

Adastra report 2024

The butterfly season began on January 1st when a Red Admiral was seen at Sidlesham Ferry Pool, Pagham Harbour. There were no further sightings of any adult butterflies for a further three weeks but in the meantime Bob Eade and Vince Massimo were monitoring butterfly eggs and larvae. Bob studies Wall Brown larvae at High and Over, near Seaford, and this year he found a single larva, on the early date of January 3rd. Vince has a Red Admiral study area at Ifield Meadows, Crawley, and on the 10th he observed a larva emerge from its eggshell, joining several other larvae that were already out in the open.

On the 22nd there was a Red Admiral at Polegate, on the 24th a Small Tortoiseshell at Shoreham, on the 26th a Brimstone and a Comma at Ashdown Forest, and a Peacock at Arlington. This meant that all five of the regular over-wintering butterfly species were recorded in January. A photograph of a mating-pair of Red Admirals in Bob Eade's Seaford garden on the 26th prompted the following comment by Vince Massimo: "There are very few images of Red Admirals mating, but this is the only one, to my knowledge, of a winter encounter".

On February 1st there was a very early Painted Lady at Church Norton, Pagham harbour. Few butterflies were seen until the 15th when there were 9 Red Admirals and 3 Brimstones at Tilgate Park, Crawley. With the temperature peaking at 16 degrees C, other butterflies emerged, including 2 Brimstones and 2 Peacocks at Falmer campus, Brighton. The following day at Tilgate Park there were at least 15 Red Admirals in and around a Daphne bush; an amazing spectacle for mid-February. Elsewhere, there was an over-wintering Humming-bird Hawk-moth at Tidebrook nr Wadhurst nectaring on Daphne, and an early Speckled Wood at Eastbourne.

On the 27th, at High and Over, several Wall Brown larvae were located in two grass tussocks, and as there was feeding damage, it was evident that the larvae were active. On the same day there was a Humming-bird Hawk-moth nectaring on Daphne at Eastbourne, and two days later another hawk-moth visited a garden at Beachy Head.

On March 6th a Humming-bird Hawk-moth was seen in Hailsham, feeding on Daphne, and in Crawley, another one was feeding on Winter Honeysuckle. On the 8th a Speckled Wood visited a Crawley garden, and at nearby Tilgate Park, there were five Red Admirals and five male Brimstones. On the same day a Large Tortoiseshell was recorded in a private wood near West Chiltington. On the 14th at High and Over, "lots of Peacocks had come out of hibernation", and in North Lancing there was another Humming-bird Hawk-moth, this one nectaring on Rosemary. The 20th was very memorable as there were five species that were "first of the season": Large White in Goring, Small Whites in many locations, including Hailsham Country Park, Green-veined White at Knepp and Amberley Wildbrooks, Orange-tip at Knepp, and Holly Blue in a Hailsham garden. Both Orange-tip and Green-veined White were very early compared to an average year, no doubt influenced by a mild winter and "the warmest- ever, February". Also on the 20th, there were 6 Small Tortoiseshells by the River Adur.

On the 24th at Highdown Gardens there was a nice variety of species, including 5 Peacocks, 5 Commas, 3 Red Admirals, 2 Small Whites and a Humming-bird Hawk-moth. At North Lancing, on the 29th, there were two more hawk-moths. In a Storrington garden on the 30th there were 3 Holly Blues, 6 Brimstones (5m & 1f), 3 Peacocks and a Red Admiral. On the same day, in the North Lancing area, there were 58 Peacocks, 17 Brimstones (16m & 1f), 14 Small Tortoiseshells, 12 Commas, 7 Red Admirals and a Humming-bird Hawk-moth. Whilst on Thorney Island, there were 12 Brimstones, 6 Commas, 6 Peacocks, 2 Red Admirals, 2 Speckled Woods and a Holly Blue.

With strong winds in early April there was very little butterfly activity, but on the 6th at Steyning Rifle Range a report of a Green Hairstreak was very welcome. Bearing in mind the general paucity of sightings, recording 8 species in a Hailsham garden on April 8th was quite astonishing: 2 male Brimstones, 1 male Orange Tip, 1 Small White, 3 Red Admirals, 2 Peacocks, 2 Commas, 2 Speckled Woods and a Holly Blue. On the 11th there was a Silver-Y moth and a Humming-bird Hawk-moth in North Lancing. On the following day at Pulborough Brooks there was a veritable host of butterflies with 15 Brimstones, 14 Peacocks, 20 Orange-tips, 2 Speckled Woods and 2 Red Admirals. A Small Copper at Hailsham Country Park on the 13th "was a nice surprise" as was a Grizzled Skipper at Mill Hill on the 14th.

It was rather quiet for a few days until the 20th when the North Lancing area produced 11 species, which included a male Wall Brown. It is interesting to note that three out of the past four years a Wall has been seen on April 20th, which may suggest that the micro-climate deep within the grass tussock, where the eggs are laid, plays a more important role than the outside temperatures, which will vary from one spring to the next. On the 24th at Mill Hill there was a Small Heath, 2 Grizzled Skippers and a Wall Brown. On the 29th there was a Dingy Skipper at Devil's Dyke, 5 Duke of Burgundys at Kithurst Meadow and a Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Rewell Wood. The following day there was a Clouded Yellow at Mill Hill and in the Cissbury Ring area there was a very large count of 58 Brimstones (34m & 24f). On the last day of the month there was a Humming-bird Hawk-moth in a High Salvington garden.

On May 7th there were 11 species at Malling Down, including 10+ Dingy Skippers, and on the same day there was also a male Common Blue on East Sussex downland. On the 9th there was a peak count of 164 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rewell Wood, and a "fresh Wall Brown" was seen at Arlington Reservoir. A few Painted Ladies were reported between the 13th and 15th, with sightings at Brighton, Abbot's Wood, Storrington, Hassocks and Littlehampton. On the 15th at Cissbury Ring there was an excellent variety of 15 species, including 58 Brimstones. On the 17th there was the following post "today was one of those superb butterflying days where you could lose yourself in the majesty of the Downs. I walked Amberley to Arundel and was thoroughly entertained by 19 butterfly species". This entertainment included the first Adonis Blue of the season and four other blue butterfly species: Common Blue, Holly Blue, Small Blue and Brown Argus. Holly Blues were having a rather modest first brood but not apparently at the county cricket ground, at Hove, when around a dozen were seen on the 18th, with another large count of 19 Holly Blues in the Lancing Ring area on the next day. On the 23rd, and after a survey of the Cissbury Ring area, the following post neatly summed up the 2024 season to date, "I've been recording butterflies here since 2013 and this is the poorest Spring for me by far".

On a much brighter note, there were five Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rowland Wood/Park Corner Heath on the 24th and also the first Large Skipper record, for the year. On the same day there were 16 species at Chantry Hill but rather surprisingly, no Green Hairstreaks. Also, on the 24th there were 14 species at Castle Hill, and the “most Small Blues I have ever seen at one site”. On the 25th there was a Humming-bird Hawk-moth in a North Lancing garden and at Kithurst Meadow there was an early Meadow Brown. On the 27th there was some very good news regarding Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rowland Wood; “Our tally of 17 individuals (9 males, 8 females) is the best since 2020, and with the foodplant in abundance, there is reason for cautious optimism for next season”. On the 30th in the NW of the county a few Wood Whites were reported. That was the 30th butterfly species recorded in Sussex in 2024, a significant milestone in the butterfly season.

On June 1st there was an emergence of 14 Meadow Browns at Thorney Island. A few days later on the 4th there was the following post, “In what has been a terrible early summer for butterflies, today I was delighted to find hundreds of Small Blues across the entirety of Wolstonbury Hill, especially on the lower slopes”. On the same day an early Black Hairstreak was found at Ditchling Common. On the 5th a search of Anchor Bottom produced 258 Adonis Blues (mostly males). On the 6th a Large Tortoiseshell larval web was found on disease-resistant Dutch Elm, somewhere in the Ouse valley. On the 8th the first Marbled White was spotted at Steyning Downland Scheme and there was an early Ringlet, at the same location, on the following day. Also, on the 9th there were four male White-letter Hairstreaks, in West Worthing. On the 11th there was a single Silver-studded Blue at Iping Common. On the 16th there was “at last some sunshine, and just a breeze and not a gale”, and with the improvement in the weather 4-5 Gatekeepers were seen at Berwick. At Knepp there was a Purple Hairstreak on the 16th and 2 male Purple Emperors, on the 17th. On the 18th there was a White Admiral at Knowlands Wood. On the 19th there was a count of 134 Silver-studded Blues at Chapel Common. Also, on the 19th there were two Small Skippers at Lancing Ring, and a “late” Grizzled Skipper at Chantry Hill. On the 21st there was a male Dark Green Fritillary on the Steyning Downs, which was the 40th butterfly species for the year.

A Humming-bird Hawk-moth at East Dean (nectaring on Lavender and Red Valerian) was very welcome, as were 5 White-letter Hairstreaks at Littlehampton Golf Course. On the 22nd there were 7 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rowland Wood, “including five females laying eggs far and wide”. Another visit to Rowland Wood on the following produced a Silver-washed Fritillary. On the 27th there were two Essex Skippers at North Lancing. On the 28th a total of 20 Silver-studded Blues were found at Ashdown Forest. On the same day at Marlpost Wood, Southwater there were four Purple Emperors, White Admiral and Purple Hairstreak. On the 29th in the North Lancing area 17 butterfly species were found. To finish the month, there was a Clouded Yellow at Knepp.

On July 1st there were several Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals in Knowlands Wood, nr Barcombe. A first-brood Adonis Blue at Mill Hill on the same day was a late date for this species. With yet more poor weather we had to wait until the 10th to record a Chalk Hill Blue, this one seen at Kithurst Hill. The 11th was “a lovely morning” and the transect on the scarp below Chanctonbury Ring revealed “loads of Meadow Browns (559), Ringlets (36), Marble Whites (21)”. On the 18th there was a male Brown Hairstreak in a Crawley garden and on the same day in the Lancing Ring area there were 19 species including three fresh,

second-brood Wall Browns. There was another early Brown Hairstreak on the following day, this one in a Lewes garden. Cross-Channel migrants were evident on the 19th, with “a small influx of c80 Small Whites noted in one field at Thorney Deeps” and “sitting on Rottingdean beach it seemed there were a few Red Admirals coming in over the sea”. On the 23rd a male Silver-spotted Skipper was seen briefly in Cradle Valley. On the 24th there was a count of 22 species at Cissbury Ring. On the same day at Stump Bottom there were lots of Marbled Whites, Dark Green Fritillaries and Six-spot Burnets and also 2 second-brood Small Blues”.

There was a male Wall Brown, a few kms north of Pulborough (any record for this species, away from the South Downs, is noteworthy). On the 28th there was a Swallowtail record at both Brighton and Seaford Head. Meanwhile, a second-brood Wall Brown count at High and Over was below average, with “a count of just 48 on the 4 mile circuit”. Some good news at Castle Hill where “at last the Chalk Hill Blue are in much better numbers, 50 plus without really trying too hard. Also very pleasingly, good numbers of Small Blue, 20 plus with some beautiful fresh looking specimens amongst them”. On the 30th there was a large Tortoiseshell in East Grinstead. There were more Swallowtails on the 30th, with one reported in a Seaford garden and another flying over a Brighton garden. At the end of the month in a North Lancing garden, there was a Humming-bird Hawk-moth, egg-laying on Hedge Bedstraw.

On August 1st at High and Over “the path was full of Wall Browns”, whilst on the Amberley Downs, a single hillside was awash with at least 500 Chalk Hill Blues. On the 2nd, another Swallowtail was recorded in Seaford. On the 4th, there was a count of 14 Graylings at Deep Dean, and 16 other butterfly species, including Silver-spotted Skipper and Dark Green Fritillary. Meanwhile Cissbury Ring “was covered in Chalk Hill Blues and Gatekeepers, and there were also about six Silver-spotted Skippers”.

On the 5th a male Long-tailed Blue visited a Felpham garden, and that was the 49th butterfly species, in Sussex, for the year (the same total as 2023) and we never did achieve the half-century. On the 6th there was an amazing count of 63 Wall Browns (on just 1.4 miles of footpath) between Sompting and Coombes Farm. On the 9th there were 18 species on the Amberley Downs, including 4-5 very fresh second-brood Adonis Blues, 100+ Chalk Hill Blues, 20-30 Common Blues and 20-30 Brown Argus. At Peacehaven there was a second-brood Dingy Skipper on the 10th (the only second-brood record for this species, in 2024). On the same day in the Cissbury area there were 17 butterfly species, including a count of 40 Common Blues, 14 Silver-spotted Skippers, 2 Painted Ladies and two Humming-bird Hawk-moths. There was also another Swallowtail, this one in Wild Park LNR, Brighton. On the 12th, there was another male Long-tailed Blue recorded in Felpham.

On the 14th, one lucky member combined a family picnic with butterfly spotting and had close views of a Swallowtail, at Mount Caburn. There was a count of 8 Silver-spotted Skippers at Chantry Hill (but with an estimate of 25-30 for the whole site). On the 16th there were “a good number of Chalk Hill Blues and at least three Silver-spotted Skippers” in the Beachy Head area. Further along the coast at Seaford, it was “lovely to finally see so many newly emerged Adonis Blues”. On the 17th at Malling Down, there were “many Chalk Hill Blue - mostly male and in pristine condition”. On the same day a Clouded Yellow was

feeding on *Verbena Bonariensis* in a seaside garden, in Lancing. On the 21st, another Clouded Yellow was on Eastbourne seafront, feeding on Red Valerian.

On the 23rd, a Brown Hairstreak was egg-laying on Plum Cherry in a West Worthing garden. On the 26th, a Holly Blue, was egg-laying on Broom (an unusual larval foodplant for this species). Brown Hairstreak sightings were very few in number until the 28th when there were sightings in East Brighton, Storrington, Woods Mill, Cuckfield, but best of all a magnificent 15 females at Steyning Rifle Range, which were found by "a team of seven". On the 28th there was a Clouded Yellow on Thorney Island and there was another by the beach at Bognor Regis on the following day. On the 29th, at Anchor Bottom, there were "100s of Adonis Blues". Silver-spotted Skippers were not plentiful in 2024 and along the Cradle Valley "they have been totally awful this year. On what has been one of the best sites for this butterfly, my highest count has only been 4, instead of the normal high double figure counts". On the 30th there was a fresh influx of at least 400 Small Whites on Thorney Island.

On September 1st, there was a late record for a Dark Green Fritillary at Anchor Bottom. In the first few days of the month there was an influx of several migratory species. There were modest numbers of Painted Ladies with 9 at Worthing seafront, 3 at Thorney Island, 9 at Goring-by-Sea, 12 at Cuckmere Haven, 3 at Whitehawk Hill, Brighton and 1 at Bexhill beach. At the same time there were also large numbers of both Small Whites and Large Whites scattered along coastal locations, and also 2 Clouded Yellows at Cuckmere Haven. On the 3rd another Long-tailed Blue visited a Felpham garden. On the 4th there were 2 third-brood Wall Browns at High and Over, "a pair of war - torn sparring Long - tailed Blues near a block of Spanish Broom" at Seaford, and a fresh female Long-tailed Blue in a Bexhill garden, feeding on *Salvia Mystic Spires*.

On the 11th there were Painted Lady reports (mostly singles) from Chanctonbury Ring, Cuckfield, Herstmonceux Castle and Thorney Island. In a Fishbourne garden a Humming-bird Hawk-moth was seen feeding on Honeysuckle. On the 13th there were 16 butterfly species at Lancing Ring, including 46 Red Admirals, 13 Speckled Woods, 2 fresh third-brood Wall Browns, and also a Humming-bird Hawk-moth. On the 13th a helice Clouded Yellow was seen at Thorney Island (that was the only helice recorded for the entire season) and on the following day there were 2 Brown Hairstreaks at Pulborough Brooks.

On the 15th, there were 18 species on the Amberley Downs, which is an amazing variety for mid-September. On Thorney Island there were 18 Small Coppers, the highest count for this species, in 2024. There were 7 Painted Ladies at Whitehead Hole, Eastbourne and on the riverbank nr Bramber there was a Wall Brown (that's an unusual location for this species). On the 16th there were 16 species at Cissbury Ring, including a rather worn female Long-tailed Blue. At Pulborough Brooks a total of 15 species were recorded over a two day period, including 2 female Brown Hairstreaks. Wall Browns were seen at Herstmonceux Castle on the 18th, 20th and 26th, with a count of 6 on the latter date. At an undisclosed location in East Sussex there was a "fresh-looking male Long-tailed Blue" on the 21st.

On the 28th there was a count of 40 third-brood Wall Browns at High and Over, as well as 13 other species, which included 2 Clouded Yellows. At Castle Hill there were 3 third-brood

Walls, and another 6 Walls were found in the Cissbury Ring area. Also, on the 28th there was a Brown Hairstreak at Plumpton.

On October 1st at Herstmonceux, “the Wall Browns put on a good show, including three females”. The 3rd was remarkable for the number and variety of butterflies seen in Sussex, and with 18 species recorded that is probably a county record for a single October day. At Lancing Ring there were 11 species including 42 Speckled Woods and 36 Red Admirals. At Arundel there was a Clouded Yellow. In Peacehaven there were “at least 24 Red Admirals on the Buddleia and Ivy, as well as 12 Peacocks and 12 Commas”. Large numbers of butterflies were seen at Friston Gallops including 4 Wall Browns. On the Amberley Downs there were 14 species, including 2 Meadow Browns, 3 Small Heaths, 2 Common Blues, 2 Green-veined Whites and singles of Adonis Blue, Chalk Hill Blue and Brown Argus.

The fine weather continued and at Thorney Island on the 5th there were “30 Small Whites, 24 Speckled Woods, 8 Red Admirals, 6 Large Whites, 2 Meadow Browns, and singles of Comma, male Brimstone and a male Common Blue (which appeared very fresh)”. On the 11th at Lancing Beach, there was a migratory movement of around 50 Red Admirals over a 90 minute period, all heading west. On the same day, in the North Lancing area, “there were 36 Speckled Woods and 26 Red Admirals”, and by the River Adur nr Henfield there was a late record for a female Wall Brown. On the 12th at Pagham Harbour there were 30+ Red Admirals – all part of the exodus that many other observers had recorded. On the same day there were 1-2 Wall Browns in a Berwick garden “they've been present on sunny days throughout their third generation”. On the 15th there was a Wall Brown in North Lancing and down by the beach there was a Painted Lady nectaring on Verbena Bonariensis. At Herstmonceux Castle “there was a very fresh female Wall Brown with quite a few males too, but the real surprise was a Humming-bird Hawk-moth darting around a Salvia”. There was another Wall at Berwick, on the 16th, this one “a fresh-looking female skipping around the garden”. On the same day at Deep Dean there was a late Meadow Brown (average latest date during the 2010-2014 county survey was Oct 9th).

On the 17th there was a Humming-bird Hawk-moth (nectaring on Verbena), in a Crawley garden. In a Felpham garden there was a rather worn male long-tailed Blue. On the 18th it was bright and sunny and there were 9 species in North Lancing, including 3 Common Blues and a female Wall Brown, and at Beacon Hill, Rottingdean “there was a remarkably fresh Meadow Brown”. On the 22nd there was a “pristine looking” Painted Lady in a Wartling garden and a Small Tortoiseshell in a Mountfield garden. On the 24th there was a third brood Holly Blue in West Worthing and a male Long-tailed Blue at Warnham Nature Reserve. On the 27th there was an amazing count of 27 Speckled Woods in the North Lancing area and also a third brood female Brown Argus on the Amberley Hills (a very late date for this species). The morning of the 29th was sunny and warm and in the North Lancing suburbs there were 11 Red Admirals, 4 Speckled Woods and 2 Peacocks.

An “anti-cyclonic gloom” hung over much of Southern England during the first half of November, and for most Sussex folk there was a monotonous daily fare of either mist or fog. However, a small amount of weak sunshine did penetrate the gloom in some coastal locations and on November 1st there was Red Admiral, Peacock and Painted Lady at Whitehawk Hill, East Brighton, and female Large White, Painted Lady and a Humming-bird

Hawk-moth at Newhaven. On the 12th there 12 Red Admirals, 4 Speckled Woods and a Comma at North Lancing, and 13 Red Admirals and a single Speckled Wood at Beacon Hill LNR, Rottingdean. On the 13th a Peacock and a female Holly Blue were seen in Hailsham, 5 Red Admirals in Horsham, and 13 Red Admirals, 7 Speckled Woods and a Small White in North Lancing. On the 15th there was a late record of a Humming-bird Hawk-moth in North Lancing and a male Holly Blue in Storrington. In the second half of the month there were quite a few Red Admiral records but more surprisingly, perhaps, were 2 Painted ladies at North Lancing and a single Painted Lady at Rackham Plantation on the 25th, and another one of these beauties at Stone Cross on the 28th.

The narrative above is a very brief synopsis of the butterfly records in 2024. Reflecting on the butterfly season as a whole, how did it compare to recent years? Were there any interesting developments? What did we learn?

There can be no denying that the 2024 butterfly season, in Sussex, was a very poor one. For most of the year the weather was awful and very insect - unfriendly, but I think we have to look further back to fully appreciate why this butterfly season was so poor. In 2022, there was 3-month heatwave and drought and bearing in mind the disastrous impact of the 1976 heatwave on our butterfly populations, there was always going to be a concern as to what might happen. Unfortunately, there was very little respite for insects in 2023 as the spring was very cold, and this clearly had a detrimental effect on those species that emerged early and were single-brooded. One poor spring followed another, with 2024 producing very little cheer. Admittedly March was mild, but it was also wet and cloudy, with very little sunshine. April was also wet and although there was a short fine spell mid-month it ended with a prolonged spell of cold nights (which is not good for caterpillar development!). Most of May was also wet and windy and the summer months that followed were not a lot better with perhaps one sunny day per week, and even when there was sunshine there were usually strong winds! There was very little insect-friendly weather (or human-friendly weather, for that matter) for most of this year, until late July, and then for the next six weeks or so we enjoyed a very pleasant late summer and early autumn.

Most butterfly species had a below-average year. Of the 46 regular resident species in Sussex, only Brimstone, Duke of Burgundy, Purple Emperor, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, and perhaps Small Blue and Chalk Hill Blue had a good season. Most species had a below-average season, poor season or very poor season. Notably, Grayling and Silver-spotted Skipper had poor/very poor seasons.

A few butterfly species fared well. The Duke of Burgundy count for the whole of the Storrington Downs was around 200. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries at Rowland Wood had a very acceptable season with a peak daily count of 17, on May 27th. Purple Emperors had a very satisfactory season at Knepp with a transect count of 45 individuals (40 males and 5 females) in week 3 of their flight season.

Later in the year, there was some good news for Wall Browns, with this species gradually expanding its range to the north of Eastbourne, with records from Polegate, Hailsham, Arlington Reservoir and Berwick. The records for Berwick were third brood individuals, which rather suggests that this species is reasonably well-established in that general locality.

Overall, there was little indication that Brown Hairstreaks had a good season, but a wonderful count of 15 females on the Steyning Downs, on August 28th, was very welcome.

Large Tortoiseshells have done well, in Sussex, over the past few years, but in 2024 there were far fewer reports. Whether this was a genuine reduction in butterfly activity or simply a reduction in activity by butterfly enthusiasts, due to the poor weather, is impossible to say. There continued to be good news in the Ouse Valley where they bred for the fourth consecutive season. Two adults were seen nectaring on Sallow blossom, on March 14th, and 3-4 miles from this location there was a singleton seen around Elm, on April 14th. Just two larval webs were found, the first 15-20 feet up a disease-resistant Elm on June 6th. Within this web there were approximately 150 spent larval skins, with the larvae already gone. A second web was found on June 14th, some 8 to 12 feet up a Wych Elm, and this web had also been vacated. The first of the Sussex-born offspring was seen on July 4th, nectaring on Greater Knapweed at a location which was a considerable distance from the natal web. Nearby in an adjoining meadow another adult was seen on the same day, and in this same meadow a further two were recorded on July 19th, nectaring on Creeping Thistle and Bramble. When it comes to nectaring it would appear that Large Tortoiseshells have catholic tastes.

In 2023 the season was “redeemed” by the influx of large numbers of migrants from Continental Europe. That didn’t happen in 2024. In late summer, there were quite large numbers of migrant Small Whites and Large Whites, but the usual August/September Red Admiral influx was modest. There were very few records for Painted Ladies, and both Clouded Yellow and Long-tailed Blue were very uncommon/scarce. Humming-bird Hawk-moths have been a very regular sight over the past few years, but in 2024 they were also very uncommon.

My Storrington garden has been very intensively studied over the past 14 years and despite the best-ever display of wildflowers this year, it was the worst-ever butterfly season with just 26 species recorded. The best day of the year was August 4th when I recorded 13 species and a total of 44 butterflies (that compares to an average year of 18-19 species and 75-80 butterflies in a single day). Garden hoverflies and solitary bees were also dramatically reduced in numbers. It was not a good year for most insects!

I like to finish these reports on a positive note but this year I am struggling, somewhat. The modest expansion of Wall Browns in the geographical area encompassing Polegate/Hailsham/Berwick was very gratifying, and the news from Rowland Wood regarding the two “Pearls” was excellent news. Insects have the capacity to bounce back very quickly as just 4-5 female butterflies can lay 100s of eggs between them. A warm, sunny spring in 2025, would be very welcome! On that hopeful note I will end the 2024 annual butterfly report.

Martin Kalaher