

DORSET / NEW FOREST TRIP – JUNE 2019

We had really enjoyed our time in Hampshire last year and we still had plenty of unfinished business in the vicinity with all the Butterflies we had missed by being too late. Originally, I wanted to go to The New Forest for the first time but after doing a bit of research I found that there wouldn't be any new Butterflies and only 1 new Dragonfly for us. I went back to the drawing board and quickly found out that Dorset had all the species of Butterflies we still wanted to see as well as Scarce Chaser Dragonfly. This is something we've dipped on far too many times in the past and after finding that we might be lucky enough to find a Sand Lizard too, that settled it and Dorset it was.

Unfortunately, my heart sank when I found out that the Badger cull takes place in 80% of Dorset.....Noooooooooo! We completely refuse to give any of our money to the areas involved in this hideousness, so that narrowed my cottage search down to just the far east corner. On the plus side it meant that we would be close enough to the border of the New Forest to be able to have a look there to see what it's like. The next problem I encountered was that all the dog cabins were booked on Friday and Saturday, so the only option was for us to go on Sunday morning ☹. Neither of us wanted to cut our trip short if we were going to go all that way but luckily, we were both able to get the Monday off so we could still have a week there. It did mean that at the end of the holiday we would need to get a Travelodge somewhere for our last night, as changeover days are always a Friday or Saturday if you're lucky. Unbelievably, with all these limitations I found one called Percy's Retreat that looked nice and was near to the New Forest border. The owners even agreed to do a 2 person discount and the best bit was that they didn't have a set changeover day, so they were happy for us to do Sunday to Sunday! I've never seen that before at a cottage, so this was well lucky and meant we didn't have to get a Travelodge after all. Brilliant! With all the basics sorted it was all systems go and I could finally concentrate on researching areas to visit, so I didn't mess up like I did with the South Wales trip. Turns out there's a lot of reserves and great wildlife places to visit in Dorset and the New Forest in summer so I ended up with enough locations to fill two weeks!! Fingers crossed the ones I'd chosen were the right ones :|. With our sailing not being until Sunday we were able to pack on the Saturday, which was much more civilised and relaxed.

Sunday 16th June

We were rudely awoken at 6am by our alarms and after sorting out the remaining odds and ends and having breakfast I started to load the car up. We arrived at the Sea Terminal at 7.58am and the cars had already started to board, so we couldn't have timed it better if we'd tried. I drove on at 8.01am having been there for just 3minutes, which has got to be a record and we spotted a **Black Guillemot** in the harbour. We went straight up to the cabin and had a look out of the window to see what was about to kick off our trip with. There were the usual **Herring Gulls** as well as some **Great Black-backed Gulls** but strangely there didn't appear to be any House Martins around the buildings up on Head Road. We set off 10minutes early at 8.35am, which was a good start and looking outside we could see 6x Black Guillemots in the harbour as well as **Oystercatchers**, **Shags** and **Gannets**. After the safety announcement came a new one for us, 10minutes worth of spiel that made dogs sound complicated and a bit like an inconvenience, so that was a bit annoying. We take Lyca to a cabin and nobody would know she was there for the entire journey, so hopefully the Steam Packet doesn't decide to get rid of the dog cabins and pet lounge to deter people from holidaying with their furry family members. Just after we had lay back on the beds to watch some TV it all kicked off in the cabin opposite and a very noisy argument ensued

between 2 blokes, followed by one of them leaving the cabin with a huge door slam! I had another look out to sea from the window at 10.20am and saw some **Manx Shearwaters** and shortly after that the Captain announced that he expected us to be docking at around 11.40am, which was 40minutes early....Yes!



Ready to go?

At 11.15am I thought I had better take Lyca out for a wee and there were loads of people sitting up on the deck. I had brought my DJI Osmo out to get some video but I quickly realised that it had the wrong filter on, so all the footage was far too bright.....Doh! Having been suffering from sciatica recently, my back was really sore from the bed in the cabin, so I hoped it had loosened up before the long drive down south.

As we came into Heysham we looked out of the window and saw **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and **Feral Pigeons** flying around and some **Cormorants** preening on the old wooden pier. We were called at 11.58am, so we headed down to the car and got in to wait to disembark. The bloke in front of me, with his surgically enhanced passenger, had ants in his pants and instantly started his car up and revved the engine, which made the inside of my car stink. When we started to drive off at 12.13pm he seemed to be in a massive rush and was pushy and aggressive, he just couldn't get off quick enough. We were just relieved to get some fresh air and as soon as we were on the open road, he had overtaken everyone leaving a cloud of dust behind him. Very suspicious.

The first birds we saw were **Magpie**, **Wood Pigeon** and at the lights in Lancaster were a few **Swifts** zooming around over the road. We heard a **Blackbird** as we waited at the next set of lights to change and there was a **Buzzard** sitting at the side of the road, posing perfectly for a photo. It made a nice change going through there in the daylight rather than the depths of the night like normal. There were more Swifts further along and they were feeding very low over the road and fields along with some **House Martins**. In the next field were **Carriion Crows** and there we spotted a **Mute Swan** on the river as we went over a bridge. Next, we added **Swallow**, **Collared Dove**, **Lapwing**, **Black-headed Gull** and **Pied Wagtail** and by 1.04pm it had started to rain, which we had kind of expected. The sun came out shortly after that which made it too warm in the car (never happy!), but it was short lived when the sun went behind some thick grey clouds and it started throwing it down. It had been 16c at

Heysham, but it was down to 13.5c now and the visibility on the motorway was terrible. By 1.39pm it had stopped and I could see ahead of us again and we spotted a **Kestrel**, hovering over the verge and also added **Grey Heron**. We got stuck in congestion near Wolverhampton, which slowed us right down, but we saw 2x **Mallards** and a **Sparrowhawk** flying over the motorway and a flock of **Starlings** at the junction for Birmingham. By the time we hit Worcestershire it was 2.50pm and we saw our first **Jay** followed by a **Hobby** hunting over some trees.....nice! The temperature had gone up to 21c, which was a relief if we were going to see anything insect wise today, and 2x **Red-legged Partridge** ran across the road ahead of us just before a junction. Gloucestershire was a welcome sight at 3.18pm and I turned off at a place called Birdlip where there was **Pheasants** in the fields but really annoyingly the sky had turned and it was raining again.....Noooooooo! We were getting near to where I had pinpointed for a walk and was good for Butterflies, so this was bad news. There were **House Sparrows** in the hedges around the houses opposite a nice looking pub in a tiny village, a **Robin** singing its heart out and **Rooks** flying around but the weather didn't look set to improve any time soon :(The sky was grey as far as the eye could see and it was still raining heavily when we arrived at Oakwood Lynch at 3.52pm. Brilliant.....not!

On the drive down my back had been niggling me, but I had hoped it would ease up sitting on the comfy seats in the car. As I got out, I was gutted to feel the pain was so bad I struggled to walk. This could wreck the holiday before it started. I edged around in the rain to try and stretch to hopefully ease it up a bit. I took Lyca out for a wee too and instead of getting all excited and thinking she was going for a walk afterwards, she made her feelings clear by running straight back to the car. I gingerly got back in too, but my back felt a little less painful which was a good sign. We sat waiting to see if the rain would pass over or at least get a bit lighter. After a while it became apparent that my masterplan had backfired and there were some even bigger, blacker clouds rolling in, so seeing as we didn't have all day we took the plunge and headed out at 3.14pm.....Urrghhhh! We walked through a field, which on a nice sunny day would've been nice but given the awful weather there wasn't a single Butterfly and it was pretty muddy to top it all off. We climbed over a stile and down a footpath through another field of wildflowers that looked great for Butterflies. As usual we were in the right place at the wrong time and could tell the place had potential.....Typical!



Would have been lovely

We saw our first **Great Tit** of the trip and then the miraculous happened and the sun came out.....Eek! We had to move quickly, as it wasn't going to last, but we hoped it would be just long enough to do what we had to do and get back to the car. We heard a **Raven** flying over and then I caught sight of our first Butterfly, which was a **Meadow Brown**. Shortly after that we found a Blue, which had us wondering for a while but turned out to just be a **Common Blue**. Next up was a **Large Skipper**, so I was trying to get as much video as possible before the sun went in again. There were some young **Blue Tits** in the trees and all of a sudden my video footage was rendered useless when Wendy shrieked in pain and swore very loudly as she was bitten by a Horsefly! Ouch! Horseflies weren't something we had expected and it had taken her completely off guard. Looking at her hand it had instantly gone red and she suspected that there would be a big itchy lump before too long.



Blimey!

We moved off pretty quickly after that and saw a **Small Tortoiseshell** before it started to rain again and we hid under some trees by a river. Lyca wasn't bothered by the weather and just wanted to go for a paddle, so seeing as she was already wet we let her.



First paddle of the hol

When the rain stopped we carried on through a field hearing a **Nuthatch** but we had to take cover under the trees by a wall again when it started again.....Grrrrrr! We had to give up waiting for the rain to stop so depressingly walked into the reserve proper.



Strawberry banks

Try as we might we knew we were flogging a dead horse trying to find our first Marsh Fritillary. This would be about our 5th dip on trying to see one. Urgghh!

Whilst searching we found an **Azure Damselfly** resting in the grass but by then it was cold, windy and grey, which was a disappointing start to our holiday. Wendy was getting more fed up by the minute and wanted to go back to the car but I was adamant that we weren't going to give up that easily. I managed to get her to carry on through another field with a Wood at the far side but we were wet and Lyca was muddy already, so we decided not to go any further. There was a **Jay** being very rowdy in there and when we heard the Nuthatch

kicking off, we started to wonder what was going on. It turned out that the Nuthatch had a young family and was, not surprisingly, being very defensive with the Jay hanging around. We turned around and started to head back after that and to my surprise I kicked up a **Mint Moth** from the grass. This was a new one for us both but unfortunately Wendy didn't see it. Much to Wendy's disgust I decided to go for a wander down the bottom of the field, while she stayed on the top path with Lyca. I didn't find anything of interest but would've regretted leaving without at least trying.

By the time we got back to the car it was 5.45pm, so Wendy got Lycas tea ready, which she wolfed down. When I sat down I think the adrenaline had been keeping me going as I realised that my back was killing me, which was a worry considering I still had to get us to the cottage yet! We set off and as I drove through the weird little village I kept my fingers crossed that we wouldn't meet another car coming the other way, as there was no way I would be able to look behind me to reverse back.....Uh oh! So, before we had even reached the end of day one, all three of us were wet and muddy already, my back was playing up big time and the entire back of Wendy's hand had started to swell up and felt very itchy. What a start!

I had chosen my route to avoid driving through Salisbury but had to go through Cirencester, past Wiltshire, where a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** flew over the road and then found myself facing having to drive through the middle of Swindon, which I wasn't happy about. Luckily it wasn't too bad and I even got a laugh out of it when Wendy offered me some encouraging words of wisdom and said, "Well we've just passed the sign for Wiltshire but we didn't drive through the middle of it." OMG, she really knows her stuff.....Hahahahaha! We spotted a **Red Kite** 20 miles away from Salisbury and then a bloke came up behind on a motorbike doing a wheelie. He rode it like that all the way down the road, past every vehicle he came to, including us and disappeared into the distance, which was unusual to say the least. We caught up with him further along and found him down a lane doing some 'business' with another bloke over the gate of a house. I know we had been driving a while but didn't realise we had driven to Columbia! We drove on through a lovely village called Collingbourne Ducis, where all the houses had thatched roofs and looked really pretty. We dread to think how much a house there would cost! At 7.03pm I pulled up outside the first Spa we came across and Wendy went in to get me a Pizza for my tea. While I sat waiting, I became more than a bit aware that my back was really bad again and I started to get a bit worried. We carried on through Tidworth and were finally in Hampshire at 7.12pm, so we breathed a sigh of relief thinking that we were nearly there. We were slightly confused as to why we ended up back in Wiltshire, having left it behind us but I put my trust in the sat nav knowing where it was taking us. We heard a **Wren** singing and shortly after we found ourselves in Rockbourne, which was where our cottage was....Phew! It looked like a nice area and every house had a thatched roof, so we waited with baited breath to see what our cottage was like. I turned up a lane and drove straight past the turn off to it as it was well hidden, so had to find somewhere to turn around and drive back....Doh!

We pulled up in the car park of Percy's Retreat at 7.53pm and straight away I noticed that there was no phone signal. I had a missed call too and started to get paranoid that it was Tesco trying to get in touch with me, so now they wouldn't be able to and we would end up with no shopping.....Aarrghhhh!



Percy's Retreat

Our cottage was small, nicely done out and modern and seemed to have been built on a small piece of land belonging to the huge thatched house next door. What a great way to make a bit of extra cash....kerching! Even with my bad back I had to get the stuff in so started to lug all our cases in while Wendy put the oven on for my pizza and started to unpack. The kitchen was nice but really small, so there wasn't much room in the cupboards for our stuff and she started to wonder where on earth she was going to put our food!



Kitchen

There was a **Goldfinch** in the garden but not much else and we were so busy we weren't ready when my pizza was done. Wendy hadn't even got hers ready to go in the microwave, but luckily it was just some soup, which didn't take long at all. After tea Wendy finished the unpacking and at 9pm I went to sit in the window to wait for Tesco, still worried that they couldn't find us and that they wouldn't come. Luckily the van pulled up bang on 9pm, so Wendy took Lyca into the bedroom while I brought all the food in.

After it had all been put away Wendy went for a well-earned bath before pouring herself a glass of Prosecco and phoned her Mum. Luckily there was a phone in the house, so the lack of mobile reception didn't matter too much. Lyca had taken herself off to bed for the evening and only emerged when she came looking for her yoghurt at 10.15pm. The cottage was really clean and comfortable but the log burner was right in the middle of the living room which meant that we couldn't see the TV if we sat on the corner of the settee....Doh! We shuffled an armchair around a bit and made the space more functional, so it didn't take us too long to feel relaxed and at home.



Odd set up

Wendy's hand had started to get worse, so she put hydrocortisone on it after her bath, in the hope that it would help. When we started to get ready to go to bed Wendy took Lyca out for a wee and I went out with them to see if there were any Tawny Owls calling. To our surprise, there wasn't but instead we could hear the classic 'squeaky gate' call of a young **Long-eared Owl**.....Ace! It sounded as though they were nesting in the group of trees opposite but then I heard something that I didn't expect at all and I didn't even believe what I was hearing. I told Wendy and we both waited in silence until we both heard it again and I could confirm that it was the chirring of a **Nightjar**! It had been ages since we had heard Nightjar and we couldn't imagine where they would be calling from as we didn't know the area well enough. After a very long but eventful day we finally went to bed at 11.11pm after I had checked the patio doors and found them unlocked :O! Good job I checked really.

Monday 17th June

Having expected to sleep like a log I was gutted that I hardly slept due to my back being agonyUrrghhh! I had to give up in the end and went into the living room to see if I would be comfier on the settee, eventually managing to get 2 hours. Inevitably, I was completely knackered when Wendy got up at 9.20pm after her marathon sleep, which made me slightly jealous, to say the least. Her hand had swollen up even more and looked decidedly haggis like, so she wasn't impressed.



Haggis hand

Having not had the best start to the day, it was about to get worse when I checked the forecast and realised that we would have to cram even more into today than we expected as it looked as though it was going to be the only decent day of the week.....Nooooooooo! How is that possible in the middle of June? :(I took Lyca out for a wee and I knew was that I was going to have to find a chemist at some point to get something for my back before it got any worse. I added **Chiffchaff**, **Blackcap** and **Dunno** to our list before going back inside to have breakfast. By the time Wendy had made the sarnies for lunch and we had got all our stuff together it was already 10.55am when we eventually headed out.

Despite the protest from Wendy, who reckoned a Chemist should be our first port of call, I was adamant that given our lack of time due to declining weather conditions Martin Down was our priority. I was really hoping to finally see an Adonis Blue (although it was probably too late for them), which would be a lifer for us both and this looked like the best day we were going to get, so I wasn't prepared to waste any time on what was, for all intents and purposes, shopping! We saw a **Grey Wagtail** in the road on the way and arrived in the car park at Martin Down NNR in Hampshire at 11.14am.

The first thing that struck us was how even the concrete car park was caked in wildflowers.



Looks promising

It already looked good apart from the fact that everyone and their dog seemed to be there....Urrghhh! We heard a **Skylark** singing high above us as we wandered through a gap in the hedge and down a footpath, which opened out onto a lovely looking chalk down land. All around us were fields of wildflowers and not surprisingly, we could hear **Yellowhammer** calling from a hedge nearby. Lyca must've realised that we weren't paying her any attention and while our eyes were diverted, she took the split second opportunity to stealthily roll in some kind of poo.....Grrrrr! I quickly yanked her lead to pull her out of it and in doing so, managed to hurt my already sore back in the process. I chose to ignore it and we carried on with our eyes to the ground and heard a **Whitethroat**, but the weather wasn't looking good for Butterflies at all. It was now windy as well and the sun was stuck behind a thick covering of cloud, so I started to doubt that we would see anything never mind what we had gone for.



Winter clothes in summer!

It seemed like a pointless exercise until I finally spotted a blue Butterfly flitting about and quickly got it in my bins to ID it. It was just a very tatty specimen of a **Common Blue**, so we carried on until we spotted another. Instantly, Wendy mentioned that it was a bluer shade of blue but I knew that could easily be a trick of the light. After a few moments of self-doubt and a triple check of the field guide, I finally convinced myself that we really were looking at our first ever **Adonis Blue**.....Waheyyy! It really was on a different spectrum of blue to what we were used to and I can only presume that if it had been a really sunny day it would've looked even better. I realised that I had to act quickly if I was going to get any video or photos before it flew off, so I handed Lyca over to Wendy.



Adonis Blue

When I was happy we continued on to see what else we could find, but at least we had seen something we had been hoping to for years. We came across another Adonis Blue and a **Small Heath** before I heard the sound of a helicopter and looked up to see an Apache flying over, which was another lifer of sorts. A **Ruby-tailed Wasp** landed on Wendy's leg, so I got its photo before it flew off and there was a Yellowhammer on the path ahead of us.



Ruby-tailed Wasp

We walked up a bank and across the top with nothing but the Skylarks and Yellowhammers to break the silence. The sun finally came out just as we reached a very sheltered, flat area between banks.



Weird fort area

We slowly walked around scouring the ground and eventually our efforts paid off and we found another 2x Adonis Blues. Unfortunately, they weren't in the best condition but that would be too much to ask, it was impressive we had found that many to be honest. We decided to give up and head back after that and set off along the bank. There were some corrugated iron sheets on the ground, so we were curious as to what was under them. I lifted a couple and surprise, surprise there was nothing.....Typical! All of a sudden a Blue flew off in front of me but this time I couldn't help but notice how small and dark it was. This got me a bit excited as I was pretty certain that I had just seen a **Small Blue**, which was another lifer but I needed to find it again, to get a better look. Wendy had been looking

elsewhere, so she hadn't seen it, which made it even more important to re-find but it wasn't looking promising. We both retraced our steps back to where I had seen it go down and slowly but carefully walked around hoping to see it fly again. Butterflies have an amazing knack of completely disappearing off the face of the earth when you try to relocate them and this one was really playing hard to get. We had all but given up when I literally nearly stood on it and it flew out from under my foot, luckily before I squashed it! It was, as the name suggests, small but it was pretty dark so that the blue wasn't obvious. Wendy saw it this time, albeit briefly, before we lost it again. Not the best view but this was 2 lifers on the first day of the holiday so we had to be chuffed with that! Even though I hadn't got any photos of the Small Blue, we were content to carry on back. It was really warm by then, which was annoying because we could've done with it being like that when we had arrived. We found a **Brimstone** on an Elder and I noticed a Buzzard flying overhead, which had a slightly weird appearance. I started to ponder over the feasibility of it being a Honey Buzzard, but Wendy just laughed and pointed to a Common Buzzard sitting in a tree just to our left. Hahaha.....I think I was getting carried away with myself after our success with the butterflies.

It was 1.25pm when we got back to the car park and we had been so impressed by Martin Down we already wanted to go back. I picked up the call of a **Lesser Whitethroat** while we ate our sarnies in the car before leaving for our next stop.

On the way we passed a lovely bright red field of poppies, which is always nice to see. Following my sat nav, I turned off the main road only to find that the road it had sent me down was closed and I had to turn back.....Urrghhh! Not long after though we parked up at Fontmell Down at 2.08pm.



Fontmell down was another Chalk down area like Martin Down. These are the places that the specialist butterfly species we were wanting to see like to live. Already we could tell these Chalk downlands were like nowhere we had been before.



Very picturesque

There was 3 'Downs' we could walk along but from my research it only mentioned Fontmell so that's the one we went for. We headed left towards a wood and there was a ton of 5 spot Burnets moths around the path. In front of us was a couple walking a Cavapoochon so Wendy ended up nattering to the woman. Luckily this didn't last too long and we were able to continue on. The route I had chosen was a loop on the map, so I was a bit shocked by the monster hill we had to go straight down. I love a loop path and hate turning back so we decided to give it a go. Maybe the strain would help my back?



Easy does it

Near the bottom we saw a pair of **Bullfinch** which are always nice to see for us Manxies. At the bottom we had to have a little check of the joints as not only was it a back killer it was a knee killer as well!

The path on the other side of the valley was a lot less severe luckily and it sort of zig zagged its way back up the hill through a deciduous wood.



Pretty much flat

In the woods we found a weird wave type moth, so I got a photo to ID later on.



Wot is this?

Even though it wasn't warm there was also a **Speckled Wood** flying along the woodland ride. The ride looked good for other butterflies like Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral but with it being overcast we knew we didn't have a chance for them. Eventually the path climbed out of the wood and edged along the top of the valley towards the car park. I wasn't best pleased with the drop to the left!



Bit sketchy

We got back to the car at 3.49pm after quite a nice walk. It would have been nice to see what was here in the sunshine though. As we put Lyca in the back seat we noticed a big flea sitting there chilling out! Wendy managed to get it in a pot and we got it released outside the car. Urkkk. We headed off at 3.54pm towards our next site, on the way seeing some **Fallow Deer** in what looked like a massive posh estate.

We arrived at Alners Gorse at 4.35pm so it was getting a bit late in the day, which was not ideal. There wasn't a car park, so I had to park in a lane on the opposite side of a busy road. We crossed over and got through the gate into the Butterfly Conservation reserve.



Originally, I had high hopes for this reserve as all Butterfly conservation reserves we have been to around the UK have been great but yet again it was such a shame to not be seeing it in the sun when it would be at its best. Nevertheless, we headed off down the track that was edged by trees.



Track towards the reserve

Not long down the path we heard a really odd, frog like, call. I then saw a bird fly across the path in front of us. For some reason my first thought was Nightingale, but had I no idea if they got them there or not. A quick check in the bird app confirmed the call was indeed a **Nightingale** and a google said they bred at this reserve.....Ace! Whilst we were faffing about one landed on a branch out in the open and did a semi song.... Arrgghhhh! A Nightingale out in the open is very scarce but by the time I grabbed my camera and got it pointed in the right direction, the bird flew. Nooooooooooooo!

Eventually we got down into the reserve proper and it looked ace. Wildflowers everywhere.



Looks great

While we were checking out the bird's foot trefoil we found a **Dingy Skipper** which we had only seen for the first time on the Norfolk trip in May and we had now found our second....Haha! At the end of the track was a weird wooded area with Ponies in it and a shed.



Bit weird

We turned around and headed back to the good area where there was a little ditch to the side, so I started scanning that and spotted an odd moth that I didn't recognise. I grabbed some photos and had a look. It became clear then, we had our first ever **Burnet Companion** moth.



Burnet Companion

I don't think they occur in the Isle of Man, so it was a nice one to find. We couldn't find anything else though so headed back up the track. Near the gate at the top, I saw a bird sitting on the fence that for some reason I just dismissed as a Robin. We carried on through the gate and as we did I could still see the bird on the opposite side on the fence. I only gave it a glance and carried on, but suddenly it flew and I realised that it was a flipping Nightingale! Arghhh.....what an idiot! If I had realised sooner I would have easily been able to get some nice video / photos.....Dohhh!

We were back at the car at 5.30pm after a long full day. On the way back I noticed we would pass a town called Sturminster Newton which had a Boots Chemist and a Co-Op. I'm not a fan of shopping but drastic times call for drastic measures and I quickly nipped into Boots and got some heat pads for my back and some ibuprofen gel. Whilst I was doing that Wendy went into the Co-Op and got herself some soup.

It wasn't too far back to the cottage but in that time we saw a **Grey Squirrel** hanging out with a Wood Pigeon and came across an awful driver who spent most of their time on the completely wrong side of the road. People who claim that Manx drivers are rubbish need to drive in the UK some more!

We got back to the cottage at 6.55pm after having only done 13,704 steps. It felt more like 130,704 to me! Luckily the second I walked in the door I had a emergency call of nature. Phew...that was very lucky! Wendy put the tea on but the soup she bought was minging whereas my Seitan Ragu and pasta was yummy. After that Wendy went for a bath but to my horror I heard an almighty scream from the bathroom. I went over and Wendy said there was an unwelcome sight still in the toilet that hadn't departed to sewage land like it should have done. Several flushes were not helping but worst of all was that there wasn't a toilet brush.....Uh oh. Wendy vacated the room and left it to me to solve the puzzle. After a sudden brainwave, I went outside and found a stick to poke the problem away with, as I

imagine that is how prehistoric man dealt with the same issue. The stick was then taken outside and deposited about 1km away down the track. Hahaha. After all that excitement I went to put the heat pack on my back to see if it would help me get a good night's sleep but it said on the pack it could only be on for 8 hours so I went with the gel instead. Wendy took Lyca out for a wee and could hear a **Tawny Owl** and the young Long-eared Owls were calling again. She also saw a Bat flying about but wasn't sure which type. We went to bed at 10.40pm and I managed to get about 5 hours sleep before the pain was too much so I had to go on the sofa again. This time I did put the heat pack on and it helped me get another couple of hours sleep.

Tuesday 18th June

I was woken at 7.30am by Lyca licking my face, so I got up and let her out then I went back to bed to try and catch up with some sleep. I managed to get to 10am before the pain was too much again. Wendy had managed to stay dead to the world through all of this till 10.40am but her hand was still showing no signs of improvement and was still huge.....Grrrrr! The lazy start was not a problem though, as the forecast for today was bad and it was raining outside, although not as heavy as forecast. Weirdly it seemed brighter outside than yesterday as well.....Hahahaha! There was pretty much no point going out to any of the planned places as it would have been a waste of time. Wendy used the time to make herself a big pot of soup for the week, whilst I googled nearby walks so that we could at least get Lyca out for a bit of exercise. I found out there was a walk very nearby and it was in the New Forest itself, so as we have never actually seen the New Forest we decided we would go there even in the rain.

We left the cottage at 2.04pm and got to Ashley Walk car park at 2.19pm and the area looking amazing. Again, it was like nothing we had seen before and nothing like I expected the New Forest would look.



New Forest

There were roaming Cows and horses all over the place so straight away we were worried about the Horseflies! Surely the rain would keep them away though and we headed off up

the track and saw a **Stonechat** followed by a calling **Cuckoo**. We managed to spot the Cuckoo flying between trees up on the ride too, which was a bonus. We carried on and got past the Horses, but a foal decided it wanted to play with Lyca and ran up to her. Lyca being her usual grumpy self, barked at the poor horse which quickly bolted off. Over the ridge we saw some **Meadow Pipit** and the Cuckoo was still flying around although still too far away for any videos or photos. Further on we had **Greenfinch** and **Linnet** and as we rounded a bend in the path Wendy spotted a **Dartford Warbler** 'dart' off a gorse bush.



Dartford Warbler area

A bit further on we got into an area of trees which was lucky as it suddenly started to chuck it down so we hid under a big Oak which kept us completely dry.



Natures umbrellas

A **Mistle Thrush** flew over and there was a **Coal tit** family in a bush behind us. A lad on a mountain bike then appeared and stopped to ask us for directions to, we think he said, Dourton, as he had no phone signal and was lost. Since we were in England my first thought

was this was a ruse to nick my phone so as I got my phone out and wandered away a bit pretending to get a better signal... clever. I found where he wanted to go and gave him directions and he peddled off happy....maybe not a serial killer then. We carried on a little bit whilst keeping under the trees when I saw a Yew tree. I said, "Hawfinches like those trees" which is one fact I've remembered from about 18 years ago when I went round North Wales with professional photographer Steve Round. We went round a corner and a bird flew onto the path in front of us, so we both got our bins on it and shouted, "**Hawfinch!**" It was our closest ever view of a Hawfinch, so I got my camera ready. There was a big tree trunk in between me and the bird so it would enable me to approach without it seeing me. Annoyingly, despite my stealthy deployment, it just decided to fly off before I even got a look in. Stupid me had gone in for the money shot instead of doing the clever thing of shoot, move, shoot, move, so I ended up with absolutely nothing. Dohhhhh! Depressed, we hid under another big tree and saw a **Spotted flycatcher** in the bush up ahead, which I hadn't expected around these parts. In the end it looked like the rain was not going to stop, so we just had to carry on and got soaked.



Wet doggy

There were still some birds about and we had a **Siskin** fly over, then a bird flew into an Oak tree up ahead and vanished. Wendy thought it was a Robin by its silhouette but as it flew to the next tree along, we could see it was a **Common Redstart**. Ace, another bird we didn't know was in the area. The walk then took us out of the wood and onto the heath again. Luckily the rain stopped. That was handy since we had nowhere to hide now. Near a small stream 2 **Fallow Deer** ran across us, so I quickly grabbed my camera but then was gutted to see it shut down due to running out of battery power! Arrghhhh rookie error. The stream looked good for one of our major targets for the week Southern Damselfly, so we had a good look.



Wow, looks great.

Wendy spotted a Damselfly, but it was just a **Large Red Damselfly** which are very common, even in the Isle of Man. I was half glad really because if we had just found our first ever Southern and my camera was dead I would have been devastated. A bit further on Wendy heard a Stonechat and jokingly said, "Dartford Warbler please?" Ever since the Ghost of Kelling Heath gave us this great tip we have never forgotten it. I then saw a bird fly from a Gorse bush and hilariously it was a Dartford Warbler. I noticed it had something in its beak like a faecal sac, so since this suggested that it may be nesting, we very quickly moved on as we didn't want to cause any disturbance. The weather had actually gone quite nice by then, so much so that Wendy's waterproofs were sticking to her legs and she had to take her fleece off! I had been an idiot originally and had only come in light trousers which weren't waterproof, but this had eventually paid off as they had completely dried already!



Boiling now!

We were back at the car at 5.03pm and considering we hadn't known about this walk at all till earlier in the day, I was very pleased we had dragged ourselves out in the rain to do it as it was a brilliant walk. On the way back to the cottage we went through Fordingbridge Town and over a small bridge where there was a **Moorhen** and **Mute Swan**. We were back at the cottage at 5.24pm, which was perfect timing for tea. Whilst Wendy put the tea on, I spent ages drying Lyca with the hairdryer, as she was soaked through and hadn't dried up all. After tea Wendy made the sarnies for the next day then went off for her bath. Outside the window a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** worked their way past. Later on, I had another incident in the toilet when I pulled the light cord and it came off in my hand! This also controlled the extractor fan as well.....Brilliant.

When Lyca went out for a wee we could still hear the Long-eared owls and there were Bats flying around again. Eventually we headed off to bed at 10.32pm. Even though my back had felt a bit better out walking, I still couldn't manage a full night's sleep and was up at 3.30am when it was too sore and I couldn't get comfortable, so I headed back to the sofa.

Wednesday 19th June

We were up at 8.30am and could see it had rained overnight. Luckily the rain had stopped but it was still 100% cloud cover which was annoying especially as we needed some sunlight. To add extra jeopardy to our day, it was also forecasting thunderstorms! I did a check on the lightning radar websites and there wasn't any anywhere, so I assumed it was rubbish. I think Wendy's hand had started to get better, although it was now just itchy. We took a while to get going and left at 10.10am, which was a bit daft as we were heading for west Dorset and our destination was quite a way off. On the way I had to stop at Blandford Forum for some Petrol as I was already out!

We reached DWTs Kingscombe Centre at 11.36am. This is Dorset Wildlife Trusts headquarters where there are a lot of wildflower meadows and I think they do wildlife friendly farming. On their main building was a load of artificial swift boxes and they were all in use which was great to see.



Nabbed from google as I forgot to take a photo of the building!

We set off for a nice loop path through the fields at 11.49am. The first section took you through what looked like DWTs allotments or something. Maybe a plant nursey? Whatever it was it was good to see at a nature reserve



Allotment?

We then got into the meadows, they were all covered in wildflowers and exactly how it should be. Even with it being 100% cloud cover there was still a bit of insect activity with Meadow Browns everywhere and a nice **Yellow Shell** moth. It was just a bit annoying again

to not be seeing this place in the sun. A bit further on from the nearby wood we could hear Long-eared Owl chicks calling. They seem to doing well in Dorset. I don't think we have ever heard this many in such a short space of time before. In a really nice meadow we finally found a different butterfly but it was only a Common Blue.



What a field!

According to my map when I planned the walk we should have been walking next to a river right about now but there wasn't one to be seen. A quick check of my OS maps app showed that I had taken the wrong turn right at the start so we had missed that section completely.....Doh. I always ignore Meadow Browns but because there were everywhere I thought I would try and get some video of them. Hilariously my camera wouldn't focus for some reason, so I ended up with nothing. It was now warming up a little bit but there was still no sun out but in the next field along this heat managed to help a big Dragonfly into the air. A quick look in the bins confirmed it as a **Golden-ringed Dragonfly**. I am 95% sure this is my favourite of all Dragonflies. It landed and sat nicely for me to get some video but for some reason I forgot to take a photo.



Golden-ringed Dragonfly (Video grab)

Whilst I was doing that there was a **Green Woodpecker** calling from a few fields away. We carried on and found a few Large Skippers and a Burnet moth. Eventually we got back to the road near the Centre and then found the river, but disappointingly it was tiny and in loads of shade. Back in the car park Wendy went into the Centres shop to try and buy some wildflower seed bombs for back home and while was in there I could see some dark insects flying around the front wall of the centre so went and had a look. Straight away I could tell they were some sort of Tiger moth which was pretty cool to start with. A quick double check of the moth app confirmed my suspicions that these were **Scarlet Tiger moths**! There was loads of them as well, all acting quite strange.



Scarlet Tiger moth

I kept watching for a while and found a pair mating, so it looked like the weird behaviour was the males fluttering about trying to find a female. It did look a bit similar to what Emperor moths do. Whilst I was getting video Wendy came out of the shop, so she was able to watch them as well. We counted 14 in total and I did wonder how they weren't all being picked off by the House sparrows that were nearby though. Eventually we headed back to the car to eat our packed lunch. We were able to sit in the car and watch all the Swifts coming and going and noticed some cheeky House sparrows had nicked the swift nest boxes and were nesting in them! I was getting a bit of jip from my back again so luckily had brought the pain gel so got some of that on as we had another walk to do nearby.

We left at 1.43pm and arrived at Powerstock Common NR at 1.52pm, even with the sat nav going mental and trying to send me down a farm track. This reserve was along an old disused railway line. Those banks seem to do quite well for insects, which I'm guessing is something to do with 1 side getting a lot of sun and heat, or maybe the material they are made from heats up quickly?



Reserve info

Again this was another place that would have been totally different if we had sun out but the weather seemed to be getting worse rather than better 😞
We set off anyway down the old railway line. I thought we might as well have a look at the area.



Old line

In the gloom there wasn't much about but when it opened up a bit, Wendy went for an explore off track and found a nice pond.



Pond

In desperation we scanned the vegetation surrounding the pond and found a few **Common Blue Damselfly** but no other Dragonflies. We also spotted a **China Mark moth** on the far side but couldn't tell which one. We carried on and the path came out of the trees and onto more meadows. There were lots of Orchids in these fields, which again we don't know which types. Even though this was an old railway line DWT had made a nice loop path, so we turned off the line and up into the woods. We heard an odd call but by now were getting a bit used to it as we found 2 **Marsh Tits** in the trees. As usual with these birds they always clear off before I can get any video or photos. Grrrrr. Out of the woods we came across a black cow. Wendy reckoned it was a cow, but I was certain it was a Bull and sure enough, as we got closer it turned out to be a Bull! Amazingly, for the first time ever for us he wasn't interested in us at all.....Result! Our joy and relief was very short lived as two more came over and one of them looked well angry and territorial.....Uh oh! We decided to back up with this one and returned to the woods where we were able to skirt around it and then back out again. Phew! Doing this we managed to see another Dingy Skipper! I tried again to get video / photos of it but yet again failed.....Doh. We carried on and came across a Badger sett and we crossed our fingers that these Badgers would be safe from the disgusting cull.



Badger sett

Looking at it, it seemed like it was in use, which was a good sign but our time there was cut short by two dogs being off their leads even though it says on the board "Dogs on leads". GRRRR! The remainder of the walk was uneventful and we were back at the car at 3.20pm. We had been lucky even with it being overcast it hadn't rained but within a few minutes of being in the car it started chucking it down! Wahey. On the downside my back seemed to be getting a little bit worse rather than better. I thought about getting a tens machine from the chemist on the way back, but they aren't cheap and I have one at home, so discounted that idea. We had one more location to go to but the weather looked too grim which was really annoying. On the way my phone, which I use for sat nav, fell off the mount and into the footwell, so I had to pull over and pick it back up as I didn't want it going under my braking foot.

We got to Lankham bottom Butterfly Conservation Reserve at 3.47pm and it was still throwing it down :(. I got out to see just how bad it was and the rain got even worse!



Such a shame to not have a walk here

A bloke and his soaked Border collie appeared from the reserve and he said to me, "There's no Butterflies out in this!" He then shook his head and said they'd had two weeks of this rubbish weather. I didn't want to give up so easily, even with Wendy saying to just go home, so I set a time limit of 4.15pm. I sat in the back to give my back a stretch and Wendy had Lyca on her knee. We got to 4.15pm and there was no sign of any clear areas coming so we gave up and left at 4.21pm. We wouldn't be back in this area again this holiday, so I was gutted to not see this reserve, but if we are ever back in Dorset it will be first on my list, as Butterfly Conservation reserves are always good. That marked the end of our day and considering the constant overcast conditions we did well to see Scarlet Tiger and Golden-ringed Dragonfly so it wasn't a total write off. It was chucking it down all the way home and to add insult to injury Wendy's friend sent her a photo of clear blue sky back home...Urrghhhh! Just before we got back to the cottage an Army Lynx helicopter flew over which was cool.

We were back at the cottage at 5.31pm, so Wendy gave Lyca her tea and my pasta and her soup were ready in 4 minutes. Sorted! Wendy went off for a bath and I checked the weather forecast which said the rain was stopping at 8pm. That was too late for me to go back to Martin Down for another look so I had a soak in a hot bath instead hoping it would help my back. After that I realised there was no Dave on the TV, so I had a go at retuning it and luckily Dave came up, so we were able to watch my favourite TV show 'Taskmaster.' Later on Lyca went out for a wee and we could hear Tawny and Long-eared Owls again and there was two types of bat flying around, probably Long-eared and Pipistrelle. We headed off to bed at 10.30pm

Thursday 20th June

The soak in the bath must have helped as I managed to sleep until 6am, which was the longest of the holiday so far and Wendy was up at 7.30am. The forecast was right and it was sunny outside for the first time and I had planned to visit our most important places on the best day of the week. Wendy looked at the forecast for the next week and it said it was going to be 26c! Ours was currently 17c, more like what you'd expect in April rather than late June! Lyca for some reason wouldn't get up, so Wendy did some washing but we still got out by 9.15am, which was good as we had a bit of a drive down to the south coast. On the way we went past a new build of 4 houses and were extremely angry to see nets over the hedge :(If we lived in that area that net would go bye bye. Further on we hit a roadblock for some reason so we sat patiently, while the bloke behind us got impatient and turned his car around. Just as he drove off, we all got ushered through.....Hahahah. We really needed the sunshine to hang on for our locations today but just as we were arriving on the Isle of Purbeck the blue sky turned black and we noticed spots of rain on the windscreen.....Nooooo!

I parked up at RSPB Arne at 10.28am and having known about this place for ages it was great to finally see it. Since we weren't in any rush because of the rain Wendy went into the shop and café first.



Arne visitor centre

We eventually set off for a walk at 10.45am and it was still cold with spots of rain. Grrrr. The walk started off under trees and we quickly spotted a moth sheltering on some ferns. Annoyingly, it was a **Brown Silver-lines** which is a very common moth that we see at home.



Brown Silver-lines

The trees then quickly opened out to the heath which is what Arne is famous for.



Arne Heath

As we walked along the track with the woods on one side and the heath on the other, we heard a **Treecreeper** calling from the trees. We then realised we were walking in the wrong direction and seemed to be heading for the neighbouring heath that wasn't part of the RSPB reserve. Whoops! It looked a nice heath though so maybe we will visit it if we ever go back to Dorset. Back on track Wendy spotted a Lizard hiding under the bracken, so I had a look and instantly got a bit excited as it looked a bit different to a normal lizard. We were pretty sure that what we had was a **Sand Lizard** and a quick check online confirmed that it was indeed! Wahey. This was a lifer for us and one of our main targets for Dorset at this time of the year.



Sand Lizard

It was a shame it never gave us a clear view, but we left it to warm up. Not much further along we found another Lizard and this one was out in the open, but unfortunately this one turned out to be a **Common Lizard**. Typical!



Common Lizard

We carried on along the track and it took us down to the water side, where Lyca enjoyed a nice paddle.



Lyca having a paddle in Poole harbour

Looking out over towards Brownsea harbour we could see some **Shelduck**, **Canada Geese** and a **Sandwich Tern** flew past. We rounded the end of the headland and the path went back up into a heathy area. Walking through there we could see **Wood Ants** all over the place. I looked into it later and I think these were Southern Wood Ants which are different

to the Northern Wood Ants we see in Abernethy Forest. The path then climbed up and had a lovely view back towards Poole over a saltmarsh.



Saltmarsh

The track then aimed back towards the visitor centre and back into the trees. Before we went that way though we took a little detour to the viewpoint.



Viewpoint board

Going down the steps off the heath we heard a Dartford Warbler but didn't get to see it. In the woods we came across a nice little pond which would have been great to have seen in the sunlight but even without we managed to find an **Azure Damselfly** on the surrounding vegetation.



Azure Damselfly

We had to move off quickly though as another dog walker came and there was no room to let them past us till a bit further on. We found another small pond and there was a Hawker of some description, some **Four-spotted Chasers** and a **Common Blue Damselfly**, so there was at least some insect activity without the sun. Near the end of the wood we found another moth having a rest. From my initial quick glance I dismissed it as a Riband wave so nearly carried on walking but for some reason I felt like getting a photo of it and as I got closer I could see it clearly wasn't one of them. I had my suspicions so double checked the moth book on my phone and sure enough it was a lifer in the form of a **Treble Brown spot**. Nice!



Treble Brown spot

I thought when the woodland ended we would be back in the car park but in fact we came out and the path edged some fields. Bit weird.



Have we got lost again?

I checked the map just in case we had took another wrong turn but we hadn't and a few minutes later we were back at the visitor centre and car park at 12.53pm. We gave Lyca a drink then went back to the visitor centre shop for some Bug houses for the garden back home. I also spied a nice looking chocolate fudge cake so got a piece for my lunch pudding :).

Whilst eating our lunch in the car we people watched and saw a couple with a baby. The woman looked very annoyed with the bloke. Hahaha! Wendy reckoned the woman would rather be shopping than being forced to walk around a nature reserve! She said it, not me! Weirdly he then got his clothes that were on hangers out of the boot of one car and put them into another car nearby. What on earth was going on there? The mind boggles. By now the car park was full and the overflow car park was filling up so this was more like how I expected Arne would have been when we arrived, so we got lucky there.

We left at 1.35pm and headed off for our next location in the area and luckily there was now gaps in the cloud. On the way we drove past Corfe castle which Wendy took a drive by photo of.



Corfe Castle

The sat nav took me down a flipping single track road again when it didn't need to. It seems to be doing that more than it used to for some reason. It was so annoying because this road went on for miles as well which wound me right up as it was very slow and I could see the main road running nearly parallel on the map. Grrrr! Just to add insult to injury a pair of Pheasants were leisurely having a stroll down the middle of the road, so we had to wait till they eventually walked through a gap in the hedge. As we passed through the town of Swanage my sat nav decided to go mental and it sent me in the complete wrong direction and towards the middle of the town....Arrggghhh! I had to back up a side road and turn around and then realised I had missed the turn off that the sat nav had told me to do.....Oops!

We eventually arrived at Durlston Country Park car park and I had expected it to be busy and it was :(To add to the depression, clouds had now rolled in so because it took us so long to get there we had missed the slight gap in the weather. Noooooooo! When we got out of the car it also seemed like there was a bit of a breeze which would have surely meant our Butterfly target would never be flying ☹. We set off anyway and wandered down a track towards a lighthouse.



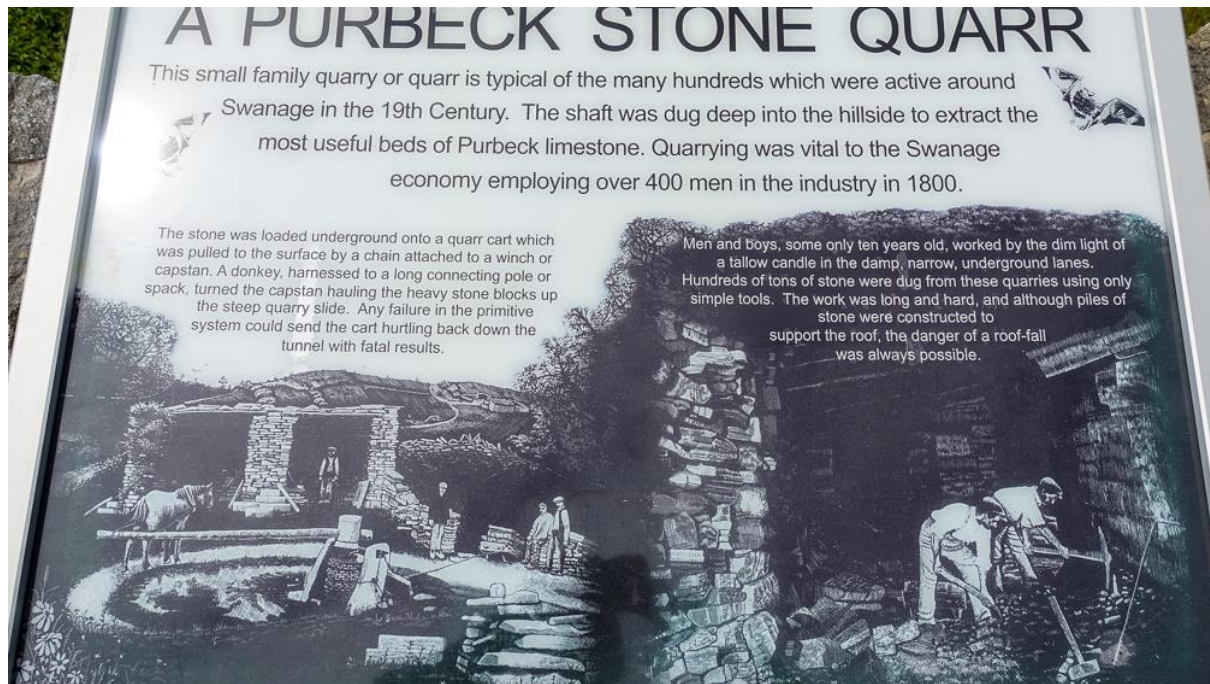
English Channel

I had glanced at the path map in the car park but had quickly forgotten how to get to the wildlife trail. Luckily enough, it was dead obvious and we headed along it. For the number of cars in the car park the trail was relatively quiet which was nice and to add to the good news the clouds were breaking up again and sunlight was coming through.....Hurray! Pretty soon after we spotted a Skipper Butterfly that I was sure was our target but it flew and we never re found it :(. Whilst searching for it a **Dark-green Fritillary** flew past and into this small old stone mine area.



Old mine

The history of which was quite interesting.



Mine info board

Around this area was quite sheltered from the breeze so we had a good scan. We found a **Marbled White** and another Skipper. This time it was hanging about in the sheltered bit so we were able to watch it closely and identify it as our target species **Lulworth Skipper**. Before we came away, I wasn't sure if it was the right time of year but thought we should have a look anyway. It's only found in a few places along this Jurassic Coast so we were very chuffed to have seen our second lifer of the day (3rd if you include the moth).



We carried on along the trail when Wendy stopped dead and pointed. She had found a **Bee Orchid** and that was a lifer for her (I had only recently seen my first ever as well).



Bee Orchid

What a place this was turning out to be! We carried on down the track and it sort of dipped into this really sheltered valley bit which was full of bushes. I imagine it would be brilliant there for migrating birds in the spring.



Sheltered valley

Since this area was also well sheltered, we had a good look around and closer to the sea we found a great patch that had more Lulworth Skippers



Lulworth Skipper

A **Small Skipper** for comparison.



Small Skipper

And since we had our eye in for tiny insects, we also found a plume moth which I am pretty sure is a **Crescent Plume** which would also be a lifer for us.



Crescent Plume (I think)

In the valley bushes we could hear a **Lesser Whitethroat** singing. We then went over to the Lighthouse and took some pics before turning back.



Durlston Lighthouse

On the walk back we found another Bee Orchid which was nice then we were back at the car at 3.38pm. We had done very well there considering I didn't pick up a trail map and just guessed where to go instead :).

Heading away from the coast back inland the clouds were dark, so it looked like we had been in the right place at the right time after all. The last place of the day to visit wasn't a reserve as such and more a designated ASSI so I knew there wasn't any actual parking. Little did I realise this also meant it would be extremely difficult to find. I went down a track which turned out to be a dead end with nowhere to park so came back out of there. Nowhere looked like where I had researched, so I had another look at OS Maps and Google maps on my phone and decided to look at a place on another road. Round there, there seemed to be a small layby at the side of the road and a track on the opposite side so we decided to give it a go. We parked up at 4.16pm and immediately the car was caked in flies.....Urrghhh! On the track there was a sign that said "Old Mission Parish Wall Track" not sure what that meant but I was happy it was a marked path. A couple of hundred metres down the track we suddenly came across an interpretation board that said Creech Heath on it! Wahey.....this was exactly the place we were looking for. It was supposedly great for all 6 species of reptile.



Crech Heath

Sure as eggs is eggs, as we stepped foot onto the heath it clouded over. Not great, but there were patches of clear sky too, so we just had to hope they were coming our way. The first section of the ASSI didn't seem that good to be honest with quite a lot going on but not much heath. Maybe it is in the process of being returned back to a heath?



Bit weird

We continued on this track, expecting to come across a water body, but instead hit a barbed wire fence. Errr? We skirted left along it then came to someone's back garden with a hot tub in it, which was not quite the water body I was hoping for, so we turned around. I was a bit down because this place had looked really good from the research I'd done, but in reality, it was turning out to be poo. On the return walk we found a path that forked off so since we had time we decided to go and explore. Nearly straight away we found ourselves in more of a wet heath and we found a nice bit of water not soon after.



This is more like it

Annoyingly it was overcast when we were looking so nothing was flying over the water, but after a good scan we found a **Small Red Damselfly** which is only the second time we have seen one. When I went to take a photo, I found my battery had died again! OMG I never learn. I ended up having to take a snap with the little RX100 point and click.



Small Red Damselfly

Further along we found a bigger pond that was caked in pond weed or something. This looked like it would have been amazing in the sun but again nothing was flying over it. Lyca also didn't like the look of it so didn't dip her toe in. I was happy about that as you don't want a dog going in ponds on an ASSI!



Big pond

Again, we had a good scan to see if we could find anything interesting and to prove that perseverance does pay off sometimes, we found a **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**. We have only seen them a handful of times as well, so it was point and click to the rescue again to get evidence.



Scarce-blue tailed Damselfly

This was more like how I expected this place to be. Imagine it in the sun? :O. The track came to a dead end soon after, so we re-traced our steps hearing a **Redpoll** flying over along the way. Going past the ditch from before we found a **Brown China Mark** moth and a **Common Darter** dragonfly. I kept thinking that if we had found the right track first, before going in the wrong direction, would we have been able to look at the ponds in sunshine rather than overcast conditions when we got there? I think the answer is, "Yes" unfortunately :(Still, we can't complain with the two Damselflies we saw and I found out a

bit later on from the Dorset county recorder that Scarce blue-tailed Damselflies aren't recorded from there so that was a really important local find.

We got back to the car at 5.39pm so a lot later than I had planned as we still had about an hour's drive to get back to the cottage.....Whoops! We had done 15,700 steps today which was ok and on the way back at 6.01pm it started chucking it down so we had actually been lucky with the weather. Nearly back at the cottage, on a single track road, a car came flying round the corner way too fast and had to slam on so hard his hazard lights automatically came on! Wendy took a note of his number plate, which was FA57 OLZ, so we can only presume that he was obviously a complete tool.

We were back at the cottage at 6.39pm and whilst there I realised what I had missed in the last few days due to the battery running out. Hawfinch, Spotted flycatcher, Redstart, Small Red Damselfly and Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly.....Aarrghhh!

After tea an Army Chinook flew over. When Wendy phoned her Mum she went outside, since it was so nice, and she saw a Spotted Flycatcher on the fence. Later on when Lyca went out for a wee there was only Long-eared Owls calling this time. We did have a bat though and after giving a description to Andy he reckoned it could have been a Noctule! We really need to get that ios bat detector adapter. We headed off to bed at 10.45pm.

Friday 21st June

For the first time on this holiday I managed to sleep all the way through and I got up at 7am. Wendy got up at 7.40am. It had rained overnight and there was a grey sky :(Our hopes that the bit of sun that came in yesterday was going to get even better were dashed straight away. Although we could see some small patches of blue trying to get through, we really needed full sun today. It felt relatively cold when we headed out at 9.22am and on the way it said it was 15.5c, which in June in southern England was ridiculous. The Sat nav took us down a farm track to a river crossing which was interesting. I had to reverse back up the track and park up in a muddy layby at our location for the morning, Latchmoor Brook. There was supposed to be a car park there, so I was a little confused to say the least. We couldn't cross the river but found a muddy bridge nearby that went through a muddy field! Hahahaha, nice start.



Mud mud mud

The sun was now out so I didn't care about the mud and it was warming up very quickly as well, so this was just what we needed. A bit further along we found the car park we were supposed to go to, so my Sat nav was nowhere near it. Flipping heck. We were then onto the New Forest area proper and it looked amazing.



New Forest

Darker clouds were starting to develop though, so we aimed for the feeder streams on the north side of the brook that I had read about on a blog that morning when trying to narrow down where we were supposed to look for our target species today. On the way we heard a **Grasshopper Warbler** which is always nice to hear. When we got to the streams Lyca was being very annoying and pulling to get in the water but there was no way I was letting in these special streams, so I had to pass her to Wendy whilst I scanned everywhere.



Lyca can wait

Whilst Wendy was waiting, she found a teneral Damselfly, so I came back to look at it. Before I could lift my bins, a Golden Retriever (off the lead) came flying in and piled into the stream.....Grrrrr! By the time the dog and owner had gone, not surprisingly, so had the Damselfly. We did find a China-mark moth there though which we think was a **Small China-mark**. We carried on and found another nice little stream and scanned it all the way down to the brook but found nothing. Weird.



Looks good

We were probably finding nothing as it kept clouding over. Further along we found a big pond so stopped to have a good look although I knew it wasn't the habitat for our target. Wendy spotted a Damselfly, so we crossed over the little stream to get closer to the pond.



Pond

The Damselfly was just an Azure Damselfly but then we spotted something a bit chunkier flying around back and forwards over the water. This turned out to be a **Downy Emerald** which we don't see that often (and not on the island at all). It never landed the entire time we watched it so there was no way of getting a photo or video. After that we continued on and found another small stream which looked good but yet again there was absolutely nothing on it. A little bit further up I found a teneral which tried to fly but then got instantly whalloped by a Large red Damselfly! Eeek it's a tough world out there. We carried on going, thinking we were flogging a dead horse, when we spotted 3 blokes standing around a tiny stream with bins. Normally I would avoid groups like that like the plague, but desperate times call for desperate measures and we headed over to them.



Our new friends

They were really nice and helpful blokes and as we suspected they were looking for what we were. They said they had had 1 about 40 minutes earlier but not again! They had also had 2

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies which normally we would be happy with but not today! We hung around for ages but saw nothing. We heard a Cuckoo in this time which was nice and one bloke spotted a blue Damselfly, which turned out to only be another Azure Damselfly. My back was starting to give me jip from the standing and looking down, so we sat down for a rest. The blokes were trying extremely hard to re find it for us which was nice but they also wanted a better view and to get some photos as before it was a very quick view. They said even though we were right over the stream they were extremely difficult to see so that boded well. Whilst I was sat down, I spotted a tiny movement on a bit of rush, so I got it in my bins and instantly could see it was a **Southern Damselfly**, our target. I called everyone over and then attempted to get everyone on it which was a mission in itself, as trying to describe a non-descript bit of rush from all the other bits was very difficult. I got everyone on it bar the oldest bloke of the bunch. I grabbed my camera to get some video whilst Wendy took over trying to get the bloke on it.



Southern Damselfly (Video grab)

Eventually the old bloke saw it but before he could get his camera on it, it flew! The other two blokes had filled their boots though, so everyone was all smiles. The main bloke of the group even gave Wendy a massive high five.....Hahahaha. He said to me, "Happy?" and I said, "Over the moon" so he gave me a slap on the back! Hahaha mental. I noticed he had a Panasonic camera and lens and asked him if it was a Gh5 (which is what I used) and he said, "Yes" then explained how he sold all his camera gear to go to the Panasonic m43 system to be more lightweight and he's never looked back. I told him that that's exactly what I'd done. The only difference was that he had a weird little lens as well and when I asked about that he said it was a 60mm macro that cost a couple of hundred quid. I was sceptical but he said the images were stupidly sharp. He passed it to me to try but the shots looked soft to me, so I handed it back. I looked into this later and apparently it's one of the most sort after lenses on the m43 system.....Whoops. We were just about to leave when Wendy saw a **Painted Lady** fly past which was new for the trip. Before we left they asked u where we came from and I said, "Isle of Man but we haven't come all this way just for

Southern Damselfly!" The main bloke jokingly said, "Yeah, yeah you say that." We are mental like, but not that mental! We said our thanks and left them to it as they seemed to still be hanging around. We had more places to go in the day so needed to get on. We headed back on the main track and saw a herd of **Fallow Deer** which seemed to be absolutely covered in what looked like horseflies.



Fallow Deer

Nearly back at the car another Apache helicopter went over and I got a nice close photo of it. I hope I didn't show up on his Radar otherwise it would have looked like I was pointing a SAM missile at him!



Apache

To reward Lyca for being good, just before we got to the car we let her have a big paddle in the brook. Unfortunately, she decided she wasn't going to get out, so it took a ton of persuading and treats to get her to move!



Not coming out

We got back to the car at 1.24pm and gobbled our lunches down as we were well hungry. It was 20c now but it felt like about 30c to me, I was boiling! We left at 1.47pm and headed south to our next location. On the way the sun went behind clouds and we got stuck in a traffic jam.....Doh. The next place was another tricky place to find so I was ready this time as we turned down a muddy bumpy track which stopped at the gate of Troublefield at 2.18pm. This was a Dorset Wildlife trust reserve that was supposedly good for Scarce Chaser which we have never seen before despite trying on several occasions.



Troublefield board

We got out of the car and walked down to the gate but were met by a herd of cows right in our faces. Wendy doesn't like cows at the best of times and I couldn't see a way to get around them at all. I tried the clapping and waving my hands about but that just seemed to attract more of them.



Doesn't seem friendly.

I hate giving up on places, but even I thought this would give us more stress than anything especially with Lyca. We then noticed the cows were caked in Horseflies and one of them even had a Giant Horsefly biting it, so that was the straw that broke the camel's back and we turned around and headed back up the track. Near the car we spotted a female **Beautiful Demoseille** which was only our second ever, but I couldn't get a shot of it before it flew off.....Arrghhh! We got back to the car and left at 2.31pm. We were close to our next location though, so I wasn't that upset and we arrived at Town Common at 2.38pm. In this area, near Christchurch, there were several Heaths / Commons we could have chosen to go

for a walk at but the main ones looked like they would be really busy with dog walkers. Luckily, I found one which seemed quieter, as the car park was tiny, which went along the route of the old 'Ringwood to Christchurch railway' that ran along the River Avon. It was supposedly another good place for Scarce Chaser and would be the last location we were going to on this holiday to have a chance of seeing one. Annoyingly, there was a man in a Discovery parked up at the entrance gate talking to a bloke with a massive dog that was off the lead. We tried waiting it out but they weren't budging so I decided I would have to just carry Lyca past. Once we got through the gate we would be fine. As soon as we got out of the car they stopped talking and went.....Phew! We got through the gate and headed down the long straight path through the trees.



Old railway line

Soon enough though we turned off this track and onto the heath proper which was a nice sandy path. We saw a **Brimstone** butterfly straight away followed by an **Emerald Damselfly**. This was promising. Unfortunately, we could also see big black clouds coming our way.....Unbelievable! A bit further on we found a pond to the side of the track, so I went for a look.



Pond

I disturbed a medium sized blue Dragonfly but lost it nearly as soon as I saw it and apart from that there was only Four-spotted Chasers flying, so we carried on. We found another pond which yet again only had 4 spots on it but then I thought I heard a Dartford Warbler. Wendy reckoned I was hearing things, so we continued. A few minutes later a Dartford Warbler flew across the track....Ha! We stopped to try and see if it would reappear but as we did I saw a Chaser flying and it landed on a stick. I got it in my bins and could see half the eyes were blue and it had dark patches near its wing bases. I was 99% sure this was our target and after Wendy had double checked the app we could finally say we had seen a **Scarce Chaser**.



It was only the female, the males look so much better, but this still felt great after so many times missing out and dipping on one. It kept flying off to catch something and coming back to the same perch, which was handy but it never aligned itself for a perfect photo and I couldn't go into the bushes to line it up either, so had to settle with what I got. We realised in all that excitement the Dartford warbler was going nuts which must have meant it had a nest nearby, so we quickly left the scene. The heath part was a nice loop path which I like, so we kept going until we met a bloke with bins.



Town Common

We got chatting to him and he was also ridiculously nice. He talked to us for ages about Town common and the species there, he was very knowledgeable. It turned out he went to Town Common nearly daily and he was like a warden of the area really. He also told us if we find any corrugated iron just turn it over as there will be snakes under them. He also told us not to go straight on at the next junction as that would take us into the Blandford Fly area. We didn't know what that was, then he told us that their bites can kill....Eek! After that we nervously went along the path and I was itching to turn right as soon as we could to get away from the dodgy area, this was not the time to get lost! When we did turn right we could see loads of blue Butterflies flying about. I thought that was a bit odd, as Common Blues don't usually fly in such numbers together. We got them in our bins and were chuffed to see these were Silver-studded Blues. We think this was the first time we had seen a naturally occurring population and not a reintroduction one.



Silver-studded Blue

The path then turned back on itself, then climbed up a sandy bank. It reminded me a lot of Dersingham bog in Norfolk.



Proper heath

When we got to the hill section we spotted something on the ground a nano second before standing on it. It took us a split second to get our heads around what it was. After the shock had subsided we realised it was a snake on the path! Next question was, "Is it alive?" as it hadn't moved when we were just about to stand on it. A closer look and we could see it was breathing but its head was down a hole in the sand. It didn't look like a Grass snake or Adder to me so that left only one other candidate really and after a quick double check confirmed it, this was our first ever **Smooth Snake**. I never thought we would ever see one of them, so this was very exciting.



It didn't budge!



Smooth Snake

We stood there watching what it was doing and hoped it would get its head out of the hole so we could see its face. We waited for what seemed like ages and could only assume it

was trying to eat another the eggs or young of another reptile that were down the hole. It definitely looked like something was being pushed down inside its body!

I held the camera up pointed at its head end for what felt like forever before having to lower it. As I did, of course, the snake pulled its head out of the hole. I snapped the camera back to my eye but in doing so the snake obviously saw me and shot off the path at the speed of light. Slowing down my video you could just see his face which was better than nothing.



Smooth Snake (Video grab)

We were chuffed to bits with this and skipped off along the path (not literally) till we hit a dead end.....Uh? Thank god we had taken a wrong turn though or we would have never seen the snake. We went back down but couldn't see where to go unless we used a permissive bridleway that said it was shut between June and September :|. We didn't need to walk on that much so took extra special care where we laid our feet just in case. I was happy when we were quickly back on the proper track though. We heard another Dartford Warbler here but saw nothing else of note. Disappointingly, we didn't find any corrugated iron to turn over either, but you can't have everything. Back at the car it was 5.13pm and Lyca was extremely thirsty nearly drinking an entire small bottle of water to herself!

To get back to the cottage we were now on the main road from Christchurch and it was rush hour.... Handy. It was chocka block but we did see two **Greylag Geese** fly over the road. Definitely feral but they all count. Sort of.

We were back at the cottage at 5.48pm which wasn't too bad and we had done 18,300 steps. Even though that was a bit of exertion our teas were rubbish. I had beans on toast and Wendy had soup.....exciting. Since there was a bit of sun out and we were near the end of our trip I decided to go to Martin Down after tea and headed off at 6.45pm. Evening is not the best time for insects, but I still wanted to go and see anyway. When I got there I expected it to be rammed since it was after work but there was only one other car there. Ace ☺. The sun was out but strangely it didn't feel that warm.



Martin Down (Video grab)

This might have been the cause of why I only found Meadow Brown, Common Blue and Small Heath Butterflies. There was though, an absolute ton of bird song and pretty quickly I picked up on a **Corn Bunting** singing.



Corn Bunting (Video grab)

Very pleased with this I turned back seeing a **Barn Owl** hunting over a distance field. This made me think that this area must be like what farm fields used to be like in the olden days. I had a mooch about on the way back and went down into like a dell type area. I found a load of tufts or mounds of grass and thought this must be where the Marsh Fritillaries would have been if we had come a few weeks earlier! Maybe next year :). Down in that area, I saw a relatively large black and white Moth. It shot past me and over a hedge never to be seen again and when I checked later I found out that Wood Tiger occur there! Arrgghhhh that would have been a belting moth to have seen. Back at the car and the car park was now empty.....Wow! I could feel that I had been burnt today though, one day of

sun and that's me burnt to a crisp. Typical! I was home by 8.30pm and chilled out till bed at 10.45pm

Saturday 22nd June

This was our last full day in Dorset and even though we hadn't been able to do our full itinerary due to the weather I still was struggling to think of where to go. On the plus side I had my first proper full sleep of the holiday and we got up at 8.30am.....Wuff! Outside it was well sunny with no clouds in the sky for the first time! Typical that it was our last day. I didn't want to waste the good weather so had a google but needed to take into account that it was now the weekend, so places would be busy. In the end we decided to give Bentley Wood a go. A few years back when we were in Hampshire we knew Bentley Wood was the place to go to for Purple Emperor and we went there. Unfortunately, I had got confused and that place was Bentley Wood Station and not the proper Bentley Wood. The place we were going to today was the proper Bentley Wood! It was nearly an hour's drive north though, so we needed to get a move on. We got out at 10.07am and it was 19.5c.

Near our destination a Vole ran across the road which I luckily avoided. We then had a **Marsh Tit** flew across the entrance track to the wood. Nice. We parked up at Bentley Wood at 11.02am and went for a look at the boards.



Dogs on leads.. yes!!

The area was big, but I had read up this morning as to where the good areas were and one of them had had a White-letter Hairstreak the day before, so we headed in that direction. Along the woodland rides we saw Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown and Large Skipper but nothing exciting.



Woodland ride

We took the turn off to go to the Hairstreak area when I spotted a Dragonfly through the trees just sitting there. It was a nice female **Broad-bodied Chaser**, our first of the trip.



Broad-bodied Chaser (video grab)

Whilst videoing that we had a **Red kite** fly over and another Brimstone Butterfly. We carried on when Wendy spotted a bloke and said, "Isn't that the bloke from Town Common yesterday?" I went, "Nah" and kept walking. When we crossed paths it turned out that it was! Haha whoops. We got chatting again and he told us we had chosen another good spot to visit (skillzzz) and he gave us some more good local knowledge. We said our, "Goodbyes" and set off for the Hairstreak elms. The man warned us about getting sore necks and he wasn't joking. Hairstreaks like the tops of trees so trying to find something even smaller than Goldcrests in the tops of trees is a killer. A Marsh tit flew through so I was able to grab a little bit of video of that but there was no sign of any Butterfly even though we knew we

had the exact right tree let alone right area! We gave it up as a bad job and set off. We ended up in a farm which was a bit odd as I didn't remember seeing that on the map.



Farm

There was static caravans there and it looked well dodgy and were probably using an illegal immigrant work force or something, so we wanted out of there quick smart. We headed left which is where the trees were and saw a **Spruce Carpet Moth**. Along a track we got to a gate which we had to climb over and pass Lyca over. When we looked back at it it had a sign on it saying "No unauthorised persons allowed beyond this point". Hahaha whoops again!



Might have been a bit lost

We found the Bentley Wood information barn straight after which was really smart. It looked like it was funded by a group called 'The Friends of Bentley Wood' and it had a big

whiteboard with recent sightings on it and a nice photo board of things that had been seen there.



Want one of these in the Isle of Man!

We were happy we were back on the correct track and then went the wrong way again nearly straight away.... Referee. This time we backtracked back to the barn, double checked the map then headed off the right way. Doing this we finally found the Eastern clearing which was supposedly a good area.



Eastern clearing

We found a Marbled White in there but not much else insect wise. Wendy thought she heard a Wood Warbler, which I doubted very much but when I heard it I pointed out that it was a **Tree Pipit**. New for the trip. We eventually found it on the top of a nearby tree so I got some video of it. The eastern clearing was really near the carp ark so we were back at the car at 1.36pm. We had lunch whilst I googled where to go for the afternoon. I thought

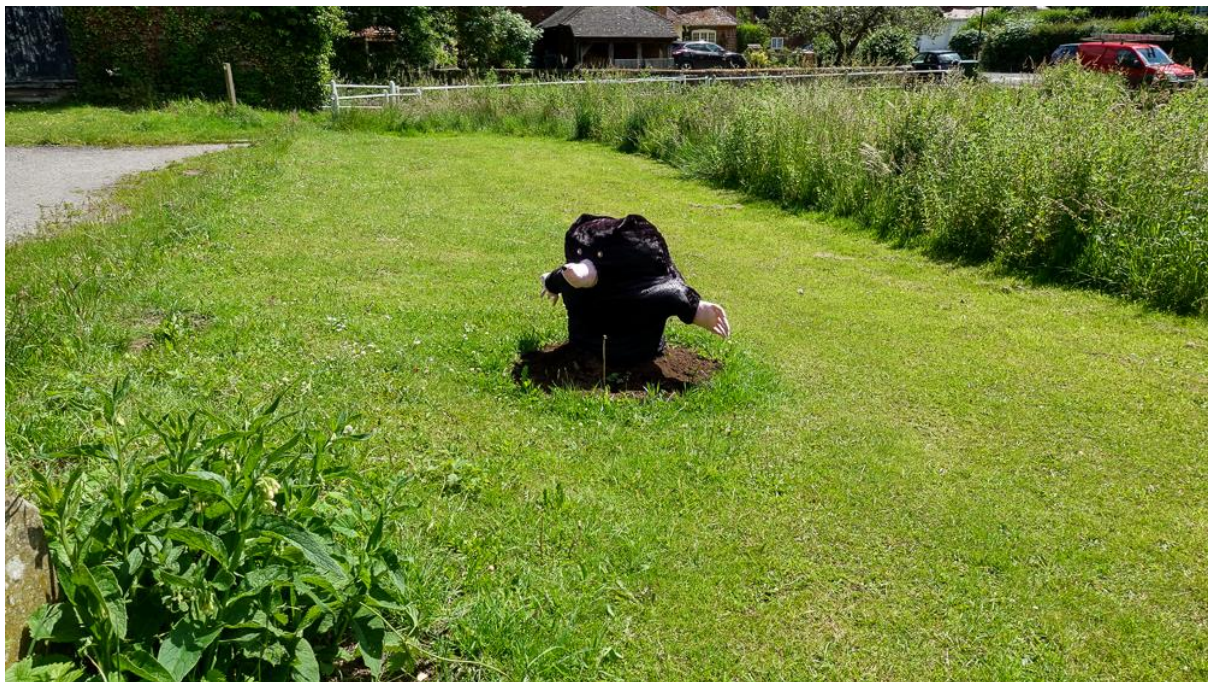
somewhere near the cottage would be good, as we had packing and stuff to do in the evening. On the google satellite images I spotted a big pond in the New Forest and saw a nearby car park so decided we would head there. Why not?

On the way we saw this nice bridge across a small river and somewhere to park next to it, so we stopped and had a look.



Nice stream

Wendy found another Scarlet Tiger and I found a mole....



Mole

It was now 21c and due to it being so much warmer than the whole week, it felt like we were in the Sahara.

We arrived at the car park at Telegraph Hill at 2.37pm but it was really busy. A quick google showed there was another car park at Fritham so we headed for there instead. On the way there were horses in the road which wouldn't move.....Haha.



Funny horses

Further up the road we went past a phone box that was full of books, like a nice little novelty library. Smart. When we arrived at Fritham car park, it too was also rammed, so I found one more to try, so headed off to Eyeworth Pond car park and got there at 2.50pm. It was still a bit busy but way less so than the other two so we decided to give it a go. The pond right at the car park looked ace.



Eyeworth Pond

Straight away I could see lots of Dragons and Damselflies flying over the water. A big **Emperor** was flying at the back and there was lots of small Damsels flying over the lilies. I

assumed Blue-tails, but when I got my bins on them I was very pleased to see they were **Red-eyed Damselfly**.



Red-eyed Damselfly

I took a lot of video and photos of these as we don't get to see them that often. When I walked back round towards the car a **Black-tailed Skimmer** came up off the rocks at the side of the water. I waited a few seconds and sure enough it came back down to the same spot.



It was now boiling and I had wasted enough time watching the Dragonflies at the pond so we set off for a walk into the woods. It was very muddy in parts which felt odd with it being so hot. Everyone we walked past seemed like very very posh, "What ho Tarquin" types, who reminded me of the flat cap brigade of North Norfolk! Lyca was enjoying the smells of the area and was pulling me all over the place.



I can smell a Badger!

The walk then came out on a heath and then it looped around and started heading back. We came across some **Woodlark** so I tried to get some video but as usual with Woodlark they flew before I could even start to try and approach. They landed in some deep grass and I couldn't work out where they had gone, so left them to it. In that same area we came across a lovely little stream, similar to what we saw at Latchmore Brook. I got a little excited that there might be Southern Damselfly there as well, so we walked along the length having a good scan.



New Forest stream

We found some Damselflies on it but there was only Azures and Blue-tailed. Wendy found a Palmate Newt in the stream and down near where it entered the wood we saw a Golden-ringed Dragonfly as well. Back in the wood Lyca was able to have a little paddle in the stream in there as it was too shaded for any rare insects so I wasn't worried she would be disturbing anything. We were back at the car at 4.45pm and it had been a very nice walk considering we had never heard of the place this morning.

We were back at the cottage at 5.30pm and there was the Spotted Flycatcher in the garden welcoming us back. We had done 15,300 steps today but it felt like more....Hahaha. We all had our tea and Wendy went for a bath, so I decided to go for a wander up the track by the side of the cottage as it was a public footpath. I got to fly the drone, since the weather was nice and had a look back at the cottage from 100m up, which was pretty cool.



Cottage (Drone grab)

I tried to make a loop route out of my walk but ended up in a field full of inquisitive cows, so I bailed on that idea and turned round and walked back.

Lyca had been asleep the entire time I had been out, so we think the week was catching up with her. We started packing as it was heading home day tomorrow.... ..Booooo :(.
Annoyingly, even though my back seemed a lot better, as I had had a big spicy tea my stomach was killing. I thought I had got away with it during this holiday as well. We headed off to bed at 10.15pm as tomorrow was going to be long day.

Sunday 23rd June

We were up at 7.50am but I had had another bad night but this time due to stomach problems.....Doh! I had woke at 3.30am in a bit of pain and had struggled to get anymore sleep after that. It wasn't just me with a bit of tummy bother. Wendy woke up and ran straight into the toilet....Hahaha! The long drive back north could be interesting! :). The sky was grey again so that was disappointing and we were all packed up and ready to go and left the cottage at 10.05am. Lyca seemed to know we were going and was in a sulk in the back seat. Driving through Wiltshire (boooooo, evil police force helps fox hunters there grrr) and it was foggy and muggy. In Salisbury I stopped off to get some petrol at 10.28am and we saw 8 parachutists coming down and landing in a field. A bit later on we saw a Gregg's and I spotted a place to park at the side of the road, so we stopped and Wendy ran in. She came back out all smiles having just snaffled the last 2 hot vegan sausage rolls. She said the girl behind the counter said usually people have to take them cold at that time of the day, so we were very lucky. This was the first time we'd tried them and after reading all the amazing reviews we certainly weren't disappointed. We need a Gregg's in the Isle of Man! Wendy said that the Holiday was now complete....Hahaha. Along the drive north we had 5 Red kites in total and also a Buzzard being mobbed by a Lapwing. We then got stuck behind a lorry which was stuck behind a car towing a caravan.....Urrghhhhh! Typically, the car with the caravan never pulled in so every single car had to overtake individually over the miles. I had to stop at a petrol station in a place called Calcutt so Wendy could nip to the toilet and the car said it was now 22.5c which was the hottest it had been all week. Of course! We headed through Gloucestershire at 11.56 and by 12.17 the temperature had risen to 24c! We passed a lake which had 2x **Coot** on it which was our first Coot of the week. We drove past Ledbury and gave them a boo and the finger seeing as it's the place of a notorious illegal Fox hunt. If I saw anyone in a flat cap, I would have spat at them like spit the dog. Horrible people.

As we approached our location for a walk the sky was still grey and the temperature had dropped to 20c. Hopefully, that would be high enough for our target species though. We arrived at Haugh Woods car park at 1.03pm and the temp was now 19c! While I was looking for places to stop at on the way home I had seen that Wood White Butterflies were out at this time of year, but didn't know of any locations. I asked our friend Andy and he said try Haugh Woods, which was a slight detour west from going up the M5 / M6 but I thought it was worth a pop. There were loads of cars there which was annoying, I didn't expect that as the woods were quite out of the way. There were two ways to go in these woods, a north loop walk and a south loop walk and they were separate so we had a decision to make. I couldn't work out which side we needed or if it made any difference, so we took a guess at the north walk. It turned out this walk was deep in trees and most of it was in full shade so not the conditions we though would be good for a Wood White. Whoops!



Haugh Woods

It was midgetastic in there as well which added to the annoyance of choosing the wrong walk but we did find a funky little micro moth at least.



Nemophora Degeerella

We were back at the car at 1.50pm and had our lunch. After that I had a wander round and finally found an interpretation board. This confirmed what we had worked out and it was the southern walk that had the nice habitat although it didn't mention Wood White specifically. It did say that Wood White is the 4th highest counted butterfly in the woods and its increasing so that was good news though. Out of 31 species of butterfly recorded in the woods so far we had seen one....Hahaha. Skillz! There was non-stop people coming

and going from the car park but not many of them looked like wildlife enthusiasts so not sure why they were coming all this way for this wood. We headed off down the southern walk at 2.23pm after a nice packed lunch. There was still no sun but it was a bit muggy so we hoped that would be enough to get something flying.



More promising

We walked about 200 yards down this nice looking track when I spotted 2 white butterflies flying in a weird flitty weak way. I ran down the track to catch up with them and sure enough these were both **Wood White** Butterflies! Get in. Yet another lifer for us.



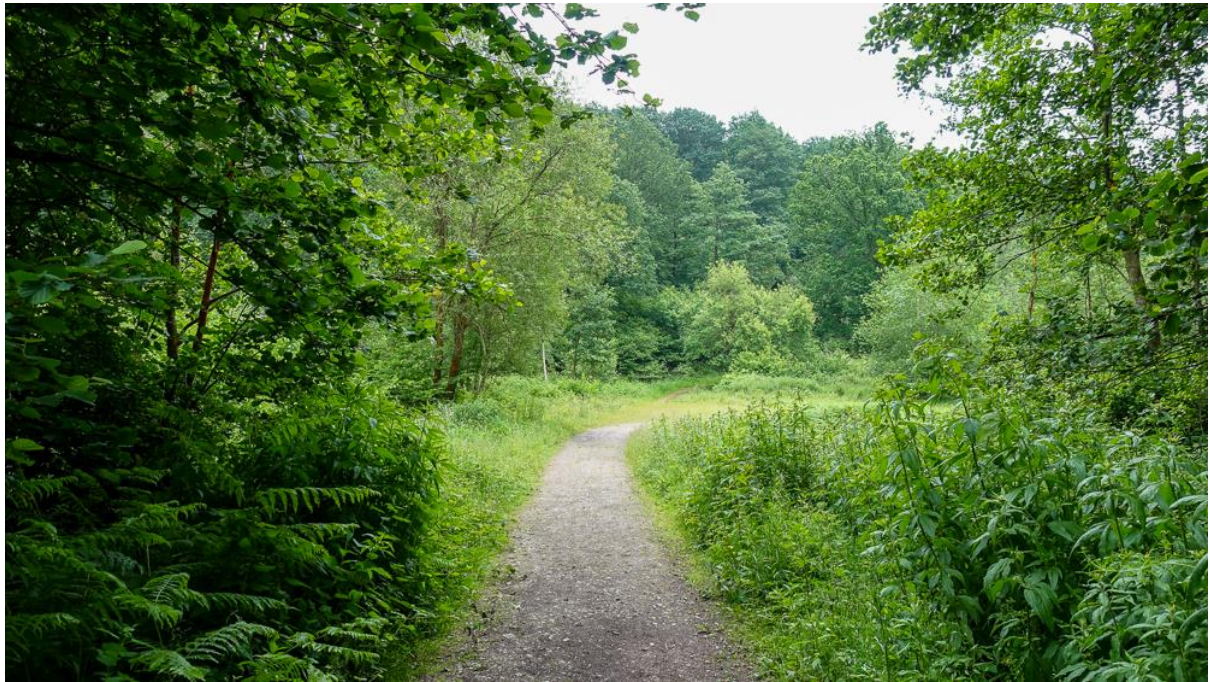
Wood White

They had a very different flight style to any other Whites we've seen and were so flimsy looking and slow in flight you could see all the details whilst they flew. We had wanted to see a Wood White for ages but our timings and locations were never right, so it was brilliant to see them on a first attempt. We carried on getting up to 4 Wood Whites pretty quickly. This place was amazing for them, yet the habitat didn't seem that special. Down a hill track we came across a load of Wood Ants dragging a live (big) beetle away to its doom... pretty grim but I thought maybe the beetle had tried to kill an ant and it had back fired terribly. It then started to rain.....Nooo! Even in the rain the Wood Whites were still flying for some reason and we got to a total of 11.....Mad! The excitement got too much for Wendy and she had to try and hide behind a tree by the path for a call of nature whilst I kept watch left and right. We got away with that one luckily and carried on. Strangely, even in this area we still haven't found a board or sign that mentioned Wood White specifically, which I found a bit odd as this seemed to be the best place in the UK for them. The only other Butterfly we saw in this section was a Speckled Wood and seeing just 1 of them to 11 Wood Whites was mental. We then added another 2 to take our total to 13....Wowzers! On the climb back up the track we eventually found another Butterfly and got a cracking view of a **Ringlet**.



Ringlet

He wasn't flying in the rain but also didn't seem to be in any shelter either. The rain then started absolutely chucking it down which I hadn't expected, as the clouds hadn't changed really. The path went into some trees, so we were able to shelter a bit.



Welcome shelter

Unfortunately, as we sheltered we heard two massive rumbles of thunder!!! What the heck? I didn't like the idea of being under huge trees during a lightning storm, so we hot footed it back to the car park.

We were absolutely soaked when we got back to the car at 3.42pm, which is the last thing you need with a day of travelling ahead of you....Grrrr! We had done 10,654 steps today which was pretty rubbish but since it was a travel day I couldn't be that upset with it.

We set off for the drive up north to be near Heysham for the overnight ferry. On the way we gave Lyca her tea in the back at 5.09pm and we had ours quite late at 6.05pm whilst I was driving. When we got near Lancaster we saw a **Curlew** fly over the fields. We carried on past Heysham and up to our usual summer time stop of Arnside Knott. It was 7.37pm by then and it wasn't raining.....Wahey! As soon as we stepped out of the car, it started to rain.....Typical! We headed off into the woods and immediately got lost, so we decided to stick to the wall and follow it along. We heard a Tawny Owl and then came out into an area that I thought looked great for High Brown Fritillaries, which we have dipped on more times than I can remember.



Arnside Knott

The only problem was that it wasn't sunny and it was evening, so there was hardly anything flying. I took a note of the location though for if we ever came at a better time of day in the future. We had a wander up towards the top of the hill and amazingly found a butterfly and even better it was a lifer! **Northern Brown Argus**. Annoyingly though it was off before I could even lift the camera :(.

We were back at the car at 8.28pm and it had started raining again which made it quite dark. That didn't stop us going to our last location and we arrived at Leighton Moss at 8.47pm. It was still raining but I persuaded Wendy that we might as well have a walk as we won't be back here for a while (little did I know just how long!). I like going to Leighton Moss at this time of the day as it's so quiet and we had a wander through the wild flower garden at the back, which has flourished since we were last there.



Leighton Moss garden

I noticed that you can now take dogs down the parallel path to the road now instead of having to walk on the road, so that's the way we went. On the path down to the public hides we heard **Reed Warbler** but at the hide it was dead apart from loads of Swallows flying over the water.



Not a lot

We had a scan and found **Great-crested Grebe, Tufted Duck, Sand Martin, Gadwall** and a **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. We could hear loud music coming from the farmhouse that's at the end of the track and wondered if it was an illegal rave or something. I wanted to go and bust out some moves, but Wendy wouldn't let me :(We gave it a few more minutes and dug out a scruffy **Pintail** and saw some **Little Egrets** flying over to the roost. The rain then started to get heavier, so we decided to leave and despite the weather we still had to walk through the usual clouds of midgies!

We got back to the car at 9.57pm which was a bit annoying as it was too early to go to the boat but too late to go to the pub. Wendy insisted it was fine, so we went to the nearby Silverdale Hotel and arrived there at 10.10pm. Wendy checked was it ok to go in and they said they were open till 11. I felt a bit awkward as there was only 1 table of 3 people in the whole pub and we have had it in the past where the bar staff wanted us out so they can lock up and finish early. I felt a little better when 2 young lads came in for a drink, so it wasn't just us holding things up.



Lyca on guard in the pub

Whilst in the pub Wendy phoned her mum and I did the bird list. That count said we got 98 species on the trip which was ok considering it was more of an insect trip. Wendy dragged out staying in the pub for as long as possible and when we left at 10.55pm we were the only people left so I don't think the bar staff were that happy with us! If it was down to me, I would have left at 10.15pm.

I drove slowly down the back roads to Heysham and we got there at 11.43pm. The Ben had just docked but there were tons of cars waiting in the queue outside of the building already. Mental. I had hoped to just get through the search area and park up so I could chill out till boarding but that wasn't to be, as we didn't go through till 12.23am! It looked like security was checking every single car and they were using a mirror to look under the vehicles and were patting people down as well. Somehow, we were let through without being searched, which made a nice change. We had done 16,845 steps today which was OK for a travel day and I breathed a sigh of relief that I had no more driving to do. We chilled out in the car and when Wendy reclined her seat, Lyca jumped on her knee and went to sleep! I think Wendy was glad when we started boarding, as her leg had gone dead by then....Hahaha! We boarded at 1.30am and there were dogs everywhere, so Lyca was going nuts and I was happy to get up to the cabin at 1.40am.

For once I must have dropped off to sleep straight away as I didn't note the time we left the harbour and we slept like logs until the announcement that we were in Douglas at 5.35am.....Wahey!

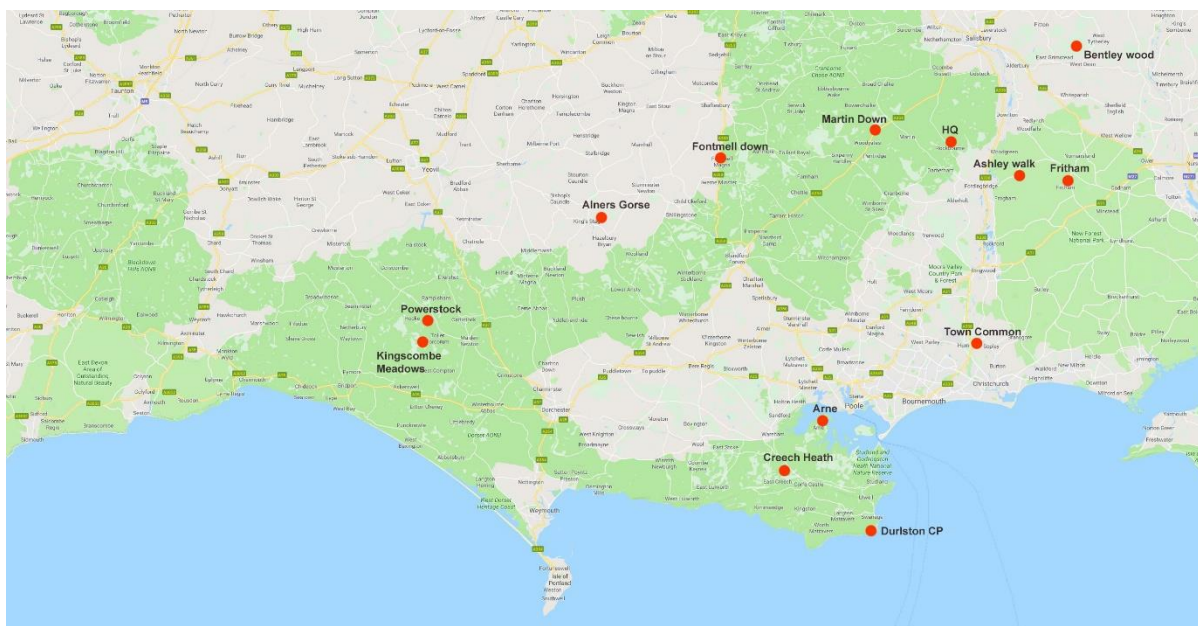


Wake up Lyca

We were home at 5.49am after having driven 1,020 miles in a week. The highlight of the trip for me was the Smooth Snake encounter. I never thought we would see a Smooth Snake, it's hard enough seeing the more common snakes. To be able to watch it for ages, oblivious to the fact that we were there, was ace and I doubt we will see anything like that ever again. It had been a brilliant holiday for our first time ever in Dorset, seeing more lifers than I thought we would. It was a shame to miss out on Marsh Fritillary again for about the billionth time and also, due to the poor weather nearly all week, miss out on many locations we wanted to go to like Portland Bill. I have already started planning a return trip to Dorset but in May rather than June, so hopefully we will finally get to visit the places we didn't get to see.

Video of the holiday is here
[Dorset wildlife trip video](#)

Location map



Bird list

Greylag Goose	Black Guillemot	Blackcap
Canada Goose	Feral Pigeon	Lesser Whitethroat
Shelduck	Woodpigeon	Whitethroat
Gadwall	Collared Dove	Dartford Warbler
Mallard	Cuckoo	Chiffchaff
Pintail	Barn Owl	Willow Warbler
Tufted Duck	Tawny Owl	Goldcrest
Red-legged Partridge	Long-eared Owl	Spotted Flycatcher
Pheasant	Nightjar	Long-tailed Tit
Great Crested Grebe	Swift	Blue Tit
Manx Shearwater	Green Woodpecker	Great Tit
Gannet	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Coal Tit
Cormorant	Woodlark	Marsh Tit
Shag	Skylark	Nuthatch
Little Egret	Sand Martin	Treecreeper
Grey Heron	Swallow	Jay
Red Kite	House Martin	Magpie
Sparrowhawk	Tree Pipit	Jackdaw
Buzzard	Meadow Pipit	Rook
Kestrel	Grey Wagtail	Carrion Crow
Hobby	Pied Wagtail	Raven
Moorhen	Wren	Starling
Coot	Duncock	House Sparrow
Oystercatcher	Robin	Chaffinch
Lapwing	Nightingale	Greenfinch
Woodcock	Redstart	Goldfinch
Curlew	Stonechat	Siskin
Kittiwake	Blackbird	Linnet
Black-headed Gull	Song Thrush	Bullfinch
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Mistle Thrush	Hawfinch
Herring Gull	Grasshopper Warbler	Yellowhammer
Sandwich Tern	Reed Warbler	Corn Bunting

Dragon / Damselfly list	Butterfly list
Beautiful Demoiselle	Brimstone
Emerald Damselfly	Wood White
Large Red Damselfly	Small Blue
Red-eyed Damselfly	Northern Brown Argus
Southern Damselfly	Adonis Blue
Azure Damselfly	Common Blue
Common Blue Damselfly	Red Admiral
Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly	Painted Lady
Blue-tailed Damselfly	Small Tortoiseshell
Small Red Damselfly	Dark Green Fritillary
Emperor Dragonfly	Marbled White
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	Meadow Brown
Downy Emerald	Ringlet
Four-spotted Chaser	Gatekeeper
Scarce Chaser	Small Heath
Broad-bodied Chaser	Speckled Wood
Black-tailed Skimmer	Dingy Skipper
Common Darter	Lulworth Skipper
	Small Skipper
	Large Skipper