

HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE **52**

Leap Year Thoughts on Time

by **David Chandler**

This year is a leap year and as I write this note in the last few days of February I am thinking about time, what to do with my extra day this month, and the forth-coming Butterfly Conservation's 40th birthday celebration events in March at Millhoppers & Totternhoe.

First of all I feel it is about time I saw my first butterfly of the year. I recall that I saw my first butterfly in the first week of February last year and to date I haven't seen a butterfly yet, despite the weather being reasonably warm and sunny on several days during the second half of the month. Then, thinking about my expectations a little harder I reason that perhaps I should not be expecting to see a

butterfly in February, for it was not that long ago that winter butterfly sightings were scarce events.

The poor summer of 2007 may have had an effect on over-wintering butterflies, for, if fewer butterflies emerged in last summer's poor conditions, then it follows that fewer hibernators might have over-wintered. Thinking further back, two hundred years ago Wordsworth wrote of seeing daffodils in the Lake District in April but nowadays the daffodils are flowering in March in the north and February in the south. If the growing season is appears to be extending and winters seem to be becoming shorter, then birds and insects may be having to adapt to quite rapid change; but if this ecological change is happening too quickly then it could be argued that their breeding cycles might have become disrupted and this has had an adverse impact on populations.

Some ecologists more dedicated than I, like Dr Jim Asher of Upper Thames Branch, have reported on these effects by the study of phenology and the work on where the border lies in Britain when Brown Argus changes from being double to single brooded I've found particularly fascinating. So given a long enough series of data, scientists may be able to extract significant trends in butterfly metapopulations that are one of the indicators of climate change.

Returning to the subject of Thyme (sic). A few years ago I was very lucky and was awarded a ticket in the Somerset Wildlife Trust's lottery to see the Large Blues on Green Down in The Mendips. The Large Blue is not only linked with a particular red ant but it is also associated with Wild Thyme. Thyme is a lovely herb and it is very attractive to butterflies; it also has a wonderful aroma as you brush past it. It is one of my "smells of the Summer" and, each year, I look forward to experiencing its scent as I walk observing the butterflies on the Chalk downlands of the Northern Chilterns.

When I went to see the Large Blue at Green Down the limestone ecology was being very strictly controlled so that the butterfly had the best chance of survival; several site managers were employed full time to ensure that the sward was at short-cropped lawn length and that the Thyme was kept in tip-top condition with unwanted encroaching plants weeded out. The slope was managed in a series of step-sized terraces and on these green stairs were a mosaic of tiny plants and herbs evenly spaced & distributed. I could see all the important reasons why

it was significant and necessary to do this to conserve the species, but it did seem a little like the butterfly was being kept in a very artificial environment to achieve it.

In conclusion, man is custodian of the environment and, by his actions, man is changing the environment. To maintain the bio-diversity of our environment we have to intervene and help preserve and conserve what we value most dear in our countryside; this is what we in the society have tried to do for 40 years, but we haven't got much *time* left to achieve this successfully.

Launch of Butterfly World in St Albans, by Ian Small



Many of
have

you will
seen the

extensive press coverage this month surrounding the announcements of the official launch of the Butterfly World project, which is planned to see the establishment of one of the UK's largest visitor attractions. The main launch was held at the Royal Society in London, followed two days later by a local launch at Sopwell House, in St Albans.

The project is the vision of one of Butterfly Conservation's vice-presidents, Clive Farrell, and the project has been endorsed both by our

President, Sir David Attenburgh and another of our vice-Presidents, Prof Jeremy Thomas, who many of you will associate with the re-introduction of the Large Blue to the UK. Another key figure supporting the project is Prof David Bellamy, who personally attended both of the launch meetings and features in the promotional video.

The centre of the project is a tropical 'biome' analogous in concept to the Eden Project buildings, with which it will share its geodesic shape. In the case of Butterfly World, however, the dome will be partly below ground, as shown in the artist's impression on the previous page. The biome will be the largest butterfly display of its kind in the world, measuring 100m in diameter and up to 17m high. The 26-acre site is designed in the shape of a giant butterfly, with the biome as its multifaceted eye.

The area around the biome will be landscaped to create a series of gardens and meadow areas. Clive intends that these should be the richest flower meadows in the UK. These, together with other features such as the 'antennae' walk-ways, 'chrysalis' pond and the spiral 'proboscis' walk will each have specially selected nectar plants to encourage a profusion of native butterflies and other insects.

The building will also include education and research facilities, a restaurant, café and retail space.

The first phase of the project will open in mid 2009 and include 'Future Gardens' an annual competition to feature 12 gardens by international designers. This will be followed by construction of the biome, provided that the current shortfall in funding can be overcome, with the biome fully open to the public in 2011, and featuring up to 10,000 tropical butterflies of over 250 species from all over the world.

If successful, Butterfly World could attract up to 800,000 visitors per year, with as many as 40% of these expected to be children. We wish the project success, as not only will it encourage an interest in butterflies, it will also serve to draw attention to the plight of butterflies to a far larger audience than this Society generally reaches, and help to ensure that future generations in this Country are as passionate about butterflies as we are.

Butterfly Conservation's 40th Birthday 'Day of Action' at Millhoppers, by Jez Perkins

The weekend of the 8th and 9th March marked the 40th anniversary of Butterfly Conservation. To celebrate this event, individual Butterfly Conservation Reserves held a 'Day of Action' and we were no exception.

Our event involved completing some much needed habitat management at Millhoppers Pasture. The main task was to remove Blackthorn scrub that is encroaching onto the banks of the stream. This is an important feature of the reserve as it supports a population of Marsh Marigolds.

The weather held so that a good morning's work was achieved and a real difference to the reserve was made. Thanks go to Jo Mason at the Forestry Commission for donating the tools and also for baking the birthday cake which provided a much needed energy boost half way through the morning. Thanks also go to the hardy volunteers that came out to support Butterfly Conservation and our branch reserve.



The Rise and Fall of the Hexton Small Blue, by Nigel Agar

The recent lecture at our AGM of the three chalk grass-land species, the Chalkhill Blue, the Duke of Burgundy and the Small Blue called attention to the very different habitat demands of the three species. Unlike the other two, the Small Blue does not occupy all apparently suitable habitats but forms small colonies sometimes confined to tiny areas a few metres across where its food plant Kidney Vetch is available. The colonies survive for a limited span of time but rarely, it seems, continue indefinitely. Small Blue colonies, presumably founded by the accidental arrival of an egg-bearing female carried on the wind have been found in many parts of the country including the extreme north of Scotland. It is certainly not confined to the chalk except in the sense that Kidney Vetch demands a calcareous soil.

One colony existed at Hexton Chalk Pits from 1984 to 1990. I became warden of Hexton Chalk pits a reserve of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust in 1979 and first noticed the Small blues on June 16 1984. The reference reads: ‘N(ew) B(utterfly) : Small Blue, *Cupido minimus*, slate brown with a white border, half the size of a Common Blue in a restricted area of long grass at the northern end of the reserve’. They were not in this immediate area in subsequent years but were usually to be found slightly further south in one of the disused chalk pits. Possibly this was the first year this species had bred at Hexton and adjusted its local habitat in subsequent years. They did not range over the entire reserve. The Small Blues were thereafter seen every year on the reserve flying from late May to mid June throughout the rest of the eighties.



Small Blue
Photo © Ian Small

The Small Blues of Hexton Chalk pits became something of an iconic species and on the 13 June 1987 members of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust visited the reserve as a field trip on the occasion of the Trust’s AGM and two Small Blues were seen. Kidney Vetch was in flower but few orchids – only Spotted Orchids and Common Twayblades were found. Wall butterflies were seen on Telegraph Hill but not Green Hairstreaks.

Dingy Skippers described as 'abundant' on the Pegsdon-Telegraph Hills

In 1989, Small Blues were seen at Hexton Chalk Pits on May 27, June 2 and 12 and 18 but had ceased when the Letchworth Naturalists visited the reserve on June 30. That month, Wall butterflies were seen at Bramfield Forest and at Bennington. Chalkhill Blues were seen at Hexton on July 24.

It is the entry of June 15 1990 that is really significant. It reads 'June has been cloudy since the turn of the month. Nevertheless Small Blue have now emerged – one brand new male, obviously newly hatched but not very active'. 'Kidney and Horseshoe vetch now out'.

June 17 reads 'Painted lady, Meadow Brown ,(First of the year), Small Heath. No sign of Small Blue'. June 26 'Dark Green fritillary. Many Small Heaths but no Small Blues.'

The following year on June 14 1991 the record is 'some Kidney Vetch. No sign of Small Blue this year.'

I never saw Small Blue again at Hexton Chalk Pits. So what had happened? The food plant, Kidney Vetch has declined but still exists. The reserve itself did not change overmuch during the nineties. It was not until 1991 that the reserve was fenced in and grazing with sheep was tried for one season. Thereafter hand cutting was the standard method of conservation as it had been before 1990. In 1990 the butterflies did however have one bad season, grey cold weather throughout June until the end of the month. Small Blues did emerge but there was little flight and probably not breeding. Recolonisation would have been difficult. The nearest known colonies to Hexton are at Sewell Cutting and Totternhoe Knolls both over ten miles to the west and another colony on the old Midland Railway bank at Ickleford discovered in the late nineties was a similar distance to the east. Re-colonisation is just possible but unlikely.

We do not know how the Hexton colony originated but presumably it could happen again if a gravid female happens to blow in at the right time the sufficient kidney vetch is in place. It is a long shot but it could happen. Management could take the form of increasing disturbance on the chalk screes in the hope that the relict population of kidney vetch might spread. It is important to ensure that ground flora is not shaded out by scrub and working parties have focussed on this objective. In the years since the Small Blue disappeared other

species have flourished. Dingy Skippers are still present, a small population of Green Hairstreaks persists and recently a small colony of White Letter Hairstreaks has been discovered. Chalkhill Blues have colonised the reserve in force. Hexton Chalk Pits is by no means a write off as far as butterflies are concerned.

Larval Emissions and Climate Change, by Ashley Cox

An EU climate change team investigating greenhouse gas production in livestock have identified a potentially huge, unexpected and highly unlikely source of methane - caterpillars. Grass feeding Satyridae larvae are, it seems, causing grave concern in Brussels, so much so in fact, that our own Council for the Regulation of Agricultural Policy has become immediately involved. Not usually known for its proactivity, the speed at which the council has reacted indicates a very real concern. Surveys in a variety of areas were implemented, including central Hertfordshire, and are currently ongoing, although preliminary results of similar surveys in central Europe have been made available.

Research carried out in an area of regenerated grassland in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, has born out much of what was predicted in 2004 by Professor Gunter Trumpf in his seminal work “Furzende Raupen von Smetterlingen”.

Professor Trumpf calculated that a single generation of Meadow Browns in his study area of just 7.5 hectares could produce in the region of 270 million larvae of which 60% would be expected to survive to the third instar and produce a staggering 300 kilos of frass. Each larvae, he discovered, was capable of producing 700 single pellets of frass in the third instar alone. He then discovered, with the aid of laser spectrometer trace gas analysis, that with each pellet is released 0.7745 cubic milligram of methane (CH₄). It very quickly became obvious to him that the effect upon the planets’ atmosphere would be incalculable were this to continue unabated on a worldwide scale. Unsurprisingly, his warnings were to go unheeded until now.

Anticipating the apathy so prevalent in the EU at the time he set about finding a solution himself. The most interesting of a number of experiments he conducted was the education of female Gatekeepers to lay their eggs on Bramble, he found that this species was in fact

particularly trainable. As the potassium content of methane -producing grasses is very low he achieved, through selective breeding, females which were attracted only to plants with high potassium levels. The common Meadow grasses (poa ssp) and Fesques are high nitrogen low potassium content species; unfortunately these species are favoured by the majority of Satyridae, so he concluded that the butterflies must be educated away from these grasses or the grasses themselves must be genetically modified. The education of butterflies is a very slow process, particularly with Satyrid species found in grassland which invariably produce only one generation a year. Couple these difficulties with the fact that many are non species specific with their choice of foodplant, for example, the Marbled White which scatters its eggs during flight; then, the better course of action would seem to be genetic modification of the grasses themselves. This subject was raised recently in the European parliament by Paolo Fril, the G8 environment and climate change representative. The British government however, view anything remotely GM as a hot potato and immediately distanced themselves by referring the entire matter to the hastily set up body which oversees all genetically modified and enhanced food and crops within our shores, the grandly named Farming and Agricultural Regulator of Tonnage Yield and Biological Upgrade Management, a sister organisation to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the mighty DEFRA. Between them they commissioned the British survey and galvanised the Council for the Regulation of Agricultural Policy into action.

This unusual chain of events has not only caught the attention of objective environmentalists, it has aroused much interest in many rather more subjective areas also. Small amounts of Methane are occasionally prone to ignite at night and it has been suggested that these could have led to increased sightings of Will o' The Wisp in recent years. Union for the Preservation of Folklore And Rural Tradition spokesman Simon Simpall agreed, "Will o' The Wisp phenomenon usually occur as a result of the ignition of marsh gas but in recent years there have been many reports from areas which quite obviously are not marshy, this could provide us with an interesting explanation in these instances"

Quite apart from the cut and thrust of environmental science, the ground breaking research and the provision of scientific explanations for old romantic superstitions there is, we must acknowledge, a human cost in all this; The land upon which the survey is taking place in

central Hertfordshire belongs to farmer Doug Field, he is a fourth generation dairy farmer who now only owns a small dairy herd, he also farms land which is given over to silage production, some of which is currently set aside. Clearly at the end of his tether he spoke of the recent upheavals that he's had to endure " I'm fed up with it. As if it's not enough I've had to cope with EU milk quotas, price reductions, the knock on effects of the recent floods and the restrictions imposed by both the Foot and Mouth and Bluetongue outbreaks, I'm now overrun with C.R.A.P. surveyors warning me that I am now responsible for caterpillar flatulence in my set aside !"

Obviously this is an emotive issue, we are assured however that the results of the joint D.E.F.R.A.~ F.A.R.T.Y.B.U.M. survey will be available on April 1st 2008

Butterflies in Nepal, by Kim Fleming

Finding out about the butterflies that live in the country you are to visit on holiday is sometimes easy. If it is anywhere in Europe for example, there are excellent modern field guides, often with distribution maps. But for some countries it can be hard to find any kind of guide or even list of species, and impossible to get practicing knowing some field marks in advance.

For European trips preparation pays dividends. Learning the patterns of unfamiliar species is good for when you first start seeing something new to you resting for a moment within sight. And it is exciting to see species abroad that you have spent years gazing at in British books, but believed that you would never see. We had this experience in northern Greece last spring seeing lots of Queen of Spain Fritillaries, which turned out to be much more distinctive than you expect once you get your eye in.

At Christmas our family went on a short trek in the Annapurna area of Nepal. We did not know what butterflies there might be, or even, since it was winter and the nights would be cold, whether there would be any. There seemed to be no books on the subject. I half heartedly searched on the internet, and found a few trip reports from individuals and tour companies, but nothing that really helped as preparation. So, if we saw some butterflies, we would enjoy them, but never know what they were.

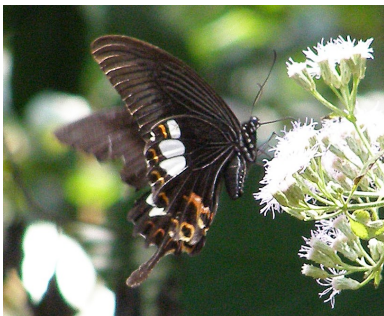
The trek, though amongst the gentlest available, was tough for us. Within the first few hours climbing up from the paddyfields of the river valley to the forested hills we saw lots of birds and butterflies. The first ones we noticed whilst catching our breath after just a few minutes looked to me exactly like the gliders that live in eastern Europe, and we had enough energy to photograph them.

How did any of us identify unfamiliar butterflies before digital cameras – or even before very short focusing binoculars? Now we can take lots of images, study the pictures immediately at home, magnify them as much as we need. This is wonderful, but it will not tell us what the butterflies are unless we have a book.

Over the following days in the hills we gradually saw more and more types. A few – the very widespread Painted Lady and Indian Red Admiral – we did know by sight, but most we had never seen before. Some were truly spectacular, one giant black, white and red swallowtail by far the largest butterfly I had seen in my life.

Back in Kathmandu we looked for any butterfly books. It turned out that Colin Smith, who evidently lives in Nepal, had published locally several guides, including a paperback with photographs of all 640 species recorded in the country.

Once home we compared our few photographs with the book, and also asked for the pictures taken by our companions of butterflies that we had not photographed. We were thrilled that our family identified twelve species through studying our pictures, every one identified. Yes, we could have photographed lots more butterflies, but that takes time, and the trek moves inexorably on!



Red Helen
Photo © Kim Fleming

So when going abroad I would recommend trying to get hold of a field guide (I find that www.nhbs.com has an amazing list of butterfly books covering lots of countries); take a digital camera with zoom (obviously!); visit bookshops in any big cities in the country in case there are local guides; and only if all this fails try the internet.

Which brings me to my last point. Everyone knows that the internet can

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

be brilliantly informative or insidiously misleading. But I was shocked at how many images of butterflies were wrongly labelled. Whilst there are some more reliable academic sites, in general I have learnt not to trust identifying foreign butterflies through internet images.



Grey Pansy
Photo © Kim Fleming



Common Commodore
Photo © Kim Fleming

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 29 March – Herts Moth Group AGM

1 pm to 6 pm. The Havers Community Centre, Waytemore Road, Bishops Stortford. Admission – voluntary donation

Friday 11 – Sunday 13 April – Capel Manor Spring Gardening Show

10am – 5 pm each day, Bullsmoor Lane Enfield. Admission charge – adults £5 Friday, £6 Sat/Sun, concessions. www.capel.ac.uk

Saturday 26 & Sunday 27 April – Lee Valley Spring Wildlife Fair

The Waterworks Nature Reserve, Lea Bridge Road, Leyton E10. 10.00 am – 4 pm each day. Admission charge. www.leevalleypark.org.uk

Saturday 10 May – 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 17 & Sunday 18 May – The Rickmansworth Festival

10.30am – 5.00pm each day, The Aquadrome, Harefield Road, Rickmansworth. Admission charge.

Saturday 24 May & Sunday 25 May – Herts County Show

The Showground, Dunstable Rd Redbourn. 9.00 am – 5.30 pm each day. Admission charges apply www.hertsshow.com

Sunday 25 May – Wildlife at Half-term

Notcutts Garden Centre Notcutts Garden Centre, Hatfield Rd, Smallford, St Albans 10.30 am – 4.30pm

Saturday 21 June & Sunday 22 June – Middlesex County Show

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Middlesex Showground, Harvil Rd, Harefield, Uxbridge, off A40, just after Junction 1 of M40. We will be located in the Community Village.

Admission charges apply www.middlesexshow.co.uk

Sunday 6 July – National Garden Scheme – open garden

Rustling End Cottage, Rustling End near Codicote, Hitchin. Opening time 12.00 – 5 pm. Admission price £3.50, no dogs

www.rustlingend.com www.ngs.org.uk

Sunday 27 July – Chilterns Countryside Festival

11 am – 4 pm National Trust Estate, Ashridge Estate Visitor Centre, near Tring. Admission Free. A special event to mark Save our Butterflies Week.

For more information about butterfly sales and how to order by post, contact Malcolm Hull by phone, e-mail or letter (details on back page of newsletter).

New - Freshly Packed Seeds

Attract butterflies to your garden - grow plants from our wide range of seeds, selected & packed by two of our members. Alan Downie and Malcolm Newland, our expert butterfly gardeners have saved and packed seeds from their favourite butterfly-attracting plants. Available to HMBC members for a suggested 50p donation per pack - either at one of our sales stalls or by post from Malcolm Hull. Order early to avoid disappointment - the list of available seed is on the next page:

Packets of Seeds - 2008.

Annual Scented Sweet Pea
Annual Aster
Betony
Biennial Yellow Evening Primrose
Birds Foot Trefoil
Burgundy Scabious
Corncockle
Cupids Dart
Dahlia (Single, Mixed)
Devil's Bit Scabious
Foxglove
Garlic Mustard
Helichrysum
Hemp Agrimony
Honesty
Hollyhock – Single Pink
Ipomea – Purpusea
Ipomea – Two-tone Blue
Jacobs Ladder
Knautia - Burgundy
Knautia – Mixed
Lavender – Dwarf Munstead Blue
Lavender – Hidcote
Lesser Knapweed
Lychnis Coronaria
Lychnis Viscaria
Mirabilis (Marvel of Peru)
Nasturtiums
Nicandra
Purple Toadflax
Ragged Robin
Red Campion
Red Valerian
Red Valerian - White
Red Valerian - Pink
Runner Bean
Sweet Pea – Perennial
Sweet Rocket - White
Sweet William
Teasel
White Scabiosa Drakenbergensis
Verbena Bonariensis
Yellow Dahlia – Single
Yellow & Maroon French Marigold



The Red Admiral and the Snowdrop

The sight of a Red Admiral butterfly fluttering among the snowdrops is a sign of the impact of climate change on British wildlife.

The snowdrop flowers in January and February. The Red Admiral has, in the past, flown between May and September. Before the 1990s, seeing the two together would have been nearly impossible.

Since the 1990's the butterfly has been recorded overwintering in ever-increasing numbers. They are now seen in every month of the year – real proof of climate change.

Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation took this remarkable photograph of a Red Admiral among the snowdrops in a churchyard in Turner's Puddle, Dorset. "I was quite amazed to see the Red Admiral flitting from flower to flower. Red Admirals were once just a summer visitor, but seeing this one on a snowdrop in February is a real sign that the climate is changing."



Migrant Watch

Migrant Watch



The Painted Lady Butterfly and Humming-bird Hawk-moth are arriving from Africa and becoming increasingly common in the UK. To find out just how common, we need your help

Working with BBC Radio 4's World on the Move and as part of Garden Moths Count, Butterfly Conservation has launched the first ever online migrant recording scheme.

If you see (or have already seen !) either of the species below since the start of 2008, please follow the links and help us track the impact of climate change on migration.

Hummingbird Hawkmoth : This moth brings a touch of the exotic to the garden, looking just like a humming-bird as it hovers to nectar at flowers. Often seen by Buddleia, it is a recent arrival in the UK from Africa. Its arrival is an indication that the climate is changing



Photo © Dave Green

Painted Lady : This butterfly arrives in the UK from Africa every year. It has orange, black and white-spotted wings. Its colours are like those of the Small Tortoiseshell - a difference to look out for is that the Small Tortoiseshell has a row of blue dots on the bottom of its wings.



Photo © Jim Asher

You can record your sightings directly, or just follow the migration progress, at:

http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/sightings_home/1095/migrant_watch.html

BBC R4:World On the Move - Great animal migrations

“Join us as we explore some of the most awe inspiring events on Planet Earth - great animal migrations. Join our legion of reporters, scientists and amateur naturalists as we follow the trials and tribulations of a World On the Move.”

This is an unprecedented attempt to track these epic journeys of the natural world and we are asking you to contribute to the project whenever it happens, wherever it happens. The program is also following the migrations of, amongst others, the Monarch butterfly, the Osprey, the Common Toad, the Humpback Whale, the African Elephant...and many more.

The program is broadcast on Radio 4 on Tuesdays, 11.00 - 11.30 am, repeated on Wednesdays at 9.00 - 9.30 pm. Also available later on BBC iPlayer



Copy Deadline for the Autumn Newsletter will be

25 August 2008

REMINDER - as previously notified, we will be producing only 3 newsletters per year from now on - scheduled for Spring, Autumn and Winter.

If you see anything interesting before the next deadline, or would like to comment on anything contained in this newsletter, then please write to me, or e-mail me with your contribution. I can also incorporate photographs, either digital or supplied as prints or slides, which I can scan.

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. Contact Jez Perkins on 07967 832627 for details of planned work parties

Therfield Heath, TL 335400 First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Contact Paul Palmer, Clerk to the Conservators, on (01462) 675232

Ashwell Quarry Nature Reserve TL 252396 for the entrance off Hinxworth Road. Work parties on the third Sunday of each month starting at 10am. Contact Chris James on (01462) 742684

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

Fryent Country Park - details from Barn Hill Conservation Group on 020 8206 0492, www.bhcg.ik.com

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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