



Orchids of The Cotswolds

1st & 2nd June 2024
Led by Sean Cole



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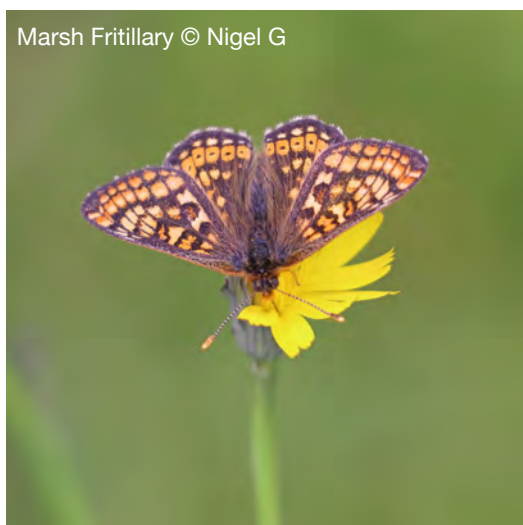
Day 1: After some minor confusion over which of the many car parks we were meeting at, we took a short walk to a roadside traffic island that was covered in Pyramidal and Bee Orchids, and also had our target Wasp Orchid. The careful walk along the busy road was well worth it!

Next, a short drive to a beautiful wet meadow and a well-known site for Burnt Orchid, though finding them can be difficult if you don't know where to go! Numbers are small but the plants are exquisite. The area around them can often get trampled by visitors so we limited our photography to two lovely plants next to the path through the meadow, which was covered in senescent Green-winged and beautifully fresh Common Spotted Orchids, as well as the occasional Common Twayblade. The adjacent meadow has a subtly different set of species, this one giving us numerous Early Marsh, Southern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchids. The hybrid between Common Spotted and both Early and Southern Marsh was present where both species pairs grew together, and gave us all good practise in spotting them – which can be relatively easy once one knows what to look for. Some were easier than others, of course, and if the guide moves on quickly, it is a sign of a difficult one! A nice surprise in this meadow was a small population within which another “Wasp” Orchid (*Ophrys apifera* f. *trollii*) was found. With the day pressing on, it was time to head for some takeout lunch at a café before heading to our next site.



Wasp Orchid © Matthew C

Prior to looking at that site, however, we realised our lunch stop was very close to one of the best sites in the country for Large Blue Butterfly. We were already aware that the first examples of this species had recently emerged locally, so it would have been foolish not to have a seat on site and eat our lunch there! We unfortunately failed, possibly because we were a fraction early, or maybe the wind scuppered us, but we did see several Brown Argus and a lot of Common Spotted Orchids.



Marsh Fritillary © Nigel G

At our first site of the afternoon, a quick detour into the wood before going to the main area produced a couple of trackside Bird's-nest Orchids which were somewhat past their best. We headed into the main meadow where the weather was kind enough to allow several Marsh Fritillaries to be on the wing, still looking quite fresh, and being quite showy, too. On the main site, our orchid targets were Early Purple (mostly over but a couple with some flowers still showing) and Lesser Butterfly Orchid, which was still nice and fresh. Some of the plants here are quite intermediate, but mostly they conform to the standard criteria for this species.

Not far up the valley was our next site, overlooking Laurie Lee Country, and this one a beautiful roadside wildlife verge managed for both butterflies and flora. There were many Common Twayblade and Common Spotted Orchids, and a few emergent Pyramidal, but our main target was Butterfly Orchids – at this spot, Greater and Lesser grow alongside each other in good numbers, and several clear cut hybrids made themselves obvious amongst the parents, being perfectly intermediate in every respect, and amplifying the differences between the parents. It was early evening by now, but the temptation of a site a short drive away to finish the day, was

too much, so we made the trip along the road to a wood containing good numbers of Bird's-nest Orchids, with enough plants to produce some in really nice condition. We went our separate ways ready for another onslaught tomorrow, saying farewells to Nigel, who was not going to be with us for a second day unfortunately.

Day 2: A much easier meeting spot today of the supermarket carpark on the edge of Stroud meant we were away soon after the rendezvous time for the short drive up onto the Common. As if we hadn't been spoiled enough yesterday, we decided before going onto the open common in the gathering heat, to check out a wood nearby, and were rewarded with fantastic numbers of picture-perfect Bird's-nest Orchids.

We then ventured out onto the hillside with fantastic views back over the Cotswolds, as far as Slimbridge and the Severn Estuary. Passing numerous Chalk Fragrant Orchids and time-ravaged Green-winged and Early Purple Orchids we headed for the steep slopes on narrow sheep paths, finding fresh



Bird's Nest Orchid © Matthew C



Bee x Fly Orchid © Eirian E

Bee Orchids and a few, less fresh but nonetheless beautiful Fly Orchids and then, finally, a single example of the Hybrid Fly x Bee Orchid – we were lucky there was still a single, decent flower left of this early-flowering and extremely rare hybrid. Three more examples previously present had been either snapped off, dug up or eaten by mammalian predators reducing our choice, But as it is such a spectacular plant, even this one made the search worthwhile.

It was lunchtime by now, so we ate in a glorious local café before heading up onto the common to have a second try for Large Blue, since one or two had been seen here the day before. We were unlucky again, but did see lots of Fragrant and Common Spotted Orchids and also a few other butterflies.

Our final site of the day was another nearby Common, a well-known orchid site among the Stroud Commons. This is the only place in the Cotswolds where Lizard Orchid is known, and we saw the single plant, which was unfortunately not yet in flower, in its protective cage next to the parking spot. This plant was

later cut down or dug up, so we hope it returns again next year.

A short walk took us to a nice area with a lot of Green-winged Orchids, and, among them, scattered Bee Orchids – including two examples of the very rare *bicolor* form. Further searches of this area of the common revealed good numbers of commoner species such as Chalk Fragrant, Common Spotted and Early Purple Orchids. The afternoon was drawing to evening by now, so the guests decided that an ice cream was the best option at this point, bought from the resident van next to the parking area. We thus ended our truly orchid-filled trip with a delightful taste of locally-made Cotswolds ice cream before saying our farewells and making our way home.



Bicolor Bee Orchid © Matthew C

Species List

Common Twayblade
 Bird's-nest Orchid
 Burnt Orchid
 Greater Butterfly Orchid
 Lesser Butterfly Orchid
 Hybrid Greater x Lesser Butterfly Orchid
 Chalk Fragrant Orchid
 Common Spotted Orchid
 Southern Marsh Orchid
 Early Marsh Orchid
 Early Marsh x Common Spotted Orchid
 Southern Marsh x Common Spotted Orchid
 Lizard Orchid
 Pyramidal Orchid
 Green-winged Orchid
 Early Purple Orchid
 Fly Orchid
 Bee Orchid
 Wasp Orchid
 Bee Orchid
 Bee x Fly Orchid

Neottia ovata
Neottia nidus-avis
Neotinea ustulata
Platanthera chlorantha
Platanthera bifolia
Platanthera x hybrida
Gymnadenia conopsea
Dactylorhiza fuchsii
Dactylorhiza praetermissa
Dactylorhiza incarnata
Dactylorhiza x kernerorum
Dactylorhiza x grandis
Himantoglossum hircinum
Anacamptis pyramidalis
Anacamptis morio
Orchis mascula
Ophrys insectifera
Ophrys apifera
Ophrys apifera forma trollii
Ophrys apifera forma bicolor
Ophrys x pietschii

Photo Gallery



Bee x Fly Orchid © Matthew C



Burnt Orchid © Nigel G



Marsh Fritillary © Nigel G



A Butterfly Orchid © Matthew C



Bird's Nest Orchid © Matthew C



Chalk Fragrant Orchid © Matthew C



Common Spotted x Southern Marsh Orchid © Eirian E



© Matthew C



Greater x Lesser Butterfly Orchid © Matthew C



Greater, Lesser & Hybrid Butterfly Orchids © Matthew C



Bird's Nest Orchids © Eirian E



Greater Butterfly Orchid © Matthew C



Marsh Fritillary © Matthew C



Small Blue © Eirian E



© Matthew C



© Matthew C



Bee Orchid © Matthew C



© Eirian E



Lesser Butterfly Orchid © Matthew C



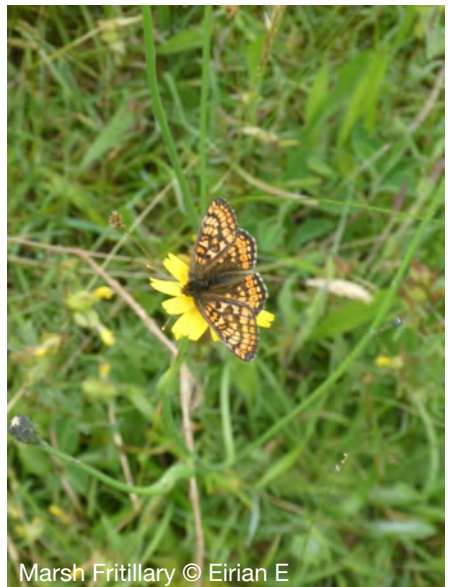
Wasp Orchid © Eirian E



Greater x Lesser Butterfly Orchid
© Matthew C



Early Marsh Orchid © Eirian E



Marsh Fritillary © Eirian E



Common Spotted Orchid © Eirian E



Burnt Orchid © Matthew C



Early Marsh Orchid © Matthew C

