

---

## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

---

ISSUE 19

SEPTEMBER 1999



**BUTTERFLY  
CONSERVATION**

Turned Out Well,

by Gavin Vicary



It seems to me to be quite a good year for butterflies, despite some particularly wet weather in June and August. This has proved to be something of a bonus as most of our local ponds are still holding some water whereas in previous years many of them have been completely dry at this time.

Our Buddleia seems to be particularly busy at the time of writing (mid-August), the most common visitors just now are Small- and Large Whites. These have taken over from the dozen or so

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

Peacocks that seemed to be permanently resident for the first two weeks of August. Of the other butterflies I usually see on the buddleia only Small Tortoiseshells have been present in lower numbers than usual.

Perhaps the most pleasing sightings on my transects are the large numbers of Common Blues that I have seen this year, especially on the one I walk in North London. Brown Argus are also doing well at the moment on my other transect at Patmore Heath. Some of the more common species such as Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper also seem to have been particularly plentiful this year.

Migrant butterflies appear to be turning up in good numbers at the moment. I have seen several Painted Ladies at the beginning of August along with plenty of Red Admirals. I have also seen Clouded Yellow on two occasions at a disused gravel pit that I have been helping to monitor.



By the time you read this the days will be getting shorter and autumn will virtually be upon us. It will be time to enjoy the last butterflies on the wing until next spring and a last opportunity to record sightings for inclusion in the Millennium Atlas

**Copy Deadline for the December Newsletter will be**

**10 November 1999**

NB it helps the editor if you can submit an electronic copy of your article (but don't worry if you can't). Files can be on disk or sent by e-mail to [ian.small@lineone.net](mailto:ian.small@lineone.net)



**AGM**

**October 27th, 8 pm**

**Cross St. Centre,  
Dagnall Street,  
ST ALBANS**

**Formalities will be brief,  
and be followed by  
refreshments and  
members' slides.**

**BRING A FEW OF YOUR  
BEST BUTTERFLY AND  
MOTH SLIDES TO SHOW**

### A Gardener's Delight, by Malcolm Newland

I have always thought that if you cram your garden full of every butterfly attractant known to man, you probably deserve the odd visit from something special.

Last summer I had my first, and I assumed last, Marbled White that flew around the front garden but did not stop. This year, twelve days earlier on 8 July, again in the front garden, at 5.30 in the afternoon, another one turned up, this time pausing to nectar for several minutes on Greater Knapweed. As I have been trying to build up a portfolio of photographs of butterflies on various plants as a "sales aid" when we are selling plants at the various garden shows which we attend, I had a print film in my camera. The shots that I took of the Marbled White have turned out quite well and should boost the sale of Greater Knapweed plants.

Even better, on 25 July, I noticed a tiny butterfly high up on *Buddleia davidii* in the back garden. A quick look through binoculars revealed it to be a White-letter Hairstreak. The following day it (or another) returned, this time settling for more than 20 minutes on an orange coloured Lantana growing in a pot at very photographable height. Sadly, the butterfly was not in mint condition, having lost its tails, but I took a few photos as evidence.

Most large garden centres have Lantanas for sale in early June and they will flower non-stop if you dead-head them until the first frosts. Peacocks, Green-veined Whites, Small Whites and Gatekeepers have also used Lantana so far.

I have also been experimenting with various members of the *Asclepias* family, but results have been disappointing up to now. If any Monarchs arrive in the autumn, you will be the first to know !!



## Tring Park Transect, by Brian Jessop

On Saturday 10 July at 12.10 I set out on my transect. It was a near perfect day. The sun was out with a temperature of 24°C and a slight breeze. I decided to take my camera with me for some unknown reason – I do not usually take it on the transect walk because it gets in the way. It started off well with 12 Speckled Wood where normally only 3 or 4 would be seen.

Further into the walk I was counting with great difficulty the dozens of Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Gatekeepers and Skippers that were flying up with every couple of steps taken. I am sure most of you will know what I mean when I say that my head was buzzing, trying to identify the Ringlets from the male Meadow Browns, with so much activity going on all around. However, I had a quick look at an area of scrub which had been cleared the previous winter, which was still fairly free from plant life. At the bottom end I noticed a butterfly flying which was different from anything else. It was gliding with a couple of Meadow Browns or Ringlets chasing after it. It gave a couple of beats with its wings and came towards me. That's when I noticed the white bands on the wings and my first instinct said "White Admiral". It settled on the bare ground and I crept slowly to within 3 or 4 feet (1 metre) of it and my brain was telling me it couldn't be what my eyes were seeing. There, in all its glory, was a perfect, beautiful, PURPLE EMPEROR !! – the first I had ever seen. My heart was pounding like mad and I thought, "nobody will believe me when I tell them". I watched it for about 5 minutes as it kept flying a couple of metres and settling on the ground again, oblivious of me as it probed the ground for minerals of whatever.

At this point I remembered I had my camera in my backpack. I backed off while I got it out, not daring to take my eyes off the Purple Emperor. It was then that I realised that I had already taken 24 pictures on the 24-exposure roll of film. There was only one (number 25) to take. I got as close as I dared, got it in focus, and clicked. I hope it comes out OK.

I watched it for a few minutes more. It was turning around on the spot just like Hairstreaks do but without the wing rubbing. What a

## **Hertfordshire and Middlesex**

---

wonderful sight to see the purple sheen come and go as it turned and opened and closed its wings. I felt rather sad when it flew off, but at the same time I felt privileged that I was around at the right place at the right time to see such a beautiful insect.

I was rather disorientated after, when I had to get back to recording Marbled Whites and Meadow Browns. I kept looking back to see if it had returned but once away from the area things got back to normal.

What a great recording season this is turning out to be. What with Grizzled Skipper being recorded for the first time and now a Purple Emperor, what next ??

Happy recording..

### **Editor's Notes, by Ian Small**

You will notice a difference in the newsletter this time. I have incorporated colour for the first time, as a centre-page spread. Please let me know if you like this approach, or would like to see more use of colour. Up to now it has not been possible to include photographs in the newsletter because of the method of producing all the copies. However, Roger Sutton has been forced to give up the central BC copying service as the machine used is terminally ill ! From now on our newsletters will be photocopied, which allows better reproduction of photographs and gives us the opportunity for colour pages (albeit at greater expense !).

Many thanks to those of you who responded to my request for articles - please keep them coming, as my in-tray is now empty !!

## **FIELD TRIP REPORTS**

### **Westbrook Hay, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1999, by Norma Dean**

The Boxmoor Trust own 200 acres of land at Westbrook Hay. There are areas of woodland, a set aside field which is now a mass of wild flowers (grown from seeds provided by Miriam Rothschild) and large areas of untreated natural grassland, with wide rides covered with clover. When Denis and I visited the site on the previous Friday afternoon, the butterflies took off from the clover as we walked along in the sunshine. On this occasion we saw 12 Small Skippers, 59 Marbled White, 51 Meadow Brown, 1 Ringlet and 49 Burnet moths. These were seen in a very small area of the site.

The overcast sky meant that Sunday was not the most promising of days for seeing butterflies and the forecast probably put people off attending. However, five of us did see some butterflies. We saw numerous Burnet moths, some even flying during the shower. Later, when the sun put in a brief appearance we saw Marbled Whites (15), Ringlets (5), Large Skippers (2), Red Admirals (3) and Small Skippers (2), numerous Meadow Browns, a Cinnibar and 2 Silver Y's. We found patches of nettles with their stems covered in Peacock larvae – so hopefully there will be lots of butterflies later on this month.

We were lucky to have David Kirk, a member of the Boxmoor Trust Management Committee, with us on the walk. David told us of the future plans which include the conversion of an ancient barn into an education centre for children. He also pointed out the various walks and woodland paths.

### **Therfield Heath, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1999 by Brian Jessop**

We met as arranged in the car park opposite the sports pavilion. The weather was mainly overcast and quite windy but at least it was warm. There were 20 people in the party, led by Brian Sawford. We started off towards the old rifle range, often the best area for our target species, the Chalkhill Blue. As we approached the grassy

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

slope, the abundance of wild flowers amongst the grasses was a delight to the eyes.

Because of the wind, the butterflies were not flying. However, we did not have to look too hard before we found our first Chalkhill Blue. It caused quite a bit of interest, as many members of the party were new to butterfly watching. After the first one, they seemed to be everywhere. Brian was in his element, showing and naming all the plants along the hillside, some I personally had not seen before. Other butterflies seen along the old rifle range were Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Essex Skipper and Small Heath. As we approached the end of the valley, we saw a Comma, Green-veined White, Large White and Ringlet just before entering the Valley Plantation Wood. Through the woodland, which was partly too shaded for butterflies we saw and watched for a while a Woodpecker going about its business.

Once out of the woodland and back on the grassland we saw a couple of Chalkhill Blues which were away from the main area. As we walked back along the heath, Alan Downie caught a female Chalkhill Blue to let members have a look, before releasing it. There was quite an abundance of Kidney Vetch, but no Small Blues were seen.

A very interesting field trip – highly recommended if it is arranged again. Our thanks to Brian Sawford and Alan Downie.



### **Broxbourne Woods, 25<sup>th</sup> July by Gavin Vicary**

Ten members met me on a hot and sunny morning to search for White Admiral and possibly even Purple Emperor, which has been recorded at Broxbourne Woods. In the event neither of the target species were seen, but we still had a very enjoyable time, as there was plenty of other wildlife for us to see.

Butterfly highlights included Purple Hairstreak which was seen by several members resting at eye level on oak leaves. A Marbled White was also seen right at the very end, but unfortunately most of the party had dispersed by this time. This butterfly has been



spreading in west Hertfordshire but is still a rare sight this far east.

Of the other butterflies the browns were particularly numerous with many Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Speckled Woods being seen. Many Peacocks were found nectaring on hemp agrimony and some time was spent showing members how to differentiate Small Skippers from Essex, but unfortunately none of the latter could be found as a comparison. Large White, Comma, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell made a total of ten species.

Having completed a circular walk we arrived back at the car park earlier than anticipated. One of the ladies on the walk suggested that we go back and visit a pond and meadow that we had not stopped at initially.

This pond turned out to be a real treat as a young grass snake was soon seen swimming. The dragonfly enthusiasts amongst us soon identified Emperor, Southern and Brown Hawkers which made a spectacular site hunting over the pond. In addition Ruddy Darter along with Large Red, Common Blue, Blue Tailed and Emerald damselflies made an excellent total.

On the way back Rozels Bush Cricket was identified by one of our members and a Green Woodpecker was heard to cap off a splendid morning.

### **Clay Lane, 8<sup>th</sup> August by Rob Souter**

This early morning event was run so that members could see the moths caught the previous night and the butterflies of this Three Valleys Water site. An Environmental Learning Centre, opened in September 1998, has since been used by school parties as a base to learn about the importance of water for wildlife. Outside, a butterfly garden has been planted by Alan Downie and has been a great success at attracting butterflies. However, this was the first time that moths have been recorded at the site.

Alan Downie, his son Stephen and myself set up three traps on the Saturday night. Alan's Heath trap was positioned near to the Centre, whilst a Robinson trap was sited on the top of one of the covered reservoirs, approaching tree-top height. These were run overnight. A Skinner trap - which we manned until the early hours - was set up on

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

the other side of a wet woodland, at the wood edge next to a meadow.

A total of 46 macro-moth species were identified. Notable species caught were a melanic Black Arches and a Maple Prominent, two formerly restricted species which have been turning up regularly in recent years, and the nationally notable Barred Hook-tip, a species which is widespread but local in our area. The larvae of the Barred Hook-tip feed on Beech. Another local species, the Ear moth, was noted and was the only species caught that is associated with wet and marshy habitats. Other interesting species were Maiden's Blush and Plain Pug, one of five pug species identified.

The Robinson trap's higher position may be responsible for the high number of Large Yellow Underwing and Common Rustic caught, and the lower number of species caught overall compared to the Skinner trap.

Heavy rain and an early start are likely reasons that only two local people turned up to see the moths but this allowed us time to discuss some finer points of moth identification since any hope of looking for butterflies were washed out.

### **Old Park Wood, Harefield, 15<sup>th</sup> August, by John Hollingdale**

Old Park Wood is a remnant of ancient woodland situated on the eastern slope of the Colne valley. Access can be gained through the main entrance of the famous Harefield hospital and turning first right past outpatients.

There were one or two sunny clearings in the wood that was mainly shaded by the tree canopy. We saw several Speckled Woods and a Green-veined White but the butterflies seen in silhouette high up in the oaks could not be identified.

However, the field alongside the wood looked more promising and so it proved. There were masses of ragwort that had proved attractive to the local Cinnibar moth. We saw several of the striking black and yellow caterpillars. Other moths seen were the Mother of Pearl pyralid moth and a Silver Y.

Common Blues and Meadow Browns were both very common in this field and we saw one Small Copper. The weather was good but quite a strong breeze was blowing. This, and the lateness of the summer, appears to have been the reason for the lack of common butterflies that I would have expected to find at this venue.

### **Stanmore Common, 21<sup>st</sup> August by John Hollingdale**

My moth evenings in the last two years seem to be fated by the ‘wrong’ weather; clear skies and little wind. This one was no exception.

Only eight common species arrived on the sheet and after an hour and a half of getting colder and colder, the six of us decided enough was enough. I had left a Robinson trap on another open area of the common and this had collected fifteen species by morning. These were mostly common species but did include a late Poplar Hawk-moth and a Rosy Rustic.

### **The Trials and Tribulations of Tetrad-Bashing, by Liz Goodyear**

Although I have been watching butterflies for many years, this is the first year that I have visited specific tetrads. John Murray sent me several maps with just “a few” tetrads to visit in the Ware / Harlow / Bishop’s Stortford area, and from my resulting travels I have compiled a Top Ten list of my personal annoyances, with brief explanations, which apart from the top two are in no particular order.

I would make it clear, however, that I have thoroughly enjoyed driving around Hertfordshire on this task, and that the joy of finding what you are looking for far outweighs the dislikes. My list is as follows:

- Treading in dog muck

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

- Smelling dog muck but not knowing where it is!
- Thistles
- Grass seeds which get in socks and shoes ( I have two pairs of socks which resemble hedgehogs)
- Stinging nettles (no offence to the nettle feeders)
- Horseflies and other nasty biting insects (I always have a tube of sting-relief cream in my pocket now)
- Trying to identify Small / Essex Skippers on a hot sunny day
- Visiting a tetrad and not being able to find anywhere decent to park
- Weathermen who say the sun will shine and it doesn't or goes in just as you visit your first tetrad. (Being part-time self-employed and full-time Mum I have to plan ahead and rely on the weathermen getting it right)
- Farmers who “accidentally” forget that a footpath runs through a field and plant crops across it. Oil seed rape and flax are particularly nasty to walk through

### **Bowles on Butterflies, by Valerie Carter**

The renowned plantsman Edward Augustus Bowles created a famous garden at Myddelton House, Bulls Cross, a few hundred yards from my recording site on Forty Hill, Enfield. He lived at Myddelton House all his life (1865 – 1954) and wrote a best-selling trilogy describing the garden at every season of the year.

In *My Garden in Summer* Bowles describes how he tried to prolong the flowering season of Buddleias. He goes on: “One of the greatest charms of these purple Buddleias is their attractiveness to insects, for if there is a Peacock, Painted Lady or Admiral Butterfly in the neighbourhood it is certain to spend many hours flitting over or sucking at the long purple spikes and driving off a Large Cabbage White or two....but the Small Tortoiseshells seem capable of holding their own, so are respected by the larger insects. Then after dark the Buddleia spikes are visited by most of the Noctuae then on the wing, and an acetylene lamp reveals their identity, and

the rarities are easy to box from the lower spikes or to tap into a net from those over one's head.”

E A Bowles waged a relentless campaign against what he called the Cabbage White Butterflies. He was founder and president of the quaintly named Forty Hill Mutual Improvement Horticultural Society (still going strong). In 1941, the schedule for the society's annual exhibition offered prizes for flowers, fruit and vegetables, with a class (no. 48) for “White Butterflies, the Large and Small Cabbage Whites (not the Green-veined White), to be pinned on White Paper, for Children under 14. 6d will be given for every 50 Butterflies.”

Myddelton House is now the headquarters of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. The gardens, which contain many of the 70 or so plants that bear Bowles' name are open to the public every weekday and on some Sundays.

### **A Year Plus in Millhoppers, by John Noakes (Reserve Manager)**

It is just over one year since we acquired our first reserve at Millhoppers in Long Marston. So it is timely to provide a brief report on management and monitoring activity as well as some thoughts on future plans.

#### Management.

Our main objectives have been;

- To reduce the coarse grasses by cutting and taking off the material at appropriate times during the year in order to encourage finer grasses and wild flowers.
- To contain the spread of blackthorn scrub into the grass land. While providing a haven for bird life and protecting a badger set it has proved remarkably invasive.

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex



*White-Letter Hairstreak (Strymonidia ne-album)* © by Mario Maier  
Removal of litter, particularly beer cans has been a continuous

White-Letter Hairstreak - see article, page 4



*Purple Emperor (Apatura iris)* © by Mario Maier

Purple Emperor - see article, page 5



Cinnibar moth caterpillars on ragwort - see article, page 11

Scarce Silver-lines moth - see article, page 22

reserve. with this in mind we have approached certain

of

co

In

W

co

M

th

W

ha

li

se

kr

N

ne

M



to  
th  
ce

n,  
so  
ve  
e,

of

Cinnibar Moth - see article, page 11

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

A survey of the number, size and state of black poplar trees has been undertaken by Margaret Noakes as part of a local project. 16 mature trees are on site. They are probably our largest native tree and becoming quite rare. Dragonflies look to be of potential interest particularly if the pond scheme goes ahead. We hope to do some monitoring in this area. There is quite a rich bird life on the reserve but so far we have not systematically recorded them.



### Publicity/Education.

The official opening day on 6<sup>th</sup> June 98 was followed by a members open day. This year the members open day resulted in only 7 attendees. Perhaps we didn't profile it well enough?

Moth evenings proved interesting and entertaining. In all we have held three. Not being a moth cognoscente I found it amusing to hear cries in the dark of "It's another Drinker" or "I think that one could be a Setaceous Hebrew Character." The last evening provided some black comedy, when two policemen descended on the group expecting to find a Druid ceremony or a local drug ring. They were perplexed to discover the mysteries of Millhoppers midnight moth madness! However it was reassuring to know there was local constabulary concern. Species list appended.

We have been able to make worthwhile contacts with Long Marston primary school. We visited the school on two separate occasions and on each visit spent time with three classes. Butterflies were brought to life by showing them caterpillars of Orange Tips and Brimstones found in our garden. They quickly realised the benefits of camouflage as a means of protection as well as specific caterpillar food plants. Two weeks later they were excited to see them as pupae. I think we were just as excited to see their response!

We finally organised a visit to the reserve for a class of twenty four

---



eight year olds. It was a lovely sunny day with lots of Ringlets and Meadow Browns flying. By chance we found a colony of Peacock larvae feeding on nettles. This enabled us to explain another means of protection to survive-masses of writhing, black things; hairy and unpleasant to eat. That is from a bird's point of view.

In all the school visits and the trip to the reserve was a great success. To see enthusiasm about the environment at this young age and from their teachers was very heartening. We hope to develop this local contact.

Most recently, we presented our work on Millhoppers together with a B.C. stall at the Long Marston village show on 7<sup>th</sup> August . It is always difficult to know what impact we make on these occasions but we certainly sold a lot of butterfly friendly plants. Many thanks to Malcolm Newland for providing so many.

To end on rather a boring note, we do have problems re parking, as we do not have particularly good relationships with our adjoining farmers. We would request all visitors to park in Wilstone village hall car park and walk to the reserve. Of course if bringing heavy equipment such as that used by our moth freaks then a car can be taken into the reserve but it will need unlocking two gates-key with reserve manager.

Clearly we do need good navigational instructions for visitors and consideration for those who find the walk difficult. We will attempt to organise a map and instructions later in the year.

Finally, a very big thank you to all those who have given time to help during our first year. A special thanks to Malcolm Newland who has helped me out on several occasions with very little advanced notice.

### **Millhopper's Butterfly List, 1999**

	<b>1st Appearance</b>
Brimstone	1/4/99
Peacock	1/4/99
Speckled Wood	24/4/99
Orange Tip	5/5/99
Small White	5/5/99
Green-veined White	5/5/99
Holly Blue	16/5/99

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

Large White	25/5/99
Red Admiral	13/6/99
Large Skipper	13/6/99
Meadow Brown	25/6/99
Ringlet	2/7/99
Small Tortoiseshell	10/7/99
Small Skipper	10/7/99
Essex Skipper	10/7/99
Gatekeeper	10/7/99
Comma	10/7/99
Marbled White	17/7/99
Common Blue	30/7/99
Painted Lady	1/8/99
Small Copper	2/8/99

### Millhopper's Moth List for 12th June

**Alan Bernard**  
**1st Section near Marshy area**  
**(moth trap)**

**John Hollingdale**  
**3rd Section**  
**(light with sheet)**

Silver Ground Carpet	same
Green Carpet	same
Brimstone	same
Clouded Border	same
Flame Shoulder	same
Setaceous Hebrew Character	same
Small Clouded Brindle	same
Dusky Brocade	same
Common Wainscot	same
Common Swift	same
Common Marbled Carpet	Blood Vein
Clouded Silver	Phoenix
Pale Prominent	Double Striped Pug
Heart and Dart	Mottled Border
Dark Swordgrass	Elephant Hawk Moth
Double Square Spot	Buff Ermine
Nutmeg	Large Yellow Underwing
Angle Shades	Bright Line Brown Eye
Common Pug	Clouded Brindle
Dark Arches	Minor Shoulder-Knot
Spectacle	Tawny Marbled Minor
Pale Shouldered Brocade	Mottled Rustic
	Straw Dot
	Burnished Brass

22 moths  
(36 separate species)

24 moths

**The Moth Page, by Rob Souter** *(note new phone number and address on rear cover of newsletter).*

**Symondshyde Wood Moth Evening. Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July.**

Around a dozen people turned up for the first branch visit to this remnant of ancient woodland, just north-east of St. Albans. I have done some recording at this site during the last couple of years and have turned up some good species.

On the night of July 10<sup>th</sup> two traps were run. A Robinson trap, which I set up on a picnic table in a glade, and a Skinner trap, positioned at the edge of the wood next to an open grassy area. The Robinson was the most effective and attracted a number of woodland species.

The best species of the night was a slightly tatty Beautiful Carpet, apparently one of the few records for Herts. (No recent records in south Herts. for several years according to Plant, 1993). A Pine Hawkmoth, three Black Arches and a Maple Prominent were the other noteworthy species recorded, whilst Fern, Scarce Silver-lines and Nut-tree Tussock were also of interest. From a total of 42 macro-moths species recorded, Yellow-tail and Common Footman were by far the most abundant species.

As always, those attending had an enjoyable evening.

**National Moth Night, Bayfordbury. Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July.**

About nine people attended this event held as part of National Moth Night (details in last newsletter). The Bayfordbury site is the University of Hertfordshire Field Station where I conduct a butterfly transect walk and also use it to investigate the ecology of the Ringlet butterfly.

The Robinson trap was set up on the lawn between the glasshouses and the mansion garden, and was run all night. A Skinner trap was operated near to the lake until about 1am.

An impressive list of 64 macro-moth species was recorded, a good

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

---

total for one night. The most noteworthy were two Black Arches, and a Bulrush Wainscot. The latter species was likely to have come from the very nearby pond but had only made it halfway to the light as it was collected out of the grass in the morning. Slender Brindle, Scorched Carpet, Large Twin-spot Carpet and Minor Shoulder-knot were also of interest. Common but impressive species were three each of Elephant and Poplar Hawk-moth. Most abundant species were Common/Lesser Common Rustic (not separated), Dark Arches, Large Yellow Underwing, Common Footman, Riband Wave and Yellow-tail.

The majority of species were recorded by 1am when most people had left but there was great numbers of Common Rustic sp. and Dark Arches which were active late at night, and were abundant in the trap by morning.

The results were passed on with a handful of lists from other branch members to Brian Goodey in Essex, who is collating national results.

### **Sugaring and Wine Roping by Rob Souter**

For this issue I thought I would tell/remind you of methods other than light trapping that can be used to see and record moths.

This article is based on pieces by Paul Waring, who wrote about wine-roping in the national BC news, and on suggested sugar recipes from subscribers to the internet newsgroup on Lepidoptera ([sci.bio.entomology.lepidoptera](mailto:sci.bio.entomology.lepidoptera)).

Wine-roping and sugaring are both baiting techniques which involve putting out sweet-smelling and rich-tasting food to attract moths.

#### **Sugaring.**

The traditional mixture used in sugaring is a potion of black treacle laced with an alcoholic beverage, a drop of amyl acetate, and fruit or chutney. This is then painted in strips on tree-trunks and fence-posts at dusk.

Here is a suggested recipe:

1 lb (450 g) of dark brown sugar

1/2 pint (250 ml) of apple cider vinegar, beer or stout

1 banana ripened to a solid brown, golden inside

2 dessert spoons (about 50 ml) of Golden Syrup

A few drops of Amyl-acetate (reported to significantly enhance the catch).

Before starting ensure the saucepan you use will allow for a 200% increase in volume.

1. Mix the vinegar, beer or stout with the sugar until it is dissolved as it will get.
2. Mash or blend the banana (including skin) and add with the golden syrup to (1).
3. Heat VERY gently, stirring frequently, for 15 to 20 minutes, at which time everything should have dissolved and the mix will start to boil.
4. Reduce the heat until the mix is simmering, stirring frequently and then simmer for about 10 minutes, stirring several times (to prevent overflow and keep the mixture from solidifying at the edges).
5. Allow to cool, stirring every five or so minutes.
6. Bottle the mix whilst still lukewarm.

Before use, stir and add a little spirit (e.g. rum). Apply with a paintbrush and ensure you have some water to rinse the brush and your hands (otherwise a very sticky night's nothing will ensue!).

A draw back with sugaring is that it requires substantial amounts of sugaring mixture over the season, particularly if sugaring at several different sites.

### **Wine-roping.**

Wine-roping is much simpler and cheaper than sugaring. All you do is dissolve as much white granulated sugar as you can into a bottle of cheap red wine. The wine should be warmed in a pan to help dissolve more sugar and produce a saturated solution. Empty the whole lot into a plastic tub with a lid. Next, cut about ten lengths of

## **Hertfordshire and Middlesex**

---

thick absorbent string, each about one meter long, and submerge them in the tub of liquid to produce the wine-ropes. These are left in the liquid until they are needed, and are returned to it afterwards. The moths settle on the rope or on the foliage on which it is laid and extend their proboscises to feed. Alcohol in the mixture makes them a little less alert and easier to box for examination but many can be identified by the light of a dull torch and left to feed undisturbed. Moths are less sensitive to red light and a rear bicycle light or some red cellophane inserted into a normal torch is a useful tip which may save you hunting around for the moth that jumped off the rope into the vegetation below on being illuminated. Other moths will flit off into the darkness if you shine a bright light on them.

### **Timing.**

The best time of year for wine-roping and sugaring is from July to September on warm nights with a slight breeze.

### **Location.**

The best sites are along rides, sheltered edges of woods and hedgerows. Tree trunks, fence posts and clumps of vegetation can be painted with the sugar mixture whilst well-soaked wine-ropes should be laid over the foliage of bushes, hedges and the lower branches of trees.

### **Results.**

Results with both sugaring and wine-roping vary considerably, from just a moth or two per rope or strip, to crowds almost shoulder to shoulder. Sugar definitely works better if you use the same beat night after night. Both sugar and wine-ropes should be inspected frequently. The first moths may take only a few minutes to arrive and the greatest numbers generally arrive within an hour of dusk. If you have not found many moths by two hours after dark you are unlikely to do so and are best trying again on another night.

Although you will not see the range of moths at bait that you would by operating a light trap, the baiting method is much less expensive and if you are just beginning with moths this could be an ideal method of getting started.

### **Species attracted.**

A few species are more prone to come to bait than to light. The Old

---

Lady moth is a good example. Likewise the Red Underwing *Catocala nupta*, which occurs widely where poplar and willow trees grow in southern Britain, and which does not show up in light traps in any numbers until quite late in its flight season, long after the first have been seen at bait or at rest on walls. Wine-roping has become a valuable technique for surveying the Crimson Underwings, *C. promissa* and *C. sponsa* which are now largely confined to the bigger oakwoods of Hampshire and south Wiltshire.

So, if you have no light trap, how about a trip to the supermarket for some plonk and sugar? If you already have other equipment, it is still worth adding some wine-ropes to your mothing gear.

**ADVANCE NOTICE...WINTER INDOOR MEETINGS**

**Jan 15th, 2000.** Butterflies of the Eastern Pyrennees

**Feb 26th, 2000.** Dragonflies of Hertfordshire

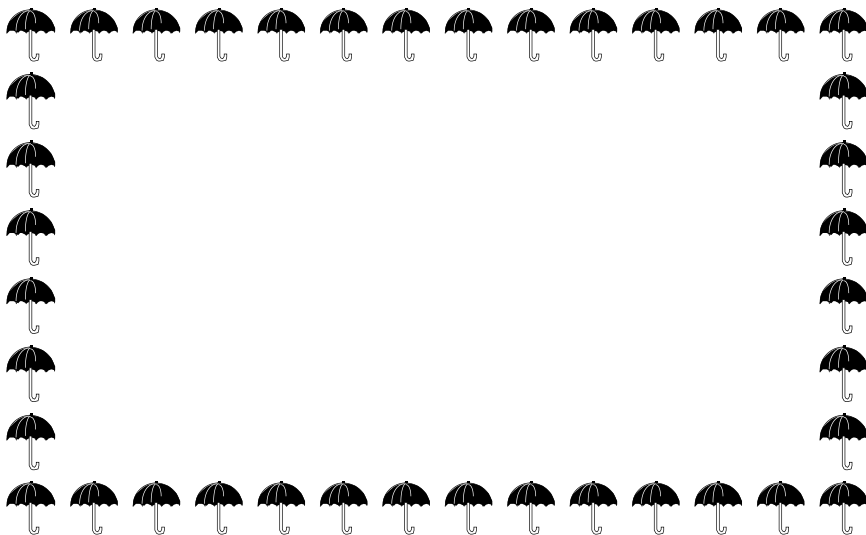
March - title and date to be arranged - details in next newsletter

All talks to be held in the Welwyn Civic Centre, Old Welwyn, at 2.30 pm. Refreshments will be provided. A map and full details will be given in the December newsletter.











## 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.

**Millhopper's Pasture** - 4th Sunday of the month, 1st work party is Oct 24<sup>th</sup> (meet at 10.30). Come along and help us with our own butterfly reserve. Contact John and Margaret Noakes (01296 660072) who will co-ordinate sustenance (lunch time) at Old Church Cottage..

**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. For details ring Alan Strawn (new reserve warden) on (01442) 232946

**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

**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  
ian.small@lineone.net

**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  
J.B.Murray@open.ac.uk

**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  
cddc@compuserve.com

**Moth Recorder: Rob Souter**

54 Willowmead, Hertford, Herts, SG14 2AT \*\*\*NEW \*\*\* .....(01992) 410783  
R.Souter@psy.herts.ac.uk

**Sales Officer: Malcolm Hull**

11 Abbey View Road, St. Albans, Herts. AL3 4QL.....(01727) 857893  
meh@stalbans.dircon.co.uk

**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 1999.