis Blue – freshly emerged and dazzling electric blue. When we had

eventually had enough of pursuing this individual as it skipped about, we headed back to the minibus, stopping to admire another Hornet Robberfly on the way.

We headed back over the Downs to Burgess Hill Station, delighted to have seen all our target species despite it having been a worryingly poor year for butterflies.

Systematic Species Lists

Butterflies

Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Brown Hairstreak	<i>Thecla betulae</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>
Adonis Blue	<i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>
Chalkhill Blue	<i>Polyommatus coridon</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa Atalanta</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>

Gatekeeper
Silver-spotted Skipper
Small Skipper

Pyronia tithonus
Hesperia comma
Thymelicus sylvestris

Moths

Silver Y
Common Marble
Green Carpet
Common Carpet
Lime-speck Pug
Oak Eggar
Vapourer
Small Purple and Gold
Cinnabar (larvae)

Autographa gamma
Celypha lacunana
Colostyia pectinataria
Epirrhoe alternata
Eupithecia centaureata
Lasiocampa quercus
Orgyia antiqua
Pyrausta aurata
Tyria jacobaeae

Other notable invertebrates

Southern Hawker
Migrant Hawker
Common Darter
Red Bartsia Bee
Hornet Robberfly
Batman Hoverfly
Hornet Hoverfly
Common Green Grasshopper
Dark Bush-cricket
Meadow Grasshopper
Roesel's Bush-cricket
Wasp Spider

Aeshna cyanea
Aeshna mixta
Sympetrum striolatum
Melitta tricincta
Asilus crabroniformis
Myathropa florea
Volucella zonaria
Omocestus viridulus
Pholidoptera griseoptera
Pseudochorthippus parallelus
Roeseliana roeselii
Argiope bruennichi

Birds

Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Yellowhammer
Common Kestrel
Red Kite
Common Chiffchaff
Green Woodpecker
Common Whitethroat
Mistle Thrush

Accipter nisus
Buteo buteo
Dendrocopos major
Emberiza citronella
Falco tinnunculus
Milvus milvus
Phylloscopus collybita
Picus viridis
Sylvia communis
Turdus viscivorus

Notable plants

Yellow Wort
Carline Thistle
Hemp Agrimony
Hoary Ragwort

Blackstonia perfoliata
Carlina vulgaris
Eupatorium cannabinum
Jacobaea erucifolia

Field Scabious
Red Bartsia
Wild Parsnip
Round-headed Rampion
Blackthorn
Small Scabious
Autumn Lady's-tresses
Wild Thyme

Knautia arvensis
Odontites vernus
Pastinaca sativa
Phyteuma orbiculare
Prunus spinosa
Scabiosa columbaria
Spiranthes spiralis
Thymus polytrichus

Photo Gallery



Chalkhill Blue © David T



Adonis Blue © David T



Small Copper © Alice M



Chalkhill Blues © Alice M



Silver-spotted Skipper © Alice M

Chalkhill Blue © Sam D



Brown Hairstreak © David T



© Kat Dahl



Chalkhill Blue © David T

Adonis Blue © Sam D



Brown Hairstreak © Sam D

Small Copper © Sam D



Silver-spotted Skipper © Sam D



Chalkhill Blue © Sam D



Brown Hairstreak © David T



Wasp Spider © Sam D



Silver-spotted Skipper © David T



Small Copper © Sam D



© Kat Dahl



Chalkhill Blue © Sam D



Silver-spotted Skipper © David T

Silver-spotted Skippers © David T



Kestrel © Sam D



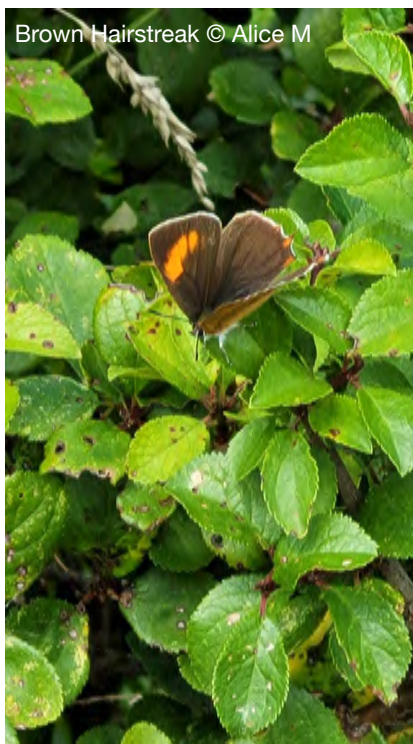
Silver-spotted Skipper © Alice M



Adonis Blue © Alice M



Brown Hairstreak © Alice M

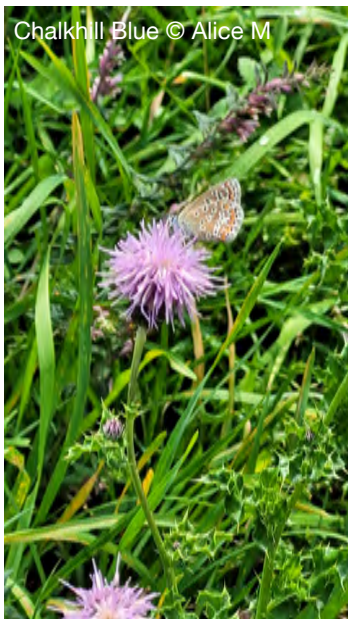


© Kat Dahl

Brown Hairstreak © Matthew C



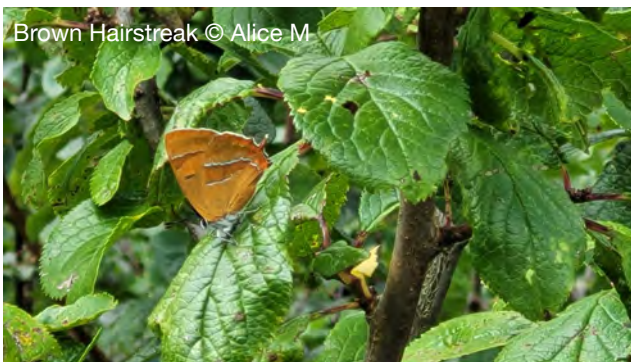
Chalkhill Blue © Alice M



Brown Hairstreak © Sam D



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