Butterfly notes for April

By Jerry Dennis, our county butterfly recorder

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Spring is here at last!

After last week's storm-battering, let's hope that the named storms have finished for a while and some calmer and sunnier weather will start to happen as we move through April into May. Butterflies have been a bit sluggish to present themselves amid the warm but cloudy, wet and windy start to the month. Some 13 species have now been seen in 2024. Amongst those species not yet seen but are imminent are Wall and Small Copper. Worthy of comment is the first Brimstone to have been seen (ever) on the Isles of Scilly at Higher Moors on St Mary's in March. Thanks to Bob Dawson for this record.



An early 2024 Green Hairstreak, *photo by L. MacLeod*

An excellent sighting of a Green Hairstreak was made by Lisa MacLeod who was walking on the cliffs near Mevagissey on 1st April. She managed to get a super photo as shown here with Lesser Celandines in the background. This is a very early sighting for Cornwall – only one has been seen earlier than this date - and the first from this location. Well done to Lisa! Be sure to be on the look-out for this beautiful butterfly on your next walks.

Another dash of vivid spring colour comes in the form of the Holly Blue and I managed to see my first one, a female, a few days ago and she was in the process of egg-laying on ivy near Prussia Cove. I managed a quick photo on my phone as seen opposite. You can tell it is a female because of the black mark seen on the top of the forewing, the males have no black markings here.



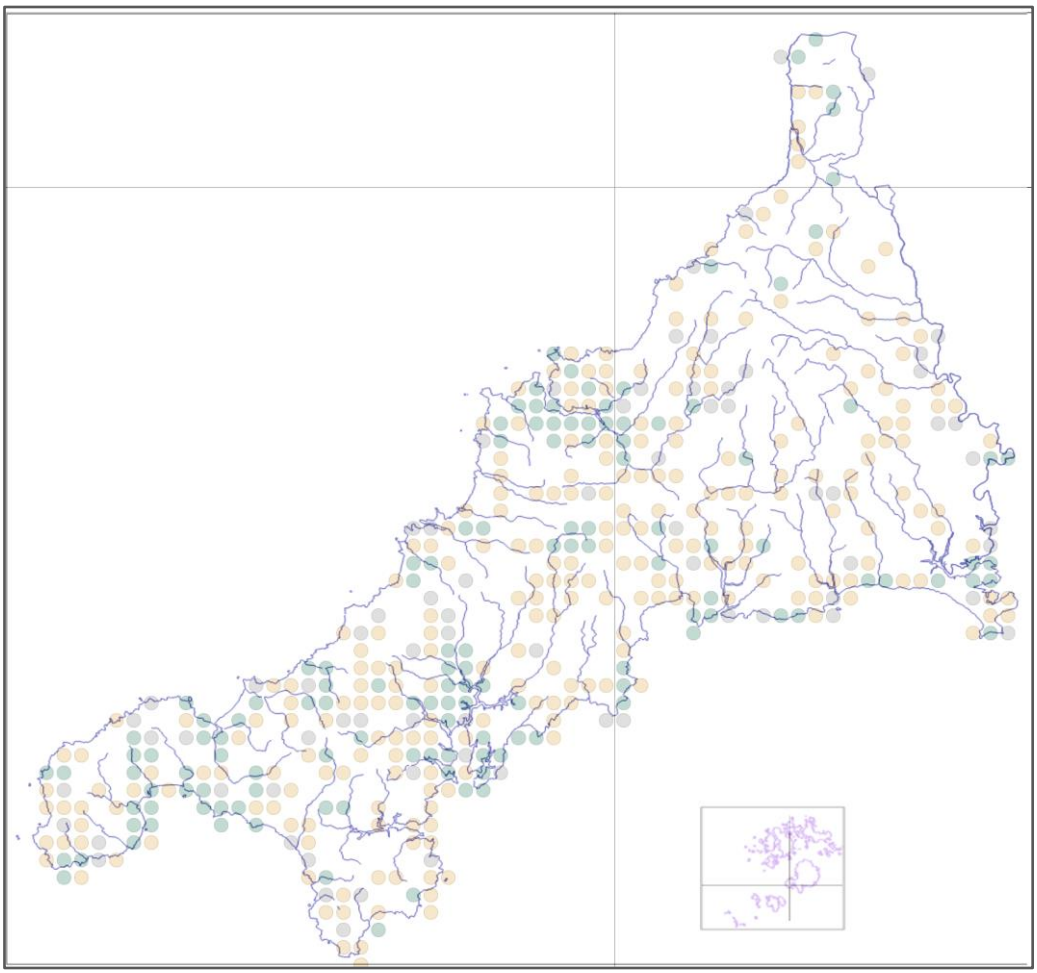
Female Holly Blue, *photo by J. Dennis*



Male Orange-tip from 2023, *photo by J. Dennis*

Another iconic spring species is the Orange-tip and this year emergence has just begun and they will be with us for about two months, with numbers peaking around the middle of May. There's no mistaking the male with his flamboyant orange wing patches but identifying the females is trickier, as, at a glance, they can look like the other common whites – Large, Small and particularly Green-veined, that are also just beginning their spring broods. This is a good time to get out your reference books and phone apps. to gen up on the nature of the black markings on the female's wings.

I have a challenge for you. The Orange-tip is common and is found throughout Cornwall. I have summarised where it has been seen in the last five years on the map below and 471 tetrads is less than half of the number of tetrads in the county. The white gaps are places where there have been no reported sightings in that time. We probably have enough regular recorders to cover the whole county in a five-year period. Have a look at the gaps in the coverage near where you live or walk and, if you have time, please try and spot some Orange-tips there this spring. They like to be out of the wind and in sunlight in gardens, along walls and hedgerows, and anywhere their larval host plants are growing. These are Cuckoo-flower, Garlic Mustard and other members of the mustard family, and also the garden plant Honesty.



Orange-tip	471 tetrads	2019-2023
Criteria:	Species per year: 10	Surveys per year: 5
1 sighting	2 - 5 sightings	10+ sightings

Have fun trying to find as many Orange-tips as you can and please record them and report them to me – see my email address above. I'll let you know in one of my future notes how we did this year.

Best wishes

Jerry