

# Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



**HERTFORDSHIRE AND  
MIDDLESEX BRANCH**

**NEWSLETTER  
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**Chairman’s Notes, by Andrew Wood**

While I’m out and about recording butterflies I sometimes fall into conversation with people I meet and when I explain that I am recording butterflies almost inevitably the comment comes back that you never see many butterflies now, or there are none around like they used to be. Results from surveys such as BC’s Big Butterfly Count also back up this perception with low numbers of butterflies and species being seen. There is no doubt that numbers have dropped over recent years and I suspect that the good years that I remember from the 1990s were probably bad years for those whose memories stretch back further. Yet is everything as bad as we think? Many things seem better in retrospect than they did at the time and nostalgia tends to add a rosy glow to many memories as we filter out the middle and recall either the best or worst.

2012 has seemed bad, mainly due to the cool and wet weather that we experienced during much of the spring and summer. This undoubtedly had an effect on butterfly flight times pushing many back by up to three weeks and seeming to reduce the numbers flying or breeding especially for some of the double brooded species such as Brown Argus and Common Blue whose opportunities for flight and mating were severely limited. Yet the late summer has seen encouraging numbers of Small Tortoiseshells after their sudden decline of the last few years. We have had more reports of possible or suspected Brown Hairstreaks, a species that has not been positively recorded for over ten years. Frustratingly, the evidence is not yet quite firm enough to confirm their reappearance. If anyone has a good or even reasonable quality photo of one in Hertfordshire and Middlesex in 2012 we would love to see it.

Its worth remembering that a few years ago BC put out a press release highlighting that Hertfordshire had lost more butterfly species than any other county in Britain, but just a few years later we have seen the return of the Small Blue, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary and Purple

Emperor. Other species have fluctuated but can still have boom years. One of my best butterfly days this year was a visit to Hexton Chalk Pit in early August. I saw more Chalkhill blues than I can ever remember seeing. I reckon that there were probably at least 1500 flying in an area about the size of three football pitches, groups of the pale blue males were clashing in groups as they searched for the much more sedentary brown females. You could hardly move without disturbing butterflies from the ground and they would regularly fly into your face and arms as they raced across the warm chalk grassland. They would fly high into the trees along the edge of the site and across the nearby road. They were even to be seen in woodland rides on nearby Lion and Moor Hills flying with Speckled Woods! Days like this remind you that all is not doom and gloom and that we must be positive about what we have in our area.

***Would you Rather Receive this Newsletter  
Electronically?***

If so, then please e-mail the editor ([ian-small@virginmedia.com](mailto:ian-small@virginmedia.com)), confirming your name **and providing your membership number.** Your membership number is quoted on the mailing label used to send this edition to you, as well as on your membership card.

We heard that over 100 of you would be interested in this option when we asked the question in our members' survey earlier this year.

As well as simplifying your storage/retention, there will be significant benefits to the Branch in reduced material costs and substantial reductions in postal costs. You will also make my life easier by having fewer newsletters to print, staple, stuff into envelopes, label, stamp etc. !

**(Members not actively requesting electronic newsletters will continue to receive them in the post as usual - no action is needed.)**

### Date for Your Diary.....

#### **Members' Day will be Saturday 16th March 2013**

The day will start at 10am with a guided walk to Bricket Wood Common SSSI, (between Watford and St. Albans), which is being managed to restore and improve the ancient woodland and rare heathland habitat. 29 butterfly species have been recorded in recent years including Silver-washed Fritillary, White Admiral and Purple Emperor. Join us for a tour round with the site managers to find out about techniques such as ride management, coppicing and conservation grazing.

All the indoor activities for the day will again be located at the Welwyn Civic Centre (same venue as 2012), commencing at 1230 with the Branch AGM. This will be kept brief, and followed by a lunch interval, with the main afternoon session commencing at 2pm. Our keynote speaker will be Matthew Oates, who works for the National Trust as their Nature Conservation Advisor. Matthew has a life-long passion for butterflies (you may have seen some of his exploits on television) and was a founder-member of the Hampshire Branch. Our other speaker will be Tim Freed, a consultant lepidopterist and illustrator, who will be talking on 'Moth and Butterfly surveying in London's Parks and Gardens'. Prior to our own Branch being formed by the splitting of the original London Branch, Tim was one of their committee members. Refreshments will be provided between these two talks, which are certain to be highly entertaining and informative.

Following the success of last year, we will again be running our Photographic Competition (details below), and those present will be able to vote for their favourite photos. As usual, there will be a raffle and we will close proceedings with an opportunity for members to show a small selection of their best photos and videos from the past year. Proceedings will finish by 5.30pm.

Full details of all of the above will be provided with the Spring newsletter.

#### **Photo Competition Rules:**

50p entry fee per picture. No limit on the number of entries which can be made in the following categories:

- UK butterflies

- UK Moths
- Non UK butterflies and moths
- Moth/Butterfly behaviour
- Non adult stages

Entries to be un-mounted, printed on good quality photographic or inkjet paper and be between 7x5 inches and A4 size. Entries should not have been digitally enhanced, apart from cropping/re-sizing. All pictures must have been taken in the period March 22nd 2012 to March 12th 2013.

Entries, with fee, to be sent to Andrew Wood (Branch Chair), who will not be competing and whose decisions will be final, to be received by March 12th 2013.

Pictures will be numbered and displayed anonymously at the members' day; each attendee will get a voting form to vote for their favourite in each category.

The entrant must be a member of BC and photographs must be their own work. Entries must be clearly labelled on the back with the entry category.

Entries will only be returned if an SAE is supplied, or collected in person at the Members' Day.

Copyright remains with the photographer, however by entering, entrants acknowledge that the Branch will be allowed to use any photograph (with accreditation) in branch publications and web pages.

Photographs must be of wild insects, not captive bred stock.

### *Field Trip Reports*

#### **Spring in Harrow 2012, by John Hollingdale**

The first event was our Spring Walk **April 29th** in Stanmore Country Park. There was heavy rain that morning so there were several phone calls excusing the callers from a probable drenching. After checking the Met Office rainfall radar, Margaret and I decided to venture out; no one else turned up. Light rain was falling at the start time so the net was left in the car and we decided to concentrate on the Park flora. I have a list of flora seen by the two previous people who have produced management plans

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over the past decades (the late Paul Moxey and Mike Waite). After a damp circuit of the Park we found that we had added to this list Bird Cherry and Field Woodrush. As regarding Lepidoptera, there was one brief glimpse of a micro that vanished as soon as it had been noticed.

The following Friday **May 4th**, Simon Braidman led an evening walk on the same site looking (or mainly listening) for bats using detectors. The weather did not cooperate (a strong North East wind was blowing) so none were heard. However I spent the next hour or so gazing at various tree trunks with a torch. I found it quite amazing observing what creatures come out at night; various slugs, flies, woodlice (including a banded one), centipedes, millipedes and two species of moth. These were *Adela reumurella*; the day flying moth with the very long white antennae and *Esperia sulphurella*. I must thank Andrew Wood for giving me the ID for this one from my brief description. The yellow line on a black background is quite striking.

On Saturday **May 19th** at 9.30pm we set up an MV light over a white sheet in W.S. Gilbert's old orchard. Again the weather gods were not on our side. A strong easterly wind was blowing so we tucked ourselves in the lee of a holly bush. Our party included Helenka, the head gardener at the Grimsdyke Hotel, and Andy Green. A few moths eventually appeared. The list at the end of the two hour session consisted of two Brimstones, two Green Carpets, two pugs (probably Oak Tree pugs) and a Maiden's Blush. The pugs will eventually make their way to Colin Plant for species confirmation. There were no micros and no Noctuids. I don't know if the constant presence of a couple of bats had anything to do with that.

### **Whipsnade Downs / Bison Hill - Sunday May 13th 2012, by David Chandler**

It was an unusually dry day in a very wet and cold period of springtime in the Chilterns as twenty BC members and guests gathered in the National Trust car park at the top of Bison Hill near Whipsnade. There were all the usual suspects attending from the Beds & Northants and the Herts. & Middlesex branches and some new faces, like Helen and Stephen Burrell, who had travelled all the way from Norfolk that morning in the hope of seeing Duke of Burgundy and Grizzled Skipper on the chalk downs.

Despite the dappled sunshine it was still quite cool for the time of year, being only 14 degrees C; therefore we were quite dependent on sunshine to bring out the butterflies.

Setting off just after 10.30am we first encountered a Speckled Wood near the car park and then, only fifty yards into the walk, Brimstone (2), Green Veined White (3), Orange Tip (3), Green Hairstreak (2), and Common Blue (1).

Then the sun went behind a cloud and the butterflies disappeared. It has to be two or three degrees C warmer for butterflies to be active in the dull conditions I found my party to be in, so I had no choice but to move them quickly along over the upper sections of the site towards the specific location in the lower sections where I had seen Duke of Burgundy in 2011.

We arrived at the sheltered ride on the lower slopes where I hoped to find the “Dukes” but the cloud cover was still keeping conditions too cool. I asked my party to spread out over fifty metres of this section and, seeing that the clouds were beginning to part, hoped that when the sun popped out from behind them, we would get to glimpse a butterfly or two. Then, as hoped, the sun peeked out from behind a cloud, my strategy worked and we saw three butterflies, two Dingy Skippers and another Green Hairstreak, nice enough, but these sightings were neither Dukes nor the Grizzled, my other target species.

The sun went behind the clouds and the butterfly action was over for the time being.

The party waited patiently in the dull conditions and I could feel their building anxiousness at not seeing a Duke or a Grizzled yet. So I made a second strategic decision to move the party onto another area where the Grizzled Skipper was more often seen by me in the past. I mused to myself that we could return to the “Dukes” area later on if necessary.

They say that fortune favours the brave and as my party moved into the Grizzled Skipper hotspot section of the site, the sun came out and I was immediately rewarded with a Grizzled Skipper sighting on a grassy bank. The cool conditions meant that everyone was able to see the butterfly and get a decent



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photograph if they wanted. Then, just a few yards further on, a fortunate break, for there, sheltering at the lowest point of the downs, were a pair of Duke of Burgundy butterflies. One flew off straight away but one stayed around long enough for everyone to get a good look and those, so important, photographs.

And, that was almost it, for the clouds came back and the butterflies settled down into the grass again. As our time was up I led the main group back to the car

park, leaving some others in the capable hands of Beds & Northants Branch treasurer Ian Kimsey to take a slightly longer way back to the cars. We did get one further glimpse of the sun at the car park and saw the Orange Tip and Green Hairstreak again.

The field trip was a success because we saw our target species but, it was difficult to lead because of the poor spring weather and so the butterflies were few and far between. We only saw twenty butterflies in total [9 species] on the field trip which is quite poor for mid May.



Duke of Burgundy  
Photo © Ian Small

## Butterfly World, Chiswell Green, 3 June, by Malcolm Hull

The Diamond Jubilee weekend will not be remembered for a glittering array of native butterflies. Rain poured down as eight of us scurried quickly into the shelter of the Insect Study Centre. Ropes stretched around the room, covered in thousands of leafcutter ants, some carrying portions of leaves up to five times their own body length. The leaf parts are taken down deep inside the nest, where the ants use them to grow a fungus, which they consume as food. Apparently they are the only animals besides humans who grow their own food as a crop. Giant Snails, Goliath Stick Insects, various crickets and the notorious desert locust were all on display, along with a fine array of multi-coloured butterfly pupae, neatly placed in a cabinet waiting to hatch out.

At that point the rain eased off and we decided to explore round the



meadows.

This is still a young site, only in its fourth year since planting and major changes are still occurring with the vegetation. The masses of Birds-foot Trefoil which gave rise to over 400 records of Common Blues last year has died back considerably. In fact it has disappeared entirely from those areas in which it was most dense and largely been replaced by grass. However Birds foot Trefoil remains plentiful in lower concentrations around the rest of the site. Kidney Vetch, food plant for the day's main target species, the Small Blue, is now much more wide spread, running along the whole length of the two chalk embankments. The sky remained overcast and it was not until the following week that I saw a Small Blue at this site. Altogether this summer I've seen half a dozen, all at the bottom of the gully between the two antennae. In June I saw a female egg laying on the flower head of Kidney Vetch and in August I saw a freshly hatched adult in the same location.

Back to the field trip – the skies remained overcast as we returned through the leaf gardens, full of nectar rich flowers. A solitary bee passed by and we discovered a spectacular bluey green and yellow larvae of the Mullein Moth sheltering on its host plant. Finally we arrived in the tropical butterfly house to see the amazing array of colourful butterflies. Although the temperature was well over 20 degrees indoors, the poor weather conditions still had an impact. The butterflies were all sedentary, with hardly any in flight, which was due to the low levels of natural daylight.

### **Horsenden Hill, 23rd June, by Andrew Culshaw**

David (Howdon) and I led the annual Horsenden Hill White-letter Hairstreak walk this morning, 23rd June. To be honest, we thought we were in danger of losing our 100% success rate in finding the species on the walk. We had not seen any this year and it was a bit windy and not too warm. However it was sunny from time-to-time and this was enough to entice 4+ rather fresh individuals to put on a decent show in a sheltered spot near Horsenden Farm. As usual, we used the telescope to good effect and all nine participants enjoyed excellent views.

Once everyone was happy, we moved on to find other leps. Burnet Companion was the only species in abundance but we managed 3-4 Red



White-letter Hairstreak  
Photo © Ian Small

Admiral, a similar number of Common Blues, a Large Skipper, a Large White, 4-5 Silver Y, a Cinnabar and our first local Meadow Browns of the year. We could not find any Marbled White, which would normally be pretty easy on this event.

We ran several overnight moth traps and showed off some examples of the catch before and after the walk. Diversity and numbers were a bit low but there was something of interest for everyone.

All in all, a very successful event!

### **Bricket Wood Common, 1st July, by Malcolm Hull**

This year's field trip was held a week earlier than usual, timed to coincide with the peak numbers of Fritillaries and White Admirals in the previous year, 2011. Unfortunately the wettest ever second quarter on record delayed the emergence of both species and none had been reported from the site before the day of the field trip itself. The day of the trip was cool and fairly cloudy and I felt rather apprehensive as a group of ten assembled in the St Stephen's parish car park. Spirits did not improve as we failed to find any sign of White-letter Hairstreak in its usual spot on the Elm along Drop Lane. And when we reached the Common, conditions remained cloudy and only the amount of mud and water underfoot was spectacular. Still, a cloudy day is often good for moths and as we moved along the gas pipe ride, we soon spotted an Emerald Moth, followed by a Silver-ground Carpet. The wet conditions seem to suit dark brown butterflies and we began to see significant numbers of Ringlets, also Meadow Browns and a few Speckled Woods. After half an hour we met Colin Everett, heading in the opposite direction up the ride to join our walk. He brought the exciting news of a Silver-washed Fritillary sighting a few minutes earlier in one of the newly formed scallops. We hurried on splashing through the puddles and found Large Skippers, a female Banded

Demoiselle and a Large Yellow Sawfly before sheltering from a sharp shower.

There are now four scallops on the ride, formed by removing a small number of trees from one side or the other to create a little sunny glade, ideal for butterflies to bask in. Arriving at the first scallop, we found our first White Admiral, perched on bracken, a favourite resting place for many butterflies on cool days. The sun put in its first brief appearance and we saw the White Admiral take-off, fly high into the treetops and then gliding back to rest. Continuing along the ride we saw more moths, a Dunbar, a Yellow Shell and 2 Silver Y's, followed by a mating pair of Meadow Browns and a second White Admiral. Arriving at the second new scallop we found a pristine male Silver-washed Fritillary in exactly the position Colin had described. A second shower intervened and half our party left for the walk/swim back to the car park.

The rest of us waddled on, arriving at the large central clearing to be greeted by the sight of a newly installed wooden fence. This is had been newly erected around the edge of the whole clearing to enclose the cattle, due to be introduced to implement the long planned conservation grazing program. The idea is that they will naturally control the vegetation (long grass, regenerating trees etc.) which will encourage the regeneration of this part of the site to acid grass heathland, a rare habitat type in Herts and the most important feature of this sites SSSI status. In butterfly terms the grazing is expected to benefit species which like short grassland such as the Small Copper, Common Blue and Brown Argus, all of which have been recorded on this site, but struggle to maintain healthy populations. It is also hoped that the Small Heath, which is present nearby may establish itself on the Common.

We stayed only briefly in the clearing and saw several Marbled Whites, plus a single Small Skipper to add to the days list. Moving swiftly on to the western section of Mutchetts Wood, we positioned ourselves at the foot of the Purple Emperor master trees by 1 pm. After a few minutes a large butterfly flew out powerfully from the canopy edge and back in again – we saw it for about 3 seconds. Half an hour later we had another brief glimpse, before thick cloud rolled in. At the time I was pretty sure that it was a Purple Emperor and having positively ID'd the species in the same spot a few days later I have no doubt it was an Emperor we saw. So despite the very unpromising conditions, all three target species were located, which just goes to show it is worth looking for butterflies, even

on rainy days.

*Postscript* – Four English Longhorn cattle were introduced onto the site in September. They will graze there for 6 weeks and then be kept elsewhere for the winter before returning for a period in Spring 2013. This begins another exciting chapter in the restoration of the Common to return it to its status of being one of the best sites for butterflies and other wildlife in Herts. To find out more about the habitat management techniques, join us for a tour round with the site manager as part of our Members day on 16 March 2013 – see details on page 4.

### **Heartwood Forest, 15th July, by Malcolm Hull**

At last a trip with no rain! 12 people joined Andrew Steel and I for this walk, arranged in conjunction with the Woodland Trust. We were rewarded with a sighting of a single White letter Hairstreak, the first record I'm aware of from this site, located on the large clump of regenerating Elm on the south-east side of Well Wood. Andrew explained that this had not been a great year for butterflies on his transect at this site – an experience many of us have shared! The other sightings of note on this trip were 3 Small Heaths, located on the area of rabbit grazed chalky grassland on the western edge of Pidler's Wood close to the junction with Well Wood. A Pyramidal Orchid was also spotted nearby on the edge of the small overgrown chalk pit. Other species spotted were Comma, Red Admiral, Small & Large Skipper, Holly Blue (probable), Small & Green-Veined White, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Gatekeeper & Ringlet plus Silver Y moth.

### **Benfleet Downs and Canvey Wick, 3rd August, by David Chandler**

Eleven members and two late arrivals participated in the joint branch field trip to Hadleigh Country Park, Benfleet Downs. The weather was a warm 19 degrees, sunny with puffy white clouds with only the small chance of a passing shower.

We entered Hadleigh Country Park at the far end of St Mary's Road and, soon after descending the steps, encountered our first target species the White Letter Hairstreak. In fact we found a pair but they were deep in the bushes and not clearly visible. We proceeded along the wooded upper ride

beside the sucker elms favoured by White Letter Hairstreaks but our passage became very wet and muddy in places because of the prolonged wet weather this season and the use of the track by mountain bikes. Along this track we also saw Small Whites, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Ringlets, Speckled Woods, Holly Blues, Commas, a Peacock and a Red Admiral and, fortunately, no one slipped into the muddy pools which was a real concern to me a walk leader.

As the track widened out into a sunny grassy glade we found Small and Essex Skippers, Green Veined Whites and a little further on, perched on a bramble flower, another White Letter Hairstreak which was clearly visible to the party and afforded a good photo opportunity. Towards the end of this long grassy ride we found Marbled Whites and a pair of Large Skippers. We stopped to rest at a viewpoint to see the sea and saltmarshes of the Thames estuary, Hadleigh Castle and the back entrance of the London 2012 Olympic Mountain Biking venue at the Salvation Army's Hadleigh Farm.

We returned by the lower ride, also known as adder alley because the snakes are often found there, in the hope of finding a Wall butterfly. The normally arid and warm local ground conditions that the adders like along this ride are also favoured by the Wall, but try as we might we could not find a Wall here today. We did, however, find Large Whites, Holly Blues and the locally scarce Small Copper along the way which was very pleasing.

Back at the steps down from the entrance we met two members from Watford, who said they had just seen a very worn Silver-washed Fritillary on bramble flower along the upper muddy-puddle riddled ride. We chose not to go and look for it as the thought of going back through the ooze was just too much.

At this point five members left, having other appointments, and the six of us remaining took a short drive over to Canvey Island. As there is no car parking at the entrance to the Canvey Wick site we parked at the local Morrisons store car park and we crossed the adjacent new clearway dual carriageway to gain entry into Canvey Wick nature reserve. Fortunately this new road is lightly trafficked or I might have had a second health and safety issue to concern me this day.

Once in the site it was immediately apparent that this former brownfield site was very different from Benfleet Downs. It was more sandy and salt tolerant plants with waxy leaves were commonplace. We found three

Wall (two male chasing one female) almost immediately; this spurred us on to go deeper into the site. We only saw the Walls for a few seconds as they were caught by a strong gust of wind. So, as the ground conditions looked very good, we went on along a raised dry gravel ride and we found Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Small Skipper, Small Heath, Essex Skipper, Holly Blue and Peacock but no further Walls. We walked back the mile we had gone into the site but still could not find more Walls. We were rewarded with a Painted Lady, only the second I have seen this season, near the entrance, but that was that for the day as a huge grey cloud covered the sun, it got cooler and all the butterflies disappeared.

All in all a very successful field trip with twenty two different species seen on the day including three Wall for about three seconds, whisked away on the breeze.

### **The Day the Emperor Let Slip! by Andrew Middleton**

I have (with Liz Goodyear) been studying Purple Emperors in Hertfordshire & Middlesex for over 10 years, after locating our first inhabited landscape in the Potters Bar area in 2000.

But closer to my home in Enfield, there have been a few historic records, as follows:

- Enfield 1909 (The Entomologist Vol. 42; 282 [November 1909]),
- Reported seen Grovelands Park where it was seen around the oak canopy in the 1950s (personal comment),
- A dead female Purple Emperor at a home inside a house in Epping Town in September 1987 and in 1976 a dead male Purple Emperor found by the park-keeper in his shed at Whitewebbs Park (Martin Catt private correspondence)
- A male grounded along Three-quarter Mile Lane, Forty Hall, in 2000 (Starr Lobb).
- A male grounded by the river, Forty Hall, 20th July 2003 (Ron Macmurdie),
- A female in flight, Ferny Hill Farm / Duncan's Wood area, 20th July 2010 (Robert Callf).

Others may dismiss this sequence of sightings, as presently happens across East Anglia where the insect is thought to be long extinct, however to us



Purple Emperor  
Photo © Ian Small

this is evidence of a low density population spanning north Enfield, and likely the remnant of a stronger population inhabiting the Chase from bygone times.

But it can be an incredibly difficult butterfly to locate when breeding at low density over a wide area, laying its eggs on willows and maybe crack willows through the landscape. To find a mate, the male of this insect sets up territory amongst the largest trees at the highest wooded locations in the landscape, to

which unmated females will naturally travel. So we had identified the high north edge of Whitewebbs Wood, with its mature oaks, as a likely site for an assembly area serving the Chase. But we couldn't find any males. Though we searched many times, crooking our necks upwards, it was a general waste of time. However this winter we identified a place where we might observe over the canopy from outside the wood, in case clashing or chasing males could be seen high in the sky. So one day near the end of July 2012, the Emperor let slip and did give himself away ~ when a woodpigeon flew over, and a large butterfly was seen to launch itself after the poor bird ~ usually only an Emperor would be so bold and aggressive to do such a thing. The flight had started well to the east of the high spot, so into the wood, and to start looking up in this guessed at vicinity. Firstly a likely quick flight overhead of a male, a move to the neighbouring clearing, another likely flight, a move to the next clearing and now views were given of an Emperor in all its glory and detail, gliding and patrolling and perching up on its leafy throne, a lofty oak leaf. This area took 3 hours to pinpoint, and the whole episode took a mere 12 years of trying, albeit on and off and over a 100 years since the first report.

What might surprise people is that, given two males were seen here on several days from July 27th to 10th August 2012, one can expect that next year's generation of males will likely select the exact same perches and patrol areas. Once such a territory is found, and the willow habitat remains

intact, and the large oaks persist, one can expect to see the Emperor here defending his throne for many Julys to come.

I hope this has given the reader some inkling of this creatures' odd and secretive lifestyle. Two fighting males on several occasions suggests it is doing quite well through the Chase, but it is almost never seen by any but a very few lucky people of the thousands of visitors enjoying these areas every summer. The butterfly population is likely linked through to populations encompassing Fir & Pond Wood, Northaw, Wormley and Broxbourne Woods, and Epping Forest, linking through westward into the central populations of England. Its conservation is quite simple ~ all people involved with land management should be aware of the scale of sallow and crack willow in their landscape and the need to conserve it, be it in wood or along woodland edge, beside river or lake, or amongst hedgerows, roadsides and spinneys.

So next July, Liz and I will hopefully return to these few oaks, which proved just a little too far from the high spot for us to easily find, and look forward to having the chance to enjoy the Purple Emperor spectacle again in the Royal Enfield Chase in 2013. We would be pleased to arrange a day or two as guides to show any interested people the insect, and will set a date or two nearer the time.

### **Gardening for Butterflies by Steve Dudley**

Having recently joined Butterfly Conservation after reading the spring newsletter I thought I'd send in an article about my experiences of gardening and looking after butterflies and moths.

I have my own garden maintenance business and after many years working in my customers gardens you start to notice how much wildlife such as butterflies, moths, bumble bees, birds and hedgehogs have disappeared from our gardens. Part of the problem is the weather, but I think the biggest problems are:

- Their habitat is disappearing,
- The overuse of insecticides and pesticide
- Increased use of weed killers and slug pellets in our gardens.

I am pleased to say that I garden organically and I pass this onto my customers. Over the last two years, with the help of some of my customers, I have re-designed flower borders, planting nectar plants such



as echinacea, Verbena bonariensis, Inula hookeri, buddleia, echinops, sedum to name but a few. I have also added wild flowers such as red valerian, birds foot trefoil, purple loosestrife, knapweed, field scabious, red campion and cranesbill into the borders to attract butterflies and moths into their gardens.

In a couple of customers gardens instead of planting their normal summer bedding plants I have planted an annual flower meadow mix plus some Californian poppy, candytuft and nigella seeds mixed in. My customers were thrilled with the results, their gardens were alive with butterflies and other wildlife.

As gardeners, in general we are far too tidy, it is important to leave some areas uncultivated and given back to nature. In some of the gardens I have left small areas of grass and nettles for Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshell, and Peacock butterflies to feed on. If you do not want nettles growing in the ground where they can sting people, especially young children, you can plant them in big flower pots and fence them off.

You do not have to stop growing all your favourite flowers - all you have to do is to add a few nectar plants to your borders to help our butterflies, moths and bees.

I am also in the bumble bee conservation trust and as with butterflies they too are also in serious decline so you will be helping them too. Please think about incorporating some nectar plants in your gardens - they are very pleasant to look at and very easy to maintain - and by doing this we would be working towards saving our butterflies and other wildlife. After all we would miss our butterflies, moths and bees if they were to disappear.

### **You Don't Need a Lot of Space to Garden for Butterflies, by Doug Crawley**

I have been interested in gardening for butterflies for a long time and I would like to share some of my experiences with you. My garden is in Pirton, a village a few miles west of Hitchin but it is not a big rural garden but the back garden of a 1960's house in a cul de sac surrounded by other similar houses. The garden measures only 42 feet by 24 and a garage cuts a chunk out of the corner of that area so I think my experiences are relevant to many typical small gardens in towns and villages across our area.

When I moved here 42 years ago the garden was a rectangle of grass with

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some rose bushes along the side, I have transformed it into an area without a wasted corner planted up to encourage butterflies (and birds and moths) to visit, feed and breed and there is still space to sit in the sun for the human inhabitants!

The garden faces roughly north west and only part of the width is shaded by the house and so it catches the sun from mid morning into the early evening, creating a sun trap for much of the day - an immediate attractant for butterflies. The soil is alkaline and I have added crushed chalk to further lighten it and this encourages plants such as Birds Foot Trefoil and Kidney Vetch to grow well, though no Small Blues yet! One major change I made was to introduce different levels into the garden in order to maximise planting space and to catch more of the sun. All around the edge are raised beds which themselves are banked up to the fence. In the middle is an area at the original level with a large bed and a small lawn of fine, not standard lawn grass which is much more slow growing and therefore does not need a great deal of cutting. As well as the beds I mentioned I also have many plants in large pots which, again, add height, and also means that plants can be moved around to create different patterns through the year and put those in flower in the most advantageous positions.

The planting is dense and mainly perennials, both wild and cultivated species, this means that weeding is kept to a minimum. Bulbs flower early on to be followed by a succession of other plants through the year to the autumn. In amongst all this there is also a small wildlife pond attracting newts and frogs. There is no master plan, I buy plants that look attractive to insects but also some that just add colour and texture to the garden, many of them coming from the standard local garden centres.

You might think in a garden this size that there is no room for trees but by keeping them well controlled I have Ash, Oak, Yew and Birch as well as a mixed hedge along the end fence containing hazel and hawthorn. There is also a Buckthorn which has succeeded in attracting Brimstones which I have watched laying eggs on the leaves and seen the caterpillars emerging and growing. I have encouraged ivy to grow along the end fence and a side fence so that it flowers in the full sun, to encourage Holly Blues to breed and, of course attracting butterflies such as Red Admiral, Comma and Painted lady particularly in the autumn. Orange Tips and Green-veined Whites breed on the Jack by the Hedge and Honesty, both plants are easy to grow and once established self seed very

freely. Nasturtiums planted in some cracks in the paving in one of the raised areas soon attracted Large Whites to egg lay and provide caterpillar food. Marjoram attracts Gatekeepers to feed on its purple flowers, the wild flower Black Horehound has purple dead nettle type flowers and are one of the few flowers that tempt Small Whites to settle and feed. There are Stinging Nettles grown in pots against the back fence of the garden, so catching the sunlight to attract Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells

I have been tweaking the garden for many years but many of the ideas here can quickly be put into play even in a small area. If every garden was like mine, or even just a part of every garden we would have a great network of butterfly – and wildlife friendly habitats across the county.

### **The Story of a Moth, by Margaret Noakes**

It was the weekend of August 18th 2012 and we were spending it with our elder son and his family in Norfolk. It was probably the hottest that we had experienced this summer. We were near the river Yare and the ditches and drains close to Great Yarmouth, in that flat fen like area that characterises the Broads of Norfolk. I often take my moth trap when we stay with them, knowing that Paul will almost certainly be putting up his mist nets (he is a bird ringer) and welcomes the opportunity to see what moths are about.

6am and Paul and I are in the garden, he extricating birds from the nets; weighing, ringing and assessing them and I opening my ‘box of delights’ Was it all those years ago when as a young lad of 15/16/17 he did much the same in our garden and would bring a squawking jay or long tailed tit to show us when we were still in bed? Did I ever imagine that he would be involved in the most significant study of cuckoo migration and catching those 5 birds in 2011 in these very nets, in his garden. But now he is a middle aged Doctor, still as passionate about birds and I his old Mum, fascinated by what I would find in his garden.

Among many of the moths I identified were the Prominents and one, an Iron Prominent I potted. I had only caught one in my garden before and wanted to



Iron Prominent, *Notodonta dromedarius*  
Photo © Ian Kimber

## Hertfordshire and Middlesex

have a really good look at him/her. After a few minutes it became clear as to the sex; she was intent on laying eggs in her 'pot' This was a whole new situation!



Iron Prominent Caterpillar feeding  
Photo © Margaret Noakes

Paul suggested that we should release her a.s.a.p. on the nearest birch/alder in his garden so that she should continue her laying there. Meanwhile I would attempt to rear the eggs at home. It was nearly three weeks before the eggs hatched and there were 16 tiny specks of life in the pot. I had wondered whether the eggs were sterile; 3 weeks before hatching seemed a long time. I collected some young and fresh birch leaves and left them to chew their way through, watching for signs of frass. Are the tiny caterpillars cannibalistic like those on the Orange Tip Butterfly? I will never know, but within only a few days all I had left were 2 growing larvae who gradually started to eat the whole leaf, rather than just the upper layer of the leaf structure.

I do not know the number of instars that these tiny but growing larvae completed before showing signs of the need to pupate. I would guess it was about 4, but the yellow and later more golden colour and curious shape that the larvae developed was fascinating. This stage took nearly another 3 weeks. Suddenly the larvae turned black and within 40 minutes of providing a depth of soil to enable them to pupate, just as suddenly turned bright green.



Iron Prominent pupa  
Photos © Margaret Noakes

I have always wondered at the complex biological/ bio chemical process that takes place at this stage of the change from caterpillar to adult butterfly/moth, but these changes in colour were so fast and so obvious. Overnight the multi coloured caterpillars had become shiny brown pupae, buried into the dark soil and ‘wriggly’

So now they are in a large ice cream pot, in soil, in the cold greenhouse; hopefully they will survive the winter and emerge in the spring /early summer. Should I take them back to Norfolk? Or would it be O.K. to release them in the garden, where the habitat is somewhat similar to that in Norfolk? I had, after all, caught at least 1 Iron Prominent this year in Herts.

There was an almost childlike approach to my experience and I wondered at what stage in my life I was really at? But clearly there is really no doubt!

Such are the 7 stages of man!!

## **Millhoppers – The Effects of Grazing, by Jez Perkins**

The reserve has now been grazed every year since 2009 with either Beulah sheep or Dexter cattle depending on the availability and the requirements of the reserve. I have found it to be beneficial to vary the grazing methods as sheep and cattle will target different vegetation types, for example Dexter cattle will quite happily venture onto the edges of the stream and graze off the coarse vegetation which is beneficial for the Marsh Marigolds, whereas the sheep tend to stay on the main meadow areas.

### Why graze?

In order for wildflowers to thrive, nutrient levels within the soil need to be kept to a minimum. This is achieved by cutting the meadow areas in September once the wildflowers have set seed. The cut material is then removed preventing nutrients from leaching into the ground. This can be achieved by either grazing or by cutting the reserve by hand. Grazing however has a number of benefits compared with manual cutting:

Manual cutting removes all of the vegetation at the same time, reducing the opportunities for over wintering invertebrates, unless refuge areas of uncut vegetation are established. Grazing, however, is selective resulting in different sward heights across the reserve.

Manual cutting is labour intensive, whereas with grazing apart from the

daily checks the grazing animals do all the work for you.

Manual cutting can cause areas of compaction where the machines run over the same areas. Grazing is low impact as long as the timings are right so the grazing animals are not on the site too long resulting in areas of poaching.

### The result of grazing

When taking a glance at the reserve during the summer months I feel that the grazing has not had too much of an impact. However after spending a bit more time examining the reserve in a bit more detail the subtleties come to light. The bindweed and cow parsley are still present and from a distance look to be completely dominating the reserve, however these species are much less prolific than in previous years. The population of wildflowers growing within these species has increased, notably knapweed, agrimony and lesser celandine. Pyramidal Orchid has been record for the last two years.

The blackthorn growing along the perimeter of the reserve is still suckering up within the meadow areas, however it is now being kept in check by the browsing effect of the sheep stunting the growth by defoliating the shoots. We will still have to cut the worst areas out by hand but the grazing is definitely helping.

### Grazing going forward

I am hopeful that the grazing on the reserve will continue to have a positive effect, benefiting the wildflowers and thus in turn the butterfly population. During 2012 we had the sheep on the reserve in early spring to knock back the more competitive species and this is a method that we will adopt during 2013. The results of the grazing will continue to be monitored through local observations and the completion of butterfly transects. If you would like to find out more about the reserve or have any questions about grazing please feel free to contact me. Also keep an eye on the website for details about forthcoming volunteer tasks.

**Butterflies of Europe for iPhone by Chris Manley, Matt Rowlings, Peter Eeles and Guy Padfield. Reviewed by Simon Spencer**

*(This review first appeared in the BC European Interest Group (EIG) newsletter last December.)*

Just occasionally technological change makes it possible for people to do something completely new. Not long ago the idea of having a complete photographic guide to the butterflies of Europe on your mobile phone would have been inconceivable. Today it is a reality.

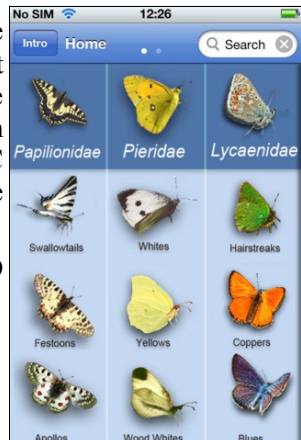
What makes it possible is the iPhone or if you prefer the phoneless and cheaper iPad. For £11.99 you can download 3000 images including maps for the 400 odd butterflies that occur in Europe. This package totals 400 Mb. The human interface is remarkably intuitive and makes full use of the capabilities of the Apple operating system. You navigate quickly by icons. A quick tap takes you to the next level and you can bring up crystal clear photographs of virtually every butterfly in Europe. You can check against similar species. In many cases you can bring up annotated diagrams telling you what to look at. You can also bring up a map which covers northern Morocco to Arctic Scandinavia and eastwards to European Turkey showing the distribution.

There are also notes on foodplant and life cycle. This is all in your pocket.

What makes this special is a collaboration between some of the best butterfly photographers and experts in Europe with someone who has contributed to a similar but somewhat inferior product on Moths. This butterfly App makes full use of the Apple graphic interface which the moth App failed to do. It also uses the very latest Taxonomy using the list available on the EIG website. Hopefully the next edition will have a complete set of photos but most island endemic graylings all look the same. I could have done with a bit more text as that takes very few megabytes compared to pictures.

I can leave behind the field guide and even the GPS but I still need to take my notebook. What is required now is a facility to record in the field, building up a list of species with an abundance code and to send it by email to BC with the date, location and coordinates before leaving the site!

Published by Lepidapp @ £11.99  
[www.lepidapp.co.uk](http://www.lepidapp.co.uk) See it on the iTunes store  
<http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/butterflies-of-europe/id499848412>



### And Closer to Home.....

We have made it easier to access the sightings page or our Branch website via your mobile phone. Just save the following link:

[http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/mobile\\_sightings.html](http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/mobile_sightings.html)

And you can also join us on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/ButterflyConservationHertsMiddlesex>

### **Does the Brown Hairstreak Butterfly (*Thecla betulae*) Still Survive in Hertfordshire? by Malcolm Hull and Andrew Wood**

The last accepted record of this species in Herts or Middx dates back to 1998, when several were reported from Bricket Wood Common, St Albans. Since the 1940's, occasional records had been received from locations around the county including Barwick, Rothampsted, Pirton, Hertford, Baldock and Hudnall Park. Writing in "The Butterflies of Hertfordshire"(1986) Brian Sawford described this species as being "now probably the rarest resident Hertfordshire butterfly".

In the ten years I have been species co-ordinator, suspected sightings have been reported on several occasions. My investigations have usually led to the suspicion of mistaken identity. Vapourer moth, Purple Hairstreak, even Small Copper and Gatekeeper are capable of mis-identification, even by seasoned observers. My own exhaustive investigations at Bricket Wood have failed to find any confirmation of the butterfly there, although it seems likely that captive bred Brown Hairstreaks (and other species) were being released at this site in the 1980's and 90's.

By far the most credible sightings in recent years have been made by Kevin Hornby on the east fringe of Welwyn Garden City at Panshanger (2009) and Blackthorn/Rolls Wood (2010). In both cases the butterfly was seen at rest in a typical position (basking in ash) and its markings clearly described. However Kevin had not seen this species before and no photograph was obtained, so these cannot be accepted as definite records.

Proving the existence of an elusive tree canopy dwelling butterfly can be tricky. Searching for its distinctive eggs on Blackthorn during winter months is the best way to demonstrate its presence. Egg hunts around Panshanger and Blackthorn Wood in 2009/11 failed to produce positive



results and there were no actual or suspected sightings of adults from either location in 2011. 2012 was not a vintage butterfly year and the first emergence of Brown Hairstreak in its stronghold around Oxford/East Bucks was not recorded until 8 August, over three weeks later last year. Over the course of the next 6 weeks Paul Why, Kevin Hornby and myself visited Blackthorn/Rolls Woods on at least 6 occasions. We saw considerable activity high up in the many Ash trees around the site. Positive identification of Purple Hairstreak and Vapourer Moth was achieved many times. There were clearly other small chocolate/golden brown coloured butterflies or moths living up in the trees, but we did not get any clear views of them at rest. Paul did manage a photo, but it is so blurry we cannot clearly make an identification.

At the same time Andrew Wood received similar reports from Peter Clarke who had been observing a large ash tree at Norton Green just to the west of Stevenage. There are extensive blackthorn hedges running alongside and near the track-way through this area. Observations and visits from Peter, Andrew, Bob Clift, Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton were again unable to positively identify any Brown Hairstreaks and again worn Purple hairstreaks, Speckled Woods and Vapourer Moths were also present. As at Blackthorn Wood one very distant picture of a similarly coloured insect sitting high in the ash is tantalisingly too indistinct to allow positive identification

**So WE NEED YOUR HELP** to undertake some egg searches on the Blackthorn hedges around the wood. These have to take place during the winter months after the Blackthorn has lost its leaves and before it comes into flower (Nov – Feb). The following dates have been fixed

**10.30 Sunday 18 November – Blackthorn/Rolls Wood**

**10.30 Sunday 10 February- Blackthorn Wood/Panshanger**

Meeting place Holwell Hyde, off Cole Green Lane. Lifts available – contact Malcolm Hull. Directions from the A414, at the roundabout SE of Welwyn Garden City take the B195 (Birchall Lane) towards Welwyn GC. After half a mile take the first turn left into Cole Green Lane. After 100 yards turn right into Holwell Hyde and park there.

Please ring Malcolm Hull (details on the back cover, mobile 07768 154324) if you intend to come.

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### 10.30 Sunday 27 January - Norton Green

Meeting Place Near the end of the dead end road (TL229223) called Norton Green. This is by the A1M west of Stevenage and is accessed from Gunnels Wood Road (A1072) by going down Bessemer Road, under the A1M and turning left into Chadwell Road which becomes Norton Green after about half a mile. It is only about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from Stevenage Station by cutting across the Leisure Park, turning right up the cycle track/footpath and going under Gunnels Wood Road and up Six Hills Way past the Premier Inn and through the underpass under the A1M.

Please ring Andrew Wood (details on the back cover, mobile 07765 098824) if you intend to come.

Details may change, particularly if there is bad weather. Please wrap up warm & bring a hand lens/magnifying glass if you have one (10 times magnification is ideal). Tuition on what to look for will be provided on the day.

For more information on Brown Hairstreaks visit the Ash Brownies blogspot at <http://betulae.blogspot.co.uk/>

### **Conservation Work Parties at Wormley Woods NNR**

As part of the Woodlands for People and Wildlife Project, some work parties are being organised in Wormley Wood. These will be carrying on with creating scallops in the southern part of the wood. Butterfly Conservation have been involved in creating some of these scallops in the past, and members might like to come along and help out. They will be taking place from 10am-3pm on the following dates:

**Monday November 26th**

**Monday December 17th**

Meet at the Bencroft West Car Park on White Stubbs Lane. It would be great to get some extra pairs of hands!

Contact: Susannah O'Riordan, South Herts Woods Living Landscape Officer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Grebe House  
St Michael's Street, St Albans AL3 4SN

01727 858901 ext 238

07876 508034

[susannah.oriordan@hmwt.org](mailto:susannah.oriordan@hmwt.org)

[www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)

## 2012 Records

Just a reminder to submit your butterfly records for 2012. We are interested in any butterfly records you have whether there is 1 or 1000+. Please send them, electronically if possible to Andrew Wood.

If you do a transect and use transect walker please package and email the file copying in Andrew Wood, paper records can be sent to Andrew Wood

Please try to get your records in as soon as possible after receiving this newsletter as this will be very helpful for compiling the Butterfly report and getting it published early in 2013.

### Charles Smith

We were saddened to learn of the death of one of our long-standing members, Charles Smith from St Albans, in August 2012 at the age of 89. Charles was an active contributor to our Branch; he walked a transect at New House Park from 1996 to 2000 and we could always rely on a meticulous set of weekly records. In more recent years he produced a series of note cards that have proved to be best sellers in and a major contributor to Branch funds. His many years of contribution to the Branch and his enthusiasm will be greatly missed and our condolences go to his family.

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

**18 January 2013**

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 sent by e-mail to

[ian-small@virginmedia.com](mailto:ian-small@virginmedia.com)

or send an article by post - address on back cover

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