

**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**HERTFORDSHIRE &
MIDDLESEX BRANCH**

Branch Review of 2019

Previous AGM Minutes

The minutes from the 2019 AGM and are available on the Branch website for members to read before the AGM:

http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/events/AGM_minutes23.03.19.pdf

If you would like to receive a paper copy then please contact Liz Goodyear (01920 487066)

Chair's Report – Malcolm Hull

Small Blue continued to be one of our main priorities in 2019. This species is expanding its range in North and West Hertfordshire and our aim is to help provide it with sustainable habitat. We've seen great progress at Heartwood Forest, where we planted Kidney Vetch in 2017, with Small Blue numbers increasing greatly. We secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to construct a new chalk bank for butterflies in Greenwood Park, St Albans. This is now complete and planted, though we shall continue to work with the site and keep an eager eye on the butterflies which move in. Local schoolchildren grew Kidney Vetch plants and helped us plant the bank. A presentation to local residents and some beautifully designed display boards will increase awareness of the Small Blue. Thanks to Mandy Floyd, Clifford Mullett, Andrew Wood, Emily Bagnall and everyone else for their help. A special word of thanks for Councillor John Bell of St Stephens Parish Council, the site owners. John was instrumental in getting the project off the ground and was able to visit before his untimely death over Christmas. An update on the next steps for our Small Blue Project will be in the April Newsletter with more details on the Branch website.

Brown Hairstreak is another Priority species expanding its range in West Middlesex. For this butterfly suitable habitat is plentiful, but it became clear that not all its sites are being well managed. We are engaging with landowners, managers, local authorities and local residents to increase their understanding of how rare the butterfly is and its specific habitat requirements. Thanks to Andrew Middleton, Paul Busby, Liz Goodyear for their work on this and do contact one of them if you would like to be involved with this species.

All the butterfly records you submit provide us with a wealth of information, which Andrew Wood, our Butterfly Recorder has again turned into an excellent Annual Report (**Hertfordshire & Middlesex Butterflies 2019**). This has been mailed not just to all our members but many other interested parties which will help raise the profile of butterflies in our area. Based on the information in the report and analysis carried out with other BC Branches in Eastern Region, we have decided that our future conservation priorities for butterflies should focus on **Small Blue, Brown Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper** and **White Admiral**. It would be great if more members would like to become involved in helping these threatened species. Prior knowledge is not required; please contact me or another Committee member if you have time to spare.

Big City Butterflies, our project to improve engagement with butterflies and moths in London took a big step forward. May Webber has been in post as Development Officer for the last year, financed jointly by the Heritage Lottery Fund and BC. May will give a presentation at Members Day. Subject

to obtaining funding for the second phase, this will commence in 2021. During the current year we will aim to maintain links with many of the sites May has visited which will be important to the project's success.

The **Four-spotted moth** continued to be a conservation priority, with further efforts at recording its range. Unfortunately, our application for grant funding was unsuccessful, but we will continue to work for this species. We are keen to find more ways to help with the conservation of moths and John Murray, our Moth Officer would be interested to hear from any members with ideas and suggestions.

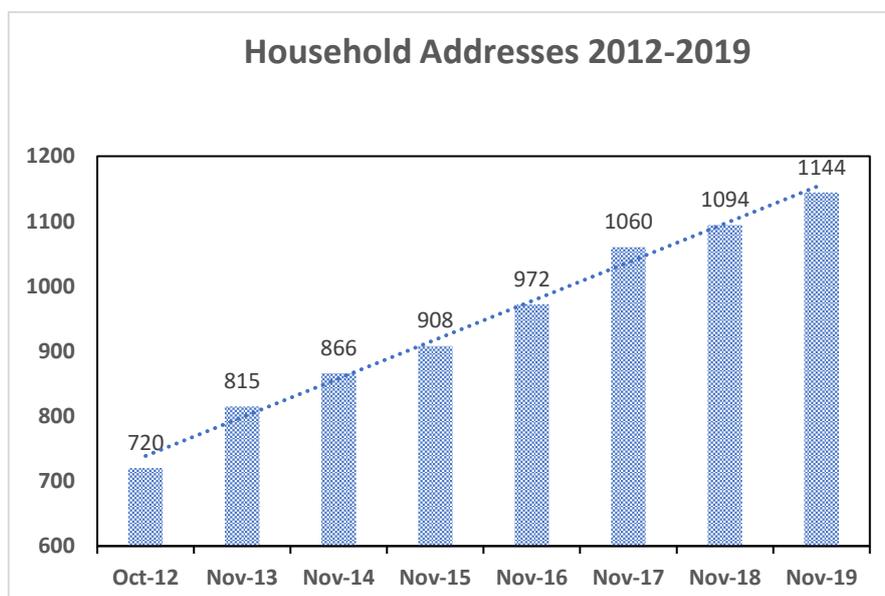
The Branch carries out a wide range of activities throughout the year and we are always grateful to members who can spare time to help. Have a look at the **Can You Help?** page on the branch website to find out more <https://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/canyouhelp.php>. Many thanks to all those who have given their time to help the branch during the year. Particular thanks to Clifford Mullett, who took on the role of Branch Treasurer.

Secretary's Report – Liz Goodyear

Since the last AGM the committee have met on four occasions. Malcolm Hull and Andrew Middleton attended a very interesting and informative Branch Liaison Meeting in October 2019. In 2019 all Liaison Meetings were held on the same day with different representatives from Head Office attending each.

Membership Report – Ian Small

Membership figures are compiled annually by Head Office at the beginning of November, allowing us to track the growth of our own Branch, but also to compare it with the fortunes of other BC Branches. As usual, the figures show a mixed picture. On the one hand, we attracted membership from 179 new households, almost identical to the previous year. However, our attrition rate was lower this year, at 12%, leading to a net increase of 50 households (4.6%) compared to the previous year and a new total of 1144 households. The consistent growth trend since Head Office began collating these figures is shown below. The attrition-rate this year is on a par with other Branches. As households can have single, joint or family membership, the number of actual members is higher than the number of households and stood at 1589 as of 1st November 2019.



The largest BC Branch continues to be West Midlands, with 1789 households, an increase of 10% for the 2nd year running. Our close neighbours, Surrey, and Cambs & Essex Branches, also both grew around 10% this year and now have 1435 and 1410 households respectively, making them the 6th and 7th largest Branches, while Upper Thames grew at just below 9%, and is the 4th-largest branch, with 1489 households. We remain 11th largest of the 31. It is notable that all these neighbouring Branches continue to grow at a faster rate than ourselves.

Our dedicated 'New Members Day' event was held at a new location in 2019 – Greenwood Park Community Centre. Although not as well attended as previous events, it was well received by attendees who were able to witness the efforts to attract the Small Blue to the area through the creation of a new chalk bank and provision of the necessary foodplants.

The Branch newsletter continues to be produced twice a year. We continue to encourage members to receive these electronically, as pdf files by e-mail, to save on the ever-increasing costs of stationery and postage. However, the proportion of members opting to receive them this way has remained stubbornly low, at only 12% of the membership. Fortunately, we continue to benefit from the good will of the Open University mail room, who process the mailings through their franking machines, resulting in meaningful savings relative to the cost of postage stamps.

Fieldtrips and Walks – Liz Goodyear

A varied walks programme was again prepared in 2019 and the majority were well attended. The weather was kind to most leaders but even a dull day can bring plenty of surprises! In December a second Brown Hairstreak egg hunt was held with several eggs again being found! We always stress that the leader of a BC Branch organised walks will be there regardless of the weather, although this isn't necessarily the case with walks organised by other organisations. If in doubt do contact the named leader on the programme.

The importance of taking precautions against Lyme disease was again highlighted in 2019 and we continue to remind everyone to make sure they are aware of the risks. <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/Lyme%20Disease.php>

Branch Website, Facebook and Twitter – Peter Clarke & Liz Goodyear

2019 saw about a 20% increase in the number of users to the Branch Website compared to 2018. Most of the increase owed to more than double the number of mobile phone users. Statistics show that there was considerably more interest in the moth pages (more than 3 times as many than in 2018). The sites and photo identification webpages were also significantly visited more often.

The Branch Twitter and Facebook pages continue to play an important role in promoting Butterfly Conservation at a Branch level. Our Twitter feed has nearly 1200 followers – not a huge increase on 2018 but some are very loyal. The Facebook page now has nearly 1000 followers! Anyone interested in learning more about moths might like to join the Herts & Middlesex Moth Group Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1620445948198816/> - here you can read what other people are recording; what moths are flying and see some excellent moth photos. Additionally, there is always lots of help with identification.

The Branch has a dedicated area on the national website which can be found at <https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/hertfordshire-and-middlesex-branch>. Due to the complications of duplicate posting of butterfly walks on the national website and Branch website, it was decided in 2019 to only list the walks on the national site. We are trying to make this easier to navigate in 2020.

Please remember to visit our Facebook and Twitter links:

<http://www.facebook.com/ButterflyConservationHertsMiddlesex>

https://twitter.com/Bc_HertsMiddx

Engagement in 2019 – Andrew Wood

One of our aims is to work with other organisations to raise awareness of butterflies, moths and their conservation. This can be by giving practical advice on conservation, training for recorders or by delivering talks and presentations. Here are some examples of 2019's activities:

Conservation Advice

- a) Friends of Hanstead Wood
- b) Harrow – Belmont Trail
- c) Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust – Balls Wood, Hexton Chalk Pit and Waterford Heath
- d) Herts County Council Countryside Management Service at Lea Valley Walk (Harpenden), Nomansland Common, Post Wood (Ware)
- e) Highfield Park Trustees
- f) Hillingdon Stafford Road/Ickenham Fields
- g) Letchworth Garden City Heritage Trust
- h) Natural England at Therfield Heath
- i) Private landowners
- j) Woodland Trust – Heartwood Forest

Events

Big City Butterfly Events at Gillespie Park Ecology Centre and Friends of Gladstone Park butterfly walk
Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park annual fair
Greenwood Park practical conservation sessions seeding & planting
Sustainable St Albans & St Stephens Parish Council
HMWT – Festival of Wildlife

Media

- a) Big Butterfly Count – Radio Verulam interview
- b) BBC Winterwatch film on hibernating butterflies

Talks – 14 given

- Harrow Natural History Group
- Hyde Gardening Association, Hatfield
- North London Collegiate Lower School
- RSPB Broxbourne Group
- St Albans's Diocese Churchyard Wildlife day
- St Stephens parish council
- U3A a variety of groups
- Women's Institute a variety of groups

Training

- Transect walking
- Site surveying

Millhoppers' Report – Chris Ridley

Monthly work parties and winter sheep grazing have continued to take place at Millhoppers over the past year, with the result that the Ladies Bedstraw has spread, and the Red Campion has again flourished. However, there was still rather a lot of Hogweed and coarse grasses growing on the first two pastures last summer, so work will continue to reduce the fertility of the soil in 2020, by cutting and raking the grass, and winter sheep grazing. The North Chilterns Conservation Volunteers have kindly helped us with the maintenance of the site on a couple of occasions this summer and will probably be able to help again next year.

Butterfly species which did particularly well last year were the Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown and Large Skipper. Common Blue and Small Copper numbers were down this year, which follows a national trend. We also carried out two moth surveys over the summer – one in July and the other in September and Roger Prue, a local moth expert, kindly came over from Hemel to help us with the moth ID. The July survey found a particularly large number of moth species – 59 in all, including Purple Thorn, Mother of Pearl, Privet Hawkmoth, Yellow tail, Clouded border and 7 Poplar Hawkmoths which were particularly spectacular. We intend to hold more moth surveys in 2020.



Herdwick Sheep at Millhoppers Photo © Chris Hilling

Unfortunately, the stream flowing through the reserve dries up each summer, so dragonflies and damselflies are unable to breed on the reserve. However, some species come to hunt on the site and Brown Hawks and Southern Hawks were seen in abundance last summer.

Water shortage and squirrel and Glis glis damage continues to affect the Black Poplar trees on the site and a professional safety inspection has been recently carried out on these trees, with some work recommended, mainly concerning the welfare of the trees. In November, the wardens attended a ditch maintenance course with a view to improving the water flow to the reserve, and a ditch close to the reserve was cleared. Currently, the flow on the Millhoppers' stream is reassuringly fast. We are continuing to investigate ways to improve water supply to the Reserve.

Meanwhile, a very uneven, slippery portion of the main footpath along the eastern side of the reserve has been resurfaced and steps introduced. This work was funded by the Parish Council and carried out by Dacorum Borough Council.

We are currently looking for help with transect walking on the reserve, so if you are interested in butterflies and think you may be able to assist, please get in touch with Christine Ridley on 07463 821287, or contact Andrew Wood.

Recording Effort in 2019 - Andrew Wood

We have received 43,534 records this year from over 2,500 different recorders who made 15,012 visits to 622 2km map squares recording almost 196,000 individual butterflies. The records are summarised in the "Hertfordshire and Middlesex Butterflies" booklet that you will receive. Records come from the following main sources:

1) Transects There were 71 transect routes that were covered in 2019. These are routes that are walked regularly each week from April to September by a dedicated band of recorders. Some of these routes have been walked for many years and give us valuable comparative material for a particular site. This is useful to compare numbers of butterflies on a consistent basis, as we do in the abundance figures in the booklet. New transects have continued to be created with only a few losses this year. We continue to provide support, information and training on transect walking and 2019 saw several site visits and training sessions to support this work.

2) The Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme, where a number of randomly allocated 1km squares are crossed by two routes walked twice a year, to provide data on trends in areas that may or may not be key areas. For instance, some are very urban and this helps to balance the trends from data collected in the hot spots of our area.

3) The Big Butterfly Count - the increasingly popular "citizen science" scheme in late July and early August and continued to produce a record number of reports. These schemes are nationally co-ordinated by Butterfly Conservation and feed into schemes such as the National Biodiversity Network and the Butterflies for the New Millennium.

4) We receive many records from casual visits to sites, people's gardens and from recorders who target particular areas in order to get comprehensive coverage of a group of 2km squares. These records come in from the smartphone iRecord Butterflies app, reports to our website, paper lists, spreadsheets and emails.

To all of these recorders we say a huge thank you. It is this kind of data that makes the UK one of the best recorded places in the world and enables us to further understand what is going on in the natural world and to try to do something to conserve and improve it. If you are not already recording please consider sending in records and helping this effort. The information in "Hertfordshire and Middlesex Butterflies" will help you to see what the current situation is and to see where we still need more recording effort.

The current recording period starting in 2015 is now complete and we received records from 685 2km squares, from 7654 recorders who saw 862,492 adult butterflies. So in 2020 we start a new recording period with a blank canvas.

Treasurer's Report – Clifford Mullett

We need to formally approve the 2018/19 accounts as they form part of the Butterfly Conservation annual results. As it is very close to the year end I have not included prior year comparatives but instead an estimate of the financial outcome of our activities reported on in the Newsletters for 2019/20 and at this members day. We are grateful for the increased donations received. Other

income relates mainly to sales of publications which were fewer this year. On the expenditure side efforts are continuing to contain printing and postage costs whilst maintaining the high quality of our newsletters to members. Financial contribution to Projects consist of £1200 for the new Small Blue butterfly bank at Greenwood Park, St Albans and £1300 for Big City Butterflies for which a future annual contribution of £2000 is under consideration. Other expenditure includes insurance and purchases for resale.

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 March 2019 AND FORECAST FOR 2019/20						
				2018/19	2017/18	Forecast
				£	£	2019/20
						£
Income:	Subscriptions			5778	5760	6285
	Donations			813	333	2070
	Other			849	517	206
	Total Income			7440	6610	8561
Expenditure:	Events			707	513	161
	Printing, postage and stationery			3804	4068	3920
	Committee Expenses			84	42	100
	AGM Expenses			487		600
	Projects			0	578	2500
	Other			677	946	625
	Total Expenditure			5759	6147	7606
Funds at 31 March				6267	5261	6922

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

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