

Butterfly
Conservation

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE **45**

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**The Value of Butterfly Observations in All Corners of
our Branch Area. An Account my First 9 Months Living
Back in Herts. and Why it Now has a Value
by David Chandler**

I was inspired by Cherry Eggleton's lovely account of the Commas of Paddington in the last edition of the branch magazine. It made me think about how spoilt, if spoilt be the right word, I once was at my old home town of Dunstable where, within five miles, I had a transect walk with 29 to 30 different resident butterfly species on it and, in a good migrants year, this species count figure could rise to a very notable 32.

As many of you who follow my writings in the magazine will know, in the first week of July last year I moved to my maternal home town of Watford. But, once you are a butterfly recorder you never lose your

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eye for the role and so I began over the latter part of the season to make a mental note of the species I saw in my comings and goings in and around the part of the town near Watford Junction Station where I live.

I ticked them all off my mental list one by one: *Browns*: Meadow Brown & Gatekeeper: I used to count the latter in hundreds but was pleased to see, what I still think of as a country butterfly, in ones and twos around Central Park. It was quite an odd feeling because a butterfly that I used to consider very common when seen on a transect section, I was now pleased to see in individuals and couples and Cherry's writings helped me to echo this feeling. *Whites*: Large, Small and Green Veined - everyone has those in their gardens, so I did not think too much more about them at the time. *The Aristocrats*: Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Red Admiral and Comma. I found these beautiful insects nectaring on the buddleias by the railway and on the ivy in Central Park. I must confess these did not register too high on my "wow" meter than perhaps they should. *The Blues*: I saw Holly Blue on some variegated holly in Central Park and, a record that I must confess did make me take a note, was the second-generation Common Blue I saw on a tiny patch of some rough ground at the far end of my street, because "the blues" are my favourites butterfly family and I was genuinely surprised to find this pretty little butterfly so close to the town centre.

However, in mid January I received a letter in my capacity as Branch Chairman from an environmental scientist firm working for a property developer and, suddenly, all the casual observations I had made became immediately more significant. The letter informed me that developers were working on two projects in Watford, one at Watford Heath (the football ground and hospital area) and another Watford Junction (the central park area). It is quite a grand double-plan for there will be a new station, a new hospital, a new football ground, car parks, residential and commercial properties.

But no multiple cinema I note, the one thing I personally think central Watford lacks!

The consultants were calling for organisations such as English Nature, HBRO, the RSBP, the Herts Moths Group, the Herts Dragonfly Group, the H&M Bat group, and ourselves in Butterfly Conservation for our observations and our data on biological records. The project study is at a consultative stage, so I was pleased that the developer's

agent had contacted our organisation in their preparation of an EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] for we have time to give them some feedback.

My close-hand experience of the butterflies of central Watford is so far only for the latter half of 2005 but I am sure I will see more butterflies in the forthcoming Spring season which I'm now eagerly awaiting, particularly as now I have the developers baying at my doorstep. I feel with the Branch's conservation committee's help, I can genuinely contribute to the environmental inquiry on how the development work in "my neck of the woods" may be progressed sensitively with the local ecology in mind and with the benefit my own local observations of the wildlife of Watford, which incidentally includes foxes, woodpeckers, thrushes, a cricket and bats!

Ware Museum Exhibition – The Butterflies of Hertfordshire

As the last newsletter was going to press, we received confirmation that the Butterflies of Hertfordshire exhibition in Ware Museum would take place from 7 March to the end of April.

The exhibition is now open, having been designed by Brian Sawford ,and is receiving a lot of compliments. Brian has used many of his photos in the display, which are truly superb and I can only say that the exhibition should be visited. Brian also arranged for some items to be lent from the North Herts Museums Service, which include all the recording notes from the surveys conducted for his book the Butterflies of Hertfordshire!

Ware Museum is on Ware High Street and just opposite St. Mary's Church. It is only a small museum but well worth a visit in its own right. The hours of opening are Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday 11 – 4 and Sunday 2 – 4 (5 from 1st April). To coincide with the exhibition we are arranging two talks in the Museum: the first on Gardening for Butterflies was held on the 28th March but there will a second talk on Moths 'The Butterflies of the Night' on Thursday 20th April presented by Andrew Wood.

We would like to thank the Trustees of the Ware Museum for allowing us to hold this exhibition and the North Herts. Museums Service for loaning some of the items on display.

The Butterfly World Trust Invitation to Branch Members – 18 May 2006

The Butterfly World Trust would like to invite members to attend an open evening at the Garden of the Rose site at Chiswell Green, near St. Albans on Thursday 18 May. An invitation from the Trust is enclosed with our newsletter. This will be an opportunity for all our branch members to meet the team behind the project and learn more about their exciting plans for the site. Unfortunately, at present parking on site is restricted and the BWT hope that some members might organise some car sharing. Please let Liz Goodyear (details on the back of the newsletter) know if you will be attending and if you would be prepared to share a car? We look forward to meeting you all on the 18 May

Upper Thames Branch Invitation to Branch Members

We have been invited by the Upper Thames Branch to join them at their Holtspur Valley Reserves Open Day on the Saturday 15th July. The Reserves are in Beaconsfield, just off the M40 or A40, and is quite handy for many of our members. The event will run from 10.30am - 4.00pm with guided walks, planned talks and displays. Restoration from derelict agricultural land to chalk grassland has been in hand for seven years, and the reserves now have some 24 butterfly species and over 200 moths recorded. Moth trapping will take place on the previous evening which should - weather permitting - give visitors a taste of what we have there. Red Kites are frequent but not yet residents. After the reserves events, we are invited to join Upper Thames for a BBQ and general gossip and relax at 'Chez Banyard'. (booking essential - contact Frank Banyard on 01494 672310) There is no charge for the BBQ, (which is always superb) but guests are invited to give donations to the reserve funds.

For the Reserve Open Day, the suggested parking initially is by the school entrance in Cherry Tree Road (SU 923904) off Holtspur Top Lane. The reserves can be reached walking down the short (steep) public footpath which starts opposite the entrance to Cherry Tree Road, but please first visit Branch reception at the Scout Hut adjacent to the school for more details of the days events and further advice on where to park nearer the reserve.

Annual General Meeting Report, Welwyn Civic Centre - 14th January 2006, by Liz Goodyear

We returned to Hertfordshire and the Welwyn Civic Centre for this year's Annual General Meeting on the 14th January 2006. This is a popular venue and we were delighted to have over forty members attend.

It was great to have Tony Davis from the national Butterfly Conservation team as our guest speaker. Tony is Butterfly Conservation's Moth Conservation Officer and one immediately appreciated his enthusiasm for moths as he introduced us to the many different species that can be found in the country. However, one of Tony's responsibilities is to improve the level of recording of UK Biodiversity Action Plan species. In Hertfordshire and Middlesex the number of UK BAP Species is quite small, but Tony told us about some of the species where work is being done to get a better understanding of the needs of these special moths. Several of the other species are so rare that even the food plants are not fully understood, despite hours of study. The extremes to which Tony goes to find out more has to be called dedication!

We then stopped for a break to have tea and cakes and there was an opportunity to chat, something that we do appreciate is so important at these meetings. After the interval, the serious side of the afternoon commenced with the AGM and a welcome from David Chandler. Reports were given in writing from the Chairman, Membership Secretary and for our Branch Reserve at Millhoppers Pasture. John Hollingdale (Treasurer) gave a breakdown of our finances and John Murray presented details of the 2005 butterfly season and latest recording progress. Several questions were asked by members and the committee will discuss the charge for the annual report to non members and the need to include more information on the work of the conservation sub-committee in the newsletter. It was also asked that the written reports could be circulated before the AGM.

With the AGM over, we were able to enjoy the many digital photos that members had taken in the last year - lovely way to end a very successful meeting!

Winter Meeting at South Ruislip, by Ann Piper

On Saturday March 4th our annual Winter Meeting was held at a new

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venue in South Ruislip. We try to spread these meetings out across the two counties and this time it was the turn of Middlesex.

In an effort to increase publicity an advert was placed in a local paper and some posters put up in the area. This resulted in a number of first time visitors from the Ruislip area so we feel the publicity experiment was a success!

As usual at these meetings there was a lot of chat and exchanging of ideas beforehand. The meeting got off to a bang but not quite as planned - John's moth trap bulb exploded !! Fortunately there were no injuries!

In the same week that the report on 'The State of Britain's Larger Moths' was published it was most appropriate that the first presentation by Andrew Wood and John Hollingdale concerned the observation, trapping and identification of moths. We were treated to some beautiful photographs and the technology of laptop and projector behaved perfectly!! Andrew's talk covered some of the common day flying moths, a glimpse at leaf mines and a look at some lovely micros. Why is it that the smaller the moth gets the longer its Latin name grows? There was plenty here to encourage us all to learn more about our local moths.

John demonstrated a range of moth traps – the mercury vapour Skinner, the blue actinic light and the one that intrigued me – the blended bulb over an old dustbin! I have been promising to start up a trap in my garden but had been put off by the cost. Now I have the solution!

The interval saw members buzzing round the moth traps and the sales stand, chatting with old friends and new acquaintances and enjoying delicious home baked cakes courtesy of Liz Goodyear once again.

The second presentation focussed on the Purple Emperor and White Admiral. This latter butterfly has a strong presence in Ruislip Woods and was chosen because of its local connections.

Andrew Middleton and Liz Goodyear have gained a reputation for their expertise in finding new sites for the rather elusive Purple Emperor and we were treated to an excellent guide on how, when and where to search for this beautiful butterfly. It was spotted at nearby Stockers Lake in Rickmansworth in 2005 so hopefully it is also in the Ruislip area.

Comparisons between the two butterflies showed how easily they could be confused and maybe in the past the Purple Emperor was wrongly identified as a White Admiral! The photos were lovely and Andrew's video clips of the Purple Emperor in a howling gale still amaze me! This talk proved how close observation, intuition and a great deal of patience are required in order to extend our knowledge of the habits and habitat of these lovely insects.

The whole meeting was pronounced a great success with 35 people attending. We were especially pleased to see some new faces. We all went away enthused with plans to hunt down the elusive Purple Emperor and to seek out and identify moths both large and small and even micro!

FOR SALE

Skinner moth trap (as seen at the South Riuslip meeting) with M/V bulb and choke. Some attention is needed to some taping on the casing. £40 ono

Will deliver to anywhere in the Herts and Middx branch area

Phone John Hollingdale 020-8863-2077

Vulnerable Species Initiative: Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and Green Hairstreak, by Andrew Palmer and John Murray

Part 1: Project background

Introduction

Anyone familiar with the annual reports for the last 10 years will be aware that several butterfly species have disappeared from the two counties: Brown Hairstreak, Duke of Burgundy and Small Blue, with Wall Brown the most likely to follow. Half a dozen or so others are represented by just a handful of dots on the report's maps and all of these have to be considered vulnerable to factors that may lead to extinction.

Three species are of particular cause for concern: Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, and Green Hairstreak. These are just hanging on to their status as breeding species within Hertfordshire, but with so few colonies their status cannot be taken for granted. All have suffered significant declines in their national populations with dramatic range reductions. In Hertfordshire Grizzled Skipper is now found on just 8 sites, Dingy Skipper on 5 and Green Hairstreak on 6 sites. All of these are located in just three small areas of central, west and north-west Hertfordshire.

If the limited range were not enough to cause concern then the colony size within these areas should. The maximum numbers seen in one hour's counting in 2005 for each species on any site were as follows: Green Hairstreak 15; Grizzled Skipper 8; and Dingy Skipper 8. Their populations appear to be fluctuating at very low numbers at present, and whilst these species are capable of maintaining colonies at low levels for many years, any butterfly



Grizzled Skipper



Dingy Skipper



Green Hairstreak

colony that is this small is extremely vulnerable to what would otherwise be marginal environmental changes such as periods of poor weather or subtle changes in habitat management. We also recognise that many of our colonial butterflies' populations have become very isolated from each other. Once a colony is lost it becomes increasingly difficult for natural recolonisation to occur as there are no longer strong colonies nearby which provide the individuals required to re-populate otherwise suitable

habitat.

In response to the vulnerability of these three species the branch conservation subcommittee has begun an initiative to ensure that we not only protect existing populations, but that we work to consolidate them and seek to provide opportunities for these colonies to expand into new sites nearby.

Understanding the Reasons Behind These Declines

Most of the factors attributable to the decline in these species are well documented:

- Changes in woodland management, especially loss of open clearings and a reduction in the frequency of sizeable canopy gaps within modern high forest systems, resulting in an increased distance between new clearings and old ones. Much of this phenomenon is a result of the reduction in commercial scale coppicing.
- Deterioration of unimproved grassland/scrub and disused artificial habitats through lack of management, natural succession, overgrazing or re-development of 'brown-field' sites.
- Alteration of unimproved grassland/scrub habitats through agricultural improvement with associated nutrient build-up which creates conditions that are unfavourable to the larval food plants of these species.
- Fragmentation and isolation of both woodland and grassland habitats breaking up metapopulations, which as described

above provide opportunities for recolonisation and population expansion.

Combating the Causes of Decline

It is clear that the factors that have contributed to long-term habitat loss and population decline arise out of powerful, complex and global social and economic forces that began many decades ago and that are not easily reversed. However, there are many examples of small and local scale conservation work that has led to lasting improvement, and changed our awareness of what we can all achieve if we have a mind to do so. We believe that there is a real opportunity to consolidate local butterfly populations and significantly reduce the vulnerability of these species. To do this requires a multi-faceted approach and one that runs in unison with national initiatives to conserve these species.

As part of this work we are considering the following activities:

- Increasing the number of sites at which populations of these species are monitored, and intensifying the recording effort to look for new colonies.
- Developing habitat condition audits to better understand the ecological factors that support colonies in our Branch area and to enhance our knowledge of supportive habitat management techniques and encouraging land owners to undertake sympathetic management practices;
- Identifying sites that if managed sympathetically could support population expansion with the aim of reducing isolation through linking colonies both within the county and across its borders;
- Undertaking individual site studies to look at breeding areas, insect behaviour and use of the vegetation in different parts of the site, so that we have more accurate information on species' status and needs within key sites;
- Offering advice for land owners, land managers and statutory agencies to ensure that through raised awareness more is being done to protect these species; and
- Raising awareness of and encouraging participation in the conservation effort to ensure the long-term survival of these species

How You Can Help

Clearly this is an ambitious project for a small branch, and it is anticipated that most of the detailed work will be undertaken by the species co-ordinators and conservation subcommittee members with the support of Butterfly Conservation's regional offices. However the search for new colonies is a task that needs plenty of volunteers between late-April and mid-June when these species are on the wing. Equally important is monitoring of these species: at present we only have long term information from 2 or 3 sites, and need volunteers to undertake transect monitoring on other sites, at least during the flight period of these species in the springtime.

If you are interested in contributing to the vulnerable species initiative, then write or email Liz Goodyear, John Murray or the relevant species recorder, or email the website as soon as possible. If you find any of these threatened butterflies, then please notify us immediately if it is at a site where it has not been recorded recently. Use a branch recording form to note the precise location, the time of day and weather conditions. Notes on their behaviour, how they use their environment, which plants they take nectar from, where they roost and lay their eggs would also be helpful.

Contacting us

It is still important that all recording forms are submitted in the normal way to John Murray and that all other species at the site are noted. This is especially the case if visiting new sites as these may reflect poorly recorded areas. There are many areas in the north and northwest of Hertfordshire that are rarely visited; and need to be searched for these species.

Key contact details are provided overleaf:

Part 2: Species Background

It is worth just outlining what we know about these butterflies. For those less familiar with the species more information is available on the branch website at <http://butterfly-conservation.org/herts/middx/target-species/target-species-new.html>. For those not on the internet, copies can be put in the post.

When to Look

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Liz Goodyear	Branch Organiser	elizabethgoodyear@hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk	01920 487066
John Murray	Branch recorder	j.b.murray@open.ac.uk	01582 833544
Andrew Palmer	Dingy Skipper coordinator	arpalmer@talk21.com	07753 913722
Jez Perkins	Grizzled Skipper coordinator	sorrynotin@hotmail.com	07967 832627
Nigel Agar	Green Hairstreak coordinator	nigel.agar@hertscc.gov.uk	01462 459870

Grizzled Skipper is typically on the wing in Hertfordshire from late April to early June, with Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak a week or so later and on to mid to late June.

We often forget that butterflies are present in their natural habitats all year round. Although searching for eggs, caterpillars and pupae is fascinating, it is not always an easy task, nevertheless we encourage you to pay particular attention to where females lay their eggs and to record the species and the parts of plants used and estimate the height above ground. Ideally take a digital photograph. There is still much to learn about the ecology of these species and this information is very useful when planning site management.

Known Sites

All these species have suffered major declines within their historic county range. Most sites for these species are now restricted to the chalk ridge in West Hertfordshire around the Pegsdon Hills and Tring area. All three species once had a similar distribution being widespread through central Herts as well as on the chalk areas. Now only Grizzled Skipper hangs on in the County's centre with small colonies in disused gravel quarries.

However, we are particularly interested in hearing from you, especially if your travels take you to areas across any part of the north of our branch area. This is the most likely place where we will find new colonies if they exist. But please do look elsewhere as there are many possible areas that are rarely visited.

What Habitats to Look Out For

Grizzled Skipper: The largest colonies of these skippers now occur in unimproved chalk grassland sites, usually with scrub, across the north

and west of Hertfordshire. They also occur in recently abandoned artificial (industrial) habitats such as disused mineral workings, spoil heaps, railway lines, motorway and road verges, woodland clearings, storage depots and even rubbish tips that occur over much of central Herts. There are plenty of possible localities of both types which have not been searched in recent times, especially in the north and northeast of Hertfordshire. This species occurred on and around a motorway verge in Middlesex in the 1990s, but much of Middlesex and north London has not been thoroughly searched in the springtime in recent years.

They flourish in sites characterised by sunny, sheltered habitats which have an abundance of spring nectar plants; and an abundance of at least one of the larval food plants growing in short (< 10 cm), herb-rich vegetation and especially on bare ground. This is their preferred breeding vegetation and its presence is the main factor limiting the distribution and abundance of adults at sites; and patches of ranker vegetation (10-50cm) and scrub/woodland edges. The larval food plants are Wild Strawberry, Agrimony (both these have been seen to be used in Herts), Barren Strawberry, Creeping Cinquefoil, Tormentil and Bramble.

Dingy Skipper: Like the Grizzled Skipper, the distribution of this species includes the chalk areas along the north and northwest of the branch area, but colonies on other habitats (see below) in central Hertfordshire have not been reported in recent years. There are plenty of possible localities which have not been searched in recent times, especially in the north and northeast of Hertfordshire. If you are not familiar with Dingy Skipper, it can easily be mistaken for a moth and vice versa, so a digital photograph, even from a distance, can often make a possible sighting certain.

Colonies occur in a wide range of open, sunny habitats including chalk downland, old quarries, railway cuttings & embankments and waste ground. Suitable conditions occur where food plants grow in a sparse sward, often with patches of bare ground in a sunny, sheltered situation. Larval food plants are Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, with Horseshoe Vetch also being used on calcareous soils. Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil is used on heavier soils. Taller vegetation is also required for shelter and roosting.

Green Hairstreak: Again, surviving colonies only occur on the chalk,

but there is a recent history of individuals of this butterfly suddenly turning up at widely separated localities across the two counties, and colonies survived near urban industrial conglomerations close to Ealing of all places, until recently. Colonies may be found on calcareous grassland, railway cuttings, old quarries, golf courses and rough scrubby grassland. This species occurs on a wide range of soils where there is a combination of short well-cropped turf in old grassland, shrubby species and ant hills. It is often difficult to see because its green colour blends in with vegetation, so it can be easily missed.

Eggs may be laid on a wide range of food plants including Common Rockrose and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil on calcareous grassland, Gorse and Broom on heathland, and elsewhere other food plants include Dogwood, Buckthorn and Bramble. In Hertfordshire, egg-laying has been seen on Rockrose.

The Waterford North Butterfly Transect, by Richard Bigg

Waterford Heath is a Nature Reserve 3 miles or so north of Hertford (TL317149). Extraction of gravel took place many years ago and the site now consists of areas of maturing trees around the perimeter and open grassland with a mix of wild flowers in the centre. The Reserve is bisected east-west, by the access road, Vicarage Lane. Transects were initially carried out on both the north and south areas, but the southern one was discontinued some years ago. The following is a description of the northern area transect.

THE ROUTE

The diagram shows the transect route and the division into ten sections. The average walking time is one hour.

The transect was first walked six years ago – the year 2000.

SECTION 1

Section one involves climbing over the fence into what appears to be a wooded area. There is however a glade amongst the trees which has a covering of wild strawberry. For this reason this area was included in the transect as it was thought it might be a haven for the Grizzled Skipper. This has not proved to be the case and only the occasional Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown are recorded.

SECTION 2

This section also has a heavy growth of strawberry and the Grizzled Skipper has been recorded here. A variety of other wild flowers also attracts Common Blue and Brown Argus. Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell often bask on the gravel path.

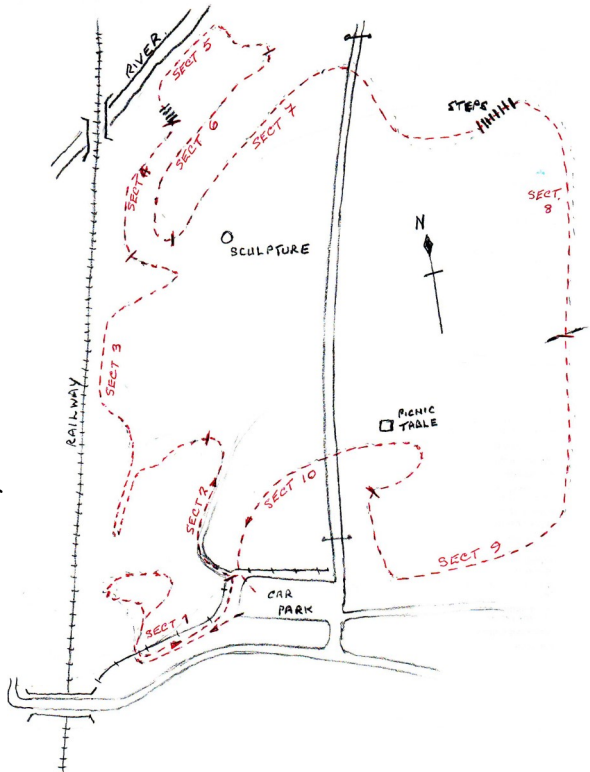
Young growth of oak, ash, spindle and particularly alder are in danger of shading out the ground cover. One instance of Purple Hairstreak was recorded on one of the oaks.

SECTION 3

The first part of this section is into a wooded area then into open meadow having a mix of wild flowers and a ground cover of bramble, strawberry being prevalent. Grizzled Skipper, Common Blue and Brown Argus can be expected along with Meadow Brown and Small Heath in their various seasons.

SECTION 4

The path here is bordered by the rail line on one side and a steep bank on the other. It is one of the most interesting sections, as practically any of the species on the site can be expected along here. It is a hot spot for the Grizzled Skipper and Comma, the latter no doubt due to the prolific growth of wild hops. Purple Hairstreak is a rarity on the site but has been recorded here.



SECTION 5

Large trees line this section, some of them covered in ivy which attracts Holly Blue, and when in flower late in the season, Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock and Painted Lady. Speckled Wood is almost certain to be seen.

SECTION 6

This section follows the top of the bank which drops down to section 4. At the start of the section there are two buddleia bushes, the only ones on the whole transect, and when in flower can be relied on to attract a number of different species. Two to three years ago the centre part of the bank, west facing and sheltered, was another hotspot for the Grizzled Skipper, but the large areas of strawberry which existed then have become overgrown, and GS is no longer recorded here.

SECTION 7

Doubling back in the vicinity of the ‘sculpture’ this section angles across a slope covered in low growing bramble and wild flowers with patches of thistle, nettle, and clumps of mullein and viper’s-bugloss. Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small Heath, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Small Tortoiseshell can all be expected here, and occasionally Grizzled Skipper and Small Copper.

SECTION 8

Climbing up from the floor of the old gravel pit this section is wooded (principally pine) and butterflies are few. A single Red Admiral is an exception and regularly seen. Further along where the pine is interspersed with deciduous growth, the odd Speckled Wood occurs.

SECTION 9

The path here is lined with large trees – oak, ash and hawthorn. Apart from the occasional Speckled Wood butterflies are few.

SECTION 10

This section circles round past the picnic table back to the car park. Common Blue, Brown Argus, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Small Heath can be expected.

SPECIES

GRIZZLED SKIPPER

The site is one of only a few in the Herts. and Middlesex Branch area where the Grizzled Skipper can be seen. The species is not as prolific as it was a few years ago, but a few individuals are sighted each year. The south part of the whole Waterford site seems to support a larger colony.

SMALL, ESSEX AND LARGE SKIPPERS

These have all been recorded, but only in one's and two's and absent in some years.

PURPLE HAIRSTREAK

This species was first recorded on Section 4 of the transect in 2004 – a single individual. In 2005 a single individual was again recorded, this time on Section 2. An elusive species to spot, it probably has always been present on the site.

CLOUDED YELLOW

The only recorded instance of this migrant species was in 2000.

SPECIES LIST

Over the six years of recording the number of species has varied between a minimum of nineteen up to a maximum of twenty three in any one year. The overall total, numbers twenty five as follows : -

Small Skipper	Essex Skipper
Large Skipper	Grizzled skipper
Brimstone	Large White
Small White	Green-veined White
Orange Tip	Purple Hairstreak
Small Copper	Brown Argus
Common Blue	Holly Blue



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Red Admiral	Painted Lady
Small Tortoiseshell	Peacock
Comma	Speckled wood
Gatekeeper	Meadow Brown
Small Heath	Ringlet
Clouded Yellow	

More details of the transect, including a summary of the numbers of each species recorded over the years 2000 – 2005, can be seen on the Branch website (www.butterfly-conservation.org/hertsmiddx)

Working for Butterflies and Moths, by Malcolm Hull

A full selection of butterfly attracting plants, together with a range of books and butterfly information will be available from our sales stall at the following events. An updated list of goods available and sales events is kept on the branch website at <http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/>

Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 March – Rye Meads Wild Gardening Weekend. RSPB Rye Meads Nature Reserve, Rye Road, Stanstead Abbots 10am – 4 pm each day. Admission Free

Friday 7 – Sunday 9 April – Capel Manor Spring Gardening Show. 10am – 5 pm each day, Bullsmoor Lane Enfield. Admission charge – adults £5 Friday, £6 Sat/Sun, concessions.

Saturday 29 April – St Albans Market. 8.30 am – 5pm, Stall in the City Centre market, St Peters St, St Albans (location likely to be in front of the Old Town Hall) Admission FREE

Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 May – The Rickmansworth Festival. 10.30am – 5.30pm each day, The Aquadrome, Harefield Road, Rickmansworth. Admission charge

Saturday 27 May & Sunday 28 May – Herts County Show, The Showground, Dunstable Rd Redbourn. Admission charges apply

Sunday 25 June – Wheathampstead Open Gardens. 15 open gardens at Gustard Wood and Blackmore End, Wheathampstead 11am – 6pm Admission £2.50 in advance, £3 on the day (no dogs).

Friday 21 – Monday 31 July – Butterfly Week events. Details to be confirmed

Sunday 3 September – Epping Forest Festival. Chingford Plain 11am – 4 pm

For more information about butterfly sales and how to order by post, contact Malcolm Hull by phone, e-mail or letter (see back cover)

Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunt, 5 February 2006, by Malcolm Hull and Colin Everett

On a bright & crisp February morning five hardy souls gathered at Uxbridge Common to look for eggs of the Brown Hairstreak butterfly. Starting near the disused dry ski-slope we started searching the suckering blackthorn, looking for small white dots, the size of pin-heads. They are usually quite visible to the naked eye, showing prominently against the dark bark of the shrub. The first hedge we found looked particularly promising, with lots of suckering plants spreading out into the field. After about 40 min. unsuccessful searching we moved north through a small wood to the A40 trunk road, which has been constructed on the site of the July 1983 Brown Hairstreak sighting. Suitable looking blackthorn stretched along the north side of the road, but we decided to retrace our steps and spent the rest of the morning searching the fields east of the ski-slope, again unsuccessfully. In total five people spent about 1.5 hours searching promising looking hedges around the site. This presents a scientifically valid result, i.e. the species is almost certainly not currently present on this site. We know that the species is heading towards Middx from the south, so this presents useful baseline data against which to monitor populations of this species in future years.

Colin Everett adds: On the disused ski slope there were at least half a dozen Siskins feeding in alders and a Goldcrest in cypresses. All five common species of thrush were seen during the search and song was heard from two Coal Tits and several Chaffinches. Park Wood produced Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper and a hunting Sparrowhawk but more notable was an example of the hoverfly *Episyrphus balteatus* active just before midday in the sheltered southern section of the wood. This is one of the most abundant and familiar species of hoverfly during mid- to late summer but most of the population then emigrates south to the Mediterranean and only small numbers remain to overwinter in the UK. Badgers are often very active in February, adult males searching for receptive females and young males seeking out new territories; sadly two animals had become victims of the M25 in Herts and Bucks. About a third of adult Badgers die each year, road accidents accounting for many of these.

Aldbury Nowers Nature Reserve and SSSI, by Michael Pearson, HMWT Volunteer Warden

The Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust's Aldbury Nowers nature reserve is situated on the west facing slope of the Chilterns scarp, a couple of miles to the north of Tring railway station. The reserve comprises two sections, totalling 19.7ha, of chalk grassland and scrub. The northern section, adjoining Pitstone Hill, is separated from the southern by c.450m of woodland, not part of the reserve. Both sections can be reached from the Ridgeway long distance footpath, which divides the southern section into two compartments.

The site, one of the largest remaining areas of chalk grassland in the county, has long been known as one of the best butterfly sites in Hertfordshire; historically 35 species have been recorded, although a number, notably the Duke of Burgundy, are now considered to be locally extinct. The current key breeding species, towards which immediate future conservation efforts will be focussed, are Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper.

Site ownership of the reserve has recently passed to the National Trust, as part of the Ashridge Estate. HMWT has been granted a 25 year management lease by the NT and is in the course of drawing up a new five-year reserve management plan, for which HMBC will provide detailed butterfly habitat management advice; and undertake all butterfly monitoring and recording.

HMBC branch members have been active during the winter with scrub-bashing; but now, with the imminent arrival of spring and the new butterfly season, attention must turn to recording the butterflies themselves. Martin Hicks will continue to carry out the transect monitoring (as well as providing the sheep which graze the reserve). But anyone visiting the reserve is asked to note and report their sightings, through the normal reporting procedures to be found on the branch website – www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk.

If you are not sure where the reserve is, or what to look for when you get there (or indeed if you are), you are invited to join Malcolm Hull's field trip to Aldbury Nowers at 2.00pm on Sunday 14th May, full details of which can be found in the branch programme: or you can contact Michael Pearson (see back page).

Further field trips are provisionally planned for **Sunday 9th July** and **Sunday 27 August**

Impossible Missions? By Andrew Middleton

I had wanted to review last spring's Butterfly Conservation's 5th International Symposium ~ Lepidoptera as Indicators of Biodiversity Conservation (April 2005), but other conservation efforts soon took over. Meanwhile, there have been many initiatives and discussions concerning the branch regarding strategies and policies on various items. On matters of conservation, the strategies applied nationally by BC are impressive, and what follows is nothing more than a personal perspective on all the above.

Whilst the range and detail of symposium talks from all continents was excellent, problems of global habitat degradation, development pressure, pollution and global warming were well highlighted and as a result rather depressing. A few of the more scientific items left me unsure as to any practical conservation implications considered or tackled by the authors.

Amongst the wealth of interesting work, one presentation entitled 'Functional habitat maps as a practical tool for butterfly conservation', by Wouter Vanreusel and Hans Van Dyck, gave me a lasting and positive impression,

"General ecological principles and guidelines can be useful for conservation policy and to some extent for conservation management. But reserve managers generally request far more practical and detailed information, for example on where and how to integrate species-specific measures into reserve design and management. In the case of localised or threatened species in relatively small reserves in intensively used landscapes (e.g. NW-Europe) the spatial integration of different autecological data (using GIS-applications) provides a useful tool to bring ecological science closer to practice. We illustrate such an approach for several regionally threatened butterfly species in a Belgian National Park (e.g. *Callophrys ruby*, *Satyrrium Chas*, *Maculinea alcon*, *Hipparchia semele*). We collected detailed data on adult and larval resource use, movements (including dispersal), behaviour and thermal aspects and integrated this information in current and potential habitat maps with high spatial resolution. These maps are now being used by reserve managers to adapt management regimes. [Maes, D., Van Dyck, H., Vanreusel. W. and Talloen, W. (2004). Functional conservation units for the endangered butterfly

Maculinea alcon in Belgium (Lepidoptera: Lycaenidae). Biological Conservation 120: 229-241.]”

Grayling was given as an example, describing how features recognised as essential (briefly: low fertility/bare egg-laying & basking patches; nectar-rich areas; patch proximity) were mapped. Areas were then targeted in the landscape, by managing for or providing missing elements, to strengthen the population network.

This approach is said to be in common use and could be applied to conservation efforts on various scales (small sites, landscapes, regions) and for both common and scarce species. It seems simple enough, but how could it be applied in reality?

Fairly easy ~ With a widespread species such as the brimstone, the branch has delivered many hundreds of buckthorns to the environment and promotes its use in landscaping and planting. An increase in buckthorns is pretty much all that is needed, and our branch has been effective in bringing this about. Likewise, an area of grass left unmown in an urban park is likely to be colonised by meadow brown and small skipper, whilst planted oaks and elms can in time support hairstreaks. A wide range of such species might be considered as environmentally undemanding, where we can all try to encourage simple conservation measures for positive outcomes.

Moderate ~ Liz and I have worked hard over the last five years studying purple emperors. PEs have been found to be moderately widespread at low density in rural areas which are fairly well-wooded and, due to past management and some neglect, sallow-rich in places. PE seems to be a species which is not too demanding and is enjoying moderate climate change ~ look after the sallows, with oaks and ash, and it should be alright. Luckily we seem to have a fairly robust, mobile and linked-up population. We adopted the policy of encouraging favourable management throughout the species' historic range, as well as between and at known sites. The branch has recently supported this by producing a woodland leaflet, with over 2,500 distributed to those who may be able to influence management favourably for PE and other key woodland species in our area. The future success of the project is now very much in the hands of partners. The support of those who have moved towards favourable management is much appreciated and the success of the project depends upon this happening in more places. However, experience

suggests positive outcomes cannot be expected even when resources are available.

Hard ~ I imagine all we who bash tetrads soon become aware that several species, such as Small Copper and Small Heath, are becoming quite restricted. Their requirements are a little more demanding in that, for example, habitats with fine grasses and sorrels are limited, sustainable management harder to achieve and such things as nitrate deposition bring additional pressures. Whilst black medick, birdsfoot trefoil and Common Blues readily colonise new and suitable patches in my neighbourhood, perhaps small heath and its fine grasses, or Small Copper and sorrels, are on the verge of being unable to do so. As individuals, perhaps we should all be looking at and thinking about these kinds of sites and opportunities in our local areas. Will the management, if any, maintain the habitat quality and retain such species at our local sites, and how can we encourage favourable outcomes of management and create opportunities for colonisation? This has certainly been placed on a recent conservation committee agenda as a formal strategy. The BC Millennium Atlas is probably the best starting place to learn more about the associations of species ecology, habitat and management, and BC has a wide range of appropriate leaflets which members could use in raising awareness and enthusing other bodies.

Impossible missions ~ Meanwhile our conservation committee has been presented with a range of species that really is threatened, and mostly associated with open, herb-rich habitats. Pressures on these species and their habitats are of a different magnitude. Fine management of sites is essential, and actions should always be informed and guided by the kind of detailed ecological information identified in the 'Belgium' paper and being developed by Butterfly Conservation.

Unfortunately, the pressures on isolated colonies limited to small habitat patches are even greater. For example, local extinctions and colonisation events are natural elements in butterfly population dynamics. Dispersing insects finding unoccupied habitat patches are rewarded, whilst movements between colonies are associated with positive factors such as genetic flow and diversity. Small isolated colonies (whether natural or introduced) do not benefit in this way, but are likely to suffer the associated negative effects. In addition, it may be difficult to manage a small habitat patch effectively, on an ongoing

and annual basis, to maintain the essential ecological factors needed to retain the species; and once lost, recolonisation is unlikely. Isolated colonies on small habitat patches, of which we already have several to consider, are likely to experience increases in these pressures year on year, placing a high demand on the limited resources of conservation bodies.

One of the best strategies to conserve these species is to generate colonisation opportunities with the aim of improving population networks and reducing these additional negative pressures experienced by isolated populations, so moving to a more sustainable situation. What could be more satisfying or exciting than seeing a rare or scarce species colonise a new area that has come under favourable management, or has been created through landscaping associated with development? To succeed, this would involve a great deal of work and co-operation by all partners, where resources are already stretched, regarding the threatened native species that remain. It may be reasonable to believe that being diverted from this or ill-prepared will cost our threatened species dearly, and we shouldn't underestimate just how difficult it will be to retain them over the longer term.

Probably through factors such as London's administrative areas and the location of scarce species, the branch has found itself focusing on Herts, and it certainly needs to develop its conservation presence in Middx. However, the branch is establishing itself as a key partner in Herts, attending to Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats, providing management advice for key sites, and influencing landscaping and development projects, with grizzled skipper, dingy skipper, green hairstreak and their habitats becoming high priorities in present efforts. This is a slow process and is only possible because Herts & Middx members have already been hard at work for many years developing all aspects of the branch.

In Need of a Holiday ?

Location: Picos de Europa.

Teresa Farino, leading local naturalist, invites you to join her for a relaxing, guided tour of the Picos de Europa in a small friendly group for one week from 25th June 2006. Scenic strolls in the best butterfly areas will be followed by optional moth trapping at Teresa's house. Accommodation in a comfortable family-run hotel in Pesaguero, travel in Spain, food and wine are all included in the price of £670. Flights or ferry from UK to Santander are extra but bookings can be arranged. For further details please contact Chris Tracey on 01453 752051

or e-mail chris@tracey94.fsnet.co.uk.



Copy Deadline for the June Newsletter will be

26 May 2006

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



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. John Noakes is compiling a list of people to call on when help is needed. If you would like to be included, please 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. Monthly work parties are held at 10.00am on the third Sunday of each month. Please contact Michael Pearson (details on back cover) for details.

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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Please direct your correspondence to the relevant committee member. The magazine is produced by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex branch of [Butterfly Conservation](#) (*Company limited by guarantee*). Registered Office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, near Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QP. Registered in England No. 2206468 - Registered Charity No. 254937 - VAT No. 565 9070 16. The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Committee or the National Society. Copyright 2006.