

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 14

JUNE 1998



**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION**

**Our Own Reserve
by Gavin Vicary**

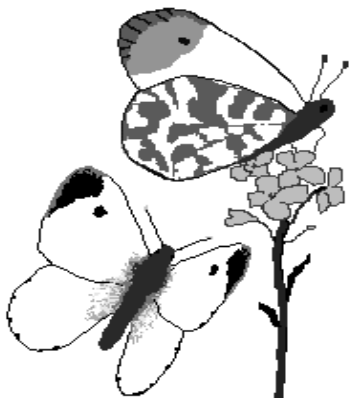
Many of you will already know that we recently acquired a Butterfly Conservation nature reserve in Hertfordshire. We had actively been pursuing a reserve in our branch region but were all surprised at the speed with which it came about.

The site is to the very west of the county near Tring and is called Millhoppers Pasture. A full account of it is given on page 4. It is a delightful remnant of ancient countryside, now so rare in Hertfordshire, that we are very pleased is safeguarded for the future.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

An official opening ceremony took place on June 6th although as parking and other facilities were limited numbers had to be kept to a minimum. At this ceremony the reserve was dedicated to the memory of Gordon Beningfield, president of Butterfly Conservation, who died on May 4 and who had lived in Hertfordshire since shortly after the second world war (see tribute on page 7).

A members' day will take place on Saturday 25th July when it is hoped many of you will be able to come along and discover the reserve for yourselves.



A number of committee members have worked extremely hard to ensure that owning the reserve became a reality. In particular, Margaret Noakes and Brian Sawford should be singled out for praise on this front. We are also indebted to Dacorum Borough Council who donated a substantial sum towards the cost of purchase.

The first stage of managing the reserve is to build on our knowledge of the wildlife that occurs there. We have contacted a number of wildlife experts to survey different plant or animal groups for us. I would also encourage members who visit the reserve to record what they see and send their records to Margaret and John Noakes (address back page), who are collating this information. Also if there are any readers who have a sound knowledge of a particular group such as dragonflies, fungi or whatever who would be prepared to help monitor the site, we would love to hear from you.

These are very busy times for the branch, in addition to the reserve a great deal else is also happening. Most noteworthy of which is that we are working closely with Three Valleys Water to benefit wildlife in our branch area. We initially contacted them regarding sponsorship for our annual butterfly report (that you will have received with this newsletter) and they kindly offered to print the

report at a much reduced cost than last year. They also invited us to give management advice to them regarding 300 sites that they own in Hertfordshire and Middlesex comprising 3000 acres and to design a 30 acre butterfly garden at one of these sites near Bushey which it is anticipated will be visited by 10000 school children every year. A task into which Alan Downie, amongst others, has put an enormous amount of time and effort.

I mentioned the annual report which has again been produced to an exceptionally high standard. John Murray, Michael Healy and Rob Souter all worked hard on this but in particular John did much of the work at a time when his wife was seriously ill and the rest of us can only admire how he managed it under such circumstances. Needless to say we all wish her a speedy recovery.

By the time you read this we will have organised the Butterfly Conservation stand at the Chelsea Flower Show. The society also had a butterfly garden at the show this year and so John Stevens organised the manning and stocking of the stand which is no mean feat at such a large event. Branch sales activities are now being coordinated by Malcolm Hull as Terry Rodbard has taken over as publicity officer to ensure that we obtain maximum publicity from all that is happening at the present time.

The field trips are also in full swing at the moment and I hope that many of you are enjoying them along with the moth trapping events which are also taking place. These are exciting times and I am sure that you will all be as delighted about recent events as we are and I look forward to seeing you at the members day at Millhoppers in July.

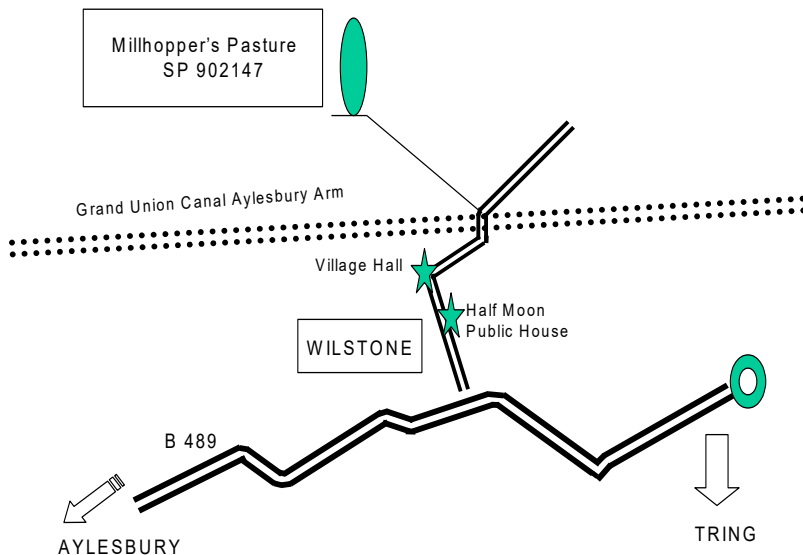
Millhoppers Pasture - Our First Reserve By Gavin Vicary

Our first nature reserve in our branch region is a small remnant of ancient countryside that remains much the same as it would have been decades and even centuries ago. It has never had pesticides or fertilisers used on it and therefore retains much of the flora and fauna that has been lost in so much of Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The reserve itself gives you that feeling that you are somewhere special having a wonderful old magical feeling about it.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Millhoppers Pasture is situated to the very west of Hertfordshire, between the villages of Long Marston, Astrope and Gubblecote, which lie to the north west of Tring.

Millhoppers Pasture is on Astrope Lane (also known as Watery Lane), midway between the village of Wilstone and the hamlet of Astrope, Long Marston. There is no vehicular access to the reserve and Astrope Lane is



too narrow to allow cars to be parked. Visitors should park at Wilstone Village Hall, 50 yards north of the Half Moon public house. The reserve is a 10-15 minute walk from the car park, turning left immediately after crossing the Grand Union Canal.

There are a number of different habitats to be found on the reserve. The main one of these is ancient grassland with the characteristic anthills and hummocky nature that show its age. Traditionally the pasture would have been grazed and this will need to be reintroduced to keep a diverse range of plants and we are already looking at ways of achieving this.

A rare tree, the native black poplar, is found in the region and there are a number of specimens which have been pollarded on the site although not for some time. Two or three require immediate

attention and it is anticipated that pollarding will gradually be re-introduced to the others. Pollarding is a very old technique whereby wood is harvested from a tree by cutting at above head height. This allows the tree to resprout beyond the reach of browsing animals until sufficient growth occurs so that wood can be harvested again some years later. This technique gives the tree a knarled, twisted shape and provides a succession of different habitats ideal for bats, fungi, a wide range of birds and insects as well as allowing more light in after pollarding to give a flush of spring flowers.

There are small streams that run around the edges of the reserve, one of which runs across the middle feeding a large marshy area. Some scrub encroachment, predominantly blackthorn, has occurred around the edges of the site and thus it can be seen that there are a wide range of habitats considering the site is small.

It will take considerable surveying and monitoring before we are fully able to appreciate the wildlife that exists at Millhoppers Pasture. Already however cowslips and marsh marigold amongst other things are in flower and there has been a good show of violets.

The numbers of birds seen has been pleasing with bullfinches, blackcaps and little owls regularly encountered. Tawny owls can often be heard and barn owls have also been reported from the area. The small streams are thought to be used by kingfishers. The reserve is also likely to be a good place for mammals with natterers bats known to be in the locality.

A transect walk for butterflies has been started and we also intend running the branch moth trap on regular occasions to build on our knowledge of the lepidoptera that occurs on the site. Martin Hicks of the Herts Environmental Record Centre has agreed to carry out a botanical survey for us and we are trying to get other experts to do other groups and look forward to plenty of rarities turning up.

Brian Sawford has already written an action plan for Millhoppers with the initial emphasis being on recording and monitoring. Reintroduction of grazing and some tree work to the pollards requiring immediate attention are amongst the most important aspects of management that it is important to undertake at an early

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

stage.

We were first alerted to Millhoppers pasture being placed on the market by our Membership Secretary Margaret Noakes who lives close by. The next step was for Brian Sawford to survey the site to ascertain whether it was suitable for the branch to consider getting involved in. Brian gave a glowing report identifying it as a small remnant of ancient countryside now so rare in Hertfordshire that it was important that it should be conserved.

A number of local residents, who have traditionally had access to the site, were concerned that it might be purchased and ploughed up by a farmer or suffer some other unsatisfactory plight. They were therefore trying to raise sufficient funds to purchase the land and hence save it for the future. It was originally envisaged that people donating funds including our branch of Butterfly Conservation would form a trust that would manage and own the site.

It soon became clear that a trust might become rather complicated and at the same time a substantial grant was obtained from Dacorum Borough Council towards the purchase price. It was therefore agreed that Butterfly Conservation would become the sole owners if the branch made up the difference between the grant and the purchase price, which we duly did. The rest of the sale then proceeded suprisingly smoothly.

A committee has been formed between ourselves and the local residents who are keen to help out with various conservation tasks and work parties. A rural action grant has been obtained and the local residents have also put up considerable funds for ongoing management, so the reserve will not be a drain on branch finances.

We are indebted to several people who helped us acquire the reserve; John Hoade of Dacorum Borough Council helped secure the grant and the solicitor John King who gave his services free of charge. Local residents including John Rotherhoe, Peter Bygate and Alan Barnard put in a lot of effort to bring the reserve about and we are also grateful to Rural Action for their grant. Martin Hicks of the Herts Environmental Record Centre has also been extremely helpful. Of our own committee John and Margaret Noakes have done an enormous amount of work as has Brian Sawford

I hope to see many of you at the reserve on the members day (25th July) when you will have an opportunity to see it for yourselves. Although only small, it is an important remnant of ancient countryside that will receive the traditional management required to keep it optimum condition for the wildlife that occurs there. It is also an enjoyable part of the countryside that is safe for the future and can be enjoyed by local people and our members.

Gordon Beningfield – A Tribute, by Brian Sawford

By the time these lines are published, a great deal will already have been said and written about the life of Gordon Beningfield, especially with regard to the positive influences upon an extremely wide range of organisations and individuals. Gordon was my friend and, like so many others, I am deeply saddened at his passing. He was a remarkable man who, both in public and in private, has left us with so much to be thankful for.



Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Gordon Beningfield was blessed with some extraordinary talents, many of which he shared willingly, not least to those who shared his passions for the traditional English countryside and its wildlife. The full nature of his contributions, not just to art and wildlife conservation but also within other spheres of his many interests, are only now beginning to be revealed as tributes are being paid. Yet, his personality was such that he would not have wished for it to have been any other way. Gordon did not seek personal limelight, however he was quietly and supremely proud of achievements of those organisations and causes he supported and, not infrequently, avidly fought for. For example, it is quite probable that, without his tireless spirit and drive, Butterfly Conservation and Countryside Restoration Trust amongst others, would not possess the strengths and high reputations they hold today.

There can be few who have not marvelled at Gordon's exquisite paintings or were not captivated by his gentle but informative talks. For many years, despite a punishing schedule of work and sufferings from the illness that finally took him from us, Gordon cheerfully gave freely of his time and expertise. But he always ensured that one or other of his beloved conservation organisations would be better off by the end of the day. Such was his nature that there will never be a full account of the impact of his generosity. Nor should there be, for that was how he wanted it. Nevertheless, Gordon Beningfield was far from being a 'soft touch', as was from time to time evidenced by tough berations he meted out against any politicians, developers, landowners, local authorities, grey squirrels, magpies and anything or anyone else posing threats to or destroying our traditional countryside and wildlife.

A man of many fine qualities, Gordon Beningfield justly earned a string of well known reputations including internationally renowned artist, countryman, author, broadcaster, ardent conservationist, glass engraver, devoted fan of the Spitfire and gentleman. Like many others who knew Gordon as a friend, I can relate that all the widespread and well-deserved recognition never went to his head and, not unemotionally, recall his other qualities. These and the good times we had together will always be remembered with affection and great happiness.

In addition to art and countryside matters, Gordon had a wide range of other interests, for a number of which he maintained an almost youthful enthusiasm. Together with his deep knowledge, sharp wit and, not infrequent, mischievous tendencies, these made for both interesting and entertaining company and conversation. For example, such interest Gordon and I shared was for historic aircraft. My wife, Terri, and I arranged for Gordon to accompany us to the 50th anniversary celebrations of the United States Air Force at Bassingbourne in 1992. Gordon picked us up in his Jaguar, a limousine which he claimed not to use very often. We duly arrived at Bassingbourne, now an army base with rigorous entry checks by armed troops. "Open your bonnet sir" demanded a soldier. Straight-faced, Gordon replied "I don't know how, but my brother does." "Where's your brother sir?" retorted the soldier. "Oh, he's at home" came Gordon's reply. After a pause, the soldier gruffed "Open your boot sir". Gordon looked him in the eye and said "My brother knows how to do that too." Completely non-plussed, the open-mouthed soldier stood for a moment, then barked "Do you have any identification sir?" Slowly, Gordon checked all his pockets, drew something out and replied "Ah yes, I have this photograph of me in a GI uniform taken at a hanger dance some years ago." Almost distraught, with his trigger finger visibly twitching, the soldier waved us through. Gordon revealed a mischievous grin.

Later that same day, after all the celebrations, we downed doughnuts, drank mugs of hot coffee and mingled with the veteran aircrew. Gordon revelled in the nostalgia, boyishly sought autographs and posed for photographs with the pilot of the famous B-17 "Memphis Belle", all the time characteristically demonstrating his gifts for giving genuine appreciation where they were due. During World War Two, American airmen were renowned for emblazoning their aircraft with nose-art. Terri jokingly suggested to Gordon that he should have a go at painting some. "Hmm, yes, but I've got this book to finish" he muttered. The next time Gordon and his wife, Betty, visited, he smiled ruefully, carefully unfurled and presented to us his piece of nose-art. Entitled 'Swinging-on-a-Star', this typically depicts a most attractive, well-proportioned and swim-suited young lady bearing an uncanny resemblance to Betty. This unusual 'Beningfield', now one of our most prized possessions,

Hertfordshire and Middlesex



hangs as a constant reminder of his artistic skills and inherent sense of fun.

Tragedy so often focuses coincidences and since his passing I notice many things bring sadness and yet evoke very pleasant memories of Gordon Beningfield. Whenever I see a Linnet, I remember how well he caught the beauty of this attractive little bird in his very last

painting. He and Betty brought it over to show my family on one of the last evenings we were to spend together. Typically humble, Gordon seemed almost embarrassed by our superlative comments that such an exquisite work justly deserved. Other quite contrasting memories are evoked by the roar of a Spitfire's Merlin engine, deep rumblings of a B-17 'Flying Fortress', butterflies in the tranquil peace of a country lane, sheep on a hillside and, above all as will be seen below, the towering songs of Skylark.

About a year ago, my daughter Laura undertook a study of Gordon's work for her art college project titling it "Preservation by Painting". Upon reflection, this title sums up a good deal of what Gordon strove so vigorously for. His paintings vividly encapsulate those aspects we most treasure in our countryside and, with his tireless campaigning, have helped preserve so much. Although, as Gordon would have said "not nearly enough". When questioned "How, in years to come, would you like to be remembered?", Gordon replied to Laura "Purely, I would like my work to reflect somebody who had a passion for the English countryside." In this he supremely succeeded and, had he lived, would without doubt have taken his work to new heights. In turn, not least through selfless generosity, this would have further enriched an already overwhelming legacy enjoyed by so many of us.

Never did we think that Laura's final question to Gordon would become so poignant – "What would you like your epitaph to be?" His instant answer was "Something related to a Skylark, a Lark ascending". A choice epitomising this unassuming man who, frequently, rose to bring so much joy to so many. Nowhere were Gordon Beningfield's influences and activities more effective than in countryside and wildlife conservation. His premature passing robbed the world of a great champion who wanted to do so much more. Gordon was also a devoted family man and the sympathies of the Branch to out to Betty, daughters Sally and Sarah, Ted and all his family.

Gordon Beningfield supported our early negotiations for Millhopper's Pasture as a nature reserve, which he had visited some years ago. The site embodies much of what he loved and painted in the English countryside. It is most fitting that the reserve is now dedicated to his memory and, as he would have emphasised, should be regarded as a stepping-stone towards even wider countryside conservation. Let us all ensure that this promise becomes our goal to fully commemorate ideals and aspirations of a dear friend and a great man.



Hertfordshire and Middlesex

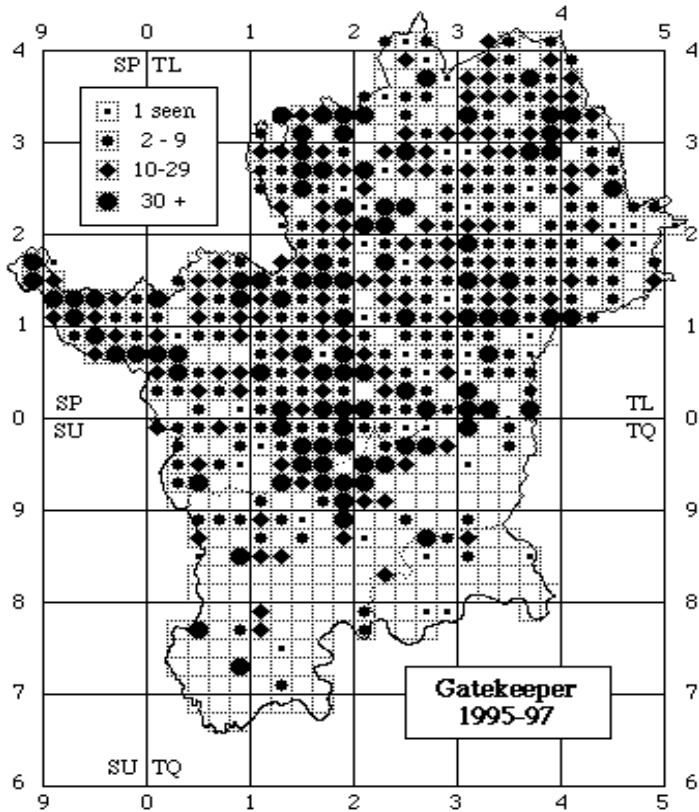
Tetrad Bashers Anonymous, by John B. Murray

As we enter the final two years of butterfly mapping for the Millennium Atlas project ("Butterflies for the New Millennium"), our coverage of Hertfordshire and Middlesex is still very patchy. The aim of the project is to visit every single tetrad (2 x 2 km square) in these two counties at intervals throughout the butterfly year, and record the butterflies there. Members have responded with enthusiasm, but it is clear that some squares are very much more popular than others. The most-visited tetrad has been visited more than 500 times in the 3 years so far, whereas there are large blocks of tetrads together which have received no visits at all.

Obviously we need to try and get a more even spread of observations. One way in which we can judge whether a square has been minimally covered is to look at the distribution maps so far of common species such as the Meadow Brown or the Small White. It is a reasonable assumption that if no Small White has been seen in a particular tetrad square, then that square has not been adequately observed. This year, we are therefore concentrating on these blank squares in the maps of common species. The Figures show the 1995-97 distribution maps of 3 common species: the Large Skipper (active in June and early July), the Gatekeeper (late July to early August), and the Small Tortoiseshell (on the wing for much of the summer). In all three cases, Sawford (1987) and Plant's (1987) surveys of Hertfordshire and Middlesex showed these species to be in virtually every tetrad, even those in the centre of towns. Yet the 1995-97 maps show large blank areas, presumably because recorders have not visited these squares at the right times of year.

Observations urgently needed

If you want to know more about the project, or if you work or live in or near one of the blank squares on any of these maps, then I would like to hear from you, and what butterflies you have seen there. If you would like to take part in a little "tetrad bashing", then please let me know also. Tetrad bashing consists in visiting a block of blank squares on the map one after the other in warm, sunny weather. Aim to spend about a quarter of an hour at a likely-looking location in each tetrad (uncut road verge, meadow or wood edge, or in towns

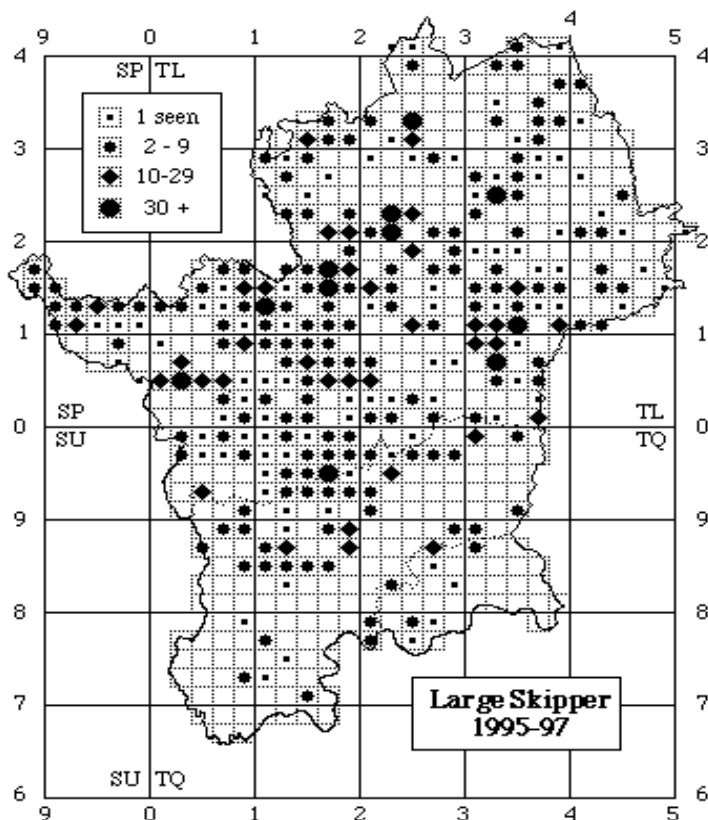


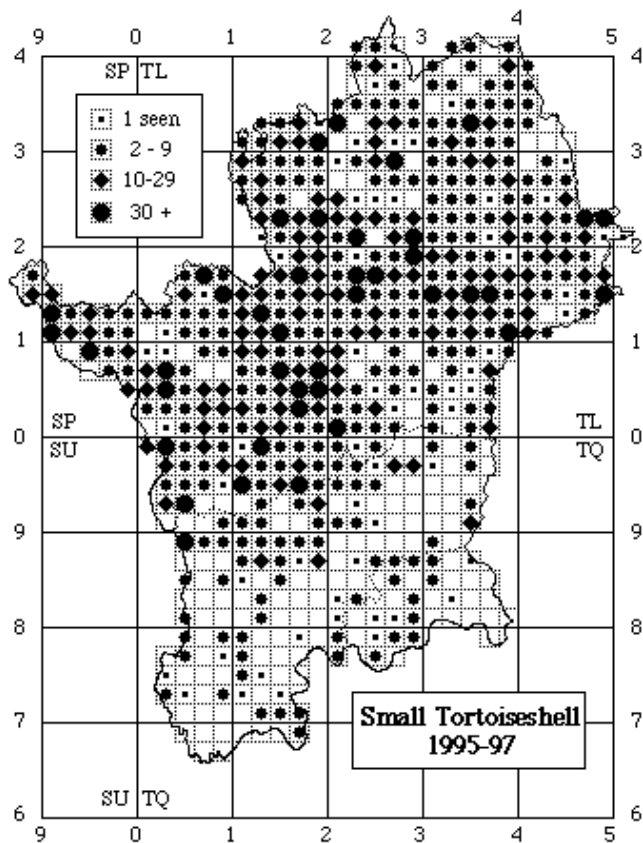
any waste land, buddleia bush or garden). If you have not seen the target species after 15 minutes or so, try another location in the same tetrad. If you've still not seen it after half an hour, move on to the next tetrad. Always record numbers of other species of butterflies seen as well, of course. My address is: Dr John B. Murray, "Field End", Marshalls Heath, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8HS Telephone: (01582) 833544. (Email: j.b.murray@open.ac.uk)

If you want to make sure you're not covering the same ground as

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

someone else, or if you want to know the most urgently-needed squares, then contact me and I'll assign you your own tetrads to concentrate on. I'm particularly interested in hearing from butterfly enthusiasts in the built up areas of London and Middlesex, especially Barnet, Tottenham, Stepney, Sunbury, Osterley Park, Hayes and the Uxbridge area, where coverage is still very poor.





Fraser's Hill, Malaysia: November/December 1997, by Vincent Judd

For our Asia trip this year we decided to try a different type of terrain. In the past we have heard that the central highlands of Peninsular Malaysia were a paradise for butterflies, and so it proved.

We obtained a booklet on Malaysian hill resorts, and eventually decided on Fraser's Hill, one of the smallest and about two hours drive from the main airport of Kuala Lumpur. The main travel agents were unable to arrange a holiday at this venue, but we were directed to a small specialist firm in Middlesex who were extremely helpful and able to put together exactly what we wanted.

Our basic plan, which we always now adopt when on butterfly trips abroad, is to stay in one centre and hire a car, and drive out each day looking for a spot that seems promising, and simply walk about and explore. In past Asian trips we tended to locate a suitable spot each afternoon, when very little is on the wing, and then head back there the following morning. However, at the very high altitudes butterflies flew throughout the day, and we ended up travelling often very short distances. For example, on one morning we went to a row of lantana bushes (lantana is an orange flowered buddleia-type shrub which is both cultivated and grows wild alongside roads and paths) only a couple of minutes drive from our hotel and spent about three hours in basically the same spot, so many different butterflies visited it.

Butterfly watching in Asia is very different from England. Here one goes to a suitable site and walks about searching for butterflies. In Malaysia, you stand in one place and the butterflies come to you. Apart from waiting by patches of flowers, clearings in forests or jungles and wet patches of ground also attract many species.

In our previous three holidays in Asia we always found that although we encountered a large number of species, the actual numbers of butterflies seen was fairly low. Generally in Asia, butterflies are fairly thin on the ground. However, at suitable spots around Fraser's Hill and the jungles below, the number of butterflies we saw was enormous.

The monsoons came very late this year which, as widely reported in this country, caused serious problems with fires in Indonesia normally extinguished by the rains. Indeed the haze only cleared from Malaysia two weeks before our arrival. As a result, instead of being there at the end of the rainy season, we hit the middle of it. However, this worked to our advantage. Although we experienced some very heavy downpours and it rained most days, the rain never lasted more than a couple of hours at a time, and resulted in wild flowers in great profusion and far more wet patches on tracks to attract down butterflies.

For the first week we spent most of our time on Fraser's Hill itself, only going down when we needed petrol. The tiny town is so remote that the nearest petrol station is a 40-mile round trip. Despite this, we did not have enough time to do justice to several extremely good spots and in consequence were not able to photograph some of the many species that could be found there. In the second week, dense cloud was a big problem, and every day we had to go down the Hill to find sunshine and butterflies. Fraser's Hill is reached by a single-track road running 5 miles from the foot to the summit. The road is open in alternate directions every second hour, so getting the timing wrong would result in a very long wait. The Hill is forested and cool due to its high elevation. Below is dense jungle which is extremely hot and humid, but very high in butterfly numbers. We found the best lowland spots to be paths close to the numerous small rivers that criss-cross the main road.

In every location, the most visible butterflies were the Pierids. Grass Yellows, of which we encountered four species, and which are smaller versions of our Clouded Yellow or Brimstone, were everywhere along roads and paths. Of the whites, the Jezebels, which equate to our Green-veined White but which are highly coloured, were almost equally numerous. However, the largest family was the Nymphalids, of which we saw 28 species. Of the many very beautiful types, my personal favourites were (i) the Autumn Leaf, which looks exactly like a leaf when its wings are closed but has a brilliant orange upperside, and (ii) the Blue Admiral, which is shaped and marked on the underside like our Comma, but has an upperside like our White Admiral but with a blue band. The ones we had most difficulty identifying were the

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Skippers, of which there are a great many with similar colours and markings. We also saw quite a number of Birdwings, but the highlight was a Tufted Jungle King, a huge butterfly of the Owl family, which we found sitting on the ground, wings outstretched, right beside our car.

Malaysia has around 1000 species of butterfly and with relatively low costs, especially at the moment with their economic problems, ease of access with direct flights from Heathrow, and even driving on the left, it is strongly recommended for anyone who wants to see stunning and exotic butterflies in profusion.

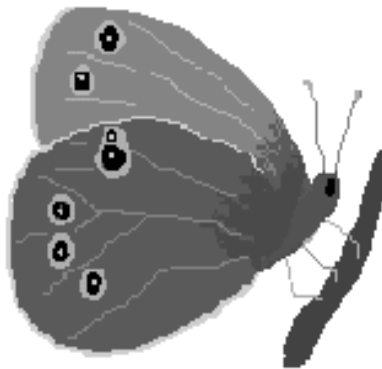
Look Out for Ringlet's in 1998, by Rob Souter

Aside from my role as branch moth officer, I am also studying the ecology of the Ringlet butterfly for a PhD at the University of Hertfordshire. To assist with my data collection I would like to ask members of this branch to make a concerted effort to record Ringlets in Hertfordshire and Middlesex this summer. This will enable me to have as complete a knowledge as possible of their distribution in the two counties by the end of this year.

The Ringlet can be found on the wing from late June until early August. It is a widespread and locally common species but has a patchy distribution. The best places to find it are where tall grasses are growing in damp, sheltered areas with partial-shade. Typical sites include clearings and rides in woodland habitats, areas of scrub, hedgerows and wood edges. It flies at the same time and often in the same places as the similar and far more common Meadow Brown. Care therefore needs to be taken to distinguish the

species. The Ringlet is a weak flier and the males can be seen patrolling for females low above the grass. The freshly emerged male can appear almost black on the upperside and has a delicate white fringe to the wings. The gold rings on the underwings of the Ringlet are a diagnostic characteristic.

Although the Ringlet has been reported to be expanding its range, and increasing in abundance at monitored sites, it has also been a



victim of changing land use and management, resulting in the loss of many colonies within its range. Examination of data from the last 3 years of recording in Hertfordshire and Middlesex has shown an apparent, dramatic decline in the status of the Ringlet. It has been recorded in 40 % fewer tetrads in the period 1995 -7 than in the last thorough survey of 1985-6. Since it is likely that it remains to be found in some under-recorded areas, I am

making this plea for assistance to see if the decline is really this substantial.

Please use the cumulative distribution map for the Ringlet shown in the report to identify tetrads from which there are no records. Don't forget to record the other butterfly species you come across as well to help complete the coverage for all species. Records can be sent through the usual channels (i.e. John Murray) rather than directly to me. Happy hunting.

Dont' Forget *Butterfly Line*

Listen on 0891 884 505 (50 p/ minute)

Ring in your sightings on 01442 824 407

Moth Evenings. by Rob Souter

So far this year I have already been out and about with light trap and generator on a number of occasions, running moth evenings and doing my own recording. Although there are not a lot of moths around at this time of year, and some nights can be fairly unproductive because it is too cold, I have already managed to see 73 species, many of which only fly during the first part of the year. Of course, the majority of moth species are on the wing during the summer months, and so this will be the best time to attend a moth evening to find out what all the fuss is about.

Here is a review of the moth evenings held to date. They were attended by a good number of different people, many of them locals who were keen to see what was flying in their neighborhood at night. If you missed out on these try and come along to one of the future events, details of which are to be found at the end of this article.

Waterford Heath 8-9th May

This 24 hour event to launch Waterford Heath Nature Reserve was a great success, and there was a number of events held for all ages and interests. For my part, two light traps were run on the south pit, a Skinner trap and a Robinson trap. Groups of nocturnal wildlife watchers made visits to see what was being caught through the evening until 1am. The warm night brought out a number of delightful species, the most abundant of which were Latticed Heath. A wide range of prominent species were attracted including Pebble, Iron and Coxcomb Prominent. Other interesting species included Lunar Marbled Brown and Pale Tussock. But the moth most appreciated was a handsome male Puss Moth, whilst the most noteworthy was a Poplar Lutestring. A total of 23 species were recorded, a good total for this time of year.

The Robinson trap was opened in the morning to show early risers (such as those who'd been up since 3am for a dawn chorus walk!) what had been caught, along with potted specimens from the Skinner trap. The younger members were especially keen to handle the moths, and a number of people new to the concept of moth trapping were very interested in the whole affair.

By the time a number of branch members arrived for a walk on the Saturday morning to look for butterflies, temperatures were already high. The warm, sunny weather was most welcome after the cool, wet April, and the day produced a number of spring butterflies. However, the Grizzled Skipper was not yet on the wing, and its emergence was already a month later than last year when it got off to an early start at the beginning of April. Orange Tip, Brimstone, Comma and Holly Blue were some of the 10 species seen on the walk which enabled everyone to explore this new and important nature reserve.

Stanmore Country Park 9th May

On the same day there was an evening of moth trapping at Stanmore Country Park, led by John Hollingdale and assisted by myself. The 11 people attending were mostly local and watched John and I set up a range of trapping methods; including Robinson, Skinner and Heath traps, a MV light over a sheet, and a number of wine ropes. Unfortunately, a cooler night and a full moon meant that we struggled to get 16 species, and only one of each, although everyone was interested in seeing a Lime Hawk-moth that bounded into the Skinner trap.

Totteridge Fields 12th May

At the request of Ann Brown from the Barnet Group of the London Wildlife Trust, I took the Skinner trap to Totteridge Fields Nature Reserve near Barnet. This fairly new nature reserve, which opened in 1995, is known to support a colony of the Chimney Sweeper, a day flying moth of restricted range which is on the wing in July. 6 local people attended but again a cool night meant activity was slow and we only caught 11 species. Again a Lime Hawk-moth was the highlight whilst Green Carpet was the most abundant. I plan to run further evenings at this site in July and September and all are welcome to attend.

Marshall's Heath 16th May

John Murray led this event at the HMWT nature reserve, last held in July 1996. 6 people attended including Raymond Uffen who was on hand to help identify any micro-moths caught. However, it was another cool night with moths only arriving in dribs and drabs. 15

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

species were recorded eventually, and Green Carpet was again the most abundant, whilst interesting species caught included Maiden's Blush and Treble Lines.

Future events.

The next planned moth evening is to be held at Broxbourne Woods on July 25th. I will be leading this event which should produce a good catch since this is probably one of the best sites for moths in the two counties.

The morning walk around Patmore Heath on August 16th will be preceded by the opening of a moth trap run through the night from Gavin Vicary's house.

In September, whilst the numbers of butterflies begins to wane, moths are still going strong and on September 19th, John Hollingdale will run a moth evening at Stanmore Common.

If you are interested in attending moth evenings at Totteridge Fields then call me in July when I should have a date. I also plan to have a look at The Commons Nature Reserve near Welwyn, and I will have to find time to look at Millhopper's Pasture, the branch's new reserve.

If you interested in coming along any time, give me a call and I can tell you what might be happening when, depending on other commitments and the weather.

Moths – Getting Started, by Vincent Judd

My interest in moths is of quite recent origin. Having had an interest in Butterflies back in the 1950's, when Large Tortoiseshells could still be found, work, family and other hobbies meant that my interest waned and it was only about 7 years ago with grown children and more free time that it resumed. However, there are only around 65 butterfly species in this country compared to about 400 in mainland Europe and 2000 in Asia. While I have been able to take regular holidays abroad twice a year, for the rest of the time the small number of species was a bit limiting. I never tire of seeing the first Brimstone each Spring, but inevitably I progressed to an interest in moths as well.

Butterflies are on the wing from around March (although in 1997 my first sighting was of a Peacock in February) until September or early October. Moths can be found for 12 months of the year.

Three years ago I embarked upon moth photography. My early endeavours before I understood how best to go about it were somewhat crude. I began by opening all our living room windows at night and leaving the lights on. This did produce a lot of moths, although surprisingly only of relatively few species. However, it also produced many other less welcome insects which in the main hit the light and fell onto my wife sitting beneath it in her armchair. The other problem was catching the moths, which tended to fly round the room at some speed. It was not long before, by mutual agreement, I confined my activities to out of doors.

The next adventure involved buying a powerful torch and spreading a white sheet on the lawn. The results were a total disappointment because I spread the sheet over the torch (yes...I know now !!) and in fact failed to catch a single moth.

Finally, I obtained the name of a supplier of moth traps, and bought the first of the three that I now have. Having explained to the neighbours that they should not be alarmed by the strange blue light in my garden, I set out the trap with immediate success.

Currently, I regularly trap at four sites including my garden, which is very large at almost one acre, and casually at others. In each of

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

the last two years I have recorded over 200 species in my traps.

People have often commented on my ability to identify the different specimens I encounter. This is no mystery. From the outset, each time I obtained a moth I would look it up in Skinner¹, note its characteristics and those of related species. Consequently, I soon learned to recognise all the species I had encountered fairly easily, although the same does not apply when I am confronted by a moth of a species that is new to me (quite a regular occurrence). It is slightly embarrassing to recall that only three years ago I could confuse a Copper Underwing for an Old Lady, although today I can recognise perhaps 250 species easily. I have successfully used the same method with my other great love, Asian butterflies.

I am writing this at the beginning of January. Two days ago on a mild night my moth trap contained 8 moths of 3 different species, around 10 weeks before I can hope to see my first butterfly of the year. The variety of moths is enormous and, although I have so far encountered around 300 macros, there are yet about 500 to go. Although many are drab, some of the species are strikingly beautiful, and the excitement of opening up the moth trap each morning never fades.

¹ Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles, by Bernard Skinner. Published by Viking.

<p>Gardens for Butterflies Check out the latest advice on 0891 884 504 50p/min. Regular updates. All profits to Butterfly Conservation</p>
--

The Quarryman's Garden Wins Gold at Chelsea

Butterfly Conservation was awarded a Gold Medal for its first ever garden at the Chelsea Flower Show. This was richly deserved as the garden was a stunning example of what can be achieved. The interest in the garden was immense and over 25,000 leaflets were distributed to visitors, many of whom also visited our stand, manned by this Branch. We hope that the lessons about butterfly-friendly gardening will have been understood by many of those visitors, who then implement those lessons in their own gardens.



Branch Committee Needs More Help !!!

It is apparent to us, and we hope also apparent to you, that things have picked up within the Branch over the past few months. We now have more to do than we have people to do them. After many years of organising our field trip programme, John Hollingdale is seeking to take a rest from this activity - is anyone out there interested in taking on this task ?? Also, we get invitations to attend a number of events (shows etc.) throughout the summer months, and often have to decline as we do not have enough people to man the stand. Malcolm Hull has taken over responsibility in this area, but if a few others would volunteer to help, that would certainly increase our options.

If you are interested, why not phone either John or Malcolm for some more information (see back page for phone details).

Copy Deadline for Next Newsletter

All material for the next newsletter should be sent to Ian Small (by mail or e-mail (ian.small@lineone.net) no later than the end of August.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday & Sunday, 18-19 July. Butterfly Festival to be held at Juniper Hall Field Centre, Mickleham, Dorking, Surrey. Hosted by the Surrey & SW London Branch. Many activities and exhibits for all ages. Entrance £2 for adults, 50p for children under 14 years.

FIELD TRIP PROGRAMME

Sunday, 5 July. The Commons Nature Reserve, to see White-Letter Hairstreak. Meet at 11.00 am in the Commons Wood School car park, TL 257111 (sheet 166) on the south side of Welwyn Garden City. Leader will be Peter Oakenful (01707 - 335196).

Sunday, 12 July. Westbrook Hay (Boxmoor Trust) to see Marbled White. Meet at 10.30 by the school at the road junction at grid ref. TL 028053 (sheet 166).

Sunday, 19 July. Arnside Knot, Cumbria, to see the High Brown Fritillary. SD 456775 (sheet 89). Contact the leader, Alan Downie, (01992 - 650829) for further details.

Saturday, 25 July. Members day at Millhoppers Pasture (see p.4 for directions). Guided walks will be held at 11 am and 2 pm. Leader, Margaret Noakes. Please contact Gavin Vicary (01279 - 771933) in advance to give us an idea of numbers who may attend.

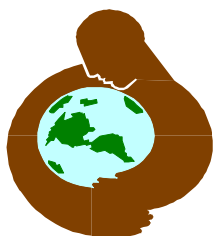
Saturday, 25 July. A moth evening at Broxbourne Woods. Meet in the reserve car park (TL 325071, sheet 166) at 9 pm. Leader will be Rob Souter (01438 - 816091).

Sunday, 2 August. Therfield Heath, to see Chalkhill Blue. Meet at 10.30 in the car park of Royston Sports Club, TL 348405 (sheet 154). Leader will be Terry Rodbard (01582 - 761998)

Sunday, 16 August. Patmore Heath to examine contents of the previous night's moth trap, and to walk the heath. Meet at 10.30:-6km north of Little Hadham, turn right at the Catherine Wheel pub,

and park on the edge of the reserve, at TL 443257 (sheet 167). Leader will be Gavin Vicary (01279 - 771933)

Saturday, 19 September. Moth evening at Stanmore Common, Middlesex. Meet at 7.30 pm in car park of Warren Lane, TQ 159935 (sheet 176). Leader will be John Hollingdale (0181 - 863-2077).



Conservation Dates

Conservation work is one of the most important activities of the Society, as loss or neglect of suitable habitats is one of the major reasons for the decline in many of our butterflies as well as other wildlife.

Below are a series of dates across Herts. and Middlesex where you can help with essential management that aims to maintain the correct conditions on these sites for the wildlife that inhabits them. Several of the dates are run by the HMWT on their nature reserves.

Therfield Heath, TL 335400 First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thomson (01763) 341443.

Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP 952131. Third Sunday of each month. Meet 10.00 a.m. in the lay-by, near Tring station.

Hertford Heath TL 354111. For details ring Anthony Oliver on (01992) 583404.

Fryent Country Park - details from Leslie Williams at the Brent Ecology Unit on (0181) 206 0492

Patmore Heath TL 443257. Meet at 10.00 a.m. on the last Sunday of each month. Further details from Gavin Vicary (01279) 771933

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Committee Members

Chairman: Gavin Vicary

Hillside Cottage, Patmore Heath, Albury, Herts. SG11 2LS(01279) 771933

Branch Organiser: John Stevens

3 Scarborough Road, London N9 8AT(0181) 804 6918

Secretary: Norma Dean

2 Seymour Crescent, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP2 5DS(01442) 252435

Field Trip Officer and Treasurer: John Hollingdale

36 Southfield Park, North Harrow, Middx. HA2 6HE(0181) 863 2077

Newsletter Editor: Ian Small

59 Penn Way, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 2SH..... (01462) 677654

Conservation Advisor: Brian Sawford

38 Northfields, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 4QX(01462) 672287

Records Collator: John Murray

Field End, Marshalls Heath, Wheathampstead, Herts. AL4 8HS (01582) 833544

Membership Secretary: Margaret Noakes

Old Church Cottage, Chapel Lane, Long Marston, Herts HP23 4QT(01296) 660072

Publicity Officer: Terence Rodbard

24 Breadcroft Lane, Harpenden, Herts. AL5 4TE (01582) 761998

Moth Recorder: Rob Souter

29 Woodstock, Knebworth, Herts. SG3 6EA (01438) 816091

Education Officer: Gerry Rirsch

10 Gibbons Close, St. Albans, Herts. AL4 9EP.....(01727) 864387

Sales Officer: Malcolm Hull

11 Abbey View Road, St. Albans, Herts. AL3 4QL(01727) 857893

Alan Downie

11 Fowley Mead Park, Longcroft Drive, Holdbrook,
Waltham Cross, Herts. EN8 7SX(01992) 650829

Please direct your correspondence to the relevant committee member. The magazine is produced by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex branch of Butterfly Conservation (The British Butterfly Conservation Society Ltd.) a registered company in England No. 2206468, which is a registered charity (No. 254937) with limited liability status. Registered Office: Shakespeare House, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6DE. The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the committee or the national society. Copyright 1998.