



Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER ISSUE *56*

Autumn 2009

Springwatch in Castlepoint,

by David Chandler

We very rarely see abundance these days and with the springtime immigration of Painted Ladies we have had a taste of this now scarce event. This springtime I have experienced another form of butterfly abundance but in this case, much more local.

The story starts in Castlepoint, a district in South Essex between Southend and Basildon where my partner Kathryn lives. One evening in late May a leaflet was pushed through her front door from the BBC's natural history unit. The leaflet said that BBC's Springwatch was filming in Benfleet and that if we had any interesting wildlife stories, particularly about badgers, to contact the local wildlife film crew team. Kathryn has badgers and foxes visit her garden and they

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have created a path through it with entry and exit holes in the fences at each end of the garden.

Kathryn was very excited about Springwatch team's visit so at 10.30pm, after our planned visit to the local cinema, instead of her climbing the stairs to Bedfordshire, she "badgered" me to go badger-watching with her at the nearby Thundersley Glen.

We set off towards the glen some half-mile away but, in the very next street, we bumped into the BBC's Gordon Buchanan, the Springwatch outside broadcast unit car and his cameraman. Kathryn excitedly told Gordon about her own garden badgers and we agreed to tell him on our return about any sightings we made at the sett in Thundersley Glen. As often happens when one goes nature watching for a particular species we only saw foxes and we told Gordon so on our homeward journey. Gordon, who told us that his role for Springwatch wasn't as glamorous a job as it appeared, stayed outside monitoring the footpath well past midnight but was rewarded with some wonderful shots of badgers using Benfleet's public footpaths and their meetings with the local domestic cats.

Writing about this nature-watching event and trying to find a target species on cue reminds me of a wonderful butterfly experience Kathryn and I had about ten days later in Pound Wood, an ancient forest in the Castepoint district not too far away from the badgers of Thundersley Glen. We had read in the local council's annual report that Heath Fritillaries were found in Pound Wood so, on this sunny Sunday morning we decided to go over there for an exploratory wood-walk to try and locate them.

Having parked up at the gate of this Essex Wildlife Trust site we were just looking at the entry information sign, when all of a sudden we were approached by David Harris, a fellow member of Kathryn's local church, who unbeknown to us was the volunteer warden for the site and was just off to monitor the numbers of Heath Fritillaries. It was a very odd but wonderful coincidence that David appeared exactly when he did.

The very amenable David took us directly to the three coppiced areas that supported the best populations of Heath Fritillary. These areas abutted electricity power lines that passed through the wood and by

necessity had been cleared of their undergrowth.

The wildlife trust volunteers had created a coppicing cycle to suit the Heath Fritillaries and, unlike the other Heath Fritillary sites I've seen in recent years, were also very careful to leave a patchwork of mature trees to provide dappled sunlight for the butterfly. Cow wheat (the larval foodplant) was lush in the best coppiced areas and this annual plant, according to David, was encouraged to spread to the adjacent newly cleared coppiced areas with the assistance of wood ants.



Heath Fritillary
Photo © Ian Small

It is strange that the Heath Fritillary appeared to need dappled shade in Pound Wood for I always thought this butterfly loves the warmth and sunshine of cleared areas in the middle of woodlands. However, as the proverb says, the proof of the pudding is in the eating because, as we observed in Pound Wood's best Heath Fritillary clearing, when there was cloud cover we could only find two or three Heath Fritillaries roosting, yet when the sun came out from behind the clouds one hundred and sixty four Heath Fritillaries rose out of the undergrowth to parade for David, Kathryn and I in an area no bigger than a cricket square. What a wonderful experience for us three to see this rare butterfly in such abundance, albeit at the peak of its flight period.

Important Date for Your Diary

The Herts. & Middx Branch Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 23rd January 2010

Our guest speaker will be Maurice Avent, the national Chairman of Butterfly Conservation.

Venue to be confirmed – full details will be in the next newsletter

We Would Love to Know, by Margaret Noakes, Membership Secretary

July, August and September of 2009 have shown an unexpected trend and a delightful one too. We have had a surge of new members join our Branch, in fact over forty new members, most of whom have joined either as family members or joint members but some as single members.

This significant increase has occurred at a time of recession when my expectation was that many members would decide they could no longer afford to be a member of our Society. This increase in membership reflects what is happening with membership in the Society as a whole, but more so. In other words the increase in our Branch is greater than almost any other branch.

So why?

I have a few theories which I would like to test but I need your help.

I would like to think that with less available money we find ourselves going back to basics and are deciding that some of what we see around us is worth pursuing in greater depth, rather than the need to spend to find our entertainment.

But has the advent of Butterfly World in our midst highlighted the beauty of butterflies sufficiently to want to find out more?

Or has the summer this year made butterflies more obvious, particularly our visitors from the south, the Painted Lady, and again encouraged us to need to know more?

Or has the offer of a year's free membership made joining not such an onerous financial proposition?

Or are we so lovely in our Branch and the activities and information that we provide so worthwhile that people want to join us?

There are other reasons no doubt and I would love to know what they are.

And why have so many members stayed with us for so many years?

So if you could find the time why not send me an e.mail or write to

me (details on back cover). I would love to hear from you.

Just to finish, but a few figures. We now have 625 members and are the 6th largest branch in Butterfly Conservation.

Thank you for joining us. You are very welcome.

It is great to have you

Data Protection

I am sure most of our members know about the law around Data Protection and certainly in the new members pack, Butterfly Conservation explain their approach to this law.

But just to remind our members of how this applies to us as a Branch.

As Branch membership secretary I hold, on behalf of the Branch, information about all members, including name, address and telephone number, the category of membership and their date of joining Butterfly Conservation.

I only use the data in relation to Branch business and it is not passed onto anybody or any organisation outside Butterfly Conservation.

But if any member would prefer to opt out of the above please do let me know

Can You Help?

As detailed above, our Branch now has over 600 members and is one of the largest branches of Butterfly Conservation.

We are a thriving and successful Branch with dedicated volunteers helping with the many jobs that need to be done to 'run a Branch'.

For some years, several of the committee members have been doubling up their roles but with the increased membership this is becoming much harder. We have also recently lost two valuable supporters with Alan Downie standing down from the committee and Ann Piper moving to Cambridgeshire. (Alan was responsible for growing the plants for the sales stand and Ann help in many ways but most importantly she took the minutes at the committee meetings.)

So we now need your help. Can you spare some time to help with organising or helping the sales and promotion team or take on the role of field trip co-ordinator?

Although we hope that anyone volunteering would attend committee meetings, this wouldn't be essential, although access to the internet would be desirable as we do a lot of our communication by email. We meet on a weekday evening about six times a year and usually at John Murray's house which is near Wheathampstead. Someone to take the minutes at these meetings would also be welcomed. If you don't drive we may be able to help with a lift.

If you feel you can help in any way or would like more information please ring or email Liz Goodyear. (Details on back of newsletter cover).

First Experiments with a Home Moth-Trap in Wembley: March to August 2009, By Debbie Pledge

Attending various events in 2008 convinced me that my interest in moths was sufficient to warrant the purchase of a moth trap. With my trap (Skinner with two 30W Actinic bulbs) safely delivered I was raring to go in March. Our back garden backs on to Fryent Country Park, and within a short distance are lots of Ash, a few Willows, some Field Maple, a small patch of Rowan, Bramble and some evergreens. Only 15 metres away is the old parish boundary separating Kingsbury from Harrow. The boundary is marked by a row of mature Oaks. Garden features include a small pond, small vegetable patch, plum tree, fig tree, gooseberry bush and Buddleia. I planted Borage and Honesty this year to attract more insects.

Between 20 March and 26 August 2009 the trap was run 14 times and 46 moth species were recorded. There were a few macro moths too difficult to identify – most of these were pugs which I am still learning to appreciate. As we have neighbours on both sides the trap is not run all night. I often go several days without using it, partly because to avoid the full moon and rainy evenings, but more importantly because I am taking a relaxed approach to this hobby: I'm not in a mad rush to see everything as quickly as possible.

Things I have learnt include: how useful head-torches are; not to pack down the trap inside the house even though it looks empty; frogs are curious about moth traps; keep the kitchen door closed when taking photographs for the moment when a moth comes to life. I can recommend Chris Manley's new photographic guide [1] as it helped me identify some species when the illustrations in the Waring and Townsend books had me puzzled.

My favourite moth was a Lime Hawkmoth in June: I was really hoping to get one, and seeing one in the 'flesh' beats looking at a picture every time.

Some of the other recorded moths include: Streamer, Angle Shades, Green Carpet, Flame Shoulder, Blotched Emerald, Heart and Dart, Riband Wave, Barred Straw, Willow Beauty, Clouded Border, Scarce Footman, Tree-lichen Beauty, Ruby Tiger, Setaceous Hebrew Character, Maiden's Blush and Copper Underwing.

Moths are identified in the evening and kept until the following morning. I photograph as many as possible inside and after releasing them outside onto the Plum tree I try to take another photo. I upload the best results to my Flickr account: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/erithacusuk/>

Key factors in my enjoyment of this hobby are that every night brings something different, the moths themselves are often very beautiful, and the challenge of identifying them calls for a good eye for detail. I am looking forward to more discoveries in 2009 and in future years.



Blotched Emerald



Ruby Tiger



Heart and Dart

All photos © Debbie Pledge

[1] British Moths and Butterflies. A photographic guide. Manley, C. London: A&C Black. 2008 ISBN: 9780713686364

Heartwood Forest, near Sandridge, by Malcolm Hull

Late last year the Woodland Trust announced that they had completed the purchase of a substantial site north of Sandridge on which to plant a major new forest. The site has previously been in intensive agricultural use with a few small dark woods and there were few recent butterfly records from there. This seemed like a great opportunity to create some good new butterfly habitat, particularly as the site is close to good existing butterfly sites at Nomansland Common, Symondshyde Great Wood and Jersey Farm Woodland Park.

The Woodland Trust own over a thousand sites in the UK and their priority is to manage these mainly for trees. Most woodland butterflies seem to thrive when trees are actively managed, involving the removal or coppicing of trees. On other sites this has meant that the Woodland Trusts management regime has not always been to Butterfly Conservation's liking.

Most of the Woodland Trust's sites are existing woods. Heartwood is to be the largest new native broadleaf forest planted for many years. So it is a rather different type of project, which hopefully will provide enough space and better scope for co-operation.

So far we have helped the WT in preparing their Environmental Statement, which is required by the Forestry Commission. This involved:

- Making three daytime trips to the site to record butterflies. A surprisingly high total of 20 species were recorded, including Marbled White, Small Copper and Purple Hairstreak. High numbers of butterflies were recorded along the woodland edge and an ancient hedgerow. These areas have been in environmental management by the farmer for some years. I recorded my highest totals this year for Peacocks (80) and Large White (5,000) at this site
- One night-time trip to record moths with John Murray. We set two traps at the edge of Langley Wood and recorded 93 species in just over three hours, of which Scarce Silver-lines was the least common

- With Andrew Woods help we identified which rarer species had been recorded at nearby sites and which might be attracted to the new forest
- Dan Hoare, our regional BC staff member prepared advice on how butterflies needs can be taken into account when planting a new forest. I found this very interesting and a copy is produced below
- Woodland Trust staff subsequently attended a workshop organised by Dan Hoare on managing woodland for butterflies. At the time of writing (end September) the WT are awaiting Forestry Commission approval before detailed planning and planting can begin. They estimate that planting the forest will take 10 years and some of the land will remain in agricultural use for several years. One sixth of the area will not be planted, allowing space for plenty of rides and clearings. In future months we hope to work closely with the Trust in developing the forest and continue to monitor butterflies on the site. If any members would like to be involved with the project, or simply find out more about it, please contact me, details on the back page.

Heartwood Forest – Notes on Habitat Enhancements for Butterflies and Moths at the Woodland Trust’s Woodland Creation Project at Sandridge, Hertfordshire, by Dan Hoare

New native woodlands as a habitat for lepidoptera

The creation of new native woodlands (typically on arable or other farmland) has increased greatly in recent decades, and has the potential to form important links between existing woodland sites and provide significant contributions to landscape biodiversity. However, many woodland creation schemes are not fulfilling their true potential in terms of biodiversity, and have little prospect of developing significant woodland ecosystems over 50 or 100 years.

In particular, once newly planted woodlands have closed canopy the chances of new flora developing are much reduced, making the early stages of new creation projects vitally important in determining their future biodiversity benefits. Incorporating key features at the design

stage is crucial, and relatively small and inexpensive enhancements can make very significant contributions to the development of the ecosystem in the long term.

A general guide to features that can enhance biodiversity has been produced by East Malling Research - Woodland Creation for Wildlife: a guide to creating new woodland for wildlife in Kent and East Sussex by David Blakesley. This is available to download at <http://www.emr.ac.uk/recentpublication.htm>. Butterfly Conservation are working with the authors on a national publication highlighting the same issues, the broad principles of which are outlined below.

General principles

Increasing floral and shrub species diversity. Butterflies require flowering plants as nectar sources and foodplants for developing larvae, and it is often the latter that is the factor limiting butterfly breeding populations in woodlands. With one or two exceptions, butterflies associated with woodland use grasses, herbaceous plants or shrubs as larval foodplants, and increasing the diversity of these species in planting mixes will greatly improve the value of the site for butterflies and moths.

Improving vegetation structural diversity. Uniform grassland or even-aged woodland plantings can be enhanced by using different planting mixes, staggering planting schedules, incorporating areas with short management cycles (e.g. coppice). Grassland areas and rides should not be uniformly mown – edges can be left to retain longer grass and natural scrub regeneration.

Providing a graded, shrub-rich woodland edge. Rides and glades function as extensions of the woodland-edge habitats which are often richest in wildlife, including butterflies and moths. Ride designs should incorporate a three-zone structure of short grass (managed regularly for access), longer grass and tall herbs (mown every 2-4 years) and a taller edge of scrub or coppice (cut every 6-20 years) that grades into developing high forest.

Planning a ride and glade network that connects to likely sources of colonisation. While many butterflies of the wider countryside are relatively mobile, the chances of colonisation, particularly by scarcer

species or grassland specialists, is very much improved by providing open sunny rides connecting into the ride network of neighbouring woodland. Cut material from ride mowing should be collected and removed or piled at the ride edge.

Specific guidance for key woodland species in Hertfordshire

Four woodland specialist butterflies of high conservation importance occur in neighbouring woodlands within colonisation distance of the Heartwood Forest site (the first three within 1-2km), and all could be encouraged to breed on site:

Purple Emperor – found within 10km of the site, and capable of colonising over long distances. Thought of as a species of high forest, breeding on sallows in established woodlands, but it readily uses willow bushes on ride edges or in younger willow thickets. *Goat Willow (Salix caprea)* is the preferred foodplant, which can be easily planted as whips in ride edges and wet flushes, and incorporated in planting mixes. Sallows are also a very important early-season nectar source for butterflies, bees and other insects, as well as a foodplant for many moths.



Purple Emperor
Photo © Ian Small

Silver-washed Fritillary – a 30% decline in UK distribution in over 30 years, but currently undergoing a population increase in the South East and expanding its local distribution. Breeds in rides, glades and coppice where the larvae feed on Common Dog Violets. It particularly likes recently-managed coppice, woodland edge and ride edges managed on rotation (3-12 years). Adults nectar on bramble in high summer and thrive where sunny but sheltered banks of bramble are allowed to develop. Encourage violets by rotational management of scrub and coppice edge, and consider plug-planting violets where colonisation from existing ancient woodland is unlikely.

White Admiral – a very severe decline in population levels on occupied sites may be due to increases in deer numbers in the core of its range in southern England, browsing out the honeysuckle on which

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the larvae depend. Adults are typically seen at established banks of bramble, which require sensitive management to ensure a continuous resource. *Honeysuckle planted in the shrub zone of the ride edge should be allowed to develop* – straggling plants growing in shaded conditions inside the tree crop are favoured for breeding. *Avoid routine ‘cleaning’ of honeysuckle from established trees during forestry operations.*

White-letter Hairstreak – more widely reported in recent years due to increased recording, this species breeds on elms, including Wych Elm, English Elm and Small-leaved Elm. *Both native and disease-resistant hybrid elms can be incorporated into planting mixes.* The adults spend long periods high in the tree canopy, often feeding on aphid honeydew, but also come to nectar sources in rides and woodland edges.



White-letter Hairstreak
Photo © Ian Small

Open habitat management on areas not being planted with trees

Nomansland Common immediately to the north will be a key source of colonisation for Heartwood Forest, both for common species and some scarcer grassland species, including Small Heath, Small Copper, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Marbled White. An extension of this unimproved grassland habitat into the open habitat network of the Heartwood project area would be a very significant contribution to the landscape. This will, however, depend upon the soil fertility of the site, and in general would be most practical where soil nutrients are lowest. Grassland seed mixes should aim to incorporate fine grasses such as fescues and bents, and areas of very short turf or bare ground would be a major addition to the grassland habitat mosaic. We would strongly recommend aiming to retain parts of this area as permanent open grassland and scrub, rather than allowing natural regeneration to secondary woodland throughout.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

CMS Gentle Weekday Butterfly Walks in SW Herts, by David Chandler

I was asked to accompany the Country Management Services field trip leader on two butterfly walks in South West Herts. acting as the informed butterfly observer. **The first walk took place at Prestwick Road Meadows near South Oxhey on 7th July and the second at Croxley Common Moor near Croxley Green on 30th July.** The CMS' John Johnson led the first walk and his colleague Alex Laurie led the second.

It was a day of sunshine and heavy thundery showers on the first walk at Prestwick Road Meadows. Despite a gloomy weather forecast around a dozed people attended.

The site is predominately an unimproved meadow bordered by scrubby woodland and hedges; there are plenty of butterfly food and nectar plants so, quite surprisingly for a suburban site, a good number of butterflies were found. We found Large, Small and Essex Skippers, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, Comma, Peacock, Small, Large and Green-veined White plus a tantalising glimpse of Purple Hairstreak high up in the oak trees near the site entrance. A surprisingly good day for the poor weather conditions with the walk finishing during a thunderous downpour.

It was a day of sunshine and light squally showers on the second walk at Croxley Common Moor. The weather forecast was fair so around a score of people attended.

The site is lovely mix of ancient flower meadow with scrubby woodland, with some marshes, chalk-land, river gravels and lowland heath. The site is bordered on one side by the River Gade, a chalk-stream and on the other by marsh and a small patch of lowland heath with heather and large ancient anthills. Lowland heath is a particularly scarce type of countryside in crowded southern England these days. Accordingly there are a wonderfully diverse variety of plants found on the site many of which are loved by the butterflies. We found Essex Skipper, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper, Painted

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Ladies, Red Admiral, Comma, and Peacock, Small, Large and Green-veined Whites plus Common Blues. The Common Blues being particularly interesting in that both the regular brown and blue-form females were seen together on the site, something I seen only on a few other down land sites in southern England.



Female Common Blue (blue form)
Photo © Ian Small

Croxley Common Moor is maintained by volunteer work party helpers and grazed by cattle and this active environmental management helps to maintain its biodiversity.

2009 Field Trips Round-up by Malcolm Hull

2009 was a vintage year for field trips. There were lots of butterflies about and the weather was good for all four trips that I led. A total of 140 people turned up including good numbers of Branch members. In all 29 butterfly species were seen and three of the trips turned up unusually high counts for less common species

Sunday 10 May - Aldbury Nowers near Tring - a bumper turnout of 36 butterfly spotters recorded a total of 13 butterfly species: Dingy Skipper (14), Grizzled Skipper (2), Green Hairstreak (3), Brown Argus (9), Small Copper (2), Small Heath (6), Common Blue (5), Brimstone (25), Orange Tip (14), as well as assorted Speckled Woods, Peacocks, Large and Green-veined Whites. Moth species included Treble Bar, Common and Green Carpet, Mother Shipton, Mint and Cinnabar. It was good to find Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper again after these were absent from last years trip. The most encouraging news is that the rarer butterflies have spread throughout the site, colonising the areas where topsoil was removed, with 8 of the Dingy Skippers being recorded in area N1. It appears that the major restoration works carried out in 2007 are having a positive effect. The newly installed Scottish sheep were seen busy munching their way through the scrub to prevent regeneration.

Sunday 12 July - Bricket Wood Common near St Albans - Despite the early rain, 25 butterfly spotters assembled at St Stephens Parish

Centre. The hedge there alongside Drop Lane contained a good amount of elm and we saw approximately 4 White-letter Hairstreak, including one at rest. Brimstone, Red Admiral, Essex Skipper, Gatekeeper, Comma and Large White were all on the same hedge. Tearing ourselves away, we headed for the Common, pausing at some oaks on Station Rd, where we had a good view of a single Purple Hairstreak through binoculars and on digital camera. Along the ride, a large cloud passed over and Ringlets were the main species in evidence. But when the sun returned we were rewarded with Marbled White, White Admiral (6 in total) and Silver-washed Fritillary. Unusually the first two SWF's were both females, nectaring close together on bramble. Males patrolled up & down the ride at high speed, behaviour that made a precise count difficult. At one point three were seen flying together. In total 3 females were positively identified and 2 males, though most of those patrolling are likely to be males. A conservative total, (disregarding some sightings that might be double counting) is 12, including 11 along the ride plus one more seen later in School Lane. Colin Everett and I had recorded 12 SWF's in Whippendell Wood, near Watford a few days earlier. Together, these are the highest totals for this species since it re-colonised Herts about 6 years ago and probably the highest totals in the whole branch area for 40 years.

More Marbled Whites were seen on the thistle patch on the Hertfordshire Way footpath, another Brimstone and a new Peacock.

In total 19 butterfly species were recorded including (in addition to those mentioned above) Large and Small Skipper, Small and Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Speckled Wood and Comma. Heading back along School Lane we saw several Green-veined Whites and a Skipper taking moisture or salts from mud beside a puddle. Butterflies taking salts can be a spectacular sight and is not particularly common in our branch area. Moths included Straw Dot, Dusky Footman and Vapourer.

The impressive numbers of butterflies seen are a tribute to the hard work put in by St Stephens Parish Council and Countryside Management Services in managing the common. During the walk we passed areas where there had been coppicing carried out last winter,

scalloping along the edge of the ride, selective removal of regenerating scrub in the ride and creation of small clearings by the removal of a handful of trees. All these initiatives are known to benefit woodland butterflies and are included in the site management plan, which BC have contributed to. Further scrub removal and coppicing are planned for the coming winter and progress towards the introduction of extensive cattle grazing is still progressing.

Sunday 16 August - Aldbury Nowers near Tring. 45 people attended and were rewarded with sightings of spectacular numbers of Common Blues. No precise count was taken, but 200 is a reasonable estimate – in comparison the highest total for this species in Herts & Middx last year was 19. The reason for this explosion in numbers is unknown – numbers had been at usual levels in May. Probably it was due to climactic factors as Common Blues seemed to do very well throughout the area this year. Other species noted included Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Large White, Painted Lady, Brimstone, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Essex Skipper, Comma, Peacock, Ringlet, Small Skipper and Speckled Wood

Moths identified included Silver Y, Common Carpet, Mother Shipton and Large Yellow Underwing. The trip concluded in the northern end of the site, with the spectacular site of dozens of butterflies – browns and blues, jostling for nectar around clumps of Wild Marjoram.

However we were unable to repeat the sightings of Clouded Yellow, Small Blue and second brood Dingy Skipper which I had less than a mile away at Pitstone a few days earlier.

Sunday 20 September – Nomansland Common near Sandridge. A new site for a late season field trip and an unexpectedly high turnout of 34 people. The weather was fine and the grass on the common had not yet been mown. We headed towards the border with Heartwood Forest, but after 10 minutes we had not seen a single butterfly and I was beginning to get concerned. Eventually a Green-veined White appeared and came to rest, but I could tell that it failed to impress the assembled throng. After 20 minutes the first Small Copper was spotted and I heaved a sigh of relief. A steady trickle of Coppers followed and we were up to five by the time we crossed Ferrers Lane, heading north to the patch of heather west of Down Green Lane. Here



Small Copper
Photo © Ian Small

there were many more coppers nectaring and we counted 34 in this area. Overgrazing by rabbits has become a severe problem in this area, with the grass eaten right down and parched brown. New heather is also struggling to grow and control through occasional rabbit trapping seems ineffective. Plans to introduce controlled cattle grazing have had to be abandoned due to local opposition, mostly from horse-riders.

Heading east following the line of Ferrers Lane we arrived at the main breeding area, which is alongside the Sandridge to Wheathampstead Rd, just NW of the Ferrers Lane junction. Here the grass is not so intensively rabbit grazed and there is a high concentration of Sheeps Sorrell, which is used as the larval foodplant. Many more Coppers were seen in this area, a few nectaring on Ragwort, but many resting on the Sorrell, with one female seen laying.

In total we saw 70 Small Coppers, one Comma, one Common Blue, one Speckled Wood, two Green-veined White, two Peacock and one Silver Y. This is the highest total of Small Coppers recorded from one site visit anywhere in the Herts & Middx area for 14 years

Butterfly World - The Worlds Biggest Butterfly Attraction Opens in St Albans, by Malcolm Hull

Butterfly World opened to the public on 5 June 2009. It closed for the winter on 4 October and the provisional dates for opening in 2010 are 28 May – 3 October.

The brainchild of Butterfly Conservation Vice President Clive Farrell, it aims to become the worlds biggest indoor butterfly attraction. It also aims to raise awareness of environmental issues, particularly the decline in numbers of butterflies and moths. It aims to be controversial and stimulate debate about how we can best conserve the butterfly.

My involvement began earlier in the year when I agreed to take on the job of liaising between Butterfly World and the Branch. An early season tour of the 27 acre site in February showed much work had been done removing topsoil from the site. The purpose of this is to reduce soil fertility to allow wild flowers to compete with coarse grasses. It was hard to imagine how a sea of mud could be transformed into a butterfly paradise in three months. But the plan was beginning to take shape. In May I arranged two tasks for volunteers from the Branch to help with planting at the Theatre of Insects and the British Butterfly Garden. The place was alive with activity with over 100 people working to get ready for the opening. But there was still far more mud than plants to be seen.

In the end they made it and on 4 June there were over 100 journalists and photographers at the press conference to see Clive Farrell, David Bellamy and Emilia Fox open the site. There was still a good deal of earth to be seen, but the plants were in place and growing fast. There is so much to see that it is difficult to summarise, but for those who haven't visited, here goes. There are four main elements to the site – the lane & car park, the gardens, the meadows and the tropical dome

The Lane & Car Park

Free to get into this bit and quite an attraction in itself. Miriam Lane is the newly created access road to the site, required by the planning permission. Named after Miriam Rothschild who had previously co-authored a butterfly gardening book with Clive Farrell and was involved with the project in the early days before her death. The lane is a beautiful tribute, cut into the ground its well drained banks with poor soil contain tens of thousands of wild flowers. Shrubs planted along the margins will grow into a hedge, with species chosen to support a wide range of wildlife. The lane leads into the car park, also surrounded by a profusion of wild flowers. It's the most attractive car park you are ever likely to visit.

Gardens

Future Gardens are 12 individual gardens, each with a different designer and chosen after a competition that attracted ten times as many entries. Their aim is to bewilder enchant delight and perplex.

All have a strong environmental theme. Some are gritty and urban and others covered in poetry. Most contain a good range of butterfly attracting plants. There are far too many to describe in detail & its expected that they will all change by next year. There's lots more information at www.futuregardens.org

There are also four permanent gardens,

- Through the Flowerpot Garden – an ants eye view of gardening
- The Spangle Gall Garden – 11 separate beds depicting different types of habitat and how to have fun in the garden.
- The Theatre of Insects – designed on a landfill theme, with a host of attractive hidey-holes and plants for insects. My personal favourite and on one memorable day in early August 25 Painted Ladies were nectaring on the flowers
- British Butterfly Garden – designed by Andrew George from BC's West Country Branch, this garden has a wide range of nectar sources and caterpillar food plants with informative display boards. Many of the plants were planted by branch members. Small Tortoiseshells quickly found the golden nettle patch which was covered with their caterpillars in July.



(left to right:) Martin Warren (BC Chief Executive); Hugo Brooke (BC Trustee); Maurice Avent (BC Chairman); Andrew George (garden designer); Jeremy Thomas (BC Vice-President) and his daughter visiting the British Butterfly Garden on opening day.

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The Meadows

Sown with a wildflower mixture providing nectar sources and caterpillar food plants with species from UK, South Africa and California. The meadows, including the proboscis garden, were a riot of colour from June to October. Masses of Birdsfoot trefoil soon attracted good numbers of Common Blues. No grass at all was planted in the meadows. Grass will soon seed itself, but in the meantime the wildflowers will have a good chance to get well established. One consequence is that grassland species such as browns and skippers were mostly absent from the site.



The 500 yard long antennae are south facing chalk banks, created by covering mounds of topsoil with chalk subsoil excavated from the site. They are designed to be covered by chalk flora, which may attract interesting butterflies although this year. This year they had been planted with cornfield annuals, which were colourful, but not much of a butterfly attraction.

The Dome

This will be the main visitor attraction. The concrete rim is already constructed, but the full dome wont be open before 2011. This year the dome site was planted with sunflowers – not mush of an attraction to butterflies I thought. But I was wrong - Painted Ladies were the star butterfly, seen immigrating in large numbers during the Branch

working party in late May, they were the most common butterfly recorded on the site overall and almost every week. Many fresh specimens were seen, a clear indication that they were breeding there. But their usual larval food plant, thistles aren't present on site. So what plants were they using? The answer is sunflowers, not shown in most books as a known food plant, although in north America Painted Ladies are regarded as an agricultural pest due to their ability to decimate commercial sunflower crops.

While the construction of the dome is awaited, there is a small tropical greenhouse

Branch Open Day

Clive Farrell to invite all Branch members and their families for a free tour round to see the site for themselves on 18 July. Over 200 people turned up, making this our biggest ever branch event by some margin. Clive and Andrew George showed members round the site and we are grateful for their time and generosity.

Transect

Each week I've been walking the site to record butterfly numbers, so we can see what effect the different types of habitat & their management have on population numbers. This will provide an objective way of assessing the ecological value of the site. So far 12 species have been recorded on the transect. Painted Ladies and Large Whites are the most common species and Clouded Yellow the most unusual sighting. Thanks to Mandy Floyd for help while I was away. If anyone else would be interested in helping next year, please let me know.

The Future

Visitor numbers have grown steadily over the summer and in future years Butterfly World will attract hundreds of thousands of people coming to see butterflies. This provides a unique opportunity for Butterfly Conservation to reach a wider audience. I believe we should continue to develop a relationship with Butterfly World, to promote our message to a warmish audience and to use the educational opportunities it presents.

The Tropical Butterfly House at Golders Hill Park, by Peter Shirley

Those of us who visited Butterfly World at Future Gardens near St. Albans in July, were, I'm sure, impressed by what they saw. The temporary house for tropical butterflies was filled with a wide variety of species flying from nectar plant to nectar plant to strategically placed rotting fruit and had us all snapping away with our cameras. I chatted to a number of fellow members of the Herts and Middlesex branch of BC and none were aware that there was another tropical butterfly house within our area, at Golders Hill Park. This is part of the Hampstead heath complex, and easily accessible from Golders Green tube station.

I have been a volunteer in this butterfly house since May of this year, but the house first opened in 2008. Golders Hill Park has a mini zoo, and I gather that it was the initiative of a couple of the keepers, to convert one of the park greenhouses into a haven for tropical butterflies and open it to the public. Suitable plants were chosen and planted and are now well established. The butterflies, and occasional moths, are purchased as pupae from a UK company that imports them mainly from Costa Rica and other South American sources. We get a delivery every week and one of the tasks I most enjoy, is to open up the special delivery package to reveal anything from 50 to 200 pupae (depending on the enthusiasm of Ross, the head keeper who does the ordering). We have to quickly attach all the pupae to wooden batons using a spot of glue at the tail, so they can hang in our emergence cabinet and emerge and dry their wings before flying out into the house.

The main activity for us volunteers, is to greet the many visitors, answer questions about the butterflies, the plants and what we do, as well as on less sunny days, helping them see the various butterflies that are resting under leaves, on the windows or on the nectar feeders. We don't encourage the butterflies to breed too freely in the house, as in its first year they found most of the foodplants quickly became completely decimated, but there are usually some eggs, caterpillars and pupae to be found in the vegetation, and which are a great delight to visitors.

I appreciate that we are situated at the very edge of the Herts and Middx area, beyond which no doubt dragons can be found, but if you are interested, please do make the effort to visit us and maybe even join as a

volunteer. Entry to the house and the park is free, with the house being open 2.00 to 4.00 pm every day from 4 April to 6 September, then just Friday, Saturday and Sunday up to 1 November. We close through the winter months. I try to be there most Wednesdays and would be very pleased to see you. Should you be interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Heath Hands, who co-ordinate all volunteers on Hampstead Heath, on 020 8458 9102, but why not visit us first.

Attract More Butterflies into your Garden in 2010

A new stock of seeds for butterfly attracting plants is now available to Branch members. Offering a range of caterpillar food plants and valuable nectar sources, our seeds are all packed by branch members and available by post in return for a voluntary donation. The current list of available species is set out below and this will expand as more seeds ripen during the autumn. An up to date list will be kept on the sales page of the branch website, together with all our range of butterfly sales goods, at <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/gardening/sales-new.html>

Aquilegia	Lavender Dwarf Munstead
Asclepias Incarnata	Blue
Betony	Lavender – Hidcote
Birds Foot Trefoil	Lesser Knapweed
Black Medick	Lychnis Coronaria
Broad Bean (The Sutton)	Nicotiana Sylvestris
Cosmo Daisy	Purple Toadflax
Cowslip	Perennial Sweet Pea
Cupid's Dart (Catanache)	Red Campion
Single Dahlia mixed	Red Valerian
Devils-bit Scabious	Red Valerian - White
Evening Primrose(biennial)	Red Valerian – Pink
Fleabane	Runner Beans
Forget – me – not	Scabious Lilac
Foxglove	Scabious White
Garlic Mustard	Silene Fimbriata
Globe Thistle	Sweet Pea Mixed Scented
Greater Knapweed	Sweet Rocket White
Helichrysum	Sweet William Mixed
Hemp Agrimony	Teasel
Honesty	Verbena Bonariensis
Ice Plant	Wonder of Peru (Mirabilis)
Knautia mixed	

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Suggested donation – 50 p per pack. Please add 10% for postage and packing (minimum 30p) and order from Malcolm Hull, 11 Abbey View Road, St Albans, Herts, AL3 4QL.

malcolmhull@ntlworld.com (Tel 01727 857893) Please make cheques payable to Herts & Middx Butterfly Conservation

Working with Network Rail, by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

It has long been known that the Grizzled Skipper butterfly thrives on railway lines both disused and those still in use. Historic trackside management benefited the needs of the butterfly with the regular maintenance gangs keeping the railway embankments tidy and fires caused by sparks from the steam engines keeping additional vegetation in control. As result there are still many known colonies either on railway embankments, close to railways, in industrial sidings and along disused railways trackbeds.



Grizzled Skipper
Photo © Ian Small

For a few years myself and Andrew Middleton have been aware that there was colony on a railway line near Hertford but we were unable to get any idea of the population level as we could only view a small section of the site through binoculars from an adjacent footpath.

With the help of Sharon Hearle (BC) we were able to make contact with Network Rail and made our first accompanied visit to the trackside at the end of 2007 where we were able to talk to several Network Rail staff members about what would be involved.

In 2008 we arranged three visits, the first in late winter to look at other suitable habitat identified by one of the Network Rail staff who knows this particular railway line very well. We then had two visits during the flight period. On all these occasions we were accompanied by a Network Rail staff member and on one occasion the Area Environmental Manager. Sharon had also been organising training

events for trackside workers based in the Peterborough area so they might also start to recognise the Grizzled Skipper as well as Dingy Skipper and the Four-spotted moth. Before our first visit we had to sign numerous forms and this happens at each visit as well. We are told where we can and can't go and have to keep a specified distance from the track although we are able to cross the line escorted. We each have to wear a 'high viz' jacket and safety helmet and if a train passes we have to stop and at the point the train driver sounds the horn, we lift our arm in recognition.

In May 2008 we had two escorted visits to the railway line to look for Grizzled Skipper and we were able to find out the true extent of the colony and we believe it (the colony) is split into two interlinking sections over a total distance of about a kilometre. One section centres on an area where there was an old station and goods yard which was closed many years ago. The site is a wide sheltered area, with low fertility habitat caused by the ballast being strewn across the grass. It is strawberry and bramble rich with numerous rabbits keeping the vegetation in control. Seed heads for roosting grizzled skippers are also present. It is perfect habitat, easily sustained by the substrate and rabbit grazing! The second section is where the track goes into quite a deep sheltered cutting. A few years ago the embankment sides were cleared of trees to stop the leaf fall causing trains to slip but unfortunately most of the trees are regenerating. However, habitat on some areas (at the base) of the embankment remains favourable but because of safety we could not go down this far so in 2008 couldn't assess the population levels on this section. We had to base our assessment on what we could see from the top which was very little although Andrew did find an egg on the second visit.

Date	Section 1 - Old Station	Section 2 - Cutting
13 May 2008	11 adults	2 adults
22 May 2008	6 adults	1 egg
11 May 2009	14 adults	7 adults

In 2009 we arranged only one visit on the 11th May, and on this occasion two trackside staff took us out. Both had been on Sharon's

course and proved to be excellent Grizzled Skipper observers. It was a glorious sunny day, which can't be predicted when the site visit is arranged (although we always have the fall back that we can look for roosters!). As you can see from the tables the results were excellent with 14 on section one and seven on section two. How did we achieve such a high result for the second section? Well this was simple because two trackside staff came along, one was able to go down the embankment onto the track and act as lookout whilst his colleague was able to walk along the edge of the track/embankment side where we were not allowed and count the butterflies for us, calling up to us!

In 2008 on the first visit we also looked at the old station sidings at Bayford and Watton at Stone. At Bayford we concluded the habitat is not good enough so we didn't revisit in 2009. However, the condition of what was an old oil terminal at Watton at Stone looks quite favourable, and although we have not recorded Grizzled Skipper we have seen other local specialist species here such as Small Copper and Brown Argus so we will continue to monitor this site.

We have to thank everyone at Network Rail that makes these visits possible but we have to stress that the location of the site has to remain confidential and trackside trespass is not only dangerous but a criminal offence.



Copy Deadline for the Winter Newsletter will be

1 December 2009

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

Why not brighten everyone's winter by telling us about your favourite butterfly (or other wildlife) moment(s) from 2009 ?



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. Contact Jez Perkins on 07967 832627 for details of planned work parties

Therfield Heath, TL 335400 First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Contact Paul Palmer, Clerk to the Conservators, on (01462) 675232

Ashwell Quarry Nature Reserve TL 252396 for the entrance off Hinxworth Road. Work parties on the third Sunday of each month starting at 10am. Contact Chris James on (01462) 742684

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

Fryent Country Park - details from Barn Hill Conservation Group on 020 8206 0492, www.bhcg.uk.com

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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