

Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH

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Autumn 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chair's Report	<u>2</u>
Dates for your Diary	<u>4</u>
Long Tailed Blue / Convulvulus Hawk Moth.....	<u>7</u>
A Monarch for a Monarch !	<u>8</u>
Box-tree Moth: Another New Arrival in Hertfordshire	<u>9</u>
The Spread of the Chalkhill Blue.....	<u>10</u>
Comma Larva on Hazel	<u>12</u>
Field Trip Reports	<u>15</u>
New Members' Day.....	<u>20</u>
Bake for Butterflies.....	<u>21</u>
Big Butterfly Count 2017.....	<u>22</u>

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Chair's Report, by Malcolm Hull

The early promise of a warm 2017 Spring subsided into a distinctly average Summer. My initial impressions are that short grassland butterflies such as Common Blue, Small Copper and Small Heath did well. Species such as Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell seemed very scarce on the wing over the summer. I'm looking forward to reading more in the Branch Annual Report which will be mailed to members next Spring.

Moths

Perhaps the star of the show this year has been the Jersey Tiger Moth, a spectacular day flying moth widely reported from London and parts of Hertfordshire. This species has only spread into our Branch area in recent years and 2017 is its best year yet. I was lucky to see one in London in July. At rest its black and yellow colouring are highly distinctive. The resourceful individual I spotted was camouflaging itself on the black and yellow warning sign of an electricity substation. People have adopted black and yellow for warning signs from the natural world. So its curious that nature now seems to be taking advantage of this for camouflage.

Box-tree Moth is another species spreading rapidly in our area. This is an attractive looking night flying moth, easily attracted to light which will readily enter an open bathroom window. It has been accidentally released in London on imported plants. It is reviled by topiarists due to its caterpillars fondness for eating Box. An increase in reports from London in the Spring led to a flurry of activity and John Murray, the Branch moth officer tells more on [page 9](#).

The long awaited update to the online Guide to Moths of Herts and Middx was published on the Herts & Middx Moth Group website in May. This is the most detailed and up to date source of information on moths in our two counties and can be accessed by the following link <http://www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk/>

Small Blue Project

The fortunes of another recent colonist, the Small Blue butterfly are less clear. Its best site at Butterfly World at Chiswell Green near St Albans remains closed and we were unable to get access to continue transect monitoring this year. Small Blues were again recorded on the adjoining Rose Gardens site, but at the time of writing this is up for sale and the

future of both sites is unknown. This is most concerning and I have written on behalf of the Branch to St Albans District Council seeking their help to protect this colony.

At Letchworth, Andrew Wood's continued discussions with the land managers and Natural England have resulted in habitat improvements and a healthy increase in Small Blue numbers. At Aldbury Nowers, near Tring the Small Blue's larval food plant remains under continual attack from rabbits and the numbers of Small Blues are low. We are working closely with the Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust who manage the site to try and help Small Blue numbers increase. Better news from Heartwood Forest near Sandridge, where Small Blues were recorded again in small numbers this summer. Working with the site owners, the Woodland Trust and the Herts Natural History Society, Butterfly Conservation is funding the cost of wild flower seeds to be planted in three plots totalling 1,200 square meters. The planting will take place this autumn and will benefit a variety of grassland butterflies, moths and other invertebrates.

Millhoppers Pasture

Our new nature reserve team of Paula Reid, Christine Ridley, Chris Hilling and Peter Melitus took over the management of our reserve near Tring this summer. They have applied a great deal of energy and enthusiasm to the task and we are very grateful for their efforts. Managing a three acre site is a considerable task and they are keen to hear from anyone who has any spare time to help - see article on [page 6](#).

Thanks to former warden Jez Perkins who has managed the reserve for us over the last ten years. Thanks also to Margaret Noakes, John Noakes and Oliver Matthews for donation to the branch of £918 to be used as a Millhoppers Management Fund. This is now held in the Branch account as restricted funds to be used solely in connection with the Millhoppers Pasture Reserve.

Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex Book

Sales of Andrew Wood's book covering all aspects of butterflies in the two counties have been encouraging. Copies are now available through the Herts Natural History Society website at £25 <http://www.hnhs.org/>

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Our next Branch **Annual Members Day & AGM** will be held on

Saturday 24th March, 2018

MARCH

24

at Welwyn Civic Centre, Welwyn Civic Centre, Welwyn,
Hertfordshire, AL6 9ER, from 11am - 5pm (timings provisional)

Full programme to be confirmed.

Don't forget to get your photos ready for the Photo Competition

Full details will be provided nearer the time.

Butterfly Conservation European Interest Group (EIG) Members Day & AGM

NOVEMBER

4

The EIG AGM and annual members day will be held on Saturday 4 November at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL. The venue is a short walk from King's Cross and St Pancras stations.

The proceedings will start with the formal EIG AGM at 13.30 which normally takes about 30 minutes, followed by three presentations including a talk by Martin Warren, who until very recently was BC Chief Executive and is now focussed on wider European butterfly conservation issues. The meeting will close at around 17.00.

All Herts and Middlesex BC members are welcome to attend, either at the start of the AGM or at 14.00 just for the presentations, and whether you have any experience of European species or not.

The programme will include presentations by Martin Davies, Will Longdon (who was the recipient of a recent EIG bursary to study Phengaris species – i.e. Large Blue and its close relatives – in Hungary),

followed by Martin Warren.

The presentations will be of interest both to those who are experienced in European species and to those who maybe less so but are interested to find out what Europe has to offer. The EIG members have a wealth of experience and, as is often the case, conversations in the coffee breaks can be very informative.

There is also an opportunity to meet for lunch locally beforehand, at a venue to be confirmed. Details will (hopefully) be posted on the EIG website: www.bc-eig.org.uk.

Roger Gibbons, Branch EIG Liaison

Please Submit your Butterfly Records by



Don't forget to submit all your butterfly records for 2017 (or any earlier years) to the Branch records collator Andrew Wood (contact details on the back cover) by 9th November.

However your records will automatically be sent to Andrew if you use the following electronic systems:

- Transects and Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey please use the electronic UKBMS system to submit your records. Contact Andrew if you need any help with the system.
- iRecord mobile app
- Garden Butterfly Survey
- Big Butterfly Count

Andrew can also accept moth records if you have a few mixed in with your butterfly records. He can also pass on records for butterflies seen in areas outside Herts and Middlesex to the appropriate county recorders, if again, you have a few mixed in with your records.

It helps immensely if you can submit any other records as a spreadsheet with these columns:

Grid reference	Site
Name	Date
Species	Number seen
Comments	

As these can be loaded very quickly into the Branch database.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

However if your records are on paper Andrew still wants them as all data is valuable for building a picture of abundance and distribution.

National AGM & Members' Day



Is being held on Saturday 11th November 2017, at the Jurys Inn Hotel, Gloucester Road, Cheltenham, GL51 0TS, Gloucestershire. Although a long distance from our Branch area this year, the national AGM and Members' Day is always worth attending.

Millhoppers' Pasture Work Parties

Millhoppers (the Branch's only nature reserve) is a small tranquil reserve and consists of grassland surrounded by a variety of large trees and hedgerow located between Long Marsden and Wilstone.

This ancient pasture has a stream-fed pond and ancient, pollarded Black Poplars. It is a rare piece of unimproved grassland surviving in an area of rich soils and intensive farmland

The reserve management has recently been taken over by a small team of volunteer wardens and volunteers are required to complement the small team making up the work parties each month.

Work parties are now held every month on the first Sunday of the month and started in August 2017.

The work parties start at 10 am and finish around 2:30 (with a break for lunch).

If you would like to volunteer at any time or would like more information please contact Paula Reid (contact details on back cover).



Long Tailed Blue / Convulvulus Hawk Moth, by Simon Bullivant

Mandy Floyd's letter in the Spring issue (74) reminded me of my own Long Tailed Blue encounter, which happened some thirty years ago, in 1987. I had spent a fortnight that summer travelling between the Greek islands, and being a keen window gardener had gathered some seed pods as I went - the plan being to germinate them the following Spring and see what emerged.

Some months later I went to my parents' home in the North East for Christmas, only returning to my Central London flat just before the New Year. I was greeted by the sight of a small butterfly fluttering around the living room. Close inspection revealed it to be a Long Tailed Blue, which I quickly realised must have emerged from one of the seed pods - that of a Bladder Senna, as it turned out.

I could not release the butterfly into the wild - late December in Goodge Street was as unsuitable an environment then as it is now. Nor did I wish to leave it flapping around my small flat. So I contacted the Butterfly House at Syon park (still 20 years away from demolition), and they agreed to give the insect a home.

I have seen many Long Tailed Blues since then, but never again in my own home, or indeed anywhere else in the UK.

On other matters: in early October last year I returned home to discover an enormous moth resting on the front door of my North London house. Worried lest this magnificent insect might fly away before I had had a chance to take a picture of it, I covered the moth with a beer glass and took it inside. Once photographed I released it in a safe place. I shared the resulting picture with John Murray, who very kindly identified the insect as a Convulvulus Hawk Moth.



Convulvulus Hawk Moth
Photo © Simon Bullivant

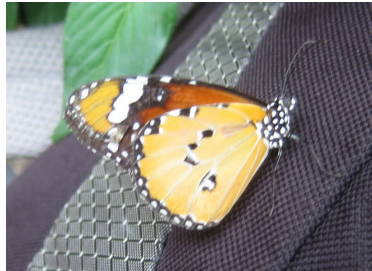
A Monarch for a Monarch ! By Hilary Bailey

On June 17th, 2017, I was in London to see the Trooping of the Colour and by chance Marlborough House Garden in the Mall was open for visitors. I was very surprised and pleased to see a Monarch butterfly flying around! I'd heard they were occasionally seen in England in September and October but this was June. There was an exotic butterfly tent in the Garden at the Natural History Museum so I enquired whether it might be an escapee but was told that they did not have monarchs this year ! so ???



Monarch at Marlborough House
Photo © Hilary Bailey

I had another experience in July after visiting the Butterfly tent – having crossed the road from the Natural History Museum to the V&A for a cup of tea, when getting my money out I discovered an exotic butterfly had accompanied me on my rucksack! So I asked them to keep my tea and took it back when, once in the warm tent again, off it flew ! Then I went back for my tea!



Plain Tiger on Hilary's Rucksack
Photo © Hilary Bailey

Editors note: Hilary's Monarch looks to be in remarkably fresh condition, suggesting that it was likely a local escapee or deliberate release. On September 21st, Butterfly Conservation issued a press release about the impact of the practice of butterflies being released as 'live confetti' at weddings. This was picked up by The Times, and their article refers to a Hampshire company providing Monarchs as 'confetti'. Nigel Spring (Dorset Branch Chairman) is quoted as saying that any Monarch seen before October is unlikely to be a true migrant. DEFRA commented that it was an offence to release Monarchs, but that enforcement was a matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. Of course, we will never know where Hilary's one came from !

Box-tree Moth: Another New Arrival in Hertfordshire, by John Murray

Recent years have been a time of change for moth species in Britain. As climate evolves and habitats disappear some species have declined drastically and become extinct, whilst new species have made the journey across the Channel from the continent, some for the first time, and others after an absence of more than a century in some cases.

One of the most recent arrivals is the Box moth, a beautiful Pyralid moth that appears to have been accidentally introduced, possibly on plants imported from the continent by horticultural suppliers, though scattered records on the south coast suggest that some are arriving here under their own steam. It is probably a native of China and Korea, but in Europe was first noticed in Germany in 2006, then in Switzerland and Holland, and was



Box Moth *Cydalima perspectalis*
(courtesy Wikipedia)

first recorded in Britain in Kent in 2007. It is now firmly established in this country, particularly in and around London, and has been recorded in 23 English mainly southern counties, but as far north as county Durham. It has been reported from 15 sites in Middlesex, 7 in southeast Hertfordshire and one near Rickmansworth.

However, not everyone is pleased at its arrival. Its foodplant, the Box tree, is the favoured plant for topiary, and the caterpillars of the Box moth can seriously defoliate plants. They are gregarious and spin silken webs over their feeding areas. Gardeners have been devastated by the damage to beautifully trimmed hedges and complex animal sculptured shapes that have taken decades of work to perfect. The moth flies in two generations, from mid-June to early August and again in September and October, and the caterpillar has been found in May-June and August to October. Naturally some gardeners regard it as a pest, and are anxious to get rid of it, and this includes my wife, who is dreading its arrival in our garden. It's no good saying (as a friend said to me) "Tell her there is nothing to dread: Box Moths are much more handsome than box hedges".

As with any control of a pest species, the problem is how to remove

the pest without damaging other harmless insects including butterflies and moths. Butterfly Conservation have posted an advice note on their website at <http://butterfly-conservation.org/files/bc-box-moth-advice-note-july-2017.pdf> . If you want to discourage this species in your garden, removal of the caterpillars by hand is the preferred method, but for larger and more serious cases, the mixed nematode biological control which is sold as Fruit and Vegetable Protection should be tried in the first instance and may have some impact, being careful to follow the instructions. As a last resort spraying with pesticide may be considered, although Butterfly Conservation strongly advises against using any neonicotinoid pesticides currently available. If spraying is used, it is important that this is carried out during calm weather, so that the spray falls only on the affected areas, making sure that spray does not fall on other plants or on the ground, where butterflies, moths and other insects may be affected. Bushes in flower should not be sprayed, as this may harm pollinating insects, which have been suffering serious declines in recent years. Remember that use of pesticides is a last resort and should only be used if all other approaches don't work or are totally inappropriate.

The moth is clearly here to stay, so the ultimate solution is to consider alternative plants to Box for topiary and ornamental hedging.

The Spread of the Chalkhill Blue, by Andrew Wood

When the Baldock bypass was built between 2004 and 2006 the Branch was involved in suggesting planting on the chalky areas exposed by the new cuttings and on the spoil dug out to create the tunnels under the Weston Hills. Among the plants were two butterfly food plants – Kidney Vetch for the Small Blue and Horseshoe Vetch for the Chalkhill Blue. We hoped that the new habitat created would provide possible breeding areas for new colonies of these butterflies to be established. The deep cuttings and the restrictions on pedestrians on the bypass means that surveying these areas has been difficult. However several bridges cross the bypass and there are areas at the northern end that are easily accessible and open to all. The main area next to the Clothall Common housing on the edge of Baldock has good amounts of Kidney Vetch on it and the cutting sides have large areas of Horseshoe Vetch that can be observed with binoculars over the low fencing at the top of the cutting.



Clothall Common
Photo © Andrew Wood



Baldock Bypass Horseshoe & Kidney
Vetch
Photo © Andrew Wood

For years we have visited and watched these areas and have yet to find the Small Blue. In 2013, when the Chalkhill Blue dispersed across Hertfordshire as large populations built up, a couple were seen here, but there were no reports of them in 2014 to 2016. The only dispersal in 2013 that led to a new colony was to Ashwell Quarry. However on 13 July 2017 Andrew Wood visited the site at Clothall Common specifically to see if there were any Chalkhill Blue there, having seen the very large patches of Horseshoe vetch along the cuttings earlier in the year. It did not take long to see, through binoculars, males flying in the cutting and soon they were found nectaring on Marjoram in the publicly accessible areas. 15 male and 2 female Chalkhill Blues were found, most fairly close to the bypass. Also near where the Icknield Way crosses the bypass there were another 5 males and a female found. These numbers and the presence of both sexes suggests a couple of viable colonies here.

Our assumption is that they have either spread down the A505 from Therfield Heath, however that is about 10km through Hertfordshire and in part Cambridgeshire, or from Ashwell Quarry which is about 6km away so are there any other colonies in the



Chalkhill Blue
at Clothall Common
Photo © Andrew Wood



Chalkhill Blue by A505
south of Baldock
Photo © Andrew Wood

triangle between Baldock, Royston and Ashwell or have they jumped across this rather intensively farmed countryside? We need to investigate.

I would strongly recommend a visit to this area in the summer, there are plenty of paths across the hillside and as well as the butterflies there were huge numbers of Six Spot Burnet moths which have not been abundant overall this year.

Comma Larva on Hazel, by Peter Clarke

On 26 July, I unexpectedly found a Comma larva, in its third instar, on hazel (Figs. 1 & 3) in a narrow ride in Millennium Wood, Stevenage (Fig. 2). Although nettle is now generally thought to be its primary host-plant, other host-plants such as Hop, elms, willows and currants are sometimes used. I know of only two instances of Comma larvae on hazel in the wild; in Chiddingfold Forest in Surrey (Wilmott et. al) and a report from Duck End Nature Reserve near Maulden, Bedfordshire on 31 July (Bedfordshire branch Butterfly Conservation).

I visited the Stevenage site each day until 14 August, at around 7 am,



Fig. 1
Comma larva on hazel leaf 26 July



Fig. 2
Habitat - hazel on left and nettles on right

and occasionally at other times as well. The larva exhibited some interesting behaviour perhaps not previously witnessed for this species in the UK. The larva was nearly always resting under a leaf, and the same one over two or more days, with significant feeding damage on the leaves (Fig. 6). The larva constructed a tent by folding a leaf it was feeding on for protection against the elements as well as predators (Figs. 4 & 7). There is no evidence, as far as I know, that Comma larvae behave in a similar way on nettles. A moult took place on 31 July or thereabouts then the fourth and final instar larva took a slightly lower position on the hazel to start feeding again (Fig. 5). On 12 August, the larva prepared itself for pupation about a foot lower than its last feeding platform (Fig. 8). Pupation was successfully completed within a day but sadly the pupa expired by 14 August, presumably through predation (Fig. 9).



Fig. 3
Comma larva 3rd instar 31 July



Fig. 4
Comma larva in hazel leaf tent 3 August



Fig. 5
Comma larva 4th and final instar
6 August



Fig. 6
Leaf damage – tent on bottom left
8 August

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Were any Comma eggs laid on the hazel? There are nettles about a yard or two distant so it is possible that after hatching out of the eggs, if laid on the nettles, some young larvae moved to the hazel shrub. The nettles looked healthy enough without significant leaf damage or any infestation of any larvae, which, unless there is some other factor involved, suggests that eggs were laid on the hazel. Comma hutchinsoni adults were on the wing in late June and early July in the area so it is probable that the Comma larva on the hazel resulted from hutchinsoni parents. It is known that such larvae develop faster and the life cycle is completed in around 6 weeks. The expansion in the past 100 years is thought to be correlated to climate change (Thomas & Lewington) and a change in host-plant preferences from hops to nettles and elms (Settele et al.). Perhaps hazel is the preferred choice of host-plant at some sites and possibly unique to hutchinsoni females.

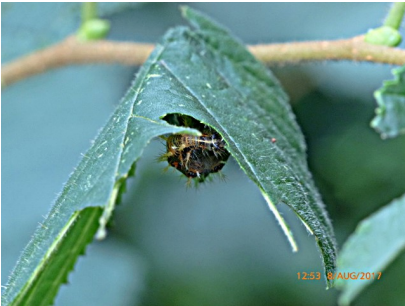


Fig. 7
Comma larva under hazel leaf
8 August



Fig. 8
Comma larva preparing to pupate
12 August



Fig 9.
Comma pupa
13 August



Fig. 10
2nd Comma pupa on same hazel shrub
20 August

A second Comma pupa was found on the same hazel shrub higher up, at eye-level on 19 August (Fig. 10) which raises the possibility that this is a sibling of the Comma pupa which had just expired and eggs being laid by a single female but no eggs have ever been found on hazel in the wild.

References:

Settele, J., Shreeve, T., Konvicka, M., and Van Dyck, Hans (2009), Ecology of Butterflies in Europe, Cambridge University Press pp.318

Thomas, J. and Lewington, R. (2014), The Butterflies of Britain & Ireland, British Wildlife Publishing, Oxford

Willmott, K., Bridge, M., Clarke, H.E. and Kelly, F. (2013), Butterflies of Surrey Revisited, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Field Trip Reports

Bovingdon Brickworks – Sunday 21st May 2017, by Liz Goodyear and Andrew Middleton

At the invitation of the Box Moor Trust this was the Branch's second visit to Bovingdon Brickworks. The site at Bovingdon is a mosaic of different habitats created when the brickworks quarry was restored to grassland which is adjacent to the still active brick making business. The site is just west of the village of Bovingdon in west Hertfordshire. The key target species for the day was Dingy Skipper but we also hoped for Green Hairstreak.

Whereas in 2016, the day had dawned cold, this morning in late May was a marked improvement but still far from perfect, with frequent periods of cloud. We were first greeted by some very curious sheep that are now grazing the site, then by David Kirk, chair of the Box Moor Trust. David helped show us around with his enthusiastic and very observant grandson Aidan. Three other members attended! However; a good selection of species were observed but unfortunately, conditions were not sufficiently favourable to see a Green Hairstreak although like most other species, it had emerged very early and this field trip might also have been a little too late – maybe next year?

The final tally of species were 10 Dingy Skipper, 5 Common Blue, 2

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Brown Argus, 3 Speckled Wood, 1 Large White, 1 Green-veined White, 2 Orange Tip, 1 Holly Blue and 1 Peacock. Moths seen included a mating pair of Phoenix moths (found by Aidan), Silver-ground Carpet, Burnet Companion, Mother Shipton, Small Yellow Underwing and *Adela fibulella*. Also one cuckoo was heard and Great-spotted Woodpecker youngsters were heard calling.

Stanmore Country Park Moth Night, 26th May, by John Hollingdale

The weather was good and about ten of us gathered around the UV light above the white sheet. Several Common Swifts appeared first as always. Moths came regularly and the more able of the attendees were able to give me most of the IDs for which I was grateful. I was recording sitting on the nearby bench. We potted most of the micros for me to look at next morning. Amongst the more notable Macros were Figure of Eighty, Orange Footman, Pale Prominent, Pebble Hook-tip, Peppered Moth, Scorched Wing, Shoulder-striped Wainscot and Small Fan-foot. There was a total of 21 macro species.

There were 11 micro species too. I had to send several of them to Colin Plant, our county moth recorder, for identifying and verification. All of those had to be examined internally; I find this very difficult. Thank you very much Colin. In all, there were five new records for the Country Park; the micro book I use has opened up the world of identifying micros. If anyone would like to see the complete list, please get in touch with me.

Horsenden, 1st July, by David Howden

A successful event as usual. We quite quickly got onto the target species White-letter Hairstreak and everyone got a good view through the telescope and in flight. We also got a decent view of Purple Hairstreak allowing people to see the difference. Other butterflies in reasonable numbers with lots of Marbled Whites particularly noticeable.



Waved Black
Photographed in Ipswich
by Paul Kitchener

Moth trap produced the usual haul, a highlight for me being two specimens of the nationally scarce Waved Black (*Parascotia fuliginaria*) - a species not previously recorded locally.

Sharpenhoe, 1st July by David Chandler (Joint Meeting with Beds & Northants Branch)

I was concerned, late on in Friday evening, as I drove around the M25 from Essex after attending my step-son's birthday party, because it was raining gently as I drove. My butterfly field trip was about eleven hours away and I was worried that people would not turn out on a dull day. Nevertheless, just a few hours later, twelve members of the local branches did arrive at the National Trust car park at Sharpenhoe on a warm cloudy morning for the joint field trip with the target species being the Dark Green Fritillary.

The party was unusual because some senior citizens attended and two of the others had walking sticks. Accordingly, I decided to keep the route to the flatter parts of the site where there was lesser risk of falls. The party was led off by myself along the tarmac path which soon gave way to the set-aside field of long grass and wild flowers. Along the way it was pleasing to see Meadow Browns, Ringlets, a

Having negotiated the kissing gate, the party enjoyed the sight of an unimproved chalk grassland with views of the Great Ouse valley in the distance. We observed Marbled Whites and then, with perfect timing, the target-species of the trip was found. With considerable excitement, the first Dark Green Fritillary of the day was seen in flight and we tracked it down to where it settled on a blue Scabious flower head with its wings open.

I was very pleased the Dark Green Fritillary had been found and the cooler cloudy conditions made it worthy of being photographed by several people as it obliged by staying still for some time. The weather was improving and some glimpses of the sun occurred warming the hedges and downs. This was to be a significant feature of the trip; the sun was neither strong enough nor shining for a sufficiently long time to encourage butterflies into lengthy flights. The photographers in the group therefore had good time to compose their shots.

With the group spreading out along the field I conducted the less mobile around the path around the edge of the field where there was easier walking. Peter Glenister, who had come along, assisted me by taking the more agile of the group through the rougher pastures in the centre of the field where the Kidney Vetch grows to try and find a late Small Blue. No joy here though. However, we added to the species

Hertfordshire and Middlesex

count for the day with sightings of more Dark Green Fritillaries, some Small Skippers, Essex Skippers and a few Small Heath.

We walked further around the site and arrived at the wildflower meadow near the Clappers. At this point the party of less-able walkers went a different way back to the car park. The remainders were able to add Large Skipper, Green Veined White, Small Tortoiseshell and a Red Admiral to their lists for the day. On the sunken path back we looked for Purple Hairstreaks, but to no avail; we were however able to add Large & Small White to the total. At the car park the first half of the field trip ceased.

In the car park meadow during a break a few people saw more Marbled Whites and Dark Green Fritillaries. After the break I led a smaller group on a short afternoon bonus excursion. This was to a narrow area of land known as Moleskin, adjacent to the minor road. Having not seen a single “blue” on the first half of the trip, Steve from Mersea Island asked if I could find a Chalkhill Blue. I said that we were in the very early days of its flight period but I thought we may have a 10% chance. “That was enough” he said, and having come a long way was game to try. We walked into Moleskin through the area



where Small Blues thrive, but saw none here today, to arrive at the south facing chalk slope at the lower end of the reserve. After a short period looking we found three freshly emerged male Chalkhill Blues, one of which posed magnificently on a flower head for all to get a stunning photograph.

This was a really pleasing end to a very successful field trip. Moth sightings on the day included Chimney Sweeper, Cinnabar and Five Spot Burnet. Good numbers of Pyramidal Orchids were seen, along with a few examples of Common Spotted. Notable birds that we saw were: Skylarks, Red Kites and Buzzards. Various Bumblebees including a mating pair of red tips.

I am sure that everyone enjoyed the field trip and it was great advertisement for Bedfordshire butterflies. I was delighted that the target species appeared in good numbers, particularly for the visiting members from the other BC branches in East Anglia who had not seen it before .

Ruislip, 5th July, by Dick Middleton

The field meeting at Ruislip NNR was very well supported with 17 attendees, although not all were able to stay for the whole trip. The usual start was made in the field behind the Ruislip Lido main car park where Meadow brown; Ringlet; Gatekeeper; both Small and Essex skipper and Marbled white were found. A pair of the latter 'in cop' giving excellent views and photo opportunities. On into Copse Wood and Speckled wood; Purple hairstreak; Red admiral; Comma and the sought after White admiral found their way onto the list for the day. The latter kept the group waiting until almost the last moment (the Leader was already formulating Plan B!) but up to 3 performed well both in flight and perched. It was then up the steep hill to St Vincents for the hoped for Purple Emperor. It was here that one of the group produced one of the approved attractants - namely one of those fish pastes! It was probably an ambitious attempt to get a PE down from the canopy but proved irresistible to dogs (I don't think the owner(s) were equally thrilled). Anyway, his lordship kept us waiting and trying to out guess which was likely to be the best viewing point. Eventually at least two were observed, much to the relief of those who had stuck it out. My thanks to everyone for their support and help.

Stanmore Country Park, 8th July, by Margaret Huitson

Unfortunately John was not able to lead the walk as he was “enjoying” a short spell in our local Hospital (and being treated very well). It was a lovely day weather-wise, sunny but with a breeze perhaps not ideal for butterflies as we got towards higher ground. I arrived with my daughter Sarah not knowing quite who to expect. I was pleased to find that Peter Elton had unlocked the gate and Dick Middleton from Butterfly Conservation was there. He is a good lepidopterist (as well as a keen birdwatcher). A few more people arrived and we set off immediately seeing butterflies at the bottom of the new ride and so we headed up there. A fresh Small Copper was a pleasing find. In all we saw all the butterflies we expected (13). We could not resist heading up to Wood Farm through the colourful flower mix at the top. The drifts of white Dittander further down were particularly striking. A good morning and John was pleased (if slightly peeved we'd ventured out of the Country Park) to hear what we had seen.

Butterflies seen: Gatekeeper; Meadow Brown; Comma; Small Skipper; Small Copper; Ringlet; Large White; Green-veined White;

Small White; Red Admiral; Small Tortoiseshell; Marbled White and Speckled Wood.

Norton Green, 13th July, by Peter Clarke

A surprise visitor arrives during our Norton Green walk this morning. Although it was sunny when seven of us started at 10:30 it was predominantly cloudy after 11:30. Nevertheless we encountered a good number of butterflies including 2 Large Skipper, 20+ Small Skipper, 2 Green-veined White, 2 Small White, 1 Small Tortoiseshell, 6 Red Admiral, 3 Comma, 4 Silver-washed Fritillary, 30+ Gatekeeper, 30+ Meadow Brown, 20+ Marbled White, 20+ Ringlet, 5 Purple Hairstreak, 3 Common Blue and 2 Small Copper. At around 11 am, a large white-banded black butterfly was flitting over some shrubs west of the open area at the common. For a moment it fed on bramble but it was too far away to be absolutely sure what it was. It was only when we looked at one of Bob's photos that, to our amazement, it was a White Admiral, a species not recorded here since 2014 so fantastic news. Moths seen include Blood-vein, Shaded Broad bar and Common Carpet.

New Members' Day & Bricket Wood Common, 22nd July, by Ian Small

We had a new venue for New Members' Day this year, at The Parish Centre, Bricket Wood. Once we had overcome the access problems of the combination lock on the stair gate, we found the venue small, but comfortable. The day started gloomy and overcast, and the weather forecast was not encouraging. Fortunately, our programme was flexible, as the afternoon turned particularly wet.

After assembling and brief introductions, we went outside to examine the contents of moth traps run the previous evening by John Murray and Andrew Wood. Interesting moths included a Privet Hawk moth, Jersey Tiger, White Satin, Gypsy Moth and Box-tree Moth (see article on [page 9](#)). With the weather only set to deteriorate, we decided to take our field walk onto Bricket Wood Common for the rest of the morning. We escaped with only a light shower



John Murray showing moths from his trap to new members

to interrupt us. Butterflies were not numerous but nonetheless, we saw 9 species, with good views of Brown Argus and Common Blue, and a Purple Hairstreak flitting at the top of a tree in a brief sunny interval. There were also several Cinnibar moth caterpillars on ragwort and the day-flying Six-spot Burnet moth.



Exploring Bricket Wood Common

We returned to the meeting room (or the pub!) for lunch and spent the afternoon session with brief presentations about the Society, our Branch, our local butterflies, recording and how to get more involved, from Ian Small, Andrew Wood and Malcolm Hull. Thanks also to Paul Busby and Liz Goodyear for their contributions to this successful and enjoyable day.

Bake For Butterflies



Butterfly Conservation is calling all budding bakers and perfectionist pâtissiers to don their aprons and bake for butterflies. Why not put your culinary skills to the test and raise vital funds to protect butterflies, moths and our environment? No event is too big or too small, and we are here to help you every step of the way.

No matter how much you raise your kind support will help protect butterflies and moths for future generations to enjoy. You can sign up now to receive a free information pack and resources including butterfly bunting, recipes and a step-by-step guide to running your event. Visit <https://butterfly-conservation.org/13064/bake-for-butterflies.html>. If you need any help planning your event, advice on fundraising or have any questions please contact Becky Miners at Head Office bminers@butterfly-conservation.org.



big butterfly count Waitrose
14th July - 6th August

The following information is taken from a BC Press Release on 25 September, summarising the results of this year's Big Butterfly Count.

One of the UK's most striking and widespread butterflies, the Red Admiral, has experienced a record summer despite soggy weather conditions causing problems for other species, results from the Big Butterfly Count have revealed. The Red Admiral saw its numbers rise by 75% compared to 2016, with more than 73,000 seen during the Count's three-week recording period.



Red Admiral
Photo © Tim Melling

This number is as many as were counted in the last three years of the Big Butterfly Count put together and the highest number by far for the butterfly since the project began. But wet July and August weather meant that 2017 was not a vintage summer with the UK's three common species of white butterfly all experiencing declines. The admiral boom was helped by a good year in 2016 followed by a mild winter and warm spring this year.

While migration is still a major feature of the Red Admiral's lifestyle, many now overwinter in the UK and it is the most commonly recorded butterfly during the winter months.

The Red Admiral was pipped to the top spot in this year's Count by the Gatekeeper which was the most commonly seen species with 93,171 counted in total, a 24% increase on last year's result.

A record 60,000 participants took part in the Count, the world's largest butterfly survey, counting more than 550,000 individual butterflies during the three-week, high-summer recording period.

Other winners include the distinctive Comma which benefited from the warm spring by producing a strong summer generation. This was a big increase on the poor year for the Comma in 2016, with numbers up 90% year-on-year. Numbers of the Small Copper increased by

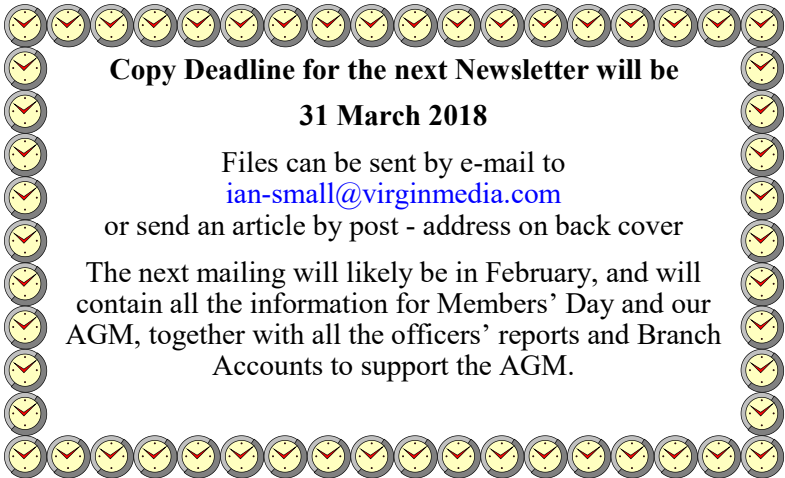
62% compared to last summer's Count and the Common Blue experienced a rise of 109% during the same period.

But all three of the UK's common white butterflies declined with the Green-veined White and Large White down 38% and the Small White down 37%. It was the worst Big Butterfly Count on record for the Green-veined White and the second worst for the other two species.

A mild winter and warm spring meant some species emerged earlier than normal so that some were already past their peak numbers by the time of the Count. The very wet summer then had a negative impact on the numbers of butterflies being seen.

Participants recorded the lowest number of individuals spotted per count since the scheme began, with an average of just 11 butterflies seen. Butterfly Conservation's Head of Recording, Richard Fox said: "It hasn't been a vintage summer for butterflies, but there have been some real positives. "The flurry of Red Admirals on buddleia bushes, vivid golden Commas holding territories along the hedgerows and beautiful flecks of blue and orange among the long grass as Common Blues and Small Coppers made the most of the sunshine before the next shower.

"Above all, the highlight of Big Butterfly Count 2017 has been the huge number of people that have got involved, spent time enjoying and counting our native butterflies and moths and done something useful and important in the face of so much wildlife decline."



Copy Deadline for the next Newsletter will be
31 March 2018

Files can be sent by e-mail to
ian-small@virginmedia.com
or send an article by post - address on back cover

The next mailing will likely be in February, and will contain all the information for Members' Day and our AGM, together with all the officers' reports and Branch Accounts to support the AGM.

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