

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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It Can Only Get Better...

by Gavin Vicary

I hope by the time you read these notes that the weather will have taken a turn for the better. The time of writing is the bank holiday at the end of May and it seems to have rained virtually non-stop for two days now.

I read some reports of early season migrants such as the painted lady starting to build up numbers on the continent earlier in the year. If the weather does turn favourable, this would indicate that there is a reasonable chance of them starting to arrive in good

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numbers.

You should have received the branch butterfly report for 1999 by now and as usual John Murray, Rob Souter and Michael Healy have done a tremendous job in producing this.

Regrettably Rob has decided to leave the branch committee, at the next AGM, as he is going to be moving away from the area. We will greatly miss his input, particularly regarding moths, but would like to wish him well.

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Andrew Wood and Liz Goodyear who have joined the committee.

One of our members, Christine Shepperson, has continued the study that she has been conducting into the occurrence of the grizzled skipper in our branch area. This butterfly is one of our rarer species, but, has been seen at a number of its known sites in Hertfordshire this year.

One population could potentially be threatened by planned work to a railway embankment but on the positive side a new site has been found for the grizzled skipper, this year. This site was an area we looked at acquiring a couple of years ago when we were looking at potential reserves in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. At the time Brian Sawford identified the site as ideal for grizzled skipper and he returned there in May with Christine and did indeed find the butterfly and was able to photograph it.

Field trips and other events are detailed in this issue and I hope those who are able to attend find them enjoyable.





Advance Notice...

This year's AGM will be on
Wednesday, November 1st
at 8pm

Cross Street Centre,
Dagnall Street, St. Albans.

The AGM will be followed by
refreshments and
members' slides

...so get your camera out over the next few months
and bring a few of your best butterfly and moth
images to share with us.

If you haven't joined us on previous occasions, don't be
put off. We try to get the formalities over with as quickly
as possible so that we can get on with viewing the slides
members bring. As long as the subject matter is
Lepidoptera then it doesn't matter if it is butterfly or
moth, adult, larva or egg, UK or foreign - we usually have
a grand mixture of all of these.

See you there....



Butterfly Migration: What to Record, by John Murray

One of the earliest records of a butterfly migration dates from 9th July 1508, at Calais on the north coast of France. Abstracted from chronicles in the British Museum library, it roughly translates: “1508, the 23rd year of Henry VII, the 9th of July, being Relyke Sunday, there was seen at Calais an innumerable swarm of white butterflies coming out of the northeast and flying south-eastwards, so thick as flakes of snow, that men being a-shooting in St. Peter’s field without the town of Calais could not see the town at four of the clock in the afternoon, they flew so high and so thick” (from C.B.Williams, *Insect Migration*, Collins 1958).

What is remarkable about this account is that, for the time, the scientific information contained therein is unusually complete. It gives the year, the date, the time of day, the locality where seen, the direction of flight, and information which enables us to get a rough estimate of the number of butterflies involved (they couldn’t see the town) and also to guess that the species was Large White, since the movement described accords with what we now know about movements of this species of butterfly.

Migrations of such large numbers of butterflies are a thing of the past, at least as far as Europe is concerned. Nowadays, a butterfly migration might not be noticed by ordinary members of the public. The most recent large scale butterfly migration in Britain was the Painted Lady northward movement during the early days of June 1996, when millions of Painted Ladies crossed the English Channel, invaded the south coast and then crossed Britain from south to north. However, as the Herts & Middx Annual Report for 1996 describes, the numbers of butterflies seen at any one place rarely exceeded one every couple of minutes, not enough to attract much media attention, and even some butterfly watchers did not remark anything unusual.

As I write (mid-May) there are reports of large numbers of Painted Ladies amassing on the other side of the Channel, so it is possible that we shall be soon experiencing another invasion of this species. Part of the reason for writing this article is to suggest what information you should be noting down if you witness a migration of this or any other species.

What to do in a butterfly migration

Once you have seen 3 or 4 butterflies moving determinedly in the same direction, you should start to suspect a migration. The **minimum** information you should then note down is:

1. The place where seen
2. Year and date
3. Species of butterfly
4. Direction of flight
5. Name of the recorder

Additional useful information would be:

6. Time of start and end of migration (or of first and last butterflies seen)
7. Numbers of butterflies involved
8. Speed of the butterflies
9. Wind speed and direction, cloud etc.
10. Height of butterflies above ground



11. Any other information (behaviour, other species flying in the same direction etc.)

The place where seen should include a grid reference if possible, otherwise enough details for it to be found on a map. The direction of flight should be determined as well as possible; in practice not every butterfly will fly in exactly the same direction, but when you are satisfied as to the average direction, try and get this as accurate as possible (e.g. is it really north? or nearer northwest, or north-northwest?) with either a compass or by using reference points on a map.

Speed of flight is a valuable piece of information to measure, but

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will obviously take more trouble, and has rarely been done in the past. The best way to do this is to time how long the butterfly takes to cross a garden or similar well-defined length that can then be measured afterwards. Most digital watches have a stopwatch nowadays, so quite accurate measurements can be made. You do have to be able to see the butterflies coming: I was able to do this during 1996 when the butterflies could be seen approaching my garden across the adjacent field, and in this way was able to get several measurements of speed.

Numbers of butterflies involved is best determined by counting the number of butterflies that cross a line of measured length in a certain time. Again a garden fence can be used, provided it is more or less across the line of flight. The wind speed (on the Beaufort scale) and direction should also be noted, plus any other meteorological information, though this can usually be sufficiently well determined from weather stations nearby.

Finally, send your observations in to the Branch Recorder as soon as possible. Butterfly migrations are rare but very interesting events, giving us a brief opportunity to collect valuable information, so make the most of them.

PostScript: Nick Bowles posted the following information on the internet on June 8th:

Several reports of P Lady entering from France this week. After a 'dribble' earlier in the week, good numbers of Painted Lady into Kent all day on the 7th. Numbers were estimated at 100s, in fields immediately inland from the coast, Elmley Marsh RSPB reserve, Kent. Also sightings much further north.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Aldbury Nowers and Ivinghoe Beacon – Sunday 21st May 2000 by Liz Goodyear

It was hard to believe that as I drove the 40 odd miles to Aldbury Nowers in rain that the day was going to turn out so brilliantly. For all those members who woke up that Sunday morning and thought that there was no point in going to the field trips because the weather was so bad, this article will prove you were wrong!

As I waited for Alan Downie our leader for the Aldbury Nowers Field Trip, the heavens opened and the rain just poured down, but then Brian Jessop and Malcolm Newland turned up so I knew I wasn't the only person that was mad. Alan accompanied by son Steven duly arrived and the five of us walked up the hillside armed with waterproofs and umbrellas.

It wasn't long before something flew up out of the grass, which was identified by Alan as a Treble Bar moth – well we had seen something! We arrived at one of the areas that Duke of Burgundy had been seen in the past and although the rain had stopped, the sky was still overcast so we assumed it would be lucky if we found any butterflies. We were wrong, a Small Heath was disturbed and then we saw that under a dried seed head a Brown Argus could be seen resting.

Alan then took us up one of the higher levels of the transect route to try and find Green Hairstreak. The whole area is a mass of Wild Strawberry and Rock Rose and when the sun shone the air was filled with the scent of Wild Thyme. Although no Green Hairstreak were found we counted over 25 Brown Argus resting under the seed heads, it was an amazing sight. I was just passing a seed head, when something caught my eye, a tiny speckled butterfly, wings closed was perched on the top of the seed. Everyone rushed over and Alan gave



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the confirmation that I wanted to hear - a Grizzled Skipper. In total we found 4 of these tiny creatures, the highest Alan had ever recorded at Aldbury Nowers with the possibility of a fifth one, although this one was seen after the sun had come out briefly and might have been one of the originals relocating themselves!

Finally, now with sun shining we moved to an area rich in cowslips, but although we looked hard for Duke of Burgundy none could be found.

It was now time to move on to Ivinghoe Beacon. Alan and Steven had to go home so the three of us drove over to Ivinghoe. Since the weather was so improved we expected to find several people waiting for us but no one else turned up. I find this so disappointing, these field trips are organised by the committee for the branch members' enjoyment. Both Alan Downie and Malcolm Newland had given up their free time to be leaders and apart from Brian and myself no one had come.

But read on because what we saw at Ivinghoe will I hope make members realise quite what they missed. We walked away from the carpark to a sheltered section where Malcolm was confident we would find butterflies and how right he was. There basking on the side of a gully was a newly emerged Duke of Burgundy, a spectacular sight. Within seconds though I had seen a second butterfly and quickly realised this was a Dingy Skipper. In this short section we counted 7 Dukes and 5 Dingy Skippers. Brown Argus and a singleton Common Blue was also seen, then at last a Green Hairstreak my first ever sighting.



Malcolm then took us to a different area hoping to see more Dukes. Unfortunately by now the clouds had returned and only one more was seen but in an area of hawthorn bushes we saw at least 7 Green Hairstreak. We soon realised that the best of the day was over, but what a day: I shan't forget it – thank you Alan and Malcolm



Field Trip – Millhopper’s Pasture BC Reserve – Moth Evening, by Rob Souter

The first organised branch moth evening of the year was held at the branch’s reserve at Millhopper’s Pasture, Long Marston on Saturday 3rd June. Alan Bernard, a local member and moth recorder and myself ran two MV traps at the edge of the grassland close to the scrub border. Unfortunately only one member turned up, although a group of locals came for a post-dinner walk to see what was being caught.

The catch was quite successful since 30 species of macro-moths and 3 species of micro-moths were recorded. Alan tried the light over the sheet method, which reduced the glaring effect of the light and was initially more successful. But later the Skinner trap I was using pulled in the majority of species and individuals.

Common Swifts arrived first in number followed by an array of common geometers. The Scorched Wing was the most notable and attractive of these. Amongst a variety of noctuids of note were 2 Figure of Eighty, a Dusky Brocade and a Small Clouded Brindle. Other species of interest were 2 White Ermine, a Pale Tussock and a Pale Prominent.

The rain had stayed away when we packed up at 12:30.

A Butterfly Meadow in Knebworth Park, by Arthur C Smith

I first discovered Knebworth Park in 1952 when my wife and I moved from Chelsea to Stevenage with our young family. We took occasional walks there and I particularly remember a sort of folly resembling part of a church wall on which our children had fun playing: it was near the west end of the lake, but disappeared long ago. I knew little about butterflies then although I had been studying natural history since my early teens in the 1930's, when my sisters and I went on early morning walks to watch birds on Bernard's Heath in St. Albans; and at boarding school in Oxford I found my first Water Avens and Green-winged Orchids in water meadows by the river Cherwell.

It was not until the late 1980's that I decided it was time to take butterflies seriously, in addition to a lifelong interest in birds and wildflowers, and serious studies of wild orchids, fungi, fossils and astronomy.

In spite of the spreading urbanisation of Stevenage, a sixty acres wood is five minutes walk from my home in one direction and the town centre is five minutes away in the other direction! Knebworth Park takes a little longer to reach and it contains unspoilt areas full of exciting wildlife. Bordering Wintergreen Wood is what might be termed a water-meadow if the little stream running through it flowed permanently, but unfortunately this is not so because it dries up for much of the summer and only flows after periods of heavy rain.

However, the meadow abounds with butterflies in the summer. The habitat is ideal for them being full of old ant-hills, coarse grasses and many wild flowers such as Birdsfoot Trefoil, Marsh Thistle, Field Thistle, Common Fleabane, Water Mint and others. This year (1999) Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Green-veined Whites were plentiful. Also to be seen were Orange Tips, Brimstones, Common Blues, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Small and Large Whites and many Skippers, but I had difficulty getting close enough to the latter to identify the different species. I obtained my first photographs of Ringlets here this summer. A Green Woodpecker frequents the meadow and usually flies up with a yaffle towards the

wood on my approach. Spotted Flycatchers and Long-tailed Tits can occasionally be seen near the woods. At each end of the meadow there is a large pond much overgrown with reeds, rushes and other vegetation; they tend to dry up during hot summer weather and are very muddy due to deer paddling in them; nevertheless, they support a few of the more common species of dragonflies which all too easily distract my attention from the butterflies.



Much of my butterfly observations are made while out on training runs, and if my route is in the countryside west of Stevenage I usually return through Knebworth Park, entering it from the road, over the high deer stile at the south-west corner of Wintergreen Wood which leads straight into the butterfly meadow. This disadvantage while out running is that I do not carry camera, binoculars, notepad and therefore sometimes miss good opportunities for photography and precise identification. On one such occasion in 1997 on the eastern border of Stevenage I came across five Skippers clustered on one flowering Teasel head - a golden opportunity for photography about which I could do nothing; nor could I make a precise species identification between Small, Essex and Large Skippers because my long-distance spectacles did not focus close enough !



Perhaps my only rare butterfly sightings were some years ago before I concentrated on them. One occasion was when out in rough grassland countryside bordering Hatfield aerodrome, when I spotted a green-winged butterfly for a few seconds which soon flew off. I did not know there were any green butterflies until seeing a photo of the Green Hairstreak some time later in a library text book.. Another time was near a junction of paths with the Icknield Way on Telegraph Hill, when walking beside some scrubby woodland, I saw in front of me a few small white butterflies flying in an unusually lazy manner as if they were drunken: they did not seem characteristic of Small Whites and had

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no black tipped wings. I shall never know if they may have been Wood Whites.

I seldom meet anyone when out on my country rambles, but in the middle of June I met Ken King near Burleigh Farm on one of his tetrad walks from Knebworth Park. He gave me some useful hints about identification being more of an expert on butterflies than I. So next summer I hope to spot a few more species in addition to the common ones in my favourite meadow.

Formation of a Herts Moth Group, by Rob Souter

The first meeting of the Herts. Moth Group (HMG) took place on Saturday 8th April 2000. This account is summarised from the newsletter sent out to HMG members following the meeting.

Thirty-four people were present at the meeting room at Digswell. Colin Plant, the Hertfordshire Moth Recorder (as appointed by the HNHS) and myself led the meeting which began with a "pep talk" from Brian Goodey of the Essex Moth Group, who gave very helpful do's and don'ts regarding the setting up and organisation of a county moth group. Colin Plant then gave a summary of the current state of recording in Herts. He reported that records of Hertfordshire moths comprises 1431 species of which 589 are larger moths (macrolepidoptera) and 842 are microlepidoptera. However, these are not all "current" records and some will certainly now be extinct (e.g., Small Eggar, Reed Leopard), some might just possibly be re-found (e.g., Argent and Sable, Heart Moth, White-spotted Pinion) and others should be still here (mostly micros). I gave a summary of BC's role in the increasingly popular study of moths, emphasising the considerable co-operation that continues to take place between BC and HNHS.

After a prolonged tea-break, to allow attendees to put faces to names, a final hour was spent in informal discussion about what the group might do. It was agreed that the Herts Moth Group would be an informal group with no membership fee. It would be open to anyone with an interest in Hertfordshire moths. It will meet twice a year and there will be four newsletters a year. A few organised field trips would be run, as would a series of workshops combining field

craft with laboratory work. Items suggested included identification of leaf-miners, how to examine moth genitalia and how to find clearwing moths.

Graham White, Conservation Manager of the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust emphasised the lack of moth records from almost all the Trust's nature reserves and invited moth group members to carry out recording work on these sites. Anyone who wished to start recording should initially telephone Graham at the Trust office on 01727 858901 during office hours.

It was agreed that in future, all moth records for Hertfordshire should, in the first instance, be sent to Colin Plant for validation and entry. He will then pass on the data to anyone who needs it.

HMG FIELD MEETINGS PROGRAMME

A series of field trips has been arranged to cover three main habitat types (woodland, chalk grassland and marshland) spread over as much of the county as possible. Anyone is welcome to attend. Extra moth traps (including actinic traps) are welcomed at all meetings.

Therfield Heath, Royston Saturday 24th June 2000

Meet: Golf course car park on west side of Therfield Road at grid ref. TL336404 (OS sheet 154, where the unfenced track crosses the yellow road running north out of Therfield across Therfield Heath).

Assemble: from 8 pm to 8.30 pm. Late-comers can follow the track west out of the car park across the golf course until it turns left below Church Hill. Keep going - we are at the end.

Trap site: We will be driving west along the unfenced track arising from Therfield Road to the area marked as Pen Hills on the OS map. Vehicles limited to those carrying equipment, but I can get several passengers in the van. Calcareous grassland with scrub/woodland. Non-slip foot-ware recommended for grassy slopes, but avoid walking on golf greens please. Leader - Colin Plant.

Amwell Quarry Wildlife Reserve Friday 14th July 2000

Meet: The entrance to the site at TL374135, on the west side of Hollycross Road, and just north of the road bridge crossing the former St. Margarets-Buntingford railway line. Hollycross Road is

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the road along the east side of the Lea Valley between Stanstead Abbots and Ware. The entrance gate will be open, and there is a parking area on the right hand side, some 100 yards further down the driveway.

Assemble: from 8 pm to 8.30 pm. Some of our activity will be close to the parking area and latecomers will therefore have no difficulty finding us.

Trap site: An area of former gravel workings restored specifically for nature conservation. Bring warm clothing and dry footwear – mosquito repellent is advised. Leader - Tom Gladwin.

Rye Meads Nature Reserve Friday 28th July 2000

Meet: Gate to reserve at TL 395106 (map sheet 166, on north side of the yellow road where it is reached by a footpath). Recommended approach from the east (B.181 Stansted Abbots exit on the A.414). If approaching from the west (Hoddesdon) you will need 30 pence each way for the coin-operated toll barrier!

Assemble: from 8 pm to 8.30 pm. Late-comers should be able to find us easily on the reserve.

Trap site: Reedbeds and damp woodland. May need wellies and mosquito repellent. Leader - Colin Plant.

Wilstone Reservoir Nature Reserve (marshland) Saturday 19th August 2000

Meet: Beside the cemetery on the B489 Aston Clinton to Ivinghoe road at grid reference SP 912135 (OS sheet 165 - car parking is available here). A track (gated and locked) leads across a field, behind the reservoir then through a gate (marked PRIVATE) to the trapping site at SP 908129 (marked as landing stage on the map).

Assemble: from 8 pm to 8.30 pm. Cars with trapping equipment will be let through the gate to the site. Latecomers can walk down the track.

Trap site: This reserve is a large area of reedbed backed onto by sallow and woodland. Wellies may be required. A barbecue will be

available so bring your own food and refreshments. Leader - Ian Burrus.

HERTS COUNTY MOTH NIGHT

One of the suggestions from the meeting was that we should have a county moth night where everyone would make a positive effort to run a moth trap somewhere new in Herts. as well as in their garden. Repeating this exercise year after year will be of use in detecting trends in population densities if the night is held at roughly the same season each time.

The county moth night for year 2000 is to be on Saturday 1st July (overnight to 2nd July).



Magic of the Maritimes, by Clive Burrows

Last summer, in mid July, I spent a week travelling around the Maritime Alps. Setting off with a group and wildlife leader, we visited a number of varied, selected sites. These would range from high, damp alpine meadows down to hot, dry grassy ones in the valleys. All sites not only promised a wealth of butterfly life but also an array of flower and bird life.

After arriving in Nice, we soon started our climb away. Heading north into the quiet mountain roads, we soon located our hamlet base for the week. This was situated near the town of St Martin du Vesubie, at around 1500m. Our first day visit was a short one, taking us just a few km up from our base into the surrounding National Park du Mercantour. The habitat here was typical of this area, rich flowery small meadows spread between areas of forest and often offset by the sound of crystal clear stream waters. One wet meadow, so small in size, hosted an array of Coppers. The local



Purple-edged Copper

race of the Purple-edged Copper ‘eurydame’ was abundant, flying here with the Sooty, Scarce and Purple-shot Coppers. The tracksides that were more shady produced Heath Fritillaries and a number of Ringlets including the Large, Almond-eyed and Piedmont. Warmer, flowery banks, covered in Thistles, Scabious, Clover and Vetch would be surrounded by a number of smaller butterflies. The fast flying Silver-spotted Skipper, Idas Blue, Titania’s Fritillary and Large Blues on Wild Thyme would all vie for one’s attention.

Our next day’s journey took us to another spot in the National Park, stopping above the tree line. The grassy mountain slopes here were noticeably windier. Here some high altitude species were found. The beautiful Mountain Clouded Yellow, Shepherd’s and Balkan fritillaries, False Mnestra Ringlet and of course the true ‘Alpine King’, the Apollo. All round this area the Apollo remains plentiful, some fresh, some worn, depending on the altitude. Here we also

encountered our first Chamois of the week. A shy animal, it is a relative of the larger and more well known Ibex.

The following day we dropped some 700m from our base into the dry valley meadows below the town of St Martin du Vesubie. A roadside stop gave us our first glimpse of a male Great Sooty Satyr. A walk down a pathway surrounded by woodland and open fields provided many a magical sight. Meleager's and Damon Blues were two good finds, along with Dark-Green, Silver-washed, Violet and High-brown Fritillaries. The sheer number of Marbled Whites, Spotted Fritillary and Black-veined Whites was amazing here. A clearing in a wooded area adorned with a number of Bellflower species also gave us a sighting of the Great Banded Grayling and Arran Brown. The heat down this low in the valley was quite wearing so an evening party in St Martin du Vesubie to celebrate the national holiday was a relaxing end to a rewarding day. The sight of fireworks lightening up the background mountaintops in the distance was one to savour.

The next morning we again travelled a short distance up to another entrance to the National Park. The visit started with good sightings of a Red Fox and both Crossbills and Nutcrackers. After quite a long and energetic walk we arrived at a promising area. An open area of stream banked meadows gave us plenty to investigate. Here, where the Small Apollo flies, we quickly found the foodplant – Yellow Mountain Saxifrage – but alas no individuals were found this time. Plenty of others to wet the appetite though – Silvery Argus, Lesser and Mountain Ringlets, Small and Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and an abundance of Apollos. The flowers were were dazzling. Among them were Alpenrose, Spotted Orchids and Snow Gentian.



Silvery Argus

The following day entailed a 2-hour trip up to the Italian border and the Col du Lombardie, situated at around 2150m. A long trip but well worth it. The damp marshy alpine grassland here not only displayed an eye-catching

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display of Cotton grass but once again a varied selection of alpine butterflies. The real jewel was Cynthia's Fritillary, but also False Heath Fritillary, Yellow-spotted and Common Brassy Ringlets. Sorting the Meadow and Grison's Fritillaries apart was a challenge for our leader. The day was rounded off perfectly by an Ibex, high up on a mountain ridge.

For our final full day we descended from our hotel. We made a stop beyond the town of St Martin du Vesubie, spending time searching the tracks of a riverbed covered in seeded Buddleias. On these bushes we found good numbers of Silver-washed Fritillaries as well as a perfect new Swallowtail, Cleopatra and a 'helice' Clouded Yellow. On the rocky, grassy parts of the tracks Oriental and Dusky Meadow Browns were seen along with Rock and Woodland Graylings. With the afternoon thunder clouds gathering in the distance one more surprise arrived. A largely dry stream bed had a large butterfly flying around a young 15ft Willow tree. It was a striking Lesser Purple Emperor. The beautiful 'clytie' form of this species perched briefly before heading up into the canopy. As threatened, the afternoon rains came but one could not be disappointed.

The week had ended as only a butterfly lover could have dreamed. After a number of changing altitudes and habitats we had recorded a fantastic number of 105 species. This beautiful part of the Alps is a haven not only for butterflies but all types of wildlife. I returned home tired but happy with all my memories to look back on...

Research into the Buttoned Snout and the Heart Moth in Herts. and Middlesex, by Rob Souter

As a part of the Biodiversity Action Programme, Sue Clarke (an ecological consultant working on behalf of Butterfly Conservation), asked Colin Plant and myself to identify those species of moth in the branch area which are of high and medium priority. A list was drawn up of notable species that have been recorded in the past, many not having been recorded for a number of years. We have now been asked to undertake research into two of these moth species in Herts and Middlesex, namely the Heart Moth *Dicycla oo* and the Buttoned Snout *Hypena rostralis*.

Although some moths have declined to the point where recovery seems unlikely, others may have natural cycles in which they alternate between abundance and rarity. The Heart Moth may be one of these, perhaps. Records suggest that it was quite widespread in southern Hertfordshire and Middlesex during the last ten years of the nineteenth century, but declined by about 1920. After a gap of no records, it reappeared in the 1940s in the suburbs of north London and was common by the 1950s, but by the early 1970s was in serious decline again. There are no records for London north of the Thames or for southern Hertfordshire in the period 1980 to 1991. The last Hertfordshire record was at Digswell in 1971. This pattern very vaguely suggests a thirty year cycle - 1890s - common; 1920s - very rare; 1945-55 - common; 1980 - absent. On this basis it ought to be on the up any year now.

Adult Heart Moths are on the wing in late June and July and should be looked for in older woodland, parkland, etc., where there are mature oaks. It might turn up almost anywhere and is very easily recognised. The caterpillars feed on oak leaves at night from April to early June, hiding by day in a tent spun with silk between leaves. They can be found by beating oak boughs over a tray. The chrysalis is formed in the soil beneath the tree. A picture of the quite distinctive, black-and-white caterpillar can be found in Jim Porter's book *Caterpillars of the*



Heart Moth

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British Isles (plate 41, picture J).

Buttoned Snout is evidently fairly common in the Herts & Middlesex area. Adults hibernate in sheds, hollow trees, etc. and are on the wing from August to the start of cold weather and then from waking up until June. The caterpillars feed on hop during



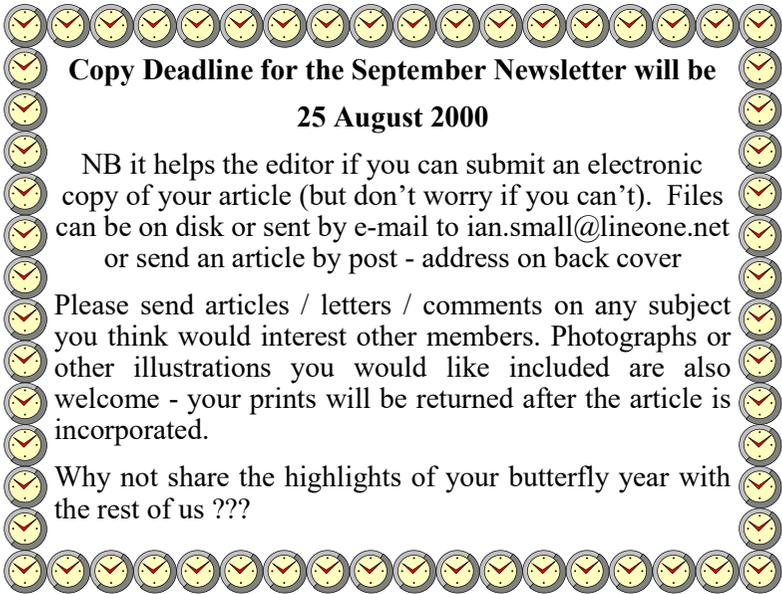
Heart Moth Caterpillar

June and July, which grows wild in many north London “brown field” sites. They make holes in the leaves and if you spot hops with holes in their leaves the caterpillars can be easily knocked out into a beating tray (or sheet) placed under the food plant. Currant Pug caterpillars make similar feeding patterns but the larvae are much smaller and though both caterpillars are not especially strikingly different from anything else to the amateur eye there is very little else that you will find on hop plants so the job is made fairly easy.

We need to assemble all records of both these species for both Herts and Middlesex. Colin would be very pleased to look at any candidate caterpillars encountered. These should be sent alive, with a few leaves of the food plant, by first class post in something that is crush-proof but which does not allow condensation to drown the beast (slide film boxes are usually OK, or film canisters if lined with tissue to absorb condensation). If you can suggest any sites that I ought to visit to look for these moths, please feel free to do so.

We are also trying to collate ALL past records of these moths for the two counties, so please let Colin have any old records you have not already sent him (see address below).

Colin W. Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts., CM23 3QP. Telephone: 01279-507697 Mobile: 07770-766416 E-mail: Colinwplant@compuserve.com



**Copy Deadline for the September Newsletter will be
25 August 2000**

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 or send an article by post - address on back cover

Please send articles / letters / comments on any subject you think would interest other members. Photographs or other illustrations you would like included are also welcome - your prints will be returned after the article is incorporated.

Why not share the highlights of your butterfly year with the rest of us ???

Butterflies in Hong Kong, by Richard Bigg

In February 1999 my daughter and grand-daughter went to live in Hong Kong when my son-in-law was posted there by the Company he works for. My daughter had reported seeing colourful butterflies so I looked forward to the visit with anticipation of seeing some exotic specimens in their natural habitat - I was not disappointed. Prior to going I made efforts to find a Field Guide for the area but failed. I don't think such exists.

They live in the New Territories close to a town called Tai Po which is roughly halfway between Hong Kong itself and the Chinese border. the area is much more mountainous than I expected, with one of the highest called Cloudy Hill (about 1500ft - 450m) within walking distance of where they live. It is a steep climb and scrubby vegetation prevented much deviation from the path but butterflies were everywhere. It was sunny and very hot on the first visit and the butterflies did not settle very often. On subsequent visits I went late afternoon and found it better for

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photography (and for me !). The most common was bright yellow speckled with brown on the underside - the Grass Yellow. there were some blues, Skippers and some browns with very little marking. I did not get to the top as I found a lower hilltop where a number of larger butterflies were establishing their territory including a beautiful Indian Fritillary and a Dark Cerulean which is an iridescent blue with black tips to its forewings.



Indian Fritillary (Argyreus hyperbius)

On a day when my wife and daughter went off to Stanley Market shopping (ugh!) they dropped me at a nature reserve called Tai Po Kau. Many years ago the New Territories were heavily forested, and Tai Po Kau has been allowed to re-establish itself as the original, with a variety of hardwood trees interspersed with vines and creepers. Here I found a great variety of butterflies ranging from huge specimens of 4-5in. wingspan to small blue and brown ones. In between there were many medium sized butterflies often brilliantly coloured.

I returned to the UK with 50-60 photographs of butterflies none of which I knew the names of. During my search for a field guide my wife had obtained from Malcolm Hull a comprehensive list of publications including one released only last year called "The Butterflies of Hong Kong". That was the good news, the bad news was that the price given was £95. To cut a long story short I approached the local library and eventually the book was purchased by a Central Document Supply and loaned to Hertford. The cost was not £95 but £150 ! It is truly a magnificent book with not only coloured plates of every adult species likely to be seen in Hong Kong, but eggs, larva and pupa of most as well. The text has line drawings of wing venation and genitalia and more photographs of each species, together with descriptions of all stages, general section covering all aspects from life cycle to nomenclature. I can

thoroughly recommend the book to anyone interested in Asian butterflies. Your local library should be able to get it from the British Library Supply Centre. The authors are M J Bascombe, G Johnston and F S Bascombe. It is published by Academic Press ISBN 0-12-080290-2.

We returned to Hong Kong in February this year and I visited Tai Po Kau, Cloudy Hill (got to the top this time) and another area. There were butterflies about, but the weather was much cooler and there were not the quantities there were in October. I got some photographs however and have managed to identify most of them (I think !).



Peacock Pansy (*Junonia almana*)
Male dry season form

A Definitive Review of Lepidoptera on Cigarette Cards, 1904 to 1938, by Stuart Pittman

John Player's started the craze in 1904 with their series of Butterflies and Moths set of 50, now valued at £90. Godfrey Phillips continued in 1911 with their 30 British Butterflies, now worth £135. Phillips published three more sets each of 25 more British butterflies in 1923 (pale blue backs), 1927 (dark blue backs) and in 1936 a set of permacal transfers. I recently purchased these sets at auction for £15 each along with a set by Abdulla dated 1935 (unfortunately a duplicate of the Phillips 1927 set). The cards all appear in three sets with the butterflies in silhouette against a matt black background.

The text is adequate with the size, foodplant and habitat although the naming of some species at the time is still confusing e.g. Small Meadow Brown (Key name on card) which it goes on to state is also known as "Gatekeeper and Large Heath". The note on the Large Skipper mentions 5 other members of the family - the omission is clearly the Essex Skipper. This highlights inadequate research as the Essex Skipper had been known since 1889, the earliest vernacular name being the clumsy Scarce Small Skipper (Kirby 1896). One very noticeable error lists the Brimstone's foodplant as blackthorn - I for one will continue to look on Buckthorn !

The 1920's saw a few further sets appear : Adkin's Butterflies and Moths (1924) set of 50 costs £90 and W D and H O Wills British Butterflies (1927) 50 butterflies now costs £1 each. The most striking sets from this era are those of R J Lea Ltd., which are of six moths, and measure 143 x 70 mm. The Oleander Hawk and Death's Head Hawk are to size, with the other 4 slightly enlarged. These gorgeous specimens are silk type cards and are described charmingly by the manufacturer as "delightful subjects for embroidery and appliqué". Two other sets of 12 cards exist from 1925, these are Butterflies and Moths and are smaller at 70 x 44 mm and 70 x 88 mm, and currently cost £30 and £50 per set respectively at auction.



W D & H O Wills, 1927

John Player produced two 1930s sets: in 1932 a set of 50 butterflies,

of which 25 were British, and a 1934 set of 25 British butterflies. These sets were also available in transfers, and each of these sets are now the cheapest which you can still acquire at around £20.

Wills 1938 set of 40 cards consisted of 20 butterflies and 20 moths in larger format (80 x 62 mm), and the innovative album allowed the cards to be inserted and the text could be read overleaf. The text is particularly informative in this set e.g. “The Comma had become scarce in the south and east of England toward the end of the 19th century, but since 1930 it has reappeared in many of its old localities in good numbers.”



Player's 1934

Unfortunately, this set also chronicles the decline of many species even then e.g. “Scarcity of the Silver-washed Fritillary in the New Forest.” (These sets cost around £32.)

Gallaher’s 1938 set of 48 butterflies and moths are still a snip at the current catalogue price of £14, but I have yet to see them at such a price and they are surely undervalued? Many of the species illustrations are in flight or have their wings open; it is debatable whether the Small Heath would be so obliging for all us photographers of Lepidoptera in the field.

In 1912, W Clarke issued a duplicate set of Player’s 1904 Butterflies and Moths. This plagiarist production is worth four times as much - £350 vs £90. I’m still saving up for these...assuming I can actually locate such a rare item !

Field Trip Programme - 2000

Sunday 18th June – Catfield Fen (Butterfly Conservation Reserve) - Norfolk

Details in Butterfly Conservation News. To see Swallowtails, dragonflies

16th July – Millhoppers and Tring Park

Leaders; Margaret Noakes (01296 660072) and Brian Jessop (01442 824907). Meet at 11.30 at Millhoppers (SP 900149) and /or 1.30 at Tring Park (Crossroads to Marlin Hill SP 924094). To see Marbled Whites, Ringlets, Chalk flora & something special?

Saturday 29th July Moth Evening Time 21.00

Location: Bramfield Woods, Bramfield, Herts. Grid Ref: TL282166. Meet in car park off Bramfield to Datchworth road. Target species: Moth trapping event. Contact: Rob Souter 01992 410783

Sunday 20th August – Patmore Heath

Leader Gavin Vicary. From Little Hadham on the A120 head north for approx. 3 miles until you reach the Catherine Wheel Public House. Immediately turn right and follow the lane for ¼ mile. Meet by the reserve notice board next to the big pond. Meet at 11.00 To see Small Coppers, Small Heath.

Saturday 23rd September Time 20.00 National Moth Night.

Location: Amwell Gravel Pits, Gt Amwell, Herts. Park on Amwell Rd. TL374 125. Meet at birders watchpoint. TL376 128. Target species: Moth trapping event. Contact: Rob Souter 01992 410783

Further moth evenings may be arranged at short notice - details will be posted on the Branch website (<http://phoenix.herts.ac.uk/pub/R.Souter/H&M-Branch.html>)

See also Herts moth group meetings detailed on pp 13-15



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 There will be no more working parties until September.

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

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