

Butterfly
Conservation

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER



ISSUE **44**

DECEMBER 2005



**Do You Know What our Regional Development Officers
Do for Us ?**

by David Chandler

Regional Development Officers (RDOs) are your branch's local contact with a full-time staff representative of the national society. The RDO's provide regional leadership and help muster our society's resources. We have two RDOs in our branch area and this is so because of the quirks in the way the Government sets regional boundaries: Sharon Hearle covers the Anglia region which includes Hertfordshire and Dan Hoare covers the South East region which includes Greater London, which itself incorporates the former county of Middlesex.

I am a strong supporter of RDOs because I believe that they help to

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

bring a regional perspective to Butterfly Conservation's activities, which I feel, complements a more parochial local emphasis taken by the region's other branches in their own conservation activities.

The H&M branch has a light touch relationship with both our RDOs: In the Anglia region I feel this is due to the fact that the branch is one of the strongest in people-resource terms in the area and so we have less of a need to call on our RDO. In the SE Region I sense we should do more conservation with our RDO north of the Thames but as Middlesex is primarily an urban environment our activities have tended to be focussed on education & awareness.

Your Branch committee has good geographical coverage throughout Hertfordshire; one merely has to have a look at the committee page in this magazine to see that Branch committee members reside in every corner of the county and so we have eyes and ears everywhere. This is a very powerful asset. We have an active conservation committee, in house insect experts, a successful sales team and an effective administration team who cement all our various activities together. However, in many of the other Anglia branches the committees are so small and have so few active members that they have to ask Sharon for direct help to maintain their conservation and local representation for their ordinary BC members. Being more self-reliant we have allowed Sharon to concentrate her efforts more on those Anglia branches with needs greater than our own. That said she has helped us when we applied for an Awards for All lottery grant for a laptop, projector, the woodlands butterfly publicity project. We have also worked together on conserving Dingy & Grizzled Skippers.

In Middlesex we have worked with Dan & his predecessor Emily Funnell on urban butterfly conservation and increasing public awareness of butterfly conservation in parks & gardens.

Dan has been working on the endangered Fritillaries in SE England and hold regular action group meetings in Farnham to help stem the regional decline in these beautiful insects.

Both Sharon & Dan's roles are supported by sponsorship and grant aid. We heard at the Branches Liaison Meeting in October that RDO roles are vulnerable to the whims of the benefactors and I for one would miss their valued contributions if ever the funding dried up.

However, your Branch committee will work hard to try and ensure that this does not happen.

Sharon & Dan hold regional meetings on the 4th & 11th of February 2006 respectively and all are welcome to attend to meet members from other branches and hear the conservation plans for the protection of scarce & endangered species in both the Anglia & SE regions.

If you wish to attend either or both of these events, please contact me for further information.

Another Local Extinction in Herts & Middx? By Malcolm Hull

It is now seven years since the last confirmed sighting of Brown Hairstreak in either Herts or Middx. Adult butterflies are hard to find and the best way of identifying its presence is by hunting for its eggs on Blackthorn in winter. Eggs are white, pin-head sized and to be found on recent growth, often near a thorn and usually below a height of 4 ft.

Egg searches carried out last winter at its last confirmed site, Bricket Wood St Albans revealed nothing. Searches near the scene of an unconfirmed sighting at Jersey Farm, St Albans were also negative. On the plus side, the populations in the neighbouring counties of Bucks & Surrey both had very good years. There are new egg records from Cheam in South London and Dorton in Bucks, both



closer to our branch area than records for many years. The Brown Hairstreak is a mobile species, which has shown an ability to colonise suitable habitats, so it could spread into our area from either the south or west. The retreat of farming and a decline in hedge trimming means that habitat quality in S & W Herts and W Middx is now much improved.

This winter we will be carrying out a Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunt on Uxbridge Common. There is suitable habitat in the area and there has been a probable sighting in the area in the past. Meet at the gates by the entrance to the Common on

the B483, Park Road, opposite to the junction with North Common Road (OS ref TQ062851) Time - **10.30 am, Sunday 5 February 2006**. Parking available in North Common Rd. Nearest Station Uxbridge (Piccadilly/Metropolitan line). Please wrap up warm & bring a hand-held magnifying glass if you have one. In the event of severe weather we may reschedule - contact details Malcolm Hull (see back cover).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held on a Saturday 14th January 2006, at Welwyn Civic Centre, Welwyn, Hertfordshire. Tony Davis, Butterfly Conservation's Moth Conservation Officer has kindly agreed to be our guest speaker. His talk will be in two parts – an introduction to moths and the work of the Butterfly Conservation moth team.

If you wish to show digital images, then these should be sent to Andrew Wood (details on back cover) in advance of the meeting. Andrew indicates that he can accept e-mail images in any format and size as he has a broadband connection. Prints, slides, images on CD are also acceptable. In fact, as they will be displayed on a screen they do not need to be high resolution. An ideal would be low resolution jpegs of 800 to 1000 by 600 to 800 pixels but he can cope with anything in PC or Mac format jpeg, tiff, gif, bmp, png, etc and also video files in mp4, avi, wmv format are also welcome. If in doubt people should contact Andrew.



**Saturday 14th January 2006
Annual General Meeting**

**at the Welwyn Civic Centre, Prospect Place,
Welwyn, Herts, AL6 9ER
Grid Ref: TL232160 [Map 166]**

**2.15 for 2.30pm - 5.30 pm
PROGRAMME**

2.30 – Introduction from our Chairman - David Chandler

**2.40 - Guest speaker Tony Davis
*Butterfly Conservation's Moth Conservation Officer***

3.30 - Interval and refreshments

4.00 – Annual General Meeting

**4.40 - Members slides and digital images
(approximate times only)**

**Help will be on hand if you need pictures of butterflies or
moths identified**

Contact Liz Goodyear if a lift is required:

elizabethgoodyear@hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk

Good car parking facilities available at the Civic Centre

The Sales and Plant Stand will be present

Refreshments available

Non-members welcome - no admission charge

Winter Meeting Saturday 4th March 2006

Our second meeting of 2006 will be the Winter Meeting on Saturday 4th March and is a second chance for members to meet and socialise during the winter months. For the Winter Meeting we will be returning to Middlesex and to the **South Ruislip Methodist Church Hall**. This is a new venue and we hope members will find it easy to reach.

[Andrew Wood and John Hollingdale](#) will be giving a talk on *Moth Trapping and Recording*. This will follow on from the talk that Tony Davis will be giving at our Branch Annual General Meeting in January and we hope to give members more information about ways to record moths.

[Andrew Middleton and Liz Goodyear](#) will be giving the second presentation. They will be talking about *White Admirals and Purple Emperors*, which are both species that can be found in the woods of west Middlesex and south-west Hertfordshire. This will also include some video footage of both species and information on how to identify and find these two impressive and rare species.

The Sales Stand will also be present and there will be a wide selection of plants and butterfly related items for sale. New season seeds will also be available. Non-members are very welcome so please tell your friends to come along.

South Ruislip Methodist Church Hall is situated on Queens Walk, South Ruislip. TQ115860 [Map 176]

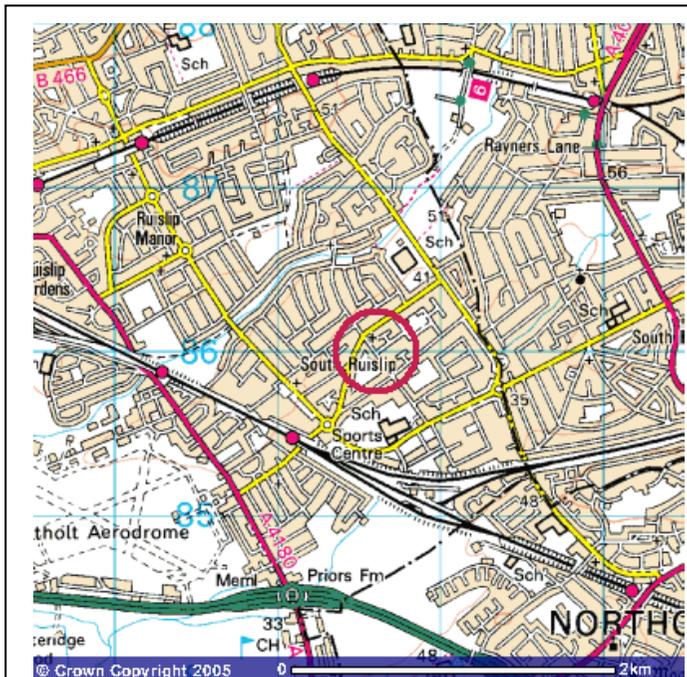
Travelling by road:

Directions from the M25 – Leave the M25 at Junction 16 (signposted Uxbridge, London) and take the M40. Continue forward at Junction 1 onto Western Avenue - A40 (signposted Central London, Harrow). At the Polish War Memorial, branch left (signposted Ruislip) and then at the Polish War Memorial roundabout take the 1st exit onto West End Road - A4180 (signposted Ruislip), entering South Ruislip. Turn right onto Station Approach *(signposted South Ruislip Station). Continue forward onto Long Drive#, bearing left onto The Fairway and then turn right onto Queens Walk and you will arrive at South Ruislip Methodist Church. Car parking is restricted but there is on street parking available. If you have access to the internet look at www.streetmap.co.uk for full details of the roads in the South Ruislip

area.

Directions from Ruislip: Take A4180 from Ruislip, past Ruislip Gardens Underground and R.A.F. Northholt and turn left into Station Approach* then follow above.

The nearest mainline/underground station is South Ruislip, which is approx ½ mile from South Ruislip Methodist Hall. Follow directions from Long Drive# (see above). South Ruislip is on the Central Line (Underground) and Chiltern Railway (Mainline from Marylebone) – please check for engineering work before travelling



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READERS LETTERS

All Good Things Come to Those Who Wait - Central London Butterflies, by Cherry Eggleton

Isn't it just the way that when you give up on a project or idea, something happens to knock all your previous assumptions on the head. So it has been this summer. Having lived in central London not far from Paddington for nearly 20 years, I have never seen any butterflies in the immediate vicinity apart from Whites, Whites and more Whites. In the mid 90's I started sowing annual flower seeds for butterflies in window boxes hoping to attract them. Although the neighbours were impressed, the butterflies definitely were not.

The only bug I caught was the gardening bug and in 2003 after ginormous efforts to keep flowers going during the heat wave, I sighed with relief when I exchanged my measly 12 square feet of containers for 1,200 sq feet on an allotment site in North Brent. And what else came with the site, yes butterflies. Well of course. Here I was 5 miles away right next to the canal, backing onto a cemetery with boundaries filled Hawthorn, weeping Willow, Poplar, Ivy, Garlic Mustard, Honesty, brambles, Buddleias and many other plants and shrubs, that I have not yet got round to identifying. How could I have been so naive to think that my urban home street, with its small north facing shady back gardens and front south facing balconies on which hardly anyone plants anything, facing onto a busy street with an LEB substation, could be even remotely enticing to butterflies?

I was given permission to use my plot for a flower garden and the window boxes were disbanded apart from 2 at ground level used for propagation purposes. The less intensive use meant that from time to time weeds self seeded, this year one nettle. As it was jutting out onto the pavement, I left it hoping that it would act as a deterrent to opportunistic passers by, which have been seen lifting the boxes in view to nicking them. In our street, even the dustbins are locked to the railings.

Well may be you can all guess what happened next, but it took me completely by surprise. Returning home on 5th August, I could see even from a distance the nettle was looking incredibly tatty. Closer inspection revealed the cause to be 11 Comma caterpillars merrily munching away on the few remaining leaf tips. Visions of squishy



Comma caterpillar

squashy caterpillars on the pavement prompted a hasty rearrangement of the 2 containers. The next morning, there was no nettle left, just the forlorn skeletal frame and the caterpillars on walkabout.

So not knowing whether they were in search of food or about to pupate, I phoned Alan Downie left a message saying Help, caterpillar crisis. Having attended an excellent talk given by Alan at the winter meeting this year on ‘gardening for butterflies’, I thought he would know what to do. The next day, armed with some good advice, I went to collect the motley crew to save them from imminent starvation, so convinced was I that one nettle does not 11 butterflies make. Not to mention the additional health hazards from passers by, who cannot resist putting their chewing gum, ciggie butts, empty drink cans and the stale bread thrown from the top flat. Plan scuppered, not one caterpillar to be seen.

Instead, 7 pupae were found underneath the railings and leaves of *Sidalcea*, and on the ridges of the container itself, each 2 feet equidistant from its neighbour and each matching their surroundings,



the ones on the black railings dark brown, whilst the ones on the container taking on a sandy colour. Not knowing the habits or requirements of emerging butterflies, I dutifully set about planting up some *Lythrum* and leaving rotting pears dotted around. Two weeks later on the Sunday morning, I was rewarded with the sight of 2 butterflies taking flight. The offerings were spurned as they flew high into the sky and made their way westwards. 4 empty cases were collected, and a further 3, which were parasitised. So 4 out of 11 does not seem a bad for

one small nettle.

So the nettle recovered and I was left to ponder the irony that all my efforts over the years had produced not one butterfly sighting and yet one humble nettle had done the trick.

And does it end here? Not quite. At the end of first week of October I was collecting tobacco plant seeds.. Ahhhhh..... Another Victor

Meldrew moment. Yes, another caterpillar meandering around in the nettles and another enclosed in a little tent of leaves. A week later the caterpillars were on walk about. Walkabout for the Red Admiral, as it turned out to be, consisted of travelling very vertically 10 feet up the building to the next flat, the next day a brown instead of black version came back down and was transferred back to the nettle, the result one beautiful chrysalis flecked with gold inside a little tent and another high up in a corner crevice of the building. Three weeks later and still the tent chrysalis had not emerged. Was it paratised, or hibernating? Well I needn't have panicked because the butterfly obligingly emerged on the 5th November, and after observing it for half an hour, after a great waggle of its antennae, it flew off away eastwards



Red Admiral pupae

towards Little Venice. After borrowing some binoculars, I found that the second chrysalis had already gone. So what can I say? Apart from the fact that W9 butterflies are very considerate of us 9- 5 working folk and I was very lucky most of the events took place at weekends. It would never have occurred to me to grow a one off nettle in a container. If someone else had suggested it I would definitely have thought not quite the full shilling. Knowing very little about butterflies, I still don't understand how they found the nettle, our street sandwiched as it is between 2 sets of fairly tall buildings with lorries continually going up and down, the street is not one for encouraging butterflies to meander around. The books always say grow clumps. Single nettles don't get a mention. So maybe it was a fluke but I shall be keeping my very beady eye on that nettle next year.

Heath Fritillary Recollections and Re-introductions, by Raymond Softly

David Chandler's article on the Heath Fritillary brought back memories of Belfair's Great Wood, near Hadleigh, Essex, which was close to my boyhood home at Leigh-on-Sea where I continued to live during my working life. I understand the Heath Fritillary had been introduced there in the early decades of the 1900's, and was the main

reason for saving a part of the wood from urban sprawl. However, good intentions without management failed, and I witnessed the spread of unmanaged tree growth, reducing the flight area and the extent of the cow-wheat. Parts of the wooded complex that had been known as flight areas I found already under a closed canopy of young tree growth. However, before extinction, I did have the opportunity to see not only the butterfly, but also the larva which, prior to its final instar, could be found basking in Spring sunshine on the dead leaves of the woodland floor. I was intrigued to know how it survived amid the multitude of ferocious wood-ants, which as the season advanced, could be seen carrying green caterpillars down the tree trunks. In spite of this predation, the woodland moths continued to flourish. As for the Heath Fritillary larvae, I placed one on the leaf-litter in an area frequented by ants and waited. At the touch of an ant, the larvae curled, presenting a façade of the spiky warts that covered it. These disappear in the final instar, replaced by hairs. The butterfly has since been introduced to nearby Hockley Woods, of very similar character, and this time appropriately managed.

So I personally am in favour of re-introductions. The Heath Fritillary it may very well be in continental Europe, but in England it sticks to the cow-wheat and coppiced woodland, and though one may cultivate cow-wheat by coppicing, the butterfly will not be able to find it without our deliberate help.

The Brimstone is different. It is a wide-ranging wanderer, and I have seen it establish itself here on Hampstead Heath after the deliberate planting of Buckthorn. Previously, it turned up as the odd wanderer every year or two. It took half-a-dozen years to get established, but now it breeds annually.

Extract from UK-Leps Discussion Forum, arising from the September Newsletter:

From Jack Harrison:

Another excellent newsletter from the Herts & Middx branch contains a comment that has me wondering.

Snip...".spotted a female Silver Washed Fritillary egg-laying on violets..."

Now of course, SW Frit larvae do feed on violets, but all the literature I have read suggests that the female, having detected the presence of suitable violets, actually lays on adjacent tree trunks or similar surfaces and not on the violets themselves. I recall one observer (it might have been Ken Willmott) telling me how one butterfly laid on his trousers, or tee shirt – certainly on some part of his clothing.

So that reported observation in Hertfordshire is a little puzzling. The observer might have been watching a female probing and identifying violets and not actually laying, or far less likely, it was a mistaken identification of a Dark Green Fritillary. DG Frit, while usually apparently choosing nearby dead bracken or other surfaces, will sometimes lay on the violets themselves.

I have never seen either species egg-laying, so am only re-iterating received wisdom.

Any comments?

Reply from Malcolm Hull:

I wrote the article & having checked with the original report, I am probably guilty of reckless paraphrasing. The original report on 10 July this year read "and found a female Silver-washed Fritillary fluttering above some violets. It is almost certain that she was looking for a place suitable for egg-laying". I doubt very much that it was a Dark-green Fritillary, there have been no records in the Watford area for many years. Silver-washed Fritillaries are hardly common, but there have been half a dozen positive IDs in the same wood in the last 2 years.

What Happens to Your Butterfly Records? By Andrew Wood

It's now a year since I took over from Michael Healy maintaining the branch records database. I thought it would be a good idea to say a little about how it is maintained and what we do with the records that we receive.

We currently have 163000 records mainly covering the period 1995 to 2005 with a few for earlier years so in an average year we add about 16000 records. A record is a species at a particular location on a particular day.

Sending in Records

Our records come in many formats, such as the branch recording forms, transect records, emails to the website, letters, scraps of paper and electronically. The minimum we need is the date, the location and species and the number seen.. To enable us to get the correct location an Ordnance Survey grid reference as well as a location's name is best. This grid reference should be at least a 2km square or tetrad but ideally a full six figure reference. These can easily be worked out using Pathfinder or Landranger map or even the Hertfordshire Street Atlas. A web site getamap (<http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/getamap/>) will also give this information. If you are recording from home, your postcode enables us to find the grid reference. For more information on recording see the "How to record butterflies" section on pages 40-41 of the 2005 Annual Report.

Inputting the records takes time and I am copying from your input to the computer I can and do make mistakes, so if you can submit records electronically it is a great help as it is quicker for me and saves errors in re inputting. If you have access to a computer there is a simple format that can be used to submit records.

Use a spreadsheet such as Excel or Works and enter the data in columns. The columns do not need a header but there should be columns with your name, grid reference, location, date, species and numbers e.g.

You can add other information in the next column across.

If the data below this first line is the same, for instance if you are

Andrew Wood	TL347105	Manor Farm Ware	23/08/2005	Peacock	1
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Hertfordshire and Middlesex

sending in lots of records from the same site you need not fill in your name, grid reference or site each time as I have a program to do this automatically so your spreadsheet could look like this.

Send this in at the end of the recording season and your records can be

Andrew Wood	TL347105	Manor Farm Ware	23/08/2005	Peacock	1
				Speckled Wood	8
				Comma	2
			25/08/2005	Small White	10
				Speckled Wood	5
	TL327908	Meadow Nature reserv	28/09/2005	Red Admiral	1
				Comma	2

added to the database in minutes.

Checking your records

We check the more unusual records to ensure that they are correct. We notice them during data input or when we review the year's records in preparation for the branch Annual Report. This involves creating lists of the 10 earliest, latest and highest numbers seen for each species. These let us to see if there are any records that appear out of the normal flight times or in unusual numbers. We also list out all the records for the rarer species and check these records again to see if there are any anomalies. You may get an email or phone call from John Murray or me asking for further details to ensure that we are only including verifiable records. For instance it is very easy to slip a line on a recording form and appear to have recorded Walls when what was seen was a Speckled wood or record an Orange Tip in September when what was seen was a Green-veined White.

What do we do with Your Records

The database and its records are only useful if there is a purpose to them and we use the records in several ways. They form the backbone of the branch Annual Report, which has been produced since 1995 and gives a status report on our area's butterflies and is a way of feeding back to all our observers what is going on. The records also go to Butterfly Conservation nationally where they are collated and used to create major works such as the Millennium Atlas and the forthcoming 2000-2004 update. Our species coordinators receive records for their species to help them in their conservation efforts. We also supply strictly anonymised records to consultants undertaking environmental

impact studies for major building and engineering projects. These studies are mandatory for such projects and we are able to obtain income for the branch by charging, not for the records themselves, but for the work involved in extracting and creating a report from them. Providing such verified information, we hope, helps to ensure that any adverse impact on butterflies or their habitats in our area is minimised.

We need Your help

Each year over 200 people send in records and not all of them are Butterfly Conservation members yet our Branch has over 500 members! I am sure that most members must see butterflies in our Branch area so I encourage you to send records in of any butterfly you see in Hertfordshire or Middlesex. If you have any records no matter from what year or in what form we would be happy to receive them.

Each record, no matter how common the species, helps us to build up a better picture of the state of butterflies in our area and across Britain.

Records can be sent to John Murray whose contact details are on the back cover.

Stanmore Country Park - Working Party Details (from John Hollingdale)

Venue: Stanmore Country Park. Date: Sunday, 19th Feb 2006, 10am

Meeting place: The top of Kerry Avenue, Stanmore. OS TQ 175928
Local public transport: Tube: Stanmore Station, Jubilee Line. Bus services: H12,142 & 340

Work: Removal of encroaching bramble, birch & gorse.

This workday is with the BTCV which means tea and biscuits provided during breaks. Please wear stout footwear and bring lunch if staying all day; tools and gloves will be provided.

Ware Museum Exhibition - Spring 2006

We have been asked by Ware Museum to stage a small exhibition this Spring on the subject of the Butterflies of Hertfordshire. Although at the time of writing, the exact dates are not confirmed, it will be for about 6 weeks sometime during March and April, which will coincide with the start of the recording season.

We hope to display some historical items that collectors might have used when collecting and have a small selection of pinned specimens to show how records were obtained in the past. However, the emphasis of the exhibition will be on the species that can now be found in Hertfordshire, how we record them and how we as a branch and national organisation are trying to help manage habitat for them. It is intended that on some of the days members of the committee will be available to talk to visitors

The Museum is quite small and doesn't open every day but everyone will be welcome to come along and have a look. We are also planning to have two evening talks which will be held in the Museum some time during the period of the exhibition. The Museum is on Ware High Street just opposite St. Mary's Church. If anyone has any old items of equipment that would be suitable to display in a museum please contact Liz Goodyear (details on the back). More details will be available on the website when known.

LEDs Work like Butterflies' Wings

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/sci/tech/4443854.stm>

Published: 2005/11/18 10:27:31 GMT

The way light is extracted from the butterfly's system is more than an analogy - it's all but identical in design to the LED. Pete Vukusic, University of Exeter. When scientists developed an efficient device for emitting light, they hadn't realised butterflies have been using the same method for 30 million years.

Fluorescent patches on the wings of African swallowtail butterflies work in a very similar way to high emission light emitting diodes

(LEDs).

These high emission LEDs are an efficient variation on the diodes used in electronic equipment and displays. (This University of Exeter, UK, research appears in the journal Science.)

In 2001, Alexei Erchak and colleagues at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) demonstrated a method for building a more efficient LED. Most light emitted from standard LEDs cannot escape, resulting in what scientists call a low extraction efficiency of light.

Ingenious design

The LED developed at MIT used a two-dimensional (2D) photonic crystal - a triangular lattice of holes etched into the LED's upper cladding layer - to enhance the extraction of light.

And layered structures called Bragg reflectors were used to control the emission direction. These high emission devices potentially offer a huge step up in performance over standard types.

Pete Vukusic and Ian Hooper at Exeter have now shown that Swallowtail butterflies evolved an identical method for signalling to each other in the wild. Swallowtails belonging to the *Priniceps nireus* species live in eastern and central Africa. They have dark wings with bright blue or blue-green patches.



The wing scales on these swallowtails act as 2D photonic crystals, infused with pigment and structured in such a way that they produce intense fluorescence. Pigment on the butterflies' wings absorbs ultra-violet light which is then re-emitted, using fluorescence, as brilliant blue-green light.

Performance-enhancing bugs

Most of this light would be lost were it not for the pigment being located in a region of the wing which has evenly spaced micro-holes through it. This slab of hollow air cylinders in the wing scales is essentially mother nature's version of a 2D photonic crystal. Like its counterpart in a high emission LED, it prevents the fluorescent colour

from being trapped inside the structure and from being emitted sideways. The scales also have a type of mirror underneath them to upwardly reflect all the fluorescent light that gets emitted down towards it. Again, this is very similar to the Bragg reflectors in high emission LEDs.

"Unlike the diodes, the butterfly's system clearly doesn't have semiconductor in it and it doesn't produce its own radiative energy," Dr Vukusic told the BBC News website "That makes it doubly efficient in a way.

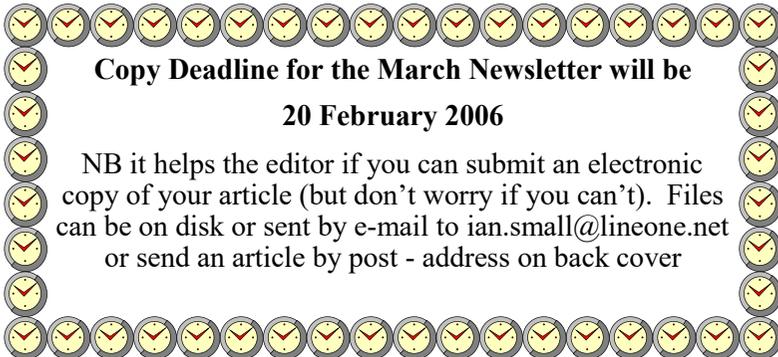
"But the way light is extracted from the butterfly's system is more than an analogy - it's all but identical in design to the LED."

Dr Vukusic agreed that studying natural designs such as this could help scientists improve upon manmade devices.

"When you study these things and get a feel for the photonic architecture available, you really start to appreciate the elegance with which nature put some of these things together," he said.

The full publication details are:

Vukusic P and Hopper I. Directionally Controlled Fluorescence Emission in Butterflies. Science 18 November 2005: Vol. 310. no. 5751, p. 1151





Conservation Dates

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.

Below are a series of dates across Herts. and Middlesex where you can help with essential management that aims to maintain the correct conditions on these sites for the wildlife that inhabits them. Several of the dates are run by the HMWT on their nature reserves.

Millhopper's Pasture SP 900149. Fourth Sunday of the month. Meet at 10.30 am. John and Margaret Noakes need your help. (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. 2006 Work Parties. Monthly work parties at Aldbury Nowers, held at 10.00am on the third Sunday of each month, are planned to continue in the New Year, the first being on Sunday, 22 January 2006. Tasks to be carried out have not yet been decided, but are likely to involve scrub clearance work on the northern compartment adjoining Pitstone Hill. HMWT, in conjunction with the National Trust, Ashridge, and others, has arranged for a major scrub clearance operation on this northern section, to take place on Wednesday, 11 January 2006. All volunteers who are available, or who can take a day off work, will be very welcome. For further details contact Michael Pearson (see back cover).

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

Fryent 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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