

August 2026 Issue 001

WINGSPAN

Magazine of the Hampshire and
Isle of Wight Butterfly and Moth Society

***Year of the
Holly Blue***

**Tiger,
tiger**

***Special
Sites***





Sheila Anne  Williams



Sheila Anne  Williams

Welcome to Wingspan

Welcome to the first edition of Wingspan - the magazine of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Butterfly and Moth Society.

Following our successful inaugural AGM in April, the newly formed committee has since been busy behind the scenes getting things in place, one of which is the creation of this magazine that ensures we communicate with, and remain connected with, our members.

We've also been busy forging collaborative relationships with other conservation organisations, while remaining true to our principles in relation to the conservation of butterflies and moths, namely:

Growing our impact over growing our membership

Focusing on the real-world effectiveness of our work, rather than expanding our numbers.

Practical conservation over a vision

Focusing on actionable, tangible conservation efforts, rather than abstract or theoretical goals.

Pete Eeles

Chair, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Butterfly and Moth Society (H&IOW BAMS)

Local engagement over centralisation

Prioritising community engagement and local impact over distant, top-down control.

Personal relationships over processes and automation

Building strong, meaningful connections with individuals, rather than relying on processes and tools.

This is, if you will, a 'first instar' publication of H&IOW BAMS. From this small beginning, we aim to publish regular editions and to grow the magazine, featuring some of the local engagement and practical conservation projects we are involved in across the region, as well as showcasing some of our amazing Lepidoptera.

Please get in touch via our **Contact** page on the website. We'd welcome your ideas for future articles and contributions relating to butterfly and moth conservation. Do get in touch!

Wingspan was created and produced by:

Editor – Kevin Freeborn

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Hampshire and Isle of Wight Butterfly and Moth Society



In this edition

Butterfly Spotlight
Holly Blue

Moth Spotlight
Jersey Tiger Moth

Foodplant Focus
Holly

Special Sites for
Butterflies and Moths
**Old Winchester Hill
National Nature
Reserve**

Butterfly Walks
**in Hampshire and
in the Isle of Wight**

Gallery

front cover:

Holly Blue

back cover:

Marbled White

Both images by

Kevin Freeborn

opposite top:

Brown Argus

opposite below:

Green Hairstreak

Both images by

Sheila Williams

Butterfly Spotlight

Holly Blue

Celastrina argiolus

By Pete Eeles



I'd be very surprised if the Holly Blue isn't considered our 'Butterfly of the Year' in 2026. There were phenomenal numbers of adults in the first brood and, as I write, the second brood seems to be equally spectacular.

The butterfly is a familiar sight, especially in gardens, where two of its primary larval foodplants of Holly (first/spring brood) and Ivy (second/summer brood) are often found. This double-brooded species is unique among the butterflies of Britain and Ireland in its use of different larval foodplants for different broods, and for it to be named after one of them could be seen as rather misleading – the butterfly might equally be called the 'Ivy Blue'.

Appearance

Males of both broods are similar in appearance, but females of the summer brood have much broader dark bands on their forewing uppersides than those of the spring brood.

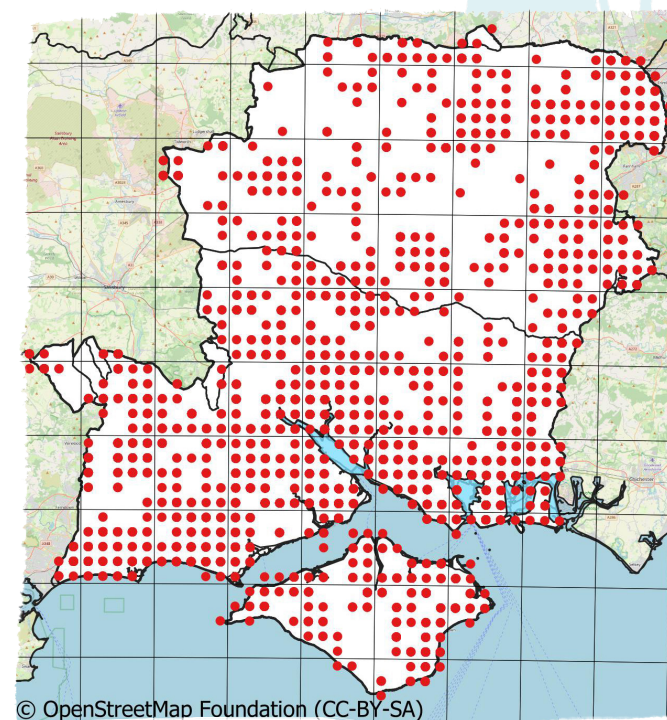


Sometimes confused with a male Common Blue, the Holly Blue's underside spotting is quite different. The Holly Blue normally flies much higher than the Common Blue, behaving much like a hairstreak, whereas the Common Blue usually flies just a few feet off the ground. The location of the individual may also provide a clue – a butterfly seen in suburbia or in woodland is almost certainly going to be a Holly Blue.

This species is known to fluctuate wildly in numbers, forming a predictable cycle over four to six years, which is thought to be driven by the level of parasitism from the ichneumon wasp *Listrodomus nycthemerus* whose sole host is the Holly Blue. The wasp lays its eggs in early instar Holly Blue larvae, one egg per larva, with the adult wasp eventually emerging from the Holly Blue pupa. As the level of parasitism increases, Holly Blue numbers decline, to the point that numbers of the parasite decline due to the unavailability of its host, allowing the butterfly to increase in numbers. And so the cycle continues.

The number of adults seen this spring would therefore suggest that the wasp had a poor 2025, with large numbers of overwintering Holly Blue pupae seemingly parasite-free. Whether this is the result of weather patterns in 2025 that suppressed parasitism or favoured larval development of the butterfly, or is simply the natural four-to-six-year cycle between the butterfly and the wasp, remains to be seen. I'm sure we'll hear a lot more toward the end of 2026.

Distribution



The butterfly is widespread and common across most of England and Wales but has a more scattered distribution in Ireland. It is also found on the Isle of Man and has been recorded in Scotland on occasion, where it has been found as far north as Edinburgh. While the butterfly will be found in the same locality year after year, it does not form discrete colonies and will wander across the landscape.

Habitat

This butterfly is found in many different types of habitat, including gardens, parks, churchyards; woodland; mixed scrub; hedgerows; and arable field margins and set-aside – anywhere its foodplants and nectar sources can be found.

I'd be very surprised if the Holly Blue isn't considered our 'Butterfly of the Year' in 2026

Life cycle

The Holly Blue is the first of our 'blues' to show itself during the year, with the spring brood emerging from overwintering pupae at the start of April in good years, peaking in early May, and giving rise to a summer brood that emerges in the second half of July and that flies until early September. While the butterfly is normally double-brooded, this does vary by region in Britain and Ireland – the most northern populations produce a single brood and, conversely, some southern regions manage to produce a third brood in favourable years, with sightings in October and, on the rare occasion, in November.

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
IMAGO												
OVUM												
LARVA												
PUPA												

photos. opposite top: Kevin Freeborn.
opposite below: Pete Eeles



Rosemary Powell

Foodplant Focus

Holly *Ilex aquifolium* By Pete Eeles



Holly is a widespread and common native evergreen tree or shrub found throughout Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The plant is well known for its glossy, spiny leaves and bright red berries that are especially associated with winter.

Habitat

Holly typically grows in woodland, hedgerows, scrub, and shaded slopes. It prefers well-drained, moderately fertile soils and is often found on acidic to neutral substrates. The species thrives in partial shade but can also grow in full sun, particularly in more sheltered locations.

Habit (Growth Form)

This species has a variable habit, growing as a shrub or small to medium-sized tree, usually reaching heights of 5 to 15 metres (15 to 50 feet). It forms a dense, conical to rounded crown with many branches. As an evergreen perennial, it retains its foliage year-round and can live for many decades.

Leaves

The leaves are simple, glossy, and dark green, with a leathery texture. They are typically oval and have spiny, toothed margins, especially on lower branches, while leaves higher up may be less spiny. The leaves are arranged alternately along the stems and remain on the plant throughout the year.

Flowers

The flowers are small, white, and borne in clusters in the leaf axils. The species is dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate plants. Flowering occurs in late spring, with the flowers pollinated by insects.

Fruit

The fruit consists of bright red berries (drupes), each containing several seeds. These are produced only on female plants and ripen in autumn, often persisting through winter. The berries are eaten by birds, which help disperse the seeds, although they are toxic to humans.

Holly and the Holly Blue

As its name suggests, Holly is a foodplant of the spring brood of the Holly Blue butterfly, whose larvae feed on developing flower buds. Larvae will also feed on developing berries on female plants, although eggs are occasionally laid on male trees that do not produce fruit and, in this case, larvae reach maturity by feeding on the terminal and tenderest leaves of the plant.

An egg-laying Holly Blue will flutter around a plant that is growing in a sunny and sheltered situation, before settling on a flowerhead, curving her abdomen underneath an unopened bud and depositing a single white egg. She then flies off to repeat the process, often on the same bush. Eggs are quite easy to find on favoured plants, especially in good years when the number of eggs laid is relatively high.

The larva starts to feed by burying its head deep into the bud on which the egg was laid, before scooping out the contents. There are four instars in total and the last instar is the easiest to find in the field, not simply because it is larger than previous instars, but because the feeding damage on developing flower buds is quite noticeable—the flower buds that have been eaten become discoloured and stand out from the others, making it very easy to scan a patch of foodplant in a short amount of time (and there may also be frass in the vicinity of the feeding damage). The buds that have been eaten also have a distinctive hole in one side where the larva has bored into the bud before scooping out the contents.

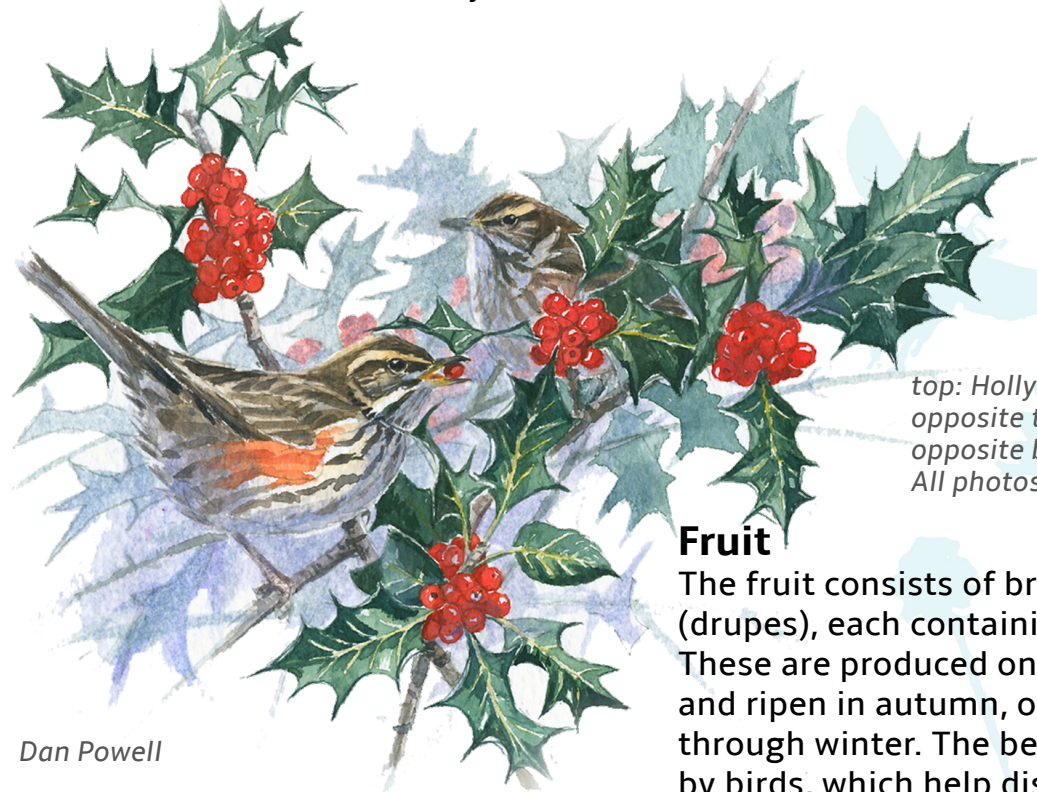
Prior to pupation, the larva gradually turns a dull purple and starts to wander away from the flower buds to find a location to pupate, when its new colouring possibly offers better camouflage as it crawls over woody stems and branches.

Holly and moths

Holly is also the larval foodplant for Double-striped Pug, Privet Hawk-moth, Swallow-tailed Moth and Yellow-barred Brindle.



*The species is
dioecious, with
male and female
flowers on
separate plants*



Dan Powell

top: Holly Blue pupa
opposite top: Holly Blue egg
opposite bottom: Holly Blue larva
All photos by: Pete Eeles



Moth Spotlight

Jersey Tiger Moth

Euplagia quadripunctaria

By Kevin Freeborn



“Tiger, tiger, burning bright...” – when William Blake wrote the opening stanza of his memorable verse it was, of course, an apex feline predator he had in mind, but with the Jersey Tiger’s striking cream, black and scarlet colouration, I’d like to think those words might equally apply to this handsome moth.

The sight of the Jersey Tiger’s bold ‘dazzle ship’ forewing patterning and vibrant orange-red hindwings has become increasingly common over recent years across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Historically rare in Britain, it is gradually expanding its range from the south coast of England. On the wing during the day and at night, the adult’s flight season is from July to September and Jersey Tigers can often be seen in parks and gardens, on rough grassland, and in coastal areas.

Appearance

Adults have a wingspan ranging from 52–65 mm. Their tiger-like markings of dark brown or black with creamy-white stripes form an intricate pattern on their forewings, providing camouflage when the moth is at rest in dappled light.

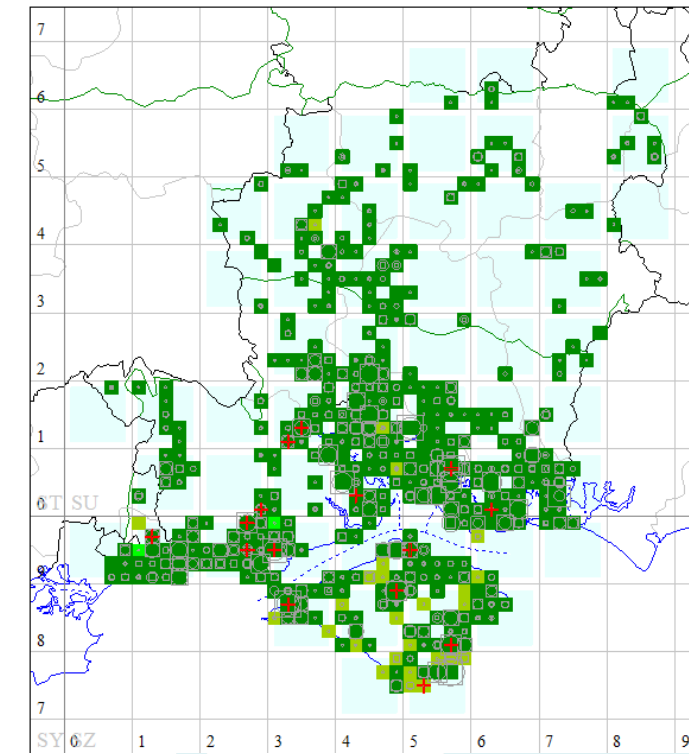
photos. top: Ashley Whitlock.
below: Rosemary Powell

When disturbed or in flight, the moth reveals its spectacular hindwings, which can range from a yellow-orange through to an orange-red with several bold black spots. It is thought that the sudden flash of bright colour is a defence to startle predators, giving the moth an opportunity to escape.



Distribution

Once restricted in Britain to the Channel Islands (hence its name) and the south Devon coast, since the early 1990s the Jersey Tiger has been resident on the Isle of Wight and has spread across The Solent, initially to coastal Hampshire, moving northwards and eastwards. Its range in England is from Cornwall to Kent and across London and the Home Counties. Migrants from continental Europe also boost resident populations, especially during warm summers like we’ve experienced for the past two years.



Habitat

The moth appears to thrive in suburbia, where nectar-rich flowers, especially buddleia, in parks and gardens, suits the adult’s generalist feeding behaviour, while its adaptability stems from its wide selection of larval foodplants. These include Bramble, Dandelion, Greater and Ribwort Plantain, Ground-ivy, Hemp-agrimony, Raspberry, Stinging Nettle and White Dead-nettle. Other habitats include waste ground and scrub, rough grassland and grassy coastal cliffs.



Rosemary Powell

Life cycle

The Jersey Tiger Moth has a single generation each year, with adults flying from high summer to early autumn. Females lay their clusters of small, pale-yellow eggs on the underside of the leaves of their favoured low-growing herbaceous foodplant. The eggs hatch within five to ten days.

Life Cycle												
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Imago												
Ovum												
Larva												
Pupa												

Early instar caterpillars are pale and hairy but later become dark with cream dorsal spots, brown spiky hairs, and orange or rusty-brown bands between their body segments. They are mainly nocturnal feeders, and the larval stage is the longest in the moth’s life cycle. Overwintering as partially grown caterpillars, they become active again in spring as temperatures rise.

Once fully grown, in late spring or early summer, the larvae spin a loose silken cocoon in sheltered spots close to the ground among leaf litter or low vegetation. Inside the cocoon, the caterpillar transforms into a smooth, dark brown pupa. In around two to four weeks, depending on the weather, the fully developed adult emerges.

Special Sites for Butterflies and Moths

Old Winchester Hill National Nature Reserve

By Kevin Freeborn



A steep-sided, wildflower-rich chalk downland with a prominent Iron Age hillfort and deciduous and yew woodland.

Special because...

A prominent chalk eminence, Old Winchester Hill has commanding views the length of the Meon Valley to the silver ribbon of The Solent and Isle of Wight. The site is rich in archaeological and historical interest with Neolithic flint implements having been found on the hill, Bronze Age tumuli, a crowning Iron Age hillfort and it was used by the military as a mortar range during World War II. Botanically there are several nationally important species including Juniper, Round-headed Rampion, and a number of downland orchids, as well as Small and Devil's-bit Scabious and Autumn Lady's Tresses. Popular with ornithologists too, the site attracts farmland, grassland and woodland species and is an important stopover for migratory species. Kestrels are a familiar sight hovering above the hillfort. The South Downs Way and Monarch's Way long-distance paths thread their way around the site.

The reserve records 37 species of butterfly and the South Slope is prime chalk grassland habitat. Here larval foodplants such as Horseshoe Vetch, Kidney Vetch and Common Bird's-foot Trefoil are widespread and in July and August there are shimmering clouds of Chalk Hill Blues.



The Walk

Use the hand gate from the car park to access the reserve. In a few steps fork left and stride out along the top of the down, with exceptional views off to the right over the hillfort and the Meon Valley. Approaching a boundary fence, a stony access track crosses from the left. Join it, walk right, pass through a gateway gap (A) and stay on the main track to a metal kissing-gate/vehicle gate (B).

There's a South Downs Way (SDW) fingerpost here and the hillfort lies ahead. Through the kissing-gate swing left in front of the ramparts and stay on the lower path as it follows the perimeter fence (left) around to a field gate gap (C) at the top of the reserve's south slope. Follow the path diagonally right, down the hill all the way to a kissing-gate and reserve noticeboard (D) at the bottom.

Beyond the gate go left and walk along the field-edge path to the next SDW fingerpost. Here turn uphill following the SDW with the

Site Natural England (NE)

Parking NNR car park (donations)

Walk distance 2½ miles (3.9km)

Terrain Downland paths and tracks, in places steep and uneven

OS maps Explorer 119

Waypoints

Start SU 645 214

(A) SU 647 207

(B) SU 643 205

(C) SU 642 204

(D) SU 640 203

(E) SU 645 208

(F) SU 642 213

Refreshment The Shoe at Exton,
The Thomas Lord at West Meon

Adapted from *Hampshire and Isle
of Wight Butterfly Walks* by Ashley
Whitlock and Kevin Freeborn

photo: Kevin Freeborn

reserve to the left and a vineyard to the right. Follow the SDW through a hand gate to return to (B). Go through the metal kissing-gate and then turn right, steeply downhill and follow the path contouring around the hillside until reaching a T-junction (E) just below a field gate (right). Turn left, descending very steeply to enter woodland through a kissing-gate at the bottom. After winding through trees reach a kissing-gate and keep ahead with the ongoing chalk path. Where this suddenly stops (F) turn right onto a close-cropped turf path for the haul back up to the car park, gained by passing through a kissing-gate at the top of the slope then keeping ahead on the main path to the reserve gate.

Butterflies to spot

A good site for all downland and grassland butterflies, including Adonis, Common and Chalk Hill Blues, Small Heath, Marbled White and Dark Green Fritillary, and Large, Small/Essex and Silver-spotted Skippers.

Butterfly & Moth Walks



In Hampshire by Ashley Whitlock

The field trip programme in 2026 was subject to several weather cancellations with rain and cool weather in the spring and extreme heat in June and July, where for health and safety reasons several walks had to be cancelled.

The Season began with a very windy experience at Park Hill, but it blew away the cobwebs of winter dormancy, and we saw the first Common Blues of the season and lots of wildflowers, including the Cuckooflower on which Orange-tips had laid their eggs.

Although we never saw our target species on Portsdown Hill, the highlight was a Green Hairstreak and strong numbers of Brimstone. At Butser Hill, we saw many Duke of Burgundies on the wing with several females laying eggs on their foodplant, Cowslip. Small Copper was common and Dingy and Grizzled Skipper were numerous as well.

On Martin Down the weather was cloudy and breezy so finding anything was going to be a challenge, but in the sheltered areas we managed to spot 14 species of butterfly, including Marsh Fritillary, Small Blue, Adonis Blue and Brown Argus. Good numbers of moths were also spotted, including Yellow Shell, Common Carpet, Wood Tiger, Speckled Yellow, Mother

Shipton and Burnet Companion.

The summer began with a heatwave, and several field trips were cancelled for health and safety reasons but at the end of June, at Creech Wood, we managed to see our target species, a rather splendid female Purple Emperor which was going about her business.

The highlight for me was seeing so much activity in Basing Wood and our target species, the Purple Emperor, was well over double figures and Purple Hairstreaks graced us with its presence on more than one occasion even though everything was very dry.

Unfortunately, with the hot dry weather the Purple Emperor season was very short, and this species was disappointingly absent from our trip to Abbots Wood Inclosure; however, the Silver-washed Fritillaries were still busy, and a female was seen laying eggs at the base of a tree trunk.

At Harting Down there were lots of Chalk Hill Blues and a few Dark Green Fritillaries, and we saw one other target species, the Humming-bird Hawk-moth.

Over the next couple of weeks, the season starts to draw to a close, but I am hoping to add the Brown Hairstreak, Silver-spotted Skipper, Clouded Yellow and Adonis Blue to the list for the butterflies of 2026.

Hampshire Field Trips in August and September

Wednesday 5 August, at 10am
Old Winchester Hill NNR
Aiming to see: Clouded Yellow, Silver-spotted Skipper, Adonis Blue

Wednesday 12 August, at 10am
Shipton Bellinger
Aiming to see: Brown Hairstreak, Magpie Moth, Wall Brown

Wednesday 19 August, at 10am
Noar Hill
Brown Hairstreak, Common Blue, Clouded Yellow

Wednesday 2 September
Beacon Hill NNR, Exton
Clouded Yellow, Silver-spotted Skipper, Brown Argus

All details of upcoming Hampshire field trips can be found on my website:

2026 field trips & Past Highlights | Purple Emperor

In the Isle of Wight by Kay Shaw

Isle of Wight Field Trips in August and September

Saturday 1 August
Mount Joy, Carisbrooke
Aiming to see: Chalk Hill Blue, Common Blue, Wall, Brown Argus
Leader: Graham Sherratt, 07944 029056

Saturday 15 August
Brading Downs
Aiming to see: Chalk Hill Blue, Brown Argus
Leader: Emma Brown, 07817504992

Saturday 5 September
Thorness Bay fields, Porchfield
Aiming to see: Clouded Yellow, Wall, Brown Argus, Small Copper
Leader: Graham Sherratt, 07944 029056

photos
top left: In search of the Glanville Fritillary on Afton Down. The Glanvilles were early this year but some were still about for this field trip. Also, in the chalk pits, we recorded Small Blue, Brown Argus, and Dingy, Grizzled and Large Skipper

right: At Thorness Bay where we saw lots of early butterflies, including Wall, Orange-tip and Small Copper

All photos by Kay Shaw



photos
Field trippers in Basing Wood in July

Female Purple Emperor in Basing Wood

Field trippers descending the slopes at Butser Hill in May

All photos by Ashley Whitlock



