

SDOS Knepp Woodland Butterflies Outing 3rd July 2025

Leader: Terry Goble

There were 21 SDOS members & guests



White Stork

We all met at Knepp Wild Café at 10am, it was already a warm morning and the butterflies in the mini wildflower meadows around the shop/café area were very active. Once we had all introduced ourselves and Tony finished his admin we set off across the road into the Knepp estate. On route we saw distant white storks soaring across the bright blue sky and a red kite sailed overhead. Much nearer we saw meadow browns, gatekeepers and large whites nectaring on the bramble flowers.



Purple Emperor feasting on oak sap

As we entered the reserve a noisy green woodpecker with its undulating flight showed well before it disappeared into a mature oak stand. Whilst we were searching for the woodpecker my attention was drawn to a small butterfly nectaring on the ragwort. After a few minutes searching I finally spotted a purple hairstreak far from the crown of a tall oak! It was lovely to see the little hairstreak so low down and with such clear views. We enjoyed this sighting for a while before a small copper grabbed our attention and then a red admiral and peacock added a splash of colour to the morning. A little further on when a few of the group and I had walked on we were called back for an unidentified butterfly resting in a small oak. It turned out to be our first purple emperor! It flew off out of sight but not before several of the group had decent views and it proved to be a portent of what was to follow.



A female Purple Emperor landed on the path beside us !

We continued towards the Knepp camping carpark where a stand of deep purple buddleia was attracting a small range of butterflies including a marbled white. We continued down towards the Red Route and passed about three stork nests complete with fledglings and adult birds still feeding some large looking offspring. It was quite a sight to see around ten to twelve birds soaring around the estate and coming into land at the different nest sites and to hear that curious bill clacking coming from one of the nests.



Juvenile White Storks

We passed a small stream and saw little other than a common blue-tail damselfly and a buzzard resting on a dead branch, so we moved on towards the hammer pond. At the hammer pond several of the group watched a kingfisher before it headed off out of view. There were a few great crested grebes, which were mainly juveniles. On the stream azure damselflies and black tailed skimmers were zooming around. Some of the group had a glimpse of an emperor hawk.



A Purple Emperor (female) landed on a member's hand!!

We then walked further on to the highlight of the walk, however on route several purple emperors were spotted flitting nearby, resting in oaks or floating overhead. We carried on until we came across an oak with many sap runs (15!). The sap attracts a lot of butterflies and we saw many purple emperors feeding on the sap and flitting around the tree and stopped for a while to enjoy the spectacle. They were also joined by the odd red admiral trying to feed on the sap runs. After a while a few of the group were sated with their emperor sightings and decided to head off.



Purple Hairstreak

The remaining members walked along the red route to a tree hide. On the way we saw a pair of Tamworth pigs enjoying the shade. At the tree house were slightly disappointed to see the pond had dried up. This hide often produces sightings of red deer and waders as well as dragonflies. On this occasion we had to be content with a few scruffy dunnock and the odd calling chiffchaff. There were also a few butterflies around including a fly-by of two purple emperors.



Sleepy Tamworth Pigs in the shade

On the return walk some of the group had a sighting of fallow deer and calling green woodpecker and chiffchaff seemed to accompany us everywhere. The day was still very warm as we strolled back to our cars, although a little more cloud seemed to have build up offering respite from the heat. Back at the carpark after a very enjoyable stroll around the knepp estate we bade each other goodbye after a lovely morning and early afternoon watching birds and butterflies.

Species List

Birds:

Great crested grebe
Moorhen
Coot
White Stork
Herring Gull
Common Buzzard
Red Kite

Barn Swallow
Common Swift
Blackbird
Song thrush
Great tit
Blue tit
Chiffchaff
Blackcap (H)
Common whitethroat
Starling
House sparrow

Butterflies:

Large white
Green-veined white
Small white
Small copper
Purple hairstreak
Red admiral
Peacock
Comma
Purple emperor
Silver-washed fritillary
Meadow brown
Gatekeeper
Ringlet
Speckled wood
Marbled white
Small skipper

Dragonflies:

Azul damselfly
Common blue-tail damselfly
Beautiful demoiselle
Black-tailed skimmer
Emperor hawker
Brown hawker