

# Nature Reserves

Great Britain has a lot. 338 National Nature Reserves and 1,475 Local Nature Reserves many of which are managed by the Wildlife Trust which are among its 2,300 Reserves. The RSPB has 200 reserves and Butterfly Conservation around 30. The British Dragonfly Society lists '20 hotspots' and around 220 good locations for Odonata. The success of our butterfly and dragonfly fauna is important as they are both a measure of the health of the countryside.



Plotting our Nature Reserves on Google Earth, the map from a distance becomes rather congested making it difficult to see our island, until I start zooming in when gradually the picture changes as the place names become more and more separated.

Separated by large areas of agricultural fields, cities and urban sprawl connected by a vast web of railway lines, motorways and roads. Fragmented is the word used by conservationists to describe this disconnection.



*Middlebere Heath NNR, Dorset. VC9*



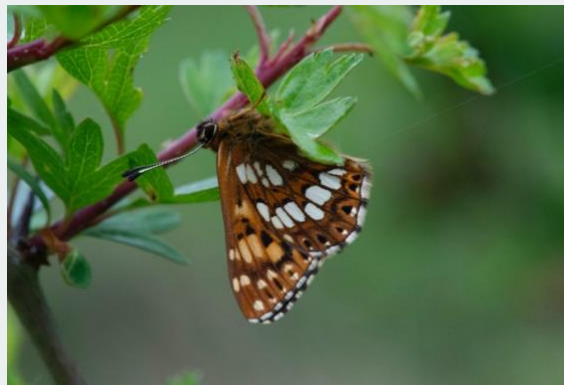
*Bernwood NNR Buckinghamshire. VC24*

Britain's first National Nature Reserve was Beinn Eighe in Scotland which was created in 1971. The smallest NNR in England is Horn Park Quarry near Beaminster in Dorset. Varying in size, our reserves protect some of our finest examples of flowering meadows, ancient broadleaved woodlands and larger expanses of lowland heathland, limestone and chalk downs, reed filled marshlands and long stretches of beaches and coastal habitats crossing several county borders like The Wash which is our largest NNR.

Gardens provide a good source of nectar. Ours is a little small and insignificant to warrant opening to the public, with its small pond which the frogs like. No dragonfly larva as yet, though we do see the occasional hawk circling overhead. We get Holly blues each year and twenty or so regular species of bird visit. One year a heron eyed-up the goldfish. Sparrow hawks raid from time to time and a pair of Great Tits claim the nesting box each year.

Hungry for a greater invertebrate experience, the likes of which we all might be consuming one day, I've taken to the road to visiting some of our reserves and waterways. Zooming further in, to look more closely at our wonderful butterflies and dragonflies.

My first port of call was Noar Hill NR at Selborne in Hampshire to look for the Duke of Burgundy, a small, chequered butterfly that was thought to be a fritillary until it was discovered to belong to an entirely different family.



*Duke of Burgundy, Incombe Hole NR. VC24*

My next notable trips were to the Norfolk Fens to look for Swallowtails and to Daneway Banks in Gloucestershire where the Large Blue has successfully been reintroduced having become extinct in the 70s.



*Large Blue, Daneway Banks NR. VC33*



*Cryptic Wood White, Craigavon Lake NR. VCH37*

On a visit to Northern Ireland, on a dank overcast day in Armagh, I counted myself lucky seeing fifteen Cryptic Wood Whites and five Large Heaths.

In Cumbria at Smardale Gill, in similar conditions, I saw a fair number of Scotch Argus on the sheltered path leading to the viaduct and further north in Argyllshire, in bright sunshine, I counted eight Chequered Skippers at Glasdrum Woods NNR.



*Chequered Skipper, Glasdrum NNR. VC98*



*Scarce Blue-Tailed damselflies, New Forest. VC11*

In Hampshire's New Forest, around its freshwater streams, ponds and flushes I counted a variety of dragonflies, including half a dozen Scarce Blue-tailed damselflies at Ober Water and in the north of the county I spotted a single Brilliant Emerald dragonfly patrolling a pond on Warren Heath among various hawkers and chasers.



*Brilliant Emerald, Warren Heath NR. VC12*



*Winterton Dunes NR, Norfolk. VC27*

Towards the end of last season, in early September, thanks to a tip-off from Dave Weaver from Natural England, under a setting sun on Winterton Dunes in Norfolk, I got a glimpse of this rare Southern Emerald Damselfly.



*Southern Emerald damselfly. VC27*



*Midwinter's day celebrations on Brabant Island, 1984*

On June 21st this year, celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> Brabant Island reunion in Penrith I hope to sneak off with my daughter Amalia to look for Mountain Ringlets which would be a fitting way to complete my list of butterflies.

I am also looking forward to returning to Scotland one day in hope of seeing our northern species of dragonflies.

59 UK species of butterflies is not many compared to 237 mainland species in France or 7,500 that can be found in the tropics.

Thinking back to my time in the Navy, working at the Fleet Photographic Unit in Portsmouth, I remember wanting to apply for an expedition to the tropics but ended up in the Antarctic for a year. The only continent in the world where there are no butterflies in fact where there's only one species of insect, the Antarctic midge.



*Wasp Spider, Higher Hyde Heath NR. VC9*

There are around 24,000 species of insects in the UK. Over the last three summers I've seen most of our native species of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies as well as a few moths, caterpillars, shield bugs, beetles, bees, wasps, chafers, flies, mayflies, ladybirds, grasshoppers, crickets, and spiders.

It's a big subject. Putting aside some time each summer, taking these photographs, I'm very conscious of the fact that without the various conservation groups and the dedicated work of thousands of volunteers this simply might not be possible, particularly when it comes to seeing some of our rarer species.

Insects are the largest group of organisms living on the planet. I imagine our entomologists pretty much know all the species that inhabit the British Isles yet it's amazing to think that worldwide potentially less than half of all species have so far been described and named by science.

All my photographs are taken in the wild without disturbing the subject and I try to submit records as often as possible.