

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 84 Spring 2022

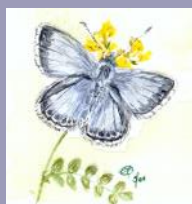
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**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

Welcome to our Spring newsletter. I'm writing this on a gloriously sunny Good Friday and have just seen my first Holly Blues, Orange Tips and Green-veined White. The last hibernating Small Tortoiseshell in my shed left this week. Its all go for the butterfly season 2022!

A lot has happened in the last six months. Our Winter Events Zoom talks were very well supported, both live and by people viewing the recordings on YouTube, which can be accessed [here](https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/youtube-new.php).

[<https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/youtube-new.php>]

These talks have reached a much larger audience than before and we will plan another series in the early part of next year. If you have an idea for a talk or would like to speak yourself, please contact Liz Goodyear.

I was delighted that Members Day went ahead on 2nd April at Welwyn, our first indoor meeting for nearly three years. The speakers on Big City Butterflies and Wilder St Albans were both excellent and all the feedback very positive. It was unfortunate that Covid massively increased during March and many members weren't able to attend. With hindsight we didn't get this quite right – although we looked into a simultaneous Zoom broadcast, the technology wasn't reliable enough. We will look at this again for next year and I'd be interested to hear members views. A full report is on [page 7](#).



Thanks to all the butterfly records you send in, the Branch now has an impressive database showing distributions and trends in our two counties. We aim to use all the information we have to help reverse the massive declines in butterflies and moths which have occurred over the last century. The aim is to achieve a Wilder Herts & Middx with many more areas of land managed in a way which helps butterflies, moths and other wildlife thrive. There are many initiatives being started by local councils, other wildlife groups, friends of local park groups and others and we are either working with them already or would like to.

Would you like to see more butterflies in your local park, woods, road verges? There are lots of great ideas we can help plan such as Low

Mow Verges, Wildflower seeding, building butterfly banks, wilder hedges and better woodland management. Most of these will only happen if they have the support of people who live in the local area. We are currently working in Islington, Haringey, East Herts, Dacorum and Watford. If you live in one of these areas and want to help then do get in touch. If you think there may be opportunities in your area, let us know as we'd love to help.

Our new program of Butterfly Walks and Moth Events has been published and is available [here](#). There are more walks than ever with nearly 40 events planned right across our two counties. So there will be one near you and opportunities to travel to see species you don't see in your local area. Our walks are a great way to meet others with an interest in butterflies and I always learn something new from those I attend. Note that some events require pre-booking - full details are provided in the detailed events programme.

[[https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/fieldtrips/Herts & Middx Field Trips 2022.pdf](https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/fieldtrips/Herts%20&%20Middx%20Field%20Trips%202022.pdf)]

I hope the sun keeps shining and you all get to see many butterflies this Spring and Summer. Remember to keep sending in your records, either direct to Andrew Wood or through iRecord. And if your travelling further afield, see Roger Gibbons article on reporting sightings overseas on [page 21](#).

In Memorium. In issue 81 of this newsletter, we included a tribute to the late John Hollingdale, who had served over 20 years as Branch Treasurer. For many years, he had been a Voluntary Warden at Stanmore Country Park and we are happy to share with you photos of a bench recently erected there in his memory.





“Right now, we are facing a man-made disaster of global scale. The twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss are pushing much of the natural world to the brink – including many of our most treasured species. In the UK, the majority of our butterfly and moth species are in worrying decline. These beautiful and fascinating creatures are not just important in their own right, but are also indicators of a healthy environment for all wildlife. Over the

next five years, Butterfly Conservation is committed to delivering the biggest possible impact for nature, playing a leading role within the conservation sector. As their Vice President, I am proud to support their bold and ambitious new strategy, taking positive action to reverse declines and restore nature across the UK for the benefit of all.”

Chris Packham - Vice President, Butterfly Conservation.

Butterfly Conservation's new organisational strategy defines our priorities over the next year as we continue to drive progress towards a world where butterflies and moths can thrive.

Butterfly Conservation chooses to be a leader in the fight for our natural world. To do that we need to build on our successes and be even more effective, to focus our resources to have a greater impact. We must build stronger collaborations, be part of nature's recovery at a larger scale, and broaden our reach to ensure that everyone has access to and can enjoy the wonders of butterflies and moths.

Our new strategy sets out three key goals to drive forward our work, making a pledge for the impact we will make on threatened species,

doubling our impact on landscape restoration and involving people in transforming spaces for butterflies and moths.

Saving Butterflies and Moths' strategy has three Strategic Goals:

- 1) Halve the number of the UK's threatened species of butterflies and moths
- 2) Improve the condition of 100 of the most important landscapes for butterflies and moths
- 3) Transform 100,000 wild spaces in the UK for people, butterflies and moths

We will deliver these Strategic Goals through a programme of Initiatives which will bring focus and co-ordination to often complex conservation efforts, and inspire many more people to get involved. These Initiatives are intended to address the key areas of concern within the conservation sector as a whole:

- Recover butterflies and moths
- Connect people to nature
- Unite for wildlife
- Tackle threats to species
- Manage land sustainably

Download (6.95 Mb pdf): [Butterfly Conservation Strategy 2021-2026](https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Butterfly-Conservation-Strategy%20Brochure.pdf)

[<https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Butterfly-Conservation-Strategy%20Brochure.pdf>]

Your Herts & Middx Branch Committee, acting through the Chair, Malcolm Hull, have been active in proposing actions that can be undertaken in our Branch area in support of the strategic goals. However, the assessment of all the proposals is still underway at Head Office, and so we await their decisions in due course.

The strategy is undoubtedly ambitious, yet we know as a result of the recent pandemic that our mental health and wellbeing is often reliant on being able to 'connect with nature'. With your support, BC can help to make this a reality for many more people.

CAN YOU HELP ?

If you think you could do more to support our activities, but are unsure how, then we maintain a 'Can You Help' page on our Branch website [here](#) that details projects and activities that would welcome your support.

[<https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/canyouhelp.php>]

Suggestions are provided covering practical conservation, surveying, recording, events and the Big City Butterflies project (see also below). Please take a look, and if you feel you could help, then please reach out to the listed contacts.

Big City Butterflies Project - Call for Volunteer Support

The busy season is fast approaching, and we are gearing up to deliver lots of project activities. To help us with this time, we are looking for support from some amazing volunteers. We will have varied volunteering opportunities in all three strands of the project: Engagement, Habitat Management and Recording & Monitoring.

To register your interest in volunteering with Big City Butterflies please fill in a form via the below link and we will be in touch when a suitable opportunity becomes available. You can indicate specific areas of interest on the form.

[Volunteer Registration/Expression of Interest Form](#)

Members' Day Summary, by Ian Small

An in-person Members' Day was held on 2nd April in Old Welwyn, the first indoor event held by the Branch since the start of the pandemic. Understandably, attendance was much lower than pre-pandemic numbers, with about 30 people attending. The duration of the meeting was restricted to the afternoon only, and seating was well-spaced in the large, well-ventilated room.

Proceedings began with the Branch Chair, Malcolm Hull presenting an overview of the Branch activities during the previous year, under the broad headings of recording, engagement, and conservation & wilding. Each of the Branch Committee were introduced under the relevant headings, and members approved the re-election of those who were standing for re-election.

Malcolm then introduced the **first of the afternoon's speakers – Steve Bolton, on Improving Urban Greenspaces for Butterflies & Moths**. Steve's role in BC is to oversee the conservation activities of the Big City Butterflies project. While this project is geographically restricted to the boroughs of central London, the conservation aims and methods – namely to improve urban green spaces for butterflies and moths – is widely applicable.

After describing the overall objectives of this multi-year project, Steve described the key elements required for butterflies to complete their life cycles:

- a) Caterpillar foodplants: e.g. Birds-foot Trefoil, Sorrel, fine grasses, coarse grasses, nettles, Nasturtium, Honesty, Blackthorn, Elm
- b) Nectar resources: e.g. Knapweed, Ox-eye Daisy, Scabious and Marjoram, Vetch's, Yarrow, Wallflowers, Verbena
- c) Shelter: territories, warm conditions, egg and caterpillar development (e.g. tall grass)
- d) Over-wintering refuge areas: For hibernating eggs, caterpillars, chrysalises or adults (e.g. grass tussocks)

Steve then went on to outline the strategies for grassland enhancement, pointing out that the best habitats for wildflowers, bees and butterflies develop on the poorest soils, where lots of plants are able to compete for the available nutrients without being dominated by coarse grasses. Much of the urban habitat is, however, nutrient-rich,

so various methods need to be used to lower the nutrient levels. One key management change, already being adopted on wider scales, is the switch to less-frequent grass-mowing combined with the removal of the grass-cuttings. Over time, this depletes the nutrient levels substantially, but only if the cuttings are removed, either by machine, or by raking.

More intensive methods of improvement require physical removal of the topsoil or turf, followed by seeding with wildflower seed and plug planting. Similarly, where nutrient levels are perhaps not so high, scarification can be used – aiming for up to 50% bare ground – prior to re-seeding and planting. Using commercial wildflower turf is also now an option, though a relatively expensive one.

Seeding with Yellow-Rattle can be an effective component of creating a wildflower meadow, as it parasitises the coarse grasses, reducing their growth, and therefore leaving more space for wild flowers. The Yellow-Rattle seeds must be sown onto disturbed ground in the autumn, and gently trodden in rather than being buried. The following autumn, the grass should be cut and removed, and wildflower seeds sown (or plug plants put in). The pattern of autumn cutting and removal should be continued to maintain the meadow, although ideally the clippings should be left for a few days after mowing to allow wildflower seeds to fall and invertebrates to escape.

The second presentation was from Heidi Carruthers about the Wilder St. Albans project. Heidi works for the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust, and the project is run jointly with St. Albans City and District Council, who have committed 2 years-worth of funding. The ‘simple’ aim of the project is to increase biodiversity across the district of St. Albans, by creating more space for wildlife – there is simply not enough at present to halt the current declines across a range of species. Heidi’s role as Project Officer is to support any landowner to make positive changes to benefit wildlife – there is something that we can all do, regardless of who we are or what patch we have.

An early success, achieved through working with numerous landowners and partners, is the release of 150 water voles into the River Ver. The project has set up themed working groups around water, trees and meadows where local stakeholders, interest groups and individuals can come together to identify a series of project or actions that can be taken to increase biodiversity.

The project web pages are active [here](#) where you can see how to take

action yourself or find other groups that you can get involved with.

[<https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilderstalbans>]

Resource packs are in preparation to enable schools to take steps to improve their school grounds for wildlife. Some of the actions identified by the Meadows and Trees working groups include:

- a) Increase species richness of amenity grassland
- b) Better manage existing meadow and heathland habitat on key Local Wildlife Sites
- c) Deliver conservation management training to green spaces teams and contractors
- d) Create one hectare of flagship meadow
- e) Increase habitat for small blue butterflies and other chalk grassland species and better connect existing calcareous grassland sites across the District
- f) Increase number of local surveyors to monitor grasslands
- g) Support the planting and management of new and diverse hedgerows

Recorders have already been monitoring the impact of ‘no-mow’ regimes across 38 plots for the number and diversity of plant and butterfly species. These are already resulting in management recommendations and opportunities for 2022 and more ‘no-mow’ plots will be added under the Wilder Spaces initiative. At the time of the presentation, 120 individual spaces had been nominated, and final decisions were awaited. Heidi also described the establishment of Wildlife Gardening Champions - 15 passionate volunteers will pilot these roles offering free 45-minute consultations and bespoke advice for improving urban gardens for wildlife.

Both of these presentations were very well received by the audience, and numerous questions were asked of both speakers.

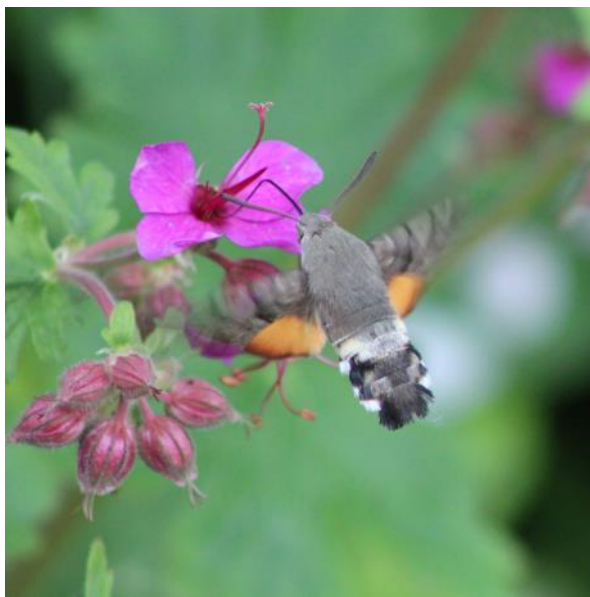
Following a short break and the drawing of the raffle prizes, the winners of the **annual photographic competition** were announced. The winning images are shown overleaf. The ‘non-UK’ category was declared void as only a single entry was submitted !

All the presentations from Members’ Day are on the website [here](#).

[[https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/HMBC Members Day 2022 .pdf](https://hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/HMBC%20Members%20Day%202022.pdf)]



Silver-washed & Dark-green Fritillaries - winner of the UK butterflies category
Photo © Colin Meager



Hummingbird Hawkmoth - winner of the UK moths category
Photo © Annie Sutcliffe

Emperor moth caterpillar -
winner of the non-adult
category
Photo © Annie Sutcliffe



Male & female Orange-tips - winner of the Behaviour category
Photo © Ian Small

Oak Processionary Moth: Recent Developments, by John Murray

The first Oak Processionary moth seen in our area was at Totteridge in 1979, since when an increasing number of this immigrant species has been seen. Since the early arrivals were nearly all males, it did not become established until a number of caterpillars were accidentally introduced into Middlesex in 2006 on imported oak trees from Europe, where the species is a pest that defoliates oak trees. Like many native moth caterpillars, the long hairs can cause skin irritation, and there were scare stories in the press about “poisonous caterpillars”. In fact we are not aware of any hospital admissions as initially feared, nor has there been any serious damage to oak trees.

Despite a programme of containment by the Forestry Commission, the moth has spread all over greater London and the surrounding area. After 10 years it was clear that the containment programme was having no detectable effect, and that the moth was firmly established and would continue to spread out to Hertfordshire and other adjoining counties. Despite this, the Forestry Commission have continued a highly controversial programme of spraying affected trees with a variant of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (abbreviated to Bt for the rest of this article), an insecticide that kills not just Oak Processionary moth, but every single butterfly and moth species in Britain, though it is claimed not to harm any other insects. Although the Forestry Commission have given us very little information, Butterfly Conservation Head Office have pieced together the following table of sites in Britain sprayed with Bt over the past few years, based on partial information:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Sites</u>
2017	350
2018	495
2019	?
2020	1186
2021	1865

The number of actual trees sprayed was more than 50,000 in 2020, so clearly there is huge potential for serious damage to butterfly and moth populations.

Spraying Nature Reserves with Insecticide

Things came to a head this year, when in mid-March a statutory notice was served on Chorleywood Common nature reserve, a prime site for moths such as the Forester, which was thought extinct in Hertfordshire until it turned up at this reserve in 2020. The Forestry Commission was planning to spray oak trees twice with Bt, in the spring and summer. We were contacted by the Parish Council, and after some frank exchanges of view the Forestry Commission was persuaded to remove the caterpillar nests without spraying, though they emphasised that this was a one-off for Chorleywood Common, and that their eradication policy would continue as before.

Chorleywood has proved to be the tip of the iceberg: we have received copies of statutory orders for sites in Wheathampstead, Nomansland Common, Fir and Pond Woods (a Wildlife Trust reserve) and Jersey Farm in Sandridge, where beehives are sited at a wildflower meadow near the affected trees. Since bees are attracted to oak sap, flowers and oak honeydew, although the spray should not kill the bees, there is potential for nectar they are gathering from the oaks to be contaminated with Bt and thus make its way into the honey. Although advocates of Bt point out that the bacillus occurs naturally in soil and is harmless to humans, most people do not eat earth. We are unaware of any guarantee that Bt is fit for human consumption.

It seems that nature reserves are being preferentially targeted for spraying, simply because they are the most likely sites for the caterpillar to be recognised, by rangers who dutifully report it, only to have the work of years threatened by the “nuclear option” of spraying with Bt.

Butterfly Conservation Head Office has adopted a sensible policy on Oak Processionary moth, advocating an education-based approach and opposing all spraying. Their policy has been firmed up recently, and they now oppose nest removal except in exceptional cases such as hospital grounds and children’s playgrounds. The moth has a natural predator, a Tachinid fly that lays eggs near the caterpillars, from which the grubs hatch out and eat their way into the caterpillars, feeding on them until the caterpillars die. Recent research has shown that this predator is an effective way to control the species, but nests should remain in place so that the flies can build up their own populations. There may well be other opportunist predators that adopt Oak Processionary and may become an additional control, as has

happened with other recent invasive pests.

We are currently approaching local councils, national conservation bodies and government ministers to try and persuade the Forestry Commission to follow the Butterfly Conservation guidelines, and are getting sympathetic responses in many quarters. We have also requested a meeting with the Forestry Commission, both to establish more details on the scale of their current operations, as well as to negotiate a policy that is agreeable to both parties. As yet we have received no reply. Butterfly Conservation Head Office are also continuing to talk with government, seeking a change to Forestry Commission policy.

Can you help?

We are anxious to keep track of what is going on in Hertfordshire & Middlesex, so if you hear of any Forestry Commission spraying plans, or are in contact with your anyone in your local council who may have received a statutory notice, please let us know (Emails: j.b.murray@open.ac.uk, malcolmhull@icloud.com). The Butterfly Conservation website has an Oak Processionary Fact Checker and Position Statement [here](#) (scroll down to the last two items).

[<https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/policies-and-statements>]

The Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunting Season Winter 2021/2022, by Liz Goodyear

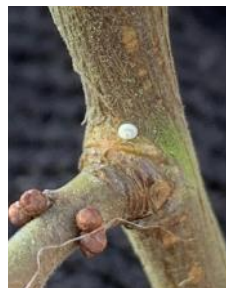
It seemed a long time since I last saw a Brown Hairstreak egg – to be exact the last time had been 3rd March 2020, just as Covid19 was hitting the headlines and shortly afterwards we were all placed in lockdown. Continued restrictions in the winter of 2020 and 2021 meant that the 21st November 2022 was the first opportunity that Andrew Middleton and I had had to conduct a serious egg hunt together. We targeted Stafford Road Open Space and the adjacent field systems near Ickenham, partly to see how the blackthorn was recovering from drastic flailing in previous winters as well as to take photos and video footage for a Zoom PowerPoint presentation we were holding prior to our first egg searching training session on the 5th December 2021!

The day was cold and windy, so the video footage proved problematic – the soundtrack was accompanied by the sound of wind, a football match and of underground trains on the nearby railway shunting around and blowing their horns! However, we were successful in finding eggs – in fact 34 over several hours of searching which was a very good tally, and bode well for the 5th December! For information, the Zoom presentation can be found [here](#)

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTQiet-GRQA>]

The forecast for the 5th December kept changing but we decided to go ahead despite the prospect of ‘a bit of rain’ – we were assisted by 14 people all keen to find Brown Hairstreak eggs! We concentrated our searching on the Stafford Road Open Space and over 30 eggs were found by lunchtime which was also a very good total. In the afternoon, on the way home Andrew and I decided to stop off at Horsenden Hill. Our last visit had been in November 2019 when one single egg was found! But last summer, Dave Howdon had recorded an adult on the opposite side of the road where up to then we had not found any eggs. By now it was seriously raining, and enthusiasm was waning but we kept looking. To our complete surprise we found eight eggs along just one length of blackthorn – this was amazing! A further three eggs were also found along a length of hedge near to where we parked the car – another hedge where we had searched before with no success! Horsenden Hill was now top of our searching agenda in 2022!

But before we could return, we had another site to visit as part of a joint collaboration with Big City Butterflies and the Friends of the Scrubs – Wormwood Scrubs! Our last visit had been in January 2020 when the only eggs found were Blue-bordered Carpet moth eggs of which there were and still are - plenty! Although the day was sunny, it was very cold and windy but to our delight a single Brown Hairstreak egg was found. Wormwood Scrubs is blackthorn/prunus rich and it was a very satisfying experience to find this egg even if it was the only one!



Brown Hairstreak egg
at Wormwood Scrubs.
Photo © Steve Bolton

So January 2022 arrived and the first site to be visited was of course Horsenden Hill, when Andrew accompanied by Dave Howdon, started

searching the blackthorn rich field systems. On the first visit 24 eggs were found and a week later, Andrew and I with Ian Watts from Cambridgeshire & Essex Branch found 47 eggs. This was so exciting and showed that the Brown Hairstreak's range was expanding at a phenomenal rate or so we thought! Our next target was Fryent Country Park – however, here we struggled and despite two visits, our final tally was 14 which was a rather lower figure than we expected, but still an increase on previous visits.

Then we hit the doldrums as well as cold weather! Two long days spent searching the Totteridge field systems where Andrew had found a single egg in the winter of 2020 produced no further eggs, nor were any found in the Whitewebbs/Trent Park areas of Enfield. We also visited the Bentley Priory area for the first time but here we found blackthorn was the missing ingredient. Even more disappointing were two negative searches at the blackthorn/prunus rich Islip Manor Meadows Reserve – situated beside the A40 and almost half way between Stafford Road Open Space and Horsenden Hill. This was top of our list to surely show an expansion from the one egg in 2019? Andrew and I visited and independently so did Ian Watts – disappointment was an understatement!

Our season ended at the beginning of March when the prunus was already starting to flower which makes egg searching much harder. We made two visits to the field systems south of the A40 opposite RAF Northolt. We had looked here before on more than one occasion and the only eggs found had been quite close to the A40! We were really pleased to find eggs around a small recreation field, beside Charville Lane and in the afternoon one more on the other side of the lane close to the Yeading Brook. Then the following week with high expectations of finding more, our last egg finds of the season were two lonely eggs next to each in the Yeading Brook Meadows NR. The most enjoyable part of these last two days of searching was it was warm and sunny and we also were able to record adult butterflies!

Hopefully this summer more adult butterflies will be found and in new locations. It is planned that another egg hunt training event will take place probably around the beginning of December 2022 so watch the branch website for details?

PS it should also be added other people have been out looking for Brown Hairstreak eggs this winter – we just 😊 don't have all the information available to add to this article

Whippendell Woods and Cassiobury Park, by Peter Fewell

(Whippendell Wood is an ancient woodland on the edges of Watford, covering an area of 165.3 acres. It is owned and managed by Watford Borough Council. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and has held this status since 1954)

I will start with the slightly darker side of nature here with the effects of storm Eunice which has taken down a fair number of trees Whippendell Woods, including this cherry tree, clearly demonstrating the destructive power of a large storm. That said it can be more destructive when contractors come into a woodland and open up areas without knowledge or guidance. Such a fate was thought to have happened to a stretch of elm that I only discovered last season. This particular path with elm was looking in better condition than the elm we rescued from the ride widening in 2020. Thankfully, a subsequent visit showed that only a few young elms were removed, and more mature elms remain undisturbed and are flowering well.



in

White-letter Hairstreaks have not been recorded in Whippendell Woods since 2019. I suspect they were around in 2020, which was a bumper year for Purple Hairstreak, but 2021 was not a good year for either species, with few Purple- and no White-Letter Hairstreaks. Whippendell Woods does have SSSI status so White-Letter Hairstreak being on the Bio-diversity action plan list should be taken into consideration and healthy elms should remain.

Before the parks manager left for a new job, she appointed Anna Daniels from the Wildlife Trust to help with the management of Whippendell Woods. I also requested a meeting to provide the information regarding the butterflies found in the park and woods for Butterfly Conservation. So on 1st March I took a day off work to meet Anna along with Rick Vickers. We started in Whippendell Woods, where we have recorded butterflies since 2017. Of all the butterfly species found in the woods the White Admiral is so far doing well as is Silver-washed Fritillary. In 2021, the first White Admiral was recorded on 1st July by Rick and the last on 15th August. They may have been on

the wing earlier but I was away in Somerset with Rick to find Large Blue butterflies as well as number of other species. But the White Admiral was on the wing for a good six weeks which is the longest period recorded so far at this site. In 2018, with the hot drought conditions, the flight period only lasted about two weeks. Rick has kept the records from our sightings since 2017. We passed on all the relevant information to Anna including “Camilla Oak” where the White Admirals particularly like to congregate year on year. This spot is found by an area known as “Strawberry Fields” where I was pleased to see that Anna and her team had cleared back the suckering brambles which had encroached the area.

This area was good for butterflies back in 2017-18 with Silver-Washed Fritillary, Marbled White, Small Copper, Common Blue seen along with Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Ringlets. Since the encroachment there have been fewer butterflies, with the exception of White Admiral and Silver-Washed Fritillary which continue to do well. The work carried out there is a good start for butterflies in Whippendell Woods. The stretch of elm that was cut down was close by, just the other side of Strawberry Fields. We explored this path and explained that this is not good news but suggested planting more elm as we told the story about the White-Letter Hairstreaks photographed there in 2018 and one in 2019.



White Admiral in Whippendell Wood.
Photo © Peter Fewell

I also mentioned the Purple Emperor sightings and put forward the idea of planting more sallow, which in time would increase the chances of seeing one in the Woods. Anna took notes throughout the time, including in the park as well, which I hope will be the start of a better management plan for Whippendell Woods. I shall get onto the park in the next paragraphs, but I am glad I met Anna and I hope we can meet again especially when the White Admiral is on the wing!

Late September 2021 was the “Big Green Week” set up by Watford Council at relatively short notice. I was asked if I could put on a butterfly walk - I replied that I could, but the chances of seeing a butterfly was very slim due to the weather, but I could do more on a theme on growing wild flowers for butterflies. There were a few

frantic emails exchanged between the council, Liz Goodyear and I to get a date sorted. It went ahead, the weather dried up, Liz Goodyear turned up (always a pleasure to see Liz), and a Speckled Wood showed up. After Liz left, the butterfly count got to an impressive 4! with 2 Red Admirals and a Large White spotted by the car park. I was rather pessimistic that morning as it was raining and I had expected the count to be 0. We ventured over to where the Small Copper is regularly seen during good weather. If the weather conditions had been like 2020, this species would have been there this late in September, but of course that wasn't to be.

Common Blue and Brown Argus have also been recorded at this spot - Brown Argus twice in 2018 and in 2020. I saw neither species in the park last season. They didn't have a particularly good season anyway but there were a few Small Copper present during 2021 as sorrel grows close by. With us that day was Vicky, who is currently standing in as Parks Manager for Watford Council. Vicky has helped out with previous butterfly walks and does support a good bio-diversity action plan for the park. We looked at a potential site by the Crochet Club for growing wild flowers for butterflies as it looked ideal as a potential site for butterflies, and this is what inspired my thoughts over the winter for butterflies in Cassiobury Park. After all, it may have been a green week organised by Watford Council, but every week is a green week during the butterfly season - just ask those wonderful volunteers who do transects throughout the year! We discussed these points with Anna where I mentioned briefly a few ideas.

We then found a post mentioning an orchard of which a ring of trees has been planted since. This was right on the spot I had in mind for a rockery designed to support the plants required for butterflies. I intend to put some ideas forward to Watford Borough Council as a response to the green week to help butterflies in the park. I would appreciate other members views regarding any of the concepts below.

I will start by mentioning where I got my inspiration from as it is important to mention this. When I joined Butterfly Conservation, I started going over to the Members Day events in Welwyn. It was just before the closure of Butterfly World, and this, along with all the talks and particularly all the chalk mounds popping up around the London Area that first inspired me. Secondly, Rick Vickers, who not only is generally my companion when out searching for butterflies, but also for persisting with growing wildflowers in his small back garden. Several books have been influential - starting with Jeremy Thomas's

book “ Butterflies of Britain and Ireland” especially the bits on the members of the blue family and the relationship with ants, followed by Professor Dave Goulson for his enlightening books from “Bee Quest” onwards, particularly the parts on brownfield sites is actually the key to my thoughts.

Over winter, I pondered about putting something forward in response to the green week for the park’s butterflies. I had the idea of a rockery as we cannot get lottery funding in Cassiobury Park as that already happened a few years back. So I was thinking about low budget and looking more into brownfield sites and what could be potentially achieved by recycling old rubble and especially broken paving slabs. There should be a plentiful supply to be found at council refuse sites and also what happens to all those slabs that are replaced by the council each year? For size I considered my living room space 6m by 3m with a height about a meter, not too big and not too small.

Within the structure of the rockery, I thought it would be good to create caves suitable for nesting bees and other invertebrates and perhaps big enough to tempt a hedgehog in to hibernate through the winter. I would like to invite the Wildlife Trust in for their advice on the structure, exploring knowledge on bees nesting habits so that the internal part isn't put together in a random fashion. Adding micro-climates to create different niche zones would be useful, of which some could be potentially good for egg-laying butterflies. By building a habitat out recycled material of about this size with added ingredients for the plants such as sand, lime, chalk and preferably some used spent grow-bag's for compost, it should work well for increasing bio-diversity. Concrete based materials will also help keep the pH levels to the required level for growing the plants.

I also considered creating a butterfly path with paving slabs, using a more two dimensional approach than above. It has occurred to me over the years, sitting in gardens with patios, that so called weeds break through the cracks when the pointing goes. Crazy paving was usually worse for those trying to keep a weed free patio. Hence you see a vast array of herbicides and pesticides across garden centres and DIY stores so that people keep their patios in pristine order. Even in my mum’s garden and drive, which my late father constructed, there is now verbena and Mexican fleabane growing out of the patio and lavender seed manages to find a way into the drive and grow there along with a variety of other unwanted plants. The drive is done with close knitted blocks not wide enough to drop a kidney vetch seed in. So bearing that

in mind, if a path is made crazy-paved stile, without pointing it can be planted with the desired plants for butterflies to lay eggs on and also the plants they like to feed upon. The gaps would provide shelter for seeds to germinate and the slabs would suppress other plants and retain a little more moisture during drought periods, depending on the drainage below.

Lets assume the path is a meter wide by six meters in length. The next things to consider are what goes on below the path, the surrounding vegetation and the availability of light. With light, the more there is during the day is best for butterflies.

As for below the slabs, it would be best to strip out the topsoil then replace it with the perfect medium of soil to grow the required plants. Birds-foot trefoil for Common Blue, perhaps rock rose for Brown Argus could be considered along with a good host of plants to provide nectar, such as wild marjoram, scabious etc. With a mixture of sand, lime, some spent compost and even rabbit droppings for the substrate, the nutrient level will be kept low to provide the perfect conditions for the plants to thrive.

Plants may encroach into the space, particularly the tall rank invasive grasses. All grasses clone themselves by moving sideways due to rhizome action. Grasses are very successful and indeed essential for many butterflies throughout their lifecycle. Most grasses we are likely to come across that become a problem could be contained by a barrier that doesn't have to be too deep below the surface. Of course paving slabs could provide the answer to that, but as long as it doesn't involve plastic, other recycled material could be a solution.

It would be great to here other members views on the above especially if these methods have been tried before. If so have they been a success or have they failed? You can email me at p.fewell@yahoo.com

Going to Europe this Summer ? by Roger Gibbons

Whether going on a specialist butterfly trip or just a general nature trip, or even on holiday, a record of any species you see would be valuable in building up a picture of species distributions.

Most countries, even France, the most popular European destination for butterfly enthusiasts, is rather under-recorded, with new locations for

localised and rare species being discovered regularly.

The European conservation bodies, such as CEN (Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels) in France, are becoming increasingly active in monitoring and protecting the more threatened species. As an example, CEN-PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur) recently produced this superb [Atlas of species in the region](#). This link enables a flick-through of some example pages, showing the degree of detail and professional presentation.

[<https://naturographe-editions.fr/boutique/atlas-des-papillons-de-jour-et-zygenes/>]

Much more detail is given [here](#) in a highly informative article by Dr Sam Ellis, until very recently Butterfly Conservation's International Director.

[<http://www.european-butterflies.org.uk/downloads/european%20butterfly%20recording%20and%20monitoring.pdf>]

Sam Ellis has also written on this topic in the Spring 2022 edition of BC's Butterfly magazine, sent to all members (pages 20-21). You can access a pdf copy of the magazine [here](#), or the article directly in the on-line edition [here](#) (this link requires your BC membership number to log in) - editor.

Happy hunting – and let's hope 2022 gives us a return to some degree of normality.

Butterfly Abundance Trends in 2021, by Ian Small

Results from the annual UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) led by Butterfly Conservation, the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), show that while the overall picture for butterflies in 2021 was poor, species that are the focus of targeted conservation efforts have fared well.

Butterfly populations fluctuate naturally from year to year, largely due to the weather, but the long-term trends of UK butterflies are mainly driven by human activity, particularly the deterioration of habitats due to inappropriate management and pollution, and climate change. Conservation efforts can make a real difference to local populations and working on threatened species in key landscapes to deliver nature recovery is a priority.

In England, 2021 was a poor year for butterflies, ranking 33rd out of the 46 years since the UKBMS began. It was a particularly terrible year for Green-veined White, is one of our most widespread butterfly species, which suffered its joint third worst year since 1976. White Admiral also had its third worst year on record and its populations have now decreased by 62% in England since the UKBMS began. After four consecutive years of increase, Large Skipper slumped to its worst numbers since 2012. Gatekeeper had another disappointing year, and this species has now not reached above average numbers since 2007.

It was a below average year for many other common butterflies such as Large White, Small Copper, Common Blue and Holly Blue. Even Ringlet numbers, which have increased by 335% in England since 1976, had its worst year since 2012.

In contrast, Dark Green and Glanville Fritillaries both had their best year on record in England. Brown Hairstreak, Black Hairstreak and Chalk Hill Blue all had their third best year, and Silver-studded Blue and Red Admiral has their fourth best year since monitoring began.

However, despite the context of the generally poor year, there were some promising results for many threatened species. The endangered Heath Fritillary, which has been the focus of long-term intensive conservation efforts in Kent, Essex and Somerset had a good year and has now increased 112% at monitored sites in the last decade.

Andrew Wood summarised the trends in our Branch area in one of our winter online Zoom talks, the recording of which can be viewed [here](#).

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBRdlQ1IoSk>]



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