

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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**Butterfly
Conservation**

New Branch Chairman...

by David Chandler

I would like to introduce myself to you. I was born back in the 1950's in Hemel Hempstead and spent my childhood in King's Langley where my mother still lives and maintains a garden butterfly transect at the age of 79. Over the years I have been saddened by the decline in butterflies and I decided to be proactive and, twenty years ago I joined Butterfly Conservation.

As I live just over the border in Bedfordshire, I have been an active member in your neighbouring branch for eighteen years and for the last five acted as their Chairman. For the last three years I have also

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been the local branches co-ordinator and sat on the Herts & Middx branch committee and, more recently, have been invited to sit on Butterfly Conservation's National Reserves Committee.

With past Chairman Gavin Vicary choosing to step down, the Branch wanted a steady pair of hands to guide them through a short period until a longer-term Chairman could be found. So I now find I have the honour of being elected your Branch Chairman in the Branch's tenth anniversary year.

My aims for this next year are simple:

- *To increase membership;*
- *To promote conservation;*
- *To promote monitoring and recording of species;*
- *To promote learning and interest in butterflies & moths, particularly in the young;*
- *To work closer with Butterfly Conservation Head Office, neighbouring BC branches and other conservation-minded bodies in our branch area.*

We also have the National AGM coming to our area in November (see below) which means we have more than usual to look forward to in, what I believe will be, a very exciting year for the Branch.

I hope to serve you and the wider Society well during my period as Chairman. My regards to you all.

27th November 2004 - A DATE FOR YOUR DIARIES by David Chandler

The National AGM is coming to Silsoe near Clophill (between Luton and Bedford on the A6), just over the border into Bedfordshire.

It was late December last year when Dudley Cheeseman, The National Chairman approached me with the idea that this Branch should co-host the staging of the National AGM. It was felt that, with me in the chair of both the Beds & Northants Branch and the neighbouring Herts & Middx branch in 2004 that it would be an ideal opportunity for the two Branches to combine their resources and jointly arrange and host the National AGM.

Dudley advised that, following feedback from recent national AGMs,

members wanted a venue near to London for this year's event to make it a bit easier for people travelling from around the country to attend.

After consulting with the two Branch committees in January, we formed an AGM sub-committee with an equal number of representatives from each Branch. We set about the task of finding a location, which we were told was one of the most important and difficult tasks. Head Office advised that the venue should be big enough to seat 250 to 300 and have good blackout facilities. It would also need to have room for the displays and sales stalls close by. Refreshments would need to be available for purchase unless we could obtain a sponsor. Good road links, a large car park and a nearby railway station were all requirements together with the availability of overnight accommodation for those travelling from afar.

The Committee set about scouring the home counties for a site worthy of staging this national event. We selected about half a dozen sites, including one venue near Tring which was a superb location with high quality facilities, but proved way out of Head Office's price range; eventually the short list was trimmed down to two possibilities and one clear favourite in Silsoe College.

On 20 February Sandra Muldoon from Head Office met up with Liz Goodyear & Angela Chandler to visit the venue. After her visit, Sandra wrote back to me "I was very impressed with the facilities there." Agreement has been reached on the use of additional, adjacent rooms for the displays and the catering facilities are especially good value. A hot lunch will be available (e.g. jacket potato plus filling, salad, dessert, tea/coffee) for about £7.

Now the committee have established the venue, over the coming months we shall look towards other ancillary events:

For example, to help meet some of the venue expenditure we can arrange a raffle, but I'm told it has to be kept modest, with no more than £250 spent on buying prizes (non alcoholic) and no money prizes allowed except for gift vouchers. Raffle tickets will be sold on the day and winners must be announced during the event.

Another aspect to consider in order to make the event more attractive would be to promote nearby places of interest for those members who may wish to see some of the local attractions. Wrest House & The Greensand Ridge Walk come immediately to mind, with Woburn

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Abbey & Safari Park, Whipsnade Wild Animal Park and The NH Museum in Tring not far away.

Keynote speakers have still to be confirmed. More news will be reported as it breaks and this will appear in future editions of the magazine and will be posted on our branch website.

Members Day Events, 17 January 2004

Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunt at Saffron Green by Malcolm Hull (Brown Hairstreak Conservation Officer) & Colin Everett

Seven optimistic egg-hunters met at Saffron Green, near Borehamwood to search for Brown Hairstreak eggs. This is former agricultural land, owned by Herts CC and recently partly opened up for public access. The habitat looked ideal and there was an unconfirmed sighting last summer.

Fortunately bright sunshine melted the early frost, so we would have no trouble seeing the small white eggs against the dark Blackthorn stems.

Seven people spent 1.5 hours searching the Blackthorn hedges around 3 fields. All 3 were selected because of the overgrown nature of the Blackthorn, with small shoots suckering out from the hedge. This is believed to be the most favoured laying territory, particularly where the hedges face south or west.

Sadly no eggs to report, but a number of other wildlife observations were made. A larval case found on a blackthorn twig was identified by Colin Everett as a member of a micro-moth in the family Coleophoridae. Unfortunately, identification to species level is not possible: there are several species which overwinter on blackthorn in this way.

Egg hunts this year by Upper Thames Branch in Oxfordshire have been finding eggs at known sites at intervals of 15-20 minutes. In combination we searched for 10 hours. The lack of eggs does not prove the species is not present on the site/in the area, but there is clearly not a thriving colony.

The Brown Hairstreak's probable extinction in Herts appears to be linked with unsympathetic hedgerow management on farms in the

past. In recent years this has changed, with overgrown Blackthorn hedges now seen in many areas of South Herts, particularly on clay soils between St Albans and Borehamwood.

After several years of decline, 2003 was an excellent one for the species, with record numbers of eggs counted at the nearest colonies in Oxfordshire - 193 were found in 30 hours searching at Whitecross Green Wood on 7 February. It is possible that increasing numbers at existing colonies will allow the butterfly to recolonise one day.

Continued habitat management for the species at Saffron Green would be useful to encourage Brown Haistreak colonisation and we have made suggestions to Herts CC. The same applies to any other potential sites.

If blackthorn rich hedges have to be cut, this should be on a three-year rotational pattern. Mowing of the grass should ideally keep away from the hedges to avoid taking out Blackthorn suckers. Grazing of hedges by horses deters egg-laying & they should ideally be kept away e.g. by electric fences.

The following noteworthy birds were seen during the event: Sparrowhawk; Stock Dove (three flying over; the species was also holding territory at the site on our visit last summer); Little Owl; Meadow Pipit; Fieldfare; Redwing; Jay; Jackdaw; Rook (rookery nearby); Starling (flock of 100+); Goldfinch (flock of 14); Yellowhammer. A Fox was also seen on the open fields.

Many thanks to Nigel Agar and Herts County Council for help in setting up the trip.

Annual General Meeting, Welwyn Civic Centre

There was an excellent turnout for this year's Member's Day meeting and AGM, with almost 50 people in attendance. Before the start of the formal AGM proceedings, members were treated to an excellent presentation given by Tom Brereton, who works for the Society as their Monitoring and Species Ecologist, and is based at Head Office in Dorset. His presentation was very well received and followed by a lively question and answer session.

In his final Chairman's address, Gavin Vicary described the growth of the Branch during his six years' tenure. In that time, the Branch has grown to be the fourth-largest in the Country, and will be celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, since the split of the original London Branch.

To mark the Committee's gratitude to Gavin, Margaret Noakes presented him with a signed print of his favourite butterfly, the Small Copper.

In his Treasurer's report, John Hollingdale highlighted the substantial contribution to Branch funds being made by the sales team, with special thanks to Malcolm Hull, Alan Downie and Malcolm Newland. During the financial year to 31 March 2003 just over £1,900 had been generated by sales, the majority being sales of plants.

John Murray, Branch Recorder, gave a preliminary presentation on data from 2003. We were in the 4th year of a 5 year project following on from the Millennium Atlas Project. There were several gaps in the coverage of tetrads, in particular in SW Middlesex and around Letchworth in Hertfordshire. Volunteers for these areas were needed. Also nationally there were gaps in Ireland, Wales and Cornwall to name some examples and members if on holiday in these areas were asked to report any recordings.

Provisional figures showed the winners in 2003 to be Small Heath and Small Copper with Brown Argus, White Admiral, Meadow Brown and Common Blue doing well as well as an abundance of Painted Ladies in August. Small Tortoiseshell numbers had also gone up. Losers were Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Peacock.

Margaret Noakes, Membership Secretary, provided the following

report:

A year of fluctuating numbers, 2003 comes to an end with a member in Singapore and one in Germany. Less far flung we have members from Bedfordshire(5), Hampshire(3), Essex(3), Surrey (6), Buckinghamshire(1), West Sussex(1), Oxfordshire(2) and 1 in both Suffolk and Wiltshire. Many of these members are members also of their own county Branch.

As in the past our Branch spreads from Royston in the north east, Hitchin and Letchworth in the north and Tring in the north west. Enfield in the east and Uxbridge in the west form the other boundaries extending to the River Thames in the south. The definition of Middlesex still provides the branch committee with an interesting point for discussion!! As always the bulk of our members come from the centre of the branch area, with a very large number owning a London postal code.

This year has been particularly difficult one for head office and membership. Suffice to say that these difficulties are gradually being resolved and the figures for membership in our branch are 550, with 7 young members and 63 life members. We are still the fourth largest branch in Butterfly Conservation.

May I end with a very big welcome to all our new members who have joined us in the last year. Do come and join us in our activities. We would be delighted to see you.

Margaret's husband John, the Millhopper's Reserve Manager, then gave a brief update, as detailed in our last newsletter.

The new Branch Constitution was then formally accepted and the formal proceedings ended with election of Branch Committee members.

After refreshments, the afternoon concluded with members slides and digital photographs.

Grizzled Skippers – An Update. Jez Perkins, Species Co-ordinator.

As Grizzled Skippers are one of the first small butterflies to emerge I thought it would be appropriate to write an update to whet appetites and encourage people to go out and about looking for this species.



Grizzled Skippers had a fair year in 2003, sightings coming from 8 sites with a maximum of 16 seen at Waterford Heath and singletons seen at Kingsmead and Bunker's Park.

Grizzled Skipper continues to be a priority species in the county. The Species Action Plan is undergoing a five year review, with key organisations agreeing objectives and actions which prescribe how this species is to be managed over the coming few years. At the time of writing, the review process was at the wider consultation period where the plan will have its final amendments made. The Species Action Plan also highlights the need to promote this species to a wider audience, including land owners, managers and members of the public through running field trips, writing articles and annual reports.

To aid this process, Sharon Hearle, BC Regional Officer, has produced an extremely useful leaflet entitled "Grizzled Skippers Need our Help". The leaflet has photographs of similar species that could cause confusion in identification, such as Latticed Heath, also their ecology, how to manage sites for Grizzled Skipper and what you can do to help safeguard this species from further decline.

There is also a training day organised, aimed at beginners, entitled "Grizzled Skipper Survey and Ecology". Course details are:

Saturday 24th April: 10am – 4pm., High Lodge, Brandon in Suffolk

The course is free of charge but booking is essential. Contact Sharon on 01638 663990 or shearle@butterfly-conservation.org.uk to ensure a place. If you would like to receive a copy of the leaflet please contact me at 43 Kingsley Walk, Tring, Herts HP23 5DR or on sorrynotin@hotmail.com

One important note with regards to the leaflet. The phone number for Whipsnade Downs is incorrect. The correct phone number is 01582 873569. Any Grizzled Skipper sightings gratefully received at my address or email above.

Happy hunting!

The Wall Brown - 2003 Season Report, by Richard Bigg

SUMMARY

Memories of the 2003 season are of a long period of hot, dry sunny weather, conditions which suit this species. However, May, when the first brood of the Wall is expected, was a month of cool strong winds and heavy showers. The hot weather started in June and went on more or less continuously through to August. The number of reported sightings of this butterfly are even less than in the previous season, and all occurred before the end of July.



2003 REPORTED SIGHTINGS

- 5 April – A Ms. Lesley Ivory reported a Wall Brown in her garden at Gustard Wood near Wheathampsted. If correct, this was an extremely early specimen. She told me that she had seen them in the garden other years also, and assured me she had identified correctly.
- 5 May – Tony Clancy reported seeing one at William Girling Reservoir. TQ 363928
- 9 May – Stuart Pittman reported one seen at Highdown.
- 22 July – Nick Sampford reported one seen in Ware on Park Road, TL 348147
- 23 July – Nick Sampford again saw one, this time in Jewson's yard at Hertford. TL 339125

PERSONAL VISITS

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

There have been sightings of the Wall around Ware in other years, particularly to the north of this town, so through late April and May I visited a number of areas in this region with a negative result.

Following the reported sighting in Jewson's yard I visited an area behind the yard, which was waste ground some years ago, but is now landscaped. In spite of repeated visits in suitable weather conditions the result was again negative. I also found time in mid-August to pay one visit to Pirton (Highdown area) and Telegraph Hill but although I saw numbers of Common Blue, Speckled Wood and various Whites there was no sign of a Wall Brown.

DISCUSSION

Owing to the larval food plant being widely available (various grasses) it is difficult to determine where the isolated specimens which are reported, might be located as a colony, if such exists at all. If the odd sighting in successive years can be called consistent, then the area around Ware would seem to be a good place to search, and as far as I can, I will be doing this. Perhaps anyone living near Ware could also help.

The two specimens seen in late July could have been first brood delayed due to poor weather earlier, in which case, there was an absence of any second brood sightings. Second brood would normally be expected through August and September. The scarcity of this species probably results in there being only one brood. This being so it is best to concentrate searches through late April to June.

The species is very sensitive to weather conditions, requiring warm sun, so if the early period is poor, the search should be extended into July.

Summer on 'a Well-Known Hill above Tring Station', by Martin Hicks, Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre

Having lived in Tring for nearly 15 years, a visit to Aldbury Nowers to enjoy its wildlife and the beauty of the Chiltern hills should not be anything unusual. But recent years of running a smallholding and Morris dancing have all kept me away from simply enjoying the local countryside – while it still survives! So when a desperate e-mail at the Records Centre made a plea for someone to undertake a programme of butterfly transects at what was Hertfordshire's most important butterfly site, I volunteered. A few weekends looking at butterflies sounded rather pleasant. 23 continuous surveys under strict(ish) conditions later.....I have discovered for myself why this has long been regarded as one of Hertfordshire's more special sites.

Aldbury Nowers was used by botany students from UCL for many years, probably during the period when it was heavily rabbit grazed during the 1940s and 1950s. This maintained the short dense grassland sward of classic chalk downland character with a huge variety of herbs. In the Flora of Hertfordshire, Dony describes the chalk forming 'a fine escarpment to be seen at its best in this part of the county at Aldbury Nowers, a well known hill above Tring Station'. His visits in 1962 recorded 50 species of plants within an area of 5 yards radius – including classic chalk grassland plants such as *salad burnet*, *quaking grass*, *Ladies bedstraw*, *rock rose*, *squinancywort*, *dwarf thistle*, *mouse-ear hawkweed*, *rough hawkbit*, *milkwort*, *Devil's-bit scabious*, *wild thyme*, *harebell*, *glaucous sedge*, *wild basil*, *dropwort*, *wild strawberry*, *fairy flax* and *marjoram*. It was formerly known also for supporting *pasque flower*, 'probably the best known of all our more rare Hertfordshire plants'.



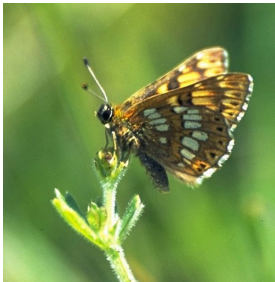
Squinancywort

It is interesting to note that Dony recorded hawthorn less than 3 feet tall, while ash was less than 6 inches – and both species were regarded as rare! But history has not been kind to this site. The dramatic decline of rabbits due to myxomatosis led to a coarsening of the grassland with upright brome, extensive scrub development of *hawthorn*, *blackthorn* and *dogwood*, as well as the development of *ash* and *birch* woodland. While management to

control scrub is taking place, the restoration of rabbit numbers and the decline in traditional agricultural control techniques led in the late 1980s and 1990s to a huge expansion of rabbits. Their localised overgrazing had a devastating impact on the grassland, creating large areas of bare and disturbed ground with short, heavily grazed turf elsewhere.

Control, exclusion fences and predation have subsequently reduced rabbit numbers. The grassland is now beginning to recover, and currently exhibits a range of vegetation communities from short turf to longer, rank grassland, bramble, scrub and woodland. Currently it is not in as good a botanical condition as when Dony surveyed it, but this is nature and reflects dramatically changing circumstances and environmental pressures. Whilst its true potential perhaps remains locked up, it remains in a state of ecological flux – a situation which actually adds to the diversity of chalk grasslands in the area. It is very different to the short downland of the adjacent Pitstone Hill, but this is no bad thing.

Notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1990, and opened by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother as the Trust Reserve Duchie's Piece in 1991, conservation work continues to maintain and improve the site. If all records are truly valid, up to 37 butterfly species have been recorded historically within the grassland, scrub and woodland communities, but since the 1950s there has been a steady decline.



Duke of Burgundy

Silver Spotted Skipper and *Adonis Blue* were last seen in the 50s, while over the next 20 years *Marsh Fritillary*, *White-letter Hairstreak* and *High -brown Fritillary* disappeared. Since 2000, records have not been made for *Small Blue*, *Chalkhill Blue*, *Dark-green Fritillary*, *Wall* and *Duke of Burgundy*.

Clearly some of these changes reflect regional trends in butterflies and are not necessarily related to site conditions or management. But where good sites still survive, an understanding of changes is essential in order to help influence management, re-affirm the importance of particular sites and the value of further habitat creation opportunities. Recording one of Butterfly Conservation's transects since 1992 has helped to demonstrate this, confirming the value of such recording in

understanding both ecology and management requirements.

So what of the summer on the hill? It was hot, dry and remained a haven for butterflies, still one of the most species-rich sites in the county. 23 different kinds were recorded, from *Brimstone* and *Orange Tip* early in the season, to *Marbled White*, *Gatekeeper*, *Meadow Brown* and *Ringlet* towards the end. Rarer species included *Small Copper* and *Brown Argus*, but the most exciting discoveries were *Grizzled Skipper* and *Green Hairstreak*, important Biodiversity Action Plan butterflies which were confirmed as still being present.

This year – hopefully with better eyes and a net! – I will be looking out for *Duke of Burgundy* which may still survive, along with *Small Skipper*, *Dingy Skipper* and *Holly Blue*, and perhaps other species found just across the valley in Tring Park. Clearly there have been significant declines over the years, but this is the case for most if not all sites within Hertfordshire. Nature is resilient if we allow it to be, and species and numbers will always fluctuate, especially under pressure of change. Rather than degrade the value of remaining good sites, it makes their conservation even more important.



Green Hairstreak

What is significant is that key species are still present at Aldbury Nowers, and opportunities for others still probably exist. Only further recording will real how well the butterfly population continues to fare, and our understanding of its continued importance and its quiet beauty continues to make it the special place it is. So here's looking forward to another summer on the hill above Tring Station....

If you would like to start transect recording, contact John Murray (01582 833544, Email: j.b.murray@open.ac.uk). You can download Transect instructions and recording forms from the website at: <http://www.btinternet.com/~michael.goodyear/BCHM/records.htm#transect>

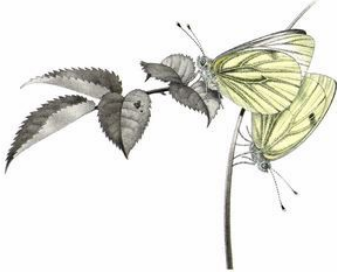
Winter Meeting, Harrow Arts Centre, 28 February 2004, by Liz Goodyear

Holding a meeting in Middlesex was a long overdue event and something the Committee had been keen to do. We arranged a variety of speakers to interest everyone and Head Office supplied us with a list of participants from the Gardening for Butterflies scheme. We wrote to everyone on the list that lived in the Harrow area and invited them to come along as one of the talks was going to be on “Gardening for Butterflies”. To our delight it soon became apparent the event was going to be very well supported and the room was full. Unfortunately it was at this point we also realised that the computer gremlin had struck and despite desperate attempts to get the digital projector to work, it stubbornly refused to co-operate.



So with the aid of two laptops running side by side, Andrew Wood gave a very informative and interesting talk on Transect Recording. Using his Balls Wood transect as an example, he was able to show through the cumulative data collected over several years of monitoring, how trends in species numbers were developing and how changes in the woodland structure may be a factor. A really good example of why transect monitoring is so important.

The second speakers were Andrew Middleton and myself. We had to forget our carefully crafted PowerPoint presentation and simply talk about our progress with the Purple Emperor project. Before we could talk about the present, we gave a brief background report on the



historic information we had collected and how this mapped out over the Branch region over the last 100 years or so. With the present, we included ways to look for suitable habitat by looking for willow, the caterpillar's food plant, in the Spring. It is essential that willow can be found in abundance at a potential woodland site

before considering looking for Purple Emperor there in the Summer. Our talk ended with a short piece of video footage of Purple Emperors seen in Hertfordshire.

After the interval, Emily Funnell, our London and South East Regional Officer, gave an illustrated talk on Gardening for Butterflies. Emily was sensible and used a slide and overhead projector and everyone was able to enjoy her pictures of garden butterflies and moths as well as butterfly and moth friendly plants. With lots of sensible tips on how to encourage butterflies and moths into your garden and with many of the plants mentioned on sale, everyone was able to go home with new ideas.

The meeting closed with a selection of digital images thanks to Andrew Wood and Roger Gibbons. Although only viewed on a laptop screen, everyone was able to appreciate the beauty of these moths and butterflies.

With over 40 people attending this was one of our most successful meetings and we hope that many more members will be encouraged to come along when we arrange some new dates for this Autumn and next Winter. At the time of writing this article we have still to plan next Winter's programme, but it is very apparent that we really do need to try and find new areas in our Branch region to visit. We would still welcome suggestions for venues, especially in southwest Middlesex. Church halls with good public transport links, accessible car parking and kitchen facilities appear to be the most suitable. Suggestions for halls in new areas of Hertfordshire would also be appreciated.

Field Trip Programme 2004

We have produced the field trip programme in a different format this year and the first instalment is enclosed with this newsletter. As members will see, the trips cover a wide range of species, as well as trying to give every member the opportunity of attending a trip in their own area at some time during the year. We do hope that several of you will attend, as leaders give their free time to make these visits possible and it can be very disappointing if only a few people turn up. Don't be put off by poor weather, as all leaders know a lot about wildlife so even if the butterflies are not being fully co-operative they can point out lots of other interesting things. We have tried to give as much public transport information as possible, but please if going by train, do check that there are no engineering works that might change the timetable! A second programme will come out with the next newsletter to cover the second half of the year and will include details of our winter programme as well.

The programme includes several events in Middlesex and two deserve extra mention. On **Sunday 25th April**, Leslie Williams with the Barn Hill Conservation Group will lead a walk from **Roe Green Walled Garden to Fryent Country Park**. This will be an opportunity for members new to identification to get some extra help and for those with some experience to simply enjoy a visit to the area. The field trip starts with a tour of the Walled Gardens, then the walk will proceed across Roe Green Park, through Masons Field (a proposed extension to the Country Park) into Fryent Country Park. On return to the Walled Gardens there will be a second opportunity to look at the gardens. Alternatively, you could bring a picnic and re-visit Fryent Park and explore the area at your leisure in the afternoon - a chance to have a nice day out in Spring. Leslie Williams is the London Natural History Society's Butterfly Recorder.

Andy Culshaw and Rachel Terry have arranged a field trip to **Horsenden Hill** on the **Sunday 27th June**. Here there will be an opportunity to look at some of the moths caught the previous night in the Horsenden moth trap and then be shown around Horsenden Hill. Horsenden Hill is one of the best sites in the area (and even Branch) to see White-letter Hairstreak, a butterfly that can be very elusive to the untrained eye. The area is a haven for wildlife and in addition to the White-letter there will be lots to see on this very interesting walk. After the field trip, there will be an opportunity to have a more

thorough look at the moths – do bring a picnic if you want to spend longer visiting the area.

The programme includes a selection of field trips arranged by our neighbouring branches including Cambridgeshire & Essex for the first time. This gives everyone the opportunity to see a few of the species we don't have in our Branch area (or for some members these events might even be closer.)

Do check the website www.hmbutterflyconservation.org.uk for any additions to the programme, as we often get sent details of other butterfly related trips arranged by other groups as the season progresses. If any member would like to lead a field trip or has suggestions for a potential new site to visit – please contact Liz Goodyear.

Herts & Middx BC Sales Stall - 2004 Programme, by Malcolm Hull

- **Friday 2 - Sunday 4 April** - Capel Manor's Spring Gardening & Country Show, Capel Manor College, Bullsmoor Lane, Enfield Middx 10.am - 5 pm daily - Admission Charge £7 (reductions on Friday & for Children)
- **Saturday 24 April** – St. Albans Market, St. Peters St., St. Albans (just in front of Old Town Hall) 9.00 – 5.00. No admission charge.
- **Saturday 22-Sunday 23 May** - Three Valleys Environment & Canal Fair, The Aquadrome, Frogmore Lane, Rickmansworth 10am - 6 pm. Admission charges apply
- **Saturday 29 – Sunday 30 May** – Herts County Show, The Showground, Dunstable Road, Redbourn. Admission charges apply. Alan Downie will be giving a talk on butterfly gardening on Saturday.
- **Saturday 3 July** – North Watford Show, Bill Everett Community Centre Leggatts Way, Watford
- **Sunday 4 July** – St. Albans Environmental Market, St Peters St, St Albans. No admission charge
- **Saturday 10 July** – Long Marston, near Tring – Tea at the

Tower, at the Old Church, Chapel Lane 2 pm – 5pm. Close to our own nature reserve at Millhoppers)

Other events planned but not yet confirmed include the BC National AGM in November.

Further events will be added onto the sales events section of the branch website at <http://www.hmbutterflyconservation.org.uk/> during the year

READERS LETTERS

Natural Habitat of the Heath Fritillary, by Paul Jeffery

I think I can answer Mr Fassett's query (newsletter, December 2003) about the natural habitat of the Heath Fritillary.

About 1950, I was out with David Hare looking for this butterfly in the Gunnislake area (Cornwall) as we knew it occurred somewhere in the vicinity. Eventually we stumbled upon it in some abundance in a small area now known as the Lockett site. What we found was that it thrived in a small area of thin acidic soils that were too poor to permit the establishment of trees. I take it that this is the natural habitat.

Many thanks for this fascinating insight - editor.

Readers letters are welcomed on any lepidoptera-related topic.

White-letter Hairstreak and Dutch Elm Disease, by John Stevens

Readers may recall the articles in this newsletter in June & September 2002 by Andrew Brooks of Hampshire & Isle of Wight branch which explained the background to what he entitled "The Hybrid Elm Pilot Study" (HEPS). Without going over too much old ground, the previous articles mentioned how the spread of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) during the 1970's and 1980's had destroyed the vast majority of the British population of Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) and English Elm (*U.procera*) which are the two larval foodplants of the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly. HEPS began in Hampshire in



Heath Fritillary

2002 with the planting of 250+ trees from 10 hybrids and Asiatic species to examine whether non-native hybrids of the elm family would survive the English climate and whether White-letter Hairstreak would adapt to the use of such hybrids.

The majority of the hybrids planted were ‘Dodoens’ and ‘Clusius’, both of which have Wych Elm (*U.glabra*) and the Himalayan (Kashmir) Elm (*U.wallichiana*) in their immediate ancestry. Neither is impervious to DED but they are highly resistant to it. A third hybrid, ‘New Horizon’, is of far-eastern parentage but seems to be almost totally DED-resistant and has proven very hardy and adaptable in trials in the USA. Other hybrids which have become available to HEPS are listed in the previous articles.

I have now received from Andrew Brookes a copy of the second annual HEPS report which indicates that 14 hybrids/species are now being evaluated but that some of the hybrids, although resistant to DED, have proved intolerant of the heavy, wet, clay soils found throughout the pilot study area. Of the established hybrids, ‘Lutece’ (DED immune) and ‘Accolade’ have fared the best with 100% survival of both saturated ground and drought conditions. Such was the vigour of Lutece that 1525 young trees were planted in hedgerows on the Isle of Wight during 2003.

Some very positive results have been obtained from the trial of European White Elm (*U.laevis*) which seems to revel in Hampshire conditions and while not DED-resistant, seems to be very unattractive to the vector bark beetles and is thus rarely infected.

It remains to be seen whether any of the trials will produce a tree which is both acceptable to White-letter Hairstreak and immune to DED but failure will not be due to lack of effort!!

Summarised by John Stevens with the kind agreement of Andrew Brookes. If anyone wishes to receive a copy of the report itself (any arboriculturalists out there??) please contact me - (details on back cover).

Monarch Butterflies Face Climate Threat

Monarch butterflies may lose their winter habitat within 50 years because of climate change, say researchers.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

The following text summarises an article published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, November 25, 2003, Vol. 100 (24) 14063-14068

Each autumn, Monarchs migrate thousands of kilometres from North America to the oyamel fir forests of Mexico, where they spend the winter months. Scientists fear that increased rainfall may render the forests unsuitable for the butterflies - which can only survive under very specific conditions.

Herculean journey

Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) have a very complex life-cycle. They breed east of the Rocky Mountains during the summer months, before embarking on a Herculean journey to reach their wintering grounds in central Mexico. Exactly how they get there is one of nature's mysteries. They navigate south by using the Sun - but their precise destination is a mere pinprick on the map, so the Sun cannot provide the whole answer. "If I was navigating my way to Mexico City using the Sun I would never get there," said Karen Oberhauser, of the University of Minnesota, US. "You would need a really smart person to work out how they do it. You would need to think like a butterfly." The Monarchs from North America feed on milkweed during the summer. In the winter they must migrate to a place where the climate is not so harsh. But crucially they need somewhere cool enough to keep their metabolism low, because there is no milkweed for them to eat.

"They have to survive the winter entirely on the reserves they built up over the summer," said Dr Oberhauser. Habitats that fit the Monarch's specific needs are rare. Their winter home is restricted to the mountainous oyamel fir forests, where they huddle in great colonies around the trunks of the trees. The cool but relatively dry conditions are just right for the Monarchs, and they cannot cope with much fluctuation. Scientists have already noticed that Monarch populations take a nosedive if there are any "blips" in their winter climate. In February 1992, for example, a single storm caused 82% of a colony to die, and 42% died after a snowfall in 1981.

Increased rainfall

Dr Oberhauser and her colleagues used a technique called ecological niche modelling to predict how the Monarchs' winter home will

change over the next 50 years. They found that, while the temperature in the oyamel forests is unlikely to change much, it will rain more, which the butterflies cannot stand because the wet increases their chances of freezing to death. The range of locations that fit the Monarch's requirements is likely to shrink even further, because of deforestation to make way for agriculture. Between 1971 and 1999, 44% of the butterflies' winter habitat was degraded, which means it was either cleared or thinned so that it was no longer suitable for the Monarchs. Scientists are worried that if this north-south migratory population is wiped out, it will prevent them from solving the mystery of how the Monarchs know to follow the same route every year. "The next step is to take the research on to a continental scale, to see if there are other places they can spend the winter," said Dr Oberhaser. "We need to think to the future, to preserve sites that might be suitable."

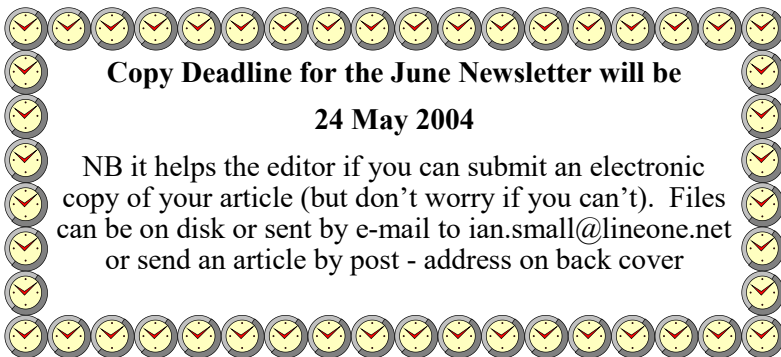
St Albans to Get New Butterfly ‘Biome’

Many members will have seen the announcements in the national press on 8 March announcing that the world’s largest butterfly dome is to be built in St. Albans. Apparently planning permission has been granted for this £15m, 30-acre development (which is said to be reminiscent of the Eden Project in Cornwall), next to the Gardens of the Rose.

Press articles indicate that up to 250,000 butterflies could fly in a 100m long transparent dome, which will have other areas for the display of other insects, e.g. spiders. It is also planned that wildflower meadows will be created around the site to attract native butterflies and moths.

The Butterfly World Charitable Trust has been formed to run the centre and to distribute profits to other wildlife or educational causes. The Trust is headed by Sir David Bellamy, and includes leading butterfly expert (and BC Vice-President) Jeremy Thomas. The property developer behind the scheme is Clive Farrell, who is also a Vice-President of BC.

It is clear that the creation of this tourist attraction will divide opinions and, at the time of writing, it is not completely clear whether all planning hurdles have been overcome. Be assured that the Branch Committee will be watching developments very closely, and if the scheme is to go ahead, then BC will endeavour to work with the scheme’s backers to ensure that its activities and ours are not in conflict.



Copy Deadline for the June Newsletter will be
24 May 2004

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



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. Fourth Sunday of the month. Meet at 10.30 am. John and Margaret Noakes 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 Thompson (01763) 241443.

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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