



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 1995



A Fresh Start

By Malcolm Newland

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our members to the new Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

Although, we are now operating under a new name it's very much a case of business as usual as we try and continue the good work

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started under the old London Branch. We must continue to try and increase the public's awareness of the need to save our remaining butterflies and their habitats, keep up and extend our conservation work and expand our recording to obtain a better idea of the present status of butterfly populations in our area.

Your committee has drawn up a programme of field trips and indoor meetings for the coming year and I hope that there is something of interest for everyone in it.

Please give us your support and bear with us as we pick our way through the perils of "going solo" for the first time.

Feed-back from our members will be most welcome as will be articles for further Newsletters, for which we would be grateful if you would adhere to the following deadlines;

May issue	15 th April
August issue	15 th July
November issue	15 th October

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Hertfordshire's Butterflies

By Brian Sawford

Overall, 1994 appears to have been not only a pretty poor year for butterflies but also for butterfly recording in Hertfordshire. With relatively few records having been submitted by early January '95, it is difficult to realistically assess the status of many species. However, it is encouraging that several new butterfly transect counts have been established which, hopefully, will provide sound data for future assessments. Also, amongst the doom and gloom of declines and some probable local extinctions, a few interesting and even exciting observations have been made.

Small, Essex and Large Skippers all did quite well. Not so Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, with very few records of the former and none for the latter which, it seems, may already be lost from the county list. Checking out past Grizzled Skipper sites should be a priority in 1995.

Two Clouded Yellow sightings were reported from St. Albans and a pristine male at Therfield Heath which was closely enjoyed by the small number of members attending the Branch's excursion there on 1st August.

Brimstone numbers were apparently lower than usual. Interestingly, a pair were observed on Alder Buckthorn, the scarce but alternative larval food plant, at Bricketwood Common. Large, Small and Green-veined Whites all appeared to have had a good summer with, possibly, some indications of immigrations from the Continent. Orange Tip numbers were generally rather poor.

Green Hairstreak were very scarce, but Purple Hairstreak fared

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better with some reports of good numbers, notably in the Bricketwood area. White-Letter Hairstreak remains scarce, reports suggesting very small colonies were received from Garston, Cheshunt, Bayfordbury nr Ayot St. Lawrence and Hemel Hempstead.

Small Copper records were very low, no doubt reflecting losses of permanent unimproved grasslands and the warm dry mid-summer weather.

Small Blue, with no records since 1990, must be regarded as lost to the County. Reasons for this local extinction are most likely related to very low numbers over recent decades, finally succumbing through a combination of factors, which might include genetic deterioration, poor weather at critical flight periods, excessive predation (effects of Pheasants from a nearby estate are considered a possible contributory cause for the loss of the Hexton Chalk Pit colony) and more obviously loss of larval food plant, Kidney Vetch, by overgrowth of more competitive grasses, herbs and shrubs.

Brown Argus and Common Blue were present in reasonable numbers, with the former noted from a few non-chalk localities, no doubt using either Cut-leaved Cranesbill or Common Storksbill as larval food plant. Chalkhill Blue continues to thrive at Therfield Heath. With several discrete populations now totalling several hundreds of individuals, this is a fine example of what good and sensible conservation management can achieve. All those who have contributed to this success should be congratulated. Hopefully, with further efforts populations of Chalkhill Blue will soon reach four figures, although hopes of reaching five figure numbers, noted earlier this century, are slim with such a changed adjacent countryside.

Following several years of abundance at the start of this decade, Holly

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Blue populations remain very low, such fluctuations are typical of this species and we should soon see numbers rising once again.

The very few sightings of Duke of Burgundy at Aldbury Nowers raise great concerns for the future of this species in Hertfordshire. Despite conservation efforts numbers seem to have been steadily declining for several years, maybe due to grazing effects of Rabbits and Deer; possibly also trampling of larval food plants by human visitors. Please take care to avoid treading on Cowslips!

White Admiral numbers were quite good at several sites and there were reports from Knebworth Woods and, the first for seventeen years, at Hudnall Park.

The undoubted highlight for 1994, was the record of a fine male Purple Emperor at Broxbourne Woods on 2nd August. Supported with good documentation this is the first report for this species in the County since 1986 and possibly suggests that this lovely butterfly has lingered on unrecorded in the Broxbourne Woods area since previous records of the mid-1950's.

Migrant Red Admiral and Painted Lady were present in reasonable numbers in late summer and autumn. Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell were quite noticeably reduced throughout most of the year, no doubt a reaction to the cool start to the season. Comma numbers were similarly affected, although reports suggest a late recovery in the fine mild autumn.

The only Dark Green Fritillary record received, to date, was of a 'wandering' male feeding on Buddleia in a garden at Clothall near Baldock. A male Silver-washed Fritillary in a garden at Hemel Hempstead also suggests a 'wanderer', but single males at

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Bricketwood Common and Broxbourne Woods add to previous recent records at both sites, perhaps indicating small breeding colonies. Such sites should be carefully monitored.

Speckled Wood appears to be going through a 'boom-time' with, in 1994, a long season, healthy populations and significant increases in its range throughout the County. Especially noticeable have been increases in sightings in North Hertfordshire particularly around Hitchin and up towards Royston. It could also be in north east of the county, an area which is generally all too neglected by naturalists.

Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper were reasonably abundant, as would be expected of our most common butterflies. Wall numbers were variable with some recorders sending reports of good populations, others low. Evidence suggests that this species is in a slow decline as dry open flowery grasslands are lost.

With good summer weather, Marbled White was well represented in the south west of the county and reports from the Nicky Line at Harpenden and a garden in Hitchin supported this for, when populations are high, 'wandering' individuals increase. Small Heath and Ringlet also appeared to have had a reasonably good season.

As noted above, these assessments have been made from a rather limited amount of data. Hopefully 1995 will see a considerable increase in everyone's recording efforts for all species, in particular to forward the main ethos of Butterfly Conservation. Let's not forget that virtually all our semi-natural habitats need managing, man-power is a prime factor in achieving this. Many of our butterfly species are under serious threats. Consider the Small Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Small Copper, etc - **are today's rarities to be tomorrow's extinctions** - you can help to determine this in your county!

Butterfly Walks

By Gavin Vicary

One of the tasks ahead for the new branch is to record and monitor butterfly populations in the branch area. This requires people in Hertfordshire and Middlesex noting the butterflies they see and sending in records for the relevant branch officer to collate.

Why Keep Records?

If we are to conserve our butterflies it is important that we know the distribution and abundance of each species from year to year. By monitoring in this way, declines (and hopefully increases) can be identified. The reasons for these changes can then be researched and relevant action taken, to try and safeguard species in decline.

In Hertfordshire, we are fortunate in that the history of our butterflies, up to 1986, is documented in Brian Sawford's excellent book; *The Butterflies of Hertfordshire*. A look through this book reveals several species lost to the county such as the Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Wood White and High Brown Fritillary.

Some of the butterflies now extinct in the county were fairly widespread. If mapping of these butterflies had been in place earlier this century, then the downward trend in numbers would have become apparent. The reasons for these trends, such as cessation of coppicing and loss of flowery meadows could then have been identified and steps taken to remedy the situation.

Walking for Butterflies

Butterfly walks are simply walks in the countryside, observing the butterflies encountered on the way. The different species seen and

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an estimate of numbers, are then recorded in a notebook, so that the walker has a record that can be sent away to the county recorder when the butterfly season is over.

These walks are often carried out in the same location at regular intervals throughout the summer. This is very useful as all the butterflies of that particular area are likely to be recorded as they emerge one by one. Traditionally called transect walks, a predetermined route is walked, weekly, for six months, starting the first week in April. When time constraints apply, however, less frequent walks are still of value, as most species are on the wing for a number of weeks and are still likely to be counted.

The commitment to a regular walk may be difficult for some people, but they can still contribute records. This can be done by monitoring butterflies in their garden, or noting down the species seen on days out in the country, or at local beauty spots. Holidays are also a good time, as contributions can be made to other branches by recording what you see and sending the information to the relevant branch (addresses given in Butterfly News).

Sending in Records

Having observed butterflies and made a note of them, it is then important to send the information to the recorder when the butterflies have finished for the year. A form, to assist with this, has been distributed with this issue of the magazine. The essential information that the form contains is as follows:

1. Name, Address and telephone number of the recorder.
2. Site information. Any local name for the site stating whether

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it is a nature reserve or local park etc. In the case of gardens, ostcodes help to identify the location.

3. The nearest town to the site and a six or four figure grid reference. If you have trouble with these, please draw a small map or give as much information as possible, so that the exact position of the site can be identified.
4. A description of the various habitats on the site
5. The species seen with an estimate of the numbers of each one. Please also state if any eggs, larvae, pupae or mating were observed. The weather conditions and duration of each visit should also be included.

The Millennium Atlas

This year the national society will start a five year project to map the distribution of butterflies throughout Britain. An atlas will then be published in the year 2000 detailing the information obtained.

Our branch will contribute to this project by submitting the records for the branch area during this period. So why not help out? Anyone can do it, even people who don't have a vast knowledge of butterflies. All you need is an identification guide such as the excellent one produced by Hamlyn and an area to walk. Not only will you be fulfilling a very worthwhile conservation purpose but you will also be out in the countryside enjoying the fresh air.

Field Trips

See pages 10 & 11. No need to book just turn up on the day. Sites are in both Herts, Middx and just outside our borders for rarer butterflies. Suggestions for future trips to John Hollingdale please.

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1995 Program

29/3/95	A Chalkland Paradise	Ian Small, Vice Chairman of the Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street, S
21/4/95	The Butterflies of Barnet	Clive Herbert talks at Harrow Arts C Station on the A410 (Uxbridge Road)
23/4/95	Barton Hills	A field trip just over the Bedfordshire Barton Le Clay Village Church at 11.
14/5/95	Scratchwood	Meet in the car park on the northern To search for Grizzled Skippers which
20/5/95	Totternhoe Quarry	With Beds and Northhants for Duke o
4/6/95	Salcey Forest	Meet in the car park of this Northhan
18/6/95	College Lake	The reserve car park lies off the B48
2/7/95	Galleyhill Essex	An afternoon excursion (4.00pm) to s Waltham Abbey A121 to Parklands.
9/7/95	Bricket Wood	Meet in Smug Oak Station car park a
23/7/95	Stanmore Common	A meeting in Middlesex to see the bu
30/7/95	Hexton Chalk Pit & Pegsdon Hills	This field trip has been arranged to c The trip will be led by Brian Sawfor
6/8/95	Hillingdon trail	More Middx. Butterflies. Meet at the
20/8/95	Watlington Hill	Meet in Oxfordshire at 11.00am in th
18/10/95	A.G.M. with Members slides	Our first Annual General Meeting. It plenty of time to see slides from men
14/11/95	Heath Fritillary Re-Introduction	A joint meeting with the Letchworth for a talk on "The Re-introduction of

A field trip will also be held with a light trap for the

If you have any queries on the above p

Time of Events

National Society on the rich flora and fauna to be found on chalk at the
Albans, at 8.00pm. Our inaugural meeting so let's start with a big turnout.

Centre, Hatch End, Middlesex, which is just east of Hatch End Railway
Arrive around 7.45pm for an 8.00pm start.

border to see Pasque Flowers and Spring Butterflies. Meet outside
10am. Ordnance Survey Landranger Map 166 Grid Reference TL 085305

Highway of the A1 just south of Stirling Corner at 11.00am
have been recorded from this area in the past. Map 176 TQ 207950

Burgandy. Meet 11.00am at Totternhoe picnic site. Map 165 SP 987218

Northshire forest at 11.00am to see Wood White. Map 152 SP 794516

Meet at 11.00am to see the Small Blue. Map 165 SP 932136

White Letter Hairstreak in this woodland. Map 166 TL 395029
After 1 mile turn into Galleyhill Road then Shinkins & 100yds to "Lake John".

11.00am to see White Admiral. Map 166 TL 135020

Butterflies on the common. Meet in Warren Lane at 11.00am. Map 176 TQ 159935

coincide with Butterfly Week. Meet at the Wendy House, Hexton Village Hall.
and start at 11.00am. Map 166 TL 107307

Eastern end of Glebe Avenue, Ickenham at 11.00am. Map 176 TQ 086857

car park on top of the hill to see Silver Spotted Skipper. Map 175 SU 709936.

hoped the formal proceedings will last about an hour, thus leaving
ers. In the Cross St. Centre, Dagnall st. near St. Albans town centre 8.00pm

aturalists at the Letchworth Settlement, Nevells Road at 7.30pm
"The Heath Fritillary in Essex" by Ken Ulrich

e with an interest in moths. See next issue for details.

one John Hollingdale on 0181 863 2077

Moth Recording

By Rob Souter

I would like to take the opportunity in this, the first newsletter of the newly formed Herts and Middlesex Branch of Butterfly Conservation (BC) to introduce myself and to get people thinking about moths.

In BC News 56, Paul Waring, the National Moth Conservation Officer, suggested that all BC branches appoint a moth officer who can act as a contact point for local BC members, the county moth recorder, and himself and the Moth Working Group within BC. As I have recently joined the branch committee I have volunteered to act as Moth Officer for the branch.

I can honestly say that I'm by no means an expert on moths but having taken on the role I am now motivated to learn as much as I can and pass on my knowledge and enthusiasm to others. More importantly I want to get branch members involved in finding out more about moths.

My own interest in moths probably began when trying to identify species that settled on my kitchen window on summer evenings, and I was immediately fascinated by the strange shapes and intricate markings that were visible when observed close up. In 1992 I did some light trapping near Hertford over several months, recording over a hundred species. More recently I experienced the incredible diversity of moths to be found on the edge of the tropical forest in Vietnam during an expedition there in 1993.

In the Writing on the Wall a request was made for members to

pass on their moth records to me so that I could begin a data base of the species of the region. I have received lists from a few members to date but wish to encourage further recording. Records can be from light trapping or casual records of species seen in the house or garden. These records will contribute to the national recording scheme that aims to record the status of moth species in Britain and identify trends in their distribution as an aid to their conservation.

In addition to individual recording it is hoped that the branch will purchase a light trap which will be set up for moth trapping events in the summer.

Moths are a large group, usually hard to see and often difficult to identify. However, moths fly all year round (even in winter when butterflies cannot be found on the wing) and even less is known about the ecology of many species, so providing scope for lots of work. Therefore, moths can help bridge the winter gap for many lepidopterists as well as the nocturnal gap during the butterfly season.

To assist with recording moths you will need to obtain a field guide. As a good starting point try the Collins guide to the Insects of Britain and Western Europe (Chinery 1986) that includes a selection of the commoner moths that can be seen. As your interest grows go for a more comprehensive guide to macro moths, such as the Colour Identification Guide to the Moths of the British Isles (Skinner 1984).

If you want to attract moths to a light trap then see the next newsletter for information on the types of traps available.

Butterfly Action Day
By Malcolm Newland

Thirteen members reported for duty armed with an assortment of spades and forks to plant a new hedge along the Northern edge of the Butterfly meadow at Standalone Farm. We had around one hundred and twenty trees and shrubs representing twenty different species which, when positioned in a double row, extended for some eighty yards. Fifty were donated by Groundwork, Hertfordshire and the remainder were purchased with a grant from North Hertfordshire District Council subject to our agreeing to maintain the hedge.

The weather for the task was dry, pleasantly warm, but overcast and with everybody working hard everything was completed in good time. Photographs were taken at various stages for display purposes and more will be taken in due course to record the development of the hedge.

As it matures, the hedge should become a useful addition to the local wildlife habitat providing shelter, nectar and larval food for butterflies as well as fruit and berries for birds and mammals.

Many thanks to the donors of the trees and shrubs and to all the helpers. A special mention for Ann Piper (the only person not connected with the committee!) and also Nikki Small and Gavin Sawford representing the youth wing.

It was a most enjoyable day and hopefully the first in a long line for our Branch.

A Trip To Bricket Wood

By John Hollingdale

The weather was breezy, with clouds chasing each other across the sky, 22 Branch members (including 3 juniors - one in a pushchair) gathered in the forecourt of Bricket Wood Station, in the anticipation of seeing the elusive Brown Hairstreak. Unfortunately, neither Brian Wildridge nor Barry Staines, who have both reported this butterfly in the area, could attend the field trip on September 11th. We were, therefore, not quite sure that we would be able to locate our quarry. However, undaunted we set off to visit the area where there was a lot of the food plant growing.

Bricket Wood is quite a large wood with many diverging paths and opinions differed as to the correct route so it seemed to be about 45 minutes later when the party, united again, arrived at the area where quantities of blackthorn were growing. On the way we had seen many Speckled Woods, two Commas and single specimens of Small and Green-veined Whites in the sunny clearings in the wood. We also identified Common Darter and Southern Hawker dragonflies.

We then searched the most promising sites along a lane and into adjacent grassy areas and examined many blackthorn bushes for eggs but with no success. The sky was now cloudier and the temperature dropped so that the butterfly would not fly in these conditions. We decided to call it a day and the party split up, some making their way home and some to quench their thirst at the local pub.

However, when a small group of us arrived back at the station we met two members of the party who reported seeing a small orange butterfly or moth flying over a blackthorn hedge into a front garden. Was it a Brown Hairstreak or a Vapourer moth?

Butterfly Conservation and the A41

By Margaret Noakes

It was December 1992, part of the A 41 from Hemel Hempstead to Hunton Bridge bypass had already been opened. Although not designated as a motorway, the road was clearly built on motorway lines.

A further stretch, from Hemel Hempstead to the Tring exit had not yet been completed. Recognising rather late that there could be potential in exploring with the Ministry of Transport the possibilities for wild flower seeding (with butterflies in mind) on the verges, I started to investigate how this could be achieved.

It had been done before, on the A 20 Dover to Folkestone road, so I began by contacting the local branch of Butterfly Conservation in that area, to ask their advice. Armed with information and encouragement from them I decided to pursue the issue.

It appears that a firm of landscape architects draw up plans and make recommendations which involve planting and seeding of areas adjacent to new roads. Local authorities and the contractors appear to have some influence, with the final approval being at Ministerial level.

I had been warned to expect difficulties, so was wary, but initially negotiations appeared to go well. With the support of Gail Jeffcoate and Malcolm Newland, I met the landscape architect and together, suitably clad with protective helmets, welly boots and luminescent clothing, we inspected 3 sites as yet unseeded.

1. **The Ridgeway path** area adjacent to the new bridge. This part of the A41 cut through chalk.

2. **Chesham** road junction
3. **Bourne End** road Junction

The area adjacent to the **Ridgeway path** (south facing) was particularly identified as valuable, as it had many examples of typical chalkland flora and could be equally valuable for associated butterflies. We were also aware that it was within sight of the important nature reserve at Albury Nowers. It was agreed that this area should be left to be grazed by rabbits. Two years later the whole area has been planted with young trees, many not appropriate for chalk, all well mulched and almost completely destroying the original flora.

The **Chesham Road** junction was found to be mainly facing west, with clay soils overlaying some chalk. An ideal area for mobile butterflies to nectar, and possible for colonisation by various grassland species. It was agreed that the area should be seeded with a special clay wild flower and grass mixture, with cutting and removal of cuttings to be done each March and October.

Two years later the area is a mess, full of rubbish, unlevelled soil, weeds and dead material. It has not been seeded, although a mixture of totally inappropriate young tree species have been planted.

The **Bourne End** junction was found to have a number of varying directional facets, with potential for mobile butterflies. It was agreed to use a chalk seed mix, with cutting and removal of cuttings, again, to be carried out in March and October.

Two years later there is no evidence of seeding and most of the junction looks a mess.

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We made a number of surveys at all 3 sites, identifying plants already growing. Communication with the landscape architect was maintained, intermittently and in March 1993 a promise of a management and maintenance plan, within two to three months, was made.

Where are we now, 2 years down the track, literally? Promised management and maintenance plans have never been fulfilled. The original landscape architect left her post and in September 1994, her replacement and I surveyed the sites, at my request. She was annoyed to see the state of the Chesham Road site and promised that work would be done there. It appears that an attempt has been made to clear this area. A promise to have the trees removed at the Ridgeway site was made, which, has not yet been done!

So what went wrong? I am now a true cynic and no longer believe what people say. Who is dragging their heels, the Ministry of Transport, or the Landscape Architects? What about that article in the Weekend Telegraph of Sept 11th 1993 two thirds of a page on 'A Roadside sold as a Nature Reserve' with butterflies and badgers pictured significantly. It is now too late - the seeding over 2 seasons of plant species, possibly not good larval food plants or adult nectar sources are likely to dominate and overwhelm any more suitable wild flowers or grasses that could have been sown. Can anybody guide my anger and disappointment, in a constructive way, towards its most appropriate source?

Conservation Dates

Below are a series of dates where you can assist with conservation work in our area. please try and help as management of this kind really does benefit our butterflies;

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Queen Mother's Nature Reserve Duchies Piece. Third Sunday each month September to April inclusive. Meet 9.30 a.m. on lay-by O/S Map Ref. 949129 nr Tring Station. Phone Malcolm Newland on 01442 67200.

Therfield Heath - Usually the first Sunday in each month. Meet 10a.m. Meeting place varies, details from Vincent Thompson on 01763 241443.

Stanmore Country Park - Times from John Hollingdale on 081 863 2077.

Anyone living in the **Hillingdon** area can get in touch with Roger Taylor on 0181 868 0207 for details of several local sites requiring volunteers.

Fir and Pond Wood -Meet third Sunday of each month at 10.00am in the layby off Coopers Lane Road east of Potters Bar.

Recorders Needed

In the next issue, Martin Baker of the Herts. and Middx. Wildlife Trust will write an account of the last three years transect walks at Duchies Piece. The Trust are appealing for walkers on this and several other reserves. If you can help call Martin on 0727 858901

Membership

Membership stood at 243 when the Herts and Middx Branch was formed by the splitting of the old London Branch. Many thanks to Gail Jeffecoate for the help given to Margaret Noakes who has taken over the post of Membership Secretary

If you know of anyone who would like to join Butterfly Conservation please write to the Head Office of the national society at PO Box 222, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6EY. Membership fees are £14.00 plus £5 for each branch joined. Concessionary rate £12.50.

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