Small White (Early Stages)

Vince Massimo

The Small White can be a pest to brassica crops, but not to the extent of its cousin, the Large White. This is partly due to it laying its eggs singly.

However females will often place several eggs on the same leaf, or a favoured location may be visited by several females.

Eggs hatch within a 7-10 days and a pale larva emerges, pausing briefly to eat part or all of the eggshell.
In the summer of 2010 I decided to grow some salad crops in pots in a sunny spot outside the back door. On the very day that the first crop of Wild Rocket (*Eruca Sativa*) was due to be taken, I watched as a female Small White laid approximately 10 eggs on it. I was not expecting this to happen, because I did not know that Rocket was a larval foodplant, but it is in the Brassica family, so it makes sense. The affected plants were re-potted and allowed to grow on separately. Two weeks later I finally spotted a number of larvae, but such was the effectiveness of their camouflage, that they were already 1cm long. Once I had got my eye in, I spotted some more on nearby Garlic Mustard plants.

The yellow line along the back of the larvae, which distinguishes them from Green-veined White, does not always show up very clearly, so a careful check of an individual segment had to be carried out and compared with the illustration in the latest Thomas and Lewington book.

All larvae were allowed to develop naturally, until they were large enough to pupate, when I put them into separate pots with food and twigs. The vast majority of the 2010 batch and all of those reared in 2013 chose to pupate upside down on a horizontal surface, (attached by a central silken girdle and a pad of silk at the base). All photos however are shown the opposite way round, for photogenic reasons (and
because that is how they appear in books).

Only one of the 2010 batch attached itself head-down to a twig. This individual pupated on 23rd August and is now expected to hatch in
Most of the pupa were of the brown form, but a few were green.
All of those were female, so here is a male.

Interesting to note that the larva found on Garlic Mustard transferred itself to Wild Rocket, which was overhanging from a nearby pot and continued to feed and develop normally. Further eggs were laid during the late summer of 2010, giving a succession of larva and pupa. Time between pupation and emergence was 8 or 9 days and the last hatching was on 30th August. However nothing that pupated after 23rd August has emerged, so these will be the ones that will overwinter, as they all look healthy.

I waited over 8 months for a particular pupa to mature and for the adult to emerge in order to complete a full sequence of images for one individual:
The female that emerged had already dried her wings and was ready to fly by the time I realised she had emerged, so she was released without any photos being taken.

Below are some representative images of the adults:
Small White female (Summer Brood)
Caterham, Surrey 22-Sept-2012
Photo © Vince Massimo

Small White male (Summer Brood) - Crawley, Sussex 3-Aug-2010
Photo © Vince Massimo