

Butterfly  
Conservation

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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER



ISSUE **40**

DECEMBER



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**The National AGM & Members Day.**  
**- Personal Reflections on Some of the Events at**  
**Silsoe on November 27<sup>th</sup>, by David Chandler**

Its the Sunday morning after the National AGM & Members Day and the adrenalin is only just damping down in my body. Chairing The Members Day was exciting and terrifying at the same time. First I sat through the National AGM and watched what I can only describe as a slick & very professional corporate-style performance by Dudley Cheesman, Martin Warren, David Hanson and Charlie Rugeroni. So, despite having some training in these things from my employers, the task of then talking live to 220 people for the Members Day was made all the more daunting.

Noon came and it was my turn. I looked up from the podium, saw 400+ eyes staring up at me and it was rabbit caught in the headlamps time for me. However, I had prepared some crib notes on my speaker introductions and knew the important sales and daily running order messages I had to relay at the various break points in proceedings, so, after what I felt was a very hesitant and bumbling start, I gradually regained my confidence. By the time in mid afternoon I was presenting the raffle prize draw, I was really enjoying myself in a bingo-caller type way and even daring to make a joke or two. Then, at the end of the proceedings I was confident enough to give the right emphasis to a tribute to Herts & Middlesex's sadly-missed Fritillary species co-ordinator John Whiteman before closing proceedings with a more light hearted whimsical comparison of the closing flag ceremony in the Olympic Games when giving the members some early notice of the BC *corporate flag* moving on from the Home Counties to Dorset for the next AGM & Members Day in Bournemouth.

Of course, my day in the spotlight would not have been possible without the considerable help from the staff at Manor Yard and all the members and local friends in other conservation bodies in the counties of Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire who turned out in numbers to make the proceedings run so smoothly on the day. ***I wish to thank you all for your help.*** Further, my thanks goes to the National AGM organising sub-committee drawn from the two organising branches, with special mention to Liz Goodyear for organising & co-ordinating the event, Sue Draper for managing the sales and displays, Margaret Noakes for the hospitality in holding the meetings at her home, Ann Piper for organising the raffle and to Trevor Boys for some exceptional desktop publishing in the hand-outs & the posters produced to a high professional standard [and, of course being the car-park manager outside on a very cold day].

Oh, & finally thanks to Anna Bell for “ringing my bell” on cue – keeping the day's events on time. nb.It was Margaret Noakes' idea & bell actually!. And remember, we do it all again at our own AGM next January; I hope to see many of you all again then

**Words of Thanks:**

*From Dudley Cheeseman (Chairman):* Well done to you and all those involved in mounting such a successful AGM! Please pass on my personal thanks to everyone concerned. The feedback I've received indicates that the day was thoroughly enjoyed by those who attended, and I suspect the stall holders, or most of them, did good business. Many, many thanks from all of us at HQ.

*From Martin Warren (Chief Executive):* Can I echo Dudley's thanks for a thoroughly well organised and enjoyable AGM. I thought you and your team were excellent and showed the Society in a very good light indeed. Please pass on these thanks to all concerned.

*From Richard Southwell (West Midlands Branch Organiser):* What a wonderful event you produced. Every presentation had its merits. I was fascinated by John Davis doing an 'audit report' on reserves rather than exclusively referring to species. Chris Packham gave very valid insights on the well trodden path of the Monarch migration but I think just pipping them to the post was Matthew Oates, along with your branch members Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton, referring to Purple Emperors in Hertfordshire. The last wins in my mind because it shows the effectiveness of local activity disproving what the experts tell us should not be.

**Important Information about BC's Butterfly Magazine, from Charlie Rugeroni, at Head Office**

Due to a mechanical problem at our publisher's mailing house, a small number of members will not have received a copy of the autumn issue of Butterfly magazine this September.

If a member has not received Butterfly issue 87, please could they contact us on 0870 7744309 or [info@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:info@butterfly-conservation.org), and we will ensure that they are sent a copy straight away.

Unfortunately, there is no other way for us to identify those members who did not receive their magazine. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience this may have caused.

**Butterfly Conservation  
Hertfordshire & Middlesex Branch  
Annual General Meeting  
Saturday 15th January 2005**

To be held at St. Thomas's Church Hall  
Prince George Avenue  
Oakwood, Enfield  
Middlesex, N14 4SN  
Grid Reference: TQ297957 [Map 176 or 177]  
(directions on next page; map on page 6)

**Time: 2 for 2.30 pm - 5.30 pm**

**PROGRAMME**

**2.30 ~ Welcome & introduction from our Chairman**

**2.40 ~ Guest speaker Richard Fox**

*"After the Millennium Atlas - using records for conservation"*

Richard is Butterfly Conservation's Surveys Manager and co-author of the Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland

**3.30 ~ Interlude & refreshments**

**4.00 ~ Annual General Meeting**

**AGENDA**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting ~ 17th January 2004
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Branch Recorder's Report
7. Membership Secretary's Report
8. Millhoppers Pasture Report
9. Election of Chair & Vice-chair

10. Election of Branch Officers
11. Any other business

**4.40 ~ Members' slides and digital images**

Please send any digital images to Andrew Wood (see back of newsletter for contact details)

**5.20 ~ Closing remarks**

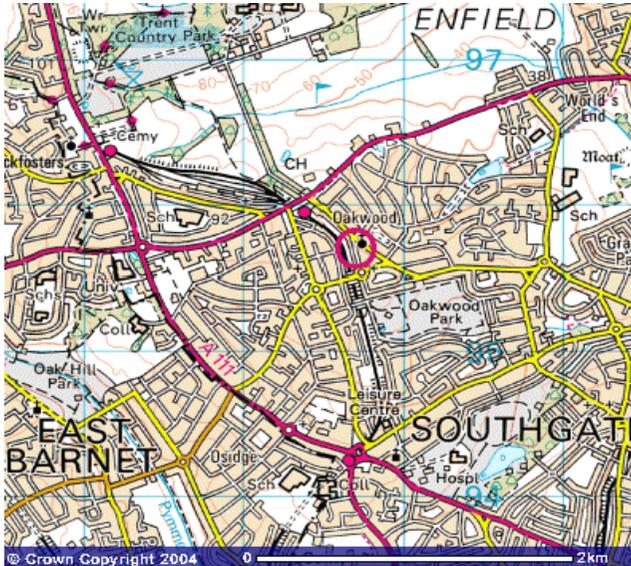
**The Sales and Plant Stand will be present**

**Refreshments will be available**

**NON-MEMBERS WELCOME**

The Parish Church of St. Thomas, Oakwood, Enfield is only a short walking distance from Oakwood Station (map is on next page). Oakwood is on the Piccadilly line with easy underground links to London and south west Middlesex. If travelling by car, the church hall is only a short distance from the M25. From the M25, exit at Junction 24 and follow the signs for Cockfosters (A111). After about 3 miles, and less than ½ mile after Cockfosters Underground Station, there will be a roundabout. Take the 1st exit sign-posted Enfield (A110). Prince George Avenue is on the right immediately after Oakwood Station. Continue for about 400 yds and St. Thomas's is on the right on the corner of Prince George Avenue and Sheringham Avenue. The car park is entered from Prince George Avenue and is just beyond the church if coming from the Oakwood Station direction.

## AGM VENUE



## WINTER MEETING VENUE



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## **Winter Meeting**

**Saturday 19th February 2005**

**To be held at the Welwyn Civic Centre**

**Prospect Place**

**Welwyn**

**Herts, AL6 9ER**

**Grid Reference: TL232160 [Map 166]**

**2.00 for 2.30 – 5.30**

### **Speakers**

**Alan Downie – Gardening for Butterflies**

**&**

**Roger Gibbons – Butterflies of Southern France**

**The Sales and Plant Stand will be present**

**Refreshments will be available**

**NON-MEMBERS WELCOME**

Welwyn Civic Centre is situated in Old Welwyn and is just off Jnct. 6 of the A1M (see map opposite). When you exit the A1M, you will encounter the Welwyn bypass and some roundabouts. However, you need to take the exit that takes you under one of the slip roads and almost immediately after this bridge the Civic Centre can be seen on the right. Take the turning immediately after the building and follow the road right round the Civic Centre and the car park entrance is behind the building. The nearest railway station is Welwyn North (approx. 1 mile) – please check that there are no engineering works that might affect your journey. If anyone has any difficulty getting to the Winter Meeting please ring or email Liz Goodyear (details on back) who will endeavour to find you a lift.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### Moth Evening, Fryent Country Park 11 September, by John Hollingdale

This is a children's event which is organised by Simon Braidman each year in September. Simon had last minute family commitments which meant I was 'in charge'. The start time was 7pm and still daylight so the children, about 10 in number, were sent to look for leafminers. The local population of *Stigmella aurella* must have taken a nose dive as dozens of bramble leaves were shown to me with the question "is this one"?

We then set up the light on an old camera tripod over a large white dust sheet. The children were given a pot and three nets and told to catch anything that arrived. Of course this is a recipe for chaos and I had a hard time preventing the light being knocked over. I was shown crane flies and small flies, leaf hoppers, mosquito like insects. The odd moth battled its way through the children to arrive near the light and be descended upon by something resembling a rugby maul.

This is an event that ends early and as it started tipping down at 9pm we all decided to go home. There were eight species of Macro seen including Orange Swift and an Autumnal Rustic. This last was seen previously on the event in 1998 but I have never recorded this moth in Harrow next door.



Autumnal Rustic *Paradiarsia glareosa*. Photo: Ian Kimber

### Patmore Heath Field Trip, 18 September, by Gavin Vicary

Three members met me on a sunny but windy morning, for a walk around Patmore Heath.

First of all we looked at the compartment containing a flock of Shetland Sheep that are kept on the reserve by the Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust who manage Patmore Heath as a nature reserve by agreement with the Parish council who own it.

As we moved across the heath I explained how historically the heath would have been grazed by livestock owned by local people. This

grazing produced a habitat ideal for the wildlife found at Patmore Heath such as green woodpeckers, ant hills, small copper butterflies and many rare plants including heath bedstraw, common sorrel, devils bit scabious and harebells, all of which were easily found.

I explained that heaths and commons had become quite a rare habitat in many regions threatening the wildlife that requires this type of habitat. This was because many of them had turned to woodland during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as local grazing became less common.

We looked at the number of trees and scrub at Patmore which have come in over the last sixty years as grazing had reduced. This led on to debate about the issues involved in maintaining a balance between open heathland and not upsetting local people who did not always understand why sometimes trees were thinned or removed.

We saw a number of butterflies and dragonflies which included several Small Coppers, a Red Admiral, Comma, Ruddy Darters and both Southern and Migrant hawkers. Small Copper was perhaps the most numerous butterfly, a number of which were found nectaring on the flowers of devils bit scabious.



The trip finished just before it was time for lunch and just as the clouds started to gather prompting agreement that we had been fortunate with the weather.

**Stanmore Country Park Moth Evening, 18 September, by John Hollingdale**

Although only seven days since the last event, but what a difference. I had as my sole companion Evelyn Crisp, a Butterfly Conservation member and Chairperson of the Harrow Natural History Society. We had clear skies and little wind; not promising. However the moths came at regular intervals and by the end of the session ten species of macro and three species of micro had been recorded.

The autumnal moths Brindled Green, Lunar Underwing and Copper Underwing were seen together with the Pyralid *Hypsopygia costalis*. Two Totrix moths were provisionally identified as *Epinotea immundana* and *Acleris emargana*. Colin Plant's provisional list of Middx micros has this last moth recorded in only one other location, Ruislip Woods.

We packed up at 10pm as the evening flight appeared to be over

### **Stanmore Country Park - A Leaf Mine Hunt, 29 October, by John Hollingdale**

This type of event has much to recommend it as, unlike moth or butterfly events, it is not reliant on the weather. All you have to do is get the date right. In the middle of September doubts were beginning to creeping in. Would there be any leaves left on the trees? Fifty years ago, trees at this time of year would have been bare, but with the onset of global warming, leaf fall has occurred later and later. Although by late October some trees had shed their leaves there were enough left for the group to examine.

The idea was for us to collect leaves, pack them into plastic bags and send them to the ever patient Colin Plant for identification. However one of our group was a fungi fanatic and we had our attention diverted by the many fungi present. "This is a good year for fungi" she said, filling her basket while we searched every leaf left. Another group member was busy examining fungus flies so the effort came to be slightly diluted by the end of the walk.

Leaves from Alder, Willow, Oak, Birch, Nettle and grass were duly packaged up and dispatched. Back came the identifications and five more species of micro moth were added to the list of seventeen which Colin had ID'd for me earlier in the autumn. However some blotch mines were classified as "immature" and the grass mine could only be narrowed down to the genus. There is obviously more to be learned about leaf mine identification.

Oh incidentally I now have a list of 30 fungi species for this site as well.

### **STOP PRESS**

The branch is 10 years old in 2005 and we thought it might be nice to do something different. We have been invited by Clive Farrell, a long standing supporter of Butterfly Conservation to visit his Ryewater gardens in Dorset. This is a popular destination of many other branches and groups and a wonderful place to visit. At the moment we haven't confirmed a date but we are working on a Saturday at the beginning of July when the butterflies and flowers are at their best. It is quite a long drive and some members might want to make a long weekend around the visit, perhaps visiting some other important

butterfly sites in the area? It is also possible to reach Sherborne by train so public transport is a possible option. For the moment I would like to know who would be interested in coming - and as soon as a date is confirmed that will be announced. Please contact Liz Goodyear as soon as possible if you would like to join us - details on the back of this newsletter

## **READER'S LETTERS**

### **Heath Fritillary and Introductions, by Charles Smith**

I welcome the article by David Chandler in the September newsletter about Heath Fritillaries in Middlesex.

My sympathies are entirely with the comments of the Chief Invertebrate Ecologist of English Nature, although they are rather forcefully expressed. I also agree with David's reaction to them

Earlier records for Purple Emperor in Herts are for Central Herts. The ~~new records for South Herts appear to have started in a small way~~ some years ago but to have been kept secret. The butterfly thrived and spread. This new appearance is due to natural causes, but how much are these natural causes influenced by human activity. The arrival has rightly been widely welcomed by all.

Heath Fritillary has always depended on a human activity -coppicing. It was introduced into Ruislip Woods in the 1950s but eventually died out. The habitat has changed and it is being re-introduced with the blessing of English Nature and the opposition of Butterfly Conservation. I see no real difference between the new arrival of Purple Emperor and of Heath Fritillary. Both are equally likely to cause either environmental disturbance and/or beneficial increased human interest in conservation. The above shows the illogical rigidity of BCs position.

I understand BCs outright opposition to new introductions and possible environmental damage and I share distrust of some policies of official bodies like EN, but times have changed, cooperation is vital; proper monitoring is now possible and is also vital. Hopefully the branch will try to persuade BC to do something about this.

I live next to an urban wasteland site mainly owned by a property developer . Much of it was abandoned former arable farmland which had been sown with introduced grasses and wildflowers , a usual

botanical practice. These introduced flowering species attracted many butterflies and I started a transect walk in 1996. It proved to be one of the more prolific sites in Herts. The largest number recorded on one transect walk was 694 and eventually there were 26 different species, but some took a long time to arrive. Unfortunately it was not a managed site and the habitat deteriorated. I gave up in 2001, partly for health reasons, but also because the transect was becoming impassable due to scrub invasion from lack of management. Now, following footpaths as near as possible to the former transect it is unusual to see more than 10 butterflies per walk under the best conditions (except in a part owned and maintained by Herts.C.C.). Even skippers are rare. This supports the comments by the EN Ecologist in your article that BC is "monitoring the death of colonies and the extinction of species"

Bunkers Park near Hemel is a managed and monitored site similar to my former transect, having been converted from arable with introduced grasses and wild flowers friendly to butterflies. Most of the expected butterflies have arrived, some in quantity but others only a few and not seen every year. This is a man created flower rich grassland with introduced plants. Why no introduced butterflies once their food plants have become established. It seems an ideal site for monitored experiments.

There must be many better arguments than the above to persuade BC to revise its attitude. The very rapid changes being made in Britain by the dominant human species must make those concerned about other species rethink their policies and become more co-operative with like minded individuals and organisations. The dominant species will continue to make changes; we must make the changes that help our cause.

### **Heath Fritillary , by John Rogers**

I refer to the article on the Heath Fritillary introduction in the current Herts and Middlesex Newsletter.

I don't have a problem with introductions, or at least with re-introductions, provided it is done using some common sense, and the introduced species is as genetically as near as possible to the original. The Large Blue, the Red Kite and the Corncrake are cases in point. However, to introduce the Heath Fritillary into Middlesex, which is largely an urban area, seems a rather odd thing to do, considering that there are no previous records. There must be several suitable areas

apart from Middlesex where there have been records in the past.

Instead of a blanket condemnation of B.C. by English Nature's ecologist, it would have been more helpful to have been given an explanation of why Middlesex was chosen.

### **Letter from Rita Capodici, North London Teacher**

I am writing to praise the vital work the Butterfly Conservation does for the beautiful and fragile creatures of our countryside. It has made the public aware of these important insects and the need to preserve their natural habitats.

Even butterflies have a role in our ecosystem; pollution indicators to flower pollinators as well as gracing our meadows, woodlands and gardens with their presence.

Hence, a big Thank you to Butterfly Conservation for saving a species from facing the same fate as the Dodo bird – extinction!

PS – my students are now interested in your work!

### **Letter from Peter Beauchamp, London**

Inspired by your really interesting report of Peter Davey's article on 'The Great Immigration of Feb 2004', I enclose a photo I took in July of a very handsome moth in Malaysia (which did not feature in their uniquely spectacular butterfly park). I had considerable difficulty in identifying this moth at the Natural History Museum in Kensington as it did not appear in any of their many reference books on the open shelves, but the expert on Borneo species eventually wrote back.

The moth is *Lyssa zampa docile*, Butler (Uraniidae), which is a fairly common day-flying moth. Wingspan of this large species is about 3½ inches. Note the two tails.

*Unfortunately, Peter's photograph was not sharp enough for reproduction, but I reproduce here a very similar image from the internet – editor*



### **Five Poles of Potential, by Malcolm Newland**

When I was reasonably satisfied that the allotment which I had taken on in 2001 was under control I asked Dave the site warden, and a keen ornithologist, why one plot remained neglected and what were the chances of turning it into a wildlife garden. Apparently the previous holder had been defeated by a combination of poor soil and the adjacent hedge with mature trees which shaded the area until mid morning even in the summer.

We canvassed the other gardeners before approaching the council for permission to go ahead and with one exception their reaction to the idea was very positive. Having obtained approval I was asked to come up with a design which would convert our standard plot of five poles or one hundred and fifty one and a quarter square yards into a mini nature reserve.

The central feature of a pond and bog-garden would have on one side a butterfly garden with a winding grass path and on the other a wildflower meadow which would be mown twice a year, once in the spring and again in the autumn.

My merry band of volunteers, Bill, Bernie, Dave, Sean and myself with a combined age of some three hundred years set to work with a will in the autumn of 2002. A pond liner was donated as was the grass mixture for the new path and meadow. Shrubs, seeds, plants and bulbs were soon filling the gaps and Sean kindly provided a rustic bench where we could sit by the pond and put the world to rights.

2003 saw everything getting established but this year the garden's full potential began to be realised and from spring through to autumn it was ablaze with colour. Eighteen species of butterfly were recorded and other beneficial insects abounded. Dragonflies were seen and tadpoles developed into froglets which we hope will grow fat on the abundance of slugs. Orange-Tip caterpillars were seen on Honesty seed pods and the wild Hop should attract female Commas when it gets bigger. Purging Buckthorn is on site for Brimstones and Bird's Foot Trefoil is in the meadow and garden for Common Blues which were seen this year. There are plenty of nettles behind the meadow which are cut in summer to promote new growth. Maybe Humming-Bird Hawk Moths will find the Ladies Bedstraw next summer.

Unbeknown to me, someone from the council took a photo of the garden, which appeared in one of their glossy publications along with an article and this appears to have encouraged at least one other local allotment to plant a wildlife garden. The more the merrier!

### **Garden Guerrillas, by John Noakes**

A chap went into Foyle's, a well-known London bookstore and is reputed to have asked an assistant where he could find books on urban Guerrillas? The assistant was said to have replied- "Young man you will find them downstairs on the left under the section Natural History."

Having forsaken an urban area for the comparative quiet of the countryside I find the pests at large in my garden here, operate with guerrilla like tactics, which often would do credit to a gorilla!

Take the most recent attack. Large holes, almost 18 inches deep appeared overnight in a bed set aside for autumn crocuses and

cyclamen. Corms and tubers were scattered over the adjoining lawn, many half eaten. No doubt many had been fully eaten but the evidence for this was difficult to come by.

Doubtless you will have guessed the villains-Badgers! Up until now I have always had a soft spot for old Mr.Brock; we have a large set on our local reserve. The excuse given in their defence is that the dry weather has so hardened the ground they had not been able to dig easily for food in their normal terrain; so they picked on my garden as a soft option. This might be a good theory but I am now beginning to feel some sympathy for Radio 4's David Archer. However, I do not have a shotgun and certainly my family would punish me severely if I took this sort of revenge.

I tried prevention, placing unattractive chicken wire over the site and it worked. The large holes did not reappear but curiously mounds, the opposite of holes I suppose, erupted from under the wire, with burrows running into the lawn.

You've guessed right again-Moles! In the course of two nights I had been subjected to a cunning pincer manoeuvre; attacked from above and below. Moles are tricky enemies to deal with but as far as I am aware, they are after worms and insects, not corms or tubers. So I will just live with the upheaval they cause and not go on the offensive yet.

A much more sinister enemy than the mole also operates at a subterranean level killing trees and shrubs by stealth. Its presence only becomes obvious when a plant weakens and then suddenly dies. It is as though a poison is being spread underground and its source unknown. After several shrubs had died I, in desperation, sought professional advice. This one would be difficult to guess.

This enemy proved to be the deadly *Armillaria mellea* -Honey Fungus. I was told there is no cure. The fungus lives in rotting tree stumps and sends out its strand like mycelium to host on and kill nearby plants. Only in the autumn does this fungus become visible; then the golden yellow toadstools, from which it gets its name, spring up and flaunt themselves from dead stumps. Very few trees are very resistant, Yew and Walnut are; most others have only varying degrees of resistance. The highly useful advice I received was not to plant anything nearby for the next 20-30years! Furthermore, grub up all dead stumps and roots - not very easy as some are 18 inches in diameter! More useful though, I have been given a list of plants with a

certain degree of resistance. I shall plant these and keep my fingers crossed, for I need to concentrate my energies where there could be some reasonable degree of success. This means taking the battle to the arch supremo in this gallery of garden guerrillas.

He is of course the grey squirrel, an introduction from North America. Like some other American introductions, such as McDonalds and Bushism-he could be considered by many, bad news. He, the squirrel that is, operates a campaign of devastation throughout the year. During the winter he eats off dormant buds, digs up crocus corms. When the spring emerges he steals birds eggs and takes over nesting sites normally occupied by native birds. During the summer he is not quite so aggressive but come early autumn he strips off all the developing hazel nuts and plunders the majority of the walnuts from adjoining trees. He looks cute and comical as he runs about with these green unripe egg shaped fruits. Like the previous villains he then turns to excavating in order to bury and store the walnuts. Of course he never remembers where they were buried. The end result the following spring is a small forest of walnut trees emerging in the garden.

With this pest, I most certainly go on the offensive; however I shall not go into print on my means as I do not wish to have a counter attack from squirrel lovers.

Other lesser pests are blackbirds, who turn the leafy borders over looking for worms and nesting material; in the process they turf out small plants and bulbs but they are not in the same league as the earlier mentioned thugs. Neither are the feral pigeons who would swoop down from the old church tower after despoiling it and my neighbour's roof with guano. A resident sparrow hawk has sorted them out.

Cats I really dare not mention. There are approximately ten in the vicinity and I just can't risk alienating ten of my nearby friends

This seems a big moan. Is there anything good going on? Of course there is. Gardens have a huge and fascinating range of wildlife, mostly of benefit. They are a joy to look at, listen to and study. Problems arise when there is an introduced species with no natural predator. Then the scheme of things gets totally out of balance. This is exemplified by the grey squirrel who can leap about totally unchallenged. He is the arch antisocial garden guerilla.

Is there anything good about the grey squirrel apart from looking rather cute? Well not a lot, although I am told they are really tasty barbecued and washed down with a good Rhone red wine!

Having written this I feel a little better. I have got rid of some of my anger over the damage caused by some of these "enemies" and will try and live in peace with them and turn the other cheek. However I really think I must order a case of Rhone wine.

Since penning this article some other villains have appeared on the scene; cock pheasants! They have started to peck off the developing flower buds of winter cyclamen and decapitating autumn crocuses. Perhaps decapitation is the solution here? Would Rhone wine be also suitable or maybe a Burgundy?

### **Butterfly Photography and Monopods, by Richard Bigg**

I don't know how you get on, but when I started trying to photograph butterflies using an SLR camera and a heavy telephoto lens in conjunction with a monopod for support, I found the two not very compatible. Initially, I walked about with the camera screwed on the monopod ready for use. This arrangement was awkward to carry, particularly when binoculars, notebook and pen were also being carried. I also discovered, to my cost, that the screw fitting in the baseplate of the camera was not robust enough to take this sort of treatment and bent the plate. I subsequently carried the two items separately, but that meant it took time to screw the monopod on when I wanted to take a photo, by which time the subject had often flown off to pastures new.



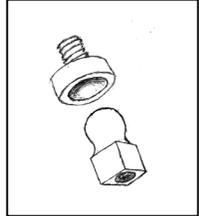
I overcame these difficulties with a simple idea which may be of interest to others who have similar problems.

I wanted to carry the camera round my neck and yet use it instantly on the monopod, and decided that a ball joint which separated was the answer. The diagram shows the idea. The socket part screws into the camera using the normal thread in the baseplate. The ball part screws onto the monopod. The thread is  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. Whitworth.

In use, it is very simple to plonk the camera on top of the monopod, and you then have complete flexibility to achieve any desired angle of attack. I am fortunate in that I have a lathe, so manufacture of the two parts was not a problem. They were turned from a piece of solid

aluminium , the ball and socket formed until they were a snug fit. I have been using the arrangement for two or three years now and find it very satisfactory. I now use a digital camera which is smaller and lighter, but still find the arrangement quick and easy to use.

**The Black Poplar. *Populus nigra* var. *betulifolia*, by Margaret Noakes**



Heavy branches arch and sweep down, giving this special tree a unique, rugged grandeur, while the bark is split with fissures and burrs giving the appearance, from a distance that it is black, hence the name. The leaves are almost triangular in shape, with the fleeting presence of fine hairs along the veins. In the spring the branches of the male trees are bedecked with beautiful red catkins ,giving the whole area a fantastic fiery glow

It was this glow that first drew my attention to our local trees, recognizing that in this far north western peninsular of Hertfordshire there were almost no other trees in the landscape that edges on the Aylesbury vale. I needed to know more about these trees. Why were they here and why had I not seen them elsewhere?

Oliver Rackham, a leading author and authority on the countryside, describes the Black poplar as one of our rarest and most distinctive native trees.

How rare were they in our particular area? The first step was to establish how many trees we had and their status. I decided to attempt a community survey of a 14 sq klm area, from the Aylesbury arm of the Grand Union Canal in the south to Wingrave in the north, bounded by the Herts. and Bucks. border.

With the aid of Millenium grants and a lot of hard slogging field work, armed with maps and record sheets, a number of us identified nearly 1000 trees, of which over 200 were damaged in some way. We also identified about 160 dead trees.

Another survey some two years later of a further 7sq klm area, again within Herts, but south of the Aylesbury arm of the Grand Union canal and bounded by the B488 identified a further 190 trees with another 29 dead trees.

Significantly these trees form over 10% of the national population and we are losing them to high winds, old age and changes in their natural

habitat. We found few young trees and no female trees: black poplars are dioecious and it appears that the female trees were cut down because of the masses of downy fluff that they produce.(they are related to the cottonwoods of North America) Fortunately poplars will reproduce asexually so over the years cuttings have been planted in hedges and used as boundary markers, particularly at the time of the enclosure movement of the 1853/4s.

Black poplars grow in damp places, alongside ditches,ponds, rivers and moats, hence their prevalence in our survey area of the Aylesbury plain But this is a changing feature,as are the agricultural practices of the area.

We have had considerable help and support from Countryside Management services, with computer programmes, further grants and a commitment to a long term planting and a management programme. Traditionally these trees were pollarded every 15years and the timber used for baskets, brake blocks and fencing, as well as the arching timbers needed for Cruck buildings.

So that is where we are now, as well as constantly monitoring and updating our survey material

But there is another threat that is on the horizon; that of disease that has shown to be devastating the Black poplars in the Manchester area. A form of scab *Venturia populina/Pollaccia elegans* has been diagnosed and is spread by wind movement over quite considerable distances. Perhaps it is inevitable that the disease will reach our trees so we need to be vigilant. If we lose our Black poplars there will be few trees left in our local landscape. We lost our elms, of which there were a huge number hereabout so it is vital that we do all we can to manage our trees,plant new ones and treat disease if that is at all practicable.

But do come and in late March/early April and enjoy the fiery glow that I was so overwhelmed by. There might be a cup of tea available at Old Church Cottage!!

P.S Moth trapping near to the Black poplars in our garden and on Millhoppers have revealed a large population of the Poplar Hawk moth as well as Swallow prominent, Poplar grey and Chocolate tip. To watch a Poplar hawk moth fly onto the trunk of a Black poplar is a real exercise in camouflage. Impossible to identify!

**'Deadly Ladybird' Sighted in UK**

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*The following is taken from BBC News Online, 5 October 2004, and was widely reported in the press.*

A ladybird which has already caused havoc to native insects in America has been spotted near a pub in Essex. *Harmonia axyridis* posed a "deadly threat" to butterflies, lacewings and many other ladybirds, Dr Michael Majerus of Cambridge University said. The ladybird is an Asian species which was introduced into North America 25 years ago to fight aphids. It has since spread to Europe and last month was discovered in the gardens of the White Lion pub in Sible Hedingham. The ladybird, which is also known as harlequin or the multi-coloured ladybug, was seen at the pub on 19 September and identified by Dr Majerus at the university's genetics department.

The adult is slightly larger than the 7-spot ladybird and comes in a range of colours and patterns. The one found in Essex was black with two very bold red spots and two smaller red spots. But the bugs can also be orange in colour and checked in pattern. "*H. axyridis* is still



Poplar Hawk moth, *Laothoe populi*  
Photo: Ian Kimber

sold in North America as a pest control. It is now the commonest ladybird in North America. It is outcompeting pretty much all of the aphid-feeding native American ladybirds which are going through anything from a slight to a very, very serious decline."

"And there are lacewing, hoverfly larvae and even butterflies that are suffering because this thing is eating all the food, and it is also eating as secondary food butterfly eggs, and other ladybirds and lacewing larvae."

Despite this unwelcome and well-publicised take-over, the harlequin ladybirds are also still being sold in continental Europe by biocontrol companies. The bug now roams across France, Belgium and Holland, with numbers soaring annually. Harlequins also feed on fruit juices as they fuel up for the winter and fruit-growers are finding that they blemish many soft fruits, reducing the value of the crop.

Wineries report the bugs also taint the vintage because of their acrid defensive chemicals.

Dr Majerus believes there is still time to save the UK from a full

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

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invasion. He urges anyone who finds the insect to send it to him with precise details on when and where the ladybird was found.

"It is critical to monitor this ladybird now, before it gets out of control and starts to annihilate our own British ladybirds," he said.



Cambridge's Evolutionary Genetics Group can be contacted at [info@gen.cam.ac.uk](mailto:info@gen.cam.ac.uk)

**Copy Deadline for the March Newsletter will be**

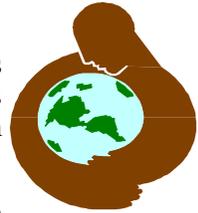
**20 February 2005**

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](mailto:ian.small@lineone.net), or send an article by post - address on back cover.

**BEST WISHES FROM THE EDITOR FOR A HAPPY AND  
HEALTHY 2005**

**Conservation Dates**

**Millhopper's Pasture SP 900149.** John Noakes is compiling a list of people to call on when help is needed. If you would like to be included, then let him know, on (01296) 660072.



**Therfield Heath, TL 335400** First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thomson (01763) 341443.

**Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP 952131.** No conservation activities planned at present. Contact Michael Pearson (details on back cover) for further information.

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

**Frynt Country Park** - details from Leslie Williams at the Brent Ecology Unit on (0181) 206 0492

**Patmore Heath TL 443257.** Meet at 10.00 a.m. on the last Sunday of each month. Further details from Gavin Vicary (01279) 771933

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