

Tour Report

UK - Butterflies & Birds of Sussex

14 – 16 September 2021

Adonis blue



Wheatear



Convolvulus hawkmoth



Adder



Compiled by Terry Goble
Images by David Pitt

After a very indifferent summer we were treated to an unexpectedly warm and sunny spell mid-September. This facilitated an excellent few days of wildlife watching and we managed to see a diversity of species. We saw some exquisite butterflies, with adonis blue and clouded yellows, perhaps the highlights a good mix of migrant and over wintering UK birds and some excellent reptiles and insects. The group were enthusiastic and great company throughout the tour, and I hope they enjoyed the Sussex wildlife and scenery.

Day 1: Tuesday 14 September 2021

After meeting one of the guests at Shoreham train station we drove to the Old Tollgate Hotel, where we met with the other members of the group. After a quick introduction we headed off to visit Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve. Although predominantly a bird reserve there have been great efforts to improve the invertebrate and general wildlife of the area.

We first visited the recently created Wiggonholt Heathland, adjacent to the main RSPB reserve. This was a wildlife unfriendly plantation until about ten years ago when it was felled to create a heathland on the sandy acid soils. Heathland has become a rare habitat in the UK and this area was a welcome addition and now supports nightjars and woodlarks. We were here to visit the newly created Black Pond, which is a rich habitat for dragonflies. Despite the water levels being very low after a prolonged dry spell we encountered many dragonflies. There were ruddy darters seemingly everywhere landing on grass, branches and people! We also saw several migrant hawkers zooming around, last but certainly not least one of the group found a common emerald damselfly. This exquisite little damselfly is quite scarce and was a nice find. We then headed back to the main reserve, with some of the group having a glimpse of a green woodpecker as it flew into a tall oak, yaffling as it went.

We entered the reserve and found an array of insect life on the flowering ivy. There were lots of bees, wasps and hoverflies and a couple of hornets contributing to the hum of insects. We also saw a red admiral looking resplendent with its post box red stripes. We walked on to the 'zigzag' path and enjoyed a nice variety of insects and birds, with blackcap male and female showing intermittently and a chiffchaff skulking through the shrubs. We added small copper and green-veined white as well as a few small whites to our sightings. We carried on to the pond, but this one was practically dried out and only a few migrant hawkers were seen.

A little further more flowing ivy produced the same resulting mass of insects. Slightly macabre was the sight of a hornet devouring a wasp that it had just caught. We carried on to 'Adder Alley' and on the wetland saw a reed bunting, but little else. Back on the main path there was a flurry of birdlife, which was hard to keep pace with! A pair of green woodpeckers flew into view and landed on fence posts, whilst in the foreground a juvenile male redstart flitted between shrubs, fences and the floor. Several chiffchaffs hopped around and a wren whizzed through the shrubs. After these lovely encounters we headed back to the carpark.

One of the group was lucky enough to get a glimpse of a stoat before it disappeared into the long grass. A little further on we found a female adder basking on a refugia. Although most didn't see it before it glided away, we were lucky enough to find a second one under the refugia, which stayed obligingly still. After this encounter we continued on stopping off at the feeders, which were mostly populated by great and blue tits. We then arrived at the car and after an enjoyable stroll in the afternoon sun headed back to Bamber.

We had enough time to check out a nearby little owl site, unfortunately on this occasion they didn't show, but we agreed to try again the following evening. We headed back to the hotel and got ready for dinner. We all met again at 7:30pm for our meal and enjoyed a relaxed evening getting to know each other, before it was time to retire and say 'goodnight'.

Day 2: Wednesday 15 September 2021

We all met at 8am and started the day with the contents of the overnight moth trap. The low clouds and dark night had ensured a good haul of moths. The highlights were a glinting burnished brass, angle shades, ruby tiger and a magnificent Convolvulus hawkmoth, our third largest moth. The convolvulus as well as being a

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big moth has a beautiful candy-striped body, revealed when it opened its wings. After photographs and admiring the moth it began to vibrate its wings, warming up just before it took off, a great start to the day.

The weather was a little cool and overcast, but we decided to check out Steyning Rifle Range for brown hairstreak. We parked nearby and walked through the reserve past the shipping container clad with insect hotels and sporting a grass roof for invertebrates. It also has a small wildlife pond. There were a few common darter and migrant hawkers around, but it was generally a little quiet. A speckled bush cricket was a nice find and a sparrowhawk dashed overhead. After a slow walk through we decided to move on to Anchor Bottom. As we were leaving the weather began to brighten and raised our hopes for finding adonis blue.

Parking up a Dacre Gardens we began our walk up the bottom of a glacial valley, which is a spectacular wildflower and butterfly meadow. Our first stop was to find the red star thistle, a nationally scarce plant. It was at the end of its flowering period, but still had one or two blooms. As always they need careful handling as they contain some vicious spikes!

As we walked on we noted meadow browns and eventually a few adonis blues a few more metres walking revealed the adonis were still around in good numbers and some in reasonable condition. We enjoyed the adonis and soon added clouded yellow to our sightings, which was a welcome bonus. We searched out the patches of autumn lady's tresses and enjoyed the spiralling orchids, which are the last of the season. A wheatear held our attention for a while as it sat on top of a bramble patch, posing well for us, whilst overhead a sparrowhawk was causing a disturbance amongst the many corvids, including two ravens. After a lovely walk among the downland, still sporting a carpet of devil's bit scabious, rough hawkbit and other downland flowers, we decided to pop to the local supermarket for a comfort stop and to buy lunch. On the way back to the car a zig zagging small butterfly caught our eye, which was almost certainly a brown hairstreak. We attempted to follow it around a large stand of blackthorn, but unfortunately it was lost from view.

We headed off to a local store to buy lunch and use their facilities, before continuing to Shoreham Fort. After parking up we had a short walk around the 'moat' to the southern walls, spotting the occasional wall lizard as it quickly disappeared either into vegetation or a wall cavity. We sat down in the warm sunshine to wait for the lizards and more importantly eat our lunch! After a short while the wall lizards began to appear and eventually we managed to spot a lovely male, its vivid green upper side lit up in the sunshine. Besides the lizards there were also a few birds around, the wooden jetty had up to ten feeding turnstones and a wheatear was a nice find that eventually gave very close views as it hopped along a replica first world war trench.

Although there had been no recent reports of long-tailed blues, we headed off to visit the site in the hope that the recent sunny weather had encouraged them to emerge. We walked to the known 'hotspot' but there was no sign of the long-tailed blues. There were several small whites and quite a few red admirals, but the closest we came to a long-tail was when a common blue was found feeding on an ever-lasting pea, raising our hope for a second! We did however find a few large female wasp spiders, their bold black and yellow striped abdomens giving them their name. Other sightings included a wall brown butterfly and a slow worm to add to our reptile list.

We decided on an afternoon/evening stroll before attempting to look for owls. We drove up to the Burgh and went on a circular walk around this downland farm. Our principle targets were grey partridge, red kite and brown hare. As we walked around in the afternoon sun we began to see our targets. Firstly we found a field with about four hares running around and although distant we had good views in the telescope. A little while later a red kite drifted lazily over the fields. It was unusual to have only seen one as this is often a place to see several birds. There were however, many buzzards around and we watched one on a telegraph wire close to where the hares were frolicking. Our only missing target was the partridge and we had to wait until we were on the return leg before we had some good sightings of a covey of birds. This consisted of a pair of adults with a few juveniles, we watched them on the path and had excellent views, being able to discern the subtly attractive markings and colouring of the adult birds. We also saw the introduced red-legged partridge in a field further along the path. Other sightings included linnets and goldfinches and a few common butterflies.

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We had just enough time to attempt to find the little owl after dipping the previous evening. We drove back towards Edburton and drew up alongside the dove cote, which was the owls breeding site. However we were to be disappointed as the owls didn't show for a second evening. However, our disappointment didn't last long as we next drove to Bramber Nature Reserve and after a few minutes' wait our patience was rewarded with the arrival of two adult barn owls. We were able to watch these magnificent birds as the light was fading until it was time to return to the hotel for our evening meal. As we walked back to the car we could hear both barn and tawny owls calling.

We all met up for our last evening meal together and it was a relaxed and enjoyable evening. After our meal we arranged the plans for the next day. Only two were going to visit the Knepp Estate as two of the group had been previously and were keen to focus on seeing the brown hairstreak. As Steyning Rifle Range is one of the best sites in the UK for brown hairstreak they had decided to spend the morning there. We arranged to meet in the morning to look at any moths from the overnight trap before going our separate ways.

Day 3: Thursday 16 September 2021

We all met at 8am and although there were quite a few moths in the trap, they were virtually all repeats of the previous day. There were however several ichneumons, parasitic wasps, which were despite their brutal lifestyle attractive insects. We said farewell to the group heading to Steyning and we set off towards Knepp. It was a short drive to Dial Post, before turning into the rewilding project. We parked up near the camping area and set off to explore the estate. Almost immediately we spotted two adult storks sitting up on top of a nest 100 metres away. We made our way to a closer vantage point and then had fantastic views of these magnificent birds. It is quite a sight to see them in Sussex after a 400-hundred-year absence and they appear to be thriving. Several had already begun the journey south, but the core population remain at Knepp as they were captive bred and had never migrated. It is astounding that the young birds retained the instinct to migrate.

After this stroke of luck we continued around the trail stopping to look at the 'beaver lake'. We discussed the fate of the original pairing and the planned reintroduction of more beavers in the near future. Out on the pond itself there were many mallards and a few coots and moorhens. There was also a splendid looking great crested grebe. We continued our walk and noted several jays, which with green woodpeckers were to be frequent sightings throughout the morning. We visited a couple of tree hides and immersed ourselves in the tranquil beauty of the habitat occasionally interrupted by a wildlife sighting or two.

We had a couple of sightings of female and young fallow deer and one partial sighting of a male sporting amazing palmated antlers, he was skittish and keen to hide. We completed the circular walk and made our way back to the car. It had been a very enjoyable walk in the warm autumnal sunshine. We grabbed some snacks and then made our way back to the hotel. Here we said our farewells as the tour came to an end.

A report from Steyning Rifle Range included accounts of sightings of brown hairstreaks (distant) and amazingly a silver washed fritillary that was very tattered and a similarly tatty female adonis.

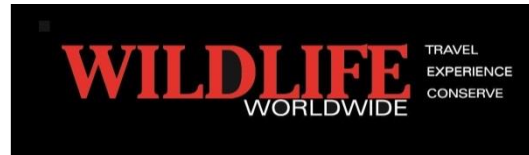
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Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>			
1	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus color</i>			✓
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓
3	Common teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓		
4	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓
5	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
6	Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>			✓
7	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓
8	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓
9	Wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
10	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		✓
11	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓
12	Common coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓
13	European white stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			✓
14	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	
15	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓
16	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	
17	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	
18	Green sandpiper	<i>Tinga ochropus</i>	✓		
19	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
20	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	
21	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
22	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓

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23	Eurasian buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
24	Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	H	H	✓
25	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓
26	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	
27	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipter nisus</i>		✓	✓
28	Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		✓	
29	Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	H	
30	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓
31	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
32	Eurasian jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
33	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
34	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	
35	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
36	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
37	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
38	Eurasian bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			H
39	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		
40	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓
41	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
42	Reed bunting	<i>Schoeniclus schoeniclus</i>	✓		
43	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
44	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
45	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓
46	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓
47	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓
48	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		✓
49	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
50	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓

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51	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
52	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	✓		
53	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓	
54	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H	H	✓
55	Eurasian blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	BUTTERFLIES	RHOPALOCERA			
1	Comma	<i>Polyommatus c-album</i>			✓
2	Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓	✓
3	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>		✓	
4	Adonis blue	<i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>		✓	✓
5	Brown hairstreak	<i>Thecla betulae</i>		✓	✓
6	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			✓
7	Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓
8	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>		✓	✓
9	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓
10	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	
11	Silver-washed fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>			✓
12	Clouded yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		✓	
13	Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>	✓		
14	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓
15	Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓		
16	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓
17	Wall brown	<i>Lasiommata mergera</i>		✓	
	MOTHS (MACROS)	LEPIDOPTERA			
	Geometrid and Others				
1	Yellow shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata bilineata</i>		✓	
2	Brimstone	<i>Opisthograptis luteolata</i>		✓	

3	Vapourer moth	<i>Orgyia antiqua</i>			✓
4	Lime-spec pug	<i>Eupithecia centaureata</i>		✓	
5	Convolvulus hawkmoth	<i>Agrius convolvuli</i>		✓	
6	Ruby tiger	<i>Phragmatobia fuliginosa fuliginosa</i>		✓	
7	Common carpet	<i>Epirrhoe alternata</i>		✓	
8	Garden carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe fluctuata</i>		✓	
	Noctuidae				
1	Heart and dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>		✓	
2	Common rustic	<i>Mesapamea secalis</i>		✓	
3	Large yellow underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>		✓	
4	Broad-bordered yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua fimbriata</i>		✓	
5	Feathered gothic	<i>Tholera decimalis</i>		✓	
6	Setaceous Hebrew character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>		✓	
7	Straw underwing	<i>Thalpophila matura</i>		✓	
8	Silver 'Y'	<i>Autographa gamma</i>	✓	✓	✓
9	Brown line bright eye	<i>Lacanobia oleracea</i>		✓	
10	Common wainscot	<i>Mythimna straminea</i>		✓	
11	Setaceous Hebrew character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>		✓	
12	White point	<i>Mythimna albipuncta</i>		✓	
13	Dark sword grass	<i>Agrotis ipsilon</i>		✓	
14	Snout	<i>Hypena proboscidalis</i>		✓	✓
	Moths (Micros)				
1	Small china mark			✓	
2	Light brown apple moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>		✓	
3	Bee moth	<i>Aphomia sociella</i>		✓	
4	Rusty-dot pearl	<i>Udea ferrugalis</i>		✓	✓
5	Thyme marble	<i>Celpha cespitana</i>		✓	

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6	Grass veneer	<i>Crambus sp</i>	✓	✓	✓
	DRAGONFLIES	ANISOPTERA			
1	Migrant hawkler	<i>Aesha mixta</i>	✓		✓
2	Common emerald damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	✓		
3	Ruddy darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓		
4	Common darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>		✓	✓
	MAMMALS	MAMMILIA			
1	Grey squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
2	Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>	✓		
3	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
4	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
5	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	
6	Fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>			✓
	REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS	REPTILIA AND AMPHIBIA			
1	European adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>	✓		
2	Italian wall lizard	<i>Podarcis sicula</i>		✓	
3	Slow worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>		✓	
	PLANTS	PLANTAE			
1	Hog weed	<i>Heracleum mantegazzianum</i>	✓	✓	✓
2	Angelica	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	✓	✓	✓
3	Self heal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
4	Common knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	✓	✓	✓
5	Greater knapweed	<i>Centaurea scabiosa</i>	✓	✓	✓
6	Devil's-bit scabious	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>		✓	
7	Common ragwort	<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
8	Rough hawkbit	<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	✓	✓	✓
9	Bird's foot trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	✓	✓	

10	Horseshoe vetch	<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i>	✓	✓	
11	Ladies bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>	✓	✓	
12	Scarlet pimpernel	<i>Lysimachia arvensis</i>	✓	✓	
13	Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	✓	✓	✓
14	Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	✓	✓	✓
15	Red star thistle	<i>Centaurea calcitrapa</i>		✓	
16	Autumn lady's tresses	<i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>		✓	