

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 36

DECEMBER 2003



**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION** SM

And it's Goodnight from
Him....

by Gavin Vicary



At the forthcoming AGM in January I will be stepping down as Chairman. I have been considering standing aside for some time and I think that change and new people coming in with new ideas will be good for the Branch.

I will be staying on the committee and I am looking forward to playing a different role over the months and years ahead. My main interest is conservation and I anticipate this being where my efforts

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are focussed in the future. David Chandler will be taking over as Chairman and I am sure that everyone will join with me in wishing him well in this role.

I have enjoyed my time as Chairman. When I took over we were a relatively young Branch having only separated from London Branch a few years earlier. We are now well established and well positioned to aid the conservation of the species that we have in Hertfordshire and Middlesex and to assist the recolonisation of one or two that had previously been lost. Our annual Butterfly Report, the conservation sub-committee and having our own reserve at Millhoppers are all of significant importance in achieving this aim. In addition, the knowledge and interest shown in Moths has greatly increased over the years.

We have a strong, knowledgeable committee and sub committee of people, membership has constantly increased and the accounts are in good shape. I look forward to the Branch going from strength to strength in the future.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported and helped the Branch during my time as Chairman and wish you all A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Don't Forget the Branch Website:

<http://www.hmbutterflyconservation.org.uk/>

...Keep up to date with those winter butterfly sightings and track the appearance as butterflies emerge in Spring. Plus the latest information about Branch meetings.

Annual General Meeting & Members' Day

Saturday 17th January 2004

DAY'S EVENTS

10 for 10.30 – Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunt

Saffron Green Meadows & Wood

Come along and help look for eggs

Full Details on Pages 5 & 6

12.30 to 2.00 – Pub lunch or drink

Just a chance to meet friends and chat before the meeting

White Horse PH

Mill Lane, Old Welwyn ~ TL232162 [Map 166]

Contact Liz Goodyear to confirm numbers

Annual General Meeting

at the Welwyn Civic Centre ~ TL232160 [Map 166]

Prospect Place, Welwyn Herts, AL6 9ER

2 for 2.30pm - 5.30 pm

(PTO for Programme)

Public Transport As mentioned in the last newsletter, we hope that members using public transport will make use of our offer to meet you at Welwyn Garden City (WAGN) but not Welwyn North. At the time of writing this article (early Dec), www.thetrainline.com says a train leaving King's Cross at 12:58 will arrive at Welwyn Garden City at 13:41, which we will arrange to meet. Unfortunately the website also indicates that anyone travelling from the Stevenage direction will have to use a bus replacement service but if anyone would like a lift please let us know. We would recommend that anyone intending to travel by train on the day, contacts WAGN to see if any engineering works will affect travel. Please let Liz Goodyear know if you require a lift by Jan. 10th. January 2004

AGM PROGRAMME

2.30 – Introduction from our retiring Chairman ~ Gavin Vicary

2.40 - Guest speaker DR. TOM BRERETON
Butterfly Conservation's Monitoring and Species Ecologist

3.30 - Annual General Meeting

4.15 – Interval

4.40 - A chance to see or show some butterfly slides and digital images

If you have any digital images that you would like shown ~ please send to Andrew Wood at least 10 days before the event either by email or on a CD
(approximate times only)

A lift will be available from Welwyn Garden City Station
Contact Liz Goodyear if lift required stating train arrival time - see page 3

Good car parking facilities available at the Civic Centre

The Sales and Plant Stand will be present

Our full supply of books including several rare second hand specialist butterfly books, as well as plants, seeds & gifts will be available

Refreshments available

For contact details – see back of newsletter

Non-members welcome

Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunt (Members' Day Event), by Malcolm Hull

Brown Hairstreak is Hertfordshire's rarest & most elusive butterfly. Adults are rarely seen, spending most of their time on the canopy of woodland trees, particularly Ash. Females descend to lay eggs on Blackthorn, usually at a height of 2-4 ft above the ground. New growth is preferred, particularly suckers which stand out from a hedge. The small white bun-shaped eggs are usually laid singly at the base of a spine or a fork in the twig.

Egg-hunting in winter is the most reliable way to tell if the species is present on a site. Once the Blackthorn drops its leaves the pin-head sized eggs are quite conspicuous against the dark twigs.



One or two eggs are laid in the fork of a twig

Saffron Green is a site recently purchased by Herts CC, which lies to the east of the A1 at Borehamwood, just north of Arkley. There is a substantial amount of suitable Blackthorn hedges on site, which we shall be searching. Our butterfly-egg hunting experts will be on hand to help, so don't worry if you haven't done this before.

Please bring a handheld magnifying glass if you have one. We shall only be walking slowly, so wrap up warm. Boots are also advisable. Ring me if you have any questions (details on back cover).

Saffron Green: The entrance to the new Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Reserve is not shown on maps as it had only recently been created, but a new all-weather bridleway has been built from Galley Lane at approximately TQ223977 where the RED CROSS is on the map. HCC have said we can have the key for the morning and it will be possible to drive up the track and park adjacent to the entrance. We will indicate the entrance on the day (PTO for directions).

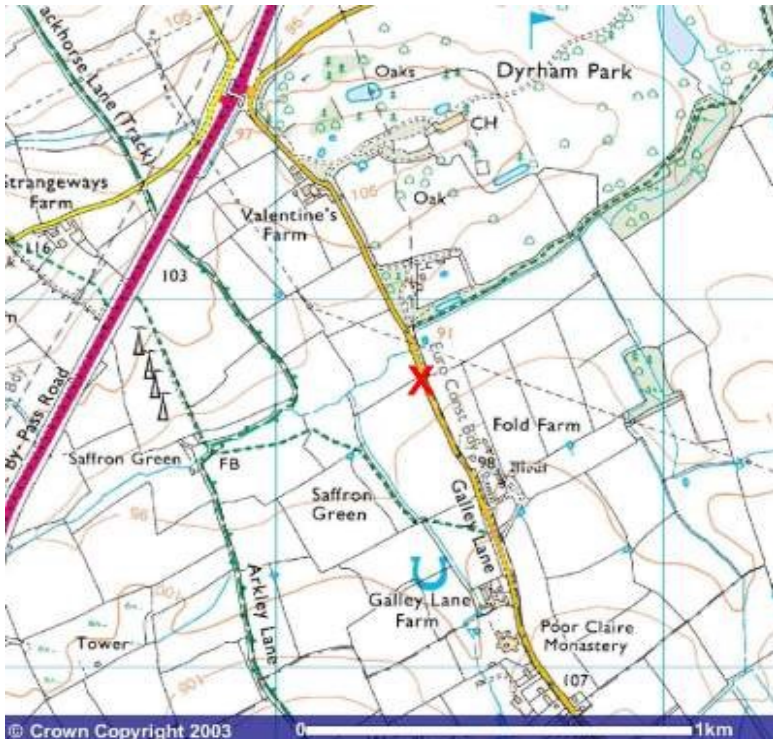
Directions:

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

From the M25/A1 south – about a mile south of Junction 25 (South Mimms) there is a small slip road just before a footbridge, which leads directly onto Galley Lane, the entrance to Saffron Green is just over ½ mile along the road on the right.

From the A1 north – continue to Junction 25 (South Mimms) and return south down the A1 and follow the above directions

From Barnet - take the A411 west (signposted Elstree), Galley Lane is on the right about 1 mile from the junction with the A1000. The entrance to Saffron Green is just over a mile along the road on the left.



Reproduced from Explorer – 1:25,000 Scale by kind permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. (c) Crown copyright 2002

Cattle in Millhoppers, by John Noakes (Reserve Manager)



At last we have cattle in our reserve! Rather should I say, have had cattle in our reserve. For if you had blinked you would have missed them. They came in at the beginning of September and stayed six weeks. Why so short? The answer was they were greedy and ate up all the grass and other things beside.

The background to their introduction followed installing secure fencing, gates and approaching a local farmer to see if he would be prepared to put cattle into the reserve. We discussed timing, numbers and eventual sward height, to avoid damage as much as possible to grassland butterflies. Sheep were not considered an option as the ground could become too wet for them. Furthermore they tend to be rather stupid, getting stuck in bramble bushes and deciding to die for the slightest of reasons! Those of you who have visited the site will realize it is rather remote and difficult to monitor any animals there.

The farmer who was most sympathetic to our aims was Keith Slade who manages the grazing at Tring Park. We decided therefore, that Keith was the right person to help us with the programme.

We set up a grazing agreement between Butterfly Conservation Central Office and Keith and on the 1st September he brought in four young cows, Belgium Blues crossed with Holstein Friesians. Two of them had been hand reared and were extremely friendly, following us too closely at times.

It was suggested, I scientifically monitored their impact on the vegetation and sward. Sadly I failed on this one. They came in so fast, ate so quickly and then were gone. However I can describe the scene and the result was quite remarkable; very different from this time last year. The grass was reduced very quickly down to approx 30cm. The lush vegetation around the pond area was obviously a delicacy. The result was a marshy area produced by puddling around the stream margins. Strangely they ate quite a lot of nettles but of course their roots remain. They got stuck into the edges of the blackthorn scrub but sadly only ate the leaves. Not surprisingly, teasles were well left alone.



Hertfordshire and Middlesex







We still have some cutting and removal of tough weeds and blackthorn stems to do but it is going to be far less work. Naturally the regular weekly transect recordings of butterflies will take place from April to the end of September.







It is possible that we may have our four visitors back to have another meal before the Spring. They will be very welcome.



TRANSECT WALKER NEEDED FOR 2004

 Dennis Shepperson can no longer walk the COLNEY HEATH COMMON (TL203057) and THE WARREN TRANSECTS (TL204053). 

 These are two very important transects and have been walked 
 for over 10 years and have provided invaluable data. It is 
 vital that this recording is continued. 

 Neither transect is excessively long and they are very close to 
 each other - please, if you think you can help, contact John 
 Murray as soon as possible (details on back of cover). 



Richard Bigg just missed the last newsletter with this item.....

The hot sunny weather this year should have been good for the Wall Brown, but I have had only a few reports of sightings. If you have seen this species this year would you please let me have the details:-

E-Mail - richard.biggs@tesco.net or

91 Fordwich Rise, Hertford SG14 2DF



Butterfly Conservation Brightens Your Garden, by Malcolm Hull

One warm afternoon last July, I was delighted to count over 60 butterflies (12 species) in my garden. Its only a small patch in St Albans city centre and five years ago even one butterfly was an unusual sight. Choosing a good variety of plants which provide nectar sources for different butterfly species has led to this transformation. I've also introduced a few caterpillar foodplants and most importantly had good advice from butterfly gardening experts.

Our branch is very fortunate in having Alan Downie and Malcolm Newland who each year grow numerous different plants and seeds. These are made available to members and the public on our sales at very reasonable prices. Most plants cost only £1 and packets of seeds are free, though we suggest a 50p donation. Our experienced team of sales stall volunteers attend a number of gardening and environmental shows, markets and other events through the year, particularly in Spring and early Summer. These are often interesting events to attend with a variety of conservation and other interesting organisations represented.

At our own BC meetings some interesting and unusual butterfly books is also available. Some of these are second-hand, donated by members and not easily available elsewhere. The sales stall also offers a wide range of free information leaflets, identification guides, children's items and gifts with a butterfly theme.

Sales Stall - Winter Programme

- Saturday 17 January - BC AGM 2 - 5.30 pm Welwyn Civic Centre - *for details see page 3*
- Saturday 14-Sunday 15 February - RSPB Lee Valley Bird Fair 10am-4pm daily. Hayes Hill Farm, Stubbins Hall Lane off B149 1.5 miles north of Waltham Abbey. Admission Charges Apply
- Saturday 28 February - BC Winter Meeting from 2.15pm Harrow Arts Centre - for details see Page 11.
- Friday 2 - Sunday 4 April - Capel Manor's Spring Gardening and Country Show, Capel Manor College, Bullsmoor Lane,

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Enfield Middx 10.am - 5 pm daily - Admission Charge £7 (reductions on Friday & for Children)

- Saturday 22-Sunday 23 May - Three Valleys Environment & Canal Fair, The Aquadrome, Frogmore Lane, Rickmansworth 10am - 6 pm Admission Charges apply

Keep an eye on the branch website where details of all forthcoming sales stall events will be publicised.

We can also deal with mail order customers - contact Alan Downie for plants and Malcolm Hull for sales goods.

The Big Draw - The Big Butterfly, by David Chandler

The Big Draw was a National Trust campaign launched during the Autumn to promote learning and awareness of environmental issues in the general public. The project leader, Jan Clark, who is based at The Dunstable Downs Visitors Centre, was supported by other interested parties including educational establishments and Butterfly Conservation locally. The mosaic photograph is of a Chalkhill Blue and is made up of 1000 South Bedfordshire children's' drawings of Chalkhill Blues photographed on Dunstable Downs from a glider on November 12th.



This type of educational initiative by the National Trust is good for increasing awareness of the general public in green issues and Butterfly Conservation Head Office have acknowledged the importance of project and may use the idea in a national educational

Winter Meeting, Saturday 28th February 2004
Harrow Arts Centre,
Uxbridge Road, Hatch End, Harrow, Middlesex
TQ136911 Map 176
2.15 for 2.30 – 5.45 pm

- 2.30 ~ Introduction**
2.35 ~ Andrew Wood
A presentation on an aspect of Butterfly Recording
3.10 ~ Liz Goodyear & Andrew Middleton
The Purple Emperor – a progress report
3.35 ~ Interval
4.00 ~ Emily Funnell
*Gardening for Butterflies and The Role of the
London & South-East Area Regional Officer*
**4.45 ~ A chance to see or show some butterfly slides
and digital images**

*For more information contact Liz Goodyear
(details on back cover)*

Car parking available at the Arts Centre

Public transport details

Hatch End station is about 200 yds away. The H12 from Stanmore Underground station (Jubilee line) to South Harrow underground station (Piccadilly line) via Pinner underground station (Metropolitan line) also stops outside the Arts Centre. Harrow on the Hill is served by the Metropolitan Underground trains to Watford but it is advisable to stay on the train to Pinner and get the H12 going to Stanmore station - get off at the Arts Centre just past Safeways. The Chiltern line service to Aylesbury also stops at Harrow on the Hill. The 182 bus service also terminates about 300 yds away from the venue too

The Sales and Plant Stand will be present

Hot drinks can be purchased from a vending machine but soft drinks, cakes and biscuits will be provided

NON-MEMBERS WELCOME

READERS LETTERS

Summer Memories, by Diane Andrews

In September, I spent a week in the Weymouth / Portland area, mainly in hopes of watching birds on migration. The weather was glorious nearly all the time and on September 17th, a particularly hot, sunny morning, I decided to see what I could find in the way of butterflies and thought I would try looking round Tout Quarry, Portland. I'd walked only a short distance into the quarry when I became aware of a stretch of bushes ahead of me, in dark silhouette against the bright sun. They appeared to be moving along the top despite the fact that I was down among paths and gullies completely sheltered from any breeze. As I approached I could see what looked like one or two butterflies fluttering briefly up into the air. When I actually reached the bush I found it was a mass of flowering ivy absolutely covered in Red Admirals, so intent on nectaring that was able to count them – 143, together with 15 Painted Ladies! I've never before seen so many in one place and I just sat entranced watching them – what a magical sight!

Two days later I saw a solitary Clouded Yellow on the cliffs above Bowleaze Cove, east of Weymouth, the only specimen I'd seen all year, and on the 20th, back on Portland again, some Wall Browns and two Hummingbird hawk-moths. So, a splendid few days!

Just one more sighting of a Clouded Yellow since then – in Suffolk, near Sizewell power station, on November 4th.

Heath Fritillary Follow-Up, by Mr S Fassett

I subscribe to Butterfly Conservation because I think it does good work, and although retired I still have many 'irons in the fire' and cannot join in any of your Branch activities.

I know very little about butterflies, but something struck me in your September newsletter. Referring to the Heath Fritillary, Sharon Hearle states that because of neglect of its habitat – coppiced woodland and rides – it could become extinct.

What was its habitat before man started coppicing or making rides? These two things are not natural, so there must be something else that will keep this species going.

The History of Coppicing and its Effect on Woodland Butterflies, by Ian Small

In response to Mr Fassett's letter, I have compiled the following response. If other members have additional information, or differing viewpoints, then please let me know....editor.

Coppicing is the oldest form of woodland management. Most British trees will regrow from the base if they are cut down and will produce vigorous regrowth of young shoots. This was realised thousands of years ago and it was recognised that the regrowth of certain species had particular uses, from slender willow withies for basket making through to large poles of oak for timber framing.

Coppicing can be traced back to Neolithic times. The world's earliest evidence of woodland management comes from 6000 year-old coppiced poles used to build wetland trackways, which have been excavated from the peat in the Somerset Levels. Through the Bronze, Roman, Saxon and medieval periods it was the most common form of woodland management in Britain and remained so at least until the mid 1800s. Because of this long history, ancient coppice woodlands are often considered to be direct descendants of the original forest that covered most of Britain after the last Ice Age.

The most commonly coppiced tree species in southern England is hazel and many of the woodlands were traditionally managed under a system called coppice with standards. Under this form of management, the wood was cut on a two-tier system. There was a lower-growing closely-spaced under-wood layer of hazel which was cut on a short rotation of between 6 and 10 years to produce small diameter rods. There was also an upper layer of widely spaced oak 'standards' which were allowed to grow as single stemmed timber trees.

For thousands of years coppiced hazel rods were used to make wattle for building construction, sheep hurdles, thatching spars, heathers and stakes for hedge-laying and many other uses. Most of the traditional uses continued up until the Second World War, but then quickly declined from this period on. Most of the copses fell into a state of neglect and it is so it is only in recent years that the nature of many of our woodlands has altered. Over thousands of years, woodland butterflies were able to 'follow the woodcutter', as freshly coppiced

areas would provide light and opportunity for foodplants to grow, and flowers to provide nectar. The rapid changes that followed the Second World War resulted in habitat change at a rate far beyond the ability of native butterflies to evolve to overcome.

Thus, whilst the true answer to Mr Fassett's question regarding what happened before coppicing is "We don't know", the fact remains that these species evolved to survive and thrive in an essentially man-made environment. Thus, when man abruptly stopped this method of woodland management, the catastrophic consequence was that many woodland butterflies were rapidly deprived of the habitats essential for their survival.

The Great Satyrid Wind-Up, by Vincent and Betty Judd

Two years ago, we bought a camper, with the objective of making a lot more trips each summer to mainland Europe. Consequently, early August found us in Austria.

The target species was the Camberwell Beauty, and although we had plenty of sightings in the area just west of Vienna – five being the highest count in one day – we failed to get even one photographic opportunity. Admitting defeat, we headed back after about four days to the Tyrol.

By late evening we had reached Innsbruck, and drove uphill to the ski resort of Axamer Lizum. This is a favourite spot of ours because, not only are numerous species to be found in the immediate vicinity, but lifts which operate all Summer can take us high up in the surrounding hills. We parked up in a corner of the enormous car park, which is usually totally deserted at night, although on this occasion there was one other camper, and proceeded to cook our meal and empty a couple of bottles of wine (well it had been a long day). During this time quite a number of Geometrid moths flew into the camper light, and all turned out to be Northern Spinach, of three forms: standard, melanic and pale. The only exception was an Arran Carpet, another new species to us. These were potted and put in the fridge ready to photograph the next day.

Our sleep was disturbed early in the morning when the camper lurched violently. As I drew back the curtain a huge cow put her head through the open window. I am not sure which one of us was the more startled.



Arran Carpet
Chlorocysta concinnata

After breakfast, we took the chair lift up one of the mountains. Reaching the top we were surprised to find how hot it was. Unbeknown to us, Innsbruck was experiencing a record temperature of 40 °, and I guess it must have been not far short of 30° where we were, quite a change from the usual low temperatures at such an altitude.

We spent some time roaming the East side of the hill and found that, no doubt because the Summer had been so hot and dry, that most butterflies seemed to have gone over earlier than usual. We saw a few Cranberry and Shepherd's Fritillaries and a solitary male Mountain Fritillary, and a very large number of Small Tortoiseshells. There were also Marbled and Water Ringlets in moderate abundance.

Moving round to the West side, we found many more of those two Ringlet species, and also both an Alpine and a Dusky Grizzled Skipper. Then suddenly we saw them: De Lesse's Brassy Ringlets. There were several flying about in a deceptively leisurely manner.

For those who have not experienced European Ringlet species, I should explain that they are not easy to photograph well. When the sun shines, they are constantly on the wing, but as soon as it clouds over they dive for cover in the grass, and a clear shot is all but impossible. We have therefore evolved a strategy for getting our pictures, and also being sure of their correct identification. We net them, keep them overnight in the fridge, and then tip them out on the ground in the rays of the early morning sun. At first they sit closed, and we can get an underside, then they open their wings slowly to warm up, and we get the upperside as well. Usually this works, although once or twice a butterfly has taken off the minute it was released.

The De Lesse's is easy to identify on the wing, since it has a pale underside hind wing, which is very obvious in flight and unusually for a Satyrid it flies in the manner of a Skipper. In theory all we had to do was net one and take it back with us to photograph. However, like all Ringlets, it has evolved a protective mechanism known as driving the lepidopterist crazy. You stand at the foot of the hill and Ringlets flap

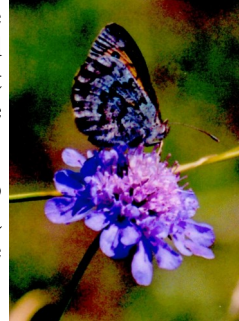
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lazily about at the summit. You climb the hill and none are to be seen, but there are now several where you have just come from. You go back down the hill and they have vanished from there but reappeared at the top, and so on. Staying in one place simply does not work: they refuse to appear.

This time we had them fooled. Betty stood at the top of the hill and I stood at the bottom. The De Lesse's appeared in the middle. Eventually we did manage to approach one sitting on a flower, but just as the shutter was pressed, it flew onto the next one. We photographed a number of flowers.

After more than an hour, we were beginning to lose our composure (Betty: "I'll kill the *** in a minute!"). Then, at long last, one made a mistake and flew close enough for me to net it.

Congratulating ourselves on finally succeeding, we dragged our weary bodies back to the cafeteria by the chair lift. Throwing caution to the wind, we ordered one of the calorie-laden banana splits, washed down with a large mug of beer, all pleasantly served by their scantily-clad waitress. It was about half-way through this feast that a De Lesse's alighted on the arm of the chair next to Betty. - It was lucky to escape with its life.



De Lesse's Brassy
Ringlet
Erebia nivalis

Coming Soon to a Beauty Spot Near You..., by Ashley Cox

**FLY TIPPINS & THE INCREDIBLE ABOVE THE LAW
RURAL EYESORES TRAVELLING SHOW**

The warming rays of morning sun lifted a mist from the dew soaked earth. The air was heavy with the scent of May blossom and damp Nettles. All around the growing sound of waking insects signalled the start of a brand new day, a Fox hurried home eager to escape the scolding Magpies that chased him into a thicket and a Robin sang atop the burned out shell of a Vauxhall Nova. Ah yes, 'twas springtime and the gentle gypsy folk were back in town.

Now, I'm with the local authorities on this one, in my opinion the travelling fraternity are much maligned and misunderstood. My children on the other hand think I live in the past, that I'm old fashioned and naive and that I should take my nose out of my musty old natural history books and return to the real world, the dog eat dog, I'm alright Jack, every man for himself world. and, that I should stop starting every sentence with the prefix "when I was a lad." That's a bit jolly unfair, just because I tend to see everyone's good side. And as for my old books, well there's nothing wrong with the Wayside and Woodland series and others of that ilk. They aren't musty, not at all. They exude a lovely rustic charm and echo an age of decency, of values, virtue and gentlemanly conduct. Written in a way that reflects the pioneering spirit of a generation spawned by Empire builders. Terribly British. They also reflect how I like to see things. For example; John Crompton, in his classic "The Hunting Wasp" doesn't refer to the Common Wasp simply as an insect which exhibits warning colouration, no, no, no, no. He is "a brigand...sporting the conspicuous black and yellow blazer of the school of Vespa." O.k. I admit that it's a sad fact that at the age of 45 I am probably one of the younger of Crompton's disciples, but dash it all, that doesn't mean I'm old fashioned.

Anyway I digress, where was I, oh yes, much maligned and all that. Yes, live and let live that's what I say; you can only speak as you find, and although not of old Romany stock, it has to be said, I've always found them most polite. Only the previous day I'd met a pair, well I didn't exactly meet them, they were on the other side of the deep dell in the local Bluebell wood and they didn't seem in the best of spirits

and I wasn't surprised. Would you believe it? They had obviously taken a wrong turn and the doors of their transit van had somehow flung open and the entire contents, consisting of builders rubble and garden rubbish, had spilled all over the wood before they had chance to reach the council dump. I felt so sorry for them. I called over to see if they needed any assistance to load it back up. I couldn't quite hear their reply because of the raucous call of the Jay in the treetops, but they waved two cheery fingers as if to say, "Thanks for the kind offer but the two of us can manage." You see, misunderstood that's all.

As I neared my local open space, (an area that lots of people had worked very hard on to turn into a wonderful Butterfly habitat and natural amenity for the whole community) I could hear the song of the Skylark. It was rather competing for supremacy with the scream of a police helicopter, which was hovering at about the same altitude, but it was lovely none-the-less. Below them both a wispy column of wood smoke rose from the centre of a rough circle formed by two trucks and a caravan, which were nestled near the hedgerow in one corner of the wildflower meadow. They couldn't have been here long but already they had made the place look like home, decorating a nearby bush with varying lengths of delicately coloured tissue. A chap in a hat stood by the fire. Heavy lines furrowed his careworn face. He looked tired, as well he might, those five bar gates aren't light you know, to wrench it off its' hinges and deposit it so high in the Blackthorn bush must have taken superhuman strength. "Good morning," I called "a fine Spring morning, the kind of morning on which I might hope to see my first Orange Tip of the season." He regarded me with a blank stare, the kind of blank stare I had last seen when I tried to sell an old Pakistani gentleman a Christmas raffle ticket, even after I had explained to him that he would be making a valuable and worthwhile contribution to the natural heritage of Britain. Beside the man, a dog was leaping around excitedly, its demented barking becoming louder and louder. The morning sun cast a rainbow in the foam gushing from its muzzle. He was obviously pleased to see me and only a stout peg and heavy gauge chain prevented him from coming to say hello. I don't know what it is, but dogs seem to like me. Whenever I'm out and about they always want to play, in fact most like me so much they seem to want me to be part of their territory; that's partly the reason I no longer wear turn-ups on my trousers. I have my own little dog of course; Molly Spottysocks is her name. Her mother was a Cocker Spaniel, papa was a rolling stone as they say, but to most people he

looks to have been a Border Collie, although to me it's obvious she's half Hyena half Skunk, genetically engineered by some crazy scientist at the doggie rescue centre. Anyway I didn't recognise what kind of dog this one was, though it was obviously some kind of obscure German breed. I know this because I distinctly heard the fellow shout to his wife to "shut the Vokken Hound up!"

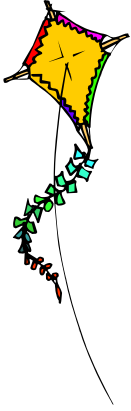
Further along the track two young lads were playing in the remains of an old fridge, they did look a pair of rosy-cheeked scamps. "Hello young fellow-me-lads" said I "have you heard or seen any Cuckoos today?" Well, to say the very least the reply to my innocent question was remarkably colourful for ones so young. I decided therefore not to enquire if they knew the whereabouts of any Woolly Bears and I left them discussing, of all things, the resemblance of my head to that of their friend Dick, most peculiar.

Onward I pressed, and indeed, I was rewarded by the sight of many early Butterfly species. I had never noticed before just what attractive basking platforms lumps of tarmac proved to be for Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells, or how striking. The pitch-blackness of them, contrasting so vividly with the pure White Stitchwort milkmaids in the hedgerow, upon which they'd been dumped. As I rounded a corner, there silhouetted in the sky above a distant field I saw what I thought could be a Cuckoo. Blast! I thought, if only I had brought my binoculars. Unfortunately my wife had confiscated them, arguing that a fellow on his own in the countryside looking through binoculars at the weekend was likely to find only one thing... himself on a police register of some kind. Now there's a sad indictment of our society if ever there was one.

I was still squinting at the possible Cuckoo when a very young girl came hurtling round the corner dragging a kite behind her, unfortunately she didn't see me, bounced off my hip and catapulted headlong into some rather nasty looking young Nettles. Her screams reached a hitherto unknown frequency. I was just about to offer some comfort when luckily her mother appeared. Strangely I was halfway through telling her what had happened and that I was on the lookout for a Painted Lady when she swept the child up into her arms and hurried off feverishly stabbing at the buttons on her mobile phone whilst warning the child of the threats posed by perverts! Jolly sound advice too, although I'm not sure if it was entirely in context with anything.



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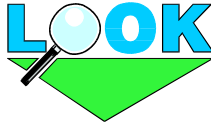
But still, it was late morning by now and time to head home. As I crossed the lane the call of the Cuckoo drifted in the air, my morning was complete. The police helicopter swooped overhead. As I looked back, blue lights flashed behind the hedgerows and sirens shattered the calm as half a dozen squad cars screeched to a halt at the point where I'd earlier crossed the lane. Typical I thought, Molly and I always seem to miss the excitement.



Branch Constitution, by Liz Goodyear

At the Annual General Meeting on the 17th January, we will be asking the membership to adopt a new constitution for the Branch. All branches of Butterfly Conservation must have their own set of rules to govern their activities. The new constitution is based on Head Office guidelines but put into the context of our activities in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. If any members would like to see a copy of the draft before the AGM, please contact the Branch Secretary (Liz Goodyear ~ details on back of newsletter). We would appreciate that if you wish to make any comments these are made to the Secretary in writing by Jan. 10th. January 2004.

Provisional Field Trip List for 2004



Full details including times, transport details and meeting places of these field trips will be in the Spring newsletter. More events are still being planned and we have not had details of the Upper Thames Branch trips that we are invited to.

- Sat May 15th, Aldbury Nowers for Spring butterflies including Grizzled Skipper (in conjunction with Bedfordshire & Northants Branch) – leader Dave Chandler
- Sat May 22nd - National Moth Night – several events will be organised across the two counties for starters we have:
 - Cranford Park – Andrew Wood
- Sun June 27th, Horsenden Hill for White-letter Hairstreak and the wildlife of Horsenden Hill, including the inspection of a moth trap run the previous night – Andy Culshaw & Rachel Terry
- Sat July 10th, Broxbourne Wood Nature Reserve for Purple Emperor and White Admiral – leaders Andrew Middleton & Liz Goodyear
- Sun July 11th, Bunkers Park – leader Michael Pearson
- Sun July 18th, Broxbourne Wood Nature Reserve for Purple Emperor – leaders Andrew Middleton & Liz Goodyear
- Sun July 18th, Stanmore Country Park for Summer butterflies – leader John Hollingdale
- Sat July 24th, Trent Park for birds and butterflies – leader Robert Callf
- Sat Sept. 18th, Patmore Heath for Small Copper - leader Gavin Vicary

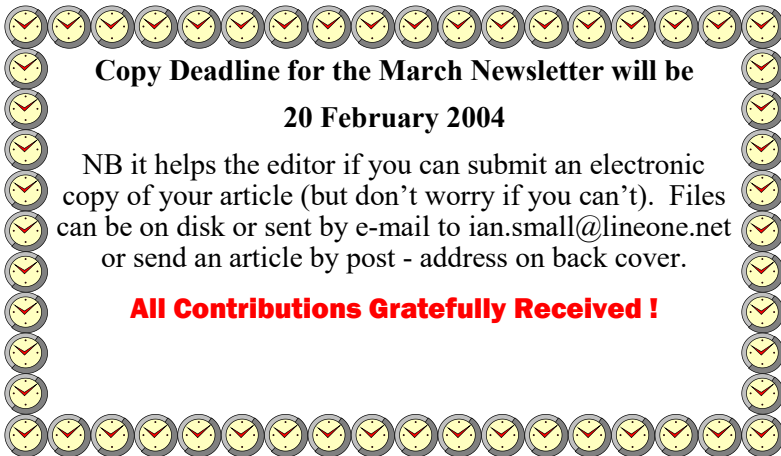
Beds & Northants Field Trip List

Members are invited to the following field trips organised by the Beds

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

& Northants Branch. Again full details will be in the next newsletter

- Sun May 16th, Totternhoe Knolls for Duke of Burgundy & Small Blue – leader Greg Herbert (10.30am)
- Sun May 23rd, Twywell Hills for Green Hairstreak – leader Doug Goddard (10.30am)
- Sat June 19th, Glapthorne for Black Hairstreak – leader Doug Goddard (10.30am)
Sat June 26th, Sharpenhoe Clappers for Dark Green Fritillary – leader David Chandler (10.30am)
- Wed July 7th, Chicksands Wood for White Letter Hairstreak – leader David Chandler (10.30am)
- Sun July 11th, Fermyn Wood for Purple Emperor - leader Doug Goddard (10.30am)
- Sat. August 28th, Gatwick Airport for Brown Hairstreak - Contact Graham Warne





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 SP 900149. Regular work parties not currently required. Contact John and Margaret Noakes to see if they need your help. (01296) 660072.

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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