

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



**HERTFORDSHIRE AND
MIDDLESEX BRANCH**

**NEWSLETTER
ISSUE *68***

Spring 2014



The Branch's 20th anniversary cake, prepared by Alex Radley, and enjoyed by attendees at our Members' Day Event.

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Chairman’s Notes, by Andrew Wood

Well Spring is well and truly here after a very mild winter. There are lots of butterflies about and I hope that you are all seeing lots of them, let’s hope it carries on this way for the rest of the year. Even better than just watching butterflies is making some notes about what you see and where and sending them to the website or to me at the end of the summer. The more information we have the more we can try to understand changes in populations and design conservation measures appropriately, not just locally but across the whole country. If you were at the recent Members’ Day you will have heard the presentation that Brian Sawford and I did looking at changes in distribution over the past 30 years. Although about half of our species have not changed their distribution, half have, there are some encouraging advances but declines in species such as Wall that have gone from a common garden butterfly to virtually absent in Hertfordshire and many surrounding areas are worrying.

It was good to see members at that day and I hope those who could come had an enjoyable and interesting time and were able to meet Martin Warren our Chief Executive. We have a great venue at Welwyn Civic Centre and it would be great to see even more members in

coming years. One thing that I have noticed is that entries for the photo competition have gone down a bit and that may be because of rising postal costs. To help with this I am proposing to offer a service to print out digital images for next year's competition. Please let me know what you think.

Members' Day and Branch AGM, 29th March 2014, by Ian Small

Members' Day was a great success, combining our usual event with a celebration of the Branch's 20th anniversary (a photograph of our birthday cake, prepared by Alex Radley, is shown on the front cover). Our special guest for the day was BC's Chief Executive, Martin Warren, but we were also delighted to welcome many former Branch Committee members.

The day began with over 40 people in attendance for the formal AGM proceedings, swelling to almost 70 as more people arrived. During the AGM, Margaret Noakes stood down as Membership Secretary, having held that position since the Branch was formed, handing over to Ian Small, who will also continue his existing role of newsletter editor. Margaret was warmly thanked for her contributions, and will continue as Vice-Chairman of the Branch. Alex Radley was formally welcomed as a member of the committee.

The first presentations of the day were by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton, summarising the phenomenal work they have done over recent years in surveying and studying Purple Emperors and White-letter Hairstreaks. Andrew and Liz have made a huge impact on our understanding of the distribution and habits of these species, not just in our local area, and their enthusiasm, dedication and self-sacrifice in pursuit of these insects captivated the audience.

After a short presentation by Malcolm Hull on the Branch's reserve, Millhoppers Pasture, there was a break for lunch, and to give attendees the opportunity to vote for their choices in the photo competitions (the winning photos of which are all shown below) and to purchase raffle tickets. Special thanks go to Margaret Noakes and Pam Edmunds for organising the catering and for all the work behind the scenes on the day and to everyone else who assisted.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

The keynote presentation by Martin Warren walked the audience through what he considered to be 10 key milestones in the history of the conservation of butterflies, starting with the publication in 1962 of the book *Silent Spring*, which documented the effects of indiscriminate use of pesticides, mainly focussing on birds. This book is widely credited with being one of the key triggers in the creation of the environmental movements in the US and Europe. Martin then charted progress over the subsequent 50 years, picking out such key milestones as (i) the ‘invention’ of the transect walk and its validation as a robust method of recording butterfly populations and flight seasons, (ii) the publication in 1984 of the first atlas of UK butterflies that attempted to show their changing distribution and which relied extensively on data from the national butterfly recording scheme and highlighted the impact of intensive land use on butterfly habitats, and (iii) the work on meta-population dynamics which demonstrated the progressive impacts of colony isolation and have led to the Society’s recent focus of developing landscape-scale conservation measures which help restore habitats in key places to enable butterflies to move more freely to avoid isolation and colony loss.



Left to right: Ian Small, Gavin Vicary, Brian Sawford, Margaret Noakes, Norma Dean, Malcolm Newland, Martin Warren and Andrew Wood.

During the break, the birthday cake was ceremonially cut, by Martin Warren.

The next presentation was a ‘double-act’ between our current records collator and author of the Branch’s Annual Butterfly Report, Andrew Wood and the author of the book ‘Butterflies of Hertfordshire’, Brian Sawford, whose book was based on data collected from 1984-86,

together with many historical records. Included in the comparison was data from Middx, included in Colin Plant's book on the butterflies of London. There have been some notable 'winners' since publication of these books, with e.g. Speckled Wood and Marbled White both spreading eastwards across Herts., and the spread of Ringlet and Brown Argus into Middx. The emergence of a strong colony of Small Blue in the re-created habitat at Butterfly World gives a notable boost to this otherwise locally-rare species. In contrast, one of the biggest losers has been the Wall Brown. Although subject to significant fluctuation in numbers, this was still a common Herts. butterfly in the mid-80s, but sadly no more, with the only sightings probably associated with translocation of plants which had eggs on them.

The final presentation of the day was by our moth recorder, John Murray, who gave a fascinating analysis of the annual fluctuations in the numbers of moths and presented a detailed correlation with weather patterns in the previous year.

All in all, it was a great day, and those present clearly enjoyed themselves.....and the cake tasted as good as it looked !

The winning photos in the photo competition are displayed below:



Orange Tip, photographed at Aldbury Nowers by **Paul Cross**, winner in the UK Butterflies category



Top: Peacock caterpillars in Kings Langley, winner in the non-adult stages category
Bottom: Marbled White butterflies at Longdeans, Hemel Hempstead, winner in the butterfly behaviour category

Both photographs taken by **Elizabeth Debenham** who was 2nd Place Winner of the International Garden Photographer of the Year 2013.

In June Elizabeth Debenham's photography will be exhibited from Bank Holiday Monday May 26th and throughout June every Wednesday and Thursday afternoon from 2-5pm at Chenies Manor Pavilion Gallery. <http://cheniesmanorhouse.co.uk/calendar>



Knapweed Fritillary, photographed in France by **Ian Small**, winner in the non-UK butterflies category.



Leopard Moth, photographed by **Liz Goodyear**, winner in the UK moths category

Recording Notes, by Andrew Wood

It looks as if this year will see a record number of Transects walked giving us high quality information about butterflies on many sites throughout our area. If you would like to walk a transect please let me know (contact details on back cover). Although the season starts in April it is not too late to start if you know a site and have the time to undertake a weekly walk. Data entry is now much easier since the recording system went online in 2013. This saves me time in the autumn and means fewer errors in transcribing records. It was a major contribution to our being able to publish our butterfly report so early this year.

Don't worry if you cannot commit to weekly walks, all your records are welcome. There are recording sheets available on the website (see below) but if you can input records into a spreadsheet, it again saves work copying out details and reduces errors in that retyping. All I need is a spreadsheet like this:

Recorder	Grid Ref	Site	Date	Species	No. seen
Andrew Wood	TL323136	Tower Street, Hertford	21/03/2014	Small Tortoiseshell	1
	TL234240	Stevenage Station	21/03/2014	Comma	1
	TL190299	Ransoms Park, Hitchin	21/03/2014	Peacock	1
	TL188302	Stormont Road, Hitchin	21/03/2014	Brimstone	1

This can be added straight into the database, though rest assured that all records are checked and I may contact you to discuss unusual records. Indeed if you do see something unusual please don't hesitate to contact me so that it can be verified at the time. If you would rather use a simple recording sheet, then you can download one from our website at http://www.hertsmiddx-butterflies.org.uk/recording-new.php#record_sheet. If you don't have access to the internet and would like to receive a recording sheet in the post, then please contact Ian Small (details on back cover).

Help Needed for Butterfly Survey at Northaw Great Wood!

For over ten years, Welwyn Hatfield Council has been supporting transect surveys at one of Hertfordshire's most important SSSIs. Northaw Great Wood is historic wood pasture common and recent management has begun the process of restoring rides and glades as well as removing a large infestation of rhododendron. This is consequently a very good site to monitor as recovery of vegetation takes place.

Sadly, this year the survey will have to be abandoned unless new volunteers can be persuaded to take it on. The survey routes take approximately an hour and a half to complete (on a good day) and although we have missed the first few weeks, there is still time for someone – preferably 2-3 people – to complete a record sheet for 2014.

There are lots of new Butterfly Conservation members in the Welwyn – Hatfield area and this is a real opportunity to take part in important scientific monitoring.

If anyone is interested, please contact Chris James, Landscape Officer on 01707 357418

Winter Field Trip Reports - Brown Hairstreak Egg Hunts, by Malcolm Hull (Brown Hairstreak Species Coordinator)

Last summer we received reports of Brown Hairstreak adults flying at two sites near Redbourn and Stevenage (see Autumn 2013 Newsletter). To try and confirm the presence of this species, which is generally considered to be extinct in Herts and Middx area, two site inspections were arranged early in 2014. Hunting for the butterfly's eggs is considered to be the most reliable method of determining its presence. Eggs are laid down low and are clearly visible, being bright white and laid on the dark stems of young Blackthorn. Here are reports from the two trips.

15/02/2014 - Redbourn Golf Club – The sun shone brightly all afternoon to welcome our first branch field trip of the year. The venue at Redbourn is a private site and the event arranged with permission from the club. The target species was Brown Hairstreak, which overwinters at the egg-stage of its life-cycle. At this time of year the small

white eggs can clearly be seen against the dark colour of Blackthorn, the larval foodplant.

The Blackthorn hedges on the course are extensive and managed in a way which should make them attractive for female Brown Hairstreaks to lay eggs on. A suspected adult sighting had been reported from this location last summer, so our hopes were high. Unfortunately two hours of searching by our party of four did not locate any eggs. Although the result is disappointing, this was a good opportunity to learn the technique of egg-hunting for this species and we all had an enjoyable afternoon.

23/02/2014 - Norton Green, near Stevenage – Our second Field Trip of the year to look for Brown Hairstreak eggs started in unpromising conditions. As well as steady rain, I noticed that a significant amount of Blackthorn was already in flower in the hedges alongside the road to Stevenage. Once the plant flowers it is very hard to spot the butterfly eggs. Amazingly the flowering season has started about 6 weeks ahead of last year! Luckily it turned out that none of the Blackthorn at Norton Green was flowering and better still seven volunteers turned up to help with the search. Peter Clarke showed us the locations of his Brown Hairstreak sightings last summer and we spent a couple of hours searching promising looking habitat in several different areas along the edge of the wood. Sadly no eggs were found, which does cast doubt on the continuing presence of the species on this site, the last confirmed record here being in 1971. It will be interesting to conduct further searches for the adult butterfly in August and September and to see if it can be captured on a photograph.

Not finding eggs is not conclusive evidence that the butterfly is not present on either site. However it does suggest either that numbers are very low or that it is not there at all. There is much habitat in the two counties that appears suitable for this species. The butterfly is far more mobile than other hairstreak species and there must be a good prospect that it can follow other species such as Silver-washed Fritillary, Small Blue and Dark Green Fritillary which have naturally re-colonised our two counties in recent years. So please do keep reporting any suspected sightings to me and if you can, take a photograph.

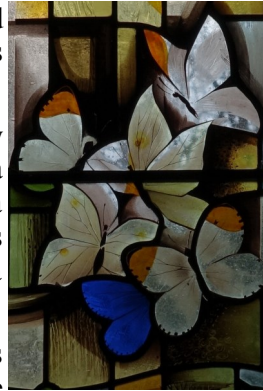
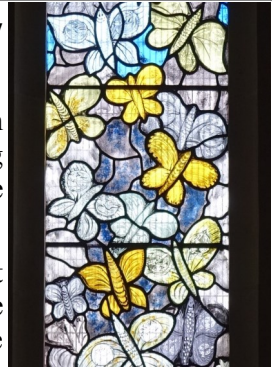
Unusual Hertfordshire Butterflies, by Andrew Wood

Butterflies are not my only interest and in recent months I have found some interesting stained glass images in two Hertfordshire churches.

St George's Church in Anstey in North East Hertfordshire has a memorial window to the USAF 398th Bomb Group who flew from the near airfield at Nuthampstead. This window is by one of the most distinguished contemporary stained glass architects Patrick Reyntiens and its middle light features a flight of butterflies many of them inscribed with names of airmen.

Right on the other side of the county is Holy Cross church in Sarratt and there, too, is a modern memorial window. This time by a Hertfordshire company Chapel Studios. This features Orange Tips, Brimstones and a Common Blue as part of the design.

There may well be other butterflies and moths in our area's stained glass, if you know of some let us know.



Butterfly Conservations Seventh Annual Symposium – Southampton University 4th – 6th April, by Malcolm Hull

Over 200 delegates flocked to Southampton to hear 80 speakers on an amazing array of specialist butterfly topics.

At least half had an international dimension with speakers from over 30 countries including such diverse spots as Vietnam, Estonia and South Africa. Interest in conserving butterflies and moths has spread well beyond its traditional strongholds in the UK, USA and the Netherlands and is now becoming a truly international movement.

Climate Change was a major theme and there were some interesting points made

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

- Butterfly species in the Northern Hemisphere are pushing their range further north – at about 1 km per year over the last quarter century.
- There are big variations between species – Purple Emperor populations in Sweden and Finland have moved 200 km further north in the last 5 years
- In the UK average temperatures have increased by less than 1 degrees C in the last century, though in quite a few parts of the planet the increase is more than 2 degrees.
- This is great news for butterflies with widespread larval food-plants – in UK Commas, Orange Tips, Marbled Whites are all examples of butterflies benefiting from change.
- Habitat specialists are potentially more at risk if their larval food-plant is only found in isolated spots. Brown Argus was given as an example of a species which has been able to switch to a different food-plant – Dove's-foot Crane's-bill to take advantage of warmer climate to expand its range. A study of Edith's Checker-spot in California found a similar pattern of behaviour. Silver-studded Blue was identified as a species that might benefit from warmer climate, due to an abundance of suitable heathland habitat in the north and west of the UK.
- Montagne species, such as Northern Brown Argus and Scotch Argus are retreating and will be threatened by climate change.

So there will be winners and losers from climate change, but the outlook may be better than was originally thought.

However there are still many threats to butterflies and many of these are linked to human activity. North American Monarchs are probably the most widely recognised butterfly around the world. Their powerful flight has helped them establish colonies in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australasia. I was shocked to hear that their number have dropped by 95% over the last 15 years. Logging in Mexico where they roost in trees over winter has been a significant factor. But the increased use of insecticide and herbicide, linked to the use of GM crops in USA and Canada is also a major factor. Certain GM crops which are resistant to herbicides are regularly sprayed, greatly reducing the amount of

Milkweed, which is essential for Monarchs to breed successfully. In the USA millions of gallons of insecticide are sprayed in the countryside each year, not to protect crops, but to kill mosquitos to prevent people being bitten. This is getting worse and has spread as far north as New York. The spraying is only temporarily effective at reducing mosquito numbers, but it is politically popular. The effect on butterfly populations is terrible and two species the Rockland Grass Skipper and Zestos Skipper have gone extinct within the last decade.

There were so many fascinating facts and figures that it was difficult to take all of it on-board. Here's a few highlights

- A Danish scientist, studying four butterfly species in Greenland catches them in pitfall traps dug into the ground – presumably the butterflies are too cold to fly! One of the species – Northern Clouded Yellow is under threat from climate warming.
- Butterfly eggs die if they are heated above 48 degrees C
- The South African Butterfly Conservation Association have published a butterfly distribution atlas – it covers 65,000 sq km and 794 species. Quite a feat as they have less active butterfly spotters than we have in Hertfordshire
- Populations of the Glanville Fritillary in the UK have crashed. This species is only found on the Isle of Wight and several colonies have recently died out. This was caused by a big increase in the number of larvae, which consumed all available food-plant and then starved to death. There is now a significant risk this species will become extinct in the UK.
- Several talks on the Wood White, which has now been identified as three separate species which all look exactly the same. Experiments have shown they cannot inter-breed successfully. The only way to tell the adults apart in the field is to study their courtship behaviour to see the different ways the males flap their wings – demonstrated by videos!
- Last but not least a talk on “Tethered flight in moths” based on experiments carried out at Rothamstead in Harpenden. By gluing small pins on the thorax of moths and attaching them to

flight mills, the characteristics of different moth species and individuals were studied. Copper Underwing was found to be the moth that could fly furthest in a night (40km) whereas the Lunar Underwing managed only a few hundred meters. Dark Arches was the fastest moth achieving 3 meters per second. Moths with the largest forewing area achieved the greatest distance and duration.

Many of the speakers are professional scientists and the talks included a good deal of science and statistics. Most were delivered to make them comprehensible to an enthusiastic amateur. Three days is quite overwhelming, but you can book for just one or two days, which should be more manageable. The next BC symposium will be in 2018 and I'd definitely recommend it.

It was really encouraging to hear how important the local recording and conservation efforts are to the scientists. Our hard work recording in Herts & Middx over the last 20 years mean we are much better placed to protect butterflies than most other counties, who lack such good quality data.

NOTICES

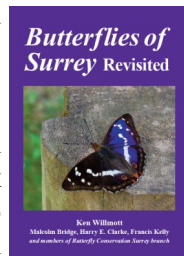
Butterflies of Surrey

Those of you who venture into Surrey for your butterflying will enjoy *Butterflies of Surrey Revisited*, published last October by Surrey Wildlife Trust.

The original *Butterflies of Surrey* was published in 1995. Much has changed since and this is a new book of 240 pages, and the first in the SWT Atlas series to be full colour. It describes Surrey's 42 species, with guides to the key sites and best times to visit. Ken Willmott is lead author, supported by other members of Surrey & SW London branch.

The book is a mine of information that will delight lovers of Surrey's downs, heaths and woods.

Butterflies of Surrey Revisited costs £16.00 plus postage from:
www.surreywildlifetrust.org 01483 795440



Newsletters in pdf Format

If you would rather receive an electronic (pdf) version of the Branch newsletters, via e-mail, then please just contact Ian Small (details on back cover). This will save the Branch the cost of postage and materials, leaving more of your subscription to fund conservation activities.

Doug Skinner – Obituary, by Malcolm Hull

Earlier this year, I was sad to learn of the death of Doug Skinner, one of our branch members based in St Albans. I first met Doug around 10 years ago, when he volunteered to help at the Branch sales stall at the Herts County Show. He was keen to learn more about butterflies and soon became a regular on the stall, helping at many of the shows we attended. I learnt that he was an engineer, as well as a fine photographer. Doug was an enthusiastic supporter of Butterfly World, realising its huge potential to educate young people about the importance of conservation. At his own initiative he visited the site regularly to talk to people and hand out leaflets. Quiet and unassuming, it was only after his death that I learned that he had been awarded an MBE for his work at Marconi and as a government adviser, leafleting. For his funeral, Doug asked that donations be made to Butterfly Conservation



Copy Deadline for the Autumn Newsletter will be

31 August 2014

If possible, please e-mail a copy of your article (but don't worry if you can't). Contributions should be sent to Ian Small (details on on back cover)

All Contributions Welcome !

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