



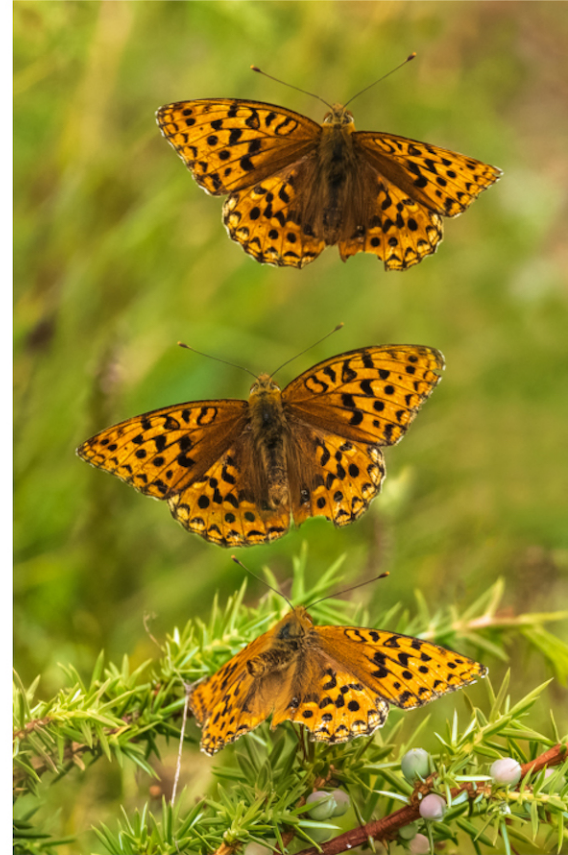
JULY

## HIGH BROWN FRITILLARY

An early start from Shropshire gets me to the car park of Arnside Knott at 9am. I bump into a fellow butterfly devotee who knows the exact hotspot among the bracken and heather beyond the reserve's stone wall. As the sun is starting to break through, the High Brown Fritillary will hopefully be perching and warming up. It's not yet hot, so it's possible to track them as they fly.

My excitement is tempered by the hard facts. Butterfly Conservation have called it the UK's rarest butterfly and efforts have been made on several working re-introductions. Since the end of wood-coppicing, there has been a 96% decline in distribution. This once common butterfly is now confined to a few sites in Northwest England, parts of Devon and Exmoor and several sites in Wales. It is wonderful to see at least 6 on the wing in a space of 15 minutes, after which the sun makes them zip about non-stop until lunch and the long motorway journey home.

Right: In flight, the underwing reveals a row of brown spots between the outer margin and the silver spangles, which differentiates it from the Dark Green Fritillary.









AUGUST

## SILVER-SPOTTED SKIPPER

This is the only skipper in the UK with distinctive white markings on its underwing which leads to its name. The second part of its Latin name *Hesperia comma* refers to the easily visible white comma. I have come to Aston Rowant Nature Reserve, a steep and south facing flower-rich chalk grassland tucked down the edge of the M40. My first visit here is overcast. When I finally get my eye in, as they really are very small, I find a single specimen hunkered down low on one of the many little paths that criss-cross these steep slopes. It's a nice warm spot to wait out the weather and I lie down with my macro and crawl in close to show all that khaki colour and fabulous array of scales, as well as a compound eye that looks prehistoric. But the deities of flight are not with me, as all I capture on the back of the screen is a rich brown blur. However, I never give up hope and a year later I return for another visit. I am overjoyed when a Silver-spotted takes off right in front of me. The good news carries on as improvements in the management of chalk grassland sites have seen numbers rise in recent years.







AUGUST

## HOLLY BLUE

If you were to ask me what is the butterfly I have seen the least of in my four years of travels round the UK, you might be surprised at the answer and also the location. Having chased the High Brown Fritillary in Cumbria and the Chequered Skipper in Northampton, I have taken 3 short steps from my front door to capture a little blue wonder. *Celastrina argiolus* means *holly tree with little argus eyes*, though that description does not quite work as the second high-summer brood of the Holly Blue lays its eggs on ivy. In all this time and with so much travelling, I have only seen it a handful of times. When it settles on my wife's Eryngium, it takes me a few moments to work out what species it is. I run inside to grab my camera, hoping it will carry on nectaring. To me it is as exciting as a

leucistic red kite or a black leopard. Once again I give thanks to my wife for her excellent planting, and today, the spikey flowers of the Eryngium have transformed into an eco-system in miniature. The visiting bumble bees make the perfect background to a strikingly marked female who deigns to fly off in a perfect diagonal, revealing vibrant wings and the old name from 1717 'The Blue Speckled Butterfly with Black Tips'. There must be good nectaring here for the Holly Blue returns again and again to grab the last sweetness of summer and if I were to get the blues, then let it be this bit of speedy sky among silver-sharp shadows.

DAVID HARRISON







AUGUST

## PAINTED LADY

The Painted Lady was once 'Bella Donna', named for the cosmetic application of the deadly nightshade. A distillation of its berries was applied by fashionable painted ladies, i.e. courtesans, to their eyes in order to enlarge their pupils and make them more alluring. This is one of the most attractive butterflies and it has a grand story behind it that took centuries to unravel. Why did they appear in Britain their hundreds of thousands on good years, and where did they go in winter? Hibernation was one theory. But it was not until 2009, using a combination of some 10,000 observers and radar records before the incredible truth was revealed. In the autumn, they leave the UK often at altitudes of up to 500 metres, using the weather to clock speeds of up to 30mph. By this time, it was finally understood that the Painted Lady has the longest migration route of any species on earth. It begins in Africa, making its way north through successive generations as far as the Arctic Circle, chasing the seasons and good feeding grounds. Their 9-thousand-mile round trip is double that of the more well-known Monarch. Such a great desire to continue and propagate the life cycle is admirable.

By late August, one of an English generation is fuelling up on the valerian in our garden, ready for its overseas journey. The underwing pattern puts me in mind of old stained glass and I feel honoured to have such a brief visitor to our home.

Left: At Shingle Street in Suffolk in early July, a newly arrived and very fresh specimen rests on the pebble beach and allows me to catch the moment.





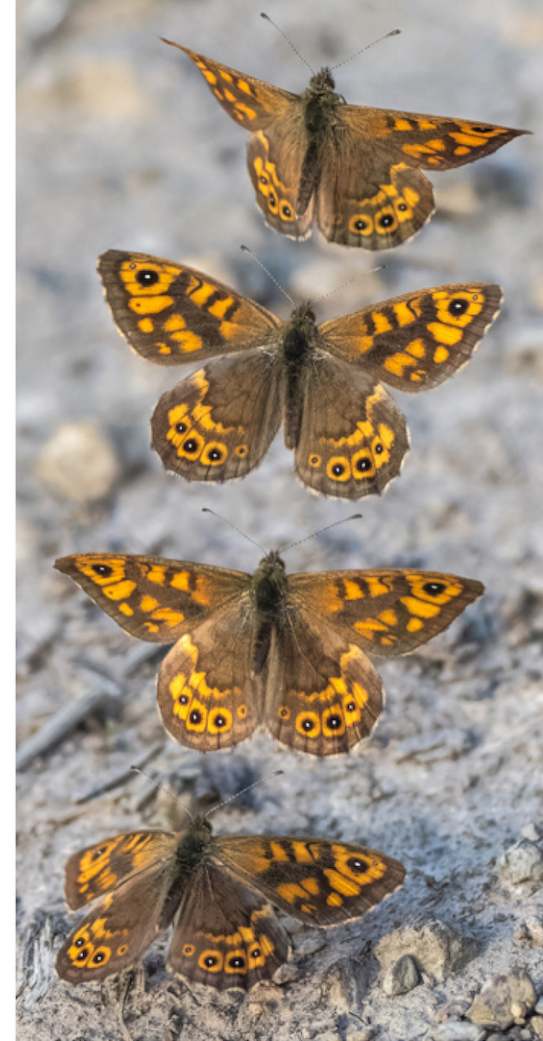




SEPTEMBER

## WALL

'The Golden Marbled Butterfly with Black Eyes' has flitted away into history and I am left here high on Bury Ditches, clinging to the last of summer and willing its warmth to stay a little longer. In the chaos of forestry clearance, tree stumps list over, torn from their muddy sockets. The heather is slowly regaining a hold and standing out from the grey landscape, a solitary clump of ragwort adds some colour. I have been visiting this spot for three days and am rewarded every time with at least two Walls, who strike me as bright and defiant in their continuity late into the season. *I may be going into the dark winter lands, but not yet.* My wife is perched nearby, while I stalk a butterfly that has lost 76% of its distribution since 1976. The Wall butterfly does like a wall, or a bit of warm stony ground, and I find a perfectly beige path to let this second-brood bright wonder take off in front of me and show those glorious eye-filled wings.





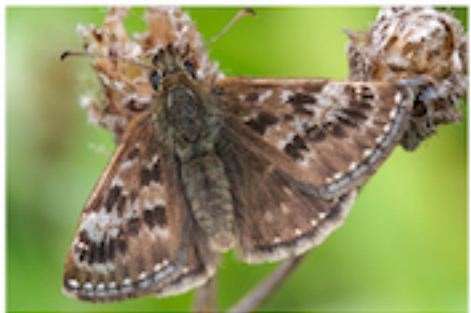




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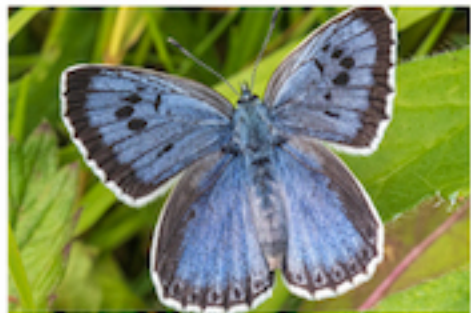
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