

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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SEPTEMBER 2002



**BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION**SM

**Commas, Kids and
Caterpillars....**

by Gavin Vicary

At the end of July I said to my young son that I had just seen a Comma in the garden. He asked if he could also see it and so we went back out to have another look with his 2 year old sister following close behind. Sure enough, we soon found the Comma sitting on a hop plant that we had grown up a fence. Upon closer inspection we found that it was laying eggs. We returned after it had gone and found that three elongated green eggs had been deposited separately at the edge of a small pair of leaves near the growing tip.

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A ritual then began as soon as I returned home from work each evening, whereby I would be rushed outside to see what was happening. The eggs survived some torrential downpours and finally after nearly a week three tiny caterpillars emerged. Soon tiny holes started to appear in the pair of leaves as the caterpillars fed. These holes were fairly conspicuous and so one evening we searched the hop and two others that are in the garden to see what else we could find. Within twenty minutes we knew the whereabouts of eight comma caterpillars on two of the plants. All seemed to be on parts of the plant that were in full sun and the hop that had no caterpillars was the most shaded of the three growing up through a small tree.



Some of the other caterpillars were more advanced than the first three found which were still so small that they just appeared as dark specs. All were on the underside of the hop leaves. The largest ones (about 5mm in length) seemed to be a mixture of black and white in colour but also curled themselves around so that they resembled a dark blob rather than being caterpillar shaped.



One evening there was great concern as two of the original three caterpillars had disappeared. This happened when they were still very small and I suspect that cannibalism by the remaining caterpillar may have been the cause. The children were however appeased at this loss by finding another Comma caterpillar on an elm that I had planted in the garden in the hope of attracting White-letter Hairstreaks.

Over the next few weeks the caterpillars ate and grew as our nightly inspections went on. The caterpillars developed into magnificent beasts coloured rusty brown and white. They usually remained contorted in a strange shape and as they got bigger the head end would rear up as we approached.

By now my son had developed an unnerving ability to find caterpillars wherever he went. Lots were discovered in the garden, the tomatoes in the greenhouse yielded caterpillars of the bright line brown eye moth and one day we were out cycling when he screeched to a halt having seen a big hairy caterpillar of the White Ermine moth which was

crossing the road and had to be helped safely to the other side. An enormous cluster of yellow eggs from a large white on the nasturtiums also caused great delight as did the many caterpillars when they emerged and reduced the plants to skeletons.

Finally there was great sadness when one by one the caterpillars reached full size and disappeared. We searched high and low for the pupae but could not find them.

I don't know who got the most enjoyment out of the exercise, me, Kieran or Penny. It is certainly very rewarding however to know that our garden has been the source of several Commas and hopefully we will meet up with them again in the spring when they emerge from hibernation. I would also recommend to anyone the merits of growing a hop in the garden. Of the three foodplants that Commas will use, I don't know if they prefer hop but certainly the caterpillars were easy to find and I was surprised at how many were on the plants.



E-mail Addresses

If you currently have access to e-mail, we would like to include you on a new register of Branch e-mail addresses. This will enable us to contact you regarding events local to you, or provide information about rare sightings in your area etc. Please send an e-mail to our Branch Secretary, Liz Goodyear, at: elizabethgoodyear@talk21.com

Annual General Meeting

This year's Branch AGM will be
on Wednesday, October 30th
at 8pm prompt

Cross Street Centre,
Upper Dagnall Street,
St. Albans.
(map on next page)

The AGM will be followed by
refreshments and
members' slides

...so bring along a few of your best butterfly and moth slides to share with us, and make us all jealous.

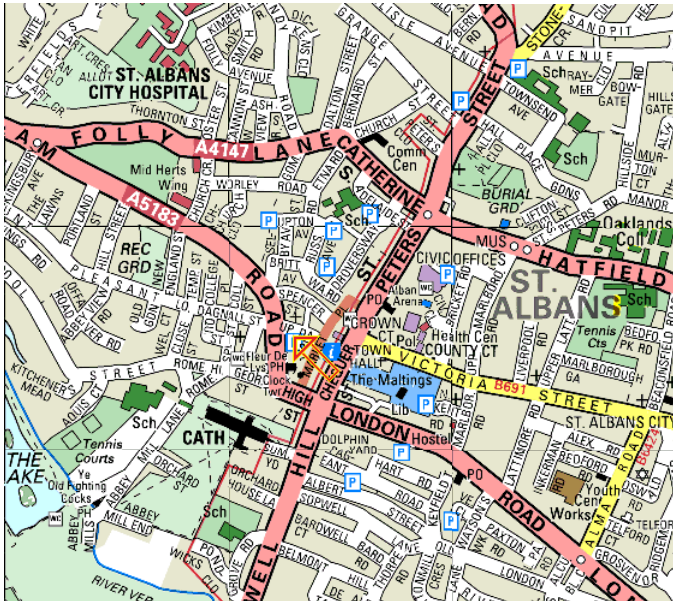
Also, we are arranging to be able to show digital photos - if you have a few choice images to share, please e-mail them or send them on disk to Malcolm Hull (details on back page) before the AGM so that they can be pre-loaded into a presentation.

There will also be a sales stall - with a new range of stock, which may be a useful source of Christmas presents - plus some display boards.

As usual, we will try to get the formalities over with as quickly as possible so that we can have more time to talk, browse the sales and enjoy the pictures.

See you there....

Venue for Branch AGM:



Corrections to the Annual Report, by John Murray

Despite the increased proof-reading this year, serious errors in the 2001 Report have been pointed out to me.

- 1 In the species account for Purple Emperor, the early and late extremes 3rd July to 13th August, multiple sightings 5th to 24th July and clashing males 13th to 17th July ALL refer to the decade 1992-2001, not 2001 alone as stated.
- 2 Liz Goodyear alone is listed as being Rare Species co-ordinator, and is alone credited with giving tips on when to observe this species, whereas in Andrew Middleton is joint co-ordinator with Liz, and wrote much of the advice with her.

A full account of the Purple Emperor will appear in a later newsletter.

Idle Thoughts, by Richard Bigg

Whenever we read or hear discussion on the decline of butterflies, the reason supposed is always ‘loss of habitats’. Habitats disappear under the plough or the ever-increasing spread of urban concrete, or food plants are killed off by the use of herbicides. Now all these things happen but I got to wondering if this is the full story. I was thinking of my Transect at



Waterford. None of these factors applies there, yet the Grizzled Skipper seems to be hanging on by the skin of its teeth (if that’s appropriate for a butterfly). The larval foodplant is present there in abundance – it’s impossible to walk in some places without treading on the strawberries. The Grizzled Skipper ought to thrive and multiply, but it is rare to see more than the odd one.

Predation is a possibility, but then nature usually allows for that. Disease is another possibility, but one might expect this to take its toll for perhaps one year, but year after year? Unless – could it be hereditary? I’m no biologist but it is common knowledge that in-breeding within a family is to be avoided as it leads to genetic weaknesses and susceptibility to disease. Could it be that in-breeding in a small isolated colony of butterflies results in the decline of the colony?

Butterflies which are wide-ranging strong fliers have suffered a decline, but only in a general long term sense, which can perhaps be attributed to a general loss of habitats. It is those species which stay in a restricted locality whose colonies tend to die out. Perhaps in the distant past, when there were numbers of such small colonies within reasonable distance of each other, then intermixing took place and genetic decline was averted.

My attention was then caught by a report of some research in the Conservation News (No. 80, Spring / Summer 2002, p19). Talking about conservation requirements of the Marsh Fritillary, it says it was “.. found that sites were more likely to retain populations of the butterfly if they were larger in area, were close to other populations and...” also “The butterfly persists as a meta-population – a network of local populations occupying discrete habitat patches.” This seemed to back up my line of thought.

Am I talking rubbish or does loss of habitats lead to genetic decline in those isolated areas which are left? If this is the case, then simple habitat conservation does not help these species. Some means of introducing new blood is needed.

Perhaps some expert will comment?

Hybrid Elm Update, by Andrew Brookes (Hampshire & Isle of Wight Branch)

This article is a follow-up to Andrew's article in our June newsletter about the Hybrid Elm Pilot Study

The silver lining to the abysmal wet weather of the early part of our summer was the survival of nearly all of the elms planted last winter; indeed, several have grown by as much as half a metre. In June we received several thousand seeds of the American hybrid "Accolade" (*U.japonica X U.wilsoniana*) donated by the Morton Arboretum, Illinois together with seeds of the "David Elm" *Ulmus davidiana*, a little-known species from China. Meanwhile, the Curator of the Royal Botanic Garden at Wakehurst Place has offered to propagate for us some of their rarest elms *U.bergmanniana* and *U.wallichiana* which are the Wych Elm's closest relatives in China and the Himalayas respectively.



Wych Elm - *Ulmus grabra*

Two significant events in the world of elms occurred this year – one negative and one distinctly positive. First, the bad news: the EU funded GenRes78 project, which sought to identify disease-resistant clones amongst the native European elms, was concluded at Easter. Although over 300 candidates from across the continent were tested by being inoculated with Dutch Elm Disease

not one showed a worthwhile resistance. However, the DNA analysis contribution by the Edinburgh Botanic Garden has at least helped to end the *Ulmus* taxonomic confusion, confirming the existence of just three European species:

U.glabra (Wych), *U.minor* [*syn.carpinifolia*] (Field, or Smooth, or Narrow-leaved Elm) and *U.laevis* (White Elm). The White Elm from central Europe is almost identical to the American Elm *U.americana* and cannot hybridise with its continental cousins and although it proved the least attractive host to the bark beetles, it was ultimately just as vulnerable to DED. The Field Elm, *U.minor*, emerged as by far the most variable species and indeed our beloved English Elm, formerly *U.procera*, has finally been relegated to one of its many varieties: *U.minor var.vulgaris*.

Better news has emerged from the Netherlands with the release of a second DED-immune hybrid. 'Lutece', the significance of which lies in its almost exclusively European ancestry. It is a complex fourth-generation hybrid with only a small exotic contribution, most of its parentage being a mix of *glabra* and *minor* varieties. The second distinction of the new hybrid from its predecessor 'Columella' lies in its form and probably ultimate size which resemble the native elms of old. The French have embraced 'Lutece' with typical Gallic fervour: the Institut Nationale de la Recherche Agronomique (NRA) has bought the patent and is cloning the tree by the thousand for planting from La Manche to Le Med. We are indebted to Dr Oliver Pontin of NRA's commercial agency SAPHO who had agreed to donate specimens of the new hybrid this autumn for inclusion in our trials.

White-letter Hairstreaks, by C H Veale

The article on the White-letter Hairstreak in the June Newsletter prompts me to mention my own sightings of this species, partly because its habits were rather at variance with those ascribed to it in the textbooks. I have no details of the early sightings, but they occurred in the summers of 1966-1970 when there were still plenty of elms close to our garden (TQ 066940). On the East side of our patio there is a screen on yew about eight feet long and six feet high. I saw what we thought was a small brown moth flying backwards and forwards across the yew. I managed to catch it, and found that it was a White-letter Hairstreak. Similar sightings occurred in the next two or three years and then ceased. As all our local elms had gone, I did not expect to see it again.

However, on 28 July 1993 I was trying to identify two brown butterflies which were sunning themselves on the flowers of some bedding plants. One flew off, but the other fluttered onto the lawn. I picked it up and found that it was a White-letter Hairstreak.

Croatian Holiday, by Brian Jessop

When asked “Where?” this summer for holidays, I replied “Croatia”. “Croatia! – what on earth are you going there for?”

Well, for a start, the flight from Gatwick is not much longer than the journey to the airport! And, if you like Greece, you will like Croatia. The people are friendly and the food is great, if you know what to order!

We stayed in a small town called Rovinj, where all the cobbled streets lead to the church at the top of the hill. All the houses are very old and interesting, and full of character. Every other shop on the hill seems to be an art shop, and the rest are bars and restaurants. In the main part of the town, all the other shops are available. Our hotel faces the harbour, across which there is an island called St. Katarina. On



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walking around the island there were lots of Cleopatra, White-letter Hairstreaks and Holly Blues. One Holly Blue in particular caught my eye because it was so small. I tried to photograph it but failed. It occurred to me that it may have been a Small Blue, but dismissed it as a very small Holly Blue. A bit further on we came across, guess what? – lots of patches of kidney vetch! Other species seen on the island were Meadow Brown, Brown Argus, Wood White, Small and Large White, Southern White Admiral and a Humming-bird Hawkmoth.

Back on the mainland, there is a forest area about twenty minutes walk around the bay. In the large forest clearings there were masses of wild flowers, covered with literally hundreds of butterflies!! They were mainly Holly Blues, White-letter Hairstreaks, Ilex Hairstreaks, Cleopatra, Southern White Admirals and ones or twos of Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Nettle-tree Butterfly, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Swallowtail (*Gorganus*), Small Heath, Clouded Yellow, Bath White, Large & Small Whites, Peacock and one Grizzled Skipper and one Speckled Wood. One Twin-tailed Pasha was seen, but the highlight had to be watching three Silver-washed Fritillaries flying and feeding in a deserted back garden in full sunshine. Also, the first time I have ever seen them, two Black-veined Whites were seen along the forest edge.

Towards the end of the holiday we took a last look at the forest areas and, to my horror, all the flowers had gone! A mechanical mower was busy cutting the whole area. They probably do this every year, so we expect they will be back again next year, we hope!



Some Thoughts about Mothers, by Anon

The following article was circulating on the Ukmoths internet newsgroup earlier this year, and was forwarded to me by John Hollingdale

Whilst I appreciate that there are many types of wildlife watcher other than ‘mothers’ (that’s moth-ers!) I make no apologies for the disproportionate amount of text dedicated to them in this article. It is merely a reflection of the extraordinary things that they get up to as a group and therefore the many rich pickings on offer.

For example, ‘mothers’ are truly nocturnal, which marks them out as being just a little bit out of the ordinary for starters. Some would-be twilighters have shown tendencies towards life in the after dark – ‘birders’ may occasionally stay out till dusk for a Nightjar and ‘batters’ will wander about for a bit making strange ‘clicking’ sounds (and then spend an unbelievable amount of time trying to work out whether it was a Daubie that few past or just more interference from a distant hairdryer) before going home to their Ovaltine and a warm duvet before midnight. Yet, unlike all of these, ‘mothers’ definitely do do it in the dark. The other thing I’ve noticed, is that they are completely obsessed by the weather, and, oh yes, the moon, and *El Niño*, and, come to think of it, quite a lot of other things to do with the climate as well.



One thing I’ve learnt you should never do, is quiz a group of ‘mothers’ on the prospects for the evening. They will collectively and without fail shuffle from one foot to another, shake their heads, then look at you in a pitying sort of way before beginning a well-rehearsed routine which the scenario is that it will be a poor night for moths for any or all of the following reasons: it’s too cold; too still; too wet; too dry; too hot; too windy; too little cloud; too much moon; and so on. And if that’s not enough, they will move seamlessly into the past tense and explain that the year so far has been all of the above and just as you start to wonder why on earth they bother, they will go on to say that whilst conditions are fine at the moment, by dusk, ex-hurricane Big Bertha will rip through from the Atlantic and blow any decent moth to kingdom come (that’s Leicestershire) or a cold air mass from the arctic will arrive and plonk itself right over their sheet and so

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wreck any prospects of seeing anything other than 'garden stuff'. The latter, I've noticed, is always spat out with real venom. So then, what's it all about?

If you were to probe a little deeper, and inquire as to their sanity in the politest way possible, they would tell you in hushed and reverential tones of the 'perfect night'. This is patently an event in history like the passing of a comet or a solar eclipse, that only occurs once in a blue moon (it should be noted here that moons as a rule are not good for nothing and therefore the analogy is fatally flawed) and seldom does such an event occur twice in any 'mothers' life-time. On such nights, they will tell you, there is no moon (see flawed analogy), very heavy cloud cover with a hint of an electric storm will hang overhead, a warm gentle zephyr will be wafting through the tree tops, humidity will be analogous to an equatorial rainforest, temperatures will soar in the upper 20s, Jupiter, Pluto, Venus and Uranus have positioned themselves in perfect alignment, there will be spectacular sun spot activity, England will have won the Ashes, and most importantly of all, there will be no *El Niño*. When all these 'events' have come together in one night (which is never on a weekend apparently), so is generated the mother of all nothing episodes. A time when any moth worth a pin is abroad and desperately seeking a mercury vapour lamp. As they relay this to you, you can't help but be impressed by the emotional intensity on show, invariably a glazed and faraway look will come over their faces as if somehow they were reliving some long cherished memory that sustains them through the lean years of their nothing existence. Is this then, I wonder, the drive and motivation for enduring all those long nights in damp wet woods, or foul smelling fens or being frost bitten on windswept moors.....well actually no!apparently on these 'perfect nights' there are so many moths whizzing about that you end up recording nothing but,well.....garden stuff !!



Don't Forget !



..to send in your butterfly records for inclusion in the 2002 Annual Report. These should be sent, **no later than 9 November**, to John Murray (address on back cover). Late November / December sightings should be sent or telephoned through to John before the end of the year. Transect records should also be sent to John.

Moth records should continue to be sent to Colin W Plant, 14 West Rd, Bishops Stortford, CM23 3QP

If you have slides, photos or digital images suitable for the Annual Report, then please send these to Andrew Wood (address on back cover). Any pictures used will be credited to the photographer.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Aldbury Nowers, 18 May

It was drizzling miserably when Trevor & Christine Allen, Paul Huckle, Liz & Chris Emery, Valerie Dunbar, Clive & Dorothy Reynolds, Michael Pierson and John Stevens turned up to accompany Dave Chandler on the joint branch field trip to Aldbury Nowers (Duchies Piece) near Tring, Herts. Michael decided the weather was too awful to continue but the tenacity of the others paid off. The party first went for a walk along the Icknield Way path through the woods above the site and was rewarded by seeing a family of Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Orange Tip eggs on Garlic Mustard. For a long time, the only adult species found was a roosting Brimstone but eventually the weather brightened, the sun came out and so did the butterflies. The group descended to the main butterfly area where they saw, close-up, a lovely female Holly Blue posing with her wings open and chased a Green Hairstreak and three other Hollies through



Green Hairstreak

the bushes. Large, Small & Green-Veined Whites made an appearance and, about 4 o'clock, at the bottom of the site near the big briar bush (where the Grizzled & Dingy Skippers can sometimes be found) a solitary Speckled Wood appeared before everyone went happily back to their cars, their patience rewarded.

Moth Evening at Totteridge Fields 6th June, by John Hollingdale

This was a moth evening for the Barnet Group of the London Wildlife Trust on one of the Trust's reserves on the edge of London, but actually in Hertfordshire. There were about ten of us gathered on one of those evenings, weatherwise, that come along too infrequently; warm and cloudy. Two bat detectors were being used but the bats were passing us by on the way to a better feeding area somewhere.

Nothing heart-stopping turned up but of the 40 species identified these were the Highlights.

Peach Blossom

Shaded Broad-bar
Yellow Shell with many on the brambles nearby
Barred Straw
Bordered Pug
Green Pug
Brimstone Moth (Are they bigger this year?) →
Vapourer
Scarce Footman
Poplar Grey
(the specimens shown in Skinner are not very clear)
Small Angle Shades
Oak Nycteoline



→

**Stanmore Country Park Moth
Evening 8th June, by John
Hollingdale**

Photos © Ian Kimber

Apart from yours truly, three people plus one rather puzzled dog attended this moth event. The method was an MV bulb suspended over a large white dust sheet.

The weather, as always, was not favourable as it was a clear evening but we saw 21 species in the two hours we were there. The best of these were Spruce Carpet, Scorched Wing, Brindled White-spot, The Flame, and Scarce Silver-lines. The most abundant moth was the Straw Dot which we also saw several of when sweeping the meadow before dusk.

Joint Field Trip to Sharpenhoe, 29 June, by Graham Warne

Fifteen members of the B&N and H&M Branches arrived at the National Trust car park at Sharpenhoe on this promisingly bright morning with the primary aim of seeing the Dark Green Fritillary. Dave Chandler led the party. Meadow Browns and Small Heaths were seen first, followed by freshly emerged Marbled Whites. Then there was even more excitement as the first Dark Green Fritillary of the day was spotted in flight and tracked down to where it settled on a

blackberry leaf with wings open to soak up the warm sun. Although this butterfly was not in peak condition, its gorgeously rich colouration made it worthy of being photographed by several people. The sun was not strong enough to encourage lengthy flights so the photographers had good time to compose their shots.

With the group spreading out along the field, there were sightings of Common Blues, Small Skippers and many Ringlets. Only single specimens of Large Skipper and Speckled Wood were seen, but pride of place went to a very late, rather weathered Small Blue on top of a nettle, spotted by Peter Tebbutt. It was very fortunate that Dark Green Fritillaries were seen in such good numbers (Graham Warne counted 16). Moth sightings on the day included Cinnabar, Five Spot Burnet and Large Yellow Underwing. Flowers included good numbers of Common Spotted and Pyramidal orchid, along with a few Fragrant and Bee orchids. On the way back to the car park some were able to add a Green veined White and a Red Admiral to their sightings for the day and during the picnic break a few people saw (fleetingly) a Small Tortoiseshell and a Painted Lady. Dave Chandler had to depart and so Charles Baker led a smaller group on a short afternoon excursion to Moleskin. By this time the weather had turned cloudier and cooler.

Most of the species mentioned earlier were seen again, but in much smaller numbers.

Bunkers Park & Long Deans NR, 13 July 2002, by Michael Pearson



Dark-green Fritillary

Bunkers Park, on the SE outskirts of Hemel Hempstead, used to be an active arable farm, until it was taken over by Dacorum BC in 1995 as a “public open space” and wildlife park. During the next two years, in conjunction with HMWT, this

former farmland was relandscaped as wildflower meadow subdivided into small fields by about 2 km of new mixed-species hedgerow; together with 10 hectares of new community woodland. At its

Acknowledgement: All butterfly images used in the newsletter are by Richard Lewington, and taken from the CD-ROM Guide to British Butterflies.

southern end Bunkers Park adjoins HMWT's Long Deans nature reserve enabling a circular walk of about 4 km (2.5 miles).

HMWT has carried out wildlife monitoring on Bunkers Park since 1996; Michael Pearson has looked after the butterflies and in 1999 a formal transect route was set up. The butterfly species count for the six years now stands at 26.

This was our first dedicated butterfly walk round Bunkers Park and it was most gratifying that eighteen people turned up on a beautiful sunny afternoon, the first break in the weather after a prolonged cool, unsettled spell. Most who came on the walk were local residents, for many of whom this was to be their first experience of serious butterfly-watching. BC, H & M, was ably represented by Dave Chandler, whose enthusiasm and expertise were much appreciated – many thanks Dave!

The walk itself started inauspiciously when we discovered that the car park where we were to meet had been effectively blocked off from the main road by two loads of dumped earth. This apparently was to prevent the return of a tribe of travellers who had just been evicted after turning the northern section of the park into a hideous imitation of a landfill site.

After a somewhat delayed start, the walk itself went off without a hitch and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. Butterfly numbers were well down on what might normally have been expected in mid-July, but were, in fact, much in line with this year's rather disappointing transect counts. Only seven species were seen, of which Meadow Brown was by far the commonest. One of the aims of the walk was to look for Marbled Whites, which would be in the middle of their peak flight period. This species was first recorded on Bunkers Park in 1997 as a single insect, which had probably come from a small colony across the road in the adjoining Long Deans NR. Since then the Marbled White has become a regular breeding species throughout the park, albeit still in small numbers. During the walk we saw 12 Marbled Whites, which coincidentally equalled the maximum one-day count in the same week of 2001.

During the walk we had the opportunity of examining some captive insects in a viewer. Few on the walk had looked at live butterflies in close-up before, and were impressed as to how different they seemed in the hand to the pictures in the butterfly book; or indeed to the same

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insects on the wing. We also looked closely at Skippers. Even the more butterfly-wise in the group found the arcane science (black art?) of differentiating Small/Essex Skippers in the field to be more challenging and less straightforward than the books would have us believe; there was even discussion over one specimen whether it was a large Small Skipper or a small Large Skipper; we agreed amicably on the former.



Marbled White

The success of this first Bunkers Park butterfly walk was due, at least in part, to the fact that it introduced a new and local Hemel Hempstead audience to the pleasures of butterfly watching on a site conveniently close to home. The newly created butterfly habitats are still immature and liable to change from one year to the next, e.g. in the new woodland areas. The effects of these changes on the butterfly population in any one year can be considerable and need to be carefully monitored so that the appropriate management can be applied.

We hope that BC members, and anyone living in the Dacorum area who uses Bunkers Park to walk the dog, or just enjoy the countryside, might like to play a part in the future development of the park as a butterfly site of growing interest and importance in the county. In due course we shall be planning for butterfly walks in Bunkers Park during 2003 and details will be published nearer the time. In the meantime anyone wanting further information can contact Michael Pearson on (01582) 840772

e-mail. jandmpearson@supanet.com

Stanmore Country Park July 14th by John Hollingdale

14 people plus a dog turned up for this walk on a lovely sunny day. In the first meadow we saw Meadow Brown, Small Skipper type, Gatekeepers and a Large White. The Skippers proved too lively to catch to identify and other wandering Whites never came near enough to net either.

Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet moths were the feature of the next meadow with several on the wing. Two Shaded Broad-bar moths were also caught here and identified.

As we reached the ride that had been created in the last few years, we saw a Red Admiral zooming about and also a purple Hairstreak settled long enough to be identified.

One Holly Blue, a Speckled Wood and a Comma were also spotted as we progressed around the site and in the last open area inside the woods we identified a Large Skipper and a couple of Common Wainscot moths.

However no butterflies were seen in the large meadow on the South East of the site. This area normally produces the largest number of butterflies. I think a May cut of the grass has brought about this situation and the mowing regime will have to be altered.



Narrow-bordered five-
spot Burnet moth
Zygaena lonicerae
Photo © Ben Smart

Green Farming Schemes are Helping England's Butterflies - a Butterfly Conservation / DEFRA Press Release, 7 August 2002.

Those of you walking butterfly transects (and it's not been easy this rainy summer) can take heart from the press release below. The Hertfordshire and Middlesex Branch, with one of the highest totals (possibly the highest?) of transects in the country, has been a major contributor to this scheme, many of your transects being critical to the analysis.

So thank you for your persistence, and remember whilst you're dodging the thunderstorms, or hoping against hope for a glimmer of sunshine, your transect data is extremely valuable and is having a widespread influence in habitat improvement nation-wide - John Murray.

New research conducted by Butterfly Conservation has revealed that the Government's agri-environment schemes are helping to slow – and in some cases reverse - the long-term decline in numbers of England's rarer butterfly species. The research shows that the Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas schemes are starting to bring about the changes needed to benefit butterflies and other wildlife. The work will help DEFRA to develop the schemes further in order to build on these early successes.

The research was possible thanks to the collective efforts of over 2,000 volunteers conducting weekly walks, known as transects, on over 500 sites in England. The results suggest that: 10 of the 13 species that depend on specific habitats have done better on sites entered into agri-environment schemes than on similar sites not under agreement. The results are statistically significant in 5 of the 10. On chalk grassland 7 out of 10 specialist species have done better on agri-environment sites, with 4 of the species having statistically significant positive trends. Those that have benefited most include some of our rarest and most spectacular downland species, such as the Chalkhill Blue and Dark Green Fritillary, and some threatened species, such as the Silver-spotted Skipper.



Chalkhill Blue

The research has not revealed a universally positive picture, and for the 34 butterfly species studied, the average decline has been 14% over the last 10 years. Although agri-environment schemes appear to be helping to stem the decline for some species, the overall picture is mixed. The research, which will be extended for another 3 years, will continue to provide information vital to the development of the schemes and for the achievement of the Government's biodiversity objectives.

Countryside Minister Elliot Morley said: "This is exciting first evidence that DEFRA's agri-environment schemes are starting to halt the decline in some important butterfly species. "The Chalkhill Blue, and Dark Green Fritillary and some threatened species such as the Silver-spotted Skipper appear to be benefiting, which is encouraging news. "I want to thank Butterfly Conservation and their volunteers for all their hard work gathering this data. We will be keeping a close eye on the situation and the progress made." Dr Tom Brereton, who headed the research for Butterfly Conservation, is delighted by the results: 'This is some of the first research work to show that agri-environment schemes are beginning to reverse the downward trend in butterfly populations. We will now be analysing the data further to pinpoint the precise mechanism driving the improvement as well as working with DEFRA officers to improve scheme design to bring even greater benefits in future.'



Silver-spotted Skipper

Dr Martin Warren, Director of Conservation for Butterfly Conservation said: 'The results demonstrate that Government investment in countryside enhancement is beginning to pay off and reverse long term declines in wildlife. Agri-environment schemes have proved very popular with many farmers and we are urging Government to increase the budget for them as recommended by the recent Curry report on the future of food and farming.'

Upper Thames Branch Members Day and AGM, Saturday 26th October 2002 The Fitzwilliam Centre, Beaconsfield, Bucks.

Here is the programme for the UTB Members Day, to which H&M members are invited. The Fitzwilliam centre is in Old Beaconsfield, directly opposite the West entrance to the Church. Plenty of off road parking, frequent trains to Beaconsfield from Marylebone; 10 minutes walk to the hall.

PROGRAMME

10.00 Doors open - Registration and refreshments

Entries for Photo competition

10.30 Welcome and Introduction to the day's Events Frank Banyard

10.40 Conservation in the Upper Thames Region Nick Bowles

11.15 Pleasures and Rewards of Transect walks Nick Greaterex-Davis

12.15 Lunch

During the lunch break there will be an opportunity to vote in the photographic competition and participate in the Quiz. Tickets for our raffle will also be available.

1.45 Annual General Meeting of Upper Thames Branch

2.15 Moths, Mysteries, Myths and Magic. Professor Michael Majeris

3.15 Butterfly Conservation and Reserves.

Open Forum led by Dr Nigel Bourn with Sven Rufus or Emily Funnell

4.15 Tea. During tea, the results of the draw for the raffle will be announced.

4.45 Quiz Results/ Photographic competition results

5.00 Members Say. 5 minute presentations by Members on their 2002

Butterfly/ moth experiences. Introduced by David Fuller

5.30 Closing address Frank Banyard

Admission to the AGM is FREE. A donation of £3 towards the cost of refreshments and facilities for the Members Day programme would be appreciated.

**Copy Deadline for the December Newsletter will be
20 November 2002**

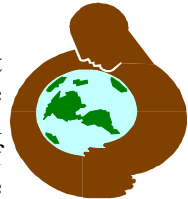
NB it helps the editor if you can submit an electronic copy of your article (but don't worry if you can't). Files can be on disk or sent by e-mail to ian.small@lineone.net or send an article by post - address on back cover

I need more contributions from members to be able to maintain the variety of content in the newsletter. Please consider writing something..my in-tray is empty!



Conservation Work

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. If you would like to assist in this work, then please contact one of the following, who will be able to provide you with the necessary details of dates and times.



- John Noakes: 01296 660072. (*Millhopper's Pasture SP 900149*)
- Vincent Thomson: 01763 341443 (*Therfield Heath, TL 335400*)
- Alan Strawn: 01442 232946 (*Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP 952131*)
- Anthony Oliver: 01992 583404 (*Hertford Heath TL 354111*)
- Leslie Williams: 0181 206 0492 (*Fryent Country Park*)
- Gavin Vicary: 01279 771933 (*Patmore Heath TL 443257*).

Committee Members

Chairman: Gavin Vicary

Hillside Cottage, Patmore Heath, Albury, Herts. SG11 2LS.....(01279) 771933

Branch Organiser: John Stevens

3 Scarborough Road, Edmonton, Middlesex, N9 8AT..... (020) 8804 6918
anax@breathemail.net

Membership Secretary: Margaret Noakes

Millhoppers Reserve Manager: John Noakes

Old Church Cottage, Chapel Lane, Long Marston, Herts HP23 4QT (01296) 660072

Committee Secretary: Liz Goodyear

7 Chestnut Avenue, Ware, Herts., SG12 7JE (01920) 487066
elizabethgoodyear@talk21.com

Treasurer: John Hollingdale

36 Southfield Park, North Harrow, Middx. HA2 6HE.....(020) 8863 2077
hollhu@yahoo.co.uk

Newsletter Editor: Ian Small

59 Penn Way, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 2SH (01462) 677654
ian.small@lineone.net

Conservation Advisor: Brian Sawford

38 Northfields, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 4QX (01462) 639859

Records Collator: John Murray

Field End, Marshalls Heath, Wheathampstead, Herts. AL4 8HS..... (01582) 833544
J.B.Murray@open.ac.uk

Moth Recorder: Andrew Wood

93 Bengoe Street, Hertford, Herts. SG14 3EL (01992) 503571
andrew@comma.freereserve.co.uk

Sales Officer: Malcolm Hull

11 Abbey View Road, St. Albans, Herts. AL3 4QL (01727) 857893
malcolmhull@djonas.co.uk

Alan Downie

11 Fowley Mead Park, Longcroft Drive, Holdbrook,
Waltham Cross, Herts. EN8 7SX..... (01992) 309621

David Chandler

24 Henley Close, Houghton Regis, Beds. LU5 5SA (01582) 862361

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