

Tour Report

UK – Butterflies & Birds of Sussex

8 – 10 September 2021

Adonis blue



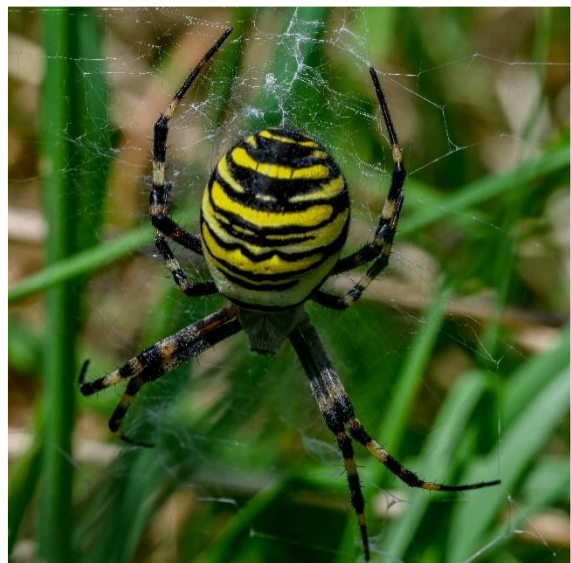
Autumn lady's tresses



Red star thistle



Wasp spider



Compiled by Terry Goble

This tour was focused on the late specialist butterflies that emerge at the end of the butterfly season and migrant birds. As at this time of year the weather and emergence times can be unpredictable, we were also broadening our interest to reptiles, insects and plants. It appears that the long-tailed blue failed to breed this year having bred successfully for the last six years and the brown hairstreak unfortunately remained elusive. Despite this we had some excellent sightings. The white stork's courtship practice was a standout moment, but we also enjoyed some spectacular invertebrates with adonis blue and wasp spiders being the highlights. We also enjoyed some excellent birdwatching with barn owl and little owl seen well and a whinchat was a nice find.

Day 1: Wednesday 8 September 2021

Weather: Mainly sunny and warm afternoon, thunderstorm in the evening

The group met at 3pm outside the Old Tollgate Hotel. After introductions and a brief chat, we set off to Pulborough Brooks Reserve. The targets were brown hairstreaks, dragonflies and reptiles. After a false start on the heath, we got back on route following the paths in the reserves. We quickly checked out the feeders, which were mainly visited by young blue and great tits, but for a little variety a blackcap and a handsome greenfinch was nice to see.

We made our way down the 'zigzags', which has a stand of blackthorn and is an ideal site for brown hairstreaks. We noted a mixed flock of tits, including long tailed tit. Further on we found the diminutive brown argus, our first identified butterfly and a nice start. As we wended around the path, we picked up a variety of butterflies, including some pristine looking painted ladies, energetic red admirals and a very attractive small copper. Others included green-veined and large whites, common blue and meadow brown, unfortunately the brown hairstreak eluded us.

We moved on to the newly formed dragonfly pond, after seeing southern hawkers in a more established pond. However, when we approached the pond, we realised the recent warm, dry spell had left the pond's water level very low. We managed to find common darter and migrant hawkers, but little else. We walked onto 'adder alley' and kept an eye out for any basking reptiles. We didn't find any but did add small heath to our butterfly species.

It was time to return so we walked back towards the visitor center, noting a herd of dark fallow deer and on the other scale a European hornet was busy bustling around the shrubs. We had time to look under the refuges and we were lucky to find a large grass snake and an adult female adder. Oddly under a second refuge there was a juvenile grass snake and a tiny juvenile adder a miniature repeat! Before we left we added great spotted woodpecker and common buzzard to our bird sightings.

We drove a little way beyond the hotel and parked up by the newly created 'Bamber Nature Reserve'. We walked through to an owl box that contained a family of three barn owls. We waited as the evening light began to fade in the hope that they would emerge to hunt. Unfortunately, a storm began to build with light rainfall. We decided to return to the car and instead look for a little owl before returning to the hotel for dinner. We drove on to Edburton and stopped in a layby to immediately find a little owl staring back at us a few meters away. We enjoyed watching the owl as it emerged into full view at the edge of a dove cote. As it flew off to hunt, we decided to head back to the hotel turning around and passing the owl again as it returned to the dove cote.

We returned to the hotel and had a few minutes to get ready for our evening meal. We reconvened at our table, and all enjoyed a relaxed and chatty evening over our three-course dinner. We discussed plans for the following day. A loud clap of thunder signaled the arrival of a storm and we decided at this point it was time to retire for the evening. We bade each other 'good night' and settled on meeting at 8am to look through the moth haul.

Day 2: Thursday 9 September 2021

Weather: Cool, misty start to the day becoming warmer with occasional sunny spells

We started the day with the contents of the previous night's moth trap. There had been quite a good haul due in part to the cloudy skies overnight and perhaps the highlights were a burnish brass, angle shades and a rosy-striped knot horn. We looked at the weather forecast, which did not seem promising, but decided to go ahead with the original schedule. We started with a short drive to Anchor Bottom. This is a lovely valley full of downland flowers, agrimony, devil's-bit scabious, self-heal and others. At this time of year one of the specialties of this valley are the autumn ladies' tresses, sometimes seen in their hundreds. These delicate orchids with small white flowers and spiraling stems are the last orchid to flower in the year. We also found the red star thistle, a nationally scarce plant.

Initially only a few adonis blues were seen, due to the cool and overcast conditions. Gradually as the morning wore on and the day became a little warmer, we began to see lots of these exquisite butterflies. The males show a cobalt blue sheen when on the wing and are a truly beautiful butterfly. We also saw meadow brown, small whites and common blue around the valley. As for the birds we had a nice migrant in the shape of a whinchat and a pair of ravens gronked and were found on top of an electricity pylon.

We then decided a cup of coffee was required for the day and a chance to find wasp spider and slow worms. He drove up to Truleigh Hill and explored a private meadow. We did manage to see several slow worms, but the wasp spider remained elusive. After a quick cup of coffee to get us all going again we set off for Mill Hill a short drive away to search for wasp spiders.

At Mill Hill we wandered down the slope to the valley floor and after a little searching finally managed to locate the wasp spider. Then it seemed like they were everywhere! We also had a few nice butterflies including brown argus, adonis and common blue, along with some of the more common species. We found an unusual spider's nest that consisted of a large sphere about the size of a snooker ball! It was discovered that it was in fact the nest of the wasp spider, one of the UK's heaviest spiders.

It was then time to grab some lunch from the local supermarket and head down to Shoreham Fort for our picnic. We were lucky to enjoy a spell of sunshine to enjoy our lunch and to bring out the Italian wall lizards to bask. We eventually saw several individuals including some bright green males. There were a few birds around including an imposing greater black-backed gull and a flock of turnstones. One of the group, as a bonus, managed to get a private tour of a historic Neilson Hut and a chat with the volunteers about the history of the fort and the more recent filming studios.

We next decided to try for the long-tailed blues at Whitehawk Hill. There had been no reports of the second brood, but with the recent spell of warm weather we thought may have encouraged them to emerge. We scoured the local 'hot spot', a patch of everlasting pea, but there was to be no signs of them. There was some compensation in the form of a pristine coma and on the way back to the car a nice holly blue. There were also a number of whites including many small whites, green-veined and large white and a few red admirals zooming around. To finish off the day we decided to take a stroll around The Burgh and do some bird watching for farmland birds and raptors.

We drove towards Amberley turning up North Stoke to The Burgh and parked on top of the hill. We went for a stroll along the top of the ridge for a circular walk. It wasn't long before we spotted one of our targets, the now scarce and declining grey partridge. Two were seen close to the field's edge and we had great telescope views of the birds. As we pressed on, we saw several buzzards and kestrels, but red kites were surprisingly absent.

The now high hedgerow obstructed views across the fields and download, but when we did get to a gap, we soon found another of our targets, the brown hare. This animal sat in the open field with the low sun

highlighting it in a golden-brown hue. It was a lovely sighting and we watched it as it bounded down the hill. We also noted a large covey of red-legged partridges on the side of the field. These are introduced birds from continental Europe, which although yet to be clearly demonstrated may be having an impact in the declining numbers of grey partridge.

We then turned for the return leg back to the car, we stopped to admire the splendor of Arundel Castle across the valley, contrasting with the 'Disneysque' Butlins in the background. Whilst we were looking across the fields, we were slightly startled to see a buzzard swoop down and snatch a rabbit, although quite brutal it was a spectacular sighting. Witnessing a successful ambush is quite a rare event and we watched as the buzzard flew to a post to eat its unfortunate prey.

We walked on and were pleased to see several grey partridges including a covey of about fourteen birds. They appear to be thriving at The Burgh even though they are declining alarmingly nationwide. We reached the car and decided to have another attempt at the barn owl so we drove back towards the hotel and dropped two of the group off whilst the rest went to Bamber Nature Reserve. We got into place and waited as the light began to fade. We fortunately didn't have to wait long before one of the group spotted a bird coming into the tree. We managed to get a good view and saw an adult barn owl. This was quickly followed by a second adult bird, and they flew towards the nest box that contained a fledgling. At this point we were joined by the reserve owner (Nick) and a wildlife photographer (David Plummer). We chatted quietly and watched the owls for a few minutes before we had to return to the hotel for our evening meals, but we were delighted to have seen these superb birds. On our return we also heard tawny owls calling and three of the group had all heard tawny calling from their hotel rooms!

We arrived a little late for our meal but managed to get seated and enjoyed our three-course meal after a long but productive day. We discussed our last day and decided that we would like to walk around the Knepp estate. Although it was acknowledged that was not the best time to see Knepp for wildlife it was still an interesting place to visit and you never know what might turn up there. We said 'goodnight; and then retired for the evening.

Day 3: Friday 10 September 2021

Weather: Cool and misty morning and mainly overcast with a few brief sunny spells.

We met at 8pm to drive to Knepp. Everyone had finished packing their luggage into their cars. Two of the group decided to follow us in their car as they needed to leave soon after 1pm to get to their rendezvous. We arrived at Knepp in good time following the back roads and parked up.

We set off on the white trail and this took us past a now abandoned white stork nest. We discussed the stork population of Knepp as they had leapt from two to seven nests this season. The total population was now around thirty-five birds! Some of these had begun their migration to Africa, whilst the original captive breeding stock that had been released into the habitat stayed at Knepp for the winter months.

We then walked on to a patch of disturbed soil, which prompted a discussion about the history and philosophy of Knepp's rewilding project. This discussion was rudely interrupted by the unmistakable sound of stork's bill clapping. This was followed by a fly-by of about ten white storks. We walked back to the original nest to where three birds had landed and were delighted to watch the storks engage in courting behaviour despite it being September!! We watched as they threw their heads right back clapping their bills whilst pointing to the sky! We enjoyed this spectacle for a while before the storks flew and we continued our walk.

We next stopped at the 'Beaver Lake'. The beavers had been unsuccessful as one had escaped and sadly died, whilst the female had been relocated. A new pair of beavers are due imminently to be released into the holding area. On the lake there were mainly mallards, with one gadwall and a few moorhens and coots.

Interestingly a pool beside the lake contained several large common and mirror carp apparently stranded there after a flood.

We then moved on, discussing the ecology and behaviour of purple emperors, a famous resident of Knepp and here in good numbers. We walked across to the blue trail in the hope of spotting some butterflies and deer. We did come across a couple of small herds of Tamworth pigs, introduced to churn the soil in replace of wild boars. We then walked to the northern section of Knepp, passing a disused windmill to the edge of the estate.

The wildlife spotting had become a little slow with a few speckled woods and meadow browns seen. We also saw several migrant hawkers, but few birds. A fly-by green woodpecker was a nice addition to our bird list, but we mainly turned our attention to the many invertebrates on the bramble patches. A scorpion fly, wolf spiders and several species of hoverfly and bees were found. This kept us entertained as we made our way back to the car park.

Here we said goodbye to two of the group as they were off to continue their journey, whilst the rest of us returned to the hotel. We bid each other farewell and the tour came to a close.

Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>			
1	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus color</i>		✓	✓
2	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓		
3	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓
5	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	
6	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
7	Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</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	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	
15	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓
16	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓		
17	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	
18	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
19	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	
20	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
21	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
22	Eurasian buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
23	Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	H	H	✓



24	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓
25	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	
26	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipter nisus</i>			✓
27	Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		✓	
28	Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	H	
29	Little owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓		
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	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		
39	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
40	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
41	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
42	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
43	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		
44	Northern house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	
45	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓
46	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H		✓
47	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	
48	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓		
49	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
50	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
51	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓

52	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓	
53	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓
54	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	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓
6	Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓
7	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓
8	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓		
9	Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	✓
10	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓
11	Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓	✓	
12	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓
	MOTHS (MACROS)	LEPIDOPTERA			
	GEOMETRID AND OTHERS				
1	Orange swift	<i>Hepialus sylvina</i>		✓	
2	Large thorn	<i>Ennomos autumnaria</i>		✓	
3	Vapourer moth	<i>Orgyia antiqua</i>	✓		✓
4	Yellow belle	<i>Semiaspilates ochrearia</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	Feathered gothic	<i>Tholera decimalis</i>		✓	

5	Setaceous Hebrew character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>		✓	
6	Straw underwing	<i>Thalpophila matura</i>		✓	
7	Silver 'Y'	<i>Autographa gamma</i>	✓	✓	
	MOTHS (MICROS)				
1	Small dusty wave	<i>Idaea seriata</i>		✓	
2	Rosy-striped horn-knot	<i>Oncocera semirubella</i>		✓	
3	Nettle tap	<i>Anthophila fabriciana</i>			✓
4	Grass veneer	<i>Crambus sp</i>	✓	✓	✓
	DRAGONFLIES	LIBELLULA			
1	Migrant hawkler	<i>Aesha mixta</i>	✓	✓	✓
2	Southern hawkler	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	✓		
3	Common darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	✓	✓
	MAMMALS	ANISOPTERA			
1	Bank vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>	✓		
2	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
3	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
4	Fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓	
	REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS	REPTILIA AND AMPHIBIA			
1	Grass snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>	✓		
2	European adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>	✓		
3	Italian wall lizard	<i>Podarcis sicula</i>		✓	
4	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>		✓	