

Small Blue butterfly conservation project at: GREENWOOD PARK BUTTERFLY BANK

OVERVIEW

The Small Blue is the UK's smallest butterfly. In Hertfordshire, it is one of the rarest species. In 2003, the only surviving colony in Herts died out, but in the last few years it has **begun a remarkable comeback**.

THE LOCATION

Today, the largest colony in the county is at Chiswell Green on the site of the former Butterfly World. This site is now closed and there is no active management to protect the butterfly's habitat.

The Herts & Middlesex Branch of Butterfly Conservation is working with local organisations on a project to save the Small Blue.

St Julian's Meadow in Greenwood Park was identified as a suitable site for habitat creation.

With support from the site owner, St Stephen Parish Council and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, this chalk bank was constructed in spring 2019.



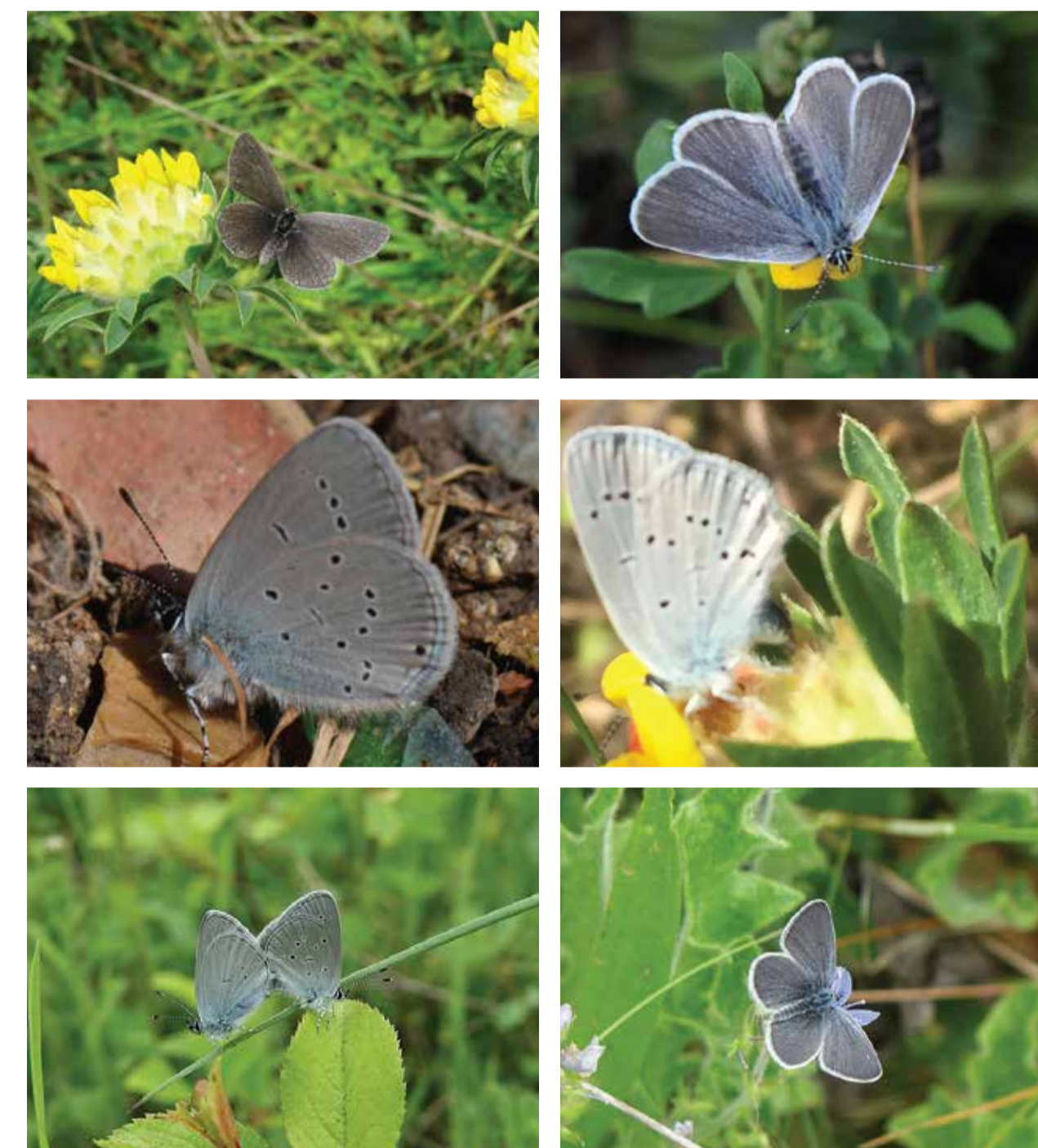
CHALK DELIVERY AND KIDNEY VETCH PLANTING



ABOUT ST JULIAN'S MEADOW

The meadow owned by St Stephen Parish Council has been created from an area previously used as a field and allotments. It forms part of Greenwood Park, which is managed to encourage wildflowers and wildlife to flourish. The grass is cut once a year, late in the summer, to prevent trees and bushes taking over.

IMAGES OF THE SMALL BLUE BUTTERFLY



Similar Species

In the St Albans area there are three other butterfly species which can be confused with the Small Blue.

HOLLY BLUE



Holly Blue: commonly seen in gardens, flying around bushes or nectaring on flowers. Larger than the Small Blue and the upperwings are bright blue with black markings at the edge. The underside is a similar shade of silvery blue with small black dots. Frequently seen around holly and ivy, its two main caterpillar foodplants.

COMMON BLUE



Common Blue: usually found in meadows, but also comes to gardens. The male upper-side is blue, the female ranges from blue to brown with marginal orange spots

BROWN ARGUS



Brown Argus: less common than the Common Blue, it can be found in gardens, fields or meadows. The upper-sides of both males and females are completely brown, with orange marginal spots.



CHALKY SOIL AND KIDNEY VETCH

The Small Blue can only breed on sites with chalky soil which support its caterpillar food plant, Kidney Vetch. For the Vetch to thrive, the soil needs to be of poor fertility and subject to occasional disturbance to allow the seed to set.

Our plan is to introduce chalk into the meadow, creating a shallow bank and ditch. This will then be seeded with a mixture of chalk loving plants, including Kidney Vetch.

We will not be introducing butterflies, but it is hoped that they will find the site as they disperse from other nearby locations.

OTHER WILDFLOWERS AND ANIMALS

Other seeds and plants include:

Bird's-foot trefoil, an important nectar source for the Small Blue and the caterpillar foodplant of the Common Blue.

Rock rose is another nectar source and one of the caterpillar foodplants of the Brown Argus.

Horseshoe vetch is a nectar source and the foodplant for the locally rare Chalkhill Blue butterfly.

The new bank will benefit several moth species and other insects.

Who is Butterfly Conservation

Butterfly Conservation is the UK charity dedicated to saving butterflies, moths and our environment. The Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch represents the charity in Herts and North, West and Central London. It leads the Small Blue Project in this area.

We welcome new members.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP:



Volunteer

To help with the project, contact Malcolm Hull malcolmhull@icloud.com



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About the Small Blue Butterfly life cycle



Like all butterflies and moths, the Small Blue has four different stages to its life.



It starts off as an egg, laid on the flower buds of the Kidney Vetch plant.



Eggs hatch after a few weeks and the tiny caterpillar burrows inside the flower buds, devouring their contents.



Like all caterpillars the Small Blue is very hungry and grows quickly. As it gets bigger it can be seen on the flower heads and occasionally it will move from one flower to another.



Like its cousin the Large Blue, the Small Blue is frequently attended by ants.



Once the caterpillar is fully grown, it crawls to the ground. It then either pupates and emerges as a second brood adult or overwinters as a caterpillar, pupating in the spring.



A complete transformation takes place during the pupa stage, before it finally emerges as a new butterfly.



The upper-side of the Small Blue can appear black or brown at rest, sometimes with a silvery blue hue. The underside is always silver blue, with small black spots. In the past Small Blues usually had one main brood each year, with the adult

butterflies flying in June. But the colony in Chiswell Green usually produces two broods. First generation adults fly from mid-May to June and the second brood from late July to August. The adult butterfly lives for around 3 months.

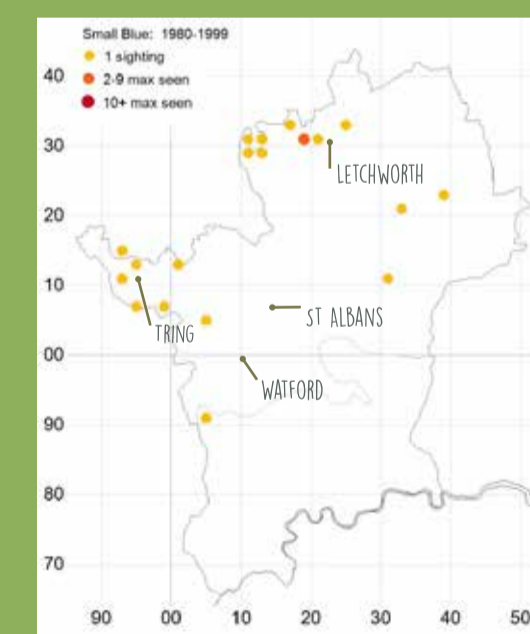
Status in Hertfordshire

Like many butterflies, numbers of Small Blues declined dramatically in the second half of the last century. This was largely due to the loss of habitat and use of agricultural sprays. The last breeding colony of Small Blues was lost in 2003.

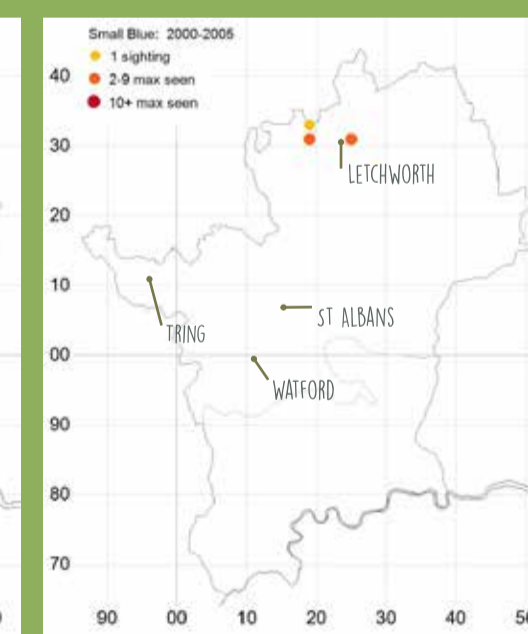
Since 2009 the Small Blue has returned to live in Herts, spreading in from the north and west. The creation of the meadows at Butterfly World in Chiswell Green, near St Albans provided perfect habitat for the butterfly to thrive.

Today Butterfly World still boasts the largest colony of Small Blues in Herts, with numbers of individuals exceeding 100 in some years. However that site is no longer open to the public and its future is uncertain. The new chalk bank at Greenwood Park will provide a much needed alternative site for Small Blues to thrive.

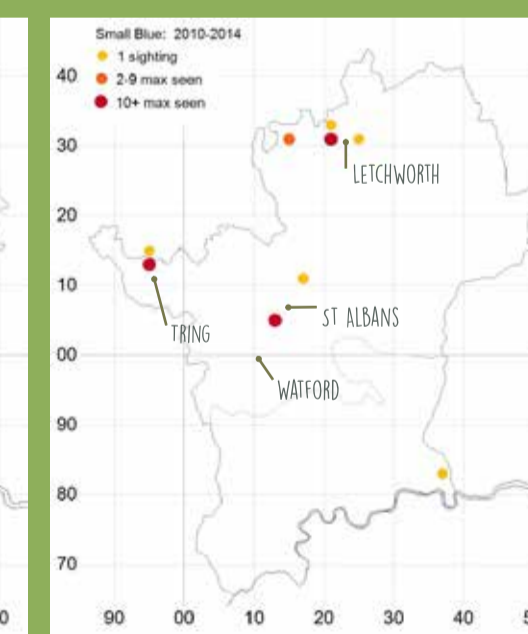
1980-1999



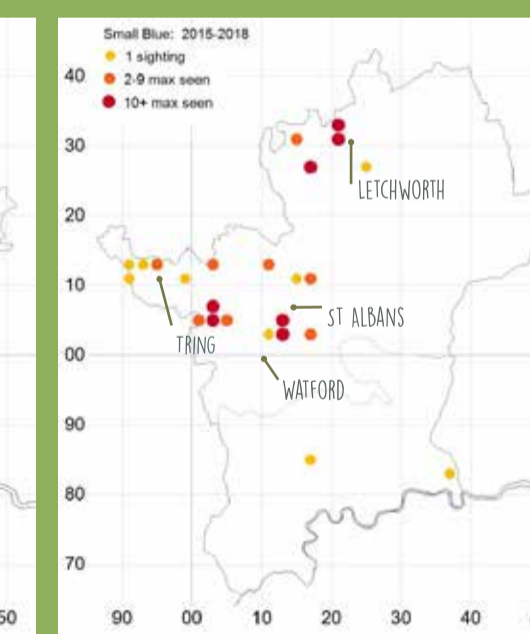
2000-2005



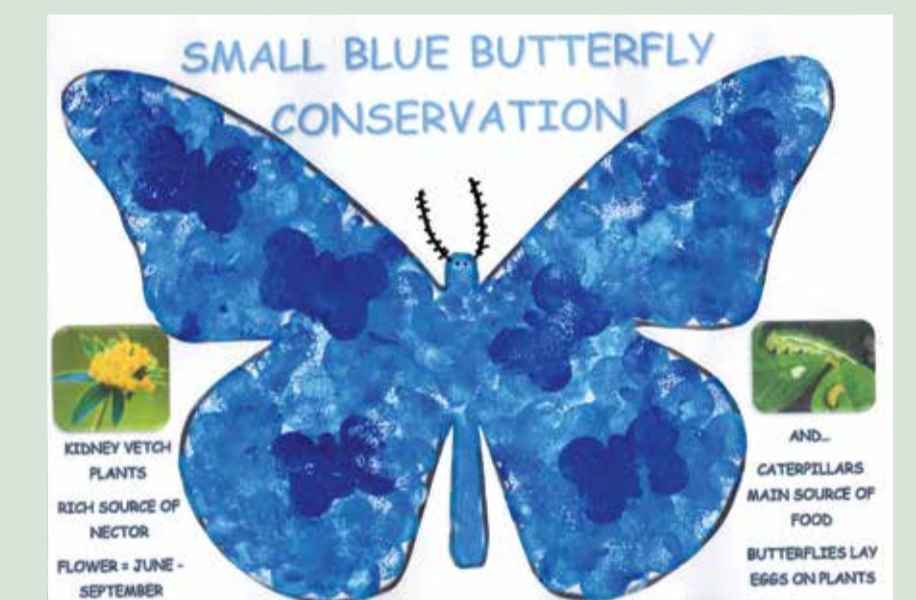
2010-2014



2015-2018



COMPETITION POSTERS



THANKS TO ALL THE CHILDREN AND STAFF FROM KILLIGREW PRIMARY SCHOOL WHO DESIGNED POSTERS, GREW AND PLANTED PLANTS FOR THE BUTTERFLIES. THANKS TO SPENCER AND MIO FOR DESIGNING THE TWO POSTERS SHOWN HERE

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